

Methodist Discourse and Industrial Work Ethic A Critical Theolinguistic Approach

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If one sees language as discourse and as social practice, « one is committing oneself not just to analysing texts, nor just to analysing processes of production and interpretation, but to analysing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures » (Fairclough 1989 : 26). I would like to illustrate this idea of interaction between discourse and context *lato sensu* by applying it to a historic form of discourse, and show that its success can be explained in terms of many features which clearly belong to the realm of discourse, but which can not always be retrieved from the text itself.

With this end in view, I have chosen to study Methodist discourse (i.e. such manifestations of it as I have had access to) from a *critical theolinguistic* ⁽¹⁾ perspective, focusing not only on the linguistic aspects of the discourse, but on all the relevant components of a « multi-modal semiotic landscape » (Kress 1995) to highlight how, by developing a message which was structured both in form and content to relate to a new and changing environment, Methodism profoundly affected not only the religious, but also the social and political world-view of the labouring classes.

Among historians, it is a fairly widespread assumption that there is a link between religion (notably the protestant ethic) and the emergence of capitalism (Cf. Weber 1905, Tawney 1926, Halbwachs 1925). In this paper, I propose to investigate one aspect of this history, i.e. how the discourse of the Methodist revival in the late 18th and early 19th century aligned itself with the ideology of the developing industrial capitalism. It has been remarked that Methodism made its greatest advances at the time and in the places where industrial developments were the most notable, and that it delivered a religious message which congrued with, rather than opposed, the demands of an economy which entailed a new division of labour, and therefore required different control structures.

(1) *Critical linguistics* explains (and often denounces) discourse processes whereby ideological contents (i.e. belief systems or world-views which come to be taken for granted in a community) are conveyed, often in a covert or otherwise surreptitious manner, by wielders of power to exert influence or condition people's minds for the sake of (notably) class interests ; *theolinguistics* seeks to describe how human discourse may be employed to refer to the divine, and beyond that, how language operates in « religious » situations in manners which may not meet the narrow standards of direct, univocal reference, but which nevertheless operate with a logic which can be demarcated in terms of known linguistic processes (metaphor, speech acts, ...). *Critical theolinguistics*, which combines the two disciplines, seeks to determine how religious language may be viewed as the vehicle or the manifestation of an ideology, i.e. a belief system that reflects power relationships and/or group interests.

It is not the linguist's priority to decide whether the diagnosis of Methodism as one of the vehicles of a utilitarian work ethic was :

- (1) (as Thompson 1991 suggests) the result of a deliberate scheme to blunt political consciousness, which « weakened the working classes from within by internalising capitalist demands », which « fostered within the Methodist Church those elements most suited to make up the psychic component of the work discipline of which the manufacturers stood most in need » and « discouraged any sedition and rebellion » ;
- (2) whether the success of Methodism was (as for Bude 1994) a visible but unwitting manifestation or reflection of an ongoing ideological shift, or
- (3) whether, as for the Methodist hagiographers (Southey 1864, Welbourne 1923, Thonger 1937, Bett 1943, Wearmouth 1937, 1945) Methodism was « a hint of daybreak in the national darkness », a social religion par excellence, « the greatest friend the working masses had in the 18th century », which gave « a sense of decency, morals and religion to the lowest classes of mankind in a time of manifold disorders and widespread distress » and « denounced social injustice ».

In objective terms, the linguist can only observe the apparent success of a message which must have been altogether unwelcome and unpalatable to the forming proletariat at a time marked by social hardship, which supported the industrialists' demands for submissiveness and actually exposed the work force to a form of psychic, if not physical, exploitation in exchange for little if any temporal gain. He must then beg the related, but more specifically linguistic question *whether the sudden success of Methodism can be explained in terms of features of its discourse*.

This question must obviously be answered in the affirmative, seeing that for centuries, the Established Church had already been preaching to the poor the duties of obedience without reaching the desired effect. But the answer cannot be boiled down to a mere matter of linguistic explanations in the traditional sense, i.e. framed in terms of, say, a particular set of lexical terms, grammatical choices or rhetorical devices. In the analysis which I would like to undertake, it would defeat the purpose to reduce the scope to a « thin » description of (some or all) linguistic characteristics of a particular discourse variety.

For example, in *Contrasting Advertising and Televangelism*, Schmidt and Kess (1985, pp. 287-308) seek to determine whether the discourse of televangelism (as a form of successful persuasive discourse) contains the linguistic devices (lexical and syntactic innovation, semantic anomaly, repetition, directives, etc.) which R. Lakoff (1982) and M. Geis (1982) diagnose as typical of persuasive advertising. They come to the conclusion that while some of the stylistic features of advertising are not resorted to, others have been taken over by the televangelists, and that these must therefore constitute the characteristic persuasive elements

prompting or enticing people to take the desired action. In doing this, they deliberately narrow down the object of their investigation to a point where the facets eventually retained are undoubtedly characteristic and relevant, but no longer sufficient to define, or *a fortiori* to interpret or explain, a type of discourse in terms of, say, its rationale or its impact on a given target audience.

Even a considerably « thicker » account in which the observed surface features are correlated with the purposes, expectations and conventions underlying one or several discourse genres would take us only part of the way : its insistence on the question of how these constraints are textualised might divert attention from conditions which contributed to the success of the discourse, but which are not reflected in its verbal or textual structure.

A useful analogy might be found here in the study of dialect : the features of a regional variety may be observed, described and correlated with geographical distribution or social class, but the reasons why a bidialectal speaker in a given situation will choose to resort to dialect rather than the standard variety, while sociolinguistically highly relevant, cannot be determined on the basis of the characteristics of the dialect text itself.

