

Florida Studies Review

Florida Studies Review

Edited by

Allyson D. Marino (General Editor)

and Marcy L. Galbreath (Executive Editor)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FCEA Board Members (2016-2017) viii

Preface x

Section I: FLORIDA STUDIES

Chapter One 2

*Mega-Python vs. Gatoroid and Pop-Culture Appropriation of Florida's
Biological Conflicts*

~Christopher Nank

Chapter Two 11

*Searching for a Greener Self: Two Journeys through the Florida
Landscape*

~Lawrence J. Byrne

Chapter Three 20

The Storm: The Case for Ellen Brown Anderson's Authorship

~Keith Huneycutt

Chapter Four 33

*From Science to Spectacle: The (D)evolution of the Museum
from Charles Willson Peale to P.T. Barnum*

~Marissa Glover McLargin

Chapter Five 46

*Navigating People, Paper, and Pixels: Examining Contact Zones
with(in) Florida's Past*

~Amy L. Giroux

Chapter Six 62

*"Eenie Meenie Miney Mose": Using Experimental Citizen
Curating to Engage Visitors with Racial Ephemera*

~Amanda Hill, Mark Kretzschmar, David Morton, and Sara Raffel

Chapter Seven.....	77
<i>An Ecstasy of Delight and Admiration: McCall and Audubon in Florida</i>	
~Maurice J. O’Sullivan	
Chapter Eight.....	88
<i>You’ve Got Art: Florida’s Post Office Murals</i>	
~Keri Watson	
Section II: LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES	
Chapter Nine.....	102
<i>“Tossed Aloft out of Her Usual Surroundings”: The Gender Politics of Space and Place in Virginia Woolf’s The Years</i>	
~Ángel Luis Jiménez	
Chapter Ten	119
<i>Donna Tartt’s “Detective” Fiction</i>	
~Heather Duerre Humann	
Chapter Eleven	129
<i>Foot and the Freak Show: A Portrait of Dwarfism in Harry Crews’ The Gospel Singer</i>	
~John David Harding	
Chapter Twelve	138
<i>Just a Little Help from a Spiritual Hand: Self Discovery in Tina McElroy Ansa’s The Hand I Fan With</i>	
~J. K. Surrency	
Chapter Thirteen.....	150
<i>A Nightmare Experience: Henry Fuseli’s The Nightmare, Bram Stoker’s Dracula, and the Experiential Role of the Viewer/Reader in Two Gothic Masterworks</i>	
~H. Alexander Rich	
Chapter Fourteen	163
<i>The Critic Sits Alone</i>	
~Roderick Hofer	

Section III: PEDAGOGY

Chapter Fifteen	174
<i>Tensions and Transitions: Supporting and Advancing ESL Students’ Reading Skills</i>	
~Iona Sarieva and Marcela van Olphen	
Chapter Sixteen	185
<i>On-line Education: How Assuring Accessibility for Diversity Enhances Usability for All Students</i>	
~Laura Tichy-Smith	
Chapter Seventeen	198
<i>The Perpetual Subversion of Elitism: Toward a Rationale for Pop Culture in Literary Studies</i>	
~Burgsbee Lee Hobbs	
Chapter Eighteen	210
<i>“A Spirit of Belonging”: Saint Leo University Flying in the Face of Jim Crow Laws</i>	
~Janis Prince and Eileen O’Brien	

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PREFACE

Welcome to the ninth volume of *Florida Studies: Selected Papers from the Florida College English Association*. After a small hiatus, the FCEA has restructured the journal, gathering edited and expanded essays presented at the 2013-2016 conferences as well as essays written by FCEA members original to this latest edition of the journal. In addition, FCEA broadened the general call for papers to include topics from the larger Humanities field. The essays you will find within represent both in-depth essays on Florida's rich literary and cultural history, and an impressive breadth of scholarship from interdisciplinary fields that include literary studies, digital humanities, film studies, sociology, cultural studies, and pedagogy.

The essays in this edition's first section, "Florida Studies," are centered on the rich historical, cultural, and literary traditions of Florida. Firstly, Christopher Nank, a returning contributor to *Florida Studies*, examines the depictions of exotic wildlife and landscape in films as creating and maintaining certain cultural and historical narratives of the region in his paper "*Mega-Python vs. Gatoroid and Pop-Culture*," the volume's first paper on popular culture. These narratives reinforce larger colonial dichotomies of native and primitive versus the culture of colonial invaders, thus maintaining fear and anxiety associated with the unknown. Likewise, Lawrence Byrne presents depictions of Florida's rich landscape but through the careful examination of two relevant naturalist works. Within these texts, the region's verdant and diverse landscape and indigenous peoples are presented as a path to a peaceful and transcendent experience with nature. Next, Keith Honeycutt's essay on Ellen Brown Anderson offers an important study of Florida's literary history in his compelling, evidence-based case for authorship of an anonymous manuscript, written in the 1800s, yet only discovered in 2015. Marissa Glover McLargin investigates the fascinating history of Charles Willson Peale and the rise and fall of his museum as a precursor to the (in)famous one of P.T. Barnum. Continuing the investigation into Florida's cultural past, Amy Giroux examines the rhetorical concept of contact zones as historians work to understand and shape historical narrative, a task that becomes particularly important when investigating the histories of marginalized groups. Similarly, Amanda Hill, Mark Kretzschmar, David Morton, and

Sara Raffel note the construction of historical narratives in their piece, which presents their experiences and conclusions as curators of a digital and physical exhibit of comic strips archived in the Carol Mundy Collection of African American Ephemera. Taking us back to the legacy of naturalist writing in Florida, returning contributor Maurice J. O'Sullivan examines the works of both Audubon and McCall on the region's beautiful and lush natural landscape. Finally, Keri Watson's essay closes the "Florida Studies" component with a fascinating look at Florida's Depression-era post office murals in an article wittily titled: "You've Got Art." The diversity of the "Florida Studies" collection speaks to the state's wealth of historical and natural treasures.

