

Frederik Exner Carstens

# Transformation in frog-lore

*An Essay on the Frog as an Agent of Bodily Change*





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Frederik Exner Carstens

Supervisor: Guitemie Maldona  
École des Beaux-Arts de Paris

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**Cover image.** The Latona Fountain in the Park of the Chateau de Versailles, created by Gaspard and Balthazard Marsy. Photo: Yves Tennevin

## INTRODUCTION

Frogs are ancient animals and they existed in all parts of the world before the migration of humans, except for the Arctic and Antarctic zones. They are distinct with their tailless, hairless and scaleless bodies, their metamorphosis from aquatic to terrestrial life as well as their very loud and diverse croaking. Frogs and toads are a part of mythologies in cultures from all parts of the world and bare a multitude of cultural associations, but with some striking cross-cultural similarities. One of the dominant themes in frog-mythology, that this text will focus on, is transformation. We find stories of shapeshifting frogs, frogs with transformative powers and human-frog metamorphosis in tales from all over the world. Most famously in Western culture is probably *The Frog Prince*, from the brothers Grimm's collections of folk tales; a frog that turns out to be a handsome prince cursed by an evil witch, who finds his human form again with the aid of a princess kissing him. In an earlier version of the tale, the transformation happens when the princess hurls the slimy suitor against the wall of her bed chamber, and in other variations from different parts of the world the princess must slit the frog skin open with scissors or cut the head off the frog to provoke the transformation. In some tales it is the frog itself that powers the transformation by taking off the frog skin or simply transforming into a beautiful bride as part of a beauty contest.

Not only in fairy tales do we have transformative frogs. In Ancient Greek mythology, Leto (or Latona) transforms the peasants of Lycia into frogs for refusing to let her and her children drink from a pond. In some cultures, origin myths tell of frogs turning into the first humans, like the one of the Arawaks from Suriname or the Va people of Myanmar and the Yunnan province in China. In Chinese mythology, a certain three legged toad has the power to transform into other forms and teaches his abilities to a human apprentice. A similar toad-spirit guru, *Gama Sennin*, exists in a Japanese folk legend, again teaching humans his toad-magic [see figure 1]. Among the South American indigenous people, there are also many tales of frog-human metamorphosis: children turning into frogs for crying out for their mothers, people trying to cross a river but finding themselves croaking trying to communicate and finally becoming frogs, as well as stories of frogs disguising themselves as humans. Folk tales and mythology from all over the world tell of transformation from human to animal, and whether frogs are overrepresented in these myths must be a question for a statistician, but I dare to say that the theme of transformation is overrepresented in frog-lore.

Frogs undergo metamorphosis as part of their life cycle. They are born as tadpoles with gills and in 3-4 months they develop into lung breathing terrestrial creatures. This has given the name *amphibian*, which means "both kinds of life" in Ancient Greek, so transformation is naturally a part of their ontology. But many other animals also undergo metamorphosis: All amphibians—frogs as well as salamanders and caecilians—do, and many insects also hatch in a larvae state before evolving into their final form. Most remarkably are probably the butterflies with their colorful transformation from caterpillar to pupa and from pupa to gracefully floating butterfly. But there are not—as far as I am concerned—many stories of human-butterfly transformation, whereas frogs seem to appear again and again in stories of body-altering. I believe that frogs are ontologically connected to bodily transformation in the deep unconscious of the human brain, and I will in this text investigate transformation-related frog-human relations in folk lore, mythology, testimonies, religious texts, ethnographic texts and fairy tales, and try to assemble a suggestion as to how this archetypical frog-human transformation motive has come about.



**Figure 1.** This triptych by the Japanese artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi from 1845 shows the Japanese legendary humanoid toad spirit *Gama Sennin*, seen to the right, teaching toad magic to Yoshikado and his sister Takiyasha, two historic figures from the 10th-11th century, that seek help to revenge the death of their father, Taira no Masakado, who rose up against the central government in Kyoto and was killed therefor.



I believe that fairy tales, folk lore and mythology are good places to look for an eventual understanding of frogs as connected to (human) transformation. The 20th century jungian scholar Marie Louise von Franz, who was a pioneer in the psychological study and interpretation of fairy tales, states:

Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material. They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that we as humans need stories to understand the world and ourselves in it. No culture is story-less, and we are all entangled in a dense rhizome of stories, overlapping and sometimes contradictory: national narratives, science, politics, cultural beliefs, religion, advertisement and personal stories, just to mention a few. Some stories of our time, the Big Bang theory for instance, aims to explain the origin of our universe, which humanity has tried to explain or understand through so many cosmogonies before that. The Big Bang theory—which I personally subscribe to—tells the extremely abstract story of an explosion of a single point 13,7 billion years ago, which resulted in our whole, endlessly big and expanding universe. And it even goes as far as to explain the precise chemical processes nanosecond by nanosecond the first instants in the life of the universe. This detailed story is the fruit of a long refinement of the scientific language, methods and technology, and it is no wonder that the much less abstract idea of an intelligent creator, shaping the world with his or her bare hands, has seemed more likely for earlier humans—or a giant bloating and exploding frog whose eyeballs become the sun and the moon for that matter.

Humans have since consciousness tried to understand the world and themselves in it, and science is one of the latest branches on a tree of stories on which also religion, philosophy, art and mythology grows, all dealing with the same questions: Who are we? Where are we and why? Countless stories have been created explaining everything from how the universe was created to why the sun rises and falls, and why a certain bird has a certain color or a certain frog make a certain sound. Some of these ancient tales have obtained archetypal status, maybe after having undergone an almost Darwinian natural selection before the invention of writing. Stories were transmitted orally, and/or illustrated by images or objects, and one can imagine how different versions have appealed more or less to their listeners and thus having had better or worse chances of being retold. Some fairy tale motives have according to some scholars existed for many thousands of years practically unaltered, even long before writing was invented.<sup>2</sup>

But not only the fairy tales change; the characters and objects as well as the listeners also change. According to American scholar in folklore Maria Tatar, the theme of transformation is in the DNA of fairy tales:

Metamorphosis is central to the fairy tale, which shows us figures endlessly shifting their shapes, crossing borders, and undergoing change.<sup>3</sup>

In her 2010 essay, *Why Fairy Tales Matter: the Performative and Transformative*, Tatar links the changing nature of the characters with the alterations of the stories themselves as well as with the change that listeners undergo in being exposed to the sometimes violent narrations, often defying the laws of nature. “*The idea of personal transformation emerges logically from a genre that draws ceaselessly on shape-shifting and metamorphosis*”<sup>4</sup> she states and continues later in the article :

It is no accident that the fairy tale chosen by the Grimms to open their collection was “The Frog King,” a story in which a curse turns a prince into a frog and a gesture of vehement rage reverses the curse (“Now you’ll get your rest,” [Tatar 2004:10] the princess shouts as she tosses the unrelenting suitor against the

1 von Franz p. 1  
2 von Franz p. 4  
3 Tatar p. 55  
4 Tatar p. 60

wall). Here it is not compassion, as in “Beauty and the Beast,” that turns a monster back into a human, but an act of passion, in all its bold intensity.

Transformation is at the heart of magical practices (...) The outburst of passion is rarely silent, and words invariably accompany and express the rage, desire and fear that work together with language to produce transformative effects.<sup>5</sup>

According to Maria Tatar, fairy tales are unique for the very oral character of all spells, charms and curses and their ability to cause real physical change. They can thus teach the listeners about the power of words, and even though children quickly learn that “Open Sesame!” does not open the doors in real life, they discover that, within the limits of the tale, the power of the witches, wizards and trolls can be appropriated by imitation. “For children,” states Tatar “all adults possess wizardry in their control over symbolic forms of expression—they can create illusions, effect changes and take on the agency through words.”<sup>6</sup> So fairy tales can help children move from the word-lacking states of childhood towards more agency in the world by expression, description and definition of the world around them.

Tatar’s take on the importance of fairy tales is one of many. I have briefly included it, because it relates to the theme of transformation, but I will not go much more into other interpretations. The analysis of this text is one of a more quantitative character than the deep and thorough interpretation of individual fairy tales. What I will attempt is to find similar human-frog relations across a broad type of written sources—fairy tales as well as many other types—and I will not so much try to analyze each individual example, for I would need an adequate method for each type of text. I am interested in the bigger picture, assembled by the many similarities across the different sources. If the same motive reoccurs in many different accounts, across cultures, times and geography, I understand it as a sign that this motive to some extent exists in the unconsciousness of the collective human psyche. And the goal is then to try and understand why this motive has become archetypical, how a certain idea—however bizarre it might seem—has gained terrain in the collective mind and has become part of a somewhat global frog-ontology.

5 Tatar p. 60

6 Tatar p. 63

Chapter one  
**THE BIOLOGICAL FROG**

Amphibians evolved to be the first terrestrial vertebrates from our common lungfish ancestors around 365 millions years ago, and they have survived three mass extinction events in the history of the planet. There are three living orders : Anura (frogs and toads, also called batrachians), Urodela (salamanders) and Gymnophiona (caecilians). Toads are popularly distinguished from frogs by having dryer bumpier skin with poison glands as a defense mechanism, shorter hind legs as well as being more terrestrial. Frogs have generally smooth slimy skin, bulging eyes and long hind legs for jumping and swimming. All toads are frogs, but not all frogs are toads, and when I write “frogs” in general terms, toads are often also included. A striking biological characteristic of amphibians is their permeability. The membrane between their body and the world they live in seems more porous than that of other animals. Remarkably, they not only breathe but also drink through their skin. Many animals perform some cutaneous respiration or *skin breathing*, but it is nothing compared to amphibians. Many salamanders, the large family of lungless species, depend almost entirely on their skin in order to uptake oxygen. Cutaneous respiration allows for amphibians to remain long time underwater (they uptake oxygen from water), and hibernate at the bottom of ponds in winter. Many species of frogs and salamanders seem to have excessive skin, and this is to maximize the surface area of their breathing skin. The thin and delicate skin of frogs is covered in mucous glands, that keep them moist. It must remain humid in order for them to be able to breathe, and their skin is also the only uptake of water, since they do not drink through the mouth.

Most amphibians lay their eggs directly in the water in a transparent gel-like substance, often thousands at a time. The eggs are not protected by a shell like those of reptiles or birds, and are thus very dependent on the quality of the water in which they are laid. It takes around 14 weeks for tadpoles to undergo the full metamorphosis into tiny tailless froglets with four limbs, lungs and thus the ability to walk the land. In addition to their double life in terms of aquatic- and terrestrial, they are also both prey and predator animals and thus central in many ecosystems both as food for other species and through their function of holding insect populations down.

Another significant characteristic of batrachians and salamanders is that they shed their skin and eat it afterwards to obtain the nutrients. The shedded skin can thus not be found lying on the ground—unlike that of snakes—which may be the reason why rebirth is not common among the many typical cultural significances of frogs. To witness the “rebirth” of batrachians, they must be caught in the act. One last skill of many frog species, that I have seen very few traces of in culture, but that I cannot let go unmentioned is the long and elastic tongue, that can shoot out of its mouth with very high speed to catch prey on its sticky end and pull it back into the mouth.

## Chapter two

### AN OVERVIEW OF FROGS IN CULTURE

There were frogs on almost all continents before there were humans, and the first found evidence of frog-human relations dates back approximately 15.000 years. Frogs are distinct with their tailless, hairless and scaleless bodies, their metamorphosis from aquatic to terrestrial as well as their very loud and diverse croaking. Maybe that is why they have a place in the mythologies of almost all cultures where they bare a multitude of cultural associations, some distinct but many very similar across different cultures. I believe, that the frog is inherently associated with human-frog transformation in the deepest unconscious of the collective psyche, and that many of the cultural associations that aren't directly connected to transformation are in fact associated indirectly. Firstly, I will briefly run through some cultural conceptions that I do not find connected to transformation—directly or indirectly— so as to give a more accurate overview of the meaning of frogs in culture, folklore and myth, than if I had only talked about transformation.

