

Post-Humanism and the Origin of Dante's Universality: With Special Reference to Canto 1 of *The Paradiso*

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Condensation of Dante's Universalism

I would like to stress the importance of challenging Dante's universality through the concept of the Other. Such re-thinking is important once we realize that the authenticity of Dante's universality has been undermined by its condensation into a certain type of European, humanist modernity. This modernity began in the 14th century in Italy as a specific point in space and time, but has consistently unfolded ambitions of positioning itself as universal in the global context. To the extent that we consider Dante as part of the enterprise of modernity, the idea of Dante as challenged by the Other can lead us to a philosophical and historical point situated beyond the European tradition of humanism.

This idea, which is now to be linked to the concept of post-humanism, is linked to a tradition of critical reflecting on Western modernity in the contexts of post-modernism and post-colonialism. Such critiques and reflections, however, are openly menaced by a new kind of universalism, one that prevails by absorbing and digesting the Other¹⁾ as the subject of such critique and reflections into its stomach and thus finally excluding it more thoroughly.²⁾ In order to confront this threatening universalism, which appeared at the edge of Western, humanist modernity, we need a new interpretation of Dante from the perspective of the Other whereby we can reconstruct the origin of Dante's universality in a post-humanist context rather than prescribing it as a fixed one.

Why then should be post-humanism exactly? It is based on my suspicion that Dante's true universality was created by appropriating medieval Latin civilization, but humanism has threatened to condense it into a single point. Humanism has formed much of the basis of modern Western thought; indeed, standing on the edge of modern Western civilization and its powerful magnetic field, we face Dante's literature through the lens of humanism. On the other hand, Erich Auerbach argues that Dante, as a realist, moves toward more universal values beyond the paradigm of humanism (Auerbach 174-5). It seems that Auerbach's emphasis on realism is essential to re-establishing Dante's universality. I doubt, however, that fundamentally, Auerbach continues to employ the concept of "individual man" which, I think, is located within the sphere of Western humanism, and this doubt needs to be linked to reconsider the concept of man, and in particularly, Western man, much more radically. I

1) This term indicates the Other to the West as well as the Other or consciousness of otherness that can be constituted within the West.

2) This is the negative effect of globalization that we now witness. Wallerstein observes our global reality governed by distorted universalism. See Wallerstein.

argue that the figure of man in the *Commedia* surpasses the concept of man, as defined by Western humanism, by extending toward the universal. If we consider post-humanism, in its broad definition, as a will and tendency to rethink the category of man beyond Western humanism, we can investigate through its new aspects of Dante's universality.

It would not be an overstatement to say that the universal thoughts and systems of the medieval Christianity, as well as those of Renaissance humanism, oppressed vernacular, locally-colored Italian literature like that promoted by Dante. Dante lived and wrote during the transitory period from the late 13th century to the early 14th century; as a result, he was located somewhere between medieval and Renaissance universalism. Perhaps more precisely, we might say that Dante actually created and facilitated this transition. In this respect, Dante's literature appropriated medieval universalism and did not simply inherit it whereby it elaborated universality; likewise, Dante's literature was condensed into Renaissance humanism's universalism and thus its universal quality was distorted.

In short, humanist universality has condensed Dante's universalism because humanism has indeed been a Eurocentric historical phenomenon and system of thought; inasmuch as Western modernity has inherited humanism, it has established a unilateral or self-centered civilization (whose pressures and hegemonies we can detect by the proliferation of so many "post-X" schools of thought); Dante's universalism, by contrast, consists of self-negation, de-homogenization, transversal communication and emission, all of which challenge and surpass a narrow humanist universalism.

Historically, Dante's intellectual location is tricky to identify, as he built his own universalism between two other universalisms: those of medieval and humanism. The two share a common ground insofar as they maintain their own

centers and are therein confined, whereas Dante's universality is diffused 'universally' by negating itself. We can find this kind of self-negating or self-de-homogenizing principle of universality in our reflective deconstruction and reconstruction of humanism in the 20th century. For this reason we have to shed new light on Dante's universality. Dante was already moving toward post-humanism before the era of humanism.

After all, looking at Dante in a post-humanist environment allows us to question what Dante should be for us *hic et nunc*. Our most crucial task is to rethink universalism. It is through such practice that we can obtain the new meaning of Dante's universality by illuminating its relevance to the Other—in other words, by studying how Dante's 'literature' is established on its capacity of self-negation and opening up itself to the Other.

I will focus on three questions. First, how can Dante's universality appropriate the humanist universalism? Second, what is the substance of Dante's universalism, along with the new concept of man, from post-humanist perspective? Third, what kind of literary value can Dante's universalism offer us?

