

ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST: MONSTROSITY AND TRANSCORPOREALITY IN *MEXICAN GOTHIC*

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ABSTRACT

Mexican Gothic by Silvia Moreno García analyses the social situation of Mexico of the 1950s. A female gothic heroine guides the reader from a quiet town to a haunted house located in a remote village. She unveils the secrets of the Doyle's family, hidden behind the walls of the manor and in the crypt, and investigates the relationship of the members of the house with the house, while they keep her trapped inside. Noemí, the protagonist is helped by the ghost of Ruth, a deceased member of the family, and both women together end the rule of the patriarch of the family, Howard Doyle. The final collapse of the house and the death of the members of the family means an end to the colonial period of the area leaving the local inhabitants and the surrounding environment free from submission. The aim of this article is to show how ecogothic serves as a theoretical approach to denounce the submission of the human and the more than human by means of colonial practices beside demonstrating that the real monsters are the colonizers.

KEYWORDS: Decolonial Thinking, Haunted House, Monstrosity, Sorority, Transcorporeality.

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RESUMEN

Mexican Gothic de Silvia Moreno García analiza la realidad social de Méjico en los años 50 del siglo xx. Una heroína gótica guía al lector desde una tranquila ciudad hasta una casa encantada situada en una villa remota. Esta heroína desvela los secretos de la familia Doyle, escondidos tras las paredes de la casa y en la cripta e investiga la relación que la familia tiene con la casa mientras la mantiene secuestrada en ella. A Noemí, la protagonista de la novela, la ayuda el fantasma de Ruth, una de las parientes de la familia ya fallecida, y las dos juntas acabarán con el poder del patriarca de la familia, Howard Doyle. La caída final de la casa junto con la muerte de los miembros de la familia significa el final de un periodo de colonización de la zona y libera a los habitantes oriundos y al medio ambiente circundante de la sumisión previa. La intención de este artículo es demostrar que el ecogótico sirve como enfoque teórico para denunciar la sumisión de los seres humanos y más que humanos por medio de prácticas coloniales, además de dar razones que apoyan que los verdaderos monstruos son los colonizadores.

PALABRAS CLAVE: pensamiento decolonial, casa encantada, monstruosidad, sororidad, transcorporealidad.

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Mexican Gothic is a novel by the Mexican-Canadian writer Silvia Moreno García set in the Mexico of the 1950s. The reader knows it is Mexico where the novel takes place from the first page, in which a costume party to which the protagonist, Noemí Taboada attends is described in detail. Silvia Moreno García also mentions the folkloric China Poblana costume, a popular one in Mexican costume parties. This party sets the atmosphere for the development of a Gothic narrative because it grows the expectations of the reader of this type of narratives for an uncanny event to take place. In fact, in his introduction to *Selva de fantasmas: el gótico en la literatura y el cine latinoamericanos*, Gabriel Andrés Eljaiek Rodríguez states that Latin American gothic normally starts with a party or a family dinner as part of the transculturation process that takes place in these narratives. Transculturation as a concept first appeared in Fernando Ortiz's *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* (1940) to explain the process of cultural exchange that occurs when two cultures enter in contact. They both lose some elements and acquire others from the other culture at the same time a new third culture is born as a hybrid from elements of the other two. In Latin America, the process has resulted from the imposition of colonization so, this transculturation has not been a pacific process but, in most instances, a painful one where a deep feeling of loss and a necessary reaccommodation have been the norm. Ángel Rama in his *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1984) applies this concept to the cultural and literary influences that create intertextuality in the narrative genre of the novel. Along these pages, I point out some of the most significant cases of narrative transculturation and discuss them under the light of ecogothic theory.

