

# Heideggerian Hermeneutics: An Introduction With Examples of Frank Norris' The Octopus

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## 中文摘要

海德格的解釋學是本體論的，也就是他所謂對於「此在」的理解。對海德格來說，理解並不是一種可以自行孤立的「認識」行爲，也不是個人進行的某一獨特事件。理解是人類存在結構的一部份。對此，理解做爲「在」的方式，更勝其做爲「知」的方式。因此，解釋學上的理解，對海德格來說，已超越了單一的本文，超越了所有歷史存在的實體，而向「在」本身的理解延伸。據海德格所言，「解釋」就是「理解的發展」。

然而，任何解釋必須建構於「前理解」，這包括了：「前有」、「前視」、「前想」。根據海德格對於「在」的理解，任何要能繼續理解的解釋，必須要對被解釋者有前理解。以歷時性的觀點來說，前理解是在理解之前；前理解卻也生於理解。這，就形成了一個循環，也就是所謂的「解釋循環」。的確，對海德格來說，解釋學循環的重要性即在於它是「此在本身存在性的前結構」。在此循環當中也「隱藏了原初理解型式的可能，」也就是「此在自身的潛在性」。

在迦達默爾看來，海德格的「前結構」，事實上指向的就是長存於人類歷史與傳統中的「偏見」。這種「偏見觀」，以字源的觀點來說，並不全然指向我們今天所稱的「負面內涵」。以迦達默爾對歷史的見解來看，「個體的偏見」構成了其「在的歷史事實」。就此意義而言，偏見作爲人類歷史的構成部份，它對於理解人類科學和傳統，非但是不可避免的，更是不可或缺的。然而，卻也只有真正的偏見，才能幫助個人建構他的「理解視界」。卻也只有真正的偏見，能將個人置換於「傳

統本文所言說的歷史視界之中」。

由以上對於偏見與視界的認識，我們了解到：所有對於傳統的解釋，都是發生在傳統之中的。也就是說，理解是由理解之內開始，然後再回到一個「已在的理解視界」。因此，解釋循環的精要就在於：不僅是「部份」指向「整體」的理解，整體的理解卻也產生於「部份」的檢視之前。尤其，迦達默爾認為，要表答整體的完整性，揭露隱藏於解釋循環當中的隱藏性，個人的視界就必須與歷史的視界融合。也就是此一「視界融合」能表現「在」；也就是此融合的視界，才能揭開海德格所謂的「知的原初型式」。此一個人視界與歷史視界的融合幫助我們解釋本文、譯解作者意識，更不斷開啓的視界，以理解人類的歷史與傳統。因此，在解釋的活動中，理解的視界不斷地擴大、增生，並且相互融合。

另一方面，在晚期的海德格哲學中，他發展出所謂「四象」的觀念，也就是包括：天、地、神祇、人，等四個面象。根據海德格的說法，四象的世界就是「在」的世界。本文的目的即在闡明海德格派解釋學的理解與四象，並以此驗諸法蘭克·諾瑞斯小說大章魚中所體現出「在」的世界。且借由本文中所舉的例子來說明解釋循環的發生、視界的產生與融合。

## Heideggerian Hermeneutics: An Introduction with Examples of Frank Norris' The Octopus

### I

Heideggerian hermeneutics is ontological. Hermeneutics, for Heidegger, is the understanding of the irreducible "givenness" of human being, or "Dasein" as he calls it. To Heidegger, understanding is not a matter of isolatable "cognition," or a particular act one performs, but part of the very structure of human existence. It is also less a way of knowing than of being. Thus, hermeneutic understanding, for Heidegger, is beyond individual texts and all other historical entities to an understanding of Being itself. According to Heidegger, this "development of the understanding," is "interpretation."<sup>1</sup> Heidegger writes:

In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, any interpretation cannot do without prior understanding, which comprises fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. Heidegger writes:

Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of

exact textual Interpretation, one likes to appeal to what 'stands there', then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting. In an interpretative approach there lies such an assumption, as that which has been 'taken for granted' with the interpretation as such--that is to say, as that which has been presented in our fore-having, our fore-sight and our fore-conception.<sup>3</sup>

