In December 1831 Adam Clarke wrote to his younger friend and admirer James Everett, “no man out of heaven is capable of writing John Wesley’s life who had not an intimate acquaintance with him.” Clarke certainly qualified but this warning has a doleful sound for the rest of us.

John Wesley’s death on March 2, 1791 produced a stream of memorial sermons and obituaries which, like the epitaphs in London’s City Road chapel which followed later, recall Johnson’s warning that, “a man is not on oath in lapidary inscriptions.”

That the Methodists should have eulogized their founder was to be expected, but that non-Methodist obituaries were almost equally full of praise may seem surprising in view of the attacks which had been leveled at Wesley for much of his public career until the late journeys which seemed like the triumphal progress of, at the very least, a tolerated national eccentric.

Yet we shall see that very shortly after his death the first biography appeared which touched off a series of Lives which revealed and aggravated divisions within Methodism rather than simply between Methodists and non–Methodists. The course and characteristics of these competing biographies has been ably charted in Richard P. Heitzenrater’s fascinating study of what he aptly calls The Elusive Mr. Wesley. The present paper has a more limited purpose. I shall focus attention on the period 1791-1831 and within this period concentrate mainly on conflicting views of Wesley’s character and some of the reasons which lay behind them. To supplement the findings of the formal biographers I shall add a few examples of public and private assessments of his character. I shall give rather more detail on some of the earliest profiles, especially Hampson’s, than to the more familiar major lives by Whitehead and Moore because they seem to me to have set the agenda for debate both on the positive and on the negative estimates of Wesley’s character later. I shall conclude with some discussion of the problems and limitations of these early profiles and a synoptic view of their findings.

Something must first be said to explain the context within which these Lives appeared. The chorus of eulogy which greeted Wesley’s death was short lived. Tensions which had long existed within Methodism erupted in ways which considerably affected the course and tone of the Lives. Wesley seemed to have secured the future of Methodism under the collective leadership of the annual Conference of traveling preachers, legally defined as one hundred named and self-perpetuating men by the Deed of Declaration of 1784. He had also left a problem, never perhaps fully solved, of how to fill the gap between conferences which he had bridged in his role as a traveling one-man executive. He had been aided (and some thought been unduly influenced) by associates like Coke and others who some critics suspected were ambitious to claim excessive power.

Methodism was still ostensibly a mere society in communion with the Church of England, but Wesley’s irregularities and his controversial ordinations in 1784 seemed to point toward formal separation despite his vehement denials. There were soon to be divisive debates on what Wesley’s plan had been: to continue the link with the Anglican Church and no more ordinations or services in church hours; or, more plausibly, to allow such concessions, where locally demanded, as a means of keeping unity and staving off formal secession; or, as more radical spirits came to demand, break with the Church and go for independence.

These disputes were complicated by a problem already stirring in Wesley’s lifetime. He had tried to insist on a “connexional” system in which he and then the preachers in Conference would control preachers’ appointments to local chapels. However, some trustees and local leaders wished to control these appointments which would have dissolved Methodism into a scattering of localized societies like so many churches of the day. More generally, there were tensions between the preachers’ growing aspirations to become a de facto ministry with high views of the divine authority of the pastoral office, with the Conference as a sort of ‘living Wesley’ (as it would later be termed), as against the rights of local leaders, including local preachers, to discipline the membership.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the traveling preachers, trustees, and other officers were divided among themselves over the question of Methodist sacraments and relations with the Anglican Church. In the explosive Bristol dispute in 1794 when trustees objected to some of the preachers administering sacraments, the superintendent, Joseph Benson, took the trustees’ side. What did develop, however, was a higher view of the ministry and of the power of Conference so as to avoid dissolution of the connexion whatever differences there were among the preachers over matters like administration of the sacraments. Furthermore, although the biographies and much Methodist correspondence of this time often seem to read as if Methodists were in an enclosed world of their own, insulated
from anything outside, they were in fact living through war, economic hardship, and political unrest which helped to color and affect their responses to assertions of authority and their view of Wesley's legacy. The leadership was anxious to assert its loyalty to King and government against persistent charges of their subversive character. Loyalty to the established order included loyalty to the established Church of England on which they had such divided opinions.3

II

The first reactions were in the eulogies to be found in obituaries and memorial sermons, both of which contained elements of biography and analysis of character.

A typical example of a non-Methodist assessment can be found in the Gentleman's Magazine. Its tone is well expressed by the remark that, "where much good is done, we should not mark any little excess." The great point is that the Wesley brothers concentrated on the needs of those who, like the Cornish miners and Kingswood colliers "had no instructor" and to them they gave a sense of "decency, morals and religion." All Wesley's talents, charity, and energy were dedicated to this end, and not to his own worldly fame and profit.4

For Methodists, Samuel Bradburn provided the most interesting and lively first sketch of Wesley's character. He had refused the invitation to preach Wesley's funeral sermon in favor of Whitehead but his character sketch was appended to a memorial sermon by Richard Rodda at Manchester.5 Bradburn was thought by some to be too witty in the pulpit, though a celebrated orator. He was seen as of "democratical" sentiments. Yet he seems to have been a favorite of Wesley and often his traveling companion. He even had both his marriages promoted, a rare favor from Wesley. Wesley persuaded a reluctant guardian to agree to the first and married the couple on the spot!6

Bradburn was particularly concerned to counter the belief that Wesley had profited from his labors, giving an interesting account of Wesley's finances and his distribution of over £1,000 per annum to charity. He praised Wesley's gifts as writer and preacher though admitting he performed less well when tired. Yet a Scottish divine had said, "It was not a masterly sermon, yet none but a master could preached it," a comment carried through into later biographies. Bradburn emphasized Wesley's cheerfulness and freedom from dissimulation though he was sometimes open to the "crafty designs of insinuating parasites." If he "happened to drop a warm expres-

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3 For the conflicts and political context see D. Hempton, Methodism and Politics 1750-1850 (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 55-80.
4 Heitzenrater, II, 150-156.
5 Heitzenrater, II, 164.
6 T. W. Blanshard, Life of Samuel Bradburn, the Methodist Demosthenes (London: E. Stock, 1871), 67.
sion” he was soon eager to be reconciled. He was always alert to “particular providences” for he saw God in everything as his Journal showed. He was loyal to King and country. Bradburn emphasized his credentials as one who had lived or traveled with Wesley frequently for seventeen years so that he, “knew his opinions, his disposition, and the very secrets of his heart.” Questioning Wesley on his religious experience the old man replied that it was generally expressed by his brother’s hymn, “O Thou who camest from above.” This testimony, with its extravagant praise tempered only with hints of forgivable imperfections, foreshadowed the tone and contents of much in the later biographies except that Bradburn omitted Wesley’s alleged love of power. So did his frequent references to personal observation and Wesley’s remarks to him which gave an air of authoritative knowledge.7

Whitehead’s funeral sermon for Wesley was equally positive, but more measured, focusing on Wesley’s theological and intellectual qualities. This was perhaps to be expected from one who, though of humble origins, had a classical education under the Moravians. He was a Methodist itinerant from 1764 to 1769; then married and failed in business; set up as a schoolmaster and then with Quaker backing qualified as an M.D. at Leyden in four and a half months! He returned to Methodism as a local preacher in 1784 and was Wesley’s favored physician. He also wrote against determinism and materialism.8

