

JOURNAL *of the* NORTHERN RENAISSANCE

<http://northernrenaissance.org> | ISSN: 1759-3085



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Issue 8 (2017) - Scrutinizing Surfaces

Brief Reflections: The Marble Surfaces of Marvell's Sepulchral Verse^[1]

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[1] Marvell's 'Mower's Song' ends with a vision of the mower's tomb adorned with 'the heraldry' of cut grass (Smith 2013: 144-5 (l. 27)). The same grass had at the start of this poem seemed a 'glass' (l. 4), or mirror, reflecting the 'greenness' (l. 3) of the narrator's youthful dreams, but the mower's unrequited love for Juliana quickly turns these green thoughts sour. The luxuriance of the grass, we learn, now begins to taunt the downtrodden narrator, who takes a scythe to the 'Unthankful meadows' (l. 13) – an act of 'revenge' that also helps restore the grass's glass-like capacity to mirror the mind of the mower (l. 20). The mower creates of the meadows a 'common ruin' that reflects his own (l. 22), and he ends the poem imagining this same cut grass scattered over his tomb – a fit epitaph for the fallen mower, echoing in death the union of flesh and grass in life. The 'Mower's Song' reflects the capacity, but also the inadequacy, of epitaphs to mirror the life and death of the deceased. It is a poem that ends with the mower's life finding fit reflection, but in an epitaph composed of leaves of grass, not words on stone.

[2] The idea of the funerary monument as an untrustworthy mirror for the life of the deceased is a recurrent theme in Marvell's poems. Alongside 'The Mower's Song', it occurs in 'The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn', probably written in early 1649 (Smith 2013: 65-71). Like the Mower, Marvell's Nymph is dying of a broken heart, her poem a lament that also ends with the speaker imagining the appearance of her tomb after death. 'First my unhappy statue shall / Be cut in marble', the Nymph declares, 'and withal, / Let it be weeping too [...]' (ll.111-13). But just as grass proves a fitter glass for the life of the Mower than the stonework of his tomb, so the Nymph also undermines the abilities of art to represent nature, questioning the accuracy of her statue's reflection of her grief for her fawn. When it comes to tears, the Nymph continues, addressing the fawn, 'Th'engraver sure his art may spare; / For I so truly thee bemoan, / That I shall weep though I be stone' (ll.114-6). The implied contrast between the 'art' of the engraver and the 'truth' of the Nymph's tears, 'themselves engraving there' (l. 118), is further developed as we learn that the fawn will have a statue of his own, 'Of purest alabaster made' (l.120). Again, art is incapable of a true-to-life representation, 'For I would have thine image be / White as I can, though not as thee' (ll.121-2). Even alabaster is unable to reflect the true whiteness of the fawn.^[2]

[3] As well as imagining the funerary monuments of pastoral figures, Marvell also wrote epitaphs for inclusion on actual monuments in the later seventeenth century.^[3] Four epitaphs in verse, one in prose, survive, each printed in Marvell's *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681). The verse epitaphs were written between 1658-1672, three in Latin, the fourth and final composed in English. Each was originally carved in stone in churches across south-east England; the three Latin epitaphs were erected alongside monuments to the deceased – since vandalised or removed – in Eton College Chapel, and the Old Church, Laverstoke, Hampshire, the English epitaph on a memorial tablet – still extant and *in situ* – in the crypt of the London church of St Martin-in-the-Fields (Figure one).^[4] It is unclear whether the surviving prose epitaph, beginning 'Here under rests the body of _____' (Marvell 1681: 70-71), was ever carved in stone – no monument bearing the epitaph has yet been located, and the identity of the epitaph's subject is still unknown.^[5] Marvell's extant epitaphs each offer

a 'breve ... speculum' (Smith 2013: 192-4 (l. 1)), as Marvell writes of his Latin epitaph for Jane Oxenbridge (died 1658) – a brief reflection of the person whose life and death it concerns. In this essay I want to show how Marvell's epitaphs, like his monuments for the Mower and Nymph, end up reflecting, not only on the life of the deceased, but the inadequacy of the reflection of that life in verse.

