

## Think Globally, Dig Locally: Pedagogy and the Archive in Early Florida Literature

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### ABSTRACT

As the field of early American literature absorbs the influences of trans-Atlantic and hemispheric models, border zones such as *La Florida* provide new opportunities for research and classroom study. Given this region's complicated history, however, the literary history is very difficult to reconstruct. Early descriptions of Florida were written in Spanish, French, Portuguese, English, Latin, German, and native languages, and they took any number of forms, including histories, *relaciones*, fiction, epic poems, captivity and slave accounts, petitions, diaries, and natural histories. What holds together this diverse body of works? Given the range of materials, one pedagogical approach is to focus on the process of anthologizing itself. Florida offers a test case by which students may replicate the tasks that colonial authors, printers, editors, and anthologists undertook themselves. It provides a test site for micro-histories that, if completed alongside other projects, may be used to redraw the map of colonial American studies.

Keywords: Florida, historiography, hemispheric studies, transatlantic studies, pedagogy, colonial literature, anthologies.

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## RESUMEN

Dado que la especialidad de Literatura Americana ha absorbido las influencias trasatlánticas y los modelos hemisféricos, regiones como La Florida ofrecen nuevas oportunidades para la investigación y la enseñanza. Debido a la complejidad histórica de la región, la historia literaria ha sido un tanto difícil de reconstruir. Las primeras descripciones de La Florida fueron escritas en español, francés, portugués, inglés, alemán y lenguas indígenas cuyos textos siguieron formatos diversos tales como: historias, *Cartas de Relación*, poemas épicos, cuentos, relatos de esclavitud y cautiverio, peticiones, diarios, así como historias naturales. Cabría preguntarse entonces ¿qué es lo que mantiene unido este *corpus* literario tan diverso? Teniendo en cuenta la diversidad antes mencionada, una aproximación pedagógica sería enfocarse en el proceso de recopilar y editar estos textos en el marco de sus propios formatos. El ejemplo de La Florida brinda un ámbito para el estudio de la “micro-historia” que, de ser realizado con otros proyectos, podría rediseñar el mapa de los estudios coloniales de las Américas.

Palabras clave: la Florida, historiografía, estudios hemisféricos, estudios transatlánticos, literatura colonial, antologías.

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## 1. THE PREMISE

The ocean waters receded some ten thousand years ago, leaving a long, narrow spit of land that comprises what we now recognize as the southeastern corner of the continental United States. Juan Ponce de Leon, who ventured north from the Caribbean archipelago during Easter season 1513, christened the land *Pascua Florida*. The sandy soil yielded neither mineral wealth nor the complex agricultural communities that had driven the Spanish invasions of Nueva España, Central and South America, and white settlement came slowly. Through most of the colonial period, Florida was *frontera*, a backwater, its only discernable value to Europeans being proximity to the powerful Gulf Stream that provided a route for homeward-bound fleets. *La Florida* was claimed, abandoned, and reclaimed several times over: by Ponce de Leon then a series of *Adelantados* who touched ground on Gulf shores before heading North; by French Hugueonots, whose toeholds on the Atlantic Coast prompted a bloody raid by Pedro de Menéndez de Avilés and the founding of St. Augustine in 1565; by Great Britain, who traded its claims to the peninsula for *La Habana* in 1763 as part of the first Peace of Paris; by Spain again, after the second Peace of Paris which ended the American Revolution; and by the United States, after Andrew Jackson's 1817-18 invasion and

subsequent purchase from Spain in 1821; and from the mid-eighteenth century to the present by the Seminoles, who waged a series of costly wars for the United States, never settling a peace.

A long history on the margins resulted in a significant, if neglected body of literature. Because claims to *La Florida* were challenged and traded several times over, this literature appears in many languages – Spanish, French, English, Portuguese, German, English, Latin, and Timucuan. The writings encompass a broad range of genres. There are panegyric and epic poems; *cartas* and *relaciones*; captivity and slave narratives; enlightenment botanical studies, topographic and nautical descriptions; ethnographies; and by the early nineteenth century, a smattering of fiction. Florida makes frequent cameos in periodical works and in the gamut of Renaissance histories, encyclopedias, and digests. There are petitions to court and king, personal diaries, accounts of cross-cultural engagement, stories of shipwreck, “true histories” and flights of imaginative fancy that bear only the slightest resemblance to their physical settings. The history of early Florida is longer and more diverse than more-widely studied colonies like Massachusetts, Virginia, or Pennsylvania. Yet in most surveys of early American literature, the southeastern borderlands remain an afterthought at most.<sup>1</sup>

Major shifts in perspective, however, have created room for change. Early American studies, it is commonly noted, had its beginnings in mid-twentieth century politics. Scholars such as Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch divined a founding mythos for a nation that deemed itself exceptional, suggesting a “unified body of thought” (Miller vii) that ran from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to nineteenth-century Romanticism; in this organic growth from region to nation, scholars charted a “Puritan Origins of the American Self.” Jonathan Edwards, by this line of thinking, begat Ralph Waldo Emerson; Anne Bradstreet midwifed Emily Dickinson and Adrienne Rich; Ronald Reagan tapped into John Winthrop; and so on. Much has changed over the past two decades, however, as an “emancipated” and institutionalized discipline called “American Literature to 1800” seeks to treat the period on its own terms, and calls for distance from a “teleology” that typed the national DNA in Puritan New England.<sup>2</sup> Scholars are paying increased attention to works in languages other than English. The geographic compass has widened to include Hudson Bay, Tierra del Fuego, the Guinea Coast, Jamaica, and London. Recent meetings of the Society of Early Americanists, the flagship organization of the field, have been held in Hamilton, Bermuda and St. Augustine, far afield geographically and intellectually from Boston of the 1630s or Philadelphia in 1776.<sup>3</sup> Trans-Atlantic and hemispheric models hold increasing sway, and the tidy narrative that once ran from Plymouth Rock (with earlier stops in Jamestown and possibly Christopher

Columbus) to the American Revolution and Walt Whitman now comes across as anachronistic and misleading.

