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“Time is on my side”: Examining the Exploitation of Feminine Bodies through the Masculine Need for Immortality in *Mexican Gothic* and *Dracula*

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Abstract

Immortality and the search for eternal youth is a recurring theme among many classic and modern gothic novels. Whether it’s vampirism, a cursed portrait, or magical mushrooms, the human, and most often masculine, need to live forever is repeatedly achieved through the use and abuse of feminine bodies. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), the infamous vampire and titular character continuously uses women—Lucy Westenra, Mina Murray, and his three “brides”—to do his bidding. Though Dracula is an almighty, ancient vampire, his immortality and power are tied to his control over the women of the novel. Likewise, in the more contemporary *Mexican Gothic* (2020) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia, the immortal antagonist, Howard Doyle, uses various female characters to continue his never-ending cycle of abuse and domination. Notably, Moreno-Garcia uses the struggle between the European Doyles and the Mexican female characters to show not only a feminine clash against patriarchal systems but also the long-lasting effects of European colonization on Mexican land. Both *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic* have gothic villains (which I will also refer to as “male parasites”) that use women primarily for the acquisition of immortality and secondly for sex, childrearing, and/or financial gains. After defining the importance of the male parasite and closely examining the characters' sexual and romantic relationships, I will analyze immortality in *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic* through an intersectional lens of race and gender, focusing on Moreno-Garcia’s twisting of the Victorian fear of the racial other.

Keywords: Bram Stoker**,** *Dracula*, *Mexican Gothic*, patriarchy, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Victorian literature

Introduction

"My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed" -Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

The search for eternal life appears in many classical and contemporary novels, and the state of immortality comes in many different forms in gothic literature. Whether through vampirism, a cursed portrait, or magical mushrooms, the human, and most often masculine, need to live forever is repeatedly achieved through the exploitation of feminine bodies. This insatiable masculine need manifests into a trope I will refer to as the male parasite. This term will be discussed in greater detail later on in the paper. Focusing first on the quote above, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), it is the titular character's vampirism that grants him longevity and supernatural abilities. Throughout the novel, Dracula is seen to primarily target and use feminine bodies as tools to hold onto his immortality and accumulate even more power. Mina Murray, Lucy Westenra, and Dracula's three brides are simultaneously his accomplices (sometimes willing, sometimes not) and victims. Furthermore, Dracula's domination of women gives him power over the novel's male protagonists. In the quote above, Dracula taunts Van Helsing and the group of English heroes while objectifying Mina and Lucy using diction such as "your" and "mine."

Dracula's triumphant proclamation is also meant to further emasculate the novel's heroes by portraying them as weak and incapable since they have failed to perform the masculine duty of protecting "their" women. However, even though Dracula proves to be an impressive adversary, this scene can ultimately be perceived as somewhat contradictory since Dracula's power is ultimately limited without the women of the novel. Dracula's relationships with Lucy and Mina suggest that it is only through the female characters that he can control and defeat the group of heroes. Dracula's powers are, therefore, very much dependent on the women around him, and his treatment of Lucy, Mina, and his three brides depicts a manipulation of women as tools for men to gain immortality and power. Indeed, in gothic literature, male villains and even heroes often shape their female counterparts in ways so that the women can serve the men's needs. This paper seeks to show how the immortal male characters of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* (2020) manipulate women, often through romance or sex, to gain and preserve their eternal lives. Past and current scholars have already extensively researched race, gender, sexuality, and immortality in *Dracula*. However, viewing *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic* together reveals how Moreno-Garcia flips the fear of the Victorian racial other and uses the concept of immortality and the struggle between the European Doyle men and the Mexican female characters to depict not only a feminine clash against patriarchal systems but also the long-lasting effects of European colonization on Mexican land.

Mexican Gothic's plot follows two Mestiza women (Noemí and Catalina) as they are tricked by a white European family who uses women to continue the cycle of immortality of their patriarch, Howard Doyle. Like Dracula and other gothic villains, Howard depends on the female characters around him for his success. He uses women's bodies to reproduce and continue his lineage so that he can eventually overtake his offspring's bodies and live forever—cycling through women for wives and children for bodies. In the novel's conclusion, it is

revealed that Howard's power is sourced through his first wife, Agnes. Though Agnes is deceased, her body is being used as a sort of vessel and conduit. Howard's son, Virgil Doyle, also uses his wife, Catalina, as a sort of tool. The Doyle family keeps Catalina frail, sickly, and mostly submissive so that they can take her money and use her to bring new blood into the incestuous Doyle line.

