

Canto X
Tom Finan

Tom Finan's Canto X is part of a reimagining of Dante's "Heaven of the Sun," in which the Church's greatest thinkers find rest. In place of the theological juggernauts of history, however, Finan places some of the world's most influential scientific innovators. Led by the famous Serbian inventor Nikola Tesla (who himself inhabits this sphere), Finan, already a science-oriented child at the age of thirteen, begins by entering a black hole to reach this next heaven. When Tesla and Finan exit, the space itself is left largely undescribed because of the enormous brain in front of them; the brain resembles Dante's eagle in the Heaven of Jupiter in that it is made of multitudes of bright shades, each shade an inventor admired by Finan. Isaac Newton, one of the foremost figures in physics innovation, speaks to Finan on behalf of the souls through the brainstem about the present state of the sphere he now dwells in while also admonishing Finan about growing scientific misinformation in the modern world. Following Newton's speech, Finan and Tesla next encounter Michael Faraday, a monumentally important figure in our modern understanding of electromagnetism and engines, who praises Finan for his curiosity but warns him of future laziness. The souls end by exclaiming "Domine, permitte eos videre!" an alteration of the blind man's plea to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (18:41: "Lord, please let me see"), asking God to grant continued innovative vision to the great minds still on Earth.

So Tesla spoke, and just as a water-filled jar
With a newly-formed leak empties its contents
So quickly, doubt fully drained now from my heart. 3

That holy oblivion, with force immense
Feared in our cosmos but revered up above,
Pulled me into darkness, my blindness intense, 6

And as a master chef feeds fresh pasta of
No form yet into the shaper's metal jaws,
Contorting it 'til the chef's labor of love 9

Concludes, I felt my soul bend 'til a great pause
even lacking pain it relieved me greatly—
And my guide smiled at me; all this I saw. 12

What I describe next I cannot, innately,
Give full justice to, but its beauty compels
Me to describe it, all for God, who sates me. 15

Now exiting Heaven's great gravity well,
I beheld an impossible sight: a brain
Enormous, upright, comprised of many cells 18

All of which lit up as soon as I strained my
Neck to look at them, seeming to be in deep
Thought, as Aquinas was while pondering God. 21

To which shades dwell in this sphere, my mind was 'sleep,
But Tesla, who read my thoughts, cleared the haze from
My mind, as a shepherd shears wool from his sheep. 24

“I know your inquiry, O you confused one:
The muscle of thought before you is made up
Of all those great thinkers who, when seeing some 27

Problem, scientific in nature, came up
With working, sometimes elegant, solutions
So that future thinkers could easily sup 30

On those answers and end the world's confusion.
Before I was sent down to spur your journey,
Here did I experience God's effusion, 33

Rewarded for that thinking which stirred me.”
So he spoke, and my soul filled with elation.
I understood now where I wanted to be. 36

Just as an earthly magenta carnation
Begins to bloom in spring, but not yet realize
Its potential in beauty, its oblation 39

Coming with time, so too could my talent rise.
Rome could not be built in a day, nor a year,
But my Rome must come before I reach God's skies. 42

My mentor gestured to the mind, which appeared
Far-off to my mortal eyes, and we began
To glide, like angels, and it grew ever near. 45

I will describe now only the souls I can:
Faraday, the engine's great developer,
Jobs, whose Apple's still feasted on by man, 48

The world's best purifier of steel, Bessemer,
And he whose telephone even permitted
Speaking halfway across Earth through the aether. 51

When all those famous thinkers so sharp-witted

Caught sight of us, they glowed even brighter and
The brain's neurons more swiftly were transmitted. 54

One shade, by accent clearly an Englishman,
Spoke from the stem of the cerebrum, so wise
I cannot well describe it by my own hand. 57

I perceived him, but with my weak mortal eyes,
He was little more than a being of light,
Yet my hearing punctured his luminous guise. 60

Said he, "Son, your humble guide Tesla might
Already have explained this sphere's being
To you, but this great mind has been in my sight 63

For centuries longer. God has been seeing
Each instance of genius, from the caveman's first
Blaze to the spaceships flying past Saturn's rings, 66

As equals, since inventors commonly thirst
For improvement. Thus, we all form the same brain,
Pondering heaven's knowledge, with which we burst. 69

Our joy is constant, yet it's never the same,
For beyond all limits God lets our mind go,
But what I say next brings many of us pain." 72

The souls, all at once, because each of them knew
Which modern grief their stem would then lament next,
Cried out with divine power, and their moans grew. 75

The one whose laws of motion govern objects
Began again, this time with a sadder tone,
"An age of fraud, son, modernity begets, 78

And truth, like chaff when some angry wind is blown,
Is driven away now in favor of mere
Profit, or power, or false smarts to be shown. 81

A great plague, huge compared to the one I feared,
Shall bring pain to your time soon: a Hellish crown
Will sow falsehoods, and death, and all will shed tears. 84

But science brings hope even to those who drown.
Learn all you can, and nature's beauty will shine

