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The CQ detective: using cultural intelligence to navigate the Gothic "gloom" of Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*

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Abstract: Mexican-Canadian author Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* uses English Gothic tropes popular in horror, detective, and crime fiction to highlight English colonial crimes in Mexico. In doing so, Moreno-Garcia rewrites both *Jane Eyre* and *Dracula* and borrows key elements from Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and H.P. Lovecraft to create the mystery at the heart of the novel. *Mexican Gothic* is also a mycological horror that serves as a metaphor for colonialism. The author's resourceful protagonist, Noemí Taboada, must become a culturally intelligent detective in order to match wits with the undead English gentleman, Howard Doyle, who represents the most dangerous kind of cultural invader and criminal. This study draws on two new applications of CQ (Cultural Intelligence) theory – one originally written for the business world, David A. Livermore's *Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The New Secret to Success* (2010); and one written about storytelling in a different cultural context, Ned Legaspi's *Culturally Intelligent Storytelling for Southeast Asian Creators* (2025) – in addition to postcolonialism, and traditional scholarship on Gothic and Crime/Detective Fiction, to explore the figurative and metaphorical implications of the book. CQ methodology helps writers and readers become more culturally intelligent, to understand and decode other cultures – much in the same way as it allows the heroine of the novel to solve the mystery and shed light on the "gloom" of *Mexican Gothic*.

Keywords: detective fiction; cultural intelligence; mycological horror; Silvia Moreno-Garcia, *Mexican Gothic*.

UBR
University of Bucharest Review. Literary and Cultural Studies Series
https://ubr.rev.unibuc.ro/
Volume 16 | Issue 1 | 2026 |

EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII DIN BUCUREȘTI
BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY PRESS
https://doi.org/10.31178/UBR.16.1.14
ISSN 2069–8658 (Print) | 2734–5963 (Online)
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Introduction

Prolific writer of thrillers and weird fiction, Mexican-Canadian author Silvia Moreno-Garcia has written twelve genre-bending novels in as many years. Her most popular novel to date, *Mexican Gothic* (2020), won the Aurora Award for Fiction, the Locus Award for Best Horror Novel, and the British Fantasy Award. *Mexican Gothic* is a curious mash-up of *Jane Eyre* and *Dracula*, in which a gloomy, English-style Victorian Mansion, High Place (complete with an English cemetery), overlooks an abandoned Mexican silver mine and the few remaining inhabitants of its once-flush town. The novel's protagonist, Noemí Taboada, is anything but a "poor, obscure, plain and little" Jane (281). Noemí is a university-educated socialite from a wealthy family in Mexico City with both confidence and ambition. She is on a mission to rescue her cousin, Catalina, who has sent a secret but confusing missive indicating she is in need of rescue – from High Place and her new husband, the much older Englishman, Virgil Doyle. Noemí's investigation into High Place reveals multiple generations of colonial crimes, including incest, murder, and even genocide. Noemí's cosmopolitan education, both formal and informal, gives her the skills and intercultural sophistication to solve the mystery of High Place and make sense of its bloody past and shocking present. While Tripp (2023) has discussed Mexican Gothic in terms of (post-)colonialism, and Finley (2024) in terms of genre, this study draws on two new applications of CQ (Cultural Intelligence) theory – one originally written for the business world, David A. *Livermore's Leading with Cultural Intelligence*: *The New Secret to Success* (2010); and one written about storytelling in a different cultural context, Ned *Legaspi's Culturally Intelligent Storytelling for Southeast Asian Creators* (2025) – to go into further depth and read Noemí as an intercultural detective, whose metacognitive faculty helps navigate not only the serpentine hallways and secret passages of High Place, but also the foggy cultural labyrinth that is further obscured by the Doyle family's "gloom" – a metaphor made literal in the novel. Through intercultural awareness and sensitivity, Noemí is able to save not only her cousin but her very sense of self from annihilation, as her CQ equips her with the faculty of metacognitive detection, reason, and adaptation, a power that stands in opposition to the Doyle family's imperious and inflexible quest for cultural and racial domination.

Mexico City

When we are first introduced to Noemí Taboada, we find her as something of an insouciant 1950s coquette, totally at ease (and somewhat bored) in Mexico City's upper echelon. She is presented as careless to the point of cruelty; for instance, when she neglects to tell her date, the handsome bachelor Hugo Duarte, that she prefers to wear an elegant, green gown instead of the agreed-upon jockey costume that she finds "ugly and scratched her skin" to the most recent gala, a masquerade ball, in which Hugo has gone to great lengths to dress like a horse, requiring him to lumber around with a papier-mâché horse's head all night (4). Embarrassed by her date, though the costume was her idea, Noemí ditches Hugo before ten in the evening, and when he asks that she at least, "[g]ive me a kiss good night," Noemí responds like a femme fatale in a *film noir* film: "'I've got to run,

but you can still have a bit of my lipstick,' she replied, taking her cigarette and putting it in his mouth" (5). By way of exposition, we are told, "Noemí, like any good socialite, shopped at the Palacio de Hierro, painted her lips with Elizabeth Arden lipstick, owned a couple of very fine furs, spoke English with remarkable ease, courtesy of the nuns of Monserrat – a private school, of course, and was expected to devote her time to the twin pursuits of leisure and husband hunting" (6). Hugo had once been considered a contender in the husband hunt, as, "[w]hen she wanted something she simply wanted it, and lately she wanted Hugo, though now that his attention had been procured, she was likely to dismiss him" (4–5).

Noemí's introduction gives the reader a cultural context with which to understand her; she is traditionally Mexican, in the sense that she has been educated by nuns, which might sound provincial even, if it were not for the fact that they taught her fluent English in "a private school, of course" (5). Her dress is cosmopolitan. She wears lipstick from Fifth Avenue, Manhattan, and furs are a high-status class marker anywhere in the Western world. We are told she has the capital to pursue leisure as if it were a career, and indeed she is "expected" to do so, a career we might assume she will be "expected" to continue long after her husband hunt has concluded. More importantly, we learn that Noemí is the kind of person who gets what she wants, as she seems "likely to dismiss" objects of her desire as soon as she acquires them. In other words, she lives in a world where, through family money and status, attractiveness, education, and her ability to manipulate social interactions, getting what she wants is fairly easy and thus boring. But is her desultory boredom connected to these societal expectations as much as her many blessings?

