Shape-shifting is a metaphor of the relationship between humankind and nature, in particular animals. Shapeshifters assumes certain characteristics, traits, and talents of an animal, usually for a limited time and for a particular purpose.

When you merge into an animal, you enter the distinctive being of the animal, stepping into catness or wolfness, and so on. It is as if you enter the domain of essence, becoming the animal, almost like becoming a mirror of the animal. Each animal becomes an aspect of yourself, your eyes, your legs, your heart become one with the eagle, the horse, the lion, etc……

Medicine Men and Shamans are particularly adept at shapeshifting: a masked and costumed shaman may imitate an animal's every movement and sound in ritual. *"The shamanic costume tends to give the shaman a new, magical body in animal form. The three chief types are that of the bird, the reindeer (or stag), and the bear – but especially the bird."* ~ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*

Although shapeshifting to the form of a wolf is specifically known as lycanthropy, and such creatures who undergo such change are called lycanthropes, those terms have also been used to describe any human-animal transformations and the creatures who undergo them. Therianthropy is the more general term for human-animal shifts, but it is rarely used in that capacity. Other terms for shapeshifters include **metamorph**, skin-walker, **mimic**, and **therianthrope**.

Almost every culture around the world has some type of transformation myth, and almost every commonly found animal (and some not-so-common ones) probably has a shapeshifting myth attached to them.[

In mythology, folklore and speculative fiction, **shapeshifting**, or **metamorphosis** is the ability of an entity to **transform** into another being …. It is present in the oldest forms of totemism and shamanism, as well as the oldest extant literature and epic poems, including works such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Iliad*, where the shapeshifting is usually induced by the act of a deity.

Examples of shapeshifting in classical literature include many examples in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Circe's transforming of Odysseus' men to pigs in Homer's *The Odyssey*, and Apuleius's Lucius becoming a donkey in *The Golden Ass*.

Many British fairy tales, such as *Jack the Giant Killer* and *The Black Bull of Norroway*, feature shapeshifting.

Ancient Indian mythology tells of Nāga, snakes that can sometimes assume human form. ……. The *Ramayana* also includes the Vanara, a group of ape-like humanoids who possessed supernatural powers and could change their shapes.

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean folklore and mythology all tell of animals able to assume human shape. Though they have other traits in common – such animals are often old, they grow additional tails along with their abilities, and they frequently still have some

animal traits to betray them – there are distinctions between the folklore in the various countries.

Chinese mythology contains many tales of animal shapeshifters, capable of taking on human form. The most common such shapeshifter is the huli jing, a fox spirit which usually appears as a beautiful young woman; most are dangerous, but some feature as the heroines of love stories.

Madame White Snake is one such legend; a snake falls in love with a man, and the story recounts the trials that she and her husband faced.

In Japanese folklore ōbake are a type of yōkai with the ability to shapeshift. The fox, or kitsune is among the most commonly-known,

In modern fantasy, the extent to which the change of shape alters the mind can be important….. In the Harry Potter series, J. K. Rowling made it so that a wizard who became a rat obtained a rat's brain (although the Animagus talent bypasses this problem). In the Earthsea books, Ursula K. Le Guindepicts an animal form as slowly transforming the wizard's mind, so that the dolphin, bear or other creature forgets it was human, making it impossible to change back. This makes an example for a voluntary shapeshifting becoming an imprisoning metamorphosis.[3]Beyond this, the uses of shapeshifting, transformation, and metamorphosis in fiction are as protean as the forms the characters take on.

T. H. White had Merlin transform Arthur into various animals in*The Sword in the Stone*, as an educational experience.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth novels, Sauron, the main antagonist of *The Lord of the Rings* is a shapeshifter…..In the First Age of the Sun (detailed in the Silmarillion) he could take on numerable forms; during his battle with Huan, the wolfhound, he takes on no less than five forms, including a gigantic werewolf, but succumbs and flees in the form of a vampire. …..Aside from Sauron, many other Maiar in Middle-earth can shapeshift. The Valar shapeshift depending on their moods. In *The Hobbit*, the prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*, the character Beorn is normally a large human, but can shapeshift into a large bear.

- From Wikipedia and http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt_va.html?a=ustx&c=words&id=12717 and
- http://sarahannelawless.com/2010/04/14/shapeshifting/