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Lake Methodism

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Chapter 2

“Elocution to the Mute”

Anglican Authority and the Cultural Revolt of Methodism

How might we understand Romanticism without secularization? Coleridge answers, when, in the midst of the chilly restlessness of “Frost at Midnight,” he warms himself with a dream “Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower, / Whose bells, the poor man’s only music, rang / From morn to evening” (28–30). The intimate nostalgia for these “bells” is an inward turn in an already tortuously introspective poem—but it’s also a fleetingly public glimpse of cultural forms that have faded from critical view. As Coleridge’s verse quietly underscores, the “music” of the poor men and women of England could be parochial in scope. Novels and poetry, the pleasures of the urban theater, were all unavailable to vast swathes of a country still agrarian, impoverished, and semiliterate. The cosmopolitanisms of the Continent or the treasures of the Orient, however delightful to tourists and connoisseurs, tended to be met as, and with, bewildering violence by the deracinated (and likely press-ganged) legionaries of Wellington and Nelson. In its Biblical stories, festivals, rites of passage and rituals of worship, plebeian culture was still tightly connected to “the old church tower”: heavily religious in character,

and almost always Anglican in confession. This isn't the Romanticism we anthologize, but it was the culture inhabited by most people in the early nineteenth century. The nation's consensus, such as it was, resided within the Church of England, which possessed "at least the nominal allegiance of 90 percent of the population" in 1800.¹

To be sure, allegiance wasn't appreciation. The music of most Anglican churches was parlous. Organs were very uncommon. More often a rustic "band" of players supplied the tune. Congregations typically didn't join in the hymns; these were sung by the solitary clerk or a straggling choir, and services barely included any song until the late nineteenth century.² The rhetorical performance of the clergyman usually deepened the dismal tone. As "Dion" sighed in the *Examiner* in 1819, even an Establishment somewhat buoyed by the rising tide of Evangelicalism still floated only "miserable specimens" of "Pulpit Oratory."³ Anyone relying on the Church of England for "music" in the Romantic period was likely to be disappointed. Anyone whose horizons were limited to it lived within a very circumscribed cultural geography.

Coleridge leverages this recollection into a contrast that never quite consoles, pitting blinkered poverty against his own overworked and underproductive mind. The "calm" that "disturbs / And vexes meditation with its strange / And extreme silentness" stirs a deeper moral vacancy, not filled by the wordplay of intellectual games (8–10). "Frost at Midnight" possesses Coleridge with a surfeit of cultural labor, versifying "extreme silentness" into a dissonant parallel of the bells' purity, as the "strange" quiet chimes with the fire's "stranger," which "flutters" as the "sole unquiet thing." Even this "sole unquiet" becomes yet more material for an idle imagination, willing to pun on the unquiet state of the poet's soul and "idling Spirit," which, "By its own moods interprets, everywhere / Echo or mirror seeking of itself, / And makes a toy of Thought" (16–23). This self-mirroring play figures the division between the nostalgic leisure of the gentleman and the plebeian body so occupied by physical labor it lacks all cultural instrumentality. Poor men have only church bells for music, Coleridge implies, because they cannot sing themselves.

These bells herald the subject of this chapter: the conditions, consequences, and collapse of the Anglican constitution, which had encoded strict divisions in thought and feeling as the moral order for the nation.

1. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 10. See especially James Obelkevitch, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsay, 1825–1875* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

2. Anthony Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (London: SPCK, 1984 [1980]), 61, 71–73.

3. "Pulpit Oratory," *Examiner* 603 (July 18, 1819): 461.

Romantic England was organized by religious institutions and differences, themselves organized by figurative laws, conventions of metaphor, and rhetorical dispositions. As we'll see in the next two sections, the Church of England ran the country, but doctrine and discipline were often far removed from its definitions of itself and its antagonists. The formal penalties and privileges of the Anglican hegemony were typically expressed in a nebulous constellation of habits for polite reading, writing, speaking, and worshipping, rather than in explicit confessions of faith. Religion was politics—but the vehicle of religious identity was its tenor.

Even for bishops, style trumped theology. William Warburton, with his own stylistic emphases, warned that "a FANATIC MANNER of preaching, tho' it were the doctrine of an Apostle, may do more harm, to Society at least, than a modest revival of *old* speculative heresies, or, than the invention of *new*; since it tends to bewilder the imagination of some, to inflame the passions of others; and, in that state of things, to spread disorder and disturbance throughout the whole community."⁴ Warburton was writing in 1763, but in 1819 "Dion" was still "disposed even to go so far as to maintain, that the precise doctrines [any preacher] entertains are of little consequence, compared with the style and power with which they are enforced."⁵

By this measure, Methodism signified a double threat, against the joint establishments of the Church of England and English culture. I borrow this chapter's title from Eve's final acquiescence, and I mean it as an allegory for Methodism's effects upon the *ancien régime*: the failure of a seemingly inevitable set of social relations, in which radical asymmetries of mind and body had been represented as Providentially determined, and in which revolt is an act of language against the Word, as the Fruit "Gave elocution to the mute, and taught / The Tongue not made for Speech to speak" (*Paradise Lost* 9:748–49). But whether stylized by Satanic "elocution" or Coleridgean "music," these denominational contests over cultural inclinations and standards shaped the situation of Romanticism as fully

4. William Warburton, *The Doctrine of Grace: or, the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit Vindicated from the Insults of Infidelity, and the Abuses of Fanaticism*, 2nd ed. (London: A. Millar and J. and R. Tonson, 1763), 131.

5. *Examiner* 603 (July 18, 1819): 461. In 1823, the *Liberal* reported that "Lady Bluemont declares" the preaching of Edward Irving, especially in its "sound," the "picturesque appearance of the orator," the "grace of action," "the beauty of style," and "the bursts of passion," to "be only inferior to the EXCURSION in imagination," which was probably meant to indict simultaneously the tastes of Bluemont, Irving, and Wordsworth. See "Pulpit Oratory: Dr. Chalmers, and Mr. Irving," *The Liberal* 4 (London: John Hunt, 1823): 299–313 (299–300).

as the successes of Scott, Byron, or Radcliffe. By the end of the eighteenth century, Methodism had made polite complacency over the absence of plebeian culture an urgently studied pose, rather than disinterested description. The dominance, not the existence, of “poor man’s music” separate from the Church of England was now at issue. Alexander Knox—Irish clergyman, friend of John Wesley, and correspondent of Southey—took it as “indisputable” not only that “a certain fuel of religious sensation is deeply lodged in man’s natural constitution,” but that this fuel had the most power in “the least cultivated classes of society,” where it abided as “as a natural instinct.”⁶

If the instinct felt new, the bond between poor man’s music and the Anglican bell was often held as immemorial as that between Church and State. Not everyone was convinced that either constitution belonged to “time out of mind,” however. The liberal curmudgeon Joseph Ritson, for example, satirized the antiquarian industry for cleansing folk ballads and songs of plebeian soil, and then reproaching plebeians for having had no culture in the first place. He had little use for Thomas Percy’s fantasy of minstrels as “an order of men who united the arts of poetry and music, and sung verses to the harp of their own composing.” The true history of English song was instead borne by a “tumultuous rout of FIDLERS, PLAYERS, COBBLERS, [and] DEBAUCHED PERSONS” who acted “as an appendage or appurtenance to the whores and lechers, from whose diversion this respectable order of men . . . were most miserably twanging and scraping in the booths of Chester fair.”⁷ This was “the real character of a nation,” which could be “collected” with “certainty” only from “the manners and diversions of the lower or rather lowest classes of the inhabitants.”⁸

6. Alexander Knox, “Remarks on the Life and Character of John Wesley,” appendix to Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and Rise and Progress of Methodism*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey (London: Longman, 1864), 293–360 (334–35). Even some recent work on the history of religion seems to accept this formation of an instinctual theological urge, residing as a chthonic force in the nervous system, rather than as a set of socialized expectations, roles, and institutions. John Kent opens his *Wesley and the Wesleyans* considering “the primary human impulse . . . to seek some kind of extra-human power,” as “religion” satisfies essentialized and always already extant spiritual appetites: “the individual’s test of a religious system is how far it can supply this ‘supernatural’ force” (John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 1–2).

7. Joseph Ritson, *Ancient Songs, from the time of King Henry the Third, to the Revolution* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1790), vi–vii.

8. “There is nothing, perhaps, from which the real character of a nation can be collected with so much certainty as the manners and diversions of the lower or rather lowest classes of the inhabitants. The principal amusement of the common people of every country

Ritson was crankily attuned to the prevailing conceit that economic differences were commensurate with affective and linguistic differences. Francis Jeffrey, though no conservative as the early nineteenth century understood it, was a typical proponent of this view. Commenting on the pseudo-democratic poetics of Southey's *Thalaba* and Wordsworth's "Preface," he deigned to remind readers that the "love, or grief, or indignation of an enlightened and refined character, is not only expressed in a different language, but is in itself a different emotion from the love, or grief, or anger, of a clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench." "The things," Jeffrey emphasized, "are radically and obviously distinct."⁹ Jeffrey's very insistence, however, recognized that such distinctions were being countermanded not only by the "new poetry" but also by the new politics from which it drew authority—in short, the reorganizations of print culture, the public sphere, and literary and political representation underway by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Methodism, as much as ballad revivalism or radical pamphleteering, drove this reorganization. The Society's brilliant songs, cheap and diverse anthologies, emotional services rich with audience participation, and techniques for self-study and group socialization altered the symbolic order of the nation, with unprecedented and frequently politically inassimilable senses of self-possession and agency. And this from congregations, as the lay preacher Duncan Wright admitted with affectionate irony in 1781, composed of "objects of universal contempt."¹⁰ Methodist services brought theater and opera to people unfamiliar with either; its large textual catalogue, tailored for different reading levels and purchasing capacities, pushed the frontiers of print. The impact on the social—as well as the individual—consciousness was transformative. As Wesley wrote in 1785:

and in every age has been a turn for melody and song. Many of the vulgar songs of France and Spain possess the first degree of poetical merit. . . . The common people of Italy listen with rapture to the sublimest flights of Ariosto, whom they appear to comprehend as well as the ablest critic. . . . The English vulgar have never, perhaps, shewn such a brilliancy of intellect, and therefor [*sic*] the compositions which they most relish are hardly to be endured by those of any other description. Nothing can be more common than to see a large crowd attending with apparent satisfaction to rhapsodies in which, though written in a jargon, and with a grossness perfectly suitable to such an audience, it is evident that the composer had not understood what he wrote, that the performer does not understand what he sings, and that the auditors do not understand what they hear; and yet, what is most extraordinary, no one of these circumstances appears to render the composition less favourite or delightful." Ritson, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, 3 vols. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1783), 1:1xx–lxxi.

9. Jeffrey, "Southey's *Thalaba*," *Edinburgh Review* 1 (October 1802): 66.

10. WV 2:22.

We had a Love-Feast. I could not but observe the manner wherein several of them spoke, one after the other. Not only the matter, but the language: the accent, the tone of voice, wherewith illiterate persons, men and women, young and old spoke, were such as a scholar needeth not to be ashamed of. “Who teacheth like him?”¹¹

Methodists were appreciative students, valuing their emotional reactions to a sermon more than the sermon’s theological soundness or rhetorical polish. They often sang their doctrine, in preference to having it preached to them, even by one of the Wesleys. The humblest were eager to testify with their own dramatic crises and conversions; the most inspired were encouraged to abandon their ploughs, tools, and frequently their families and shops, for itinerant lay preaching.

These acculturating developments, more than any doctrinal or political agenda, struck at the core of Anglican authority. The front line, moreover, had never been political ideology. Wesley had been no friend to obvious radicalisms. Especially later in life, he cheerfully accommodated himself to whichever ministry happened to be in at the moment, while taking frequent pains to deny any theological innovation.¹² He declared (somewhat disingenuously) that he taught only “plain, Old Christianity”: “I and all who follow my Judgment do vehemently refuse to be distinguished from other men, by any but the Common Principles of Christianity.”¹³ After his death in 1791, most forms of Methodism still identified with both Church and State, and some Wesleyans were attending Anglican services in the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ There were notable exceptions: the Kilhamites and Primitive Methodists were concentrated in areas of Luddite activity, and most of the Tolpuddle Martyrs were Methodists or sons of Methodists.¹⁵ Yet it wasn’t these peripheries but the center of the Methodist movement that produced one of the most dramatic transformations since the Civil Wars. This took shape chiefly against the rules of art, and

11. Wesley, *Journal and Diaries* I, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 57.

12. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 374. See also Clark, *English Society*, 284–300.

13. John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1742), 15–16.

14. In addition to some forms of worship, Methodists still relied on the Church for its notarizing functions for birth, baptism, marriage, and death, even after the Civil Registration Act of 1836 provided them with alternatives (Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church*, 24–36).

