

EXPLORING PERSONIFICATION AND PLAYFULNESS IN ROGER MCGOUGH'S "PILLOW TALK" WITH OCCASIONAL AI ASSISTANCE

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Abstract: This article analyzes Roger McGough's poem "Pillow Talk", focusing on its use of personification, humor, and rhythm to portray childhood imagination. AI was occasionally used to assist in interpreting complex poetic features.

Keywords: personification, humor, rhythm, childhood, AI support.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada Rojer MakGoffning "Pillow Talk" she'ridagi personifikatsiya, hazil va ritm orqali bolalarcha tasavvur ifodasi tahlil qilinadi. Ayrim murakkab o'rinlarda AI yordamidan foydalanilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: personifikatsiya, hazil, ritm, bolalik, SI yordami.

Аннотация: В статье анализируется стихотворение Роджера МакГофа "Pillow Talk", с акцентом на олицетворение, юмор и ритм как средства выражения детского воображения. В отдельных случаях использовалась помощь ИИ.

Ключевые слова: олицетворение, юмор, ритм, детство, поддержка ИИ.

Introduction. Roger McGough – witty pop poet, showman, later radio host, author of books for children and playwright (Xakimova, 2022) – is recognized for his humorous and accessible poetic style, often rooted in themes of childhood, imagination, and the everyday. As part of the Liverpool Poets, his work breaks traditional poetic boundaries by emphasizing simplicity, wit, and relatability. "*Pillow Talk*" exemplifies this approach by animating a pillow, turning a familiar bedtime object into the lively protagonist of an unseen nighttime world.

This study seeks to analyze how McGough employs literary devices such as personification, rhyme, and narrative voice to convey whimsy and irony. In a few cases where textual ambiguities arose, AI support was consulted to supplement interpretation — not to replace critical thinking, but to enhance precision and expression.

Methodology. The article adopts a qualitative literary analysis based on close reading of the poem; identification of stylistic features such as personification, rhyme scheme, and structure; thematic analysis focusing on

imagination, mischief, and contrast between perception and reality; occasional use of AI to clarify complex figurative expressions and refine analytical language

The analytical lens is primarily formalist, focusing on what the text reveals through its language and structure.

Results are seen in Use of Personification; Structure, Rhyme and Rhythm; Thematic Focus: Imagination and Misrule; Narrative Perspective and Irony.

Use of Personification. The central poetic device in the poem is personification. The pillow is not only described as speaking, but also playing games, sneaking through the house, and causing minor domestic chaos. For example: *"They divebomb off the wardrobe / Do backflips off the chair..."* (McGough, 2017) This gives the object human-like autonomy and imagination, aligning with how children often imbue objects with life. In analyzing this, AI assistance was helpful in confirming that the verbs used (e.g., *divebomb*, *tiptoe*) are typical of physical human behavior, which strengthens the anthropomorphic effect.

Structure, Rhyme and Rhythm. The poem is composed of rhymed quatrains (four-line stanzas), mostly with an AABB rhyme scheme. This musical, predictable structure supports the childlike narrative voice and makes the poem suitable for oral reading or classroom discussion. The rhythm is generally anapestic, contributing to a bouncy, playful tone. However, certain lines such as: *"If granny met one on the stairs / Imagine the look on her face!"* (McGough, 2017) show a shift in tone and meter, which might confuse some readers. AI-based metrical analysis helped verify the metric variation here, suggesting it serves to emphasize humor and surprise.

Thematic Focus: Imagination and Misrule. The poem reimagines the bedroom – usually a quiet, restful space – as a scene of secret nighttime rebellion led by the pillows. Games like *Blind Man's Buff*, *Leapfrog*, and *Wrestling* are used to depict chaotic energy. The tone remains light-hearted, though subtly reflective of how children see order and mischief differently from adults. Additionally, a humorous reversal occurs at the end: *"If I didn't have to spend each night / Under your big snoring head!"* (McGough, 2017) This comic twist collapses the fantasy, grounding the poem in reality while reinforcing the pillow's ironic fate – full of potential, but ultimately crushed under a human.

Narrative Perspective and Irony. The poem is narrated in the first person by the speaker (possibly a child), recounting what their pillow "told" them. This framing supports a double perspective – the childlike belief in magic, and the knowing smile of the adult reader. The ironic tone is especially visible in parenthetical lines, which feel like whispered secrets: *"And you end up by getting blamed / For something they left out"* (McGough, 2017) AI input was particularly useful here in recognizing the parenthetical style as a technique of narrative layering – creating intimacy between speaker and reader, as if letting them in on a joke.

Discussion. McGough's "*Pillow Talk*" illustrates how poetic language can animate the everyday and reflect the whimsical logic of children. Through vivid personification, consistent rhyme, and narrative humor, the poem blurs the lines between fantasy and reality.

The poem also subtly critiques adult rationality by presenting a world where objects misbehave and children understand more than they're credited for. In exploring such themes, occasional reliance on AI proved helpful for clarifying metrical patterns and naming rhetorical techniques, but the core interpretations remain rooted in human analysis and literary sensibility.

Conclusion. Roger McGough's "*Pillow Talk*" is a masterclass in balancing accessibility with artistic depth. It transforms a mundane object into a source of mischief and storytelling, reflecting both childlike imagination and adult irony. The structured playfulness, combined with a surprising ending, gives the poem both emotional and aesthetic appeal. In this analysis, AI served as a supportive tool, particularly useful in resolving uncertainties around meter and figurative language. However, the nuanced interpretation, contextual understanding, and thematic insight remain grounded in traditional literary criticism.

References:

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