

Dante's *Inferno*: The Mirroring Between Farinata and Capaneus

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Within *Inferno*, Dante Alighieri's depiction of Farinata, the 13th century Florentine leader of the Ghibellines, and his depiction of Capaneus, one of the seven warriors against Thebes, contain a significant number of parallels. By analyzing cantos X and XIV through "vertical reading" and examining Farinata and Capaneus' similar themes and commonalities, I will argue that Dante writes Capaneus and Farinata to be entwined mirrors of each other in order to establish how life before death affects a sinner's experience in hell within *The Divine Comedy*.

MIRRORING of cantos and characters within *The Divine Comedy* is not uncommon. P.W. Damon (1965) argues that Ulysses and Cato are anti-types of each other; Guido da Montefeltro and his son Buonconte Montefeltro are written as opposite mirrors of each other in terms of sin; and metamorphosed, entwined pairs — such as Ulysses and Diomedes — are found all through the work. Catherine Keen (2016) argues to connect cantos by a type of "vertical reading" saying that "the value of comparison and retrospection, to identify connections between episodes in different canti or cantiche [cantos], soon emerges" when this type of reading is done (p. 55). Dante's *Inferno* (1472/1996) centers around planned separation of human sinners by divine edict, but at the same time, centers around human connection: the desire to see loved ones or enemies, to speak with each other even when not allowed, and to metamorphose into one being from two. When applying this type of analysis to Farinata of canto X

and Capaneus of canto XIV, they quickly emerge as another pair created in tandem with each other. By analyzing parallels concerning I) linguistic similarities, II) personality and pride, III) physical sensation in hell, IV) parental strife, V) earthly attachments and lack of confession, and VI) their negative charge in movement towards purgatory, I will argue that Dante establishes commonalities between the two characters and makes them mirrors of each other in order to establish how life before death affects a sinner's experience in hell within *The Divine Comedy*.

I: Linguistic Parallels

Linguistic parallels between Farinata and Capaneus make themselves immediately apparent as the first indication that these men reflect each other. They share disdain for their Christian surroundings: "He [Capaneus] had, and still seems to have, / God in *disdain*" and "He [Farinata] was / rising up with his breast and forehead as if he had / Hell in great *disdain*" (Dante, 1472/1996, XIV. 69-70, X. 34-36). Farinata is one who is "great-souled," and Capaneus is "great" (X. 73, XIV. 46). Both sinners are also predominantly static; Farinata's head and eyebrow movements in X. 88 and X. 44 are the only movements he makes, whereas Capaneus remains still through his entire canto.

Fire and heat play a similar role both linguistically and within each man's death. Each canto mentions fire in relation to cities: "City of fire" and "Flames that Alexander saw in the hot / parts of India" (Dante, 1472/1996, X. 22, XIV. 31-32). Farinata bakes within his sepulcher, and Capaneus lies on burning sand with fire raining down upon him. Regarding death, Farinata and his wife's bodies were "exhumed and burned," and Capaneus was struck down by Zeus's thunderbolt: "...another example of fire from heaven" (pp. 163, 228). Their cantos are writ-

ten to mimic each other in a way that is quickly visible, easily establishing a connection from the first reading.

II: Parallels Pertaining to Personality and Pride

Farinata, born Manente de Uberti, was a real person who led the Florentine Ghibellines from 1239 to 1264. He was an extremely powerful leader and warrior, responsible for driving the invading Guelfs out of Florence in 1248, and again in 1251. After his death, he was charged with heresy by the Guelphs and excommunicated (note by R.M. Durling on Dante, 1472/1996, X. 32). Capaneus, in comparison, is one of the Seven Against Thebes, seven characters of Statius' (90/1995) *Thebaid* who fought against Thebes as a result of King Oedipus' death. He is an extremely proud, large warrior who holds contempt for the gods and does not pray to them. When he screams insults at Jupiter from atop a wall of the city Thebes during book ten, Jupiter strikes him down with a lightning bolt due to his pride and hubris. Both men were fierce warriors fighting to take hold of a city, despite being from different eras and even different realities.

