

# Fear and Personification in: Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant"

Bhawani Shankar Adhikari, Lecturer in English, Nepal Sanskrit University, Balmeeki Campus, Kathmandu

## Abstract

This research has displayed the role of fear both to the school children by the giant in the beginning and the fear of The Lord Jesus Christ to the giant later when the giant identifies the little boy with the wounds of nails on his palms and feet and the literary figure of speech, personification used in the story of Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant". It has linked the four types of personifications and how the British women were applied as the personifications to extend the colonial government as the civilized and the superior race in the globe. The personification of British women is because of fear of not being superior to the natives of the nations where the British colonial government was formed. As the British women were powerful to the British colonial government, so is the strength of the use of personifications in the work of art and 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 any readers but it is to be identified as the language of personifications by the readers while reading. 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". The concept of fear functions as the source of bringing the arrogant giant into the normal position and allowing the school children to play in his garden. The giant has the fear of losing the spring season and the fruits in the trees of his garden. It is only via neurology injected into the psyche of the giant that the school children got an opportunity to play in the giant's beautiful garden after their school.

**Keywords:** Biblical, categories, Christianity, civilization, conventional, default, fear, fearology, metonymy, novel, personification, recognition

## Introduction

Personification is the figure of speech often applied in 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 literary writing to bring literariness to the use of language. "Personification- as a human being becomes an abstract idea. Personification works . . . clothing abstractions with the attributes of the 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 the fourth century as Smith has stated and it initiated to be used with the Greek literature and the art. Fear has its role in awareness via consciousness and knowledge. "Knowledge generates fear. Knowledge should be for knowledge; it should be for the sake of life. Knowledge without an understanding of fear is useless (Subba 21)". It means fear functions merely after the conscious knowledge and fear can not be generated sans knowledge and the knowledge must be for life as the school children and the giant both have the fear only after their knowledge and the scare for their life in the story "The Selfish Giant". The fearologist (kalu) has pointed out both positive and negative fear and he has the same line of thought as Subba in the role of fear. Michael Fisher's Fearology is applied to protect humanity via disaster as R. Michael Fisher quotes Barber's (2005), "Fear's not just a factor; it's a major player" (Fisher 4). Fear is the master player of the 21st century and fear has become the central concept as it is expressed: "...fear is a central concept [and reality] in both social and political [and cultural] theory" and our everyday lives" (Fisher 6). And Exotic Fearology has displayed the fear's role and how fear is comprehended as:

The present fearological era may open the eyes of diverse scholars to make fearology not only a discipline

but a comprehensive science. Fear is not so cut and dried as we have thought and imagined, but it is a rather complex idea, more than what it appears on the surface. It has neither the scientific tools to measure yet what needs to be measured, nor does it have all the issues clarified to be placed in one basket and dealt with effectively. (Adhikari and Fisher 158-195)

Fear is a complex idea and its role is to be comprehended based on practical affairs as it has displayed in Wilde's short story "The Selfish Giant". The school children's fear has created the fear of the selfish giant in his garden via snow-storm, Northwind, Frost, Hail, and always being Winter in the garden and spring and birds outside of the garden.

### Field of use

Personifications are used in ample fields such as 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 rainy 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 personification. When the 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 in the colonial settlement during the colonial era of Britain since British women were personified as a civilized and superior race. Painting white women's figures was a kind of personification 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 specific criteria for using the personifications and it is used the way it is required and felt to be suited by the users. Fear is applied in day to day affairs of life as it is used to scare the school children to enter the giant's garden to play after their school and it is applicable in the life of the giant as he faces merely natural disasters in his garden in absence of the children being in the garden and at the moment as the giant recognizes the boy as Jesus Christ who has come to punish the giant if his nature/manner/behavior of being callous to children is not changed.

### Types of personifications

Personifications are classified into four categories based on their use and three kinds of fears. They are illustrated as:

A. Conventional personification: based on a mapping between a human basic sense and the distinct non-human contextual sense that can both be found in the dictionary.

B. Novel personification: 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: 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: 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 based on the use of personifications in fiction. It is clarified with the following examples of the use of personifications. "This soap will remove the most obstinate stains" is an example of 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 an example of default personification. "The administrative office telephoned to ask her for voluntary evening help" is the personification-with-metonymy.

"The fear of man differs in the morning, afternoon, evening and night. Low fear occurs in the morning, mid fear in the afternoon, high fear in the evening, and extreme high fear at night (Subba 178)". Low fear, mid fear, and extreme fear are of three types and medium fear is appropriate to move ahead and achieve success in life,

### Hypothesis

The Selfish Giant as a story of the children may not be comprehended as a story of fear and personification. This research is based on the following research questions or the statement of the problems:

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?

C. What are the roles of the personified objects in the story The Selfish Giant?

D. How fear has acted a positive role both on the school children and the giant in the story The Selfish Giant?

### Research Methodology

This research is carried out with the textual analysis of the story The Selfish Giant of Oscar Wild and it is interpreted with the figure of speech of the personification. The critical research of the various writers of the story is taken as the secondary resource to judge the

role of personification applied in the story *The Selfish Giant*. The story is viewed through the fearology and fears perspective too.