Dracula and the antagonists of *Mexican Gothic* (Howard and Virgil Doyle) seek immortality at the risk of destroying everyone around them, allies and foes alike. Although Judith Wilt's chapter, "Gothic Brothers," opens and centers around Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, her insight on immortality can be applied to the villains of *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic*. Wilt states, "[I]t is an economical universe: if he [Victor Frankenstein] wants immortality, all the life in the world, Victor is doomed to take it away from others" (63). Dracula, Howard, Virgil, and other male characters that gain immortality often show no concern that their longevity comes at the cost of their own souls or, more often, the lives and agency of the women around them. Because of these moral repercussions, gothic writers do not often depict immortality as ideal, and "the curse of immortality" (Stoker 174) is often examined in fiction and academic scholarship as being trapped in a static, eternally fixed state. Stephanie Branson explains that the curse of immortality stems from being "immortal in a mortal world" (34). Immortal characters are often unable to adapt to the ever-changing world around them. While Dracula, Howard, and Virgil remain attached to the past, the women they victimize represent modernity and the changing times. Even with all their power, the gothic villains of these novels cannot keep the world from turning.

While Jeffery J. Franklin chooses to label Dracula as a demi-immortal, his article also analyzes the consequences of eternal life, especially within the context of good and evil. Franklin explains that in *Dracula* and other tales of (demi) immortal figures, "demi-immortality always comes with a price, if not a curse" (3). This price or curse usually pertains to losing one's sense of good and evil, therefore becoming immortal also means becoming monstrous and inhuman in a way. As Jeffery Jerome Cohen observes, "any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual" (24). Although extensive research has been done on Dracula's immortality, racial otherness, and monster qualities, there is room to explore how a novel like *Mexican Gothic* further reveals the underlying implications of Dracula and his longevity. For example, although Dracula's racial otherness and vampirism both contribute to him being monstrous and villainous, Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* combats the typical gothic white hero/gothic foreigner villain trope by making the white Howard and Virgil Doyle the antagonists and the Mestiza female characters the protagonists.

Furthermore, romantic and sexual relationships are weaponized in *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic,* and the three main villains, Dracula, Howard, and Virgil, often use the illusion of love, lust, shame, and guilt to manipulate the female heroines. Thus, sex and gender are important factors in how these gothic villains keep their immortality and power. While Bram Stoker seemingly perpetuates traditional gender roles, Silvia Moreno-Garcia explicitly challenges societal ideals that continuously repress female sexuality. *Dracula* expresses concern for "the new woman" of the late Victorian Era, a representation that went against Victorian gender standards inspired by works like Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House." However, Bram Stoker's novel also presents many taboo sexual actions of the Victorian period, such as

homosexuality and interracial relationships. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos explains that Dracula, therefore, "presents a fantasy world that would have provided escape from many of the sexual and psychic restraints prevalent in Victorian culture" (106). This conflicting portrayal of women and sexuality is also discussed by Prescott and Giorgio, who begin their paper by pointing out how Mina Harker experiences conflicting feelings when it comes to her relationship with Dracula: "she [Mina] recounts this perverse seduction [by Dracula] in her own words… 'strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him' (284)" (487).

Though *Dracula* seems to clearly condemn overly sexual women (Lucy and Dracula's three brides are villainized despite their origins as Dracula's victims), the inner conflict seen in Mina's character clearly show that the sexuality of Stoker's novel is actually not black and white but complex and contradictory. Because sex and romantic relationships are an important part of these novels, I would like to further explore why male characters prefer female characters to gain or keep immortality and how female repressed sexuality is depicted within the characters of Mina, Lucy, Noemí, and Catalina.

