In 1939 Eartha White thanked the Lord for the “marvelous machine” that preserved “the songs people sing.” The Eartha White Mission in Jacksonville was home for the Negro Unit of the WPA Florida Writers Project and the site of one of the first recordings of Florida folklore. Here is Eartha White thirty-two years later, in 1971.

Front Cover: Photograph © Florida Fotobanc

In This Issue

The WPA Florida Writers Project
A personal view

A View from the Board
Critics Forum

Blacks in Spanish Florida
Grants Awarded

The Measure of Modern Poetry

F·E·H
Forum
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The Humanities
speak the language of “you” and “me,”
in which everything is understood as having a place among us.
Through the humanities
we comprehend our lives, cultures, and societies.
By the humanities
we enter the ideas, texts, traditions and aspirations
which define our existence.

The Florida Endowment for the Humanities is an independent, non-profit organization, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the State of Florida, and private contributions. It supports public humanities activities in Florida, including making grants to non-profit groups and agencies for public humanities programs throughout the state.

Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Florida Endowment for the Humanities or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Readers’ comments, and articles grounded in the humanities, especially as related to Florida, are welcome and will be published as space permits. Please direct materials to George Schurr, editor.

F·E·H Forum is distributed free of charge to the friends and constituents of the Florida Endowment for the Humanities. If you wish to be added to the mailing list, please request in writing.
With the demise of the WPA* in 1943, much of the raw field material collected by Florida Writers Project workers was being dumped into barrels for burning. Stetson Kennedy salvaged what he could and guarded it through the half century since.

A grant from FEH made it possible for Kennedy to transfer this and other material to the Bureau of Florida Folklife Programs Archive at White Springs. A symposium on these resources, “In The Nick of Time,” was held February 4, 1989, under FEH auspices. The proceedings are to be published by the University Presses of Florida.

Stetson Kennedy last visited the pages of the Forum (Fall 1986) in “The WPA Guide to Florida: a conversation between Ann Henderson and Stetson Kennedy.”

Florida folklore recordings made by the WPA Writers Project in the late 1930s were in the nick of time. The old lifestyle of Florida’s pioneer days was on its way out. The era when Florida was “one big cattle pen” was almost over.

The winter borealis of cattlemen “greenin’ up the woods” with fire was dying out. So, too, was that centerpiece of rural life, the mule. And John Henry, that steel-drivin’ man, was just about ready to lay down his hammer and die too.

The latter half of the 1930s was a true watershed, marked by Florida’s joining the Union and the world in many a cultural sense, and the 20th Century in a technological sense. Electricity, running water, asphalt, traffic lights, radio, “damyankee” tourists, and World War II were coming around the corner.

There can be no understanding the temper of those times without reference to the “Great Depression.” Ordinary depressions and recessions come and go, but the Big Bust was something else altogether. A decade and a half later, the UN was to count the American South as one of the major hunger areas of the world. Can you imagine how famished it was during the depression? I won’t go into the many faces of hunger. I only note that here in Florida social case workers were turning in reports of mothers who were obliged to give their babies over to dogs to suckle. Those were indeed “root-hog-or-die” days.

Folkstuff Everywhere
Growing up in Jacksonville, which was culturally south Georgian, I was of course immersed in what we now call

*WPA, Works Progress Administration, a program of the federal government in the 1930s, designed to provide income for otherwise unemployed persons.
the tracks." We were no sooner parked in Lover's Lane than she began to say such things as, "I ain't done nothin' but ketch hell since I was hatched!" and "I already done more livin' that you ever will." It was enough to make a fellow stop and think, but not about romance.

Another rich source was the George W. Kennedy Furniture Company, "The Store for Thrifty People." My father catered to the "dollar down and dollar a week" clientele, which was most numerous at the time. He was, in fact, a one-man social service agency, setting up many a young couple in marital life.

Afternoons and summers, I helped collect those dollar bills, which brought all manner of folkstuff my way. It was I, for example, who answered the phone when a black woman called in to say, "Come get this bed you sold me yesterday! I'm a married woman with a houseful of kids, and I can't have no talkin' bed!"

My father's competitors said he was too good a Christian to be in the furniture business (a tithing Baptist, no less), but there were times when he sent me out to help "repo" merchandise. If there was food cooking on the stove, or people in the bed, we just removed both and hauled off the goods hot.

It was a hard school for learning about life, and I fully understood when I heard the ditty:

If there ever was a Devil
Born in the land,
It musta been
The furni-ture man!

On the Beach in Key West

I had an abortive fling at the University of Florida, where neither of us did the other much good. After some 18 months I invented the concept of independent studies by shipping a trunkload of books to Key West, and hitchhiking after them.

Key West was so hard hit that the city fathers, sitting in plenary session in Pepe's Cafe, voted to turn the municipality over to the state, which in turn turned it over to the FERA (precursor to the WPA), which sent in a dictator, who resolved to turn "The Rock" into a tourist resort. So I helped plant coconuts along the boulevards, and rake up the seaweed which every high tide conveniently brought in.

To lighten our task, my co-workers told jokes. Like one among them who, when the lunch-time whistle blew, sliced a hunk of Cuban bread, held both halves up into the air, then solemnly squeezed a lime over them, put them together, and started munching.

"What in the world do you call that?" his comrades asked.

"Sandwiche de marisco (shellfish sandwich)," he replied.

Up until that time I had been writing poetry. Then I married a Key West girl, half Conch and half Cuban. When I picked up the tab for two for breakfast the next morning my bare footed exited the window, never to return.

At the wedding reception a case of Bacardi rum was emptied into a punchbowl and served straight. All the windows were filled with the heads of young boys holding tin cans and demanding "Ron! Ron!" Had we not obliged, they would da la lata (give the can), the Hispanic equivalent of the charivari tin pan serenade which the French brought to Pensacola.

Joining the WPA

The year 1937 found me back in Gainesville, auditing classes in journalism, there being no offerings in creative writing. It was at this point that I decided to apply for a job with the WPA Florida Writers Project, which had been established in 1935.

To get any WPA job, one had to be certified as being eligible for "relief," i.e., have no money, no property, no job, and no prospect of acquiring any of those things. Being eminently qualified, I got a job as "Junior Interviewer" at $37.50 per fortnight. In a matter of months I was transferred to the state office in Jacksonville and made one of the half dozen state editors. We (and all the world) could tell we were editors by the oversize pencils we had, each clearly labelled "EDITOR."

An inventory of Key West folk stuff which I had compiled earlier was sent to Washington, where it caught the eye of national folklore director Benjamin Botkin. At his recommendation, I was put in charge of collecting folklore, oral histories and social-ethnic studies in Florida. Some of this went into my Palmetto Country (1942), a volume in the American Folkways Series edited by Erskine Caldwell.

The authorized strength of the Florida project was 200, which included a "Negro Unit" of 10. Unlike some latter-day professional folklorists (we were the first professionals), our field workers did not have to "relate" to their informants: they were related — by virtue of culture, geography, and sometimes even family. All they had to do was knock on any door, and the rapport was there.

A great deal had already been collected by the time I came on board. Folklore was scattered all over the state office; and I hastened to sort it along ethnic lines, which comprised five clamped volumes.

There were no tape recorders in those days. We all had to rely upon our memories and dash off to write it down. Many of our field workers had a tendency to "write it up" instead of down, and it was with great difficulty that we persuaded them to refrain from literary flourishes.
Stereotyping Was In

To make matters worse, those were the days when stereotyping on the basis of race, religion, class, region and even occupation dominated the public mind. We were veritably a nation of Archie Bunkers. And, since stereotyping was everywhere to be found in film, theater, literature, and cartooning, it is hardly surprising that it penetrated the pages of the FWP. This entailed writing in the "dis, dat, dese, dem, dose" school of Negro dialect. Under the influence of Botkin, Richard Wright, Zora Hurston and others, we made a beginning in getting away from this, in favor of idiom.

