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Women's Education and the Gothic in Latin America: Luisa Pérez de Zambrana's *La hija del verdugo* (1865)

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In a wave of literary and philosophical innovation and transition during the nineteenth century, some Latin American authors directed their energies towards social reform and, more specifically, towards an advocacy of women's rights and education. In both their poetry and prose, Cuban women writers such as Luisa Pérez de Zambrana (1837-1922) were addressing these concerns for their communities, and an important and innovative promotion of women's education can be found in Pérez de Zambrana's poetry and fiction, particularly in the novel *La hija del verdugo* (1865). This narrative, a brief, historical, serial novel pertaining to late Romanticism and set in the mid-eighteenth century, utilizes popular Gothic themes to leverage women's education as a way to bolster their contentment and lift them out of horrifying circumstances. Pérez de Zambrana argues that the most desirable characteristics in women are intelligence and fortitude for self-improvement brought on by overcoming obstacles, and this position was revolutionary for a time when the expected models for women's comportment focused more on enhancement of beauty and docile domestic servitude. Using a Gothic backdrop to the story and to the protagonist's origins, Pérez de Zambrana critiques the traditional construction of female characters and the limits set on women's behavior by offering an alternative path for her heroine, Olivia, who uses education to fight a tragic destiny caused by her father's work as an executioner, showing that goodness can be cultivated through instruction.

In this analysis, I will examine the Gothic features of Pérez de Zambrana's novel and subsequently discuss how they work together with the novelist's endorsement of women's education and advancement in their historical context, contributing to an emerging discourse surrounding Gothic themes in Romantic fiction throughout the Americas. I employ a more inclusive definition of the literary Gothic as it progresses into the nineteenth century, like the one Jarlath Killeen uses to classify many texts in this period as "Gothic" that include horror, mystery, and history (2).[1] From a theoretical perspective, I am guided largely by feminist approaches to a women's Gothic literary tradition posed by critics such as Ellen Moers, Anne K. Mellor, and Ellen Malenas Ledoux and by a recent analysis of the Gothic's transportation to Latin America by Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez. As will be shown, *La hija del verdugo*'s opening scenes depict a Gothic aesthetic in the executioner's revelation of his criminal history to a condemned man, Carlos Schiler.

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Carlos subsequently escapes prison and marries the executioner's daughter, Olivia, despite her shady origins. Wanting to overcome her horrific past, Olivia educates herself and is integrated into high society, proving that knowledge is a mighty weapon against a tragic destiny and touting women's intellectual pursuits. By reading the narrative through a Gothic lens, we can infer new meanings from the author's criticisms of traditional gender and social class roles and her support for education. To better situate *La hija del verdugo* in its historical context, let us now briefly examine Luisa Pérez de Zambrana's life and the influence of nineteenth-century educational discourse and Gothic traditions on the novel.

Luisa Pérez de Zambrana, originally Luisa Pérez y Montes de Oca, is best known for her poetry, which attracted the acclaim of her Cuban contemporaries. However, aside from a few paramount studies of her poems, with the most recent and complete being *La claridad en el abismo,* a 2014 tome by the late Félix Ernesto Chávez López, relatively little research has been conducted on this fundamental female voice of Cuban Romanticism. Luisa Pérez de Zambrana began writing during her teenage years in Santiago, initially publishing her poems in important Cuban periodicals such as *El Diario*, *El Orden*, and *El Redactor*. After her early success drafting verses for newspapers, she released a volume of her poetry, *Poesías de la Srta. Da. Luisa Pérez y Montes de Oca* (1856), which gained her widespread notoriety in her homeland. Two years later, the author married Ramón Zambrana y Valdés, another preeminent writer and scientific thinker, and became better integrated into intellectual high society when the couple relocated to Havana.

