



# RECANTING ERRORS, ASSERTING TRUTHS: IDEOLOGY AND MODALITY IN ABIEZER COPPE'S "COPP'S RETURN TO THE WAYES OF TRUTH"

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## ABSTRACT

The article proposes a pragmatic-stylistic analysis of modality and ideology in Abiezer Coppe's "Copp's Return to the Wayes of Truth" (1651), a dramatic recantation written in prison by one of the most (in-)famous radical thinkers of England during the Interregnum. As the analysis will try to show, the peculiar features of this text and its complex communicative strategies call for a wider variety of methodological tools, complementing the application of code-driven models for the analysis of modality with more use-driven pragmatic and stylistic frameworks. In Coppe's text, textual and contextual elements are as fundamental as code and grammatical aspects to convey evaluation, and they trigger a very sly conflict between overt and covert meanings, producing interstitial, ironical, even subversive reading possibilities, thus demonstrating how modality is inextricably tied to a variety of linguistic devices to produce a multifaceted message.

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## 1- AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 1.1

As Neary [29] insists, point of view is "one the most intensively studied areas of stylistic enquiry" (175), in particular in its interaction with modality and ideology. After all, communication is goal-oriented, Austin [1] contended, and the perlocutionary effects which are at its core are inextricably tied to contextual factors, among which the addressor's point of view and its ideological bearings are paramount, as the seminal works by Uspensky [41], Fowler [10] and Simpson [34] demonstrated. In fact, as Austin himself reminded and as we all know from our everyday experience, a large part of communication is indirect and often below the level of consciousness, so much so that Hunston [20] maintained that "Evaluation incorporates various parameters, it is often implicit and relies for its effect on intertextuality, and in many texts it is multilayered. Evaluation plays a key role in the construal of a particular ideology by a text or set of texts" (177). This is particularly evident in suasive texts and exchanges, where assertions, evidence, and arguments are important not only for the information they provide, but also for the way they are arranged and presented, that is for the point of view<sup>1</sup> they convey.

Identifying and analyzing the latter is, thus, a fundamental step for the proper understanding of texts, and, among the many linguistic tools available, the analysis of modality is particularly useful, especially when it is conveyed by "hidden" and non-codified modalizing patterns. In fact, a rigid code-driven analytical framework is not enough to highlight that large part of the process of communication which is use-driven in its being indirect and based on the recovery of contextual inferences. Short [33], for example, did not try to categorize narration, but analyzed linguistic phenomena, even small linguistic facts, that produce viewpoint effects by influencing speech and thought presentation: thoughts and perceptions,

<sup>1</sup> Point of view is a well-established and, to a certain extent, self-explaining label but, as Thompson–Hunston [38] already pointed out, the same concept is designated by a variety of terms –such as "connotation", "affect", "attitude", "appraisal" "stance", "evaluation"– which "cover slightly different overlapping areas" (2) but are a good testimony of the complexity of the phenomenon they allude to. On the topic see also Del Lungo–Tognini [6].



for example, are often represented through the use of particular verbs and adverbs which do not belong to the “canonical” category of modalizers.

In his analysis of the major parameters used for modalizing sentences and encoding the ideas of probability, obligation, usuality and willingness, Toolan [40], too, openly recommended an open approach which should take into account not only the classic modalized sentences, but also evaluative verbs, adverbs and adjectives, and even the different, more creative ways to express what he calls “metaphorized” modality” which must be uncovered “by *interpreting* that text” (55). Also the collected essays in Hunston–Thompson [19], despite their very different theoretical approaches, endorsed the view that the expression of a writer’s opinion “needs to be accounted for in a full description of the meanings of texts; and that this is not always a straightforward matter” (2). More recently, Kuno [21] demonstrated how linguistic categories or items not directly associated with point of view may function as modalizers in communication. Syntactic constructions constantly interact with discourse perspectives, producing what Kuno termed “Empathy Perspective” and shedding light on the speaker’s/writer’s attitude. Semino–Short [32], too, contended that a properly conducted linguistic analysis cannot dispense of speech presentation as a mere “leftover”, since a large part of communication is indirect, as Sperber–Wilson’s [37] relevance theoretic approach amply demonstrates.

Douthwaite [7] also convincingly argued for the necessity of integrating a code-driven approach with a use-driven approach. The modal grammar model he proposes accounts for a wider variety of expressive means for the realisation of modality, complementing the application of modal grammars with a pragmatic and stylistic approach to modalization. Modality is inextricably tied with other linguistic devices to produce a complex message, and the analysis of a number of functional perspectives contribute to broadening the scope of the methodological tools for the linguistic analysis of communicative strategies. Douthwaite’s model is basically an extension of the Uspensky [41]–Fowler [10]–Simpson [34] scheme, which had already expanded the codified means expressing opinions and attitudes by adding, to the traditional modal auxiliaries, other codified markers such as lexical verbs expressing knowledge, prediction and evaluation (i.e. Uspensky’s *verba sentiendi*), modal adverbs or expressions, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, generic sentences and fixed expressions claiming universal truth. Douthwaite’s [7] heuristic model also includes some closed word classes, nouns, lexical verbs, pronouns, possessive adjectives, prepositions—and some non-modalized forms which do not perform modal functions at code level but at pragmatic level—style, shared world knowledge (i.e. places, historically, politically, or socially important people and events), rhetoric (especially metaphor and irony), intertextuality. Such a “mixed” approach denies the classic objection to stylistics, namely that it provides “a non-situational description of language rather than its interpretation” (Toolan [39]: xiv), and has the advantage of being a methodology which adapts to the text and not vice-versa. After all, as Lambrou–Stockwell stress [22], stylistics has always been an *applied* discipline and “stylisticians have traditionally spent far less time pondering methodology compared with the practical matter of getting on with the analytical and exploratory work” (3). Of course, this does not mean that stylisticians have naively ignored the methodological and theoretical dimension of linguistic analysis, but that their main aim is to provide a descriptive account of textual mechanics and the reading process, highlighting the textual evidence that accompanies the reading of a text.

## 1.2

These theoretical issues confirm that texts in general, and such key factors as point of view and the writer’s ideological positioning in particular, require an approach to language that considers textual and contextual elements as fundamental as code and grammar aspects: it is necessary to take into account their modalizing potential in order to evaluate attitudes, opinions, and values in a text without running the risk of being content with an easy and mechanical form = meaning equation, already stigmatized by Austin [1]. If one rigidly limits oneself to the analysis of linguistically encoded meanings, one runs the risk of underdetermine their actual interpretation. After all, point of view is not just a question of spatial (the visual angle) and temporal (how time is perceived) perspective, but also of psychological and ideological effects<sup>2</sup> which are linguistically encoded as well as pragmatically inferred<sup>3</sup>: in other words, interpretation has to account for “the physical, psychological, and ideological position in terms of which narrated situations and events are presented” (Herman [13]: 442), but also *how* those narrated situations are presented as significant.

This has momentous consequences for the analysis of point of view and ideology especially in those texts which are heavily context-dependent, characterized by a suasive strategy, and featuring dramatic existential aspects; texts, that is,

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<sup>2</sup> From a conceptual perspective, point of view is “the way in which a text mediates a set of particular ideological beliefs through either character, narrator or author” (Simpson [35]: 78), while, on a psychological plane, point of view refers to the ways in which a narrative can be refracted through an individual’s consciousness.

<sup>3</sup> The exact nature of the semantics-pragmatics distinction and the extent to which meanings are encoded or inferred has been of course a very problematic issue since Grice [12]: see, for example Burton–Roberts [2], Recanatì [31] and Clark [3].



where the “expression of opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes” (see Lyons [24]: 452) is directly connected with life and death issues.

