

The 'New' Cultural History: Hunt's *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Ginsberg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, & Darton's *The Great Cat Massacre*. By Xaq Frohlich.

1) Hunt's study of the "collective unconscious" of revolutionary France, Davis's sleuthing of identity and deception in 16th century France, and Ginsberg's creative lower class of Inquisition Italy each represent an effort to crack the historian's black box left by a deficiency of written sources on the early modern illiterate classes. If history books have been stories of upper class "high" culture, how does the "new history" rewrite those histories through its focus on previously peripheral or subjugated cultural groups? Is it successful at its efforts in building a bottom-up history, or does it function better at only drawing attention to the pretentious assumptions that have traditionally presumed a top-down flow of culture?

2) Hunt's analysis of the subjective experience of the French Revolution, through literary and artistic representations of family and projections onto a social-political transition from patriarchy to *fraternité*, begs the question of how the new historian's analysis itself can remain detached and objective. What does it mean, for example, that Sade and others wrote pornographic, indulgent parodies of the royalty in the year leading up to and into the French Revolution? Would Hunt's attempt to associate familial imagery in a literary context with a social and political movement be strengthened by a knowledge of how contemporaries would have read the texts she cites, or is the study of an "unconscious" will something that can be extracted directly from the texts as she does?

3) Ginsberg and Davis's stories (and from what I know of Darton's Cat Massacre book as well) are all fascinating stories. Yet, their uniqueness, which drew first the historian's eye, and then the reader's, becomes problematic as the authors attempt to draw meaning to a broader context – does Ginsberg's creative protagonist represent bottom-up cultural critique or just a silly nut? Is the theatrics of Darton's cat massacre sign of serious political foment, or simply (heartless) farce? (Here Davis's numerous "perhapses" keep her hands clean.)