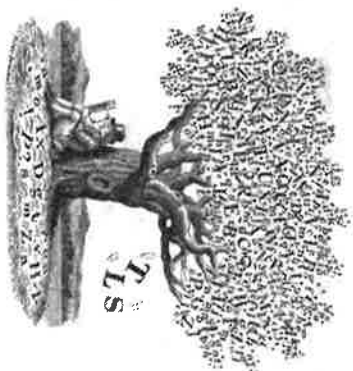


Roman plays

Sir, – I don't mind if T. P. Wiseman disagrees with my conclusions in *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* (August 9). I would have been grateful, however, if he had taken more time to explain and respond to my argument, rather than dismissing it peremptorily as "written in the abstraction of critical theory". I suggest that Shakespeare's sense of Roman history is often opposed to Wiseman's own, and it seems to me a disservice to the reader that he does not acknowledge or address this contrast in his review. Part of the problem is a difference in method: Wiseman's approach is closer to social history, mine to intellectual. I address analogous debates about the grounds of historical explanation explicitly, however, in the book itself, where I propose that Shakespeare, like St Augustine, sees beliefs about theology and ethics as the most important engine of historical change, rather than class conflict.

In *Remembering the Roman People* (2011), Wiseman explores the nature and extent of pro-plebeian ideology in Rome in the period leading up to Caesar's assassination. Shakespeare does not share this ideology. Questioning the motives and effectiveness of both *populares* and *optimates*, Shakespeare focuses instead, like Ronald Syme, on the tragic consequences of unrestrained competition: the tendency St Augustine calls *libido dominantis* ("lust for power") and that I describe as "proto-liberal". Like E. S. Beesly, Wiseman admires Julius Caesar. He aligns Caesar with the Gracchi and reimagines him, against the grain of Cicero's influential criticism, as he once might have seemed to the Roman plebs: "the people's champion" (*Julius Caesar*, 2016). Shakespeare, much in contrast, pokes fun at Caesar. Like the authors of medieval biblical drama, Shakespeare sees not only Caesar, but also rival world-bestriding statesmen such as Brutus, as examples of failed messiahs: inadequate secular alternatives to Christ. Most frustrating of all, however, Wiseman misses my larger point. Political philosophers such as, most recently, Patrick Deneen, argue that liberalism lacks any intrinsic principle sufficient to secure lasting solidarity between individuals. Without mitigating forces such as, especially, Christianity (howsoever residual), liberalism as Deneen sees it rapidly degenerates into what Hobbes calls *bellum omnium contra omnes* ("a war of all against all"). Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner see "neo-Roman" republicanism as a viable alternative. But Shakespeare does not. Shakespeare's representation of the fall of the Roman Republic shows that Roman republicanism was prey to the same kind of intractable internal conflict that now plagues

'Salvator Mundi'



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ing in isolation". I make the same point ("there was a good deal of teamwork").

Robert Simon says that he was "always" the acknowledged owner of the "Salvator Mundi". I must have been misled by Professor Kemp's own account of the May 2008 London viewing. In *Living with Leonardo*, Kemp describes Simon as "the custodian of the picture", and adds, "I later learned [Simon] was its co-owner". At least to Kemp, Simon was not an acknowledged owner. Indeed, Kemp recalls that Simon told him that the painting was "in the hands of a good owner". At the time of the 2011 exhibition, the *Sunday Times* reported, "Its ownership is a closely guarded secret. Robert Simon, a New York art dealer, is representing the owner, or owners – the official line is it is a 'consortium'".

Mr Simon writes, "I never, as averred, 'offered the painting for sale privately' after the National Gallery exhibition". The exhibition closed in February 2012 and the painting ended up in private hands in May 2013. In my article, I simply repeat that fact. For reasons of space, I did not report on earnest, failed attempts to sell the painting to American museums. Mr Simon makes clear that he did not deal directly with Yves Bouvier, but sold the painting through an auction house. I did not imply that the two

ever met. As with the purchasing and selling of many valuable objects, one need not ever meet the buyer, or even know his identity, to engage in negotiations with him. Ben Lewis (*The Last Leonardo*) reports that one of the owners met an agent acting for Bouvier in Paris on April 10, 2013.

