

Restoration of 'Salvator Mundi'

Sir, – Permit me to correct some inaccuracies in Federico Varese's article on the "Salvator Mundi" (August 16 & 23). As both an art historian who devoted years of study to the painting and as an (always acknowledged) part-owner of it, I rigorously separated my role as scholar from any direct involvement in the painting's sale. I never, as averred, "offered the painting for sale privately" after the National Gallery exhibition, nor did I conclude negotiations to pass it on to Yves Bouvier, whom I have never met and whose identity was unknown to me until nearly two years after his purchase of the picture in May 2013. The sale of the painting was proposed to its owners (I was one of three) by an auction house on behalf of the then anonymous Bouvier who, we were informed, intended to place the painting on public view in Paris. This had followed a nearly year-long unsuccessful effort by an American museum to acquire the painting. Furthermore, neither I nor my partners have ever lodged a legal complaint concerning the sale transaction, as stated in the article.

Two further revisions. Professor Varese writes that Martin Kemp's opinion "was readily accepted by at least one other expert" at the National Gallery meeting. In fact all five scholars present independently supported the attribution to Leonardo, as confirmed by each in emails to me in July 2011. And the decision by the National Gallery to include the painting in the Leonardo exhibition had not then already been made. It would be many months before it was requested.

I do happily admit to having "worked closely on the restoration for six years" with the conservator Dianne Modestini. But the carefully reasoned choices made in the process, such as the masking of the thumb pentimento, were never commercially motivated, and certainly not made to ease the painting's sale ten years in the future for \$450 million. They are in any case subject to further discussion, as I suspect the attribution will continue to be.

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The origins of Christianity

Sir, – In reproving me for apparently suggesting that Christianity was a "Western" invention, Samir

Marcel Duchamp was not a thief

Sir, – Everyone loves a conspiracy, even better if it debunks modern art. It is almost an English tradition! Even so, it is a little depressing to see the assertion that Duchamp stole his artwork "Fountain" from Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven being endlessly repeated without the evidence ever being checked (Matthew Bown, "Toilets of our time", August 23 & 30). But it turns out that the evidence is very thin indeed, and consists principally of wishful thinking and demonstrable misunderstandings on the part of von Freytag-Loringhoven's biographer, Irene Gemmel, and deliberate bad faith on the part of certain critics who cheerfully admit that their aim is to discredit the founder of conceptual art. A letter from Duchamp to his sister is cited (in a conveniently incorrect translation in Gemmel's biography), but this only repeats what Duchamp was careful to tell everyone except the few who were in on this affair. His sister Suzanne was not one of these, but she knew enough of the protagonists not to be told the whole story. Thus, contrary to the assertions of these critics, almost everyone involved with the exhibition at the time believed that "Fountain" had been submitted by a young woman: there was no cover-up. Accusing someone posthumously of outright theft requires convincing evidence. There is none.

There is, indeed, a great deal of evidence that directly rebuts it, although little room to go into it here. Suffice it to say that the refusal of

Saad (Letters, August 16) makes a fair point. But in my review of C. A. Bayly's *Remaking the Modern World* (July 19) I was not referring so much to the actual origins of Christianity as to the fact that its spread and institutionalization had taken place mainly in the West, in the wake especially of Islam's rapid takeover of the Middle East from the seventh century onwards. Christianity was gradually displaced from its birthplace, just as Islam itself found much of its following in Central, South and East Asia, where the majority of Muslims are still to be found. In that sense both religions were "de-centred", giving one the appearance of a Western religion and the other an Eastern, Asiatic, look. Thus when Christianity was re-exported to the East, its Western character was bound to be qualified by local peculiarities, just as Islam too changed in its migration from the Middle to the Far East. This was really Bayly's point.

