

John David Miles  
Fall 2014

## **Professional Development Assignment Report**

Fall 2013-Spring 2014

I would like to thank the University of Memphis for the PDA that I received during the academic year of 2013-2014. The majority of my time was dedicated to the development of my book project, "The Secular History of a Sacred Space," but I also used the time to contribute to other writing projects and academic conferences.

### Conferences

I attended and presented at two conferences during my PDA. The first was the Consortium on the Revolutionary Era Annual Conference in Oxford, MS during February of 2014, where I co-organized a panel and presented a paper entitled "'A true, if a slight, impression': Rewriting the Revolution in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *The Linwoods*." In this paper I argued that author Sedgwick's 1835 novel about the American Revolution recast the war as a domestic drama, thus forestalling the possibilities of continued political radicalization or a second revolution. (I am currently working to extend this presentation into an article-length essay.) I also served as a respondent for another panel titled "Revolutionizing the Narrative: Writing American Voices."

I also attended the Society for Early Americanists (SEA) Special Topics Conference in London, England in July, for which I received a travel grant from the College of Arts and Sciences. I presented the paper "'The Title of an History': Increase Mather's Transatlantic Historical Project," which was drawn from the third chapter of my book project. In this presentation I argued that only by situating Puritan minister Increase Mather's 1676 history of the recently completed King Philip's War in New England alongside the larger moves in post-Restoration historiography can we understand the full importance of his project to place New England both within and beside the longer arc of English history. While at the conference I also served as a chair for the panel "Relocating London in Atlantic Knowledge Networks."

Several discussions that I had in London resulted in the organization of a panel on John Winthrop that has been accepted to the joint SEA/Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture conference in Chicago in June of 2015. I will be presenting a paper titled "The Governor on the Hill: John Winthrop and Colonial Refashioning," which draws on material from the first chapter of my book project.

### Publications

I was asked to contribute to Cambridge University Press's collection *A History of Virginia Literature*, for which I produced the essay surveying the state's output of "Science Fiction and Fantasy." This essay reaches back to early nineteenth-century writers such as George Tucker and traces the state's place in the history of science fiction literature down to the 2012 publication of Lydia Netzer's novel *Shine, Shine, Shine*. While the work of Edgar Allan Poe and his link to early science fiction is well known, other authors such as Will Jenkins and Nelson Slade Bond in the twentieth century have also been influential to the genre, such that an examination of science fiction and fantasy authors tied to Virginia is more than simple state pride, but serves as a

microcosm for the larger evolution of the genre. This collection is currently in production and will be published early in 2015.

I also finished a final edit and page proofs of my essay “Captured by Genre: Mary Rowlandson’s Western Imagination on the Nineteenth-Century Frontier,” which appears in the collection *Before the West Was West: Pre-1800 Western American Literature* (U of Nebraska Press, 2014).

### Book Manuscript

Most of my time during the PDA was spent on developing my book project, “The Secular History of a Sacred Space: Narrating Community in Seventeenth-Century New England.” My manuscript examines how the histories written in New England during the seventeenth century evolved from simple annals of discovery to ideologically complex arguments for the region’s exceptional place within the larger English imperial project. Concerned with first cataloguing the exploration of New England, then reporting the founding of new colonies, and finally recording the presence of the godly English in America, the colonists’ narratives about their past evince a shift from texts that wrote the colonies’ difference as initially a happy accident of religious history, toward an understanding of a region whose religious mission was buttressed by claims of political difference within the historical space of England. My work traces the historical consciousness of New England, placing the colonists’ narratives into conversation with evolving conceptions of English historiography during the seventeenth century, and demonstrates how the region developed a sense of communal mission that transcended the religious motivations of the founders. By examining narratives that wax apocalyptic and wane utopian, I argue that these historical projects develop a secular present only by remembering a sacred past. Though produced with sub-national concerns, by wedding the rhetoric of religious destiny to a narrative of political self-recognition, these histories contain the seed of the argument for American exceptionalism, and it is this ideological content to which the early nation turns in the early nineteenth-century when asked to imagine its providential past.

My manuscript is divided into five chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion. My first two chapters concern the realm of manuscript circulation in New England and early colonial writing published in London. My next two chapters turn to the print sphere and Puritan publications on both sides of the Atlantic following King Phillip’s War (1675-6). In my final chapter I examine Cotton Mather’s attempt to figure a coherent colonial identity by orienting the present to a heroic past of exemplary biographies. My epilogue turns briefly to the nineteenth century to show how the historical theories of the seventeenth century impacted the historical novel in the young United States.

My PDA gave me time to take my reading in new directions, expanding my understanding of seventeenth-century English historiography and the longer tradition of church history, as well as draft substantial portions of my manuscript. I plan on completing my manuscript in 2015.

### Miscellaneous

I was also a reader for the journal *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* during 2014.