Cultural Transformations of the Concept of Transformation:

Ovid and Kafka

by

Jessica Sacco

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Student’s I.D. /Code  353892 (M)

Student’s Name & Surname  Jessica Socco

Course  Master of Arts in Literary Tradition and Popular Culture

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Abstract

The concept of metamorphosis is one that has migrated culturally through various spectrums, such as time and media. It has been culturally transformed to suit the period of time and also the genre in which it is used. This cultural migration has been analysed in this thesis through the works of Ovid and Kafka as the main texts. The concept of metamorphosis has been analysed from two main aspects: the transformation of the body and its effects on the mind, as well as the transformation of the concept itself. Stephen Greenblatt’s Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto is the principal text used to analyse the movement of the concept of metamorphosis in light of the theory of cultural mobility.

To further analyse the concept of transformation, both as a physical change and also from its psychological aspect, various secondary texts have been used such as: Harold Skulsky’s Metamorphosis: The Mind in Exile, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s Metamorphosis: Creative Imagination in Fine Arts Between Life-Projects and Human Aesthetic Aspirations, Volume 81, Bruce Clarke’s Allegories of Writing: The Subject of Metamorphosis, and David Gallagher’s Metamorphosis: Transformation of the Body and the Influence of Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” on Germanic Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries among others.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter focuses on the psychological aspect that surrounds the idea of transformation. The second chapter examines the way metamorphosis is used in different genres ranging from epic poems to gothic narratives, while also focusing on the movement of the concept of transformation through different eras, from ancient Greece to the 20th century. This thesis’ third chapter is highlights the incorporation of the concept of metamorphosis into different media. The fourth and final chapter explores the concept of metamorphosis in different aspects of popular culture, such as adaptation, superheroes, and contemporary literature.
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Introduction

Metamorphosis is a concept that has itself undergone different transformations and, in a sense, lived up to its name. From its early representations as a mythical idea to its recent evolutionary stage as a topic in popular culture, it has changed not only in narrative detail, but also in its inferential reach and implications. It is an interesting topic that has always fascinated the common and learned reader, mostly for its mythical and supernatural elements. This thesis aims to delve deeper into this concept to discover the transformations that the idea of metamorphosis itself has undergone through its movement from one culture to another, as well as the evolution it has experienced through ages, artistic mediums, and thematic purposes.

The title of this thesis, *Cultural Transformations of the Concept of Transformation: Ovid and Kafka*, illustrates the mobility of the concept of metamorphosis through various cultural aspects, such as genres and media, with insights into its psychological implications. This cultural mobility is analysed mainly through the analysis of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, as well as other minor literature titles. The theory of cultural mobility presented by Stephen Greenblatt is the main theoretical basis of this research, which refers to Greenblatt’s *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*. The principal aim of my thesis is to highlight the evolution and the transformation of metamorphosis through the analysis of various characters and cultural aspects of the two main narratives mentioned in the title.

The thesis is divided in four chapters which treat the different cultural aspects touched by the concept of metamorphosis. The first chapter, divided into five parts, focuses on the psychological aspect that surrounds the idea of transformation. The first part tackles the question of what defines a human being, and how one’s humanity is then affected by a metamorphosis. The next part concerns itself with the relationship between the mind and the body, a relationship
which is challenged by the concept of metamorphosis, as the mind is embodied in a completely different form. Following this section, the focus shifts to the interiority of a person either prior to the transformation or after. It examines how metamorphosis could be both the reason for inner struggles, as well as the result of an unstable mind. The fourth part delves into the effect that a metamorphosis has on surrounding characters, and not exclusively on the morphed being. It analyses the reactions of these characters towards the unexplainable phenomenon of metamorphosis, as well as their treatment of the transformed character. The fifth and last section of this first chapter explores the lasting effects of metamorphosis on the morphed being as it forces them to be alienated from their family and their society, thereby making them unable to communicate with others.

The second chapter is also divided into five sections and examines the way metamorphosis is used in different genres. The first section focuses on how the theme of metamorphosis is used in epics, taking Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as the main text, and also on how it relates to the Hellenistic period. This section is followed by an analysis on the inclusion of the concept of transformation in the Gothic genre, mainly through the study of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, as well as how this concept has been affected by the theory of degeneration of this period. The third part focuses on the exploitation of metamorphosis in Absurdist fiction through the analysis of Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, as well as how the depiction of transformation is used as a symbol of nihilism. The fourth section concerns itself with the use of the concept of metamorphosis in different religions as a symbol of reincarnation and rebirth. The final part analyses whether metamorphosis in these genres is used as a form of divine intervention or as a diabolic tool that causes monstrous transformations.
This thesis’ third chapter is divided into three parts that highlight the incorporation of the concept of metamorphosis into different media. The first section focuses on various portrayals of metamorphosis in visual art, and how these depictions have changed from artist to artist. It is subdivided into two parts focusing on two different types of this visual medium: paintings and sculptures. The second main part of the chapter examines the ability of music to portray metamorphosis, focusing especially on its melodic capacity to narrate episodes of metamorphosis. The last part of this chapter deals with the use of metamorphosis in literature through the analysis of two classical titles, Homer’s *The Odyssey* and William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It examines how the theme of metamorphosis is incorporated into the characters of these stories, as well as their general plot and setting.

The fourth and final chapter is also divided into three parts exploring the concept of metamorphosis in different aspects of popular culture. The first section analyses the idea of adaptation as a form of metamorphosis. It observes how a story can be transformed into another different narrative by transferring it to a different medium. The next part concerns itself with a central aspect of the concept of metamorphosis, identity. It explores the repercussions on an individual’s identity as he undergoes transformation. To analyse this aspect of metamorphosis, this section is subdivided into two parts focusing on two contemporary literature titles: *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (together with its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*), and the *Harry Potter* series. The final part of this chapter focuses on how the concept of metamorphosis is used in superhero figures, as well as on how it affects the universe of these superheroes.
1. The Psychological Aspect of Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis is more complex than being simply synonymous with the body's physical mutation into another form. It also concerns the psychological changes that the transformed being might undergo in the moments before, during, and after the transformation. Each transformation affects each person differently depending on the causes, reasons, and nature of the transformation.

To begin with, the concept of metamorphosis raises important philosophical questions: what makes a human definable as such? Is the mind the main element to a person, or is the body the more determining aspect when defining what constitutes a human being? These questions revolve around the question of individuality, and the constant characteristics that it retains through different forms. Furthermore, the transformation does not only affect one's body, but it also has drastic consequences on the mind of the individual. Ovid's and Kafka's metamorphoses are notable examples of psychological changes alongside physical mutations. This psychological element is mainly portrayed through the alienation revolving around these authors' characters, which is brought about by their physical change, and also by the nature of the metamorphosis. Due to the transformations that these characters undergo, they inevitably face isolation and rejection from their family and acquaintances, a factor that further affects the character’s psyche, and that ultimately leads to alienation.

1.1. What constitutes a person?

In order to comprehend the full effects of metamorphosis on a person's individuality, one must first establish the characteristics that make up a human being, and whether any of these characteristics are retained after the transformation takes place. The behaviour of the afflicted being is one element that can be used to identify some of the characteristics that a human being
should possess. Following the behavioural characteristics of a being before and after transformation, one would easily realise that they differ greatly. Generally, the transformed being demonstrates the same behavioural patterns of the animal it is now changed into.¹ Owing to this change in behaviour, the transformed being can no longer be defined as simply human, since he or she now partly falls in the same category as his beastly form. Thus, the transformation has affected not only the physical form of the transformed being, but also the patterns of perception, instinct, and thought or reaction typical of its species. This, to an extent, also affects the person's relationship to his kin, considering that he can no longer be regarded as one of their own due to the outer and inner alterations obtained in his being. Two outstanding examples of this process are Gregor Samsa's and Actaeon’s respective transformation. The two characters are transformed into an insect and a stag respectively, and as such are not recognised by their own family, to the point that they are left to die.

Apart from behavioural patterns, consciousness of one’s state of being is also another factor to establish the personhood of the transformed being. According to an article written by Harold T. P. Hayes, if the morphed being still shows signs of conscious reasoning, then he should be regarded as having human qualities.² Thus, if the mind is still the same after the transformation, then the character should still be classified as a human being, notwithstanding his newly acquired shape. In this case, the mind is stronger than the behavioural patterns associated with or expected from a new bodily nature, since the mind is here deemed a greater agent in determining the traits that make up a human being. However, is behaviour or reason truly enough when it comes to defining what personhood is?

During the process of transformation, the mind endures a powerful change resulting from the body’s metamorphosis. Thomas Nagel, a political philosopher whose scholarly work also focuses on the mind, analyses this notion through the idea of a person imaging himself as a bat. According to Nagel, one cannot fully become another entity unless they can experience the world exactly as this other existence does. This means that sharing another person’s experience of the world is tantamount to sharing their form and perception, or that sharing another person’s being means having their very same engagement with the world. Nagel's example is that if a man wants to understand what it feels like to be a bat, then he must transform into a bat. However, it is not simply a matter of replacing one’s bodily form with another, since the person's mind must also accept the transformation if he is to avoid being caught between two realities: an animal body and a human mind. If one's mind does not develop in accordance to its new physical form, then one may be deemed little more than a person embodied in an alien form. In contrast to this theoretical standpoint, Gregor Samsa’s human personality is completely disregarded as against the horror and repulsion his insect form inspired in everyone. His family also refuse to even consider that this insect was once their son or brother, completely ignoring the possibility that the insect Gregor still possesses some semblance of inner human characteristics. Having some sort of human consciousness enables Gregor to feel entrapped in the body of an insect, with only the outer qualities of acting like one, despite his interior human turmoil. Taking Gregor’s situation as a revealing example, one could argue that during the transformation the being in question experiences the body of another, together with the ensuing conditions and physical interactions with the world, without necessarily relinquishing his former anxieties, fears, and concerns, now intensified on account of the metamorphosis itself. This conundrum forces the person to see another creature’s reality through a human point of view.

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The characteristics of personhood point to a deeper definition of what personhood is. Lawrence H. Davis’s specific definition for personhood entails being conscious of one’s self: “[...] this means having the ‘concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states,’ and believing that one is oneself ‘such a continuing entity’ [...]”. According to this statement, personhood revolves around being fully aware of one’s own surroundings as they relate to one’s interiority, the knowledge that one remains the same person through different situations eliciting different feelings. If we were to consider this idea as the definition of personhood, then both Gregor Samsa and Actaeon would be regarded as human beings in their respective animal forms. Despite the former’s supernatural transformation, he continually proves to have retained the same human character as he attempts to accept and get accustomed to his new body. Actaeon, likewise, tries in vain to be recognised by his hounds, and feels distraught when they fail to identify him behind his new outer appearance. These two similar episodes show two human minds trapped inside an alien and possibly repulsive body, consciously aware of their new fates and still feeling the same human emotions as they did previous to their new physical nature and its bodily interaction with a surrounding world.

1.2. Mind versus Body
In defining what personhood is, one must also take into consideration the relationship between the mind and the body, to understand whether a person should be characterised by his interiority alone, by his physical shape alone, or by both in mutual effect. According to Harold Skulsky, both these human qualities are equally important as the person is the mind, and the mind is the core of the body. Following Skulsky’s notion, one can establish that mental characteristics are embodied by physical ones and externalized into recognizable patterns of actions and reactions.

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4 Skulsky, p. 8.
5 Ibid., p. 133.
This can be further qualified in the case of metamorphosis, for the inner turmoil and mental state of the morphed being can be interwoven with the transformed body’s new physical abilities, which may be truly apt in expressing earlier human concerns. For instance, Nyctímene’s transformation into an owl, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, represents her shame for committing incest. In this example, Nyctímene’s moral degradation is being expressed by the owl’s distinctive nature of travelling only at night, away from prying eyes. But the distinctively human quality of shame also suggests that Nyctímene should go on being considered as a person, even if in her new form, as she retains her mental qualities which seem to be enhanced by the shape and typical behaviour of an owl. In most cases of literary metamorphosis, old mental traits are reaffirmed by new physical ones after the transformation takes place, which in essence is a means of merging the two previously separate natures into one.

The next issue regarding the mind and the body in the process of metamorphosis is the idea of individuality. Both the mind and the body are essential for one’s identity as they constitute the person as a whole. However, the mind possesses a stronger influence on the distinctive characteristics of one’s individuality. This is because it is directly related to the personality and experiences of the person, which are ultimately externalised by the body. The definition of identity implies uniqueness as one’s experiences and emotions are only their own. In spite of this, Ovid’s account of Narcissus creates an element of doubt regarding what identity truly is. Narcissus does not undergo a physical transformation, but rather a mental one. He falls in love with his own reflection and the knowledge that he is fated to never be with his beloved drives him to madness. He realises the impossibility of intimacy with his own reflection, if only because they have too much in common. In his eyes they are two individuals with the same experiences and behaviour and, thus, with the same identity. In this episode, Narcissus’

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6 Skulsky, p. 34.
uniqueness is being divided between himself and his reflection, causing him to question his own individuality to the point that he becomes irrational in his reasoning. In conclusion to this section, personhood is defined more by the mind than the body, and as a result, physically transformed beings should still be regarded as human beings since their interiority remains intact even after the transformation has taken place.

1.3. Inner Struggles and Transformations
A transformation does not only affect the transformed being physically, but it also has certain repercussions on the person’s mind and sanity. Metamorphosis can lead to various psychological consequences, such as madness, confusion, and alienation - all of which attest to a tortured mind during the act of transformation. Daphne's transformation into the laurel tree exemplifies this tortured mind, as she slowly realises that her consciousness is now entrapped in the stillness of a tree. In some cases, however, metamorphosis is actually the consequence of a tormented mind struggling with two sides of their own personality, especially where moral matters are concerned. Both instances lead the character to a state of inner instability, whether this is due to the transformation itself, or to the inner struggle that brings about metamorphosis.

