

## Revisiting *Paradise Lost* Through K-Pop: A Global Approach to Teaching Writing

Nayoung Seo  
George Washington University  
Washington DC, USA  
[nayoung.seo@gwu.edu](mailto:nayoung.seo@gwu.edu)

### ABSTRACT

The short film series *Wings* (2016) by the Korean musical group BTS (Beyond the Scene) revisits John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. BTS reinterprets Adam and Eve's leaving of Eden as youths' self-discovery process, overcoming a binary mindset. BTS emphasizes how experiences—trials, pains, and the struggle of youths to walk out of black-and-white perspectives—turn out to be “all so beautiful” as resources to grow. *Wings* demonstrates how the themes and elements in *Paradise Lost* can be used as a tool not only to explore Biblical concepts, but also to understand what pedagogical environments youths need to fully express themselves as writers. Inspired by Hermann Hesse's *Demian*, BTS emphasizes this process of breaking through binary perspectives as a process of “metamorphosis” for youths. This study, therefore, aims to reveal the pedagogical importance of the self-discovery of youths, especially in higher education. BTS demonstrates how *Paradise Lost* not only relates to Western adaptations and theological approaches, but also carries pedagogical value to Eastern societies, encouraging South Korean youths' self-expression. Furthermore, BTS's emphasis on youths' freewill can encourage a supportive environment in the writing class, which empowers them to overcome the fear of “making mistakes” and encourages them to discover their multifaceted selves.

**Keywords:** global pedagogy, popular culture, self-discovery, teaching writing, K-Pop, *Paradise Lost*

## INTRODUCTION

As a South Korean musical group (K-pop group), BTS (Beyond the Scene) conveys a message of youths' self-discovery through their short film series *Wings* (2016). In *Wings*, BTS portrays youths' challenging journey of self-discovery within a stagnant world constructed by previous generations. As youths transition into adulthood in South Korea, they typically lose the opportunity to express their own ideas or opinions. Young students are taught to honor older people's opinions as part of their culture, often leading to the silencing of their new ideas or thoughts due to the cultural expectation to defer to parental or teachers' suggestions. By comparatively analyzing *Wings* and John Milton's (1658) *Paradise Lost*, this essay reveals the value of self-exploration for youths as they leave behind the mindset of Eden—the binary mindset—and freely express themselves through writing, transcending the boundaries of good and evil, right and wrong, and light and darkness. Through comparisons between *Wings* and *Paradise Lost*, this paper will demonstrate how the themes and elements in *Paradise Lost* can be used as a tool not only to interpret Biblical themes and symbolism, but also as a pedagogical tool which encourages the self-expression of youths outside of a binary frame. This article will begin with an analysis of the *Wings* film series, including its relationship with Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Hermann Hesse's (1919) *Demian*, and then branch out to examine the educational system in Korea and internationally.

## BEYOND THE SOUTH KOREAN BINARY SCENE

In a 2023 article from *The Guardian*, Raphael Rashid highlights the high suicide rate among young people in South Korea: "In 2021, South Korea recorded a suicide rate of 26 per 100,000 people, the highest among OECD countries. Suicide was the main cause of death for those aged 10 to 39, with 44% of teenage deaths." Rashid further explains that feelings of "worthlessness and discrimination for not conforming or for being different" are among the main factors contributing to the high suicide rate among young people in South Korea. Through their short film series *Wings*, BTS delivers a message on how to overcome such high pressure to "conform" to the norms that previous generations have imposed upon youth. They deliver a message of what it means to challenge the binary, black-and-white perspectives embraced by older generations, which restrict their ability to push beyond established social norms and hinder their autonomy. Through their intertextual work with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, BTS emphasizes the importance of encouraging youths to find their own paths against harsh social norms, underscoring the significance of free will. The musical group sheds light on how mistakes resulting from following their own paths ultimately allow youths to experience "grace" instead of downfall. Their message has resonated not only with young people in South Korea—selling over one million copies nationally—but also with youths worldwide, as evidenced by their 74.7 million international followers on Instagram ("Posts," 2024).