#### **Weather and agriculture**

Most frogs require moist environments for skin breathing and mating, so they will typically appear before, during and after rain, when the air is moist, and start croaking. This connection between rain and frogs is obvious and has led to many frog-rain motifs in images and myths from cultures across the globe. In early agricultural societies, the right amount of rain was crucial for survival and thus the object of much worshipping and praying. In Ancient Egypt for instance, the Nile would overflow in July every year and by September, the waters would retract and leave a 10 km wide strip of very fertile soil. Frogs would be abundant here, living and mating in the puddles and a few months after their arrival, myriads of tiny froglets would appear. The frog became the symbol of the number *hefnu* which indicates 100.000, and was thus a symbol of abundance in Ancient Egypt.<sup>1</sup> In ancient China, people would pray for rain by imitating frogs, and images of frogs can be found on drums with sounds that reminded people of thunder and lightning.<sup>2</sup> [See Figure 2] South American Indians by the Orinoco River are meant to have kept frogs under clay pots, where they were nourished and worshipped in order to secure rain or good weather.<sup>3</sup> Ancient Greek philosophers and Roman poets have written about the connection between frogs croaking and rain,<sup>4</sup> and in some parts of Bangladesh and India, some agricultural societies have held marriages between two frogs to ensure rain for the crops.<sup>5</sup>

Ye Shuxian, Chinese literature and folklore scholar writes in his 2011 essay *From Frog to Nüwa and Back Again: The Religious Roots of Creation Myths*:

The symbolic seasonal function of frogs and hop toads as explained in the context of comparative mythology is significant. Why would frog and hop toad have obtained such a widely accepted deity status in mythical thought? Their croaking voices made humans aware of the alternation of the seasons as a warning sign regulating the seasonal production activities of agriculture and husbandry. Thus frog/toad and sun became

- 1 Crump p.67
- 2 Shuxian p. 60
- 3 Wassén pp. 633-634
- 4 Crump p. 74
- 5 Crump p. 72



**Figure 2.** Karen Rain Drum in bronze made around 18th century in Myanmar by Karen people, a Sino-Tibetan ethnic group. Notice the frogs sitting on top of each other on the top. Drums similar to these have been produced from 600 B. C. in different cultures and countries in Southeast Asia.

characters in a mythical reality imagined in frog-sun patterns on numerous objects unearthed in the prehistoric cemeteries of Hetao village, Minhe county in Qinghai province.<sup>6</sup>

### **Frogs guarding freshwater**

There are many associations with water, as well as with wells or fresh water springs. Many myths from indigenous Americans as well as indigenous Australians tell of how a frog or a toad drinks all the water from a source and gets completely bloated. A cultural hero, human or animal, then defeats it by either cutting in open or making it laugh so that all the water is released, which then creates a river. Some variations are creation myths, where the sudden flow of water creates the world as we know it.<sup>7</sup> The motif of a frog obstructing the access to fresh water is common in many parts of the world. The motif appears in several of Grimm's fairy tales, for instance in *The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs*, where the hero—as one of his supplementary tasks—must find the answer to why a fountain, that used to flow with wine now has run dry and does no longer even give water. The answer, which he learns from the Devil is, that there is a toad sitting under a stone in the well, and that the citizens must kill it to have their fountain back. In the Scottish variation of the Frog Prince, *The Tale of the Queen Who Sought a Drink From a Certain Well*, a dying queen sends her daughters out one by one to fetch water from the Well of True Waters, but a frog is sitting in the well refusing to let the daughters take water, unless they marry him. The two eldest daughters refuse, but the youngest accepts in order to save her mother's health. The frog finally turns into a prince when she—on his request—cuts his head off. There are many variations of this tale, some in which the well is dried up and the frog can bring the water back, others in which a poor girl has been sent away to fetch water with a strainer or a holed ladle by her evil stepmother, and the frog can advise her or help her succeed.

The association with agricultural fertility is probably not disconnected from the association with luck and prosperity, which is seen especially in Asia. In Feng Shui, the toad is a symbol of luck, prosperity and economic wealth, known as the Money-frog or Money-toad. A well known legend tells of the three legged toad Ch'an Chu, who becomes the traveling companion of the historic person Liu Hai, who was a minister in 10th century China and who gave up politics to become an ascetic student of Taoist magic.<sup>8</sup> His toad friend revealed the secret of eternal life to him according to the legend.<sup>9</sup> In Japan, there is a similar myth of a three legged toad-companion and counsellor to the mountain hermit Kosensei, who himself looks like a toad and has learned the art of transformation from his amphibian friend.<sup>10</sup> The frog is here thus associated with both eternal life as well as transformation.

### **A mythological swallower**

In other tales, from Asian as well as South- and North America, frogs are known to swallow the moon or the sun(s) either in the creation phase of the world or in etiological tales explaining either eclipse or the very cycle of day and night. In some Chinese folklore, there is not a man or a rabbit in the moon but a frog, and it occasionally swallows the moon which causes lunar eclipse. The same motif exist among several American Indian cultures of a giant frog swallowing the moon causing the lunar eclipse. One myth of the Maidu people of California tells how the sun steals the frog's children whereafter the frog chases it down and swallows it.<sup>11</sup> In the creation myth of the Tujia people of China, a frog swallows twenty-two of the twenty-four suns created by Zhang Guolao to dry the flooded earth. Of the last two remaining suns, one shine at day: the sun, and the other by night: the moon.<sup>12</sup>

There are many tales of frogs swallowing things, like heroes, astral bodies, a large amount of water or hot embers. The large mouth of the frog and its incredibly fast sticky tongue that in the blink of the eye can reach out and catch a prey must have made it some kind of a mythical swallower in the eyes of humans. One very peculiar recurrent motif is the frogs ability to swallow hot glowing

6 Shuxian p. 62  
7 Anderson pp. 10,11,18  
8 DeGraaff pp. 91-92  
9 Crump pp. 86-87  
10 DeGraaff pp. 92-95  
11 Wassén pp. 640-641  
12 Shuxian p. 59

embers. There are for example tales among the Tupí-Guarani tribes in South America, that tell how a frog is the keeper of fire, keeping the burning hot coals in its mouth. The frog either grants fire to the people, or it is somehow obtained by the cultural hero tricking or defeating the frog.<sup>13</sup> According to British helminthologist W. N. F. Woodland, if red-hot charcoal is thrown before toads at night, they will swallow it without any sign of inconvenience—likely mistaking it for luminous insects like glow-worms or fireflies.<sup>14</sup> And accounts from several ethnologist having studied the cultures of indigenous peoples of South-America confirms this surprising behavior.<sup>15</sup> As we shall see later, we find the same motif in a Chinese fairy tale of a frog swallowing a heap of burning hot embers.

### **Magic and bioweapons**

All toads have poison glands on the outside of their skin, and some frogs have a very strong neurotoxin in their skin, and they have therefor been used as bioweapons. The most known example is the poison darts expelled from the blow pipes of the South American Indians, but there are many examples of how toads have been used in poisonous attacks also in Occidental history. Toad poison have even been added to explosive shells in the beginning of the 18th century to enhance lethality of the bombs.<sup>16</sup>

Frogs and toads are common ingredients in magic potions and in the use of spells and curses. In 1317 Hugues Geraud, the bishop of Cahors admitted to having tried to put a deadly curse on Pope John XXII using toads, spiders, wax images and the gall of a pig.<sup>17</sup> There are many accounts of frogs and toads in the use of black magic, and I will touch thereupon later, for I believe that some of these accounts can be associated with frog-human transformation. But one rarely positive association in European culture is the association with love and aphrodisiac. In Ancient Rome, frog amulets could be worn as a protection from fading love and Plinius the Elder wrote about how a frog, a reed and a woman's menstrual blood could be utilized in protection against adulterous love. I will finish this chapter with the words of the American herpetologist and behavioral ecologist Marty Crump, who writes in her 2011 book *Eye of Newt and Toe of Frog, Adder's Fork and Lizard's Leg*:

An old English love charm to avoid breakup consisted of sticking nine pins into a live frog, immersing the frog in oil of vitriol, and burying it. In Denmark, a toad heart dipped in jam was eaten to cure a broken heart. In the United States, it was believed that if a young woman put a live frog under her pillow and slept on it, the first fellow to walk into her house the following day would be her future husband. If a girl saw a toad hopping across the road in front of her, she would see her beau that day. Lovesick young men were told to enclose a toad in a box bored with holes. Place the box near an anthill and leave it until the toad dies and ants clean the bones. Remove a hook-shaped bone and fasten it in the sleeve of the intended lover to make her fall in love. (...) if a man places the tongue from a live toad over his wife's heart while she sleeps, the tongue will act as a truth drug, the wife will tell all, and the husband will learn if his wife is faithful.<sup>18</sup>

13 Wassén p. 644

14 Woodland pp. 1-2

15 Wassén p. 647

16 DeGraaff p. 73, quoting Chen, K. K. and Jensen, H. *A Pharmacognostic Study of Ch'an Su, the Dried Venom of the Chinese Toad* from *Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association* 18 (3), 1929 p. 244

17 DeGraaff p. 111

18 Crump p. 134

Chapter three  
**TRANSFORMATIVE FROGS**

**Frog-human metamorphosis**

Now that we have a rough overview of some of the myriad cultural ideas about frogs, let us move on to the theme of transformation, which is maybe more of a supercategory than a singular cultural idea. Frog-to-human-transformation or vice versa is a common motive in many cultures around the globe, and to start with one of the most well known examples, we have the transformation of the ugly slimy frog to a handsome prince in *The Frog Prince*, also known as *The Frog King* or *Iron Henry*, one of the brothers Grimm's classics. This image is an important cultural meme and has been reproduced endless times in popular culture, but it has been known to many cultures long before the brothers Grimm. We see the same motive in many fairy tales from almost all parts of the world, with variations as to how the transformation takes place and whether it is a prince or a princess. In the first published version of *Iron Henry*, the transformation happens when the princess hurls the stubborn frog into a stone wall in rage and disgust, and only in later versions does it take a kiss for the prince to return to his human form. In the Russian fairy tale, *The Frog Princess*, three brothers must follow three arrows shot by their father, the King, in order to find their wives. The arrow of the youngest brother, Ivan lands next to a frog by a well, who he credulously marries. The older brothers find beautiful and rich wives by following their arrows, and the three wives must compete in tasks of sewing and cooking proposed by the King. Ivan is downcast, but the frog is in fact the very beautiful and witty Vasilisa the Wise, who with her magic powers outsmarts her sisters-in-law without revealing her true identity. Ivan's wife finally appears at a feast as Vasilisa the Wise and surprises everyone, Ivan included, who rushes home and finds the frog skin and burns it. When his wife finds out she explains, that had he only waited three more days, she could have been human for ever. She is under some kind of curse, and must flee. Ivan then ventures to find her, and by the help of the Russian archetypical witch, Baba Yaga and three animals, whose life he has spared on his journey, he defeats the evil Koshchei the Deathless, another Russian archetypical character and saves his wife [see figure 3]. In other versions, the frog asks to have his/her skin slit open or to have his/her head cut off. In some tales, a greedy king is tricked into putting the frog skin on and the curse is thus transferred to him. In the world of fairy tales, the list of variations on a given theme is long.

In literary fairy tales, we also have significant frog-human relations. The Danish 19th century writer Hans Christian Andersen's *The Marsh King's Daughter*, is about a girl who is human in daytime, but with a monstrous personality, and toad by night, but with a gentle and sensitive character. Her mother is an Egyptian princess, who flies up to Denmark in her feather suit searching for a rare flower to cure her father from illness, but who is captured and raped by the Marsh King, a swampy creature that reminds one of the nordic mythological monster *Nøkken* (or *Nixie*.) The child is born out of the swamp on a flower stem and found by a Viking chief's wife. She has her birthmothers appearance but her birthfathers mind in daytime and vice versa by night. Through this inversion of body-mind and the later redemption and final goodbye to the frog form and monstrous character, Andersen lets us understand, that the frog body is the negative and unwanted one, linked to the evil mind of the child by day.

In Ancient Greek mythology, which crawls with metamorphosis, we also have some significant human-to-frog transformations. Leto (or Latona), the mother of Apollo and Artemis, is denied access to





Figure 3. Ivan finds his arrow in *The Frog Princess*, illustrated by Ivan Bilibin 1901

drinking from a pond in Lycia by some peasants, that—even after she pleads in a very moving speech—stirs the mud up from the bottom of the pond to obstruct her. She then reveals herself to be a goddess and turns the inhospitable peasants into frogs, deeming them to forever stir up the water in that very pond. Zeus also transforms the nymphs of Melos into frogs as a punishment for having granted a burial to Euphorion whom he hates.

Another example of a God transforming a human into a frog can be found in the Italian folk story *Those stubborn souls, these Biellese* in which a farmer is transformed into a frog and must live in a pond for seven years as punishment for refusing to say “God willing” when asked where he is going by God disguised as an old man.<sup>1</sup> In some stories, it is the frogs themselves that hold the ability to transform. In a Peruvian tale, a young girl is held captive by a condor. She asks permission to wash her clothes in the river, and meets a frog that offers to transform herself into the girl, so the girl can escape without the condor noticing. The frog is rewarded with a kiss on the forehead, where a jewel later appears once it turns back into a frog.<sup>2</sup> As a parenthesis one could mention the widespread myth of toads having a precious jewel inside their foreheads, a so called *toadstone* which was meant to have magic abilities. The before mentioned three-legged toads from both Japanese and Chinese folk lore also had power to transform themselves.