Whitehead set out to display Wesley’s leading characteristics as “man and minister.” He defended the role of learning for ministers and stressed Wesley’s knowledge of languages, arts, and sciences. Though Wesley depended on God’s grace, he followed both scripture and reason—he who does not do so is liable to be a prey to imagination and be “carried away by his passions.” Wesley avoided “enthusiasm” because he possessed a correct knowledge of the order of salvation from repentance to perfection and his religion rested on the solid evidence of the senses. His ministry was as effective and valuable among the common people by making them good citizens and loyal subjects as it was in making them good Christians. Whitehead concluded with an edifying description of Wesley’s deathbed.9

In what was soon to unfold as the pattern of Methodist and other biographies of Wesley, it is instructive to set alongside these public eulogies, a private assessment of Wesley’s character by John Pawson in his manuscript

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7 Samuel Bradburn, A Sketch of Mr. Wesley’s Character, originally Manchester 1791 appended to a sermon by Richard Rodda; reprinted by Thomas Jackson, ed., Select Letters...by John Wesley (London, 1837), ix-xxvii.
8 On his life, see notes on John Pawson’s manuscript “Life of Dr. Whitehead,” Methodist Church Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester (MCA); Tyerman manuscripts (uncatalogued), III, ff.43-78; and Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., Dictionary of National Biography (London: Oxford University Press, 1949-1950), II:1057.
9 J. Whitehead, A Discourse ...at the Funeral of the late Rev. Mr. John Wesley (London, 1791).
autobiography, which assessment was only published a few years ago. I cite it at this point because it appears to have been written in the year of Wesley’s death and independently of Hampson’s biography of the same year. Pawson was a leading preacher who knew Wesley well. Though he certainly had disagreements with him he was a man of great integrity with a single-minded devotion to what he saw as fundamental Methodism, stressing the preaching and pastoral role of the ministry. Unfortunately he was distinctly humorless and his disapproval of anything which he thought diverted from serious religion made it difficult for him to appreciate some aspects of Wesley’s many-sided interests. We shall see that his lack of interest in general culture had a disastrous effect on Wesley’s papers later. It should be added that he was very hostile to Charles Wesley and his brief notice of Charles’ death was shocking in its doubts about Charles’ edifying end. This reflects the bad relations between Charles and some of the preachers which would also affect biographies of John Wesley.

For Pawson, John Wesley was “a very great man,” “the providential instrument of a glorious revival of pure and undefiled religion,” though some “made him something more than human.” He had a “remarkable good natural understanding” improved by “a very liberal education” and had “a clear manifestation of the love of God to his own soul” and preached a “full, free and present salvation through faith in our blessed Redeemer.”

As a preacher Wesley could be truly edifying, but in later life was too “formal, dry and too much upon a legal plan” unless he had prepared properly. His conversation was, “generally lively, entertaining and profitable, but sometimes very light and trifling” for he was too prone to reflect the company he was in and, “wanted some very serious, sensible, spiritual man to lead him by the hand and to begin the conversation.” In other words someone like Pawson! Despite his many excellent qualities Wesley had “some very great weaknesses.” His “natural temper was exceedingly warm” and not always under control. In government, “he was extremely fond of power, it was as dear to him almost as his life.” Perhaps he “used it to as good purpose and abused it as little” as anyone in his position, but, “he certainly thought that God had committed this authority to him...and would never allow it to be called into question or share it.” In a variety of affairs he “acted as a politician,” meaning with something that looked artful and designing, though perhaps this was necessary when dealing with such a variety of people. Nor was he sufficiently guarded against flattery, some thinking he loved

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Methodist History

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10“Some Account” f.36; “Wesley Observed,” 16.
11For a similar warning to a friend expecting Wesley’s visit, see Pawson, Letters, I. 59 (in 1788).
it. Designing people, therefore, took advantage of him and led him to value worthless people who set him against his real friends.13 But his greatest weakness was, “his extreme fondness of the company of agreeable young women” and though there was “nothing criminal in this” it grieved his friends and lowered him in their estimation. Pawson concluded that Wesley was raised up by Christ to do great good and died full of faith and love. The criticism about young women does not appear in the biographies apart from comment on the Hopkey and Murray affairs and Wesley’s disastrous marriage, but elsewhere Pawson found he had to refute some nasty Methodist gossip.14

III

Now for the biographers. Who were they? How well were they qualified? How and why did they come to undertake their task? It is curious to reflect that Boswell’s Life of Johnson, which marked a new and startling stage in the art of biography, was finally published on May 16, 1791, just two and a half months after Wesley’s death, though a sample of his methods had already appeared in his Journal of a Voyage to the Hebrides in 1786. Boswell’s revelations of the eccentricities and weaknesses of his friend struck some contemporaries as intrusive and improper. Yet his intention was to honor his hero by a complete portrait of a formidable moral personality, in its own way as exemplary as any Methodist biography. He did so, moreover, by something more than a collection of anecdotes. Johnson’s views and character are displayed by interaction with his friends like a series of vivid theatrical cameos.15 There is no evidence that Wesley read the Hebrides book, but he did meet Boswell and read his Account of Corsica.16 He knew and respected Johnson, but one suspects he, too, would have felt Boswell’s Life went too far.

The early biographers who had known Wesley certainly used anecdotes to record isolated remarks by Wesley or even to underlie views they ascribed to him, but there is nothing of Boswell’s vivid realization of a formidable personality in conversation. They did indeed share with Boswell one handicap as we shall see, that is, they only knew directly the old, not the young, man.

To be fair, they lacked the culture and outlook of Johnson’s circle and, as we shall see, were bred in a very different biographical tradition, though Whitehead and perhaps Hampson possibly had broader views. Sadly, I do not know of any profile of Wesley by a woman, though the considerable sur-

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13In his manuscript “Life of Whitehead” Pawson thought John as good a judge of character as Charles. See Tyerman manuscript III, f.50.
viving correspondence of Methodist women could pay dividends here and work already under way shows how his personality as well as theirs can be revealed in it.  

Wesley's circle suggests several possible candidates for a "minor Boswell"—people like Thomas Coke, Alexander Mather, and Joseph Benson as well as Pawson. Bradburn had his say, but the rather elusive figure of Joseph Bradford was also a traveling companion who apparently was capable of quietly resisting Wesley's will on occasion. Alexander Knox, an ex-Methodist, we shall see, wrote a remarkable appreciation of some aspects of Wesley. Adam Clarke wanted to write a biography, but had to settle for his valuable _Memoirs of the Wesley Family_ instead. Only Henry Moore of the close companions actually achieved the task and because of a mixture of circumstances, obstacles faced by all the early biographers and the problem of the necessary degree of detachment from the venerable and formidable leader his _Life_ was to be a deeply flawed performance.

Was a biography needed at all? Henry Moore's first thought after Wesley's death was that no biography was necessary because Wesley himself had supplied it in his _Journal_ and other writings. He claimed that he only changed his mind when he learned of the threat of Hampson's _Memoirs_ of Wesley. Even then he thought it should be chiefly a compilation from Wesley's own writings. "Wesley his own biographer" has surfaced periodically but we shall see this approach faces considerable problems.

IV

In any event the need to produce an acceptable life of Wesley for Methodists was precipitated by the news, soon after Wesley's death, that John Hampson, Jr. was about to publish one. In what follows I shall briefly characterize the biographers with only summary comments on the contents of their work. Hampson, however, demands rather more detail because, as it turned out, his description of Wesley's character determined the shape and much of the content of all that followed. Hampson was the son of an older John Hampson. Both had been itinerants and both had left Wesley in opposition over the Deed of Declaration of 1784 which omitted them from the "Legal Hundred." The elder Hampson had a reputation as a critic of the Church of England and as a "republican." The son obtained an Oxford education and settled in Sunderland as an Anglican priest.

