Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 49
Number 2 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol 49, Number 2*

Article 5

1970

Chateaubriand's Florida and His Journey to America

E. P. Panagopoulos

Part of the American Studies Commons, and the United States History Commons
Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq
University of Central Florida Libraries http://library.ucf.edu

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Panagopoulos, E. P. (1970) "Chateaubriand's Florida and His Journey to America," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 49: No. 2, Article 5.
Available at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol49/iss2/5

CHATEAUBRIAND'S FLORIDA AND HIS JOURNEY TO AMERICA

by E. P. PANAGOPOULOS *

THE AMERICAN WRITINGS of Chateaubriand have nearly been forgotten. Despite the beauty of their poetic prose and the power of their descriptions, historians now consider them obsolete. In 1968 the bicentennial year of his birth was celebrated in other parts of the world with special conferences and impressive publications, but in the United States no periodical commemorated the event, and no paper re-evaluating Chateaubriand's contribution was read in any of the numerous historical meetings. [1] And yet, Chateaubriand was not just another author. During the first half of the nineteenth century his writings played a great part in shaping French, if not European ideas about America. In the Parisian literary salons, eager young intellectuals tried to satisfy their insatiable curiosity about the New World by listening to his exotic tales. Among them was Alexis de Tocqueville, Chateaubriand's distance cousin. [2] And long after Chateaubriand's death in 1848, Europeans who visited this country still carried with them preconceptions and cliches derived from his writings.

America never again quite captivated the imagination of a major European literary figure so much as it did that of Chateaubriand. His important romances are staged in the American wilderness. His *Atala,* the sad and melancholy Indian tale, which played in France the same role that Goethe's *Werther* had played in Germany, was not only staged, but, as Chateaubriand asserted, it was even written "under the Indian tepees." His various discourses on politics, history, peace, war, revolutions, religion, on the great wonders he saw in his long journeys, and even his romantic literary outbursts overflow with

* Mr. Panagopoulos is professor of history, San Jose (California) State College. He is the author of *New Smyrna: An Eighteenth Century Greek Odyssey* (University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1966).

1. A new translation of Chateaubriand's writings, *Travels in America,* by Richard Switzer, was published by the University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, in 1969.
2. George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America* (New York, 1966), 2.

the esthetic experiences resulting from his travels in the United States. No matter where Chateaubriand stood, whether on the Alps or by the Egyptian pyramids, in Greece or in Jerusalem, in England or in France, memories and poetic images from America sprung to the fore to offer him a metaphor, a symbol, a standard of comparison, or a way to illuminate an idea. In this manner, even a belated *in memoriam* commentary on his works related to America, and particularly to Florida, seems appropriate.

Francois Rene Chateaubriand's involvement with America began in the spring of 1791, when he suddenly found himself possessed of an ambitious desire to contribute to the discovery of an American Northwest passage and to explore the Arctic Ocean and the North Pole. He was then twenty-three years old. His humanistic education was the best a young nobleman could receive. His military training was adequate. His correspondence to the emotionalism of the new literary mood, perfect. And his romantic soul was perfectly attuned to this adverturous expression of his creative ego. This was the time when in France, as he stated, "the Revolution was marching in grand pace. The principles on which she was founded were mine [too], but I detested the violence, which had dishonored them. I was happy to go and search for an independence more conformable to my taste, more sympathetic to my character." [3] So he left for the United States, arriving on July 10, 1791; five months later, on December 10, 1791, he left America to return to France.

Reading Chateaubriand's *Voyage en Amerique,* his *Memoires d' Outre-tombe,* and the innumerable references to the New World in his works, one wonders how it was humanly possible for a person to visit so many places and live so many experiences within only five months. From his own assertions, Chateaubriand's itinerary in America looks like this: he landed in Baltimore, visited Philadelphia, went on to New York and Boston, and then returned to New York. Afterwards he was off to Albany, Lake Ontario, and Lake Erie, down to Pittsburgh, and from there along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to the Natchez, Mississippi area. Next he qourneyed into Florida, traveling as

3. This is a free translation from F. R. Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres completes de Chateaubriand,* 12 vols. (Paris, 1827), VI, 45. Hereinafter referred to as *Oeuvres.*

far east as present-day Alachua County and New Smyrna before returning via West Florida to the Mississippi and Natchez. From there, by way of Nashville and Knoxville, he crossed the mountains and travelled as far as Salem, North Carolina. He then turned northwest, crossed the Ohio River, and reached Chillicothe, Ohio. From there he went directly east to Philadelphia, and then to Baltimore where he took ship to Europe.