The Cultural Intelligence (CQ) methodology

All of Noemí's (and the reader's) assumptions are soon called into question when she receives a mysterious letter from her cousin Catalina. A letter begging Noemí to leave the bright lights of Mexico City, a milieu where she is a savvy operator, for High Place, a remote Victorian Mansion in the mountains, owned by the Doyle family, technically her new relatives, who seem as remote in time as they are in space, and whose English manners – indeed, whose English culture – prove as cold and inhospitable as to confound all of her previous assumptions concerning her power to get what she wants.

Calling cultural assumptions into question during intercultural interactions is the domain of the relatively new field of study called Cultural Intelligence, a term coined by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang in *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions Across Cultures* (2003). As business professors of global management and cross-cultural psychology, they recognized that with twenty-first-century globalization, cross-cultural interactions occur more frequently and often involve cooperative bottlenecks and intercultural failures to act or solve problems. Building on psychologist Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), neither emotional intelligence (EQ) nor analytic intelligence (IQ) can serve as "an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings" (336). Cultural intelligence extends the concepts of IQ and EQ, with one major difference: CQ can be enhanced through education and strategy, whereas IQ and EQ are mostly fixed. CQ is an interdisciplinary field that draws heavily on anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology, and postcolonialism, and it has gained broad

popularity through David Livermore's CQ books for a wider audience, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence* (2010). Few have used a CQ lens to examine works of the imagination until Ned Legaspi's *Culturally Intelligent Storytelling* (2025). Legaspi, a former media executive and content strategist turned academic, examines several films and series that have attained global popularity and therefore seem to "travel" beyond the borders of their local audiences: *Squid Game* (South Korea), *Paper Heist* (Spain), *Dark* (Germany), and *Parasite* (South Korea). Conversely, as a native of the Philippines, Legaspi has a special interest in Asian storytelling and examines films that have become pan-Asian hits, sharing Asian cultural values that have helped them gain international admiration throughout most Asian cultures. Legaspi adapts elements of the CQ framework into what he calls the Culturally Intelligent Storytelling (CIS) Bamboo Framework, which examines the intercultural relationship between author and audience, as well as the sometimes-conflicting cultural values of characters within the text.

In *Leading with Cultural Intelligence*, David Livermore breaks individual CQ into a continually evolving "Four-Dimensional Model of Cultural Intelligence": "The four dimensions are CQ drive, CQ knowledge, CQ strategy, and CQ action, usually referenced in the research as motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and behavioural CQ" (25). This is to say, the success of an intercultural interaction depends on the motivation of the individual to reach across a cultural gap, to learn about deep, often hidden cultural values embedded in the other culture, devise strategies to modify his or her behaviour based on reason and deduction/induction, and finally execute these strategies in the real world. Legaspi's Bamboo Framework: "StoryRoot, StoryCraft, StoryPulse, and StoryLeaf" builds atop Livermore's four dimensions and is able "to bring the framework to life" (*Cullturally Intelligent Storytelling* 138). The CIS Bamboo Framework turns the four dimensions into an organic metaphor that Legaspi sees as particularly understandable for Asian readers: "Bamboo may have different meanings across Southeast Asia. In some places, it may symbolize home; in others, ceremony, survival, or adaptability. That's the beauty of it – it flexes to meet the culture it grows in" (149).

CQ drive: mission briefing, Mexico City

In order to use a CQ framework to understand *Mexican Gothic*, we should start with Noemí's personal motivation or CQ drive, and the novel's StoryRoot, "[y]our story's cultural DNA, core values, and lived experiences live here. Like rhizomes, they may be hidden – but they feed everything above the surface" (154). These "rhizomes" become clear when we learn that Noemí abandons her party and Hugo not out of boredom, but because her father, Leocadio, has summoned her for a late-night audience. Leocadio is a wealthy industrialist whose office is "decorated in a modern style that seemed to echo the newness of the occupant's money" (5). We are told he has turned an inherited "small chemical dye business into a fortune," and his taste in decoration in both home and office favours "bold colours and clean lines," with chairs upholstered in vibrant red, and luxuriant plants added splashes of green to every room" (5). So, to further define Noemí's cultural context, we now know that her father is no old-money colonial scion, but a *nouveau riche* captain of industry (though one with a sense of style), who we can guess runs both family and business

with a firm hand. We learn that Noemí was summoned by telephone from her party, and upon her arrival, the *paterfamilias,* aside from some gentle condescension, speaks to his daughter more or less like a lawyer or other plenipotentiary agent on retainer. Noemí's father has received a disturbing letter from her newly married cousin Catalina, who has gone to the mining town of El Triunfo to live with her new husband, Virgil Doyle. Noemí's father asks for his daughter's opinion of this mysterious missive:

> *I bar my door but still they come, they whisper at nights and I am so afraid of these restless dead, these ghosts, fleshless things. The snake eating its tail, the foul ground beneath our feet, the false faces and false tongues, the web upon which the spiders walk, making the strings vibrate. I am Catalina. Catalina Taboada. CATALINA. Cata, Cata come out to play. I miss Noemí. I pray to see you again. You must come for me, Noemí. You have to save me. I cannot save myself as much as I wish to, I am bound, threads like iron through my mind and my skin and it's there. In the walls. It does not release its hold on me so I must ask you to spring me free, cut it from me, stop them now. For God's sake . . .*
>
> *Hurry,*
> *Catalina (8)*

Presented with this disordered letter, which we will come to understand is littered with clues, Noemí and her father speculate whether Catalina, a couple of years younger than Noemí, has lost her senses or whether this is the result of a melancholy imagination. Catalina was orphaned as a girl and subsequently developed a fixation on dark fairy tales and Gothic literature.