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1 For an example of a woman acting as go-between to persuade Rev. Peard Dickinson about Wesley's dislike of his ruffles, see Tyerman, manuscript II, f.194 in 1790.
Hampson no doubt received some of his information about Wesley from his father who had known Wesley since 1752. Indeed one unconfirmed statement has it that the Memoirs really came from the father. There is certainly a flavor of "republican" or "democratical" sentiments, at least in ecclesiastical terms, in his criticisms of Wesley's authoritarianism. His preface shows that the book was begun before Wesley's death and that he had expected that his candid comments would receive a response from the old man.

Hampson certainly had much to say in praise of Wesley, but for Methodists this was undermined by his criticisms of Wesley's theology, especially on conscious assurance of the Holy Spirit and Christian perfection. Perhaps even more hurtful was the blame laid on Coke and the preachers for pressuring Wesley to issue the Deed of Declaration and the 1784 ordinations, both of which Hampson criticized severely.

Hampson's detailed analysis of Wesley's character is of great importance for the way in which, like it or not, it settled the agenda and much of the contents—though omitting, softening or justifying negative comments—of later biographies. His famous description of Wesley was repeatedly plagiarized without acknowledgment and to this day fixes a vivid and indelible image at least of Wesley in old age. He is that venerable figure: snowy-haired; neat; clean; plainly dressed, his "hilarity" contrasted with sober Methodists (Pawson perhaps) who "seem to have reckoned laughter among the mortal sins."

On Wesley's writings and character Hampson's remarks were often quoted without acknowledgment or at least paraphrased for their positive content while the careful reservations could be omitted or glossed over. Having commented on Wesley's writings, literary style, and skill in controversy, Hampson went on to evaluate his preaching, temperament, and extensive charity. His preaching, Hampson thought, suffered from too great frequency for, "he made it a point to preach if he could stand upon his legs." Wesley's learning is praised, though he is seen as lacking a capacity for science and history. Temperamentally, he was notable for his "placability" though he had a naturally hasty temper subdued by religion. However, he was more temperate to non-Methodists (except infidels) than to Methodist critics. To them he was much sharper, though always ready to forgive. His temperance was extraordinary, even excessive, though relaxed in later life.

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21 So Alexander Gordon's article John Hampson in *Dictionary of National Biography*.
22 Hampson, III:50-64.
23 Hampson, II:156-170.
24 Hampson, II:176-217.
26 See below for the later biographers.
27 Hampson, III:144-164, 165-209.
28 Hampson, III: 170.
His “superstition” is rather briefly referred to, and then he says that he thought Wesley lacked “softness and sensibility” even in his charity. “He had no attachments...that partook of the genius of friendship” and his “attachments” seemed to be for “public” considerations, i.e., the advantage of Methodism. Above all Hampson inveighed at length on Wesley’s insistence on absolute power over his connexion.

News of Hampson’s forthcoming biography, even though its contents were not known, led the executors of Wesley’s will to issue a warning against “spurious and hasty accounts” and the promise of “an authentic account” from the trustees of his papers. There was every reason to suppose that Hampson’s account would be hostile. The trustees of Wesley’s papers, who were to publish what they thought fit and burn the rest, were Coke, Henry Moore, and Whitehead. Whitehead was chosen because of his greater leisure and residence in London and Moore committed Wesley’s papers to him for the Life, an act which he was to regret, with a powerful sense of regret, for the rest of his life. The error, arguably, damaged and distorted the whole course of Wesley biographies in the period under our surveying.

The rights and wrongs of the controversy which followed may be variously judged, but it is hard to escape the impression that Whitehead was most at fault. Having accepted an honorarium of 100 guineas for his work he pressed for more, the various proposals and counter-proposals centering around his evident desire to maximize profits for as long as possible before the book committee took control, at which point, as was customary, the profits would go entirely to a preacher’s charity. Whitehead also wanted to retain the copyright until the work was in print, not only for profit, but also to avoid censorship by the committee and Conference. For ever since Wesley’s day, care had been taken that Methodist publications should be vetted in this way. Moore and his supporters claimed that Whitehead must have known the terms of Methodist publication for the charity and that no censorship was intended. But Whitehead, standing on his status as a professional man and author, argued that his honor and integrity required security that his book would not be mutilated as well as his right to a substantial profit. He had just reason to fear that the book would be censored, as indeed it was in a later edition from Dublin in 1806 after his death. What made everything far worse was that as the dispute went on there were other conflicts between the Conference and Wesley’s executors over a codicil to Wesley’s will which transferred control of Methodist publications from the executors to a committee of preachers. Whitehead also enrolled a committee to support his cause drawn from City Road trustees hostile to the preachers. Behind this lay the divisions noted earlier in this paper between the preachers’ authority

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29 Moore’s “Plain Account” in Faithful unto Death, 91.  
30 See Moore’s “Plain Account” in Faithful unto Death, 85-125, and notes on pamphlets therein; short account is found in Stevenson, City Road Chapel, 131-139. I have examined a sample of pamphlets on both sides.
in the Conference and local trustees keen to control their pulpits. Whitehead’s status as a local preacher also pitted him against the ministerial pretensions of the itinerants. For some of the participants, including Whitehead, there was also the ongoing debate about Methodist ordinations and sacraments, and opinion for and against the drift towards separation. Whitehead, at least in his book, was to be extremely hostile and satirical about Wesley’s ordinations, blamed on ambitious preachers. Meanwhile Henry Moore became more and more desperate and indignant about Whitehead’s illegal (as he saw it) retention of Wesley’s papers.

Faced with Whitehead’s obduracy, the Conference resolved as early as October 1791 to publish an authorized life, the profits exclusively for the preacher’s charity. This, they hoped, would counter Hampson’s portrait of Wesley, but more immediately deprive Whitehead of his profits when he proceeded to publish independently. The two sides had already been circularizing Methodist societies with rival versions of events and now the preachers urged them not to buy Whitehead’s projected book. Coke and Moore were commissioned to write the rival Life. It was written in great haste, mostly by Moore and allegedly in four weeks. Published in April 1792, it sold 10,000 copies with a second printing appearing when the Conference met in July.

