

Reclaiming the Gothic:

***Mexican Gothic*, Latino Representation, and Postcolonial Power Structures**

Itzel Sosa
Spring 2026

“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” - Noemi Taboada (Moreno-Garcia, Mexican Gothic, 42)

“The serpent does not devour its tail, it devours everything around it, voracious, its appetite never quenched” - Francis Doyle (Moreno-Garcia, Mexican Gothic, 244).
Mexican Gothic

“Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us” (Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, 90)
Frankenstein

Post-Colonial Feminist Gothic Introduction

Mexican Gothic (2020) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia follows Noemi Taboada, a glamorous and ambitious young woman living in 1950s Mexico, who is sent to investigate a disturbing letter from her recently married cousin, Catalina. Her investigation leads her to High Place, an isolated mansion in the Mexican countryside where the mysterious Doyle family resides. As Noemi uncovers the family’s dark history, she becomes entangled in a web of secrets, supernatural horror, and generational abuse. Set in the 1950s, *Mexican Gothic* acts not only as a critique of traditional values and gender roles portrayed within the domestic space but also as a reflection on how post-colonial legacies continue to shape systems of power. Through this lens, the novel challenges audiences to question contemporary expectations of gender, domesticity,

and sexuality. Moreno-Garcia parallels modern-day society not by displaying vast differences but by presenting gender roles within the domestic space that remain relevant today and are evident in the various interactions between male and female roles in the novel. Moreno-Garcia thus creates a sense of discomfort for the reader that positions *High Place* itself as unnatural and therefore “uncanny.”

The Gothic tradition emerged from distinctly European settings—particularly German and English literary traditions—rooted in Anglo-centric ideals that engineered the ideas of class and race to solidify power for white colonial culture and, specifically, white colonial men. Historically, the Gothic relies on colonial narratives of hierarchy and class that render the non-European “other” as monstrous or threatening, further perpetuated by power structures that frame racialized foreign bodies as sources of fear (Markman, 2000). By seeing the familiar as strange and the strange as familiar, the Gothic explores an ancient thread of anxiety, an inherited psychological and cultural memory tied to imperial history, racial difference, and the destabilization of European identity. Canonical works such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) exemplify the tradition of creating barriers between individuals psychologically and socially, where the figure of the “monster” becomes a symbolic site for anxieties surrounding the construction of the self, especially in the midst of difference. Shelley displays how the struggle of power dynamics goes unchallenged, guaranteeing an infrastructure that ensures the “other” remains subservient to the dominating figure. *Mexican Gothic* repositions these conventions within colonized spaces, forcing readers to confront the lingering effects of colonialism. By situating a Gothic mansion in rural Mexico and centering the experiences of Noemi Taboada, a brown-skinned Mexican woman, Moreno-Garcia examines a continuation of colonialism through

systems that feed off each other, similar to how she depicts the functionality of the Doyle family and their relationship to the Mexican land within which they reside.

The Gothic genre in literature is traditionally defined by the ideas of the “uncanny” and “otherness,” perpetuated by elements such as decay, inheritance, confinement, haunted spaces, and the persistence of the past (Wester, 2020). The Gothic tradition of “othering” a racialized figure aligns with Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze in which audiences are trained to position themselves within an implicit “male” perspective, and in fact an implicit “white male” perspective, producing femininity and racial difference as objects of spectacle. Within the framework of “othering,” genre becomes a mechanism of power: it determines who gets to represent culture, whose perspective is normative, and whose bodies signify fear.

Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s *Mexican Gothic* transforms the Gothic form through a distinctly Mexican and postcolonial lens, using gender dynamics as a form of social commentary that reveals how colonial power and patriarchal authority are used to control women’s bodies and autonomy. Providing readers with an examination of *Mexican Gothic* as a Latina reimagining of the Gothic genre produces a critique that moves beyond representational inclusion and toward cultural and literary transformation and reclamation. This project traces how Latina representation in Anglophone literature, specifically the Gothic, functions not merely as visibility but as a form of authorship, authority, and resistance within historically exclusionary literary traditions. This project argues that *Mexican Gothic* uses postcolonial Gothic frameworks to challenge canonical assumptions about whose narrative and perspective really matter. By reframing race, gender, and power dynamics through a Latina perspective, Moreno-Garcia challenges readers to transform the narrative of our societal infrastructures. Moreno-Garcia thereby provides audiences with a story that transforms the Gothic from a colonial genre into a

site of anticolonial resistance and agency. In doing so, the narrative spotlights the issue that colonialist ideals have not been erased and that their new shape, neo-colonialism, is still prevalent today. Her authorship enlightens readers of the harmful ideology that continues to plague contemporary society, including American culture, by depicting a relationship between good and evil within the domestic space through the continuous replication of dominant and subordinate positions in the struggle for autonomy of one's bodies and labor, including women's reproductive system, signifying a much longer struggle for control of Mexico's territory.

