The Double Helix:
The Idea of Spain in Florida's Literary Imagination 1513-2013

Dr. Maurice O'Sullivan, Professor of English and Kenneth Curry Chair in Literature
Rollins College

Diversity has defined Florida ever since the first Paleo-Indians arrived over 12,000 years ago and began adapting to our state's remarkably complex ecosystem. From the technologically sophisticated Calusa with their canals and artificial islands to the Timucua and Apalachee with their intricate agricultural societies, the state's pre-contact people appear to have developed a series of competing cultures largely governed by the regions in which they lived. Of course, our understanding of them is limited since it relies primarily on the survival of a relatively small number of artifacts and accounts by Europeans more interested in expanding their own cultures than documenting those already here.

While Spain dominated much of the colonial period, France and England left significant legacies as well. The greatest body of our earliest literature, of course, records Spain's extended quest to establish a permanent settlement in La Florida, from Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's remarkable narrative of self discovery, *Los Naufragíos*, and the two heroic accounts of Hernando de Soto's heroic expedition by the unknown Gentleman of Elvas and Garcilaso de la Vega to such poems as Bartolomé de Flores' *Obra nuevamente compuesta* (1571), Juan de Castellanos' *Elegias de varones illustres de Indias* (1589), and Alonso Gregorio de Escobedo's *La Florida* (c.1609). Even here, however, our diversity is evident. The Gentleman of Elvas, after all, was a Portuguese officer in de Soto's expedition and wrote his history in his native language, while de la Vega himself adopted the nickname El Inca to reflect his dual heritage, since his father was a Spanish conquistador and his mother a Peruvian Incan princess.

Our first poem, the first poem written by someone known to have spent time in Florida, came as a direct result to Spain's first permanent settlement, San Augustín. Oddly enough, that poem was actually in French, an octet of frustration by Nicolas le Challeux, a carpenter who had been part of the French Huguenot attempt to establish Fort Caroline. The presence of French Protestants in what Spain claimed as its territory inspired Philip II in 1565 to send Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, the Captain General of the Fleet of the Indies, to eliminate the French threat and ensure a permanent Spanish presence. After Menéndez' victory, le Challeux was one of the few French to escape and return home to Dieppe, where he decided in his brief poem to warn anyone thinking of going to Florida ("Qui veut aller a la Floride") that the experience had left him worn out by rot ("abbatu de poureté").

The most notable of the Huguenots to die in that conflict between Spanish and French was Jean Ribaut, who had led the first attempt at a French settlement, Charlesfort, on Parris Island and only recently assumed leadership in Fort Caroline. He had missed the first group of settlers to Fort Caroline because he had been detained in the Tower of London after trying to win Elizabeth I's support for a Protestant settlement in Florida. As part of his campaign for English aid, he wrote an account of his first voyage in French and apparently translated it into English. Although the original French version has disappeared, the English version, *The Whole and True Discoverye of Terra Florida* (1563), offers the colonial era's most lyrical account of the New World, a hypnotically lyrical description of this "incomparable lande" which he describes as "the fairest, frutefullest and pleasantest of all the world," filled with a people "of a goodly stature, mighty, faire and aswell shapen and proportioned of bodye as any people in all the worlde, very gentill, curtious and of a good nature."

While France relinquished its geographic and political claim to Florida after the loss of Fort Caroline in 1565, it continued shaping Florida's culture both directly and indirectly. In 1801 François-René, viscount de Chateaubriand, published *Atala, ou les amours de deux sauvages dans le désert*, a short novel about the natives of Florida which earned him immediate fame and would eventually establish him as France's leading writer and intellectual and the father of French romantic prose. Quickly translated into English, German, Spanish and Italian, his story of noble savages doomed in the midst of a natural paradise that was being slowly transformed by pragmatic Western values helped shape much of American literature and mythology throughout the nineteenth century. Since Chateaubriand, France's influence on our literature has been largely indirect, primarily through the work in Creole and

English of such members of Florida's Haitian community as Edwidge Danticat, Jan Mappou, Joanne Hyppolyte, Poet Prosper Sylvain, Poet Max Pierre, M.J. Fievre, and Félix Morisseau-Leroy.

