

Memory and the Quest for Family History in One Hundred Years of Solitude and Song of Solomon

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Volume 3 Issue 1 (March 2001) Article 4**Susana Vega-González,****"Memory and the Quest for Family History in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Song of Solomon*"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss1/4>>

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Abstract: In her article, "Memory and the Quest for Family History in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Song of Solomon*," Susana Vega-González explores similarities between the novels of García Márquez and Morrison with a special focus on the use of memory and imagination. Based on theoretical models, Vega-González proposes that fictional representations are a means of rewriting history, a particular aspect of literary discourse. The texts under scrutiny constitute true quest stories of characters who search for their family history along their own identity amidst the dangers of capitalism and its excessive desire for progress and class ascendance. The break with narrative linearity through such recollections of things past, the reliance on the supernatural and the advocacy of hybridity are some of the features that link Morrison and García Márquez with magic realism, a literary mode that contributes to their rewriting of a history peopled with the ghosts of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.

Susana VEGA-GONZÁLEZ

Memory and the Quest for Family History in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Song of Solomon*

Pierre Nora proposes that "the quest for memory is the search for one's history" (289). In their attempt to reconstruct the communal histories of their people, Toni Morrison and Gabriel García Márquez rely heavily on the use of memory as a means to rewrite the history of those oppressed because of race, class and/or gender in a world where historiography has been dominated by the white man. Memory is closely related to the reclamation of identity and history -- both personal and collective. Both memory and history dominate *Cien Años de Soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) from the very beginning, where the character Aureliano Buendía is introduced through his own recollections: "Muchos años después, frente al pelotón de fusilamiento, el coronel Aureliano Buendía había de recordar aquella tarde remota en que su padre lo llevó a conocer el hielo" (9) / "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (9). Like García Márquez, Toni Morrison claims memory -- as well as imagination -- as an essential part of the narrative act: "The act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: Remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory -- what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our 'flooding'" (Morrison, "Site" 119).

The use of memory and imagination reaches the realm of myth and fantasy of both authors, whose novels are peopled with the living dead, superstitions and beliefs, folk wisdom, oral tradition, dreams, and fantastic elements. These two writers also share a historical past marked by the oppression, violence, and exploitation engendered either by colonialism or slavery, racial marginalization and the consequences of technological progress and industrialization. As Lois Parkinson Zamora aptly states when referring to the similarities between García Márquez and William Faulkner, "contemporary Latin American writers have found in the literature of the South elements akin to their own national experiences: colonial appropriation of land and culture, a decadent aristocracy, injustice and racial cruelty, belated modernization and industrial development" ("*One Hundred*" 28). Although she was born in Ohio, Morrison is heir not only to a family past in Alabama but also to the African American beginnings and trajectory of her people in the South of the United States, which she consciously portrays in her novels. Likewise, if "precisely because it is unresolved, history has provided the tensions and ironies of much of the best of recent Latin American fiction" as Parkinson Zamora argues ("Usable Past" 13), the African American unresolved past has too encouraged contemporary African American writers such as Morrison to engage in the task of revising and rewriting that past. It is the aim of this paper to suggest a comparative analysis of Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) and García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which share not only their thematic concerns but also diverse narrative techniques.

Notwithstanding Morrison's admiration for García Márquez, she has denied any conscious allusion to his fiction in her novels (see Watkins 50). There are, however, numerous connections between both writers which we shall attempt to expose here, with a special focus on the interaction between memory and history as well as its role in the characters' quest for lineage and family history. The links between Morrison and García Márquez go beyond the literary discourse to reach even their personal lives. Born in Aracataca, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, García Márquez acknowledges traces left in his fiction from the mixture of the different cultures he grew up in -- pre-Colombian, Spanish and African: "In the Caribbean, to which I belong, the overflowing imagination of the black African slaves was mixed with that of the pre-Colombian natives and then with the fantasies of Andalusians and the Galicians' worship of the supernatural. ... I believe the