Of course, text content and structure are bound to enter into the total picture but they constitute only part of the explanation. The eventual account will try to show how *all* aspects of Methodist discourse, *including non-textual ones*, coherently served (or were made to serve) a purpose which we could label *conversion*, whether religious, ideological or both.

But this inclusive approach to discourse requires a methodology liable to encompass many non-linguistic considerations as well as a fair amount of linguistic variance. One promising path is opened up by some of the questions asked in the analysis of discourse genres (e.g. Bhatia 1993, pp. 13-26), which will go so far as to discuss the history, beliefs, goals etc. of the community which uses (or used) the genre in question. This approach resorts not only to the texts themselves, but also to existing literature on the speech community and its linguistic habits. Additional questions come from the somewhat older « ethnographic » approach, which relates the text to its sociocultural context (its purposes and things like social identities of the participants, cf. Hymes 1964).

The variety of documents presented a considerable challenge, as different genres, even « close cousins » in terms of similar discourse purposes, called for different methodological approaches (Bhatia : *op cit*, p. 59 ; also Kress 1988). Sermons, for instance, come to us as more or less accurate transcripts with little if any indication as to their actual performance in the spoken medium. The printed texts lend themselves to a homiletic analysis or to descriptions of the theological and ideological representations contained in them, but largely defeat analysis in terms of interaction, which may have conditioned audience effect. The solution here is to rely on second-hand documents, i.e. on the preachers' own reports, on the confessions of their contemporaries and the comments of analysts and critics, biased as they may be. (There is a marked tradition of Methodist hagiography as well as a school of

disparagement of Methodist manipulation of working class consciousness), or even on pictorial material for the real or presumed effect the sermons produced on the crowds or the individuals addressed.

A first reading of a small corpus of documents and comments, although rather casually composed, suggested that the success of Methodist discourse was not an accident, but the result of what looks like a concurrence of features *at many discourse levels* to ensure favourable reception with the public targeted — not only at the language level *stricto sensu*, but also, for instance, at the (non-textualized) level of the socio-psychological state of the audience, which encouraged it to be particularly receptive, and to respond favourably to the form given to the Methodist gospel, to its subjacent theology and / or to the circumstances in which its message was conveyed.

This composite perspective opens up a wider selection of relevant aspects of the total discourse situation :

1. The first category, *participation*, addresses the question of who the senders and addressees are in the discourse situation, and how each of these affects the manner in which the message is delivered and perceived.

1.1. The kind of *audience* addressed by Wesley and his followers was highly specific in both its nature and its needs. An analysis of Methodist membership (Warner 1930, p 165 ; Gilbert 1976) indicates that the movement concentrated upon the very section of the community which was increasingly being drawn into the industrial processes — people torn loose from their rural or small-town artisan communities, who were having to adapt to a new conception and division of labour, with control-structures different from those of the family-based rural life. The development of sweatshops and factory work as instruments in the production process entailed the emergence of a new class of workers forced to toil long hours in squalid conditions for wages which would scarcely allow them to subsist — if at all :

the spate of northern mechanical inventions ranging from Kay's flying shuttle of 1733. Hargreaves' spinning jenny of 1767, Crompton's mule of 1779 [to] Arkwright's many improvements during the same period. [...] In 1769 Watt made his first steam engine and by 1785, he and Boulton introduced steam-power into factories. Combined, the new inventions and power revealed the most amazing potencies and possibilities [...] Pitt let the industrial revolution go on its ugly way, and create a squalor unparalleled before in England » [...] « The new steam-driven machines gave the workers no leisure, and they could only employ their non-working hours in the sleep of exhaustion or in the oblivion of drunkenness. The conditions of work inside the factories were deplorable ; brutal masters whipped their workmen whilst their wives similarly drove the workwomen with blows. Work was carried on in very hot rooms ; the air was full of dust ; men, women and children were on their feet fourteen or more hours a day. Factory doors were locked, and a worker was fined if he was caught washing, whistling or opening a window ; nor was he allowed a drink of water until meal-times [Ever] greater reliance was placed on child-labour ; it was estimated that about 1797 Lancashire had some 30.000 of them in the mills (Whiteley : 1945. pp 128-9)

A correspondent in the Sunday Times declared that there were « tens of thousands of Englishmen, industrious, kind-hearted, but broken-hearted beings, exasperated into madness by insufficient food and clothing — by the utter want of necessities for themselves and their unfortunate families. There is no complaint anywhere that [. . .] having undertaken to labour for pay, they will not work. The complaint is on their side, that they cannot get such wages for their work as will keep them above starvation » (Wearmouth : 1937, p. 42).

Thus it helped to establish a climate of distress and insecurity, of *anomie* in which the familiar moral and ideological landmarks broke down (for instance, the ideological paradigm of « fair price », cf. Thompson 1991 : 261 and Bude 1994 : 1). It was part of the official strategy under Wesley to focus the new propaganda where the largest number of unattached people could be reached : « Go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most » (*Works*, vi : 350). These sectors of the population were not catered for by the Established Church, which had neither the means nor the will-power to provide for the needs of new districts and in many cases spoke a language altogether foreign (both in terms of register and of relevance) to the situation of the emerging proletariat. Yet these people appear to have come to the new industrial centres with a religious background of sorts — a minimum of familiarity with the Bible — on which it was possible to graft a new discourse. It must be remembered that these were times when religion was (still ?) taken seriously. The promise of heaven and the fear of hell still constituted powerful arguments to a pre-Darwinian, pre-Marxist, pre-Freudian, pre-Bultmann public, and the language of creation and eschatology, of faith and belief, of authority, obedience and judgment, had an immediate cash-value which was not open to questioning and demythologizing as it is in our century. To this audience, Methodism offered not only a gospel of salvation, but also, and according to some authors more importantly, a number of secular benefits — a feeling of dignity, a sense of community, and an ideology of work which, unpleasant though its practical implementation might be, allowed to make sense of a worker's dismal life, and even to derive a certain pride from it (Gilbert 1976, pp. 84, 88-9; Wearmouth 1937, p. 270).

