

CREDULITY, SUPERSTITIONS, AND FANATICISM

The preacher

The print depicts a preacher – his open mouth and scale of vociferation an allusion to [George Whitefield](#)'s powerful voice^{[1][6]} – speaking to a church congregation from the top of a high [pulpit](#). His text is opened at a page which reads "I speak as a fool", and he is wearing a [Harlequin](#) jacket under his clerical gown. He is holding a puppet of a [devil](#) with a [gridiron](#) in his left hand and a puppet of a witch suckling an [incubus](#) in his right hand.^[7] His wig is falling off to reveal a [Jesuit](#)'s [tonsure](#) underneath. To the right, the "scale of vociferation" measures his oratory, rising from "natural tone" to "bull roar". (In *Enthusiasm Delineated*, the puppet of the witch was a figure representing God (after a painting by Raphael), and the sides of the pulpit are adorned with additional pairs of religious puppets which are omitted in its final version.)

Superstition

The print includes visual references to more than a dozen reputed instances of witchcraft or possession in England.^{[8][9]} The three figures decorating the pulpit each hold a candle, and allude to the ghost seen by Sir [George Villiers](#) (whose name appears in a book held by the figure on the right), the ghost of the stabbed [Julius Caesar](#) appearing before [Brutus](#), and the ghost of Mrs Veale (immortalised by [Daniel Defoe](#) in *A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal the Next Day after her Death to One Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury 8 September 1705*).^{[1][10]}

In a [box pew](#) at the foot of the pulpit, another clergyman pushes an icon of the [Cock Lane ghost](#) down the shirt of a young lady in the throes of [religious ecstasy](#) (in *Enthusiasm Delineated*, this was an aristocratic rake fondling the breast of a woman); to the left of this couple a devil whispers into the ear of a sleeping man. The "Poors Box" has grown cobwebs, showing Hogarth's view that the Methodists were disregarding good works by emphasising faith so strongly.^[10] To the right, standing on copies of [Wesley's Sermons](#),^[7] and [Glanvill's Book of Witches](#), a religious thermometer measures

the emotional states of a brain (borrowed from one of Christopher Wren's anatomical illustrations) from a central reading of lukewarm, either upwards through love heat, to lust, ecstasy, madness and raving, or downwards through low spirits to sorrow, agony, settled grief to despair, then madness and suicide. On top of the thermometer is an image of the [Cock Lane ghost](#), and the [Drummer of Tedworth](#).^[7]

The congregation are in various states of ecstasy, grief and horror. Another minister (most likely a representation of the squint-eyed George Whitefield)^[1] sings with a pained expression a Methodist hymn, accompanied by weeping [cherubs](#). A [shoeblack](#) vomits nails and pins – possible a reference to the [boy of Bilson](#), who ate metal items. Next to him a woman lies on the floor with rabbits running from under her skirt – this must be [Mary Toft](#), a woman from Godalming, who in 1726 was supposed to have given birth to a litter of rabbits.^[7] A Jew with a knife sacrifices an insect on the altar. A turbaned [Turk](#) looks in at the window, quietly smoking a pipe, and thanks the prophet that he is a Muslim.^[11] He represents the "rational, enlightened part of mankind looking down on Christian fanatics with surprise and disgust."^[1]

Above the congregation is suspended a "A New and Correct Globe of Hell by Romaine" (possibly referring to [William Romaine](#)^[1]), with parts labelled "Molten Lead Lake", "Pitch & Tar Rivers", "Horrid Zone", "The Brimstone Ocean", and "Eternal Damnation Gulf". One man below the globe is terrified when a preacher next to him (possibly John Wesley) points it out to him.^[1]

Beneath the engraving Hogarth quotes [1 John 4:1](#), "Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the World."

Reception

Art historian [Horace Walpole](#) praised Hogarth, stating that this print "surpassed all his other performances" and "would alone immortalize his unequalled talents."^[12]