It must be remembered, too, that the Jim Crow prototype of apartheid was all-pervasive and inviolate. The FWP Negro Unit, consequently, was housed apart, and we had no visual contact other than with the messenger they sent every two weeks to pick up their checks.

When Zora Hurston came on board, FWP director Carita Doggett Corse called us into her private office to explain that Zora would be passing through, and that, inasmuch as she had been feted in New York literary circles, and was inclined to "put on airs" such as smoking in the presence of white folks, we would have to make allowances. So Zora came, and Zora smoked, and we made allowances.

With Jim Crow serving as Big Brother, watching over our shoulders as we wrote, white chauvinism and paternalism were inevitable in the copy produced by whites, and a degree of ingratitude in that of blacks. It was a form of job insurance for both.

Getting a Recording Machine

It was not until 1939 that the Library of Congress entrusted the FWP with a recording machine, a cumbersome contraption that cut directly onto acetate discs and required two men to carry. One of the first things we did with it was to call in Zora, set her down in a chair, and see what we could get out of her. I asked if she knew "Uncle Bud," and she said that she did.

"What kind of song would you call that?" I asked.

"Oh, that's one of those jook songs."

"What do you mean, 'jook song'?"

"Well, a jook song is one which you wouldn't sing in front of anything but a jook woman."

But you heard it?"

"Yaas, I hearrd it," Zora laughed.

So she sang it for us, but I am much too old-fashioned to repeat its verses in public. However, Ormond Loomis has the tape at the Bureau of Florida Folklore Programs in White Springs. I believe that if you get in touch with him he will send you an unexpurgated cassette. At cost. No questions asked.

After Zora, we took our new recording machine to the Eartha White Mission.

Our Negro Unit was housed there, in the heart of Jacksonville's black ghetto. This was before United Way, and the Mission was the only place to which hungry and homeless blacks could turn. The people there that day started singing the spiritual:

"Lord, I'm runnin',
Tryin' to make a hundred;
Ninety-nine-and-a-half won't do!"

Having already discovered the magical effect which instant playback can have in turning informants into ham actors, I played it back.

"Hold everything right there!" Mrs. White commanded. "We're going to have a little prayer."

What she prayed was, "Lord, this is Eartha White talkin' to you again. We just want to give thanks to you for giving mankind the wisdom to make such a marvelous machine, and for giving us a President like Franklin D. Roosevelt, who cares about preserving the songs people sing."

Hurricane Lore

From there we moved on down state, taking in Minorcan lore at St. Augustine, and Conch stuff at Riviera above Palm Beach.

I was especially fascinated by the lore associated with Florida's "Big Blows," which abound in South Florida, such as the story which goes, "It blowed so hard it blowed a well up out of the ground, blowed a crooked road straight, and scattered the days of the week so bad Sunday didn't get around 'til late Tuesday mornin'."

The "Miami Hairycane" of 1926 gave rise to a truly classical ballad, which includes the lines:

"Great Gawd-amighty did mooooove out on the water,
And all the peoples in Mi-ami run..."

"Ships swarm down that ocean,
It was most too sad to tell;
Ten thousand peoples got drown-ed,
And all but twelve went to Hell.
Another such ballad, "The West Palm Beach Storm" of 1928, tells it exactly like it was:

"The storm met the hurricane
In West Palm Beach,
And they sat down and had breakfast together;
Then the storm said to the hurricane,
"What say we breeze on down
to Miami
And shake that thing?"

On down the line in Key West we encountered a Bahamian black named Theodore Rolle, whom everyone called "Tearoll." After we had recorded some of the Bahamian classics, including his Cab Calloway style "Hoist Up the John..."
The Man! Sing somethin'
the whispered warning,
4 FEHForum
turpentining?"
they
When
stopped my car; he stopped me from
posted sentries. From time to time came
appointed hour,
scheduled
audience.
The onliest way out is to die out," I replied.
"Don't you know that nobody can force you to work in satisfaction of a
debt?" I persisted.
"They do do it. ... If you tries to leave, they will kill you, and you will have to
die, because they has peoples to bury you out in them woods."
Stacey's last words were, "Hey, Government Man! When you get back up to
Washington you tell Claude Pepper
us folks ain't gettin our chops down here! We likes a chop good as anybody. You tell him if he can't do no
better for us than he is been doin', to
come on home and plead the law, and
let me go up yonder!
As we were about to drive through the camp gates, the woodsman came
up and asked, "Who was that colored
gal came in here ahead of y'all? She
was pretty smart for a colored gal.
Course I figured she was about three-
fighs white."

Gathering raw gum for turpentine

"In the Turpentine"
Zora was preceding us as a talent
scout, and after we had done Ybor City
she beckoned us to a turpentine camp
at Cross City. One informant she di-
rected us to was Cull Stacey, then in
his 80s, who had "been in the
turpentine" (sic) all his life.
Whenever the white woodsman was
out of earshot, I would don my cap
as director of social-ethnic studies, and ask
questions about peonage and such.
When I did, the workers promptly posted sentries. From time to time came
the whispered warning, "Here come
The Man! Sing somethin' quick!"
Cull Stacey had a lot to say, such as,
"Women? I loves em all! There's no
sucha thing as a bad woman."
And again, "Herbert Hoover? He
stopped my car; he stopped me from
rollin', and here I am anchored."
"Why don't you get out of
turpentinein'?
I asked.
The onliest way out is to die out," he replied.
"Don't you know that nobody can
force you to work in satisfaction of a
debt?" I persisted.
"They do do it. ... If you tries to leave,
you will have to

Paging Tolstoy
In retrospect, I suppose that the major attrac-
tion which folkstuff
has for me is its ability
to say so much in so
few words. I believe it
was Tolstoy who said
that he preferred to dis-
cuss really serious mat-
ters with illiterate peas-
ants, because their
thinking and speaking
processes had not been
obfuscated by formal
training.
If I knew how to con-
tact him, I would sug-
Stetson Kennedy, founding member and
current president of the Florida Folklaw Society, received the Florida Folk Heritage
Award in 1988. He is currently at work on a
collection of Key West lore, Grits and Grunts, and an all-Florida volume, Sand in Their
Shoes. His Palmetto Country is being re-
printed (The University Presses of Florida, fall '89).

*Here again I must refer you to Ormond Loomis for tapes. While at the Library of Congress
they were long kept in a top-secret file labelled "Delta."
PROPOSAL WRITING WORKSHOPS

Have you given thought to doing a public humanities program but feel nervous about writing a proposal? Are you not sure just what counts as a humanities project? How to prepare a budget? How to say what you mean? How to deal with “guidelines”?

