

1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era

Volume 22

Article 3

2015

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE Anti-Methodist Exaggeration in Samuel Foote and William Hogarth

Brett C. McInelly

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/sixteenfifty>



Part of the [Aesthetics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brett C. McInelly (2015) "FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE Anti-Methodist Exaggeration in Samuel Foote and William Hogarth," *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*: Vol. 22, Article 3. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/sixteenfifty/vol22/iss1/3>

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE

Anti-Methodist Exaggeration in Samuel Foote and William Hogarth¹

Brett C. McInelly

*I*n the prologue to *The Minor*, first performed on the London stage in 1760, Samuel Foote sets out to justify his less-than-flattering depiction of Methodism: “Ridicule is the only antidote against this pernicious poison. [Methodism] is a madness that argument can never cure: and, should a little wholesome severity be apply’d, persecution would be the immediate cry: where then can we have recourse, but to the comic muse; perhaps, the archness and severity of her smile, may redress an evil, that

¹ Some of the contents of this article were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and one should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

the Laws cannot reach, or reason reclaim.”² According to Foote, Methodism represents a system of belief and practice that promotes religious enthusiasm and thus cannot be countered through moderate means, requiring instead an incisive satiric approach mildly tempered with a comedic spirit.

That Foote bothers to offer a justification for his attack on Methodism is curious, inasmuch as Methodism had been lambasted from the time of its founding at Oxford in the early 1730s;³ and his justification suggests that even Foote recognized that he perhaps pushes the limits of satiric decorum, potentially making a mockery of religion. As one of his counterparts cautions in the prologue, “Have a care. Dangerous ground. Ludere Cum Sacris, you know”⁴ (9)—do not toy with the sacred.

About the same time Foote was producing his play for the London stage, William Hogarth was working and reworking an anti-Methodist print, originally titled *Enthusiasm Delineated* (1760–61) and eventually changed to *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism: A Medley* when it appeared in its final form in 1762. When questioned as to why Hogarth altered the original print, John Ireland claimed in 1798: “I can account for it in no other way than by supposing some friend suggested that the satire would be mistaken, and that there might be those who would suppose [Hogarth’s] arrows were aimed at religion.”⁵ In other words, in attacking Methodism, Hogarth ran the risk of having his efforts confused for an attack on religion in general—the same concern Foote raises in *The Minor*.

Indeed, Hogarth’s alterations might well be understood within the context of the controversy generated by Foote’s play, which ignited one of the most publicized and heated pamphlet wars “in the history of theatre,”⁶ as supporters of both Foote and the Methodists debated the propriety of *The Minor* in the press. Matthew Kinservik claims that the publicity surrounding *The Minor* “is second only to the Collier controversy in the number of titles

² Samuel Foote, *The Minor* (Dublin: G. Faulkner, 1760), 9.

³ Clive Field’s bibliography of eighteenth-century anti-Methodist literature includes over 600 titles, many of which appeared in multiple editions throughout the period. See Clive D. Field, “Anti-Methodist Publications of the Eighteenth Century: A Revised Bibliography,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 73.2 (1991): 159–280.

⁴ Foote, *The Minor*, 9.

⁵ John Ireland, *A Supplement to Hogarth Illustrated* (London: Mr. Nicol, 1798), 248.

⁶ Jane Moody, “Stolen Identities: Character, Mimicry and the Invention of Samuel Foote,” in Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, eds., *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660–2000* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 80.

and duration of the debate.”⁷ Foote’s play, in fact, gave way to one of the most prolific periods in the anti-Methodist campaign to discredit the revival via the press. As one observer reported, “Grub Street has taken the hint” and “we can hardly walk the streets, but we hear ballads, in which the very words of our blessed Saviour are blasphem’d, and treated as the rare doctrine of Dr. Squintum,”⁸ Foote’s dramatic caricature of George Whitefield. The Methodists and their supporters claimed that Foote’s attack on Methodism was an attack on Christianity.

Situated against this backdrop, Foote’s play and Hogarth’s satiric prints suggest the facility and limits of what I will term a rhetoric of exaggeration, a theory of persuasion by means of satiric hyperbole. Hyperbole is, of course, a hallmark of eighteenth-century satire. Mock epic, for example, depends on exaggeration for its formal and thematic character. But hyperbole could also prove a risky enterprise, at times bordering on libel when directed at individuals and, in some cases, exposing the author to public and perhaps even government censure. When applied as an antidote to Methodism, a fringe but internal movement to revive the established church, satirists like Foote and Hogarth ran the added risk, as Foote intimates, of toying with the sacred. They thus had to develop various strategies for rationalizing their critiques; and Methodist religiosity provided Foote and Hogarth with a viable rationale for the severity of their attacks by appearing immoderate to many outside observers and consequently only countered, as Foote argues in his prologue, through equally immoderate means.

As I have suggested, it is odd that Foote felt the need to justify his attack on Methodism in the first place. Methodism was hardly a sensitive target, at least from the point of view of most non-Methodists. The movement and its participants had been taken to task from the outset of the revival for teaching salvation by faith alone, lay preaching, even on the part of women, and encouraging a highly emotional kind of religious experience. Enthusiasm, generally defined in the eighteenth century as “a vain belief of private revelation”⁹ and associated with emotional excess, became the most common accusation leveled at the Methodists. Enthusiasm, critics contended,

⁷ Matthew J. Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 151.

⁸ Martin Madan, *A Letter to David Garrick, Esq; Occasioned by the Intended Representation of The Minor* (London: Mr. Field, 1760), 33. Madan was an associate of Whitefield and the most prolific respondent to *The Minor*.

