"We shall be made a story": Reacting to Colonial Literature and the Past
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Abstract: By adapting a role-playing game from the Reacting to the Past series to meet the goals of my literature course, I have been able to dramatically increase engagement in my Early American literature course. After my students have spent the first six weeks of the semester reading colonial literature, they take on roles as 17th-century characters in Boston to debate the innocence or guilt of Anne Hutchinson. As their characters, they each write a personal history, keep a journal, and write and deliver a speech. The students play the game with verve, even vehemence, as they develop strategy and persuasive tactics to promote their own goals. By the end of the game, they have learned to analyze colonial texts with greater depth and understanding, and as a class, they have, in effect, collectively created their own version of historical romance of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

In "A Model of Christian Charity," John Winthrop declares to his fellow travelers aboard the Arabella that their new utopia "shall be as a city upon a hill," a simile that has since become famous in American culture to represent the United States, rather ironically considering the Puritan context, as a beacon of individual freedom (86). For Winthrop, the "city on the hill" image was double-edged; it was as much about the possibility of the colony's fame as a model society as it was about the colony's shame if it did not succeed. Winthrop warns the colonists that if they cannot fulfill their covenant with God, they "shall be made a story" throughout the world; in other words, they will become the model of Christian failure (86). Winthrop's prescience in this moment still has the power to surprise me. Whether Massachusetts Bay is considered a success or a failure, colonial New England has indeed been "made a story," passing through generations and different permutations into American mythology.

Alas, most of the English majors enrolled in my 300-level Early American literature course are certain that they will dislike, or at best, be bored by the stories and myths of colonial America before they have even begun reading. Even worse, I found that some of their reading experiences in class were not radically altering their expectations. Yet, if I were to sidestep Winthrop and Massachusetts Bay in my course, which covers the colonial and federalist periods, I would be reacting against the New England colonial past and ignoring its literary and cultural influence. While I could expect eager discussion of Bradstreet's
"Prologue" and lyric poetry, the ilk of Winthrop, Bradford, Morton, Williams, Taylor, and even Rowlandson generated less enthusiasm. While my Midwestern students are unflaggingly polite, they expressed their lack of interest loudly and clearly with good-humored groans and respectful, yet pointed, questions such as, "When do we get to read the novels in this class?" For many of my students, colonial literature represents a past that is too familiar—through elementary to high school they have been told alternating tales of colonial hagiography and hypocrisy. At the same time, however, colonial literature represents a past that is too much a foreign country—too religious, too self-righteous, and most of all, too irrelevant. While I liked to think that my focused mini-lectures and probing discussion questions were expanding my students' knowledge and appreciation, I knew they weren't grappling with the colonial texts in the same way they would unpack the literature of later periods.

I clearly needed a new strategy to engage my students with the stories of colonial America. In freshman courses for non-majors, my students often become more engaged through writing a "creative analysis" essay, in which I ask them to write their own version of a text with contingent events or a different point of view. Through the act of story-telling, by becoming fiction writers themselves, my freshmen grow personally invested in understanding and analyzing literary texts. I decided to harness this approach in my Early American course with my juniors and seniors, but in a more complex way, by adapting the role-playing game, The Trial of Anne Hutchinson. While the game is played most frequently in history courses, I adapted it to create my own version that meets my goals in a literature course. The game, part of the Reacting to the Past series, assigns students roles as seventeenth-century Bostonians who must decide whether Hutchinson should be banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony for her outspoken heterodoxy. I renamed my course Creating American Literature: 1620-1830, to emphasize that we would study the foundational texts and genres that shape American literature and, in effect, create our own collective historical romance about the American past by creating our own characters as part of the Hutchinson game. The first half of the semester is devoted to reading colonial literature and playing the game. The rest of the semester, we read Early American novels: Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Hope Leslie, Hannah Webster Foster's The Coquette, Charles
Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, and Royall Tyler's *Algerine Captive*. *Hope Leslie* is a historical romance that mythologizes Massachusetts Bay from the point of view of women and Native Americans, and *The Algerine Captive* begins with a satirical account of the colony, so these texts act as a contextual frame to help us situate our own classroom colonial story that we created in the game during the first half of the semester. All of the novels work well in conversation with one another and the course theme, exploring the intersections between history and the literary imagination, along with issues of identity, ethnicity, gender, and cultural ideals. The Reacting to the Past game, however, is the catalyst that makes real critical analysis and conversation happen in this class.