The audience of Methodist discourse calls for a couple of other remarks — first about children as possible addressees. Wesley lacked any insight into child psychology. He reportedly disliked children (Rattenbury 1941, p. 170; Cf. however Murrell 1891, pp. 138-148) but was aware of the effects that early indoctrination could have on their further life and needs as he viewed them — the need to be saved from eternal damnation and the fires of hell, and the related need for pious rectitude and a disciplined existence. This particular sector of the audience was addressed through a specific set of channels — schools and Sunday-schools — to cater for these needs :

Break their wills betimes [says John Wesley], begin this work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, perhaps before they can speak at all. Whatever pains it costs, break the will if you would not damn the child. Let a child from a year old be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly; from that age make him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it. If you spare the rod you spoil the child. If you do not conquer,

you ruin him Break his will now, and his soul shall live, and he will probably bless you all eternity

Children were brought to this « bliss » largely by frightening them with the terrors which lay in store for the sinner. The Wesleys themselves indulged very little in hellfire preaching and warned their preachers against doing so, but for the children, no account of hell was lurid enough. It is significant that the hymns which threaten their singers with future woes were written not for the pagans of England, but for children. Some of them are almost incredibly horrible, and it is understandable why some present-day critics have spoken of « psychological atrocities, emotional bullying and religious terrorism » :

Shall I — amidst a ghastly band —
 Dragg'd to the judgment seat
 Far on the left with horror stand
 My fearful doom to meet ?

While they enjoy his Heavenly Love
 Must I in torment dwell
 And howl (while they sing hymns above)
 And blow the flames of Hell ?

A final point to be made about the audience is that even though the discourse was essentially addressed to the working population, part of its message was not wholly uncongenial to some sectors of the dominating classes, who found in the Calvinist idea of « election » the justification of their wealth and authority. Although a certain bourgeois self-satisfaction can be traced even in early Methodist hymns and in Isaac Watts' *Divine Songs for Children*, this aspect becomes more heavily marked in later publications, when Methodism itself evolves into a middle-class religion

1.2. Still at the level of *participation*, the *addressers / senders / authors* of the messages also contributed to the success of the discourse — both by their linguistic behaviour (more about which later) and in aspects which move beyond the bounds of what can be traced in the messages themselves.

They were, first of all, people with a purpose, but also people with a marked personal charisma. Wesley, Whitefield and Bunting each had their own pulpit style — very different styles as a matter of fact — but reports from their contemporaries stress that elements like the « fire and charm of their personality » and details like their physical appearance or the expression in their eyes had a profound effect on people's minds : Wesley « seemed to see into men's souls ; to put his finger upon the hidden sin, the unconfessed fear. He had the power of making each man feel as though he talked to him alone » (J. Nelson in Fitchett 1920, pp. 176-7)

With the increase of their adherents, Methodist preachers were led to delegate part of their responsibilities to lay society leaders. The choice of these men to whom

Wesley and his followers grudgingly, but increasingly, entrusted missionary tasks and supervision of the societies was to play a key role in the success of the discourse (Wearmouth 1937, p. 25): the exhorters, lay preachers and class-leaders came from among the working population itself, and were encouraged to « think with the wise and speak with the vulgar. » Many of the local preachers were humble men who found their figures of speech (as one said) « behind my spinning-jenny », but who turned out to be « working-class saints with all the zeal of preaching friars ». Class meetings could, in a dialect-speaking England, be conducted in the prevailing vernacular and thereby generate genuine lay piety. Many of the tracts were confessions recorded from among the poor themselves: thus the carriers of the message were close to their target audience both in language and in sensitivity, a fact which added to their persuasive impact. Some resulting features of discourse like lexical choice and imagery can be documented, although first-hand documents (like penny tracts) are hard to get hold of. Others, like accent, must once again be inferred from second-hand reports, but it is likely that the lay preachers showed the same language features as their audience.

2. The *Purpose* of Methodist Discourse is clearly marked at many levels in the texts inasmuch as it seeks to be persuasive for individuals in content, form, rhetoric, and organization. The interesting question, however, is whether there is one central purpose, or whether there are several.

2.1. John Wesley « preached to convert ». One document hints that Wesley's ultimate motive behind all his activity may have been the accomplishment of his duty in order to save his own soul, although this seems in contradiction with the reformatory idea of free grace, which is not « earned » (Cf. Marquardt 1977, p. 21); but his generally recognised aim was to expose the 18th century underworld to the saving influence of the gospel of Christ — a gospel of repentance, conversion and salvation addressed to the individual: « We know no Gospel without salvation from sin » (*Works*, xiii, 36). Methodist discourse focused on the scriptural teaching that Man is a sinful, « fallen » creature, but that the grace of God in Jesus Christ is made available to all. The main and first purpose of the discourse, then, was to persuade each individual in the audience of their state of sin, and to trigger off a personal response of repentance leading to conversion.

2.2. But this theology, no matter how basically Christian, did give rise to controversy. Wesley's idea of salvation was explicitly Arminian — a theology of free, universal grace which clashed head-on with the Calvinist doctrines of election and reprobation. In addition to the missionary purpose, one may then discern within the total discourse a type of polemical aim as well — although the « propaganda » for the doctrine must — like much of Wesley's theology — be distilled from his sermons, journals, and (especially) hymns:

Whoe'er admits, my soul disowns
 The image of a torturing God
 Well-pleased with human shrieks and groans.
 A fiend, a moloch gorged with blood !
 Good God ! that any child of Thine
 So horribly should think of Thee !
 Lo ! all my hopes I here resign
 If all may not find grace with me !

