

---

# American Inheritances: Crumbling Patriarchies in “Southern” Narratives

*Kristin L. Squint*  
*Louisiana State University*

**I**n the introduction to *Hemispheric American Studies*, Caroline Levander and Robert Levine describe the Americas as “intricately intertwined geographies, movements, and cross-filiations among peoples, regions, diasporas, and nations” (3). These multifaceted relationships offer numerous opportunities for comparative cultural analysis, and in U.S. literary studies, scholars have begun to explore the Southeast for transnational connections to various literatures of the Americas. Southern literature has long differentiated itself from mainstream U.S. literature in which the national identity has been defined “by a rich, imperial, white Northeast” (Smith and Cohn 1). Part of this identity has been formed from a story that has been told about the United States: that it was a geographical and social *tabula rasa* until Puritanical hard work cleared the wilderness and a society evolved, underpinned with Enlightenment ideology, in particular with the belief in the equality of humankind. This story has been criticized from both the inside and the outside of the U.S. for its omission of alternate histories. Carlos Fuentes claims that there is “a Pollyanna mentality at the very foundation of the U.S.” (52), and Toni Morrison suggests that, in the U.S., the past is either viewed through an idealistic lens or missing altogether (Zamora 207). Deborah Cohn argues that the U.S. South, “because of the stigma and ostracism that it experienced during Reconstruction, has [...] been unable to escape from the burden of its past, and consequently, has been excluded from the national discourses of innocence and progress, as well as from its future-oriented mentality” (136). The historical division between the U.S. North and South was primarily socioeconomic, encapsulated in Southern planter’s society. What divided the South from the North is also what ties it to other regions of the Americas: the plantation as central to “New World” socioeconomic functions is “repeated” (to borrow from Benítez-Rojo) throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, and the U.S. South.<sup>1</sup> George Handley describes contemporary writers who wrestle with the repercussions of this exploitative system as having “parallels

with one another across languages and national borders [that] become the principal means of producing postslavery, and ultimately postnational, meanings” (15). Narrowing this transnational focus, Cohn contends that the U.S. South and Latin America, despite their historical, political and cultural disjunctions, “can be said to share a history—of dispossession, of socioeconomic hardship, of political and cultural conflict, and of export of resources to support the development of a ‘North’” (5). This shared history is too painful to be imagined away; hence, writers of both regions draw from these legacies in order to reconcile themselves with the present.

Generational family novels are common in literatures of the U.S. South and South America, according to Cohn, often exhibiting themes such as shifts away from agrarian economies, urbanization, dissolution of patriarchies, issues of prejudice and violence which often lead to or are a result of racial tensions, and problematic sexual issues such as miscegenation and incest (7). William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, and Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* are novels which not only reflect many of the aforementioned themes but also cycle around questions of inheritance. Though each text critiques the patriarchal structures represented, Faulkner and Rulfo achieve this through modernist aesthetic techniques, whereas Morrison and Allende utilize postmodernist aesthetic tools. David Harvey claims that the concept “that all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate is essential to the pluralistic stance of postmodernism” (48). This pluralistic view is the primary difference between the modernist and postmodernist texts examined here: authoritarian patriarchies and oppressive histories paralyze characters in *Go Down, Moses* and *Pedro Páramo*, yet in *Song of Solomon* and *The House of the Spirits*, female characters resist patriarchal systems, creating possibilities for transformation and growth beyond painful pasts.

Modernist William Faulkner is the U.S. Southern author most credited for influencing Latin American literature of the twentieth century. Indeed, many studies have traced his influence on writers including Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Juan Rulfo, and Mario Vargas Llosa (Cohn 10). Smith and Cohn argue that characters such as Faulkner’s recurring figure, Quentin Compson, who are “unable to extricate themselves from a personal past that is in some way bound up with their region’s history, [and] embody the theme of historical paralysis, left a tremendous genetic impact on the development of Latin American narrative from the 1940s on” (305). This relationship between past and present, particularly the question of linear time, is a familiar theme of modernist writers. History and time pervade not only in the themes of these authors’ works but also in their writing styles. Political philosopher

Jürgen Habermas claims that “[a]esthetic modernity is characterized by attitudes which find a common focus in a changed consciousness of time” (1750). Faulkner’s use of modernist narrative techniques including stream of consciousness and other non-linear representations of time has been particularly appealing to Latin American writers seeking to stretch beyond the boundaries of realism (Cohn 51). Richard Moreland argues that Faulkner’s use of modernist aesthetics represents the alienation of the South as a result of the Civil War in the same way that the use of modernist techniques by other writers such as T.S. Eliot illustrates the isolation of Western culture after the destruction of World War I (23). Alienation of a culture from its own history, a form of societal rupture, can lead to ideological shifts; according to Phillip Weinstein, Faulkner’s modernist aesthetic represents how Western patriarchy, which had been a functioning paradigm in realist texts, becomes dysfunctional within modernism (355). More dramatically, Faulkner’s fictions demonstrate that “Western patriarchy—its sanctioned designs for white males moving through space and time—begets not fulfillment but, in a culture filled with others who are both disowned and one’s own, disaster” (374).

