IS VIRGIL NAKED? CLOTHING IN DANTE'S *COMMEDIA*

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Abstract: Dante's poem presents the humiliation of nakedness as part of the punishment of the souls in hell. But what about those in purgatory and limbo, and what about Virgil himself? Although most readers cannot imagine a naked Virgil, Dante gives only a hint of the state of clothing of the souls in limbo, and none at all concerning that of the souls in purgatory. Silence on this point was not an option for visual artists, however, and a survey of illuminations of the *Commedia* reveals some significant difficulties the poet's reticence is able to avoid. It is suggested that Dante's silence concerning the theologically expected nakedness of the souls in purgatory and limbo, including Virgil, is probably due to a reluctance to draw attention to what would otherwise be an awkward similarity between these generally positive figures and the souls of the damned. Dante-pilgrim as a living man is repeatedly described as clothed, but he is also repeatedly mistaken by those in hell as a soul newly arrived for punishment. Consideration of this contradiction reveals Dante's preference for dramatic effect over logical consistency in presenting what he claims to have been an actual journey.

The inspiration for this essay was a question asked in an undergraduate response paper, "is Virgil naked?" The student went on to say that she couldn't imagine Virgil naked, standing beside a clothed Dante, and this is doubtlessly the view of most readers.¹ Yet there is no evidence in the poem that Virgil is clothed, and an exploration of the student's question, along with a survey of the clothed or nude status of other characters in the *Commedia*, provides insight into the poet's artful use of significant detail as well as a rare example of Dante's subordinating the logical consistency of his story to dramatic effect.

¹ Ms. Zhou Wen asked the question in a Peking University essay entitled "Spirits in the Nude."

That nudity is the normal state of souls after death is attested by the Book of Job: “Nudus egressus sum de utero matris meæ, et nudus revertar illuc” (1:21). Nudity was the original state of human beings, and this was at first no reason for embarrassment (Gen. 2:25). But after the Fall, Adam and Eve felt shame at their nakedness (Gen. 3:7, 3:10–11),² and there are also several indications in the *Commedia* that its readers are meant to consider nakedness a humiliation. Jacopo Rusticucci urges Dante-pilgrim not to disdain Guido Guerra, who, “tutto che nudo e dipelato vada, / fu di grado maggior che tu non creda” (*Inf.* 16.34–36). As Virgil slides with Dante into the ditch of the hypocrites in order to escape the Malebranche, his lack of concern for dignity is compared to that of a mother escaping a burning house with her child, “avendo più di lui che di sé cura, / tanto che solo una camiscia vesta” (23.40–42). And in purgatory, Dante’s friend Forese Donati inveighs against the immodest women of Florence who go “mostrando con le poppe il petto” What laws were ever needed, he asks, to make barbarian or Saracen women cover themselves? (*Purg.* 23.102–05). The *Commedia* also reflects both Biblical and contemporary social ideas of the shameful of nudity by repeatedly referring to the souls in hell as naked (for example, *Inf.* 3.65, 16.34–36, 18.25, 20.52–54, 30.25). Nakedness is clearly part of the punishment of the damned, just as enforced nudity has more recently been used as a method for humiliation and intimidation of prisoners by such regimes as Nazi Germany. Moreover, Dante’s theory of *ombre* seems to preclude the characters in his after-world being imagined as clothed. As Statius explains, hologram-like images are radiated from the souls of the people Dante encounters; the *ombre* are projections that only constitute semblances of the bodies before reunion with their souls at the Last Judgment (*Purg.* 25.88–108). It is hard to understand how such images could be imagined as clothed. From what would the clothes be radiated?³

As a writer, Dante had the option of simply remaining silent concerning the clothed or unclothed state of the characters his pilgrim meets. Visual artists, however, had no such liberty, and even a cursory examination of the ways that

² Also relevant are Cham’s affront to the dignity of his father by seeing Noah’s nakedness (Gen. 9:21–25), and the prohibitions of Leviticus (18:6–19).

