



# **INTERTEXTUALITY**

Two significant religious allusions in 'The Chosen Vessel' by Barbara Baynton (1896)



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# What is an allusion?

- An allusion (as in 'alluding to something') is a language feature that enables us to draw comparison between texts (intertextuality).
- It is when there is overt or an implied reference to another story, person or event, ones that are very widely known (for an implied reference, see Harry Potter on slide 9)
- Basically, when an allusion is made in a text, we are meant to link the allusion with the text and identify what similarities they share.
- Allusions can be culturally determined. For example, a novelist in Spain would use allusions that are familiar to their *Spanish* readership which might not translate for someone reading in Australia.

# Types of allusions

## Myths, legends and folklore, such as:

Achilles – Icarus – Thor's hammer – Hercules – Yowies (Australia) - Prometheus – Robin Hood – King Arthur - Pandora's Box – the Banshee – Cupid – the Dreamtime

## Biblical, such as:

Great Flood – the crucifixion – Eden – David and Goliath – Good Samaritan – Judas – the Prodigal Son – Solomon's wisdom – The Fall of Man (snake, apple) – Daniel in the Lion's Den – Noah's ark – Jesus walking on water

## Literary, such as:

The Wizard of Oz – Harry Potter – Romeo & Juliet – Hamlet – Jekyll and Hyde – Snow White - Cinderella – Casanova – Frankenstein – To Kill A Mockingbird – Lord of the Rings  
Alice in Wonderland

## Historical, such as:

Witch hunts – Hitler – Holocaust – Titanic – Rasputin – Mother Teresa – French Revolution - The Black Death (plague) – slavery and its abolition – Einstein – WWII atomic bomb

# RESEARCH TIME – JIGSAW ACTIVITY

*Group work:*

1. Get into groups of four – these are your HOME GROUPS.
2. Each member of the group is allocated a number 1-4. If there are 5 people in the group because of an uneven number in the class, two people will be a number i.e. 2 x number 4s.
3. Gather into your SPECIALIST GROUPS for the research segment. This involves all the 1s sitting together, all the 2s, all the 3s, all the 4s.
4. For this activity, the 1s will research Myths/legends/folklore; 2s will research Biblical; 3s will research Literary; and 4s will research Historical.
5. Within your specialist groups, divide the labour and research what each of the listed stories, events or people is about. Record your research on the handout provided. *The aim is to summarise the story down to the most important events into no more than four sentences.*
6. Return to your HOME GROUPS. Take turns sharing the information you came up with in your SPECIALIST GROUPS until everyone has information in all of the fields.

<https://youtu.be/euhtXUgBEts> Jigsaw activity how-to from Cult of Pedagogy

# Working out the importance of allusions

Find out what the original story/person/event was all about and list some key characteristics and traits

What similarities are there between the original text and the one you're analysing?

Why has the creator drawn our attention to this story/person/event through allusion?

How does all of this affect your response to, and interpretation of, the text?

The background features a light grey base with several overlapping organic shapes: a large dark brown shape on the left, a large olive green shape on the top right, and a light grey shape on the bottom right. A white silhouette of a fern frond is visible in the top left corner. A white wavy line runs across the bottom right area.

# Examples of analysing allusions

# Example #1 – ‘Chocolate is my Achilles Heel’

In the legend of Achilles, his mother dips him into the River Styx which makes him completely invulnerable to injury in battle – except the heel by which he held onto him. It is his ‘weak spot’.

Later in his life, he is killed when, according to many versions of the legend, an arrow hits him in this exact spot.

So in the sentence ‘Chocolate is my Achilles heel’, by drawing comparison between their fondness for chocolate and the legend of Achilles, the speaker is linking their love for chocolate to a weak spot. Just as Achilles was felled by an arrow in his weak spot, so too is the speaker felled by chocolate which IS their weak spot.



