

Put the *The Return of Martin Guerre* and “The Great Cat Massacre” in conversation. What is similar about these works, how do their themes overlap? (This is an abstract prompt. Use your imagination! Think about what we learn from each text. Think about the portrayal of the working poor.)

The Return of Martin Guerre and “The Great Cat Massacre” are very similar. Both are constructed narratives from primary sources that argue to what extent symbolism determines the behavior of non-bourgeoisie roles in 16th and 17th century France. Moreover, both Darton and Zemon argue how some low-class members operate through society with more autonomy than is typically generalized. They are creating new conclusions to be drawn about the roles of individuals between different social classes.

First, let us compare how Darton establishes personal interactions and symbolism as the reason behind an individual's behavior in their day-to-day life. With Darton and “The Great Cat Massacre,” it could be assumed without understanding his argument that the large social structures between owner and laborer are the reasoning behind behavior in people like Contat’s day-to-day life. For example, without Dartons explanation of the symbolism in the 16th century, one might assume Contat is living his life based on a reaction to class struggle. Actions like being an apprentice are simply a means of obtaining a better social and economic status. Supporting the generalization that lower-class individuals of this time did not have that much to offer in historical context besides that social and economic struggle. However, through the memoirs of Contat, Darton can explain that the context of lower-class individuals fits into a similar context of the winners in a society where both are in different economic classes while operating with the same culture of 17th century France. The story of Contat and the other laborers killing the boss's wife’s cat is evidence that both the bourgeoisie and lower class exist with the same symbols or culture. Further supporting a new context of the lower class where it is

not only a life of production but a life where people never consider their class. They are considering how to react and take advantage of the playing field that all humans exist in regardless of class.

Zemon offers a similar argument in *The Return of Martin Guerre*, where she explains how earlier accounts of the Martin Guerre event also put low-class individuals in a different historical context than usual. Toward the end of her book, she brings up the primary source she used from James Coras, a judge during the Martin Guerre case, as evidence for interactionism creating an intricate role affecting all classes in the 16th century. Similar to how Darton puts Contat on the same playing field as the bourgeoisie from their shared culture with cats, Zemon puts Arnaud in the same playing field as Coras by pointing out Coras' remarks of being some prodigy. Zemon does not explicitly call this interactionism; however, the similarity between the bourgeoisie in "The Cat Massacre" and Coras is that they are reacting to individual experiences. To Coras, Arnaud's actions are admirable in some way. Even though history portrays these classes as almost entirely separate, they cooperate to the extent of a personal level.

Lastly, Darton and Zemon's arguments explain the autonomy that low-class individuals were not perceived to have. Similar to how Zemons did not explicitly call the relationship between Coras and Arnaud interactionism, Darton does not explicitly describe the actions of Contat and his peers as autonomous. However, in Darton's final page he says, "Monsieur and Madame retire, leaving the workers in liberty." I consider the description of "the workers in liberty" as more autonomous than the descriptions of any other worker in the 17th century. Similar to how we can forget about the symbolic interactionism causing their actions, history can also forget the context of how low-class individuals were not only expressing independence in their own class but instead, like in "The Great Cat Massacre," expressing independence directly

towards a class that is thought to be untouchable by non-bourgeoisie. Zemon explicitly contradicts the autonomy of low-class women in the 16th century through her analysis of Martins's wife Bertrande. Compared to peasant men, women are more generalized in their place in history as subject to men. In the case of Bertrande, similar to Darton with Contat, Zemon argues that the Bertrande's behavior can support autonomy outside the generalization of peasant women. To Zemon, Bertrande was not deceived by Arnaud, instead, she was consciously deciding to keep her status as a married woman. Both Zemon and Darton reject the large-scale context of 16th and 17th century by arguing the extent of social norms acting on these individuals.

The micro-scale arguments from primary sources of early France allow more ambiguity for the context of individuals who were not of the highest class. I believe that the personal interactions between people contribute more to their true historical context than the typical generalizations that throw classes into small boxes. Low-class individuals are not looking at a system from far away and then operating through a large-scale lens. There is no clear definition of a Woman in the 16th century the same way there is no true definition of a Woman now. Each individual offers a different context relating to their own interactions.