One example of an inner struggle as a result of the transformation is Io's myth. Her unexpected transformation into a cow leads to her panic at seeing her new reflection. This transformation, however, has deeper and more complex feelings underlying the initial confusion, most notably Io’s denial of her new appearance. By rejecting her cow form, her repeated attempts to communicate as a human only come out as heifer sounds. All this intensifies her confusion at her inability to perform previously effortless and undemanding human activities, causing her to feel fearful of the noises she herself makes, in addition to the dread at seeing her reflection. She is unable to identify herself in her new body, and thus feels trapped in a foreign
corporeal presence. The psychological repercussion of this transformation on Io is powerful to
the point of robbing her of the ability to articulate her anxieties, even when she regains her
human form, for fear of hearing animal sounds instead of her own voice. The metamorphosis
endured by Io and its effects on her mental state can be compared to the psychological state of
anxiety. Freud distinguished two types of anxiety: traumatic, ‘automatic’ anxiety, which is
related to the mind in a state of shock and, ‘neurotic’ anxiety, focused on the assimilation of
shocking situations to create a defensive mechanism. The first type of anxiety is the one that
most concerns the myth of Io as it is a response to the powerlessness felt during a specific
traumatic experience, in Io’s case her transformation. Being transformed into a cow is a deeply
distressing situation for Io, even more so when she realises that she has lost her ability to speak.
During her transformation, Io feels utterly helpless, traumatised to the point of being fearful of
her own reflection. The automatic anxiety in Io then materialises itself through her fear of
voicing herself, afraid of the heifer sounds she could possibly make. Io’s mind is in such a
powerful state of shock that she loses the ability to distinguish between her interiority and her
body, believing them to be one and the same thing. This leads her to the feelings of anxiety
directed at her physical abilities and her appearance.

Narcissus' myth is a different case of transformation resulting from an inner struggle. As
stated previously, he falls in love with his own image reflected in the water. The moment he
realises that he is attracted to himself and that it is their closeness that divides the two
appearances of the same identity, his unstable state of mind reaches the point of suicide. On the
other hand, according to Harold Skulsky, Narcissus in his mental state fails to realise that he is
actually in love with himself, thinking that he is attracted to someone bearing his exact same

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looks. However, it can also be argued that Narcissus recognises himself in the reflection, and, as a result of precisely this knowledge is driven to the point of insanity and to committing suicide. He is tormented by the fact that the person he loves lacks a body of his own, lacks individuality; his image is what defined him, and now it is the object to bring about his own destruction. Through Narcissus' episode we are able to witness the fragility of the mind, broken by one's simple reflection. If we are to consider the theory that Narcissus acknowledges the fact that he is attracted to his reflection, then his tale can be analysed in light of the concept of narcissism, derived from his myth. Narcissism is a personality disorder that describes one's excessive fixation with one's self. There are various traits of a narcissistic personality, but Narcissus demonstrates mainly two of them: arrogance and self-absorption. He displays these two traits in his attitude towards others, believing himself to be superior to them, as well as being convinced that no one is worthy of his love. Furthermore, those who suffer from narcissistic personality disorder are mentally incapable of noticing the destructive damage they cause to themselves and to others through their narcissistic behaviour. Narcissus demonstrates this element of a narcissistic personality throughout the course of his myth, but it is most prominent in the scene of the reflection in the pool. In this scene, as specified before, Narcissus is completely fixated with his own image, failing to realise that he is slowly becoming increasingly unaware of his surroundings and of himself, thus destroying himself with his excessive interest with his own reflection.

The myth of Narcissus, if taken to be a portrayal of a narcissistic personality, can be paralleled to the story of Dorian Gray, protagonist of The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde. Likewise to Narcissus, Dorian Gray also acknowledges his physical beauty through a

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8 Skulsky, p. 32.
9 Arthur Freeman, Angela Breitmeyer and Melissa Flint, 'The Challenges in Diagnosing Narcissistic Personality Disorder: Difficult to Define, but "We Know It When We See It"', Clinical Forum, 2000.
symbol of reflection, his portrait. Gray’s obsession with his beauty and his youth leads to the curse of the painting, which ages, scars, and shows signs of corruption in his stead. The portrait is analogous to Narcissus’ reflection in the pool, as both are a symbol of revelation through which both characters recognise their own beauty and are entranced by it. Another parallelism between the character of Dorian Gray and that of Narcissus, is that in Gray’s pursuit to achieve eternal youth, he fails to realise the harm he is causing to those around him and to himself. Each crime and sin Gray commits transform his painting into an image of horror, reflecting the nature of his soul. The metamorphosis in Wilde’s novel occurs gradually through the portrait with each of Gray’s transgressions, while in Narcissus’ myth the transformation occurs at the end, when he commits suicide. Both of these stories portray the destruction brought on by excessive self-admiration, emphasised by the metamorphosis that both Narcissus and the portrait undergo. Through the analysis of these two stories, we reach the conclusion that the concept of metamorphosis is used to symbolise two different aspects of life. In the case of Dorian Gray, metamorphosis is taken to imply the degeneration of the human soul, as opposed to the salvation symbolised by the metamorphosis of Narcissus into a flower. As a result, we have a movement of the concept of metamorphosis from being a symbol of reincarnation and salvation, to being one of corruption and decay.

Ovid, in his epic poem, uses characters to portray the inner struggle one endures when faced with two opposing choices, usually derived from a strong desire to act upon one’s wishes and yet resisting this longing. Two such episodes are that of Bylbis and Myrrha. Both stories share the same theme of incest, which reaches similar consequences. They are both attracted to family members, a physical attraction that causes them to question their identity and also their own sanity. Furthermore, both feel marginalised in their respective families as they feel like
strangers in their own familiar space. Their immoral actions towards their own kin are the cause of their transformations, either as punishment or as a form of compassion from the gods towards their ill-fate.

Byblis, in love with her brother Caunus, desperately tries to reason her attraction towards her own blood, and attempts to be accepted by him only to face rejection each time. His constant rejections drive her to madness leading to her transformation into a mountain spring, a symbol of her incessant weeping. In this form, she is forced to cry constantly, eternally compelled to feel the sadness of repudiation, as well as the solitude brought on by her immoral attraction and by the nature of her transformation.

In contrast to Byblis' tale, Myrrha manages to fulfil her unnatural desires by deceiving her father, Cínyras. Realising the identity of his mistress, he attempts to kill Myrrha, forcing her to flee to save her life and that of her unborn child. Myrrha, fully aware of her heinous crime, is struck by strong feelings of guilt, as well as isolation, feeling that she belongs to neither the realm of the living nor that of the dead. This leads to her metamorphosis into a tree bearing her name. In spite of this, the scene which truly tests Myrrha's strength of mind is the moment of labour. Having lost all of her physical abilities along with her human body, she is forced to quietly bear the pain of childbirth, until she is ultimately aided by Lucína, goddess of childbirth. The imagery of the tree cracking open to allow Adonis to free himself from his mother’s womb are striking in their detail and their realistic portrayal, evoking in the reader a similar feeling of pain. Moreover, the knowledge that Myrrha can never act as a mother to her son causes her to feel more isolated than before, as now she is missing the bridge which once connected her to her past life as a human. The tale of Myrrha can be analysed also in light of the Electra complex, a term coined by Carl Gustav Jung. The complex describes a girl’s competition with her mother
for psychosexual possession of the father. In the case of Myrrha, the mother is not present and therefore has no direct competition, but this role is filled by her own inhibitions towards her feelings. Freud considered the Electra complex, or as he called it ‘negative Oedipus complex’, to be far more emotionally intense that its male counterpart, possibly resulting in a woman with a submissive and troubled personality. This element is paralleled to Myrrha being constantly plagued by doubts and guilt as a result of her sexual feelings towards her father. Furthermore, her submissive personality is emphasised in her complete submission to be exiled from both realms and also in her transformation into the myrrh tree.

In the case of Gregor Samsa, his inner torments are both the cause of his transformation, as well as the consequence of it. Gregor feels isolated from his family and work environment, feeling trapped in his own body and forced to live for the benefit of others. This is because his parents entrust him with the paying of their debt, while also living off of his wage. These feelings ultimately result in his unexpected metamorphosis into a vermin, a transformation which he does not fully acknowledge at first. However, the mental consequences of his transformation develop gradually as he slowly begins to realise his situation. Gregor’s body is immediately aware of the new change, but his mind slowly accepts the transformation as it steadily adapts to the physical alterations. Gregor’s transformation forcibly confines him to the isolation of his room, in segregation from the rest of his family. This causes him to yearn for human interaction as well as his human abilities. The metamorphosis affects also his perception and taste as he slowly starts to enjoy being in tight places and eating rotten food. His new form has a strong influence on him to the extent that he ends up questioning his sanity as well as his human nature now trapped in the body of an insect. Perhaps, out of all the mentioned transformations, Gregor’s

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is the most life-changing one as its mental repercussions seem to be far stronger than those of the other metamorphoses, being directly repudiated by his own family both in his human, as well as vermin, form.

In conclusion, through these various examples of inner struggles leading to their respective transformations, we can note that metamorphosis is sometimes the result of having made a psychological or specifically moral choice, as analysed through Byblis' and Myrrha's myths. On the other hand, the power to make a choice masks an unstable mind, most notably represented by Gregor Samsa's predicament. A telling contrast emerges between the analysed transformations of Ovid's epic and the metamorphosis of Kafka's character. Although both authors portray a transformation that invokes a feeling of isolation in the character, the manner of representation differs from one author to the other. While Ovid's tale depicts a human mind entrapped in a body deprived of the ability to show suffering or joy, Kafka provides us with a character who is able to manifest his feelings through his insectile behaviour. In spite of this, Gregor is still rejected by his family as they deem his behaviour and movement abnormal, although it is normal in an insect.

1.4. Metamorphosis as Perceived by Surrounding Characters
As stated earlier, metamorphosis affects the transformed being both physically and mentally. However, it also has an impact on characters surrounding the morphed being, since both the person who undergoes and the bystanders who witness the metamorphic process must come to terms with the transformation. In most cases, the problem that the other characters must face is whether the transformed being is still human or not and, how they should treat him and act

1 Skulsky, pp. 36-37.
around him. This situation is dramatically and graphically portrayed in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and, to a lesser degree, even in some episodes of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

In Kafka, all of the secondary characters regard Gregor with disgust and horror, as well as shame in the case of his family members. Gregor’s family is the main affected party by his metamorphosis, after Gregor himself. The insect Gregor is not immediately recognised by his family, who, at first, only feel threatened by this new creature living in their own house. However, the moment they start viewing the creature as Gregor, they are imbued with a feeling of repulsion and a lack of tolerance towards their family member. This is due to the fact that his family is unable to understand the circumstance of the transformation that Gregor must endure. They feel distant towards him because they have not experienced anything similar to what he has undergone, and thus they fear and reject the unknown. For one to understand what another is truly experiencing, there must be a link between one’s perspective and empathy.\(^\text{12}\) In spite of feeling detached from Gregor, his family still feels that they have a duty towards him, a duty to tolerate him and provide him with the bare necessities. Grete, Gregor’s sister, is the only one who voices her thoughts and feelings regarding her brother’s transformation. After caring for Gregor for some time, she feels that she can no longer tolerate this situation and, thus, starts to reason with her parents regarding the identity of this “dreadful creature”.\(^\text{13}\) Grete is the only one of the Samsa family to create a set of characteristics that identify a human being. Through her theory, she attempts to prove that this being is not Gregor, as he shows beastly qualities instead of human ones, otherwise he would have spared them from all this trouble. His family feels imprisoned by this responsibility towards Gregor, and view it as a curse that is draining all of

\(^{12}\) Nagel, p. 442.

their energy.\textsuperscript{14} As a result, Gregor’s metamorphosis leads his family to regard him as a nuisance, a parasite that is living off of their own vitality and their sense of familial duty.

Contrastingly to Kafka’s focus on the reactions of the surrounding characters, in Ovid we rarely see similar attention to others’ perceptions. Ovid gives importance to the mythical element of the transformation, focusing on the process of metamorphosis itself and on the fate of the transformed being. Kafka, on the other hand, gives prominence not to the transformation, but rather to its repercussions on both the affected party and the other characters. Metamorphosis in Kafka is used as an element to emphasise the reactions of society and the familial institution towards diversity, which is embodied by Gregor’s transformation. In other words, in Kafka’s narrative the focus shifts to the treatment the transformed being receives from others, as opposed to the mythological focus of Ovid’s transformations.

Ovid’s epic contains numerous metamorphic episodes that trigger different reactions from external characters familiar with the transformed being. These reactions range from obsession to rejection, mostly depending on whether the character has recognised the identity of the afflicted person. Apollo, obsessed with Daphne, attempts to make the nymph his possession. Desperate to be free from his passion, Daphne pleads to her father Peneüs, a river god, to change her form. Her body is transformed into a laurel tree that still retains her original beauty and, even in this shape, Apollo still feels attracted to her. He touches the tree as though he is really touching Daphne, and announces to her that since she cannot be his lover, then she is to be his tree.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, he wears a branch from her new form in his hair, on his lyre, and also his quiver, in an effort to always be close to his beloved. Obsessed by Daphne, he also grants her a second transformation by turning her new form into a symbol of glory, destined to be the crown

\textsuperscript{14} Skulsky, p. 186.
of champions and of leaders, such as Augustus. The episode of Syrinx and Pan also revolves around obsessive passion, similar to that of Daphne and Apollo. Similar to Daphne’s myth, even Syrinx undergoes two transformations, first into marsh reeds, and later transformed into a musical instrument by Pan. Consequently, both of these episodes portray an obsession with the person themselves, regardless of their physical shape, as well as their beauty, an element which is common between all of their forms. In contrast to Kafka’s focus on the reactions of others after the transformation has occurred, in these two episodes the central point is the obsession with the being prior to the transformation. In most myths, the transformation occurs as an attempt to avoid capture by a passionate god or creature. The victims try to discourage their predators by changing their form, believing that it is their physical beauty that attracts them and not themselves. However, the two examples mentioned prove otherwise. Both Apollo and Pan are not simply attracted to the nymphs’ beauty, but they are also obsessed with possessing them, regardless of their physical shape.

On the other hand, there are various episodes in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* that revolve around rejection and misunderstanding, such as that of Callisto, and Actaeon. Transformed into a bear and a stag respectively as punishment by the gods, they both face refusal from their kin and acquaintances. Callisto, changed into a bear by Juno, attempts to approach her son to no avail. Arcas has never seen his mother before, and thus is unable to recognise her, inducing him to flee for his life. He attempts to kill her in order to save himself, an action that results in a metamorphosis for him, and a second one for Callisto. They are transformed into two constellations, the Ursa Minor and the Ursa Major respectively. The episode of Actaeon is analogous to that of Callisto in this element of unawareness. Transformed into a stag by the goddess Diana, he is stripped away of his human abilities, unable to voice his pleas and woes. He
is later found by his dogs, who see a prey instead of their master, and Actaeon inevitably meets his ill-fated end at the hands of his dogs and companions. In both these cases, the secondary characters should not be held at fault for not recognising their kin as they are unaware of the circumstances of their mother’s or master’s new beastly shape. In conclusion, taking these two episodes as examples, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* rejection is most often the result of a lack of knowledge regarding the nature of the transformation, resulting in a tragic end for the transformed being.