15. Semmel, *Methodist Revolution*, 137. For recent accounts of the meanings of Luddism, see Kevin Binfield, ed., *The Writings of the Luddites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), and Steven Jones, *Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), esp. 45–75.

the social distinctions and deferences such rules managed. Even inveterate revolutionaries such as Hazlitt were put off by this insurgency. Methodism, he sneered, "let loose the imagination of the gaping multitude."¹⁶ If Hazlitt was provoked into uncharacteristic sympathy with Burke's contempt for "the swinish multitude" of the Revolution, the Anglican establishment was mortified to discover that its power now extended only as far as its ability to entertain. One of its clergy whined in 1795, as he saw his congregation abandon him for the greener pastures of field preaching, "Is a Christian orator to descend to all the gesticulations of the stage, and to rant like a tragedy king?"¹⁷

By the last decades of the eighteenth century, "Methodism" bespoke a massive reorganization of the logic, purpose, and demographics of "culture." Wesley himself proposed (modestly) the Apocalypse as the only sufficient scale on which to weigh the impact. Preaching in 1787, he found human nature seeming born again, well in advance of the lesser revolution in France:

"The times" which we have reason to believe are at hand (if they are not already begun) are what many pious men have termed the time of "the latter-day glory"; meaning the time wherein God would gloriously display his power and love in the fulfillment of his gracious promise that "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea."¹⁸

This global promise appalled the left no less than the right. Liberals such as Hazlitt and Hunt, and especially radicals such as Cobbett, saw in Methodism the prospect of the working classes distracted from their own political interests by a new, superstitious conservatism. But a correspondent of Viscount Sidmouth was morally certain that "To be a Methodist is to be a Jacobin in the extreme."¹⁹ Yet one soldier turned preacher recalled in 1781 that Methodists were thought to be heirs to the terrifying discipline of the New Model Army; his officers "feared what our enthusiasm would turn to, and mentioned Cromwell, who could preach and pray one part of the day, and kill and plunder the other."²⁰ The now-reactionary Poet Lau-

16. Hazlitt, "On the Causes of Methodism," 60.

17. George Croft, *Thoughts Concerning the Methodists and the Established Clergy* (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1795), 9.

18. Wesley, *Sermons* II: 34–70, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 525.

19. Quoted in Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 51.

20. *WV* 2:32.

reate Southey rehearsed a different spiritual warfare, in the well-known story that Wesley was an undercover Catholic agent, out “to make a party among the poor, and when the Spaniards landed . . . join them with 20,000 men.”²¹ This secretly coiled army of insurrection, averred Sarah Trimmer and Sir Frederic Morton Eden, was in fact a mass of sluggish idiocy, dragging down the State:

Of late years, there has been a very general Complaint, over every part of the kingdom, of the increase of the parish poor. To what cause are we to ascribe this increase? . . . No cause whatever has a more powerful influence than the increase of Methodists. I have shewn, that this Religion is, in the *first* place, a heavy Tax; and, that in the *second*, it encourages Idleness; and both of these contribute to make men poor, and to keep them in that state.²²

Jesuit, Jacobin, Jacobite, incendiary and wet blanket: the array of incoherent charges testifies to the alarm, and the emergency. The wildly competing meanings suggest that “Methodism” had complicated the terms for political speech itself, in what Burke mapped as “the most important of revolutions . . . a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions.”²³ Leigh Hunt had hinted in 1808 that “not a day passes, but the Methodists are endeavouring to overthrow the Episcopal Church by a thousand weapons open and secret.”²⁴ John Wesley’s older brother, Samuel, was the prophet: the Methodist “societies are sufficient to dissolve all societies but their own.”²⁵

21. Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism, in Two Volumes* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820 [New York: William Gilley, 1820]), 2: 21. All quotations, unless otherwise marked, are taken from the 1820 edition.

22. [Sarah Trimmer], *A Review of the Policy, Doctrines and Morals of the Methodists* (London: J. Johnson, 1791), 49–50. Eden approvingly cited this passage in *The State of the Poor: Or, An History of the Labouring Classes in England, From the Conquest to the Present Period, in Three Volumes* (London: J. Davis, 1797), 1:ix–x. Eden seems not to have read Trimmer, but rather an Anglican clergyman’s pamphlet that drew from her; see John Howlett, *Examination of Mr. Pitt’s Speech* (London: W. Richardson, 1796).

23. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and On the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event*, ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), 175.

24. Hunt, *An Attempt to Shew . . .*, Essay 1, “On the Ignorance and Vulgarity of the Methodists,” 301.

25. Quoted in Anthony Armstrong, *The Church of England, the Methodists and Society, 1700–1850* (London: University of London Press, 1973), 67. Later members of the family would be alienated, as well. In 1791, contemplating the Revolution and the uncertain con-

The Methodists were separating from the emotional regulations that the Church of England established for its communion, as well as the country. Southey, the first non-Methodist to write a biography of Wesley, saw in "The Rise and Progress of Methodism" not only the disestablishment of the Church, dire enough, but also the "moral expatriation" of England from its cultural identity, inextricable from its Church.²⁶ The security of these identities was no small matter during the Napoleonic wars, which threatened both the Church and its national domain. But the worry had cropped up whenever the Anglican hierarchy suspected cultural agents of foreign and domestic subversion. After the defeat of the Catholic menace in 1745, the Bishop of Exeter alleged its survival in the alternate print cultures and affective scripts of Methodism, that "*Surfeit*" of "*Lives, Characters, Sentiments and Actions,*" "*Journals, Letters, and other Works*" with which the Wesleyan "*Press has cramm'd the Public.*"²⁷ By 1791, two years after the French Revolution, James Lackington opened his parody of a Methodistical "life" by gauging the monstrous "multitude of memoirs under which the press has groaned."²⁸ Although Jon Klancher reports a complete "absence of a textual countercode of political discourse" before the secularized radicalisms of the 1790s, this report overlooks a vitally present Methodism.²⁹

It became very convenient, moreover, to lump Methodism together with Jacobinism, however incommensurate. In 1800, the Rev. Richard Polwhele vouched for a rumor first broached in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, "that Paine's Works, and other books of the like tendency, have been translated into Welsh, and secretly distributed by the leaders" of Wesleyan bands.³⁰ In the same year Samuel Horsley, then Bishop of Rochester,

sequences of Wesley's death, Wesley's grand-nephew fretted over the new "constitution he has established among a people scattered throughout every part of a great, a powerful, and a luxurious nation." John Annesley Colet, *An Impartial Review of the Life and Writings, Public and Private Character, of the Late Rev. Mr. John Wesley* (London: C. Forster, 1791), 17.

26. Robert Southey, "History of the Dissenters," in *Quarterly Review* 10 (October 1813): 90–139 (138).

27. [George Lavington], *Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists, Compar'd*, "Preface," unpagged.

28. Lackington, *Memoirs*, xv.

29. Klancher, *Making of English Reading Audiences*, 42.

30. Richard Polwhele, *Anecdotes of Methodism, to which is added, A Sermon, on the Conduct that Becomes a Clergyman* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1800), 59. There's some satisfaction in finding that Polwhele, best known today as the calumniator of Mary Wollstonecraft and those he named *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), was loathed by his parishioners. With his *Anecdotes*, he attempted to do to Methodism what he had done to the Rights of Woman. The Methodists proved harder targets, and he quickly found himself besieged

saw Methodists substituting for politically repressed radicals: “these new congregations of non-descripts have been mostly formed, since the Jacobins have been laid under restraint of those two most salutary measures, commonly known by the names of the Sedition and the Treason Bill.”³¹ Whether the initial objection was ecclesiastic or political, gentlemen of many different convictions and parties could concur, with Southey, that “the confederated and indefatigable priesthood” of the Methodists was a cultural blight. Methodists “barely tolerate literature, and actually hate it,” insulating themselves with formal loyalty, while poisoning the soul of the nation with “mildewing superstition, blasting all genius in the bud, and withering every flower of loveliness and innocent enjoyment.”³²

This “blasting” and “withering” uprooted the country’s putatively organic politics, since the government of polite taste overlapped, if imperfectly, with polite government. The weak bureaucracy of the state was diffused in its gentry, in occasional turns as Justice of the Peace or as a part-time functionary (such as stamp-collector for Westmoreland), with status rather than technocratic ability the usual qualification. Coleridge, for example, a negative of personal and professional accountability in 1804–5, quickly ingratiated himself into the management of the crucial Mediterranean theater of war with little to recommend him other than his wit at dinner; he was also offered a mission to Russia in order to negotiate an £80,000 grain purchase, and he accepted the role of Acting Public Secretary of Malta, a position of real power and substantial salary, in early 1805.³³ Even this 1790s Jacobin could be entrusted ten years later with the overthrow of France, so long as he was legibly “polite.”

The Church of England was the pillar supporting the hegemony of respectability, supplementing the sparse number of formal bureaucrats with an agent in every parish, who fulfilled almost all civil functions. This hegemony, as hegemonies are wont, accommodated substantial diversity in its scientific, economic, and theological positions.³⁴ The Articles were

by a well-organized campaign. Even his shopping trips were haunted by a Methodist lay-preacher, who “assailed” Polwhele with a “foaming torrent . . . of his tub, or his horseblock eloquence,” who called the *Anecdotes* “lies,” and who insisted “on my revocation of such palpable falsehoods, and threatening to bring the people around me in the market-place of Helston at some future day, and force me to authenticate my stories, or retract them, there, if I persisted in abusing the fraternity” (Polwhele, *Anecdotes*, 18–22).

31. Samuel Horsley, *The Charge to the Clergy of His Diocese* (London: James Robson, 1800), 19–20.

32. Southey, “On the Evangelical Sects,” 507.

33. See Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804–1834* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 29–33.

34. But while eminent clergymen such as Paley and Malthus navigated the moral conse-

deliberately vague, and the Church had evolved to encompass doctrinal protest, in order to institutionalize a set of cultural habits that generated social coherence, while authorizing intellectualized disagreement. "Old Dissent," I think, picked battles the Church often thought least important, and was best equipped to manage. Even as they protested some of its doctrines or legal claims, most middle-class Dissenters dutifully conformed to the Church's much more significant expectations of polite reading, writing, and "reasonable Christianity."³⁵

Methodism, more than the liberal but well-off strains of Dissent, was a genuine rebellion. Its assault on polite norms, Southey insisted, was all the more lethal because it was so politically and theologically muddled. Even while subscribing to the Articles, the Methodists denied the nation's implicit contract, alienating themselves from "common sympathy":

It is no light evil for a state to have within its bosom so numerous and active and increasing a party, whose whole system tends to cut them off from all common sympathy with their countrymen, and who are separatists not in religious worship alone, but in all the ordinary observances of life. Not satisfied with exclusive salvation, they must have every thing exclusive, and accommodations for the Methodists are to be found in every place, and of every possible kind. They have not only their own chapels, their own schools, their own mad-houses, and their own Maga-

quences of Newtonian mechanics and economic calculus, most men promoted to bishoprics between 1780 and 1820 were substantially more orthodox.

35. There was significant cultural overlap between the Church of England and those forms of Dissent originating in the seventeenth-century ejections: churchmen regularly purchased the works of Nonconforming divines such as Isaac Watts and Richard Baxter, and the reading lists at Dissenting academies included many Church of England theologians. See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 1:164–204. The case for Toleration was usually made by appeals to the socioeconomic solidarity of Dissenters and churchmen, rather than through any argument for a natural right of conscience. "Most Protestant Dissenters did not claim that they should be eligible for public office because of any right they possessed as men *qua* men, merely that the special privileges won by men of their class, wealth and station should not be denied them purely because of their faith" (Hole, *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order*, 123). Dan White argues that Dissenters, concentrated among the urbanized and educated "middle sorts," took pride in presenting themselves as serious men of business, pulsing with the lifeblood of English identity: as the "parent and guardian of the nation's own libertarian and commercial spirit" (*Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, 28). Southey, confessing in 1834 his "very hearty dislike for dissenters as a body," as it was "hardly possible to believe how dishonestly they write, how impudently they suppress or misrepresent important facts, how rancorously they hate the Church, and with how bitter and uncharitable a spirit they are possessed," still said (if only to perfect the prejudice) that many of his best friends were Dissenters: he had an "abundant liking for individuals among them." *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Kenneth Curry, 2 vols. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965), 2:410–11.

zine, but they have their own Bible, their newspaper, their review, their pocket-book, their cyclopaedia, their Margate-hoys, and their lodging-house at Harrogate, next door to the chapel, and with a bath in the house.³⁶

Though his ostensible target was Methodist “exclusivity,” the old canard that nonconformists were an “*imperium in imperio*,” Southey read this isolation very differently from cloistered renunciations of the world. Methodism was an alarming *modernity*, pervading every aspect of English cultural life—even its baths. Far from abandoning Englishness, Methodism was rewriting it. Already, Southey conceded, most readers understood “poetry” as the hymns and lyrics of the prolific Charles Wesley: “no poems have ever been so devoutly committed to memory as these, nor quoted so often upon a death-bed.”³⁷ This was a coup against the cultural figures that held the allegiance of all men, Tory and Whig, Unitarian and churchman. The Brothers Wesley had replaced Shakespeare as the emissary of English:

The works of Voltaire have found their way wherever the French language is read; the disciples of Wesley wherever the English is spoken . . . there may come a time when the name of Wesley will be more generally known, and in remoter regions of the globe, than that of Frederick or of Catharine.³⁸

This revolution in national (and imperial) mythmaking was beyond any the Rights of Man might precipitate. English enthusiasm, as much as French atheism, could topple monarchs, by fracturing their conventional buttresses. Methodism was desynonymizing “culture” from polite culture, “society” from polite society, and neither could be assumed any longer to reproduce polite rule—whether headed by “Frederick,” “Catharine,” or, though unsaid, “Louis” and “George.”

