

Latin Drama and Leveller Ideas: Pedagogy and Power in the Writings of Richard Overton

I

The Presbyterian cleric Thomas Edwards has been awarded the title of ‘first discoverer of the Levellers’. The ‘prime targets’ of the third part of Edwards’s voluminous heresiography *Gangraena* (three parts, 1646) were ‘the men who were later to be recognized as the leaders of the Leveller party’ – John Lilburne, William Walwyn and Richard Overton – and his summary of their constitutional radicalism anticipates fairly accurately the contents of the first *Agreement of the People* (3 November 1647).¹ By attacking the political theories of the future Leveller leaders within the genre of the heresiography, Edwards explicitly linked political radicalism with religious heterodoxy. Lilburne, Walwyn and Overton had a history of religious activism and involvement in separatist congregations: the three men appear in the first and second parts of *Gangraena* as prominent heresiarchs as well as in the third part as political radicals or ‘civil heretics’. Most scholars have concurred with Edwards’s connection between radical religious belief and Leveller ideas, even if they cannot agree over the nature and importance of that connection.² For Edwards, the seditious political opinions of men such as Lilburne, Walwyn and Overton confirmed the anarchic consequences of allowing the laity to engage openly in religious speculation. The multitude of ‘Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices’ infecting England in the 1640s was a consequence of allowing ‘illiterate Mechanick persons’ to debate theology and voice opinions ‘both unsound and weak, fit to take women and weak people, but not to satisfie any scholar’.³

There might appear to be a curious contradiction in Edwards’s characterization of the radicals as ‘illiterate’. He frequently quotes from heretical books in the margins of *Gangraena* and explicitly connects the usurpation of the university-trained clergy by ‘illiterate Mechanick persons’ with Parliament’s failure to enforce both its 1645 Act against lay preaching and its Licensing Act of 1643.⁴ However the apparent contradiction in Edwards’s

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simultaneous accusation of illiteracy and citation of radical texts is the effect of an anachronistic understanding of terms. In the early seventeenth century 'literate' and 'illiterate' largely retained the medieval sense of their Latin roots, *litteratus* and *illitteratus*. These terms denoted 'two "education-worlds": "literate", the education-world of Latin and the cleric . . . "illiterate", the education-world of the vernacular and the lay person'.⁵ It is literacy in Latin, not in the vernacular, that Edwards erects as a boundary between clergy and laity. Christopher Hill, the most influential historian of seventeenth-century English radicalism, has repeated these hostile contemporary claims about the lowly educational background of the radicals but from a positive and sympathetic Marxist perspective: 'the eloquence, the power of the simple artisans who took part in these disputes is staggering'.⁶ Edwards uses the charge of ignorance to disqualify radical voices from being heard, whereas Hill celebrates the conditions in which ordinary people were free to engage openly in religious and political speculation. Like Edwards, however, Hill sees radical ideas and writings as an authentic expression of popular beliefs that evolved outside the institutional educational and cultural structures of early modern England:

[P]ersons (including women) who had no university education, often no grammar school education even, found no obstacles to publication . . . [s]o in the interregnum discussions there was no longer a shared background of classical scholarship; the rules of logic which structured academic controversy were ignored. University scholars treated the newcomers with contempt, and this in turn fuelled opposition to the universities as such. The whole classical curriculum and the conventions of academic argument were called in question.⁷

As this extract indicates, Hill does not identify radical ideas exclusively with the oral culture of the illiterate; such a position would be untenable given his total reliance on printed sources for evidence of those ideas. Rather he follows Edwards in ascribing authorship of radical books to those with little or no formal humanist education – to those without Latin literacy. It is the radicals' lack of a Latin education, Hill argues, that explains their rumbustious and irreverent prose style: their writings brought the 'speech of ordinary people' into the previously elite sphere of printed opinion and debate.⁸

Hill's representation of a 'popular heretical culture' that burst into the open with the collapse of traditional forms of authority and censorship in the 1640s depends upon a bi-polar model of cultural conflict which has become largely outmoded in early modern studies. The focus of scholarship has moved over the last decade towards the interaction between elite and popular cultures rather than their opposition or polarization.⁹ This interaction is in fact exemplified by the Leveller leadership, who were

on the lower fringes of the social and educational elite, with enough in common with the poorer classes and small businessmen to act as their spokesmen, but at the same time with the social and educational confidence which would make them

potential leaders. These were men who had both worn leather or woollen aprons and sat at school desks. Perhaps half of them could read Latin and half could not, half were the sons of gentlemen and half were not. In this respect they straddled the major social and educational divides of the nation.¹⁰

So while the radical writers of the 1640s have been represented as *illitterati* both by their contemporary enemies and their historiographical friends, some amongst the Leveller leadership had experience of and access to elite cultural traditions. In his recent argument for the neglected influence of classical republicanism on Leveller ideas, Samuel Glover foregrounds the availability of translations on the London book market. At the same time he observes that many of the Leveller theorists and spokesmen were ‘comparatively highly educated men in an era when being well-educated was synonymous with having an understanding of classical rhetoric and republican history’.¹¹

Richard Overton’s pre-Leveller text *Mans Mortalitie* (1643/4) exemplifies this point.¹² Overton argues in *Mans Mortalitie* for the indivisibility of flesh and spirit and rejects the orthodox Christian belief in the existence of a soul that survives the death of the body. He seeks to prove, as his title-page succinctly puts, ‘both Theologically and Philosophically, that whole Man (as a *rationall Creature*) is a Compound wholly mortall, contrary to that common distinction of *Soule* and *Body*’.¹³ In the course of his argument Overton makes more than two dozen references to classical sources and supplies a sophisticated account of how Platonic dualism has been grafted on to Judaeo-Christian doctrine to produce the pernicious fiction of the immortal soul, which he argues has no basis in either Scripture or natural reason. It was long thought that Overton was a ‘self-educated printer’ with a sectarian past stretching back to the Jacobean period: his confession of faith for admission to a Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam was presumed to have been submitted around 1615 because it was discovered with other documents of that date.¹⁴ While our knowledge of Overton’s origins remains sketchy, it now seems clear that he was in fact the Richard Overton who matriculated at Queen’s College, Cambridge in 1631 (as a sizar, indicating he was not from a wealthy background). He was probably about fifteen or sixteen at the time. Marie Gimelfarb-Brack has persuasively argued that his Baptist confession of faith – which is in Latin – actually dates from 1639–43; the lack of anti-Presbyterian sentiment or heterodox religious belief in Overton’s writings before *Mans Mortalitie* points to the later date of 1643.¹⁵ So despite his frequent appearances in *Gangraena* and other heresiographical writing of the 1640s, Overton does not fit the polemical stereotype of the heretic as *illitteratus*. As I have argued elsewhere, by accepting and repeating hostile contemporary claims about the intellectual resources of radical writers in this period, we run the risk of failing to appreciate both the full complexity of their ideas and the rhetorical sophistication of their writings.¹⁶

Reading the rhetorical strategies of *Mans Mortalitie* through Overton’s intellectual biography will allow us to draw some conclusions about the

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relationship between Levellerism and humanist pedagogy which will complement and complicate Glover's claims about the influence of humanism on Leveller thought. Ann Hughes has recently argued that it is less fruitful to read Leveller literature for 'coherent abstract policies' on issues such as the parliamentary franchise than to reconstruct the 'identity and agency offered to its readers'. Leveller texts can thus be treated as 'a means by which a new political movement was imagined or called into being, rather than as a straightforward reflection or presentation of pre-existing demands or interests'.¹⁷ The pre-Leveller text *Mans Mortalitie* develops an intellectual framework in which Leveller ideology itself could be 'imagined or called into being': Overton's rejection of the humanist educational system in which he had himself been trained combines with his heretical conception of the body to offer 'identity and agency' to readers excluded from the structures of knowledge and power in seventeenth-century England.