Both *Go Down, Moses* and *Pedro Páramo* use modernist aesthetics to represent the historical crises of the U.S. Civil War and the Mexican Revolution; these conflicts lead to the dissolution of patriarchal structures in the texts. *Go Down, Moses* seems more like a grouping of stories connected by geography and personages rather than a novel and was incorrectly titled in its original publication as a result (Wagner-Martin 2). Yet Faulkner insisted on the unity of the work despite its seeming lack of cohesiveness (Harris 634). Paul A. Harris calls the “gradual accretion of layers of time, events, and significance in the work its *textual memory* [since] its seminal moments echo and resonate with other elements in the book” (635). One of Faulkner’s modernist aesthetic tactics is to condense time into weighted images suggestive of the thematic whole, in this case, disruption of patriarchal orders.

For white U.S. Southerners in the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction South, the plantation symbolized a glorified past that stood in stark contrast to the economic hardships of the era. Plantations and their disillusioned occupants persist throughout the body of Faulkner’s work. The patriarchal legacy of Lucias Quintus Carothers McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses*, is miscegenation and incest which haunts his descendants beyond the Civil War and into the twentieth century; he impregnates two of his slaves, the second of which is Tomasina (Tomy), his own daughter, leading to the suicide of the first, her mother, Eunice (Faulkner 256-258). Valérie Loichot describes how incest complicates lineage, “[representing] a transmission that returns to its point of origin, in a self-enclosed circle, an antigenealogy” (34). None of McCaslin’s descendants, neither white nor black, are able to reconcile with

their traumatic family history in the post-Civil War South. McCaslin leaves a twisted inheritance within the capitalistic exchange mechanism of slavery when he attempts to ameliorate the pain he causes by bequeathing his son and slave, Turl, a thousand dollars to be received upon reaching adulthood.

Through the patrilineal system, Isaac (Ike) McCaslin should receive his grandfather's land and properties, but at sixteen he reads the ledgers that detail his family's financial history, including information about the purchase and sale of slaves and the suicides of Tomy and Eunice (251). When he turns twenty-one, he repudiates his material inheritance because it is the only way he can disentangle himself from a violent and incestuous history (244). This scene represents the larger division of families across moral borders as a result of the U.S. Civil War, and is one of the novel's metaphorically weighted moments. Ike's decision to refuse his inheritance, and therefore patriarchy, also reflects the influence of his childhood relationship with Sam Fathers, the son of a Chickasaw<sup>2</sup> chief and a slave woman—therefore an outsider to white Southern patriarchy—who initiates Ike into the mysteries of the natural world (165). Ike's inheritance goes to Carothers (Cass) Edmonds, son of McCaslin's daughter, a further disruption of the patriarchal system. Withdrawing from the burden of his family history does not actually free Ike from responsibility. At the end of his life, he is condemned by a young black woman who is both the mother of his great-great-nephew, the child of Carothers "Roth" Edmonds, and his third cousin (345). Roth has repeated the amorality of his great-great-grandfather, by having an incestuous relationship and then by offering money, instead of commitment, to his lover. The young woman implicates Ike in her predicament when she argues that Roth had been morally ruined by Ike's forfeiture of his inheritance, an abandonment of patriarchy: "[Y]ou gave to his grandfather that land which didn't belong to him, not even half of it by will or even law" (345). Her criticism might seem ironic since African American women are marginalized by both gender and race under white patriarchy; however, her argument proves how Ike's resistance, though disruptive of the hegemonic system, effects no real change. Her impact on Ike reveals his own investment in the racist ideology that bolsters white patriarchy since he cannot accept his family's past or present interracial relationships. Duane Guage claims, "Young Ike rejects his family inheritance and attempts to live the type of existence he had learned in the woods, but he cannot because he is oppressed by a heritage of moral guilt; he cannot lose his race prejudice. The natural philosophy of Sam, the primitive, is unattainable to the guilt-ridden white Southerner" (31).

Lucas Beauchamp, on the other hand, demands his inheritance, the thousand dollar legacy left unclaimed by his father, Turl (Faulkner 106). John T. Matthews suggests that Lucas's various financial schemes, including

his negotiations with Roth Edmonds and his treasure hunting, are his way of seeking restitution for the inequities of slavery (32). In addition to his financial acumen, Lucas accepts his white grandfather's lineage when he fights Cass Edmonds for his wife. Lucas nearly kills Cass, and, satisfied with his performance in the conflict, thinks, "So I reckon I aint got old Carothers' blood for nothing, after all [...] I needed him and he come and spoke for me" (Faulkner 57). Despite the empowerment of financial independence and a strong family identity, Lucas still lives in a segregated and racially-tense rural Mississippi society. When the novel ends with the execution of Lucas and Mollie's grandson, Samuel Beauchamp, Mollie tells Gavin Stevens, a Jefferson attorney, that Roth Edmonds "sold [her grandson] to Pharaoh" (364). This allusion indicts the McCaslins in their role as former slaveholders and the continuing impact it has on all of their shared community.

