# Allusion

GREGORY MACHACEK

IN DENISE LEVERTOV'S POEM "O TASTE AND SEE," THE OPENING phrase—"The world is / not with us enough"—recalls the opening phrase of one of William Wordsworth's sonnets: "The world is too much with us" (and seems to reverse or dispute Wordsworth's assertion). To note, evaluate, and interpret this sort of brief phraseological imitation of an earlier writer—whether it is referred to as an *allusion* or an *echo* or an instance of *intertextuality*—has been an aspect of literary scholarship at least since Macrobius cataloged Vergil's borrowings (*furta*) from Homer. However venerable the critical enterprise that studies such imitative phrases may be, though, discussion of the phenomenon is beset by limiting assumptions, conceptual murkiness, and terminological imprecision. Worse, the terms generally used by critics to describe a phraseological adaptation like Levertov's—words like *echo* or *borrowing*—tend to imply unoriginality or slavish imitation, even when the critic means to stress the imitative writer's subtle craft and playful erudition. As a result, scholarly consideration of authors' imitation, adaptation, and recontextualization of earlier authors' phraseology enjoys little prestige in the field of literary study. Nor has the intense theoretical activity of the last thirty years—which has offered new terms, like *intertextuality*, and radical redefinitions of traditional terms, like *influence*—done as much as one might expect to introduce conceptual or terminological rigor into our understanding of phraseological imitation. If anything, recent theorists of intertextuality, opposing their approaches to the traditional study of allusion, have tended to diminish even further the status of such study. In a treatment of the concept of intertextuality, Jonathan Culler suggests that consideration of verbal echoes has essentially been rendered obsolete by the newer concern (109). Harold Bloom claims bluntly that

GREGORY MACHACEK is an associate professor at Marist College. He is completing a manuscript entitled "'Written to Aftertimes': Milton and Homer."



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verbal echoes have "almost nothing to do with . . . [p]oetic influence, in the sense I give to it" and are suited only to "those carrion-eaters of scholarship, the source hunters" (19, 17).

Despite such scorn from poststructuralist critics, for at least the past twenty years scholars of classical and modern literature have been struggling to develop a conceptual model and a critical vocabulary that will allow them more effectively to discuss the nature and workings of these brief phraseological adaptations (usually referred to as allusions or echoes, though such terms, I will show, must be used with care). Most frequently, critics have proceeded by likening allusion to something else. Richard Garner likens allusions to metaphors, seeing the allusive text as tenor and the evoked or source text as vehicle. John Hollander likens them to the rhetorical trope of metalepsis. William Porter compares allusion with the logical syllogism known as enthymeme, Allan Pasco with a horticultural graft. John K. Hale's "Milton Playing with Ovid," citing the game theorist Roger Caillois, likens allusive writing to play. Each of these analogies illuminates an aspect of verbal echo, but the range and diversity of the phenomena to which allusion has been likened suggest that no single comparison can convey all aspects of this subtle and variform literary device.[1]

I aim to provide a more comprehensive conceptual model of allusion, or phraseological adaptation, than has heretofore been offered (in part by synthesizing the work of the aforementioned critics, who, focused on different authors and periods, often seem unaware of one another's efforts). But rather than propose another illustrative metaphor, I intend to consider the nature and workings of allusion in detail. To a large extent, this will involve reconsidering the critical nomenclature for describing manifestations and aspects of the phenomenon. I must initially, and at some length, distinguish phraseological adaptations of a single identifiable precursor from the more diffuse *intertextuality* (for poststructuralists a constitutive element of all textuality); then I will consider the terms *allusion* and *echo* in their own right. Finally, I will propose a means by which the study of allusion and that of intertextuality can be coordinated to foster a more comprehensive understanding of textual interrelations than either alone allows.

## Intertextuality

For many critics, *intertextuality* is synonymous with *allusion*. When Jane Melbourne, for example, studies "biblical intertextuality in *Samson Agonistes*" or when Anne Lake Prescott examines "intertextual topology: English writers and Pantagruel's hell," they use *intertextuality* to designate what would once have been called *allusions to*, or *echoes* or *adaptations of*, an earlier author's work by a later writer. Their use of the term as a rough synonym for *allusiveness* is fairly characteristic of critical parlance.

But for some critics, the word has a meaning that is significantly different from, even antithetical to, the more traditional terms. Julia Kristeva coined the term *intertextuality* to designate a special form of textual interrelation: the way a variety of texts—not just works of literature but also other meaningful social phenomena, such as carnival—emerge from a particular semiotic order ("Bounded" 37–38). For her, the word denotes not so much the relations between particular texts as the semiotic principles and presuppositions that lie, as it were, between texts from a given culture and allow them to have what meaning they do, the "sum of knowledge that makes it possible for texts to have meaning" (Culler 104). Some critics would like to see *intertextuality* retain this special meaning. Jonathan Culler, for example, stresses the difference between truly intertextual explorations of the "order of words" in which a text takes up its meaning, on the one hand, and "source study of a traditional and positivistic kind," on the other (109). Intertextuality, he insists, is "less a name for a work's relation to particular *prior* texts than a

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designation of its participation in the discursive *space* of a culture" (103; emphasis added). Here he follows Roland Barthes's formulation as well as Kristeva's; for Barthes, "every text . . . belongs to the intertextual. . . . The quotations from which a text is constructed are anonymous, irrecoverable, and yet *already read*" (77). Culler acknowledges that in practice intertextuality is "a difficult concept to use because of the vast and undefined discursive space it designates." But, in any case, the concept of intertextuality was expressly "designed to transcend" that of allusion (109). Kristeva herself has called the common use of *intertextuality* as a rough synonym for *allusiveness* a "banal" misappropriation of her term (*Revolution* 60).

