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Literary personification has long been taken for granted as an important aspect of Western narrative; Paul de Man had given it prominence as "the master trope of poetic discourse." James Paxson here offers a critical and theoretical appraisal of personification in the light of developments in poststructuralist thought. He reassesses early theories and examines the allegorical texts of Prudentius, Chaucer, Langland and Spenser to show how personification works as a complex artistic tool for revealing and advertising the problems and limits inherent in poetic or verbal creation.