



The Mystery of Metamorphosis: A Scientific Detective Story (Sciencewriters)

Frank Ryan

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Metamorphosis has intrigued human observers for thousands of years. While everyone knows this trick of nature transforms caterpillars into butterflies, fewer are aware that this process of transformation also occurs in many other insect species, as well as in amphibians and-in its greatest diversity-in marine creatures. Still, despite its widespread occurrence, metamorphosis has largely remained a mystery-not just to the people who watch gorgeous orange Monarchs emerge from green caterpillars once ensconced in cocoons, but also to the scientists who have tried to unravel just how the transformation works. In *Metamorphosis*, Frank Ryan delves into the mystery headfirst, showcasing surprising new ideas that are shaking established science.

Ryan recounts how the intricate physiology of metamorphosis has slowly revealed its secrets. He brings the work of pioneering scientists-such as Jean-Henri Fabre, Vincent Wigglesworth, and Carroll Williams-to life as they explore the inner workings of the insect world. We also meet contemporary scientist Don Williamson, whose work on sea urchins and other ocean-going animals led him to a theory of larval development that challenge some of the longest-held beliefs in evolution-including those that date back to Darwin's time. Williamson, whose revelations have launched huge debates in science, has risked being labeled an iconoclast for encouraging people to think differently about how species evolve-a process, he says, that is not as linear as we've believed, and that involves not just mutation but also hybridization.

A character as enchanting as metamorphosis itself, Williams exemplifies the importance of questioning time-honored beliefs. Through his work and those of the other monumental scientists in this book, we come closer to understanding the ancient and miraculous transformation of juvenile life forms into beautiful and complex adult insects and animals.

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