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"The thick and black clouds of Obloquie": Modality and Point of View in Abiezer Coppe's 'A Remonstrance'

Abstract: This article discusses the interaction between modality, point of view and ideology in Abiezer Coppe's *A Remonstrance* (1651), a letter of protestation written in prison by one of the most infamous radical thinkers of England in the 1650's. Point of view is one the most fruitful topics of stylistic enquiry, in particular in its interaction with modality as carrier of ideological effects, but, as recent studies amply demonstrate, it is advisable to adopt a heuristic methodology integrating a code-driven approach with a use-driven model in order to account for a wider variety of expressive means for the realisation of modality. As this article tries to show, in Coppe's text this modal function is mainly performed by periodic sentences and digressions, which act as modalizing structures in the text and, together with the creation of weak implicatures, introduce a destabilizing element with clear ideological implications. The stylistic analysis of *A Remonstrance* shows how this apparently sincere protestation of innocence is in fact a layered, polysemous text that problematizes the idea itself of sincerity, uses a varied set of modalizing elements to convey an alternative point of view, and produces interstitial (even subversive) reading possibilities.

Keywords: Stylistics, Ideology, Relevance Theory, Periodic Sentences, Religious debates, Coppe Abiezer

1 Introduction

This article discusses the interaction between modality, point of view and ideology in Abiezer Coppe's *A Remonstrance* (1651a), a letter of protestation written in prison by one of the most infamous radical thinkers of England in the 1650's. The text was written to counter the extremely serious charges against its author, but ironically it was dismissed as an insincere recantation produced by an insincere writer who was just trying to get away with it, so much so that shortly after Coppe had to write another, longer pamphlet to convince the authorities of his innocence.

Coppe has been widely studied by history scholars, but his texts are certainly worth considering from a more linguistic perspective: *A Remonstrance* provides a very interesting case study in this sense, because from a rhetorical point of view it is an emblematic example of a failure (it did not convince the authorities), but from a linguistic perspective it sheds light on some unexpected relationships between

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stylistic structures, rhetoric and historical theology which are worth examining. It goes without saying that the limited scope of an article does not allow an adequate discussion of all the implications and suggestions produced by an approach of this kind; however, this study will hopefully highlight the potential of applying the critical insight coming from stylistic analysis to the study XVII-century religious disputes.

In particular, the article will focus on the relationship between modality and point of view in *A Remonstrance* to show the complexity of this layered, polysemous text: by exploiting the potential of a 'performative' style, it uses a varied set of modalizing elements to perform one theological stance while professing another, highlights the problematic nature of commitment to human vs. divine laws, and produces interstitial (even subversive) reading possibilities.

The first part (Section 2) will present the theoretical framework of this study, while the following Section 3 is structured in subsections to give some essential biographical and contextual information on Coppe (3.1), discuss the use and ideological bearings of periodic constructions as main modality markers in the text (3.2), present a detailed linguistic analysis of the most important passages of the text, with special attention to specific stylistic features and their effects on the reader from a relevance theoretic perspective (3.3).

2 Review of Literature

Coppe's *A Remonstrance* stands out for its idiosyncratic way of conveying modality through the frequent recourse to periodic constructions and the creation of weak implicatures: they act as the main modalizing constituents in the text, but also favor the proliferation of problematic elements whose clear ideological implications play a decisive role in conveying the writer's point of view.

The latter is one of the most intensively studied aspects in stylistic and critical discourse analyses, especially in its interactions with modality.[1] In fact, the latter reveals the writer's stance on a sentence meaning, or at a more general level his cognitive, emotive, or volitive attitude towards reality. This means that a certain viewpoint is inevitably conveyed at textual level by modal indicators, which are thus reliable indicators of a writer's interpretation of reality or how he envisages possible alternative courses of actions. In other words, modality adds to the 'neutral' semantic meaning of a sentence and, as such, has clear links not only with stylistic choices but also with viewpoint issues and with the expression of the writer's subjectivity (see, for example, Palmer 1990).

Modality is usually conveyed by different modal systems (see Simpson 1993: 43): deontic (expressing obligation, duty or commitment), boulomaic (indicating the wishes and desires of the speaker), and epistemic (revealing, together with its subsystem of *perception,* the degree of confidence a speaker has in the truth of a sentence). These modal systems can be realized in a wide variety of ways, from modal auxiliaries to adverbs to a range of other devices, and a writer can also choose to be epistemically 'non-modal' and express a strong commitment by presenting categorical assertions.

These modal systems can also have different modal 'shadings' (Simpson 1993: 51 ff., Neary 2014: 183), depending on how modality is involved in making a text more or less 'co-operative' towards the reader: positive shading characterizes texts which foreground the deontic and boulomaic systems of modality focusing on the characters' duties, obligations and desires; negative modal shading, on the contrary, produces a more elusive narrative in that it reflects the uncertainty as to the 'facticity' of the events, actions or characters. As a consequence, in this kind of texts epistemic and perception modalities feature prominently and the resultant narrative is more ambiguous because events are rendered less 'real' and hence less reliable for the reader.