Coke and Moore’s Life is generally agreed to be of little value. Coke was an Anglican clergyman and Wesley’s main aide in his later years. As Hampson darkly hinted, and others had often suspected, he was thought by his enemies to be behind the Deed of Declaration and ordinations with a view to inheriting Wesley’s authority. Moore had been a confidant of Wesley’s later years and a supporter of Methodist ordinations and the authority of Conference. He himself had been ordained by Wesley and took this very seriously as a sign that Wesley intended this to apply to England. The preface to the Life said nothing of the Whitehead affair and made the best of an embarrassing situation over the Wesley papers by claiming that, “the authors had had plenty of opportunities to inspect them, so that there is nothing material respecting him that is not given in the volume,” and that Wesley himself had informed them of many important matters not in the Journal. In reality they relied largely on the Journal apart from some personal knowledge of Wesley’s later years. They implicitly defended Coke over the Deed of Declaration and ordinations. Wesley’s writings are praised and defended against strictures on his style by making the valid point that he wrote only to serve God and the people, not to achieve literary fame. The analysis of his character follows the positive aspects of

3Faithful unto Death, 120 and n.58.
3Coke and Moore, 480.
Hampson without naming him, and on Wesley's appearance without even acknowledging they were quoting. A few touches of their own are added here and there, but nothing in the way of real criticism is admitted.\textsuperscript{35}

Whitehead's \textit{Life} finally appeared in two volumes in 1793 and 1796. It was in fact a dual life of John and Charles (like Moore's many years later). Though denied much commercial success by the circumstances of its creation (and Whitehead took care to give his own version of the affair in the preface), it is a much more accomplished and useful work in some respects than its origins and contents allowed Methodists to admit. Wesley is in fact handled more positively and even perceptively than in Hampson. The real offense lay in persistent hostility to the itinerant preachers who are blamed for ambitiously perverting original Methodism for their own ends especially in the "grand climacteric year" of 1784.\textsuperscript{36} This "ambition" he sees appearing well back in the 1750s and the danger of separation from the Church he saw as only one half of the threat to the original Methodism. This he saw as a "bridge" between Church and Dissent, a society open to both.\textsuperscript{37} He saw Wesley as being unwillingly pressurized in his weakening old age by Coke and the rest. As a physician and something of a psychologist, he has interesting comments on Wesley's alleged credulity and "enthusiasm," for while acknowledging that he could draw too much from unconfirmed testimony, in principle he accepted that there really is divine intervention though working through laws as regular as the laws of nature and that apparitions cannot be ruled out as impossible. He did think that changes in character are less sudden than Wesley often supposed and he recognized that Wesley himself modified his views in later life.\textsuperscript{38}

On Wesley's appearance and character Whitehead follows Hampson closely, if with defensive modifications. He quotes him frequently, often with broad agreement, using the quotations as headings for discussion of particular points yet never naming him.\textsuperscript{39} On Wesley's writings, he explains limitations of style as due to adaptation for the good of readers short of time and money.\textsuperscript{40} Wesley's grasp of power is excused and blame for its abuse laid on the preachers later, whereas Wesley used it to defend the people from the preachers.\textsuperscript{41}

John Pawson, who knew and liked Whitehead and had tried to mediate between him and the hostile preachers, nevertheless thought him much at a fault in the controversy. However, when he came to read his \textit{Life} again in

\textsuperscript{35}Coke and Moore, 517-539.
\textsuperscript{37}Whitehead, II: 282-84.
\textsuperscript{38}Whitehead, I: 296-298; II: 114-115, 309.
\textsuperscript{39}Whitehead, II: 463-485.
\textsuperscript{40}Whitehead, II : 465-466.
\textsuperscript{41}Whitehead, II: 474-477.
1798, he thought it not as bad as Henry Moore claimed, the chief errors being due to Whitehead's reading Charles Wesley's manuscripts. In a manuscript life of Whitehead, Pawson corrected what he saw as Whitehead's misrepresentations based on Charles's hostility to the preachers so as to exonerate them from ambition. He claimed that Wesley had forced ordination on them and was furious when some refused it. Perhaps Pawson protested too much for there had certainly been pressure from the preachers as early as the 1750s. Incidentally, he claimed that Whitehead had been willing to submit his work to the preachers, alter what offended, and acknowledge this in a new edition.\(^4\) Rehabilitated as a preacher, Whitehead was actually commissioned in 1800 to write an epitaph for Wesley for City Road Chapel by his old supporters, the trustees. After the usual eulogy the epitaph subtly stated that Wesley was, "The patron and friend of lay preachers, by whose aid he extended the plan of itinerant preaching." When the tablet was renovated in 1822 this was replaced by, "Was the chief promoter and patron of the plan of itinerant preaching."\(^4\)

With Whitehead's Life the first crop of biographies came to an end until a fresh controversy over Southey's Life from 1820 provoked another. In the meantime, however, a painful event had taken place which would affect all later would-be biographers of Wesley. This was the fate of Wesley's manuscripts after Whitehead had handed them back in 1796. They seem to have passed through several hands until they reached John Pawson, quite wrongly as Moore, the most available trustee, rightly felt. According to Pawson the Book Steward George Storey thought there was nothing in the papers worth publishing. Pawson largely agreed. Most of them he regarded as "rubbish," some of which, "ought be seen by none but himself [Wesley] which one would wonder he had not destroyed." But then comes a remark which must chill the blood of a Wesley scholar. Pawson mentions "some of the little books of which there are a good many, but I think there is little or nothing in any of them that will be useful." They were, he said, in a shorthand which Pawson claimed Moore would decipher better than he could, "yet I can pretty well make them out."\(^4\) These are obviously Wesley's private diaries, so nearly lost. For Pawson, having burnt large quantities of papers, sent Moore the rest. It seems that some other preachers took papers as souvenirs or for safety, including Adam Clarke. With commendable restraint, Moore, describing the holocaust including Pawson's notorious destruction of Wesley's copy of Shakespeare, commented that, "Mr. Pawson was a worthy holy man, but was possessed of but little taste." He thought ministers should stick to the study of divinity.\(^4\) Deplorable though all this sounds, Pawson

\(^4\)Stevenson, City Road Chapel, 342.
\(^4\)Everett and Clarke, I: 211; Stevenson, City Road Chapel, 135.
had a case. The will said nothing of a biography being written, only of printing or destroying papers. Pawson, saying there was little worth publishing in the papers, commented that, "I think Mr. Wesley wanted money too much in his lifetime to leave any thing behind him which was likely to take the market." He once complained that Wesley was obsessive in pushing preachers to make sales, another example of his "political" behavior. Once he refused to make old John Hampson a superintendent because he sold so few books! It is actually very likely that Pawson interpreted the will correctly, but Moore was a would-be biographer, not a salesman.

Before going on to the Southey affair, it is of interest to see a view of Wesley from a Calvinist Evangelical. In 1800 Thomas Haweis, an Evangelical clergyman in parish service but closely associated with the Huntingdon Connexion, published his *Impartial and Succinct History of the Rise, Decline and Revival of the Church of Christ* (3 vols.) Neither succinct nor impartial, this is a typical specimen of evangelical history in which signs of gospel light shine out through the patristic and Popish darkness. Unlike his predecessors, the Milners, he carried forward the story from the Reformation to the 18th century. Hence his brief profiles of Wesley and Whitefield which balance praise with criticism. The point of interest is that Haweis, though a firm predestinarian and Anglican incumbent, had participated in Lady Huntingdon’s irregularities and warmly appreciated and supported all types of “methodism” and evangelicalism. It is remarkable that a man with his associations could take such an objective view of Wesley. He said, “I hope never to be ashamed of the friendship of John Wesley.” He briefly pays tribute in the usual way to Wesley’s scholarship, good company, preaching (“chaste and solemn” and lacking Whitefield’s “coruscations of eloquence”), and his control of his people. He allows that it would not have been surprising if Wesley, “had not sometimes thought of himself more highly than he ought to think.” One tiny detail he adds not found elsewhere—that a small cast was occasionally visible in one eye, evidently not a confusion with Whitefield as he knew both men. The real surprise is that this predestinarian, recognizing that Wesley had Arminian views, gives a very fair description of Wesley’s view of salvation: freewill and holiness yet all dependent on grace. He only criticizes Wesley for his vehement and unfair attacks on Calvinists as prone to antinomianism, a fair enough comment on Wesley’s tone in such attacks.

