

1. Writing as the Daemonic

“O Bottom, thou art changed! . . . Thou art translated!”
—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.1.104–7

Of all the mythic occurrences to which literary characters can be subjected, bodily metamorphoses are at once the most drastic and the most typical. Mythic typicality places an allegorical frame around any literary metamorphic episode. For instance, although the precise significance of Gregor Samsa's transformation may be in doubt, we remain confident about the ultimate profundity of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, just because it recalls the fate of so many other epic or Ovidian protagonists. In this sense alone, the *Metamorphosis* is an allegory of writing: it flaunts its own paradigmatic belatedness, its virtual location within the immeasurable line of metamorphic typology. Once Kafka chose to transpose a metamorphic fiction into the modern world, he could not go wrong, and the intrinsic comedy of his fable is bound up with the abiding literary instinct for miraculous transformation.¹

Walter Benjamin associates baroque allegory with the melancholy of transcendental meaning and historical time: “In allegory,” writes Benjamin (1985) with reference to the German *Trauerspiel*, “the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head” (166).² The ludicrous juxtapositions of minds and bodies in metamorphic stories such as Kafka's complicate this scheme, however, for these narratives present parodic revisions or travesties of epic and theological solemnities. Whereas a mythic or scriptural metamorphosis may be the occasion for an awesome epiphany or revelation of the sacred, a literary metamorphosis cannot be taken completely seriously. Its manifest absurdity is already the most reliable indicator of allegorical irony, urging the reader to reconstruct the particular pretexts undergoing parodic transformation.

This is not to say that literary metamorphoses have nothing serious to tell us. On the contrary, fictive transformations of human bodies can represent the most dire and literal human issues. Embedded in the changes of Lucius, Bottom, Lamia, Dr. Jekyll,

and Gregor Samsa are grave matters of gender construction and sexual conflict; familial and class identity; economic, social, and cosmological structures; moral affects and intellectual ideals. The aim of this study is to codify and interrelate these levels of meaning in metamorphic stories. Still, all such material and spiritual significances are folded into and doubled over the ostensibly nonsensical surface of the fiction. Literary metamorphoses powerfully play upon the essential and potentially tragic disjunctiveness of allegorical form. They make the interfusion of sense and nonsense their textual sport.

This interfusion of the meaningless and the meaningful is also the condition of language, especially when it is set forth in the graphic body of writing. The transformation of spoken language or visual images *into* writing prefigures all the other transformations carried out by and in writing. The structural model of the sign as a composite of signifier and signified can be used to indicate the fundamental reciprocity of allegory and metamorphosis. To read a text as an allegory produces an inner transformation of its meaning, a substitution of signifieds, whereas the event of a bodily metamorphosis depicts an outer transformation, a substitution of signifiers. An allegory enforces a semantic or thematic translation of the lexical sense of a text; a metamorphosis brings about the literal rewriting of a character on the model of verbal translation from one language into another.

The critical recuperation of allegory that has taken its main impetus from the work of Benjamin has focused especially on its writing-like or scriptive character: "at one stroke the profound vision of allegory transforms things and works into stirring writing" (Benjamin 1985, 176). Insofar as translation is a paradigm of writing in general, metamorphosis in literature may be read as an allegory of writing and its effects—reading, (mis)interpretation, figuration, intertextual transmission, and so forth. The metamorphic changes represented within texts are allegories of the metamorphic changes *of* texts. Characters that produce or endure bodily metamorphoses personify the intermediary power of verbal translation, the powers of written scripts to bridge the gaps among dead and living languages and societies. Agents with metamorphic powers intervene in strange locales and foreign languages, cross over into alien registers. Similarly, elements in translated texts cross over verbal and cultural barriers, at the expense of the prior language and other formal qualities of the prior text. Yet metamorphic stories are eminently translatable. Fictions of bodily transformation retain their symbolic powers despite the alterations of the signifiers that narrate them.³

A literary metamorphosis typically exploits the mistakes and misrecognitions attending reading and writing. In the *Golden Ass*, the protagonist Lucius's metamorphosis into an ass instead of a bird immediately results from his girlfriend Fotis's misreading of the jars containing Pamphile's magical ointments. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck transforms the affections of the quarreling lovers when he mistakes the "Athenian weeds" that render Demetrius interchangeable with Lysander, and Bottom's metamorphosis into a "monster" occurs in close proximity to Puck's comic "misprision." In both of these tales as well, the agent of metamorphosis is an elixir or *pharmakon*, as in Plato's famous metaphor for the ambivalent powers of writing. Near the end of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates relates that Thoth was the creator of numbers and arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, games of chance, as well as writing (§274d). Thoth submits his inventions to Ammon, to receive the Father's sign of approval. In defense of writing, Thoth tropes it as a *pharmakon*. Writing will be a miracle cure: "This invention, O king . . . will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is an elixir of memory and wisdom that I have discovered" (*P* §274e). However, Ammon withholds his approval and declares that this drug will turn into a poison, deadening rather than spurring the memory, reducing living, inner wisdom to dead, outer simulacra (§274e–75b). Plato's metaphor of writing as a *pharmakon* is intended to structure values logocentrically, that is, to privilege insides over outsides. Yet as Derrida shows, the (non)virtue of the shifty *pharmakon* is to be indeterminate with regard both to its effect and to its position, neither entirely outside nor entirely inside.

