

Eric S. Rabkin

Metamorphosis, the Mechanisms of Repression, and the Evolution of the Unconscious in European Literature

APPARENTLY HUMAN BEINGS DID NOT always have an unconscious. While the psychology of Sigmund Freud treats dreams as windows on the repressed, invisible, and hence insidiously potent realities of our souls (“psyche” being Greek for “soul”), our oldest texts treat dreams as coded prophecies. In *Genesis*, Joseph demonstrates his wisdom to Pharaoh in two ways. First, he interprets Pharaoh’s twin dreams as predictions of seven fat years and seven lean years. There’s nothing Pharaoh can do about this because «God hath showed Pharaoh what he is about to do» (*Genesis* 41:25). From a modern viewpoint, we need to understand that getting Pharaoh on the couch and adjusting his quasi-divine feelings about his quasi-divine father, will not make God the Father any less likely to build up the Egyptians’ confidence and then sucker-punch them with famine. Second, Joseph gives Pharaoh good, practical advice about storing a fifth of the grain from each of the fat years as a resource to be tapped in the lean years. In recognition of Joseph’s ability to “divine” meaning and posit good policy, Pharaoh transforms the erstwhile slave Joseph into his viceroy, a transformation so utter that Joseph’s own brothers will not recognize him when, in the lean years, they go down into Egypt begging relief.

Why did Pharaoh dream? In part, clearly, to give Joseph the chance to manifest his interpretive powers. «I told this [dream] unto the magicians,» Pharaoh says, «but there was none that could declare it to me» (*Genesis* 41:24). Joseph is the best darned symbol reader – or should we say simply reader? – that Pharaoh has ever encountered. From the standpoint of the writers of *Genesis*, be they divinely inspired or not,

RABKIN Eric S., «Metamorphosis, the Mechanisms of Repression, and the Evolution of the Unconscious in European Literature», *RiLUnE*, n. 6, 2007, p. 45-60.

God's plan was to save the Hebrews, inaugurate their captivity, and then test them, making them stronger, eventually leading them out again to take on a covenant with Yahweh and become transformed in the desert. There is good in the lean years, in other words, but not good for Pharaoh. And why should there be? *Genesis* is a book by and for the Hebrews. Pharaoh's dreams do not reveal an unconscious, yet their correct interpretation motivates a transformation, one so profound that, at least from the viewpoint of Joseph's brothers, it constitutes a metamorphosis: «And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him» (*Genesis* 42:8).

According to the etymology offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the word "metamorphosis" first appears in Latin from Greek, and thence makes its way into all modern European languages, as the plural form used by Ovid in titling his grand compendium of ancient tales of transformation. The typical story in *Metamorphoses* is one in which a character performs some natural act and in response a god performs some supernatural act. These miracles may be divided among two prototypes which I would call the truly metamorphic and the metagenetic (or, more simply, the genetic). Each has psychological implications.

The stories of Narcissus and Echo offer typical metamorphic events.

It is not possible for any god to undo the actions of another god, but in return for his loss of sight, the omnipotent father granted Tiresias the power to know the future and softened his punishment by conferring this honor upon him (Ovid 1955: p. 83).

Jupiter's granting of second sight is supernatural, but not what most people would consider transformative in any essential sense; that is, while second sight may be a metaphorical change, it equates to granting a fairy tale hero some special power or tool while leaving the shape and nature of the character unchanged. «Liriope was the first to test his reliability and truthfulness». She asks Tiresias if her baby-to-be will live long. «Yes, if he does not come to know himself». That baby, Narcissus, offspring of the beautiful nymph by rape committed by the curving stream of Cephisus, inspired immediate love «even in his cradle». While many lads and many girls fell in love with him, ... his soft young body housed a pride so unyielding that none of those boys or girls dared to touch him. One day, as he was driving timid deer into his nets, he was seen by that talkative nymph who cannot stay silent when another speaks, but yet has not learned to speak first herself. Her name is Echo, and she always answers back.

Echo still had a body then, she was not just a voice: but although she was always chattering, her power of speech was no different from what it is now. All she could do was to repeat the last words of the many phrases

Metamorphosis of the Unconscious in European Literature

that she heard. Juno had brought this about because often, when she could have caught the nymphs lying with her Jupiter on the mountainside, Echo, knowing well what she did, used to detain the goddess with an endless flow of talk, until the nymphs could flee.