## Example #2 - 'Jane's lawsuit against McDonald's was a real David and Goliath fight'

David was just an ordinary young boy and Goliath was considered a giant, standing at 6 feet 9 / 2.06 metres by today's measurements.

Goliath was part of Philistine army that was threatening the Israelites. He was so big and powerful that no one dared to fight him. Long story short, David fought Goliath using a sling and stones, and he won. The little guy won against the big, powerful, seemingly impossible-to-conquer big guy.

So when the sentence compares Jane and McDonald's law suit to David and Goliath, it is an allusion that is emphasising a battle against big and small...one in which the small wins.

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# Example #3 - Harry Potter as a modern-day Christ figure / Messianic archetype

According to the Bible, Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice to save humanity from the consequences of sin and evil. He was crucified but resurrected to become the deified centre of Christianity. Christians are in a constant battle with Satan and his evil with the aim of achieving eternal life.

Harry Potter's life follows a similar narrative arc. Born of humble beginnings albeit with powers, he is killed in the fight against evil. He is resurrected, however, and continues the fight until Voldemort is vanquished once and for all and evil overcome.

This narrative arc compares Harry Potter to Christ. He is a saviour figure (Messianic archetype) just as so many characters have been before and after him: Gandalf in *Lord of the Rings*, King Arthur of legend, Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, John Coffey in *The Green Mile*, Walt Kowalski in *Gran Torino*.

# Religious allusions used in 'The Chosen Vessel' by Barbara Baynton

1. The Chosen Vessel
2. The Madonna and Child



# THE CHOSEN VESSEL ALLUSION

This allusion has two possibilities.

The first is that Mary is considered to be, and often referred to by ministers and the like as, the 'chosen vessel' for the Christ-child, a label based on this verse in the Bible: 'you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus' (Luke 1:30-33). She is the vessel in which God sends his son Jesus, the saviour of humanity, to earth. She is never actually *called* the chosen vessel; this is more of a 'label' given to her by believers.

This, linking to the many references to the Madonna and Child image in the story (see later) AND the young mother with a baby could be perceived as an allusion to the sacred role of women: that of bringing life into the world. In contrast, from a feminist perspective, it is men that destroy life (Christ's crucifixion, the young mother's murder in the short story).



# The chosen vessel allusion cont'd



The second possible interpretation of this allusion relates to Christ naming Paul as a 'chosen vessel'. This occurs after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

In Acts 9:15, Jesus says of Paul, 'He is a chosen vessel of mine', connotative of him being special, precious and prized. This, despite the fact that Paul (who was once Saul) was one of the key persecutors of the early church. So even though he was 'the foremost of sinners', as he described himself, Jesus could use him for great good.

A reference to this in the short story comes at the end when Peter Hennessey, so sure that a vision of the Blessed Virgin and Child has appeared to him, prays on his knees, 'And hast Thou chosen me?' Peter is elevating himself to the status of St Paul.

**Controversial:** A resistant interpretation of the word 'vessel' as it is used throughout the Bible to refer to someone who God *uses* for his own purpose, is to suggest that dehumanization, objectification and exploitation are a part of the Christian god, not necessarily love, salvation, and good things.

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

When you have finished studying the short story 'The Chosen Vessel', come back to this slide and answer this question:

Based on your study of the short story, what interpretation of the 'chosen vessel' allusion seems to be the most relevant? Justify your answer.

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# THE MADONNA AND CHILD

In simple terms, the Madonna and Child is an image replicated in artwork that shows Mary, the mother of the baby Jesus, holding him in her arms.

As Christ is the centre of Christianity, which spread from the Roman province of Judea out into the world throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> century, aspects of his life were often alluded to in the arts – in this instance, the Madonna and Child is a reference to the immaculate conception and Mary as a virgin mother.

With this in mind, the image has come to symbolize not just motherly love but traits associated with Mary: purity, virtue, and innocence.





