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Charlotte Goëtz, *Marat en famille: La saga des Mara[t]*, 2 vol. Brussels: Pôle Nord, 2001. 271 pp. and 325 pp. Illustrations, facsimile documents, notes, bibliography, and index. 45.00 € (both vols; pb). ISBN 2-30040-17-3 and 2-930040-18-1.

Review by James Livesey, Trinity College, Dublin.

Scholars of the French Revolution, particularly those interested in Jean-Paul Marat, already owe much to Charlotte Goëtz and the group Pôle Nord. Their ten-volume edition of the works of Marat and the volumes of archival material they have published subsequently are the basis on which any future work on this enigmatic figure will be based. The two volumes of material she has unearthed on Marat's family background are another contribution to the reconstitution of a particularly difficult archive. Despite a lifetime spent in correspondence, very little has survived directly from the hand of Jean-Paul Marat. Unless an as yet unknown *fond* emerges the only way in which an archival grounding for the study of Marat can be created is by restoring the contextual documentation that can help illuminate the historical meaning of his actions and writings. The effort involved in this work of reconstitution is enormous. The documents employed in the work in hand, many of them reproduced in facsimile and transcribed form, derive from archives as diverse as those of the town of Bono in Sardinia, through the archives of the Mercedaire order in Rome to the more travelled files of the *Société Typographique de Neuchâtel*. This work is fundamental in the strong sense of generating the documentary evidence for historical debate.

The work is organised as a series of documents linked by commentary. The goal of the presentation is to rescue Marat from the "black legend" of the alienated figure from the underworld. Instead the volumes develop a portrait of a man profoundly marked by the difficulties faced by his family in the efforts to integrate themselves into eighteenth-century European society. Jean-Paul Marat's father, Jean Mara, left his native Sardinia, his Catholic faith, and his position as a monk in the Mercedaire order in 1740 to seek refuge, a new faith, and a new life in Geneva. Jean Mara (Jean-Paul added the "t" after a sojourn in Dublin in order not to be taken for an Irishman) never succeeded in reacquiring a firm legal and social identity. His efforts to obtain Genevan citizenship and to practice his vocation as a teacher were unsuccessful. His family commitments—he was to have nine children in all—drove him to more creative, and precarious, strategies. He worked as a free-lance designer in the nascent textile industry in Boudry, as an unofficial doctor, and as an agent for the newly founded *Société Typographique de Neuchâtel* in Geneva. Mara's precarious hold in the world of letters allowed him to survive a series of crises, but it did not allow him to overcome his precarious social position. Jean-Paul Marat and many of his siblings inherited from their father their distinct problem of finding a place for themselves in the world.

The Marat family's curious position, culturally equipped to move in the world of letters but socially and politically vulnerable, illuminates their most prominent member's trajectory through that world. His famous combats against academies and his attempted critique of Newtonianism are of a piece with his father's rejection of Catholicism or his brother Henry's participation in the Genevan revolution of 1782. The intersection of family and politics produced a recognisable conjuncture. Goëtz's secondary goal of establishing that Marat was not a monster but rather a loving member of a functional family is also well achieved. She reproduces interesting pages from a conversation in 1821 between Pushkin and his old

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teacher from the Russian Imperial *Lycée*, Marat's brother David. Two portraits on David Marat's wall represented his sister Albertine and his famous brother; the first was his favourite but the second was "the memory he respected" (II: 102). Goëtz's Marat cannot be dismissed as any kind of aberration.

This kind of documentary work is vital to any serious writing, but the approach to Marat proposed here, while it helps us avoid various unhistorical approaches, does not offer a means of unlocking the origins and meaning of his revolutionary radicalism. That "*Marat était doux dans sa ménage*" (II:104) was clear to contemporaries; it was one of the things that made his violence so strange and chilling. Yet family is too frail a context to hold in place the energies released in the Revolution. Even the admiring David petitioned the Russian Imperial Court to be allowed to change his name in 1795 in order to conceal his relationship to his brother. This family background helps us to see the problems that engaged Marat but not to understand his particular resolution of those problems.

Goëtz is so anxious to establish that Marat was not a monster that she underplays vital clues in his political and intellectual development. For example, in 1768 his brother Pierre was implicated in political tensions in Neuchâtel to the point that the family had to leave the canton, and another brother, Henry, was implicated in the 1782 events in Geneva. In her desire to undermine any notion of a family pathology she draws no conclusions from these incidents. But scholars such as Béla Kaposy, Helena Rosenblatt, and Richard Whatmore are reasserting the importance of precisely these kinds of experiences in the Swiss cantons to an understanding of the radical positions assumed in the French Revolution. The evidence offered in these volumes might be usefully read from this perspective to understand Marat's particular trajectory. That his early family experience was Swiss could turn out to be vital.

There are other problems with this work. Gender relations within the Marat family are barely touched on though there are numerous references to the emotional centrality in Jean-Paul's life of his mother. It is also odd that, given the family context, so little is written about Albertine, the youngest sister in the family who went to Paris after Marat's murder and became a kind of living monument to her brother. A comparison with the roles played by the Robespierre brothers' family, particularly their sister Charlotte, or by Eliza Condorcet, daughter of the revolutionary theorist and of Sophie de Grouchy, could have been fruitful. The second volume is also disfigured by a postscript implying a conspiracy to blacken Marat's name that crudely mishandles deep problems of historical memory. However, the core contribution of this work is its presentation of documents that do the basic work of restoring a lost context to an enigmatic figure.

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