## USING K-POP'S INTERTEXTUALITY TO REVISIT CLASSICS

The value of using K-pop culture to understand classics like *Paradise Lost* lies in K-Pop's intertextuality and transmedia networking. In "Thinking Through Intertextuality in Korean Pop Music Videos," K-pop scholar CedarBough T. Saeji supports this idea by explaining how "BTS encodes their work with complex intertextuality," enabling fans to "identify and compile BTS references, engage with complex philosophical texts, and explain these references to other fans" (57). Saeji further elaborates on how "Korea's close relationship with and long acceptance of America as a cultural benchmark has meant that American and other Western classics are available in Korea in every medium," (51) thereby "welcom[ing] everyone to enjoy K-pop not as a foreign language but as a new field of cultural play" (60).

Such intertextuality ignites significant interest in the stories and concepts present in BTS's works among young people, fostering transmedia networking. In "Success Story: How Storytelling Contributes to BTS's Brand," BTS scholar Courtney Lazore argues that BTS's incorporation of intertextuality triggers "numerous discussion posts, tweets, and videos with in-depth deliberations about BTS's stories and concepts" (56). She further describes such phenomena as follows: "There are entire Twitter accounts and websites dedicated to analyzing and connecting BTS's stories, such as the ARMY Theorists Society (@ARMY\_society) account on Twitter, which currently has over 51,000 followers. Theory posts are also popular enough to have their own flair tag on the BTS subreddit" (56). This emphasizes how BTS's works have sparked interest among young people in analyzing the different "stories and concepts." It suggests how BTS's intertextuality can serve as a valuable resource for young students in cultivating their interest in literary and philosophical concepts through their visual and vocal art.

BTS's intertextuality is also evident in their short film series *Wings*. As indicated by the title, which symbolizes angels or Heavenly beings, BTS draws upon Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton depicts how the lost innocence of Adam and Eve does not lead to an absolute downfall; rather, their newly obtained knowledge becomes a resource for experiencing God's grace through the coming of the Son of God. Through this paradoxical message—growing through loss—BTS encourages youths to expand their edges by growing through the innocence of strict South Korean social norms and the competitive educational environment imposed on them by the parental and adult generations. Through their *Wings* series, BTS, with its huge global popularity, further inspires young people worldwide to embark on a journey of self-discovery and become fully-formed individuals.

### **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BTS'S WINGS AND MILTON'S PARADISE LOST**

BTS challenges binary, black-and-white perspectives, which have been embraced by and imposed onto youths by older generations, and that hinder youths' freewill from exploring themselves outside of the fixed social standards. To begin with, just like in *Paradise Lost*, opposing imageries abound in *Wings*. *Paradise Lost*'s contrasting concepts include Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, Good and Evil, and Right and Wrong. To deliver these opposite concepts, Milton uses the imagery of light and darkness to express their contrasts. For instance, in *Paradise Lost*, angels are physically described in terms of light, while devils are generally depicted by their shadowy darkness. Milton also uses light to symbolize God and God's grace as seen in Book III:

Hail holy light, of spring of Heav'n first-born,  
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam  
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,  
And never but in unapproach'd light  
Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,  
Bright effluence of bright essence increate. [Book III, 1-6]

With this depiction that "God is light," Milton asks that he be filled with this "light" so he can tell his divine story correctly and skillfully. Through this, Milton not only focuses on depicting the characteristics of God as "light" but also gets himself involved in the poem. He uses the poem as his personal prayers as a writer of *Paradise Lost*. This demonstrates how Milton is struggling between the world of light and darkness—God and Satan. Shown by this confession of Milton, *Paradise Lost* provides the inner struggles of human beings, who stand between the choices of good and evil, depicted by the images of light and darkness. This theme of inevitable inner conflict is intertwined throughout the whole story, and this conflict is present within each character in *Paradise Lost*, especially Adam and Eve, who are in their youth. Just as Adam and Eve represent mankind, Milton mirrors the inner conflicts that mankind goes through. Considering the social development

of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, the inner struggles that Milton depicts are clearly associated with the theme of BTS's *Wings*—a child challenging themselves to trespass their original world to the new world as a grown being. In “The Social Psychology of Adam and Eve,” Jack Katz (1996) depicts the story of Adam and Eve as “their metamorphosis into mature social beings” (557). Interestingly, the title of BTS's *Wings* also can be interpreted as “the metamorphosis” of youths’ ideas. This can refer to how a bird goes through a metamorphosis in the egg and breaks the shell and flies out of it with “wings.” The wings, therefore, symbolize how a child comes out of the binary mindset (inside of the egg) to challenge themselves to move outside of it by reforming their ideology, different from the older generation. Just like Adam and Eve go through metamorphosis by moving from the garden of Eden (the familiar world) to the outside world (the painful reality as grownups) after the Fall, BTS depicts youths facing a new world which cannot be interpreted through the black-and-white lens.