The changes are equal parts invigorating and perplexing. Early Americanists, who typically revel in their “in-between” status, once again find themselves following the lead of historians who tend to devalue textual analysis, and who in the case of the cis-/circum-/trans-Atlantic models, have not yet reached consensus themselves.<sup>4</sup> In scholarly journals, one finds a repeating cycle of giddy pronouncements and cause for caution. Alison Games opens one of many “state of field” essays with a quote from Fernand Braudel: “A historical study centered on a stretch of water has all the charms but undoubtedly all the dangers of a new departure” (2006: 741). Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan advise that “[h]istories of the Atlantic world – even if some small slice of it – will always be extraordinarily difficult to accomplish”; no “single story” can knit together French, Portuguese, English, and Spanish colonialisms (Hinderaker and Horn 398). Colleagues in literary studies fight the same disorientation. For decades our surveys relied upon an ersatz historical narrative for coherence; these are the beginnings, we assured students, who were forced to slog through musty sermons and discovery accounts before hitting the “good stuff.” Several monographs, collections, and anthologies have worked to unseat the tired myths of national origins,<sup>5</sup> resulting in a far more inclusive and realistic verbal portrait of early America than had existed, but not without some knowledge-fatigue. Instructors must face their own “feelings of stupidity or ignorance,” Carla Mulford notes, when adopting unfamiliar texts into a course. Hemispheric and trans-Atlantic models open the gates to a flood of new authors and works. As one unnamed scholar was said to quip: “Is there anything any more that we don’t have to know?” (Bauer 282) Even Jack Greene concedes that the “pedagogical devices necessary to encourage new generations of colonialists to step outside the nation-state paradigms and work within a hemispheric framework are not yet in place” (Greene and Morgan 312).

What to do then? In this paper, I argue for a program of teaching and scholarship that might be called enlightened parochialism. The position is not necessarily popular. Amidst the calls for broader Atlantic and global connections, regionalism has emerged as a straw man. “Regional” obscures a broader view, Alison Games argues (2010, paragraph 5). Because academic jobs often have a geographic framework, the work done by teacher-scholars perpetuates insular biases. Her case for scholarly “globetrotting” is well taken, even welcome in cases where resources are readily available, but unrealistic for teachers “in the trenches,” and in a peculiar way, dismissive of otherwise viable strategies. Political structures such as the state-supported university make academic labor possible. (Why shouldn’t one’s work cater to the taxpayers who live there?) More broadly,

regional and global are not mutually exclusive; if provincial centers were part “of a single whole,” as Bernard Bailyn argues (36-38), then one presumably can use the local as a point of entry into the wide Atlantic archipelago. If I begin a study from the place where I work and live, Florida, I quickly find myself thrown from London to Lima to La Rochelle and the South Seas. My hunch is that scholars mining other regions would reach similar conclusions. One can “travel a lot in Concord,” to paraphrase Thoreau, by investigating a single plot and fanning outwards from there.

Immediate advantages follow. Any program in early American studies needs at least three things: a curriculum, students to enroll in the classes, and a modicum of financial support. First, regarding texts. Early Americanists assign obscure works. Even a small university with a fair-to-middling library, however, houses a “regional” section with materials not readily available elsewhere. Second, students. Classes about arcane topics sometimes struggle with enrollment. At my campus, a small branch of a very large university, students typically hail from this state and county. Few possess a burning interest in colonial America; enough harbor curiosity about Florida, however, to spare my offerings from the Registrar’s axe. Graduate students in my campus’ Florida Studies Program (a program which, again, makes no sense in any other state) round out my enrollment roster. Lastly, funding. Despite dwindling resources in American higher education, agencies with political support have an interest in supporting research about the district they represent. One might speculate why more academics do not frame projects that are “close to home,”<sup>6</sup> but my own record of grant writing has improved since narrowing the geographic focus.

The immersion in a local archive, finally, plays into one of the great strengths of early American studies, providing a point where scholarship and teaching may intersect. The quotidian and cutting edge converge. In yet one more “state of the field” roundtable, the literary historian Susan Scott Parrish makes a case for getting lost in “thickets of pathlessness” (294). Seeking out new materials has a way of rendering trite narratives obsolete. Parrish issues this directive: “Get inside an archival starting place and then, without a strict research map or ‘plot,’ let your archive teach you about the particular spatial linkages and mentalities of this period” (299). A handful of early Americanists have, in the past, described classroom projects that do just this;<sup>7</sup> in my case, a passion for the archive found expression through dull academic committee work. The full details of the story scarcely need recounting here. Our English (or literature) faculty was asked to remap our major. I sat through a series of meetings with the three other colleagues, and together, we formulated a series of “Student Learning Outcomes.” Each course taken for the major would have to address two “SLOs”; the Outcomes

would differ for each course.<sup>8</sup> Concepts should trump content. Our committee rejected historically-framed courses such as “The Age of Dryden, Swift and Pope” (our larger main campus could cover those, we could not), and instead we put emphasis upon skills. In the process, we framed learning outcomes that happened to fit courses in early American literature, following Parrish’s directive almost to the letter, namely:

- ✓ Knowledge of historical and cultural movements, particularly before 1800, including British and American literature, along with major movements in world literature.
- ✓ An ability to access and evaluate library holdings, to develop a research protocol that effectively utilizes appropriate scholarly source (including electronic, print, and other materials); to assess the quality of traditional as well as non-academic sources; to conduct research that involves relevant primary materials; and to identify the terms of an ongoing critical argument and situate their own writing within that dialogue.