Nevertheless, in general critical parlance the term has become a catchall, referring to various sorts of textual interrelation: the relations between authors and their precursors as well as the relations between texts and the reigning semiotic practices of a given historical moment. The original definition of *intertextuality* probably cannot at this point be upheld. Indeed, the "banal" understanding of the term quickly became so widespread that Kristeva coined a new word, *transposition*, to convey what she had originally meant by *intertextuality* (60).

Although it may not be possible, as Culler would wish, to insist that *intertextuality* retain its original sense, it should be acknowledged that the kind of analysis that Kristeva and other poststructuralists undertake does differ significantly from the traditional study of allusions and verbal echoes. The broad distinction is between approaches that study the text diachronically, in connection with earlier works of literature, and those that examine the text synchronically, in connection with a contemporaneous semiotic field made up of literary and nonliterary texts. In the essays in which she introduced the term *intertextuality*, Kristeva indicates that her project involves placing "textual arrangements . . . within the general text (culture) of which they are a part" ("Bounded" 36) and repeatedly stresses that she is as interested in synchronic as she is in anterior utterances (e.g., "Word" 65–66). The synchronic approach to textual interrelations is characteristic of the new historicism and cultural studies that have come to dominate literary scholarship in the past thirty years (although to describe the semiotic practices in effect in a culture at a particular historical moment, critics now more typically use Foucauldian terms such as *discourse* or *discursive formation* than either of Kristeva's terms). Louis Montrose, for example, characterizes new historicism along precisely these lines, as a project that "reorients the axis of intertextuality, substituting for the diachronic text of an autonomous literary history the synchronic text of a cultural system" (17).

The term *intertextuality* (as the quotation from Montrose, which uses it in the broader sense, indicates) probably by this point cannot be limited to its original sense. The widespread misapplication of the term testifies to the need felt by critics of diachronic textual interrelations for a more adequate vocabulary. First, critics in some cases need a term that describes a quality disseminated throughout a text. The terms *allusion* and *verbal echo* name a brief, local phenomenon. But some authors (e.g., Milton, Pope, Gray, Eliot, and Pound) write poems so densely allusive that one wants a term to capture the frequency— the ubiquity, even—of verbal echoes in their works. *Allusiveness* is awkward; *intertextuality* seems to convey precisely this saturation of one text by phrases from the entire literary tradition. A second reason for the misappropriation of *intertextuality* may be that many of the terms traditionally used in the analysis of interpoetic relations suggest an inequality between the two texts in question. Such terms as *source*, *borrowing*, and *echo* imply that the allusive text is of lesser stature than the text being evoked through allusion. The terminology can give the impression that the earlier text possesses an admirable creative plenitude, while

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the later text is secondary not just in time but in value—derivative, unoriginal. *Intertextuality*, by contrast, suggests a relation between equals and may on that basis be preferred over traditional terms by critics who wish to stress that the later author's creativity in adapting an echoed phrase to a new context is no less remarkable than the creativity manifested by the earlier author in composing the line.

Since even Kristeva has abandoned the term, my first terminological proposal is to use *intertextuality* in the broadest way, to refer to all possible forms of textual interrelation, diachronic or synchronic, and, where needed for clarity, to specify which sort of intertextuality one has in mind. In Levertov's "O Taste and See," the opening lines (and the title) will evoke, for readers who share Levertov's literary tradition, specific anterior texts: the Bible and Wordsworth's sonnet. And to analyze those connections, under a term like *allusion*, would be a matter of diachronic intertextuality, explored more fully in the next section. But for a brief example of the sort of synchronic intertextuality promoted by Kristeva, Barthes, and Culler, consider just the word "world" in the opening line of Levertov's poem. As the poem will go on to define that word, the "world" is "all that lives / to the imagination's tongue" and includes such heterogeneous phenomena as "grief, mercy, language, / tangerine, weather" (53). This definition of *world* helps explain a curious feature of Levertov's poem—namely, that, despite her apparent disagreement with Wordsworth at the outset, she urges roughly the same thing that he does in his sonnet: a less distanced, more passionate relation between people and their environment. The seeming disagreement arises from the fact that *world* means something different in each poet's historical moment. In Wordsworth's day, *world*, as clear from its equation with "getting and spending," evidently had as its primary meaning something like "the business world," a meaning that by 1964 perhaps only survived in the adjectival form *worldly*; in Levertov's day, by contrast, *world* primarily meant all of phenomenal existence.[2] Note that this kind of analysis does not consider Levertov's deliberate reworking of her Wordsworthian source. Instead, it attempts to characterize the discursive presuppositions of Levertov's day, matters as "banal" (as Culler terms them) as the meaning of *world* (110); in this analysis Wordsworth's poem simply serves to illuminate, by contrast, the meaning the word had in the mid-twentieth century.

The two forms of intertexuality, diachronic and synchronic, while distinct, can be coordinated. In a moment I will return to Levertov's poem, to consider her allusion to Wordsworth in connection with the synchronic analysis offered above, but first it is necessary to consider that form of diachronic intertextuality known as allusion more fully in its own right.

