

A Hermeneutical Reading of *Paradise Lost*

Rebellion and Obedience

by

Paul Kuei-chi Tseng

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Preface

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has generated an extraordinary body of scholarship over the past three centuries. Few literary works have invited such a diversity of critical responses, ranging from theological and historical inquiry to philosophical, linguistic, political, psychoanalytic, feminist, and postmodern interpretation. Each generation has discovered in Milton's epic new questions worthy of exploration.

The present volume joins this ongoing scholarly conversation from the perspective of philosophical and biblical hermeneutics. It is neither intended to replace existing approaches nor to diminish the value of other critical traditions. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate that hermeneutics provides a coherent methodological framework within which the literary, theological, and philosophical dimensions of *Paradise Lost* may be considered together. My central is to investigate how meaning itself is constituted, unfolded, and renewed through the act of interpretation.

The title, *In the Beginning Is the Word*, reflects the fundamental conviction upon which this study rests. The Johannine declaration that "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1) is understood here not merely as a theological affirmation but also as an epistemological and hermeneutical principle. If the Logos constitutes the ground of creation, revelation, and understanding, then interpretation itself necessarily unfolds within the horizon of the Word. Literature, theology, and philosophy therefore participate in humanity's continuing search for meaning through language. Milton's epic, deeply rooted in the biblical narrative and the Christian intellectual

tradition, offers an especially fertile field in which this relationship may be explored.

The argument developed throughout this volume emerges from a dialogue between classical hermeneutics and the theological imagination of Milton. The philosophical contributions of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and E. D. Hirsch provide essential points of departure, yet the purpose of this study is not simply to summarize their theories. Rather, their insights are brought into conversation with the biblical text itself and with Milton's poetic representation of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Such a dialogue, I hope, illustrates that hermeneutics is not merely a technical methodology but an ongoing process through which texts continue to disclose meaning across historical distance.

Among the methodological assumptions guiding this study, particular emphasis is placed upon Heidegger's notion of *fore-structure* and Gadamer's conception of the *hermeneutic circle*. I argue that the opening invocation of *Paradise Lost* establishes the interpretive horizon governing the poem as a whole. The first twenty-six lines function not simply as a conventional epic prologue but as the semantic and theological centre from which the subsequent books derive their coherence. The movement between part and whole, so fundamental to hermeneutical inquiry, becomes especially evident in Milton's carefully constructed narrative architecture. Every episode, image, and theological reflection both presupposes and enriches the horizon established at the outset.

At the same time, this study attempts to move beyond purely structural analysis. Interpretation cannot remain confined to recovering an original historical meaning alone. Following Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance, while remaining

attentive to Gadamer's account of historically effected consciousness, I suggest that literary works possess an enduring capacity to speak beyond the circumstances of their composition. Such significance, however, is not achieved through arbitrary subjectivism. Rather, it emerges through disciplined dialogue between the historical integrity of the text and the historically situated understanding of the reader. Hermeneutics thus becomes neither the imposition of contemporary concerns upon the past nor the antiquarian reconstruction of an inaccessible historical world, but an encounter in which both text and reader participate in a genuine fusion of horizons.

The biblical distinction between *Logos* and *Rhema* offers an additional perspective through which this dynamic may be understood. Throughout this volume, *Logos* is regarded as representing the enduring structure of revealed truth, while *Rhema* signifies the living appropriation of that truth within particular historical circumstances. This distinction provides an interpretive bridge between textual permanence and contemporary application. It also helps explain why *Paradise Los* continues to address questions of freedom, obedience, temptation, authority, love, and redemption that remain central to human existence.

The chapters that follow therefore proceed by reading Milton's epic within a series of interrelated biblical horizons. Genesis provides the foundational narrative of creation, innocence, the Fall, and the promise of redemption. Isaiah expands that horizon through prophetic anticipation of divine restoration. Pauline theology illuminates the relationship between grace, obedience, and the new creation. Rather than treating these biblical materials as isolated sources or literary influences, this study regards them as constitutive elements of the theological world within which Milton's imagination operates.

