Populism in English Civil War news discourse. A corpus-assisted discourse study of *Mercurius Britanicus*

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1. Introduction

The outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642 triggered a fervent political discussion over principles of power and State which saw the exaltation of liberty and popular parliamentary sovereignty over the allegedly tyrannical government of the king, Charles I. Appeals to the voice and power of the people ricocheted from one pamphlet to another where Puritan authors – under the influence of an increasing radicalism and a precocious republicanism – vindicated the role of the Parliament in executing the public interest of its people. In 1642 Henry Parker claimed that "power is but secondary and derivative in Princes" and that "the fountain and efficient cause is the people" (in Orr 2002: 178). In 1644 Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish Presbyterian, argued that the origin of political power resides in the people, which gave them the right to resist a wicked Parliament or a tyrannical ruler (Kennedy 2008: 152). In 1649 Milton defended the regicide by affirming that "the power of Kings and Magistrates is nothing else, but what is only derivative, transferred and committed to them in trust from the people to the Common good of them all" (in Orr 2002: 179). The emphasis on the people as the key referent of the Early Modern notion of popular sovereignty may sound familiar to the modern-day reader as a result of its proximity to the notion of populism as manifestation of people's will against the élite. Even so, some considerations need to be drawn regarding the identity of the "people" targeted by the 17th century Parliamentarian propaganda as different from the identity of a modern democratic 'demos'. In the 1640s Parliamentary claims to represent the "common people" were merely "a somewhat larger élite's railing against Royalists" (Hardin 2003: 153). Indeed the "people" supposedly represented by Parliament were mostly made up of financially independent men belonging to the

middle and upper classes.[1] What, on the other hand, appears to be consistent over time is the propaganda rhetoric at the basis of appeals to the "people", i.e. the exploitation of the notion of popular sovereignty as a stratagem to support rule by élites who were not at all beholden to the larger polity (Hardin 2003: 153). As Hardin claims, still today appeals to the "people" serve more as rhetorical legitimization of a particular political faction than as a description of a real democratic government (2003: 154). By assuming a continuity in the rhetoric of popular sovereignty over time, the aim of my paper is to investigate possible traces of populist discourse in the propaganda of the Parliamentarian press in the period of the English Civil War in an attempt to establish whether and to what extent the present-day concept of populism – intended not as an ideology but as a political discourse style – can be applied to historical media texts in moments of crisis. To this purpose, I selected the Parliamentarian periodical publication *Mercurius Britanicus* as object of inquiry and I adopted Moffit's (2016) definition of populism as a political style characterized by three main indexes: "appeal to the people *vs* the élite", "bad manners" and "crisis, breakdown or threat".[2] In order to detect and measure the "level" of populism in *Britanicus*, the three indexes are analysed in terms of their linguistic actualisations in the form of keywords, by applying principles from corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS). By identifying the quantitative salience of words referring to the three indexes, their encoding in discourse and their performative character in the written text, I believe that it is possible to argue in favour of a notion of populism as a movable discourse category which can transcend limits of time and find interesting applications in the field of historical media discourse.

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[1] Robinson adopts a more inclusive perspective claiming that although by principle the Parliament press addressed men with property and therefore political rights, in practice "the Parliamentary war machine was a disparate coalition which included people from different groups whose identities were defined in many ways" (2016: 74).

[2] Although it might be argued that Moffitt's definition is broad to the point that – under it – a great deal of political discourse could be defined as "populist", it nonetheless has the merit of identifying three categories within which political discourses can be assessed in terms of their degree of adherence to some aspects of a populist discourse style.

2. Theoretical framework

In his book *The Global Rise of Populism* (2016), Moffitt defines populism as a political style which manifests itself through discursive features (i.e. language and rhetoric) as well as through aesthetics and performance in the form of images, self-presentation, body language, design and "staging" (2016: 40). The author stresses the performative and affective dimension of populism and contextualizes it "in the heavy mediatised and stylised milieu" of contemporary politics (2016: 28). In my understanding of populism I shall focus on its discursive and performative components but – unlike Moffitt – I shall detach the category from its dependence on contemporary politics in order to test its applicability to different historical contexts. In this sense, I shall follow the principles of the discursive approach (Hawkins 2009; de La Torre 2010) which views populism as a particular mode of expression which is gradable in the sense that it can be found in various degrees in different texts across time and space. From this perspective populism is not regarded as an ideology but as a discourse which can be discerned through an analysis of its linguistic and rhetorical components. Indeed a political actor or a propagandist can use populist language, though his/her ideology is not populism but, for example, republicanism or socialism. In this regard, it is also worth bearing in mind that political actors and their supporters do not commonly define themselves as "populists" even though their language fulfils Moffit's definition of populism "Populism" is in fact an "outsider", even antagonistic term, used by those who do not adhere to or agree with the message or the messenger in question and as such it has strong derogatory connotations (Partington and Taylor 2018: 26).