Mexican Gothic subverts traditional Gothic elements and presents a complex portrayal of race, gender, and colonialism from the perspective of a Mexican woman. Noemi Taboada, the novel's protagonist, functions as a destabilizing catalyst not only for these themes but for the Gothic genre itself. Her strong sense of agency, class awareness, and intelligence thwarts the entrenched hierarchies of the Doyle family through ethical resistance and unyielding refusal to internalize the logic of domination present in High Place, the colonial home of the Doyle family. By creating such a character as Noemi, Moreno-Garcia transforms the Gothic heroine from a passive object of fear into an active moral protagonist, positioning her as both witness to and challenger of colonial violence and patriarchal control. In other words, Noemi acts as a heroine to Catalina Taboada, as well as Francis Doyle, within the setting of High Place, positioning audiences as eyewitnesses to the defiance Noemi displays towards these systems of oppression.

Moreno-Garcia accomplishes something quietly radical in *Mexican Gothic*. What may initially appear as a conventional Gothic narrative conceals a depth that many readers overlook, particularly if they fail to recognize the generational trauma that saturates the novel's psychological and cultural landscape. Rather than merely revisiting the past, Moreno-Garcia creates a parallel to the present, revealing how historical violence, colonial systems, and

inherited power structures persist across time that contemporary life often refuses to acknowledge. She does not simply “break” barriers, instead exposes a continuous historical lineage that moves across genres and time, demonstrating how systems of domination, subordination, and representation repeat themselves under different forms.

High Place: Estate and Mycelium

In *Mexican Gothic*, the setting of High Place functions as a colonial Gothic space, mirroring the romantic depiction of English estates while embodying histories of exploitation and violence. The house represents the wealth extracted from the land, literally and figuratively, as it was built upon the exploitation of local Indigenous workers in the silver mines situated in the Mexican countryside, owned by the Doyle family. The Doyles, specifically the patriarch Howard Doyle, disregard their inherent differences with the land, which they colonized, therefore seeing the indigenous community as inferior. This behavior was displayed through the family's refusal to learn the native language and even bringing a piece of England with them, “That’s what Uncle Howard wanted, a little piece of England. He even brought European dirt here” (Moreno-Garcia, 18). Noemi states, “It was the house that disfigured the land,” illustrating the relationship of how the parasite sucks humanity away from the host, being Mexican land, displaying the imperial legacy in the flesh (Moreno-Garcia, 60).

The house, being described as a decaying creature, further establishes not just the aesthetic of a Gothic estate but an archaic, unchanging moment in time for High Place and the overall Mexican community of El Triunfo. Specifically the house exemplifies the time period in which the silver mines closed down in 1915 with its lack of fully functioning electricity, rooms that are discarded and covered in dust, as Noemi describes “Daylight did not improve High

Place” further depicting the mourning the house seems to exemplify with not only the loss of its class value but of the family members and English mine workers that died within its vicinity. (Moreno-Garcia, 38-41). Although the novel takes place in the 1950s, the events that affected the house happened years prior, the gender stereotypes that were present in 1915 continue to be perpetuated through the expectations that the Doyles maintain at High Place. Specifically, the role Howard Dolye expects his daughters and wives to play in providing him with power and future offspring through their reproductive functions.

Furthermore, the house itself transforms the domestic space into the uncanny through its intersection of domesticity, neo-colonialism, and Moreno-Garcia’s use of the supernatural within High Place itself. In addition to implementing the idea of eugenics and incestual familial relationships within the novel, Moreno-Garica creates a fungus that permeates High Place, transforming the estate into a living, haunted entity that invades both the bodies and minds of its inhabitants. The fungus maintains hallucinogenic and parasitic properties through its network of mycelium within the land of El Triunfo and, by extension, the Doyle family. This relationship allows its toxins to infiltrate its victims' consciousness through a waking nightmare and dreamlike state, reflecting the Doyle family history.

Catalina & Mad Woman in the Basement

Catalina Taboada acts as the catalyst for both Noemi’s intervention and for the novel itself by sending an urgent message to her uncle pleading for aid within High Place. This is the pivotal moment not only within the novel, but also for Noemi and the audience overall. Catalina’s letter for immediate aid acts as an introduction to the gothic themes present in the

novel and of High Place itself, specifically how Moreno-Garcia uses Catalina's character to introduce and portray the traditional gothic female role, the "mad woman."