Through these various examples, we can note how the various portrayals of metamorphosis evoke different reactions from several characters of the story. These reactions are related to the nature of the transformation, which in its turn is related to the cause of transformation. The cause, as analysed in the mentioned cases, is usually linked to various social and familial problems, as well as to the interior torments suffered by the victims of the transformation. Consequently, metamorphosis is an embodiment of the anxieties and issues relating to the society of the story’s literary period, and the reactions to it are the reflection of that social period’s thoughts regarding diversity and unfamiliar circumstances. Each variety of metamorphosis represents the fear of otherness and the marginalisation of this diversity. This fear is a common element between all societies and cultures, which renders metamorphosis the perfect tool to represent these social anxieties regardless of the setting in which it is set.

### 1.5. Alienation and Loss of Communication through Metamorphosis

The transformations mentioned previously have a deeper impact on the character’s personality, as well as their sanity. This is due to the fact that the metamorphosis forces these characters into an involuntary exile, confining them to isolation from their family and friends. This isolation is the consequence of the inability to communicate resulting from the transformation endured,
which ultimately also leads the character to be rejected by the other characters. In other words, isolation is the main state of mind that arises as a result of the character’s transformation. However, in some cases, it is the transformation that is a consequence of the alienation that the character feels prior to the supernatural event. This is mostly true for Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, although one may find similar examples in certain episodes of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Furthermore, the theme of alienation in Kafka is more intricately intertwined with Gregor’s character when compared to the numerous metamorphic episodes of Ovid’s epic. This is due to the fact that while reading Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, the reader has the opportunity to understand and observe the mental transformation that Gregor gradually undergoes as his story unfolds. Most of Ovid’s mythical narratives lack this possibility of understanding the psychological implications of metamorphosis as the focus usually falls on a bodily transformation rather than inward changes in the character’s state of mind, although there are some notable exceptions, such as Myrrha’s episode. The following analysis provides an insight on how the concept of metamorphosis has been expanded in ways that have brought about an inversion of its cause and effect. This means that metamorphosis in the epic genre is used as the result of an event or action, while in more recent periods the focus on metamorphosis has shifted to it being the cause of specific undesirable consequences.

Before analysing any transformation through the theme of alienation, it is important to first define what alienation is, and how it can be incorporated into the various metamorphic narratives one may encounter. Alienation concerns itself with the estrangement of people from their own world, feeling as though they are no longer in control of their own life. This element of alienation is incorporated in Kafka’s novel as an underlying theme (more so than in Ovid’s epic), portrayed by the Samsa family’s struggle to pay off their debts. Alienation is also the result of
being forced to work to earn a living, rather than to satisfy one’s need to deliver one’s own product or service.\textsuperscript{16} Gregor’s situation is an example of this work-related alienation, as he is forced to work an unfulfilling job to repay his parents’ debt. He does not have the opportunity to work in order to express his own personal goals and to deliver his service to others, but he is forced to work simply to earn a living and to solve his family’s financial crisis. Such a situation results in Gregor’s estrangement from himself and his family, as well as the society which is responsible for his family’s circumstance. According to Marx’s theory of alienation, working to earn a living leads the worker to lose the ability to control his own life as he wishes. Moreover, the worker loses the opportunity to develop any possible relationships with others, an element which is symbolised by Kafka’s main character. Society is also to blame as it is the main reason for alienation as it is mainly defined by the distinction in social classes. To an extent, this can also be applied to the various unsatisfying familial relationships Gregor has with his parents and his sister. Furthermore, being defined simply by one’s social class instead of their own personality, leads one to feel estranged from their own humanity.

Gregor’s alienation revolves mainly around his job as a travelling sales man, as well as the lack of communication that results from his work. Due to his social status, he is forced to work a job that does not satisfy him, causing him to feel isolated both at work and at home, as he is not able to develop any relationships with others.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, the position of power he has obtained in his familial circle, causes his parents and his sister to feel estranged from him. This important aspect demonstrates that the lack of communication between Gregor and his family


\textsuperscript{17} David Gallagher, \textit{Metamorphosis: Transformations of the Body and the Influence of Ovid's Metamorphoses on Germanic Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries} (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 128.
was already affecting their relationship even prior to his unexpected transformation.\textsuperscript{18} As a result, the metamorphosis Gregor endures reveals this alienation through the dehumanising nature of the transformation. Gregor’s transformation is thus the result of a chain of events that started with the parents’ debt leading up to this unexpected point. Due to this, it can be said that Gregor’s change into a vermin is partly brought about by his parents’ negative attitude towards him, more specifically the unjust reliance on Gregor to pay their debt. Consequently, his transformation can be viewed as an embodiment of the parents’ guilt towards forcing on Gregor all of their financial troubles, represented by Gregor’s initial reaction to the metamorphosis: a guilty conscience.\textsuperscript{19} The transformation, therefore, can be considered to be a symbol of guilt, as well as of alienation.

Ovid portrays similar episodes of metamorphosis, where a human is changed into an animal, and hence trapped inside another’s body. Similar to Kafka’s transformation, Ovid’s characters find themselves unable to communicate with others, a situation that leads to their isolation.\textsuperscript{20} Actaeon’s and Callisto’s metamorphoses are two very similar episodes that symbolise alienation as the result of lack of communication. As mentioned previously, both of these characters are transformed by the deities Diana and Juno respectively, as an act of punishment for their wrong-doings. Both their metamorphoses into animals have similar unfortunate consequences. Both are stripped of their voice, and hence unable to communicate with their peers, retaining only the ability to utter animal sounds. Their inability to communicate inevitably results in an involuntary isolation, as well as a feeling of alienation from their human self. This alienation is the result of their psychological entrapment, as well as the resulting loss of their

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 221.
\textsuperscript{20} Skulsky, pp. 29-30.
human abilities and connections. As opposed to Gregor’s example, the alienation in these two Ovidian transformations is not the direct cause of the transformation, but rather it is the metamorphosis itself that provokes the feeling of estrangement. This shows how along its cultural migration, metamorphosis can switch causes and effects, can exchange inner anxieties and appearances according to the priority given by the narrative period to either bodily shape or mental state. However, this does not mean that the concept of metamorphosis changes completely from one period to the next, or that it shifts its focus between physical shape and psychological states. Metamorphosis always retains a fundamental relationship between outer and inner conditions, between bodily shape and psychic turmoil, and this connection is found in both classical and modern depictions of transformation, such as Ovid’s and Kafka’s narratives.

Most of Ovid’s transformations focus on the element of lack of communication symbolised by the character's stolen ability to speak. During the process of metamorphosis, the transformed being's tongue is overwhelmed by the transformation, causing the metaphoric death of his power of speech, which renders him unable to prove his identity to the other characters.21 Echo’s episode is a particularly dramatic example of this loss of speech. While she does retain her voice, she is unable to voice her own thoughts, only having the power to repeat others' last words. In the case of Philomela’s tale, we are presented with a literal image of loss of speech. Philomela loses her tongue after threatening Tereus to report his heinous deeds committed upon her. The loss of the ability to speak, coupled with the violation she endured, cause her mind to be irreversibly broken and traumatised, driving her to seek revenge. Gregor’s character is also afflicted with the lack of the ability to communicate. Due to his transformation into an insect, his speech comes out properly only the moment the words are uttered but quickly become distorted, thus unable to be understood by others. However, since he hears himself speak clearly he still

attempts at communicating with his family, only to further their repulsion towards him. This results in Gregor becoming increasingly alienated from his family, causing him to seek refuge in the solace of his room to not cause any further distress to his family.
2. The Concept of Metamorphosis through Different Genres

The idea of transformation has always fascinated artists and authors of different historical periods, and it has also travelled across different genres and media. This is due to its wide spectrum of possibilities and consequences, as well as its incongruity to reality. Apart from featuring as a major theme in various books, the concept of metamorphosis was also exploited in transmitting the diverse cultural aspects and political or social issues characterizing particular periods, giving such concerns a new meaning through its figurative potential. This concept also impels one to constantly change his point of view regarding a text or a visual representation of transformation, as well as to understand how metamorphosis functions and evolves as a theme. Metamorphosis is the focal point of different genres, among which the most relevant are epics, Gothic novels, and also absurdist fiction, a more recent literary genre in relation to the first two.

Firstly, one should take into consideration the relation between the idea of a genre and the concept of metamorphosis. Each genre tackles a set of specific problems of the society it is most prominent in, such as epics during the Hellenistic period. Metamorphosis is thus deployed effectively within the possibilities offered by a particular literary genre to expose and highlight these issues. Moreover, the element of transformation can be used in various genres to portray the effect that a certain problem or change can have on the society and culture in question. Secondly, the movement of the concept of transformation between different genres is also essential to understand how this itself has undergone definitive changes. The reason and portrayal of metamorphosis changes in each genre along with the cultures it depicts, as it is a malleable concept exploited by authors and artists alike.

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22 Skulsky, p. 1.
2.1. Myth, Epics, and Metamorphosis

A primary genre harbouring several episodes of metamorphosis is the epic poem. This lengthy narrative type of poem usually focuses on a specific topic containing details of heroic feats and events of relevance to a specific culture or nation, most notably the Greek and the Roman. Consequently, myths of transformation are constantly narrated in this particular genre as they are linked to these heroic feats, as well as to the culture it is related to.

An outstanding example from the Hellenistic period is, undoubtedly, Metamorphoses by Ovid. This epic contains the most notable and extended list of mythical transformations since the 1st century, as such stories were not widely popular in pre-Hellenistic literature. It is a poem that focuses on the evolution of a living being until it reaches its new shape, in other words it progress from an original to a new form. Ovid's poetic narrative not only incorporates the aforementioned epical motif of transformation as its main focal point, but it also incorporates transitions from one genre to another in its various accounts of metamorphosis, such as elegy, hymn and tragedy amongst others, as well as other poetic forms. By incorporating various genres and poetic forms into his epic, Ovid is able to show how adaptable myths are, and also makes them appear more credible.24 Additionally, it also concentrates on a wide range of Greek and Roman literature, thereby involving a wide literary canon in its singular treatment of the subject.25 Thus, Ovid employs both the Greek, as well as the Roman, versions of mythical episodes of transformations, transforming the original episodes into new narratives. The reason behind his choice is possibly to emphasise the influence that these mythical narratives had on these two powerful and prominent societies, to the extent that such transformations became an essential part of their culture. Ovid’s epic did not only influence the culture of his time, but it is

24 The Cambridge Companion to Ovid, p. 119.
also the main mythological reference for European culture, and defines myths as imaginary tales of gods and heroes. Mythological scenes have traditionally been portrayed in texts, paintings, and various other art forms for two main reasons: firstly, they were known well enough by the common people to be recognized immediately across different genres; secondly, they were variously employed to explain more clearly the defined structure of the world, and also the connection between gods and men. In addition, during the Hellenistic period, myths were habitually used to talk about human relationships and experience, but their specific purpose differed between separate representations depending on the story type. For example, myths about gods are generally interpreted as allegories about natural happenings, while myths about heroes are more often considered as vehicles of moralistic teachings. Myths of metamorphosis are similar to heroic ones in that they both offer a deeper meaning, although the former is more metaphorical in its descriptions. Furthermore, myths also bear a degree of cultural importance, which implies that they can be used to explain cultural, societal, and also national aspects.

Another purpose of mythical narratives, probably the most well-known, is their aetiological function, that is their ability to explain the origin of different natural, along with social, phenomena. Moreover, numerous aetiological myths have different versions as they are deeply affected by social changes, which impose certain alterations on these myths to suit the needs of that specific society. As such, this type of myths can be used to confirm specific social facts pertaining to a particular historical period. Aetiological myths are divided into various categories, among which one can find, as a minor section, aetiological metamorphoses. These tales are concerned with natural changes which are explained through a single and detailed

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26 The Cambridge Companion to Ovid, p. 108.
27 Alan Cameron, Greek Mythography in the Roman World (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 223.
29 Ibid., p. 115.
transformation in the past. Thus, the transformations in myths are more or less related to nature, an element which suggests the philosophical thought of man’s idea of himself, as well as his relationship with nature.

The transformation of Scylla into a cliff is one example of an aetiological myth. First, her lower body is changed into hell-hounds by an enraged Circe, and is later transformed into a cliff. However, there are also some metamorphosis myths which refer to more recent events, such as the star myths, which focus on the origin of the various constellations. For instance, the gems of Ariadne's crown are transformed into the constellation Corona by Bacchus, who sympathised with her after she had been abandoned by Theseus. In the transformation myths, the newly created entity is directly related to the previous entity from which it derived through the metamorphic process. The manner in which the two entities maintain a generative relationship to each other remains contingent upon the imagination of the poet who narrates the transformative process, resulting in a myriad variations of the same myth. Usually, the link between the two forms is a retained characteristic that is synonym with the transformed being. For instance, Clytië, one of Apollo's lovers, retains the love and devotion she reserves for her lover even in her new form as a heliotrope. This devotion is symbolised by the flower's motion of turning its face towards the sun. Another example is the transformation of Cycnus into a swan, who retains his name in both forms. Furthermore, the human beings who undergo a specific physical transformation do not lose their human nature, rather they take on forms that portray their interior nature, that is the transformation accentuates certain aspects of their human character.\(^\text{30}\) Cyparissus’ metamorphosis into a cypress tree is an example of this, as his intense grief is emphasised through his transformation into the symbol of mourning. Thus, numerous transformations in the Metamorphoses occur as a result of the physical externalisation of the

\(^{30}\) *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, p. 171.
character’s interiority, rather than at the whim of a god.\textsuperscript{31} The various examples mentioned show that Ovid’s episodes of metamorphosis follow one of two models: individual into species (such as Cycnus into a swan), and individual into paradigm (Cyparrissus into the symbol of mourning).\textsuperscript{32}

Despite having so many different versions, each aetiological metamorphosis has one thing in common with the other myths of the same category: a shocking image of shifting shape. A vivid and appalling detail is most often the focal point of mythical narratives in general, and also an element common to most genres of classical narrative. But the most graphic examples of this central aspect of myths are the tales that concentrate on transformation. Myths of metamorphosis, together with their frequently monstrous result, are usually depicted in an almost realistic manner so as to make the supernatural element, that these stories invariably contain, appear more reasonable and more believable. The transformation of Hyacinthus into a flower of the same name is one example. Although the metamorphosis itself is extraordinary, it feels more believable considering that a plant is named after him. These myths, along with others, were told to young children, before and during the Hellenistic period, by the women taking care of them.\textsuperscript{33}

Consequently, one can define myths of transformation as being an old type of fairytales used with the main purpose of educating children of a tender age. Apart from being a discursive tool used to express new experiences and emotions related to natural and concrete situations, myths are also an abundant source of various forms of imagery and allegories, among which the act of transformation remains outstanding for its vivid recurrence. One possible reason for attributing such a prominent role to metamorphosis in Greek and Roman culture is its use as a politically or socially effective tool to control the behaviour and attitude of people, warning them of dramatic

\textsuperscript{31} Cameron, p. 292.  
\textsuperscript{32} Skulsky, p. 133.  
\textsuperscript{33} Cameron, p. 218.
changes consequent upon unacceptable behaviour. Ovid's epic abounds with tales of this genre, such as the myth of the Lydian soldiers. In this example, Bacchus transforms the Lydian soldiers into dolphins for attempting to deceive him. Another instance is the tale of the Propoetides, who are changed into solid granite by Venus for prostituting themselves at her temple and, also for stating that she is not a goddess. In both these two cases, the transformed beings are punished for behaving inadequately towards a god.