In the next example, one will notice the combined recourse to music and lexical repetition of key terms (all, every) reminiscent of present-day advertising jingles :

O for a trumpet voice
 On *all* the world to call
 To bid their hearts rejoice
 In him who died *for all* !
For all my Lord was crucified
For all for all my saviour died !
 O let thy love my heart constrain !
 Thy love for *every* sinner free
 That *every* fallen soul of man
 may taste the grace that found out me
 That *all* mankind may prove
 Thy sovereign everlasting love.

2.3. In Wesley's theology, the New Birth was only a first stage, and as the 18th century wore on, the doctrine of justification by faith hardened : Christ's ransom was only provisional and forgiveness of sin lasted only so long as the penitent went and sinned no more — but it was always possible to « backslide » into sinful depravity. The means of maintaining one's state of grace, then, was to lead a life of Christian service and duty, not only in the spiritual realm, but also through a methodical discipline in all aspects of worldly life — and above all, in « taking up one's cross », in labour and self-denial.

The initial Wesleyan work ethic was part and parcel of his soul-saving programme — making the best use possible of the time one was allotted on earth (like a good steward) and abstaining from frivolous, sinful activity. But as some critics point out, this philosophy eventually developed into a utilitarian doctrine in which work and obedience (including child labour) were raised to the status of virtues in their own respect — more and more explicitly so, to the point where one may be inclined to follow those who discern a social or political motive in the discourse as well as a religious one. The key to the success of the utilitarian work ethic was its integration in a religious message which invested it with a spiritual meaning and (through the structures in which it was mediated, as we shall see) gave the workers a sense of purpose, security, and community at a time of acute distress

3. Much of the appeal of the Methodist message can be traced simply to its *discourse content* — but perhaps the point is too obvious to be dwelt on at length

— and its unique synthesis of different theologies : Lutheran theology with its authoritarianism, Calvinism's doctrine of human depravity with its morbid sense of guilt, its obsession with personal salvation, and its joyless, ascetic discipline ; the Arminian amendment insisting on the universality of grace and the possibility of man's participation in his own salvation — a message of hope which was played down by the fear of « backsliding », which stressed the need for continual self-denial. It is especially on this latter element that a work ethic could be constructed : Man's proper attitude before God was one of self-abasement, and God's curse over Adam supported the blessedness of hard labour, poverty and patience in suffering : Methodism told its adherents to look to the distant future for redress, but at the same time reassured them of their worth and offered them a hope of an increased social and economic self-improvement in the present.

In terms of management, the « cost » was the hard work and the self-denial which the working classes had to put up with anyway, while the « benefit » was a share of the pie, not only in the sky, but on earth as well.

4. The *Discourse Medium*, or rather *media* through which Methodist discourse was conveyed are essential to any account of its success, inasmuch as it is through these that the message managed not only to reach the industrial labourers which it sought to address, but also to exert an inescapable grasp on their lives and souls.

Methodist discourse might be described as an early form of multi-modal communication. The different purposes (conversion, polemic, social) were spread over different discourse genres, among which several represented partial or total innovations as they evolved with time or varied with the settings in which they appeared. Each of these genres deserves a full-fledged « thick » study in its own respect, but here I cannot but very rapidly skate across the surface.

4.1. Initially, Methodism resorted almost exclusively to the oral (spoken and sung) medium — an obvious choice with a largely illiterate audience — but the religious meetings differed markedly from the services of worship in the established churches. Wesley preached out in the open air, a circumstance which scandalised the conservative clergy, but which added much to the appeal of the message, and apparently to the audience's attention :

I wonder at those who still talk so loud of the indecency of field-preaching. The highest indecency is in St Paul's Church when a considerable part of the congregation are asleep, or talking or looking about, not minding a word the preacher says. On the other hand, there is the highest decency in a church-yard or field, when the whole congregation behave and look as if they saw the Judge of all, and heard him speaking from heaven (*Journal. III. p. 373*).

The emotional atmosphere at the open-air meetings was much enhanced by the singing of hymns (more about which below). The message itself was delivered according to a recurrent pattern (Cf. *Journal*, 20 december 1751) which ran from a

statement of divine law to a description of Man's sinfulness, and thence to the revelation of God's love for sinners and an emotive personal appeal for immediate conversion :

Thou art the man ! [...] The Lord hath need of thee ! Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell, art just fit to advance his glory Oh, come quickly ! Believe in the Lord Jesus and thou, even thou, art reconciled to God (Cf Southey 1864 : 250)

In the short excerpt, we can recognise both Wesley's characteristic *plain speaking* and the « restricted code » of address with which he ended his sermons — a direct, personal appeal which allowed people to say that they felt personally addressed by Wesley's rhetoric Although Ertl (1988 : 66-7) reports that Wesley would not willingly dispense with the notion of hell as a deterrent, Wesley himself reportedly did not feel the need to frighten his adult audiences with the fate reserved for sinners in the hereafter In the later, more popular developments of Methodist preaching, however, « hellfire-and-brimstone preaching » became a well-recognised and highly effective genre :

« You have often seen a spider or some noisome insect when thrown into the midst of a fierce fire, and have observed how immediately it yields to the force of the flames. There is no long struggle, no fighting against the fire, no strength exerted to oppose the heat or to fly from it Here is a little image of what you will be in hell, except you repent and fly to Christ » (John Edwards in Guttery 1920 : 230).

« You poor unconverted creatures in the seats, in the pews, in the galleries, I wonder you do not drop into hell ! It would not surprise me if I should see you drop this minute. You Pharisees, hypocrites, now, now you are sinking into the pit ! » (John Davenport in Guttery 1920 : 280)

4.2. *Hymns* are recognised to have been among the most powerful instruments of Methodist influence. Before Wesley, hymns were little sung in England, and although the real pioneer of hymn-singing was Isaac Watts, it was Wesley who discovered that when religious words were set to soul-stirring music, with the metre carefully chosen to fit both the subject and the temperament of the audience (Rattenbury 1941 : 37-38), the emotive and mnemonic effect on the minds, even of illiterates, could be astonishing Hymns disseminated the gospel more successfully to the Methodist audience than ordinary speech could have done.