### Creation myths

Another place to find the transformative power of frogs is in creation myths. Frogs are associated with the creation of life and the primeval waters from which life has sprung in many cultures.<sup>3</sup> In Chinese mythology, the frog is correlated to the chief goddess of creation Nüwa, and there are many creation myths including frogs on the upper reaches of the Yellow River.<sup>4</sup> In the mythology of the Jino people, a Tibetan-Burman ethnic minority living in the Yunnan province of China, a toad is the very cosmic substance with which our universe is formed. In the beginning, the giant Mother Amo was the only inhabitant of the world, which was all was covered with lifeless water. She one day meets a huge toad, that tries to swallow her, but she wittingly jumps into its mouth and stretches her arms above her head so the monster cannot close its mouth. It bloats and finally explodes sending its one eyeball far up into the sky, where it becomes the sun. She finds the second and hangs it up in the sky as the moon, and proceeds to gather the scraps of its body from which she creates the world and the heaven.<sup>5</sup>

### Inherent mutability

The frog seems to possess some kind of inherent mutability. They have been thought to generate spontaneously from putrefaction or from mud, and just as quickly to dissolve into slime and disappear again.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle first coined the idea of spontaneous generation and thought, that animals created this way were also temporary and lived shorter lives.<sup>7</sup> The idea has probably several origins, one of them being the fact that flies lay their eggs in rotting organic matter so that maggots and later flies appear spontaneously generate from the rotting matter. And where there are flies, there are most likely also frogs feeding on them, who also can appear quite suddenly from mud when rain falls, which might have been another factor contributing to the conception. Frogs and toads have long been categorized with animals such as snakes, lizards, scorpions, spiders, worms and flies as *filthy* animals. Vincent de Beauvais, a French 13th century monk and encyclopedist explains that “many things do experience mutation and corrupt things are transformed into diverse species as bees from the putrid flesh of calves, beetles from horses, locusts from mules and scorpions from crabs.”<sup>8</sup> The examples must have been taken directly from Ovid, who lets his Pythagoras character give a lecture on *Autogenesis*, in which he lists exactly the same examples of animals generating spontaneously and goes on to describe how mud

1 Crump pp. 89-90

2 Crump p. 90

3 Pallua p. 64

4 Shuxian p. 72

5 Yilu Lu translated and quoted in Shuxian pp. 72-74

6 Crump p. 137

7 Soth

8 quoted and translated in Bynum, 2001 p. 85



**Figure 4.** Frau Welt about 1300, Sct. Peter's Cathedral, Worms, Germany,

contains the generative seeds of frogs. In medieval times, there was a conception about changeability as negative whereas permanency and stability in form was idealized and was regarded as closer to God and sacred things. The poem *De Mundi Philosophy* written by Milo probably from the 12th century reads :

The creatures of the mire are not perpetual:  
earth, mire of the elements, is their mother,  
she absorbs all that decays, the dregs of living things,  
takes back what she brought forth, gives new and takes the old.  
(...)  
Heaven is for spirits, earth for mutable things.  
(...)<sup>9</sup>

This idea of an inherent mutability of “the creatures of the mire,” I believe is very central to why myths and tales about frogs are so often about radical change. There were ideas of frogs being able to generate spontaneously from the corruption inside the human body, which I will later go deeper into. For now, I would just like to mention the medieval motive known as *Frau Welt* or in its male form *The Prince of the World*, which is a well dressed aristocratic figure, when seen from behind revealing a rotting body crawling with toads and worms to show the corrupt rotting backside of worldly wealth, greed and privilege [see figure 4].

### Human fertility

If there is a strong agent of radical change in the human body, then it is the uterus, and the frog and the uterus have also for long been regarded as connected. The idea is undoubtedly connected to the water and rain association and the frog being a symbol of agricultural fertility. Marty Crump writes:

Ancient Egyptians closely associated frogs and human fertility. The frog goddess Heket was goddess of childbirth and fecundity, and the tadpole symbolized the fetus. Men and women wore gold frog amulets to protect against loss of virility and against infertility. Frogs also symbolized fertility for the ancient Greeks, who linked frogs to Aphrodite, goddess of love. Greeks wore her symbol, the frog, to ensure their own fertility. The frog was also sacred for Venus, Roman goddess of love and fertility. (...) In Ancient Rome, tailors' folklore instructed the garments should be closed with nine frogs. Scholars have suggested that this belief stems from an ancient Babylonian cylinder seal used as a fertility charm that showed nine frogs, representing the nine months of human gestation. Ancient Europeans associated the toad with the womb; woman left small toad figurines at holy sites in hopes of getting pregnant. (...) The Mayan word for toad, *mut* or *much*, also refers to female genitalia. (...) During the Middle Ages, the Wends, a western Slavic tribe, had a legend in which frogs—not storks—deliver children to their parents.<sup>10</sup>

In Europe in the Middle Ages, votive wax figures of toads with vagina-like slits on their backs were placed in sacred places as a petition for pregnancy<sup>11</sup> [see figure 5], and there is even an interesting idea of the uterus as a walking toad-like being. Marija Gimbutas, Lithuanian-American archeologist, writes in her 1989 book *The Language of the Goddess*:

There is a good deal of evidence from both folklore and history (Egyptian, Greek, Roman and later) that the toad was regarded as an epiphany of the Goddess or her uterus. Hence the belief in the “wandering womb,” found in Egyptian and classical sources as well as from present day folklore. Both Hippocrates and Plato described the uterus as an animal capable of moving in all directions in the abdomen.<sup>12</sup>

Up until the 1970's, a magic ritual dance called *Žapci* (Frogs) was performed in secrecy by married couples in the northern Croatia (or *Žabská* or *Žabský* in southern Moravia in the Czech Republic). The dancers touch the genitals of their partners while imitating frog movements, jumping and leaping

9 Quoted in and translated by Bynum 2001 p. 81

10 Crump pp. 134-135

11 Pallua p. 65

12 Gimbutas p. 251



**Figure 5.** Votive toad figure, 18th-19th century, Germany

in humorous ways and imitating the sexual act and symbolizing and evoking the fecundity of the agricultural cycle.<sup>13</sup> The frog is also associated with the squatting and birth giving woman, which is seen in prehistoric images of frog-human hybrids such as bone engravings from the cave of Les Trois Frères in the south of France that is believed to be around 13.000 years old<sup>14</sup> and from the San paintings from rock shelters in the South African Drakensberg Mountains [see figure 10, page 42].

13  
14

Pallua p. 68  
Gimbutas p. 251

Chapter four  
**FROGS AS AGENTS OF BODILY CHANGE**

What I hope is that we begin to see the outline of a cultural frog, that is inherently connected to the theme of transformation and especially transformation of the human body. I will now move from the obvious examples to a selection more indirect ones and try to argue why I believe that also these cultural ideas, though not centered around transformation, can in fact be regarded as connected to it.

**Frogs as effigies**

It is a common idea in magic and spiritual practice, that a subject can be represented by an *image* (understood in a broad sense), which can then serve as a spiritual bridge from the practitioner to the represented subject in either benevolent or malevolent intentions. In his 1929 book *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, professor of English literature George Lyman Kittredge writes:

No department of witchcraft affords more convincing evidence of continuity than Image Magic, technically termed *invultuacio* or *envoûtement*. From remote periods of history in Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and India, from classic times and lands, from the middle ages, and so on down to the present day, the practice of image magic has been prevalent, and it is still common the world over, (...). An effigy of wax, clay, wood, metal, or almost any substance, is pierced with nails, pins, or thorns, and burned or slowly roasted. The victim suffers corresponding torments, pines away as the puppet melts or crumbles, and dies when it is stabbed to the heart. Sometimes the image is buried or drowned instead of being consumed by fire, and there are other varieties (...). The same method in general may be applied to remedial purposes—the image being treated in such a manner as to benefit the patient.<sup>1</sup>

The same logic is at play in most religious practice, where it is the most ancient of ideas, that an image of a deity brings you closer to- and helps you obtain the virtues of the deity. In the medieval concept of *ex-votos*, we see the same logic of representation at play: images of body part were carved, painted, cast in wax or hammered out in metal to represent specific healed body parts and placed in sacred places “intended not merely as thanksgiving gifts or symbols of a miraculous event but as something of the healed self offered back to God”<sup>2</sup> states the American medieval scholar Caroline Walker Bynum in her 2011 book *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. Ironically the most well known effigy is probably the Voodoo-doll, a practice of hammering pins into a doll representing a victim, which has in fact no connection to Voodoo, but is a misconception from American pop-culture. In European folk magic and witchcraft, this kind of effigy is known as a *poppet*. The power of this kind of magic is in the imitation, the likeness of the image and the subject.

Interestingly there are many examples of frogs and toads used as effigies; that is, as representatives of the victims. The Italian 16th century physician, philosopher and botanist Andrea Cesalpino has recorded an example of a toad with its eyes sewn shut in order to cast a blinding curse on a husband, so that he would forget about his wife and children.<sup>3</sup> According to Kittredge “An English spell for black magic is or was to hang up nine living toads on a string and then bury them: as they pine away, your enemy will languish until death comes.”<sup>4</sup> He later

1 Kittredge p. 73  
2 Bynum, 2015 p. 112  
3 DeGraaff p. 112  
4 Kittredge p. 95

writes of a witch from the beginning of the 20th century “(...) who professed to be able and willing to torture anybody by means of a sheep’s heart or a toad full of pins hung up in the chimney,”<sup>5</sup> and of “a modern wizard of Somerset [who] kept toads on hand in pots: to make a person pine away and die he would stick a toad’s heart full of pins and hang it up in the chimney.”<sup>6</sup> In Finland, many hundreds of frogs buried in tiny coffins were found in churches around the beginning of the 20th century. Some were impaled, some had their mouths stitched up. This is believed to be the result of attempts to perform either black magic or counter magic, to harm either a victim or one’s spellcasting aggressor [see figure 6]. In South America, one account from the beginning of the 20th century describes how the Mataco people in Argentina and Bolivia bewitch enemies by taking bodily leftovers from their victims such as nails, hairs, faeces etc. and placing it inside the mouth of a live frog, which was then sewn up as well as the other orifices. The frog was then hung on a stick near a fire where it would swell up and slowly die, and the victim should have suffered an equally slow and painful death.<sup>7</sup> The Swedish late 19th century ethnographer Erland Nordenskiöld who recorded this, also found a crucified frog with human hairs placed in a nearby grave on the borders between Peru and Bolivia, supposedly to inflict harm upon a human victim.<sup>8</sup> Another example from Bolivia recorded in 1920 describes how “(...) the body of a live toad is pierced and wrapped in a piece of cloth, with hair, &c. from the person who is to be bewitched, and then the animal is buried. The belief is that the person in question will feel pain in the same part of his body as the toad, and that he will die if the animal does not recover its freedom.”<sup>9</sup> It is likely that the crucifixion is inspired by European colonizers and missionaries, but there is evidence suggesting that the idea of using frogs in magic and medicine as effigies is much more ancient. In a medical text written in Sumer on a clay tablet from the famous Library of Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria (668-c. 630 BC), it is explained how to cure “seizure-of-the-mountain fever,” an illness which is manifested by burning fever, profuse sweating and trembling. To cure a patient you must catch a green frog, and bring it to your patient on the same day and...

(...) wipe him [with it] from his head to his feet while he is still in his bed, before he has touched the ground with his feet, and you speak as follows: “Frog, release the seizure which has seized me. Frog, the ague which has seized me – when you have escaped with your life and returned to your water, on that day will you bring it back to me!” You have {him} say this three times and once he has dropped his spittle into its mouth three times you take it to the wilderness, tie up its feet with a thread {of re}d and white wool and rope it to a thornbush, {then that ma}n will be cured.<sup>10</sup>

This magic healing ritual from 7th century B.C. Mesopotamia works by a very similar logic as the European and South American magic more than 2.500 years later. And there are several other examples of written magic recipes from the Assyrian Empire that involves somehow transferring one’s evil or ailment to a frog and then leaving it tied up.<sup>11</sup> The frog is used as a mirror to the human patient, who must spit in its mouth three times in order for the illness to be transferred. We can assume that the author of this text had some knowledge of how many illnesses are contagious via saliva, but spitting in the mouth of a frog seems to me also a very symbolic and very intimate act. It bears resemblance to Jesus breathing life into the clay birds in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. It is almost as if the patient transfers a tiny part of his soul to the frog in order to mislead the illness, so that attacks the frog-dummy in the belief that it is the human victim.

We can guess on many reasons for the widespread use of frogs and toads in witchcraft. First of all, toads are poisonous and have been used in witchcraft for their poison. Toads were common in earth-floored huts<sup>12</sup> and are easy to catch in comparison to mice for instance. They are not the property of anyone since they are not beneficial animals and killing toads had no consequences (besides from

5 Kittredge p. 99

6 Kittredge p. 182

7 Wassén pp. 623-624

8 Wassén p. 625

9 Wassén p. 624

10 Stadhouders: 162-163, { } signifying unclear or missing parts in the original text

11 Stadhouders p. 164

12 Kittredge: 182





**Figure 6.** One of more than 30 frog coffins found in the stone foundation under the Kuopio Cathedral in Finland by the end of the 19th century.

eventual accusations of witchcraft). Given their big bulging eyes and intense regard, frogs and toads will easily evoke empathy and show real expressions of pain if tormented, which I believe have seemed to enforce the power and efficiency of any curse as opposed to pinning insects for instance. But it is important not to forget, that the logic of image magic is powered by similitude, by the likeness of the *image* to the represented subject. Given the many examples of toads and frogs as effigies for curses against human victims, it seems that toads have been regarded almost as a ready-made humanoid figure apt for witchcraft or medicinal use, intuitively fit for representing any human subject. I believe that this points to the fact, that it is a common human idea, that frogs and humans are connected through likeness, that we somehow see ourselves reflected in the frog and have done so since ancient times. Sources about magic rituals can seem very dubious to today's reader, but I believe that the importance of magic in ancient societies should not be underestimated. Magic was probably entangled in- and in some cases indistinguishable from religion, art and science, and was used for many important purposes: life and death, love and good health etc., so it was important that it *worked*, or was as plausible as possible. So I do not believe that frogs were carelessly chosen as effigies, but rather because they—in the eyes of the practitioners and “costumers”—really were seen as good, efficient and convincing effigies.