This kind of analysis has also a more general bearing at a rhetorical level: usually an argument is effective not because the speaker/writer follows a precise set of rules but because he is able to gain consensus by emphasizing the interpersonal aspects of his argumentation, producing an effect on the readers and convincing them to read his words with trust. In other words, a successful argument cannot be simply based on *logos*, but must heavily rely on *ethos* and *pathos*, ultimately generating *fides* in the hearer/reader. A very personal account, a constant appeal to *pathos*, the careful building of one's *ethos* are as fundamental and effective as rational lines of reasoning to make a convincing argument. From a stylistic point of view, these aspects can be best appreciated by analyzing modality as a way of expressing point of view and how this way of presenting personal opinions achieves relevance on the reader's part.

### 1.3

On the basis of this theoretical framework, this article focuses on the ways point of view is conveyed in Coppe [4] (hereafter *CR*), a dramatic recantation written in prison by one of the most (in-)famous radical thinkers of England during the Interregnum. The text has been chosen not only because in it, as in any persuasive writing, “evaluation is important to the purpose of the text” (Hunston [20]: 177): its interest lies in the fact that it is a particularly poignant plea from a man who is experiencing a dismal detention and whose main and explicit goal is regaining liberty; and yet, the necessity of being (or at least sound) as convincing as possible, is repeatedly problematized by Coppe's idiosyncratic style. Interestingly enough, Coppe very often expresses less than absolute commitment to some of his statements, usually organizing his sentences in a way that questions their apparently univocal message, transforms its strong implicatures into weak ones, triggers a very sly conflict between overt and covert meanings, and produces interstitial, ironical, even subversive reading possibilities.

After a cursory biographical sketch to provide the necessary contextual elements to the texts, I will propose a stylistic analysis of the text (Coppe has been widely studied by literary critics and historians but, to my knowledge, not from a linguistic perspective) to demonstrate how an “extended” pragmatic and stylistic approach can shed light on the author's underlying attitude and ideological positioning.

## 2- DISCUSSION

### 2.1

Abiezer Coppe (1619-72?) was born in Warwick, had a very good humanist education, so he came from a very different milieu than the many “mechanick” preachers who came into prominence in the central decades of XVII century. One of the most notorious religious radicals, Coppe became a roaming Anabaptist preacher when war broke out and also served as a chaplain to a provincial parliamentary garrison. His 1647 spiritual experience allegedly transformed him into “a child of God” to whom the restrictions of conventional society no longer applied. As many other Ranters, he was accused of questioning old conceptions of sinfulness and evil as irrelevant: such behaviors as swearing, drinking, blaspheming, or having irregular sexual relationships were deemed should be no longer forbidden for spiritually renewed people who were free from moral law and could transcend sin on earth. His most notorious pamphlet, *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649), extolled the overthrow of the bishops, the king and the House of Lords, and announced that Christ's Second Coming was imminent, that wealth and property would be abolished and all things would be held in common. The pamphlet was publicly burned and Coppe was imprisoned without trial in January 1650 (Parliament issued the *Blasphemy Act* a few months later). After two public recantations and further examination, Coppe was released at the end of June 1651. Little is known of his later life<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.2

*CR* is a composite text in five parts: 1) a *Preface* addressed to the Parliament “shewing What the Author hath been, and now is”; 2) a longish section which presents theological “Errors” and truthful “Assertions” (“Truth asserted against, and Triumphant over Error”); 3) the letter which one of his inquisitors, reverend John Dury, sent to Coppe (“The Preamble to the ensuing Proposals”); 4) Coppe's detailed “Proposals” (i.e. creed) in response to that (“The Answer of A.C. to Mr Duries Proposals”); 5) a concluding letter to Marchamont Nedham, the editor of the weekly periodical *Mercurius Politicus* and “spokesman” for the Commonwealth regime (“A.C. his letter to his Much Honoured Friend, Mr. Marchamont Nedham”). It was, thus, conceived as a complex, well-organized plea to both religious and political authorities, a carefully constructed argument in which Coppe cleverly mixes logical, ethical, and pathetic proofs to convince the authorities of the

4 For more detailed information on Coppe see Hessayon [14], Hessayon [15] Hill [16], Hill [17], Hopton [18], Smith [36], Corns [5], McDowell [25], McDowell [26], McDowell [27], Pick [30].





disproportionate harshness of his imprisonment and, hopefully, regain his liberty. The text, however, also conveys other, momentous implicatures producing unpredictable perlocutionary effects which are worth considering.

### 2.2.1

CR opens with a *Preface* "To the *Supream Power*, the PARLIAMENT of the Common-wealth of ENGLAND, And to the Right Honourable COUNCEL of STATE" which is worth quoting at length (CR: A3r-A3v):

- [1] I Am exceedingly sorry, that I am fallen under your honours displeasure.
- [2] And the rather because I am perswaded that you take no delight to lay heavy burthens upon any, nor to afflict any above measure.
- [3] And although I have FORMERLY wondered at my sore, tedious, and long continued imprisonment, under which unsupportable burthen I extreemly groan.
- [4] And the rather in respect of my poor weak disconsolate wife (whom I left in perfect health and strength) and my small innocent children.
- [5] Shee being brought (almost) to deaths dore, with continual and sore languishing for my tedious imprisonment.
- [6] And for the space of above half a year, and to this day is under the Physitians hand, to our great Grief and charge.
- [7] Besides that unspeakable and continual charge (which in several respects) I lie at, and for the space of a year and half have lien at in prison.
- [8] Which hath wasted and almost utterly undone mine and me, that I have scarce clothes to hang on my back.
- [9] And all that little that I have at home, ruined and spoiled, &c.
- [10] And my poor innocent children scattered here and there in several places, to our great care, Grief, and Charge.
- [11] Although I say I have formerly wondered at the tediousnesse, and long continuation of my imprisonment, yet in all humility, I stoop to, and humbly acknowledge your Justice. [12] And do not (now) much admire at my imprisonment.

Coppe humbly apologizes, admitting his faults and explicitly acknowledging the *Justice*, [S11], of the political authorities. The beginning of the passage is unmistakably explicit in expressing the writer's new opinions and attitude: *exceedingly* [S1] gives his repentance a maximum grade, the narrative I is characterized by mental processes (*I am sorry* [S1], *perswaded* [S2]) significantly performed by someone who has already *fallen under* [S1] the authorities' displeasure. Linguistically, then, these parts are perfectly in tune with what a "sinner" is expected to do: meditate on his folly, acknowledge it and apologize (icastically signalled by the presence of *formerly* in capital letters [S3], obviously implying the very different *now* alluded to in [S12]). On the other hand, the members of Parliament are presented as honourable men who are not angry or vengeful: if Coppe provoked their *displeasure* [S1], they magnanimously abstain from carrying out those material processes (*take no delight to lay heavy burthens upon any, nor to afflict any above measure* [S2]) which they might enforce. Moreover, they are discreetly attributed godlike qualities through an easily recognizable intertextual allusion to *Matthew* 23, 4 ("For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders"; KJV) and *1 Corinthians* 10, 13 ("God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able"; KJV).

The central section ([S3]-[S10]) of the passage, however, is very different from the section discussed above: if it was functional to establishing the addressor's *ethos* and demonstrating his new attitude after the rational, honest acknowledgment of his past folly, here the text harps on the dramatic situation Coppe is going through, emphatically highlighting the disproportionate harshness of his imprisonment and its appalling consequences for Coppe's life but especially for his family.

