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Chloé Hogg, *Absolutist Attachments. Emotion, Media, and Absolutism in Seventeenth-Century France*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019. Xii + 276 pages. \$34.95 (cl). ISBN: 978-0-8101-3941-1.

Review Essay by Hélène Visentin, Smith College, MA.

Departing from what she terms “spectacular absolutism,” a self-reflexive mode of representation that establishes a subject’s passive relationship to the monarch, Chloé Hogg makes the case for a “mediating absolutism” shaped by people’s feelings towards the sovereign through art, literature, and, particularly, print news. Hogg argues that these relational and emotional modes of connection involve a more active and generative process on the part of the audience perceived as early modern consumers of news.

Hogg begins and ends her book with a simple and clever idea that resonates with a readership acquainted with social media. Just as today one can feel an emotional attachment to the leader of one’s by following her/him on Twitter and/or friends on Facebook, seventeenth-century subjects developed close connections to Louis XIV through various media, among them the emerging periodic press. Disputing, or rather nuancing, the common idea that the absolutist power of the longest-reigning European monarch was based on a vertical mode of connection and hegemonic power best exemplified by the palace of Versailles, *Absolutist Attachments* convincingly demonstrates the many ways people could feel horizontally connected to their king. Ambitious in scope and rich in detail, this book combines vast erudition and strength in depth across several areas of studies—art history, history, French studies, media studies, disability studies, and affect studies. Thus, Hogg’s monograph deploys five substantial chapters to reveal the vectors of affectivity and media connectivity (or disconnections) between Louis XIV and his subjects—mainly the nobility—and to explore new ways of political adhesion.

To make her point, Hogg analyzes a florilegium of “episodes and modes of mediation,” or what she calls “archives of feeling,” after Ann Cvertkovich.[1] Each chapter presents a case study, revolving mainly around war news and how this information generates various political feelings. To give an idea of the richness of the content as well as the wide ranging sources drawn upon by Hogg, I offer a brief overview of the chapters. Chapter 1 looks at the iconography and critical reception of Louis XIV as Alexander the Great displaying an array of human emotions and passions, based on the painting by Charles Le Brun, *Les reines de Perse aux pieds d’Alexandre* (1660-1661). Hogg shows how an image connects the king to both the artist and his subjects through taste, judgment, and emotions. Chapter 2 offers a careful analysis of panegyric literature describing a famous episode of the Dutch War—the passage of the Rhine in the summer of 1672—that led to a literary war exemplifying a real news experience for its readers.

The central chapter (Chapter 3) is devoted to the war coverage in Donneau de Visé’s monthly periodical *Le Mercure galant* founded at the beginning of the Dutch War. Hogg shows how this new media succeeded in developing new practices of writing and reading about the king perceived as a “body of information” (p. 103) while creating a different form of engagement

based on “feeling newsy” (p. 97). Ultimately, the *Mercure galant* changed the way the king related to his subjects, prompting a more direct royal communication based on both emotion and information. In Chapter 4, a collection of panegyric literature as well as parodic literature (parodies of Boileau’s *Ode sur la prise de Namur*) surrounding the sieges of Namur in 1692 and 1695 present another case study of “an absolutist media event” that teaches “reading as a practice of affective dissidence” (p. 161) and what it means to have “an attitude” among French elite readers at the end of the seventeenth century. The final chapter (Chapter 5) adopts an original approach to define a form of “pathological absolutism,” through the way Charles Perrault in *Les hommes illustres* (1696-1700), Sévigné in her correspondence to her daughter Mme de Grignan, and Donneau de Visé in the *Mercure galant* recuperated images of wounded bodies from members of the nobility at war as a mode of creating affective connectivity between Louis XIV and elite subjects. In this regard, disability is viewed as social capital, culminating in the building of the Invalides.

Hogg’s *Absolutist Attachments* urges us to question our assumptions. Two points come to mind. First, since the seminal work of Norbert Elias’ *The Court Society*, it is commonly admitted that Louis XIV perfected courtly etiquette to enhance control of the nobility. As a result, courtiers wore a social mask, hiding their true feelings by mastering the art of dissimulation while showing the public the “right” emotions appropriate to the occasion. This emotional constraint turned into a survival skill to achieve advancement and success is well depicted, for instance, in precious portraits of courtiers in *Les Caractères* (1688) by La Bruyère, or the influential novel *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) by Lafayette. Certainly, the film director Roberto Rossellini captured the individual self-constraint put on courtiers’ behavior in *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV* (1966). Hogg’s thesis adds fine nuances to this monolithic representation of the nobility by bringing together a variety of lesser-studied sources from which she proposes an in-depth reading. Secondly, early modern scholars are acquainted with the monthly periodical the *Mercure galant* through the prism of salon culture and *la galanterie*, since these subjects have received renewed attention.[2] But by focusing on war news—“The seventeenth century was an age of war and journalism” (p. 15)—, Hogg allows us to discover another facet of this periodical that worked as a social network and a source of information.[3]