⁹ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1 (London: W. Strahan, 1755), s.v. “enthusiasm.”

caused Methodists to confuse spiritual and sexual feelings, thereby giving way to immorality; enthusiasm might lead to madness and even suicide. The charge also brought to mind the religious fanaticism that was thought to have given way to civil war in the previous century, and Methodists were regularly compared to Cromwellian puritans. Methodism's appeal to women and individuals from the lower ranks compounded such concerns, inasmuch as contemporaries worried that Methodism might encourage social and political unrest among the dregs of society. As Foote himself points out, "Twenty Thousand [Methodist] Men are, it seems, ready to take the Field, whenever their Spiritual Guide shall give the Word of Command."¹⁰ In short, the satiric treatment of Methodism prior to *The Minor* was hard-hitting, to say the least, and neither Foote nor Hogarth were entirely original in arguing that enthusiasm culminates in extreme forms of religious behavior, dangerous to self and society.

While Foote's attack on Methodism is hardly the focus of *The Minor*, the plot of which centers on Sir William Wealthy's efforts to rescue his son from a life of dissipation, the play proved divisive in at least two respects—first, in Foote's use of mimicry; and second, in his portrayal of Mrs. Cole, a Methodist caricature who conveniently reconciles her profession as a procuress with her new-found belief in justification by faith.

Foote built his reputation, and fortune, on his skills at theatrical mimicry, which has its roots, at least within the Western tradition, in ancient Greece and the satiric caricatures of contemporary public figures made famous (or infamous) by Aristophanes. Foote, in fact, saw himself as the English Aristophanes, reviving the tradition of satiric impersonation of real persons for the English stage, a practice that drew applause and profits. But Foote's imitations also elicited wide-ranging criticism. As Jane Moody demonstrates, mimicry in general and Foote's brand of mimicry in particular occupied a precarious place within eighteenth-century society "between legitimacy and illegitimacy, respectability and transgression." In bringing recognizable figures onto the stage in particularly vicious ways, "Foote's imitations seemed to break the boundaries of polite sociability," for which he incurred the censure of some within the literary establishment. These critics were particularly leery of Foote's habit of targeting the physical deformities of his victims.¹¹ Foote's caricature of George Whitefield in the figure of Squintum is a case in point.

¹⁰ Samuel Foote, *A Letter from Samuel Foote to the Reverend Author of the Remarks Critical and Christian on The Minor* (London: T. Davies, 1760), 20.

¹¹ Moody, "Stolen," 67, 70–71.

While Squintum never actually appears in the play (at least not until the epilogue, delivered by Foote in the figure of Whitefield), the name deliberately mocks a defect in Whitefield's eye and was readily associated with the Methodist leader. As one contemporary noted, Foote "knew no quality of satire but personality, who would sacrifice his best friend for the gratification of tormenting him."¹²

Foote's impersonation of Whitefield, however, did not prove the most unpalatable feature of *The Minor*. "What made this play so outrageous," Moody explains, "was Foote's blasphemous conflation of the rhetoric of Methodism and the business of prostitution."¹³ As one critic observed, "It is to be regretted that [Foote] put into the mouth of Mrs. Cole . . . sentiment[s] which might be delivered from any pulpit with the utmost propriety."¹⁴ Nonetheless, Moody may be overstating the matter slightly; the Methodists had been accused of justifying sexual misconduct by pleading salvation by faith from the outset of the revival. The way Mrs. Cole justifies her own immorality had become, by the time Foote was writing, a cliché. As early as 1741, Henry Fielding took up this line of argument in his parody of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Fielding's protagonist, whose readings include Whitefield's sermons, in which Whitefield refers to good works as "filthy rags,"¹⁵ proclaims, "Those people who talk of Vartue and Morality, are the wickedest of all Persons. That 'tis not what we do, but what we believe, that must save us."¹⁶

I would suggest, then, that publicity, not necessarily novelty, accounts for the controversy generated by *The Minor*. Mrs. Cole's character, along with Squintum, became the most recognized characters of Foote's play, which is somewhat remarkable given that Mrs. Cole appears in only a handful of scenes and Squintum not at all. Yet Squintum became a household name and figured into a number of anti-Methodist works, including *Friendly Advice for Dr. Squintum* (1760), *The Crooked Disciple's Remarks Upon the Blind Guides Method of Preaching* (1761) and *The Methodist and Mimic* (1766).¹⁷ *The Minor*

¹² Quoted in Moody, "Stolen," 68.

¹³ Moody, "Stolen," 78.

¹⁴ Quoted in Mary Megie Belden, *The Dramatic Work of Samuel Foote*, Yale Studies in English, Vol. 80 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 106.

¹⁵ George Whitefield, *The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough* (London: C. Whitefield, 1739), 28.

¹⁶ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Judith Hawley (London: Penguin, 1999), 23.

¹⁷ *Friendly Advice for Dr. Squintum* (London: 1760); John Harmon, *The Crooked Disciple's Remarks* (London: J. Harmon, 1761); and *The Methodist and Mimic* (London: C. Moran, 1766).

was a hit at the Haymarket during the summer season and then, unusually, ran in parallel performances at Covent Garden and Drury Lane in the fall. The play was produced regularly throughout the eighteenth century on the London stage and in the provinces; it was performed no less than 33 times on the Yorkshire theater circuit between 1766 and 1784.

