

**Two American Souths:  
Modernisms of Miguel Ángel Asturias and William Faulkner**

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### *Abstract*

Histories of military destruction, occupation and rebirth connect Latin America to the United States' own Southern states. Because the regions were both victims of military defeat and colonial reliance on others, the motivations for creating art in both places were similarly driven. In the thirties and forties, Guatemalan writer Miguel Ángel Asturias produced significant works that highlighted the struggles of a native people to maintain control of their land and traditions in the midst of Spanish invasion, including especially *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930) as well as other novels focused on the indigenous Latin American land. During roughly the same time period, William Faulkner, too, was writing about underrepresented populations with his stories of the southern black experience. He echoed many of the same themes that exist in Asturias' novel in his own *Go Down, Moses* (1942), which deals with the repercussions of owning and destroying the land and the people that inhabit it. Although both could be described as writing in the mode of European modernism, I will argue here that it is more accurate to say that Faulkner's and Asturias's work resembles the *modernismo* tradition, which is described as specifically reliant on the land and myths associated with nature to describe the cultures of Mayans and Southern blacks. Thus this study aims to avoid the usual topics of conversation that posit Faulkner to be the origin of Latin American literary success, and to describe his work through the lens of Latin American *modernismo*. Exploring the regional and indigenous *modernista* tradition of the early twentieth century as well as the similarities between Faulkner's works to these works of the

“other South” will allow for a better understanding of the origins of Latin America’s modernist developments that has previously been credited to Faulkner’s influence.

The modernist style evolving at the beginning of the twentieth century in most English-speaking circles was inapplicable to Asturias and Faulkner when illustrating their homelands, but they did find many useful techniques for their own writing in the style. Both authors had access to a metropolitan society that could sufficiently remove itself from the natural world, but they needed to write in a literary form that would connect to the rural, indigenous places they lived. They found a way to accomplish this through incorporating myth, legend and tradition for a transformation to a homegrown modernist style. By describing unbreakable ties between people and the land through stories and superstition, Asturias and Faulkner worked on projects with similar motives: translating the personal experience of life in Guatemala and Mississippi respectively to an audience that is physically distanced from the subjects by using a modernist frame of storytelling and mythology. Although neither author belonged to the oppressed populations in their countries, both Asturias and Faulkner maintained a relationship with the native land and explained the purpose of their homes through historical tensions of race and ownership. They explored the traditions of their societies and incorporated the stories of oppressed populations into their homegrown style of writing to better understand the future direction of their birthplaces. Using the lens of the Spanish invasion in Guatemala and Reconstruction in Mississippi, Asturias and Faulkner aimed to describe the complications of colonization and the impact of these invasions on the present circumstances by sharing a collective history through a unique *modernista* lens.

*The texts*

Miguel Ángel Asturias' *Leyendas de Guatemala* seems to be a disconnected assortment of stories from the ancient Maya-Quiché text, the *Popol Vuh*, but the legends are all connected through a common thread of individuals battling against invading powers for freedom with the strength of a natural, indigenous heritage. The oral tradition of these legends is communicated through the text of the story prefaced with the novel's dedication to Asturias' mother, who "used to tell [him] stories," which suggests the importance of these myths in the author's personal experience of his Guatemalan background (Asturias, 1). Divided into nine legends, *Leyendas de Guatemala* begins with two introductory sections that describe the duality of past and present and the effects of Spanish colonialism in present-day Guatemalan society. "Guatemala" introduces the land in which all of the myths take place, which exists because of Indian tradition as well as Spanish influence, and all of the natural elements that differentiate seasons and landscapes in the region. "Now That I Remember" introduces a pale-skinned narrator that is unreliable with many different (and sometimes contradictory) voices and opinions and is not a native to the land. These two overview sections are followed by four more traditional myths, all representing the capacity of humanity to overcome oppression and obstacles in different ways. The "Legend of the Volcano," "Legend of Cadejo," "Legend of Tatuana" and "Legend of Sombrerón" all use aspects of Mayan culture to discuss issues of contemporary Guatemalan society like temptation, independence and religion. The following story, "Legend of the Treasure of the Flowered Place," is an untraditional addition to the collection, and it is the only point in the legends in which the Spanish invaders are explicitly represented and the Guatemalan

traditions are physically invaded by incoming soldiers from Europe. “The Sorcerers of the Spring Story” is the penultimate legend that depicts the traditional Maya-Quiché beliefs about creation, and the punishment of mankind for not loving one another. The novel ends with a short play, “Cuculcán,” which features two prominent characters of Mayan myth—the deceitful bird El Guacamayo and the powerful Plumed Serpent Cuculcán—that argue about the origins of the sun. El Guacamayo plots against Cuculcán to take his place of power, but his plan is foiled by the other gods, symbolizing the strength of Mayan tradition. Asturias adapts traditional native culture into a modern novel to demonstrate that “the future of his country depends on the recognition and validation of indigenous heritage” (Prieto, 34). The text is a result of Asturias’ anthropological background, and his study in Paris of Mayan origins contributes to the book’s creative representations of Guatemalan folklore.

*Go Down, Moses* is a collection of seven stories that unfold more than 100 years of the McCaslin family history and the plantation founded by Carothers McCaslin in Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Instead of explicitly introducing the readers to the land and the narrator like Asturias does in *Leyendas*, Faulkner throws the reader without context into the first section, “Was,” which depicts events that occurred in the beginnings of the McCaslin family. This section sets the background for the mythical history and origins of the curse on the family’s land and plantation, which is placed there because of their reliance on slavery. “The Fire and the Hearth” shows the eventual mixture of black and white sides of the complicated family tree—to which the white side seems to be fairly oblivious—and the irony in the passing down of land and power of the McCaslin legacy to keep inheritance and ownership

from the black descendents. “Pantaloons in Black” continues to demonstrate the struggle for power of the blacks in Mississippi, and this story is the only one to depart from the direct relations of the McCaslins by featuring Rider as the main character, who is a strong black slave that lives on their plantation. In the two following stories, Carothers McCaslin’s grandson Isaac is the central character and the reader follows his growth as a hunter through “The Old People” and “The Bear.” The first of these also demonstrates the Indian origins of the McCaslin land and explains that it came into the first family members’ possession through transactions of Native American enslavement. The repercussions of this enslavement complicate the actions in “The Bear,” and Isaac McCaslin witnesses the curse that has been placed on the land as a result of slavery inflicted by his ancestors. The final two stories, “Delta Autumn” and “Go Down, Moses,” describe the more recent race relations and the evolution of relationship between the whites and blacks of Yoknapatawpha County as the two sides of the family tree are on the brink of change in the 1940s. “Delta Autumn” features an interracial and incestual relationship between Roth Edmonds and a distant black Beauchamp cousin whose skin appears to be almost white. The final story in the series features a white lawyer, Gavin Stevens, who is embedded in the traditions of his paternalistic Southern upbringing, but he realizes at the end of the story that Mollie Beauchamp wants to experience a funeral just like anyone else for her executed grandson, and he helps her to bring him back—even though he is never able to come to terms with the unnerving and unsettling black traditions. Although originally published at different times, the individual stories of the novel come together to present a thorough depiction of the McCaslins’ complicated relationship with each other and with their plantation.

The novel deals extensively with slavery and race, but it also approaches issues that are also evident in Asturias' work, such as the relationship to land and the trials of a minority population to overcome an oppressive power. The book begins with a dedication to Faulkner's "Mammy" Caroline Barr, who "was born in slavery and who gave to [his] family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to [his] childhood an immeasurable devotion and love." This dedication may seem out of place because of the atrocities that Faulkner later describes of the white male slave owners abusing, raping and mindlessly trading their black female slaves as if they were not human. However, by mentioning the tradition of slavery before the opening page of the novel and its influences on his personal life, Faulkner is preparing the reader for a view of the more difficult realities of Mississippi's past and the complicated race relations that exist between whites and blacks. This dedication contrasts Asturias' dedication to his mother's storytelling—which generally highlights the importance of oral history to his works—and proves to be a more complex way to set the stage for the readers' experience of cultural interactions.

Both works consist of a series of seemingly independent short stories, but they are referred to as novels by their authors because of their ability create a larger conversation from different points of view about an extensive, collective history. The comparison of these works is unique in the conversation about Latin American modernism because Asturias is not typically remembered for his first collection of stories, even though *Leyendas de Guatemala* contains notable elements of the first modernist movements in the country. The critical discussion is focused around his later novels, including *El Señor Presidente* (1946) and *Hombres de Maíz*.