Appropriation of Humanist Universalism³⁾

At least from the European perspective, humanism was a historical and material ground on which Dante's universality developed. Dante was the poet

3) On the basis of this principle, I find the so-called thought of horizon; that is, paralyzing the chronological or vertical linkage between Dante and humanism. In this process, Dante's universality plays the role of reconstructing the pseudo-universalism of humanism; Dante's universality becomes a result of appropriating the universalism of humanism. Here, what is called the post-history of power occurs and the theoretical (or epistemological) rupture intervenes.

of Florence, then the poet of Italy and Europe, and now has been universalized as a world poet. In this process of obtaining universality, humanism has been a tireless engine. Ironically, Dante's 'universality' was established after the emergence of nationalism in Europe in the middle of the 18th century, when the units of the nation-state were settling into their intellectual, territorial and historical consciousnesses. In contrast to the "post-national constellation" that we now face, as Habermas would put it, such consciousness of the nation-state was mostly a Eurocentric system of thought that posited Europe as bearer of civilization and built a Europe-centered cosmopolitanism.⁴⁾

Even after the advent of nationalism, Europe maintained its homogeneity and tended to seek its deepest roots by tracing them to Greek and Roman civilizations through the Renaissance. Humanism was the concept and spirit that most strongly affirmed and sustained Europe's unified self-identification. Within this framework, Dante's universality was misleadingly contextualized within a humanist tradition that originated from a single point of civilization. In this sense, post-humanism appears as the way of expressing skepticism of humanism and means to surpass it.⁵⁾

Speaking ethically, if one considers post-humanism as nullifying the

4) For example, Eliot recognizes Dante's universality by mentioning that Dante inherited the universality of Medieval Latin civilization. However, the medieval Latin civilization that Eliot mentions is not located outside the territorial, cultural and historical borders of Europe. This is because Eliot discusses Dante's universality without referring to the outside of Europe. See Eliot.

5) In this sense, I may add that while being a medieval poet and builder of humanism. That is to say that Dante already bears the power to overcome (to borrow Heidegger, 'Verwindung') humanism or the figure of primordial man that has not yet been inspired by humanism. To the extent of Verwindung, we can understand that the primordial man includes and at the same time surpasses the humanist definition of man, which is the figure of man we find in Dante's literature from the post-humanist perspective.

substance of humanism itself, post-humanism seems an impossible and improper project. In the lecture in 1935 (Edmund Husserl), Edmund Husserl observes that Europe undergoes the intellectual impasse of humanism in the 20th century. Asking the European people about the responsibility of not being able to operate the humanist-philosophical heritage, he deplors the collapse of the humanist tradition that might have saved mankind. He diagnoses the crisis of humanism as occurring when human subjectivity is buried under scientific and technological objectivism. Likewise, we are now witnessing a triumphant technological civilization that incapacitates or deforms the humanities (*humanitas*).

On the other hand, Martin Heidegger, in his lecture in 1946, claims that if the death of humanism operates as such in the same context of the triumph of technological civilization, we should be working to postpone endlessly the death of humanism rather than abetting it. This is what Heidegger means by *Verwindung*; from the perspective we gain by deviating ourselves outside humanism through *Verwindung*, we are able to grasp the substance of the crisis of humanism. If we consider that the term *Verwindung* implies an overcoming which is in reality a cognition of belonging, a healing of a illness, and an assumption of responsibility, we can understand that to examine the crisis of humanism through *Verwindung* is both to overcome and acknowledge humanism itself.

In this respect, to borrow Gianni Vattimo, the crisis of humanism is not an overcoming but a *Verwindung*, a call for humanity to heal itself of humanism and to yield itself up and resign itself to humanism as something for which humanity is destined (Vattimo 49). This is to say, the ground (Ge-Stell) we use for appropriation or reformulation of human value that we perhaps can never abandon is still nothing but humanism. The proclamation of the death of God

does not accompany the victory of man, but rather hurries his death because, along with the death of God, the foundation on which we can preserve human value, perhaps even eternally, vanishes; in other words, only appropriating the value of God can guarantee human value. When we accept the fact that we face a landscape of post-humanism, the task of appropriating humanism in to post-humanism becomes an ethical imperative.

However, in this narrowly humanist thought, the concept of man remains confined to European context and prevents us from a proper consideration of the Other's context. The crisis of humanism declared by Heidegger, Husserl, Vattimo and, most distinctively, by Spengler's *The Decline of the West* indicates the crisis of Eurocentrism and of the bourgeois model of *Bildung*, all of which lack any consideration of the Other. We can say, then, that the strivings for *Verwindung* in the first half of the 20th century did not move even a step outside European universalism.

