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Chloé Hogg, *Absolutist Attachments: Emotion, Media, and Absolutism in Seventeenth-Century France*. Rethinking the Early Modern series. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2019. xii + 276 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $34.95 (pb) ISBN 978-0-8101-3941-1.

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As I write this in my home office, in spring 2020, practicing "social distancing" from my fellow humans, most of my contact with other people is now mediated through phone calls and text messages, emails and Zoom conferences, the radio and the Internet. I have become acutely aware of how these media act as vectors for contagious emotion (mainly anxiety) and how they forge a (virtual) sense of connection through shared feeling. The current pandemic has provided a strangely apt context for reading Chloé Hogg's new book, which explores how an expanding media culture in seventeenth-century France made it possible for subjects to imagine new kinds of emotional and affective ties to the king and to one another. By analyzing an unconventional body of texts, Hogg revises the field's dominant understanding of the mediation of the absolutist political relationship, shifting from an emphasis on the spectacular representation of the monarch to the more personal forms of imagined relationship enabled by the intimacy of print media. By focusing primarily on literary objects designed for consumption by individual subjects, alone or in small groups of friends, *Absolutist Attachments* examines the private, subjective, psychological, and emotive aspects of being a subject of absolutism. As such, it offers a fresh angle on seventeenth-century French political culture, understanding it in terms of elective attachments rather than force or coercion. Hogg's argument offers an exciting alternative to the theories of Louis Marin, Jean-Marie Apostolidès and Peter Burke, and a thoughtful extension of the work of Christian Jouhaud, Hélène Merlin-Kajman, and Roger Chartier in emphasizing the importance of literary publics in both maintaining and contesting the regime.[1]

Across five eclectic chapters, Hogg investigates a wide array of "media," capaciously defined to embrace letters, essays, poems, engravings, and occasionally even paintings and monuments along with periodical publications. With this term, she emphasizes how literary and iconographic works mediate their public's perceptions of the king and his actions. By using "media" as an umbrella category, Hogg also ingeniously calls attention to the way that the expanding periodical press under Louis XIV altered its readers' and viewers' consumption of the representations of public affairs. Chapter 2, for example, juxtaposes multiple reactions to the tragic death of the duc de Longueville in the passage of the Rhine at the start of the Dutch War (1672). Panegyrics for an otherwise successful military campaign are countered by aristocratic accounts such as those in Sévigné's letters, dominated by mourning for the loss of a young nobleman. Meanwhile, official accounts, including the *Mercure Galant* news gazette, blame the rash Longueville for his own death to mitigate the emotional influence of such expressions of noble grief. Engaged in a debate about accuracy and timeliness, this proliferation of accounts "reveals a process of medial transference at work, as literary formats and genres are consumed according to an emerging media protocol of news" (p. 79). Hogg argues: "This blending of panegyric, history, and news put into question the status of literature, its function and audience…. Conflicts of accountability

and accuracy, of style and tone, in the panegyric literature of the passage betray the uncertainty of seventeenth-century readers and writers around what they expected literature to do" (pp. 94-95).

"News" emerges from the pages of Hogg's book not only as a genre of writing but as a way of reading or indeed a culture of reading. In chapter 3, Hogg delves into the "news culture of war" as expressed in the periodical press itself, focusing on the *Mercure Galant*, the monthly publication edited by Jean Donneau de Visé from 1672 until 1710. Although supported by the government, the journal also took subscription fees and explicitly catered to the perceived desires of its readership. Its editorial voice directly addressed the imagined reader. Quarterly supplements included correspondence from the public. Most important, Donneau de Visé advertised his efforts to satisfy his readers' appetites. For example, Hogg shows that the *Mercure*'s war coverage cited readers' requests for less information from the battlefield and more pleasurable content. In listing those who distinguished themselves in battle, the editor acknowledges the desire of elite readers to see themselves and their families mentioned in accounts of Louis XIV's martial glory. Interactive features such as battle maps further drew readers into the strategy and drama of distant wars. In these ways, Donneau de Visé rises to the challenge "to make the king's wars public news and public news useful and entertaining to private subjects gathered together as a public of (self-interested) media consumers" (p. 109), principally by cultivating his readers' desire to be informed. As a result, news became a powerful "form of absolutist attachment" (p. 99). The *Mercure*'s paradigm of actively including and appealing to the reading public influenced how news circulated and how political relationships were expressed in other genres. Hogg points to a 1709 letter signed by Louis XIV and distributed in print to publicize the king's reasons for rejecting a peace agreement to end the War of Spanish Succession. Written not only to inform but also to offer "consolation" to French subjects distraught by the ongoing conflict, the letter works to overcome objections to the king's decision by appealing to subjects' sympathy with the difficulty of his dilemma (p. 124). The emotional power of such gestures of intimacy between king and subject become especially clear in Hogg's fine analysis of media representations of Louis's tenderness toward noblemen wounded in war, the subject of chapter 5. The public could expect to be addressed directly and to consume information about current affairs couched not in the glorious rhetoric of panegyric but in the more intimate language of compassion, care, friendship, and pleasure.

