# EPIGRAPH AS AN INTERTEXTUAL DEVICE IN LITERARY TEXTS

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***Annotation***
*This article examines the intertextual features of the epigraph in literary texts. The research demonstrates that epigraphs serve as important intertextual units that guide readers’ interpretation, deepen the ideological meaning of literary works, and connect texts with broader cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts.*
***Keywords:*** *epigraph, intertextuality, literary text, intertextual relations, dialogism.*

In modern linguistics and literary studies, literary text is regarded as a complex communicative structure composed of interconnected linguistic units. A literary work is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it exists in constant interaction with other texts, traditions, and cultural discourses. This interaction is commonly explained through the concept of intertextuality. According to intertextual theory, every text reflects traces of previous texts and establishes semantic relations with them through various linguistic and stylistic devices.

One of the most significant intertextual devices in literary discourse is the epigraph. As a textual element placed before a literary work or one of its sections, the epigraph performs not only a decorative function but also a semantic and interpretative one. It introduces the thematic orientation of the work, guides the reader’s perception, and establishes a dialogue between the main text and another cultural or literary source. Thus, the epigraph functions as a “foreign word” embedded within the author’s discourse.

Although the epigraph has been studied extensively in literary criticism and linguistics, its intertextual characteristics have not been sufficiently explored. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the epigraph as an intertextual unit and to reveal its semantic and linguopoetic functions in literary texts. The study also compares the use of epigraphs in Uzbek and English literature in order to identify their common and distinctive features.

The term “epigraph” originates from the Greek word meaning “inscription”. Traditionally, it referred to inscriptions written on monuments or tombstones. In literature, an epigraph is a quotation, proverb, verse, or phrase placed at the beginning of a literary work or one of its chapters to reveal the thematic and ideological orientation of the text[5, B. 153]. Researchers define the epigraph as an important interpretative key that prepares readers for understanding the literary work. According to literary dictionaries, the epigraph introduces the central idea of the text, creates a specific emotional atmosphere, and establishes semantic relations between the literary work and another source. Since the epigraph usually consists of a quotation borrowed from another text, it possesses a strong intertextual nature. The dialogic aspect of the epigraph

is especially important. As M.M. Bakhtin argues, the presence of a “foreign word” within a text creates dialogism[1, B. 365]. In this sense, the epigraph enters into dialogue with the main text: it may confirm, expand, reinterpret, or even ironically contradict the meaning of the literary work. Therefore, the epigraph functions not only as a stylistic ornament but also as a semantic and ideological component of the text.

Intertextuality refers to the relationship between texts through references, quotations, allusions, and other textual connections. The epigraph represents one of the clearest forms of intertextuality because it directly introduces another text into the literary structure. O.A.Pudova emphasizes that epigraphs play a significant role in decoding literary texts. Since epigraphs often refer to precedent texts known within a cultural tradition, they help readers interpret the author’s intention and understand the ideological direction of the work[4, B. 158]. Similarly, I.G.Timakova views the epigraph as a microelement of the text that contributes to the formation of the macrotext and stimulates readers’ cognitive activity[2, B. 12]. The epigraph also possesses metatextual functions. It comments on the literary work from outside the main narrative and shapes readers’ expectations before they enter the text itself. Consequently, epigraphs create a bridge between the literary work and external cultural, philosophical, historical, or religious contexts.

The epigraph performs several important functions in literary discourse:

1. **Ideological function** – revealing the central idea of the literary work;
2. **Guiding function** – directing readers toward a particular interpretation;
3. **Symbolic function** – creating symbolic associations and deeper meanings;
4. **Aesthetic function** – enhancing the artistic expressiveness of the text;
5. **Dialogic function** – establishing communication between different texts;
6. **Pragmatic function** – influencing readers’ emotional and intellectual perception.

Researchers note that epigraphs often serve as condensed representations of the entire literary work. N.Tosheva describes the epigraph as a symbolic concentration of the text’s ideological center. In many cases, the epigraph becomes a “key” that unlocks the deeper semantic layers of the literary work[3, B. 113].