By fulfilling Winthrop's prophecy—by making Massachusetts Bay Colony a story—my students have become intellectually, and even emotionally, invested in Early American literature. I have played my own modified version of the Hutchinson game in this course four times, and I have also played it twice as a half-semester course in our university Honors program. Instead of reacting against "the city on the hill," now my students react with and to one another as colonial characters, drawing upon their knowledge of colonial culture and literature to enter the debates surrounding Hutchinson. The game has dramatically increased student engagement, involving students in creative and critical thinking in ways that build upon their knowledge gained through more traditional classroom discussion. In addition, the game has allowed me to incorporate group collaboration in my classroom in authentic ways as students band together to plot game strategy and divide up responsibilities for arguments and research.

Academic hierarchy is subverted as I sit on the sidelines, a spectator in my own classroom while students play the game and take control. The game offers opportunities for leadership roles, and in the guise of characters, quiet students often find a voice and speak with passion. Students play the game with verve and, at times, even vehemence, as they stand before the podium, addressing the "Boston Church" or the "General Court," or asking each other questions and arguing for their own interpretations of the language of literature, law, and religion. Every time I play the game, it unfolds in different ways, so I am unable to predict what will happen, except that students will become invested in creating their characters. Moreover, by the end of the semester, students have written their own individual
and interwoven stories of colonial life, in effect, crowd-sourcing in class a collective mythology of Massachusetts Bay. In the rest of this essay, I will provide an overview of the Reacting pedagogy and series, and then explain the basics of the Hutchinson game and my adaptation of it specifically for an American literature course.

Reacting to the Past and Playing in the Present

Reacting to the Past is a series of complex "games" in which students take on roles as assigned characters to debate and discuss issues related to pivotal issues in history. Before students begin to "play" a game, they read and become familiar with the major texts and history of the period in which the game is set. In addition to the Hutchinson trial, the series includes games that focus on a myriad of topics such as Henry VIII and the Reformation, the French Revolution, the trial of Galileo, India and independence, and Athens and democracy. The games are unscripted and are played within a framework of contingent history; as a result, many possible outcomes, even those that are not historically accurate, are possible at the end of the game. For example, Hutchinson could be found innocent; Athens could appoint a tyrant rather than institute democracy at the end of the Peloponnesian War. During the games, students are actively engaged in researching, writing, and delivering speeches as their characters in addition to the lively, and often, very heated, debates that arise. Students run the game sessions as the professor takes a backseat as the "Gamemaster," offering guidance and, if needed, any arbitration. Just as in a traditional class, the professor evaluates students on their written assignments—their speeches—and their participation. In general, games are designed for classes of 13-30 students, so they are ideal for smaller, discussion-based courses.

The best word I can use to describe a Reacting game is intense. Students are given role sheets that outline their characters' background, beliefs, and goals in the game; just as in real life, some characters might have a past they wish to hide or personal goals that conflict with their public personae. While some characters are historical people, many are fictional people based upon the period. During the game, students may have individual goals, but in many cases they also work as part of a team or faction to achieve larger agendas. The students and/or factions that achieve their goals are declared the "winners" at
the end, and some instructors assign small bonus points for victory, but like me, many Reacting instructors find that students are motivated regardless of bonus points. After the game play is ended, the professor leads the class in a game "postmortem" discussion in which students unveil their strategies and counterstrategies and discuss the outcome of their individual game in relation to the historical event.

The Reacting pedagogy and series was first created in 1996 by the historian Michael Carnes at Barnard College and is now played at more than 300 colleges and universities. In Minds on Fire, his book about the Reacting series, Carnes explains that he began to develop the role-playing pedagogy in frustration after a semester in which, despite his best efforts, he could "feel the boredom in the room" (18). A student assured him that his class was fine, explaining that the reality about college is that all classes are just "sorta boring" (19). This student’s assessment of higher education led Carnes to think about how to infuse a class with the energy that students bring to their pursuits outside the classroom.

