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Buck, Lawrence P. The Roman Monster: An Icon of the Papal Antichrist in Reformation Polemics

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Bucer wanted only to show that the Mass and its associated prayers and liturgy had been subverted from their true meaning and that recapturing the truth did not require much more effort than the admission from the representatives at Trent that humans make mistakes. Circumstances were against him and his treatise, however, sandwiched as it was between the assembling of Trent, the Schmalkaldic War (1546–47) and the *Augsburg Interim.* Thompson noted that *De vera et falsa* became for Bucer a "final notice of the stark choice facing every Christian" (39) as he went into exile.

There can be no argument that the modernization and translation of primary sources is an important and useful endeavour and that Thompson has done some admirable and careful work here, correcting previous typographical errors spread by uncritical (and now online) editions of the treatise. Importantly he has also eased the language of the treatise into a more readable format (expanding abbreviations, supplying alternate readings of ambiguous passages, deconstructing obscure passages, and modernizing spelling and punctuation), but a passing familiarity with Latin is still necessary to get the full impact of the text. I wonder why an English translation was not produced and included in the same volume—a minor complaint with regard to an otherwise excellent piece of scholarship.

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Buck, Lawrence P.
The Roman Monster: An Icon of the Papal Antichrist in Reformation Polemics.
Early Modern Studies 13. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2014. Pp. xiii, 258 +13 ill. ISBN 98-1-612481-06-7 (paperback) $49.95.

In early 1496 in Rome, reports began to circulate about a strange hybrid monstrosity found among the detritus left by the Tiber as it receded following the previous month's flooding. According to the earliest accounts, this creature had the body and head of an ass, but with the breasts and pudendum of a woman. Its appendages, too, were a worryingly unnatural mix of forms: one hand human, the other the tip of an elephant's trunk; one foot a claw, the other a cloven hoof. On its backside was the face of a bearded old man, and a tail—at the tip

of which was a serpent's head. Although found dead, as Lawrence Buck shows in his fascinating new study, *The Roman Monster*, in the hands of would-be reformers and Protestant polemists this bizarre and troubling creature came to enjoy a second life that spanned most of the sixteenth century—most notably, of course, by way of Philip Melanchthon's 1523 *Pope-Ass Explained* which glossed each part of the creature's anatomy allegorically as a specific and particular critique of some aspect of papal power.

Buck's work is essentially a microhistory centred upon the sources and legacy of Melanchthon's version of the pope-ass figure up to the 1580s. As such, it fills a lacuna in the scholarship, for, despite the growth in monster studies over recent years, Melanchthon's figure has largely escaped serious scholarly attention. For Buck this is unfortunate, as *Pope-Ass Explained* is a sophisticated and sharply honed polemic that encapsulates many of the arguments made by Luther and his followers up to this point, making them available in popular form. Indeed, Buck goes so far as to wonder whether the figure could have served as a mnemonic for some of Luther's criticisms of the church.

As Buck shows, Melanchthon was not the first to harness the pope-ass to polemical ends. As early as 1498, a woodcut of the creature was in circulation in Bohemia. Entitled "Roma caput mundi," and set in a landscape featuring identifiable Roman landmarks, including both the Castel Sant'Angelo—flying the unmistakeable cross-keys banner of the papacy—and the Tor di Nona, used at this time as the papal jail, the illustration drew upon rhetorics of monstrosity to condemn papal claims to secular and spiritual power.

Although he lacks any direct evidence, for Buck the presence of the Tor di Nona suggests that this Bohemian image was itself a copy of a lost Italian original, for although the tower was a powerful symbol of papal authority in Italy, outside the peninsula it did not have the same evocative resonance. Extrapolating further, Buck argues that this lost politicized version of the pope-ass likely began life among the Waldensians of Rome, for its argument closely mirrors that of the heretical sect.