Moreno-Garcia leans into the gothic trope by first positioning Catalina as the opposite of Noemi's fiery spirit, "...Catalina, who was gentle and obedient, as gently squashed down," speaking specifically to her calm and reserved mannerisms, making it easier for the Doyles to manipulate her (Moreno-Garcia, 73). Further describing Catalina's romantic personality, "Her cousin had never quite lost that young-girl wonder of the world" that situated her in a vulnerable disposition to the manipulations of her fiancé, Virgil Doyle (Moreno-Garcia, 94-95).

Moreno-Garcia alludes to the idea that Noemi would be key to Catalina's safety and survival from High Place through her continuous descriptions of Catalina's weak nature in comparison to Noemi's tenacity. This suggests that individuals who endure hardship within domestic spaces that position them as "inferior" must develop the resilience and determination necessary to challenge oppressive systems from within and dismantle them from the ground up. Therefore, Noemi ensures not only Catalina's safety, but the safety and security of all individuals affected by the Doyles' control and exploitation.

Essentially, through these descriptions, Moreno-Garcia deliberately compares the cousins to exemplify that while they may share a unique and close relationship, the two are also a mirror of one another, specifically in being the embodiment, or shadow, of the other's lack in characteristics, in other words, the "double." A key Gothic motif that represents the alter ego of a protagonist. The double, or the *doppelgänger*, represents the divided self, referencing specifically the uncanny, where the familiar elements are portrayed as strange and, if not, overall terrifying. For instance, the Doyle household, High Place, embodies the uncanny as it depicts the domestic space as decidedly strange, horrifying, and dangerous to the ordinary character within the Gothic

narrative. This idea of the double deals with the split self persona symbolizing inner turmoil, or the unconscious of one's own psyche. Although Moreno-Garcia follows this classic Gothic motif, the cousins maintain a loving relationship, rather than one born of resentment. Their relationship is not antagonistic but is instead supportive and caring. Their bond is characterized by respect and nurturing of one another—where one lacks in character, rather than viewing the other with envy, they view with admiration. A classic depiction of the 'other self' within Gothic literature is Victor Frankenstein and his monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Victor Frankenstein's monster serves as the physical embodiment, and essentially shadow, of Frankenstein's own unchecked ambition and guilt. This relationship is born of Dr. Frankenstein's hatred and animosity towards his own creation, a creature that represents the creator's soul and overall true self, which is torturous to confront. In contrast, the Noemi cousins' relationship can be described as opposites, it is within their differences that their strong bond is born. Where one lacks, the other is in abundance, a portrayal of two sides of the same coin being reflected within one another. Further highlighting the deeper understanding they hold for one another, allowing unconditional understanding to be maintained. Moreno-Garcia adapts this Gothic motif of the doppelgänger to fit the women's experience, specifically in relationships with other women.

Through Noemi's reflections, the novel illustrates the solidarity women create through shared hardship, forming unspoken connections that allow them to recognize and respond to one another's fears. This is displayed in the numerous interactions in which Catalina would exchange furtive glances and panicked expressions with Noemi when she could not verbally express her fears. Further evidence is provided by Noemi's commentary on men's disposition when encountering vulnerable women, "Men were always so afraid of tears, of having a hysterical woman on their hands" intimating this lack of camaraderie that women lack with men due to

societal expectations of a man's countenance that dissuades them from being vulnerable and falling to a machismo attitude, mentally and emotionally separating themselves from their female counterparts (Moreno-Garica, 63). Bringing to attention women's experience within domestic spaces, specifically toxic and abusive environments, in which women are needed to rescue one another. Particularly shown in scenes in which Catalina reaches for Noemi's hand in panic, unable to verbally express her fears, due to the psychological abuse she's endured within High Place, unable to trust herself to recognize which experiences were real and which actions were manipulated; she can communicate her anxieties through their unspoken understanding of one another and their sister-like bond. Hence, why the Doyle family members, specifically Howard, Virgil, and Florence, wish to keep the two women separated: women alone are strong, but women in numbers hold power.

Moreno-Garcia conveys to audiences the misunderstood aspect of women within Gothic literature, and by extension, within literature overall. The initial call for aid sent by Catalina is immediately dismissed by her uncle, Leocadio Taboada, Noemi's father, who believes her manner of writing is "nothing but exaggerations and marital trouble...a play for attention," acting as the perpetuator of the recurring motif of the dismissal of women (Moreno-Garcia, 7). Moreno-Garcia further critiques the social behaviors towards women not only within marital relationships as traditionally depicted in Gothic literature, but also the attitude towards women wanting to achieve more for themselves. Noemi agrees to her task to travel to Catalina in order to ensure her opportunity of achieving a higher education, which her parents frowned upon, believing it unnecessary for a young woman to apply herself academically rather than within the marital market. Further mirroring current gender dynamics that Moreno-Garcia analyzes,

positioning audiences to view a critical perspective of gender stereotypes that are traditionally displayed within Gothic themes and literature overall.