After trading the Bahamas to England in exchange for Minorca and Florida in 1783, the Spanish retained the British political division of the area into two separate territories: East Florida, which absorbed all the land east of the Apalachicola River; and West Florida, which encompassed everything from the Apalachicola to the Mississippi, including Mobile, Natchez, and Baton Rouge, except for the Île de Orléans. When *Atala* appeared during the first year of the nineteenth century, the two Floridas were the most ethnically and culturally diverse area of North America with a population that included a variety of Native American communities, the descendants of Spanish and British colonists, British loyalists, Americans, Canary Islanders, Minorcans, Greeks from New Smyrna, Scotch Irish, French Huguenots and Acadians, Jewish traders and Africans both free and slave. That diversity has continued even as Florida's boundaries contracted.

Despite that rich variety of peoples and tongues, the two languages that have primarily shaped our state's history and culture are Spanish and Anglo-American English. The conventional account of that literary history has been essentially bimodal in a simple sequence, with a Spanish colonial tradition replaced first by pragmatic British colonial writers largely interested in anglicizing the state—as the Rio de San Juan became the St. Johns and the Castillo de San Marcos Fort St. Mark—followed by waves of American and other immigrants embracing English as their primary language of literary and social discourse. Once Florida became an American territory and then a state, our traditional literary history holds, the Southern farmers, Yankee entrepreneurs, Midwestern snowbirds and tourists who flocked to the Sunshine State created a linguistic and literary culture which eventually absorbed even the children of non-English speaking immigrants.

While English has clearly been the dominant language of our literature for much of the past two centuries, that fact often conceals the ways Spanish culture has continued to influence Florida's evolution. What has actually existed, almost from the time of the Europeans' first contact, is a literary and cultural DNA formed by a double helix, with Spanish and English strands constantly wrapping about one another. Over time, the strands have not only become more tightly interlaced, but each strand's membrane has become increasingly permeable.

Once the English began their attempt to redefine Florida by dividing it into separate regions, anglicizing its landmarks, and cataloguing its flora and fauna, the Spanish strand of our literary DNA developed through four distinct nucleotides as the two cultures became more tightly intertwined. The first and oldest of those traditions is *la tradición* itself, primarily the work of writers in Spanish who see themselves in temporary or permanent exile. The second consists of writers in English relying on a wide variety of stereotypes to demonize or romanticize our Spanish heritage. The poet and literary historian Carolina Hospital calls writers in the third tradition *Los Atrevidos*, the daring ones, people of Spanish heritage who have chosen to write in English. Like *Los Atrevidos*, the final tradition, which seeks to re-imagine our continuing Spanish heritage, is a revisionist one, native English writers reconsidering both that past and its implications for our present and future.

The most obvious tradition was the continuing Spanish one. Initially that involved the extensive commerce between Cuba and Florida, so that by 1891, as Carolina Hospital points out, "Cubans in Key West alone numbered 8,000—a majority of the small island's population/" ("Preface, *Century*, xiv.) Those numbers occasionally translated into political influence; both Tampa and Key West, for example had Cuban-American mayors during the nineteenth century.

The long tradition of important Cuban writers who spent at least some time in Florida, often as political refugees, stretched from Bishop Pedro Augustin Morrell de Santa Cruz (1694-1768) and Felix Varela (1788-1853) to Diego Vicente Tejera (1848-1953), Jose Marti (1853-1895), Martin Morúa Delgado (1856-1910), Bonifacio Byrne (1861-1936), José Manuel Carbonell (18800-1968), Augustín Acosta (1886-1979), Guillermo Rosales (1946-1993). These figures often traveled widely within the United States, using Florida as a base or touchstone. Many of the early writers, like José Martí, eventually returned to

Cuba. Others like Felix Varela, Juana Borrero (1878-1896), Lydia Cabrera (1899-1992), and Eugenio Florit (1903-1994) ended their lives in the United States. Among those who never returned to Cuba, including most of the more recent, post-Castro refugees, is Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990), whose autobiographical *Antes que anochezca* (1992) became Julian Schnabel's 2000 film *Before Night Falls* and the opera of the same name by Jorge Martin, which premiered at the Fort Worth Opera in 2010.

Not all of these writers came from Cuba. The 1956 Nobel Laureate Juan Ramón Jiménez, who fled Spain at the beginning of its Civil War, spent a number of his years in exile as a professor at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, which reminded him of his native Moguer. In his homage to the area, *Romances de Coral Gables* (1948), the last stanza of "Pero lo solo," with its hesitant and qualified repetition of "pero," describes a crucial absence that almost all of these writers recognize, for even in the lush safety of George Merrick's vision of a Mediterranean Revival Eden something essential is missing, "ahora está solo en el alma" ('now it is only in the soul"):

> Pero lo solo está aqui
> pero la fe no se cambia
> pero lo que estaba fuera,
> ahora está solo en el alma.