Stanley Tick claims that it is only through a character such as Gavin Stevens whose authority role as a forward-thinking, educated Southern white man, unconnected to a slaveholding history, that the past can be reconciled in any kind of positive way in the still-segregated (1940s) South (71). Stevens's gesture of paying for Beauchamp's funeral and its associated expenses, and compassionately withholding the truth about the young man's death from his grandmother suggests a vast shift in white notions of racial equality, especially when compared with the novel's introductory chapter in which Buck and Buddy McCaslin go on a hunt for their half-brother and slave, Turl, as if he were a wily animal. Like the scene of Ike's repudiation, Stevens's gesture is a metaphor of the novel's larger concern with the question of compensation to McCaslin's black descendants for the pain inflicted by the patriarch on Eunice and Tomasina.

Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* also uses modernist aesthetics to represent a historical crisis. Here it is the Mexican Revolution, which leads to the dissolution of another patriarchal structure. As in *Go Down Moses*, Rulfo depicts time non-linearly: Juan Preciado learns the story of Comala through multiple ghostly voices and ultimately becomes a part of their world, a place of eternal memory with no hope of movement from a paralyzing past. Thomas Lyon describes the effect of this narrative technique: "a novelistic world is created where no time passes, or even exists, an eternal, formless span with no visible temporal markers" (447). Unlike Faulkner's condensation of time, Rulfo's text conflates memory with dream to achieve atemporality. As Jason Wilson explains, "All the empirical laws of life and death, and time with its breakdown into present, past, and future are discarded, as in dreams where the living and the dead haunt the dreamer with equal realities, and time loses its forward-arrow momentum" (239).

Like *Go Down, Moses*, *Pedro Paramo* highlights the shift from an agrarian society and the breakdown of social structures (plantation/hacienda) that accompany such a society. As Faulkner's work examines the dissolution of a patriarchal plantation system as a result of the Civil War in the U.S. South, *Pedro Páramo* takes place in the years surrounding the Mexican Revolution, another crisis that results in vast societal rupture. Wendy Faris discusses how the past weighs heavily in both U.S. Southern and Mexican literatures:

In the South this past concerns the gentility of the Old South, the courage of Confederate heroes, and the legacy of slavery; in contemporary Mexico the past time-frame is doubled, as it were: the present looks back both on the glory of the Aztec empire with its subsequent destruction and also on the much more dubious glory and subsequent betrayal of the ideals of the revolution, a second chance for a new beginning not yet fully realized. ("Southern Economies" 335)

The seeming temporal paralysis in *Pedro Páramo* underscores the inability of the revolution to achieve its ideals; this aesthetic approach is similar to the weighted imagery of Faulkner's novel that suggests the impossibility of movement from a history of oppressive plantation patriarchy.

Both novels also ask questions about inheritance and parental responsibility. One of the narrators of *Pedro Páramo*, Juan Preciado, shares qualities with Ike McCaslin and Lucas Beauchamp. He is the legitimate son of Pedro Páramo, but he has been disinherited as a result of his father's refusal to honor his obligations to the woman he married, Dolores Preciado (Rulfo 19). Dolores has requested that Juan return to Comala to find his father and "*Make him pay [...] for all those years he put us out of his mind*" (19). For Dolores, Comala is lush and picturesque, but when Juan arrives, he finds an infernally hot, abandoned town (4). Such a discrepancy is a common feature in Latin American literature and is analogous to the gap between U.S. Southern nostalgia and reality (Cohn 20). Zamora argues that Dolores's mother's vision of a life-giving Comala can be read as a metaphor of the Mexican Revolution because both are a "failed utopian dream" (Zamora 117). Similarly, Wilson asserts that the novel was written

at a time when the official version of the unique Mexican Revolution had turned into stereotype and lie [...] That there had been a revolution, that its praiseworthy 1917 constitution had been put into practice, and that the people were better off than under the earlier despot Porfirio Díaz, who had enriched his country at the expense of the peasants and indigenous people. (235)

Like the Revolution, Juan's journey will not be a return to Paradise; instead, he will hear his father's story from a town full of ghosts and will be in the grave himself before the novel's end.

Paralleling Carothers McCaslin's abuse of his female slaves, Pedro Páramo treats women as if they were commercial goods at best or completely disregards them. Cohn asserts that in Spanish America, "Women's roles are narrowly defined [...] their main function is to produce legitimate male heirs" (123). He marries Dolores Preciado for her wealth, in order to pay back the loans his father incurred (36), and when a woman accuses Miguel Páramo of killing her husband, his father's representative offers her corn as compensation (65). Pedro Páramo produces so many illegitimate children that the priest is ashamed not to have spoken to him of the matter (69); furthermore, Páramo's servant, Damiana Cisneros, describes the patrón's habit of entering the rooms of the young women of the hacienda in the middle of the night as well as her own complicity in finding him sexual partners (105). Pedro Páramo's exploitation of patriarchal power in order to fulfill his seemingly insatiable sexual desire demonstrates a heinous corruption of the system.