Previous studies have been conducted in order to measure populism in discourse by means of computer-based quantitative content analysis (Armony and Armony 2005; Pauwels 2011; Reungoat 2010), but they were met with criticism on the basis that a mere counting of words cannot account for a discursive style which is the result of tone and language contextualization (Hawkins 2010: 71; Moffitt 2016: 22). In light of these objections, my research is grounded on the principles of corpus-assisted discourse studies (Partington 2004, 2008; Stubbs 1996, 2001) which combines the usual qualitative approach to the analysis of text with the quantitative analysis of Corpus Linguistics in the attempt to discover patterns of

occurrences and link them to specific socio-historical discourse practices. Haarman and Lombardo define the feature of this methodology as "a constant movement back and forth between data in the form of concordances, collocations and clusters on the one hand, and on the other, the contextual information (i.e. the actual texts) retrievable from the software" (2009: 8). This "shunting" between the concordances and the cotext reveals more clearly the meaning and tone of the discourse feature examined than would be the case by simple quantitative analysis and appears to accommodate previous criticism (Brownlees 2012: 22). What is more, since measuring the populist style in the text requires an understanding of wider contextual matters, my inquiry will extend beyond the textual context to include considerations of the socio-cultural, historical and ideological conditions within which the Parliamentarian newsbook was produced (Pahta &Taavitsainen 2010: 551).

3. The historical context of the Civil War

The English Civil War was a unique event in the history of England in that it pitted a monarch, Charles I, and his Parliament against one another for the first time. The reasons for the hostility against the king were many, not least the MPs' resentment for the king's ruling of the Kingdom without the Parliament for 11 years during which he imposed his Personal Rule in matters of politics and religion (Russell 1990, Sharpe 1992). When in 1640 the king was forced to summon the Parliament again to levy taxes to finance his war against Scotland, the Parliament took its revenge by impeaching his leading counsellors for High Treason (Orr 2002). This marked the beginning of an open conflict between Charles I and his Parliament which led to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642. Within months of its first publication, the Parliamentarian *Britanicus*, in the person of its editor Marchamont Nedham, accused Charles I of deserting his Parliament, of favouring delinquents, Papists and foreigners, of allowing his Catholic wife to trigger civil unrest, his bishops to bring in Popery and his 'evil' counsellors to introduce tyranny. While other fanatical puritan pamphlets were prepared to criticise the king for his tyrannical government, none compared with *Britanicus* for

the vehemence and crudity of its content and for its polemical persuasiveness (Macadam 2011).

4. *MercuriusBritanicus*

Britanicus came out in August 1643, eight months after the publication of the Royalist *Mercurius Aulicus*, in order to counter the latter's highly effective propaganda. It was edited by Marchamont Nedham, who is considered by a number of historians as one of the most skilful and effective propagandists of the 17th century (Raymond 2004, Foxley 2013). Both *Aulicus* and *Britanicus* adopt a similar argumentative structure whereby the reader is presented first with the other newsbook's assertion and then with their own editor's rebuttal. This dialogism is particularly evident in *Britanicus* since the rival newsbook's statement is usually introduced by the reporting tag "He saies" and "he tells us". Within such a heteroglossic framework, Nedham's style is notable for a strong personalization and an emotive tone which enhance the performative character of his propaganda and boost its persuasive force. While the Royalist editor of *Aulicus* mostly relied on satire, Nedham opted for personalizing the debate by transforming *Aulicus* into a "public enemy" to be discredited, vilified and mocked at through overtly polemical attacks: "So full of lying and railing, that I think he [Aulicus] is afflicted by all the pimp." (*Britanicus*, 10 October 1643). This highly confrontational language was not immune from consequences, especially when Nedham began to launch attacks on the personality of the king, for which he was censured and sent to prison.

The presence of *Britanicus* in the title underlines the editor's intention to report and defend the news and rights of the nation at large (Brownlees 2012: 14). This was particularly significant as the word prioritized the community of British people – with no difference in rank and status – as target of the news and supporters of the common cause. Within such an ideological framework, even the presumably unintentional misspelling of the word *Britanicus* (missing double 'n') in the first issue acquired a particular socio-political connotation. As Brownlees notes, *Britanicus* remained misspelt throughout its existence – despite the Royalists'

mockery of its solecism – as a flag of the "commonness" of the people as opposed to the pomposity and formality of the ministers and courtiers at Oxford (2006: 17).[3] In this polarized context, the spelling mistake became a significant marker of solidarity to enhance the socio-linguistic and ideological closeness between the Parliamentarians and the people, for whom substance was more important than prescriptivism. By means of this reiterated "performance of ordinariness" *Britanicus* gathered consensus in the nation, placing itself midway between the world of politics and the world of the people.

5. Corpus

In my study I have made use of the *Florence Early English Newspaper Corpus* (*FEEN*) compiled by Nicholas Brownlees at the University of Florence (Brownlees 2012) and available on the *CQPweb* Corpus Query System. It consists of 256,500 words and is structured in 6 sub-corpora representing aspects of periodical news discourse from 1620 to 1649. The first three sub-corpora contain *Corantos* from 1620 to 1641, the fourth sub-corpus includes several well-known 1640s newsbooks and the last two sub-corpora contain *Aulicus* and *Britanicus* respectively. In particular, *FEEN* records 16 numbers of *Britanicus* from 5 September 1643 to 7 October 1644 (amounting to 58,900 words) and 22 numbers of *Aulicus* from 1 January 1643 to 24 August 1644 (89,100 words).

In the course of the analysis I shall proceed both from hypotheses to data and from data to hypotheses. My first step is to create a wordlist for *Britanicus* and a wordlist for *Aulicus* and compare them in order to obtain a keyword list for *Britanicus* which reflects its discourse specificity in comparison with its rival publication. The keywords are analysed in concordances through collocations and clusters. Their semantic networks and lexico-syntactic patterns help our understanding of the way in which "appeal to the people *vs* the élite", "bad manners" and "crisis or threat" are represented in the text.