(1949). These novels more clearly influenced magical realism which was a significant literary movement following a few years after their publication, and they are written in a politically motivated way that garnered more attention. Regardless of its popularity in relation to Asturias' following works, the legends in *Leyendas de Guatemala* are united through the history of the Maya-Quiché people in a similar way that *Go Down, Moses* unravels the myths of the McCaslin family and their ties to the native land.

The form of both novels is similar, but the content varies significantly based on the differences in social situations of both regions. Faulkner focuses much more on the regular interactions and relations between a complicated family consisting of both blacks and whites. He uses these relationships throughout the book to describe the evolution of the population in Mississippi and the implications that the history of slavery has on both people and places in the South. Asturias briefly depicts the coexistence of both races in a specific time and place, but his stories gradually lead to this pivotal point of coexistence in the country's history by illustrating the strength and the endurance of the indigenous people and their ability to overcome these restrictive powers. He then generally ignores the potential for negative influences of the Spanish conquistadors and emphasizes the indigenous peoples' ability to supersede and adopt elements of this cultural impact. The lack of coexistence between the two races in Asturias' work prevents the same racial interaction that Faulkner offers; he focuses primarily on the history of the Maya-Quiché instead of viewing them as intertwined with the Spanish conquerors throughout their history.



Critics argue that the similarities in economic and social struggles of the American South and indigenous Central America are compelling reasons for likeness in the literature of the two regions in the early twentieth century. However, they often undermine the originality of the Latin American authors by assuming that they imitate Faulkner instead of being able to uniquely write within the modernist movement. One such critic, Deborah Cohn, argues that the Latin American writers are able to see themselves in the modernist works centered on Faulkner's South. She writes:

From the moment that his works became available in Spanish in the 1930s, [Latin American writers] interpreted the South's experiences, its Civil War and resulting sense of regional difference and marginalization, its exclusion from the economic and military successes of the rest of the nation, [and] its problems of underdevelopment in the early decades of this century, as analogous to their own nations' struggles to break the yoke of colonialism and dependency, and to break out of the 'backward' position to which they had been relegated. [150]

Cohn believes Faulkner's legacy in the South is to provide answers for Latin Americans struggling to understand their past in a modernizing world. She notes that the two regions share histories of "dispossession, socio-economic hardship... and the export of resources to support the development of a 'North'," which she claims ties their experiences together and makes Faulkner's works imperative to the development of Latin American works (151). Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes has also attributed much of the success of his region's literature solely to the influence and relevance of Faulkner, saying to American audiences that "William Faulkner is

both yours and ours... For in him we see what has always lived with us and has rarely with you: the haunting face of defeat” (Cohn, 150). He reads Faulkner as the authority of modernism that Latin America has used as a reference and a template to convey its own stories and history in a new way. He does not give value to his region’s literature of the early twentieth century and suggests that Faulkner’s influence was the reason that Latin American literature gained any significance in the greater artistic community. By assuming that Latin American authors only look to Faulkner for inspiration when trying to understand their own social and political situations, Cohn and Fuentes fail to give Latin American authors any power to create their own stories.

While this comparison may be useful in explaining the origins of the 1960s Latin American Boom and Faulkner’s relationship to certain authors, it does not sufficiently explain the uncanny likenesses between Faulkner’s literature and the contemporary writings of authors such as Miguel Ángel Asturias in the early twentieth century. Before this emblematic period of Latin American literature, there was another movement that was arguably more representative of Hispanic culture and art. The key literary movement in the first decades of the 1900s in Latin America is referred to as *modernismo*, which specifically deals with “the mighty struggle against nature reach[ing] transcendental proportions and in all cases approach[ing] allegory and myth: man against nature, civilization against barbarism, good against evil.” The writers of this movement were considered regionalist, and wove their rural and indigenous traditions that focused on the use of land into the mainstream of Latin American life (“Latin American Literature,” *Britannica Encyclopedia*). The differences between the English-speaking style and the Spanish-speaking style of modernism are seen in the influential settings and themes that

become central to the message of the texts. Mexican writer Octavio Paz argued for a clear distinction to be made between *modernismo* and Modernism: “Latin American *modernismo* does not have anything to do with what the English language calls *modernism*,” and he points directly to the sufferings of his region that Spain and other European countries never experienced. He believed that *modernismo* represents intellectual independence from Europe and the region’s response to foreign criticism of Latin America’s rural, religious and spiritual traditions (Hart, 231-2).

By examining writers that created influential works prior to the translation of Faulkner’s works into Spanish, it is evident that not all Latin American modernist authors could have relied on the works of the American South to catalyze their understanding of their own land. In fact, Faulkner’s goals in translating the traditions of the Southern black population into his works suggests that he was more in line with the *modernismo* style, which countered the English modernist techniques of new creation by relying on the presence and importance of the natural land to convey meaning into modern society. Faulkner demonstrates this immediately with the presence of his fictional Yoknapatawpha County and its relevance to the events that occur in his novels. Jolene Hubbs discusses this tendency in her article about Faulkner’s “rural modernism”:

It critiques the conflation of the urban and the modern, in part by revealing how the country is used as a foil against which urban modernity is defined. Understanding the novel's engagement with rural life in the modern era redefines the relationship of Faulkner's work to the literature and politics of its Depression-era context, exposes

the social and aesthetic import of rural obsolescence, and suggests a means of rethinking modernism writ large. [2]

Specifically in *Go Down, Moses*, he stands up to a majority society that criticizes traditional beliefs of a minority by representing cultures in the South that have been belittled and considered inferior by the rest of the country after the loss of the Civil War. He shows the conflict between the two existing cultures in the region, but ultimately bestows the people tied to the natural land as the most important to preserve and protect.

Asturias's work in the 1930s as opposed to a more common assessment of a Latin American magical realist author following three decades later allows for a comparison to Faulkner's novels in relationship with the earlier *modernismo* movement without the need to consider the possibility of direct influence. Asturias, writing *Leyendas de Guatemala* more than ten years before the publication of Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, initiates this understanding of his home country and the people in it by examining the mythical origins of the indigenous peoples, the destruction of the Spanish invasion and the rebirths that developed from it. At the same time, Faulkner used the strained relationship and history between Southern blacks and whites to depict the challenges—and at times, impossibilities—of Reconstruction and renovation in a time of low morale. The challenges that Miguel Ángel Asturias faced in being recognized were not necessarily unique; Andreas Huyssen believes that Western modernity has always seen itself as “a stage both of history and for historiography against the temporally and geographically non-modern,” and the modernisms of these geographically “non-modern” regions have been

neglected (196). He continues to argue in his article “Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World” that:

For too long, such non-Western modernisms have either been ignored in the West as epistemologically impossible, since only the West was considered advanced enough to generate authentic modernism, or were dismissed both in the metropolis and in the periphery as lamentable mimicry and contamination of a more genuine local culture. [198]

However, in analyzing the use of race relations and the reference to culturally mythical origins to describe the successes or failures of a region in modernist literature of Guatemala and Mississippi, the desire to make sense of a homeland torn by tensions is the true bonding factor and shared purpose.

### *Myth and Modernism*

At first glance, the idea that modernism could encapsulate and represent ancient oral stories that had been repeated for generations and centuries seems contrary to the spirit of the movement. Ezra Pound’s emblematic declaration to *Make it New!* in the title of his 1935 book spoke for the new generation of artists and writers post-World War I. A new motion had been started to escape the past methods of creating art, to begin anew with a critique of the old and a trajectory for the future. Manuel Diaz Rodriguez explains the possibility for flexibility and originality within the movement when he says, “[m]odernism in literature and art does not refer

to any particular artistic or literary school. It is rather a profound spiritual move carried out by artists and writers from dissimilar schools” (López, 1). This spiritual aspect allowed for personal interpretation and expression in nontraditional ways instead of the rigidity evident in both theme and form in realist and romantic forms of literature of the nineteenth century.