II

Overton's career as an oppositional political writer and advocate of deregulated religion spans the 1640s. In the early years of the decade he issued a string of satirical pamphlets against Laud and the bishops composed in dramatic or semi-dramatic form. In the mid-1640s he resurrected the indecorous satirical style of the Elizabethan Marprelate tracts, under the pseudonym of 'Martin Marpriest', to attack the intolerance of the Presbyterian clergy. In the later 1640s he was involved in the composition of most the Leveller manifestos and in issuing defiant protests against his persecution and that of other Leveller leaders by Parliament and later Cromwell. While a less directly polemical and more theologically speculative text than Overton's other writings, *Mans Mortalitie* is, as we shall see, a deeply political work in an age when religious speculation was always politically significant.¹⁸ The radical implications of Overton's abolition of the soul are measured by the reaction of authority and orthodoxy: *Mans Mortalitie* provoked several lengthy printed rebuttals and was named by heresiographers, both Presbyterian and Anglican, as an extreme example of the irreligion rife in England in the absence of a national church discipline. It was cited, alongside Milton's writings on divorce, when in August 1644 Parliament made moves to suppress recent heretical books under the Licensing Act of the previous year.¹⁹ Indeed *Mans Mortalitie* has been most often discussed in terms of its possible influence on the development of Milton's monism and mortalism as imaginatively represented in *Paradise Lost* and bluntly stated in the *de doctrina Christiana*. It has even been suggested that Milton might have had a hand in the revised version of Overton's text published under the title *Man Wholly Mortal* in 1655.²⁰ While there is no firm evidence to support such a claim, it seems reasonable to suppose that Milton would have looked at *Mans Mortalitie* when

it first appeared, given both his angry incredulity at the similarly hostile reception of his divorce tracts and the incipient monism evident in those tracts.²¹ However the more immediate relationship between the philosophical and theological principles espoused by Overton in *Mans Mortalitie* and the formation of Leveller ideology in the mid-1640s, in which Overton played a leading role, has received comparatively little attention.²²

The dramatic form of many of Overton's polemical pamphlets combined with their frequent references to the theatre and echoes of specific plays (in particular Shakespeare) led Margot Heinemann in her essay on 'Popular Drama and Leveller Style' to argue that Overton had been an actor or playwright, or both, in London in the 1630s.²³ One piece of evidence in her persuasive case for Overton's theatrical career is his presence in the list of actors for the lost Latin play *Versipellis*, first staged at Queen's College, Cambridge in 1631–2 and written by Thomas Pestell, chaplain to the Earl of Essex. Despite the sharp decline in the production of university drama in the 1630s, Queen's was 'especially active' at this time and a comedy house was constructed at the college in the opening years of the decade.²⁴ Developing Heinemann's speculation about Overton's involvement in dramatic circles in Caroline Cambridge, we might see a hint of his future religious politics in his choice of college production. While Overton appears in the cast list for *Versipellis* by Pestell, who moved in puritan gentry circles and was fined by Laud's High Commission in 1633, he is missing from the cast of another play performed at Queen's that academic year, *The Rival Friends*, composed by Peter Hausted for a visit by Charles and Henrietta Maria. While most of the players in *Versipellis* also appeared in *The Rival Friends*, Overton seems to have chosen not to act in a play that was written by a prominent Laudian and contains a good deal of anti-puritan and anti-sectarian satire. Hausted was to be attacked by an angry mob at the university church in 1634 for preaching too vigorously against nonconformity; he is probably best known for his alleged collaboration with the King in writing *Ad populum: Or, a Lecture to the People* (1644), a vituperative anti-Parliamentarian poem.²⁵

Further evidence of Overton's involvement in Cambridge drama is to be found in *Mans Mortalitie*, where there is a reference (missed by Heinemann) to the Latin comedy *Pedantius*, first performed at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1581. Probably written by Edward Forset, a Fellow of Trinity, it was enduringly popular at Cambridge and was finally published in 1631, the year in which Overton matriculated. The character of *Pedantius* is a humanist tutor, described as *paedagogus*, whose mastery of rhetorical *copia* within the gendered boundaries of the classroom is comically revealed to be useless when faced with the concrete external realities of debt and failure with women (the character is a caricature of Gabriel Harvey, and consequently the play was a particular favourite of Harvey's *bête noire*, Thomas Nashe).²⁶ The other main comic character in the play is Dromodotus, a scholastic logician who is described as *philosophus* but who constantly inserts meaningless or

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absurd grammatical and logical tags into his speech. In its caricature of academic types and parody of the university curriculum, *Pedantius* is a fairly typical example of Renaissance academic drama. Yet as with many Elizabethan Latin plays, *Pedantius* seems to have been designed to educate its audience in humanist techniques as well entertain them with parody of those techniques. According to the Oxford dramatist William Gager, plays were staged in the universities not only to 'recreate our selves' but 'to practyse owre owne style either in prose or verse . . . to embowlden owre yuthe; to trye their voyces, and confirme their memoryes'.²⁷ The published text of *Pedantius* draws attention to this fusion of parody and pedagogy by prefacing the play with a list of rhetorical tropes that the reader is presumably supposed to look out for in the dialogue.

