

**A New *Bolgia***

1 My master and I emerged from the bolgia to a white structure that protruded from red clay surrounding its pearly columns.

4 The front facing facade stood on pillars thick like the legs of elephants and as white as their tusks, gleaming not in the sunlight but by magnified flames.

7 Fire eroded the structure that was sinking into the vast earth. Words traced its monstrous dome, and I made out *'in lumine tuo videbimus lumen.'*

10 My master urged me, "Do not be blinded by the minds contained within this temple of knowledge; they are bound to the building by their brains.

13 This is a timeless pocket, in which you will recognize great scholars and writers from your time as well as eras distant from your own.

16 They did not sate themselves with knowledge but gorged upon it, until encyclopedias took residence in their cranial cavities.

19 They spout facts and twist their tongues until their thoughts parade out of their mouths and pounce on each and every audience member.”

22 His speech fell upon me and then fell upon the dirt-- my eyes and mind were fixed on a figure who appeared and vanished at a vast window.

25 I became a nameless reflection. My speech surged and fell flat at my teeth as though it were the ruthless sea. A myriad of thoughts drowned in my mind.

28 “I have read your fears. Although you revel in beautiful speech, bound and unbound words alike, this is not your eternal resting place.

31 Your admiration for language stems from an innate curiosity; it is not used as a vault from which to launch yourself into greatness.

34 Being genuine absolves you from a fate such as this one.” Breath returned to my lungs and my legs felt as though they could continue their trek.

37 He sensed my relief and took me by the arm. We proceeded to march as though indoctrinated through openings in the hellfire.

40 We ascended marble steps and passed a statue engraved with the title of ‘Alma Matter.’ I asked, “Who is this woman preserved in stone?”

43 “This is lady Columbia. She possesses a patriotic fervor. Lady liberty is the namesake for this forsaken institution. They have forgotten she resides on their steps.”

46 As we walked past the metal goddess, sitting in robes and adorned with wreaths, I heard the grinding of stone-- she watched as my master and I made our way.

49 We approached a set of double doors that seemed to ascend to the celestial realm itself. The closer we grew, the greater the heat engulfed me. I was panting upon arrival.

52 My master reached for a knocker slightly above his frame. It was gilded and folded as though it were made from pink human tissue.

55 Pushing the knocker into the door, it opened, revealing a cavernous hallway that was lined with books of all sizes and colors.

58 My neck ached as I gazed upon the ceiling, failing to ascertain the edge of this library of thoughts. Our footsteps dissolved upon a smooth, white, stone floor

61 The surfaces induced temporary blindness. The brightness was unbearable. The light bore into marble statues embedded into the center of the mind palace.

64 Forcing my eyes shut against the glare, I clung to my master's arm and he propelled me forward for a few steps and slowly removed his body from mine.

67 "The beams penetrate your shut eyelids regardless of how tightly you force your sight beneath them. Open your eyes to this empty place. The light is innocuous."

70 I did as my master commanded and gradually lifted my eyelids, accepting momentary blindness as a deluge of light flooded my vision.

73 My eye-opening was greeted by a series of stone statues that had not been near me upon my arrival. My master implored me to touch the surface of one.

76 The marble figure nearest to me had a wreath upon his own head that seemed to be embedded in the dome of his skull.

79 I touched the stone's cheek and immediately balked-- his face was burning as though an eternal and immutable fire was blazing just below my touch.

82 My master gaged my surprise and informed me,  
“This is the result of the overcrowding of thoughts-- these  
men collected ideas for the sake of spewing them like bile.

85 They care not for introspection nor enlightenment,  
but for bravado and acclaim. The rhetoric that ravages their  
brain and the moments in history that dot their thoughts and

88 the endless list of logicians they can name has been  
improved upon: they have been provided with all of the  
knowledge in the realm of man.

91 They have to sift before every fact before their  
tongues can yield speech. Their minds grow hot from the  
exertion, the floor is white with melded remains.”

94 As he spoke a small, bespectacled girl shattered  
on the floor. On impact there was a great roar that shook  
the entire building as though it were made from paper.

97 Tears sprung to my eyes and, turning away from  
my master, I gazed into the eyes of the man closest to me,  
and dared to put a finger to his cheek again.

100 It singed and burned upon impact. My guide  
did not acknowledge this meager act of defiance, and  
shame rushed to make my cheeks as scorching as my  
sizzling flesh.