The gender power dynamics that are displayed within *Mexican Gothic*, specifically within the domestic space of marriage, are evident through Virgil Howard's interactions and descriptions of his own wife. As he describes Catalina's state to Noemi, "Catalina was not well. She ran a very high fever. She sent that letter in the midst of her sickness," he uses his position as 'husband' in attempts to control the perception of his wife through manipulation of not only Catalina, but of Noemi as well (Moreno-Garcia, 33).

When Virgil describes Catalina's symptoms to Noemi upon her arrival, she describes his attitude as speaking "with a careful detachment, as if he were describing a stranger instead of his wife," suggesting that women are easily dismissed regardless of their concern for those who maintain the vulnerable position in question (Moreno-Garcia, 52). This tendency to dismiss women's concerns is further demonstrated by Catalina's family. Despite clear signs that something is seriously wrong, her uncle attributes her distress to a mere marital dispute. By claiming that the situation "may be best handled by a woman," Mr. Taboada simultaneously acknowledges Catalina's suffering while reducing it to a marital spat, reflecting the broader tendency to undermine women's experiences and concerns (Moreno-Garcia, 7). Through Catalina, Moreno-Garcia displays how the women displayed as unstable within Gothic literature represent a more nuanced issue of the dismissal of women's real concerns for their own safety and well-being.

This idea that women are often required to support and protect one another is likely familiar to many female readers, as it reflects the shared experiences of navigating patriarchal systems that frequently dismiss or marginalize women's concerns. This idea of female solidarity

is rarely allowed to be recognized within our society, specifically in everyday life, where women are manipulated to see one another as competition and as obstacles. Moreno-Garcia subverts this female relationship that is perpetuated by patriarchal norms through the relationship between Noemi and Catalina. Rather than establishing a relationship built on resentment, she highlights their strengths to support the challenge against patriarchy and the colonial rule governing High Place.

Moreno-Garcia brings this relationship to light through the Doyle family, and specifically its Gothic themes that position the relationship of patriarchy and women through the Gothic lens of the uncanny. Through this perspective, audiences are able to view these systems of toxic-masculinity, patriarchy, and therefore colonial ideology as the monstrous “other” as these structures are portrayed as unseemly within the narrative of *Mexican Gothic*, which positions Noemi, Catalina, and all those negatively affected by the Doyles as the normative and victims.

Gender Roles: Toxic Masculinity & The Unseemly Women

Mexican Gothic subverts traditional Gothic elements, presenting not only a complex portrayal of post-colonial infrastructures but an argument against perceived gender norms. Within colonial and patriarchal notions, women are positioned as subservient, this is seen within the novel through the perspective of the Doyle family, who frame female autonomy as dangerous, irrational, and morally suspect. Women who show strong emotion, assert independence, or display traits socially accepted in men are instead constructed as wicked, unstable, or insane and threatening. Noemi acts as a mirror for the patriarchal figures, specifically Howard Doyle. Howard views Noemi as a threat because she encompasses many

traits that are associated with masculinity, more generally in how she continues to violate the rules of the house and specifically the unspoken expectations of women, which are governed by patriarchal norms. By refusing to act docile or obedient, Noemí's unapologetic self-expression challenges the patriarchal structure of High Place, which renders her behavior as "unseemly," through the perspective of the Doyle family, as she continues to disobey the household rules and the attempts at regaining her autonomy. Specifically, in her attempts to express free will in partaking in vices, speaking her mind, and wishing to be in the company of her cousin. As a result, she is positioned as a destabilizing presence, an enemy figure, exposing how female agency itself becomes framed as a threat to the colonial masculine power.

Simultaneously, Moreno-Garcia also combats the ideology of toxic masculinity by creating the character Francis Doyle, the youngest of the Doyle lineage. He is described as a soft-spoken man in relation to Noemi's strong personality traits. Through Francis, Moreno-Garcia challenges gender norms by placing him in the submissive role compared to the superior individuals, including his family and Noemi. This characterization is usually associated with female roles, not just within the Gothic but of literature overall. Moreno-Garcia assigns traits to Francis that are commonly associated with feminine attributes within a patriarchal lens, hence relating to his distance from his family as he is seen as the fatal flaw of the Doyles. Francis' characterization is intentional, to further enhance Noemi's hero narrative and therefore placing her in a position of power that is seen as unnatural within a patriarchal society. This further supports Noemi's challenge to patriarchy itself and, by extension, the societal implications that are presented through the Doyles.

Francis Doyle acts as a critique of gender norms that continue to perpetuate toxic-masculine idolizations, by providing audiences with a subject that they can visibly see the

possibilities of change that are current. By providing the dynamic present between Noemi and Francis, regardless of their budding romance, Noemi challenges Francis' foundations. While he may not have fallen into the perpetuated system of colonialism and patriarchal domination, he is a victim of the system and is given the opportunity to change the narrative, therefore establishing a reality that is possible and necessary to create change within our societal infrastructures built on ideologies that support and encourage discrimination based upon gender, race, and class.

