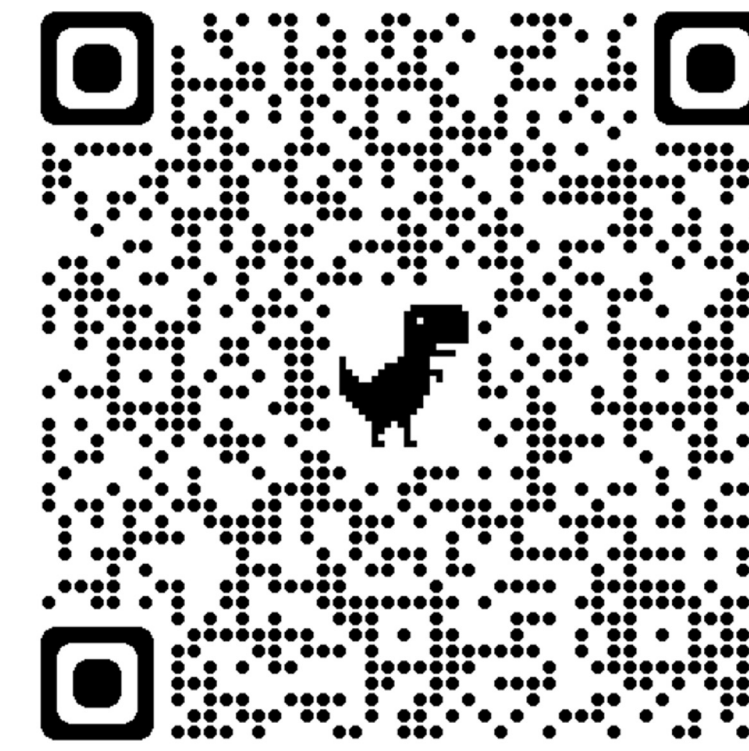


# GHOSTS IN THE WALLS: COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN SILVIA MORENO-GARCIA'S *MEXICAN GOTHIC*

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## INTRODUCTION

Silvia Moreno-Garcia's novel *Mexican Gothic* follows the story of Noemí Taboada, a young Mexican socialite, and her encounter with the enigmatic Doyle family, English colonizers who made their fortune in the Mexican silver mines. While staying at High Place, the Doyle's residence, Noemí discovers a sinister secret within the walls of the house: a fungus that allows for Howard Doyle, the family's patriarch, to transfer his consciousness through a network of memories created by the fungus called the gloom and deposit himself into the body of one of his children, thus achieving quasi-immortality. The novel encompasses themes of colonialism, racism, and feminism; and overarching and encompassing all of these is the concept of collective trauma. The pervasiveness of the fungi in High Place and its connection to the Doyle family traditions represents different types of collective trauma: 1) trans-generational trauma, 2) female trauma, and 3) historical trauma.

## CRITICAL APPROACH

I examined *Mexican Gothic* through the lenses of clinical psychology and the research on the transmission of trans-generational trauma in terms of biological processes and attachment theory; feminism and female rage in the response to patriarchal trauma; and historical trauma in terms of colonialism and colonial oppression as well as racism and eugenics.

## MAIN ARGUMENTS

### TRANS-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

- Biological processes play a role in the transmission of trauma by affecting gene expression which is then passed onto future generations (Grand and Salberg, 212). The accessing and passing of memories or trauma from the gloom is comparable to this epigenetic process of trans-generational trauma transmission.
- According to Grand and Salberg (211), parental trauma can be passed on to the next generation via attachment relationships. We can assume the Doyles, having been raised in an environment not conducive to healthy attachment relationships, inherited trauma in this way.

### FEMININE TRAUMA

- Traumatized female characters are often portrayed as monsters or villains (Vega 47). Agnes Doyle represents, specifically, a subversion of this trope as a victim and the key to dismantling Howard Doyle's system of patriarchy.
- The feminist support network "demonstrates the importance of solidarity in the struggle against patriarchy" (Vega 48) Noemí's victory over the Doyles can be partially attributed to her feminist support network.

### HISTORICAL TRAUMA

- The fungus is "a symbol for trauma which the colonizer weaponizes against the colonized. The colonizers "often justify colonizing others by bringing life to a 'dead' or 'savage' culture, but just like mushrooms, they do not revitalize but destroy the land they are colonizing" (Cutter 113).
- Racism and eugenics as a form of historical trauma is used by the colonizer to further oppress the colonized via the "colonial racial hierarchy" (Cutter 111).



## CONCLUSION

The fungus in *Mexican Gothic* represents different types of collective trauma: 1) trans-generational trauma, 2) feminine trauma, and 3) historical trauma. By the end of the novel, Noemí and Francis are able to break the cycle of trauma. Although it is unclear what kind of effect said trauma will have on them in the future, we are left with a hopeful note: "The future, [Noemí] thought, could not be predicted, and the shape of things could not be divined. To think otherwise was absurd. But they were young that morning, and they could cling to hope. Hope that the world could be remade, kinder and sweeter" (Moreno-Garcia 301).

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