In this context, Erich Auerbach's interpretation on the concept of "man" in the *Commedia* remains in the category of works that strived to reconfirm the root of identity of Europe. Auerbach relates Dante's universality to humanism by arguing that Dante's literature embraced humanist secularism. For Auerbach, Dante pursued his "salvation" through literature rather than through religion. That is to say, Dante was a great realist insofar as his literary salvation never neglected its socio-historical context. Dante was the first to configure

man, not as a remote legendary hero, not as an abstract or anecdotal representative of an ethical type, but man as we know him in his living historical reality, the concrete individual in his unity and wholeness; and in that he has been followed by all subsequent portrayals of man, regardless of whether they treated a historical or a mythical or a religious subject, for after Dante myth and legend also became history (Auerbach 174-5).

What Auerbach emphasizes is “Dante’s testimony to the reality that is poetry, to the modern European form of artistic mimesis which stresses the actuality of events” (174). For Auerbach, Dante was the first writer who actively configured human reality,⁶⁾ a reality that classical conventions had configured very differently and medievalism never configured. That is to say, despite his location between medievalism and Renaissance humanism, Dante represented human reality in a different way from medievalism and Renaissance. Auerbach maintains that this is the power and substance with which Dante built his unique universalism independently from the universalisms of the medieval and of humanism.⁷⁾

However, from Auerbach’s statement that “Dante discovered the European representation of man, and this same representation made its appearance in art and historiography” (Auerbach 174), we can see that Auerbach discusses Dante’s literature employing a deeply Eurocentric mode of thinking, which is unable to include the true universality. Thus we need to separate what Auerbach calls realism from its narrow European context of man; that is, we need to maintain that Dante pursued literary representation of human reality in the universal dimension. What “man” and “human reality” imply here should not be what Husserl might indicate in his concept of “European man in crisis,” but rather the *universally* universal man.⁸⁾ We must imagine Dante’s universality as

6) On this, Eliot also emphasizes; “And gradually we come to admit that Shakespeare understands a greater extent and variety of human life than Dante; but that Dante understands deeper degrees of degradation and higher degrees of exaltation” (Eliot 36).

7) Relying on Boccaccio, we can affirm that the contemporary reaction to the *Commedia* was a kind of realism. See Boccaccio, 33-38.

8) Mancusi-Ungaro’s statement is noteworthy in relation to Dante’s cosmological definition of man. “At the heart of Dante’s cosmological politics is the axiom that all men in all generations and parts of the world, by virtue of their *humanitas*, are

derived from his cosmopolitan perspective, which is no less than transversal communication of diverse socio-historical contexts.⁹⁾ From this perspective, Dante's literature will operate still or more effectively beyond the European specific context of humanism because it re-contextualizes European humanism within more universal dimensions of literature and its representation of human reality. In this respect, Dante's literature 'already' bears the appropriation of humanism, negating and simultaneously including humanism.

In what kind of historical situation did this appropriation occur? Dante produced literary texts in vernacular Italian with the intention of communicating with ordinary people in a time of great social and intellectual change. On the other hand, he dynamically played the role of humanist scholar by excavating and developing the classical literary heritage. These two goals could hardly be pursued without conflict; Dante attempted a transversal movement between these two heterogeneous points, without staying safely in either of them—not in the particularity of Italian or in the universality of Latin. As a result, his literary texts show us the rivalry between the particular and the universal; whereas most humanist writers and scholars of the 15th century simply overlooked their local life, forgetting such conflict and nestling into the comfortable arms of the

fellow citizens within a single human community. We would identify this community as "mankind" or "the human race" itself. Dante's translation in the political treatise is "humana civilitas; "in the poem it is most frequently" *umana specie*" or simply "uomo" (5).

- 9) Burckhardt says that "the cosmopolitanism which grew up in the most gifted circles is in itself a high stage of individualism. Dante, as we have already said, finds a new home in the language and culture of Italy, but goes beyond even this in the words, 'My country is the whole world.' And when his recall to Florence was offered him on unworthy conditions, he wrote back: 'Can I not everywhere behold the light of the sun and the stars; everywhere meditate on the noblest truths, without appearing in gloriously and shamefully before the city and the people? Even my bread will not fail me'" (100).

classics.¹⁰⁾

Dante's universality, therefore, was constructed by negating the basis of medieval universalism and simultaneously standing on it. Such capacities of self-negation and transversal communication, viewed from our current position, were the powers through which he was able to escape incessantly from Renaissance humanism's hegemonic self-identification with Latin civilization. Historically, however, the humanist tradition has reduced Dante's universality into its own, shaping the modernized face of Dante since the Enlightenment of the middle of 18th century. Accordingly, I would say that Dante's universality, which is nowadays familiar to us, could be seen to some extent as 'invented' by the modern enterprise of Enlightenment.

I would next like to reconsider what Dante's universality should be, rather than continuing to criticize the authenticity of humanist universalism. In fact, Dante's universality can be explained in diverse ways which each require independent arguments. Here I will focus on illuminating the concept of man in the *Commedia* in ways that go beyond the limit of Western humanism, which will inexorably be linked to highlight Dante's literature and literary language rather than criticize the authenticity of humanist universalism.

