

Review of Göttliche Komödie und Exegese, by  
Manfred Bambeck, Romanic Review, 70 (1979)  
409-410.

*Göttliche Komödie und Exegese*. By Manfred Bambeck. Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1975. Pp. 253. The express purpose of this book is to fill a gap in Dante scholarship. Bambeck holds (pp. 3-6) that Dante's particular debts to the literature of classical antiquity have been more carefully studied than his reliance on the vast enterprise of biblical exegesis in the Middle Ages. Admitting there have been useful assessments of the long-recognized importance of allegorical composition in general in the *Divine Comedy*, he maintains that much remains to be done on the level of specific explication. The competent reader of Dante, "poeta doctus par excellence," must often be a riddle-solver, intimately familiar not only with Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Statius, and the other pagan poets, but also with Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux, Cassiodorus, Haimo of Auxerre, Hugh of St. Cher, Peter Lombard, Richard of St. Victor, and many others.

The work is a miscellany; its thirteen chapters confront specific images, metaphors, symbols, and conundrums with germane exegetical analyses of similar biblical images, etc. Bambeck considers, among other topics, "Left and Right in the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*," "The Leaden Cloaks of the Hypocrites (*Inf.* 23. 65)," "Frogs in the *Inferno*," "Church Metaphors in the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*," "The Ethiopian at the Last Judgment (*Par.* 19. 109)," "The Devil as Bird (*Par.* 29. 118)."

A description of the treatment of infernal frogs may serve to indicate the interpretative procedure employed throughout the book. Bambeck begins by revealing (through material usefully quoted *in extenso*) a consistent exegetical line regarding the significance of biblical frogs (*Exodus* 8. 2. 3, *Psalms* 77. 45, *Rev.* 16. 13). According to the exegetes (some ten are cited), the frogs stand for the "garrulous vanity" (*loquacissima vanitas*) of the heretics, who, produced in abundance in the stream of Holy Scripture, leave behind the pure source and dwell in the slime of sin, error, and deception. They further symbolize the ministers of the Antichrist, "qui non loqui, sed potius garrulis vocibus strepere videbuntur. Omnem quoque quietem auferunt ab electis, dum eos ubique graviter insequentur, et in coeno, hoc est, in immunditia peccatorum devolvent" (Haimo of Auxerre, quoted p. 81, n. 16).

Bambeck next examines three Dantean similes: *Inf.* 9.76 ff. (frogs-heretics), 22.25 ff. (frogs-barrators), 32.31 ff. (frogs-traitors). He shows that previous criticism of these has established 1) their source in Ovid, *Met.* 6.370-81, 2) their realism, and 3) the importance of the heavenly messenger in *Inf.* 9. This leaves unasked the crucial question of the propriety of the imagery to the three respective categories of sin. To answer it, one must look to biblical exegesis and its elaborately formulated association of heresy and deceit with batrachian *modus vivendi*, habitat, and cacophony (brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax?). "Die Lurche in den Metamorphosen des Ovid sind gewissermassen das Rohmaterial, das in den Lurchen biblischer Herkunft symbolisch geformt und gedeutet in das christliche Weltbild eingefügt erscheint" (p. 89).

The consistently adroit and illuminating juxtapositions of poetry and exegesis prove that this is a profitable line of inquiry. The book is full of compelling argumentation and apposite erudition. (JAMES P. HOLOKA, *Eastern Michigan University*)