

The Muamandú

O man, whatever country you may belong to, whatever your opinions may be, attend to my words; you shall hear your history such as I have read it, not in books composed by those like you, for they are liars, but in the book of nature which never lies.

Hatayo has spent three days in the forest. He returns a man. He takes Domatoa under wing. They will learn the way with women. And so K has no boy. There are other boys, not yet initiated, for whom K the non-human would be a unique if ambiguous experience, excitingly iniquitous but forgivable. Emic. But K does not want a boy. If he wanted anything it would be a woman now. Meanwhile, the atmosphere of the woshana has darkened. Two have contracted a virulent form of malaria. Fleas are rampant. The manioc garden is ragged and unproductive. Soon the woshana and the garden will have to be burned. The tribe will have to move and build a new woshana. With the assistance of Rosowara's divinations Bowakawo has chosen the new site. It is a bit farther from the river, nearer the lagoon. But there is much work in burning, clearing, rebuilding, and replanting. And during the move the tribe will be vulnerable to ambush by the Mureka-peo. Nhudua, a lively young man of extraordinary swiftness and intelligence, has been put in charge of a small cadre of roaming outposts to be deployed while the new woshana is being built. The three abducted Mureka-peo women have never been reconciled to their captivity. One has escaped. The other two, husbandless, subjected to frequent sexual predation, have remained so sullen they have been sent home.

These patterns are well known to K and need not be studied further. His current project aims at measuring the acquisition, expenditure, and conservation of bodily energy. There are no machines among the Róirúa-peo—water, wind, and sun unharnessed for physical labor. The energy equation, therefore, is simple for any individual and for the tribe as a whole: caloric intake = caloric output, taking into account growth in children and the accretion of fat in adults, the latter exceedingly rare. With Korakama's help K has found four volunteers for the project, two men and two women, one old and one young for each gender, a sufficient sampling. K does not know what persuasions Korakama has used, but his debt to Korakama is precisely spelled out. He must tape a session in which Korakama will recount a narrative, of what K does not know.

K has contrived a balance scale with a stout limb of a large ingas tree, the fulcrum being the crotch of the same tree. The counterweight for the human body is a bag of rocks made of monkey skins. K has calibrated it carefully. As it turns out, the subjects so enjoy sitting in the sling made by Korakama from braided reed that Korakama must scold them to keep them from swinging like children in a park.

Korakama studies the numbers on K's four caloric charts, one for each subject. There are numbers for Tinitupa, Bowakawo's daughter; Wodaga, a woman of about 60 years; Netaroa, Wodaga's husband, both of them proud of posture and dignified; and Junavú, an alert and animated young man in his twenties. Korakama points to the number for Junavú and laughs. "Do not ask this one to your hammock."

"I will not ask any of them to my hammock," K says flatly.

"This one?" Korakama points to Tinitupa's number.

"None of them."

Korakama laughs his arching laugh. His pride does not permit him to ask K what he wants from the project, which is good, because K would have a hard time explaining to him the significance of caloric counts.

So, for all four, the calabash for soup is carefully etched, fish and game are weighed. Korakama is given a watch. He does not need much instruction. He has seen other non-humans use the instrument. He takes pulses. He times work sessions. With a thermometer he checks temperatures at precise times each day. With a sensor that K has provided he measures at set intervals O₂ and CO₂ in the breath of each subject. But of all the measures he enjoys most the test for oral malodor, requiring each of the subjects at predetermined times to blow gustily into his face. He twitches his nose, requires repeated exhalations, and finally marks on a scale that K has constructed the exact degree of offensiveness. Tinitupa's breath proves the most malodorous, the most alkaline, the most tainted by degraded proteins. "Her vagina will stink, too," Korakama assures K.

The first language of man, the most universal and most energetic of all languages, in short, the only language he had occasion for, before there was a necessity of persuading assembled multitudes, was the cry of nature, a cry never extorted but by a kind of instinct in the most urgent cases, to implore assistance in great danger.

Late one night there is a screaming that comes from outside the woshana and leaps over the wall. K bolts from his hammock. Out on the floor of the woshana just beyond the moon-shadow of the overhang a young woman throws herself down into the dirt babbling hysterically. Several women run to her and lift her up into a sitting position. She buries her face in her hands and howls inconsolably. For some moments the women speak softly to her, then sharply. Finally one slaps her on the head. If there is danger, it must be told.

Now virtually the entire tribe begins to assemble. "Ya-Yay-Yao!"