Modern literary schemes introduced concepts that undermined the need for structure and sequence as it was known in literature to this point in time. As Theodor Adorno describes, "modernity is a qualitative, not a chronological, category. Just as it cannot be reduced to abstract form, with equal necessity it must turn its back on conventional surface coherence, the appearance of harmony, the order corroborated merely by replication" (218). Both Miguel Ángel Asturias and William Faulkner capitalize on the flexibility of time present in the form of modernism, and they are able to depart from the strictly straightforward methods that require order. They use the concept of time in nonlinear ways both to describe the impact that past and present have on each other and to describe how this affects an indigenous people and heritage. In *Leyendas de Guatemala*, Asturias writes the three initial paragraphs of his second introductory story, “Now that I Remember,” in the present tense, but shifts to past tense after that small section once Cuero de Oro, a native storyteller, begins his description of the Mayan world. This technique evokes a temporal confusion and insecurity of the time frame in which the narrative is taking place, which adds mythical elements to the form of the story. The focus of the first few paragraphs is specifically on age and time, and the narrator says that his “age makes [his ancestors] sad” and that he is “deprived of the consciousness of time” (13).<sup>1</sup> The use of

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<sup>1</sup> All English translations of Asturias’ *Leyendas de Guatemala* are my own.

alternating tenses continues through to the end of this legend with the introduction of the chipilín tree, described as a “small tree of sleepy eyelids,” which destroys the notion of time and “reaches where the chiefs, old priests of the kingdom, are buried” underneath (13). Because it is a tree that is able to disregard a time construct, the story relates the modernist technique back to a natural source and creates a myth founded in the indigenous Mayan culture and land. The lilting, sing-song lines and repetition in the book’s stories create a sense of oral narration in the myths, which suggests that they have been passed along for generations, and the constant reference to ancestors and past village priests and kinds give the stories an integral place in the tradition of the people.

Faulkner is noted similarly for disordering and blurring the timelines of his works, and he does so in *Go Down, Moses* by suggesting the significance of an oral tradition of history founded in the family’s heritage. The entire book is based on tales, traditions and legends passed down throughout generations, and we see these things through Ike during the progression of the stories. While not all of the details are laid out in the very beginning, Faulkner unearths piece by piece the information about the history that Ike discovers along the way that affects the way he and his family live today. He does not write in the same sing-song way as Asturias and his style is sometimes cryptic, but the content of his legends and the significance behind discovery of these oral traditions are enough to call attention to the need for retelling and revisiting the past to create a stronger future. Because storytelling is the source of truth and information in the novel, the meaning and development of *Go Down, Moses* relies on the myths and legends passed down through generations.

Utilizing the myths and traditions of the past and returning to what had already been written proved to be a successful means for modernists to stand apart from old styles and create new literary trends. Umberto Eco describes the impossibility of absolute originality in his book *The Limits of Interpretation*: “The ‘modern’ avant-garde (at the beginning of this century) challenged the Romantic idea of ‘creation from nothingness,’ with its techniques of collage, mustachios on the Mona Lisa, art about art, and so on” (95). The effort to employ the past to satisfy the present artistic and critical needs is a technique that William Faulkner and Miguel Ángel Asturias use to capture the spirit of the territories they write about. The shift in perspective to consider effects of the past is appropriate in understanding colonialism and conquest in both works as the very condition for modernity and a focus on progression (Huysen, 192). They specifically capitalize on the modernist concept of discontinuousness, or the failure of smooth transitions in time and development. Through the invasion of unwelcome technology and production to the natural state of their hometowns, the authors depicted this discontinuousness as a curse on the land that humanity is fulfilling. Asturias and Faulkner do not assume that there can be creation out of nothing; they use mythical beliefs that the new production in society comes from predispositions in history and jarring transitions that can suddenly alter communities.

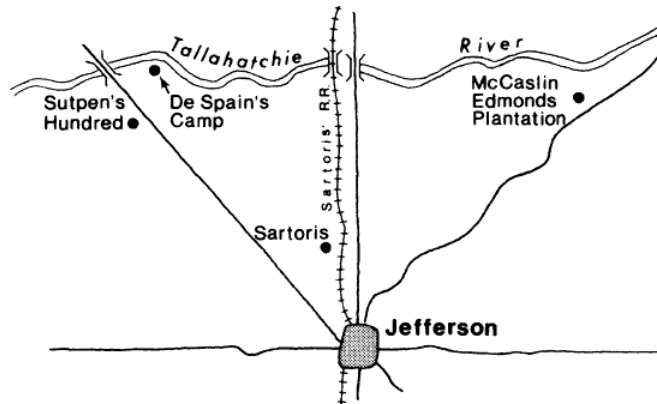
Asturias presents this modernist concept of sudden invasion and forced change in “Leyenda del tesoro del lugar florido” (“Legend of the Treasure of the Flowered Place”) as the Spanish explorers overtake the indigenous village. This segment is unique in the collection because it represents a more directly individual illustration of past occurrences created by Asturias as opposed to a story directly adapted from the ancient Mayan text *Popol Vuh*. In this



legend, the Mayan people are celebrating an animal sacrifice when suddenly, “a guard interrupted the festival. Spread with alarm! With the momentum and the force with which the Volcano tore the clouds, he announced a powerful army marching in the city” (46). The jarring change of events breaks apart the tradition of the indigenous people and alters their way of life in an instant. By describing the ritualistic sacrificial ceremony as a mythical backdrop to the contrasting Spanish army invading the land, Asturias exemplifies the modernist concept of discontinuousness with the quickly changed form of the story and the lack of peaceful transition in his country.

In his most enigmatic section of *Go Down, Moses*, William Faulkner similarly depicts the grating contrast brought to his region by change and development through a native, traditional frame. “The Bear” is based on a legendary curse that has been placed on the land because the McCaslins have thrived on the plantation by enslaving blacks and Indians for generations in an attempt to own the land, which ultimately has led to the downfall of the South. This curse is attributed to “Old Carothers’ doomed and fatal blood which in the male derivation seemed to destroy all it touched,” and “all who derive from it... white and black both, lie under the curse” (Faulkner, 293 & 266). The people must try to endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted, which becomes more difficult as new developments destroy the land they inhabit. They suggest that the curse is “more than justice [because] only the white man’s blood was available and capable to raise the white man’s curse” (248). As the people and circumstances of the land change with time, the power of the myth is replaced by the human development that destroys nature and fulfills the curse on the land.

Faulkner describes this shift in significance through the comparison of the bear and the locomotive cutting through the forest. Before Old Ben—a seemingly mythical bear that guards the land—is defeated, he is thought to be an indestructible force more powerful than the train and the people developing the land. As a part of the mythical wild, he is “being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness.” He is also a constant focus of attack, “which the little puny humans swarmed and hacked at in a fury of abhorrence and fear like pygmies about the ankles of a drowsing elephant.” Despite the resistance and desire for destruction, Old Ben takes on the “shaggy tremendous shape” of a locomotive, speeding with the same “ruthless and irresistible deliberation” (185-6). During the era that the bear reigned in the wilderness, the actual symbol of metropolitan expansion into nature remained harmless and secondary. Carrying unthreatening loads like children’s toys, it was never an object of importance in the region and “nobody bothered to listen for it or not” (305). However, once Old Ben is killed, the train “is different now” and it was as though the death “(and not only the train but himself...) had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill not even finished yet and the rails and ties which were not even laid” (306). Witnessing this change makes Ike realize that he cannot return to this place anymore after many years of hunting trips and bonds with the land. This physical disruption of nature is not enough to overpower the mythical presence of Old Ben, but when he is violently destroyed a new power is able to overtake the land and cause drastic and sudden change.



*This map depicts physical division that the manmade railroad introduces to Yoknapatawpha County.  
(Aiken, 451).*

Myth also brings relativity and functionality to the work that Asturias and Faulkner are doing by associating it with specific order. In a style that can seem so abstract and inaccessible as modernism, revisiting mythical origins creates substance and grounding. In his well-known review of *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot articulates the need for modern authors to use history to lead into the present:

They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. [Myth] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. [*“Ulysses, Order, and Myth”*]

In a world filled with war and violence, Eliot sees that a connection between past and present will ground modern art forms and provide a role for the works in society. The voices of Asturias and Faulkner relate events to the regional, mythological basis to give reason to and tie together current events continuously. In “Guatemala,” the introductory section of *Leyendas de*

*Guatemala*, Asturias builds a strong foundation for the present Guatemalan society by creating an image of a country made of layers. He says that:

As told in the stories that nobody believes now—neither grandmothers nor children—this city was built over buried cities in the center of America. To unite the stones of the walls, the mixture was kneaded with milk. There exists the belief that the trees breathe the breath of the people that inhabit the buried cities.” [5-6]

The history of the country supports the country existing on top of this influence today, and they are held together with a natural mixture that nourishes the growing nation. He also glorifies the past and explains its superiority over the top layers in “Guatemala” when he exclaims that “the cornflower was not more beautiful than the last morning of these kingdoms!” (8). The emphasis on the deep foundation of the culture and its true authority over all the layers that followed it begins the collection of stories with meaningful substance.

