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# Marat and His Anger

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***Abstract.*** *Marat was the notorious French politician in the 18th century who expressed his opinions using strong pathos and emotion. This essay will focus on the employment of anger in Marat's writings, including his* Chains of Slavery *(1774) and* L'Ami du people *(1789), taking a closer look at how Marat appealed to his emotions so as to influence readers' psychological states and behaviours. Marat's experience as a politician in both London and France will be analyzed in order to understand the reason behind his anger. By combining the economic and political situations in the 18th century with the arguments in Marat's writings, the essay will provide a more comprehensive look into Marat as well.*

***Keywords:*** *Marat, French Revolution, Emotion,* Chains of Slavery, L'Ami du peuple

## Introduction

The scholar Rachel Hewitt claimed that "The very word 'emotion' originally meant a 'movement, disturbance, perturbation', mostly in the form of 'political agitation, civil unrest; a public commotion or uprising'."1 During the period known as the Age of Enlightenment, philosophy had a superior position, and reason possessed the second place, receiving high praise from French Enlightenment writers. Inevitably, some criticized emotion for distorting human reason and turning people away from the truth. The Stoics, for example, were extreme opponents of emotion, suggesting that "earthly events and objects were all 'indifferent', unworthy of emotional investment".2 However, the so-called "Grub Street" writers of the Enlightenment era used the weapon of anger, which they defined as "[a pleasurable desire for the individual's feeling of being blocked or hampered" in the eighteenth century]"3. Above all in France, Grub Street writers criticized the inner circle of philosophes and

1 Hewitt, Rachel. 2017. A Revolution of Feeling. (London: Granta), 6.

2 Ibid, 189.

3 Enenkel, Karl A.E. and Anita Traninger. 2015. Introduction: Discourses of Anger in the Early Modern Period. (KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN), 7.

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contended that the High Enlightenment "look[ed] very tame"4. Grub Street writers often had a hard life, enduring a difficult "psychological toll", "loneliness", and poverty. Due to "being hampered" both physically and psychologically, their anger boiled over.5

Jean-Paul Marat was a member of the community of Grub Street authors in France. In Marat's early years, he expressed his "overt opposition to Newton's optical theories".6 His audacity caused his alienation from the Academy of Sciences, so he lost the ability to become a physicist in respectable circles and hardly attracted patronage. This rejection would lead him to another way of development. Marat joined the ranks of Grub Street. He was good at using anger to filibuster, propagandize, and persuade his readers. As mentioned in the History of Emotion, anger belongs to the basic emotions that can be transferred through language. Marat wrote sentences seething with anger to encourage people to fight and rebel against despotism, arousing their passion and courage to revolt against French Kings. His angry voice was mainly shown in his accusations and warnings with all their power, and his writing style was "deadly serious".7 These elements are on vivid display in the Chains of Slavery (1774), Marat's famous political book, which encouraged people to shake off the chains that bound them. Marat, full of fury, criticized monarchical government and "craved revenge against the society that had failed to appreciate his genius".8

**Histography**

Marat was famous for his influence in the French Revolution. When talking about politicians during the period of the French Revolution, historians would never overlook Marat due to his great leadership and talents. As a "friend of the People," Marat published L'Ami du Peuple to speak out about his opinions on human rights, and stood by the poor to strive for changing the terrible situation in France. Though L'Ami du Peuple has been widely studied by historians to trace Marat's contributions to the development of equality and justice, many historians have suggested that the Chains of Slavery, which was written well before the Revolution, captures Marat's early

4 Darnton, Robert. 1971. The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France. (Oxford: The Past and Present Society), 114. http://past.oxfordjournals.org/