"The Curse of Immortality" and the Male Parasite Trope

As mentioned at the start of this paper, Dracula makes a point to state that it is through the female characters of the novel he will be able to control the group of heroes and then the world. Though Dracula feeds on women and uses them to gain more power, neither his brides nor Lucy and Mina are his equals. Dracula tells Mina, "[you] shall be later on my companion and my helper" (233), making it clear that she will always be beneath him even when her vampiric transformation is complete. Immortal villains like Dracula are often unwilling and incapable of sharing power. Judith Wilt states, "[immortality] with Dracula, as it is always with the Gothic antihero, the great old man, is vertical, a great stream pouring down that one must contrive to entirely swallow, although getting and keeping life on these terms is more like climbing a ladder that is itself constantly descending" (88). Since Dracula's immortality is indeed dependent on taking life and control away from others (primarily women), his power and longevity are actually quite precarious. The fragile and stagnant state of immortality is also acknowledged by Van Helsing in *Dracula* when he says*:*

> When they become such, there comes with the change the curse of immortality. They cannot die, but must go on age after age adding new victims and multiplying the evils of the world. For all that die from the preying of the Undead become themselves Undead, and prey on their kind. And so the circle goes on ever widening, like as the ripples from a stone thrown in the water (Stoker 174).

Dracula's vulnerability is seen in his need for the English characters; before he meets Lucy and Mina, he uses Johnathan Harker. At the start of Stoker's novel, the famous vampire is actually in a weakened state, and he often reminisces about the past; Johnathan expresses:

> I have had a long talk with the Count. I asked him a few questions on Transylvania history, and he warmed up to the subject wonderfully. In his speaking of things and people, and especially of battles, he spoke as if he had been present at them all… he grew excited as he spoke (Stoker 24).

Often, the curse of immorality additionally causes immortal characters to look back fondly at a distant yet glorious past, a time when they reached a peak in terms of power, finances, and influence.

The inability to evolve along with the world is illustrated in Bram Stoker's novel firstly through Dracula and Johnathan's relationship. Dracula enlists Jonathan to help him with some financial and logistical issues, but he also importantly uses him to learn about the modern English world. Dracula would not be able to navigate Victorian England without the help of the English characters around him. Wilt analyzes this nostalgia in connection with Dracula's insatiable need for power by stating:

> Dracula is unable to bear the changing world, the curving universe, his own curve out of the familiar phases of life where he led armies and ruled peoples. His fight to drain the world is really a fight to stay in one solid place. And since the universe does curve and move, he is bound to lose (88).

Vampires and other immortal creatures are emotionally frozen in their original time, and they often struggle when attempting to adjust to the ever-evolving world around them. Therefore, characters like Dracula, Howard, and Virgil turn to women whom they can use as tools to restore the money, power, and prestige that is currently lost to them.

Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* illustrates the curse of immortality through the main antagonist, Howard Doyle. Howard uses his family to continue his lineage so that he can take over the bodies of his children by transferring his consciousness into the "gloom," a supernatural "database" that he uses to live forever and control other members of the family. Howard and, consequently, his family are therefore shown to be stuck in time. Howard's cycle is also represented in the Doyle family symbol, the ouroboros. When Noemí asks Virgil to explain the image, he says, "the snake eats its tail. The infinite, above us, and below" (Moreno-Garcia 87). Later in the novel, when Noemí finally understands the violent cycle that gives Howard his power, she realizes, "he [Howard] would die, he would slide into a new body, and Francis would cease to exist. A demented cycle. Children devoured as babes, children devoured as adults. Children are but food. Food for a cruel god" (270). However, like Dracula, Howard's power is precarious. Some characters, like his daughter, Ruth, attempt to resist him and his control. Though Ruth comes close to defeating her father, Howard is able to overtake her mind so that she loses control of herself and unwillingly commits suicide.