Dante's Universalism: the Concept of Man

We may say that the fundamental elements of post-humanism are, first, the overcoming of historical Western humanism, and second, the philosophical

10) Jacob Burckhardt also says that "The position and influence of Italian culture throughout the world depended on the fact that certain subjects were treated in Latin - *urbiet orbi* - while Italian prose was written best of all by those to whom it cost an inward struggle not to write in Latin" (Burckhardt 165).

re-establishment of the concept of man. If the former is to argue that Dante's universality is related to having condensed historical humanism, the latter is to support Dante's universality as an appropriation of humanist philosophy which I will discuss below.

If I can say on the context discussed in the previous chapter that Dante's universality surpasses European universalism, it will be because it does not exclude the Other. What matters now is whether otherness can be maintained or not when we undertake a study of Dante's universality in the context of a humanism—or even a post-humanism—developed Eurocentrically, to what extent it can be maintained, and how. I argue that Dante's literature provides us with a solution to this impasse. It does so including the 'other' reader in the literary process while allowing the reader to maintain his or her otherness. This is possible insofar as Dante's literature possesses the capacity of opening itself to the heterogeneous other by continually negating and de-homogenizing itself. Certainly, this capacity provides the power to sustain his literature's universality.

In short, I agree that the concept of post-humanism, as Heidegger might maintain, may stand on *Verwindung* of humanism; however, by re-questioning how dynamically it opens to the Other's context, I would like to imagine how post-humanism can become even more inclusive. My suspicion is related to reflect that the Western context of post-humanism may still rest on the non-universal concept of European man, just as humanism has done, and my imagination is linked to establish a new concept of universality in which man, in Dante's literature, may be realized per his ability to surpass himself.

The *Commedia* shows the way in which man surpasses himself; it figures out in literary manner the way of other-ing, that is, the way of co-existence of the divine and human powers that Dante organizes in his *Monarchia*. To surpass

self means to include and alter the Other which is linked to harmony and co-existence of opponents. By showing the process that man surpasses himself by including the Other and altering himself, Dante forms conclusively his politics and philosophy in the *Commedia*.¹¹⁾

In the *Commedia*, Dante establishes the universal value of man, thus replacing the locus of God, the center of universe, with ‘non-place-ness’. Here ‘non-place-ness’ indicates the nature of man because only negating himself man can obtain universal value. Self-negation does not mean self-nullification but recognition of the Other without insisting the perfection of self boundary. According to Ullmann, “Dante released man’s pure and natural humanity from its Christian restrictions and encrustations and set it free: he ‘naturalised’ and mundanised the Christian by liberating him from the bondage in which as a subject to higher authority he was held. The effect of this rebirth or restoration of man was his acquisition of liberty which was the hallmark of man as a citizen” (Ullmann 107). We might say that Dante took notice of the multi-dimensionality of man toward its universality; as he investigated universal communication with vernacular in the *De vulgari eloquentia* and constituted universal power with *humana civilitas* in the *Monarchia*, he performs the profound pursuit of universality in the *Commedia*. Indeed, the concept of man itself in Dante inheres the concept of community, consciousness of ethics and the practice of other-ing.

In the *Monarchia*, Dante holds the “man’s goal is two fold: so that, just as heal one among all created beings shares in incorruptibility and corruptibility,

11) Regarding the concept of man in Dante, his *Monarchia* provides huge and crucial references. The focus is that the nature of man is dual and complex, and man participates in the ultimate aims of his natures. Here what “dual” means is this world and that world respectively, but I would like to draw Dante’s concept of man from the complex ‘way’ of existence of man rather than its contents.

so he alone among all created beings is ordered to two ultimate goals, one of them being his goal as a corruptible being, the other his goal as an incorruptible being" (3.16.3).¹²⁾ Here we need to note that the two objectives rely on each other, and further, in order to make the duality of man operate positively, we must pay special attention to 'the third element' in this whole scheme: the relatedness which mediates body and soul so as to complete man.

In this respect, I would like to focus on the tripartite symmetry of the writer, the pilgrim and the God on which the *Commedia* is built:

- 1) Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei,
qual si fé Glauco nel gustar de l'erba
che 'l fé consorto in mar de li altri dèi.
- 2) Trasumanar significar per verba
non si poria; però l'esempio basti
a cui esperienza grazia serba.
- 3) S'i' era sol di me quel che creasti
Nevellamente, amor che 'l ciel governi,
tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume me levasti. (*Paradiso* 1. 67-75)

In this passage, the pilgrim Dante looks at Beatrice, who stands toward the sun and recalls Glaucus and senses his own transformation. This transformation is for him like a preparatory stage to enter Paradise; that is, in order to enter Paradise, man must possess divinity. Therefore, the term "trasumanar" means that the pilgrim, who cannot enter Paradise with his mortal body, now climbing the ladder toward Paradise, begins to understand the Love of God and becomes a superman and surpasses the limits of mortal being through metamorphosis from humanity to divinity; the writer or the pilgrim Dante combines the

12) Citations from *Monarchia* are from Dante, *Monarchy*.

particularity of humanity of himself to the universality of divinity.