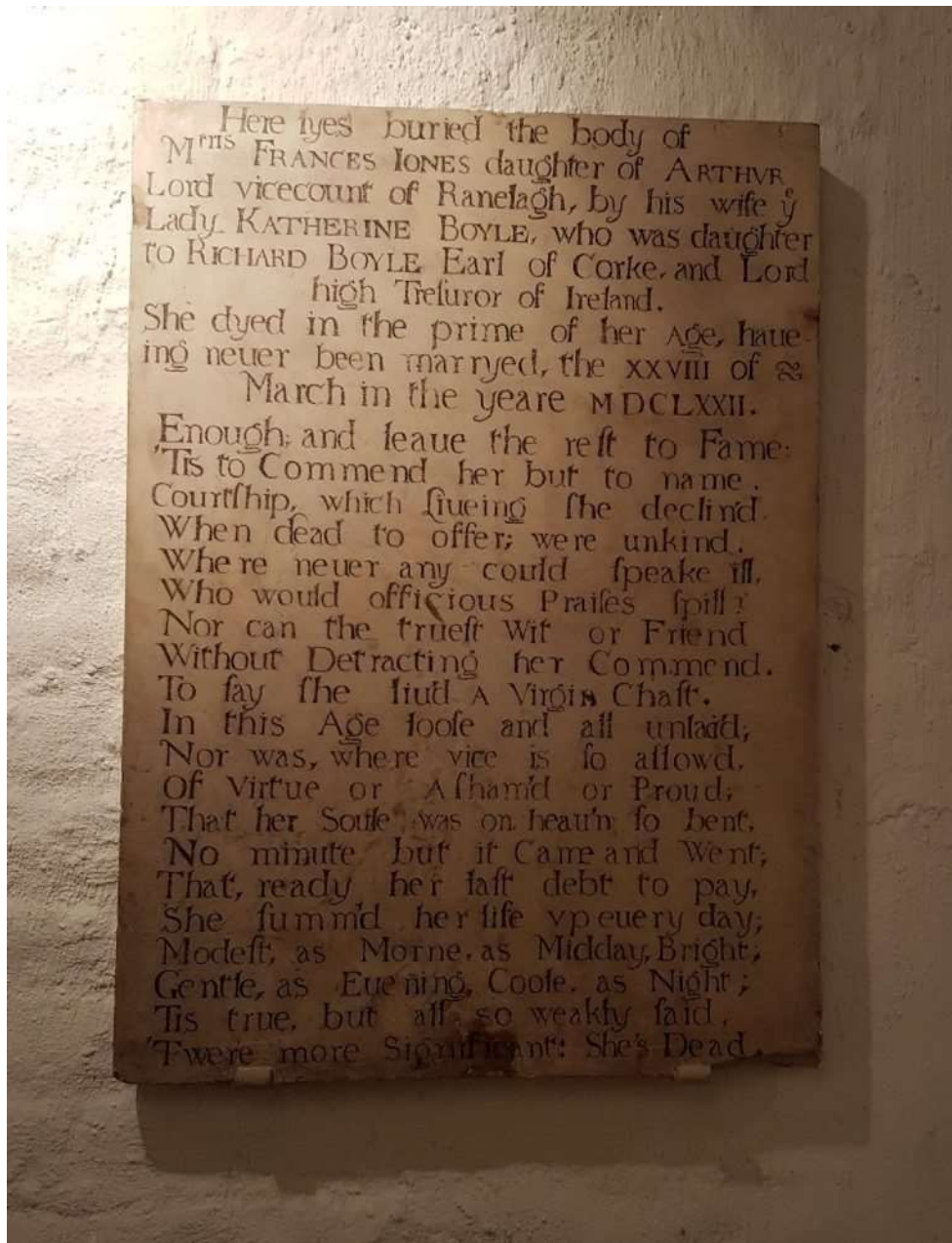


Figure one: Memorial tablet for Frances Jones (c. 1672), Parish church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London.

Photo credit Liz Oakley-Brown.

[4] Critics who have noted this capacity of Marvell's epitaphs for self-critical reflection on the failings of the form have confined their comments to Marvell's English epitaph for Frances Jones, who died in March 1672 (Figure one). This epitaph, as Annabel Patterson notes, is entirely composed of a sequence of 'inexpressibility topoi' that pay tribute to Frances's virtues only indirectly, insofar as the poem insists from start to finish on the impossibility of expressing Frances' virtues in verse. Patterson is among critics to claim that Marvell's epitaph for Frances Jones reflects his disillusionment with Restoration culture,

arguing that Marvell found it increasingly difficult to speak well of England in his post-Restoration writings, and that he opted for satire or silence as a means of 'speaking true' (Patterson 1978: 50-59 (57); Scodel 1991: 223-36). But the inability of language to reflect the 'truth' of a virtuous life in verse is a theme running throughout Marvell's poetry from the late 1640s onwards. If Marvell's epitaph for Frances Jones connects, as Joshua Scodel argues, with his prose attack on the Anglican minister Samuel Parker, *The Rehearsal transpros'd*, also written in 1672, it shares its concern to 'speak true' with the three Latin epitaphs that Marvell composed for Jane Oxenbridge in 1658, and for the brothers John and Edmund Trott, who died in 1664 and 1667 respectively.

[5] In what follows, I want to connect Marvell's conceit of the epitaph as an untrustworthy mirror to his lifelong commitment to the cause of religious toleration for beliefs and practices outside the established church. Marvell's tolerationism emerges particularly prominently in *The Rehearsal transpros'd* and other controversial writings from the 1670s that were penned as part of wider debates over the question of toleration (or 'indulgence') that surrounded the promulgation, and then hasty repeal, of the Declaration of Indulgence in March 1672 (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003a: 4-20). But as critics are increasingly realising, Marvell's tolerationism has deeper roots than the 1670s. As Nicholas von Maltzahn suggests (2007: 86-104), it is an attitude almost certainly rooted in Marvell's childhood and the influence of his father's irenic consumption of writings from across the religious spectrum – from the Laudian writings of Edward Kellet to Joseph Mede's millenarian commentary on the Book of Revelation, *Clavis Apocalyptica*. [6] Evidence of these and other writings are included in the Reverend Andrew Marvell's surviving manuscript sermon book, which also contains a near complete translation – 'the first known English translation extant', von Maltzahn argues (2007: 93) – of the Latin Racovian Catechism, first published in Raków, Poland, in 1609, with an English translation attributed to John Biddle printed in Amsterdam in 1652 (Mortimer 2010: 39-45; 158-67). Raków was the centre of Socinianism – an anti-Trinitarian and anti-Calvinist creed, first developed by the Italian jurist Faustus Socinus (died 1604), whose ideas were considered so inflammatory that they were outlawed across Europe, with copies of the Latin Racovian Catechism burnt in England by order of parliament in 1652 (Mortimer 2010: 196-204; Coffey 2000: 149-51). As well as denying the divinity of Christ, the taint of original sin, and the Calvinist doctrine of justification by faith, the Racovian Catechism identifies a key role for reason in our religious convictions and defends the principle of religious toleration. From Biddle's translation we learn that all our knowledge of the Christian religion is contained in the Bible, which alone is sufficient for establishing 'Faith on [sic] the Lord Jesus Christ, and obedience to his Commandements', without regard for the creeds and councils of visible churches (Biddle 1652: 8). The true church, according to the Racovian Catechism, is merely 'the Society of such Men, as hold and professe the saving Truth' that is revealed in scripture (Biddle 1652: 166). Because Socinianism downplays the traditions and practices of particular churches as things indifferent to salvation, it maintains that membership of the true church can cut across creeds and congregations, co-existing wherever the 'saving Truth' has a home. Tolerance of the religious beliefs and practices of others is therefore a recurrent theme in Socinian writings, and it is coupled with intolerance of any church that seeks to impose their particular beliefs and practices upon others. Von Maltzahn traces the influence of this particular aspect of Socinianism into Marvell's own writings in defence of religious toleration in the 1670s (2007: 93-5).

[6] But Socinianism was not alone in advocating toleration in the mid-seventeenth century. The circle of Cambridge Platonists surrounding Benjamin Whichcote, fellow of Emmanuel College from 1633, shared the Socinian emphasis on reason and toleration, and, like

Marvell, were themselves suspected of Socinianism – a charge they rigorously denied. One of Whichcote's pupils at Emmanuel was Marvell's exact Cambridge contemporary, Nathanael Culverwel. His *Spiritual opticks* (1651) uses the Pauline image of seeing God 'through a glass darkly' (1 Corinthians 13.12) to emphasise the disabling as well as enabling properties of reason, and it is on the basis of his acknowledgement of reason's defects that Culverwel argues for the desirability of religious toleration, in a world which he likens to a murky mirror, in which the face of God shows very dimly indeed.^[7] Like Culverwel, Marvell's verse epitaphs also use the language of reflection to express limitations in our understanding of what cannot be perceived by the eye, but as well as sharing imagery, both writers also share ideas about religious toleration which, I want to argue, their references to dim or distorted mirrors help convey. In this essay about the marble surfaces of Marvell's funerary verse, then, I also want to use Marvell's mirror-like metaphors to scratch beneath the surface of our current understanding of Marvell's engagement with religious toleration. I will suggest that the sympathies with Socinianism that von Maltzahn detects in Marvell's prose writings from the 1670s are late flowerings of an attitude towards toleration influenced by the Cambridge Platonists, and already implicit in the 'brief reflections' of Marvell's verse epitaphs from the early 1650s onwards.