My comments on Southey must be cursory. An expert view of his *Life* will appear in the papers at the recent Manchester conference from Professor W.A. Speck who is working on a life of Southey. Southey had a fascinating career, beginning with Wordsworth and Coleridge, as a radical in religion

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6I have used Joseph Milner, *The History of the Church of Christ* with continuations by Isaac Milner and an extract from Haweis (Edinburgh, 1840), 1053, 1063-1064.
and politics, through Unitarianism to at least apparent Anglican orthodoxy and political conservatism. He had in 1818 already published articles on Wesley which excited correspondence from Charles Wesley’s children, Charles and Sally, and from James Everett who (unlike his friend Adam Clarke), rather admired Southey. Southey’s *Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* had to be answered if only because of his literary reputation and likely circulation outside the Methodist world. In brief, though paying tribute to Wesley’s talents, zeal, and good effects on the lower orders Southey, while giving a very fair description of Wesley’s theology, saw it as deviating from Anglican norms. His irregularities, though forced on him by the circumstances of his mission, led inexorably towards schism. The two criticisms which attracted particular attention from Wesley’s admirers were the charges of love of power, credulity, and superstition. “However he may have deceived himself, the love of power was a ruling passion of his mind.”50 Wesley’s, “disposition to believe in miraculous manifestations of divine favors led him sometimes to encourage an enthusiasm which impeached his own judgement and brought a scandal upon Methodism.”51 “His disposition to believe whatever he was told, however improbable the fact, or insufficient the evidence, was not confined to preternatural tales. He listened to every old woman’s nostrum for a disease,” set up as a physician, and published them in his *Primitive Physick*.52 But interestingly, on the Epworth poltergeist Old Jeffery, Southey allowed his reality as a “preternatural” phenomenon, while denying this implied a “miracle.”53 Perhaps the most valuable reaction to Southey came in Alexander Knox’s *Remarks on the Life and Character of John Wesley*, originally written from 1825, which caused Southey to change his mind on the “ambition” issue though he did not live to revise his work. Knox’s *Remarks* first appeared in an edition by Southey’s son in 1846.54 Knox was an Irish friend of Wesley, formerly a Methodist, whose insight into Wesley’s theology and personality lacks any effective parallel among the early biographers.

Knox argued that Wesley did not show the characteristics of an ambitious man—as witness his criticisms of his creation in later life and his even excessive trust of his associates.55 Knox agreed that Wesley was too credulous and ascribed supernatural origins to events which could be more plausibly explained naturally. He jumped to conclusions too readily, believing what he wished to believe. What Knox was anxious to reject was the notion

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51 Southey, II: 81.
52 Southey, II: 166.
53 Southey, II: 184.
54 Southey, I: 20.
55 Southey, I: x.
56 Southey, II: 354-355. This and the following references are from Knox.
that Wesley was a “vulgar enthusiast” in the pattern of the visionary millenarians of the mid-17th century.\textsuperscript{56} He conceded that he might look like this and even that Wesley, “would have been an enthusiast if he could, but there was a soundness in his imagination which preserved him, personally, from all contagion of actual fanaticism.”\textsuperscript{57} In a fascinating and perceptive discussion of Wesley’s revelations of himself in correspondence, especially with women, Knox showed how here too he was liable to display his “enthusiastic” tendencies, but also how female sensibilities seemed to draw from him a fuller exposure of his spiritual experience.\textsuperscript{58} Finally, more than anyone else in this period, Knox, who has been seen as a precursor of the Oxford Movement in his concern for Christian holiness, was able to place Wesley’s quest since 1725 in a larger perspective. He related him to the early Fathers and the Christian Platonists of the 17th century as a pursuer of “perfection.” This, he believed, was the thread running through all Wesley’s apparent changes in direction. Justification for him had from the start included the beginnings of moral regeneration. It was not, as in “modern” definitions of the doctrine, simply a “forensic acquittal in the court of heaven.”\textsuperscript{59} The Methodist reaction to Southey was much cruder. Richard Watson’s \textit{Observations on Mr. Southey’s Life of Wesley} (1820) was particularly so. Watson had not known Wesley. He had begun as a Wesleyan itinerant, moved to the Methodist New Connexion, then back to the Wesleyans. He was of a new generation of preachers which was said to have added culture to the pulpit and was the author of the first Wesleyan systematic theology. He was also a supporter of the “high” Wesleyan doctrine of the pastoral office. His fundamental criticism of Southey was that his attack on Wesley and Methodism’s teaching would logically undermine Anglican doctrine and even Christianity itself. They, too, would have to be judged enthusiastic and fanatical. But Southey had no competence as a theologian and judged religion more as a philosopher who gave naturalistic explanations for everything (except, inconsistently, the case of Old Jeffery). Unless he accepts the reality of providence, the influence of the Holy Spirit and God’s work in redeeming fallen humanity, he cannot be a Christian, so Watson argued.\textsuperscript{60} As to Wesley’s character, Watson acknowledged Southey’s tributes but rejected the charges of credulity and power-seeking. Supernatural phenomena Watson defended, as Wesley had done, by the traditional arguments from scripture, the wise men of all ages, and competent witnesses, only doubted in recent times. Wesley’s power had not been sought and it was retained from necessity, not ambition. It was exercised with mildness and integrity unlike men of ambition.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{56}Southey, II: 339.
\textsuperscript{57}Southey, II: 356-357.
\textsuperscript{58}Southey, II: 339.
\textsuperscript{59}Southey, II: 345-347.
\textsuperscript{61}Watson, 189-197, 199-207.
Once again we can see Methodists responding to an agenda they had not chosen, but in the Southey-Watson case can also be seen more starkly than before a clash between two different world-views even though this was in reality more nuanced than Watson admitted in his portrayal of Southey as little better than a materialist. However satisfying Watson’s attack may have been to Methodists, the scale and comprehensive coverage of Southey’s Life seemed to demand a Methodist response of equal scope. At the Conference of 1820 a number of “influential persons” desired to counter “the worldly-minded and sinister” view of Wesley given by Southey. Adam Clarke was urged to respond and offered £500 for the copyright by Joseph Butterworth the Methodist M.P.62

Clarke was certainly willing to oblige. He had been collecting materials for a Life for a long time as he revealed in a letter as early as 1809.63 He was encouraged, he told his friend James Everett, by the fact that, “It has often appeared to me that Mr Wesley was more free and playful with me than with others, under an impression that I might possibly contemplate a life of him; he entered into various family and other affairs; and dwelt upon them, as if anxious to impress upon me and give the most correct information. I have many things that have never been presented to a public.... As yet we have no proper character of him: the men who have written of him, have not properly understood him.”64 Amongst his informants was Sally Wesley, Charles’ daughter, whose anecdotes from herself and her mother were sent to Clarke and were designed to defend her father’s and uncle’s characters. For example, she blamed the Grace Murray disaster on Murray’s own conduct.65

Clarke, as one of the young confidants of Wesley’s later years, seemed at least as well qualified to be his biographer as Moore. He was Methodism’s great polymath, indeed some doubted whether his scholarly obsessions could be combined with the work of a minister.66 Yet he was also enormously active in this role too and earned effusive and affectionate compliments from that severe judge, John Pawson.67 He had become suspect for his obstinate denial of the eternal sonship of Christ and was a hero to James Everett and others critical of the Methodist leadership and was seen by some as leader of a party opposed to Richard Watson.68

In a letter to the Book Committee Clarke explained that he needed Wesley’s papers but that Moore had refused to part with them. He must therefore turn to work on the Wesley family instead. “I reluctantly forbear to