“Religion is the Basis of Civil Society”

For the Established Church still governing England, this was catastrophe, not transformation. Stories of the secularization of politics, of post-

36. Southey, “On the Evangelical Sects,” 510.

37. Southey, *Life of Wesley*, 2:161.

38. Southey, *Life of Wesley*, 1:34–35.

Revolutionary contests between classes and ideologies without denominational identity, make poor sense of the period. The "successive hammer blows" of the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (1828), Catholic Relief (1829), and the first Reform Bill (1832) dramatically reshaped the constitution between Church and State.³⁹ But the fifty years leading up to this transformation do not easily support a progressive narrative of inexorable, secularizing separation from the Church of England. "Reform" was the goal of Catholics and Dissenters; "secularism" and "Toleration" were themselves religious agendas in the early nineteenth century. Moreover, firm churchmen as well as committed reformers received the dismantling of the Anglican constitution as an unexpected and somewhat unprecedented event. The classes and interests supporting the original Settlement and Act of Toleration had very little in common with those agitating for Repeal and Relief.⁴⁰ All sides often felt that the late seventeenth-century legal code was the antithesis, rather than precursor, of the arguments a century or more later. Southey thought the 1698 Blasphemy Act clear and generous enough that the "necessity" of the Unitarian Relief Act in 1813 "was not quite obvious,"⁴¹ while Paine violently condemned the sort of "Toleration" enjoined by the Act which bore its name.⁴² "Reform was not

39. John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, "The Church and Anglicanism in the 'Long' Eighteenth Century," in *The Church of England c.1689–c.1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–64 (61).

40. Mark Canuel argues that the "spirit of toleration . . . could be viewed as a series of legislative enactments extending from the Act of Toleration in 1689" to Repeal and Relief, but such a view may require a historical abstraction occluding the variety of local differences and tensions haunting this spirit (*Religion, Toleration, and British Writing*, 12).

41. The Blasphemy Act had exempted from the benefits of the Toleration Act any Dissenter who denied the Trinity. Southey wrote, "The necessity for the repeal was not quite obvious. . . . We are not aware that any Unitarian was ever deprived of a legacy by the enforcement of this law, or debarred by it from the exercise of any legal right: and certainly that body of dissenters had not been prevented by it, from defending, inculcating and diffusing their peculiar opinions with perfect freedom, whether from the pulpit, or the press. In fact, they had organized themselves as a sect, during the existence of the statute, grown up, and flourished (as far as can be said that they have flourished) under it." Southey, "New Churches," *Quarterly Review* 23 (July 1820): 549–91 (570).

42. "Toleration is not the *opposite* of Intolerance, but is the *counterfeit* of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding Liberty of Conscience, and the other of granting it. The one is the pope armed with fire and faggot, and the other is the pope selling or granting indulgences. The former is church and State, and the latter is church and traffic. . . . Toleration, therefore, places itself, not between man and man, nor between church and church, but between God and man; between the being who worships, and the BEING who is worshipped; and by the same act of assumed authority by which it tolerates the man to pay his worship, it presumptuously and blasphemously sets itself up to tolerate the Almighty to receive it." Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man, Part One*, in *The*

seen as inevitable” before Waterloo, argues Jonathan Clark, and it seemed even less likely between 1815 and 1827. Establishmentarians controlled the Parliamentary agenda; their authority was reversed by a sudden rash of deaths and defections, more than by the changing sense of the nation.⁴³ Burke’s dictum, though a motivated (and resented) rhetoric in 1790, ruled the next four decades: “We know, and what is better we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society.”⁴⁴

This wasn’t an ecumenical feeling. The vagueness of Burke’s “religion” was one of the recognizable ways in which Anglican identity, and its dominance, was encoded. The history of the word “Anglican” until 1800 is a history of absence: it “scarcely occurs” as a noun, since “the Church of England was commonly referred to as ‘the church’ or ‘the establishment’; its members as ‘Church of England men’ or ‘churchmen.’”⁴⁵ In its catholicity, the Church declined to qualify itself. Amidst the welter of Dissenting nuance, it remained the (only) Church, sublimely removed from both argument and explanation. While the Anglican establishment is often dismissed as “a moribund institution,”⁴⁶ the casual and even indifferent ways in which it theorized itself argued not senescence, but absolute dominion.⁴⁷ The Church was normative because it was natural, as well as national. Other denominations—Baptist, Unitarian, Presbyterian, Congregationalist—blazoned their doctrine and discipline, but the Church was beyond theological debate or structural nicety, conceptually and historically synonymous with “England.”

The Church was privileged as an organ for expressing and preserving national and racial truths, rather than doctrinal specificities. Disestablishment, then, threatened the existential ordering of Englishness, the hierarchical and exclusionary community Burke projected onto the first-

Thomas Paine Reader, ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1987), 201–62 (231).

43. Clark, *English Society*, 505–26. See Hole, *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order*, 240–47, for a rejoinder to Clark’s case that the successful case for Emancipation and Repeal “was based solely on expediency, not at all on principle” (243).

44. Burke, *Reflections*, 186.

45. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, xiii.

46. Goldberg, *Lake Poets*, 32.

47. Walsh and Taylor find Anglicans “quietly confident in the superiority of their own Church over all others”: “eighteenth-century English clerics were sufficiently relaxed in their churchmanship to feel little need to defend the integrity of their Church or to define its identity.” Moreover, they argue that the period from 1688 to the late 1820s was one of substantial continuity in the structure, doctrine, and political orientation of the Anglican Church, and that this continuity is the material and ideological rationale for conceptualizing “the long eighteenth century” (Walsh and Taylor, “The Church and Anglicanism,” 58).

person plural: "We know, and what is better we feel inwardly." "We owe to it," intoned Southey in his *Book of the Church* (1824), echoing both Burke's grammar and its politics, "our moral and intellectual character as a nation; much of our private happiness, much of our public strength."⁴⁸ Southey had meant his *Book* as catechism, a replacement for the ancient *Book of Martyrs* as the textbook for theo-patriotism in Andrew Bell's national schools.⁴⁹ His abiding moral lesson was that the national Church was also an intimate establishment, bound up in domestic affection rather than legal compulsion. Reform meant not just disinheritance, but parricide and infanticide: "I offer, therefore, to those who regard with love and reverence the religion which they have received from their fathers, a brief but comprehensive record, diligently, faithfully, and conscientiously composed, which they may put into the hands of their children."⁵⁰ Southey again borrowed from Burke in his quiet conflation of "religion" with the establishment (as well as in his politicization of domestic sentiment), but for the *Reflections*, the Church was something even grander: the constitution, not simply of the private family or the public "family" of the nation, but of the very possibility of sociopolitical thought and feeling. Burke's constitution was founded in cognition, in the immutable, inaccessible laws of language and logic, rather than in arbitrary (and alterable) legal codes. Attacks on the constitution were thus self-incriminating solecisms in English and Englishness. Men of sound judgment, Burke argued, "do not consider the church establishment as convenient but as essential to their state . . . the foundation of their whole constitution." Such constitutional ties produced, and were derived from, the "natural" workings of a prior mental constitution: "Church and State are ideas inseparable in their minds, and scarcely is the one even mentioned without mentioning the other."⁵¹

Some clerics were even more direct: "They that secede from the Church may be thought to secede likewise from the State."⁵² The Church was certainly the State's most visible and ubiquitous apparatus.⁵³ If Dis-

48. Robert Southey, *The Book of the Church*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1824), 2:511.

49. David Eastwood, "Robert Southey and the Language of Patriotism," *The Journal of British Studies* 31.3 (July 1992): 265–87 (284).

50. Southey, *Book of the Church*, 1:2.

51. Burke, *Reflections*, 197–98.

52. Joseph Eyre, *A Dispassionate Inquiry into the Probable Causes and Consequences of Enthusiasm* (London: J. Long, 1800), 18.

53. W. R. Ward argues that the "legal dependence of the Church upon the state disguised a real dependence of a weak state upon networks of informal influence including those of the Church" (W. R. Ward, "The Religion of the People and the Problem of Control, 1790–1830," in *Studies in Church History*, vol. 8, *Popular Belief and Practice*, ed. G. J.

senters weren't convinced by the representations of churchmen, they remained infuriatingly helpless before Anglican control over their daily lives. Bishops comprised ten percent of the House of Lords, were required to reside in London while Parliament was in session, were active in its deliberations, and voted as a block; for most of the long eighteenth century, divisions were separated by 20 to 30 votes, making the 26 Bishops critical for any government.⁵⁴ But more important were the lesser clergy, present in every parish, distinctive by uniform, and comprising an organization matched in human capital only by the army or navy. The Church was staffed by approximately 10,000 men, and the modern nation-state—and its civilian bureaucracy—hadn't yet been fully invented; the advent of the civil service in the middle-to-late nineteenth century posed the first major structural recruitment challenge for the Church. But in the Romantic period, “government” could be a strikingly informal, limited and semi-privatized thing. Though the prosecution of the global war against Revolution, the management of an empire, the annexation of a continent, and the maintenance of discipline at home were obvious strains, between 1790 and 1820, the entire staff of the Treasury peaked at 86, while the Home and Foreign Offices combined employed less than 45 clerks.⁵⁵

In default of a civil bureaucracy, clergy were the functionaries managing all English subjects, regardless of denomination. Parliament, sermonized the rector of Lincoln College in 1792, “justly considers . . . the ministers of the national church . . . the support and bulwark of the state.”⁵⁶ Anglicans were the only notaries and registrars available: before the 1836 Civil Registration Act, it was nearly impossible to be married (or

Cuming and Derek Baker [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 237). Deryck Lovegrove responds that the eighteenth-century consensus was of a constitution of Church and State which preserved, rather than blurred, the distinctions between them, as an arrangement “between two free and equal sovereign bodies” (Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780–1830* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 8). Jonathan Clark suggests the ties were more intimate: the “authority of any institution or practice” in England “could be traced, usually at no very far remove, to the claim of the Church to embody a specific authorization by Christ, and to be in a sense His continuing body in the world. It was ultimately because the Church was an authoritative hierarchy that the society which was so often held to be identical with it so often claimed to be an authoritative hierarchy also. It was natural that fundamental alienation from society in early-modern England and colonial America should generally have had a religious origin” (*English Society*, 318).

54. Armstrong, *Church of England, the Methodists and Society*, 9–10.

55. Russell, *Clerical Profession*, 19.

56. Edward Tatham, *A Sermon Suitable to the Times* (London: J. F. and C. Rivington, 1792), 9.

to record births, deaths, and burials) outside of the Church of England.⁵⁷ In villages especially, the resident Anglican priest was very likely to be the only—and certainly the most familiar—representative of the national political order. Clergymen frequently assumed more powerful positions. Between 1783 and 1794, Anglican priests were the nation's tax collectors, and throughout the Romantic period they seem to have proved the fraction of the gentry most likely to serve as Justices of the Peace.⁵⁸ Clergymen controlled the social safety net, tattered as it was, and manipulated it in order to exact submission; in 1794, the lay preacher Joseph Cownley recounted the difficulties he had solidifying Methodist converts in rural communities, as local parsons cut off parish relief for those who went to hear him speak.⁵⁹

The clergy were tied not just to the state, but to its spoils, though this plunder, as Paine and Burke testified in their different ways, was unevenly distributed between the best bishoprics and the worst curacies.⁶⁰ But benefited clergymen were some of the largest beneficiaries of the Acts of Enclosure: between 1757 and 1835, nearly two-thirds of all Acts commuted the parish tithe into land for the rector, usually at a rate of at least one-seventh to one-eighth of the entirety of the parish's land.⁶¹ Romantic England thus saw a substantial redistribution of landed wealth to benefited Anglicans, producing a remarkably—and newly—entitled group, which owed its ascendancy to the *ancien regime*. Clergymen were among the most committed partisans for the status quo, since the French Revolution propheesied that the confiscation of property would start with theirs. Though they made up only one-third of the Justices in Oxfordshire between 1775 and 1816, Anglican priests were responsible for 80 percent of the convictions

57. Knight, *Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society*, 13.

58. Russell, *Clerical Profession*, 142–68.

59. *WV* 4:134.