Following Heidegger's understanding of Being, we know that any interpretation which is to continue understanding must already have understood what is to be interpreted. Temporally, prior understanding precedes understanding; understanding breeds prior understanding. This forms a circle, the so called "hermeneutical circle." For this circle, Weinsheimer interprets:

Traditionally, the hermeneutic circle was expressed in spatial terms, of part and whole. Heidegger, by contrast, thinks of it temporally, in terms of a circle between the "already" and "to be." This circularity corresponds to the historical being of Dasein from which the interpretive sciences and all other modes of understanding derive.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, for Heidegger, this circle is very important in that it is "the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself," and that "in the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing," that is, "Dasein's own potentiality-for-Being."<sup>5</sup>

For Gadamer, he conceives that Heidegger's "fore-structure" actually points to the "prejudices" which have long existed in human history and tradition. The "concept of prejudice," etymologically speaking, does not necessarily refer to "the negative connotation familiar today."<sup>6</sup> In Gadamer's concep-

tion of history, the "prejudices of the individual" constitute "the historical reality of his being." In this sense, being a part of human history, prejudices are indispensable, as they are inevitable, for the true understanding of human sciences and human tradition.

However, only true prejudices can help the individual build his "horizon of understanding." Only true prejudices can help transpose the individual "into the historical horizon from which the traditional text speaks." For "horizon," Gadamer describes:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of "horizon." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth. . . . On the other hand, "to have a horizon" means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition.<sup>7</sup>

With the above recognition of prejudices and horizons, we can see that all interpretation of tradition occurs within tradition. That is to say, understanding always begins within and returns to an already given "horizon" of understanding. Therefore, the significance of the hermeneutical circle lies in

the fact that not only do the parts lead to understanding the whole but there must also be an understanding of the whole prior to examining the parts. Above all, to Gadamer, in order to reach the wholeness of the whole, to uncover the-covered-up-ness as hidden in the hermeneutical circle, the individual horizon must be fused with the historical horizons.<sup>8</sup> It is the "fusion of these horizons" that presents Being. It is the very fusion that unveils Heidegger's "most primordial kind of knowing." And it is the fusion of the individual horizon and the historical horizons that helps interpret the text, decode the consciousness of the author, and keeps opening up new horizons for the understanding of human history and tradition. Thus, in the activity of interpretation, the horizons of understanding keep expanding and multiplying as they are melting and fusing with each other.

## II

As to the practice of hermeneutical interpretation, I have to admit that the hermeneutical theory, when applied to the reading of literary texts, is hard and difficult. Hermeneutics, a science or a philosophy of interpretation, keeps challenging human mentality for the understanding of human history, tradition, truth, and Being. In his evaluation of hermeneutics, Weinsheimer writes:

What, then, are the practical consequences of hermeneutics for the literary critic? One obstacle to answering this question is that, as we noted at the outset, hermeneutics names no systematic or unitary body of theory. Retracing its history leads us (as history often does) to the nominalistic conclusion that hermeneutics exists not in general but only in the particular, only in the particular theories championed by their several partisans. To elaborate the prac-

tical consequences implied by each of them would not, of course, be possible here. Given the generality of the scope of hermeneutics, what occurs in all understanding and interpretation, there is and can be no identifiably hermeneutic approach to literary interpretation. Since in principle it comprehends every mode of understanding, hermeneutics has no definite characteristics or procedures that would prescribe how one could produce a specifically "hermeneutic interpretation." Thus, for the practical critic, it would seem that hermeneutics has either too many consequences or too few.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, as Gadamer states, there are full of "barriers" in the "truly hermeneutic universe."<sup>10</sup> However, the point is that the hermeneutic universe will remain open to us if only we are willing to put it into practice in our literary reading. For this, Weinsheimer gives us an example of Rudolph Bultmann's Heideggerian reading of "the meaning of Scripture" in his own evaluation of hermeneutics.<sup>11</sup> In his Poetry, Language, Thought, Heidegger also demonstrates his reading of Georg Trakl's poems with his approach of hermeneutical phenomenology.<sup>12</sup> The fact is that in his later years, Heidegger develops, in his philosophy, a concept of the fourfold,--that of the Sky, the Earth, the Divinities, the and Mortals.<sup>13</sup> For Heidegger, the world of the fourfold is the world of Being, a healthy given world from God. Therefore, in my book, Pride and Violence in Stephen Crane's Novels and Poems, published in 1992, I make an attempt, too, to decode and interpret Crane's poems with Heidegger's hermeneutical interpretation of the world of the four-fold.<sup>14</sup>