*Go Down, Moses* sets the stage for the stories with the first section, “Was,” which by the name alone represents a past time that is significant in telling following stories. In this part, Faulkner introduces the beginnings of Uncle Buck and Sophonsiba Beauchamp’s relationship, which is a key starting point because their son Isaac McCaslin is the thread that generally ties all other stories together. Ike recounts in the opening of the book that the history was “not something he had participated in or even remembered except from the hearing, the listening, come to him through and from his cousin McCaslin... of the old time, the old days” (4). Throughout the novel, Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy are considered to be the origins of the McCaslin family, and they are represented as a mythical past of creation. The poker game that

Uncle Buddy won to keep the new slave, Tennie Beauchamp, on his plantation remains a significant event in the history of all characters, and their reference to that moment is a constant, haunting reminder of the implications of slavery for the family. By the time Isaac is an old man—at the very beginning of “Was” as well as in the penultimate story, “Delta Autumn”—he is called Uncle Ike by the other family members in the same manner as his ancestors, and he continues the tradition of mythological ancestry for the next generations. This introductory section that describes the beginnings of the family is set much further back in time than the others, framing the attitude of antebellum South and setting the foundation for future characters and relationships.

This reliance on the McCaslin family past as well as the complex foundation for Guatemalan society represents the idea that George Steiner considers in relation to all modernist works: “In twentieth-century literature, the elements of reprise... have organized precisely those texts which at first seemed most revolutionary. [...] The new, even at its most scandalous, has been set against an informing background and framework of tradition” (490). A collage of old and new elements creates the stories of the present characters. In both novels, the historical beginnings represent a solid basis for understanding other events and the significance of changes in culture and society.

*The American myth: Regeneration through destruction*

To best depict the state of Guatemala and Mississippi after years of defeat and occupation, *Leyendas de Guatemala* and *Go Down, Moses* discuss their homeland's progress and change within the same American myth: regeneration through violent destruction. Although they both refer to this shared mythology as being important in the evolution of their countries, Asturias and Faulkner are actually working in different ways to describe how breaking down one culture makes way for another to take form. In his myths, Asturias describes the Mayan culture as being superior to outside influences that invade their traditions, and he uses examples of myths that show this act of individuals overcoming different symbolic situations with grounding in the ancient *Popol Vuh* traditions. On the other hand, Faulkner is not as optimistic about the restoration of his Southern American way of life and the abilities of the oppressed people to ultimately succeed against the odds, and he describes the outcome of destruction in Yoknapatawpha County at the generation of an entirely different culture and lifestyle that does not belong to the native people of the land.

In *Leyendas de Guatemala*, there are countless instances of a Mayan life superseding the destructive forces that try to break apart the foundation of the land. "Legend of the Volcano" provides a clear instance of the possibility of Maya-Quiché revival in Guatemala with the recreation of nature after Cabrakán, who promotes earthquakes, and Hurakán, who instigates destructive winds, force all but one man out of the land. The last man to remain, Nido, builds a temple to bring safety back to the land, and the wildlife is then able to return. Asturias references the number three in this story in multiple places, most importantly when a trio

consisting of a spiritual guide, a lily and a child helps Nido complete the temple (21). This number is spiritually significant in the indigenous Nahuatl culture, and suggests the power of the native people to overcome imposing forces and return to their resources after rebirth of the culture. Another instance of new life springing from the end of another life is in the second introduction, “Now that I remember”:

In the jungle, the forest passages are closing. The trees fall like flies in the web of impassable weeds. My step awoke the echoes of the wandering tribes who came from the sea. Here was where they began their song. Here is where they began their life. They began their life with the soul in hand. [14]

This passage describes the falling of nature that gives way to a revival of ancient tribes that used to flourish. Although one element of the forest is dying, another is able to be reborn by the passing of another down a path of ruin. Growth from the remains of destruction in *Leyendas de Guatemala* is very positive and describes optimism for the dominance of native culture and identity over the weaker colonial influences.

Other representations of the native culture’s superiority over the imposing powers in this book are seen in “The Sorcerers of the Spring Storm.” This legend is the penultimate section of the novel and describes a land already taken over by a patriarchal governing, unnatural force. When the people in the land do not respect each other or the wildlife that surrounds them, the river that runs through the center becomes a source of punishment for their immorality. In an act that recalls images of the flood in Genesis, the river floods its surroundings and overtakes the land, killing everything that stands in its way. When the flood waters recede and the land is

again visible, all that remains are the city ruins covered by vegetation of the Quiché land. “The gods, the earth and the woman continue,” without the negative impact of masculine power struggles (like those evident in Old Carothers and the slavery tradition throughout *Go Down, Moses*), to live on in this newly restored world (62). The survival of these three beings suggests that men seeking power need to be eliminated from the land in order to restore peace and humanity, and Asturias describes the destruction of the negative force as an act of the indigenous land itself.

Faulkner does not find as much optimism in the myth of destruction of past culture for the return of tradition and indigenous power. He sees the physical, invasive developments in the land to be transformative and favorable to change guided by the outside forces. In “Delta Autumn,” when Isaac McCaslin has grown old and is on his last hunting trip after over fifty years of going into the woods every November, he recollects the changes that he has seen to the area over time. “That time was gone now,” he says about the beginnings of his hunting in the woods. “Now they went in cars, driving faster and faster each year because they roads were better and better and they had farther and farther to drive, the territory in which game still existed drawing yearly inward as his life was drawing inward” (320). The changes and developments in the environment that he has known for so long are creating new traditions of the hunting expedition for new generations of people, and Ike is noting both the end of the trips as he knows them as well as the eventual end of his own life. Richard Moreland supports Faulkner’s use of disruption and change in nature without the complete end of a way of life when he says in his essay that:



Faulkner accepts neither civilization's triumph nor the wilderness's destruction and death as the final pronouncement of this myth. It is this ambivalence that not only survives the political uses of myth to excuse exploitation and destruction, but survives, as well, ironically detached literary "exposures" of the myth's often destructive political simplifications. [176-77]

Faulkner believes that the path after ruin for renewal is only open to the exploiter, and the jarring changes that provoke destruction are only an excuse for the invading power to move further away from native traditions of the past. In "The Bear," the desire of frontier hunter Ike McCaslin to be initiated into heroic manhood by his knowledge of the beast and his ability to track it down and destroy it symbolize the lack of ability for historical past to gain strength and dominate. Ike acknowledges the legend of Old Ben and embraces the challenge to violently destroy the creature, which Faulkner uses as a representation of the wild and the innate strength of nature. He acknowledges the historical importance placed on the creature through the dreams he has about Old Ben, but still strives to rid the forest of the bear because according to myth, his death must happen. The death of Old Ben in turn clears a path for further metropolitan development of the region and exploitation of its natural resources, and the change that comes to the land signifies the cursed results of their obsession with owning and controlling the natural land (Moreland, 176). While Asturias believes that the succeeding power after violent change is undoubtedly the indigenous heritage of the territory, Faulkner is less convinced that the native culture can always revive in this way and he finds the modes of destruction a reassurance of the new power's superiority and ability to overcome the old traditions of the region.

*Making sense of the land*

The writings of both Asturias and Faulkner came at a time of change in the significance of their country's future. Literature has flourished and evolved in times of historical tension, transition and revolution; the modernist movement is no exception. The modernists' rejection of linearity and chronological order to explain change is replaced by "events evoked, revived and relived at memory's whim, and unmarked transitions between past, present and future" (Cohn, 157). In *Leyendas de Guatemala*, Asturias refers to the ancient text of the *Popol Vuh* as his only connection to the ancient Mayans as a *mestizo* from the city, and he glorifies both the old and new Guatemala through the power of the indigenous people. Faulkner's approach is bleaker in *Go Down, Moses*, as he depicts the grave issues of the American South before the Civil War as well as Mississippi during the Reconstruction phase after the conflict. He also demonstrates that black Southerners could possibly make significant changes or improvements in society by using their relationship to the land as a way to symbolize this potential energy, but he does not demonstrate a successful situation in which they are able to surpass the dominant powers in place.