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[3]In July 1644 *Aulicus* writes: "we are still resolved to take notice, till we find him able to spell his owne name, which to this hower Britannicus never did" (*MA* 14-20 July 1644).

6. The analysis

The table below shows the first fifteen keywords in *Britanicus* elaborated by the *CQPweb* together with their frequency and their log ratio.

Keywords	Frequency	Log ratio
Aulicus	133	5.47
Popery	37	4.03
Popish	30	3.73
tells	101	3.61
sirrah	39	3.37
our	334	3.09
am	44	2.87
I	570	2.85
do	142	2.61
Queen	47	2.38
says	183	2.37
us	239	2.18
?	283	2.11
me	64	1.95
Enemy	78	1.84

Table 1. Keywords for *Britanicus* elaborated by the *CQPweb*.

6.1. Appeal to the people *vs* the élite index

Moffitt (2016) defines "the people" as the central audience of populists as well as the subject that populists attempt to "render present" in their discourse and performance. Unlike other descriptors, such as "workers" or "middle class", which have a relatively well defined social meaning, "the people" has no precise social

contours and remains a fluent concept with no precise group structure, boundaries and characteristics, although it is capable of carrying these senses, making everybody feel they are part of it (Canovan 2005: 140). The appeal to the people is also connected to claims against the élite and its political correctness within a polarized logic which sees the triumph of the "common sense" over the language of technocrats and the interests of the Establishment.

I shall start my investigation by taking into account the word "people" which is unexpectedly absent in the keyword list. I initially hypothesised that "people" could be a keyword in *Britanicus* but statistical evidence denied my initial assumption. Indeed both newsbooks refer to the people in their propaganda and the difference in the number of occurrences is not particularly salient, with *Britanicus* featuring 68 instances and *Aulicus* 53. After checking concordances, I noticed that in *Britanicus* the word acquires textual and ideological relevance as a result of its topicalization in the title of the periodical. In this regard, a comparison between the title of *Britanicus* and the title of *Aulicus* reveals their different attitude towards the people (my emphasis).

> MERCVURIUS BRITANICUS: Communicating the affairs of great BRITAINE: For the better Information of the **People.**

> MERCVRIUS AVLICUS, Communicating the intelligence, and affaires of the Court, to the rest of the KINGDOME.

Nedham appeals to the people from the very beginning by "rendering them present" in the title and by showing that his newsbook is produced and tailored to their need for information. *Aulicus*, on the other hand, focuses on the élite world of the Court at Oxford and defines its addressees by exclusion and impersonalization as the "rest of the kingdom".

Not only does Nedham speak to the people but most importantly he speaks for the people, which means that he represents a virtual image of the popular will and desires. The concordance analysis shows that in constructions where "people" appears either as subject of passive sentences or as object of active ones, they are represented as in desperate need of a change:

> How often have the Parliament and **people** been **deluded** by such Messages. (*MB*, 30 Sept-7Oct. 1644)

> **the people** being so **jaded** out with Common-prayer and Popery. (*MB,* 15-22 July 1644)

> The King is rambling about and **ruining his people** in such a manner that no man would believe them to be his subjects. (*MB*, 4-11 Jan 1644)

When "people" appears as actor-subject of active sentences, on the other hand, they are represented as ready to fight on the Parliament side as they become aware of the benefits of the libertarian principles of the Commons.

> **the people are willing to redeeme themselves** from the slavery they were in, under the Cavaliers (*MB*, 1-8 July 1644)

> **the people are at great ease** since the Kings party are taken off them, and are now **able to rise for the Parliament**, for they weighed so intolerably upon them, that **they now finde** what the Liberty of the Subject is, a thing they never heard of before (*Ibid.*)

The role of Nedham as proxy for the people is also traceable in the collocation of "people" with semantic lexemes referring to sight as metaphor for understanding and awareness. Below are some examples

> The **eyes** of **the people** do now begin to be opened and they **plainly see** (by the actions of the Queene, the English Papists, and the Irish Rebells at Court, and in the Armies) that though the maintaining of the Protestant Religion, and the Kings Prerogative be pretended, yet the introducing of Popery is the onely thing intended. (*MB*, 26 Sept-3 Oct. 1643)

> Have I not unmasqued the forgeries of the other side, and **put a candle** into the hands of the **Common people to see** the Court-tricks, and Oxford-tricks, and Bishop-tricks, and Jesuit-tricks? (*MB*, 23-30 Sept. 1644)

The quotes are also characterized by a binary opposition between "the people"/ "I" *vs* "King"/ "Queen"/ "Bishops"/ "Jesuits", which is strongly socially divisive. The Court in the person of the king and his counsellors are portrayed as an enemy of the people and as a scapegoat for the nation's ills.