After getting back home from the costume party, Noemí learns she must go on a quest to visit her newly married cousin, Catalina, who has sent Mr. Taboada a confusing letter in which she doesn't seem to be either much physically healthy or mentally sane. Except from the fact that she is Mexican, actually a descendent of indigenous population, "My father is from Veracruz and my mother from Oaxaca. We are Mazatec on her side" (Moreno García 2020, 29) Noemí, the heroine of this story, shows all the typical features of a European or American gothic character, such as her curiosity and intrepid character as well as her decisiveness to unveil the secret hidden behind the mysterious letter her cousin has sent to her family. She has even been brought up in a comfortable home with the protection of her parents who belong to the new bourgeoisie of the country, much like the aristocratic lineage of the protagonists of classic gothic novels. She is also a very intellectual woman, dreaming of obtaining her father's permission to study Anthropology instead of looking for a man to get married. She accepts the mission because her father promises her to agree to her desires if she first goes to investigate about her cousin's new home and her husband's family. Her cousin, Catalina, however, like most fairy tale heroines, has lost her mother; a mother who was European as she came from France. Catalina at the beginning of the story represents the Jungian archetype of the damsel in distress who has to be rescued from evil hands, much like the characters of the fairy tales she adores: Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and even Bella from *Beauty and the Beast*. Actually, this last fairy tale is Catalina's favorite and Noemí makes a very accurate comparison between the staff at High Place with the one in the fairy



tale as they all seem to be haunted by supernatural forces: “The staff at High Place was almost invisible, like in one of Catalina’s fairy tales. *Beauty and the Beast*, that had been it, had it not? Invisible servants who cooked the meals and laid down the silverware. Ridiculous” (59). Noemí goes even further in her description of the domestic workers: “Lizzie, Mary, and Charles, who, like the porcelain locked in the cabinets, had been imported from England many decades ago” (59). She compares them with inanimate objects, devoid of agency, behaving like automated machines performing the tasks for which they are trained. At this stage, Noemí still refuses to acknowledge that some kind of spell has been thrown on the house, like in the fairy tale just mentioned but the thought of magical or supernatural events taking place crosses her mind for an instant.

Catalina and later Noemí are trapped in High Place after the first marries into the Doyle’s family unknowingly of the troubles she will bring upon herself and her cousin. Contrary to fairy tales, rescue will not come in the form of a prince, as confinement and abuse are not exerted by stepmothers but by a preternatural force, whose attitudes are typical of colonialism and sexism. In this narrative, the protagonists will have to manage to escape by their own means, helped by a local healer and a member of the captors’ family, Francis, who far from being the charming prince represents more the sacrificial lamb for the family. The character of Francis subverts the structure of fairy tales, as he performs the role of the victim that has to be saved from his uncle’s thirst for power and youth. In fact, his own mother accepts and supports the sacrifice of his son for the perpetuation of the lineage.

Noemí also learns soon that the wild intimidating forest of fairy tales in her particular case means salvation instead of entrapment while the house, the embodiment of civilization, is the dangerous environment that threatens to engulf her. In fact, El Triunfo, the village closest to High Place and to which she has been forbidden to go, is described in very positive terms: “It took her a while, therefore, to realize that she was headed into a forest, for El Triunfo was perched on the side of a steep mountain carpeted with colorful wildflowers and covered thickly with pines and oaks” (15), compared to the later depiction of the house, with the mist and darkness that governs High Place.

This family in whose manor the narrative is set, the Doyle’s, comes from England, and they pretend to be aristocrats by creating their own heraldic symbol: “The ouroboros.” “The snake eats its tail. The infinite, above us, and below” (86). It is not casual that the snake is the element of nature selected to represent the family as it is an animal that inspires fear, which is the same feeling the family attempts to instigate in the locals to impose control. The snake also changes its skin like Howard Doyle who moves from one body to another at ease to survive and create a feeling of immortality. Ironically, Doyle, the family name, a very popular one in Ireland, has a Viking origin and was given to foreigners with a darker skin because it means: “dark stranger.” Silvia Moreno may also have had in mind the British writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, father of Sherlock Holmes when she wrote the story, thus, the reference to the name.