This book also reflects a broader conviction concerning the nature of literary criticism itself. Modern critical discourse has often been characterised by methodological plurality and, at times, by competing theoretical paradigms that appear mutually incompatible. While such diversity has undoubtedly enriched Milton studies, it has also raised important questions regarding the grounds upon which interpretation may claim validity. Hermeneutics does not eliminate these tensions, nor does it promise definitive interpretive certainty. It does, however, encourage intellectual humility by reminding interpreters that every act of understanding arises from historically conditioned perspectives. The interpreter inevitably approaches a text with inherited assumptions, linguistic traditions, cultural experiences, and theological commitments. Recognition of these limitations is not a weakness of interpretation but one of its essential conditions.

I am deeply indebted to the many scholars whose writings have shaped my own thinking. Although this volume frequently engages with major figures in twentieth-century hermeneutics, it has equally benefited from generations of Milton criticism, biblical scholarship, and philosophical inquiry. Every academic work stands within a tradition larger than itself, and this study is no exception. Whatever originality it may possess arises from participating in, rather than departing from, that continuing intellectual inheritance.

My gratitude also extends to colleagues, students, editors, and friends whose conversations, questions, and encouragement have accompanied the long development of this manuscript. I would like to pay my special thanks to Prof. Heinz-Uwe Haus for his persistent encouragement and guide. And I am also greatly indebted to Romanian theologian Prof. Cosmin for his friendship and collaboration. Besides, I am supposed to show my sincere gratitude to Sarah Palmer publisher of Ethics International, for she generously

extends me a golden opportunity of publishing my academic research abroad. Above all, I thank God for everything.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the enduring significance of the biblical text itself. Whatever one's theological commitments, few would deny the profound influence of Scripture upon the intellectual, literary, and cultural history of the Western tradition. Milton understood this with exceptional clarity. His ambition was not merely to compose an epic worthy of classical antiquity but to interpret the history of humanity within the larger drama of creation, fall, and redemption. To read *Paradise Lost* attentively is therefore to enter a conversation that extends beyond literature into philosophy, theology, history, and the perennial search for truth.

If this volume succeeds in encouraging readers to reconsider Milton's masterpiece through the discipline of hermeneutics, it will have achieved its purpose. It is offered, not as a final word, but as an invitation to continue the conversation that great books inevitably inspire—a conversation that begins with language, is sustained through interpretation, and continually returns us to the enduring value of the Word.

Paul Kuei-chi Tseng

July 2026, in New Taipei City, Taiwan

Introduction

Abstract

This introduction establishes the methodological foundation for a hermeneutical reading of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, framing the book as an attempt to interpret "the Word" in order to uncover both the meaning and the significance of Milton's epic. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's concept of fore-structure in *Being and Time*, the study argues that the first twenty-six lines of Book One function as the fore-structure controlling the semantic development of all twelve books, and that Hans-Georg Gadamer's "hermeneutic circle" offers the corrective by which the individual parts of the poem can refine and validate this initial pre-understanding. Building on E.D. Hirsch's distinction between meaning and implication, the introduction further proposes that the dual nature of the Word—Logos as fixed textual meaning and Rema as living, contemporary utterance—allows the epic to be read both a historically fixed document and as a text that can fused with the reader's present horizon. To ground this hermeneutic circle theologically, the chapter surveys the first three chapters of Genesis as a biblical microcosm of *Paradise Lost*, tracing the themes of creation, the naming of creatures, the innocence of Edenic love and sexuality, the Fall, and the promise of salvation, and links these to the Book of Isaiah's prophecies of judgment and redemption. In sum, the introduction lays out the interpretative apparatus—fore-structure, hermeneutic circle, and fusion of horizons—that will be applied throughout the book to the themes of creation, marriage, sex, sin, and salvation in Milton's epic.

Key words: *Paradise Lost*, hermeneutics, fore-structure, hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons, Logos and Rema, Genesis, Milton

I. In the beginning is the Word

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Gospel of John, 1: 1) In the beginning, the Word was hovering upon the waters, creating all beings including humans. In the East, He created a paradise, opening the first chapter of the human race. The rise and fall of our human ancestors, Adam and Eve, initiated and inspired Milton's writing of *Paradise Lost*, an eternally memorable epic of Western literature. This work is designed to methodologically research a way of interpreting the Word in order to dialectically apply an illuminating method for uncovering the significance or meaning in Milton's work. At first, I will adopt the conception of fore-structure delineated in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* to pinpoint the conscious meaning¹, whose fabric controls the semantic development of all books of the epic. Concerning this point, I will associate the idea of fore-structure with Gadamer's "hermeneutic circle," a theological way of interpreting the Word and literary texts. It is to be noted that Heidegger's fore-structure is very similar to the idea of pre-understanding or presupposition in hermeneutics, whereby "self" and "I" combine to create a personal horizon of reading or interpreting the texts, resulting, to some extent, in prejudice and a vicious circle of misreading. However, this is paradoxically a necessary evil in constructing a fore-structure. The redeeming method is to use a well-applied hermeneutical circle in which the individual parts of the text can remedy the limitations of the pre-understanding or the personal horizon of the reader. In addition to an explication of the meaning of the text, I will go further to uncover the significance, or, in E. D. Hirsch words, the implications of the epic. Indeed, the central theme of the work lies in the fore-