## Allusion, Echo

Diachronic intertextuality can take a number of forms: parody; cento; the strategies by which a work establishes itself in a particular genre or tradition; works, such as Christopher Marlowe's "Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," that answer an earlier literary work. The type of diachronic intertextuality under consideration in this essay—a textual snippet reminiscent of a phrase in an earlier author's writing but smoothly incorporated into the new context of the imitating author's work—is distinguishable primarily by being brief, discrete, and local and evoking a single text that the culture of the alluding writer associates with an identifiable earlier author. While such phraseological adaptations may contribute to the total meaning or effect of the literary work in which they appear, their impact (especially in larger works) is often local because of their brevity. They subtly reinforce or qualify the phrase or other limited context in which they are manifested. When, at the end of the second section of *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot recalls Ophelia's "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good

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night, good night," the effect of the allusion is local, juxtaposing Ophelia's mad speech with the routine farewells of the patrons leaving the pub in that portion of Eliot's poem. A particular reader might assign the echo a meaning that ramifies and bears on the entirety of Eliot's poem, but the allusion has its primary impact in its immediate context.

The two names generally used for these recontextualized phraseological imitations are, as I have mentioned, *allusion* and *verbal echo*. Neither term is entirely felicitous, as I shall show. The semantic range of *allusion* is too broad, while that of *verbal echo* is too narrow.

Critics use *allusion* to name two phenomena that, while similar in some respects, are ultimately distinct. If a poet mentions a little-known fact or makes a roundabout reference to a well-known fact, we speak of this as an allusion. But we also use *allusion* for a poet's incorporation into a poem of a short phrase reminiscent of a phrase in an earlier work of literature. In the opening of *Paradise Lost*, the phrase "That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed" is the first kind of allusion, a roundabout way of referring to the person of Moses; the phrase that follows, "In the beginning," is the second kind of allusion: incorporation of words from the opening of Genesis into Milton's poem (8–9).

These two types of allusion, learned or indirect reference and phraseological appropriation, differ significantly from each other, as I shall show more fully in a moment. But the two tend to be conflated under a single term for a number of reasons. One is that there is a species of allusion that combines aspects of both phenomena: indirect reference to an author or literary work. Milton's reference to Maeonides can be called an allusion (in the sense of a learned reference) to Homer (3.35). Similarly, the proem to book 9 of *Paradise Lost* speaks of "Neptun's ire . . . / that so long perplex'd the *Greek*," a roundabout way of saying "the *Odyssey*" (18–19). We might call that too an allusion to Homer. But we use the term very differently when we say that "from Morn / to Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve" alludes to Homer's description of Odysseus's slumber: "I slept nightlong, and into the dawn, and on to the noonday" (*PL* 1.742–43; *Od.* 7.288). The first two are simply circumlocutions, while in the second case Milton's very language is crafted on a Homeric model.[3]

Another similarity between the two kinds of allusion—learned or indirect reference and phraseological adaptation—is that both may require scholarly annotation, and this points to more general similarities. Both are instances of what might be called advanced literacy. Moreover, the literacy that is necessary for the recognition of learned references and phraseological adaptations is part of a larger precondition: the reader must share a tradition with the author. (In fact, one of the effects of allusion may be to divide an audience into those who have a cultural kinship with the author and those who do not.) In the case of a learned reference, this shared tradition is a body of knowledge with which poet and reader are acquainted. In the case of phraseological adaptation, the nature of this shared tradition is a little more complex. Author and reader must have been exposed to the same text, which therefore must be highly valued by the author's and the reader's cultures—valued, moreover, in a way that encourages minute attention to verbal detail and remembering of such detail.

But despite these similarities, to incorporate a snippet of someone else's language into the flow of one's own is a matter significantly different from simply referring in a learned or roundabout way. We can begin to suggest the difference with a practical question: what happens when a reader does not recognize each kind of allusion? Readers who do not know the information to which a learned reference alludes are generally aware of their ignorance ("I've never heard of Maeonides"; "I don't know who 'that first Shepherd' is") and can often remedy it by consulting a reference source.[4] By contrast with a learned allusion, phra-

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seological adaptation is generally integrated unobtrusively into the alluding text, so that uninformed readers will generally not be aware that they are missing anything; they will simply take the phrase as the later author's own. Levertov's assertion "the world is / not with us enough" would make a basic kind of sense even to a reader unacquainted with Wordsworth.

The fact that a phraseological appropriation can be covert, then, the fact that its derivation can go unnoticed, distinguishes it from learned or indirect reference, where readers tend to be aware that they are missing something if the referent is unknown; and this practical difference points to a more essential difference between the two phenomena conflated under the term *allusion*. All language is referential, so learned or indirect references, though perhaps more obscure than other words in a poem, are not essentially different from them. While phraseological adaptations also often have a referential aspect, more immediately striking is their qualitative, almost ontological, difference from other language in a poem. An integrated verbal repetition treats preexisting phraseology almost as a sort of physical raw material that can be cut, reworked, and incorporated into a new setting—like scraps of paper glued to a collage or fragments of stone set into a mosaic.[5] Pasco's use of the term *graft* highlights the physicality of this phenomenon. A phraseological appropriation calls attention not only to the expressive capacity but even to the material nature of language. Part of the power of Eliot's line "I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" resides in the strain between two enunciations of "to be": the more vigorous emphasis provided by the rising intonation of Hamlet's question "to be or not to be" versus the deflated, prosaic intonation the phrase receives as part of Prufrock's quotidian declarative phrase "meant to be" (line 111).

