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Dismembering Monstrous Metaphors in Latinx Speculative Fiction

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DISMEMBERING MONSTROUS METAPHORS IN
LATINX SPECULATIVE FICTION

A Thesis
by
DANIELLE GARCIA-KARR

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Subject: English

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

December 2022

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LATINX SPECULATIVE FICTION

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December 2022

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ABSTRACT

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U.S. public discourse and popular media are rife with monstrous metaphors of Latinxs. This thesis argues that these gothic monstrous metaphors construct an affective economy of fear, which results in material violence and the devastation of Latinx lives. I further argue that to intervene within this affective economy, Latinx authors write speculative fiction, employing critical race methodologies, to negotiate monstrosity in relation to citizenship. In other words, speculative Latinx authors disidentify with monsters and enact epistemic disobedience, problematizing the known and naturalized and delinking Latinx people from monstrous metaphors to interrupt cycles of fear and violence. In exploring this metaphoric disidentification, I build from across many disciplines, including scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cathryn Merla-Watson and Otto Santa Anna to analyze the works *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* by Cherríe Moraga, *Mexican gothic* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia, and *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado. This is a critical race project which not only discusses its methodologies, but enacts them. Through counterstory, this thesis pushes back against dominant epistemologies. In sum, through analysis of these complex negotiations of monstrosity, this thesis demonstrates how speculative Latinx authors engage in decolonial activism, reframing the way Latinx people are perceived and, hopefully, treated.

DEDICATION

The completion of my master's degree would not have been possible without the support of my family. My spouse, George, supported our family financially and took on so much more responsibility with our children. My mom, Shari Storm, and his mom, Karen Karr, were also invaluable in caring for the kids so that I could write my thesis. Additionally, the immense support of my wonderful professors at UTRGV gave me the confidence I needed to not only complete this project but move forward to a PhD program. My wonderful friends Kimberly Regalado and Devon Bradley made this grad school journey not just bearable, but enjoyable. All of these people, and myself, I thank because without each of their contributions, this work could not have been completed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I grew up in Brownsville, Texas, right along the US-Mexico border. All through school, and even through my undergraduate degree at the University of Texas at Brownsville, I read very few novels by people of color and nothing by an openly queer author. In my final year of my bachelor's degree in English, I took a class called Science Fiction. On the very first day of class, my professor opened with a joke. "What is the golden age of Science Fiction?" he asked. He looked around expectantly. When no one ventured a guess, he continued, "A 13-year-old boy." He chuckled to himself. In his view, Science Fiction, like every other genre, is a genre written by men for males. Additionally, just like in every other class I had taken at this Hispanic Serving Institution, every assigned text was written by white men. This is something that has frustrated me immensely. Latinas are cultural producers of all kinds of art and literature including speculative fiction.

Nearly ten years out of my undergraduate degree, I joined a local book club which was founded for women who needed a safe place to meet and discuss Science Fiction and Fantasy. Unfortunately, most Sci-Fi/Fantasy book clubs are composed of mostly men, who are inhospitable: gatekeeping, taunting, verbally attacking, and physically intimidating. With this safe space created, we fostered different conversations and quickly decided that we not only wanted to read and discuss speculative fiction, but speculative fiction written by those of marginalized identities: women, LGBTQIA+, and BIPOC. Without this community lamenting

the ways we were represented in speculative fiction, I never would have found the exigence to search for something more or different. Unfortunately, these types of texts are subject to immense criticism from academia, which doesn't widely view genre fiction as having literary merit, from men, who truly believe that Science Fiction and Fantasy are their domain, and from conservatives who want no marginalized person to have a voice which might challenge the dominant ideology's narratives. However, these views are not uncontended. The push back of those with marginalized identities against the literary "canon" and the fight for representation and inclusion within the classroom is an ongoing conversation. Our monstrous desire to be seen and heard pushes the dominant public to cry out against Critical Race Theory and to ban books in schools and libraries. It is evident that the mere desire for more as women, as Chicanas, is audacious, frightening, and monstrous.

What makes a monster is its deviation from the white heteropatriarchal norm. Even growing up in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), I was often excluded for being feminist, dominant, and not conforming to the expectations of women and girls. In Brownsville, for nearly ten years, I performed onstage at the community theater, the Camille Playhouse. As the loud, domineering one, I was always cast as the villain. Not even in pretend could anyone imagine that I could embody the straight, sweet, kind, subservient, female characters. I have played the Wicked Witch twice, the Wicked Stepsister twice, a lesbian three times, a man twice, and even a cat, but never a cishet woman. Every time the villain was queer coded, and the queer character was a joke. In all that time, not once did I perform in a show written by a Latinx author, let alone a female or queer one. Here, the dominant ideological control of art is evident. Nothing challenging to patriarchy or white supremacy was ever allowed to exist in this physical or metaphorical space. Gender roles, ideals, and expectations ruled my life, as it does many women,

but especially BIWOC, from early childhood onwards. As many Latinx women, I have always been cast and considered monstrous for the various ways I was different from others within and without my community, culture, gender, or other identity markers.

By unframing Latinx people, but especially women and queers from raced and gendered scripts and monstrous metaphors, Chinanx authors create space within the public imaginary for the multidimensional, prismatic, and unique ways of being Latinx. In the subsequent sections of this thesis, I will delve into three specific texts to analyze metaphors and imagery. This thesis argues that the following texts engage gothic metaphors of monstrosity to intervene within dominant metaphorical rhetoric that impacts public policy and shapes the life of people of color in concrete ways. All of the pieces chosen for analysis in this project share certain elements: all contain the speculative, all have female leads and deal in metaphor and monsters, all are written by Latinas, and all come from contentious times when public discourse was particularly unpleasant towards immigrants. I argue that with their works, these authors enact epistemic disobedience to alter the material consequences of monster rhetoric on Latinas within and without their cultures.

U.S. public discourse and popular media are rife with monstrous metaphors of Latinxs relegating them to the liminal spaces of society. Designed to influence the affective economy, these monstrous metaphors engage with the dominant white public imaginary to invoke fear, anger, and disgust which results in the devastation of Latinx lives. Therefore, to intervene within this imaginary and affective economy, Latina authors write within genres of speculative fiction to negotiate monstrosity. Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms monster, monstrosity, and monstrasize. Monsters are nouns, recognizable cultural figures like the ghost, vampire, or blob. Monstrosity is adjectives and characteristics that make up the monster including appearance,

diet, language, weaponry, residence, and affect. Monstrasize is a verb: the act of applying these characteristics to a person or people to make them metaphorically monstrous.

As a study of monstrosity, this project studies many interactions and intersections of othered identities including race and gender. Therefore, it is critically informed by Gender Studies and Mexican American Studies. Throughout this project, I use and quote a variety of terms including Latina/o/e/x/@, a person of Latin American descent, Chicana/o/e/x/@, a person of Mexican descent born or living in the US, Hispanic, someone from a Spanish speaking background, and Mexican, which can be used both for a person born in Mexico and a person with Mexican heritage. These terms all have cultural and political histories. Jackie Cuevas who traces the lineage in *Post-Borderlandia* argues “The ‘x’ in ‘Chicanx,’ ‘Latinx,’ and other terms attempts to move beyond the binary and offers a trans, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, and gender variant intervention that opens up the possibilities of ascribing any gender, or none at all, to the term” (20). This move against Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal binary systems is also a decolonial act of epistemic disobedience. As this is a CRT project, I will generally choose to employ a term with the ‘x’ unless speaking of someone who has specified their gender. Queer is another term with a long and contentious history. The purposeful use in this text is both an act of language reclamation and a subversive act to “disrupt normalized categories” (Cuevas 19). It can be used as an adjective, noun, or verb additionally refusing easy categorization. It has been used to mean that which is different or abnormal and was adapted to become a slur against the LGBTQIA+. I use the term queer to describe the blurring of discrete categories and the refusal to reside within binary systems. Because both Latinx and queer have a history of being employed by the dominant white heteropatriarchy to lump people together and vilify or monstrasize them. However, when used by an in-group member, they are used to push back against this power

structure and illustrate the vibrancy and difference within the umbrella term. To argue that Latinx authors speak back against colonial norms, I choose to employ terms which challenge them as well.

Another necessary term to define is speculative fiction. This is an umbrella term to describe fiction which speculates or deviates from the “real” world. It encompasses many genres including Fantasy, Science Fiction, Gothic, and Horror. However, building from the work of Speculative Scholars Tanya Gonzalez, Cathryn Merla-Watson, William Calvo-Quiros, and Teresa Goddu, I will argue that these ideas of horror and monstrosity do not reside solely on the page within fiction. Therefore, I will contextualize these ideas as they impact Latinx people in the world. Disidentification is a method of simultaneously gesturing towards and reacting against something. It “refers to the process of manipulating dominant markings...in order to distance oneself from the oppressively dominant systems of representation” (Cuevas 10-11). It allows both the author and audience “not just to tolerate ambiguity but also to incorporate it” into themselves and their understanding of the world (Cuevas 11). Further, delinking is a method of epistemological production outside of “colonially defined terms” which “acknowledge[s] and challenge[s] its effects” (Ruiz and Arellano 141-147). Both are decolonial acts of epistemic disobedience. Decoloniality is “a political, epistemic, and ethical project that...speaks back to this world system that affects all aspects of society” (García and Baca, *Rhetorics*, 2). Therefore, decoloniality implies epistemic disobedience which pushes against “Western ways of knowing and creating knowledge” that “affirm[s] the epistemic rights of the racially devalued” (Ruiz and Arellano 144). With these rhetorical methodologies, Latinx authors utilize speculative fiction to empower, create and distribute knowledge, and address injustice. Contributing to the nascent but growing field of study into Latinx Gothic Literature, bringing it into conversation with

Rhetorical Studies, I focus on monstrous metaphors and their material consequences to discuss how Latinx authors engage in this discourse, interrupt the circulation of dehumanizing rhetoric, and negotiate monstrosity and citizenship.

Essential to this research is my relationship to the material, my positionality. In academia, there has historically been a preference for objectivity. However, as a range of theorists—including the contributors of *Rhetorics Elsewhere and Otherwise* and Mary Hagar's *The Myth of Objectivity*—argue, this is an unrealistic and unattainable myth. Those who tout and claim objectivity are usually those at the center of the dominant ideological framework. Everyone “possess[es] judgements, preferences, interests, biases, and opinions that inevitably creep into their work” (Hager 577). With so much at stake for those at intersectionality marginalized identities like queer Chicanas, it is important that they are allowed to speak for themselves, not spoken for or over lest the bias of others infect the scholarship. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality and Gloria Anzaldúa too explores the concept in her work. They argue that those at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities experience the world is fundamentally different from those who do not. I have many privileges coming from a middle-class background with a college education and having light skin. These have an impact on what I am able to see, identify with, and understand. It is my responsibility to identify and understand these privileges to check for unintentional bias. I also have several marginalized identities which equally inform my work. As a queer, disabled, and Chicana, my interest and analysis of this topic of Latinx monstrosity originates in personal experience and has personal consequence. Following in the footsteps of my academic foremothers, I center not the hegemonic white, heteropatriarchal perspective, but myself and my many intertwined and entangled identities. As such, I purposefully chose to cite marginalized scholars who offer more nuanced perspectives than the

Eurocentric, white male, disciplinary giants. In this project, it is my goal to bridge rhetoric and literature from an autoethnographical perspective. This material matters not only to me, but also to those who look, sound, and move about the world in similar ways including Chicana feminist theorists and authors.

To conduct this analysis, I have chosen three Latinx Speculative works: Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*, and Carmen Maria Machado's *Her Body and Other Parties*. While all of these works are speculative fiction by Latina's, the first is a play, the second a novel, and the third a short story collection. Additionally, these authors are from different ethnonationalities: Mexican American, Mexican Canadian, and Cuban American. What connects them is their shared transAmerican perspective. José David Saldívar argues that since the US, Canada, and Mexico were all colonized by European nations, they share the colonial legacy through a shared "matrix of power" marked by gendered, racial, religious, language, and color hierarchies emblematic of white heteropatriarchy's capitalist structure (xii). All three North American countries are marred with the ongoing effects of capitalism, but further, they influence each other through policy and the global market. Therefore, authors of marginalized groups within these hierarchies share commonalities and experiences under these systems of oppression. Women speculative authors of different Latinx ethnonationalities speak back to these systems of power through their works and the redeployment of monstrosity. In this thesis, I demonstrate three ways in which Latinx speculative authors contend with monstrosity in their works. Cherríe Moraga reclaims the power of monstrosity with the figure of the ghost, *la Llorona*; Silvia Moreno-Garcia disidentifies with and reassigns the monster with the figure of the vampire; and Carmen Maria Machado queers the

monster with the figure of the Blob. While these tactics are not mutually exclusive, I explore the one I find most prevalent in each work.

Chapter 1 is an analysis of Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* published in 1995. This text was selected firstly because Moraga collaborated closely with Gloria Anzaldúa and is reflective of the ideas coming out of the Chicana Feminist Movement. Secondly, this text was instrumental in paving the way for later texts. Thirdly, this text exemplifies the theme of hunger as a marker for monstrosity. And finally, this text comes from a political moment when Spanish speaking people were being villainized in the media and excluded from schools and more through the English Only Movement. It speaks back against NAFTA and the Chicano movement and the violence both engendered. *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Media* is a reimagining of the Greek Media myth. This also makes the text apt for analysis here because much of contemporary understandings of monstrosity stems from Greek tradition. This tale is put on the stage with an all female cast except for the character of Media's son. With vivid imagery, it problematizes our understanding of monstrosity and makes evident the material consequences of monstrous metaphors.

Chapter 2 moves forward in time published in 2020 by Silvia Moreno-Garcia titled *Mexican gothic*. Reimagining the classic genre of the gothic within the setting of an imagined past Mexico, Garcia explores the idea of monstrosity. This text comes out of another politically turbulent period surrounding the Trump administration. The 45th president notoriously employed a variety of vile metaphors to condemn Mexican people and promote his border wall to keep these monsters out. Moreno-Garcia directly calls out colonialism and calls into question the foundations of citizenship. Unlike Moraga's work, this text was much more widely circulated and popular. *Mexican gothic* was nominated for best novel through the Nebula Awards. Both this

text and the following use literature to intervene within the monster economy which was employed against them and those like them.

Chapter 3 focuses on a contemporary of Garcia's, Carmen Maria Machado and her work *Her Body and Other Parties*. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on texts which emerged following Donald Trump's campaign and the following horrors visited upon Latinx people. Both of these texts were very popular, winning prizes and places on best seller lists. They were able to access a larger portion of the public than Cherríe Moraga. However, both build upon the tradition of speculative fiction, specifically the gothic and domestic horror, that she laid out. *Her Body and Other Parties* is a series of short stories which queer genre boundaries and borders. The theme throughout is the reality of violence perpetrated against women's bodies. Machado speaks back against rape culture and fatphobia among other things. She, like Moraga and Moreno-Garcia, use art to find purchase for their voices. All three dismember the monstrous metaphor, delink and disidentify with it as a politically subversive act of epistemic disobedience.

Building off of the work of scholars across time and discipline, I formulate a comprehensive view of monstrosity as it regards to the Latina. My methodology builds on work in multiple fields including history, cultural studies, monster studies, feminist studies, Latinx studies, sociology, religion, literature, and rhetoric. Work on Cognitive Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson, built on by Otto Santa Anna and William Nericcio lay the foundation for my argument because they illustrate how metaphors are used to make monsters in order to inspire fear, distrust, hatred, and disgust. This then has a demonstrable and devastating effect on the lives of Latinx people. From there, I rely on work by monster theorists to trace the history of monsters to trace the semantic usage of the word today. In addition, with works by scholars like William Calvo-Quiros, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Toni Morrison, I am able to lay out tropes and

archetypes of monstrosity and the gothic and Horror. By defining the monster and examining typical methods of conveying fear, I can then examine how Latinx authors negotiate the idea of monstrosity. The theories I use discuss feminism, queer theory, rhetoric, cognitive metaphor theory, social justice, monstrosity, the gothic, and citizenship. My contribution is tying them all together to propose that what Latinx authors of speculative fiction are doing is necessary, purposeful, and nuanced. Once this understanding is built, I am able to explore how these monstrous metaphors are negotiated in three specific works of speculative fiction. The monster is built up in the imaginary about people through figurative language. In each text, I will examine how stereotypes that construct the monstrous other are defined, challenged, upheld, or reclaimed. In this way, I add to the growing field of Latinx Studies by building connections between Gothic Rhetoric and Literature.

Literature Review

Controlling art is a method of controlling the citizenry's thoughts and ideas. The casting of me, a queer Chicana, literally on the stage and figuratively within the minds of those in my community, reinforced white heteropatriarchal views and influenced the public imaginary by controlling who they were allowed to see me to be. Unfortunately, this is not a unique experience but pervasive within the LRGV and elsewhere. Regardless of place, theater, literature, and popular media are mediums through which epistemological and ontological knowledge is transmitted. Louis Althusser, a French philosopher, argues that art has the ability to "make us 'perceive' ... the very ideology in which [the art is] held" (271). Therefore, art can make the naturalized ideology of white heteropatriarchy obvious. Once seen, it can be dealt with. However, Anzaldúa argues that this disenchantment, this confrontation of collective "shadow beast[s]" is painful (*Borderlands Critical*, 74). She calls the fear and resistance we have to knowledge the "Coatlicue State" which is "a rupture in our everyday world" that can leave us paralyzed, unable to move forward and change, unable to unsee and go back to the way we were before (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands Critical*, 112-114). Because social change is so difficult and scary, Bertolt Brecht, a playwright, theorist, and Marxist, argues that the pleasure of art is necessary for people to engage in the process. In *A Short Organum for the Theater*, Brecht argues that "theatre may allow [the audience] to enjoy as entertainment that terrible and never-ending labour which should ensure their maintenance, together with the terror of their unceasing transformation" (135). In this way, Brecht elucidates the discursive nature of art. Art can engage

the public's empathy and the spectrum of affect. The fear generated by the monster accesses the affective dimension of the audience. The monster metaphor paints a target, sets the sights, on the victim of that othering discourse. Edward J. Ingebretsen argues that public discourse adopts and repurposes artistic modes "to shape public notions" (5). Ergo, it is clear that there is a back and forth, a discourse, between art and the public. Each understand, inform, and respond to each other. Utilizing this ability of art to enter into public discourse is a method by which Latinx authors subvert dominant ideological narratives.

The narratives of the dominant ideology use metaphor in rhetoric to create pictures of what and who people can be. In majoritarian narratives, Latinx people are grouped together under the umbrella term with no ethnonational distinction. This helps with the construction of a homogeneous, stereotyped group identity. Ergo, in the public imaginary, a monolithic image of what it means to be Latinx exists. This image is uneducated, unwashed, impoverished, and unwanted. It is metaphorically monstrous. In public discourse, to be Latinx is to be not just an immigrant, but an alien. In *The Latinx Files*, Mathew Goodwin argues the alien is "the ultimate Other", just like the monster (11). This image is pervasive and ubiquitous. It has been cemented in the public imaginary through repetition and propaganda to justify violence and oppression against Latinx people and maintain them as an easily controllable and exploitable workforce. Therefore, Latinx people are an easily monstrasized scapegoat who can be disposed of at will. This is the argument expounded on by historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's book *Not a Nation of Immigrants* and Natalia Molina in *How Race is Made in America*. Latinx authors push back against these ideas in their works of speculative fiction because there is much at stake for them in their lived realities.

This imagined picture of Latinx determines not only how we are thought of, but how we are treated. Metaphors guide our understanding of the world and our interactions with it. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue it “govern[s] our everyday functioning” (3). Building from their Cognitive Metaphor Theory, transferring it to advertising and the power of visual images, Matthew O. Peterson adds “metaphors are inherently open-ended” but “is dependent upon a familiar source” (68). When an audience is met with a familiar or repeated trope they are less likely to push back. Therefore, the rhetorical use of monster metaphors engages with the public’s knowledge and imagination to access feeling and incite action. These monster metaphors rely on preconceived stereotypes and racial scripts which permeate popular culture and dominant media. However, Latinxs are not passive audiences. Jillian Báez argues that “Latina audiences are performing not only a *preferred* or *dominant reading* through passively consuming a text, but also *negotiated* and *alternate/oppositional readings*” (17). Building from Chela Sandoval’s methodologies of the oppressed, Báez argues that Latinas understand symbolic meanings, break them down, expose them, repurpose them, and “produc[e] their own constructions” (17). In this way, Latinx speculative authors both gesture toward dominant modes and tropes and push back against them effectively disidentifying and delinking through epistemic disobedience.

