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Anticolonial Feminism, Sylvia Moreno-Garcia, and the Female Gothic: A Textual Analysis of Mexican Gothic

Hana Vega

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ANTI-COLONIAL FEMINISM, SYLVIA MORENO-GARCIA, AND THE FEMALE

GOTHIC GENRE:

A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *MEXICAN GOTHIC*

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Communication Studies

by

Hana Carolyn Vega Escamilla

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

Latinx authors writing in English are challenging the western literary canon and the way stories are told through a western-centric lens. I argue that Mexican Canadian author Sylvia Moreno Garcia and her novel *Mexican Gothic* redefines the genre by telling the story of a British family living in 1950's Mexico from an anti-colonial feminist lens. After a review of the literature on the gothic genre and how authors of color use it to respond to western-centric ideas in their own gothic novels, I am approaching the text using postcolonial and decolonial feminist theories to conduct a textual, genre, and ideological analysis. My analysis reflects a portrayal of the gothic genre that centers and promotes anticolonial feminist ideologies such as having a decisive female protagonist of color who drives the story, a variety of characters that challenge gender and racial stereotypes, and contextualized depictions of Western characters and motifs. By analyzing the storyline and character development in *Mexican Gothic*, my research presents a feminist and anticolonial reading of the novel.

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DEDICATION

To my family, you all have made the investment in me, and I am determined to make it count.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

According to the recent article, “Just How White Is the Book Industry?”, ninety-five percent of the published authors in the US from 1950 - 2018 are White, which reinforces a western-centric worldview (So & Wezerek, 2020). Feminist, decolonial, and postcolonial theories have worked to deconstruct said worldview and reveal how whiteness and misogyny get reproduced through literature. This thesis draws from feminist literature because while not all its theorists focus on the intersection of race and sex, Disch & Hawkesworth (2016) in their article explain that the feminist theorists that do, begin by conceptualizing them as “the product of particular ways of thinking that privilege some while disadvantaging others” (p. 4). Postcolonialism on its end also deals with those kinds of intersections, but it also critiques “Eurocentrism [and rejects] universalizing claims and [emphasizes] difference and the local” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 123). On a similar vein, decolonial theory analyses, among other things, how “European knowledge production was accredited as the only valid knowledge, [while] indigenous epistemologies were relegated to the status of primitive superstition or destroyed” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 129).

Analyzing storytelling as a practice gives an opportunity to understand how both western-centric and alternative ideas get reproduced. It also helps in analyzing and creating gradual shifts in what people who are exposed to these stories consider normal or even possible. This research project connects

anticolonial (both postcolonial and decolonial) forms of feminism to literature by critiquing how some authors are presented as the authorities in the production of culture and knowledge (Mediatore, 2016, p. 951).

Silvia Moreno-Garcia is a Mexican-Canadian author of speculative fiction. Born in Mexico and raised in Canada, she obtained a master's degree in science, and technology from the University of British Columbia. Later, she began her career as an editor of horror anthologies, evolved to become a writer of short science fiction, then finally into the best-selling novelist known today. After publishing several science fiction and fantasy stories in magazines, in 2015 she published her first of nine novels, *Signal to Noise*. By the time she fully shifted from short stories to stand-alone novels, she had developed a background in the subjects of horror, science and technology that complemented the Mexican-culture focus of her novels. One of her latest releases, *Mexican Gothic*, is the text I will analyze further.

Set in 1950's Mexico, the novel follows Mexican socialite Noemi Taboada as she rescues her cousin Catalina from her abusive husband Virgil Doyle, his wicked family, and their cursed house. The novel features twelve different characters that I will be introducing in order of appearance, starting with Noemi, her father Leocadio Taboada, and her older cousin Catalina. At her father's request, Noemi travels from her home in Mexico City towards High Place, a secluded English manor in the Mexican countryside town of El Triunfo. She is introduced to her cousin's in-laws and learns that the living members of the

family are Virgil, his stern older cousin Florence, her shy son Francis, and the sickly family patriarch Howard Doyle. Once she arrives, she is surprised by the rundown state of the house and how all members of the family, with exception of Virgil, look ill, even when both her and her father were aware that Virgil's family had lost most of their fortune during the Mexican Revolution. Her mission is first stalled because she is told that Catalina is bedridden by a strong tuberculosis. When she finally gets to meet the family physician in charge of Catalina's recovery, Dr. Cummings, he condescendingly dismisses Noemi's questions concerns about finding her cousin psychiatric help, forcing her to stay in the house longer. Unconvinced with Dr. Cumming's diagnosis, Noemi becomes allies with Francis, who helps her learn the family's history and travel to the town of El Triunfo for a second opinion where she meets Dr. Camarillo and Marta Duval, the local healer. Over the rest of her visit, Noemi starts experiencing strange hallucinations and dreams, similar to what her cousin Catalina described in her letter to Mr. Taboada at the beginning of the story. Through the recurring dreams and some investigation, Noemi learns of deceased family members like the matriarch Agnes Doyle, her sister Alice, and Virgil's older sister Ruth. In the process of learning the disturbing details of the tragedies surrounding the Doyles, Noemi discovers that Virgil married her cousin because of both her money and her partially European bloodline, and that Howard plans to add Noemi into the family as well. In a supernatural twist, Noemi finds that the reason why Howard was able to rise to power was his acquisition of a local species of mushroom that

extends life and creates a psychic connection between its consumers. In an effort to weaponize the mushroom, Howard engages in incest, cannibalism, and slavery, using his mastery of the fungus to take over the minds of people working for him and ensure the cooperation of his family members. With the help of allies like Marta Duval, Dr. Camarillo, and Francis, Noemi and Catalina manage to destroy the Doyle family's mind controlling weapon and escape. Using genre and storytelling conventions such as point of view of a woman to decenter the White European experience, the novel plays on gothic elements such as the damsel in distress, the mad woman captive by a wicked husband, and the ghost to give an anticolonial twist to themes like feminism, imperialism, and eugenics.

Storytelling can be applied not only to explain difficult and complex themes, but to contextualize and reveal western-centric parts of literature as well. Author Silvia Moreno-Garcia (2020) and her novel, *Mexican Gothic*, make for ideal subjects of study because of how she manages to bring well-established gothic elements into dialogue with elements of the anticolonial feminist theories such as contextualizing English characters' actions and culture with their history as colonizers. For example, Moreno-Garcia is part of a long and established line of Latin American authors (Somers, 1950; Fuentes, 1980; Aridjis, 1993; Enriquez, 2016; de Fez, 2020; Ojeda 2020; Roche, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Ampuero, 2021; Bombal 2021; Rivero, 2021) that have used storytelling and notably the gothic genre to process subjects like coloniality, modernity, and patriarchy—which speaks to the richness of Moreno-Garcia's work and its

potential as a focus of research. Although *Mexican Gothic* exists alongside several novels that fit a global aspect of the gothic genre (Aleman in Sotomayor, 2021) that is usually categorized under Latin American gothic and an additional descriptor like Andino (in reference to the countries of Bolivia, Peru, Columbia, Ecuador, and Chile), decolonial, or feminist (Sotomayor, 2021), *Mexican Gothic* stands out because of the global recognition it has strategically managed to achieve. I will be explaining some of the things that the success of *Mexican Gothic* implies later.

To demonstrate my point on what elements *Mexican Gothic* contains, I will approach the text using the feminist postcolonial and decolonial theories to conduct a textual, genre and ideological analysis. While the last report of the So & Wezerek (2020) article was that the number of White authors being published in the US had decreased to eighty-nine percent by 2018, Moreno-Garcia is still one of the few authors of color published in the last five years. *Mexican Gothic* has earned several literary awards, appeared in multiple bestseller lists, and recently secured a limited series to be eventually released on *Hulu*. The definitive part of this piece of Moreno-Garcia's work, however, is how it subverts some of the foundations of the gothic genre itself. In other words, my argument in this thesis is that through *Mexican Gothic* Sylvia Moreno-Garcia is redefining the genre with an anti-colonial feminist lens.

Methodology

Textual, Genre, and Ideological Analysis

For this thesis, I am conducting a textual analysis on Sylvia Moreno Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*, published in 2020. Textual analysis is associated with the discipline of cultural studies, which operates on the axioms "that knowledge is power, that discourses define reality, and that there is no such thing as 'objective' knowledge" (McKee, 2001, p. 1). This type of analysis focuses on making educated guesses about what the most likely interpretations of text are (McKee, 2001). Subcategories or techniques in this type of methodology include genre and ideological analysis. Genre analysis on its part also involves studying the text, but its focus is on the tropes used in reference to create the characters, the representations of their social identities in the form symbols and metaphors, aspects of the plot such as who are the heroes battling a villain, and strategic choices about the setting like the inclusion of an isolated gothic manor. Lastly, ideological analysis is about identifying and interpreting recurring themes that emerge as the story progresses.

I conducted the analysis by looking for feminist and anticolonial elements in *Mexican Gothic* in the form of character representations, literary archetypes as rooted in both Mexican and British storytelling traditions about the supernatural, and an ideological analysis of the patriarchal and imperialist themes. I researched the gothic genre, especially the female gothic category, to establish a base for what a typical set of gothic characters is and then interpreted in what

ways these differed from the characters found in *Mexican Gothic*. I then organized and interpreted the different symbolic representations that characters fell under and how literary archetypes of Mexican origin were used to help subvert the ones of British origin. Afterwards, I looked for evidence of imperialist and/or patriarchal messages in the text, followed by anticolonial and/or feminist rebukes that address those messages. The result is a portrayal of a revamped gothic genre that centers and promotes anticolonial feminist ideologies such as having a woman of color as the heroine and an English patriarch that is written to symbolically stand for English colonialism as the villain.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Author Diversity and Representation in U.S. Storytelling: An Anticolonial Feminist Theoretical Perspective

Weinberg and Kapelner (2022) published a study they conducted in 2020 titled “Do Book Consumers Discriminate Against Black, Female, or Young Authors?” to see if the alleged discrimination in publishing was justified based on profit-focused arguments. The subject emerged into discussion when, encouraged by the #PublishingPaidMe protest on Twitter back in the summer of 2020, authors began disclosing their advances and providing proof of pay discrimination on Black authors. This study further revealed that the book publishing industry began as a “historic cultural gatekeeper [...] editors purportedly used to call the shots based on taste and cultural importance...”, but that has since changed to a business that bases their choices on the expected performance of the book or author on the market (Weinberg & Kapelner, 2022, p. 2). Weinberg and Kapelner’s article then proceeds to put into question the hegemony in publishing choices by pointing out that “publishers have also played an active role in creating and cultivating markets and crafting their expectations about book pricing, as in [for example] the structure of the female dominated romance market which focuses on mass market production of inexpensive books by women for women” (Weinberg & Kapelner, 2022, p. 2).

To clearly understand how the breakthrough of authors of color like Moreno-Garcia makes an impact in the U.S. literary canon, I will be relying on the framing of the anticolonial theories: postcolonial feminism and decolonial feminism, to cover both the importance of diversity in literature and the way *Mexican Gothic* decenters Eurocentric views on the gothic genre. The essential takeaway from the Weinberg and Kapelner study is that book consumers do not discriminate the material they read based on the author's race, gender, or age, merely on personal taste that has to do with the content of the book itself (Weinberg & Kapelner, 2022). The lack of discrimination on the consumer end indicates that the publishers are driven by "their own self-fulfilling prophecies about anticipated performance and market behavior", but what are those prophecies saying? On what are they based?

Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonialism made itself noteworthy by being "[a]ttentive to the power of discourse, [scholars] relied upon textual analyses to devise critiques of colonialism and capitalism that supplemented discussions of exploitation and domination" (Mendoza, 2016, p. 123). However, like in other recognized fields in academia where feminism has made significant contributions, the feminist aspects theory took longer than the theory itself to achieve recognition and validity of their own right (Mendoza, 2016). The main example that Mendoza (2016) gives is the career of Gayatri Spivak who challenged the choice of subaltern scholars to not address the dimensions of gender and sexuality in their

accounts of the “postcolonial condition”. Spivak is also credited for conceptualizing “epistemic violence” as a key feature of knowledge production in Western societies, especially subjects or concepts like the “third world woman, [the representation of] silenced women of the global South through a form of ventriloquism” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 124). The text of Spivak (1985) that informs this thesis, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”, details how third world women are represented in fiction in a way that blurs the boundary between animal and human so that their entitlement to humane treatment is easier to question and so they are reduced to tools that help glorify the imperialist project. Spivak also shows how third world female authors respond to these stories in their writing, humanizing those same characters and contextualizing the stories within the culture they were written, it being the culture of the British empire (Spivak, 1985).

Decolonial Feminism

Mendoza (2016) suggests in his research that while decolonial feminism has roots in the scholarship of Native-American, Chicana, and African feminists published in the 1960s and 1970s, its foundation is clearer in Gloria Anzaldua’s work in 1987. Anzaldua’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* presents her theorized concepts like that of mestiza consciousness and *pensamiento fronterizo*, which proposed “the subversive character of subjugated knowledges that fracture colonial languages and epistemology in ways that change the terms of debate” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 129). Another influential scholar, who notably draws from

postcolonial theory as well as theorists from Latin America, is Emma Perez with her book *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999), which focuses on the topics of Chicano, nationalist, and patriarchal historiography (Mendoza, 2016). There are also indigenous and African anticolonial scholars who study “both the impact of colonization on women and the colonizing discourses of Western feminism” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 130). Decolonial theory in itself is recognized as influential for scholars in Latin America, the Caribbean and is achieving recognition in “the US feminist academy, although it has not had the instant success that postcolonial theory experienced in the 1990s” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 131). Part of the reason is that some theories, such as Maria Lugones’ coloniality of gender, are still being contested. For example, one of the criticisms on Lugones’ (2010) is related to her concept that proposes “that indigenous societies did not have “gender” before European intrusion” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 131).

For decolonial scholars, deciphering whether the categories and organization of gender as we know it today were introduced after colonization or not is important because this influences “revolutionary theories and feminist proposals for state policies, laws, and practices as well as political imaginaries” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 133). However, Mendoza (2016) proposes that “the question of whether gender is a colonial construct or an ancestral practice may pose a false dilemma” because in either case, the contesting scholars agree that the European gender system was key to the arguably genocidal conditions that followed (p. 133). Due to the impact of gender in understanding colonialism,

hearing women's stories of their experience with it becomes crucial, uncovering how storytelling is a legitimate way to study the conditions that women have endured in societies that have been in contact with colonialism. In the next section, I will review the literature on how feminist scholars have used the literary canon for their agenda.

Feminist Applications for Storytelling

Since the western literary canon poses too broad of a topic, this thesis narrows down to the evolution of its system of genres. A study by Tzvetan Todorov & Richard Berrong titled "The Origin of Genres" explains that "[t]here has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in continual transformation, and the question of origins cannot be disassociated, historically, from the field of the genres themselves" (Todorov and Berrong, 1976, p. 161). In other words, genre is a system that is dependent and limited by the culture that it emerges from and the conventions that constitute each genre reflect that. Gayatri Spivak describes imperialism as "England's social mission, [...] a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" that is transmitted even through novels that are not meant to address that subject directly (Spivak, 1985, p. 319). The idea that western ideologies are propagated through the genre conventions is further supported by Todorov & Berrong's (1976) conclusion that genres are created through discourse and thus are essentially meant to change along with the people who engage with them. A way that postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholars seek to address the need for the western literary

canon to include ideologies that deviate from the western-centric is by contributing to said canon with their own stories.

For starters, feminism is a “mutifaceted, multisited project” that takes place across the globe (Lisa Disch & Mary Hawkesworth, 2016). In the facet that deals with literature, Shari Stone-Mediatore (2016) sets out to investigate the potential that storytelling might have in advancing such a project. One of the first observations she makes is that feminist thinkers use stories that feature some form of personal struggle to push boundaries in academic and political debates so they can amplify the voices that would not otherwise receive “a public audience or intellectual credibility” (Stone-Mediatore, 2016, p. 949). In the second observation however, she qualified the findings by saying that “storytelling has no unique affinities to feminist goals and, moreover, that feminist enthusiasm for storytelling risks providing a guise of liberatory speech to practices that reproduce structures of exclusion and domination” (Stone-Mediatore, 2016, p. 950).

The cautionary argument puts Stone-Mediatore (2016) in agreement with Todorov & Berrong’s (1976) article, which states “[g]enres communicate with the society in which they flourish by means of institutionalization” (Todorov and Berrong, 1976, p. 163). In other words, if storytelling is not inherently tied to any goals or agenda, its effects depend on what conventions are institutionalized at the time a published story is added to the canon. The “structures of exclusion and domination” that Stone-Mediatore (2016) warns about include 1) placing too

much emphasis on personal problems, 2) developing a debilitating lack of self-awareness, and 3) that by turning to storytelling authors of color can buy into the idea that they hold the same kind of authority than that of the elites that have helped silence them in past. In the end, however, Stone-Mediatore (2016) concludes that even if storytelling is not inherently feminist, thinkers in the discipline still turn to it because it nonetheless helps in making sure the intellectual styles and universal standards are challenged by both readers and storytellers. Moreover, the versatility of storytelling then brings up the matter of content versus form or audience that decolonial authors grapple with before they can have their work reach larger audiences, a concept that I will explain with examples in the section of the gothic genre. Nevertheless, storytelling and with it the western literary canon form part of the discourse where dominant ideas become institutionalized, making it worth participating in for feminist thinkers.

Gayatri Spivak's (1985) does exactly that when she sets out to deconstruct the Western creation of the Third World Woman. Using the novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and *Frankenstein* (1818), she examines the "the operation of the 'worlding' of what is today 'the Third World'" (Spivak, 1985, p. 320). The first two texts portray two different accounts of the character Bertha, who Spivak argues is used as "an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (2016, p. 326).

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is the ex-wife of the male protagonist (Mr. Rochester) whose marriage was arranged when she was a popular debutante in Jamaica. In Bronte's novel, she is portrayed as an unhappy woman who was unstable from the beginning of the marriage and who lives captive under Rochester's care to prevent her from hurting others or herself. The author of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, treats the character with sympathy by writing her a backstory that portrays her as more than an animalistic "other" figure meant to humanize Jane by contrast, who begins the story as a woman of lower status and therefore an "other" herself.

The last text, *Frankenstein*, is described as "a text of nascent feminism that remains cryptic, I think, simply because it does not speak the language of feminist individualism which we have come to hail as the language of high feminism within English literature" (Spivak, 1985, p. 329). Instead of a straightforward conflict between a vulnerable female protagonist and a dangerously obsessive man, "Frankenstein's apparent antagonist is God himself as Maker of Man, but his real competitor is also [the] woman as the maker of children" (Spivak, 1985, p. 330). Spivak reads *Frankenstein's* different feminist messages using psychoanalysis and Freudian theory, "I could urge that, if to give and withhold to/from the mother a phallus is the male fetish, then to give and withhold to/from the man a womb might be the female fetish" (Spivak, 1985, p. 330). Spivak finishes her chapter by qualifying that just because the writers' work exhibits certain messages of imperialism (Charlotte Bronte) and cryptic feminism

(Mary Shelley), that does not necessarily indicate the writers harbor those sentiments or convictions themselves. What the texts do help indicate is that “[h]ere the language of racism - the dark side of imperialism understood as social mission - combines with the hysteria of masculism into the idiom of (the withdrawal of) sexual reproduction rather than subject-constitution” (Spivak, 1985, p. 331). Spivak’s (1985) work argues that English storytelling has imperialist messages interwoven because the English are indoctrinated into propagating the ideology since youth. My study operates on the assumption that Spivak’s claim is true to explore how Moreno-Garcia uses the already critical nature of gothic fiction to challenge imperialist ideologies, such as the idea that a third world writer is less qualified to tell stories that are relevant in first world spaces.

The concepts of the Third World and storytelling are both revisited in Trinh Minh-ha’s (1989) *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Coherent with the arguments of Stone-Mediatore (2016) and Spivak’s (1985), Minh-ha asserts that “[i]mputing race or sex to the creative act has long been a means by which the literary establishment cheapens and discredits the achievements of non-mainstream women writers” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 16). In other words, Minh-ha critiques how writers who are divergent from the White heteronormative identity tend to be identified with a qualifier in front of their profession title and that such qualifier implies the writer's work is thus less relatable and valuable. Weinberg & Kapelner propose in their study that the bias

that affects writers of color does not lie with the book consumers but with the publishers' own self-fulfilling prophecies.

According to Minh-ha's work, the bias takes form in organizing identity through two traps: forcing the writers to choose a label to conform to and then pushing them to use it as a starting point for their assimilation process into the 'author' identity. These strategies are traps because first the labels are oversimplifying a writer's essence in ways that White, European male writers are not expected to. Second, since the unspoken standard is to be a White, European, male and 'objective' writer, a woman of color who aspires to the title can only strive endlessly without full success. Minh-ha (1989) concludes by saying that storytelling and researching identity in relation to writing is relevant for postcolonial feminism because it questions the assumptions of patriarchy and modernity, in this case who gets to bear the title of a writer without needing additional descriptions.

The most direct benefit that storytelling has been found to have in research is revealing the components of western concepts like how patriarchy and modernity affect the categorization different stories and their authors, but another postcolonial scholar has shown that it can also help those who engage with it in negotiating the norms that their society has indoctrinated them into. This is especially valuable for people who do not have access to higher education and with it, participation in the discussions taking place in academic and political circles. Anne McClintock's (1996) article "Imperial Leather: Race, Cross-

Dressing, and the Cult of Domesticity" analyzes the diaries of a couple in Victorian society, recording the clandestine and eventual marital relationship between Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick. Through a textual analysis, McClintock observes that Cullwick uses what she learns from her experiences in role playing and the reflections in her journal to take "her place among the countless women for whom fetishism was an attempt - ambiguous, contradictory and not always successful - to negotiate the boundaries of power in ways that do not yield simple lessons about dominance and submission" (McClintock, 1996, p. 650).

