Florida Studies

Florida Studies:
Proceedings of the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Florida College English Association

Edited by

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To Steve Brahlek, Rich McKee,
and Socky O’Sullivan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to all who participated in the 2011 meeting of the Florida College English Association (FCEA) at the Crowne Plaza in Indialantic. Speakers representing institutions from all around the state (and even beyond its borders) convened to present their research, exchange ideas, and refresh their spirits with colleagues from other institutions.

With readings from original works in both poetry and prose, a two-part writing workshop, and paper topics ranging from Shakespeare to *The Hunger Games*, from Karen Russell's novels to Dostoevsky's Underground Man, and from the postmodern Western to Florida's shipwrecks, the conference program offered, we hope, something for everyone. Conference participants were treated to the music of McKee & Papagan, aka,Whatever at the Thursday evening reception, after which members were invited to join host Steve Brahlek for informal readings of their original poetry and prose, followed by a screening of *Immokalee, U.S.A.*, directed by FCEA member Georg Koszulinski. At the closing luncheon on Friday afternoon, Keith Huneycutt was named 2011's distinguished colleague, and the conference ended on a high note with an engaging talk by *New York Times* bestselling author Tim Dorsey.

This volume is a record of some of the fine work that came out of that conference. We are honored to work with the scholars who have produced the essays in this collection. Special thanks also go to *Florida Studies* editor Paul D. Reich, who collected, reviewed, and edited the submissions, planned and organized this volume, and worked with the publisher to ensure a high-quality product.

FCEA would like to thank Florida Institute of Technology for its support of the 2011 conference. Special thanks to Dr. T. Dwayne McCay, Dr. Gordon Nelson, Dr. Mary Beth Kenkel and Dr. Robert Taylor for taking time out of their busy schedules to join us in person. FCEA also thanks Wendee Yoakum and Miguel Ferrari at the Crowne Plaza in Indialantic for their expert management of the event.

We hope that everyone will join us again in Ybor City in 2012.

PREFACE

Welcome to the seventh volume of *Florida Studies: Proceedings of the Florida College English Association*. I continue to be impressed with the depth and breadth of this year's submissions and hope you will share my enthusiasm for this collection. After an engaging conference in October, close to twenty presenters from the 2011 FCEA Annual Meeting edited and expanded their presentations, submitting their work for review. These final twelve selections are remarkable both for their variety and their passion for Florida studies.

The essays in the first section, Pedagogy, focus on the college classroom and the challenges facing institutions of higher learning in Florida. Tammy Powley examines the use of Flannery O'Connor's short stories in a literary survey class that services first and second year students. Interestingly, Powley finds that her students' belief in the authenticity of O'Connor's depictions of Florida and the South depend in large part on the length of time they have lived in the region. Regional identification is a repeated theme in Lori Cornelius's essay. In a university colloquium course at Florida Gulf Coast University, Cornelius employs Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* "to engage students in meaningful discussions of ecological literacy, and to assist them to understand how sense of place affects various aspects of culture and personality." In the final essay of this section, Twila Yates Papay and her student, Christian Kebbel, conclude this section's focus on region with an essay that examines student retention at Rollins College. While Florida colleges and their beautiful campuses have little problem attracting students, keeping them requires a broad range of engaging programs.

In the next section, Old Florida, our contributors focus on a number of writers who, at various points in their careers, called Florida home. The first of three essays that call for re-evaluations of Zora Neale Hurston's work, Steven Knapp looks at the author's writing relationship with slavery; he argues that Hurston's generational experiences allow her to create "a more nuanced assessment of the plantation in black history" than many critical interpretations have allowed. Similarly, April Van Camp calls attention to the critical readings of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*—often made through a feminist lens—that ignore Hurston's focus on love and "neglect[s] [Hurston's] original intent." In the final essay on Hurston,

Marvin Hobson examines her experiences in Ft. Pierce, Florida, a town that was appealing to the author because it "expose[s] a wonderful merger of anti-adoptions and re-inscriptions of a unique Southern culture." Florida's impact on two other authors—Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs—has also been underappreciated, and Michael K. Walonen discusses the role the state plays in their works and lives. To conclude this section, Maurice J. O'Sullivan examines early Florida historian Garcilaso de la Vega and his detailed account of Hernando de Soto's expedition in *La Florida del Inca*.