The Greek counterpart of Thoth is Hermes, the most manifestly daemonic of the Olympian divinities. Hermes's proper attributes as a herald, messenger, guardian, and guide, an intermediary, as a secondary or filial term proclaiming an Other's (parental) word, parallel the standardized attributes of daemons in general. In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, his innate talents include the gift of metamorphosis, which he uses to pass through a keyhole, to cross over stealthily from outside to inside after stealing Apollo's cattle, and the gift of persuasion, which he then uses to move Zeus to wink at his theft.⁴ Both Thoth and Hermes are patrons of reading and writing, and accordingly, both bear a *pharmakon*. In Book 10 of the *Odyssey*, at Zeus's behest Hermes delivers to Odysseus the herb Moly, an antidote to protect him against Circe's metamorphic charm. Derrida notes some other parallels between Hermes and Thoth, not the least of which is their both being gods of death. "Like his Greek counterpart, Hermes,

whom Plato moreover never mentions, [Thoth] occupies the role of messenger-god, of clever intermediary, ingenious and subtle enough to steal, and always to steal away. The signifier-god."⁵ Hermes has a similar genius for impropriety, and comes to oversee a number of disreputable agents and activities, stealthy operators and their acts: thieves, merchants, alchemists, lovers, sophists, and rhetoricians, and their economic, sexual, and linguistic commerce.⁶

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck is not only the Cupid, he is the Hermes, the metamorphic trickster of the text. Upon his entrance, Puck tells us that he operates by means of the "slip": "The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale, / Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me; / Then slip I from her bum, down topples she" (S 2.1.51-53).⁷ And when Oberon sends him to fetch the flower "love-in-idleness" to concoct a love potion, Puck aligns with Hermes/Thoth as the deliverer of a *pharmakon*. Moreover, the potion Puck administers to Lysander, Demetrius, and Titania derives from the mock-Ovidian metamorphosis of "a little western flower," upon which fell an erotic daemonic power, "the bolt of Cupid" (2.1.166,165).⁸ The bearer of this *pharmakon* is a splendid figure for the aggressive comedy of metamorphic misprision.

John Keats's *Lamia* specifically concerns a triangle of stealthy characters, and it brings the figure of Hermes together explicitly with the story of a human metamorph. To motivate his *Lamia* story, Keats conjures up the figure of Hermes and sends him in search of an invisible nymph:

. . . The ever-smitten Hermes empty left
 His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft:
 From high Olympus had he stolen light
 On this side of Jove's clouds, to escape the sight
 Of his great summoner, and made retreat
 Into a forest on the shores of Crete. (*KP* 1.7-12)

Keats's image has Hermes already in stealthy flight, fleeing subservience to the Father, flying to the place of desire. "Hermes is constantly underway: he is *enodios* ('by the road') and *hodos* ('belonging to a journey'), and one encounters him on every path."⁹ Keats's emphasis on "amorous theft" is doubly accurate: Hermes was often found in league with Aphrodite, to the point of virtual fusion in the figure of Hermaphroditus. Hermes's association with a mythic androgyne underscores the propriety by which Keats brings Hermes forward as a patron of transgressive and indeterminate erotic relations.

Reading Hermes's myth (in Keats's retelling) as an allegory of writing, we find the dispossessed signified sliding away (the aban-

donment of the Father's word), as Hermes assumes primacy, asserts and enacts the arbitrary agency of the signifier, chasing desire down and along the syntagmatic chain. The patron of interpreters (*hermenes*) and textual intermediation (hermeneutics), Hermes oversees the script, as Hermes the guardian and guide of the dead oversees the crypt. Hermes the messenger personifies the medium of symbolic transmissions. Jane Harrison has drawn out the opposition in the figure of Hermes between the winged messenger and the ponderous, phallic stone Herm, "a rude pillar later surmounted by a head," to the point that a late-ancient fable "makes the god himself voice the dilemma: was he a tombstone, was he an immortal?"¹⁰ Hermes's dual roles as a tombstone and a guide of departed souls are both underwritten by the circulatory structure of the linguistic sign: the signifier marks the spot where the signified died and entered the (s)crypt.¹¹ A suppresser or translator of semantic proprieties, an agent that ferries psyches or transfers unbound essences from one realm to another, that binds the dead to death, Hermes also personifies the trope—the brilliant, mercurial transfer of image and meaning from one term to another, from one order of signification to another. Counter to the Apollonian ideal of proper metaphor and the "light of truth," Hermes's genius concerns shady rhetoric: linguistic stealth, imposed allegoresis, verbal and graphic trickery, business contracts, skill at the oath. "Hermes is the master of the magic formulae which bind" (Brown 1969, 14).

Hermes knows the road to Hades; Keats at one point names him "the star of Lethe" (1.81). Following the aegis of Hermes, allegory goes to Hell. No trope can avoid some element of semantic impropriety; in this shifting light the trope is a potential curse, a stealthy appropriation of the essences of terms by other terms and the holding down of terms by other terms. A furtive trickster and thief, Hermes presides over the metempsychoses of linguistic agents, the displacements of semantic values. He grants illicit possessive desires; he promotes shady transfers.¹² Furthermore, the congruence in mythic personification between Hermes and Thoth underscores the daemonic status, the metamorphic nature of writing as such. In Derrida's exposition of Thoth as a figure for the filial, secondary, anti-authoritative or subversive position of writing in relation to the primary paternity of the spoken logos, Thoth personifies writing as daemonic. As scapegoat (*pharmakos*), wandering outcast, or stealthy outsider, the metamorph exemplifies the status of writing within a logocentric system.¹³ Metamorphs such as Lucius, Lamia, or Mr. Hyde, are all hermetic characters met along the street or by the roadside.