According to one of his biographers. Andre Maurois, "Chateaubriand spent only five months in America, but what does a great writer need? An incense-breathing night, an Indian encampment, a few teeming and motley visions, the clang and splendor of an exotic vocabulary. Of these he can create a world.[4]" This may be so. But the problem is that the "world" Chateaubriand had created was a historical one. It is true, unlike most of his compatriots, he was more interested in the physical than in the human landscape of America. In dealing with it, however, he did not rest content with descriptions of majestic waterwalls, of the forests' imposing "kingdoms of solitude," of the desert's enchantment, and of the profound sentiments evoked by the virgin American continent. He did something more. He reported in detail on the flora and fauna he encountered, detailed enough to excite readers trained in phytology or zoology, and in several short chapters, he described beavers, bear, deer, buffaloes, wolves, foxes, fish, snakes, and many other animal and fish species. When he finally dealt with the crown of the American wilderness, the "man of nature," as he called the Indian, his elaborate discussions could satisfy any specialist of his time. He described Indian tribal organization, family, social customs, economy, religion, medicine, languages, dances and games, the Indian art of war, and their political organization. Thus, he analyzed the "despotism in the state of nature" of the Natchez; the "limited monarchy in the state of nature" of the Moscogugles; and the "republic in the state of nature" of the Hurons and the Iroquois. In fact, it is difficult to find an aspect of Indian life not treated with scholarly pretensions by Chateaubriand.

According to his account he joined an Indian party and travelled through North Florida as far as Cuscowilla, the Indian

---

4. Andre Maurois, *Chateaubriand: Poet, Statesman, Lover* (New York, 1938), 44.

town near Micanopy and present-day Gainesville. He described Cuscowilla as "a Siminole *[sic.]* village, . . . located on a chain of gravelly hills about half a mile from a lake; the fir-trees, separate from one another and with only their tops touching, divide the village from the lake: through their trunks, as through columns, one can see the huts, the lake, and its rivers on the one side of the forest, and on the other side, the prairies. It is almost like the sea, the plains, and the ruins of Athens that can be seen through the isolated columns of the temple of Olympian Zeus." [5] It was here that he first heard of the Fountain of Youth, although he asked sceptically, "Who wants to live again?" [6] Of Apalachucla *[sic.],* which he visited enroute back to Natchez, he wrote: "It will be difficult to imagine anything more beautiful than the surroundings of Apalachucla *[sic.],* the village of peace." [7]

Florida excited his imagination. He described its natural beauties and noted the "remarkable species of hybiscus," azaleas, magnolias, papayas, and the other flora, from the great cypress trees to the vegetation of the savannas. The large variety of fish and animals impressed him, but nothing fascinated him quite as much as the "crocodiles, floating like trunks of trees." [8] He spoke of them repeatedly, often with the interest of a zoologist. He noted that "the female does not distinguish her own eggs from those of another female; she guards all the egg-nests under the sun. Isn't it something entirely singular to find the communal children of Plato's Republic among the crocodiles?" [9] The heavy Florida rains startled him. He wrote: "the cataracts of the abyss open; the drops of rain are not separated: a curtain of water connects the clouds and the earth." [10]

In Florida he discovered some Indian ruins on a mound by a lake near a grove of magnolia trees. The fragments of broken vases and other utensils scattered here and there, heaped together with fossils, shells, petrified plants, and ossified animals, created in him a strange feeling. "The contrast of these ruins with the youthfulness of nature, these monuments of men in a desert which we believed that we were the first to penetrate,

5. Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres,* VI, 98.
6. Chateaubriand, *Memoires d' Outre-tombe,* 4 vols. (Paris, 1895), I, 441. Hereinafter referred to as *Memoires.*
7. Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres,* VI, 99.
8. *Ibid.,* 94.
9. *Ibid.,* 97.
10. *Ibid.,* 98.

caused a startling impression in the heart and spirit."[11] He found the Indians of Florida different from those of Canada. The men, in Florida, were larger in size, while generally the women were small. According to an Indian legend that Chateaubriand had heard, one could see the most beautiful women in the world in Florida, and this intrepid French traveler met two of these beauteous ladies. He found their elegance striking, and he used them as the prototypes for his Atala and Celuta, the two heroines in his most beautiful romances.[12] Thus, Florida was not just another place among the many he had visited all over the world; it was a unique experience for him that found an expression in most of his important works.

Chateaubriand offered his impressions of America, not as the product of his poetic imagination, but as his own experience. The world he described was one of solid facts, the authenticity of which he strongly defended. However, while he was still alive, some scholars expressed doubts about the accuracy of his descriptions. In 1827, the *American Quarterly Review* supported the argument that Chateaubriand had never visited the Mississippi River, which he had so vividly described. Later, others maintained that he had relied heavily upon literary sources and not upon his own experience in composing his American travel accounts. In 1903, after scholarly research of Chateaubriand's writings, Professor Joseph Bedier made a devastating analysis of the 1791 voyage to America. Gilbert Chinard and other historians were also critical, and it was obvious that Chateaubriand was presenting a provocative case in historiography. The re-evaluation of Chateaubriand's American writings has continued over the years.[13]

---

11. *Ibid.*, 92.
12. Chateaubriand, *Memoires,* I, 442.
13. Joseph Bedier, *Etudes critiques* (Paris, 1903), is an indispensable study for the understanding of Chateaubriand's American writings; Gilbert Chinard, *Notes sur le Voyage de Chateaubriand en Amerique, juillet-decembre, 1791* (Berkeley, 1915); Chinard, *L' exotisme americain dans l' oeuvre de Chateaubriand* (Paris, 1918); Chinard, *Chateaubriand, Francois Rene, Les Natchez, livres I et II: Contribution a l'etudes des sources de Chateaubriand* (Berkeley ,1919); Ernest Dick, *Plagiats de Chateaubriand* (Bern, 1905); Dick, "Quelques Sources Ignorees du Voyage en Amerique," *Revue d' Histoire Litteraire de la France,* XIII (1906), 228-45; Madison Stathers, *Chateaubriand et l' Amerique* (Grenoble, 1905). The more important recent studies include: Manuel de Dieguez, *Chateaubriand, ou le poete face a l' histoire* (Paris, 1963); Richard Switzer, ed., *Chateaubriand: Voyage en Amerique,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1964); Pierre Moreau, *Chateaubriand* (Paris, 1967); August Viatte,

Professor Bedier proved first that Chateaubriand had traveled only as far as Niagara Falls. There is some evidence, however, that he may have gotten to Pittsburgh, but never down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to the Natchez area, Louisiana, and Florida. All of his "impressions" and descriptions of the Old Southwest and Florida were taken from other authors. Bedier also dealt with Chateaubriand's sources. Though many travelers had published books about the West and the South since the end of the seventeenth century, five of these authors are distinctly recognizable in Chateaubriand's work: Francois-Xavier de Charlevoix, [14] William Bartram, [15] Jonathan Carver, [16] Le Page du Pratz, [17] and J. E. Bonnet. [18] In page after page and in parallel columns, where the text of the original author was compared with Chateaubriand's version, Bedier demonstrated the source of his descriptions. [19]

Other scholars suggested additional works that Chateaubriand had utilized liberally. Among them, Ernest Dick, in his doctoral research [20] and in an article, [21] revealed that Chateaubriand's description of the Great Lakes and the Ohio and Mississippi rivers came from a book by J. C. Beltrami, a former Italian judge and traveler, [22] and from one by Sir Alexander MacKenzie. [23] Professor Gilbert Chinard noted that Chateau-

---

"Chateaubriand et ses precurceurs francais d' Amerique," *Etudes Francaises,* IV (1968), 253-61: Armand Hoog, "Du mythe d' hier au reel d' aujourd'hui," *ibid.,* 349-60; Raymond Lebegue, "Realites et resultants du voyage de Chateaubriand en Amerique," *Revue d 'Histoire Litteraire de la France,* LXVIII (novembre-decembre 1968), 905-33; Lebeque, "Chateaubriand, l'historien et l' artiste," *Annales de Bretagne,* LXXV (September 1968); Christian Bazin, *Chateaubriand en Amerique* (Paris, 1969).