In the next section of the journal, "Literary and Cultural Studies," this year's contributors focus on engaging readings and critical lenses of diverse works. Ángel Luis Jiménez begins this grouping of essays with a critical examination of gender and space, as presented in the writings of Virginia Woolf, while Heather Duerre Humann explores the non-standard use of detective fiction tropes within the work of writer Donna Tartt. Following this, John David Harding's essay on *The Gospel Singer* analyzes the construction of otherness in narrative and the writer's approach to often marginalized bodies or behaviors. Then, J. K. Surrency examines Tina McElroy Ansa's *The Hand I Fan With*, arguing that traditional tropes of coming-of-age narratives are both subverted and complicated by the protagonist's racial and gendered experiences. In "A Nightmare Experience," H. Alexander Rich approaches literary analysis through the lens of art history in his reading of two Gothic works of different mediums: Henry Fuseli's oil painting *The Nightmare* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Concluding the section, Roderick Hofer offers an important and thoughtful discussion on the role of critical thinking in defining the work of English professors. The questions raised in Hofer's essay bookmark the literary analyses that precede and lead into the next section on teaching strategies of pedagogy.

To open the final section of this volume, "Pedagogy," ESL professors Iona Sarieva and Marcela van Olphen discuss their extensive experiences working with non-native speakers of English in the college classroom, offering pedagogical suggestions and strategies. Secondly, Laura Tichy-Smith questions assumptions about the conventional understanding of online and distance learning roles, argues for the importance of accessibility for all students in each of these classroom formats, and encourages universities to implement certain assistive and adaptive technologies to make this happen. Then, the short essay "The Perpetual Subversion of Elitism," a second paper on popular culture by returning

contributor Burgsbee Lee Hobbs, examines the discipline frequently attacked by recent critics of Humanities degrees' return on investment (ROI) value as a subject with intrinsic value, worthy of scholarship, instruction, and integration in Literary Studies courses. Finally, Janis Prince and Eileen O'Brien conclude the pedagogy section with their historical account of Rudolph Antorcha, the first black student to attend Saint Leo University in 1898, when doing so was illegal, revealing some key details about the highly celebrated student's background and experience that have been scrubbed from the official narrative.

Everyone involved with the production of 2017's edition of *Florida Studies* is excited to share the diverse and fascinating scholarship inspired by the annual FCEA meetings. Florida's rich literary and historical culture is on full display in this volume, and the scholarship represented by FCEA scholars is both engaging and dynamic.

—Allyson D. Marino, General Editor

SECTION I:
FLORIDA STUDIES

CHAPTER ONE

MEGA-PYTHON VS. GATOROID AND POP-CULTURE APPROPRIATION OF FLORIDA'S BIOLOGICAL CONFLICTS

CHRISTOPHER NANK

Florida's history has been defined through incursion and invasion, from the earliest arrival of European explorers to the present day. The state's history is a tale of colonial wrangling over possession of the territory, of depredations upon the earliest inhabitants, of water hyacinths, of Burmese pythons, of iguanas, of lionfish, and of influxes of immigrants, retirees, and snowbirds. These form a continuous theme in Florida's development and its cultural narrative. Scholars, journalists, literati, and filmmakers have used this theme to define the state for larger audiences as well. As a filming location, Florida has proven attractive for depicting sinister, primitive settings showcasing hostile or exotic denizens of the wilderness, as in 1954's *Creature of the Black Lagoon* or the *Tarzan* films of the 1930s and 40s. The 1972 "eco-horror" film *Frogs*, filmed at Eden Gardens State Park in Walton County, suggested the uneasiness Florida natives felt toward the denizens of their swamps and waterways. The film depicts hordes of lizards, frogs, snakes, turtles, and alligators turning against humans when the ecological balance of their habitat is disrupted by a local patriarch's use of a deadly pesticide on his estate. It's worth noting, however, that many of the "native" reptiles used in that film were in fact not indigenous to Florida. Mary Lambert's film *Mega-Python vs. Gatoroid*, produced by Asylum Studios and first airing on the SyFy network in early 2011, captures in a grotesquely melodramatic way the primitive fear of Florida wildlife that works like *Frogs* tap into. It additionally evokes the tension between "natives" and "invaders" in an allegorical conflict pitting a fearsome indigenous reptile against an equally feared non-native one.