The Doyles are also shown to be obsessed with their own prosperous past from the start of *Mexican Gothic*, but Noemí quickly discovers that their manor house, High Place, is in ruins, and the family has lost their silver fortune. Furthermore, the Doyle family's physical isolation, sense of superiority, and racial prejudice have left them incapable of adapting to the modernizing world around them. Noemí and her cousin, Catalina, embody modernity and represent progress, the opposite of the Doyles, who are linked with archaic customs and decay. The immortal characters of Dracula, Howard, and Virgil further reveal a recurring trope that I have identified in gothic literature, which I refer to as the male parasite. These are male characters who use women for their own personal gains. When considering the parasitic nature of the vampire, the name of this trope seems quite obvious; however, the male parasite refers to any male character (supernatural or mere human) who physically, emotionally, financially, or symbolically drains female characters. These men often seduce and trap women through the institution of marriage in order to gain immortality, resources, class status, power, and more. In *Mexican Gothic,* this is seen when Virgil admits that once his family's silver mines open up again—thanks to his wife, Catalina's financial backing—the Doyles will be able to "find our way

in this world" (Moreno-Garcia 202). The Doyles all share the same economic anxiety which pushes them to do whatever it takes so that they can once again be rich and powerful.

Because of the nature of his immortality, Howard longs for power and control of the people around him. Towards the end of *Mexican Gothic*, when Howard is finally weakened after Catalina's attack, he makes one last attempt to gain control of Francis' body in order to escape his own death. As he dies, he holds out his hands towards Noemí and Francis and says, "you're mine. Your body is mine" (272). Howard uses his powers to force his will upon others, he does this to everyone in his family unit except, to an extent, his favorite son, Virgil. Unlike Dracula who has no "heir" or male accomplice, Howard's ideologies are perpetuated by his son after he is dead. Virgil takes control of the "gloom" and tries to overpower Noemí, who is able to destroy the source of his power and hopefully finally end the Doyles' cycle of abuse. Virgil is only able to control the gloom once his father, Howard, is dead. Dracula, Howard, and Virgil (though father and son) are unable to share power with each other. Howard and Virgil are never equals, there is always a power imbalance between them. At the end of *Mexican Gothic,* Virgil tells a horrified Noemí that his plan for her to kill Howard for him has succeeded and now that Howard is "weakened. I control the gloom now… when he dies, he'll die forever. I won't let him have a new body" (Moreno-Garcia 285). This link between morality, eternal life, and selfishness can also be explained as the immortal characters' "scant regard for harm done to others or for the sanctity of human life… their sociopathic and homicidal tendencies pose a threat to social order and make a point about the undesirability of their powers" (Franklin 3). Howard's disregard for others' lives possibly derives from the instability of his immortality.

Howard and Dracula are very similar gothic villains—despite being immortal powerful beings, both are in a weakened state at the start of their respective novels. In *Mexican Gothic* when Howard's plan is finally made known to Noemí, it mirrors that of Dracula. Both of these gothic villains also seem to collect pretty girls, adding to their collections and using their money or influence to gain control of other men. Dracula plans to manipulate the English heroes through Lucy and Mina just like Howard uses Noemí's fondness of his nephew, Francis against her. Ultimately, although Dracula and Howard need women in order to stay immortal and regain any power that they have lost, the female characters of each respective novel lead these male parasites to their destruction even though they originally seemed to be their salvation.

Mothers and Wives in Dracula and Mexican Gothic

In many gothic novels, women are either depicted as monsters or angels (Appignanesi[1]). This designation usually depends on how successfully female characters portray traditional gender roles. Focusing first on the women of *Dracula,* Lucy's vampiric transformation and later violent death at the hands of the novel's heroes is much different from Mina's survival and "usefulness" in taking out Dracula. Lucy and Mina's different endings are the result of how each character fails or succeeds in portraying Victorian gender ideals. Although Mina does not exactly misalign with the Victorian "New Woman," she tends to follow more traditional and

[1] In her introduction to Gilbert and Gubar's canonical work, *Madwoman in the Attic,* Lisa Appignanesi notes that "idealized, woman is the Virgin Mary, the nineteenth-century angel of the house, keeper of morality, the unsullied, desexualized innocent of the law courts. If she topples off her pedestal, she is transformed into a monster, a killer of men, a less than human creature with a fishy tail."

conservative gender roles. For example, Mina offers emotional support to the men of the novel—when comforting Lord Godalming, she contemplates, "I suppose there is something in woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood" (Stoker 186). Dracula also refers to these patriarchal expectations of women when he tells Mina, "and you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and helper" (Stoker 233). Mina and her role as a good Victorian women therefore is tied to her being portrayed as a useful tool for both Dracula and the group heroes.