The first aspect to be noted is that this section is realized by eight clauses rankshifted to sentence level (see Douthwaite [8]). [S3] (*Although*) is linked to [S11] (*Although I say*), with all the other sentences in between acting as parenthetical constructions providing details and specifications. Five in eight are also graphologically foregrounded: they begin in the same way (*And*), imposing an internal norm of accumulation to this section; moreover, this use of coordination is a way to avoid giving salience to one particular sentence: all of them are presented as having the same importance, each one adding to a different aspect or illustrating from another perspective the central point of the section.

The periodic sentence structure reinforces this impression: as Leech-Short [23] made clear, "A periodic sentence in a strict sense is one which saves its main clause to the end. But as it is unusual for sentences of any complexity to have this form in English, we shall use the term 'periodic' more loosely, and say that any sentence has a periodic structure if anticipatory constituents play a major part in it." (225). A periodic sentence structure is a way to emphasize end focus, because it "reinforces the highlighting of final position with the highlighting of syntactic form" (225). It also increases



difficulty, because it obliges the reader “to store up syntactic information which it will use later on” (102), but on the whole it is a way to make syntax the carrier of an element of suspense. And since “The element of suspense clearly depends on the size of the anticipatory constituent: the longer the constituent is, the greater the burden upon the memory, and the greater the tension.” (226), Coppe’s text is clearly aiming at producing a hyperbolic tension.

This central section features a full array of linguistic elements which try to arouse pity through emphasizing *pathos*: most heads are value-laden terms, usually accompanied by modalizing premodifiers in listings: *my sore, tedious, and long continued imprisonment* [S3]; *unsupportable burthen* [S3]; *my poor weak disconsolate wife* [S4]; *my small, innocent children* [S4]; *continual and sore languishing* [S5]; *tedious imprisonment* [S5]; *great Grief and Charge* [S6]; *unspeakable and continual charge* [S7]; *scarce clothes to hang on my back* [S8]; *my poor innocent children* [S10]; *our great care, Grief, and Charge* [S10]). In this almost unbearable sequence of extremely negative adjectives and terms, two instances of internal variation stand out: the one postmodified head (*all that little ... ruined and spoiled* [S9]) brings out to the readers Coppe’s abject material poverty; the only positive token (*perfect health and strength* [S4]) further emphasizes Coppe’s wife tragic condition.

Significantly, this long series of premodified evaluative nouns contains several repetitions: *imprisonment* is first *sore, tedious, and long continued* [S3], then again *tedious* [S5]; the children are first *small, innocent* [S4], then *poor innocent* [S10]; the *great Grief and Charge* in [S6] becomes *unspeakable and continual* [S7] and then again *great* in [S10], but this time accompanied by *care*, too. Such a blatant flouting of Grice’s [12] Quantity maxim is of course a way to give extra emphasis to some items, but also a way to amplify and further qualify their disastrous effect: by changing *small* into *poor*, for example, the text underscores gives a more intense description of Coppe’s children, who are not just young but also poverty-stricken.

As Kuno [21] reminds in entries c) and f) of his general framework on the “Empathy Perspective”, a speaker’s empathy is greater with an explicit descriptor than with another descriptor dependent upon the former (“c. Descriptor Empathy Hierarchy: Given descriptor x (e.g. John) and another descriptor f(x) that is dependent upon x (e.g. John’s roommate), the speaker’s empathy with x is greater than that with f(x):  $E(x) > E(f(x))$ ”), and, more importantly, a speaker cannot empathize with someone else more than with himself (“f. Speech Act Empathy Hierarchy: The speaker cannot empathize with someone else more than with himself/herself:  $E(\text{speaker}) > E(\text{others})$ ”) (316). This means that the highly pathetic description of the addressor’s family and property is, in fact, functional to arousing pity for his own tragic condition in jail.

The periodic syntactic structure discussed above reverberates at sentence level, confirming the principle of end-focus: each sentence, in fact, concentrates in final position heavily loaded phrases or verbs: [S3] *I extremely groan*. [S4] *small innocent children*. [S5] *my tedious imprisonment*. [S6] *great Grief and charge*. [S7] *in prison*. [S8] *clothes to hang on my back*. [S9] *ruined and spoiled*, &c. [S10] *great care, Grief, and Charge*.

Verbs, too, contribute to reinforce the *pathos* in this section of the text: *groan* [S3], *left* [S4], *lie at* and *lien at* [S7], *hath wasted* and *undone* [S8], *scattered* [S10] indicate negative material processes which, in most cases, have human beings as their goals. Moreover, their bad effect is underscored by the way they are modalized: in some cases, they are specified by evaluative adverbs which give them maximum intensity (*I extremely groan* [S3]; *almost utterly undone* [S8]); in other cases, they are accompanied by lexemes, phrases, or postmodifiers which are not modalizers in themselves, but functionally convey an explicit and ideologically loaded description of reality. The postmodifying phrase (*almost*) *to deaths dore* [S5], for instance, gives the lexical verb *brought* [S5] a dramatic connotation which it normally does not have, since it refers to someone (Coppe’s wife) whom he *left in perfect health and strength* [S4]. The same is true for the absolutely neutral term *hand* [S6] which implies the extremely serious health problems of Coppe’s wife by being part of a circumstantial relational process (*is under the Physicians hand* [S6]). [S8], too, presents an interesting case of modalization: the goal of the already mentioned material processes *hath wasted* and *undone* is not a person, but two pronouns, *mine and me*, thus objectifying their referent (Coppe and his life, his family, his property). Coppe’s dehumanization is confirmed by the second part of the sentence, *I have scarce clothes to hang on my back*: the evaluative *scarce* denounces the fact that now his clothes are turned into rags, therefore he can no more be the actor of such a material process as *wear*; *hang* is used instead, in conjunction with the hyponym *back*, signalling the fact that Coppe’s body can now be identified with one of its parts.

This initial section produces a growing syntactic suspense which culminates in the last paragraph, whose importance is underscored by its being the only one of this section realized by two sentences, [S11] and [S12]. Significantly, the only material process reinforces the idea of total submission (*stoop* [S11]), an action performed *in all humility*, [S11], while the verbal process *say* ([S11]) introduces three *verba sentiendi* (*wondered* [S11], *acknowledge* [S11], *not... admire* [S12]). These verbs, however, do not just testify to Coppe’s repentance (he wondered at his imprisonment, then understood his sin, now is not surprised any longer); they are also pathetically loaded by the way they are modalized: while *formerly* [S11] signals the chronological break between present and past, the phenomena associated to the mental process (*the tediousness, and long continuation*) are value-laden terms, postmodified by a prepositional phrase featuring such a





value-laden term as *imprisonment* [S11]; similarly, *acknowledge* is modalized by the evaluative adverb *humbly* [S11], a perfect attitude to recognize the authorities' *Justice* [S11]. Beginning with *And*, the concluding [S12] deploys once again the internal norm of accumulation of the central section. The mental process *admire*, moreover, is preceded by *much*, whose modalizing force is made stronger by its being preceded by a negative auxiliary *do not*, but especially by the foregrounded use of *now*, graphologically emphasized by the parenthesis, which stresses the break with his past actions. The last term is, once again, *imprisonment*. The flouting of Grice's Quantity maxim (it recurs four times in [S3], [S5], [S11], [S12]) is clear indication that it is the problem the writer wants to stress with a particular force: the disproportionate harshness of his imprisonment is alluded to a disproportionate number of times. And if he is now ready to acknowledge their *Justice* [S11], they, too, are invited to show that justice by setting him free.

[S11] and [S12], then, represent the intensification and culmination of all the preceding sentences: the central concept the whole text revolves around (Coppe's imprisonment) is mentioned twice in two lines and each sentence presents a series of modalizing elements which add to the overall *pathos* of this textual section and thus produce a more urgent entreaty to the authorities. They confirm Coppe's rational acknowledgment of his former folly, but they also summarize the pathetic appeal of [S3]-[S10], mixing rational, ethical, and pathological elements to produce a more effective perlocutionary effect.