In *Aulicus*, the appeal to the people is present but is encoded in patterns which represent the masses as ignorant and credulous and as a result dangerous to the maintenance of the natural order of things. The most frequent lexico-syntactic

pattern features "people" as object of verbs such as "cheat", "befoole", "beguile", "deceive":

> Which lest it should be reckoned by the London Pamphletters, amongst the prosperous successes of the Holy cause; and **cheate poore credulous people into beliefe**, that the Towne was taken by assault, with all the Ordinance Armes, and ammunition, and Prisoners more then can be numbred (for with such kind of stuffe doe they **foole their Readers**). (*MA*, 16-22 June 1644)

> and to **befoole the people to a faith** therein it was Ordered that publique thankes for that great victory should be given to God the next Sunday after. (*MA*, 5 Feb. 1644)

> and to **beguile the people** with the greater artifice, prisoners are led in triumph through the City, as if they had beene taken in those severall actions. (*MA*, 22 Jan. 1644)

Although *Aulicus*'s editor appeals to the people in the attempt to warn them of the lures of the Commons, he obviously lacks the anti-establishment attitude which would make his dialogic performance convincing. The general impression is that within the heteroglossic framework, *Aulicus* was compelled to appeal to the people without being fit for the role on account of its élite belonging. Indeed, Royalists generally maintained a snobbish attitude towards the plebs as confirmed by their claim that the "true strength" of the Parliamentarians "consisted in the rabble of the people" (Malcolm 1983: 157). By and large the enquiry into the patterns of "people" in *Britanicus* suggests that although the computational analysis does not record the word amongst its keywords, its usage in concordances nonetheless reflects the editor's construal of the common people as a national community to be valued and prioritized over the private interests of the Court.

Proceeding now from data to hypotheses, I shall consider the pronouns and possessive adjectives in the keyword list as subcategories of the "appeal to the people *vs* the élite" index (Reungoat 2010). The keyword "I", for example, identifies the role of Nedham as leader of the people and marks his personal involvement in discourse:

> For **I** have by an excellent, and powerfull Providence **led the people** through the labyrinths of the enemies Plots, through all their Iesuiticall windings and turnings, through the Episcopall, and Prelaticall pretences. (*MB*, 10-17 June 1644)

> For my own part, **I** professe to the world, and the world may read me, **I** am abroad from the first, to this very last sheete, **I** have made it my only designe to this day, to render the wayes, and plots of the Kings party as ridiculous, as they had made God and his Ordinances, and pure worship. (*MB*, 29 July- 5 Aug. 1644)

One of the most frequent collocates of "I" is "am" in the patterns "I am sure" and "I am confident". Martin and White (2005) classify these formulations as forms of "proclaim" which rather than directly rejecting or overruling a contrary position, limit the scope of dialogistic alternatives through the author's interpolation and heightened personal commitment to the truth value of the proposition. Although these formulations acknowledge the heteroglossic diversity of opinion in the communicative context, they present the authorial voice as challenging a particular dialogistic alternative, making it harder for any reader to advance such a contrary position. In the examples below Nedham aims at guiding his readers towards the desired ideological positioning, through the force of his assessments.

> if the Court had such an offer, **I am confident** they would not refuse it at any price, nay let me tell you, the State-breakers at Oxford have bid sufficiently not long agoe, and to that purpose have used many endeavours, but without successe. (*MB*, 12-19 Sept. 1643)

> Master Aulicus if our ladies have a legislative power, **I am sure** some of your Ladies have Soveraigne power, if ours compell their own Sex, yours compell another Sex, which is not so naturall, we know who can rule her husband at Oxford, and make Keepers, and Secretaries, and Treasurers, and privy chamber men. (*MB*, 26 Sept- 3 Oct. 1643)

As Brownlees argues, this subjective involvement of textual voice frequently occurs in dialogic construals in which Nedham in the first person comments on what *Aulicus* had claimed in the previous number (2012: 27-28). In this regard, Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework and dialogistic perspective help our understanding of the persuasive potential of Nedham's heteroglossic discourse style. By engaging with his antagonist in a dialogic confrontation where alternative views are re-enacted to be then systematically challenged and defied, Nedham attempts to bias his readers' perception of events so as to guide them

into a politically-biased community of shared value and belief. This further defines his role as not just the purveyor of news but as provider, mediator and interpreter, making his editorial persona very close to the modern populist actor who not only transmits mediated claims on behalf of the people but also judges those claims on the people's behalf (Moffitt 2016: 108).

> The newes from Court this week is various, but **I** shall give you some particulars you may relie on. (*MB*, 12-19 Sept. 1643)

> He tells us againe of the small number in both Houses, three Lords and Commons; Master Aulicus, **I** had thought I had corrected you sufficiently for this the last weeke; will you still drive that trade? (*Ibid.*)

Along with "I" pronouns the keyword list features "our"/ "us" which in several cases incorporate the reader in an alleged pronominal relationship of solidarity and ideological closeness between news-writer and audience.[4] This use of an inclusive *we* does not appear in *Aulicus* where "we"-pronouns refer exclusively to the pamphlet and its editor (Brownlees 2006:31).[5] In *Britanicus* the first person plural pronouns and possessives contribute to the construction of a homogenous and undefined community of people inside which Nedham's role oscillates between the extraordinariness of the leader (as authoritative voice) and the ordinariness of the common man (as being "one of them") along a "technocratic-populist scale" (Moffitt 2016: 47).[6]

> He saies, **we** are sorry the King escaped our hands: can ye blame **us**, when it hath cost **us** so much redeeming him, but he escaped not only **our** hands, but **our** feet too, he rid, and **we** went on foot... (*MB*, 1-8 July 1644)

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[4] In the complete keyword list we also find the keyword "we" though with a lower log ratio (1.17).

[5] An example of *Aulicus*'s use of the exclusive *we* is traceable in the following quote: "which being premised once for all, **we** now go on unto the business; wherein **we** shall proceed with all truth and candor" (*MA,* 1-7 Jan. 1643).