Another decisive factor for the analysis of modality is its variety (Fowler 1986: 167): a writer's modal commitment is usually expressed through *verba sentiendi*, modal auxiliaries, or evaluative adjectives and

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1 Simpson (1993: 43) describes modality as the writer's "attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence"; according to Kiefer (1994: 2515) "the essence of 'modality' consists in the relativization of the validity of sentence meanings". Bybee & Fleischman (1995: 2) argued that modality can have "a broad range of semantic nuances … whose common denominator is the addition of a supplement or overlay of meaning to the most neutral semantic value of the proposition of an utterance".

adverbs, but viewpoint may as well be conveyed through 'hidden' and non-codified modalizing patterns which are carriers of ideological effects and implicit evaluation.[2] As a consequence, the very category of modalizer has been enlarged to include a wide array of linguistic phenomena that are not directly associated with point of view but nevertheless influence speech and thought presentation. For example, thoughts and perceptions are often represented through the use of particular verbs and adverbs or syntactic constructions which are not 'canonical' modalizers but may have modalizing effects (for example, underscoring the empathic dimension of a text, cf. Short 1996, Kuno 2004, Hunston & Thompson 1999). This means that describing the meanings of a text is never a consistent process and it necessary to adopt a wider approach which should take into account evaluative terms and the many other creative ways to express modality which can only be uncovered by interpreting that text (for a similar claim see Toolan 1998: 55).

Among the various aspects which can be profitably taken into account for the analysis of modality, ideological effects are of paramount importance, especially in a text like Coppe's which is so deeply embedded with theological as well as rhetorical issues.[3] A properly conducted linguistic analysis cannot dispense of speech presentation as a mere 'leftover', because point of view necessarily plays a decisive role not only as indicator of the visual angle and the temporal perspective of a text, but also as the source of psychological refractions and ideological effects.

The study of the ideological implications of modal effects in *A Remonstrance* inevitably raises such problematic issues as the relationship between semantics and pragmatics and the consequent definition of reliable indicators to establish the extent to which meanings are linguistically encoded or pragmatically inferred (see Grice 1989, Recanati 2004, Burton–Roberts 2007, Clark 2009, and Mello, Panunzi & Raso 2011). This issue is hotly debated because critics always hope to define a complete list of modalizing devices, but in most cases they have to account for many unpredictable ways in which the writer may present his own opinions and viewpoints to the reader, especially when he relies on covert forms of communication.

In any case, it is very difficult to find a straightforward and reliable one-to-one correspondence between a verb and an attitude or opinion, and the modern reader must be alert and flexible enough to appreciate the modal nuances of a text. This also means that modality must also be approached from a pragmatic point of view, considering it as an illocutionary act to communicate the writer's attitude (See Kärkkäinen 1987). In other words, it is necessary to integrate code-driven analytical frameworks in linguistic analyses with those aspects in the communicative process which are specifically use-driven, indirect and based on the recovery of contextual inferences.

Some recent studies have followed this recommendation, stressing the importance of a methodological approach which does not dispense with the theoretical accuracy of linguistic analysis, but at the same time is capable of adapting to the text and focusing on the textual evidence that accompanies the reading process. [4] After all, the content of a message amply transcends its mere linguistic encoding because the writer may convey his meanings in other ways than by relying on coded forms of communication (Wilson & Sperber 2012: 24).

This shift from focusing on basically coded forms of communication to adopting a more inferential analytical practice fits perfectly with the theoretical model of inferential pragmatics proposed by Relevance

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2 Thompson & Hunston (1999: 177) explicitly stated that evaluation "is often implicit and relies for its effect on intertextuality, and in many texts it is multilayered".

3 As Neary (2014: 183) makes clear, "Identification of the type of modality employed will not only assist in identifying the mode of narration; it also provides a means of pinpointing the linguistic techniques involved in narrative point of view". As a matter of fact, the close relationship between modality, ideology and point of view has been well established ever since the seminal works by Uspensky (1973), Fowler (1986) and Simpson (1993), and it has been extended in more recent studies such as Semino and Short (2004).

4 "McIntyre (2006), for instance, extended the discussion of point of view beyond the traditional generic boundaries of prose to drama; Bosseaux (2007) effectively applied the study of point of view to translated texts; Sotirova's empirical studies showed that reader responses to narrative point of view do not necessarily depend on the linguistic cues which <<theoreticians have listed as evocative of narrative viewpoint>> (2006: 121)" (Neary 2014:188). Douthwaite (2007) basically extended the Uspensky – Fowler – Simpson frameworks and made the case for the inclusion of all those non-modalized forms which do not perform modal functions at code level but are of paramount importance at pragmatic level.

theory, which relies on the presumption of relevance of the implicit meanings of any message:[5] a speaker/ writer explicitly ostensifies her/his wish to communicate, creating an expectation of relevance and giving a clue to her/his intentions; the message gives all the necessary information in the most economical way and provides enough cognitive effects to a reader so as to convince him to engage in the processing effort required to find the meaning; finally, the hearer/reader infers the intention from the clues and the context-mediated information. Relevance theory thus proposes an ostensive-inferential model of communication based on the concept of optimal relevance[6] (the ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth processing by the reader and is the most relevant one compatible with the writer's abilities and preferences). This is usually taken to mean that the pursuit of optimal relevance always comes at the expense of processing effort, because readers limit their hermeneutic effort to what satisfies the presumption of relevance conveyed by a message, that is what is strictly necessary to recover the writer's intended meanings.

What makes a text like *A Remonstrance* so peculiar is that its optimal relevance is not presented as incompatible with the reader's processing effort; on the contrary, it seems deliberately built to consume the reader's processing resources in order to stimulate her/his hermeneutic response and pursue further meanings than would have been warranted by the writer himself, so that, in the end, it is the reader who is entitled to draw conclusions and infer meanings that the author can only hint at. This is achieved by Coppe's handling of strong and weak implicatures (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 199-201) which are closely linked to the determinacy of interpretation. Of course, it is impossible to make a rigid distinction between intended and unintended inferences (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 199), but in general implicatures can be considered strong when there are no alternative assumptions that a writer expects the reader to infer and, consequently, interpretations are determinate. On the contrary, the greater the number of possible meanings, the greater the reader's responsibility, the weaker the implicatures.

