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Oded Rabinovitch, *The Perraults: A Family of Letters in Early Modern France*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018. xvi + 233pp. Tables, figures, charts, notes, bibliography and index. \$57.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781501729423.

Review by Malcolm Greenshields, University of Lethbridge.

In the first two pages, Oded Rabinovitch starts his book with “Cinderella,” an arresting illustrative story, and probably the most popular attributed to the Perrault family. The author argues convincingly that it is a tale about kinship. A sweet-natured young woman, Cinderella toils endlessly in rags at the command of her abusive stepmother and stepsisters. Just as her abusers seem to have a hereditary nastiness, Cinderella’s virtue and kind nature are part of her family inheritance. When she is in despair because she cannot go to the prince’s ball, kinship produces a solution. Cinderella’s godmother, who is also a fairy, appears and outfits her splendidly for an evening at the ball. When she is found to be the wearer of a glass slipper left at the palace, her fairy godmother transforms her rags into a regal costume. The end of the tale asserts the strength of kinship when Cinderella, bride of the prince, rather than abandoning her family, invites her stepmother and stepsisters to the palace and provides her stepsisters with aristocratic husbands. Kinship has trumped vengeance and individualism.

While social advancement was more rapid and lofty for Cinderella than for most, it was also a common goal in seventeenth-century France. Rabinovitch attempts to explain the strategies used by the Perrault family to advance socially and, beginning as a family of barristers, ultimately to become a distinguished family of letters. Using various family strategies and seizing the opportunities that presented themselves along the way, the members of the Perrault family became influential in a variety of fields.

The first movement forward in these developments was geographic. Early in the seventeenth century, Pierre Perrault, a lawyer from Tours, moved to Paris. There he married Paquette Le Clerc, who was from a prosperous family with some notable connections, and began to establish himself in the relatively humble parish of St. Etienne du Mont in the university quarter on the Left Bank. Pierre’s movement reflected larger changes in France as centers of provincial culture lost importance, and Paris became the heart of the cultural world. Paquette and Pierre had five children who survived to adulthood; Jean (died 1669), Pierre (1611-80), Claude (1613-88), Nicolas (1624-62), and Charles (1628-1703). With the exception of Jean, whose historical record is scant, the brothers collaborated on writing and participated in circles of intellectual sociability.

While most of Pierre Sr.'s connections were local, and he remained in his parish, he did develop some relations in the court of Gaston d'Orléans, uncle of Louis XIV. His children would later move to more central and prestigious districts. Eventually, Charles Perrault would have an office in the house of Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619-83), perhaps the most influential minister of Louis XIV.

Another element of the family strategy for advancement was the investment in expensive educations for the Perrault children. Charles, Pierre, Claude, and Nicolas could all write well and devoted themselves to serious study. Their parents taught them to read, and their own intellectual energy and curiosity carried them far. While Jean, Pierre, and Charles became lawyers, only Jean seems to have practiced for any sustained period. Law was a common starting point for other careers such as royal office and particularly finance. The educational investment went beyond the family's legal tradition. Claude Perrault became a physician and was regent in the Paris Faculty of Medicine, while Nicolas received his doctorate in theology and became a professor at the Sorbonne. Even after they abandoned their initial posts, all four of the youngest sons were able to distinguish themselves as writers and scholars.

With an extensive documentary base, especially of notarial archives, Rabinovitch portrays the Perraults as a family whose strategy employed many of the typical means of the period to advance their prospects and careers. As a result, the author's portrait of their progress is a dynamic thicket of intersecting networks involving new institutions, patronage, circles of sociability, a country house, and venal offices. Kinship infused the whole of this system of advancement. The author also shows kinship to have been a factor in the development of new cultural forms and intellectual approaches that were to characterize the age of scientific revolution and the expansion of vernacular literature along with a new larger population of readers, and the development of national literatures. The base of intellectual endeavor was the household, while the new formal centers of intellectual inquiry were the royal academies.