[6] Moffitt (2016) postulates the existence of a technocratic-populist scale along which it is possible to assess how populists present themselves, moving between the poles of technocracy and populism. The former is considered managerial, about problem-solving and in pursuit of incremental change, the latter is charismatic, attracted by grandiose rhetoric and interested in the politics of identity.

> Master Aulicus tells **us** of our two Troops raised by young maids and Virgins:
> Can all your Cavaliers show **us** a Regiment of such or, nay but a Squadron?
> (*MB*, 12-19 Sept. 1643)

6.2.   Bad manners

The second index of populism is "bad manners" which consists in a coarsening of political rhetoric and a disregard for appropriate modes of behaviour in the political realm. Moffitt identifies bad manners in the use of slang, swearing, political incorrectness and being overtly "colourful" as opposed to the "high" behaviours of rigidness, rationality, composure and use of technocratic language which is typical of mainstream politics (2016: 44). In the attempt to explain the persuasive power of populism as political style, Moffitt draws a comparison between populism and mediatisation. Indeed throughout history, media – in their different forms – have struggled to arouse people's attention and to be competitive in the market by appealing to dominant news values and using captivating storytelling techniques. Regarding bad manners, Moffitt equates disregard for appropriateness, political incorrectness and colourfulness with three aspects of contemporary media logic: personalization, stereotypization and emotionalization. I shall follow Moffitt's association between politics and media in order to see whether and to what extent Early Modern English journalism anticipates features of present-day media logic in its encoding of bad manners.

Before examining the media strategies adopted in the newsbook, it is important to establish how Nedham deliberately flouts norms of decorum.[7] To do so, we need to bear in mind what was considered normative behaviour when referring to Royals at that time. In the Stuart period, Nedham was supposed to acknowledge and accept the notion of the *iure divino* character of the king and to respect His Sacred persona (Sharpe 1992). Both James and Charles I grew

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[7]Traditionally decorum is the doctrine of fitness or appropriateness of style matched to genre, subject-matter, characterisation or situation (Wales 2001:96). In the current analysis, decorum is intended as the appropriate style to refer to political authorities, especially those with a divine mandate. In Early Modern polemical discourse, decorum stands for moderation, tolerance, respect and appropriateness. See Gloning (2005) for a detailed classification of the communication principles at the basis of decorum in Early Modern controversies.

accustomed to hearing their kingship praised through a battery of biblical injunctions which expanded the power and sanctity of the Royal authority. The king was portrayed as the Lord's Anointed who, the Bible said, was "not to be toucht with rude hands" or even to be the subject of evil speech and thought. Many writers emphasised the importance to civic order of the maintenance of the "Great Chain of Being" and insisted any attack on King or Church, however well intended, would endanger the entire social fabric (Malcolm 1983: 138). Notions of "comeliness", decorum and order were supposed to operate in Church and politics, since peace and conformity were pleasing to God and essential for social cohesion. As *Aulicus* claims, "to put bitter and most contemptuous scoffs upon his Royal Persona is that which Davids heart could not bear. And is against not only the course of the Scripture but against an article of the late Covenant" (14-20 July 1644). On account of this interpretation of monarchy as pattern of divinity embodied in the persona of the king, Nedham's deliberate flouting of appropriateness was perceived as outrageous and even blasphemous. In the keyword analysis three words are used as address and reference terms with the primary aim to insult, deride and demean the Royal authority: "Aulicus", "Sirrah" and "Queen".

The address term "Aulicus" has the highest keyness value. The word is not only indicative of the dialogic character of *Britanicus's* style but also of Nedham's emphasis on personalization in his interactive argumentation. Indeed, as Brownlees notes, Nedham personifies *Aulicus* not just in order to respond to a rival pamphlet but primarily to construe and deride a very personal enemy (2006: 29). In so doing the editor manages to catalyse the readers' anger and contempt towards an individual persona made of flesh and blood and to exploit their venom and scorn to the benefit of the Parliamentarian cause. Keeble argues that the personalization of news also helps to simplify events and make the complex dynamics of history intelligible (1998: 98). Indeed through personalization and dramatization writers are able to appeal not just to their readers' rationality but also to their emotions, thus fulfilling the requirement for an attitudinal and emotional dimension in the news which acts as bearer of persuasiveness (van Dijk 1998: 85).

The vocative "Aulicus" occurs as unpremodified "Aulicus" or "Master Aulicus" within a negative semantic prosody of deception and misinformation.

> **Master Aulicus**, you are so used to robbing and plundering where you are, that you have forgot all honest language. (*MB*, 5-12 Sept. 1643)

> He tells us of divers Trunks of moneys we sent into Scotland to buy our brethren: **Master Aulicus**, lie a little more handsomely, this is gross, we are now but in debate for their advance money, you think we are such State-Truckers and Brokers as you are at Oxford, indeed you bid lustily, five Counties and 300000.li. (*MB*, 12-19 Sept. 1643)

> **Master Aulicus** we rail not like you, you rail in Churches, I mean, you rail-in Altars at Oxford, nor do we lie like you, you lie in two large sheets of paper, you are his Majesties Liar in chief. (*MB*, 19-26 Sept. 1643)