In 1860, Pérez de Zambrana published another volume of her verses titled *Poesías*, with a prologue penned by her compatriot Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, whom Pérez de Zambrana befriended when the famous poet returned to the island that same year. While the two differed somewhat in writing style, Pérez de Zambrana did attract the acclaimed writer's attention, along with that of Domitila García de Coronado, who would feature her in the pivotal compendium, *Álbum poético-fotográfico de las escritoras cubanas* (1868). Here her poems appeared alongside those of other once-prominent Cuban female authors such as Catalina Rodríguez, Úrsula Céspedes de Escanaverino, and Julia Pérez y Montes de Oca, Luisa's younger sister who also composed poetry. During this same decade, Pérez de Zambrana also penned her two novels: *Angélica y Estrella* (1864) and *La hija del verdugo* (1865), both originally published in serial installments and rereleased in the 1950s.[2] These texts are somewhat rare outside of Cuba, and hopefully a renewed interest in the reevaluation of Pérez de Zambrana's works will incite their reprinting and greater circulation. The later years of the author's life were filled with tragedy that was reflected in her writings, as she outlived her husband and their children, later perishing in poverty. Thematically, Pérez de Zambrana's works take on a variety of social issues and topics such as loss, love, nature, family, and identity, and she ultimately influenced the writing of a generation of authors, including her friend Adelaida de Mármol, José Martí, and Juana Borrero, who commented on her works in their own compositions, as Chávez López has documented. Although Pérez de Zambrana's poetry has received some attention, her prose deserves another look for its literary merit and important ideas related to women's education in her era. In particular, while *La hija del verdugo* does contain some clichés common to the sentimental novel, the plot is influenced by Gothic and proto-feminist

trends that should be of interest to critics and historians who have previously neglected to read the text beyond the surface level.

Pérez de Zambrana's interest in women's education fits into larger currents of popular discourse in this period, which are important to briefly examine. Specifically, a debate surrounding women's formal instruction had begun to infiltrate intellectual circles as early as the eighteenth century, playing out in the Hispanic world in texts such as *Defensa de las mujeres* (1726) by Benito Jerónimo Feijóo and *Discurso sobre la educación física y moral de las mujeres* (1790) by Josefa Amar y Borbón. While these two authors were from Spain, concepts from these texts, as well as questions about women's places in their communities, were also rapidly disseminating in the Americas, as societies were grappling with how to modernize their social structures during nineteenth-century movements for national autonomy. As Doris Sommer argues in *Foundational Fictions* (1989), the stability of the home was reflective of societal order. Consequently, the developing polemic surrounding the value of women's education in Latin America was largely focused on women's importance as mothers and wives and the influence of their knowledge on familial interactions, which delineated a microcosm of social well-being.[3]

Aside from the argument that women's schooling helped them to fulfill familial responsibilities, some authors in the Americas also proposed that women were intelligent beings who deserved educational opportunities. In this vein, there are many texts by female writers that encourage women's instruction, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. Influential essays treating these themes include, for example, "Emancipación moral de la mujer" (1852) by Argentinian Juana Manso and "Influencia de la mujer en la civilización" (1874) by Peruvian Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera. Beyond essayistic prose, some fictional works also argued for women's intelligence and goodness. In this current, *Sab* (1841) and other novels by Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and short stories, such as "La hija del mazorquero" (1858) by Argentinian Juana Manuela Gorriti, denounced women's exploitation and depicted their acumen and fortitude. Finally, key periodicals emerged that reevaluated women's roles and championed their schooling. In Pérez de Zambrana's native land we find, for example, the influential magazine *Álbum Cubano de lo Bueno y lo Bello* (1860), directed by Gómez de Avellaneda. Some of these texts and their ideas circulated throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and, in this atmosphere of emerging questions about women's education, Luisa Pérez de Zambrana published *La hija del verdugo* (1865) to add her voice to this growing debate, employing a cogent and innovative Gothic framework for her argument.

