



The Divine Comedy

Dante Alighieri
Part Two

“There is only one theme: an era is coming to an end which lasted nearly two thousand years, when religion had primacy of place in relation to philosophy, science and art; no doubt this simply meant that people believed in Heaven and Hell. These disappeared from imagination and no poet or painter would be able populate them again, though the models of Hell exist here on earth.”

- Czesław Miłosz

Inferno / Geography

- *The Divine Comedy*: 100 Cantos
- *Inferno* 1+33 / *Purgatorio* 33 / *Paradiso* 33
- Good Friday / 1300 C.E. / Dante is 35 of his allotted 70 (Psalm 89:10) / The Christian life should mimic the life of Christ (see *A Hidden Life* / 2019).
- Terza Rima (aba / bcb / cdc / ded) / Psalm 139:8 / "If I descend to the heavens ..."
- First Christian Epic. The Greater Images (67)



Webster Musings...

- *The Divine Comedy* (in its entirety) investigates our alignment / misalignment with the love of God.
- How do we experience "contrapasso" right now? How is the *Comedia* instructive, not for some future tense, but for today?
- Is Dante an asset or a liability to Christian theology / discipleship / cosmology / notions of the eschaton?
- "Any book worth its salt points up and out of itself." - Bohumil Hrabal



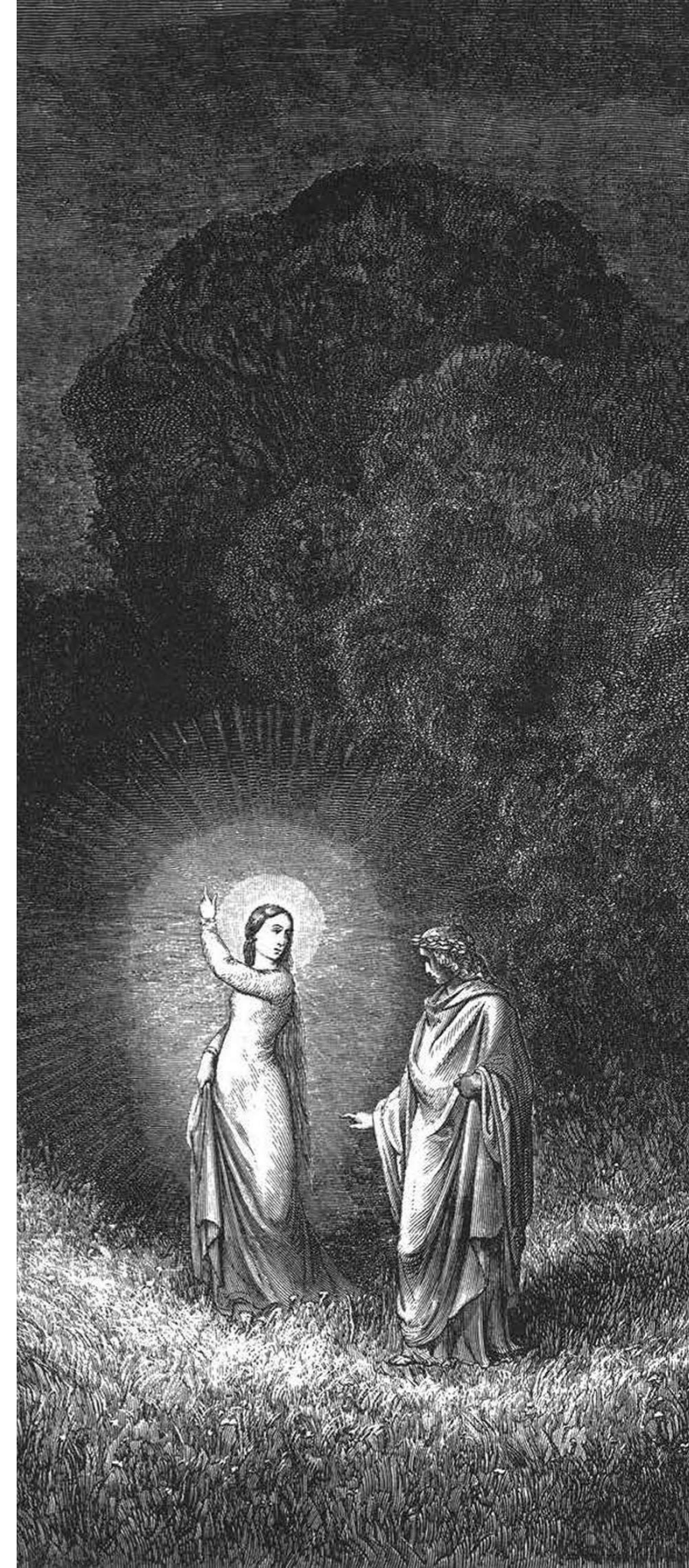
Webster Musings...