Capaneus is, of course, a symbol of pride and hubris. Dante knew Capaneus from the *Thebaid*, in which H. A. Mason (1992) argues that "Statius converted Capaneus from a human rebel against the gods [referencing *Seven Against Thebes* by Aeschylus] to a potential *rival* of the gods" (p. 8). It is this characterization that Dante has of Capaneus—not the human-against-the-gods, Prometheus-like, "bad boy" of the *Seven Against Thebes*, but a Nimrod-like figure of rivalry and hubris. Statius' (90/1995) Capaneus hates the gods: "Held justice irksome and despised the gods," only worshipping himself (3.603). His own pride extends past the acceptable measure of even Pagan standards, meaning that his prideful atti-

tude within Christian standards would be immeasurable.

Farinata's own pride, while not as blatantly spoken of as Capaneus', is also significant. "All generations of readers have been struck by the indomitable pride and courage displayed by Farinata's monumental figure, perhaps the most impressive in the entire *Inferno*," says Durling (1998, p. 139). Farinata is described using the word *magnanimo*, which has important connotations: "If we turn to Latin poetry, we find that the adjective *magnanimus* could be used in a way that emphasized the link between *magnitudo animi* and pride or ambition" (Dante, 1472/1996, X. 73; Scott, 1962, p. 98). Farinata is hailed as a great man, but the etymology surrounding his description reveals his un-Christian-like pride and ambition.

Dante (1472/1996) characterizes the sin of pride as physically large and imposing within both cantos, creating yet another parallel between the two. Capaneus is a massive figure, physically: "Held justice irksome and despised the gods; / And prodigal was he of his own life / Should anger urge—a centaur he might seem / of Phloe's dark forests or a match / For Etna's Cyclopes" (Stattius, 90/1995, 3.603-607). Farinata is described as "great-souled"; he "stood erect" even when sitting (X. 73, 32). Furthermore, the placement of Dante in relation to Farinata creates the image of a massive figure towering over Dante: "He stood at the foot of [Capaneus's] tomb" (X. 40). Instead of using different methods to physically showcase pride that would distinctly separate these men and give them more individualistic personalities, they are brought closer together by

their matching manifestations.

III: Parallels Concerning Physical Sensation in Hell

An Epicurean, Farinata appears in Canto X where he is placed within the sixth circle (the Heretics) because of his belief that the soul dies with the body, instead of believing that the soul will be reunited with the body come the second coming of Christ. "Epicurus and his followers have their cemetery in / this part, who make the soul die with the body," states Virgil—a belief which directly contradicts the teachings found within the Bible (Dante, 1472/1996, X. 13-14). To Epicureans, the soul is not immortal: their body and soul are bound to the earth.

The placement of Capaneus is more complicated and requires more discussion to understand. Capaneus—a Pagan who existed before the time of Christ—appears in Canto XIV of *Inferno* and is punished for

blaspheming against Zeus. Dante places him in the third subcircle within the seventh circle of hell, "the violent against God, Nature, or industry," a placement that fascinates scholars due to Dante's seeming assertion that even Pagans who blaspheme against their Pagan gods are still placed within a Christian hell (Dante, 1472/1996, XIV). Virgil says that Capaneus "holds / God in disdain and respects him little" instead of holding Zeus in disdain (XIV. 69-70). The implication here is that even a sinner who has never heard of Christianity before, if they act in a way unfitting for a Christian to act, will be sent to hell. Dante the Poet appears to assert that those who go against their own non-Christian gods are rebel-

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ling against the Christian God himself and will therefore be punished.

As seductive as that idea is, however, a more realistic analysis is due to the commonly held belief in the Middle Ages that Pagans could be pre-Christian prophets and therefore their Pagan gods were prefigurations of the Christian God. To Dante, Zeus and God would be the same creation. In Dante's time, many Christians believed that the Pagans had seen some spiritual Christian truth even before said Pagans knew what Christianity was, and therefore the Pagan gods would be treated in a somewhat similar fashion to the Christian God:

On the one hand, the Christian poet does not hesitate to denounce the 'false and lying gods' of the ancient Romans (Dante, 1996, i, 72); on the other, he associates ancient divinities with the angelic intelligences that govern the various heavens (Convivio n, iv, 1-7), as though the Pagan Romans had glimpsed part of the Christians' truth. In fact, the Christian poet who was bold enough to refer to Christ as "supreme Jove" (Purg. vi, 118) judges a Pagan by the laws and religious numina he knew and should have revered. Capaneus is therefore damned for his impious rebellion against God, known to him under the mask of Jove. (Scott, 1998, p. 188).