This distinction between adaptation and reference has further implications. Because of the material nature of recontextualized phraseological adaptations, because the incorporated fragment has been discernibly excised from its original situation, words *omitted* from the adopted phrase can come to be seen as significant, in a way for which there is no equivalent with learned references. Consider the previous example. Eliot's line contains both a reference (admittedly not especially learned or indirect) to the character of Hamlet and an echo of the phrase "to be or not to be." The reference to Hamlet may bring to mind any number of associations with that character that might bear on "Prufrock" (the protagonist's indecisiveness, his self-recriminations, his relations to women, etc.). But the echo works somewhat differently. For Eliot to echo only one half of Hamlet's famous question calls attention to the omitted half, "or not to be"; perhaps Eliot thereby suggests that among the ways in which Prufrock is not like Prince Hamlet is his inability to contemplate a meaningful or heroic suicide. Whatever meaning we may assign to the omission, we realize that no similar interpretation can be made of the reference, for there is no way in which the reference can emphasize a deliberately excluded dimension of Hamlet's character. When Milton asks, "Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?" he, like Eliot, uses the capacity of echoes to signify by virtue of an omitted portion of a phrase (*PL* 1.33). His line echoes one from the *Iliad* in which Homer asks who set Achilles and Agamemnon at odds with each other: "Who among the gods set them in bitter contention?" (1.8). In his recasting of the line, Milton's omission of the Homeric phrase "among the gods" is perhaps intended to signal the recent loss of heavenly status in the figure to whom his question refers. Phraseological adaptations, then, can more pointedly signify by omission than can references.[6]

So the two phenomena generally conflated under the term *allusion* differ from each other in a number of important respects. True, there is a playfulness in each: indirect references are like a riddle or trivia question ("by what name is Maeonides more commonly known?"); phraseological adaptations are like

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a sophisticated version of peekaboo or *fort-da*, in which a treasured object, having disappeared from view, delightfully reemerges. This playfulness perhaps makes *allusion*, with its root of *ludo*, an appropriate term for the broad category. But it is also useful to keep in mind the differences between the two species of allusion and to have a set of terms for distinguishing them, when necessary.

*Echo* might seem an appropriate term to specify the type of allusion that I have been calling phraseological adaptation. The word is already in common usage and, like Pasco's *graft*, has the advantage of calling attention to the material quality of this kind of recontextualized verbal snippet. It must be used with care, though, because if *allusion* is too broad to designate phraseological adaptations, *echo* can be too narrow, especially if it suggests that the prior text can be evoked only through a verbatim repetition of its phraseology. In some cases, an author will exactly duplicate an earlier author's phrase. In "To the Shade of Burns," Charlotte Smith speaks of the poet as one whom Great Nature taught to "build the lofty rhyme," an exact echo of a phrase from Milton's "Lycidas" (line 11). However, the alluding author usually alters the adopted phrase—and not just its significance (which is almost inevitably modified as it is adapted to its new context) but generally even its phraseology. Much of the humor in A. E. Housman's "Malt does more than Milton can / To justify God's ways to man" results from the deflation of the grandiloquent "ways of God" to the colloquial "God's ways" as Housman shrinks Milton's pentameter to his own tetrameter. Verbatim imitations, true echoes, are in fact more rare than adaptations that involve slight phraseological alterations.[7]

The slight imprecision of *echo* may seem a point that is hardly worth quibbling over. In critical parlance, after all, *echo* is obviously understood to indicate phrases that recall an earlier phrase, whether they do so through a verbatim repetition or through more general resemblance. However, insofar as *echo* implies exact duplication, it is one of those terms that tend to suggest that allusive texts are derivative and their authors unimaginative and thus to diminish the accomplishment of allusive authors and the prestige of allusion study. For if the broader definition of the term is not kept in mind, then statements such as "Keats echoes Spenser" may give the impression not of playful and creative adaptation of a precursor's language but of mechanical or slavish reiteration.

My second terminological proposal, then, concerns *allusion* and *echo*. These two words are so widely used to designate cases where a snippet of an earlier author's work is excised, refashioned, and recontextualized in the writing of a later author that it hardly seems worthwhile to propose an alternative term, particularly something cumbersome like *phraseological appropriation* or *adaptation*. Nevertheless, I do urge that *allusion* and *echo* be used with a greater mindfulness of their inadequacy and that a term like *phraseological adaptation* be available for cases when a more precise description of the phenomenon is desirable.

## Spur, Reprise

Further consideration of *echo* may point to another terminological deficiency that plagues the study of allusions. The phenomenon is bipartite: phrase X in the work of an author recalls phrase Y in the writing of an earlier author. It would be useful to have distinguishing terms for the two phrases (and a third term for the entire dyad). If the later phrase is called an echo, how are we to refer to the earlier one? What is the name for the initial sounding that generates an echo? *Call*? *Cry*? Those do not seem particularly felicitous. Nor is *source* entirely appropriate, since it generally names the full work in which the imitated phrase appears (an objection that applies to *subtext* and Gérard Genette's *hypotexte* as well). The absence of a simple term that might be paired with *echo* is a significant limitation in the technical vocabulary available for analyzing the phenomenon.

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In critical parlance, *allusion* commonly (but confusingly) serves to designate both the imitative phrase and the entire double unit of imitative and imitated phrases. Consider, for example, John K. Hale's treatment of how the Miltonic phrase "If thou beest he; But *o* how fall'n! how chang'd" (*PL* 1.84) recalls Vergil's "quantum mutates ab illo" ("how changed from him"). Hale says that "many readers have found here an allusion to the shock with which Virgil's Aeneas meets the ghost of his kinsman Hector" ("Tradition" 26). Hale's "here" presumably means "in this phrase from *Paradise Lost*," so allusion must refer to Milton's phrase specifically; this sense is underscored when Hale begins a question "even if it does allude," where "it" must be understood as the Miltonic phrase. A moment later, however, when Hale says, "[I]n short, the allusion enables Milton to implant several pertinent things at once in the responsive reader," "allusion" must refer to the Miltonic phrase *in combination with* the Vergilian phrase (and those elements of the Vergilian context that enrich the meaning of the Miltonic phrase). In context, Hale's meaning is clear enough. But it cannot be conducive to clarity, particularly in general discussion of the phenomenon, to have one word name both the whole entity and one of its parts.