Considering Francis' position, there is also an intrinsic ambivalence maintained in his relationship with Noemi, specifically in his need for her. Francis' embedded attachment to the fungus within High Place, as is the case with the Doyles overall, positions him in a vulnerable state in which separation from the fungus, and therefore separation of the ideologies of patriarchy, colonialism, and discrimination, physically harms him. Therefore, his lack of action perpetuates the cyclical nature of these principles. Noemi acts as his catalyst in challenging these norms, portraying the position of the individual within the system who wishes to break away but is either not given the tools to do so or believes themselves unable to, for fear of the societal repercussions that would be dealt as a consequence for challenging these power dynamics. Proposing concern for individuals unable to think for themselves unless another form of power structure is presented, therefore maintaining a cycle of constant domination over an entity.

Women as Vessels

The fungus present in High Place requires a vessel, not as the embodiment of its unnatural capabilities, how Howard Doyle functions, but in the literal sense of an object that carries another object within itself: a woman. As Francis describes the role of Howard Doyle to

Noemi, “He transfers his consciousness to the gloom and then from the gloom he can live again, in the body of one of his children,” sharing the secret behind his family history, “Only the children, it goes down the bloodline. And for generations, the bloodline has been kept isolated, to ensure we were all able to interact with the fungus, that we would keep this symbiotic relationship. No outsiders” (Moreno-Garcia, 213). Evidently, the one final rule was broken as they needed to “strengthen” their lineage by introducing a bloodline that was accustomed to the unfamiliar territory, which High Place resided in, Mexico, they needed women of the land, from the land.

In Noemi's discovery of Ruth Doyle's story, the woman whose soul acts as the haunting aspect within *Mexican Gothic*, she recognizes the parasitic relationship occurring within High Place, specifically that of Howard and his continuous chase for power. In a desperate attempt to break free from the oppressive controls of High Place, Ruth shoots and kills her family members and then herself. Ruth represents a model of feminine resistance through her actions, attempting to defy Howard Doyle, and therefore a challenge to all oppressive social mechanisms of thought, acting as moral aid for Noemi as she prepares for her final encounters with Howard.

While it was the natural mushrooms that originated from the land and were cultivated through traditions practiced by the Indigenous communities, “It was the house that disfigured the land” (Moreno-Garcia, 60). Disfiguring the holistic rituals into a poisonous fungus that is maintained through a parasitic relationship between the host, Mexican land, and the women who continue the Doyle bloodline, and the parasite represented by Howard Doyle, highlighting Mexican culture and its relationship to the land. In conversation, Francis shares with Noemi what he has learned about the mushrooms that grow around High Place, specifically his understanding of nature and its importance within Mexican Indigenous cultures, “The Zapotec Indians of your

country practiced dentistry by giving people a mushroom which would intoxicate them and serve as an anesthetic. And the Aztecs, they too found mushrooms interesting. They consumed them in order to experience visions,” demonstrating how medicinal practices for these communities revolved around natural remedies, a practice that promoted community, as Noemi clarifies for Francis in regards to his “Spaniard chronicles” research (Moreno-Garcia, 98). Establishing the historical lens that the novel calls attention to, particularly the history of colonization that is exemplified through Howard Doyle. The fungus growing within the house exemplifies the intersection of gender and colonialism, specifically alluding to the gender power dynamics present. Howard Doyle, the parasite, needs women’s bodies to cultivate and spread the fungus through the bloodline. Moreno-Garcia deliberately uses a fungal relationship to physically display the parasitic relationship between host and leech, symbolizing the framework of power dynamics between Mexicans and their colonizers.

The fungus is not simply of the land, if this were the reality of the relationship to the Indigenous community, the workers would not have fallen ill in the mines nor died by toxic exposure to this fungus. The relationship being described is the transformation of a product provided by the land that is exploited and utilized incorrectly. It is through this exploitative relationship that High Place produces the “gloom,” a byproduct of the misuse of a natural remedy that transformed its healing properties into a toxin that prolongs the user's life, that being Howard Doyle. In order for Howard to maintain this power, a vessel is required, and through this vessel, the gloom is created by capturing Doyle's history by way of memory. The question, therefore, after considering the functions of the fungus and gaining an understanding of the Doyle family: why do they require the Taboada women?