[7] The early modern sepulchre is a multifaceted surface – an interface between the dead and living that conceals the physicality of death, even as its epitaph reveals the life of the tomb's occupant to visitors. Musing on the etymology of 'sepulchre' – from the Latin '*semipulchra*, halfe faire and beautifull' – the antiquarian John Weever draws attention, in *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631), to the superficiality of the tomb, its 'externall part or superficies [...] gloriously beautified and adorned; and hauing nothing within, but dreadfull darknesse, loathsome stinke, and rottennesse of bones' (1631: 9). The marble statuary and stonework of the material tomb is a surface that shrouds skeletal remains, but the epitaph inscribed on this marble surface is there to reveal what the stones themselves conceal: 'to continue the remembrance of the parties deceased, to succeeding ages', Weever writes, for 'they are externall helpes to excite, and stirre vp our inward thoughts', 'in that by them we are put in minde, and warned to consider our fragile condition' (1631: 8, 9). The aim of the epitaph, then, is to reflect on the life and death of the deceased, and in so doing to bring visitors face to face with their own mortality – 'to have the remembrance of death euer before our eyes and that our brethren defunct may not be out of minde as out of sight'. The epitaph is thus a mirror and a monitory: as Marvell's cut grass mirrors the 'common ruin' of his mower and of humanity more generally, so Weever writes that epitaphs should reflect 'the life, and the manner and time of the death of the person therein interred' at the same time as they remind us of the 'fragile condition' of us all (1631: 9; Llewellyn 2000: 337-62).

[8] The idea of the epitaph as an exemplum that preaches morality by putting us in mind of mortality is a commonplace of early modern thought. Noting 'the reciprocal dynamic between the poetic epitaph and contemporaneous culture', Joshua Scodel is among critics to chart the epitaph's changing function across the long Reformation, arguing that epitaphs evolved with society's attitudes towards religion, and that their late medieval emphasis on inviting the living to pray for the deceased shifted with the abolition of purgatory towards an individualising protestant focus on admonishing the living to learn from the dead (Scodel 1991: 2; Llewellyn 2000: 253-4; Newstok 2009: 19-22). Marvell also makes moral mirrors, of the living as well as dead. Writing to console Sir John Trott, most likely on the occasion of the death from smallpox of his second son, Edmund, in August 1667, Marvell calls on Sir John to 'be exemplary to others in your own practice' of grief (Margoliouth 1971: 311-13 (312); Marvell 1681: 67-9). In his only surviving English prose epitaph, included in *Miscellaneous Poems*, Marvell commends his anonymous subject for being 'polished to the

utmost perfection'; his virtues and lack of vanity were such, Marvell writes, that 'he appeared only as a Mirrour for others, not himself to look in' (Marvell 1681: 71). But Marvell found it considerably more difficult to translate the exemplary actions of the living into the 'brief reflections' of funerary verse. A virtuous man or woman might live their lives as a mirror for others, but Marvell could not share Weever's confidence in the ability of epitaphs to admonish the living by holding a mirror up to the life of the deceased. Marvell's epitaphs always betray an acknowledgment of their own inadequacy as reflections of a remembered life, an awareness of the contrast between *verba* and *res*, image and reality, that prompts Marvell to question the efficacy of the early modern epitaph as an exemplary mirror for the living.

[9] Marvell's Latin epitaph for John Trott, Edmund's older brother, who died, also of smallpox, three years before Edmund in June 1664, is a case in point (Smith 2013: 196). The poem opens with Marvell calling on the marble surface of his epitaph to 'Act your part, O marble, and with your customary humanity [to] speak the brief epitaph of John Trott' ['Age Marmor, & pro solita tua humanitate, / [...] / Effare Johannis Trottii breve Elogium'] (ll. 6, 9). Any implication that marble is a worthy mirror for John's virtues is quickly removed in the poem, however, as we learn that Trott was so 'wholly unblemished, refined, genuine, even beyond the metaphor of Parian marble and worthy to be carved on a gem, not stone' ['Erat ille totus Candidus, Politus, Solidus, / Ultra vel Parii Marmoris metaphoram, / Et Gemma Scalpi dingus, non Lapide:'] (ll. 10-12). Parian marble, Pliny the Elder writes, was highly prized for its purity by ancient Greek sculptors, who referred to the stone as 'lychnites', or lamplike – a possible reference, Carmelo G. Malacrino notes, to its 'distinctive translucence' (Pliny the Elder 1962: 36.iv.14; Malacrino 2010: 16). But however flawless, even Parian marble fails, for Marvell, to reflect the purity of John Trott's own 'unblemished' virtues. In his epitaph for Edmund Trott (Smith 2013: 197-8), enclosed with his letter to Sir John and printed alongside it in *Miscellaneous Poems*, Marvell moves from the inadequacy of the epitaph's marble surface to emphasise the inadequacy of the epitaph itself, for we read that Edmund's parents 'have placed in vain these surviving words' to their 'most beloved son' ['Dilectissimo Filio Edmundo Trottio / Posuimus Iidem Iohannes Pater Et Elizabetha Mater / Frustra superstites'] (ll. 1-3). 'In vain', Nigel Smith notes in his edition of Marvell's poems (2013: 197 (l. 3n)), refers to the vanity of Edmund's parents' hopes for continuing the Trott family line, now that Edmund, the last of their surviving sons, had died. But the 'surviving words' of the epitaph also reflect on the vanity of their own ambitions to pass on the example of Edmund's virtues to future generations of readers. Marvell's epitaph to Edmund offers a series of tributes to his moral and physical perfections, but this poem is also self-conscious about the inherent risk of turning genuine praise into platitudes, in cases, as this one, where the subject of an epitaph is so exemplary that the poet's tribute to them risks sounding insincere. Thus, having devoted twenty lines to Edmund's praise, Marvell ends his epitaph with what, for Patterson, amounts to an 'astonishing method of inverted insult' (Patterson 1978: 56) – Edmund, we learn, is 'a betrayer of friends, a parricide, the sponge of his family' ['Proditor Amicorum, Parricida Parentum, / Familiae Spongia'] (ll. 32-3). These are accusations, as Marvell writes, expressly designed to 'lighten the envy of true praise with a feigned reproof' ['Ut verae Laudis Invidiam ficto Convitio levemus'] (l. 31). At the same time as it strives for an accurate reflection of Edmund's virtues, therefore, this epitaph also betrays anxiety that readers might find the 'surviving words' insincere.