### 2.2.2

In the following section of the *Preface*, Coppe (CR: A3v) explains that he was slow in making his address to the Parliament because he lacked inspiration ("neither could I at all do it, til whatsoever came from me") and because

[13] I am given to understand that your Honours have been extreemly laden, and your ears filled brim full of complaints against me \* which have arose from a kinde of zeal in some, from inveterate malice in others.

[14] \* Herein I honour, & humbly submit to the Magistrate, an only speak of those several sorts of informers against me, &c.

[15] From ignorance, weakness, mistake, misapprehensions, and misunderstandings in others.

[16] Which hath been occasioned by some bypast, and indeed, strange actions and carriages. [17] And by som difficult, dark, hard, strange, harsh, and almost unheard of words, and expressions of mine.

[18] Of which I shall make bold to give first your honours, and then the \*world a brief account.

[19] \* This I have been advised to, and am also bound in conscience to do in several respects, and amongst the rest, that I might be a warning to others --- and amongst other things --- that he that thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall, & c.

This passage, too, is syntactically foregrounded: the introductory [S13] stands out as the longest sentence so far, with an elaborate construction realized by two coordinate clauses and a subordinate relative clause. The others four clauses are all rankshifted to sentence level, two of them [S16] and [S17] given extra emphasis by their being united to form a single paragraph. Sentences [S14] and [S19] are given graphological prominence by the layout of the text, as will be discussed later.

If the syntactic construction of the passage is as elaborate and foregrounded as the preceding section, the writer's attitude and stance are very different. The *complaints* against Coppe are characterized not by a transitive but by an ergative process (*have arose*, [S13]), thus stressing their independent and uncontrollable growth; three processes are in the passive form (*have been ... laden ... filled* [S13], *hath been occasioned* [S16]), the first two modalized so as to give them maximum intensity (*extreemly*; *brim full*). The only process in the active form is *give* (S18), echoing the passive *I am given* which opens [S13], but performing a different role in the verbal groups they belong to: in [S13] it modalizes the mental process *understand*, implying that comprehension was not an action performed by Coppe himself, but it was helped by someone else or some external factor; in [S18], on the contrary, it is a process Coppe performs not only actively, but daringly (*I shall make bold*). The fact that the same verb is used let the implicature arise that, just as Coppe was made to understand something important concerning *your Honours*, now he will be bold enough to do the same to the authorities and the whole world he is writing to, making them understand something important. Coppe, in other words, does no more appear the powerless apologetic prisoner who humbly asks to be released: he is the only active agent in this section, while the authorities are the involuntary receptors of the complaints of his detractors [S13] and the long list of his strange actions and behaviours [S16].

Sentences [15] - [17] present a long list of value-laden nouns and adjectives which, basically, echo the accusation against Coppe and thus fill the addresses' ears *brim full* again. The introductory [S13] underscores their artificiality and falsity: they derive from the inauthentic righteousness (*a kinde of zeal*) or the hardened malevolence (*inveterate malice*) of Coppe's enemies. [S15] extends the accusation to other opponents, this time qualified through five negative terms (*ignorance, weakness, mistake, misapprehensions, and misunderstandings*) which acquire extra emphasis by being the fundamental components of a prepositional clause rankshifted to sentence level. They are not demonstrated, but simply accumulated



because, in fact, they are not explicit charges; their sheer number is a way to underscore the fact that the accusations against Coppe were uselessly numerous and, more importantly, the consequence of hermeneutic incompetence (*ignorance* is the first in a list that ends with three nouns whose prefix *mis-* signals the inability of understanding properly). Also Coppe's behaviours, as already mentioned above, are foregrounded by being part of two sentences, [S16] and [S17], united in a single paragraph, and the use of torrential listing gives them extra relevance. Significantly, they too are not negative terms: his behaviours were *strange*, but especially his words and expressions were hard to interpret: they were *strange* (again), difficult, surprising, even *harsh*, just like the ones of the biblical prophets or seers. The long listings of terms, in other words, has the effect of providing a rather exhaustive list of reasons why Coppe's words were misinterpreted. Seen in this light, his punishment appears even more disproportionate, since it is caused by a misunderstanding.

Sentences [S14] and [S19] deserve a mention not only because their graphological foregrounding underscores their importance, but because they play a decisive role in conveying the complexity of the writer's point of view. The side notes referred to by the asterisks are conceived to be read together with the main text: they are not confined to the bottom of the page or to the end of the whole text. Moreover, they are not neutral, explicatory comments: the obsequious actions of the narrative I, described by the two processes *honour* and the modalized *submit* ([S14], are in fact a way of dismissing the *informers* who, despite their being of *several sorts* only deserve *an only speak* [S14].

Even more momentous are the implicatures of [S19]: significantly, the two passive processes (*advised*, *bound*) led the writer to act (*to do*), in compliance with a superior calling (he does not say who advised him) or the voice of his *conscience*, and to become a *warning to others*. The following biblical allusion, however, features an ambiguity which opens up unexpected subversive possibilities: Paul maintains that all the punishment and tribulations experienced by Israel in its long history have to be interpreted as "ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 *Corinthians* 10, 11-12; KJV). This seems to confirm Coppe's willingness to repent and accept his role as negative example for other people. Yet, the parenthetical comment *amongst other things* [S19] subtly hints that the *warning* he gives can also have other implicatures: the Pauline words of caution apply to everyone and even those who think they are right (such as the *informers* as well as the authorities themselves) may be wrong and run the risk of falling because they consider themselves morally upright.

It is this possibility that empowers Coppe to *make bold to give* his own version or interpretation of his case, thus achieving a major strategic goal: the innumerable complaints and accusations against him that have just been mentioned in [S15] and [S16], are further delegitimized: they are not only the consequence of hermeneutic failure, they may also be the allegations of someone who wrongly claims he is right.

The first, immediate consequence of this occult, parasitical doubt cast by the text is that the writer can present his claim to provide a *brief account* of those accusations not as yet another boring repetition of them, but as a useful and legitimate practice (even if this obviously means giving a personal, biased presentation of "facts"). But there is another, more radical implication that affects the whole text: if the accusations against Coppe were provoked by misunderstanding, and if those who think they are right may also be wrong, the text is implicitly calling for a broadmindedness open to different interpretations of reality. Coppe's *warning*, in other words, is a reminder for everybody that words can have a double meaning and can require a double reading. There will always be an "official" face value in Coppe's opinions and assertions, which can be read as demonstrations of Coppe's willingness to recognize his past folly and humbly beg for his release. At the same time, however, his words and even the innumerable biblical quotations that intersperse his text bear with them the possibility of an alternative reading, a different point of view, another ideological positioning. The effects created by the text can be unpredictable and the reader is invited not to respond in a rigid way: each section, a single sentence, even single words can allude to multiple referents, express different ideas from different perspectives, have a literal and a symbolical (or ironical) meaning.

The introductory part is, thus, fundamental because it makes the reader aware of a possible discrepancy between linguistically encoded and pragmatically inferred meanings. Of course, this does not mean that Coppe is not sincere and deliberately trying to deceive the authorities; rather, he is trying to convince them in every way that his punishment was exceedingly harsh, that the informers are not necessarily reliable, that his own words and behaviors may be judged in a different way, that his irresistible prophetic calling still leads him to teach his flock.

### 2.2.3

The aforesaid changes in the hermeneutic paradigm have a clear bearing on the interpretation of the other parts of Coppe's text: Coppe's nomadic life as itinerant preacher (during which he "sinfully" lived with three women, according to the accusations), for example, is presented as a call from God who irresistibly invited him to go on *pitching and removing my tents from place to place* (CR: A4r) just like He had done to Israel. Not only does Coppe compares himself with an





obedient Israel; once again the side note provide fundamental contextual implicatures which make the overall meaning richer (CR: A4r):

[S20] In this I do not in the least degree intend any thing concerning the sinfulness of my life, the author whereof was the divell. [S21] But concerning the various dispensations in way of that religion I have passed through, &c.”

