SAIF Final Report for Kara Candito (2011-2012)
Topic: “Cambio,” a series of poems (Creative Endeavor)

Abstract

I applied for and received funding to complete the research and writing of “Cambio,” the final section of my second manuscript of poetry. “Cambio,” which means change in both Spanish and Italian, uses the lyric-narrative form and the post-confessional poetic tradition to explore my experiences growing up in a biracial, bicultural household in which both parents were first-generation Americans. This section opens with two dramatic monologues based on the interviews I will conduct with my Calabrian-Sicilian grandfather and Costa Rican grandmother about their experiences immigrating to the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. In the central poems in the section, I combine the lyric-narrative form with post-modern polyvocality (of language and voice) to explore my own experiences of hybridity and marginality through the lens of childhood. The final poems in “Cambio” address my adult negotiation of a hybrid identity that is simultaneously American, Italian, and Latina. This project works within the recent trend of the poetics of identity while also challenging the boundaries between poetry and memoir.

Budget

I requested and received $4000 for salary. This allowed me to work full time on my creative work and research over the summer.

Results

The results of my 2011-2012 SAIF Grant were very successful. Not only did I research, write and revise all of the poems in “Cambio,” but I also wrote and revised new poems that will be included in other sections of the book.

The creative work I completed with the support of last year’s SAIF Grant has garnered the attention of the national creative writing community. As of August 2012,
I have accepted invitations to be a featured reader for the following literary events, conferences, and readings series:

Prairie Schooner Book Prize Series Reading, Association of Writers and Writing Programs 2012 Conference Event (March 1, 2012, Chicago, IL)
The Kalamazoo Book Arts Center (March 10, 2012, Kalamazoo, MI)
The Wit Rabbit Writing Series (April 3, 2012, Columbia College, Chicago, IL)
The Third Annual Great Twin Cities Poetry Read (April 21, 2012, Hamline University, Saint Paul, MN)

*A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry*, Wisconsin Book Festival Panel and Reading (scheduled for November 2012)

Several of the poems I wrote and revised last summer have been published or are forthcoming in prestigious literary journals. I believe that these successful publications bode well for the manuscript at large, and I am optimistic that I will succeed in publishing it with a reputable press. The accepted poems include:

“Bestiary,” *Failbetter* (forthcoming in Fall 2012)

“Diagnosis” and “New Years Day,” *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact* (June 2012)


“Sebastian’s Arrows,” *A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry* (University of Akron Press, March 2012)

“Deathbed,” *The Pedestal* (Fall 2011)

“Bodas de Sangre: Lorca Addresses His Sister,” *Spillway* (Fall 2011)

Benefits to the University

The poems in my second collection compliment UW-Platteville’s commitment to diversity and multiculturalism in the classroom and on campus. My project initiates a dialogue about culture, race, and “difference” as dynamic, constantly shifting categories, rather than fixed attributes that are often assigned static positive (white, American) and negative (non-white, “foreign”) labels. As literature, poetry enables identification and imagination with other perspectives and groups with which students might have little experience. Imaginative rather than instructive, poetry traverses the boundaries of racial and cultural identity. Since I began my professorship at UW-Platteville in the fall of 2010, the readings, conferences and panels I have participated in, along with the work I have published in literary journals, have each contributed to UW-Platteville’s reputation as a regional center for the arts. Additionally, the publication of my second manuscript would bring recognition to UW-Platteville’s Humanities Department.
Results:

The results of my SAIF Grant were very successful. Not only did I write a large portion of the manuscript in draft form, but I also revised or wrote two scholarly articles that are based on portions of the manuscript. Both articles were accepted in quality peer-reviewed journals. I feel that this early enthusiasm for my project bodes well for my ability to publish the entire manuscript with a first-rate academic press. The articles accepted are listed below, with a brief description:

“‘People of Colors’: Multiethnic Humor in Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle and Weeds.”

This article argues that Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle and Weeds present a multiethnic humor that complicates the traditional modes of American ethnic humor.

The article will be the basis of the my book’s conclusion.


This article argues that the HBO series Curb Your Enthusiasm uses the figure of the schlemiel from Jewish folklore in order to explore the tenuous position of American Jews in contemporary American culture.

I also attended the Film and History Conference in Milwaukee on November 13th, 2010 and presented a related paper entitled “Shiksas Gone Wild: Jewishness as Gateway Ethnicity in...
Weeds.”