Noemí's father says Virgil has been unwilling to bring Catalina to Mexico City for medical help, physical or mental, and that his plaintive letters to the Doyles receive only curt, unhelpful responses. The scene functions much like a mission briefing from M to Bond in an Ian Fleming novel, or, in earlier generations, the kind of briefing a client such as the King of Bohemia in "A Scandal in Bohemia" or Helen Stoner in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" would give Sherlock Holmes in his parlour at 221B Baker Street. Noemí's father charges her to "Assess the situation. Determine if she [Catalina] should indeed be moved to the city, and attempt to convince him [Virgil] this is the best option if that is the case" (11). Having been given a mission, we learn the price of Noemí's services, which becomes a greater revelation to Noemí's CQ drive: "Noemí, you've been going on and on about the National. If you do this, I will give you permission to enroll" (12). It turns out Noemí is a secret intellectual, and though her studies as a bachelor student have been as desultory as her social life, ranging from theatre to history, and finally anthropology, "[s]he wants to pursue a master's degree in anthropology. This would require her to enroll at the National University. Her father thought this a waste of time and unsuitable with all those young men roaming the hallways and filling the ladies' heads with silly and lewd thoughts" (12). Noemí asks her father if he is serious about giving his permission. Noemí's father indicates the seriousness of his permission equals the seriousness of her mission: "Yes. It is a serious matter. I don't want a divorce splashed in the newspaper, but I can't allow someone to take advantage of the family" (12–13). Noemí's father goes on to express

both his annoyance with Catalina's hasty marriage and his concern for her, a girl he has raised and protected. Behind his businesslike demeanour and his distaste for scandal is concern. Noemí's father picks up the telephone to send a telegraph informing Virgil Doyle of his daughter's impending arrival: "Discretion and smarts in what I need. He is her husband and has the right to make decisions on her behalf, but we cannot be idle if he is reckless" (13). Here is the StoryRoot of *Mexican Gothic*: Mexican culture is deeply patriarchal, and 1950s Mexico gives women little more protection than they enjoyed in Victorian England. What if Doyle desires to commit Catalina to an asylum, or even keep her prisoner in her own home à la *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason? Noemí's father holds typical ideas about women's role in society, but is flexible enough to grant her at least some intellectual freedom, for instance, to get a master's degree, though he sees it as frivolous rather than progressive. But the strictures concerning gender being what they are, Noemí's father cannot send a man to rescue Catalina. If it takes a thief to catch a thief, then clearly in Noemí's father's estimation, it will take a woman to save a woman, and he will use Noemí's ambition and many talents, including her fluent English and her cosmopolitan CQ drive, to serve as his agent in this matter.

CQ knowledge: a journey into the English Gothic

Noemí's arrival at High Place lands the reader squarely in Gothic territory. Indeed, the title *Mexican Gothic* gives us a meta-awareness of both the setting and the tropes associated with the Gothic genre, and asks an implied question: how does the author plan to employ these tropes in a new world landscape set in the Hidalgo Mountains? In an article for *Culturefly*, the author explains that her "novel *Mexican Gothic* takes place in a chilly, fog-shrouded town at the top of a mountain, a town with a deep British influence. For some people, such a locale would seem incompatible with their idea of Mexico. *Mexican Gothic* is inspired by a real town complete with an English cemetery: Real Del Monte" ("Silvia Moreno-Garcia" n. pg.) The author goes on to say that Real Del Monte is known as "Little Cornwall" because of both its English Victorian architecture and the numerous English, Welsh, and Cornish miners who came to dig for silver and other minerals in the nineteenth century. The headstones in the graveyard literally face toward England, and according to the author, it "looks like something out of a Hammer horror film if you come to visit it at certain times of day when the mist clings to the tombstone"; Real Del Monte confounds the cultural assumptions of "folks that pictured the whole nation as one hot desert, out of a Speedy Gonzales cartoon" ("Silvia Moreno-Garcia" n. pg.)

With this information, the reader's CQ knowledge has been altered, raised beyond the stereotypical decor of Tex-Mex Restaurants and mariachi bands. But to understand what Moreno-Garcia is trying to accomplish, we must move from one set of tropes to another, from Speedy Gonzales to Hammer Horror Films, most famous for Christopher Lee in his role as the titular vampire in *Horror of Dracula* (1958), a role he reprised no less than ten times, as well as Peter Cushing playing Sherlock Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1959). By talking about Hammer Horror films, the author invokes images of a landscape where "mist clings to tombstone" either in the shadow of a decrepit castle or attached to a tattered mansion hugging wind-swept moors, and, as always, a character or family suffering

a supernatural curse. The disconnect of associating Mexico with Gothic horror tropes is part of the aesthetic impact of the novel's title, *Mexican Gothic*, and suggests that Moreno-Garcia intends to blend the English Gothic literary genre with a Mexican setting, marrying two different cultural contexts and leaving readers to wonder: how will she pull this off?

Beyond finding the right Mexican setting to carry out this mission, the author sees the novel as melding two parallel branches of the Gothic: a feminine Gothic and a masculine Gothic. In an interview with *Vox*, Moreno-Garcia explains that her introduction to Gothic horror began with H.P. Lovecraft and quickly progressed to Edgar Allan Poe, with *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Carmilla*, and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* following fast behind:

> I wasn't very much interested in what is called gothic romance or a female Gothic. I was more into what is termed the male Gothic, which is Gothic books that have supernatural elements, graphic violence, and that kind of stuff. Sometimes we also call it Gothic horror, as opposed to what we consider to be the female Gothic, which is more like Scooby-Doo types of stories. *Jane Eyre* kinds of tales, in which a young woman goes to a distant location, meets some dude, and then there's mystery to unravel. There is a happy ending – that is mostly the desire of that kind of story. (Grady n. pg.)