5 Ibid, 104.

6 Conner, Clifford D.2012. Marat, Jean-Paul: Tribune of French Revolution. (London: Pluto Press), 28.

7 Ibid, 65.

8 Ibid, 30.

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goals as a politician. Since there were fewer techniques to attract readers and encourage action by objective argument, Chains of Slavery seems closer to Marat's original writing style. Also, since the Chains of Slavey was written by Marat in London during the 1770s, it focuses largely on British politics, providing a kind of model for his thinking about the French political situation. The linkage between Marat's early years abroad and his experience in France has often been discussed by historians. For example, Rachel Hammersley once commented that the Chains of Slavery is "not only about the gestation of Marat's political ideas, but about the intellectual connections between these two nations during this period." In his early works, Marat began to refine his ability to use emotions to persuade and express passion in order to address certain problems and to awaken empathy in his readers. In Jean-Paul Marat: Tribune of French Revolution, Clifford Conner discussed the function of anger in Marat's writings as a powerful weapon.9 This essay will also discuss the influence of Marat's anger, but it will evaluate the efficiency of using anger in Chains of Slavery, and it will look into Marat's characteristics by citing his writings from both his books and his newspaper.

**Marat and Chains of Slavery**

Chains of Slavery, Marat's first political book, was published in London in 1774. Very Often, political commentators were inclined to praise the system of the British Parliament, for its independence and for its ability to curtail the King's power. In the France of this time, the loudest voiced on republican topics tended to see the British political structure in favorable terms. However, Marat had seen a darker side of British politics. Deeply influenced by the radical British politician John Wilkes, who led the "Wilkes-and Liberty" movement from 1763 to 1774, Marat was attuned to Parliament's many shortcomings and the monarch's abuse of power. During that period, corruption in Parliament had reached an unprecedented level. King George III violated the independent rule of the British Parliament, and recentralized the power in the crown. John Wilkes, as a journalist, criticized the King and was thrown into prison as a result. The imprisonment of Wilkes aroused the British populace's anger, and social conflicts frequently ensued, leading to the development of a grass-roots movement.10 Witnessing the situation in Britain, Marat reviewed the British economy and politics in the Chains of Slavery. He seriously criticized the corrupt parliamentary system, expressing his anger at the oppression suffered by the people. In Chapter I, entitled "Of the Power of Time", Marat invoked that "heads heated with ideas of liberty,""the bloody image of Tyranny," and "the area of justice" to begin the book, establishing the firm theme of promoting freedom while combating the unfair politi-

9 Ibid, 66.

10 Ibid, 14-16.

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cal system.11 In the next chapter, Marat wrote down the famous sentence with an allusion to Rousseau: “[People] perceive the chains concealed with flowers, ready to be fixed on the arms of their countrymen.”12 Marat used symbols that could stimulate the human senses, such as blood and heat, to give readers a vivid impression of the strong colors and tensions of the scenes he described, inspiring thrills and sensations. Combining images representing oppression and violence (chains) with those standing for peace and beauty (flowers), he contrasted the softness of flowers with the hardness of chains to show the deception of cruel despotism, providing a novel and fearful scene that contained the tragedy that despotism brought to the country. From the perspective of Marat, public entertainment was used to threaten the country by destroying virtue and promoting luxury and corruption, leading people to be slaves of the King and dupes of despotism.13 Dances, songs, plays—all were mere tools for the King to conquer the people and destroy their freedom. As Marat wrote in Chapter VI: “Thus plays, entertainments, shows, are the allurements of servitude, and the tools of tyranny”.14 Persuading people to cast off their virtues, public entertainment also led to an “idle and lewd life”15 and further served to enslave the people. It distorted people’s concept of liberty, inducing them to indulge in luxuries and pursue a money-oriented life, distracting people’s attention from important political topics to useless and harmful activities, decreasing people’s wit and cognitive abilities.16