The mental process *intend* is modalized by the preceding superlative form (*in the least degree*) but also by the following *any thing*, thus stressing the absolute innocence of his words. At the same time, Coppe disowns any responsibility as to the sinfulness of his life, claiming that its author was the devil. Then, in yet another rankshifted clause [S21] which foregrounds its content, he explicitly alludes to the *dispensations* that, as a prophet, he was entitled. Once again, the humble, apologizing voice of the prisoner who must be careful not to offend the authorities is made to coexist with the assertive voice of the prophet to whom standard judgements do not apply.

This means that the text can be read according to two different points of view and any assertion can have a double interpretation. Of course, there are no clear-cut differences or linguistic signals at code level that can be considered as sure indicator of one or the other. The shift in the point of view must be appreciated at pragmatic level and it is an ambiguity which is obviously exploited to disclaim one's responsibility but also to reassert some truths which are not exactly orthodox. Moreover, the passage from one perspective into another is smooth and reversible as ever, so it is easy to make an admission of guilt and then revise it or present it in a way that produces unexpected implicatures. For instance, when Coppe mentions some former reprehensible behaviors and declarations of his, he admits that (CR: A4r)

[S22] I did for a season leave that way: [S23] and thought that I was shewn a more excellent way, living and triumphing in joy unspeakable, and full of glory”

The verbum sentiendi *thought* is deployed in all its modalizing ambiguity: from an orthodox perspective, the sentence can be interpreted as an admission of folly (i.e., “I wrongly believed I was shown a good way but in fact it was totally wrong”) and one could affirm that Coppe is recognizing his sins. At the same time, however, the clear biblical echoes (1 *Corinthians* 12, 31 “and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” and 1 *Peter* 1, 8 “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”; KJV) imply that those behaviors and declarations were from a prophet who spoke in God's name and they are still valid. Again, when Coppe (CR: A4v) speaks of

[S24] Unfathomable, unspeakable mysteries and glories, being clearly revealed to me.

he exploits a foregrounded construction with a non-finite clause rankshifted to sentence level in order to stress the importance of the message it conveys. The two evaluative adjectives with negative prefixes in thematic position qualify the mysteries and glories as being incommensurable to humanity (just like God in Paul's *Romans* 11, 33 “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”; KJV). Yet, their incomprehensibility and inexpressibility are offset by the superior cognitive powers of the prophet, significantly occupying the final position in the sentence and aptly transformed into a goal to stress that God is the real responsible of the revelation. The implicature of the sentence, however, is ambiguous: does *clearly* mean that the prophet is revealed the fact that those mysteries and glories will remain incomprehensible? Does *clearly* mean in fact “falsely” because it refers to the perception the writer had during his past, sinful point of view when he thought he was seeing correctly what later turned out to be false? Or is it a true statement by a God-inspired prophet? And, more radically, are the readers invited to detach themselves from Coppe's claim because they are false, or are they invited to keep paying attention to his prophecies because they are true? Whatever the interpretation, the modalizing effect of *clearly* demonstrates that the force of Cope's text is that an alternative point of view, a different interpretation, the proposal of an agonistic hermeneutic pattern is not code-connected, but transferred to the pragmatic level of the text in its interaction with the reader.

One last example from this section: mentioning a cup that God put into his hand, Coppe tells that (CR: A4v)

[S25] it was filled brim full of intoxicating wine, and I drank it off, even the dreggs thereof.

[S26] Whereupon being mad drunk, I so strangely spake, and acted I knew not what.

[S27] To the amazement of some.

[S28] To the sore perplexity of others.

[S29] And to the grief of others.

[S30] For I was (really, in very deed) besides my self.

Does *intoxicating* [S25] refer to the real wine he was accused of drinking without restraint during his “preaching tours” in the country or to the prophetic intoxication which allowed him to denounce the evil an corruption around him? Similarly,





*drink off* may indicate the material process of drinking the wine or the mental process of fully understanding one's prophetic mission, and the modalizing adverb *strangely* [S26] can also mean "wisely" if it is to be read in a prophetic perspective. In the rankshifted clauses [S27] – [S29] foregrounding is further reinforced by their specular construction, which emphasizes the climactic passage from *amazement* [S27] to *sore perplexity* [S28] to *grief* [S29]. The passage from surprise to grief may indeed allude to the effect of Coppe's "sins", which were so scandalous and blasphemous to his contemporaries. Yet, the same climax might be a way to underscore the desired effect of his preaching, which was controversial and provocative enough to elicit those reactions in his listeners and induce them to change their lives.

The hermeneutic difficulties of this passage culminate in [S30], where the proverbial metaphoric expression *to be beside oneself* is modalized by the two surprising adverbs in parenthesis: their compresence strongly specifies that *really* is to be interpreted literally; and yet, how can one be *in very deed* beside oneself? The whole passage basically relies on the fact that in XVII-century prophetic writings true reality was otherworldly and thus only metaphorically describable. The more metaphorical you were, the more realistic and literal you were. As a consequence, literal and symbolical are inextricably tied, and the Lost Son's perspective of the apologizing prisoner coexists with the Prophet's who is still preaching conversion (which ultimately means a change of direction and point of view). The relativity of perspective highlighted in Coppe's text implies that even his imprisonment is a question of point of view and opinion, not of "truth". The final remarks of the section confirm this aporia (CR: B2r):

[S31] And I pray, hope, and believe (that through the Grace of God) my future deportment, to all sorts, shall make amends for what is by past.

The sentence is a perfect conclusion for an apology, rejecting past mistakes and promising future compensations. However, the final *verba sentiendi* (instead of more solemn and binding verbs, such as "guarantee" or "swear") may mean that the writer will do his best to *make amends* of the coerced apology he has just presented, that is, he will continue preaching after the harsh period in jail. After all, a few lines before he had written that

[S32] I have been strangely acted,

[S33] And by the Devil deluded.

and the surprising use of *strangely* to modalize the passive material process *acted* [S32] may refer to the pressure (the devilish delusions alluded to in [S33]) he had to comply with in writing his act of contrition.

### 2.3

The second part of *CR, Truth asserted against and Triumphant over Error*, is a detailed list of seven errors and seven contrary assertions that revolve around the main accusations levelled against Coppe. It is a section which is characterized by the regular use of Jakobsonian parallelism: the fundamental scheme is the presentation of the error (introduced by the formulaic *I disown, detest and protest against*) and then its accurate confutation, introduced by a synthetic, assertive orthodox declaration (for example, *I. ERROR That there is no sinne vs. I. ASSERTION That there is sinne* or *V. ERROR That Cursing and Swearing is no sin vs. V. ASSERTION That Cursing and Swearing, is a sin*). The assertions are all present-tense relational processes, thus verbally presented as certain, unmodalized statements, despite the obvious fact that, being assertions, they inevitably express the writer's point of view.

In the first assertion, Coppe sets out to demonstrate that *there is sinne*: he starts with a quotation from *Ecclesiastes 7, 20* highlighting the omnipresence of sin (CR: B3r; *There is not a just man upon Earth, that doth good, and sinneth not*) and then devotes no less than four pages to demonstrate the omnipresence of sin, punctuating his claim by a refrain:

[S34] Every man on earth, living here below, sinneth (CR: B3v)

...

[S35] There is none righteous; no, not one. (CR: B4v)

[S36] None that doth good, no, not one. (CR: B4v)

[S37] All are Sinners (CR: B4v)

...