Nedham engineers a "you *vs* us" polarization which implies people's identification with an inclusive "we" as opposed to a distancing "you", referring to *Aulicus* and the Royalist party. The accusation of manufacturing false news is a very common trope both in *Britanicus* and *Aulicus* and ricochets from one newsbook to the other, in much the same way as contemporary mainstream media and populist actors reciprocate accusations of fabricating "fake news"(Mc Nair 2017). Far more interesting, on the other hand, is the use of the cluster "Master Aulicus". In the Early Modern English period the title "Master" was an honorific and was generally used in the context of a servant addressing his/her master or in the context of a person of lower rank addressing a superior (*OED*). In *Britanicus* the deferential title *Master Aulicus* is not only a marker of irony but it is also meant to stress the social divergence existing between the superior status of *Aulicus* (the enemy belonging to the élite) and the lower-rank people that *Britanicus* represents. In this sense its frequency responds to the editor's intention to construe a socially-divisive discourse which could provoke duelling and confrontation.

The next keyword is the insulting address term "Sirrah" again addressed to *Aulicus* to belittle its status and delegitimize the authority of its discourse. The dramatization of Nedham's news discourse through vocatives, reported speech, imperatives and rhetorical questions (see the question mark in Table 1) enhances his performative role as populist actor on the printed page. As we can see in the

following quotations, "Sirrah" is followed by the imperative and by a rhetorical question, which reveal a direct and hostile attitude towards the enemy.[8]

> **Sirrah** do not blaspheme, to call for Gods help to your lies and Prodigies, and for the particulars, they came out last week, and they are these; I will save you the labour. (*MB*, 15-22 July 1644)

> He says we have Coblers, Tinkers, Feltmakers, that are Ministers: **Sirrah**, amongst all these trades, leave your trade of lying, and scandalizing; I will bring an honest Feltmaker, to the shame of your Protestant Religion at Oxford. (*MB*, 19-26 Aug. 1644)

> *Last Treaty* He now comes to the last Treaty, or Treachery, which you please, wherein his Excellency did so faithfully demean himself, and here he Prints the Letter to the full; but that is such a tedious piece of Treachery I should print too: **Sirrah**, why Print you not the Kings, there is something in that? do ye shame a little at your Epistles? (*MB*, 2-9 Sept. 1644)

Example 2 is particularly significant in terms of Nedham's construction of a social and ideological division between the Royalists and common people. Nedham dramatizes *Aulicus*'s scorn for workers (by means of its indirect reported speech) and exploits it to praise the honesty of common people as opposed to the treacherousness and dissimulation of the élite of ministers at Oxford. Nedham overturns the traditional values which recognize the sacred character of the king and the authority of his ministers in order to destabilize the status quo and foster the emergence of a new popular awareness. In his logic, lower rank people are represented as the depository of honesty and integrity as opposed to the deception of the educated and noble gentlemen at Oxford.

Another easy target of *Britanicus*'s bad manners is the Queen. In 1625 Charles I married a Catholic member of the French nobility, Henrietta Maria. The woman was considered another evil counsellor in the king's team and responsible for the king's betrayal of his Church and his country (Sharpe 1992: 176). Nedham tinges

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[8]Brownlees notes that in 10 out of the 36 instances in which *Britanicus* adopts "Sirrah", the derogatory title is followed by the imperative. He also observes that *Aulicus* is more respectful in its use of address terms. The fact that *Aulicus*'s editor makes a greater use of the unmarked honorific *sir* than the abusive *sirrah* is indicative of the decorum of his language (2006: 24-30).

her consciousness with massacre as he stereotypically represents her as thirsty for Protestants' blood and the king as totally subdued to her will.

> His Majesty it is thought took horse to visit the **Queen**, and returned as soon, she lies sick it seems of her disease and affairs at once; only the bloody execution and massacre at Bolton, on the godly party there, hath little refreshed her, and since those famous Ministers suffered by the barbarous usage of Rupert, she hath been pretty well, for nothing is a better cordial to her, then a mornings draught of the blood of an hundred Protestants. (*MB*, 10-17 June 1644)

> but the King offers the **Queen** the Sceptre, and I wonder at that, for if I mistake not, she hath had it all this while in her own hands, but she declines it, and offers it to the Pope, thus Pope and Queen share the Sceptre of England betwixt them, and the King keeps riding from Oxford to Exeter, and from the heart of most of his good people, and if his Majesty will be always thus horsed, he will ride out of his Kingdom too shortly, if he gallop on his way to Rome at this rate. (*Ibid.*)

> **The Queen** at Burbon.* Her Majesty is going towards the waters of Burbon, it is time to wash, after so much bloodshed.(*MB*, 19-26 Aug. 1644)

To the élite's accusations of being uncivil with the King in his pamphlets, Nedham rebuts by defending both his "colourfulness" in discourse and his belief in speaking the truth without making distinction of rank. Nedham's bad manners and disregard for hierarchy and tradition elicit an impression of sincere and authentic communication with his readers.

> I was pleasant on purpose, that **baiting my Intelligence with some sport**, I might, be read as well in the Court as the City, and when all the serious Treaties would not draw people off from their good linking to the Kings ways I thought it the best to jeer them out of it.(*MB*, 29 July-5 Aug. 1644)

> And now if any other (whose leisure serves them to write beyond all these) take up the notion of Britanicus, I must give this advice, that he dip in the same Ink I have done, that he spare neither friend, nor foe, that his quill be a pen for the Public only, that he venture through the provocations both of friends and enemies, **that he speak truth to the King, as well as to the Common people, to Queens, as well as to Gentlewomen of a lower Rank**, and now I must speak to all I writ to, in their several Classis, before I fold up my Paper. (*MB,* 23-30 Sept. 1644)

Speaking to the people and for the people poses the issue of language and Nedham repeatedly ventures into metadiscoursive reflections in his newsbook.