As the account progresses, McClintock notes that while Cullwick is a willing participant in the role-playing dynamics of the relationship, she resists the idea of marriage and refuses to appear in public as Munby's wife. McClintock writes "[i]f, on one hand, she called Munby 'Massa' [the dated slang form for the word 'master' enslaved people used in the US] and seemed to [adhere] symbolically to Rousseau's dictum that the husband should be a 'master for the whole of life'; [...] there is every evidence that she saw Munby's 'mastery' as purely theatrical" (McClintock, 1996, p. 671). Munby's and Cullwick's accounts over a period of decades reveal and highlight, first, the strong similarities between the expectations for a wife, servant, and slave. "Cullwick's slave-band [one of her more prominent identities in the dynamics with Munby] exposes a fundamental contradiction within classical liberal theory: women are naturally like slaves and thus cannot make contracts, but women must enter into contracts in

order to become wives and thereby waive their right to contract-making” (McClintock, 1996, p. 673). Second, the accounts demonstrate Cullwick’s insistence on angling for the rights that drive feminist agendas: agency over her body, labor, money, and reproductive freedom—all derived from a person who did not have the traditional/academic introduction and space to test those ideas.

The Gothic Genre

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (2022), the gothic novel is a pseudo medieval piece of fiction that kicked off with *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. It became known for featuring medieval buildings and ruins, castles, monasteries, subterranean passages, hidden panels, and trap doors. After solidifying itself with authors like Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker, the genre lost popularity and then resurfaced as an influence for authors like the Bronte sisters, Edgar Allan Poe, and Charles Dickens. It continued evolving into the modern horror and romance genres known today during “the second half of the 20th century, [when] the term was applied to paperback romances having the same kind of themes and trappings similar to the originals” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022).

Those who study the gothic genre usually divide it into two schools, the Female Gothic and the Male Gothic, although what determines each category is still being contested. To some, it is a distinction about the author’s gender while for others it comes down to the themes that emerge. Angela Leonardi (2016) explains in her article, “The Function of Gender in Female and Male Gothic,” that

it was scholar Ellen Moers who coined the term 'female gothic' to refer to Gothic fiction written by women after studying and comparing the two first Gothic novels, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Moers research is known for several insights, starting with the observation of how Radcliffe created a narrative with a female protagonist who is "a heroine and a victim at the same time, which would become one of the typical characteristics of the Female Gothic" (Leonardi, 2016, para. 5). Another key point in Moers' work is the claim that the category is a "coded expression of women's fears" such as entrapment, the cult of domesticity, and their lack of control and agency with regards to their bodies, especially during childbirth (Smith & Wallace, 2004). Despite being contested since the research and term first emerged in 1976, the main theme associated with stories that fall into the 'Female Gothic' category remains to be the tendency to portray eighteenth-century patriarchal society as one that tilts the political, social, and economic power in favor of men and is thus the main threat to the protagonists (Leonardi, 2016). This theme is what makes for either the backbone of contemporary gothic stories or for a key idea to which writers respond to in their own work, especially in the case of feminist and postcolonial feminist scholars.

The Female Gothic

The Mysteries of Udolpho is the second text published that fits the gothic genre (Britannica, 2022) after *The Castle of Otranto*, a male gothic, and is perceived as one of the two quintessential gothics. The male gothic, sometimes

described as the 'true gothic' emerged as a category in response to Anne Radcliffe's female led novel (Leonardi, 2016). Leonardi (2016) explains that the male gothic is considered to be 'the true gothic' because of its characteristics and the message they present: supernatural is always left unexplained, rape is shown more directly, and the universe in the story is merciless and confronted by an insubordinate protagonist. In other words, the gothic novel is only true to its genre if the villain is 'the Other' and the protagonist's job in the plot is to force it into submission and solve the conflict it inspires (Paravisini-Gerbert, 2017). The theme becomes even more problematic from an anticolonial feminist perspective once the reader begins to understand what, or whom, this "Other" is. Across the texts the list of "Others" includes but is not limited to Italian antiheroic men, Black men, and any other dimension of "race, landscape, erotic desire and despair" that presents an unknown to the usually close-minded protagonists—which in the Male Gothic includes all the female members of their own species. "[I]n Male Gothic fiction, women are seen as unnatural and artificial. Consequently, women are always presented in a negative way. This is of course in contrast with Female Gothic fiction, that mostly presents women as victims and questions their identity" (Leonardi, 2016, para. 10).

I will be expanding on both the research done on the use of the "Other" in gothic storytelling and the subcategories of the Female Gothic during my analysis in the next chapters, as that is the category I will be primarily using to inform my research. This section will first clarify the other way in which researchers divide

the two gothics. By relying on themes, the choice comes down to the horror (male) and terror (female) gothic. Leonardi's (2016) article explains that "the difference is that, while men fear [the horror of] 'the Other' (women included), women fear 'the terror of the familiar: the routine brutality and injustice of the patriarchal family, conventional religion, and classist social structures'" (Leonardi, 2016, para. 14). Because of the specific ways in which the experiences of either men or women get centralized, the divide still tends to include many authors whose gender matches the category of gothic they write for.

However, the argument that there is a correlation between the author's gender and the plot has been widely studied and since discarded, mainly by Alison Milbak in a compilation of book and several essays that look at the male writer appropriation of the Female Gothic, which is supplemented by Anne Williams' (1995) research using different Greek mythology and psychoanalysis. "[Williams] looked back through the use made of Greek mythology by Freudian psychoanalysis to locate the origins of the Female Gothic narrative (typified by female point of view, happy ending, explained ghosts and an adherence to terror), in the myth of Psyche and Eros, as opposed to the Oedipal myth which underpins the male version" (Smith & Wallace, 2004, p. 2). Thus, the debate has since evolved to asserting that female gothic is too wide of term because it oversimplifies the subject and does not present a fitting source of contrast on its own.

A good example of that oversimplification is a study that researches characters that “could be considered Gothic protagonists that operate both inside and outside the boundaries set by traditional Gothic motifs”. Michail Markodimitrakis (2016) analyzes the works of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), and Guillermo Del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006). Markodimitrakis centers his analysis around the female protagonists Alice and Ofelia, who undergo journeys meant to be a portrayal of resistance against the norms of the world they reside in. He explains his focus on the gothic genre by describing it as a revolutionary mode of expression since its beginnings, when it adopted its namesake from the Goth’s known for overthrowing the Roman empire, which stood as a symbol for order and divinely given power in its time. “It is used by multiple authors as a means to convey ideas, beliefs and anxieties, any feelings in general the readers inadvertently suppress but can never escape from” when thinking about their ‘modern’ and ‘rational’ world (Markodimitrakis, 2016, p. 2). Markodimitrakis finishes his reflection about what the genre constitutes by also supporting the opinions of authors like Moreno-Garcia, who perceive the gothic genre as one too versatile to be reduced to a single canon or in this case, a pair of narrowly defined categories.

Del Toro (2006) and Moreno-Garcia (2020) both are building on the Latin American gothic tradition and what is more, their approach to using male and female gothic reflects Anzaldua’s (1987) concept of *pensamiento fronterizo*

regarding the gothic categories. I began the critique of oversimplification as applying to the female gothic and its limitations, but in the next chapters I will show that *Mexican Gothic* extends creates complexity with the entire genre, incorporates elements categories of both without committing fully to either, and connects categories based on the Eurocentric and patriarchal elements they share, as I will explain with details later. Finally, it is also important to note another characteristic that Del Toro's and Moreno Garcia's work has in common: both have achieved global recognition because they have grappled with the conflict of content, meaning an anticolonial story, versus form, mainstream western audiences. By choosing to codify their texts with symbolism, strategically assimilating Eurocentric tropes and conventions to appeal to audiences who are not yet ready to entertain decolonial ideologies, they have managed to create decolonial texts that got published at the expense of clear alignment with decolonial ideologies. Again, I will only be able to allude briefly to the negotiations that take place for *Mexican Gothic* to appeal to general audiences and look forward to dedicating its own section to the limitations of decolonial and postcolonial mainstream published texts in a later study.

CHAPTER THREE:
REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMINISM IN *MEXICAN GOTHIC* THROUGH THE
FEMALE GOTHIC

In this chapter I argue that feminism is depicted in *Mexican Gothic* by choosing to have a heroine as the protagonist, the subversion of sexist tropes and stereotypes, and the portrayal of a feminist collective. First, I am looking at one of the subcategories of the female gothic called 'Gothic Feminism' which I use to outline how the character of Noemi sets herself apart from other gothic female protagonists. The section will be followed by tangible examples from the book that showcase the feminism portrayed through Noemi grounded in her interactions with the patriarchy as represented through the other characters in the book. After discussing how the gothic genre told through Mexican storytellers helps understanding the story through a marginalized person's experience, I will review some tropes or stereotypes that have roots in the gothic genre. These include the damsel in distress, the mad woman, and the ghost (Hogle, 2002), along with how Moreno-Garcia responds to them using her own adaptation of those tropes into her novel. Lastly, this chapter will show how the book characters portray a feminist collective that drives the plot.

Heroine Protagonist

How feminism is portrayed in gothic novels has been discussed and explored by authors before Moreno-Garcia thanks to the evolving lens of the female gothic genre (Smith & Wallace, 2004) and the novels of Latin American

authors (Somers, 1950; Fuentes, 1980; Aridjis, 1993; Enriquez, 2016; de Fez, 2020; Ojeda 2020; Roche, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Ampuero, 2021; Bombal 2021; Rivero, 2021). Due to the scope of this research, I will be narrowing my focus to the female gothic and using the anticolonial feminist elements to compliment the research, leaving the full connection to the Latin American gothic genre to be a future direction for research. Thus, the main subcategory informing this chapter is known as Gothic Feminism, coined by Diane Long Hoeveler (1998) after examining how the heroines in these novels posed as “blameless victims of a corrupt and oppressive patriarchal society while utilizing passive-aggressive and masochistic strategies to triumph over the system” (Hoeveler, 1998, in Smith & Wallace, 2004, p. 2). Due to the found vagueness of the overall genre, several of the subcategories of the female gothic are named as slight variations of the original. For example, analysis of texts that have gender as their subject of focus are referred to as “Feminine Gothic”, while when the texts are examined for queer messages they are referred to as “Lesbian Gothic”. Gothic feminism emerged as a response to the position of some scholars like Anne Williams (1995) who proposed that the male and female gothic differed in their Greek-myth-typified formulas. The male gothic in the formula analysis is informed by the myth of Oedipus, a tale about male taboo transgression, and the female gothic by the myth of Psyche and Eros, which depicts female victory through sacrifice. The contention between the two scholars is centered around Williams’ endorsement of the female gothic genre as a subversive or even revolutionary

depiction of female characters and their agency for its time. Hoeveler (1998) on the other hand proposes that depictions of women in female gothic literature make it the originator of what is currently viewed as a type of 'victim feminism', one meant to instruct middle class women how to strategically play-act at passive femininity to gain a "fictitious mastery" over the patriarchy.

In addition, based on the framing provided for other female gothic subcategories (Smith & Wallace 2004), Latin American gothic should be able to fit as one of the subcategories that sprung from research in the female gothic. It deals with feminist aims, is able to decenter dominant perspectives like postcolonialism encourages and thus should easily fit into the analysis, but it does not. The Latin American gothic brings back into discussion concepts like *pensamiento fronterizo* (Anzaldua, 1987), which rejects binaries and operates on a fluid space in the in-between. *Mexican Gothic* draws from both categories because it prioritizes a decolonial framework that communicates the complexity and nuance of the intersection of a woman of color with indigenous heritage that is faced with patriarchy and imperialism in a way that female gothic is too limited to do as it operates from a Eurocentric framework. The nuance, the fluid uncertainty is what I aim to include in the analysis not only to acknowledge properly the depth of decolonial work that has gone into *Mexican Gothic* that I cannot yet cover, but also to leave open future research directions.