When the monster metaphor is employed, it bypasses fact or logic to engage fear. Rhetorician Edward Ingebretsen argues, “the word ‘monster’ as metaphor and rubric in gothic America” is “employed as a rhetoric of rebuke” and “the metaphor justifies a range of...violences physical as well as rhetorical” (2). Also expanding on rhetorical monster making, Otto Santa Ana, in the monograph *Brown Tide Rising*, explores the metaphors used to describe Latinx people in the public domain through popular culture, media, and politics. He argues “By way of such metaphors, the current image of Latinos in the public’s imagination took

hold...Such metaphors shaped public opinion about Latinos” (Santa Ana 7). These visual metaphors which cast Latinx people as monstrous are dependent upon ingrained stereotypes which are circulated in popular media and public discourse. In *Tex[t]-Mex*, William Anthony Nericcio adds that these metaphors designate how real people are seen. He states, “The Tex[t]-Mex is the fabric made by others, worn by ourselves...Such an evocative metaphor, such a provocative conjuring through which to see the body of the Mexican American” (Nericcio 30). Nericcio explains how these stereotypes, these monstrous metaphors, are put upon Latinx people, and we are seen and treated as if they are reality. In other words, the word monster carries weight and meaning and when it is assigned to Latinx people through rhetoric it masks their individuality and creates the conditions for continued violence and oppression. In tying together history, sociology, psychology, rhetoric and literature, I piece together a picture of just how and why Latinx people are seen and treated the way we are.

These metaphors have material consequences for Latinx people and their treatment by the public, but also in policy and law. Ingebretsen explores how individuals are made metaphorically monstrous and the effects this has on them. Santa Ana traces the metaphorical monstrosity put upon groups to show how public opinion and imagination have a demonstrable impact on the lives of Latinxs. Santa Ana gives many examples of the types of metaphors used including floods and plagues. These are very amorphous, unfightable dangers. The monster metaphor functions differently, designating a target. Through these metaphors, pictures of the dangerous other who must be kept in their place is cemented in the public’s imaginary. This leads to the forced sterilization of Latinx women, the separation of families at the border, mass shootings, the femicides in Juarez, and excessive and everyday violences against Latinx people both individually and collectively.

Cognitive Metaphor Theory posits that human brains do not distinguish between what is ‘real’ and what is imagined when it is pictured. What is seen physically and what is seen within the mind’s eye trigger similar brain processes. Therefore, the use of imagery and metaphor are important and powerful. What we can picture, we are more likely to believe, remember, and act upon. Rick Williams, in his study of photography and the impact of the visual, contends

most media images are permeated with messages of persuasion that are specifically designed to bypass reason. With symbolic, archetypal power beyond logic, they communicate to our interior feelings, values, needs, and desires in ways that shape our beliefs and direct our decision making and external actions (47).

Images, whether physical or metaphorical, constitute a powerful type of rhetoric. By triggering fear, monstrous metaphors permeate and persist within the public imaginary. This is a discursive process by which the imagined monster of Latinx people is circulated within the dominant public sphere which leads to violence and oppression.

Furthering the discussion of the contribution of the visual arts to the monstrous metaphor, *Stony the Road* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. documents how images were circulated during reconstruction and beyond to cement the view of Black people as other and subhuman. In *Afropessimism*, Frank B. Wilderson argues that because Black people were fundamentally never viewed as human, they were socially dead: natively alienated, disrespected, and subject to extreme violence. This in turn facilitated their physical deaths. Black people, and monsters, are not viewed as alive in the sense that they deserve civil and human rights. In this way, violence, murder, mass incarceration and policing, are all justified. Shifting to Native Americans, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz details historical monster making of indigenous peoples in *Not A Nation of*

Immigrants. Again extreme violence has been justified and continues to manifest in violence, oppression, and death.

This construction of the metaphorical monster put upon BIPOC is pervasive historically and contemporarily. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color and is a contested term within the Black community. It lumps together many disparate groups and people without acknowledging their individuality, communities, or cultures. I use it because this is how anyone who is not white is conceived within the dominant white heteropatriarchal ideology. The narratives which cast us as monstrous stem from this framework. In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison explores why. She argues that this construction of the other, this metaphorical monster is essential to the construction of “America” and whiteness. Morrison contends,

Through the simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a pallet, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom (7)

This invented version of Africa and its descendants permeates literature, advertisement, and public discourse through metaphor and imagery. In the same way as both Black and Indigenous communities, other brown people and Latinx people are monstrasized in order to keep them in their place and in order to maintain the structures of oppression that are capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. To Disrupt this construction of the monstrous metaphor is to destabilize the very foundations of whiteness. This is terrifying, in itself monstrous. Through their works, marginalized authors, but especially those at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, negotiate the monster metaphor. Through narrative, they enact epistemic

disobedience and disidentification. In some ways, they push against the metaphorical monstrosity put upon them. In other ways, they reclaim it. For a monster is scary and in a monster is power.

Monsters are prevalent in works of horror and the gothic. Mark Edmonson defines the gothic as “the art of haunting” and identifies common tropes like the “hero-villain, heroine on the run, a terrible place, uncut fear” (xi). The gothic is a genre with historical foundations in Europe “usually marked as beginning with Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* [1764]” with a “recognized coterie of authors” (Goddu 3). Teresa Goddu adds that in this traditional form, it critiqued class hierarchies and in feminist hands, patriarchy. The gothic includes tropes like “doom and gloom”, “darkness and the grotesque”, “haunted houses, evil villains, ghosts, gloomy landscapes, madness, terror, suspense, horror” (Goddu 3-11). Additionally, the gothic has religious ties and was often used to monstratize the racial or religions other to inspire fear of the outsider. The British gothic was a tool of critique but also of citizenship used to reinforce stereotypes and xenophobia.

The American gothic is less easily defined according to Goddu. It follows similar patterns and tropes, but without the historical frame or canon. However, the gothic arrived in America with its founding ideology. The US was founded on capitalism and the desire for more land and goods. Capitalism has historically been described in terms of the gothic by Karl Marx with imagery of the “bloodsucking...vampire” (Saldarriaga and Manini 54). Additionally, US capitalism was founded on slavery, which is intensely gothic and relies on the social and physical death of Black people. This same gothic rhetoric is employed as propaganda to shape public opinion and imaginary. In the same way as the British gothic, the American gothic uses tropes to incite emotions. However, instead of critiquing class, it is more often read as a critique of the

social and psychological. Additionally, Goddu posits, “American gothic literature criticizes America’s national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation’s claim to purity and equality” by “tell[ing] of historical horrors” (10). The gothic permeates every layer of US culture. Edmonson contends that “conventions of gothic horror are making their way into, and decisively shaping, many apparently nonfiction forms” (Edmonson 5). Politicians, like Trump, allude to the gothic in their rhetorical monster making. They rely on the public’s understanding and acceptance of its conventions and tropes. With this “gothic narrative” an “American nationalism fueled by fright” is created and can be employed at will from the pulpit to social media (Ingebretsen 6-13). Although in some ways distinct from its European origins, the American gothic also functioned both as a method of critique and a reinforcement of xenophobic racial scripts.

Pushing back against hegemonic scholarship on the gothic, scholars of marginalized identities employ critical race methodologies to gain new understanding of the genre. Further nuancing and narrowing the gothic genre are the Southern gothic and the African American gothic. These mediums are used as methods of critiquing slavery and usually set their stories in plantations and recall historical trauma and terror in their hauntings. Goddu and Morrison explain these functions and help fuel our understanding of the Latinx gothic. In *Altermundos*, Cathryn Merla-Watson expands by arguing

horror and related genres are apropos for interpreting Latin@ social life and subjectivity, not only because Latin@s have been continually figured as the monstrous other in US popular culture but also because horror and terror have been endemic to and have textured Latin@ lived experience and history (3).

Further, in *Murder, Madness Monsters*, Tonya Gonzalez argues “Latina/o gothic texts are thus artistic productions that in some way negotiate examples of Latinidad and gothic discourse to highlight or address the monsters within the imagined U.S. and Latina/o community” (xiii). The Latinx gothic functions in a fundamentally different way from both its predecessors and contemporaries while still adhering to many of the genre expectations, constraints, and tropes. In *Buenas Noches*, María DeGuzmán ties aesthetics into the gothic and argues that Latinx cultural producers “demonstrate a critical and finely honed familiarity with European Romantic, expressionist, existentialist, and phenomenological traditions and have integrated and transmuted them to their own ends” (11). Here she builds from Morrison to argue against the simplistic understanding of color binaries where light equals good and dark equals bad. Instead, DeGuzmán illustrates how traditional tropes of the gothic are adjusted in Latinx texts and must be interpreted contextually. She argues that symbols like “night and related tropes of darkness” were traditionally shorthand for danger and evil and used to create terror (DeGuzmán 23). However, in Latinx hands, these same tropes can be reconfigured and night can be “figured as a kind of vast assimilatory space-time...where borders bleed and melt into one another” (DeGuzmán 16). This aligns with Anzaldúa’s theory of the *nepantla*, a transformative and ultimately freeing space. Additionally, in *From Amazons to Zombies*, Persephone Brahm argues, since horror is everywhere in the US, using the genre in fiction makes it “possible to set forth a vocabulary for de-monstering Latin America” (20). Following in the radical tradition of social critique, but pushing back against xenophobic ideas, Latinx authors nuance the gothic in order to disidentify with it and dismember the metaphorical monster put upon them. I argue that in this way, they enact epistemic disobedience.

The idea of monster has shifted over time and space. Modern ideas of monstrosity within the US dominant public imaginary come from Greek tradition and Eurocentricity. Robert Schwaller expounds on this idea in *Creating Monsters*, “The origin of western monsters can be traced at least as far back as Homer and other Greek authors of the first millennium BCE” (21). In *From Amazons to Zombies: Monsters in Latin America*, Persephone Brahm traces the history of monstrosity from Aristotle to the “discovery” of the “new world”. She argues “Aristotle defines the monstrous simply as that which does not meet normal expectations” and this includes women” (Brahm 3). Woman is “inherently and essentially an aberration from the perfection of Nature as embodied in the male” and all other monstrosities stem from her (Brahm 3). When Graeco-Roman religions met Christianity, monstrosity acquired stronger moral implications. To be monstrous was to be a foil to all that was good or holy. Brahm also bridges to Michel Foucault arguing that for him “a monster becomes a monster not only because it crosses a natural boundary, but because the transgression challenges the civil or religious rationality that justifies that boundary’s existence” (12). The easiest way to rectify this problem is to kill the monster off entirely. In *Foucault’s Monsters and the Challenge of the Law* Andrew N. Sharpe explores legal ramifications of monstrosity. Classified as a monster, there were no legal consequences for that person’s death. People with severe deformities or disabilities were considered monsters. Therefore, a monster is not only undeserving of civil rights, it also has no human rights. The lack of rights owed to a monster is particularly relevant to the move into the modern age and the infamous voyage of Christopher Columbus. Coupled with Christianity, casting the indigenous population as monstrous was to cast them as evil; therefore, to vanquish a monster was righteous. This is how the published letters of Columbus described the Natives he encountered. In *Columbus’s Monsters*, Elena Daniele explains “a convenient typology of monstrosity in the New

World was also created, very early on, as part of a dialogue between authors and their audiences” (117). This served multiple purposes. Firstly, it followed literary traditions which were familiar to the readers and which therefore gave credence to the words. Secondly, it justified the claiming of these “new” lands and the subjugation of these people. While monstrosity predates the Christian mythology, much of the rhetorical monster-making in the foundation of the United States sprouted from a religious standpoint. It monstrasized the indigenous as demons and savages without souls.

This tradition permeates early American Literature. Goddu argues, “the Indian was demonized through gothic symbols that in turn justified white aggression” (56). Through narrative, oral or written, white US citizens were “Taught from infancy to see the Indian as a gothic monster” (57). Annegret Marten contends “The monster’s body functions as a projection space for the colonizers’ racial fear and simultaneous fascination with the indigenous people. In this way the image also deflects the charge of barbarism away from the colonizers and onto the monster” (200). Dunbar-Ortiz details the material consequences of this in *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States*, where she shows how Natives suffered genocide at the hands of the US and its citizens. Monster metaphors in public discourse have predictable violent outcomes for the people they are employed against. From colonization onwards, monster metaphors have been employed by public figures and officials in the US to incite public fear and justify state sanctioned violence and oppression.

However, the monster figure is not unique to the US, even if it fits in aptly with the gothic discourse of white heteropatriarchal capitalism. William Calvo-Quirós contends, “Monsters are everywhere. As immortal entities, they are older than capitalism, patriarchy, xenophobia, and homophobia. Nevertheless, monsters can be some of these oppressive systems’

most ferocious allies” (*Sucking Vulnerability*, 112). Predating modernity, the monster character or archetype is seen across cultures. When monsters met Christianity through colonization, they became not only something to explain the unknown, fantastic, unexplainable, or awesome, but something evil. The monster is a symbol “for categories of identity that are discriminated against, put down, hidden, or forgotten in ableist, heteronormative, misogynist culture: categories that are based in the body, its gendering, its characteristics, its disabilities”, in short, anything that deviates from “societal notions of what is ‘natural’ and ‘good’” (Saldarriaga and Manini 77). Because of its ubiquity and historical precedence, the public understands the monster’s associated tropes whether in fiction or reality. Ingebretsen argues, “the formula of the monster story has been so familiar that its terms—and the violence that accompanies them—can be transferred from movie to political forum” and the hate its invocation inspires can “seep into court, into news, into prison” (14). Monsters have unspoken rules and connotations. They engage with genre expectations, constraints, and conventions to access the public’s unconscious. Without necessarily understanding why or how, the citizenry’s anger can be activated and directed by the dominant ideological narrative. This has devastating effects on anyone considered non-normative. Therefore, it is necessary not only to demystify this process, but also ways in which it might be combatted.

In order to understand how these tropes are implemented, an understanding of what constitutes a monster is necessary. In his article, *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, Jeffery Jerome Cohen defines monsters as “A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrum is etymologically ‘that which reveals,’ ‘that which warns,’” (62). Monsters inhabited faraway lands. They were strange, dangerous, and Other. John Block Friedman elucidates the foundations of monstrosity in “*A Measure of Man*,” *Excerpted from The Monstrous Races in*

Medieval Art and Thought. He argues that “Greco-Roman accounts of the monstrous races exhibit a marked ethnocentrism which made the observer’s culture, language, and physical appearance the norm by which to evaluate all other peoples” (Friedman 32). Importantly, Friedman breaks down markers of monstrosity into categories: food, culture, language, weapons, residence, and appearance. These are the elements to be disrupted in order to deconstruct the monstrous metaphor. From Cohen and Friedman, it is clear that the monster is an epistemic cocreation of cultures which designates who is lesser and undesirable. However, it is this very discursive nature that allows for the borders of monstrosity to be negotiated and permeated by those generally cast as monstrous.

For those assigned female at birth, monstrosity is assigned from the moment they exit the womb. Minji Lee explores the foundation of this perception in *The Woman’s Body, In-Between* and argues that women existed “between men and animals in an existential hierarchy”, not quite one or the other (3). From Aristotle to the “standard medical view of women” during the medieval period, “feminine bodies” were “monstrous”, “less-developed versions of men”, full of “deficiencies and inferiorities”, and both “mysterious and secretive” (Lee 4-5). Additionally, Lee argues that women were seen to “lack the intellectual capacity, patience, and stability” of men because they were “more animalistic” and “less capable of controlling their bodily needs and desires” (5). Anzaldúa argues that

The female, by virtue of creating entities of flesh and blood in her stomach (she bleeds every month but does not die), by virtue of being in tune with nature’s cycles, is feared. Because, according to Christianity and most other major religions, woman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine... Woman is stranger, the other. She is man’s recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast” (*Borderlands Critical*, 74)

Building on these ideas of woman being more tied to the body and its needs, Jess Zimmerman builds the argument for why women are configured as monstrous based on hunger. She argues, “Outsize hunger is the province of the monster, and for women, all hungers are outsize” (Zimmerman 32). However, she further argues the point that monsters contain power. To reclaim monstrosity, at least in part is to claim that power, for “What strength the unapologetically hungry monster-heroine could have: enough to swallow a man” (Zimmerman 46). Lee and Anzaldúa also explore ways in which monstrosity is dismembered and repurposed to reclaim feminine power. Monstrosity and femininity are inextricably tied for even if a woman herself is not a monster, all monsters are born of women. From antiquated definitions of deformity to fantastical tales like *Beowulf* to contemporary mass murderers, every monster is the product of their mother. Monstrosity is a function of patriarchy in that it teaches women what they can and cannot be. It warns of what they will become if they dare to ask for more or push back. For those at the intersection of gender and race, the monster issue is compounded.

Female, brown, queer, Chicana or Latina, or in any other way non-normative people are routinely made metaphorically monstrous in the public’s imagination and therefore the public’s memory. When the atrocities against these populations are committed, they elicit little sympathy on behalf of the victim. Getting rid of a monster is a good thing. Monsters serve the very important function of the foil to who is in charge, who is a citizen, who has rights, and who does not. Those in power, cisgender, heterosexual white men, are citizens. A citizen can own land, make money, participate in politics and policy making. A citizen has rights. They make and enforce the rules. Society and the world was built to benefit their needs and desires. The citizen is defined by what they are not. Anyone not of this privileged group is a monster, to be feared, warned against, so that they can be condemned, controlled, and contained. This is a function

which maintains power in the hands of white heteropatriarchy. To make a person or group metaphorically monstrous is to rob them of rights and encourage violence against them. Lynchings, murders, rapes, mass incarceration, and many other types of violence and oppression face the monster. However, Bernadette Calafell argues that while “women of color are constructed as monstrous Others” it is possible to repurpose the metaphor to “draw readers into action or spaces of resistance” (Calafell 111). With all of this at stake, Chicana feminist authors reclaim speculative fiction to reconfigure the monster to enter public discourse and influence the public’s imaginary.

Chicana Feminism and Monster Studies are a natural pairing. Monsters reside in liminal spaces, in between spaces, border spaces. Gloria Anzaldúa calls the Borderlands the home of the “Los atravesados”, “the prohibited and forbidden”, “the squint-eyed and perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead” (*Borderlands Critical*, 57-58). Chicanas are residents of the Borderlands regardless of the physical space they occupy. They have historically been denied full membership from every sector of their identity. The white male dominated public, the white feminist movement, and the Chicano movement all relegated them to the margins. In the public imaginary, created through public discourse and the narrative of the dominant white heteropatriarchy, to deviate from the ideological white male center is to be monstrous. Not only are Chicana’s monstrous in the eyes of the dominant, but also within their own culture. Monsters are contextual. What is othered, feared, and loathed varies by group. Within Chicana society, women are villainized and monstrified to enforce colonial and patriarchal standards of comportment. Through Latinx works of Speculative Fiction, these metaphors of monstrosity are negotiated.

A foundational theorist focused on the intersectional experiences of queer Chicanas like herself, Gloria Anzaldúa expounds on this idea in her published works and those she collaborated on. A queer Chicana, Anzaldúa felt othered. She felt that she was a freak and monstrous because of her gender, her race, her sexuality, and her body. Different arenas, different public spheres, othered her in different ways. Each pushing her constantly to the outside. Anzaldúa went on to reclaim and recapture the idea of monsters and the other to empower it. The poem *Llorona Coyolxauhqui* illustrates this idea, starting with, “Soy hija de la mujer que transnocha// I am the daughter of La Llorona// and I am La Llorona herself, I am the monster’s child and the monstrous” (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 295). As such, she resides in the nepantla, “a dark wood-// between home and the world”, not quite fitting anywhere (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 295). She is the “daughter that almost killed her mother” and her mother was “monstrous” because she “got herself banged up” (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 296). The entire matrilineal heritage is monstrous. However, Anzaldúa illustrates that la Chicana is more than the monster she is cast as. She is all of her cultural formothers. She carries with her the generational knowledge and trauma. Anzaldúa says that she is the daughter of monsters. She is the daughter of la Llorona. She is the daughter of Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui. Much of the monstrosity in this context is defined by sexuality and rebellion. She is their daughter and she is them. They are monsters who birthed her, so she is a monster, and she in turn creates new monsters. These monsters force others into the nepantla. They force readers and viewers to confront personal and collective shadow beasts. To die and be born anew. In other words, for their old selves, their old prejudices, ideologies, guiding mythologies perish and out of the nepantla emerges a new being. In this way, new monsters are born, to terrorize in turn and force others to reckon with the wounds of white supremacy, patriarchy, sexism, colorism, racism, and more.

Monsters warn. Monsters create fear. Monsters challenge traditional understandings. Monsters refuse easy categorizations and binaries. Monsters are personal and public. Monsters are bridges across time, space, culture, and language. Monsters reflect different fears and desires based on the audience. Monsters are part of a conversation or dialog between the creator/writer and the reader/viewer. Monsters belong everywhere and nowhere. Monsters queer, blur, and blend borders and boundaries. By acknowledging monstrosity, by reclaiming it and recreating it, Anzaldúa, and the Latinx authors of speculative fiction who follow her, work to subvert the dominant ideology and enact social change.

