

Personification in Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant"

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Received: August, 16, 2023 Revised: September, 21, 2023 Accepted: October, 9, 2023

Abstract

The research has displayed the role of the literary figure of speech, personification used in the story of Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant". It has linked the four types of the personifications and how the British women have been applied as the personifications to extend the colonial government as the civilized and the superior race in the globe. As the British women have been found to be powerful to the British colonial government, so is the strength of the use personifications in the work of art and in the literary creativity. The personified objects and the seasons in the story have elevated its classic form to the fairy –tale as the story of the children and it has lured the attention of the readers. Reading such personified tales enhances the creativity of the children and of any readers but it is to be identified as the language of personifications by the readers while reading it. The beauty and the strength of the fairy-tale would be lost in absence of the personified objects and the seasons in the story "The Selfish Giant". Overall, personification in "The Selfish Giant" makes the story's moral lessons more accessible and memorable for children by giving human traits to non-human elements and depicting their interactions in a way that resonates with the readers' own experiences and emotions. While younger children might understand personification more through the narrative and illustrations, older children might analyze it more critically and recognize it as a literary device used to enhance the story's themes and moral lessons. It has been found that the teachers have to apply some of the techniques in the context for the students in making them comprehending the use of the personification in the story and by displaying the effectiveness of the use of the figure of speech in creating the curiosity for the learners.

Keywords: civilization, Christianity, personification, recognition, metonymy

Introduction

Personification is a literary device where human traits, emotions, or actions are attributed to animals, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas. It helps create vivid imagery and deeper connections in writing by making non-human elements seem more relatable. It can also be defined as it is giving human qualities to something that isn't human.

For everyday example: When we think of a time we might say, "The wind whispered through the trees." Here, the wind can't actually whisper, but describing it this way helps us imagine how softly it's blowing.

In Literature, personification helps bring scenes or objects to life. For instance, if a book says, "The old house creaked and groaned," it's giving the house human-like qualities to show how it seems to be expressing discomfort or age.

In visualizing the concept, we imagine our stuffed animal or toy talking or showing feelings. This is personification because it gives life and emotion to something that's not alive.

The purpose in literary writing is that personification makes descriptions more engaging and relatable. It helps readers or listeners connect with abstract ideas or inanimate objects by making them seem more like humans with feelings and actions. By using personification, writers can make stories, poems, or descriptions more vivid and emotionally impactful, allowing readers to experience the world through different perspectives.

In this respect, personification has been identified as the figure of speech often applied in the literary creation. It is the process of conferring the special human role to the inanimate and the non-living things. The English dictionary defines "A literary device in which an inanimate object or an idea is given human quality (wave)". It is an artistic representation of an abstract quality in the literary writing to bring literariness in the use of language. "Personification- as human being becomes an abstract idea. Personification works . . . clothing abstractions with the attributes of personality of all the ideas presented as sentient beings (Scholes, Robert et al 546)". The abstract ideas are attributed as human personality and play the human roles. "Auden depicts body and mind in general via metaphor and personification. What makes Auden's mind and body personifications strange, however, is that they are unlike the imaginary abstractions we often associate with personification (Hamilton 408)". Personifications make the creation unique and artistic in its form and the contents. "We personify when metaphorically ascribe agency to normally inanimate objects, turning non-existent or imaginary entities into realistic actors or agents (Hamilton 409)". Personifications are the tools to embellish the way of the expressions in artistic creations. "Personifications which I define as representations of things, places, events, or abstract ideas by the human form. Personifications had been well known to Archaic Greek artists (smith 129)". Personification is as old as the human civilization and it goes back to fourth century as Smith has stated and it initiated to be used with the Greek literature and the art.

Field of use of figure of speech

Personifications are used in ample fields as in literary creations, politics, day to day language, business, art, paintings, religions and the like. Personifications are applied in day-to-day communications of language as we convey the message of the raining condition as "God, INDRA, is weeping". H Rider Haggard's famous discussion on *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), once boasted "there is not a petticoat in the whole history (qtd in Alessio 239)". It is the day-to-day expression of the personification. When British imperial became dominant, women were central imagery and female personifications represented a wide range of meaning (Alessio 239)". Personifications are used ample forms and intentions. ". . . a female personification that could range in its symbolism from personal welfare to duty, became an ideal image by which to promote colonial settlement (Alessio 249)". Women's personification played the dominant role for the colonial settlement during the colonial era of Britain since British women were personified as civilized and superior race. Painting white women's figure was a kind of personifications as ". . . artists personifying British colonies in graphic or painted form (Alessio 265)" which indicates the powerful weapon to British colonial civilization. To sum up, it has no

any specific criteria of using the personifications and it is used the way it is required and felt to be suited by the users.