While all of this is wholly plausible, Buck's case is made stronger by virtue of the fact that in early 1498 two members of the Bohemian Brethren, a sect similarly disparaging towards papal power, came to Rome to meet a delegation of Waldensians. Thus, Buck suggests, it is quite likely that it was these two Brethren who were responsible for carrying the image back to Bohemia, where it was printed—circulating in secret for the next twenty years.

With similar precision, Buck is able to make a strong circumstantial case that Luther encountered the Bohemian version of the image in February 1521 when he was given a tract by a Czech scholar on the illegitimacy of papal power. It is likely, Buck thinks, that Luther was slipped a copy of the woodcut at this time because the picture effectively encapsulated some of the arguments of the Czech's longer work.

As fascinating as Buck's reconstruction of the pedigree and dissemination of these early versions of the image is, the heart of his work is given over to a detailed examination of Melanchthon's exposition of the figure. Here, in particular, Buck is concerned to place the reformer's arguments in context, showing how Melanchthon wove together ideas lifted from a number of Lutheran texts published between 1520 and 1523, situating them within the broader discourses on portents and monsters, drawing also upon veins of late medieval apocalypticism—including the notion of the papal Antichrist—to create a thorough and far-reaching condemnation of the papal regime.

The final third of the study examines how the pope-ass figure was reworked and reused through the rest of the century by different religious and intellectual communities to serve their particular ends. Here, Buck focuses in particular on the figure's use in wonder books, the 1579 English redaction of Melanchthon's 1535 revised version of the *Pope-Ass* pamphlet, and a curious Catholic reading by the French ecclesiastic Arnaud Sorbin who argued in 1570 that the creature actually portended the coming of Luther!

This is a very good book, and the work Buck has done to trace the early history of the image is impressive. But it does suffer from some of the usual problems associated with microhistories. Because Buck is writing for both a scholarly and popular audience—and there is much here for both—he has to provide many long digressions on subjects such as the Donation of Constantine, Waldensianism, and medieval apocalypticism that will be familiar to specialist readers.

However, in a book that is concerned with the rhetorical power of a particular image the issue of audience gets rather short shrift. *Who* is encountering Melanchthon's image—and how are they doing so? Equally, when people encounter the figure, do they view it through the lens of Melanchthon's exposition in the way the reformer intended—or do they simply engage with the very striking image of the pope-ass unmediated, or, perhaps, mediated through the commentary of their peers? How do people respond to the figure? Does

it evoke terror, wonder, or contemptuous laughter—and does this reaction change over the century as the figure becomes something of a commonplace itself? In this capacity, it is frustrating that Buck never returns to consider in depth the idea that it could have functioned as a mnemonic. It may have been possible to address some of these issues by placing both the Bohemian image and Melanchthon's tract within the broader context of early modern print culture in general and Reformation pamphlets in particular.

Although Buck's approach to non-English titles is inconsistent (German is generally translated while Latin is not), this is a well-produced book. It is well illustrated and rounded out with a translation of Melanchthon's 1523 text.

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Connelly, Frances S.
The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play.
Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. x, 190 + 62 ill. ISBN 978-1-107-01125-0 (hardcover) $100.95.

Frances S. Connelly's new study responds to a critical lacuna in art-historical scholarship, namely, the absence of a comprehensive "study of the grotesque in the modern era, despite its pervasive and insistent presence from 1500 onward" (18). In order to address this gap, the author moves away from the traditional definition of the grotesque that negatively describes this category in relation to its perversion of normative types. Connelly instead elucidates a grotesque that is shaped by what it does; it is an art that "ruptures boundaries, compromising them to the point where they admit the contradiction and ambiguity of a contrasting reality" (10). As the author readily acknowledges, such an open definition could render problematic the very notion of the grotesque as a category, yet her attention to the contextually precise iterations of this broader type make this a worthwhile and challenging contribution to scholarship.

The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture covers art from the late Quattrocento through the end of the twentieth century. To organize this vast amount of material, Connelly divides the main body of the book into five thematic chapters, each of which develops chronologically. This structure