The film's story arc is typical of those deployed by science-fiction monster/disaster films, detailed by Susan Sontag in her essay "The

Imagination of Disaster”; the “emergence of the thing,” followed by unconfirmed reports of the danger, ignored warnings (until it’s too late), “further atrocities,” manifested as all-out mayhem and destruction, and the final repulse of the menace by the appointed “heroes” (42-3). Sometimes, as she writes, the heroes themselves are “unwitting” catalysts for the emergence of the monster, and this is the case in *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid*. The monsters’ rampage is contextualized within a larger debate about preserving and protecting natural habitats in the Everglades; in their attempts to address these concerns, the two leading characters actually exacerbate the situation, leading to “further atrocities” as swarms of gigantic snakes and alligators roam the landscape by the film’s final act. As Stephen Asma writes in “Monsters and the Moral Imagination,” “monsters can stand as symbols of human vulnerability and crisis, and as such they play imaginative foils for thinking about our own responses to menace.” In *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid*, the perceived “menace” of introducing invasive species to a sensitive habitat reveals the vulnerabilities of not only the environment itself, but of social attitudes toward this particular environment and its fearsome-seeming wildlife.

And in this sense, the film hardly stands alone. It can be argued that, for a majority of Americans, and for Floridians themselves, these stories reinforce and perpetuate a view of Florida colored by paranoia of “invasions” and resident insecurity about its own “natives,” whether plant, animal, or human. Often the relationships between humans and the Florida environment are fraught with anxiety, terror, and tension in such works, leading to evocations of “monstrous” depredations upon all parties (human and non-human). Author Zora Neale Hurston was not above exploiting this insecurity regarding her home state’s fauna—her sensational depictions of ghost panthers in her short story “Spunk,” hostile snakes in “Sweat,” and rabid dogs riding on cows in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* testify to this. Even beyond the wildlife, her depictions of natural Florida phenomena evoke this. The devastating hurricane that hits Lake Okeechobee near the end of the novel, in fact, is imagined as a “walking,” sentient monster—such phrases as “a monstropolous beast” are used to describe the storm, and the lake itself is described as “getting madder and madder,” a “monster awoken,” “trampling” the cottages near the shore (158-161). The writings of early “visitors” to Florida are in some ways no less lurid in their records of the wildlife. Philadelphian William Bartram’s accounts of Florida are embroidered with similar sensationalism—tales of aggressive smoke-breathing alligators more akin to dragons form the subject matter of Book II, Chapter V of the *Travels*. The French cartographer Jacques LeMoynes’s 16th century engravings of the native

Timucuan in Florida depict alligators as dragon-like monsters of enormous size.

However, once a degree of relative comfort and tense coexistence with the more intimidating aspects of the native environment was achieved by settlers, this unease gradually turned toward biological invaders from outside the state. In the late 19th century, the non-native water hyacinth introduced to the St. John's River went on to overrun and choke off waterways (Clark 137-38). The present-day paranoia in south Florida over invasive Burmese pythons, in particular, is intense: Miami Metro Zoo, for instance, in 2012 offered a "pet amnesty" to owners who wished to turn in their large constrictors, hoping this would dissuade them from releasing the pets into the wild. An episode of the PBS program *Nature* makes reference to an "army of snakes" gathering power in south Florida, and quotes Miami zoo officials as stating there's not enough manpower, resources, or money to adequately fight the threat. Larry Perez writes in *Snake in the Grass*, a memoir of his time battling invasive pythons as an Everglades park ranger, that that the public in general tends to view invasive species in a "schizophrenic" manner, admiring the fearsome or exotic traits of species like the Burmese python or the green iguana, and acknowledging their potential harm towards native Florida habitats, but "remain[ing] reluctant to infringe upon the personal liberties" of pet owners and dealers (159). Even more recently, the *Tampa Bay Times* proclaimed in July 2015 the arrival of a "goo-spewing worm" from Papua New Guinea that "eats snails, slugs," and other native worms, and "like any ambitious mutant monster, [. . .] is invading the U.S. by way of Miami" (Staletovich 5B). While terms like "monster" contain "a lot of metaphysical residue on them, left over from Western traditions," Asma states, "the language still successfully expresses a radical frustration over the inhumanity of some enemy." This florid language is used fairly regularly in both journalistic and fictional treatments of Florida's ecological conflicts, indicating the level of perceived foreignness inherent to invasive species.

Mega-Python vs Gatoroid has fun with these insecurities and frustrations, taking the native paranoia about invasion (and invasive species) and the outsider's atavistic fear of Florida fauna and blowing them up to garish, funhouse-mirror dimensions. Absurd and horribly written, filmed, and edited, by any standard, the film nevertheless is a telling repository for every fear of the sort mentioned above. Additionally, it reflects the gamut of bizarre real-life encounters between "native" and "alien" that recur in Florida over the centuries, exploiting them so effectively, in fact, that glaring, embarrassing factual errors about the state

are either ignored completely by the filmmakers or—depending on one’s point of view—intriguingly assimilated into their distilled vision of all the ecological anxieties surrounding Florida. Henry Jenkins has written, for instance, that “each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information we have extracted from the ongoing flow of media around us and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives.” Anne Rowe states that “in spite of the state’s assimilation into the mainstream of American life, the *idea* of Florida still has a powerful charm” (6); to Caroline Hospital, a discerning eye “that captures, even defends, the state’s natural character, defines Florida literature” (3). As a defense of Florida’s “natural character,” *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid* falls laughably short, even if to its heroic park rangers defending the Everglades—and eventually Miami—from the “invasions” of freakish, giant beasts, the conflict does overtly symbolize the real tensions between those “natives” who see themselves acting as stewards of the Everglades’ ecological health and the “outsiders” who seek to disrupt that balance. The movie’s vision of Florida, making no use of location filming, relying instead on stand-in California locations that barely resemble the Everglades, is ultimately a collective constructed mythology analogous to the “personal mythology” Jenkins describes, making use of all manner of “bits and fragments” from the media flow dating back over 200 years. And the plot, as mentioned, follows Sontag’s typical disaster-movie path, evoking the well-worn clichés about monsters and human insecurities that Asma describes.