Asturias refers to the relationships between the old indigenous and the new urban inhabitants of Guatemala in an abstract and surreal way to focus on the future of his country and the Mayan people as they rise from the ashes of colonial defeat. In revisiting the first legend "Guatemala," Asturias represents Guatemala as a city consisting of buried cities superimposed on each other, preserved and distinguishable, like the floors of a building. These cities in the center of America are interred by the influence of the Spanish in the country. Asturias has a

generally positive outlook on the future of the country, and he suggests through this image that the invasion could not actually eliminate any aspect of the Guatemalan life. This image of perfectly protected layers creates the ability of the subterranean Mayan culture to surface in a way that positively impacts the new culture of Guatemala. Throughout the collection, Asturias represents traditional myth from the *Popol Vuh* that exemplifies the resilience of the Maya-Quiché people and showcases characters that rebuild the possibility of life from the ruins and overcome oppressions caused by disaster and evil. In his representations of Latin America, Asturias relates the depth and complexity of the country's natural land with the cultures of its inhabitants.

Although this depiction of preserved native power is important for the understanding of Mayan influence in present-day Guatemala, Byron Barahoma argues that it also works against the realities of colonialism in Latin America, and contradicts other stories in the collection. The sole moment of explicit conflict between Mayan and Spanish existence in the collection of legends is in "Legend of the Treasure of the Flowered Place," when the conquistadors cause the natives to flee from their sacrificial ceremony. Asturias describes the Mayans as connected to the natural world and links them with the abundance of their land when he describes the ceremony as "a crowd, without being mad, screaming madly in front of the temple Atit, filled with flowers, bunches of fruit, and women showing their colored breasts and spears," and they ultimately find safety during the invasion behind a "wall of clouds that turns like the rings of Saturn" (46). The Spaniards, on the other hand, are described as filled with want and desiring possession of the physical land; they rip tree trunks straight from the ground along their march to use as vessels (47). Barahoma believes that "what is ultimately at stake is the illusory character

of victory and defeat despite the prevailing asymmetrical relations of power within the modern Guatemalan state” (28). He claims that Asturias is at odds with himself and is working through a purpose of the coexisting influences and ownerships of the Guatemalan land and culture. As Asturias’s first significant novel, *Leyendas de Guatemala* strives towards a reason for rebirth of Mayan pride and tradition in a nation still suffering from the hardships of defeat and reliance on outside forces.

Faulkner also struggles greatly with the realization of Yoknapatawpha County’s worth in the scheme of the American South, but his significant distinction from Asturias’s efforts is his negative outlook on the future of Southern culture. He assumes “sterility and stagnation of the present” as opposed to Asturias’s focus on new life in a changing world (Cohn, 165). In “Delta Autumn,” the penultimate segment of *Go Down, Moses*, Ike McCaslin is confronted by a black woman who claims to be both a distant cousin and the mother of Roth Edmonds’ child. Ike sends her away with money to cover a family sin, and in the next sentences after she departs Roth kills a doe in the woods during the hunt—another symbolic sin that the family must work together to hide instead of rising above and claiming ownership. Ike, an old man at this point in the story, believes that he and the woods are fading away together, and that there is “just exactly enough of it” to run out together into “a dimension free of both time and space” (337). These situations provide a direct relationship between the earth and the lives and actions of the characters, as well as a parallel between the African American characters and their impact on the natural world. The scene also proves that neither Ike nor Roth is able to overcome the restraints of tradition in their society because they have no control over any part of the culture that

regulates them, and they cannot alter the projected fate of the wilderness that they have grown to know and love. After the encounter with the woman, he cannot imagine living in a society that is beginning to mix races, and he sees the repetition and continuation in this situation compared to the incestual and miscegeneous ledger entries he read about his family history when he was younger.

While Faulkner does not assume the natural ability of the oppressed to overcome the influences of powerful invasions like Asturias does, he represents the innate connection to the wild by others in a more positive light and the ability to live above the effects of domination by a source disconnected with nature. In “The Old People,” he illustrates two moments of natural purity that Ike McCaslin experiences, thanks to Sam Fathers’ knowledge of the wilderness and his willingness to pass on his traditions to the next generations. Ike’s anointment in the blood of the deer he killed and his vision of the mythical buck spirit are the moments in the story of the power of natural connection that overrides any influence of the invading metropolitan world into the serenity and peace of the woods. When Ike tells McCaslin Edmonds about his experiences, McCaslin knows the legend he speaks of and instead of doubting him he shares more about the myth of the buck—which he says must thrive on “all the blood hot and strong for living, pleasuring, that has soaked back” into the earth—that he knows from Sam showing him as a child in the same way (179).

The gloomier assumptions about the future of his hometown after conflict are evident in the Latin American Boom authors writing two or three decades after Asturias. Gabriel García Márquez, perhaps the most influential Colombian author of the era, is often considered a Latin

American “Faulkner” because of his self-proclaimed inspiration found in Faulkner’s works. He once wrote that he:

found evidence... of the similarity between our two worlds. It was in this region, where the [United] Fruit Company was building towns and hospitals and draining some zones, that I grew up and received my first impressions. Then... I read Faulkner and found that his whole world... was very like my world, and was created by the same people. [Cohn, 164]

As García Márquez claims Faulkner’s South to be a mirror image of the sufferings in the Latin American world, he is taking on a shared vision of the country’s detrimental fate after colonization.

While the United Fruit Company’s oppressiveness ties directly to Central America, it also holds unexpected connections with the American South. In Guatemala, the company controlled the entire postal service by 1901 and was worth \$215 million by 1930, hiring the most employees out of any company in Central America. Asturias and many other progressives in the region publicly denounced United Fruit Company’s control over their lives, and many individuals suffered from insufficient pay and abuse under the high demands for bananas and tropical fruits in other parts of the world. The company maintained its headquarters in New Orleans—just neighboring Faulkner’s realm—until 1985, and it grew to be incredibly powerful in that area as well (“Political and Economic History of Guatemala”). Faulkner specifically examines these types of tyrannical desires for land and the powerlessness to surmount the ownership restrictions imposed by authorities. Although he strongly opposed businesses as

abusive as United Fruit Company, Asturias does not contribute to the same sense of failure that Faulkner exhibits, and he gives power to the previous generations by highlighting the triumph of human spirit against evil intentions in *Leyendas de Guatemala*. In political and economic terms, Latin America appeared to be a promised land filled with resources and still diversifying and evolving after World War I, unlike Europe. A half century of independence and attempts at reunification made the region more appealing and hopeful to Asturias in terms of resisting outside powers than other parts of the world (Prieto, 29). Faulkner and Latin American writers of later decades give more power to the land and the inability to overcome the traditional oppression, but Asturias works against that with the strength of the buried cultures and the capability of native people to overpower the structures that the invaders of their land built on top of them.

The generally pessimistic views of this mythological tradition evident in *Go Down, Moses* are consistent with the political outcome of his area after the Civil War because while he was writing, the antebellum South still relied heavily on the influences of the northern United States. On the contrary, there is a greater span of time between Asturias' era and that of the Spanish conquest in Latin America. With this greater gap between the political invasion and the present day, Asturias is able to see a more positive comeback from the indigenous cultures in Guatemala and he has more perspective in terms of the time required to recover from this level of tragedy. "Legend of the Volcano" begins by setting the time span of the story, saying that "there was a day in a century that lasted many centuries" (19). This introduction acknowledges that the time frame for the legends is also a product of myth and does not reflect the real time it

takes for transformation and recovery of the previous way of life after invasion in a country.

With this depiction of time, Asturias does not suggest that the ability to overthrow a reigning power comes with ease. He and Faulkner wrote from a distance about the strength of the minority to overcome its oppressor in its own time.

Faulkner thoroughly describes this mixture between old and new cultures, as well as the history's influence on the present society. He constantly refers to the McCaslin family past and even opens his novel with the story of the beginnings of the McCaslin plantation, and he describes a more complex relationship to Yoknapatawpha County's history that is not evident in Asturias' work. He describes the natural land as a mythical reference, but he also shares through Ike McCaslin the problematic tendencies of his family history as well. Ike realizes that the ways of the McCaslin past as better than the direction that the family members are currently heading when he reads the family's ledger entries. From these documents, Ike is able to deduce that his grandfather, Carothers McCaslin, had sexual relations with and impregnated a slave woman, and then later had sexual encounter with their daughter. These realizations prove the imperfections and disturbing and horrific elements of the slavery tradition in Southern history, and Faulkner does not assume that this is a perfect past to return to. By incorporating more complexities and coexistences of the modern lifestyle with old ways, Faulkner communicates the impossibilities of relying on mythical history to model present-day societies.