Overton's reference to *Pedantius* comes after one of the most remarkable passages in *Mans Mortalitie*. While Overton believed in an ultimate resurrection at which all human beings would be raised bodily to face divine judgement, one of the consequences of his denial of the immortal soul is the abolition of heaven and hell as geographical locations where the soul is sent for punishment or reward after the death of the body: 'the present going of the Soule into *Heaven* or *Hell* is a meer *Fiction* . . . the *Resurrection* is the beginning of our *immortality*, and then Actuell *Condemnation* and *Salvation*, and not before' (p. 3).²⁸ The provocatively festive vision of destruction and liberation projected in the prefatory poem, probably written by Overton himself, leaves us in no doubt as to why *Mans Mortalitie* elicited such outrage from orthodox Calvinists such as Thomas Edwards:

*The Hell-hatch'd Doctrine of th' Immortall Soule
Discovered, makes the hungry Furies houle,
And teare their snakey haire with grief appal'd,
To see their Errour-leading Doctrine quail'd,
Hell undermin'd, and Purgatory blowne
Up in the aire, and all the spirits flowne,
Pluto undone, thus forced for to yeeld
The frightned Soules from the Elizian Field.
And squallid Charron now may leave his Trade,
To see all Soules made subject to the spade,
And Cerberus his dismall fate deplore,
To thinke that he shall scare the Soules no more.*²⁹

This poem is in fact derived from a speech in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (first published, 1604), in which Faustus defiantly responds to Mephistophilis's initial warning that his renunciation of Christ and the Scriptures has put his soul in danger of damnation.³⁰ If Overton is indeed the author, the poem provides more evidence of his familiarity with the commercial theatre. The 'hungry Furies' who 'houle' at Overton's discovery of their 'Errour-leading Doctrine' are presumably those puritan ministers who obtain their authority and power from terrifying the people with hellfire sermons on the torments

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of damned souls. In his satirical pamphlets of the mid-1640s, Overton repeatedly attacks the Presbyterian clergy for their false claims to superior spiritual knowledge and their self-aggrandizing manipulation of the fears of the ordinary people; in *The Araignment of Mr. Persecution* (1645), he mocks his 'Presbyterian Adversaries' for being 'so invective against [*Mans Mortalitie*] in their pulpits' in a desperate effort to 'maintaine their repute with the people' (p. 20).³¹ Yet while the poem emphasises Overton's destruction of hell, it also celebrates, if less triumphantly, his abolition of heaven (*the Elizian Field*'). Overton insists that both heaven and hell will not come into being until the dissolution of creation at the general resurrection: 'they are but in *posse*, not in *esse* till the Resurrection' (p. 36). References to the existence of heaven and hell in Scripture should thus be interpreted figuratively as descriptions of spiritual states or conditions in the created world, as 'expressions after the manner of men, to shew the gradation of condition betwixt the wicked and the righteous, the one the extreamest debasement, the other the extreamest exaltation, which could not be better figurated to sence, then by Heaven and Earth' (p. 40).

One of the questions that then arises from this denial of the literal existence of heaven is the location of the resurrected Christ. Overton's monistic understanding of the human body leads him to maintain that Christ's 'whole humanity (soul and body as 'tis called) suffered death' and then 'totall Resurrection'; consequently he must now inhabit a material location: 'Reason tels us that [Christ] must be within the compasse of the Creation, for there is no *beyond*, without it *place* or *being* is impossible . . . every place must be materiall, for *non datur vacuum*, and every matter must imply creation, else it could not be: therefore he is within the Creation' (pp. 41, 47, 48). Overton concludes that Christ must have ascended to the sun, which he describes in a long and eloquent passage as 'the Epitome of God's power, conveyour of life, growth, strength, and being to every Creature' (p. 49). Overton's conception of the sun as the material headquarters of Christ derives from his definition of God as 'the true light which lighteneth the world, and every one that commeth therein, and this glory chiefly in the Sun, the Moderatour and upholder of the whole Creation. Therefore, there must Christ be, or else he sitteth not at the *right hand of God* in all things' (p. 53). The sun is 'now the Author of motion, generation, and subsistence' on earth; but it is merely a reflection of the light which is God's '*face*, or true light, which by mortality cannot be seen' and will not be revealed until the apocalypse, when it will dissolve creation in a 'consuming fire' (pp. 51, 53). Christ thus resides in the sun awaiting the '*restitution of all things, Act. 3. 21*' (p. 48). The punning identification of the risen Son of God with the rising sun is of course a common one in early modern English literature. It is rather more startling to claim that the Son is actually in the sun. Having earlier ridiculed those who waste their time speculating about whether hell is located in the earth, the sea or the sky ('some have feigned it in *Mount Aetna*'), Overton concludes his

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meditation on Christ's ascension to the sun by comparing those theologians who pointlessly seek to locate the precise astronomical position of heaven to Dromodotus, the foolish and arrogant academic in *Pedantius* who tries to order all experience into the categories of syllogistic logic: 'I know no better ground they have for it, then such as *Dromodotus* the Philosopher in *Pedantius* had to prove there was Divels: *Sunt Antipodes: Ergo Dæmones. Sunt Cœli: Ergo Cœlum Empyreum*' (pp. 39, 54). Overton adds his own parody but the quotation is accurate, indicating either that he possessed the 1631 edition of *Pedantius* or that he had acted in a performance of the play – perhaps in the role of Dromodotus – while at Cambridge.³²

III

To expand on this unexpected allusion to *Pedantius* with which Overton concludes his discussion of Christ's habitation of the sun, we first need to consider both the theological principles that had attracted him to sectarian religion earlier in 1643 and the philosophical and political implications of his monistic view of the body. According to General Baptist doctrine, Christ's sacrifice has made redemption available to all human beings and damnation is the result of individual choice and action in this life. This doctrine of general redemption placed 'heavy emphasis upon individual responsibility in the matter of salvation, [and] appealed to those who were appalled by the extreme antinomian consequences of the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination'.³³ Overton is quite clear on this: 'None can be condemned into Hell, but such as are actually guilty of refusing of *Christ* because immortality or the *Resurrection* cannot be by Propagation or succession, as mortality from Adam to his Issue, and so the Child, though temporally, yet shall it not eternally be punished for his Father's sinne, but his Condemnation shall be of himself (p. 5)'. David Wootton has argued that the Levellers' egalitarian, democratic principles did not derive from the theological doctrine of free grace, because this doctrine did not necessarily involve a belief in either universal salvation or free will; but clearly Overton takes the position in *Mans Mortalitie* that all are potentially saved and that every individual has been granted the freedom to determine their own fate.³⁴

Overton's insistence on the spiritualization of flesh also provides the philosophical grounds for a radically activist and egalitarian politics. Stephen Fallon and John Rogers have recently shown how the attribution of spiritual energy to bodily matter could validate the natural integrity, agency and self-determining capacity of the individual. A monistic representation of the body could thus provide an ontological justification of the exercise of free will against the arbitrary determinism of both Calvinist theology and Hobbesian mechanist philosophy, which stripped human beings of agency and made them the helpless subjects of irresistible external forces. By extension to the

spheres of political and religious organization, monistic materialism, or 'vitalism', offered an alternative to traditional theories of hierarchy and absolutism as the natural, divinely-ordained way of things and could thus function as a philosophical analogue for ideas of popular sovereignty and liberty of conscience: 'Vitalism, in short, banishing the centralizing logics of Calvinism and mechanism alike, secured into the fabric of the physical world a general scheme of individual agency and decentralized organization that we can identify as protoliberalism'.³⁵ We cannot be sure, as Norman Burns points out, that Overton anticipated Milton's vitalist cosmology in *Paradise Lost* and 'extended his monistic view [of man] to the rest of the universe'; however Overton's insistence that '*place or being is impossible*' outside matter suggests that he does not conceive of a separate spiritual realm anywhere in the creation, and perhaps indicates an emergent notion of the corporeality of God.³⁶ Fallon makes no reference to Overton and Rogers only mentions *Mans Mortalitie* in passing in a footnote, referring to Overton as 'one of the century's earliest monistic radicals'. However their arguments about the radical political and religious ramifications of monistic materialism are exemplified by Overton's leading role in the development of Leveller ideology. 'For the vitalist radical', writes Rogers, 'the flesh is heir to its own source of power and agency'; and his point is illustrated by Overton's declaration of natural rights in *An Arrow Against All Tyrants and Tyranny* (1646): 'To every Individuall in nature is given an individuall property by nature, not to be invaded or usurped by any . . . [f]or by naturall birth all men are equally and alike borne to like propriety, liberty and freedom' (p. 3).³⁷