Mega-Python vs Gatoroid opens with a team of animal activists releasing a swarm of various snakes into the Everglades, having “liberated” them from the ostensibly cruel clutches of a zoological research facility. This effort is explained by the coordinator of the effort, Dr. Nikki Riley, as “making a difference” and wanting the snakes to thrive “in their natural habitat.” From the outset she and her team of graduate students are presented as outsiders to the area, as trespassers and strangers; what exactly Dr. Riley is a doctor *of* is never revealed in the film—she merely self-describes as “an environmentalist.” Of course, to suggest that the Everglades are the pythons’ “natural habitat” is absurd on the face of it, especially when presented by an environmental scientist with a doctorate—this is one of many such errors and fallacies the film does not try to explain or justify. It is simply presented as a matter of course to set up the larger antagonism between “natives” and “invaders” on an interpersonal human level, with the conflict that ensues between the pythons and native fauna of the Everglades paralleling it throughout.

Park ranger Terry O'Hara emerges as Riley's nemesis; she is aligned with the "native" population of people, plants and animals, and witnesses first-hand the damaging effects the released snakes wreak on the ecosystem soon after their release—preying casually on pets, native wildlife, and humans. That invasive pythons have been present in the Everglades long before 2011 is, like the missing details about Riley's professional credentials, not even footnoted by the film; the plot implies that Riley's actions in the opening scenes are the sole cause of the snakes' sudden ubiquity and unexplained aggression. O'Hara, the park ranger, subsequently engages in what evolves into a personal vendetta against Riley on several fronts; she is appalled by the toll the predatory pythons are taking on the Everglades' alligator population and sets out to begin a "war" with the snakes by feeding dead chickens laced with an experimental steroid to the gators, thus, in her mind, defending the natural "balance" of the ecosystem. How she is able to determine the depredations on the native fauna of the Everglades as a whole, relying solely on several eyewitness reports within a small radius of her ranger station is never explained; as with the release of the snakes, this can be read as an allegory for larger-scale ecological awareness of the effects of invasive species on native ones. It also demonstrates the often-publicized insecurity about the sanctity and health of native Florida species.

The alligators soon grow to gigantic proportions, and like the pythons, develop hyper-aggressive behavioral traits. As months pass, and more pythons consume alligators who have themselves consumed the experimental drugs, both animal populations begin to ravage the landscape, attacking and devouring each other, smaller animals, and humans. By the film's later scenes, the gators have grown to Godzilla-like proportions (resembling to a large degree the alligators depicted in LeMoyné's engravings) and the pythons are shown to be capable of devouring entire train cars and taking down airborne blimps. Implicitly, O'Hara, with whom audiences' sympathies are presumed to lie, represents the "native" side of the alligators, and Riley, as the interloper, represents the "invasive" pythons. The arguments they employ in defense of their respective actions and alignments underscore the ecological symbolism of their enmity; Riley states that "environmentalism" requires extreme measures, while O'Hara believes Riley to be a "terrorist." Riley also scorns O'Hara's possessive attitude toward "her" Everglades, stating that she arrogantly treats the area like her own little kingdom. The fable-like allegorical nature of their conflict is underlined here, since in no way could the individual actions of two people, presented as they are here, affect the ecosystem on such a grand scale. The heated and nasty

exchanges between them mirror a number of debates on the issues of natural conservation versus outside development and immigration, referenced earlier, that have been a focal theme in Florida for decades. Intentionally or not, the characters allegorize the “deeply personal nature of environmental ethics” Perez discusses in *Snake in the Grass*, referencing again the competing views of pythons’ place in the Everglades ecosystem (145).

The women engage in several physical confrontations themselves before teaming up to help defeat the beasts as they invade and destroy much of Miami. The scenes showing the monsters stalking the streets of the city evoke the somewhat primitive fear of “natural Florida” that Susan Orlean writes of in *The Orchid Thief*; specifically, she implies that Florida is full of weird, dangerous people who resent outside intrusion (124), and that to her, a New Yorker, the Everglades is “alien” (9), a “green hell” (35), and that the land is always in danger of being reclaimed by the so-called “jungle.” “The developed places are just little clearings in the jungle,” she states (9). It’s hard to imagine this fear of “the jungle” reclaiming the developed spaces being rendered more frighteningly (albeit ridiculously) than in these scenes of *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid*, evoking Patrick McCormick’s claim that most movie monsters are often “poorly-disguised surrogates” for our fears about a range of issues—immigration and minorities, land development and climate change, or ecological imbalance (41).