Who does not perceive that everything seems to remove from savage man the temptation and the means of altering his condition?

K pushes to the fore, where he can make out the words of the terrified woman as she begins finally to speak coherently. The Muamandú attacked her. He chased her through the forest to the woshana.

The Muamandú is a creature of two dispositions. In one he is a trickster, annoying, comical, mildly hurtful. In the other he is a close cousin of the sasquatch, not as apish, but hairy nevertheless and with spider-like legs that enable him to run with sickening swiftness, malevolent and invulnerable. Colleagues have suggested that the Muamandú and his Amazonian variants represent an atavistic memory of some primordial hominid. Others, infected by psychoanalysis, have suggested a psychic archetype. K knows that the Muamandú is neither. It is a creature invented by some tribe for a particular purpose—perhaps simply a boogeyman to frighten children or enemies—and then passed from tribe to tribe by trading, war, and other contacts. Thereafter it is reified and mythologized. All of which seems suspiciously emic, but K knows the persistence of the Muamandú must be explained by its continued utility, though he does not yet know what that function is.

I shall not stop to examine in the animal system what primordial man might have been before he became at last what he actually is; I shall not inquire whether, as Aristotle thinks, his neglected nails were no better at first than crooked talons; whether his whole body was not bear-like, thick covered with rough hair; and whether, walking upon all fours, his eyes, directed to the earth, and confined to a horizon of a few paces extent, did not at once point out the nature and limits of his ideas.

Well, the women want to know, what was the victim (Cunugóa, a niece of Bowakawo) doing in the forest at midnight, when predators and demons might be lurking about? Cunugóa speaks of a stranger that dragged her from the woshana. K cannot make out the details. Neither can the women. Cunugóa receives several hard slaps to the head. K

wonders if Cunugóa has secretly taken ebene, strictly forbidden of women. Quickly interest turns to Cunugóa's account of the encounter with the Muamandú, rendered in a blubbery voice. She was coming from the clearing near the lagoon. Suddenly, Cunugóa reports, she heard a thrashing and a hissing in the forest behind her. The very memory of it causes her to bury her face in her hands and make a yodeling wail, which, however, is rewarded only with more slaps to the head. Tell!

“Yo-ee-ay-o!”

The Muamandú was swinging on the cut limb the non-human put in the ingas tree. He jumped down. Cunugóa ran as fast as her feet would carry her, but the Muamandú only laughed a screechy laugh like the night-hunting Murucututú and ran around in front of her. Every way that she ran, the Muamandú cut off her escape. He had the moon in both eyes. At last she stopped, frozen by fear. The Muamandú screeched and thrust his hairy paw into her vagina.

The women push Cunugóa's legs apart and inspect the offended organ. K cannot see what they see, for they bend close over the stricken girl. Into his mind's eye, however, glides the image of the shining doublet of moist lips, probed by the fingers of the examiners. They stand up and call, “Tovamapua!” She is violated!

“Ya-Yay-Yao!”

Among the passions which abrade the heart of man, there is one of a hot and impetuous nature, which renders the sexes necessary to each other; a terrible passion which despises all dangers, bears down all obstacles, and to which in its transports it seems actually capable of destroying the very species which it was supposed to preserve.

“Tell! How did you get away?”

Cunugóa says that she would have been killed but a Hekura-buúl came and frightened the Muamandú away. Both disappeared and Cunugóa ran back to the woshana.

The women move away from Cunugóa. One offers brief comfort, but a mixture of disapproval and fear distances the women from the victim. It will be days before Cunugóa is fully accepted back into the society of Roirúa-peo women. They will not persecute her, but it will take a long time for them to warm to her again. Now the tribal circle breaks apart and the people go back to their hammocks.

There is a principle that has escaped Hobbes. Man has the gift to moderate the blind and impetuous thrusts of self-love or the desire of self-preservation. It softens the ardor with which he naturally pursues his private welfare. It is an innate abhorrence of seeing beings that resemble him suffer. I shall not surely be contradicted in granting to man the only natural virtue which the most passionate detractor of human virtues could not deny him, I mean that of pity.

The next morning K speaks to Korakama. “Tell, have you ever seen Muamandú?”

“Not this way of Cunugóa.” Korakama flicks his hand dismissively. “Another way.”

“What way?”

“The way non-humans never see because they can only see flat like the top of the river. Muamandú comes this way.” With his hands cupped Korakama brings his fingers and thumbs together to form a hollow sphere. “Here I have seen him.”

K thinks that the sphere is part cranium, part bowl of sky, but he senses that he is not to ask.