Even within that Spanish tradition, however, there were occasional recognitions of connected cultures. An 1886 poem from Ybor City, "Speaking Diversely," which begins fairly traditionally ("A este Quibués llegué yo/cuando en La Habana embarqué") offers an early version of Spanglish ("Ay lobi plenty cubano./Ay don laiqui Americano"). When J. Joaquin Fraxedas published in 1993 his Hemingwayesque account of three *balseros* struggling to reach Florida, *The Lonely Crossing of Juan Cabrera/La trevesía solitaria de Juan Cabrera*, it became the first novel released simultaneously in English and Spanish.

This continuing Spanish *tradición*, primarily fueled in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by Cuban expatriate writers and centered in Miami as their surrogate cultural home, is a rich one, from Heberto Padilla's and Belkis Cuza Male's bilingual work to Martha Padilla, Pura del Prado, and Amando Fernandez. While these writers and many others have explored multiple genres and subjects, almost all of them see themselves as victims of a cultural and social diaspora, strangers slowly adjusting to a strange land but still shaped by an essential sense of displacement and separation.

By 1821 when the United States took possession of Florida from Spain, the young nation saw the need to expand its national myth beyond the Puritans and founding fathers. Florida's three centuries of exotic history offered rich possibilities for a country trying to define its past and future. That history, however, quickly fell victim to the kinds of stereotypes that Ralph Waldo Emerson reflected in his journals during a visit to St. Augustine during the winter of 1827-28: "Oldest town of Europeans in North America, full of ruins, chimneyless houses. Lazy people, housekeeping intolerably dear, and bad milk from swamp grass because all hay comes from the north." He goes on to complain that no one is willing to make the effort to travel forty miles north for good hay. In addition to his frustration with what, as an industrious New Englander, he clearly regards as a *mañana* culture, he also condemns its lingering, superstitious clinging to a religion which, to him, epitomized Old World superstitions, especially when he ironically presents the "worthy father of the Catholic church here" as a con man recently "arrested for debt" and mocks "the Cathedral, full of great coarse toys."

While Emerson's journals were private, other stereotypes about Spain's legacy featured prominently in American fiction, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century. By the middle of that century, after the Alamo and Gold Rush shifted the nation's expansionist imagination westward, the American West emerged as the psychic universe in which writers could construct and explore American myths. It came to symbolize the unlimited potential of the United States and to provide an elemental landscape in which men could achieve and test their manhood, define the fundamental tenets of good and evil, and demonstrate the epic story of the inevitable expansion of Western civilization and its values, or at least the American version of those values.

But for the first half of that century, Florida served much the same purpose for a different set of myths and legends about our national identity: those focusing on exploration, contact, settlement, and transformation. This southernmost frontier of North America offered American audiences a dark, mysterious, exotic land with almost 300 years of adventure, intrigue, history and romance. Novelists from Chateaubriand, Caroline Lee Hentz and Thomas Mayne Reid to Ned Buntline, William Gilmore Simms, and Washington Irving found a rich source of material in La Florida's eclectic human stew and bloody, adventurous past. From the tragic fate of the Huguenots and lurid tales of piracy to heroic accounts of exploration and brutal Indian wars, Florida allowed many of our first post-colonial writers to define their visions of the American experiment.

Spain's role in that history was constant. Unlike England's bold and heroic buccaneers, Spain's conquistadors were dark and diabolical, relentless and bloodthirsty. Pirates proved an especially attractive subject. Joseph Holt Ingraham, a well established writer of historical romances, published *Rafael, or; The Twice Condemned: A Tale of Key West* in 1845. Set largely in the waters between Cuba and Key West, the vengeful buccaneer Rafael escapes death only to be recaptured by Cuba's even more vengeful governor. The book's protagonist resembles not only the rebels and pirates who had filled Ingraham's earlier novels, but the Biblical heroes who would dominate his work after he became an Episcopal priest in 1852.

In 1847, Edward Zane Carroll Judson, writing under his pen name Ned Buntline, published *The Red Revenger; or, The Pirate King of Florida*. While Ingraham had set his adventure only a few years before, Buntline had his pirate king ravage the coast 300 years earlier. Buntline, who had served in the U.S. Navy's Mosquito Fleet during the Second Seminole War, combined writing with politics through much of his life. He was not only one of the first dime novelists, writing over 400 during his lifetime, he also helped found the Know Nothing Party and inspired the nativist gangs of New York to start the Astor Place riots.