In punishment, Juno «curtail[s] the power of that tongue which has tricked me» creating the Echo behavior we all know, although still embodied. Echo falls in love with Narcissus, following him, speaking – of course – only when spoken to. He likes the sound of his own words but disdains Echo as he does all others. Finally, one of the

scorned raised up his hands to heaven and prayed: “May he himself fall in love with another, as we have done with him! May he too be unable to gain his loved one!” Nemesis heard and granted his righteous prayer. (Ovid 1955: p. 84-85)

The rest of the story is well known. Narcissus comes upon a “clear pool”, sees his reflection, mistakes it for another, falls desperately in love with it, and yet every time he reaches for it, it disappears in the water’s turbulence. Ultimately he dies of a broken heart, leaning over the pool, and where his withered body should have been discovered a new flower, which we call Narcissus, or Daffodil, is found, growing on moist shores and with its head looking toward the water. Echo, too, having wasted away to nothing but voice, can be heard, if we speak loudly enough, from the rushes on the opposite shore. Thus each fulfilled their fates as appointed by the gods.

In true metamorphoses, like those of Narcissus and Echo, the change of physical shape reveals a previously existing psychological state of the characters who undergo those changes. Narcissus was always beautiful, self-loving, proud, disdainful, and his metamorphosis into a bright flower that seems to be looking forever at its own reflection emblemizes the poetic justice of such egotism leading to death. Echo was always a chatterbox, always saying more than was just, giving the appearance of truth but distorting truth. That we can be seduced by hearing our own words shows our own pride; that someone would care to do no more than adapt to others shows so little a sense of self – moral or otherwise – that metaphorically at least there is no person there. Echo’s disembodiment is also, then, poetic justice, and with two additional symbolic truths. First, words from sources unknown, no matter how pleasing, should not be trusted. Second, the evil that words can do may continue long after their speaker departs. Narcissus’ flaw was self-love; Echo’s was irresponsible loquacity. Their metamorphoses reveal their prior psychological states.

One might argue that some metamorphoses reveal not the transformed but the transformer. The case of Actaeon is instructive. He

was a great hunter who, in the forest one day with his hounds, hears female voices coming from a shrub-shrouded pool. He parts the foliage to see Diana, virgin goddess of the hunt, bathing with her nymphs. They cluster about, trying to shield her from Actaeon's invasive gaze, but uselessly because she is taller, «head and shoulders above them» (Ovid 1955: p. 79). Diana vengefully changes Actaeon who, in Ovid's gorgeous language, is befuddled and ultimately terrified as his feet and hands turn to hooves, his head sprouts antlers, he loses speech, and his own hounds finally tear apart his living body. Yes, this is a story about Diana, and perhaps about the worth of virginity. But it is also a story about invasion. Actaeon was a self-confident hunter before this day. He had parted foliage without permission many times to spy on deer or more ferocious animals, all prey to him. The antlers reflect the exaggerated manhood he always felt. And his consorting with a pack of hounds only shows how much of a beast he always was. In other words, again, metamorphosis reveals the prior psychological state of the character undergoing change.

But not all change is what I would call truly metamorphic. In Ovid's recounting of the tale of the sculptor Pygmalion, something else is at stake when his statue Galatea comes to life. Pygmalion believes in love and chastity.

[T]he loathsome Propoetides ...dared to deny the divinity of Venus. The story goes that as a result of this, they were visited by the wrath of the goddess and were the first women to lose their good names by prostituting themselves in public. Then, as all sense of shame left them, the blood hardened in their cheeks, and it required only a slight alteration to transform them into stony flints.

When Pygmalion saw these women, living such wicked lives, he was revolted by the many faults which nature has implanted in the female sex, and long lived a bachelor existence (Ovid 1955: p. 231).

But in that period he also created an "ivory statue" and «[s]o cleverly did his art conceal its art [that] Pygmalion gazed in wonder, and in his heart there rose a passionate love for this image of a human form». At the next festival of Venus, Pygmalion prayed.

