

The Family Romance of the French Revolution

By Lynn Hunt

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This latest work from an author known for her contributions to the new cultural history is a multidisciplinary investigation of the foundations of modern politics. "Family Romance" was coined by Freud to describe the fantasy of being freed from one's family and joining one of higher social standing. Lynn Hunt uses the term broadly to describe the images of the familial order underlying revolutionary politics. In a wide-ranging account using novels, engravings, paintings, speeches, newspaper editorials, pornographic writing, and revolutionary legislation about the family, Hunt shows that politics were experienced through the grid of the family romance.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Not just for French specialists, this difficult yet fascinating book should also interest psychohistorians, cultural-intellectual scholars and political scientists. Recognizing that absolutism rested on a model of patriarchal authority, cultural historian Hunt (*Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* , Univ. of California Pr., 1989) uses Freudian terminology to explore what the killing of the father-king Louis XVI meant to the revolutionaries creating a new political order. Examining contemporary painting, literature, and iconography to see how those meanings are expressed, she uncovers the "collective unconscious images of the familial order" underlying revolutionary beliefs. Motivating the political struggle, she demonstrates, were changing cultural notions of what defined a "good" mother or father, the republican focus on fraternity rather than patriarchy, and efforts to democratize family life.

- *Marie Marmo Mullaney, Caldwell Coll.*,

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Review

"This study will definitely challenge many a complacent historian."--John Taylor, "San Francisco Chronicle

From the Back Cover

This latest work from an author known for her contributions to the new cultural history is a daring multidisciplinary investigation of the imaginative foundations of modern politics. "Family romance" was coined by Freud to describe the fantasy of being freed from one's family and belonging to one of higher social standing. In Freud's view, the family romance was a way for individuals to fantasize about their place in the social order. Hunt uses the term more broadly, to describe the images of the familial order underlying revolutionary politics. She investigates the narratives of family relations that structured the collective political unconscious. Most Europeans in the eighteenth century thought of their rulers as fathers and of their nations as families writ large. The French Revolution violently disrupted that patriarchal model of authority and raised troubling questions about what was to replace it. The king and queen were executed after dramatic separate trials. Prosecutors in the trial of the queen accused her of exerting undue influence on the king and his ministers, engaging in sexual debauchery, and even committing incest with her eight-year-old son. Hunt focuses on the meaning of killing the king-father and the queen-mother and what these ritual sacrifices meant to the establishment of a new model of politics. In a wide-ranging account that uses novels, engravings, paintings, speeches, newspaper editorials, pornographic writing, and revolutionary legislation about the family, Hunt shows that politics were experienced through the grid of the family romance.

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