

ALLUSION THEORY: MAIN APPROACHES AND CONTROVERSIES

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the approaches presented in the works of three main sources of allusion theory—Ziva Ben-Porat (1976), Carmela Perry (1978), and William Irwin (2001). The aim is to comparatively review the definitions and theoretical models of these three scholars and to establish a methodological framework for the linguopoetic study of allusion.*

Keywords: *allusion, intertextuality, linguopoetics, literary text, semantics, pragmatics.*

Allusion is a phenomenon that is very common in literary texts and everyday speech, but theoretically not clearly defined. It differs from quotation, parody, and plagiarism and has a specific linguistic nature. At the same time, the scientific definition and boundaries of allusion are still controversial in linguistics and literary studies.

This article reviews three of the main and most cited sources of allusion theory: Ziva Ben-Porat's two-text activation model, Carmela Perry's semantic-pragmatic approach, and William Irwin's intention-based definition. All analyses are based only on verified, real-world scientific sources.

1. Ben-Porat: a model of simultaneous activation of two texts. The modern scientific foundation of allusion theory was established by Ziva Ben-Porat in her 1976 article "The Poetics of Literary Allusion" published in *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*. This article is cited in almost all scholarly works on allusion today.²¹

Ben-Porat defines allusion as "a mechanism for activating two texts simultaneously."²² This activation is carried out by means of a special signal—a sign—that a given sign in a given text refers to another independent text.

As a result, unpredictable intertextual patterns emerge between the two texts. The strength of Ben-Porat's model is that it portrays allusion as a mechanistic, four-step process: (1) recognition as a signifier, (2) identification of the source text, (3) activation of the source text, and (4) comprehension of the intertextual relationship. However, Pucci later pointed out a problematic aspect of this definition: the role of the reader is neglected in the definition, and the real power of the allusion arises in the reader's mind, whereas Ben-Porat's formula "buries it under the guise of a linguistic function."²³

²¹ Ben-Porat, Z. (1976). The Poetics of Literary Allusion. *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1, 105–128. Ben-Porat is a professor at Tel Aviv University and is considered the founder of the theory of allusion.

²² Ben-Porat (1976), p. 108: "The literary allusion is a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts."

²³ Pucci, J. M. (1998). *The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 36. Pucci criticizes the absence of the role of the reader in Ben-Porat's definition.

2. Perry: semantic and pragmatic approach.

Carmela Perry published an article in *Poetics* in 1978, "On Alluding."²⁴ She attempted to explore the theoretical status of allusion through semantic and pragmatic approaches, rejecting the traditional definition of "covert reference."

Perry's major contribution was her explicit articulation of the "meaningfulness" of allusion: the simultaneous presentation of related texts can activate new patterns of meaning between the two texts, which in turn alters the significance of the alluding text.²⁵

Perry also notes that allusion and humor are based on a similar psychological mechanism: both are speech phenomena that rely on the pleasure of "rediscovering the known," an observation that shows that allusion is not limited to fiction but also exists in everyday speech.²⁶

3. Irwin: The Problem of Intention and the Reader. William Irwin published an article in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Volume 59, Issue 3, pp. 287–297) in 2001, entitled "What Is an Allusion?" He begins his work by asking: "What is an allusion? The answer seems obvious at first glance: an allusion is an indirect reference. But this definition is not a satisfactory final answer."²⁷

Irwin's main contribution is to emphasize that allusion must be intentional and conscious on the part of the author. He also develops the aesthetic dimension of allusion: allusion creates a playful sense of unity and community between reader and author, and encourages the audience to participate actively, unlike simple direct expression.²⁸

One of the main points of contention with Perry is whether allusion can occur unconsciously.²⁹ While Perry denies this possibility, Irwin partially acknowledges it. This dispute continues today over how much allusion depends on the author's intention.

4. Comparative analysis of three theories. In modern linguistics, theories of allusion have developed mainly within the framework of the "literary semantics model": this model defines allusion as a deliberately implemented form of indirect intertextuality, a "means of connecting texts" (Ben-Porat), a "trope of relation" (Perry).³⁰

The approaches of the three scholars differ as follows: Ben-Porat places the text at the center and sees allusion as a linguistic sign within the text. Perry interprets it as a speech act, adding semantic and pragmatic dimensions. Irwin, on the other hand, emphasizes the author's intention and theoretically deepens the reader's process of recognizing allusion. These three models do not exclude each other, but rather

²⁴ Perry, C. (1978). On Alluding. *Poetics*, 7, 289–307. This article was written as part of a research project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

²⁵ Perry (1978), p. 292. Perry also examines allusion within the framework of speech act theory and draws on the theories of Austin and Searle.

²⁶ Perry (1978), p. 301. Freud's concept of "rediscovery of something known" is taken from *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905).

²⁷ Irwin (2001), p. 287: "What is an allusion? The answer seems obvious at first. An allusion is an indirect reference. While this definition may be a convenient starting point, it is, as we shall see, not a satisfactory final answer."

²⁸ Irwin (2001), p. 291. Irwin later considered the aesthetic function of allusion in a separate article: Irwin, W. (2002). The Aesthetics of Allusion. *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 36(4).

²⁹ Compare Perry (1978), p. 300, and Irwin (2001), p. 291. This issue remains an unsolved problem in allusion theory.

³⁰ Pope, R. (1998). *The English Studies Book*. London: Routledge, pp. 235–236. See also Miner, E. (1993). Allusion. In: *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 38–39.

complement each other: for linguopoetic research, it is appropriate to use them in a complex way.

In conclusion, the theory of allusion is still at the center of scholarly debate. Ben-Porat's two-text activation model, Perry's semantic-pragmatic analysis, and Irwin's intention-based definition—all three approaches together shed light on the phenomenon of allusion from different perspectives.

These three theoretical sources are mandatory reading for a researcher studying the comparative linguopoetics of English and Uzbek. Ben-Porat's textual mechanism, Perry's semantic-pragmatic analysis, and Irwin's authorial intention—all three dimensions together allow for a complete linguopoetic analysis of allusive names.

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