

To: Curran Fellowship Committee, Research Society for Victorian Periodicals

From: Erica Haugtvedt

Re: Narrative for 2020 Curran Fellowship, *Transfictional Character and Transmedia Storyworlds in the Nineteenth Century*

I write with sincere gratitude to report on the research activities made possible by the 2020 Curran Fellowship awarded for research toward the book manuscript, *Transfictional Character and Transmedia Storyworlds in the Nineteenth Century*.

When I accepted the fellowship in March 2020, I had hoped to travel to London to visit archives for the project, but the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic soon made it clear that travel would not be feasible in the near future. From March-June 2020 I worked full-time from home without childcare. My partner and I cared for our 2-year-old son while also teaching online. This delayed research progress on the book manuscript. Near the end of 2020, I wrote to RSVP to ask for an extension on the use of the fellowship funds, which was readily granted for 2021.

Between June 2020 and June 2021, I completed the introduction, chapter one, and chapter two of the manuscript. I submitted the partial manuscript for peer-review on June 1, 2021. I trialed various databases for 60 days each to see if the primary materials were useful to my research. In June 2021, near the end of the fiscal year, I arranged for South Dakota Mines to purchase permanent access to Proquest's British Periodicals II database. I had initially planned to use the funds to purchase one year's access, but the price for permanent access was 50% off for \$11,333.62. I was able to persuade the provost to pay \$2000 from discretionary funds toward this database, as part of an effort to address the research needs of faculty in the humanities. I paid the \$5000 from the Curran Fellowship, and the Humanities department paid the balance of \$4,333.62. I am very happy to have secured this resource for myself and other Humanities faculty into perpetuity at Mines. We did not even have JSTOR access until we shared resources with Black Hills State University a couple of years ago. Access to British Periodicals II significantly improves the British periodical primary sources available to us in Rapid City, SD.

The central claim of this book is that the serialized, periodical, and dramatic media environment of the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century in Great Britain trained audiences to perceive the continuous identity of characters and worlds across disparate texts, illustrations, plays, and songs by creators other than the earliest originating author. Transfictionality, defined in 2005 by Richard Saint-Gelais, occurs when "two (or more) texts share elements such as characters, imaginary locations or fictional worlds" (612). Transfictionality resembles real-world non-fiction narration in that transfictional characters and worlds are elaborated over time and multiple instances of description. Transfictional characters and worlds thus often confuse (purposefully or coincidentally) reality and fantasy.

Transfictionality allows characters to be socially constructed through their portrayal in multiple texts by (potentially) multiple authors. Transfictional characters and worlds are often subject to questions of coherence and (retroactive) continuity in that they both resemble historically existent persons and places while also flouting the parameters of consistency. Calling a transfictional character “the same” across texts is therefore typically a point of debate. Transmedia is a type of transfictionality that occurs when a fictional world is narrated across media in ways that collaboratively expand descriptions of that storyworld; in this project, transmedia occurs across drama, illustrations, merchandise, and songs as well as the British press where authors other than the originating author take up a common character.

I used British Periodicals II to access primary sources relate to the *Jack Sheppard* mania for writing chapter two, including reviews of melodramas and passing commentaries on the influence of fiction on vulnerable audiences. Chapter two focuses on appearances of Jack Sheppard in Ainsworth’s novel of the same name, melodramatic adaptation in the cheap theatre, and penny press novelizations. The chapter argues that some laboring class versions of *Jack Sheppard* write back against Ainsworth’s novel by rescuing Jack in the end, refusing to have him die for his crimes. The *Jack Sheppard* mania occurred during a crisis in English law, when the policing of laboring class bodies was on the rise. Execution for crimes like petty theft, for which the historical Jack Sheppard was hanged in the eighteenth century, had now been outlawed, but working-class people could be arrested for being too loud in the streets, public drunkenness, or presence in any place that had been converted into a minor theatre (penny gaffs). In this context, I argue that responses to Jack Sheppard that write against his actual history and give him a second life become a way for laboring-class audiences to reclaim stories told about people like them. Indeed, I found that the strongest affirmations of Jack’s survival occur in the representations that were least legal: an 1845 melodrama at the City of London Theatre that was shut down by police for violating the licensing ban on Jack Sheppard titles, and an 1840 plagiarism published by George Purkess of an 1839 serialized penny press novelization.

I thank the Curran Fellowship and the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals for the opportunity to make significant progress on my book manuscript, as well as for the opportunity to enrich the database resources available to faculty like me at Mines for a long time to come.

Sincerely,

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