After serving as a sergeant in the Civil War—he later promoted himself to colonel—Buntline moved to the West and introduced his readers to a young scout named William F. Cody, but whom he renamed Buffalo Bill. Like most of his work, *The Red Revenger* reads like a boy's adventure story, filled with fabulous palaces built into cliffs on the west coast of Florida, alluring women and exotic figures with names like Rinard, Gaspar and Chico the Dwarf. The merciless cruelty of Rinard, the Red Revenger, stems directly from the stereotypes of superstitious and malicious attitudes perpetuated largely by their colonial rivals, attitudes which persist today as in the Italian Nobel Laureate Dario Fo's 1997 play *Johan Padan and the Discovery of America*, in which his hero, a fugitive from the Inquisition, finds ways to protect Florida's tribes from the onslaught of implacable Spanish colonists intent on obliterating their culture.

Pirates also inspired authors of shorter fiction, like John Howison's story "The Florida Pirate" (1823) and William Henry Herbert's novella *Ringwood the Rover* (1843), set in 1659. In almost all the stories, the title character has suffered some traumatic event that drove him to piracy. As he challenges authority—in Herbert's case, Reginald Ringwood threatens to kill Juan de Melendez' daughter if the governor does not surrender St. Augustine—the protagonist offers opportunities for the author to thrill audiences with language that blends archaic forms, bloodthirsty threats and breathless syntax in the purple prose characteristic of the period's popular fiction. Ringwood, for example, makes this vow if the city is not surrendered: "And for the girl—thou shalt behold her undergo things, fifty—nay! but fifty thousand times more terrible than death protracted and made horrible by the most lingering torments!" (12)

Even America's most famous novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, reinterpreted that tradition of piracy with *Jack Tier; or, The Florida Reef* (1848). Originally published as Cooper's only serialized novel two years earlier, the story uses an American captain, Stephen Spike, attempting to trade smuggled gunpowder for gold during the Mexican-American War. As the aging but still wily Spike attempts to elude American naval frigates and survive hurricanes, this modern pirate plots to sell his ship to

Mexican adventurers, pressure a young passenger into marrying him, and then retire to Mexico with his gold and new wife.

Like Emerson, Cooper sees Mexico's Spanish values as the antithesis of Anglo-America's pragmatic, future-oriented exceptionalism, as when he describes it as a "nation [with] a mixed race [that] has necessarily the various characteristics of such an origin; and it is, unfortunately, little influenced by the diffusion of intelligence which certainly exists here" (I.150). As with Emerson, Cooper believes that the Catholic Church's influence helps explain what he sees as the fatalism and lack of self reliance among all Mediterranean people. As his young All-American hero, Henry Mulford, faces crisis after crisis, he never thinks of praying for divine intervention, "because he had been taught to believe that the Anglo-Saxon mariner did not call on Hercules, in every occasion of difficulty and distress that occurred, as was the fashion with the Italian and Romish seamen, but he put his own shoulder to the wheel, confident that Hercules would not forget to help him who knew how to help himself" (I.228).

Even Spike's Mexican customer, the noble and pure Iberian Don Juan Montefalderon, a much more admirable figure, inspired by a patriotic desire to halt *la intervençion norteamericana*, recognizes "that the northern neighbors of his country were a race formidable and enterprising" and would, because of their discipline and vision, inevitably rise "high on the scale of national power and national pre-eminence, unless they fall by their own hands" (II.51). Don Juan even, if somewhat begrudgingly, cedes to them the name Americans.

The same year that *Jack Tier* appeared in book form, Ned Buntline became the first person to publish a second novel about the state, *Matanzas; or, A Brother's Revenge: A Tale of Florida*. Although it claims to be a fictional version of the same stories about the Huguenots that William Gilmore Simms would retell far more accurately two years later in *The Lily and the Totem*, Buntline's idea of history has little to do with facts. He sets the story in 1548 on Isla Anastasia, assuming that the Spanish have already settled Saint Augustine and built a second fort on Anastasia.

In the dime novelist's adventure, a corrupt priest uses threats of the Inquisition to control the Spanish governor and garrison at the fort on Anastasia. When a group of French Huguenots wreck off the coast and are rescued by the governor's daughter Elisa, Padre Sabano recognizes an uncle, Baron Ludovico de Gourges, and cousin, Edouart, who had refused to help him years before. Imprisoning the governor, baron and his son, Fr. Sabano plots the seduction of Elisa and crucifies the French crew as heretics. The baron's second son, Dominic, comes to the rescue, crucifies some of the Spanish troops in retaliation, and has the "demoniac priest" branded with a cross on his brow and coiled serpents on his cheeks.