Numerous myths can be thought to have a link with politics, if only as narratives of transformations and heroic deeds intertwined into a vehicle for a political argument. As such, the myth of metamorphosis is used not only to explain natural phenomena or social occurrences, but also to represent political structures and power. The most notable example of such mythical exploitation is the opening sequence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In this episode, Ovid introduces the council of the gods in a manner that corresponds to the Roman council of the time, as well as Augustus Caesar's political power. Additionally, the scene that describes the battle of the Olympian gods and the Titans, which resulted in the former's victory, evokes Augustus' triumph over several of his foes. Thus, Ovid’s epic sets out with an indirect representation of Augustus' heroic standing and deeds through the detailed unfolding of the Titanomachy. A similar mythical battle, the Gigantomachy, was also politically relevant in its Hellenistic portrayal of the accomplishments of the princeps, the First Citizen or Emperor of Rome. Another instance of political representation in the *Metamorphoses*, this time tied more closely to the metamorphic process, is the episode of King Lycaon. The banishment of Lycaon at the hands of Jupiter is the result of his treacherous deeds towards the god. The Arcadian King served Zeus roasted human flesh, after which Zeus punished him by turning Lycaon into a wolf, and banishing him from his own kingdom. However, Lycaon's actions not only affected him, but the whole human race, as
Jupiter punished all men as he feared for the safety of his people, such as nymphs and fauns. This can be compared to Roman approaches of defence used when the safety of the empire was being threatened.\textsuperscript{34} The most notable metamorphosis, linked to politics, is the apotheosis of Julius Caesar. The Roman Emperor's victories and deeds of valour secured his transformation into a god and also into a comet. This political metamorphosis is a poetic praise that Ovid directed at Julius Caesar and, later in the book, at Augustus as well. This apotheosis effectively links the end of the \textit{Metamorphoses} to its beginning, as this deification signifies godly power reflecting the power of Jupiter in the first book.\textsuperscript{35} All of these transformations are not a benevolent act by the gods, but rather a symbol of their power, which to an extent is a form of tyranny comparable to the tyrannical power the emperor possesses.\textsuperscript{36}

Another aspect of this poem that is connected to politics is the leitmotif of movement which persists from one episode or section to the next, a leitmotif which has been seen as a figurative vehicle for the transfer of empire.\textsuperscript{37} Moreover, the poem's development from Eastern countries to more Western ones implies that the universal history, as a source of power, has also migrated from East to West, thus reaching Rome. Regarding this relationship between the \textit{Metamorphoses} and its political representations, critics state that this epic poem, continually centring on transformations, is a literary allegory of the ambition of Augustus Caesar, as well as other Roman princeps, to keep hold of all the countries under their direct power. However, one must also keep in mind that most of the transformations described in the \textit{Metamorphoses} are actually final, that is to say that the changed figure does not go back to its original form. For example, Syrinx, after changing into marsh reeds, retains that form and does not change back

\textsuperscript{34} The Cambridge Companion to Ovid, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{35} Cameron, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{36} Skulsy, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{37} The Cambridge Companion to Ovid, p. 54.
into her human body. On the other hand, what does indeed change constantly is the poem's movement from one episode of shape shifting into the next, and each story represents a transformation that has various levels of emotional and psychological effects on the changed character, which then flow into the next narrated tale.\textsuperscript{38}

In the prologue of the \textit{Metamorphoses}, Ovid mentions that apart from the theme itself revolving around shape shifting, his writing has also undergone a transformation:

\begin{quote}
Changes of shape, new forms, are the theme which my spirit impels me now to recite. Inspire me, O gods (it is you who have even transformed my art), and spin me a thread from the world’s beginning down to my own lifetime, in one continuous poem.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

In this short introduction, Ovid not only summarises his epic’s topic but also attributes his transformation as a writer to the gods, and implores them to inspire him to successfully write this continuous poem, beginning with the world’s creation and ending with Ovid’s historical time. This prologue strengthens further the mythical element of Ovid’s poem, as well as giving a greater importance to the gods by implying their direct power over the text. Ovid’s poem goes through various changes relating to its writing, such as tone, and subject matter. This changing aspect of the \textit{Metamorphoses} sometimes dominates over the poem’s theme of transformation itself.\textsuperscript{40} The numerous transformation narratives in the poem concentrate on the outset of the world until it finally reaches the mythical apotheosis of Julius Caesar.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, Ovid chooses to illustrate his mythical episodes of transformation by following a chronological order and, as such, each mythical episode is connected to the next through a narrative link of cause and effect.\textsuperscript{42} Additionally, this means that each narrative is affected by the tone of its predecessor, creating a chain of continuous metamorphoses. Ovid divides the \textit{Metamorphoses} into three

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Ovid}, p. 52.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ovid, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{40} \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Ovid}, p. 164.
\item \textsuperscript{41} \textit{A Companion to the Roman Empire}, ed. by David S. Potter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 446-447.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Cameron, p. 274.
\end{itemize}
distinguishable sections: Primeval, Mythical, and Historical. The first section relates to the creation of the world and the victory of the gods over the titans. The second part focuses on the fantastical element of transformation, while the last section is dedicated more to Ovid’s contemporary time. However, although the last few episodes revolve around historical figures, the poem never reaches a purely historical context as these narratives are far more mythical than historical. In this epic poem, one can identify four main reasons of metamorphosis. The first one is the use of metamorphosis as a means to an end by gods who transform themselves into another form to attain their desired object, such as when Jupiter changed into a bull to kidnap Europa. Metamorphosis as punishment is the second purpose. This occurs when a god transforms a mortal, or sometimes another mythical being, into an animal or object to punish them for a certain offense committed against the gods. Lycaon’s transformation into a wolf for trying to murder Jupiter is an example of this. The third reason for metamorphosis is its being granted as a reward. Gods transform mortals into deities to reward them for completing a heroic deed, such as Hercules’ apotheosis for successfully accomplishing the twelve labours. Both the second and third reasons are a demonstration of the gods free choice, at specific moments, to aid or punish others. Lastly, metamorphosis is used as an escape route. Deities transform mortals, as well as other beings, into another form as an answer to their pleas for emancipation from an unwanted encounter or a recognized threat. For instance, Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree after she pleaded her escape from Apollo’s advances. These four main purposes demonstrate that the gods are no different than mortals in the intrigues, passions, and vices that rule human character, they

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43 Cameron, p. 275.
44 Ibid., p. 278.
45 Skulsky, p. 48
46 Gallagher, p. 25.
are only different in that they possess the power to act upon their emotions and bring changes through their gift of metamorphosis.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{2.2. The Gothic, Shape-shifting, and Degeneration}

The next literary genre that contains more recent examples of metamorphosis is the Gothic genre. Gothic novels are known mostly for their disturbing content, such as the gruesome and yet fascinating doings of the vampire in Bram Stoker's \textit{Dracula}, conveyed through the highly mysterious and supernatural plot elements that have relegated the genre to a popular cultural sphere. As an essential element in this genre, metamorphosis effectively portrays the supernatural aspect of Gothic novels. Furthermore, this genre constantly changes styles, a feature that further emphasizes its unrealistic elements and realises the act of metamorphosis on a technical narrative level.\textsuperscript{48} The Gothic is currently viewed as a representation of two models of reality: extraordinary events and everyday life.\textsuperscript{49} These two realities have both been incorporated into this literary genre to represent the possibility of unusual situations happening in real life. The fear of extraordinary situations occurring in the real world is to some extent mitigated or tempered through the explicative use of transformations. The Gothic metamorphosis is an extraordinary event that prompts a feeling of surrealism in the reader. This leads the transformation to be distanced from the reader's reality. In addition, the Gothic metamorphosis embodies the cultural anxieties of the Victorian era, such as homosexuality. The changed being in Gothic novels groups this genre with the horror style, as it is distinguished by a deformed creature who elicits a sense of repulsion in the other characters.\textsuperscript{50}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{47} Skulsky, 50.  \\
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 204.  \\
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 193.  
\end{flushleft}
One of the most notable examples of Gothic metamorphosis can be found in the novel of Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Stevenson’s novel embodies the Gothic novels’ recurring motif of the double through the transformation endured by Henry Jekyll. It is a concept that involves the comparison and contrast between two different characters, in this case Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in order to represent the opposing forces in the human character. In the novel, Dr. Jekyll represents the rational side of the human character, while Mr. Hyde symbolises its more bestial nature. This element of duality can be compared to J. K. Rowling’s werewolf character Remus Lupin from the *Harry Potter* series. Analogous to Dr. Jekyll, even Lupin is torn between his interiority and his rational side. Furthermore, they both suppress their interior desires in favour of social acceptance and appreciation, while their transformation unshackles them from the constraints that society has imposed on them. Both of their respective interiorities are externalised by their transformation into a monstrous creature, Lupin becomes a werewolf, while Dr. Jekyll becomes the aggressive Mr. Hyde. Moreover, both of their transformations symbolise the aggressiveness and predatory nature of the human character.

Homosexuality is a principal theme of Gothic literature, often embodied by the transformed being. The experience of metamorphosis allows the character to delve deeper into his own psyche, while also enabling them to explore their sexuality. Edward Hyde is one example of this, as he is the literary manifestation of this concern with one’s own sexual identity. Homosexuality is indirectly implied and it, too, was regarded as unnatural and

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monstrous in late-Victorian society from which it was omitted. It was likewise anathema to the male's self-awareness at the time. The supposed abnormality of this sexual orientation is represented through the deformed image of Mr. Hyde, a form which both attracts and disgusts other characters. This identification of Mr. Hyde’s monstrous appearance with homosexuality is symbolised by the reaction of other characters towards him, a reaction which parallels the attitude of the late Victorian society towards homosexuality. Furthermore, Mr. Hyde has significant interactions only with male characters, further implying his character as a symbol of homosexuality. Homosexuality is also viewed as a symptom of social degeneration. As a result, homosexuals are deemed to be a threat to the social strength of the late-Victorian society. Homosexuality is thusly a social concern represented through the exploitation of shape-shifting elements in Gothic literature.

Ethical degeneration is another important theme of Gothic literature. In its core meaning, degeneration is best explained as the biological change of a specific form from one complex shape into a simpler one, best described as a metamorphosis into a more regressive form. The degeneration theory can also be considered to be a direct result of the theory of evolution. To an extent, Charles Darwin's theory is partly responsible for the increased number of abhumaness portrayals in Gothic literature of the late-Victorian era. Therefore, one can say that an increased fascination with metamorphosis may have derived from the science of evolution, as it not only states that species change forms, but also that the human body retains aspects of all its previous animal forms. Furthermore, this Darwinian concept rendered irrelevant the anthropocentric view, as the human body was now considered able to change its form, even into repulsive shape. The theory of evolution was not only a step further into understanding the development of the human body from an earlier physical stage, but it also meant that any combination of physical

changes were now considered to be a possibility. As a result, the human sciences of the late 19th century focused also on the concept of human metamorphosis. The human body's ability to evolve thus finds artistic representation in a narrative form of the same period, namely, the late-Victorian Gothic novels with their predominant shape-shifting portrayals. In Stevenson’s story, Mr. Hyde is a clear example of this representation. Doctor Henry Jekyll regresses into an abominable shape that lacks both control and morality. The change occurs due to a science experiment that leads latent interior qualities of Dr. Jekyll to be externalised in the form of Mr. Hyde. The physical appearance of gothic characters changes constantly, and its resultant mutations are immediately deemed to be an abomination by other characters. Moreover, the changes that the Gothic human body experiences can also be described as devolution, another aspect of the degeneration theory. This means that the body regresses to a previous, less developed state and, in some cases, it can also dissolve completely. For instance, the body of Dr. Jekyll dissolves completely into that of Mr. Hyde as the transformation becomes permanent.

In Gothic fictions, metamorphosis also works as an instrument of escape from the constraints of society. People are disciplined from a tender age to follow a pre-determined path in their life to reflect their social status and background. They are thus influenced to only regard that which is socially acceptable and to reject their desires. This situation is similar to Henry Jekyll's childhood, who was raised to become a doctor, and forced to shun his own needs as they were an obstruction to his social status. In Gothic literature, such repressed desires are the driving force of the disfigured monsters found in each story, such as Mr. Hyde. These creatures are thus the released desires of their social counterpart. They are the direct opposite and the distorted version of the character who embodies the standards set by society. For instance, Edward Hyde is the counterpart of Henry Jekyll, who symbolises the latter's repressed desires.
Additionally, Gothic literature centres its plot around the uncanny, the familiar suppressed in the subconsciousness of the mind. Consequently, the experience of metamorphosis becomes a result of the main character's discovery of his unconsciousness. This transformation is depicted not only through a physical deterioration, but also through a complete loss of humanity. On the other hand, in some cases, metamorphosis is portrayed as being a liberating event characterised by the morphed being's externalised interiority. Hence, the transformation results in the dissolving of social limitations. For this reason, the transformation can be identified as the return of the repressed, as it represents the hidden anxieties and desires of the character. Edward Hyde is an example of this, being the embodiment of Henry Jekyll's deepest desires. Creatures similar to Mr. Hyde are referred to as abhumans, as they are neither humans nor beasts. This is because these beings hold characteristics of both sides. For example, Edward Hyde retains Jekyll's intelligence and memories, but he acquires a brutal nature caused by his repressed desires. Consequently, Mr. Hyde is free to do as he wishes as he is not bound by society like his counterpart is, and is thus uncontrollable. In this case, the metamorphic experience reflects the character's interiority which is no longer imprisoned in the outer appearance of a doctor.

2.3. Absurdist Fiction, Nihilism, and Metamorphosis
Along with the epic poem and the Gothic genre, absurdist fiction is also another literary style which makes use of the theme of metamorphosis as an essential narrative element. Some examples of absurdist fiction include Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*, Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. The basic element that distinguishes absurdist fiction from other narrative styles is that, in most cases, it lacks a traditional plot structure. This genre focuses mainly on the experiences of its main characters in situations where they are unable to discover any plausible meaning in their life. This inability is represented by
the actions and events encountered by the character, which call into question both the truth and the values embraced by him or her. The main element of study in this genre is human behaviour scrutinized under certain circumstances. This means that this genre is focused on how people react to certain difficult and absurd situations. As a result, metamorphosis is a perfect tool exploited by absurdist fiction to represent people’s behaviour when faced with strange circumstances.