Some literary metamorphoses emblemize their textuality simply by literalizing the *pharmakon*, reifying the agent of metamorphosis as something eaten or absorbed: the magical ointment Fotis misapplies to Lucius, or the juice of the flower "love-in-idleness" Puck uses to doctor the affections of the Athenian teenagers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹⁴ In the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Jekyll's transcendental potion is also a textual trope. Its chromatic "turning" is an allegory of writing as metamorphosis. Stevenson describes the potion with an emphasis on what Dr. Lanyon literally terms the "metamorphoses" produced by its manufacture: "The mixture, which was at first of a reddish hue, began, in proportion as the crystals melted, to brighten in colour, to effervesce audibly, and to throw off small fumes of vapour. Suddenly and at the same moment, the ebullition ceased and the compound changed to a dark purple, which faded again more slowly to a watery green" (*JH* 347). Keats's invention of the Hermes episode that begins *Lamia* already marks it with a daemonic signifier, and the allegory of writing in the poem extends from Hermes to the character of Lamia herself. In traditional criticism, Lamia has often been taken as a figure for "literary romance" representing Keats's increasingly ambivalent attitude toward "the faery way of writing." Wandering from place to place and from body to body, the unfathered, unfathomable Lamia is a figure for any written discourse detached from its author and imposed upon by an interpretive authority—a dispossessed subject under the spell of another's word. Apollonius's final banishment of Lamia resonates with the Platonic demotion of writing in the *Phaedrus* and, more specifically, the exiling of Poetry in the *Republic*.

In the *Golden Ass*, a prominent anecdote early in the narrative dramatizes the linguistic dimension of literary metamorphosis. In a comic digression from the main plot of Lucius's metamorphic career, a character named Thelyphron gets mugged by a metonymy. First of all, as a center of mockery Thelyphron introduces Lucius's forthcoming role in the Festival of Laughter: both are the butt of cruel jesting, Thelyphron among the guests at one of Byrrhaena's banquets for having been beset upon and disfigured by Thessalian witches. A guest explains, "a fellow whose name I needn't mention got dreadfully bitten about the face by that hell pack" (*GA* 41). With this ironic glance at the speaker's name, commanded by Byrrhaena to deliver Lucius his story, Thelyphron begins. Once, when traveling through Larissa, he was so broke that he took a job guarding a corpse against nocturnal desecration. Although during the night he fell asleep, when he awoke the next day both he and the corpse seemed to be unmolested and Thelyphron collected his

wage. But that afternoon during the last summons over the corpse, a grieving uncle accused the widow of poisoning her husband.

At this point an Egyptian necromancer proposed to solve the murder mystery by summoning the husband's shade back into his body, which could then testify in its own behalf. Soon enough, the corpse stirred and cried out accusations against the wife. It went on to explain that marauding witches had cast a sleeping spell on the student hired to stand guard, and had then called out the dead man's name—Thelyphron: "when they called: 'Thelyphron, Thelyphron, come!' he . . . offered his face for the mutilation that they intended for mine; and they nibbled off first his nose and then his ears." The living Thelyphron then confesses to Lucius, "I clapped my hand to my face . . . and my nose fell off; then I touched my ears, and they fell off too" (50). Byrrhaena's banquet bursts into laughter.¹⁵

Apuleius leaves the story of Thelyphron hanging there. Its purpose is not to indict the murderous wife's infidelity but to foreshadow Lucius's coming transformation. Thelyphron's "loss of face" adumbrates Lucius's own embarrassment, his total bodily dispossession by metamorphosis into an ass. With Thelyphron the occasion of transformative disfiguration is explicitly linguistic. He learns to his chagrin that he and the corpse he had contracted to guard have the same name.¹⁶ Thus to his mortification, Thelyphron has been traduced by an adjacent signifier, double-crossed by the very arbitrariness of the vehicle of his own identity. Along with his wage, Thelyphron inherits another's physical misfortune. Some hermetic trickster positioned Thelyphron's name so that his person becomes a daemonic figure or allegorical vehicle for a corpse.

The linguistic counterpart of the spoken name is the written signature. Both are signifiers of proper identity and of the "propriety" by which one lays claim to personal possessions and social prestige. *Jekyll and Hyde* deploys a series of episodes in which socioeconomic motifs are woven into scenes of writing, particularly the writing of signatures. In Mr. Hyde the economic and the grammatological subtexts of the story collide.¹⁷ Hyde is a walking chiasmus, an obscure crossroads, generated at the intersection where Dr. Jekyll in metamorphic disguise crosses and is crossed by a defenseless female. In the first chapter, "Story of the Door," Enfield recounts to Utterson an odd scene he had witnessed. It seems a "little man" had callously trampled a young girl who happened across his path from a "cross street" (284). Enfield had grabbed the malefactor, and the girl's indignant family demanded a sum of money. Enfield followed this throng to a back-alley doorway:

The next thing was to get the money; and where do you think he carried us but to that place with the door?—whipped out a key, went in, and presently came back with the matter of ten pounds in gold and a cheque for the balance . . . drawn payable to bearer and signed with a name that I can't mention, though it's one of the points of my story . . . Yes, it's a bad story. For my man was a fellow that nobody could have to do with, a really damnable man; and the person that drew the cheque is the very pink of the proprieties. (285–86)

