

Zoomorphism

Definition of Zoomorphism

Zoomorphism is a derivative of the Greek words *zōon*, which means “animal,” and *morphē*, which means “form,” or “shape.” It is a literary technique in which animal attributes are imposed upon non-animal objects, humans, and events; and animal features are ascribed to humans, gods, and other objects. Like in this instance,

“A couple of customers that had been heading for my slot began to knock against each other, like scared pigs in a chute.”

(*A&P*, by John Updike).

Here pigs are meant to be intelligent animals, and have been used as a [simile](#) to show how people were behaving.

Opposite of Anthropomorphism

Zoomorphism means assigning a person, event, or a deity with animalistic characteristics. [Anthropomorphism](#), on the other hand, is ascribing human qualities to other objects, animals, and inhuman creatures in order to give an insight into their functions.

Examples of Zoomorphism in Literature

One can find zoomorphism examples in literary pieces written during the time of the Romans and ancient Greeks. However, modern literature has used it extensively as well.

Example #1: *Barn Burning* (By William Faulkner)

“The **two sisters** got down, big, **bovine**, in a flutter of cheap ribbons; one of them drew from the jumbled wagon bed a battered lantern, the other a worn broom. His father handed the reins to the older son and began to climb stiffly over the wheels ... There was something about his **wolf-like independence** and even courage when the advantage was at least neutral which impressed strangers, as if they got from his latent ravaging ferocity not so much a sense of dependability, as a feeling that his ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his ...”

Bovines are cows. They are perceived often as slow, stupid, and lazy animals that do not question their masters. On the other hand, wolves are ferocious predators. In the above excerpt, the girls are represented as cows – having a lack independence, following their father without questioning. The father is compared to a wolf, which has “ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions.”

Example #2: *A&P* (By John Updike)

“You never know for sure how **girls’ minds** work (do you really think it’s a mind in there or just a little **buzz like a bee** in a glass jar?) but you got the idea she had talked the other two into coming in here with her, and now she was showing them how to do it, walk slow and hold yourself straight ... The **sheep pushing their carts** down the aisle – the **girls** were walking against the usual traffic (not that we have one-way signs or anything) – were pretty hilarious...”

In this case, *buzzing like a bee* is supposed to imply that there is really nothing important in the girls’ minds. While the customers are compared to sheep, who wander in groups mindlessly down the aisles.

Example #3: *The Holy Bible, Psalms* (By Multiple Authors)

“For you have been my help. I will rejoice in the **shadow of your wings**. (*Psalms* 63:7, English Version)

“If I take the wings of the dawn, and settle in the remotest part of the sea...” (*Psalms* 139:9, English Version)

Here, God is represented as a bird. The bird's/God's wings are compared to the comfort and shelter that God gives to His people.

Example #4: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (By William Shakespeare)

“I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was: **man is but an ass**, if he go about to expound this dream ...”

This excerpt is the speech of Bottom in the play, who had a dream in which he was an ass-headed monster adored by a gorgeous fairy queen. He describes that humans cannot comprehend his dream; it is beyond their approach.

Function of Zoomorphism

Zoomorphism is a literary technique. Examples of zoomorphism are often found in short stories (used to effectively provide detailed descriptions about the characters in stories). Records show that it has been used as a literary device since the times of the ancient Romans and Greeks. It is a very helpful tool for the effective description of different characters. The purpose of using this technique is to create a [figurative language](#) and provide a [comparison](#).