### The 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 using the literary device, personification in their writings when they write literary works of art. It reflects the fear's role that had acted in the story *The Selfish Giant*.

### Delimitation

This research cannot go beyond the analysis of the story *The Selfish Giant* and the fear's role and the use of the personification and its role to embellish the literary use of language. It is guided merely by the research questions.

#### Review of literature

The *Selfish Giant* is merely interpreted as the story of the children. The use of a literary device as the personification, metaphors, similes, and 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 the structural approach especially syntactic structures of modification (Devi 3). It has explained the various positions of adverbs, phrases, prepositions, modifiers, and sentence structures in the story but has not done the literary device as presented in the story. The next researcher has viewed "The *Selfish Giant*" through the reader-response approach with a questionnaire methodology to the children and how they have different responses in the process of language learning (Selcuk 2009). It has explained how children learn language through short stories. The *Selfish Giant* has been explained as the case of a missing Christ child. "An angelic boy" appears to take revenge on 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." The giant then realized the children are blessed. This is parallel to the Christian story of Jesus (Jo Szweczyk 2)". The Christian concept of Jesus Christ acting as the god-fearing to the selfish giant and such principles are not discussed yet. Hence this research has filled the gap left by the other researchers by mirroring the use of the personifications and the fear's role in the story "The *Selfish Giant*" of Oscar Wilde's figurative use of language.

### The textual analysis

The *Selfish Giant* is a fairy-tale by 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 learned an important lesson about love and care and sharing the source of happiness with others. This story holds different meanings for people of different ages 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 make it a classical one, and the different types of 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 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. "The trees forgot to blossom (Wilde 194)". The trees 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 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.

The 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 with 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 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 on 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 for the Hail and the possessive case "his breath" is in use for 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 an 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 literary devices like metaphors, similes, and personifications are the sources 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 wintering 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 about how the season 'spring' has forgotten to come into 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. Autumn has understood that the giant is too selfish. The pronoun "she" is used for Autumn and 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 been 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 a pleasing one. The angelic boy has got the reference to 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 into a 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 ceases to roar and the Hail stops dancing as humans do in fact. Hence it is personified structure in the story. It is only humans who become glad and if "the trees were so glad", it is the act of personification. The trees wave their arms to receive the children's heads as mother's wave their arms to receive their babies. The flowers look up through the green grass and laugh as humans feel joy with the 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 lifting the baby in her arms and talking 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 human beings. Such an entire act –of personifications of seasons and the natural objects beautifies the language to express the feelings and emotions in a pleasing form. Personifications have played the role to convey the meanings in a shortened form. If the learners know about such use of the language, they learn to use it even in their 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 a device on their level and they cannot grasp the intended message of the fairy-tale.

Fearology is injected into the psyche of the selfish giant as he was nervous while there was a dance of The North wind, Hail, Frost, Hail, Snow, and the winter in the garden of the giant. The giant knew that it was the result of his selfishness and his heart melted to welcome the children in his garden as "And the Giant's heart melted as he looked out. 'How selfish I had been!' he said; now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground forever and ever.' He was sorry for what he had done (Wilde 296)". It is the outcome of the consciousness and the knowledge that the giant got and he had the fear of always having the dance of Winter, Snow, Frost, Hail, and The North Wind, and his heart is melted via its fear as

Subba has rightly pointed out the concept of fear. The giant got changed into a positive and kind and loving to the children via the role of fear in him. "It is your garden now, little children, said the Giant, and he took a great ax and knocked down the wall (Wilde 196)". The giant loved the little boy best and asked the children " But where is your little companion?" he said: 'the boy I put into the tree (Wilde 196)". The giant saw the little boy and went to him and found the wound and he said, 'Who hath dared to wound thee?' for on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet (Wilde 197)". Then the giant was ready to take his big sword and slay who had wounded the little boy. At this the boy said "Nay!" answered the child, but these are the wounds of love. Who art thou?" said the Giant and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child. And the little child smiled at the Giant, and said to him, 'You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is paradise (Wilde 197)." The fear's role to the giant offered the opportunity to go to heaven. The fear has got a positive role to change the giant and the school children too had the fear of going inside the giant's garden once the giant warned them and put the notice as "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED (Wilde 196)." As the school children did not go in the garden of the giant, there was negative effect in the Giant's garden and it turned out to the cause of his behavior change. The fear's role in the positive form has become a blessing in the life of the giant and also to the little children to be cheerful and play happily in the Giant's garden.

### Conclusion

This study has displayed the role of fear and 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 three types of fears and how the British women were applied as the personifications to extend the colonial government as the civilized and the superior race in the globe. It was the role of fear to personify the British women as the superior ones among the aborigines of the nations where The British ruled as the colonial government. As the British women were powerful to the British colonial government, so is the strength of the use of personifications in the work of art and 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 any readers but it is to be identified as the language of personifications by the readers while reading. 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". It has filled the gap that the researchers have not given attention to drawing the use of the personifications and the role that literary technique has given the 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. Fearology has acted to convert the Selfish Giant as kind/ loving/ caring and friendly with the school children and it has advised all to be kind and loving via this story's role of fear and in fact, the fearology is the law of the laws to all.

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