The final section, Contemporary Florida, continues to identify the state's place within larger literary, cultural, and political traditions. Keith L. Huneycutt, for example, focuses on the revisions made to Peter Matthiessen's Watson trilogy, arguing that in his move to focus more attention on race, the author "clarifies his vision of Henry Short as an instrument of tragic forces even as he paradoxically develops Short more fully as a character acting with free will." Salena Coller turns our attention to Cuban-born writer Daína Chaviano, whose novel *The Island of Eternal Love* incorporates "realism and supernatural elements in order to tell the story of Cubans and Cuban exiles." These elements, Coller contends, "become intermingled … [to expose the] powerful nature of love." In his evaluation of Edmund Skellings's poetry, Lawrence Byrne evaluates the author's treatment of time, memory and place, arguing that his "stature as a poet will rest … upon the unique, memorable, and often deceptively quiet ways he reveals the struggles of a human consciousness." Finally, our concluding essay—authored by Lee Campbell and Debra Jacobs—looks at the "linguistic variables" of a Tampa-based radio talk show host who uses his show to make an "explicit performance" that engages his audience.

As you can see from these brief summaries, the essays in this collection provide strong evidence of a rich and diverse interest in Florida studies. They also provide a representative sample of the fascinating work presented at the 2011 FCEA annual meeting.

Paul D. Reich, Editor

PEDAGOGY

FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S SOUTH AND FLORIDA AS THE MISFIT

TAMMY POWLEY

> The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida … "Now look here, Baily," she said, "see here, read this," and she stood with one hand on her thin hip and the other rattling the newspaper at his bald had. "Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is aloose from the Federal Pen and headed towards Florida."
>
> ("A Good Man" 202)

As part of the curriculum for my Composition II class, which is a literary survey-style class for college freshmen and sophomores, I introduce students to a range of literature, including works by Flannery O'Connor. Like the majority of anthologies, ours includes "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," and students are always shocked and horrified by the ending of that story. It is obvious who has completed the assigned reading, judging by the reactions the students have to the story when they return to class. I prompt students to discuss the usual literary devices—theme, irony, setting, and characterization—and most of my students become fans of the writer because of the mix of unexpected violence and ironic humor she is so well-known for.

Unfortunately, I can't make the class entirely about Flannery O'Connor, and therefore, I limit the reading assignments to two O'Connor stories: "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and "Good Country People." Then I pepper these with some brief secondary source material and biographical information that explains her religious beliefs and her place in what is termed as Southern Gothic literature. Class discussion can get pretty lively in the traditional classroom as students express their disbelief over the ending of both stories and the crazy characters who finally manage to capture their attention about halfway through each. This verbal exercise is something my web-student miss out on, so as a way to try to bring a little of that feeling to those classes, I include a blog post for these students to respond to which asks the following questions: What elements in Flannery O'Connor's stories do you feel bring a Southern flavor to her work? As

someone who lives in the South, do you identify with any of these stories, or do you feel that she is too "over the top" for you?

Not surprisingly, I get a real mix of answers. Some students who have only lived in Florida a few years find her South to be too much, and unbelievable. They fit into a group of readers who, O'Connor explains, believe that if a writer uses the South as the scene for a story then complete authenticity is required ("The Grotesque" 38). As for the Florida natives, it depends on how long their families have lived in the state. Those from generations of Florida crackers usually find her work resonates with their own experiences. Others who are first generation Floridians often feel like recent transplants and cannot buy into her characters or the plot. The disparity of reactions made me wonder about O'Connor's South and whether we Floridians are part of it. Has Florida ever fit into it, or are we excluded because, like The Misfit, we are "a different breed of dog" ("A Good Man" 209)? Just as some of my students feel a connection to her stories and some do not, is this ambiguous connection true about the South she creates in her fiction? Do some of us belong there and others of us do not, and if so, why? These are some of the questions I explore as I research Flannery O'Connor's South and hold it up against what I have known as a Florida resident for forty-four years.