Feminism Through Noemi

To set Noemi apart from other gothic protagonists, Moreno-Garcia chooses a couple characteristics that communicate both her protagonist's role in the story and her ability to participate in it. She is a twenty-two year old Mexican socialite from a large family, both of her parents are alive and she has a brother to inherit most of the pressing responsibilities. Her status as a daughter of a stable, affluent family deviates from the trope of helplessly vulnerable and subservient women.

Noemi has a European-Catholic upbringing, she is bilingual, well-read and determined to be one of the few women trying to pursue higher education in the fifties. This means that she is not just better prepared to navigate the systems of the imperialist and patriarchal society than the average person, but she also has the means to pursue 'unconventional' routes like higher education with minimum consequence. Given the fall of the British empire years prior to the 1950's when the story takes place, along with the bankrupt state of the Doyle family's wealth, Noemi's economic and social status places her on equal—if not superior—ground according to the classist and patriarchal society she lives in. Her level of privilege is what gives her room to challenge and question the English family that others do not have, either because they are of the working class as shown with the house staff and town residents, or for being too closely monitored as shown with younger or newer members of the family like her cousin Catalina, or black sheep like Ruth Doyle and Francis Doyle at later parts of the book.

Unlike other novels like *Jane Eyre* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where the female characters are either a full spectator or a train wreck of a villain, the book opens with Noemi leaving a late-night custom party with her date struggling to keep up, inverting the idea that women either pursue or work in attracting men. Another point that is clarified by the first chapter is how despite having more strengths and advantages than an average protagonist in the genre, she is still vulnerable. By showing how she is responding to the summons of her father, fuming for being called home early, it communicates that she is a capable woman who is neither helpless or invincible, especially in an era where Mexican women were still fighting for the right to vote.

Furthermore, while most of the canonized gothic novels include protagonists who just serve the purpose of exploring womanhood as an abstract in a patriarchal society, the author takes the first chapters to convey Noemi's personality and traits as a person one could actually encounter in real life. She is independently minded, scorns at the limiting idea that "[g]irls were supposed to follow a simple life cycle, from debutante to wife", but does not dismiss it in a postfeminist fashion. She understands that her privileges, like attending high-end parties, driving in her convertible, or being able to aspire for exciting experiences are all conditional to her social status and its responsibilities.

Noemi, by virtue of being a fleshed-out character, is then able to give a deeper exploration of womanhood and Indigenous identity showcased in how she alternatively pushes and adheres to the social roles assigned to her. For

instance, she describes getting permission to attend the party as is done in conservative households (p. 6) and takes critiques on her work ethic from her father (p.11) but omits information from him that might alter his willingness to support her decisions, like how her companion to the party is a suitor of lower status who she is not allowed to or interested in marrying. She expresses how she received the proper education of socialite where “[she] learned rebellion while muttering the rosary” (p. 23) during her education in a private Catholic school, which in context of her Indigenous identity also alludes to the rebelliousness to fully assimilate a colonial religion. She is also shown facing consequences for her ‘insubordination’, like being called flighty when changing her major three times but stubborn in refusing to let her parents dissuade her from finishing her education (p. 11), labeled as impertinent and spoiled by most of the Doyles, and an instigator by her cousin’s lewd husband Virgil (p. 261). Most importantly, none of these insubordinations are depicted as morally flawed in themselves, nor are the consequences presented as justified as they would be if the story promoted patriarchal values and aligned with a Virgin/Whore binary ideology. I will expand on the definition of the binary archetypes further in another section.

Benevolent Sexism Through the Father Figure

The displays of sexism are portrayed as harmful incrementally as the story progresses, and they all play a part in how Noemi’s situation worsens to the point that it does. The first type of display is of benevolent sexism that is represented

by Noemi's father, Leocadio Taboada. For the purposes of this chapter, I will define benevolent sexism as well-intentioned but condescending attitudes towards women that imply the innate superiority of men to justify traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 2016). Noemi only shares one scene with her father in the book, but many of her decisions are framed by the behaviors she exhibits in her interaction with him. Meaning, how she goes about making choices in a way that maintains her father 'indulgent' as a way to protect her own autonomy. For example, she has hobbies that indicate independence and are perceived as masculine, especially for the time period, like driving and formally studying history (p. 42), but her father 'allows' them because they indicate that her personality takes after his (p. 11).

Noemi's own beliefs challenge the idea that her leanings or decisions are unusual for a woman, framing the diversity in her interests as a natural result of her own capabilities and desires: "Noemi's father said she cared too much about her looks and parties to take school seriously, as if a woman could not do two things at once." Moreover, even though she has a degree of understanding over the flaws in her father's way of thinking, she is not able to perceive it clearly enough to see it as problematic as much as she does find it irritating. For example, when Mr. Taboada calls Noemi home early from a party because he has received a letter from Catalina, he explains to her that while he is worried, his main suspicion is that his melodramatic niece might just need someone to talk to. Noemi's internal dialogue qualifies that her cousin might be emotionally fragile to

a point, but that she does not think it is fair to write off Catalina's trauma from losing both parents at a young age as an innate tendency to be irrational (p. 10). Noemi then reflects that Catalina and Mr. Taboada have a difficult relationship because he broke off her first engagement, which Noemi thinks is the reason why the courtship with Virgil was a secretive affair right up until the courthouse wedding.

In summary, although it is extreme to hold Mr. Taboada as responsible for all the events that Catalina and Noemi endure in the book, the ideology that encourages him and other men to think that they have the obligation and right to make the decisions for women in their lives is characterized as what left the heroines vulnerable to the Doyle's in the first place. The story portrays how her uncle's controlling behavior is what first inspired Catalina's rebellion and helped Virgil manipulate her into the romanticized notion of a rushed wedding. The negative influence of the paternal character is also what drives Noemi to prioritize being likable, at times at the cost of her own boundaries.

Hostile Sexism Through English Civility

Noemi's arc throughout the story is arguably defined by what she learns from her interactions with Virgil. In a sense, her interactions with him are an escalation of what she experiences from her father, minus the respect that Mr. Taboada has for her as a human being. For the purposes of this chapter, I will define hostile sexism as antagonistic attitudes that place members of the male sex as superior and members of the female sex as an inferior threat that must be

conquered (Glick & Fiske, 2016). Although she is decisive and clever in how she handles situations, such as when she keeps the conversation on topic despite Virgil's attempts to dismiss her (pp. 33-34), her confidence is grounded in her privilege. When her confidence is shaken in front of Virgil's intimidating skepticism, she regains calm by reminding herself that she comes as an emissary of her father, who she perceives to be a highly respectable man (p. 32). In her mind, her words and endeavors have value only because they are supported by her father's, instead of their innate value of coming from a family member who can see the suspicious treatment of her cousin happening in front of her.

The privilege of her status as the young and educated daughter of an affluent family is what has enabled her to avoid a direct attack almost until the end, and it is also what keeps her blindsided to do anything of use to help Catalina or herself. In the story, the plan is for Doyles to bide their time until Noemi inhales enough spores from the mushrooms growing inside the house walls. The particular species of fungi is what enables them to establish a psychic connection, called the Gloom, that allows them to control others and so they hold back from doing anything other than expressing disapproval for the first few days of her arrival. Noemi, however, does not really see the connection between her privilege and the treatment the Doyles give her. She instead exhibits the belief that her power depends on being perceived as likable, that the transgressions that she can get away with are proportionate to how much others like her (p. 58).

Her arc completes as she accepts reality. In the middle of the story, there is a scene in which Virgil finds Noemi as she is sleepwalking (p. 118), an uncomfortable conversation ensues while he leers at her in her nightgown. When he insists on walking her to her room, she is portrayed as hesitant to voice that she wants him to leave her alone and accepts when he insists on escorting her through the dark hallways instead. The novel at one point also communicates explicitly that it is important for Noemi to avoid antagonizing other people:

It bothered her to be thought of so poorly. She wanted to be liked.

Perhaps this explained the parties, the crystalline laughter, the well-coiffed hair, the rehearsed smile. She thought that men such as her father could be stern and men could be cold like Virgil, but women needed to be liked or they'd be in trouble. A woman who is not liked is a bitch, and a bitch can hardly do anything: all avenues are closed to her (p. 58).

In addition to communicating Noemi's understanding of what attitudes are allowed for women, these statements serve as feminist assertions that show how the habits learned by conforming to the ideologies of benevolent sexism leave women vulnerable to the ideologies of hostile sexism because both are rooted in the same patriarchal narrative. In the scene with the nightgown is when it becomes fully apparent, at least from the outside, that the 'power' Noemi gains by being liked is an illusion that encourages her dependence on the approval of the upholders of patriarchy around her. In the next section, I will outline the

tropes, and the subversions, that form the myth that presents the patriarchal exclusion of femininity from power as the natural order.

Subversion of Tropes

Female identity in Mexico, and therefore in Mexican Gothic iterations of it, is informed by two archetypes: la Virgen de Guadalupe and la Malinche (Subero, 2016). It might be tempting to simplify these identities to opposing binaries, but both have complicated and conflicting meanings. Marianism is meant to embody values like virginity, piety, and selfless motherhood, among others, but also stand for the component of patriarchy that positions women as spiritually superior yet subservient to their male counterparts. In Indigenous spirituality, the Virgin was even fused with *Tonantsi*, a complicated female goddess who was stripped of their darker characteristics by the male-dominated facets of Azteca-Mexica culture (Anzaldua, 1987).

Malinchism is the reference to the enslaved woman who 'betrayed' her nation by choosing to work with Cortes. She, in the Mexican collective imagination, embodies both the nation's reverence to its partially lost Indigenous origins and the attraction to the values and traditions of the conquerors as a path to their own superiority. Anzaldua (1987) even shows the link of splitting *Tonantsi* original form into parts (*Tonantsi*, *Coatlícue*, *Tlazolteotl*, *Cihuacoatl*) to make her the good, one-dimensional mother and *Coatlícue* and *Tlazolteotl* into the whore aspects. Moreover, La Malinche's story and symbolism are central to the mythology of La Llorona (who is at times depicted as the same person), who

further develops her plight into a metaphorical stand-in for the Indigenous people who experience the grief of being seduced then discarded by the Western invaders.

Based on these archetypes of Malinchism and Marianism, Subero (2016) expands on the idea of Malinchism as a foundation for the idea of femininity as a monstrous entity (not necessarily in the form of La Llorona) that women must be protected from tapping into by God and the men in their life. The idea is further rooted in gender by asserting that women are crippled with hysteria due to their condition as mothers, essentially helpless to conditions like grief and resentment (usually triggered by the loss of their children and the abandonment of their lovers). The specific and punishing circumstances are meant to direct women towards being good, God-fearing women who will avoid becoming like La Llorona through the path of chastity until marriage to a virtuous Westernized man (as exemplified by Marianism and its own set of problematic characteristics). This in turn leads to the interpretation that, in what Subero (2016) admits is a misguided intention, La Llorona then becomes an attacker and corrupted mother figure who aims to rid the Indigenous women of both the domestic and foreign invaders that seek to take root in Mexico through them. This painful and dark reflection is how Subero (2016) explains the severe reality that Mexicans need to come to terms with: mestizaje (the mixing of indigenous and colonial cultures) happened through a brutal process, but the resulting identity must be accepted and celebrated for healing to occur.