Overton's monistic philosophy and sectarian theology thus complement each other: the former redeems flesh from Calvinist notions of depravity and impotence, while the latter stresses the universal availability of salvation and the importance of individual agency. We can now place Overton's speculation about the divinity of sunlight in *Mans Mortalitie* in the wider context of his anti-Calvinist theology and heterodox ideas about the relationship between man, nature and the divine. Just as the sun shines over all of the world and all creatures can see (and feel) the power of God in the light of the sun, which rises daily to dispel darkness and sustain life, so all have been granted the opportunity to escape hell and receive salvation through the death and rising of the Son of God. Academic efforts to work out the exact location of Christ and heaven in the stars are laughably futile because Christ is in the sun and the light of the sun is everywhere and visible to everyone. The reference to *Pedantius* emphasises Overton's universalism – or rather potential universalism, given the capacity of the individual to bring about their own 'condemnation'. We can compare the comments of the horticultural reformer John Beale, who despite being an Anglican cleric held distinctly heretical ideas about the nature of the universe and the presence of spirit in creation. In a letter to Samuel Hartlib in 1660 in which he questions the premises of Cartesian mechanism, Beale asserts that 'to the humble & obedient children of

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God', divine truths are 'more cleare . . . than the light of the Sun can bee, & hath as little neede of demonstration'.³⁸ For Beale, sunlight provides a fitting natural analogy for the clarity and universality of divine truth, which needs no academic or scientific explication. For Overton, sunlight is more than an analogy for the divine – it is the reflected face of God.

The learned search for the location of the Son in a celestial '*Cælum Empryeum*' is just as futile for Overton as the obsessive Calvinist scrutinizing of the soul to locate evidence of salvation – of the presence of Christ within – given that every individual has been freely granted grace. The puritan imperative to anatomize the soul in its relation to the corrupt external world of matter and the body is rendered irrelevant both by Overton's monism and his General Baptist theology, and he literalizes the process of spiritual self-dissection to expose the bizarre logic of orthodox dualistic metaphysics:

Now seeing all this while we have had to do with this immortall Soul, we cannot find, or the *Soularies* tell us what it is, such likewise is its residence; for if we ask, where it is? They *flap us i'th mouth* with a *Ridle*, *tota in toto*, & *tota in qualibet parte*, the whole in the whole, and the whole in every part: that is, the whole immortall Soul in the whole body, and the whole Soul wholly in every part of the body . . . and so, were a man minced into *Atomes*, cut into innumerable bits, then would be so many innumerable whole Souls, else could it not be wholly in every part.

*Monstrum horrendum, ingens; cui quot sunt
Corpore crines,
Tot vigiles Animæ sup̄ter, mirabile dictu!*
And thus the *Ridle* is unfolded. (p. 72)

As with the allusion to Dromodotus, the foolish philosopher who can only perceive the world within the formal limits of the syllogism, Overton here uses the language of scholastic logic to ridicule academic speculation about the nature of the soul. Just as he parodies the academic play *Pedantius* to mock the theologians in their own institutional language of learning, on this occasion he comically re-writes Virgil's description of Fame in the *Aeneid* – hinting, perhaps, that the real objective of these 'Soularies' in their debates about man and the divine is not truth but reputation.³⁹

The claim that Overton is using the reference to *Pedantius* to equate academic pretension with the dangerous errors of Calvinist theology may seem strained, but in fact he frequently employs the register of the academic curriculum to attack the puritan clergy for their arrogance, intolerance and corrupt elitism. In the best of his satirical play-pamphlets, *The Araignment of Mr. Persecution*, he describes how the spirit of Persecution has passed through the bodies of characters such as Mr. Spanish Inquisition and Mr. High Commission into 'the godly shape of a Presbyter'

and then Scholer like, as if it had been for a goodly fat Benefice, in the twinkling of an eye jumpt out of *Scotland* into *England*, and turn'd a reverend *Synodian*, disguis'd with a Sylogisticall pair of Britiches (saving your presence) in *Bocardo*, and

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snatching a Rhetoricall Cassok he girt up his loynes with a Sophisticall Girdle, and ran into the wilderness of *Tropes* and *Figures*, and there they had lost them, had it not been for the *Spirits Teaching*, by whose direction they trac'd him through the various windings, subtile by-Pathes, secret tracts, and cunning Meanders the evening wolves, wild Boares and Beasts of the Forrest in the briery thickets of Rhetoricall Glosses, Sophistications and scholastick Interpretations had made . . . (p. 1–2)

The anti-Platonist Overton here puts the concept of metempsychosis to satirical use. 'Bocardo' was both the name of a prison in the old North Gate of Oxford and a term for a tricky stage (the third mood in the third figure) of a syllogism. Punning on 'bocasin', a form of lining cloth, Overton associates the Presbyterians' concealment of their true motives under the disguise of sophisticated logic and rhetoric with their false arguments for the persecution of formally uneducated lay preachers.⁴⁰ In the same pamphlet a minister is 'newly *Metamorphosed* by a figure which we Rhetoricians call METONOMIA BENEFICII from *Episcopallity* to *Presbytery*' (p. 16). The characters of Mr. Persecution, Sir John Presbyter and Mr. Assembly-of-Divines are always appealing to their education and learning as evidence of their superior spiritual knowledge and authority. Sir John Presbyter's defence of Mr. Persecution is conducted in the language of syllogistic logic and peppered with Latin tags, while it is on the grounds of both his educational attainments and clerical status that Mr. Persecution pleads for mercy from Lord Parliament: 'My Lord, I am a Clergie Man, and beseech your Honour for the benefits of my Clergie: I have been of all the Universities of Christendom, taken all their Degrees, proceeded through all Ecclesiastical Orders and Functions, and my Lord, at present am under the Holy Order of Presbyterie' (pp. 19–21, 40).