O'Connor's Time and Place

While biographically and historically related details are worth examining, I tend to agree with O'Connor in her essay "The Teaching of Literature" when she states that "the student has to have tools to understand a story" and these "tools operate inside the work and not outside it" (128). So, just as I tell my students to "stay within the story," that is where I start my research as well, beginning with setting. Time and place, however, are not always very clear or even focal elements to her stories. In "Good Country People," Mrs Hopewell and her daughter, Joy-Hulga, live on a farm; however, there are few descriptive details about it until near the end of the story when Joy-Hulga and Manly Pointer meet up for a picnic. Neither thinks to actually bring any food for this picnic, and after going "down into the pasture towards the woods," they stop at the "edge of the wood," and he "kisse[s] her heavily" ("Good Country" 197). Pointer follows Joy-Hulga through the woods, attempting to help her by moving "swaying blades of thorn vine" (197) out of her way until they eventually enter a barn. This is where the awkward seduction scene takes place. The last part of the story also provides more details about the farm when Mrs Hopewell and Mrs Freeman are shown "in the back pasture,

digging up onions" and they see Pointer "emerge a little later from the woods and head across the meadow to the highway" (200). The mention of the various pastures, wooded areas, and finally the barn all give an impression of a large area of land. In fact, early in the story it is noted that Mrs. Hopewell needs someone to "walk over the fields with her" (189).

The family in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" are from Atlanta, Georgia, and for them, like many who live north of Jacksonville, Florida is a vacation destination. As the family begins its trip, the grandmother enjoys the scenery and tries to interest John Wesley and June Star in it as well:

> She pointed out interesting details of the scenery: Stone Mountain; the blue granite that in some places came up to both sides of the highway; the brilliant red clay banks slightly streaked with purple; and the various crops that made rows of green lace-work on the ground.
>
> ("A Good Man" 203)

This description does not sound very much like the semi-tropical landscape most Floridians are familiar with, but of course, at this point the family has only recently left its home in Georgia. Other than a graveyard, again pointed out by the grandmother, this early part of the story does not provide much else as far as setting.

Finally, when the family reaches The Tower, Red Sammy's place brings with it some familiarity to anyone who has travelled in the South, including parts of Florida, starting with the signs incrementally placed along the side of the road: "TRY RED SAMMY'S FAMOUS BARBECUE. NONE LIKE FAMOUS RED SAMMY'S!" (204). Roadside vendors in Florida commonly use this type of bread crumb trail so that motorists can prepare to slow down and stop for a bag of hot boiled peanuts or whole watermelons fresh from a local farm. As a college student in the 1980s, I often travelled from Orlando (the big city) to Rockledge along Highway 50. Summer meant watermelon season. Usually the signs dotting the highway read something like "Fresh watermelon $1"; "Free samples"; "Ready to eat." The boiled peanut vendors usually touted "Boiled Peanuts," "Hot and Spicy," and had a drive-through system where you were met at your car window by an old man carrying a paper bag of soggy peanuts.

Mom and pop stores can still be found in rural areas of Florida such as Yee-Haw Junction and Fort Drum. Selling everything from fried chicken to overalls to ammunition, they cater to locals who may have to drive as much as an hour to find a Wal-Mart as well as travellers who are just passing through but need gas and maybe something to eat. Even some

small Florida towns that aren't necessarily in rural areas have these stores that become anchors in the community. In Fort Pierce, Florida, there is Merv's Café. This small cinderblock building which sits behind the Kentucky Fried Chicken off US 1 is a local go-to spot for tourists and residents. You can purchase delicious Cuban food, stock up on Avon supplies, mail a package or letter at the post office inside, pick up a cold drink, or buy some flip-flops, suntan lotion, and post cards.

Connecting with Time

Setting, as far as the idea of place, is again a little vague in O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge." However, time is apparent when Julian's mother insists he escorts her to her Wednesday evening "reducing class at the Y" because "she would not ride the busses by herself at night since they had been integrated" ("Everything That Rises" 213). This is when it is necessary to briefly step outside of the story and consider when it was written and published. "Everything That Rises Must Converge" was published in 1965, the year after the author's death (DiYanni 187). The mid-1950s and early 1960s in the South were racked by racial incongruities, and while O'Connor never went so far as to become a crusader for equality, some of her stories at least touch these issues. The protagonist in this story, Julian, hates his mother's unyielding prejudices against African Americans and "insists that he has a truer sense of … his place in the changing world," but he is "only slightly more subtle in his racism" (186). Much like Joy-Hulga in "Good Country People," Julian believes he is the intellectual superior of his mother and bristles at her "insensitivity" ("Everything That Rises," 215) and racist attitude. He views himself as a liberal minded individual who must do what he can to make up for the bigoted attitude of people like his mother. When he purposely sits near African Americans on the bus, he views this as his generous way of making up for the past indiscretions of his mother and those like her, but he is really using these actions as a way to exact revenge on her and "teach her a lesson" (218).