Through the eyes, words, and works of creators who rely on their normativity, queer characters, female characters, and BIPOC characters are forced to reside within tiny boxes of acceptable behavior. Only those stories in which characters conform to prescribed roles and racial scripts are allowed to be told or to matter. This is the viewpoint pushed back against by Latinas. Through their works, they argue that every woman's story, every queer person's story, every BIPOC person's story matters and can be told on its own terms without the need to ameliorate the characters to make them more palatable to a heteronormative audience's expectations. Patricia Nelson argues that women "serve as archetypes" and that word and concepts are "simultaneously idealized and vilified" which "reduce[s] the idea of woman to symbol, rather than acknowledging real women's complexity" (1). In Mexican culture, gender norms are defined by "the duality of marianismo and machismo, which represents a gender role phenomenon based on traditional cultural norms and the impact of Catholicism (Arrizon 150). Women's roles are defined by "the Virgin Mary" and "marianismo" whose "ideal of purity and passivity", traits of being "eternally immaculate and giving", and sole sexual purpose of procreation, are the guideposts (Arrizon 152). Figures like las tres madres, La Llorona, La

Malinche, y La Virgen de Guadalupe form the ends of the virgin/whore binary of possible categorization for women. These are the molds of womanhood for Mexican people. They have been framed this way. To decolonize las madres, rebirth them, and in the process ourselves, feminist Latinx authors reclaim their stories, retell them, and provide them and ourselves with new ways of being, existing, and surviving. Breaking the cultural foremothers from the frames of monstrosity not only negotiates the concept of monstrosity within the dominant culture, but also contextually within patriarchal, Latinx culture. In her book *[Un]Framing the "Bad Woman"*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba calls the process of removing oneself, one's characters, or character archetypes from their boxes is called "unframing" them. To frame is to define and view in a certain way, to isolate and highlight something specific, but it is also to place blame upon. Framing contains, limits, binds, and borders. Frames can be interior, "how we want to define ourselves" or exterior, "imposed upon us", and they are often "incompatible" (Gaspar de Alba 21). The "bodies who queer/alter the male-centric history, politics, and consciousness of Chicana/o culture" transgress these borders and "break the frame" (Gaspar de Alba 17-22). Once the frames are broken, they can be reframed in "protest frames" by movements like the Chicana feminist movement to "genderate collective identities" and promote "social actions" (Gaspar de Alba 22). This is the work that Chicana women authors do. Taking feminist icons from their prescribed frames of "bad woman", i.e. monsterhood, and reframing them as complex and powerful by retelling their stories. Metaphors of monsters, especially hordes crossing the border, engage the public's fear toward Mexican women. Conflated with zombies, these women are seen as brainless labor who uncontrollably reproduce and who are coming to consume us, or at least our jobs and wealth. These women and their children are threats, inhuman, who need to be controlled, contained, and condemned. Monster metaphors make this vulnerable population into

scapegoats, a convenient red herring to redirect “citizens’ fears with respect to labor security, health, and disability, the environment, and other minimum requirements for human life” (Saldarriaga and Manini 17). Fear of the other is a rhetorical tool used by the dominant majority to unify citizens within a nation-state and exert ideological control. Intervention in this affective economy by Latinx authors of speculative fiction destabilizes these narratives and call citizenship into question.

In a Eurocentric, heteronormative, and patriarchal society like the US, narratives depend on strict binaries. Therefore, the citizen must have a foil, that which it is judged against, the monster. Citizenship within the nation-state denotes rights, resources, and protection. Based in Graeco-Roman tradition the citizenship was defined by property ownership and only included white men of means. We have not moved very far from this foundation. Today, nation-state citizenship is defined by who is outside of its borders. Ostensibly, those born in the US are citizens. However, according to feminist critique of citizenship, this still only truly means white men because they are the ones with rights and power. In addition to rights, citizenship comes with responsibilities. Ingebreetsen argues, citizenship “requires us to collude in public fantasy” where “national culture becomes local—through images, narratives, monuments, and sites that circulate through personal/collective consciousness” (6-15). Dunbar-Ortiz argues this point from a historical perspective to indicate that to aim for citizenship was to aim for whiteness and participate in the monsterization of those outside the bounds. In other words, citizens perpetuate the monster myth and forcibly exclude the other in order to justify their own membership. The rhetoric of politicians and public facing officials uses narrative to construct people as metaphorically monstrous and thereby “normalize and justify state violence, especially when directed at elements of the citizenry that are considered less ‘alive’ than others” (Saldarriaga and

Manini 39). This ties into another meaning of citizenship which is who belongs within society and who does not regardless of legal right to do so. As hard as the dominant ideology of the US has historically striven for a homogenized white American identity, it doesn't exist. However, BIPOC still routinely have their citizenship and humanity brought into question. This is what Latinx authors push against in works of speculative fiction where they dismember and reconfigure the monster.

Mexicans, regardless of citizenship status, are often seen and treated as illegals. Both Dunbar-Ortiz and Santa Anna expand on this idea within their texts. However, this is also evident in contemporary rhetoric of the Republican National Party which calls for the expulsion of Mexicans and the building of a “big beautiful wall’ at the border with Mexico” (Saldarriaga and Manini 40). This imagery plays on common tropes of the gothic and horror and is seen in shows such as *iZombie* and *Z-O-M-B-I-E-S*. In both of these popular shows, walls are built around zombie populations to contain the dangerous hordes and keep them from the citizens.. The conceptualization of them within the public imaginary has material consequences on the rights, resources, and protections they receive in the US. Latinx people are perpetually made other and subjected to alienizing logic, which is, according to Karma Chavez, “a structure of thinking that insists that some are necessarily members of a community and some are recognized as not belonging” (5). Alienizing logic, according to Chavez, can “manifest” as “genocide, lynching, the plantation, the reservation, the ghetto, the interment camp, the prison, the hospital, quarantine, or deportation” (9). This logic is employed through the use of the monstrous metaphor in the narratives of the dominant white heteropatriarchal ideology. Other Latinx scholars like Emma Perez and William Calvo-Quiros also discuss the concept of citizenship in their works. Perez argues that “ideologies constructed around race and sex were linked to justify

who was undesirable as a citizen in the United States” (Perez, *Queering*, 126-127). In much the same way, Calvo-Quirós states that “mainstream aesthetic theory holds an innate tendency toward chromophobia, constituting a system of chromoeugenics, through the naturalization of aesthetic categories of deviancy, social pathology, and correlations about uncivilized and unfit citizenship” (Calvo-Quirós, *Politics*, 76). In other words, someone is “unfit” for citizenship by the simple virtue of being, using, or liking any non-white color. On top of that, as a form of ideological and epistemological control, colonialism and patriarchy “utilized the world of the visual (including in their chromatic choices) to create an imaginary collective citizen” (Calvo-Quirós, *Politics*, 84). Through the eyes of dominant society, through the imaginary of the public, Latinx people are not people. They are inhuman. They are undesirable. They are illegals. They are aliens. They are monsters. In a capitalist, heteropatriarchal system and country that conceived of its citizens exclusively as white, male, able bodied, heterosexual, and cisgender, everyone else is other and disposable. According to James Tyner in *Dead Labor: Toward a Political Economy of Premature Death* argues “Those individuals who are deemed nonproductive or redundant, based on an economic bioarithmetic, are disproportionately vulnerable and increasingly disallowed life to the point of premature death” (xiii). This “exclusionary reality” poses a problem for feminists who continuously engage in “individual and collective struggles” to “recogniz[e] and expos[e] the limitations, restrictions, and violence enacted by states through constructions of citizenship” (Roseneil 1). Feminist theorists of citizenship engage with third space and afropessimism to ask if whether to strive for citizenship, or dismantle the system entirely in favor of something new and different. Báez argues that the cultural dimension of citizenship focuses on “more symbolic aspects of citizenship, such as feelings of belonging and recognition”; and Latina’s enact cultural citizenship both through active audience participation

and cultural production (33). I argue that Latinx speculative authors call the validity of white heteropatriarchal notions of citizenship into question by queering the boundaries between the citizen and the monster and also between cultural and civil citizenship. With speculative fiction and its monsters, Latinx creators, scholars, and thinkers engage in epistemic disobedience and delinking and force the audience to consider this question of citizenship. They create new and different stories to combat dominant narratives and dismember and reimagine monstrous metaphors. In so doing, they create new possibilities for how to exist in the world as Latinx, queer, female, disabled, or other. Nuancing our understanding of monstrosity through works of speculative fiction is subversive because it nuances our understanding of citizenship and humanity and the rights contained therein.

With citizenship and humanity at stake, Latinx authors use speculative fiction to negotiate and intervene in this portrayal and assignment as monstrous with narrative. Because “Latin@s have been continually figured as the monstrous other in US popular culture” it is necessary for authors to engage with this metaphor to disrupt it (Merla-Watson and Olguín, 3). Working within dominant culture, within dominant systems, within dominant genres, Latinx producers push against their expectations and strictures. I further contend that to negotiate the metaphorical monster is to engage in public discourse, mediate public imaginary, and enact social change.

Methodology

Gothic monstrosity is defined by fear. That which calls into question the validity and normalcy of the dominant ideology is scary for those at its center. Critical Race Theory, Decoloniality, and anything else that decenters and challenges the perspective of the cisgender, heterosexual, white man, is perceived as a threat. This threat is reified with the monster, which is then mapped onto the bodies of marginalized people. Because those at the top of this hierarchical structure are few, the public must be enlisted to fight off the monster through gothic narratives which fearmonger. The gothic monster is built up in the imaginary through figurative language. In each text, I will examine how stereotypes that construct the monstrous other are defined, challenged, upheld, or reclaimed.

For me, research looks like a lot of reading, thinking, and writing. However, because I am a non-traditional student, this takes on non-traditional aspects. I listen to audiobooks and articles between dropping off children at school, while walking my dog, and while cooking. The material conditions of my life as a Chicana, a partner, and a mother do not disappear as I study. My thinking doesn't take place in a library or within the hallowed halls of academia. In fact, I am an entirely virtual student. My thinking happens in conversation with peers and mentors, but also with friends and family. I have a number of recordings of myself outside on a walk or in a car where I try to capture my thoughts and ideas as they happen. In talking to fellow non-traditional graduate students and friends, I realize that these experiences are not isolated, they are prevalent in the lives of Chicanas. A part of making education and academia equitable and accessible is accepting that for us it looks different, feels different, and sounds different. When I read any

book, I am looking with a queer, feminist, Chicana lens. This means seeing how my own experiences, those of my friends and family, line up with what I read. It means making personal connections. It means building understanding in dialog with the author.

In this thesis, I employ many rhetorical theories and scholars. These rhetoricians include Bernadette Marie Calafell, Romeo García, Damián Baca, and more¹. I have chosen to specifically cite marginalized scholars who build from the white, male major disciplinary figures like Aristotle or Foucault. Many come from the historical foundation of Aristotle and Michel Foucault. With these theorists, I set up the precedents for my work. They help me build a theory of decoloniality in rhetoric and writing. I also define essential terminology including delinking, disidentification, and epistemic disobedience. I take the ideas they have applied to other artifacts and materials and bring them in conversation with Latinx speculative literature and monstrosity.

Monstrosity is constructed in relation to citizenship. Therefore, I build from the works of multiple scholars in citizenship studies, several also rhetoricians, including Karma Chavez, Jillian Báez, Josue David Cisneros, and more². Again, I chose marginalized scholars who build from traditional scholarship for their nuanced perspective. Chavez's concept of alienizing logic, Báez's arguments regarding cultural citizenship, and Cisneros's understanding of border rhetoric help me develop different conceptualizations of citizenship of civil–legal membership within geopolitical borders—and cultural–group belonging regardless of legal status. From both Feminist and Latinx perspectives, they also call into question just what it means to be a citizen in affect and action. I tie in these ideas of citizenship into conversation with monstrosity and how they are negotiated within Latinx speculative fiction.

¹ Ellen Cushman, Kate Vieira, Haneen Shafeeq Ghabra, Steven Alvarez, Fatima Zahrae Chrifi Alaoui, Iris D. Ruiz, Sonia C. Arellano, and Shyam Sharma.

² Laila Lalami, Lisa Flores, Sasha Roseneil, Derek Heater, Kendall Phillips, Ersula Ore, Natalia Molina, William English, Christian Kock, Lisa S. Villadsen, and Emma Cohen de Lara

Many of these theorists build from Latinx and Chicax Scholars, many of whom come from intersectional perspectives including gender, sexuality, and disability. Anzaldúa's theories regarding nepantla and Coyolxauhqui, Anzaldúa, Moraga, Perez, and Sandoval's exploration of queer feminism within the Chicax community, Calvo-Quiros's scholarship on monstrosity, Cuevas and Gaspar de Alba's studies into Latinx queerness, and Arrizón's understanding of gender provided fundamental shifts in how we think about race, gender, and sexuality independently and intersectionality. Because these are also markers for monstrosity within the dominant white heteropatriarchy, I juxtapose these conceptualizations against each other and see how it plays out within Latinx speculative fiction.

The fight for the validation of Latinx identity and rights is ongoing. There is a long history of contention. Latinx people are not exactly white or Black, although they can be either or neither. Latinx is also a term which encompasses many different ethnonationalities. In order for Latinx scholars to conceptualize what this means, why it matters, and how it works in different spaces, they build from other minoritized scholars. This includes Black and critical race scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Toni Morrison, Frank B. Wilderson III, and more³. These scholars contribute essential ideas and language like double consciousness, intersectionality, and counterstory. Toni Morrison in particular theorizes how Black people are subjugated through the creation and circulation of the image and stereotype of an imagined version of a Black person. I too build from this theory to discuss the version of Latinx which exists in the dominant white imaginary to argue that Latinx speculative authors write to speak back against it.

This imagined version is monstrous. Therefore, from here, I move to understand how these othered groups are constituted as monstrous in the public imagination. I use work on

³ James Baldwin, bell hooks, W. E. B. DuBois, Achille Mbembe, Orlando Patterson, Michelle Alexander, Patricia Collins, Frantz Fanon, Alexander G. Weheliye, Carol Anderson, and Derrick Bell

metaphor which demonstrates how they are used and the material impact they have on people by Otto Santa Ana, William Nericio, George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson. These authors describe concepts like Cognitive Metaphor Theory and explore the role of language and imagery on the individual human brain which manifests as collective action by the public against minoritized groups. I use these texts to explain why it matters that Latinx speculative authors negotiate monstrous metaphors.

This monstrous metaphor has historical precedent. While the word monster was not always employed, the tropes and language of gothic monstrosity was. Historians I build from include Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Paul Ortiz, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. These scholars offer Critical Race histories from the perspectives of the oppressed. They trace histories and address rhetoric and imagery which was used to subjugate Native, Mexican, and Black people. These historical precedents allowed for present day rhetoric and monster making.

Examining contemporary rhetoric from popular media, politicians, and the pulpit, Edward Ingabretsen bridges these ideas into monstrosity to talk about how the monstrous metaphor impacts individuals. This work is important to my thesis because he makes the direct connection between rhetorical monster making in the media to collective action by the public to consequences for the individual.

I am examining Latinx monstrosity within literature, so I build off literary theorists. These include Norma E. Cantú, Cristina Herrera, and more⁴. However, many of my theorists I have listed in other groups, categories, or academic disciplines also do work in literature and theory. Additionally, as a bridge between literature and embodiment, here I will mention the performance scholarship I utilize including Micaela Díaz-Sánchez, Daphne Taylor-García, and

⁴ Ylce Irizarry, Drew Milne, Louis Althusser, Bertold Brecht, Roland Barthes, Raymond Williams, Trevor Boffone, and Terry Eagleton

more⁵. All of this monstrous talk takes place within horror and gothic genres and I rely on the theorists Judith Halberstam, María DeGuzmán, Tanya Gonzalez, Cathryn Merla-Watson, B. V. Olguín, Susana Ramírez, Teresa A. Goddu, and Mark Edmundson. Bridging from feminist, queer, historical, and Marxist literary critique, I focus in on the scholars who combine these perspectives in Latinx speculative fiction to tie it with rhetorical monster making.

From here, I move to understand monsters and monstrosity as a trope and construction. Based on my in depth reading of many scholars⁶, there are six major markers for monstrosity: culture, appearance, food, residence, weapons, and language. Each of these is considered monstrous for the ways in which it deviates from the white heteropatriarchal center and norm. These medieval ideas and understandings were brought forth to the conquest and colonialism and applied to the Native peoples in the Americas. These tropes of monstrosity have survived and are still routinely applied to marginalized groups, but especially those of multiple, intersectional marginalized identities. Additionally, according to Jeffery Jerome Cohen, “The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis” (64). Therefore, a monster is someone who does not adhere to the socio-cultural norms of the white heteropatriarchy and cannot be easily constrained to categories or binaries. In each work, I will detail how each of these categories on monstrosity is contended with. I created a chart and framework to organize my quotes and ideas from each focus text about each marker of monstrosity. In this way, I will demonstrate that working within the dominant culture, with identifiable modes, genres, and tropes, Latinx authors like Cherríe

⁵ Yolanda Broyles-González, Maria Lugones, and Roberto D. Hernández.

⁶ Jeffery Jerome Cohen, John Block Friedman, Asa Simon Mittman, Marcus Hensel, Michael Camille, Edward Said, Julia Kristeva, J. Halberstam, Rosemarie Garland-Thomas, Roger Luckhurst, David McNally, Sigmund Freud, Michael E. Heyes, Tzvetan Todorov, Eric Severson, David M. Goodman, Peter J. Dendle, Richard Ofshe, Ethan Watters, Timothy K. Beal, Emma Bridges, Djibril al-Ayad, Jana Byars, Hans Peter Broedel, Robert C. Schwaller, Elizabeth A. Lisot-Nelson, Linda L. Carrol, Andrew N. Sharpe, Richard E. Keatly, Jessica Oxendine, Elena Daniele, Jana Byars, Judith Bonzol, Kathleen Long, Amanda Boyd, Donna J. Haraway, Minji Lee, Sady Doyle, Lisa Kroger, Melanie R. Anderson, Jess Zimmerman, and Jane Ussher. Kinitra Brooks, Sami Schalk, Persephone Braham, Cynthia Saldivar, Luz María Gordillo, Linda Heidenreich, Patricia Saldarriaga, and Emy Marnini

Moraga, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, and Carmen Maria Machado queer our understanding of monstrosity and citizenship through the purposeful use of critical race methodologies like disidentification and delinking as a subversive act of epistemic disobedience.

CHAPTER II

AY, MIS HIJOS! RECLAIMING MONSTROSITY AND THE FUTURE'S POSSIBILITIES IN CHERRIE MORAGA'S *THE HUNGRY WOMAN*

Pórtate bien or la Llorona will come for you. La Llorona, El Cucuy, visiting spirits, floating lights, magic trees, egg cures: these folkloric figures and magical objects animated my abuela's stories along with tales of her own misdeeds and supernatural experiences. She used her stories, always flavored with resistance and resilience, as a tool to convey cultural memory and history. I, like many Mexican and Chicax⁷ children, grew up on folktales and horror, with caregivers frightening me into good behavior. Family members illustrated folklore as a teaching tool, historical record, cultural validation, and even "social protest" (Castro 2001, xiv). For many Latinx⁸ people, no distinct line exists between folklore and horror, the ghostly and ghastly continually crossing genres' borders. To that end, folk horror can be understood as people's stories and beliefs which engage with the horrific and terrible. For Chicax authors, folk horror bleeds into speculative fiction, which is "grounded in the Southwest and draws upon familiar folkloric figures" (Merla-Watson and Olguín 2017, 11). Further, contemporary queer Chicax cultural producers unframe—defined by Gaspar de Alba as undoing harmful framing, bordering, and blaming—folkloric figures from Eurocentric epistemologies and patriarchal gender scripts as a method of social critique. In other words, marginalized authors engage with the folk, the

⁷ Mexican American, gender neutral and trans inclusive

⁸ Latin American, gender neutral and trans inclusive

public, through stories with which they are familiar in order to alter how marginalized people are depicted and thereby understood and treated. Chicana speculative authors transform the public's preconceived notions by engaging directly with the colonial imaginary through their creative works. Latinxs are constructed as metaphorically monstrous in the US imaginary through many modes including popular media, public discourse, and political rhetoric. Monster as metaphor is "employed as a rhetoric of rebuke" to create exploitable fear and justify violence (Ingebretsen 2003, 2). These metaphors "shap[e] public opinion about Latinos" and lead to devastating material consequences. Luckily, public opinion and policy can be altered by "Renegade metaphors" which "replace ones that produce intolerant attitudes" (Santa Ana 2002, 11). Latina speculative authors reclaim and redeploy monstrous figures, subverting dominant ideological narratives, and asserting our fundamental human and citizenship rights because fiction bypasses audience logic to "speak directly to the limbic...system—bypassing the discursive (syllogistic) rationality" (Asma 2014, 955). Further, William Calvo-Quirós posits, "Monsters and the phantasmagoric have long been central to the Chican@ experience as reminders of our unresolved haunted histories of violence and oppression" (Calvo-Quirós 2017, 39). Additionally, "haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done" (Gordon 2008, xvi). In other words, by deconstructing and unframing the ghosts that haunt folk horror, queer Chicanxs make oppressive systems visible so that they might be changed.

