

The Werewolf

“There was a clan of supposed werewolves, associated, probably, with human sacrifice and cannibalism. It was thought that whoever tasted the flesh of a sacrificed human victim became a werewolf. There was a cave sacred to Zeus Lykaios (the wolf-Zeus); in this cave no one had a shadow, and whoever entered it died within a year.”

—Bertrand Russell

Underbrush—I am the hunted one, he who crawls beneath the bushes and slithers through the grasses. For three days now they have hunted me, forcing me to run from tree to tree and hole to hole, seldom in the open. And now I have ended up here, at the yawning mouth of this fathomless cave, where there are no shadows, where life gets slowly but irreversibly sucked into the final blackness. My senses are still sharp, but my power is almost spent. The chase is almost over. Their dogs have picked up my scent and I hear hunting horns echoing through the trees, always closer, closer.

There must be many more of them by now. The rallying cry has gone up throughout the countryside. Were it not for their numbers I should never have been outwitted, for they are all hopelessly dull. Their senses are numb, their minds feeble. They have forgotten how to hunt. They have become as domesticated as their crops and animals. Now in place of furs they wear clothes of woven cloth, drink milk instead of the cold pure water of mountain streams.

Yes, they have forgotten how to hunt! They live clean and dainty lives all of them, and that is what they feel the need to protect most. They are slow to anger, aroused only when their sense of culture, their sense of being a civilized race, has in some way been infringed upon. Indeed, in their civilization lies their strength—the brute strength of their numbers. Although they possess weapons and swords, among themselves they permit no violence. That is reserved for us.

—No, I shall not be found out by cleverness or by courage. I shall not be taken by skillful warriors trained in one-on-one combat. I shall simply be run over, fallen upon by throngs of stampeding masses and crushed beneath their clumsy boots.

Already they have tried to burn me out. But only charred stumps of trees and singed blades of grass have been left as a token of their fury. The entire plain is desolate. They have sacrificed their grain, made offerings of their cattle while they were still grazing in the pastures below the village. A full year’s labor has been consumed in their flaming wrath. Their cries mingle with the smoke rising heavenward. Is it for me that this rape of the earth, this rape of their very sustenance, has taken place?

Surely it does me an honor to think that I am worth it all and were it not for this I should have yielded much sooner. For I have done nothing against them and yet have had my revenge. I do not permit myself to savor the smile which comes with such revenge, yet it does indeed give me much pleasure to see them expend their energies so vitally just for once, even if it means their own self-destruction. When it all is over, I, of course, will be held responsible for the damage caused by their own foolish pillaging, and indeed in many ways I am. Out of destruction comes the hope of renewal—this perhaps being my unacknowledged motive—but I realize that for these people, these villagers who were once my very friends and neighbors, though they lose everything they possess and love most, though they sit in ashes and weep at the loss of their every material treasure, still they will cling to, still they will cherish those hopes, those illusions which, in the face of all adversity, continue to preserve their way of life, their superstitions, and their institutions. It is upon the destruction of these that my ultimate survival depends, for then I shall no longer be hunted. They will welcome me once again as a brother and as a friend. Flesh to flesh and mind to mind there will no longer be any difference between us.

To them, however, this can never be. I am nothing but a savage, all that they once were but now detest. But for all their civilization, are they really any different? Life is savage, and the same life fills us all.

Or am I already dead?

Ever since the day of my transformation there have been doubts—persistent doubts—which make it difficult for me to confirm my own existence. All I know is this: whether I be truly alive or dead, the impressions of life continue to flow around me in currents, like water, like a person drowning perhaps,

who sees only lavish swirls and liquid shapes dissolving and reconstituting themselves without apparent pattern. I have searched for a pattern endlessly, but the bursts of shapes and colors move too swiftly for my senses to trace and record their paths; in vain do I watch the tapestries of motion I find myself swimming in. First I am consumed in sheets of flame, and then suddenly immersed in quenching pools, in rivers of icy water which carry me swiftly away from all that is familiar. Indeed, where is the boundary of the flame? And do the rivers cease to flow when they empty into the sea?

I claim to have been everywhere, knowing I have been nowhere. Is there really any difference between omniscience and ignorance? But something is pushing me from behind, touching my sides with guiding nudges and pulling me onward with an irresistible tug. The more intellectual among us have expounded the philosophical significance of this uncanny force but their explanations are not very satisfying, even less satisfying than the ruminations of those blind, but forever questing romantics who stress the power of the individual will to attain in its striving some previously unattained goal—a goal which, by definition, is unknowable before it is attained, and therefore one which no one presumes to describe. All that I can be certain of is that I move continuously, without interruption, never guided, but with the semblance of guidance. Since the only way a problem such as this can be ultimately unraveled is by untying the knots of logic which bind it, I take comfort in my ignorance, resolving polarities by ignoring them, and finding both a blessing and a curse in what I call the “inevitabilities” of my existence.

So am I free? As time passes this question has steadily lost its original significance for me. The authorities had forewarned us of the dangers of trying to go beyond what one already is, claiming it to be a sin. Yet they were only partially correct in their assumptions about its consequences. Having never tasted human flesh, and thus having never themselves actually experienced the transformation, they could never, of course, be quite certain about what would result. That is, they knew what caused one to *become* like me, but they did not know what it was like to actually *be* me. Moreover, since those of my type are always on the fringes of their society, how accurate could even their external (and so-called objective) observations have been? Inevitably their self-assured theories as regards our nature were based more upon fear than upon understanding. To the theoreticians, having once fallen into sin, we are forever bound in slavery to it. Accordingly, we have but one moment of freedom, one moment in which to decide, and once that moment has been lost we can never return to it. Moreover, the consequences of whatever we do in that moment are completely and irrevocably fixed, dooming us to the endless cycle of reliving what, in their opinion, was the ultimate sacrifice of liberty.

