

21A.211

Study Questions

***Salem Possessed* and other materials on Salem Village**

Remember that the episode in Salem Village and New England witch hunting in general are parts of the wider European witch hunt.

"Three Sovereigns for Sarah" distorts the events in Salem Village less than other dramatizations, and in several respects it follows *Salem Possessed* closely. What are the difficulties of presenting history in a dramatic film? What is the influence of using a major star like Vanessa Redgrave? What great Hollywood theme is she playing out?

One of the great virtues of *Salem Possessed* is that it ties together individuals and broad patterns, so we can see the impact of individuals on events but also their place in the big picture. What is the importance of the following actors in the Salem drama? Tituba? Bridget Bishop? Governor Phipps, Justice Stoughton, Cotton Mather, Increase Mather, Samuel Parris, the Porters and Putnams, George Burroughs, John Proctor, Mary Easty?

How does B&N's take on Sarah Good (pp.203-206) differ from Carol Karlsen's in the Reader? What do the differences say about historical interpretation?

Most interpretations of the Salem episode pay great attention to the "afflicted girls," and most get caught up in the question of whether they were faking or crazy. How do B&N avoid this trap? What do you think was going on with the girls? How do our examples of spirit possession from the first half of the semester bear on this question?

Most interpretations of Salem follow the dramatic events closely day by day and week by week. How do B&N avoid that trap? How does the outbreak of 1692 end up as just one step in a long process?

In what ways do B&N's interpretation of the impact of legal procedures resemble Levack's? Many historians have treated the Salem episode as a kind of mass lynching--- how do B&N see it differently?

What elements in the Salem trials played roles analogous to torture in continental European trials?

In what ways were Salem village and its long history of factionalism typical or unusual?

Why does it matter that the frontier had moved away from Salem Village?

How did the Mathers and Samuel Parris, as religious leaders, shape the Salem crisis? In what ways do they resemble the demonologists discussed by Levack? Do you know examples from your own home towns of conflicts between minister and congregation?

Do you buy the argument by B&N (p.145) that the Putnams "displaced" their accusations, attacking stand-ins like Rebecca Nurse rather than the individuals they really hated? What are the strengths and dangers of the displacement argument?

The culmination of B&N's argument is their analysis of "Witchcraft and Social Identity" (pp.179-216). What do the life histories of the accused and the ways they were portrayed tell us about the value conflicts felt by everyone, including their accusers?

How does B&N's analysis of witches and social mobility connect with the chapter by Briggs called "The Projection of Evil"? to the tables from McFarlane introduced in class? to Levack's theme (pp.64-67) of rebellion?

(For anyone who has read *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*): How does B&N's interpretation of the relationship between Puritanism and the economy differ from Max Weber's?

What do B&N tell us about witches and gender?

What witches do B&N exclude from consideration? How might this shape their interpretations?

How can the Salem Village episode be unique and at the same time typical?