Miguel is the only heir that Pedro Páramo claims, and it is he who "fully realizes his paternal legacy. He, too, alters the law and subverts traditional codes of conduct to accommodate his transgressions" (Cohn 152). Miguel inherits his father's disregard for the lives of others through his active participation in rape and murder, receiving distanced approval for his actions by a father who fully accepts responsibility for his son's crimes (Rulfo 64). Dorotea also enables Miguel and confesses to finding girls for his sexual escapades, even creating opportunities for him to rape the unsuspecting ones (74). Both Damiana and Dorotea are complicit in acts of sexual violence, suggesting the inability of the hacienda's female community to resist patriarchal power. Those who do resist are absent in some way: Dolores Preciado, Pedro Páramo's first wife, seeks revenge, having been discarded by her husband, and Susanna San Juan, Páramo's second wife, ignores his love, suffering from psychological and emotional disorders.

Unlike the McCaslin heirs of *Go Down, Moses*, Juan Preciado has no material legacy and no distant relatives against which to struggle. The town of Comala is dead in every possible way. Pedro Páramo, in mourning for the loss of Susana San Juan, simply gives up. The patriarch's refusal to act condemns the entire society. When Páramo stops planting the fields, the unemployed fieldworkers are forced to desert the town seeking work, and some of them join the revolutionary forces that skirmish in the countryside (80-81). Upon Juan's return to the village, he encounters the ghosts of the town's past, and it is through his conversations with them that he inherits his father's only legacy, his story. For Juan Preciado, as it is for the McCaslin

heirs, the oppression of a patriarchal order results in the dissolution of a family unable to reconcile with its past. Juan Preciado cannot act in the face of Comala's death at the hands of Pedro Páramo; in fact, he claims he "drowned" (58) and is buried by and along with the other ghosts of the town nearly halfway through the narrative. Now a part of the community of the dead, Juan continues to engage them in conversation, sinking more deeply into the grave of his inheritance. Juan Preciado witnesses the crumbling of patriarchy but, like Ike McCaslin, is paralyzed by forces outside of himself. Juan's death is another example of a failed, idealistic dream since his mother's desire for revenge against the brutal patriarch—a desire shared by much of the community—dies with him.

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* also display how societal and cultural ruptures impact oppressive, patriarchal legacies; however, unlike *Go Down, Moses* and *Pedro Páramo*, these novels do not result in familial dissolution due to an inability to reconcile past and present. Instead, both Morrison's and Allende's novels focus on female-centered ideologies that offer solutions for familial unification through an acceptance of painful histories; such solutions become possible as a result of the novels' postmodern aesthetics. In Harvey's examination of the relationship between modernity and postmodernity, he locates a number of points at which the postmodern can be differentiated from the modern. Two of these breaks are particularly applicable to Morrison's and Allende's texts: Harvey argues that postmodernism embraces the ephemerality and fragmentation of modernity, rather than counteract it in some way (44), and that postmodernism develops "an incredible ability to plunder history and absorb whatever it finds there as some aspect of the present" (54). Such elements are demonstrated by these novels' shared theme of recuperating a past in order to find alternatives to the continuation of patriarchal systems.

How does one justify the inclusion of the work of Midwest-born and Northeast resident, Toni Morrison, in an analysis of literature of the "Souths"? Thadious Davis describes the value of recognizing Southern culture as an element of black U.S. identity and discusses the influence of the Southern literary tradition on black writers (6). *Song of Solomon's* plot points to the significance of Southern culture, tracing a journey southward, a backwards Great Migration, of a young African American man who is seeking an inheritance of gold and discovers a different kind of inheritance in his family's Southern roots. In addition, there is much debate about the effect of Faulkner's oeuvre on Toni Morrison's body of work; however, it diverges from the discussion of Faulkner's influence on Latin American writers. Unlike the enthusiastic acknowledgment of Faulknerian literary roots by Carlos Fuentes (Cohn 2), Morrison has been reticent to acknowledge a

Faulknerian authorial heritage (Duvall 3). The collection *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-envisioned* examines the complex intertextuality between the two writers' works, grounding Morrison in the Southern tradition, without directly claiming that Morrison's work is of Faulknerian "ancestry." Handley has argued that *Song of Solomon*, in particular, works as a kind of response text to *Absalom, Absalom!*, considering that both Sutpen and Macon Dead build their dreams of property and land ownership seemingly out of nothing; similarly, each man's legacy is fraught with complications that result from a racist social structure: "Faulkner conceives of the 'design' of white male social power as founded on a contradiction that proves to be genealogically sterile, while Morrison exposes that complicit with that design is a violence that deprives African Americans of their ancestral ties to the land" (176).