The draw of early American literature has always been the search for new materials and patterns of arranging them. (There is no single author one “has” to read.) The SLO’s allowed me to design a curriculum that supported my own research. Who would have guessed that such selfish aims could translate into sound pedagogy?

## 2. THE LITERATURE OF EARLY FLORIDA: A BRIEF SURVEY

Imagine the scenario. Eight undergraduates, four masters degree candidates, and a handful of auditors sit in a horseshoe around the instructor. Some twenty empty desks are scattered about Davis Hall, Room 250, University of South Florida St. Petersburg. By rough calculation, we are a dozen crossbow shots from the path that Panfilo de Narváez and Cabeza de Vaca crossed in 1528.<sup>9</sup> It is the first day of the 2010 Spring semester. All eyes are fixed in front, where I have projected the class syllabus onto an overhead screen. We review the reading for the term: a half dozen paperbacks, mostly specialized editions, amounting to a pricey \$100+ for the students; online texts available through the voluminous, semi-legal, Google Books collection; electronic books accessible through our university library; a course packet assembled by a local copy shop; and a scattershot of my own scans and photocopies, most of which would be hastily thrown together minutes before class. I explain the core assignments. Instead of the traditional mix of quizzes and papers, students would complete weekly reading worksheets (Appendix A), a short anthology project, and make a small contribution to a collective anthology. The last part interested me most. Because no textbook in early Florida literature exists, the students would be involved in making one. The very mishmash, I explain, is the point: our class would create a resource for future classes.

Here is the premise. In 2009 the Florida Humanities Council announced a call for grant proposals anticipating the 500 year anniversary of Ponce de Leon's landing. The Humanities Council sought projects that were accessible to the public, had classroom applications, and that drew attention to the long history of Spain in Florida. In preparation, scholars gathered for a one-day roundtable to discuss how funds might be allocated. I was fortunate enough to attend and left with the idea of an anthology.<sup>10</sup> Over the Spring term I would test the ideas, then in Summer 2010, write the grant. Students would work through the process of selection, contextualization, and the grunt work of scanning texts and proofing copy. Together we would assemble a preliminary version of our reader, "Early Florida in the Literary Imagination, 1513-1821." The project would give the course immediacy and hands-on relevance, qualities often missing from a class on colonial letters.

This was not the first time I had experimented with a regional approach. Teaching early American literature poses challenges unique to the field. To grasp questions of aesthetics and rhetorical choices, students must possess basic historical knowledge. The texts feel "unliterary." To those schooled in close readings of traditional works, the earlier writings often hold little appeal. Then there is the Otherness of the past. A common misconception is that colonial America will provide an archetype, or antecedent, to the present. Students pickled in twentieth-century Florida enroll in the course with the hopes of discovering a progenitor of Zora Neale Houston (instead they find Briton Hammon); southerners want some sort of Gothic to predate William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor (it will not happen); still others, dimly recalling lessons from a high school history class, want to know what happened to the Pilgrims. The literature from early America comes from a different world, I must remind them. Colonial ideas about religion, nation, cultural difference, even one's body differ from our own. Until a student accepts the Otherness of the past and the historical contingency of aesthetic forms, he or she will fumble with the strange thoughts transacted in lost genres. More modern forms of, and motivations for, writing simply do not apply. All this is to say that students become frustrated — "bored" is their word — when familiar plot lines, characters, and motifs fail to announce themselves.

But a shift in my approach empowered students. By involving them in the process of selection, I gave them leave to "like" or "not like" a work. Once they were given license to be less knowledgeable, or *students* I would say, they became less defensive. Week after week, a class would begin with the usual complaints ("boring"), then after some explanation on my part, an "ah-ha" moment would follow. A change in tactics made this possible. In previous semesters, I had asked students to undertake their own recovery projects. Initially I assigned a canonical text, such as Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners

in the Hands of an Angry God” or Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, then blindly expected them to track down a regional equivalent. My demands met predictable results. In a second version of the course, I expected graduate seminar papers — the equivalent of an academic journal article. In either case, I overestimated the motivation and research skills even amongst doctoral candidates, and only the more diligent or creative students rose to the challenge. The class anthology, by contrast, turned the angst-ridden individual research into a more manageable group endeavor. With some pre-digesting on my part, we formulated a brief survey of Florida literature.<sup>11</sup> This survey would bear little resemblance to the standard narrative of “American literature to 1800.” The buzzwords of national exceptionalism (“City on a Hill”) were strikingly absent, as were the normal clichés for Florida (the hot and sandy waste was rarely depicted as “paradise”). Lacking thematic coherence or historical continuity, we worked with the scraps of words that were traded, translated, elaborated upon, and compressed — in short, we made visible the editorial tasks behind an anthology typically used in a college English class.