Contemporary readers may have a hard time placing themselves in this period, considering how much has changed. While racism hasn't vanished from our culture, forced integration on public transport and in schools, for example, are not fresh issues in the minds for most of us, let alone younger readers from my composition class who are only recently introduced to O'Connor's work. Therefore, the period may be one factor that limits young Floridians from connecting to some of O'Connor's writing.

O'Connor's Characterization

After examining setting, characterization is another literary device that may help determine if Floridians have a place in O'Connor's South. Robert DiYanni provides a succinct description of the author's trademark plot and use of characters:

> The typical O'Connor story often begins with a comic protagonist who indulges in fantasies of moral or social superiority or has a false sense of the certainty of things. The protagonist then has an ironic and traumatic (if not fatal) encounter with other characters or a situation that suggests the disturbing possibility of an incomprehensible and frequently terrifying universe (186).

Though she only named one character "The Misfit," many of her characters are misfits, people who just do not fit in wherever they may be. The grandmother actually relates to The Misfit at the end of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" as at first she tries to plead or bargain for her life. However, there is a "spiritual kinship linking the grandmother and the Misfit," even before she meets him; it is evident that they share something in common, "a relation of metaphor" (Burke 2010). Like The Misfit, she is living in a place and time where she does not belong. The Misfit is frustrated that he was not alive to witness Jesus "because if [he] had been there [he] would have known and … wouldn't be like [he] … is now" ("A Good Man" 211). The grandmother still lives in the past. She tells the children stories from her youth, and when she meets Red Sammy, they have a lengthy discussion about how "people are certainly not nice like they used to be" (205). For the most part, her family ignores her. Her son Bailey barely speaks to her, and in fact there is little dialogue in the story from Bailey or his wife. When Bailey does speak, it is right before they have the accident and the grandmother has used the children to nag him into turning the car around to see an old plantation. While she does interact a lot with the children, they are rude and treat her with no respect or affection, going so far as to suggest she stay home rather than go on vacation. However, as June Star explains, "she wouldn't stay home for a million bucks" and "she has to go everywhere [they] go" (202). Other than The Misfit, her cat Pity Sing is the only creature she has any kind of affinity with in the story, especially since they both cause the car accident.

Joy-Hulga is another lonely protagonist. She hates herself and the world because when she was a young girl she lost her leg in a hunting accident. In O'Connor's essay "On 'Good Country People'," she describes Joy-Hulga as being "spiritually as well as physically crippled" since "there

is a wooden part of her soul that corresponds to her wooden leg" (234). She is rude and hostile towards everyone around her and attempts to find solace in books about philosophy. She ironically studies theories about humanity but is unable to see that she is using her self-hatred as a way to escape any kind of human intimacy; this all changes, however, when she meets Manly Pointer. Her naiveté allows her to believe that she shares some kind of connection to Pointer, and she even goes so far as to fantasize "that she would run away with him" ("Good Country" 199). Both Joy-Hulga and Manly Pointer think they are the seducer, but as William Burke points out in "Protagonists and Antagonists in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," Pointer does not manage to complete his seduction, and Joy-Hulga is misguided by the falsehoods Pointer tells her about selling Bibles and having a heart condition:

> The emphatic issue in the Hulga-Manley relation is her misreading of him and, by extension, herself. He is not the naive lover she fantasized, not the heart and head-weakened young man she could educate into the profundities of life in a godless, valueless world. He is, rather, her tutor. He exposes the philosophical nihilism of Hulga as a cover for her own private disappointments: her lost leg, her sense of physical ugliness, her exclusion from romantic love.