Turning now to the sources of the Gothic strategies utilized in the novel, Pérez de Zambrana appears to pull directly from a Gothic literary "canon" in crafting the problematic origins of her protagonist. Some gaps currently exist in scholarly criticism of Gothic traditions in nineteenth-century-Latin-American literature, but as Cynthia Duncan argues in *Unraveling the Real: The Fantastic in Spanish-American Ficciones* (2010) and as José María Martínez describes in *Cuentos fantásticos del Romanticismo hispanoamericano* (2011), Gothic themes were heartily embraced in the creation of Hispanic Fantastic and Romantic narratives. While the Gothic largely flowed from a European (particularly British, German, and French) literary corpus, the movement did gain important footholds in Latin America during the mid-nineteenth century. As Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez has

recently outlined, Gothic texts from other countries were widely read throughout the Americas, and an array of Latin American prose works beginning during Romanticism, such as Juana Manuela Gorriti's "Coincidencias" (1867), exhibit Gothic traits. For Eljaiek-Rodríguez, such texts also adapt European Gothic techniques for their own purposes through "*tropicalization*," sometimes setting Gothic horrors in the Old World, or Europe, as a form of critique (14). As we shall see, his theory appears to play out in *La hija del verdugo*, since the story's setting in Europe allows the author to question some traditional colonial values.[4]

While the definition of the "Gothic" has now become flexible enough to include multiple texts over several centuries, Jarlath Killeen has outlined the hallmarks of the genre as including elements of terror, enigmatic circumstances, characters with perverse or problematic pasts, and historical settings (2). In *La hija del verdugo*, the use of a Gothic aesthetic in the London cityscape and surrounding countryside generates a petrifying atmosphere for the plot's events that later helps to advance the author's educational and social messages. The opening dungeon sequence, the monstrous executioner, the protagonist's potential illegitimacy and unsettling past, and the story's scenic backdrops (an isolated cabin, a prison, a castle, and a cemetery) all establish the text's Gothic undercurrents.

As numerous critics of English literature have noted, women's texts employing Gothic themes often served to decry and highlight gender inequalities and women's feelings of being "othered" caused by restriction and censure of what they could say, do, and write. Anne K. Mellor, for example, argues that British women wielding the Gothic form adapted its shocking themes for the domicile, using incest, murder, and violence to show the horror of women's realities and restrictions (91). She posits that "by moving the exercise of sublime power into the household, the female Gothic domesticates the sublime as paternal transgression [. . .] that is everywhere most monstrous and most ordinary" (91). In Pérez de Zambrana's case, the novel depicts dangerous outcomes resulting from patriarchal control over women from its opening pages and sets the stage for the protagonist's transformation through education.

Delving into the text, in the first scene of the *La hija del verdugo*, Sir Carlos Schiler, a handsome, aristocratic gentleman, is being held captive in the tower of London, awaiting his death sentence for supposed political crimes. Ruminating in his cell during "una noche oscura y sombría" (3), Carlos envisions his end with secret terror: "[P]ensaba [. . .] en el cadalso que le esperaba: meditaba en aquel aparato lúgubre, en aquel tablado cubierto de negro, en aquella hacha reluciente y espantosa, que debía apoyarse en su cuello y dividirlo" (4). The horror of his approaching execution lays out the text's Gothic landscape, which is furthered through the arrival of a sinister figure a few hours before sunrise: the executioner tasked with taking his life, who has come to propose a surprising plan. Octavio Gretten, described as "desagradable y sombrío," first tells Carlos the tale of his tragic life, his marriage, and the birth of his daughter (4). In this backstory, readers learn that Octavio killed his adopted brother, Justo, in a jealous, Cain-like rage by instinctively dealing him a fatal blow after the two began pursuing the same young lady. The executioner confesses his crime thusly: "[E]nterré mi puñal en el pecho de Justo que lanzó un débil grito y cayó anegado en su sangre" (9). After this murder, Octavio

abducted Cecilia, his love interest, ensconcing her in a rural cottage. Here, the unconscious young woman was taken forcefully in a frightening rendition of Mellor's domestic Gothic, shown through Octavio's confession of the circumstances of their relationship: "Cecilia se había desmayado; quise irme, pero no tenía valor para marchar. Tomé a Cecilia en mis brazos y huí con ella" (9).

