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## Matelda in the Terrestrial Paradise

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### ABSTRACT

This analysis of the enigmatic figure of Matelda, guardian of the Terrestrial Paradise in Dante's *Purgatorio*, considers both the unresolved question of Matelda's historical identity, in particular whether Dante is alluding to the historical personage, Countess Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115), and the numerous critical glosses that have emerged over the years, whereby Matelda has been interpreted as a symbolic figure, for example, as the biblical typology of the active/contemplative life, as the representation of human wisdom, or in a variety of other symbolic guises.

Whilst alluding to recognisable idyllic poetic images, such as the *donna angelicata* of the vernacular tradition, Dante's conceptualisation of Matelda is nevertheless aligned to the pilgrim-poet's own development *in via* of a redemptive poetics in which the writer articulates an urgent message of reform, at both the secular and ecclesiastical levels. The linking of Matelda with the notion of the loss of the prelapsarian state of humankind's innocence and her supervision of the penitential cleansing rites performed on Dante-protagonist, in anticipation of his ascent to Paradise in the company of Beatrice, represent crucial moments in Dante's mapping out of prudential history for his readers and his call for a recovery of Christian values.

Dante's portrayal of the figure of Matelda in the Terrestrial Paradise has been variously interpreted as an image of primeval innocence, as the *donna angelicata* of the stilnovistic tradition, as the biblical typology of the active/contemplative life or as a representation of human wisdom. [1] However, any attempt to address the question of Matelda's historical identity is fraught with difficulty since no scholar who has entered the minefield of debate on this elusive figure has, to date, provided an indisputable and convincing solution to the mystery of her true identity. Arguably, the matter may be left in suspense with no ill effect on the character who appears in Dante's poem. Nevertheless, with a number of hypotheses in circulation, not to mention earnest acrosticisms and anagrams of her name as possible fonts of truth, [2] modern-day Dante scholars entering the critical fray cannot ignore the plethora of Mateldas that emerges from the centuries of dedicated scholarship. These *dramatis personae* include the celebrated Matilda, Countess of Canossa known as Countess Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115), the visionary Saxon nuns Matilda (or Mechtildis) of Hackenborn (d. 1298) and Matilda of Magdeburg (1207-1282), Saint Matilda (c. 895-968), mother of Emperor Otto I, [3] one of the cast of unnamed women who feature in Dante's *Vita nuova*, from the screen lady to Giovanna, and further suggestions that have surfaced over the years, for example, that Matelda is Dante's wife, Gemma Donati, Dante's mother, donna Bella, Beatrice's sister, Vanna, Mary Magdalen, or the figure of Rahab. [4]

On the whole, the early commentators, who were keen to show an unbroken pattern in Dante's selection of real-life personages, supported the theory that Dante was alluding to the wealthy and influential Countess Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115), daughter of Beatrice of Lorraine. Countess Matilda's generosity to the Papal cause at the time of Pope Gregory VII is well-remembered and her endowment of vast tracts of land to the Papacy during a time of tension with the Empire enhanced immeasurably its power and prestige. She was a major figure in papal and imperial politics for decades; an authoritative player in the Imperial-Papal struggle that culminated in Emperor Henry IV's submission to Pope Gregory VII in 1077. Through her inheritance, the Countess

acquired large holdings in Tuscany, Liguria, Lombardy, Modena and Ferrara, all of which she donated to the Holy See before her death. Twice-married but with no issue, Countess Matilda was known for her sharp intellect, strength of character and ability to wield considerable power and influence, thus maintaining a political role as an ally to the papacy without relinquishing her autonomy.

In echoing the name of Countess Matilda, could Dante be suggesting the authority of an influential political figure? One might argue that the choice of a strongly partisan historical figure such as Countess Matilda contrasts with Dante's universal political theorising since the Countess' bequests of territory could be compared to the damaging effects of the Donation of Constantine and the notion of the acquisition of temporalities in the Church: "quella dote / che da te prese il primo ricco padre!" (*Inf.* XIX, 116-117). [5] However, according to Joan Ferrante, Countess Matilda acted in good faith: "Leaving her lands to the church was a mistake, but well-intentioned, like Constantine's Donation, which was far more harmful but does not deny him heaven". [6] At the same time Countess Matilda's presence in the garden could be interpreted as an idealized example of a political leader who cooperates with but also maintains her independence from Christ's Vicar such that she is not subservient to the Church's dominion and earthly *regnum*.