But, in truth, the consequences are not quite what they, from their presumably “unimpassioned” point of view, imagine them to be. We suffer little from our sin, but greatly from our acquired status as sinners. Perhaps this accounts, in part, for the odd mixture of both curiosity and loathing with which the villagers regard us when they unexpectedly meet up with us far from the comforts of their homes. It also accounts for why we are compelled to live in the forests on the edges of their towns, hidden and uneasy. They mock us, even as we continually mock the disgust they so deeply feel towards us. Among ourselves we cannot help but to regard their foolishness with a healthy dose of humor, but outside the inner circle all is otherwise. What good would it do should we respond to their ignorance with anything more than utter seriousness? We must keep up appearances, even if it only serves to confirm their prejudices about our savagery.

Perhaps I really am dead. It is odd (forsaking the perfectly logical possibility that it is in fact the norm) for an action to produce results which are completely opposite from the ones intended. Indeed, is not our suffering the mere result of having expected more than it was possible for life to give, more than we perhaps were even capable of receiving? In the age in which I live, this seems to be the most crucial and pressing question we must confront. We all were raised as children on the remnants of idealism, and disillusionment is nothing more than the consequence of idealism gone sour. The village elders and priests, who should know better, passionately wish to resurrect the older modes of thought which they feel are best simply for having lasted the longest. What they fail to recognize is that these modes of thought contain within themselves the very seeds of opposition and rebellion which they wish to avoid. Better if there were no traditions at all and thus nothing to rebel against! The sowers of destruction have planted these seeds and fertilized them with their own lethargy. Attribute it to their age if you wish, the old man returning to the womb, helpless and feeble, desiring comfort and warmth at any expense, desiring nothing less than a return to complete nonexistence, to death itself, which is a comfort of sorts, but one which hardly affords the warmth they so greedily and ravenously crave.

Our longing for security is our longing for death. It is only because we are so committed to this

insupportable notion of constant progress—a tendency so ingrained in our race, we dare to call it innate—that despair, decay, and death seem—no—*are* inevitable. But we in the forests are different because, owning nothing, we have nothing to defend or protect. Indeed, we must be warriors, but warriors of a different breed. Holding everything in common we must fight only to make sure that each gets his equal share, and scarcity dictates that wars between us and the villagers are a necessary consequence of the predicament they have placed us in. Unlike the villagers we hoard no food, build no stockades. We live day to day, enjoying the fruit of the meadows, the dew on the grass. Material goods, as with everything else in this world—our lives included—are perishable, and among us the person possessing a great number of goods is likely to possess less rather than greater prestige.

My greed is only for life. I demand complete fulfillment. It is nothing less than this insatiable thirst for completion which drew me into my present state of affairs. I had anticipated finding something beyond myself into which I could become painlessly absorbed. And I became drunk on my own longing for it! Now I can see that this feeling itself was nothing more than an opiate. But then—ah then!—the very thought of it pierced my heart and my heart became a soul, warm and deeply felt, a fire consuming me from within. The pleasure of such destruction, *self*-destruction if you prefer—the terms themselves are inconsequential—has been scorned and defamed by those who, again, fear that putting an end to the inner self is the moral equivalent of suicide.

They will readily admit, of course, that the body is a limitation, whereas we, to the contrary, do not differentiate between spirit and matter, and so have no preference when it comes to choosing between the sum total of *what* we are and the brute fact that we can make no claim to being anything whatsoever. When all expectations have ceased, limitations are immediately recognizable, and there is no need in the least to fear whatever our inquiries may uncover. Partaking of the tree of knowledge was for us merely an outward symbol, a sacrament if you will, which did less to confirm our limitations than to simply acknowledge that beyond certain horizons we can only *assume* that something more awaits us. Unlike the others we were not ashamed, we did not mind being cast into the wilderness. Now we run naked in the mountains and the valleys, along the dry cracked stream beds where the stones are sharp and cut our feet and lick our blood as if to draw it back into the earth once again.

Perhaps I am speaking with a year's worth of experience between now and the day on which my transformation occurred. Perhaps then I *did* possess an uncontrollable urge not simply to attain complete union with the universe but to set myself above it. I remember seeing the corpse lying on the pyre, as if my own blood had been spilt in sacrifice—an atonement unto myself. There were no categories to distinguish myself from the other, no method to establish our separate identities. I watched from a distance and yet saw myself watching. I was aware, although only of my own awareness, as if I were asleep yet knew that I was asleep. I could no longer act because all of my actions were being observed by myself from some vantage point irreconcilable with what were in truth my actions. "I *am* the corpse!" A thought, unreal and without empirical foundations? A fiction perhaps? But my *experience* nonetheless. The blood tasted bitter on my lips and the flesh filled my mouth with a burning stench. Thus I ate and so began my transformation.

Have I lost my soul, my dearest possession? Or is that too a longing and a fiction? I suppose the others are right. I *have* returned to my primitive state, indistinguishable once more from an animal. And life fills my being in all its contradictions.

Or am I dead?

I am Lykaios. I am a werewolf.