The Moravians had revealed to John that hymns could be put to the service, not merely of worship, but also of instruction Charles Wesley wrote no less than 8,000 hymns, and certain preachers reportedly were more attached to their hymnbooks than to the Bible : they discovered that hymns could be used to teach doctrine to the theologically untrained just as the stained-glass windows and frescoes in cathedrals could support the teaching of scripture Of course many of the hymns were intended for singing ; but the Wesleys also intended their hymnbooks to be used as « a little body of experimental and practical divinity » To this must be added what I have already called a polemical function : many of the hymns reflect the life-long controversy of the Wesleys with the Calvinists. The great

hymns were largely accountable for the diffusion of the Arminian doctrine throughout evangelical Christendom

4.3. As the Methodist societies became more numerous and as the popular masses became conversant with the written medium (not least thanks to the Methodist contribution to the children's instruction in reading, while the teaching of writing was subject to controversy), John Wesley forged the plan to disseminate knowledge by distributing *tracts*, arguing that « men wholly unawakened will not take the pains to read the Bible [...], but a small tract may engage their attention for half an hour, and may, by the blessing of God, prepare them for going forward » In a short time, these leaflets, posters and booklets were to develop into a popular mass medium — 700 million pages in 28 years (Archibald 1883, p. 190) — which allowed thousands who never attended church to be brought in contact with the Gospel, but also to be exposed to the confessional exhibitionism of converts and the self-righteous prescriptionism of class leaders. These often short-lived but widely circulated publications are interesting inasmuch as they are often products of popular writing which allow one to assess to what extent the religious representation of middle-class interests was adopted or « internalised » by class leaders who themselves belonged to the laborious layers of society

4.4. Printed Publications. Wesley was a great believer in the virtues of the written word, and encouraged reading pure and wholesome literature both in his aides and in the faithful. Under his impulse, the movement undertook a vast campaign of dissemination of literature for popular education (Warner 1930, p. 230). It gave birth to book-rooms and libraries, and encouraged the publication of magazines and books — many of the latter in the form of popular autobiographic-confessional *Lives* for the instruction of the faithful (Ertl 1988) or Sunday School books, « arrows directed at the heart of children », intended to teach them what to think, how to practice religion, and how to be good Christian citizens at a time of tension between competing value systems (Gillespie 1988, pp. 5-12).

5. I have already hinted (in the discussion of open-air preaching) that *the setting* in which these various discourse media operated added much to their emotional impact. This was, it must be remembered, an age of religious enthusiasm, where « frigid inhibitions » gave way to « a warm religion of the heart », and Wesley frequently reports how, at his open-air meetings, the hymn-singing and preaching triggered off strong emotional responses like crying and fainting, and even occasional bouts of hysteria, of which he disapproved (*Journal*, March 1788). Similar reactions were observed during certain love-feasts and watch-nights, occasions which reportedly evolved (or degenerated) from quiet religious ceremonies where the believers shared water and bread into highly emotional occasions where the participants entered into « convulsions of conversion,

conviction of sin, penitence and visitation by grace », as can be documented from both textual and pictorial material :

At a love-feast in the Methodist chapel, the penitent knelt in the pew and, in an agony of the soul, began to wrestle with God. Although the enemy raged and rolled upon him like a flood, some leaders, with some pious females, came into the gallery, and united in interceding for him at the throne of grace : the more they prayed, the more his distress and burthen increased, till finally he was nearly spent, and sweat rolled off him, and he lay on the floor of the pew with little power to move. This, however, was the moment of deliverance : he felt what no tongue can ever describe ; a something seemed to rest upon him like the presence of God that went through his whole frame ; he sprang on his feet, and felt he could lay upon Christ by faith (Marsden quoted in Thompson 1991, pp. 403-4)

Various explanations have been offered for these spectacular reactions ; among them, the extasy induced by rhythmic hymn-singing, the tension fostered by the awareness of sin and the fear of damnation, which was often represented as imminent ; or (less plausibly, cf *infra*) the excitement inspired by language which re-directed repressed sexual tensions into religious channels. According to one critic, this recourse to emotion in the conversion process was a form of manipulation in which religion served as a safety valve for the exploited :

These « orgasms of feeling » allowed to release emotions which were dangerous to social order and made more possible the single-minded weekday direction of these energies to the consummation of productive labour (Thompson 1991, pp. 405-6).

The Methodist *class-meetings* constitute a clearer case. As social events, they offered the uprooted and abandoned people of the industrial revolution some kind of community to replace the social environment they had lost. There was usually a free and easy atmosphere about the meetings conducted in vernacular, and each person was expected to take some part in the devotions. At the spiritual level, the gatherings emphasized personal experience, as members were encouraged to reveal the very secrets of their hearts to their fellows. The class-leaders, laymen chosen from among the people, were regarded as friends and as shepherds of souls, who acted as spiritual advisers, and who must rebuke or exhort members as the occasion demanded (a procedure denounced by critics as a form of spiritual police, cf Southey 1864 : 241-2, Piette 1938). In this manner, the setting was calculated to exert private and personal influence, and to make converts « perceive the inner light »

6. The discussion of the verbal *form* in which the discourse is cast is a more familiar assignment for the linguist : what was the « magic », the verbal hypnotism which allowed the messages of Methodists to sway large crowds, convert « the outcasts of society into useful members, [and] civilize even savages » ? (Wearmouth 1945, p. 182).