### **Frog-human marriage**

Marriage between humans and frogs is a recurrent motif in folk tales and mythology in many different parts of the world. I have found examples of this motif in tales from Europe, the Americas, Russia, Asia, Central- and North Africa and I am sure there are many many more. *The Frog Prince* is the obvious example, which we have discussed before in relation to metamorphosis from frog to human.

In Grimm's collections we also find *The Three Feathers*, a variation of the Russian tale *The Tsarevna Frog*, in which a king has his three sons compete in order to decide who gets to be his successor. The one who brings home the most beautiful ring wins the kingdom, and the king throws three feathers in the air, that the brothers must follow. The feather of the youngest brother, Simpleton, barely flies anywhere, but leads him to a big toad living underground, who provides him first with a beautiful ring of extraordinary splendor, but the brothers do not accept their defeat and insist on new challenges. The toad hence provides a fine precious carpet for the second competition and for the third round, the three sons must go and find a woman, and the one who brings the most beautiful woman back to the castle wins the kingdom. The big toad lets Simpleton choose a little toad from her many children and take it to the castle in a hollowed out carrot pulled by mice. Upon arrival the carrot is transformed into a beautiful carriage pulled by impressive horses, and the toad is transformed into a beautiful princess. She does not only win the beauty contest but also the extra contest proposed by the jealous brothers of jumping through a ring hanging under the ceiling in a hall of the castle. The metamorphosis is different from that of *The Frog Prince* and stories like it, for the princess is not a cursed human turned into a frog by an evil force, but an actual toad turning into a princess. Besides from looking like a beautiful human princess, the only thing she has to prove before the marriage is a complicated jump through a ring hanging under the ceiling. The brothers think, that “the delicate maiden will jump herself to death,” but she easily beats the two coarse peasant women that the cocky brothers have brought to the contest. She jumps through the ring “as lightly as a deer” as it says in the text, or *as lightly as a frog* one might add, for she is not a normal princess after all. We have here a variation of the marriage theme, where the marriage itself is not up for much discussion before it happens: Simpleton expresses no objection to the idea of marrying a toad, and the girl is transformed even before his family sees that she is a toad, so in this case there is no shame connected to it.

An interesting variation of the frog-human marriage motif is found in the North American Indian folk tale from Yakutat in which once again, marriage is proposed by the frog, but contrary to most other tales the married couple lives with the frog's family and community: The Chief's beautiful and cocky daughter picks up a frog one day and verbally mocks it. Shortly after, a mysterious young man comes to her and asks for marriage. Contrarily to her many suitors, she accepts the offer, and under a kind of spell she leaves with the young man to what she thinks is his father's house, which is in fact the lake. There is an interesting description of how she found many young people there and therefore quickly forgot where she came from. One year later she is found squatting amongst the frogs by a lake. The tribe tries

to get her back, but the frogs resist and she escapes with her new frog family. The tribe then drains the lake and she is finally captured, but her behavior and language remains *froggy* for some time, until she finally regains consciousness. She cannot eat anything, and finally her tribesmen hang her over a pole and she vomits up all the black mud she has eaten when she lived amongst the frogs and then dies. It is an etiological story that explains why the frogs in that area can understand human language and why the KiksA'dî tribe can understand frog language.<sup>13</sup>

In this story, there are several kinds of transformation at play : the mysterious suitor is obviously a transformed frog, casting a spell on the girl. But the transformation of the girl is an interesting case. She is not transformed bodily, but is mentally turned into a frog. This reminds me of David Cronenberg's *The Fly* in which the scientist Seth Bundle has an accident and during the course of the film slowly turns into a human-fly hybrid. The transformation is bodily as well as mental, and at some point, when he still looks more human than fly he has a visit from his female counterpart, the journalist Veronica Quaife. The worried Quaife brings him some donuts which he vomits acid on to liquify before swallowing, exactly like a fly. Only when Quaife gasps in chock and disgust does he realize or rather *remember* that "Oh, that's disgusting," as he then shamefully exclaims. A similar transformation is happening to Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, who wakes up one day transformed into a verminous insect. His body is fully transformed from the first page, but when he wakes up he has his full human consciousness. Only gradually does his mind become more and more insect-like, as if he starts to forget what it is like to be human: he starts liking hanging upside down from the ceiling and dreams of having his room transformed into a humid cave. According to Israeli scholar of literature and human/animal studies Naama Harel's reading, it is his family's dehumanization of him that ultimately transforms Samsa. In her 2020 book *Kafka's Zoopoetics: Beyond the Human-Animal Barrier* she states, that

(...) over the course of the novella it becomes clear that his verminous existence is not forced on Gregor from outside, by nature, but from his immediate human environment, namely his parents and sister. It is the family that engenders this change through its attitude towards Gregor. Animal existence is not presented here as purely a biological state, but as a fusion of biological and social existence.<sup>14</sup>

Marx states that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness,"<sup>15</sup> which Harel intelligently applies to Gregor Samsa's social transformation. She later states :

Kafka offers a counterintuitive antithesis of species identity as a socially constructed category, generated through biopolitical practices of segregation, exclusion, confinement, undernourishment, and violence.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of the KiksA'dî girl it is not other humans dehumanizing her, but the frogs that socialize her into forgetting her humanity. Even though her body remains that of a human, the tale clearly is one of transformation. After one year of marriage, she is completely socialized into a frog, squatting and croaking. In this rare case, the frog-human marriage is lived out in the frog society far from humans, and therefor the human partner becomes more and more "froggy." In the case of a frog marrying into a human family as it is most often the case, one could imagine the socialization going the other way: the frog becoming gradually more human by virtue of eating at a table, sleeping in a bed etc. In fairy tales we rarely see this gradual transformation, for the frog most often turns out to be a beautiful prince or princess before the marriage. But I would dwell with the idea of marriage, or the fear thereof: For why is it so often marriage with a frog, that is presented as the ultimate punishment or humiliation, the terrible condition one has to accept to i.e. retrieve one's golden ball? Maybe the concept of transformation by socialization is central to the archetypical loathing against the idea of marriage with a frog. I have mentioned how humans across a wide scope of cultures have seen themselves reflected in the image of the frog; how our ambiguous relation to frogs include some form of relating. The idea of a human

13 <https://sacred-texts.com/nam/nw/tmt/tmt026.htm>

14 Harel p. 46

15 Marx: p.11

16 Harel p. 48

living with frogs is repulsive primarily because of the frog's swampy habitat, typically regarded as unclean and hostile to humans. But the idea of a frog socialized as human may be frightening not only because of its sliminess, but also because of its resemblance to humans; it seems maybe somehow more "realistic," that the little tailless creature with its visible fingers and big eyes could convincingly play human, than if it had been a donkey, a pig or a bird. And furthermore, the frog's ability to metamorphosis and the idea of its inherent changeability could contribute to the conception of it being able to climb the species-hierarchy and ascend to human status. So I believe that the frog-human marriage is the archetypical worst-case scenario that the hero must accept to obtain happiness, not only because of the immediate bodily repulsiveness of frogs, but also because of their eerie resemblance to humans and some unconscious phobia of the admittedly far out idea, that frogs could be convincingly humanized by socialization.

### **Frog-human hybrids**

Another important concept when trying to fully understand the archetypical motif of marriage between human and frog is mating. Again, the fact that frogs have some resemblance to humans makes it easier to imagine the body of a human-frog hybrid, than for instance a sheep-human hybrid, even though the very act of mating between human and frog is very difficult to imagine. Animal hybrids or human-animal hybrids have often been depicted as composite beings put together by different human- or animal body parts (e.g. animal head on human body) in both prehistoric images as well as in medieval times, when there was a big production of this kind of images. Composite hybrids—such as Pan, the ancient Egyptian animal headed-gods, centaurs, sphinxes, griffins as well as the chimera of medieval imagery—are much more prevalent than hybrids with an actual blend of traits. As a sculptor and creator of images, I would state that in the case of a frog-human hybrid, it is much easier to imagine an actual blend of characteristics than in the case of most other animals, the joints on our hind legs bend the same way for instance, contrary to most mammals. The frog-human hybrid thus appears more *realistic* than most other human-animal hybrids. And I believe that this is one of the reasons why we might feel instinctively repelled by the idea, which could have contributed to gaining the frog-human marriage archetypical status.

This may also be the reason why many accounts of *real* frog-humans having been born by humans have been published in newspapers in Europe and America, especially in the 19th century. One account from the *Salida Mail* of Colorado on the 18th of December 1888 reads:

#### **A strange monstrosity**

A horrible child was born to a respectable married lady of Goshen, Indiana, Saturday night. The production was quite small and bore a strong resemblance to a frog. The feet were flat and the toes webbed, while the arms assumed unnatural positions and the fingers were also webbed. There was no neck and the head was drawn back. The face was more like a frog's than human. There was no spine and the offspring appeared to rest more naturally when placed upon hands and feet.<sup>17</sup>

From Znojmo in the then Austro-Hungarian Empire (now the Czech Republic) in the German-language newspaper *Znaimer Wochenblatt* on the 2nd of April 1887 readers could find the following text:

#### **An Appalling Freak**

From Stockerau is written: Franziska H., a 32-year-old unmarried maid in Niederfellabrunn, gave birth to a horribly abnormal child last Saturday. The child only had a normally developed human torso with shoulders, chest and stomach. The head, abdomen and legs, however, were those of a large toad. The hands attached to the arms also resembled in their deformity the feet of the aforementioned animal. The mother was so horrified by the misshapen child that she stomped it with her feet immediately after birth and thus killed it. The woman, who had already given birth to several normally developed children, explained that the deformity was caused by an incident that occurred last summer when she was picking flowers and was fiercely frightened by the sudden appearance of a toad. The incident was reported to the authorities by

the doctor, Mr Iakob. As the child who was killed did not have a human face, the mother is unlikely to be charged.<sup>18</sup>

The mothers explanation as to why her child looks like a toad is noteworthy here; that the shock from the toad is responsible for the deformed child. It is the exact same explanation that the French *Homme-grenouille* André Bourdois gives as explanation of his own resemblance to a frog in the French language Algerian newspaper Le Courrier de Sétif on the 23rd of March 1884 :

Ce fut en 1866 que l'Homme-Grenouille débuta. On le vit pour la première fois à la fête des Loges. C'était un petit bonhomme gros comme une outre, et dont la figure était exactement celle d'un batracien. Gros yeux, bouche énorme, peau visqueuse, rien n'y manquait. Il fit courir tout Paris, et provoqua l'attention de l'Académie de médecine, dont un délégué, M. le professeur Berhaut, l'étudia avec soin.

André Bourdois—c'était le nom du phénomène—raconta à M. Berhaut qu'il devait sa tête de grenouille à une frayeur qu'avait éprouvée sa mère, alors enceinte de lui, en se trouvant subitement face à face avec des grenouilles-taureaux au jardin zoologique d'Anvers.

