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FABRIZIO DI MAIO

**WELCOME TO HELL.
DANTE'S "INFERNO" IN VALERIO
EVANGELISTI'S EYMERICH SAGA***

1. Dreaming of the Middle Ages

The contemporary epoch has constantly been revisiting the medieval period. This continuous return can be explained by the fact that many issues of our world come thence, and we need to go back there to properly find our roots. In fact, what was commonly perceived as the 'dark' ages, was on the contrary a period of astonishing intellectual vitality in many fields such as science, biology, architecture, and literature. For centuries, the Middle Ages have exercised a strong fascination on many artists and if we draw attention to Italian literature, there are many poets and writers who, from the 15th century to our days, have recovered medieval themes

* I am most grateful to Brandon K. Essary for his advice in the editing of this paper.

such as knights' sagas, inquisition and the Crusades.¹ There are different ways of using and representing the Middle Ages in literature, some authors use them as a pretext, others for an ironical revisitation, others stereotype them as a barbaric age: "before rejoicing over a return of the Middle Ages, we have the moral and cultural duty of spelling out what kind of Middle Ages we are talking about".²

This article examines the role played by Dante in the contemporary writer Valerio Evangelisti's work, the Eymereich saga, composed by eleven novels: *Nicolas Eymereich, inquisitore* (1994), *Le catene di Eymereich* (1995), *Il corpo e il sangue di Eymereich* (1996), *Il mistero dell'inquisitore Eymereich* (1996), *Cherudek* (1997), *Picatrix, la scala per l'inferno* (1998), *Il Castello di Eymereich* (2001), *Mater terribilis* (2002), *La luce di Orione* (2007), *Rex tremendae maiestatis* (2010), *Eymereich risorge* (2017).³ Eymereich saga's novels can be defined as hybrid-historical because, starting from a traditional literary genre such as historical fiction, Evangelisti has transformed it using other popular narratives such as crime, horror-, thriller, spy-, and adventure-novels. It is worth considering that the main plot embraces fictional characters and situations against a framework of recreated historical scenarios with many events and characters that really existed. In the literary recuperation of the Middle Ages, Evangelisti depicts an epoch of economic crisis, power clashes and violent theological debates inside the Church: we can argue that the saga represents the Middle Ages as a mirror of the present.

In these novels, the main plot is set in the past (14th century), another subplot is set in our contemporary time, and a third one in the future. In the

¹ U. Eco, *Dreaming on the Middle Ages*, in Id., *Travels in Hyperreality*, London, Picador, 1987, pp. 61-72; Id., *Living in the Middle Ages*, ibidem, pp. 73-85.

² Id., *Dreaming on the Middle Ages*, cit., p. 72.

³ Evangelisti also wrote some short stories based on the Eymereich character such as *Venom*, in *Metallo urlante*, Torino, Einaudi, 1998, pp. 9-68.

principal plot, Evangelisti reconstructs accurately the life in the Middle Ages and focuses on the protagonist of the saga, the historical figure of the Catalan inquisitor Nicolau Eymerich (1320-1399).⁴ In the subplots, the characters and events of the main plot are depicted from a different point of view, distorted by the lens of time but still recognisable. Although located in different spaces and times, the events narrated in the three plots show significant similarities. In the Eymerich saga, history is not so much a sequence of events but rather a multifaceted system of interlocked and analogous facts and characters that are deeply linked to each other. In the novels, history is not a continuous line, but rather a fabric that folds on itself, so that points which are on distant parts of this structure come to touch each other. Evangelisti highlights the existence of enduring features in human behaviours and thoughts, on both individual and collective level. Therefore, in the Eymerich saga there is a direct correspondence between past, present and future with clusters of events that repeat themselves throughout history. For example, in the first novel of the saga, *Nicolas Eymerich, inquisitore*, Eymerich needs to unveil a conspiracy of witches based on a neo-pagan cult of Diana. A series of supernatural events include the apparition of a gigantic woman (Diana herself) in the sky. In the plot set in the remote future, titled "Malpertuis", a psytronic starship heads to the