14. Especially, Francois-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Journal de Trevous: Histoire et description generale de la Nouvelle France, avec le journal historique d' un voyage fait par order du roi dans l' Amerique septentrionale,* 3 vols. (Paris, 1744).
15. William Bartram, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country* (Philadelphia, 1791).
16. Jonathan Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (London, 1778).
17. Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (Paris, 1758).
18. J. E. Bonnet, *Les Etats-Unis d' Amerique a la fin du XVIIe siecle,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1795).
19. Bedier, *Etudes critiques,* 199-287.
20. Dick, *Plagiats de Chateaubriand,* 1-53.
21. Dick, "Quelques Sources Ignorees du Voyage en Amerique," 228-45.
22. J. C. Beltrami, *La decouverte de la source du Mississippi et de la Riviere Sanglante* (New Orleans, 1824).
23. Alexander MacKenzie, *History of the Fur Trade* (London, 1801).

briand had relied heavily upon Baron de Lafontan's works, [24] and had "borrowed" large parts of Pere Lafitau's study of the American Indians. [25]

Chateaubriand, in both the *Voyage en Amerique* and in the *Memoires d' Outre-tombe,* made general references to most of these writers and to many others as well. In the case of William Bartram for instance, he stated: "Immediately after the description of Louisiana, some extracts from Bartram's voyages are included, which I have translated with a great deal of care. With these extracts are inter-mixed my rectifications, my observations, my reflections, my additions, my own descriptions . . . . But, the whole [outcome] of my work is entangled in such a way that it is almost impossible to either separate or recognize what is mine from what is Bartram's. I leave then this section the way it is, under the title 'Description of certain sites in the interior of the Floridas.' " [26] But the critical reader finds these references inadequate; the impression that Chateaubriand offered a picture of America as he himself experienced it is very disturbing.

A trained historian today might describe Chateaubriand as a plagiarist. One might even question the Frenchman's scholarly ethics. One of the most charming passages in the *Memoirs* describes Crateaubriand's meeting with George Washington. Carrying a letter of introduction from the Marquis de la Rouerie, who had fought under Washington in the Revolution, as soon as he arrived in Philadelphia, Chateaubriand went to visit the President. He learned that Washington was away, but Chateaubriand wrote that he stayed on in Philadelphia until the President returned, and this is how he described their meeting:

> When I went to carry my letter of recommendation to him, I found once more the simplicity of the ancient Roman.
>
> A small house, resembling the neighboring houses, was the palace of the President of the United States: no sentries, no footmen even. I knocked, and a young maid-servant opened

24. Baron de Lahontan, *Nouveaux voyages de M. le baron de Lahontan dans l' Amerique septentrionale,* 2 vols. (La Haye, 1703); de Lahontan, *Dialogues curieux entre l' auteur et un sauvage de bon sens qui a voyage* (La Haye, 1703).
25. Pere Lafitau, *Moeurs de sauvages ameriquains, comparees aux moeurs des anciens temps,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1724). Chinard discusses this matter in *Chateaubriand, Francois Rene', Les Natchez, livres I et II,* 51-54.
26. Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres,* VI, 91.

