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The ambiguity of the “great Chiron” – *Inferno* 12

1. Silent violence

“Pàrtiti, bestia”¹, Virgil orders the Minotaur; Plutus is dismissed as “Taci, maladetto lupo!”², and Cerberus deserves not a single word, just a handful of mud thrown by Virgil in order to hush the demon’s “bramose canne”³. Nevertheless, it is not the same in front of the head Centaur Chiron. Virgil seems respectful, his speech is prolonged, his verbal aggression is more tenuous. The scene is well known: in *Inferno* 12, Dante and Virgil go beyond the High Bank, a huge ravine dividing Upper Hell from Lower Hell, that collapsed when Jesus Christ descended into the Limbo to free the Old Testament upright souls. His arrival provoked such a thunderous earthquake that the author of the *Aeneis* thought – hyperbolically – that “l’universo / sentisse amor” (*Inf.* 12. 41-42): in other words, according to Empedocles’ philosophy, the four elements the Earth is composed of – fire,

¹ *Inf.* 12. 19.

² *Inf.* 7. 8.

³ *Inf.* 6. 27.

air, water, earth – feeling *philia* among them, collided so energetically that the Globe went back to the Primordial Chaos, producing landslides in this point and in other places of Hell⁴ (“e in quel punto questa vecchia roccia, / qui e altrove, tal fece riverso” *Inf.* 12. 44-45).

The High Bank separates hoplessly Upper Hell from Lower Hell, dividing simultaneously the sinners who were just not able to contain themselves from those who did evil violently or astutely. The landslide is a ravine so steep “ch’alcuna via darebbe a chi sù fosse” (*Inf.* 12. 9) and it is like Lavini di Marco, situated between Serravalle and Lizzana by Basserman,⁵ before mentioned by Albertus Magnus,⁶ and probably visited by the same Alighieri during his passages through the March of Treviso. On the mountain’s summit, “n su la punta de la rotta lacca”, was stretched “l’infamia di Creti” (*Inf.* 12. 12), that is the Minotaur, depicted as in the Middle Ages with the body of a bull and a human face (we can comprehend it by his movements: “Qual è quel toro che si slaccia in quella

⁴ As Giorgio Stabile notes in Aa. Vv. *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Istituto della enciclopedia italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, Roma, 1976, tomo II, pp. 665 – 667, Dante could read Empedocles’ doctrines and their discussion in many works of Aristotle commented by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, first of all in *Metaphysics*.

⁵ Alfred Bassermann, *Le orme di Dante in Italia* (a cura di Egidio Gorra, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1902), 425-428.

⁶ “Montes autem ruunt duplici de causa sine motu per ventos. Quarum una est, quia radices eorum abraduntur aliqua de causa et tandem, quia fundamenta non habent, cadunt in toto vel in parte. Aliquando autem, eo quod multum elevantur, siccantur in sublimi et scinduntur, in quas scissuras ingredientibus aquae torrentium cum impetu deiciunt partem scissam a reliqua parte montis”. S. Alberti Magni, *Meteora*, in S. A. Magni, *Opera omnia*, tomus VI pars I, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfolorum, 2003, p. 148.

/ c'ha ricevuto già 'l colpo mortale, / che gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella”
Inf. 12. 22-24).

Incited by Virgil, Dante has to run away from the Minotaur's fury: “Corri al varco; / mentre ch'e' 'nfuria, è buon che tu ti cale” (*Inf.* 12. 26-27). That furious bull is impossible to tame, as “gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella”, overcome by the violent impulse dulling his intellect, and drowning his conscious discernment into a river of bloody wet heat humors - not coincidentally, one of the main elements in the the Seventh Circle landscape is Phlegethon, the bloody river “dal bollor vermiglio” (*Inf.* 12. 101). The Minotaur, image of that insane bestiality, mentioned by Virgil in *Inferno* 11, is completely aphasic, he is not able to direct his impulses rationally and he turns them into brute force. The violent stimulus dominates and overcomes him, in a process of reason loss precisely described by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa* (Q. 10 Art. 3):

“The passion of the sensitive appetite moves the will, in so far as the will is moved by its object: inasmuch as, to wit, man through being disposed in such and such a way by a passion [...] Now this influence of a passion on man occurs in two ways. First, so that his reason is wholly bound, so that he has not the use of reason: as happens in those who through a violent access of anger or concupiscence become furious or insane, just as they may from some other bodily disorder; since such like passions do not take place without some change in the body. And of such the same is to be said as of irrational animals,

which follow, of necessity, the impulse of their passions: for in them there is neither movement of reason, nor, consequently, of will”.⁷

Violence, overcoming the reason and fizzling the *logos*, is the result of the union between the soul movement of *ire* and that of *cupidity*, of yearning for possession. If the sins punished in the first circle of Violence evoke almost literally what Guglielmo Peraldo wrote in the chapter *De Ira*

⁷ “Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, passio appetitus sensitivi movet voluntatem ex ea parte qua voluntas movetur ab obiecto, inquantum scilicet homo aliquantulum dispositus per passionem, iudicat aliquid esse conveniens et bonum quod extra passionem existens non iudicaret. Huiusmodi autem immutatio hominis per passionem duobus modis contingit. Uno modo, sic quod totaliter ratio ligatur, ita quod homo usum rationis non habet, sicut contingit in his qui propter vehementem iram vel concupiscentiam furiosi vel amentes fiunt, sicut et propter aliquam aliam perturbationem corporalem; huiusmodi enim passiones non sine corporali transmutatione accidunt. Et de talibus eadem est ratio sicut et de animalibus brutis, quae ex necessitate sequuntur impetum passionis, in his enim non est aliquis rationis motus, et per consequens nec voluntatis. Aliquando autem ratio non totaliter absorbetur a passione, sed remanet quantum ad aliquid iudicium rationis liberum. Et secundum hoc remanet aliquid de motu voluntatis. Inquantum ergo ratio manet libera et passioni non subiecta, intantum voluntatis motus qui manet, non ex necessitate tendit ad hoc ad quod passio inclinatur. Et sic aut motus voluntatis non est in homine, sed sola passio dominatur, aut, si motus voluntatis sit, non ex necessitate sequitur passionem.” S. Thomae de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, in S. Thomae de Aquino, *Opera Omnia*, Romae, Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1969.

in his *Summa*,⁸ we have to underline that Dante has already punished the ire *tout court* in Upper Hell. The ire Dante refers to results in violence, as connected to the yearning for possession, to *cupidity*, leading to *hybris*, to the excess. Not coincidentally, this is the Canto of tyrants, brigands, and marauders: men “che fecero a le strade tanta guerra” (*Inf.* 12. 138), devoted to the excess, to *hybris*, according to a widespread interpretation at the end of the XIII Century⁹. The studies about The Damned in *Inferno* 12, realized by great critics such as Ezio Raimondi¹⁰ and Umberto Carpi¹¹, analyzing the biographies of the violent against others, confirm the close association of violence and war, or better said the use of military power for his own military and political interest, in this Canto.