This last aspect highlights an implied theme about the illusion of control or knowledge of the state’s habitat; O’Hara is not a scientist, not a politician, nor a corporate chief—she is no one, really, with the knowledge or power to inflict vast changes across a swath of the environment. But as a “down-to-Earth” Florida park ranger, depicted as loving the Everglades and dedicated to protecting its nebulously-defined “natural balance” (a phrase that pops up again and again in the movie’s dialogue), she represents to the audience a kind of “native” authority on the people and the area. Early on, for instance, she explains with conviction to some local hunters, portrayed as bedraggled, unlearned, sexist, and ready to shoot at the slightest provocation (*Entertainment Weekly* reviewer Ken Tucker dubs them “Everglades backwoods locals”), why they can’t freely hunt alligators within the park. But as later scenes show, her knowledge of the environment, of the forces controlling interspecies competition and balance, is tenuous at best, and she is revealed to be as awed and scared of the state’s natural fauna as everyone else (perhaps, though, acknowledging her own interfering role in producing the calamity that has befallen the area).

It is no sensational exaggeration to suggest that *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid* was “inspired by a true story”; in 2005, *National Geographic* documented an incident in the Everglades in which a deadly struggle between a 13-foot python and a 6-foot alligator ended when the gator burst out of the snake’s stomach after being swallowed. This outlandish, incredible event was also detailed in the previously-mentioned 2012 PBS *Nature* episode—with the lurid title “Invasion of the Giant Pythons.” As Sontag, McCormick, and others might argue, this very title pathologizes the snakes as thoroughly as does *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid*, and contextualizes the issue in terms of disaster-movie epic. It is possible, in this light, to read *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid* as simply another bizarre “fragment in the media stream” (to use Jenkins’ phrase) that informs audiences’ notions of Florida ecology and biological invasions. Critical appraisal of the film, both professional and audience-generated, though, has tended to focus on the sarcastic interactions between the two female leads (portrayed, notably, by former teen pop icons Debbie Gibson and Tiffany) and the hokey special effects. This is not surprising; as *EW*’s Tucker states, “the key to enjoying these junky films is for us to be able to laugh at how ludicrous they are, while everyone in the film itself is behaving as though real lives are at stake, that real danger is at hand.” It is for this very reason, though, that the film’s subtexts about Florida’s natural habitats, its perhaps unintentional allegory about the various invasions the state has endured and the attempts at preservation that arise, become significant. They are indicative of how much assumed knowledge has been passed on through the media stream to filmmakers and audiences who might be otherwise ignorant of this ongoing issue.

As the anecdote about the real-life python and gator illustrates, the actual history of invasive species in Florida is almost as bizarre, improbable, and incredible as *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid*, involving human deaths, property destruction, and large waterways totally overrun with deceptively beautiful flowers. Its status as biologically “the most invaded state” in the continental US reflects the similar “non-nativeness” of its human population. According to Daniel Simberloff, 27% of all plant species, 24% of fresh water fish, and 24% of land mammals established in Florida are non-native (27). As a result, it becomes hard to define exactly what *native* means in the state, since it depends on *when* and in what context you’re examining the state’s flora, fauna, and people, and various historical and creative texts have had wildly varying ideas on these topics over the last 250 years. Orlean alludes to this in *The Orchid Thief*—that “the flow in and out” of Florida “is so constant that exactly what the state consists of is different from day to day” (10). Many counties in Florida fly

the flags of the five nations Florida has belonged to, historically, paralleling the tumultuous exploitation and attempted preservation of the state's natural resources as they are invaded, incurred upon, occupied by different cultures with different values and ecological concerns. James Kautz points out obliquely how "snowbirds, crackers, and recently-settled Yankees" have displaced the Seminole natives that once resided in the area around present-day Palatka, a scenario that could easily apply to many areas of Florida (123). Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' characters in *South Moon Under* actually viewed the establishment of government nature preserves in Florida as a form of invasion and occupation from without (190). Gloria Jahoda even writes in *Florida: A History*, in a tone decidedly implying invasion, of how the space program has overrun and "colonized" the area around Cape Canaveral (172-73).

Given the remarkable success of these real-life invasions and displacements, perhaps it isn't *so* far-fetched for viewers (both Floridians and outsiders) to imagine visitations as frightening and outlandish as those depicted in *Mega-Python vs Gatoroid*, or human conflicts between "natives" and "aliens" as volatile as that between the park ranger and the scientist. At the very least, they provide easy, fertile ground, located to many audiences in a plausible setting, for exploitation-minded storytellers—a tradition in melodrama that dates back at least to William Bartram.