⁴ J. P. Kirsch, *Eymeric, Nicolas*, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia. An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, edited by Ch. B. Herbermann, E. A. Pace, C. B. Pallen, Th. J. Shahan, J. J. Wynne, assisted by numerous collaborators, New York, The Encyclopedia Press, 1913, vol. V, pp. 735-736: "He entered the Dominican Order at an early age [...] Eymeric showed great activity as a preacher, as well as a writer on theological subjects. Some years later, he was made inquisitor general of Aragon; we find him in this office in 1366, and several tractates on dogmatic subjects date from the years immediately following. [...] He wrote numerous theological works and also special tractates defending the legitimacy of the Avignon popes [...] As early as 1376 he had compiled, as a guide for inquisitors, his *Directorium inquisitorum*, the only one of his more extensive works that was afterwards printed".

planet Olympus to capture one of the Greek gods (the same Diana) that still exists there.

It is worth considering that Evangelisti was influenced by Jungian theories about synchronicity.⁵ According to Jung, synchronicity, as a meaningful coincidence and an acausal connecting principle, is a concurrence of events and a psychic factor that is independent of space and time:

“What else is the meaning of the frightful regression of our time? The tempo of the development of consciousness through science and technology was too rapid and left the unconscious, which could no longer keep up with it, far behind, thereby forcing it into a defensive position which expresses itself in a universal will of destruction. The political and social isms of our day preach every conceivable ideal, but, under this mask, they pursue the goal of lowering the level of our culture by restricting or altogether inhibiting the possibilities of individual development. They do this partly by creating a chaos controlled by terrorism, a primitive state of affairs that affords only the barest necessities of life and surpasses in horror the worst times of the so-called “Dark” Ages. It remains to be seen whether this experience of degradation and slavery will once more raise a cry for greater spiritual freedom.”⁶

Jung aimed at expanding the Western world’s core conceptions of nature and psyche. In fact, his innovative concept of synchronicity challenges the physicists’ classical view of causality. It also forces a reconsideration of the meaning of chance, probability, coincidence and the peculiar events in our lives. In these endeavors, Jung was radically rule-breaking; he was not afraid of the boundaries between different disciplines but sought out to understand the most profound levels of mind, culture and nature, identifying recurrent patterns that he called “archetypes”.

Through the concept of synchronicity, what emerges in the Eymerich saga is a dystopian vision of history. Evangelisti focuses on events of the

⁵ See C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity. An Acausal Connecting Principle*, Translated by R. F. C. Hull, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1972.

⁶ Id., *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Edited and translated by G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull, New York, Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 349.

past such as wars, genocides, dictatorships, revolutions, natural disasters, famine, mass migration, upheavals, pandemics and narrates in the saga – usually in the subplot of the future – how they could happen again in an imaginary future. Dystopia, as antonym of utopia, is a concept related to societies of the future, which are often characterized by totalitarian governments, processes of depriving people of fundamental human qualities, environmental disasters, and other negative features linked with a clear degeneration of the society. In the Eymerich's novels, these dystopian characteristics are present in the plots set in the future:

“Per Jung esistono due concezioni temporali che lui riscontra nei vari paesi e nelle varie religioni. La prima concezione riguarda un tempo consecutivo, nel senso che una cosa si sviluppa da un'altra e ogni cosa ha una causa in un'altra. L'altro tempo riguarda la storia simultanea, cioè una cosa accade e simultaneamente ne accade un'altra nello stesso momento. Si tratta del principio stesso della magia. La magia orientale e occidentale si fondano proprio su questo; cioè io pronuncio una certa formula, e in un certo momento accade una certa cosa. E quando la pronuncerò un'altra volta si creeranno le condizioni perché si ripeta il fenomeno. A questa concezione io ho dedicato alcuni libri del mio curriculum. Soprattutto direi che *Mater Terribilis* è tutta basata su questo concetto qua. Il concetto junghiano poi stilizzato dai post-junghiani.”⁷

2. *Journeys Through Hell*

The strong presence of Dante in the Eymerich saga has been disregarded by critics and scholars who have largely focused on themes such as subconscious, hybridisation, cross-genre fiction, gothic and sci-fi in

⁷ *Intervista a Valerio Evangelisti (20 gennaio 2014)*, in E. Carraro, *Valerio Evangelisti, Il ciclo di Eymerich e il romanzo dell'inconscio*, Tesi di Laurea in Filologia e letteratura italiana, Relatore A. Cinquegrani, Venezia, Università Ca' Foscari, 2014, s. p., web address <http://www.eymerich.com/materiali/tesi-elisabetta-carraro-2014.pdf>.