In BTS's “WINGS Short Film #7 AWAKE” (directed by YongSeok Choi), Seokjin, the oldest of the members, symbolizes the grownup. Wearing a white shirt and black pants, he wakes up from the bed and walks towards the door. This white shirt and black pants symbolize the inner conflict that a child goes through standing between what he has learned as “good” and “evil” norms, defined by their parents and the adult generations. When Seokjin reaches the door, which bears scratches, it opens by itself. The scratches symbolize the process of a bird hatching—how a bird beats the shell of the egg with its beak to be able to break through it. The background music says, “I want to stay more and dream more, but it's time to leave.” These lyrics show how a child's development does not depend on someone else's enforcement but relies on a child's agency to break out of their shell. The song emphasizes the meaning of “time,” which suggests that all youths will inevitably have to face their time to hatch.

Followed by these two scenes, Seokjin leaves the light behind and walks to the darkness—the world outside warmth and comfort. This later scene shows the clear parallels between “WINGS” and the section of *Paradise Lost* when Adam and Eve leave Eden in Book XII:

They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
...  
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way. [640-641, 648-649]

Departing from Paradise—the realm of light—Adam and Eve “took their solitary way.” Light can symbolize what is visible and intelligible. They depart from what has been familiar and head towards the shadowy unknown—the domain of darkness. The “solitary way” of Adam and Eve resonates with BTS's interpretation of youths’ self-determination, which is related to free will. Their growth does not occur through any external power or authority, but rather, it must be a “solitary way,” implying that they must make their own decisions. BTS highlights free will similarly to how Milton emphasizes it in *Paradise Lost*.

Walking from the door and reaching the end of the hallway, Seokjin gazes at a bird frame hanging on the wall adorned with Abraxas-patterned wallpaper. Lazore argues that *Wings* contains references to Hermann Hesse's novel *Demian* (54). *Demian* is a German coming-of-age novel that delves into protagonist Emil Sinclair's journey of inner exploration guided by his enigmatic friend, Max Demian. Sinclair grapples with his own identity, morality, and the duality of human nature. In *Demian*, abraxas is introduced as follows: “The bird is flying to God. The name of the God is called Abraxas” (100). Abraxas is one of the Egyptian gods. It is known for being able to represent truth and lying, good and evil, light and darkness in the same word and in the same act. This imagery therefore suggests that all of the above—and more—are possibilities for young people to discover for themselves. Through showing Abraxas with the bird's frame, BTS therefore emphasizes how what “Abraxas” symbolizes is needed to become a fully-realized being. Furthermore, by emphasizing

“Abraxas” as a big bird that fills a frame, BTS shows how it too has to break “the frame” to fly as a real bird. This idea mirrors Adam and Eve’s departure from Paradise. Though they once belonged to Eden, which was all that they knew and needed, they must eventually leave—or break—that “frame,” to journey to a new place where they will be able to use their free will to make their own decisions. Milton depicts how Adam and Eve become acquainted with exercising their agency for the first time after being cast out from the Garden of Eden in Book XII:

Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide [Book XII, 647-649]

First, it is a painful step for them to leave Eden. Milton talks about how “some natural tears they dropt.” By describing their grief as “natural,” he suggests that feeling this kind of tearful pain is not limited to Adam and Eve, but rather is a growing pain that is generalizable to all of humankind.. Milton emphasizes their newly acquired freewill by saying that “the world was all before them, where to choose / Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.” Alongside mentioning “Providence their guide,” acknowledging the possibility of predestination by God, Milton notes that they must face “the world” and must now decide “where to choose their place of rest.” They now have “choices” to make, after leaving their familiar “frame” of Paradise. Milton, therefore, shows how this journey out of the garden of Eden into the world positions them as independent beings.

This relationship between Adam and Eve’s decision-making process, social development, and growth is also reflected in the lyrics of *Wings*. At the point that Seokjin looks at the bird in the frame, the song says:

Yeah, it’s my truth.  
It’s my truth.  
I will be covered with wounds all over.  
But it’s my fate.  
It’s my fate.  
Still, I want to struggle and fight.

