

Illusion

Definition of Illusion

An illusion is a false illustration of something, a deceptive impression, or a false belief. Literally speaking, an illusion is something that is false and not factual. It tricks the human brain into thinking an unreal into a real. In other words, it is meant to mislead the perception of readers, and deceive their senses. Writers deceive readers' sense of sight, touch, taste, and sounds, making them imagine what is happening, by illustrating certain details. Read on to learn more about *illusion* in literature.

Examples of Illusion in Literature

Example #1: *The Great Gatsby* (by F. Scott Fitzgerald)

One example of illusion appearing as reality in the novel, *The Great Gatsby*, involves the [protagonist](#), Jay Gatsby, and his meager family background. The reality is that he has lived a poor life to such an extent that he decides to drop out of college after just a couple of weeks. He hates the janitorial job he has taken to pay his tuition and fees for school. Then, in chapter four, Gatsby describes to Nick,

“I’ll tell you God’s truth. ... I am the son of some wealthy people in the middle-west [San Francisco] – all dead now.”

Here Gatsby portrays a false reality of his family background, which is an illusion.

Example #2: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (by William Shakespeare)

“If we shadows have offended
Think but this, and all is mended –
That you have but slumbered here ...
No more yielding than a dream.”

(Act-IV, Scene-II, Lines 55-59)

In these lines from his [monologue](#), Puck alludes to a [contrast](#) between reality (the real world) and illusion (theater). He offers commentary on the theater as a [fantasy](#) and dream, where sometimes real life events become dreams and fantasy.

Example #3: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (by Tennessee William)

In the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams, Blanche dwells upon illusion for her self-defense, against both outside threats and her own evil spirit. Her deceits, however, do not carry any trace of wickedness; rather, they appear from her lack of ability, and her weakness to face the truth. Blanche is an idealist figure, who does not see the world as it is, instead seeing it as it should be. Dream and fantasy cast a liberating effect that protects Blanche from upcoming tragedies.

Throughout this play, the writer contrasts Blanche's illusion with Stanley's unwavering [realism](#). By the end, Stanley wins due to his real worldview. Similarly, Stella, another [character](#), must bear a kind of illusion, pushing herself to believe that accusations leveled against Stanley are untrue – which would allow her to continue living with Blanche's husband.

Example #4: *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (by John Keats)

In his poem, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, Keats focuses on the concept of illusion. A dying knight meets a beautiful woman, and ultimately becomes victim to the illusion of her beauty and love. Keats has used men like kings, warriors, and princes to show how powerful illusions affect them, and how they become victims of their own misperceptions. He shows that, though they are powerful in their careers, they are also weak, due to their inability to see truths, and judge the fatal spells beautiful woman cast upon them.

Example #5: *The Tempest* (by William Shakespeare)

Perception of illusion and reality plays a major role in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Magic dominates an island, diminishing the ability of the new arrivals to differentiate between illusion and reality. The outlook of each individual also tempers reality. For instance, Gonzalo is positive, and sees the island as a beautiful one; while Antonio and Sebastian see it as an unwelcoming place, due to their negative outlooks. Magic obscures reality, and illusion becomes stronger, on account of individual perspectives.

Function

Illusion is a delusion of real sensation. Writers use it to present something they have perceived in their minds differently from the reality. Its function is to surprise, and to provide something interesting to entertain their audiences. It also helps the [audience](#) develop emotions within a contextual framework, encouraging exploration of something different from reality. In addition, it serves as a clue, and helps the audience figure out where the scene or plot is going. The use of illusion is very common in literature, advertising, and architecture.