Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief & the Borders of the Self*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 279. $65. ISBN 9781421404806.

Charles Lamb, Hazlitt tells us, once ended a debate over human perfectibility by raising his glass not to 'Man as he was', or 'Man as he is to be', but 'Man as he is *not* to be'. Misty G. Anderson shares Lamb's good sense, and her compelling *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* gives us a story not about what Methodism was, but what it probably was not.

Her story is the better for it. Anderson's interest is in writing *about* Methodism, not *by* Methodists, the energetic mess of satire, pornographic parody, and outright lies that filled eighteenth-century British culture. While this happens to be a 'Methodism' retailed to modern critical tastes, it's also an argument that Methodism was always already so retailed, that its eruptive presence across the century owed as much to salacious gossip as to moving testimony. Anderson suggests that eighteenth-century England understood 'Methodism' not as a reliable set of people or theological commitments, but rather as a discursively 'floating anxiety', an 'imaginative dumping ground' in which the bodies and behaviors threatening the project of Enlightenment were binned (8). In its ubiquitous misrepresentations of Methodism, the Enlightenment self – taken here to be autonomous, historically consistent, skeptically self-aware, and male – determined itself by determining its limits. Methodism, Anderson argues, was everything modernity should not be: porously available to outside influence, susceptible to radical conversion, collective rather than individual in identity, and female.

But *Imagining Methodism* moves beyond easy binaries, working over the Wesleyans' investment in the putative technologies of modernity: self-study, print culture, even 'reasonability.' After all, the Methodists called what they did 'Experimental Christianity', and they were always writing, talking, and reading about their spiritual fluxes, especially interested in documenting those disruptive 'New Births' in which their selves were most undocumentable. So *Imagining Methodism* casts 'Methodism' as a solecism in the ideology of 'modernity', the impossible combination of Lockean method (hence 'Methodist') and primitive rapture. Here was a problematic at once engaging and unnerving: what if empiricism didn't tend toward secularism? Could 'self' be disembedded from 'spirit', 'reason' from 'belief', when Methodists performed their identity?

Anderson tracks these concerns across Methodism's greatest hits: sex, sermons, and songs. After the book's master arguments, Chapter 2 turns to Mary/George Hamilton, an adventurer who passed as anatomically male with several wives in the early 1740s, and Henry Fielding's account of her life and punishment in *The Female Husband*. Fielding embellished the facts by making Mary/George a Methodist, which, according to Anderson, provided a ready-to-hand discourse for representing bodies and sexualities otherwise unnamable. Anderson reads Fielding's Hamilton – and later, the androgynous figure of George Whitefield – as dramatic slippages in the sex/gender system, at just the moment it emerged.

Chapter 3 pits Whitefield's eroticized preaching against John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, arguing that both share a yearning for a sacramental sexuality, in which bodies and words incarnate (rather than figure) holy mysteries. This is an appealing chapter, although since Cleland never directly alludes to Methodism, Anderson works with suggestive parallels rather than deliberate interventions. As a result, we get telling instances where the *Memoirs* are 'like' Methodist enthusiasm, but I am not sure simile rises to critique – it is hard to

determine whether Cleland is managing these overlaps for programmatic rather than accidental effect.

Chapter 4, 'Actors and Ghosts: Methodism in the Theater of the Real', is the most ambitious in the book. An opening study of Whitefield's theatricality (and its mockery by Samuel Foote) evolves into a wide-ranging argument on 'possession', incarnation, and the nature of the spiritual 'presence' produced by theatrical spectacle and religious performance. This develops into lengthy treatments of Hogarth, the Cock-Lane Ghost, and even Vaucanson's 'defecating duck' automaton and its afterlife in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* – an exciting concatenation, but one that might have been presented to even more effect as several chapters.

Chapter 5, through a series of close readings, argues that the 'holy ballad opera' of Methodist hymns ideologically 'ruptured' its singers from possessive individualism, generating instead corporate, desiring, and spiritually embodied (yet emotionally unaccountable) selves. Such ruptures begin to heal in the final chapter, which uses *Humphry Clinker* and *The Spiritual Quixote* to capture the moment in the 1770s – before the hardening prompted by the French Revolution – when it looked as though 'Methodism' might be reimagined as a salubrious (if comic) enthusiasm, stitching together a national community through itinerant preaching, while settling into the safely invigorating differential of denominationalism.

Anderson's prose is witty, and she brings welcome rigor to a collection of squibs, rants, and sermons too often dismissed as incapable of sustaining serious thought. This is an important intervention – *Imagining Methodism* will need to be reckoned with by all students of 'spirituality', 'enthusiasm', and 'secularity' in the long eighteenth century.

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