In reading Zeus as a pre-Christian symbol of God, the placement does make sense. Capaneus denied Zeus as his savior and blasphemed against him—he therefore denied God and blasphemed against Him as well, actions that appropriately place him in the third subcircle.

Despite their differences in sin and their differing placement in hell, Farinata and Capaneus are the only sinners who do not physically experience their punishments. Capaneus does not register the physical pain his shade should be endur-

ing. "Who is that great one who seems not to mind the / fire, and lies there scornful and frowning?" Dante the pilgrim asks Virgil of Capaneus, who is unbothered by the fire (Dante, 1472/1996, XIV. 46-47). He lies there surly and annoyed, the rain not "ripening" him in any way (XIV. 48). Similarly, Farinata rises from his tomb "with his breast and forehead as if he had / hell in great disdain" and is never described as bothered or in pain (X. 35-36). The image of a tortured shade being disdainful towards his torturer is striking and almost singular throughout *Inferno*—his only companion in such an attitude being Capaneus.

I posit that Farinata appears unbothered by hell's punishments due to his Epicurean beliefs when he was alive. The following Epicurean philosophy explains why Farinata would not believe in physical sensation after his death:

The soul has sensation owing to its protection within the body, to which it communicates sensation. Even though parts of the body be lost, the soul still has sensation; but if the soul be lost, the body ceases to feel; and so does the soul when the body is broken up. (Epicurus, 207-217/1940a, p. 17)

Additionally, Epicurus (207-271/1940b) states, "Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is a deprivation of sensation" (p. 30). According to his own philosophy, Farinata does not believe that he can feel once he is dead. There is, of course, contention between scholars whether the claim that Farinata does not feel his punishment is accurate, but Dante's own description of Farinata in combination with the additional evidence that the Epicurean philosophy provides supports the argument that there is a much stronger chance that Farinata does not feel his physical punishment than academics have previously

considered.

As for Capaneus, he has not changed from his earthly, living state at all; he has no concept of a Christian God. Hilari-ously, Capaneus doesn't seem to even understand where he is: "As I / was alive, so am I dead" (Dante, 1472/1996, XIV. 50-51). Capaneus cries out, this cry also being "a reference to the Stoic idea of consistency and imperturbability, again involving allusion to Farinata," further emphasizing his unchanging nature and his dismissal of Christian theology (note by R.M. Durling on Dante, 1472/1996, XIV. 51). He still believes that he has rebelled against Zeus, not God—he refers to all powers as Zeus (XIV. 52-60). Capaneus implies that he does not understand where he is—so much so that the idea of a Christian God and a Christian Hell, even as he experiences those things, remain completely unknown and unacknowledged. Capaneus died a Pagan and his grasp of Christianity is as non-existent as it was when he died; how can it be any different, if he is dead as he was alive?

The lack of physical pain that both sinners endure, when analyzed in tandem with Farinata and Capaneus' beliefs in life, creates the possibility that living beliefs also affect the strength of how a sinner physically feels their punishment. Hell does not exist independently of the living world. Rather, "What we see in the punishments of the damned are figurative replications of the actions or natures of sins themselves," which accounts for the way hell reflects the choices that the damned made during their lives (Cogan, 1999, p. 37). In both cases, the choice to turn away from God was a willing one, despite the different theological backgrounds. Farinata had Christian knowledge and chose to turn away from God knowing Biblical truth. As for Capaneus, his choice to turn from Zeus functions in the same manner when contextualizing

Christian theology towards Paganism in the Middle Ages. In life, neither Farinata nor Capaneus adhered to Christian tradition. It is my argument that Farinata and Capaneus' living beliefs and actions predict their experience in hell, and in their cases, predict their inability to feel pain.