It is one of the claims of this paper to show that not everything can be boiled down to linguistic choices or devices in the traditional sense ; but it would be short-

sighted not to acknowledge the role of the Methodist preachers' language, varied as it may have been

6.1. I have already mentioned the recourse to dialect in class meetings and the persuasive use of direct address in preaching. The issue of Wesley's « plain speaking », however, deserves some additional interest. In the preface to his *Sermons on Several Occasions*, John Wesley specified that

Nothing here appears in an elaborate, elegant, or oratorical dress. [...] for now I write, as I generally speak, *ad populum*, to those who neither relish nor understand the art of speaking. [...] I design plain truth for plain people. [...] I labour to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood, all which are not used in common life

His sermons were framed in language that was simple and terse, « the noble and simple language of the Authorized Version ». Legend has it that Wesley in his early evangelizing days read over his sermons to an old maidservant and crossed out every phrase that she did not grasp immediately. He perfectly understood the value of Saxon words and single syllables and never allowed latinity to overload a sentence (Whiteley 1938, repr. 1945 : 228-9). The same can hardly be said about the vocabulary of the hymns : some of John and Charles Wesley's amazing verse may be criticized as « near the boundary of pedantry and usefulness » (Manning 1942 : 117) :

Those amaranthine bowers
Unalienably ours
Bloom, our infinite reward
Rise, our permanent abode
From the founded world prepared
Purchased by the blood of God

Unlike Whitefield, who resorted to anecdotes, images, puns, allusions and a whole range of suggestive histrionics (« Mr Whitefield preached like a lion », Southey 1846, p. 88), John Wesley avoided « florid style » and sought to strike a deeper note which brought home to his audiences a sense of the horror of evil and the necessity of conversion. His aim was « not to entertain, but to save souls ». Some authors suggest that there must have been more to his sermons than may be retrieved from the printed transcripts :

« Wesley's sermons as written, though excellent standards of reference, would hardly have been the marvellous instrument of conversion which his preaching was [...] it is probable that they were illuminated by illustrations, direct appeals, and all the fire and charm of his personality » (Towlson 1957, p. 229)

While it is true that he did not deliver « placid literary homily », there is little factual or even circumstantial evidence that John Wesley indulged in oratorical mannerisms or extravagances (Maser 1957, pp. 110-17). One notable exception in the corpus is Wesley's sermon on *The Great Assize* with its vivid description of

the final judgment in graphic and fiery terms; its urgent reminder that all are to be judged; and its final exclamatory appeal to « give oneself to him »). His persuasive strength resided, rather, in orderly « reason and argument » rather than in anecdote or illustration; in an unambiguous two-valued logic (Hayakawa 1990, pp 128-140) of evil and good, damnation and salvation, supported by biblical evidence and driven home by means of clear, straightforward personal arguments :

It would have been of little use to explain to the common people that drunkenness was evil because it degraded reason, man's noblest faculty; but telling them that they could have died in a state of drunkenness and showing them the horrid consequences of dying before they had accepted grace always profoundly affected them (cf. Dr Johnson in Pottle 1950)

The same two-valued logic can be recognized in the hymns :

There is beyond the sky	There is a dreadful Hell
A heaven of Joy and Love	And everlasting Pains
And Holy Children when they die.	There Sinners must with Devils dwell
Go to that World above	in Darkness, Fire and Chains (Watts. 1751)

or

How shall I leave my tomb ?	Shall angel-bands convey
With triumph or regret ?	Their brother to the bar ?
A fearful. or a joyful doom	Or devils drag my soul away
A curse or blessing meet ?	To meet its sentence there ? (Watts, 1751)

In the 19th-century developments of Methodism, this logic of good and evil was to degenerate into a morbid fear of sin, which was assimilated with carnal desire — an element which, incidentally, was not altogether absent from Wesley's own message : « Christianity declares that all men are conceived in sin, shapen in wickedness, that hence there is in every man a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not subject to his law », but which was to become a major theme only later. The sermons of Jabez Bunting, notably, focus on the horrors of hell which await the sinner, and on the « inner life » by means of which he may avoid its rigours. Since the present world is evil, Man's ambition is to free himself from this sinful existence and to aspire to the bliss of the Kingdom. Hence the positive connotations attached to the imagery of death and crucifixion :

Let us also go and die
With our dearest dying Lord
[]
(our heart's) uppermost desire
With our nature's life to part
Meekly on Thy cross t'expire
[]
Let the Man of Sin be slain
Die the flesh. to live no more

6.2. Much criticism has been levelled at the imagery, especially of the Methodist hymns. As pointed out already, John Wesley's hymnology was much influenced by the Moravian hymns, whose « wounds » imagery was (even then) frowned upon as being in very poor taste, especially the strong sexual overtones given to the wound in Christ's side :

O precious side-hole's cavity
I want to spend my life in thee
There in one side-hole's joy divine
I'd spend all future days of mine
Yes, yes, I will forever sit
There, where thy side was split (in Knox 1950. pp 408-17)

But even though we do find some traces of this imagery in Wesley's hymns, it would be a strong claim to say that Methodism resorted to it systematically : John's clean mind rejected all sentimentality (he even changed « dear redeemer » to « great redeemer ») and, as pointed out already, he was extremely critical of the excesses found in the Moravian hymns. Recourse to the imagery of blood is more frequent, but Wesley would not have adopted it if it had not partaken of Biblical symbolism, where the term « blood of Christ » refers both to the cancelling of sin and to the cleansing from sin (man participates in Christ's sufferings and receives the love of Christ). It may be a bit of an overstatement to speak of « sacrificial, masochistic, and erotic language » (Thompson 1991, pp 407-8), but some case could be made for it :

Still the Wounds are open wide
The Blood doth freely flow
As when first his sacred Side
Receiv'd the deadly Blow
Still, O God, the Blood is warm
Cover'd with the Blood we are