Through this song, Seokjin, the oldest among the members, confesses how youth moving forward into adulthood require “fated” pain, which in his case, causes him to “be covered with wounds all over.” But he emphasizes his free will to “struggle and fight” even though the growing process is painful. This message of growing pains can be applied to the learning process of youths. They need a classroom environment where they can learn to “struggle and fight” to find themselves.

To describe such a “fight” of youths in the process of finding their true colors, BTS’s *Wings* and *Paradise Lost* use dark imagery to demonstrate the opposite world from Paradise. Although “true colors” or “true self” can have various meanings, I am referring to one’s ability to pursue dreams/fulfill desires, apart from the demands or expectations of society. It gives a vivid contrast to the light imagery of Paradise and God. To depict Satan, in contrast to the luminous image of God, Milton uses darkness—the absence of light—to describe Hell and Satan to represent the absence of God and his grace:

From Chaos and th’ inroad of Darkness old,  
Satan alighted walks: a Globe farr off  
It seem’d, now seems a boundless Continent  
Dark, waste, and wild, under the frown of Night  
Starless expos’d, and ever-threatening storms  
Of Chaos blustering round, inclement skie; [421-426]

In a clear opposite to the depiction of Heaven and God, “unapproached light,” Milton uses “Darkness,” “Night Starless,” and “Chaos” to describe Hell and Satan. These opposite poles of Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, that Milton emphasizes in *Paradise Lost* can also be found in BTS’s *Wings*. These two opposite worlds appear in “WINGS Short Film #1 BEGIN” (dir. YongSeok Choi) through how they use the black-and-white color contrast. The music film begins by showing the title, “#1 BEGIN,” in black with a white background behind it. This black-and-white color contrast is also shown through the album’s cover.

After showing the letter “#1 BEGIN,” the film starts with how Jungkook, the youngest member of BTS, sleeps on his white bed with his white shirt on in a dark room. As the youngest member, he symbolizes a youth who has not been through the process to become a grown-up yet. To symbolize that a child will grow up, or metaphorically undergo the process to become a bird, the film depicts a black bird pattern on the left chest side of the white shirt. In a dream, with a loud sound that is reminiscent of a car accident and the breaking of windows, he sees the image of a white bird against a black background. The sound of the car accident is notable by the loud squeal of the car’s brakes. This means Jungkook, who now belongs to the world of comfort and familiarity on the white bed, will no longer be able to dwell there and now has to go through the process to face the real world outside of that comfort place. After he wakes up, the film says: “Because the dawn right before the sun rises is the darkest.” Next, Jungkook looks at a portrait of himself, painted with a black-and-white contrast, and finds a red stain on his left eye. The red stain can symbolize the intervention of another element that cannot be defined by his perspective of seeing the world as a child. This red color also symbolizes temptation that leads him to be away from the world that he once belonged to. This idea can be supported by how his white bed moves away and leaves him alone in the center of the dark room when he stares at the red spot.

This color of red also appears in Book II of *Paradise Lost*:  
 What if the breath that kindl’d those grim fires  
 Awak’d should blow them into sevenfold rage  
 And plunge us in the flames? or from above  
 Should intermitted vengeance arm again  
 His red right hand to plague us? [170-174]

In these lines, Milton shows how the “red right hand” symbolizes the “vengeance” of God. In the same way, when Jungkook finds a red spot on his left eye on the painting, the world of Paradise (the white bed he once lay on) moves away from him, and he is left alone in the darkness. After this happens, it suddenly starts to rain in *Wings*. Heaven, which is symbolized by light and the sun. When Jungkook is left alone in the dark rainy room, a bigger painting of himself moves toward him. The painting looks straight at him. Now his painting has various colors mostly around his hair and eyes and his chest where the bird was, on his white shirt.

When Jungkook looks at the shirt, he feels afraid and uncomfortable and begins to cry. Jungkook’s fear demonstrates the emotional struggles that youths face when they encounter the different identities within themselves that cannot be described as white or black—the perspectives that the older generation have imposed upon them. The tears from his eyes also flow from the painting’s eyes and colors spread all over his face.

