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The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent, 1720-180, by Tessa Whitehouse (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2015; pp. xiii + 250. £55.00).

‘How doth the little crocodile/ Improve his shining tail’ begins one of Lewis Carroll’s light-hearted poems in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The verse is a satire of ‘How doth the little busy bee/ Improve each shining hour’, the opening of ‘Against Idleness and Mischief’ by Isaac Watts. The original appeared in Watts’s *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children*, first printed in 1715; the satire was published in 1865. Watts’s composition was still considered worth holding up to ridicule a full century and a half after it was written. That is a measure of the cultural hegemony exercised by Watts over English education. Nor was his sway limited to the sphere of small children. His *Logick: Or, the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth: With a Variety of Rules to Guard against Error, in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences* (1725) remained the standard introductory text on the subject, even at Oxford, for well-nigh a century. Isaac Watts, probably known today chiefly as a hymn writer, was an author of immense influence.

Tessa Whitehouse dissects the intellectual world inhabited by Watts not by exploring ideas but by examining the textual output of his circle, the leading thinkers of eighteenth-century orthodox Protestant Dissent. Watts was central, and so was his younger contemporary Philip Doddridge. Both were Dissenting ministers of the Independent, or Congregational, persuasion. A major contention of Whitehouse, with a nod to Foucault, is that there was a corporate dimension in the production of texts. Watts, Doddridge and those around them discussed, revised and otherwise contributed to each other’s writings. A diagram on page 24 illustrates how the circle of Watts and Doddridge was bound together by

ties of letters, academies, editing and family. They formed a body of friends, sharing a common allegiance to Protestant religion outside the established church.

The patterns of influence are well illustrated. John Jennings, Doddridge's tutor at his academy, provided the model for his more famous pupil's eventual published lectures. Both adopted the mathematical method of deduction, applying it to questions of theology and ethics. Doddridge's lectures were in turn still being imitated in Dissenting academies fifty years after his death in 1751. They were last published separately as late as 1822, but before that they had been translated into Dutch and, remarkably, French for the consumption of Jesuit students. His *Family Expositor*, a commentary on the Bible for household use, was completed after his death as a venture in mass marketing by James Rivington. The work shaped Dissenting piety over subsequent generations. The demand to know more about the author brought about the publication of a selection from his correspondence in 1790. Doddridge was a celebrity.

The social foundations of the intellectual achievement of these men are explored as far as the sources allow by the author of this monograph. Just occasionally there are slips about Dissent itself: ministers did not appoint deacons, for they were elected by church members (p. 110); Dissenting numbers were not falling throughout the century, since after the 1770s the Evangelical Revival gave new energy to the movement (pp. 199-200). But the main message of the book is persuasive and important. These Dissenting figures, working together, helped mould their culture. Watts, it is shown, fostered an international and interdenominational community of learning. Most important, they gave a fresh understanding of the place of reason in human affairs. Watts wrote *The Strength and Weakness of Human Reason* (1731). The weakness was that it was inadequate for giving knowledge of God; the strength was that it generated ways of thinking that permitted sound conclusions. Watts's heroes were Newton, Gassendi, Bacon, Boyle and, above all, Locke. The Dissenting minister, together with his fellows, was profoundly important in disseminating the assumptions of

these men to a wider audience. Whitehouse justly concludes that, among religious thinkers, it was not just rational Dissenters and Latitudinarian Anglicans who swayed opinion. Watts, Doddridge and their orthodox circle were equally shapers of the Enlightenment.

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