Interestingly, the sequels to Foote's play go to even more absurd extremes in ridiculing the Methodists, which may explain why these sequels were never performed. The plot of *The Spiritual Minor* revolves around Mrs. Cole and Squintum's efforts to "convert" Miss Ogle to Methodism and a life of whoredom by invoking the doctrine of salvation by faith. Mrs. Cole cautions that Christians should not "rely too much upon their own good works" because "it argues a want of faith." When Miss Ogle insists that "a woman . . . be allowed to value herself upon her vartue," Mrs. Cole counters, "A woman that values herself upon her vartue can't have a true faith." The play insists that Methodism is a sure path to antinomianism. Rakish, Mrs. Cole's client and would-be seducer of Miss Ogle, effectively draws this conclusion in stating that Methodism accords with his libertine lifestyle: "I'm something of a Methodist myself: I have not the least apprehension of being damn'd, though I indulge myself in the full gratification of all my passions."¹⁸

Most Methodists were far from being antinomians, and many believers devoted themselves and their resources to a host of charitable enterprises. Whitefield, for example, maintained an orphanage in Georgia, for which he raised impressive sums. But by putting the stress of their religion on justification by faith, Methodists opened themselves to charges that inevitably, perhaps even naturally, stretched the truth of their experiences. Most Methodists would have agreed with Mrs. Cole's statement in *The Spiritual Minor* that relying on good works "argue[d] a want of faith." Whitefield claimed that "you are justified before God, without any respect to your Works past, present or to come."¹⁹ Even Wesley, who espoused the necessity of works righteousness, contended that "'works done before justification are not good,' in the Christian sense, 'forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ . . . yea, rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not' (how strange soever it may appear to some) 'but they have the nature of sin.'"²⁰ Although Whitefield and Wesley intend to

¹⁸ *The Spiritual Minor* (London: W. Morgan, 1760), 10, 30.

¹⁹ Whitefield, *The Folly*, 28.

²⁰ John Wesley, "Justification by Faith," in eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 117.

emphasize the centrality of faith in a Christian life and to give credit to God for an individual's righteousness, they nonetheless articulate a position their antagonists could easily, even logically, take to perverse conclusions.

Examples, of course, abound from the period in which hyperbole proved aesthetically and rhetorically effective—Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* comes to mind. Satiric hyperbole was routinely rationalized by the satirists themselves as they formulated theories for the severity of their art. Dryden proclaims that satire "is that sharp, well-mannered way of laughing folly out of countenance."²¹ Pope claims that satire "heals with Morals what it hurts with Wit."²² And Fielding insisted that his aim was "to expose the reigning Follies, in such a Manner, that Men shall laugh themselves out of them before they feel that they are touch'd."²³ In short, technique trumps the seeming ruthless nature of satiric critique, and the ends ultimately justify the means. For the satirist, Michael Seidel explains, "wit is the murder weapon of choice . . . , a weapon that, at least on the face of it, disguises the messiness of satiric activity."²⁴

But Foote pushes beyond established arguments by pleading the irredeemable nature of his victims, a position taken up by at least one of his supporters:

Perhaps the sallies of enthusiasm deserve more to be repressed, than any of the other productions of folly or fashion. These are not only ridiculous in themselves, but are also prejudicial to society; the subjects of this folly are incapable of serious persuasion, as they are deaf to serious argument. The comic writer before us [Foote], therefore, has most happily leveled his ridicule at such; and though, perhaps, he cannot hope to reclaim those who are already tainted with this disorder, yet he may possibly prevent its spreading among others, whose ears are yet open to the voice of conviction.²⁵

²¹ John Dryden, *The Miscellaneous Works of John Dryden*, vol. 4 (London: J. and R. Tonson, 1760), 223.

²² Alexander Pope, *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (London: T. Cooper, 1737), 19.

²³ Henry Fielding, *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (London: J. Roberts, 1737), 4.

²⁴ Michael Seidel, "Satire, lampoon, libel, slander," in ed. Steven N Zwicker, *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 38.

²⁵ "Some Account of the *Minor*," in *The British Magazine*, vol. 1 (London: James Rivington and James Fletcher, 1760), 410.

Methodists, the critic imagines, are too far gone to be reclaimed, and the threat they pose to the larger society ultimately justify Foote's conflation of Methodism with prostitution. In such cases, satirists are at liberty to stretch the truth to potentially distasteful and questionable extremes, an argument that ostensibly allows for a no-holds-barred approach to satiric attack.

Put another way, the anti-Methodists chose to fight fire with fire, a tactic validated by the charge of enthusiasm, a charge that, again, was not entirely unwarranted. Even Wesley, who was less florid in his preaching and more skeptical of religious enthusiasm than Whitefield, believed that reason only took the believer so far. Reason could assist individuals in making sense of spiritual experience and the scriptures, but reason could not provide proof of spiritual truths.²⁶ God and his influence are felt in the heart, not intuited through cognitive processes, a point of view that helps to explain why Methodist religious experience manifested itself in emotional ways. Such a stance made it easy for critics to diagnose Methodists as enthusiasts and madmen. As Roy Porter observes, "In common parlance, people were typically called 'mad' when impassioned beyond moderation and 'reason.'"²⁷

Methodist accounts do tend to emphasize the highly emotional nature of conversion and Methodist meetings. In 1739, T. Mitchell explained in a letter to William Seward that "great things are going on here . . . in our society. A woman was delivered from the spirit of bondage and received the witness of the spirit of adoption. She continued in such agonies for near half an hour, as drew almost the eyes of every one into tears . . . [before] her deliverance from her grand adversary."²⁸ Methodist meetings throughout the period confirmed stereotypes of noisy and energetic participation on the part of congregants. As Sarah Crosby wrote from Leeds in 1799, "We have lively meetings and preachings: indeed, some are noisy ones, such as many loud 'amens,' and while anyone is praying aloud, another is saying aloud, 'Bless the Lord!' Another, 'Glory be to God!' A third, 'Lord answer prayer!' And again,

²⁶ See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 205–53.

²⁷ Roy Porter, *Madmen: A Social History of Madhouses, Mad-Doctors and Lunatics* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004), 35. Michel Foucault has similarly argued that unreason in the eighteenth century was generally associated with madness, a move that effectively silenced seemingly irrational expressions. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books), 1965.

²⁸ T. Mitchell to William Seward, 26 April 1739, John Rylands University Library, DDSec 40.

'Do Lord,' or, 'Bless their souls.'"²⁹ Methodists interpreted such events as evidence of the power of God manifested in their lives, while anti-Methodists saw evidence of religious enthusiasm.