62Everett, Clarke II:141.
63Clarke to Sally Wesley, May 17, 1809 in S. Dunn, Life of Adam Clarke (London, 1863), 222.
64Everett, II: 142.
65Wesley College Bristol manuscript, D6/1/276 onwards.
67But the austere Pawson was enormously impressed by his character and ministerial work. Pawson, Letters, I:147, 149, 154-155.
68Watson to R. Rodda, Methodist Church Archives, Manuscript, MAM 111.7.23 on March 7, 1818 though Watson thought better of Clarke than of his supporters.
make any reflections on their detention [the papers] and its principle.” Clarke evidently thought Moore was wrong to refuse access to the papers. He told Everett that Moore’s answer to his request, “I shall not soon forget.” Moore said, “I should be glad to see a life of Mr. Wesley worthy of you and shall give you all the help I can in honor; but I will not let you have the care of the papers of Mr. Wesley confided to me.” Clarke said, “I was not a little surprised.” Recounting the Whitehead story, he affirmed that the papers should go to the connexion and be open to him, otherwise he could not undertake a life. Moore even refused Clarke’s offer of material and help to write a Life himself since Clarke had been commissioned to do it. Why did he refuse? Everett, ever suspicious of the Methodist hierarchy, thought that Moore wanted to write a Life himself, but also that the “backstairs influence” of Watson with the hierarchy was exercised to foil Clarke. The most likely explanation is that Moore, still haunted by resentment and guilt over the Whitehead affair, was determined not to be caught again and stuck to a narrower interpretation of his trustee duties than Clarke accepted.

Clarke never quite gave up hope of writing, if not a full life, at least a substantial profile of Wesley in his Wesley Family. But a third edition of the work was turned down. Was the putative Life a great loss? Possibly so in terms of information. Furthermore, he thought the Book Committee unwise as well as unjust to demand the need to submit such a book to their scrutiny since the reviewers had said that Hampson’s book was “for truth and the public,” Coke and Moore’s “for the connexion,” and he did not wish to appear to write for a “party.” Clarke’s veneration for Wesley was even less this side of idolatry than Moore’s. Even Everett thought that, competent though his performance was in the Wesley Family (which saved much priceless material from destruction only just in time), he lacked the talents for a full-scale Life of someone as complex as Wesley.

It was Moore’s Life which instead appeared in two volumes in 1824-1825. It emerged from the need to offer a full-scale corrective to Southey, but the result was distinctly odd. In his preface Moore certainly criticized Southey, but only after commenting on Hampson, while the central thrust of the preface was a résumé of the Whitehead affair with a complaint that some Wesley manuscripts had still not reached him. “Wherever they are found, they belong to me; and those which have been quoted, either by Dr. Whitehead or any other person, are my property.” The body of the biogra-

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aDunn, Clarke, 222.
bEverett, Clarke, II: 163-164.
cEverett, Clarke, I: 166.
dJ. E. B. Clarke, An Account of... Adam Clarke, 3 vols. (London, 1833), III: 351; Dunn, 172.
eEverett, Clarke, II: 142.
fFor Clarke’s eulogy of Wesley as supreme in everything from scholarship to politics as well as religion see Everett, Clarke, I: 165, quoting from Adam Clarke, Miscellaneous Works (London: William Tegg, 1868), VII:359.
gEverett, Clarke, II:184.
Character and Criticism in Some Early Biographies

Phy makes clear a desire above all to correct Whitehead. Indeed a note at the end of Moore's manuscript account of the old controversy states that in response to Southey, Moore, "took Dr. Whitehead's Life of Mr. Wesley, corrected it in many places, improved it throughout, and added to it in any important valuable original particulars." 77

Whether or not this is strictly accurate, Moore's remarkable dependence on Whitehead has struck informed readers of his Life. Moore certainly trades on his own friendship with Wesley to give an impression of authority and authenticity to his interpretation of Wesley and quotes conversations with him for this purpose though, as I remarked earlier, without the vivid realizations of a Boswell. What is exposed on closer scrutiny is the extent and character of his plagiarizing, briefly but devastatingly exposed by Heitzenrater. 78 It is not simply a matter of failure to acknowledge sources, but also of presenting this material on occasion as if it were his own eyewitness account. Thus, on Wesley's appearance he largely reproduces Hampson's famous description if with some touches of his own. The whole performance, sadly, underlines how the Whitehead controversy had deprived Moore of whatever ability he might have had to construct an independent assessment of Wesley. Moreover, as I emphasized earlier, behind Whitehead lurked the largely unacknowledged primary agenda from Hampson. Furthermore, despite all the additional details and discussions showing the enrichment of the sources from access to the Wesley papers, Moore's general survey of Wesley's writings and character closely follow the lines laid down, and much of the wording, in the earlier Coke and Moore Life.

On the controversies over the Deed of Declaration and ordinations Moore naturally exonerates Coke and the preachers and places the responsibility on Wesley himself. He justifies Wesley by saying that though he adhered firmly to scripture, the Primitive Church, and the Church of England, in the end, where necessity forced him to do so, he followed scripture alone. 79 His writings should be judged by the dedication of his talents to the work of God and human need, not literary fame. 80 But Moore praised them all without discrimination, citing also Oxford approval for the Wisdom of God in Creation. 81 The same positive tone, with little allowance for weakness, also marks his survey of Wesley's character, largely following Whitehead with some touches of his own. Thus, he quotes Briggs' criticism of Wesley's religious experience, but comments that Wesley could not be as free in revealing it as a pastor of a regular congregation. 82 On Wesley's tem-

77 "Faithful unto Death," 125. The manuscript is not in Moore's hand, though corrected by him.
78 Heitzenrater, Elusive Mr. Wesley, II, 178-79.
79 Moore, Wesley, II: 293-307, 326-347.
80 Moore, Wesley, II: 400.
81 Moore, Wesley, II: 407-408.
82 Moore, Wesley, II: 153-154.
perament he also quotes the old man’s claim that he is led mainly by reason though sometimes along with impressions and apt scriptures. “Give me a reason,” he often said to Moore.83

On the “power” issue he quotes Wesley’s defense and his feeling of duty to a providential call. While on “credulity,” he repeats Watson’s defense with quotations from other authorities for his general position.84

Heitzenrater, recognizing Moore’s faults, nevertheless feels that on the whole his is the most useful of the early biographies.85 Certainly this is so for the amount of material it contains. It also lacks Whitehead’s distortions over some major issues. Yet it is disappointing to find that it lacks a really independent view of Wesley’s character. Even leaving aside his lack of serious critical appraisal of some of Wesley’s generally acknowledged weaker points, Moore’s description is much inferior to Bradburn’s and Hampson’s lively presentation of Wesley’s character.