The reader's ability to infer meanings by drawing implicatures is thus paramount to recognise the writer's viewpoint and his communicative intentions and *A Remonstrance* seems to rely on this idea, since the tract apparently denies, or at least questions, the existence of a single, orthodox view, opening the text to the possibility that the strong implicatures which should be inherent in an ideologically tense recantation concerning theological matters are in fact weak implicatures triggering multiple interpretations. Seen from this perspective, Coppe's text reveals the author's central dilemma (how to be released without abjuring his former controversial ideas and continue preaching) and his attempt to solve it by resorting to particular stylistic choices in the hope of keeping his theological freedom while regaining his actual personal freedom.

3 Discussion

3.1 Context and background

Abiezer Coppe (1619-72?) was one of the most notorious English radical preachers during the Interregnum (for detailed information on Coppe and his writings see Hill 1972, 1982, Hopton 1987, Smith 1989, Corns 1992, McDowell 1997, 2003, 2012, Hessayon 2004, 2011, Pick 2009). He is usually considered the quintessential Ranter, though some historians even deny the existence of such a movement or claim it was invented in sensationalist pamphlets by Puritan moralists. In any case, Coppe's behavior was unquestionably provocative, featuring such 'excesses' as preaching stark naked and/or completely drunk, or publicly

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5 As Wilson and Sperber (1994: 105) usefully remind, some implicatures are contextual assumptions derived from memory or from observation which help processing the content of a sentence. Other implicatures are contextual implications which can be inferred only from the joint consideration of input and context and are derived by deductive inference from the content of a sentence and the context."

6 See Wilson & Sperber (2004: 612), which is the elaboration of the original definition proposed in Sperber and Wilson (1995: 158). As to the difference between *inferential* and *coded* Wilson and Sperber (2004: 607) maintain: "According to the code model, a communicator encodes her intended message into a signal, which is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code. According to the inferential model, a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided."

sleeping with women. He even adopted mad behaviors: when, on 1 October 1650, he was questioned before the parliamentary committee, he started mumbling, talking nonsense and flinging fruits about the room.[7]

However, Coppe stood out among many other 'mechanick preachers' of his time for his academic training. He was born in Warwick, the child of a respectable Presbyterian family, and had a very good humanist education. He attended Oxford University and studied theology and classical languages (perhaps even a little Hebrew). He progressively took to radical positions and during the Civil War he served as a chaplain to a provincial parliamentary garrison in the New Model Army. In 1647 a mystical experience allegedly transformed him into 'a child of God': he thus became an itinerant preacher and harbinger of an ecstatic form of liberation which was more and more at odds with the orthodox theological positions of the Presbyterians and the Baptists.

Coppe's ecstatic prophecies culminated in his provocative and controversial pamphlet in two parts, *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649-50), where he set himself up as "a signe, and a wonder" to all the nation: in contrast to the assumptions and accommodations of orthodoxy, Coppe stressed God's unlimited and arbitrary power,[8] and like Gerrard Winstanley and the Quakers he announced that a Christ's Second Coming was imminent.[9] Claiming that moral restrictions no longer applied to the redeemed, Coppe felt called to enact a new form of community that he envisaged as the ideal Christian society. As a consequence, the tract contained an apocalyptic prediction which explicitly foretold the end of any form of power wielded by the 'great ones', the overthrow of the existing social order, and the abolition of private property.

Coppe's appropriation of biblical concepts and prophetic claims was highly personal but by no means unique: mid-XVII-century England was rife with prophets, children of God, spouses of Christ and other "abusers of Scriptures" (see Hill 1972, Smith 1989) and, on a more general level, the Bible had become a storehouse of opinions and actions which both sides in the Civil War used to support their conflicting ideological positions. This strategic use of the Holy Writ, however, could lead to unpredictable consequences: Coppe's theological studies had granted him access to various authors and their controversial positions, allowing him to expose the unstable and contingent nature of the biblical text itself, its apparently orthodox interpretations, and its distortions to justify authority in contemporary political discourse. It was quite natural for an educated preacher like Coppe to resort to the Bible and use it as a justification for his most provocative behaviors and ideological positions. So, if the "commission to write" came directly from God, the style and the language adopted by Coppe was clearly modeled on Old Testament prophets'.[10]

Coppe's preaching had already drawn the attention of the authorities, but after the publication of *A Fiery Flying Roll* they singled him out as a potentially dangerous public figure, especially because of his former political affiliations, which made him a sort of betrayer of the emerging ruling class. *A Fiery Flying Roll* was immediately banned and burned by the hangman, and its author was imprisoned without trial in January 1650 (some even claim that Parliament issued the Blasphemy Act a few months later as a direct consequence of the publication of Coppe's tract). Coppe wrote *A Remonstrance* to protest his innocence, but it failed to gain him liberty[11] and so it took further examination and a second, longer recantation (Coppe 1651b) before he was released, in June 1651.

3.2 Periodic constructions

Even a cursory reading of *A Remonstrance* shows that, despite the necessity of being (or at least sounding) as convincing as possible, Coppe was not interested in producing a plain, neat answer to the accusations levelled at him. Rather, his text is characterized by an extremely idiosyncratic style in which periodic

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7 The Unitarian minister Alexander Gordon (1887: 190) is explicitly dismissive in his claim "that Coppe's mind was disordered is clear". MacGregor (1984: 132) describes Coppe as "a social deviant", Morton (1970) limits himself to considering him "unbalanced" and thinks that in the episode of fruit flinging Coppe disguised himself into feigned madness.