“What about Hekura-buúl?”

Korakama laughs a high abrupt laugh. “The Hekura-buúl has teeth in her vagina to eat the penises of boys. They run. Cunugóa lied. Hekura-buúl does not come to women. Hekura-buul does not fight with the Muamandú.”

Sightings of the Muamandú become frequent now. Grub gatherers see him high in a Samaúma tree jumping from limb to limb. Disconsolate fishermen come back to report that the Muamandú ran across the top of the water and capsized their canoe, which they have lost, barely saving their lives. In the manioc garden women have spotted the Muamandú swishing his tail violently and decapitating plants. And there are other reports.

It is no surprise to K when Korakama tells him the four volunteers for the caloric study have quit.

“When do you think the Muamandú will leave?”

“It will not matter to you when the Muamandú leaves. You can never see him.” Korakama looks steadily at K. “The peo want you to leave.”

“Want me to leave? Why?”

“Because the Muamandú will stay and hurt us until you leave.”

“Do you believe that?”

“The peo believe it.”

“Does Bowakawo believe it?”

“The peo believe it.”

K remains silent in thought for some moments. He is puzzled. He had thought that he was well established with the Roirúa-peo. He suspects some kind of ruse or test, very possibly of Korakama’s contriving. He says, “I will go into the forest and meet the Muamandú.”

“You will not see the Muamandú.”

“The Muamandú will come out. I will tell him to go away. You will go with me to see that it is done. I, K, say it.”

Korakama laughs as at a foolish child. “I, Korakama, say you can never see him. The eyes of non-humans are turned the wrong way.”

K says, “It is not in the eyes. It is in the words.”

Korakama grows serious. “Non-humans do not have a word for the Muamandú. They do not have a word for many things. They cannot see these things.”

We humans must therefore make use of propositions; we must speak to have general ideas; for the moment the imagination stops, the mind must stop too, if not assisted by speech.

K says, "I have words for Muamandú that you do not know."

"There is only one word for Muamandú. You will say that different peo downriver or upriver in the mountains have another word for Muamandú. I, Korakama, know that. It is not the same. Muamandú is only here. Here he is Muamandú. You can never see him."

"I will go into the forest and call Muamandú by these words I know. I will tell the Muamandú to leave. You will come with me so the peo will know it."

"I will come. I will bring my dog. She likes to go into the forest where the Muamandú will not come."

The dog does not have a name. It is only Korakama's dog. But it is happy to go on a walk. Before Korakama and K can open the panel in the woshana wall, the dog leaps through a hole. The entire woshana wall is tattered and sagging. It cannot last much longer. "Where will you call Muamandú?" asks Korakama with labored patience. The dog scampers around the trail, nose to the ground, but looks up from time to time to make sure that she is not out of sight of her master—a wise dog, fearful of jaguars.

"In the clearing by the lagoon, where Cunugóa was raped."

Korakama shrugs noncommittally.

The two men resume their walk toward the lagoon. At the edge of the clearing K stops abruptly and calls loudly, "Mumuama!"

The dog, startled by K's call, turns sharply and runs back to her master, staying close, looking up into his face. Korakama stops and cocks his ear, smiling.

K says, "Something has frightened your dog."

Korakama says, "She does not know what a Mumuama is. She thinks it may be an animal of the non-humans."

K walks slowly toward the far end of the clearing where he had constructed the weighing device in the ingas tree. He imbues his movements with tense expectation. He believes that if he acts out a compelling charade, Korakama will play along. He believes that Korakama does not want him to leave. He is for Korakama, as for Rosowara, a hybrid creature of much interest.

The large limb that had served as the shaft of the balance scale has been taken from the crotch of the tree and broken in two. It lies at the edge of the clearing with the burst monkey skin bag, the stones scattered now in the grass. The dog stays well away from the torn bag. Korakama says, “The Muamandú did not want it here. The Muamandú does not want you here.”

K says nothing to that. He lifts his head and pitches his voice higher, up into the trees. “Titamuú!” Silence.

At first men gave every object a peculiar name. If they called one oak A, they called another oak B. In order to marshal several instances under a generic name—oak, tree—it was necessary to know their properties and their differences; to be stocked with observations and definitions, that is to say, to understand natural history and metaphysics, advantages which the men of these times could not have enjoyed.