In line with a certain radicalism of the time, he celebrates plain English as a guarantee of honesty of emotions and authenticity of information and opposes it to the mystifying language of the bureaucrats and ministers at Oxford. Given that *Britanicus* generally offers a more literary argumentation with regard to clausal construction than is the case in *Aulicus* (Brownlees 2006: 17), the editor's advocated preference for plain English as well as his greater use of interactive-involved features of orality can be interpreted as part of his self-presentation along the technocratic-populist scale. Indeed by accommodating the expertise of the professional writer (the technocratic style of the élite) with his celebration of the common language of the people (populism), the scale model perfectly represents the ambivalent attitude of the editor.

> *His Majesty sends to Oxford for Ordinance and Ammunition. * His Majesty says he, sent his Commands to Oxford to send him some Ordnance and Ammunition, that is, in **plain** English, provision for murdering his good Subjects. (*MB*, 1-8 July 1644)

> *Tertia, a new name for Irish Rebels.* And saies he, He sent for some of the Tertia to encrease his Army, this is a new name for the Irish Rebels, they must be called the tertia now, that the people may not understand who they are, this tertia is sure a Latine word of the Vicechancellours own giving. (*Ibid.*)

> If it be thus dangerous to speak **Plain** English, what will Eliah answer for jeering Ahab and his gods, and the Prophets? (*MB*, 29 July-5 Aug. 1644)

The simplicity of language advocated by Nedham is consistent with an authenticism which opposes rationality and appeals to emotions. According to Thompson, the populist actor as bearer of authenticism "prizes simplicity of language [...] because he associates simple expressions with honesty of emotion and at least the appearance of being willing to engage with the lowliest members of the chosen community" (2016: 155).

6.3. Crisis, breakdown or threat

Moffitt claims that populism gains its impetus from the perception of crisis, breakdown or threat and – even when no real threat actually exists – it aims to induce it through dramatization and performance (2016: 45). The populist actor is therefore a skilful fearmonger among his people ready to provide an alternative

response which is quicker and more effective than that of the mainstream politics of the élite. A similar attitude appears to be adopted in *Britanicus*, where the editor performs and dramatizes the threat of a Catholic conspiracy allegedly backed up by the king in the attempt to turn a political dispute into a national fight for religious defence. As Taggart argues, the question of whether there really is a conspiracy is not important – rather the key factor should be on populist actors' ability to create a sense of threat and [...] to inject a national urgency of action among the people (2004: 275).

Nedham's propaganda was successful in performing people's traditional fear of Popery. Indeed as Newman points out "too many educated men and not all of them Puritans and Parliamentarians viewed the Catholic presence as a threat" (1981: 398). According to historians, more and more people joined the godly army not because they really wanted to rebel but because they were convinced that the king no longer protected their religion (Hopper 2000: 24). The religious issue was therefore a key in-group factor and Nedham was very skilful in exploiting the emotional component of media language in order to elicit feelings of resentment and anger among the godly gentlemen. In particular, he adopted discourse strategies which correspond to three criteria of present-day media logic: intensification, simplification and focus on scandal. By linking Royalists with Roman Catholics and their behaviour with violence, Nedham attempted to discredit and delegitimize the *iure divino* character of the king in the eyes of public opinion.

The threat of Popery is encoded in discourse by means of the keywords "Popery" and "Popish". About 60% of the time the word "Popery" co-occurs with words referring to the Royals ("King", "Prerogative", "Majesty", "he", "Queen", "Oxford", "Rupert"), thus projecting a negative semantic prosody onto the Court of Charles I and its treacherous conduct. "Popery" also features a semantic preference for noun phrases such as "the introducing/setting up of Popery" and for verb phrases such as "bring in/make haste towards/show a way into". All the collocations contribute to the representation of Popery as landing in the Kingdom under the king's outrageous approval (Cecconi 2017). The examples below show how focus on scandal, simplification and intensification take shape in the propaganda discourse of *Britanicus*. In particular, focus on scandal is achieved by means of

a clash between Protestant Kingdom and Catholic Court, intensification is actualised through exacerbated negative semantics, listing and intensifiers, while simplification is carried out by means of a one-dimensional and stereotypical representation of the events.

> *The Popes Bull* There is the Popes Bull lately intercepted from Rome (evidence sufficient [...] that **the setting up of Popery in this Kingdome, is the quarrell at Oxford)** which Bull promises pardon to those Papists that fight against the Parliament not onely for their own sins past, but a plenarie indulgence and forgivenesse for the future. [FOCUS ON SCANDAL] (*MB*, 26 Sept-3 Oct. 1643)

> The eyes of the people do now begin to be opened and they plainly see (by the actions of the **Queene, the English Papists, and the Irish Rebells at Court, and in the Armies**) that though the maintaining of the Protestant Religion, and the Kings Prerogative be pretended, **yet the introducing of Popery is the onely thing intended.** [FOCUS ON SCANDAL and INTENSIFICATION] (*Ibid.*)

> He saies **his Majestie** hath now a commodious Port for Ireland: Yea, there is the design, because it is so convenient **for landing Rebels and Popery.** [SIMPLIFICATION] (*MB*, 24-31 June 1644)

> **His Majesty** it seemes rid fast to see her**,** indeed he hath made **too much hast towards Popery**, and hath been riding thither all this time, since he first set out from his Parliament. [INTENSIFICATION] (*MB*, 10-17 June 1644)

The negative semantic prosody of Popery is reinforced by its collocation with words referring to massacre, plunder and violence.