8 According to Pick (2009: 31) his positions might even show Pelagian and Joachite influence.

9 For a general outline of the English radical movements in the XVII century Hill (1972) remains unavoidable.

10 Pick (2009: 35), for example, identifies Isaiah as the prophet whom Coppe "seems to owe a good deal stylistically".

11 Pick (2009: 34) defines it "a notably incomplete apology".

sentences feature prominently. In a very general way, that term is applied by linguists to any sentence in which anticipatory constituents (i.e. subordinate or dependent constituents in non-final position) play a major role: a periodic sentence draws the reader's attention to the syntactic structure itself of the sentence by giving extra emphasis to end focus,[12] but, more importantly, it produces a syntactic dislocation that imposes a great hermeneutic pressure on the reader, because s/he has to store up in her/his memory all the various anticipatory materials until s/he gets to the final constituent.

In itself, the recourse to meandering syntactic elaboration and intrusive parenthetical comments does not necessarily indicate any inherent hermeneutic instability or heterodox claim in a text: parenthetical constructions, euphemisms and hedges are usually considered as indicators of politeness (Leech & Short 2007: 251), and, in the cultural context of XVII-century England, periodic sentences would feature prominently in spontaneous preaching. They might even be deliberately flaunted by preachers as evidence of their prophetic claims: the ability to lecture and sermonize at length and in a syntactically complex way without losing the argumentative control was the best proof that the speech was not an individual's own contrivance but the divine word coming through him or her, the best confirmation of Christ's words: "it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." (*Matthew* 10, 10; KJV).

However, despite his affinities with other radical preachers of his time, Coppe's writing is allowedly considered idiosyncratic and unconventional – according to Hill (1972: 210) he had "a prose style quite unlike anything else in the seventeenth century" – and in the case of *A Remonstrance*, this originality is produced by the implicatures triggered by an unusually extensive use of digressions and parentheses (there are no less than thirty in the five pages of the text, and three in the title page alone). Their dramatic quality is ideal for a climactic build-up of tension and pathos: after all, the recourse to afterthoughts, asides, and comments is a very clever way to add to the text and give extra relevance to ideas or insights that do not deserve to be sidelined.[13] But Coppe's use of parenthetical digressions can not only be ascribed to his pursuit of a special kind of emphatic syntax, because their frequent use also generates a different effect: as the following pages will try to demonstrate, periodic sentences seem to be deliberately employed to produce a specific effect on the reader and strengthen the rhetorical force of the writer's arguments, highlighting the link between stylistic choices and the expression of point of view.

More importantly, this unconventional use of modality in Coppe's text questions commonplaces concerning not only the deontic and boulomaic systems, but especially the epistemic one. The skillful use of biblical quotations or allusions introduces a clear deontic perspective in the text, stressing that obligations or permissions are not interpreted by Coppe in terms of social or institutional laws (see Kärkkäinen 1987: 150), but as the necessity of acting morally according to the Gospel ("it is my Life" Coppe repeats over and over again in his tract). As a consequence, it is very difficult at the boulomaic level to understand what Coppe's hopes are: his remonstration is clearly aimed at regaining liberty, but the stylistic features of the text suggest that his desires have a wider scope and he never seems willing to quit his prophetic stance. He says that the propagation of the Gospel "is the desire of my soul" (Coppe 1651a: 2), but the whole text is also a passionate attempt to build a certain ethical image of the writer and to accuse in an indirect way the authorities who inhibit the existence of liberty and community in English society.

The obligations and wishes emerging from deontic and boulomaic modalities are thus strictly tied to Coppe's attitude to the truth-content of sentences, in particular those coming from his adversaries or contained in the parliamentary acts. Their validity is questioned by the writer's assumptions emerging from his epistemic comments but, interestingly enough, Coppe is not at pains to demonstrate the reliability of his own opinions: his confidence in the truth of his own propositions is simply taken for granted, as if his defiant act of ostensively performing the inspiration he claims were enough to justify his rejection of empty formalisms.

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12 As Leech & Short (2007: 181) maintain, it "saves the main part of the main clause to the end, and thus reinforces the highlighting of final position with the highlighting of syntactic form".

13 As Leech & Short (2007: 187) remind, a "parenthesis is in part a recuperatory mechanism, a way of digressing from the main structure of the sentence in order to include something which, with more forethought, could have been integrated into the syntax of the sentence."

A further element of complexity in Coppe's text is that it is difficult to determine the modal shading throughout Coppe's text: the centrality of the deontic and boulomaic modalities, even in the form of generic assertions and Gospel quotations, cannot be said to provide a positive shading because the overall polemic attitude of the narrative I and the use of parenthetical constructions function as epistemic signifiers, destabilizing the very nature of the facts and words presented in the text. It is a sort of self-consuming artifact, that questions its own validity as soon as it is presented to the reader, thereby obliging the latter to respond actively to the of the text, and consider the possibility that there may be more to the text than its outward, explicit claims.[14]

Obviously, the relationship between theology and rhetoric is a very complicated issue and, as to Coppe, his true theological claims are still not agreed on by specialists (see Davis 1993, McGregor et al. 1993). However, the analysis of *A Remonstrance* sheds light on Coppe's attempt to encourage the reader's emotional and empathetic engagement. His repeated shifts from literal to metaphorical interpretation of religious tenets, his surprising manipulation of deontic and epistemic modal systems not only demonstrate that ideology can be encoded in many ways, but also that any stylistic analysis of point of view is inextricably tied to the potential interpretive effects of the context in which such shifts take place.