Mr Simon points out that he never took Bouvier to court. I wrote that Simon had "lodged a complaint" without specifying against whom. It has been widely reported that the owners reached a confidential out of court settlement with Sotheby's regarding the auction house's potential, and only alleged, collusion with Bouvier. He also questions that Kemp's opinion "was readily accepted by at least one other expert" (my words). Simon retorts that "all five scholars present independently supported the attribution to Leonardo". The five experts invited to the May 2008 meeting at the National Gallery were Carmen Bambach, David Alan Brown, Maria Teresa Fiorio, Pietro Marani, and Kemp. Bambach told the *Guardian* (June 2):

"I wasn't really asked what I thought about the 'Salvator Mundi' at the time [of the 2008 meeting]. If my name is added to that list, it will be a tacit statement that I agree with the attribution to Leonardo. I do not". Fiorio is reported saying, "I never issued an official opinion on the 'Salvator Mundi' ... I discussed the painting informally" (*Last Leonardo*, p173). Marani is quoted thus: "I was not asked for an attribution, and we did not offer a consensus. I said, 'yes, it may be'". When Brown saw the picture, he readily agreed with Kemp that it was a Leonardo. Naturally, I am happy to revise my narrative on the basis of additional evidence.

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Pockets

Sir, – Reading Ulrika Rublack's review of *The Pocket: A hidden history of women's lives, 1660–1900* by Barbara Burman and Ariane Fennetaux (September 6) reminded me of a book of essays called *Leaves in the Wind* by "Alpha of the Plough", which I bought on one of my visits to secondhand bookshops many years ago. Alpha of the Plough was the nom de plume used by A. G. Gardiner when writing in the London evening paper *The Star* during the First World War. He was a successful and well-regarded journalist and editor and his essays were written with a dry wit reminiscent of Jerome K. Jerome. For some reason the only one of these essays I still recall is "On Pockets and

Things", in which he addresses the paucity of pockets in women's clothing compared to men's. As a result he said there was a need for a "Society for the Propagation of Pockets Among Women" saying "Women have won the vote from the tyrant man. Let them win their pockets from the tyrant dressmaker".

F. W. NUNNEMEYER
Beckley, East Sussex.

Divided cities

Sir, – Why are we repeatedly told that Nicosia is "the world's last divided capital" (see Kaya Genç's review of *Nicosia Beyond Barriers*, September 13) when Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, is divided by the so-called Peace Wall?

RICHARD PINE
Peritha, Corfu.

Flying machines in literature

Sir, – In discussing the earliest references to flying machines in literature, J.C. opines that "no one is likely to predate Tennyson" and his 1842 reference to "airy navies" in the poem "Locksley Hall" (NB, September 6).

However, in her post-apocalyptic futurist novel *The Last Man* (1826), Mary Shelley refers to "sailing balloons" powered by "feathered vans [wings] cleaving the unopposing atmosphere" that can travel from London to Scotland in forty-eight hours.

CHRISTOPHER GOULDING
Newcastle upon Tyne.

St Frideswide

Sir, – In response to Martin Foreman's letter (September 13): almost every tour guide taking a group through Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, will stop in front of Burne-Jones's stained glass depiction of St Frideswide's life and announce that the object on the wall behind her deathbed is also, a porcelain toilet. It is not. It is a cistern and water basin, which Burne-Jones's mentor Rossetti copied from an etching by Dürer and then included in a number of his works, as part of their medieval set decoration.

PAUL ACKER
Oxford.

present-day liberal politics worldwide. His Roman plays, in this sense, are a prescient picture of our own political condition.

PATRICK GRAY
Department of English Studies,
Durham University.

The Fitzgeralds and alcohol

Sir, – It was brave of Joanna Scutts to write about the Fitzgeralds without mentioning alcohol (September 13). And although discussions of drink can swiftly become dreary, there is