In the early part of last century, a variety of critical opinion supported the view that Matelda was based on the historical "Signora di Canossa" as Alfonso Bertoldi terms her, [7] while Bruno Nardi asserts that the unwillingness of some modern-day critics to endorse Countess Matilda as a candidate for identification as the figure in the garden is related to the discovery of later historical evidence supporting her allegiance to the Pope. [8] John Scott observes: "By introducing the Pilgrim to the triumphal procession, and to Beatrice, Matelda offers him a vision of the right relationship between the active life and the Church on earth". [9] Matelda in Eden could thus be an idealised historical personage with links to a reform papacy. [10] Mindful of such possibilities, Dante's creation of a character drawn from the formidable personal attributes of the Countess Matilda would serve as a worthy corollary to Beatrice, while signalling that Dante's transitional experience in Purgatory is closely linked to his awareness of the political exigencies of his society. Textually, however, an incontrovertible link between Matelda and a well-known historical character, or the soul of a person with whom Dante was acquainted, remains elusive. [11]

Pitted against the bevy of Mateldas advanced by commentators is the school of critical thought that maintains that Matelda is a symbolic figure only. Here, too, the theory may be further divided into three basic points of view:

1. Matelda is linked to Leah in *Purgatorio* XXVII (who symbolizes the active life);
2. Matelda represents the purifying rites that Dante and all the souls in Purgatory must undergo;
3. Matelda acts as an interim guide and authority between Virgil's relinquishing of the task and Beatrice's assumption of it.

Linked to the symbolic model is the proposal that Matelda is the personification of (i) Philosophy, that is, the *Donna gentile* of Dante's imaginative faculty; [12] (ii) the wisdom of the Old Testament (*Ecclesiasticus* 24:5-42 and *Proverbs* 8:22-31); (iii) human wisdom that recognizes the Christian God - an intermediary position between Virgil's pagan wisdom and Beatrice's divinely-infused wisdom; [13] (iv) an original state of human innocence, or lastly (v) original justice, whereby she is linked to the figure of the star-maiden Astraea (*Monarchia* I, xi, 1). The latter theory, advanced by Charles Singleton, asserted that Matelda figured "that perfection of human nature which man enjoyed in Eden before his fall". [14]

In contrast to other figures in the *Purgatorio*, no biographical information on Matelda is provided during her encounter with Dante. Indeed, the Poet does not name Matelda until well after her first encounter with him in the garden and then in an informal way only, by means of Beatrice, "Priega / Matelda che 'l ti dica" (*Purg.* XXXIII, 118-119). Nonetheless, the solitary "bella donna" has a strong impact on Dante; visually and aurally, by means of her dance-like movement and song; through her demeanour that embodies the purity of the prelapsarian Edenic state while, at the same time, imparting knowledge that is universal and timeless, a divinely-bestowed wisdom of the ages and, lastly, through the carrying out of her official duties in preparing Dante for the final stages of his journey through the purgatorial realm in order that he may ascend with Beatrice to Paradise.

The figure of Matelda first appears to the Pilgrim in the guise of a beautiful young woman who sings to herself while picking wondrous flowers along the banks of the river Lethe in the Terrestrial Paradise (*Purg.* XXVIII, 37-42). A short while later, Dante makes an analogy between the young woman and Proserpina (Persephone), daughter of Earth, who was snatched by Hades to become his bride in the Underworld (*Metamorphoses* V, 391-394). Proserpina (or Ver) symbolizes the coming of Spring (*Purg.* XXVIII, 49-51). Matelda's luminous gaze is subsequently compared to the goddess Venus, who falls under the spell of Adonis' beauty after she is pierced accidentally with one of Cupid's darts (*Purg.* XXVIII, 64-66). Dante, in wanting to reach the side of the river where Matelda has been gathering *fioretti*, states that his desire to be with Matelda is comparable to that of the tragic Leander impatient to join his beloved Hero awaiting him on the opposite bank of the Hellespont (70-75). Although the Wayfarer demonstrates his eagerness to partake of the wonders abounding in the garden, his desire must be curbed until he has been fully prepared and

instructed by the lady.