³ Of course, Dante imagines God to exceptionally clothe certain classes of souls when it suits his purpose — as in the lead cloaks of the hypocrites in hell or the hair shirts of the envious in purgatory. Less obvious instances of “clothing” as punishment might be the thorn bushes in which the souls of the suicides are bound (“si lega,” 13.88) and the flames which wrap (“si fascia,” *Inf.* 6.48) the souls of Ulysses and Diomedes.

afterworld souls are portrayed in the art of the late Middle Ages reveals some of the difficulties Dante is largely able to avoid.

Dante's decision to describe the souls in hell as explicitly naked agrees with most visual depictions. In some instances, such as Giotto's *Last Judgment* in the Scrovegni Chapel, a fresco with which Dante may have been familiar,⁴ a few of the damned are shown clothed in order to indicate their professions — a monk in his habit, a merchant in his tunic and carrying a bag of goods.⁵ Generally, however, Giotto and other visual artists present the damned as fully naked. Illuminators of the *Commedia* generally conform to this convention — again, however, with interesting exceptions. Although a full survey of the illuminations of the *Commedia* is beyond the scope of this study, a brief account of three important fourteenth-century illuminated manuscripts throws useful light on the choices Dante faced in describing the souls of his afterlife.

British Museum MS Holkham misc. 48 represents all of the *Commedia*'s souls in hell proper as naked, except for the textually supported hooded cloaks of the hypocrites (24). The artist who created the illuminations for British Museum MS Egerton 943 shows the souls as naked, with the exception of the Lustful, who are fully clothed as they swirl on the wind before the pilgrim and Virgil (f. 10v).⁶ The illuminator's refusal to compound the punishment of the Lustful by the further humiliation of nakedness may reflect Dante's own comparatively generous treatment of this class of sinners, especially his narrator's sympathy towards Francesca. Alternatively, the illuminator may not have wanted to risk his viewers taking inappropriately prurient interest in the naked forms of this category of sinners. It is interesting that the Egerton illuminator gives these souls a greater dignity than the parallel category of sinners in his purgatory, since he shows the souls being cleansed by fire on the highest terrace of the mountain as nude (f. 114).⁷

⁴ See Nassar 54.

⁵ The monk is lying prone in the lower left of the scene, and the merchant is walking down the tunnel leading into hell just below the monk.

⁶ Also exceptional are the recently arrived souls awaiting judgment by Minos (f. 10).

⁷ Perhaps the illuminator is troubled by the problem of how clothes could survive the purifying fire, yet Virgil invites Dante-pilgrim to test the fire-resistance of his gown (*Purg.* 27.28–30), and the illuminator shows Dante, Virgil, and Statius traversing the wall of flame fully clothed.

If the souls in hell are naked, what about those in purgatory? With the exception of the souls of the envious, who are “clothed in coarse haircloth” (*Purg.* 13.58), there is no indication that Dante imagined the souls on the mountain as anything but naked. The angels stationed on the mountain are described as clothed (*Purg.* 8:28–29, 12.88), and Cato, as shore guardian and a patriarch worthy of reverence (*Purg.* 1.31–32), might be expected to share a similar dignity. However, there is no evidence that he is clothed, although Virgil refers to his having left behind the *vesta* of his body, which “al gran dì sarà sì chiara” (*Purg.* 1.74–75). The state of clothing of another member of the mountain’s non-angelic “staff,” Matilda, is similarly unspecified. If she were imagined as nude, however, this would help explain Dante-pilgrim’s initially erotic attraction to her (*Purg.* 28.40–76).⁸