Octavio claims that Cecilia eventually accepted him as her husband, despite the problematic origins of their union and her fear of his macabre nature. However, Cecilia still blamed him for their precarious living situation on the margins of society, proclaiming that, "la terrible violencia de tu carácter es la que nos ha perdido a todos" (10). Although Octavio was content to live in hiding, the police eventually apprehended him, and, since the London executioner position was vacant, he was offered the post instead of a death sentence. Through the dehumanizing responsibility of killing others, Octavio explains that he found a means to support his wife and their daughter, Olivia, embracing his destructive urges for the family's survival. As an executioner, Octavio is condemned to repeat his murderous past time and time again; He explains the horror of this dark destiny to Carlos, saying "¡[. . .] [N]o sabía que ser verdugo era peor que ser reo de muerte!" (14), and he also describes his suicidal obsessions: "Cada vez que había un reo en las prisiones del Estado, tomaba la aciaga resolución de suicidarme" (15). The linking of murder, suicide, and destructive tendencies in Octavio's vocation founds the troubled patriarch's urges in Gothic terror and classical forms of tragedy. More importantly, the horror and violence surrounding the Gretten's marital partnership also provides a vision of the domestic circumstances depicted in women's Gothic writing that Mellor describes (91).

In the wake of his wife's abrupt death, Octavio is exhausted from years of sinister labor and proposes to Carlos that they swap places, enabling the nobleman to break out of prison. In exchange for his assistance, the executioner begs Carlos to wed his teenage daughter. When the young man initially rebuffs the vile proposition, Octavio commits suicide in the cell, poisoning himself to escape from his envenomed tragic existence and declaring his final intentions to fulfill his "sangriento destino" (19). Feeling guilty and indebted to the conflicted executioner, Carlos decides to honor the final wishes of the man who granted him clemency from capital punishment and tracks Olivia down to Gretten's cottage. Olivia's tragic past was described by her father, but the details of its effect on her persona will be directly revealed to readers as the story progresses. While the atrocities in her family history seem, perhaps, exaggerated and insurmountable, they do parallel the real domestic horrors some women faced during this period, when domestic violence, marital rape, and other crimes against women were fairly commonplace.[5]

In these opening pages, the transgressions and suicide of the father, the problematic abduction of Cecilia, and Olivia's birth in clandestine circumstances as the product of a crime hold true to the conventions of women's Gothic fiction. For Olivia, Carlos Schiler is hypothetically a gallant character who might offer her salvation, but even he is first presented as a shadowy criminal, having been incarcerated and subsequently freed through the suicide of his future wife's father. In this way, Pérez de Zambrana compares her heroine's situation to that of her mother and, in general, of women who were relegated to the home and suffered the consequences of the patriarch's actions. While the

author presents an extreme scenario of a woman from shady beginnings, she does this to illustrate that even this protagonist can leverage her intrinsic potential for self-improvement, shaping her own destiny as the tale progresses.

The protagonist's Gothic origins are also founded in a literary tradition of malaise and monstrosity described by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who posit in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) that women writers often utilized such symbols of illness, imprisonment, and monstrosity to offer parallels to the restrictions on women, including female writers, and the reaction of their societies towards them.[6] From this perspective, Olivia Gretten's shady parentage story and the characterization of her beastly father should relegate her to the status of a monster if her reputation is based on her bloodlines, as it traditionally would have been. Monstrosity and "otherness" narratives abound in Gothic literature, and works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) demonstrate this tradition. Shelly's masterpiece and related texts offered fertile ground for sowing seeds of discontent for those "othered" by society, as critics such as Marcia Aldrich and Richard Isomaki have shown. The connections between the creation of a text itself and the creation of a monster within the text reflect women writers' knowledge of the social prohibitions and taboo surrounding their literary production (Aldrich and Isomaki 126).