Here is what an early literature of Florida looks like:

(1) *Visions*. In the first class, I introduce a short poem that includes the earliest mention of “Florida” in English verse, “Have you not hard of floryda.” This rather programmatic ode draws from the conventions of the golden age, depicting a landscape loaded with turkeys, oysters filled with pearls, and “glysterynge gold” there for the taking (Jones). But the poem also introduces a central theme of Florida literature: that of the landscape far-off, a little known region that was easily idealized, as much the subject of European convention as a physical topos, and thus easily revised. Unit One of the course, “Visions,” rounds out this idea with discussions of Ponce de Leon. The standard historical source is Antonio de Herrera y Tordesilla, although Peter Martyr d’Angiera provides a short account of the fountain with “extraordinary hidden virtue” in his *De Orbe Novo Decades* (293). With the *Decades* of Peter Martyr (as he is known in English), there is an opportunity to introduce how discursive frames shaped content. In other words, how does this fantasy subject fit within Martyr’s constellation of Renaissance ideas, figures and conceits? Juan de Castellano’s “Elegía a la Muerte de Juan Ponce de Leon” prompts a similar question. Given the subject, Castellanos will provide a description of the celebrated fountain:

Bebiendo de sus aguas pocas veces,  
 Lavando las cansadas proporciones,  
 Perdían fealdades de vejezes,  
 Sanaban las enformas complexiones [...] (107)

But the Fountain of Youth comprises only a small part of Castellanos' elegy; the purpose of the poem, rather, is to elaborate upon the heroic ideals of those who suffered for God and Crown. Because the "Elegía a Ponce de Leon" has been published only in partial translation with an aim toward establishing intrinsic qualities of Florida (Jones and O'Sullivan 17-18), the larger themes of nobility and loss are easily missed by modern readers. An early lesson becomes clear by providing the entire poem: how a fixation with the local landscape occludes broader Caribbean, hemispheric and imperial contexts.

(2) *Discourse of Failure*. A theme of failure runs through the early literature of Florida, mostly because its exploration followed the spectacular successes in Nueva España, Central America, and Peru (Pastor Bodmer 116). The narrative of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca provides the benchmark for several companion texts, as Florida entered debates about the New World. The Spanish entrada there plays a bit part in the well-known *Brevissima Relación* of Bartolomé de las Casas (108-110), and Las Casas' pious defense of Native American rights provides a useful counterpoint for Cabeza de Vaca's own self-fashioning as Christ.<sup>12</sup> The rhetorical sophistication on Cabeza de Vaca's part becomes even more apparent when read alongside the "Memoir" of his near contemporary, Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda (1575), a more obscure work that was described in 1793 as "a very good account," although "from a man who was not acquainted with the art of writing" (quoted in Smith 15). The juxtaposition of Las Casas's elegantly wrought (yet idealizing) defense, Cabeza de Vaca's gripping allegory (which students come to see as a masterpiece of its form), and Fontaneda's utilitarian "Memoir" allow students to make a crucial leap from reading "historical" documents for content to grappling with rhetorical design.

(3) *The De Soto Chronicles*. Four narratives of the 1539-43 expedition of Hernando De Soto survive, each with its own textual history and rhetorical imperatives, and in light of these differences, the company's four-year march through the present-day South provides an opportune point for examining how reports from America were circulated, consumed, presented and framed.<sup>13</sup> The two earliest are by-and-large straightforward: a "Relation of the Island of Florida" by the factor for the King, Luis Hernandez de Biedma (Clayton 221-246) and a "Relaçam Verdadeira" by the Portuguese soldier identified only as the Fidalgo de Elvas (Clayton 19-220). The later versions have a much richer textual history, documenting how a backwater like Florida registered in Renaissance literary culture. An "Account of the Northern Conquest and Discovery of Hernando De Soto" by Rodrigo Rangel (or Ranjel) was folded into the *Historia general and natural de las Indias* by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (Clayton 247-306). Oviedo's frequent interjections, while fairly easy for scholars to spot, provide a handle

for students still struggling to grasp the shift from manuscript to printed works. The longest and most rhetorically sophisticated account, *La Florida*, by El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, opens a particularly rich field of discovery for students into genres of writing. What opportunities for reflection and commentary (in contrast to the *carta* or *relación*) did a renaissance history afford? What position did a mestizo author such as El Inca Garcilaso hold in writing empire? And lastly, as students find themselves having to condense a massive archive into one short chapter, how can narrative cohesion be preserved while also acknowledging the distinctive qualities of varied works? With this unit, the students in my Spring 2010 class stopped talking about editorial practice and started *becoming* editors.

(4) *Fort Caroline and St. Augustine*. The same questions raised by the two-volume *De Soto Chronicles* provide solid grounding for framing the 1565 founding of St. Augustine, which was as much a verbal battleground as it was a military one. A useful documentary edition by the former U.S. congressman Charles Bennett retells the story of the French settlements in Florida and the origins of St. Augustine. Following the leads of French pilots Jean Ribault (also Ribaut) and René Goulaine de Laudonnière, Huguenot settlers established toeholds on the Atlantic Coast. The Protestant presence and a rival empire in America led Philip II to dispatch Pedro de Menéndez, who roundly defeated the French and unwittingly sparked a war of words. The literary quality of this chapter in Florida history is surprisingly rich. Ribault penned a glowing description, *The True Discoverye of Terra Florida*, and Bennett's collection of depositions, reports, and scattered writings create the opportunity to shape a narrative history that cuts across genres. An *Obra Nuevamente Compuesta* by the malagueño Bartolomé de Flores provides the poetic gloss, and the Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues left a visual record of the Timucuan Indians that, while unreliable ethnographically, is regarded as a classic source for European perceptions of indigenous people.

