Sylvia Plath's Use of Dantean Structure
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I. Introduction
Many people have remarked on the genius of Sylvia Plath's poetry. However, it has come to my attention that Plath has been grossly misunderstood by her critics, such as the famous critic, Harold Bloom who left Plath out of his book *The Western Canon*: "Well, what can I do? They are not good writers, they are ideologues. Miss Plath was not an ideologue, she was merely a hysteric" (Mead 41). Perhaps out of a desire to understand Plath's personal psychology, these critics and commentators contentedly placed Plath among the Confessional poets - and shut the book. When in reality, Plath was an artist of a much higher order.

It is my personal belief that good poets enter into conversations with all sorts of things, but *great* poets enter into conversations with other *great* poets and I believe that this is what Plath was doing.

It appears that Plath at least had an interest in *The Divine Comedy* written by the 13th century Italian poet, Dante Alighieri. We know that Plath read *The Divine Comedy* by Dante, specifically the Carlyle-Wicksteed translation. Both it and the book *The Figure of Beatrice*, by Charles Williams were read for a Medieval Literature course taken by Plath at Smith College during the 1952-1953 school year ("Legacy Library: Sylvia Plath").

Plath also possessed a personal copy of *The Divine Comedy*, which is now held at the Lilly Library at Indiana University. Her copy of the book contains "extensive manuscript annotations" ("Legacy Library: Sylvia Plath").

It can also be surmised that Plath either attempted to learn Italian - the native language in which Dante wrote - or was perhaps interested in doing so, because two books from her personal library express her interest in the Italian language: *Libro Italiano* says "Sylvia Hughes 3 Chalcot Square" and has "underlining and marking by Plath" and the book *Italian Through Pictures* has Plath's mother's name written on the inside flap ("Legacy Library: Sylvia Plath").

*The Divine Comedy*, an epic poem told in three parts (cantiches): the *Inferno*, (Hell) the *Purgatorio*, (Purgatory) and the *Paradiso* (Paradise) is arguably the best poetic creation
of all time. In the *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil descend into the funnel-shaped circles within the pit of Hell in the first cantiche. The second cantiche, the *Purgatorio*, charts the poets' ascent upon the island-mountain that is Purgatory. In the *Purgatorio*, Dante is reunited and aided by his postmortem courtly love, Beatrice, (*Purgatorio* XXX) now bathed in heavenly beauty. At the summit of Dante's Purgatory sits the Garden of Eden, and Eden is followed by Dante's final climb through the heavenly spheres towards God. Harold Bloom places Dante and Shakespeare in the center of the Western Canon because they "excel all other Western writers in cognitive acuity, linguistic energy, and power of invention" (43).

On an allegorical level, *The Divine Comedy* charts the ascension of the soul towards God.

Edward Butscher has remarked on the similarities of Plath's "Epitaph for Fire and Flower" and the doomed lovers Francesca and Paolo in Canto X of the *Inferno* (Butscher 195). The Scottish Poet Don Patterson wrote a poem called "The Forest of Suicides" wherein he reworks canto XIII of Dante's *Inferno*. However, in Patterson's poem, when the tree is snapped, the voice of Sylvia Plath emerges (Corcoran 233-34). Many have noted Plath's use of *terza rima* (the same poetic form which Dante used) but has anyone given serious thought to just how inspired by Dante Plath may have been? Comparatively, the attention Ted Hughes receives for his involvement with the Classics has been vast.

In this paper I will attempt to show that Plath indeed structured the three books she wrote before her death after *The Divine Comedy*. *The Colossus and Other Poems* was her *Inferno*, *The Bell Jar* was her *Purgatorio*, and *Ariel* was her *Paradiso*. However, the methods which Dante and Plath employed in order to organize their material were very different from each other. This paper will examine each methodology separately and then examine the poems and chapters within each of Plath's three books and briefly explain how they interact with the corresponding cantos in *The Divine Comedy*.

II. Methodology

*Dantean Devices and Design*

The design of *The Divine Comedy* is one which scholars and critics have puzzled over since its inception. However, we know that Dante began *The Divine Comedy* with the end fixed in his mind. After penning *La Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*) which explains a great deal about his life with Beatrice, his future work was set in stone: "it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman, after the which, may it
seem good unto Him who is the Master of Grace, that my spirit should go hence to behold the glory of its lady" (*Portable Dante* 618). In reality, Dante suffered the sudden death of his young love, Beatrice Portnari, whom he had met when he was just nine-years-old. He became infatuated with her and remained infatuated even though they both married other people. Rather than the modern "love" or "infatuation" as we think of it today, Dante's feelings towards Beatrice were in actuality the "exulted bondage" of courtly love. He was enamored by her beauty, morals, and intellect yet extremely respectful in his worship of her. He utilized her as a vehicle with which to move his narrative forward, and as an example of virtues one would wish to attain.

*The Divine Comedy* ends with the deification of Beatrice who had stepped into the narrative to act as Dante's guide. Dante then experiences the beatific vision, in which (according to Christian theology) one is allowed, to see God face-to-face. The Bible explains that God dwells in the light which no man can approach unto; "whom no man hath seen, nor can see" but when God reveals Himself to us in heaven we will then see Him face to face (*King James Bible*, 1 Tim. 6:16). The Dantean structure is predicated upon this vision happening. Therefore, the beatific figure is of utmost importance. The beatific figure represents unattainable or courtly love personified by Beatrice and "the effect of Beatrice on Dante is to arouse his 'valor' or nobility" (Williams 76).

*The Divine Comedy* was written with a specialized structure for each of its 100 cantos; the *Inferno* has an Introduction and 33 subsequent cantos and the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* have 33 cantos each for a grand total of 100 cantos. Dante's chronology was also tightly organized, temporally. While *The Divine Comedy* was written between 1308 and 1321, the plot itself takes place over only a few days; from Good Friday through Easter Sunday in the spring of 1300. Many have attested that *The Divine Comedy* also held mystical information within its cantos, the planets; their astronomical and astrological aspects and the Tree of Life have all been unearthed from its lines. Great thinkers such as Ezra Pound, Michelangelo and Carl Gustav Jung have all read and commented upon, translated or emulated its inherent greatness of structure. In addition, there were four "keys" to the cantos or four ways which they could be read: "allegorically, literally, morally and analogically" (Williams 56).

Ultimately, *The Divine Comedy* is regarded as an autobiographical achievement: it
tells us much about Dante's own life. No matter how one approaches the work, it is clear to the reader that Dante wished us to see that decisions on earth speak volumes about character and that "life on earth is what counts" (*Portable Dante* xxii). Decisions are what truly matter to Dante both in earthly life and in the pursuit of spirituality. Even in the Heavenly Spheres of the *Paradiso*, Dante still finds himself reflecting on life upon earth. The human condition on earth is absolutely inescapable throughout the narrative.

Dante at times talks about something in a premonitory fashion as if he knew it would happen before it actually happened in reality. This is also a well-known Dantean device used within *The Divine Comedy*. It was intended to puzzle, and to allow the poet to appear prophetic. Plath also employs this tactic in *The Bell Jar*, for example, when she clips the star off of the sunglass case and gives it to her baby to play with and one has to look no farther than Plath's tragic end to find additional examples: "Suicidal, at one with the drive" (*The Bell Jar* 3, *Ariel* 33).

Voltaire said of Dante, "The Italians call him divine; but it is a hidden divinity – few people understand his oracles. He has commentators, which, perhaps, is another reason for his not being understood" (*Portable Dante* vii). I feel the same thing could be said about the work of Sylvia Plath. Many have commented, criticized and weighed-in on Plath's writing, but the true nature of her work was more divine than her commentators may have supposed.

*Plath's specialized structure*

When Sylvia Plath made the conscious decision to use the poetic form of *terza rima* as the structure for several of the poems in *The Colossus and Other Poems*, she automatically entered into a poetic discourse with other poets who also use that form, most notably, Dante, Chaucer, and Boccaccio among others. Yet few have suggested how Plath may have expanded upon *The Divine Comedy*, while at the same time making innovations upon the its style and organizational structure.

In Plath's take on *The Divine Comedy* there is no question of her strength of originality: she poured her own life into her work. She does not assimilate Dante, that is not what I mean to suggest. It became clear to me after some time, however, that Plath would not and did not use the same structure as Dante, but rather, she had to develop her own
structure based on her own spiritual constraints yet still coached by Dante and she seems to settle on Judaism, specifically, the High Holy Days also known as the Days of Awe.

It is well-known that Plath employed imagery of Judaism, especially that of the Holocaust in several of her poetic works. While the common consensus has been that Plath was Unitarian, she may have had a deeper connection to Judaism than previously supposed. In a radio interview for the British Council, with Peter Orr in October 1962, Orr asked Plath about the meaning behind her copious references to the Holocaust in poems such as "Daddy," and Plath replied: "In particular my background is, may I say, German and Austrian; on one side I'm a first generation American; on one side I'm a second generation American and so my concern, I must say, with concentration camps and so on is uniquely intense..." ("Sylvia Plath - 1962 Interview"). It could be possible that Plath had Jewish roots on either side of her family, most likely on her mother's (Aurelia Plath's) side. When Plath was eight, Aurelia Plath recalls taking her children to the beach, "I knew that as soon as it got dark there would be the emergence of the new moon, and I took both children down to the beach," (Voices and Visions: Sylvia Plath). In Judaism, the sliver of a new moon marks the beginning of a new Hebrew month and is considered a minor holiday.