M. Berhaut émet, dans son rapport, l'opinion que cela n'a rien d'inadmissible. (...) <sup>19</sup>

### Body invasion and exiting

In the two above-mentioned examples, the explanations given as to why these alleged frog-human hybrids were born are strikingly similar. It suggests a somewhat common—at least in Europe and its colonies—belief, that frogs and toads have some magic ability to intrude the human body or altering the processes inside it; in these examples, by giving a shock. There is in fact some evidence that supports, that this idea is a common conception. There are many accounts in both mythology as well as non-fiction “medical” texts of women giving birth to toads, frogs and snakes which has widely been regarded as a negative religious omen.<sup>20</sup> The Italian 16th century naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi noted :

(...) in 1533, on a certain farm in Thuringia near Unstrum, a toad with a tail was born to a woman (...). Nor is this surprising, since Coleus Aurelian's and Platearius write that women sometimes give birth, along with a human fetus, to toads and other animals of this kind.<sup>21</sup>

According to the above-mentioned Italian 12th century physician Matthaeus Platearius, women from Salerno in Italy would drink a strong juice of celery and leek to try and kill any potential toads having introduced themselves in the uterus.<sup>22, 23</sup> The English 14th century alchemist John Dastin mentions, that a toad can spring from the milk of a nursing woman and there are as well accounts of toads issuing from abscesses on human bodies.<sup>24</sup>

As we have touched upon before, frogs and toads were believed to generate spontaneously from putrefaction, and thus also being able to generate from the corruption inside the human body. Some naturalists found however a more “realistic” explanation for the alleged frogs and toads inside the human body; that frogs eggs could have been drunk by accident whereafter they develop into full sized frogs inside the human body.<sup>25</sup> There are also traces of the belief, that curses and witch-inflicted ailments can be extracted from the body in animal form. According to Kittredge, “(...) in Nigeria, bats and frogs are taken from the mouths of possessed persons.”<sup>26</sup> In European folk lore, we see a similar motif in the Grimm fairy tale *The three little Men in the Wood*. The good-hearted but ill-treated daughter is blessed by the three little men in the wood for her kindness by having a piece of gold fall from her mouth every time she speaks. But the jealous stepdaughter, who tries to follow her step-sisters example, is rude towards the three little men and they punish her by making a toad jump from her mouth

18 unknown author, Znaimer Wochenblatt

19 unknown author, Courrier de Sétif

20 Ermacora p. 9

21 DeGraaff p. 102, latin translation by George Frear.

22 DeGraaff p. 102

23 Ermacora p. 11

24 DeGraaff pp. 103-104

25 DeGraaff p. 102

26 Kittredge p. 175

every time speaks. Charles Perrault collected and published a French variation of the same tale called *Diamonds and Toads* or *Les Fées* in French. This motif of toads jumping from a corrupt person's mouth when he/she speaks seems immediately and instinctively understandable, also by children. One could probably make a Jungian psychological analysis of it, but I prefer to stay in the realm of the concrete and to insist that slimy and warty toads actually crawl out of the girls mouth whenever she opens it, exactly as in the medieval accounts of toads springing from human bodies. The Danish 16th century artist Melchier Lorch uses the same motif in his reformist propaganda print *The Pope as Antichrist* [see figure 7] inspired by Martin Luther calling the pope so. The print depicts an hairy, rat-tailed, bat-winged satanic pope spewing streams of batrachians, snakes and scorpions. The same motif is seen in a case recorded by the 13th century theologian and encyclopedist Thomas of Cantimpré in his *Universale de Apibus* of a man, who—while confessing sins—vomits up seven toads.<sup>27</sup> But there are not only accounts of toads exiting human bodies; in other stories they are intruders that refuse to leave. In another case recorded by of Cantimpré, a young man had a toad jump onto his face and attach itself so firmly, that it became a malicious permanent tumor. The fate of the young man was interpreted as a punishment for having been undutiful to his father, and the resident bishop sent him on a pilgrimage as a walking moral warning against ingratitude.<sup>28</sup> The motive exists also in folk lore: The folk tale *l'Homme-Crapaud* from Brittany in France tells of a man who goes to the well to fetch water for his girl. A toad leaps onto his face and attaches itself, impossible to remove, and the man must comply with its demands to let it marry one of his daughters.

All these accounts, folk fictions, myths and dubious medieval medico-religious texts suggest a common (especially European) idea, that frogs and toads can breach the barriers of the human body, magically introduce themselves into the bodies of humans or be so by malevolent magic. They were thought to be the embodiment of the corruption inside the human body, both literally the putrefaction as well as the moral sins. They spring from the body as a sign of evil, and in some cases the exiting has thus been regarded as a kind of exorcism. In other cases the stream of toads coming from the body is perpetual and is due to an inherent evil. A different—but somewhat similar—idea is that of toads and frogs coming from the outside and merging with the body, becoming a tumor or a deformity in a fetus etc. We see thus batrachians not only as representatives of earthly dirt and corruption, but also as powerful agents of change. It seems they have been attributed an ability to metamorphosis that extends the boundaries of their own bodies, and permits them to alter the very nature of the human body.

### **Illusive croaking**

Anyone who have ever experienced a pond full of frogs croaking at night, knows how immersive an experience it is. In places with dense populations of frogs and toads, such as rainforests, the sound of croaking can be frankly deafening. Frogs have real vocal cords, unlike birds, and many males have vocal sacs; a pouch of thin flexible skin, that can fill with air and resonate sound. Some croaking is audible to human ears at 1-2 km distance away. In his 1991 book, *The Book of the Toad*, American professor in English Robert DeGraaff writes:

In pitch, toad voices cover a wide musical range: the low pitch of Fowler's toad or some of the spadefoots rivals the profound bass of the bullfrog, while the Southern toad definitely qualifies as a soprano and the little oak toad may reach nearly three octaves above middle C.<sup>29</sup>

The sound of frogs and toads croaking is extremely varied not only in pitch, but in character as well. Having a vocal chord have allowed every species to develop its own distinct sound to attract mates or dominate same-sex specimens, and there is a great variety in the characteristics of the croaking from one species to another. The catalogue includes “nasal quonks, deep moans, faint buzzes, shrill liquid thrills, whistled wheets, warbling chirps, raspy snores, metallic vibratos, weak low-pitched toots, short squeaks, doglike barks, deep low-volume honks, or explosive grunts.”<sup>30</sup> Some species croaking has

27 Brignon p. 223

28 DeGraaff p. 102

29 DeGraaff p. 32

30 DeGraaff p. 33



Figure 7. The Pobe as Antichrist, Melchior Lorich, 1545

been described as sounding like birds: blue cranes, owls, nightingales, young chicken, young crows, and others as sounding like sheep, cats, crickets or even as a police whistle, a distant tractor, nails running along the teeth of a comb.<sup>31</sup> The audible omnipresence of frogs has been known to almost all prehistoric societies, and the croaking of frogs is present in a significant amount of frog myths and tales. I will in this chapter talk about the sometimes illusive croaking of frogs, that I believe we can associate with transformation. Crump sums up some croaking-associated myths and cultural conceptions:

In Sarawak, Malaysia, certain shrub frogs (Chacophoridae) are thought to be agents of evil spirits, capable of bringing death, because their calls resemble the sound of nailing a coffin shut. In contrast, in Japan the flutelike chirps, birdlike trills, and warbles of the Kajika frog (*Buergeria burgeri*) have long been celebrated in Japanese poetry. The Aztecs likened the noise made by one of their earth goddesses to the trill of the cane toad (*Rhinella marina*). Indians of the Rio Içana in northwestern Brazil say that ghostly frog people paddle up the river in their canoes at night. A frog locally named “paddle frog” imitates the sound of their paddles as it calls. Indigenous people of Hispaniola liken a frog call, “toa toa,” to infants asking for their mother’s breast. (...)”<sup>32</sup>

I wish to take a closer look into some of these many associative conceptions based on the croaking of frogs. We find the “paddle frog” described again in the British 19th century missionary Charles Daniel Dance’s account from a night in the rainforest in Guiana:

At nine o’clock, dark night, while in my hammock, I heard with drepidation the sound of approaching paddles (...). The noise of paddles continued for a long time, yet the sound did not seem to approach nearer. Astonished at this, to me, remarkable occurrence, I mentioned it to one of the men, who told me that it was a croaking frog, the paddle-frog, called—from the sound it emits—*bura buraro* (...).<sup>33</sup>

Everard Im Thurn, a British explorer, botanist and colonial administrator describes a similar experience at night in the Guianan rainforest in the end of the 19th century:

Various kinds of frogs kept up an almost deafening concert of marvelously varied croaks, some musical, some most unmusical. One imitated the beat of paddles striking in regular time against the sides of a canoe after the Indian custom ; and the likeness was the more deceitful because the sound alternately rose and fell gradually as though a canoe came up the river, passed the camp, and was then paddled up the stream out of ear-reach. Often and often I have lain long in doubt whether the sound heard was caused by paddles or by frogs.<sup>34</sup>

The very deceptive croaking of this “paddle-frog” has—among people indigenous to the north-western part of Brazil—given birth to the myth of a ghostly frog-people paddling the rivers in the dense mist of the night called the *Arú* people.<sup>35</sup>

Frogs sounding like infants crying for their mothers breast is also a recurrent motif, one that has lead to several tales of how children can turn into frogs if crying out for their mothers. One story from when Haiti and The Dominican Republic was called Espanola tells of how some children happened to be separated from their mothers, and they cried out for their mothers breast “*Toa Toa Toa*”—which should both mean “mamma” and be the sound that frogs make in springtime—and were suddenly turned into frogs forever, still croaking “*Toa Toa Toa*” in springtime.<sup>36</sup> It is easy to imagine the educative efficiency of this kind of story: “*stop crying or you will turn into a frog!*” But the idea of frogs sounding like crying infants exist also in folklore on the other side of the globe from South America; that is in Northeast China. Shuxian writes:

31 DeGraaff p. 32-34  
32 Crump p. 249  
33 Dance quoted in Wassén p. 628  
34 Im Thurn: 12  
35 Wassén pp. 627-628  
36 Wassén p. 629



People associated the frog with humankind because of its likeness to human forms and its sounds remind of human infants' cries. That is why, meaningfully, children have hitherto been generally addressed as *wa* (娃) in Northwest Chinese languages, a character whose font and pronunciation closely resemble those of 蛙 (*wa*, frog).<sup>37</sup>

A tale from the Chiriguano people, living in the foothills of the eastern Andes, recorded in the beginning of the 20th century explains that the frogs of the river are actually people who tried to cross the river on some stocks, but...

(...) The rushing stream carried the stocks away. Those who were behind began calling to those in front: 'How are you getting along?' At first there was an answer, but as the front party grew more and more frozen there was but an *ā* for an answer. Finally those who were behind could not cry but *ā* themselves. They were all turned into frogs and are still heard crying *ā, ā, ā*.<sup>38</sup>

There are more tales like these, where people or children are involuntarily turned into frogs, and they are somewhat etiological tales aiming to explain the origins of the frogs by the river and their very voice-like croaking. A common quality is that the act of croaking or verbalizing frog-like sounds plays an important catalyzing part. In many fairy tales, spells and charms are often verbally powered. Tatar writes, on the performative power of words in fairy tales:

It may be true that we talk about language as having somatic effects (words can "wound" or have the power to "assault" us), but, in fact, it is only in fairy tales that they are endowed with the capacity to produce real physical change. (...)

Change comes less through the force of magic wands than through spells, words that promise to create change.<sup>39</sup>

This oral power, that Tatar talks about is also in play in these tales: it is the exclamation of the frog sound, that provokes the transformation, as if the croaking itself is "the magic words" in a transformation spell.

But I wish to return to the audible deceptiveness, of which we have another example in the Grimm fairy tale, *The Good Bargain*: A peasant returns from the market, where he has sold his cow for seven thalers. He passes a pond full of frogs croaking "aik, aik, aik" and the man gets into an argument with the frogs, for he hears "eight, eight, eight" when it is in fact seven thalers he has earned, not eight. When he cannot talk them to reason, he finally throws his money into the pond, so the frogs can count themselves, and of course his money is lost. In the original German version, the frogs croak "ak, ak, ak" which sounds like "acht, acht, acht" (eight), but in translations to other languages the croaking sounds like four or six. This is another example of the multiform of the frogs' croaking, and how it works in many different languages. For this kind of tale to gain folk status, it must be somewhat commonly understood, that the croaking of a frog can sound like almost anything. It is not bad hearing, we must understand, but poor intelligence, that leads the peasant to believe that the frogs are talking to him and finally brings him to throw his money in the pond.

What these examples have in common is the croaking as a central element; either as a some kind of charm with the power to catalyze transformation when pronounced by humans, or the multiform audible manifestation of frogs as an agent of deceit and what we could call audible shapeshifting. We see again the frog portrayed as some kind of deceitful shapeshifter, but in these examples it is by virtue of its croaking, which can sound like—and thus appear like—a multitude of different things.

### **Frogs as an omens of death**

As a last example of cultural conceptions, that I believe are indirectly associable with transformation and thus can establish the frog as an agent of all sorts of change, I will shortly evoke the idea, that frogs and toads are omens of death. For the Kágaba people indigenous to Columbia, a toad entering

37 Shuxian: 71

38 Nordenskiöld quoted in Wassén p. 628

39 Tatar p. 61

your home or leaving its faeces on your stool can foreshadow death.<sup>40</sup> In some African folklore, frogs and toads are to blame for the very mortality of the human race. In a myth from the Efé people of D. R. Congo, a toad was given a heavy pot with death in it by the Supreme Being Muri-Muri. A frog came along and offered to help carrying, and as the toad got tired it finally accepted help, but ordered the frog to be careful not to drop it. The frog hopped along but dropped the pot, and death escaped and thus all humans are doomed to die.<sup>41</sup> And is not death also connected to change, is it not the ultimate transformation? I will finish with the words of Bernard Sylvestris, the French 12th century monk, poet and philosopher:

(...) all change is the image of death. Indeed everything that undergoes change, while it passes from one thing to another, must necessarily die as what it is, so that I may begin to be what it is not.<sup>42</sup>

40 Wassén p. 625-626

41 Crump: 110

42 Bernard Sylvestris, quoted and translated in Bynum 2001 p. 135

Chapter five  
**FROGS IN ASIAN FAIRY TALES**

I will now return to the theme of human-frog marriage, which we also have many examples of in Asian fairy tales. As we shall see in these three examples, though the narratives are very recognizable from other tales discussed here above, there are some interesting differences compared to the Occidental fairy tales.