The policies of the monarchy made it a voracious consumer of funds as Louis XIV built massive armies to fight for the glory and the expansion of France. The glorification of Louis XIV also required writers, artists, and architects for a sustained and vigorous propaganda campaign. The Perrault family's accomplishments and reputation were advanced partly in response to these royal needs. First of all, Pierre became an official in royal finance about the same time as he married into a family of royal officials and bought the office of receiver general for the *généralité* of Paris. Like his colleagues, Pierre made a rich living handling the King's money. He also made Charles his aide. Charles became a clever and amusing writer of poems and other pieces. Moreover, he promoted his brother's image with his writing and helped Pierre to establish circles of intellectual sociability both in Paris and in the Perrault country house at Viry, southeast of Paris. The households acquired an aristocratic flavor, as eminent thinkers, writers, and artists found Viry and its company to their taste. The most historically notable of their guests was Christiaan Huygens (1629-95), the brilliant Dutch mathematician, physicist, astronomer, and inventor, a great scientist and a major contributor to the Scientific Revolution. Huygens and his family became close friends of the Perraults. The family's affinity reached great heights indeed.

While these gatherings, where guests feasted, gambled, talked, and collaborated could be called salons, they were much less formal and constrained than the classic image of the "great" salons would suggest. In fact, Rabinovitch brings a welcome corrective to the notion of the salon, with

his description of the less formal gatherings like those at Viry that included many established authors and gave Charles in particular a public reputation as a poet and writer. Among the literary guests was Jean Chapelain (1595-1674), a poet and critic who began under Richelieu to work as an intermediary between the monarchy and the literary community. He became a crucial supporter of Charles Perrault.

The Perrault family's future took a sharp turn in the early 1660s, when the King's great minister Colbert undertook a purge of financial officers, and Pierre was disgraced and deeply in debt. Despite Charles's attempts to intervene for Pierre, Colbert was determined, and Pierre's financial career was over by 1663. Charles, by contrast, was on the rise, and his prestigious literary, bureaucratic, and cultural career became the new means of advancement for the family. His poetry had come to the attention of Colbert, who impressed Mazarin with it. With the death of Mazarin, Colbert became a member of the king's small council of ministers and soon served in a range of functions including not only finance but also various aspects of cultural affairs. He decided that medals, histories, poetry, buildings, and monuments would serve to glorify Louis XIV. On the recommendation of Jean Chapelain, the Perraults' guest at Viry, Colbert named Charles secretary of the Petite académie, a committee to oversee these projects. In the midst of his considerable activities he was also appointed to the Académie française.

Authors in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were not only the creators of literary works but also persons who inhabited families, who had official titles, were members of formal institutions, and had patrons. All of these factors served to establish identity and even the worthiness of the writing itself in the minds of the reading public. Institutional associations and titles were given pride of place. As he rose in status, Charles Perrault gained valuable marks of his success: commissioner of buildings, controller general, member of the Académie française. Even after his disgrace, Pierre was still given the title of receiver general in biographical works. The kinship in a family of letters meant that if one member of the family was mentioned in a biography, all four brothers were usually mentioned. Colbert, of course, was an important patron for Charles, and the work he gave Charles allowed him to help his brothers. He was especially able to promote Claude, who left his post in the Faculty of Medicine and became a noted scientist, inventor, architect, and author. The establishment of the Academy of Sciences in 1666 was crucial to Claude's future. He was appointed as a founding member, probably because of Charles's connection to Colbert.

While he had no formal preparation, Claude established his usefulness and reputation rapidly. His architectural knowledge and abilities brought him important commissions such as the design of the eastern façade of the Louvre. His scholarly talents were evident in the praise accorded his translation of *The Ten Books of Architecture* by the ancient Roman architect and military engineer Vitruvius. His knowledge and experience of machines and an interest in natural history and philosophy led him to do his most prestigious work. He dissected, illustrated, and explained animals drawn from the abundant supply of exotic creatures in the royal menageries at Versailles. His book on the natural history of animals was the result of these long labors. Claude's early education and the accumulation of his disparate activities made him perhaps one of the few persons able to complete his later work on the mechanics of animals, which compared the systems and movements of animals to those of machines. His fine drawings, some of which Rabinovich has reproduced in the book, were superior to most others in his field and distinguished his work among scientists in the new scientific age. His early literary endeavors with his brothers, including a paraphrase of the *Aeneid* and other projects,