Proposal writing workshops are scheduled for April and May. FEH staff will review the proposal writing process, guidelines and application forms with you. Bring your questions and suggestions. For further information, and to let them know you are planning to come, please call the appropriate contact person. Locations and dates are as follows:

PENSACOLA
April 26, 1-3 P.M. at
The Education, Research and Development Center
Bldg. 78, Rm. 5-3
University of West Florida
Contact: Ron Evans
(904) 474-2688, exts. 88, 89 or 90

FORT WALTON BEACH
April 27, 1-3 P.M. at
Fort Walton Beach Area Center of U.W.F.
Rm. 8
(414 Mary Esther Cutoff)
Contact: Sarah Dykes
(904) 244-1000

PANAMA CITY
April 28, 1-3 P.M. at Panama City Campus of F.S.U.
Bldg. C, Rm. 104
(4750 N. 23rd St.)
Contact: Charisse Gibson
(813) 272-3473 (FEH office)

FORT MYERS
May 2, 11 A.M. at
Edison Community College
Contact: Charisse Gibson
(813) 272-3473 (FEH office)

MELBOURNE
early May at
Florida Institute of Technology
Contact: Charisse Gibson
(813) 272-3473 (FEH office)

AVON PARK
early May at
South Florida Community College
Contact: Charisse Gibson
(813) 272-3473 (FEH office)

Florida Film Exhibit Continues

“Lights! Camera! Florida!,” FEH’s traveling exhibit highlighting the story of film in Florida, has been to Miami and Key West.

Watch for it:

March 21-May 14 Tallahassee Museum of Florida History
May 17-30 Gainesville The Oaks Mall
June 2-27 Orlando Orlando Museum of Art
June 30-July 27 St. Augustine Lightner Museum
July 28-August 31 Jacksonville Museum of Arts and Sciences
Cici Brown (Ormond Beach) and Richard P. Janaro (Miami) have been elected to the FEH Board of Directors. They take their seats at the meeting of the Board in Tallahassee. They fill the seats left empty by the death of George Beauchamp and the resignation of Barbara Cohen.

CICI BROWN, first vice-president and chair of government liaison of the Board of Trustees of The Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach, has a long-standing interest in the relationship between political processes and cultural opportunities. She is credited with developing strong and ongoing support for the museum by the city, county and state. One of those people who helps to make the world a better place to live in, Brown’s concern for water resources in Volusia County led her to develop a well timed and well received program which was singled out for the 1984 Garden Club of America’s conservation award covering five Southern States. A sustaining member of the Junior League of America, Brown is a member of the Nature Conservancy, has long been active on Florida Music Festival committees, and has been involved in the biennial visits to Florida of the London Symphony Orchestra. A native of Massachusetts and graduate of Westbrook College (Maine), Brown is widely traveled. She sees FEH as a cultural link between global perspectives and local programs.

RICHARD P. JANARO, assistant dean of theatre at Miami’s New World School of the Arts, helped create their award winning theatre program. A playwright/director/producer for both stage and TV, he directed the 1987 showcase production of “Children of a Lesser God” for the Florida State Thespian Conference. He holds degrees in literature and drama from Harvard University and the University of Miami, with additional graduate study at Boston University, Jagellonian University (Poland) and Lawrence University (California). Janaro joined the faculty of the University of Miami in 1953, moving to Miami-Dade Community College in 1961, where he became Professor of Humanities in 1972. Janaro sees drama as an entry point to the humanities, as reflected in his first book, Responses to Drama (with Thelma Altshuler, Houghton-Mifflin, 1967). “The Way of the Humanist,” one of the thirty half-hour units in The Art of Being Human — a telecourse directed and produced by Janaro — won an Emmy for best educational documentary in 1979. The text for The Art of Being Human, by Janaro and Altshuler, is now in its third edition (Harper & Row, 1989). Janaro’s central concern is developing critical thinking.
A VIEW FROM THE BOARD

What the developer wanted to do was nothing more than Coral Gables founder George Merrick would have done if it hadn't been for the Great Hurricane of 1926. Develop Tahiti Beach. Or Cocoplum, as it is now called, a posh enclave of single family homes on Biscayne Bay.

But in Florida, the rules are different now. In Merrick's day, just 60 years ago, progress was measured in terms of how many acres you could dredge, fill and build upon, and the devil take any messy mangroves and alligators that might be in the way.

Today, everyone knows all those techniques are harmful to Florida's delicate ecosystem. Mangroves filter water and provide fish nurseries. Alligators are the bellwethers of all the threatened wildlife throughout the state. You can't develop willy nilly here anymore.

Where the line is drawn between accommodating for the inevitable growth and defending what is left of Florida's natural terrain is a matter of ethics.

From the humanities point of view, a good decision would be one which took into account a number of values, not just one side or the other. The ethical dilemma would be resolved by a wise consideration of all the elements, the potential impact on all sides, and a decision including the values of all.

(It is also virtually impossible to be ethical and hypocritical at the same time, which is an excellent check to remember when in doubt.)

Take the case of the Cocoplum development.

On one side were the developers, respected men from Atlanta and Miami who had created fine communities in the past. They wanted to build a golf course on about 118 acres of mangroves, as well as to dredge canals to provide landfill for the course and homesites. This would have meant razing the black and red mangroves and buttonwood trees which had taken root here following the 1926 hurricane.

On the other side was the Florida Audubon Society and its roving troubleshooter, Charles Lee.

In the middle was a Florida club and resort marketing consultant, who was, coincidentally, serving on the Boards of the Florida Audubon Society and the Florida Endowment for the Humanities.

The consultant was being paid by the developers, who were adamant about the golf course. Lee was equally adamant about fighting their entire development. Lee promised to challenge them every time they needed a government permit. The permitting route could take years.

The resolution of the matter, which the consultant worked out with both sides, called for the developer to deed those 118 acres of mangroves to the state of Florida, never to be developed. In return for this, Florida Audubon (and by tacit understanding, all other conservationist groups) agreed to withdraw its objections to the development of the upland part of the property, along with the completion of the canals.

Today, Cocoplum is almost finished, the mangrove forests are intact and healthy, and manatees inhabit the canals which wind through the handsome homes of the community.

The solution was an example of ethics in action. Truth to tell, neither party was wildly happy about the solution. But under the circumstances, carefully considering all the values involved and attempting to do the "right" thing by both parties, the final result was a fair one.

Florida's rapid growth — the state will be third largest in the nation by the end of this century, and that's only 11 years away — presents an array of ethical decisions on development questions for almost everyone, on an almost daily basis.

In my own case, and I am the consultant who almost strangled on the Cocoplum mangroves, my partners and I face the dilemma constantly. We live with the challenge that FEH has put to Floridians: face up to and deal with current ethical dilemmas.

As Floridians, we are desperately trying to help preserve what is left of our native environment, both on land and in our bays, rivers and reefs. As marketing consultants, we are engaged in advising our clients on how to attract the guest, member or buyer to his resort or community.

Can we do both fairly, justly, ethically? Our attitude is that we must try. If we withdraw, we who are enlightened to the need for careful planning and development, who will take our places?

All of us, as citizens, have the moral responsibility to support reason and restraint in the development of Florida. For the humanist — and that especially means for FEH — that means taking the high road and sticking to it.

David Pearson
Miami, November 1988: I attended most of the Miami Book Fair’s programs this year, but I still look at it from the perspective of a perhaps more typical fair-goer, someone who drops in from time to time. The fair worked.

For openers, Norman Mailer’s presentation proved simply extraordinary. He compelled a sometimes skeptical audience not by tricks but by his mastery of language and literary culture. His integrity, honor and honesty commanded the evening and reverberated throughout the week.

Or consider the philosopher-educator Mortimer Adler. Alan Bloom (The Closing of the American Mind) or Ed Hirsch (Cultural Literacy) might have excited more controversy. But Adler, at 85, has been famous longer than most of us have been alive. Adler’s reforms square with neither the new elitism (like Bloom’s) nor TV-drugged popular culture. Ostensibly old-fashioned, Adler’s ideas still possess revolutionary potential. Moreover, the vigorous old philosopher spoke with power, authority and passion.