Types of personifications

Personifications are classified in four categories on the basis of its use. They are illustrated as:

- a. Conventional personification: It is based on a mapping between a human basic sense and distinct non-human contextual sense that can both be found in the dictionary.
- b. Novel personification: It is based on a mapping between a human basic sense that can be found in the dictionary and a novel non-human contextual sense that cannot.
- c. Default personification: It is based on a default interpretation of the basic sense as human when it can technically be interpreted as human or animate or general but a default human interpretation is favored.
- d. Personification- with –metonymy: It is “personification based on a violation of the selection restrictions of the basic sense caused by the replacement of a human agent or patient with a metonymically related non-human agent or patient (Dorst et al 178)”.

These four types of personifications are classified on the basis of use of personifications in the fiction. It is clarified with the following examples of use of personifications. "This soap will remove the most obstinate stains" is the example of the conventional personification. "The pines were bowing and shivering in the wind" is the novel personification. "To move forward by jumping on one foot" refers to birds or an animal hopping with one foot or with all feet to jump and it is the example of default personification. "The administrative office telephoned to ask her for voluntary evening help" is the personification-with-metonymy. "The Selfish Giant" is merely interpreted as the story of the children. The use of literary device as the personification, metaphors, similes and the images are ignored. The short story "The Selfish Giant" has been interpreted on the types of the adverbial constructions and the distribution of adverbial constructions based on structural approach especially syntactic structures of modification (Devi 3). It has explained the various positions of adverbs, phrase, prepositions, modifiers and the sentence structures in the story but has not done the literary device as presented in the story. Next researcher has viewed "The Selfish Giant" through the reader response approach with questionnaire methodology to the children and how they have different response in the process of the language learning (Selcuk, 2009). It has explained how children learn language through short stories. The Selfish Giant has been explained as the case of missing Christ child. "An angelic boy" that appears to take revenge with the Giant but the child disappears from the moment the selfish Giant turns loving to the school children (Pedersen 31). Pedersen's research is performed through the Biblical perspective. Hence this research has filled the gap left by the other researchers by mirroring the use of the personifications in the story "The Selfish Giant" of Oscar Wilde's figurative use of language.

The story "The Selfish Giant" as a story of the children has not been analyzed from the point of view of the personification yet. So, the research has attempted to fill the gap by answering the following research questions:

A). How do the children comprehend the use of personification in the story "The Selfish Giant"?

B). What are the various personifications used in the story “The Selfish Giant”?

Objective of the study

The objective of this research is to clarify the problems of the children's comprehension of the personifications of the various objects in the story “The Selfish Giant” and to mirror the objects playing the role of personification to confer the broader meanings in a concise form of the language, and how the personified objects have played their roles to deliver the intended meanings. It opens the readers to practice to use the literary device, personification in their writings when they write literary work of art. The specific objectives are:

A). To explore the idea how the personifications used in the story can be comprehended in the story “The Selfish Giant”.

B) To identify the various personifications used in the story “The Selfish Giant”.

Research Methodology

This research has been carried out with the textual analysis of the story “The Selfish Giant” by Oscar Wilde and it is interpreted the figure of speech of the personification used in the story with the lines of the personified symbols as the primary data. The critical research of the various researchers ‘articles, reports as well as the opinions of writers of the story has been taken as the secondary resources to interpret and judge the role of personification applied in the story “The Selfish Giant”.

Delimitation

The research has been confined within the analysis of the story “The Selfish Giant” and the use of the personification and its role to embellish the literary use of language. It is guided merely by the research questions.

Analysis

“The Selfish Giant” is a fairy-tale of Oscar Wilde. It is a short story for children and it was first published in the anthology *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in 1888. It is about a giant who learnt an important lesson about love and care and sharing of the source of happiness with others. This story holds different meanings for people of different age and the background of grasping intellectual strength.

The story "The Selfish Giant" contains varieties of the use of figurative language as metaphors, similes, symbols and personifications. Among them the personifications used in the story makes it classical one and the different types of the personifications are discussed in it. The seasons and the different objects of nature are personified to convey the feelings, emotions and attitudes through the personified objects in the story.