On closer view, not only the Minotaur does not make use of the speech, but also Dante, as the character, stands silent throughout the whole Canto. In these verses, we can read Virgil’s, Chiron’s, and Nessus’ words, but Dante does not say a single word in the first round of the seventh circle. “This is above all a Canto of things seen” Botteril

⁸ “Pars Tertia De peccatis prouenientibus ex ira: 1 .De guerra; 2. Incendiarii; 3. Omicidio” Guilelmi Peraldi, *Summae Virtutum ac Vitiorum*, (Coloniae Agrippinae, 1614), tractatus VIII, tomus II, titulum generalis.

“Ex ira etiam sequuntur guerrae, incendia, homicidia, & alia iniecto manuum iniusta, & rapinae”. Guilelmi Peraldi, *Summae Virtutum ac Vitiorum*, (Coloniae Agrippinae, 1614), tractatus VIII, tomus II, Pars III, 292.

⁹ Andrea Zorzi, *Tiranni e tirannide nel Trecento italiano* (Roma, Viella 2013).

¹⁰ Ezio Raimondi, *L’aquila e il fuoco di Ezzellino*, in E. Raimondi, *Metafora e Storia* (Torino, Einaudi, 1970).

¹¹ Umberto Carpi, *I Tiranni di Flegontone*, in U. Carpi, *La nobiltà di Dante* (Firenze, Polistampa, 2004).

commented.¹² Therefore, Dante maintains a physical and emotional large distance from these sinners. Dante stands silent just in other two episodes in the first Cantic: in front of Geryon (*Inf.* 17. 91-92 “I’ m’assettai su quelle spallacce; / sì volli dir, ma la voce non venne”) and in front of Lucifer (*Inf.* 34. 22-24 “Com’io divenni allor gelato e fioco, / nol dimandar, lettor, ch’i’ non scrivo, / però che ogne parlar sarebbe poco”). In these two situations Dante’s silence is caused by his astonishment, as after all his annoyance is incomparable at the sight of these violent, the first sinners in Lower Hell. “The Minotaur [...] marks the beginning of a new phase in the journey, characterized by a harder and more demanding experience of the knowledge of evil”, Andrea Mazzucchi reports.¹³

2. *On ire and cupidity*

As reported in the paragraph above, ire and cupidity are indicated by Saint Thomas as the two roots violence originates from. Throughout the Canto, Dante presents them other two times: so, they represent a real *leitmotif* guiding the reader in the exegesis of *Inferno* 12, in the interpretation of the kind of violence there, in the comprehension of the ethical-political “guilts” committed by the sinners mentioned: tyrants, marauders, saboteurs, and murderers. Indeed, when Dante and Virgil gaze at the

¹² Steven Botterill, *Inferno XII*, in *Lectura Dantis Virginiana. Dante's Inferno: Introductory Readings*, (edited by Tibor Wlassics, *Supplement to Lectura Dantis* 6, 1990), 157.

¹³ A. Mazzucchi, *Quegli che si lascion condurre dai loro sfrenati e bestiali appetiti a usare violenza [...] diventon monstri*. Lettura del canto XII dell'*Inferno*, (in A. Mazzucchi, *Tra convivio e commedia*, Roma, Salerno, 2004), 81.

landscape in the ring of violent against others, the astonished narrator exclaims: “Oh cieca cupidigia e ira folle / che sì ci sproni ne la vita corta, / e ne l’eterna poi sì mal c’immolle!”. What Dante gazes at completely in the middle of the High Bank is the landscape of violent, with all the elements composing it - visually and semantically -: the Phlegethon, that is the “riviera del sangue in la qual bolle / qual che per violenza in altrui nocchia” (*Inf.* 12. 47-48), the damned boiling in blood, and thousands of centaurs running by a wide moat “in arco torta” (*Inf.* 12. 52), and shooting with their arrows “qual anima si svelle / del sangue” (*Inf.* 12. 74-75). In this part, cupidity is defined *blind*, recalling the yet mentioned Minotaur “che gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella”, while ire is connoted as *foolish* – as also the Minotaur “nfuria”.

Besides, as analyzed elsewhere¹⁴, these violent damned deserve a double contrapasso. First of all, blood; just as they spilled the other people’s blood in their life, they have to be submerged in it now, according to the already well-known Orosius’ passage “satia te sanguine quem sitisti”¹⁵, recalled by Dante also in *Purgatory* 12, 57 “Sangue sitisti, e io di sangue t’empio”. The second contrapasso, well underlined by several Medieval critics as Boccaccio, but not valorized by the modern ones, is significantly closer to the idea of tyranny and the abusive management of military force, as mentioned above. This contrapasso consists precisely in a punishment carried out by the Centaurs, half-man half-horse demons,

¹⁴ Cfr. Alessandro Ardigò, *Centaurs e dannati nel canto XII dell’Inferno*, in *Acme - Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università degli Studi di Milano*, n°LXV, 2012 (1).

¹⁵ Horosius, *Historia adversus paganos*, 2. 7. 6).

images of the first cavalries from Thessaly, looking like men with their mounts as a whole, while galloping as fast as the wind during their raids, according to Isidore¹⁶. Moreover, Lucan in *Pharsalia*, one of Dante's direct sources, states that the mount from Thessaly was "the first to chomp at the iron bit and to foam for the new reins": that was immediately conceived as "a presage of menacing war"¹⁷. The same Lucan, just after the mentioned verses, reports that in Thessaly "people used to count their riches, consequently ending up in wicked wars"¹⁸.

Wars, mercenaries, power, tyrants: all the elements of the Canto *Inferno* XII. The infernal centaurs are "the most efficient and organized army in Hell";¹⁹ according to Giovanni Boccaccio, they constitute a cavalry that represents for the damned "the bitterness of the continuous memory" of the wicked actions that violent in *Inferno* XII:

"had already done with the force of the coats of arms; and so people who trusted in armies' faith and strength, and who poured others'

¹⁶ "Centauris autem species vocabulum indidit, id est hominem equo mixtum, quos quidam fuisse equites Thessalorum dicunt, sed pro eo quod discurrentes in bello velut unum corpus equorum et hominum viderentur, inde Centauros fictos adseruerunt." Isidoro di Siviglia, *Hetymologiae sive Origines*, (a cura di Angelo Valastro Canale, Torino, UTET, 2004), 11. 3. 37.