Carlos Franqui—early ideologue of the Cuban revolution—offered a cool, detached and sometimes ironic assessment of Cuban history and established Fidel within the whole course of the island’s history. He offered, in short, a long-range perspective on the revolution, something we need more of in our community.

Will experimenting with the format add crispness? This year’s fair offered evidence to suggest so. Two panels in particular—one on black male writers, the other on the ’60s—ranged into the most exciting realm of ideas, and either might have substituted for one of the key addresses in the fair’s opening week.

Problems persist, of course. Dumb questions plagued every session. Indeed, the most effective panel for cross discussion and debate, the one on black male writers, provoked the dullest questions and goofiest statements of all.

At the same time, in its own way, even this tendency speaks to the fair’s vitality. The excitement of being in the same room with literary paragons charges the book fair’s whole atmosphere. Folks lust to interact with the authors even when they have not read their books.

The fair’s organizers have created a Goombay Festival of the mind and spirit. In this regard, they fulfill the highest objectives of the Florida Endowment for the Humanities. Shades of old Mortimer Adler, the FEH proposes to bring culture out of the ivory tower and make the traditional humanities accessible to the widest variety of citizens. No program in our state does so any better.

Darden Asbury Pyron
Evaluator

Sarasota, October 25, 1988: The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings reading/discussion series at the Sarasota Public Library (Selby Library), was well attended, 25 to 30 throughout. Most of those who came were retired and female. I counted only four male participants. Remarkably, over 60 percent of the audience spoke during the final one-and-one-half-hour discussion. This is a tribute to the scholar/discussion leader and to the idea of a series in which participants come to know each other.

The discussion was well focused and utilized insights from the movie “Cross Creek”, the books The Yearling and Cross Creek, and the play, “A Tea with Zora and Marjorie.” I could not help but think that this kind of seminar is exactly what the humanities are all about. People were reading, looking, and discussing. The leader was lecturing and facilitating. This type of enterprise should continue.

The lecturer should be better rewarded, the video upgraded to a movie, and the books arrive on time. Otherwise, I could not have been more pleased.

Robert Benedetti
Board Member

St. Petersburg, October 28-29, 1988: “T.S. Eliot and the Modernists: A Centennial Celebration” was a high-class, academically oriented event. The conference was well attended (I counted 60 or so), but some of the material was not easily available to those not acquainted with modern textual criticism. The language of deconstruction was distracting. The best presentation was a dramatic reading led by Paul Massie from USF. The audience was rapt.

I was surprised that time was not provided for questions. Papers were read. A performance was given. But participants were asked to hold questions overnight. This should not be, particularly where the language of some performers and the content of all is difficult. The conference, run this way, converges too much with the proceedings of the T.S. Eliot Society rather than a public humanities project.

I also think that, if difficult and technical material is to be presented, the papers should be available to participants before the meeting. Actually, the reader given provided a simple overview of T.S. Eliot’s work but little to prepare the listener for the involution of deconstruction.

The Poynter Institute makes a fine place for such events and should be used in the future. In sum, a strong showing, if a bit precious at points.

Robert Benedetti
Board Member
African-Americans played significant roles in Florida’s history, yet they remain invisible in the literature. However, the sources for the black history of Spanish Florida are amazingly rich and varied. The Spanish were meticulous bureaucrats and African-Americans appear everywhere in their records. These records are preserved in the Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain, the University of Florida’s P.K. Yonge Library, and elsewhere.

**Black Slaves**

Beginning in 1565, black slaves were brought to Florida to labor for Spaniards. Some of these slaves led lives of unceasing toil and misery. Others lived fairly comfortably in the homes of their Spanish owners.

The royal government was the main employer of slaves in Spanish Florida. Slaves served as auctioneers, town criers and messengers. They worked in the royal hospital and barracks, and served the military by cutting firewood, maintaining weapons, tending mounts and providing their music. Royal slaves worked on public construction projects, in the stone quarries, and at lime kilns.

In the countryside, slaves were the cowboys, field hands and lumberjacks. They also hunted, trapped, fished and grew food to sustain themselves and the larger white community.
Urban slaves were the artisans, domestics, musicians, sailors and soldiers of St. Augustine. They were included in dowries, bequeathed in wills, traded and exchanged, and even posted as bonds.

In short, slaves were a critical component of both the economic and social structure of Spanish Florida.

**Legal and Social Status**

What was the legal and social status of African-Americans in the Spanish world? Long before Africans were enslaved by Europeans, slave codes were incorporated into Castilian law by King Alfonso X. When African slaves began to reach Spain in the fifteenth century, these codes were applied to them. As the New World discoveries were considered a kingdom of the Crown of Castile, Spanish laws governed slavery in Florida.

The Siete Partidas of King Alfonso held that slavery was contra razón de natura (against the laws of nature). Man was a noble and free creation of God. Slavery was an accident of fate and an aberration in nature, not a preordained or perpetual condition.

Unlike slaves belonging to the English, Spanish slaves were never merely chattel property. Spanish legislation specifically granted slaves rights and protections. Slaves had the right to personal security and had legal recourse against a cruel master, including being released from the control of an abuser.

Slaves had the right to hold and transfer property and to initiate legal suits. They had the right of self-purchase and the ability to pursue it.

Spanish tradition encouraged owners to practice charity towards their slaves and to treat them well. Owners were responsible for teaching their slaves the rudiments of the faith, so that they might be admitted to the Church. Before God, masters and slaves were considered brothers-in-Christ. Slaves enjoyed all the sacraments of the Church, including marriage. The sanctity of the family was protected by requirements not to separate family members. Owners often became part of a slave's extended family by serving as godparents at slave marriages and baptisms.

However, the ideal represented in Spanish slave codes cannot be accepted at face value. Some laws were observed. Others were not.

Nor were the Spanish free of racial prejudice. In the New World, Iberian anxieties over religious orthodoxy became a preoccupation with racial purity. African-Americans were assigned to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Blacks and mulattoes, even if free, suffered penalties for having descended from slaves.

**Free Blacks**

Nevertheless, the emphasis on a slave's humanity and rights, and support for manumission in Spanish slave codes and social practice, made it possible for a significant free black class to exist in the Spanish world. A few were manumitted by owners. Others were already free when they came to Florida from Cuba or other areas of the Spanish empire.

Another group of slaves became free by astutely manipulating the contest between Britain and Spain.

In 1670, England challenged Spain's claim to exclusive sovereignty in *La Florida* by establishing the colony of Carolina. Soon after, slaves from the English plantations began to seek refuge among the Spanish. The runaways received baptism in the Catholic faith and were welcome additions to Florida's labor and military force. In 1693, the Spanish king freed the converted slaves, "granting liberty to all ... the men as well as the women ... so that by their example and by my liberality ... others will do the same." He cited religious principles, but clearly understood the diplomatic and political implications of his action.

The English complained of the Spanish sanctuary policy, considering it "a flagrant provocation." In fact, slaves continued to seek asylum in Florida. They were frequently aided in their escape by Indians. The Spaniards sent parties of escaped slaves and Indians back to raid Carolina plantations. In turn, frustrated British planters launched an unsuccessful retaliatory raid against St. Augustine in 1728. African-Americans fought bravely in the town's defense.

**Francisco Menéndez**

The case of Francisco Menéndez illustrates the sometimes dilatory nature of Spanish racial justice. Menéndez, a Mandingo born in West Africa, was enslaved and taken to Carolina. He escaped and joined the Yamassee Indian war against the English. Three years later he made his way to St. Augustine in the company of the Yamassee chieftain, Jorge.