60. Burke declared that the English people "can see a Bishop of Durham, or a Bishop of Winchester, in possession of ten thousand pounds a year; and cannot conceive why it is in worse hands than estates to the like amount in the hands of this Earl, or that Squire" (*Reflections*, 203). Paine retorted, "The comparison is out of order, by being put between the bishop and the earl or the squire. It ought to be put between the bishop and the curate, and then it will stand thus:—*The People of England can see without pain or grudging, a bishop of Durham, or a bishop of Winchester, in possession of ten thousand pounds a year, and a curate on thirty or forty pounds a year, or less.*—No, Sir, they certainly do not see those things without great pain or grudging" (*Rights of Man*, 230). The poorest curates seem to have been in the Lake District, where some "livings" were significantly below starvation wages, at £10 per year (Armstrong, *Church of England, the Methodists and Society*, 26).

61. Russell, *Clerical Profession*, 31.

issued at the Quarter Sessions; they frequently led armed posses from the front, and weren't shy in reading the Riot Act themselves.⁶²

In this post-Revolutionary hardening, liberals within the Church became marked targets. The King himself intervened to forbid William Paley a bishopric, while Richard Watson, a prelate who flirted with heterodox politics—and who provoked Wordsworth with his apostasy, Blake with his sophistry—was frozen until his death as Bishop of Llandaff, the very lowest rung of episcopal preferment and a living worth much less than many well-endowed rectories.⁶³ The doctrinally tolerant and politically flexible strands of Latitudinarian Anglicanism went into very swift decline. By 1795, the party line was firm: the Bible “embraces every opportunity of enlarging on the duty of subordination, and of shewing how much a respectful and obedient conduct towards the magistrate, honours GOD, while it is a test of Christianity.”⁶⁴ While this might warm Hannah More, it was too tepid for Bishop Horsley, whose uncompromising publications swiftly translated him up the episcopal ladder between 1788 and 1806. Napoleon was the Beast, France the Whore, Horsley charged, and the End was indeed nigh.⁶⁵ The Apocalypse was neither poetical figure, nor marginal enthusiasm, but the concern of the highest circles of Anglican orthodoxy. The events facing the Church had only the Crucifixion as precedent: “No crisis, at any period of time since the moment of our Lord's departure from the earth, has more demanded, than the present, the vigilant attention of the Clergy of all ranks and orders, from the Prelate to the Village-Curate, to the duties of the weighty charge, to which we are called.”⁶⁶

62. Russell, *Clerical Profession*, 152–9.

63. John Walsh and Steven Taylor, “The Church and Anglicanism,” 40–41. On Paley, see G. Cole, “Doctrine, Dissent, and the Decline of Paley's Reputation 1805–1825,” *Enlightenment and Dissent* 6 (1987): 19–30.

64. Thomas Thomason [Truebody], *An Essay Tending to Prove that the Holy Scriptures, Rightly Understood, Do Not Give Encouragement to Enthusiasm or Superstition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1795), 36. Isabel Rivers cautions that establishment theology, especially in the early eighteenth century, was more diverse: while “social conservatism is undoubtedly an important element in Anglican thought . . . it has been overemphasized by modern historians to the neglect of other elements” (*Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, 1:82).

65. “The democracy of Apostate France seems indeed, in many particulars, to be doing the work of Antichrist before he comes, and preparing his way before him. . . . Insomuch that this odious French Republic, aping the manners, grappling the dominion, speaking to friends and to enemies the high vaunting language of antient Rome, we seem to behold the dreadful Apocalyptic Beast, which, at the time of the desolation of the Pagan whore exhibited in vision to St. John, had been, but was not, but was to be again; we seem, I say, to behold, in the French Republic, this dreadful monster beginning to rise, in its antient form, out of the raging sea of Anarchy and Irreligion” (Horsley, *Charge*, 10–11).

66. Horsley, *Charge*, 3. For a sustained reading of Horsley's thought as “characteristic

But Horsley's notion of "vigilant attention" was unlikely to arrest the Four Horsemen. Chiding that the "Festivals and Fasts of the Church are, I fear, not without some connivance of the Clergy, gone much into oblivion and neglect," he instructed that Whitsuntide should now be observed. One service on Easter morning was no longer satisfactory; Ash Wednesday should be celebrated, as well; churches ought to be unlocked "every day in the Passion week," even if no services were held; the Sacrament should now be given four times a year, which, for most parishes, was three times more than usual.⁶⁷ This was milquetoast to sop the blood-dimmed tide—yet the Anglican response to the Revolution was less dramatic in practice than rhetoric. Sunday services, by and large, were still limited to once in the morning, which made attendance in rural parishes difficult; prayer meetings were very unusual until the 1830s; meetings not overseen by the incumbent were typically forbidden.

Moreover, the Church was physically incapable of admitting the masses it attempted to catechize. Its infrastructure hadn't developed after the turn of the eighteenth century; as Southey wrote in 1820, since Queen Anne's reign, "the population of the kingdom has doubled; and that of the circle about London has probably decupled its inhabitants; but no additional churches were built, neither were any means provided for imparting religious instruction to multitudes who were now actually excluded from public worship."⁶⁸ The last major allocation of funds for new churches had been in 1711, after which the very few that had been built were speculative investments backed by private consortiums, "financed by sales and rents from pews and burial places, with no room for the poor."⁶⁹ As sleepy villages became booming centers of industry, the national Church no longer matched the nation. By 1817, the Church of England in Manchester

of the intelligent, conservative, high-church Anglicans of his day," see Hole, *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order*, 160–73. Hole implies that the alarmism of Horsley's 1800 *Charge* may have been the "onset of senility" (170).

67. Horsley, *Charge*, 27–28. Communion was very rarely administered until the rise of the Oxford movement, and before the 1830s was often performed only on Easter. Though he was never theologically orthodox, Coleridge self-identified as Anglican fairly early in his turn to political conservatism, and was in some ways typical of Anglican practice. While (and perhaps because) he invested the ritual with profound significance, he did not take Communion at any time between his first year of college and 1827. See J. Robert Barth, S.J., "Coleridge and the Church of England," in *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, ed. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: St Martin's, 1990), 291–307 (301–2).

68. Southey, "New Churches," 563–64.

69. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 320.

only had seats for 15 percent of the city,⁷⁰ and Southey was certain that Liverpool could admit only 20 percent of its population; in Yorkshire, seating was wanting for 580,000, and in Chester, 1,040,000.⁷¹

The Discourse of Anglican Authority

The Establishment wasn't wholly passive before this emergency. Parliament gestured toward triage in 1818, granting one million pounds for the construction of new churches, and the project generated surprisingly broad-based support.⁷² The Church's prerogatives were defended with ferocious, even eliminationist language,⁷³ as well as naked violence: one Methodist lay preacher was silenced by a drunk parson hitting him in the face, knocking the legs out from the chair he was standing on, and shaking him by the collar with such force that the cloth ripped, while a band of hired thugs looked on darkly.⁷⁴ But the strange distance between frenzy at

70. Armstrong, *Church of England, the Methodists and Society*, 91.

71. Southey, "New Churches," 553. Simon Dentith argues that the paucity of seats was a serious problem for Anglican authority, as the carefully mapped geography within each church, with bought pews for the gentry, free pews for the middle sort, and benches for the lower classes, worked "as an institution in which the social hierarchy is precisely reproduced . . . and in which patterns of social command and patronage are reinforced on a weekly basis" (*Society and Cultural Forms in Nineteenth Century England* [New York: St. Martin's, 1998], 31). David Hempton suggests that Methodism didn't erode Anglican power, but profited from these demographic and structural erosions already underway, flourishing where the Church of England had grown weakest (*The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750–1900* [London and New York: Routledge, 1996]).

72. New churches made strange bedfellows. Southey was joined by Keats's friend, Benjamin Robert Haydon, in campaigning for the government grant, and the poet-laureate praised the painter's "forcible appeal" that £10,000 be set aside to commission art for the new churches, which would, according to Southey, "complete the glories of this triumphant age, by producing an age of art in England, equal to any which Greece or Italy can boast" (Southey, "New Churches," 586–88). Benjamin Robert Haydon, *New Churches: Considered with Respect to the Opportunities They Offer for the Encouragement of Painting* (London: J. Carpenter, 1818).

73. Though Southey had ecumenical interests, leading to engagements with (if not endorsements of) a variety of religious experiences, by 1827 he was "persuaded of two things—that nothing is so likely to bring an explosion, and that there can be no tranquility for Ireland till the Romish religion is subdued there, and therefore this is the right course to be pursued. If I were in Orders I would be there" (*New Letters of Robert Southey*, 2:311). Anglican opinion could be much more extreme than even this. Southey himself condemned in 1810 a diatribe arguing that Methodist "vermin . . . must all be caught, cracked, and killed in the manner, and by the instrument which are found most efficacious to their destruction" (*New Letters of Robert Southey*, 1:267).

74. WV 3:74.

impending Apocalypse, and palsied solutions such as Whitsuntide observance, wasn't the Church's failure, but its ideological aspiration. The dominant strain of Anglican thought held the Church's power greatest when least explicit, its function the naturalization, rather than evangelization, of Christianity. The Church had little interest in the attendance of its parishioners, couldn't seat them had they turned up, and reliably bored those who did: but it reserved to itself, and this affective restraint, most venues for formal political and cultural agency.

Anglicanism evaporated disruptive feeling, while confusing antagonistic intellectual positions before their political factionalization. The precedents for powerful, popular religiosity were grim, so the "strict canonical order of our Church," Alexander Knox wrote in 1828, was designed to afford "no proportioned means of awakening an entire people from a moral sleep," insuring they slumbered peaceably.⁷⁵ Southey celebrated this enervation as an "infinite blessing": "I am never weary of repeating that faith is an appetite of the mind: our establishment starves it, the Catholics gorge it even to surfeiting and sickness."⁷⁶ The Church set a low bar for its dogma,⁷⁷ and the nuance of its best theologians was probably irrelevant to the everyday faith of most clergy and almost all communicants.⁷⁸ Anglicanism was purposefully messy in the Romantic period, avoiding lucid spiritual thought through its material diffusion, intellectual diffuseness, and rhetorical "reasonability," not at all the same as intellectual "rationality."

Theological nicety, or even self-awareness, had been a hallmark of separation since the first Puritans were called "Precisians." Two hundred years on, the *Quarterly Review* lamented that "needless scruples and ill-judged austerities of manner and deportment have agitated bosoms and darkened countenances which before were guileless, and innocent, and gay as the birds in the thicket."⁷⁹ The good churchman was cheerfully relaxed, attached to Christianity by those socialized pressures, familial affections, and uninterrogated overdeterminants Burke heroized as "prejudice," not

75. Knox, "Remarks," 331.

76. *New Letters of Robert Southey*, 2:6.

77. Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, 1:32.

78. The disabilities imposed on Dissenters made them acutely aware of their doctrines, and the sacrifices they made for them. Anglicans enjoyed the privilege of an uncritical religiosity; after Reform, the situation didn't change dramatically. Tractarianism was very much an elite phenomenon, even among clergymen, until much later in the nineteenth century (Knight, *Nineteenth-Century Church*, 19).

79. "Southey's *Life of Wesley*," *Quarterly Review*, 4.

any spiritual appeal.⁸⁰ The best Anglican was a cultural, rather than faithful, Anglican:

The majority of the English, as of every other people, follow the religion of the country, because they have been bred up in it, conform to it because they have been told it is true, and never think of questioning its truth, nor of requiring any other reason for their belief. For the purposes of the state this is sufficient; their names are to be found in the parish registers, many of them regularly go to church themselves, and those who do not, send their wives and children there.⁸¹

For Wordsworth, his “grey-haired dame,” Ann Tyson, figured the homey comforts of a benevolently flaccid Anglicanism, so complacent it was genuinely somnolent:

Her clear though shallow stream of piety,
That ran on Sabbath days a fresher course.
With thoughts unfelt till now I saw her read
Her bible on the Sunday afternoons,
And loved the book when she had dropped asleep
And made of it a pillow for her head. (1805 *Prelude* 4:216–21)

This “clear though shallow stream” flowed from a Church identified by regional and racial norms rather than doctrinal commitments, with a long history of jettisoning theological concerns for social cohesion. Anglicanism appears a problematic prefiguration of secularization: before the rise of Tractarianism and widespread Evangelicalism by the 1830s, the Church

80. In his defense of the Established Church, Burke wrote, “You see, Sir, that in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings; that instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own stock of private reason. . . . Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, and they seldom fail, they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason. . . . Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency. . . . Prejudice renders a man’s virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature.” Burke, *Reflections*, 183. See especially Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing*, 17–20.