The de Gourges family sail off to establish a peaceful colony on the Mississippi near Natchez, along with the governor, a new Protestant convert, and his daughter, Edouart's new wife. Ten years later the renegade priest, now a great Indian Medicine Man, leads his new tribe to attack and slaughter the peaceful Huguenots, including the parents, Eduoart, and Elisa's two children. This time, Dominic gains his final revenge but Elisa soon dies of a broken heart.

When Florida's Spaniards appear in a more positive light in our early fiction, their roles are equally stereotyped. In our first novel, the elegiac *Atala* (1801), Chateaubriand has his young hero, Chactas, sheltered by the kindly Spaniard Lopez in St. Augustine after his father's death. That protector's featurelessness becomes apparent after Chactas leaves, becomes a prisoner of the Seminoles, and escapes with the young maiden Atala. They find refuge with the saintly French missionary, the saintly Fr. Aubry, whose understanding of life and insights into nature contrast sharply with that vaguely remembered, impotent Spaniard who had little influence on his ward for the two and a half years he sheltered him. (Fr. Aubry's communion with nature is so absolute that in the restored Eden he has created for his native parishioners he keeps a pet serpent.)

Three decades after *Atala*, the Rev. Michael Smith's *The Lost Virgin of the South* appeared in 1831 under the pen name Don Pedro Casender. Published in Tallahassee by a Florida resident and set largely

in the state, *The Lost Virgin* is an extraordinarily confusing work in which a muddled plot and incredible characters—the title character, captured as a child by Seminoles after a shipwreck, finds a Bible which she uses not only to teach herself to read but to convert herself to Christianity—exist mostly to exalt Andrew Jackson. The author clearly likes Spaniards, perhaps because they are the enemies of Jackson's foes, the British, but he seems a little confused about ethnicity. Although his heroine, the virgin of the title, is Calista Ward, daughter of a Colonel Ward, her brother is Don Pedro Casender, the novel's putative author. And the recurring hero of the book is a Spaniard, Perendio Cevillo, who rescues Calista from a shipwreck at the beginning of the novel and years later from an attack by her brother, who does not recognize her. Nothing is ever fully clear in this incoherent picaresque novel, with long digressions to tell the story of the pirate Es Joebe or allow Native Americans to debate Christian theology, classical philosophy and contemporary literature. At its end, clearly uncertain of how to conclude his narrative, Smith sends his major figures off to Spain to fight Napoleon.

In a parallel if more coherent picaresque novel, Robert Montgomery Bird's scathing *The Adventures of Robin Day* (1839), almost every character is ignorant, violent, brutal, or naïve. While Bird, who would eventually became a Professor of Medicine at the Pennsylvania Medical College and an early experimenter in photography, seems primarily interested in attacking Fenimore Cooper's complex but heroic portrait of native Americans—in the preface to an 1852 reprint of his *Nick of the Woods*, he dismisses all of Indian culture in Hobbesian terms as "ignorant, violent, debased, brutal"—he also finds time to skewer most aspects of American culture. Whether planning schoolboy pranks, fleeing the law or volunteering to defend the young American Republic in the War of 1812, little goes right for the boy who washed onto the shore of New Jersey in a shipwreck. When he tries to enlist in a military unit to defend the United States during the war, for example, he finds that he has accidentally joined a British loyalist militia marching against the American army. His misadventures in that campaign include capture by both Indians and pirates before he finally discovers that he is a Spanish noble. Bird seems to use that idealized heritage as his antidote to all that is wrong in his America.

Bird is, of course, an exception. The Spaniard, whether Spanish, Mexican or Cuban, was more often the other. Even in a more idealistic vision, like *Vasconselos: Romance of the New World* (1853) by William Gilmore Simms, whom Edgar Alan Poe considered America's finest novelist, the hero is Portuguese. This novel, set in sixteenth-century Cuba and Florida, focuses on conflicts and conciliation between cultures. The book ends with a romantic vision of hope and harmony when his Portuguese hero Philip Vasconselos marries the Indian Queen Cocalla. A historian as well as a novelist, Simms combines both his interests in retelling the tragic story of the French Huguenots' attempts to establish a colony in the New World in *The Lily and the Totem* (1850). Although not actually fiction—he actually calls it a "series of sketches" on the title page—Simms embellishes liberally, especially when he believes it necessary "to supply the deficiencies of the record" ("Epistle Dedicatory, iv).