Clearly, *Mexican Gothic* is a melding of what she sees as a feminine and masculine approach to the Gothic, or perhaps it is a shell game where one set of tropes is replaced with another: for instance, a young heroine is confronted with a mystery, but the supernatural elements are not ultimately demystified "Scooby-Doo" style, in favour of a mystery with real supernatural forces at its heart. Indeed, we feel that Noemí's father's apprehension that Catalina is being held against her will seems well-founded when we later discover that Catalina is captive in a sickbed under the pretence that she has contracted tuberculosis. Thus, Catalina resembles the confined Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* or perhaps the hallucinating narrator in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). But ultimately this is a red herring, as the real answer to the novel's central mystery is not a flesh-and-blood madwoman in the attic, driven insane by the sensory deprivation of her confinement or the injustice of a tyrannical husband, but a supernatural secret buried in the basement of High Place. It is this buried past that is the source of the Doyle family's power, as well as their ability to control not only Catalina but generations of indigenous workers in their mines. *Mexican Gothic* might be best described as postcolonial horror, which reverses the trope of 'the other.' In early Gothic novels, 'the other' originally took the form of anti-Catholic villains in books like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Moreno-Garcia explained to *Vox* that the dark 'other' so exoticized and feared by the Anglo-Protestants began to shift with British Imperialism: "[T]he British Empire is expanding. Gothic literature is also expanding, and it's finding other sources of frightening Others from parts of Europe that Radcliffe might have mined. So not necessarily Italy or Spain. That's when you get *Dracula*, who's coming from Eastern Europe. The source of evil is now not Spain, it's Transylvania, Romania" (Grady n. pg.). *Dracula* is, in some sense, a horror of a reverse colonialism, as Dracula intends to drain England's lifeblood and enslave its most innocent inhabitants. Moreno-

Garcia goes on to show how anxieties concerning race are central to what she identifies as both the masculine and feminine gothic: "this idea of decay and danger in things like *Jane Eyre*, where there's the mad wife in the attic. She is white, but she is Creole. So, she is a white-born woman raised in the Caribbean; there is very much a sense that there is a danger that you are going to be degraded, that something happens physically that brings you down. It diminishes your whiteness and contaminates you" (Grady n. pg.). So, the Gothic almost always brings an intercultural context, one that mines the fear of *the other* as a fear of being overrun as well as being overcome. In this case, the other *is* the English, and High Place is their ruined castle, complete with an English cemetery.

Like Dracula, Howard Doyle, the Doyle family patriarch, has imported native soil for the cemetery: "'It's all very English,'" explains Virgil's younger cousin Francis, who has been dispatched to chauffeur Noemí from the train station in Triunfo to High Place: "'Um. That is what Uncle Howard wanted, a little piece of England. He even brought European earth here,'" (18). Noemí's first sight of High Place is as much a Hammer haunted house as it is Thornfield: "It looks absolutely Victorian in construction, with broken shingles, elaborate ornamentation, and a dirty bay window" (20). Before Noemí can enter with Francis carrying her bags, we are told, "[t]he house loomed over them like a great, quiet gargoyle. It might have been foreboding, evoking images of ghosts and haunted places if it had not seemed so tired..." (20–1).

For all intents and purposes, Noemí is now in another country, one where English is the official language: "We don't speak Spanish at High Place. My great uncle doesn't know a word of it. Virgil does poorly, and my mother wouldn't ever attempt to stitch a sentence together" (18). Francis is the only member of the family who has bothered to learn Spanish or shows any interest in the larger Mexico that surrounds Triunfo. Noemí is, of course, prepared: "'Lessons every day since I was six," she said, switching from Spanish to English. "I am sure I will have no problem" (18). But as any student of CQ would tell you, speaking the language is not the same thing as knowing the culture. In addition to the English-only policy, Noemí is forbidden to smoke or to speak above a whisper. Total silence is demanded at dinner, which Noemí finds shocking, as she finds the meal itself, chicken in a heavy mushroom cream sauce: "She was not used to eating at this hour. Nights were no time for heavy meals; at home they had pastries and coffee with milk. (...) Would they have four o'clock tea, or was it five o'clock?" (28). This is a fairly typical challenge for most Latin travellers visiting a Germanic country, and vice versa. The body is synchronized to one culture's rhythms of when to eat, work, and sleep, and will find functioning in another to be awkward, often to the point of culture shock.

But we have established that Noemí has a high CQ drive; her cosmopolitan education gives her high CQ knowledge as well. Besides her fluent English, we have learned that Noemí has studied history, which helps her understand the historical arc of colonialism in Mexico and how it intersects with the Doyle family. For instance, "[m]any formerly thriving mining sites that had extracted silver and gold during the Colonia interrupted their operations once the War of Independence broke out. Later on, the English and French were welcomed during the tranquil Porfiriato, their pockets growing fat with mineral riches. But the Revolution had ended this second boom" (17). Upon arriving at High Place and finding their mansion in such a dilapidated state, Noemí realizes the Doyles are well past their glory

days, and the forces of history are unlikely to reverse their fortunes. This raises the question: did Virgil marry Catalina for her money, as her father fears?

When Noemí is finally reunited with Catalina, confined to her sickbed, she finds her reasonable, though a bit depressed and tired, and under the constant supervision of Francis's martinet mother, Florence, who sees it as her job to enforce High Place's culture of stifling quiet and secrecy. Noemí relays to Catalina the latest gossip from Mexico City by acting out their friends' conversations and melodramas: "You are so good when you do impressions. Tell me, are you still bent on those theatre classes?" (49). Later, when flirting with Francis in the English cemetery after a long passage discussing the Doyle passion for mushrooms, Noemí lights a cigarette: "[S]he took a puff and tilted her head back. It enhanced her long, elegant neck, which was among her finest features, and made her feel like a movie star. … Noemí looked like Katy Jurado when she struck the right pose, and of course she knew exactly what pose and angle to strike" (100–1). Noemí's theatre training gives her an additional set of social tools to those acquired by her experience as a socialite, a set of dramatic skills by which she can flirt, charm, feign innocence, and most importantly, play dumb, a repertoire that will allow her to survive High Place before the truth concerning its murderous past is finally revealed.

Probably Noemí's most important CQ knowledge in terms of the novel's theme comes in the form of her anthropology background, a field that allows her to stand up to Howard, the Doyle patriarch who, though a decrepit old man with papery skin, "porcelain-white teeth" and gums "a noxious shade of purple," is the real mastermind of High Place's many crimes (30). The ban on talking is lifted when, during Noemí's first dinner at High Place, the ancient old man interrupts the meal to make a rather dramatic appearance: he proudly announces his interest in eugenics. In an awkward bit of racial profiling, Howard observes, "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). Well-versed in the ethnographic literature of the day, and equally experienced at "dealing with irritating men," Noemí verbally spars with Howard, though no other Doyle dares speak at the formal dinner table: "I once read a paper by Gamio in which he said that harsh natural selection has allowed the indigenous people of this continent to survive, and Europeans would benefit from intermingling with them. (…) It turns the whole superior and inferior idea around, doesn't it? [T]he elder Doyle seemed pleased by this answer," (30) as well as by Noemí's rebellious intellect and spirit, but relieves the tension at the table by returning to his room upstairs.

