



Macbeth Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which human qualities are attributed to an animal, object, or idea. Personification is often used in order to project a character's fears and concerns onto the outside world.

In the famous soliloquy below, Macbeth sees a phantasmal dagger floating in front of him, leading him to Duncan's chamber to commit regicide, or the murder of a king. After reading the passage carefully, respond to the prompts and questions that follow in order to better understand how personification is used to create action when there is none.

Macbeth

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going,
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still,
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. There's no such thing.
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep. Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings, and withered murder,
Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,

With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives.
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.
I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.
(No Fear: 2.1.33–64)

1. In the first nine lines of the soliloquy, Macbeth directly addresses the dagger, referring to the weapon as *thee* and *thou*. Explain how this use of direct address gives life to Macbeth's central concern in these lines.

2. Identify the use and purpose of personification in the following line:

Thou mashall'st me the way that I was going. / And such an instrument I was to use.

3. Read the two examples of personification below that Shakespeare uses in the soliloquy to convey Macbeth's uncertainty about what he is seeing. Examine how these examples of personification are used in this section, and then explain how each conveys Macbeth's confusion.

Mine eyes are made the fools

the bloody business which informs / Thus to mine eyes

4. In the following section of the soliloquy, the nouns and verbs used to create personification are color-coded. The nouns are blue, and the verbs are red. Study this passage and the examples of personification within it. Then explain how Shakespeare uses personification to illustrate Macbeth's recognition that the murder he is about to commit is evil.

Now o'er the one half-world

Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse

The curtained sleep. Witchcraft celebrates

Pale Hecate's offerings, and withered murder,

Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,

Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,

With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design

Moves like a ghost

a. wicked dreams abuse

b. Witchcraft celebrates

c. withered murder Moves

5. Identify how personification is used in the following section of text in order to convey Macbeth's actions and his concerns about killing Duncan.

Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,

And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it.

6. In the last line of the soliloquy, Shakespeare uses personification to suggest that the "bell" is inviting Duncan to "heaven or hell." How does this use of personification separate Macbeth from the act he is about to commit?

7. Throughout this soliloquy, personification gives life to Macbeth's concerns and allows him to transfer his guilt about the act he is about to commit onto the world around him. Explain how this works and how personification is used to give action to a scene where there is none.