Kathleen Feeley describes O'Connor's characters as "a catalog of her freaks" full of "comic perversion" (236). O'Connor also discusses this concept of the freak in her essay "The Grotesque in Southern Fiction" and explains that whenever she is asked "why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks" her reply is that they "are still able to recognize one" (44) and "it is when the freak can be sensed as a figure for … essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature" (45). In *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes is another misfit and freak who demonstrates religious perversion when he attempts to form the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ. Like Joy/Hulga, he claims he doesn't believe in anything, yet he also has a strong religious background and the "Bible is the only book he read[s]" (*Wise Blood* 11). After being discharged from the army, he attempts to go home only to find an empty "skeleton of a house" (12). His siblings and parents were dead before he left for the army, and his grandfather, a preacher whom he hoped to emulate someday, never did like Motes and "had a particular disrespect for him because his own face was repeated almost exactly in the child's and seemed to mock him" (10). Motes leaves his empty home and travels to another city where he is not wanted or loved. He has no clear destination and has lost his previously unquestionable faith in God. He continues to

become more and more mentally unstable and alone until he finally feels the need to punish himself by putting lime in his eyes and walking around with shoes full of gravel and glass. His and Joy/Hulga's claims about believing in nothing are obviously false, and as he struggles with his mixed up religious convictions and his place in the world, he becomes more alienated.

Alien Characters with Us

Alienation and isolation are inherent qualities found in many small Florida towns. I grew up in Rockledge, Florida, a bedroom community of the Kennedy Space Center. During the late 1960s and 1970s, this town had a TG&Y sundry story and a Winn Dixie grocery store. If you needed anything these two establishments did not carry, then you travelled to Merritt Island, Cocoa, or even as far as Orlando. Flannery O'Connor's alienated characters are extreme but not necessarily all that removed from real life in many small southern towns like Rockledge. We also had our stock of characters who lived among us but just did not belong. They were, as O'Connor refers to them, "maimed souls" ("The Grotesque" 43).

At sixteen, I held a coveted position as a Food World cashier. My sister had worked there before me and her best friend, Melissa, ran the office. The manager, an imposing man with a beer belly who always carried around a Styrofoam spit cup for his tobacco, decided it was okay to take a chance on hiring me, even though he preferred "his girls," as he called us, to be a few years older.

A customer came through my line one day who I recognized. He was the lawn-man from the Rockledge Country Club Apartments. I saw him outside there almost every day raking or mowing or just standing around with a blank stare. He had a page-boy style haircut and always wore coveralls. This day, as he stood in front of me, I remember thinking he was super tall, well over six feet. I rang up his small number of grocery items, he paid without a word, and then he walked away. As he did, I heard a "clop, clop, clop" sound and turned around to see that he was wearing women's Caddy style high heels. Back then, they were all the rage, at least for young women my age. In fact, I had really wanted a pair.

I queried my younger sister, Tracey, about some of the odd-ball characters from our childhood. She immediately recalled "the Jesus guy," a fellow who had long hair, a beard, always wore sandals and a trench coat, and rode his bike around town as he looked for someone—anyone—to discuss his religious beliefs with. After replying to my question, Tracey posted to her "Rockledge peeps" on Facebook about it in an effort to

canvas more responses for me. What followed was a list of characters, most having titles as their names in a very similar pattern to that of "The Misfit." There was "the Speedo guy," "the black cowboy," "the homeless beer man." One of my sister's Facebook friends, Sally Kalarovich, remembered "the crazy doctor [who] had the walk in clinic on the corner of Barton and Fiske. He had a giant wall of bees in the middle of his waiting room."

A Place We Know

This reaction from my sister's Facebook friends reminds me of some of the statements from my web students who are ready to be part of O'Connor's world. They have seen what Ronald Schleifer describes as a world that places them "between the familiar and the strange, the natural and the supernatural" (163). Their experiences as Floridians validate O'Connor's "position in the world" (167). This may be why students who are recent transplants or first generation Floridians find O'Connor's stories to be unbelievable. The characters and settings in her stories are outside their own experiences. For example, they cannot accept that Joy-Hulga would let Manly Pointer take advantage of her or that Mrs. Hopewell would put up with her daughter's condescending and rude attitude. L. B. Kennelly discusses O'Connor's "larger audience, [who may be] unfamiliar with Southern life, [and how] easily [it] discounted the experiences of men they felt imaginary" (102). Therefore, Kennelly explains that if the "protagonist is not believable" then the work "is subject to critical misinterpretation" and "readers [who] cannot relate to the characters" are not "emotionally affected" (103).