> the door. I asked if the general was at home; she replied that he was in. I said I had a letter for him. The servant asked my name, which is difficult to pronounce in English and which she could not remember. She then said softly, "walk in, Sir," and led the way down one of those narrow passages which serve as an entrance-hall to English houses; she showed me into a parlour where she asked me to wait until the general came . . . . After a few minutes, the general entered the room: tall in stature, of a calm and cold rather than noble bearing, he resembles his engraved portraits. I handed him my letter in silence; he opened it and glanced at the signature which he read aloud exclaiming: "Colonel Armand!" This was the name by which he knew the Marquis de la Rouerie and by which the latter had signed himself.
>
> We sat down. I explained to him as best as I could the object of my journey. He replied in monosyllables in English and French, and listened to me with a sort of astonishment. I remarked this and said to him, with some little animation:
>
> "But it is less difficult to discover the Northwest Passage, than to create a people, as you have done."
>
> "Well, well, young man!" he explained, giving me his hand. He invited me to dinner for the next day, and we parted. I took great care to keep the appointment. We were only five or six guests at table . . . . I left my host at ten o'clock in the evening, and never saw him again . . . . Such was my meeting with the citizen soldier, the liberator of a world . . . my name perhaps did not linger one whole day in his memory: well for me, nevertheless, that his looks fell upon me! I felt warmed by them, for the rest of my life: there is virtue in a great man's looks. [27]

To the impressions left on Europeans by Franklin and Jefferson, and to the other accounts about early American leaders, now was added Chateaubriand's description of Washington. It dealt with unimportant incidents, but it was so forceful a description that it strengthened Europe's image of Washington as an outstanding man of classical simplicity and republican ethos. All well and good, but there is one disturbing element; it now is certain that Chateaubriand never met George Washington at all. Scholars who have studied this incident all agree that during the whole period of Chateaubriand's stay in Philadelphia,

27. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, transl., *The Memoirs of Francois Rene Vicomte de Chateaubriand, Sometime Ambassador to England,* 6 vols. (London, 1902), I, 210.

Washington was absent from the city. [28] There is among the Washington Papers in the Library of Congress the letter of Marquis de la Rouerie to the President. [29] But there is another letter written by Washington on September 5, 1791, to la Rouerie, noting that Chateaubriand had perhaps deposited the letter at his residence but had departed the following day for Niagara. "I did not see him," Washington wrote. [30]

Added to these suspicious circumstances, there are several misleading inaccuracies scattered in Chateaubriand's works, which, though not on important subjects, are still disturbing. For instance, in his *Memoires d' Outre-tombe,* Chateaubriand describes Florida, which he had visited, according to his account, and he mentions the New Smyrna colony: "After the Morean insurrection in 1770, some Greek families took refuge in Florida; they could still believe themselves in that Ionian climate which seems to have relented, together with men's passions: at [New] Smyrna, in the evening, nature sleeps like a courtesan wearied with love." [31] Later, in his *Itineraire de Paris a Jerusalem,* he describes Megara, a town in Greece, where he noted a variety of chicken he had seen before in America, but which his host thought a native of his own locality. Chateaubriand thought to enlighten him:

> I told him that I had travelled in the country of these birds, a far away country, located beyond the sea, and that there were in that country Greeks established in the middle of the woods among the savages. In fact, certain Greeks, tired of oppression went over to Florida where the fruits of liberty made them forget the memories of the native land "the ones who had tasted that sweet fruit could not any more renounce it, but they wanted to live among the lotus-eaters and they forgot their country." [32]

---

28. Bedier, *Etudes critiques,* 178-84, points out it was impossible for the two men to have met during those days; M. Martino, "A propos du Voyage en Amerique de Chateaubriand," *Revue d' Histoire Litteraire L'exotism americain de la France,* XVI (1909), 467; Chinard, *L'exotism americain dans l'oeuvre de Chateaubriand,* 45-48.
29. Emma Kate Armstrong, "Chateaubriand's America," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,* XXII (1907), 345-70.
30. Bazin, *Chateaubriand en Amerique,* 75; Lebegue, "Realitiees et resultats du voyage de Chateaubriand en Amerique," 906.
31. de Mattos, *The Memoirs of Francois Rene Vicomte de Chateaubriand, Sometime Ambassador to England,* I, 243.
32. "Itineraire de Paris A Jerusalem," in Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres,* V, 172-73. The quotation in Chateaubriand's free translation is from Homer's *Odyssey,* IX.