Well into the twentieth century, St. Augustine remained a combination of an exotic tourist destination and a reminder of Spanish perfidy. In an autobiographical novel about a winter in Florida in 1855, *A Trip to Florida for Health and Sport*, Cyrus Parkhurst Condit notes both the bustling tourist business in St. Augustine and its origins when French Protestants "were cruelly murdered by the Spaniards near Matanzas Inlet" (115). That lingering sense of injustice continued in *Spanish Bayonet*, Pulitzer-Prize winning poet Stephen Vincent Benét's 1926 novel about his Huguenot ancestors in eighteenth-century Florida.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Anglo Florida began embracing a romanticized vision of its Spanish heritage, driven largely by its tourist aspirations. Trying to attract Northern visitors, Henry Flagler decided that the Spanish Renaissance Revival style offered an exotic alternative to their usual resorts and chose it for the design of his Alcazar Hotel (now the Lightner Museum) in 1887 and Ponce de León in 1888. He also bought the Casa Monica, which Franklin Smith had created in the same style in 1888. A few years later the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago re-introduced the country at large to traditional Spanish and Mediterranean architecture Set amid all the formal neoclassical buildings that defined the White City's 633 acres, along with a few exotic areas like King Bull's Tipee Hut, the

Algerian Village and Samoan Villagers, the white stucco Mission Style California State Building stood out. Spain, which had decided it was time to remind the United States of its Spanish heritage, built replicas of the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria and sent them, along with a set of Columbian artifacts. To house the artifacts, Spain built La Rabida, a replica of a monastery near Palos de la Frontera in Huelva Province, where Columbus waited in 1491-2 to hear about the financing for his voyages. (Spain's has continued recalling that relationship; in 2010, for example, it named its massive solar thermal power station in Extremadura La Florida.)

To a great extent, the Columbian Exposition was the United States' announcement to the world that it was taking its place among the major industrialized nations. And Americans flocked to it. Even William James, the distinguished Harvard philosopher and psychologist, found himself uncharacteristically gushing when he wrote to his novelist brother Henry, "Everyone says one ought to sell all one has and mortgage one's soul to go there." He added that the experience was so transformative that "[p]eople cast away all sin and baseness, burst into tears and grow religious" (Letters 1.348).

Among those transformed by both the buildings and the exposition's emphasis on the City Beautiful movement were the Floridians who visited and imagined ways of adapting the style beyond Flagler's grand hotels. Over time the Mediterranean Revival style morphed into a Spanish Colonial Revival style, influenced by Mission Revival work. Architects working in Florida from Addison Mizner and August Geiger to Gamble Rogers and Maurice Fatio adapted it so well that, along with art deco, theme park fantasy, and Miami postmodernism, it became one of the state's distinctive styles, marking everything from colleges like Rollins to entire communities like Coral Gables.

A decade after the Columbian Exposition, city boosters and tourism promoters, recognizing the appeal of that Spanish heritage, sought ways to domesticate and expand it. In 1904 *Tampa Tribune* society editor, Louise Frances Dodge and director of customs George Hardee created Gasparilla, a celebration of the legendary pirate José Gaspar modeled largely on New Orleans' Mardi Gras. That same year Luella Day McConnell opened the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park in St. Augustine, perhaps understanding the idea's drawing power for aging tourists. As Florida positioned itself as a safely exotic tourist destination, *la leyenda negra*, the black legend of merciless conquistadors brutally repressing native peoples, faded into a myth of Spanish *romanticismo*, with well-bred, magnanimous *caballeros* serenading demure, exotic *senoritas*. That is the very image that Florida's first Poet Laureate, Franklin N. Wood, evoked in his 1931 sonnet "Tampa":

> Within the Spanish quarter of the town
> In fancy I can hear, behind a wall,
> The tinkling of a troubadour's guitar.

Those stereotyped images of Spanish Florida continue to appear in everything from popular culture to children's literature. In his 2002 film *Sunshine State*, John Sayles recognizes and satirizes the continuing appeal of that tradition as Mary Steenburgen works relentlessly and fruitlessly to promote a pirate festival, clearly modeled on Gasparilla, while complaining about the difficulty of inventing history.