81. Southey, “On the Evangelical Sects,” 486–87.

of England restrained disruptive or liberationist intensities within religious identity, modeling a Christianity that naturalized the supernatural mysteries still surviving within orthodox Protestantism.

Very few points of doctrine were so essential that refutation damaged the Church's spiritual or temporal authority. This was, after all, a Christianity carefully insecure on the grounds, mechanisms, and meanings of Salvation. The Thirty-Nine Articles were "often deliberately ambiguous, to leave room for varying interpretations," juggling Calvinism with Arminianism, the grace of election and the work of repentance, fully authorizing neither.⁸² The final form of the Articles in 1571 struck a political compromise between fundamentally irreconcilable soteriologies; after the Act of Settlement, many churchmen were pleased that the Church's vague, contradictory teachings derailed doctrinal controversies before they progressed into armed disagreements. Theological rigor suggested moral and cognitive morbidity, fatally discredited by the Civil Wars. The most essential matters were best left unexplored, for the sake of the individual soul as well as the nation. The *Quarterly* praised "the ambiguous and comprehensive wording of some of the articles,"⁸³ and even the hard-charging Horsley shrank from doctrinal entanglements. Clergy ought "to avoid controversial argument in . . . the dark subject of Predestination and Election," as the Articles were wisely unhelpful: "differences of opinion, upon these subjects, have subsisted among the best Christians from the beginning, and will subsist, I am persuaded to the end." These "differences," Horsley insisted, were ineradicable, arising from "necessity, from the inability of the human mind to reconcile the doctrine of Providence, irresistibly ruling all events, with the responsibility of man as a moral agent." It was far better—and quintessentially establishmentarian—to prioritize the affect of the sermon, and regulate its manner, rather than its details: "I would advise you to use in general, not an argumentative, but a plain didactic style: teach with authority, not as the Scribes," and avoid all mysterious points.⁸⁴

Hazlitt jeered that these mealy-mouthed Anglicans thought with only their pusillanimous bellies: "*men should not quarrel with their bread and butter.*" The consensus on the Articles was fuzzy because no churchman had any incentive to think clearly: "Is it likely that a man will intrepidly open his eyes to conviction, when he sees poverty and disgrace staring him

82. Barth, "Coleridge and the Church of England," 299.

83. "Southey's *Life of Wesley*," *Quarterly Review*, 8.

84. Horsley, *Charge*, 32.

in the face as the inevitable consequence?”⁸⁵ Even subscribers granted that the Articles were a bad-faith document of practical expediency, not Scripture. Southey’s doctrinal opportunism, while remarkable, wasn’t unusual. The genius of the Articles, he wrote in 1811, was what they didn’t say: “The nature of the Fall and the question of the Trinity and the superhuman nature of Christ may safely be left undefined, for every person to understand according to his judgment.”⁸⁶ But as Southey well knew, “the question of the Trinity and the superhuman nature of Christ” were precisely the matters *not* safe for the individual conscience. Until the repeal of the Blasphemy Act in 1813, both had legally compulsory answers, which Southey eagerly exploited. As soon as a “Barrister,” James Sedgwick, mounted a Socinian assault on these “mysteries,” Southey did a swift about-face, and pretended that the Church of England was entirely of one mind on the “safely undefined”:

What! The bishops? the dignified clergy? have they then exploded all doctrinal mysteries? have they ceased to hold the doctrines of the Trinity, the corruption of the human will, and redemption by the cross of Christ? Do our clergy solemnly pray to their maker, weekly before God and man, in the words of a liturgy which they know *cannot be believed*? Either this is true, or the Barrister is a libeller, a rank and convicted libeller.⁸⁷

Such gymnastics—confessing in private the insignificance of the Articles, using them in public as a truncheon—fooled no one, even as they extorted temporary acquiescence. But an instrumentalist view of the Church, as a spiritually vacuous institution of political hierarchy and due subordination, wasn’t some scandalous Deistic critique. This was the key conceit of the Establishment’s defenders: “it saves us from persecution; but its creed will not stand the test of sound criticism.”⁸⁸ Men who “accepted” the Articles had some freedom to ignore them; those who formally rejected them paid a heavy price for their dissent. Even a scholar such as Southey could be strikingly—and conveniently—ignorant of the terms of his own belief. While considering John Wesley’s insistence that “*no good works can be done before justification, none which have not in them the nature of sin,*” he barked, “This doctrine, however, was not preached in all the naked

85. “On the Clerical Character” (1818), in *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 7:250–52.

86. *New Letters of Robert Southey*, 2:6.

87. Southey, “On the Evangelical Sects,” 484.

88. *New Letters of Robert Southey*, 2:6.

absurdity of its consequences." Yet as Coleridge quietly remarked in his marginalia to the *Life of Wesley*, "Did R.S. remember that the words in Italics are faithfully quoted from the Articles of Our Church?"⁸⁹

Few pious frauds were quite as self-aware in their mendacity as Southey's. But this doctrinal deemphasis was an important plank for the Church's program of "reasonable Christianity." As an ideology of social and epistemological orthodoxy, its terms didn't admit much variation: the "Religion, by which alone our salvation is to be obtained, is altogether a reasonable service," opined one cleric in 1792;⁹⁰ "Our religion is to be reasonable, consistent, and uniform," agreed a Norrisian medalist in 1795;⁹¹ the "great simplicity and reasonableness" of revelation, prophecy, and miracles were the subjects of the 1824 Warburton lectures.⁹² "Reasonable Christianity" wasn't the "rational religion" of progressive Dissent: instead it valued a holistic (and reactionary) "good" over the unaccommodating rigor of the one true faith.⁹³ Reasonability guaranteed the temperament—and temperance—of an argument more than its conclusions. "Reasonable" men might disagree reasonably, yet still be "consistent, and uniform" in style. This discursive practice had the minor virtue of being unfalsifiable, if not true: no skepticism or heterodoxy challenged a Church rooted in emotional and aesthetic habits, rather than positive doctrinal claims.

89. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. George Whalley, 6 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980–2001), 5:138.

90. Tatham, *A Sermon Suitable to the Times*, 3.

91. Thomason, *An Essay Tending to Prove*, 38.

92. John Davison, *Discourses on Prophecy, in Which Are Considered Its Structure, Use, and Inspiration* (London: John Murray, 1824), 27.

93. Joseph Priestley's "rational religion" was very far indeed from Anglican "reasonability." In 1791, he published the Wesley family's accounts of their haunting by a spirit, Old Jeffrey; against what he took to be the asinine credulity of the founders of Methodism, Priestley offered a neat distillation of the "rational religion" of radical Dissent: "Of what unspeakable value, then, are rational principles of religion; and how happy should that man think himself who has never known any other! and yet the Scriptures teach them in the plainest manner, and uniformly instruct us to judge of ourselves and others, not by uncertain and undescribable *feelings*, but by evident *actions*. As our Saviour says, 'by their fruits ye shall know them;' for where a man's conduct is not only occasionally, but uniformly right, the principle upon which he acts must be good. Indeed the only reason why we value good principles, is on account of their uniform operation in producing good conduct." This is the far edge of eighteenth-century theology, in which the recognizable structures of normative Christian thought have been almost entirely translated into a secularized philosophy. The old tension between faith and works is recast as one between "uncertain and undescribable *feelings*" and "evident *actions*," the innate grace of "good principles" against the bare-Arminianism of "good conduct." *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, ed. John Towhill Rutt, 25 vols. (London: Smallfield, 1817–32), 25:328.

The Church much preferred theologically infelicitous, yet discursively “reasonable” Christianity to strident accuracy. “[T]he proof of religion,” argued John Davison in his *Discourses on Prophecy*, “gathers light and strength from the concentrated force of all its moral evidence,” the “aggregate” of “concurrent proofs,” any one—or even all—of which could be discredited without discrediting the belief built upon them.⁹⁴ Davison’s lectures on the truth of revelation danced from point to point, conceding weaknesses here and there, secure that skeptics could land only glancing blows. It was a “vicious manner of reasoning to represent any insufficiency of the proof, in its several branches, as so much objection”: “if the divided arguments be inconclusive one by one,” the result was hardly “a series of exceptions to the truth of religion,” but rather “a train of favourable presumptions, growing stronger at every step.”⁹⁵ Assembled reasonably, an agglomeration of individual arguments, each dissatisfying, was an irrefutably compelling whole. If “rationality” accorded with transcendental principles, Anglican reasonability was an inductive mortar, cementing a brickwork of exceptions, errors, and deficiencies. The theology of the Church mirrored its purpose, fabricating a consensus out of diverse and competing elements, reconciling (or at least occluding) disagreements into a solemn and solid gestalt: “If the single stone or column be sufficient to uphold the edifice, we are not to think that the edifice really presses upon that single support; when it reposes, and with a far greater security, upon the broad united strength of the entire range and system of its fabric.”⁹⁶

“Reasonable Christianity” was sociable Christianity: an exhortation to “be reasonable” is a demand for collegiality, an appeal to the sanity of relaxed interpersonal relations, while an injunction to “be rational” is a rebuke made in the name of a hard, often impolitic truth.⁹⁷ Churchmen viewed the purity of rational Dissent as an atomizing force of disagreement and solipsistic self-fashioning. Milton might have dedicated himself to “the gracefull symmetry” of “moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes,”⁹⁸ but Southey rejected this geometry with a bare antithesis: “There is a spirit of dissent, as well as a spirit of Christianity.”⁹⁹

94. Davison, *Discourses*, 31.

95. Davison, *Discourses*, 35.

96. Davison, *Discourses*, 43–44.

97. These connotational differences have been extant since the fifteenth century; “reasonable, adj. 6a.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2010), February 9, 2011, <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/159072>.

98. John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 997–1024 (1019).

99. Robert Southey, “History of the Dissenters,” *Quarterly Review* 10 (October 1813): 90–139 (130).

"Dissent," Southey elaborated, had neither identity nor history, only Oedipal self-repudiation. The "evil" that "grows out of the principle of dissent" was obvious:

The minister of an establishment has no temptation from vanity, or the love of singularity, or to any more worldly motive, to labour, as Jeremy Taylor expresses it, in the mine of insignificant distinctions: but among Dissenters the right of private judgment is so injudiciously inculcated that the men who are trained among them learn not unfrequently to despise all judgment except their own. Many of their students seem almost to have considered it a proof of weakness if they should believe as they were taught; as if theology, like chemistry, were a science in which every generation ought to make some discovery beyond its predecessor. Thus the Presbyterian seminaries produced Arians; the Arian school brought forth Socinian pupils, and when the Socinian college was established, they who had sat at Gamaliel's feet came away unbelievers. . . . The consequence of this has been that the English Presbyterians are rapidly disappearing, and Arianism is so nearly extinguished that we believe at this time a minister cannot be found for the last congregation in which it lingers.¹⁰⁰

Against this self-righteous balkanization, the Church of England nurtured assent to standards more urgent than logic. Anglican theologians prized iteration and agreement as much as the positions agreed upon—safe theology was redundant theology. Thomas Robinson's massive, four-volume *Scripture Characters* (1792) was a successful foray in Biblical typology, running to a fourth edition by 1800, yet it was symptomatically glad to have small reason for being. No "new information [is] aimed at, as being entirely foreign to the plan," Robinson shrugged. Rather, "those doctrines, which have been generally received in the Christian Church, are taken for granted" here, though such "doctrines" were also left generally undefined. "[A]cknowledged principles" were preferred to "the most ingenious . . . arguments": that another clergyman had produced an identical book with identical conclusions a few years earlier—"the same thoughts will naturally offer themselves to the mind"—was hardly preemptive competition, but conclusive proof of Robinson's soundness.¹⁰¹

100. Southey, "History of the Dissenters," 130. This was a familiar insult; cf. Burke's claim that Richard Price's "zeal is of a curious character. It is not for the propagation of his own opinions, but of any opinions. It is not for the diffusion of truth, but for the spreading of contradiction. Let the noble teachers dissent, it is no matter from whom or from what" (*Reflections*, 95).