(5) *Christians and Indians*. By far the richest accounts of native-white relations came from religious writings. In 1696 the Quaker Jonathan Dickinson shipwrecked en route from Jamaica to Philadelphia, and in his captivity narrative *God's Protecting Providence*, left a vexed record of miscommunication between the British "Nickaleers" and Indian "Caseekeys" (30-31). Writings from the Franciscans who attempted to Christianize Florida natives provide even deeper views into indigenous beliefs. Juan de Paiva's singular manuscript, "Origin and Beginning of the Game of Ball that the Apalachee and Yustagan Indians Have Been Playing Since Pagan Times Until the Year of 1676" (Hann 321-348) recounts the religious, cultural, and social significance of a ballgame that is similar to, but not the same as, lacrosse. Paiva's intent, to eradicate the

custom he described, resulted in a series of reversals and self-defenses that — in their very complications — provide a far more nuanced record than the flat oral traditions that appear toward the beginning of most anthologies. A 1613 *Confessionario* by the seasoned priest Francisco Pareja was prepared as a primer for new missionaries, but in doing so, Pareja also created a window for modern readers into native beliefs. Young priests were to ask medicine men: “In curing someone, Have you placed in front of the sick person white feathers and new chamois and the ears of the owl and arrows which are stuck in, and then said you will take out the evil in sickness?” (32). In addition to the strictly utilitarian writings, the epic poem *La Florida* by Alonso de Escobedo survives. Inconceivably, Escobedo’s twelve book poem has been translated only in rudimentary prose form; particularly notable are Books 8 and 9, which deal with Escobedo and his experiences with Florida natives (Sununu, Escobedo).

(6) *British West and East Florida*. With the surrender of Spanish claims to Florida to England after the Seven Years War, the literature takes a radically different turn. The British Crown split the colony into two, East and West Florida, with capitals in St. Augustine and Pensacola respectively, and promoted Florida as an alternative to the Caribbean staple colonies. An increased emphasis upon settlement fed the market for topographical and scientific writings, including the painstakingly accurate nautical surveys by William De Brahm, natural histories by Bernard Romans and William Bartram, and ethnographies by James Adair. A little-known, retrospective “Diary” by Pensacola resident Elizabeth (Betsy) Pilot provides a rare woman’s voice, while Briton Hammon briefly touches on the experiences of a black sailor. These writings only occasionally veer into the category of “literature” (Bartram’s *Travels* being the notable exception) but through Florida, it becomes possible to see how words defined an empire — and vice versa.

(7) *Borderland*. Florida remained a border region through most of the nineteenth century, and as a result, one finds few of the claims of Manifest Destiny that shaped early U.S. literature. After the War for Independence, claims to the peninsula reverted to Spain, then again to the United States until 1821 — although the Seminoles, mosquitos, and fears of a degenerative climate prevented Florida from being settled by whites until much later. A region about which little was known, meanwhile, provided a fertile spot for the imagination. Francois-René de Chateaubriand folded his reading of William Bartram and other sources (including the Jesuit *Relations*) into a novella, *Atala*. This drippingly-sentimental fiction harbors the worst excesses of nineteenth-century romanticism — “As a fawn seems to cling to the flowers of the pink lianas, grasping them from its fine tongue on the steep mountain bank, so I remained suspended on the lips of my beloved” (27) –

and students tend to reject the work as “Florida literature,” although the selective borrowing reiterates the theme of circulation and reproduction that gives an imagined borderland its shape. John Howison’s “Florida Pirate” likewise bears only the most peripheral relation to the place named in its title, yet as a tale with quasi-abolitionist sentiments, it speaks to anxieties about slavery and maroon communities.

Florida remains on the periphery for another half century, and as a result, no grand vision of empire lends shape to this land’s identity. The many shifts challenge consensus-seeking scholars who seek “to understand the history of the Americas as a single story” (Hinderaker and Horn, *op cit.*). This is a literary history without coherence or closure. What we have instead is the process of textual production itself. As students sift through a wide variety of materials, they must face questions of selection. They engage in the same process of digesting, translating, “cutting and pasting” that started four centuries ago. What better lesson, from this great period of anthologies, than to make one an anthologist? Students become the literal (or should I say literary?) heirs of Peter Martyr, Richard Hakluyt, Oviedo y Valdés, and Chateaubriand.

### 3. DIRECTIVE, IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

Imagine the scenario. The half dozen surviving members of the Spring 2010 class sit with me in the campus computer lab. It is mid-April. The room is mostly empty. Surrounding students (not in my class) check their Facebook pages, watch videos, and play games on the university-owned Dells. My group huddles around a machine linked to a tractor-feed scanner. I explain the process of digitizing a text: how to load pages in the proper direction, check on the Optical Character Recognition function, save the scan into a Microsoft Word file, run a spell check, and standardize the format. “This is the grunt work of scholarship,” I explain — though I am not convinced about the value of the exercise myself. I make a feeble analogy to biology classes. In a course that uses lab rats, someone must swing by the lab over the weekend and check the food and water. Otherwise the rats die and experiments fail. To my surprise, the students buy this awful analogy. Or they are worried about their grade. Either way, they nod in agreement.

The Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software breaks down data to shapes on a page. For the computer, the characters signify nothing. I like this starting point. What turns shapes on the page into meaning? What are the narrative structures that we must recognize in order to perceive words-strung-together as coherent, relevant thoughts? What historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts must we consider for any text to warrant the physical effort of scanning? What parameters have we set as a class for inclusion? By the end of the term, my students should know not to take an

anthology for granted. Editors make choices. For every text that appears in a finished volume, far more have been left out. These decisions are not arbitrary, I note, but require careful thought. Every anthologist has an agenda. Our class now has two projects going: the group anthology and individual mini-anthologies. Hopefully the former has served as a guide for the latter. As the students start assembling their mini-anthologies, they must clarify for themselves what holds together one particular corner of “Florida literature.”

Two weeks later, the semester comes to a close. The individual final projects are mixed. We had discussed the assignment at length, and despite weekly status reports, the students did not seem to grasp the criteria for “A”-level work. As with any new assignment, I would struggle with the absence of successful models that I could share with them. On the final meeting day, I ask a colleague in my department and a former graduate student to grill the class. The projects that take a creative bent are clearly the most successful. One puckish senior assembles a phrasebook in Timucuan for imaginary tourists in seventeenth-century Florida. A second culls together scraps from a semester of reading into a volume of “found” poems. The poems are surprisingly successful; the act of digesting, sifting through, and transcription allowed him to capture the texture and nuances of colonial language. No complaints there. Others projects are littered with typos, misspellings, and alarming gaffes. In cases where synthetic introductions are needed, some “borrow” from what they insist on regarding as a free and open archive — the internet. The many varieties of final projects make grading almost impossible.

It is easy for teachers formulating new assignments to overlook the skills that are being presumed. The students in our literature program already possess the training in close reading and rhetorical conventions needed for the standard literary analysis. But they were not prepared for the level of research (despite the targeted Learning Outcome) that the individual anthologies required. Being a more seasoned scholar, I forgot how difficult it is to track down and contextualize obscure texts. As a daily witness to student skills in other forms of online inquiry, such as downloading music and social networking, I figured they would have no trouble with library tools. That transfer of knowledge did not happen. Simply put, I underestimated the leap between passive consumer and active producer of an anthology. Although we had discussed the process *ad infinitum*, nearly all struggled with the basic tasks: framing a question, selecting texts that illustrate that question, synthesizing scholarship for an introduction and annotation, and providing clean copy.

My own work turned out to be much easier. As the deadline for Florida-Spain 500 grant approached, I proposed an anthology: “Early Florida in the Literary

Imagination, 1513-1821.” This project (Appendix B) would take into account the needs of in-state high school students, general readers, and early Americanists nationwide. Two months passed; the grant received funding. Continued review of the scholarly literature convinced further me of the timeliness of this project. It has become standard in the pages of *Early American Literature*, *American Literary History*, and *The William and Mary Quarterly* to note the realignment of the field along hemispheric or trans-Atlantic models. Even with new anthologies and online resources, however, foundational scholarship remains to be done. Multilingual courses in American literature will be impossible to develop without translations. The problem of distance strikes me as particularly acute: widening the parameters of a field from the Canadian Arctic to the *Cono Sur* requires an impossible erudition. Scholars presume accountability for more than any one person can know. Several solutions have emerged, most notably, collaboration. Others, I suggest, may consider scale. Rather than tracking trans-Atlantic currents, why not simply choose a single port of call? Isn't it enough to acknowledge the nation-state as the anachronism it is, then tend to the full range of influences and groups who traded cultures within present-day borders? Even archaeologists start with a single, small grid.

What if a handful of teacher-scholars across the United States committed to collective projects of recovery? What would our map of colonial letters look like if faculty members at Louisiana, upstate New York, Maine, and New Jersey each took on an exercise of literary archeology? From these states alone, we would have pastiches that included writings in French, Spanish, Dutch, German, Swedish, and English, creole, and native languages. How might a series of empirically grounded, local projects change our broader understanding of early America? And what would we gain by putting the dig at the center of both research and teaching? I finished the Spring 2010 semester with the bones of a book, should I want to pursue it, and a useful anthology at the very least. More importantly, the students who survived the course completed “real scholarship”: they scanned texts, debated selections, and with often animated dialogue, taught themselves how to make unfamiliar literature *familiar*. Even if their individual projects disappointed, we broke new ground together.

Future classes will revisit work from the Spring 2010 term. A graduate seminar slated for Fall 2011 will annotate the primary texts, probably add a few more, and comb through the secondary literature to provide headnotes. The anthology will go online in primitive form, and if all goes according to plan, our graduate students will test the content at area high schools. The anthology will then be reviewed again. Over time, the shape of “early Florida literature” will become more and more clear. I may even find

some “single story,” a thematic thread or figure in the carpet. By then, it may turn out, students will no longer be preparing an anthology. They will be *using* the work of their earlier peers. Students enrolled in a class called American Literature to 1800 at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg will not have to pay \$100+ for books. There will no more photocopies slapped together at the last minute. All the readings will be available at one convenient source. My assignments will make perfect sense. The course will be perfectly organized... And far less interesting.

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## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup> Volume A of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, the standard textbook for college courses, devotes almost 250 pages to New England; Florida, however, is tucked into an 80-page section on "New Spain," represented only by a thin twelve pages from Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and in a section on "New France," three pages of Laudonnière (Lauter 39-51, 216-18).