The combination of cultural and natural elements in the narrative contributes to the gothic character of the narrative. The first example is the description



of the house covered in mist and bearing similarities with the house of Usher in Poe's well-known short story "The Fall of the House of Usher:" "It was so odd! It looked absolutely Victorian in construction, with its broken shingles, elaborate ornamentation, and dirty bay windows" (20). Then, the drowsiness of the guests and next, the vision of a woman buried alive scratching her coffin, again bring echoes of "The Fall of the House of Usher and another popular E.A. Poe's story "Ligeia:" "Wood. She could smell damp earth and wood, and when she raised a hand, her knuckles hit a hard surface and a splinter cut her skin. Coffin. It was a coffin. The cloth was a shroud. But she wasn't dead. She wasn't. And she opened her mouth to yell, to tell them that she wasn't dead even when she knew she'd never die" (183).

From a posthuman perspective and following Donna Haraway in her influential *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), the concept of naturecultures finds its maximum exponent in *Mexican Gothic*, a novel in which the boundaries between culture and nature, human and the more than human not only dissolve but reorganize. The plant and animal species involved in this exchange restructure their physical and psychological essences producing a new type of monstrous entity difficult to define in human terms. This regrouping reaches a point in which the animal and plant species in connection depend on each other for their survival and their expansion, aiming to maintain control over the territory and the human and animal species that inhabit it. The house itself seems to become a living being at least in the mind of Noemí who perceives the changes taking place within the walls of her room: "The wallpaper was peeling, revealing underneath sickly organs instead of brick or wooden boards. Veins and arteries clogged with secret excesses" (116). But the house does not become a monstrous being by itself, it is the reflection of the oppression of the undead, of the ghosts inhabiting it that causes the transformation: "She followed the beating of the heart and a thread of red on the carpet. Like a gash. A line of crimson. A line of blood. Until she stopped in the middle of the hallway and saw the woman staring back at her" (116). Ruth and Agnes, trapped in the family crypt scream through the walls of the house, yell for help to finally rest in peace and to put to an end the abuse they are subjects to.

Apart from the question of gender which proves fundamental in this novel, race and ethnicity acquire utmost relevance during the development of the plot. The characters are divided in two different families. Apart from the Doyles, already mentioned as an old aristocratic European lineage that represents the old colonial power which is disappearing little by little, the other family, to which Noemí, the main character belongs to, the Taboada, marks the beginning of a new bourgeoisie in a Mexico finally liberated from Spanish, French or English colonial impositions. Thus, Silvia Moreno García sets purposefully the location to point out the struggle towards decolonization that Mexico was undertaking at that time, the 1950s.

I attempt to expose how decolonization and ecogothic function indistinctively and as a combination in this narrative to expose and battle patters of oppression towards human beings and nature attempting to submit and control them, especially the ones related to women and indigenous peoples. Contrary to the most generalized opinion of critics, I consider Latin American gothic, a product of narra-



tive transculturation, as unique and liberating as a decolonial act when we take into account the type of narrative we are dealing with.

This article aims at showing how ecogothic works as a decolonial force exposing and condemning situations of abuse in traditionally minoritized communities and ecosystems. The imposition of a colonial regime causes the alteration not only of the lives of the human beings but also of the more-than-human, animals and plants included as María Lugones argues in her essay “Towards a Decolonial Feminism” (2010). Ecogothic narratives as this one include a claim for wilderness preservation against the introduction of alien and foreign natural species which eventually bring about the disappearance of the local flora and fauna.