In the signature, writing coincides with a sign of personal identity, a sign that can be either legitimately or illicitly duplicated. In a practical context, fixing a signature to a financial document transforms personal identity into economic identity, producing a tilt into the fluid indifferentiation of circulating currency. Checks drawn on banks function when the bank credits the signature of the drawer. But here, given the discrepancy between the bearer, a “damnable man,” and the unseen, as yet unnamed drawer, Enfield is doubtful about the authenticity of the signature. The problem Stevenson is proposing here may be stated: how can the signature of someone who is not self-identical be credited? Hyde holds a check on which two names are inscribed—one general sign of mobile identity (“Bearer”) and one signature of proper identity (“Jekyll”). Ostensibly this or any check authorizes a transfer of capital from one account to another. However, in this case it authorizes a dubious circulation of the soul's gold from the official books of public identity to a private slush fund. Through this business with the check, Stevenson has already sketched out the actual state of affairs with Jekyll, as it will be unfolded by Utterson: Dr. Jekyll is doctoring his own books, having set up a phony body, a dummy corporation in the name of Edward Hyde. Jekyll has rigged his own spiritual accounts, to secure illicit pleasures without incurring the moral debts demanded by his conscientious economy.

The device of the dubious signature recurs several times once Utterson sets out to get to the bottom of Jekyll's problems. In the “Incident of the Letter” following the murder of Sir Danver Carew, Utterson confronts Jekyll and speaks more truly than he yet knows, asking, “You have not been mad enough to hide this fellow?” (311) Jekyll responds by producing a letter

written in an odd, upright hand and signed “Edward Hyde”: and it signified, briefly enough, that the writer's benefactor, Dr. Jekyll, whom he had long so unworthily

repaid for a thousand generousities, need labour under no alarm for his safety, as he had means of escape on which he placed a sure dependence. The lawyer liked this letter well enough. . . .

“Have you the envelope?” he asked.

“I burned it,” replied Jekyll, “before I thought what I was about. But it bore no postmark. The note was handed in.” (312)

But when Utterson asks who handed in the letter, the butler informs him that no messenger had appeared. Later Utterson shows a graphologist the “murderer’s autograph” (314), Hyde’s signature on the letter produced by Jekyll, and Jekyll’s own signature. The expert compares them: “Well, . . . there’s a rather singular resemblance; the two hands are in many points identical; only differently sloped” (315). Utterson jumps but lands just short of the proper conclusion: “‘What!’ he thought. ‘Henry Jekyll forge for a murderer!’” (315)

The crucial detail here is an absence, the absence of the envelope in which a letter genuinely “handed in” would have arrived. Both signatures were in fact written by the same hand, and consequently there was no need of an envelope, an outer covering, upon which to inscribe the names of sender and receiver. There was no need of an actual conveyance between two persons, for in fact, both Jekyll and Hyde reside within the same envelope, and take turns “writing the signature” on that envelope. Ultimately, in *Jekyll and Hyde* the allegory of writing resolves into handwriting, handwritten texts, the material medium of Jekyll’s and Hyde’s shared identity, or duplicity: “Nor must I delay too long to bring my writing to an end,” we read in the last paragraph of the story; “Should the throes of change take me in the act of writing it, Hyde will tear it in pieces” (371–72). So when Jekyll remarked earlier of the fictive envelope in which the forged letter from Mr. Hyde had supposedly arrived, “I burned it,” he also named in a figure the implied fate of his bodily person. It, too, is a nonexistent or interminably deferred envelope, that has fallen from being into writing, where it suffers the “throes of change.”

Letters call for envelopes, some outer conveyance to envelop their inner content. Spiritual messages require material vehicles, but the agents transporting those messages may not deliver them properly. As message-carrying agencies, in related but distinct ways, writing and allegory both operate according to the logic of the supplement.¹⁸ Written texts can be misappropriated, altered, misdelivered, or misconstrued. At the intersection of allegory and

metamorphosis, the inevitable slippages sustained by the supplementary and vehicular status of writing are reified *in the form of the daemonic*. The mythopoetic realm of the daemonic depicts intermediation and transformation within a complexly communicating cosmos. The daemonic status of writing is personified through messenger figures who may either act as the herald—the representative signifier—for an Other, or assert independent agency. Structurally considered, the intermediary realm of the daemonic is this very oscillation between majority and minority, primary and secondary status, autonomous and delegated action. Angel or devil, as a figure of communication the daemon is a supplementary agent, a personified message moving rapidly through space and across borders: thus it is depicted as winged.¹⁹ Consider Diotima's description of Eros as a daemon in Plato's *Symposium*: Eros is "a great spirit, Socrates: the whole of the spiritual [τὸ δαιμόνιον] is between divine and mortal . . . interpreting and transporting human things to the gods and divine things to men; entreaties and sacrifices from below, and ordinances and requitals from above: being midway between, it makes each to supplement [συμπληροῦ] the other, so that the whole is combined in one" (*P* §202e).²⁰

My treatment of the daemonic closely follows Fletcher's (1964) philological excavation and recovery of this ancient theological term for allegory theory. "Daemons, as I shall define them, share this major characteristic of allegorical agents, the fact that they compartmentalize function" (40). Fletcher brings the daemonic forward as a textual and rhetorical form of "possession," that aspect of allegorical apparatus that exerts structural power over and so determines the possible range of an agent's activity. In literature, "the increase of daemonic control over the character amounts to an intensification of the allegory. It is striking that this progress in abstraction is accompanied by an increased importance given to the name . . . to name a person is to fix his function irrevocably" (49–50). The "supernatural" or metamorphic force of the daemonic is thus anti- or trans-organic: "Constriction of meaning, when it is the limit put upon a personified force or power, causes that personification to act somewhat mechanistically. The perfect allegorical agent is not a man possessed by a daemon, but a robot" (55). The contemporary daemonic is thus clearly evident in the elaboration of post-organic creatures such as cyborgs, but this note of ontological transgression is deeply rooted in traditional ideas of the daemon: "Daemonic forces thus become participants in the cosmic drama of man versus god, almost as if the daemons were the relationships, personified, of man to god. To the extent that he follows this intermediary pattern, the allegorical agent is not quite human, and not quite godlike, but shares something of both states" (61).