Even Wesley came to view such episodes with some degree of skepticism. Writing in one of the later installments of his *Journal*, Wesley describes some misguided congregations in his connection:

But even while they are full of love, Satan strives to push many of them to extravagance. This appears in several instances. 1. Frequently three or four, yea, ten or twelve, pray aloud all together. 2. Some of them, perhaps many, scream all together as loud as they possibly can. 3. Some of them use improper, yea, indecent expressions in prayer. 4. Several drop down as dead, and are as stiff as a corpse. But in a while they start up, and cry, Glory! Glory! perhaps twenty times together.

Wesley goes on to accurately claim that this behavior might "bring the real work [of the revival] into contempt," yet he suggests that these individuals be reproved in "the most mild and gentle manner possible."³⁰ Notably, this account appears in Wesley's published *Journal*, which he produced, in part, to defend himself and the movement from his critics. The passage thus serves as a warning to his followers at the same time it suggests to his critics that such meetings are the exception and not the rule.

Nonetheless, eighteenth-century Methodism was anything but a moderate religion. In addition to emphasizing extraordinary spiritual experience and demanding relentless activity on the part of its members, Methodism encouraged its followers to live lives of disciplined—perhaps excessive—sobriety, decrying such earthly pleasures as play going, cards, and drinking. Some Methodists accepted the possibility that devotees might have to forsake family and friends for Christ's sake; and Wesley even advocated celibacy, fearing that the love for one's spouse might surpass one's love for God.³¹ In the eighteenth century, merely living what Wesley and Whitefield preached could land the pious devotee in a madhouse. Whitefield records in his *Journal* the

²⁹ Sarah Crosby to Mary Fletcher, 22 April 1799, John Rylands University Library, Fletcher-Tooth Collection, MAM FL 2.5A/13.

³⁰ John Wesley, *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, from September 4, 1782 to June 28, 1786* (London: 1789), 124–25.

³¹ John Wesley, *Thoughts on a Single Life* (London: Foundery, 1765), 5.

circumstances under which one man was committed: “I . . . went and talked with his sister, who gave me the three following Symptoms of his being mad. First, That he fasted for near a Fortnight. Secondly, That he prayed so as to be heard four Story high. Thirdly, That he had sold his Cloaths, and given them to the Poor.” Whitefield goes on to explain that the man sold his clothes after reading in the Bible that Christ had instructed a man to do likewise.³² “To Georgian churchmen this was crazy,” Porter explains, “once it would have been holy.”³³ While this episode represents an extreme case, Methodist asceticism, proselytizing zeal, and devotion to God appeared equally immoderate to many outside observers and help explain why anti-Methodists like Foote resorted to extreme tactics.

One wonders, however, if the claim that Methodists could not be reasoned with merely provided Foote and other anti-Methodists with a crude justification for figuratively eviscerating their victims in print. Even some non-Methodists wondered whether Foote had not gone too far. Writing in the *Monthly Review*, an anonymous critic claims that “the satire leveled at the great Leader of the Methodists, seems to be extremely out of character.” He goes on:

It is no less unjust to Mr. W . . . than absurd, to suppose a man of his penetration, either conniving at, or being the dupe of, an old Bawd’s hypocrisy, in continuing to follow her iniquitous occupation, while she frequents the tabernacle, and cants about the New Birth. And when we are told that an occasional Hymn is given out, and a thanksgiving Sermon preached, on occasion of mother Cole’s . . . recovery from sickness; who can forbear smiling—not with approbation of the conceit, but with contempt for the Author of such improbable scandal?—We despise and abhor all enthusiastic flights, and high pretensions to extraordinary sanctity, as much as Mr. Foote can do; but without entering into the enquiry whether or not these are proper objects of play-house ridicule, it is most certain, that no man or body of men, ought to be charged with more than they are guilty of.³⁴

³² George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, from his Arrival at London, to his Departure from Thence to Georgia* (London: James Hutton, 1739), 98.

³³ Porter, *Madmen*, 28.

³⁴ Quoted in Belden, *Dramatic*, 86.

As late as 1788, critics questioned the propriety of Mrs. Cole's character: "Methodism, no doubt, is a pestilent error—as such, it should be corrected. One correction may be ridicule—but then, let that ridicule be safe. Don't offer what shall make bad, worse—a correction more heinous than the error to be corrected. Don't open a brothel upon the stage."³⁵ Not surprisingly, attempts were made, most notably by Whitefield's patroness, Lady Huntingdon, and the Archbishop of Canterbury,³⁶ to have the play suppressed, and a few cosmetic changes appear to have been made to the script for later performances, most notably the elimination of the epilogue delivered by Foote in the character of Whitefield. Although Foote was never in danger of having his license revoked by the Lord Chamberlain,³⁷ both the propriety and legitimacy of his stage representations of Whitefield and the Methodists were questioned within the realm of public opinion.

Part of what gave the anti-Methodist satire its edge was that these writers cut to the core of the Methodists themselves, dissecting and invalidating their innermost desires and feelings. To be sure, Mrs. Cole, originally performed by Foote himself, provided theater goers with comic relief. But even if Foote could claim that "the love of virtue" lit "the flame [of satire],"³⁸ he, like a host of anti-Methodist writers, would have had a harder time showing that his efforts were "directed against vice, with an air of contempt of the fault, but no ill-will to the criminal."³⁹ As one whose livelihood depended on a steady flow of theatergoers, Foote certainly had an axe to grind. The Methodists, and particularly Whitefield, were the most outspoken critics of the theater since Jeremy Collier. Whitefield, who was a theater enthusiast during his youth and actually considered a career on the stage, waged war on London playhouses, sometimes preaching against the stage in the heart of the theater district, which he declared "Nurseries of Debauchery."⁴⁰ John Wesley, who tended to be more moderate in his attitudes toward drama and believed the theater, if regulated, might facilitate social reform,⁴¹ considered the English stage "the

³⁵ *The World*, no. 325, 14 January 1788.