In the citation 1), we can hardly distinguish whether the feeling that “within me I was changed” belongs to the writer or the pilgrim; indeed, it occurs for the two simultaneously inasmuch as they share it. Since it is the feeling of metamorphosis (l. 69) and of “trasumanar” (l. 70), it moves immediately from the pilgrim to the writer and vice versa. The writer who locates in the non-transcendental position connects himself to the experience of “tras” and share it with the pilgrim, in which the writer becomes conscious of the pilgrim, who surpasses him, as the Other. In this connection, the writer shows the scheme in which any difference from the Other is nullified by his sharing the pilgrim’s feeling of surpassing.

In the citation 2), the writer explains with his direct intervention what such connection and sharing mean by adopting the neologism “trasumanar.” The problem that we now face is what ‘man’ as the object of surpass and humanism Dante submits above may be; in other words, we need to interrogate ‘whether’ we should imagine a stage beyond humanism if the term “trasumanar” implies the limit of humanism.¹³⁾ The concept of man that I submit from a post-humanist perspective relying on the whole citation above is neither superman, nor God, nor man himself but something that includes all of them; that is, the concept of man can be established only if it surpasses not only God but also itself. If God is a being who surpasses man, the concept that man surpasses God means that man surpasses its own surpass. Thus man is not so much a concept as a process itself of repeated surpasses or ‘surplus of surpass.’

13) In fact it would not be possible to clarify the limits of humanism; here instead we are able to imagine something beyond it on the horizons of post-humanism or neo-humanism or just humanism in the sense that man can never escape from the boundary of human-ism. See Hegel, 111-119.

In this sense, humanism, insofar as it is based on the concept of man as a center of recognition of the world and God, cannot but be confined to itself because it does not allow self-negation, and therefore it can hardly produce universality of its horizon.

What draws our attention is that the "writer" Dante controls all of the processes of synthesizing the particularity of humanity and the universality of divinity. If we recognize the writer Dante, as the subject who achieves the "trasumanar" of the pilgrim Dante, we may also recognize that the "trasumanar" of the pilgrim occurs per the writer Dante's self-conscious reflection. Through this self-conscious reflection, the writer Dante is conscious of not simply himself but also himself as the Other, that is, as the pilgrim Dante. In doing so, he also desires himself as the Other by recognizing himself, in that position, as a superman. Self-consciousness as the Other occurs only in the inter-dependent relationship with the Other, not in the isolation of one's independent being. That is to say, the Other (the pilgrim Dante) originates from the writer Dante's consciousness, but also forms and surpasses it, as the writer Dante makes the pilgrim move toward God. Through such chain of surpasses, the writer Dante becomes conscious of himself as the Other. This kind of observation shows that "trasumanar" occurs in the threefold way of networking of the writer, the pilgrim and God, which is important in order to understand the concept of man figured in the *Commedia*.

As we see here, the writer Dante is conscious of the pilgrim Dante as the Other, and also makes the pilgrim Dante be conscious of God as the Other again, and further once again, makes God conscious of the writer (a process that takes place in the writer's consciousness and in the literary process too). In this sequential process of becoming the Other, the writer, the pilgrim and God enter into an inter-dependent relationship; that is to say, the writer surpasses himself

through his relationship to the pilgrim and, likewise, the pilgrim surpasses himself through the relationship to God and, likewise again, the concept of God surpasses itself as the writer incarnates the text here on earth, thus allowing the *Commedia* relevance to human reality. In this inter-dependent relationship, the sequential process of surpassing does not negate their respective positions, but rather identifies the differences between them. This sequential process of Other-ing promotes an openness in which each figure — the writer, pilgrim, and God — becomes the Other, includes him, and negotiates difference in the space of an epistemological rupture, rather than merely recognizing the Other as a mirror-image of the consciousness of any one figure.

It seems that this tripartite symmetry of the writer, the pilgrim and God¹⁴⁾ differs from the dualist symmetry which bases Hegel's dialectics of master and slave. By virtue of tripartite symmetry, the writer connotes the process of how the pilgrim surpasses the pilgrim himself and further puts the writer himself in that process and operates it. In other words, if "trasumanar" of the pilgrim Dante opens the process of other-ing per an inter-dependent relationship with God, the writer Dante, by prospecting and controlling such process from his position of being man, still leads the pilgrim Dante to a transcendental and non-transcendental being; that is, the pilgrim becomes a superman but along with the ending of the text *The Commedia* or even in-between it, he still returns ceaselessly to the writer's human position.