Like Morrison's other novels, *Song of Solomon* "[juxtaposes] the realities of African American family relations to hegemonic family romances, to the dominant mythos of the patriarchal nuclear family which in the ruling culture constitutes the measure of success" (Hirsch 70). This patriarchy can be contrasted to the matriarchal societies of Africa which were thrown into disorder by the societal and cultural rupture of the Middle Passage.<sup>3</sup> Deidre L. Bádéjo describes the resultant impact on matriarchal African cultures: "The twin monsters of enslavement and colonialism marginalized African womanhood by denying the African male power to protect women's custodial rights. In the West, without African male protection from external threats, the agency of African womanhood was placed in direct conflict with Western male sexism" (101). In Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, patriarchy crumbles and is replaced with an African matriarchal inheritance, demonstrated through the relationships between the assimilated patriarchal figure, Macon Dead II, his sister Pilate, and his son, Milkman.

Macon's and Pilate's early childhoods were spent on their father's farm, Lincoln's Heaven, a rural, freedman's paradise (Morrison 51). When a white family who desires his productive land murders Macon Dead (53), his son, the next Macon Dead, says, "Something went wild in me [...] when I saw him on the ground" (234). One effect of Macon's "wildness" is a perversion of his father's values. Macon Dead twists the harmonious property-ownership of his father into an obsession, buying shacks and tracts of land unwanted by rich, white real estate developers in the urban environment of his adulthood. Macon cannot recreate the positive community of Lincoln's Heaven; in fact, his attitude toward his tenants, the poor blacks of Southside, is brutal. Macon passes on this philosophy of ownership to Milkman when he deems the boy old enough to learn: "Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (55). Herman Beavers

argues that Macon's "relationship to the economy is a reproduction of that which exists on the Southern plantation" (70) since he can only rent shacks to black people of a lower economic class than he, suggesting that Macon has assimilated into the dominant culture's value system. His assimilation is a form of willful forgetting of his own family's history.

Unlike in Faulkner's and Rulfo's novels, Macon's ideology of patriarchal domination is not the only model available to Milkman Dead, the protagonist of *Song of Solomon*. Pilate, his aunt, is the antithesis of his father; instead of living a cold, materialistic existence, she is a liminal figure. Pilate is the matriarch in a family of three women and is financially independent as a result of her bootlegging business (Morrison 29-30). Her most surprising characteristic is her lack of a navel, which is presumably connected to her mother's death during childbirth, forcing Pilate to give birth to herself (28). Pilate's absent navel simultaneously outcasts her from society and frees her from the established expectations of Western rationalism. She speaks with the dead "often" (149), and after her father's spirit tells her, "You just can't fly on off and leave a body" (147), bears the responsibility for a bag of bones that she believes to be a white man her brother had killed when they were children. Her father's spirit also instructs her to "Sing," (147), and images of Pilate singing punctuate the text: the three women harmonizing as Macon watches their scene of familial warmth from outside the window (29), the three women singing the song about "Sugarman" flying away during Milkman's first visit to their house (49), and Reba and Pilate singing for "mercy" at Hagar's funeral (316-319). Unlike Macon, Pilate carries her history with her: her father's memory, a childhood song, even the name given to her at birth, written on a piece of paper in a box hanging from her ear (19).

The "Sugarman" song, actually the novel's "Song of Solomon," makes reconciliation of past and present possible for the Dead family. The key to the song lies in Milkman's journey, a task his father gives him to locate the dead white man's gold, which is actually Pilate's bag of bones (203). This journey for gold ironically strips Milkman of his material nature. In a series of trials that takes him first to Danville, Pennsylvania, former site of Lincoln's Heaven, and finally to Shalimar, Virginia, where his ancestors were enslaved, Milkman unravels the puzzle of his family's history through interactions with the community. He discovers that Pilate has never had a bag of gold, and the bones she carries are actually her father's. "Sing" was her mother's name, short for "Singing Bird," a Southeastern U.S. Indian, suggesting a link between indigenous African and indigenous American matriarchal cultures.<sup>4</sup> "Sugarman" was "Solomon," her grandfather, a slave who freed himself by flying back to Africa. The power to fly is Milkman's true inheritance; it is the knowledge of how to transcend the weight of the material world. Such

knowledge gives him the ability to make amends to the loved ones he had hurt earlier in the novel when he was still a servant of patriarchy, achieving some measure of familial unification. This knowledge also helps him to take flight at the novel's end.

Like *Go Down, Moses* and *Pedro Páramo*, *Song of Solomon* is set during a period of social upheaval: the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Milkman's final flight results from a struggle with Guitar Bains, his childhood friend, on a mission for the Seven Days, a black vigilante group. The group's purpose is to avenge the murders of any blacks whose deaths did not receive justice in the system of white-controlled American courts. Guitar attempts to murder Milkman because he believes he has been betrayed: Milkman had promised to share Pilate's gold with him. Without it, he cannot avenge the bombing of the Birmingham Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in which four young black girls were killed (O'Reilly 222). Guitar's attempted murder of Milkman dramatizes the discord within the black community about appropriate ways to achieve social equality. The fact that Milkman takes a leap of faith in answer to Guitar's violence shows that he has come into his inheritance from Pilate and is offering an alternative to a struggle that has been reduced to the binary opposition of murderer or victim. Yet, this is not the only rupture Pilate's song heals for Milkman: by embracing her philosophy, he also accepts a pre-Middle Passage and African matriarchal inheritance, thereby rejecting the white patriarchal system his father has emulated. Unlike the modernist productions of Faulkner and Rulfo, Morrison's novel offers her characters a new existence, one that is separate from the hegemonic history of plantation slavery and made possible by the pluralism of postmodernism.

Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* is another contemporary novel detailing a period of social upheaval, specifically the fall of a landowning upper class to a socialistic regime and the subsequent collapse of that regime. The novel critiques political history: In 1970, Salvador Allende was elected President of Chile on a platform of wide-sweeping socialist reforms; by 1973 he had been deposed in a bloody coup d'état by General Pinochet's military forces, reinforced by right-wing conspirators and the U.S. CIA and State Department (Earle 546). In *The House of the Spirits*, Senator Esteban Trueba, a member of a landowning class disenfranchised by a socialist President's reforms, helps plan and fund a fictional coup. Trueba is the patriarchal figure of the novel, and much like Macon Dead, begins his conquest of property after suffering a significant personal loss, the death of his fiancée, Rosa "the Beautiful" (Allende 32). Rosa is the ideal of woman to Esteban, much like Lincoln's Heaven is the ideal of property ownership to Macon. When his ideal is crushed, Esteban consoles himself by retreating to his family's *latifundio*, Tres Mariás. Like Pedro Páramo, he finds pleasure in raping his powerless female

employees, the first of whom is Pancha García (56). Pancha García bears a son, Esteban García, who eventually avenges the pain of his illegitimacy and poverty-filled childhood against Alba Trueba, Esteban Trueba's only recognized grandchild. The legitimization of a female heir can be contrasted to Rulfo's novel in which Pedro Páramo only recognizes the male who will continue a violent, patriarchal legacy. Allende underscores how such a shift may lead to feminine empowerment and give a voice to Alba in her role as a narrator. As Cohn notes, "The dialogic relationship between male views of reality and those of women and lower classes is reduplicated structurally in the novel's assignment of opposing perspectives to separate narrators: Trueba, the incarnation of the patriarchy, and his socialist granddaughter, Alba, the voice of subversion" (123).

Clara is the matriarchal figure who stands in opposition to Esteban, ultimately making way for Alba's resistance. Clara is clairvoyant, communicates with spirits, and like Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, she is the keeper of the family's history. The first and last lines of the novel, "*Barrabás came to us by the sea*," (Allende 1) come from Clara's notebooks, signifying her authority as storyteller, especially significant since Esteban is one of the first-person narrators of the novel. In her notebooks, Clara records the family's history and, through this process, is able to subvert the patriarchal system into which she is born. Clara seems to be passive, especially when contrasted to her mother Nivea, an activist in the women's suffrage movement, yet she exerts herself early in her marriage to Esteban by not naming either of their sons after him because "repeating the same name just caused confusion in her notebooks that bore witness to life" (115). Cohn argues that Clara's notebooks "constitute a space that [Esteban] can neither participate in nor control" and "become her excuse for wresting from the patriarch the privilege of naming children and, by extension, of founding a lineage that 'counts'" (125).

Clara's outright revolt against Esteban's authority comes when he discovers that their teenage daughter Blanca has been having an affair with Pedro Tercero García, the son of his foreman at Tres Marías. When Esteban beats Blanca and then rages against his wife for her inadequacy as a mother, Clara confronts him with her knowledge of his sordid history, while defending the two young lovers: "Pedro Tercero García hasn't done a thing you haven't done yourself. [...] You also slept with unmarried women not of your own class. The only difference is that he did it for love. And so did Blanca" (Allende 200). For the first and last time in his life, Esteban hits his wife, hard enough to knock out her teeth; the result is that Clara never speaks to him again. Since it is only through spoken language that the patriarch can voice his commands to others, Clara's silence is another subversive tactic: a refusal to engage in a system of oppression.