101. Thomas Robinson, *Scripture Characters: or, A Practical Improvement of the Prin-*

The most powerful performances of Anglican iterative consensus, however, came from the practical theology preached weekly from thousands of pulpits across the country. Many (perhaps most) of these sermons weren't written by their delivering clergymen. Successful sermons by reputable clerics were published, purchased, and read aloud (often verbatim), a depersonalized economy reinforcing the Church's consensus and extension, the primacy of universal institutionality over fungible individualities. Dissenting ministers took this as one of the more serious differences between nonconforming dedication and establishmentarian apathy; as late as 1820, their preaching manuals still rehearsed Philip Doddridge's eighteenth-century warning: "Never preach a borrowed sermon."¹⁰² While the Church of England didn't celebrate the market for "pre-owned" sermons, neither did it suppress the heavy traffic.¹⁰³ The Rev. Dr. John Trusler, whom Blake memorably accused of having "fall'n out of the Spiritual World,"¹⁰⁴ found sufficient demand for a unique enterprise: a line of popular sermons, cleverly engraved into simulated calligraphy, insuring that any congregant surreptitiously glancing at the "notes" for a sermon would be impressed by "handwritten" originality.¹⁰⁵

Even those clergymen moved to write their own sermons often weren't moved far. Many stopped after one sermon for each Sunday. John Sharp, a well-placed Northumberland cleric and grandson of an Archbishop of York, was typical, using the same fifty-two sermons for 45 years, preaching 2,800 times before his death in 1792, without adding once to his canon.¹⁰⁶ Printed sermons helped excuse staffing deficiencies, as widespread pluralism meant that the parish resident was often a poorly incentivized, and sometimes frankly incompetent, curate; a set of approved texts from which he might read meant that the Church need not trouble itself too much about his zeal or theological acumen. Though some local (usually Evangelical) exceptions attracted national attention by the Regency, Anglican preaching was still a heavily textualized phenomenon until the

cipal Histories in the Old and New Testament, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (London, 1793 [1792]), 1:viii–x.

102. *The Preacher's Manual*, 3rd ed. (London: Richard Baynes, 1820), 134.

103. See Françoise Deconinck-Brossard, "Eighteenth-Century Sermons and the Age," in *Crown and Mitre: Religion and Society in Northern Europe since the Reformation*, ed. W. M. Jacob and Nigel Yates (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), 105–21 (113–14).

104. Letter to Rev Dr Trusler, 23 August 1799, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, Newly Revised Edition*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 702.

105. Russell, *Clerical Profession*, 87–88.

106. Deconinck-Brossard, "Eighteenth-Century Sermons," 111.

middle of the nineteenth century. Clergymen took pains to make clear—through flat tones, stolid pacing, and quiet vocal projection—that sermons were scripted artifacts, in which pre-extant truths were read aloud, rather than discovered through improvisatory energy. As Oliver Goldsmith had observed in *The Bee*, the archetypical parson insured that his “audience feels not one word of all he says,” so that “he earns among his acquaintance, the character of a man of sense; among his acquaintance only did I say, nay, even with his bishop.”¹⁰⁷

The nineteenth-century *Preacher's Manual* shared Goldsmith's disappointment, grumbling over those who “read all their sermons”: it “requires a degree of courtesy to call this preaching; and seems to need no gifts but teeth and tongue—and hardly these as many persons perform it.”¹⁰⁸ But a “degree of courtesy” was very much the desired temperature of these lectures. Blandness paved the Anglican *via media*, “the sober golden Mean” of a well-regulated publicity, which brought out in the open, and then quietly canceled, all the private derangements which were “of a dangerous sort and prejudicial to society,” in order to produce “mutual Forbearance, general Goodwill, and the Benefit of All.”¹⁰⁹ The “peculiar beauty” of established Christianity, argued Joseph Eyre, was the “Moderation and Temperateness which it unquestionably exhibits,” the calm of a “mode of Worship” renouncing all “the extravagant distortions of frantic Fanaticism,” avoiding those “incoherent effusions” so effective “upon the imagination of credulous adherents.”¹¹⁰ Churchmen were the first to admit that their religion was dull, because it was intentionally so: the ever-recurring round of tired sermons figured a social order as eternal as its rhetoric.¹¹¹

The practical theology of the Church of England swapped spiritual mystery for social mystification. The generalized education at Oxbridge provided no formal training in the composition of sermons; clergy adapted the only form they knew, exporting wholesale the arid textualism of the

107. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Bee. Being Essays on the Most Interesting Subjects* (London: J. Wilkie, 1759), 201.

108. *Preacher's Manual*, 71–72.

109. Eyre, *Dispassionate Inquiry*, 2–8.

110. Eyre, *Dispassionate Inquiry*, 20–21.

111. Paul Goring finds that a well-known text for sermonizing in the eighteenth century, Michel Le Faucher's *Traité de l'action de l'orateur* (1657; translated in English in the eighteenth century as *Essay upon the Action of an Orator*), formally instructed clergyman that well-regulated, “polite” oratory “is a key to social order; it is a pedagogic tool to be wielded paternalistically by those invested with political and religious authority so as to spread and enforce the tenets of Christian belief, sympathy and justice” (*Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 47).

collegiate disputation—often complete with classical allusions—into the pulpit.¹¹² In 1828, Southey regaled John Gibson Lockhart with a story of Coleridge’s father, who “used to astonish and delight the Ottery people” with untranslated passages of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.¹¹³ But these gentlemen appreciated what the congregation couldn’t: Joanna Southcott, after all, was born in John Coleridge’s parish and sat in his church, and in 1802 she recounted drifting away from the confusing, sterile lessons of her village parson for the visceral appeal of “Mr. Westley’s preachers.”¹¹⁴ Southcott had failed to absorb this most important of all Anglican doctrines, that the ancient languages of Scripture ordained the supremacy of the class of men that decoded them. The alien scholasticism of the sermon, and the larger clerical economy from which it was acquired if not composed, made the university immanent in even wretched curates, confronting congregations with the distant power sanctifying the clergyman, if not the Sacrament.

The rhetoric of Anglicanism made the person of the clergyman inseparable from his structural role, always gesturing toward the immovable Church behind the fallible man, resulting in a Christianity almost Catholic in its commitment to the bureaucracy of the soul. Salvation was better based in hearsay than individual experience, and ought to be mediated through the intercessory representations of the Church: it was “the glory of the Christian Faith . . . that they who are employed in the lower but useful offices of life, should receive religious instruction from others who have greater opportunities to know, and are better qualified to judge,” as the “mixed and exalted virtue which is the only means of our Salvation . . . requires not information that is direct, conviction that is immediate, nor the first degrees of knowledge, but . . . can ever grow from a second-hand information and out of a weaker conviction, as its proper soil.”¹¹⁵ The Church cultivated this “mixed and exalted” Christianity as the “proper soil” for the naturalization of its hierarchy. “Salvation” was a technically demanding problem beyond amateurish self-help, requiring the professional services of the cleric. The Anglican ratio between self and God was thus a complicated amalgam of privacy and publicity: if moral thought, feeling, and behavior weren’t governed by the secrets of Roman superstition, or guarded by a caste of priests with magical endowments,

112. Russell, *Clerical Profession*, 86–87.

113. *New Letters of Robert Southey*, 2:331.

114. Joanna Southcott, *The Strange Effects of Faith* (London: E. Spragg, 1802), 85.

115. Tatham, *A Sermon Suitable to the Times*, 4–5.

they hardly belonged to the priesthood of all believers. The discourses of Christian interiority—the prospects for redemption, the consequences of sin, the qualities of “conviction”—were heavily trained techniques, the privileges of an establishmentarian education rather than a Catholic thaumaturgy. The “glory” of Anglicanism was its “second-hand information,” which guaranteed that intimate and individual spiritualities were meaningful only as they were managed, explicated, and transformed by institutionalized authority. Personal intuition was likely to misrecognize the true condition of the soul, which could be safely gauged only by the studious, reasonable, and well-trained clergyman, and the gentry hegemony he represented. Humility before the Lord meant deference to the affective conventions his vicars prescribed: “the apostles . . . exhort the followers of Jesus to ascertain the certainty of their convictions and the ground of their expectations, NOT by any INWARD FEELINGS and EXPERIENCES, but by the weight of *rational* evidence there is for them.”¹¹⁶

“A Brand Plucked out of the Burning”

As Anglicanism dispersed affective intensities, Methodism threatened a literal cult of sentiment. The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, argued Bishop Horsley, was the most serious threat the Establishment faced after the Revolution. Equality of property, universal representation, and philosophical skepticism would never seduce solid Englishmen, who were much more likely to be taken in by a dramatically passionate Christianity:

Instead of divesting Religion of its mysteries, and reducing it to a mere philosophy in speculation, and to a mere morality in practice; the plan is now to affect a great zeal for orthodoxy; to make great pretensions to an extraordinary measure of the Holy Spirit’s influence; to alienate the minds of the people from the Established Clergy, by representing them as sordid worldlings; without any concern about the soul of men; indifferent to the religion which they ought to teach, and to which the laity are attached; and destitute of the Spirit of God.¹¹⁷

116. Thomas Ludlam, *Four Essays: On the Ordinary and Extraordinary Operations of the Holy Spirit; On the Application of Experience to Religion; and on Enthusiasm and Fanaticism* (London: T. Ludlam, 1797), 44.

117. Horsley, *Charge*, 19.

The Church read Methodist “affect” as pretense, its “great zeal for orthodoxy” as oxymoron, since the “Religion of Jesus, owed nothing to the . . . passions, of the human Heart: but the Religion of J. W. [John Wesley] owes to these almost every thing.”¹¹⁸ Methodistical “Heart Religion” unraveled the soporific arrangement between cleric and congregation at the root of the constitution, and prelates worried that the “wholsom rules” of Church government were “not only broken-through, but notoriously *despised*,” as the Wesleyans abandoned parish churches for new “Ministers,” with whom “there is no Manner of Relation.”¹¹⁹ The Methodist care of the soul traded professional technique for the “sense” common to all, who “might come to Christ now, without any other qualification than a sense of their own sinfulness and helplessness.”¹²⁰ The *Examiner* cast this religious sensibility as bodily sensuousness and literary sensationalism, beyond any Cockneyism: the “difference” between “a rational religion” and one “calculated for the uninformed mass of mankind” was that between “those who think without feeling, and those who feel without thinking.”¹²¹

Wesleyans wore the insult with pride. Salvation came from right feeling, without benefit of clergy, theology, or even words: “a man may be saved who cannot express himself properly . . . a man can be saved who has not clear conceptions. . . . Therefore, clear conceptions . . . are not necessary to salvation. Yea, it is not necessary to salvation to use the phrase at all.”¹²² Here was a cultural program doubling as soteriology. Conventional literacy (and the hierarchy it scripted) was irrelevant to both Methodist salvation and Methodist reading and writing. Wesley blocked the exchange between textual production and consumption: good readers didn’t make good writers, and familiarity with the history of ideas disabled, rather than credentialed. As he declared in the “Preface” to *Sermons on Several Occasions* (hereafter *SOSA*), one of the more widely reprinted texts of the eighteenth century:

Nay, my design is in some sense to forget all that ever I have read in my life. I mean to speak, in general, as if I had never read one author, ancient or modern (always excepting the inspired). I am persuaded that,

118. Trimmer, *Review*, 17.

119. [Edmund Gibson], *Observations upon the Conduct and Behavior of a Certain Sect, Usually distinguished by the Name of Methodists*, 2nd ed. (London: E. Owen, 1744), 6.

120. *WV* 2:101.

121. “Pulpit Oratory,” *Examiner* 603 (July 18, 1819): 461.

122. Wesley drafted these principles while “alone in the coach” in 1767; Alexander Knox drew Southey’s attention to them in his “Remarks,” 342.

on the one hand, this may be a means of enabling me more clearly to express the sentiments of my heart, while I simply follow the chain of my own thoughts, without entangling myself with those of other men; on the other, I shall come with fewer weights upon my mind, with less prejudice and prepossession, either to search for myself or to deliver to others the naked truths of the gospel.¹²³

Against the socialized "prejudice and prepossession" that Burke, Southey, and other churchmen identified as the iterative consensus of Anglican reasonability, the Wesleyans celebrated the "naked," inspired insularity of nothing but the heart's affections and the truth of the imagination.¹²⁴ But spiritual heat, Southey worried, was socially incendiary: "Fanaticism always comes to this in its progress: first it depreciates learning, then it would destroy it. There have been Christians as they believed themselves, who would have burnt the Alexandrian library upon the same logic as the Caliph Omar."¹²⁵

Wesley might have styled himself "*homo unius libri*," but Methodism's ultimate danger to the archive wasn't arson, but new curation.¹²⁶ By himself, Wesley might have restocked the Great Library; the *Quarterly* had begrudging awe for him as "a voluminous author, almost 'de omniscibili.'"¹²⁷ In addition to his own sermons, tracts, public *Journals* and private letters, Wesley orchestrated one of the most comprehensive publishing empires of the long eighteenth century, which attempted to bring all knowledge, sacred and secular, under the Methodist imprimatur. The fifty-volume *Christian Library* anthologized the whole of "Practical Divinity" in "the English Tongue,"¹²⁸ quietly editing the recalcitrant; Bunyan, for

123. Wesley, "Preface" to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, *Sermons* I: 104-5.

124. Though there were ironies even within Wesley's humility tropes. He had been Fellow of Lincoln College and Lecturer in Greek, and this abjuration of classical learning evidenced its continued possession, allusively flitting from Marcus Antoninus to Pindar. As the *Quarterly* recalled in 1821, Wesley could nimbly shift registers to fit audience and occasion, and "in one of his latest sermons in the neighbourhood of Oxford, observing that many members of the University were among his audience, he introduced into his discourse a dissertation on the second Aorist, with a dexterity and acuteness which evinced that he had neither forgotten nor neglected the studies of sixty years before" ("*Southey's Life of Wesley*," 12).

