

Chloé Hogg. *Absolutist Attachments: Emotion, Media, and Absolutism in Seventeenth-Century France*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019. xii + 276 pp. + 14 illus. \$34.95. Review by IVY DYCKMAN, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR.

The origin of the term media, as we use it today, probably extends back to the mid-to-late nineteenth century when such modern inventions as the telegraph, telephone, and phonograph incorporated the technology of the time to expand communication with audiences both near and far. As a result, leaders in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries discovered how even more sophisticated advancements in communication would allow them to extend their influence and power over their own peoples and the world at large. Often this was and is done through what we call spin to manipulate points of view and to elicit gut reactions. Although the designation “mass media” did not exist in seventeenth-century France, the Sun King, Louis XIV, did take advantage of early modern communicative modes—i.e., the emerging periodic press—available to him to exert control and connect with his subjects on an emotional level.

In her monograph *Absolutist Attachments*, Chloé Hogg examines how Louis XIV, from beginning to end of his long reign, discovered how the media of the period could be harnessed to ensure total fidelity under his authoritarian hand. Certainly, this media was used as a vehicle for autocratic propaganda. But Louis used the public’s growing interest in his affairs of state, especially wars, to create affective attachments that would touch the heart and thus enchain the people to his absolutism. Art forms, literature, and print media were the primary agents used by the French king to emotionally bind subjects to his will, guaranteeing their uncompromising loyalty. In the five chapters, described below, Hogg traces the evolution of these absolutist attachments, which she aptly used as the title for her book. The historical examples that she selects to illustrate her arguments make for a clearer understanding of the text in general, rendering it more coherent. Her extensive research includes detailed notes as well as premodern and modern sources. The index and a listing of the fourteen illustrations

further assist the reader in negotiating the challenges posed in the work.

Chapters One and Five are the only ones that speak of means other than the written word to engage the public with their monarch in order to construct emotional connections with his absolutism. Hogg introduces her topic with a lengthy discussion of a noteworthy painting executed by the *Premier peintre du Roi*, Charles Le Brun. *Les reines de Perse aux pieds d'Alexandre* (1660–61) emerged at a crucial time in Louis's long reign. Having survived the rebellions of the Fronde, recently married to his royal Spanish cousin María Teresa, and no longer under the influence of the deceased Cardinal Mazarin, the young king undertook to establish his personal rule as an absolute sovereign. Le Brun's painting, a lifelong favorite of Louis, messaged to his subjects the sort of ruler he proposed to be. He is portrayed as Alexander the Great, a "loving king" (22) whose identity was mistaken by royal captives who were consequently pardoned for their embarrassing error. Engravings were widely disseminated so that everyone would know that their young ruler would indeed be loving and merciful. Louis had managed to spin his image, forging his heart and feelings with those of his subjects. Reaching them on an emotional level would solidify their connection and allegiance. This was Louis's initial use of media for propaganda, which proved successful.

Much of Louis XIV's reign was dedicated to going to war with France's European neighbors in order to establish his regime's dominance on the continent. This opened up opportunities for the king as well as literati, journalists, and personal correspondents to express themselves objectively and subjectively about the aggressions. Louis had the advantage of his position to exert influence over and affectively manipulate his subjects. Still, those with pen in hand managed to open dialogue between the sovereign and his subjects. Chapters Two, Three, and Four discuss the power of the written word and its role in portraying, lauding, and criticizing the conflicts. In her treatment of the inception of the Dutch War in 1672, Hogg describes how the crossing of the Rhine became "the first media war of the French monarchy" (18). The king's spin doctors reported it as a triumph while personal accounts by other people conveyed conflicting views. She dedicates an entire chapter to Jean Donneau de Visé, pioneering journalist and founder of the French periodical *Mercure galant*. He

reported the news of Louis's wars to a receptive public. However, he made the horror palatable by interspersing it with items that would entertain his readers: art, literature, society. Apart from royal proclamations and the Te Deum ceremony, the king could thus more effectively bond with his subjects through the innovation of early modern news media. Finally, Hogg describes literary reactions to the sieges of Namur in 1692 and again in 1695. The first was a victory celebrated in the *Mercure galant* and in a poorly received ode by Boileau, which became fodder for parody when the English king, William of Orange, recaptured the fortress three years later. Boileau's bad poem and the ensuing mockery reflected a reversal in the affective bonds between monarch and subject.

In Chapter Five, as in Chapter One, Hogg deviates, for the most part, from print media to demonstrate how the Sun King rehabilitated his image to maintain absolutist rule. After the Namur 1695 debacle, restoration of the affective union between monarch and people was effected by means of the wounded body. Disabled heroic warriors, such as those ghoulishly pictured in Perrault's *Les hommes illustres*, were repurposed to serve society and their sovereign in other productive ways. Scientific and technological contributions, for example, represented a continuation of warfare, this time away from the physical battlefield into that of the intellectual sphere. Louis, creator of the Invalides and agent for the physical and societal rehabilitation of his realm's invalids, recreated himself as well, this time as the "surgeon king" (19). He succeeded in restoring the health of the injured body politic by once again establishing absolutist attachments with his subjects.