There is a direct correlation to colonial history within these two relationships, specifically regarding eugenics and Indigenous female trauma. This parasitic relationship is a parallel to the Doyle mining company, as they extract silver from the mines, exploiting and capitalizing on the original Indigenous community who provided for the business through their physical labor. By exploiting the community, the Doyles abused the men workers by exposing them to the toxic fungus, the embodiment of colonial history, and by extension, the patriarchal control over indigenous women. Control over the women of these communities provides control over the land, symbolising the cynical cycle of what it means to perpetuate patriarchal neo-colonial social structures that reinforce one another—colonialism, patriarchy, and misogyny. Therefore, Moreno-Garcia depicts the underlying resource that colonists needed in order to maintain power over these Indigenous communities, the women.

The essential idea is established through the relationship that Howard Doyle sustains with the fungus. Howard requires women's bodies in order to continue his bloodline, by extension, continue his life, and power over the land. Moreno-Garcia's narrative provides a depiction of the inherent control of women's bodies as a natural resource. Portraying women as a representation of land and land as women, clarifying this relationship through the introduction to Ruth Doyle, the woman buried beneath High Place who maintains the fungus and therefore creates the gloom in which her vengeful memories lie, communicating with her family and future women entrapped within High Place, subject to the treatment and violation she endured.

This positions the motif of the "uncanny" or "the other" through a colonial perspective reversed. The Indigenous community in which Howard Doyle colonizes is viewed through the normalized position within the traditional Gothic trope of "the other." Meanwhile, what has historically been labeled as the norm is positioned as "the other," therefore, the true monster.

Moreno-Garcia provides audiences with a new outlook by positioning them through Noemi's perspective, allowing readers to see the subverted image of Howard Doyle along with the societal implications that are imposed on social infrastructures such as patriarchy, toxic masculinity, sexism, and overall racial discrimination, as the unfamiliar, strange, and monstrous.

Howard Doyle the English Conquistador

There is nothing unfamiliar about the character of Howard Doyle. He is a misogynist, believes in the colonial archetype, and follows a toxic-masculine and patriarchal-centered lifestyle, which he uses to justify his treatment not only toward the Mexican community in which he colonized, but toward all those he believes to be inferior to himself. Essentially, his character represents the embodiment of the original conquistadores who introduced these ideologies within the Indigenous communities they colonized. Moreno-Garcia changes the narrative within Gothic literature in creating the familiar (Howard, a white man) to the unnatural by depicting his body as the decaying rot of the fungus itself, essentially a living and breathing pestilence that is a result of embracing through mind and body these societal structures that were built upon the Indigenous communities and the subjugation of the people. Howard Doyle essentially acts as a representation of the functioning and societal structures of today, the monster, and the embodiment of patriarchy.

Howard's need for the Taboada women equates to the "sexual conquest" of the original Indigenous women within colonial history, and specifically that of Mexico. The statement of sexual conquest is deliberate in introducing the idea that the fungus passes through the Doyle family through sexual relations. In this transfer of soul and body, Howard ensures that the

women are contaminated through the necessary means of touch, specifically sexual intercourse, to maintain his bloodline. By transferring his mind and soul into his family, he ensures that it is himself who is reproducing his heirs. The idea of sexual conquest refers to the relationship he sees not just with the Taboada women, but with women overall. “He sounded proud, like a man who has received a nice ribbon at the county fair for his prize hog or more,” furthermore, Howard states, “She did her duty and she did it well” in regards to his first wife (Moreno-Garcia, 75). Evidently not seeing women as marital relationships into a welcoming family, but rather as another established conquest over the land and for male power within the home.

The relationship between Howard Doyle and women within this narrative replicates the dichotomy between patriarchy and the principles men follow with respect to women, seeing women as mere objects that are to be used and discarded once their purpose has been fulfilled. This framework that perpetuates the idea of individuals being used as resources is demonstrated through the ideology that Howard maintains in his belief that he and his family are the superior figures, acting as a parallel to current times, which Moreno-Garcia brings awareness to through her narrative in *Mexican Gothic*. Particularly, individuals who do not match the white supremacist characteristics are determined by this demographic to belong to an inferior race, class, and gender.

The fungus functions as a disease, as Moreno-Garcia describes through dialogue and the relationship of each character’s interactions with the gloom. The gloom is the disease of the fungus that is physically manifested through psychological factors. The direct patterns include the workers of the original mines falling ill and dying. Richard, Francis’s father and Florence Doyle’s husband, dies while attempting to escape the gloom and its infection, refusing the pattern

of subjugation of his people. This provides a link to the concept of the fungus, and therefore the gloom, acting as the manifestation of sexually transmitted diseases.