Traditional pedagogy emphasizes the half of learning that is "rational, hierarchical, individualistic, and well-ordered," Carnes argues, overlooking the other half of learning and "aspects of the self relating to emotion, mischievous subversion, social engagement, and creative disorder" (13). The role-playing and student-centered pedagogy of the Reacting series allows students to engage with these attributes of non-traditional learning, tapping into these overlooked "well-springs of motivation and imagination" (Carnes 13). And though the games are fun, they are also intellectually rigorous and academically demanding; students in Reacting classes report that they spend more time on class work than they do in their other classes (Carnes 6). The growth of the Reacting series in recent years is a testament to its academic success: 10 Reacting games are published by W.W. Norton, another two are available through the Reacting Consortium Press, and 20 more games are in development. Reacting workshops are held several times a year at different universities, offering faculty opportunities to practice the pedagogy and play the games together. There is also an active Reacting Facebook group for faculty, which is a quick way to crowdsource answers or advice when needed. The Reacting website (https://reacting.barnard.edu/) offers a detailed overview of the series and games, and is the best source for new information about this expanding series.
Professors' Reactions to the Reacting Series

Other professors have found the same kind of success that Carnes documents in *Minds on Fire* and that I have found in my own classroom. "I have seldom been so gratified in a classroom," writes Tracy Lightcap, a professor at LaGrange College in Georgia, in the journal *PS: Political Science and Politics* (177). In a multidisciplinary freshman seminar that included a focus on the Iraq War, Lightcap's students also played the games about the French Revolution and India. In the previous years, Lightcap had found that students had difficulty thinking critically about the Iraq War because they found Iraqi culture "incomprehensible" and their ideas about the war were dictated by "emotional cues centered on patriotic attitudes" (175). By playing the games about France and India before studying the Iraq War, however, Lightcap's students were able to develop a more sophisticated understanding of political decision-making and collective consequences (175).

In the journal *Feminist Teacher*, April Lidinsky, reports similarly high levels of student engagement. Lidinsky finds that the game's student-centered focus fulfills bell hooks' call for a feminist pedagogy and also meets the criteria of high-impact practices in teaching (208). Lidinsky, a professor in the women's and gender studies department at University of Indiana South Bend, teaches the game *Greenwich Village 1913: Suffrage, Labor and the New Woman* in a first-year experience course of 30 students. "From the perspective of feminist standpoint theory," Lidinsky writes, "students often have found it quite transformational, as well as enjoyable and shocking, to write, speak, and debate from a complex standpoint" of gender, ethnicity, and class that is often different their own (210). Role-playing games, she finds, can "unsettle the usual power dynamics of a classroom and offer opportunities for empathy, a hallmark of feminist pedagogy" and high-impact practices (Lidinsky 210). Moreover, the class, which has a waiting list, has helped to attract majors and minors to the gender studies program (Lidinsky 209).

Reacting pedagogy can also be effective abroad, writes the historian Patrick Mason, who played the Hutchinson game at the American University in Cairo, a university with an undergraduate population of primarily Arab and Muslim students. In his article in the *Journal of American History*, Mason writes that "there seems to be no better way to put
American students to sleep than to utter the word 'Puritans' "—a statement, which as I've acknowledged, I have experienced first-hand (1115). In Cairo, however, his students were intrigued by puritanism and Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity." Seventeenth-century arguments about the relationship between church and state "still speak to the modern world" (1116) for many of these students, says Mason, who describes his experience playing the Hutchinson game in Cairo as "jarring but intellectually thrilling" (1115). Ultimately, the experience taught him that "how the history we offer can … and should, speak to the present circumstances of our students, even if we avoid being explicitly presentist in our historical pedagogy" (1116).

The experiences of these professors and the ones that Carnes relates in Minds on Fire resonate with my own. Like the political scientist Lightcap, I find that the game helps to breakdown students' preconceived attitudes and better understand a culture that is foreign to their own. Like Lidinsky in her gender studies first-year experience course, I find that role-playing helps students think about identity and point of view, which I value from a feminist standpoint, but also because it is critical to literary interpretation. Like the historian Mason, the game highlights for me the importance of cultural impact, and the way we need to help students understand the relevance not only of history, but of literature, to their own lives.

As this scholarship suggests, most Reacting games tend to be played in history, political science, and first-year experience courses. Although one game, Stages of Power: Marlowe and Shakespeare, 1592, is targeted more specifically to literary studies, the nature of the series and the topics of the published games naturally lend themselves to history courses. The games' active learning pedagogy also makes them popular in first-year seminars. As Carnes argues, however, Reacting games can be effective in a variety of disciplines and in different course levels. Literature courses, by their nature, focus on the interpretation of texts and character in specific contexts, and, thus, are ideal for the type of argumentation, role-playing, research and writing that Reacting games require. In my literature course, however, I want to focus on the multiplicity of interpretations and the literary characteristics of a variety of genres and texts in ways that are different from many history, political science, or first-year experience seminars.
**Game Basics: The Trial of Anne Hutchinson**