These actualizations of the gothic narrative have gone to great lengths to explore and process Mexico's conflict with its opposing cultural identities—embodied in a woman nonetheless—but have yet to address the limiting depictions of womanhood. Depictions of La Llorona, a female vampire, and a witch all serve the same purpose in Mexican gothic narratives: to blur the lines between the binary identities of indigenous and colonial by contrasting them to the firm and condoned ones of the virgin and whore dichotomy. I argue that part of Moreno-Garcia's contribution with her female characters is expanding the ways in which womanhood can be depicted in the gothic genre in ways that align with feminism in challenging the duality of the Marianism and Malinchism archetypes, like her Latin American gothic predecessors have done, but with a complicated set of codifications that can still be presented to western audiences even as the distinguishing details are rooted in Indigenous spirituality.

The Clash of the Heroine/La Malinche and the Byronic Hero

Noemi has the markings of a strong hero, she is capable, decisive, and intelligent. Her strengths are subversively communicated as her interest in her looks, her curiosity for the arts, and interest in men even though these are also stereotypically feminine interests. More importantly, she has traits that make her vulnerable because they are characteristics that she has in common with the archetype of la Malinche, like her ability to knowingly wield her sexuality as well as her attraction to Western values and traditions—such the ones that dictate that men like Virgil who fit the trope of the byronic hero are an ideal or more

compelling type of European masculinity (Stein, 2004). The byronic hero trope is assigned to male characters that fit the description of being tortured, individualistic, and representative of an unattainable ideal that is not meant to be a role model (Stein, 2004).

Virgil himself is described across the story by Noemi as a handsome and polished man (p. 10). His speech and mannerisms are melancholic, intense, yet constantly civil; his ability to be threatening without raising his voice or using foul language is a key trait for his character and something I will explore further in the section of the mad-woman/damsel-in-distress (p. 284). By playing off Noemi's and Virgil's chemistry, the novel executes the subversion in three forms, starting off with how the relationship between the two never develops into a romance. Instead, Moreno-Garcia uses their dynamic to showcase the predatory nature of Virgil's—and therefore the byronic trope's—characteristics. Derived from his own father's worldviews, Virgil reasons his actions through a philosophy of predetermination (p. 89) where he takes what he wants regardless of what others around him, including Noemi, want. For example, near the end of the book he traps Noemi in a room after her forced wedding ceremony to his cousin Francis Doyle and then tries to assault her (p. 261), the language he uses deliberately frames symptoms of Noemi's chemically induced arousal as consent despite her explicit verbal refusal. The assault serves as a moment of feminist assertion in the plot because it challenges the attractiveness with which the byronic hero's

obsessiveness and selfishness is presented, choosing to highlight instead how it normalizes abusive tendencies towards women.

Mexican Gothic's second subversion to the conventional dynamic between the byronic hero and the gothic heroine is by giving Neomi unconventional traits for a gothic heroine that interfere with her disposition to be subservient. There is her habit of smoking, some knowledge on anthropology, and her sense of identity developed through strategic rebellion. Smoking, which at the time was regarded as a refined and aesthetically pleasing habit is also toxic to the mushrooms that the Doyles are trying to poison her with, giving a small but precious immunity as it fights off the spores accumulating in her lungs. When she meets her cousin's British in-laws, her education allows her to discern not only the racist politics that the Doyles live by, but also how to fight back once she gathers enough clues. Lastly, the willfulness that she has cultivated is what gives her the strength to break away from the Doyle family's mind controlling device, it being the Gloom, long enough to destroy it.

Finally, the last subversion is how Neomi avoids giving in to the weaknesses she shares with the archetype of La Malinche by developing a romance with Francis Doyle, Virgil's mutinous cousin, by the end of the novel. Even though Francis Doyle is a member of the Doyle family and British, he is depicted as one who stands opposed to his family's way of life in whatever way he can. He is the only one capable of speaking Spanish, he shows respect for local customs and people, and the desire to grow and distance himself from his

roots in a way that the rest of his family does not. Through her relationship with Francis, Noemi is depicted rejecting the idealized version of European masculinity but European masculinity itself. Adding the dimension of Malinchism, Noemi's rejection of her potential relationship with Virgil also serves as symbolic rejection of patriarchy's implied supremacy from a Mexican female who refuses to assimilate that system even as she negotiates by working with the resources she had access to like Francis' help.

Damsel in Distress/The Mad Woman/Marianism

Catalina is portrayed through the tropes of the damsel in distress, the mad woman, and the Marianism archetype. The characters that fit these tropes tend to be subservient to male characters, unidimensional, and in the case of two of the tropes, regarded as pure. I will be explaining each of them separately for the sake of clarity in this section. First, the mad woman is a trope that describes a stigmatized depiction of mental health where a female character is both presented as a threat and as subservient to a male character (Haralu, 2021). It is commonly used in gothic literature and can be found in books like *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Rebecca* (1938) and short stories like "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), to which this story makes several references (pp. 252, 257, 276). The second trope, the damsel in distress, is first found applied to a gothic heroine in Horace Walpol's (1764) *Castle of Otranto*, described as a character that is "permitted only to find herself in danger, scream, flee, and be rescued or protected by various male characters [...] it would be difficult to pin down a single aspect of her

personality, other than her desire to marry the male hero” (Skopic, 2019). While Catalina is never explicitly described by this title, Noemi does express that she regards her as a sweet nurturer who would find living in Highplace unbearable, even before she has the chance to witness Catalina telling her about the voices haunting her in person (p. 31). Her compassionate qualities also make her fit with Marianism, as the archetype is portrayed through a character’s virginity, piety, and selfless motherhood (Subaro, 2016). In the book, Noemi describes Catalina’s affinity for motherly duties, she is shown suffering mostly in silence throughout the story, and the reader is told by other characters about the inexperience that Virgil took advantage of when convincing her to marry him in a rush.

She is first mentioned when Mr. Taboada calls Noemi to show her a letter Catalina sent from High Place, the English manor where she lives with her newlywed husband, Virgil Doyle. In the letter, she erratically begs her family to rescue her, claiming that she is being poisoned and that she is hearing voices from inside the walls. Mr. Taboada in turn expresses concern that his niece might be struggling with her mental health and is not receiving the right attention, as High Place is located in the Mexican countryside and Virgil’s family does not count with a lot of resources.

The way Mr. Taboada frames the events leading to Noemi’s visit for her, even if she is shown privately disagreeing in the novel, set the stage for the key messages that Moreno-Garcia conveys with these tropes: the subtle

manifestations of abuse and theme of female rage. The abuse is subtle because Virgil is treated with the benefit of the doubt, by both Noemi and her father, right up until the climax. When Mr. Taboada demands to know what is happening via correspondence, Virgil's behavior is evasive and aggravated at having another man meddle in "his business", as was an acceptable attitude at the time.

Although aware of the suspicious circumstances the hurried marriage took place in and the way laws and conventions at the time gave Virgil control over Catalina's bank account, he chooses to send Noemi to investigate in what he hopes will be a non-confrontational maneuver.

It is not until later in brief conversations and independent investigation from Noemi's part that it is revealed that Catalina used one her few trips to the town church to ask Marta Duval, the local healer, to send the letter for her. Noemi, and therefore the reader's, support of Catalina is how the trope of the mad woman is first unraveled. The story incrementally validates her account of the events not only by having Noemi endure the same thing but by choosing to be careful with the disclaimers. Instead of aiming to distance Catalina from the trope of the mad woman, Moreno-Garcia works to dismantle its validity all together, starting with the narratives that might serve to excuse Virgil's behavior.

When Mr. Taboada first calls Catalina melodramatic, Noemi privately counters it with her own perception of her: a gentle person who lost her parents at a young age. When Virgil attempts to portray her as afflicted from opioid-induced seizures and suicidal, Noemi discovers different evidence and reasons

out the flaws in Virgil's story. Through conversations with both Marta and Dr. Camarillo, the town's physician, she learns that not only does Marta not have the resources to create an opioid-based tincture, but that even if she did, then it would help with the seizures, not cause them (p. 160). In a later conversation with Francis Doyle, he urges her to drink the tincture for herself, as the herbal remedy is what Catalina was using to fight the effect of the spores and thus regain her free will, not a poppy-based drug meant to kill her after a seizure.

Following the narratives of Catalina's 'hysteria' comes the hallucinations that take away from her credibility, until Noemi begins her research. Even before completely piecing together the inner workings of the Gloom, Noemi hits the mark in her theory that there is a scientific explanation for the hallucinations that both her and Catalina have been experiencing (pp. 176-177), further tearing down the English and patriarchal myth that divides and isolates women in their struggles. After successfully establishing that Catalina is not the problem, the story goes on to address the dimension of her mostly private rebellion to escape her husband and his family.

She attempted to covertly warn Noemi during their first conversations (pp. 26, 50), she tried to escape before being stricken by the seizure for using too much tincture after being exposed to the spores for too long (p. 140). Finally, once the Doyles are convinced that Noemi is fully under Howard's—Virgil's father and family patriarch—control, the pretenses are dropped. Catalina then is notably quiet during the makeshift "wedding ceremony" of Noemi and Francis until the

following ritual where Howard's consciousness is supposed to be transferred into Francis' body. With Virgil's cousin Florence perceiving Noemi as the main threat, Virgil himself being incapacitated, and Howard and Dr. Cummins being too occupied with trying to transfer Howard's consciousness to Francis, Catalina finds an opportunity in being ignored. It is worth noting that the events up to this point solidify her status as a damsel in distress because despite her many efforts, she does not manage to escape until Noemi helps her directly.

While in a different story she would have been the villain, in here her decision to move discreetly towards the bed where the sickly Howard lies to stab him in the eye is one of the most heroic moments in the book. The moment is what springs the protagonist back into action where, after another sequence of events takes place where Francis kills his mother Florence, Noemi drags both him and Catalina out through the house and into the family mausoleum. The three almost make it out until they are intercepted by Virgil, who gets caught up in a fight with Francis after trying to attack Noemi. By successfully getting dismissed from the villain's notice for a second time, Catalina once again has the opportunity to take the initiative when Noemi lights the roots of the Gloom on fire and leaves Virgil vulnerable to her attack.

Again, part of the power of Catalina's depiction as a vulnerable damsel/Maria archetype that turns mad woman is that it does not distance itself from any of the tropes, but instead embraces and reclaims them, turning the blame not only on Virgil, but also on the "civilized" patriarchy he is meant to stand

for and the violence it inflicts on women. In the next section, I will be looking at the character Agnes Doyle who is the clearer example of the marianism archetype. As it is, the story uses the characters of Catalina, Agnes Doyle, and Florence Doyle to display different versions of what happens to women in the Doyle family who align with the archetype. Catalina is treated as a hostage, Florence internalizes the ideologies she has been raised with and exerts them on those she considers beneath her, and Agnes is sacrificed in the name of the family's glory.

The Ghost

A clearer portrayal of female rage and the marianism archetype is seen in the character of Agnes Doyle through the trope of the Ghost. To clarify, the trope of the ghost is regarded as a "characterization of supernatural encroachment" (Frank, 1987). In other words, it is used as a symbolic representation of something intangible that threatens the protagonist. In the case of *Mexican Gothic*, the trope is used to expose the callous type of imperialist patriarch that Howard Doyle is based on and the nature of the violence he will likely inflict on others if given the chance. In the story, Agnes Doyle is shown to be the eldest of Howard's two nieces, orphaned at a young age then sent to live with him in Mexico once the mine started flourishing. When time came to find her a suitor, Howard married her himself, making her the matriarch of the family. When Howard discovered that he would be able to achieve immortality and a version of mind-control by fusing the fungus with a human mind, he buried Agnes alive

where the fungi grew. Her traumatic death turned her into the Gloom, a person turned space where Howard can access the minds of others who breathed the spores and ate the fungi unknowingly slipped into their food. A space where the minds of the people who breathed these spores would be connected to and left vulnerable to Howard's manipulations.

