

An **allusion** is when a writer references people, places, events, literary works, myths, or works of art-- either directly or by implication. An allusion can function as either metaphor or metonymy, depending on the degree that an explicit comparison between the multiple texts is developed.

Allan H. Pasco, in *Allusion: A Literary Graft*, writes, "Attention should be focused on what the external work adds to the alluding text... one should recognize that allusion is more than the external term or intertext, indeed more than the sum of the internal and external terms. It is a *relationship* between a minimum of two terms that, through varying degrees of parallels or oppositions, creates a new entity greater than any of its constituent parts" (13-14).

To help understand how this relationship between multiple texts is developed, consider R. F. Thomas' identification of different categories of allusive reference (developed initially in context of the poetic models borrowed by the Roman poet Virgil):

- **Casual Reference:** in which a reference is made, but only in a general way, adding little to the new context
- **Single Reference:** in which the reader is intended to identify the reference and apply it to a new context; the "single" refers to the number of sources for the reference, not a single instance of allusion
- **Self-Reference:** in which the allusion is made to one's own work
- **Corrective Allusion:** in which the text is opposed (on some level) to the intentions of the reference
- **Multiple Reference or Conflation:** in which several sources are simultaneously used to fuse and transform the cultural tradition

According to this framework, Ben Okri's "When the Lights Return" arguably uses the Orpheus myth as *single reference*, *corrective allusion* (in which some details are the same, but used for different purposes, or some details are deliberately altered to update the myth and subvert its original meaning), and *conflation* (in which the Greek myth is fused with Yoruba myth and culture).

DIRECTIONS: 1) Identify the facts and events of the Orpheus myth. 2) Match with the corresponding facts and events in the Okri story. 3) Identify any additions that Okri makes from sources outside the Greek myth (i.e., allusions to Yoruba culture to create a fusion), and 4) Discuss the way that Okri converges or diverges from the purpose of the original Orpheus myth for each fact or event being considered.

You can set this up as a chart, paragraphs, or a list of the evidence with a discussion of its significance. The numbers in the directions are a list of requirements, not a guide to structure.

The categories from the quiz were Orpheus, music, Eurydice, snake, Cerberus, underworld, and Maenads. Some of these are quite specific (e.g., snake), and some are probably too broad (e.g., Orpheus), but the broad ones can be narrowed to make them more manageable (e.g., "Orpheus as musician" or "Orpheus as lover"). If the correspondence does not develop anything important (i.e., if it's essentially a casual reference, like Cerberus in the Okri story), do not include it.

I would strongly suggest looking at my model for this activity, linked from my web-site, since it will give you an idea about how to organize the information (you don't have to use my format, though) and the level of detail that I expect (I would pay more attention to this).

5) Once you are through, summarize with a thematic statement in which discuss how Okri is using the events of the story to argue something about the human experience.

As a reminder, here were some of the big areas we discussed in context of this idea the last time we discussed theme statements (the original reference sheet is also still available for download):

- **Human nature:** What image of humankind emerges from the work? Are people, for example, generally good? Deeply flawed?
- **The nature of society:** Does the author portray a particular society or social scheme as life-enhancing or life-destroying? Are characters we care about in conflict with their society? If so, in what ways do they conflict with that society? Do these characters want to escape from it? What causes and perpetuates this society? If the society is flawed, how?
- **Human freedom:** What control over their lives do the characters have? Do they make choices in complete freedom or are they driven by forces beyond their control? Does Providence or some grand scheme govern history, or is history random and arbitrary?
- **Ethics:** What are the moral conflicts in the work? Are they clear cut or ambiguous? That is, is it clear to us what is right and what exactly is wrong? When moral conflicts are ambiguous in a work, right often opposes right, not wrong. (Don't forget to examine these issues from the perspective of every character.) What rights are in opposition to one another? If right opposes wrong, does right win in the end? To what extent are characters to blame for their actions?

Example Theme Statement (using the original Greek myth):

The original Orpheus myth suggests both the power and limitations of art as a transformative ideal. On the one hand, through art Orpheus is able to exercise near-divine power over his surroundings, but this is contrasted to notable failures of intent when it would seemingly matter most, viz. the attempt to return Eurydice to life or to save himself from the frenzy of the Maenads. For the Greeks, then, the artist would seem to be a semi-divine figure, but ultimately a human one. There is power in art, certainly, but it is not the sort of power that can reliably be used to control or manipulate others. Though art consecrates and transfigures the world, in other words, it is not, in itself, the world's salvation.

Obviously, Okri focuses more on the relationship between the Orpheus and Eurydice figure than on the artistic function of Ede (indeed, there seem to be real limitations on Ede's ability to artistically transform his world), which is why my example focuses on elements of the story you would be unlikely to use for your assignment.

This assignment is due Tuesday (4/2). If you give the assignment to me early enough, I will mark it up with comments and corrections as if it were a timed writing. If you turn in the finished assignment early, there will be a small grade incentive (+3 points). If you miss the midnight deadline but turn in the assignment before eight hours have elapsed, there will be a small point deduction (-3 points). If you turn in the assignment between eight and twenty-four hours late there will be a larger point deduction (-10 points). If you turn in the assignment at any point after that, there will be a substantial point deduction (-20 points). If you turn in the assignment late, but do not want points deducted, you may earn back credit by doing the same assignment with Atwood's "Eurydice."