Marat proved himself to be an extreme populist, using short and serious words to point out the drawbacks of entertainment. He expressed his anger bravely through his words, forming his own style of writing. In the following chapters, Marat depicted the British King as a villain who desired to expand his power to every corner of the nation in order to inflict the royal interest on the people’s will and abolish legal rights. And he described from the perspective of political structure, economics, and justice how the British King oppressed his people. For example, In Chapter V: Of the Pomp of Power, Marat stated “Whenever [kings] appear in public, it is with the attributes of foreign power”17, showing the collusion between the pomp of the domestic government and foreign governments who acted as a backup. Marat believed that only the power of royalty could make the situation so corrupt and

11 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1774. The Chains of Slavery. (London), chap. 1

12 Ibid, chap. 2

13 Ibid, chap. 10

14 Ibid, chap. 6

15 Ibid, chap. 12

16 Ibid, chap. 10

17 Ibid, chap. 5

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distressed, but the collaboration between pomp, the King, the aristocrats, and even merchants and foreign powers finally lead to the situation of extreme corruption in Britain. As Marat claimed, " [Princes] grant peculiar prerogatives to individuals, and give pensions to courteous officers, to adulatory academicians, poets, comedians, etc."18 The King also broke the balance between the Parliament and the King by intruding into the judicial courts, pursuing unfair cases and changing the definition of justice19. Under the scheme of despotism, the royalty's interest was the supreme goal of the nation's development, and the cost, no matter how large it was and how many people it hampered, was considered worthy and necessary for achieving the goal and protecting the King.

Additionally, Marat saw the great impact of a public army. The army, in the republican language and conception, was a crucial source of power and independence. Marat argued for a public and federal army which belonged to the common people instead of the crown. In Chapter X: Of Luxury, Marat expressed his argument explicitly: he praised the model of Sparta, which was an army-based polis comprised of citizen-soldiers, instead of Athens, which was commercially oriented and flourished because of the transactions of the kinds of luxuries mentioned above. Marat spoke highly of the spirit of sacrifice of the Spartan soldiers, who protected their polis with their own hands and weapons. He saw the altruism and the republican elements in Sparta and commented on the contrasting situation in Britain. "Thus perished liberty at Sparta, and thus it will perish among us", Marat observed, suggesting the growing social evil of the 1760s and 1770s.20

As Marat's first political book, the Chains of Slavery already shows a key feature of Marat's writing: his use of pathos. In Marat's writing, it is not hard to see his effort to break the "tranquility" of the text in order to express the emotion of anger to his audience by using short sentences and exclamation, which is one of the ways to transfer anger mentioned in the History of Emotions.21 For instance, in Chapter LVIII: To usurp Supreme Power, Marat exclaimed :"How many of these acts of great policy, are swallowed up by time and buried in the night of oblivion; yet how many are still recorded in history!"22 And in Chapter LX: Inconsideration and Folly of the People, Marat wrote that "For a few idle persons to pass away their time in those spacious gardens which surround his palaces, what a multitude of useful labourers

18 Ibid, chap. 18

19 Ibid, chap. 21

20 Ibid, chap. 10

21 Hewitt. 2017. A Revolution of Feeling, 12.

22 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1774. The Chains of Slavery. (London), chap. 58

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were reduced to wretched habitations! What a great number of them buried in the mud!"23

In Marat's contemporary era, however, there were philosophes who frowned on the use of the strong emotional language employed by Marat and his Grub Street peers. Unlike the neo-Stoics, Marat invoked emotions aloud, especially anger, to threaten, encourage, and warn people to take actions to recover and protect their liberty and to seize their natural rights. He used mainly short and powerful sentence, such as "lead us to freedom"24"It is all over for us"25, to express his disappointments about the British government and his belief that the "King's power would only be legitimate if constrained by law and exercised in the interests of the people".26 Marat was an empirical person who only confirmed those policies that could benefit the society and its people. Specifically, he called for the redistribution of wealth in society, maintaining that "people without property who were faced with starving to death had an absolute natural right to confiscate the surplus property of the wealthy.""Political freedom is meaningless to a starving person," he added, stressing that "the law should forbid excessive inequality of wealth."27 Even more than political rights, Marat firmly believed that basic necessities for the people were of fundamental importance. He deemed the right to survival to be the highest and the most basic rights for citizens, insisting on the interest of the common people and fighting against privilege. Marat suggested that, under the same law, regardless of wealth or poverty, people were all equal in Britain, and the brave ones who fought for their mutual rights were all siblings.