In *Purgatorio* XXVIII, Matelda's lucid explanation of the natural and divine forces at work in the garden ("che puote disnebbiar vostro intelletto", 81), is preceded by a classical analogy with Persephone, not imagined in her adult role as Queen of the Underworld ("regina de l'eterno pianto", *Inf.* IX, 44), but pictured in the last moments of her girlhood innocence just prior to her kidnapping and forced descent to Avernus. Thus Matelda evokes the notion of primordial innocence: the young maiden Persephone in the act of gathering springtime flowers. Matelda's expository monologue then concludes with the corollary that the *divina foresta* was perhaps the source of inspiration for the poets of antiquity when they imagined a Golden Age of primeval innocence:

Quelli ch'anticamente poetaro  
l'et de l'oro e suo stato felice,  
forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro.  
Qui fu innocente l'umana radice;  
qui primavera sempre e ogne frutto;  
nettare questo di che ciascun dice".  
(*Purg.* XXVIII, 139-144)

The description contains echoes of Ovid's lyric evocation of the Golden Age in the first book of *Metamorphoses*:

The earth itself, without compulsion, untouched by the hoe, unfurrowed by any share, produced all things spontaneously [...] It was a season of everlasting spring, when peaceful zephyrs, with their warm breath, caressed the flowers that sprang up without having been planted. (101-103; 106-109) [\[15\]](#)

The smiling response of Virgil and Statius to the notion of a pagan prefiguration of humankind's state of happiness and earthly perfection in Eden closely follows the announcement in *Purgatorio* XXVII of Dante's liberation from sin ("libero, dritto e sano tuo arbitrio", 140). In recalling the Golden Age of humanity and the wisdom of the ancients, Matelda is preparing the Pilgrim-poet for his own experience of inner joy and divine revelation as one who recognizes that while the prelapsarian state of innocence is lost to humankind forever, nevertheless, Dante, after witnessing the mystical Procession and its revelations concerning the parlous state of affairs between Church and State, will relay a message of hope and reform to the living.

In the opening lines of the subsequent canto, Matelda is linked to the *pastorella* theme of Dante's contemporaries, the *donna innamorata*, and thence to an image from classical times of nymphs roaming freely through woodlands:

Cantando come donna innamorata,  
contin col fin di sue parole:  
'*Beati quorum tecta sunt peccata!*'.  
E come ninfe che si givan sole  
per le salvatiche ombre, dis ando  
qual di veder, qual di fuggir lo sole,  
allor si mosse contra 'l fiume, andando  
su per la riva; e io pari di lei,

(*Purg.* XXIX, 1-8)

The opening image recalls the words of Cavalcanti's "cantava come fosse 'nnamorata" (vs. 7) in the poem *In un boschetto trova' pasturella*. [\[16\]](#) In his conceptualization of Matelda and her role, Dante suggests, in the one episode, mythological and literary antecedents, the themes of Parnassus and the Golden Age of poetry with an allusion to well-known classical lovers and elements borrowed from a familiar contemporary genre and location, the *topos* of the "locus amoenus". The *bella donna* of Dante's imagination emanates an air of both innocence and authority and fulfils a specific divinely-appointed task since she is invested with superior intellectual capabilities and a mature knowledge of the phenomena in the Earthly Paradise ("purgher la nebbia che ti fiede", XXVIII, 90). It will be Matelda's task to clarify Dante's doubts regarding the origin of the rivers and the movement of the wind in the marvellous garden atop the mountain which, as Statius has informed him previously, is not affected by atmospheric phenomena (*Purg.* XXI, 43-54). Moreover she will instruct Dante and lead him to the candelabra (a source of light during the allegorical procession), clarify his mental confusion, soothe him with her song and lead him to where he will drink of the divine waters that flow in the garden. [\[17\]](#) In this respect her duties and function go beyond the possible range of responsibilities that an ordinary purgatorial soul could be expected to perform and she carries out the important baptismal-like renewal of Dante (and the silent Statius) in the waters of Euno (*Purg.* XXXIII, 142-145).