¹There is a unifying power and united structure in *Paradise Lost*. The central facts of God's redemption and man's fall construct the central meaning or significance of the long epic. And some critics, like Tillyard, divides the central meaning to so-called conscious meaning and unconscious meaning.

structure and can be revealed and evidenced by a hermeneutic circle. However, just as the Word consists of two aspects, that is, Logos and Rema, a dialogue between the author and the reader can be so didactic that it can uncover the fixed and absolute meaning of the text, and on the other hand, the dialogue can also be now-and-here and be fused into the contemporary world. Since Rema is actually the living logos, which has been experienced in today's world of the reader, a contemporary reading of the text can be associated with the reader's personal horizon as well as his or her social milieu. To illustrate this, I will put forth themes such as creation, marriage, sex, sin and salvation to renew or refresh one's reading of Milton's work. Meaning and implication will be fully explicated in this book.

The epic poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton was written during a time of religious revolution in England. John Milton did not want his epic to be just a traditional one, a story of a nation or a people. Instead, he would make the entire story about the human race, thereby making his epic more pointedly important to all mankind, not just to England. Milton loads the first twenty-six lines with references to classical literature and biblical passages. Also in those lines he presents his proclaimed subject, identifies a muse, declares that his epic will surpass those epics written before, and states his goal in writing the poem. Milton, in addition to that, manages to personalize his poem by references to his blindness and political happenings in England in his day. Only a great poet could fit so gracefully all this pertinent information into the first twenty-six lines of a twelve-book poem. All these qualities ensure that his epic will truly exceed all the rest.

II. Fore-structure

A. Heidegger's concept of fore-structure

Accordingly, Heidegger's concept of fore-structure will be applied to discuss the themes as well as the general meaning of *Paradise Lost*, which is well epitomized in the first twenty six lines of the epic. Heidegger raises this notion with the belief that interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something given in advance. Therefore, it is almost impossible to understand anything without prejudice and presupposition. Historicity and temporality, for example, will affect the formation of the pre(fore)-structure of understanding. And since historicity and temporality are deeply related to personally lived experience, understanding has something to do with human existence. Accordingly, Heidegger explains the meaning of understanding as follows:

In every case this interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance—in a fore-having (fore-structure). As the appropriation of understanding, the interpretation operates in Being towards a totality of involvements which is already understood—a Being which stands (Heidegger 191).

Understanding is thus prior to every act of existing. But since the pre-understanding of the text is to some extent prejudicial, the validity of the pre-understanding needs to be based in the "hermeneutic circle." For the validity of the presupposition (fore-structure) is expected to correspond to the interpretation of the individual parts.

Fundamentally speaking, the subject matter of this epic poem, in the words of Milton, is "of man's first disobedience" (line 1). In his blank verse, Milton refers to the story in Genesis where Eve tempts Adam to eat the "forbidden fruit." In the first five lines of the poem he describes

the beginning of mortality, suffering, and man's restoration, as "the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe, with the loss of Eden, till one greater Man restored us, and regained the blissful seat" (lines 1-5). "Death" is human mortality, and "all our woe" is man's suffering (line 3). When he says "till one greater Man restored us," Milton is referring to Christ, and how He came to regain man's seat in heaven. In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, man, Adam, lived immortally in paradise with his wife, Eve. Milton's goal in writing *Paradise Lost* was to "justify God's ways to men" (line 26). He hoped to explain God's mysterious plan for mankind. In short, when applying the conception of fore-structure to interpret the epic, we cannot neglect the whole picture provided by the first twenty-six lines, which prompts a pre-understanding to connect and direct the description of the individual parts of the epic.