The illuminators are inconsistent in their portrayal of the souls in purgatory. Egerton, whose artist was clearly the most prudish among those of the three manuscripts surveyed here, shows the souls uniformly clothed (with the exception of the Lustful, as noted above). Holkham shows the souls of the lower divisions of the mountain clothed in tunics (Cato is shown in a Roman toga, p. 57). Following the Envious in their textually specified hair shirts, however, the souls on the upper levels of the mountain are naked, including the important character Statius. British Museum MS Yates Thompson 36 presents the souls on the mountain naked with the exception of Statius. He is fully clothed as he embraces Virgil’s feet, although he is surrounded by other souls on the terrace of avarice and prodigality who are naked — including the high-ranking souls of Hugh Capet and Pope Adrian V (who, however, is wearing his tiara, f. 100). As in the case of Virgil, the illuminator seems reluctant to show a particularly important character like Statius, who has just completed his penance and who is described as accompanying Dante-pilgrim throughout the remainder of his ascent of the mountain, in the humiliating condition of nakedness. This was probably a wise decision, since the Holkham illumination of the clothed Dante and Virgil standing in conversation with a totally naked Statius shocks the viewer by its incongruity (98).

The souls Dante encounters on his journey through the heavens to the Empyrean are generally portrayed in the *Commedia* as lights, torches, or luminous

⁸ In Holkham p. 107, Matilda is fully clothed as she dips the clothed Dante in the river Lethe; see also pp. 108, 109, 111, and 112. The presence of the naked Statius in these portrayals is strikingly incongruent — all the other figures are fully clothed. Egerton also has Matilda gowned from head to foot (f. 114, 115, 115v) as does Yates-Thompson (f. 116v).

images (such as the faces which appear in the sphere of the moon, *Par.* 3.10–22). For these souls, the question of clothing does not arise. In the depiction of the celestial consistory (30.129), however, the poet follows the Biblical assertion that the souls of the saved are clothed in white robes (for example, Matthew 17:2; Revelation 3:5, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 19:8). The illuminators, not content to portray featureless lights and torches, seem uncertain how to show the souls of the blessed. The beautiful Yates Thompson *Paradiso* miniatures (thought to be the work of Giovanni di Paolo) generally show the souls clothed. However, the souls in the heaven of Jupiter, shown dancing, are naked. Likewise, although the souls in the petals of the Yates Thompson celestial rose are robed (f. 185), those in an alternate depiction of the empyrean as a consistory surrounding an empty imperial throne are shown naked (f. 184). This contradicts the poetic text, which specifies that the souls in the seated ranks surrounding the place awaiting Henry VII constitute a “convento de le bianche stole” (*Par.* 30.129).

Having surveyed the poetic descriptions and manuscript depictions of the state of clothing of the general categories of souls in Dante's afterworld, we can now consider the key roles of Virgil and Dante-pilgrim themselves.

Although most readers imagine Virgil clothed, and all the illuminations of the poem known to me show him this way, there is no evidence in the poem's text that supports the assumption. As we have seen, Dante emphasizes the degrading nudity of the damned but is silent concerning the state of clothing of the more admirable souls in purgatory. Therefore, the souls in limbo, who are technically in hell but for whom the poet shows great respect, represent an especially crucial test of his handling of the clothed/naked motif. There is, however, only one piece of clearly relevant evidence, Dante-pilgrim's passing mention that among the ancient heroes he sees “Cesare armato” (*Inf.* 4.123). Commentators often assume that this means that Caesar is wearing a suit of armor, although it could also mean that he is simply carrying a sword or spear (compare the description of Homer with his sword, *Inf.* 4.86).⁹ The detail seems to be intended mainly as a symbolic indication of Caesar's social role, much as the merchant's tunic and monk's robe in the Scrovegni *Last Judgment*, and, in any case, it is not evident that Caesar's state of

⁹ Yet another possible interpretation is given in Daniele Mattalia's note on the description “armato di occhi grifagni” (*Inf.* 4.23). Mattalia speculates that Dante's inspiration for the martial accoutrements in limbo was probably the situation Virgil describes in Elysium, where Aeneas sees the “currus... inanis” (*Aen.* 6.651) and other equipment of the ancient heroes which has been transferred to the afterlife.