This shows how his world is no longer defined by a perspective of black-and-white. His tears, which symbolize growing pains, ultimately lead him to find the true and varied colors inside of himself. Jungkook’s world of familiarity and comfort falls apart with a red stain that symbolizes the Fall, leading him to experience the “solitary” steps to become a grown-up similarly to how Adam and Eve take their “solitary” path after the Fall, experiencing the vengeance of God represented by the “red right arm” (174). Through this tearful process of challenging himself to walk outside “the shell,” the childhood world that he once belonged to, he finally has real wings on his back. This shows how his metamorphosis to become a bird is achieved through his fall, failures, and tears—or lost innocence. Losing innocence can symbolize a rite of passage that is scary

but necessary. Only by losing innocence can Adam and Eve become grown up or “mature” enough to survive in the “real world.” Adam and Eve lose their innocence by gaining knowledge. They “fall,” but they also gain the ability to explore the world beyond the (garden) scene.

This transition from one world to the other also appears in BTS’s “WINGS Short Film #2 LIE” (dir. YongSeok Choi). In the film, Jimin, the second youngest in the group, sits on one of the white beds in a small room covered by white curtains. The white room seems filled with a light blue color, which symbolizes the sky. Although the color white dominates the frame, Jimin’s pants and shoes are black. As symbols of movement, his legs and feet indicate the use of free will. This characterization represents how he is tempted to move in an opposite way from where he belongs. As if trying to reach to the other side of his world, he stretches out his left hand to the other bed. After this scene, Jimin says, “tell me the way, please stop me, please let me breathe.” This statement shows how Jimin is tempted to explore “the way,” of the new world. He says how strong that temptation is by asking for help to “stop” him and “let him breathe.” This scene also parallels what happens to Eve after she encounters Satan, disguised as the snake when she sees and hears about the forbidden fruit. After this scene, Jimin holds a fruit, which shows a clear similarity with *Paradise Lost*, and finally eats the “red” fruit, which again symbolizes the Fall and “vengeance of God.” Building upon this action, after eating the fruit, he says “I am stuck in myself. I am dead.” These two lines clearly show how Jimin, who once asked to “stop” him from entering the new world, now feels “dead” because he has transcended a line and moved on to a new place from which there is no return—as if he defends the reason that he ate the fruit.

Along with these scenes from Jimin, in “WINGS Short Film #7 AWAKE,” BTS shows more scenes related to Eve. One scene shows Seokjin, the oldest among the members, looking at himself in the water before he walks to a bird’s painting, where he stares at the reflection of himself. Attracted by it, he tries to touch it with his finger. When he touches the water, thunder rolls behind him, and he becomes alarmed. Seokjin breaks away from looking at the reflection and looks back behind him. This depiction of self-awareness as a child and temptations of self-obsession clearly reminds us of how Milton describes Eve, who looks at the reflection of herself in Eden and goes through the process of becoming self-aware in Book IV:

As I bent down to look, just opposite  
A shape within the wat’ry gleam appear’d,  
Bending to look on me. I started back,  
It started back; but pleas’d I soon return’d  
Pleas’d it return’d as soon with answering looks  
Of sympathy and love. There I had fix’d  
Mine eyes till now, and pin’d with vain desire [460-466]

These lines depict how Eve first sees her image reflected in a body of water. Because she feels “pleas’d,” she “return’d” to see the reflection again. Full of “sympathy” and “love,” she stares at it until God calls to her. The scene exposes how Eve’s self-love ultimately distracts her from loving God. Her desire to continue to stare at her own reflection foreshadows the temptation in her newly rising self-awareness. In “Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’: Eve’s Struggle for Identity,” Shari Zimmerman, a psychologist, notes that: “In a world where outside and inside are still one, indistinguishable and undifferentiated, Eve is strikingly unaware of the fact that the reflection in the water is her own” (248). This shows how Eve strongly parallels a child that is in the middle of the process of finding her true self. Thus, Eve’s reaction to her reflection in the water parallels BTS’s depiction of this stage of youth. This depiction supports the theory that youths need to go through the process of becoming self-aware, which can be crucial to pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Instead of teaching them to follow “right” examples, youths should be exposed to an environment wherein they can discover their own colors and freely express them. In *Milton Studies*, Don Norford notes that “Eve still lives in the oceanic womb-like state in which

one does not distinguish between self and world” (12). This supports the idea that the water reflection scene both in *Paradise Lost* and *Wings* symbolize a young child, who is not fully aware of themselves yet. After this similar scene with Eve’s water reflection scenario in *Paradise Lost*, the narrator in the film says: “we cried a lot and laughed a lot, but it was all so beautiful.” Instead of dividing moments of youths into good and evil, right and wrong, and black and white, BTS emphasizes how all the trials, pains, and struggles as youths turned out to be “all so beautiful” as resources to grow. Through this message, BTS highlights how important it is for youths to embrace every moment without biases or stereotypes.