The Reacting game *The Trial of Anne Hutchinson: Liberty, Law, and Intolerance in Puritan New England* was designed and written by Carnes and Michael Winship, a professor of early American history. The game book, published by Norton, contains an excellent historical overview and primary documents, including the Hutchinson trial transcript, some conversion narratives, and Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity." The book also contains a game outline and rules; professors register through Norton to download character role sheets and supporting information. The game is set in November 1637 and adopts the counterfactual premise that after Hutchinson's first trial, there was so much dissatisfaction that the court has agreed to hold a second trial a few days later. The second counterfactual premise is that Hutchinson's supporters have been disarmed. The third premise is that there has been a large influx of new immigrants to the colony, who must become church members to remain in the colony and to vote in the court. The introduction of these new community members may very well affect the outcome of this second trial.

All characters in the game are male, so all players are free to speak publicly in church and court and can have voting rights; my female students especially relish the opportunity to play male characters. About a third, or slightly more, of the characters are part of the Winthrop faction, whose primary game objective is to convict Hutchinson and banish her. The Winthropian leaders are, of course, John Winthrop as governor, a deputy governor, and the church pastor. About a third of the class are supporters of Hutchinson; their general leader is dubbed the First Friend, and their major goal is to have Hutchinson cleared of all charges and allowed to remain in Boston. The other third of the class members are the "Indeterminates," who include the immigrants and John Cotton, the Teacher of Boston Church, whose vote counts twice in any tie. All game sessions take place in the court or church, but to vote in either place, a character must be a church member. While all members of the Winthrop and Hutchinson factions are already church members, the immigrants share their personal stories—their conversion narratives—to be voted in as church members. The court is the setting for the trial and all legislative issues;
the election of new church members occurs in the church. Most of the immigrants are truly indeterminate at the outset of the trial, although a few may favor one side or the other. No student plays Hutchinson, who is offstage "in jail" during the game, and as a woman, would not be allowed to vote in the church or court. No one is allowed to speak with Hutchinson and no new testimony by her is possible, so all the game players—just as twenty-first century scholars—must work to interpret her ideas from her testimony in the trial transcript and from what others have said about her.

While the guilt or innocence of Hutchinson is at the center of the game, Winship and Carnes have written the game so that students understand the intersections between cultural, political, and religious issues in the debate over state authority and individual autonomy. For example, the colony is in danger of losing its charter from England, and the colonists' relationship with the Pequods is fragile. In addition, Winthrop has set price and wage controls, which he sees as important for the community as a means to stop price-gouging, but the measure has angered some merchants and workers who want higher profits. The shipload of newcomers adds to the strength of the town, but also raises concern about identity and shared values. My students can easily relate these secondary issues to our current national debates about peace, national security, income equality, and immigration, which helps them better understand the complexity of colonial culture, giving them a new appreciation for the literature they read and the Hutchinson trial.

The game schedule outlined in the book takes about four weeks to play: one week for the readings in the book and about three weeks of game play, including the final "postmortem" discussion after the game ends. All students write and deliver two speeches, in addition to contributions to game discussion and debate.

**Recreating the Hutchinson Reacting Game**

The game as written by Carnes and Winship is brilliant. And while the original structure of the game is ideally suited for a history course, in my literature class my primary goal is to use the game to help my students gain a deeper understanding of colonial prose and poetry. In addition, I want the game to help my students think about character and point of view, especially the recursive ways in which experience and identity shape ideology and
interpretation, not only in history, but in the creation of all texts, past and present. To achieve these goals, I have changed the game in four ways: greatly expanding assigned readings, creating new writing assignments, modifying game roles, and shortening the time devoted to game sessions.

When introducing the game, I explain to my English majors that I have modified the schedule and assignments in the game book and how these changes make the game better meet our goals. I also write the word "counterfactual" with a flourish on the board, listing the game's basic counterfactual premises. Then, I ask with a smile, what other term we could use to express the same idea as "counterfactual." Someone usually says rather tentatively, "Lie?" I emphasize that while counterfactual premises might not be true, they're not the same as a lie. "Lies misrepresent facts, and we know the facts," I say and ask them to remember that we are in a literature class. At this point, several people shout out the answer I'm looking for: "Fiction!" Everyone laughs, and I explain that since a counterfactual premise is a type of fiction, that while Reacting to the Past games might be played more frequently in history courses, they work especially well in literature courses. In a literature course, I naturally assign a great deal more texts to read than those included in the game book: My students read not only Winthrop, but also Smith, Bradford, Bradstreet, Morton, Williams, Wigglesworth, Taylor, and Rowlandson, in addition to excerpts from the Bay Psalm Book and New England Primer. However, most of these works had not been written by 1637, the setting of the game.