In St. Augustine, Menéndez intended to claim the freedom promised by the Spanish Crown, but was betrayed by a non-Christian Indian named Mad Dog and sold back into slavery. Menéndez did not give up. Again and again, he petitioned the Spanish governors and the Bishop of Cuba for his liberty and that of other escaped slaves.

Finally, in 1738, Governor Manuel de Montiano investigated and found for Menéndez and his fellow slaves. He freed the petitioners and established the first free black town in the present-day Florida.
United States, *Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose* (commonly known as Fort Mose), about two miles north of St. Augustine. Menéndez, his wife, María, and some thirty-seven other families became homesteaders in Mose. In gratitude the freedmen vowed to be “the most cruel enemies of the British” and to spill their “last drop of blood in defense of the Great Crown of Spain and the Holy Faith.”

**Fort Mose**

Mose, strategically located on the major land and water routes to St. Augustine, was a walled fort which enclosed a church, the priest’s house, a lookout, a well, and guardhouses. A moat, with vicious Spanish bayonet growing from its top, surrounded the fort.

The villagers lived outside the walls of the fort, near their planted fields. Twenty-thatched huts, resembling those built by Indians, sheltered at least forty-four men and twenty-three women, according to a village census.

Governor Montiano referred to these people as the “subjects” of Menéndez. Menéndez’s character and military skills led the Spaniards to regard him as a natural lord, much like an Indian *cacique*. He commanded the black militia from 1726 until at least 1763.

The first settlement at Mose was short-lived. In 1740 General James Oglethorpe, the English Governor of Georgia, led an attack on St. Augustine. His vastly superior forces overwhelmed Mose. The blacks retreated to St. Augustine. From there Captain Francisco Menéndez led his militia on dangerous reconnaissance missions. When the time came, they joined in the surprise attack which retook Mose, devastating the enemy. The governor commended Menéndez’s bravery in two letters to the king.

Mose’s original structures were destroyed in the fighting. The displaced settlers had to live in St. Augustine until a second Mose was rebuilt in 1752. The new settlement was occupied until the Spanish were forced by treaty to evacuate Florida in 1763.

For twenty years Florida was British.

**The Second Spanish Period**

After the victories of the Spanish Captain General Galvez at Pensacola and the American General Washington at Yorktown, the Spanish were able to regain control of Florida in 1784. They did their best to re-establish Spanish hegemony and culture as it had been, but this time they found themselves a minority in their own colony. In 1790 Spaniards, including troops and dependents, accounted for only about one-sixth of the total population, making Florida unlike any other Spanish colony in the New World.

During their brief tenure in Florida, the English had established flourishing plantations worked by slaves. Many of these Britishers remained, after swearing loyalty to the Spanish Crown.

The American Revolution forced those loyal to George III to evacuate Charleston and Savannah. Many headed for Florida. Refugee planters from the Carolinas and Georgia brought more than 8,000 slaves with them to East Florida.

Some of the slaves took advantage of the situation. Amidst the disorder they escaped. Many of them requested and received religious sanctuary and freedom.

Governor Zespesdes doubted the religious motives of these refugees but honored the seventeenth-century sanctuary decree. More than 250 slaves were granted liberty.

Runaway ads placed by their English masters describe a family which sought sanctuary: Prince Witten and his wife, Judy, were born in “Guinea” around 1760. Their children were slave-born in South Carolina. Prince was “negro, six feet, strong built and brawny... talkative, with a large mouth.” A skilled carpenter, he risked several escape attempts “to avoid a separation from his family... to which he is much attached.” Judy was “5’7”... a smart, active wench.” Glasgow was about eight years old and a “well-looked boy of an open countenance and obliging disposition.” Polly, age six, possessed “lively eyes” and was “gently pitted with small pox.”

In St. Augustine, the Wittens found freedom. They underwent religious instruction, were baptized, and Prince and Judy consecrated their twenty-one year union. Prince provided for his family by doing carpentry. The Wittens acquired a home, had prominent white neighbors, and even became slaveowners themselves. Prince went on to a heroic career in the free black militia.

**Black Militia**

Blacks enjoyed a long tradition of military service in Spanish Florida. The earliest records for black troops date back to 1683. Blacks proved to be loyal and fierce warriors against Spain’s enemies: Indians, French, English, Geor...
mies: Indians, French, English, Georgians, and even the United States Marines. They had a vested interest in maintaining the sovereignty of the government which had freed them.

In 1796 General Jorge Biassou, Caudillo of the black Auxiliaries of Carlos IV in Santo Domingo, arrived in St. Augustine. One of the most important leaders of the Haitian revolution, he commanded an army of 4,000 and outranked the more famous Toussaint L'Ouverture. The Spanish king honored his army with proclamations, medals, uniforms, and pensions. But at war’s end, he ordered them to disband and disperse.

Jorge Biassou led the remnants of his “family” into exile in St. Augustine. Shortly after their arrival, Biassou’s brother-in-law and military successor married the daughter of Prince Witten. Whether or not it was a whirlwind romance, this enabled the two refugee groups to combine forces and consolidate their status. Thereafter many marriage and godparent ties linked their members. Together, the Biassou and the Wittens served in joint military expeditions on the northern and southern frontiers of St. Augustine.

Spain Departs

In 1821 Spain ceded Florida to the United States and the Spanish community of St. Augustine was once more evacuated to Cuba. Most African-Americans joined the exodus. Many of those who stayed behind were relegated to the category of chattel.

The Georgians who flooded into the colony had no intention of permitting a propertied and armed free black class to encourage their slaves’ aspirations toward freedom. When they gained legal control of Florida they legislated white supremacy, and opportunities for free blacks declined.

Suggested Further Reading:


Jane Landers, the director of the History Teaching Alliance — jointly sponsored by the National Council for Social Studies, the Organization of American Historians, and the American Historical Association — wrote her doctoral dissertation on Black Society in Spanish St. Augustine, 1784-1821. Historical consultant to the Fort Mose Archeological and Film Projects, Landers continues to dig into Spanish, Cuban and American archives. She won the Florida Historical Society President’s Prize in 1988. Landers is a member of the FEH Speaker’s Bureau.
GRANT APPLICATION DEADLINES
1989-90

For regular projects expected to begin after October 9
- Preliminary Application form due by July 8
- Final date for submission of completed Proposal/Contract form (28 copies) is August 8
- Decision by September 18

For regular projects expected to begin after January 2, 1990
- Preliminary Application form due by October 3
- Final date for submission of completed Proposal/Contract form (28 copies) is November 4
- Decision by December 8

For regular projects expected to begin after April 30, 1990
- Preliminary Application form due by January 30, 1990
- Final date for submission of completed Proposal/Contract form (28 copies) is March 2, 1990
- Decision by April 9, 1990

For all media projects (once a year only) to begin no earlier than May 1, 1990
- Preliminary Application form due by November 3
- Final date for submission of completed Proposal/Contract form (28 copies) is January 13, 1990
- Decision by April 16, 1990