If Plath did in fact have Jewish roots on her maternal side, this would at least partially explain her poetic use of such phrases as "my face a featureless, fine/ Jew linen" and "I think I may well be a Jew" among others (Plath, Collected 244, 223). It could also explain why the female voice of "Daddy," inherits, as Plath wrote, "an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish" (Ariel: Restored 196).

Additionally, we also know that Plath used two books: Jewish Festivals: History and Observance, by Hayyim Schauss and A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem by Milton Steinberg in paper dated December 8, 1951 for a Religion class at Smith ("Legacy Library: Sylvia Plath"). Plath's biographer Peter K. Steinberg has recently blogged about some of the press releases Plath wrote during her time on the Press Board at Smith, a quarter of which covered Jewish events on campus, mostly sponsored by the Hillel foundation (Steinberg).

Directly, we can see from the dates on her poems, which poems were written during Jewish Holidays. Plath organized her manuscript of Ariel so that it would end with the
poem, "Wintering" which was written on the day after Yom Kippur in 1962. The day after
Yom Kippur is traditionally a day of forgiveness. Prayers said on this day include a public
confession of sins.

Specifically, Plath wrote many of the Ariel poems on Jewish holidays, "Stings" was
written on Shabbat Shuva (The Shabbat of Returning), "Elm" was written on Passover,
"The Detective" was written on Tzom Gedaliah, "The Swarm" was written on the eve of
Yom Kippur and several other poems were written on other Jewish holidays, including
days of the new moon.

The High Holy Days are comprised of: Rosh Hashanah (New Year), The Ten
Days of Repentance, and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). The Ten Days of Repentance
are inclusive of these two holidays and the days between them, (which include the Fast of
Gedaliah, Shabbat Shuva, and Erev Kippur or the eve of Yom Kippur). The actual season
of teshuvah (repentance) starts a full 30 days before Rosh Hashanah. "Three books are
opened on Rosh Hashanah. One is for the out-and-out wicked; a second for the truly
righteous; and a third for those in between. The righteous are at once inscribed and sealed
for life; the wicked for death; judgment on the middle group is suspended till Yom Kippur.
Should one of that group attain merit during those days then he is inscribed for life:
otherwise for death….All are judged on Rosh Hashanah and their fate is sealed on Yom
Kippur" (Schauss 156).

This explains volumes about the tone of each of Plath's books because the tone of
Yom Kippur is a somber one compared to the tone of Dante's Paradiso. "In all other
festivals the spirit is one of exalted joyfulness. The exaltation of Rosh Hashanah and Yom
Kippur, however, has no traces of joy, for these are profoundly serious days, with a feeling
of the heavy moral responsibility which life puts on all" (Schauss 112). While it is true that
Plath has been labeled as a Confessional poet and Dante's The Divine Comedy was also a
fictionalized autobiography, it is important to remember that these particular autumnal
Jewish celebrations are also "concerned only with the life of the individual, with his
religious feelings and innermost probing. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year but, in
contrast with the New Year of other peoples, it is greeted not with noise and joy, but with a
serious and contrite heart" (Schauss 112). It is a season of confession. Even though
we have no actual date for the day Plath penned "The Manor Garden" we do know she
wrote it while she was at Yaddo from September through November 1959 and we know that she ends *Ariel* by penning "Wintering" on the day after Yom Kippur in 1962. If we surmise that our count begins on the day before Rosh Hashana and from there according to a Hebrew calendar noting the appearance of moons in *The Colossus*, I believe we end up on Yom Kippur in the morning. What remains is the last 25 hours of Yom Kippur, 20 of which are represented in the 20 chapters of Plath's *The Bell Jar* (which starts "by nine in the morning," (1), just as Dante's *Purgatorio* starts in the morning as the sun is rising) before Esther, our protagonist, loses track of time: "I had the impression it wasn't night and it wasn't day, but some lurid third interval that had suddenly slipped between them and would never end" (23). The remaining 5 or so hours left of Yom Kippur comprise *Ariel*. Just as Dante's last 8 minutes of the *Inferno* were "crowded" (*Modern Library* 7), each poem in *Ariel* could, theoretically, be counted down to the minute if we use the proper location and the Hebrew calendar for the year in which Plath writes of: 1953.

"The Swarm," was written on Erev Yom Kippur in 1962 which is perhaps part of the reason why Plath decided to take it out of her *Ariel* manuscript; her "hours" are clearer and more precise without it. In my opinion, "The Swarm," is an attempt to cover the same subject matter of "Wintering," the latter which Plath may have felt to be the more successful attempt; an even better reason for her to leave it out of her manuscript. There is no poem written on Yom Kippur in 1962 presumably because it is a day of observance and work is forbidden.

Just as Dante would not have been able to write without a spiritual framework to provide structure for the steps a soul needs to take to achieve a beatific vision, Plath would need to do the same in order to be successful. Therefore, placing the structure of The High Holy Days upon Plath's poems makes sense, as I will attempt to explain.

Dante's chronology is traceable, I argue Plath's is as well but instead of following the sun, Plath follows the moon (and to a lesser degree the sun) for it is the moon that dictates the movement of the Hebrew Calendar. The Hebrew calendar is a lunar-solar calendar (as opposed to the Julian or Gregorian calendar which are solar) based on cycles of the moon. A new moon starts a new month.

Calculating the Jewish hour requires taking the total time of daylight from sunrise to sunset and dividing it into 12 equal parts. Since the duration of sunlight varies by season;
so will the hour. "What happened that night, inside your hours/ Is as unknown as if it never happened" (Hughes, *The New Statesman,* "Last Letter").

If "The Manor Garden," is supposed to be indicative of Rosh Hashanah, and we wished to prove that, one of the best things to look for would be the blast of the shofar. A shofar is a special horn traditionally made out of the horn of a ram and it is customary to blow the shofar every morning (except on Shabbat) starting on the first day of Elul until the day before Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah is also known as Yom Teruah (the day of the shofar blast). Sometimes it is also called Yom ha-Zikaron, or "Day of Remembrance" in reference to the commandment to remember to blow the shofar (*The Complete Tanach*, Lev. 23.24). The sound of the shofar symbolically represents a call to spiritually awaken: "Awake, sleepers from your sleep, and slumberers arise from your slumber!" (*The Complete Tanach, Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 3:4). We cannot hear the shofar in "The Manor Garden" but we can clearly hear it in the third poem of *The Colossus*, "Night Shift," which describes a sound that "confounded inept guesswork" and "stunned the marrow" and evidently woke the sleeping (not literally, but perhaps metaphorically, in other words: spiritually asleep) protagonist up (Plath, *Collected 76*).

Because the blast of the Shofar is not reflected until "Night Shift" it puts her in the tradition of observing the entire month of Elul, (the Hebrew month preceding Tishri) a forty day penitential period, as part of the High Holy Days observance. This forty day period is traditionally interpreted as being representative of the forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai before returning with the second (replacement) set of the Tablets of stone. These forty days are also significant because they mark the point of departure from Dante's methods for Plath. "The first real sign that the Days of Awe are nearing appears on the day before the New Moon of Elul. The day before each New Moon is called a minor Day of Atonement….Many Jews fast on that day, and there is a big congregation present for the afternoon prayers, to recite S'lichos, prayers of supplication and confessions; it really feels like Yom Kippur" (Schauss 143). Therefore, this day, the 30th of the Hebrew month of Av is the day that we see reflected in "The Manor Garden."

Because Jewish holidays take place from sundown to sundown, they take place over two days. Therefore, Rosh Chodesh Elul (New Moon of Elul) begins on Elul 1 through Elul 2. In September 1959 when Plath was at Yaddo, Rosh Chodesh Elul began at
sundown on September 3, 1959 and Elul 1 fell on September 4, 1959. "The Manor Garden" therefore represents the minor Day of Atonement before the New Moon as seen in the line: "Incense of death. Your day approaches" (Plath, Collected 125).

"Two Views of a Cadaver Room," the second poem in The Colossus, which Plath split into two parts, represents these two "days" of Rosh Codesh Elul, for this very reason. In this poem we also find an allegorical scene from the Vita Nuova in which Dante dreams of Beatrice being forced to eat his own heart. In "Two Views of a Cadaver Room," the narrator is handed a heart from a corpse on the dissecting table. Her third poem, "Night Shift" marks the blowing of the shofar that would have traditionally been done after the end of the morning services on Elul 1 (Schauss, 143).

Like Dante, Plath also employs a structure of 100; Plath's The Colossus: and Other Poems contains 40 poems, The Bell Jar has 20 chapters and Ariel: The Restored Edition also includes 40 poems. Add it up and you get 100; 100 pieces of writing that correspond uniquely to Dante's 100 cantos.

While Dante would, for example, punish the diviners, magicians, and astrologers within a single canto of the Inferno, it seems plausible that Plath has stretched out these punishments and has given each its own poem, thereby "punishing" each sin separately. By using the Christian structure of the prescribed severity of the sins of incontinence, violence or brutishness, and fraud or malice as starting points for the divisions or demarcations for each canto in the Inferno, Dante was able to control or reign in the matters of subject and topic. This type of refinement is repeated throughout The Divine Comedy with the Purgatorio featuring the distinctions between perverse, defective, and excessive love followed by the demarcations of Christian virtues and the solar system of the Middle Ages in the Paradiso.