So at this point, I explain to my class that we will add another significant counterfactual premise: All the poetry and prose we read in class has been written and published via manuscript circulation by 1637, and in general, we can expect most of our colonists and immigrants to have read or have basic knowledge of these texts. I readily concede to my students that this is a whopper of a counterfactual premise, but it is critical to encouraging students to integrate their knowledge of early American literature into the creation of their characters and the game. I still hold them responsible for knowing the general dates of publication for the works at the end of the class, and my students do not have problems separating the facts from the counterfactual ones.
The game is designed to spend one week of reading before students begin to play, but in my literature class I devote a total of six weeks of readings: about five weeks for the literature and one week for the trial transcript and other game book materials. This time spent discussing the literature is central to my objectives in playing the game; I don’t want to rush through the reading or dump it onto them as outside research; instead, it is important to me that as a community of readers—and as fictional colonial characters—we share some common cultural and literary knowledge. Moreover, in a literature course, we need to pay attention to not only what the text says, but how the text creates meanings, and close reading takes time. Because we discuss the game the first week of class and the importance of the literature to playing the game, their reading is more focused and much more engaged.

I have also expanded and written new game roles to emphasize the creation of character for my course. As the game is written, students assigned to the Hutchinson or Winthrop factions are given identical role sheets that explain their basic views about the trial and their game objectives, but these roles lack individual character identities. The roles for John Winthrop and John Cotton contain some basic biographical material, and the roles for the immigrants include fictional but realistic one-page biographical summaries; for example, the Wealthy Merchant from London is worried about Winthrop’s cap on profits; the Unmarried Cooper believes that his actions are God’s will. Using the excellent immigrant role sheets written by Carnes and Winship as my model, I have written one-page biographical sketches for all of the game characters. I have also added more historical characters: On the Winthrop side, I have included Thomas Dudley and Simon Bradstreet, Anne Bradstreet’s father and husband, respectively, since they were present and spoke at the Hutchinson trial. On the Hutchinson side, I have added William Coddington, a town deputy, who also spoke at the trial. I have also given most of the characters a special tie to one of the literary texts or authors we have read in class.

Not surprisingly, Dudley and Simon Bradstreet are expected to be experts in Bradstreet’s poetry. In the Hutchinson camp, one of the characters is also a great admirer of Bradstreet’s poetry and wit, and because his wife was instrumental to his conversion, he has a strong appreciation for women’s spirituality. A Winthropian and young Harvard
student knew Taylor and has corresponded with him, an immigrant lawyer once was an acquaintance of Morton, another immigrant is a cousin of Smith. Several characters have special interest in colonial texts about Native Americans: One has been friends with Rowlandson, another has adopted a Pequod orphan, ostensibly as a servant, but has begun to think of him as a son, and another character has been held captive for two months. Characters' economic status, in some instances, affect whether or not they support price and wage controls, and thus, whether they want to support Winthrop or undermine his authority by supporting Hutchinson. Since many of these brief, basic biographies for each character include a tie-in to colonial literature, it changes the way students play the game, highlighting the goals of my English course.

My revision and expansion of the character roles is crucial to helping students become more invested in the course reading. I usually assign their roles after the second week of class, and post a "Who's Who in Colonial Boston" list on the class website, so we all know the characters in our dramatis personae. I do not assign the roles earlier because I want to first get to know the students, which helps me to make more informed role assignments, and I also want to foster a sense of class community before we splinter into factions. After I assign the roles, however, students begin reading with the doubled lens of their own selves and their seventeenth-century selves. Reading as their characters gives them an opportunity to read with a different sort of "personal" stake and critical creativity. Class discussion immediately becomes more complex as they begin to differentiate their own views from their characters' views. To help them become more familiar with their characters, I used to have students stand up and introduce themselves as their characters to the class.