Evangelisti's works.⁸ But in order to recreate the proper gloomy atmosphere of despair and dismay in his novels, I argue that Evangelisti has filled his texts with intertextual connections leading to a Middle Ages poetical masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*. In the re-use and manipulations of Dante, Evangelisti is among many other authors who, in the 20th and early 21st Century, have been inspired by the Florentine poet.⁹

Dante is the poet-protagonist of the *Divine Comedy* who, at the age of thirty-five, awakens in the dark wood of sin, acknowledging the condition of guilt and ignorance in which he has fallen. He is guided by Virgil through the realms of the Inferno to witness the real nature of Evil. The encounter of diverse sinners causes a succession of moods in Dante such as bewilderment, fear, astonishment and pity. During this journey, Dante sometimes feels lost and stunned. In other circumstances, he shows acrimoniousness and righteous indignation towards the sinners.

Similar harshness is felt by Eymerich when he challenges different heretic groups (Cathars, Luciferians, Dulcinians) and battles against varieties of witchcraft and sorcery that are practiced by the members of those sects. Along the eleven novels of the saga, he behaves like a 'dark'

⁸ See L. Somigli, *Valerio Evangelisti. Scritture in corso*, Firenze, Cadmo, 2007; U. Rossi, *Valerio Evangelisti: The Italian Way to Slipstream*, in "Science Fiction Studies", 40, 2, July 2013, pp. 335-63; É. Vial, *Bûchers d'autrefois et guerres à venir: Valerio Evangelisti et l'inquisiteur Nicola Eymerich entre littérature populaire et discours engagé*, in *Novecento... e dintorni. Images littéraires de la société contemporaine*, Actes du colloque "Guerre et violence dans la littérature contemporaine italienne" (Université Stendhal – Grenoble 3, 21-22 novembre 2003), sous la direction de A. Sarabayrouse, in "Cahiers d'études italiennes", 3, 2005, pp. 125-318, web address <http://cei.revues.org/279>.

⁹ See Z. Baranski, *The Power of Influence: Aspects of Dante's Presence in Twentieth-Century Italian Culture*, in "Strumenti critici", n. s., 1, 1983, pp. 343-376; *Dialoghi con Dante: Riscritture e ricodificazioni della "Commedia"*, a cura di E. Ardissino e S. Stroppa Tomasi, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007; *Metamorphosing Dante. Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Editors M. Gragnolati, F. Camilletti, and F. Lampart, Wien, Turia + Kant, 2011; A. Casadei, *Dante oltre la "Commedia"*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2013.

detective who seeks to reach the truth in every possible way. Eymerich also acts as a Machiavellian character that often uses violence – even not directly – and trickery for the successful outcome of the inquisition trial.¹⁰ According to him, violence must be used to eliminate heresies, to coerce blasphemous populations and to purge the sacrilegious communities. He is ruthless but, at the same time, displays a brilliant intelligence and a profound culture in his words and actions. Eymerich is overall a fragile character of the utmost integrity that fights for the supreme ideals of the Roman Catholic Church as the expression of God's will:

“Ma perché in Linguadoca lo chiamavano San Malvagio? [...] Perché dicevano che aveva due nature. Giusto e crudele, umano e spietato. Persone che l'avevano conosciuto in momenti diversi non si persuadevano che potesse essere lo stesso uomo. [...] Eymerich non sopportava quel tema. Fin dall'infanzia sua madre Luz, esigente e lontana, gli aveva rimproverato una naturale doppiezza, che per lei equivaleva a un'inclinazione alla vigliaccheria e all'inganno.”¹¹