Moreno-Garcia presents this challenge to audiences, specifically Anglo-readers, of the uncensored colonial legacy. The idea that colonizers carried with them sexually transmitted diseases along with immune diseases, and their rapacious relationship with Indigenous communities and by extension, natural resources. Moreno-Garcia uses this depiction specifically of sexually transmitted diseases to mirror the predatory relationship that occurs in colonial frameworks, further enhancing the monstrous aspect of Gothic literature through a lens of colonialism, through the perspective of the colonized groups of individuals. The feeling and depiction of this sexually transmitted disease, particularly when Howard Doyle assaults Noemi while attempting to colonize her into the Doyle family to be used as yet another vessel to continue his lifeline. Noemi describes his body at this point in the novel as a pestle rotting away. Moreno-Garcia establishes this depiction to exemplify the physical representation of the frameworks of patriarchy, colonialism, and class differences that morph into an inhuman mentality mirrored within this Gothic novel as the monstrous creature that Howard Doyle has decomposed into.

Howard, therefore, acts as the familiar conquistador actor, sharing the same traits that men maintain and perpetuate today. The Howards Doyles of today's time are still prevalent, they continue to feed off this rhetorical fungus, the societal infrastructures that continue to perpetuate patriarchal control, injustices of gender, toxic-masculinity, and modern colonialist ideologies that continue to perpetuate racial differences and the exploitation of women's bodies. The underlying entity that is needed to continue giving life to this poisonous fungus is women.

Women are needed within society to subjugate and give men power that they would not have been granted otherwise. As Noemi asks Howard in a targeted conversation, “It turns the whole superior and inferior idea around, doesn’t it?” (Moreno-Garcia, 30). A question that is posed to society through Gothic literature, specifically challenging the power dynamics present within different parasitic relationships. These relationships are displayed through dynamics that switch roles of superior and inferior actors, particularly the swapping of normative characters to the monster and vice versa. The exchange of roles brings to light true identities through mirroring unconscious beliefs and desires that are held by the opposing figure, specifically the monstrous figure, being a physical representation of the horrors that are held by the psyche of the opposing normative figure. The normative figure is a physical representation of a pure morality that is maintained by the monstrous figure. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley provides an example of this relationship. Victor Frankenstein’s monster questions human nature, “why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders them more necessary beings,” alluding to the role of the uncanny individual who is revealed to be a necessary entity to confront the protagonist, and by extension audiences, relating to the initial argument that women are needed in order for men to feel empowered as they compare themselves to the demographic in which they can display themselves as dominant in comparison through targeted differences. (Shelley, 88).

This relationship, that of the confrontational being and the character that portrays the living reality, is paralleled within Moreno-Garcia’s writing. Particularly within the relationship between Howard Doyle, Noemi Taboada, and the audience itself. Moreno-Garcia uses her narrative to portray the historically subjugated relationship that is maintained between the Doyles and Noemi, referencing the neocolonial relationship taking place, that of gender power

dynamics, which positions women as inferior to men. While also reflecting a change in power dynamics that is being presented through Noemi's actions of challenging the patriarchy, as she challenges societal norms, implicating a change that is possible through Moreno-Garcia's deliberate commentary on the power of feminism through Noemi. The thought-provoking aspect of her character includes depicting gender stereotypes that are displayed during the 1950s and today's daily occurrences are closely paralleled. Moreno-Garcia is purposeful with this depiction as she enhances audiences' awareness that restrictions on women's positions within domestic spaces are still prevalent, which should raise alarms to prevent complacency and deliberate ignorance. This relationship is portrayed as a subverted image of the Gothic, where the uncanny takes the position of the normalized societal infrastructures of today, while the character portraying the norm is presented through Noemi herself. Through this depiction, Moreno-Garcia challenges Anglo-readers specifically as a call to change our narrative within our overarching culture of modern-day toxic masculinity and overcoming the psychological obstacles that place women as inferior to men.

Francis Doyle, in this sense, acts as a representation of change that is possible within the confines of a tyrannical form of thought. The fungus that is entrenched within the Doyle lineage and house itself represents that toxic societal infrastructure that has continued to hold up the colonial and patriarchal legacy. Francis displays his small form of autonomy by providing Noemi with objects to protect herself against not only his family but the growing fungus as well. Francis represents the individuals who recognize the biased infrastructures that govern the lives of all those subjected to inequality through the hegemonic actors, yet inevitably, his lack of autonomy to separate himself literally from the confines of his home disables him from being able to make drastic changes that would finally remove himself from these patriarchal and colonial norms. It is

only within his conversations with Noemi that he is able to show some forms of strength against his family. Revealing yet another underlying reason as to why individuals feel powerless against the hegemonic patriarchal powers that govern social structures, the idea of lacking another belief to believe in. More specifically, how individuals are not able to think for themselves without a governing presence of another actor directing their actions, morals, and ways of life. Therefore, replacing one fungus with another parasite to blindly follow as the new morals provides a way of life that does not need to be challenged. Exemplifying how our protagonist, a Mexican woman, is powerful and necessary to put a final end to the power the fungus has over the land, its people, and a reclamation of colonial history.