[S38] All are Sinners. [S39] Sinners All (CR: B4v)

...

[S40] All are under sin. (CR: Cr)

[S41] As it is written, there is none righteous; no, not one; - there is none that doth good, No, not one (CR: Cr)



...

[S42] ALL have sinned, &c. (CR: B4v)

...

[S43] All are full of sin" (CR: Cr)

...

[S44] For we have sinned. (CR: Cr)

[S45] We, our Kings, our Rulers. [S46] Our Priests, our Judges. (CR: Cr)

[S47] All have sinned, and gone astray. (CR: Cr)

[S48] Do sin, are sinners (CR: Cr)

[S49] Wo be to us, we are sinners. (CR: Cr)

The obsessive repetition of the same phrases and expressions is emphasized not only by the fact that they are inserted in very short and usually rankshifted sentences, but also by their rhetorical embellishments: the consecutive sentences [S35] and [S36], for example, feature a homoeoteleuton; almost every sentence from [S37] on presents the anaphoric repetition of *All*; [S38] echoes [S37] (written a few lines before) and is followed by [S39] to form a very effective chiasmus. [S41] puts forward another homoeoteleuton clearly echoing the former.

[S44] stands out because it introduces the first person plural pronoun, a decisive strategic move to create a new implicature in the following sentences: the *we* of [S44] is immediately reused in thematic position in [S45] to be "parsed" into a possessive adjective which in its turn extends sinfulness to others. Theologically sound as it is, the idea that all are sinners is explicitly referred not only to kings or rulers, but more importantly to *Judges* [S46], the lexeme in the final position of a rankshifted phrase. Then [S47] echoes [S42] but amplifies it by adding the material process *gone astray*, thus implying that also the authorities and the judges may have been led off track in their decisions. Then again [S49] reasserts the centrality of the first person plural pronouns (*us, we*) thereby stressing once again that *all* admits no exception, therefore it also includes *our* authorities mentioned in [S45] and [S46].

Coppe, of course, concedes he is a sinner, too: he is undoubtedly part of the *we* who sinned. Yet, he has been "*greatly humbled for my humiliation*" (CR: B4r) and, more dramatically writes that (CR: B4r) :

[S50] I have felt it like pangs of death: I speak it with sorrow and shame: and all to this purpose,

[S51] That I might proclaim, There is sin, sin with a witness.

The humiliating strictness of his imprisonment is alluded to through an extreme comparison: of course, Coppe cannot have experienced the pangs of death before, but the hardship he wants to describe are so terrible that they must be evoked hyperbolically as the spasm of a dying man. The alliteration of /s/ in the central part of [S50] gives further emphasis to the verbal process *speak* and its verbiage, the two loaded terms *sorrow* and *shame*, presenting the very difficulty of expressing his physical and moral pain.

However, the proleptic *this purpose*, foregrounded by its final position in the sentence and its alliteration, opens up a new perspective and conveys other implicatures: despite his terrible sufferings, Coppe can solemnly reveal (notably, the verbal process is *proclaim*, not a milder *say, reveal* or *express*) that sin is visibly present everywhere: in fact, the final part of [S51] is foregrounded phonetically by the alliteration of /s/ and graphologically by the use of italics, while the repetition of *sin* demonstrates its omnipresence even at textual level. This insistent avowal of the omnipresence of sin produces another important retrospective textual effect: the sinfulness of Coppe's former life does not seem so serious if seen in a general context in which all are sinners. In the autobiographical part at the beginning of his *Assertion*, Coppe had recalled his *wofull experience of what is sin* (CR: B3v), underscoring *what it hath cost* him (CR: B3v). So, even if every man is a sinner, Coppe's sins have had a dramatic *cost* (i.e. imprisonment), and by stressing the universality of sin, Coppe once again denounces the excessive severity of his punishment.

Elsewhere, the writer's point of view emerges in a different way: for instance, in recanting error IV (CR: C3r) "*That God is in man, or in the creature onely, and no where else*", Coppe does not deny the former statement (for example writing "God is not in man", also because it might imply another blasphemy, since God's divine sparkle is in any man, the soul is divine and so on) but slyly sneaks in a pantheistic emendation which is not completely orthodox, either: *That God is not confined in man, or in the creature only, but is omni-present, or every where* (CR: C3r). Stating that God is not confined in man does not exclude the possibility that God may also be within man, but this idea, one of the Ranters' most controversial claims, later levelled against the Quakers as an open blasphemy, is left at the level of implicature and not openly expressed.





Another interesting instance of linguistic subtlety is the confutation of the *V. ERROR, That Cursing and Swearing is no sin*. Coppe begins by declaring that for 27 years he was free from this sin, but he admits that he was later “*infected with this plague of Swearing*” (CR: C4r). The following *ASSERTION* should confirm that cursing and swearing are sins: in fact, it begins with the short, unequivocal statement that “*Cursing is a sin*” (CR: C4v) because it is against Christ’s precepts. Swearing, on the contrary, is dealt with in more detail: the relational process *Swearing is a Sin* is repeated three times in eleven lines, a recurrence which insinuates the doubt that the writer’s is not a solemn statement but an echoic repetition which, as Sperber–Wilson [37] demonstrate, “is primarily designed to ridicule the opinion echoed” (241). This impression is reinforced by the fact that the leitmotiv *Swearing is a sin* culminates in two sententious statements (CR: C4v):

[S52] Because of Swearing, the Land mourns.

[S53] Because of prophane swearing, vain swearing, false swearing, for-swearing, and forc’t-swearing, the Land mourns.

[S54] And I mourn.

The apodictic value of [S52] is underscored by its brevity, while the syntactical inversion gives extra emphasis to the verb *mourn* in final position and stresses the cause-effect relationship between swearing and mourning. Curiously, however, [S53] repeats [S52] with the only, conspicuous difference that *swearing* is now qualified in a more precise way by a series of premodifiers. The absolute, unequivocal statement in [S52] is, thus, restricted as if the swearing the writer alluded to in [S52] were not swearing in general, but the more specific kinds of swearing specified in [S53]. In other words, the various premodifiers convey modality in a very subtle way: on the one side, they can be interpreted as part of a relational process, as if the whole sentence meant “the land mourns because of swearing, which is prophane, which is vain, which is false” etc.; on the other, they can be read as true, value-laden premodifiers identifying very specific types of swearing. In this case, one may conclude, what is wrong is any form of “meronimous” swearing (*prophane swearing, vain swearing, false swearing* etc.), not swearing itself. This implies that the swearing alluded to does not necessarily refers to blaspheming: in particular, the last three modifiers, foregrounded by their almost homophonous nature and their alliterative /f/ sound, suggest that there may also be a false type of swearing, a disavowing form of swearing, even a forced kind of swearing. The terse, foregrounded [S54] makes clear that false, for- and forced swearing has ruinous effects not only on the Land at large, but also on individuals. Coppe’s text, then, lets the implicature arise that what should really be at stake is not swearing as a moral sin, but all those socially induced forms of swearing which can lead one to recant or to renounce his ideals. Of course this is not communicated explicitly, but what is worth noticing is that the use of modality allows Coppe to present a series of apparently sound assertions, whose linguistic construction, however, allows alternative, interstitial interpretations.

The final *VII ASSERTION* deserves a mention because it presents a variant, or internal deviation (see Douthwaite [8]): a side note informs that in this assertion (CR: Dr) “*is also something hinted concerning community in the general, and concerning liberty*”, a surprising promise since it should demonstrate *That Community of Wives is unlawful*. In fact, the latter is quickly dealt with and disowned (CR: Dr):

[S55] First, because it is a breach of that pure Precept. I Cor.7.2 ...