14) The tripartite symmetry is also Dante's way of understanding our world. Gilson grasps that the world Dante understands is built on the orders of man, politics and religion (*ordo humanus*, *ordo politicus*, *ordo Ecclesiae*) which are identified with the authenticities of three sciences: philosophy, theology and politics. In Dante's concept of humanity, these three orders are in the relationship of reciprocal authority and obedience which is not the problem of dignitas but *iurisdictio*. See Gilson 162-224.

In the citation 3), we can witness the confrontation between the writer and God which, however, occurs through the writer's reflection rather than his replacement of God's position, and in addition, the writer's reflection occurs by making the pilgrim substitute the writer himself; that is, the writer's surpass is through this reflection of self-consciousness. As stated above, the writer asks 'which' part of him was raised toward the transcendental world; this problem is linked to the theological issue of which part between body and soul the pilgrim takes when he ascends to the paradise.¹⁵⁾

We might be able to suggest a sort of eclecticism: in the *Commedia*, the pilgrim's ascent to the paradise accompanies body and soul. Body and soul of the pilgrim ascend altogether; and the higher they ascend the more body loses weight and becomes painless. The pilgrim's body described in the citation above is now almost like that of the holy spirits after the resurrection of body, material without weight.¹⁶⁾ From this perspective, "trasumanar" goes with reduction of the weight of human body which, however, does not mean the disappearance or nullification of body but merely the absence of the weight. In this case, body is transformed to or replaced by soul but leaves its trace through which we can say that "trasumanar" includes the surpass and non-surpass simultaneously.

The role of God in the tripartite symmetry of the writer, pilgrim and God is pursued by the humanity (as the object of passing in "trasumanar") in that

15) This problem has long been discussed in theological aspect along with the saint Paul's ambiguous assertion: "I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 *Corinthians* 12:3-4). Like Paul's assertion, Dante also describes his situation ambiguously. However, we need to observe that Dante declares in other parts of the *Commedia* (*Paradiso* 1.98-99, *Paradiso* 21.11-69) that soul and body ascend to the paradise altogether. Therefore, the ambiguity in the citation above is quite intentional.

16) See Umberto Bosco's footnote to lines 73-75.

of the body, soul and humanity [or “the human”]. As in the former the pilgrim surpasses his consciousness by relying on God as the Other, in the latter the soul surpasses itself by relying on the humanity. Here, the effects of surpass are to start the literary process in the former and to raise the trace of the body in the latter. Thus, although the body is transformed into the soul, it leaves its trace so as to realize the contradictory figure of the humanity. This is the post-humanist definition of man that we encounter in the *Commedia*.

Now we can conclude that what “the part of me that You created last” (l. 75) is the pilgrim as the Other which is the projected image of the writer’s reflective self-consciousness. By virtue of this process, the writer surpasses himself through the existence of the pilgrim whereby makes his surpassing itself an Other. In doing so, the writer maintains his own place and at the same time moves toward the horizon of surpassing, where we witness the figure of man as contradictory being.

Literary Value of Dante’s Universalism

The tripartite symmetry in the *Paradiso*, through the process of repeated surpasses that it operates, leads us to understand positively the concept of man as a contradictory being. Furthermore, the “trasumanar” simultaneously implies transcendence and non-transcendence of man. Now I move to discuss further the idea of man as a contradictory being in the context of literature; this is the new work of understanding the *Commedia* in the post-humanist context and reconstructing its universality. I will discuss the idea of man as a contradictory in the context of literature in relation to the problem of ‘ineffability’ raised from the phrase “Trasumanar significar per verba non si poria [passing beyond the

human cannot be worded].”

In the past, the discussion on the ineffability has mainly been concentrated on the tension between the two aspects; on the one hand, the phrase “passing beyond the human cannot be worded” signifies the impossibility of including the heavenly experience in the human language, that is, the irreducibility of the experience of divinity into the form of humanity,¹⁷⁾ and on the other hand, nevertheless, the writer Dante makes his pilgrimage (through the pilgrim) as being able to be used for his and the others' salvations. The tension between the two is in fact the literary engine to sustain the *Paradiso*.

Honess clarifies that Saint Paul's ambiguous expression and Dante's position differ from each other (Honess 116). Paul denies expressing his experience more perfectly while Dante, declaring he has borrowed from Cacciaguیدا, does not (*Paradiso* 17.127-129). As Honess observes, many critics support this difference. In fact, the ambiguous expression by Saint Paul as well as the hesitant expression by Dante are the most effective ways to reach the perfect expression rather than abandoning or denying it. Regardless of whether or not they deny it, they have already drawn our attention to ineffability itself. Here I believe that Dante appeals to the literary process.