Eventually, Noemí is led to her bedroom, an enclosed room with little light and a four-poster bed, "which looked like something from a Gothic tale; it even had curtains you could close around you, cocooning yourself off from the world" (23). Adding to this sense of claustrophobia is the deteriorating rose-coloured wallpaper, which might be an homage to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Because of her father's chemical and dye business, Noemí is something of an accidental expert on the subject of pigments and dyes. Upon entering High Place for the first time, Noemí notices the stained-glass windows are tinted blue: "Cobalt oxide had been used to create the petals. She knew such things. The paint business, as her father put it, had provided her an endless array of chemical facts" (22). When Noemí returns to her room, she notices a spot of mould on the pink wallpaper

and "[s]he thought of those green wallpapers so beloved by the Victorians that contained arsenic. The so-called Paris and Scheele greens, microscopic fungi could act upon the dyes in the paper and form arsine gas, sickening the people in the room" (46). A combination of scientific knowledge from her father's business and morbid cultural trivia concerning the Victorians makes Noemí critically aware of the possibility that an environmental toxin could be responsible for Catalina's illness, and this she believes increasingly likely when she herself begins to dream and hallucinate figures in the rose-coloured wallpaper: "That night she dreamed that a golden flower sprouted from the walls in her room. It had tendrils, yet it wasn't a vine, and next to the not-flower rose a hundred other tiny golden forms. *Mushrooms*, she thought, finally recognizing the bulbous shapes, and as she walked toward the wall" (55). Like the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," Noemí finally discerns the figure of a woman inside the wallpaper, only a woman with no face: "Where her face ought to have been there was a glow, golden like that of the mushrooms on the wall. The woman's glow grew stronger and then dimmed. It was like watching a firefly in the summer night sky" (56). Slowly but surely, Noemí uses her knowledge as she pieces together clues in this English embassy lost in time; she becomes a CQ detective, using her many sources of knowledge to uncover how the Doyle's colonial history is intertwined with mycology, but her ever-increasingly vivid dreams of the woman with no face also make her start to doubt her own sanity, as Noemí is left to fight to keep her sense of self.

Legaspi says that the CSI Bamboo Framework, as represented by "StoryCraft, is not a universal formula for storytelling. It is a reflective, values-driven process – a way of shaping narrative that emerges from the story's StoryRoot" (194). If bamboo teaches "us that true strength comes from rootedness, not rigidity," then we can understand that a culturally intelligent storyteller like Moreno-Garcia can sway back and forth between her native Mexican culture and the Anglo/Global audience for which she writes, as bamboo "is flexible without being weak, and firm without being brittle. It bends with the wind but does not break – a metaphor for how culturally intelligent stories adapt to global audiences without losing their core identity" (194). As we will see in *Mexican Gothic*, Noemí's core Mexican identity is threatened by annihilation from the English horror that animates High Place and the Doyle family.

CQ strategy: navigating the floor plan

In the keystone work of feminist literary criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert that "[w]e tend today to think of *Jane Eyre* as moral Gothic, the archetypal scenario for all those mildly thrilling romantic encounters between a scowling Byronic hero (who owns a gloomy mansion) and a trembling heroine (who can't quite figure out the mansion's floor plan)" (337). Indeed, Thornfield seems as mysterious and hard to navigate as Jane's maturation into adulthood; the authors note that the mansion has traditionally been mythologized as "Jane's confrontation with masculine sexuality" (338). Of course, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Bertha Mason is the central mystery of *Jane Eyre*, and her almost criminal existence does not so much frighten Jane as express the rage and violence pent up inside the girl after years of abuse. For these feminists, the women are the criminals transgressing against patriarchal authority.

In *Mexican Gothic*, the criminals are clearly the Doyle family themselves, which by now we can think of as the Doyle crime family, with Howard as its aging and decrepit don. As noted before, Noemí is no "plain Jane," and she is much defter in dealing with "irritating men," as well as sexually aggressive ones, at least on home turf in Mexico City; but at High Place, Noemí is menaced by the Byronic Virgil, who, though married to her cousin, makes little secret of his attraction to Noemí. By the end of the novel, he openly treats Noemí as something to be conquered, enjoyed, and ultimately used as reproductive property: "What a pretty face you have. Dark skin. Dark eyes. Such a novelty" (236). By this time, Noemí already understands that she is being groomed to become part of the Doyle's eugenics designs: "*Dark meat*, she thought (…) 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" (237). As a CQ detective, Noemí unravels this secret as well as the supernatural element that animates the house, invades her dreams, and ultimately makes it impossible for her to leave.

To understand this, we will examine the CQ strategy, also known as metacognitive CQ. In other words, Noemí's CQ drive heightens when she realizes that both her life and Catalina's are in danger at High Place, and she must use her CQ knowledge to unravel the Doyles' mystery to survive. Here, it is worth comparing metacognition to the mental machinations of the great detectives, namely Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, both hyperrational outgrowths of the Gothic tradition. Michelle Miranda argues that both Poe and Doyle, and their nineteenth-century detectives, solve crimes "to resolve the fear of death and monsters" ("Reasoning through Madness" 1), as depicted in the Gothic tradition; thus, Dupin discovers the razor-wielding 'Orang-Outan' in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and Holmes explains away the vengeful hellhound that haunts the moors in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. In Poe, horror and reason are two sides of the same coin; horror is countered, and somewhat contained, by what Poe called "ratiocination." According to Miranda, "'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' begins with a treatise on analytical thinking by means of games like chess, draughts, and whist" ("Reasoning through Madness" 5). This is to say that often, an at-first insoluble problem must be treated like an opponent: "Dupin uses ratiocination to assess the facts as outlined in the reports. Upon the assertion that there could be no way to trace the murder, Dupin addresses the limitations of the police and their investigative abilities" (5).