[10] The epitaph for Edmund Trott also contains another motif characteristic of Marvell's monumental verse, a preoccupation with going beneath the marble surface of the memorial stones to imagine the decaying remains within. Marvell writes of the grave as 'a fine and

private place' (l. 31) in 'To his Coy Mistress', dateable in its earliest version to the early 1650s (Smith 2013: 75-84), but here and elsewhere in his writing, Marvell flouts the assumed privacy of the tomb, imagining the mouldering body of his coy mistress corrupted by worms, who 'shall try / That long preserved virginity: / And your quaint honour turn to dust; / And into ashes all my lust' (ll. 27-30). It is to ashes that Marvell's thoughts also turn in the midst of his tribute to Edmund Trott, breaking off mid-way through his praise 'of both the strength and the beauty of youth, attractive in aspect, in carriage, in speech equally', with the dismissive phrase, 'and whatever else adds worth to ashes' ['Medio juventutis Robore simul & Flore, / Aspectu, Incessu, sermone juxta amabilis, / Et siquid ultra Cineni pretium addit'] (ll. 11-13). A similar fascination with bodily dissolution and decay appears in Marvell's epitaph for John Trott, which comments wryly on how 'the deadly pox [had] made sport of his well-made body', to the extent that, even prior to death, John had appeared a walking corpse, 'encrusted ... in a living tomb' ['Ferales Pustulae Corpus tam affabre factum / Ludibrio habuere, & vivo incrustarunt sepulchro'] (ll. 22-3).

[11] This attentiveness to death and dying as a process of bodily dissolution belies each epitaph's remembrance of their subject's moral and physical perfections. Scodel is among critics to draw attention to the popularity of the 'double tomb' in the early seventeenth century, in which visitors are confronted by two effigies of the tomb's occupant; the one as they appeared in life, dressed in clothes befitting their status and profession, the other – recumbent, shrouded, skeletal – a conventional representation of mortality, within the late medieval tradition of the *transi*, or cadaver tomb. Key examples of 'double tombs' from this period include the monument to Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury (died 1612), erected at St Ethelreda's, Hatfield (Hertfordshire) between 1609-1616 (Llewellyn 2000: 340 (fig. 121)), and the joint monument to Henry Cavendish (died 1616) and William Cavendish, first earl of Devonshire (died 1626), erected at St Peter's, Edensor (Derbyshire) in the late 1620s (Scodel 1991: 40-44 (fig. 2)). Scodel writes that the aim of the 'double tomb' was to celebrate the potential for life's achievements to outlast death, insofar as the iconography of these tombs helped admonish and inspire future generations by drawing attention to the effigy of the man or woman as they appeared in life, which was always placed uppermost, above the recumbent, skeletal figure, as though vanquishing death (Scodel 1991: 40 *passim*; Llewellyn 2000: 340). Marvell's use of such *memento mori* seems, by contrast, less a vehicle for the triumph of virtue, more an admission of the vanity of attempts to remember the merits of individuals after the bodily metamorphosis of death. His imagined corpses interrupt and absorb our attention, as Marvell's macabre fascination with the metamorphoses of death and disease detract from his ostensible purpose to praise the virtues of the deceased in life. Thus, in his epitaph for Jane Oxenbridge, who died of dropsy in April 1658 (Smith 2013: 192-4), Marvell moves from detailed description of Jane's fluid-filled body – she, 'suffering five years with dropsy', he writes, 'by gradual stages ... became swollen beyond the limit of the human form' – to develop a colourful conceit comparing Jane's swellings to the waters of the biblical Flood, her soul to 'a dove [released] from the ark of her body' ['Donec quinque annorum hydropes laborans, / Per lenta incrementa ultra humani corporis modum intumuit. / [...] / Evolavit ad Coelos, tanquam columba ex arca corporis'] (ll. 23-24, 28). Occupying five of the epitaph's final ten lines, the very excessiveness of this conceit risks overpowering Marvell's more prosaic tribute to Jane's 'works of Christian piety' ['Pietatis erga Deum [...]'] (l. 20) that comes before. Weever writes that the sepulchre conceals skeletal remains, while the function of the epitaph inscribed on its marble surface is to reveal the life of the tomb's occupant to the living. But as well as holding a mirror up to remembered lives, Marvell's epitaphs also act as windows that peer indecorously into the privacy of the tomb, there to muse on the bodily dissolution of those whose living virtues had held a mirror up to others. In the process, his epitaphs draw attention to their own

failure to reconstruct the pious life of individuals within the 'brief reflections' of their funerary verse.

[12] Marvell's most sustained commentary on the failings of epitaphs to reflect exemplary lives comes in his epitaph for Frances, daughter of Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh, who died in 1672, aged 39 (Smith 2013: 199-200). This, Marvell's latest surviving epitaph, and his only extant example of funerary verse in English, is printed in *Miscellaneous Poems* without indication of its subject's identity. That it was written for Frances Jones was established only in 1979, when Hugh Brogan (1979: 198-9) discovered the verses on her memorial tablet in the crypt of the London church of St Martin-in-the-Fields (Figure one). The poem itself makes sense only when read alongside the tablet's opening preamble, 'Here lyes buried the body of / Mistress Frances IONES', for Marvell's claim in the second line – 'Tis to commend her but to name' (Smith 2013: l. 2) – relies on our foreknowledge of Frances' identity. This conceit – 'that the mere naming of [Frances Jones] is her truest praise' (Patterson 1978: 56) – might stand for the thematic concerns of the poem as a whole.

[8] The poem, as Patterson recognises, is from start to finish a commentary on the impossibility of writing a credible tribute to Frances's virtues in funerary verse, one that recognises the limitations of language to 'commend', and which ends with the claim that any such tribute is but 'weakly said' (l. 19).