O divina virtù, se mi ti presti
 Tanto che l'ombra del beato regno
 Segnata nel mio capo io manifesti,
 vedra' mi al piè del tuo diletto legno
 venire, e coronarmi de le foglie
 che la material e tu mi farai degno. (*Paradiso* 1.22-27)

17) According to Honess, to emphasize the impossibility of expressing the heavenly experience is based on the medieval tradition of the ineffability of God (Honess 116-122).

Appealing to Apollo (“divina virtù”), Dante manifests “the shadow” that indicates the limitations and possibilities of human language in relation to the problem of ineffability. Although the image of Paradise is transcendental whereby cannot be represented through human language, the writer Dante in reality represents it with his ‘human’ language. Precisely because Paradise cannot be represented through human language, he is able to breed the effect of representation more dynamically. This contradiction, that is, to signify something that “cannot be worded,” is to maximize the possibility of human language beyond its ‘human’ limits, which sustains the literariness of the citation above. The weak and vague image of “the shadow,” which is indispensable for constructing literary language, stands for Dante’s language endowed with the “godly force” of Apollo. Now we can recognize that “the shadow” is no more the passively mirrored image but an active representation of “the blessed realm”; it is a literary construct produced by foregrounding the communicative nature of our language. What is crucial here is the communicative capacity and process of extending beyond the self that human language provides.

The ineffability is the destiny of human language. The pilgrim now faces the reality that he has never met and experienced. Because it cannot be worded, he cannot but invent a new language for it (Fernandez 175).¹⁸⁾ I think that this ‘new language’ is not necessarily a newly coined one that differs completely from the existing one. The newness here is rather constituted in the act of diverse interpretations of the literary language; its process itself is ‘invention’.¹⁹⁾ Dante’s confession that “passing beyond the human cannot be worded” is

18) See also the *Paradiso* 10.43-48.

19) In this respect, Petrocchi’s classification of the language of the *Paradiso* can be regarded merely the basis of such process in which its newness is formed. See Petrocchi 109ff.; cited in Fernandez. 176).

believed to be intended to the construction of literary process toward communication with the readers rather than a linguistic experiment of pure neologism. Therefore, we need to pay attention to the effect of the neologism which may well be the rhetorical strategy by the writer Dante that can be understood in the aspect of exchange between style and subject matter. Dante takes the example of Glaucus in order to complement that effect whereby he might invite the readers to infer what he intends; the new language completes with the readers.

Thus, ineffability prescribes the “significar (being worded)” that is realized through literary process. As noted above, literary process operates between the writer, the text and the reader. Dante manifests the firm consciousness (“capo”) that his poem is worth to receive the laurel wreath. Here, the consciousness is no less than memory. The motif of memory, which appears repeatedly in the *Commedia*, plays the role of mediating between the writer and the pilgrim in the conversational relationship (*Paradiso* 2.1-15).

We can find here the fundamental premise of the *Paradiso* as a literary text. In order to draw down to this world the pilgrim who ascended to the world of ineffability, the writer, to repeat, should recognize the limit and possibility of human language. The possibility of Dante's language is in its power of surpassing itself. Dante confesses the limit of his language but bears the possibility of surpassing itself in such way of self-negation. The transcendental world ‘compromises’ with Dante²⁰) and Dante accepts it so as to include the

20) “Qui si mostraro, non perché sortita / sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno / de la celestial c’ha men salita. Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno” (*Paradiso* 4. 37-40). Here, by adopting “far segno,” the writer Dante seems to mean his own literary language; that is, he coins and communicates the heavenly experience with human language. Now the writer uses consciously “sign (segno)” or “indication (far segno)” to allow the pilgrim understand the pure, holy Truth. For the same reason,

transcendental world in his language. However, it is certainly Dante's literary project that controls all of this process. Therefore, by surpassing once again what surpassed it, Dante's language is able to make the transcendental world non-transcendental one. Here 'surpass' is no more infinite yet returns to the so-called 'pre-transcendental' world. What is at stake is that the return can never be a fixation but what can be called 'return to nowhere' insofar as it is indefinitely emitted in a horizontal way in the 'pre-transcendental' world. This is exactly the literary process that Dante achieves with the readers' cooperation in which the conversation between his text and reality occurs successfully.

The figure of man who surpasses his surpass, that is, surpasses yet returns to his position incessantly, is what we can constitute in the aspect of tripartite symmetry and communication of human signs in the depths of the *Commedia*. By operating the process of other-ing, this figure of man makes an universal understanding of man possible. The Other in Hegel's brilliant concept of the dialectics of master and slave indicates merely an individual man, an unknown presence outside of the center. Within his framework, the Other remains a figure who exists to highlight the contradictions within a specific, homogeneous society, and his discussion, therefore, cannot but be limited to the ontology of Western modernity. In addition to this, Dante suggests to us the ability of literature to expand Hegel's concept toward the Other outside the West, and to suggest that post-humanism is a discourse through which, by linking the death of God to the death of man, we can re-construct the transversal communication between them. In the *Commedia* I find the ethics of literature to make such communication possible. In this interpretation, I would say that the ethics of literature resurrects Dante in our post-humanist stage.

the Bible endows the God with human hands and feet. See. *Paradiso* 4.43-45.