If you gods can give all things, may I have as my wife, I pray – he did not dare to say: «the ivory maiden,» but finished: «one like the ivory maid». However, golden Venus, present at the festival in person, understood what his prayers meant, and as a sign that the gods were kindly disposed, the flames burned up three times, shooting a tongue of fire into the air. When Pygmalion returned home, he made straight for the statue of the girl he loved, leaned over the couch, and kissed her. She seemed warm: he laid his lips on hers again, and touched her breast with his hands – at his touch the

Metamorphosis of the Unconscious in European Literature

ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft [...] It was indeed a human body!
(Ovid 1955: p. 232).

Pygmalion praises Venus who herself attends his marriage to Galatea. Clearly the statue's change does not reveal its already-existing psychological state for statues have no psychology. Also, the transformation of Galatea does not reveal anything about Pygmalion's prior state. Narcissus was self-involved before and after his change; Pygmalion was a confirmed bachelor before but an eager husband after the change. Instead, what we find here is a transformation of the normal mechanism for creating a woman, a genetic change, metagenesis. From a rhetorical standpoint, metagenesis is a variety of metamorphosis; however, from a psychological standpoint, the two are distinct. In the case of Pygmalion, instead of the love of two people and the rearing by many producing a new person, we have the love of one person and one god and a commitment to an ideal. The change in Galatea, her alternative mechanism of genesis, reveals something about Venus the transformer. That love can work miracles is a delightful conceit, complete with the rising flames that Hollywood will appropriate nearly two millennia later.

The observation that metagenesis reveals something about the transformer rather than the transformed can help us understand the emergence of the unconscious in European literature. Victor Frankenstein takes charnel waste and reanimates it. As many critics have observed, Victor seems eager to have offspring, but he is loath to collaborate with a woman. Instead, he forges an alternative genesis, not by tongues of fire but by electricity. His creation's coming to life does not reveal the monster's prior psychological state but Victor's. In Mary Shelley's epistolary novel, Victor, withdrawn into his private pursuit of the power of life and death, receives a prophetic letter from his father: «I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected» (Shelley 1969: p. 55). The father is correct. Victor's nameless creation wishes for wife and children, but Victor reneges on his promise to provide a mate and so in his desperation to achieve society, the monster murders those around Victor, striving to force his maker to make again. On the sixth day in Eden, God «created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female create he them» (*Genesis* 1:26). God's first-born is "Adam" which is Hebrew for a reddish color that characterizes the clay from which Adam was shaped. Those who wrote *Genesis* knew where babies come from, so God's sculpting of Adam is a metagenesis. That this act from its first mention includes male and female reveals God's prior psychological state: he

favors community, he favors love, he favors family, and he gives us what we need. Victor, however, “The Modern Prometheus” according to *Frankenstein’s* subtitle, gives us only tools. Victor, like Prometheus, creates by violating the will of the higher gods. There is a struggle going on in Victor, what we might now call a failure of ego-integration as the superego, represented in part by his father, struggles unsuccessfully to restrain the knowledge-hungry id that wants what it wants and everyone else, especially family, be damned.

The trope of metamorphosis, either directly in the transformed or, with metagenesis, in the transformer, reveals a psychological state that exists before the transformation. In general terms, the psychological states thus revealed go through three historical phases. In the oldest, in which metamorphosis exposes the state of mind of Narcissus or Echo or even of God, psychological revelation is likely to be poetically just, but is not likely to suggest the existence of an unconscious. While Actaeon may or may not have thought of himself as haughty and transgressive, there is nothing hidden about the temerity of the famous hunter. In order for metamorphosis to reveal the unconscious, there has to be an unconscious. The depth metaphor for the human psyche – with its division between the upper, conscious, known level and the lower, unconscious, invisible level – only becomes prominent after the Renaissance initiates what Eugene Goodheart called «the cult of the ego». Just as we may date the beginning of the Romantic period in England conveniently albeit arbitrarily from the 1798 publication of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads*, we may date the invention – discovery? – of the unconscious from the 1690 publication of John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke, as is well known, argued that our experiences mark our minds, shape our minds, and that we may not even be aware of all the experiences formed into the so called substance of our minds. (Aristotle, of course, had also suggested that the human mind begins as a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate which experience marks. Aristotle, however, also believed in universal, abstract ideas that stocked the mind, or could do so through logic and introspection. Locke did not. Aristotle, then, saw the mind as composed of its known experiences and its discoverable truths. Locke saw the mind as composed of its known experiences and its hidden, unknown experiences). Before this depth metaphor takes hold, the models of the human psyche are typically – in the literal sense – superficial. According to metaprosopy, a branch of medieval physiology that Geoffrey Chaucer used at least rhetorically (Curry, 1960), the face tells us what we need to know about the character. *The Wife of Bath* is revealed by her gap teeth to have easily entered privates and to have few sexual scruples. The signs

