

William Walwyn had argued that the levelling effect of true Christianity would be to 'empty the fullest Baggs, and pluck down the highest plumes',¹⁸ so Coppe warned that 'the mighty Leveller' was coming to infuse men's hearts with a charity which would bring down the established order, both within men and in society at large. Those who resisted would be judged, punished and eventually swept away.¹⁹

Who are they who stand in the way: these things that are; frustrating the things that are not? The rich, obviously, but also those religious formalists, devious in their appearances, who everywhere diverted religious performance from its true work in charity, into the niceties of observance and speculation. Coppe saw his work as 'a terrible threat to the Formalists'. The formalities of religion were amongst those things which had been set on high and must be cast down in the day of the Lord.²⁰ The meticulous, intolerant observances of the 'Precisian' were no more than hypocrisy 'for under them all there lies snapping, snarling, biting, besides covetousnesse, horrid hypocrisie, envy, malice, evill surmising'. Not only are anglicans, presbyterians and independents wanting in this regard, so too the gathered churches of the sects, the 'anti-free-communicants', setting themselves apart to quarrel over sprinkling, dipping and the like, masked their hypocrisy behind a contentious preoccupation with forms.²¹ Even so, and it is important to recognise this, Coppe's attack does not stop here. Amongst those who abandon forms altogether is yet a new kind of formalism. Strutting through his work is a character, 'the young man void of understanding' alias the 'well-favoured Harlot'. The sexual inversion, the male harlot, is typical of Coppe. This figure also rejects the formal churches and their ordinances in favour of the sufficiency of the spirit within, the antinomian speculations of the 'Spirituell Notionists'.²² Their posturing also produces nothing in terms of practical Christianity. It is an anti-formalist formalism, still clothing religion in hypocrisy, still sterile, still the enemy. So worrying to Coppe is it, that the prime objective of the second part of *A Fiery Flying Roll* is to discover 'the secret villanies of the holy Whore, the well-favoured Harlot (who scorns carnall ordinances, and is mounted up into the notion of Spiritualls)'. The well-favoured Harlot, scorning Scripture, 'speaking nothing but Mystery, crying down carnall ordinances, &c. is a fine thing among many, it's no base thing (now adaies) though it be a cloak for covetousnesse, yea though it be to maintain pride and pomp; these are no base things. These are things that ARE, and must be confounded...'. But this, by our historians' definition, is the Ranter antinomian, demolisher of the protestant ethic. Yet for Coppe he is one of the things that are—to be overthrown by the things that are not.