With regard to its allegorical function, the daemon typically bears a message with a moral content—good or evil whispering to the human soul. As transmitted by Platonic allegory, the mythic divinity Eros becomes the model for Socrates's daemon—a message-bearing demigod on the order of Hermes. In the *Phaedrus*, forced to advance Lysias's disgraceful thesis that one should prefer a “non-lover” to someone under the genuine sway of Eros, Socrates veils himself, ironically dramatizing his sense of shame with the implication that his sign of conscience is on the alert well before he explicitly mentions it: “When I was about to cross the stream, the spirit and the sign [τὸ δαυμόνιον τε καὶ τὸ εἰωθὸς σημεῖον] that usually comes to me came—it always holds me back from something I am about to do—and I thought I heard a voice from it which forbade my going away before clearing my conscience, as if I had committed some sin against deity” (*P* §242b–c). Socrates's phrasing places the daemonic and the semiotic into apposition.

In his playfully lyrical daemonological tract *On the God of Socrates*, Apuleius develops the sense of the daemonic as a signification of the moral psyche: “The poets, from this multitude of demons, are accustomed, in a way by no means remote from the truth, to feign the Gods to be haters and lovers of certain men, and to give prosperity and promotion to some, and to oppose and afflict others. Hence, they are influenced by pity, moved by indignation, racked with vexation, elated with joy, and are subject to all the affections of the human mind; and are agitated by all the fluctuations of human thought, with similar commotions of the spirit and agitations of the feelings. All which storms and tempests are far alien from the tranquil state of the celestial Gods” (*GS* 360–61). As a buffer between the human and the divine, the “middle nature” of the daemonic is an allegorical defense of the divine from its mishandling by poetic visionaries who portray celestial gods as susceptible to human desires.²¹ Such a vision of the daemonic is a certain response to monotheistic moral pressures. But when the divine is redefined as beyond affective values, that very exclusion produces an identification of the daemonic with human affectivity.

The daemonic is nothing if not equivocal. The ethereal and aerial realm of daemons is poised between heaven and earth; although immortal like the highest gods, daemons are affected like mortals, subject to passion. Daemons are “capable, just as we are, of being affected by all that soothes as well as all that moves the mind” (362). Both humans and daemons are moved by feelings: passionate daemons behave like mortal persons, passionate persons turn into daemons. Without dogmatic Platonic moralization, Apuleius has translated the Platonic daemonic into an affective

psychology. Now comes the crucial turn in Apuleius's account: "According to a certain signification, the human soul, even when it is still situate in the body, is called a demon" (GS 363). And when Apuleius arrives at the "god" of Socrates in particular, he makes explicit the psychological connection between the daemonic and the moral imagination.²² The daemonic according to Apuleius intersects with the uncanny according to psychoanalysis. The daemon is a "divine sign," the superego or parental letter in the unconscious, the script of the conscience. The allotted daemon is a magical double, reconceived here on the model of the myth of Er in the *Republic* as an impartial representative before a divine bar:

Plato is of the opinion that a peculiar demon is allotted to every man, to be a witness and a guardian of his conduct in life, who, without being visible to any one, is always present, and is an overseer not only of his actions, but even of his thoughts. But when life is finished, and THE SOUL has to return to *its judges*, then the demon who has presided over it immediately seizes, and leads it as his charge to judgment. . . . The demon scrupulously takes part in all these matters, sees all things, understands all things, and dwells in the most profound recesses of the mind, in the place of conscience. (GS 365)

On the God of Socrates is thus a psychological rhapsody on the allotted daemon as moral signifier. With regard to Socrates and his *daimon*, Apuleius had just mentioned a passage from the *Phaedrus*: "Once, for example, when he was with Phaedrus, beyond the precincts of the city, under the covering of a shady tree, and at a distance from all onlookers, he perceived a sign which announced to him that he must not pass over the small stream of the river Ilissus, until he had appeased Love, who was indignant at his censure of him, by a recantation" (369). Apuleius, the ironic amorist of the *Golden Ass*, points to a moment when a daemonic sign, the advocate of Socrates's conscience, comes not to prosecute but to defend the powers of Eros.

However, the term d(a)emon—as its unstable orthography indicates—has become a discursive vehicle overloaded with incompatible tenors, complexly weighted with Western cultural freight, and sustaining wide changes in meaning over at least three millennia of currency (see Fletcher 1964, 41–48). The use of "demon" to mean "evil spirit" is "a Jewish application of the Greek word, anterior to Christianity" (*OED*). In Judeo-Christian culture, Eros is suppressed or infantilized and the daemonic splits off into angels

as heralds of the divine and devils as agents of evil. Ambivalence is incorporated into the pagan idea of a daemon as a being situated between the human and the divine, whereas in Judeo-Christian usage, that positional ambiguity is polarized and an unbridgeable chasm set up between heaven and hell, good and evil. Discussing Augustine's pivotal role in the codification of Christian theology, Barkan notes that his treatment of demons is especially connected to ideas of metamorphosis. For Augustine, "the demonic explanation of metamorphosis is both satisfying and significant. It locates metamorphosis in that special realm where the pagan and Christian traditions intersect, that of the ancient gods who were permitted to survive as demons or fallen angels. . . . Demons are intrinsically metamorphic" (Barkan 1986, 99–100).