Related texts from this period in the Hispanic world have also used grotesque, marginalized, or ridiculed characters to parallel women's conditions, or they have depicted female characters who find themselves in pitiable circumstances to elucidate women's restrictions within and exclusion by society. For example, some works portray isolated or ostracized characters suffering physical or mental deterioration, such as Soledad Acosta de Samper's title character in *Dolores* (1867), who withdraws from society and its judgement as her body degrades from leprosy. Another targeted depiction of a daughter who might be characterized as monstrous by familial association, since her father works as henchman to the Juan Manuel de Rosas regime, is found in Juana Manuela Gorriti's "La hija del mazorquero" (1865), where the heroine's goodness prevents her from being corrupted morally by the patriarch's tyranny.[7] In this way, Pérez de Zambrana's novel situates itself in a corpus of narratives depicting women from marginalized positions of ridicule or Gothic origins and using themes such as execution, criminality, and monstrosity. These misunderstood female characters prove through plot events that they are actually meritorious despite the degradation of others.

Consequently, the esoteric and unfavorable characterization of Olivia early in *La hija del verdugo* offers a path for the author to develop the importance of the influence of education in the rest of the text to rescue the protagonist from her isolation and monstrosity. While society has essentially cast Octavio as a barbarian, he is also a misunderstood character, who in the end tries to find a better life for his daughter before leaving this world. As his offspring, Olivia will endure the consequences of her origins, both in the ridicule of others and in her own troubling problems of self-esteem and self-worth. The executioner highlights the biases of society towards his daughter and negates their veracity to Carlos in the text's first mention of Olivia:

> Si no me concedéis esa gracia porque preferís la muerte a casaros con la hija de un verdugo, yo os juro, señor, que mi hija no ha heredado uno solo

> de mis malos instintos [. . .] Sé que os causará horror uniros [. . .] con la miserable hija de un ejecutor; pero vos, señor, podéis marcharos a otro país en donde nadie podrá presumir que descienda ella de tan miserable origen. (16)

Bolstered by the father's pleas that his daughter has not inherited his bad traits and does not deserve to be labeled a monster, Carlos is thus intrigued by the female protagonist.

When Carlos arrives at the Gretten's home at dusk, readers are finally directly introduced to the young heroine. Olivia is first shown outside the house, locking the family's domesticated birds into a cage, perhaps offering a metaphor for her own situational entrapment. She receives Carlos inside the cottage and accepts his proposal of matrimony after he brandishes a letter from her father promising her in wedlock, of course, without her consent. The Olivia that readers meet is described as homely, somber, and frighteningly death-like, depicted as "descolorida, fatigada y confusa" (26), and later with a "moribunda expresión de todo el semblante" (38).

These depictions fit with representations of troubled female characters and the Gothic woman writer's subjectivity that Ellen Moers has described, arguing that the female Gothic mode contains elements of "the haunted and the self-hating self" (166). A tortured and tragic figure, Olivia characterizes herself as "tan rústica y tan despreciable" (26) and "una criatura" who is "la miserable hija de un ejecutor" (38). Of course, all of these depictions call to mind her father's monstrous nature and her frightening creation story. At the wedding between the two young people, Olivia is depicted as "sin gusto, sin distinción y sin gracia," but Carlos prays to God to see her good qualities and finds her pure and inexplicably beguiling (26). From this moment on, the internal goodness of the protagonist contrasts with stereotypes surrounding her, and the author has set the stage for her intellectual conversion. A major shift also occurs at this point in the novel, as Olivia leaves behind the spaces of her past to turn over a new leaf when the couple escapes England for France. The novel's subsequent negation of determinism proves that one's fate is not fully determined by one's birth and circumstances.