An example of this is the sudden and unreal transformation of Gregor Samsa, the main character of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, into a beetle. This novella contains, as mentioned previously, the metamorphic motif of a human being physically changed into an insect, as well as the consequences of said transformation upon the character’s psyche and the attitude of society towards him. Moreover, Kafka effectively locates this transformation in a realistic setting by stating at the very beginning of the story that “It was not a dream.” As stated in the previous chapter, Gregor’s metamorphosis produces different reactions from others, although a sense of repulsion towards the transformed being is common between the other characters. In absurdist fiction, Gregor’s metamorphosis is thusly used as a tool to explore the attitude of society and the familial institution towards an element of diversity.

Another common element in this narrative type is the philosophical condition of being nonexistent, nothing, a view that appertains to the mode of thinking commonly known as nihilism. This philosophical stance is evident in Kafka's novel to the extent that Gregor is deemed to no longer belong to the human race by his family and, therefore, he is defined only according to his outer appearance. Thus, Gregor's interior humanity is rendered worthless and unreal. Metamorphosis in absurdist fiction is defined by a nihilistic element as it causes the

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56 Gallagher, p. 117.
57 Kafka, p. 3.
58 Skulsky, p. 185.
transformed being to feel inadequate in his former body. This also symbolises the unsuitability felt by the character in his own familial surroundings, as well as feeling alienated from society in general. This nihilistic element can be compared to Myrrha’s and Byblis’ inadequacy with their familial bonds, as they both feel attracted towards one of their family members. The absurdist element in these two myths is found in their behaviour towards their loved one and towards themselves, a behaviour which reaches its culmination in their respective metamorphoses. In Kafka the metamorphosis is the cause of the characters’ behaviour and attitude. On the other hand, in Ovid’s epic the focus on the behaviour of various characters occurs prior to the transformation, which is actually caused by such actions.

2.4. Transformation, Reincarnation and Religion
The concept of change can also be identified as a religious concept which one can find in different cultures. The element of metamorphosis in various cultures and religions is often related to the belief in a consciousness persisting through life as well as death. In various belief systems, metamorphosis is used as a metaphor for the continuation of life after death: one would change his form and endure beyond one’s expired bodily form. However, metamorphosis is also considered to be a symbol of the mortality of the human body, apart from its representation of the continuity of the soul. This symbolism can be seen in different religions, such as Christianity and Hinduism, which attribute to the human being a soul, or self-consciousness, rather than simply define it as a body.

Religion has always embraced the various representations of life and death, which are constantly portrayed through the movement of the soul from one body to the next. This means
that metamorphosis in religion is directly related to the immortality of the soul.\textsuperscript{59} It is also a common attribute of divine figures. Taking Christianity as a source of religious examples of metamorphosis, we find that Christ undergoes two main transformations: from God to man, and from man to God. Both transformations are a representation of the divine power of God, a parallelism to the divine power of mythological gods. Furthermore, Christ’s incarnation into man is a metamorphosis that recalls the creation of the world: God transformed nothing into the earth, and dust into man – two cosmogonic transformations that find their epical parallel in his transformation into man.\textsuperscript{60}

In Ovid’s epic, we can also find various examples of metamorphosis portrayed as neither death nor life. The most notable case is the tale of Myrrha. This episode presents us with a character who, after committing a heinous crime, wishes to be banished from both the realm of the living and that of the dead. As a result, her transformation is a symbol of the continuity of life, as well as a representation of physical death due to sin.\textsuperscript{61} Her consciousness carries on after her human death as she continues to feel pain even without a human body. This element of metamorphosis can also be found in popular culture, especially in the figure of the zombie, also known as the undead. The zombie, similarly to Myrrha, is a creature that belongs to neither the realm of the living nor the underworld. The transformation into a zombie occurs after the death of a human being, and has different causes depending on the context in which it is set. However, in most cases, the cause is always a virus that has been either spread intentionally or otherwise. Contrastingly to Myrrha’s myth, the zombie figure is not a symbol of a persisting consciousness, but is the complete opposite. The undead represent the unnatural endurance of the body past its

\textsuperscript{59} Jaroslav Pelikan, \textit{Christianity and Classical Culture: the Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism} (Yale University Press, 1993), 280.
\textsuperscript{60} Pelikan, p. 284-285.
\textsuperscript{61} Skulsky, p. 28.
lifetime, and the mindlessness of a soulless being. Thus, metamorphosis is considered to be both a symbol of salvation, as well as an image of horror and damnation.

This can also be applied to the religious concept of reincarnation, which Ovid continuously makes allusions to in the *Metamorphoses*. Through religions we can note that there is a clear distinction between the body and the mind, a distinction which Ovid also makes. For the mind to live, it does not need to be always in the same body, as it can live on in different forms. The transformations narrated by Ovid represent an active consciousness even after the change and, thus, should not be considered as a representation of death. This element of reincarnation is also represented in Ovid through Pythagoras’ speech in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses*. In his speech, Pythagoras states that, “We too are part of the world and are more than physical bodies; we also possess winged souls”. Through this verse, Pythagoras is explaining how humans are not merely a physical body, but they are also a constantly discerning mind that travels from one vessel into another, while remaining an unchanged selfhood. Therefore, we can say that the mind is depicted as an entity by itself in epical and religious narratives of metamorphosis, wherein the soul, though directly linked to a physical body, need only maintain its spiritual selfhood in changing outer forms in order to live on.

2.5. Metamorphosis: Divine or Diabolic Intervention?
As stated previously, metamorphosis is a theme exploited in different genres for different reasons. However, it is always regarded as a supernatural event, whether it occurs in an epic or in a more contemporary genre. In spite of this common element, there are some major differences in the manner that the transformation ensues.

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In epic poems, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the transformation is always due to a divine intervention. It is consistently a god who changes his own form, or chooses to change someone else's as a reward or a punishment. On the other hand, the metamorphosis in Gothic literature occurs due to a diabolic intervention, as it always has a monstrous result. In the case of Stevenson's novel, the transformation is the consequence of a science experiment, instead of a manifestation of divine power.\(^{63}\) Contrastingly, in Ovid only the gods possess the power of shape shifting, while Gothic novels attribute this ability to mortals as well. In Kafka's novel, *Metamorphosis*, the transformation occurs unexpectedly and through mysterious occurrences. In this case, there is no apparent external force, no god or science experiment is the cause of such transformation, but rather the real reasons are omitted from the text and left to the imagination of the reader. Furthermore, although in both epics and Gothic tales the change occurs gradually and sometimes it reverts back to its previous form, in Kafka the transformation occurs from the beginning with the result that Gregor Samsa never reacquires his human shape. Religions use metamorphosis as a form of Divine salvation as the concerned party is given another chance by being reincarnated into another body. One’s soul is transferred into a secondary body to ensure the survival of one’s interiority. Religion has exploited this concept to highlight the immortality of the soul and the fragility of a physical body.

In conclusion, the movement of the concept of metamorphosis and its meaning is apparent in these four genres, as there is a major difference in the manner that such a theme is portrayed. All four depict a physical transformation, but the causes and reasons differ greatly because each is following the ideas of their own genre while also attempting to represent the main concerns of their period.

\(^{63}\) *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, p. 192.
3. Metamorphosis Portrayed in Different Media

As mentioned in previous chapters, the concept of metamorphosis has been variously portrayed in countless literary works, beginning with epic texts and enduring up to its more popular depiction in more modern forms of narrative. However, metamorphosis has also proved a central theme in various other artistic forms and media, such as sculpture, painting, and, more recently, music. All of these other forms of representing metamorphosis have taken their inspiration from archetypal portrayals of the act of shape-shifting, and often choose to represent it in a more visual or aural manner, giving it a new tangible dimension which entails further modes of interpretation.

These various media enable the concept of shape-shifting to be portrayed in a variety of new ways, focusing on different levels of perception other than imagination. This is because these art forms build more on the visual aspect of the representation, as well as its movement and sound in some cases. The artist has the possibility to translate the original into a new form by transforming words into visual and aural adaptations.

Understanding how the concept of metamorphosis is translated from a literary text into another medium is essential to fully grasp the extent of adaptability of such a theme, as well as its potential movement from one medium to another. This entails the solving of certain issues related to the level and method of adaptation of each medium. The first fundamental question is: how is metamorphosis portrayed in different media? This question focuses on the method of portrayal itself, and how this affects the representation of metamorphosis on another perceptual level, other than the literary, such as the visual. It is also a question directly linked to another important issue: the extent to which the new representation distinguishes itself from its own original significance, as effected by its first medium of transmission. In this case, the debating point becomes the degree to which the source material can be found and reaffirmed in the new
form of representation. A related question concerns the aspects of metamorphosis repeatedly selected over different periods of representation, in contrast to the less enduring features. Literary and film representations of transformation retain the opportunity to represent the whole metamorphic process, from its origin to its consequence. Sculpture and painting, however, are visual representations that do not enjoy this benefit in so far as they do not entail some special technique for narrative sequence, but instead remain confined to one moment of the metamorphic process. In such cases, this single moment is usually the most graphic, or most iconic element, of the chosen transformation. The final question is: do these varying representations portray metamorphosis as the beginning of a new life, or rather as the imminent death of the transformed shape or being? This issue is contingent upon whether the artist chooses to depict the act of metamorphosis as another step in a person’s life journey or, conversely, whether he or she depicts it as part of a degenerative or moribund setting, thereby choosing between the continuity or finality of life.

3.1. Shape-shifting in Visual Art

Visual art is an aesthetic region that holds popular representations of metamorphosis inspired by various canonical texts. It consists of a collection of different art forms, including sculpture, painting, and photography, whose metamorphic motif concerns itself with the visual creation of a specific moment in the transformation process. The theme of metamorphosis has always attracted artists of different periods and styles, and has in some cases become synonymous with love stories which, in most cases, ended in a tragic transformation of either character, or sometimes both. Furthermore, through visual representations, we are able to identify how the changed being’s new form is directly connected to its previous state through specific elements. This connection signifies a continuity, a transition between a character’s different forms.
Through the analysis of visual art we can note how this medium appropriates itself of a literary concept and image and transfers it to canvas, reinterpreting words into a visual medium.

3.1.1. Metamorphosis in Paintings and Sculptures

One of the most popular, as well as classical, visual mediums to represent the theme of transformation is undoubtedly painting. This medium is in some aspects similar to text in that it can be a very descriptive art, even allowing for the unfolding of a narrative through its tools of representation. As a result, paintings can portray a metamorphic episode by effectively maintaining the same narrative and descriptive detail of their literary inspiration.

Ovid’s metamorphic episodes are one of the most detailed and vivid mythical tales and, as such, this facilitates the visual portrayal of their respective scenes. In turn, this helps artists convey these scenes in a manner as faithful to its original source content and artistic medium as possible. Unfortunately, not all of the metamorphic episodes were allowed to be represented in painting. This is due to the classical rhetoric principle of decorum. This principle set certain limitations on what could be portrayed, as well as in what manner. Decorum, in its milder restrictive definition, stated that artists should remain true to the source material (thus transferring a faithful description of textual episodes to canvas) while also following appropriate moral and social discriminations, such as sex, age and rank.64 However, it is the strictest rules of decorum that concern the depiction of mythological episodes in paintings, especially those related to metamorphosis. As Christopher Allen writes in The Cambridge Companion to Ovid, “Absolute decorum, on the other hand, prohibits the display of the violent, the repulsive and the obscene. The underlying principle of absolute decorum is that the integrity and dignity of the human body are to be preserved.”65 This means that artists were not allowed to portray the

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64 The Cambridge Companion to Ovid, p. 341.
65 Ibid., p. 341.
human body undergoing physical change as this would have been tantamount to a profanation of the natural state of the human body. Paradoxically, although decorum forbids the portrayal of the act of transformation, it does not prohibit the representation of humanlike beasts, such as centaurs and satyrs. Furthermore, it permits artists to depict gods in their changed appearance as this transformation is not permanent, but features only as a temporary disguise. The concept of metamorphosis is thus affected negatively by the principle of decorum, as the latter attributes a negative connotation to the idea of transformation. What in literature is considered to be an artistic description, in visual art it is synonymous with immorality and physical degeneration.

Nevertheless, one outstanding exception to the aforementioned rule of decorum is the transformation of Daphne into a laurel tree. Daphne’s myth is a popular image that has moved from culture to culture, as it depicts a fierce love from one side, and a desperate attempt to flee from the other. It is an image that, like the concept of figura, has been destroyed and remoulded countless times, especially in visual art, ranging from a faithful depiction to a change of setting and symbolism. Many were the artists who have chosen to represent this mythical tale, such as Antonio del Pollaiuolo, Nicolas Poussin, and John William Waterhouse, who have all taken their inspiration from Ovid’s version of the myth. Of these three artists, Pollaiuolo is the least faithful to Ovid’s description of the classical episode. His version depicts Daphne and Apollo in Renaissance attire, with Apollo embracing Daphne in the process of transformation, her arms already partly turned into branches. Here the image of Daphne’s story has been readapted into a Renaissance setting, thus removing crucial mythical elements of the tale. Poussin’s and Waterhouse’s versions stand closer to the classical aspects of the myth. Both paintings depict Daphne being slowly engulfed by branches, and with an expression of fear and despair upon her face.

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66 Ibid., p. 347.
face. Apollo is shown holding onto her in Poussin’s painting, while in Waterhouse’s he is almost touching her. However, both depict the god in a state of shock as he slowly notices Daphne’s transformation.

The concept of metamorphosis has been transferred not only to canvas but also to marble. In other words episodes of transformation are also depicted in sculptures. Contrastingly to other media, most of the visual art forms do not have the possibility to portray the whole episode of metamorphosis. As it can be seen in various sculptures, only one instant of the transformation can be captured. As such, the whole concept of metamorphosis as a process that has a beginning and an end has been transformed in sculptures as a concept denoting a single moment of the transformation process. However, this does not mean that the artist is limited to portraying a static image of the transformation process. An artist can effectively portray the illusion of movement even in a static image, depending on the level of his talent. This element of movement gives the visual portrayal of metamorphosis another level of interpretation as the viewer can witness the process of transformation right before his eyes.