The situation is almost exactly analogous to the one that prompted I. A. Richards to coin *tenor* and *vehicle* in order to separate elements of a metaphor: "one of the oddest of the many odd things about the whole topic," Richards observed, "is that we have no agreed distinguishing terms for [the] two halves of a metaphor—in spite of the immense convenience, almost the necessity of such terms if we are to make any analyses without confusion." Richards noted that *metaphor* was "sometimes used for the whole double unit" and "sometimes for one of its two components [the one he calls the vehicle] in separation from the other" (96). In just this way, *allusion* is sometimes used for the whole double unit of imitative and imitated phrases, and sometimes just for one of its components: the imitative phrase.

The terms that critics have proposed to designate the imitative phrase have not been especially felicitous. Ziva Ben-Porat speaks of a "sign containing a *marker*" that brings about the "simultaneous activation of two texts" (107; emphasis added). Carmela Perri follows her in this usage (291). Garner speaks of a *trigger* (6). These terms do highlight how the imitative phrase calls to mind the phrase on which it is modeled and thereby invites a hermeneutic process of comparing the allusive text with the evoked text. But terms such as *trigger* and *activation*—besides suggesting, wrongly, that imitative phrases inevitably call to mind the phrases on which they are based—also give a rather reductive and mechanistic impression of how a reminiscence operates (only slightly softened by Robert Alter's use of *signal* in place of *marker* or *trigger*). Moreover, by suggesting that the imitative phrase is purely functional, directing us to the prior text in a search for details there that might enrich the meaning of the allusive text, *trigger* is yet one more term that subtly suggests the derivative, secondary status of the later author relative to the (original, plentiful) precursor and keeps us from attending to the artfulness of the adaptation. And, finally, Ben-Porat's terminology still leaves us with no term to designate the phrase in its initial incarnation.

This seems to me a situation, analogous to the one in which Richards found himself, that may warrant the introduction of new terminology. I propose that when it would be useful to distinguish the phrase that recalls from the phrase that is recalled, we speak of the echo as a *reprise* and the initial version as a *spur*. The initial phrase is a spur in the sense that, like a rock spur, it stuck out to the alluding author and in the sense that it provided an impetus for his or her allusive reappropriation.[8] And a reprise is a taking up again, which is what the later author does with the earlier phrase. This pair of terms is intended to stress the creativity of the adapting author no less than the one whose phraseology is adapted. If anything, I hope that the

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pair slightly privileges the agency of the later author and that it might thus gently counteract the tendency of terms like *echo*, *borrowing,* or *influence* to suggest a secondary, lesser, or derivative status for the imitating author.

Using the proposed terminology, then, we would say that Levertov's "O Taste and See" opens with an allusion—of the two kinds, a phraseological adaptation—to Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us." More precisely, her opening lines, "The world is / not with us enough," have as their spur the Wordsworthian phrase "The world is too much with us." Her reprise noticeably (starkly, defiantly) differs from its spur, negating Wordsworth's assertion by changing his "too much" to "not . . . enough." But her reprise makes another, more subtle change to the spur, a change that we are now (having seen the almost material nature of phraseological appropriation) in a better position to appreciate. Levertov's reprise breaks the spur across two lines of her poem. Doing so means that the phrase "The world is" hovers by itself in our consciousness for a moment, as though Levertov means to do more than simply assert something about the world but is going to define it. And that is what the poem in some measure goes on to do, as we will see more fully in a moment when I coordinate these insights into the poem's diachronic intertextuality with our earlier observations regarding its synchronic intertextuality.

One final clarification about phraseological adaptations is in order, though, before we turn to the variety of uses to which such allusions can be put and how the analysis of allusion and intertextuality can be coordinated. In studies of long works, a further conceptual and terminological difficulty arises. The signifying impact of an allusion is, as I have mentioned, often local. As Ben-Porat schematizes it (though I use the terminology I have been proposing), when knowledgeable readers encounter a reprise, it sends them back (in memory at least) to the evoked text (112). The readers consider whether elements of the evoked text enrich or qualify the meaning of the allusive text. For shorter texts like Levertov's poem, this is indeed the basic process. But in allusions to lengthy texts, a single reprise might activate not so much the entirety of the evoked text as the immediate context of the spur. When Alexander Pope has one of Belinda's sylphs accidentally get caught in the baron's scissors and speaks of how "[a]iry substance soon unites again" (*Rape* 3.152), we might perhaps say that Pope alludes to *Paradise Lost*; but, more precisely, he is recalling the moment in book 6 of Milton's epic when Michael wounds Satan. In such cases, I propose using *passage* or *immediate context* in a quasi-technical way to refer to the text immediately surrounding the spur or the reprise. In this case, then, we would say that Pope's reprise "Airy substance soon unites again" recalls the spur "th'Ethereal substance clos'd / Not long divisible" (*PL* 6.300–31) and sends readers back to the immediate context of the phrase in Milton's war in heaven, which recounts Michael's wounding of Satan, inviting them to consider whether elements of that passage enrich or qualify the immediate context of the reprise in *The Rape of the Lock*. Together, the numerous allusions to *Paradise Lost* in Pope's poem evoke the whole of Milton's epic—as a way of emphasizing how trivial the conflict between Belinda and the baron is. But individual reprises may recall smaller portions of *Paradise Lost* for more specific local purposes.