In terms of ethnicity, Catalina is preferred by the Doyle's over other local women because she has European blood but the house, which becomes a character itself and a very monstrous one, likes Noemí's strength better. She even has a royal name as in English Catalina is Catherine. The patriarch of the family, Howard Doyle, realizes Noemí has more indigenous blood than Catalina, so he constantly makes racist remarks to make her feel uncomfortable and remind her of her inferior position in comparison to his own family: “He pointed at her. ‘Both your coloration and your hair. They are much darker than Catalina’s. I imagine they reflect your Indian heritage rather than the French. You do have some Indian in you, no? Like most of the mestizos here do’” (29). Like his father, Virgil Doyle is a predator, ready to fall upon his prey, first Catalina, then Noemí. He is expected to inherit the manor and the silver mine which has been closed for decades but they intend to reopen it. They plan to submit the will of the locals with the gloom, which traps and annihilates the consciousness of everyone that approaches High Place. Apparently, Howard Doyle even brought earth from England, supposedly to assure himself that his roses would bloom. Of course, there is a hidden meaning behind the roses as they metaphorically stand for the children he expects to raise to perpetuate his lineage in America. In his attempt to become immortal both literally and through the expansion of his family, the truth is that he was carrying with him the fungi, the mold that heals wounds and brings eternal life. The fungi functions as the metaphorical view of colonization from the point of view of Silvia Moreno-García as it suppresses the will and agency of the people who enter in contact with it. The novel does not engage in questions of mycophobia, or the fear of infections from fungus; it is the way the mold affects the brains of the people that inspires terror: “The shifting mold was mesmerizing. It rearranged itself into wildly eclectic patterns that reminded her of a kaleidoscope, shifting, changing. Instead of bits of glass reflected by mirrors it was an organic madness that propelled the mold into its dizzy twists and turns, creating swirls and garlands, dissolving, then remerging” (191). The fact of losing control of their consciousness as the gloom invades them, the awareness of its agency provokes a clear feeling of ecophobia. The fear of losing “the integrity of their human body and the human subject” (28) towards the agency of the nonhuman element as Simon Estok argues in “Corporeality, Hyper-consciousness, and the Anthropocene: ecoGothic: Slime and Ecophobia” (2020) threatens those who enter in contact with the gloom and fight to survive as it prevents them from leaving the place and condemns them to remain narcotized like the domestic workers are.



As terrifying as it sounds, Noemí, the protagonist of the story learns that the Doyle's have already used this type of control in the past until the mine workers managed to start a rebellion in which most of them were killed. What happens is a controlled extermination of the indigenous population, of all the local inhabitants who were working in the family mine. María Lugones claims in "Towards a Decolonial Feminism" that "indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species-as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild" (2010, 19). This is the status they acquire in *Mexican Gothic*: Howard considers the natives beasts and treats them accordingly: he gives them a lower status than the other species and uses them for his own profit. He is in control of everything and everyone, even the landscape that surrounds the manor. On top of that, it must be highlighted in an exercise of environmental justice that the practice of mining deteriorates not only the health of the workers but also the landscape, and disrupts the life of the animal and plant species surrounding the area. Noemí in her train voyage to El Triunfo observes how the landscape was turning from being bucolic to becoming threatening and wild: "At the bottom of the mountains, farmers tended groves and fields of alfalfa, but there were no such crops here, just the goats climbing up and down rocks. The land kept its riches in the dark, sprouting no trees with fruit" (Moreno García 16). It is most likely that this is the effect of mining in the area, that the trees would bear no fruit and only goats would inhabit the land; other farm animals would not be able to survive in such landscape nor the crops. The land had been so exploited and abused that the remainder was in clear decay. While this power is exerted, the locals are mere observers, they do not have the agency to intervene and stop the environmental destruction of the area: mining is another way of imposing a colonial power.

As I have just explained above, in this attempt to exercise control over the people and the land, Howard Doyle alters the landscape, even importing earth from England, to successfully cultivate the mushrooms and make the fungi grow and expand to humongous proportions. This would be the start of the gloom, the grotesque combination of the mold growing in the house with the neuronal connections of Howard's first wife, Agnes who ends her days buried alive in the family crypt. Agnes is referred to as the mother since the energy to have everyone under control comes from her imprisoned mind. She embodies Donna Haraway's concept of naturecultures already explained and represents the motif of the undead together with Ruth, ever present in Gothic narratives. According to María Lugones, "the European bourgeois woman was not understood as his [man's] complement, but as someone who reproduced race and capital through her sexual purity, passivity, and being homebound in the service of the white, European, bourgeois man" (2010, 743). Agnes was locked in a coffin to maintain her mind conscious, contributing to the creation of fungi and bees for the survival of the family. The creation of the gloom comes from Howard's obsession to be in control, to have the power and possess the secret of eternal life. David Punter in *The Literature of Terror: The Gothic Tradition* expresses that this search is typical of the literature of Romanticism: "the forbidden knowledge which the romantic ostensibly seeks is similar to that of the alchemists: the knowledge of eternal life, the philosophers' stone, those kinds of knowledge which will make men gods" (1996, 105).