Overton is ridiculing the Presbyterians in terms of the formal learning which they, like the bishops before them, invoked to distinguish a clerical elite from the laity. As we have seen, orthodox Calvinist clerics such as Thomas Edwards demanded the persecution and imprisonment of lay preachers on the grounds of their inability to expound the Scripture in Latin and Greek. Formal education in logic, rhetoric and the classical languages became a polemical tool in the clerical propaganda campaign against the sects. In her survey of printed versions of public disputations between Presbyterian ministers and religious radicals in the 1640–1660 period, Ann Hughes has found that invariably 'the orthodox silence the radicals through their learning; the radicals are 'sorry disputants', lacking educated oral skills and ignorant or scornful of the rules of disputation'.⁴¹ In *The Dippers Dipt* (1645), for example, Daniel Featly denies his Anabaptist interlocutors the right to debate theology because 'they understand not the Scripture in the Originall languages, they cannot expound without Grammar, nor persuade without Rhetorik' (sig. B3v). Dismissing the Anabaptists as 'illiterate artificer[s]', he deploys a succession of syllogisms to expose their logic as absurd and sarcastically rejects their theological arguments as meaningless without

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the logical method taught in the universities: 'If you dispute by Reason, you must conclude syllogistically in mood and figure, which I take to be out of your element' (p. 4). Featley – who cites *Mans Mortalitie* as one of the most pernicious of the flood of recent heretical books – mocks such ridiculous attempts to turn 'Mechanicks of the lowest rank into Priests of the highest places' (p. 153).

The emphasis of the puritan clergy during the 1640s on Latin literacy as the qualification that excluded the laity from involvement in theological matters points towards the elitism of the humanist pedagogical system as it was structured into a set of social relations. Walter J. Ong writes in his classic essay on 'Latin language study as a Renaissance puberty rite':

[W]hen Latin passed out of vernacular usage, a sharp distinction was set up in society between those who knew it and those who did not. The conditions for a 'marginal environment' were present . . . in helping to maintain the closed male environment the psychological role of Latin should not be underestimated. It was the language of those on the 'inside', and thus learning Latin at even an infra-university level was the first step toward initiation into the closed world'.⁴²

Thomas Edwards and other orthodox puritans sought to maintain the 'closed male environment' of a clerical caste by erecting Latin education as a boundary; religious radicals such as Overton sought to break down the boundaries between clergy and laity and reconstitute what Overton describes as the 'arbitrary power' of church authority according to a decentralized vision of religious self-determination and self-organization. The university play *Pedantius* is a product of the exclusive world of Latin education that Ong describes, performed by and for those who have been initiated into that closed male environment. On a rhetorical level, Overton's display of his knowledge of Latin and of the Latin-speaking world of academia undermines the accusation of the puritan clergy that the radical must be, by definition, *illitteratus*. Moreover, Overton takes a Latin joke about the absurd application of syllogistic logic out its original academic environment and relocates it in a heretical vernacular pamphlet that rejects the exclusive right of a university-educated clergy to pass authoritative judgement on religious matters. The effect of this relocation is to collapse hierarchies: it is no longer an in-joke *amongst* the academic community; rather it becomes a satire *on* the pride and pretension of that community and its claims to absolute knowledge.

Overton's reference to Cambridge drama in *Mans Mortalitie* begs comparison with Milton's bilious recollection in *An Apology against a Pamphlet* (1642) of witnessing ministers and future ministers disport themselves in student productions:

[I]n the Colleges so many of the young divines, and those in next aptitude to Divinity have beene so oft upon the Stage writhing and unbuttoning their Clergie limmes to all the antick and dishonest gestures of Trinculo's, Buffons, and Bawds; prostituting the shame of that ministry which either they had, or were nigh hav-

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ing, to the eyes of Courtiers and Court-Ladies, with their Groomes and Madamoiselles. There while they acted, and overacted, among other younger scholars, I was a spectator; they thought themselves gallant men, and I thought them fools.⁴³

Milton, who was still at Christ's College when Overton came up to Queen's, combines his contempt for both the Anglican emphasis on ceremonial religion and the effeminate luxury of the Caroline court with an expression of puritan distaste for the immorality of theatrical display. The suggestion of grotesque sexual as well as dramatic performance in the image of the (cross-dressed?) student actors 'writhing and unbuttoning their Clergie limmes' associates Milton's attack on the closed male environment of Cambridge with the accusations of sodomy aimed at the monasteries by early English reformers such as John Bale.⁴⁴ While the passage emphasises Milton's university background, he separates himself as disgusted spectator from the degenerate actions of his fellow students. Milton maintains that these dramatic activities demean both the intellectual pursuits of the scholar and the religious office of the cleric, and he wants his readers to be convinced in this passage that he himself would never have set foot on such an unreformed stage. Overton, on the other hand, flaunts his specific knowledge of university drama and quotes a line from one of the more popular Cambridge plays. The ex-actor Overton is not driven by any anti-theatrical prejudice or concern for the solemnity of clerical status but, like Milton, he invokes his educational experience to satirize the institutional connection between the universities and the clergy. Yet while Milton is appalled by the lack of moral seriousness and intellectual application displayed by future ministers, Overton rejects the very notion of a separate clerical caste distinguished from the laity by the extent of their institutional education. Overton agrees, as we shall see, with his fellow future Leveller William Walwyn, who argued in 1644 that the clergy locate their spiritual authority in a training of 'seven yeares at least' in logic, rhetoric and languages to 'keep all in a mystery, that they only may be the Oracles to dispense what, and how they please'.⁴⁵

IV

Overton's use of *Pedantius* allows us to make wider claims about the relationship between humanism and Leveller political theory. Overton's General Baptist faith placed, as we have seen, immense importance on the role of the individual in their own salvation. Immortality becomes wholly conditional upon the choices made in this life – a soteriological position that, as we have seen, is in line with his monistic ascription of spiritual agency to flesh in the realm of natural philosophy. Consequently the role of education becomes central to salvation, for the individual makes the right and the rational choices through the accumulation of knowledge. As Erica Fudge has recently pointed out, Overton's abolition of the soul leads him to argue that the

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differences between humans and animals 'are not innate but created, are potential rather than actual . . . they have to be augmented by an external addition like education'.⁴⁶ For Overton, 'Humanity though glorified is but a Creature', just as angels are 'creatures as glorious as glorified humanity' (p. 48). He believes that redemption and immortality are potential rewards that God has given human beings the freedom to lose, but he also considers 'full' humanity to be a potential state that depends upon nurture rather than nature: 'all mans Faculties, yea those of Reason, Consideration, Science &c. all that distinguish Man from a Beast, are augmented by Learning, Education &c. lessened by Negligence, Idleness &c. (p. 20)'.