It's an interesting question, incidentally, why Islam, despite a



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this exhibit for the Independents Exhibition created a scandal at the time just as Duchamp intended, yet von Freytag-Loringhoven herself, who was never slow to come forward, never claimed this work as her own then, nor in the years afterwards, in private or in print. Nor did any of the many people involved ever mention her name in this connection at the time, or in any of their subsequent interviews or numerous memoirs. On the contrary, Beatrice Wood, for example, who was involved in the whole affair and wrote the first defence of "Fountain" in 1917, confirmed in her memoirs that it was by Duchamp, and Henri-Pierre Roché, a fellow conspirator also then in New York, did the same in his memoir *roman-à-clef*, *Victor*.

Duchamp did in fact have a collaborator, who happened to be a woman, because it was important that the work should not be submitted by him. Her name was Louise Norton, the editor of a rather interesting magazine on the interface of fashion

and avant-garde art called *Rogue*. If art historians wish to correct the female record, then they might like to investigate her. She later married the composer Edgard Varèse and had a close friendship with Frank Zappa when in her nineties.

The errors in Gemmel's account of the "Fountain" affair are corrected, along with a convincing rebuttal of the accusation against Duchamp, and an account of his actions and intentions, in an article by Dawn Adès for the *Journal of the London Institute of Pataphysics* (14/15, 2018, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: A continuing controversy"). Adès is surely the international expert on this subject, and her conclusion is worth repeating: "[Gemmel's] work is welcome as a reassessment of von Freytag-Loringhoven's strange life and involvement with the Munich and New York avant-gardes, but it does not help Gemmel's case to fabricate a role for her heroine in the history of Fountain".

ALASTAIR BROTCHE
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Sir, – Re Matthew Bown's piece "Toilets of our time", I am surprised that there was no mention of Burne-Jones's window in Christ Church, Oxford, showing a WC in the deathbed scene of St Frideswide. Perhaps the only stained glass loo in Christendom?

MARTIN FOREMAN
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While Gould does blow a few notes on the tiny harmonica he has been given, the singing is not done by Gould; it is rather a recording of the song by Johnnie Davis.

VERNON SHETLEY
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First-name terms

Sir, – Mark Etherton (Letters, August 23 & 30) describes Terry Eagleton's charge – that D. J. Taylor's choosing to be known by his initials demonstrates "that the English don't like being on first-name terms with strangers" – as "curious". It certainly is curious, not least because there is a simple and logical alternative explanation. Taylor began using his initials in place of his given name David as a result of being mistaken for a well-known motoring correspondent of the time, David Taylor, by J. L. Carr, who seemed more interested

in discussing petrol consumption and the cost of servicing than literature. The story is told in *The Last Englishman: The life of J. L. Carr* by Byron Rogers.

DARRYL ROYCE
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Modern Lawrence?

Sir, – Gerri Kimber, in her review of a collection of essays on D. H. Lawrence, states that Lawrence was ahead of his time in, to use Michael Squires's words, helping to shape "our modern view of industrialization and mechanization as injurious to workers and the environment" (September 6). Ahead of Blake, Hardy, Ruskin, Gaskell and Tolstoy?

NEIL COOPER
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Ghost-unwritten

Sir, – While I am not a copyright lawyer, surely the ghostwriter and subject of an "autobiography" jointly and equally own the copyright of the book? If so, then Colin Lovelace (Letters, September 6) could still publish his work. Though there might be letters etc, that he could no longer include, most of the original text could still be used and supplemented, and even, perhaps, bring him some financial reward.

MALCOLM SHIFRIN
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An earthly paradise

Sir, – Justin Warshaw (September 6) explains that "*The Second Sleep* [by Robert Harris] marks a move to dystopian science fiction but the approach is familiar; his futuristic dystopia is recognizably our history. The people speak the English of the King James Bible. They use old money and imperial measures. England is a monarchy with an established church, a feudal system and long-standing wars with France".

This is surely no dystopia but a vision of an Earthly Paradise regained. Should your readers rush to buy Mr Harris's novel to soothe our melancholy in our present, lonely exile with his story of this glorious restoration?

SIMON MCKIE
Rudge, Somerset.

'The Long Goodbye'

Sir, – Adam Mars-Jones's memory has misled him ("Golden lads and girls", August 23 & 30). He states that Robert Altman's film *The Long Goodbye* "ends with Elliott Gould singing 'Hooray for Hollywood'".