This chapter specifically examines metaphors of monstrosity in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. In this play, the traditional Greek myth blends with the tale of la Llorona. Medea and all of the *jotería* have been cast out of Aztlán, recaptured homeland of Chicana people, to the ghetto borderland of Phoenix. Medea is betrayed by her husband, Jasón, and kills their son, Chac-Mool before dying herself. Additional characters include Medea's

lover, Luna, and her grandmother Mama Sal. The traditional chorus is replaced by “four warrior women who, according to Aztec myth, have died in childbirth” and represent the four cardinal directions (Moraga 2001, 294). These women also double as the minor characters in the play and often their words overlap with other characters, illustrating the shared nature of these violent and oppressive experiences. All characters are defined by their relationship to Medea. In this essay, I perform a close reading of key scenes to demonstrate how monstrosity is either cast off or reclaimed by Moraga through the character of Medea, archetypal bad mother, representative of la Llorona, and stand in for all disenfranchised Chicanas. This analysis reveals the need to reimagine the monster because metaphors matter.

Hemispheric Heuristic of Monstrosity

The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea adapts the traditional Greek tragedy to a third space dystopia filled with queer Chicanas. According to Emma Pérez, third space is an “interstitial space that third world women occupy,” “where agency is enacted through third space feminism,” and the “decolonial imaginary” is possible. Anzaldúa calls this in-between space the nepantla, where things are “br[oken] down” and “tak[en] apart” (Pérez 1999, xvi). By creating a space between temporalities and realities, Moraga reconstructs this play into a liminal third space of nepantla, where transformation is possible. Occupying liminal space between semantic categories, Medea is not just a victim or a villain: she is a chingona. A chingona “fucks gender, fucks with gender, fucks things up” (Cuevas 2018, 30). Chingonas, like Medea, fuck with the norms of white heteropatriarchy, making them monstrous from the dominant ideological standpoint. However, to Moraga, a queer Chicana, her power is evident. She calls the audience to consider exactly what makes a monster, nuancing the audience’s understanding and disrupting binary systems like citizen/monster or virgin/whore. Moraga unpins Medea from the gendered, colonial, religious scripts of marianismo to tie her more closely to the folk horror figure of La

Llorona. For Latinas and la jotería, Moraga reclaims the monstrosity, its power and its agency, by making Medea a chingona.

The Hungry Woman references major political violences in addition to the everyday oppression of Latinxs, queers, and women which inform Moraga's use of gothic monstrosity. Written in 1995, following the pivotal 1994 elections which gained the Republican majority in the Senate and elected Newt Gingrich, this work speaks back to the Chicano Movement, The English Only Movement, and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in addition to more general violence against Chicanxs, women, and queers. Though produced various times over the years but not widespread⁹, it has been influential in laying the foundation for other feminist, Latinx gothic works. Scholars who studied this work include Patricia Ybarra and Barbara Smith from a feminist and LGBTQIA+ perspective and Michelle R. Martin-Baron and Juan Ráez Padilla from the angle of myth and folklore. Tonya Gonzalez's "The (Gothic) Gift of Death in Cherríe Moraga's '*The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*'" informs this project for she is the first to explore this play through the lens of the gothic. Gonzalez's focuses on death, not as a curse or punishment, but a gift of freedom from heteropatriarchal oppression. I add that the control over life and death is emblematic of power, specifically Medea's, a queer Latina's, power. While Gonzalez concentrates on the genre's features, I focus on the figure of the monster through Medea.

Metaphoric monstrosity has been deployed against Latinx people from the conquest onwards. Foundational monster theorist Jeffery Jerome Cohen argues, "Representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic"

⁹ Commissioned 1995; Staged readings 1995, 1997, 1999, and two in 2000; Produced 2002 Celebration Theatre, 2005 The Pigott Theatre, 2006 The Leeds Theatre

(2020, 65). Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Persephone Braham, Patricia Saldarriaga, and others¹⁰ document the historic mapping of monstrosity onto indigenous and then Latinx bodies. Braham posits, “Embodying exoticism, hybridity, and sexual and other excesses, monsters sustained the ongoing conceptualization of the unknown that was a prerequisite to conquest” (2015, 2). This metaphoric monster making continued to the present to allow for construction and constitution of citizenship, explored by Josue David Cisneros, Karma Chávez, Natalia Molina, and more¹¹. Karma Chávez details the alienating logic used to construct a person or group as outsiders to be “separated or excluded” and “which is opposed, repugnant, or unaccustomed” specifically in relation to the citizen (2021, 6). These scholars answer the question of why the construction of the metaphoric monster in relation to BIPOC populations exists.

Scholars including Otto Santa Ana, William Nericcio, and Edward Ingebretsen detail the consequences of such rhetorical monster making. Building from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson and cognitive metaphor theory, Santa Ana contends that “Humans build their concepts of the word in terms of images...by means of metaphor” which leads to devastating material consequences for Latinxs, including linguistic terrorism, workplace and housing discrimination, and outright violence (2002, 8). Exploring this rhetoric of fear, Ingebretson argues metaphoric monster making is “language designed to hide the violence they enact” where “Monster-talk...is narrative and metanarrative...it tells a story, explains the story, and draws moral conclusions, simultaneously” (2003, 43). Monstrous metaphors deny citizenship and belonging, but also condemn and condone violence.

¹⁰ Paul Ortiz, Emy Manini, Robert C. Schwaller, Jessica Oxendine, Elena Daniele, and Jana Byars ¹¹ Lisa A. Flores, Leo R. Chavez, Lawrence Davidson, Laila Lalami

Building my framework for understanding monstrosity, I compiled many scholars¹² including Cristina Santos, John Block Friedman, and Jeffery Jerome Cohen. Combining the works of these scholars with those of Gloria Anzaldúa, I established a methodology to understand the major markers of monstrosity: appearance, diet, residence, weaponry, culture, language, references, and affect, which I will address here. Cohen posits “The monster is difference made flesh” (2020, 65). Friedman contends monsters make “the observer’s culture, language, and physical appearance the norm by which to evaluate all other people” (2020, 32). Clearly, monsters represent difference from the perspective of the dominant. Additionally, Anzaldúa argues, “woman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine, she must be protected. Protected from herself. Woman is the stranger, the other. She is man’s recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast. The sight of her sends him into a frenzy of anger and fear” (2021, 74). Conjoining these perspectives allows us to see the intersectional impact of metaphorical monster making because those marginalized groups have monsters of their own. As scholars like William Calvo-Quirós, María Herrera-Sobek, José Limón, and more illustrate, Latinx monsters are “more than just superstitious or naive figments of the ‘primitive’ imagination: they are sophisticated articulations” of interpersonal violence, systems of oppression, and discriminatory laws and policies (Merla-Watson and Olguín 2017, 16). Additionally, as I argue, Latinx cultural producers can dismember and redeploy monsters, negotiating the perception and treatment of marginalized groups.

La Llorona is the most well studied Latinx monster, ghost, and folkloric figure. In *Altermundos*, Merla-Watson and Olguín trace the genealogy of scholars which include “Norma Alarcón, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cordelia Candelaria, Ana Castillo, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Alicia Gaspar

¹² Marcus Hensel, Noël Carroll, Michael Camille, Edward Said, Julia Kristeva, Jane Ussher, Andrew Sharpe, Michael Heyes, Lisa Kröger, Melanie Anderson, Judith Halberstam Donna Haraway, Sady Doyle, Asa Mittman, Avery Gordon, Jess Zimmerman, Minji Lee

de Alba, Cherríe Moraga, Domino Renée Pérez, Emma Pérez, Tey Diana Rebolledo, and Sonia Saldivar-Hull, among many more” (Merla-Watson and Olguín 2017, 16). Domino Pérez posits that la Llorona is “alternately, and sometimes simultaneously, a person, legend, ghost, goddess, metaphor, story, and/or symbol”, often conflated with la Malinche/la Chingada, Malinalli Tenepal, Doña Maria, Coatlicue, and Cihuacoatl (Pérez 2008, 2). La Llorona stands “as a cultural counterpoint to La Virgen de Guadalupe’s maternal goodness” (Pérez 2008, 30). According to Alicia Arrizón, good women like La Virgen embody the qualities of “goodness, humbleness, dedication to family, and virginity” as opposed to “the undesirable traits...treachery, lying, deceitfulness, and sexual promiscuity” (2020, 154). These folkloric figures are often employed as behavioral guides and delimit socially acceptable behaviors for women. To that end, La Llorona has historically been understood from a folkloric perspective. Domino Pérez illustrates how traditional perspectives on La Llorona are “conservative or static”, preserving historic versions of her tale (2008, 16). However, to fully understand la Llorona, she must also be understood also in terms of horror and the gothic, of representing, haunting, and making visible the lingering harm which must be accounted for and rectified.

Archetypal Bad Mother

Cherríe Moraga mobilizes the seemingly monstrous figure of la Llorona to not only excavate specters of heteropatriarchal Chicano nationalism, but also begin to imagine a more liberatory future. I trace how Moraga dismembers the monster to further develop a Latinx epistemology of monstrosity. In a close reading of *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, I examine how Moraga disidentifies with both dominant and Chicanx gender scripts by dismembering the monster and unframing folkloric figures. I conclude that Latinx speculative authors engage in rhetorical acts of epistemic disobedience through art to alter the perception and

treatment of Latinx people in the US. The opening scene of Act I introduces Medea, sitting in a mental hospital:

MEDEA: Cover the mirrors, Nurse. I don't want my son to see me like this, red-eyed, crow's-feet drooping. I am a motherless sight... Bring out the purple cloths. We'll pretend it is Lent and we await the resurrection of my son, my holy son. I'll sleep until then, until he returns to me... The mirror is cold, impenetrable. You can never get inside it, unless you are a child or un muerto. I am neither, no longer, not yet... Tiny ghosts live inside me. The ghost of my own pathetic girlhood. (Moraga 2001, 298)

The chorus of Aztec warrior women, Cihuateo, have framed the play in the Aztec myth of Coatlicue becoming pregnant with Huitzilopochtli. They tie the traditional Greek myth to the Aztec and even Christian saying "So, too begins and ends this story. The birth of a male child from the dark sea of Medea" (Moraga 2001, 297). By tying together these disparate mythologies, Moraga alludes to Medea's archetypal nature. She is the ubiquitous and quintessential evil woman and monster.

This passage begins with Medea wanting to "Cover the mirrors" because she literally and metaphorically does not want to see herself. Anzaldúa understands the mirror as a symbol connected to Coatlicue. Throughout the play, Medea is repeatedly connected to Coatlicue, who is a "creator goddess" of Aztec mythology, the quintessential mother (2021, 86). Coatlicue, sometimes known as Coatlalopeuh, Tonantsi, Tlazolteotl, and Cihuacoatl according to Anzaldúa, underwent transformation following Catholic colonization. Her positive aspects were attributed to Tonantzin, who became la Virgen de Guadalupe, the good mother. Her "darker guises" which went on to include la Chingada and la Llorona were made into "putas", cementing the virgin/whore dichotomy (2021, 87). This connection to Coatlicue sets up the expectation that

Medea represents the archetypal bad mother. Through the mirror, we see and understand ourselves fully, including the shadow beasts we have striven to hide through desconocimiento. Therefore, Medea begins the play refusing to acknowledge or integrate the monstrous parts of herself, remaining trapped in the metaphorical Coatlicue State. Regardless of whether she can see the monster, the audience has her put on display.

Infidelity and infanticide mark the pinnacle of monstrous motherhood/womanhood. This passage transgresses temporality, remembering the past and foreshadowing the future, revealing Medea will commit both. Infanticide is referenced here as Medea is a “motherless sight”. Later in the play, the audience learns that Medea’s husband, Jasón, caught her and Luna in bed together, which led to Medea’s exile from Aztlán. Medea fled with her young son, Chac-Mool, representative of hope and the future. When Jasón tries to take their son back for the purpose of legitimizing his hold of Medea’s land, Medea kills Chac-Mool to release him from the cycle of violence of toxic masculinity. Rather than condemning her as an evil woman like her namesake or la Llorona, Moraga associates her with Christian mythology. This is done by constructing Chac-Mool as Christ, “the holy son” whose “resurrection” is anticipated during “Lent” with the “purple cloths”. The familiar folkloric figure of Jesus Christ is evoked in Aztec indigenous Chac-Mool who is equally worthy of worship, will release Medea from torment, and will be resurrected in a better future. Throughout the play, the line between human and monster is queered and blurred. Monstrosity is juxtaposed with holy. In this way, Medea holds the power of the monster, but is released from its violent cycle of oppression.

Additionally, past, present, and future blend together. Here, Medea is neither “child” nor “muerto”, “no longer, not yet”, however, all of these instances of Medea live inside her as “Tiny ghosts” in addition to the ghosts which are the monsters, cultural foremothers, folkloric figures,

and generational traumas. Referencing other ghosts as inside of Medea marks her as monstrous. From the outset of the play, Medea is entangled with the stories of women who have come before her, but in the end, she is released from the neverending pain, in a “gothic gift of death” where we can imagine a future of freedom (González, 2007). Unlike typical monsters, Medea’s character does not engage the audience in the affective dimension of monstrosity with fear, horror, revulsion, disgust, terror, etc. Instead, when the audience sees how Chac-Mool and Luna view her, we bear witness to Medea’s pain and pity her. Medea nuances our understanding of la Llorona, not simply a woman scorned who takes her wrath out on an innocent, but instead a trapped mother, desiring better for her child, who achieves freedom in the only way she can.

In addition to these temporal changes, the setting oscillates between the mental hospital and her home in Phoenix, “now a city-in-ruin, the dumping site of every kind of poison and person unwanted by its neighbors” which is “Located in the border region between Gringolandia (white Amerika) and Aztlán (Chicano country)” (Moraga 2001, 295). Sometimes, different locals occupy the same physical space on the stage. Residence also marks a monster, according to Friedman, with those outside of the boundaries and borders of the civilized world are barbarous, monstrous. Medea resides between two civilized countries and can belong to neither, to both she is an outsider, monster. This liminal border space is where monsters live. It is the *nepantla*. The changes in time and space further illustrate that Medea’s story is not solely her own, but that of many other women in different times and places.

In this passage, as throughout the play, Medea reflects internalized heteropatriarchy and colonialism. She laments her “red-eyed, crow’s-feet drooping”, complaining about her appearance, a common marker of monstrosity. For women, monstrous appearance is anything that displeases the male gaze with either too much or too little sexual appeal. As evidenced by

the virgin/whore dichotomy, women's place in society is dictated by her sexual availability and service to men. Cristina Santos defines how appearance and sexual availability define monstrosity through these four archetypes: the "ugly, old, overly intelligent woman" become "the crone, the witch, the hag", the "beautiful, young, expressive woman" become "the sirens, mermaids", the "sexually powerful, promiscuous" become "the vampires, succubi, whore, prostitute", and the "monstrous mother/Stepmother" become "La Llorona, fairy tale witch" (2017, xvii). As an amalgamation of these, Medea is monstrous. Further, when Medea's appearance is judged by the representative of the patriarchy, her husband Jasón, she is lacking, monstrous. When he talks of her beauty, it is always in the past tense. Medea uses this heteropatriarchal gaze to devalue and condemn herself. However, when Luna, Medea's lover, representative of the queer gaze, speaks of Medea's looks, she appreciates the current beauty. Moraga illustrates how attractive or not, Medea is undeniably human.

Feminine Monstrosity

Moraga uses Medea to critique the view of women within the Chicano Movement. According to Arrizón, this nationalist movement was "saturated with sexism, homophobia, and internal oppression" and women "were expected to perform the 'three fs': to feed, fight, and fuck their men" (2020, 163). Acting outside of these gendered expectations made a woman monstrous. In Act 1, Scene 2, Medea has received the letter from Jasón demanding the return of his son.

Reading aloud to Luna, Medea picks the letter apart:

MEDEA/JASÓN: "She reminds me of you, Medea. Your once-innocence. Your wide-eyed eagerness. She is the Medea you were before the war, before 'politics changed you...changed us...She bled for me, just as you did once'"

MEDEA: *Politics*. Men think women have no love of country, that the desire for nation is a male prerogative. So like gods, they pick and choose who is to be born and live and die in a land I bled for equal to any man. Aztlán, how you betrayed me! Y aquí me encuentro

in this wasteland where yerbas grow bitter for lack of water, my face pressed to the glass
of my own revolution like some huerfana abandonada (Moraga 2001, 301)

In this letter, sixty year old Jasón tells Medea of the nineteen year old girl he will marry.

Through his direct their direct comparison, his complaints reveal the aspects of Medea which he sees as monstrous, the shadow beast, that which displeases and frightens his male gaze. To be a good woman, Medea should be young, innocent, subservient, ever suffering, virginial, like la Virgen de Guadalupe, the only true virtuous woman. When viewed through the heteropatriarchal virgin/whore dichotomy, the only alternative for fallible, human women is to be monstrous like la Malinche or la Llorona. Further, a common marker for female monstrosity is treachery.

Tricking men makes you a monster, and Medea has tricked Jasón. Later, the audience discovers that Medea was not a virgin. As a child, she was raped by her brother. To convince Jasón of her virginity, she bit her tongue, literally, and spat the blood onto the covers. The version of Medea that Jasón remembers and compares his child-bride never existed except in his mind.

Additionally, Medea is compared to Circe, witch and monster of Greek lore, famous for entrapping a man through deceit. Jasón tells Medea that he “torment[s]” him and therefore she “should live on an island” (Moraga 2001, 326-327). She responds that she needs someone to notice and “accuse [her] of tormenting them with [her] beauty” (Moraga 2001, 327). Just like this witch out of Greek mythology, Medea ensnares and entraps men with her beauty. In the same way as Circe, Medea is victim to a man who takes what he wants and then leaves. While Medea thinks that she is securing a place for herself and her son in Aztlán by seducing Jasón, he later says that she can come live as his “ward” in his “second bed” and she is in no “position to negotiate” (Moraga 2001, 338-339). She refuses to be his “Juárez whore,” which alludes to the femicides in Mexico and the heteropatriarchal understanding of women as objects to be used and

discarded as a man sees fit (Moraga 2001, 338). Rosa Linda Fregoso elucidates, “What is now understood as various forms of ‘femicide’ started in 1993, a year after the signing of NAFTA, and continued on through the tenure of three Mexican heads of state” (2003, 1). Elsewhere in the play, Mama Sal, representative of the past, cultural memory, and history, discusses the harms of NAFTA with Chac-Mool, ensuring that he, representative of the future and hope, remembers. *The Hungry Woman* is about both preserving history and ensuring change for the future. In many ways, Medea relives the stories of her namesake, Circe, la Llorona, la Chingada, Coatlicue, and many other women. In the end however, Medea holds the power and is freed from this cycle. Medea’s response to Jasón’s letter speaks back to misogyny within the Chicano Nationalist Movement. Women, like Medea, were castigated for fighting for equality. They were left out of the revolution and faced violent consequences for participating. Medea is monstrous for her participation and for subverting the ideology in which men are “gods”, choosing who will “live and die”, when she takes power into her own hands and kills Chac-Mool (Moraga 2001, 301). Destruction of male property and progeny is the ultimate act of betrayal of her husband and assertion of her own power.

During Medea’s speech, she code-switches between English and Spanish. Language is a major marker for monstrosity. Anzaldúa enlightens that Chicanxs “are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration” because we mix languages and are therefore subject to “Linguistic Terrorism” (2021, 124). Civilized language is unambiguously the language of the powerful and remains within bounds. Lack of the dominant language or hybridity of languages is monstrous. Within the last sentence, as with much of the play, Medea repeatedly switches back and forth, mixing and blending languages, making her monstrous. Queering English and Spanish, Medea makes the boundaries between the two ambiguous, disidentifying with language as a marker for

monstrosity. Combining lores and languages allows the audience to see la Llorona as representative of the suffering of women the world over.

Gothic Monstrosity

From the queer of color standpoint, Medea is not monstrous for the ways in which she fails to live up to white heteropatriarchal expectations and gender scripts. Her monstrosity instead stems from the pain and violence she experiences and in turn inflicts upon others. The audience is called to enact the Coyolxauhqui Imperative and bear witness to this suffering. Medea is unlikable for the ways in which she hurts others, including her partner, Luna, representative of the queer of color gaze and Coyolxauhqui, Aztec goddess of the moon and Chicana feminist icon. Characterized by kindness, Luna cooks, cleans, creates, builds, plants, and tries to make things work. However, as Medea gets more and more stressed about Jason, she takes it out on Luna. Their relationship is fraught because of the world in which they are forced to live. In Act 1, Scene 8, Medea and Luna have been fighting and Medea laments:

MEDEA: You once thought me beautiful, Lunita. My hair the silky darkness of a raven's, the cruelty of Edgar Allan Poe's own, I know. I know you think me cruel...I'm not cruel, I'm dying. Dying to make sense of it...How is it you used to drink from me as if you yourself didn't taste the same coppered richness when you brought your own bloody fingers to your mouth...At night, I would lay awake and wonder, how is it she could worship me so...It doesn't matter now. I am the last one to make this journey. My tragedy will be an example to all women like me. Vain women who only know to be the beloved. Such an example I shall be that no woman will dare to transgress those boundaries again" (Moraga 2001, 318-322)

Importantly, again in this section, Medea aligns with divinity, worshiped by Luna. Additionally, Medea blends the lines between beauty and monstrosity. The juxtaposition of beauty with the

gothic suggests that the lines between human and monster, between desirable and detestable, are unclear and permeable. Medea is as beautiful as a fairytale princess like Snow White with raven black hair, but also cruel, deadly, and even vampiric, drinking of “coppered richness”. Moraga ties Medea to figures across folklores to gesture towards the widespread nature of this monstrous treatment of women. Moraga disidentifies with monstrosity by deconstructing beauty standards and appearance as a marker of monstrosity.