Doyle enslaves everyone around him, not only the mine workers but also his family and the family doctor whom he brought from England must be serving his own purpose. His son Virgil and his nephew Francis are conceived in order to serve as bodies, as vessels into which Howard can be transmuted when his body grows too old to allow him to live: “We’re special. The fungus bonds with us, it’s not noxious. It can even make us immortal. Howard has lived many lives, in many different bodies. He transfers his consciousness to the gloom and then from the gloom he can live again, in the body of one of his children” (212). When Francis explains to Noemí his function in the family he refers to himself as an orchid: “I was grown like an orchid. Carefully manufactured, carefully reared. I am, yes, like an orchid” (249). The monstrous body of Howard Doyle, imperfectly healed from his own daughter’s attempt to murder him has patiently waited for Virgil, his son, and for Francis, his nephew, to become adults and, thus, he has contemplated the deterioration of his sick body while seeking to enlarge the family with new members who can serve as bodies to transmute into and hold his consciousness in the future. This is where the sentence of the title comes from: it was pronounced every time Howard’s consciousness moved from one body to another, the birth of a new human being as when Jesus Christ was born.

Virgil, however, has traced a different plan which includes letting his father die and take his place as the master of the house and controller of the surroundings. After he marries Catalina and takes her to High Place, his expectations of her adaptation to the house are lowered as she is suffering, feeling suffocated in the atmosphere of the building and especially her room. Her husband pretends she has the female malady. Her illness is disguised throughout the novel first as hysteria, the classic mental illness associated with the fact of being a woman, then with tuberculosis which Noemí doubts and asks the local doctor for a second opinion, distrusting her cousin’s husband. Catalina also had to stay at the house because of the condition of women in Mexico in 1950. At that time, the confinement of a woman to the domestic realm was also a question of the preservation of a moral code. They were not allowed to own property or to vote, women rights were nonexistent. The fact that Catalina is the product of miscegenation reinforces the fact of her lower status compared to the Doyle’s.

Virgil’s family were attempting to have descendants and Catalina was brought for that purpose into the house and locked upstairs in her room as a Bertha Mason, lest she decided to run away or get acquainted with the locals. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen affirms in the introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, “the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith (“die erste Eva;” “la mere obscure”), Bertha Mason, or Gorgon (1996, 9). Catalina is restrained in her room and forced to ingest food contaminated with fungi because she does not surrender to the influx of the house. She refuses to give in and accept the physical and mental submission her husband’s family demands of her. Her resistance makes her sick, unable to fight against the controlling forces of the house, rendering her submissive and docile to her husband and his family.

In the letter asking for help that Catalina sends Mr. Taboada, her uncle, she complains about her husband’s treatment towards her. As she is a woman, she is



thought to be exaggerating and when Noemí asks about her cousin's health, her own father replies: "It's not as if your cousin hasn't had a tendency toward the melodramatic. It might be a ploy for attention" (7). But Noemí gives credit to Catalina and also considers the fact that she is an orphan. In the letter she sends, she is concerned about being poisoned and ill-treated at the house. The telegram describes the house as a classic American Gothic setting: "This house is sick with rot, stinks of decay, brims with every single evil and cruel sentiment" (7). Catalina also describes her captors as cruel and unkind, calling them: "these restless dead, these ghosts, fleshless things" (7). She claims that there is something in the walls that prevents her from getting better: "The walls speak to me. They tell me secrets. Don't listen to them, press your hands against your ears, Noemí. There are ghosts. They're real. You'll see them eventually" (50). This supernatural presence invades the space of the house, including the greenhouse, the cemetery and the family crypt. Everything seems to be under the influence of a strange powerful presence that Noemí and Catalina acknowledge and deeply fear, although they ignore the manipulation to which they are being subjected.