3.3 Text analysis

The beginning of the text stands out for its almost total absence of narrative progression, since it meanders about apparently secondary details and expatiates on the circumstances of Coppe's imprisonment (sentence numbers are provided for ease of reference):

> [1] I, having patiently, cheerfully, and silently sustained (*through the malice, ignorance, mistake, and blinde zeal of Informers) a twelve-months imprisonment in the common Goals of *Warwick*, *Coventry*, and that most infamous Goal of *Newgate*, Have been within these few days informed by my dearest friend, That
> [2] The two † Acts of *May* 10. and *Aug.* 9. 1650 were put out because of me; thereby intimating that I was guilty of the breach of them. [3] Whereupon, (after my long, and by many admired patience and silence) I thought good not so much for mine own sake, (for my pure innocence supports me, and lifts up my head above all these things) but for the sakes of others,
> [4] To present
> [5] This ensuing Remonstrance, Vindication, and Attestation.
>
> [6] * *All fleshly interests, carnal Gospellers, and pretenders to Religion, with some secret enemies (though seeming friends) to the State, combining together to incense them against me, because I have faithfully and boldly declaimed against their hypocrisie, pride, covetousness, self-seeking, and villany, covered under the cloak of fleshly holiness and Religion, &c.*
> [7] † *Which were put out half a yeer after mine imprisonment.* (Coppe 1651a: 1)

In sentence [1] the narrative I is emphatically put in thematic position, thus signaling the highly personal commitment of the text, an impression which is reinforced by the fact that the syntactic development of the sentence is 'blocked' by a series of anticipatory materials which delay the appearance of the main verb, the verbal process *have been ... informed*. Also the verbiage (to use the well-known Functional Grammar term) which follows is particularly long, amounting to the whole sentence [2]. Sentence [3], too, features a lot of anticipatory materials, thus confirming an internal norm of high syntactic elaboration, which is finally concluded by the rankshifted sentences [4] and [5] (see Douthwaite 2000).

Also from a semantic point of view, the beginning of Coppe's tract is characterized by an accumulation which slows down the reading: the speaking voice underscores the harshness of his imprisonment, stressed by a climactic triplet formed by two *common Goals* (Warwick and Coventry) and a *most infamous Goal*

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14 As Neary (2014: 184) puts it "the position of the 'undermining' epistemic and perception markers in the narrative is fundamental to the resultant effect; foregrounding these markers results in the 'factuality' of what follows being immediately questioned, while placing them after the depiction of a certain event/thought results in readerly confusion as categorical assertions are effectively undermined".

(Newgate) [1], and also the following lines are over-detailed, with value-laden nouns typically occurring in couples or triplets and regularly premodified by evaluative adverbs or adjectives. For example, the material process *sustained* in sentence [1] is premodified by the three modal adverbs *patiently, cheerfully, and silently* which clearly underscore the evangelical quality of Coppe's endurance[15]

In this carefully built rhetorical architecture, the recourse to parenthetical structures highlights Coppe's intention to focus on the heroic fortitude shown during his imprisonment rather than on producing a rational answer based on stringently logical arguments. In sentence [3] Coppe mentions again his *long, and by many admired patience and silence*, thus demonstrating that he chose to fight vicariously what was basically a question of orthodoxy and ideology as a question of ethical reliability.

While Coppe presents himself as an innocent Christian martyr, he cautiously avoids any direct attack against Parliament: the use of the passive material process *were put out* in [2], for example, is an elegant way of blaming the *Acts* as the real causes of his imprisonment. However, the ideological perspective of the text is conveyed, albeit indirectly, through the severe criticism of his enemies (see Jeffries 2010), whose utter wickedness is emphasized, if not exaggerated. The *Informers* who accused him are not only denounced for their *malice, ignorance, mistake and blinde zeal* [1]; their iniquity is given extra importance by being discussed in detail in a long side note [6].

The note itself deserves a mention for a number of reasons: it is given special relevance by the fact that it is rankshifted to sentence level and it is also graphologically foregrounded, since it is not confined to the bottom of the page but it is next to the main text and thus clearly conceived to be read along with it. Moreover, it confirms Coppe's love for parenthetical constituents, since it is itself a digression which contains another parenthetical structure, thus amounting to a sort of periodic sentence of the second degree. Finally, the note does not contain neutral, explicatory comments, as the shorter one that follows it [7], but rather bears out the writer's ideological perspective by contrasting, once again, Coppe's pious behavior and his antagonists' immorality.

The moral uprightness claimed by Coppe is demonstrated by the modal adverbs used to describe his actions: as a true prophet, he denounced *faithfully and boldly* their evil actions and in retaliation he was slandered and arrested. So, while Coppe is at pains to present himself as someone who is "meek and lowly in heart", his adversaries are discredited as being false and carnal, according to the Pauline tenet that "to be carnally minded is death" and "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (*Romans* 8, 6-7 KJV). The list of sins committed by these people is quite long (*hypocrisie, pride, covetousness, self-seeking, and villany, covered under the cloak of fleshly holiness and Religion* [6]) but Coppe especially focuses on *villany*, the only postmodified term in the list, whose perversity is evident for the oxymoronic quality it implies: in Puritan England, the chosen country made by the Society of the Saints and that was to house Christ's Second Coming, to have *"fleshly interest"*, to be *"carnal Gospellers"* or *"pretenders to Religion"* who cover their misdeeds under the *cloak of fleshly holiness and Religion*" was a contradiction in terms or, worse, the most telling quality of the *secret enemies ... to the State* [6].