Weaponry also traditionally marks monstrosity with sophisticated and modern weapons denoting civility. Medea’s weapons are her beauty, words, and poison, all divergent from these norms. Female monsters are often defined by the sexual attraction they hold for men and the ability of that beauty to disarm and control men. Medea has used it this way, but through aging lost her desirability to the male gaze. However, she still “possesses a dark and brooding allure, akin to obsidian: a razor-sharp edge with a deep and lustrous sheen” (Moraga 2001, 329).

Throughout the play, Medea is angry and mean. She pushes people away and hurts them. Her grandmother warns that “You’re gonna push [Luna] so far away from you, she won’t be able to find her way back” (Moraga 2001, 302). Medea says “she doesn’t give a damn if [Luna] feel[s] exploited” (Moraga 2001, 313). Medea is “cruel,” “pissed off,” and “not fair” (Moraga 2001, 308). She uses her words to hurt others. In the end, Medea uses herbs as poison to kill first her son and then herself. Medea’s weapons of choice are not modern or masculine, guns or knives, but still effective. By giving these feminine tools power, Moraga disidentifies and delinks with heteropatriarchal thought, indicating the intrinsic power of women.

While not monstrous by some markers, as a warning sign, Medea is monstrous. Jeffery Jerome Cohen contents that “The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible” and “prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private

bodies may move” (2020, 69). Additionally, “The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis” and “refuses easy categorization” and “The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference” where “monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual”(Cohen, 2020, 64-65). Medea represents racial difference from white US society and gender difference from the Chicano movement. In between, she represents category crisis. More than anything, she herself states she stands to warn off all other women from following her path; her suffering will deter them. All of these monstrous standards, Medea meets. Moraga makes no attempt to throw off monstrosity entirely, instead she reclaims and redeploys it. The monster is scary, maybe if Medea is a monster, we can be scared into treating people like her, like la Llorona, better.

Reclaiming La Llorona y Madre Coatlicue

Throughout the story, allusions connect Medea and la Llorona. These references begin small with “I feel my hands as liquid as the river” (Moraga 2001, 303). Then, “Medea lets out a deep wail” (Moraga 2001, 332). Also, she asks “Do you smell my baby’s death” (Moraga 2001, 334). The Cihuataleo earlier retold a folktale of the hungry woman, connecting la Llorona and Medea to hunger. Historically, food has been one of the biggest markers for monstrosity. As Zimmerman argues, any hunger at all on the part of a woman is monstrous. However, the hunger represented in this story focuses not so much on the hunger for food, but for the desire for justice, recognition, equity, home, and more. Anzaldúa contends “Like la Llorona, Cihuacoatlé howls and weeps in the night, screams as if demented” because sometimes this is the only form of resistance afforded to BIPOC women (2021, 93). This is a cry of desperation for the injustice and oppression to be addressed, for all that has been kept from the lives of queer BIPOC women to be redressed. This is the Coyolxauhqui imperative: the call to bear witness to pain and put the pieces back together to enact change. This is the work which takes place in the nepantla, as Anzaldúa suggests, to transform both the past and the present and produce a better future. With

food, Moraga breaks down Eurocentric epistemologies and narratives. She delinks food from monstrosity and redeploys la Llorona as a powerful figure calling for social change. In Act 2, Scene 2 Medea literally transforms into and embodies La Llorona:

CIHUATATEO (*Changting*): All, viene La Llorona. Rivers rising. Cold-blooded babies at her breast...*They encircle Medea with the ghostly white veil of La Llorona. It is a river in the silver light. Medea and the sound of the children's cries drown beneath it* (Moraga 2001, 335)

The play begins with Coatlicue and ends with rewriting the ending of La Llorona's story. Moraga reintegrates the tales which colonization has separated, reclaiming the monstrous aspects of ourselves, and accepting the duality and ambiguity inherent to life.

In addition to this culmination of La Llorona references, this story is told in a non-linear fashion and Medea both haunts and is haunted by her past while she resides in a mental hospital. Unlike in the original Greek tale or in the Llorona folktale, Medea's child returns and releases her pain. Moraga has Chac-Mool, the child, the representation of the future, voice "La Llorona never scared me like she's supposed to...I felt sorry for her, not scared" (Moraga 2001, 316). The audience is called to witness Medea's pain, la Llorona's pain, again enacting the Coyolxauhqui Imperative. We as the audience and readers are called to heal generational and cultural traumas to reimagine what it means to be female or monstrous or both. Moraga blends Greek myth with the Mexican folklore and disidentifies with patriarchal Chicano ideology which paints women as monstrous. This epistemic disobedience creates the imaginative possibility of a future where la Llorona, Latinxs, and especially queer Latinas are seen and treated differently.

Conclusion

There are material consequences of metaphorical monster making. On August 2, 2019, Texas Governor Greg Abbott sent out "an anti-immigrant fundraising letter calling on

Republicans to “DEFEND TEXAS NOW” which “echoed the xenophobic rhetoric of Donald Trump, who as spoke of an ‘invasion’ of migrants”¹³. The very next day, a gunman cited Abbott’s words in his manifesto before driving 600 miles from Dallas to El Paso and killing twenty-two people. Like other proponents of the dominant white heteropatriarchy in the US, Governor Abbot’s language, narratives, and metaphors aim to contain, control, condemn, and even extinguish Latinxs. When Latinxs are portrayed solely as problems, “figured as monstrous, threatening, or beastly through stereotypes of the bandido, drug dealer, or gang member, and as actual monsters”, violence ensues, both short and long term, from the personal to policy level (Merla-Watson and Olguín 2017, 14). The violences of the past are remembered through stories of the gothic and ghostly which haunt our present, reminding us there is still much to be done to rectify the situation.

Reclaiming these ghosts, unframing them from their gendered and racial scripts, releasing them from their torment allows us to imagine the same might be possible for other Latinx women. Latinx Speculative Authors “engage crises in representation and create speculative historiographies” (Merla-Watson and Olguín 2017, 11) and thereby “the politics of the possible” (Saldívar, “Postmodern Realism”, 534). William Calvo-Quirós articulates that Latinx Speculative Productions “propos[e] (and produc[e]) a new world...constructed in the imagination but never completely disassociated from the ‘real’. Here, the real is perceived as temporal, as a stage toward a world that is based on the premise of equality and social justice” (2017, 39). Here, chronology is queered, past bleeding into present and future. Moraga reclaims monstrosity in *The Hungry Woman* with the figure of Medea, tying her to the ghost/monster la Llorona, and liberating her from the pain of the past and present to the hope of the future.

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/22/texas-governor-anti-immigrant-letter-el-paso>

The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea is a nepantla. It is in-between Classic Greek and contemporary Chicana traditions, between folklore and reality, between theory and embodiment, between past and future. It calls us to watch as things are broken down and put back together, to acknowledge our own roles in the pain experienced by the characters, to accept our own monstrous sides, and emerge monstrous ourselves. Through the lens of folk horror, this analysis shows Moraga redeploys monstrous metaphors in a discursive act of disidentification and delinking as epistemic disobedience. In this speculative work, Moraga subverts the dominant white heteropatriarchal ideology, makes visible the material harm caused to Chicana people as the direct result of gothic, monstrous rhetoric used against them, and directly comments on the destruction caused by US policy and practice. In negotiating the monstrous metaphor, Moraga engages the public's imaginary to intervene in affective economy and alter the treatment of Latinx people in the US.

CHAPTER III

MONSTRAS Y MUJERES: DISIDENTIFYING WITH MONSTROSITY IN SILVIA MORENO-GARCIA'S *MEXICAN GOTHIC*

In March 2021, Silvia Moreno-Garcia fumed on Twitter that not only was she not “told ahead of time that a Spanish edition of *MEXICAN GOTHIC* would be out by Minotauro” or provided with the translated copy, but that they were refusing to translate the title as she had requested. In this thread, she posted her message first in English and then Spanish commenting “keeping the title in English, in a book about colonization” was not only “muy irónico” but also “(bueno, y grotesco)” or grotesque. As a member of her audience, I was largely unsurprised, if dismayed, by this information, for it showcases the colonial ideology still prevalent throughout the Americas. This chapter explores these very tensions between women of color and colonialist powers.

Silvia Moreno-Garcia is a Mexican-Canadian author of speculative fiction. Born in Mexico in 1981, she immigrated to Canada in 2004 where she later obtained her master’s degree from the University of British Columbia in 2016. Moreno-Garcia calls herself “Mexican by birth, Canadian by inclination” and focuses her works on her homeland. This chapter examines *Mexican Gothic*, published by Del Rey Books, owned by Random House, in the US and Canada in 2020, which was a bestseller and “Hulu, ABC Signature Studios and Milojo Productions will adapt it for the small screen as a limited series”. Moreno-Garcia’s transAmerican perspective shines through her books and speaks to many people including the Latinx diaspora.

The United States, Canada, and Mexico are all colonized lands, infected by Eurocentric ideologies including white heteropatriarchy. In *Trans-Americanity*, José David Saldívar expands

on Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of Americanness to "conceptualize the coloniality of power as sharing axes of both domination and subjectification, articulated with labor, exploitation, and capital" to highlight "the ways the hierarchical relations of coloniality, power, ethnicity, racism, and scientific colonial modernity themselves shaped the Américas from their very invention" (xii). In other words, capitalist exploitation of labor from one country led to patriarchal, ethnic and gendered violence in another. Moreno-Garcia utilizes the metaphoric monster of the vampire to showcase these transAmerican, colonial systems of oppression and speak back to them.

In the US, Latinx people are constructed as metaphorically monstrous within the public imaginary through rhetoric which likens them to floods, hordes, plagues, murderers, rapists, gang members, and drug dealers. The devastating material consequences of this rhetorical monster making include violence, oppression, and death. I argue that to intervene in this affective economy, Latinx speculative authors engage with the imaginary through fiction, negotiating the figure of the monster. Contemporary authors like Moreno-Garcia build from the foundations of Anzaldúa and Moraga. This essay explores how Moreno-Garcia accomplishes this task in *Mexican Gothic* through disidentification and epistemic disobedience. Through epistemic disobedience, problematizing the known and naturalized to delink Latinx people from monstrous metaphors, Latinx speculative authors like Silvia Moreno-Garcia interrupt cycles of fear and violence.

Mexican Gothic

Mexican Gothic is a gothic horror story set in 1950s Mexico which centers around cousins Noemí and Catalina. Recently and hastily married to Englishman Virgil Doyle, Catalina moved to his ancestral home, High Place. Since their marriage, none of her family has seen or

heard from Catalina. When a strange letter which calls Catalina's sanity into question arrives, Noemí is tasked by her father to quietly travel to High Place and discover the truth of her cousin's situation. As the novel pushes forward, the reader is more and more immersed in the atmosphere, the gloom, and the terror which are emblematic of High Place. As it turns out, Howard Doyle, the patriarch, has gained a form of immortality with a mystical mushroom and seeks to extend his power and fortune regardless of expense in human lives. The Doyle line is declining, after hundreds of years of incest, and require new blood to invigorate and perpetuate it. First Catalina and then Noemí, who is forced to marry Francis, are brought into the family for such a purpose. In High Place, they are monitored, controlled, belittled, gaslit, and violated. After fighting for their lives and destroying High Place and its inhabitants, Noemí and Catalina escape with the youngest son and ally, Francis Doyle, in tow. However, the conflicts and terrors of the story are never fully resolved and the audience is left to speculate what the true outcome will be. Have they defeated the monster? Or will it return again? In this work, the critiques Moreno-Garcia made in her thesis live on, as she reimagines monstrosity as a way to castigate white heteropatriarchy.

Criticism of *Mexican Gothic* by readers and academics focus on purposeful choices by Moreno-Garcia which disrupt Eurocentric epistemologies. Issues with pacing and an unlikable female protagonist are the top complaints on Goodreads. I contend that these are both purposeful acts of decolonization on the part of Moreno-Garcia because gendered norms and narrative structures are both rooted in European colonial oppression. Additionally, the academic concern expressed in Elizabeth Nichols', a white, female, Latinx Literature professor, review is that the book is not "Mexican enough" (113). While she concedes that the novel captures the essence of the gothic novel with "decaying/gloomy houses, damsels in distress, supernatural elements, and

intense emotions”, she finds it fails “to take advantage of the ‘Mexican’ uniqueness of its setting” (Nichols 111). I argue, rather than “simply transport[ing]” the “decaying English house...to the Mexican countryside” in a “lack of originality”, Moreno-Garcia constructs a delicate and powerful rhetorical argument which showcases the harm of forcing Eurocentric ideologies on the Americas (111-112). Nichols entirely misses the point of the novel because the lack of “specificity of place (Mexico)” is intentional (112). The British gothic is purposefully superimposed on the Mexican setting, mirroring conquest and cultural control, to critique and condemn European colonialism. Under the colonial legacy of white heteropatriarchy, Mexican culture is nearly erased. *Mexican Gothic* demonstrates for the reader the harm caused by historical colonialism and its contemporary ramifications.

Additionally, this use of genre helped *Mexican Gothic* gain immense popularity, both a best seller and optioned for television. Moreno-Garcia employs the rhetorical genre constraints of the traditional British gothic, steeping the reader in ambiance, recalling emblematic works including *Wuthering Heights*, *Rebecca*, *Jane Eyre*, *Dracula*, and *The Yellow Wallpaper*. By utilizing the rhetorical genre constraints of the gothic novel, including atmosphere, pacing, terror, horror, and the monstrous other, and adjusting the conventions, setting, heroine, message, Moreno-Garcia constructs a powerful argument. The ubiquitous gothic which underlays the dominant Eurocentric culture in the Americas is easily understood and accessible to audiences. With it, Moreno-Garcia can engage them in a critique, make their ideology evident to them, and redirect the affective economy.

Latina cultural productions have the power to display for the reader their ideology and challenge them to confront their prejudice. To do this, they challenge the reader’s ingrained perception of monstrosity and demonstrate true evils through monstrous metaphors. These

authors blur normalized borders between binaries such as human/monster. As fiction, cultural productions like novels allow the reader a safe and accessible way to experience realities of racial oppression they might not otherwise encounter and makes it impossible for them to deny their reality.

Theorists like Louis Althusser and Bertolt Brecht illustrate the connections between art, ideology, affect, empathy, and social change. Althusser argues that art has the ability to "make us 'perceive' ... the very ideology in which [the art is] held" (271). Therefore, in a contemporary piece, art has the ability to display for the audience their own ideology. By challenging the preconceptions of the reader about the mythical monstrosity of BIPOC and challenging its epistemological foundations, queer Chicana authors make the reader's ideology evident. Brecht, a playwright, argues that "theatre may allow [the audience] to enjoy as entertainment that terrible and never-ending labour which should ensure their maintenance, together with the terror of their unceasing transformation" (135). His point seems to be that change is difficult and scary, so art is necessary to engage people in it. Both Althusser and Brecht share the point of view that art can show the audience issues in society and call for change. Fiction, in a paraphrase of Brecht, must be cunning in order to tell the truth of racism and its effects in the world, even to readers who might otherwise resist or deny their culpability.

The stories we tell are an opportunity to reconstruct and understand ourselves and our histories. Fiction and art are powerful because they engage the imagination. Anzaldúa argues that in order to be enacted, something must first be imagined: "Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands Critical*, 157). She further argues that the mind and body "reac[t] equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to 'real' events" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands Critical*, 99). As a political activism, she

considers stories to be “‘enacted’ every time they are spoken aloud or read silently” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands Critical*, 135). Fiction can be a nepantla, a liminal space between ontologies, where transformation is possible. Fiction can force us into the Coatlicue state by forcing us to know, to see, to understand reality as different than we have been taught. Art builds the bridge between the reality we have and the future we want. In *Mexican Gothic*, the monstrous other is not Noemí, although the dominant ideology would construct dark skinned Mexican women as such. Instead, monstrosity is removed from her and assigned instead to the representatives of colonialism and white heteropatriarchy, the Doyle family.

In order for the reader to view their own ideology, fiction by marginalized people evokes strong emotions and fosters connection between the reader and the characters. Chicana Feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa illustrate both the power and function of art as activism. Because the woman of color cannot “escape from race or gender...color and sex” when creating art, her “creativity is political” and her art is a “politically subversive gestur[e]” (Anzaldúa, *Haciendo Caras*, xv-xxiv). She further argues, “I have never seen so much power in the ability to move and transform others as from that of the writing of women of color” (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 33). With the power of writing, we move ourselves from the margins to “the foreground, the background, and the figures predominating” (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 115). As peoples of colonized lands, we are born into a “frame of reference” that is “white, male, and heterosexual” (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 115). Moreno-Garcia is making that frame plain by using it as the frame of her story as well. We have to first see the frame before we can break it.

The Gothic and its Monsters

As a recent novel, *Mexican Gothic* has no published research or criticism on it yet. However, there is much research done on the Gothic. Generally, the British Gothic is marked “as

beginning with Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* [1764] and continuing through the 1820's" with a "recognized coterie of authors" including "Walpole, Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, Godwin, Gohh, Maturin, Mary Shelly" (Goddu 3). Gothic texts are generally marked by "Darkness—an absence of the light associated with sense, security, and knowledge", "disturbances of sanity and security, from superstitious belief in ghosts and demons, displays of uncontrolled passion, violent emotion, or flights of fancy to portrayals of perversion and oppression", and "supernatural possibility, mystery, magic, wonder and monstrosity" (Botting 2). These texts "register revulsion, abhorrence, fear, disgust and terror" (Botting 2). The gothic has a history of critical and academic dismissal, "bemoaned" for its "crude taste" and as "popular fiction" (Botting 13). The British gothic was a popular mode during colonization and continues to influence art of the Americas today.

Popular media and public discourse utilize gothic metaphors to construct an imagined version of Latinx people as dirty, illiterate, poor, thieving, raping, drug dealing, gang members. Otto Santa Ana's *Brown Tide Rising* and William Nericcio's *Text-Mex* discuss the import of the language, rhetoric, and metaphors used to describe Latinx people and the material impact it has on their lives. Josue David Cisneros's *The Border Crossed Us* and Karma Chavez's *The Borders of AIDS* discuss the purpose of such metaphors and rhetoric which constitutes citizenship and justifies exclusion and oppression. Edward Ingebretson's *At Stake* illustrates the impact of rhetorical monster making on individual lives. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's *Not A Nation of Immigrants* and Persephone Braham's *From Amazons to Zombies* argue that these metaphors have historically been mapped onto Native peoples to justify conquest and colonization. Cathryn Merla-Watson's *Altermundos* posits that gothic and horror are apt modes for Latinx cultural producers because of these metaphors and the violence they illicit and condone. I argue that

Latinx speculative authors redeploy monstrosity to intervene in this affective economy and alter the perception and treatment of Latinx people.

At the most basic level, a monster is that which deviates from the dominant ideological and cultural norm. In the US, this means the cis het white man. From an extensive survey of monster theorists including John Block Friedman, Jeffery Jerome Cohen, and more, I assembled a list of the most common markers of monstrosity: culture, appearance, food, residence, weaponry, language, references, and affect. Culture is the center from which all other markers branch because monstrosity is contextual. I explore how these monster markers are removed from Noemí and reassigned to Howard and Virgil Doyle, focusing largely on connections to vampires and Dracula.

The vampire is one of the most famous monsters of gothic fiction. A reason for this may be its ubiquity and as Theresa Bane posits “Vampires are without a doubt the single most adaptable monster that mankind has ever dreamt up” (1-8). Different myths assign vampires different characteristics including aversion to sunlight, drinking blood, draining health/vitality/energy, avoidance of mirrors, crucifixes, and garlic, biting, giving blood, or even “causing plagues and death” (Bane 1). Dracula is by far the most famous vampire, who builds from these folklores, and whose “cultural importance”, according to Robin Wood, “clearly begins with Stoker’s novel” (388). From its 1897 publication, *Dracula* has haunted the public imaginary and has been well studied by academics. Exploring the folkloric connections to Dracula, Alexis Milmine suggests that “Dracula works on...primal fear” inherent to humans and communicated through folklore (54). Dracula is a cultural symbolism of “the monstrosity transmitted by the contact with the full alterity of such oriental aliens” (Marín 35). Raphaella Delores Gomez follows this line of thinking to explore the orientalizing of Dracula as a method of conveying and confirming fear of

the non-European other, positing that Stoker's vampiric imagining is filled with "racially prejudiced sentiments" fueled by "Scientific Racism" (75). Dracula's historical foundation traveled across oceans as he did, not in boxes of dirt, but in pages and minds.

