



Imagery

Imagery is the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings and thoughts. When we read language expressed imaginatively, the meaning comes from what the images suggest to us, rather than their literal or exact meaning. For example, when Macbeth says his 'seated heart' is 'knock[ing] at his ribs', we know this is physiologically impossible, but the image certainly expresses the degree of terror he feels.

There are many different kinds of imagery, the most familiar being metaphors, similes and personification. Both metaphors and similes are poetic devices which compare two things. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another, for example, 'Life's but a walking shadow' (V, v, 24). A simile describes two things as 'like' one another; for example, '[Duncan's] gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature' (II, iii, 110). Personification is attributing human qualities to things that are not human. For example, Scotland is described as a person when Macduff says, 'our country ... weeps, it bleeds, and each new day / A gash is added to her wounds' (IV, iii, 40–41).

Other types of imagery are alliteration and assonance. These poetic devices repeat sounds to achieve particular effects. Alliteration repeats consonants (for example, 'fair is foul') and assonance repeats vowel sounds (for example, 'Double, double, toil and trouble'). Sometimes, imagery appeals to our sense of sight, sometimes to our sense of hearing and sometimes to our sense of touch or smell.