“clothing” can be extended to the other souls in Dante’s limbo. Further evidence in the text is equally ambivalent. That Virgil shares the nudity of the other souls in hell seems implied in the scene in which the leader of the Malebranche agrees to Virgil’s request for a parlay while muttering to himself, “Che li approda?” (*Inf.* 21.78) — indicating that he mistakes Virgil as a damned soul coming for punishment, for whom no amount of talking will be of use. It might seem unlikely that Malacoda would make such a mistake if Virgil were clothed, but, as we shall see, the same mistake is repeatedly made lower in hell concerning the indisputably clothed Dante-pilgrim.

The visual art presentations of the souls in limbo, of which Virgil is one, also show interesting variations. Of forty-four randomly sampled late-medieval depictions of the Harrowing of Hell available on the internet, nineteen show the patriarchs and prophets fully clothed in neck-to-heel gowns, two partially clothed, and the remainder fully naked. All of the works showing the souls clothed and partially clothed are Italian, while the others, showing the souls naked, are French, Dutch, English, Spanish, and German.¹⁰ None of the Italian works shows the souls fully naked, perhaps because of the precedent of the robed patriarchs and prophets in Giotto’s early and masterly *Descent into Limbo*, 1320–25. Even Jacopo Bellini’s *Christ’s Descent into Hell*, which may have been influenced by the Renaissance revival of the idea of heroic nudity, shows the souls clothed in loincloths. As the Egerton illuminator seems to have made an exception for the souls of the Lustful, one of the Italian artists may have made an exception for the father of mankind, Adam. In the fourteenth-century Harrowing of Hell fresco of the Chiesa Matrice, Castelbuono, Adam is wearing a loincloth while the pelvic regions of the other souls, including Eve’s, are not visible because they are behind him, a portrayal which is reminiscent of the twelfth-century Capital 3 in the choir of the Church of Sainte-Nectaire, Auvergne, which shows Adam swathed and the other souls naked.

The *Commedia*’s illuminators are similarly conflicted in their depictions of the souls of Dante’s limbo. In Yates Thompson, Dante and Virgil are shown conversing with the fully clothed figures of Homer, Lucan, and Ovid, while the castle in the background has a fully clothed figure in its doorway (a guard of some sort?). Within the crenellations of the castle’s highest level, there are five other figures, three clothed and two naked. Perhaps in depicting the naked souls the illuminator was thinking of the unbaptized infants, although all five figures are

¹⁰ Works surveyed date from 1300–1500.

shown as adults and, of course, in Dante's conception, the castle is reserved for non-Christians who achieved merit through their deeds; it is not imagined to include infants. Bodleian MS Holkham misc. 48, in contrast, shows the souls of the four ancient poets greeting Dante and Virgil naked, although Homer carries — as specified by the text — a sword (6). Another interesting detail of Holkham is the depiction of the souls in the castle itself as embarrassed by their nakedness—they are shown covering their genitals with their hands (p. 7).

In purgatory, Dante's clothed status is confirmed by Virgil's invitation for the pilgrim to put the hem of his gown into the purifying fire on the terrace of the lustful in order to test that it will not be damaged and, consequently, that he himself will not be harmed (*Purg.* 27.28–30). On the mountain, however, rather than recognizing Dante-pilgrim as alive by his clothing, the souls notice — and are frightened by — Dante's shadow (2.67–68, 5.27, 23.112–14). In an amusing reversal of the usual situation on earth, the souls are as startled by the presence of a living human being as we would be by a ghost. Does the fact that the souls in purgatory do not recognize by his clothes that Dante-pilgrim is living indicate that they are clothed as well? If so, their dress must be magically transparent, since they are repeatedly surprised that Dante's has a shadow. Likewise, if Virgil is clothed, he must be wearing miraculously diaphanous clothing because his body casts no shadow (*Purg.* 3.19–21).