After her death, Howard remarried to Agnes' younger sister, Alice Doyle, who would become the mother of Ruth and Virgil. It is unclear if there were more children born from either Agnes or her sister, as Noemi narrates visions during her dreams that show a woman giving birth then being killed (p. 155). The men in the vision, one of them presumably being Howard, would then lead a ritual where they would kill and cannibalize the child born with spores already in their system as a way to strengthen the connection between Gloom and the surviving members of the Doyle family (p. 281).

While the trope originally described the ghost as representing a supernatural being that is the manifestation of something that invades and disrupts the natural order, Noemi's description reframes the existence of Agnes' ghost as the indicator that the natural order has been disrupted—not the cause itself:

And it struck her all of a sudden this fact that she had missed, which should have been obvious from the very beginning: that the frightening and twisted gloom that surrounded them was the manifestation of all the suffering that had been inflicted on this woman. Agnes. Driven to

madness, driven to despair, and even now a silver of that woman remained, and that silver was still screaming in agony.

She was the snake biting its tail.

She was the dreamer, eternally bound to a nightmare, eyes closed even when her eyes had turned to dust (p. 289).

In the sense of Agnes' condition being the signal of a problem instead of a problem in itself makes it well suited to treat the theme of female rage because of what it reveals about the standards that women are held to. Like in the case of la Malinche's evolution to the myth of La Llorona, the tropes of the ghost and even that of the mad woman present the victims of trauma in their aftermath as the monsters. These women are the disruptors of the natural order, they are who need to be defeated by the protagonist, not the crimes against women that are still taking place in the modern world. Moreno-Garcia takes the trope and subverts it by treating the patriarchy and its demands as the curse and her release the key to breaking it. The use of the serpent as a symbol also links this scene to Anzaldua (1987) and the *Caotlicue* state, an Indigenous-based metaphor the dark night of the soul that, in Anzaldua's take, prompts people trapped in their addictions to wake up and engage in life again.

Feminist Collective

Mexican Gothic depicts several people assisting Noemi and Catalina in destroying the Gloom and escaping the Doyle family: Agnes Doyle, Ruth Doyle, Francis Doyle, Dr. Camarillo and Marta Duval. I argue that the choice to give

Noemi and Catalina a support network is feminist because it demonstrates the importance of solidarity in the struggle against patriarchy. For example, when Noemi first arrives at the house, she begins receiving visions from Agnes (pp. 55-56) about the family history, creating a contrast between the manipulative narrative that the family presents to her and the actual tragedies that make up its past. The visions and dreams also serve as exposition for the reader to understand that the downfall of Howard Doyle and his family is a task completed by Noemi, but initiated decades prior by Howard's daughter Ruth. Through the piece of Ruth's consciousness that is attached to the Gloom, Noemi learns how the young girl killed a large number of her family members and wounded Howard in a way that left his body permanently weakened thereafter, stunting the traction he had made in taking over the town of El Triunfo.

Although English and treated as a valuable member of the family at the time, the character of Ruth is portrayed as feminist by showing how she uses her free will to choose a lover who is not approved by her family and by showing when she fights back after her fathers tries to force her to marry one of her cousins anyway. Noemi is shown how in revenge for killing her lover, Ruth took a shotgun the day of her wedding and killed the groom Howard chose for her, the groom's parents, Ruth's own mother Alice, and then finished by shooting Howard in the stomach. Her older cousin Florence at this point had hidden with an infant Virgil, escaping the attack. Despite her efforts, Howard survived the wound and used the Gloom to force Ruth to point the gun at herself. In Noemi's visions, she

sees Ruth's last moments repeatedly, altered slightly to tell her the key to freeing Agnes and destroying the Gloom. Although Ruth fails to defeat her abusive family, she does manage to weaken it and establish herself as Noemi's ally within the Gloom.

In addition to depicting Agnes and Ruth as informants that help jeopardize the patriarchal system they exist in from the inside, there is the unlikely ally she finds in Francis Doyle. He is the one who conspires with her, bends the rules by taking trips to the town, fills in the blanks about the family history and shares the weaknesses of the fungus that helps create the Gloom. Francis is depicted as one of the heroes and also an antithesis to the Doyle family's belief that people's natures are unchangeable from what they are born into, which they use to justify the genocide and oppression of what they regard as "inferior" individuals. At the end, he kills his mother in a struggle for a revolver to keep her from shooting Noemi and he fights Virgil when he tries to attack her and Catalina. His portrayal comes across as feminist because his more feminine qualities are what is consistently highlighted throughout the story. He is nurturing and sincere when Noemi is feeling confused and later defeated when she understands that she will be forced to join the family through marriage (p. 235). Although he was raised with the same teachings as the rest of the family, he is depicted as conflicted and thus increasingly rebellious as the story progresses. The story shows how his moral code is one of the reasons why Howard chose him as his next vessel as opposed to Virgil, who grew up to be exactly the type of abusive person he

values. Also, there is another subtler decolonial element that relates to the relationship and narratives that Indigenous Latin Americans have with different empires. There is an idiosyncratic relationship between Spain and the Latin American cultures they colonized where the latter presents itself as the lesser of two evils because most of the strategy focused on religious conversion of the Indigenous followed by assimilation attempts through breeding with them, contrasted with the genocide of the Anglo-Dutch colonists (Gallegos, 2022). By making Francis a compassionate love interest, the relationship also presents a counterpoint to that narrative because it portrays an Anglo-Dutch male character as an alternative ally that nullifies the value of the “lesser evil” that Spanish colonizers offer.

Then there are the depictions of the specialists Dr. Camarillo, the local doctor in El Triunfo who Noemi asks for a second opinion on Catalina’s condition, and Marta Duval, who gives Catalina and Noemi the tonic to fight off the effect of the fungus. Unlike the family physician Dr. Cummings, the portrayal of Dr. Camarillo is feminist because he is written to act non-condescending, humble, and compassionate. When Noemi comes to him for help, he agrees to examine Catalina even though the Doyles are hostile to him. He is willing to take her account seriously unlike Dr. Cummings, who dismisses her protests, and he is honest and transparent when he cannot provide the help she is looking for. Moreno-Garcia seems to make a point of giving both Francis and Dr. Camarillo moments where they admit they are out of their depth (pp. 86, 279), challenging

the stereotype that men must always take charge and have the solutions for any given situation. In turn, Marta is shown helping Catalina send a letter to Mr. Taboada in secret and serves as Noemi's main informant in filling in the blanks about El Triunfo's history with the Doyles. Although the appearances are seemingly brief, the participation of all these different characters makes the story a feminist text because it communicates the importance of making feminist struggles a group effort, instead of instances of individual empowerment.

Conclusion

Moreno-Garcia places different feminist and patriarchal ideas in dialogue with each other through Noemi and her interactions with other characters, how Moreno-Garcia subverts tropes and uses them to unpack and dismantle the Marianism/Malinchism binary, and how she sets up the plot in way that makes the defeat of the villains a group effort as opposed to an individualistic pursuit. While traditional gothic heroines are shown performing unidimensional passive femininity to navigate the system (Hoeveler, 1998), Noemi is consistently active in the plot and able to come across as a complex character regardless of whether she is exhibiting her strengths or her weaknesses. Moreno-Garcia explains the qualities of Marianism outside of their romanticized framing and explores how the characteristics associated with the archetype of La Malinche are used to demonize strong-willed women. Finally, she uses multiple characters to show the varied direct and indirect forms that resistance can take.

CHAPTER FOUR:

REPRESENTATIONS OF ANTICOLONIALISM IN *MEXICAN GOTHIC*

Gothic novels are set up to be formulaic stories centered around heroes and villains (Williams, 1995), usually featuring villains that deviate somehow from the archetype of an ideal or redeemable British protagonist. Moreno-Garcia uses her own novel to show how characters actually fall into the categories of the colonizers and the colonized, with the colonizers being presented as the heroes. Spivak (1985) argued in her own reading of the British novels *Jane Eyre* and *Frankenstein* that gothic novels by western authors serve to promote England's social mission of spreading imperialism around the world. In the individualized perspectives of gothic novels, imperialism is communicated in the gothic plot by centering around protagonists who fit idealized versions of English masculinity or femininity and antagonists who are threatening because of their difference, be it a disability like Bertha's in *Jane Eyre* or a foreign culture and language like in *Dracula*. Moreno-Garcia reverses the western gothic novels' formula by representing the English colonizers and their romanticized culture as the villains of the story and colonized Mexican characters as the heroes.

To illustrate why this in an anticolonial novel, I will discuss the depictions of the colonized and the colonizers. Although the two depiction themes overlap, I will be breaking down each separately and in-depth. Moreno-Garcia contextualizes the impact of the British family's presence in Mexico by telling the story through the eyes of a woman of color that uses her own culture and values

as a point of reference. In the second part of the chapter, I explain the Doyle family's relationship with imperialism and how Moreno-Garcia uses mushrooms as a metaphor for colonization.

Humanizing the Colonized: Depicting the Family and Working Class Values

Mexican Gothic recounts the fall of a family of British aristocrats that colonized the Mexican countryside town of El Triunfo, a silver mine turned ghost town after the Mexican Revolution in 1910. *Mexican Gothic* features Noemi Taboada as the protagonist and narrator, which from an anticolonial perspective presents a challenge to imperialist institutions that work to silence voices that deviate from the European patriarchal narrative. As a heroine, she is depicted as an educated affluent family to create a contrast to the limiting way in which Mexican women are conventionally depicted in western media as strictly members of the working class but also to add nuance to her character. One of the decolonial ideologies is to shift away from dichotomies like good and bad to make space for complexity (Anzaldúa, 1987), but also for the negotiations that take place during the creation of texts that reach the mainstream like *Mexican Gothic* (Gallegos, 2022). Finally, by having her as the protagonist in the story, the novel stands as anticolonial because it shows the value of letting women tell the stories of their people through their eyes, filling in the blanks that the colonizers create in their cultural narrative.

Even though she was born into a relatively advantageous position, the colonizers in the story still treat her primarily as an Other. For example, when

Howard starts conversation remarking on her dark skin and presumed indigenous heritage (p. 29). Noemi follows the comment with a challenging “what is your point?” response that Howard uses as a prompt to start a condescending conversation on Jose Vanconcelo’s book *The Cosmic Race*, which he uses to suggest that she, along with some members of the Mexican population, admirably display some desirable traits despite their undesirable indigenous heritage (p. 29). This scene not only explicitly communicates the darker side of imperialism that is racism (Spivak, 1985), but it also stands for the rejection of that ideology. By making it an interaction between Howard and Noemi, the conversation serves to challenge the stance that indigenous traits are undesirable by focusing on presenting Noemi’s culture in a favorable light as well as showing what “undesirable” traits look like when found in a member of a high economic class.