Such a frenetic use of periodic structures does not seem aimed at modifying or assuaging the force of a sentence. On the contrary, they take over the main structure of the text and block its narrative progression, allowing the writer to criticize his adversaries and impose his ethos as a reliable man. It would appear, then, that the recourse to anticipatory materials differs information not because the reader must linger on a cogent apology, but because Coppe wants to confirm his former opinions and exploit the possibility of writing against his enemies, with no special care for crafting a convincing recantation.

This is confirmed by the fact that Coppe relies heavily on categorical expressions in the first part of his tract, but then he starts resorting to modalization on a regular basis, thereby reducing the commitment to his own words (Lyons 1977: 763 and 808-809, Simpson 1993: 45-46, Jeffries & McIntyre 2010: 80). He begins with solemn declarations in the present tense (Coppe 1651a: 2) "my soul abhors", "I hate them", "whereat I

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15 The text alludes to such easily recognizable passages as "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you" *Luke* 6, 22-23, KJV; "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong", *2 Corinthians* 12, 10, KJV; or "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure" *2 Thessalonians* 1, 4, KJV).

laugh", or "Neither do I repent", but in the following pages he starts specifying (Coppe 1651a: 3-5) "I utterly protest", "I can boldly ... challenge", "I (patiently and silently) lie by the walls", "I ... avowedly protest", "I can speak seemingly knowingly powerfully", "I do from my heart detest", "I am utterly against". It is true that Coppe uses intense or high grade evaluative adverbs and phrases, but his preference for modalized instead of categorical expressions obviously introduces a more nuanced attitude.

It would appear, then, that Coppe progressively adopts a 'performative' style, resorting to periodic structures as modalizers in order to make communication more covert and allusive. Of course, the frequency of periodic structures might produce unpredictable perlocutionary effect, because the ambiguities they produce might also seem to confirm the lack of epistemic warrant of Coppe's argumentations and consequently legitimate the authorities' suspicions as to his untrustworthiness.

In the conclusion of the tract, for example, Coppe's ideological stance once again surfaces indirectly but the qualification he makes in discussing Liberty and Community might also be read as a further proof of his former dangerous opinions:

> [8] As for Liberty, I owne none but the *glorious liberty of the sons of God* which I and *the whole creation groans* after. [9] And I do from my heart detest and protest against all Sinful liberty, or that is destructive to soul or body.
> [10] And as for Community, I own none but that Apostolical, Saint-like community, spoken of in the Scriptures. [...]
> [11] Know all men by these Presents, That I am utterly against that Community which is sinful, or destructive to soul or body. (Coppe 1651a: 5)

The idea of *liberty* presented in [8] is clearly more comprehensive than the pure physical freedom from jail, since it is identified with the more universal freedom envisioned by Paul[16] and implies a complete renewal of the whole creation, with the consequent abolition of human norms and abuses. This is confirmed by the fact that the two radically different adjectives used in sentence [9] to premodify liberty (*glorious liberty* vs. *Sinful liberty*) clearly question the very idea of a single, universal definition of freedom, implicitly attacking all those who arrogate to themselves the right to judge and condemn in the name of liberty.

Similarly, the premodifiers *Apostolical, Saint-like* in [10] clearly indicate that the idea of community that Coppe has in mind is the one described in the *Acts of the Apostles*[17] thereby reviving the debate on some of the radical ideas which he had proposed in his preaching and in his controversial writings: as a matter of fact, the allusion to that ideal model allows Coppe to underscore its distance from the real community he lives in and which claims that it is made up of 'visible saints' but imprisons preachers and is therefore *destructive to soul or body* [11].[18]

3.3.1 Relevance stylistics

As it has been repeatedly stated in the previous pages, the mix of literal and metaphorical, the blurred referentiality of terms, and the possibility of interpreting them in opposite ways, make the text a lot more ambiguous than it seems at first view. Relevance theory is particularly useful to account for the covert communication which features prominently in the tract.

When Coppe (1651a: 2) points out that in their Act "the Parliament express their desires (*by all GOOD MEANS*) *to propagate the Gospel, &c.* Which is the desire of my soul", the anaphoric reference of *which*, whose salience is increased by its being in thematic position in a rankshifted sentence, is not so clear: does *which* refer to the *good means* or to *the Gospel*, or to its *propagation*, or to all of them? More important, and paradoxical, the meaning of *Gospel* is doubtful, too: since Coppe was accused of distorting and

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16 "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" *Romans* 8, 21-22, KJV.

17 "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", *Acts* 2, 44-45, KJV.

18 Incidentally, a very similar comment on freedom and community will be included in Coppe (1651b) as well, demonstrating the importance that Coppe attributed to these problems which he had already raised in his former controversial tracts and which he does not refrain from mentioning despite his imprisonment.

blaspheming the Word of God, it is not possible to decide whether he is alluding to the propagation of the orthodox message of the Gospel or to his own 'prophetic' assertions, which he considered the true, authentic interpretation of the Gospel.

This complex and allusive language, however, does not give the impression of creating gratuitous difficulties and ambiguities. Rather, it reveals the attempt to find a way of writing which might sound relevant to a double type of audience: on the one hand, *A Remonstrance* must appear a sincere, apologetic plea to regain freedom; on the other, it must confirm Coppe's sincere adherence to his own convictions. Therefore, Coppe underscores the hardships and humiliations he has undergone and meekly tolerated because in this way he can demonstrate that he has amply paid off his former transgressions. At the same time, he repeatedly stresses that his sorrows and pains have a clear evangelical quality. In this way, he does not protest his innocence in a clear and explicit way (which would entail a disavowal of some of his former behaviors and ideas), but implies it by showing how his sufferings bear a clear similarity with Christ's.