In reality a little more than 400 Greeks had indeed left for Florida in 1768, not *after,* but two years *before* the insurrection. They constituted a large segment of the New Smyrna colony (1768-1777), located some seventy miles south of St. Augustine. By 1791, when Chateaubriand was supposedly in Florida, New Smyrna, after a dramatic and short life, was completely deserted. Of the original number, only a few Greeks survived, and these, in 1777, had established themselves not in the wilderness "among the savages," but in St. Augustine. In 1783, when Florida was retroceded to Spain by the Treaty of Paris, the names of these Greeks were known. [33] Moreover, Father Thomas Hassett, as well as the official Spanish censuses kept after 1783, listed the names and noted the status of these Greeks. In 1791, when Chateaubriand had allegedly visited Florida and this area, the Greeks in St. Augustine owned homes, schooners, shops, and in some cases, slaves. [34]

Similar misrepresentation of facts can justify a critical attitude toward Chateaubriand. However, this is not the way to approach his American writings. The contemporary historian who would like to appreciate the Frenchman's works should be differently "tuned." The fast reading techniques that enable him to devour volumes of historical material should be forgotten. Chateaubriand's reading requires time. His writing is a great art. The musical quality of the word, its semantic value, its "weight," and more than everything else, the word's "color" are for Chateaubriand very important matters. The descriptions of places, situations, and human beings have a "painterly" quality through which Chateaubriand creates the mood he desires to convey. [35] Here again, the historian must be alert and be aware of Chateaubriand's romantic subjectivity, which works against accuracy. Sainte-Beauve, who had studied Chateaubriand's writings very closely noted that as early as 1800, there was already the opinion that "Chateaubriand paints the objects the

33. Governor Vicente Manual de Zespedes to Conte de Galvez, St. Augustine, July 16, 1784, Archivo General de Indias, Audencia de Santo Domingo. *legajo* 2660, 1-10.
34. "Census Returns, 1784-1814," *East Florida Papers,* bundle No. 323-A, Library of Congress manuscripts division; microfilm roll 55-A (reel 148), P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville. For details, see E. P. Panagopoulos, *New Smyrna, An Eighteenth Century Greek Odyssey* (Gainesville, 1966).
35. Thomas Capell Walker, *Chateaubriand's Natural Scenery: A Study of His Descriptive Art* (Baltimore, 1946); Chinard, *L' Exotisme americain*

way he sees them, and he sees them the way he wants to see them. Certainly this should be attributed to the magic of the talent." [36]

On this point one should take Chateaubriand as a distinct case. He had a passionate love for history, and he wrote voluminous studies on historical subjects. But his romantic disposition and his sensitivity to esthetic values made dull for him a mere re-creation of the reality. He found it more exciting to create this reality. "I have made the History, and I can write it," he said. [37] He had a similar approach to geography; if a certain scenery fit in another location better, he did not hesitate to transplant it and to compose his own landscape. Professor Lebegue reminds us of such an incident. Chateaubriand had been profoundly impressed by Bartram's description of the St. Johns River, with its little floating islands inhabited by alligators, snakes, frogs, and blackbirds. But Florida's St. Johns River was not renowned enough for Chateaubriand, and so he transferred the "little floating islands" some 1,000 miles westward, placed them in the lower part of the majestic Mississippi, and there he created the exotic mood he pursued. The frogs and the blackbirds, which were too common he thought for French readers, were eliminated and were replaced with flamingoes and herons; and the beastly alligators were substituted by gentle young crocodiles that resembled large lizards. And then Chateaubriand described the scene: "The green serpents, the blue herons, the pink flamingoes, and the young crocodiles all embark as passengers on these flowery vessels, and the colony unfurls its sails to the wind to be lulled asleep in some secluded antre of the river." [38]

Naturally, one can always ask: "But is this a 'reality'?" And this author is almost certain that Chateaubriand would have argued eloquently, like so many philosophers and artists, starting with the question: "Just what is historical reality, and how much do we know about it?" He would then affirm that his historical works, such as his *Essai sur les Revolutions* etc., were

---

dans l' oeuvre de Chateaubriand; Pius Servien, *Lyrisme et Structures Sonores* (Paris 1930); H. Lecene, ed., *Les Peintres de la nature* in *J. J. Rousseau, Bernandin de Saint Pierre, Chateaubriand* (Paris, 1886); Jean Pierre Richard, *Paysage de Chateaubriand* (Paris, 1967).