This year, however, a student suggested that they should "speed date" as their characters instead. The "speed date" session was extraordinarily successful; by the end of the class period all the students had engaged in a two-minute conversation with each other as their characters, and these quick introductions, though repetitive, were fast-paced and fun. The absurdity of the speed session also was an effective ice-breaker to the idea of role-playing, which understandably, makes some students a little nervous. For example, after a few awkward conversations, the young woman playing Simon Bradstreet was soon saying
in a normal, conversational tone, "Oh, my sweet Anne writes poetry and loves literature, but she is nothing like that dangerous Hutchinson woman!" By the end of the third week, I have them sit together in their factions—the Winthropians, Hutchinsonians, and Indeterminates—which helps to build a sense of team camaraderie. The lack of class time scheduled in most games for reading and analyzing texts, is my major critique of the series; I worry that students might engage with the larger ideas but not grapple with the nuances of language and meanings of the texts of the period.

The new role sheets also have allowed me to create two new assignments to emphasize characterization: character biographies and journals. For the character biographies, students must name their characters and write a three-page biography that expands upon the information given in the role sheet. While this biography must work within the framework of the assigned role, it must offer deeper insight into the subjectivity of the character, perhaps by describing one or two formative experiences or a crisis that the character has faced. Students have the option of writing these biographies from the stance of a twenty-first century, third-person account, as first-person autobiographies, as letters by their characters, or as short stories. While the assignment is broad enough to allow for different approaches, in short, students are writing their own versions of historical fiction. These biographies are often poignant and dramatic; students tell stories of the death of children, financial struggles, their dreams for new lives in the colony, the joys of domestic life; and crises of faith. Students also incorporate references to the literature we have read. Not only does this assignment build upon the game's sense of creative play, it also means that their arguments in the trial will be more nuanced, shaped by their individual perspectives rather than more simplistic stances of "innocent" or "guilty" about Hutchinson.

For the character journal assignment, students must write a two-page journal entry in the voice of their character for each class meeting of game play. In their journals, they express their characters' attitudes about the different speeches, discussion, and events "in Boston" that day. The journals are to be written in a way that echoes seventeenth-century style, showcasing the student's knowledge of the period's diction and syntax. The process of reflection and writing about the class events in their character's voice deepens their engagement in the game and expands their opportunities for creative writing and play. In
the journals, students delight in venting private emotions in contrast to their public personae in the court and church. Sometimes students write their journals as a series of letters to friends or family back in England, and often they include references to events in their characters' lives outside the action of game, such as details of conversations with their co-workers or wives. Some students ask for permission to turn in handwritten journals, so their diaries will "feel" more authentic, and I have had some students burn the edges and tea-stain the paper to make their journals seem antique. Two students have even included pressed flowers in their journals: In one, I discovered a four-leaf clover sandwiched between the pages, and in another, a Hutchinson supporter included a pressed pink rose, a symbolic reference to Hawthorne's statement in *The Scarlet Letter* that a rose bush grew outside the jail where the "sainted Anne Hutchinson" had walked (Hawthorne 34).

Like the idea to "speed date," the idea for the journal assignment came from a student. The first time I played the game, during the postmortem session a student asked if she could read an excerpt from the journal "her character" had kept during the trial. I was stunned—she had written at least an extra 10 pages of creative fiction beyond the assignment. The rest of the class thoroughly enjoyed learning her character's secret thoughts and reactions to their own statements during the game, and everyone encouraged me to make the journal an assignment for future classes. Now, during the postmortem session, sharing excerpts from character journals is a major highlight of not only the game, but the entire semester, for my students. The excerpts range in tone from plaintive to funny, and as we share in moments of revelation or hilarity, any lingering discontent about arguments during the trial are also dispelled. Moreover, the sharing of excerpts underscores the rich, detailed world that the students have collectively created through the game; they have, indeed, collectively written their own historical fiction, their own version of the mythology of America. As Winthrop predicted, the early colonists have been "made a story," but this version of the story my students have created together.

With the addition of the character biographies and journals, I have students write and deliver only one formal speech, instead of the two assigned in the game book. The first time I played the game, I did have students write two speeches, but they complained at the end that some of their arguments seemed repetitive, and I found that the game sessions took a
bigger chunk out of the semester than I wanted. The biography and journal assignments allowed me to better achieve my emphasis on character creation than two speeches did. I also find that students craft more careful formal speeches if they write only one. The speech assignment is critical to the game, giving students an authentic experience in persuasive rhetoric in front of an audience that offers immediate feedback and asks questions that are both friendly and critical, perhaps even hostile. Having students write and deliver only one formal speech also has had the unforeseen benefit that students engage more readily and naturally in discussion and debate—actual conversations as their characters—rather than saving up commentary for their second speeches. In addition, they must post their speeches to our class website after they deliver them; that way, all of Boston can accurately quote from each other in the next meeting.