are there for all the world to see. In a less obvious but no more complex way, the ancient and medieval psychology of humors attributed the qualities of personality to the relative balance among four fluids – blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm – in the human body. If you are phlegmatic, you must have too much phlegm. Time to eat garlic and get that blood flowing. And astrology, of course, explains that our characters are in our stars. The only thing hidden about that is the arcana of astrology itself. Even today, with extreme behaviorists like B. F. Skinner, the notion of an unconscious is absent. (Indeed, for Skinner, even consciousness is only an epiphenomenon of the mechanistic human mind). But for those who adopted a depth psychology, the unconscious came into being, say sometime in the seventeenth century, and eventually metamorphosis revealed it.

We can see the unconscious developing in the eighteenth century as works like Thomas Gray's *Elegy* (1751) ponder the hidden psychological life of a «mute inglorious Milton» who may be buried in that country church-yard. But the use of metamorphosis as a trope is rare in the Enlightened period between, say, 1690 (Locke) and 1764, when the publication of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* vigorously initiates self-conscious Gothic literature, works wherein those desperately unwilling to die are regularly metamorphosed into ghosts, thus revealing, of course, their prior unwillingness to die. But in general, in a literary period that disparaged both the idea of an active deus and the device of *deus ex machina*, the robust return of the classic trope of metamorphosis had to await twin developments: a Romantic enthusiasm for exfoliating the Gothic (leading to, for example, horror stories like J. W. Polidori's *The Vampyre*) and the trick of naturalizing the Gothic by justifying its fantasy through science (leading to science fictions like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a work emerging from the same postprandial challenge that prompted Polidori's writing). Both of these developments occur in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

E. T. A. Hoffmann, writing his famous tales between about 1800 and his death in 1822, implicitly embraced depth psychology, although it would be unreasonable to call him a proto-Freudian. In *The Doubles*, each of the two main male characters is a «Doppelgänger» for the other and appears to be the other's Dark Double; each has the same woman as the anima for whom he yearns; and each has a Dark Woman figure with whom to contend. And then there are the doubled saloon keepers, the mix-ups, mistaken identities, and even a wound that makes one character completely resemble another...with whom he was switched in infancy! In short, this confusing tapestry of family and social relations displays and projects a quadripartite map of the psyche and a collective cryptic

narrative world that would accord completely with the collective unconscious that was championed by C. G. Jung, if only Jung had been born yet. On the other hand, Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, a work that Freud himself treats at length in his essay on *The Uncanny*, could not have been more Freudian had Freud been born and Hoffmann his double.

Nathanael, the protagonist of *The Sandman*, comes to fear Coppelius, a lawyer who visited Nathanael's childhood home; tormented him, one presumes playfully, by touching – and thus violating – the food on his plate; and worked with his father on secret alchemical researches. Nathanael spies on these one night and is discovered when there is a chemical explosion that kills his father. Nathanael comes to think of Coppelius as the murderous Sandman, the bogey his mother had used to force him to sleep. Later in life, Nathanael meets a barometer salesman named Coppola whose visage chills Nathanael by its uncanny resemblance to that of Coppelius. (In *The Uncanny*, Freud analyzes this tale and draws from this visual correspondence one of his main points: the feeling of the uncanny arises from encountering the familiar in an unfamiliar place). Hoffmann's story opens with a letter the deeply troubled Nathanael writes to his friend Lothar hoping to find proto-Freudian relief: «I will, with all my strength, pull myself together and calmly and patiently tell you enough about my early youth so that everything will appear clearly and distinctly to your keen mind» (Hoffmann 1969: p. 94). But Nathanael mistakenly puts his letter into an envelope addressed to his sweetheart, Klara, Lothar's sister. Hoffmann makes clear in Nathanael's next letter, which is properly addressed to Lothar, that this misdirection «occasioned by my distraction» (Hoffmann, 1969: 103) was what we would call a Freudian slip, a revelation of the unconscious. But before that, Klara – the clear-eyed one, more in-sight-ful than Nathanael into the significances of Coppola (eye-socket in Italian) and Coppelius – offers a different response than Nathanael sought.