We might draw a comparison with Overton's notion of a sliding scale of 'Creatureship', according to which the individual can both ascend to the level of fully human and descend to the level of beast, with the monist scale of matter outlined by Raphael in *Paradise Lost*, according to which substance is more or less spiritually refined depending on its distance from God.⁴⁷ It has recently been suggested that Raphael's scale of matter is a metaphysical expression of Milton's post-Restoration disillusionment with popular sovereignty. The stratification of nature according to spiritual purity thus measures Milton's movement during the 1650s away from 'a Leveller-influenced theory of the body politic whereby a commonwealth of rational men organize themselves' to an aristocratic republican vision of 'the political state as a rude multitude governed from above by a 'rational' elite'.⁴⁸ At the same time, however, Raphael's hierarchical stratification is not solidified but flexible according to merit: matter in Milton's vitalist universe is possessed of the agency to move closer to God '[i]f not deprav'd from good' (5.471). In his Leveller writings, Overton goes beyond Milton in synthesizing an egalitarian and revolutionary politics with a monistic metaphysics. The people of England are denied their natural right and liberty to organize themselves by the tyrannical rule of political and clerical elites; they are 'deprav'd of good' not by their own actions or merit but by the oppressive apparatus of church and state. Persecutory and elitist structures of power prevent the people from augmenting the faculties of 'Reason, Consideration, Science' that constitute human-ness, so making impossible the achievement of difference between man and beast. As Overton writes in *A Defiance Against All Arbitrary Usurpations* (1646):

The poore deceived people are even (in a manner) bestialized in their understandings, become so stupid, and grosly ignorant of themselves, and of their own natural immunities, that they are even degenerated from being men, and (as it were) unman'd, not able to define themselves by birth or nature, more than what they have by wealth, stature or shape, and as bruits they'll live and die for want of knowledge, being void of the use of Reason for want of capacitie to discern, whereof, and how far God by nature hath made them free. (p. 2)

Overton claims that the common people of England are prevented by the monopoly over knowledge maintained by ruling elites from exercising the rational capacity and freedom of will that God has granted to human nature.

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Denied the liberty to become properly human, they have become ‘bestialized in their understandings’.

Overton’s argument has some of its roots in traditional Reformation polemic. The Calvinist Francis Rous in 1622 described popery as ‘generally a Religion very neere fitted for brute beasts, for it teacheth them to be saved in ignorance, and by beleeving as the Church beleeves. Which is upon the matter of beleeving that which they know not, and by not knowing what they beleeve’.⁴⁹ Overton thus turns familiar anti-Catholic arguments against the Presbyterians. However the language which he uses – ‘grosly ignorant’, ‘degenerated’, ‘not able to define themselves’ – derives from his monist conviction that matter can become either progressively more spiritual and pure or progressively more material and gross.⁵⁰ The terms of Overton’s polemic are also a specific response to those such as Thomas Edwards who would deny the common people the freedom to learn for themselves about their relationship with the divine on the grounds that they are ‘illiterate Mechanick persons’. ‘Mechanick’ was a term not only synonymous with the mean, the vulgar and the unlettered in early modern discourse, but it was also associated with ‘the material or *materia* as the formless to be shaped’, ‘something placed at the bottom of a hierarchy to be governed or ruled’.⁵¹ In other words, Overton accuses the clergy of excluding the people from learning and knowledge in order to rule over them as undefined matter. Robbed of their humanity, the people are reduced, to borrow a phrase from Donne, to ‘a lump, where all beasts kneaded be’.⁵² Ultimately, this violation of the individual’s ‘selfe propriety’ is not only an ‘affront to the very principles of nature’: it has the terrible consequence of preventing people from understanding ‘how far God hath made them free’ in making salvation dependent upon their actions. Overton defiantly declared from his cell in Newgate in 1647 that ‘so long as I know the Lord liveth, who will once judge every man according to his deeds, whether good or evil . . . then I am sure I shall have righteous judgement, without respect of persons’.⁵³ The ‘poor deceived people’, however, have been made ignorant of their own spiritual agency by the clerical usurpation of their natural rights as rational, self-determining creatures.

Overton cuts to the elitist core of the humanist pedagogical system as it was structured into a whole series of social institutions in Renaissance England, and in particular clerical religion, whether Anglican or Presbyterian. Erica Fudge observes that ‘if humanist pursuits fulfil human potential, make, in fact, the human truly human, then those who could not join in, who were not literate, would seem to be not human’.⁵⁴ Overton argues that humanism is in fact used to support hierarchies of ‘arbitrary power’ by organizing the categories of literate and illiterate, clergy and laity, orthodox and heretic, human and beast. Those excluded from knowledge and power by the boundaries of Latin literacy – boundaries which are drawn along the lines of class and gender – lose their identity and agency and exist only as the shapeless, coarsened matter of the governed, ‘void of the use of Reason’. Overton had

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himself been initiated into this elite, closed society of humanist pedagogy and was familiar with the conventions of that society, such as the comic performance of the curriculum in in-house entertainments like *Pedantius*. In his Leveller vision of an egalitarian society where all humans were free to become truly human and so more divine, Overton was able to put that familiarity to satirical use.

The specific reference in *Mans Mortaltie* to *Pedantius* perhaps gestures further at the association in Overton's thought between the humanist pedagogical system and the oppression of the laity by clerical power. If Overton did own the 1631 edition of *Pedantius*, he would have been familiar with the striking frontispiece, which shows the characters of Dromodotus and Pedantius facing each other, the latter prominently holding in his right hand a birch for flogging his pupils. The birch and the ferula became symbolic in early modern England of the rigid disciplining of body as well as mind in the humanist system. Beating was a means of forcing the boy to understand that learning Latin grammar was both a physical ordeal in itself and an initiation into the harsh public world of male power. This 'causal relationship between grammatical training and the punishment of boys' became axiomatic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: physical pain was required both to correct the faults inculcated in the vernacular world of the commonalty and to regulate pedagogical orthodoxy.⁵⁵ The endemic violence of humanist education is evident in countless school statutes of the period and in pedagogical texts such as the *Shorte Dictionarie for younge begynners* (1553), in which John Withals lists the following as essential vocabulary for the scholar: 'A rod to doe correction with; to beate; to be beated; A Palmer to beate or strike scholers in the hande; A rebuke; A stripe; to beate or strike; A Blowe or clappe with the open hand; A buffet with the fist; to buffet . . . the marke or print of a hurt in the body'. The 'fetishized rod' wielded by Pedantius thus became 'an emblem of order and knowledge' in early modern England, with the pedagogue assuming in the classroom the sovereign authority of monarch or magistrate to discipline the bodies of his disobedient subjects.⁵⁶ Beating was also encouraged by Calvinist ideas about the inherent depravity of the flesh in general and of the wilful child in particular. The puritan cleric and schoolmaster John Brinsley describes in some detail the range of punishments to be administered to boys in an effort to 'beate the Latine into their heads'; Brinsley thought the birch sanctified by God as an earthly instrument of correction.⁵⁷

Overton himself would certainly have experienced the institutional relationship between bodily disciplining and authorized knowledge fostered by the humanist system. In his Leveller tracts he argues that it this same relationship between violence and the imposition of conformity which underpins and maintains the 'arbitrary power' of institutional religion and of the ordained, university-educated clergy, whether Anglican or Presbyterian, over the common people. The repetition of violent acts performed by authority

on the body of the heretic in *The Araignment of Mr. Persecution* recalls the list of various methods of beating the disobedient schoolboy in Withals's *Short Dictionarie*:

But this fellow PERSECUTION . . . *Hangeth, Burneth, Stoneth, Tortureth, Saweth a sunder, Casteth into the fiery Fornace, into the Lions Denne, Teareth in peeces with Wild Horses, Plucketh out the eyes, Roasteth quicke, Bureth [sic] alive, Plucketh out the Tongues, Imprisoneth, Scourgeth, Revileth, Curseth, yea, with Bell, Book and Candle, Belyeth, Cutteth the Eares, Slitteth the Nose, Manacles the Hands, Gaggeth the Mouthes, Whippeth, Pilloreth, Banisheth into Remote Islands* (p. 10)