So, when Coppe deals with "*Prophaneness and Wickedness, Superstition and Formality &c.*", he does not produce any concrete proof of his innocence, but simply affirms that he opposed those sins in words and deeds, a claim whose honesty is proved by the fact that most people judged him the quintessence of sinfulness:

> [12] The two former, my soul abhors, and I hate them with a perfect hatred; [13] and have, by Life and Conversation, by Doctrine and Example (for many yeers) decried them; [14] yea, even since I have been by all men (except those that knew me) cried up (as my *fore-runner* before me was by all sorts even of the most religious and righteous men, except a handful that knew him) for the worst of sinners, the vilest of persons; for a *Blasphemer, a Devil, &c.* (Coppe 1651a: 2)

Similarly, while discussing idolatry and superstition, Coppe avails himself of a rhetorical question "Have any been *Boanerges* upon this account? (I speak as a fool) I have thundered more against them then they all" (Coppe 1651a: 2) which, characteristically, relies on two rather costly implicatures to legitimate his point. The Aramaic term *Boanerges*, meaning 'sons of thunder', is in fact a quotation from *Mark* (3, 17) and was the nickname used by Christ to call the two impetuous apostles John and James, but in itself refers to an outward behavior (energy, passion, zeal etc.) and not to a moral quality. However, this extremely sophisticated allusion, which requires a great processing effort, is implicitly used as a sufficient proof of the moral righteousness of the claimant, with no further demonstration. Again, later on in the text, Coppe does not complain for the fact that:

> [15] the Almighty (whose I am, and who will do with his own what he pleaseth) Hath set me (as formerly he hath most of his holy Prophets and Servants) as * *SIGNE and a WONDER.* – And –as a *stumbling stone, and ROCK of OFFENCE to both the houses of Israel, &c.*
> [16] * Isa.8. 18, 14-15. Zech. 3.3, 8. 🖝 [Men wondered at.] *Their words wondered at, their carriage wondered at, their actions wondered at, &c.* * As was Hosea, *Hos. 1-2.* (Coppe 1651a: 2-3)

The graphological foregrounding of such terms as *sign*, *wonder* and *rock of offence* in [15] is reinforced by the side note [16], which reminds the reader of the biblical prophets who experienced defamations. This means that those terms cannot be interpreted literally: they are used in a symbolical way and their weak implicatures stress that the imprisonment and the slanders are seen as signs of a curse by some, but they can also be considered as the best proof of Coppe's election. The two parentheses in [15] confirm this interpretation, since they underscore the link between Coppe, God, and the old prophets.

It would appear, then, that Coppe bolsters his claims by showing how 'unquestionable' facts can be interpreted in different ways. His condemnation is not a sign of a curse but of election, and the argumentative force of his text lay solely on the creation of a marked juxtaposition between himself as a wronged prophet and his pharisaical enemies. He even protests his innocence stating that "here I can boldly (as in reference to the grace of God) though in all humility (as in reference to my self) challenge the whole world and say, *Whose ox have I taken? Or whose ass have I taken? Or to whom have I done any wrong?*" (Coppe 1651a: 3), using once again parenthetic constructions not to provide a better or clearer explanation, but to encourage the reader to catch the implicatures produced by Coppe's act of ventriloquism in his pretension to righteousness by his adopting the voice of Old Testament prophets.

The constant appeal to the reader's hermeneutic abilities and inferring skills seems aimed at obliging her/him to revise her/his ideas of relevance and adapt it to the new spiritual scenario Coppe has been building in the tract. As a consequence, the more one reads on *A Remonstrance*, the more one gets the impression of a text which never expresses absolute commitment to its apologetic statements, but rather questions orthodox truths and transforms strong implicatures into weak ones, producing what may appear ironical or even subversive reading possibilities:

> [17] Resolving, by the help of the Omnipotent, Omnipresent JEHOVAH (whom I purely *worship in the spirit,* having *no confidence in the flesh*) to enlarge my self (when I enjoy my liberty) upon these things; [18] and to all unprejudiced spirits (and perhaps to the silencing of them also) to give an account of my self, in reference to those Various Dispensations, past and present, that I have been and am led into and thorow: [19] as also, the removing of all stumbling-blocks, the clearing up of those mistakes, and the wiping away those aspersions, which (through malice, weakness, ignorance, and mistake) have been cast upon me; [20] who have been so covered with a cloud, that no one amongst a thousand know me. (Coppe 1651a: 1-2)

Sentence [17] stands out not only for its rankshifted status but also for its parenthetical structure, with anticipatory materials hindering the syntactic development, so that the reader is forced to slow down his reading: Coppe claims that his cult is sincere and purely spiritual (as the short quotation from *Philippians* 3, 3 makes clear) and takes his imminent liberation for granted so much so that he even promises to say more on *these things* as soon as he enjoys his liberty.

However, it is not clear what *these things* refer to: they may be the *Remonstrance, Vindication, and Attestation* which have just been mentioned in the preceding sentence [5], or they may allude to the spirit-flesh dialectics, or even to a more thorough discussion of the two acts issued by Parliament. In any case, Coppe just passes over them and chooses to focus on the *Various Dispensations* [18] he was allegedly granted after becoming a 'child of God', and sentence [19] confirms his stance: his text will remove the *stumbling-blocks*, the *mistakes* and the *aspersions* cast on him by his enemies (once again, discredited with an almost verbatim repetition of the value-laden terms used in sentence [1]), but the writer does not seem to disclaim his own mistakes or to apologize for his own past behaviors.