Benefits to the University

These publications and the book which they will lead to will give national attention to the University and serve as an outward symbol of the University’s commitment to diversity.

Furthermore, this research informs my classroom practices, as I discuss the importance of ethnic representation in all of my courses. In particular, I feel that discussions of race and ethnicity often emphasize racism and persecution. Ethnic humor, while by no means ignoring these issues, is often a site of positive resistance and community building and can therefore provide a useful counterpoint to trauma and oppression. Ethnic humor therefore provides students with a
richer understanding of American multiethnic culture.

Application for Scholarly Activity Improvement Fund

Category A

2012-2013

1. Title: Spectator: A Collection of Poems

2. Type of Project: Creative Endeavor

3. Abstract

I am seeking SAIF funding to complete the research, writing, and submission process for my second collection of poetry, Spectator. Poems from the collection have been published in such major literary journals as AGNI, The Kenyon Review, Spillway, The Southern Review, The Rumpus, and Nimrod International Journal of the Arts. Since last summer, additional poems in the collection have been accepted for publication in such important anthologies as A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry, The Prairie Schooner Prize Winners’ Anthology (2003-2012), and The Rumpus Original Anthology. The poems in Spectator engage the lyric-narrative form and the post-confessional poetic tradition to explore my experiences growing
up in a biracial, bicultural household in which both parents were first-generation Americans. The collection includes dramatic monologues based on the interviews I conducted with my Calabrian-Sicilian grandfather and Costa Rican grandmother about their experiences immigrating to the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. The lyric-narrative poems in the collection employ polyvocality (of language and voice) to explore my own experiences of hybridity and marginality through the lens of childhood. The final poems in Spectator address my adult negotiation of a hybrid identity that is simultaneously American, Italian, and Latina. This project works within the recent trend of the poetics of identity while also challenging the boundaries between poetry and memoir.
4. Introduction

Objectives

My objectives for the period for which I am requesting funding are:

• In early July of 2012, to travel to New York City to interview Maria Lisella and Gil Fagiani of the Italian American Writers Association of which I am a member about the experiences of twentieth century Italian immigrants in the United States

• From July 10, 2012 to July 31, 2012, to revise and organize the manuscript sequence and the arrangement of poems within each of the three sections

• From August 1, 2012 to August 30, 2012, to research Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 poetry manuscript contests and literary presses with a special interest in the poetics of ethnic, racial and linguistic identity

• From September 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013, to submit Spectator to such prestigious
book prize contests as the Donald Hall Prize in Poetry, the New Issues Poetry Prize, the Barnard Women Poets Prize, and the BOA Editions Poetry Prize; and to submit the collection to two editors who have expressed interest in publishing it, Cody Lumpkin of the University of Nebraska Press, and Michael Wiegers of Copper Canyon Press.

Description
and family history through the lenses of race and culture, and I believe my background, my aesthetic (as developed in my first collection of poetry), and interests lend themselves to such subject matter.

In July of 2009, renowned poets Stephen Dunn and Marilyn Hacker selected my first collection of poetry, Taste of Cherry, for the 2008 Prairie Schooner Book Prize (University of Nebraska Press, September 2009). The poems in this collection initiated my exploration of the politics and poetics of inhabiting an Italian-Latina cultural space. Poet and Princeton University professor Tracy K Smith has written of Taste of Cherry: “These poems are poised and raw, hard-knuckled and siren-sweet. Their many speakers confess openly to a desire to be transformed, even undone, by unmitigated experience. Fearlessly and with clear-eyed candor, [poet’s name] sings a whole new set of constellations—made of ‘the body’s light . . . the din of a hundred conversations’—into bright being.” In a 2010 review of the collection published in the well-regarded online journal, Blackbird, Randall Marshall praises my attention to the complexity of human experience and emotion: “Like Hart Crane, Rimbaud, and Lorca before her, she senses how human blood burns “like a poultice of broken glass,” and rejects “all the sweet geometry” she ever learned. No cold, rational philosophy explains
her.” Katie Willingham published a review of Taste of Cherry in Rain Taxi (Spring 2010), one
of the most respected literary review journals in the country. Willingham’s review notes my
attention to the subtleties of experience: “Taste of Cherry derives its name from...Abbas
Kiarostami’s film...about a man who considers suicide but decides to live after tasting
mulberries. The title invokes something powerfully present in these poems... revealing layers
of meaning buried beneath the surface of our daily experience.” David Baker, the senior
editor of The Kenyon Review, wrote in a fall 2011 acceptance letter for two poems from
Spectator, “These poems manage to do what Elizabeth Bishop did, to make the exotic
familiar
In Spectator, I have harnessed the poetics reviewers and established poets praised in my first book and also delved more deeply into the fabric of biracial, bicultural identity. The collection’s opening dramatic monologues address the alienation and exile with which many immigrants to the United States struggle. The central poems in the collection examine my own childhood struggles between a more conservative family-oriented Italian-Latina culture and the American culture into which I was born. The central themes in the collection include gender identity, religion (Catholicism), language (English, Spanish, and Italian), the concept of family (and how it differs according to culture), immigrant imagination, and food. The
final poems in the collection examine from an adult’s perspective the advantages and disadvantages of inhabiting a hybrid identity. Finally, the poems pay special attention to the challenges of marginality, exile, and cross-cultural identification.