Caribbean taught me to see reality in a different way, to accept supernatural elements as something that forms part of our daily life" (qtd. in Pierce 67). The Colombian author also feels indebted to the stories told by his grandparents, with whom he lived until the age of eight: Unbelievable stories his grandmother narrated with the utmost naturalness together with war adventures related by his grandfather, the Colonel Nicolás Ricardo Márquez Iguarán. In a similar manner, Morrison's narrative feeds on the ghost stories her mother used to tell her during her childhood in what Paule Marshall calls "the wordshop of the kitchen" (35). Like García Márquez, Morrison grew up in a family whose members talked about dreams, superstitions, omens, visions, and the ancestors with the same certainty as they talked about daily matters (Davis 144), to the extent of confessing her intimacy with the supernatural (Strouse 54). On the other hand, both authors take from their families the name of a character in these two novels. The presence of the ancestor Solomon is based on the oral tradition of Morrison's family, her grandfather being John Solomon Willis (Strouse 54). Furthermore, the autobiographical component of *Song of Solomon* is acknowledged by the writer herself when she refers to her relatives in Alabama (Jones 130). Similarly, García Márquez recreates the figure of his grandfather in the character Coronel Gerineldo Márquez, recalling episodes from his life such as the murder his grandfather had committed when young, his ensuing escape and his foundation of a village (García Márquez, qtd. in Coser 199), as José Arcadio Buendía does in *Cien Años de Soledad*. Finally, the family name Iguarán is transposed from the writer's own life to his work in the character Ursula Iguarán, who marries her cousin, as García Márquez's maternal grandmother had done.

Both *Cien Años de Soledad* and *Song of Solomon* constitute quest stories since they enclose the development of a character's search for his family history, which culminates in his solving an enigma, be it enclosed in a song or in some parchments written in a foreign language. Macon Dead III, the protagonist of *Song of Solomon*, is born in a home that could be described precisely as dead. As a matter of fact, the family name is highly symptomatic of the Dead family's lack of identity and its spiritual death. The Dead are a well-off African American family whose determination to ascend in the social ladder of a capitalist system has worked to the detriment of their ethnic values and identity. However, they are accepted by whites only in an economic sense but not on a social and communitarian level while they are completely detached from low-class African Americans. This isolation is also reflected on the Dead's home, characterized by its coldness, lack of vitality and human values which have given place to selfish materialism and pride. The ritual parade on Sundays in the Packard has as a main goal to expose the whole family and its halo of successful progress: "These rides that the family took on Sunday afternoons had become rituals and much too important for Macon to enjoy. For him it was a way to satisfy himself that he was indeed a successful man. It was a less ambitious ritual for Ruth, but a way, nevertheless, for her to display her family" (31). The education Milkman receives from his parents determines his confusion, his lack of identity and disconnection from his ancestors. The only legacy he inherits from the past is the idea of a materialistic progress and a name, Macon Dead, whose very origin entails the dispossession of an identity, since it had been mistakenly assigned to Milkman's grandfather by a drunk white officer during the Reconstruction. When he asked him about his birthplace and his father's name, the officer wrote the answers -- Macon and dead -- in the gaps corresponding to the name and family name. This is one more example of the inadequacy of the history written in a hierarchical world where the oppressors write the history of the oppressed. This is also portrayed in García Márquez's novel, especially in the episode of the massacre provoked by the banana company, which takes a toll of three thousand deaths. However, the official account of the facts given out by the authorities intends to hide such cruelty: "No hubo muertos, los trabajadores satisfechos habían vuelto con sus familias, y la compañía bananera suspendía actividades mientras pasaba la lluvia" (263) / "There was no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rain stopped" (252). The fear of reprisals creates a web of collective amnesia; only José Arcadio is aware of such a conscious manipulation of events. As Wolfgang Karrer aptly states, "recall and amnesia are intimately connected with power relations between cultures -- collective amnesia results from hegemony of one culture over another" (143). But before the

written history there is the oral history that passes on from one generation to another. Thus José Arcadio tells Aureliano the real version of what had happened, although years later Aureliano will realize that collective amnesia still dominates Macondo, where many "repudiaban la patraña de los trabajadores acorralados en la estación, y del tren de doscientos vagones cargados de muertos, e inclusive se obstinaban en lo que después de todo había quedado establecido en expedientes judiciales y en los textos de la escuela primaria: que la compañía bananera no había existido nunca" (329) / "would repudiate the myth of the workers hemmed in at the station and the train with two hundred cars loaded with dead people, and they would even insist that, after all, everything had been set forth in judicial documents and in primary-school textbooks: that the banana company had never existed" (315).