1989-90 FEH Board Meetings

June 2 in Tampa
September 8 in Tampa
December 1 in Tampa
March 30 in Tallahassee

13
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Event Title</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TALLAHASSEE</td>
<td>African - Americans and Filmmaking: panels/lectures/discussions on blacks in films and as filmmakers shaping contemporary consciousness</td>
<td>Sponsor: Harambee Arts and Cultural Heritage Council (FEH grant: $7,980/Approximate total cost: $19,000) Scheduled for Feb. 25 &amp; 26, as part of the Ninth Annual Harambee Arts and Cultural Heritage Festival. Contact Charles Stephens, Jr. (904) 488-7973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JACKSONVILLE</td>
<td>Architecture, Public Space and Modernity: exhibits/discussions designed to inaugurate public consideration of how the design of public spaces can shape Jacksonville’s future</td>
<td>Sponsor: University of North Florida (FEH grant: $4,400/Approximate total cost: $9,500) Scheduled for March through April, at the UNF Library. Contact Richard R. Weiner or Sam Kimball (904) 646-2560/2850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAINESVILLE</td>
<td>Jewish Arts Series: interpretive presentations on Jewish art, film, and poetry by internationally recognized authorities</td>
<td>Sponsor: Center for Jewish Studies, University of Florida (FEH grant: $2,713/Approximate total cost: $5,860) Scheduled for Jan. 26, Feb. 15, and Mar. 8, at Gannett Auditorium. Contact Barry Mesch (904) 392-1625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW SMYRNA BEACH</td>
<td>Government’s Role in the Arts and Humanities: considering issues ranging from policy matters to propaganda pressures, in the third annual Ethics of Change Forum</td>
<td>Sponsor: Atlantic Center for the Arts (FEH grant: $3,450/Approximate total cost: $31,000) Scheduled for Feb. 24 &amp; 25, at the Atlantic Center. Contact Donna Blagden (904) 427-6975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEESBURG, CLERMONT, MT. DORA and SOUTH SUMTER COUNTY</td>
<td>Picaresque II — Mini-Chautauqua: the story of music and the importance of story telling demonstrated and explained by a trio of scholar/performers</td>
<td>Sponsor: Picaresque II (FEH grant: $4,950/Approximate total cost: $15,600) Scheduled March 5-9, at Clermont Methodist Church, Lake-Sumter Community College, South Sumter High School, and Mt. Dora Community Center. Contact Gary H. Hofthaus (907) 272-5341 (Alaska)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORLANDO</td>
<td>Renaissance Dreams: presentations, lectures and discussions on how the arts and letters of the English Renaissance continue to haunt our lives</td>
<td>Sponsor: University of Central Florida (FEH grant: $13,538/Approximate total cost: $30,500) Scheduled at the Public Library and various other locations from February 7 through April 23, as part of the Orlando Shakespeare Festival. Contact Stuart Omans (407) 423-6905</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAMPA</td>
<td>Interpreting Jean Genet’s THE MAIDS: scholars provide cultural/philosophical context, program notes, and post-performance discussions of three performances</td>
<td>Sponsor: Stageworks Theatre Company (FEH grant: $1,230/Approximate total cost: $2,500) Scheduled Jan. 21, 28, &amp; Feb. 3, at the Loft Theatre. Contact Anna Brennen (813) 251-8984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAMPA BAY AREA</td>
<td>A Religious History of Tampa Bay: Seminars investigating the historic development of religious institutions, communities and traditions around Tampa Bay</td>
<td>Sponsor: National Conference of Christians and Jews (FEH grant: $16,440/Approximate total cost: $41,000) Scheduled for January through June, 1990, in Tampa, St. Petersburg, Pinellas Park, Tarpon Springs, St. Leo, Sarasota, and Bradenton. Contact Nathan Katz (813) 974-222</td>
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SARASOTA
Archives in the Humanities: a forum on the development, organization, preservation, and use of archival material
Sponsor: Sarasota Music Archive of the Sarasota Opera Association (FEH grant: $9,350/Approximate total cost: $22,500)
Scheduled for March 19, at the Opera House
Contact Mildred Petrie (813) 366-8450

MIAMI
Florida’s Labor History: a symposium on the history of the labor movement in Florida.
Sponsor: Center for Labor History and Studies, Florida International University (FEH grant: $16,100/Approximate total cost: $40,000)
Scheduled for November, at F.I.U.
Contact Margaret Gibbons Wilson (305) 554-2371

Other Voices: a series exploring cultural insights of acclaimed filmmakers and writers from Africa, India and Latin America
Sponsor: Miami-Dade Public Library System (FEH grant: $6,000/Approximate total cost: $15,500)
Scheduled February through April, at the Main Library, downtown
Contact Maria Macias (305) 375-4223

Written to the FORUM

About “Picaresque 2 — Mini-Chautauqua,” well done. It was good for me as a police officer to see this side of life. This experience is a pleasant change from the “real” world I deal with everyday. I hope that through experiences like this in the future I will continue to see and appreciate the good side of people.

Steve Rockefeller
Leesburg

Thank you for the most rewarding experience I have had as an educator in the last fifteen years. I feel extremely fortunate to have been included in the FEH/Mantee Community College seminar — “Patterns of Culture in Florida Life” — August of 1988. The surprise of the seminar was the quality of the professors. Everything was perfectly timed. The director was always gracious and kind. This year I decided to spend the first week of school orienting my students to the state of Florida, which for many is a new home. The materials provided through the seminar were invaluable for this study.

Joy (Williams) King
Venice
Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.
My subject is War, and the pity of War.
The Poetry is in the pity.

Written by Wilfred Owen, these lines are from
the preface to "a projected volume of poems."
Born in 1893, Owen enlisted in 1915 and died
November 4, 1918, in the War to End all Wars.
His lines live on.

Poets live by lines. They break and
change and shift them for emphasis
(visual or vocal), to enhance a rhythmic
pattern or its absence, to shape
the printed page like a picture, to sus-
tain a firm meter, to break that pattern,
or simply to make a line feel right.

Measure by Measure

No matter who writes a line, or
whether it is one line or two, each line
can roughly be measured. Often such
measurement offers a clue to how the
poem was made, and how it moves.

Until World War I, poets seemed to
have a remarkably consistent and
widely shared sense of what a line
should be. It should be written in met-
ers. It should be in some way musical.
It should rhyme to enhance the music
and to emphasize the ends of lines.

For the modern poet, however, rhyme
seems often intrusive. Musicality can
embrace a high degree of dissonance.
The classical "metrical feet" offer only
one of the many ways to measure the
line. Even the absence of measurement
is crucial: first, because most writers
are highly aware of what they are trying
not to do; second, because ignoring a
fact of language doesn’t make the
words disappear.

'Modern poets do not begin with clas-
sical meter, a way of counting which
limits what can be counted. Rather,
modern poets search for measures,
which can meter a world not seen be-
fore. In modern poetry any aspect of
language is ripe to be counted, me-
tered, or taken as a way to order our
perceptions.

Measuring helps us "get at" modern
poetry. Consider William Carlos Wil-
liams's

THE MEASURE
OF MODERN POETRY

by A. McA. Miller
The Red Wheelbarrow
so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens.

Four two-line stanzas add up to one sentence. Each stanza is a separate perception. These lines take time apart. They provide images as clear and separate as the time-lapse lines of Duchamp’s famous painting “Nude Descending a Staircase” (p. 16).

In all four stanzas, the first lines are precisely three words. All the second lines are one two-syllable word. The opening lines of the first and last stanzas are four syllables each. Those lines make the outer stanzas an “envelope” for the inner two stanzas, each of which opens with a line of three syllables.

Modern Accounting
Counting, then, begins to unlock this poem. But not all poems, and especially not all modern poems, count this way.

The traditional way of counting is rooted in the tough, stable fabric of our language. Old English, which was there before 1066, gave us the stresses and the heavy drum-beats of Modern English (“hus wi” for “housewife,” “whale road” as a kenning for “sea”). Then the Norman conquest brought French to give light and tripping syllables (“féminine” “and” “maritime”) to go with the Saxon sound.