**The Frog Maiden**

In the Myanmar tale *The Frog Maiden*, a poor married woman gives birth to a frog that she and her husband come to love and raise as their daughter. The frog is smart and kind and the village community develops profound sympathy for her. The mother dies, and the father marries again to a woman with two evil daughters, who are jealous of the general popularity of their frog step sister. The two stepdaughters go to an announced hair washing ceremony at the castle, where the youngest of four princes will choose his bride amongst the girls turning up, and the frog hops along with them in spite of their mocking and protest. The prince chooses his fiancée by throwing a posy of jasmines up in the air, and it falls on the head of the frog. The young good hearted prince keeps his promise, and they marry. The king later announces that he will choose his successor by competition between his four sons. The frog bride helps her husband winning the contests first by conjuring up a golden deer and since rice and meat that remains fresh forever. The final task is to bring the most beautiful woman on earth, where she once again confidently tells the prince to trust her and escort her to the castle on the appointed date. When they arrive, she takes off her frog skin before the king and his sons and is a beautiful maiden in a silk dress. The couple gets the kingdom and she burns the frog skin.

We recognize the three competitions finishing with the beauty contest from several Grimm tales, but what is interesting here is that the maiden seems to actually be a frog, and not a cursed princess. She is born by human parents who accepts her for who she is in spite of her frog body. The marriage with the prince happens before the transformation as a preliminary test, whereas the real “problem” of the narrative is the king’s contests and winning the kingdom.

**The Toad Bridegroom**

In a Korean variation *The Toad Bridegroom*, a toad crawls up from a dried out lake and asks a fisherman to take him home. At first he does not accept, but the frog comes knocking at his door at home and the man’s wife lets him in to stay. As well as in the Myanmar tale, the toad is accepted and loved by the childless couple, and proclaims one day that he wants to marry the daughter of a rich neighbor. The parents try to talk him out of it, but he persists, which is a recurrent theme, as we shall see. The mother gets punished by the prestigious neighbor for her provoking proposition, but the toad tells her not to worry. He then ties a long string and a lantern to a hawk’s feet. He hides in a nearby tree, and having the hawk hovering above the house by the string, he proclaims in loud voice at night that the neighbor must accept the offer and that he otherwise will be punished. Seeing only the hovering light, the neighbor thinks that the message is from heaven, and accepts the offer out of fear. It is the youngest daughter who accepts to marry the toad after the two eldest has refused. After the wedding the toad demands his young wife to cut his skin with a pair of scissors, and a beautiful young man steps out of the toad skin. The next day, again in his toad skin, he wins a hunting competition against his brothers-in-law by the help of a white haired man, who brings him one hundred deers. He finally steps out of his toad skin and takes his

wife as well as his adoptive parents with him up to heaven. In a variation, he tricks his brothers-in-law, which leads to them being taken away as slaves, before ascending to heaven.

In both tales, marriage with a prestigious human partner is only a preliminary test, something attained quite easily by a little luck or wit. In Occidental frog tales, the marriage is almost always the final redemption and only happens after the frog has revealed itself to be an attractive high-status human. But before that revelation, marriage is absolutely out of question. In most Occidental tales, the frog is a pariah, and only barely has the right to sit at the table.

### **The Frog who became an Emperor**

I would like to make a point about what Russian structuralist folklorist Vladimir Propp calls *the initial situation* of the fairy tales, the sort of stable situation before the hero leaves home and ventures out to find happiness elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> We will bring in a third example this time from China. In the similar tale, *The Frog who became an Emperor*, a frog is born to a poor childless couple. The man is away when the birth takes place and comes home only some years later. As well as in the other tales, the mother is first frightened and ashamed by her offspring, but hence accepts the frog child and raises him as her own. The father also first expresses skepticism, but also quickly accepts him as his son. The frog asks one day to be taken to the Emperor as he proclaims he will be able to defeat the invading enemy. The emperor has promised his youngest daughter to anyone who can rid the country of the invading forces, and is of course skeptical with the frog's self confidence. The frog asks for a big heap of hot glowing embers, that he swallows during three whole days until completely bloated. Notice here the theme of a frog swallowing glowing embers, that we know from American mythology. He then asks the emperor to open the gates and then spits the embers on the foreign army who flees in despair. The cunning emperor rewards the frog, but avoids the marriage by arranging the casting of an embroidered ball, very much like in the Myanmar tale. The *man* who catches the embroidered ball will become the daughter's bridegroom. Of course, the frog catches the ball, but is still refused because he is not a real man, and a new throw is arranged. He then transforms into a man and catches the ball again and the king is relieved and proclaims the handsome stranger the bridegroom of his daughter. After the marriage he changes back to frog in daytime but remains human at nighttime, by taking off his frog suit. His father-in-law asks him why, and he answers that the frog suit is a priceless piece of garment that keeps hot in winter, cold in summer and protects him against both rain and fire. The old emperor asks if he can try it on, but is unable to get it off again and must thus live as a frog. The ex-frog prince can then seize the power of the whole empire.

This variation differs from the others in that the preliminary test is defeating an enemy army and gaining acceptance from the King, whereas obtaining the marriage is the main "problem" of the narrative. The final tricking of the king resembles that of the variant of the Korean in which the frog tricks his two brothers-in-law in the very end. But the similarity that I want us to look at here is in the first part of the tales. The scheme is the same in all three stories: The frog comes to the childless poor family—either born by the mother or comes knocking on the door—and the parents first reaction is that of disgust and shame, as one could expect, after which they accept the frog and finally loves it and treats it like a child. We do not often see this level of acceptance in European fairy tales. After her mother's death, the Myanmar frog heroine gets two mocking stepsisters, jealous of her popularity, and she has thus an archetypal fairy tale motivation for leaving home and seek happiness elsewhere. But the ill treatment follows the archetypal scheme of a poor daughter of a widower who marries an evil stepmother with evil stepdaughters, and is thus not unlike the ill treatment of a human child. In the case of the Korean and Chinese stories, the cosmos of the family is only disturbed the moment the amphibian hero proclaims to want to marry the daughter of his rich neighbor or defeat an entire army, after which he suffers from some speciesist discrimination. Before this admittedly slightly megalomaniac statement, that marks the passage from childhood to adulthood, the fact that the hero is a frog seems not to pose any problems in the close circle, i.e. the family or the community. These frogs are living quite normal (for human) lives in families and communities, and enjoy at times even popularity and love from family

1 Propp pp. 25-26

and friends, though they at other times are discriminated for being frogs. The frogs arrival or birth provokes an initial chock, after which its presence is normalized and it is treated almost as a human, though maybe an outcast, like a Simpleton, Blockhead Hans or Tom Thumb, but certainly not as an Occidental frog. It is hard to imagine a frog in a European tale enjoying a such peaceful family life with loving human parents and general acceptance from the community. In fact, the mere concept of a frog hero or heroine is quite different from most Occidental fairy tales, that I have been able to find. The frog in these tales is not the one whose journey we follow or who we empathize with—certainly not before it turns into a human—whereas it seems much more common in Asian tales. It suggests a difference in the view on frogs and which status they are attributed in folk lore, from Asia to Europe.

### **Frogs as ancestors**

I believe that we see examples of this difference also in certain origin myths, in which a people actually stem from frogs. There is a creation myth of the Arawak people living in northern South America, in which there is a large iron basin full of toads with fish tails. When God one day walks by it, he decides to transform these toads into humans, into Arawak.<sup>2</sup> In a folk tale from the Saisiat people of Taiwan, a man named Saival is out fishing without luck, until he catches a frog. He throws away the frog, but sees it metamorphose into a kid, which he then brings home and from which the whole Taputaberasu family stems.<sup>3</sup> The Va people of Burma and from the Yunnan province of China also stem from frogs according to their origin story. Their first ancestors, the couple called Yang Taomu and Yang Dai were—according to the legend—tadpoles before they metamorphosed into frogs and then monsters living in a cave. They lived from hunting animals, until one day when they killed a human and ate it. They kept his skull as a token of pious worship, and bore many offspring with human appearances after this. They ordered their children to offer human skulls to them after their death, which explains the headhunting culture of the Va people, that lasted up until the middle of the 20th century.<sup>4</sup> In all these three origin myths, the given people's own legends explains how they originate from frogs, which must be said to be a rather positive frog-human relation in comparison to Occidental folk lore.

2 C. Van Coll p. 512

3 Shuxian p. 71

4 Shuxian pp. 50, 71



**Figure 8.** Christ in the Winepress on the outer wings of a closed Crucifixion triptych from the last quarter of the 15th century, Koblenz, Mittelheim Museum, Germany.

Chapter six  
**METAMORPHOSIS IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE**

We find that the view on frogs and toads are overall more negative in Occidental sources than in the Asian examples. They appear in many transformation myths, but often as the antithesis to the beautiful princesses or handsome princes, that springs from their skin. They also represent corruption, putrefaction and decay, and are often portrayed eating corpses and rotting matter, especially in medieval visual sources. The Swedish biologist Carl Linneaus, who formalized modern biological classification, wrote about reptiles and amphibians in 1758:

*These foul loathsome animals are distinguished by a heart with a single ventricle and a single auricle, doubtful lungs and a double penis. Most amphibians are abhorrent because of their cold body, pale color, cartilaginous skeleton, filthy skin, fierce aspect, calculating eye, offensive smell, harsh voice, squalid habitation, and terrible venom; and so their Creator has not exerted his power to make many of them.<sup>1</sup>*

This harsh statement might be humorous for today's reader, but represents more or less accurately the view on amphibians in the West as "foul and loathsome animals" at the time it was written. Some six centuries earlier, in the 12th century, the before-mentioned poem by Milo talked about the mutability of the "creatures of the mire." At that time "there was a concern to delimit species-crossing very carefully. Church lawyers continued to employ the famous *Canon episcopo* of ca. 900 that prohibited as blasphemy the belief in metamorphosis or body-exchange."<sup>2</sup> In many texts from the time, concern and anxiety, but also fascination of radical change is expressed. Only God had a body that could remain the same through death, decay and resurrection<sup>3</sup>, and the more mutable something was, the further it was from the image of God.

Biblical events and phenomena related to radical change were discussed, such as the Eucharist; whether the wine and wafers *was* indeed the blood and flesh of Christs or whether it transformed in the moment of consumption, and to which extent this transformation should be understood literally and physically or more metaphorically. In the popular medieval motive known as "Christ in the Winepress," we see a bleeding and cross-carrying Christ crushing grapes with his feet in a winepress. The cross is pressed down on him by a big horizontal wooden screw, as in a real mechanic winepress, and the blood is pouring from his five wounds, mixing with the grapes. The red wine/blood is then finally collected from a tap in either barrels or directly in the chalice [see figure 8] Bynum writes:

For all the complicated explanations of theologians that bread and wine become body and blood, what we seem to see here is the opposite: a sort of reverse transubstantiation. We see Christ squeezed under a very material machine; the red stuff in the basin evokes wine as well as blood and underlines their visual similarities. It is as if Christ's blood becomes wine.<sup>4</sup>

The Eucharist is a huge transformation-related subject, that I will not go more into. But other biblical events also became the subjects of theologian and natural philosophical discussions, such as the staffs of Moses and the Egyptian priests turning into snakes in the Exodus. The plague of frogs in the Exodus

1 Linneaus, quoted in Crump p. 10  
2 Bynum 2001 p. 82  
3 Bynum 2001: 79  
4 Bynum 2015 p. 83

could be another example, and it may be worth noting the sheer fact that one of the ten plagues were frogs. The frogs in the Exodus are relatively material though. They do neither generate from- or dissolve into slime, nor do they fall from the sky. They are coming up from the Nile to cover the land, the cities and houses, and when God kills them again, their corpses remain and must be piled up in heaps that make the land stink.