<sup>2</sup> The genealogy epitomized by Perry Miller's essay, "From Edwards to Emerson" (184-203) has been reviewed and even demonized several times. Ralph Bauer convincingly demonstrates how an exceptionalist conception of American Studies resulted in the fragmentation of studies in "Notes on the Comparative Study of Colonial America" (283-284). Susan Scott Parrish provides a concise summary of recent work in British American studies: "Moving away from scholarship that studied pockets of colonial culture or as anticipations of the inevitable 'character' of the United States, literary scholars over the last twenty years have come to see colonial Anglophone culture as part of the transatlantic British world; scholars have come to study spaces of conflict and creolization wherein English, indigenous, and African people encountered one another; and scholars have geographically reached beyond New England and Virginia to study British culture in the Middle Atlantic and the Caribbean (546). An early marker in this process is Philip Gura's influential, "Early American Studies: A Vade Mecum," and this signaling accelerated into a minor movement when Gura turned over the editorial reigns of the journal *Early American Literature* to David S. Shields. Despite the disavowal amongst critics of an evolutionary model amongst scholars, however, the "roots" have always been an easy sell; Giles Gunn closes the introduction to the Penguin anthology, *Early American Writing*: "The seeds of American writing have been deeply planted; it now only awaited the chemistry of future experience to germinate them and set them free" (xl).

<sup>3</sup> The significance of the location was not lost on participants; as Sean X. Goudie, chair of the presidential session at the Bermuda conference notes, "an SEA conference in Bermuda would signal the arrival of the West Indies as an important site of inquiry in early American studies" (694). Lest I

overstate my case, the Society of Early Americanists conference convenes again in 2011 in Philadelphia; and queries about the Puritans still draw the most animated dialogue on the SEA's discussion list.

<sup>4</sup>William Spengemann identified the problems of a field called "early American literature" decades ago: "early" positioned it to a field that came later, "American" presumes a nationality that the authors themselves did not recognize," and "literature" does not necessarily qualify for what are, in many cases, utilitarian writings (1993, 512). On historians' indifference to literary scholarship in colonial studies, see Slaughter's essay in *Early American Literature*, which was also published in *The William and Mary Quarterly*. Particularly illuminating is a comment by respondent Marion Rust, who distinguishes between "documents" and "texts": Literary critics trade in "texts" and historians in "documents," with the latter supporting a national obsession with originary myths (403). The nostalgic longing for origins has also thwarted studies of Florida literature. The few surveys of the literature seek to chart essential qualities of place, rather than focusing on textual circulation, and views of early Florida are skewed toward the present as a result; see O'Sullivan and Lane, Rowe.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Krise's edited collection, *Caribbeana*, provides a healthy selection of colonial English-language literature written outside the present-day United States, while Castillo and Schweitzer's *The Literatures of Colonial America* take a broader, hemispheric approach. Sean Goudie examines the "shadowy presence" of the Caribbean in the early republic (9). E. Thomson Shields and José Rabasa are among the few scholars to turn to the northern borderlands as a literary subject, while Gordon Sayre has recovered French writings about Native Americans. On hemispheric models of scholarship, Ralph Bauer's influence has been particularly extensive; see also Bauer and Mazzotti, whose pathbreaking comparative volume, *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas*, includes a useful short review of hemispheric and Atlantic scholarship (55-56).

<sup>6</sup>The beginnings to an answer to that question may be found in a recent survey by historian Claudio Saunt of articles in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, a journal that as Saunt observes, tends to publish studies about the northeastern United States at the expense of other regions. Because the premier schools (where a publishing historian most likely received his or her training, are in the Northeast), the research remains focused on that part the country (262-267). Traditionally the colonial South has lacked the caché of the Virginia Tidewater or New England. Bailyn lauds the Atlantic history for its "cosmopolitan" character (40). My own experience suggests that when an academic moves South for a job, he or she becomes regionally bound, less "cosmopolitan" by common perception, which may explain why untenured teacher-scholars interested in making a mark in trendy subfields (such as Atlantic History) may not hitch their research to where they live.

<sup>7</sup>Writing in a pre-digital age (1983), literary historian William Spengemann made a case for students in his graduate seminar becoming bibliographers of bibliographies. His aim, like Parrish's is to define early American literature "on its own terms, according to its own peculiar situation, rather than in relation to American literatures as a whole whose center of gravity lies outside our period, in a significantly different world" (1983, 8). Rosalie Murphy Baum suggests how the archive could be used with the French literatures of America, particularly the 73-volume translation of the *Jesuit Relations*; students may be given a small sampling, and once shown the massive set, then "choose readings that particularly interest them" (119). Daniel E. Williams reviews a similar experiment in the preface to *Liberty's Captives: Narratives of Confinement in the Print Culture of the Early Republic*. Modeling his teaching upon what he learned at an institute for documentary editing, Williams organized a graduate seminar around the preparation of little-known captivity narratives; the exercise evolved into "The

Jefferson City Editorial Project,” which eventually became a book (x). Such a model sensibly combines theory and praxis. Rather than reading works of early American literature, students *become* early Americanists. These examples aside, however, it should be noted that the conversation about teaching early American literature is still in the nascent stages. Syllabi and some additional resources relevant to early American literature are available on the SEA website ([www.mnstate.edu/seateaching/resources.html](http://www.mnstate.edu/seateaching/resources.html)); of particular note on this site is a link to E. Thomson Shields, “Beyond the Anthology: Sources for Teaching Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century Colonial Spanish Literature of North America.” The one volume to date specifically dedicated to pedagogy and colonial literature, *Teaching the Literatures of Early America* was useful for suggesting an expanded canon although, the essays in this volume mostly limit themselves to available texts — rather than actual classroom approaches.