Another bond between Morrison and García Márquez is their portrayal of marginal communities within capitalist economies and the evils these economies can entail. The banana company is but a sign of the invading imperialism Macondo falls prey to. In spite of its initial lure of progress and wealth, the banana company takes a heavy toll on this pre-industrial village. When progress is achieved at the expense of human rights, when material wealth brings about exploitation and spiritual death, then the foundations of a people or a nation are shattered. Referring precisely to the harmful traces the banana company left behind for the Macondians, Aureliano Segundo realizes that "Macondo fue un lugar próspero y bien encaminado hasta que lo desordenó y lo corrompió y lo exprimió la compañía bananera" (295) / "Macondo had been a prosperous place and well on its way until it was disordered and corrupted and suppressed by the banana company" (282). In fact, after the dissolution of the company Macondo faces unremitting decadence conducive to its final destruction. Milkman Dead resembles the patriarch José Arcadio Buendía in that their excessive thirst for material progress leads both of them towards a futile search for gold. In his obstinate attempt to find the precious metal, José Arcadio, who had already been looking for the sea to no avail and who had ended up founding Macondo, decides to use the magnet the gypsies had brought into the village: "Exploró palmo a palmo la región, inclusive el fondo del río, arrastrando los dos lingotes de hierro y recitando en voz alta el conjuro de Melquíades. Lo único que logró desenterrar fue una armadura del siglo XV con todas sus partes soldadas por un cascote de óxido, cuyo interior tenía la resonancia hueca de un enorme calabazo lleno de piedras" (10) / "He explored every inch of the region, even the riverbed, dragging the two iron ingots along and reciting Melquíades' incantation aloud. The only thing he succeeded in doing was to unearth a suit of fifteenth-century armour which had all of its pieces soldered together with rust and inside of which there was the hollow resonance of an enormous stone-filled gourd" (9-10).

The only thing José Arcadio finds are the traces of the Spanish imperialism. And these findings are surely proleptic of the new oppression his village will be submitted to with the presence of the banana company and the bloody events it will bring about between the natives of Macondo and the army. However, he is blinded by the fierce race for progress, the technological advances and the lure of enrichment, all of which certainly prevent him from seeing further implications of the Spanish armour he comes upon. His obsession with scientific inventions exerts a progressive damage on his initial attitude of communal initiative. His first creations had been the traps and cages to ensure that all the houses in the village would have birds; he had placed the houses in such a way that they could all receive the same amount of solar energy and river water. However, "aquel espíritu de iniciativa social desapareció en poco tiempo, arrastrado por la fiebre de los imanes, los cálculos astronómicos ... las ansias de conocer las maravillas del mundo" (16) / "That spirit of social initiative disappeared in a short time, pulled away by the fever of the magnets, the astronomical calculations ... the urge to discover the wonders of the world" (15-16). The journey Milkman starts in search of the gold supposedly left in Shalimar, Virginia, has a more optimistic ending, although it is not the one the protagonist expected. While José Arcadio does not seem to remember the implications of the armour he comes across, Milkman, on the contrary, culminates his metaphoric journey with the healing of his amnesia and the ensuing spiritual rebirth those renewed links with his ancestors render. When analyzing the process of regeneration Milkman undergoes, we find that it is similar to that of the last Aureliano, since the latter also experiences a rite of spiritual rebirth or "spiritual rite of passage" (Halka 42).