From its British origins, the gothic and its monsters were often used to condemn alterity. When adopted by authors of other nationalities, the modes and metaphors gained flexibility. Scholars who explore Spanish vampire fiction include Maria do Carmo Mendes, who connects Dracula to Don Juan as two literary figures "who stand out in the Western canon as symbols of seduction" (271). She contends that these two archetypal figures share cultural impact, "sexual and social treat", "aristocratic origin", mesmerizing power", "irresistible fascination", "illegitimate and even immoral advances", and "absolute control of the opposite sex" (271). In this way, Mendes connects Dracula to Spanish legend. Critically, Alfonso Sastre relays the "long-standing metaphorical meaning of vampiro" in Spanish as "profiteer" who bled the working class dry (56). This follows David McNally's analysis of Marx's "language of monstrosity" calling capitalism vampiristic (15). Further connecting capitalism and vampirism, William Calvo-Quiros analyzes the Mexican folklore monster of the Chupacabra, arguing "Chupacabras is more than just a naive livestock-blood-sucking creature, but rather it represents a sophisticated entity that carries within it the violent struggles lived by communities of color, because of the local impact of global neoliberal policies, as manifested by late capitalism" (212). These vampiric monsters, whether they suck blood, soul, or production, drain populations are employed by Latinx authors to make the violence of systems of oppression visible. Adriana Gordillo argues "Vampires, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, have been a symbol that aids discussions related to race, gender, and capitalist production systems" (252). In *Mexican Gothic*, Moreno-Garcia blends

traditions of the gothic, the vampire, and the monster in epistemic disobedience as a method of intervention in the colonially constructed, transAmerican, affective economy.

Dismembering the Monster

Mexican Gothic is told from a limited 3rd person point of view focused on Noemí, the protagonist, a dark-skinned Mexican woman. Within the colonial imaginary, women like Noemí are constructed as metaphorically monstrous for their gender, ethnicity, and phenotype. Moreno-Garcia methodically delinks these elements from monstrosity in a rhetorical appeal to logic. When each marker of monstrosity is broken down and removed from Noemí, representative of Mexicanas, the audience is left with the conclusion that it is impossible for her to be the monster. If we can see Noemí as human, worthy of humane treatment, then perhaps we can move to see other Mexican women as such as well.

The first chapter introduces Noemí and illustrates her background and character: wealthy, aristocratic, well educated, and high class. She is described as follows:

“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 at Monserrat—a private school, of course—and was expected to devote her time to the twin pursuits of leisure and husband hunting”

(Moreno-Garcia 6)

Unlike monsters, Noemí is unmarked by differences in culture, appearance, language, or residence. She is beautiful and fashionable, fitting right in with her society. Monsters diverge from cultural norms, but for the most part, Noemí appears to conform. The only way in which she challenges them is the gendered scripts and expectations. Noemí is independent, strong minded, and willful but never monstrous. She is also shown to be frivolous and self serving in

this introductory chapter. She “cycle[d] through admirers on a regular basis and was quite capable of wearing four outfits in a single day” (Moreno-Garcia 11). According to her father, she is “on a slow course to nowhere” (Moreno-Garcia 11). While Noemí wants to obtain a master’s degree, her father thinks the university is “both a waste of time and unsuitable with all those young men roaming the hallways and filling ladies’ heads with silly and lewd thoughts” (Moreno-Garcia 12). Her mother is “equally unimpressed by these modern notions of hers” (Moreno-Garcia 12). Valuing neither her time nor pursuits, Noemí’s father does not hesitate in calling her home from a party and sending her to the country to check on her cousin, Catalina, who he worries may be going crazy. Like Jonathan Harker of *Dracula*, Noemí is sent as an envoy to the monster’s abode.

The Doyle family reflect dominant white heteropatriarchal views, treating Noemí poorly from the moment she arrives in High Place. This mistreatment ranges from passive aggressive, irritated, hostile, or outright violent. In chapter 6 Noemí reflects on how the Doyle family views her:

"Virgil had been absolutely irritated with her when they had spoken the previous day. Noemí remembered what Virgil had said about men doing as she wanted. It bothered her to be thought of poorly. She wanted to be liked...women needed to be liked or they'd be in trouble. A woman who is not liked is a bitch, and a bitch can hardly do anything: all avenues are closed to her” (Moreno-Garcia 58)

Noemí has been attempting to follow through with the task her father assigned her and abide by the Doyle family’s rules. While she has not been in High Place long, she already senses she is unwelcome. She immediately and repeatedly asks to see her cousin. However, any and all questions regarding her condition are met with gaslighting. Noemí’s audacity to push back and

question anger Virgil Doyle, who is unused to being held accountable as a privileged adult white male. Noemí is hesitant to push him too far though because she is aware of what the consequences could be. Monstracizing language, calling a woman a bitch, removes humanity and leads to condemnation. The Doyle family represents white heteropatriarchy and cycles and systems of oppression and abuse. While Noemí attempts to operate within this system, she is unable to help her cousin. Regardless, symbols of abusive colonial systems do not like to be challenged. Within High Place, Noemí is not treated like the pinnacle of society she is accustomed to at home in Mexico City. Instead, here, she is made to seem out of place and unruly, unlikable. She is repeatedly called an object, thing, or “creature” (Moreno-Garcia 88). Regardless of how they see and treat her, she is still not monstrous.

Noemí is never connected to monstrosity through allusion. Instead, she is aligned with Jonathan Harker of *Dracula*. In Chapter 8, Noemí finally obtains the second opinion she was told she could have on Catalina’s condition. However, following the doctor’s departure, Virgil maneuver’s her into speaking with him alone and she feels uncomfortable in his presence. He questions whether or not Noemí is a “good Catholic” (Moreno-Garcia 89). Suddenly, Noemí feels anxious about the “absence” of “the cross” around her “neck” (Moreno-Garcia 89). In *Dracula*’s presence, Jonathan Harker feels comforted by the cross given to him. Noemí lacks this comfort. Later in the novel Noemí is truly trapped in High Place, unable to escape or run away, much like Jonathan Harker. Like *Dracula*, Virgil commands her “to write a few more letters, to assuage [her father’s] concerns” (Moreno-Garcia 238). This parallels the scene where the Count forces Jonathan Harker to write to Mina convincingly enough that she doesn’t turn up and wind up in danger. Additionally, repeatedly throughout the novel, Noemí suffers from disturbing

dreams which transgress the border with reality, just as Harker did. Overall, Noemí plays the part of the protagonist, juxtaposed against the monsters, Virgil and Howard Doyle.

Redeploying the Vampire

Moreno-Garcia pulls heavily from traditional gothic tropes in *Mexican Gothic*, but redeploys them to alter their messaging. In Stoker's *Dracula*, the gothic is used to reify racial prejudice. Stoker invokes Shakespeare when Lucy writes to Mina of Desdemona, commenting on the horror and scandal not of murder, but of her being killed by "a black man" (34). In *Mexican Gothic*, repeated allusions are made to Hamlet, a play not often read as gothic but containing many of its elements including death, ghosts, and insanity. Ophelia/Catalina is in love with the second in command, Hamlet/Virgil. Hamlet/Virgil convinces Ophelia/Catalina of his love before rejecting and gaslighting her in a repeated abusive tactic. Hamlet, like Virgil, displays a misogynistic ideology and believes "frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.146). Ophelia, like Catalina, has been trained by patriarchy to be obedient and passive and is eventually driven from her mind and sensibilities. Additionally, Catalina reminds Noemí of the painting of "Ophelia dragged by the current, glimpsed through a wall of reeds" (Moreno-Garcia 48). All of these connections serve as foreshadowing, appeals to pathos, and the signal that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.90). Just as in Hamlet, the source of the contaminant is "poison" both physical and metaphorical (Bevington 546). When Moreno-Garcia references Shakespeare, it serves to gain the attention and authority of the Classics, but also to critique patriarchy. Virgil Doyle plays not just one monster/villain, but multiple. In addition to Hamlet, he is also his namesake Virgil of Dante's *Inferno*, leading Noemí into the depths of hell, and Dracula. Virgil, who sits at the right hand of his father, is also "fair-haired, blue-eyed" and with a "coolly sculpted face" (Moreno-Garcia 32). He is "imperious" and has "the stamp of authority here" (Moreno-

Garcia 32). Like Dracula, he is aristocratic in bearing. Although he is “handsome. Like a sculpture” his face is like a “death mask” (Moreno-Garcia 33). Noemí characterizes Virgil as “a carnivore, high up the food chain”, a predator (Moreno-Garcia 145). Maria do Carmo Mendes’s analysis of the commonalities between Don Juan and Dracula align in Virgil. She argues “Don Juan and Dracula, relentless predators of the female sex, can both be regarded as ‘fatal men’” and “Both characters are seductive and terrifying. For a short moment, they can trick their victims and look fascinating. But fear almost immediately becomes the sole reaction to their presence” (276 & 280). This is Virgil in a nutshell. It can be confusing to the audiences because at times it seems as if Noemí is attracted to him and it is unclear if it comes from her own mind and free will or his.

Virgil, like Dracula, repeatedly sexually harasses and assaults. This is especially showcased in Noemí’s nightmares that verge on reality: “Noemí snapped her eyes open...the bathrobe she was wearing was not cinched; it lay loose and open showing her nakedness. She was barefoot. The room she stood in lay in shadows...Virgil Doyle, sitting in his bed...regarded her” (Moreno-Garcia 184). Noemí had been taking a bath and, unbeknownst to the reader, fell asleep and began having extremely vivid dreams of Virgil in the bathroom with her. In the tub, naked, under his gaze, she cannot move or speak, causing “Shame and surprise and anger [to shoot] through her body” (Moreno-Garcia 182). He begins to undress and “She was petrified, like the unwary character in an old myth. She was the victim of the gorgon” (Moreno-Garcia 182). He kisses her mouth and neck, “pausing to bite at the top of her breast” (Moreno-Garcia 183). Ramón del Valle-Inclán explores non-traditional adaptations in “Satanás” where the vampire does not drink blood from the neck but instead “leaves visible bite marks on...breasts” (16). Here, Noemí does not protest and in fact experiences some arousal, but she does not

consent. The monstrous imagery used surrounding Virgil illustrates that he is the monster and she is the victim. The dream abruptly shifts and shifts again before she finds herself standing in Virgil's room. Mendes argues "Don Juan and the vampire are always related to darkness" just as Virgil is here. Virgil is a sexual predator and threat who wants to rape Noemí to exert his power over her and force her to comply with the white heteropatriarchal world order. With Virgil, Moreno-Garcia engages in the affective economy by directing audience terror and fear towards him and the systems of oppression he represents.

The most obvious Dracula references are attached to the patriarch, Howard Doyle. When Noemí entered the house for the first time, she noted an empty space on the wall and conjectured it might be a missing mirror. Dracula too hates and destroys mirrors. All of the descriptions of Howard Doyle create a mood of danger. Upon first meeting him in Chapter 3, Noemí describes him thusly:

"Old would have been an accurate word to describe him. He was ancient, his face gouged with wrinkles, a few sparse hairs stubbornly attached to his skull. He was very pale too, like an underground creature. A slug, perhaps. His veins contrasted with his pallor, thin, spidery lines of purple and blue" (Moreno-Garcia 28-29)

The family is dining together and Noemí directly contrasts the food at High Place with that at her home. This serves to attach the Doyles to monstrosity as food is a major marker. Noemí is accustomed to light night time meals of "pastries and coffee with milk" rather than the "chicken in an unappealing creamy white sauce with mushrooms" she is served here (Moreno-Garcia 28). Additionally, this passage is filled with monstrous imagery for Dracula also has "the general effect...of extraordinary pallor" (Moreno-Garcia 16). Additionally Howard, like Dracula, does not eat with the family, instead watching, "vivisecting" Noemí with his violent and oppressive

gaze (Moreno-Garcia 29). Howard immediately makes his white supremacist ideology evident through commenting on her “darker” coloration and discussion of eugenics (Moreno-Garcia 29). Additionally, Howard, like Dracula, is “half enveloped in shadows” (Moreno-Garcia 29). Further, multiple times characters comment on how Howard “brought boxes filled with earth from Europe” just as Dracula did in order to travel (Moreno-Garcia 126). These references to Dracula in appearance, food, and residence all serve to construct Howard Doyle as monstrous. All of these references to *Dracula* serve multiple purposes. They are a way of engaging in the rhetorical genre of the gothic by illustrating genre awareness and employing genre conventions. They are also a rhetorical appeal to pathos to engage in the affective economy through an atmosphere of terror. Finally, by comparing characters here to characters from a classic novel, Moreno-Garcia associates her own novel with tradition and authority.

Later in the novel, allusions connect Doyle to other vampire myths. When Noemí has finally given in and decided she will leave to fetch help, she is coerced into attending a final supper and saying goodbye to Howard. Here, the family communally assault Noemí:

“They shoved her down...hand behind her neck. Howard Doyle turned his head upon the pillow and looked at her. His lips were as bloated as his leg, crusted with black growths, and a trail of dark fluid dripped down his chin, staining his bedclothes...Howard Doyle smiled at her, showing off his stained teeth...then he pressed his lips against hers. Noemí felt his tongue in her mouth and the saliva burning down her throat as he pressed himself against her and Virgil propped her in place” (Moreno-Garcia 204)

In this scene, there are multiple references to Noemí’s neck, although it is never bitten. Additionally, in some vampire lore, the vampire must not just bite but share their blood to turn someone. This is what Doyle does here. He infects her with his bodily fluid to attempt to turn

and control her. Additionally, in some lore that blood contains memories. Immediately after being forced to consume this black fluid, Noemí begins to experience visions of the Doyle past and learns of the many disgusting things they have done. She discovers that Howard Doyle is the reiteration of the original Doyle who came to Mexico. Through the use of a mystical mushroom, he has passed his consciousness from body to body. She learns of the family's incest, murder, and cannibalism, all monstrous.

Further, Doyle is connected to the vampire metaphor for extractive capitalism. Following this episode, Noemí understands that the numerous deaths of the Mexican silver mine workers under the Doyle family were not from a plague but from the malevolent and oppressive presence of the gloom, or Howard Doyle's mind. Bane argues "Throughout history, every culture of man has had an incarnation of the vampire, a being responsible for causing plagues and death" and Howard Doyle really is responsible for the deaths in this village (1). He calls the Mexican dead and their bodies "Mulch" to feed the house, the fungus, and the Doyles (Moreno-Garcia 236). Capitalism drove the Doyles from England to Mexico: "Mining has always been [The Doyle's] trade, and it all began with silver...In England" and they "came chasing more silver here" (Moreno-Garcia 244). Their family symbol is the serpent and Noemí realizes "The serpent does not devour its tail, it devours everything around it, voracious, its appetite never quenched" (Moreno-Garcia 244). This plays off of the outsize hunger and monstrosity trope. The monster here is extractive capitalism. Howard Doyle drains the community of its workforce and lifeblood. Even the surrounding town is worn down and colorless because of him. The nearby town is like a ghost town with "few signs of activity", "musty air", "color peeling", "doors...defaced", and "flowers...wilting" (Moreno-Garcia 17). It doesn't just represent itself. This town represents "Many formerly thriving mining sites that had extracted silver and gold

during the Colonia” (Moreno-Garcia 17). Once Noemí leaves the immediate area, she realizes that the countryside is beautiful and it is “the house that disfigured the land” (Moreno-Garcia 60). Colonialism is the blite condemned through this metaphoric monster making of Howard Doyle.

In *Mexican Gothic*, High Place and Howard Doyle evoke two major emotions of monstrosity: terror and horror. Terror is “high art”, full of fear and anticipation (Kröger and Anderson 25). Horror is “sheer and blinding fear followed by blood and guts”, a “low art” which “destroys feeling” (Kröger and Anderson 25). Horror is immediate and disgusting. High Place, the residence of Howard Doyle and his family, is home to monsters. Howard Doyle is the monster. He is horror. His home is terror and builds off of most traditional gothic markers with the exception of country placement. With the descriptions of the house and land surrounding it, tension, apprehension, and fear are built within the reader. This place is “wilder” and the rhetoric used includes “ravines”, “mist”, “fallen off a cliff”, “quick death”, “faltered” which create an atmosphere of fear (Moreno-Garcia 19). This is all very atmospheric and filled with aesthetics of the gothic. These rhetorical appeals to pathos create a mood of unease. This is a once prosperous place in a state of decline and decay. High Place is a “horrid house” where “It’s very difficult...to discern what’s real from what’s false” (Moreno-Garcia 236, 242). This place is “foreboding, evoking images of ghosts and haunted places” (Moreno-Garcia 20). The house is described as “ghastly”, “damp”, “dark”, and “very cold” (Moreno-Garcia 49). Noemí reflects the pessimist standpoint that there is no going back, repairing, or improving from a flawed foundation, but the house instead should be “razed” and “built...anew” (Moreno-Garcia 49). High Place is an “opulent cage” (Moreno-Garcia 71). Every single room is marked by decay and while observing it with Noemí, we are made to feel her claustrophobia and disgust. This

atmosphere of doom and gloom is built through gothic rhetoric and appeals to pathos. As Noemí walks into the house “The faces of long-dead Doyles stared at [her] from across time” all “fair-haired” and each “face blended into another” (Moreno-Garcia 22). This long history of white supremacy is a legacy that haunts the home and community and now Noemí. Noemí characterizes High Place as “a place of hopelessness”, “forlorn” with “shabby grimness” (Moreno-Garcia 83-84). Noemí tours the “greenhouse” which is “like the postscript and the end of an awkward letter” where “Neglect had flourished” with “dirty glass panels and broken glass aplenty” in addition to the “water” which had “seeped in” and the “mold” which “caked the planters” (Moreno-Garcia 87). Here, like elsewhere in the house there is the image of “a twining serpent” where the “snake eats its tail” (Moreno-Garcia 87). Noemí recalls seeing it “around the house” and Virgil explains that it is “the ouroboros”, the family “symbol” which represents “The infinite, above use, and below” (Moreno-Garcia 87). It consumes itself, it is forever doomed to cause itself pain and suffering, and it also consumes everything alive and dead in its path. This ever present snake, mark of Howard Doyle, phallic symbol, represents patriarchy. Through these descriptions of the house and the nearby town, Moreno-Garcia builds her argument, critiquing white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. All of this death and decay is the direct result of those oppressive, systemic forces.

In the end, in order to escape with her cousin, Noemí burns High Place down with its inhabitants, save Francis Doyle. However, this ending is dissatisfying and incomplete. Did good triumph? Will evil resurface? We do not know. In fact, the reader is pointed at the distinct possibility that these monsters are not defeated. Firstly, there are the allusions to Persephone’s tale in Greek Mythology with Noemí “dressed as Spring”, Francis “blushed as red as a pomegranate”, and their wedding described as “misplaced spring” (Moreno-Garcia 14, 97, 258).

Persephone is condemned to return to the underworld again and again. Will Noemí? Additionally, according to Jeffery Jerome Cohen, it is the mark of the monster to “escape” and “reappear” (Moreno-Garcia 63). Howard Doyle was able to continue his reign because of mushrooms and Francis says the “mycelia can be pretty resistant to fire” and some mushrooms “sprout more easily after a forest fire” (Moreno-Garcia 297). Additionally, Francis dreamed “the house had stitched itself together and [he] was inside it, and this time there was no way out” and “It was grander than before” and “when [he] walked, mushrooms sprouted from [his] footsteps” (Moreno-Garcia 299). He asks Noemí, “What if it’s never gone? What if it’s in me...in the blood” (Moreno-Garcia 299). He is worried because he doesn’t want to be “like him” (Moreno-Garcia 300). If he is the pomegranate and she is Persephone, then he is what ties her to the underworld forever. She, like the reader, will need to remain constantly vigilant against the monsters that are the oppressive systems of colonialism.

Conclusion

With a combination of rhetorical appeals, disidentification, delinking, and epistemic disobedience, Moreno-Garcia builds and strengthens her argument: monsters are real, they just aren’t what we’ve been conditioned to expect and believe. Where Cherríe Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* reclaims and reincorporates the monster to gain its power, Moreno-Garcia reassigns it. Moreno-Garcia calls the reader, the audience, to reconsider what we consider monstrous. We are called to question the stories we have been told. We are called to open our eyes.

Mexican Gothic was published in 2020 and was widely popular and acclaimed. It came after the racist and tumultuous Trump administration which seemed to bring every racist out of the woodwork. Trump engaged in gothic rhetoric arguing, “When Mexico sends its people,

they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists.” (Washington Post). With gothic rhetoric, he constructed Mexican people as metaphorical monsters. His racist words and those of Texas Governor Greg Abbot directly incited violence against Latinx people within the US.

