

Distortion

Definition of Distortion

Distortion is a literary device that twists, exaggerates, changes, and makes something quite different from what it actually is. Writers can distort a thought, an idea, a situation, or an image. They may use [symbolism](#), [satire](#), and [personification](#) to present distortion. For instance, in his novel *Animal Farm*, George Orwell uses personification and symbolism to distort stereotypes and historical figures. Read on to learn more about *distortion* in literature.

Examples of Distortion in Literature

Example #1: *1984* (by George Orwell)

“Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end, we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten.”

“[...] Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. Even now, of course, there’s no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime. It’s merely a question of self-discipline, reality-control. But in the end there won’t be any need even for that.”

“[...] In fact there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.”

In the above excerpt taken from *1984*, George Orwell has used distortion of several facts as a manipulative device. He expresses that this is an important part of human thought, as it either limits or structures the ideas of individuals. Orwell has rather focused on political language to distort the story's concepts and events by naming them differently than their names in our reality.

Example #2: *Gulliver's Travels* (by Jonathan Swift)

Swift uses distortion in his writings, such as the use of diminution to launch an attack on human grandeur. For instance, in Book I of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift presents the Lilliputian king as greedy and powerful, and people as diminutive mortals. In fact, the author ridicules their king, because kings are symbolic figures of grandeur and power. However, the Lilliputian king is just six inches tall. By manipulating the fact of their physical smallness, the author emphasizes the [moral](#) smallness and pettiness of the Lilliputians.

Example #3: *Catch 22* (by Joseph Heller)

Heller has used distortion many times in ironic situations to get his message across in his novel, *Catch 22*. He has used distortion of justice, which is influenced by problematic personal integrity and greed. For instance, in part-5, Yossarian asks Orr if it is possible that he could remain on the land. In fact, anyone who is crazy could stay on the land. Doc replies that Orr can definitely remain on the land; however, first he would have to send a request. Orr is crazy and does not make a request. If he asks to stay on the land, it means he is not crazy; thus, those who want to get out of combat duty are not crazy, nor can they get out.

Example #4: *Shrek* (by William Steig)

Shrek is contradictory to traditional fairy tales, because the author did not use a pretty princess and pompous prince as his leading characters. Rather, he uses an Ogre as a hero, and a less-than-attractive woman as the damsel in distress. This is a completely reverse situation, with the author using

Distortion satire can be seen in a number of reversal of situations.

Fiona beats robin-hood, who tries to save her from the ogre. This shows distorts the situation, showing Fiona to be a damsel in distress, who ends up rescuing herself.

The ogre takes the place of a prince, as he goes on a quest to save the princess with a secret.

Donkey lives with the ogre, taking him as a friend – which is absurd, because ogres are gruesome.

Donkey falls in love with a dragon that is likely to eat him. This is a reversal that is unbelievable for the readers – that donkey and dragon could live together peacefully.

Finally, the distortion satire is complete when Fiona herself turns into an ogre at sundown.

Function

The use of distortion is found mostly in novels, short stories, and advertising. Its basic purpose is to create humor, and lay emphasis on a point, a thing, or a person by distorting reality. Sometimes, distortion may highlight a remarkable action or feature through [comparison](#) and [contrast](#). It also criticizes, makes fun, and gives comic relief to readers. In addition, distortion describes an important feature of the story as being worse or better than it actually is.