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CHAPTER TWO

SEARCHING FOR A GREENER SELF: TWO JOURNEYS THROUGH THE FLORIDA LANDSCAPE

LAWRENCE J. BYRNE

William Bartram's *Travels*, from the date of its first publication in 1791, has received a perhaps surprising amount of attention and influenced a wide range of scientists, historians, and literary artists. Yet even its most ardent admirers must acknowledge the rather disconcerting and at times frustrating mixture of styles and intentions the text displays. Passages of strictly objective observation are interspersed with lists of Latinate names for plants, shrubs, and trees and these are often interrupted by dramatic accounts of storms, alligator fights, and personal encounters with Native Americans. It is difficult, indeed, to classify the book as one or another genre and this is often attributed to the infancy of natural history writing itself. It is only recently that yet another kind of writing has been added to the list of possible types. Several critics and commentators have suggested that the book can be read as an autobiography, a kind of coming to know saga set in and against the natural world that serves as the chief agent and catalyst for the inner journey the author undergoes. Bartram himself acknowledges repeatedly throughout the work that nature and his experiences of it are the most direct and strongest ways he will ever experience God and His divine providence at work in the physical universe. Larry Clarke in his essay "The Quaker Background of William Bartram's View of Nature" has traced this religious sensibility to Bartram's early training as a Quaker. Seeking always the "inner light" that was the key to individual faith and salvation, Bartram found it, unmistakably and consistently, in his interactions with nature, thus seamlessly combining his interests as a natural philosopher with his growth as a person, a growth measured by the proximity he attained to his Creator. In the opening paragraphs of his Introduction to *The Travels* he

clearly states the fundamental rationale for the book and the holistic view that allowed him so easily to associate his scientific observations and cataloging with religious activity, particularly with an attempt to draw ever closer, through both understanding and lived experience, to God:

This world, as a glorious apartment of the boundless palace of the sovereign Creator, is furnished with an infinite variety of animated scenes, inexpressibly beautiful and pleasing, equally free to the inspection and enjoyment of all his creatures. Perhaps there is not any part of creation, within the reach of our observations, which exhibits a more glorious display of the Almighty hand than the vegetable world. (Bartram i)

Thus, for Bartram journeys into and through nature are spiritual journeys by means of which one's faith is reaffirmed and continually amplified. The frequent paeans throughout the book to God, to his Providence, and to his special care and guidance of human lives are not, therefore, interruptions of the scientific observations and systematic cataloging of plants, but the central and centering motivational force for his travels and the written record he keeps of them. This perspective informs not merely the effusive passages of pastoral description, but manifests itself in a carefully calibrated allegorical reading of the natural phenomena Bartram took special note of. In one of the numerous descriptions of the natural springs which fascinated him, he emphasizes the magical translucence of the water and goes on to note that this absolute purity, because it makes deception impossible, leads to an uncharacteristic harmony among the many creatures who live within the waters of this spring: "[. . .] there are no signs of enmity," he writes, "no attempt to devour each other; the different bands seem peaceably and complaisantly to move a little aside, as it were, to make room for others to pass by" (Bartram 105). Such peaceful coexistence among natural predators suggests to Bartram, and through him to us, the moral lesson that all of God's creatures, including we humans, can live at peace with each other and that natural instincts, even in their completely unrestricted natural state, can be sublimated to something resembling the common good. In another such passage, Bartram recounts his deliverance from the jaws of a hungry wolf that had, in the middle of the night, crept up nearly on top of him while he slept and stolen a batch of fish he had suspended above him from a tree branch. In this incident, he clearly sees the hand of God working to protect him and deliver him safe from a terrible danger. He prefaces the event with a brief, but telling comment about the all pervasiveness of Divine protection: "At midnight I awake; when raising my head erect, I find myself alone in the wilderness of Florida, on the

shores of Lake George. Alone indeed, but under the care of the Almighty, and protected by the invisible hand of my guardian angel” (100).

Even when confronted with the brutal and violent sights of the natural struggles simply to survive, he insisted on tracing God’s plan for the parsimonious and efficient functioning of the entire creation. It was the interlocking and interrelated whole that was the central goal, so that each species, no matter how trivial or minute had a critical part to play in the ongoing drama, if only to provide nourishment to larger and more fully developed predators. The Ephemera, for example, spawned in the river mud and living nearly invisible, brief lives, serve to nourish fish and other more complex forms of animal life. They serve also to provide a moral lesson to the human observer: “The importance of the existence of these beautiful and delicately formed little creatures, in the creation, whose frame and organization is equally wonderful, more delicate, and perhaps as complicated as that of the most perfect human being, is well worth a few moments contemplation [. . .] what a lesson doth it not afford us of the vanity of our own pursuits” (Bartram 53-54). In his famous description of a battle between two male alligators, creatures at the other extreme from the Ephemera on the great chain of animate life, he emphasizes not the cruelty and brutality of the fight, but the magnificent power and focused ferocity of the two combatants, suggesting the sublimity rather than the terrible violence of this necessary struggle for supremacy:

Behold him rushing forth from the flags and reeds. His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. When immediately from the opposite coast of the lagoon, emerges from the deep his rival champion. They suddenly dart upon each other. The boiling surface of the lake marks their rapid course, and a terrific conflict commences. (75)

It is this comprehensive vision of the interconnectedness of all living things that has led some commentators to call Bartram a kind of proto-ecologist. He can be viewed as standing at the origin of a direct line of descent leading to today’s environmentalism which treats the natural world as a complex ecosystem kept in delicate balance by a fluid, intricate set of relationships between predators and prey. Yet he was not, in his characteristically self-contradictory way, above seeing the wilderness, as many of his colonial contemporaries did, as a kind of tabula rasa waiting to be settled and cultivated by humans who would in fact be improving on what nature merely offered as pure potential. The wide Alachua Savanna,

for example, which was an endless source of fascination for him, could one day support a thriving and numerous human community. He writes, "Next day we passed over part of the great and beautiful Alachua Savanna, whose exuberant green meadows with the fertile hills which immediately encircle it would, if peopled and cultivated after the manner of the civilized countries of Europe, without crowding or incommoding families, at a moderate estimation, accommodate in the happiest manner above one hundred thousand human inhabitants, besides millions of domestic animals. And I make no doubt this place will, at some future day, be one of the most populous and delightful seats on earth" (Bartram 158).