¹⁷ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6. 396-sgg: "primus ab aequorea percussis cuspide saxi / Thessalicus sonipes, bellis feralibus omen, / exiluit, primus chalybem frenosque momordit/ spumavitque novis Lapithae domitoris habenis."

¹⁸ Lucano, *Pharsalia*, 6. 406 sgg. "illic, quod populos scelerata inpegit in arma, / diuitias numerare datum est."

¹⁹ Italo Borzi, *Dal Minotauro a Chirone*, (in Italo Borzi, *Verso l'ultima salute: saggi danteschi*, Milano, Rusconi, 1985), 76.

blood, robbed temporal essences, and stole freedom thanks to them, are stimulators, strugglers for their souls in eternal damnation”.²⁰

From the army of the centaurs three of them come out: as in a diplomatic mission, they separate from the troop and they move towards Dante and Virgil, who have already descended completely the High Bank. The three centaurs are Nessus, Pholus, and Chiron between them.

At this point, we should discard a possible interpretation, credible among some fourteenth-century critics as Francesco Da Buti, but unmentioned by modern critics. We are talking about Nessus as the image of violence against others, Chiron as the representation of violence against oneself, and Pholus as the symbol of violence against God, thus recalling the three rounds composing the seventh circle of violence.²² This interpretation is based on Chiron’s voluntary death, in order to run from a sorrow that otherwise would have eternally gripped him, as we will see

²⁰ “già fecero con la forza della gente dell’arme; e così coloro, nella cui fede vivendo si misero, nelle cui forze si fidarono, con le mani de’ quali versarono il sangue del prossimo, rubarono le sostanze temporali, occuparono la libertà, sono stimolatori, faticatori delle loro anime nella perdizione eterna”. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, (a cura di Giorgio Padoan, vol. VI of *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, a cura di Vittore Branca. Milano, Mondadori, 1965).

²¹ For further information on Centaurs see Alessandro Ardigò, *Centaure e dannati in Inferno XII*.

²² “Nomina qui l’autore tre Centaure come capitani delli altri, per mostrare le tre spezie della violenza; cioè per Nesso quella che si fa nel prossimo e sue cose; per Chiron quella che si fa in sè medesimo; e per Folo quella che si fa contra Dio”. *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra La Divina Commedia di Dante Allighieri*, (Fratelli Nistri, Pisa, 1858-62), *Inferno* 12.46-66.

later, whereas, according to some early commentaries, in the third book of *The Thebaid* Pholus would have faced God, therefore committing violence against the “deitade”.²³ Nevertheless, this explanation is to reject, as it is born by a mistake made by Guido from Pisa. In his work *Expositiones*, Guido from Pisa confuses Pholus with Capaneus, a mistake that had been already reported in the annotations to Guido’s comment:

Quell'altro è Folo, che fu sì pien d'ira. Folus fuit quidam homo bellicosus et valde potens in armis, sed tamen totus iracundia plenus. De quo narrat Statius, tertio libro Thebaidos, quod tempore belli Thebani, dum VII reges contra Thebas convenissent in unum et Amphioraus sacerdos et vates Apolinis deos consuleret, et ipsi dii respondissent quod non erat tutum ad bellum procedere contra Thebas, iste Folus, iracundia inflammatus, ait ad Amphioraum: «Non enim debemus timere dicta deorum, sed potius ire viriliter contra hostes. Nam michi est virtus et ensis».²⁴

²³ “Et nominat tertium centaurum, quem describit simpliciter ab iracundia sua, dicens: quell'altro è Folo che fu sì pien d'ira, et dicunt aliqui quod per istum intelligitur Capaneus, quod est penitus falsum, quia Capaneus punitur inferius inter violentos contra Deum”. Benevenuti de Rambaldis de Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, (nunc primum integre in lucem editum sumptibus Guilielmi Warren Vernon, curante Jacobo Philippo Lacaita. Florentiae, G. Barbèra, 1887), *Inferno* 12.72-75.

²⁴ *Guido da Pisa's Expositiones et Glose super Comediam Dantis*, (or Commentary on Dante's Inferno. Edited with Notes and an Introduction by Vincenzo Cioffari. Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1974), *Inferno* 12.72.

The editor Michele Rinaldi says: “Cfr. ST AT., Theb., III 607-616, dove, però, è Capaneo a rivolgere un’analoga apostrofe ad Anfiarao; Guido può essere stato fuorviato dall’«unus ut e silvis Pholoos habitator opacae» del v. 604 (gli Scolia in Stat. Theb. III 604, ed. R. D.

This mistake, reported also by Michele Rinaldi, supervisor of the critical edition of *Expositiones et glose super Comediam Dantis* by Guido from Pisa, spread in some other comments, until reaching Buti's interpretation, as seen above: it constitutes so a main element in his wider explication about the allegorical figures of the three centaurs. On the other hand, a more relevant interpretation in the text is once again the identification of Pholus and Nessus with cupidity and ire. Nessus is reproached by Virgil with the expression “mal fu la voglia tua sempre sì tosta”, whereas Pholus is “sì pien d'ira” (*Inf.* 12. 66-72). Nessus' “voglia” Dante refers to is extracted from the episode narrated in the Book IX of *The Metamorphoses* by Ovid: here the centaur “valens membris scitusque vadorum”, as overcome by cupidity, tries to steal Hercules' new bride Dejanira.²⁵ Hunted and killed by one of the hero's arrow, he was able to immerse his tunic in Hydra's poison just before dying, later causing Heracles' death by deceiving Dejanira – that is why Dante, in the verse 69, states that Nessus “fé di sé la vendetta elli stesso”.

Talking about Pholus, Dante could not probably have read in any of his sources that the centaur was more irascible than his mates; actually, Boccaccio comments: “We do not have any information about Pholus,

Sweeney, Teubner, 1997, p. 228, 1255 chiosano tale verso con l'osservazione: «utique Centaurus»”.