Referring to the last Aureliano, Chester S. Halka echoes the initiation process described by Mircea Eliade in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (1958), where he argues that all initiations are based on the death and following rebirth of the initiate, who goes through at least some of the following stages: Loss of consciousness, suffering, a ritual killing and dismemberment, forgetting the past, possession of a new name, learning of a new language, knowledge of the history and myths of the community, a mystical enlightenment or epiphany, and, finally, the discovery that the initiate forms part of the myth that has just been revealed to him (Halka 42). If Aureliano Babilonia follows this pattern, so does Milkman Dead. Throughout Milkman's journey to the South - - Pennsylvania and Virginia -- he undergoes, progressively, an involuntary separation from the urban materialism he is used to: His hat falls down and his watch stops working. In the South Milkman is seen as if he were a white Northerner, and the initial hostility towards him gives rise to a fight with another man. For Linda Krumholz, this fight symbolizes the first one of Milkman's ritual deaths; devoid of his personal belongings, he must now relinquish his alienated heart (560). Later on, Milkman will set out on a hunt with other men where the process towards self knowledge is progressively consolidated, the identification with nature being a clear sign of it: Milkman "found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth. Walking it like he belonged on it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there -- on the earth and on the place where he walked. And he did not limp" (281).

The union with the earth represents, as Morrison herself admits, "his coming of age, the beginning of his ability to connect with the past and perceive the world as alive" (LeClair 375). The dismemberment of the bobcat after the hunt is a symbol of Milkman's own dismemberment as an assimilated black man. By plucking the animal's heart with his own hands, he is at the same time getting rid of what still remains in him of his previous life and his white mentality. Milkman's ritual process is finally completed when he discovers his own genealogy through the lyrics of a song. As if it were a riddle, he deciphers the clues enclosed in the words sung by some children and in the names they mention. He learns about the ability to fly his great grandfather Solomon had demonstrated when he returned to his motherland Africa, flying away from the fetters of slavery. Thus taking the baton from his African ancestor, Milkman will jump into the air too at the end of his trajectory, hence becoming a part of the myth of the flying Africans he has heard of. But before that he must be witness to his aunt Pilate's death, which constitutes another source of suffering for him. Finally, Milkman's name acquires new symbolic connotations as his family name "Dead" does not mean death any more but connection to the dead.

In a similar manner, at the end of *Cien Años de Soledad*, Aureliano Babilonia manages to decode the parchments of the gypsy Melquíades that prophetically narrate the history of the Buendía family, to whom he belongs. The son of Renata Remedios (Meme) and her lover Mauricio Babilonia, he is brought up by his grandmother Fernanda del Carpio, who makes sure that his real origin remains forever hidden. Therefore Aureliano Buendía does not know his true identity and when he becomes his aunt Amaranta Ursula's lover both are unaware of their actual kinship: "Profundizando en el pasado, Amaranta Ursula recordó la tarde en que ... su madre le contó que el pequeño Aureliano no era hijo de nadie porque había sido encontrado flotando en una canastilla. Aunque la versión les pareció inverosímil, carecían de información para sustituirla por la verdadera" (344) / "Going deeper into the past, Amaranta Ursula remembered the afternoon on which...her mother told her that little Aureliano was nobody's child because he had been found floating in a basket. Although the version seemed unlikely to them, they did not have any information enabling them to replace it with the true one" (329). Like Milkman, Aureliano Buendía witnesses his aunt's death too. The death of his aunt and wife during childbirth represents the greatest suffering for him. This is why he tries to placate his pain drinking to the point of losing consciousness. Aureliano will finally understand the true nature of the parchments, written in Sanskrit, thus succeeding in decoding the epigraph that narrates the beginning and the end of the Buendía family: "El primero de la estirpe está amarrado en un árbol y al último se lo están comiendo las hormigas" (349) / "The first of the line is tied to a tree and the last is being eaten by the ants" (334): "Aureliano no había sido más lúcido en ningún acto de su vida que cuando olvidó

sus muertos y el dolor de sus muertos, y volvió a clavar las puertas y las ventanas ... para no dejarse perturbar por ninguna tentación del mundo, porque entonces sabía que en los pergaminos de Melquíades estaba escrito su destino" (349) / "Aureliano had never been more lucid in any act of his life as when he forgot about his dead ones and the pain of his dead ones and nailed up the doors and windows again ... so as not to be disturbed by any temptations of the world, for he knew then that his fate as written in Melquíades' parchments" (334).

