

the playwright's intentions, it nonetheless testifies to his enormous skill as a comic writer, whose words continue to entertain even outside of the multidimensional spectacle in which they were originally placed.

Francis Assaf. *Quand les rois meurent. Les journaux de Jacques Antoine et de Jean et François Antoine et autres documents sur la maladie et la mort de Louis XIII et de Louis XIV*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2018. 322 pp. €68.00. Review by DENIS D. GRÉLÉ, UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS.

In *Quand les rois meurent*, Francis Assaf focuses on the two kings who dominated most of the seventeenth century, Louis XIII and Louis XIV, and more specifically, on their deaths, which seem to have nothing in common. Louis XIII, a pious king, lives his last moment fearing God, while Louis XIV, ever the master of himself, rules almost to the end. And yet, in *Quand les Rois Meurent*, a book presenting the many manuscripts that depict the last few days of Louis the Just and Louis the Great, Assaf shows that many similarities can be drawn. While Henri III and Henri IV were both assassinated and had little time to present the spectacle of their death, Louis XIII and Louis XIV died in plain view. As Assaf explains, both kings—affected by fatal diseases of the era (Louis XIII from Crohn's disease and Louis XIV from diabetes)—expired almost as though on a theater stage, propped up on their beds, surrounded by their doctors and families, and closely watched by their court. In his book, Assaf retells the dramatic events through the journals of renowned memorialists, inept medical practitioners, or the unassuming servants of those two kings.

In the first part, Assaf looks at the death of Louis XIII, using the writings of some of the celebrities of the time: Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, better known as "La Grande Mademoiselle," Françoise Bertaud (Madame) de Motteville, Olivier Lefèvre d'Ormesson and, of course, Saint Simon, who was not even born yet, but whose father was a close acquaintance of Louis XIII. More interestingly, he includes the more modest figures of Pierre Porte and Richard de Bury. By means of Jacques Antoine, Assaf is able to retell in precise details the careful staging, almost hour per hour, of the king's long agony. One of the most fascinating aspects of this presentation is the cultural atmosphere

in which the death of the king occurs. Assaf is able to reveal how the authors' retelling Louis XIII's death were drawing deeply to the Baroque movement with its plays on shadows and lights, its mystical attraction, and its dark realism. Assaf presents with humor the outrageous apologies given to Louis XIII, which, even for the time, reached extremes rarely seen before.

In the second part, Assaf draws upon the Antoine brothers, Dangeau and Saint Simon (who was a first-hand witness this time) to retell with precision every gesture and action leading up to the death of Louis XIV. Using his broad knowledge of the period, Assaf interprets the historical documents he has at his disposal to underline the political games as well as the implications and importance of the staging of Louis le Grand's death. The agony of Louis XIV shows not only the power exerted by his medical team, and the patience of the suffering king, displaying his humanity but also how much Louis XIV was aware of the predominance of his political body over his physical body.

The third part of this volume consists of the original texts regarding the death of these two kings, first the journal of Jacques Antoine on the death of Louis XIII, followed by the journal of the two Antoine brothers, Jean and François. Added to these two important texts are fragments of Louis XIII's will, the full text of Louis XIV's will, as well as a few documents related to the Antoinnes' life.

This well-crafted presentation of the death of two major political leaders in the history of France could have benefited from an introduction linking the two events with greater clarity. For example, Assaf could have explored the difference between the two monarchs insofar as Louis XIII dies as a true Christian, with humility and fear of God, whereas Louis XIV stays the king until the end. Is that a difference of character or does it express a deeper transformation in French political culture? The link between the political body and the physical body is clearly explored and beautifully presented. One of the best moments of this presentation occurs when Assaf explains the level of adulation for Louis XIII, and the absurdity of some of the elegies. But one may wonder about the purposes and deeper intentions of such discourses. To what extent were these speeches part of the monarchical propaganda machine? Was it customary at the time to compare the king to God? Is it possible to know the reception of those discourses?

One may regret likewise the overstated assertions that the doctors of both kings were ignorant and pretentious, for this does not add much to the argument. For historical purposes, Assaf retains the original texts with their spelling and punctuation, which can make the reading challenging at times. If the choice of keeping the links (“ligature”) may be questionable, the desire to preserve these writings as presented is commendable and valuable for specialists.

Despite a few misgivings, Assaf’s book has an undeniable historical importance: it brings together documents that are not easily accessible; it presents those documents clearly and accurately; and, most of all, it separates what is fact and what is fiction. Assaf’s knowledge of the time period, its culture, and its people contributes greatly to the understanding of the events and the texts presented. The work of a specialist, this text is meant for an audience of specialists.

Peter Sahlins. 1668. *The Year of the Animal in France*. New York: Zone Books, 2017. 491 pp.+ 13 color illus., 135 b&w illus. \$25.39 Review by DENIS D. GRÉLÉ, THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS.

1668, France is victorious in Flanders; Condé takes the Franche Comté; and the animals make “a dramatic entrance onto the stage of French history” (11). In this most recent book from Peter Sahlins, the reader is taken back to the decade of Louis XIV’s seizure of power, not on the back of a war horse but on the wings of the birds of the royal Ménagerie. In this well documented and richly illustrated volume, Sahlins explores the role of animals and their influence on literature, the arts and sciences at a turning point in France’s history. Alive in a cage, lying on a dissection table, or drawn on paper, animals take over in the newly redesigned gardens of Versailles, at the royal library in Paris, and in the salons of the Parisian elite. Divided into three parts, the book opens with a preliminary section that looks at the source of “the year of the animals” in the literary accounts of the now-demolished Ménagerie of Versailles. The two chapters focus on the living animals, and on the civilizing influence they exerted upon literature, in particular on La Fontaine and Madeleine de Scudery.