The film ends by showing six photos on the floor: a boy standing alone with a long shadow behind him, a child and a mother hugging each other, a red apple on the ground, a brown piano, a bird in a frame, and a closed door. These images represent various moments in life, such as a young boy being cared for by his parents, times of temptation and yielding to it, and dreams of becoming a bird. These photos can be related to the journey of Adam and Eve: being in Eden, yielding to temptation by eating the forbidden fruit, and heading towards the gate towards the unknown world. Through these images, BTS conveys the message of transcending from the familiar to the unknown as youths. By showing the pictures one by one, BTS paints how all the moments are “so beautiful.”

BTS also highlights the youths’ collective efforts for companionship with each other. BTS uses “we” as the subject of the sentence: “we cried a lot and laughed a lot, but it was all so beautiful.” They encourage young people to walk (and support each other) through the painful journey together. This is also evident from the last two lines of *Paradise Lost*: “They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way” (648-649). Milton concludes *Paradise Lost* by showing how Adam and Eve hold their hands and leave Paradise. Their transition from the familiar world to the new world happens not through a one-sided effort but through teamwork. Both Milton and BTS conclude their work by highlighting the collectivism and companionship of youths to challenge themselves from the biased standards of “good and evil.”

### **WINGS IN THE SOUTH KOREAN EDUCATIONAL SCENE**

In South Korea, such a binary mindset of either “good” or “bad” is prevalent in the education system. Students are easily judged as either successful or failing based on grades. In this process, youths often lose the opportunity to express their own ideas or opinions, conforming instead to the mold created by teachers’ definitions of success. Honoring older people’s opinions, as part of their culture, also contributes to these expectations toward students. Consequently, young students’ new ideas or thoughts are often silenced by the cultural expectation to follow the definitions of success set by parents and teachers. In a 2015 NPR article, Elise Hu explains such a success-oriented education system of South Korea. Hu states that “[e]verything here seems to ride on a single college entrance exam — the *suneung* — taken in November. It’s so critical that planes are grounded on test day for fear of disturbing the kids. Results determine which universities students can get into, and since there are as few as three colleges considered top tier by future employers, the competition is fierce and the stakes are sky high.” Hu further quotes Tom Owenby, who spent five years in Seoul teaching English and AP history classes and is now a professor at Beloit College in Wisconsin. Owenby comments on the Korean educational system: “It’s not about finding your own path or your own self, as it is about doing better than those around you. It’s in many ways a zero-sum game for South Korean students.”

In the national South Korean news platform *Yonhap News*, Kim Soo-yeon echoes Owenby’s observations, discussing how this competitive environment in schools contributes to a high suicide rate among South Korean students: “Academic pressure to get good grades and enter better universities or financial difficulties caused by the economic slowdown have been cited as the main causes for the suicides by teens and young people here” (Kim 2022). Examination results determine which universities students can



attend, and with only a small number of colleges considered prestigious by prospective employers—the older generation—the competition becomes life-consuming. This intense competition leads to a lack of recognition and understanding of individuals under society’s harsh expectations to be “successful” by the standards set by the adult generation.

Through *Wings*, BTS confronts such binary perspectives of success and failure by emphasizing how mistakes allow youth to experience “grace.” This has enabled BTS, which now has worldwide influence, to deliver a message of hope to youth. As an Asian musical group that highlights the importance of finding one’s own way in life against harsh social norms, they emphasize the significance of free will, as depicted in *Paradise Lost*. In depicting grace, Milton shows how the Fall ultimately becomes the graceful resource for the Son of God to save the world. The angel Michael explains this idea in Book XII:

O Goodness infinite, Goodness immense!  
 That all this good of evil shall produce,  
 And evil turn to good; more wonderful  
 Than that which by creation first brought forth  
 Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,  
 Whether I should repent me now of sin  
 By me done, and occasioned; or rejoice  
 Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring;  
 To God more glory, more good-will to Men  
 From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. [469-478]

Through these lines, Milton reveals how “evil turn[s] to good” (471). He highlights how “wrath” becomes the source that “grace shall abound” (478). Even though by Adam and Eve lose their innocence and get cast out from Eden when they eat the forbidden fruit, the Fall does not end in misery, but rather a source of “much more good-will to Men / from God,” which means it opens the door for grace to abound through the coming of the Deliverer: “The great deliv’rance by her Seed to come / (For vy the woman’s Seed) on all mankind” (600-601). Milton exposes this irony wherein Adam and Eve’s Fall eventually leads to the good fortune of “all mankind.”