Asturias is more literal in his translation of myth from history, and he uses the same symbols and meanings found in ancient texts without significant changes for a glorification of the Mayan traditions coexisting with the influences of the Spanish. Because he does not account



for the negative aspects of a complicated colonial past in the same way that Faulkner does, he is able to remain more positive about the comingling of culture in present society. Faulkner recognizes the imperfections of a simple translation of myth and he incorporates the atrocities of the past in his depiction of these typically romanticized times. Faulkner also does not see much value in the new changes in Southern society, which Asturias more easily comes to terms with as part of the new Guatemalan way of life. This acceptance of new cultural influences and the potential for a stronger Guatemalan culture as a result of them is a stark contrast between the works of Asturias and Faulkner.

*Getting in as an outsider*

Both Miguel Ángel Asturias and William Faulkner had the desire to find this value and tell the stories of a racial group from their homes, but they faced the difficulties of exploring a culture that they did not belong to and portraying it in an accurate way. Not only were the authors faced with not belonging to the groups of which they were describing the history, but Asturias also was attempting to tackle the complexities of the Mayan world in Guatemala with an ocean separating him from his home country. This trend of writing from the outside or from exile was a common trend in the modernist period because of the sudden ease of mobility, and these two authors are in the good company of others like Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. They utilize it as another myth of the genre, and in this sense the purpose of physical separation is a necessary means to find a circular way back to the truth and maternal soil (Eysteinnsson and Iska, 737). For Asturias and Faulkner to better understand the history and importance of their homelands, a distanced viewpoint in an area that was progressive and

metropolitan was a way to realize the characteristics of the rural areas of origin that prove them to be just as rich in artistic possibility and growth.

Generally, Asturias and Faulkner represented the minority groups with the best intentions, but critics argue constantly about the possibility of successfully telling the perspectives of others if the storyteller has no personal understanding of their cultural and social struggles. In Faulkner's case, W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" has relevant implications on a white man's ability to perceive Southern black life after the Civil War and whether his view is obstructed because he believes that whites only have one identity—and therefore one perspective—in society, as opposed to the need for multiple identities for blacks. For the *mestizo* city-dweller Asturias, many denounce the reliability of his European-educated writings from Paris in being an accurate part of the Mayan experience. He is criticized extensively for the fact that what would one day become a consuming interest, the struggle for Indian rights, was no more than a subject of intellectual curiosity even at the time he wrote his doctoral dissertation (Prieto, 18). Doubters are frequently concerned with the challenges set in front of Asturias to communicate the otherness of "all the ages of a composite people whose principles and order differ from the European context in which he writes" (Barahona, 21). The authors return to their natural origin as a means of self discovery, but other issues arise as they attempt to encapsulate an entire racial group and the relationship they hold with the state of their shared homeland into their novels.

The similarly natural, rural environments that both authors describe in their novels are not the same environments from which they are writing, but they use this backdrop to call on

associations between the two worlds that might otherwise remain unnoticed. Asturias and Faulkner evoke a sense of simplicity in their writings by discussing connections between the rural life and universal basic human elements: food, community, and freedom. They also draw on negative elements of life such as danger of the wilderness or unknown, isolation, and weaknesses. Concerns for these concepts in human nature are not disappearing, and they actually can remind those not directly involved in a rural, natural state of the significance of referring to those places as part of the fundamental human experience. In *Go Down, Moses*, Boon Hogganbeck is so disturbed by the urban setting of Memphis, “as if the high buildings and the hard pavements... and the men in starched collars and neckties made their boots and khaki look a little rougher and a little muddier and made Boon’s beard look worse and more unshaven and his face look more and more like he should never have brought it out of the woods at all” (221). He cannot understand the complexity of the metropolitan in comparison to the life of simplicity he lives in the woods during the hunting trip, and this strong contrast between the two ways of life make his rural world seem ideal. The rural environments also tend to exemplify the innate power in the natural, especially in Asturias’ repeated depiction of natural disasters and storms like the Huracán and Cabrakán that destroy all developed life. As Michael Bell describes, the power of the occasional natural disaster reminds us that the natural world is in no way disappearing or weakening. In this case, it seems as though the rural setting is truly the superior and the urban is weak and in need of protection from the less developed (“Two-ness of Rural,” 409).

Faulkner's works are often seen in the literary world as honest depictions of the interrelations between blacks and whites in his invented Southern microcosm, Yoknapatawpha County. Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges even describes "el mundo peculiar [de Faulkner]" as "criollo," or of mixed race (Cohn, 166). Faulkner was also well-practiced in his depiction of "Black English" that he personally experienced in his hometown in Mississippi, and he often incorporated these elements of speech into his novels to develop the reality of black culture as he could access it. American literary critic Irving Howe praised this dedication to accuracy when he said that "no other American novelist... has listened with such fidelity to the nuances of... [the Negro's] speech and recorded them with such skill" (Taylor, 441). Faulkner is attempting to find a way for the underrepresented population to have a form of expression and identity within the same structure and function of the majority's means of expression, but with its own significant variations. In regards to the formation of a black identity, the use of this dialect by all members of the same black community creates an element of the group's spirit. Even though not all characters are restricted to the use of this linguistic form alone, they can understand and relate to its communal effects.

Faulkner returns to mythical and historical representations in *Go Down, Moses* to depict black culture in a strategic way that evokes stronger emotion and connection to the story. In the final segment of the book entitled "Go Down, Moses," Mollie Worsham mourns the loss of her grandson with a traditional black spiritual. In an overwhelming fit of emotions, she exclaims that "He dead, Pharaoh got him... Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin... Sold him to Pharaoh and now he dead" (361-2). The participation of others in her house in the spiritual adds authenticity

to the historical use of this type of song. As Moreland describes, Mollie and the others in her community “adapt this spiritual to their particular accusation and grief just as the black spiritual as a historical genre has adapted to strategically different, critical purposes the accommodationist white religion which provided many of its terms and (sometimes uneasily) sanctioned its expression” (189). Faulkner illustrates the discomfort that this tradition brings to outsiders like Gavin Stevens, who is constantly telling her to “hush” and experiences physical discomfort when listening to Mollie mourning, and he finally needs to escape the room to be outside where there is “air, space, breath.” She simply explains the outcries as “our grief,” and she has no apologies for her actions (362-3). The ability to refer to this past cultural form of mourning and use it in her own freedom, instead of as an enslaved woman as it was traditionally known, empowers Mollie and gives her and the community a strength that is incredibly personal.

Faulkner’s depiction of Black English in his characters’ dialogue can have positive implications on identity for the people, but there is also much critique of his capability of creating a comprehensive black image with this technique. By examining the “Pantaloon in Black” section, Walter Taylor suggests that the character Rider’s Negro identity is evident entirely through the “rhythmical repetition of imagery and dialogue, which indicates a superficial Mississippi Negro experience” (441). Contrary to the suggestion that the repetitive use of a dialect is useful in establishing legitimacy and individualism for Southern black, Taylor believes that this excessive use of a different language style for the black characters in Faulkner’s works creates an identity that is too static and simplistic for the reality of the black culture. He notes that falling back on this method “obviously from a white perspective instead of a Negro

heritage” prevents Faulkner from expanding his efforts and committing fully to the depiction of a true Negro identity. (432) William Dahill-Baue notes this concern for Faulkner’s inability to develop the complexities of black life in Mississippi by remaining solely interested in representing the language when he discusses the patronizing tendencies that a written dialect can connote for a reader. By clearly separating a group of people from speaking in a way that is considered visually “standard” by the reader, he explains that Faulkner’s technique potentially perpetuates unfamiliarity between Southern whites and blacks that make black characters seem less intelligent or developed.

In “Pantaloone in Black,” Faulkner also demonstrates the cruelty of white characters towards black characters without understanding the feelings and reactions associated with the black characters as a result. The sheriff’s deputy explains Rider’s story to his wife, and tells her how Rider killed Birdsong and was jailed for his actions. In discussing Rider, he says:

Them damn niggers. I swear to godfrey, it’s a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. Because why? Because they ain’t human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes. [150]

The sheriff’s deputy equates Rider and other blacks to wild animals and underestimates their humanity. By explaining that they can understand and communicate with language but they can’t understand basic emotions and feelings of others, he is saying that all of

the language that they do use is just representative of what people are supposed to do but it only lies on the surface of black identity. This idea suggests that the power Faulkner gives his black characters to communicate and use language for their own gain does not actually bring the audience closer to understanding them because it is all just a performance to seem just like the whites.