As a scholar of early modern French theater, I appreciate Hogg’s interrogation of “spectacular absolutism,” but I was curious why she did not fully engage with spectacles, especially since court performances were seen as a continuity of war.[4] Hogg states: “*Absolutist Attachments* thus seeks to understand absolutism, not merely through its representations or performances, but also as a media phenomenon comprehending the protocols, practices, and genres, particularly those of print news, that mediated a feeling of sovereignty in early modern France” (p.16). As I read *Absolutist Attachments*, I developed a clear sense of this objective by the author’s focus on war news coverage as a channel for absolutism through affective attachments. Although critical works on seventeenth-century spectacles (e.g. *ballet de cour*, theater, *tragédie lyrique*) are abundant, I would have liked the author to make more connections to courtly performances, since Louis XIV’s reign was defined not only by military campaigns, but also by numerous *divertissements*.

In a similar vein, Hogg’s thesis might have benefited from greater consideration of public ceremonials within a historical frame. She briefly mentions royal rituals at the beginning of

Chapter 3 (“The King’s News”), mainly in the context of the *Te Deum* ceremony, to rightly argue, after Michèle Fogel, that these events were circulated through a “ritualized process of publication” (p. 100).[5] Hogg points out:

Information was a protocol to be followed (the sounding of the trumpets signaled the public reading of the proclamation, followed by the posting of a printed placard and the entry into a register of a signed copy of the printed text by the crier). [...] Put starkly, this history of early modern royal news opposes information as an embodied, sensorial connection with the king to information as a textual and reading practice, mediated by print—in short, news as ceremony versus news as media. (pp. 101-102)

Then, she states that Donneau de Visé’s monthly journal was “a space, in fact, of mediation.” (p. 110). However, one can argue that the ritual of the king’s entry into a city defined a space where the sovereign was face to face with his subjects at large—not only with the elite members of the society—, a space where subjects could “feel for their sovereign” (p. 125). Royal entries also generated numerous printed accounts, not only festival books but also small factual brochures or *canards* similar to tabloid newspapers that were widely circulated.[6] Thus, royal entries could also be seen as events “mediated by print.” While belonging to “spectacular absolutism,” ceremonial entries were based on a strong relational connection between the king and his subjects (i.e., the symbolic *remise du cœur de la ville* by a chosen beautiful child of the city). That said, *Absolutist Attachments* allows for a better understanding of one of the reasons why ceremonial entries showed a significant decline under the reign of Louis XIV. Most scholars have argued that the centralization of power went hand in hand with the monumentalization of the representation of the king (Versailles) and, in doing so, eliminated the need for public rituals. By examining how emotion and information interplay to develop forms of attachment in king-subject relationships, Hogg clearly demonstrates that the emerging news landscape, particularly new periodicals such as the *Mercure galant*, created a space for connectivity and affectivity that could offer an effective substitute for public ceremonials.

NOTES

[1] Ann Cvertokovich, *An Archive of Feelings* (Duke UP, 2003).

[2] See works of Claude Habib (*Galanterie française*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006), Alain Viala (*La France galante. Essai historique sur une catégorie culturelle, de ses origines à la Révolution*, Paris, PUF, 2008; *La Galanterie. Une mythologie française*, Paris, Seuil, 2019), Delphine Denis (*Le Parnasse galant: Institution d’une catégorie littéraire au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2001), and Faith E. Beasley (*Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*, London/Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), among others.

[3] See Christophe Schuwey on this topic, especially his recent monograph, *Un entrepreneur des lettres au XVII^e siècle. Donneau de Visé, de Molière au Mercure galant* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020).

[4] As an example, I quote a passage from the *Relation de la fête de Versailles du 18 juillet 1668* by André Félibien, historiographer of Louis XIV: “Le Roi ayant accordé la paix aux instances de ses alliés et aux vœux de toute l’Europe, et donné des marques d’une modération et d’une bonté sans exemple, même dans le plus fort de ses conquêtes, ne pensait plus qu’à s’appliquer aux affaires de son royaume lorsque pour réparer en quelque sorte ce que la Cour avait perdu dans le Carnaval pendant son absence, il résolut de faire une fête dans les jardins de Versailles où, parmi les plaisirs que l’on trouve dans un séjour si délicieux, l’esprit fut encore touché de ces beautés surprenantes et extraordinaires dont ce grand prince sait si bien assaisonner tous ses divertissements.” (Paris : Imprimerie Royale, 1679). 3.

[5] Michèle Fogel, *Les cérémonies de l’information dans la France du XVI^e au milieu du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

[6] For instance, Christian Jouhaud shows that the surrender of La Rochelle, in 1628, and the royal entry that followed, produced numerous printed accounts, brochures, and placards. See “Imprimer l’événement: La Rochelle à Paris,” [In] *Les usages de l’imprimé (XV^e-XIX^e siècle)*, dir. Roger Chartier (Paris: Fayard, 1987). 381-438.

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