The independence that we observe in the second half of the novel, when Olivia will take charge of her education and prove her virtue to other characters, is not an unusual feature of the female Gothic novel. In fact, as Ellen Malenas Ledoux puts it, some women writers "depict Gothic settings in which female characters cultivate the types of intellectual, moral, and physical strength that contemporary feminist authors advocated for the next generation" (57). For Ledoux, the contrast between themes of female subjugation under patriarchy and the realization of women's intellectual aspirations or personal strength is commonly found in the genre (55), and she cites multiple British writers who employed this framework in their novels, such as Eliza Fenwick, Joanna Baillie, and Sarah Wilkinson (59).[8] Accordingly, the balancing act of depicting the protagonist as a monster or victim using Gothic themes alongside her subsequent triumph over her negative destiny through her effort and wit forms the hallmark of Pérez de Zambrana's novel, which fits within this trend in women's Gothic writing.

Once Olivia and Carlos have moved to the continent, the heroine suffers the disdain of members of the upper class, particularly her new sister-in-law, who judges her for her upbringing and her father's stigmatized career, despite the fact that he ironically rescued Carlos from certain death. As Olivia endeavors to leave her past behind, Pérez de Zambrana positively reframes her lead character and pushes her towards self-improvement in her new country, which comes to represent intellectual ideals. While Carlos passes his days in the court, Olivia spends her time caring for Carlos's elderly father, demonstrating an amiability that is underappreciated by the nobles. Later, when Carlos leaves for a year-long business venture, Olivia, noticing the marked differences between herself and other members of the household, tries to better her standing through education (42). Initially wanting to imitate Lady Diana Nelson, Carlos's sister, and her friends, Olivia's feelings of inferiority about her Gothic past at first seem to overwhelm her:

> Las damas que visitaban a Lady Nelson iban peinadas y vestidas con una elegancia y una gracia infinitas, tenían [. . .] unas conversaciones llenas de oportunidad y cultura [. . .] y sobre todo un despejo para todas las cosas que asombraba a la pobre Olivia, que las colocaba entonces en una esfera sublime de prestigio, ilustración y grandeza. ¿Cómo, pues, podía esperar la desgraciada, ignorante y despreciable hija de un verdugo, que Sir Carlos la amase? (42)

However, her education ultimately becomes a serious goal: "Olivia sentía un vehemente deseo de ilustrarse y de llegar a adquirir aquellos modales y aquellas palabras, que tanto admiraba" (43). The protagonist thus pleads with Rosa, her maid, to find her a teacher of literature and history who "le enseñase algo de lo que sabían aquellas señoras," and her self-directed schooling begins from there, surprising readers with her transformation into an educated woman (43).

Also of importance is that Rosa, although she is of a lower social class, is the noblest and wisest of the secondary characters, serves as Olivia's confidant, and helps Olivia arrange her schooling. Describing Rosa's intelligence and magnanimity of spirit, the narrator explains,

> Era Rosa una joven de veinte y ocho años, nada hermosa, pero inteligente, amable y cariñosa por naturaleza; así es que en el momento le buscó y le trajo un maestro, a cuyo arbitrio dejó Olivia la elección de los ramos que debía enseñarle. Este empezó un plan de educación y la joven se dedicó al estudio con un ardor y una constancia asombrosa, aunque con el mayor secreto. (43)

Rosa's kind nature but lowly social position also establish her as a parallel figure to Olivia, and these two working-class characters organize together to overcome obstacles to Olivia's achievement, a subtle threat to bourgeois social order. Notable too, is the contrast that the author forges between Rosa, who helps the protagonist, and Lady Nelson, Olivia's vindictive sister-in-law. Although Lady Nelson supposedly serves as a model of learning, her personality differs greatly from that of Rosa and Olivia, suggesting that

goodness is not transmitted hereditarily or through wealth. Specifically, Lady Nelson sees Olivia as beneath her family, and she refers to the heroine as a "criatura," poisonously insinuating that Carlos could not possibly love Olivia because of her origins (32). She is also the character who reveals the truth to Olivia that her marriage was arranged in exchange for Carlos's amnesty (54). Here the text appears to subtly argue Romantic, liberal ideals that are relevant for the political situation in Cuba during the mid-nineteenth century. Bearing in mind that these events are historically set in France shortly before the Revolution (under the reign of Louis XV), a questioning of the value of inherited nobility may be at play. If being a good person does not coincide with being wealthy or of noble birth, the monarchy system's logic is negated.