The realm of the supernatural curiously makes its appearance through the dreams that Noemí experiences in her room. Upon her arrival to the house, she starts feeling something or someone is observing her but she cannot describe it. What she realizes however is that she loses control of herself in her dreams and engages in sexual practices with Virgil. When he wakes her up, he constantly tells her that she has been sleepwalking. These dreams are premonitory of the events that would take place later and of the sexual molestation that she would end suffering if she does not react quickly and escapes from the house. A voice constantly reminds her to open her eyes, to wake up from the drowsiness state the house puts her in. Noemí eventually understands the messages the voice is sending to her and joins forces with Ruth, the ghost of the house, who supposedly killed herself after shooting the rest of the members of the family, most of whom died as a consequence of the attack. Although Ruth is portrayed as a monster by her relatives, Noemí learns from a local healer, the curandera Marta Duval, the truth of Ruth's suffering: how her lover Benito, was horrendously murdered by her family because he belonged to a lower class, therefore, not accepted by her family. Apart from the fact that Benito was an indigenous inhabitant, her uncle had already arranged her marriage to her own cousin, Michael, whom she despised deeply. Ruth had to serve a purpose in the family like every other member: to produce an heir, another body for Howard's future transmutation.

The supernatural elements contribute to highlight the unfair treatment inflicted on the local workers and native inhabitants as they show who the real beasts are: the colonizers. As Gabriel Andrés Eljaiek Rodríguez argues in *Selva de fantasmas: el gótico en la literatura y el cine latinoamericano* the monstrous other is located in Europe, in the old continent, where many of the narratives take place or where many protagonists come from (2017, 58).¹ Undoubtedly, in *Mexican Gothic*,

¹ Original in Spanish: "El otro monstruoso está en Europa, en el viejo continente, lugar donde se desarrollan muchas de las narraciones o provienen muchos de sus protagonistas" (2017, 58).



the Other, the alien and the monstrous is represented by Howard and Virgil Doyle, originally from England. They embody the decadence of a colonial past imported from the old continent imposed on the indigenous people and especially on women. Even the women in the family have suffered a forced submission to the patriarch to the point of losing their lives to provide him pleasure. Consanguinity has been the norm in the family because they have procreated through incestuous relationships, until they have realized their mistake. Thus, Howard and Virgil Doyle attempt to preserve their decaying lineage which is about to disappear by bringing new women to the house to use them as the vehicle to perpetuate their blood: "On occasion you need to inject new blood into the mix, so to speak. Of course my father has always been very stubborn about these things, insisting that we must not mingle with the rabble" (237). A clear case of female oppression, the example of Catalina and Noemí brings attention to how Mexican (and Latin American at large) female bodies have been historically sexualized, erotized and exoticized as they are in this novel: treated as commodities, they are the colonial product to satisfy the lust of the colonizer. Noemí finds herself in this position after a conversation with Virgil: "Dark meat, she thought. Nothing but meat, she was the equivalent of a cut of beef inspected by the butcher and wrapped up in waxed paper. An exotic little something to stir the loins and make the mouth water" (236). Depriving the Doyle's of an ability to procreate, Silvia García Moreno almost makes a political statement for their disappearance: their survival feels anachronical in a postcolonial era like the 1950s.