In presenting the incongruous situation of the living pilgrim's afterworld journey in his poem, Dante was inspired by Virgil's exploitation of the dramatic possibilities of Aeneas in the world of the dead — in such incidents as the lowering of Charon's boat when the hero steps aboard (*Aen.* 6.412–13; compare *Inf.* 8.28–30) and the hero's vain embrace of his father's bodiless form (6.700–02, compare Dante's embrace of Casella, *Purg.* 2.79–81). Virgil also presents the surprise of his underworld characters at the presence of a living Aeneas, as in Charon's challenge (6.388–91, compare *Inf.* 3.88–93) and as in the terror of the souls of the Greek soldiers who see Aeneas' flashing arms among the shadows (6.489–93). Dante decided to adopt this last motif as an important element of his own story, dramatizing repeated recognitions and non-recognitions of Dante-pilgrim's living state.

In the upper circles of hell, the denizens seem to have no difficulty perceiving the pilgrim as a living visitor. Charon recognizes Dante as an "anima viva" (3.88); Minos challenges the pilgrim, clearly aware that he is not a soul who has come for judgment (5.19–20); and Plutus seems to know that Dante-pilgrim is an intruder

(7.1). Francesca immediately recognizes Dante as a living being (“animal,” 5.88), as do the fallen angels on the walls of Dis: “Chi è costui che senza morte / va per lo regno de la morta gente” (8.84–85). In the same way, Farinata and Cavalcante recognize Dante-pilgrim’s living status (*Inf.* 10–22, 58–69).¹¹

However, in the meeting of the Dante-pilgrim and Virgil with the centaurs, the poets are first spied from afar by Nessus, who, assuming Dante is one of the damned, challenges, “A qual martiro / venite voi che scendete la costa?” (*Inf.* 12.62–3). A few lines later, Chiron — more perceptive — recognizes that Dante is alive by the fact that he moves what he touches (12.80–81). The necessity of such an oblique deduction is odd, however, because the pilgrim’s status should have been at once obvious to the centaurs by his clothing, which is clearly referred to in later episodes of the *Inferno*. Brunetto Latini has no difficulty seeing that Dante is alive and even attracts his attention by tugging at the hem of his robe (15.23–24), and the usurers also immediately recognize the pilgrim’s living status (19.40). Later, the Florentine sodomites shout to him, “Sòstati tu ch’a l’abito ne sembri / essere alcun di nostra terra prava” (*Inf.* 16.8–9). In this scene, Dante’s clothing is not only noticed, it also seems to be the reason that the Florentines realize that he is still alive, asking him “chi tu se’, che i vivi piedi / così sicuro per lo ’nferno fregghi” (32–33).¹²

Commentators on the *Commedia* praise its careful realism in such details as the shifting of the scree under the weight of Dante-pilgrim as he descends to the circle of the violent (*Inf.* 12.28–3) and the sudden shift in perspective as the poets cross the center of the earth’s gravity (*Inf.* 34.76–90). Robert Hollander carefully works out the size of the giant Nimrod from the seemingly precise indications given in the text, and then wryly remarks, “One senses [Dante’s] amusement at the reader who will do this calculation” (note to *Inf.* 31.58–66). In fact, Dante-narrator deliberately tempts the reader to question the realism of the more unbelievable elements of his account — and then goes on to defend their veracity.

¹¹ Although Cavalcante does not state his conviction that Dante is alive, this is clearly implied by his concern that his son does not accompany Dante on such an extraordinary journey and by his despair when he mistakenly assumes that Guido is dead. The situation seems to be modeled on Andromache’s anguished questioning of Aeneas when she realizes that he is not a ghost — “vivisne ? aut si lux alma recessit, / Hector ubi est ?” (*Aen.* 3.311–12).

¹² It may be significant that in this scene the Florentine sodomites’ nakedness is particularly emphasized, in contrast to Dante-pilgrim’s explicitly being clothed. When first seen, they are described as wrestlers, “nudi, untì” (15.22).