One example of such extraordinary representation is Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s *Apollo and Daphne*. As stated previously in painted portrayals of metamorphosis, Daphne’s myth is one of the most popular transformations in history that has itself undergone various changes through the ages, and Bernini’s sculpture clearly portrays this change. In this work of art, Bernini successfully manages to portray the ongoing metamorphosis of Daphne, as well as both hers and Apollo’s emotional transformation. This sculpture is undoubtedly the best representation of this mythical myth, as Bernini manages to expertly depict Daphne’s transformation without overshadowing her own physical beauty.⁶⁸ He makes use of various textures in the creation of his sculpture, such as the leaves and bark, to create the illusion of movement, as well as life.

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⁶⁸ *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, pp. 341-343.
Regarding this ability to portray movement, Ann Thomas Wilkins states in her journal article that:

Bernini’s sculpture rivals poetry in the manner in which it represents the sequential development of the story and—in a sense— that it surpasses poetry in that the sculptural medium can more successfully represent the illusion of bark and leaves. In part Bernini rivals poetry by commandeering what was considered to be one of its great virtues—the ability to develop a narrative over time.69

In other words, according to Wilkins, visual art (in this case sculptures) has the advantage of effectively representing the different textures that a specific metamorphosis might entail, something that texts find more difficult to achieve. Furthermore, Wilkins also comments on Bernini’s remarkable ability to portray the process of metamorphosis instead of being limited to depict only one specific instant of it. Thus, Bernini enables viewers to witness one of Ovid’s transformation episodes unfold right before their eyes, as well as perceive the various levels of emotional changes of the depicted characters. Moreover, an important factor for sculptors when preparing to create their representation of metamorphosis, is the placement of their work of art. In other words, a sculptor takes also into consideration the position, as well as the best location, in which his sculpture should be placed. This element of sculptures is essential as it further emphasises the concept of change through the various angles in which a sculpture may be viewed. As a result, the transformation depicted by the artist can be experienced gradually, as it also happens in the different narratives. This progressive metamorphosis situates sculptures on a similar level to texts as the story develops slowly, and the transformation is perceived by the viewer and reader as the narrative progresses. In view of all of the techniques incorporated into this sculpture, Apollo and Daphne is a perfect example of a metamorphosis seen on various

degrees, gradually changing form before one’s eyes, similar to the evolution undergone by the concept itself from culture to culture.

The various descriptions and analyses on the different portrayals of the myth of Daphne suggest the transformation of a metamorphosis myth in different art forms, in this case paintings and sculptures. These artworks are a notable example of an image that is being transformed constantly in its meaning and setting as it travels from one visual depiction to the next. Each artist chooses to convey a specific meaning through his original depiction of an episode of metamorphosis, be it faithful or otherwise. The transformation of Daphne’s metamorphosis from one art form to another gives it various levels of meanings, as well as perception, as it is adapted to each visual medium and to each artist’s technique. Daphne’s myth has travelled through different periods changing appearance, aspects, and symbolism in each visual depiction. Pollaiouolo’s Renaissance depiction of Daphne’s image, although not faithful to the original myth, renders the myth more contemporary, as the transformation of the setting reflects the society of that period. On the other hand, the faithful portrayal of Daphne’s myth in Poussin’s and Waterhouse’s paintings is an attempt at transferring a mythical image into a contemporary culture. This movement is performed by retaining the main features of the myth but adapting it to the techniques of that period so as to be appreciated by the contemporary audience.

Apart from Daphne’s and other episodes of metamorphosis that artists choose to depict directly, there are other paintings in which transformation is rather implied than portrayed, or a different scene of the tale is represented. In some cases of mythical transformation, the focal point of the story is not metamorphosis but, rather, its outcome. Here, the artist finds it easier to omit the metamorphic element of the episode from his painted version as it is not the defining component of the myth. One example of such representation is the episode of Narcissus and
Echo. In most cases, artists who choose to portray the episode of Narcissus do not give much importance to Echo’s character, opting to direct their attention mostly at the central story point: Narcissus gazing upon his own reflection. However, Nicolas Poussin in his painting *Echo and Narcissus*, inspired by a Christian tradition, chooses to not portray Narcissus looking at his reflection, but rather lying dead by the pool with his head surrounded by Narcissus flowers, symbolising his imminent transformation. In the background, Echo is shown grieving on a rock, another element representing her tragic transformation into stone. Another painting by Poussin that portrays Narcissus and Echo is *The Realm of Flora*. This painting is inspired by all of the mythical beings whose death results in a transformation into a flower, such as Narcissus, Hyacinth, and Clytië. As Erwin Panofsky writes in an essay regarding Poussin’s paintings, “The extinction of one beauty means the genesis of another, and unending love is at the bottom of all these tragic deaths which, therefore, do not signify annihilation but metamorphosis.” In other words, all of these transformations are related to the theme of love, as all of the deaths are the result of a tragic love story. The way in which Poussin chooses to represent Narcissus and Echo is proof of this statement. In this painting, Poussin is not simply representing the metamorphic process of these mythical characters, but he is also symbolising the reincarnation element of metamorphosis as the characters are given another chance by living in another form.

Poussin’s paintings are a clear example of the movement that one simple image can undergo in its lifetime, being transferred from one culture to another, and from one representation into the next. His various depictions of the myth of Narcissus and Echo demonstrate how this myth can be easily transformed and reshaped into different stories and

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71 Erwin Panofsky, ‘Et in Arcadia Ego’, *Philosophy and History; Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (Oxford, 1936), 244.
symbols, according to the meaning that the artist wishes to convey with his work. However, it is not only according to the artist’s intended meaning that metamorphosis is reworked. It is also according to the techniques, as well as the style, of each medium. In paintings and sculptures, transformation has been transformed into a visual perception of metamorphosis, being constantly adapted to new social and cultural contexts. It has been transformed from being a simple literary description of a mutation to being an image of wonder and horror that can be witnessed by a larger audience than its literary counterpart. Literary representations of metamorphosis can only be appreciated by an educated group as it is aimed at a specific elite audience. A visual image of a transformation, however, can be observed by the majority of people as the metamorphic process can be easily understood, although a certain level of knowledge is still required to truly appreciate the intricate details of any visual work of art. These artworks portray the different symbolisms that metamorphosis has been attributed through different eras, such as reincarnation, death, and freedom. They emphasise how the concept of metamorphosis has retained these meanings while also assimilating the new values and interpretations of the different societies and cultures it has been transferred to.

In conclusion, in visual art, metamorphosis is considered to be a shocking image which should not be shown directly, but it should be either implied or depicted in a way that the human body retains its original beauty, such as in the case of the various mentioned portrayals of Daphne’s transformation. This appalling connotation in visual art that has been given to the concept of transformation differs considerably from the fantastical element that this concept carries in literature, as highlighted in the previous chapter regarding different genres. Furthermore, visual representations of metamorphosis are able to reach a wider audience than their literary counterparts since it can be understood even by the least knowledgeable about the
subject. As a result, even the perception towards this concept has changed as it no longer belongs
to the elite few, thus becoming a subject of immorality from one side, and of beauty from the
other. This is because it is an image which might shock the viewers, but which undoubtedly awes
the readers with its vivid descriptions and diverse symbolisms.

3.2. Metamorphosis and Music
Visual representations of metamorphic episodes are undoubtedly the most popular portrayals of
this fascinating concept. However, they are not the only ones. An unconventional method of
representation is through the musical medium, which is often overlooked in the studies of shape-
shifting portrayals. The concept of metamorphosis has always been associated with visual
representations or a literary description of the transformation process. As such, its evolution into
an image that can also be represented through sounds is fairly recent. Music gives
metamorphosis a new level of interpretation as it focuses on an auditory representation of this
concept. In the past, as mentioned previously, various art forms had to abide to the concept of
decorum in their specific portrayals, which troubled artists of different periods. However, music
is one of the few media, if not the only one, which had the possibility of avoiding the rules of
decorum. This is due to the fact that it is not a visual medium and, thus, it could not visually
shock viewers through its representations. In other words, in the case of Ovid’s epic, its vivid
descriptions of metamorphosis could be incorporated into the musical medium without the artist
fearing that he is not abiding to the idea of decorum.

One example of musical representation of metamorphic episodes is Carl Ditters Von
Dittersdorf’s twelve symphonies based on Ovid’s Metamorphoses, of which only six have
survived. In this case, it is not the concept of metamorphosis itself that is being transferred into
another medium, but rather it is a literary representation of it that is being transformed. Despite
this fact, a form of new metamorphosis is still present in Dittersdorf work as we are presented with an auditory representation of metamorphosis, a transformation of an image into musical sounds. Dittersdorf managed to recreate Ovid’s flowing narrative through the use of various musical forms, while also successfully representing the dialogues, the vivid descriptions, and complex characters abundant in Ovid’s mythical poem. As a result, he expertly succeeds in transforming Ovid’s text into a series of musical pieces, narrating through them the different myths of metamorphosis. Dittersdorf achieved this not by considering the poem as a whole, but by isolating individual stories, choosing a tale from each of the *Metamorphoses* fifteen books. He chooses the ones that can give him the possibility of representing their events and descriptions, mostly the ones with a dramatic setting, using a variety of musical techniques. Furthermore, Dittersdorf renders his symphonies more contemporary by combining the ethical values of his time to the themes and elements of Ovid’s poem. In these symphonies, Dittersdorf employs a variety of instruments to represent the different levels of dialogues and emotions in Ovid’s text.72 His musical knowledge allows him to manage the representation of the myth’s locations, not simply its events. Thus, he successfully manages to transform an idle scene in a specific episode into a flowing melody in his symphonies.

Through Dittersdorf’s adaptation of Ovid’s mythical tale, the metamorphic episodes are now attributed with a new style that does not focus on a literary or a visual representation, but focuses more on the unspoken and invisible tones of the transformation process. As stated previously, Dittersdorf turns his attention towards the emotions and reactions that a metamorphosis creates, such as hope, fear, and anger, and represents all of these through the musical medium. Thus, the concept of metamorphosis has shifted to being the simple imaging of

a shape-shifting process to being the event that causes different feelings in the character, feelings which can be transferred to a musical score to form a new representation of metamorphosis. Furthermore, through Dittersdorf’s work, this concept has the possibility to reach a new type of audience, and through the musical medium it can also be perceived differently than its visual and literary counterparts.

Out of Dittersdorf twelve symphonies, only three make use of a metamorphic scene, from three different *Metamorphoses’* episodes, as their main focal point and theme. These three transformation myths are Actaeon’s metamorphosis into a stag, Phineus change into stone, and lastly, the peasants transformation into frogs. In certain cases, Dittersdorf takes the liberty to change certain aspects of Ovid’s texts. His third symphony, *Actaeon*, is a notable example. In this musical piece, he reverses the roles of the main characters, Diana and Actaeon, and thus changes the theme of the story itself. Dittersdorf portrays Actaeon as a predator with malevolent intentions towards the goddess Diana, who is depicted in all her godly beauty, with no tones of hostility directed at Actaeon. Dittersdorf chooses to change this aspect as he is influenced by the Christian tradition which focuses on the justice of gods and mortal sins and, thus, does not favour the representation of a vengeful god. A contrast between Dittersdorf and Ovid can also be found in the ending of the symphony. Dittersdorf

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73 Oade, p. 254.
74 Ibid., p. 255.
chooses to represent Actaeon’s final moment in a brutal fashion, without allowing him any compassion. This emphasises the violence of his death, while Ovid chooses to focus on its tragic aspect by highlighting the humanity Actaeon retains in spite of his physical transformation.

In the mentioned example, we can note how Dittersdorf adapts the various elements of Ovid’s episodes of metamorphosis to the musical medium. Moreover, he chooses to transform these myths into stories which are closer to his contemporary audience by incorporating values and ideas of his respective society. Thus, he manages to deliver a metamorphic episode that is simultaneously both mythical and contemporary as he retains certain aspects of the transformation process while adding specific cultural tones of his time. The concept of metamorphosis is transferred to a more contemporary representation by being culturally and socially transformed to achieve new symbolisms, such as becoming a divine righteous tool, and thus becoming a more socially acceptable concept for Dittersdorf’s audience.

In conclusion, through this analysis of a musical representation of various metamorphic episodes, we can note that metamorphosis has shifted from being only represented through visual and literary mediums to also becoming an element of musical representation. Thanks to Dittersdorf’s excellent work, the concept of metamorphosis has been portrayed successfully through the exploitation of various musical tones and instruments to highlight the different aspects associated with the theme of metamorphosis. As a result, a typically visual theme has been transformed into an aural one, transferring it to another level of perception, as well as giving metamorphosis a completely different level of symbolism and representation. As Greenblatt states in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, “We have more a sense of fragments than a set of coherent histories”75, a theory that can be applied to the movement of specific aspects of metamorphosis, rather than the movement of the concept as a whole. Regarding this movement

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75 Greenblatt, p. 15.
of fragments, Dittersdorf’s inspiration to selected pieces of Ovid’s tale, enable him to transform a representation of the concept of metamorphosis into something else entirely.

3.3. Transformation Represented in Literature

Literature, along with visual art, is one of the most popular media to represent and exploit the concept of metamorphosis. As a result, classical literature abounds in literary representations of metamorphic characters, ranging from exchanging one’s appearance for another’s to transforming completely into another creature. In some cases, especially in epic literature, the concept of transformation is represented in a more metaphorical fashion, as we have seen with regards to Ovid’s poem.

3.3.1. Homer’s *The Odyssey*

An example of an allegorical representation of metamorphosis is found in Homer’s epic poem, the *Odyssey*. This epic is abundant in its representation of metamorphosis myths (such as Scylla’s), as well as examples of the gods’ power of transformation. The gods use disguises in order to communicate with humans, such as Athena’s many transformations to aid Odysseus on his quest. However, metamorphosis is also used as a tool of power as seen in Circe’s episode in which she transforms Odysseus’ men into swine. Nevertheless, the most notable representation of metamorphosis in the *Odyssey*, is Homer’s distinction between one of the many facets of this concept: sameness and strangeness. These two sides of metamorphosis concern the original physical or mental state of the being, and his new circumstances after the transformation has occurred. In the case of the *Odyssey*, this element is focused on Ulysses character, rather than his physical appearance.

Homer portrays this metamorphic theme through Odysseus journey to find his selfhood by assimilating the various strange events he experiences into himself. Thus, metamorphosis is
seen in Homer's epic through the motif of self discovery in which one must incorporate foreignness into his own being in order to regain their own sense of familiarity. In other words, one must transform themselves into that which is foreign to themselves in order to find their own identity. In the case of Odysseus, this happens through his character development through the epic. At first, Odysseus is represented by his impatience and pride, two characteristics which prove to be harmful, as he endangers not only himself but also his crew. An example of such a disastrous consequence is the scene where Odysseus reveals his identity to the blinded Cyclops, thus incurring the wrath of Poseidon. However, Odysseus, having assimilated the consequence of his actions into himself and learnt from his own mistakes, by the end of the book becomes wiser and trades pride with patience. This is represented by his disguise into an old beggar in order to discover who is still loyal to him, and also to regain his own familiar space from the hands of strangers. In this episode, we see Odysseus as a hybrid figure of both otherness and sameness. This hero's journey also provides us with a theme of identity where one is in search of his true self – a theme which can also be seen in various of Ovid's metamorphosis tales, such as Iphis’ myth.