As such, the daemonic is also intrinsically allegorical: it personifies the supplementary status of allegorical meaning. Moreover, its structural role of cosmic intermediation parallels allegory's historical role of cultural intermediation, as between Christian moral authority and its problematic pagan inheritance. In the early nineteenth century, while participating in the Romantic demotion of neoclassical allegory relative to the aesthetics of the symbol, Goethe provided pagan allegory with some discursive shelter by resuscitating the term "daemonic" with its intermediary, aleatory, and mischievous nature intact: "It was not divine, for it seemed without reason; not human, for it had no understanding; not diabolical, for it was beneficent; not angelic, for it took pleasure in mischief. It resembled chance, in that it manifested no consequence; it was like Providence, for it pointed toward connection. All that restricts us seemed for it penetrable; it seemed to deal arbitrarily with the necessary elements of our existence; it contracted time and expanded space. It seemed to find pleasure only in the impossible and to reject the possible with contempt. To this entity, which seemed to intervene between all others, to separate them and yet to link them together, I gave the name daemonic, after the example of the ancients."²³

Anticipating Goethe's Romantic reinscription of the pagan daemonic, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* both reawakens and mocks the daemonic realm of metamorphic allegory. The relation between Oberon, the King of the Fairies, and Puck, his underling and prankster, parodies that of Zeus and Hermes, the Godfather and the Son/Messenger, as well as the paternalism for which they stand. But the more parodic the daemonic becomes, the more strongly it may be translated from mythic detachment into material significance. The manifest silliness of such characters gives them a kind of cover under which to

carry powerful and serious contents. Oberon and Puck have several scenes where they expound the distinctions among daemonic orders. Puck declares, "yonder shines Aurora's harbinger; / At whose approach, ghosts, wand'ring here and there, / Troop home to churchyards: damnèd spirits all, / That in crossways and floods have burial"; Oberon's cryptic reply, "But we are spirits of another sort" (3.2.380-88), is perhaps not so cryptic, if by this remark Oberon posits himself and Puck as spirits of the text, literary daemons. The fairy realm emerges in Shakespeare's metamorphic farce as an imaginary supplement needed to resolve the real human dilemmas. In the allegorical construction of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the most profound level of cultural interpretation is to be found at the extremities of the fairy nonsense.²⁴

Puck. How now, spirit! Whither wander you?

Fairy. Over hill, over dale,

Thorough bush, thorough brier,

Over park, over pale,

Thorough flood, thorough fire;

I do wander everywhere,

Swifter than the moon's sphere . . .

—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2.1.1-7)

"I do wander everywhere": the Fairy personifies pure (mytho)poesis, the interminable movement of meaning through contingent sequences of signs. By sounding the scale of nature, the Fairy's song begins to orchestrate Shakespeare's comic vision of prolific eros. But it also figures as ironic backdrop for Bottom's mock-monstrous interlude, in that it alludes to another, peculiarly unstable, "watery" figure of transformation, Proteus, with his virtue of passing elusively through long series of forms: "Hold him struggling there, though he be violent to escape. / He will try it by becoming all the many creatures / That move on the earth; and then water, and divinely kindled fire" (*HO* 4.416-18). Conveyed through this daemonic being, the phases of Proteus mirror the metamorphic movements of allegory, the metaphoric carrying of sense over and away from vehicle to vehicle.

The meta-writing by which literal signs are transposed into literary figures is doubly daemonic. Tropes are occasions for semantic clash and overload, unstable and reversible relations, a potential strife of agencies within the same scene. The tenor of a figure may have predicated to it an infinite series of vehicles; but any vehicle, once inducted, may overturn the original tenor. Figuration turns daemonic when the vehicle will not stay put but

overmasters the tenor, or when the tenor is already the vehicle for a previous tenor, to the detriment of the new vehicle. The play of figuration turns grave when signs and persons become interchangeable and the one proceeds to eliminate the other.²⁵ Reflecting on the trope of personification, Steven Knapp comments, "if personifications are animated through the intensification of metaphor (or more precisely, through the intensification of a metaphoric vehicle at the expense of its supposed 'tenor'), then mimetic agents may have a converse tendency to slide 'back' into metaphor (that is, the agent may turn out to be the vehicle of a previously unsuspected or forgotten tenor). The reversibility of personifications thus makes the boundary between rhetoric and agency less secure than it might have seemed."²⁶

Quince. Ay. Or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine. (3.1.51–3)

* * *

Bottom. Some man or other must present Wall; and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some roughcast about him, to signify wall. (3.1.59–61)

* * *

Wall. In this same interlude it doth befall
That I, one Snout by name, present a wall . . .
This loam, this roughcast, and this stone doth show
That I am that same wall: the truth is so . . .
Theseus. Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?
Demetrius. It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard
discourse, my lord. (5.1.154–66)