Ethics of Literature

The writer Dante is the center of the *Commedia*; however, he is also the non-center or the center to operate the orbit of de-centering in his literary enterprise. This is so because he builds a ceaseless transversal communication with the Other wherein he negate ceaselessly his status as the center of the literary enterprise. By ceaselessly reconstructing himself, the writer Dante opens the text and invites the readers to his enterprise of literature, so that he paradoxically kills himself. In the place of his death, by virtue of its non-place-ness, his communication with the readers and further communication among them occur.

In this respect, we can consider the ethics of literature in two ways: one aspect is the communication with the reader, and the other is the self-alteration of the literary text which occurs during that communication. A literary text, in the communicative unfolding with the readers, leads them to reflect on their own life-worlds; the readers converse with the text as well as with themselves and their worlds. In this conversation, the readers are able to objectify themselves and their worlds, and thus obtain the momentum of consciousness and practice of them.

This process is linked to the self-alteration of literature. Literature is open beyond time-space, and in this openness a literary text welcomes new interpretations that continue the process of deconstructing and reconstructing the text. This is the ethics of literature without which literature cannot exist and cannot have reason to exist. This differs from the ethics of philosophy, sociology or religion, whose ethics suggest a specific scope of inquiry or instruction. The ethics of literature escape from such a delimited scope and motivate the reader and text to find freedom outside it. It is precisely because

Dante is such a brilliant and careful writer that we can discuss his universality in relation to humanism and post-humanism in the full and open context of the non-Western Other.

Dante's literature, by including the contradictory positions of the center and non-center and surpassing itself, makes itself open to the Other. Starting from Dante's confrontation with the dialectical process of identities is, I think, the most effective way to consider properly the true possibilities of his universality, stretching beyond Western man, in our post-humanist context. Dante's universality allows us to reconsider humanism in the era of its crisis. By our extending humanistic principles to the context of the Other, humanism is no longer confined to the West. This is the universal appropriation of humanism – and, I believe, this humanistic post-humanism should be the foundation of a newly universally universal man.

Dante's universality revives humanism in its era of crisis insofar as the true universality in his literature makes the universalism of humanism true, that is to say, not confined to and defined by Europe. For this reason, we foreground post-humanism, not as the death of humanism, but as the universal appropriation of humanism. Only in doing so, post-humanism can be a universally "human" civilization.

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Post-Humanism and the Origin of Dante's Universality: With Special Reference to Canto 1 of *The Paradiso*

Abstract

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If we can say that Dante's universality surpasses European universalism, it will be because it does not exclude the Other. What matters now is whether otherness can be maintained or not when we undertake a study of Dante's universality in the context of a humanism developed Eurocentrically, to what extent it can be maintained, and how. I argue that Dante's literature provides us with a solution to this impasse. It does so including the 'other' reader in the literary process while allowing the reader to maintain his or her otherness. This is possible insofar as Dante's literature possesses the capacity of opening itself to the heterogeneous other by continually negating and de-homogenizing itself. Certainly, this capacity provides the power to sustain his literature's universality.

The idea of man as a contradictory in the context of literature, particularly in relation to the problem of 'ineffability', is indispensable for understanding Dante's literary enterprise to pursue and include otherness. The tripartite symmetry among the writer, the pilgrim and the God in the first canto of the *Paradiso*, through the process of repeated surpasses that it operates, leads us to understand positively the concept of man as a contradictory being. Furthermore, the "trasumanar" simultaneously implies transcendence and non-transcendence of man. The writer Dante is the center of the *Commedia*; however, he is also the non-center or the center to operate the orbit of de-centering in his literary enterprise. This is so because he builds a ceaseless transversal communication with the Other wherein he negate ceaselessly his status as the center of the

literary enterprise. By ceaselessly reconstructing himself, the writer Dante opens the text and invites the readers to his enterprise of literature, so that he paradoxically kills himself. In the place of his death, by virtue of its non-place-ness, his communication with the readers and further communication among them occur. In the *Commedia* I find the ethics of literature to make such communication possible. In this interpretation, I would say that the ethics of literature resurrects Dante in our post-humanist stage.

Key words

Dante, *The Paradiso*, humanism, post-humanism, universality (universalism), literature, transversal communication, ineffability, tripartite symmetry, trasumanar, transcendence, ethics of literature

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