Since Cuba was still under Spanish rule, hidden denunciations of the monarchy developed by some Cuban writers and intellectuals often surface in the belief systems espoused in their texts.[9] The advocacy of common people in pursuing education and a better lifestyle, as well as the critique of nobles (like Lady Nelson), developed in *La hija del verdugo* may also have bolstered arguments for a restructuring of social class following the hard work paradigm and a break from the monarchy system. The contrast developed between the Gothic British Isles, where Olivia is first portrayed as an oppressed heroine at odds with her environment, and France, where she finds agency to educate herself, also suggests some embodiment of liberal ideals that the latter country may metaphorically represent. Here, Eljaiek-Rodríguez's application of "*tropicalization*" to the Gothic appears to play out, as Pérez de Zambrana offers an implicit critique of colonial powers in her depiction of England.[10] Pérez de Zambrana's focus on women's agency and education in this portion also helps readers to envision a learned, dynamic role for women in a future free society. When such theoretical concepts are applied to Cuba, women would form part of the yet-unrealized national independence project.

As the novel continues, Olivia dedicates herself completely to her studies during her husband's absence: "Olivia redobló sus esfuerzos, y pasaba las noches y los días inclinada sobre los libros sin dormir, sin comer, sin descansar" (43). In the process of constant study, the heroine grasps the truth about human beings: that they are filled with almost limitless potential and that they can avoid the propensity towards the kind of evil epitomized by her father. The narrator describes the realization of this knowledge thusly: "En semejante lectura conocía ella toda la dignidad de nuestro ser, todo el precio de las facultades que poseemos y toda la altura a que podemos elevarnos. Y esto le daba doble aliento para seguir sus estudios" (44). In this scene, Pérez de Zambrana also justifies universal education, as all people are educable, including women. It is obvious that "las facultades" are possessed by everyone, shown through the use of the plural first-person verbs: "poseemos" (44). Realizing this, Olivia also relinquishes her wish to merely emulate her sister-in-law and embarks on a more substantial path to erudition by deciding to study French and piano as well: "Más tarde [. . .] le había rogado a Rosa que le buscase un profesor de música y de idiomas" (44). These discoveries connect her success with her self-determination, suggesting a strategy for women regardless of social standing.

When Carlos returns to the mansion, Pérez de Zambrana provides the first description of the changes in the protagonist after months of study. The narrator opens the scene by detailing the room of the educated young lady, first symbolically representing her

scholarly improvements through the setting: "[Carlos] iba a salir, cuando le llamó la atención ver en aquel lugar un piano y varios papeles de música. [. . .] Notó también que había dos estantes llenos de libros, y se puso a recorrerlos: eran todas selectas obras morales y literarias" (45). Also on the bookshelves were some verses that Olivia had written, a meta-literary image subtly endorsing women's writing, a cause favored by Pérez de Zambrana herself (46). When Olivia enters the room, there is a shift from her improved surroundings to her improved image. Although she had been previously depicted as "simple" and "sin gusto," in her dedication to her studies she has also learned better ways to dress herself (26). She is now described thusly: "Llevaba un vestido de gaza azul cortado con exquisito gusto y ajustado con suma gracia a la cintura. El cabello en abundantes y lustrosos rizos de azabache se estremecía en trono de su rostro suave, agraciado y pálido" (47). Everything about Olivia is now as positive as her description had been negative when Carlos first encountered her, and even her previously unhealthy pallor is viewed in favorable terms.