In reality, of course, it would be utterly inconceivable for Bartram or any traveler through this vast and uncharted wilderness to foresee that one day it would be the natural world that would be threatened by the presence of humans and not the other way around. It is indeed helpful, as we contemplate the current precarious state of our environment not only in Florida but globally, to keep in mind that for men like Bartram the primeval land they traveled across seemed to offer endless resources. There was no question of renewing them, for they would certainly never possibly run out or down, could never be depleted by a human population that, at the time, barely clung to its existence in small pockets of cultivation and trade. It is true that Native Americans had lived for centuries in these wild places, managing to survive quite efficiently by developing a symbiotic relationship with the land. Bartram admired them and their way of life, and a number of times even praised this respectful harmony with nature over the white view that emphasized conquering rather than sharing. Yet he also sees as inevitable the white movement onto the land and its "improvement" through cultivation, for always as the good and helpful scientist he aspired to be, he frames even his own wanderings in terms of their practical usefulness to his fellow men, white men he means, with their specifically white ways of viewing land possession and use.

Nor does Bartram ever explicitly suffer the modern or more accurately post-modern anxiety about language and its problematic relations to and with "reality." Again, like many of his contemporaries in the yet untrammled so-called age of reason, he moves easily and without much reflection between the experiences of his journey and the recording of them in language. As a scientist, he relies upon the accuracy of the Latinate names of plants and animals when they are available, and as a travel writer he paints landscapes and recounts adventures with the intention of rendering them alive and vivid to his readers. Yet this apparent unselfconsciousness is belied by the archival record studied by

scholars who have revealed the many ways Bartram altered, revised, and ultimately shaped his original field journals into the book he eventually, after some fourteen years of mulling over and studying his original experiences, published as his *Travels*. The final version has a point and purpose that would not, could not be available to the person who lived the experiences in the flesh, so to speak, but became available only to the person who wrote them down years later. It is for this reason that writers such as the historian Thomas P. Slaughter are able to call the book a spiritual autobiography that holds readers' interest even today precisely because it is the tale of a self coming to know itself in relation to and with the natural world. For Slaughter, the "meanings" Bartram ultimately found in his adventures while writing them down, "go deeper and farther into the culture and the man, and reflect his and, to some extent, our attempt to understand ourselves in relationship to nature, to triangulate who we are in relationship to the rest of nature" (*Travels* xlvi). And Slaughter goes on to claim that "William Bartram had but one message to share in the *Travels*: all of nature, including humanity, is one and infused with the spirit of its creator" (xlvi). He may have had inklings of this truth when he began his wanderings in 1773, come to a greater understanding of it as a result of his four years in the wilderness, but it was in the writing down of these events, of his observations and adventures, that he came to understand what he had learned and in the process tried to share it directly and emotionally as truth to his readers.

Bill Belleville does not deliberately set out to follow Bartram's peregrinations through Florida, but inevitably his path crosses his intrepid predecessor's, both as traveler and writer, and he continually evokes, throughout *Salvaging the Real Florida: Lost and Found in the State of Dreams*, the spirit and ecological vision of the earlier naturalist. At one point he claims Bartram as his favorite precursor and role model: "Of them all, I most identify with Bartram, of course. Not only because he was an artist and writer with sensibilities informed by the sublime, but because he was so nonchalant about how strong his emotional stamina really was" (Belleville 195). The Florida he travels through is, of course, radically different from the wilderness Bartram encountered more than two centuries ago. It is the very post-lapsarian world of so-called planned communities, beachfront condos and beach erosion, mega-malls, theme parks, congested and smog-embroiled cities sprawling out into their soggy or scrubby environs. A world that, were Bartram suddenly to awake in, would no doubt make him believe he had made a wrong turn and ended in the inferno rather than at the destination he had so devoutly hoped and worked for. Yet Belleville's purposes, for he has several, are quite similar

to Bartram's and his primary message is much the same, if perhaps even more intensely necessary today than it could have been during Bartram's time.

Belleville is, by his own admission, a professional nature writer which means he writes not just about the natural world, but more specifically and pointedly, about the human interactions with that world. This means that a majority of the essays in the book are at least in part motivated by the grim, ever creeping erosion of Florida's natural landscape. In each case what he highlights and carefully argues is the need to conserve, preserve, and recover those portions of the natural world that still survive. These may be rivers or parts of rivers, as when he describes the magnificent natural springs that so fascinated Bartram, or it might be the diverse and teeming underwater life of a coral reef that most of his readers have never guessed at much less seen. He repeatedly, often satirically, points out the bungling and deliberate profiteering that have marked, and continue to mar civic and official attempts to stem the powerful forces of development and commerce. Of the Florida Water Management District, for example, he has this to say, "At the same time DEP [Department of Environmental Protection] was releasing its list of impaired waters, the river's Water Management District (WMD) was busy making plans to pump surface water from our flat warm landscape. It was doing so because it has allowed real estate developers to squander our underground aquifer to the point that it's no longer sustainable" (Belleville 153). And he points out the sad irony of a new gated subdivision named Bella Foresta that necessarily destroyed, as so many places do, the genuine forest that had occupied the spot for centuries

