

Ireland) while simultaneously remaining truly binational in focus. Occasionally this reader would have liked to have seen further qualification about the pervasiveness of the ‘public opinion’ evinced in these varied publications – perhaps comparable to the popular voices seen in recent works on early modern Venice and Paris – to round off the discussion; however, this would have moved beyond the established remit of Helmers’s work (pp. 5–6). Indeed, the fact that this work invites so much more research into these intersections and interactions further testifies to its quality, and its relevance to anyone interested in the early modern period.

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The first American Evangelical. A short life of Cotton Mather. By Rick Kennedy. (Library of Religious Biography.) Pp. xiv + 162 incl. frontispiece, 3 maps and 10 ills. Michigan–Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2015. £11.99 (paper). 978 0 8028 7211 1
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While the image of Cotton Mather remains the preferred punching bag for those who wish to heap scorn on the Puritan colonists of early New England, serious scholarship has been constructing a picture of Mather that is more complex and that makes the case for his importance in American intellectual and religious history. Rick Kennedy has been one of the architects of this revaluation, in part through his contributions to the multi-volume edition of Mather’s *Biblia Americana* and now in this short introduction to Mather.

In *The first American Evangelical* Kennedy makes the case for Mather’s importance as a preacher, a pastor, a scientist, a civic leader, a husband and father, and an author of works of history, theology, medicine and philosophy. In the process he demolishes numerous myths about the clergyman, most importantly in this regard in his assessment of Mather’s role in the Salem witchcraft episode. Kennedy effectively places Mather in the context of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Boston, but also locates him in the broader Atlantic world of ideas.

A brief guide to sites in Boston that were central to Mather’s life will be useful for those who visit the city and wish to understand what it was like in the colonial period. This book is the best available introduction to Mather’s life and ideas, and offers excellent suggestions for further study. While Reiner Smolinski’s anticipated biography will likely be the definitive scholarly study of Mather, Kennedy’s *Short life* offers a readable introduction that is easily accessible to the general reader.

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Spinoza & Dutch Cartesianism. Philosophy and theology. By Alexander X. Douglas. Pp. vii + 184. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. £30. 978 0 19 873250 1
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In this short book Alexander Douglas argues in favour of interpreting Spinoza’s philosophy in the light of the ongoing conflict between Dutch Cartesians and Protestant Scholastics, the latter rooted in Calvinism and Neo-Aristotelianism. At

issue was the viability of natural theology with or without the support of biblical revelation. Protestant theologians charged the Cartesians with impiety, because they separated natural philosophy from theology, explaining natural events by purely natural or mechanical causes, making no mention of divine creation and providence, and hence giving God no glory. The Cartesians defended this practice by appealing to the integrity of natural philosophy in its separateness, a principle of separation that has its roots in Bacon, although this is not acknowledged by Douglas. Spinoza responded by reconnecting theology and natural philosophy, and by providing a historical critical interpretation of the Bible that limits biblical revelation to its particular political theological context, and by replacing biblical authority with the political principle of the liberty of philosophising. Douglas's thesis concerning Spinoza's context is eminently plausible, and it fits the radical and subversive intent of Spinoza's philosophical programme and its comprehensive scope. However, he fails to make the case. Whilst his exposition of the Cartesian and Protestant background is on the whole adequate and useful, his interpretation of Spinoza is not. His exposition of Spinoza, especially of his metaphysics, is brief and inadequate, and most likely will only confuse novices and perplex more experienced scholars. He fails to explain how Spinoza recast the Cartesian notion of substance and made it the central idea of an *a priori* naturalistic monism. Indeed, he seems to have no clue to the essential character of Spinoza's metaphysical system. He also seems not to comprehend certain logical concepts on which his exposition depends: viz. the distinction between valid and sound argument, and the nature of circularity.

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VICTOR NUOVO

Enlightening enthusiasm. Prophecy and religious experience in early eighteenth-century England. By Lionel Laborie. Pp. xii + 353 incl. 6 ills. and 3 tables. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. £80. 978 0 7190 8988 6
JEH (67) 2016; doi:10.1017/S0022046916001081

It is now *de rigueur* to prick the Enlightenment's pretensions to 'reason' by demonstrating that the eighteenth-century was replete with mystics, millenarians and miracle workers. Alchemy, the Kabbalah and Behmenism stalk the new Enlightenment. Laborie's fine monograph pushes at an open door, yet brings into the room a rich exploration of the 'French Prophets'. This was a group of refugees from the hideous brutalities of the Camisard revolt in the Languedoc who arrived in London in 1706, quickly gathered several hundred followers, and captured public imagination. A prosecution for blasphemy and a failed bodily resurrection later, the movement subsided, though a devoted core persisted and today find descendants among the American Shakers. Laborie is generous in his debts to the important study by Hillel Schwartz thirty-five years ago, but he takes the subject in fresh direction. Humbling in his archival tenacity (embracing Halle, Paris, Geneva, Chester, Glasgow), his new finds include notes on the backs of playing cards, cited thus: 4♠. Sure-footed in his presentation, he handles panoramas and vignettes assuredly, and glides between Cevennois