Chains of Slavery was not only a book for analyzing the political system in Britain, but it also had more practical uses. In fact, this book was written to encourage a revolution in Britain to change the situation. It persuaded its readers to free their souls and to break their chains, aiming at overthrowing tyrannical government and its centralized power. In the end, the Chains of Slavery had only a negligible influence on British history. But arguably it had a huge impact on the French people, helping Marat to develop his unique emotional political style that he would perfect at the time of the French Revolution.

23 Ibid, chap. 60

24 Conner. 2012. Marat, Jean-Paul: Tribune of French Revolution, 36.

25 Ibid, 71.

26 Ibid, 37.

27 Ibid, 44.

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**Marat and France**

Chains of Slavery inspired Marat to publish his own paper later in France. In the year 1789, Marat began to call himself, l'ami du peuple, the "friend of the people." Using this platform, Marat was able to express his views to the French people more conveniently and freely. The elements of emotions were well preserved in Marat's later works in the L'Ami du peuple, showing Marat's sense of justice and his concern for the development of France.

L'Ami du peuple, later named the Journal de la République Francaise, had a significant effect on the French people throughout the period of the French Revolution. Marat "talked to the victims of oppression"28, revolted against the King, and advised people to seize their own rights. Combining political articles with commentary on the up-to-the-minute political situation in France, Marat proved his excellent talents as a gifted political writer.

Before the French Revolution, the economic situation was not optimistic at all. Farmers encountered a bad crop in the year 1789 because of the extreme cold weather, and then the ice melted in the next spring, causing a catastrophic flood that hit the French economy again. Since the supply of wheat was poor, and demand far exceeded supply, the price of bread went sky-high, posing a threat to people's lives in that period. Witnessing the weak government and the continuing calamities, Marat seriously "blamed former royal officers for leading France into a terrible mess"29, arguing that the aristocrats and the King were on the other side opposite the common people.

To warn people of their lost rights, Marat used vivd imaginary as he had in the Chains of Slavery, showing a particular affinity for language that one commentator has described as "blood-thirsty" 30 . He wrote of "heads chopped off," warned of those who would "cut your throats without mercy," and "slits the bellies of your wives,"31 so as to arouse people's emotions and motivations for engaging in the revolution. These words not only awakened people's fear, but also forced readers to think about the current society and community. The pictures he described and the elaborate usage of scary phrases could raise the natural anger of people and bring a powerful emotional impact to readers, enemies, and traitors. Moreover, Marat vigorously opposed the National Assembly's attack on workers' rights, claiming that the "revolution is to serve the interest of the poor." He even advocated the purifi-

28 Ibid, 66.

29 Ibid, 37.

30 Ibid, 5.

31 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1790. It's All Over for Us!. (National Assembly of France).

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cation of Paris by blood and mobilizing people to take the grass-root movement to show their determination of defeating the authority.

Compared to Chains of Slavery, the later works in Marat's newspaper, L'Ami du peuple and Journal de la Republique Francaise, were more moving for his readers. Marat showed his concern for the French Revolution, expressed his sentiment for the loss of freedom, and wrote with high emotion of the collapse of the French crown. The emotions under his pen extended to other types as well, such as sorrow, happiness, and grief. In l'Ami du Peuple, No. 625, December 14, 1791, "Freedom is Lost", for example, Marat wrote that

"Yes, freedom is lost among us, and lost without a chance of return. But while waiting for the tyrant to be re-established in his power, cast a glimpse on the excesses of despotism that the fall of our current tyrants will soon bring about."