Although Mina is clearly meant to be the "good" Victorian woman of *Dracula,* she, like the "bad" women, Lucy, and Dracula's three brides are all depicted as hypersexual and promiscuous at some point in the novel and this sexual expression is always tied to their relationships with Dracula. Dracula uses women for their bodies: their blood for food and their bodies to sexually satisfy him and his need for power. The heroes of the novel are also guilty of objectifying women like this; they praise Mina for her virtue and usefulness in killing Dracula and are disgusted with Lucy's new vampiric form which is monstrous and "unclean" (Stoker 172). Previous research on gender and sexuality in *Dracula* almost always points out Lucy's hyper sexualization. Unlike Mina who is committed to Jonathan throughout the entire novel, Lucy's character is introduced alongside a line of eager suitors. When she struggles to choose a husband between them, Lucy tells Mina, "why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" (Stoker 49). Senf's article, "*Dracula:* Stoker's Response to the New Woman," analyzes Lucy's character and her sexuality by stating:

> [Lucy's] desire for three husbands suggests a degree of latent sensuality which connects her to the New Woman of the period. It also implies that Lucy is unhappy with her social role, that she is torn between the need to conform and the desire to rebel. Mina's journal and its revelation of Lucy's sleep-walking confirm this division. By day Lucy remains an acquiescent and loving Victorian girl. By night the other side of her character gains control; and Mina describes her as restless and impatient to get out. It is this restlessness which ultimately leads her to Dracula and to emancipation from her society's restraints (42).

As Senf points out, there is a duality in Lucy's character—the flirty but still innocent "good girl" and the seductive, murderous vampire. Even though Lucy chooses to marry Arthur Holmwood, her other two suitors are still shown to be devoted to her care when she falls ill. However, all this changes when Lucy becomes a vampire. She is no longer seen as pure, and the men are no longer attracted to her. Dr. Seward remarks that "[vampire] Lucy's eyes [are] unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew. At that moment the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing" (Stoker 172). Dracula has "won" Lucy, and now that she is no longer loyal to the group of heroes and Victorian gender roles, she must be destroyed.

Sex proves to be a tool used by male parasite characters to control women who are encouraged to have no desires outside of their wifely, maternal roles and sex also plays an important role in the relationships between women and immortal male characters. Dracula and the villains of *Mexican Gothic* weaponize romantic and sexual relationships. They lure women in, often manipulating them and controlling their emotions with supernatural powers and mind games. Because of the manipulation the female characters of *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic*

experience, these women often struggle with their sexual attraction to the gothic villains of the novels. However, this struggle with attraction can also be seen as representative of the sexual repression that women often feel, especially in the time periods both novels take place. In *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Misha Kavka argues that "in *Dracula,* the vampire combines feminine with masculine sexual and emotional characteristics… the Gothic captures, and to some extent makes available for catharsis, the fear associated with the unstable boundaries of our subjectivity" (211). Both *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic* demonstrate sexual repression within their female characters. Lucy and Mina both struggle with some sort of attraction to Dracula and must learn to reject those desires in order to portray the correct version of Victorian femininity, especially what was known as the "Angel in the House" trope.[2] After an encounter with Dracula, Mina exclaims, "I was bewildered, and strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him [Dracula]. I suppose it is a part of the horrible curse that such is, when his touch in on his victim" (Stoker 233). Moreover, because *Dracula* presents many types of Victorian sexual taboos, such as interracial and homosexual relationships, Dracula's character can be symbolic of sexual desires that were not publicly accepted or even allowed in the Victorian era.

Similar to the disgust and regret Mina presents in *Dracula*, in *Mexican Gothic,* Noemí constantly feels guilty for her sexual desires, especially when it comes to Virgil. She often feels the need to suppress all her sexual desires completely. Though Noemí and Virgil clash many times throughout the novel, Noemí struggles with the attraction she feels for him. After a nightmare in which Virgil sexually assaults her, Noemí wakes in Virgil's room and reflects:

> She did not wish to blush in front of him. To turn crimson like an idiot in front of a man who wielded such meticulous hostility toward her. But she thought of his mouth on hers and his hands on her thighs, like it had been in the dream, and an electric thrill ran down her spine. That night, that dream, it had felt like desire, danger, and scandals, and all the secrets her body and her eager mind quietly coveted (Moreno-Garcia 186).

