Memory and Nation

in The Specter of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America

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This chapter examines how the Salem witch trials were embedded in the creation of a distinctly American national mythology in the wake of the Revolution, and explores the role of both print and region within that creation. It suggests that the use of Salem witchcraft as one dividing line between the colonized past and the national present emerged from a deliberate effort to create a national mythology in the decades after the Revolution. The chapter contends that Puritan Salem's 1692 episode of witch-hunting provided an opportunity to demonstrate the moral progress inherent in the transformation from colonies to nation.

Whose Myth is it Anyway? Coyote in the Poetry of Gary Snyder and Simon J. Ortiz

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This chapter contrasts the poetry of Gary Snyder and Simon J. Ortiz, in particular their use of the trickster Coyote from Native American mythology. It compares examples from the work of Snyder and other 'white shaman' poets with selections from Ortiz's poetry to show how the former's distance from ancestral knowledge and the mythic roots of Native community identity results in an ersatz poetry written from ethnopoetic ignorance. On the other hand, Ortiz's Coyote poems speak from an Acuna Pueblo voice, an assured one that is comfortable in its play with language and subject, and which seeks no divisions between place, family, myth, and art.
This chapter analyzes and discusses the performance of Chicago, which opened in 1975. Here were the key elements of Fosse’s art, the carnal act on one hand and, on the other, the indefinable American something that toys with our imaginations and infuriates the authorities. Sex and jazz worked as a set, like crime and show business in the early talkie. The chapter argues that in his faithful adaptation of Maurine Watkins’ play, Fosse brought out all the bawdy chaos that “Chicago” meant in American mythology. To close, the chapter discusses the reception of the musical as well as the inevitable changes in the cast after the first several hundred performances of Chicago’s initial run.