

JOURNAL OF FLORIDA STUDIES

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF THE IDEA AND PLACE THAT IS FLORIDA

Volume 1, Issue 5, 2016

True Places

Casey Blanton, *Editor in Chief*

"It is not down in any map; true places never are." Herman Melville

Some of the first European-made images of East Florida show us mountains in the background, gold nuggets in the streams, and tail-thrashing alligators easily 40 feet long. Even given sixteenth century artistic conventions, we have to wonder what these early travelers wanted to convey about Florida. They were clearly making choices about how to present this 'new' land, and they definitely wanted to impress. Early explorers from Spain and France had benefactors in Madrid or Paris who needed good reasons to bankroll another expedition. Travel writers and painters wanted to sell exciting stories and exotic images of the New World to an expectant audience in the Old World. To accomplish these ends, writers would create a new narrative for the "unstoried" wilderness they encountered. What ultimately emerges in

art, maps, and in travelogues – and what persists over Florida's long history -- are two central narratives: Florida as a tropical, seductive Eden and Florida as 'other,' an exotic, dangerous, and empty territory — a new land to be conquered or surrendered to.

Joining fact to fabrication is not a new technique. Travel writing is notorious for looking like truth and acting like fiction. William Bartram's *Travels*, published almost 20 years after the traveler/naturalist walked, rode, and paddled through 18th c. Florida, purports to be a record of those travels, but in fact it is a compilation of several trips masquerading as one. Like all travel writers, and all artists, Bartram chooses what to foreground, what to praise, and what to leave out. Like his delicate and stunning botanical drawings, Bartram's travel book is

sensitive, spiritual, scientific, and fanciful. To his credit, the Florida that Bartram constructs is a land where we need to step lightly, look around, and ask questions.

The problem with creating a familiar, accessible, and mostly honest narrative about Florida lies in its ecosystem. Florida is not traditionally beautiful in the way other parts of the Americas are. Sixteenth century paintings notwithstanding, Florida is flat, monotonously green, spiky, buggy, and hot. Vermont's tidy Green Mountains and Yosemite's dramatic El Capitan always look predictably stunning in images consumed by tourists. By contrast, the landscape of the Long Leaf Pine Preserve where I walk is an acquired taste. Its undergrowth is thick with palmetto, virtually impenetrable. The pines themselves stand tall and straight with no inviting shade beneath them. The path is hard and white, flooded and impassable in the summer. There are wild hogs and snakes on the ground, loud roosting birds in the trees and in the water. Hardly a walk in the park. But there is beauty nonetheless. Florida's appeal, in Gerard Manley Hopkins' words, is one of 'pied beauty,' containing "[a]ll things counter, original, spare, strange." Florida's beauty is not conventional; it is not grand; it is instead, rather strange and uninviting. Harriet Beecher Stowe was on to this when she

warned Northern tourists eager to visit Florida: "Don't hope for too much." But tourists do hope and they do travel to Florida. Some of these travelers aim to stay here and make a new life. To accommodate these visitors, developers construct new environments out of the uncomfortable messiness of landscape and weather. They clear out the pines, pave the palmettos, and cool the air. To amuse these travelers, a new tropical 'eden' is sometimes built as a tourist attraction, complete with palms, alligators, and wading birds—minus the muggy heat and mosquitoes.

The old Florida of my childhood is nearly invisible now. I see it hiding on small back roads, in forgotten communities on the southwest coast, and, if we look hard enough, in a clump of old live oaks behind a new grocery store. The radical re-making of Florida is one of her oldest narratives, the Everglades being our most spectacular example of not protecting a strange and confusing ecosystem. The disastrous experience of draining the Glades may have finally taught us that the ways we envision Florida has consequences. As Gregory Bateson has rightly argued, ecological problems are a result of a bad ecology of ideas. It matters how we think about Florida.

For Part 2 of *Journal of Florida Studies*, "Travel and *Travels*," co-editor Dr. Thomas

Hallock and I invited authors who would think hard about Florida through the lens of travel. Like the response to Part 1 on Bartram's *Travels*, we were again humbled and astonished by the depth and breadth of the very fine work we received. Because *JFS* is interdisciplinary, and because we believe in sustaining a rich diversity in our ecology of ideas, we are always pleased to offer academic analyses along with poems, photographs, and memoirs.

We asked for Travel and we got it – especially on the subject of Cuba. Four of the sixteen published submissions are about going to Cuba, leaving Cuba, or imagining Cuba. **Chantel Acevedo's** short story follows a man on his journey from his home in Orlando to the Cuba he left as a child in order to comfort his beloved *abuela* on her deathbed. **Manuel Cachán's** memoir is about exile, the loss of a Cuban homeland, and the search for identity in the mountainous regions of Asturias and Galicia in western Spain – his father's birthplace. **Alfred López** introduces us to the extraordinary history of José Martí's revolutionary shuttle diplomacy in Florida and beyond. And the stunning photographic work of **Maria Martinez-Cañas** evokes the idea of travel to and from Cuba through her juxtaposition of Cuban postage stamps with striking abstract black and white photo-collages.

We are remarkably fortunate in our poets. The powerful images of **Rick Campbell's** evocative "Bay of Horses" bring to life a desperate, chilling moment during Pánfilo de Narváez's ill-fated expedition to Florida. In the careful and attentive style for which she has become so well known, **Debora Greger** offers us three quiet, powerful poems about a bowl, a death, and a world. Florida's poet laureate **Peter Meinke** brings us a short story (illustrated by his wife Jeanne) about a Florida man's reversal of fortune in Poland. **JoEllen Schilke's** poem asks us to pause and look while a meteor falls from the sky into a Florida field. And **Marty Williams** reminds us about Florida's natural wonders of weather and woods and their indelible smells and textures.

The memoirs published here offer a counter-narrative to the traditional storylines of Florida as Eden or swamp: Florida as home. **Cathy Salustri** takes us on a road trip, circling around Lake Okeechobee. **Heidi Hutner** remembers the Miami of her childhood and her parents' stormy 'nuclear' marriage. **Rick Campbell** recalls his first home in Florida with a yard full of Appaloosas.

The scholarly articles examine what others have made of Florida: **Steve Schoen** takes on the rhetoric of *Blackfish* and the changes that film's argument has made at SeaWorld.

Greg Specter examines how the Florida letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe define her attitudes about her adopted home in frontier Florida. **Elizabeth Powers** analyzes 19th c. Florida guidebooks and finds them full of persistent narratives reinforcing Florida as dangerously wild, ripe for taming by hearty Northern visitors. These are important academic studies because they remind us that Florida's constructed narratives of wonder and control continue to determine how travelers approach our state.

This issue marks our fifth year of publishing the *Journal of Florida Studies*. Gratitude goes out first to Daytona State College for supporting a small, upstart academic journal. Thanks go to my colleague and friend Michael Flota, our Managing Editor, whose cheerful and savvy advice is always welcome. To Jessica Kester, maybe the best poetry editor on the planet, we could not offer the high quality of poetry at *JFS* without you. Much gratitude also goes out to Alison Nordström for her smart and stunning choices for our photographic portfolios. And to Bryan Seagrave in Creative Services, thanks always for making us look classy online. Lastly, we could not possibly have pulled off these two remarkably strong issues without the broad-ranging academic connections, the vision, and the ebullience of Dr. Thomas Hallock. Thanks very much Tom, it's been quite a ride.