Later, at the climax of the novel, Virgil attempts to seduce Noemí using this attraction in an attempt to manipulate her: "it's me you want, me you fantasize about. We have an understanding, don't we? We know each other, really know each other. Underneath the layers of decorum all you do is want" (Moreno-Garcia 261). However, although Noemí almost gives into this seduction, like Mina with Dracula, she is able to resist this sexual/romantic temptation, unlike Catalina and Lucy[3]. This resistance is one of the reasons why Noemí is able to defeat Howard and Virgil. Although Laura Linneman's article focuses on sexual repression in *Dracula,* her statement: "although she [Mina] is preyed upon by Count Dracula, [she] is not consumed by vampirism and able to aid the Crew of Light due to her rejection of the omnisexual and overtly sexual vampire behavior" (8) can be applied to the heroine of *Mexican Gothic.* That said, it's crucial to remember that in *Dracula,* only Mina is rewarded with survival and praise for

[2] Coventry Patmore's poem, "The Angel in the House" (1854) depicted a maternal, wifely woman who was submissive to the men around her, especially her husband. The angel in the house exists largely in the domestic sphere and is tied to her wifely and motherly duties.

[3] Catalina and Lucy seem to be more susceptible to Dracula and Howard's charms than Mina and Noemí. However, although they are victims of the gothic villains, they are often seen as less resistant than their female counterparts who avoid being manipulated by Dracula and Howard.

remaining loyal to traditional gender roles, while in *Mexican Gothic*, both Noemí and Catalina survive, with Catalina being the one who debilitates Howard so that the protagonists may all escape.

Also, unlike Mina and Lucy, Noemí and Catalina are both fetishized by the gothic villains of their novel because of their racial background. Dracula may target Mina and Lucy because they are English women and they can help him gain control of England, but this is different to Howard's manipulation of Noemí and Catalina. Early on in *Mexican Gothic,* Howard is shown to be obsessed with eugenics. When Howards asks Noemí, "What are your thoughts on the intermingling of superior and inferior types?" she reflects that she "felt the eyes of all the family members on her. Her presence was a novelty and an alteration to their patterns. An organism introduced into a sterile environment. They waited to hear what she revealed and to analyze her words" (Moreno-Garcia 30). Though she is belittled by the Doyles, Howard also sexualizes Noemí multiple times. When forcing her to marry Francis, he tells her, "'You look beautiful, my dear,' he said. 'One of the prettiest brides I've had the chance to gaze upon.' She considered exactly how many girls that might be. Another pretty girl for his collection" (Moreno-Garcia 257). After this forced marriage, Virgil sexually assaults Noemí and though she manages to get away from Virgil, she is trapped by the only female villain of the novel, Florence Doyle, who has shown her distaste for Noemí from their first encounter. Although Florence herself was raped by Howard, she expresses no sympathy for either Catalina or Noemí. Florence's internalized misogyny and submission to Howard had made her perpetrator in the cycle of abuse she was once a victim of: "'Virgil tried to rape me,' Noemí said. 'He tried to rape me, and I should have killed him back there.' 'Shush,' Florence replied, looking disgusted. Things were never spoken at High Place, not even now" (Moreno-Garcia 268). Sex and violence are used by the gothic villains to force the female characters to comply; however, Noemí, Ruth, and Catalina, are all shown to resist and fight back against Virgil and Howard.

Female characters are not just used for sex; many of the women that the gothic villains of *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic* target eventually begin to take on a maternal role or are forced into one by the men. Though Mina is not a mother in *Dracula,* at one point, she contemplates, "we women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked; I felt this big, sorrowing man's head resting on me, as though it were that of the baby that some day may lie on my bosom" (Stoker 187). These conservative gender roles are often imposed on female characters by their male counterparts. This limits women like Mina, Noemí, and Catalina to only be considered useful when they can be mothers and wives. In *Mexican Gothic*, this cycle of forcing women into maternal roles begins with Howard's first wife, Agnes. Agnes' body is used as the source of the gloom's power.[4] Even though Agnes was unable to provide Howard with children like his other wives, she becomes a symbolic maternal figure as the mother of the gloom's mushrooms. For Howard to maintain his immortality, his wife must be able to give him children; though Agnes was unable to do this, she was able to become a conduit of his power. Fertility is vital for the women Howard forces to be his wives.