# The Madonna & Child religious allusion: IMAGES THROUGH THE AGES



# Medieval Madonna & Child

The Medieval period went from 1066 to 1485 A.D.

This examples was painted by Italian painter Giotto in 1315. It can be seen today in the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

**This painting is actually a bit hilarious...look at how grown up the Baby Jesus is!**



# Renaissance Madonna & Child

The Renaissance ('rebirth') – one of the most important historical periods of human history on account of the enormous leaps in knowledge and discovery that were achieved – overlapped the Medieval period a bit and dates from about 1429 to about 1800. There were lots of little 'stages' within this whole historical period, as one stage caused the next.

A good resource:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/renaissance-timeline-4158077>

**Painted by Raphael in 1505. It can be seen in the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.**



# Victorian Madonna & Child

Queen Victoria herself liked this painting very much. Her husband, Prince Albert, purchased the painting in 1845.

**Painted by Scottish painter William Dyce in 1845. It is currently a part of the Royal Collection and is at Osborne House.**



# Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Madonna & Child

Madonna and Child images were still popular during the late 1800s and into the early 1900s.

**Painted by Adolphe Bouguereau,  
'Virgin of the Lilies', 1899**



# Modern Madonna & Child

How have you noticed the portrayal of Mary and baby Jesus changing over time in terms of their appearance as well as a sense of the closeness between them?  
Does this last image redress gaps and silences in previous paintings?

**Painted by Patricia Brintle in 2008,  
'Madonna and Child, Hope for the World'**



# Madonna and child allusion quotes in 'The Chosen Vessel'

'She prayed as she gently raised herself with the little one in her arms, held tightly to her breast.'  
(Section 1)

'...he knew the white figure not for flesh and blood but for the Virgin and Child of his mother's prayers.'  
(Section 3)

'[His mother]...was on her knees before the little altar...that enshrined the statue of the Blessed Virgin and Child.'  
(Section 3)

'...once more the face of the Madonna and Child looked down on him, but this time silently, peacefully.'  
(Section 3)

'...her eyes seemed to beam with the forgiveness of an earthly mother for he erring but beloved child.'  
(Section 3)

# Significance of the Madonna and Child references

The notion of prayer is a key part of Christian belief and a *motif* within this story – but it is fruitless, worthless prayer. The wife prays for deliverance and safety as the swagman circles her home and then at the moment of her capture and murder; Hennessey's mother prays that the Madonna will save her son and stop him from going against the priest; and at the end, Hennessey himself prays in adoration as he believes himself to be the 'chosen vessel' (more on this later.)

What we come to understand is that all this prayer and supplication is futile. The wife is not saved. Peter Hennessey is very much not saved, as his actions indirectly lead to the murder of an innocent wife and mother. His religious ecstasy is short lived, we imagine, once he hears the news about who the white figure was; not a vision of the Blessed Virgin with her child, but a defenseless woman in need of help. HIS help. He could have been the saviour figure in this story.

# Significance of the Madonna and Child references cont'd

The inanimate Virgin and Child statue, the false meaning of the painting in the priest's study through Hennessey's rapturous eyes, and the pointless pleading to God by the young mother all suggest that there is no miraculous answer to the dangers of the bush for women, who are vulnerable in their isolation and loneliness. Nothing can save them. It is a situation that is brought about by men (husbands bringing wives out to isolated farms) and both exploited and abused by them.

**In this story, the Madonna and Child is not about maternal love and protection. It is about empty religious promises and beliefs that keep, in this instance, vulnerable, innocent young women and children in danger with no power to help them. This challenges a key belief within the Christian ideology that was dominant within this historical and cultural context. In the world of the young wife, there is no divine help. In this story, the Madonna and Child as sacred Christian iconography is nothing more than another empty religious symbol.**



# Question to apply to 'The Chosen Vessel' by Barbara Baynton

How does an understanding of religious allusions influence your interpretation of the short story? Justify your answer with evidence from the text and your research.