In her work, Plath draws strong parallels between the work of Dante allegorically and locates the correct symbols of Judaism ensuring that the pilgrim's journey remains intact. The more one knows about these holidays the easier it is to decipher them out of Plath's work. The first line of "Parliament Hill Fields," for example "On this bald hill the new year hones its edge," was written on February 11, 1962, indeed after New Years Day. However, if you look at a traditional Hebrew calendar - it's circular. February 11, 1962 was the 7th of the Hebrew month Adar I. Adar is nearing the top of the circle. On March 28,
1961, Plath writes the poem "I Am Vertical" and if we imagine her a little figure, walking around the circle that is the Hebrew calendar, she is in fact vertical, because March 28, 1961 is the 11th of the Hebrew month of Nisan which is the first month of the ecclesiastical year and it is at the top of the circle.

"Dante's tradition is that he wrote the exalted last canto of his Paradiso shortly before his death on September 14, 1321" (Portable Dante xvii). In the exact same way, Plath's Ariel poems, of course, were found, bundled neatly on her desk after her death. According to The Catholic Encyclopedia: "In July, 1321, Dante went….to Venice. Two months later he died, at Ravenna, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, and was buried in the church of San Francesco in that city. The whole of the La Divina Commedia had been published, with the exception of the last thirteen cantos of the Paradiso which were afterwards discovered by his son Jacopo and forwarded by him to Can Grande" (Gardner). Can Grande was Dante's good friend and benefactor.

This is interesting on two counts: first, it appears that Plath did the same thing. She moved to London where she had lived for "only eight weeks, written thirteen poems, nursed two sick children, been ill herself, furnished and decorated the flat, and killed herself" (Ariel, xix). Ted Hughes' decision to cut 13 poems from Plath's Ariel was something that raised the ire of various scholars and feminist critics who then accused him of censoring Plath. Hughes held back thirteen poems from the first published edition of Ariel because, as he said: "I simply wanted to make it the best book I could" (Plath, Ariel: Restored, xix). This is important because it means that Ted Hughes knew what Plath was attempting to do and he was supporting her work by holding back these thirteen poems in order to maintain consistency with not just the work of Dante, but the life of Dante. The poems did not appear in Plath's intended order until the publication of Ariel: The Restored Edition. To be clear I am suggesting that Hughes' withholding of Plath's 13 poems from her Ariel manuscript (he swapped these 13 poems out of the first 1965 U.K. edition of Ariel and then chose 13 of Plath's other poems as substitutes) was most definitely intentional, because if he had not done so then Plath's work would not have adhered to the Dantean tradition of withholding 13 poems after death.

What follows are a few excerpts from my work in progress: "Tangled Up in Blue: Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and The Divine Comedy." Here we will examine the poems and
chapters of Plath's books and briefly discuss how they correspond to specific cantos of The Divine Comedy.

By the end of this paper I hope to make it understood that Plath achieved what Milano said Dante and his friend, the painter Giotto were also able to do: "They do not perfect a dying art; they cross the threshold onto a new one" (*Portable Dante* xxxv).

III. The Colossus & The Inferno

_The Inferno Canto I - "The Manor Garden"

Famously, *The Divine Comedy* begins on Good Friday: "Midway the journey of this life I was 'ware/ That I had strayed into a dark forest./ And the right path appeared not anywhere" (*Portable Dante* 3). At the beginning of Canto I, Dante is lost in a dark wood. He is 35 years old and he finds himself threatened by the beasts of this wood which are metaphorically representing the vices of lust, pride and avarice, when the spirit of the poet Virgil appears out of the mists and tells him that a divine lady in Heaven (Beatrice) has sent him to be Dante's guide. "You must take another road…if thou desirest to escape from this wild place" says Virgil (*Modern Library* 13). Plath begins *The Colossus* with "The Manor Garden," but it is late summer or early fall: "The fountains are dry and the roses are over" (*Collected* 125). By fountains, Plath may be alluding to Virgil, whose cognomen was "Maro" or "fountain." Perhaps she is suggesting that there is no guide and so she sets out alone.

"Incense of death, your day approaches" (*Collected* 125). The Days of Awe do not arise unexpectedly, the attitude during the entire month before Rosh Hashanah is "an earnest and sober one, and all feel that soon the solemn days, the days of penitence will begin" (Schauss 143).

The Leopard, Lion and She-Wolf which Dante encounters at the beginning of his journey in Canto I of the *Inferno*, are held to be symbols of Dante's "vicious habits which prevent his reform" (*Portable Dante* 4), while Plath's "you" in her poem inherits "the family wolves" (*Collected* 125). The wolf in Dante's Canto I is a She-Wolf and generally held to be symbolic of the sin of incontinence, meaning lack of self-restraint or unchastity, but Plath's wolves are neutral, meaning, they are of the "family" and not gender specific. The word "Guelph" is etymologically linked to the word "wolf" (the Guelph and
Ghibellines being the two major conflicting factions in Florence during Dante's lifetime).

Plath's "birds" that "converge" (Collected 125) are like the messengers which Beatrice sends to aid Dante. In Canto I Virgil explains to Dante how he heard that he was in need of guidance. We hear that the Virgin Mary called Lucia, who went to Rachel who spoke to Beatrice, and Beatrice's tears make Virgil, "hasten more to come" (Modern Library 20). Plath's birds also echo the flocks protecting the Israelites in Isaiah 31:5: "Like flying birds, so shall the Lord of Hosts protect Jerusalem, protecting and saving, passing over and rescuing (The Complete Tanach).

And here we can see clearly that this is the Jewish equivalent of the pilgrimage that Dante describes. The Israelites are wondering through the wilderness, being led by Moses, so Plath is drawing a parallel between Dante and Virgil in the wilderness within Canto I and the story of the Exodus. Moses came down from Mt. Sinai on Yom Kippur with his face shining with radiance (Correspondingly, in "Fever 103" Plath writes "I am a lantern" (Ariel 79)). Moses asked to be stricken from "the book which You have written" regarding the book of life opened on Rosh Hashanah, if God would not make an atonement for his people (The Complete Tanach, Ex. 32.32-3). The willingness of Moses to sacrifice himself for the good of the people runs parallel to Jesus' death and resurrection which are the days which Dante has chosen to portray in The Divine Comedy.

Then Plath steps back and shifts the poems perspective to a spider "on its own string" which "crosses the lake" (Collected 125) while Dante remembers in Canto I: the fear "which had continued in the lake of my heart the night that I passed so piteously."

When we think of spiders and poems and Plath, generally we also think of Arachne or Minerva. In Ovid's Metamorphoses, Minerva is turned into a spider by Athena for not crediting that her talent for weaving was at least in part bestowed by the goddess. As Ovid relates this story, it is both a compassionate and punishing act. Athena took pity on Minerva and let her live: "so you shall live, Bad girl, to swing, to live now and forever even to the last hanging creature of your kind" (Ovid 166).

But in Canto I of the Inferno, it is Camilla who gets the mention, the Camilla from Virgil's Aeneid, the fierce, virgin warrior-princess. In book VII (line 1055) of the Aeneid, she is described as "a warrior;/ her woman's hands have never grown accustomed/ to distaffs or the baskets of Minerva;/ a virgin, she was trained to face hard battle/ and to
outrace the wind with speeding feet./ Across the tallest blades of standing grain/ she flies -
and never mars the tender ears" (197).

Again we see Minerva, the moon goddess, this time as part of a rejection. Curiously
enough, Camilla's father, King Metabus, tied her to a spear and threw her across a lake to
keep her safe as he was being chased by men bearing arms (Aeneid, book VI). As he did
this, he promised Diana the goddess of the hunt and the moon that Camilla would be her
servant if she would keep her safe. Camilla was kept safe, retrieved by her father at the
other side of the lake and went on to become a female warrior in the Trojan wars (Virgil
Aeneid 302). It's essentially an adoption story.

"Sow" - Inferno Canto V
In Canto V of the Inferno, Dante meets Minos the judge of Hell. This is the Second Circle
of Hell which contains the souls of the carnal sinners who are blown about incessantly in
total darkness by fierce winds. Dante's pity upon hearing the story of Francesca da Rimini,
the ill-fated adulteress from The Inferno, causes himself to faint "with pity, as if I had been
dying; and fell, as a dead body falls" Dante fainted because he was overwhelmed by the
"force and swift passion of divine justice" or pity (Modern Library 34).

In "Sow," Plath has taken Dante's lintel and stalls of Minos' judging chamber and
appropriated them into a pig house, specifying the pig's gender as female.
"But one dusk our questions commended us to a tour/ Through his lantern-lit/ Maze of
barns to the lintel of the sunk sty door" (Plath, Collected, 60). Minos says to Dante in Canto
V, "Oh thou who comest to the abode of pain!" (Portable Dante 31).

Dante says "My thoughts were mazed," while Plath stands in a "Maze of barns"
(Portable Dante 28). Dante says he "came into a place void of all light" where Minos' tail is
curled (in the same way as a pig's tail curls) (Modern Library 32). He then explains that
however many times Minos' tail winds around a sinner is equal in number to the circle of
Hell into which the sinner will be placed. "I say, that when the ill born spirit comes before
him, it confesses all; and that sin-discerner sees what place in hell is for it, and with his tail
makes as many circles round himself as the degrees he will have to descend" (Modern
Library 31).

Canto V is also interesting because it gives us a long list of carnal sinners and they
are all female queens: Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra, Helen, and so on. This is a detail Plath
definitely picked up on. The ill-fated lovers of Canto V, Francesca and her brother-in-law
Paulo, were reading about Lancelot and Guinevere when they kissed. Both were stabbed to
death by Francesca's husband. (*Modern Library* 35). One of the characters in the story of
Lancelot is Lancelot's nephew Sir Bors. Sir Bors was actually one of the knights successful
in recovering the Holy Grail and is often a Renaissance symbol of Christ's purity. Plath
imagines with awe a "knight,/ Helmed, in cuirass// Unhorsed and shredded in the grove of
combat/ By a grisly-bristled/ Boar, fabulous enough to straddle that so
's heat" (*Collected
61).