In the 12th century Ovid was being enthusiastically revisited and discussions evolved around natural phenomena such as flies spawning from decaying matter, food resulting in bodily growth and the petrification of fossils. Bynum writes:

Nor was the opposition to hybridization and metempsychosis limited to theologians. Natural philosophers also used the principle “like begets like” to impose order on the world and hold individuals in mostly immutable categories.<sup>5</sup>

In the imagery of the time, we see a flourishing of the hybrid monstrosities, that we now identify as iconic for medieval art. Bernard de Clairvaux, the 12th Cistercian abbot and mystic was very preoccupied with ontological, psychological and spiritual combinations in his time. He wrote a theory of *unitas* and *mixtio*, and we must understand that *mixtio* is regarded as something generally negative, the opposite of pure. He, who was also against “mixing” and “adulterations” of “pure” foods created by God<sup>6</sup>, lived in a time when hybrid monsters flourished in religious imagery. In his writings, he expressed his strong discontent with elaborate romanesque figurations, that—in his view—could compromise the concentration of praying monks in sacred places:

(...) the ridiculous monstrosity, the amazing deformed beauty and beautiful deformity (...) of an astonishing variety of diverse forms (...) unclean apes (...) monstrous centaurs, creatures part man and part beast, tigers, warriors, (...) many bodies with one head and many heads with one body, tail of serpent on quadruped, head of quadruped on fish, horse with goat combined, horse with horn.<sup>7</sup>

A scholar contemporary to Clairvaux, Conrad of Hirsau, “in an often-cited passage that echoes the *Canon episcopi*, takes metamorphosis to mean “transformation of substance” and forbids the reading of tales in which man’s reason (the image of God) is obscured in his mutation into beasts or stones.”<sup>8</sup> If frogs and toads somehow are ontologically correlated to radical change, to unstable form and inherent mutability, then it is no wonder, that they are not exactly positive symbols in the European Middle Ages, where *mixtio* was monstrous and *puritas* and *unitas* symbolized proximity to God. Earthly things were in strong opposition to heavenly things, and there was in theology a strong concern about not getting mixed up with the unclean bodies of earthly beasts or simple plants. And what could possibly be more earthly than a slimy frog appearing from the mud in a swamp? There was a certain acknowledgement of some kinds of metamorphosis, the petrification of fossilized plants for instance or food turning into bodily growth, but a big fear and opposition to the idea of metempsychosis; the transmigration of the soul for instance in reincarnation as “lower” life forms.

Some thousand years before, in Antique Greece, there was also a fascination with metamorphosis, but the view on metempsychosis and body hopping might have been less fearful. In Ovid’s *metamorphosis*, the character of Pythagoras teaches the readers:

All things change, nothing dies. The spirit wanders and comes from there to here, from here to there and occupies whatever body it likes, and from wild beasts transfers into human bodies, and into wild beasts when in ours, and does not perish at any time. And just as wax is easily stamped with new images, and does not remain as it was nor keep the same shapes, but is, even so, itself the same, so, I teach, is the soul always the same, but it passes into a variety of shapes. And so, in case piety is conquered by the belly’s desires, refrain, I do declare, from expelling kindred soul by unspeakable slaughter, and let not blood be

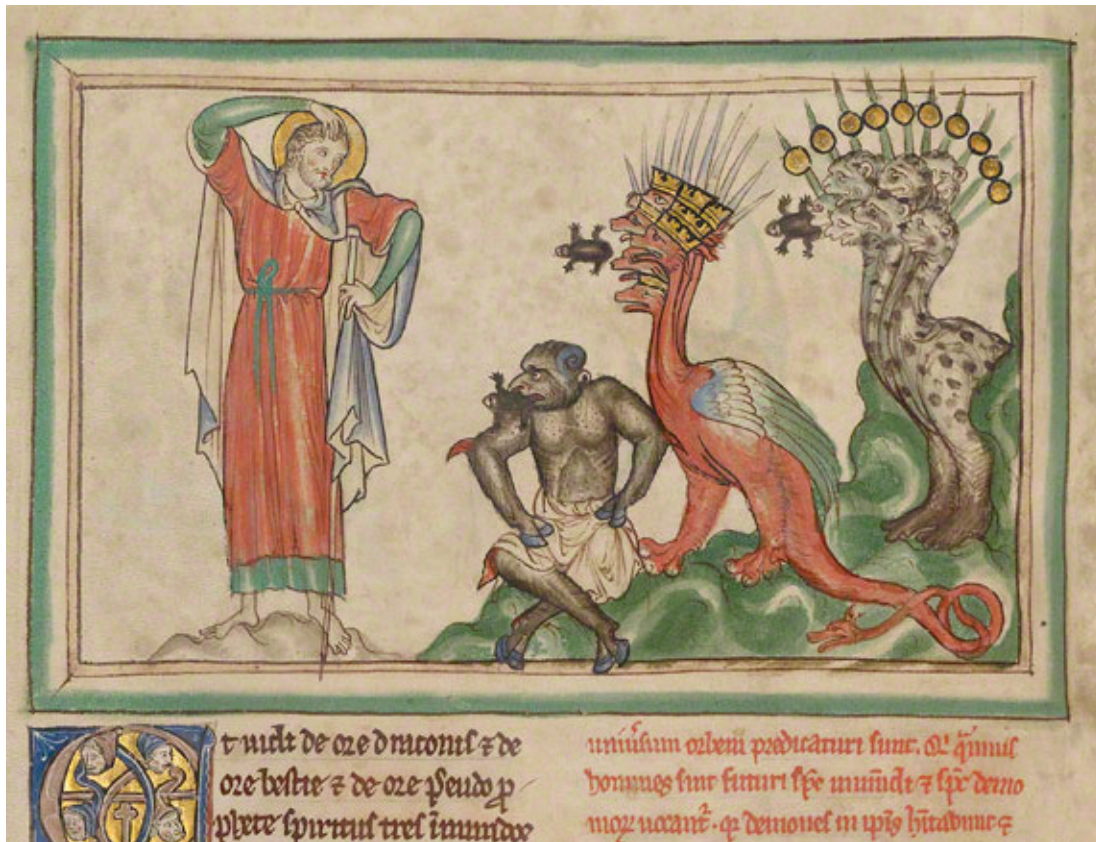
5 Bynum 2001 p. 82

6 Bynum 2001 p. 118

7 Clairvaux, quoted and translated in Bynum 2001 p. 117

8 Bynum 2001 p. 85





**Figure 9.** Illustration from *The Getty Apocalypse*, a 13th century manuscript of the biblical Book of Revelation. We see Sct. John witnessing three unclean froglike spirits springing from the mouth of the seven headed dragon, the beast and the false prophet. The book's editor, Berengaudus included his own theologian commentary to the biblical text and wrote "(...)they are rightly likened to frogs, that are unclean reptiles living in the mud, because just as the frog dwells in dirty waters, so the disciples of Antichrist will easily deceive those who are not afraid to be dirtied by diverse vices and sordid ways. For the harsh and ugly voice of frogs signifies their wicked preaching full of blasphemies."

fed by blood.<sup>9</sup>

Ovid's Pythagoras character presents a view on metempsychosis much more positive, than the theologian view on the matter in the Middle Ages, and he goes on to explain how even the elements change from earth to water to air and to fire only to change back again. If we assume that Ovid's statement about change, if not necessarily represents, then at least expresses an idea that is not completely alien from the mainstream, then we can also state that the view changes from Ovid's time and until and in the Middle Ages. Mainstream Christianity is not fond of the idea of body-hopping, which we see in the examples above from the early Middle Ages, and this could also be one of the reasons why the frog, as an agent of bodily transformation, has such a bad reputation in Occidental culture. It is after all, as I have argued throughout this text, a strong agent of change, inherently connected to metamorphosis and bodily transformation, and even—which is even worse for the medieval Christians—the altering of the human body.

9 Ovid, book 15, 143-175

## CONCLUSION

As I mentioned in the introduction, the analysis of this text is a quantitative one, and the analyzed material is very varied. There are material from many different cultures, times and of different character. Throughout the text and through my research, I have tried to regroup the different texts after similitude to find some patterns and be able to regroup the motives in categories. That there are many transformation-related themes in frog-myths is evident. These themes are not only represented in high quantities; some of these stories also have a high memetic quality. We need only think about *The Frog Prince*, which might be one of the most famous transformations in pop culture still today. I have mentioned many sources of frog transformation, and left much more unmentioned (and unnoticed), and I believe that the sheer quantity of tales with similar transformation-motives is conclusion enough for this part. Stating how frequently the theme of transformation occurs in frog ontology is a first step towards looking deeper into the many other recurrent motives and finding more signs of change and mutability.

In the collective frog-ontology, we have a lot of stories and sources that are not talking about transformation as such, but I have argued that many of these examples, when looked at in the right context, actually also relate to the theme of transformation. The argument is thus again a quantitative one; it is the many examples coming together as shattered pieces of an archeological finding, drawing bit for bit a puzzled image of a whole; a recognizable form. Had there only been one example, let us take the human-frog marriage motive, it would have been hard to convincingly connect these stories to the idea of transformation by socialization and mating (and maybe it still is. I will leave that for the reader to decide). But there are many signs of a connection between the bodies of frogs and those of humans, more than with most other animals I believe. The frog-turning-into-human-stories are not necessarily in themselves a sign of this, for there are countless of transformation or hybrid stories with other animals in mythology and folk lore from just about anywhere. We need just think about werewolves, centaurs, the many Gods with transformation abilities, the feather cloaks from Norse mythology or the many metamorphoses in Greek mythology, just to mention a few. So shapeshifting is not reserved for frogs, and transformation-myths make a whole category that exists in countless of cultures from around the world. It is when we notice, that the stories that are not about transformation as such, also are connected to the theme on a deeper level, that the recognizable form starts appearing.

### **A frog-human connection**

The frequent use of frogs as effigies in image magic that we have seen in sources from three continents spanning over more than 2500 years, indicates the commonness of the conception that frogs and humans look alike; that frogs have been accessible ready-made figures, apt for representing or mirroring any human victim or patient in a magical practice that works by similitude, reinforced with objects or objects with connection to the victim placed in the mouth of— or buried with—the frog-effigies. There are many visual sources that also play on the likeness of frogs and humans, or more specifically frogs and squatting women. The rock art motives from South Africa show ambiguous frog-like figures with human artifacts and weapons [see figure 10]. The danish symbolist sculptor Rudolph Tegner recognized this likeness, which his 1913 sculpture *Frøen* ('the frog') plays on [see figure 11]. The squatting position was a widespread position for childbirth, and the frog as a symbol of fertility might also be informed by this. The most obvious reason for the frog-fertility motive is its connection to water and rain (habitat, croaking and sudden appearance) which has made it a global symbol for land fertility in agricultural societies, but the resemblance of the human birth-giving position to that of a frog could also have played



**Figure 10.** A frog-like hunting figure painted by the San on the rock wall of the Willcox shelter in South Africa, I have not been able to find anyone who attempts to date this painting.



**Figure 11.** *Froen* (the Frog), Rudolph Tegner, 1913

a part.

We have touched upon many fertility related phenomena from across the globe. And from Heqet, the frog-headed goddess of Ancient Egypt, the associations with fertility Gods from Ancient Greece and Rome to frog votive figures in medieval Europe and the more recent Eastern European frog-dances we could go on to talk about the birth of frogs. I have discussed several examples of frogs being born to human parents, in the world of fairy tales in especially Asia, in European medieval medico-religious accounts of frogs exiting human vaginas (and other orifices) and “real” accounts written in the miscellaneous minor news section in newspapers of the 19th century of frog-human hybrids being born by terrified human mothers. These stories, I believe, rely on the repulsiveness of the idea; the shock-effect of “*what could be worse?*” very like the motive of the beautiful prince springing from the skin of his total opposite; the slimy, ugly frog, in the memetic fairy tale transformations. But I also believe that likeness has something to do with it, and furthermore that it points to the frog having some kind of transformative power over the human body. Let us start with the transformative power and get back to likeness later: We have seen how uteruses—arguably the organ with the most significant transformative power in the human body—were thought to resemble toads in different Ancient mediterranean folk lore. What more is, in the 19th century newspaper accounts, we account several times the same explanation for the births of frog-humans: that the women received a shock from a frog. In one account the scare happens during the woman’s pregnancy which then provokes a deformation of the fetus, we must assume, whereas in the other one it is unclear whether it is an already existing fetus or whether the shock actually impregnates her with the frog-fetus. In any case, these examples indicate a belief that the frog is able to act upon the human body without physical contact and alter the processes going on inside it; that it is a strong agent of bodily transformation, which must also be the conclusion of the motive of the clingy toad becoming a facial tumor. I have quoted three examples of frog-human hybrids described in newspapers, but there are many more.<sup>1</sup>

To return to the likeness argument, I believe that these accounts indicate that something in the anatomy of frogs makes the idea of a frog-human hybrid imaginable. Some deformities have been regarded as frog-like, and the relatives and bystanders have believed that these deformities were caused by frogs. It is impossible to know what the described infants actually have looked like—we must assume that the written accounts are heavily influenced by rumors and exaggeration—but we can establish the fact, that a frog-human born to human parents was a somewhat believable event in Europe late in the 19th century; that people have been able to envision a hybrid with mixed traits, (and not just a composite hybridization i.e. a frog head on a human body etc.) And in my view, this necessitates a common acknowledgement of the similarity of frogs and humans.