Both Dante and Eymerich make a journey through Evil (symbolised by the sinners to Dante and by the heretics to Eymerich) and its various representations. They meet an array of damned characters that are beyond all hope, each one suffering different degrees of damnation for the wrongdoings they committed or are committing in life. Dante meets sinners that are already dead in the circles and ditches of the hell; Eymerich meets them when they are still alive and persecutes them as heretics. Apart from the indignation and moral judgement felt towards the sinners, in both Dante and Eymerich a sensation of physical disgust can emerge in front of anything that is related to sickness, decay or weakness:

¹⁰ See U. Rossi, *Valerio Evangelisti: The Italian Way to Slipstream*, cit.. p. 342.

¹¹ V. Evangelisti, *Le catene di Eymerich*, in Id., *L'ombra di Eymerich*, Milano, Mondadori, 2014, pp. 628-629.

“Provò un senso di repulsione. Detestava qualsiasi forma di debolezza. Sapeva che ciò non era molto cristiano, ma era un sentimento più forte di lui. [...] Eymerich doveva fare uno sforzo su se stesso per dominare il proprio ribrezzo. Sfiurare quei corpi mangiati dai parassiti e coperti di sporcizia era una prova durissima per la sua volontà. C'erano scrofolosi che si grattavano con foga, contadini maleodoranti, membri del clero minore con le tonache lacere e unte”.¹²

“Qual è colui che sì presso ha 'l riprezzo
della quartana c'ha già l'unghie smorte,
e triema tutto pur guardando il rezzo,
tal divenn'io alle parole porte”.¹³

Both Dante and Eymerich talk to the sinners, trying to weigh the moral and juridical responsibility of their actions and the intention that has caused them. Facing the dramatic representation of the consequences of sins, Dante and Eymerich gain a new understanding of the true nature of good and evil. They both are led by a primary goal, which is the liberation from the forces of evil: Dante's character understands it as the first condition for his personal salvation, while Eymerich devotes his life to battle the evil by fighting against the heretical forces that are menacing the Church's unity.

Like many settings of the *Inferno*, in his novels Evangelisti depicts prisons, wells or underground locations as places of evil deeds with almost inaccessible points of entry. Both Dante's and Eymerich's journeys through evil are characterised by descents towards deep and dark spaces where sinners have lost human semblance to show their terrible condition. Not surprisingly, Eymerich appears for the first time in the saga while he is entering an underground cistern in which corpses used to be thrown during the plague. Eymerich enters the cistern to investigate mysterious presences hiding in the bottom of the huge well, where there is no light and the atmosphere is filled with an overwhelming stench:

¹² Id., *Cherudek*, Milano, Mondadori, 1997, p. 56, p. 224.

¹³ *Inferno*, XVII, 85-88.

“L’odore salmastro proveniente dalla cisterna sotterranea gli serrò la gola. Era noto a tutti che durante la pestilenza di quattro anni prima, quando gli uomini morivano a grappoli in tutta l’Aragona, numerosi cadaveri erano stati gettati nelle acque scure di quel pozzo gigantesco. [...] Uno strano odore era rimasto, sgradevole e penetrante, a ricordare la tragedia di quei giorni.”¹⁴

In the third novel of the saga, Eymerich is sent to investigate the resurgence of the Cathar heresy in the Alpine area of Châtillon, where the inquisitor meets deformed and monstrous animals and human beings. More than once, Evangelisti makes the reader aware that the travellers, Eymerich and his colleague padre Jacinto Corona, are going to have a close encounter with the evil (the stench is indeed a metaphor). Here the writer describes Eymerich’s experience in a way that recalls Virgil’s and Dante’s reaction in front of the tomb of Pope Anastasius II, who reputedly had heretical tendencies:

“Le pareti dell’imboccatura erano spesse almeno un braccio. Varcato che ebbero il passaggio, Eymerich e padre Jacinto Corona furono investiti da un lezzo orrendo, misto di zolfo e aceto. Per un attimo ebbero la tentazione di tornare sui loro passi; poi, chiamate a raccolta le energie e strette le tonache alle gambe, penetrarono quasi di forza nell’ambiente.”¹⁵

“In su l’estremità d’un’alta ripa
che facevan gran pietre rotte in cerchio,
venimmo sopra più crudele stipa;
e quivi, per l’orribile soperchio
del puzzo che ’l profondo abisso gitta,
ci raccostammo, in dietro, ad un coperchio
d’un grand’avello, ov’io vidi una scritta
che dicea: ‘Anastasio papa guardo,
lo qual trasse Fotin de la via dritta’.”¹⁶

¹⁴ V. Evangelisti, *Nicolas Eymerich, inquisitore*, in Id., *L’ombra di Eymerich*, cit., p. 26.

¹⁵ Id., *Le catene di Eymerich*, cit., p. 678.

¹⁶ *Inferno*, XI, 1-9.

Throughout the novels of the saga, Evangelisti frequently recalls images of abysses, wells, cavities, underground lakes, cliffs, gorges which are essential elements in the Dantean *Inferno*'s architecture. In the novel *Il mistero dell'inquisitore Eymerich* the King of Aragon Peter IV, accompanied by Eymerich, lands on Sardinia with a powerful army to subjugate his turbulent vassals. The military operations run parallel to Eymerich's fight against a pagan cult introduced by Benedictine monks who cure the Sardinians with the thaumaturgic waters found in a cave. Evangelisti's depictions of these subterranean places, "un'anticamera dell'inferno",¹⁷ reflect the Dantean depiction of the Hell, an abyss inhabited by monstrous creatures shrouded in dim light:

"[...] vi sono dirupi, laghi sotterranei e abissi senza fondo. Chi non conosce il percorso ha difficoltà a entrarvi [...] non riusciva a sottrarsi alla sensazione di vivere l'incubo più orrendo della propria vita. Non era solo l'idea di sfociare in qualche pozzo brulicante di creature inimmaginabili a spaventarlo. Era quello stesso condotto che stavano percorrendo, privo di luce e di rumore, salvo rombi cupi e inspiegabili che, di tanto in tanto, facevano gelare il sangue nelle vene. *Se avesse dovuto figurarsi le bocche dell'inferno, non le avrebbe immaginate diversamente.* [...] Eymerich si fermò su una piattaforma di roccia, che si arrestava bruscamente. Lì la luce azzurra era molto fioca; tuttavia si scorgeva l'imboccatura di un enorme abisso, da cui proveniva un rumore soffocato, raccapricciante oltre ogni dire [...] si sporse un poco. Dapprima non vide nulla, poi i suoi occhi attoniti colsero una massa sterminata di materia viscida che si torceva nell'ombra, sul fondo del precipizio."¹⁸

We find other parallels in the novel *Il corpo e il sangue di Eymerich*, through loathsome odours, flames and shrieks, darkness and a feeling of bewilderment. These places remind the Dantean Malebolge and the stronghold of Satan, the City of Dis, largely described in Cantos VIII and IX:

¹⁷ V. Evangelisti, *Il mistero dell'inquisitore Eymerich*, Milano, Mondadori, 1996, p. 219.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 113, p. 205, p. 221. Emphasis added.

“Il fumo delle torce, l’afrore nauseabondo e la cacofonia di voci della piccola folla che sostava nel locale provocarono a Eymereich un senso di soffocamento [...] Una luce insufficiente proveniva da tre finestrelle, infossate in profonde nicchie contornate da panche di pietra. [...] Il cortile si trasformò in un attimo in un *inferno*, in cui duemila persone cercavano una via d’uscita calpestando corpi e correndo alla cieca. Le urla erano tante da formare un unico, spaventoso gemito collettivo che sovrastava ogni altro rumore. [...] Eymereich continuava a fissare con sguardo rapito la *bolgia* ai suoi piedi.”¹⁹

3. *Contrappassi*

When depicting heretics, Evangelisti sometimes employs the idea of *contrappasso*, used by Dante in relation to the punishment of the souls in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. From the Latin *contra* and *patior*, ‘suffer the opposite’, the *contrappasso* consists of damning sinners by subjecting them to a punishment either resembling or contrasting with the sin itself, as the fulfilment of a destiny freely chosen by the souls during their life.