125. Southey, *Life of Wesley*, 1:93.

126. Wesley, "Preface" to *SOSA*, *Sermons* I:105.

127. "Southey's *Life of Wesley*," *Quarterly Review*, 47.

128. John Wesley, *A Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts and Abridgments of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity, which have been publish'd in the English Tongue*, 50 vols. (Bristol: E. Farley, 1749-55).

example, appeared without his Calvinism.¹²⁹ Along with theology, Wesley marketed histories of England, collections of songs, manuals of folk medicine, and a compendium of “natural philosophy,” abridged so “as to not require any large Expence, either of Time or Money.”¹³⁰ Wesley’s savvy eye for “Expence” profited Methodism even more than his personal charisma, pitching products in most price tranches, while advertising, serializing, and reviewing the whole in his *Arminian Magazine*. This vertical integration—decades before similar experiments by Murray, Blackwood, and Longman—earned more than £1,000 p.a., from texts often priced at several pence.¹³¹ And all during what William St. Clair calls the “High Monopoly period” of English publishing, in which the reading available to the poor was otherwise extraordinarily limited in scope and antique in age.¹³² Methodism was an oasis in this cultural desert, marking landmarks for inexperienced readers with its collections and periodicals, suggesting more substantial sites for exploration in Wesley’s own writing. Most of what was suitable for a Christian could be purchased under the Methodist brand, and for poor men and women uninterested in hoary chapbooks, there were few alternatives. The most enterprising bookseller of the late eighteenth century thought their brand loyalty absolute: “There are thousands in this society who will never read any thing besides the Bible, and books published by Mr. Wesley.”¹³³

In loving Methodist books, Methodists loved themselves. Wesley trained illiterate men and women to read their subjectivities—those “INWARD FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES” anathematized by

129. Isabel Rivers remarks, “Wesley’s editorial practice created certain problems. His decision to delete what he regarded as error and to make all his chosen authors consistent with one another meant that he drastically misrepresented some of them” (*Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, 1:218). Wesley “fused (or confused)” author and editor functions, silently adapting (and not infrequently, plagiarizing wholesale) whatever was at hand (Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 346).

130. John Wesley, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation: Or a Compendium of Natural Philosophy*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Bristol: William Pine, 1770), 1:iii.

131. For a survey of the economics of Methodist publishing, see Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 350. Henry Abelove tabulates that Wesley’s income was “as big as, or bigger than, the revenues of eighteen of the bishoprics of the Church of England” (*The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990], 9 n16).

132. St. Clair argues that the “lower boundaries of the reading nation . . . were still reading, or were listening to others read aloud, a body of printed texts which were produced in the pre-modern age. For nearly 200 years a large constituency of the English reading nation was locked into the print of the early years of the reign of King James” (*Reading Nation*, 83).

133. Lackington, *Memoirs*, 69.

the Church—as aesthetic objects superior to any appreciated by more “refined” sensibilities.¹³⁴ As he argued in his 1780 essay “Thoughts upon Taste,” culture meant cultivation of the moral self, and distinction meant discrimination against everything but the egotistical sublime dwelling within everyone:

May we not likewise observe, that there is a beauty in virtue, in gratitude, and disinterested benevolence? And have not many, at least, a taste for this? Do they not discern and relish it, wherever they find it? Yea, does it not give them one of the most delicate pleasures whereof the human mind is capable? Is not this taste of infinitely more value, than a taste for any or all the pleasures of the imagination? And is not this pleasure infinitely more delicate, than any that ever resulted, yea, or can result, from the utmost refinements of music, poetry, or painting?¹³⁵

In Wesley’s regime of taste, poor men, not the establishmentarian “bells” of “Frost at Midnight,” were themselves their “only music.” Poverty forbade the beaux arts, but the Methodist self was an inalienable cultural property: the fluxes and refluxes of an unsophisticated field-hand or harried housewife in the throes of salvation ought to be savored with “delicate pleasure,” surpassing “the utmost refinements” of leisure.¹³⁶

Wesley’s culture of the self was more than figural. Taught to read themselves, Methodists learned to write themselves: “Both Charles and John Wesley wanted everybody to write, and Methodists wrote continually, sometimes compulsively, and in many different genres: diaries, journals, letters, poetry, treatises, sermons, hymns.”¹³⁷ These were among

134. D. Bruce Hindmarsh proposes that Methodism “seemed to name and call into being a new sense of interiority for these converts” (*Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 139).

135. “Thoughts upon Taste,” in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 13:465–70 (467).

136. Henry Abelove speculates, “Perhaps the Methodists disapproved of adult play, and especially theater, because they had an ongoing theater of their own, which they liked better than the one that dramatists provided. In their theater they were the stars as well as the audience. Their lines were the lines that were remembered and commented upon afterward” (*Evangelist of Desire*, 105). David Bebbington has documented that while Methodists and Evangelicals “deplored” theater in the nineteenth century, there is strong evidence that they read quite a lot of drama “in the privacy of their own homes” (*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* [London: Unwin Hyman, 1989], 67).

137. Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22. See also Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley’s Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008).

Methodism's most popular, and the serialized autobiographies comprising the *Arminian* and *Methodist* magazines modeled the dual promises of salvation and publication awaiting every member of the Society, while smuggling profane pleasures under holy cover. Methodist "Lives" were picaresque, and the Augustinian division between youthful sin and mature Christianity captured the appeal of both. Novels were frowned upon, but one hardly needed *Tom Jones* with stories of sexual, martial, and global adventurism such as Sampson Staniforth's. A revered lay preacher, Staniforth opened his 1783 "Life" debauching a Highland girl; her family, vowing to kill him, pursued him across moors and rivers with drawn swords; an escape to the Continent (and tour as soldier) devolved into a binge, climaxing in Ghent, where he found himself "now engaged with a Negro-man's wife, who was passionately fond of me."¹³⁸ The hagiography of the lay preachers could also be Gothic for those who couldn't afford Radcliffe, and more hair-raising. Thomas Hanby curdled the blood in 1780:

It was in the winter season, and a dark night. All was quiet till I gave out a hymn. Then they approached the house, broke first the window-shutters, and then dashed the windows in. The head of this mob was a forgerman, half an idiot, who had bound himself under an oath he would that night have my liver. He brought the pipe with a large bellows, with which he made a frightful noise, and which was to be the instrument of my death.¹³⁹

If the moral was uncertain, the narrative thrill was palpable. Widespread demand provoked a number of competing (but less successful) periodicals into marketing more "lives," of Methodists as well as others, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁴⁰ George Whitefield and John Wesley were two of the great English sermonizers, and Charles Wesley a mighty lyricist—but the most valued texts of Methodism were often those of the Methodists themselves.

This writing, reading, and discussion solicited the promotion of "Creatures" Sarah Trimmer thought better left to darkness:

Other Religious Societies have no bait of this kind to hold out to their Members; they can give them no hopes of any kind of preferment. They must rest contented with the humble appointment of Hearers. . . . Every

138. WV 1:67.

139. WV 2:63.

140. Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 229–33.

member is immediately raised to Consequence, and flattered with Hopes, as soon as he enlists with these people. This Society, above all others, pays the greatest attention to every member, whatever may be their rank, or character in Life.¹⁴¹

Subjects consigned to personal incoherence and public disorganization would turn the world upside down in exchanging submissive "Hearing" for self-dramatizing: "Servants" were already "more confident and self-willed, less chearful and tractable."¹⁴² Methodists were the attendant class, not fit for "the greatest attention," and by translating "tractability" into tracts, they upset the economies of feeling, representation, and property. But Trimmer's anxiety was competition as much as revolution. In the "shocking Prostitution" turning housemaids into saints, "these ignorant and unfeeling Creatures" were assuming the privileges of sentiment, the safest grounds on which conservative, middle-class women, themselves circumscribed, might charitably express their authority: "ignorant Lads and Lasses, soon take upon themselves to visit the sick, to administer comfort to the disconsolate. . . . Duties which, require good sense, fine feelings, a discernment of character, and the most delicate attention, to be discharged as they ought."¹⁴³

Southey, too, was concerned that social action and self-knowledge remain bound to "good sense" and "fine feelings." The redistribution of affect was as likely to end in disaster as the redistribution of wealth. Autobiography was class privilege, and Methodists could no more manage themselves than manage an estate:

Of all morbid habits, that of watching our own sensations is one of the most unfortunate . . . if the act of watching our bodily sensations does itself derange the body, and disturb those vital functions which are only carried on healthily and regularly as long as they are unperceived, it is not less certain that the moral economy of our nature is exposed to a like danger by that system of self-watchfulness which the Methodists require.¹⁴⁴

The "watchfulness" was morbidly private, but the "derangement" was national. The disruption to the "moral economy" from newly visible subjectivities, valuable only "as long as they are unperceived," distressed the

141. Trimmer, *Review*, 8–10.

142. Trimmer, *Review*, 43.

143. Trimmer, *Review*, 9.

144. Southey, "On the Evangelical Sects," 498.

“vital functions” of the body politic. Genetic as well as social codes were transformed, “in proportion as they overspread the country”:

The very character of the English face is altered; for Methodism transforms the countenance as certainly, and almost as speedily as sottishness or opium. Go to their meeting-houses, or turn over the portraits in their magazines, and it will be seen that they have already obtained as distinct a physiognomy as the Jews or the Gipsies—coarse, hard, and dismal visages, as if some spirit of darkness had got into them, and was looking out of them.¹⁴⁵

This was reading Wesley’s favorite trope against its owner. Saved from a house fire by what he thought was Providence, Wesley took as his motto, engraved on portraits, coins, and, finally, a grave: “Is this not a brand plucked out of the burning?”¹⁴⁶ Southey here recast the Methodist “brand” in both molds: the heat of conviction, and the sign for an array of products, which together seared cultural forms onto the flesh. Methodist “physiognomy,” as well as the “portraits” and “magazines” hawking it, equally registered the transformations in the “character of the English face.” But the exile of Methodism to the pathology of racial difference (“Jews and Gipsies”) condemned the illusion of stable national identity, as well. Methodism might be a “dismal visage,” but then Englishness was merely one mask among many, and one readily slipped off. The ideological and material forms of polite culture and the confessional state were alarmingly liable to spectral, physical, and economic repossession, as “spirits of darkness got into them,” and gazed out from the inside.

This Methodist “brand” was proxy for the much wider transformations—and terrors—of modernity. For Southey, “writing the Life of Wesley” meant writing all “religious history for the last hundred years.”¹⁴⁷ In “Methodism,” the emergencies of Romanticism collided: the reorganization (and atomization) of print culture and the public sphere by the

145. Southey, “On the Evangelical Sects,” 503.

146. Suffering from an illness from which he later recovered, he preemptively composed his epitaph: “HERE LIETH THE BODY OF JOHN WESLEY, A BRAND PLUCKED OUT OF THE BURNING: WHO DIED OF A CONSUMPTION IN THE FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF HIS AGE, NOT LEAVING, AFTER HIS DEBTS ARE PAID, TEN POUNDS BEHIND HIM; PRAYING GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME AN UNPROFITABLE SERVANT!” (Southey, *Life of Wesley*, 2:253).

147. *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 6 vols. (London: Longman, 1849–50), 4:285.