IV: Parental Strife

Both Farinata and Capaneus display a broken parental-versus-filial relationship with their creator and turn away from Him. Farinata is positioned like Jesus Christ, his body placed in *Imago Pietatis*, but unlike Jesus whose soul existed past death, Farinata did not believe in the immortality of the soul. In contrast to Jesus Christ who allowed his body to die because of the will of God, Farinata "literally cause[s] his soul to die" by being an Epicurean (Durling, 1998, p. 138). The abrupt arrival of Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, who interrupts Farinata to ask Dante about his son and becomes overcome with agony when he believes his son to be dead, throws the bastardized representation of Jesus and God's familial relationship into even greater relief (Dante, 1472/1996, X. 52-73). This emotional exchange between Dante and Cavalcante highlights Farinata's lack of emotional connection to other humans and to God: he does not ask about anyone he loves, simply of Florence. This parental strife and representation of fatherhood is so strong in Canto X that it even reaches Dante: "In Farinata and Cavalcante, then, Dante encounters fathers: literally the father and father-in-law of his closest friend, but also fathers of his city, past leaders of Florence, where they were partly responsible for the heritage of civil strife that plagues it" (Durling, 1998, p. 137). Canto X is ripe with fathers and representations of failed and/or misconstrued father-son relationships.

Capaneus is linked with parental strife as well when we read him as De

Scipio (1990) does: “If Capaneus is the prime example of pride in his revolt against God, then the seventh circle represents the central point for the structure of Hell. It establishes a direct symbolic link between Capaneus and Lucifer as the primary figures of rebelliousness against God” (p. 176). In this way, we can see Capaneus as being linked with Lucifer. We see an emblem of not only pride but also failed love linked with pride—Lucifer was God’s most beloved angel. However, Lucifer chose to abandon God and reject him, similar to the way Capaneus cannot even recognize God. Lucifer also chooses to go against God and fight him, in the same way Capaneus chooses to rage against Zeus and turn from him. Additionally, not only are Capaneus and Lucifer linked, but Capaneus is also from the *Thebaid*—Thebes itself being profoundly emblematic of parental-versus-filial strife.

V: Earthly Attachments and Lack of Confession

Both Farinata and Capaneus are bothered more by earthly events than their own punishments in hell. Farinata’s laissez-faire attitude towards Hell is clear throughout his speech. He speaks to Virgil and Dante the Pilgrim only of earthly, political things such as Florence, their ancestors, and the wars. When discussing the discord between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, Farinata states, “If they [the Ghibellines] have / learned that art [of returning] badly.’ he said, ‘that torments me / more than this bed” (Dante, 1472/1996, X. 76-78). As for Capaneus, his earthly emotion was so powerful that it directly shaped the way in which he experiences Hell. Even Virgil says, “No / punishment, other than your rage, would be / suffering of a measure with your fury” (XIV. 64-66). Additionally, an interesting parallel appears here between Farinata’s earth-bound philoso-

phy and Capaneus’ body being forced to lie on hell’s ground. For both these men, these earthly events are more powerful than the punishment God has created for either of them.

Neither Farinata nor Capaneus are able to explain why they are in Hell. In both cantos, Virgil is the one to explain why they are punished (Dante, 1472/1996, X. 13-14, XIV. 62-71). Other sinners do not understand their sin, really, but they are still able to discuss it, such as Francesca does in Canto V: “But if you have so much desire to know the first / root of our love, I will do as one who weeps and / speaks” (X. 124-126). Importantly, there is no confession for either Farinata or Capaneus, when in many other cantos the sinners confess. Neither Capaneus nor Farinata admit to guilt, or to their sin as a such. Capaneus talks only of his death by thunderbolt and does not name God once, not understanding the truth of God or Christianity, or understanding that his death and placement in hell is the result of committing a sin. Farinata speaks only of earthly politics. The only statement that could be considered a confession is spoken by Farinata when he says, “Your speech makes you manifest as a native of / that noble fatherland to which perhaps I was too / harmful” (X. 25-27). Here, Farinata’s admission of guilt is not about his being an Epicurean—rather, it is about his earthly acts. To both Farinata and Capaneus, their sins do not exist, and therefore they never partake in any form of meaningful confession.

