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Canto 350¹

*Journey into a new ring: disrespect to the earth - the greedy - Koch brothers - the
mindless - Sarah Palin - the shallow*

My feet sink into the deep gravel as Virgil and I descend into the following ring. Flint² crumbles and shifts with each step I take, as if the substance beneath the earth has been excavated. Upon reaching the foot of the great chasm, I pause. An immense wave of heat overwhelms me³. Virgil, my ever-compassionate leader, places a reassuring hand on my shoulder, urging me to continue.

My ears buzz with the sound of sizzling coals. (1) My eyes strain as they focus on a throng of silhouettes emerging from fire and flame. As I journey forward, a vast cape of smoke obscures my vision.

Advancing toward the many silhouettes, I see that one of them reaches out to confront me.

“Tell me, Florentine, you who speak in the Tuscan tongue, who are you?” asks the sinner as he struggles to stay afloat in a Baptismal abundance of sweat (2).

“O you whose perspiration forms a polluted river, I am the exiled one,” I reply, as the pathetic soul gazes pitifully into my eyes.

¹ **Canto 350:** 350.org is one of the biggest supporters of the global climate movement.

² **Flint crumbles and shifts:** Before the match was invented, flint rocks were commonly used to start fires.

³ **An immense heat overwhelms me:** Part of the punishment of the souls is that their ring is hot. This heat is a contrapasso in that the souls denied climate change.

“Forgive me, Dante, for I must return to my fate,” weeps the soul as the sinewy roots grow from the muck to confine him. Just before my eyes, the shadow begins to disappear. As it fades, my thoughts turn to those souls deprived of mother nature's resources.

What happens next leaves me dumbfounded. As the roots burst through the earth, they somehow grasp the resigned soul. Engulfing him, the roots suck the soul into oblivion. I gaze forward, only to see a broad scene of blackened defeated flora, interrupted by large craters where the earth has been gutted. Where the soul once stood, now there stands only a worn stump.

“Virgil, where have the shades retreated?” I hesitantly ask. Virgil takes me by the elbow to one of the many pits. As I peer into the rough crater⁴, I see bulky tangled roots, like those of a cypress, evidence of an earth that was once flourishing. Imprisoned by the roots (2), a soul glances up at me as sweat rushes from his temples. The roots restrict the sinners much as a python suffocates its prey. As I investigate further, I notice another sinner, intertwined with the first one I saw.

“Identify yourselves,” I command to the tangled souls.

Looking up at me, the souls respond, “For we are the mighty Koch brothers!”

“How dare you walk through Hell so casually, looking down on us like we are scum. Up above, we were greater than all of you; we were richer than God, not to mention Croeses, and we had it all,” they continue.

I respond, “Yes, I cannot contradict you. You both were richer than God, and

⁴ **Rough crater:** The souls are tangled in coal mines. Coal mines are notorious for polluting the land, water, and air. Coal Mining also produces methane, a gas that contributes to climate change.

Croeses. But so was the Roman Emperor, Nero⁵ (3). He put his greedy interests before the earth just as you two did.”

“Greed is good⁶,” they respond.

Taken aback, I reply, “O you who are deplorable, at least I can walk freely up above, for you both are trapped in Hell! (6)”

“Dante, do not take the bait, move on from these tragic souls,” my friend Virgil says with a scoff (5).

To you loyal to my poem, see into my soul and comprehend me; know that I cannot simply let this issue rest (7).

But move on I must, continuing throughout the great plane.

“Drill baby, drill!” These words pollute the air as I walk. The sound echoes across the chasm. I witness a woman, squawking like an angry hen, nearly suffocated by the roots gnarled like the knuckles of an ancient hand. Persisting, she chants, “drill baby, drill!” I hesitantly approach. “Tell me, what brings you to my excavated pit?” barks the soul.

I reply, “O you who shot wolves from a helicopter with a machine gun⁷ are much like the greedy Koch brothers I just encountered. You all are like a malignant tumor, sucking up all the earth's precious resources till your greedy hands can no longer grab. (4)”

“I don’t care! Drill, baby drill!,” she chants.

⁵ **Roman Emperor, Nero:** Nero was the last Roman Emperor of the Julio- Claudian Dynasty. He was famous for his greed and selfishness.

⁶ **“Greed is good”:** A quote from the movie, *Wall Street* (1987)

⁷ **shot wolves from a helicopter with machine guns:** In an act that angered many environmentalists, Sarah Palin shot wolves with a machine gun from a helicopter.

Disregarding her mindlessness, I conclude that there is nothing to say to shadow and silence those absorbed in their greed. Taking me by the hand, Virgil, who looks to be as disgusted as I am, leads me away, squeezing my hand tighter, as the circle gets hotter and hotter in the fire of human shamelessness.

Sources:

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>
- <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094291/quotes>
- <https://350.org/>