²⁵ Ovidio, *Metamorphoses*, (a cura di Nino Scivoletto, in *Opere*, Torino, UTET, 2000, vol III), IX, 101 e sgg.

except for being Ixion and a cloud's son, like the other Centaurs"²⁶. Other critics are generally less honest than Boccaccio, as they merely follow the text of *Commedia*, instead of accepting the absence of direct sources: "Pholus was a certain man, a warlike and very mighty one in the force of arms, but full of the wrath"²⁷. As a consequence, we could suppose almost certainly Dante voluntarily attributed the ire to Pholus, in order to develop exactly Thomas' ideas about ire and cupidity both literally and figuratively.

3. Inner thoughts

At this point, the reader, Dante, and Vergil are in front of the *great* Chiron, who, standing in the middle of the scene, is above the trio of centaurs. "Gran" (v. 71) might mean merely *ingens*, that is greatly statuesque, as Virgil, in front of him, reaches just his chest "dove le due nature son consorti", where the human features mix with the equine ones. Chiron in *Inferno* is certainly a centaur with powerful limbs, who "is above with his whole human part"²⁸ - maybe also symbolically - the two poets; after all, Chiron had been already defined *ingens* in the *Achilleid* by Statius²⁹, and Dante merely reformulates it. However, the adjective "gran"

²⁶ "Di questo Folo niuna cosa abbiamo, se non che esso fu figliuolo d'Isione e d'una nuvola, come gli altri Centauri". Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, Inferno 12.72.

²⁷ "Folus fuit quidam homo bellicosus et valde potens in armis, sed tamen totus iracundia plenus". Guido da Pisa (1327-28[?]), *Inferno* 12.72.

²⁸ Fernando Figurelli, *Il Canto XII dell'Inferno*, (in F. Figurelli, *Studi danteschi*, Napoli, Istituto universitario orientale, 1983), 159.

²⁹ Statius, *Achilleis*, (in P. P. Statius, *Opere*, a cura di G. F. Villa, Milano, BUR, 1998), 1. 195-196.

have many senses in *Inferno*: we can read that Cerberus³⁰ is “gran vermo” in no less than 47 statements, just as great is Averroes’ “comento”³¹; the divine verdict about the last judgment³² is “gran”, as Plutus³³ is “gran nemico”. We should realize what sense Dante attributed to Chiron, and there are really many elements hinting at the poet’s concept of the “gran” centaur also and mainly as *magnanimus*. Both the classical tradition and the fourteenth-century critics of *The Divine Comedy* seem to channel into this direction. And it is not exactly “logico e piano” for an infernal demon.

According to mythology, Chiron was an immortal “biforme” being born from the union between the Oceanid Philyra and Cronus, turned into a horse on that occasion; he was a doctor and a musician³⁴, and he instructed the greatest ancient heroes, among whom especially Achilles and Hercules, in his cavern in Thessaly, on the mountain Pelion. Chiron really distinguished himself from the other impetuous and vicious centaurs born from a cloud, devoted to *rixae* – like the big brawl during Pirithous’ wedding banquet³⁵ -. His cavern, for example, was very different from the other centaurs’ horrible and disgusting ones, as it was a reflection of his personality:

³⁰ *Inf.* 6, 22.

³¹ *Inf.* 4, 144.

³² *Inf.* 6, 104.

³³ *Inf.* 6, 115.

³⁴ “saxo stant antra vetusto, / quae iustum memorant incoluisse senem. / ille manus olim missuras Hectora leto / creditur in lyricis detinuisse modis”. Ovid, *Fasti*, 5. 385-386.

³⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 12. 210-sgg.

inside [the cavern] there are the Centaur's high dwellings, clearly different from his wicked brothers' ones. Here there is neither a blood-stained arrow, nor alder poles broken during nuptial battles, or craters smashed on blood relative enemies, but just innocent quivers and empty wild-beast hides. And this had been his possessions as long as he had been young; by that moment, once he had given up the weapons, his only effort was analyzing the plants capable of giving back the health to mortals, or singing with the lyre the epic deeds of ancient heroes to his pupil.³⁶

In *The Fasti*, Ovid defines him as “iustum senem”³⁷, poisoned in his cavern by mistake, surrounded and mourned by Achilles and Hercules³⁸. Furthermore, the centaur enjoyed such a widespread respect that Isidore added the figure of a surgeon inventor of the veterinary medicine to the image of the centaur expert in botany between Late Antiquity and Late Middle Ages:

A Greek called Chiron invented the medicine dealing with harness animals, reason for which he is represented as a half-human half-horse. The

³⁶ “Centauri stabula alta patent, non aequa nefandis / fratribus: hic hominum nullos experta cruores / spicula nec truncae bellis genialibus orni / aut consanguineos fracti crateres in hostes, / sed pharetrae insontes et inania terga ferarum. / haec quoque dum viridis; nam tunc labor unus inermi / nosse salutiferas dubiis animantibus herbas, / aut monstrare lyra veteres heroas alumno.” Statius, *Achilleis*, 1. 111-sgg.

³⁷Ovid, *Fasti*, 5. 379-384.

³⁸ “Dumque senex tractat squalentia tela venenis, / excidit et laevo fixa sagitta pede est. / Ingemuit Chiron, traxitque e corpore ferrum: / adgemit Alcides Haemoniusque puer” Ovid, *Fasti*, 5. 397-400.

name Chiron derives *απὸ τοῦ χειρίζεσθαι*, that is operating with hands: indeed, Chiron was a surgeon.³⁹

Dante knew very well these narrations about the best among the centaurs. First of all, this is confirmed by the verse 71: the expression “*nodrì Achille*” is a calque of “*nutritorque ingens*”⁴⁰, already attributed to Chirone by Statius. The habit of indicating the centaur as *nutritor* had then passed from century to century until reaching Early Middle Ages tradition; indeed, we can find it in the words of the auctoritas Isidore: “So Chiron the Centaur has been included among the stars for educating Hepius and Achilles⁴¹. This continuous comeback of calques of the same words is due to the inclusion of *The Achilleid* “in the *Liber Catonis*, the main anthology of Late Middle Ages didactic books, in the Thirteenth century”,⁴² guaranteeing its circulation and analysis. Dante demonstrates to control Chiron’s events also in *Purgatory 9*, where he recalls the same passages from *The Achilleid*: here, Dante compares his awakening with Achilles’ one, when the hero was kidnapped by his mother Thetis while he

³⁹ “*Medicinam iumentorum Chiron quidam Graecus invenit. Inde pingitur dimidia parte homo, dimidia equus. Dicitur autem Chiron ἀπὸ τοῦ χειρίζεσθαι, quia chirurgus fuit.*” Isidoro, *Etymologiae*, 4. 9. 12.