Geryon, he admits, is nearly inconceivable, but he then gives a detailed description of the monster and a highly realistic account of his flight on its back (7.7–27, 100–136); the twelve Malebranche have unusual and complicated names, but the pilgrim is at pains to explain how he was able to quickly memorize them all (22.37–39); on purgatory's terrace of the gluttons, Dante-pilgrim wonders how immaterial spirits can feel hunger (25.20–21), whereupon Statius embarks on a long explanation of the formation of aerial bodies (34–158). Dante repeatedly invites us to evaluate his story on the basis of its plausibility by raising such questions. Moreover, the questions raised and explanations given are requirements of the narrative occasioned by the products of his imagination alone; they are not like the explanations of traditional philosophical and theological points on which Virgil and Beatrice often lecture the pilgrim.

All the passages of the *Commedia* surveyed in the preceding pages show Dante's awareness of the incongruity of a living person in the afterworld, as well as showing that he pays careful attention to this situation's consequences when it serves his poetic purpose. Yet, as we have seen, concerning some important details, Dante is inconsistent. He repeatedly affirms that his pilgrim is clothed and that most of the souls in hell are naked. Yet the denizens of hell often fail to recognize that the pilgrim is only a visitor. How is it that the centaurs — including the wise Charon — do not notice even at close range what should be the obvious incongruity of a damned soul being clothed in a Florentine gown? Likewise, much lower in hell, although the hypocrites see that Virgil and Dante are not wearing lead cloaks, they are only able to deduce that Dante is alive by the throbbing of the pulse in his throat (23.88–90). Other souls fail to recognize Dante-pilgrim's living status altogether (Mohammed, 28.43–45; the alchemists, 29.94–99; Master Adam, 30.58–59).¹³ How are these contradictions to be explained? We must of course avoid the mistake of the women of Verona — Dante's text is neither the record of a real journey nor a modern detective novel, in which every inconsistency must be eliminated in order to satisfy a readership demanding meticulous realism. Nevertheless, Dante's departures from internal consistency with regard to the clothed or naked status of the souls of his afterworld are worth exploring. It

¹³ Boca degli Albatì's statement to Dante-pilgrim, "se fossi vivo" (*Inf.* 32.90), could mean either "if you were alive" or "if I were alive." For this reason, it is not certain that Boca fails to recognize Dante as a living person.

might, of course, be argued that the inconsistencies are simply due to the author's "nodding,"¹⁴ but alternate and more illuminating explanations are also possible.

One initially attractive hypothesis concerning the varying ability of the inhabitants of hell to recognize Dante-pilgrim's status is that, unlike the souls in the higher circles who immediately notice that Dante is alive, those lower in hell are prevented by their evil from seeing that even a clothed traveler could be anything but one of them — a soul come for punishment. This explanation seems ruled out, however, because the souls in purgatory — on their way to heaven — also do not recognize by his clothing that Dante is alive. Consideration of the narrative art of the poem, however, provides a convincing explanation for the lack of perceptiveness of these more virtuous souls, as well as for the poem's silence regarding the clothed or nude status of other positive figures of the story.

Although the souls presented in *Purgatorio* should logically be imagined as naked, their nakedness is never mentioned. This lack of emphasis and Dante-pilgrim not being recognized as alive by his clothing can be attributed to the same cause. The author does not wish to draw attention to an awkward similarity between souls who are on their way to heaven and the inhabitants of hell, nor does he wish to call attention to the humiliating condition of the souls in purgatory by highlighting his persona's contrasting dignity. By extension, this explanation also applies to the poem's avoidance of specifying the clothing or nudity of the important figures Cato, Statius, Matilda, and, above all, Virgil. In visualizing the state of dress of these virtuous characters, Dante allows the reader to follow his or her own imagination. Any explicit description of their theologically expected nakedness would disturbingly mirror one of the punishments of the damned. With regard to Virgil, it might also be argued that since Dante's later guides — Beatrice and Bernard — are clearly clothed (*Purg.* 30.31–33; *Par.* 31.60), Dante must have also intended to give similarly respectful treatment to his pilgrim's first guide. A late-fifteenth-century illumination in the Vatican Library shows the kind of scene Dante may have expected the reader to imagine: Cato in a robe, Dante and Virgil clothed, but the souls recently arrived on the shore naked.¹⁵

¹⁴ As in the case of Sancho's donkey disappearing and then miraculously reappearing in *Don Quixote*, although a publishing error is also possible.