As Weinsheimer points out, hermeneutic study is "nominalistic." When we interpret a specific text of an author or the collective texts of an author, we need to associate our thoughts with the philosophers we follow. For example,

how can we read Trakl's or Crane's poems if we don't have the "fore-structure" or "preunderstanding" of Heidegger's world of the four-fold? In other words, any four-fold interpretation will be meaningless without Heidegger's hermeneutical understanding of the four-fold. In this sense, a hermeneutical methodology may come into shape when we interpret literary texts according to the philosophers' understanding of life, tradition, and human history.

Furthermore, Heideggerian hermeneutics is highly selective because of his unique epistemology of language. Heidegger believes that language speaks, that language speaks Being, that language speaks as world and thing, that only poetic language speaks. Heidegger writes:

If we must therefore, seek the speaking of language in what is spoken, we shall do well to find something that is spoken purely rather than to pick just any spoken material at random. What is spoken purely is that in which the completion of the speaking that is proper to what is spoken is, in its turn, an original. What is spoken purely is the poem. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Heidegger believes that poems are spoken purely, so that they speak the world of Being. However, Heidegger doesn't intend to exclude prose writing from his hermeneutic reading. In Heidegger's eye, pure prose is never "prosaic." "It is as poetic and hence as rare as poetry." Heidegger's conception of language shows that language is the house of Being. Being dwells in the "presencing" of language. For this, Terry Eagleton writes:

Language for Heidegger is not a mere instrument of communication, a secondary device for expressing 'ideas': it is the very dimension in which human life moves, that which brings the world to be in the first place. Only where there is language is there 'world', in the dis-



tinctively human sense.<sup>16</sup>

Owing to the specific recognition of language as the locus where Being and truth dwell, finding out the original meaning of a specific word becomes very important. This science of the origin and history of words is called etymology. For example, Gadamer begins introducing his "prejudice," which we have already mentioned above, with its original meaning in German and in Latin. Second, a hermeneutical interpreter will coin new words if he thinks them correct and necessary for expressing his philosophical thoughts. This coining of new words is called neologism. For this, there are many examples in Heidegger's work, the words such as "presencing," "nearness," "jugness," and so on. Third, hermeneutical interpreters, like the phenomenological, believe that an author's consciousness is a whole, and that all the texts of a particular author are a whole, too. Take poetry for example, Heidegger writes:

Every great poet creates his poetry out of one single poetic statement only. The measure of his greatness is the extent to which he becomes so committed to that singleness that he is able to keep his poetic Saying wholly within it.<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, hermeneutical criticism can "move with aplomb between the most chronologically disparate, thematically different texts in its resolute hunt for unities."<sup>18</sup> For Heidegger, he holds that not all poems or texts speak the world of Being. Therefore, he has to select the poems or texts which suit his theory. To put it in Robert Magliola's word, Heidegger in his practice, must "limit himself to poetry which accommodates Being as his theory understands it."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, for the purpose of presenting the wholeness of the whole as presented in an author's texts, cross-sectional reading of an author's texts becomes the important strategy for hermeneutical interpreta-

tion.

For hermeneutical interpreters, it is acceptable to say that an author may know his own consciousness less than his interpreter does.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the following examples which I give from Frank Norris' The Octopus, are established upon the hypothesis that Norris himself doesn't know that his novel "accommodate" Being. In this sense, the following examples are the ones of how Heideggerian theory recognizes the world of Being represented in The Octopus.

For The Octopus, its structural and thematic center points to the growth of a crop of wheat. The cycle of growth, in a sense, corresponds to the hermeneutical circle, in which is hidden "a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing."<sup>21</sup> From Heidegger's four-fold point of view, the cycle of growth, going on under the dome of the Sky, is the very demonstration of the Divinities' force on the Earth, despite the violence and war happening among the Mortals, that is, between the ranchers and the railroad owners. Toward the end of The Octopus, Presley, one of the leading characters in the novel, comes to a "strong and true" understanding of God's force revealed in the cycle of growth. Norris describes:

Men were naught, death was naught, life was naught; FORCE only existed--FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make way for the succeeding generation, FORCE that made the wheat grow, FORCE that garnered it from the soil to give place to the succeeding crop.

