

# Chapter One

## Where do All the Allusions Come from

### I. What is an Allusion?

#### 1. Definition of Allusion

The word “allusion” originates from Latin “allusionem”, meaning “a playing with, a reference to”.

According to *Oxford Dictionary of Reference and Allusion*, “when we make an allusion we mention the name of a real person, historical event, or literary character, not simply as a straightforward reference (as in ‘Hercules was an ancient Greek hero’), but in order to conjure up some extra meaning, embodying some quality or characteristic for which the word has come to stand.” (Delahunty and Dignen, 2010:x)

M. H. Abrams defined allusion as “a brief reference, explicit or indirect, to a person, place or event, or to another literary work or passage”. (Abrams, 1971)

According to Manser, “an allusion is a reference that evokes a certain set of aspects or features of a person or thing. For example, a kind and selfless person may be referred to as a *Good Samaritan*; a musical genius may be hailed as a *Mozart*; a political, administrative, or financial scandal may be referred to by name with the suffix *-gate*, after *Watergate*; a large-scale nuclear accident may be referred to as another *Chernobyl*; a fatal weakness may be referred to as a person’s *Achilles’ heel*; something that rises anew in the face of defeat may be compared to a *phoenix rising from the ashes*; and 9/11 has become synonymous with terrorist atrocity.” (Manser, 2003)

“Allusion” is roughly equivalent to the Chinese expression “典故” (dian gu), whose original meaning, according to *Ci Hai*, is “典故和掌故”, meaning “literary quotations and classical allusions”. It also refers to the person responsible for the observance and arrangement of rituals. Dian Gu in Chinese later acquires its second meaning: a reference to a story, place, character, or a sentence in literary or classic works.

#### 2. Key Elements of Allusions

- form of the allusion ( 典面 *dian mian*)
- origin of the allusion ( 典源 *dian yuan*)
- meaning of the allusion ( 典义 *dian yi*)
- use of the allusion for a specific purpose in a particular context ( 用典 *yong dian*)

#### Example 1

**Allusion:** Cleopatra’s nose

**Meaning:** an apparently insignificant thing that is actually of extreme importance and major consequences