³⁶ While many of the Anglican clergy criticized Whitefield's activities, at times barring him from their pulpits, Whitefield had his allies as well as enemies within the Church.

³⁷ Kinservik, *Disciplining*, 151

³⁸ William Cowper, "Charity," in *Poems, by William Cowper*, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1800), 210.

³⁹ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* (London: W. Lewis, 1836), 486.

⁴⁰ Whitefield, *The Folly*, 13.

⁴¹ See T. B. Shepherd, "Methodists and the Theatre in the Eighteenth Century," *Wesley Historical Society* 20 (1935–36): 166+; and Terrance Xavier McGovern, "The Methodist Revival and the British Stage" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 1978).

sink of all profaneness and debauchery”⁴² and successfully lobbied to stop construction on a theater in Bristol in 1764.

Perhaps most vexing to Foote was the fact that Whitefield and the Methodists competed with the theater for the public’s attention and money. Without state-sponsored support, the Methodists naturally relied on solicited funds to support their societies and charitable enterprises. Whitefield was particularly skillful in this regard. Benjamin Franklin, who heard Whitefield preach during Whitefield’s American tours, attended one sermon determined to resist the preacher’s solicitations, but “as [Whitefield] proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the Coppers. Another Stroke of his Oratory made me ashamed of that, and determin’d me to give the Silver; and he finish’d so admirably, that I emptied my Pocket wholly into the Collector’s Dish, Gold and all.”⁴³

When Whitefield began preaching in the open air in the late 1730s, he provided quite a show. Whitefield, in fact, was as accomplished a mimic as Foote. As one contemporary observed, “I [could not] discern any difference between Mr. Whitefield’s preaching and seeing a good tragedy.”⁴⁴ Indeed, Whitefield practiced a form of theatrical mimicry by enacting scenes from the Old and New Testament and playing the parts of biblical characters; he likewise mimicked the experiences of repentant sinners. “To appreciate Whitefield’s printed sermons fully,” Harry Stout observes, “we have to read them less as lectures or treatises than as dramatic scripts” as Whitefield “enacted the agonies of damnation and the ecstasy of salvation.”⁴⁵ Stout thus dubs Whitefield the Divine Dramatist. As Foote claimed of Whitefield and Methodist preachers, “I consider these gentlemen in light of public performers, like myself; and whether we exhibit at Tottenham-court [the site of George Whitefield’s London tabernacle], or the Hay-market, our purpose is the same, and the place immaterial.”⁴⁶

⁴² John Wesley, “The More Excellent Way,” in eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 518.

⁴³ Quoted in Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 107.

⁴⁴ Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 3 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1871), 158–59.

⁴⁵ Stout, *The Divine*, 41, 42.

⁴⁶ Foote, *The Minor*, 9. Not surprisingly, Whitefield was criticized for condemning the theater at the same time he coopted its tactics. Yet his supporters justified his preaching style: “Can a Preacher devise a more powerful Method to work upon the Minds of his Auditors, than by illustrating the Doctrines he advances by Stories and Examples?” Whitefield, this supporter goes on to say, “does not seek after the vain Pomp of Eloquence, or the Flowers of Rhetoric, which you Stage-players and word-catching Critics hold in such high Esteem; his only Aim is to edify a Christian

Whitefield was not the only member of the Methodist community who was accused of having a dramatic bent: converts were similarly portrayed as actors as Methodist conversion came to be defined as a "Fanatic Art" or performance. Methodist preachers, one satirist observes, teach their followers "The downcast Look, the frantic Start; / . . . / From [them] I caught the whining Tone, / the Knack of length'ning out a Groan, / And making pantomime Grimace / Pass for a Sign of inward Grace." Accordingly, Methodist conversion is nothing more than "mock Convulsions."⁴⁷ William Combe similarly suggests that Methodists perform "Stage-Tricks": "They're taught to snivel, groan, cant, whine, and wheez."⁴⁸ In actual practice, Methodist conversion was probably not this calculated, but the process, particularly when narrated in conversion accounts, followed a distinct pattern or script,⁴⁹ which might give the impression that such experiences were "staged"; and as I have already suggested, Methodist meetings were marked by what could easily be perceived as dramatic emotional displays. That Methodists rented unused theaters as preaching-houses added another dimension to the charge that Methodist religiosity was merely performed.⁵⁰ For curious bystanders and critics of the revival, conversion, whether observed firsthand or via printed reports, could come off as highly dramatic, if not premeditated, and Methodists, like performers, appeared to deliberately draw attention to themselves via their exaggerated expressions and movements.⁵¹

Congregation." Ultimately, then, Whitefield's sincerity justifies the highly performative nature his preaching: "Mr. Whitefield, in discoursing of Regeneration, makes so powerful an Impression upon the Minds of his Auditors, he must speak from his own Feelings, and have experienced it before for himself." Martin Madan, *A Letter to Mr. Foote, Occasioned by his Letter to the Reverend Author of the Christian and Critical Remarks on the Minor* (London: P Wicks, 1760), 8, 12, 18–19.

⁴⁷ Voltaire's *Ghost to the Apostle of the Sinless Foundery* (London: J. Bew, 1779), 24, 29.

⁴⁸ William Combe, *The Fanatic Saints, or Bedlamites Inspired* (London: J. Bew, 1778), 23.

⁴⁹ See Bruce D. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

⁵⁰ See Henry Abelove, *Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 105–06.

⁵¹ Misty G. Anderson describes Methodist meetings as a "theater of the real" and argues that Foote, as well as Hogarth, draw attention to the ways "Methodism unsettled the boundary between actor and role, as well as the space between actor and audience in sermons that left congregants deeply moved, even changed, by this theater of the real." Foote and Hogarth, Anderson argues, were both troubled by and fascinated with the ways Methodist theatricality transformed selves and blurred the distinctions between performance and reality, which they reveal in their satiric attacks on Methodism. See Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief, and the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 131.