36. C. A. Saint-Beauve, *Chateaubriand et son groupe litteraire, cours professe a Liege en 1848-1849* (Paris, 1850), 168.
37. de Dieguez, "*Chateaubriand, ou le poete face a l' historie,* 71.
38. Lebegue, "Chateaubriand, l'historien et l' artiste," 463.

not fiction, like his *Atala* and *Rene,* but were history, based on an exhaustive research and knowledge of the revealed past. Perhaps he would also state that for himself, his kind of history, tuned on a subjective key, was more sincere and bolder than the history of so many others who claim exactitude and objectivity, and who in reality express a very subjective point of view. This might have been the resume of his defense. As far as his geography is concerned, Professor Hoog has already remarked that this is an "esoteric geography" and in accord with his nostalgic mood. [39]

On the problem of historical fidelity and exactitude, a careful and "objective" study of his historical works paradoxically reveals that they contain no more inaccuracies than many of the historical works of his contemporaries. In connection with Florida, students of its history know only too well that almost all historical accounts, from William Stork's in the eighteenth century to John Lee Williams' in the early nineteenth, abound in inaccuracies and false descriptions. If William Bartram and William Gerald de Brahm are reliable, it is perhaps because the former was a dedicated botanist and the latter a well trained cartographer. Moreover, with wisdom, both men tended to leave history out of their accounts, at least as much as it was possible.

Then, in relation to what is termed plagiarism by our contemporary standards, one must place it in the framework of Chateaubriand's contemporary mentality. The eighteenth century concept of the intellectual contribution to a pyramidal accumulation of knowledge, made it possible for authors to offer general references or no references at all to previous works, as long as they were confident that they were adding their own small contribution to this pyramid. The author felt a certain detachment from his work which had been superimposed on the general edifice of knowledge. To contribute a list of names and works in order to justify something that had been already accepted was a mere display of erudition. It was as if one were to state that the sum of the three angles of any triangle is equal to two right angles and to give Pythagoras as a reference. On the other hand, the treatment of the background material was differently molded in the hands of Chateaubriand. There is a great differ-

39. Hoog, "Du mythe d'hier au reel d' aujourd' hui," 353.

ence between William Bartram's botanical descriptions and Chateaubriand's poetic description of the same object. To accuse Chateaubriand of plagiarism is almost the same as if one were to impute plagiarism to Virgil, whose *Aeneid* follows the Homeric pattern; or Shakespeare who re-wrote an older play and created from it his *Hamlet;* or Goethe, who used Marlow's *Dr. Faustus* and the *Faust-Book* and created his own *Faust.* With these writers, as with Chateaubriand, whatever the foundation, the outcome is a new creation, fresh and majestic like its author.

To the "practical" question of the importance of Chateaubriand's American writings for the contemporary historian, the answer is that alongside the wealth of sources on the early national period of the United States they do not offer important information. The historian, however, will be surprised to find an unexpected interest in Chateaubriand's analysis of the American and Florida scene, and he will then understand why these writings created such an impact and developed cliches that were frequently repeated by the Europeans of that time. His survey, for instance, of the American contrarieties and his prophetic statements about the coming tragedy of the 1860s; [40] the clarification of the spectacular diversity of the country, an opinion expressed amid naive European generalizations and oversimplifications about America; [41] his incisive observations on the socio-economic structure of the United States, with which he at least influenced his young cousin, Alexis de Tocqueville; and his analysis of the country's literary and intellectual life, [42] all reveal a remarkable historical insight.

Thus, Chateaubriand's American writings are of particular interest to those who study the manner in which European opinions about America were shaped during the first half of the nineteenth century, and even later. No matter, however, what other "practical" use one might find in them, it seems that it is appropriate for the workers of our craft to pay some attention to the writings of a renowned author "who wrote extensively about this country and wrote *con amore.*"

40. Chateaubriand, *Memoires,* I, 225.
41. *Ibid.,* 256.
42. *Ibid.,* 250-51.