Epigraphs in Uzbek literature frequently derive from folk wisdom, classical poetry, religious sources, and philosophical sayings. They often reflect national identity, spiritual values, and historical memory.

“*Agar haqiqat mening yuzimga oyoq bosib o‘tishni taqozo etsayu sen buni qilmasang, aslo rozi emasman.” (Bahouddin Naqshband)*
*“Pillapoya bo‘ldim senga, azizim, Sen ham gal kelganda pillapoya bo‘l!” (E.Vohidov)*

A vivid example appears in Ulugbek Hamdam’s story “Pillapoya”. The story contains two epigraphs: one by Bahauddin Naqshband and another from Erkin Vohidov’s poetry. The first epigraph emphasizes sacrifice in the pursuit of truth, while the second highlights mutual human support and spiritual growth. Together, these epigraphs guide readers toward the philosophical interpretation of the story and symbolize the moral journey of the protagonist.

Another important example is Abdulla Qahhor’s story “Dahshat”, whose epigraph states: *“Xotin-qizlarning burun zamonda ko‘rgan kunini bilmaysizlar, qizlarim, aytgan*

*bilan ishonmaysizlar!..”* (To‘raxon oyi). This epigraph immediately prepares readers for the tragic social atmosphere of the narrative and foregrounds the theme of women’s suffering in traditional society. The epigraph thus performs ideological, emotional, and interpretative functions simultaneously.

Halima Khudoyberdiyeva’s poem “Uyg‘on so‘zin aytgach” also demonstrates the intertextual role of epigraphs. The epigraph, borrowed from Mehmed Emin Yurdaqul – *“Chirimoqda Sibirda ulug‘ turk shoirlari”* – refers to the tragic fate of Turkish intellectuals exiled to Siberia. Through this reference, the poem gains a broader historical and cultural dimension connected with collective memory and national awakening.

In English literature, epigraphs frequently originate from the Bible, classical literature, historical documents, and philosophical texts. These references enrich literary works with broader cultural and intellectual associations.

T.S.Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men” provides a notable example. The epigraph “Mistah Kurtz – he dead” refers to Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness”, while “A penny for the Old Guy” alludes to the English historical tradition associated with Guy Fawkes Day. These epigraphs establish a dialogue between Eliot’s poem and historical-cultural contexts related to spiritual emptiness, moral collapse, and modern alienation. They also deepen the symbolic meaning of the title “The Hollow Men”.

Ray Bradbury’s novel “Fahrenheit 451” begins with the epigraph: *“If they give you ruled paper, write the other way.”* Borrowed from Juan Ramón Jiménez, this epigraph symbolizes intellectual freedom and resistance against conformity. It anticipates the novel’s central conflict between free thought and ideological control within a totalitarian society.

Another significant example is Edith Wharton’s “The House of Mirth”, whose epigraph is taken from the Biblical Book of Ecclesiastes: *“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”* The epigraph creates an ironic contrast with the glamorous but morally empty society depicted in the novel and prepares readers for its philosophical and ethical critique.

In conclusion, the epigraph represents an important intertextual device that connects literary texts with external cultural, historical, philosophical, and religious sources. By introducing a “foreign text” into the literary structure, the epigraph expands the semantic field of the work and guides readers toward a deeper interpretation of its meaning. The comparative analysis of Uzbek and English literary examples demonstrates that epigraphs in both traditions perform similar functions, including ideological orientation, symbolic representation, dialogic interaction, and reader guidance. However, the sources of epigraphs differ according to cultural traditions. Uzbek literature primarily relies on folk wisdom, religious sayings, and national philosophical thought, whereas English literature often employs Biblical, classical, and historical references. Therefore, the epigraph functions as a universal intertextual unit that enriches literary discourse, strengthens the author’s artistic intention, and establishes meaningful dialogue between texts, cultures, and readers. Prepared based on the uploaded source material.

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