Though Moore’s was the last of the eyewitness biographers, the impact of Southey was not yet exhausted. The Conference of 1831 commissioned Watson to write a Life for “general circulation” which did not necessarily mean a snub to Moore’s more massive work. But at the same Conference there was a curious exchange between Moore and the formidable Jabez Bunting. Moore announced that he, “had some valuable documents relating to Mr. Wesley and intended to publish a ‘Life’ of him but must burn some of his papers.” Bunting rather pointedly remarked that no man needed less reminder about Trusts for Wesley than Moore, but why had not the papers been published or burnt as the trust required? Moore then rather tartly remarked that, “Mr. Watson had done well: he could write well upon a broomstick, and the more knots in it the better. He wished well to all but he meant to attempt another Life.”86 Whether or not he felt aggrieved at Watson’s being invited to write a Life for “general circulation” he must surely have felt so when, at the 1832 Conference Watson was asked to expand his Life into a “standard and authorized life of our venerable founder.”87 In any event Watson died before he could write the work. Moore had certainly embarrassed the hierarchy on more than one occasion, but Clarke, too, had doubts about Watson’s fitness for the work. Clearly with Watson in mind he claimed in November 1831 that only himself and Moore remained of those who knew Wesley and that he could not see how anyone who had not known him and the modus operandi of early Methodism could write a Life.88 Perhaps James Everett was not being paranoid when he claimed that Bunting had urged Watson to write the Life “to keep Clarke ‘out of the market’ as it is phrased.”89

83 Moore, Wesley, II: 294.
84 Moore, Wesley, II: 441-450.
85 Heitzenrater, Elusive Mr. Wesley, II: 179.
87 Heitzenrater, Elusive Mr. Wesley, II: 182.
88 Clarke, Memoirs of Clarke, III: 350-351.
89 Everett, Clarke, I: 165-166.
Moore, incidentally, had a final disappointment. When, in 1836, the Conference resolved to resume ordination by laying on of hands, Moore, seeing himself as the last surviving man ordained by Wesley, thought he should have been asked to participate to maintain what he evidently regarded as a kind of Wesleyan succession intended by Wesley when the time was right. Whether or not he was correct, he was ignored, possibly as a deliberate snub, but also because a Wesleyan view had evolved of a "virtual ordination" even of preachers not formally ordained by Wesley.

This was one of the more striking features of Watson's otherwise unremarkable *Life* of 1831. He claimed that even the early lay preachers had been implicitly ordained without the optional extra of laying on of hands, because they exercised the "pastoral office" and were not mere preachers. On the actual ordinations he maintained that Wesley was justified in acting as a "primitive episkopos" following the early church and even the Church of England's pronouncements under Henry VIII! Whatever Watson's merits as a theologian, his view of early Methodism was determined by Wesleyan ecclesiology, the hardening of separation from the Church and Anglican criticism in the 1820s.

V

The early biographers and profilers, apart from Southey and Watson, naturally made much of their personal knowledge of Wesley to fortify their authority against their rivals. Important though this advantage must seem it suffers from one obvious limitation and even disadvantage. They only knew the elderly or at most late-middle-aged Wesley. Most only knew him from the 1770s, Pawson and Knox from the 1760s, Hampson indirectly via his father from the 1750s. To put the point iconographically, they saw him as he appeared in Hone's portrait of 1765 or even Romney's of 1789 rather than Williams' 1742 portrait. This shows the tense, austere though authoritarian figure, still reflecting a good deal of the Oxford Methodist despite his conversion four years before, rather than the more relaxed, genial and patriarchal figure of Hampson's description.

How could they penetrate behind the later figure? We have seen that Henry Moore at first thought no biography was necessary given that Wesley had displayed his life himself in his *Journal* and other writings and even any further *Life* would largely be drawn from them. The *Journal* did indeed heavily influence both the form and content of the early biographies and has done so ever since. But the *Journal* as a biographical source and record has one obvious defect and several others which have, surprisingly, only been

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92 Watson, Wesley, 285-289.
detected quite recently, most notably in W. R. Ward's impressive introduction to it in the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley's Works.93

The obvious defect is that it only covers Wesley's life from 1735, though it includes a few memories from earlier times and the retrospect of his religious development prefaced to the conversion account of May 24, 1738 plus the first introduction describing the Oxford Holy Club. Wesley's childhood and youth, apart from a few scattered anecdotes and the story of the rectory fire plus the family context provided by Clarke's Wesley Family, is effectively as little known to us as it was to the early biographers. If, as older biographers felt, the child is father to the man, or character has its roots in early childhood plus genes inherited from his Puritan forbears, then it looks as though we shall always lack vital clues to his character formation.

Nor is the Journal very revealing about his inner life after the self-examination in January 1739. Far from being the strictly contemporary personal record it appears to be, and has often been taken to be, it is selective and the selection and slanting of the entries reflect Wesley's mind at the time of publication three years or more after the events described. It is really a work of high-class propaganda and distorts Wesley's place in the revival of which he was part.94 There are many other problems with the Journal as a source, let alone as a model for a Wesley biography. All his biographers, early or later, find it difficult to abstract from that extraordinary chronicle of journeys a pattern of development of his life, character, and the rise of Methodism. Nor does it provide a ready model for a biography, especially a religious biography.95 Hampson and Southey and even in some measure Whitehead might be accused of seeing Wesley's progress in terms of men of the world. For Methodists the most familiar model was the numerous memoirs and autobiographies of Methodist saints, many published by Wesley in the Arminian Magazine or as vignettes in the Journal. As exemplars to follow they concentrated on their subject's progress to conversion though some took color from other 18th-century types which were proliferating, like novels, as evidence of a growing interest in individual development. Silas Told's early life at times seems like a mixture of Robinson Crusoe and Grace Abounding. Elizabeth Rhodes sometimes looks like a Methodist Pamela, winning through attempted seductions to a Methodist rather than aristocratic marriage.96 As Ward points out, conversion narratives leave the rest of life as a mere chronicle of religious activities. In Wesley's case the conversion is a climax receding almost to insignificance as the years of later journeys unroll at formidable length. Those journeys become more of a travelogue than the

94 Ward and Heitzenrater, 18: 37-61.
95 Ward and Heitzenrater, 18: 1-36.
journey of a soul as Wesley mellowed. Finally, being a journal and not a career in retrospect like other Methodist narratives, there was no scope for any kind of considered analysis of the shape and meaning of the life as a whole. This could only be the work of a biographer mesmerized by the lure of Wesley’s own record.

To remedy the gaps, supplement the Journal, interpret key events, and perhaps penetrate Wesley’s inner life, resort could be had to his other writings, letters, private papers, and private diary. We have already seen what was the fate of Wesley’s papers: the loss, clearly, of many letters to Wesley and the survival of the “little books” in shorthand. Some letters Whitehead and Moore could use with advantage and there is some indication of a very limited use of the diaries though it is clear that they were unable or unwilling to use them to reconstruct Wesley’s life and development at Oxford—a task only accomplished in our own time. For his later years and controversies as well as his character in old age, personal recollections became of importance. But these were so colored by biographers’ and profilers’ own views of his intentions and personal relationships to him, not to mention their involvement in the struggles after his death, that they are still subject to debate, influenced by later and present-day views of Methodism. Nor can Wesley’s aged memories of his youth be relied upon.

It may be added that it was perhaps even more difficult for the early biographers than for us to understand the significance and possible value of Wesley’s early high church phase, heavily influenced by the Manchester Nonjurors. Influenced by their views of justification by faith, conversion, and Christian perfection (the last highly controversial even within Methodism), it was difficult for the biographers to do justice to Wesley’s extraordinary development, its twists and turns, its shifts between the twin menaces of Calvinism and Pelagianism. Knox saw something of this but Moore too easily glossed over the problems of the notorious 1770 Minutes and he made no comment on the remarkable reflections of Wesley in his coach in 1767. The even more remarkable reflections in a letter to Charles in 1766 which seemed to show that he only knew God through “reason’s glimmering ray” were unknown to these biographers.