"The Thin People" - *Inferno Canto XXXIII*

In "The Thin People," the fifteenth poem of *The Colossus*, Plath writes about people who
seem to be turning into trees. Correspondingly, we see in *Inferno* Canto XIII, sinners who
have sinned by committing suicide (violence against self) on earth are punished by being
turned into trees in Hell. "At the time of Dante's birth, Florence had just become a burghers'
republic, founded on an unsteady alliance between the merchant class (known as the
"popolo grasso" or, Fat People) and the artisans ("popolo minuto" or, the Minute People),
and governed by elected representatives of their trade unions, or guilds" (*Portable Dante
viii*). These "minute people" remind us of the thin people in Plath's poem. Plath's thin
figures "wore// The insufferable nimbus of the lot-drawn/ Scapegoat." Plath concludes the
poem, thusly: "See, how the tree boles flatten/ and lose their good browns// If the thin
people simply stand in the forest,/ Making the world go thin as a wasp's nest// And grayer;
not even moving their bones." (*Collected 64*). Here, Plath does not ask the reader in the
form of a question to look; but commands the reader to look. We have to assume that the
poet wanted us to see these artisans; these thin people turning into trees in the forest. We
have to inquire about the ways in which artisans can be perceived as scapegoats. Certainly,
we can clearly see the scapegoat in Jewish theology; from the time before the destruction of
the second temple in Jerusalem when a goat was selected by lots which were pulled by the
High Priest during Yom Kippur. The goat that was chosen to carry off the sins of the people
was then sacrificed. Plath also personifies Ted Hughes as a scapegoat in the *Ariel: The
Restored Edition* poem, "Stings." Likewise Ted Hughes also writes of the scapegoat in
his poems "The Scapegoat" (*Collected Poems* 433), and "Scapegoats and Rabies" (*Collected Poems* 187). Laurence Binyon also uses the term "bole" in his translation of *The Divine Comedy*: "When the mad spirit doth the body quit…/Minos condemns it to the seventh pit.// It falls into the wood, and there, without/ Place chosen for it but as fortune dole./ Like any grain of spelt it comes to sprout,// Shoots up to a sapling and a forest bole." (*Portable Dante* 71).

Plath seems to allude to the killing (or at least the starvation) of artisans by the Nazi regime in "The Thin People" when she writes: "it was only/ In a war making evil headlines when we// Were small that they famished" (*Collected* 64). Plath says that even in the peace after wartime these thin people persisted: "They found their talent to persevere/ In thinness" (*Collected* 64). The trees in the forest where Dante and Virgil walk appear with leaves: "not green the foliage, but of colour dusky; not smooth the branches, but gnarled and warped; apples none were there, but withered sticks with poison" (*Modern Library* 71). When Dante plucks a branch from one of these trees it yells out in pain and blood comes out of its stem instead of sap "so from that broken splint, words and blood came forth together: whereat I let fall the top, and stood like one who is afraid" (*Modern Library* 72). This particular line seems to be echoed in the first line: "The Laburnum top is silent, quite still" (*Collected Poems* 326) of Ted Hughes' poem "Autumn Nature Notes" and the subject matter is also reflected in his poems "The Laburnum" and "The Inscription" (*Collected Poems* 1176, 1154) which I will address in more depth later.

### IV. The Bell Jar & The Purgatorio

Having emerged from Hell, Virgil and Dante find themselves on the eastern shores of the island-mountain of Purgatory…It is the dawn of Easter Day, 1300" (*Portable Dante* 188). In *The Bell Jar*, Plath's protagonist Esther Greenwood is beginning her internship at a magazine in New York City, while staying at the (for women only) Amazon hotel.

#### Cantos I, II, XXX

That famous opening line from *The Bell Jar*: "It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenberg's, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York" lines up exactly with Dante's meeting Cato the Younger when he first arrives on the isle of
Chéreau

Purgatory (1).

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were electrocuted on June 19, 1953. The Jewish couple were supposed to be executed two days earlier, but were granted a stay from the Supreme Court. Therefore, their electrocution did not happen until after Shabbat (Jewish Sabbath) had already commenced on the 19th (this distinction of date and time still offends in the present as traditionally the use of electricity is prohibited during Shabbat).

Canto I of the Purgatorio introduces the heroic suicide of Cato the Younger who chose death rather than life under the rule of Caesar; therefore, his grisly suicide was about freedom and having the right to choose. The Rosenberg's may have been Plath's analogous counterpart to Cato the Younger, which is to say they were much more than a simple representation or a foreshadowing of Esther's impending ECT treatments.

Plath seems to be comparing the desert landscape of Dante's Canto II with the landscape of New York. She writes: "Mirage-gray at the bottom of their granite canyons, the hot streets wavered in the sun, the car tops sizzled and glittered, and the dry, cindery dust blew into my eyes and down my throat" (Bell Jar 1).

Correspondingly, Dante writes: "We lingered yet by the ocean-marge, as they/ Who think upon the road that lies before/ And in their mind go, but in body stay;/ And lo! As at the approach of morning frore/ Mars through the mist glimmers a fiery red" (Portable Dante 194).

In The Divine Comedy, Purgatory is located in Jerusalem and there is a sense of exile, the newly dead are singing "In exitu Israel de Egypto" which is derived from Psalm 114 and translates as "during the departure of Israel from Egypt" (Modern Library 203). Just as there is a sense of exile after the Israelites have been freed from slavery in Egypt by Moses, so there is a perhaps similar feeling of exile exhibited by the young women at the Amazon who are in their early twenties, "bored," and longing for something else that their hearts do not yet know (Bell Jar 4).

The Bell Jar, chapter 15 - Purgatorio Canto XIII
In Canto XIII of the Purgatorio, Dante and Virgil "encounter the once envious spirits" and "the envious eyes that once found food for bitterness in all sights of beauty and joy, must
now in penance refrain from drinking in the gladness of sea and sky and human love, for their lids are drawn together with such a suture of wire as is used to tame the wildness of the untrained hawk; and their inward darkness is matched by their sober raiment" (Modern Library 264) and "Dante is shamed, as though he were taking ungenerous advantage of those whom he sees, but who cannot know his presence…” (Modern Library 264). We are told by Virgil that "As far as here counts for a mile," in spite of what the reader may think, or what Dante himself thinks or feels about how far the pilgrims have already come on their journey (Modern Library 265). In chapter 15 of The Bell Jar, Esther encounters the mental institution she calls Caplan and her seemingly envious acquaintance Joan for the first time. Joan has come to Caplan because she read about Esther's suicide attempt in the newspapers: "I read about you and then I ran away" she says (Bell Jar 218).

Joan then, exemplifies Dante's character of Sapia of Siena: "Sapia, born around 1210 into the prominent Salvani family of Siena, perversely rejoiced upon witnessing the defeat of her fellow citizens (Ghibellines from Siena) at Colle di Val d'Elsa, where her proud nephew Provenzan Salvani was killed. She now puns on her name in recognition of her foolishness" (Danteworlds). Plath does a similar thing with her treatment of Joan in The Bell Jar: "dens sapiens" is Latin for "wisdom teeth" just as Homo Sapiens is of course Latin meaning "wise man" this may be why Plath writes "Joan beamed, revealing her large, gleaming, unmistakable teeth." (Bell Jar 217).

Dante says of Sapia "Among the others I saw a shade that was expectant (my emphasis) in look, and if one would ask, "how so?" its chin it lifted up after the manner of the blind," (Modern Library 267). Expectant, I feel is important because in chapter 15 of The Bell Jar, we read that Esther "looked just as if I were going to have a baby," (215). We also read that the character Philomena Guinea (Esther's benefactress) asks Esther's mother: "Is there a boy in the case?" because "If there was a boy in the case, Mrs. Guinea couldn't of course have anything to do with it" (Plath, The Bell Jar 207). We also meet the strange character of Mrs. Norris who refuses to speak or look at Esther.

We know that Plath's benefactress, Olive Higgins Prouty was critical of the care Plath received during her 1953 hospitalization which Prouty helped pay for (Butscher 122). Perhaps, if there had been a boy in Plath's case, the moral responsibility of payment would have fallen to his family, not Prouty.
Sapia says, in *The Purgatorio* Canto XIII, "though Sapia named, yet sapient I was not. Of others' suffering was I much more glad than of all good luck that befell my lot. And lest thou think that now deceit I add, hear if, already when life downward wheeled, I was not, even as I tell thee, mad" (*Portable Dante* 254). Shortly after they meet at Caplan, as Plath wrote, Joan rejoices in sharing newspaper clippings with Esther, detailing Esther's disappearance (*Bell Jar* 221). Sapia is introduced in Canto XIII but she also appears in Canto XIV, likewise, Joan is introduced in Chapter 15 but most of Chapter 16 is devoted to her.

*The Bell Jar, chapter 20 - Purgatorio XXXIII*

At the end of *The Bell Jar* Esther revisits the "rivers and Pilgrims" that the doctor told her about on her first day at the hospital which again, absolutely echoes the scene set forth in Dante (209, 273, *Portable Dante* 349).