[S56] Secondly, this tenent, is a corrupt opinion, that Christ hates; which is briefly hinted at in that of Revel.2.6...

[S57] Thirdly, that it is destructive to the dearest, and nearest relations, and the occasion of multitudes of miseries and perplexities.

[S58] Fourthly, it is destructive to the [bene esse]–Well-beeing of a Common-wealth.

Schematic as it is, this assertion stands out for the writer’s skillful lack of commitment: the passage is noteworthy for the surprising absence of Coppe’s “I”, which features prominently in the rest of the text. The four attributive clauses (*it is ...*) provide a very general definition, sounding like a quotation, or someone else’s opinion but there is no sign of endorsement by the narrative I, who simply presents these relational processes as a matter of fact; [S58] even uses a Latin phrase which strengthens the impression of a detached, formulaic tone. On the contrary, in the following part, dealing with community and liberty, the narrative I once again features prominently as in the rest of the text, thus confirming the impression that in this case the ideological perspective is conveyed in a very implicit and occult way and the writer’s point of view is simply evoked by omitting the first person as validating subject of the four statements. The general impression is that Coppe provides an anodyne discussion of the error he was accused of because he wants to focus his attention on more urgent and paramount issues (community and liberty), implying that before deciding if the community of wives is lawful or not, it is necessary to define the very nature, meaning and scope of a *community*. As a consequence Coppe (CR: Dv) stresses that

[S59] As for community, I own none but that Apostolical, saint-like community, spoken of in the Scriptures.

...



[S60] I do from my heart detest, and protest against all sinfull liberty, or that is destructive to soul or body, or the [bene esse] the well-beeing of a Common-wealth.

The reference to the *Scriptures* in [S59] clearly indicates that the community Coppe has in mind is the first one described in *Acts 2, 44-45* ("And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."; KJV). By hinting at an ideal model which is very far from any real community, Coppe sets a very high standard which is obviously at variance with the concrete examples of his time. Once again, it is not an open criticism, but an indirect warning for complacent religious and political leaders: after all, the premodifier *saint-like* underscores the difference between true saints and those who claimed that they belonged to the Puritan community of "visible saints".

Also [S60] contains an implied attack to the authorities: by pre-modifying *liberty*, Coppe makes a distinction between *sinful* liberty and legitimate liberty, questioning the very idea of a single, universal definition of freedom. After all, liberty may become an idol, or a manifestation of authority in disguise which can prove disastrous for the *soul or body* of individuals and for the *well-being* of the Commonwealth alike. In this way, Coppe cunningly revives the same radical ideas concerning true community and true freedom which he had proposed in his preaching and in his controversial writings, but he does so in a linguistically clever way, never presenting his opinions and ideological stance in an explicit way.

## 2.4

The various aspects discussed above are even more noteworthy if one remembers some of the contextual factors which led to Coppe's recantation: John Dury, in his letter duly reproduced in *CR* as "*A Preamble to the ensuing PROPOSALS, and ANSWERS*", had explicitly recommended "*before men, whose eyes are upon you, that you make not a fair profession of being effectually converted only to gain your liberty*" (*CR*: D2v). Coppe, then, had been forewarned that he was under the severe surveillance of the authorities and his writing should demonstrate beyond any possible doubt that his repentance was sincere: a well-written and persuasive declaration (a *fair profession*) was not enough because it would have been possible to feign true conversion.

Dury had also been outspoken in his request that Coppe should "*use means to make your repentance the more remarkable ... your humiliation the more publick and notable ... with the more care of giving a ful assurance to the State, that you shall never return thereunto again*" (*CR*: D3r). The repetition of adjectives in the comparative form and evoking outward visibility (*remarkable, publick and notable*) clearly underscores the expectation of a public contrition (as if Coppe's repentance were to be visible *coram populo*), while another comparative form introduces the necessity of a complete atonement (its extreme degree being underscored by the adjective *ful* and the frequency adverb *never*).

Coppe starts his answer assuring that he did not ask to be released in order to go back to his former habits and behaviors. He also guarantees that the solemn professions he made "*came from the bottom of my soul; cordially, fervently, and compunctionately*." (*CR*: D3v), but the foregrounded syntactical position of the three adverbs, pathetically loaded, also underscores other possible implicatures of Coppe's protestations, their invigorating power (*cordial* was commonly used also as a noun to indicate a tonic to stimulate a weak heart), the fervent zeal of their author, his feeling of regret tinged with hesitation. Coppe's assertions are not *fair professions*, but reveal conscious stance, albeit presented in an oblique way.

Coppe, in other words, never carries an open controversy, yet he does not give the impression of giving up his prophetic mission of stirring the conscience of his contemporaries on fundamental issues as social justice and true religion. For example, Dury's invitation to explain thoroughly "*Whether any thing be otherwise a sin, then as men imagine it to themselves to bee so*" (*CR*: D2v) is taken up and retorted against him thanks to a dazzling series of repetitions (no less than thirteen times in seventy-four textual lines) which inevitably trigger echoic irony and allow Coppe to denounce other kinds of sin (*CR*: Er):

[S61] I say, and know, that drunkenness of all sorts, theft of all sorts, and murder of all sorts, is a sin.

[S62] Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.

[S63] And so is pride, covetousness, hypocrisy, oppression, Tyranny, cruelty, unmercifulnesse, despising the poor and the needy, who are in vile raiment, &c. \* Jam.2.

[S64] A sin.

[S65] Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.

...

[S66] And the laying of Nets, Traps and Snares for the feet of our neighbours, is a sin.





[S67] Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.

[S68] And so is the not undoing of heavy burthens, the not letting the oppressed go free, the not breaking every yoaik, and the not dealing of bread to the hungry, &c. and the hiding our selves from our own flesh, & c.

[S69] A sin.

[S70] Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.

Not only is Dury's overzealous request parodied by the constant echoic "quotation" of his words; Coppe recovers the pathetic mode he had used in the first part of his text, stressing once again the relevance and pervasiveness of evil (emblematically underscored by the rankshifted [S64] and [S69]). In [S61] the climax *drunkenness, theft, murther* is foregrounded by the repetition of a postmodifier which stresses inclusiveness (*of all sorts*); moreover, the verbal process *say* followed by the mental process *know* incisively make the sentence a solemn, authoritative declaration. [S63] features a long listing similar to the ones Coppe had already used before in the text; significantly, however, *Tyranny* stands out as the only capitalized lexeme; moreover, the list of traditional sins such as pride or covetousness, is enriched by other more "social" transgressions, such as *oppression*, or *despising the poor and the needy* (the latter, incidentally, are the only ones whose difficulties are underscored by the postmodifying relative clause). The catalogue of unconventional misdeeds goes on in [S66], where the hunting metaphor built around the three lexemes *Nets, Traps and Snares* is surprisingly referred not to animals but to *neighbours*, a loaded term due to its evangelical resonance. [S68] concludes this list in an even more vehement way, deploying pathetically loaded nominalized verbs in negative form (*the not undoing, the not letting, the not breaking*) to emphasize the gravity of the consequences of these social crimes. As a consequence, the overall effect of this passage is to deftly convey the implicature that this long list of iniquities is not an abstract condemnation of sin or a bland censure of misdemeanours, but a dramatic denunciation of real, harmful actions (some of which Coppe experienced himself), clearly carried out by people in charge (perhaps Dury himself). Thus, the possibility of discussing the nature of sin gives Coppe the opportunity to include in his text a vehement denunciation of a number of social evils under the veil of a theological clarification, and, once again, to urge the authorities to set him free.