⁴⁰ Statius, *Achilleis*, 1. 276.

⁴¹ “*Sic Centaurus Chiron, propter quod nutrierit Aesculapium et Achillem, inter Astra dinumeratus est.*” Isidoro, *Etymologiae*, 3. 71. 36.

⁴² Carlo Caruso, *Canto XII*, (in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno*, Firenze, Cesati, 2000), 176.

was sleeping in Chiron's cavern, and he was then carried to Skyros island, as she was worried about his destiny as a warrior:⁴³

Non altrimenti Achille si riscosse,
li occhi svegliati rivolgendo in giro
e non sappiendo là dove si fosse,

quando la madre da Chiròn a Schiro
trafuggò lui dormendo in le sue braccia,
là onde poi li Greci il dipartiro;
(*Purg.* 9. 34–39)

Before such a positive tradition towards the greatest among the centaurs, we should comprehend what senses and what roles Dante might have attributed to him by placing him as an infernal demon. There are 25 verses about the figure of the centaur from Pelion in *Inferno* 12 overall: Chiron's presentation (verses 70 -71); the *great* centaur's description (verses 77 - 82); Vergil's long request (verses 83 - 96); Chiron's submission to the divine will (verses. 97 - 99):

E quel di mezzo, ch'al petto si mira,
è il gran Chirón, il qual nodrì Achille; 71
[...]
Chirón prese uno strale, e con la cocca
fece la barba in dietro a le mascelle. 78

⁴³ Statius, *Achilleis*, 1. 24-sgg.

- Quando s'ebbe scoperta la gran bocca,
disse a' compagni: "Siete voi accorti
che quel di retro move ciò ch'el tocca? 81
- Così non soglion far li piè d'i morti".
E 'l mio buon duca, che già li er'al petto,
dove le due nature son consorti, 84
- rispuose: "Ben è vivo, e sì soletto
mostrar li mi convien la valle buia;
necessità 'l ci 'nduce, e non diletto. 87
- Tal si partì da cantare alleluia
che mi commise quest'ufficio novo:
non è ladron, né io anima fuia. 90
- Ma per quella virtù per cu' io movo
li passi miei per sì selvaggia strada,
danne un de' tuoi, a cui noi siamo a provo, 93
- e che ne mostri là dove si guada,
e che porti costui in su la groppa,
ché non è spirto che per l'aere vada". 96
- Chirón si volse in su la destra poppa,
e disse a Nesso: "Torna, e sì li guida,
e fa cansar s'altra schiera v'intoppa". 99

According to Guido Mazzoni (1925), Chiron, Nessus and Pholus form a trio “that is statuesque, wonderful, and in which the composed central figure, in the act of thinking, has two blurred figures at his right and at his left”.⁴⁴ The admiration for the elegance of these three figures inspires the neologism Dantesque «predonatellismo» in Mazzoni. This image of a pre-Renaissance awaited order passed in a more moderate way to the successive readers, spreading the general accepted opinion that “Dante [to the Centaurs] attributes nothing monstrous, repugnant, or frightening”⁴⁵. This interpretation, widespread in the early twentieth-century critique, as animated by a research of “poetry” according to Croce’s philosophy, is hard to be accepted now, particularly after the publication of the yet mentioned studies about tyranny by Ezio Raimondi and Umberto Carpi in the last decades.

Chiron stands between Nessus and Pholus, and Medieval critics had already noticed the preminence of standing in the middle: “he is placed in the middle thanks to his honor, his intelligence, seniority, virtue, and to moderate the anger and fury of his companions”.⁴⁶ According to Benvenuto da Imola’s thought, we can clearly perceive how the first critics had already separated theoretically “gran Chirón” from other infernal guardians. He deserved honors, virtues, intelligence, and temperance; he was attributed qualities suitable for a wise and right man, derived from

⁴⁴ Guido Mazzoni, *Lectura dantis il canto XII dell’Inferno letto da Guido Mazzoni nella sala di Dante in Orsanmichele*, (Firenze, Sansoni, 1925), 25.

⁴⁵ F. Figurelli, *Il Canto XII dell’Inferno*, 157.

⁴⁶ “ponit ipsum in medio gratia honoris, ratione nobilitatis, aetatis, virtutis, et ut temperaret iram, et furorem sociorum”. Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), *Inferno* 12.70-71.

mythology, from which he borrowed widespread knowledge, a life as educator, and a sublime death, so that Jupiter turned him into the Centaurus constellation. These behavioral features seem to shine through Dante's verses, outlining Chiron absorbed in his thoughts, looking at his chest ("E quel di mezzo, ch'al petto si mira / è il gran Chirón" verses 70-71), and moving his beard with a nock while on the verge of saying something well-thought-out ("Chirón prese uno strale, e con la cocca / fece la barba dietro le mascelle" verses 77-78). When the great centaur starts to talk, neither does he threaten anybody nor does he shout out like the other guardians, but he shows proof of deductive acuity ("Siete voi accorti / che quel di retro move ciò ch'el tocca?" verses 80-81). Virgil dismisses Nessus badly - preserving his usual superiority and disdain in front of the infernal guardians -, but, before negotiating with Chiron, his harsh tone disappears all of a sudden. On the contrary, Virgil "conceals an order in a request". He invokes Beatrice, and he justifies himself by saying that neither himself nor Dante are thieves. Therefore, according to Vellutello and most of Medieval critics, Chiron is a demon capable of deep "inner thoughts", and for that reason he is "the only one whose human part reveals such a noble inclination that it triumphs over the beast".⁴⁷

Going in order, these are Chiron's behaviors that attracted and still attract the critics' attention: moving his beard with the nock to free his mouth and be ready to talk; keeping his head reclined while looking at his chest thoughtful, and lastly showing proof of his deductive acuity ("disse a'

⁴⁷ Italo Borzi, *Dal Minotauro a Chirone*, (in Italo Borzi, *Verso l'ultima salute: saggi danteschi*, Milano, Rusconi, 1985), 79.