Faulkner's search for truth through this version of language and communication is futile, and this repetition of a meaningless language structure as a quest to reach the truth of the group's identity only distracts from what could be truly integral in reaching the minds of the minority (Cowart, 168). He also sees the literary integrity of the black community as "lacking in true conviction for substantial change," and he believes that this racial distinction alone could be the creation of nothing more than a noble tragedy (5). Because Faulkner only allows the reader to see how white characters are disturbed by the mannerisms and speech of the black characters, the reader is left without a clear understanding of what is inside the heads of black characters. This lack of understanding of the "other" is alienating, and without an explanation of the blacks' actions, Gavin Stevens does not seem so strange in "Go Down, Moses" for being unable to function in the presence of an unfamiliar black culture. Although Faulkner's use of the dialect is not intended to demonize the entire population of Southern blacks, he is still defamiliarizing a broader audience with the communication methods of the black characters and making the written dialogue difficult and sometimes unintelligible with purposeful spelling alterations. Faulkner works well to keep a consistent and honest style when writing in a Southern black

dialect, but he cannot avoid the strangeness that it evokes and the possibilities for resistance between racial groups in comparison to the rest of the characters' language in his novels.

While Faulkner was working to write about Southern black experience through a language barrier, Asturias was additionally challenged by distance from his country of literary interest. He wrote *Leyendas de Guatemala* from Paris while translating the *Popol Vuh* and *Rabinal Achi* with French scholars, and therefore lacked the advantage of on-the-ground experience for his stories. Marc Zimmerman gives Asturias relevance despite a lack of personal connection to his subjects, explaining that "the indigenous world is marked by customs... and structures that are fundamentally different from those that rule in the rest of the country, and that constitutes a clear attraction to those Guatemalan writers who have been educated within Western norms and yet seek a distinct, autochthonous dimension to their work" (56). In Paris, Asturias began to form a perspective for reinterpreting Guatemalan reality through the combination of anthropological and surrealist lenses that developed during his education in the European country. He strived to be the moral consciousness of the people, and in reaching for this goal he developed new literary techniques by using nonlinear plots and mythological, indigenous imagery to do so. He was in a constant search for a core Mayan-ladino identity of the Guatemalan people through historical interpretation, and "because the 'people' [were] at stake, the dominant artistic problem [became] that of forging a new literary mode able to express and in fact foster a positive transformation of his people's multileveled collective consciousness and spiritual heritage" (129-30). He was not really striving for a detached sense of a peoples' identity, but instead he was aiming to belong to it. Asturias presents himself at the end of



“Guatemala” and introduces his own voice into the legends of another cultural group. Upon arriving to the capital he exclaims, “Mi pueblo! Mi pueblo!” (12), which reveals Asturias' feelings of nostalgia and desire to be included as a member of this society. He incorporates himself into the stories extracted from the traditional *Popol Vuh* to create a place for him in the Maya-Quiché culture.

While Asturias consistently draws from his formal European education in his writing style and his illustration of the ancient Mayan world, he also uses this background in ethnographic and anthropological research to transform the manner in which he understands Eurocentric behavior and he works against it *Leyendas de Guatemala*. In an introductory letter for the book written by Paul Valéry, Asturias' translation of the original legends was “beautifully said but also faithful” (3). He also relied heavily on his experience as a journalist for *La Prensa* stationed in Paris during the time of his literary work, and this created a strong connection abroad between him and his homeland. By drawing from the *Popol Vuh* and inserting cultural referents and natural elements of his country that were never easily recognized or rationalized by European audiences and alienated them, Asturias created distance between himself and the traditional Parisian efforts to depict heterogeneity of outside cultures with their techniques and education obtained through his experience in their culture (Barahona, 23). He was not simply another modernist author from the cosmopolitan style writing abstractly about a topic he wasn't familiar with; he instead took the cultural heritage of his home country and used it to his advantage to define himself apart from the other modernist writers of his time.

Ideally, Asturias would have brought new understanding to greater audiences through his separation from the Mayan people because of his ability to relate to a larger spectrum of individuals. If he had successfully bridged the communication gap between insiders and outsiders, he could have not only aided in the relationship between the Western world and the Mayan people, but he could have also furthered the personal development of the Guatemalan people's historical knowledge and the power they potentially held for change. Unfortunately, critics argue that Asturias experienced firsthand how writing from a European perspective with a Western education background often leads to excessive exoticism and romanticism of the indigenous people. This phenomenon is an ongoing struggle as the developed world aims to reach an understanding of the third world, and Asturias is no exception; as stated by Zimmerman, "the romanticizing and posturing that clung to many of the country's most sincere intellectuals and artists might even, ultimately, come to be laid at the feet of Asturias as a limitation in his work" (123). His exotic view of the natural state of the country, with pine trees "made of women's eyelashes" and "under the love of the almond trees", mud "smells like the flesh of a woman" (Asturias, 15). He also tends to objectify the woman in descriptions of nature, like when he says "ancient vines wrapped to shorten the magic's reach, as the vegetation had enveloped the earth, as clothing envelops the woman" (62). The sexualization and romanticism of the indigenous world is typical of European study, and this fails to set him completely apart from his judgmental, cosmopolitan peers in Paris. Because he can only imagine the Mayan world from a historical, anthropological point of view that is mostly determined by scholars of the West (even the ancient text of the *Popol Vuh* is only intelligible

when translated into a modernized language for Asturias), he can only access a one-sided viewpoint that does not encompass the reality of indigenous Guatemalans (Marting, 117).

### *Hybrid Identity*

Because Miguel Ángel Asturias and William Faulkner remain on the outside of select groups that live in and bring significant culture to their homes, the authors aim to create a sense of hybrid identity that allows them to get a step closer to the people of the regions. In doing so, they fuse the influences of the invading or reigning powers of the land with the indigenous or native influences that provide substance and cultural foundation. The novels both exemplify a mutation of the two different identities to explain how the homeland evolves, which embodies the modernist tendencies to show progress and growth through art in places that appear stagnant and unchanging. Although Asturias and Faulkner are working towards the same goal again, it is clear that they are doing so with different outcomes in mind. Asturias believes that this transition to hybridism is positive for the culture of the Mayans, but Faulkner does not find the combination of races and cultures to support the myth of the land or enhance the fundamental importance of the native condition of the people. We find once more that Asturias' outlook on the ability of a lifestyle to change is much more optimistic than Faulkner's apocalyptic beliefs about the end of an era.

Faulkner fights against the positivity associated with acclimation of culture and association with others in *Go Down, Moses*, and he assumes that this tendency is simply incompatible with the times. The entire novel consists of conflicts and issues arising from the mixture of blacks and whites in the same family, and this tension finally comes full-circle in

“Delta Autumn.” It is fairly obvious that the young woman that confronts Isaac McCaslin about Carothers “Roth” Edmonds knows much more about their family and his life than someone who was not a part of it. This return of the oral tradition and the knowledge that she possesses as being a part of the Beauchamp family incorporates her into the same history as Ike. The concept of an unknown black woman being associated with his family is unnerving to him, and he is distraught by the possibility of this integration. While she has pale lips and “skin pallid and dead-looking yet not ill,” he still thinks that “[m]aybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America” the time will be right for this hybrid identity and representation of mixed racial groups, “But not now! Not now!” (344). Although Ike denounces the domination of blacks through slavery and rape in the McCaslin family history after reading the ledger entries, he still upholds a line that should not be crossed in racial acceptance and he cannot fathom the mixture of blacks into his family tree. Faulkner is suggesting the unnatural timing for the combination of different peoples by providing the parallel of the doe’s murder and Roth’s unnatural, devastating timing in both situations. By associating the bloodshed of an innocent, pure doe with the known death of a pure bloodline, Ike expresses the effects of this miscegenation as destructive to the McCaslin family line.

Faulkner also describes the hybridism of the characters’ race in “The Fire and the Hearth,” in which Lucas Beauchamp and Roth Edmonds are shown to be close as children that they almost felt like brothers. Roth reflects on his childhood with Lucas and their inseparability:

Even before he was out of infancy, the two houses had become interchangeable:

himself and his foster-brother sleeping on the same pallet in the white man’s

house or in the same bed in the negro's and eating of the same food at the same table in either... He and his foster-brother rode the plantation horses and mules [and] they were sufficient, complete, wanting, as children do, not to be understood, but only to love, to question and examine unchallenged, and to be let alone. [107]

The “interchangeability” and equality of black and white living spaces for the children and the knowledge of their complicated bloodline—which physically mixes blacks and whites—blurs the line between race for this family. The reference to Lucas as a “foster-brother” brings the boys into close relationship and explains an interracial bond that is different than the typical power structure between races; it suggests equality and unity between them. Because Roth says that they did not want to be understood, but only to love, he recognizes the complexity in their friendship and does not expect outsiders to comprehend the coexistence of blacks and whites in one household.