Nuance Through the Protagonist

Before getting into some of those culture markers, I will further address Moreno-Garcia’s decision to write Noemi’s character as a socialite. In an interview following the book’s release, she explains that she wanted Noemi to come from a wealthy family that prides itself on being high class and western-educated because she wanted a Mexican heroine who would occupy a position other than that of a nanny or servant (Moreno-Garcia in Quintana, 2021). In addition, changing the trope that a gothic heroine needs to be below the gothic hero in the hierarchy not only challenges the stereotype by which Mexican

women are presented, but also enables Noemi's character to be skeptic of the superiority narrative the British family relies on to encourage the submission of members in the working class, which Moreno-Garcia argues would not be possible if Noemi were written as a member of the working class herself.

Therefore, what separates Noemi is that her version of sophistication is based on a different set of values than those of the Doyle family. This is important because the critique made on how Mexican characters are dehumanized in gothic novels is more comprehensive than simply coding the rich as bad and the poor as good. Noemi's family displays wealth through modern and flamboyant trappings as well as time spent building connections with family and community. Aside from the time where Noemi explicitly says that she is "expected to devote her time to the twin pursuits of leisure and husband hunting" (p. 6), otherwise interpreted as being an active member of the community who is focused on expanding her family unit, the way in which Noemi describes her status is by listing where she shops, expensive items she has access to, and the private school where she was taught to speak English. Her values in this area are not necessarily opposite or innately noble by comparison to those of elitism, tradition, and discretion shown by the Doyles, but they do put her in a position where she can understand and reject their idealized way of life because she is an equal.

In addition, Moreno-Garcia does make a commentary through Noemi about what she thinks of people in the service industry, even as she decides to

not make her protagonist as one among them. While British etiquette for the staff instructs to be all but invisible, Noemi is written to acknowledge their humanity from page 1. She describes how the chauffeurs of the party patrons systematize a routine to balance their needs with their commitments, such as sleeping, socializing with other chauffeurs, or sneaking away to visit a love interest or pursue dinner. Although the conditions described are not ideal circumstances of living by any means, there is still an acknowledgement that these people are not employees, but that they are merely people who are employed. The description focuses on the agreement of two collaborators, the patron and the chauffeur, to work on an agreed task and then split the agreed profit. It is notable that in this scene, Noemi and her date break the unspoken agreement by leaving early, so the chauffeur is nowhere to be found and the two are forced to look for a taxi to return them home. I argue that this is a subtle reminder of the free will of members in the working class, a trait that the staff at High Place lacks completely.

To clarify, the author does not paint the life of members of the working class that do not come in contact with High Place as better than those in the Doyle family because their situations are perfect, but because they challenge the romanticized myth of the noble aristocrats and their devoted servants whose lives revolve around their masters. Aside from the initial example in the first page, Noemi elaborates on her attitudes towards working class people when she meets the staff at High Place for the first time. She notes how, true to the myth, the staff

is almost as invisible as the servants in the fairytale of *Beauty and the Beast*—before ridiculing the idea of a home being maintained by faceless and nameless entities (p. 59). As simple as it sounds, Noemi is effectively set apart and closer to the Other because she describes being used to knowing all the people who worked at her house and in High Place by name as the norm.

Vertical and Horizontal Thinking

Next, there is the emphasis on family and community that is shown by the Taboadas throughout the book. For starters, there are the moments when the reader learns of the Taboada family's history through Noemi. After the death of Catalina's parents, Mr. Taboada adopts her and raises her as his own (p. 13), finances her wedding to Virgil as a gesture of good faith (p. 9), and then makes arrangements to intervene when she expresses via correspondence that she does not feel safe with her husband and his family (p. 12). Moreover, the plot itself is about a damsel in distress who counts on the woman she is closest with to rescue her.

During the story, Noemi mocks the importance some families place on a person's position in the family tree when Francis explains that he is Virgil's cousin once removed. "I always figure that if they come to my birthday party we are related and that's it, no need to pull out the genealogy chart" (p. 19). When put in context with the Doyle family's devotion to their self-perception as "the finest type of manhood and womanhood possible" that is revealed later in the plot (p. 78), Noemi's statement separates the two definitions of family in the book:

hers being a community that aims for the greater good versus something that is more akin to an exclusionary guild. On top of the definition, there is the difference in what counts as quality time in relation to family from each side, Noemi describes being used to casual norms, like evenings having coffee with milk and pastries during lively conversations (p. 28) seeing Catalina look after the younger members of the family as her father offers prizes to the child who solves his riddles (p. 31). Unlike the dynamics of the Doyle family that I will outline in the next section, Noemi has been raised to view traditions, like partaking of meals with family, as a way to fulfill collectivistic purposes that strengthen the bond to the community.

Mexican Gothic manages to challenge the colonizer-colonized hierarchy that Mexican people are oppressed under without inverting it. By the end of the novel, the characters of Noemi, Catalina, and Francis are simply a group of people that present a symbolic alternative to imperialism and its values. For example, Noemi is depicted as being able to speak English as a demonstration of her capabilities similar to Francis who chose to embrace his environment by learning Spanish (p. 18), demonstrating once again how *Mexican Gothic* symbolically rejects the disdainful part of European culture instead of the culture itself. She embeds Mexican culture markers, ways of thinking, and complex characters in the gothic formula created by white European authors for white European audiences, and she does so by presenting the virtues and validity of

an alternate culture—not its superiority as that would simply imply a transition from one hierarchy to another.

Depicting the Atrocities of the Colonizers

In *Mexican Gothic*, imperialist Britishness is depicted as obsolete, predatory, and arrogant through the members of the Doyle family. For example, using her own culture as a point of reference, Noemi deems the British markers of wealth she finds upon her first meeting as “dated, dirty, and [in need] of a paint job” (p. 16). The dissatisfaction narrated by Noemi serves as a critique of the unfounded pride that markers—like the outdated car Howard sends Francis in to pick up Noemi (p. 16) or the tarnished silver engraved plates and cups in the china cabinets (p. 27)—stand for because of the way they are used to indicate a standard of excellence that Howard defines his bloodline by (p. 78). While the gothic genre itself is founded in the romanticization of medieval buildings and families that cling to tradition in a world of change, Noemi is written to question this by expressing feelings of discomfort with the contrast between the somber Victorian High Place and the modern homes, apartment buildings, and bright colonial houses she is used to (p. 20). Although having resided in Mexico for decades, the house was built by English workers, made to match English architecture, and even stands on exported European dirt (p. 18). Incidentally, the family is shown as stuck in tradition to the point of forgoing electricity in most of the house because the last renovation was done in 1909 (p. 23), hinting at how

the Mexican Revolution a year later symbolically cut off the ties between the family and the modern world.

Impersonal Family Dynamics

The environment that is reminiscent of a time-capsule presents the shallow performativity of British etiquette as something used to present a front of civility and sophistication even as the family and their property is in a literal state of decay because of its abusive relationship with their environment. While the reader is reminded through Noemi's observations that in Mexican households social events like dinners or weddings are meant to celebrate relationships, community, and connection, the forced wedding of Noemi and Francis then is depicted in contrast as a shallow opportunity for the Doyle family to perform their status and further their agenda (p. 28, 71, 257).

During the event of the wedding, the interactions are shown not only as bureaucratic but also exploitive. After the "ceremony", for example, Florence starts off intending to lecture Noemi on the mechanics of marital relations, and when Noemi questions the need to explain sexual reproduction to an adult woman during her wedding night, Florence talks about modesty and chastity of Doyle girls (p. 258), glossing over the fact that these girls were expected to participate in relations with older male relatives. As Noemi is shown reflecting skeptically on the likelihood that women in the Doyle household could remain "innocent" with men like Howard living under the same roof, the point is punctuated by Virgil's near assault (p. 260) after Noemi refuses Florence's

assistance and is left alone. Here, *Mexican Gothic* incorporates decolonial feminist theory with the use of language associated with Marianism to then criticize the religious European aspects that indoctrinate women to be both ignorant and defenseless in the domestic sphere, vilifying female sexuality in the process of exploiting it.

Doyle and the Ouroboros

Howard Doyle's past is cryptically expressed with far-in-between comments, but what is revealed characterizes him as the symbolic stand-in for coloniality within *Mexican Gothic*. Doyle's arrival to Mexico is depicted to have happened around 1650, as explained by his nephew Francis, matching the period where England develops an advantage over other empires due to its naval power (Israel, 1998). In addition to how his timelines are written to parallel wins and losses of the actual British empire, Francis explains how his uncle has been transferring his mind to the bodies of his children for more or less three hundred years, changing the essence of both himself and his vessel into a new version of both (p. 213). The depiction of Doyle's backstory blurs his characterization as a person and turns him into something intangible instead, such as an infectious set of ideologies that are passed from one generation to the next.

The way Doyle's process of obtaining immortality is depicted is also decolonial because it treats the themes of committing genocide against indigenous peoples so he can steal and then pervert their resources for his own benefit. Through Noemi's visions, the reader learns that Doyle arrived in Mexico

as a rich man looking for a cure to a terminal disease when he found a small group of what is implied were indigenous people that utilized the mushroom to extend their lives and access ancestral memories. Doyle, upon having his health restored by the mushroom, joined the congregation and earned their trust (p. 205). He killed them at the first opportunity, took over the caves where the fungi grew, and started his experiments on a surviving female member until he found a way to create the Gloom using Agnes' mind centuries later. Noemi describes receiving a vision from Agnes' point of view where she receives a silver, jewel-filled casket for her wedding (p. 259), adding to the terrifying element of romanization of female sacrifice for the good of her "family". Along with the imagery of Agnes' body attached to mausoleum's fungi covered wall that is an echoing of a Madonna painting—a decolonial element because of the strong influence of the Virgin Mary and how she adopted many meanings for the indigenous population in Mexico—there is an undertone of epistemic violence in how Howard built a statue of Agnes on a pedestal, commemorating her as the matriarch and glossing over the brutalities he is still putting her through for the sake of his empire.

On the topic of indigenous symbolism and other topics studied in decolonial theory, there is also the connection Doyle is shown to have with the infinity symbol in the form of a serpent that eats its own tail. Not only is this symbol meaningful in western religious tradition, explaining why it is introduced as Doyle's code of arms, but also presented as a link to the decolonial feminist

author Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). The connection is rooted in how the story portrays two versions of the infinity symbol represented by the serpent that eats its own tail, also known as the ouroboros in the west or as a reference to Aztec goddess Coatlicueh in decolonial feminist thought. In its original and healthy form, the most common meaning of the symbol stands for the eternal circle of death and rebirth (p. 257), but the book shows how Howard twists this through Agnes and the Gloom into a stagnant loop of repetition without progress as he utilizes his kin to extend his life beyond its natural length. Paired with the genocide he inflicted on the original holders of the mushroom, there is the perversion of the mushroom itself.

The Mushroom Hierarchy

There is an arrogance that is expressed through the racist elements of imperialism, here explained metaphorically through the mushrooms. Doyle accomplishes immortality and a god-like status through colonizing el Triunfo and molding it and its inhabitants to his advantage. The reason why the mushroom makes for a good metaphor for racism and coloniality is because of how it enables Howard to control and exploit other living beings (p. 286). He takes a natural resource that a part of the population is dependent on and then uses it to kill or enslave those who do as little as breathe the same air as him, and the longer they are exposed, the harder it is to pose resistance. As shown with the contrasting reactions of Noemi and Francis, or even Noemi and Catalina, the longer a person is exposed to the spores, the more violent and crippling it will be

when they take action to delink themselves from the mushroom and the connection it provides to Howard and the Gloom. Decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo (2007) describes delinking as the detachment of the perverse logic of coloniality (Fanon, 1961) and its ideas like the universalism of European knowledge. In the case of *Mexican Gothic*, the symbolism of domination that Howard attaches to nature and the mushrooms gets centered until it becomes difficult for the other characters to see that the Gloom is not a source of invincible evil, but instead a sick pattern that can and needs to be broken—or in the case of novel—turned into ashes.