> his Majestie is in a just indignation against Sir William for following him, yes, this is the secret, for would our Commanders sit still, or keep their distance, and let them alone at their **plunder and popery** , all would go well, but Sir William is too spirited to sleep so neere Oxford, or his Majesty. [INTENSIFICATION]

> Oh all ye Parliament party! What do ye fighting any longer, lay down your Armes, **disband, to your houses, give up your throats to the swords of the Cavaliers, your houses of Plundering, your wives to ravishing, your Liberties to spoiling, your Religion to Popery**, your Priviledges to Prerogative, the King commands it. [INTENSIFICATION]

"Popish" is the other keyword which is used to enhance the treachery of the king and his alignment with the Church of Rome. It mostly collocates with the word "Army" in the cluster "Popish Army". *Britanicus* uses "Popish" as a synonym for "Royalist" and "naturalizes" the ideological construction according to which the king's army was mostly made up of Catholics.[9] Although the Marquis of Newcastle was ordered to recruit subjects "without examining their conscience more than their loyalty to the king" (Newman 1981), godly propaganda exaggerated the Catholic proportion of the contingent and re-labelled Newcastle's army as "Popish army" applying the media logic of intensification and simplification. By labelling the opposing faction as Papists, Nedham implicitly identified his own party as made up of true Protestant English people. This collective identity, which was homogenous and exclusive at the same time, created a comforting notion of belonging for many Englishmen who considered Protestantism as the distinctive trait of their own national liberty and identity.

> The like may be said of the Governour of Plimouth, and those Oxford Hirelings in the Army, and both Houses of Parliament, **that staid there onely to advance the Designe of Popish Army, and to undo their Countrey.** [INTENSIFICATION and SIMPLIFICATION] (*MB*, 5-12 Sept. 1643)

> I make no doubt but this **Popish Army** will within a few days be as weary of besieging Hull as their Brethren were before Glocester. [SIMPLIFICATION] (*Ibid.*)

> Newcastle is now a Marquisse, oh to see what a horrible title man may get by being Generall to a **Popish Army**. [FOCUS ON SCANDAL] (*MB*, 19-26 Sept. 1643)

> They were all undone, And so we hope at London, And heres an end of the ***Popish*** Army. [INTENSIFICATION and SIMPLIFICATION] (*MB,* 22-29 July 1644)

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[9]Fowler uses the notion of *naturalization* to refer to the subtle practice by which newspapers use a recognisable set of key words as if they were basic-level terms, natural and taken-for-granted categories in order to convey an ideologically biased representation of reality (1991: 57).

7. Conclusions

Corpus-assisted discourse analysis has proved a valuable methodology to detect statistically salient language features in historical news discourse which can be linked to aspects of populist rhetoric. Indeed the quantitative evidence of keywords combined with a qualitative investigation of both the textual and socio-cultural context in which the words occur allow the researcher to gauge a broader and latent set of meanings in discourse. In the present article, Moffitt's three indexes of populism have been applied in order to examine possible traces of populism in *Mercurius Britanicus,* an English Civil War periodical pamphlet edited by the propagandist Marchamont Nedham from 1643 to 1644. The keyword analysis has revealed that the three indexes are present in the periodical as distinct features of the editor's style in comparison with its rival publication *Mercurius Aulicus.* With respect to the "appeal to the people" index, the keyword analysis has highlighted the notion of a homogenous community of English people in the form of personal and possessive first person pronouns which imply the strong personal involvement of the editor as "one of us, the people". At the same time, however, keywords have failed to account for the textual relevance of the reference term "people", which does not appear as quantitatively salient in comparison with *Aulicus.* Even so, the concordance tool has enabled us to recover the ideological significance of the word, by showing its topicalization in the title and its recurrent patterns of occurrence within a polarized logic where the commonness of the people is exalted against the Prerogative of the court. With respect to bad manners, the keyword results have documented Nedham's "non-politic" style in the form of address and reference terms through which the editor manifests his scorn for the Royalists at Oxford and his direct challenge to the sacredness of the king and his representatives. Finally, the analysis of keywords in context has revealed the editor's attempts to construe a semantics of threat and fear through the repetition of derogatory evaluative lexis to refer to the Catholic minority and through pervasive allegations of a Papist conspiracy involving the king and his family. The samples taken from the corpus have also provided evidence of the extent to which principles of modern-day media logic (personalization, stereotypization and emotionalization with regard to "bad manners" and intensification, simplification and focus on scandal with respect to

"the crisis and threat" index) were already at work in Early Modern English news discourse.

To conclude, although Moffitt uses his notion of populism as a context-dependent category which cannot be disentangled from the mediatised contemporary politics in which it occurs, corpus-assisted discourse analysis shows that certain aspects of populist discourse might also be tracked across time. In this sense, it seems to be possible to claim that certain discourse strategies identifiable as populist may be consistent over time, and could be applied beyond the boundaries of present-day politics.

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