In the fragrant garden filled with bird-song, Matelda's smiling demeanour and radiant expression are a source of delight to

Dante, an unexpected gift of loveliness "di levar gli occhi suoi mi fece dono" (XXVIII, 63), and which she features in six cantos, remaining in the Pilgrim's company, her physiognomy is never described in detail. This is because Matelda's desirable presence, while suggestive of a spectrum of recognisable, idyllic poetic images of the female form, combines a natural human form with a divine and incorruptible nature. Matelda appears self-contained and self-reliant in all her actions as she sings to herself and is immersed in gathering flowers from the garden. Furthermore, she refers to her own inward delight by mentioning the Old Testament psalm *Delectasti* (XXVIII, 80-81), and her actions and ministering to the Pilgrim can be seen as anticipating Beatrice's task and her initiation of Dante to the delights of Paradise. Thus the figure of Matelda combines an independent spirit and edifying influence with an open expression of divinely-infused joy.

Dante's Matelda has textual links to both the classical Persephone (renewal and new life) [18] and to the Biblical idea of a *figura* or an event that prepares one for the fulfilment of another event, since her appearance in the poem is preceded by the prophetic dream of Leah, and her active presence has been interpreted as a fulfilment of that dream (*Purg.* XXVII, 100-108). The Old Testament linking of the two sisters Leah and Rachel, symbols of the active and contemplative life, has its counterpart in the New Testament with the sisters Martha and Mary. [19] In the midst of gathering flowers, both Matelda (as an active presence) and Leah (in oneiric guise) appear to Dante bathed in the warmth of Venus' pre-dawn rays. Whilst it is evident from the text that Matelda's appearance is linked to the idea of the active life, she is also engaged in enlightening and supervising the Pilgrim at an intellectual level and, as such, her significance should not be reduced to that of simple handmaiden to Beatrice. [20] While the four maidens from the allegorical procession are defined as *ancelle* to Beatrice, Matelda is perceived as a guardian in the Terrestrial Paradise and is a character in her own right who exhibits personality traits that are not impoverished in the wake of Beatrice's solemn arrival and the evident seniority of her role. Beatrice is on friendly terms with Matelda but does not treat her as inferior or subservient. Similarly, the textual link with Leah/Rachel (and by analogy Martha/Mary) adds a further dimension only to Matelda's characterization, but does not provide a definitive gloss on the significance of this animated poetic creation whose sublime inner radiance reflects her love of "lo sommo Ben" (XXVIII, 91).

While her physical beauty suggests traditional poetic models that Dante transcends in his quest for *l'alta matera* and she inspires comparisons with classical figures, Matelda retains a distinct personality and demeanour, combining natural virtue and beauty with the dignity of her station as a guardian appointed by God, but who is not, however, a member of the angelic caste. If, as Bosco and Reggio assert, Matelda is "un'idea figurata", [21] she is so within the context of a redemptive Christian poetics, since her characterization explores the range from the idyllic and pastoral with stilnovistic overtones, to biblical and mythological references, to the revelatory and deeply personal.

Matelda's soothing presence has a restorative, strengthening effect on the Pilgrim who has been cleansed in the searing wall of fire and whose growing desire to ascend to God gathers momentum with every passing hour (*Purg.* XXVII, 121-123). Much of Dante's release from the weaknesses of the will has been supervised by Virgil, but now his own natural intelligence is once more potent and ready to face new challenges. "Voi siete nuovi", states Matelda (XXVIII, 76), as she provides the ministering influence to oversee the restoration of Dante's intellect within the confines of her otherworldly precinct. Thus Matelda's genesis as a poetic image is linked to the unique moment of the poet-protagonist's development *in via*, and to his final goal of being united with Beatrice. Her multi-form image is textual evidence of Dante's poetic self-mastery on the eve of Virgil's departure and Beatrice's arrival, when he has left behind the company of pagan poets and seeks confirmation of his autonomy as a Christian poet. The image of Matelda pertains to Dante's own representation of the course of eternal history; a movement from pagan symbols to Christian symbols. [22] Thus the important penitential cleansing rites performed on Dante in the flowing waters of Eden and overseen by Matelda take place in order that he be freed from the memory of sin (Lethe) and restored to wholeness of being by the memory of virtue (Eunoia) in anticipation of the paradisiacal "eterna fontana" in Heaven (*Par.* XXXI, 93).