If there is a dark power which treacherously attaches a thread to our heart to drag us along a perilous and ruinous path that we would not otherwise have trod; if there is such a power, it must form inside us, from part of us, must be identical with ourselves; only in this way can we believe in it and give it the opportunity it needs if it is to accomplish its secret work... It is the phantom of our own ego... [O]nly your belief in their hostile influence can make them hostile in reality (Hoffmann 1969: p. 102).

Klara goes on to give a pre-Freud Freudian analysis of how childhood trauma, like witnessing one's father's violent death, can lead to what we would call neurosis and she offers the hope that clarity of understanding, exposing the repressed memories to the light, will dispel

them and bring calm to the sufferer. Instead, Nathanael falls in love with an automaton, a salon amusement created by a scientist named Spallanzani. Although an impressive creation, Olympia clearly is not human. She never speaks, for example, and her eyes do not really meet one's gaze. But Nathanael at a conscious level thinks of her as an attentive listener and her failure to stare back at him as an index of modesty. He falls in love with her, but, as the reader sees, the dissonance between his repressed knowledge that she is artificial and his conscious belief that she is real drives him over the edge, literally, tumbling to his death from a tower. Olympia fulfills the observation made since ancient days: «Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad». (There was, by the way, a real scientist in this period who had studied at the University of Bologna, a biologist named Lazzaro Spallanzani whose first name recalls the Biblical story of bringing the dead to life and who in his own research confirmed the impossibility of the spontaneous generation of life. Hoffmann knows what he is doing. He wants his readers, like his characters, to look below the surface). In Hoffmann's tale, the reader understands that the metamorphosis that Nathanael perceives is metagenesis. Therefore, we should expect it to reveal the prior psychological state of the transformer. Since beauty – and in this case life – is in the eye of the beholder (Hoffmann 1969: p. 115), Nathanael is the transformer. His prior mental state was dissonant, fearful, and driven by guilt. His spying, his eyesight, seemed to him to occasion his father's death. The guilty espionage not only cost him a father but thwarted his father's attempts to bring to light a means of transformation, the elusive success of alchemy. Even a real scientist like Spallanzani can't do that; indeed, has proved that it can't be done. But in his own mind, Nathanael does just that, compensating for his guilt by fulfilling, or trying to fulfill, his father's metamorphic pursuit. Unfortunately, the metamorphosis is complete only in fantasy. In the fictional reality, Olympia is a sham and Nathanael dies. And we readers know the unconscious reasons why.

At the time Hoffmann was writing, the Grimm Brothers published their classic *Household Tales*. *The Frog Prince* is both thoroughly typical of the revelatory nature of true metamorphosis and particularly rich in its symbolic representation of the unconscious of the frog and of the princess. The casual memory most adults have of the story is captured in the pop apothegm that «you've got to kiss a lot of frogs before you find a prince». But in the Grimm version, there is no kissing. In fact, the frog, in return for retrieving the golden ball that the princess had let slip down a deep well, asks much more: that «thou wouldst love me, and have me for thy companion and play-fellow, and let me sit by thee at table, and eat from thy plate, and drink from thy cup, and sleep in thy little bed» (Grimm

1963: p. 33). The princess promises this but, once she gets the ball back, runs home. Later though, her royal father instructs her to fulfill her promise. But after dinner, once in the bedroom and away from her father's sight, the princess' disgust takes over.

Then she felt beside herself with rage, and picking him up, she threw him with all her strength against the wall, crying, «Now will you be quiet, you horrid frog!» But as he fell, he ceased to be a frog, and became all at once a prince with beautiful kind eyes. And it came to pass that, with her father's consent, they became bride and bridegroom. And he told her how a wicked witch had bound him by her spells, and how no one but she alone could have released him, and that they two would go together to his father's kingdom (Grimm 1963: p. 35).