This shift in expectations appears in the literary responses to the Sieges of Namur (1692 and 1695) in which Louis XIV gained and then lost the Flemish territory. Hogg notices an acknowledgement of France's vulnerability in the panegyrics celebrating the 1692 success, shadowed as they are by residual bad feelings about the 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In the *Mercure*, the event is marked by juxtaposing accounts of celebrations in different French regions with letters representing the event from an array of perspectives. Complexity, diversity, and personalization characterize the media responses to this military success, written for a public weary of war. Against this backdrop, Boileau's slightly belated and tonally anachronistic "Ode sur la prise de Namur" (1693) was a spectacular critical failure, Hogg suggests, because it did not connect with its readers emotionally. The outpouring of critical literature on Boileau's infelicitous ode in turn fueled the torrent of satirical literature produced after the 1695 loss of Namur, which parodied Boileau to spoof the military embarrassment. Instead of cultivating an emotional attachment between monarch and subjects, this body of texts adopted a coolly ironic

"attitude" (p. 153). Parodists "lay bare the workings of absolutist representation to change perception and cultivate critique" (p. 161). Hogg implies that the emergence of this critical gaze on the monarchy and the traditional genres of its glorification was made possible by a media culture in which even state-sponsored publications deferred to the tastes of its public. Perhaps it is worth adding that contemporary observers also commented on this subtle but significant empowerment of media-consuming subjects in the last years of Louis XIV's reign, as when Charles Dufresny, Donneau de Visé's successor as *Mercure* editor, proclaimed, "le public est un souverain."[2]

In sum, *Absolutist Attachments* contributes to our understanding of political culture under Louis XIV by drawing attention to "subject-centered" strategies of representation and mediation (p. 16). Yet these subjects, and the publics they constitute, are a somewhat elusive focal point of the book's argument. With a few notable exceptions (the marquise de Sévigné who complains about *Mercure* accounts of battles that give insufficient credit to her relatives, or the critics who mocked Boileau), seventeenth-century media consumers appear mainly as they are reflected in the media they were offered to consume. Indeed, most of the book's case studies examine fictions of political subjectivity created by artists who sought or enjoyed the patronage of Louis XIV. My lingering question at the end of *Absolutist Attachments* has to do with this absent presence of the subjects, so to speak, of Hogg's argument. What does it mean to produce a subject-centered account of absolutism when the experiences and feelings of those subjects remain largely inaccessible? In the absence of first-hand testimony from media consumers, how can we responsibly theorize about their subjective reactions? (This methodological question interests me in part because it arises in my own work, as well.)

While reading *Absolutist Attachments*, I found myself thinking of Michael Warner's useful conception of the public as a discursive fiction which "exists by virtue of being addressed"—useful in no small part because it offers a way to think about the significance of the media audience without having to speculate about the possible responses of individual media consumers.[4] Warner's analysis of the power of address and other "devices of reflexive circulation" credits the *Mercure Galant* and its English counterpart, Addison's *Spectator,* with pioneering the technique of forming a public by representing readers to themselves.[5] Hogg's book extends this insight by showing us a greater variety of discursive strategies through which seventeenth-century media imagined its consumers. Sometimes, reading subjects find themselves represented as part of a larger public. This is especially true in the *Mercure Galant*, where references to the journal's own readership sit alongside depictions of the eager audiences ("tout le Public") buying up copies of the king's 1709 letter on the war with Spain (pp. 127-28). Elsewhere, these fictions take the form of exemplary subjects modeling an affective stance toward a royal figure. This is the case in Charles Le Brun's careful portrayal of the variously adoring, astonished, and humbled Persians who bow to their new emperor in the magisterial painting *Les reines de Perse aux pieds d'Alexandre,* compellingly analyzed in chapter 1 as a demonstration of the subject's role as "the necessary other of absolutist representation" (p. 29). Other examples might include the injured soldiers in Perrault's *Les hommes illustres qui ont paru en France pendant ce siècle* who demonstrate a faithful desire to continue serving the king in spite of disability, and Madeleine de Scudéry's fictional Cléandre who struggles to articulate "cette nouvelle sorte de passion" he feels for his prince (p. 191). How do these divergent