Another benefit of the speeches is that they give students "safe" practice at public speaking; I have often been surprised to the degree with which my English majors are frightened of public speaking. This semester, one student placed the trash can next to the podium before she spoke—though she projected confidence in class as John Cotton—she also explained to me after class that public speaking makes her so nervous that in the past she had become physically ill. As Cotton, however, she acted as the model of a calm, elder minister, making firm but soothing statements to an unruly congregation.

The central argument to the game, of course, is whether Hutchinson's views, and the degree to which she has espoused them in public—are so dangerous to the commonweal that she should be found guilty and banished. While the Winthrop and Hutchinson factions agree on many of the major tenets of their puritan faith, the Winthrops emphasize that one's state of grace is best determined by logically examining one's daily actions, while Hutchinsons emphasize the importance of an emotional experience of the indwelling of the Spirit. When general arguments related to antinomianism are discussed in class, students first tend to see the arguments as "hair-splitting," and wonder why the puritans just couldn't solve such a minor difference in opinion. I usually invite them to step back from the seventeenth-century and look at some of the current American political debates that engulf us now. For example, most Americans believe that we should have a minimum wage, but many disagree vehemently about the level of that wage. For my
students, this is an "aha" moment; when they have looked at the past, they often see only the abstract principles of an issue without considering the complexity of the contexts and the people who argue about the principles. Through the creation of characters, antinomianism and other arguments about doctrine and the church/state relationship begin to gain more legitimacy.

I tend to go through unnecessary angst in assigning roles, wanting to make sure that I balance out the speaking and writing abilities of the class equally among the factions, and that I give students roles that they will embrace. I have never had a student express disappointment in a role. I always have the class elect Winthrop because it helps to emphasize to them that the colony was a government both "civil and ecclesiastical," as Winthrop explains in his "Model of Christian Charity" (85). The student elected as Winthrop is always a class leader with both excellent academic and social skills; indeed, usually the class elects a student I would have selected if I just assigned the Winthrop role myself. I appoint the role of Cotton and the Pastor, and then allow the Hutchinsons to select their "First Friend" as their leader.

In classes that do not emphasize colonial literature, students might be more likely to emphasize biblical citations in their speeches, and I have heard tales of students at other institutions who hurl biblical verses at each other in rapid-fire volleys. I am not interested in argumentation via scriptural sound bites. I explain to my students that while puritans saw biblical citations as evidence of the rightness of their arguments—the trial transcript includes some excellent examples—pastors also could spend several hours delineating the meanings of a verse. For puritans, reading the bible still required acts of individual interpretation. My students are quick to let me know that they really don't know many biblical citations. I post a link to an online, searchable bible, which allows them to conduct keyword or subject searches, if they wish to find an appropriate biblical citation. If they do use a biblical citation or story, I require them to offer an explication to show how their reference serves as evidence for their arguments, which helps them to better understand the connections between biblical and literary exegesis. The bible, then, becomes another literary source in the game, in addition to the texts that we read together. My students also use their imagined but realistic experiences as characters to support their arguments and
views—epiphanies during walks in the woods, conversations with friends, incidents in their shops and on their farms.

As the Gamemaster, I want to keep the element of surprise as part of the game, so I make random events occur. For instance, I might announce that there has been a colonist living on the outskirts of town who claims that he has heard rumors of a small band of Pequods who are planning to attack. Or, I might announce that Hutchinson is reported to be ill and wishes to return to her home until the outcome of the trial. Or, perhaps a large comet was seen streaking across the sky the previous night, causing a sense of spiritual concern—what does this natural omen mean? Exasperated by a student's repeated tardiness, I put him in the "stocks"—a chair in the corner at the room—and invited colonists to throw rotten fruit—balled up sheets of paper—at his feet. He apologized profusely for the holes in his fence, which had allowed his pigs to escape, and the next time he was on time. Events such as these emphasize the game’s unscripted nature in addition to spurring students to engage in quick critical and creative thinking.