This attitude is confirmed by the fact that Coppe describes his own situation through an extremely telling metaphor in [20]: the cloud he is *covered with* apparently alludes to the slurs that distorted his own physical features and made him virtually unrecognizable. However, the cloud is one of the most typical images used in the Old Testament to evoke God's guiding presence on behalf of Israel,[19] thus allowing Coppe to sneak in a veiled claim that the cloud that changed him beyond recognition is in fact the proof of God's protection and approbation.

Nowhere is Coppe's ambiguity more evident than in the following passage:

> [21] The Act is bent against these ensuing Execrable Opinions and c. As (first) [*The denial of the necessity of Civil and Moral righteousness amongst men.*]
> [22] If there are such a generation of men, they stand or fall to their own master. [23] As for me, I say concerning them, *O my soul! Some not thou into their secrets: unto their assemblies, mine honour, be not thou united, Gen.49.6.*
> [24] This Opinion (in the presence of the All-seeing God, in whose presence I am, and whom I serve) I utterly protest against. (Coppe 1651a: 3)

This Opinion in sentence [20] is thematized and its importance further enhanced by the parenthesis which follows it and that, as usual, increases the syntactic suspense. However, it is by no means clear which opinion Coppe is utterly protesting against. The first, more immediate impression is that *This opinion* refers to what is placed immediately before: Coppe's words in [22] or the biblical quotation in [23]. Since both hypotheses are clearly impossible, one may refer Coppe's displeasure to the *Act* of Parliament, which occupies thematic position in sentence [21], and it is necessary to read the whole passage over again to decide that, this being a recantation, the 'correct' reference must be to one of the *Execrable Opinions* quoted in the act: *The denial of the necessity...* [21].

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19 See, for example, "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way" *Exodus* 13, 21, KJV.

From a relevance-theoretic point of view, the high cost of such a syntactic arrangement appears unjustified because the text does not seem to provide enough implicatures and extra meaning to offset the supplementary processing effort, unless Coppe's purpose were to question surreptitiously the Act of Parliament itself, which is of course entirely possible. In any case, by violating the more 'natural' syntactic construction, the passage not only adds to the burden on the reader's syntactic memory, but subtly encourages him to neglect the absence of convincing justifications from the writer and, instead, to linger on the various anticipatory constituents (such as the quotation from *Genesis* 49, 6, which condemns the assemblies of violent men and thus entails that Coppe is the innocent victim of his countrymen's hostility).

Furthermore, the almost tautological content of the parenthesis in sentence [24] is yet another reminder that Coppe is misinterpreted and mistreated by a perverse *generation of men* [22] and that his being accused and imprisoned is in itself a sure sign of election. It is not surprising, then, to read that:

> [25] Herein do I make my boast of God all the day long, and in him do I triumph and rejoice, though I am (to my joy also) numbered amongst Transgressors, and the chiefest of them preferred before me; many of them being released and set at liberty. (Coppe 1651a: 3)

Once again, Coppe is at pains to establish his own ethos and reliability, stressing that he is an innocent man who is still unjustly imprisoned, while many other offenders have been set free. He even reminds his readers that he duly and blithely accepts his misfortunes in the spirit of the Beatitudes: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (*Matthew* 5, 12; KJV).

4 Conclusion

In Coppe's *A Remonstrance*, the common devices for viewpoint presentation are obviously present, but the modal effects triggered by the use of periodic sentences and the creation of weak implicatures are particularly striking. They perform a decisive ideological function since they allowed Coppe to communicate overtly with the apparent audience (the political and religious authorities) while communicating covertly with his intended audience (his followers): on the one hand Coppe tried to coax the authorities by underscoring his meek acceptance of his punishment and by implying that the harshness of his imprisonment and the slanders he received were a sufficient punishment for his sins; on the other, he was able to prove his sincerity as a true, unheeded prophet that did not compromise and whose righteousness was testified by his Christ-like sufferings.

The recourse to such a dual communicative mode was undoubtedly risky, but Coppe was certainly not naïve. Perhaps he was trying to sharpen his rhetorical weapons and to hone an allusive and polysemous style, in order to sound convincing and comply with the expectations of the authorities while keeping his radical political ideals. He may even have undervalued the gravity of his situation hoping he would be set free anyway, but he also must have anticipated the authorities' reaction as a matter of course: the repeated use of periodic constructions undoubtedly reinforced the impression of the writer's half-hearted commitment to his apologetic words, and the hermeneutic instability conveyed by weak implicatures might well appear intolerable. On the whole, however, it seems that, by favoring the indeterminacy about the content of his text, Coppe blurred his intentions, aiming at sounding authentic and faithful to his own prophetic mission, even if it necessarily meant that he run the risk of not appearing sincere to those who expected a more straightforward recantation.

This choice can thus be considered as an attempt to advance a statement of principle in a different guise: if open preaching always run the risk of leading to the prophet's imprisonment, a more allusive stylistic mode might hopefully confirm the disciples and exhort them to continue in the faith, even if it entailed a costlier form of communication. The demanding features of the text, the ambiguities it triggers, and the frequent use of parenthetical constituents suggest that Coppe deliberately used them as a sort of hedging, in order to draw the reader's attention to specific aspects of his text, restate some of his former radical ideas, albeit in a more indirect guise, and ultimately modify the cognitive environment of his fellow citizens, even if this might fail to get him his freedom, as it eventually happened.

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