## Functions and Effects of Allusion

Most studies of allusion are resolutely hermeneutic. One critic describes allusions that do not contribute to a text's meaning as "inherently uninteresting" (Porter 30); most others simply assume that the hermeneutic dimension of allusion is the only one worth studying. The assumption that allusions are supposed to mean something is evident in Edwin Stein's term "non-allusive echo," for phraseological adaptations that do not meaningfully activate

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their source texts (3). And William Porter has built a taxonomy of "literary associations"—from appropriation through reminiscence, echo, and borrowing to critical allusion—based on how much the echoed passage enriches the meaning of the echoing one, but he labels all types other than critical allusion "lesser forms of literary intertextuality" (17–35).

But enriching or qualifying local significance is not the only effect that allusions can have or the only purpose they can serve. Allusions can help to establish a work's genre. Through an allusion, an author can signal an affiliation—literary, political, or personal. Allusions serve to imply a work's audience. The "fit audience" that Milton wants Urania to find for his epic is clearly one with a broad knowledge of the Western intellectual and literary tradition. By contrast, the obscurity of some of the allusions in Eliot's *Waste Land* demands scholarly annotation—which Eliot, in part, provides—and the allusions thereby signal that the modern age has lamentably lost a common literary culture and tradition. Allusions may allow covert communication among a cognoscenti. They establish a special kind of rapport between author and reader. Certain aspects of how they function—that they exercise the memory, for instance—may even in particular cases be important. Milton, for example, associates the Fall with a lapse in memory. In *Paradise Lost* he has Raphael warn Adam to "*remember* [the example of Satan] and fear to transgress"; and the narrator's assessment, after the Fall, of Adam and Eve's actions is that they "ought to have still *remember'd* / The high injunction not to eat that fruit" (6.912, 10.12–13, emphases added). Given the importance that Milton attaches to memory, perhaps the allusive density of *Paradise Lost* is not merely an accident of his vast learning; perhaps the allusions are designed to offer the reader the opportunity to exercise a mental faculty that Milton regarded as essential to moral decision making.

In addition to the terminological clarifications I have offered, then, the study of allusion could benefit from a richer sense of the possible effects allusion can have or uses to which it can be put.

## Synchronic and Diachronic Intertextuality

But perhaps the study of allusion could benefit most by being more fully coordinated with the approaches to synchronic intertextuality that have characterized poststructuralist literary criticism. Although it is understandable that early poststructuralist critics felt a need, in setting out their theoretical premises, to distinguish their approaches from traditional forms of literary study, the diachronic intertextuality of allusion is not, as critics like Culler and Montrose have suggested, antithetical to synchronic considerations of a text in its historical moment. Indeed, I will argue that, just as the study of allusion stands to benefit from the insights of poststructuralism and new historicism, those forms of criticism can in turn be enriched by a more sophisticated consideration of allusion—of, in particular, the cultural circumstances in which readers notice and interpret allusions. Allusions to earlier authors are no less cultural a phenomenon than the relations between literary texts and sumptuary laws, accounts of the colonial enterprise, medical treatises, and the whole host of other contemporaneous texts in connection with which we have been reading literary works for the past twenty or so years.

Whether readers notice an allusion and how they interpret it once they do—these are culturally determined matters. I hope to illustrate the impact that a reader's historical moment has on the interpretation the reader assigns an allusion by examining the interpretations of one of Milton's verbal echoes of Homer made by various editors over the past three centuries.

In Raphael's account, in book 5 of *Paradise Lost*, of the Father's begetting of the Son and his appointing him the head of all the angels, we are told that, after the celebration that ensues, "ambrosial Night with Clouds exhal'd / From

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that high mount of God" (5.642–43). By calling night "ambrosial," Milton adapts a phrase from Homer, who in the second book of the *Iliad* speaks of "ambrosiēn . . . nukta" (2.57). (The words in the Homeric spur are the etymological roots of the words in the Miltonic reprise, so the allusion is a translinguistic echo.)

To suggest the impact of a reader's historical moment on that reader's interpretation of an allusion, I will examine how this echo has been glossed by editors in successive generations. In 1695 Milton's earliest editor, Patrick Hume, notes the Homeric spur and then glosses the phrase as follows: "Divine Night, from the pleasant refreshment and necessary support Sleep affords us. *Ambrosia* is used of the *Poetick* Food by which the Gods maintained their *Immortality*, thence us'd for sweet, delicious and invigorating" (188). Half a century later, in his 1749 edition, Thomas Newton also focuses on the alimentary meaning, but he omits Hume's reference to the way in which ambrosia sustains the immortality of divinities: "So Homer calls the night ambrosial . . . and sleep for the same reason ambrosial, because it refreshes and strengthens as much as food, as much as ambrosia" (362). Henry John Todd's variorum editions, beginning in 1801 and reprinted throughout the nineteenth century, simply reprint Newton's note. Merritt Y. Hughes, in 1957, does not gloss the line. Alastair Fowler's edition of 1968 glosses "ambrosial" as "fragrant"; he notes the Homeric source and then sends readers to an earlier gloss, of book 2, line 245 (298). That note glosses "ambrosial" in a way that gives priority to the olfactory meaning, pointing out first that "ambrosial" means "fragrant and perfumed" and mentioning that it can also mean "immortal," because "ambrosia was the fabled food, or drink, of the gods," but then going on to reiterate the olfactory meaning by noting that ambrosia "was, however, also identified by the herbalist with certain specific plants; see, e.g. Gerard, *Herball* (1597) p. 950: 'The fragrant smell that this kind of Ambrosia or Oke of Cappadocia [sometimes "Oak of Jerusalem"] yeeldeth, hath mooved the Poets to suppose that this herbe was the meate and foode for the gods'" (101). Roy Flannagan, in 1998, omits any reference to Homer and focuses entirely on the olfactory significance: "The night is fragrant, since it is perfumed with clouds exhaled from the Mount of God" (496).