This is why it matters. Ingebretsen argues “the word ‘monster’ as a metaphor and rubric in Gothic America” is “employed as a rhetoric of rebuke” to “justif[y] a range of . . .violences physical as well as rhetorical” (2). Santa Ana posits “the negative language and metaphors targeting Latino immigrants have serious implications” because “Once a group of people is defined as somehow not fully human, as animal-like, or as a disease or national burden, then it is easier to treat” them as such (xiii). To intervene in this view of Latinx people and the treatment which results from it, Moreno-Garcia disidentifies with monstrosity, delinking it from Mexican women, in epistemic disobedience. *Mexican Gothic* reassigns monstrosity. In this work, Moreno-Garcia argues that Mexican women are not monsters. She argues that white men can be, especially insofar as they represent and uphold systems of oppression. She argues that white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism are the real monsters. Moreno-Garcia asks the audience to change what we view as monstrous. See Mexican women as human and treat them as such. See white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism as evil, dangerous, and monstrous. Treat them as such. Treat them like monsters to be defeated. Treat them like foes. Eradicate them. Burn them to the ground, there is no salvaging them.

These things are entangled and all a part of the same system. They work together. You can't just get rid of one. Systems of oppression are abstract, not always tangible. They can live in each individual person, but are a part of a much larger network of oppression. We must

constantly be aware and fight it within ourselves, but also work to break down and dismantle the larger system. *Mexican Gothic* is effective because it, like most Speculative Fiction, is viewed as frivolous, entertainment, and popular culture. However, as a teacher, I know that the best learning happens when the students don't know they are doing it. They don't resist the teaching if they think they are just having fun. This is the subversive nature of art. bell hooks says that popular media is where the learning happens. Using it is how we make these difficult and abstract concepts like white, capitalist, heteropatriarchy and its effects tangible and knowable. This is the best way to get people to see things differently. The audience, like Noemí, is asked repeatedly to "open your eyes". Slowly, over time, we have our eyes opened to the true horrors going on in the world. Once we are able to see them clearly for what they are, we can change the way we understand the world and act in it.

CHAPTER IV

QUEERING MONSTROSITY IN CARMEN MARIA MACHADO'S *HER BODY AND OTHER PARTIES*

As I write, women and people of color are being stripped of their rights in this country. Roe v Wade was overturned on June 24, 2022. In protests of this decision, many white women wore the iconic red capes of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Frustrated because this fictional work takes inspiration from historical abuse including forced sterilization, rape, medical experimentation, and more, across social media platforms, outcry arose from BIPOC creators, who have never had bodily autonomy. These creators rightfully claimed that white women do not care until it happens to them. *The Handmaid's Tale* caused white women these horrors visited upon their bodies when they imagined their racial privilege would shield them. In my analysis of Carmen Maria Machado's short story "Eight Bites" from the collection *Her Body and Other Parties*, I argue that she refrains from specific ethnonational markers so that her white audience can identify with the characters and join the fight for social change.

In the US, certain bodies are acceptable and safe, while others experience various levels of oppression, threat, and violence. The safest body is the cis het white males. Because of the colonial systems of oppression that is white heteropatriarchy, all other bodies are sexualized, objectified, controlled, legislated against, ignored, invalidated, harassed, assaulted, harmed, or killed. To justify this violence and exclusion, these raced and gendered bodies are made metaphorically monstrous in popular media and discourse. Those at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities struggle for survival as Gloria Anzaldúa puts it, on "this thin edge of //

barbwire”. This tenuous grasp of life and safety is their entire existence because of how their body is read. These gothic monstrous metaphors put upon marginalized peoples construct an affective economy of fear, disgust, and hatred. To intervene in this economy, speculative authors redeploy the figure of the monster to change how the marginalized body is read and treated.

For Chicanas, the body is also the primary site of resistance. We use our bodies to learn, to know, and to “make a connection” as an act of resistance, decolonization, and healing (Moraga xxxvi). Diaz-Sanches argues, “the body functions as the critical site for the (de)construction” of imposed identities (1). Therefore, the existence of our fat, queer, female, Latinx bodies is transgressive and destabilizes the narratives of the dominant ideology. It proclaims, *Aquí Estamos, y no nos vamos!* When fat, queer, female, disabled, BIPOC, or otherwise marginalized authors take up the pen and create characters who look, sound, and feel like them, allowing them to take up space upon the page and in our minds, they remove them from the monstrous constraints society tries to trap them in.

With the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, white women are awakening to the war on female bodies that BIPOC women have been experiencing for hundreds of years. For intersectionality marginalized groups, this war for the rights of full citizenship, including safety and autonomy, is fought on multiple fronts. Left out of the feminist movement for their ethnicity, the Chicano movement for their gender, and the gay rights movement for their skin color, queer Chicanas fight for the right for their bodies to exist in all publics and counterpublics and not be read as monstrous abominations to be destroyed under white heteropatriarchy. In the *Panza Monologues*, Virginia Grise critiqued the *White feminist Vagina Monologues* arguing, “in the war for our bodies, it became clear to me that before you can get to the battle for the concha, we have another score to settle, another place on our beautiful bodies to baptize, actualize, a place that

had been demonized, sterilized, starved, stuffed, covered over” (40). La panza is the stomach. It is a place that brings life to our bodies, digesting our food, and brings life into the world, birthing humans. It is a place of emotional knowledge where we feel butterflies in our stomach or a punch to the gut. It, like the rest of the Chicana body, has been subjugated. Reclaiming it, freeing it, acknowledging it, accepting it as a part of what makes us whole is an act of protest and decolonization. Therefore, when authors like Machado reimagine and redeploy the monster, delinking it from the fat, queer Chicana body, they create a radical and revolutionary image capable of fighting this war within the imaginary.

In this essay, I explore monstrosity in Carmen Maria Machado’s *Her Body and Other Parties*. This 2017 short story collection won the Shirley Jackson Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award. It was met with widespread acclaim and reached a wide audience. The opening story, “The Husband Stitch”, was nominated for the Nebula Award. Each story in this collection takes a different tack, from story retellings to fanfiction. However, each story is centered around a female protagonist and contains themes of body horror. This work comes after the Trump campaign and election, speaking back to violence and control of women and their bodies. By showcasing small, everyday horrors and violences perpetrated against women and their bodies, Machado challenges the audience to adjust their views on how women, but specifically fat, queer BIPOC women, are seen and treated.

In the short story “Eight Bites” in this collection, Carmen Maria Machado remakes the archetypal monster of the Blob, an amorphous, non-human entity whose function is to consume and generate fear. This story is told from the first-person perspective of an unnamed narrator through her journey with weight loss surgery. Tracing the generational trauma inflicted from mother to daughter, this tale asks the audience to reflect on where true monstrosity lies. Is it The

Blob which is sometimes used to critique over-consumption, the elite, and capitalism, but nonetheless attribute these horrors to fat bodies and associate them with Christianity's deadly sin of gluttony? Or is it the treatment of that body? Machado speaks back to traditional fatphobic rhetoric, queering this monster, addressing systems of oppression and showcasing the violence they cause. Building from the gothic foundations of Cherríe Moraga, Machado queers the monster, blurring the lines between us/them, human/monster.

Fat Female Monsters

As I conducted my research for this paper, I discovered how little I could find regarding fatness and monstrosity. Plenty of people have discussed the abjection and hatred directed toward the fat body, especially the fat female body, and doubly so at the intersection of any other marginalized identity. However, very few have delved into how this presents in the creation of fat monsters. Off the top of my head, I can name several monsters that join fatness with monstrosity, exemplifying white heteropatriarchal fatphobia. The Dursley family from *Harry Potter*, *Shrek*, the Slitheen from *Doctor Who*, No-Face from *Spirited Away*, Oogie Boogie from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Jabba the Hutt from *Star Wars*, Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*, The Penguin from *Batman*, Kingpin from *Marvel*, Cylostra from *Vampires of the Coast*, and Stitches from *Blizzard* are immediate examples in contemporary popular culture. It is beyond the scope of this project to fully delve into these characters and their constructions as embodied fatphobia. However, it is evident that fat bodies function as shorthand for moral corruption.

Fat Studies explores an infrequently discussed avenue of oppression. Jennifer-Scott Mobley argues, "Americans hate fat people. To be fat is to be aberrant, to be "othered,"...thus enabling fat to remain a (largely acceptable) site for social, political, and legal prejudice" (1).

Further, she contends “People who appear fat are coded as not only gluttonous and weak-willed but also lustful, greedy, lazy, stupid, loud-mouthed, irrational, and, most importantly, lacking in any kind of self-control” (Mobley 22). Michael Carolan describes the metaphors applied to fat people, “a type of animal - a pig, hog, or cow”, which implies the “carnavalesque body; a body ruled by passions, urges, and animalistic desire” (91). Without using the term monster, these scholars are describing monstrous language which Others and dehumanizes in order to justify mistreatment.

However, fat discrimination disproportionately impacts women. Abigail Saguy argues “bias leveled at fat women extends well beyond such public harassment, creating real and substantial disadvantages in education, employment, dating and marriage, health care, and media representations” in addition to increased violence and sexualization (602). Saguy ties fatness to both feminist and queer rights interests and activism because fighting for the right to be fat and still have worth and rights in society is fighting against the white male gaze of heteropatriarchy. Jamey Merkel further argues the connection between fat and queer as they both disrupt binaries: fat/thin and man/woman. Additionally, Merkel illustrates the “similarities between fat individuals and transgender individuals in terms of bodies and transition” (75). Merkel builds from Kathleen LeBesco, who posits “both fatness and queerness are, or have been, medicalized, pathologized, and stigmatized. Both are – or have been – at the center of moral panics in which they are conceived of as perverse, excessive, unnatural, and a threat to the social order” (qtd. in Wykes 3). Being fat, female, and/or queer are constructed as non-normative in dominant ideological narratives which center the cishet white male. For those at the intersection of multiple of these marginalized identities, the metaphorical monster making and its consequences are compounded.

Fatphobia stems from anti-Black racism. Sabrina Strings illuminates, “The fear of the imagined ‘fat black woman’ was created by racial and religious ideologies that have been used to both degrade black women *and* discipline white women” (6). Aesthetically, fatness is associated with the racial other and was linked to “savage”, “course”, “immoral”, and “black” to monstratize (Strings 6). Building from Strings, Anna Mollow contends “Fatphobia functions efficiently as a weapon of the new racism by enabling the adaptation of old ideas about black people’s supposed inborn physical deficiencies to a modern context...replicat[ing] stereotypes of black people as undisciplined and unable to control their appetites” (Mollow 106). This intersectional view matters because it is “White women’s racial privilege [that] is significantly muted when they are fat” (Saguy 604). White public space is a tenet of white supremacy and requires specific aesthetics. William Calvo-Quirós contends that “the West utilizes aesthetic theory to validate ethnic and racial oppression and segregation through discourses around taste” and class (76). To be an American citizen, worthy of rights, is to match white aesthetics, including class, ethnicity, race, strict gender norms, and weight. Fat is used as a “colorblind” method of demarcating race and class and therefore worthiness in society. The fat, female, BIPOC body is not just othered, but removed as far as possible from the “normal” ideal, the cishet white man, by making it monstrous. If it is a monster, then any in all violence against it is not only justified, but righteous, heroic.

Few scholars have tied together fatness with the gothic and monstrosity. Lesleigh Owen connects fatness and monsters. She builds from Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection arguing, “Fat bodies are gendered. Fat bodies are raced. Fat bodies are classed and sexed. They are fascinating, repulsive, empowering, and reviled, often all at once” and are “coded in media as sexual and gross, lazy and powerful” (Owen 1). Fat bodies are viewed like monstrous ones, with a

combination of fear and desire, their ambiguity and hybridity marking them. Owen further argues, “Fat bodies are scary and repulsive precisely because they throw cause and effect into question, blur supposedly sharp lines between seeming opposites...and encourage us to rethink the divisions between the scary and monstrous Other and the safe and socially appropriate Self” (2). Srirupa Chatterjee and Nilanjana Ghosal connect fatness to the gothic in their reading of Sapphire's *Push*. They read the Precious's body as “a repository of cultural hatred, anxieties, and violence characterising the intersectional oppressions of appearance, gender, class, and race” (Chatterjee and Ghosal 10). Many parallels between *Push* and “Eight Bites” can be drawn from the generational trauma at the hands of the mother, gothic tropes, and monstrous fat body which speaks back to violent and oppressive systems. Additionally, Kathy Hilton from *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* used *Push*'s main character, Precious, as a monstrous metaphor to reprimand her for being big, Black, and successful.

Within white heteropatriarchy, women exist as the object of the white male gaze, to please and serve. Cristina Santos contends, “woman is not *born* monstrous but is *constructed* as such” by “systems of power (e.g. patriarchal, heterosexual, etc)” (xiii). One way women are controlled by these systems of power is through constructions of the diametrically opposed femininity and monstrosity. Jess Zimmerman uses Greek mythology and the tale of Charybdis, “a voracious woman who was cast into the sea by Zeus”, who is “fueled by hunger, defined by it, driven by it”, to illustrate how female hunger is constructed as metaphorically monstrous (33-34). Importantly, Zimmerman notes, “Outsize hunger is the province of the monster, and for women, all hungers are outsize” (32). As a result, she argues, “Women talk ourselves into needing less... We reduce our needs for food, for space, for respect, for help, for love and affection, for touch, for being noticed” to avoid being constructed as monstrous and treated as

such (38). In other words, women are constructed as metaphorically monstrous for the mere act of wanting anything more than is expressly given to her under white heteropatriarchy.

In fact, for their gender alone, women have historically been seen as other, lesser, monstrous. From medieval times, Minji Lee posits that based in the “standard medical view of women at the time” women were viewed as “less-developed versions of men” full of “deficiencies and inferiorities”, supported by “the works of Aristotle and Galen but the Church Fathers as well” (4). Dana Oswald argues the three main monstrous categories are “monsters of excess, monsters of lack, and hybrid monsters”, so Lee contends that women are monstrous their hybridity between man and beast (3). I argue that fat BIPOC women are monstrous for all three: perceived excessive consumption, lack of feminine beauty ideals to appease the white male gaze, and the abovementioned hybridity along with hybridity of race, culture, and ethnonationality. The potent combination of science/medicine and religion produce the female monster just as scientific racism justified the oppression of the racial other.

From an analysis of a myriad of monster texts and scholarship, I have identified seven major markers for monstrosity, all dictated from the cultural center of the observer. These are appearance, diet, residence, weaponry, language, affect and monster references. There is much overlap between theorists, but none have a methodology which includes all. Jeffery Jerome Cohen argues “Representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic” (Cohen 65). J. Halberstam contends, “Gothic fiction finds a monster versatile enough to represent fears about race, nation, and sexuality, a monster who combines in one body fears of the foreign and the perverse” (Halberstam 110). Persephone Braham posits “most of the behavior anomalies attributed to the monstrous races concerned either eating (nutrition) or sex (genderation)” (Braham 5). She further argues “Christian criteria

for separating monsters from non-monsters included language, reason, and especially spirituality” (Braham 7). John Block Friedman finds, “a monstrous race and the rustic or churl whose uncivil nature is commonly shown by the club he wields” (Friedman 38). Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes the monstrous shadow beast, “woman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine...the stranger, the other. She is man’s recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast. The sight of her sends him into a frenzy of anger and fear” (Borderlands Critical, 74). These markers are taken and applied to people as a “rhetoric of rebuke” (Ingebretson 2). When a marginalized person is made metaphorically monstrous, any and all violence against them is seen as justified.

This metaphorical monster making has devastating material consequences. Following cognitive metaphor theory, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, metaphor’s matter and “structure what we perceive, how we get around the world, and how we relate to other people” (3). Edward Ingebretsen contends that “Monster-talk” is “metaphors of extreme violence” which “tells a story, explains that story, and draws moral conclusions simultaneously” (43). It is no wonder then to see the manifestations of this violent speech play out in the world. Many recent mass shootings in the US are the direct result of this metaphorical monster making including the El Paso, TX shooting targeting Latinxs, the Buffalo, NY shooting targeting Blacks, and the Colorado Springs, CO shooting targeting the LGBTQIA+ community. When politicians take gothic metaphors of monsters and apply them to humans, creating gendered, sexualized, racialized, and otherwise marginalized monsters, an affective economy of fear is created and stoked, resulting in predictable catastrophe. I argue that to intervene in this affective economy, Latinx speculative authors negotiate and redeploy the figure of the monster to reshape the world and their treatment within it.

Monsters are generally believed to be elements of fiction, to reside within the pages or on the screen in speculative works. Luz Goordillo argues that “US mainstream cultural productions of science fiction and fantasy, horror, and gothic genres confabulate and create alternative and futuristic worlds that are predominantly white and heterosexist” (199). Even in this imagined realm, the monsters reflect the gendered, sexed, classed, and racialized body as the other. The gothic teems with monsters and can be expansively defined as “the art of haunting” (Edmonson xi), marked by tropes like “doom and gloom”, “darkness and the grotesque”, “haunted houses, evil villains, ghosts, gloomy landscapes, madnesss, terror, suspense, horror” (Goddu 3-11). While the traditional gothic was used to reify prejudice, Tonya Gonzalez argues “Latina/o gothic texts are...artistic productions that in some way negotiate examples of Latinidad and gothic discourse to highlight or address the monsters within the imagined U.S. and Latina/o community” (xiii). Contemporary Latinx gothic engages in a discourse and rhetorical genre well known by the public but negotiates the monster.

Carmen Maria Machado’s *Her Body and Other Parties* most specifically engages with a subgenre within the gothic called body horror. Xavier Reyes defines this as “a type of fiction or cinema where corporeality constitutes the main site of fear, anxiety, and sometimes even disgust” (393). This disgust is often connected with “Abjection, a critical term strongly connected to the body” which is “connected to repression” and “can help reveal the subjective underpinnings of the social dehumanisation” (Reyes 395). Abjection, the body, and monstrosity are tied. This is the realm in which Machado’s work resides. Each short story in this collection contends with the female body and its monstrosity. By contextualizing and humanizing the female protagonists, even through the abjection of their bodies, Machado illustrates that the two are entangled, inseparable. Machado asks the audience to embody her characters. From the

affective perspective, she asks us to feel as these characters feel, to experience their pain and horror alongside them. She queers the lines between us and them, between monster and other. Machado asks the audience to see the fat, BIPOC, queer, female body not in horror and disgust, but with sympathy and care.

As a recent work, little has been published. However, Jessica Campbell's *Real Women Have Skins* and addresses the story "Real Women Have Bodies" in *Her Body and Other Parties* from a folklorist perspective. Campbell argues that this book is "steeped in folklore and urban legends" (302). She further argues that "In the story 'Real Women Have Bodies', Machado engages most explicitly with European folk and fairy tales" (Campbell 302). The entire collection repeatedly references and alludes to European and US American tales. I argue that this is purposefully done so that Machado can engage with the public's imaginary. She scaffolds what she tries to teach on what the audience already knows and understands. From there, she makes alterations in order to negotiate the monster.

Additionally, Melanie Rapoport's *Frankenstein's Daughters* makes brief mention of *Her Body and Other Parties* in a discussion of the uprise in horror publications and genre interest among women. She argues that "female writers are taking the opportunity to use horror fiction to elevate conversations surrounding women- and selfhood, using the discomfort evoked by body horror to demystify and normalize discussions surrounding women's bodies" (Rapoport 619). On this collection, she writes about the focus on themes such as "sex and sexuality, body image, motherhood, and in "horrific tales surrounding women and their bodies" to "heighten the natural everyday horrors women face" (Rapoport 623). While all of this is true, Rapoport focuses on the struggle of women. However, as showcased by third world feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, the struggles of BIPOC women are often overlooked or minimized in this

context. Moraga's work might have gained traction because of its engagement in this genre and its applicability to all women, but she very much explores these themes and concepts from an intersectional culturally nuanced angle. While women are constituted as metaphorically monstrous, Latina's experience is compounded by their ethnonationality. For those at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities—fat, queer, female, BIPOC, disabled, etc— the likelihood of being seen and treated as human, deserving of basic rights, is miniscule. Authors like Machado use the monsters in their works of speculative fiction to call into question the validity of the oppressive colonialist systems which are used to justify such violence and thereby subvert them.

Gothic Medicine

“Eight Bites” begins with the surgery on which the entire story hinges. The horror is juxtaposed with the everyday. The doctor discussing her vacation with the nurse is layered with the narrator's thoughts of “choke”, “inhaling underneath water”, “panic”, and “die” (Machado 149). There is gothic imagery of a body opened, taken apart, the doctor's “hands are in my torso...She is loosening flesh from its casing” (Machado 149). This immediate, yet mundane, body horror orients the reader to the story before it flashes back to before the surgery, when she learned her sisters had undergone it:

“My first sister, well, I thought she was dying. Being sisters, I thought we all were dying, noosed by genetics. When confronted by my anxiety...my first sister confessed: a surgery. Then, all of them, my sisters, a chorus of believers. Surgery. A surgery...A band, a sleeve, a gut rerouted” (Machado 150-151)

While the narrator has three sisters, they all look, speak, and act the same since they have undergone the surgery. It has echos of *Stepford wives* and are uncanny. They speak with “a

single mouth that once ate and now just says, 'I feel really, really good' (Machado 151). They parrot lines of many weight loss spokespeople. The narrator's initial reaction to weight loss surgery is to associate it with "dying" and "anxiety", but her sisters evangelize and subconsciously convince her. These three sisters recall elements of Greek mythology including the sirens who lure sailors to their deaths and the three fates: past, present, and future.