This marriage accounts for the meter of poetry from Chaucer forward. Verses were made by switching stressed and unstressed syllables back and forth in a pattern so clear that, if it changed, the change was meaningful. When Robert Frost writes a poem it is in this tradition. We are reassured by the weights of his words and not just the sentiment. As Frost puts it:

So if you find you must repent
From side to side in argument,
At least don’t use your mind too hard,
But trust my instinct — I’m a bard.
(from “To a Thinker”)

Whitman’s ideal was so vast that not even a whole catalog of images could realize it. His goals were so sweeping that the present was never enough. How was he to find a form which could measure up to his vision?

Whitman reached back through the cadences of the King James Bible to the structures of Hebraic poetry.

In the “Song of Solomon,” syllables and words are not counted; instead, verses are shaped by repeated and balanced phrases and clauses:

Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead.
Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.

(Song of Solomon 4:1,2)

There are just two lines here, each as long as a small paragraph. Captivated by the form of this Biblical poetry, Whitman piled images together into a sequence of echoing phrases. He gave order to his lines by repeating motifs like “I see,” or “Land of,” or “And I know.”

Whitman built his best verse from the four basic Biblical ways of dealing with phrases and clauses: as equal or synony-

Years of the modern! years of the unperform’d!
Your horizon rises, I see it parting away for more august dramas,
I see not America only, not only Liberty’s nation but other nations preparing,
I see tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations, the solidarity of races,

(from “Years of the Modern”)
in the world of The Waste Land speaks to and from the visual arts of its era. In the world of this poem, as in that of Picasso’s cubist period, objects and scenes are viewed simultaneously from more than one point of view, and in more than one frame of time.

The quince jours noyé,
Le miroir et la houle de Cournonville,
Le temps de la cargaison d'étain:
L'importa très loin . . .

The above French into a particular number of syllabically rhymed lines, reads:

All this became possible because the French syllable was, for Eliot, a metrical discovery: different meters for different matters.

Controlling the poetic line provides Eliot with shifting perspectives. One could count syllables in English or

hoedic, a fornight dead,
with of gulls, and the deep sea swell
fit and the loss.
under sea
care of bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
the stages of his age and youth

派遣 the whirlpool.

the or few
who turn the wheel and look to windward,

Heleb, who was once handsome and tall as you.
The Red Wheelbarrow
so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens.

Four two-line stanzas add up to one sentence. Each stanza is a separate perception. These lines take time apart. They provide images as clear and separate as the time-lapse lines of Duchamps’ famous painting “Nude Descending a Staircase” (p. 16).

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This marriage accounts for the meter of poetry from Chaucer forward. Verses were made by switching stressed and unstressed syllables back and forth in a pattern so clear that, if it changed, the change was meaningful. When Robert Frost writes a poem it is in this tradition. We are reassured by the weights of his words and not just the sentiment. As Frost puts it:

So if you find you must repent
From side to side in argument,
At least don’t use your mind too hard,
But trust my instinct — I’m a bard.
(from “To a Thinker”)

In the mid 19th century an underemployed journalist and printer, Walt Whitman, had something to say which required a different way of accounting:

Whitman’s ideal was so vast that not even a whole catalog of images could realize it. His goals were so sweeping that the present was never enough. How was he to find a form which could measure up to his vision?

Whitman reached back through the cadences of the King James Bible to the structures of Hebraic poetry.

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Whitman built his best verse from the four basic Biblical ways of dealing with phrases and clauses: as equal or synony-
mous (=), as being contradictory (≠) as being cause-and-effect (→), and as a climax of feeling (!). Here they are, at work in the second section of Whitman’s “Song of Myself.”

(≠) *Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,*

(→) I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,

(≠) *The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.*

(≠) *The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,*

(→) *It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,*

(→) *I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,*

(!) I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

Armed with these Biblical techniques, Whitman was able to break from the metrical tradition that had held sway since Chaucer. With conceptual elements (phrases, clauses, and whole statements) rather than the traditional meters and syllables, he was free from finger-counting.

Moving into expansive modes of speech and song, more like Wagner’s opera than a conventional sonnet, Whitman blazed a trail for later poets to follow. Even as different as “The Red Wheelbarrow” (quoted above) is from Whitman’s poems, Williams still claimed Whitman to be the best early model for an American poetics.

Even a casual reader can feel the affinity between Whitman and many of the American “Beats” for whom a line of poetry often is the line of breath. Since Whitman, read aloud and read well, the poem moves as one speaks it. And the reader’s mind moves with it as if in performance.

**French Syllables**

Just as the fundamentals of Modern English stem from the confluence of Germanic Old English with Romantic French, so one strong aspect of modern poetry stems from a creative conflict in the twentieth century between two ways of measuring the poetic line: the Anglo-American and the French. In the Anglo-American tradition one counted stressed and unstressed syllables in tandem, grouped them into metrical feet, and then counted the feet. Traditional poetry in French, however, counted only the syllables — but all of them.

So strong are these traditions, even now, that precisely the same piece of recorded sound will be perceived as quite different by listeners whose native languages differ. If your native language is a Germanic one, like English, you “hear” strong and weak syllables in the first line of Baudelaire’s “La Beauté” —

"Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre . . . ." But a native speaker of French “hears” only the succession of syllables. Metrically, in French all 12-syllable lines are equal.

Reading the late nineteenth century French Symbolist poets unlocked the creative powers of T.S. Eliot. Born in Saint Louis, Missouri, young T.S. Eliot lived in London in the teens of this century. There he worked hard to establish himself as a master of continental culture. He even devised experimental poems in French. In “Dans le Restaurant,” a comparatively slight piece that would grow up to become a crucial part of *The Waste Land,* Eliot wrote:

**Phlébas, le Phénicien, pendant quinze jours noyé,**

*Oublié les cris des mouettes et la houle de Cournouaille,*

*Et les profits et les pertes, et la cargaison d'étain:*

*Un courant de sous-mer l'emporta très loin . . . .*

He later translated his own French into English lines of an irregular number of syllables, again unpredictably rhymed. This section, titled “Death by Water,” the shortest in Eliot’s poem of 2,313 mostly free-verse lines, reads:

**Phlebas, the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,**

**Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell**

**And the profit and the loss.**

**A current under sea**

**Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell**

**He passed the stages of his age and youth**

**Entering the whirlpool.**

**Gentle or few**

**O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,**

**Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.**

All this became possible because the French syllable was, for Eliot, a metrical discovery: different meters for different matters.

Controlling the poetic line provides Eliot with shifting perspectives. One could count syllables in English or
French. One could have images echo images or not. What was essential was to
gain a new vantage on old traditions, thereby creating a new tradition in the
process. Now the poet could say what
had not been said before, and may not
have existed before:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
(from "The Hollow Men")

Different Measures,
Different Subjects

Until very recently, all properly edu­
cated people saw the world as based on
a mental model built by Copernicus and
Newton. Newton, for whom God was a
watchmaker, believed the universe ticked
to a fixed regularity. The problem was
only to find it. When laws are discov­
ered, then truth is laid down.

Given such a mind-set, no wonder
that great poets wrote their lines in strict
conformity not only with classical met­
rics but often with a strictly self-imposed
rule defining "good" lines as being all
the same size: five metrical feet, ten
syllables. Alexander Pope follows the
rule, and says it all:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in
night:
God said, Let Newton be! and all was
light.
(from "Epitaph Intended for Sir Isaac Newton")

How we feel determines what we meas­
ure. In return, how we measure deter­
mines what we feel, especially for poets.