While so many writers, architects and urban activists looked to the past, a new group of writers began re-inventing that past. In her *Cuban-American Writers* (1988), Carolina Hospital termed these primarily Cuban American writers *Los Atrevidos*. Unlike their predecessors, they write in English, "belong to a future that acknowledges a new historical reality," and "have had to develop their talents within two cultural and linguistic worlds: a private one and a public one" (16). Hospital herself reflects what a *Reed Business Information* review of her poetic memoir, *The Child of Exile* (2004), terms a "hyphenated dailiness." She often treats that dual consciousness ironically, as in her poem "How the Cubans Stole Miami," which sees the rising Cuban tide as simply another of the cultural waves which have swept over our state's second largest city.

While many of those writing in Spanish had an elegiac, wistful tone, *Los Atrevidos* generally treat their nostalgia with some wit, like the first Cuban to publish a book of poetry in English, Pablo Medina, whose title epitomizes what Hospital calls the "coalescence of two cultures" (15): *Pork Rind and Cuban Songs* (1975). Even less obviously ironic works, like that of the bilingual poet, novelist and playwright Gustavo Pérez Firmat, raised in Miami and now a professor at Columbia University, explicitly show writers existing simultaneously in two cultures. Both his memoir, *Next Year in Cuba* (1995), with it echoes of the Jewish diaspora, and his collection *Bilingual Blues* (1995) reveal a far more complicated understanding and embracing of Spanish-Cuban-American life than the work of Florida's earlier writers in Spanish.

The list of these writers and their work is both long and impressive, from Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) and *The Aguero Sisters* (1997) and Ana Menéndez' *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd* (2001) to Johnny Diaz' *Miami Manhunt* (2008) and *Beantown Cubans* (2009). They range from well established figures like Virgil Suarez, Dionisio Martinez, Silvia Curbelo, Marisella Viega, and the distinguished literary and art critic Ricardo Pau-Llosa to relatively new writers like Anthony Perez and Jorge Reyes. While a handful, like Mercedes Limón and Elias Miguel Muñoz, continue to write in Spanish, others, like Roberto G. Fernandez, who publish in both languages have come to realize that their English work, like his *Holy Radishes!* (1995), tend to get far wider recognition

Some, like Eduardo Machado and Dolores Prida, are beginning to re-shape American theater, while Nilo Cruz's beautifully constructed *Anna in the Tropics*, a play about Ybor City's cigar makers, won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize. Ybor City, of course, is the birthplace of Jose Yglesias (1919-1995), the essayist and editor whose success as a writer and whose 1963 novel *A Wake in Ybor City* earned him the right to be considered the godfather of *Los Atrevidos*.

This new vision is not limited to Cuban-American writers. Yvonne Sapia, whose parents came from Puerto Rico, shares the sense of re-imagining both past and future. In "Inventing Poetry in Miami" (1983), she recalls her stepfather discussing divorcing her mother with her over "a cup of Cuban coffee" and an old waiter telling them "this is what it is like/for something to die." In her work change is the only constant. Near Biscayne Bay in "Civilization Poem" (1983), she notices that an old Spanish mansion she had admired is now gone: "men build the houses/and tear them down." Her art gives her the ability to remember and preserve what is disappearing around us. As a Floridian, she also wants to include in those memories the state's history; "Godiva at Olustee" (1983) evokes the only major battle on Florida soil during the Civil War. By imagining that site "where the South ends/and begins," she suggests the value of a historical perspective in understanding the present as she combines medieval legend and local history.

While poetry and literary fiction, memoir and autobiography still dominate their work, a number have established significant reputations in other genres. One Cuban-American writer with roots in Florida, Daína Chaviano, has become one of the world's most respected authors of science fiction and fantasy, while another, Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, has won both Shamus and Flamingo awards for her detective series featuring Lupe Solano. Still others, like theologian Miguel A. De La Torre and Yale University's T. Lawson Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies Carlos Eire, have used the same sensibility to explore historical and religious issues.

The success and increasing visibility of these writers have had a strong influence on other writers in English, leading many of them to re-evaluate Florida's Spanish traditions in more realistic and authentic ways. The year before the U.S. Congress changed the name of Fort Marion back to the Castillo de San Marcos in 1942, Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benét felt free to mock the legend of "Hernando de Soto" with rollicking amphibrachs and anapests:

> Hernando de Soto was knightly,
> Hernando de Soto was bold,
> like most of his lot,
> he'd be off like a shot

wherever he heard there was gold.