By means of the figure of Matelda, Dante presents a poetic image whose textual significance provides a vital link in Dante's poetic mapping out of redemptive history and his place in the poetic triumvirate comprising Virgil (whose poetry explores the pre-Christian value of *pietas*), Statius (representing the early Christian era of conversion to the faith and the impact of this on individual lives) and himself as protagonist (representing the medieval Christian era in urgent need of a recovery of values and a return to the true mission of the early Church). In the role and image of Matelda Dante surpasses both the poetic representations of classical goddesses, heroines and nymphs desired by deities or heroes, and the idealised *donna angelicata* lauded by the vernacular poets. Just as Beatrice's role is central to Dante's articulation of a vernacular salvific poetics, Matelda's supervision of Dante's final rite of purification, before his ascent to the heavenly order, attests to her importance in a crucial phase of his spiritual development and reforming mission.

## NOTES

[1] The interpretation of Matelda as Wisdom was first proposed by Luigi Pietrobono, *Il poema sacro: Saggio d'una interpretazione generale della Divina Commedia*, 2 vols, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1915, vol. 2, pp. 90-96. See also his essay, "Matelda" in *Nuovi saggi danteschi*, Turin, S.E.I., 1954, pp. 169-197. Ulisse Fresco argues for Matelda as a symbol of "la nuova sapienza cristiana ubbidiente di nuovo a Dio", "Amore di Sapienza nella *Divina Commedia*", *Il giornale dantesco*, Vol. XXVII (1924), p. 209. More recently, Peter Armour has convincingly argued that Matelda represents primeval Wisdom. See "*Purgatorio XXVIII*" in *Dante Commentaries: Eight Studies of the Divine Comedy*, ed. David Nolan, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1977, pp. 115-141 and "Matelda in Eden: The Teacher and the Apple", *Italian Studies*, 34 (1979), 2-27.

[2] For example, the name Matelda spelled backwards results in *ad laetam* meaning "toward joy". See Robert Hollander, "The Women of *Purgatorio*" in *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton UP, 1969, p. 152, n.18 and Gioacchino Maruffi, *Matelda svelata*, Rome, Stabilimento A. Staderini, 1936, p. 3. See also Peter Armour's good-humoured summary of etymological and cryptographical theories pertinent to the topic in "Matelda in Eden: The Teacher and the Apple", pp. 24-26; Concetto S. Del Popolo, "Matelda (22 aprile 1978)", *Lecture Classensi*, Vol. 8, Ravenna, Longo, 1979, pp. 121-134; Jerome Mazzaro, "The Vernal Paradox: Dante's Matelda", *Dante Studies*, 110 (1992), 107-120. See Caron Cioffi's entry "Matelda" in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing, New York and London, Garland, 2000, pp. 599-602.

[3] See for example, M.F.M. Meiklejohn, "The Identity of Dante's Matelda" in *Collected Essays on Italian Language and Literature presented to Kathleen Speight*, eds Giovanni Aquilecchia, Stephen N. Cristea and Sheila Ralphs, Manchester University Press, 1971, pp. 24-27.

[4] See Fiorenzo Forti's entry "Matelda" in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, III, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-71, pp. 854-60 and Armour, "Matelda in Eden", p. 4. See Benedetto Croce, *La poesia di Dante*, Bari, Laterza, 1961, p. 63, "Matelda, da fata della primavera, diventa ancella ed esecutrice di riti espiatori", and pp. 126-127. Ettore Caccia, "Il mito di Matelda", *Lecture Classensi*, Vol. 2, Ravenna, Longo, 1969, pp. 173-197, presents a number of hypotheses on the identity of Matelda and finally settles on the view that Matelda is based on Dante's memories of his youth in Florence (p. 193). Giovanni Federzoni believes that Matelda was a young friend of Beatrice's. See *Studi e dipinti danteschi*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1935, pp. 24-27. See also E. G. Parodi, "Intorno alle fonti dantesche e a Matelda", *Poesia e storia nella Divina Commedia. Studi critici*, Naples, Francesco Perrella, 1921, pp. 315-363; Lorenzo Mascetta-Caracci's proposal that Matelda is Giovanna (Primavera), the woman loved by Guido Cavalcanti: "Matelda", *Il giornale dantesco*, Vol. XXVIII (1925), 237-257; Giulio Natali, "Il Paradiso terrestre e la sua custode", *Siculorum Gymnasium* (Rassegna della facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell'università di Catania) N.S., anno VIII, n. 1 (gennaio-giugno 1955), pp. 197-210; Tilde Nardi, "Matelda", *L'Alighieri*, Anno III, N. 2 (luglio-dicembre 1962), 29-34; Francesco Biondolillo, *Ore dantesche*, Ravenna, Longo, 1969, pp. 133-153; Franco Masciandaro, *Dante as Dramatist: The Myth of the Earthly Paradise and Tragic Vision in the Divine Comedy*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991, pp. 187-230.