¹⁵ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, cod. Urbinate lat. 365, c. 100r.

But what about the inconsistency of the motif's presentation in *Inferno*? Perhaps the best explanation of Dante-pilgrim in hell not being consistently recognized as living by his clothing is simply the requirement of artistic variety. Once the author decided to make the incongruity of Dante-pilgrim's living status in the afterworld an important part of the journey's interest, it would quickly become tedious to have the pilgrim recognized as alive by his clothing every time the motif is employed. This would necessitate repetitious explanations of how he has come to be traveling through hell whenever a soul is surprised by his clothing. Dante-poet chooses the more dramatically effective method of sometimes having the souls of the damned either simply assume that the pilgrim is one of them or having them deduce that he is alive on the basis of evidence other than his clothing. Sometimes, as well, ignoring Dante-pilgrim's clothing allows a dramatic announcement of the traveler's living status. For example, Virgil informs the alchemists that Dante is alive and then uses the opportunity to explain the purpose of the journey. This news causes the souls of the sinners to turn towards Dante in surprise (*Inf.* 29.94–99). It is also Virgil who lures Antaeus into helping the poets descend to Cocytus by promising the fame that a living man returned to the world can bring to the giant (31.127–29). Dante-pilgrim himself earlier tries this technique with Guido da Montefeltro. When Guido mistakenly assumes that Dante is a soul newly fallen into the *mondo cieco* (27.25–25), the pilgrim replies by saying that he can assure that Guido's name will still be remembered above. Despite the pilgrim's implication that he is alive, Guido doesn't believe him, based on the sinner's understanding of the one-way-only nature of visits to hell (61–66). Finally, in the dialogue with Bocca, Dante explicitly states that he is alive and can provide the precious gift of fame, but the sinner vehemently rejects this offer (32.91–96).

As already noted, in purgatory Dante-pilgrim is usually recognized as alive by his lack of a shadow.¹⁶ Sometimes, however, as in hell, Virgil or Dante himself must clarify the pilgrim's status. But in contrast to the situation in hell, this information is given only to souls who cannot see the pilgrim — Sapia, because her eyelids are sewn shut (*Purg.* 13.142), the souls of the slothful, because it is dark (18.109–10), and the avaricious and prodigal, because they are lying facedown on

¹⁶ The first encounter with a group of souls in *Purgatorio* may seem an exception. In this instance, the new arrivals on the shore of purgatory deduce that Dante is living by his breathing (2.67–68). Dante does not describe them as noticing the pilgrim's clothing, but why don't they recognize that he is alive by his shadow? Probably because the meeting takes place in twilight (2.55–57).

the ground (19.96). In all of these scenes, therefore, the issue of why the souls do not recognize by his clothing that Dante is alive is avoided, and, as a result, also avoided is an awkward drawing of attention to their nakedness.

Despite Dante's careful handling of the state of clothing in *Purgatorio*, it must be admitted that there are contradictions in the presentation of this motif in the *Inferno*. As I have argued, however, when puzzling over such inconsistencies, it is best to bear in mind a point that Hollander advances in another context: "Dante is generally precise in honoring the ground rules he establishes; it is also true that he has written a poem, one that allows him to please his fancy when he chooses" (note to *Inf.* 21.39).¹⁷

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¹⁷ I would like to thank Prof. Hao Tianhu, my colleague at PKU, as well as a third reader at *Quaderni* for making invaluable suggestions for the improvement of this study.

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