B. Unfolding of the reader's horizon

In addition, interpreting the epic, from the perspective of hermeneutics, entails a dialogue between the author's horizon and the reader's horizon. The pre-understanding, that is, the fore-structure of the reader, within the perspective of Christian theology, might be primarily based upon the first three chapters of Genesis. And on the role of salvation, which emerges as the keynote of Book XI and Book XII, a basic understanding of the theme of the Book of Isaiah is helpful, because this book forms a horizon for the reader to see how an inter-textual relation exists between the epic and the Scripture. Actually, only when grounded on a mutual understanding of Genesis and Isaiah, can a fusion of horizons be reached.

The first three chapters of Genesis can be deemed a microcosm of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The epic seems to seek their elaboration and amplification. A brief review of those parts of these three chapters

closely related to the text will be presented as below. In this way, not only its intertextuality but the fusion of horizons can be shown. Furthermore, the essence of the literary and artistic value of the epic may be appreciated based on the axis of the Word, as will be discussed.

i. Chapter 1 of Genesis

First, in Chapter One, we can see how Jehovah created the world through the uniquely powerful voicing of Logos. Everything is created from His utterance and the hovering of the intrinsic nature of the Word, namely, the Spirit. And it should be pointed out that there is a coordinate conjunction between 1: 1 and 1: 2, which signifies that God's creation may indeed be the re-making of the fallen world destroyed after being judged by the Supreme Being due to the rebellion of Satan and his followers, one third of the heavenly angels. The suspended hiatus between 1:1 and 1: 2 could be an unfolding stage on which a war had been waged between good and evil, between the anointed Christ and the fallen archangel. Thus, it will take time and effort for Milton to elaborate on the suspended time space. In other words, the rich imagination of Milton has been flying between the extremely limited recorded biblical history and his poetic narration of the spiritual war. Besides uncovering the between-the-lines hidden meaning, we can see that man is created "in the Triune God's image and after the Triune God's likeness" (Genesis 1: 26). It follows that man is like God both in his outer appearance and in his intrinsic nature. In Hebrew, image refers to intrinsic nature, while likeness is associated with the outer appearance. As the chief figure in the re-made heaven and earth, man bears the responsibility of having dominion over, namely, managing the world. And God also promised that man would be so blessed that his descendants would be multiplied all over the world.

ii. Chapter 2 of Genesis

Next, in Chapter Two, are unfolded the construction of Eden, the creation of good and evil, the creation of Eve, the naming of all creatures, and the innocence of the first couple's sexual relations and love.

First of all, "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2: 8). In Eden, the Lord God grew two trees—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—which are both symbolic of two sources of the universe: God's eternal divine life and the Satanic force. This design put before man an existential choice or dilemma: either to obey God's command to keep himself, in the eyes of the Creator, morally pure or to choose to know good and evil, enlightening himself and seeking to go beyond the horizon of God's absolute knowledge. To be obedient and follow the absolute Being or to choose a self-conscious life. Obedience would lead to immortality and glory, whereas disobedience, death and curses. Indeed, this is the key choice of the human dilemma: the choice between innocence and self-consciousness.

In addition, according to Genesis 2: 20b to 2: 22, Eve was made from one of Adam's ribs. The first man of the universe was made from dust (Genesis 2: 6), while the first woman on earth was a refined artistic work made from a rib rather than dust. This story of creation logically stems from and results in a patriarchal society. For in terms of creation, woman comes out of man. Since woman is second to man, obedience is supposed to be her duty and responsibility. Breaking with this logic could result in human tragedy, just as the temptation of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil leads to the downfall of our human ancestors.

What's more, judging from the naming of all creatures (Genesis 2: 20), we can see the abundance of Adam's wisdom as well as the origin of human languages. Adam was supposed to have such a good understanding of the characteristics of each creature that he was capable of naming each of them. Actually, this proves the unfathomable depth of his knowledge and wisdom.

