**Shapeshifting**

**From The Black Vault Encyclopedia Project**

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**Shapeshifting**, **transformation** , **transmogrification** or **morphing** is a change in the form or shape of a person, especially:

* a change from [human](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Human&action=edit&redlink=1) form to [animal](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Animal&action=edit&redlink=1) form and vice versa
* a change in appearance from one person to another

Shapeshifting is not considered scientifically or medically possible for humans (and animal shapeshifting is not any more extensive than that of the octopus, simply contorting body shape), but it is a common theme in [myth](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Mythology&action=edit&redlink=1) and [legend](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Legend&action=edit&redlink=1) and a popular theme in [science fiction](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Science_fiction) and [fantasy](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Fantasy&action=edit&redlink=1) stories. Some [conspiracy theories](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Conspiracy_theories) claim that [alien](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Extraterrestrial_life) [reptoids](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Reptoid) are capable of shape-shifting.

"Shapeshifting" often refers to characters who change form on their own, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, while "transformation" (TF) refers more commonly to externally imposed change of form, whether by [magic](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Magic_(paranormal)&action=edit&redlink=1) or sufficiently advanced technology. There is no settled agreement on the terminology.

**Shapeshifting in myth**



1722 German woodcut of a werewolf transforming

Popular shapeshifting creatures in myths and legends are [werewolves](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Werewolf&action=edit&redlink=1) and [vampires](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Vampire) (mostly of [European](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=European&action=edit&redlink=1), [Canadian](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Canadian&action=edit&redlink=1), and [Native American](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Native_Americans_in_the_United_States&action=edit&redlink=1)/early American origin), the fox spirits or were-foxes of [East Asia](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=East_Asia&action=edit&redlink=1) (including the [kitsune](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Kitsune&action=edit&redlink=1) of [Japan](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Japan&action=edit&redlink=1)), and the gods, [goddesses](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Goddess&action=edit&redlink=1), and [demons](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Demon&action=edit&redlink=1) of numerous mythologies, such as [Loki](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Loki&action=edit&redlink=1) from [Norse mythology](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Norse_mythology&action=edit&redlink=1) or [Proteus](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Proteus&action=edit&redlink=1) from [Greek mythology](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Greek_mythology&action=edit&redlink=1). It was also common for [deities](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Deity&action=edit&redlink=1) to transform mortals into animals and [plants](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Plant&action=edit&redlink=1).

Although shapeshifting to the form of a [wolf](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Gray_Wolf&action=edit&redlink=1) is specifically known as [lycanthropy](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Lycanthropy&action=edit&redlink=1), and such creatures who undergo such change are called lycanthropes, those terms have also been used to describe any human-animal transformations and the creatures who undergo them. [Therianthropy](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Therianthropy&action=edit&redlink=1) is the more general term for human-animal shifts, but it is rarely used in that capacity.

Other terms for shapeshifters include **metamorph**, [skin-walker](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Skin-walker&action=edit&redlink=1), **mimic**, and [**therianthrope**](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Therianthropy&action=edit&redlink=1). The prefix "were," coming from an Old English word meaning "man", is also used to designate shapeshifters. Examples are "werewolf," "weretiger," etc.

Almost every [culture](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Culture&action=edit&redlink=1) around the world has some type of shapeshifting myth, and almost every commonly found animal (and some not-so-common ones) probably has a shapeshifting myth attached to them. Usually, the animal involved in the transformation is indigenous to or prevalent in the area from which the story derives. It is worthy to note that while the popular idea of a shapeshifter is of a human being who turns into something else, there are numerous myths about animals that can transform themselves as well.

Examples of shapeshifting in [classical literature](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Classical_literature&action=edit&redlink=1) include many examples in [Ovid](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Ovid&action=edit&redlink=1)'s [*Metamorphoses*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Metamorphoses_(poem)&action=edit&redlink=1), [Circe](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Circe&action=edit&redlink=1)'s transforming of [Odysseus](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Odysseus&action=edit&redlink=1)' men to pigs in [Homer](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Homer&action=edit&redlink=1)'s [*The Odyssey*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Odyssey&action=edit&redlink=1), and [Apuleius](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Apuleius&action=edit&redlink=1)'s becoming a donkey in [*The Golden Ass*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Golden_Ass&action=edit&redlink=1).