Other cases of metaphor are the *heart* (a central metaphor in Methodism, which evolved from the locus of divine action in Man to the seat of emotion and (later) even of sentiment) ; and *military images* (for the battle against sin). *Fire* was hardly experienced as a metaphor in the vivid descriptions of hell and other apocalyptic visions, but here the recourse seems to have been particularly frequent and strong — albeit less often in Wesley's own preaching :

See ! see ! He cometh ! He maketh the clouds his chariots ! He rideth upon the wings of the wind ! A devouring fire goeth before him, and after him a flame burneth ! See ! He sitteth upon his throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour ! Behold, his eyes are as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters ! How will ye escape ? [] Can ye prevent the sentence ? [] Blind wretch ! Thou camest naked from thy mother's womb, and more naked into eternity [] Vain hope ! Lo, hell is moved from beneath to receive those who are ripe for destruction And the everlasting doors lift up their heads, that the heirs of glory may come in ! (« The Great Assize », in : *Sermons on Several Occasions*, p 204)

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Lancashire under the management of Methodists and they serve me excellently well » (Warner 1930, pp 175-8) In time, however, the popularity of Methodist workers with their masters was to subside, as their superior degree of education and fluency set them apart as formidable spokesmen for their peers. In workers' disputes, the Methodists were reportedly « the hardest to deal with », and were among the first to be dismissed by their masters as soon as the strike was over (Wearmouth 1937, p. 230).

8. Case Example : The Early Methodist Representation of Work.

I hope to have shown that the success of Methodism both as a religion and as a vehicle of a utilitarian ideology can be explained in terms of a unique coalescence of all aspects of Methodist discourse, including the non-textual modes.

I would now like to move towards a more critical assessment of the discourse by studying the representation of one key notion — human work — across several genres, and thus to show how an idea which originated as a religious precept eventually came to be « internalized » by the workers as an ethic, indeed an ideology of work. Although I have refrained from turning this attempt at a critical analysis into a « checklist », the reader will notice that the instruments with which the analysis is performed are taken from the toolkit described above : discourse participation and interaction, purpose and content (religious and social), medium, linguistic form (lexical as well as rhetorical), and perhaps above all, discourse reception by the actual addressees.

In Wesley's sermons, the clearest references to work I have found appear in his sermons on *The Use of Money* and *The Good Steward*. Wesley urges his audience to « Gain all you can ⁽²⁾ by honest industry, and to use all possible diligence in your calling » without wasting time on « silly, unprofitable diversions ». At the lexical level, it is interesting to note the synonym *calling* for *work* — a basically protestant conception (Weber 1905) which suggests that human labour is the response to a divine vocation, and that Man is to answer to the Lord for his professional activity. The second-person address and the inclusive / solidary « we » of the sermon (example *a*, where Wesley speaks with the authority and certitude he derives from his status and from scripture) becomes a first-person optative or representative speech act in the hymns (example *b*). Of course it is difficult to decide to what extent these utterances were felt to be commissive :

- (a) I gave thee hands and feet, and various members, wherewith to perform the works which were prepared for thee : were they employed, not in doing "the will of the flesh", of thy evil nature ; [.] but "the will of him that sent" thee into the world, merely to work out thy own salvation ? [.] We cannot be wise stewards unless we labour to the uttermost of our power; not leaving anything undone which we possibly can do, but putting forth all our strength »

(2) The first precept « gain all you can » must not, however, be divorced from the two others, « save all you can », and « give all you can ». Wesley himself was dismayed to see the growing wealth which resulted from the Methodist's industriousness, and warned that failure to obey this third commandment would « double the number of children of hell » (*Works* VII, p. 286).

- (b) The task thy wisdom hath assigned O let me cheerfully fulfil [. . .] Every work I do below I do it to the Lord

For adults as for children, work is viewed as a proper and meaningful use of God-given time on earth. Even leisure time should be filled with useful activity, and yielding to the will of the flesh (i.e. letting oneself be guided by one's sinful carnal « nature » rather than by self-denial and obedience) is not only inefficient, it is viewed as evil. At Wesley's Kingswood School, games and play were considered as unworthy: « He that plays when he is a boy will play when he is a man », and free time was spent digging or chopping wood.

In the education of children, the virtues of work are mediated through simple metaphors set to short sentences in an iambic 8 and 6s metric pattern which is almost irresistible as a mnemonic. (It is the pattern of both « O God our Help in Ages Past » and « Let dogs delight to bark and bite », both by Isaac Watts, cf. Manning 1942, pp. 50-61). Thus, in Isaac Watts's hymnal, of which both Wesley and Methodist parents made great use ⁽³⁾, the sun is held up as an example of a relentless and uninterrupted work-discipline:

My God, who mak'st the sun to know	So like the sun would I fulfill
His proper hour to rise	The business of the day
And to give light to all below	Begin my work betimes and still
Dost send him round the skies	March on my heavenly way !
When from the Chambers of the East	Give me, O Lord, thine early grace
His morning race begins	Nor let my soul complain,
He never tires nor stops to rest	That the young morning of my days
but round the world he shines	Has all been spent in vain

In the same vein, the *emmet* and the *little busy bee* are used as examples of continual activity which keeps the child away from sinful activity (and out of Satan's clutches), so that the child may in due course « give account of each day »:

How doth the little busy bee	In works of labour or of skill
Improve each shining hour	I would be busy too
And gather honey all the day	For Satan finds some mischief still
From every opening flower !	For idle hands to do.
How skilfully she builds her cell.	In books or work or healthful play
How neat she spreads her wax	Let my first years be past.
And labours hard to store it well	<i>That I may give for every day</i>
With the sweet food she makes !	<i>Some good account at last !</i>

In Wesley's logic, then, the insistence on the virtue of work still seems to be subordinated to his soul-saving programme, although the additional components of docility and « detestation of all sedition and rebellion » understandably lay him

(3) Here, at least, we have an indication about successful reception — not only in terms of the many reprints of Watt's *Divine Songs for Children*, but also in the fact that Lewis Carroll parodied them in *Alice* (1865), presumably as verses which would be commonly known to a 19th century audience. cf. J. H. P. Pafford's editorial comments in the Oxford facsimile edition (1971, p. 93)

open to the criticism that he hindered social progress and actually encouraged exploitation of the working classes, including child labour (Warner 1930, pp. 130, 150).