Upon you, son, and God's light will be sent down."	87
So he spoke, and suddenly I was inclined To move to be among, not in front of, those Wondrous souls, to become part of the great mind.	90
Sensing my want, my guide suddenly rose And together we floated upward, forward, Until by the mind's neurons we were enclosed.	93
Like a farmer strolls inside his fruit orchard, Able to pick out any fruit, equal in Flavor, so too did I walk between the souls.	96
I then ran into another Englishman, Whom I recognized from my ascent before, The magnet's master, the man of the engine.	99
I knew him immediately and rushed toward Him to hear how his great wisdom might help me. Before I spoke he knew my query; I soared	102
With joy. The soul began, "O, do I truly, Before me, behold such a curious mind? What grace must God have shown me!" But hard to see	105
Was to whom, Tesla or me, he spoke. I pined For this knowledge, but he continued further, "You, O radiant one, your future, to my mind,	108
Is now brighter than your curious fervor, And even your present is shaped by your love For learning, which will take you so much further	111
Than you know. But, as with any gift, be of Extra caution, so as not to misuse it. For laziness no man is always above.	114
You, even with effort, can fall victim if Your drive does run low, and oft will be your brain: Caught up at the edge of the modern world's cliff,	117
Wasting away in the cyber-world contained In the tablet you go to sleep with each night, Like a wine whose stupor perpetually stains	120

The function of its drinker's thinking and sight. Be wary of such 'pleasures' when they appear, For their overuse will surely bring you plight.	123
I warn you, but from my message you must hear Of your command of the human world's knowledge That shall advance if you try, year after year."	126
After he concluded, I must acknowledge, All doubt fled me, now replaced by certainty, From the shade whose engine first produced wattage.	129
Suddenly, the whole brain, with great urgency, Began to glow brighter than I could perceive, And they heightened their joyful eternity;	132
The perfection I saw, I could not believe. But after the words of kind Faraday, The shades' singing signaled it was time to leave,	135
<i>"Domine, permitte eos videre!"</i>	136

Notes

Lines 4-6: *"That holy oblivion, with force immense / Feared in our cosmos but revered up above / Pulled me into darkness..."* Finan uses a black hole, an important and somewhat mysterious entity of modern astrophysics unknown to Dante, as the gateway to enter this new sphere. Finan being sucked into the black hole via its insurmountable gravitational force mimics man's natural attraction to God.

Lines 7-12: *"...as a master chef feeds fresh pasta... / into the shaper's metal jaws... contorting it... / I felt my soul bend..."* When he enters the black hole he feels himself being *spiritually* stretched—accurately to what one would *physically* experience while sucked into a black hole. The scientific term for said stretching is "spaghettification," so Finan uses a pasta-related metaphor to describe it.

Lines 16-34: *"...a brain / Enormous, upright, comprised of many cells..."* In Finan's Paradise of innovation, there is a brain made up of all history's best thinkers, perhaps to emphasize that combining humanity's knowledge and collaboration leads to the most progress. The ultimate way of "rewarding" these people is allowing them to ponder *everything*, forever, together.

Lines 37-42: “...Rome could not be built in a day, nor a year, / But my Rome must come before I reach God’s skies.” Finan wants to develop his talent in scientific inquiry. He seems to understand that it is a process, but nonetheless one that must happen. As a young child he was scientifically minded and so felt it was his destiny to pursue such a path.

Lines 47-51: “I will describe now only the souls I can... Faraday... Jobs... Bessemer... he whose telephone even permitted / Speaking halfway across Earth...” The souls named are Michael Faraday, an enormously important inventor and pioneer in electromagnetism (also, notably, a devout Christian); Steve Jobs, the father of iPhones and much digital technology; Samuel Bessemer, who invented the Bessemer process for purifying steel; and Alexander Graham Bell (not named) who first invented the telephone.

Line 76: “The one whose laws of motion govern objects...” Reference to Newton’s laws of motion.

Lines 78-87: “An age of fraud, son, modernity begets...” Newton describes a period coming to Finan’s time soon—which has really already started—of misinformation, which will prove to be harmful during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since this Paradiso is set in 2019 there is still roughly a year until the pandemic begins. However, there is hope: Newton suggests that education leads to beauty and good.

Line 99: “The magnet’s master, the man of the engine.” Finan begins to speak to Faraday.

Lines 115-123: “Wasting away in the cyber-world contained...” Faraday, after praising Finan for his talent and curiosity, warns Finan against becoming lazy as time goes on. The story takes place mere months before he got his first phone, which was the main tempter for the vice Faraday warned against.

Lines 130-132: “Suddenly, the whole brain, with great urgency / Began to glow brighter than I could perceive...” The brain may start glowing more because it is excited to receive another member into its ranks.

Line 136: “Domine, permittite eos videre!” The souls all exclaim “Lord, allow them to see!” as Dante prepares to exit this heaven. That phrase is a very slight change to the plea of the blind man in Luke 18 (“Lord, let me see”). By “see” they perhaps mean “understand,” and they are essentially hoping that God will allow the souls still on Earth to see the world’s problems—and their solutions—by the guiding light of innovation.