At the end of Chapter Two, we can see the innocence of love and sex, as well. Their love is pre-destined for union because Eve is the bone of Adam's bones, the flesh of Adam's flesh. Furthermore, sex is no shame since "they [Adam and Eve] were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2: 25). So, in paradise, before the downfall of the first couple, love and sex are pre-ordained to be unsullied and innocent.

iii. Chapter 3 of Genesis

Moreover, in Chapter Three, no less important than the downfall of the first couple and the temptation of the snake is the promise of Christ's salvation, which is well elaborated in Book IV and Book V. After eating the forbidden fruit, the first couple's eyes were opened, "and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3: 7). The fig leaves are symbolic of man's self-righteousness, which, however, cannot endure the wear and tear of time to essentially justify man's deeds. Thanks to God's mercy, "unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Genesis 3: 21). The coats of skin refer to the salvation of Christ, Who, as the lamb of God, made Himself an offering to God to save and justify those who believe in Him. According to Genesis 3:15—"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Galatians 3: 16), the seed of the woman indeed refers to the descendant of Abraham, the forefather of

the Israelites. The descendant of Abraham will fulfill the promise of salvation, redeeming man out of ordained curses and receiving the blessing of the Spirit. Only when based on the theological consideration, can the amplification in the literary text show forth the essence of human history. Book IV and Book V combine to elaborate on the promised salvation of Christ, which is well portrayed in Apostle Paul's epistles, especially in Galatians. Actually, the promise of salvation overshadows all other theological doctrines in the third chapter of Genesis.

iv. The Book of Isaiah

Furthermore, in order to have a deeper understanding of the salvation, we've got to reconsider it from the horizon of the Book of Isaiah. For the Bible is the major source of Milton's work. And understanding of the salvation especially delineated in Book XI and Book XII cannot be separated from Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's salvation for the entire fallen human race. Two quotations of the biblical verses are pinpointed here as important references for man's fall and God's provision of man's salvation. First, Isaiah 14: 12-13 say that "How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! Thou art cut down to the ground, that didst prostrate the nations! And thou that didst say in thy heart, I will ascend into the heavens, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God." Lucifer, one of the names of Satan, fell due to his pride. And thanks to his lies, Adam and Eve fell into doubt about God's commandment, eventually being ousted from the Garden of Eden. However, in Isaiah 9: 6, we can see God's salvation prepared for the whole world. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace." Actually, the value and meaning of the Book of Isaiah lie in its delineation of God's salvation prepared for those who repent of their sin. This forms a parallel with Milton's epic.

So, an inter-textual reading will be further elaborated in the following chapters.

The essence and literary value are reinforced by Milton's elaboration and amplification of the biblical truth. How can a literary work survive the wear and tear of age and time without showing forth universal truths? In fact, Milton's unfolding of human history does parallel the descriptions of biblical history. His personal horizon is intimately associated with the theological record. Accordingly, the first three chapters of Genesis and the Book of Isaiah lays a foundation for his telling of the rise and fall of our human ancestors, Adam and Eve. And the first twenty-six lines of the First Book form a solid fore-structure, instrumental for the reader's full understanding of the whole twelve books. In other words, a grasp of the first twenty-six lines offers a method for gaining the truth. The other individual parts of the epic play the role of circularly amplifying this pre-understanding. The pre-structure and the other individual parts are basically an organism, supporting and connecting with each other. This circular relationship is in line with the principles of the so-called hermeneutic circle.

On top of that, it has been pointed out that there are a unifying power and united structure in *Paradise Lost*. The central facts of man's fall and God's redemption construct the central meaning or significance of the long epic: man was created of matter; pure, noble, but curiously fallible since having freedom of will. His mental versatility and gregariousness expose him to the assaults of passion, which, while it sways reason, robs him of liberty and subjects him to slavery both within and without; but by the operation of Christ he may establish reason once again in his mind and reach a higher state than that from which he fell. As mentioned before, the central meaning forms a fore-structure controlling the whole semantic development of the twelve books of the epic. And without the fore-structure, a hermeneutical

reading of the Milton's work would not be as accessible, and the fusion of horizons would be based on different foundations.

III. B. Fusion of horizons

As far as the interpretation of *Paradise Lost* is concerned, the quest for crucial binary pairs and their mutual references must therefore be essential and rewarding. A brief survey of the notion of fusion of horizons will be stated as follows, serving as a complement to the linguistic binary opposition. "Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers; for what participation is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship of light with darkness? And what consent of Christ with Beliar, or what part for a believer along with an unbeliever? And what agreement of God's temple with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6: 14-16) The Apostle Paul holds that no participation or fusion is possible between righteousness and lawlessness, between light and darkness, and between Christ and Belair. This was actually an effective prescription for the sickening situation of the local church in Corinth, which was then in a chaotic state. In modern literary critical terms, the orthodox Christian practice and doctrine were deconstructed in those days. In an attempt to settle all the thorny problems such as fornication and the threat of schism, Apostle Paul demanded a clear-cut distinction between light and darkness, between Christ and Satan. To prevent the fall of the church, Apostle Paul upheld the idea of no fusion between good and evil. Similarly, when tracing back to the fall of our human ancestors, we can also find a linguistic and theological binary opposition in *Paradise Lost*.