Finally, it must be emphasized again that not only their estimates of Wesley’s character, but their approaches to constructing and interpreting Wesley’s life were heavily conditioned by their predecessors, the need to respond to them, and to refute them. Where character was concerned, this meant above all the concealed presence of Hampson whose picture of Wesley, the topics to be discussed, the virtues to be praised, and the weaknesses to be acknowledged, toned down, rejected, or simply omitted, set the pattern for all the later portraits. This prevented a genuinely fresh view from appearing.

\footnote{Ward and Hcitzenrater, 22:114; Moore on the Minutes, Wesley, II: 227-240.}
\footnote{John Telford, ed., The Letters of John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1931), V:15-16.}
VI

Wesley’s appearance and general personality are, as we have seen, very largely repetitions of Hampson’s description and portray him as in old age. For Moore, to judge Wesley’s conduct and motives by “worldly” canons like Hampson and Southey is to misunderstand him, and Knox, with much greater subtlety, agreed. Along with their perhaps deceptively rare references to his political loyalties, there were claims by obituary writers about Wesley’s beneficial social influence on the common people. Moore, though asserting loyalty to King—and, more controversially, the Church—was wary of seeing this too as praise based on worldly calculation. All agreed on his learning, though Hampson and Whitehead, unlike Moore, thought he lacked time and talent for science and history. The limitations of style as seen by Hampson, were for Whitehead and Moore a misapprehension of his purpose to serve God and educate the busy middling orders. His preaching, all agreed, could be below standard when tired and ill-prepared, and Hampson and Fawson complained of anecdotage, though both perhaps misunderstood the adaptation to his audience. Wesley’s temperance seemed extreme to Hampson and Whitehead, though relaxed in later life, including a tendency to sleep in the afternoon. His “placability,” it was agreed, came from long discipline over a naturally hasty temper, though redeemed by readiness for forgiveness and reconciliation when it broke out. His sociability and attractive conversation were agreed to by all except for Fawson’s belief that he needed a serious guide. His charity was acknowledged by all, though Hampson thought it did not proceed from a natural softness, but from duty. He struck a similarly dissident note in his belief that Wesley in personal relationships seemed to lack the “genius of friendship,” but rather as in all else had the interests of Methodism in mind. All but Moore seem to have felt that he was too prone to believe the best of people, an amiable fault but one which led him to trust flatterers intriguing for influence. In his manuscript “Life of Whitehead,” Pawson claimed that he was as good a judge of character as his brother, quoting him as saying that, “my brother trusts no one and is often deceived; I trust everyone but am never deceived.”99 Though all comment with varying degrees of puzzlement and disapproval on Wesley’s marriage and Moore thought he knew more of the Hopkey affair—though not the Murray affair—from Wesley himself, only Pawson privately deplored Wesley’s fondness for young women. Knox delicately explained this in terms of Wesley’s rapport and openness with them in spiritual matters. But on spirituality none of the biographers seemed able to penetrate Wesley’s reserve very far, though as Knox saw, the letters to women were more revealing. Nevertheless, the Methodists were sure he was a devoted and spiritual man.

On superstition and credulity, Pawson was silent. Though not, so far as one can see, subject to experiences of this kind, like all Methodists he accepted “particular providences.” Here a gulf was fixed between Hampson and Southey as against Moore and Watson who defended Wesley’s “credulity” by appeals to scripture and tradition while Whitehead offered a kind of psychological analysis allowing for supernatural intervention which yet observed laws and respected human personality. All agreed, too, on Wesley’s grasp of absolute power, but against Hampson and Southey this was given some mitigation by Pawson, and from the other Methodists and Knox more whole-hearted justification. It was seen as necessary, thrust upon him rather than grasped, benevolently exercised and ultimately as a providential commission, as Wesley himself clearly believed. Here there is a paradox. Hampson and Whitehead underlined Wesley’s power yet when it came to the detested Deed of Declaration and the objectionable and unjustified ordinations they blamed the preachers, while Moore and Pawson were quite clear that Wesley alone had the responsibility. There is not much doubt that they were right, but Hampson and Whitehead, seeing this as a departure from Methodism’s original plan and contrary to Wesley’s lifelong assertions of loyalty to the Church, could only conclude that his power had declined under pressures of senility and ambitious advisers, only for him to regret it later, a claim which was hotly contested by other interested parties.

Here an anecdote, probably not widely known, neatly brings together the issues of Wesley and the supernatural as well as power. Some Methodists as well as outsiders regretted that Wesley included so many supernatural tales in the Journal and Magazine. At the Conference of 1779 when the roll of preachers was read and questions about their faithfulness aired, Robert Roberts said that John Wesley should be questioned first. Wesley allowed this and Roberts complained about the stories. Wesley asserted, “the man that does not believe that spirits may make their appearance is an infidel.” Roberts replied, “Then I am an infidel.” At this Wesley smiled and said they would talk about this another time.100

VII

Watson’s Life appropriately concludes this survey, for even if he had not known Wesley, it is the last Life to appear while major survivors like Clarke and Moore were still alive. It was also the point at which the conflicts over policy which had influenced Wesleyan biography since the 1790s were being reinterpreted, indeed remythologized, to fit the emerging Methodist church and a new phase of criticism. In terms of views on Wesley’s personality, the set of characteristics laid down by Hampson had been perpetuated by subsequent biographers with varying degrees of modification. With

100 Methodist Church Archives, Everett Scrapbook (uncatalogued), f.420. For other criticisms on this issue, see, Telford, VI: 81-82, 108; VII: 139-140, 300.
Moore and Watson the positive image of Wesley had been fixed for Methodists along with a rather stereotyped view of the way of salvation which Watson epitomized in his *Theological Institutes*.

Understanding the ways in which Wesley’s thinking as well as his character had changed during his long life were obscured partly by defective information, but also by the difficulty which even Methodists who had known him had in coming to terms with what they knew of his high church antecedents and the circumstances in which he had grown up as well as the extent to which he had modified the stock evangelical views of justification by faith. Even for Methodists his doctrine of Christian perfection was a source of disagreement.

So far as his character was concerned, though Hampson had laid down the agenda for analysis, his criticisms (along with those of Pawson and Knox as yet unknown to them) would be too difficult for them to accept as possibly genuine aspects of a complex personality. The cruder charge of power-seeking could be mitigated by stressing its necessity, the notion that it was thrust upon Wesley and not sought, but ultimately, as in Wesley’s own mind, as a providential commission. But this raised the more awkward charge of “superstition” and “credulity” which even Methodists might admit Wesley indulged to an excessive degree. Watson’s reaction to the charge might be crude and excessive towards Southey, but he revealed a real dilemma. How far could you push criticism of this kind without removing the divine intervention necessary for salvation altogether? Yet the defense of Wesley and his followers on traditional lines was already under challenge from 18th-century sceptics. Even the more orthodox English compromise between “reasonableness” and the traditional gospel of grace tempered by concerns for morality and excluding modern miracles though allowing for at least a “general” Providence, would soon prove as susceptible to the acids of 19th-century thought as Wesley’s “enthusiasm.” Here, already, two world-views were overlapping but potentially in conflict. Wesley was undoubtedly affected by some “Enlightenment” values but his “reasonableness” covered a highly supernatural view of the world and a strong sense of his providentially guided role in it. The early Methodist biographers and profilers certainly understood this and accepted it. Though his critics did not deny divine action, they found it difficult to accept Wesley’s and his followers’ understanding of his character as determined not only by virtuous motives, but also by a special divine calling. Later generations would find his character, what I have called a “reasonable enthusiast,” even harder to understand.