Similarly, Doyle's detective has a low opinion of Scotland Yard's methodology and prefers deductive methods more in line with Doyle's own scientific training as a doctor; that is, not only deduction, but also inductive reasoning, the discovery by process of elimination, to wit, the old Holmes adage, "[w]hen you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth" (172). According to Miranda, beyond Sherlock Holmes, "Doyle wrote lesser-known tales of horror, mystery, and the supernatural. Many of these stories share a direct correlation to the work of Poe, establishing Poe's influence on a variety of Doyle's stories. Oftentimes, Doyle demonstrated that theories of the supernatural could be unravelled through scientific reasoning" ("Reasoning through Madness" 7). Stephan Rachman explains that, despite Sherlock Holmes disparaging Dupin in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) as a kind of rival, Doyle freely acknowledged his debt to Poe, who "is the master of all. To him must be ascribed

the monstrous progeny of writers on the detection of crime. Each may find some little development of his own, but his main art must be traced back to those admirable stories of Monsieur Dupin" ("Poe and the Origins of Detective Crime Fiction" 25). Rachman asserts that the Dupin stories make a vital shift with the last installment, "The Purloined Letter," from the "messy proliferation of newspaper-oriented details that clutter "The Murders in Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" only to expose detective fiction's inherent analytical mechanisms, recasting the problem of imagined reality as one about analysing the minds of others" (25). Thus, detective fiction delights in the art of "cross and double cross" in which characters "find themselves either being outplayed by their own techniques or caught up in an increasingly vertiginous cycle of self-consciousness" (25). With "'The Purloined Letter,' Poe laid out a generic template that would be taken up by a succession of writers from Conan Doyle to Jorge Luis Borges to Paul Auster. With the success of Sherlock Holmes, the figure of Poe's analytic detective was entrenched in popular culture and wedded to adventure narratives" (26). Thus, ultimately through metacognition, Dupin must outwit the dishonourable Minister D, and Holmes must foil the machinations of the Napoleon of crime, Moriarty.

It is no coincidence that the Doyle family shares the surname of the famous British author whose Sherlock Holmes mysteries often result from crimes committed overseas in the Empire, the consequences of which follow the criminal home to England, as in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (1892). Moreno-Garcia posted to her fans on *Goodreads* under the heading of the Doyle family motto:

> "Et Verbum caro factum est" is Latin for "And the word became flesh," from the Gospel According to John. Howard Doyle is named after H.P. Lovecraft and Arthur Conan Doyle, both famous in their fields (horror and mystery), both with numerous racial issues underpinning their fiction, and both with an interest in the sciences. In the case of Arthur Conan Doyle, he was quite interested in some of the more bizarre 'scientific' pursuits of his time, such as mediums (yes, ghosts were a scientific pursuit in the late 19th century). ("Silvia's Kindle Notes" n. pg.)

Noemí's antagonist, Virgil, is really a pawn (though a treacherous one) of his father, Howard, Noemí's real opponent, whom Noemí must ultimately match wits with and engage in metacognitive counterstrategy. We cannot say ratiocination is the same as a CQ strategy, though ratiocination and Holmesian deduction/inductive reasoning are both metacognitive methodologies in their own right. In CQ, metacognition generally concerns one's own cultural assumptions, thought processes, and strategies for dealing with culturally unfamiliar situations. In this sense, a person with high CQ can reflect on these assumptions and develop progressively more effective ways of asserting his or her will in the novel context of the alien culture. Thus, the more CQ knowledge, the more likely an effective CQ strategy. Noemí is a CQ detective because she must navigate the labyrinth of High Place, its gardens and cemeteries, with earth transplanted from England, using her own methodology to uncover and ultimately defeat the Doyle crime family and what seems to be their telepathic connection to one another. If Rachman is correct that detective fiction evolved into a genre ultimately about "analysing the minds of others," *Mexican Gothic*

makes this metacognitive link literal through its supernatural elements, namely the existence of what the novel calls the gloom, a direct link between Noemí's mind and Howard's.

CQ strategy: escaping the gloom

Mexican Gothic reveals itself to be a new addition to the trend in mycological horror, or 'shroom boom, as well as a Lovecraftian-style Weird Fiction, which is sometimes referred to as New Weird. Noemí discovers Howard is hundreds of years old, kept alive by a supernatural mushroom species used in native Mexican healing ceremonies that now colonizes the entire Doyle domain, mixing Mexican and English soil, with its hub and source deep in the basement of the now-ironically named High Place. Francis explains: "The fungus runs under the house, all the way to the cemetery and back. It's in the walls. Like a giant spider's web. In that web we can preserve memories, thoughts, caught like the flies that wander in a real web. We call the repository of our thoughts, of our memories, *the gloom*" (211). The ghosts that haunt both Noemí's dreams, such as the faceless woman, and the chorus of voices that murmur in Catalina's letter are the voices of dead Doyles caught forever in the gloom: "they whisper at nights, and I am so afraid of these restless dead, these ghosts, fleshless things. The snake eating its tail, the foul ground beneath our feet, the false faces and false tongues, the web upon which the spiders walk making the strings vibrate" (8). Francis continues to explain that *mycorrhiza* is the key to understanding the gloom as well as its ability to assimilate individuals into the web: "Fungi can enter into symbiotic relationships with host plants. Mycorrhiza. Well, it turns out that it can also have a symbiotic relationship with humans. The mycorrhiza in the house creates the gloom" (211). Through mycorrhiza, the gloom threatens to collapse both Naomí's and Catalina's individuality into an irresistible symbiotic relationship with the Doyle family, and Howard, as the gloom's ultimate emperor. Howard seeks to make Noemí and Catalina his slaves, bound by the gloom, trapped with generations of previous Doyle women who have succumbed to Doyle's quest for immortality.