"market economy of the text,"¹⁴⁸ the revision of the social function of "religion" and the established church, and most urgently, the remaking of religious identity by market desires. The Methodists "Usurp a new, unprecedented *Post, / And by Retail* dispense the *Holy Ghost*," transubstantiating communion into commodity, irrevocably shifting spiritual into economic competition.¹⁴⁹ "Denomination" was no longer a matter of birth, the confessional compulsion of Anglicanism; or a matter of belief, the doctrinal gatherings of Old Dissent; but a matter of being bought, expressed by products and preferences, driven by the unregulated whims of unregulated people. "Nothing can be better calculated for amusing and entertaining," Trimmer complained, than that "catalogue of Anecdotes, Experiences, Visions, Miraculous Interpositions, &c." sold by the Wesleyans: "where is the difference between going to the Theatre and the Tabernacle. . . . It is amusement at the Bottom."¹⁵⁰ But by sinking religion into "amusement," the Methodists exploited a space over which the Church had no purchase.¹⁵¹ Political dominance didn't translate into market dominance; rather than confronting the Church directly in doctrine or at law, as Dissenters did, the Methodists had seized—and increasingly, monopolized—the domain of cultural authority before other denominations recognized its existence. The Methodists sold Christ well enough to bankrupt the Establishment. "It is folly to suppose the poor do not love reading," Southey noted. But while "the poor" spent their pennies enthusiastically on Methodist songs and sermons, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge fruitlessly gave its texts away, while the Cheap Repository Tracts rotted "in the high road."¹⁵²

148. Klancher, *Making of English Reading Audiences*, 19.

149. Anon., *The Love-Feast: A Poem* (London: J. Bew, 1778), 9.

150. Trimmer, *Review*, 7–8.

151. "Clergy could no longer rely on the combined efforts of the spiritual and secular courts to impose Anglicanism in the parishes, and it was only through pastoral directives, through the efforts of individual clergy, through their powers of persuasion rather than legal coercion, that the Church was likely to make any impression against its rivals." Jeremy Gregory, "The Eighteenth-Century Reformation: The Pastoral Task of Anglican Clergy after 1689," in Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor, *The Church of England c.1689–c.1833*, 67–85 (70).

152. "The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge circulates many excellent books, but they are elementary, or doctrinal, or controversial; highly useful when read; but for the most part such as can only be read as a duty. The Cheap Repository Tracts are often good; but we have picked up papers from this manufactory in the high road, (scattered there by some godly travelers as seed by the way side,) and have found among them baser trash than ever contributed to line the old wall at Privy Garden. It is folly to suppose that the poor do not love reading, if works which are of a nature to interest them be published in such a form as to come within their reach" (Southey, "On the Evangelical Sects," 512).

“The Essence” of Methodism, agreed Sarah Trimmer and Leigh Hunt, was its publicity, which crowded out polite conversation with plebeian voices. “Their Religion” was neither liturgy nor catechism, but discourse, the “religious Gossiping” of “Preaching, their Usual talk, and their Writings.”¹⁵³ Hunt found “the modern Methodists . . . by no means a ‘skulking nation who shun the light, mute in public, and prating in corners’”: they “come forward in all places, they thunder out their anathemas in the midst of the sunshine and the bountiful fields.”¹⁵⁴ Even after trading “sunshine” and “fields” for chapels and magazines, Methodism’s raucous outdoor ceremonies endured as its iconic spectacle. Field preaching was its first and most explicit illegality, a calculated violation of the Conventicle and Five-Mile Acts, which regulated the registration of houses of worship and outlawed open-air religious gatherings. The Bishop of London grumbled, “if this be not an open Defiance of Government, it is hard to say what is.”¹⁵⁵ It was also Methodism’s first miracle. Though the events shrank as they became more common, initial crowds were the stuff of legend: in the summer of 1742, at the tiny parish of Cambuslang outside of Glasgow, Whitefield attracted a crowd of 30,000, a number “significantly larger than the population of Glasgow itself in the 1740s,”¹⁵⁶ while Wesley claimed to have performed his own Sermon on the Mount, packing 20,000 bodies into a 40 by 100 yard space.¹⁵⁷

Curiosity was a galvanic force. Churchmen clucked at the vulgar who “ran in droves to hear” the “*Field-preaching*, the *Uncommonness* of which is the very circumstance that *recommends* it,”¹⁵⁸ while the rough language of the lay preachers was keyed to mobbing enthusiasms: “these *charming* vociferations gain the attention, and steal into the hearts of those people of delicacy and discernment, who are wont, on other occasions, to demonstrate the fervor of their hearts in melodious *huzzas*, and W[ilke]s and Liberty for ever!”¹⁵⁹ For those who knew only the parish church, the character of the Methodist service—the frightening accounts of hellfire, the groaning demonstrations of the audience, and the sublimity of the hymns—was unreadable. Wesley himself appeared a “consternation” to settled lives, rooted in the clergyman who sedately preached familiar doctrine, who

153. Trimmer, *Review*, 28; 40.

154. Hunt, “On the Ignorance and Vulgarity of the Methodists,” 301.

155. [Gibson], *Observations upon the Conduct and Behavior of a Certain Sect*, 4.

156. Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 193.

157. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 346.

158. Lavington, *Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists, Compar’d*, 12.

159. Anonymous, *Naked Thoughts on Some Peculiarities of the Field-Preaching Clergy. By a Member of the Church of England* (London: J. Priddon, 1776), 6.

remained firmly ensconced in one parish (pluralists rarely shifted from the better living on Sundays), and who embodied the inevitability of the Church of England in the poor man's life. Here is Christopher Hopper's shocked report from 1781:

[W]e heard a strange report of one Wesley, a Church clergyman, that had been at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and had preached in Sandgate to many thousands, who heard him with astonishment. This new thing made a huge noise. The populace entertained various conjectures about him; but few, if any, could tell the motive on which he came, or the end he had in view. He made a short blaze, soon disappeared, and left us in a great consternation.¹⁶⁰

The immediate consequence wasn't conversion, but affective chaos, as the service provoked responses from a congregation unused to performances of feeling. Later seeing Charles Wesley in the fields, Hopper was baffled along with everyone else: "I ran with the multitude to hear this strange preacher. When I saw a man in a clergyman's habit, preaching at a public cross to a large auditory, some gaping, some laughing, and some weeping, I wondered what this could mean."¹⁶¹

The wildfire spread, according to the *Quarterly*, from art, not artifice, cabals, or trickery. Methodism introduced rhetoric to those who "had never heard anything like eloquence; and an eloquence like Wesley's, recommended by a dignified manner, an harmonious voice, and a thorough persuasion of the truth and importance of all he asserted, employed on the most awful truths . . . might well thrill the heart and give any direction to their feelings which he thought proper."¹⁶² Whitefield was so irritated by this "thrill" that he gave his own "Directions how to hear SERMONS," ruining the fun he knew he represented for many hearers: "you" ought to "come to hear [sermons], not out of Curiosity, but from a sincere Desire to know and do your Duty. . . . Ears entertained, and not our Hearts reformed, must certainly be highly displeasing to the Most High God."¹⁶³

160. WV 1:114.

161. WV 1:114.

162. "Southey's *Life of Wesley*," *Quarterly Review*, 37–38.

163. George Whitefield, *Directions how to hear SERMONS: A Sermon Preached at Christ's Church in Spittlefields* (London, 1739), 9. John Rule argues that Methodism challenged the politics of leisure in rural communities. Most approved "games," such as wrestling, bear-baiting, and even drinking bouts were often sites for gentry control, with winners treated by the squire, and competing teams usually assembled from the dependents of different squires. In its pious opposition to such practices, Methodism was eroding not so

But even in these vast crowds, supervised by ordained clerics such as Wesley and Whitefield, Methodist culture always returned to the Methodists. Many congregants had little interest in passive audition. Crowds typically used the preaching as the excuse for their own play. Wesley had dismissed “clear conceptions” and “proper expressions” for spiritual feeling, and an account of his time in Wales from 1781 suggests how overdetermined the emotional responsiveness of his flock had become: though the “people understood no English,” nevertheless “their looks, sighs, and gestures showed God was speaking to their hearts.”¹⁶⁴ For the faithful, this was proof of Wesley’s orphic ability to touch his auditors—for everyone else, proof that Methodists were so restively addicted to self-staging they barely classified as “audience.”

“The quiet regularity of domestic devotion must be exchanged for public performances,” Southey grimaced in the *Life of Wesley*: “the members are to be *professors of religion*; they must have a part to act, which will at once gratify the sense of self-importance, and afford employment for the uneasy and restless spirit with which they are possessed.”¹⁶⁵ Southey’s punning critique recognized one more failure of the “moral economy.” Sham spiritualisms nauseated as they “afforded employment” to a sweated underclass, whose ignorance led them to misrecognize vulgar playacting as “professional” distinction, and who unwittingly participated in their own

much “entertainment” as its hierarchy, with a “bottom-up” organization dissimilar from the moralizing impositions of Evangelicals or Factory Owners, who attacked these “wasteful” exuberances while attempting to preserve the ratios of deference such exuberances reinforced (Rule, “Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800–50,” in *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Robert D. Storch [New York: St. Martin’s, 1982], 48–70). Both establishment clerics and established entertainers viewed the Methodists as serious threats to their livelihood, and acting troupes, publicans, and ballad singers were well represented in violent mobs. Charles Wesley was almost murdered by a group of “players” in 1740; Whitefield’s church was assaulted by mobs in 1755–56 funded by the theaters in its vicinity, and ballad singers were at the front of some particularly brutal gangs (John Walsh, “Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century,” in Cuming and Baker, *Studies in Church History*, vol. 8, *Popular Belief and Practice*, 213–27 [220]). Lackington shrugged that enthusiastic rapture was just a way to fill time: “as I happened to have no other pursuit or hobby horse, there was a kind of vacancy in my mind” that the agonies and ecstasies of conversion filled. Field preaching offered the same opportunities as dances and fairs. Going to a field “at Farmer Gamlin’s at Charlton . . . I fell desperately in love with the farmer’s handsome dairy-maid,” causing him to abound “in spiritual gifts, which induced this honest rustic maid to be very kind to me, and to walk several fields with me . . . while I poured heavenly comfort into her soul, and talked so long of *divine* Love, until I found that my affection for her was not altogether of that *spiritual* nature” (*Memoirs*, 86, 106–7).

164. WV 1:133.

165. Southey, *Life of Wesley*, 2:159.

dispossession: after all, the Methodists didn't own but were rather "possessed" by their dramas.

Feverish emotionalism courted "the Wesleyan Manifestation," a practice abandoning "the *still, small voice*" of reasonably moderated Anglicanism for "storms and tempests . . . tumults and confusion."¹⁶⁶ Methodist enthusiasm, the *Quarterly* reminded its Tory readership, was terrifyingly literal, harboring the capacity for real violence within its revolutions in feeling and representation. Wesley

had the unhappy art of inoculating his audience with convulsions and frenzy, surpassing the most extraordinary symptoms to which animal magnetism has given rise, and calculated more than any other possible occurrence, short of actual criminality, to alarm and disgust the friends of rational religion, and to bring disgrace on the name of the Christian religion itself. Violent outcries, howling, gnashing of teeth, frightful convulsions, frenzy, blasphemy, epileptic and apoplectic symptoms were excited in turn on different individuals in the Methodist congregations.¹⁶⁷

In this apoplexy, Southey read the grotesque parody of reputable imaginative energy. Methodism was what happened when ditch-diggers played at being poets, with bodies bred for manual, rather than emotional, labor:

A powerful doctrine preached with passionate sincerity, with fervid zeal, and with vehement eloquence, produced a powerful effect upon weak minds, ardent feelings, and disordered fancies. There are passions which are as infectious as the plague, and fear itself is not more so than fanaticism. When once these bodily affections were declared to be the work of grace, the process of regeneration, the throes of the new birth, a free license was proclaimed for every kind of extravagance. And when the preacher, instead of exhorting his auditors to commune with their own hearts, and in their chambers, and be still, encouraged them to throw off all restraint, and abandon themselves before the congregation to these mixed sensations of mind and body, the consequences were what might be anticipated. Sometimes he scarcely began to speak, before some of his believers, overwrought with expectation, fell into the crisis, for so it may be called in Methodism, as properly as in Animal Magnetism. Sometimes his voice could scarcely be heard amid the groans and cries of these suf-

166. Warburton, *Doctrine of Grace*, 97.

167. "Southey's *Life of Wesley*," *Quarterly Review*, 35.

fering and raving enthusiasts. It was not long before men, women, and children, began to act the demoniac as well as the convert.¹⁶⁸

Southey's theater of "groans and cries," "disordered fancies," and "bodily affections" performed the catastrophic inversion of the hierarchy of Coleridge's bells, staging a nightmare both of plebeian autonomy within, and, worse, complete dominion over the cultural sphere. For all the horror at the "demoniac" masquerading as "convert," the real object of attention here was the lost attention for "the preacher," as Wesley shrank into irrelevance after his grant of "free license" for expression. The newfound elocution of the Methodists, histrionic and deformed, spoke over the gentleman's "voice scarcely heard," compelling his acquiescence before "he scarcely began to speak."

This "Methodism" localized the generalized anxieties over the fate of a public sphere of reasonable affect, complementary discourse, and due subordination threatened by a populace that will have its will. Enthusiastic "passions" were "as infectious as the plague," as plebeian bodies agitated into communal frenzies, prologue to national paroxysms. But ultimately, the contagion was fatal not to the Methodists infected, but to the consumptive authority of the figure of respectability adjacent to them. In Southey's account, treatment, whether private or public, may no longer be possible—though, as we're about to see, this wouldn't prevent Wordsworth from maintaining his own quarantine, for more than half a century.

168. Southey, *Life of Wesley*, 220–21.