In this story, the frog does not turn into a prince; he turns back into a prince. His human-like status had been signaled from the first by his ability to speak. Even though the princess' passion is violent, her passion in the bedroom releases him from the curse of mocking anthropomorphism that another woman had imposed on him. We never know who or why, only that it happened. Perhaps just being a man, in this world in which fathers like the king can compel obedience from women, was cause enough. No matter the cause, the effect is clear: the metamorphosis reveals that the consciously demanding frog was all along unconsciously beautiful, loving, and kind. Thank goodness the princess broke through.

So far, metamorphosis has consistently revealed prior psychological states. In the world before the advent of depth psychology, those states were themselves visible, as with Actaeon; in the world after the advent of depth psychology, those states could well be invisible and unconscious, as with Nathanael and the Frog Prince. The OED in its definition makes clear the source of the unconscious: «Applied to mental or psychic processes of which a person is not aware but which have a powerful effect on his attitudes and behaviour, specially in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, processes activated by desires, fears, or memories which are unacceptable to the conscious mind and so repressed; also designating that part of the mind or psyche in which such processes operate». Once we have the possibility of an unconscious, we need to ask how repression creates it. In the case of Frankenstein, Victor's own unrecognized egotism creates a monster willing to kill. In the case of Nathanael, his guilt, the sense that his spying somehow caused his own father's death, is insupportable. Nathanael represses himself. The Frog Prince is repressed by an angry woman. In this historic phase, then, repression, be it thought of as arising within or without us, is a matter of the relative power of one individual over an individual's consciousness. However, as we saw with

Metamorphosis of the Unconscious in European Literature

Victor's father, the overpowering individual may sometimes in some sense stand for society. As we move through this period, the importance of repressive social norms becomes clearer. As Freud wrote in *Civilization and Its Discontents*,

[...] replacement of the power of the individual by the power of a community constitutes the decisive step of civilization [...] The liberty of the individual is no gift of civilization (Freud 1961: p. 47).

The metamorphoses of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* illustrate the beginning of this decisive step. Alice famously eats a bit of this and becomes tremendous, a bit of that and becomes tiny, the transformations seeming to occur even more arbitrarily than those administered by a chaotic god. But there is no chaotic god in Wonderland. The entire domain can be understood as a projective fantasy. Following the metaphor of depth psychology, Alice falls into her own unconscious and sees it anew. Some of that unconscious is straight out of Freud, her death jokes, for example, often centered on her cat, or her anal eroticism displayed, for instance, at the tea party at which she, although a gate crasher, rudely demands that rules be observed. From the very first chapter, though, Carroll makes clear that the psyche constructing this Wonderland was itself created in part by others. As Alice falls down the famous rabbit hole, she proceeds so slowly that she can read the labels of jars on shelves she passes, reach out to take them, and then replace them.

«Well!» thought Alice to herself, «after such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs! How brave they'll all think me at home! Why, I wouldn't say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house!» (Carroll 1960: p. 27).

Although Alice is falling ever further into her own world, she carries within her, and hence into the construction of that world, a conception of "all" who inhabit her normal world. She judges her experiences and actions as she imagines they would. At the same time, the third-person narrator, who by the very structure of narrative is more powerful than Alice, maintains a somewhat sardonic distance from her. His parenthetical remark, implying that if Alice fell off the house in the real world she would die into silence, is a grim joke at the character's expense. Alice's introjective comment and the narrator's unsympathetic one together suggest that in the Victorian world, children are beginning to be commoditized, treated not as individuals but according to rules. Charles Dickens had made the same point in the critique of education he offered about a decade earlier in *Hard Times* (1854). And those rules – «Children should be seen and not heard»; «At table always pass to the right»;

«Work before play»; and so on – are not the rules of a single overpowering individual but the rules of society, even if those rules are espoused and enforced by individuals. Repression by a neighborhood bully, in other words, is a matter of one-on-one conflict; repression by the neighborhood policeman is a matter of the state versus the individual. In Europe, metropolitan police forces began to emerge in the early nineteenth century.

By the twentieth century, we are firmly into the third phase, that in which the metamorphic revelation of a prior psychological state characteristically shows an unconscious formed not by conflict with one or two other individuals but with the world at large. Franz Kafka created the archetype of modern metamorphosis.