In these passages, as if to underwrite the connection between the two devices, Shakespeare inserts a wry burlesque of allegorical personification into his pointed comedy of daemonic metamorphosis. Fixing themselves into a structure of emblematic props, so as to "disfigure the persons" of Wall and Moonshine, Bottom's ingenuous companions undergo comically grotesque mock-metamorphoses, reverse personifications in which clowns are transformed into ludicrous signifiers. Theseus and Demetrius, the play's own readers of these motley allegories, would interpellate the audience into their system of values with light ironic commentary, Theseus with a humorous personification, Demetrius with a pun. The larger point

underscored by these passages is that the allegorical metamorph is a reverse or transposed personification, not the poetic animation of an abstraction but the fantastic fixation of a person within an alien structure of signs.²⁷

In an allegorical personification or a personified abstraction, a scenic or inanimate tenor is joined to or replaced by a vehicle denoting some quality or property of an agent. To couple an abstract, inanimate tenor to an animate vehicle augments the tenor, compounds its connotative value by "bringing it to life."²⁸ But when a human agent is designated as the tenor for which a scenic vehicle is substituted, that meaning can be captured, trapped by the trope, "possessed" by the vehicle such that the tenor, the realm of the agent, as a result of the allegory, is dispossessed by and reduced to the arbitrariness of a signifier. The daemonic origin of the metamorph thus encodes the structural determination of the human subject. Myths of the daemon simply displace and repeat the catastrophic origin of the subject. If persons as social agents are constituted through and on the model of signifiers within sign systems (for instance, as tokens distributed within a kinship system), then there is no guaranteeing that some Other won't deploy them improperly, as metaphors, and thus exchange their literal identities for fictive figures, or simply rewrite them according to some other script. The human psyche is simultaneously set up and overturned by a rhetorical betrayal.

Thus myths of divine origin are supplemented by counter-myths of demonic corruption. In patriarchal epics, for instance, presumptuous females are variously portrayed as either the agent or the dupe of the daemonic. Placed next to Satan beside the Tree of Knowledge, Eve becomes an everlasting metonymy of the daemon. Yet the story that regards woman's creation in the first place as an afterthought, a secondary and belated performance, has already stigmatized the female as daemonic—a shifty, transformative supplement disrupting a prior, proper ratio. In Book 10 of *Paradise Lost*, when Milton's Satan takes credit for Adam's fall, he testifies as well to Eve's seduction with a *pharmakon*, an apple with a curse upon it:

". . . I found
The new-created World, which fame in Heaven
Long had foretold, a fabric wonderful,
Of absolute perfection; therein Man,
Placed in a paradise, by our exile
Made happy. Him by fraud I have seduced
From his Creator, and, the more to increase

Your wonder, with an apple! He, thereat
 Offended—worth your laughter!—hath given up,
 Both his beloved Man and all his World,
 To Sin and Death a prey. . . ." (PL 10.480–90)

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is the daemonic agent as "uninvited guest," the "stranger in the house" of God's newest creation.²⁹ His figure personifies the persuasive charms of allegorical displacement: intruding upon the literal intentions of God's and Adam's previous namings, Satan imposes the persuasive fictions ("you will be like God") that Eve will accept as motives, corrupts literal ingenuousness with figurative duplicity, and so dispossesses humanity of its proper birthright. Eve believed a lie, but then, how was she to know the difference between Satan's lie and God's truth without tasting of the tree of knowledge? Just as allegorical figures disguise their proper meanings, daemonic agents gravitate to scenes of oscillation between ignorance and knowledge. The questions of literal belief and poetic faith produced by the "fluctuations" of allegorical personifications are thoughtfully raised by Steven Knapp (1985):

In one sense, the energy with which [personifications] shift from one mode of representation to another is the measure of their peculiar power. But such mutability, however pronounced in personifications, is a property that may spread, as if by contagion, to other, ostensibly more "literal" agents, as the example of Satan reveals. Not only does Satan, for all his psychological complexity, remain to some extent a theologically precise representation of evil; but, just as the allegorical content of a personification can seem to dissipate, leaving a relatively opaque and independent agent, so Milton frequently allows psychology to lapse as Satan—suitably shrunken, enlarged, or otherwise transformed—freezes into emblematic fixity. The result is sometimes a grotesque surprise, as in Satan's metamorphosis into a serpent. (59–60)

However, these interpretive questions are compounded with regard to the reading of literary metamorphs. The interpretation of Satan's character is complicated by the sanction Christian doctrine provides to consider Satan somehow "literally real" in contrast for instance to Milton's Sin and Death, which are never mistaken for mimetic agents. But one can acknowledge the reality of evil without having to grant the literal or actual personhood of Satan. As a

catastrophically fallen angel, a daemon (not a human) to begin with, the figure of Satan is already a moralized trope. The interval between his expulsion from heaven and his metamorphosis into a serpent is drawn out sufficiently to enable him to include the New World in the orbit of his Fall. So Satan's metamorphosis proper does not inaugurate a metamorphic narrative, but terminates a demonic interlude with an emblem of judgment.³⁰ Satan's metamorphosis has the "emblematic fixity" Knapp observes because Milton has now detached his figure from the human action:

His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,
 His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
 Each other, till supplanted down he fell
 A monstrous serpent on his belly prone
(PL 10.511-14)

As opposed to the figure of Satan, allegorical metamorphs like Lucius, Lamia, and Gregor, although they could not be more fictitious, are never frozen into emblematic fixity. This is itself a measure of their success as fictions. These narratives slip beyond the linear translations of dogmatic moralization to produce the "opacity" necessary for real characterization, for persuasive fictions of personhood. The metamorphic body is virtually ironic: a strong metamorph is cryptic, never transparent. At the least, for a literary metamorphosis to succeed, the metamorph must resist symbolical recuperation and remain opaque. Otherwise, the metamorphic defense collapses entirely, and the metamorph gets reabsorbed into some collective structure. Unless a metamorph gets up and walks away with the abstraction that would nail it down, it devolves into a moral personification of that abstraction.