At the end of the novel Aureliano finds out about his real family name, Babilonia. This character's symbolic death is represented by the decease of his son Aureliano Buendía, who finally brings his lineage to an end after being devoured by ants. As Chester S. Halka argues, "the character who wrongly thought himself to be Aureliano Buendía dies a ritualistic death, symbolized by the death of the child with the same name; then, as in a christening ceremony, he is symbolically reborn, an act signalled by his new name, Aureliano Babilonia" (43). While both novels conclude with the image of wind or air, its implied connotations are quite different in each case. Whereas García Márquez closes his novel with the destruction of the Buendía family and his village Macondo, ravaged by an apocalyptic hurricane, the ending Morrison chooses for hers is dominated by a feeling of optimism. Milkman's plunging into the air with his newly found ability to "ride" it brings about the spiritual salvation of the protagonist and, by extension, that of the whole black community, as long as it does not ignore its ethnic and cultural heritage. Although Aureliano and Amaranta Ursula turn their heart towards the past after realizing how uncertain the future looms and in spite of the fact that their son seemed to be "predispuesto para empezar la estirpe otra vez por el principio y purificarla de sus vicios perniciosos y su vocación solitaria, porque era el único en un siglo que había sido engendrado con amor" (346) / "predisposed to begin the race again from the beginning and cleanse it of its pernicious vices and solitary calling, for he was the only one in a century who had been engendered with love" (332), it is now too late to stop the final destruction and Aureliano Babilonia's ensuing physical death. In Brian Conniff's words, "the novel's 'apocalyptic closure' is a denial of progress, as conceived by either the scientist or the politician, and a momentary glimpse of the world that might have been, if the great patriarch had not been so carried away with his idea of the future -- if he had tried, instead, to understand history" (173). Indeed, the history of the Buendía family is founded on violence, fratricide, rape and hegemony, all of which is but a reflection of Colombian and much of Latin American history -- episodes such as the civil war and the banana company massacre are based on real events occurred in Colombia. And a nation based on such foundations is doomed to solitude and spiritual death. Therefore, Macondo proves to be one of García Márquez's "doomed enterprises" (Franco 132), an aborted nation whose founding family does not have the chance of redemption at the end of the book. On the contrary, Morrison closes her novel with a more optimistic ending where Milkman finally achieves not only a sense of identity from the past but also the healing connection with his ancestors which ultimately brings about his salvation. One of the most obvious links between Morrison and García Márquez is their adoption of magic realism in their narrative.

Although magic realism has been traditionally associated with contemporary Latin American fiction, it is also present in authors from other continents (Lodge 114) and, particularly, in the work of contemporary ethnic writers, "who have lived through great historical convulsions and wrenching personal upheavals, which they feel cannot be adequately represented in a discourse of undisturbed realism" (Lodge 114). The African American distorted world of slavery and racism and the upside-down Latin American world of corruption, war, exploitation, colonialism, and imperialism turns everyday reality into a surreal experience verging on the fantastic. The constant presence of supernatural events, dreams and visions, the use of the flying motif, the power of myths and oral tradition, the pendulum-like movement between past and present and the break of linear narrative are but some of the connections between *Cien Años de Soledad* and *Song of Solomon* that relate these two novels to magic realism. However, Morrison has often shown her discontent with such categorization because of the negative connotations the term "magic" has had in the Western world: "I was once under the impression that that label 'magical realism' was another one of those words that covered up what was going on ... If you could apply the word 'magical' then that dilutes the realism but it seemed legitimate because there were these

supernatural and unrealistic things ... going on in the text. But for ... literary critics it just seemed to be a convenient way to skip again what was the truth in the art of certain writers" (Davis 143-44). Nonetheless, throughout her career Morrison has produced a literature clearly committed to the reality of her people, demonstrating that magical realism is not equivalent to escapism and that the use of the supernatural does not preclude the author's concern over social, cultural and ethnic issues. Furthermore, the fiction of these two writers is a reflection of the hybrid reality they have lived in a context where different races and cultures coexist. It is that personal background that favours the synthesis of different world views. As Brenda Cooper argues, hybridity "has been shown to be a fundamental aspect of magical realist writing. A syncretism between paradoxical dimensions of life and death, historical reality and magic, science and religion, characterizes the plots, themes and narrative structures of magical realist novels ... The plots of these fictions deal with issues of borders, change, mixing and syncretizing. And they do so ... in order to expose what they see as a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques would bring to view" (32).