Noemí sees through her visions the history of the house, visited by the female ghosts of the family but also product of her own hallucinations provoked by the mushrooms which connect with her in a transcorporeal manner; these fungi enter her subconscious through the air and the food she ingests and their materialities fuse inhabiting in her, becoming her parasites. The human and the more than human intrude into each other, Alaimo's transcorporeality, in this case, highlights the consequences of interfering with the environment as the mold invades the space of the other animal and plant species reigning over them. Then, natural elements are intimidating and colonizing because they take the space of the indigenous plants and inhabitants and kill them. As Estok points out, "We have initiated what can only be understood as an Anthropocene ecoGothic in which the monstrous Nature we have created now threatens our very survival" (2020, 27). This is exactly the case in *High Place*, Howard and Virgil in their human exceptionalism believe they are entitled to possess everyone and everything else. Their depravation takes them to even ingest human flesh, to become cannibals eating the dismembered bodies of their own children hoping to reach eternal life: "A communion. Our children are born infected with the fungus and ingesting their flesh means ingesting the fungus; ingesting the fungus makes us stronger and in turn it binds us more closely to the gloom. Binds us to Howard" (280). This connects them with the figure of the vampire drinking the blood of his victims to survive, maintain his eternal life and become more powerful. David Punter in *The Literature of Terror: a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Volume 1 the Gothic Tradition* analyses this gothic creature, by taking Lord Ruthven from John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* as the model and makes its characteristics extensive to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The first



feature that he points out is the sexual potential of the vampire which Howard Doyle also possesses: “what Ruthven exercises over his victims is a kind of *droit de seigneur*, that kind of absolute sexual privilege which is a concomitant of absolute power, and which is at the same time a predictable object of middle-class fantasies” (104) and continues explaining where the thirst for blood comes from, it is the need to prevent the definite loss of his aristocratic status: “he is dead yet not dead, as the power of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth century was dead and not dead; he requires blood because blood is the business of an aristocracy, the blood of warfare and the blood of the family” (104). The Doyle’s had lost all their money and depended on seducing rich female heirs to obtain enough money to reopen the mine, the source of their past wealth that they still exhibit ostentatiously in their cabinets and recover the high status they had once enjoyed.

The connection with *Dracula*, both the character and the novel, goes further than the search for eternal life through the consumption of human blood or flesh. Many contemporary literary critics have studied the imperialistic character of Bram Stoker’s narrative. They identify the vampire with colonialism and contemplate its defeat at the hands of the locals as a solid proof of the urgency to make disappear such systems of imposed power. However, a deeper analysis of the influence of *Dracula* on *Mexican Gothic* in colonial terms exceeds the scope of this work.

In connection with these descriptions and comparisons between the figure of the vampire and the characters of Howard and Virgil Doyle, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in the introduction to his volume *Monster Theory* defends that monsters “are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (1996, 6). I must insist here that the monsters and the beasts in *Mexican Gothic* are the colonizers. Silvia Moreno García subverts the traditional portrayals of indigenous inhabitants of the American continent in canonical literature as savages and cannibals to transform them into victims in the hands of an English abusive colonizer.

At the beginning of the novel, Noemí disregards the idea of the house being haunted although she is an avid reader of anthropology related to witchcraft, and she has knowledge of Mexican and indigenous traditions. Identifying as mestiza, she represents a bridge between the scientific knowledge imported from Europe and the US and the indigenous traditional wisdom derived from the observation and understanding of nature. This is why she also trusts Marta Duval. This curandera, a classical figure of Mexican tradition, appears as the key to liberate the two women, as a representative of silenced indigenous knowledge opposed to medical doctors and offering a change in cultural epistemologies: from the powerful European inherited knowledge to a traditional focus on nature which reveals more effective than any of the medical remedies Dr. Cummings or Dr. Caramillo provide Catalina or Noemí. She prepares the tincture that prevents the house from abducting these two women. The inclusion of traditional elements means a clear tropicalization of the gothic genre and the collapse of the house means the final disappearance of a colonial system that had been imposing its laws for centuries over the indigenous ones. Sandra Vizcaino and Inés Ordiz in the introduction to their volume *Latin American Gothic in Literature*



and Culture support this claim: “the Gothic in Latin America is very much rooted in local realities and histories, and often linked to different processes of modernization. These include the colonization and occupation of the region by Europe or the United States; the formation of the new nation-states following the wars of independence; and the collapse, failure, exhaustion, and absence of national projects that lead to violence, inequality, and exclusion.” (Vizcaíno-Ordiz 24). Colonization carries the suppression of local stories and culture, thus, creating ignorance to allow the imposition of its own values and education. The government of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico (1877 to 1880 and 1884 to 1911) allowed the establishment of foreign businesses, a new colonial system in which the lower classes suffered exploitation which eventually led to the Mexican revolution.