<sup>8</sup> The other SLOs include: familiarity with theory; an awareness of the range of literatures including works by historically marginalized groups; skills and written and oral communication; and “civic engagement.”

<sup>9</sup> Thanks to Albert Vogt, a military reenactor and former student in my home university’s Florida Studies Program, for this calculation.

<sup>10</sup> On the grant, see the Florida Humanities Council website ([www.flahum.org/index.cfm/do/Grants/Spec\\_Initiatives](http://www.flahum.org/index.cfm/do/Grants/Spec_Initiatives)). My pitch made during the one-day session is on [www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6LUVGRi5obQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6LUVGRi5obQ)

<sup>11</sup> My own reconstruction of early Florida literature began with the early chapters of O’Sullivan and Lane, *The Florida Reader* (29-58) and the early essays in Michael Gannon’s edited collection, *The New History of Florida* (1-206). Space does not allow me, in the survey below, to acknowledge the secondary literature on the period, and while a revised historical survey of early Florida remains a *desideratum*, readers might begin with these sources.

<sup>12</sup> The definitive translation of Cabeza de Vaca, available in a one-volume paperback, is by Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz (Nebraska), which presents the manuscript account, but the Penguin paperback, which follows the published 1542 *Relacion*, includes chapter breaks, making it far more accessible for students.

<sup>13</sup> In class I used the exhaustive edition, *The De Soto Chronicles*, edited by Clayton, Knight, and Moore. This two-volume set is expensive for undergraduates but available online. Volume 1 of *The De Soto Chronicles* includes the three major primary accounts, and volume 2 is a 1935 translation of *La Florida del Inca Garcilaso de la Vega*. The translation of *La Florida* by Varner and Varner is far more fluid but sadly out of print.

APPENDIX A: WEEKLY RESPONSE SHEET

AML 4300/LIT 6017/LIT 4930:  
 Early Florida in the European Imagination  
 Weekly Class and Self-Assessment

Your Name:  
 Author:  
 Title of Work:

**What You Learned (circle one)**

1	2	3	4	5
Very useful, learned a lot	Very instructive	Somewhat instructive	Not useful	Not useful, learned little

What does this selection teach you about literary culture and history?  
 What historical-biographical background needs to be provided to make sense of this work? Be as specific as possible.  
 Identify specific points that require clarification. Give page and line number (i.e. 48:3, to identify page 48, third line), with specific points for clarification.

**Enjoyment Factor (circle one)**

1	2	3	4	5
Delightful and engaging	Very enjoyable	Somewhat enjoyable	Yawn!	Painfully dull

How much of this text would you include for college-level and adult readers? All of it? Some of it? None of it?  
 On what grounds would you justify including, or not include, your suggested selection?  
 With what other texts is this text conversational?

## APPENDIX B: TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Early Florida in the Literary Imagination

*1: Early Visions*

Anonymous, "Have You Not Heard of Florida"

Juan de Castellanos, "Elegía a la Muerte de Juan Ponce de Leon"

Peter Martyr, from the *Decades*

Antonio de Herrera y Tordesilla, from *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del Mar Oceano*

*2: Explorers, Invaders*

Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, from the "Account" (chapters 3-9)

Bartolomé de las Casas, from *Brevissima relacion de la destruccion de las Indias* (Florida chapter)

Escalante Fontaneda, from *Memoir*

*3: Reading DeSoto*

Fidalgo de Elvas, from the *Relaçam Verdadeira* (in Clayton et al., *The De Soto Chronicles*)

Luis Hernández de Biedma, from the "Relación de la Isla de Florida" (from Clayton et al., *The De Soto Chronicles*)

Rodrigo Ranjel, from "Account [of] De Soto (from Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia general y natural de las Indias*; reprinted in (from Clayton et al., *The De Soto Chronicles*)

El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, from *La Florida* (Book 2:1, ch. 1-6)

*4: Fort Caroline and St. Augustine*

Jean Ribault, from *The Whole and True Discoverye of Terra Florida*

John Hawkins, from *Voyages and Discoveries*

Pedro de Menéndez, "The Capture of Fort Caroline" (from Charles Bennett, *Laudonniere and Fort Caroline*)

Jacques LeMoyne de Morgues, from the *Narrative*

Nicolas le Challeux, "Who wants to go to Florida?"

Bartolomé de Flores, "Obra Nuevamente Compuesta [...]"

"Request to the King [...] by the widows, little orphans, friends [and] relations of those that have been cruelly invaded by the Spaniards" (from Bennett, *Laudonniere and Fort Caroline*)

*5: Encounters, Religious and Ethnographic*

Juan de Paiva, "Ball Game Manuscript" (from John Hann, *Apalachee: The Land between Two Rivers*)

Francisco de Pareja, from the *Confessionario*  
Alonso de Escobedo, from *La Florida* (books 8 & 9)  
Jonathan Dickinson, from *God's Protecting Providence*

6: *British Occupation*

Elizabeth Pilot, "Autobiography" (cited in D.L. Bauer)  
Bernard Romans, from *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*  
William deBrahm, from *Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North  
America*  
William Bartram, from *Travels*  
Briton Hammon, *Narrative of the Uncommon Suffering*

7: *Imagining Florida*

Eunice Barber[?], *Narrative of the Tragical Death of Mr. Darius Barber*  
René Chateaubriand, *Atala*  
John Howison, "The Florida Pirate"  
Sarah Allen, from *Narrative of the Shipwreck*