While Faulkner represents this hybrid white and black identity in many characters, he also shows others rejecting its presence and the denial of its existence. In “The Fire and the Hearth,” mixture and blurred lines between white and black identity is acceptable for children, but it is not as simple for adults to exist with this duality of bloodlines. Lucas shares his frustration with the real inequality between him and Roth, and says that, “If this is what the McCaslin blood has brought me, I don't want it neither. If the running of it into my black blood never hurt him any more than the running of it out is going to hurt me, it won't even be old Carothers that had the most pleasure” (56). He describes fluidity between his black heritage and

the heritage of the white McCaslin family, but he doesn't think that any good has come from this mixture of identities and blood lines. He acknowledges the relation to the plantation owner's family, but because he does not see any of the family's wealth, he does not find the hybridism of his identity to be beneficial in any way now that he has grown.

Asturias also clearly depicts mixed Mayan and European cultural influences throughout *Leyendas de Guatemala*, which separates him from the *indigenista* literature of previous decades. The typical works that fall under this category are defined by a resistance to European domination of the indigenous peoples' way of life, but they are still limited by a stereotypical, exotic portrayal of the natives that ultimately leaves them hopeless and completely dependent on the Europeans. Asturias does not prescribe to these restrictions as I have already argued, and he is one of the first authors to imagine the possibility of new forms of identity and a continuous, evolving native culture that is just a facet of the greater Guatemalan society. He represents this distinct mixture of identity in "Guatemala" by presenting the country as a palimpsest in which the duality of the Maya-Quiché and Spanish identities can flourish and coexist. He says that the "ancient city is preserved under the Catholic cross and faithful guardians of the volcanoes," uniting both Spanish and Mayan religious elements as equally protecting to the people of the nation (9). Giving equal power to the Mayan and Catholic influences of Guatemala is a significant part of Asturias' work because he discusses that the people of the country are actually protected by the presence of both. Although Catholicism and the Spanish are mostly thought of as foreign and destructive to Latin Americans throughout history, Asturias challenges that and

posits this influence as one of the strengths and protectors of the Guatemalan society in the present day.

Such balancing of the two identities is evident in the “Legend of Sobrerón” as well, which describes the story of a monk being tempted by a ritual ball that contains the devil. In this myth, the monk is fighting the temptation to keep for himself the traditional Mayan ball that continues to bounce outside his window, which he is well aware belongs to a young boy. When he is finally able to return the ball, he yells, “Away from me, Satan!” and the ball then transforms into the demon itself, “born into the world the Sombreón” (41). The combination of the traditional significance of the Mayan ball game as well as the presence of a Catholic monk and the devil of Christian faith balances popular tradition with the deeper layers of the pre-Hispanic world. The common Christian ideas of resisting temptation and obeying a higher moral sense are also recalled in this myth, which Asturias adapts from the uninfluenced Mayan texts. Asturias can find value even in referring to Guatemala as the “land of trees” in “Now That I Remember,” which is what the Spanish conquistadors designated as the new name for the region (Prieto, 36). *Leyendas de Guatemala* in this sense can be seen as a work resisting the desire for purification of either race that searches for equilibrium between the cultural aspects of both Europe and Central America.

### *Conclusion*

After close examination of these two novels of the early twentieth century, the presence of modernist intentions is evident despite borders separating antebellum South from Central

America, metropolitan from rural. Although for decades critics have been crediting Faulkner for his intervention into the literary progress of Latin America by the middle of the twentieth century, there is strong precedence for modernism in the region in earlier years—even predating the production of Faulkner’s works—surrounding the World Wars that can no longer be denied or ignored. Faulkner’s influence on Latin American literature is undoubtedly significant in the era of the Boom during the 1950s and 1960s, but it does not become relevant to the culture until his works were translated into Spanish and more well-read. However, political and social parallels between both North and Latin American cultures called for the same function of art and literature at the same time to explain the current political and social situations and deliver meaningful hope for the future. Faulkner avoided the cosmopolitan in a similar way as Asturias did, and he subscribes more to the *modernismo* techniques of indigenous representation and meaning in tradition grounded in ties to the land and nature evident in Latin America during the early twentieth century. *Leyendas de Guatemala* and *Go Down, Moses* truly matter in the effort to ground a nation’s stories in their rich source of myth, culture and history, and in doing so they do not fit in with the abstract metropolitan modernist tendencies of the time. Although the metropolitan style served an important purpose in other cultures, it was not as useful to describe the indigenous, natural lands that Asturias and Faulkner were working in and trying to describe, and a new style formed from those separate needs.

Asturias and Faulkner fought against the artistic restrictions that accompanied being members of racial groups that were more removed from the native land and peoples. They received extensive criticism for trying to reach these populations and understand them as



outsiders, but they ultimately tried to depict them by using their own interpretations of the language and stories as well as their experience with the more modernized techniques that were surfacing in the more developed, metropolitan world. By exploring the basis of these foreign cultures, these two modernist writers focused on the metaphysical issue of meaning, and found in myth a method of grounding their works (*Literature, Modernism, and Myth*, 21). Both Asturias and Faulkner acknowledged that nothing could be made completely new, and they worked within the resources they had readily available to learn and understand the land that they inhabited as “invaders” themselves. They built a solid foundation for their unique interpretations by referring directly to the historical traditions founded in previous texts and cultural works.

The two authors used many of the same tactics in order to portray their homes as living, progressive places, but they often also used these tactics to accomplish very different goals. Together, they express their rural and nature-driven environments as mythical, complex locations that dramatically change depending on the connections to the actions of the people inhabiting them. This focus on homegrown modernism instead of writing from an urban or European point of view allowed for the exploration of what nature means to the distanced world and what relevance new influences have on the rural cultures already in existence. For Asturias, the Spanish conquest left its mark on Guatemala, but the deep and perfectly preserved layers of Mayan culture have the power to rise above the unnatural influence. While the Maya-Quiché may be able to rise from the ashes in a rebirth after this invasion, Asturias recognizes but welcomes the fact that they will not do so without new aspects of the Spanish culture engrained in them. For him, this is simply evidence of the malleability and potential for endurance that the

indigenous people have always possessed. In contrast, Faulkner does not see any positive potential of a new, outside influence on the lives of those that belong to the rural culture. He also recognizes the destruction of the wilderness and the traditional way of life in Yoknapatawpha County as a means for rebirth, but he does not see the rebirth of the culture that has lived in the land. He believes that the past powers will fall and new influences will be able to rise above any “layers” that might exist below the surface of a newly developed American South. Faulkner takes into account the complexities of the modern world more so than Asturias does, who is almost entirely reliant on the ancient stories of the *Popol Vuh*. Because Asturias takes these stories without major alterations and uses the same symbols and intentions of the oral tradition, they are less influenced by the realities of his complex and changing present-day society than Faulkner’s novel.

Faulkner and Asturias aim to capture endurance of tradition through the depiction of the minority groups inhabiting their homelands, and they turn to language to try and reach the people in a new way. Faulkner works to establish an identity for the blacks in Yoknapatawpha County by staying true to their speech acts and referring to traditional spirituals and legends that he has witnessed in the area. Asturias uses the ancient *Popol Vuh* text and translates it into stories into which he can incorporate himself and his present society into the iconic symbols of Maya-Quiché culture. Both writers received extensive criticism and doubt about the success of these techniques to reach the other culture, but ultimately they created a reason for the re-examination of their homelands for a contemporary audience who may have simply disregarded the regions as failed or irrelevant.

The previous critical approach to Asturias' writing has discredited his earliest work as *indigenista* and irrelevant to the modern progress of literature, but the text deserves another examination. Faulkner may have changed the course of Latin American literature of the later twentieth century, but Asturias and other writers should be rewarded acknowledgment for the early and innovative views of their native countries and regions that Faulkner seemed to also be a part of. Faulkner was in line with the methods of these authors to represent their world as built over a foundation of cultural heritage and tradition. These two authors may not have achieved the most noteworthy depictions of the "other" that shares space with them at home, but they undoubtedly brought relevance and sparked discussion about a way of life that had previously been completely ignored by the literary world.

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