SAIF Grant 2008-2009 Final Report

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ABSTRACT:

As the principle investigator of this project, I applied for a SAIF grant to begin revising my dissertation into a publishable book that explores the complex relationship between nineteenth-century American fiction and elements of an emerging transnational capitalism that supported the United States’ economic and territorial expansion in the decades prior to the Civil War. I focus particularly on the genres of the sea adventure and the domestic novel of reform. I argue that these genres demonstrate how the discourses of commerce, science, racial purity, and domesticity were mutually constitutive and necessary to the formation of the bourgeois subject-citizen the center of national political and literary identity.

Other critics of the period have discussed how these genres are deeply marked by the internal ideological divisions in antebellum politics and culture (e.g. slavery, Abolition, suffrage, westward expansion and Indian Removal). However, I argue that a thorough understanding of the cultural authority of these fictional forms requires studying them in the context of the transnational circulation of goods and people that could not be easily reconciled to properly national structures. To this end, I study writers at the center of the American literary canon (Edgar Allan Poe, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Herman Melville) alongside writers who were living at the periphery of U.S. political and economic activities (Jamaican writer Mary Seacole). A transnational approach to antebellum literature also provides a framework for understanding the persistent relevance of nineteenth-century cultural divisions and alliances in contemporary scholarly and political debates.

BUDGET:

a) Salary: $3,600

b) Books: $400

c) Outside Support $0

TOTAL COST (fully encumbered) $4,000

RESULTS:

The SAIF grant provided me with the opportunity to begin transforming my dissertation into a book manuscript. The first concrete step in this long-term project has been to edit the foundational first chapter, which is on the work of Edgar Allan Poe, in two distinct ways. First, I refined the chapter into an article-length essay for submission to Nineteenth Century Literature, a
peer reviewed scholarly journal. Pending final edits, the article will be officially submitted this month. I was also able to do crucial research in the growing field of Book History in order to expand the chapter length version of the Poe essay for the book manuscript. I presented this research to the UWP community by participating in the Research Poster day event in March 2009.

The grant also gave me time to complete a version of my second dissertation chapter on Jamaican writer Mary Seacole for a conference presentation at the November 2008 American Studies Association convention in Albuquerque, NM.

The grant also allowed me to purchase several books that are crucial to the development of the manuscript. Some were either foundation texts in the discussion of Poe’s politics, and some were out of print texts that Poe used as source material. Other books are recent publications in the fields of Maritime and Hemispheric American Studies, and will help me situate my research within current scholarship on nineteenth-century American literature.