«As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect» (Kafka 1971: p. 89). We are never told what changed Gregor in *The Metamorphosis*, but we quickly learn that he had been a «commercial traveler», scurrying hither and yon at the bidding of his bosses, intent on supporting his family, that is, his indolent father, dull mother, and beloved sister who he hopes will pursue her music. While the princess who ultimately marries the Frog Prince could escape her father's scrutiny and express her rage in the privacy of her bedroom, Gregor, though an adult, has no safe retreat. On the road, he is observed by clients; at home, he must satisfy his family. When his transformation prevents him from working, his employer sends someone right into his bedroom to check on him, although that someone, of course, recoils in disgust. Karl Marx suggests that being precedes consciousness; that is, that the way we live in the world of material relations shapes us even before we achieve self-awareness. Gregor has been scurrying here and there in the service of economic necessity, almost never motivated by real pleasure, rarely thanked and then not warmly. He had become an insect metaphorically – unconsciously – long before he became one in his body.

The particular insect that Gregor becomes is a dung-beetle, a scarab, a symbol of regeneration for the ancient Egyptians. When he finally dies, his remains are carried away, thanks to the charwoman, by the local butcher boy, presumably to become sausage and feed others. This eucharistic outcome echoes three events: Gregor's metamorphosis occurring on Christmas, his death on Easter (both of which dates celebrate metamorphoses of the Christian god), and the consequent metamorphosis that we read of Greta, Gregor's sister, in the last line. The parents have taken her on a countryside outing and note her «vivacity»: «And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her

feet first and stretched her young body» (Kafka 1971: p. 139). But this is not a happy ending, a promise of Resurrection based on sacrifice. Although Gregor consciously loved his family, and especially his sister, we come to know that each had been profoundly changed earlier when Gregor had accepted financial responsibility for the family. After Gregor's metamorphosis, it becomes clear that the father had lied about his own poverty. No one had helped Gregor even at the moment when he had to give up all personal ambitions to help them. But once Gregor cannot earn, all three remaining Samsas suddenly become productive.

Gregor, from Latin, means watchman, from the word for flock. This character monitors the world for the reader and warns us, but he is caught by a nature that forces him to do as the flock wishes. Samsa, I think, comes from samsara, the opposite of nirvana in Hindu philosophy. Samsara is the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. It comes from Hindi for "wandering through". A good shepherd, a gregor, prevents the greg from wandering off. There is a conflict within Kafka's character. Gregor consciously wants to serve his family but unconsciously he wants to evade the responsibilities they and the world have imposed upon him. He has become an insect who, if need be, is quite willing to die. That is what the world has made him unconsciously. That is what his metamorphosis reveals. There is neither resurrection nor nirvana to follow. To the extent that we live in a Kafkaesque world, that is our fate as well.

The revelations of metamorphosis, one might notice, have often had much to do with love (eros) or sex, from Echo's and Narcissus' unrequited loves to Actaeon's peering illicitly at the virgin goddess to the obscene birth of Frankenstein's monster to Greta Samsa's stretching her young body. This frequent connection makes sense because, as is explicit in metagenesis, metamorphosis in general, like love and sex, makes individuals. Whether we think of Freud as a scientist or as an allegorist, his narratives of the connection between sexuality and repression, between sexuality and the development of the unconscious, are the most powerful we have. Even those who dismiss Freud's literal truth cannot speak without adopting his vocabulary. Stories are powerful.

In the final, fortieth "record" of the personal journal that wholly constitutes Eugene Zamiatin's classic, futuristic, dystopian novel, *We*, the title character, D-503, has just been subjected to an x-ray procedure for the removal of "fancy" that is, of his imagination. It leaves him with an idiot grin. Despite his many turmoils, in that last record he says that «smiling is the normal state for a normal human being» (Kafka 1971: p. 217). This cannot be. He has watched his lover tortured to death by the state. But it can be, to the now fundamentally changed D-503, who

believes without reservation, as he says in the novel's last words, «Reason must prevail» (p.218). Clearly Zamiatin is attacking the then young Soviet state – *We* was the first book officially banned by the Soviets – but he is more broadly attacking the modern industrial world. Karl Marx spoke of the transformation that the imposition of perfection would produce, the «new communist man». It never happened. Erich Fromm warned of the «escape from freedom» that makes both fascism and consumerist conformism attractive: giving up the self makes life oh so much easier. But Zamiatin still struggles. D-503 is told by a doctor that «a soul has formed in you». Is that dangerous, he asks? “Incurable” (Zamiatin 1922: p. 84-85). But the x-ray procedure at the end of the novel does cure him. It removes his imagination, his soul, his psyche, and D-503 metamorphoses into silence, like Galatea before her quickening, like an inversion of Echo: all body, no voice.