Metamorphic allegories typically bear the mark of a daemonic supplement, the sign of an improper secondary. Stories of human metamorphosis trace a circuitous play of indetermination and intermediation between agents and terms positioned in proportions of proper to improper, primary to secondary—gods and humans, humans and beasts, masters and slaves, parents and children, males and females, literal and figurative meanings. A son's or a daughter's inscription can trace in the paradoxes of the filial position the fault lines that undermine central or primary terms. Kafka's fables amply demonstrate these structural dynamics. In his texts, traditional archetypes undergo a daemonic rupture from dogmatic significations. Allegorical types emerge in Kafka's text not merely as merciful clues to a hermetic signification. He positions them there and then operates upon them, or springs them open.³¹

The *Metamorphosis* is only the most obvious of Kafka's occasional reworkings of classical allegory. More than this once, Kafka doses mythemes with ironic deformations. With Kafka's parabolic version of Ulysses in "Silence of the Sirens" in mind, Benjamin comments: "Ulysses, after all, stands at the dividing line between myth and fairy tale. Reason and cunning have inserted tricks into myths; their forces cease to be invincible. Fairy stories are the traditional stories about victory over these forces, and fairy tales for dialecticians are what Kafka wrote when he went to work on legends. He inserted little tricks into them."³² Hermes, too, the metamorphic master of the linguistic slip, is another allegorical agent who inserts "little tricks" into preexisting structures.³³ Kafka's heroes characteristically come to grief due to kinds of inscrutable interventions, but Benjamin identifies Kafka the writer with the Hermes who freewheels his way unscathed from episode to episode.³⁴ Like other daemonic tricksters—creatures of ecstatic flight that entrap the unwitting or outwit the entrapments of others—the Hermetic Kafka laughs: "he is an author who laughs with a profound joy, a joie de vivre, in spite of, or because of, his clownish declarations that he offers like a trap or a circus" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 41). The traps Kafka sets are those the ironic literary allegorist typically sets for over-zealous readers.³⁵

Kafka's ironic daemonic often functions within the cosmos of imperial bureaucracy, the hierarchies constructed by the distribution and movement of powers through an unfathomable institutional apparatus.³⁶ Benjamin (1982) comments, "the world of offices and registries, of musty, shabby, dark rooms, is Kafka's world" (112). Kafkan bureaucracy burlesques the typology of the daemonic, as in his parable "Poseidon": "Poseidon sat at his desk, doing figures. The administration of all the waters gave him endless work."³⁷ In the figure of bureaucracy, mundane structure is amplified into an allegorical labyrinth. The bureaucratic cosmos domesticates the daemonic by making it the routine wielding of an Other's power over the mundane order. But the terms of Kafka's parody of daemonic types are already present in Apuleius's reworkings of Plato's myths.

Socrates's visionary palinode in the *Phaedrus* recounted the ranks of the "twelve great gods": "There are many blessed sights and many ways hither and thither within the heaven, along which the blessed gods go to and fro attending each to his own duties" (*P* §247a). In *On the God of Socrates*, Apuleius revises the Platonic daemonic: "being placed as messengers between the inhabitants of earth and those of heaven, they carry from the one to the other, prayers and bounties, supplications and assistance, being a kind of

interpreters and message carriers for both. Through these same demons, as Plato says in his *Symposium*, all revelations, the various miracles of magicians, and all kind of presages, are carried on. For specially appointed individuals of this number, administer everything according to the province assigned to each" (GS 356–57). Apuleius's blatant parable of imperial government subverts to some extent Diotima's evocation of Eros as potent and venerable cosmic force, with the lesser figure of the generic daemon as an anonymous imperial functionary relegated to a specific "province" of the polytheistic bureau. Here the daemonic agent is doubled back, demoted once again to a strictly secondary role as a delegate of the imperturbable divinities it serves.

According to Fletcher (1964), "Kafka rewrote this mythology ironically in his parable, 'Couriers'" (44):

They were offered the choice between becoming kings or the couriers of kings. The way children would, they all wanted to be couriers. Therefore there are only couriers who hurry about the world, shouting to each other—since there are no kings—messages that have become meaningless. They would like to put an end to this miserable life of theirs but they dare not because of their oaths of service. (Kafka 1958, 175)

If king and courier are read as father and son, then "Couriers" turns toward the family circle in the *Metamorphosis*. Gregor Samsa was once a courier, that is, a commercial traveler: "Oh God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on! Traveling about day in, day out. . . . The devil take it all!" (M 9). So Gregor's profession bears an allegorical signature in the Hermetic attributes of travel and commerce. But Gregor is a mockery of Hermes, not a potent and aggressive operator, but an exhausted, exasperated victim of an irrevocable routine. In ludicrous, unintelligible explanation to the chief clerk when Gregor first breaks loose from his room, the metamorph says that such a life slips out of one's control: "Travelers are not popular, I know. People think they earn sacks of money and just have a good time. . . . And you know very well that the traveler, who is never seen in the office almost the whole year round, can so easily fall a victim to gossip and ill luck and unfounded complaints, which he mostly knows nothing about, except when he comes back exhausted from his rounds, and only then suffers in person from their evil consequences, which he can no longer trace back to the original causes" (37).