[13] This emphasis on the inexpressibility of Frances' virtues is, for Scodel, connected to the poem's composition in or around the month of Frances' death in March 1672. The same month saw the promulgation of Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence, extending toleration to Catholics and protestant nonconformists, and the publication of Samuel Parker's edition of *Bishop Bramhall's Vindication of Himself and the Episcopal Clergy From the Presbyterian Charge of Popery* (1672), with its preface defending the Anglican policy of persecuting nonconformists, whom, as Parker alleged, served the cause of popery by destabilising the English protestant state (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003a: 4-20). These events prompted Marvell to pen his pro-tolerationist *Rehearsal transpros'd* attacking Parker's preface, published in September 1672. Marvell's lively, and highly literary response to the substance, as well as style, of Parker's preface, opens with sneering remarks upon the extravagance of Parker's tribute to the achievements of John Bramhall, the recently deceased archbishop of Armagh. Parker, Marvell writes, is guilty of overpraising the erstwhile archbishop, and he argues that the effect of such 'improbable *Elogies*' runs contrary to their design, in that they 'diminish alwayes the Person whom they pretend to magnifie', by awakening 'Interest, Curiosity, and Envy' in readers, who 'are subject to enquire [...] whether he came by all this honestly, or of what credit the Person is that tells the Story?' (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003a: 55). Scodel (1991: 225-30) connects Marvell's censure of Parker's immoderate style – 'bedawb'd with Rhetorick, and embroyder'd so thick that you cannot discern the Ground' (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003a: 55) – with his concerns over the credibility of his praise for Frances Jones, arguing that Marvell is unable to express Frances' virtues in verse because unable to disentangle the language of praise from the larded rhetoric of Parker's dissolute style. Language itself is debased 'In this Age loose and all unlac'd' (l. 10), Marvell writes in his epitaph for Frances Jones, and so only with silence can a poet hope to speak well of the dead.

[14] But Marvell's concern with the credibility of epitaphs is by no means confined to his 'Epitaph upon Frances Jones'. Patterson argues that Marvell was caught throughout his career between the twin imperatives of 'speaking well' and 'speaking true' (1978: 57-8), and the idea that true praise might seem insincere when expressed in poetry runs throughout Marvell's epitaphs from the 1650s onwards. Marvell might claim his epitaphs offer 'brief

reflections' of the deceased, but both his words and the marble upon which they are inscribed are variously dismissed as inadequate – 'in vain', or 'weakly said' – to the task of reflecting virtues in verse. The image of the epitaph as an untrustworthy mirror for true virtue is a recurrent conceit in Marvell's poetry, animating the tombs imagined in 'The Mower's Song' and 'Nymph Complaining', as well as the Latin epitaphs. If, as Scodel suggests, Marvell's 'Epitaph upon Frances Jones' should be read in the context of his attack on Parker's 'improbable *Elogies*' in *Rehearsal transpros'd*, then it is also necessary to consider how the concerns of both these texts from 1672 might revisit and reflect on the expression of those same concerns in Marvell's earlier epitaphs.

[15] What, then, might have motivated Marvell's lifelong concern with the inadequacy of epitaphs, and with the language of untrustworthy mirrors within which these concerns found expression? Marvell's use of the epitaph-as-mirror motif in *Rehearsal transpros'd* suggests strong connections between his concerns for the credibility of epitaphs and his commitment to the cause of religious toleration. Marvell likens Parker's tribute to Bramhall to the misshapen reflection of distorting mirrors, arguing that Parker 'hath, like those frightfull Looking-glasses, made for sport, represented [Bramhall] in such bloated lineaments, as I am confident, if he could see his face in it, he would break the Glass' (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003a: 56). But Marvell attacks the indecorum of Parker's 'improbable *Elogies*' in the same breath as he rails against Parker's intolerance of nonconformity, for he alleges that religious partisanship lies at the root of Parker's extravagant praise of Bramhall. Parker, Marvell quips, asks 'but ... two Conditions' of the deceased before he chooses to pay tribute to their virtues, that they 'have a mind to die, [and] to be of his Party' (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003a: 52). So the 'bloated lineaments' of Parker's tribute to Bramhall becomes, for Marvell, a metaphor for how religious partisanship can distort our perception of reality.

[16] For von Maltzahn, Marvell's commitment to religious toleration is almost certainly rooted in Socinianism, that body of antitrinitarian writings associated with the teachings of Faustus Socinus. Socinus empowered individuals to use reason as a guide to choosing their own path to salvation, and in so doing he also stressed the importance of religious toleration, in a world where knowledge of God was neither natural, nor innate. These principles, von Maltzahn argues, may well have been familiar to Marvell from an early age, given what can be established about Marvell's father's own Socinian interests from the evidence of the partial English translation of the Racovian Catechism contained in Marvell Senior's surviving sermon book (von Maltzahn 2007: 93-4). Von Maltzahn notes that Marvell makes a number of references to Socinianism in his later writings on toleration, including in *The Rehearsal transpros'd*, in which Marvell quips about the growth of Socinian sympathies among latitudinarian divines in the Church of England, whose preference for permissive conformity over over-scrupulous uniformity, as set out by Simon Patrick, in *A brief account of the new sect of latitude-men* (1662), showed an inclination for tolerance of religious differences that fell outside the fundamentals of faith.[9] 'Onely I cannot but say, That there is a very great neglect somewhere, wheresoever the Inspection of Books is lodged', Marvell quips, 'that [...] Socinian Books are tolerated and sell as openly as the Bible' (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003a: 128).

[17] It was not with Socinianism that Patrick and other latitudinarians identified, however, but with another branch of rational theology that emerged in England in the mid-seventeenth century and which was associated with the circle of university men surrounding Benjamin Whichcote at Emmanuel College – the 'Cambridge Platonists'. [10] Like Socinians, with whom they were frequently identified, the Cambridge Platonists also

emphasised a fundamental role for human reason in our knowledge and contemplation of the divine, and they argued that because reason was not infallible, there should be latitude for religious toleration within a broad-based national church. In *An elegant and learned discourse of the Light of Nature* (1652), another fellow of Emmanuel College, and Whichcote's former pupil, Nathanael Culverwel, characterises reason as 'the Candle of the Lord' – a divine albeit 'diminutive' light that helps illuminate, however dimly, our knowledge in this life of the existence of God in the next (Culverwel 1652: sigs. B1^r, R1^v). Plato compared human understanding to a shadow of reality projected by candlelight onto the wall of a cave (Plato 2008: 240-47 (514a-520a)). Mediating this Platonic metaphor through the Pauline image, in 1 Corinthians 13.12, of seeing God 'through a glass darkly', Culverwel, in *Spiritual opticks* (1651), writes of the world as being 'full of looking-glasses' – from 'the poorest and most abject being', to 'that vast and polished looking-glasse', the sky (Culverwel 1651: sig. C4^{r-v}). 'God hath communicated severall resemblances of himself to the creature', Culverwel writes, 'as the face sheds that image or species upon the glass whereby it selfe is represented'. As we see ourselves in a mirror, so we see a reflection of God in ourselves. But in all these glasses, he continues, 'we see but darkly', in part because of the dimness of the mirror, in part the defects of our rational eye (1651: sigs. C4^r, B2^r).

