



1. How is the Puritan religion exhibited at the film’s outset? How would you describe it?
2. Old folk tales are the basis of the film’s plot. Why do you think colonial America is such a dark setting?
3. How does this family provide for itself on the frontier? What tasks does it undertake?
4. How is the topic of predestination incorporated into the conversation between the father and the son while they are hunting in the woods?
5. Tales of witchcraft aside, how does the movie convey the hardships of colonial life?
6. How is lust exhibited as a dominant feature of life in isolation?
7. In what ways does “cabin fever,” suspicion, and betrayal add to the film’s suspense?
8. The director insisted that deep historical research was necessary for the film’s look and tone. How is this authenticity conveyed in the dialogue, clothing, and sets?
9. In early Massachusetts, why were women targeted as scapegoats during times of anxiety? How does the film depict this pattern?
10. Consider the Salem Witch Trials. How does the sense of paranoia shown in this film compare with those of that historical event?


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Accompanying primary source:

Elizabeth Knapp (1655–1720) of Groton, Massachusetts, was the daughter of James Knapp (1626–about 1699) and Elizabeth (Warren) Knapp (1629–?), both of them immigrants to New England who settled first at Watertown, and then later removed to the new town of Groton. Elizabeth is my seventh-great grandmother. The following account of Elizabeth’s unfortunate possession by a demon in 1671 when she was sixteen years old is quoted in full from Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*. Mather’s account of Elizabeth Knapp’s possession is one of fourteen examples he gives of “Wonders of the invisible World” that have manifested themselves in New England:

“In the Town of *Groton*, one *Elizabeth Knap* (*October* 1671,) was taken after a very strange manner; sometimes weeping, sometimes laughing, sometimes roaring, with violent Agitations, crying out *Money! Money!* Her Tongue would be for many Hours together drawn like a Semicircle, up to the Roof of her mouth; so that no Fingers apply’d unto it, could remove it. Six *Men* were scarce able to hold her in some of her Fits; but she would skip about the House yelling and howling, and looking hideously.

On *Dec.* 17. her Tongue being drawn out of her mouth to an extraordinary Length, a *Dæmon* began manifestly to speak in her; for many Words were distinctly utter’d, wherein are the *Labial Letters*, without any motion of her Lips at all: Words also were utter’d from her Throat sometimes when her mouth was wholly shut; and sometimes Words were utter’d when her mouth was wide open; but no Organs of Speech us’d therein. The chief things that the *Dæmon* spoke, were horrid Railings against the Godly *Minister* of the Town; but sometimes he likewise belch’d out most nefandous Blasphemies against the God of Heaven. And one thing about this young Woman was yet more particularly remarkable: She cry’d out in her Fits, that a certain Woman in the Neighbourhood appear’d unto her, and was the only Cause of her Affliction.

The Woman thus cry’d out upon, was doubtless an Holy, a Devout, a Vertuous Person; and she, by the advice of her Friends, visited the Afflicted. The possess’d Creature, tho’ she was in one of her Fits, and had her Eyes wholly shut, yet when this innocent Woman was coming, she discover’d her self wonderfully sensible of it, and was in grievous Agonies at her Approaches.

But this *Innocent Woman* thus accus’d and abus’d by a malicious Devil, pray’d earnestly *with* as well as *for* this possess’d Creature: Whereupon coming to her self, she confess’d, That she had been deluded by Satan, and compell’d by him unreasonably to think and speak Evil of a good Neighbour without a Cause. After this, there was no further Complaint of such an ones Apparition; but she said, some Devil in the Shape of divers, did very diversly and cruelly torment her, and then told her, it was not *He* but *They*, that were her Tormentors.”