K continues around the clearing until he is very near the lagoon. “Camuramura!” he calls. The water gives his voice a plangent edge. This time, from far off to the right where the lagoon narrows and branches into the several igarapés that feed it, there comes a mocking yetchety screech. The dog whimpers. Korakama shushes the animal and tunes his ear. The sound comes again, this time mixed with a barely audible gabble. K sets off down a scrabbly path that leads along the largest igarapé. Korakama and the fearful dog follow. Now comes a single extended cry. K believes it signals the fright and flight of some creature. He breaks into a trot and soon reaches the edge of a smaller clearing at the opposite side of which stands a huge Brazil

nut tree, thickly branched and shadowed. Korakama and the dog follow.

“There!” shouts K, pointing up into the tree.

The dog’s fear now propels her from her master’s side and back down the path toward the lagoon and the woshana, the dangers of the forest less than the creature, whatever it is, that now confronts the two men. “See it up in the tree?” says K. “There. On a limb in the leaves. It is wearing hair like a monkey.”

“The Muamandú does not look like a monkey.”

“The Muamandú looks like what it wants to look like. Look. The Muamandú has put leaves around his head and over his face. You can see it. I will speak to it in the name that has power. Camuramura! Go! Camuramura! Go!” K whips his hands and arms angrily through the air. “Camuramura! Go!”

Now there is a brittle cry from high in the tree and a leafy scampering that diminishes rapidly. The creature is gone.

“Come.” K leads the way back to the large clearing. There he picks up two of the weighing stones and taps them together.

“What do you do?”

K has not actually thought of his act as specifically symbolic but rather just a ritualistic addition to the charade. On the spur of the moment he says, “Dau. Dau,” the root in Roirúa-peo for spirit. With a carefully contrived ritual grace he tosses the stones out into the clearing. “Leave them.”

K and Korakama return to the woshana to encounter a deep silence. No one is out in the yard, not even children. All are under the shade of the overhang in their hammocks or nearby. No one comes forward. As K proceeds toward his place he sees that the trunk that contains all of his equipment and journals has been dragged some distance from his hammock. He stops. Korakama goes forward, pausing to look at the trunk with mild surprise. He passes on to his own hammock, but does not lie down. The dog is there, looking ashamed, making a barely

audible whimpering. Korakama touches its head. The dog is silent. Korakama goes to the woshana wall and selects some words from his cubby. These he puts in his mouth, carefully.

K stands waiting stolidly in the sun. He sees Bowakawo standing just within the shade.

After a while Korakama strolls out into the sun and turns to address those within the shade. "Did you see my dog?"

Bowakawo steps out from the margin of shade but says nothing. No one answers, even though Korakama squints theatrically, as though looking for a speaker. "Did you see my dog run from the forest and come to my hammock?" Still silence. "She was afraid." Korakama extends his lips, a gesture that means there is pressure building inside of him. His cheeks, each painted with a black scroll of wind, fill with air. "She was afraid because the non-human shouted at the Muamandú. The Muamandú was in a tree. It did not like the name the non-human gave it."

"What was the name?" K identifies the speaker, Nhudua.

Korakama puffs his lips out and with a great gust of breath brays, "Camuramura!"

A sporadic cry rises from the people. "Doko-yah!" This is unknown. "Doko-yah!"

When it is quiet again Nhudua says, "It is a good name."

Korakama says, "Why do you say it is a good name? What do you know of Muamandú?"

Nhudua comes out into the sun with an exaggerated insouciance that wins him giggles from some of the girls. "I met the Muamandú in the forest one night. I was with Cunugóa." Some men laugh. Women make a clucking sound. "The Muamandú pushed one paw into Cunugóa's vagina and one paw in my rectum." Nhudua kneels on the ground and spreads his buttocks. "You can see!"

"Ree-ya!" General laughter.

Korakama steps toward Nhudua, who jumps up and runs back into the shade. There is a new burst of laughter. Korakama says, "The non-

human told the Muamandú to go. Go, Camuramura! The Muamandú did not like the name the non-human gave it. It screamed. The dog ran away. In this time the Muamandú will not come back.”

Bowakawo nods.

Korakama walks back to his hammock and lies down.

Nhudua comes forward with alacrity and moves K's trunk back to his hammock. There is a general milling about. The children come out into the sun. No one bothers to look at K. Maybe, he thinks, he has narrowly escaped the fateful animosity of the people. And it is also not unlikely that he has been set up by Korakama and put in his debt. K goes to his hammock and lies down. He touches the bumpy remnant of a scab on his forehead, from a curious cut he received the day he took ebene. Another gift from Korakama no doubt. Mark of Cain. K smiles and shakes his head with bemused admiration.