Plath writes: "there ought, I thought, be a ritual for being born twice - patched, retreaded and approved for the road, I was trying to think of an appropriate one when Doctor Nolan appeared from nowhere and touched me on the shoulder. "All right, Esther."
I rose and followed her to the open door….and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room" (Plath, *The Bell Jar* 273).

Doctor Nolan, the character based on Plath's real doctor in 1953 (Dr. Ruth Beuscher) then takes on the role of Dante's character Statius. Statius is a poet who steps in to help Virgil to guide Dante for a few cantos towards the end of *The Purgatorio*. Dante says, correspondingly: "So the fair lady, having taken me,/ Set forth and spoke to Statius in his place:/ "Come with him," gracious as a queen may be./ If, Reader, for the writing were more space,/ That sweet fount, whence I ne'er could drink my fill,/ Would I yet sing, though in imperfect praise./ But seeing that for this second canticle,/ The proper planned is full to the last page,/ The bridle of art must needs constrain my will./ Back from that wave's most holy privilege/ I turned me, re-made, as the plant repairs/ Itself, with its new foliage./ Pure and disposed to mount up to the stars" (*Portable Dante* 365).

Therefore, you can now see clearly how Plath appropriates Dante's "bridle of art" from the last canto of the *Purgatorio* into a "magical thread" in the last chapter of *The Bell
Jar. The river which Dante speaks of is the Eunoe, which resuscitates memory. Plath draws a parallel between the Euno and the way psychoanalysis works. In a previous conversation between Dante and Beatrice, we learn that the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, springs from a fountain along with the Eunoe, the river of remembrance. Dante's metaphor for himself as a plant that repairs itself is an absolute match for Plath's metaphor of herself as a tire that has been re-treaded. Dante ends each cantique by looking at the "stars" and Esther, the name of Plath's protagonist, is etymologically linked to the word "star" as seen in the word "estrella." In The Bell Jar, Esther is the one who finds herself being looked at as the doctor's "eyes and faces all turned themselves towards" her as she walked into the room (273).

As Plath is writing the poems for The Colossus, as she is physically penning them at Yaddo, she asks herself in her journal: "Who am I? Why should a poet be a novelist? Why not?" (Journals 520). This turns out to be very important for it was the exact question that Dante asked himself when he set out to form the Commedia "Who am I?" The notion of poetic freedom being synonymous with originality is at the heart and soul of the Purgatorio (Mazzotta).

V. Ariel & The Paradiso
In Plath's Ariel, we have an interesting juxtaposition of thought and theology. I think this is something that has been apparent to all readers, but to grasp its truth is very difficult. This is not just because the material is difficult, but because the land we are inhabiting within the poem is not earth—it is Paradise. The tone is not of this earth even though it is grounded in a sense of humanity; it poetically moves closer towards the language grasping at a beatific vision.

In Plath's poem "Fever 103," we can see Dante's Paradise in the line: "My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats/ to Paradise" (Ariel 80).

In addition, the eighth circle of Dante's Paradiso is also known as the heaven of the Fixed Stars. In Plath's poem "Words," she references this heaven directly: "from the bottom of a pool, fixed stars/ Govern a life" (Collected 270).

Morning Song - Paradiso Canto I
In Canto I of the *Paradiso*, Dante begins by speaking about his attempt at remembering the Heavenly Paradise and how he knows, sadly, he will fail:

"In that heaven which most recieveth of his light, have I been; and have seen things which whoso descendeth from up there hath not knowledge nor power to retell...Nathless, whatever of the holy realm I had the power to treasure in my memory, shall now be a matter of my song" (*Modern Library* 403). Correspondingly, "Morning Song" is the first poem in *Ariel*. It is also a poem about early motherhood and the indescribable joys and moments of sweetness as well as personal transformation that happens during peaceful times spent with one's own infant. These moments are fleeting and that is just what Dante says is in Canto I. He says he can only do his best to remember and he prays to the God of poets, Apollo: "O good Apollo, for the crowning task, make me a so-fashioned vessel of thy worth, as thou demandest for the grant of thy beloved laurel" (*The Modern Library* 403). In Binyon's translation this reads a bit differently: "For the last labour, good Apollo, I pray," (*Portable Dante* 367). It seems to me as if Plath may have turned Dante's "labor" or "crowning task" into a rhetorical trope here, as she is speaking literally in "Morning Song" about the hours after the labor of childbirth. Dante finds himself able to hear the "music of the spheres" and he is bewildered by this and finds himself utterly transformed by it and so he looks towards Beatrice and sees "She, sighing in pity, gave me as she gazed/ The look that by a mother is bestowed/ Upon her child in its delirium crazed," (*Portable Dante* 370).

Beatrice then explains to Dante that things here (and everywhere) rise according to their goodness towards God or sink for lack thereof. This theory of Beatrice's is an Aristotelian concept of hierarchy not unlike the great chain of being (la scala naturae) with which great artists and writers have used to help structure their work. He goes on:

"In the order I speak of, all natures incline/ Either more near or less near to their source/ According as their diverse lots assign./ To diverse harbors thus they move perforce/ O'er the great ocean of being, and each one/ With instinct given it to maintain it's course." (*Portable Dante* 370). "Order" and "form" are both words, that in the Italian language, (*ordo, forma*) the language in which Dante was writing, are considered synonyms for beauty.

Dante and Beatrice are on their way to the moon but they have not yet arrived. The moon is associated with (as each of the levels of the *Paradiso* are associated with) a
specific branch of the liberal arts, the moon being the place of grammar and the grammarians, and also rhetoric, history, poetry are grouped here according to the concepts of the Middle Ages. Therefore, the reader of *The Divine Comedy* should begin to notice that the language which Dante employs begins to take on more grammatical diction in the *Paradiso* as opposed to the language of the *Purgatorio*. Likewise, we see the same shift happen between the voice of Plath's *The Bell Jar*, and the voice of *Ariel*. In Plath's last line of "Morning Song," we can clearly see the thoughts shared by Dante's grammarians: "And now you try your handful of notes;/The clear vowels rise like balloons." The sweet vowels of the infant are rising upwards toward heaven. "A far sea moves in my ear" says Plath's narrator, which echoes Dante's "great ocean of being" cited above (*Ariel* 5).

Plath's line, "I'm no more your mother..." mimics the same sentiment here of Dante's "instinct," in other words, it is the use of free-will that influences an individual on his or her journey.

There are striking similarities between the "window-square" in this poem and the one in Plath's earlier poem, "Morning in the Hospital Solarium," but Plath, as far as we know, never gave birth in a hospital. These squares also appear in Plath's "Three Women." Why keep calling them window-squares? What could she mean? Perhaps as subtext we readers are supposed to look for panes or "pains." This choice of diction exemplifies a poetic decision on Plath's part; it is perhaps a refusal to acknowledge the "pain" or "pains." Then again, perhaps she means the interior windows commonly used in hospital nurseries. In a letter to her mother dated "April 1st, 1: 15 p.m.," Plath wrote, perhaps cryptically, upon the birth of her first daughter, Frieda: "The whole American rigamarole of hospitals, doctors' bills, cuts and stitches, anesthesia, etc., seems a nightmare well left behind." (A. Plath, *Letters Home* 374).

In Canto I, it is midnight in Jerusalem but noon in Eden even though Dante and Beatrice are not in either place physically; rather, they are flying through the sphere of fire towards the moon. Similarly, any mother who gets up at night to go to her newborn would say that she knows these moments well – it is midnight in Jerusalem, it is noon in Eden.

"Ariel" - *Paradiso* Canto XXXIII

In Judaism, S'lichos or selichot is the service which contains liturgical poems called
piyyutim and penitential prayers. It is interesting to note especially in regards to Plath that selichot are usually recited between midnight and dawn. When I learned of this, I immediately associated it with Plath's own comments about her Ariel poems: "These new poems of mine have one thing in common. They were all written at about four in the morning -- that still, blue, almost eternal hour before cockcrow, before the baby's cry, before the glassy music of the milkman, settling his bottles" (Ariel 195).

Plath said that she titled the poem "Ariel," "after a horse I'm especially fond of" (Ariel 196). "Woe to Ariel! To Ariel the city where David dwelt, add ye year to year let the feasts come round" (The Complete Tanach Is. 29.1). Ariel is another word for Jerusalem, as many have already noted. "add ye year to year…" is an admonition to keep observance of the passing festivals. Ariel is representative of Plath's Yom Kippur. After the closing prayer of the Yom Kippur services, "the gates of heaven which were open all day will now be closed with us on the inside" ("How is Yom Kippur Observed?"). Allegorically, in Canto XXXIII of The Divine Comedy, Dante will tell of his experience of the beatific vision.

Plath's "Ariel" is a famously hard to grasp, enigmatic poem. It is brief and intense; it seems to gallop and fly straight into the sun. Dante's Paradiso, Canto XIII takes place in the Heaven of the Sun and begins with a description "fifteen of those stars that, in sundry regions, quicken the heaven with such brightness as to pierce all the knitted air, let him imagine that wain for which the bosom of our heaven sufficeth night and day, so that it faileth not to the wain-pole's sweep" (Modern Library 483-4). Those fifteen stars are the "seven bright stars of Ursa Major and the two brightest of Ursa Minor (more commonly known as larger bear and smaller bear, or the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper). The Big Dipper is also known as the plough. Dante asks us to "imagine them all arranged in a double Ariadne's crown" (Modern Library 487). This is supposed to look like the chariot in the sky. This description of the wain by Dante is followed by the description of the constellation of: "Minos' daughter, Ariadne, whose crown was turned into a constellation" when she felt the "chill of death" after Theseus had abandoned her (Portable Dante 433, Modern Library 484). Likewise, Plath penned "Ariel" after her separation from Hughes on her birthday in 1962.