By all rights, Catalina has killed her husband and abuser, Virgil Doyle, when she stabs him in the eye. However, there is little narration confirming that all evil has been ended by the burning of High Place. This nuance of determining whether or not the Taboada cousins and Francis Doyle remain safe is further established through Ruth Doyle's own haunting words to Noemi, "It's in the blood, Ruth had said—but you can cut out a tumor" (Moreno-Garcia, 273). This advice provided by Ruth further connects the notion of persistence of the past, a vital theme exemplified throughout the novel, enhancing Moreno-Garcia's narrative and call to recognition of time as a continuous perpetuation of toxic societal structures. *Mexican Gothic* ends with the seemingly successful rescue of Catalina Taboada and Francis Doyle, but with the lack of narrative confirmation that the fungus has been completely eradicated through the burning of High Place, the novel closes with an uncertainty that the fungus will not reappear in yet a different form to continue the gloom and its haunting through another vessel. The audience is left questioning whether or not the toxin within High Place has infiltrated the land, and therefore, the people continue to perpetuate all that is encompassed within the representation that is the fungus

and the gloom. Therefore, Moreno-Garcia closes *Mexican Gothic* with a final haunting thought following the traditional Gothic theme to commemorate the classics.

Conclusion: A New Narrative

Mexican Gothic transforms haunting into the enduring presence of colonial violence, patriarchal control, and generational trauma that refuses to remain buried. High Place is haunted not simply by ghosts, but by histories of exploitation that continue to shape the present. The walls preserve memory, the gloom carries inherited violence through psychological trauma, and Ruth Doyle's lingering presence serves as a reminder that what has been silenced inevitably resurfaces. Moreno-Garcia positions haunting as a warning that the past does not disappear simply because society chooses not to confront past sufferings. Instead, unresolved harm services by adapting into new forms, embedding itself within institutions, domestic spaces, and social structures that continue to normalize inequality.

By reframing the Gothic through a Latina and postcolonial lens, Moreno-Garcia reveals that the most terrifying aspect of haunting is not the supernatural itself, but the persistence of the past and its oppressive systems that society allows to continue unchecked. Howard Doyle becomes the embodiment of this persistence, a decaying colonial figure sustained through the exploitation and domination of women, surviving only through the abuse of women. Noemi's resistance demonstrates that confronting the past is necessary not only for survival but for transformation. To acknowledge what haunts us is to expose the systems that still shape the present and interrupt their repetition before they determine the future. The novel's ending deliberately remains ambiguous. Although High Place burns, Moreno-Garcia leaves readers with

the unsettling possibility that the fungus, and everything it symbolizes, may survive.

Colonialism, patriarchy, and racialized violence are not eradicated in a single act, they persist and mutate. *Mexican Gothic* ultimately argues that the past remains with us until it is confronted directly. The haunting endures as both memory and warning, urging readers to recognize inherited violence in the present and challenging them to reclaim the future before those same structures take root again.

Moreno-Garcia's decision to situate the novel in the 50s is not merely to fit within a historical fiction genre, but a deliberate commentary on the persistence of colonial and patriarchal power structures in the present. Although *Mexican Gothic* is set in a postcolonial moment, the novel suggests that the official end of colonial rule evidently did not dismantle the systems of domination it produced. Women continue to face limitations on their autonomy, while hierarchies based on race, class, and social status remain embedded within society. Through the Doyle family's obsession with racial purity and control, Moreno-Garcia illustrates how colonial ideologies survive beyond the empire itself, adapting to new social and political backgrounds. The novel's central message is that these structures have not disappeared, they continue to shape contemporary experiences and relationships of power. The destruction of High Place at the conclusion of the novel functions as a rejection of these cyclical systems, and the act of physically burning down the foundations of the colonial and patriarchal figure acts as a figurative call to dismantle these systems. In this sense, the novel is more than a Gothic horror story, it is a powerful critique of the enduring presence of colonial rule and a call to create new possibilities beyond its influence.

Works Cited

Literary Texts

Moreno-Garcia, Silvia. *Mexican Gothic*. Del Rey, 2020.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Introduction by Jeanette Winterson, Vintage Books, 2025.

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Independently Published, 2019.

Critical Texts

Ellis, Markman. *The History of Gothic Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2000. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/jj.31464679>. Accessed 4 Feb. 2026.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, Autumn 1975,

pp. 6–18. Amherst College,

<https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1021/Laura%20Mulvey%2C%20Visual%20Pleasure.pdf>.

Wester, M. (2020). *Twenty-first-century Gothic : an Edinburgh companion* (M. L. Wester & X.

Aldana Reyes, Eds.; 1st ed.). Edinburgh University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474440943>