The personified objects of the nature express emotional feelings through the human voice in the garden of the selfish giant and the features display how the giant's garden turned out gloomy one. "The trees forgot to blossom (Wilde 194)". The trees are conferred the human role of forgetting to blossom in the garden by comprehending the selfish nature of the giant. "Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass but it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again and went off to sleep (Wilde 194)". The flower is

personified as taking its head out from the grass and noticing the notice-board of the selfish giant "Trespassers will be prosecuted" converts the flower feels so sorry for it. Then the flower as with the sense of the human beings slips back into the ground again and goes off to sleep. It is the act of human beings that the beautiful flower that the flower does as humans do. "The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost (Wilde 194)". It reveals that the "Snow" and the "Frost" enjoyed dwelling in the giant's garden as people do.

Next personification is the "snow" and the "Frost" in the story. The entire personification of the "Snow" and the "Frost" goes as:

The snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and he blew the chimney-posts down. 'This is the delightful spot' he said, 'We must ask the Hail on a visit. So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey and his breath was like ice. (Wilde, 194-95)

The "Snow" the "Frost", the "Hail" and the "North Wind" are performing the human role and they are communicating one another in the Giant's garden. The writer has given the pronouns "they" to the snow and the frost and "he" to the North Wind. Likewise, the pronoun "we" is used to the snow, to the frost and to the North Wind and they invite the Hail as the human beings invite with their conscience. These personified objects of nature are making the plans how to dwell in the giant's garden as the humans make the plans by the use of their conscious minds. The pronoun "he" is used to the Hail and the possessive case "his breath" is in use to the Hail to indicate how ice like cold breath the Hail had in the giant's garden. The conversation of these personified objects and the pronouns as well as the possessive case used to address them is the example of the emotional and expressive use of the language through the literary device of personifications as the language of Oscar Wilde contains vivid emotional and artistic forms as "it is emotional, figurative and expressive (A. D. 69)". So, the literary devices like metaphors, similes and personifications are the source of expressive means in the fairy-tale "The Selfish Giant".

Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant" has got abundant use of the personifications. The seasons are personified as narrated "Spring has forgotten this garden, they cried, 'so we will live here all the year round. . . The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none. 'He is too selfish, 'she said. So, it was always winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees (Wilde, 194-95)". Here the Snow and the Frost converse how the season 'spring' has forgotten to come in the giant's garden. So, the Snow and the Frost have become happy as human beings to dwell in the garden all the year round. Spring is the enemy of the Snow and the Frost. The moment the Spring arrives in the garden, the Snow and the Frost have to quit the garden. The Autumn season has given the golden fruit to every garden but not in the Giant's. The Autumn has understood that the giant is too selfish. The pronoun "she" is used for Autumn and the Autumn has identified the giant as being too selfish for the school children as the human beings know the giant's selfish nature. The Autumn expresses that the North Wind, the Hail, the Frost and the Snow dance through the trees of the selfish giant's garden. The Autumn has experienced, felt, and realized as human beings have identified the giant as being selfish to the school children. There is no difference between the human beings and the Autumn in understanding the nature of the giant as "Love, History,

Luck, and so on, are probably better understood by personification than any other source domain (Hamilton, 440)". So, the Autumn as personified has reflected the better form of the Giant's loveless nature to the school children in his garden.

As the selfish giant realized his stupid mistakes and turned loving to the school children by the visit of "an angelic boy" in his garden, then his garden became pleasing one. The angelic boy has got the reference of the Bible as "The principles of Christianity are significant in Oscar Wilde's fairy-tales (Umetsu 53)". The Selfish Giant is not the exception of it. The garden turning as the paradise for the school children is also expressed through the personified approach as it is narrated:

Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring . . . And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's head. . . and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. . . 'Climb up! Little boy! Said the tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could but the little boy was too tinny. . . He did not hate the winter now, for he knew that it was merely the spring asleep, and that the flowers were resting. (Wilde 195-97)