Each editor brings personal insights and preferences to the task of annotation. But these editors' glosses of "ambrosial night" also at least partly reflect cultural presuppositions at work in their historical moments—in particular, presuppositions related to the way Homer was constructed in each century. For if allusions to Homer (and other authors) are not properly placed on a diachronic axis of intertextuality but are, as I am claiming, as cultural a matter as the contemporaneous texts in connection with which we now read literary works, that is because, as theorists of canon formation have insisted, canonical authors do not persist unchanged through time but are reproduced by each generation of readers and critics (B. Smith 27–35; Guillory 237).

For Hume, as for many in the seventeenth century, heathen poets like Homer see the truths revealed to Christians as "through a glass, darkly." In fact, these poets derive their descriptions of supernatural phenomena from the Hebraic scriptures:

> That the Mosaical Philosophy is the most ancient, is not only very certain, but [it is also certain] that all the Heathen Poets, and their greatest philosophers too, borrowed their Description of the Chaos, and what they delivered of the first Formation of Matter from the Creation as delineated by Moses, whose writings many of them saw, though they did not understand them. (3)

Despite their incomplete comprehension of Moses, Homer and other ancient poets are regarded by Hume and his age as usefully supplementing the account of supernatural

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phenomena provided in the scriptures. So, for example, in glossing "the void profound of unessential Night," Hume notes that "Night was by the Ancients esteemed a goddess, or rather the Mother of all the Gods, as being before the creation of any thing, Darkness approaching nearest to, and being the best resemblance of, Non-entity" (*PL* 2.439; Hume 67). Hume's gloss on "ambrosial night" similarly seems to credit Homer with suggesting an angelological fact not directly revealed in scripture: that the angels sustain their immortality in part through the refreshment that heavenly night provides, which they take in almost like a kind of food.

When we turn to Newton, we see him backing away from attributing any supernatural significance to "ambrosial night." Night "refreshes and strengthens as much as food," he says, adding (because it is the part of the line that needs the gloss, but seemingly as an afterthought) "as much as ambrosia." Newton's gloss is in keeping with the more rationalistic ethos of the eighteenth century and with the increasingly rationalistic construction of Homer during that period. As Howard Clarke remarks in *Homer's Readers*, Pope is a transitional figure: "the last of Homer's commentators to make full use of the allegorical tradition," he was, nevertheless, "plainly uncomfortable" with its "fine-spun interpretations" (97). Even before his translations of Homer's epics, as early as the *Essay on Criticism* Pope was casting Homer less as a source for knowledge about the supernatural than as the poet who had best expressed the laws of the natural world. When "t'examine ev'ry part [Vergil] came, / *Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the *same*" (lines 134–35).

As we move into the twentieth century, Homer tends to be constructed less as an author whose lines provide valuable information about the supernatural world (as they did for Hume) or the natural world (as they did for Newton) and more as a generic exemplar. Flannagan's introduction to *Paradise Lost* in the *Riverside Milton*, for example, begins with a section entitled "A Short History of the Epic Genre." Flannagan claims, "For Milton, the word [*epic*] would have meant the noblest works of Homer, Vergil, Dante, Boiardo, Tasso, Spenser . . . writing in their most expansive genre" (297). Conversely, the word *Homer* would, in Flannagan's presentation, have meant primarily a genre: "In western European literature, the epic genre begins with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*" (298). Given the late-twentieth-century construction of Homer primarily as a generic exemplar (and our reading of him primarily in translation, which is a related issue), it is not entirely surprising that Fowler de-emphasizes the Homeric derivation in favor of "fragrant"; that Flannagan chooses not to mention the Homeric source phrase; and that Hughes does not gloss this passage at all. After all, Homer's calling night "ambrosial" plays no role in the construction of the poem as an epic (especially given that "ambrosial night" is not a repeated phrase, like "rosy-fingered dawn," and thus not a striking part of the oral-formulaic composition of Homer's primary epic). "[A]mbrosial night" is just an intriguing phrase that appears in the *Iliad*, and since Homer does not exist for us primarily as a source of information about the natural or supernatural world, the Homeric spur for "ambrosial night" is not worthy of notice in our historical moment.

I want to make clear that I am not seeking to correct an oversight by Hughes, Fowler, or Flannagan or to impugn their classical scholarship. In my argument, the omission cannot be otherwise. Given the way in which our culture constructs Homer, his status as the source for Milton's phrase "ambrosial night" is largely inconsequential. Whether and how one interprets an allusion, in other words, is a function of one's historical moment. Allusions to earlier authors are not some diachronic phenomenon rendered obsolete by synchronic cultural study; they are no less cultural than any other textual phenomenon.

The field of allusion studies needs the insight—call it a new-historical insight—that

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allusion is culturally mediated. Emerging out of a formalist or structuralist tradition, most recent treatments of allusion have attempted to liken verbal echo to other literary or rhetorical features such as metaphor or enthymeme and to treat the recognition and interpretation of an allusion as occurring almost automatically in reading. As I have shown, Perri and Ben-Porat speak mechanistically of a "marker" and Garner of a "trigger," some feature of the alluding text that sends readers (automatically, it would seem) back to the source text—although (as our teaching of undergraduates regularly reveals) if the reader does not share a literary tradition with the alluding author, no form of marker will serve to evoke the source text (Perri 295; Ben-Porat 109; Garner 6). Participating in the metaphysics of presence that Derrida has done so much to deconstruct, formalist scholarship is, as Culler calls it, positivistic enough to find a scandal in a textual feature that only some readers will perceive and that cannot conclusively be argued to be "there" in the poem. But a criticism allowing for the culturally constructed nature of phenomena that on the surface appear simply to exist finds no scandal here. Scholars who study allusions would do well to acknowledge how the recognition and interpretation of a verbal echo are culturally mediated and do not automatically occur in a transhistorically stable and predictable fashion.