[5] All quotations from the *Commedia* are taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. G. Petrocchi, Società Dantesca Italiana, Edizione Nazionale, 4 vols, Milan, Mondadori, 1966-1968.

[6] *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton UP, 1984, p. 206. Emperor Constantine is in the Heaven of Jupiter (*Par.* XX, 55-60) and Dante notes that although Constantine's actions were to good purpose, they bore evil fruits.

[7] Alfonso Bertoldi adopts a two-pronged view that Matelda also represents allegorically the active life, *La bella donna del Paradiso Terrestre*, Florence, Ufficio della "Rassegna Nazionale", 1901, p. 5. See also Michele Barbi, "Nuovi problemi della critica dantesca: VIII - Impero e Chiesa", *Studi Danteschi*, 26 (1942), p. 39, "Matelda - senza dubbio - la contessa di Toscana; ed è ben naturale che Dante l'abbia voluta far presente in quella parte del poema dove più di proposito intese esprimere, attraverso una vasta figurazione simbolica, i principii fondamentali della sua dottrina intorno alla Chiesa e all'Impero e intorno ai loro vicendevoli rapporti". See also the résumé by Edward Moore as to the identity of Matelda, in his *Studies in Dante. Third Series. Miscellaneous Essays*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1968-69 (reprint of 1899, Oxford, Clarendon Press edition), pp. 210-216. Other critical material related to Matelda includes: Francis Fergusson, "Matelda: The Letter for the Spirit" in his *Dante's Drama of the Mind: A Modern Reading of the Purgatorio*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton UP, 1953, pp. 204-215; Alberto Chiari, "Preludio al Paradiso dantesco", *Lecture del "Purgatorio"*, a cura di Vittorio Vettori, Milan, Marzorati, 1965, pp. 304-320; Umberto Bosco, *Dante vicino: Contributi e lecture*, Caltanissetta-Rome, Salvatore Sciascia, 1966, pp. 274-296; Antonio Enzo Quaglio, *Il canto XXVIII del Purgatorio*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1966 and "Canto XXVIII", *Lectura Dantis Scaligera, Purgatorio*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1967, pp. 1039-1066; Gaetano Marcovaldi, *Studi sul pensiero di Dante*, Rome, Istituto Grafico Tiberino di Stefano De

Luca, 1969, pp. 43-46; John C. Barnes, "Dante's Matelda: Fact or Fiction?", *Italian Studies*, 28 (1973), 1-9; Peter S. Hawkins, "Watching Matelda" in *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's Commedia*, eds Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Stanford, California, Stanford UP, 1991, pp. 181-201; Flavia Coassin, "Matelda: Poetic Image or Archetype?" in *Visions and Revisions: Women in Italian Culture*, eds Mirna Cicioni and N. Prunster, Providence/Oxford, Berg, 1993, pp. 3-12.

[8] Bruno Nardi, *Nel mondo di Dante*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1944, pp. 276-278.

[9] *Dante's Political Purgatory*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, p. 184. Peter Armour writes of Countess Beatrice of Tuscany and Countess Matilda, mother and daughter who ruled jointly for a short time and are buried together in Pisa, thus suggesting an historical link with the duty of care towards the Pilgrim jointly carried out by Beatrice and Matelda in the *Commedia*, "Matelda in Eden: The Teacher and the Apple", *art. cit.*, p. 26. Joan Ferrante also supports the view that Matelda represents the countess of Tuscany, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-248.