The North Wind ceasing to roar and the Hail stops dancing as humans do in fact. Hence it is personified structure in the story. It is only humans become glad and if "the trees were so glad", it the act of personification. The trees waving their arms to receive the children's heads as mothers wave their arms to receive their babies. The flowers look up through the green grass and laugh as humans feel joy with beauty of the garden and laugh. To speak by the tree as "climb up! Little boy!" and to bend the branches down to gain the children by the tree is the resembling act of the mother to lift the baby on the arms and to talk with him or her with motherly love. The tree does as the mother does to the little boy. The "spring" being asleep and the "flowers resting" are the activities of the human beings. Such entire act –of personifications of seasons and the natural objects beautify the language to express the feelings and emotions in a pleasing form. Personifications have played the role to convey the meanings in a shorten form. If the learners know about such use of the language, they learn to use it even in their own creative writings. The children are to be informed about the literary use of the personifications while teaching and they are to be awakened in it to create the interest. Otherwise, they never comprehend such device in their level and they cannot grasp the intended message of the fairy-tale. The use of personification in literary language has become common but it has become as hard as Adhikari et al (2020) have discussed about the condition of the global politics and it has turned out as complex as Adhikari et al (2022) have analyzed the condition of the global political situation and it has been realized as serious as Adhikari (2020) has explained about the global condition generated by the coronavirus for making the small children to understand the use of the figure of the speech.

Findings

In Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant," personification is used extensively to imbue non-human elements with human traits and emotions, creating a more vivid and relatable narrative. Some of the key examples of personification used in the story have been narrated as:

The Garden: The garden itself is personified, reflecting different emotions based on the Giant's behavior. When the Giant is selfish and keeps the children out, the garden is described as being

in a perpetual winter, with “snow” and “frost” ruling over it. The garden is said to be "sad," indicating that it shares in the Giant’s unhappiness.

The Seasons: Seasons are given human-like characteristics to reflect the Giant's mood. For instance:

Winter: Winter is described as being “angry” and “bitter,” showing its displeasure with the Giant’s actions.

Spring: When the Giant's attitude changes, Spring is described as “joyful” and “happy,” representing the newfound warmth and life that returns to the garden.

The Trees: Trees in the garden are also personified. When the Giant is unkind, the trees refuse to bloom, and when he becomes generous, the trees stretch out their branches and bloom, displaying happiness and gratitude.

The Birds: The birds are depicted as being “happy” and “playful” when the children return to the garden. They sing melodiously, reflecting the joy and life brought into the garden by the presence of the children.

The Children: While the children themselves are not personified in the traditional sense, they are portrayed in a way that highlights their impact on the garden. Their presence is what transforms the garden from a state of winter and sadness to one of spring and joy.

Through these instances of personification, Wilde emphasizes the connection between the Giant’s moral transformation and the natural world, illustrating how his actions affect not only himself but also the world around him.

In “The Selfish Giant” by Oscar Wilde, children can understand the use of personification through several key elements and these main elements have been presented as:

Relatable Emotions and Actions: The Giant’s Garden and seasons are given human traits and emotions. For instance, the garden becomes “sad” when the Giant is selfish and “happy” when he opens up his garden to children. Children can relate to these emotions because they themselves experience feelings of happiness, sadness, and joy, making it easier for them to connect with the garden's personification.

Visual Imagery: The illustrations or descriptions in the story often depict the garden and seasons in a way that resembles human behavior. For example, the winter is described as “angry” and the spring as “joyful.” This visual representation helps children grasp the concept of personification by showing how non-human elements can have human-like qualities.

Cause and Effect: The story shows a clear cause-and-effect relationship between the Giant’s actions and the garden's responses. When the Giant is selfish, the garden remains in winter. When he changes his attitude and welcomes the children, the garden blooms. Children can understand this dynamic as a way to illustrate how actions and attitudes can impact others, even if those others are personified elements like seasons or gardens.

Moral Lessons: Children often grasp personification in literature because it helps convey moral lessons in a more engaging and understandable way. The transformation of the garden reflects

the Giant's internal change and moral growth, making abstract concepts like generosity and selfishness more tangible for young readers.

Overall, personification in “The Selfish Giant” makes the story’s moral lessons more accessible and memorable for children by giving human traits to non-human elements and depicting their interactions in a way that resonates with the readers' own experiences and emotions.

Children might grasp the use of personification in "The Selfish Giant" at different levels, depending on their age and developmental stage. Some of the techniques for them in comprehending the use of the personification have been presented through different subsections below:

Emotional Connection: Young readers can relate to the personified elements because they often attribute human feelings and traits to their surroundings. For example, they might understand that when the garden is described as “sad” or “happy,” it reflects the emotional state of the garden, helping them connect with the story’s themes.

Visual Imagery: If the story is accompanied by illustrations, children can see how the garden, seasons, and trees are depicted with human-like features and emotions. This visual representation helps them recognize personification as a literary device that makes abstract concepts more concrete and relatable.