Clara's final and most life-affirming resistance to the patriarchal order comes when she saves Alba's life. As the daughter of Blanca and Pedro Tercero García, Alba grows up a synthesis of her two lineages: the privileged granddaughter of a landowner and the daughter of a peasant turned renowned socialist folk singer (206). Though Alba is raised in Senator Trueba's house, she follows in the footsteps of her activist great-grandmother, supporting the rights of the disenfranchised; thus, when the military coup destroys the socialist regime, Alba is taken as a political prisoner. Alba nearly dies receiving the inheritance that her grandfather left her: sadistic torture at the hands of Esteban García, her uncle, the only named face among Esteban Trueba's illegitimate multitude. Alba pays for her grandfather's crimes with a concentration of physical and psychological pain. When the suffering becomes unbearable, Alba tries to die by starvation during her imprisonment in the "doghouse," a solitary, sealed cell in which it is impossible to stand or even move (413). Clara's spirit comes to Alba and convinces her that "the point was not to die, since death came anyway, but to survive, which would be a miracle" (414). Clara urges Alba to write her story in her mind in order to preserve her sanity, and this matriarchal inheritance of hope is what saves Alba and helps her, in her own words, "to reclaim the past" (1). Alba's mind-writing prefigures the project that becomes the narrative of *The House of the Spirits*, a collaborative effort by her, her grandfather, and her grandmother's notebooks. Even though she is pregnant, possibly a result of Esteban García's numerous rapes, Alba refuses to pass on hatred, "that terrible chain" (432) of her patriarchal inheritance. This is a kind of "prophylactic narrative," a term coined by Loichot to describe the stories of women who have been raped since the narrative (a creation of the rape) is a form of resistance against the rapist (34). Allende's novel suggests that women will be the bearers of a new heritage, one that does not privilege one story over another; rather it sets them side by side so that future generations may learn from both. This technique is an additional example of a pluralistic postmodernism.

Magical realism, what Angel Flores termed in 1954 as "genuinely Latin American" (116), is yet another common aesthetic element in *Song of Solomon* and *The House of the Spirits*. Much scholarship has been devoted to the intertextuality of Allende's novel and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's influential magical realist work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Hart 271). Critical studies by Theo L. D'haen and Wendy Faris argue that magical realism can be read outside of the context of Latin America as a subcategory of postmodernity (D'haen 194; Faris 185). In "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," Faris extensively enumerates the characteristics of magical realist texts and then cross-references those traits that relate magical realism to postmodernism. Both *Song of Solomon* and *The House of the Spirits*

contain a number of magical realist elements, the most obvious being the presence of an “‘irreducible element’ of magic” (167), such as Pilate’s smooth navel or Clara’s conversations with spirits. Since both novels “take a position that is antibureaucratic, and [...] use their magic against the established social order” (179), they qualify as those types of magical realist texts that are postmodern, according to Faris. These narratives, then, can be situated outside of a realist, rationalist Western tradition, emphasizing the resistant nature of the magic used by both matriarchal figures. Cohn contends that such resistance subverts patriarchy in *The House of the Spirits*, a claim that can also be applied to *Song of Solomon*:

[the novel] suggests that prevailing discourses for constructing and depicting reality are additionally handmaidens of a patriarchal system whose pseudo-objective voice likewise claims to stand for the past but, in truth, reproduces only that which affirms and perpetuates its own norms. Accordingly, magic realism is refigured here from a feminist perspective to describe women’s experiences and strengths within a male-dominated system. (109)

Contemporary American literatures are rich with critiques of Western patriarchy. These critiques resonate from our diverse histories, reaching back beyond first contact between Europeans and the Native peoples of the Americas. The matriarchies of pre-contact societies influenced American cultural development by offering a different model of social organization: “Early feminists, emerging from a socioeconomic culture in which most women owned nothing and were defined as legal appendages of their husbands, were awed by Haudenosaunee [Iroquoian] culture, in which women owned the home and much of the means of production” (Johansen ix). *Song of Solomon* and *The House of the Spirits* demonstrate that crumbling patriarchies in the Americas need not result in societal paralysis; instead, female-centered ideologies may offer alternatives to a system that represses, repudiates or denies its painful past. Neither Faulkner’s nor Rulfo’s narrative offers direct hope for moving in a positive direction away from collective memories of an oppressive history: these texts simply represent the dissolution of patriarchies as a result of societal and cultural ruptures. In *Go Down, Moses*, such collective memory is either renounced, by Ike, or condemned, by Mollie, and in *Pedro Páramo*, this collective memory exists only among the dead. Citing Brian McHale’s claim of modernism as epistemological and postmodernism as ontological, Steven Connor argues that the movement from the former to the latter entails recognizing “that the problems of knowing are both intensified and transformed when the very acts of seeing and understanding

are themselves taken to generate new worlds or states of being” (66). A new world is created in *Song of Solomon* when Pilate’s song offers the possibility of reconstructing a dispersed, life-affirming collective memory and in *The House of the Spirits* when Clara’s notebooks, an alternative history, hold the key to reconciling a painful collective memory with the present. As P. Gabrielle Foreman asserts, in *Song of Solomon* and *The House of the Spirits* “women become the site of a history that survives and so nurtures the present” (286).

## NOTES

1. Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* points to the plantation as a central model for Caribbean studies. The project utilizes chaos theory to explicate the diversity and interrelatedness of plantation cultures.

2. In contrast to the Europeans who colonized the United States, the Chickasaws were a matrilineal society in which descent of individuals was traced through the mother’s clan (Atkinson 5).

3. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy asserts the thesis that black Americans became the first “truly modern people”(221) because of the societal and cultural rupture of slavery, centuries before Europe or the United States experienced their own historical crises.