approaches to representing absolutist subjects work distinctly to imagine new affective relations between sovereign and subject?

A second question has to do with the congruence between ideal representations of the feeling subjects of absolutism and their media-consuming counterparts. In all the exemplary fictions analyzed by Hogg that portray affective bonds between subject and sovereign, the emotions that connect ruler and ruled appear freely given. Does the same hold true for reading subjects? If *Absolutist Attachments* left me unconvinced on one point, it might be the tendency to over-estimate the capacity of subjects to freely choose their mediated affective attachments. This is perhaps most clear in the case study Hogg offers as a "template" for the others that follow: her reading of Le Brun's *Les reines de Perse*. Set in the aftermath of the Battle of Issus, the painting centers on a representation of captive Queen Sysigambis, mother of the defeated ruler Darius III, mistakenly bowing not to Alexander but to his lieutenant Hephaestion. As seventeenth-century viewers would know, this misrecognition triggered the true emperor to make an exemplary gesture of generosity, both forgiving the queen for her error and naming his lieutenant "a second Alexander." In Hogg's analysis, Sysigambis's error becomes a "choice" or "preference" (p. 35). She "feels" Hephaestion to be her ruler and for Hogg this instinct represents a more general sense of freedom on the part of the subject: "your 'feels'…are the 'feels' of choice" (p. 42). Hogg suggests that the painting's observer also enjoys this freedom of emotional volition (p. 41)—an argument extended throughout the book with reference to Jacques Rancière's notion of the "emancipated spectator." Yet Le Brun's painting guides the external viewer to avoid Sysigambis's error through lighting and compositional techniques that draw our eye (or at any rate, an eye accustomed to seventeenth-century artistic conventions) to the real Alexander in ways that we might not even notice. The painter skillfully shapes our inclinations, nudging us to have the right feelings about the right object. Most media accounts of Louis XIV's reign attempt to do similar work. Texts and images may appeal to media consumers in a personalized way (and this is a truly significant insight, well demonstrated in the book). Yet the feelings a reader or viewer might experience in response to these media are shaped, informed, and conditioned in ways that call into question assumptions about subjects' autonomy over their own emotions. Warner surmises that "the projection of a public is a new, creative, and distinctly modern mode of power" because it provides a framework for the individual media consumer's interaction with the public world, delimiting what reactions, desires, and feelings might be considered normal.[6] The way seventeenth-century media produces a normative emotional framework for the absolutist subject might be a topic for a future study inspired by Hogg's innovative book.

How subjects might feel simultaneously free to choose their mediated attachments and emotionally ensnared by the narratives and images they consume is not unique to the seventeenth century. Hogg makes a compelling argument that the "imbrication of emotion and information" may be seventeenth-century France's most enduring legacy to current times (p.194). What this historical comparison illuminates is how bound up we are by media and the emotions and communities they engender, and how the apparent "choice" to friend a president on Facebook (pp. 20 and 194)—or, for that matter, to stockpile hand sanitizer—arises out of emotions not entirely of our own choosing.

NOTES

[1] Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha Houle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Minuit, 1981); Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); Christian Jouhaud, *Les pouvoirs de la littérature : Histoire d'un paradoxe* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000); Hélène Merlin-Kajman, *Public et littérature en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Belles lettres, 1994); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Linda Cochrane (N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

[2] Charles Dufresny, *Amusemens sérieux et comiques* (Amsterdam: Henri Desbordes, 1699), p.126.

[3] For an archival, sociological approach to studying the readers of seventeenth-century media, see Geoffrey Turnovsky, "Les lecteurs du Mercure Galant: Trois aperçus," *Dix-septième siècle* 270 (2016): 65-80.

[4] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p. 67.

[5] Warner, p. 95.

[6] Warner, p. 108.

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