"Carro" is the Italian word which Dante uses to describe this wain or chariot, is symbolic of the holy chariot upon which the Ark of the Covenant is set. The seven stars of
Ursa Major form the car which symbolically is the church conceived as the vehicle or vessel in which man is conveyed to heaven and of which the prototype would be the car of Elijah" (Fletcher 85). Elijah is important here, because the poem "Ariel" is based on the story of Elijah.

The story of Elijah as it relates to the poem "Ariel" is told in the second Book of Kings, chapter 2. Elijah was a prophet, famous for performing many feats. He was able to raise the dead and bring down fire from the sky. Some folkloric traditions claim he is responsible for dew ("the dew that flies") (Plath, Ariel 34).

Elijah's story begins with the knowledge that God has promised to take Elijah up in a whirlwind to heaven. Elijah's devoted disciple Elisha says to him "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee" and Elijah said the same to Elisha (The King James Bible, 2 Kings 2.2). The problem was, this was the day the Lord had said he was sending a whirlwind for Elijah: "and the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day?" And he answered, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." (The King James Bible, 2 Kings 2.5). Elijah again repeats that he will not leave Elisha. The two go to the banks of the Jordan river, where "Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground" (The King James Bible, 2 Kings 2.8). Elijah then says to his disciple what he can do for him before he is taken away by the Lord. Elisha suggests that he gives him "a double portion of his spirit" (The King James Bible, 2 Kings 2.9). Elijah agrees only if Elisha sees him when the Lord takes him, when "behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (The King James Bible 2 Kings 2.11).

In "Ariel," we get the sense that the narrator is also looking up at the sky like Elijah: "Then the substanceless blue/ Pour of tor and distances// God's lioness,/ How one we grow/
Pivot of heels and knees!" (Plath, Ariel 33). When Elijah's disciple sees him being taken away he cries: "my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (King James Bible 2 Kings 2.12). And when Elijah is gone Elisha takes his clothes and rips them in two and picks up the mantle which Elijah had dropped during his ascent. Plath's "White/ Godiva, I unpeel -/ Dead hands, dead stringencies" (Ariel 33) is her personification of
Elijah dropping his mantle.

Now that Elisha had Elijah's mantle and a double portion of his spirit, he was able to perform miracles too. He too parted the Jordan and crossed it as Elijah had done ("The furrow// Splits and passes") (Plath, Ariel 33) and he appeared prophetic in front of the sons of the prophets who began to believe he indeed had twice the spirit of Elijah, and so they began asking him for help. Because Elisha had asked for and received double the spirit of Elijah; he did everything twice as well. This is based on the concept of inheritance during biblical times. If a man had three sons, his wealth would be divided 4 times and the eldest son would get half, while the other siblings got ¼ each, for example. So, when the people came to Elisha complaining their water was bad and he fixed the water; the land was fruitful and flourished as well: "I/ Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas" (Plath, Ariel 33). However, when some children mocked Elisha for being bald two she-bears came out of the forest and ate 42 of them. Which brings us back to regard the Ursa Major and Minor, and the stars mentioned by Dante that we are supposed to imagine as the wain or chariot. It seems that this story of Elijah from the Bible also has ties to these constellations. I do not make this connection alone, Fletcher does also (Fletcher 85).

These 42 children eaten by the bear should remind one of the title of Plath's short story "The Fifty-Ninth Bear" which was written by Plath after a trip through Yellowstone she made in 1959 with Ted Hughes. It is acknowledged to be a fictionalized story based on real events. It is the story of a husband and wife who "still, enacting as they were a ritual of penance and forgiveness…” (Plath, Johnny Panic 107) guess how many bears they will see on their trip, Sadie who is "devout as a priestess" (Plath, Johnny Panic 108) guesses that they will see 59 bears and Norton guesses that they will see 71 bears (Plath, Johnny Panic 108). They see 59 and the last bear kills Norton. In Plath's story, she calls the last bear - the one that kills Norton - "My bear." (Johnny Panic 116).

In European star charts, the constellation Ursa Major was visualized with the "square" of the Big Dipper forming the bear's body and the chain of stars as a long tail. However, bears do not have long tails, and Jewish astronomers considered Alioth, Mizar, and Alkaid instead to be three cubs following their mother. We can then say that, "the brown arc of neck I cannot catch" is the star Arcturus, or "Guardian of the Bear" and it is located in the constellation Boötes next to Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. The brightest star
of Boötes is Arcturus, in fact, Arcturus is the third brightest star in the night sky. One of the ways to locate Arcturus in the night sky is to follow the arc of the handle of the Big Dipper (Ursa Major).

Arcturus is often identified with the myth of Arcas. The myth, if you are not familiar with it, is that Arcas’ mother, Callisto, was turned into a bear by Hera who was jealous because Zeus (her husband) was the father of Arcas. Out of necessity then, Arcas was raised apart from Callisto with a different family in Arcadia. Arcas became a great hunter and one day, he met his mother in the forest. When she approached him, because she had been turned into a bear, he almost shot her with his arrow. Zeus averted this tragedy by turning them into stars (Callisto became Ursa Major and Arcas became Ursa Minor). So that is why Plath’s "I am the arrow" is so powerful and so very, very sad. This Arcas, therefore, is Plath's Beatific figure. As a result, Plath's line "The child's cry// Melts in the wall" has fresh meaning (Ariel 33,34).

In Hughes' poem, also called "The 59th Bear" (and in Plath's story of the same name) the reader can see both authors verbally playing with the concept of the wain as a car and Ursa Major and Ursa Minor as bears. Hughes calls the bears he sees "jolly inflatables" (Birthday Letters 91). He sees only two of them at first, but the last one, is the one which rips open the trunk of the car (wain). He writes, "The car/ Five paces away, looked natural enough./Then more rippings inside it, and it shook/ And I saw the dark blockage, a black mass/ Filling the far rear window. 'Those damned bears!'/ One's getting into the car" (Birthday Letters 92). In addition, Hughes has several poems which seem to allude to these same unruly celestial bears, most notably "The Brother's Dream" (Collected Poems 194), "I See a Bear," (Collected Poems 261), "The Bear" (Collected Poems 160), and last but not least from Tales from Ovid: "Callisto and Arcas," (Collected Poems 896). "The Big Dipper is my only familiar," writes Plath in "Stars Over the Dordogne" (Collected 165).

The Bee Poems/ Paradiso Canto XXX-XXXIII
The Bee Poems are fascinating. They come right at the end of Ariel: The Restored Edition, Plath's Paradiso, and they line up perfectly with the disappearance of Beatrice (Paradiso XXX-XXXI). All of the sudden, the pilgrim Dante turns around, expecting to see his beloved Beatrice, and he sees instead Bernard de Clairveaux, a saint, and not just a saint,
but a fatherly figure who leads Dante the rest of the way through the last canto of the
*Paradiso* (*Par.XXXI*). Dante does see Beatrice again, but only briefly, when she has taken up her spot within the virgin rose. Bernard de Clairveaux was a Doctor of the Church and he was known as "Doctor Mellifluus" largely for disagreeing with the theological philosophies of Peter Abelard ("abielles" is the French word meaning honey bee and the honey bee genus is known as 'Apis mellifera' which helps to explain why Bernard de Clairveaux is also the patron saint of beekeepers and candle makers). In addition, bees themselves make an appearance in Dante's Paradise in Canto XXXI: "Like bees, which deep into the flowers retreat one while, and at another winging come back thither where their toil is turned to sweet…"(*Portable Dante* 528).

Williams says that the bees fly "between all the human images" and that they are "the golden bees of the angelic creation…" which fly about the flower of Paradise (*Beatrice* 226).

Dante ends the *Paradiso* this way: "But these my wings were fledged not for that flight,/ Save that my mind a sudden glory assailed/ And its wish came revealed to it in that light./ To the high imagination force now failed:/ But like to a wheel whose circling nothing jars/ Already on my desire and will prevailed// The love that moves the sun and other stars" (*Portable Dante* 543-44). The idea behind the wheel, is the idea of the divided will, the will and the desire being separate from each other. However, in this scene Dante feels that his will and God's will are one and the wheel is moving perfectly. In "Wintering," Plath alludes to Dante's "wheel whose circling nothing jars" by comparing it to her midwife's honey extractor. This device spins the honeycombs to extract the honey. The narrator in Plath's poem says she has gleaned her six jars of honey from the extractor. We have to remember that "Wintering," the last poem included in Plath's *Ariel* manuscript, was physically written on the day after Yom Kippur in 1962. She writes a poem on the day before and the day after Yom Kippur, but not on the day of Yom Kippur. Why does she do this? I think she does this because she herself is observing that Yom Kippur is a mandated day of rest and worship. However, on the day after Yom Kippur only the most orthodox worshippers "arise earlier than usual…they do this so that Satan will have no cause to argue before God that, once Yom Kippur is over, Jews become lax and are too lazy to get up for the morning services" (Schauss 155).
On Yom Kippur, God erases the sins committed before God, but not the sins committed against individuals which is why, in order to receive full atonement on Yom Kippur, it is customary for one to seek out those individuals which one has wronged in order to ask them for forgiveness for the sins which one has committed against them. What happens or what could one imagine happening in situations when one is unable to find the person one has wronged?