[10] Victoria Kirkham argues in support of a bipartite division, reflected in the landscape and imagery of the Terrestrial Paradise, whereby the material and the eternal are in combination and Matelda is "ad litteram the Countess of Tuscany and spiritualiter Wisdom" and "a miraculous paradox [...] both Venerean and virginal", "Purgatorio XXVIII", *Lectura Dantis*, 12: Supplement, *Dante's Divine Comedy, Introductory Readings II: Purgatorio*, ed. Tibor Wlassics, *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, vol. II (1993), pp. 423, 425. Anna M. Chiavacci Leonardi, *La guerra de la pietate: Saggio per una interpretazione dell'Inferno di Dante*, Naples, Liguori, 1979, p. 32 highlights the dualistic tension evident throughout the *Commedia*: "la sua qualitativa distintiva e specifica [...] che sta nel doppio registro, o doppia tensione espressiva, tra il terreno e l'eterno, tra lo storico e il metastorico, di cui il cammino del primo verso la figura, e l'amore dell'ultimo il termine".

[11] One recalls the exasperated tone of Arturo Graf who declares: "Se Dante, per prima cosa, avesse chiesto a Matelda: Chi sei? e che fai costà? avrebbe risparmiata molta fatica ai commentatori e fatto a noi un grande servizio", "Il canto XXVIII del Purgatorio", *Lecture scelte sulla Divina Commedia*, a cura di Giovanni Getto, Florence, Sansoni, 1970, pp. 850-851.

[12] Evasio Comello, *Matelda*, Sarno, Tip. Fischetti, 1917, p. 28 identifies a series of transformations that have at their core a tribute on the part of Dante to his wife Gemma Donati. Thus the *donna gentile* of *Vita nuova* becomes Lady Philosophy in the *Convivio* until finally, in the figure of Matelda, the Poet fuses the notion of the contemplative, philosophical life with that of the active life. In 1925 Hoxie Neale Fairchild published a study of Matelda within the context of multiple allegory. Fairchild asserted that Matelda fulfilled the function of *precursor* on a number of levels. Although the primary hypothesis was that of Giovanna-Primavera, that is, Matelda as the forerunner of Beatrice, from this basic premiss Fairchild then offered the reader a choice of precursorial possibilities which may be summarized as follows: Matelda may be linked to the Active Life that heralds the Contemplative life (Leah to Rachel) and to Grancontessa Matilda's Florence in a Golden Age (with John the Baptist as patron saint) looking forward to an age of revival. Moreover, Fairchild also saw connections with Lucia, and in the realm of "historical precursors and servants of God in the Active Life", with Martha and Mary, Monna Vanna and Monna Bice and lastly John the Baptist and Christ, "Matelda: A Study in Multiple Allegory", *The Romanic Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1925), 136-164. Variations on the theme of the Active-Contemplative Life include Maria Francesca Rossetti, *A Shadow of Dante Being an Essay towards Studying Himself, his World and his Pilgrimage*, Port Washington, New York/London, Kennikat Press, 1901 (reissue 1969), p. 185: "the Flower-culler of Eden, the only permanent inhabitant appearing there, would seem to be the realization and development of the dream-Leah, and so the Christian type of the Active Life in the Paradise of Earth: Beatrice standing in the same relation to the dream-Rachel, and to the Contemplative Life in the Paradise of Heaven"; Marcello Campodonico, for whom Matelda is "la Perfezione raggiungibile nella Vita attiva, che è il Paradiso terrestre", "Matelda la 'Philosophia Doctrinalis?' la 'sorella' di Beatrice?", *Il giornale dantesco*, XXVI (1923), p. 117 and Manfredi Porena who maintains that Matelda symbolizes both the active and the contemplative life "e che per quest'unione di simboli ella viene poi insomma a rappresentare la perfetta felicità terrena", *Delle manifestazioni plastiche del sentimento nei personaggi della Divina Commedia*, Milan, Ulrico Hoepli, 1902, p. 150.

[13] Rachel Blanche Harrower attests to Matelda as a symbol of "the human Understanding as it was first created, at its highest point of power and activity, perfected through knowledge and fully prepared for the bliss of intellectual satisfaction", *A New Theory of Dante's Matelda*, Cambridge University Press, 1926, p. 9.

[14] C.S. Singleton, "Matelda", *Dante Studies 2: Journey to Beatrice*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 218. See also the chapters entitled "Natural Justice" and "Lament for Eden". Singleton's view has recently received support from R. A. Shoaf who maintains that Matelda "not only figures, she also enacts justice", "Lo gel che m'era intorno al cor (Purg. 30.97) and *Frigidus circum praecordia sanguis* (Geo. 2. 484): Dante's Transcendence of Virgil", *Lectura Dantis*, 5 (1989), p. 36.