Drawing from any of our documents, identify and develop themes that are relevant to contemporary American politics, social structures, international diplomacy, or military tactics.

Contemporary American politics, social structures, and military tactics are very similar to early Europe. One could even argue that modern America is the completion of many ideas that were only partially manifested in early Europe. Themes of virtue, power, and military strategies in Machiavelli's *The Prince* are extremely visible in Contemporary America. The social

generalizations of women in the 16th century that Natalie Zemon-Davis argues against are still a prevalent debate for the identity of modern American women.

Machiavelli's definition of virtue seems like the blueprint for every modern American politician. Being virtuous is not simply doing something good out of the kindness of your heart. Instead, virtue is a tool used to gain appraisal from a population. Meaning a leader should be virtuous only to gain popularity. The contemporary American idea of politicians is that they represent a population by lobbying for legislation the group believes is good for society. However, this idea of the political system is entirely idealistic. The real way politicians operate is as cynical as Machiavelli's take on virtue. Where American politicians are not lobbying virtuous legislation, they are lobbying legislation that will gain them votes or popularity in their party.

Machiavelli's definitions of power also manifested in contemporary America. Power, to Machiavelli, can be achieved through an individual's skill, clout, crime, or legal transitions of power that certify a leader. America allows for changes in power every four years at its largest scale, which means that throughout even the last twenty years, different presidents have displayed all four strategies for achieving power. Most recently, Machiavelli hit the nail on the head with contemporary America and a rise to power through crime. According to Machiavelli, a rise to power through criminal acts creates the most significant risk for a leader. Through Donald Trump's 2020 election campaign, we saw this considerable risk of achieving power through violating the constitution unfold. Where Machiavelli is proven correct, America stands firm on its ideas of legally achieving power. We can see how Donald Trump's risk has led to hate from many American citizens and disownment from members of his own political party. If

Donald Trump had read Machiavelli's *The Prince*, he might have seen how decertifying the electoral college was not his best option for maintaining office.

Lastly, if Machiavelli were alive today, he would be in awe of the contemporary American military complex. Machiavelli's dream state consists of a strong military built of soldiers native to the state. Without a strong military, the state might not even be considered a legitimate nation to Machiavelli. Moreover, the use of the military for things like international diplomacy or domestic control is clearly existing in the contemporary American military-industrial complex. Today America spends hundreds of billions of dollars trying to keep our nation's military at its best. We also do not have our military exclusively in America; instead, our military can be found in almost every region of the planet. The problem of domestic control Machiavelli debates is not even a question in contemporary America. Even if we had, another civil war it is pretty much impossible that any citizen uprising could scratch the power of the United States military. It is almost laughable to think that any independent domestic revolt could be successful.

Socially Zemon argues about the autonomy of women during 16th century France. Generalizations about the identity of women allowed for many historians to contradict Zemon's claims that Martin's wife had little autonomy. Invalidating possible decisions Betrande might have made during the events that made the trial of Arnaud. I believe these generalizations of women's identity are at a major change in American history today. Where instead of historians debating women's social standing based on their identity, we have the American public and politicians in a huge debate about constructing the current identity for women. Relating to more conservative American ideas where women's identity is clear can be compared to the historians who reject Zemon's argument of women's autonomy in feudal France based on their

assumed definition of a woman in that time. The other side of the contemporary American debate on identity could be aligned with Zemon's argument. That women do not have this concrete identity or way of life. Instead, the definition of women can be narrowed down to each individual's personal experience. Where if we fast forward a thousand years from now, a historian could not assume a woman's behavior is based off a concrete identity because women's identity is not definable in a large portion of American society. Even in regions where politicians are legislating a concrete identity for women, there is still no way to define them clearly.

Modern America is a compilation of many early European ideas. The success Machiavelli predicts if leaders follow certain actions is evident in the success of the United States. Themes of power and virtue are playing out before our very eyes. Understanding where these ideas stem from leads to an easy relationship between then and now. Zemon's challenge of identity is something we will continue to deal with forever. Americans are not focused on class struggle; we are focused on the individual's pursuit of liberty.