This certainly seems to be the case Hogarth makes in *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism: A Medley*. The scene, the inside of a Methodist chapel, looks more like a theater or, as Bernd Krysmanski suggests, a madhouse than a church.⁵² The theatrics of Methodist sermonizing is, of course, emphasized in the figure mounted in the pulpit, dangling puppets before his affected audience and wearing the garb of a harlequin beneath his priestly robes. Hogarth's preacher is a performer, and he appears to be in competition with other characters in the print for his audience's attention. These competitors include what appears to be another preacher holding forth in the audience (just below the window to the left). Krysmanski, in fact, suggests this figure is John Wesley.⁵³ If so, Hogarth might be drawing attention to the fact that Whitefield and Wesley competed for followers following their theological split in 1739 over the doctrines of predestination and election—Wesley advocated “free grace,” while Whitefield was a staunch Calvinist. The two men remained friends, though they never reconciled their theological differences, and the movement splintered into Arminian and Calvinist camps.⁵⁴

The most distracting figures in the print can be characterized as side-show freaks—a woman giving birth to rabbits and a boy vomiting pins and nails in the foreground. The woman below the pulpit is more focused on the seductive gestures of a man, perhaps a lay preacher,⁵⁵ than the preacher in the pulpit, and one wonders what amongst this chaotic scene would capture the attention of the foreign observer at the window who must surely be bewildered, if not entertained, by the exhibition before him. One eighteenth-century critic imagines this observer thinking, “If this be Christianity . . . , Great Prophet, I thank thee that I am a Mahomedan.”⁵⁶

The implication in Hogarth's final version is that Methodism has become part of an entertainment culture, thus echoing Foote's critique of Whitefield's

⁵² Bernd Krysmanski, “We See a Ghost: Hogarth's Satire on Methodists and Connoisseurs,” *The Art Bulletin* 80.2 (1998), 295. In the eighteenth century, the difference between the theater and a madhouse was not as striking as one might imagine—both could serve as places of entertainment. People often visited madhouses to watch, with amusement, the insane, and they often paid an “admission” fee for this pleasure. Hogarth captures this practice in his concluding scene of *The Rake's Progress* (1735), which portrays the inside of Bethlam hospital and includes two fashionable ladies in the background viewing the spectacle of the hospital's inmates.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁵⁴ See John Wesley, *Free Grace* (Bristol: S. and F. Farley, 1739); and George Whitefield, *Free Grace Indeed! A Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley* (London: 1741).

⁵⁵ Ireland suggests this possibility. See John Ireland, *Hogarth Illustrated* (London: J. and J. Boydell, 1793), 182.

⁵⁶ *Hogarth Moralized* (London: S. Hooper, 1768), 118.



CREDULITY, SUPERSTITION and FANATICISM
A MEDLEY.

Believe not every Spirit but try the Spirits whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.
Designed and Engraved by W. Hogarth. Published as the Act directs March 18th 1764.

Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism: A Medley. © Trustees of the British Museum.

theatrical preaching style and providing a rationale for an equally hyperbolic depiction of the Methodists. If the Methodists come off as performers and sideshow freaks, Hogarth suggests, how can he be making a mockery of religion? With preachers who play with puppets, it is the Methodists who toy with the sacred.

But if we compare *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism* with Hogarth's earlier working of the print, it appears that Hogarth worried that his attack

on Methodism might have been misunderstood as a general attack on religion. This is evident in the ways Hogarth downplays the religious iconography in the second version. The icons of Christ that are being consumed by congregants in *Enthusiasm Delineated* have been minimized in *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism* and transposed into ghost figures. While clearly a jab at the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, as well as suggesting that Methodists were Papists in disguise, an accusation that had been leveled since the early days of the revival,⁵⁷ the original rendering of the Christ figures may have been too literal for some tastes (no pun intended) and could have been perceived as, at the very least, irreverent. The shift away from religious iconography is also apparent in the puppets dangling from the pulpit and the preacher's hands. The puppet in the preacher's right hand in *Enthusiasm Delineated* is, as Krysmanski has shown, actually a reworking of Marcantonio Raimondi's depiction of God appearing to Noah; the puppets hanging from the pulpit are also similarly modeled on religious art: moving from left to right, we see imitations of Albrecht Durer's *Adam and Eve*, Rembrandt's picture of *Peter and John Healing the Cripple at the Gate of the Temple*, and Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses.⁵⁸ In *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism*, the puppet in the preacher's hand has been changed into a witch riding her broom, and the three hanging from the pulpit represent ghosts from popular and classical lore, the significance of which I will address shortly.

Hogarth's parody of so-called masterpieces of religious art leads Krysmanski to conclude that the "real target" of *Enthusiasm Delineated* is art enthusiasts and "the zealous predilection of misguided connoisseurs for traditional, 'sublime' religious art" and not Methodists at all. He states, "Through [the] puppets the secondary meaning of the scene, hidden behind a veil of anti-Methodist satire, becomes clear. We are looking at an auction of pictures in which a fashionable auctioneer, disguised as a fanatic preacher, extols to art enthusiasts old master works in the ridiculous, disparaging form of puppets."⁵⁹

Hogarth, of course, regularly satirized his countrymen's penchant for Continental art and the tastelessness of self-professed connoisseurs; he also championed a distinctly English artistic sensibility he helped to define, so Krysmanski's interpretation seems more than plausible. But I would suggest

⁵⁷ See, for example, George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared* (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1749).

⁵⁸ Krysmanski, "We See," 299.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 298, 299.