[4] As mentioned earlier in this paper, the gloom acts as a supernatural database of sorts in which Howard can store his consciousness and take over his children's bodies and control the members of the Doyle family to live forever. The gloom is powered by a mysterious fungus that is hosted in Agnes' body.

Because of the incest within the Doyle family, sometimes Howard's daughters or relatives are forced to also be his wife, as seen with Florence, Howard's niece. However, because she failed to conceive, Francis tells Noemí, "when my mother [Florence] came of age, Howard tried to...but he was too old, too damaged, to give her a child" (Moreno-Garcia 214), most likely due to all the inbreeding in the Doyle family, Florence had to go out and find a husband outside the family. In *Mexican Gothic,* Howard especially views women's roles to be directly tied to their success in maternal and wifely duties. He tells Noemí:

> "These are my wives," Howard said. "Agnes passed away shortly after our arrival to this region… It was a long time ago. But she has not been forgotten. Her spirit lives on in High Place. And there, the one on the right, that is my second wife Alice. She was fruitful. A woman's function is to preserve the family line. The children, well, Virgil is the only one left, but she did her duty and she did it well" (Moreno-Garcia 75).

Howard blurs the line of familial relationships and repeatedly commits incest for the sake of racial purity. However, as seen in his "acquisition" of Catalina and Noemí and also in Dracula's "conquest" of Mina and Lucy, both gothic villains must eventually seek out foreign[5] women to continue their cycle of violence and power. Ultimately Howard, Virgil, and Dracula cannot live forever without the women they victimize, and they manipulate them using gender standards and sexual desires against them.

The Racial Other and Colonization

In many Victorian and gothic novels or films, the racial other is meant to be the outsider and someone dangerous. In *Dracula* specifically, the titular vampire has invaded England and means to take away the heroes' women, but Dracula is not simply "taking" Lucy and Mina away from the Englishmen; he is penetrating them, infecting them, and changing them into something new. Additionally, Dracula has not just come to England; he has plans to overtake it and the world, replacing the role of the English as the colonizing, invading force. Stevenson explains this by saying, "Stoker's perdurable myth reflects the ancient fear that 'they' [foreigners] will take away 'our' women, and Dracula is at his most horrifying not when he drinks blood or travels in the form of a bat but when he, a man of palpable foreignness, can say, 'Your girls that you all love are mine.' An old black ram, he says, is tupping your white ewe" (145). Though Dracula is the clear racial other in Stoker's novel, Howard and the Doyles are the foreigners in *Mexican Gothic*—they belittle and make Noemí feel like the outsider, but they are the true trespassers on Mexican land. In *Mexican Gothic,* the European Doyles are still very much the colonizing force, but the reader does not fear the "racial others," who, in this case, traditionally would be Noemí and Catalina—instead, "Moreno-Garcia takes the common gothic trope, conflict with the 'other,' (generally a darker foreigner), and flips it. In *Mexican Gothic,* the people we're supposed to fear are the white people" (Cutter 110). The Doyles have not only trapped Noemí and Catalina, but they have also abused countless of others, especially the Mexican workers of their silver mines.

[5] In *Dracula*, the titular vampire is the obvious racial other of the novel, however to him, Mina and Lucy are considered foreign since they are English.

Just as Dracula needs Lucy and Mina, Howard needs Noemí and Catalina to add "fresh blood" (Stoker 43) to his family line, which is weak and sickly due to years of inbreeding. Howard also needs these women and their money to reopen his silver mines and replenish the dwindling Doyle funds. Notably, Howard Doyle, a white European man, chooses Noemí and Catalina, two Mexican women, while Dracula seeks out English women to extend his control over a new group of people. Stevenson points out that "for Dracula, though, the need for 'foreign women' is no mere hankering. Rather, because his sexual partner is also his food, the vampire must marry out or die. A world without foreign women would represent not only sterility but famine" (144). Dracula and Howard also must seek out "foreign women" because the women directly around them (in *Mexican Gothic,* it is the town of El Triunfo that surrounds High Place while in Stoker's novel it is the town and various people around Dracula's castle) are suspicious of the gothic villains and know to stay away from them.