Overton argues that the violent imposition of uniform belief supports tyranny and divides nations, families and friends, ensuring that there can never be 'Peace and Friendship Nationall and Domestike' (p. 11). Above all, state persecution violates the natural right and freedom of human beings as individual 'rationall creatures' to determine their own beliefs (p. 24). Milton uses the imagery of pedagogical correction to make a similar point about the free circulation of knowledge in *Areopagitica* (1644): 'What advantage is it to be a man over it is to be a boy at school, if we have only scrapt the ferular, to come under the fescu of an Imprimeur? If serious and elaborate writings, as if they were no more than the theam of a Grammar lad under the Pedagogue must not be utter'd without the cursory eyes of a . . . licenser?'.⁵⁸ Overton calls, like Milton, for liberty of conscience and a pedagogical method based not upon violence and coercion but conversation and persuasion (though Overton's method, unlike Milton's, excludes neither Catholic nor unbeliever):

But if the Papist knew the Protestant, the Protestant the Papist to love another: & would not molest or in the least injure one another for their *Conscience*, but live peaceably and quietly one by another; bearing one with another, and so of all Religions: What man would lift up his hand against his Neighbour? . . . shall the more knowing trample the ignorant under his feet? we should carry our selves loving and meeke one towards another, *with Patience perswading and exhorting the contrary minded* (pp. 11, 12)

Richard Halpern has drawn attention to the apparently contradictory fact that physical punishment intensified in the English educational system with the adoption of a humanist programme that was predicated on the efficacy of the 'gentler method' of rhetorical persuasion.⁵⁹ The contradiction is perhaps explained by the co-option of the humanist curriculum to define the ruling elites of church and state against a class-based commonalty. If the corrective beatings that became included in the institutional application of the humanist programme functioned as an 'internalization of symbolic violence designed to replace the openly violent codes of feudalism', then the learning of Latin grammar initiated boys into a set of hierarchical social relations that were founded on power as well as knowledge.⁶⁰ In his emphasis on the pedagogical efficacy of persuasion and argument and on the democratizing role of education in

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enabling human beings to understand themselves and their God-given freedoms, the Leveller Overton was the true heir of the humanist ideal.

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Notes

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The place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

- 1 David Wootton, 'Leveller Democracy and the Puritan Revolution', in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns with the assistance of Mark Goldie (Cambridge, 1991; paperback edn., 1994), pp. 418–19.
- 2 For a summary of scholarly positions, see Wootton, 'Leveller Democracy', pp. 435–8. The most detailed study of the links between the emergence of the Levellers and the sectarian activity of Civil War London is Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: the Separate Churches of London, 1616–1649* (Cambridge, 1977).
- 3 Edwards, *Gangraena; Or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errours, heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in the last four years* (3 parts, 1646), part 1 (second edition), sig. A5v, p. 33.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 5 Peter Biller, 'Heresy and Literacy: Earlier History of the Theme', in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1–18 (p. 4).
- 6 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas in the English Revolution* (1972), pp. 293–4.
- 7 Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (1993; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1994), p. 199. Cf. 'From Lollards to Levellers', in *Collected Essays of Christopher Hill. Volume 2: Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Brighton, 1986, rpt. 1988), pp. 89–116.
- 8 Hill, 'Radical Prose in Seventeenth-Century England: From Marprelate to the Levellers', in *Collected Essays of Christopher Hill. Volume 1: Writing and Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England* (Brighton, 1985), pp. 75–95.
- 9 Tim Harris, 'Problematizing Popular Culture', in *Popular Culture in Early Modern England, c. 1500–1800*, ed. Tim Harris (1995), pp. 1–27. Cf. Bob Scribner, 'Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?', *History of European Ideas*, 10 (1989), 175–91.
- 10 Wootton, 'Leveller Democracy', p. 413. Cf. Thomas N. Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 130–2.
- 11 S. D. Glover, 'The Putney Debates: Popular Versus Elitist Republicanism', *Past and Present*, 164 (August, 1999), 47–80 (p. 59). For the use of translations of classical and humanist texts by Walwyn, who had no Latin, see Nigel Smith, 'The

- Charge of Atheism and the Language of Radical Speculation, 1640–1660’, in *Atheism From the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford, 1992), pp. 131–58.
- 12 The first edition of *Mans Mortalitie* is dated 1643 on the title-page; however Thomason dates his copy 19 January 1643/4, so the date of publication (new style) could be January 1644. Thomason crossed out ‘Amsterdam’ as the place of publication and wrote in London. Overton controlled, with his fellow General Baptist Nicholas Tew, a secret press in Coleman Street in London around this period and most likely printed the first edition himself; see Perez Zagorin, ‘The Authorship of Mans Mortalitie’, *The Library*, 5th series, 5 (1950), 179–83; Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, pp. 151–3.
 - 13 *Mans Mortalitie*, ed. Harold Fisch (Liverpool, 1968), p. 3. All references hereafter to *Mans Mortalitie* are to this edition. Page numbers follow in brackets in the text.
 - 14 Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Camb., Mass., 1972), p. 1; Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1912), I, 250, II, 216–18.
 - 15 Marie Gimelfarb-Brack, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité, justice! La vie et l’oeuvre de Richard Overton, niveleur* (Berne, 1979), pp. 4–6, 86–90; B. J. Gibbons, ‘Richard Overton and the Secularism of the Interregnum Radicals’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 10 (1995), 63–75 (pp. 64–5).
 - 16 Nicholas McDowell, ‘A Ranter Reconsidered: Abiezer Coppe and Civil War Stereotypes’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 12 (1997), 173–205; McDowell, ‘Degrees of Divinity: The Intellectual Resources of the Radical Imagination in England, c. 1630–1660’, D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (2000); McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630–1660* (Oxford, forthcoming).
 - 17 ‘Gender and Politics in Leveller Literature’, in *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Susan D. Amussen and Mark A. Kishlansky (Manchester, 1995), p. 165.
 - 18 Harold Fisch states in the introduction to his edition of the text that it ‘lacks any political aim or context’ and bears a ‘somewhat eccentric relation to the rest of [Overton’s] literary output’; *Mans Mortalitie*, introduction, p. xvi.
 - 19 Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton*, pp. 159–69; *Commons Journal*, August 26 1644.
 - 20 See Dennis Saurat, *Milton: Man and Thinker* (1925; 2nd edn, 1946), p. 279; Saurat’s claims for Milton’s involvement in *Man Wholly Mortal* were refuted by George Williamson in ‘Milton and the Mortalist Heresy’, *Studies in Philology*, 32 (1935), 553–79, reprinted in his *Seventeenth Century Contexts* (1963). The most detailed discussion to date of the mortalist heresy in early modern England, which compares the positions held by Overton, Milton and Hobbes, is Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton*. Burns, following the now discredited biography of Overton as formally uneducated printer, tends to underestimate Overton’s intellectual range.
 - 21 On the monistic elements in the divorce tracts, see Stephen Fallon, ‘The Metaphysics of Milton’s Divorce Tracts’ in *Politics, Poetics and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 69–83.
 - 22 There has been no concerted development of William Haller’s brief discussion of