The narrator's jars of honey are like "six cat eyes," but why six and why are they in the wine-cellar? Cat's eyes have slit pupils and they also glow when photographed. This is because of a feature of their eyes, known as tapetum lucidum, (Latin for 'bright tapestry') and this feature also allows them to have a greater ability to see at night. This idea of the slit and the bright tapestry is interesting when you think of it in terms of Jewish theology and the bright tapestry that is made to cover the ark of the covenant in the holy tabernacle which was only pulled back by the High Priest on Yom Kippur. In the days of the first temple in Jerusalem, the High Priest was only allowed to enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, which is to say the House of God (Schauss 137). "In the first Temple the ark with the Cherubim stood in the Holy of Holies" (Schauss 300). Correspondingly, Plath writes: "This is the room I have never been in/ This is the room I could never breathe in" (Ariel 89).

In essence, Plath seems to be suggesting that the voice in this poem spun the honey around in the midwife's honey extractor (which is akin to the wheel of divine intellect in Dante). Now she has her sweetness of understanding in her soul (honey) which is more aligned with the Divine than any of the other poems in Ariel. Dante says: "even such am I; for almost wholly wanes my vision now, yet still the drops I feel of sweetness it distilled into my veins. Even so the sunbeam doth the snow unseal; so was the Sibyl's saying lost inert upon the thin leaves for the wind to steal." Plath's "snow" is rendered as a "mile-long body of Meissen" (Ariel 90).

Dante has already had his beatific vision with God and he is, through the process of writing, trying to remember all of it. However, he recognizes that he is losing a lot of his memories in this process. He goes on, praying: "Vouchsafe unto my tongue such power to attain that but one sparkle it may leave behind of thy magnificence to future men…" (Binyon 541). Plath then takes Dante's "sparkle" left behind and compares it with what has been left to her, here: "Next to the last tenant's rancid jam/And the bottles of empty glitters
- /Sir So-and-so's gin" (Ariel 90).

In "Wintering," Plath's bees "ball in a mass/ Black/ Mind against all that white" (Ariel 90). Correspondingly, in Dante we see; "Substance and accidents, and their modes, became/ As if together fused, all in such wise/ That what I speak of is one simple flame.// Verily I think I saw with mine own eyes/ The form that knits the whole world, since I taste./ In telling of it, more abounding bliss.// One moment more oblivion has amassed/ Than five-and-twenty centuries have wrought/ Since Argo's shadow o'er the wondering Neptune passed" (Portable Dante 542).

Therefore, Dante is explaining that his awe was wrapped up in this moment of being in the presence of God, and that he has forgotten more than man has forgotten in 2,500 years about the Argonauts. Correspondingly Plath writes "Will the hive survive, will the gladiolas/ Succeed in banking their fires/ To enter another year?" (Ariel 90). One needs to remember that to Dante this poem was about "I who to the goal was drawing nigh/ Of all my longings," (Portable Dante 540) meaning that spiritually, the desires are ending, but also remembering that he died shortly after writing this last canto. It is this "I" that wants to leave something behind for the future. It is a poem for the future that goes hand-in-hand with a killing off of the ego; "That but one sparkle it may leave behind/ Of thy magnificence to future men." (Portable Dante 541). Plath is doing the same thing, she is asking; "Will the gladiolas/ Succeed in banking their fires/ To enter another year?" (Ariel 90). Therefore, in regards to Plath's own work; would it have a readership who could build upon it and cross a threshold in order to create new art the way she had innovated and pushed the work of Dante? These are the types of questions she was asking, in my opinion.

While it is true that Plath and Hughes purchased their house in Devon from Sir and Lady Arundell, "Sir so-and-so's gin," (Ariel 89) from Plath's poem "Wintering," is an odd phrase. Plath does the same thing in The Bell Jar: "I'm Doctor Soandso, I'm Doctor Soandso" (200). So-and-so is a place-holder name that is usually employed with an attached negative connotation. So-and-so, first appeared as a male character (in Hebrew: Ploni Almoni) in the Book of Ruth (The Complete Tanach, Ruth 4.1). Boaz wants to marry Ruth, but he first needs to ask Ploni Almoni, because the first right of redemption falls to him. Ploni Almoni is first asked by Boaz if he wants to buy widow Naomi's farm and he agrees, ("I will redeem it") but when he is told he is going to have to buy the farm and
inherit Ruth he changes his mind ("you redeem it yourself, I cannot do it") because a young woman could give him a son and a son would be an heir to the land, so not only would he be out of the money he used to buy the land, he would be out of the land if she produced an heir. The Book of Ruth is typically read during Purim, and Ruth is often celebrated as a convert to Judaism who understood the principles of Judaism and believed in them with her heart. One of the most famous lines spoken by Ruth which celebrates the spirit of this conversion is written in 1 Ruth 16: "Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you, for wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God." (King James Bible). Ted Hughes also alludes to this line from The Book of Ruth in "The Epilogue Poems," from Gaudete where he writes: "Let me be one of your warriors/ Let your home/ Be my home. Your people/ My people" (Collected Poems 368).

Why would Plath designate "gin" as 'Sir,' unless Plath wanted us to know it was a male's gin? Throughout Birthday Letters, specifically in "Portraits," Ted Hughes asks "What's that? Who's that?/ Out of the gloomy neglected chamber behind you/ Somebody had emerged, hunched, glaring at you,/ Just behind your shoulder - a cowled/ Humanoid of raggy shadows. Who?" (104). Who is there? That is the question we should be asking. Who is Plath's beatific figure? Indeed this is one of the keys to Plath's poems, because the way that Plath interprets Dante is character-centric. We can see this with her proto-feminist Minos, in "Sow," her personification of Jane as Sapia in The Bell Jar, and the female society of bees that parallels the appearance of Bernard du Clairveaux in Dante's Paradise. So, we ask, "Whose gin?" and the only gin that would have mattered to Plath is Gordon's: The only gin that has a male's name at all, in the world, is the brand: Gordon's Gin. Plath seems to always prefer the Latin etymologies above all others. Gin is etymologically related to the Latin "gigno" which means "beget, born."

Gordon Ames Lameyer dated Plath in 1953, the year of her suicide attempt and resulting hospitalizations. His father, Paul Lameyer, was also interned and held on accusations of Nazi war crimes. He was released in 1945, during Plath's lifetime. In a letter Plath wrote to her then boyfriend Richard Sassoon she corrected this sentence "I thought even, at the most desperate time, when I was so sick and could not sleep, but only lie and curse the flesh of Gordon whom I was going to marry" by crossing out "of Gordon"
(Journals 219,685). Note the distinction, not simply "Gordon," but she curses "the flesh of Gordon."

Perhaps there is an autobiographical basis for the third voice in Plath's radio play "Three Women." While it is true that critics and commentators have been wary of assuming such things, we know that Plath used her life as grist for the mill of artistic creation. A better question in my opinion, is why would not the third voice in "Three Women" be autobiographical?

If Gordon Lameyer fathered a child with Plath but refused to take ownership of his heir then it makes perfect sense for Plath to use "so-and-so" from the Book of Ruth to refer to him this way. It would then make sense that "Dr. Gordon" is the character who administers shock treatments to Esther in The Bell Jar, and why during her 1953 hospitalization, Plath's letters to Gordon Lameyer change in their tone as Peter Davison has said: "the tenderness towards Gordon vanished and she began acting, she assumed a persona....as the year went on she got tougher and tougher" (Butcher 123). It also shines new light on the jilted lover poems of the Juvenilia - to jilt is to deceive in love.

A "Gordon" is also another name given to the double bass, (the largest instrument in the violin family) so if Plath would speak of Gordon Lameyer poetically, perhaps she might use these terms instead of using his given name to shield him, or veil him and herself from any suspicion if the two had conceived a child but, to my knowledge, she does not do this (however, I have not consulted the unpublished Juvenilia at Smith but, even "Doom of Exiles" from 1954 reads to me as an early attempt at Canto I of The Inferno).

Hughes, however, does refer to "double bass" in his poem "Bullfrog" "With their lithe long strong legs/Some frogs are able/To thump upon double / Bass strings, though pond water deadens and clogs." (Collected Poems 83). Plath does have, correspondingly, in her often-neglected Juvenilia, a poem called, "On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover" which features women turned into "toads" simply by looking into the eyes of this demon lover (Collected 325).

Hughes' poem "Music on the Moon" from Moon Whales and Other Moon Poems (1976) also mentions double basses: "Double basses on the moon are a risk alright/At the first note enormous black hands/Appear and carry away everything in sight." ("Ted Hughes: Music on the Moon").
"The Swarm"

I believe Plath removed "The Swarm" from her Ariel manuscript for two reasons. The first reason, I've already mentioned is because of the date in which she wrote it: Erev Yom Kippur in 1962. What remains of the "hours" of her Yom Kippur in Ariel are clearer without it. As I have said, The Divine Comedy tells the story of what happened from Good Friday to Easter Sunday in 1300, but Dante did not finish writing his book on Easter in 1321. He finished writing it shortly before his death in September, 1321. This is yet another way in which Plath attempts to perfect his methods by finishing her books not just in less time, (it took Dante about 13 years to write The Divine Comedy, but Plath was able to finish her three books in roughly four years) but by ending Ariel with a poem written on the day after Yom Kippur in 1962, which shows a sort of piety. In addition, Plath was doing her writing at a much younger age than Dante, in fact, completing it well before the age at which he began.

Secondly, I think Plath removed "The Swarm" from her manuscript because she must have felt that the poem "Wintering," where we also see bees swarming, was more successful. Therefore, both poems are attempts at rendering Dante's beatific vision in the last canto of The Divine Comedy.

