

The Ranters were the spearhead of the struggle against the internalised repression of the puritan sense of sin, or guilt. As Frank McGregor puts it, 'their ultimate aim was the attainment of freedom from the burden of sin'.⁹ Antinomianism and pantheism were instruments to that end. By 1984, Hill was arguing that the truly revolutionary voice of the seventeenth century was heard only in the writings of Abiezer Coppe, George Foster and Laurence Clarkson, three Ranters. By accepting property, the Levellers inevitably blunted the revolutionary edge of their cause. Winstanley and the Diggers rejected property but, by accepting sin, Winstanley ultimately endorsed the need to repress and diverted his vision of a better society into a utopianised totalitarianism. It is the Ranters who, in rejecting sin and repression, epitomised the negation of the protestant ethic and its accompanying cultural forms which have been major props of the hegemony of the ruling classes ever since.¹⁰ This is the framework which has underlain the claim that the Ranters warrant our attention and the significance which has been attached to them over the last fifteen years.

Coppe is a spearhead, a leader, a defining instance of Ranterism. Morton's view was that it is 'in his writings that the Ranter attitude to good and evil was most powerfully developed'.¹¹ In Hill's version, there was a mystical, quietist wing of the Ranters led by Joseph Salmon, but Coppe was the leader of the 'drinking, swearing, smoking Ranters' acting out sin so as to repudiate it as a restraining category.¹² Despite the absence of evidence that Coppe ever engaged in these practical antinomian activities, he continued to be seen as their advocate. *A Fiery Flying Roll*, according to McGregor emotional and incoherent, was the text of practical antinomianism, declaring 'all religious ordinances obsolete'.¹³ Coppe's reputation as a leader of the Ranters rests, therefore, on a reading of this text. My view is that such a reading is a gross misreading, and that it is their overall framework or paradigm that forces these good historians to major distortion and egregious error in this case. It is a cautionary tale I tell. The people make their own history. They must have resisted the protestant ethic, a hegemonic projection of their masters. To do so, they must have repudiated sin and hell in gestures of antinomian and pantheistic defiance. The Ranters led that struggle. Coppe was a Ranter. Therefore *A Fiery Flying Roll* must have said these things. Let us see.

Like many of his contemporaries in 1649—the year of the downfall of monarchy, Lords and the ancient constitution—Coppe was dwelling with an electrifying sense of the imminence of God's second coming, of an approaching millenium, a third dispensation. It was a world in which things that are not would set at nought the things that are. In which, Coppe suggested to illustrate the