Sample (both poems are forthcoming in The Kenyon Review, Spring 2012):

Initiation #5: Lorca

He is standing at the foot of my bed with an insanely tragic smile and a syringe full of lead. The injection makes me feel phenomenological—where am I in the barrel, the plunger, the hub? He is sitting beside me in a bloodless body, stroking the pink sheets with eyes like a fruit that’s never in season. After the swabbing and the ritual tying on of rubber, burning casinos and countries I’ll never visit pass over the room. I am here
to learn how to suffer more beautifully.

Outside, at the bus stop, thin men in scrubs
read about nanobots, and maybe they can map
the malignant cells unspooling in my marrow,
or the best, fastest path of a bullet entering the chest.

Inside, in another dimension, we are riding
two lame mares to the pasture where I am
ravaged by centaur after centaur, never a satyr.

Bodies matter, how they break open,
which animals we let inside us. I am here

to learn how to suffer more beautifully,

to smile for the white air and give everything away.

Little Testament

My aunt swears Santa Rosalia died alone and chaste

in a cave on Mt. Pellegrino, that this is why

the water fizzes like a forgotten bride.

She swears Santa Rosalia’s spirit returned 400 years later,

in a time of plague, when men went down like rubber dogs

and the women said, There goes another Christ,

not even time to resurrect.

I love the legends of girls who get what they want
even if they have to be buried alive for it. Here,
where I am student to all I survey—a Faberge Egg,
the Vucciria market down the street, 100 naked bulbs
swaying at noon, the sidewalk wet with ice and fish guts.
Here, where a gang of Sicilians ran through the streets
at Vespers in 1282, slitting the throats of Frenchmen

who couldn’t say ciciri: chickpeas.
Tonight, a man juggles blood oranges, adds more and more,
then makes them disappear into this jacket. I know
the mainland still doesn’t give a shit about the island’s
African wind. I’ve asked the parched hammock,
which has lost its terrazzo. I’ve asked my aunt
who believes in a world expressionless as cuttlefish,
where the baying of a dog at dusk means mala notizia

and only virgins go to heaven.
I’ve asked my aunt who waits as a wife waits,
with one ear to the ground, for the future to arrive
like armies in epic poems. And how bright the fields look,
how innocent, stuffed with all those unnamable flowers

that last second before they’re trampled.

5. Methodology (including timeline):

The strengths and successes of my first book have given me the poetic skills and the
connections within the creative writing world to succeed in publishing my second collection
of poetry. In this second collection, I will continue to work within the post-confessional

tradition and also engage a more elliptical, postmodern style of poetry by incorporating
disparate voices and languages into the poems in a way that mirrors the chaos and abundance of immigrant and biracial experiences and identities.

In early July of 2012, I will travel to New York City to interview poets Maria Lisella and Gil Fagiani of the Italian American Writers Association about the poetic representation of twentieth century Italian immigrants in the northeastern United States. Upon returning from New York City, I will revise the poems in my manuscript that deal with my grandfather’s experiences as an Italian American immigrant. In mid-July of 2012, I will revise and organize the manuscript sequence and the arrangement of poems within each of the three sections. In August, I will research Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 poetry manuscript contests and literary presses with a special interest in the poetics of identity. From September 2012 to June 2013, I will submit Spectator to such book prize contests as the Donald Hall Prize in Poetry, the New Issues Poetry Prize, the Barnard Women Poets Prize, and the BOA Editions Poetry Prize. During this period, I will also submit the collection to two editors who have expressed interest in publishing it, Cody Lumpkin of the University of Nebraska Press, and Michael Wiegers of Copper Canyon Press.