According to Autumn Finley, "Howard's use of the fungi for immortality at the cost of his community reflects his colonial dominance. Like the ouroboros family crest, Howard is a snake that constantly devours its offspring. With each reincarnation, Howard becomes less human and more fungal" ("Fungal Colonialism" n. pg.). This is to say, mycology becomes the ultimate metaphor for the colonial criminal exploitation of native populations, a crime that debases the criminal as well as the victim: "The ecological horror developed by Moreno-Garcia throughout *Mexican Gothic* is inherently postcolonial. She binds the setting of High Place, the quintessential British Gothic manor, to the colonial Mexican landscape to show the horrors of colonial inheritance and invasive species on both the colonisers and the colonised" (Finley n. pg.).

Howard is guilty of uxoricide; like fairytale Bluebeard, he is a murderer of wives, many times over. His first was a native woman he married and then murdered three hundred years ago, in order to obtain the sacred mushroom from the unnamed native tribe who used it in their healing rituals. The gloom is responsible for enslaving hundreds of native and imported miners who worked the Doyle silver mines, who were either worked to death or

poisoned by the gloom; though, of course, only the English miners were given a decent burial in the English cemetery, the Mexican miners were left to rot in the wild. According to Colleen Marie Tripp's reading of *Mexican Gothic*, "the monstrosity of the gloom lies not in the mushroom itself, but in the process of capitalist world-ecology that constructed it, from the exploitation of labourers and structural racism that arises from its labour practices to the role of silver or capital in shaping El Triunfo's society. High Place and the gloom become symbols of the continued systemic presence of imperial and industrial capitalist epistemes in Mexico" ("Empires of Extraction" 244). Tripp sees the Gothic genre as replicating many of the inequities of colonialism:

> The Gothic genre, originating in Britain but now a global phenomenon today, historically naturalized the colonial rhetoric of monstrosity and racial/ethnic otherness as opposed to questioning the status quo, from Charlotte Brontë's racist depiction of creole Bertha Mason to Bram Stoker's invention of Dracula as an imperial other. The Patriarch of High Place, Howard Doyle – with his belief in eugenics, violent oppression of women, and strictly enforced bourgeois rules of conduct – mirrors the 'anxiety model' of criticism that defines today's Gothic theory. (237)

As this analysis echoes Moreno-Garcia's interview with *Vox*, it becomes clear that Catalina's obsession with dark fairy tales and Gothic literature is part of her original attraction to Virgil and High Place, as she mistook Virgil for a kind of Rochester and High Place for Thornfield, and thus she was seduced and ensnared into the gloom.

Legaspi says StoryPulse is the counterpart to CQ strategy, "Bamboo Part: The Flow Within (sap or vascular tissue). Function: Transports energy from the root to the tip, keeping everything alive" (*Culturally Intelligent Storytelling* 156). Legaspi goes on to say of StoryPulse: "This is your story's emotional rhythm – its ability to resonate across cultures. You're not guessing. You're listening for where the story might pulse with life in unexpected places" (157). Here, Legaspi tries to identify a dynamic principle in cross-cultural narrative: a variable value or desire that can leap from the author's culture and galvanize the audience. Perhaps in *Mexican Gothic*, the pulse is strongest in the novel's chief villain, who consumes not only indigenous Mexicans but even his own family, including his English wives, Agnes and Alice. Howard does not view his wives or children as family; they are more or less genetic mulch to grow the gloom's power (many images of cannibalism infect Noemí's dreams). As Howard's body weakens, he can use the gloom to transfer his consciousness into a younger vessel like Virgil or Francis. The family has now become so inbred that Howard needs new genetic material to sustain the gloom, and he desperately needs someone with indigenous Mestiza blood like Noemí to strengthen the bloodline (Catalina has a French mother, and proves less suitable than her cousin).

Of course, this grotesque family is perverted by the father, who is really more of a parasitic vampire than a real paterfamilias like Noemí's father, whose modern, colourful tastes in home and office contrast sharply with the Gothic environment of High Place and its practically immortal master. So strong is our feeling of disgust for Howard, not only because he is a cold-blooded killer, but because he perverts the duty of a father to be a protector, a duty Legaspi indicates is held particularly sacred by Latin Americans. Legaspi

offers a cultural analysis of varying values in most cultural markets, including in Chapter 24, "Stories That Dance with Feeling: Getting to Know Latin American Audiences," where he asks: what are Latin American audiences like? Answer: "Family is the foundation of life in Latin America – not just parents and children but extended kin, godparents, neighbours, and lifelong friends" (*Culturally Intelligent Storytelling* 111). In particular, under the passage on "Authority," Legaspi writes: "[p]ower is respected, but it must be humane. Leaders are expected to protect and care, not simply command. Audiences often resonate with parental figures, wise mentors, or strong yet tender characters whose authority feels earned through love and sacrifice" (112). Viewed this way, we can see that Noemí's father, stern but concerned, who sends a daughter on a mission to save a niece, serves as a foil to Howard, who would ultimately desire to sacrifice his children rather than sacrifice anything for them. Loving parental reverence is a Mexican cultural value, and Morena-Garcia deftly translates this into her text, even though it is written in English for a largely global audience. Ilana Nash, in her article on teen detective series, argues the parent/adolescent dynamic is key to understanding narrative lust in detective stories in which the protagonists have yet to come of age: "*The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew* series offered readers the pleasure of seeing adolescents triumph over adults in their superior ability to know: (…) Juvenile delinquency stories also relied on the assumption of youth desire to know, to break taboos and trespass into the adult world of illicit activities. Both types of literature, written by adults, assume the adolescents have a natural drive toward transgressive knowledge" ("Teenage Detectives" 73). Though Noemí is out of her teen years (barely), she does not really have the status of an adult in either 1950s Mexican or historically English cultures. Yet, her rebellious spirit and her "drive toward transgressive knowledge" (73) are part of her cultural intelligence, as her CQ metacognition seeks to defy Doyle's patriarchal corruption and Howard's lurid criminal conduct: incest, murder, cannibalism, genocide.