In Canto XXVIII of the *Inferno*, the decapitated Bertran de Born pronounces: “Così s’osserva in me lo contrapasso”.²⁰ Bertran was considered a maker of division and he is condemned with other “seminator di scandalo e di scisma” in the ninth ditch of the eighth circle. Because they have strewn divisions in society, the sowers of division are cut in half repeatedly. The sinners walk in circles until they reach a point where a demon with a sword cuts them in half; they keep walking and dripping gore everywhere, eventually heal, then come back to be hacked again:

“E tutti li altri che tu vedi qui,
seminator di scandalo e di scisma
fuor vivi, e però son fessi così.
Un diavolo è qua dietro che n’accisma

¹⁹ Id., *Il corpo e il sangue di Eymereich*, in Id., *L’ombra di Eymereich*, cit., p. 260, pp. 459-460. Emphasis added.

²⁰ *Inferno*, XXVIII, 142. Bertran de Born, Lord of Hautefort in Provence, was a famous troubadour of the 12th century. He sowed divisions among the children of Henry II of England, encouraged the Prince Henry to rebel against his father.

sì crudelmente, al taglio de la spada
rimettendo ciascun di questa risma,
quand'avem volta la dolente strada;
però che le ferite son richiuse
prima ch'altri dinanzi li rivada.”²¹

What Dante sees in the ninth ditch is, in Dante's own words, impossible to describe adequately. There are indeed innumerable sowers of religious and political discords who are dreadfully and differently mutilated. Because of the horrific view of wounds and blood, speech and memory do not have the capacity to express so much:

“Chi poria mai pur con parole sciolte
Dicer del sangue e de le piaghe a pieno
Ch'i ora vidi, per narrar più volte?”²²

The novel *Il mistero dell'inquisitore Eymerich* describes a similar chastisement: the Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich,²³ considered a sower of scandal in the psychoanalytic community because of his thoughts and experiments, suffers a horrible punishment. Evangelisti was directly inspired by the Dantean depiction of the sinners in the ninth ditch:

“Nella semioscurità del pozzo cilindrico, la falciatrice si preparò a graffiare le pareti in un nuovo giro sanguinoso. In realtà, era Reich che la battezzava tra sé ‘la falciatrice’: quell'intrico di congegni e di lame rotanti, mosso da un perno centrale e sorretto da un unico braccio, non somigliava ad alcuna macchina esistente. [...] Ogni volta che incontravano il corpo di Reich, le lame lo riducevano in sofferenti brandelli;

²¹ *Inferno*, XXVIII, 34-42.

²² *Ibidem*, 1-3.

²³ Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) was an Austrian psychoanalyst. He wrote important books such as *Character Analysis* (1933) and *The Sexual Revolution* (1936), in which he argued that sexual energy could alleviate neurotic symptoms. He also suggested that the function of the orgasm was to maintain equilibrium by discharging extra biological energy that is usually in the body. Because of his theories related to the sexual liberation, he became a controversial figure into the psychoanalytic community of his time.

ma subito dopo, passato il supplizio, quel corpo si ricomponeva, e rimaneva ad attendere, silenziosamente urlante di dolore, il completamento del giro successivo.