Simple Cause and Effect: Children can follow the cause-and-effect relationships in the story. They see that the garden’s state changes based on the Giant’s behavior—when he is selfish, the garden remains in winter, and when he becomes kind, the garden blooms. This helps them understand that the garden’s emotional responses are a way to show the Giant’s moral transformation.

Storytelling Context: Through storytelling, children often pick up on how characters and settings can express feelings and intentions. Personification in "The Selfish Giant" helps to teach them that in literature, non-human elements can be given human-like qualities to convey deeper meanings and emotions.

While younger children might understand personification more through the narrative and illustrations, older children might analyze it more critically and recognize it as a literary device used to enhance the story’s themes and moral lessons.

Identifying the use personification

Identifying personification in a story can be an engaging way to help students understand this literary device. Some of the techniques through step-by-step approach we can use to guide students in recognizing personification in the context.

To identify the use of the personifications to students that we need to define Personification by explaining that personification is that human traits are given to animals, objects, or ideas. For example, saying “the sun smiled down” gives the sun human-like qualities.

We have to read the story by choosing a story with clear examples of personification, such as “The Selfish Giant” by Oscar Wilde. We must highlight key examples by identifying examples together in the story line and by pointing out specific instances where non-human elements are described with human traits. For example, in “The Selfish Giant,” we might highlight phrases

like “the garden was sad” or “Winter had been staying there so long,” and discuss how these descriptions give human-like feelings or actions to the garden and seasons.

We have to discuss the effect by asking questions and encouraging students to think about how personification affects their understanding of the story. For example, we need to ask, “How does describing the garden as ‘sad’ make you feel about the Giant’s actions?”

We have to compare and contrast by showing without personification and presenting a description without personification and compare it. For example, compare “The garden was full of snow and ice” with “The garden was sad and the trees were gloomy.” And asking the students to discuss how personification adds emotional depth.

We can use visual aids by illustrating if available, using illustrations from the story that show personified elements and discussing how the images reflect the personification in the text.

We have to create activities of personification of hunting and having the students find examples of personification in the story on their own. They can highlight or list phrases where non-human elements are given human traits. We need to rewrite exercise by asking students to rewrite a passage from the story with and without personification. This helps them understand how personification changes the description and tone. We have to discuss the impact by creating the effect on reader and talking about why the author might use personification and how the use it has made the story more engaging or help convey a message to the readers.

We need to relate to their experience by personal connection by encouraging the students to think of times when they use personification in their own language or imagination, such as talking to their toys or describing their day. By guiding students through these steps, we can help them understand and identify personification in literature, making it easier for them to recognize and appreciate this literary device in various texts.

Conclusion

The research has been found to have displayed the role of the literary figure of speech, personification used in the story Oscar Wilde’s story "The Selfish Giant" as effective one for the elevation of its beauty. It has been found to have linked the four types of the personifications and how the British women have been applied as the personifications to extend the colonial government as the civilized and the superior race in the globe. As the British women have been found to be powerful to the British colonial government, so is the strength of the use personifications in the work of art and in the literary creativity. The personified objects and the seasons in the story have been found to have elevated its classic form to the fairy –tale as the story of the children and it has drawn the attention of the readers. Reading such personified tales enhances the creativity of the children and any readers by reading it but it is to be identified as the language of personifications by the readers while reading it. The beauty and the strength of the fairy-tale would have been lost in absence of the personified objects and the seasons in the story "The Selfish Giant". It has been found to have drawn the curiosity for the readers of the children and the researchers have not given attention to draw the use of the personifications and the role that literary technique has given interest to go through the fairy-tale to the readers. But the children are to be made aware of the personified objects and the seasons and how they are used in the language to understand the literary language to enhance their skills in their creativities too.

Overall, personification in “The Selfish Giant” makes the story’s moral lessons more accessible and memorable for children by giving human traits to non-human elements and depicting their interactions in a way that resonates with the readers' own experiences and emotions. While younger children might understand personification more through the narrative and illustrations, older children might analyze it more critically and recognize it as a literary device used to enhance the story’s themes and moral lessons. It has been found that the teachers have to apply some of the techniques in the context for the students in making them comprehending the use of the personification in the story and by displaying the effectiveness of the use of the figure of speech in creating the curiosity for the learners.

Implication

The research has become implacable for the teachers in making the students engaging in the literary device and making the teaching literature effectively in the class room and it has its practice in the daily speech of the language.

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