In “Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall,” Arthur Lovejoy notes that “This, though for the greater part a most unhappy story, concludes with a prediction of the Second Coming and the Final Judgment, when Christ shall reward” (161). In a similar fashion, irony is also beautifully used in BTS’s *Wings*. They argue that growing up is ideally achieved by challenging oneself to be tempted to be away from the expectations from adults. BTS thus demonstrates how a child’s journey toward adulthood involves finding the true and varied colors inside of themselves. By paralleling *Paradise Lost*, BTS thus shows how a metamorphosis through “lost innocence” is significant for a child’s self-discovery process. BTS therefore revisits *Paradise Lost* to highlight the value of youths’ self-discovery through their contemporary artwork.

## APPLICATION TO TEACHING WRITING

BTS’s emphasis on youths’ self-exploration is not only related to their individual choices, but is also pertinent to social and pedagogical change. In *BTS: ONE*, Nam-joon, BTS’s leader, articulates why they write songs for today’s young people: “Honestly, from our standpoint, every day is stressful for our generation. It’s hard to get a job, it’s harder to attend college now more than ever” (76). He also mentions that “Adults need to create policies that can facilitate that overall social change. Right now, the privileged class, the upper class needs to change the way they think” (76). This message of Nam-joon reveals how BTS’s *Wings* is related to the educational change needed for young people to break the social “shell” built by adults and become free

“birds” as individuals. Another band member, Yoon-gi, supports the leader’s thoughts by saying: “And this isn’t just Korea, but the rest of the world. The reason why our music resonates with people around the world who are in their teens, twenties, and thirties is because of these issues” (76). BTS highlights the importance of educational, political, and social change for youths to challenge themselves from social expectations to find their various dispositions across the globe.

BTS’s emphasis on the self-learning process of youths can be applied to higher education, especially to teaching writing. Even though writing is a form of self-expression of youths’ thoughts and ideas, students often struggle with writing. They are often asked to read sample writings and compare those to their own to judge if theirs are “good” enough. Yet, such a binary lens can hinder students from expressing their various thoughts and ideas without fear. The writing skills should not be a standard to divide between a correct or wrong piece of writing. They can be cultivated through students’ own personalities and practices.

In John Warner’s (2018) *Why They Can’t Write*, Warner mentions how grading can function as something that can intimidate students and hinder or altogether keep them from writing. He emphasizes how the continuous practice of “reading and writing” itself can contribute to bringing out students’ “inner writer” more effectively than judging them through grading (217). Even though writing requires technique and skill, these can be gained through students’ “solitary walk”; they can learn these skills by themselves through their practice. They need a friendly environment not to be afraid of “making mistakes” according to the black-and-white perspectives.

Instead of imposing a teacher’s thoughts or ideas of what it means to write better, students need time and opportunities for their own self-expression in writing classes. The “shell” of the egg cannot be broken by the forces imposed by the outside of it. It should be the youths themselves who have to break it and find the “better writer” in themselves. Through giving students freewill to write and express their unconventional ideas, the fixed frame of thoughts established by older generations can be challenged, leading to social change. Instead of insisting on an exemplary way of expressing students’ thoughts or ideas, teachers ought to be more open-minded and wait for students to express their reforming ideas in their writing, artwork, or speech.

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## AUTHOR BIOS

Nayoung Seo is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in English at The George Washington University, where she is a Columbian Distinguished Fellow. Ms. Seo's research focuses on comparative literature between East and West, particularly Romanticism and Shakespearean adaptations. She has presented on gender, cultural globalization, childhood, and film and theater studies at the American Comparative Literature Association, Shakespeare Association of America, Asian Shakespeare Association, Renaissance Society of America, Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, and other venues. Her most recent essay "Switching Gender Roles: Romeo and Juliet in K-drama" is in press from *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, issue 16.1, September 2024.

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