Furthermore, the theme of metamorphosis found in this epic can be viewed as an analysis of cultural transformation, of cultural aspects being transported from one end to the other, as it reveals a continuity between a former identity and a different manifestation of it. As such, the metamorphic element found in Homer's tale is a representation of cultural migration, in which one travels from one place to another, assimilating its foreign culture into himself and into his own familiarity. In other words, metamorphosis does not only imply a change of forms, it also entails the joining together of sameness and otherness into a single being, as can be seen through the various mythical examples.

3.3.2. William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

A more recent classical text which also incorporates the concept of change as one of its themes is Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. This play is directly influenced by various Ovidian tales, such as the exploitation of Apollo and Daphne's myth, although the roles in Shakespeare are reversed. Shakespeare also incorporates the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe as a play within a play. Thus, he is transforming his play into a mythological narrative derived from the various mythical influences he incorporates into his writing.

In Shakespeare's play we are introduced to the theme of vision and love, two elements which directly influence each other. The events in this play occur due to the curtain of illusion that blurs the character's eyes and leads them to fall in love with the wrong character. This illusionary element of metamorphosis is explained successfully by Cesar L. Barber, who states that, "Metamorphosis expresses both what love sees and what it seeks to do".  

The concept of time in *A Midsummer's Night Dream* is also represented by an element of metamorphosis, symbolised by the day's transitional aspect. This metamorphic aspect of time is stated by Hippolyta with the lines, “Four days will quickly steep themselves in night. Four nights will quickly dream away the time”", referring to her wish to be married to Theseus as soon as possible. Barber compares time's transitioning element to liquid's ability to easily transform into something else. This imagery of liquid can also be seen in the form of the potion which is poured into the eyes of the characters, and alters their perception of what they see. In other words, their visual sense is deceiving them by transforming what they see into something which it is not. Barber comments on the way that the lack of perception through metamorphosis is portrayed in this play, and writes that:

79 Barber, pp. 106-107.
The teeming metamorphoses which we encounter are placed, in this way, in a medium and in a moment where the perceived structure of the outer world breaks down, where the body and its environment interpenetrate in unaccustomed ways, so that the seeming separateness and stability of identity is lost.  

In other words, the way Shakespeare chooses to represent metamorphosis renders the perception of the character's surroundings unstable, while also blurring the distinction between one's body and the environment surrounding them. This leads to the instability of one's identity, and losing track of what is true and what is not.

Apart from having various references to the concept of metamorphosis, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* also portrays a literal metamorphosis: Bottom's transformation into an ass' head. This transformation is notable as it only affects his body, but it does not influence his personality as he retains his selfhood throughout the metamorphosis. This means that Bottom's personality does not undergo a transformation along with his body, which signifies the continuity of his human nature and the element of indefiniteness of his transformation. His change into a donkey's head is also a symbol of the loss of dignity in the human body. Furthermore, the mysterious occurrence of his physical change, as well as its symbolism, recalls many of Ovid's strange metamorphoses.

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80 Barber, p. 107.
82 Ibid., p. 275.
4. The Concept of Metamorphosis in Popular Culture

As we have seen in the first chapters of this thesis, metamorphosis has had an influence on various genres and media. This chapter will be focusing on the impact that this concept has had on the different facets of popular culture. Considering that popular culture is a vast area of study, this chapter will be dealing with an area of media representation, as well as specific literature titles and topics, that are the most closely related to our contemporary culture and society.

The area of media representation which this chapter will analyse in light of the concept of metamorphosis is adaptation. It will consider this idea as a form of metamorphosis, where one medium is transferred into another, changing its main elements to suit those of the new method of representation. Adaptation is in itself a metamorphosis as it takes one story created for a specific medium, and then adapts it into another one. As a result, adaptation can be seen as a tool to transform, as well as to further develop the original story by using the techniques and strengths of the chosen medium.

Next, the chapter will analyse two literature titles that have become a major part of popular culture: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (and its sequel, Through the Looking-Glass), and the Harry Potter series. It will focus on the theme of identity and duality that can be found in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, as well as J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series. In the former, Alice questions her identity after a series of events she experiences in Wonderland, while in the Harry Potter series, the idea of identity is related to the characters that have the ability, or the possibility, to change their form, be it by free will or otherwise.

Finally, this chapter will be studying the concept of metamorphosis which one may find in the increasingly popular topic of Superheroes. This section, will analyse the manner in which metamorphosis is adapted in this contemporary subject to introduce humans and creatures with superpowers, and also as an explanation for their supernatural abilities. Furthermore, the idea of
metamorphosis as a result of a traumatic event will also be analysed as a form of introducing otherness.

4.1. Adaptation as a Form of Metamorphosis
The concept of metamorphosis does not simply entail the transformation of one's body into another form, but it also entails the idea of adaptation; that is the transformation of a story into another as it is transferred from medium to medium. In a similar fashion to the differences and similarities that one may find when analysing a metamorphic figure, even the analysis of an adaptation produces contrasts and comparisons between the two forms. Furthermore, adaptation involves both memory and change, familiarity and unfamiliarity, another common element which can also be found in various representations of metamorphosis.

The question that always surrounds the theory of adaptation is whether an adaptation should be faithful to its source material. This issue of faithfulness can be paralleled to various metamorphoses that still retain a specific element from the previous form. During a transformation, the being's body is completely changed into another form. However, in most cases, this new form possesses an aspect prominent in its previous form, thus connecting both embodiments to each other. This can also be said regarding adaptations which still retain a specific element of their source material through the numerous differences between the two media. Narratives can be easily transferred between one medium to the other, however not all of the main features of a specific medium can be passed to the next as successfully.83 This means that stories are easy to transform from medium to medium, but specific elements of it that were the focus on in the original medium, may not be the central element of the same narrative in the new representation. The same point can be argued regarding the concept of metamorphosis. In

episodes of transformation, the focal point of the original form shifts to another element of the new form. For instance, in the myth of Scylla, the central element shifts from her beauty as a nymph to the monstrosity of her poisoned lower half. In the case of adaptations, the focus may shift from the novels' ability to represent interior voices and thoughts, to the films' expertise in transmitting movement.  

Regarding the issue of faithfulness, in the criticism of adaptations, the attention is usually directed to what has been lost through the translation of one medium into another, rather than to what the narrative has gained by being transformed into another form of representation. Furthermore, by using the term adaptation with a film, book, video game, and so on, we overshadow the adaptation itself by constantly comparing it to its original source material. This type of criticism can also be found in tales of metamorphosis where the transformed being notices more what he has lost and fails to acknowledge the new abilities he has acquired through the transformation, while constantly comparing his new form to his former one. Adaptations are not a copy of their source material as they are a reinterpretation, a reimaging that retains the main elements of its source. It is, as its term suggests, an adaptation of a material into something else to suit the elements and purposes of the new medium. 

In an adaptation, it is not simply a story that gets translated from one medium into the other, but its world also gets transformed into the new medium. For example, the world of a novel, that is its characters, locations, and rules, can be transformed to the screen. As a result, adaptations are a movement from one sign system into another, such as the transformation of

84 Juul, p. 48.
words into images.\textsuperscript{87} Moreover, adaptations can be considered to be hybrid forms, the merging of two media together; a mutation which enables the original source material to survive through another medium.\textsuperscript{88} Likewise, even metamorphosis can be viewed as being a hybrid form of the being's previous body and its new one, a transformation that aids the being to survive complete death by retaining a common element between the two forms. Due to this, adaptation enables media to continuously evolve, creating new forms and interpretations of previous materials. Comparing adaptation to biological evolution, one can find a similarity in their movement to more favourable conditions, with adaptations adapting to new cultures and media through the transformation of certain elements into their new form defined by the new medium. In adaptations, metamorphosis occurs both in the change of medium, as well as in the change of certain plot elements and narrative techniques to suit the style and target audience of the new medium.

4.2. Metamorphosis and Identity in Contemporary Literature
Metamorphosis entails a distinction between two forms of a being, be it a physical distinction or a psychological one. This is the reason why contemporary novels with a theme of shape-shifting usually focus on it with a sort of dichotomy. They make a distinction between two aspects associated with metamorphosis, such as mind and body, the self and the other, and other aspects. This dichotomy can be seen in Lewis Carroll's narratives, but even more so in J. K. Rowling's books. Moreover, these dichotomies are all directly related to the theme of identity central to the concept of metamorphosis. In mythology, this element of identity is embodied by the shape-shifting figure of Proteus, who in spite of the numerous metamorphoses he undergoes, he still

\textsuperscript{87} Hutcheon, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{88} Hutcheon, p. 31.
retains his own individuality. In Carroll's novels this concept of identity is portrayed through Alice, while in Rowling's books it is represented by its various shape-shifting characters.

Caroline Bynum, in her book *Metamorphosis and Identity*, categorises the concept of identity into three distinct definitions: 1) Individuality or personality (that which sets one apart from the others); 2) Identity position (being part of a specific group); and 3) Spatiotemporal continuity (knowing that one is still the same person as before). The first classification is prominent in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as Alice's individuality sets her apart from the rest of the inhabitants of Wonderland. However, Alice fails to classify under the third category as she suffers from an identity crisis throughout the novel. In the *Harry Potter* series, it is the second classification that has a more notable role compared to the other two, as the universe of the story is defined by the hierarchical system of the wizarding world.

### 4.2.1. Identity in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*

The theme of identity in Lewis Carroll's book is represented by Alice's journey through Wonderland which also represents her quest to find her own self-hood. We follow Alice through her adventures in Wonderland as she attempts to define her identity, as well as trying to make sense of all the nonsensical events she experiences while in Wonderland and in the Looking-Glass world.

The metamorphic element in Carroll's tales is defined by the numerous physical changes Alice endures throughout the whole story of *Wonderland*. These continuous physical changes, as well as her forgetfulness, have a deep effect on Alice's mind as she suffers from an identity crisis in the first novel, to the point that she even starts to question her own individuality. Furthermore, these changes force Alice to feel uncomfortable with her size, as well as her body. This feeling

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of distress is also common in Ovid's tales of metamorphosis as he narrates the reaction that the morphed beings have to their new form, such as Io's transformation into a heifer defined by her inability to recognise herself in her new body. The various physical metamorphoses that Alice endures are also a representation of the changes one goes through puberty, as well as the feelings associated with this period.

The identity crisis Alice suffers in Wonderland starts in the first part of the story as she is trying to make sense of the strange things that are happening to her in this unknown place. She attempts to understand her circumstances by reasoning with herself in an effort to discover whether she is still Alice, or whether she has become someone else. Through her mistaken logic, however, she is lead to believe that she is Mabel, one of her classmates, simply because she finds that she knows, or rather remembers, very little. Here one can notice how Alice's identity is directly related to her memory, as she starts to question her identity the moment she realises that she can no longer remember even the simplest things she previously knew. According to John Locke, memory is the mental device by which one can ensure continuity of his consciousness, and thus continuity of the self. Therefore, our knowledge of our past experiences helps us to define and identify our present self.

Alice's quest for her identity is further challenged in the scene of her encounter with the Caterpillar:

"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I— I hardly know, sir, just at present— at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then. "What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar sternly. "Explain

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91 Tyler Shores, "Memory and Muchness": Alice and the Philosophy of Memory', in Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser, ed. by William Irwin and Richard Brian Davis (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010), 201.
Here we are presented with an Alice that is unable to answer a seemingly simple question about herself as her numerous transformations have confused her concept of her own identity. However, she acknowledges that she is no longer herself, or at least no longer the Alice she was in the morning. Here Alice is challenging Bynum's third definition of identity, the spatiotemporal continuity, as her physical size is constantly changing along with her idea of herself. With the help of the Caterpillar, Alice realises that she is suffering from an identity crisis, and starts to consciously attempt to find her own self through her experiences in Wonderland. Conversely, regarding this element of self, Nietzsche suggests that the self is only an illusion and only our experiences exist. Through this Nietzsche is implying that we are constantly changing as we are affected by our own experiences and perceptions, and therefore there is no self that is constant. In Alice's case, her perceptions change along with her as she is affected by the changes in her physical size. This is paralleled to change in viewpoints that children go through during puberty.

Through Carroll's narratives, Alice is forced through various changes that ultimately aid her in understanding these two strange and illogical worlds. At the end of both novels, Alice finally reaches a point where she can identify her individuality and self by assimilating the nonsensical elements she experiences in both Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world. Given these points, it can be said that the assimilation of the logic and rules of both of Carroll's

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93 Rick Mayock, 'Persoectivism and Tragedy: A Nietzschean Interpretation of Alice's Adventure', in Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser, ed. by William Irwin and Richard Brian Davis (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010), 158.
94 Ibid., p. 158.
universes, that is their otherness, into Alice results in her discovery of her newfound identity, and the knowledge of her new perceptions.

4.2.2. Identity and Duality in the Harry Potter Series

In the *Harry Potter* books, shape-shifting is portrayed through Animagi, a witch or wizard who can change their appearance into an animal's at will, as well as through the figure of Remus Lupin, who transforms into a werewolf. There is, however, a difference between these two shape-shifting categories: the former retain their consciousness throughout the whole transformation, while the latter do not. The reason for this difference is that werewolves do not have the privilege of free will regarding their metamorphosis, unlike Animagi. The Animagi are thus a representation of "continuity within change" as their consciousness is not affected by their transformation. The change in shape in Rowling's books usually provide an insight on the innermost traits of a character, as their new form usually represents a specific behaviour of their human one.

Animagi, in their animal forms, retain qualities and behaviours of their human form, an element which proves the continuity of their human identity and consciousness. Apart from human qualities and behaviour, Animagi also retain some of their physical features in their animal form. For example, McGonagall's transformation into a cat has markings round her eyes similar to the glasses she wears in her human form. Another notable example is Peter Pettigrew's transformation into a rat, as this metamorphosis represents not only his physical features but also his human behaviour. His transformation into a rat provides us with an unconscious insight into his interiority as we later discover that he has betrayed his friends by 'ratting' them out. Thus, the transformations described in the *Harry Potter* books, reveal the innermost and darkest aspects of

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96 Ibid., p. 4.
the shape-shifting being.\textsuperscript{97} Furthermore, although Animagi can transform at will, they do not choose their animagus form as it is a form which reflects an inner character trait.

