

William Bartram: Discovering Florida



MLS 586 Masterworks - Fall, 2009
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Masterwork:

The Travels of William Bartram: Francis Harper's Naturalist Edition. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998. [Because of the scholarly apparatus, this is **the** required text]

Recommended Biographical Studies:

The Natures of John and William Bartram by Thomas P. Slaughter (Vintage 1996)
[An unusual comparative biography which explores the father-son relationship, their religion, science, and travels].

The Art and Science of William Bartram by Judith Magee (Penn State UP and the Natural History Museum, London, 2007) [Beautiful oversize book with full color illustrations placing Bartram in the context of the largely European traditions of natural history illustrations and showing his extraordinary achievements in both science and art].

Course Description:

Bartram is the Founding Father of Florida Studies by reason of his extensive travels throughout the southeast in 1760's and 1770's. He was a master of liberal studies: botanist in the tradition of Linnaeus, ecologist (before it was a science), anthropologist interested in the life and morality of the indigenous peoples, proponent of animal dignity, artist whose drawings of plants and animals fed the European and American world with some of its first visions of our wild life, and Philadelphia Quaker who for many years ran a seed business out of the Bartram Gardens his father had started. His *Travels* were read widely across two continents, but his overall philosophy of life has been greatly neglected in American Studies.

This course will bring together all the facets of his thinking while providing up to four weekend field trips to follow his trail and show the current state of wild Florida. The heart of the course will be the journal each student keeps of responses to the readings, personal experiences of Florida and nature, creative writing efforts, and weekly prompts from the broad range of topics covered in the course. It is expected that from the many interesting threads of the course each student at the conclusion will be able to bring the journal to a polished focus (in a brief essay or other creative form).

Outline of the Five Weeks:

1. Oct. 21: THE BASIC TEXT (Meeting in Woolson House, just off of Orlando Hall)

Pre-read the whole book, note the workable parts and scholarship, scan the non-Florida parts I, III, and IV using the summaries, then focus on Bartram's 1791 Introduction, pp. *li-lxi* and write a solid response in your journal (journal prompt #1).

Now read all of part II, identifying the most important or telling passages and scenes (prompt #2). This will require that you vary your speeds, scan quickly long catalogues of plants and distracting excursions. What problems of scale do you see in Bartram's writing? How far removed from the actual experiences is he in time, place, or fiction in this 1791 publication?

2. Oct. 28: BARTRAM'S HUMAN ORDER (Woolson House)

Compare one or two key passages of the 1791 edition with the draft manuscript published by Nancy Hoffman in her dissertation and provided in Blackboard pdf files (prompt #3). Can you tell which version is closer to Bartram's nature? If you were creating a more readable text for contemporary readers (a college textbook for instance), how might you use both forms of the text? how use synopsis and omission?

Our principal concern this week is to see Bartram's democracy, the outgrowth of his encountering many natives. Review your overview of week one, gathering some of his many native encounters, then read his Account of Natives (Harper pp. 304ff). Two

additional readings are provided on Blackboard. He wrote an essay about how Natives should be treated, ostensibly for the consideration of the Continental Congress in its drafting of the Constitution (Some Hints and Observations.pdf). On a broader level we have my transcription of an unpublished Bartram manuscript on human morality and animal dignity that sets forth a core understanding of the basic morality of nature (See Animal Dignity.pdf). In your journal, make an entry that focuses on the document or scene which is most telling for you (prompt #4).

3. Nov. 4: THE ART OF WILLIAM BARTRAM (Meeting in the Olin Library Archives)

This session will be using the Olin Library Archives and the Florida Collection to demonstrate the rare drawings and illustrations, first editions, etc. in conjunction with Judith Magee's book (recommended above). Sketching is a very important activity for the nature journal because it teaches us to have what John Burrough's called, "A Sharp Lookout." Photography is a second tool for the nature-writer's vision and exploration that can also enhance your journal.

How do Bartram's best illustrations capture the themes of his introduction? How much ecology do they represent? How does/should ecological thinking change our language? Our perception?

4. Nov. 11: THE SCIENCE OF WILLIAM BARTRAM (Woolson House)

In the last two weeks of the course we will begin the show-and-tell portion. Here is where you get to report on the focus you have taken in your journal in terms of the natural science of the course, moving from the key passages in Bartram (using his extensive index) to your own experiences, to Florida field guides. The structure of this discussion will be a basic understanding of the dozen or so major Florida natural habitats and a variety of important species (prompt # 5).