This is, of course, just the opposite for those readers—my sister's Facebook friends, my Florida cracker students, and myself—who feel ties to Flannery O'Connor's South. We belong in her world. We get it. We can accept that Manly Pointer pretends to be a door-to-door Bible salesman or that the grandmother dresses up for a family car trip so that "in case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady" ("A Good Man" 203), because in our world, like O'Connor's fictionalized South, we have known people very similar to these characters. We have followed roadside signs and dined at places like Red Sammy's. Her world is a place we know. Our South may be full of sand and palm trees rather than red clay and granite, but we have many of the same southern roots that tie us to Flannery O'Connor's "prophetic vision" ("The Grotesque" 44).

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FOR THE LOVE OF PLACE: USING KAREN RUSSELL'S *SWAMPLANDIA!* TO CONVEY A SENSE OF PLACE

LORI CORNELIUS

The Florida of the past, with its exclusive mystique characterized by swamp buggy tours and alligator wrestling sideshows, has continued to fall prey to urbanization and development over the past several decades. One young writer keeps alive the spirit of Florida in its heyday in a work of delightful magic realism set in modern (1980s to 1990s) Southwest Florida. The methods that Karen Russell employs to create the sense of place that invades the novel *Swamplandia!* allow this work of fiction to engage students in meaningful discussions of ecological literacy, and assists them in understanding how sense of place affects various aspects of culture and personality. In this instance, a clear definition of "sense of place" is helpful. Dr Thomas Woods, the president of Making Sense of Place, a corporation that provides services to cultural and natural history organizations, says:

> People develop a "sense of place" through experience and knowledge of a particular area. A sense of place emerges through knowledge of the ***history***, ***geography*** and ***geology*** of an area, its ***flora and fauna***, the ***legends*** of a place, and a growing sense of the land and its ***history*** after living there for a time.
>
> The feel of the sun on your face or the rain on your back, the rough and smooth textures of the land, the color of the sky at morning and sunset, the fragrance of the plants blooming in season, the songs and antics of birds and the cautious ramblings of mammals are ***environmental influences*** that help to define a place. ***Memories*** of personal and cultural experiences over time make a place special, ***favorite objects*** that shape to your hand or body with use, ***songs or dances*** that emerge from the people of a place, ***special skills*** you develop to enjoy your area--these too help to define a place and anchor you in it. Through time, shared experiences and stories (history)

> help to connect place and people and to transmit feelings of place from generation to generation.

Karen Russell's novel *Swamplandia!* provides a textured sense of place of the type outlined by Woods, and it was the book I chose to explain the concept to my first University Colloquium class at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU).

The history of Florida is revealed in many ways, including the story of a dredge and its crew "digging a canal through the central mangle of the swamp" (Russell 127) during the depression. The geology of Florida, a state that rests on limestone, and the geography of a land that lies "beyond the grid of Army Corps levees and drainage canals, across a triangle of new highways that slide over and under one another likes snakes in a warren" (Russell 78) are revealed in a manner that is both matter of fact and, at times, nostalgic. Russell uses authentic names like The Model Land Company—started by Henry Flagler in 1896 "to manage his expanding real estate holdings in Florida" (Brown & Hudson 57)—and authentic stories like those of the orphan train children in order to provide historical and legendary examples of the ever evolving Florida landscape and its inhabitants. In one part of the story, Russell blends these two elements—the dredging of the Everglades during the depression with a young man who had been deposited in the Midwest by the orphan train—to create a character whose spirit mingles with the essence of Floridiana through an unusual romantic relationship with the narrator's sister, Osceola. Louis Thanksgiving is a long-dead, teenage dredgeman, and his spirit retells the story of his first reaction to Florida, including notable details to flora and fauna:

> Florida, in those days, was a very odd place: a peninsula where the sky itself rode overland like a blue locomotive, clouds chuffing across marshes; where orange trees and orderly rows of vegetables gave way to deep woods and then, further south, broke into an endless acreage of ten-foot grass. This, finally, was the vision that reached Louis T. through the train window: a prairie that looked as vast as the African savanna. A strange weed or wild corn shifted restlessly in the afternoon winds—saw grass, said a fellow passenger beneath the slouch of his hat. That was the name for the long stalks that swallowed the WPA men up to the waists of their coveralls. Teams of lumbermen and government surveyors were working up and down the train rides, an eerie counterpoint to the dozens of herons and deer that Louis saw standing in the marshes. Then the dizzying height of the trees in the pinewood, the thin millions of them extending as far as the eye could see. They were called slash pines for the catface scars left by the gumtappers—already thousands of acres had been tapped for

