



# History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction

*Deborah Cohn, Deborah N. Cohn*

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It is commonplace among literary critics to refer to William Faulkner's influence on Spanish American literature. Yet few studies have delved seriously into why the attraction of the writings of this southerner has been so powerful. In this bold new study, Deborah N. Cohn addresses this question squarely, from two perspectives.

First, Cohn proposes that Faulkner's appeal derives from Spanish American authors' perception of similarities between the South's history and the experiences of their own respective nations. She delineates historical experiences common to the South and Spanish America, including civil wars, defeat and dispossession, regional marginalization, and socio-economic hardship. She also suggests that Spanish American authors found in Faulkner a set of concerns with which they could identify and that, as a result, they were inspired to take up the stylistic innovations characteristic of his writing. The resulting assimilation and adaptation of Euro-American modernism through Faulkner has been an indispensable part of what is known as *la nueva narrativa*, "the new narrative," as well as of successive movements in Spanish American literature.

From another perspective, Cohn's book shows points of contact between works by other southern and Spanish American novelists without positing relations of influence. Specifically, after identifying common, recurrent themes in modern southern and Spanish American literature in general, Cohn reveals levels of a shared understanding of regional history in Faulkner and Mario Vargas Llosa, in Ralph Ellison and Isabel Allende, as well as in Katherine Anne Porter and Juan Rulfo. Her analyses compare and contrast these authors' shared attempts to provide correctives to official, mainstream historical discourse through alternate, parallel strategies for reconstructing, recording, and reclaiming the past.

In yoking together the South and Spanish America as neighboring spaces with similar personalities, Cohn advances a daring and controversial thesis that both narrows and enhances the frame of comparison between the literatures of the South and Spanish America.

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