

## COMMENTARIUM

### a first-hand account of canto xiii

Q: what sort of sin is suicide?

Ingratitude; wastage; a tonnage of discarded food. Hence the Harpies. Suicide as a particular case of bad table manners – incorrect position of cutlery on a finished plate, untouched food, elbows up, an obstinacy in using dessert spoons for soup and knives for else. Truly no better than they. That's why Cato made it out, and never sprouted: commendable eating habits, and no attempts to monopolise the garum at the table.

Q: what is the punishment?

We are trees.

Q: you mentioned cato. that is marcus porcius cato (the younger not the elder) he died in 46BC, threw himself over a sword. read plato to prepare.

Merely common sense for a certain type of republican sensibility. He is not here.

Q: no he's not. won a chance to wet his toes in purgatorio, which is better than the alternative, i.e. not to have any toes at all to keep accordingly wet or dry. so what's it like to be a tree?

Think of this: fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva is a genetic illness which in unscientific terms turns you into a thin red layer in between bones. An exoskeleton grows over you – not fully developed, of course, there's no clean division of vertebrae, shapely fibular elongation: but tissues quiver to a stop, and turn to stone. It's like that. And like being stuck inside your head – neural pathways now roots clinging to dry soil. You can feel it when you bleed. Our restlessness refined, and now we know – all roads lead to here there's nowhere else, the way out only crams you further in; and look at what remains, intense aliveness pure Is it's serfdom logic, you know, the body as a piece of borrowed land you till and tend to, as your fathers tilled and tended to, not able to leave without permission. To desert entails a risk, which is not death. You're stuffed with time until you gag and placed again behind the plough; I wish we could go mad.

Q: that's great to hear. and do you expect to be a tree for long?

Yes.

Q: care to elaborate on that?

We do not get our bodies back. Others wait for judgement's day – worse pain they say but one could nearly imagine dynamism in the way torment flares up this tendon first and that one later. The body thing's peculiar, as most scholarship is aware. Ours will hang: unique case in all of hell. We'll bend under their weight – and only pity is, we have no eyes to watch them rot. It would have been something to do.

Q. I'm not sure they do that, bodies, that is. incorruptible etc consider salvation.

Oh yes that must be convenient – not for us, but for those giddily floating up, like atoms. Being an atom is not great. Where would it fall in the scale of post-human embodiment, especially in relation to being a tree, I could not say, but things resist change: see the stone's victorious attempt to stay a stone. What man would let his soul unravel, and forget? Not that anybody gets a say in it, of course, but we crucified him once, so I suppose that won us some right to parlay. “No atoms”, we said. “Well, if you really feel so strongly about it” – not an accurate portrayal I wasn't there. I paraphrase; it's how I keep myself amused these days.

Q: naturally. and now to conclude: inferno, any comments?

The thing you need to understand about this place is that it's a cheap horror ride. We jerk up as recorded voices sound, *o Tosco che per la città del foco vivo ten vai...* and if you stay long enough, we'll start again. Mechanical whirring of our joints, slight disturbances – a crackling in our words. It's all a sham. There's a smoke machine behind the door.

Q: thank you. that will be all.

My pleasure. Come back soon.