compagni: "Siete voi accorti / che quel di retro move ciò ch'el tocca?"). According to Giovan Battista Gelli, Chiron, before starting to talk by moving his beard, teaches us "that, when we would say something, we should prepare ourselves both with the external instruments necessary to that purpose and with ideas and inner thoughts, as Chiron shows us".⁴⁸ However, Gelli is an author from the Sixteenth century; we can so understand that there is no need for going forward through time to actually notice that the relation Chiron-thought was already stabilized in the Fourteenth century. For example, already in the Commentary by Benvenuto da Imola (1375-1380) we can read: "Why did [Chiron] do that? The author describes the gesture of a wise man, who considers his purpose before talking; so, he puts the arrow, that is the speech, onto his mouth before pronouncing it. Indeed, the word is a real arrow, as it flies and penetrates, it cannot be cancelled, and it often returns to the face of the person who has thrown it; therefore, the wise Chiron is right to think before talking, and not to be as impetuous as Nessus".⁴⁹ For this reason,

⁴⁸ "con lo esempio suo, che quando noi vogliamo parlare, noi dobbiamo prepararci non manco ne gli strumenti esteriori necessari a tale officio, che ne' concetti e pensamenti interiori, com'ei mostra che facessi questo Chirone". Giovan Battista Gelli (1541-63), *Commento edito e inedito sopra la Divina Commedia*, (a cura di Carlo Negroni. Florence: Bocca, 1887), *Inferno* 12.76-84.

⁴⁹ "Sed quare fecit hoc cum sagitta? quare potius cum fine, quam cum puncta? Dico quod ad hoc autor tangit actum sapientis, qui considerat finem antequam loquatur; ideo avolvit sagittam, idest sermonem ad os antequam emittat. Verbum enim est recte sagitta, quia volat et penetrat, nec potest revocari, et saepe revertitur in caput sagittantis; ideo bene sapiens sicut Chiron, loquitur praemeditate, non impetuose, sicut fecerat Nessus." Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), *Inferno* 12.76-78.

the words in the *Comentum* by Giovanni da Serravalle⁵⁰ are almost identical. The *sagitta* is so the image of the word, of the *logos* Chiron would be able to use. In fact, according to the *Commento* by Vellutello (1544), Chiron would represent “the moderate and honest speech”.⁵¹ In conclusion, the great Centaur in *Inferno* XII is the *figure* of the negation of impulsivity, the embodiment of the contemplative spirit and of the wise predisposition, starting from the Late Medieval commentaries.

This idea of meditation is reinforced also by the action of keeping the head reclined while looking at the chest, with the expression “al petto si mira” in the verse 70. Chiavacci Leonardi writes that Chiron is “contemplative and thoughtful, as his role of tutor requires”⁵². Benvenuto da Imola shares this idea too, as he notices that this gesture characterises “the gravitas and the maturity of a man”, because Chiron is *magnus* both

⁵⁰ “et Chyron accepit unum stralem, idest unam sagiptam, et cum coccha (idest principio sagipte, idest illa summitate sagipte, ubi est illa fexura, que ponitur super cordam archus, vel in qua fexura intrat corda archus), cessavit barbam retro ad mandibulas, quia ipse habebat magnam silvam pilorum, que usque ad pectus pendeat; quos pilos detexit cum coccha, ad denotandum quod homo sapiens, quando loquitur, primo considerat finem. Pro sagipta considera sermonem volatilem; sic volat verbum: preterea, nulla sagipta penetrat subtilius quam verbum, preterea, sagipta emissa non potest revocari; nec verbum emissum et prolatum est revocabile.” Johannis de Serravalle (1416-17), *Inferno* 12.76-78.

⁵¹ “il moderato, & honesto discorso” Alessandro Vellutello (1544), *Inferno*, 12.91-99.

⁵² Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, *La Divina Commedia a cura di Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi*, (Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1991 – 1997), 215.

in body and soul⁵³; Alessandro Vellutello adds that Chiron had inherited his father Cronus' meditative disposition.⁵⁴

To read a contrary interpretation based on Chiron as a small-minded rough infernal guardian, we have to wait for the XXI century, when critics search for the historical-cultural connections between this Canto and Tyranny, rather than emphasising poetry/no poetry in it, as seen previously. Particularly, Carlo Caruso writes:

If we interpreted the expression “looking at his chest” as “visible in front of us”, so considering “at his chest” as an allotrope of “opposite to” - with an articulated preposition -, we would have nothing but a deictic [...] The meaning of the whole sentence would be therefore “And that centaur in the middle, standing in front of us etc.” [...] Something different than looking at his chest! Chiron, as a good guardian, has always kept an eye on the two poets - especially on Dante -.⁵⁵

Besides the great centaur's behaviour, what really strikes the reader is also Virgil's respectful manner while approaching him. The request of a mount for Dante, who could not have waded across the bloody river otherwise, (“e che porti costui in su la groppa, / ché non è spirto che per l'aere vada” verses 90 - 91), lasts a whole four tercets and it contains a *captatio benevolentiae* (“necessità 'l ci 'nduce, e non diletto”), a somewhat

⁵³ “ch'al petto si mira, in hoc notat gravitatem et maturitatem hominis, èe il gran Chiron, magnus corpore et animo”. Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), *Inferno*, 12.70-71.

⁵⁴ Il suo temperamento “cogitabondo [...] lo tenea dal padre [Crono]”. Alessandro Vellutello (1544), *Inferno* 12.70-75.

⁵⁵ Carlo Caruso, *Canto XII*, 173-174.

unique event in *Inferno* if we consider the interactions between the two wayfarers and the other infernal guardians. It is evident Virgil does not behave as he behaved with Cerberus, Plutus, the Minotaur, Nessus, and so on.

More than one twentieth-century critic compared the words Vergil used with Chiron to those the same poet would use no less than with the guardian of Purgatory Cato. Thus, the verse 87 (“necessità ci conduce e non diletto”) would recall the verses in *Purgatory* 1: “Sì com’io dissi, fui mandato da esso / per lui campare; e non lì era altra via / che questa per la quale i’ mi son messo”. Figurelli states that the episode of Chiron, “seems even not to be set in *Inferno*”.⁵⁶

Furthermore, Vergil needs to invoke Beatrice (“tal si partì da cantare alleluia...”) and the divine duty she entrusted him, in order to justify the passage through the river Phlegethon, as he nearly felt obliged to explain the crossing *ad inferos* “concealing an order in a request”⁵⁷. But Beatrice seems not to be sufficient, and so Vergil invokes also the Divine Will (“ma per quella vitù per cu’ io movo”, v. 91).

Nevertheless, we should remember that “Chirone is always an infernal guardian, a punisher and at the same time a being punished by the divine will”; therefore, if we could distance ourselves from interpretations raising the figure of this centaur excessively, we should also try to

⁵⁶ Fernando Figurelli, *Studi danteschi*, 160.