In keeping with the parameters of magic realism, Morrison and García Márquez dismantle traditional binary oppositions such as life/death, material/spiritual, reality/fantasy, good/evil in what we can describe as an apologia for a hybrid discourse or a synthetic fusion of binary oppositions. The very term "magic realism" entails the harmonious synthesis of opposites; as Enrique Anderson Imbert suggests, magic realism is the synthesis between the real (thesis) and the supernatural (antithesis) (9). In these two novels life is dominated by the presence of the dead and the daily life of characters intermingles with the world of myth, folklore and the supernatural. While Pilate stands as Morrison's most emblematic conjure woman whose hybridity is revealed by her not having a navel and who has a close relationship with the supernatural, the spirits of the dead populate Macondo's world too; the gypsy Melquíades returns from the realm of the dead to talk to Aureliano Segundo and José Arcadio Buendía has several conversations with the deceased Prudencio Aguilar. Morrison includes in her novel the popular African American myth of the flying Africans in the times of slavery, one of them being Solomon, Milkman Dead's great grandfather -- the flying motif is also included in García Márquez's novel in the shape of flying carpets. Likewise the story of the Buendías enters a mythic dimension as it turns out to be a one-hundred-year family saga written by the soothsayer Melquíades before it happened.

Apart from the transgression of boundaries, the break of narrative linearity -- by means of flashbacks and flashforwards -- is another feature of magic realism, as Graciella N. Ricci points out (82-83). The characters' journey into the past through memory reconstructs their personal and collective histories. Pilate Dead stands out as the bearer of ethnic and cultural values as well as the preserver of memory and storytelling; in fact she is the link between past and present, the one who recounts her personal life to Milkman and who instils in him the nourishing seeds of ancestral connection. Time plays a crucial role in García Márquez's masterpiece, as it can be inferred from its very title. The novel begins with one of the multiple flashforwards which anticipates future events and memories throughout the novel: "Muchos años después, frente al pelotón de fusilamiento, el coronel Aureliano Buendía había de recordar aquella tarde remota en que su padre lo llevó a conocer el hielo" (9) / "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (9). On the other hand, both novels start and culminate with an event that fuses beginning and end in a circular movement. The motif of flying opens and closes *Song of Solomon*: "The North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior" (3) / "Without wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees -- he leaped ... If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it" (337). *Cien Años de Soledad* comes full circle from the foundation or genesis of Macondo to its destruction or apocalypse. The circularity and repetition of time is thus acknowledged by Ursula Iguarán, who "se estremeció con la comprobación de que el tiempo no pasaba ... sino que daba vueltas en redondo" (285) / "shuddered with the evidence that time was not passing ... but that it was turning in a circle" (272). All in all, magic realism proves to be a valid means of rewriting history for those writers who have to deal with the ghosts of slavery and colonialism and the distorted reality they bring

about, as it is the case of Morrison and García Márquez. As Michael Dash points out, although "colonization and slavery did not make things of men ... in their own way the enslaved peoples might have in their own imagination so reordered their reality as to reach beyond the tangible and concrete to acquire a new re-creative sensibility which could aid in the harsh battle for survival. The only thing they could possess ... was their imagination and this became the source of their struggle against the cruelty of their condition" (200). We can conclude that both *Song of Solomon* and *Cien Años de Soledad* denounce the dangers of a relentless hunger after material progress, the pernicious effects of personal and collective amnesia, the sterility of violence, wars and racial confrontations, the same power hierarchy leading to the oppression of a powerful group over an oppressed community and the same manipulation of history in favour of those in power. At the end of *Cien Años de Soledad*, and despite all the discoveries and technological advances introduced in Macondo, the false progress is but anchored in the final devastation. As it happens in *Song of Solomon*, what remains after all is the capacity to transcend the horizons of a heavy material reality through the flight of imagination and literary creation.

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