CQ action: saying the right thing at the right time

Finally, CQ strategy must give way to CQ action, embodied in the protagonist's ultimate decision to resist Howard and his imperial will to dominate. Here we see another parallel to *Dracula* in terms of language. Howard refuses to learn Spanish, as he considers it beneath him (as do Virgil and Florence), but this is somewhat different from Dracula, who wishes to speak English perfectly (perhaps this is the difference between a demonic colonialist setting out to conquer a new world and one who already considers himself to be on home turf). According to Christine Ferguson, Dracula is interested in speaking English as a native and urges Jonathan Harker to act as his tutor: "You shall I trust, rest here with me a while so that by our talking I may learn the English intonation; and I would that you tell me when I make an error, even the slightest, in my speaking" ("Nonstandard Language" 26). Ferguson argues that the reason why Dracula ultimately fails in colonizing England is that he does not have the CQ to camouflage himself inside the native population: "Rather, it is his obsessive concern with linguistic perfection and standardization that truly set him apart. Count Dracula equates linguistic mastery with other kinds of mastery – if he can speak English like, or perhaps better than, a native, he can assimilate with and eventually dominate British citizens" (238). But the vampire's plan produces the absurd, stilted speech

for which he is often mocked in popular culture, and stands out amongst the plenitude of London dialects: "To be English, he seems to believe, is to speak its language in an utterly unidiomatic way. This belief leaves him unequipped to navigate the varied and multimedia forms of language that are rallied against him when he does alight England's shores" (238–9). Dracula has high CQ drive and knowledge, but his CQ strategy is flawed, and thus his CQ action ends in failure. In contrast, Howard Doyle is too arrogant to learn Spanish at all, and CQ detective Noemí, along with Francis, as an interlocutor, use his cultural ignorance against him. By now, totally in love with Noemí and terrified of being consumed by Howard, Francis warns Noemí in Spanish that her food is being drugged: "He can hear, through the walls, through the house, but he doesn't speak Spanish. He won't understand" (229). Noemí realizes they can plot against Howard in Spanish, despite his telepathic ability to listen to them. Noemí and Francis conspire to rebel against Howard during the marriage ceremony, in which Francis will marry Noemí and Howard will take control of Francis's body. Noemí, by now as practiced at stagecraft as at spycraft, pretends to go along with this unholy marriage but ultimately sabotages the wedding and the ritual of transformation. While Howard regains control of both Francis and Catalina, he cannot dominate Noemí. Agnes, Howard Doyle's first wife, the woman with no face, protects her. The climax of the novel and answer to the mystery of High Place leads Noemí to the basement, a basement that holds the secret origin of its hidden supernatural power: not a mad woman in the attic, but a dead woman in the basement, a victim of ritual murder, whose body is the epicentre of the gloom:

> Until she was staring at Agnes again. "Sleepwalker," she whispered. "Time to open your eyes." She tossed the lamp against the corpse's face. It instantly ignited the mushrooms around Agnes's head, creating a halo of fire, and then the tongues of fire began to spread quickly down the wall, the organic matter apparently as good as kindling, making the mushrooms blacken and pop. (276)

Noemí starts a blaze at the heart of the mystery, a blaze that ultimately consumes all of High Place. Noemí explains that, "[w]hat had once been Agnes had become the gloom […] It was possession and not even that, but something she could not even begin to describe. The creation of an afterlife, furnished with the marrow and the bones and the neurons of a woman, made of stems and spores" (Moreno-Garcia 284). The homogenizing, mycorrhizal system of spores and mycelium sprouting from Agnes's defaced skull stands in stark contrast to the rhizomes that make up the flexible, CQ-informed CIS Bamboo Framework, pairing CQ action with Legaspi's category StoryLeaf.

StoryLeaf helps narrative travel from one culture to another. In the chapter entitled "How to Build a Bridge without Losing your Roots," Legaspi discusses genre as one way of transmitting the values of one culture to another: "Use genre fluently. Genre can do a lot of translation work. Horror, rom-com, and thriller all provide global 'on-ramps'" (*Culturally Intelligent Storytelling* 229). In addition to genre fluency, a narrative must have universal values to gain purchase in another culture: "Focus on universal emotions. Grief, joy, fear, anger, jealousy – these travel well. Anchor your story in these, even if the cultural setting is unfamiliar" (229). In her interview with *Vox*, Moreno-Garcia expresses her

disappointment with most fiction about Mexicans and Latin Americans written in English:

> In general, the type of story that you get if you're Latin American and you're reading something in the English language – because it's different if you're reading Spanish fiction – you don't get any genre fiction at all. The stories that you can tell are very limited. Normally they limit you to the suffering illegal immigrant. So, I wanted to do something that was in genre, because I like genre. I wanted to do something that was horror, not [hardship and suffering porn]. And I wanted to write something that reflected some of the people that I knew. Some of the people that I saw reflected in my life and society growing up" (Grady n. pg.).

Conclusion

By trading the tropes of the Speedy Gonzales cartoon for the tropes of the Gothic (from Ann Radcliffe to Hammer horror), Moreno-Garcia feels that she is more able to communicate an authentic Mexican culture with authentic Mexican characters, though they exist on haunted ground, in haunted architecture. In addition, the author translates Mexico's deepest historical trauma not only into English, but also metaphorically into the tropes of crime and detective fiction to elucidate the historical crimes of colonialism. By crafting an entertainment that delights in the Gothic horror and detective tropes it juggles so fluently, the novel's hybrid composition is a structural argument against the identity-rending, homogenizing mycological horror it uses as its central metaphor. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) offers a productive methodology for reading fiction that explores cross-cultural encounters. By examining how characters navigate unfamiliar cultural environments, adapt their behaviour, and negotiate conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings or competing values, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the intercultural dynamics represented in imaginative literature. Furthermore, CQ offers a framework for understanding not only how characters negotiate cultural differences within fictional worlds but also how literary works themselves cross cultural boundaries – why certain cultural artifacts successfully "travel" between cultures while others do not.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The research and writing of this study were supported by the University of West Bohemia through the GRAK26 grant.

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Citation: Vice, B. The CQ detective: using cultural intelligence to navigate the Gothic "gloom" of Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*. *University of Bucharest Review. Literary and Cultural Studies Series* 16(1), 2026: 213-231.
https://doi.org/10.31178/UBR.16.1.14

Received: September 6, 2026 | **Accepted:** November 9, 2026 | **Published:** November 11, 2026