I have also argued, that the very popular frog-human marriage motif, could be informed by this likeness; that the phobia of marriage with frogs is rooted in the resemblance and thus a sort of phobia of frogs climbing the social ladder and becoming “humanized” (and humans descending the evolutionary ladder and becoming “amphibianized”). This is probably the most far fetched argument of my text, I will admit that. But let us just for a moment reconsider the notion of marriage as a fusion, as two becoming one. Marriage existed for many decades before divorce did and has been about many other things than—if at all—love; economic security, reproduction, status, honor, social control etc. The idea of living with a moist and cold frog, maybe even kissing or sleeping with it, is obviously repulsive, something I believe we all understand immediately, when first hearing these stories in childhood. But is it not so repulsive exactly because it also to some extent reminds us of a strange little human? The slight familiarity, that we recognize in the eerie cold body, the idea that the morphology is like our own, I think is very perturbing. For it is exactly this familiarity that makes the idea of fusion possible, and thus “realistic,” either through socialization or mating, as I have discussed above. The principle “like

<sup>1</sup> These are collected by Eugene M. McCarthy, PhD in genetics from the University of Georgia, translated and published on his website macroevolution.net. He links to the original sources in the archives of the respective newspapers, which i have also done. I have verified the translations, used the original French text or translated myself from German. The website is sometimes very dubious though and McCarthy presents these accounts, along with grainy screendumps from YouTube videos, supposedly showing real frog-human hybrids, as evidence to support his theory of hybrids as an alternative theory to Darwin’s theory of natural selection. Even though I do not view these accounts as establishing much more than the fact that people have recognized frog-traits in some deform humans, McCarthy’s work with collecting these accounts and providing the original sources have been very useful for me.

begets like,” that Bynum talks about in relation to the natural philosophical view on transformation in the 12th century is at play here again: things transform into things, that they look alike.<sup>2</sup> Living and sleeping with a beaver or a lizard is probably not on many people’s list of dream-partners, but I would argue that these ideas could not provoke the same physical repulsiveness and thus do not have the same cultural memetic potential as the frog-human marriage.

One needs only look at a stretched out frog to notice the comic similarity to a human body. The bulging eyes and big mouth, often give the impression of a facial expression, though admittedly an immutable one; some frogs look like they are smiling in contentment whereas many toads with their bulging “eyebrows” look grumpy or almost resentful. We have also seen examples of audible likeness of human sounds to the croaking of frogs i.e. in the comparison of children’s crying to the sound of frogs croaking in South American tales and in China. The recognition of human traits in the hairless and tailless frog have most likely played a big part in the collective imagination from which many myths, stories and beliefs have sprung. Would there have been origin stories of the human race actually stemming from frogs, had we not seen ourselves mirrored in them? Would there have been such an amount of transformation stories, stories of frogs and humans swapping bodies? Would dances have evolved in which frog movements are imitated to procure fertility? Would frogs have been used as effigies to represent humans? We will of course never know, and even though similarity is important, the primordial connection between frogs and humans that I am trying to trace is informed by much more than just the obvious similarities.

I have evoked the idea of frogs being inherently mutable, unstable in form and with the potential to change or dissolve on the spot. There is the idea of spontaneous generation in Ancient Greece, that evolves throughout the European Middle Ages. Frogs are one of the central animals in this natural philosophical myth, along with flies spawning from rotten flesh. Frogs can seem to appear very suddenly when it rains, and myriads of frogs can appear seemingly out of nowhere, as if they had spawned from the ground. They disappear as suddenly as they have come, which leads to the belief that they could disintegrate into slime. Furthermore, we have seen medieval accounts of the mire as well as its inhabitants as something fundamentally mutable in strong contrast to heavenly things. This idea of an inherent mutability is undoubtedly connected to the metamorphosis of amphibians, but also to the medieval notion that the most earthly creatures, the ones furthest from the image of God, were not constant in form. We see nevertheless many examples of what I would call inherent mutability from sources far from the European Middle Ages in time and place. It is at play when, in Jino mythology a giant frog is the cosmic substance from which the Universe is created by the creator Goddess. And we see it again in North American mythology, when a frog drinks all the water in a spring and contains it in its massively bloated body until the cultural hero releases it and it creates a whole river full of animals. In contemporary popular culture, we also have frogs being blown up like balloons. The misbehaving boys from the 1990 film *The Reflective Skin* blows up a frog with a straw only to make it explode in the face of a bypassing widow by shooting it with a slingshot. In the 2001 animation film *Shrek*, the title-troll blows up a frog and gives it as a helium-balloon to his girlfriend. And some frog species can in fact bloat to help them float or scare away predators or competitors.

I believe that this idea of inherent mutability—informed by metamorphosis, skin shedding, bloating of the bodies or the vocal sacs and the sudden reappearance at rainfall—is also at play in all the many associations with the change of seasons as well as the stories, tales and myths of frogs transforming into humans or altering the human body. Frogs and toads, in magical practice have commonly been used as ingredients or parts of rituals meant to change things, as well as in alchemy<sup>3</sup> which is, if anything, a practice aiming to procure radical change.

What I hope at this point is, that this text has convincingly argued, that there is evidence—from a broad spectrum of cultures and times—of a certain connection between frogs and humans, a connection via transformation and body altering. Humans have related with all sorts of animals since prehistoric times, but frog-human relations could maybe be characterized by being very *close*; in fact so close that they sometimes blur the lines between our bodies and theirs.

2 Bynum 2001 p. 82

3 DeGraaff p. 101-102

### Frog status

For the second part of my conclusion, I want to sum up the interesting pattern of which we see the outlines when comparing Asian to Occidental fairy tales; that the view on frogs seems more positive in Asia than in Europe. The very existence of frog-protagonists living in human universes in Asian folk tales indicates a difference. The frogs in the chosen examples have human parents—either birth- or adoptive—with whom they live peacefully after the parents’s initial (and understandable) skepticism, and are in some cases even described as loved and respected by the community. They venture out to marry, either consciously or not, and by luck or cunning they succeed in marrying a human partner of high status, which I do not believe an Occidental frog could succeed in without first transforming into a human. First as a married frog, to some extent a part of the royal or high status family does the real challenges begin for our protagonists; they must prove clever and sly, and use their magic powers to defeat the brothers- or sisters-in-law and win the respect of the king or father. They finally transform into human form, and the ending is very like that of the Occidental frog-marriage tales. In the Russian—or should I say Eurasian—tale about Ivan and Vasilisa the Wise, the first half is similar to that of the Asian tales; marriage before transformation and three tasks to win the respect of the king. A notable difference in the frog status, one that makes the tale land on the more Occidental side is, that Ivan is the main character, and that the frog does not have human parents, but is encountered first when Ivan follows his arrow to its pond. In the German fairy tale *Puddocky*, a beautiful girl named Parsley moves in with a neighboring witch, when her mother is caught stealing parsley from the witch’s garden to feed her daughter, who only eats parsley. The witch turns her into an ugly toad, because of three princes fighting over her, when spotting her in her window. She later helps the youngest of the three princes inheriting the kingdom by helping him with three tasks—very like the ones from the above-mentioned examples—the last one being to bring home the most beautiful girl. She, very like Vasilisa the Wise, brings herself to the castle and transforms back into the beautiful Parsley and marries the youngest prince. We are introduced to her before the young prince, so it is tempting to call her the main character. But she is not given any agency in her human form, in fact we only know that she is beautiful and only eats parsley, but not how she feels when having to move in with the witch or when transformed into a toad. Only in her toad-form does she act in the story by helping the prince, whose hardships the story is centered around. We are told how desperate he feels when the confronted with the impossible competition organized by his father. This tale is nevertheless uncommon in the fact, that we know the girl both before, during and after her transformation to toad, but I still believe she would be categorized as a magic helper/animal bride in this story, as so many other fairy tale frogs.

But it is not entirely true, when I say that there are no frog-protagonists in European fairy tales. We have discussed Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Marsh King’s Daughter* about a human-frog child, and in his much shorter story *The Toad*, the main character is an actual toad leaving its pond to seek happiness elsewhere. Andersen’s stories are not folk tales, but literary fairy tales, and cannot be regarded as the results of processes in the collective psyche. And as parenthesis, I think it is noteworthy, that Andersen invented the genre *tingseventyr* (‘thing-fairy tales’) which are tales with (often inert) objects as protagonists: a well hung steak, a silver coin, a teapot, a toy, a darning-needle or a street light for instance. I am mentioning this, so we keep in mind that Andersen had a quite radical view on what and who merited main-character status; a vital materialist long before Jane Bennett and Bruno Latour. With that in mind, I believe it is fair to say, that we do not have a lot of frog main-characters in Occidental folklore, and we can ask ourselves why.

I have, much aided by the work of Caroline Walker Bynum, tried to give an account of the christian view on change in the Middle Ages in Europe. As I have stated, there was a fascination as well as a resistance to things changing form, especially to metempsychosis; the soul migrating to another body, but also in a much broader sense. The fact that the mainstream religion of Europe rejected the idea of reincarnation and thus developed a certain resentment towards mutable things might very likely have influenced the folklore, that of course have much more ancient roots, but that have passed through the Middle Ages as oral stories told and retold through generations. It is not the view on frogs as agents of change that is European, but the “mutatiophobia” that, with its roots in medieval Christianity, casts a shadow over frogs in the later European sources.



### **Resilient permeability**

Lastly, I will share some more loose thoughts about why I believe that frog-human relations are relevant or interesting to investigate. I have talked about the astonishing permeability of frog's bodies, about how they both breathe and drink through their moist skin; a skin which is in some sense more comparable to the inside of our mouths than to our own skin. Almost any amphibian interaction with the world is thus one of absorption. I have also mentioned how their eggs only are protected by a transparent gel-like substance and therefor relies strongly on the qualities of the water in which they are laid. One could say that the body of water in which the eggs are laid acts almost like a surrogate mother for the myriad of eggs that in the course of a few weeks develop into tiny gill breathing tadpoles.

I believe having seen, in much contemporary literature and art from the ecofeminist field, a somewhat recurrent and important attempt to (re)mind us humans, that we are a part of the world and that the world is a part of us, to put it very simply. It is the idea that if we only understood, that all our actions—even as metropolitans in our cultural bastions as far away as possible from the soils in which our vegetables grow—are connected in complex rhizomes to an infinite amount of processes all around the globe, we would be better apt to act in a healthy way for the world and thus also for ourselves and each other, how complexly entangled in itself the world might be. I do not think, that frogs need any reminding of their connection to the world. But no non-human animals do, one could object, for only humans have developed a such complex web of culture, that permits one to survive even if never having set foot outside of the concrete jungle and not understanding anything about where food comes from, how to cultivate, collect, hunt and make it edible. But I would argue, that the frog especially does not need any reminding of its connectedness to what surrounds it, that it is unique in its radical porosity, and that this intense connection to its surroundings is its lived experience. It is also what makes amphibians so vulnerable to environmental pollution and change in climate conditions. In 2023, 41% of amphibian species were registered endangered compared to 26,5% of mammal species, 21,4% of reptiles and 12,9% of birds.<sup>4</sup> So this body-porosity is a fragility in some sense, but then again it is also a very direct sensibility to one's surroundings, something that—had we humans had more of it—could maybe change the world for the better; something that I think many would agree is worth striving for. For we are in fact permeable as well, though we might not think about it daily. We also breathe through the skin, only much less than amphibians, and air, water and food passes through us every day all the time. The embryonic liquid in which our offspring develop is not spontaneously generated, but created by the body from what it is fed with and therefor affected by all sorts of pollution uptake through air, food or water.

In the face of climate change we do see, very understandably, a societal attempt to harden our skin so to say. States with economies that permit them to do so reinforce their infrastructures in anticipation of the growing pressure from more extreme weather, storms, wildfires, floods and extremely cold and hot temperatures. Money is spent on rendering borders impermeable in order to keep out climate refugees from the global south rather than on halting the emissions themselves—whose existence is in some cases totally neglected by elected populists—which is what Naomi Klein calls “climate barbarism.” The bitter irony of it is that the countries with the economic power permitting these infrastructural changes, are also the economies that have produced and continuously produce the most negative effects to our global climate (and they are also—with exceptions—geographically located in the parts of the world where the climate changes are the least tangible). So the populations in the global north, with the crucial responsibility to create and demand real political change, are to some extent screened off from the worst consequences of climate change and the people gravely affected by it, and they have thus less political motivation to demand and create the necessary changes. The populations in the less fortunate countries with less historical and contemporary responsibility live much closer to the consequences of climate change, but have much less political and economic agency in this global race against time, because they do in most cases not profit from- or finance the industries or companies with the highest emission rates.

4 Manning

So why look for a primordial connection between humans and frogs? I believe that frogs have something that we urgently miss: They have the lived experience that, when they move through the world, the world moves through them. And maybe we can get a little closer to understanding this experience through our amphibian *arche-twins*. For they do after all, as we have seen in the analyzed examples above, hold the key to our own bodily transformation. And if we were to mutate, or at least understand our bodies differently in the world, we could maybe strive for more permeability; more connectedness and the vulnerability that comes with it as a sort of resilience or resistance.

I will end with a question, posed by the rapid disappearance of frog species; a big question that this text maybe also has tried to answer all along: What would happen if frogs went extinct, besides from the eco-systemic changes that would follow the loss of such an important prey-and-predator group? What would it mean for human culture, if we forever lost this tiny moist creature, to which we for millennials have created very close, but ambiguous relations; in which we have seen ourselves reflected and represented; from which we have imagined us originating and to which we have imagined us transforming?



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