

Great Books/Tampa Bay Concludes Successful “Cuba” Conference

Watch for Next Tampa Bay Event Coming Soon!

An enthusiastic crowd of nearly forty booklovers, friends, and spouses gathered in St. Petersburg, FL, on the last weekend of January for the 11th Annual Tampa Bay Great Books Annual Conference, exploring a subject of enormous and immediate interest to any student of literature or public affairs (and especially to Floridians) — **“Cuba: Looking at the Island Through History, Memoir, and Fiction.”**

As guests arrived from Toronto, Houston, and cities throughout South Florida, some early arrivals took advantage of the opportunity to experience the Dali Museum, just a short walk from our headquarters hotel, with Tampa GB Council Vice-President **Ann Ottaviano** (a highly-respected Dali Museum Docent) leading our group through the interpretation of seminal works (and masterworks) on display, including “The Ecumenical Council” (seen at right), Dali’s tribute to Pope John XXIII.



On Friday evening, January 29th, the Conference agenda opened with a buffet of Cuban cuisine and a fact-filled yet poignant keynote presentation by **Annie Betancourt**, the first Cuban-born woman to be elected to the Florida Legislature. Annie has worked with the Florida League of Women Voters to develop greater understanding between women in Cuba and South Florida, and was one of a handful of notables invited to attend both the re-opening of the American Embassy in Havana and the re-opening of the Cuban Embassy in Washington last year. **Annie**, pictured at left between Tampa Bay Great Books President **Sara Cohen** and Secretary/Chief Moderator **Patrick DeMarco**, provided a perfect foundation for the weekend’s discussions ahead.

On Saturday and Sunday, participants gathered in breakout groups to consider the texts, beginning with “Cuba in the American Imagination” (Louis Perez) and “Waiting for Snow in Havana” (Carlos Eire), and concluding Sunday morning with Christina Garcia’s novel, “Dreaming in Cuban.” The selection of reading material compelled our participants to contemplate a broad range of objective and subjective viewpoints, as well as factual assertions contrasting with visceral emotions. Suffice it to say that no one left the conference unmoved or unchanged by what they read or by the observations of others participating in the “Shared Inquiry.”

At right, Cristina Garcia’s multi-generational novel, “Dreaming in Cuban,” provided the content for the final set of discussions on Sunday morning, January 31st. TBGBC President Sara Cohen (lower left) led one of three breakout sessions that included (clockwise, from left) **Mario Sparagana, Brenda Tipps, Barbara Brown, Alice Levine, Janice Perelman, Margaret Hoffman**, and (partially hidden) **Joel Fyvolent, Anne Strozier, Judy Patterson, and Joyce Simard**.



The Conference came to a close with a prize raffle featuring gifts (some handmade) contributed by Tampa Bay Great Books Council members, as well as impressive fruit baskets provided through the continuing generous support of Publix Supermarkets.



Below at left, **Ann Kirkland** (known to many Great Books aficionados as the force behind the popular Classical Pursuits literary travel programs) celebrates a lucky draw as **Cath Mason** presents her with a hand made scarf ideal for the return to chilly Toronto after a weekend with temperatures nudging 70 in St. Petersburg!

More news and more pictures are on the way, plus details on the Tampa Bay Great Books Drama Conference, in just a few weeks! To stay informed, check in often at www.tampagreatbooks.com