Marat used pathos in this text as well to show his sorrow of losing the freedom: "O my Fatherland! What a terrible fate the future reserves for you! A fatal decree of pitiless destiny will always tie over your eyes the blindfold of illusion and error in order to prevent you from profiting from your resources and to deliver you, defenselessly, into the hands of your cruel enemies!"32

Unlike his usual expression of anger, the emotions in the texts above showed Marat's strong passion for France and freedom. The flow of other emotions besides anger provided readers with a more realistic figure of Marat, awakening people's empathy or their love for their siblings and nation.

In L'Ami du Peuple, No 671, July 12, 1792, "What Men Are More Vain than the French?", Marat showed his disappointment to the French people: "Of all the people in the world, the Frenchman is the one least made to be free." And he further reasoned that it was selfishness that caused their dilemma: "But what men are more vain than the French? Each of them neglects to work together for the common good with the most enlightened and upright men in order to seek a private role in public affairs."33 Marat questioned human nature to express his strong belief in the evil of people's mind, but his attitude to the future of people's freedom was positive. As he called them "brothers and sisters"34 in the Letter to the Jacobins and "friends of

32 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1791. Freedom is Lost. Translated by Mitchell Abidor. Online Archive. https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/marat/1791/freedom-lost.htm

33 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1792. What Men Are More Vain than the French. Translated by Mitchell Abidor. Online Archive. https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/marat/1792/vain.htm

34 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1792. Letter to the Jacobins. Translated by Mitchell Abidor. Online Archive. https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/marat/1793/letter-jacobins.htm

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the Fatherland"35 in The Flight of the Royal Family, Marat expressed his respect and love for his fellow citizens and fighters. In Journal de la République Francaise, No 105. January 23, 1793, The Execution of the Tyrant, which marked the surrender of the French King at the end of the French Revolution, Marat exclaimed his exciting mood and sense of glory: "The head of the tyrant has just fallen under the sword of the law; the same blow has overturned the foundations of monarchy among us. I finally believe in the republic."36A profound silence reigned all around him, and when his head was shown to the people, from all around there arose the cries of Vive la nation! Vive la république!"37

Though Marat once put down his pen in 1792, he could not abandon his heart which always was passionate for France and his people. In turn, his supporters looked forward to his returning and longed for his power under the pen to encourage people to revolt for their future and obtain their deserved human rights. As written in The Hébertists Back Marat, the president Hébert and secretary Naud of the Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man and the Citizen expressed their happiness when Marat was back: "The Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man and the Citizen testified to the Friend of the People, the severe and courageous Marat, its wish that he once again take up his journal.

Ever devoted to the Fatherland, this writer has decided to take up his pen again, sharpened by crime and tyranny's new maneuvers. More than ever, Marat will pierce crime through the heart, support the friends of freedom, encourage and enlighten the people, astonish slaves, and make the evil blanch."

They spoke aloud their hatred for the period of terror, during which they were not able to utter their sounds in brochures and newspaper. When Marat returned, they gave sufficient understanding and supports for Marat to welcome his back: "How painful it was for the Friend of the People to flee to a foreign land when, proscribed, his death sworn to by the court and Lafayette, he left thousands of victims defenseless, struck by the same blow as him! But what could he have done in those times of horror when most of the popular writers were cowards or had sold out? Would it have served the cause of humanity to continue his journal when the most peaceful citizen

35 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1792. The Flight of the Royal Family. Translated by Mitchell Abidor. Online Archive. https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/marat/1791/king.htm

36 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1793. The Execution of the Tyrant. Translated by Mitchell Abidor. Online Archive. https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/marat/1793/tyrant.htm

37 Marat, Jean-Paul. 1793. The Execution of the Tyrant. https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/marat/1793/tyrant.htm

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couldn't pronounce the name of the Friend of the People without being dragged to a prison cell?"38

Marat's later argument in his own newspaper were very similar to the early ones in the Chains of Slavery: advocating virtue, the importance of a public army, defeating despotism, and so forth. But they were also more developed and stylistic in their analyses of French politics. His talents was admired by his people of France, and he was the shining one in the crowd using his pen as a sword, opening the way for himself. He kept on uttering the angry voices to warn people or used deep passion to embrace his fatherland, expecting it could recover from traumas and wars. With the help of his newspaper, Marat became the famous journalist and politician of the revolutionary period. He could finally be heard.