In my classes, the Hutchinsonians have been more likely to win. During the postmortem, students are quick to acknowledge especially persuasive arguments or skillful speakers who swayed votes for the different factions, but they also acknowledge that they allowed a certain presentism to skew the game in favor of a Hutchinson victory. They are attracted to Hutchinson's individualism and admire her for the strength and wit in her arguments with Winthrop in the first part of the trial transcript. They are sympathetic to her as an outspoken woman in a patriarchal society. Also, they readily admit that she's the underdog, and there is a special pleasure of righting the perceived wrongs of the past. However, from my point of view as Gamemaster, it seems that a Hutchinsonian victory is often dependent upon the tone set by Winthrop and the pastor. If Winthrop and the Pastor seem autocratic and emphasize Hutchinson's gender, they are more likely to lose; if they emphasize community and Hutchinson's prophecy of destruction at the trial's end, they are more likely to win. I do not give either faction advice; they determine their own strategies.

One semester, I was shocked when the Winthropians told me that as a faction they had voted out the pastor and promoted the assistant pastor to replace him, a decision they had made in consultation with Cotton. The student playing the pastor had adopted a harsh
and often scornful dogmatic tone, which was alienating some of the immigrant characters, and though his faction had asked him to adopt a more congenial manner, he had refused. The Winthrop faction and its new pastor emphasized the importance of wage and price controls to keep the rich from spawning a "gentrification" cycle that outpriced the poor. The Winthrops also emphasized their concern that Hutchinson was harming community ethos by spreading doubt about others' salvation. The ousted pastor was more surprised than hurt by his demotion, and he switched factions, to the delight of the Hutchinsonians. Even with the extra vote, in this session, the Winthropians handily won.

In addition to playing the Hutchinson game in my 300-level English class, I have also played it with the same emphasis on colonial literature as a 7-week seminar in our university Honors program. In the Honors class, some students are a little less adept at imagining their fictive characters—I remember a biology major who remained confused by the assignment to write the character biography. "You mean I'm just supposed to make stuff up?" he asked incredulously. "But how do I know what to write?" On the other hand, the Honors students more readily embrace a spirit of debate—they argue more vociferously and want to win in ways that seem less important to my English majors who are more interested in the expression of their characters' views.

I want to note that you just can't plop a Reacting game into a class, nor should anyone expect a Reacting game to become a sort of pedagogical magic wand. First of all, setting up the game and learning how to play it is a major time investment for the professor; and even though I've been playing the Hutchinson trial for several years, the game set up involved in assigning roles still requires more time and effort that I expect. In addition, like in any class, some days just don't go as well as others. I've noticed that after an unusually heated game session, the next game day may be more subdued, as if students want to balance out the levels of intensity. Sometimes, for no apparent reason at all, parts of a game discussion become ho-hum. What I've come to realize is that a lackluster session doesn't invalidate the pedagogy of the game; all classes ebb and flow. I also want to acknowledge the most obvious reason for the success of the game: novelty. As we all know, a change of pace can enliven any routine. If all of students' classes every day, every
semester were based upon role-playing games, students might start to be thrilled by listening to lectures and writing academic essays.

One of the common critiques of Reacting games is that students will think they "know" history, falsely believing that by "becoming" historical figures they have accessed the subjectivities of the people of the past. However, this has never become an issue in my course, which emphasizes that we are creating historical romance, not recreating history. Both facts and texts are stubborn things, and the act of interpretation requires students to engage with facts and texts. When my students discuss the game in the post-mortem session, they use phrases such as "My version of Winthrop thought that ...," or "My character believed that ...". They always want to know how the game unfolded in different classes; how was the Betrothed Chandler in this class different from the Betrothed Chandler in another class? Such language shows that they know they are creating an interpretation, their own "text" of a historical event, not the "true" account of history. The end of the game does not produce a consensus of "truth" about history; indeed, at the end of the game students have learned that the past defies simple explanations, and that interpretation is an intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical act of power. They are re-acting to the past, not re-enacting it.

Reading a variety of colonial prose and poetry, especially in conjunction with playing the Hutchinson game, also teaches my students that seventeenth-century colonists were not just "the other," but they were complex individuals with a full range of emotions and concerns. At the end of the semester, they still laugh at H.L. Mencken's famous definition of puritanism as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy," but they also understand the way in which Mencken's view perpetuates misrepresentations of colonial culture and literature (Mencken 624). As a literature professor and Gamemaster, I'm delighted to prove Mencken wrong: In my class, the students playing puritans are not haunted by the happiness of others, they do not sigh and wish they had signed up for a different class; instead, they are invested in making and being made a story.
Works Cited


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