The absence of confession from Farinata and Capaneus creates interesting implications, especially when considered in tandem with the standards of confession at the time. “Regular confession—with its focus on personal sinfulness and the need to examine one’s faults year after year—was a longstanding and intimately familiar practice,” Steinberg (2013) says of medieval Christian tradition (p. 479).

Confession, being one of the seven sacraments, is still considered a way of vital importance to be close to God. Farinata and Capaneus' lack of confession and lack of guilt does not just create yet another mirror between the two, but also establishes a similar distant relationship with Christianity—just as their failed parental relationships with God and their connection to the earth instead of the Christian afterlife do.

VI: Negative Charge in Movement Towards Purgatory

Farinata and Capaneus have the potential to go to Purgatory, but it would require much change. This is an extraordinarily contentious statement. Virgil believes that Pagans are permanently damned; he says about the damned Pagans that “they did not sin; and if they have merit, it is not enough, because they did not have baptism” (Dante, 1472/1996, IV. 34-35). His assumption is that even a Pagan who does not sin is still damned to hell, no matter what. However, Steinberg's (2013) conclusion differs: “Virgil's claim, then, that the souls in Limbo have not sinned is without foundation” (p. 479). As the Harrowing of Hell indicates, spirits cursed to Hell can be saved: there is the possibility that a sinner can ascend to Purgatory, even after being damned. Harrowing of Hell creates an exceedingly small possibility of transformation, one that is so fascinating that it deserves some consideration.

Farinata and Capaneus' lack of guilt for their sins and their lack of confession, as well as their lack of love for any form of God—really, their lack of even *comprehension* for what they did—create a sort of ‘negative charge’ in terms of their spiritual journey and/or redemption. If a sinner has the potential to ascend to Purgatory or to leave Hell, as many sinners did during the Harrowing of Hell, there would certainly be certain standards a

sinner must meet. If Purgatory is about refinement, then a sinner must accept that they require refinement and trust in God to change them for the better. Confessing one's sin is the first step—acknowledgement of what one did wrong. Many sinners, both Pagan and Christian, possessed such knowledge: Francesca, Brunetto, Guido da Montefeltro—seemingly the majority. They are able to explain why they find themselves interred in eternal damnation. But Farinata and Capaneus cannot do even that.

Interestingly, if this purification does begin to occur, Farinata and Capaneus might begin to experience pain. To experience pain in Hell is to allow God to influence you, which neither Farinata nor Capaneus do. I believe the first step in their ascending to Purgatory would be letting go of those

earthly attachments and allowing God's Hell to perform the duties it is supposed to do, including the torture of physical sensation. Purgatory is refinement, transformation, and a letting go of all earthly desires. If the way to be saved from Hell and sent to Purgatory is to truly be worthy of such a movement, like those that Jesus saved during the Harrowing, then a love for God is necessary, as well as an acceptance of Him, his acts, and influence

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in order to receive that love. Pain would also be necessary because as the first step in experiencing a Christian connection.

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References

VII: Conclusion

Dante's *Inferno* is a mix of intertextuality from his main characters, themes, and quoted books. It is a puzzle of Classical and Medieval references, wrapped in conjoined meanings which tie together Christianity and Paganism. To not care about these connections dismisses an integral part of *The Divine Comedy*, an aspect so important to Dante that he constructed the entire story around it. For this reason, the study of Farinata and Capaneus is extremely important. Ignoring this pair of men ignores the vertical weaving of *The Inferno* and, in doing so, ignores one of the most essential elements of the entire poem.

When analyzed together, Farinata and Capaneus provide insight into both Dante's concept of Christianity and organization of characters, as well as his philosophy on the various sins that Farinata and Capaneus commit. These two warriors are another example of Dante's fascinating intertextuality which creates the vivid world of *The Divine Comedy*. Their mirrored strong earthly attachments, lack of physical pain within hell, broken familial relationship with God, excessive pride, lack of confession, and lack of guilt connect them through the *Inferno* as another remarkable, entwined pair. The negative charge they demonstrate in terms of sin and how the theology surrounding these characters creates the possibility that ascension from hell is possible an extremely exciting analytical possibility that is worth further study.

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