[18] Culverwel's part-Pauline, part-Platonic image of the world as a murky mirror that at best casts only a shadowy reflection of the divine, is as concerned to emphasise reason's fallibility as its foresight, and it is from recognition of these limitations in human reason that Culverwel's argument for the desirability of religious toleration develops. Although acknowledging, in his *Elegant and learned discourse*, that it is 'but fitting and equal' to show a 'reverent esteeme' for religious beliefs that have the stamp of age or authority to recommend them, Culverwel argues that the mere authority of age is insufficient a guide without proof of intellectual prowess, and that we should never feel bound to believe the opinions of others in cases where their opinions differ from our own (1652: sig. X4^r). 'For can you think that God will excuse any one from Error upon such an account as this, such a Doctor told me thus, such a piece of Antiquity enform'd me so, such a general Councel determin'd me to this', Culverwel asks; 'where was thine own Lamp all this while?'. At its best, he continues, a general church council is 'a comparing and collecting of many Lights, an uniting and concentricating of the judgements of many holy, learned, wise Christians with the Holy Ghost breathing amongst them'. But all such councils are 'subject to frailty and fallibility', and so while the authority of church leaders and councils should be respected, none should feel bound by their judgements 'unlesse his minde also concurre with theirs' (1652: sig. Y2^r). Emphasising the rights of individual reason to determine 'the vitals and inwards of Religion', Culverwel questions the ethics of heresy laws that condemn someone for saying 'that two and two makes four' whenever 'the Church shall determine against it': 'O dangerous point of Socinianisme!', Culverwel quips, 'O unpardonable Heresie of the first magnitude! [...] Away with them to the Inquisition presently, deliver them up to the Secular powers, bring fire and fagot immediately' (1652: sigs. Y2^r, Y3^r).

[19] To argue that religious persecution is unethical, however, is not, of course, to argue that all religious beliefs are of equal merit in Culverwel's eyes. If in the above passage Culverwel seems sympathetic to the Socinian emphasis on reason in religion, elsewhere his *Elegant and learned discourse* attacks the 'excessive vanity and arrogancy in *Socinus*, to limit and measure all Reason by his own' (1652: sig. Z4^v), and he rails against 'the unruly head of *Socinus* and his followers [who] by their meer pretences to *Reason*, have made shipwrack of *Faith*' (1652: sig. B1^v). Although Culverwel appears to preach tolerance of Socinianism, he nevertheless censures Socinus and his followers for their overly-rationalist

interpretation of the scriptures. Socinians, he argues, reject the doctrine of the trinity on the basis that this concept is neither mentioned in the Bible nor consistent with their own mode of reasoning. But Culverwel emphasises the need to balance reason with faith in our approach to religion, to recognise that God has chosen to reveal himself in this world through mysteries and miracles that are not always comprehensible to our rational eye. 'As the Unity of a Godhead is demonstrable and clear to the eye of Reason', he writes, 'so the Trinity of persons, that is, three glorious relations in one God is as certain to an eye of Faith' (1652: sig. Z4^r). The Socinians err in ignoring the light of faith, Culverwel argues, but at the other extreme is the new sectarianism of the late 1640s – 'from the *blundering Antinomian*, to the *vagabond Seeker*, or the *wild Seraphick*' – all which serve, for Culverwel, 'for so many fatal examples of the miserable weaknes of mens understanding' (1652: sig. S1^v). Such sects are as arrogant as Socinians in their conviction of the rightness of their religious beliefs, Culverwel writes, but he argues that reason in these cases gives way to blind faith, and if '*The Candle of the Lord ... be amongst them*, yet 'tis not so powerful as to scatter and conquer their thick and palpable darkness' (1652: sig. S1^v).

[20] Culverwel did not live to see the rise of Quakerism under George Fox and his disciples in the early 1650s, but his criticism of sects who exchange the light of reason for the 'darkness' of religious error anticipates the language of anti-Quaker literature circulating in the years immediately after Culverwel's premature death, at the age of just 32, in early 1651 (Ingle 2004; Hutton 2004). Quakers, who put faith in the primacy of inner revelation – the indwelling Christ – as a spiritual guide to their interpretation of scripture, turned the Pauline image of the prospective glass on its head, arguing that this passage, far from emphasizing limitations in our knowledge of God in this world, in fact illustrates the clear-sightedness of the Quaker understanding of the divine. Following her own spiritual awakening, the Quaker Mary Forster writes, 'those things which before were hard and dark to me, are now become plain and easie, and now I see [...] in the Light of the Lord I see light, not as in a glass darkly, but now I see face to face' (Forster 1669: sig. B1^r). Responding to the new Quaker threat of the 1650s, Presbyterian and Church of England ministers returned to 1 Corinthians 13, reinforcing Culverwel's earlier reading of this passage against sectarian claims that seeing God 'face to face' was achievable in this life through the inner light of revelation. 'Tis alledged, That *Scripture* and *ordinances* are useful only in our *minority*: whilst we are *babes* in Christ', writes Richard Sherlock, who as chaplain in the 1650s to Charles Stanley, eighth earl of Derby, was directly engaged in debates with Fox and other Quakers active in Lancashire at this time. And that 'if we will see *clearly*, we must throw away the *glasse* of the *word*, and *ordinances*, and have our inspection into the things of God more *immediately*, and *nearly*, even by *immediate Revelation*'. 'But this mistakes the passage' in 1 Corinthians 13, Sherlock asserts, 'which is not about degrees of perfection in this life but comparing the different conditions of the state of grace (in this life) and glory in the next'. Only in death, Sherlock writes, will we see God face to face. 'In the mean time', he continues, 'we must make use of those *prospectives* God hath graciously lent us' – for the world, as Culverwel reminds us in *Spiritual opticks* (1651), is 'full of looking-glasses'. 'If we throw away this *glasse*', Sherlock writes, 'we must expect either to see nothing at all, or nothing, but what are the *dreams* and fond *imagination*s of mens hearts' (Sherlock 1655: sigs. X3^v-4^r).^[11]