In addition, there is the detail that the compatibility of the mushroom works hierarchically just like racism, a tool of coloniality that here is represented by the character of Howard, does. In his research of the mushroom, Howard found that his line could form a symbiotic relationship with it, hence the immortality, but those side effects differed with other people. This not only does this serve to explain why he in-bred with his kin, selectively chose other English aristocrats like Francis' father to join the family, but also why he justifies the genocide of the community that he perceived was underusing it in comparison to what he could accomplish with it. Howard found that most Mexican and British people in the working class do not survive being exposed to the mushroom, similar to how marginalized communities do not survive the conditions created by coloniality, although some can endure with some consequences. The “resistant” ones are depicted as the mindless servants Howard brought from England (p. 212), which

at the end of the story are shown to be reduced to resembling toys that have fallen apart (p. 276).

Lastly, there are people like Howard who have some disposition, it is unclear if it is genetic or not, to survive or even grow physically stronger because of their interaction with the mushroom, and even in that group there are disparities. Howard, Virgil, and Noemi each are portrayed as having an affinity with the fungi and the Gloom, which reflects their positions as the most shielded by privilege as far as the dynamics go in the house at the time of the story. Florence, Francis, and Catalina are in turn shown as crippled by their own privilege, for it just makes them targets to be exploited in some way by those that land higher up. Catalina especially makes for an interesting case, as her alignment with the Marianism archetype, and some elements of colorism she brings into discussion as someone described to have lighter skin and more European features than Noemi, puts her in a position that seems to imply that the poor state of her mental health is due to fighting the part of her that is inclined to assimilating the spores or the colonizer's culture.

High Place & The Empire on Which the Sun Never Sets

In the last section, I mentioned how *Mexican Gothic* included scenes that affirmed the humanity of people in the working class outside of El Triunfo, while characters that fall into that same class that come into contact with the Doyles are barely given a name at all. True to English etiquette, the lives between the classes that share a space are segregated to the point that the aristocrats are

barely aware of the existence of the people that make their lifestyle possible. As its name suggests, High Place is a home that is notably removed and above the mining town that the Doyles control and drain of resources in order to sustain whatever aspects they can of their lifestyle. The house is presented as an echo to the actual British empire, whose natural resources are scarce and thus has only managed to flourish through its abuse of military power in more abundant countries. Moreover, how the Doyles are shown to remain and pose a severe threat even after receiving devastating blows, like the shot Ruth fired on Howard he never healed from, also makes a commentary on the empire for which the sun never sets. The ending of *Mexican Gothic* is ambiguous in its stance of Noemi's conclusions or overall future after she escapes High Place. *Mexican Gothic* does not validate Noemi's opinions when they are solely based on her experiences, they are simply included for her character exposition. The lack of endorsement also means that Noemi is not rewarded with a fully triumphant ending and instead left with an uncertainty about how much her efforts actually accomplished, just like how the work of decolonial and postcolonial scholars is still an ongoing effort.

Conclusion

Narrating *Mexican Gothic* through the eyes of a Mexican woman affirms the value of letting women tell their stories and how the Doyle family symbolically stands for the British empire. Moreno-Garcia chooses to write Noemi as a strong female character that introduces her culture into the story as she experiences

what it is like to be on the receiving end of “England’s social mission”, depicting it as an escalation of the terror that other British gothic heroines feel in the domestic setting. Then, the author takes her time constructing the plot around Doyle as a multifaceted entity that shows the products of imperialism, including but not limited to slavery, genocide, invasion, and the perversion of the natural world around them.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Limitations

This thesis employs textual analysis methodologies and thus only analyzes the ideological meanings that are embedded through the book. It won't be addressing how readers make sense of the anti-colonial feminist meanings that come through the textual analysis and ideological reading of Mexican Gothic. In the future, I plan to conduct a reception study to see how books written in the female gothic genre from the formerly colonized South or Latin American gothic genre can contribute to decolonial awareness or thinking. Also, although I aimed to give a comprehensive view of both anticolonial theories, the scope of this research did not allow for a full dive into the Latin American side of gothic literature, I plan to expand on this angle of my research. Lastly, this research works on the assumption that race is an inherent aspect of imperialism and thus is not as complete as it could be if it had drawn from Critical Race Theory and its scholars as opposed to just postcolonialism, decoloniality, and feminism.

Conclusion

My research illustrated the importance of having more published authors of color to challenge the dominance of western centric ideologies in U.S. literature. After reviewing relevant literature on postcolonial and decolonial feminism as well as the gothic genre, I conducted an in-depth textual analysis of

Sylvia Moreno-Garcia's novel *Mexican Gothic*. Through a feminist reading, I explain how the female point of view is centered through the heroine protagonist, how a series of patriarchal tropes are subverted, and how the heroines are made to count on a feminist alliance as they defeat the story's villains. In an anticolonial analysis, I show how instead of focusing on taboo transgression or sacrifice, Moreno-Garcia's novel revolves on humanizing the colonized and demystifying the colonizers. Due to the complex themes it manages to cover, *Mexican Gothic* makes a case for letting women tell their own stories through a genre that has been traditionally seen as male-dominated in terms of its writers and protagonists. My thesis situated the place of the female gothic within the history of the gothic genre and examined the importance of the female gothic in terms of telling stories from a feminist anti-colonial standpoint.

Moreno-Garcia and her novel *Mexican Gothic* adds value to the U.S. literary canon because her stories present a different version of gothic horror and terror that remains loyal to the essence of the genre even as it updates it with anticolonial feminist twists. She builds on the work of other Mexican storytellers, such as the filmmakers Ramon Peon and Rene Cardona (Subaro, 2016), that present coloniality as an intangible but undeniably present form of horror that turns patriarchs like Howard Doyle in *Mexican Gothic* into near-invincible monsters. I argue that in her novel, Moreno-Garcia presents the ideologies of sexism and racism as sources of terror that women need to face as they navigate colonized spaces. As an author of color, she provides an original story filled with

Mexican references that still taps into the familiar themes like English aristocratic characters and supernatural elements. Her story is all the more noteworthy because she chooses to center it on a family of British colonizers as opposed to Spanish conquistadors. Not only is Mexico's long history dealing with invaders from multiple empires underrepresented in the media, but the involvement of England specifically makes it relevant to the U.S. canon due to the influence it has in North American culture in the present day.

My research discussed the evolution of Feminist Theory through postcolonial and decolonial theories to then apply that understanding of anticolonial feminism as a lens to analyze Moreno-Garcia's gothic novel. Through such a lens, I was able to understand how centering the point of view of the novel's heroine, Noemi, presents a postcolonial feminist approach because it challenges the superiority of western knowledge. As *Mexican Gothic* sticks to Noemi's point of view, she slows the pace of the story even as the intensity remains, forcing the reader to focus on how a bystander like Noemi comes to terms with what is happening. In this way, the story is careful not to reproduce what Stone-Mediatore (2016) calls structures of exclusion and domination, which are described as the encouragement to focus too much on individual problems, developing a lack of self-awareness, and telling stories about personal struggle to give the female author the same authority as that of the male authors who have silenced them in the past. My thesis also argued that the ambiguity of the

ending where we are not told whether the mushrooms were eradicated with the fire is how *Mexican Gothic* presents anti-colonialism as an ongoing project.

By drawing on literature that contextualizes gothic stories in Mexican settings, I introduced the history of vilifying the idealized exclusionary practices of European culture through tropes like the female vampire, a witch, or the archetype of la Malinche that evolves into La Llorona (Subero, 2016). In presenting these women as monsters due to their emergence or corruption by European culture, Mexican storytellers can use them as a space to process their cultures' relationship with the outcomes of imperialism such as colonization and mestizaje. Using the archetype of Malinchism and of its dual counterpart Marianism, Moreno-Garcia writes the characters of Noemi and her cousin Catalina to present how these archetypes are designed to portray women's different strengths as weaknesses to be exploited by patriarchal powers.

My analysis reveals how *Mexican Gothic* organizes the ideologies of imperialism and patriarchy and promotes postcolonial and decolonial feminism. In chapter 3, I outline how Noemi Taboada is portrayed as a decisive woman who values her autonomy and emerges triumphant in a conflict against mind-slaving colonizers, making her a feminist role model who stands against imperialism. In chapter 4, I describe how *Moreno-Garcia* presents a strong understanding of the gothic genre with the way she writes every character in the Doyle family to stand for a different 'ideal' British man or woman, problematizes

it, then introduces her own ideas in a way that western-educated readers can understand.

During my feminist analysis, I found that *Mexican Gothic* combined the motifs of both the male and female gothic to create a heroine that would stand apart from the rest. I found that it references a combination of British and Mexican takes on gothic tropes to discuss women's experiences in dealing with the terror of an imperial domestic setting. I found that the plot is arranged to center the values of solidarity and sisterhood, making it a feminist text by showing how organized efforts are what enacts change. This allowed me to identify and explain the different themes in the novel, such as how Noemi's weakness is her alignment with certain characteristics of la Malinche or how her story is a reminder that it is possible to confront the darker parts of one's nature and change.

In my anticolonial reading of the book, I note through a standpoint analysis that placing Noemi as the protagonist sets up a direct opposition to imperialism themes that are discussed in the novel. I found that gothic novels place characters that divert from the idealized depiction of British masculinity or femininity as the villains and that the heroes align themselves consistently with the mission of imperialism. Moreno-Garcia also takes note of this and uses it to tell a subversive story where the heroes are the groups that have been colonized and the villains are the colonizers. Lastly, drawing on postcolonial and decolonial theories, an ideological analysis also revealed that *Mexican Gothic* contains a

comprehensive analogy for the British empire through the Doyle family and the stolen mushrooms used to create the Gloom.

I clarify what the anticolonial feminist applications for storytelling are before discussing once again the origins and distinctive characteristics of the gothic genre. The simplest benefit from applying anticolonial feminist ideologies to storytelling is that the readers can learn and reflect about complex themes that they might not be able to access otherwise. An example of how *Mexican Gothic* accomplished this is by briefly communicating throughout the novel that Noemi was privy to topics like anthropology and gives the reader a glimpse of it as she is making sense of the Doyle family's scheme.

I began my research summarizing the research that debunked the assumptions and misconceptions in publishing that the works of writers of color would not sell as well. Afterwards, I introduced one of the texts that did break through into the published canon, *Mexican Gothic*, which is an exceptional example of the female gothic genre. Not only does it align with the idea that genres need to evolve but also it contributes to women's popular culture. It also makes a powerful anticolonial stance by building on Mexican storytelling traditions regarding the supernatural. Feminist storytelling strengthens the novel's main argument rooted in the ills of colonialism through carefully placed metaphors. My thesis demonstrated that through her novel *Mexican Gothic*, Moreno-Garcia subverted the gothic genre that has been dominated by the Anglo literary canon since its conception.

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