That these precepts were assimilated by the workers themselves can be observed in a number of moral stories in tracts and Sunday-school books :

I determined that the business of my station should be done as well as it was in my power. and with all possible dispatch. I found by this method I could do far more work in a day than I had done before, and have plenty of time for all the means of grace . . . Idleness and religion can never be reconciled together.

Worldly business was a burden to me, but He Whom my soul loveth has removed that also. He made me willing to labour, and keeps me in perfect peace. while thus employed (James Hall and Joseph Marshall of Birr. as quoted in Warner 1930, pp. 169, 172)

When fellow workers asked a Methodist why he worked so much harder and faster than anyone else, he replied that it was because he had to live with himself on the Sabbath and feel that he'd given his best efforts. Here is the individual as his own policeman [. . .] Clearly, the Methodists as presented in this sample had reason to view their Sunday Schools and its teachings as a wonder-working movement, in terms of its effect on the minds of men (Gillespie 1988, pp. 5-12)

Some tracts go a step further, however, and detach themselves from the original spiritual intent, when they explicitly refer to the economic structure of society, and seek their justification both in middle-class arguments (i.e. industrialization as being more productive) and in its representation of the working class as naturally adverse to a demanding work-discipline :

[The boy asks why he heard a working-man complain that machines were stealing jobs from the poor. His mother answers :] because his early habits are interrupted. Instead of his old woman spinning and he weaving, at home, at his own time, he must now join with the others, in feeding the machines with cottonwool, which is cleaned, spun, and woven far better than human hands could do it. . . now he may have constant work and regular wages, instead of the uncertain payments of his handwoven piecework. . . but he dislikes [someone else setting the regular hours and weekly schedule] instead of making an extraordinary effort at one time, and then holiday (sic) afterward, as in former times » — *Social Progress*. quoted in Gillespie (*op. cit.*)

For the sake of proper balance, it must be conceded, however, that if work could be viewed as a fulfilment of divine vocation, the Methodists did not fall into the extravagance of supposing that *laborare est orare*, that a man's occupation exhausted the meaning of his calling. As Rattenbury (1941, p. 277) points out, God may be served in and by secular work; but if obedience to God is synonymous with work, there is no reason why God should still be worshipped in Church — a secular view unacceptable to the Methodist. The spiritual prevails over the secular : in the Sunday School Tract entitled *The First Day of the Week*, a maidservant will rather lose her place than iron her mistress's dresses on the Lord's Day

The middle-class perception of work relationships is reflected in Wesley's hymn « for masters », with its ambiguous mixture of concern and responsibility (albeit somewhat patronizing) on the one hand, and status awareness on the other — although status differences are confined to the present existence :

Inferiors, as a sacred trust I from the Sovereign Lord receive.
That what is suitable and just, Impartial I to all may give
O'erlook them with a guardian eye, From vice and wickedness restrain,
Mistakes and lesser faults pass by, And govern with a looser rein.
The servant faithfully discreet, Gentle to him, and good, and mild
Him would I tenderly entreat. And scarce distinguish from a child

Yet let me not my place forsake, The occasion of his stumbling prove
The servant to my bosom take. Or mar him by familiar love
O could I emulate the zeal Thou dost to thy poor servants bear
The troubles, griefs and burdens feel Of souls entrusted to my care :
In daily prayer to God commend The souls whom God expired to save
And think how soon my sway may end. And all be equal in the grave !
(Manning 1942. pp 14-15)

Critics report that in the later, early-nineteenth-Century developments of Methodism, Jabez Bunting, notably, went much further both in his utilitarian advocacy of work and in his definition of sin in terms of man's natural impulses. It may, then, be necessary to add the criterion *Time* to our conceptual toolkit. But pending comparison with a later corpus, the indictment that Methodism, through its discourse, actually and deliberately participated in the attempt to adapt the workforce to the demands of the industrialists and their machines, as Thompson would have it, is open to some reserve

What I can conclude as a linguist at this stage is that language and society are inextricably intertwined. It is difficult to decide which conditioned the other, but the mutual interdependence between Methodism and the Industrial Revolution is quite clear. The impact of Methodism on the working classes (or, in the converse view, the favourable reception which Methodism enjoyed with the miners and industrial workers) can be explained in terms of features of Methodist discourse, especially if the description of this discourse comes to encompass social parameters like audience identity and expectations — features which are not immediately textualised. It is this which allows me to claim that an analysis of this discourse in its various aspects, including the non-textual ones, has more to offer in this respect than a strictly corpus-based approach ⁽⁴⁾

(4) The question of whether Methodism was deliberately used as an instrument in manipulating the working classes into submission can not, at this stage, be answered. There are a few indications, however, which may constitute circumstantial evidence for the case : In the text corpus itself, we see that the work ethic is « internalised » by the authors of tracts who presumably belong to the laborious classes themselves, and that as time advances, the ethical implications may be detached from their religious motives (Cf the tract *Social Progress*). Outside the corpus, we can see that both Richard Baxter (whose 17th-century writings were reportedly favourite reading among the early Methodists) and Andrew Ure in his wake, advocated recourse to religion as a way of establishing a work discipline.

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