Contrast that with the more sympathetic but serious image X.J. Kennedy offers of “Ponce de Leon” (1994) at the explorer’s realization that there is no Fountain of Youth:

These Everglades
Dissolved his bones, rusted the cutlass blades.
He felt the night wind harden—
Arthritic raindrops dabbled at his tent.
Was his resolve now, like the wine casks, spent?
Destroying him, the Angel begged his pardon.

What could be comic or satiric becomes both tragic and redemptive in a poem that reflects on both aging and the loss of dreams. In a more pragmatically optimistic vein, David Kowalczyk finds one absolute value in the explorer’s life in his “Consoling Ponce de Leon”:

To wake up
curious
The best
anyone
can ever
hope for.

And Barbara Winder’s portrait of “Cuban Refugees on Key Biscayne” (1977), describing old men napping “in aluminum chairs,” suggests that the only true fountain of youth flows through their dreams of childhood memories.

Part of the revisionism stems from a general re-thinking of history, one that either does not require transforming the conquistadors and missionaries into scapegoats or recognizes the essential similarity of all those who have come to Florida. Pulitzer Prize winning poet Richard Eberhart, for example, reverses the values of Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Fenimore Cooper. His “Opposition” (1981) celebrates many of the very qualities Spanish colonists prized—the state’s “wildness of nature,” its residents’ open senses, and their “lust of the idea of Paradise”—by contrasting them with the restrictive, deadening “long heavy shadow of the Puritans” in the North, which resulted in a “tameness of nature” and a static culture characterized by the “desolations of the past eroding the present.”

In “Florida Warns Her Colonists” (1982), Cynthia Cahn has nature itself warning those who would exploit her rather than embrace her. While she uses imagery associated with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, her language connects all those who want to abuse the state’s natural resources from the earliest colonists to modern developers. And in “Mock-Up” (1982), she recommends imagination and dreams as a better way to experience the past than traditional museum displays.

For Campbell McGrath, this new perspective allows us to “be what we choose to be,” including “Dixie-fried Cubano rednecks” (“Because This Is Florida”). And he revels in the cross-cultural camaraderie he experiences “At the Royal Palm Barbershop,” with “travel posters bespeaking identity/Jerusalem and Havana; Miami Beach;/three flags for Cuba, Israel, and the U.S. of A.” His poetry reflects his ease in living among “Cuban fishermen with cruciform tattoos” (“Hurricane”); and when a man asks to cut down the coconuts in his yard and “cart them away for *coco frio*,” the Chicago-born son of Irish Catholic parents finds a very Miamian way to communicate with the recent *cubano* immigrant:

In Miami Spanglish he calls me boss,
and I say, *Hay un otra árbol más grande atrás*,
my Spanish even worse than his poor English.

“Eclogue”

In this simple, everyday conversation, the casual blending of two cultures once in conflict suggests how powerfully they have influenced each other and how permeable the membranes surrounding each strand of our literary DNA have become.

Carol Frost goes even further her bilingually titled "Relación of Cabeza de Vaca," crossing both gender and ethnic lines. In her sympathetic portrait of the explorer who wandered for eight years from Florida to Mexico, developing an enormous empathy with the natives he lived among, the 2011 Gold Medalist in the Florida Book Awards captures his shifting allegiances as she relies on her own empathy to imagine his thoughts and words at critical moments in his life. When he finally finds himself on trial, late in life, for his years as *adelantado* of the Rio de la Plata in South America, he admits both one formal charge against him and the underlying fear that he had gone native: "Yes, I punished a hidalgo for striking an Indian chief, and I walked barefoot in the Paraguay nights."

At this southernmost edge of the United States, an ethnically heterogeneous frontier with a flexible identity where America's past regularly confronts its future, our culture has always embraced diversity. While we attract and nurture a multitude of languages—state education officials claim that 301 languages are spoken in our schools, and Nobel Laureates have written about Florida in Yiddish (Isaac Bashevis Singer), Italian (Dario Fo), Spanish (Juan Ramón Jiménez) and English (Ernest Hemingway)—for almost five hundred years our essential literary and cultural DNA has consisted of dual strands of Spanish and English encircling one another. While Spanish has been a primary language ever since Ponce de León first named La Florida in 1513, our English roots are almost as long, beginning with the translation of Jean Ribaut's lyrical *The Whole and True Discoverye of Terra Florida* in 1563 and the lush description of our landscape in the 1564 British song "Have You Not Hard of Floryda?" Over time the rich and complex literary traditions of those two strands have become closer and closer, offering an extraordinary, living example of the ways cultures and languages shape and enrich one another.

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