⁵⁷ Guido Mazzoni, *Lectura dantis il canto XII dell’Inferno letto da Guido Mazzoni nella sala di Dante in Orsanmichele*, 21.

understand what sense Dante might have given to the two-form quadruped from Pelion.

4. Chiron and justice

The first part of the current study insists largely on cupidity and ire as sources of violent impulse. Moreover, it focuses on the interpretation of the violence narrated in *Inferno* 12 not as an extemporaneous private *excessus*, but as a concept related to weapons, armies, and longing for power: the violence in *Inferno* 12 arises from human conscience, but once materialized it becomes public and politic, voluntary and deliberate. The damned represent the antithesis of the right state man, of the person who “aspires to the benefit of the State”, that is the common good, and at the same time he “seeks the law purpose”, according to what Dante himself states in the II of *De Monarchia*.⁵⁸ These damned long for personal power and the “forza” and the “ferute dogliose” inflicted to the their neighbors are the instruments to gain it.

Therefore, *Inferno* 12 is not the Canto of the “centaurs”, but the Canto of Tyranny, as intensely reaffirmed by the fourteenth-century critics: according to some of them - like *The Ottimo*, even if not only itself - the introduction of *Inferno* 12 turns actually into a pretext for mentioning and commenting the passages from the Book V of *Politics* by Aristotle, translated into Latin by William of Moerbeke in the seventh decade of the

⁵⁸ “Quicumque preterea bonum rei publice intendit, finem iuris intendit.” *Mon.* 2. 5.

XIII century, in which the *Philosophus* describes the forms of government and their respective degenerations, tyranny above all.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ “Lo reggimento politico è opposito a quello de’ tyranni, del quale parla il Phylosopho nel .v. libro de l’Ethica, et nel libro della Politica, dove dice che per tre modi pote essere retta la republica e da uno solo huomo, o da alquanti huomeni pochi, o da tutto il popolo. Da uno huomo in due modi: che o quello huomo à buona intentione et volere d’amplificare li beni de subditi et allora à nome re, o àe la contraria cura et è tyranno. Da pochi in .iiii. modi: lo primo che questi sieno nobili o antichi. Lo secondo che questi sieno ricchi. Lo terzo ch’elli sieno forti del corpo. Lo .iiii. ch’el[li] siano scientiati. Et questi .iiii. modi possono avere diversi fini et intendimenti. Se li primi intendono al bene de cittadini sia recta la cittade molto ordinatamente, sì per ch’anno amore ad essa, sì per che per anticho sono quindi, sì perché in fino da piccoli fuorono in exercitio di governare altrui, et sono conoscenti de vertù et di vitio a tale hora che uno di bassa conditione non sa pur s’elli è huomo o bestia. Poi sono sempre solliciti al diritto reggimento per tema de non perdere honori e stato. Ma se questi tendono a male fine si è molto disordinata la cittade, prima perché anno perduto l’amore che per li loro antecessori debbono avere alla cittade, poi perché sanno ogni malitia del reggere ché in fino da piccoli impararo il reggere, poi però che vogl[i]ono fare ogni male, per la loro nobilitade anno il podere e ’l seguito. Et così si puote dire de’ ricchi se intendono al bene della cittade, però che vetano le rubarie, le ingiurie et le guerre, questi fanno belle casamenta et possessioni et vivono a modo d’uomeni. Ma se intendono a male fine, allora la cittade è retta malamente, sì perché con le loro ricchezze mantengono assessini et rubatori, fanno uccidere et rubare li cittadini, o per avaritia d’avere o per ch’altri non sormonti et spermentansi d’intrigare guerre per mettere colte et dazii a gl’altri et essi sono exactori, et così tengono in povertade il popolo et guastano le possessioni che rendono bella la cittade et fanno torri et guarnimenti da guerra. Li terzi se intendono a buono fine, bene reggono la cittade però che ’l popolo universalmente è grasso sì che odiano li oltraggiosi, li superbi o nobili o ric[c]hi che sieno, e ’l popolo vuole che l’arte et le mercantie vagl[i]ano et non sono di grande animo che sappiano volere cose che siano disordine di loro cittade, però che non conoscon più. Se questi anno mala intentione, male è retta la cittade però che ciascuno àe sua propria malitia et stendela contro al proximo in ogni acto et perché in loro regna molta invidia et loro malitia non è temperata con senno, et cetera. Delle dette tre signorie la migl[i]ore [è] quella del re, la seconda quella de pochi, la .iii. quella del

In this interpretation the “pre-Renaissance” Chiron does not find his room. Chiron is an infernal guardian, he is the head of the army of centaurs, and he commands them. He is traditionally the most important among the Centaurs, and he is also the greatest and the best known Centaur in *Inferno*. Nevertheless, even such an interpretation would be finally incomplete, as it would imply “a lack of sense” in the figure of Chiron: the great centaur would be there just as he was a “celebrity”, the greatest among the centaurs, without elevating the scene with suitable senses. We should not bring up Augustine⁶⁰ to reaffirm how the Medieval mentality was trained - and used - to attribute and research several senses into every element of the real and the ideal world.

According to Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti⁶¹ the Dantesque *demonic* works as a parody of the classical myth, where demons are extracted from, and then they are completely given new senses. So, Minos, an upright and honest judge according to the myth, turns into a caudal and growling monster, still acting as a judge, even if he is absolutely degraded to “sorter” of souls, as “parody is not directed to the classical model of the infernal judge, as narrated in *The Aeneid*, for example, but to the only judge, that is

popolo. Et delle ree la mala signoria è quella del popolo, peggiore è quella de pochi, pessima quella del tyranno.” *L’Ottimo Commento* (1338), *Inferno* 12. Nota.

⁶⁰ “Intueri oportet quae ibi aeterna intimentur, quae facta narrentur, quae futura patrifamilias proferenti de thesauro suo nova et vetera, quae duo etiam Testamenta dicuntur.” S. Aurelii Augustini, *De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, (in *Patrologia Latina*, a cura di J. P. Migne), vol. 34.

⁶¹ Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, *Parodia e dismisura: Minosse e i giganti*, (in *Letture Classensi*, n° 9 / 10, 1982, Longo editore.

God, of course”.⁶² If we consider the example of Nessus, we can affirm that Bàrberi Squarotti’s thesis works well anyway. In *Inferno*, Nessus preserves his characteristic of *scitus vadorum*, expert on fordings, and his initiative - as he is the first among the centaurs to come out of the group in order to stop Dante and Virgil -, even if he is “parodied” and made comical, degraded: instead of kidnapping Dejanira near the river Eveno, he obediently convoyes the pilgrims beyond the river Phlegethon, towards the ford to *Inferno* 13, now, obliged by the divine will - and by Chiron -.