4. Though patriarchal societies existed in the Americas prior to European contact, matriarchal systems dominated certain areas including what has become the U.S. Northeast, the U.S. Southeast, and the U.S. Southwest. Resources on the subject include Laguna writer Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, an important early study. A more recent collection that explores matriarchal societies in various parts of the Americas is *Daughters of Mother Earth: The Wisdom of Native American Women*. Another notable contemporary text is Choctaw Michelene Pesantubbe’s *Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World: The Clash of Cultures in the Colonial Southeast*, an examination of the devaluation of women in Choctaw society after contact with a patriarchal French culture.

## WORKS CITED

- Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon, 1983.
- Allende, Isabel. *The House of the Spirits*. Trans. Magda Bogin. New York: Bantam Books, 1985.
- Atkinson, James R. *Splendid Land, Splendid People: The Chickasaw Indians to Removal*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004.
- Bádéjo, Deidre L. “African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of Women of African Descent.” *Research in African Literatures* 29.2 (1998): 94-111.

- Beavers, Herman. "The Politics of Space: Southernness and Manhood in the Fictions of Toni Morrison." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 31.2 (1998): 61-78.
- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Trans. James E. Maranise. Postcontemporary Interventions Series. Eds. Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Cohn, Deborah N. *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1999.
- Connor, Steven. "Postmodernism and Literature." *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Steven Connor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 62-81.
- Davis, Thadious. "Expanding the Limits: The Intersection of Race and Region." *Southern Literary Journal* 20.2 (1988): 3-11.
- D'haen, Theo L. "Magic Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers." *Zamora and Faris* 191-208.
- Duvall, John N. "Toni Morrison and the Anxiety of Faulknerian Influence." *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-envisioned*. Eds. Carol A. Kolmerton, Stephen M. Ross, and Judith Bryant Wittenberg. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997.
- Earle, Peter G. "Literature as Survival: Allende's *The House of the Spirits*." *Contemporary Literature*. 28.4 (1987): 543-54.
- Faris, Wendy B. "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction." *Zamora and Faris* 163-90.
- . "Southern Economies of Excess: Narrative Expenditure in William Faulkner and Carlos Fuentes." *Smith and Cohn* 333-54.
- Faulkner, William. *Go Down, Moses*. New York: The Modern Library, 1995.
- Flores, Angel. "Magical Realism in Spanish America." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Eds. Zamora and Faris. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. 109-17.
- Foreman, P. Gabrielle. "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call." *Zamora and Faris* 285-303.
- Fuentes, Carlos. Interview. Johnathan Tittler. *Diacritics* 10.3 (1980): 46-56.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Guage, Duane. "Faulkner's Indians." *American Indian Quarterly*. 1.1 (1974): 27-33.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity—An Incomplete Project." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1748-59.
- Handley, George B. *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas: Family Portraits in Black and White*. New World Studies. Ed. A. James Arnold. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2000.

- Harris, Paul A. "Scaling Time in *Go Down, Moses*." *Poetics Today*. 14.4 (Winter, 1993): 625-51.
- Hart, Stephen. "The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende." *Kristal* 270-82.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1990.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Knowing Their Names: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*." *New Essays on Song of Solomon*. The American Novel Series. Ed. Valerie Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Johansen, Bruce. Series Editor's Foreword. *Daughters of Mother Earth: The Wisdom of Native American Women*. Native America: Yesterday and Today Series. Ed. Barbara Alice Mann. Westport: Praeger, 2006.
- Kristal, Efraim, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.
- Levander, Caroline F. and Robert S. Levine, eds. "Introduction: Essays Beyond the Nations." *Hemispheric American Studies*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2008.
- Loichot, Valérie. *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse*. New World Studies. Ed. A. James Arnold. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2007.
- Lyon, Thomas E. "Orderly Observation to Symbolic Imagination: The Latin American Novel from 1920-1960." *Hispania* 54.3 (1971): 445-51.
- Matthews, John T. "Touching Race in *Go Down, Moses*." *Wagner-Martin* 21-48.
- Moreland, Richard C. *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990.
- Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.
- O'Reilly, Kenneth. "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years—from the Freedom Rides to Albany." *The Journal of Southern History* 54.2 (1988): 201-32.
- Pesantubbe, Michelene E. *Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World: The Clash of Cultures in the Colonial Southeast*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2005.
- Rulfo, Juan. *Pedro Páramo*. Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden. New York: Grove Press, 1994.
- Smith, Jon and Deborah Cohn, eds. *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*. New Americanists Series. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Tick, Stanley. "The Unity of *Go Down, Moses*." *Twentieth Century Literature*. 8.2 (1962): 67-73.
- Wagner-Martin, Linda, ed. *New Essays on Go Down, Moses*. The American Novel Series. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- . "Introduction." *Wagner-Martin*. 1-20.
- Weinstein, Philip. "Cant Matter/Must Matter: Setting Up the Loom in Faulknerian and Postcolonial Fiction." *Smith and Cohn* 355-82.

Wilson, Jason. "Pedro Páramo." Kristal 232-244.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris, eds. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

---. *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.