In the early 1940s, Robert Lowell's
Pulitzer Prize winning volume Lord
Weary's Castle was written in lines as
traditionally measured, balanced, and
disciplined as those of any Newtonian
traditionalist. The lines are not only a
basic five-foot structure, they are all ten
syllables long:

Whenever winds are moving and the breath
Heaves at the roped-in bulwarks of this pier,
The terns and sea-gulls tremble at your death
In these home waters. Sailor, can you hear
The Pequod's sea wings, beating landward, fall
Headlong and break on our Atlantic wall . . .
(from "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket")

So vast is the energy of Lowell's pre­
cise lines that they remind one of the
immense and driving voice of John Mil­
ton in Paradise Lost. This is, after all, a
poem of deep loss — an elegy — but the

hallmark of Lowell's energy is its meas­
ured control, as if the tightly rhymed
poem were straining against its own
boundaries.

Twelve years later, in Life Studies
(1959), Lowell speaks more directly of
his life (now in a mental hospital) through
an edgy free verse which varies from
three to eleven syllables per line. The
effect is conversational and seemingly
unrehearsed, except for the sudden
stitches of unexpected rhyme which knit
the lines into jagged patterns:

The night attendant, a B.U. sophomore,
rouses from the mare's nest of his drowsy head
propped on The Meaning of Meaning.
He catwalks down our corridor.
Azure day
makes my agonized blue window bleaker.
Crows maunder on the petrified fairway.
Absence! My heart grows tense
as though a harpoon were sparring for the kill.
("This is the house for the mentally ill.")

(from "Waking in the Blue.")
The structure of this poem has measurably changed from the previous one, to express the pressures within it, and within the poet.

Consider, also, the world of Sylvia Plath. Her early poetry in The Colossus has a sardonic ear for melodic cadences. The first stanza of “Morning Song” scans as surely as Shakespeare’s pentameter:

Love set you going like a fat gold watch,
The midwife slapped your footsoles,
and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

What does measurement of Plath’s line tell us? That finally, even after great stress, there is balance in one’s perceptions — a balance as sure as the scientific laws that organized masses of data in Newtonian physics. Given its harsh tone, the structure of this poem’s lines is ironic, precisely because it is controlled by the world’s impersonal order.

In “Metaphors” Plath changes the meter. Each line is nine syllables. The odd number of syllables cuts against one’s expectations. What is so strange about nine syllables? Just that the dominant line of Anglo-American poetry (from Chaucer through Tennyson) cannot consistently be written in nine syllables. Ten, yes. Nine, no.

Like Eliot, Plath found that an uneven number of syllables makes a line strange and unsettling — as if our familiar and predictable cityscapes had suddenly become an underground wilderness, without the regular geometry we all can understand. The lines feel regular, but wrong. In “Metaphors” child-bearing has become spooky and slanted, through its arithmetically odd regularity:

I’m a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This load’s big with its yeasty rising,
Money’s new minted in this fat purse.
I’m a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I’ve eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there’s no getting off.

“Edge,” among Plath’s last poems, uses an almost final (and terrifying) metrical distortion. Again, the subject of the piece is overtly maternal, yet the eerie interplay between voice, image, and line helps transform the scene into a funeral sculpture mythic in its dimensions. We can’t approach the lines of the poem with any readily definable form of measurement. We have crossed from the Newtonian world into a newly twisted place that defies regularity. This new space requires new ways of measuring.

Here, in full, the poem “Edge”:

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty,
She has folded

Then back into her body as petals
Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

These lines were written just days before Plath’s suicide. How do we measure them? How do we count? The point, I’m afraid, is that we don’t know how. Yet, this is no random composition. Beyond our ability (right now) to define it, there’s a deep structure in Plath’s “Edge.”

Again, science echoes poetry. As James Gleick points out in Chaos: Making a New Science, “Clouds are not spheres . . . Mountains are not cones. Lightning does not travel in a straight line. The new geometry mirrors a universe that is rough, not rounded, scabrous, not smooth.” Is this not like much modern poetry? Like many of our most powerful contemporary poems, Chaos Theory makes the claim “Odd shapes carry meaning.”

On a merely arithmetic level, we cannot unpack Plath’s poem like a fractal. Not yet. But we know there is a reinforcing echo — a cry of similarity — between the structure of its surface and what it means deep down.

Many modern American poets, in our dubious and continual present, work with the intensities of Whitman, Eliot, Lowell, and even Plath. Measurement is a way to “get a line on” their work. Get the hefts of the lines they use. Then you can feel and judge for yourself some of the powerful open secrets that fine poems have to tell.

A. McA. Miller, Professor of Literature at New College of USF (Sarasota), is general editor of New College Magazine and is the author of some 100 poems and occasional pieces. Florida consultant for the American Library Association/National Endowment for the Humanities video-based project Voices and Visions, “Mac” Miller is the resource scholar for the Venice Area Public Library pilot (one of twenty-five in the country) of these programs on modern poetry. Professor Miller is also the latest addition to the FEH Speakers Bureau.
**Critics FORUM**

**PBS-TV, November, 1988:** "Geronimo and the Apache Resistance," which covers the basic subject of white-Indian relations, is one of the best documentaries I have seen. Showing how the whites hoped to destroy the very soul of the native, "Geronimo and the Apache Resistance" is a major advance toward understanding the problems which have long been faced by native Americans. It is an interesting, very informative mixture of the stories of a number of Apaches who had personal knowledge of Geronimo and his followers, reinforced by an outstanding collection of still photos and a very effective narrator.

The producers have managed to take verbal accounts of a group of Apaches and string them together in such a way that they make a well organized narrative. This is a very difficult thing to do, but when it is done well, it gives the viewer a sense of realism that is difficult to match. There is some repetition in the wonderful accounts of the Apache storytellers, but this is more than offset by good illustrative material.

This is an excellent film, one which presents the Indian point of view with honesty and accuracy. The white man's view of the native American, while not given great elaboration, is made quite clear. A major merit of the film is that it succeeds in presenting a number of fairly complex ideas in a form that can be understood by the general public while not boring the expert. I cannot think of anything that could be done to improve it.

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**Frank L. Owsley, Jr.**
**Evaluator**

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**Written to the FORUM**

Thank you for providing me with a healthy dose of Florida, via the wonderful back issues of the Forum. I especially liked the cover of the Fall '87 issue, as I collect early Florida postcards, especially tourism scenes, and am writing a Florida postcard book. Sometimes, the messages on the backs are just as much fun as the scenes.

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**Jan Godown**
**Amarawalk, New York**

"A Tea with Zora and Marjorie" was excellent, educational. To think that I might have missed this wonderful performance had I not read about it in the Sarasota Herald Tribune! I have visited Cross Creek. Saw the movie several times. Read her (Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings) books. Honeymooned in St. Augustine. And thoroughly enjoyed this afternoon. Gail and Eunice were wonderful. I must locate more information on the later years of Marjorie's life. And Zora, I can't believe I've never heard of Zora Neal Hurston.

Thank you for coming to Venice.

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**Mrs. Manuel L. Bass**
**Nokomis**

The treatment you gave my discussion of "Our Constitutional Genius — Individual Freedom Under Majority Rule" (Spring/Summer 1988 Forum) is pleasing and gratifying to me. I like the fact that you had the Messrs. Bell, Hatchett, Adley, Patterson and Maidique comment thereon. It added immeasurably to the content and helped emphasize my point.

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**Chesterfield Smith**
**Miami**

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George Beauchamp 1906-1988

A member of the FEH Board since 1985, Dr. Beauchamp blessed FEH with his tireless voice for the essential role of the humanities in the lives of all Floridians.

Dr. Beauchamp stated his credo in “A View from the Board” (Spring/Summer 1988 Forum):

We dedicate ourselves to the expansion of the humanities into every section and community of our state ... to building a better understanding of what the humanities are and what they offer in pleasure and enrichment to every human being.