It does not come as a surprise that even Dury's stern reminder that Coppe's humiliation should be "*the more publick and notable*" is willingly taken up and answered (CR: E3v): "*I doe not desire that what I have spoken, and to that purpose written, may be put under a bushel: or confined in a corner, but that it might fly abroad, to that end, &c.*". As the allusion to *Matthew 5, 15-16* makes clear ("Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"; KJV), Coppe sees his words as prophetic revelations of God's will and he cannot be but eager to spread them a text in which his opinions, his ideological stance, his social denunciations are put forward, albeit in an indirect way.

## 2.5

The last part of *CR* is the short letter to Marchamont Nedham, in which Coppe tries to demonstrate that he has complied with all the requests from the political and religious authorities, and is therefore eligible for releasement. From a linguistic point of view, this last section again deploys several parenthetical constructions and rankshifted non-finite clauses to amplify in a pathetic way his argumentation (CR: E4r):

[S71] As for my former Writings, which you and the other Gentlemen lately received; I cannot question, but that I have (now) fully fulfilled your desires, and requirings therein.

[S72] By deleting what might prove offensive to any.

[S73] By altering, correcting, and amending other things. And

[S74] By explicating some other things that might appear dubious, or difficult.

[S75] And herein I have not omitted the least clause-

[S71] and [S75] stress the complete exoneration of Coppe's former faults by emphasizing the idea of totality (*fully fulfilled, not ... the least clause*), while the *now* (graphically foregrounded by the parenthesis) proves Coppe's good will in apologizing and leading a "new" life. Yet, the list of material processes in [S72]-[S74], presented in their non-finite form (*deleting, altering, correcting, amending, and explicating*) and referred to an unspecified goal (*what, other things, some other things*), indirectly convey an alternative interpretation of those same processes, possibly alluding to the fact that in the whole text Coppe often reasserted his former radical ideas in a different way. Of course, this possibility is only present as implicature and Coppe does not pursue this aspect; rather, he protests over and over again the completeness of his recantations (CR: E4v):



[S76] I have faithfully, sincerely, (and as I conceive) fully, (and I hope, satisfactorily) answered his Letter, and those various Proposals therein contained, &c.

...

[S77] And, Secondly, there is not any one, from the greatest to the least error, therein insinuated, which I do not (both cordially, and zealously) declaim and protest against, &c.

[S78] And, Thirdly, I have faithfully (and I humbly conceive) fully, asserted Truths: contrary to every one of the Errors therein insinuated. [S79] And to divers other Errors which I have not been (in the least degree) taken or tainted withal, &c.

[S80] Which I hope may give you full satisfaction. [S81] I having (According to your advise) proceeded therein roundly, freely, and fully.

In [S76] the long list of premodifying adverbs which separate the auxiliary from the process delay information to underscore the absolute faithfulness of his declarations while the mental processes in the parentheses convey the humble, hopeful attitude of someone who is strongly hoping to be released. [S77] reinforces the claim of completeness by exploiting two superlatives (*from the greatest to the least*) and, once again premodifying the processes with two adverbs which should prove the sincerity (*cordially*) and eagerness (*zealously*) of Coppe's recantation. [S78] and [S79], foregrounded by the fact that they are united to realize a single paragraph, basically repeat the same claims, the three adverbs stressing the accuracy (*faithfully*) and completeness (*fully*, immediately reinforced by the following *every one*) of the recantation, or the writer's deferential attitude (*humbly*). [S79] further stresses Coppe's good will, who claims that he has even confuted other errors he was not accused of, with the superlative *the least degree* once again underscoring the absoluteness of his statement. The blatant flouting of Grice's Quantity maxim, together with the sheer number of modalizers that intersperse the text, imposes an obvious pathetic pressure on the readers. In fact, Coppe's hope of being released is not voiced explicitly: as [S80] makes clear, by highlighting over and over again the fullness of his confession and assertion of truths, Coppe tries to give the authorities a correspondently *full satisfaction*, which in its turn should logically lead them to concede Coppe full liberty. The three adverbs foregrounded in [S81] by their final position in an already foregrounded non-finite clause rankshifted to sentence level once again reiterate the idea of sincerity and completeness and confirm the implicature of the text: Coppe has followed all the right steps (according to the *advise* he had been given), he has done all he was asked to do, he gave the authorities *full satisfaction* and therefore he can legitimately expect to be released.

### 3- CONCLUSIONS

In *CR*, Coppe's writing style is very idiosyncratic and personal, featuring what McDowell [27] describes as an "intricate parody of the linguistic and typological forms of orthodoxy" (213), with an instability of tone that runs the whole gamut from the apocalyptic to the ironical<sup>5</sup>. This can be broadly considered as part of the early modern radical style (see Hill [16], Hill [17] and Smith [36]), but, being rife with modalizing elements, it provides a wonderful test case for a linguistic analysis of the scope and pervasiveness of the writer's expression of ideologically loaded opinions: if much of suasion is covert, then a pragmatic-stylistic analysis of the type proposed here can help lay bare these aspects.

Coppe manages to describe and repeatedly allude to his dramatic conditions in jail; at the same time, he complies with the request of a complete confession, and he is also able to indirectly express his views and denunciation of some social evils. So he apparently did not renounce his prophetic mission and was able to produce statements and affirmations which might be plausibly orthodox but, at the same time, polysemic enough to let out alternative interpretations and potentially subversive implicatures: as Coppe himself acknowledges: "*In a mystical sense, I built a great Babel*" (*CR*: Br).

The "prophetic" strain of the text produces a very ambiguous and continually shifting perspective, the prophet by definition speaking in the name of God and from His point of view, while biblical references and imagery, in turn, make up a scriptural context which in the end is functional to supporting Coppe's own truth. Gospel or Pauline quotations are used as testimonies of Coppe's orthodoxy and compliance with authority, but they also become authoritative justifications his ideas of spiritual awakening and social criticism (see Pick [30]).

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<sup>5</sup> As Flinker [9] maintains, Coppe's "language turns out a pastiche of biblical references that conforms to a new rhetorical structure, his prophetic voice simultaneously imitative and radically new. Coppe's discourse is midrashic in its collation of biblical texts that combine to shape a new entity in the language of the old. The ambiguity of the language is part of the point which is always somewhere between the letter and the spirit he makes great claims that ultimately remain couched in mystery and strangeness." (127).





This does not necessarily mean that Coppe was a hypocritical deceiver who was just pretending to gain liberty: after all he hopes that his assertions may “serve as sharp shears to clip the wings of the Fiery flying Role, which insinuates several blasphemous opinions” (CR: Cv). Nevertheless, the many occult ways in which the text deploys modality demonstrates the complexity of the text’s locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects in pledging theological orthodoxy, securing Coppe’s release, dismissing his accusers, and retaining his radical social message.

If *A Fiery Flying Roll* was basically an apocalyptic prediction from the standpoint of God, envisioning the overthrow of the existing social and religious order, the linguistic analysis of *CR* demonstrates that Coppe withdrew some “blasphemies”, but on the whole kept the same radical political stance. As a consequence, such common opinions as Gorton’s [11] that Coppe was “so far reduced to reason by his punishment, as to be willing to avoid giving offence to the ruling powers” (G6v) or McEnery’s [28] that in *CR* Coppe was “more forthright, identifying swearing and cursing as sins and accepting that the scriptures forbid them both” (66) need revising.

Coppe was eventually released: many of his contemporaries were not convinced of his sincerity and thought he was just pretending repentance. According to McEnery [28], Coppe’s “release on the basis of *Coppe’s Return to the Ways of Truth* has been interpreted by some historians as evidence that Coppe was released on compassionate grounds, as he was believed to be insane” (66). A pragmatic-stylistic analysis of his text will not offer a definitive answer to these doubts, but it certainly provides the elements for a more objective discussion of Coppe’s writings and their bearing on the ideological milieu of mid-XVII-century England.

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