**Conclusion**

Marat, in his times, was often isolated. His daring opinions on science enraged the Academy of Science. However, his virtues such as independence and perseverance, which were on display long before he became a politician, were hard to ignore, and they further established the basis for Marat to be an important actor in French history. Marat's first contribution to the political ferment was Offering to the Nation, but it did not make Marat a famous politician. His second writing, Supplement to the Offering to the Nation, though far from a call to rebellion, was critical enough to catch the eye of the royal censors. The Supplement was declared seditious, but this brought him to the attention of the radicalizing public.39

After he became a politician, Marat caught public attention by his anger and passionate writing style like other Grub-Street writers did. From his words, some readers found Marat to be sinister and scary, and his use of "blood" and "violence" was commented to be insane and brutal. Marat warned off his enemies and traitors by the burst of emotions, embracing the freedom of people with his full passion. Marat showed his extreme populist's opinions and his powerful writing, even though many of his contemporaries criticized Marat as an ignorant, and even crazy politician. His view as a pure republican scared off many readers, made them stunned at his use of language, questioning the underlying meaning between lines. However, Marat's anger was not only the result of emotions and passions, but also the evidence of his reason. On the July 14, 1790, most people in France celebrated their achievement on the revolution and the compromise of the French King, believing the peace of France was in their hands already after months and

38 Marat. 1793. The Execution of the Tyrant. https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/marat/1793/tyrant.htm

39 Conner. 2012. Marat, Jean-Paul: Tribune of French Revolution, 35-37.

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years of effort. But Marat warned people in his newspaper, l'ami du peuple, that the victory was not reached yet and the achievement at that moment was a“vain spectacle”40. He asked his audience with fury: “Will it always be necessary to treat you like overgrown children?”41 On August 31, 1790, General Bouille launched an attack with his troops and the Mertz National Guard. Afterwards dozens of soldiers were hanged for their role in the mutiny. The Nancy National Guard was dissolved and the local Jacobin Club was forced to disband. The “bloodbath at Nancy”42 proved Marat’s constructive talent in politics. Conflicts, terror, and chaos came up to France once again, instead of people’s expectation of peace and serenity. Marat, proved his passion and intelligence, won the name of “father of fraternal societies”43.

Marat chose anger as his weapon. Among all the emotions, he captured the natural one which could be suited for all levels of people, no matter their jobs or social status. In the late period of the French Revolution, Marat suggested to “educate and organize the sans-culottes to fight against their enemies”, meeting directly with the people at the lowest level of society. The wide public supporters, further helped Marat to be the l'ami du peuple de jure. Also, his anger expressed through violence was a way of hectoring his enemies and supposed traitors, posing threats and preventing the potential losses might be caused by them. There were other intelligent politicians who used emotions as arsenals as well, but they were not as successful as Marat in some ways. It was Marat’s choice contributing to his fame and achievements. For example, compared to Robespierre, who used terror as his sword to rule society, Marat aroused people’s emotions in a more efficient way. When perceiving anger, readers could sense the strong intentions that Marat had, which could set orders and direct people explicitly. Compared with anger, fear could make people lose their temper, put themselves into a dilemma where they did not know how to break the dead-lock. Thus, once terror was put into practice, it could be more disastrous and uncontrollable than anger.

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40 Ibid, 68.

41 Ibid, 70.

42 Ibid, 75.

43 Ibid, 77.

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