

Dante's Pilgrimage through Turabian Inferno

Shane Hanssen

EN 2213 B: World Literature I

November 20, 2014

Midway through the journey of our semester, I woke in a dark library, for I had procrastinated greatly. How I entered there, I cannot truly say. I had become so sleepy at the moment I first turned on the television, deciding to do my assignment later, but my heart was stricken with terror, when I found myself at the entrance of the vast, peculiar library.

Two paths stood before me. One path appeared easy, and straight. The other appeared rigorous and curved around a series of shelves that towered high into the air. A magnificent bearded beast blocked the straight path. The bird-like beast appeared great and powerful, so much so that the ground beneath it seemed to tremble with fear. Its wings beat rapidly, stirring a hot wind through the air. With my initial path blocked, I rested as my body adjusted to the infernal heat, and then began my journey through the maze-like structure of the library.

Along my pilgrimage, a figure appeared to me in the distance, quiet and contemplative. “What art thou?” I inquired. “Art thou man, or beast, or spirit?” The figure answered to me, “Neither man, nor beast, but spirit. I was once a woman, a Chicagoan, deeply involved in the formation of a writing style made specifically for historical papers.” “Art thou the Saint Kate Turabian, author of the first edition of the Chicago Manual of Format and Style?” I responded bashfully, slightly star struck. “I am the woman you speak of. I have been sent here to show you the error of your ways, and bring you back to the ways of proper format. Look around you, for you have found yourself in the place of eternal punishment for the sins against Turabian Format,” she responded. I grasped what she had told me with great fear and grief, and I knew that I needed her help. I pointed toward the path that I was to take and said, “Behold the creature that obstructs my path.” A stern sense of respect spread across her face before she addressed me. “This is the great Foster. Red ink flows from his talons, and his beard ensnares those who commit atrocities against Format and Style. None who take the path that appears easy will pass

his scorn unscathed. We must take the more difficult route, passing through each walkway between the giant book shelves that tower over our heads. I will be your guide as you embark upon this journey.” I agreed to her aid, and we began our voyage.

We traveled to the edge of the first circle before my guide spoke again. “Prepare yourself for the ghastly sights that are to come. This place is partitioned into three circles, each circle more severe than the last in the crimes committed and the punishments for those crimes. We stand on the threshold of the first circle. This circle is reserved for those who have committed sins of format.”

As we approached the first hallway of punishment, I found myself surrounded by a landscape of complete emptiness. The world was completely white and devoid of shape. Souls around me wandered aimlessly, without purpose or direction. “This is the hall of the blank page. All souls here have forgotten to place a blank page between the title page and the first page of the body of their paper. They are destined to wander eternally in the blank page they forgot to include.” This vast emptiness brought great terror to my heart, and I urged my guide to keep moving. She obliged, and we advanced to the next hallway.

In the second hallway, people limped around their territories with great difficulty, attempting to pick up pencils and other utensils, only to clumsily drop them. Saint Kate led me closer to the condemned souls and explained to me, “This hall is reserved for those who were incorrect in their pagination. Just as their page numbers were placed in the wrong place, so parts of their anatomy are in the wrong places. Take a closer look.” As I observed, I noticed a man struggling to pick up a pencil. Upon further inspection, I saw that feet protruded from his wrists where his hands should be, and likewise, from his ankles emerge hands. The souls here struggled

with even the simplest of tasks, and their anguish was great. We observed with grief, and continued along our path.

As we approached the third and final hall of the chamber of format sins, I heard voices shouting, though I could not distinguish what they were saying. When we arrived we saw that the souls appeared larger than normal. As they spoke to one another, they trailed off before completing their thoughts. My guide clarified the punishment for me. “This is the hall of incorrect font. Souls trapped in this hall used a font larger than twelve point Times New Roman in order to make their paper appear longer. Their larger than normal statures are a result of using a larger than normal font. Furthermore, since their papers were left incomplete, so these souls are damned to speak in incomplete sentences.” As we approached the end of this chamber, we rested for a short time.

My guide rose from her seat and urged me to rise and continue my journey. However, I had grown weary, and I wished to rest a bit longer. Saint Kate quickly chastised me for my laziness, “Rise, you fool! Do not fall into temptation, for the chamber that we approach will be your home if you do not repent. We stand on the outskirts of the chamber of procrastination.” My heart was filled with terror and grief, and I followed my guide to the first hall.

In this hall, screams of agony filled my ears, and the stench of cheap energy drinks filled the air. The souls here sat hunched over computer screens, typing vigorously, and intermittently pausing to scream in pain. My guide appeared to almost pity the souls as she explained to me, “The poor souls damned here waited until the last possible minute to write their papers. As punishment, they must frantically type a paper for a rapidly approaching deadline, only to have their computer crash before they save their progress. I truly say to you, these souls experience

nothing but panic and anguish.” Stricken with grief, I wept for the souls lost here, as I saw my own potential fate.

As we advanced to the second hall, I saw men walking on stilts like circus performers wandering about. When I drew closer, I realized that the souls were not on stilts, but rather were stretched disproportionately at the arms and legs. These figures towered over me, and brought great unrest to my temperament. “These are the souls that asked for extensions on every deadline,” explained Saint Kate. “With every extension they asked for, their arms and legs were extended as well. Now they are cursed to walk this hall, extending their limbs to reach something, only to find it just out of reach.

My stomach began to turn as we approached the final hall of this chamber. The air was thick in my lungs, and a horrendous odor filled my nostrils. In this hall, the souls were unnaturally pale, their noses were red, and they clutched their stomachs as they wretched upon the floor. With great disdain, my guide revealed what I was observing. “The souls in this hall claimed to be sick on the due date of their papers in order to get an extra day to make up for lost time. As their punishment, they must suffer from the ailments they claimed to have while they were writing their overdue papers, a punishment far too easy in my opinion.” For the first time in my pilgrimage, I felt a sinister sense of glee as I watched these wretched souls suffer. We lingered a while, but the stench became too great, and we continued along our path.

I was exhausted, but the end of our journey was near, and knowledge of this invigorated me to quicken my pace. My guide stopped me before we reached the final chamber. “You must brace yourself, for the final chamber has only one hall. The torment you are about to witness is far greater than any that you have seen here. This is the chamber of plagiarism.” Fear gripped me in such severity that a scream escaped from my lungs.

In this hall was a group of souls fighting and tearing at each other's flesh at the bottom of a deep valley. In the middle of the crowd was a book. "What book is it that they fight so ravenously over?" I asked my guide. "The pages of the book are empty," she replied. "The souls here are punished for their plagiarism. Each soul claims to be the author of the book. They do not fight over the actual content of the book, but credit for writing it." The book was torn to pieces until nothing remained. Just then, I heard a terrible roar, and a gust of wind nearly knocked me off of my feet. Overhead was the great Foster, flying with great ferocity toward the cluster. As it flew overhead, red ink poured from its talons, flooding the hall and consuming the warring crowd until nothing was visible but a sea of red. "Just as red light floods the computer screens of their professors as their papers are scanned through a plagiarism detector, so the souls here are flooded with the red ink of failing grades," explained Saint Kate. Slowly, the ink drained, revealing only the crowd drenched in red and a new book, identical to the one before. The souls found the book, and the fighting ensued again.

We waited at the top of the valley, and soon the book was destroyed, and the Foster approached once more. As it flew over our heads, we grabbed onto its talons and let him carry us away from the final chamber. When it released us we were standing on the outside of the library. I sighed with great relief, as my journey in this horrible place had come to an end.