As for Chiron, we should underline at least two aspects Medieval and Renaissance critics call insistently to mind: his central position between Pholus and Nessus and his transfiguration into Sagittarius constellation.

Benvenuto da Imola tells us Chiron stands in the middle “for his honour, his nobility, his age, and his virtue”, but especially “to temper the ire and the fury of his mates”⁶³ Nessus and Pholus, that is to say to temper their ire and cupidity. Even Buti states something similar: “Chiron represents the abstinence resisting concupiscence”⁶⁴. Therefore, Chiron is a *right* being, not as for his wisdom as for his resistance to the two roots of violence, mitigating them with his intellect and other human superior capacities. Chiron is able to preserve his great temperance, reinforced during his long-lasting experience as instructor of heroes even in *Inferno*,

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “ponit ipsum in medio gratia honoris, ratione nobilitatis, aetatis, virtutis, et ut temperaret iram, et furorem sociorum”. Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), *Inferno* 12.70-71.

⁶⁴ “Chirone che significa l’astinenza che percuote di lunga; e così resisteo alla concupiscenzia, e servò castità”. Francesco da Buti (1385-95), *Purgatorio* 9. 1-12.

where he is also the head of an army. His temperance rhymes with justice, a clear contrary of *hybris*, the characteristic traditionally attributed to tyrants in those decades.⁶⁵

Moreover, the identification Chiron-Sagittarius is even more present and certainly widespread in the comments and in the collective imagination in the XIII-XIV centuries. The connection is so strong that the centaurs are not equipped with bows and arrows in the ancient tradition - or better still, bows and arrows appear in some ancient episodes, but these are not distinctive elements as they are in *Inferno* XII. Such a representation of these half-man half-horse beings in *Hell* implies the overlap between the figure of the Centaur and the image of Sagittarius, a constellation typically equipped with bow and arrows.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Chiron was not turned into Sagittarius in ancient literature; he was transformed instead into Centaurus constellation.⁶⁷ This constellation - in which the Centaur is not represented equipped with bow and arrows - is included among the 48 constellations described in *The Almagest* by Ptolemy, a book in which there is also the more famous Sagittarius (this one equipped with bow and arrows, instead). Isidore correctly reports the difference between Chiron-Centaurus constellation and Sagittarius, because Sagittarius was precisely Crotus, son of the god Pan, and a really talented hunter, the first one to use arrows for hunting. Medievals had

⁶⁵ Cfr. Davide Quaglioni, «*Quant tyranie sormonte, la justise est perdue*». *Alle origini del paradigma giuridico del tiranno*, (in Zorzi A. (cur.), *Tiranni e tirannide nel Trecento italiano*, Roma, Viella, 2013).

⁶⁶ Cfr. Alessandro Ardigò, *Centauri e dannati in Inferno XII*.

⁶⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, 5. 379; Isidoro, *Ethymologiae*, 3. 71. 36.

probably lost the notion of this difference since centuries, and they identified uniquely Chiron with Sagittarius. However, according to Medieval astronomical-astrological tradition Sagittarius was the sign of justice, as directly influenced by Jupiter. Moreover, Sagittarius was *knowledge, intellect* and *justice*, just like Chiron. We can read in *The Ottimo*:

Under Jupiter there is Sagittarius [...]. Under Jupiter there are knowledge, intellect, and justice; this justice we will debate shortly. [...] What else is justice if not our system, or rather the divine will, and the bond of human company? [...] The right man not only will harm anybody, but he will also prohibit to harm other people; though, to harm nothing is not justice, but it is abstinence from provoking other people's damages. Therefore, here it starts the way to elevate yourself, from not stealing other people's possessions: and give the stolen goods back to their owners; and castigate and obligate the thieves, as they could not scare other people: you will not run into a discussion for any doubt, but examine the quality of the spirit.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ “Sotto Jove è Sagittario [...]. Sotto Jove sono sapienzia e ragione e justizia, d'essa justizia brevemente tratteremo. [...] E che altro è justizia, se non nostro ordinamento, anzi divina legge, e legame della umana compagnia? [...] Il giusto non solamente non nocerà, ma eziendio divieterà li nocenti; però che nulla nuocere, non è justizia, ma è astinenza dall'altrui. Da questo dunque comincia, che tu non tolga l'altrui, acciò che tu sia promosso a maggiori cose: e ristituisci quelle cose che dagli altri sono tolte; e li rattori, acciò che non sieno da temere agli altri, gastigagli e costringili: per nullo dubitamento del parlare allegherai questione, ma riguarda la qualitate dell'animo.” *L'Ottimo Commento* (1333), *Paradiso* 18. Nota.

The justice embodied by Jupiter and Chiron-Sagittarius is described as assisting other people and not harming them; “right” is defined as not appropriating other people’s possessions (remember the “ruine e le tollette dannose” in *Inferno* 12); there is a conceptual connection between “the abstinence” from other people’s possessions and knowledge and intellect. These are behaviors perfectly symmetrical and opposed both to all the damned in this Canto - tyrants, murderers, saboteurs, and marauders - and to the Centaurs, as they are unstable sons of a cloud commanded by cupidity, all of them except Chiron, born from different parents.

According to *The Ottimo*, the right man respects “the bond of human company”, that is the social group and its law; the right man is he who wants to “assist everybody, to harm nobody”, just the contrary of the Centaurs and these damned, who harm everybody to benefit from it - as Boccaccio reports: “by harming other people they try to grow themselves”⁶⁹.

The behaviors of “right old” Chiron, as Statius called him, are not fortuitous, but exactly identical and opposite to the features of the other centaurs and the punished souls, who embody the antithesis of right and of moral and political justice. And the wise Chiron-Sagittarius personifies directly justice, as he becomes the punisher for the violent against other people, for the unfair souls. However, Chiron is not that admired classical statue we talk about, as he is always an infernal guardian. That is why the

⁶⁹“per lo disertamento altrui procurano d'acrescere se medesimi” Giovanni Boccaccio (1373-75), *Inferno* 12. 55-99.

justice and the temperance he becomes messenger of are parodies of the real Christian justice, according to Bàrberi Squarotti's thesis. Pagan justice and wisdom are degraded, as it often happens, and they cannot leave (if not exceptionally) the low and comical setting per excellence, that is *Inferno*.