104 He took me by the arm down a hallway that was overflowing with inaudible pain; there were no voices, only doors and books of a plethora of colors and sizes.

107 “Master, what poor souls are imprisoned behind each and every one of these entranceways?” He responded by gesturing towards the closest archway.

111 Underneath the arch was a door that was made from dissected books--pages and spines alike were woven together. The structure that creaked open upon my touch.

114 The entrance yielded another door that stank of decomposing flesh. Paper thin strips of skin were melded together, tethered to spines to create a sturdy surface.

117 This dual entryway gave way to a room in which every surface was covered in moaning, ailing bodies and pages of books.

120 They were squawking names at one another through the waves of pages that suspended them in the middle of the air.

123 After wading through the debris, my master indicated towards a soul in the corner covered from neck to toe with leaded dictionaries.

126 He had ceased trying to remove the volumes,  
and a grey fluid was leaking out of the edges of his body  
and onto the floor near by.

129 “Ailing soul! Tell me what caused your plight  
and I will resurrect your name once again in the realm of  
mortals and light.”

132 His voice croaked and quavered beneath the  
pressure of the volumes. It came out in a fluttering whisper,  
bristling against pages of novels surrounding him.

135 “I was brought to this place as I lay dying.  
Many years ago after gazing upon a light in august, my  
hands yearned for pen and paper.

138 I produced thought upon thought and ushered  
them deeply to the page. My sentences twisted around one  
another and around my mind like nooses.

141 They told me I was a madman and a genius,  
that within me I had both the sound and the fury. My books  
flew off of the presses and my finances became stable.

144 The sentences were never enough for them.  
Like vultures they dissected my work and I relented-- the  
words grew longer and the meaning more obscure.

147 I preached these storylines to the world, coupled  
with the devil's drink I encouraged the young writers to  
find a voice for themselves and forced mine upon them.

150 My sentences grew more incomprehensible as  
my fame reached its climax, but even after the barn was  
burning I kept writing.

153 The joy was gone but the press lingered,  
begging for insight that I readily provided for them. I gave  
Emily a rose and it was the final straw.

156 My words were nothing but a place to fill a lack.  
Now I have all of them, a prison of words, and I am bound  
to the prose I once used to manipulate the ideas of a

160 generation.” My tears dripped slowly onto the  
leaden wordbooks, creating a streak of gleaming luster that  
dropped slowly down onto his pale face.

**Notes:**

Lines 4-6: “The front facing facade...magnified flames.”

This is a description of the white pillars of the main administration building of  
Columbia University that were iconic for their size and stature.



Line 9: “*in lumine...lumen*”

Latin translation of the motto of Columbia University: In Thy light shall we see light.”

This further references the school itself; different motifs of light are an allusion to the entitlement and idea of bringing enlightenment to the world that accompanies the stereotype of a Columbia student or any ivy-league institution.

Lines 22-24: His speech...vast window”

Dante believes that he sees himself walking through the halls of Columbia University.

Lines 31-33: “Your admiration...into greatness”

This is a reference to a previous canto in which Dante relishes the joy and beauty of writing with his companion who is trapped in hell, Brunetto Latini.

Lines 40-41: “We ascended...of ‘Alma Mater””

The “Alma Mater” is a statue that is iconic and is located on the steps of Columbia University to embody the nature of the school.

Lines 43-45: “This is...their steps.”

Further elucidation of the figure of Columbia in reference to the school and the origin of its title.

Lines 53-54: “It was gilded...human tissue.”

The knocker is in the shape of a human brain.

Line 73: “Eye Opening”

This is a pun and a double-entendre--Dante Pilgrim is becoming more enlightened and is also literally opening his eyelids.

97-102: “Tears sprung to...make my cheeks.”

This act of defiance is a massive step outside of Dante Pilgrim’s typical character: by defying Virgil even in an implied manner, Dante allies himself with the thinkers in this chamber and reveals how deep his sympathies lie.

Line 135-160: “as I lay dying... generation”

The next few terza rimas detail the rise to fame and decline of William Faulkner, a prolific American author who is known for his convoluted, pretentious prose and preaching morals he did not believe in. They are littered with allusions to various books and short stories written by Faulkner, and elaborate on the influence of alcohol and the press that manipulated his later pieces.