- "Search me O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any offensive way in me, and lead me in the ways everlasting." - Psalm 139:23-24 / Not a bad posture for Lent.
- Difficulty = Growth / Poetry is the art of paying attention / "Attention is the beginning of devotion." - Mary Oliver
- Allegory as devotional exercise. Testimony: Deacon Jeremiah / Age 17.
- May this reading renew our gratitude for God's saving grace in our lives.



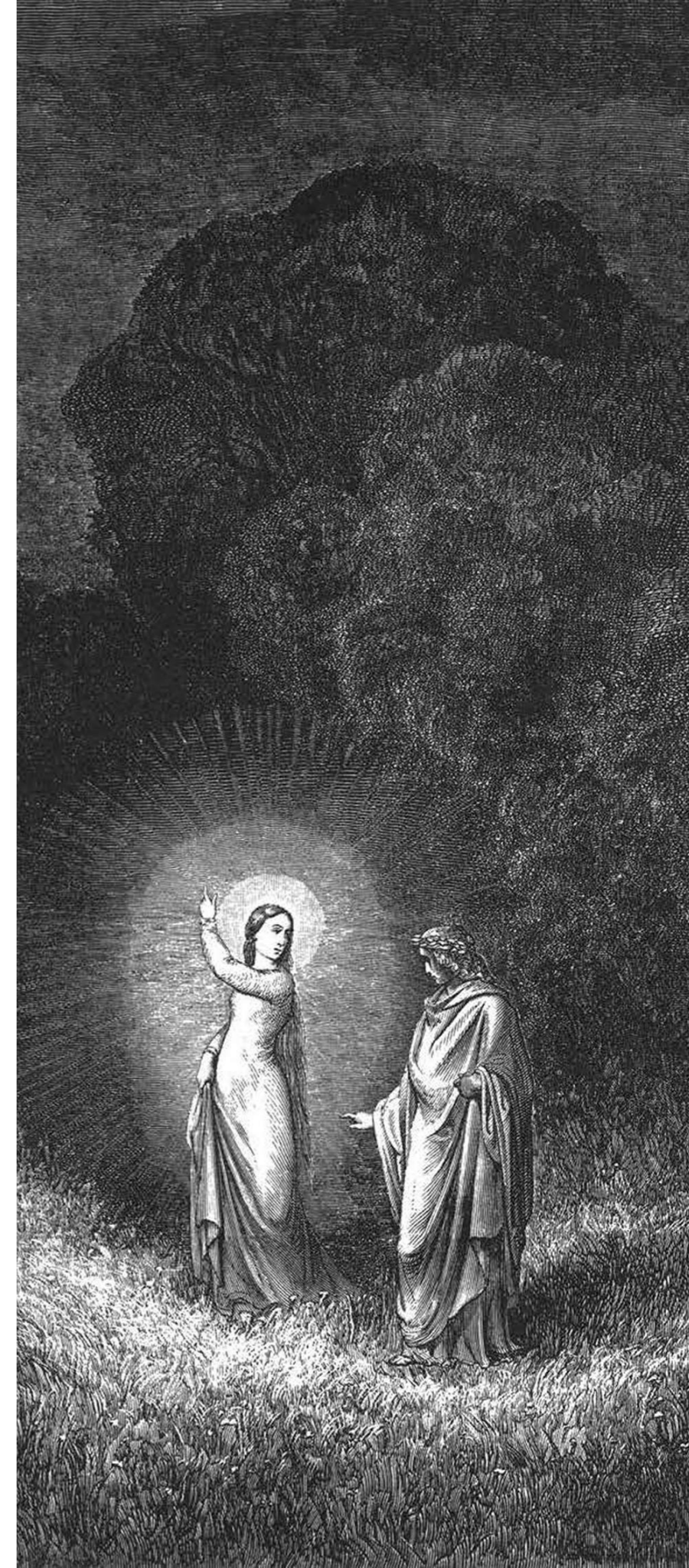
Sayers Introduction

- The project: "Yet there I gained such good." An act of witness (ln. 8). St. Augustine: *Confessions* / Milton: *Paradise Lost* - "To justify the ways of God to Men."
- The catalyst and agent is Divine Love (Beatrice). The instigator is not the individual, but God. The surprising use of Virgil in this economy. Testimony (Shakespeare / Rilke / Eliot).
- Inferno (Dramatic Disorder) / Purgatorio (Didactic Realignment) / Paradiso (Divine Order)
- Allegory vs. Symbolic Images (13 / 16 / 19)