[15] *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Mary M. Innes, U.K, Penguin, 1975 (1955), pp. 31-32.

[16] See Umberto Bosco's discussion of the Cavalcantian themes in the episode, "Il canto XXVIII del *Purgatorio*", *Nuove letture dantesche*, V, Florence, Le Monnier, 1972, pp. 143-144. In a later study, for the most part a reprint of the last-mentioned essay but slightly augmented, Bosco states: "la bellezza di Matelda stilnovisticamente concreta e religiosamente celeste", "L'idillio sacro: Matelda (c. XXVIII del *Purgatorio*)", *Altre pagine dantesche*, Caltanissetta-Rome, Salvatore Sciascia, 1987, p. 235.

[17] C. H. Grandgent regards Lethe and Euno as symbolic of the rite of absolution: "This rite is administered by Matilda, type of Innocence, who first plunges the swooning poet into Lethe, then leads him forth to join the dance of the four Cardinal Virtues", *Dante*, London, George G. Harrap, 1920, p. 203.

[18] Emerson Brown, Jr. asserts that Dante recognizes in Matelda "a brief glimpse at his own prelapsarian state. [...] the lovely and innocent Matelda brings the lovely and innocent but also threatened and doomed Proserpina to his mind", "Proserpina, Matelda, and the Pilgrim", *Dante Studies*, 89 (1971), p. 41. Giuseppe Tricoli deifies Matelda: "Dea dell'eterna primavera sbocciante rigogliosa all'intorno", *Il Purgatorio dantesco: Studio critico*, Florence, La Giuntina, 1951, p. 163. This may be compared to Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, who asserts that Matelda represents "l'allegoria della natura nella condizione di suprema perfezione e innocenza", *L'Ombra di Argo: Studi sulla Commedia*, Turin, Genesi, 1992, p. 333.

[19] An example of this view is advanced by A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Matelda is to Beatrice as Leah is to Rachel, or Martha was said to be to Mary, or the terrestrial paradise where man worships through the purity of his deeds is to the celestial paradise where the soul adores by reflecting the Divine Light. Matelda is the guide to that new life of joy and innocence wherein Dante will rediscover the "old flame" and find Beatrice and, through her, God", *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton UP, 1966, p. 107. See Mario Pazzaglia's discussion of Leah and Rachel in "Il canto XXVII del *Purgatorio*", *Nuove letture dantesche*, Vol. 5, Florence, Le Monnier, 1972, pp. 103-130.

[20] T. K. Swing's observation that "Dante's ultimate end is not to meet Matelda but Beatrice. Matelda turns out to be only a handmaid to Beatrice" demotes Matelda's obviously independent and important function, *The Fragile Leaves of the Sibyl*, Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Press, 1962, p. 95. H. Wayne Storey's observation gives appropriate recognition to Matelda: "Like Leah's relationship to Rachel, Matelda's knowledge and actions form the foundation, the sisterly complement, upon which Beatrice's extraordinary teachings in the contemplative and visionary arts are built", "Revision and Vision in *Purgatorio XXXI*", *Lectura Dantis*, 14-15 (1994), p. 32.

[21] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia, Purgatorio*, con pagine critiche a cura di Umberto Bosco e Giovanni Reggio, Florence, Le Monnier, 1988, p. 470.

[22] As Rosetta Migliorini Fissi suggests, Matelda teaches Dante to recognize God's providential imprint: "Matelda insegna dunque a Dante [...] ad oltrepassare le parvenze sensibili [...] a cogliere nel mirabile ordine della creazione - contemplato nella perfetta e incontaminata natura edenica - il disegno provvidenziale tracciato dall'artefice divino", "L'ingresso di Dante nell'Eden", *Studi Danteschi*, 58 (1986), p. 33. The essay reappears with some modifications as "Il canto XXVIII del *Purgatorio*", *L'Alighieri*, Anno XXXI, n. 2 (1990), 3-50. Nicol Mineo says of the Terrestrial Paradise: "In esso Dante ha pensato e rappresentato come realtà i comportamenti ideali sognati dallo stilnovismo e l'essenza dell'ideale mondo cristiano imperial-comunale", *Dante*, Bari, Laterza, 1986, p. 246.

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