It was the mystery of creation, the stupendous miracle of recreation; the vast rhythm of the seasons, measured, alternative, the sun and the stars keeping time as the eternal symphony of reproduction

swung in its tremendous cadences like the colossal pendulum of an almighty machine--primordial energy flung out from the hand of the Lord God himself, immortal, calm, infinitely strong.<sup>22</sup>

To put it in Gadamer's term, what Presley has experienced, as we have seen above, is a "fusion of horizons" which enables him to understand the "primordial" truth lying behind the cycle of growth. As an outsider, Presley has kept an indifferent attitude toward the struggle for the wheat by the ranchers and the railroad. It is his "prejudice" that the conflicts between the ranchers and the railroad are trivial to him. Thus, when touring on the farm, he cares about his poetic writing more than he does the hard lives of the farmers such as Hooven and Dyke. In spirit, he wants to be poetic; however, as he gets more and more involved in the fight between the ranchers and the railroad, the same landscape changes his view of life and death, that is, from that of indifference to that of empathy. As Presley's horizon of understanding expands, he sees not only the Earth, the Mortals, but also the Sky images of "the sun and the stars keeping time." His horizon fuses with the landscape in front of him when he recognizes that the FORCE of the life cycle is, in fact, the Divinities. Thus, as one of the Mortals, Presley in his perception is experiencing the very "presencing" of Being, Being embodied in the aggregation of the Sky, the Earth, the Mortals, and the Divinities. In the very presencing of Being dwells the fourfold intimacy which Presley perceives in "the vast rhythm of the seasons" and the "eternal symphony of reproduction."

Finally, I would like to point out that hermeneutics is basically thematic in its interpretation of a text or texts of a particular author. Besides, hermeneutical reading is subjective as well because it interprets the texts according to the thoughts and theory of the philosopher or the philosophers it nominates.

From the above examples of The Octopus, we can see that Heidegger's theory and Gadamer's conception of "prejudices" and "fusion of horizons" can, to a certain degree, recognize Being in the world Norris describes. Interestingly, Being dwells in the cycle of growth as "Dasein's own potentiality-for-Being" is hidden in the hermeneutical circle. The above examples are only my exercises for the purpose of explaining how Heideggerian hermeneutics, when applied to literary reading, works to help construct a world of Being, of which the writer himself does not know.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: SCM Press, 1962) 188.

<sup>2</sup>Being and Time 188.

<sup>3</sup>Being and Time 191-92.

<sup>4</sup>Joel Weinsheimer, "Hermeneutics," in Contemporary Literary Theory, eds. G. Douglas Atkins & Laura Morrow (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1988) 123.

<sup>5</sup>Being and Time 195.

<sup>6</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989) 270, 277, 303.

<sup>7</sup>Gadamer 302.

<sup>8</sup>Gadamer 306.

<sup>9</sup>Weinsheimer 132.

<sup>10</sup>Gadamer xxiv.

<sup>11</sup>Weinsheimer 124-25.

<sup>12</sup>Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and

Row, 1971).

<sup>13</sup>Heidegger interprets his conception of the fourfold, things, difference, for the most part, in Poetry, Language, Thought. Also see Robert R. Magliola, "Heideggerian Hermeneutics," in his Phenomenology and Literature (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue UP, 1977; 2nd ptg., 1978) 57-80.

<sup>14</sup>Chuan-hui Hung, Pride and Violence in Stephen Crane's Novels and Poems (Keelung: Shin-shan, 1992) 116-34.

<sup>15</sup>Poetry, Language, Thought 194, 208.

<sup>16</sup>Terry Eagleton, "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory," in his Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 63.

<sup>17</sup>Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 160.

<sup>18</sup>Eagleton 60.

<sup>19</sup>Magliola 78.

<sup>20</sup>Weinsheimer 118.

<sup>21</sup>Being and Time 195.

<sup>22</sup>Frank Norris, The Octopus: A Story of California (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958) 436.

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