It's easy for the reader to find binary oppositions that contribute to the complexity of this poem: God's heaven/Satan's hell, light/darkness, authority/freedom, domination/subordination, reason/passion, and obedience/transgression are all thematically important, paired opposites. In view of the fact that binary oppositions pervade *Paradise*

Lost, we may do well to assume that Milton, consciously or unconsciously, composes this epic on the basis of binarism, just as John T. Shawcross claims: "The complexity of Milton's simulated creation of a world is seen in the poem's intricate structures; its philosophical technique is sustained by the literary device of opposites" (209).

Adam and Eve's relationship will be pinpointed and analyzed since their relationship is closely connected with the fore-structure: disobedience was the cause of man's fall. Most certainly all theologians and readers of the Bible interpret the Genesis story of the creation of Earth's first human couple, Adam and Eve, as one of comedy-turned-tragedy: their blissful lives were shattered when Satan tempted Eve with the promise of knowledge by eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the one tree in the garden that God designated as untouchable. However, Genesis does not fill in the missing background information as to the reasons why man and woman came to be the first rational, mortal creations of God's divinity. Moreover, most believers in the Bible do not know the specific similarities and differences regarding the two humans' characteristics, and how their relationship impacted each other as well as all other living creatures in the garden.

Humans were created in the image and likeness of God. This testimony of a human's innate divine likeness and godlike image can be traced back to these lines in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*: "Two of far nobler shape erect and tall/Godlike erect, with native honor clad/ In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all/and worthy seem'd, for in their looks divine/ The image of their glorious Maker shone" (Book IV, lines 287-91). The modeling of the first parents can be seen as a sign of God's love and divinity: proving their perfections by making them flawless in flesh and spirituality, providing the necessities for their well-being, and having them mirror the roles that God already mapped out on a

physical, mortal level in Eden. However, even though God created them in His likeness, He created them to be physically, spiritually, and psychologically different.

The contrasting relationship between Adam and Eve might well be discussed within the horizon of the biblical tradition. As mentioned before, man's fall resulted from "disobedience"—the first couple's disobedience of God and Eve's disobedience of Adam. And Eve's disobedience was in essence against the patriarchal tradition of the Old Testament and the Apostles' teaching in the New Testament.

When tracing back to the tradition of the Old Testament, we can see that the leaders of the Hebrew society, whether kings or prophets or priests, were all male. Women in those days played a subordinate role. The male kingship tradition can be proven by 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, and 2 Chronicles. Furthermore, according to Leviticus, the priests leading worship in the temple were also all males. In addition, the male tradition existed in the tradition of the prophets. Take Isaiah and Jeremiah, for instance. The major prophets in the Old Testament were all male. And all minor prophets were also chosen by God from among males. So the patriarchal tradition was pre-ordained and practiced by Hebrew society. Breaking with the rule of power would only lead to mankind's fall, if we interpret human history as based on the axis of the Word.

No less important in explaining the patriarchal tradition is Apostle Paul's teaching in the eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians. According to 2 Corinthians 11: 3, "...the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." This verse is invaluable for clearly pointing out the divinely ordained power relationships of the whole universe. Besides, according to 2 Corinthians 11: 8-9, "the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman

for the man.” Here, Apostle Paul teaches that Eve was of Adam, and that Eve was created for Adam. Based upon this, Eve’s disobedience was against the divine power structure logic, leading to the loss of Paradise.

In conclusion, this book is designed to use a hermeneutic approach to uncover the hidden meaning underlying Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. From the outset, we will see that the fore-structure forms a solid foundation for interpreting the whole semantic development of the twelve books. The pre-understanding shown by the first twenty-six lines of Book One is very instrumental in uncovering and interpreting the other individual parts of the poem. It’s just like a hub holding together the spokes of a wheel. Moreover, besides revealing the textual meaning of the epic, we will explicate the associated significances from the perspectives of creation, love, marriage and sex, which can form a contemporary reading of this work written in the 17th century, and uncover relevant insights projected from the today’s reader’s horizon. Thus, a fusion of horizons can be achieved, and the eternal value of the work can be evidenced.