Lo stridio dell'ingranaggio si ripercosse nelle sue membra appena ricomposte, preannunciandogli una nuova, inevitabile lacerazione. [...] *Sapeva dove si trovava: era in uno di quegli inferni semplicistici eppure efficaci descritti in tanti vangeli apocrifi, nelle apocalissi tardive e nelle parabole di alcuni profeti minori dell'Islam. Tormenti rudimentali e sanguinari, destinati a perpetuarsi in eterno*".²⁴

It is not by chance that Evangelisti recalls Islam and some of its prophets, who are present in the schismatic ditch: Mahomet was regarded as a Christian renegade and Ali, his son-in-law, was considered Mahomet's successor.²⁵ We can find similar interpretations of Islam as the main force of the Antichrist in many passages of the saga, where Eymerich (just like Dante) considers Mahomet as the chief divider of humanity. The butchery suffered by the prophet expresses the common thought of Christendom on the beastliness of an alien faith:

“Già veggia, per mezzul perdere o lulla,
com'io vidi un, così non si pertugia,
rotto dal mento infin dove si trulla:
tra le gambe pendevan le minugia;
la corata pareva e 'l tristo sacco
che merda fa di quel che si trangugia.
Mentre che tutto in lui veder m'attacco,
guardommi e con le man s'aperse il pezzo,
dicendo: 'Or vedi com'io mi dilacco!
vedi come storpiato è Maometto!
Dinanzi a me sen va piangendo Alì,
fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto.”²⁶

Another quotation of *Inferno*, XXVIII can be found in the novel *Cherudek*, where Eymerich carries out an investigation in the French town of Figeac, where a conspiracy has been planned by the followers of the

²⁴ V. Evangelisti, *Il mistero dell'inquisitore Eymerich*, cit., p. 233. Emphasis added.

²⁵ See A. D'Ancona, *La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente*, in Id., *Studi di critica e storia letteraria*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1912, vol. II, pp. 167-306.

²⁶ *Inferno*, XXVIII, 22-33.

Evangelium Aeternum. The architect of the conspiracy is Johannes de Rupescissa, who can distil a type of liquid that can keep dying people alive but also induce altered states of consciousness. Evangelisti narrates the encounter between Eymerich and a man who was possessed by this wizardry:

“L’uomo riprovò a parlare, ma non riusciva che a urlare. Tremando dalla testa ai piedi tese le braccia verso l’inquisitore, come per chiedere aiuto. Accadde allora qualcosa di pazzesco e atroce. Le mani si piegarono sui polsi, poi caddero sul suolo bagnato. Lo sconosciuto continuò ad agitare i moncherini, che terminavano in brandelli di carne purulenta, mentre il suo urlo si faceva più alto e disperato. Cadde violentemente in ginocchio, mentre il cappello piumato ruzzolava in una pozzanghera.”²⁷

In this case, the portrait corresponds to the portrait of another sinner of the ninth ditch, Mosca de’ Lamberti, who started the feud in Florence between the Guelphs and Ghibellines early in the 13th century:

“E un ch’avea l’una e l’altra man mozza,
levando i moncherin per l’aura fosca,
sì che ’l sangue facea la faccia sozza,
gridò: ‘Ricordera’ ti anche del Mosca,
che disse, lasso! «Capo ha cosa fatta»,
che fu ’l mal seme per la gente tosca’.”²⁸

Mosca, who had raised not only his hands but also the hands of many others in a bloodshed that ruined Florence and part of Tuscany up to Dante’s time, has now both hands cut off while the blood is covering his own face. The heretics in the Eymerich saga, no matter whether scapegoats or victims, are considered makers of division and so consequently punished.

²⁷ V. Evangelisti, *Cherudek*, cit., p. 282.

²⁸ *Inferno* XXVIII, 103-108.

The re-elaboration of images and situations from the *Inferno* in the Eymerich saga is remarkable for two reasons. First, in a literary way Evangelisti has materialised the concept of synchronicity that is at the roots of the saga: events that had happened – and have been narrated – in the Middle Ages can find correspondences in other times (present and future). Second, drawing from the *Inferno*, Evangelisti has recreated a proper background for his own ‘infernal’ narrations of sinners, punishments, pain and darkness: Dante’s *Inferno* can be also read as an earthly poem with its realistic description of landscape and characters. Many images of the *Inferno* are overwhelmingly part of our collective imagination and have had a profound influence on the production of literature in the Western world since the moment the *Comedy* was first read to our days. In conclusion, through the literary quotation of Dante, Evangelisti characterises the present as a reflection of the Middle Ages, with corresponding political and religious clashes: a world full of sins and sinners.

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