**Shapeshifting in fiction**

Shapeshifting can be a rich symbolical and narrative tool and [shapeshifting fiction](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Shapeshifting_fiction&action=edit&redlink=1) has been around at least since the days of ancient Greece. Today, the theme appears in many [fantasy](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Fantasy&action=edit&redlink=1) and [science fiction](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Science_fiction) stories. Both occasionally feature races of shapeshifters, and both magic and technology can be used to impose a change in form.

The word "transmogrification" has been popularized by the [eponymous device](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Transmogrifier&action=edit&redlink=1) used in [*Calvin and Hobbes*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Calvin_and_Hobbes&action=edit&redlink=1)

**Shapeshifting in real life**

Some animals, particularly [octopuses](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Octopus&action=edit&redlink=1), are able to change their body shape and color to mimic other creatures and objects, for [camouflage](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Camouflage&action=edit&redlink=1) or to hide in narrow spaces. The [Mimic Octopus](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Mimic_Octopus&action=edit&redlink=1) is noted for its ability to impersonate [sea snakes](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Sea_snake&action=edit&redlink=1), widely different [fish](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Fish&action=edit&redlink=1) species, and rock formations.

**Transformation enthusiasts**

*Main article:* [*Transformation fantasy*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Transformation_fantasy&action=edit&redlink=1)

Many children have animal transformation fantasies and shapeshifting is a well-known feature of [fairy tales](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Fairy_tale&action=edit&redlink=1). Interest in transformation isn't limited just to them, though; the concept captures some imaginations of all ages. Note that having an interest in shapeshifting is distinct from belonging to [therians](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Therianthropy&action=edit&redlink=1), [otherkin](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Otherkin) or any other group that actually identifies with or wishes to become something else.

It is possible for this interest to be sexually charged, or to accentuate other fetishes; for instance, forced shapeshifting can lend itself well to themes of [dominance](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Dominance&action=edit&redlink=1). The result is a [transformation fetish](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Transformation_fetish&action=edit&redlink=1).

**See also**

* [List of shapeshifters](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=List_of_shapeshifters&action=edit&redlink=1)
* [Resizing (in fiction)](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Resizing_(in_fiction)&action=edit&redlink=1)
* [Self-reconfigurable](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Self_reconfigurable&action=edit&redlink=1)

**References**

* Hall, Jamie, *Half Human, Half Animal: Tales of Werewolves and Related Creatures* (AuthorHouse, 2003 [ISBN 1410758095](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Special:BookSources/1410758095))

**External links**

* [The Transformation Stories List](http://transformationlist.com) (not updated recently)
* [Metamorphose.org](http://www.metamorphose.org) (regularly maintained)
* [Transformation Stories Archive](http://tsa.transform.to)
* [Specialized definition on WikiTherian](http://wikitherian.org/wiki/tiki-index.php?page=Shapeshift)
* [TFCentral](http://www.tfcentral.com) - A portal dedicated to transformation. Hosting, forums, image gallery, story archives, and chat.
* [The Fluid Self - Changing Identities During Spiritual Travel](http://www.spiritualtravel.org/OBE/self.html)
* [Portal of Transformation](http://www.jh-author.com/portal.htm) - Site with sections on the folklore behind a number of different shapeshifters from around the world.
* [Stories set in fictional town "Barken, TX"](http://www.dogpawz.com/barken/index.html)
* [The Siren Song](http://www.thesirensong.net/) - Started back in 1997 - this site is home to original TG transformation/shapeshifting art, comics and animated shorts.
* [Mako Pictures](http://www.makopictures.com/) - A spin off from The Siren Song - this site is home to original TG transformation/shapeshifting independent live action movies.

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