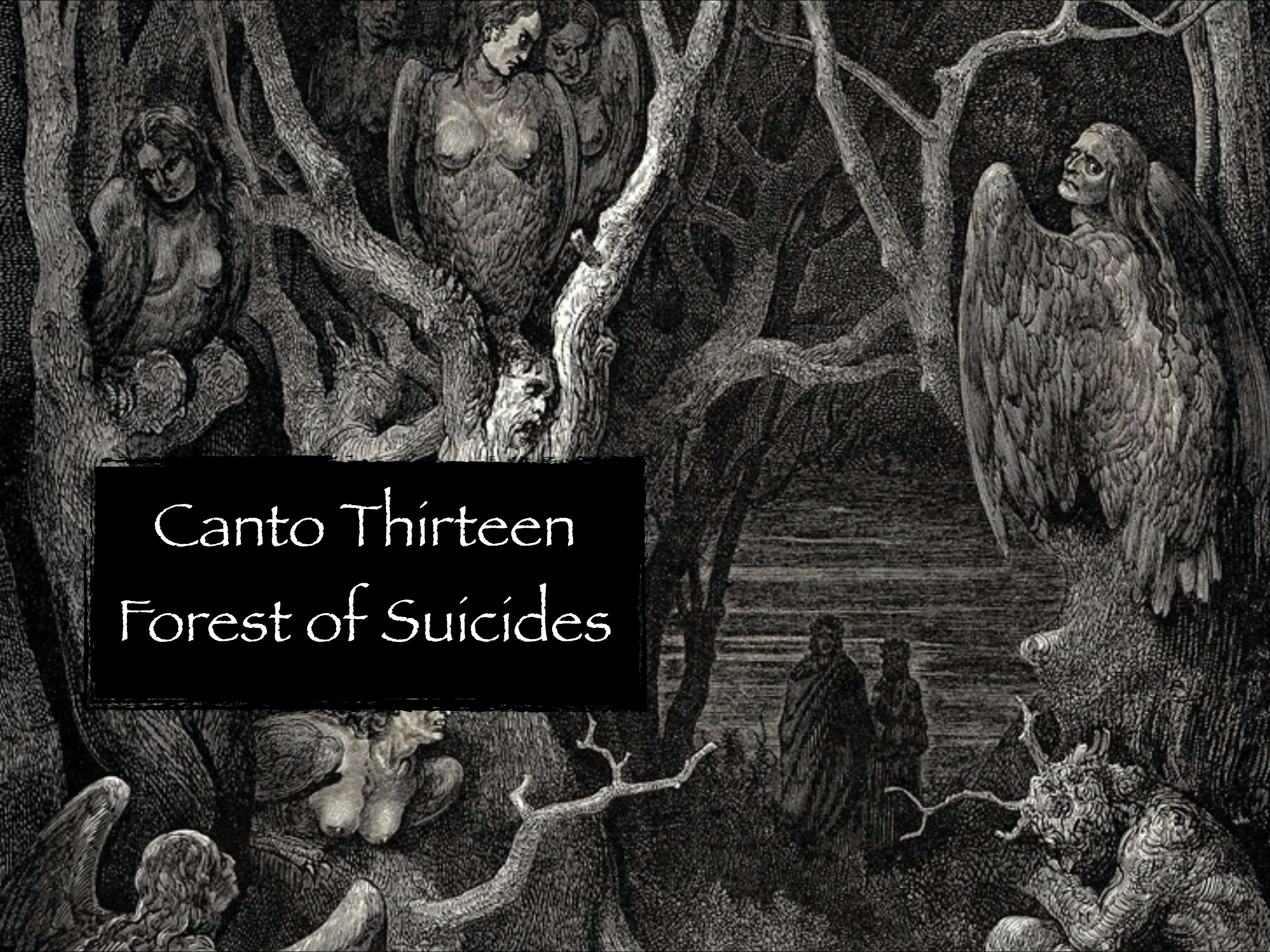
Sayers Introduction

- Dante's anticlericalism and politics / A student of Aristotle / The church should be a fetter, but not complicit with worldly powers (45).
- Dante's project / critique is both temporal and eternal (47).
- Begins composition in 1314 / Italian (49)
- Devotional Readings



Canto One





Canto Thirteen
Forest of Suicides

Jeremiah @ 17

Trees / "no green here" / suicide - no propagation of life / "fruit" (4)

Harpies (birds with human faces): a distortion of Imago Dei / Aeneid - the "will to destruction" (10)

Mournful wailing (22) / Heard not seen / A vision of mental anguish.

Must be acted upon to speak / total loss of agency and volition (28)

Polydorus / Humans turned into trees.



Canto Thirteen
Forest of Suicides

Words commingled with blood / blood
as "last word" / must be acted upon to
speak (43)

Ex: Pierre delle Vigne / Historic
Example (55) / Actual people /
communities are impacted by this
loss.

@17, I needed this dramatic portrayal
of "The Violent Against Self." I
needed a severe and articulate
reminder of our beloved status as
Imago Dei. Without it, I would have
fallen into despair. I needed poetry,
not therapy.



Canto Thirteen
Forest of Suicides

Second Space
Czesław Miłosz

How spacious the heavenly halls are!
Approach them on aerial stairs.
Above white clouds, there are the hanging gardens of paradise.

A soul tears itself from the body and soars.
It remembers that there is an up.
And there is a down.

Have we really lost faith in that other space?
Have they vanished forever, both Heaven and Hell?

Without unearthly meadows how to meet salvation?
And where will the damned find suitable quarters?

Let us weep, lament the enormity of the loss.
Let us smear our faces with coal, loosen our hair.

Let us implore that it be returned to us,
That second space.