The most ludicrous modernism was a new walled -in development that, after the native baywood and sweetgum were clear-cut and clay was piled atop the rich black wetland earth, became the "Bella Forest," an enclave of ritzy new homes guarded by a gate. Like other developments that are named for wildlife they displaced—Eagle Ridge, Black Bear Estates, etcetera—Bella Foresta is simply one more fancy name that has no real meaning here. It is as if the just-pretend illusion of Disney has spilled over its fence and rolled pell-mell over the countryside. (99)

Yet, although it is clear that he wants his reader to understand the eventual practical consequences of the environmental degradation that daily occurs in the state, he, like Bartram, ultimately argues, mostly through a vivid recounting of his own personal experience, that the natural world, apart from its practical benefits, offers an intensely personal reward that can be found nowhere else. It is while traveling through natural

places, rivers, swamps, and natural springs, that Belleville and like-minded fellow travelers discover a special, almost mystical sense of self. He does not, cannot argue, as Bartram does, that this deepened sense of identity is the result of a direct union with God as manifested in His creation. Belleville lives, after all, in a decidedly secular age. He describes, rather, not a heightened sense of self, but a loss of self, a flowing out into the natural sights and sounds that surround him as he saunters or paddles through wilderness landscapes. Here, for example, is his description of a solitary journey through a series of creeks and lagoons: “I sit here for a while, savoring the wild solitude, until finally the tide begins to fall, ever so gradually [. . .]. The scent of salt and sea, and sun-warmed mangroves and sea purslane is palpable. At the top of the tree line an osprey returns to her giant twig nest with a fish in her talons. These are the sort of moments I live for, unexpected trysts of discovery that both comfort and excite me” (Belleville 84). Something similar occurs while he paddles deep into a wild space, one of the few remaining:

I am in wonder and awe at the evanescent quality of this real *bella foresta*, a place that truly seems on the verge of dissolving into vapor. I have finally broken through the artificial surrealism of the fantasy worlds, and found my way to one that mindfully threads its way through time. Back here, everything seems to make sense. Mullet in the tree tops, alligators soaring through the air, wildflowers glowing as if lit from within. Awe, beauty, respect, fear.

I pretend I need to do nothing more in this world than acknowledge the iconic light. (101)

In each of these journeys the moment of transcendence comes when the habitual, workaday self, the one he depicts as tied to schedules and our modern technological gadgetry, fades away and is temporarily lost, and only the senses, in a heightened openness to the natural sights and sounds around them, remain. It is this experience of what sounds like nothing so much as pure bliss that can only be found, for Belleville at least, in the wild places of nature. And although he refrains from suggesting we are touched in such moments by some divine force, he several times recalls the “ancients,” as Bartram called them, that is, the indigenous people who for centuries lived in Florida before the coming of white men and for whom nature was indeed full of divinity. As Belleville describes it, this lost world of spiritual presences can be at times still felt by contemporary travelers passing along the trails and through the landscapes those early people used daily: “Wilderness areas like the one that now surrounds me

are among the last repositories for the sacredness that once guided entire lives, that forged everlasting bonds between mortals and the gods of the natural world on this peninsula” (100-101). Something of this spirit-filled world remains inscribed in the natural world that the modern pilgrim, if careful and reverent in his approach to nature, enters and this too is a reward beyond the merely practical that nature affords us without any need of elaborate technology or self-help guidance.

Another significant and perhaps inevitable way Belleville finds himself set apart from Bartram and the 18th century world of his *Travels*, is his acknowledgement of and confrontation with the distinctly post-modern dilemma arising from the perceived gap between experience and language and the resultant concession that this gap can never be completely closed. In an essay appropriately titled “What’s Really in the White Space,” he admits that there is always a white blur, a mysterious movement of fluid transition between the sensations the natural world stirs in his senses and the act of reflecting on and understanding these feelings. And this white, indistinct, and mysterious opening widens still further when the writer attempts to transfer into words the natural world he has felt in, with, and through all of his senses. Inevitably, the process itself involves a displacement, a movement away from the scenes that inspire the writing in the first place, a bitter loss of place rather than a place found and realized. Yet if the writer about nature is to say anything at all, he must pass through this white area, this mysterious frontier that defies articulation and come out on the other side with the words he hopes will best, if only dimly, hint at the living experience he has left behind. It is this movement away from the direct experience of nature in order to salvage some shadow of its power in a medium inimical to it that tinges all nature writing with nostalgia, the feeling that something essential and unique has irretrievably been lost. Belleville ends his contemplation of the irony involved in his own profession by comparing this movement from experience to language with the swift starts and stops of a lizard known as an anole that he observes with a naturalist’s careful eye in his own backyard:

[. . .] I appear like the anole that moves in time-warping spurts. No one even sees the actual movement; all they know for sure is where the lizard starts and stops. That blur of light in between may be a true dynamic. Or it may simply be white space on a historic map, territory that is too unimaginable to be known. And, one second ago I was sitting at my patio table with my cappuccino. And now, here I am, tapping little plastic keys on a strange machine. All the space in between is nothing more or less than a white blur. (196-197).