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- this relationship in *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1955), pp. 176–8. The comments of Howard Shaw are typical: ‘What is important about [*Mans Mortalitie*] is not so much its content as the adventurous rationalism of its thought’; *The Levellers* (1968; 2nd edn, 1971), p. 21. See now, however, Erica Fudge’s highly original discussion of the relationship between Overton’s conceptions of the human and the animal in *Mans Mortalitie* and Leveller ideas about the individual and society; *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Hampshire, 2000), pp. 143–70.
- 23 Heinemann, ‘Popular Drama and Leveller Style – Richard Overton and John Harris’, in *Rebes and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A. L. Morton* (1978). Her argument here is largely repeated in the epilogue to *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Oppositional Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge, 1980). For further discussion of the dramatic style of Overton’s political satire, see Nigel Smith, ‘Richard Overton’s Marpriest Tracts: Towards a History of Leveller Style’, in *The Literature of Controversy: Polemical Strategy from Milton to Junius*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (1987).
- 24 G. C. Moore-Smith, *College Plays Performed in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1923), p. 10.
- 25 Moore-Smith, *College Plays Performed in the University of Cambridge*, pp. 7, 9, 85, 109–10; F. S. Boas, ‘University Plays’, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, VI: the Drama to 1642, part two*, ed. by Sir A. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge, 1910; rept. 1969), p. 324.
- 26 Boas, ‘University Plays’, p. 306.
- 27 Quoted in J. W. Binns, *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: the Latin Writings of the Age* (Leeds, 1990), p. 121.
- 28 Overton, like Milton, held the form of mortalism known as thnetopsychism. In *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton*, Burns rightly warns against the anachronistic identification of Overton’s monism with either deism or secular materialism; see especially pp. 157–161. See also the forceful repudiation of the historiographical tendency to regard Overton’s mortalism as really secular ideology wrapped up in religious terms in Gibbons, ‘Richard Overton and the Secularism of the Interregnum Radicals’, *passim*.
- 29 N. C., ‘To his worthy friend the Author upon his Booke’, in *Mans Mortalitie*, p. 5, lines 1–12. Overton is fond of inserting poems in his texts that are clearly his own work but signed with different initials; see, for instance, ‘To his Friend the Author upon his Booke’ by A. B. in *The Araignment of Mr. Persecution* (1645), sig. A3v, which has some stylistic similarities with the poem before *Mans Mortalitie*.
- 30 See *Dr Faustus: the A-Text*, ed. Roma Gill (2nd edn, 1989), 4. 58–62: ‘This word damnation terrifies not him, / For he confounds hell with Elysium: / His ghost be with the old philosophers. / But leaving these vain trifles of men’s souls, / Tell me, what is that Lucifer thy lord?’
- 31 Compare William Walwyn’s criticism of Calvinist ideas of double predestination as ‘those yokes of bondage, unto which Sermons and Doctrines mixt of Law and Gospel do frequently subject distressed consciences’; *Walwyns Just Defence* (1649), in *The Leveller Tracts 1649–53*, ed. William Haller and Godfrey Davies (New York, 1944), p. 361.
- 32 See [Edward Forset], *Pedantius* (1631), pp. 11–12.
- 33 Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, p. 73.

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- 34 'Leveller Democracy and the Puritan Revolution', pp. 437–8.
- 35 Stephen Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 96–9; John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, 1996; paperback edn., 1998), pp. 1–16 (p. 12).
- 36 *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton*, p. 160 n. 16.
- 37 Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, pp. 37–8 n. 73.
- 38 Quoted in Michael Leslie, 'The Spiritual Husbandry of John Beale', in *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land*, ed. Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (Leicester, 1992), pp. 151–72 (pp. 159–60).
- 39 See the *Aeneid*, 4. 181: 'Monstrum horrendum, ingens, cui quot sunt corpore plumae, / Tot vigiles oculi subter, mirabile dictu'. In Overton's parody, this becomes: 'Ominous, awful, vast; for every hair on the body is a waking soul beneath, wonderful to tell'.
- 40 On 'bocardo', see the *OED*. I am grateful to Dr. Richard Serjeantson of Trinity College, Cambridge for information about the technical aspects of syllogistic logic.
- 41 'The Pulpit Guarded: Confrontations between Orthodox and Radicals in Revolutionary England', in *John Bunyan and his England, 1628–88*, ed. A. Laurence, W. R. Owens and S. Sim (1990), p. 43.
- 42 In *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca and London, 1971), pp. 119, 121. On the fundamental conservatism of humanist pedagogy as it was manifest in institutional and social relationships, see more recently Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), pp. xiii–xiv.
- 43 *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D. M. Wolfe, 8 vols (New Haven, 1953–82), I, 887.
- 44 On Bale, see Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (New Jersey, 1997), pp. 38–83.
- 45 Walwyn, *The Compassionate Samaritane* (1644), pp. 29, 32.
- 46 *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture*, p. 153.
- 47 *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow, Essex, 1971; fourteenth imprint, 1991), 5. 404–505.
- 48 Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, pp. 107, 111; cf. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, p. 109.
- 49 *The Diseases of the Time Attended by their Remedies* (1622), pp. 189–90.
- 50 As with Milton, an aspect of Lady Anne Conway's monistic materialism was the notion that 'sin makes the spirit (i.e. mind and body) grosser, coarser, more corporeal'; D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (1964), pp. 138–9.
- 51 Patricia Parker, "'Rude Mechanicals'", in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margareta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 46, 48.
- 52 'To Sir Edward Herbert, at Juliers', line 1; *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1986), p. 218.
- 53 Overton, *An Arrow Against All Tyrants*, p. 3; Overton, *The Commoners Complaint* (1647), p. 23.

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- 54 *Perceiving Animals*, p. 70.
- 55 Stewart, *Close Readers*, p. 88; Ong, 'Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite', p. 115.
- 56 Withals quoted in Stewart, *Close Readers*, p. 93; Wendy Wall, "'Household Stuff': The Sexual Politics of Domesticity and the Advent of English Comedy", *English Literary History*, 65 (1998), 19. Wall reproduces the frontispiece of *Pedantius* to illustrate her argument about the symbolic status of the birch. On pedagogical violence in early modern England, see also Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (New York, 1991), pp. 21–45.
- 57 John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education 1560–1640* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 149; Brinsley, *The posing of the parts; or, A most plaine and easie way of examining the accidence and grammar* (1611; seventh edition, 1630), p. 87; Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius, or the Grammar Schoole* (1612), ed. by E. T. Campagnac (Liverpool, 1917), p. 290.
- 58 *Complete Prose Works*, V, 531.
- 59 *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation*, p. 35.
- 60 Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (New Jersey, 1993), pp. 55–6. See also Stewart, *Close Readers*, p. 85.

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