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Chapter One

The Sphere and Application of Hermeneutics

Abstract

This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for the book by explicating the origin, historical development, and application of hermeneutics as a discipline of interpretation. Tracing the etymology of “hermeneutics” to the Greek messenger-god Hermes and to the Old Testament practice of Urim and Thummim, the chapter establishes hermeneutics as the art of bringing hidden meaning to understanding, whether of scripture, law, or literature. It then offers a concise historical survey of major hermeneutic theorists—Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Bultmann, and Gadamer—tracing the discipline’s movement from a specialized technique of biblical exegesis toward a general philosophy of understanding grounded in historicity, temporality, and pre-understanding. Particular attention is given to Gadamer’s account of the hermeneutic circle, language as “the universal medium” of understanding, and the concept of the fusion of horizons. From this theological reading of Gadamer, the chapter derives three working principles for biblical interpretation: that no isolated verse can capture the whole truth, and every verse is inseparable from the rest of scripture, and that each portion of the Word must be weighed against the whole. The chapter closes with a discussion of metacriticism—criticism of criticism—illustrated through a case study of the Song of Songs. Together these theoretical tools—hermeneutic circle, horizon, and metacriticism prepare the

methodologic ground for the subsequent thematic chapters on *Paradise Lost*.

Key words: hermeneutics, Gadamer, Heidegger, hermeneutic circle, metacriticism, Logos, Song of Songs, biblical interpretation

I. Introduction

Nowadays, the question for me is whether *Paradise Lost* can speak to modern man. Hermeneutics is most often equated with biblical or textual exegesis but its implications for criticism both include and extend beyond the field of linguistics. Hermeneutics also enables the reader to engage in dialogue with words which articulate his understanding of what the text means. Hermeneutics helps the reader to rehear the poem's meaning, which may transcend time and place. Thus, insight into hermeneutics and hermeneutic theory is a necessary prelude to an explication of the meaning and significance of *Paradise Lost*.

This chapter is designed to explicate some essential aspects of hermeneutics, which include its origin, a brief historical survey of major hermeneutic theorists, the hermeneutical circle, its applications and metacriticism.

Not many scholars in Taiwan have been concentrating research into hermeneutics. In addition, when surveying classical hermeneutics, I find that the hermeneutical circle has laid a solid foundation for applying hermeneutical theory to the reading of texts, both biblical and secular. Here, I will explicate a variety of the definitions of the hermeneutical circle as introduced by literary theorists. Besides, I will make some judgments on these. However, it should be noted that the hermeneutical theorists present few real cases illustrating the application of hermeneutics to the reading of texts, religious or

general. In consideration of this weakness of past studies, I will explicate a few concrete, applicable examples to help readers gain a better understanding of both the literary theoretical philosophy itself and its practical applications. Finally, I am interested in explicating the conception of metacriticism, which will be illustrated in the critical reading of *Song of Solomon* in the Old Testament. Hopefully, readers can acquire a whole picture of hermeneutics, which, to be sure, will be very helpful for a contemporary reading of *Paradise Lost*.

II. Its origin

The long journey toward the explication of what hermeneutics is and how it functions begins by going back to the etymology of the word itself. Historically speaking, the word “hermeneutics” is closely associated with the Greek wing-footed messenger-god Hermes transmitting the messages of the gods to mortals. In other words, he not only announced them but acted as an “interpreter” who rendered their words intelligible. Indeed, he renders intelligible what is beyond human understanding intelligible.

Moreover, it should be pointed out that we can find a parallel in Exodus 28: 30 in the Old Testament, in which the priests acted similarly to the Greek wing-footed messenger. They transmitted the words of Jehovah by means of the Urim and Thummim whose interpretation was objective, for it was confined to certain fixed patterns designed to explain the divine meaning. It should also be noted that in the Old Testament, especially in Moses’ days, the Israelites sought the will of Jehovah with the help of the priests, who brought the hidden will of God to light by means of the Urim and Thummim. So, it seems to be assumed that the interpretations of the Urim and the Thummim could be the genesis of hermeneutics, as well. Hermeneutics is consequently engaged in two tasks: first, the ascertaining of the exact meaning-content of a word, sentence, text,