With symbolism Machado indicates the hereditary nature of fatness and trauma. All sisters were raised by a mother who had an "Iron will" and "slender waistline" who only ate "eight bites" at any meal (Machado 152). In comparison, the narrator has always felt fat, even growing up, even when she wasn't. She has so internalized fatphobia and the need for her body to appear a certain way to be acceptable and fit into the world. She tries her mother's method, but fails, making herself "so angry [she] began to cry" (Machado 152). To fit the standard she has been taught is necessary, she decides to undergo surgery herself. Fatphobia and trauma travel from her mother's generation, to her and her sisters, down to her daughter, past, present, and future.

Before the surgery, the narrator's eating is monitored by her sisters. Chatterjee and Ghosal posit, "present techniques of cultural surveillance on the body ensure a 'civilizing' of eating practices" (17). In other words, people police what others eat in order to ensure that they do not become fat i.e. monstrous. Following her sister's surgeries, they "angled their forks and cut impossibly tiny portions of food—doll-sized" and judged the narrator for not doing the same (Machado 151). Prior to her own surgery, the narrator attempts to go out to eat alone for a "final meal" as those on "death row" do, but her sister follows and watches her (Machado 155). After they leave, the reader is forced to inhabit that role and confirm the narrator follows her new diet. Before the surgery, the narrator's food is described decadently: "the salad leaves were dripping

vinegar and oil and the noodles had lemon and cracked pepper” (Machado 152). After the surgery, it is bland and unappetizing: “small chicken breast” and “grapefruit” (Machado 161-162). With this surgery, life has lost its color and flavor. While the narrator is technically alive throughout the story, substantial imagery points to the surgery demarcating the line between fully alive and half dead. This state of not fully alive or dead, which disrupts and queers a normalized and expected binary, is monstrous. The story is told from the first person, we are the narrator. Therefore, we too have monsters within us, just waiting to come out. Because every woman will age and gain weight, displeasing the white heteromale gaze, we are all just monsters in the making. If this is the case, then it makes sense that we should reconsider what a monster is and how it is treated.

Additionally, throughout “Eight Bites” Machado showcases casual medical violence endemic to marginalized bodies. Owen uses numerous statistics including the fact that “more than 50% of doctors regard their fat patients as awkward, unattractive, ugly, and noncompliant” (10). Fat, female, and/or BIPOC bodies are habitually mistreated and ignored by medical professionals. Marginalized people have their concerns diminished and pain dismissed. This is often hidden through medical gaslighting. Virginia Grise’s “*Your Healing is Killing Me* is a manifesto for bodies in struggle, under attack, and the targets of structural violence” and pushes back against the violence done to bodies by oppressive systems including medicine (Vargas 8). Machado illustrates with Dr. U the harm a doctor can do and that they aren’t always what they seem to be. Dr. U appears to be kind, like she will help usher the narrator into a new, better self and life. However, she is also uncanny and slightly threatening. She “smiled with all her teeth”, which reads as predatory (Machado 154). Additionally, in her office, two dogs run around and one “was decorously taking a shit in the hallway”, indicating that the entire enterprise is

animalistic and full of shit. When the narrator finally goes in for the surgery, she begins to have second thoughts. Dr. U changes, “Gone was the sweetness from her office; her eyes looked transformed. Icy” (Machado 159). She uses an allegory to tell the narrator to be “obedient” or be “always last” and “lost” (Machado 159). Dr. U also threatens the narrator saying, “Don’t make me cut out your tongue” (Machado 159). This recalls Gloria Anzaldúa’s essay “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” because words and languages that question and subvert, like “Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out” (Borderlands Critical 120). However, the doctor is Dr. U. She is you. In this story, we are doing the damage to ourselves. We are cutting out our own tongues along with any other parts of our bodies we deem unacceptable. Capitalism, internalized racism, sexism, and fatphobia might be driving our unconscious mind, but we are perpetuating these systems of oppression and if they are to be addressed, it must start with us.

Gothic medicine is incredibly popular in media as illustrated in shows like *Private Practice*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *House M.D.*, *ER*, *The Good Doctor*, and many more, where millions of people tune in to watch bodies cut open, bodies in pieces, disabled bodies, sick bodies, grotesque bodies, blood, gore, and death. Shows like these draw on the long history which connects gothic monstrosity with medicine. Andrew Sharpe argues, “the legal category monster forms an important part of a history of the legal present” (3). Analyzing Foucault, he traces medical monsters through the ages: “the *bestial human* in the Middle Ages”, “*Siamese or conjoined twins* in the Renaissance period”, and “the *hermaphrodite* in the Classical Age” (Sharpe 4). Monsters had no rights, so any and all violence was allowable against them, including medical experimentation and murder. This is how Black and Indigenous people were treated at the founding of the Americas. Frank B. Wilderson III showcases how Black slaves were dehumanized and therefore “socially dead, which means they are: 1) open to gratuitous

violence...2) natively alienated...and 3) generally dishonored, or disgraced” (8). This legacy is evident in contemporary monstrous metaphors used to vilify victims and absolve culprits. Anna Mollow illustrates how this monster logic still impacts BIPOC today through police brutality and medical violence and neglect. While BIPOC are not legally designated monsters, even as victims, they are portrayed as such through the media’s use of fatphobic monstrous metaphors. As such, there were no legal repercussions for their deaths. The violence visited upon marginalized bodies, but especially those at multiple marginalized identities, is ubiquitous. This is what Machado is calling attention to. She asks the reader to inhabit this body which is viewed as monstrous and see it instead with sympathy.

Monstrous Mothers

Gothic fiction is marred by numerous mothers who harm their children. While the narrator’s mother did not physically abuse her children, she instilled the belief that their worth was tied to their weight. The narrator continues this tradition with her own child, the only named character in the story, Cal. The narrator fears Cal’s reaction to the pronouncement of surgery. Cal represents the queer of color gaze. Cal forcibly reacts to the news, arguing, “if there’s ever a time to swear, it’s when your mom tells you she’s getting half of one of her most important organs cut away for no reason” (Machado 158). Cal is characterized as “curdled anger. She was furious constantly, she was all accusation. She had taken the moral high ground from me by force” (Machado 158). Cal pushes back against the gaze of white heteropatriarchy, but cannot win with her own mother. Months after the surgery, Cal finally reaches back out to her mother:

“Do you hate my body, Mom?” she says. Her voice splinters in pain, as if she were about to cry. “You hated yours, clearly, but mine looks just like yours used to... You think

you're going to be happy but this is not going to make you happy...Do you love every part of me?" (Machado 164)

The narrator does not answer and hangs up on Cal. The truth is that the narrator does not love every part of Cal and her body and Cal knows it. The narrator centers the blame for her broken and dissatisfactory body on Cal. In her mind, she got fat because she had Cal and “suddenly everything was wrecked” (Machado 153). The surgery returns her to a “Pre-Cal body” (Machado 163). The surgery doesn't just remove the fat, it removes the history, the connection between mother and child. While the narrator doesn't admit to herself that her surgery has anything to do with Cal, in fact, it does. In hating herself and cutting out pieces of her own body, she is transmitting that internalized misogyny to her daughter, perpetuating the intergenerational harm. Additionally, when the narrator reflects on Cal's body, she sees it as “imperfect, but...fresh, pliable” (Machado 158). She does not love as a mother should, unconditionally, but instead views her child with judgment. Additionally, when she finally sees the monster of the story, she is reminded of her daughter.

Inside the House

The monster in “Eight Bites” does not appear until after the surgery. As the narrator recovers and transforms, she becomes aware of a presence in the house. One night, she “wake[s] up to something standing over me” which she at first thinks is her “daughter, up from a nightmare” (Machado 161). For some time, she senses this something, “Too large to perceive. Too small to see” in the house (Machado 163). After her phone call with Cal, the narrator follows eerie sounds into the basement:

“The thing is down there. In the light, it crumples to the cement floor, curls away from me. It looks like my daughter, as a girl. That's my first thought. It's body-shaped.

Prepubescent, boneless...I hear its sounds: a gasping, arrested sob...It is a body with nothing it needs: no stomach or bones or mouth. Just soft indents...She is awful but honest. She is grotesque but she is real...I lean down and whisper where an ear might be. 'You are unwanted,' I say. A tremor ripples her mass. I do not know I am kicking her until I am kicking her...every kick is more satisfying than the last. I reach for a broom and I pull a muscle swinging back and in and back and in, and the handle breaks off in her and I kneel down and pull soft handfuls of her body out of herself, and I throw them against the wall" (Machado 164-165)

If this monster were really a monster, it would be wreaking havoc. The audience would be compelled to fear and hate it. Based on the markers of monstrosity outlined above, this creature meets some. It's appearance is "grotesque" and alludes to Blob monster and has no language, only "a gasping, arrested sob". However, this monster eats nothing, resides in the same house as the narrator, uses no weapons, and does not engage the audience or the characters in the affective dimensions of terror or horror. In fact, it is the treatment of this creature which renders the reader disgusted. More than once this monster is connected to Cal. It was born from the fat caused by Cal and resembles her.

When Machado redeploys the Blob monster, she shows the audience how much of the damage and trauma we endure is done to ourselves. When those who perceive themselves as fat castigate themselves for it, the violence they enact with their words are unnoticed. Likewise, when they grab fistfuls of themselves in the mirror, squishing and pulling and hurting the parts they dislike, it is done privately. So too is punishing one's body through starvation, binge eating, induced vomiting, and excessive exercise. By physically separating the narrator from her fatness and then enacting violence against said fatness, Machado makes the ways we internalize

fatphobia and harm ourselves through word and deed visible and visceral. The call is coming from inside the house, we are doing these things to ourselves because we have internalized white heteropatriarchy's ideology.

In "Eight Bites" the Blob is not the real monster. The monster is the white heteropatriarchy. The monster is fatphobia which is inextricably tied to sexism, colorism, racism, ableism, and classism. The monster resides in all of us because of the incredible number of images we have been overfed on regarding beauty standards and worth. In this way, Machado queers the monster. She blends the lines between it and us. We are the same.

Gothic Death

The story ends with a flash forward to the narrator's death. The narrator knows when and how she will die:

"I will die the day I turn seventy-nine...*here is where I learn if it's all been worth it.* The pain will be unbearable until it isn't...Arms will lift me from my bed—her arms. They will be mother-soft, like dough and moss. I will recognize the smell. I will flood with grief and shame...by loving me when I did not love her, by being abandoned by me, she has become immortal. She will outlive me...She will outlive my daughter, and my daughter's daughter...I will cry as she shuffles me away from myself...I will curl into her body, which was my body once, but I was a poor caretaker, and she was removed from my charge... 'I'm sorry,' I will repeat. 'I didn't know'" (Machado 167-168)

We are left to question whether Cal will break the cycle of generational trauma. If this tormented fat self forever lives on, then perhaps not. In the end, after so much sacrifice, self recrimination, and pain she discovers that we are our bodies and our bodies are us. There is no separating the two to say that the mind is what truly matters. There is no solace to be found in finally achieving

the strictures of dominant society because it means losing the things that truly matter, like family, for her sisters are now dead and her daughter rarely visits.

In this passage, the monstrous imagery is truly shattered. Rather than monstrous, this entity is motherly, the caretaker carrying her across the threshold between life and death. In the gothic trope of death, the narrator is freed from the strictures of white heteropatriarchy and can finally see clearly. She understands now that she was the monster all along for the ways she treated herself and the values she communicated to her own daughter.

Monster References

Monster references are references within popular culture, folklore, legend, fairytale, or myth to figures who are generally constructed as monstrous. One such figure is Coyolxauhqui, a figure of Aztec mythology, who represents the moon and is infamous for being dismembered and cast into the sky. Challenging traditional gender roles and threatening masculinity, she is monstrous from the perspective of the white heteropatriarchy, but also from within Latinx patriarchy. Chicana feminists reclaim this cultural formother in their works as an act of epistemic disobedience. Gloria Anzaldúa, foundational Chicana feminist, theorizes something she calls the Coyolxauhqui Imperative as a process “to heal and achieve integration” (*Reader* 312). This is achieved by “making and unmaking” and “bear[ing] witness” to trauma (*Reader* 312-313). Coyolxauhqui was wounded, torn to pieces by her own family, and cast away. However, she survived as something new. “Eight Bites” begins with the narrator’s mouth being filled with “the dust of the moon”, if we are to see and imagine ourselves as the narrator and the narrator is filled with Coyolxauhqui, then we are called to identify our trauma and put ourselves back together, by so doing subverting white heteropatriarchal ideology (Machado 149).

The Coyolxauhqui Imperative, to see the wounds, integrate these traumatic experiences into ourselves, and come out with something new, takes place in the nepantla. Anzaldúa defines this liminal space as “the place where transformations are enacted” (*Reader* 278). Those who “facilitate passages” of this space and “deal with the collective shadows” are called nepantleras (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 248 & 293). Authors and artists occupy this space. With their works, they create a third space, a liminal space, a border space. It combines reality and imaginary. Anzaldúa calls art “a sneak attack”, “about identity”, “political” and “subversive” (*Reader*, 124-135). When consuming Latinx art the audience “is forced into participating in the making of meaning—she is forced to connect the dots, to connect the fragments”, in other words, to enact the Coyolxauhqui Imperative (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 127). This is why “the writing of women of color” has “the ability to move and transform others” (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 33). Understanding this, it makes sense that “a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared” and monstrasized (Anzaldúa, *Reader*, 33). Machado understands this. She does not try to separate monstrosity from herself. Instead, she shows the audience that the monsters, the shadow beasts, the parts that are feared and condemned by others are always a part of us. She then asks us to consider if these things should be considered monstrous and treated as such.

Machado uses *Her Body and Other Parties* as a nepantla, a transformative space where the Coyolxauhqui Imperative is enacted. Here, the audience bears witness to the pain suffered by so many women. Owen contends that fat bodies are “ambiguous, fluid, and liminal” and therefore contain the potential for transformation and challenging social paradigms (10). The audience is asked to embody and experience the suffering of marginalized people to empathize with it so that they can enact social change. The audience goes into the book with one

understanding of reality and must participate in its unmaking to build new understanding and come out transformed.

In addition, the structure of the book itself, segmented and separated into individual short stories is an allusion to Coyolxauhqui. Each story is of varying lengths, but centralizes women and focuses in on parts of their bodies. In “The Husband Stitch”, this is the narrator’s neck and vagina. “Inventory” focuses on sexual experiences and the places on the body engaged in this process. In “Especially Heinous”, the victims that haunt Benson are “The-girls-with-bells-for-eyes” (Machado 78). In “Real Women Have Bodies”, the women’s bodies literally disappear over time. “Eight Bites” focuses on fatness and the stomach. In each story, parts of a woman’s body are used, dismissed, vilified, ignored, and abused for different purposes by different people. To enact the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, we are required to take the pieces offered here and put them together to discover meaning.

Conclusion

Through literature, through narrative, through speculative fiction, the author is able to highlight what is considered monstrous in society--the fat, brown, queer, or female body--against the that which is truly monstrous--the treatment and violence perpetrated against those bodies. In this way, the author highlights the imperative to decolonize our minds by reclaiming our bodies. As with the Queer Aesthetic described by Calvo-Quiros and the ideas of Theories of the Flesh by Andrea Pitts, Marina Ortega, and Jose Medina the image our bodies present is both readable and powerful in disrupting binary, Eurocentric, colonial, racist, and patriarchal thinking. If I already know that you will look at me, my body, and make judgements on that basis, then purposefully choosing to break with normative standards makes a point. It destabilizes hegemonic colonial body aesthetics which reinforce oppressive power structures. By accepting

our bodies, by asserting their validity and allowing them to exist in non-normative ways, we employ the power of panza, creating a protest aesthetic which proclaims, I deserve to exist. I deserve to live. I deserve to take up space. Porque aquí estamos, y no nos vamos.

In every story in *Her Body and Other Parties*, Machado purposefully includes and gestures towards traditional markers of monstrosity in her characters. However, she queers the lines between human/monster and illustrates their pain, asks us to bear witness, and causes us to question whether these traits are really so monstrous after all. This is disidentification. The truth is that we can never be separated from or immune to the dominant culture casting some part of us as monstrous. That will always be a part of our lives. However, we can decide how we react to others. We can decide how we view and treat ourselves. We can decide what we accept and what we fight to change. In knowing that we have these choices, we regain our power. Knowing and accepting this is epistemic disobedience.

Her Body and Other Parties follows a very tumultuous presidential election. During his campaign, this transcript was exposed:

Yeah, that's her. With the gold. I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her. You know, I'm automatically attracted to beautiful — I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything...Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything. (New York Times)

Politicians, musicians, tv shows, movies, other media, and many men reduce women down to her body parts and only insofar as he is interested in using them. This is what Machado is speaking back against. Opening reader's eyes to the fact that these dominant narratives are dangerous through gothic body horror is an effective mode to enact social change.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I came to my graduate studies with a question: how do marginalized groups use their language to reclaim power? This led me down the path to monstrosity and led to many more questions: what makes a monster, what are the effects of monstrosity in society, how do marginalized groups use monsters, where do we find contemporary monsters, and what is the history of monstrosity? After researching and exploring in this area, I developed the guiding research question for my thesis: How and why do Latinx speculative authors use monstrosity? The conclusion I have come to is that Latinx speculative authors deconstruct and redeploy the figure of the monster in order to disidentify and delink with it. With their works, they enact epistemic disobedience to redress the conceptualization and treatment of Latinx people.

Each of the works and authors I have chosen did something slightly different with monstrosity. Cherríe Moraga reclaims the power of the monster through the figure of the ghost, *la Llorona*; Silvia Moreno-Garcia reassigns the monster through the figure of the vampire; and Carmen Maria Machado queers the monster through the figure of the blob. These tactics serve different rhetorical functions and speak back to the particular time period and issues which spawned their monsters. In 1995, Moraga responds to issues within Chicano culture and critiques the exclusion of women and queers from the nationalist movement. With a figure that haunts, Moraga is illustrating the contemporary relevance and continued harm caused by sexism and homophobia. Additionally, she speaks back to harms caused by the dominant culture including

NAFTA and the femicides in Juarez. By reclaiming the monster, reintegrating it, Moraga assumes its power. Power is necessary to engage in and win fights on multiple fronts. In 2017, Machado responds to a wave of racism and misogyny brought forth from the shadows with Trump's election campaign. In queering the monster, making it sympathetic, and engaging the reader's empathy by making them see it as a part of themselves, Machado builds bridges, a la Anzaldúa, across race and ethnonationality, among women, because joined they are better able to fight. In 2020, Moreno-Garcia responds not only to the Trump election, but the rise in far-right ideology which springs from it across the Americas. Through the reassignment of monstrosity, she condemns the white heteropatriarchal ideology of colonialism. Each treats monstrosity slightly differently for a different rhetorical purpose but a shared outcome of addressing inequity, oppression, and violence against Latinx peoples and bodies.

As such, the connection between these works becomes clear. While there are several differences between them including their treatment of monstrosity, they are joined by shared purpose and transAmerican perspective. Other differences include that one was published more than 20 years before the other two. Two works are by queer authors. One work is by a Chicana, one by a Mexican Canadian, one by a Cuban American. One work uses code switching, one references Spanish with no code switching, and one has no reference to Spanish or Latinxs at all. Also, one is a play, another a novel, and another a collection of short stories. Regardless, these three cultural productions share the similarities of Latinx speculative fiction.

These specific works were chosen for this project because they met the initial criteria of by Latina authors of speculative fiction. Equally importantly, these works speak back to specific injustice against Latinx people. *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* by Cherríe Moraga is included because she and Gloria Anzaldúa are foundational scholars in border studies, queer

studies, and Latinx studies. Cherríe Moraga's works paved the way for the speculative Latinx authors who came after. As such, her works were a necessary frame of reference for the project. Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* and Carmen Maria Machado's *Her Body and Other Parties* were selected to illustrate this kind of renewed interest and current wave of contemporary Latinx speculative fiction and gothic horror. These works were immensely popular and reached a much wider audience. Additionally, all three works were put into conversation together because of the thematic link of stories. Each work addresses and discusses the prevalence of stories and storytelling. Each work addresses the impact on stories and narratives on the way we perceive, understand, and move about the world. They all address the damage the dominant ideological narratives cause and provide an alternate or counterstory. Finally, while each of these works is in a different mode, they all seek for their audience to embody the new knowledge and story. Embodied and experiential knowledge has a different and longer lasting impact. Plus, we only really care about things when they happen to us. *The Hungry Woman* is a play, with characters embodied by actors. *Her Body and Other Parties* begins with a story with notes for "If this story is read out loud" so that the reader can embody the passages. However, as all of them are gothic, and aim to engage the audiences emotions, they all seek to have the audience embody the terror and horror of monstrosity. Rather than engage these emotions towards Latinx people. These works seek to intervene in the affective economy and direct these feelings towards the truly monstrous forces in the world. By so doing, Latinx speculative authors attempt to alter the perception and treatment of Latinx people for the better.

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