There is a physical colonization of Mexican land in addition to the colonization of the Mexican people. Just as Dracula must travel with soil from his homeland, Howard brings English soil to High Place. Francis tells Noemí, "you'll see it. It's all very English. Um, that's what Uncle Howard wanted, a little piece of England. He even brought European earth here" (Moreno-Garcia 18). Excluding Francis, the Doyles have a distaste for Mexican culture and a prejudice for the people of Mexico—they refuse to speak Spanish, dismiss Noemí and the other Mexican characters, and overall have racist attitudes for the entirety of the novel. Much of this negative sentiment seems to stem from the Doyles' own sense of inferiority since they have lost their fortune and status. As mentioned previously, the "curse of immortality" greatly affects the Doyles. When Virgils scolds Noemí for giving Catalina an herbal tincture, he remarks on Mr. Taboada's (Noemí's father and Catalina's guardian) dislike of him marrying Catalina, "when the mine was open, he would have been glad to see Catalina married to me. Back then I would have been worthy… It must still irk him, and you, to know Catalina picked me. Well, I'm no two-bit fortune hunter, I'm a Doyle. It would be good of you to remember that" (Moreno-Garcia 146). Ultimately, Howard Doyle's immortality and role as a male parasite, at its core, really is the culmination and continuation of sexist and racist ideologies and unlike Dracula, whose immortality and power dies with him, in *Mexican Gothic*, when Howard is dead, his ideologies are seen in his son, Virgil, who quickly takes over as the new ruler of the supernatural fungus. Howard's power, racism, sexism, and archaic customs live on because of the cycle of abuse that he has created.

Conclusion

Mexican Gothic twists the Victorian fear of the racial other and uses it along with the male parasite trope to depict a broader representation of colonization and racial violence. Moreno-Garcia additionally shows how two nontraditional gothic heroines, Noemí and Catalina, deal with racism and fetishization simultaneously by Howard and Virgil, who seek not only to live forever but to regain the former glory their family has lost. In these novels, female characters are used for their bodies and shaped into tools for men who often trap them through the institution of marriage or under the pretense of romance. These women are also punished for their desires, and their sexuality is used against them as they are expected to fit in with conservative gender roles. Furthermore, Howard's immortality symbolizes the never-rending cycle of abuse that women are subjected to, in this case, especially, women of color.

Additional work can be done on the implications of differences between female pairs of characters like Noemí/Mina, Catalina/Lucy, and Florence/Dracula's three brides. Florence and Dracula's three brides are victims turned accomplices and there is also a suggestion in both *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic* that women can either be intelligent and therefore dangerous (to gothic villains) or pretty and "simple-minded" or at least more susceptible to manipulation. For example, Senf noted this difference between Mina and Lucy:

> Lucy is a perpetual child, pampered by everyone around her. Her letters reveal a concern with social events and the rather thoughtless pursuit of her own pleasure. Mina, on the other hand, has had to take care of herself. At the beginning of the novel, she is an assistant schoolmistress, a productive and conscious member of her society; and the intelligence and capacity for independent action and judgment which appear in these initial letters remain the predominant elements in her character throughout the novel (42).

This can also be applied to *Mexican Gothic,* as Catalina is a "dreamer" when compared to Noemí. Catalina is a more passive, romantic girl who simply wants to fall in love and have a "happily ever after," in contrast, both Mina and Noemí are educated and push back against some conservative gender roles while conforming to others; this makes them dangerous for Howard and Dracula, and rightly so, as these female characters' actions directly lead to the gothic villain's destruction. In contrast, Catalina and Lucy are the ones that the gothic villains successfully manipulate. Lucy is transformed into a vampire and puppet, and Catalina is drugged by the spores of the mushrooms, rendered almost entirely defenseless until the very end of the novel. However, unlike Lucy, Catalina breaks free from the gothic villain's control and is instrumental in helping Noemí, Francis, and herself escape from High Place. The similarities and differences between *Dracula* and *Mexican Gothic,* along with consideration for the function of the male parasite trope in gothic literature, open up many possibilities for future research projects since many classic and contemporary gothic novels often depict female characters in a cyclical struggle against a male force.

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