Enthusiasm Delineated. © Trustees of the British Museum.

that there is layer to Hogarth's use of the puppets in *Enthusiasm Delineated* that Krysmanski misses that relates directly to his satire on Methodism. Drawn from biblical sources, the puppets intimate Whitefield's strategy of enacting scenes from the Old and New Testament. The juxtaposition of God in the preacher's hand with the devil in the other presents the audience with a choice of salvation or eternal damnation. This is religious theater as much as an art auction. As Krysmanski eventually concedes, Hogarth's revisions can be accounted for, in part, by his fear that his satire of enthusiasm for religious art might have been misunderstood: "Probably John Ireland is right in guessing that Hogarth's near scatological treatment of Christian iconography in the

first state might have caused scandal.”⁶⁰ Krysmanski correctly suggests that the anti-Methodist critique is stressed more in *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism*, but the means by which Hogarth pulls this off deserves further analysis. While Hogarth plays down the more general religious elements, he plays up the anti-Methodist critique via a rhetoric of exaggeration.

If Hogarth emphasizes art enthusiasm in his first rendering, he directs his focus in the second to credulity in general—the gullibility of human beings to believe in almost anything. The woman giving birth to rabbits in the bottom left of the print is Mary Toft, a woman who, following a miscarriage in 1726, convinced many of her contemporaries, including medical experts, that she had delivered various rabbit parts. Her hoax was eventually exposed, and the affair was often referred to as an example of human gullibility. The figure next to Toft has been identified as the Boy of Bilson, who convinced his neighbors that he had been bewitched and possessed by the devil by vomiting nails.⁶¹ The print also includes allusions to a number of ghosts, including the Cock Lane and Tedworth ghosts, stories that surfaced and were proven hoaxes in the same year Hogarth published *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism*. The religious puppets around the pulpit are replaced with puppets of Mrs. Veal, popularized in Daniel Defoe’s *A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal* (1706), Caesar’s ghost, made famous by Shakespeare, and Sir George Villiers, who reportedly returned as a ghost to foretell the murder of his son, the first duke of Buckingham.

By situating the Methodists among various representatives of silliness and superstition, Hogarth suggests that the evangelical revival and its participants have more in common with the world of ghosts and freakish phenomena than religion or true piety. Hogarth depicts a theater of the absurd, not a church. Hogarth, in fact, referred to his own artistic medium in theatrical terms. “My picture,” he explained, “was my Stage and men and women my actors who were by Mean[s] of certain Actions and express[i]ons to Exhibit a dumb shew [sic].”⁶² In other words, Hogarth, like Foote and Whitefield, represents himself as a bit of a performer or puppeteer, manipulating his scenes for the delight and edification of his audiences. The difference, according to the anti-Methodists, is that Foote and Hogarth have let their audiences in on the joke; their satiric intentions are made self-evident through their

⁶⁰ Ibid., 307.

⁶¹ See Ireland, *Hogarth Illustrated*, 186–87.

⁶² William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty, with the Rejected Passages from the Manuscript Drafts and Autobiographical Notes*, ed. Joseph Burke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 209.

exaggerated treatments of their subjects, whereas Whitefield has either deceived himself into believing the enthusiastic notions he preaches, or he has intentionally duped his congregations. Whitefield creates victims, Foote and Hogarth accessories to the crime. As Seidel argues, "The satirist—through the literary manipulation of style and tone— . . . make[s] accomplices of his readers."⁶³ Like the foreign observer at the window in Hogarth's print, viewers of *The Minor* and *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism* experience Methodism from a critical distance; that is, they can discern the contrived nature of the production, finding humor in the scene at the same time they can appreciate Foote's talents at theatrical mimicry and Hogarth's artistic acumen. Methodists, on the other hand, are caught up in the enthusiastic currents of the preacher's performance without recognizing that the preacher is merely pulling their strings in the same way Hogarth's preacher manipulates the puppets. As Misty G. Anderson argues, anti-Methodist attacks like Foote's and Hogarth's indicate that Methodists "lack[ed] the proper theatrical distance and . . . become part of the theatrical event."⁶⁴

Hogarth further aligns Methodism with supernatural and freakish phenomena by connecting Methodist belief and practice with the occult. The thermometer in the lower right of the print sits on a copy of Wesley's hymns and Glanvill's *On Witches*, which affirmed the existence of witches; and supporting the basket containing a copy of Whitefield's *Journal* is James I's *Demonology*, which encouraged the practice of witch hunting. Both of these elements are additions that do not appear in *Enthusiasm Delineated* and attest to Hogarth's efforts to couch his critique of Methodism within "a Medley" of credulity and superstition. Methodists, like believers in ghosts, witches, and women who give birth to rabbits, are portrayed as gullible and misguided, products of religious enthusiasm and their own churned-up emotions. Dangling a devil holding a pitchfork in one hand and his voice raised to a "Bull Roar," as indicated by the "Scale of Vociferation" to his left, Hogarth's preacher is in the middle of a hellfire-and-damnation sermon, which, judging from the horrified expressions on the faces of his captive audience, appears to have achieved its aim. The globe of hell dangling above the crowd further attests to the harrowing nature of such sermonizing by reminding congregants of the eternal misery that awaits the unfaithful. As the globe makes clear, hell is filled with "molten-lead lake[s]," "bottomless pit[s], and "brimstone ocean[s]." Indeed, Methodist preachers had a reputation of scaring their

⁶³ Seidel, "Satire," 38.

⁶⁴ Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 140.

audiences into belief, a charge that was not entirely without warrant. As early as 1745, the Methodist leadership worried, “Do not our Assistants preach too much of the Wrath and too little of the Love of God?”⁶⁵

Like Foote, Hogarth merely exaggerates the truth of Methodist religiosity to achieve his satiric effect. He certainly goes to extremes, but does so by suggesting that the Methodists go to extremes themselves. The range of Methodist experience, according to Hogarth’s mental thermometer, waivers between suicide on one end and madness on the other, with everything from despair and agony to lust and ecstasy in between. Just as Wesley insisted that Methodism was a “religion of the heart” and affected both body and soul, Hogarth stresses this same point, though in a relatively derogatory sense, by indicating the mental and bodily rhythms Methodists experience.