> turpentine. The slash pines reminded Louis of a stark daguerreotype he had seen once as a child of Lee's emaciated Confederate forces. (Russell 131–32)

In just this one passage, readers are exposed to the geography, flora and fauna, history, and culture that make up, in part, south Florida and the Florida Everglades during the time of the New Deal. Even the choice of the comparison of the slash pines to "emaciated Confederate forces" serves as a reminder of the South's influence on this place. Florida was a place where people could start over, recreate themselves through hard work and, as the story eventually reveals, die on a dredge with an entire crew and go unsung until a Ouija Board game directs a lonely teenage girl to find love in the creation of Louis Thanksgiving's memory.

The man-made damage to the environment of Southwest Florida and the impact on its watershed is also addressed:

> Water once flowed out of Lake Okeechobee without interruption, or interference from men. Aspiring farmers wanted to challenge her blue hegemony. All that rich peat beneath the lakes was going to waste! *Melaleuca quinquenervia* was an exotic invasive, an Australian tree imported to suck the Florida swamp dry. If you were a swamp kid, you were weaned on the story of the Four Pilots of the Apocalypse, these men who had flown over the swamp in tiny Cessnas and sprinkled melaleuca seeds out of restaurant salt and pepper shakers. Exotic invasives, the "strangler species" threatened our family long before the World of Darkness. The Army Corps of Engineers had planted thousands of melaleuca trees in the 1940s as part of their Drainage Project, back when the government thought it was possible to turn our tree islands into a pleated yellowland of crops. I was raised to be suspicious of the Army Corps of Engineers, with good reason. The dikes and levees that the Army Corps had recommended for flood control had turned the last virgin mahogany stands into dust bowls; in other places, wildfire burned the peat beds down to witchy fingers of lime …
>
> Now the melaleucas had formed an "impermeable monoculture." That meant a forest with just one kind of tree in it. Most of the gladesmen had long ago abandoned the dream of farming their islands. You could sum up the response of the Army Corps of Engineers and the swamp developers in one word, said our dad: "Oops!" Forest fires raged and burned the swamp down to peat. Frosts came and a man could break his knife trying to slice through a glade tomato. By 1950, the dream of drainage was largely dead. The Army Corps of Engineers changed its objective from draining the "wasteland' of the swamp islands to saving them. Unfortunately for my family, the melaleucas were still root-committed to the old plan, the drainage scheme. They swallowed fifty acres a day.
>
> (Russell 96-97)

In work that is both historical and imaginative, readers are educated about the dangers of irresponsible planning and tampering with the environment in the name of progress; of trying to make land work for something beyond its intended, or sensible, use. For example, the sprinkling of the melaleuca seeds from Cessnas in order to dry up the Everglades is accurate; but Russell has taken some liberty with the concept of the Four Pilots of the Apocalypse. Still, the results of their handiwork as depicted in her book—the resulting dust bowls, wildfires, and frosts—are extremely accurate.

FGCU requires that all students who graduate from the University attend an interdisciplinary environmental education course called University Colloquium. The course is designed to explore the concept of sustainability as it relates to a variety of considerations and forces in the environment. In particular, consideration is given to ecological, social, ethical, historical, scientific, economic, and political influences. The course objectives include the following requirements:

- To provide a "sense of place" and an understanding of the unique ecological features of the environment of which students are a part.
- To assist in achieving the FGCU learning goals of "developing an ecological perspective" and a commitment to "community awareness and involvement" in teaching the related outcomes that state that the student will "… know the issues related to economic, social, and ecological sustainability, analyze and evaluate ecological issues locally and globally, participate in projects requiring awareness and/or analysis of ecological and environmental issues."
- To enable a working understanding of sustainability, of environmental education, and of ecological literacy.

A study of *Swamplandia!* reveals material that meets each of these course objectives.

When it comes to Student Learning Outcomes for Colloquium, students are expected to:

(1) Demonstrate an understanding of environmental issues through writing and class participation.
(2) Critically analyze environmental issues from economic, social, political and ecological perspectives.
(3) Describe the unique ecological features of the area and analyze the unique challenges posed to Southwest Florida by rapid growth.
(4) Demonstrate a working understanding of sustainability, sense of place, and ecological literacy.