6. Bibliography


7. Benefits to the University

The poems in Spectator compliment UW-Platteville’s commitment to diversity and multiculturalism in the classroom and on campus. My project initiates a dialogue about culture, race, and “difference” as dynamic, constantly shifting categories, rather than fixed attributes that are often assigned static positive (white, American) and negative (non-white,
“foreign”) labels. As literature, poetry enables identification and imagination with other
perspectives and groups with which students might have little experience. Imaginative rather
than instructive, poetry traverses the boundaries of racial and cultural identity. Since I began
my professorship at UW-Platteville in the fall of 2010, the readings, conferences and panels I
have participated in, along with the work I have published in literary journals, have each
contributed to UW-Platteville’s reputation as a regional center for the arts. Additionally, the
publication of my second manuscript would bring recognition to UW-Platteville’s
Humanities Department and further its reputation as a university that promotes diversity in
all forms.

8. Potential for Future Outside Support

At this time, I am not applying for additional outside support.

9. Distribution (to university colleagues)

I would like to present the results of my research and publication efforts at the Humanities
Faculty Forum next spring. Additionally, I would like to participate in a Liberal Arts and
Education Faculty Forum next spring, when I would read from the poems I have completed
with the support of a SAIF grant, and also share my experiences of researching and
representing multicultural memory and identity through poetry. In the future, I will continue to share my creative work with colleagues both informally and through formal presentations and the dissemination of my poetry.

10. Previous SAIF Grants

I received one SAIF Grant for the 2010-2011 academic year. This was the first time I applied (see addendum).
11. Budget

I am requesting $4,000 for salary.

Travel (Research Travel to New York City: airfare, lodging, meals)--------$1200

Supplies (Paper, Toner, Ink)------------------------------------------ $300

Manuscript Submission Fees and Postage Fees------------------------- $500

Salary-------------------------------------------------------------------------------- $2000

Total SAIF Request ----------------------------------------------------- $4000

12. Budget Justification

This funding will give me financial support for the manuscript submission process and enable me to complete my research travel. Additionally, the support of a SAIF Grant would enable me to devote the summer months to revising and organizing the poems in Spectator, and to researching publication venues, and to securing a publisher for the book.

Thank you for your consideration.
Addendum: Additional Information Regarding Previous SAIF Grant

- I have received one SAIF Grant for the 2011-2012 academic year. This was the first time I had applied.

- The work described in this proposal extends the same project as last year’s proposal. Last year, I used the SAIF Grant to research, write and revise the poems in “Cambio,” which is the third and final section of Spectator. This year, the SAIF Grant will allow me to revise the project, to organize the manuscript sequence, to research publication venues and opportunities, and to (hopefully) succeed in publishing the manuscript with a respected press.

- The results of last year’s SAIF Grant were very successful. Not only did I research, write and revise all of the poems in “Cambio,” but I also wrote and revised new poems that will be included in other sections of the book.

- As a means of sharing the results of my 2011 SAIF grant with the campus
community, I will be the featured reader for the Spring 2012 Humanities Creative Writing Festival.

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The creative work I completed with the support of last year’s SAIF Grant has garnered the attention of the national creative writing community. As of February 2012, I have accepted five invitations to be a featured reader for the following literary events and readings series:

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The Kalamazoo Book Arts Center (March 10, 2012, Kalamazoo, MI)

The Wit Rabbit Writing Series (April 3, 2012, Columbia College, Chicago, IL)

Visiting Writers Reading Series (April 14, 2012, University of North Texas, Denton, TX)

The Third Annual Great Twin Cities Poetry Read (April 21, 2012, Hamline University, Saint Paul, MN)

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Several of the poems I wrote and revised last summer have been published or are
forthcoming in prestigious literary journals. I believe that these successful publications bode well for the manuscript at large, and I am optimistic that I will succeed in publishing it with a reputable press. The poems accepted are listed below:

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(University of Akron Press, March 2012)

“Deathbed,” The Pedestal (Fall 2011)

“Bodas de Sangre: Lorca Addresses His Sister,” Spillway (Fall 2011)

“Rimbaud Watches the Sky Darken,” “Sunday Afternoon Watching Scream I,” Io: A Journal of New Writing (Summer 2011)