Whereas Foote dodges the charge of toying with the sacred by suggesting that Methodist preachers like Whitefield have more in common with street hawkers and performers than religious ministers, Hogarth distances his critique of Methodism from mainstream religion by aligning Methodism with superstition in general and similarly suggesting the performative nature of Methodist meetings. Neither Foote nor Hogarth was original in exaggerating the effects of Methodist preaching and doctrines, and their depictions of Methodism do not bring anything new to the table of anti-Methodist satire. But Foote clearly touched a nerve in his satiric portraits of Squintum and Mrs. Cole, and the alterations Hogarth made to his satire on Methodist enthusiasm indicate that he recognized that an attack on Methodism might come across as sacrilegious. While it is unclear how aware Hogarth was of the controversy surrounding Foote’s play, it is possible that, given the extensive publicity surrounding *The Minor*, a Londoner like Hogarth would have known something of the dispute and feared being caught up in a similar storm of controversy.⁶⁶

In conclusion, Foote and Hogarth’s clash with the Methodists centered around two prominent eighteenth-century ideals, namely, a desire for moderation, particularly in religion, and an insistence on decorum in all things, including satiric representation. The perceived lack of moderation in early Methodism attracted the anti-Methodist gaze and provided the rationale for a

⁶⁵ John Bennet, *Minutes of the Methodist Conference, 1744–48*, 2 August 1745, John Rylands University Library, MA 177/489.

⁶⁶ Anderson suggests that Foote may have seen Hogarth’s original print, and she refers to Hogarth’s two anti-Methodist prints as “an elaborate reading of *The Minor*.” However, she is less interested in describing Hogarth’s revisions and seeing those revisions in the context of the controversy surrounding *The Minor*, as I attempt to do here. See Anderson, 151–52.

rhetoric of exaggeration; hyperbolic critique, however, ran the risk of violating both aesthetic and religious sensibilities. Foote and Hogarth decried the lack of moderation and decorum in early Methodism, but they did so through arguably immoderate and less-than well-mannered means. At the very least, the argument that religious enthusiasm can only be countered through “wholesome severity” pushes the boundaries of logical argument and suggests that Foote and Hogarth may have been in danger of participating in a kind of enthusiasm themselves. As Aristotle claimed of the use of overstatement in argument, “Hyperboles . . . betray vehemence. And they are used, above all, by men in an angry passion.”⁶⁷ While I do not mean to suggest that Foote or Hogarth were necessarily motivated by anger, their attacks could (and did) come off as malicious. Curiously, one commentator condemned Foote’s play on the same grounds Foote attempted to justify it: “Now I beg leave to ask the ingenious Author, Where, in this Piece, doth Satire exist? What publick good (as he talks of) could he aim at by such an exhibition; or could he be so vain as to imagine that such a performance would reclaim one steeled in Iniquity, or cure another raging with Enthusiasm?”⁶⁸ In other words, satire only works if its targets possess a capacity for critical reflection and change. Religious enthusiasts, the critic claims, do not. Thus, Foote transgresses the laws of satiric decorum by ostensibly acknowledging the helplessness of his victims but still choosing to flay them anyway.

While we might imagine Arabella Fermor reacting with good humor to Pope’s exaggerated account of her exaggerated reaction to the loss of a lock of hair, it seems unlikely that Methodists would have responded in a similarly lighthearted fashion to the anti-Methodist critique—and not necessarily because they lacked a capacity for the ironic. Foote and Hogarth, after all, did not target the trivialities of fashionable society; rather, they targeted the inner convictions of their Methodist victims. Methodists naturally took these attacks personally, though they interpreted them as signs of persecution that ultimately confirmed them in their faith. As one Methodist proclaimed, “Grant, Dearest Redeemer, that we may rejoice when we are counted worthy to suffer shame for thy sake.”⁶⁹ In some ways, then, attacks like Foote and Hogarth’s may have actually helped facilitate the revival, bolstering faith and emboldening believers. As one Methodist woman explained of the antagonism she

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, trans., Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 216.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Belden, *Dramatic*, 98–99.

⁶⁹ T. Mitchel to William Seward, 26 April 1739, John Rylands University Library, DDS 40.

encountered at a society meeting, “When I met the people in the room one night, our enemies were under the window in the garden mocking and deriding. The more they mocked the more my courage increased.”⁷⁰ Of course, it is difficult to determine the actual effects of satire on readers. Did Foote’s play or Hogarth’s print detour believers or would-be converts?

While such a question may be impossible to answer, comments like those just cited indicate that the most severe rebukes may have proved the surest signs of the divinity of the Methodist enterprise, at least in the hearts and minds of the victims of the anti-Methodist critique. In an anti-Methodist poem inspired by *The Minor*, a Whitefield persona acknowledges that Foote has caught him at his game, claiming, “Your wit I applaud, but your satire I fear.”⁷¹ But the truth is, Whitefield relished controversy and hardly feared persecution. As he claimed in the wake of Foote’s attack, “I am now mimicked and burlesqued upon the public stage. All hail such contempt!”⁷² Thus, the severity of these attacks may have undermined Foote’s and Hogarth’s efforts by, first, confirming believers in their faith and, second, by coming off as too outrageous to be believed, even for a group of supposed enthusiasts.

⁷⁰ Hannah Ball to Mrs. Hanks, 27 October 1776, John Rylands University Library, PLP 3.32.1.22.

⁷¹ *A Letter of Expostulation from the Manager of the Theatre in Tottenham-Court, to the Manager of the Theatre in the Hay-Market* (London: R. Stevens, 1760), 7.

⁷² George Whitefield, Letter MCCXL, in *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield*, vol. 3 (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 262.