When I taught University Colloquium for the first time in the summer of 2011, I wanted my Floridiana book choice to expose students to a sense of local place, as this particular sensibility feeds into all of the other course objectives and student learning outcomes. Russell's book did that for me, a Florida transplant of twenty-five-years, and I hoped that the elements of sense of place would also resonate with my students; and they did. Notice what one student wrote about the impact of Russell's work on his view of the Everglades:

> I was moved by the vivid descriptions used in this book with regard to the massive spans of the Everglades and the 10,000 islands. One of my biggest fears is breaking down on a secondary road or even on a boat out in the Everglades, and having to navigate through cattails and saw grass marshes and prairies. Louis Thanksgiving and his crew died out there after his dredge broke down. The Bigtree family lived in the midst of what I would avoid. Also, I felt especially uncomfortable reading about Ava's trek with the Birdman to the underworld. The whole underworld thing doesn't bother me; it's assimilating the wilderness with the underworld that makes me feel lost and terrified. Russell describes the mangroves as ballet-like prop roots that stand above the mud looking ready to walk (150). If I were to reflect on this comparison while in the Everglades at night, I'd probably panic. (Esquilin)

I also wanted the book that I chose to represent the Florida that I know, the one that deals with issues related to development in Southwest Florida and the Everglades, and one where I could show students the same plants, animals, and reptiles, and discuss the same environmental issues. In particular, *Swamplandia!* allows students to critically analyze environmental issues from economic, social, political, ecological, and even scientific perspectives.

Economic: the alligator park is in dire straits financially, having lost its headlining act, Hilola Bigtree, to cancer. Additionally, the World of Darkness, a Hell-based amusement theme park on the mainland, threatens to obscure *Swamplandia!* with its automated rides like the Leviathan that drops Lost Souls through a series of "funnels, pools, and bowls meant to replicate the twists and turns of a labyrinthine whale's stomach" (Russell 121–122). Tourists cease coming to *Swamplandia!*, and both the Chief and Kiwi go to the Mainland to obtain funds to assist their dying livelihood. These economic quandaries, while quirky in nature, reveal the continual economic upheaval that has marked Florida from its early days, as one faction after another pushes to remake Florida in its own image, and for economic gains.

Social: The book is an anthropological study of a Florida alligator wrestling community, and in particular of the culture as displayed through a family of self-proclaimed Indians who dress in the costumes as part of their show. "Although there was not a drop of Seminole or Miccosukee blood in us, the Chief always costumed us in tribal apparel for the photographs he took. He said we were 'our own Indians'" (Russell 6). The Bigtree family constitutes their own tribe, a culture created and nurtured by the patriarchal Chief. Further, the text conveys the demands made on a family when one member dies, resulting in a period in which everyone comes undone, each in their own way. The isolation of the children who are home schooled and socially awkward around those of their own age also makes for interesting social commentary; however, the enterprising nature and above-average intelligence of the children is noteworthy. Overall, the social perspective in the book gives readers plenty to discuss.

Ethical: There are several ethical issues and dilemmas touched on in the text, including those of a personal nature and those relating to the world at large. The Chief chooses to leave his children to fend for themselves in a crumbling environment, without clear guidance or appropriate supervision. The consideration of other practices—like building large amusement parks that compete with smaller local attractions, whether children should be home schooled, and the quandary presented over poor stewardship of the land—all make for excellent examples of ethical issues.

Political: The Army Corps of Engineers has its historical roots as a political tool of the U.S. Government's Armed Forces devoted, in part, to Flood Control. There are many other references to government-backed programs like the CCC boys and the WPA workers, all part of the New Deal promoted by Roosevelt in the 1930s to get people back to work. How the political agendas of one era have impacted the lives of others long after those politicians have left office, gives rise to interesting discussions about the role and extent of government oversight.

Ecological: The ecological perspectives in this book are many and varied. They include issues related to interference with the natural watershed through dredging and purposeful swamp reclamation through attempts to remove the water by utilizing invasive species like melaleuca trees. Like the political and economic forces, once certain ecological disturbances have been put into motion they are difficult, if not impossible, to stop. In the case of the melaleuca trees, Ava and her sister fight against the odds anyway, cutting down melaleuca saplings and painting the stumps with herbicide. Someone else's vision of Florida swampland as a developable resource conflicts sharply with the Bigtrees'