

Steven E. Ozment. *The Serpent and the Lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation*.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. x + 326 pp. \$35. ISBN: 978-0-300-16985-0.

Steven Ozment clearly enjoys the company of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), famed artist of the German Reformation. In *The Serpent and the Lamb*, Ozment writes with warmth and enthusiasm about this artist, whose factory-like workshop produced images that now grace every major museum collection, though he is not yet a household name in the United States. After reading Ozment's entertaining biography of Cranach, the artist may soon gain some deserved name-recognition.

Cranach is most typically linked to Martin Luther as a co-conspirator and producer of visual propaganda. Scholars have also recognized his work for Catholic patrons, most famously Albrecht of Brandenburg, and have rightly presented a nuanced understanding of Cranach as a savvy businessman who partitioned personal feeling and profit. Ozment celebrates Cranach as a canny political player and family man.

Ozment's idiosyncratic use of sources and documentation occasionally derails the reader. He relies upon older sources that are the bedrock of Cranach scholarship. Yet he seems unaware of recent scholarship that would have furthered his research. For example, Ozment discusses Melancholia images by both Albrecht Dürer and Cranach with no reference to the superb scholarship of Charles Zika (*The Appearance of Witchcraft: Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe* [2007]).

Some of Ozment's terminology weighs the narrative down. *Renaissance* is a contested term. Recent scholarship, for instance by Christopher Wood (*Forgery Replica Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* [2008]) guts the term and reconstructs it according to an early modern archaeological perception of visual culture. Ozment accepts the idea that the Italian Renaissance was a model to which Northerners aspired. This older idea may be plausible; yet Ozment offers no nod to current debates and offers no defense of his own position. Furthermore, he posits a teleological view of art history that sees the Renaissance as a victory over the late medieval period, a step in an evolution towards better quality: "masters of the Renaissance transcended Romanesque and Gothic art" (26). This too is a notion that is generally problematized in art-historical literature.

Generally Ozment reads images as expressions, direct or indirect, of Cranach's experiences and obligations to his patrons. Ozment explores a variety of pictorial types, from altarpieces to erotica. Occasionally, his reading of painting takes an odd turn. For example, he identifies the content of *The Dying Man*, 1518, as Lutheran. This is incorrect for at least two reasons. First, in 1518, Lutheran ideas were too inchoate to have any impact on painting. Second, he misinterprets the picture's iconography, which includes such Catholic motifs as the Trinity and text from the Latin Vulgate. An angel holding a sign that says "good works" and a text

admonishing the viewer to follow God's commandments epitomize the contractual theology Luther would ultimately reject. In my own research (*Lucas Cranach the Elder: Art and Devotion of the German Reformation* [2009]: 61–62) I interpret *The Dying Man* as purely Catholic. Even if Ozment were to disagree with me, he could further his own interpretation by rejecting mine. He also seems to be unaware of my publications about Cranach's altarpieces, which he discusses in the final chapter of the book.

Ozment is a connoisseur of Cranach's women, whom he describes as "knock-down gorgeous" (186); "shiny-white, svelte-perky" (210), or "fetching" (193). Despite his appreciation of female figures, he rejects out of hand the idea that female bodies may be bearers of patriarchal meaning, dismissing such notions as "prudish" (199). This position leads to peculiar conclusions. For instance, he sees the diaphanous veil across the groin of a *Venus* of 1529 as a "moral-religious boundary not to be transgressed" (202). On the contrary, the veil is a boundary precisely meant to be transgressed. It signifies the power and subterfuge of seduction.

Occasional historical gaffes give the reader pause. How could Dürer's 1514 *Melancholia* be produced in the context of Luther's new theology, when the Ninety-Five Theses were three years away? And a woodcut of *Venus and Amor*, dated 1506, is identified in the text as a painting and in the caption as an etching.

Ozment muses on the relationship between art and history. He considers scholarship such as Joseph Koerner's (*The Moment of Self Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* [1993]) that privileges artistic vision and identity in contrast to interpretations that position images and objects as cogs in the wheel of broader historical phenomena. Ultimately, he decides Cranach abandoned any pretense of genius, choosing pragmatism instead. In arriving at this assessment, Ozment helps his readers better understand this important artist.

BONNIE J. NOBLE

University of North Carolina, Charlotte