In "The Swarm," a swarm of bees is being shot at by a neighbor (a man with curious grey hands) and these images unravel alongside images of the defeat of Napoleon's Grand Army. "Napoleon's March" is a song that is traditionally played at the end of Yom Kippur services by Chabad-Lubavitch adherents. The song was chosen by the Alter Rebbe (Shneur Zalman of Liadi). After hearing the song (he opposed Napoleon) he designated it as a song of victory and a niggunim. It was a subversive act. It is said that when the niggunim is sung, the spirit of the Alter Rebbe returns ("the man with grey hands smiles") Shneur Zalman of Liadi was the founder and first rebbe of Chabad, a branch of Hasidic Judaism then based in Imperial Russia. He also was the author of the Tanya. In real life, the Shneur Zalman of Liadi was imprisoned twice "stings big as drawing pins," writes Plath, who also ends her poem subversively: "Napoleon is pleased, he is pleased with everything." (Ariel 192).

Chabad-Lubavitch boasts the largest membership of all branches of Judaism and unlike other branches, they are politically involved in Israeli politics. If some find it hard to believe that Plath either identified or empathized herself with Chabad in any way other
than simply for artistic effect, I would direct attention to her Juvenilia poem "Bitter Strawberries" and ask that special attention be paid to the conversation overheard by the narrator in the poem: "They talked about the Russians…./ We heard the head woman say./Bomb them off the map." (Collected 299). The narrator's response after overhearing this is to handle the fruit very gently while snapping it from its stem. The fruit the narrator picks is symbolic of what can be gleaned from the stem of the belief system. Plath also worked at a strawberry farm when she was seventeen and it is not unthinkable that she actually did overhear a conversation just like the one in "Bitter Strawberries."

On this note, it is interesting to wonder if Ted Hughes' poem "Shibboleth" (Collected Poems 794) which is presumably about Assia Weevil, is actually about Plath. Perhaps the "Berkshire county" of the poem is not in fact the Berkshire county of the UK, but that of Massachusetts, right next door to Hampshire County where Smith College is located and where Hughes and Plath lived. In "A Masque for Three Voices," Hughes writes: "I only know what ghosts breathe in my breath -/ The shiver of their battles my Shibboleth" (Collected Poems 825).

The Laburnums

Hughes penned "The Laburnum," "Autumn Nature Notes," and "The Inscription," after Plath's death. In "The Inscription," Hughes references his promises to be under the laburnum with Plath: "Tell me/ We shall sit together this summer/ Under the laburnum. Yes, he said, yes, yes, yes/….The laburnum like a dressed corpse in full yellow" (Birthday Letters 172).

Indeed, Plath seems to personify each of these poisonous laburnums. In her own "The Arrival of The Bee Box" she wonders if the bees (perhaps representative of the Dantean larger community: the world, Hughes, the readers of these poems) would they notice if she turned herself into a tree. "I wonder if they would forget me/ If I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree./ There is the laburnum, its blond colonnades," would the bees notice (Ariel 85)? She is also putting herself on the great golden chain of literature (laburnums are often called golden chain trees) and the history of great thinkers – and asking if anyone would notice. In other words, if she took the autobiographical story of her life and weaved it into a great chain of her own, would anyone notice?
In the first part of the poem, "Autumn Nature Notes," Plath is personified by Hughes as a goldfinch coming to feed her babies, shaking and singing in the laburnum, top before flying off (Hughes, *Collected Poems* 326). This has its roots in Dante's Canto XXIII of the *Paradiso*: "As the bird amidst the loved foliage who hath brooded on the nest of her sweet offspring through the night which hideth things from us, who, to look upon their longed-for aspect and to find the food wherewith to feed them, wherein her heavy toils are pleasant to her" (*Modern Library* 544). The poet Francis Thompson wrote a book length poem called *Sister Songs* which celebrate a woman named "Sylvia," in which, "the long laburnum drips its honey of wild flame, its jocund spilth of fire./ Now pass your ways, fair bird, and pass your ways/ If you will; I have you through the days!" (Thompson). It is interesting to wonder if Thompson may have been like a Daniel Arnaut (Dante's favorite troubadour) to Plath.

Tu Bishvat, (The New Year for Trees) would have arrived after sunset on Friday, February 8, 1963, the day that Plath sent a suicide note to Hughes which he intercepted later that day, if we are to take "Last Letter" literally. Obviously, over the weekend, something changed and Plath took her life instead on Monday. Why is this important? While it is true that Tu Bishvat is by most modern day Jewish observers considered nothing more than a Jewish Arbor Day, because of Plath's connection to Dante, the day took on special meaning. Yes, the day just so happened to be "The New Year of the Trees" but it was planned, well in advance, as the poems attest. It is important because if we started out looking for Plath's Beatrice, and found it to be Arcus, the question now becomes: who is Plath's Arcus?

When Beatrice died, we learn in the *Vita Nuova*, that "her most noble spirit departed from among us in the first hour of the ninth day of the month; and according to the division of time in Syria, in the ninth month of the year: seeing that Tismim, which with us is October, is there the first month. Also she was taken from among us in that year of our reckoning (to wit, of the years of our Lord) in which the perfect number was nine times multiplied within that century wherein she was born into the world" (*Portable Dante* 598).

Just like Dante, then, Plath would have needed to use two calendars, but instead of the Syrian calendar, she would have used a Hebrew one. In order to find the exact day of her child's birth - if indeed I am right and there is a child - you have to subtract 9 days, 9
months, and 9 years from the day she meant to be found on February 9, 1963. Which gives us two dates depending on what time the day the child was born: October 19, 1953 before sunset, if after sunset; either the 19th or the 20th of October, 1953. This indeed falls into the period of time when Plath was hospitalized after her first suicide attempt. "Two days in no calendar, but stolen/ From no world,/ Beyond actuality, feeling, or name" (Hughes, The New Statesman "Last Letter").

To the suicides which Dante encounters in the wood of the self-murderers, (Inferno XIII) he shows compassion and "although writers of classical Rome admired by Dante allowed--and even praised--suicide as a response to political defeat or personal disgrace, his Christian tradition emphatically condemned suicide as a sin without exception." Due to his treatment of other famous suicides, it suggests a "more nuanced view" (Danteworlds).

Judaism treats suicide as something to be avoided at all costs, especially Hasidic Judaism. There are a few situations, three, to be exact, that according to the Talmud, (Jewish law) a person should take their life rather than commit the sin. These are the three cardinal sins: murder, sexual misconduct, and idolatry. In addition, there are a few extreme situations according to Maimonides (Rambam) that could require self-sacrifice, but ultimately, the consensus of Jewish thought is that suicide is best avoided.

VI. Conclusion
In conclusion, I hope it is clear that Plath modeled her life as much as her life's work after Dante's, and that in doing so she employed the use of a beatific figure, and that this figure was indeed inaccessible just as much as Dante's Beatrice was inaccessible to him.

Was she successful? Simply because the parameters she had chosen to employ in her work did not provide her with quite the same beatific vision of Dante, does not make her unsuccessful. She was not dwelling in the unapproachable light of the face of God, rather she experiences "No light/ But the torch and its faint// Chinese yellow on appalling objects" and a spectacle of bees that crowd like static (Plath, Ariel "Wintering" 89). This does not mean she failed to reach the Dantean poetic goal of a beatific vision, far from it.

Why shouldn't her tone be darker and more haunting than Dante's? The poetic structure she set up and devised herself literally collapsed upon her. This is about a woman poet who pushes herself to be better than Dante and whose Beatrice is not dead. A positive
poetry would have a successful outcome, which is what we see most in Dante - a negative poetry collapses but it says something too; it too has a message, it lays its heavy commentary on the shoulders of the situations that predicated it. "Wide open, your secret averted/ As the sharp-nosed critic, the puritan/ Rejects the excess of your silks,/ And your abandon, like the needlessness of a parrot" (Hughes, "The Rose" Collected Poems 500).

As Al Alvarez said, "Sylvia Plath tackled head-on nothing less serious than her death….if the road had seemed impossible, she proved that it wasn't. It was, however, one-way, and she went too far along it to be able, in the end, to turn back" (O'Reilly 71).

I have now shown you how each of the thirteenth cantos of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* correspond with the fifteenth poems in Plath's *The Colossus* and *Ariel* and the fifteenth chapter of *The Bell Jar*. I have written this paper in the hopes of muting certain ridiculous conversations regarding the worth of Plath's poems and with the intention of breathing new life into the study of Dante and Plath.

Voltaire concluded that Dante's "reputation will go on increasing, because scarce anybody reads him." Similarly, it is more than unfortunate that in recent times *The Divine Comedy* has fallen off many required reading lists. Of the institutions that still teach it, most focus on teaching *The Inferno* and neglect *The Purgatorio* and *The Paradiso*. If institutions do teach it, student interest is in a dwindling state. In fact, the day I went to pick up *The Divine Comedy* from the library just so happened to be the very same day the local community college librarian was going to toss it out. "We just pulled it for weeding," were the librarian's exact words, which is how I came across my excellent first paperback edition, but weeding only happens at this local institution after ten years have passed without anyone borrowing the book.

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**A Special thanks to**: Michael Smith, Margery E. Golden, Kate Smith, Dr. Waldo Hagberg, MD., Lillian Correa, Rabbi Samuel M. Stahl of the Chautauqua Institute, William & Warren Chérau, Dr. & Mrs. Frank and Betty Jo Brooks, Dolly Selanick, and the editors of Plath Profiles: W. K. Buckley, and Peter K. Steinberg.
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