Even though the question of class struggle does not belong much in American literature and it is better reflected in European writing, this novel, however, shows the combination of race and class issues as it portrays the struggle of native workers of a silver mine to protect their rights over the exploitation of the Doyles, the owners. Howard Doyle constantly exerts the power over the rest of the local inhabitants of El Triunfo. Even the name of his house, High Place, provides the clue of how important he thinks he is. “The superimposition of power by the colonial administration in the American tropics is partly achieved through epistemic violence wherein the local culture, belief systems, languages and narratives are eradicated or forced to become covert” (Edwards 2016, 20).

The analysis of the monstrosity of the house as a projection of the monstrous personality of the patriarch of the Doyles exceeds the aim of this article although it belongs fully to the Gothic genre, in a clear homage to the motif of the Doppelgänger as it appears in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or even “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

Duplicity or duality also mark the relationship between Ruth and Noemí. While Catalina is kept in bed, vulnerable and malleable, Noemí gathers her remaining strength to fight against the attempts of the house to submit her and learns to trust the ghost of Ruth, whose presence, as I have already discussed, wanders the house as her consciousness has been trapped in it after dying. Both women connect and join forces to battle their destiny when Noemí realizes that Ruth has been and still is a prisoner just like her. Even being part of the Doyle family, Ruth wouldn't dare to contradict the will of her father and when she rebels against him and tries to kill him shooting him as well as the rest of the family, she discovers that the great strength Howard has acquired eating his own kin and the fungi that heals wounds, saves him. Unfortunately, not only Howard survives but takes revenge against Ruth forcing her to fatally shoot herself although it would be more accurate to say that she stayed undead as the narrator describes:

She realized that what she had been seeing, the voice whispering to her, urging her to open her eyes, was the mind of Ruth, which still nestled in the gloom, in the crevices and mold-covered walls. There must be other minds, bits of persons, hidden underneath the wallpaper, but none as solid, as tangible as Ruth. (233)



Ruth guides Noemí through the house, warns her to stay alert and open her eyes, as I have already pointed out, and tells her that the secret of the house is located in the English cemetery. They complement each other as Noemí ends the work that Ruth could not finish by destroying the family and with them the whole house.

The reference to fairy tales continues along the whole story, even at the end, with Francis lying unconscious, Noemí recalls the recurrent kiss scene that brings a happy ending to most fairy tales. As the mock wedding had taken place before the collapse of the house, the novel cannot end in marriage and the final sentence they lived happily ever after not make sense. The subversion of the structure and plot must continue and it is necessary to point out that, in this case, the dormant or kidnapped maid has been substituted by a poor man, unable to contradict his mother or uncle and who has resigned himself to give up his life for a higher cause: the survival of his lineage through his uncle's possession of his body to be able to procreate with Noemí.

The fact that the narrative ends triumphantly in the liberation of Catalina marks a distinction in colonial terms. The two women liberate themselves from the oppression of race and gender with the help of another woman, Ruth, and ruin the plans of the patriarch of the family. The death of Howard, of the monster, marks the end of oppression in High Place and even the undead women, Ruth and Agnes, get freed from the service they were still paying to the family as they were maintaining the gloom, therefore, Howard, alive with their subconscious. The escape of the protagonists means a process of decolonization, of running away from old rancid practices imposed on the colonial subjects and involves a change of mind from the part of the colonizer, represented by the only survivor: Francis Doyle, as well as a restoration of the surroundings, of the environment, including plant and animal species that had been destroyed first with the exploitation of the silver mine from the time of the Spaniards, then with the controlling gloom that had deprived the inhabitants of the house and the mine workers of their human agency and integrity making them behave erratically.



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