The fact that allusion is culturally mediated also means, however, that the rejection of allusion by cultural studies has been unnecessary. Indeed, poststructuralism and new historicism only stand to benefit by readmitting the study of allusion. The opposition that Montrose implies when he contrasts "the diachronic text of an autonomous literary history" with "the synchronic text of a cultural system" is a false dichotomy. It is false because there is no such thing as a "diachronic text of an autonomous literary history." Milton alludes not to Homer but to mid-seventeenth-century Homer; and Hume is attuned to late-seventeenth-century Homer, Newton to mid-eighteenth-century Homer, and so on. But Montrose's implied dichotomy is also false because "cultural systems" cannot be fully understood synchronically. Part of what cultures do is select from among the works that were valued in the past, assign contemporary significance to those works, and pass them on to the next generation. (Indeed, one might argue that this diachronic activity better deserves the name *culture* than the hypostasized society-at-a-given-historical-moment that has been the focus of recent "cultural" analysis.)

Critics of new historicism, and new-historicist critics themselves, have often remarked the irony that their commitment to synchronic study of historical moments means that they cannot easily construct histories in the most fundamental sense of that term: diachronic narratives of past events. The theory has not known how to account for the movement between one snapshot synchronic moment and the next. I propose that the sector of a culture that allows an author to allude and a reader to recognize and interpret an allusion might provide a pivot for Montrose's axes of intertextuality, a point on which to move between synchronic and diachronic analyses of culture. To focus on the complex of agents and practices, explicit standards and implicit assumptions, by which a particular society assigns value and meaning to cultural artifacts—the complex in which allusions find their conditions of possibility and significance—might helpfully provide cultural studies with the means to discuss the process of enculturation and new historicism the means to write histories.

Consider again Levertov's "O Taste and See." Our diachronic analysis of her adaptation of Wordsworth's phrase has revealed how the poem temporarily gives the impression that it will offer a definition of the world: "The world is. . . ." Our synchronic analysis of the poem's historical moment has revealed that Levertov and her contemporary readers, as

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a result of their cultural presuppositions, regarded *world* as meaning something like "all of phenomenal existence." Together, these two insights explain the curious fact that the poem seems aggressively to dispute Wordsworth and yet urges much the same kind of stance as his poem does: a more passionate involvement in one's environment. Levertov and Wordsworth do in fact disagree, as this twofold analysis makes more clear, over what that environment should be called and what it should include. Wordsworth's alternative to the world of getting and spending is "nature": "Little we see in nature that is ours." Levertov does not want to limit the aspects of the world with which we should be passionately involved to moonlit nights and roaring seas but wants them to include subway rides (perhaps to arrive at our place of getting) and "crossing the street" (perhaps to spend our earnings on a new pair of shoes). More comprehensive than Wordsworth's nature, Levertov's "world" includes it but does not exclude his world of getting and spending. This struggle with Wordsworth, partly deliberate but partly a function of the deep assumptions that characterize the ideology of a particular moment, accounts for much of the power of Levertov's short lyric.

Allusion, especially the species of allusion that I have referred to as phraseological adaptation, is a literary device involving subtle artistry and playful erudition; the impact of allusions on the meaning of a literary work can be significant and far-reaching. The study of allusion, however, has been hampered by limiting assumptions and an imprecise technical vocabulary, as well as by the claims made on behalf of other forms of intertextuality, claims that have diminished the prestige of such study in literary criticism. Allusion is a more artful and resonant literary device than our critical vocabulary has allowed us to appreciate. Moreover, given that allusion lies at the nexus of important strains of contemporary literary criticism and theory, our neglect or disparagement of the phenomenon suggests that the device has perhaps been not with us enough.

## Notes

1. Ricks, in his *Allusion to the Poets*, invents a new metaphor to describe the workings of almost every allusion he examines.

2. In *The Oxford English Dictionary*, compare 2, "the pursuits and interests of this present life, esp. in religious use, the least worthy of these temporal or mundane affairs," with 7a, "the earth and all created things upon it."

3. Discussing allusion in *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age*, Alter distinguishes between verbal echo and learned or roundabout reference but then, to my mind, confuses the issue again by naming echo "literary allusion," an inadequately distinguishing term, since, as I have shown, roundabout references can be made to literary works.

4. Dictionaries of allusion, incidentally, themselves point up the difference between the two phenomena conflated under the name *allusion*, for they are always dictionaries of learned references; a dictionary of phraseological adaptation could not exist because it would have to reproduce the entire literary canon. Not even a source like John Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* can serve as a reference work for verbal echoes, since poets do not always allude to the famous, pithy statements that make up such compilations.

5. Consider Teskey's treatment of poetic allusion in *Delirious Milton* 116–28.

6. Dobranski reads one of Herrick's allusions by attending to what was omitted from it (176).

7. This is especially true when one considers phraseological adaptations of texts originally written in a language different from that of the alluding text, where part of what is involved in the appropriation is translation.

8. Here I do not mean to invoke Derrida's use of the term in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. However, at the end of that essay, Derrida nicely illustrates the precondition for allusion when he discusses the sentence "I have forgotten my umbrella," found among Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts. Speculating on what its meaning might have been, Derrida exemplifies the cultural work by which phrases come to be associated with particular authors, owned by them, and therefore available for appropriation and adaptation by other authors (123–35).

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