[21] In his poems from the early 1650s, Marvell conveys a similar mistrust of sectarian claims to divine revelation, his treatment of the mowers in *Upon Appleton House* (c. 1651), for example, echoing the anti-sectarianism of Culverwel and his contemporaries. Marvell's concern over the rise of Levellers and Diggers in commonwealth England is clear enough in *Upon Appleton House* (Smith 2013: 210-41), a poem written at Nun Appleton, near York,

around August 1651, and which, as Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker note, uses the metaphor of mowing to reflect anxieties over Leveller insurgency elsewhere in Yorkshire that summer (Hirst and Zwicker 1993: 252-3). These are anxieties embodied in Marvell's 'tawny mowers' (l. 388), whose work in cutting the grass to make hay leaves behind a field of stubble – 'a levelled space' (l. 443), Marvell writes, and 'naked equal flat, / Which Levellers take pattern at' (ll. 449-50). For Cristina Malcolmson, mowing in the poem represents 'the excessive violence that would occur' if Levellers and Diggers were allowed to put their 'theologically and ideologically unsophisticated [...] ideas into effect' (Malcolmson 1994: 261-2; Wilding 1987: 155). Malcolmson argues that Marvell's figure of 'bloody Thestylis' (l. 401), who like her namesake in Virgil's *Eclogues* prepares food for the mowers in *Upon Appleton House*, recalls the religious controversialist Katherine Chidley, herself a Leveller from the late 1640s onwards (Malcolmson 1994: 262-3). Her published ripostes to the Presbyterian polemicist Thomas Edwards, author of the 'seventeenth-century best seller', *Gangraena* (1646) (Baker 2004: ¶11), had likened the struggle of separatists in Presbyterian England to the deliverance of 'the children of Israel out of the Land of Egypt when Pharaoh vexed them' (Chidley 1641: sig. *3^v).^[12] The comparison makes sense of Thestylis' outcry in the poem: 'He called us Israelites; / But now, to make his saying true, / Rails rain for quails, for manna, dew' (ll. 406-8). The 'he' in these lines refers most obviously to the poet and his previous comparison between mowers and Israelites, and Jonathan Crewe sees this meta-poetic moment – in which a character in the poem is allowed to answer back to, and wrest control of, the poet's imagery – as a metaphor for England's own struggle to control radical sectarian voices 'on the boundless meadows outside' Fairfax's 'fortified garden' (Crewe 1994: 284).

[22] Malcolmson is among critics who also read the anti-sectarianism of *Upon Appleton House* into Marvell's treatment of mowing in 'The Mower against Gardens' (Smith, ed. 2013: 131-4), a poem traditionally assumed to have been written around the same time as *Upon Appleton House*, during the period of Marvell's employment at Nun Appleton between 1650-52, as tutor to Mary, daughter of Thomas, Lord Fairfax, the retired army commander. In this poem, Marvell's mower not only speaks against the unnaturalness of 'enforced' (l. 31) horticultural practises like grafting and budding but against the principle of an 'enclosed' (l. 5) garden *per se*. Its 'square' (l. 5) of stagnant sterility the mower contrasts with the 'wild and fragrant innocence' (l. 34) of 'the sweet fields' (l. 32) beyond – home as well to mowers as to 'the gods themselves' (l. 40). The early 1650s saw growing interest in the production of gardening and husbandry manuals which equated gardening with land enclosure, and which as Katherine Bootle Attie notes, were printed as part of a national drive to increase crop yields after the ravages of civil war and recent poor harvests in the late 1640s (Attie 2011). But such 'pro-enclosure' manuals also reacted to protests in the late 1640s against the enclosure of agricultural and horticultural land by writers like the Digger Gerard Winstanley, Attie argues, whose *New Law* (1649) condemns the enclosure of gardens as a cause and consequence of our loss of innocence at the time of the Fall. Only by cultivating common land can we return to the Garden of Eden, Winstanley writes, and Malcolmson reads evidence of Winstanley's radical stance into 'The Mower against Gardens', arguing with Bruce King that Marvell at once echoes and undermines Leveller and Digger protests against enclosure in this poem (Malcolmson 1994: 255-61; King 1970).

[23] Paul Hammond seeks to re-date 'The Mower against Gardens' to c.1668, developing Allan Pritchard's argument for reassigning a Restoration date to Marvell's 'The Garden' on the basis that this poem contains images borrowed from poetry collections by Katherine Philips and Abraham Cowley first published in 1667 and 1668 (Hammond 2006; Pritchard 1983). Hammond finds evidence of similar borrowing, from Cowley in particular, in 'The

Mower against Gardens', and his argument for re-dating the poem to the late 1660s has enjoyed widespread critical consensus. But as Hirst and Zwicker argue, there is no reason to assume a Restoration date for either 'The Garden' or 'The Mower against Gardens' on the basis of parallels with Philips' and Cowley's printed poems alone (Hirst and Zwicker 2012: 164-77). Marvell, they argue, may have encountered the work of both poets in manuscript in the early 1650s, since 'the absence of evidence for early manuscript circulation is not the same as evidence of the absence of such circulation' (2012: 168). Indeed, they write, the direction of borrowing may have run the other way, with Philips and Cowley making use in their poems of images circulating in manuscript copies of Marvell's 'The Garden' and mower poems. Although no such manuscript copy has yet been discovered, recent evidence pointing to the possible circulation of *Upon Appleton House* in manuscript in the 1650s is particularly suggestive in this regard (Hirst and Zwicker 2012: 172, n. 27). Reassigning 'The Mower against Gardens' to the Restoration ignores the rich seam of horticultural imagery available to Marvell within gardening manuals printed in the early 1650s. It also removes a key rationale for this poem's composition, alongside *Upon Appleton House* and in dialogue with gardening manuals, as an anti-sectarian response to Leveller and Digger protests against enclosure, and the enclosure of gardens.

[24] The anti-Leveller context of both 'Mower against Gardens' and *Upon Appleton House*, and their shared use of the mower as a mouthpiece for anti-enclosure writing current in the later 1640s, combines to make 1650-52 a more likely date for the composition of 'Mower against Gardens' than the late 1660s. By then, the Levellers and Diggers had long ceased posing a serious threat to social order, and so the poem's attack on Winstanley and others would have made little sense. But however inconsistent this poem's particular attack on Levellers and Diggers would seem if reassigned to the later 1660s, Marvell's mistrust of religious extremes is certainly also a feature of his post-Restoration writings. When Herbert Croft, bishop of Hereford, argued in *The Naked Truth* (1675) for a policy of compromise between Anglicans and the more moderate nonconformists, Marvell defended Croft against the attacks of Francis Turner, whose *Animadversions* (1676) had insisted that all dissenters be made to conform to the established rites. The result was *Mr. Smirke*, and its appended *Short Historical Essay Concerning General Councils* (1676), and yet in both Marvell balances his support for nonconformists with passages revealing his own preference for moderation in religion (Spurr 2011: 170-1). 'Truth for the most part lyes in the middle', Marvell writes in *A Short Historical Essay*, although 'men ordinarily seek it in the extremities' (Dzelzainis and Patterson 2003b: 137). But the established clergy, Marvell argues, 'will never get the better of the Fanaticks' by forcing them to church (2003b: 174). 'Men are all infirm and indisposed in their spiritual condition', he notes in *Mr. Smirke*: 'Is it not reason', therefore, 'that men should address themselves to such Minister as they think best for their souls health?' (2003b: 105). No creed can compel where conscience does not permit it, because each is 'his own both Minister and People, Bishop and Diocess, his own Council', he argues in *Short Historical Essay*, and 'his own Conscience excusing or condemning him, accordingly he escapes or incurs his own internal Anathema' (2003b: 145). Marvell follows Culverwel in disparaging the authority of creeds and councils, but, like Culverwel, he also counsels prudence in matters of faith, and emphasizes the role of reason as a steer to the fanaticism of inner revelation. In *Mr. Smirke* Marvell mocks Francis Turner's suggestion that the clergy should force 'beggarly Fanaticks' to open their eyes to the 'truth' of religion, but clearly Marvell felt that some dissenters were more clear-sighted in their beliefs than others (2003b: 102-3). Where Marvell departs from Turner, however, is in his conviction that clear-sightedness comes through persuasion, not persecution, through liberty of conscience, not compulsion.