The most noteworthy Animagus, however, is undoubtedly Sirius Black. His transformation into a huge black dog is associated by others with death and ill-omens. This association with death emphasises Sirius' lack of judgement.\textsuperscript{98} Furthermore, it is also a sort of symbol of his past and future encounters with death. Sirius Black is set apart from other Animagi as, in spite of retaining his human identity, he displays dog behaviours in his animagus form. Eric Saidel (as quoted in Holly Batty's journal article \textit{Harry Potter and the (Post)human Animal Body}) implies that "his mind changes along with his body".\textsuperscript{99} This means that the metamorphosis does not only affect one's body, but it also has certain repercussions on one's mind, as these physical changes entail a change in one's identity.

The figure of Remus Lupin is important for the concept of metamorphosis as his involuntary transformation, due to a curse, into a werewolf highlights many of the interior aspects of his identity. Remus Lupin's name is a direct symbol of his werewolf metamorphosis as both names recall a specific association with the figure of the wolf. This suggests a continuation of the self through both forms.\textsuperscript{100} Although his name symbolises a certain continuation, Lupin's consciousness does not endure in his transformation, unlike Animagi. The only possible way for Lupin to retain his consciousness in his werewolf form is by drinking a potion each week prior to the expected metamorphosis. Without the help of this potion, Lupin is unable to hold on to his

\textsuperscript{97} Green, p. 87.  
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 87.  
\textsuperscript{99} Batty, p. 28.  
\textsuperscript{100} Ward, p. 4.
mind. He is unable to exist as both Remus and the werewolf, and thus remains "outside of the metamorphic process itself".\textsuperscript{101}

Furthermore, Lupin is marginalised by society due to the nature of his transformation, forced to live an impoverished life underground. However, even living among other werewolves he is considered an outcast as he attempted to live among wizards. As a result, Lupin's transformation into a werewolf unshackles him from the constraints of society, as well as the limits he has imposed on himself.\textsuperscript{102} His metamorphosis is thus a symbol of his repressed anger, as well as the aggressiveness of his interiority, both of which are a result of the treatment he receives by the wizard society. This aggressive interiority is contrasted by the passivity of Lupin's exterior character, as it is his attempt at hiding his inner traits. Lupin is constantly trying to be identified as a human, and not as a werewolf, although both forms constitute a part of his identity. Regarding this element of duality in the figure of the werewolf, Nicole Jacques-Lefevre writes that werewolves should be perceived as "neither wolf nor man [...] he is at the same time both the one and the other in a continuous mutation".\textsuperscript{103} Moreover, the werewolves inability to control their animal instincts renders this shape-shifting figure a representation of the animality of the human interiority.\textsuperscript{104}

Remus Lupin’s marginalisation can be compared to that of Gregor Samsa, who is marginalised by both society, as well as his family. Both are forced to the margins by society due to the nature of their respective metamorphosis. In the case of Lupin, as mentioned before, he is marginalised due to the uncontrollable aggressiveness of his werewolf form, while Samsa is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[101] Ward, p. 5.
\item[102] Green, p. 105.
\item[104] Batty, p. 29.
\end{footnotes}
isolated because his transformation is an inexplicable and strange occurrence, which his family and society do not have the ability to understand. Furthermore, both of their transformed bodies act as a sort of refuge from their anxieties, as well as from the social and physical restrictions that have been imposed on them by both society and themselves. Gregor Samsa ultimately finds solace in his insectile body which also functions as an embodiment of his feelings of inadequacy and other feelings of apprehension. Remus Lupin’s bodily transformation into a werewolf liberates him momentarily from the unfair limitations that society has forced on him, and thus it aids him to free his interior aggressiveness and anger; which is continuously hidden while in his human form under an exterior image of passivity. Another common element between the figure of Kafka’s character and that of J. K. Rowling is the desire to seek approval and acceptance from those around them. Both Samsa and Lupin are defined by a strong feeling of isolation which they attempt to fill by complying to the restrictions and rules that society has imposed on them, and by abstaining from ever following their own desires, since they would be further frowned upon by their society and family. In conclusion, despite their transformations, they still strive to carry on with their respective lives, although they are continuously held back by their physical metamorphosis which they both fail to fully accept.

Another figure who undergoes some transformations and is important to the idea of duality is Harry Potter, the main protagonist of the series. Harry Potter is neither an animagus nor a werewolf, but throughout the books he experiences various transformations thanks to specific potions and other magical substances. He changes his form into that of another student by drinking a ‘polyjuice’ potion which enables the drinker to assume the appearance of someone else. However, the most notable metamorphosis that Harry Potter undergoes is the transformation into a fish in the fourth instalment of the series.

105 Skulsky, p. 176.
The transformation occurs due to the consumption of a plant known as 'gillyweed' which then results in the growth of gills and webbing between the fingers and toes, and it enables one to breathe underwater. After Harry undergoes this metamorphosis, he starts to think of himself as being part of another species. This means that during the duration of his transformation he does not conceive of himself as being human, but as a fish. Harry is fully aware of the physical changes that his body is going through and, as such, he is able to perceive the connection he has with the species he is currently embodying. Moreover, his various transformations confuse his notion of identity, rendering him unable to differentiate between human subjectivity and the animal one. Through these metamorphoses, Harry's human identity becomes increasingly blurred with that of the animal form he embodies.

The element of duality in the figure of Harry Potter is represented by his connection with snakes; a connection which he is unaware of. Harry exhibits a dual identity which is defined by his possession of two language systems: human and snake (known as Parseltongue). As previously mentioned, Harry is not aware of the link he has with snakes, and as such, he is unable to identify with them. However, Harry is also unable to fully identify as a human being, as the affiliation he has with snakes is deeper than the one he has with humans. The reason for this is that Harry has acquired Parseltongue prior to having learned the human language, an element which has strong repercussions on his identity. Being unaware of his affiliation with snakes, Harry fails to react to his ability to communicate with snakes as he does not realise that this ability of his is an abnormal one. Furthermore, he fails to distinguish between Parseltongue and human language considering that the former is deeply embedded into his subconscious, believing that it is an ability shared by everyone. The presence of Parseltongue places Harry's

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106 Batty, p. 30.
108 Ibid., p. 35.
identity in an unstable condition, as he does not have the ability to distinguish between his two sign systems, and also because Parseltongue is frowned upon by the wizarding society. Moreover, according to Holly Batty in her journal article *Harry Potter and the (Post)human Animal Body*, "Language has historically been the defining marker that separates humans from animals"\(^{109}\), a statement which the figure of Harry strongly challenges. Since he is in possession of two languages belonging to two different species, this places him in between these two said species, being simultaneously neither one nor the other, but still being part of both. This is a common element shared between many representations of metamorphosis, such as the myth of Io, as during the transformation the being fails to identify himself with either forms, being stuck between one and the other.

Through the analysis of these various figures of the *Harry Potter* series, we come to the conclusion that in this book's universe the body is continuously represented as an unstable medium.\(^{110}\) This physical instability is defined by Harry's various transformations, by the Animagi, and lastly, by the werewolf figure. The body is portrayed as being a mutable material, challenging the idea of a stable embodied state, an element which is prominent in the concept of metamorphosis.

### 4.3. Transformation, Mutation, and Superheroes

The concept of metamorphosis is also central to the superhero figure which has become an important aspect of popular culture. In the case of superheroes, the element of metamorphosis manifests itself mostly in the form of supernatural powers, and not as a change in appearance as is common in numerous myths and stories of transformation. Furthermore, the concept of

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\(^{109}\) Batty, p. 35.  
\(^{110}\) Batty, p. 26.
metamorphosis in superhero stories is represented through various issues, as well as key events, crucial to the development of the superhero figure.

In a variety of superhero narratives, metamorphosis is represented through the issue of radiation, giving rise to many superhero figures and new ideas of superpowers. In these numerous stories, we are presented with the idea of radiation that causes a variety of mutations in people who either worked close to the source of the radiation or are directly related to people who did.111 This is similar to the tale of Dr. Jekyll who transforms into Edward Hyde through a science experiment. However, contrastingly to Stevenson's novel, the metamorphoses that affect superheroes are a symbol of evolution, and not degeneration as is the case with the transformation of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde.

Stevenson's story can also be compared to the tale of the superhero known as the Hulk. Both stories represent mutation as being the cause of science experiments, which result in the transformation of Dr. Jekyll and Bruce Banner into their alter egos. While Henry Jekyll’s metamorphosis requires the consumption of a potion of his own creation, Bruce Banner transforms whenever he is angry or upset, thus being directly related to his state of being. Moreover, though the circumstances of their transformations share some sort of parallelism, the nature of their alter egos differs. While Mr. Hyde is a morally deformed, physically repulsive, and a cruel character, the Incredible Hulk is a creature with superhuman strength who, although simple minded and acting completely out of control, ultimately performs good deeds.112 Under these circumstances, when these two shape-shifting characters are compared alongside each other, the Hulk's figure becomes a symbol of evolutionary progress in the form of a monstrous, albeit socially advantageous, transformation, while Hyde’s deformed figure is its direct opposite.

Another notable difference between these two figures is that Bruce Banner accepts his duality and fully acknowledges the presence of his alter ego, thus turning him into the superhero he becomes known for. On the other hand, Dr. Jekyll does not, an element which leads him to his imminent demise.

The theme of genetic mutation is another representation of the concept of metamorphosis; a theme which is central to the stories of the superhero group known as the X-men. The mutations of the X-men serve as a metaphor for all the people that have been marginalised by society. Consequently, comparatively to the werewolf figure of Remus Lupin in the *Harry Potter* series, the metamorphosis in the X-men stories is used as a reason for marginalisation and rejection from society and family. Contrastingly to other superheroes, such as Spiderman and Ironman, who acquire their superpowers from accidents, or by using special technology respectively, the powers that the X-men universe portrays are a result of genetic mutations. Thus, the X-men world uses human evolution as a central theme to the genetic metamorphoses that affect the characters of this comic book story. Regarding this representation of superpowers as a genetic evolution, George Teschner in *X-Men and Philosophy: Astonishing Insight and Uncanny Argument in the Mutant X-Verse* states that, “The X-Verse is unique in representing superpowers as a result of a natural biological process, mutation”. In most cases, the superpower that these mutated humans acquire in the X-men universe is not an improvement of a natural human ability, but rather it is an additional skill which is separate from any biological abilities. As a case in point, Storm’s psychic ability to manipulate weather patterns over limited areas caused by her

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113 Fick, p. 75.
116 Ibid., p. 227.
genetic mutation is extraneous to the rest of her human natural skills. These powers do not only affect these characters’ physical abilities, but they also affect their minds since they are considered as outcasts by society, and are forced into hiding. According to Teschner, “In the X-men, the body and the mind have undergone metamorphoses; perhaps it would be more symbolic to call mutants metamorphs”.117

Another common representation of metamorphosis is through specific traumatic events that are essential to the rise of the affected character as a superhero figure. In other words, an unusual and life-changing circumstance in the life of a specific character, leads to the emergence of their superhero alter ego, such as in the case of Batman and Spiderman, amongst numerous others. In these types of narratives, the characters face a traumatic situation, usually the death of their parents or close relatives, which affects their notion of justice and their faith in the authority. As a result of this event, the characters choose to take matters into their own hands, and thus they become superheroes. Furthermore, to transform themselves into their superhero alter ego, they must assimilate the foreignness of another world, which in most cases is usually represented by the world of organised crime. All superhero figures must also adapt to their newfound powers and skills, and learn to incorporate them into their own personal life in order to preserve the familiarity of their world.

Conclusion

As the preceding chapters of this thesis have amply illustrated, the concept of metamorphosis has undergone multiple changes along its travel through different ages, art forms, and cultures. It was essential to start this research with an analysis of what defines a human being who is then vulnerable to metamorphosis, and this was followed by an analysis of the psychological effects of outer transformation upon the mind of the transformed being. To this was added the affect of the transformed being’s new appearance on the surrounding characters, thereby determining the expanding repercussions associated with transformation: from the individual being’s psyche to society. Furthermore, this research has also highlighted the differing inner effects of metamorphosis through an array of novels and characters.

Secondly, the thesis has traced the movement of the concept of metamorphosis through various genres and media pertaining to canonical literature and popular culture, followed with an analysis of the adaptations of the concept and depiction of metamorphosis depending on the multiple dimensions of cultural mobility. The concept of metamorphosis has started out as a mythical power that was reserved only to the gods. In later periods, however, metamorphosis has transformed into an idea that reflected deformity and horror, as analysed in the Gothic genre, as well as in visual art. In recent years, metamorphosis has been associated with superpowers and magical abilities, as well as a symbol of natural physical change and identity.

This research focuses mainly on the ability of the concept of transformation to adapt to any context and setting it is used in, as it is easily moulded by authors and artists to represent their concerns or anxieties pertaining to their times. Another main point of this thesis is how the effects of transformation on a being’s psyche have changed through the years, and from one artist to another. Such changes are connected to this concept’s constant settlement in different
cultural contexts, a mobility which enables it to answer the cultural needs of the society that adopts it. Furthermore, the concept of transformation is extremely versatile as it endures through numerous changes, aspects, and implications, as was seen with its correlation with psychological, religious, and bodily themes such as identity, reincarnation, and monstrosity. Its ability to be independently exploited in any given work, both on a physical and a psychological level, testifies to its continued adaptability.

Through my research of various aspects of metamorphosis, as well as through my analysis of different texts, I have found that the concept of metamorphosis is as adaptable as the transformations it portrays or implies. In other words, metamorphosis has the ability to take on numerous forms, as attested by the numerous characters mentioned in this thesis, and similar to the constantly shifting shapes of its mythical embodiment: the figure of Proteus. Furthermore, this research has shown that metamorphosis is not only a synonym for constant change, as it is also used to represent the complex interiority retained by a character through outer changes to his or her appearance. Its analogous correlation with the concept of marginalisation is another illustration that metamorphosis cannot be reduced to mere change. It is a concept that has various psychological factors embedded within itself as it always had repercussions on the psyche of the transformed being. This element has rendered metamorphosis a perfect image for artists and authors to exploit as they try to depict the inner struggles of their characters.

The transformations analysed in this thesis are directly related to culture and canonical literature, as well as to the issues pertaining to the respective contemporary society which sets the context. This culturally mobile concept reflects its mutability, as well as its ability to be reused infinitely as a symbol for a variety of social and psychological concerns. The concept of metamorphosis, although having undergone vast changes through different periods, is still
essentially the same idea revolving around transformations of the body and the mind. It has assimilated otherness into its sameness, and has thus survived numerous cultural and social evolutions. In other words, the concept of transformation has been transferred from one culture to the next, each time incorporating into itself the new values and symbolisms of the society it is adapted to, while still successfully retaining its previous representations and meanings, that have themselves been adopted by the new culture.
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