5. Nov. 18: FLORIDA TODAY (Jean and Steve's House: 1343 Audubon Dr., Maitland)

Each student will have an opportunity to report about the conclusion(s) to be embodied in the final entry of the journal. If your journal is 30-40 pages, then the conclusion might be one tenth of that. Polishing of that conclusion on the basis of remarks of others will be possible because the final form of the journal will be submitted by Nov. 25th.

Grade Formula:

Attendance, participation in text discussions, Florida naturalist contributions: 25%
Journal prompts, creativity, and concluding essay/entry: 75%

Guidelines for the creation of the course journal: FINAL DUE DATE NOV. 25

Treat yourself to an attractive piece of practical or artistic bookcraft of the size that is psychologically right for you. In other words, start with an empty book(let) that will work as a nature journal. I use a 7x4.4" spiral notebook with lines for writing and sketching. It has pockets for photos or leaves. In the field I carry a pocket-size notebook to write down details of new creatures I discover so I can identify them later, and also prompts to carry over in my journal.

Every entry should have a date (hence the word *jour-nal*). When the course is over, you will be asked to put topics or titles on substantive pieces, number the pages, and create a table of contents to slip into the beginning.

There are three dimensions to this journal: your self, Bartram's readings (generating the ideas of the course), and nature experiences (field trips past and present).

It is important not to let your self (life) overwhelm the course or nature. Certainly we are not twittering here, though some trivialities will occur because we can't tell what's exactly important until we re-evaluate it all. For many of us, however, the relationship to nature was forged in childhood and is firmly rooted in memories. So the self in your journal will often be a memoir of "my first encounter with a rattler," "misconceptions I had to overcome about Florida," etc. These memories can have entries of their own or can pop up as important experiences that help interpret the readings or help describe nature as we experience it during the course.

The course readings and our discussions of them can form at least a third of the entries. For those of you who don't speak up that much in class, these entries can show how deeply you understand the readings. Writing on the prompts before each class can give you energy to speak up and precision to presenting your side of the matter. Critique of our discussions afterward can also be entered, to help refine the content of the course.

When we go on field trips, bring all of your best senses. Gather pictures in your mind or with sketches or a camera. When you sit down later to write about them, be spontaneous and imaginative, careful to choose language worthy of the excitement and understanding you have found. Do not worry about correct spelling, punctuation, or grammar. This is a journal or rough draft. You can cross out, tear out, or start over. You can pick up the same topic later or insert cross references when connections come to mind later.

So, what if I do all my best journal writing on my computer or blackberry? Thoreau wrote by hand ten million words of journal (available in Olin) to back up his Walden. I prefer you think of posterity and scribble in a book(let). You can always attach printed pieces into the notebook and many of you will prefer that format for the conclusion.

Always bring your journal to class!

Field Trip Possibilities:

Exploring wild Florida has always been a feature of Rollins student life. The field trips are an optional feature of the course designed to illustrate Bartram's writing, but especially to enliven the imagination of the journalist and foster the nature writing of the course. They are also an important feature of building the MLS community. If you are unable to attend, please try to find time on your own to gain fresh experience of the wild under Bartram's guidance and in his spirit of discovery. An important part of your journal is to say how close to Bartram's Florida is the Florida we have preserved today?

For samples of my own journal writing turned into essays, see the draft version of my book, *The Song of Wekiva*, which provides many essays, poems, prose poems, and much historical background (<http://web65.rollins.edu/~sphelan/writings.html>).

1. DeLeon Springs: breakfast at the sugar mill (canoeing and hiking possible)--> a visit to Hontoon Island and/or Blue Spring in the afternoon on our return
2. Seminole State Forest: hiking the Florida Trail and discovering little known springs here and there, following bear tracks and calling forth scrub jays.
3. Canoe trip down the upper Wekiva River to Shell Island, owned by Rollins and embodying a long history of student engagement with the river including archaeology of the native midden site in the 1970's.
4. Ten mile canoe trip from Russ and Katie's House on the Little Wekiva to Katie's Landing above SR 46, with a stop off at Twin Mounds, another important indigenous site studied carefully by Dr. Brent Weisman of USF.
5. A hike from Kelly Park or Wekiwa Springs State Park to Camp Cozy, site of the Apopka Sportsmen's Club hunting parties along Rock Springs Run, with consideration of their important role in the preservation of the river.
6. Canoe trip from Kings Landing near Kelly Park down the nine miles of Rock Springs Run to its confluence with the upper Wekiva River. From there we can enter the Wekiwa Springs and/or turn east to Wekiva Island (formerly the Wekiva Marina) where they will pick us up and return us to our transportation at King's Landing.

Other trips can be considered. Saturdays or Sundays are the most likely times, but any group may choose any time available during the week.