gave him a style and eloquence that made him an impressive figure in the Academy and in society. His medical training in anatomy and his familiarity with machines were indispensable. Although dissection itself was often considered a base activity suited only to barber surgeons and the like, during his dissection of a camel in 1688, Claude contracted an infection and died.

Watching the progress of the Perraults as it is described here is fascinating. With considerable economy but with much significant detail, the author has rebuilt the web of networks that made a remarkable literary family. Rabinovitch not only shows the various relationships that advanced the Perraults, but also charts their wealth, possessions, debts, and dowries. This astute use of documents is a strong point of the book, along with Rabinovitch's imaginative use of fairy tales to support his cogent argument about the pervasive importance of kinship. Occasionally, the mixture of thematic organization with necessary chronological passages leads to some unavoidable repetitiveness, but it does not mar the essential integrity of this concise work.

The book begins and ends with kinship at the center, and every significant moment along the way affects the family's progress. Initially the choice of a boy's godparents could directly affect his welfare and sometimes the direction of his career. Marriage further spread the affinity of the family and could determine its financial solidity and prestige. When Pierre married the widow Catherine Lorimer, she brought with her connections to the world of royal officeholders and a dowry of 150,000 *livres*. Even the official witnesses to a marriage could be a source of prestige and a demonstration of important connections. While there were no witnesses of great importance from Pierre's side at his wedding, the eighteen witnesses on Charles's contract in 1672 included many of the rich and powerful, over half of them nobles, such as the Duc de Chevreuse and the Duc de Noailles. Some of his noble and powerful connections were benefits of Charles's work at Versailles, so that his career networks also affected his extended kinship. His important patron Colbert sent his own wife and daughters to the wedding and appointed Claude to the Academy of Sciences.

As Colbert aged, kinship trumped his other connections. In 1681 and 1682 Colbert gave Charles's post of aide to his own son and ceased to pay Charles as a man of letters. Colbert died in 1683. Charles kept only his appointment at the Académie française. His literary production had been thin while he served Colbert, but now he was to live by his pen as an independent writer in the modern fashion. Although he had written before and during his work at Versailles, in the early modern period Charles was celebrated mainly for later works he wrote while a member of the Académie française. Although his work as a cultural intermediary at Versailles was considered worthy of praise, his volumes on the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns and his preceding poem on the century of Louis the Great were always worthy of notice to his contemporaries. Charles was firmly on the side of the Moderns, living, as he saw it, in the age of new knowledge and scientific advancement. Versailles had been his greatest patron, but his subsequent writing was considered superior. Interestingly, the now-famous fairy tales were not considered particularly noteworthy until the late eighteenth century. In a sense, Charles was ahead of his time with Mother Goose. Always thinking of the family, he attributed the tales to his teenaged son Pierre d'Armancourt, perhaps hoping that the presentation of the tales to the niece of Louis XIV would advance his son's career.

Charles, the only Perrault of his generation remaining after 1688, continued to bolster the reputation of his family. He even took on the difficult cases. After his disgrace, Pierre had

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turned to serious writing and research, and his most noteworthy interest was hydrology, in a research project that led to a book on the origins of springs. Nicolas, pious theologian though he may have been, was a more difficult problem. He lost his post after mounting a public defense of the Jansenist Antoine Arnauld in 1656. Charles did his best to emphasize the intellectual purity of his brother's endeavor. Nicolas also wrote a polemic on the morality of Jesuits that was mentioned in connection with his name. Whether or not Charles's attempt to protect the family's reputation was successful, the Perraults remained a family of letters. Oded Rabinovitch shows here, perhaps better than anyone before him, the complexities and importance of kinship in seventeenth-century France.

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