It is common in modern utopian literature to see sex, with its potential for fostering powerful attachments between individuals, as the great threat to the totalitarian state. That's why sex is so often either rigidly regulated or debased by promiscuity. In Zamiatin's novel, D-503 is led to his own rebellion against the United State by I-330, a woman willing to violate the Table of Hours regulating all labor. But she is not the origin of D-503's apostasy. Before he ever meets I-330, D-503 begins the novel, his diary, with this line: «This is merely a copy, word for word, of what was published this morning in the State newspaper». There follows a progress report about the building of the Integral, a great rocket ship the state intends to use to bring «mathematically faultless happiness» to other worlds (Zamiatin 1922: p. 3). We come to learn that D-503 is the chief builder of this ship. The newspaper article then, by implication (but certainly not by name), praises his singular success. But D-503 knows one should never be singular in the United State. So he struggles with his need to make his own mark. He justifies his writing by implying that he functions as does a printing press, merely copying approved text. But that implication is false, and although D-503 never admits it, his apostasy begins not with sex but with his desire to write, to proclaim his individuality, to reach a reader. When his metamorphosis does occur, turning him into a statue that artfully conceals the fact that it is a statue, he loses his psyche. This is thus not true metamorphosis but the variant I've called metagenesis. And as always, it reveals the prior psychological state of the transformer. The United State long ago concluded that the best way to treat people is to mechanize them. Remove imagination, and they become simply parts. Add imagination, and the trouble begins.

Metamorphosis of the Unconscious in European Literature

There are three broad phases in the literary use of metamorphosis as revelation of previously existing psychological state. In the oldest, that state is conscious and metamorphosis simply gives character its due. In the second, after the advent of depth psychology, the unconscious is revealed as a reflex of repression imposed on the psyche by individuals. And in the third, after the development of the industrial state, the unconscious is revealed as a reflex of repression imposed on the psyche by the functioning of the modern world. How can one escape that imposition? One can give up the self voluntarily, as Fromm suggests many totalizing ideologies invite; or one can die more literally, as Gregor Samsa did; or one can try to live in literature, as Zamiatin's D-503 attempted. At the current moment in the evolution of the unconscious in European literature, literature itself has become a key domain in which the unconscious can seek freedom. The literary imagination is vital to us all.

Eric S. Rabkin*
(University of Michigan)

* Eric Rabkin is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Rabkin has published and edited more than 160 texts, among which: *Narrative Suspense* (1973); *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976); *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (avec Robert Scholes, 1977); *Teaching Writing That Works: A Group Approach to Practical English* (avec Macklin Smith, 1990); *Stories: An Anthology and an Introduction* (1995); *Effective Writing* (videotape series, 1995); *The Rise and Fall of Twentieth Century Formula Fiction* (ed. avec Carlo Pagetti, 2001), et *Mars: A Tour of the Human Imagination* (2005).

Bibliography

CARROLL L., *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland in The Annotated Alice*, ed. by Martin Gardner, New York: World Publishing, 1960.

CURRY W. C., *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (1926), New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960.

FREUD S., *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), ed. and trans. by James Strachey, New York: Norton, 1961.

GOODHEART E., *The Cult of the Ego: The Self in Modern Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

GRAY T., «Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard» (1751), in *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed. by William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith and Roger Lonsdale, London: Longmans, Green, p. 117-140.

GRIMM J. and W., *Household Stories of the Brothers Grimm* (German 1812-1815; trans. 1886), trans. by Lucy Crane, New York: Dover, 1963.

HOFFMANN E. T. A., «The Sandman» (1816), in E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann*, ed. and trans. by Leonard J. Kent and Elizabeth C. Knight, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

KAFKA F., «The Metamorphosis», in Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, ed. by Nahum N. Glatzer, New York: Schocken Books, 1971.

OVID, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Mary M. Innes, Baltimore: Penguin, 1955.

SHELLEY M., *Frankenstein* (1818), ed. by M. K. Joseph, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

ZAMIATIN E., *We* (1922), trans. by Gregory Zilboorg, New York: Dutton, 1924.