[25] Marvell shares Culverwel's emphasis on the dimness of our perception of God in this world, and it is this acknowledgement of our spiritual infirmity that causes both writers to condemn the arrogance of sects that presume to know the 'truth' of religion, and of churches – the Roman Catholic and Restoration Anglican churches in particular – that seek through creed, council, or act of parliament to impose their beliefs and practices upon others. But Marvell does not confine his sense of our 'infirm ... spiritual condition' to his post-Restoration prose writing alone. Throughout his career, he returns to the motif of epitaphs as untrustworthy mirrors, and these are images rooted in the same Pauline language of seeing through a glass darkly that informs writing by Culverwel and his contemporaries in the early 1650s, in which mirrors become metaphors expressing limitations in our spiritual understanding. The edition of Culverwel's *Spiritual opticks* that was published posthumously by William Dillingham in 1651 ends with an epigram explaining how, in death, Culverwel has 'gone to see' God face to face (Culverwel 1651: sig. E2^v). The pious life can be a fit reflection of the face of God in this world, Culverwel writes, for 'look but into your selves, and you will find immortall souls shewing forth that image according to which they were made' (sig. C4^r). But only in death, he continues, can we see beyond '*Visio reflexa*' – 'the severall glasses' of this world (sig. C4^v) – to 'the *visio recta*, a sight of God face to face, to know as we are known' (sig. E2^v). In reflecting the life of the deceased to the living, Marvell's epitaphs also underline the limits of our perception, in this life, of the life to come. His 'brief reflections' are self-consciously inadequate mirrors, unable to find a fit language with which to express moral worth, and always struggling to see beyond the marble surface of the funerary monument to the 'dreadful darkness' within.

[26] Marvell was Culverwel's exact contemporary at Cambridge, both matriculating in 1633, and, like Culverwel, he must have come into contact with the ideas of Benjamin Whichcote and other Cambridge Platonists as a student in the 1630s. Nigel Smith writes that Whichcote, a fellow of Emmanuel from 1633, was associated with Trinity, Marvell's college, and that John Sherman, also of Whichcote's circle, was a fellow of Trinity, 'whose lectures Marvell may be supposed to have heard' (Smith 2010: 32). Donald M. Friedman has similarly speculated about the influence during Marvell's time at Trinity of Whichcote and other Cambridge Platonists (Friedman 2003: 277). It is in the motif of the epitaph as an untrustworthy mirror, however – a motif that Marvell's 'Mower's Song' shares with his four verse epitaphs from the period 1658-1672 – that I would suggest we look to see evidence of the Cambridge Platonists reflected in Marvell's poetry. The grass that Marvell's mowers cut down in *Upon Appleton House* becomes, in 'The Mower's Song', a 'glass' reflecting the life of the mower after death. In so doing, it reminds the leveling mowers, and Marvell's readers, that the world 'is full of looking glasses' – 'brief reflections' that frustrate our search for religious certainty, and which question the fanaticism of those who claim to see God face to face.

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NOTES

[1] This article has been written with grateful support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, grant reference AH/L008866/1. **[back to text]**

[2] For the significance of alabaster funeral monuments as a statement of social rank, see Llewellyn 2000: 237-8. Llewellyn argues for a hierarchy of stone materials in early modern England, noting that 'commentators habitually described materials as if they were types of people' (237). **[back to text]**

[3] I here adhere to McFarlane's (1986: xxxiii) broad definition of epitaphs, as defined, not by considerations of form or content, but as poems 'that can be (or can be presumed to be) inscribed on a tombstone. This means simply (i) that it concerns a death, and (ii) that it can vary considerably in length'. Scodel (1991: 1) writes that before the sixteenth century the brevity of epitaphs was in part necessitated by the expense of engraving on stone. The technological developments that drove down these costs in the early modern period was therefore responsible for encouraging the greater variety in length that McFarlane notes as a characteristic of the Renaissance epitaph.**[back to text]**

[4] For discussion of the Eton and Laverstoke monuments, see Smith, ed. 2013: 192, 195. For the tablet at St Martin-in-the-Fields, see Brogan 1979.**[back to text]**

[5] I am grateful to Professor Martin Dzelzainis for highlighting the significance of this little known epitaph, in his lecture 'Marvell's Legacies', at the University of Hull, 10 March 2016.**[back to text]**

[6] For discussion of the Reverend Andrew Marvell's religious interests, as witnessed in his surviving sermon book at the Hull History Centre (C DIAM/1), see Smith 2010: 20-25. For the toleration debate in mid-seventeenth-century England more generally, see Coffey 2000: 47-77.**[back to text]**

[7] For Culverwel's ideas in context, see Goldie 2004.**[back to text]**

[8] Patterson was unaware of Frances Jones' identity when writing *Marvell and the Civic Crown* in 1978.**[back to text]**

[9] Patrick's own 'latitude' did not extend to toleration of nonconformity, however; his *Friendly Debate between a Conformist and a Non-Conformist* (1669) was a decidedly unfriendly invective which anticipated Parker's own argument for the necessity of persecuting nonconformists in the interests of protestant unity against the popish threat. See Parkin 2004.**[back to text]**

[10] For the relationship between the Cambridge Platonists and Latitudinarians, see Spellman 1993: 25-9, and van den Berg 1988.**[back to text]**

[11] See also similar comments rejecting Quaker readings of 1 Corinthians 13.12, in Weld 1653: 15, and Sheffield 1654: 87.**[back to text]**

[12] For discussion of *Gangraena*, see Loewenstein 2008 and Hughes 2004.**[back to text]**

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