Although, for Carlos, Olivia's conversion appears to just be physical at the beginning, he confirms that the books and music belong to her once she starts to play the piano: "[. . .] [S]e dirigió lentamente al piano: abrió éste, se sentó y empezó a tocar pausadamente una melodía escocesa de un tinte patético y doloroso. Sir Carlos la miraba con una sorpresa inexplicable. ¿Qué era lo que había originado aquella feliz variación?" (47). The parallel between Olivia's physical and intellectual changes is manifested through the musical term "variación," which suggests a new creativity in her piano playing alongside the obvious changes in her persona from Carlos's perspective (47). As Lou Charnon-Deutsch has noted, the male gaze in nineteenth century art forms can be problematic in that it can reduce women to existing merely as part of male desire (3). However, while Olivia appears to have educated herself partially to impress her husband, from whose perspective readers view the scene, there are also more progressive motives at play.

Rather than merely depicting her heroine as subserviently learning for her husband's sake, perhaps Pérez de Zambrana offers a meticulously controlled presentation of Olivia through Carlos's eyes because of her consciousness of a possible rebuke by male readership and her desire to control the reception of the still-controversial topic of women's education. This could link back to theories that María Salgado has proposed of Pérez de Zambrana's careful management and control over the depiction of herself in autobiographical epistolary portraiture to avoid censure or misrepresentation. By depicting Olivia's changes and her education from her husband's viewpoint as a tool to better their relationship, Pérez de Zambrana works within the existing framework of this popular nineteenth-century argument to subtly influence the reaction to her educational message. Observe some of the motives presented for Olivia's study: "Ella había leído muchas veces que los conocimientos y las buenas y amables cualidades hacen a una joven querida de todo el mundo y esto la llenaba de la más dulce ilusión [. . .] por hacerse estimable a los ojos de Sir Carlos" (44). Crucially, the narrator remarks that this argument has already been promoted ("había leído muchas veces") and somewhat accepted as grounds for women's education during the period (44). While such rationale served to promote increased activism surrounding women's schooling, it still figures as part of an idealized female domesticity for men's sake. Subsequently, hidden behind this socially-

accepted justification, the author also subtly espouses more progressive views on women's education in the text.

Aside from educating herself for her husband's benefit, it appears that key factors like a love for study and a desire to understand debates and intellectual conversations may be greater factors in Olivia's self-directed learning. Crucially, Pérez de Zambrana suggests that Olivia embarks on her educational journey in spite of her belief that Carlos might never love her, deciding to learn and "no esperar ser amada" (43). Olivia also endeavors to be actively engaged in lettered discussions as an equal. For example, the narrator comments that "[e]l pensamiento de llegar a comprender a Sir Carlos, y de poder sostener sus interesantes y elevadas conversaciones, arrebataba a la joven y le daba una voluntad para vencer las más escabrosas dificultades" (43). From this description, we see that Olivia does not want to serve merely as an ornament in her husband's salon. Instead, she wishes to wholeheartedly participate in the intellectual activities that take place there. Completely outside of a theoretically feminine education, Olivia also takes initiative in finding subjects she might want to study for her own personal enjoyment. Of note, the novel portrays her growing interest in history, which would not have been a traditional field of research for women. As the narrator puts it, "[e]l estudio de la historia cautivaba sobre todo su espíritu," suggesting that Olivia is learning for its innate pleasure (43). In concurrence with these examples, it seems that although the argument that education is important for marital contentment is present, there is also a true promotion of study for the sake of women's happiness and women's rights, as Olivia educates herself by her own volition and for her own felicity.[11]

Olivia's conversion from an ostracized and rustic executioner's daughter with a Gothic past to a woman of high society shows how women can improve their destinies through education, good character, and good fortune. The transformation that Olivia undergoes also deconstructs the fatalistic vision of deterministic philosophies of the period, which again increased in popularity later in the nineteenth century with the emergence of Naturalism. Furthermore, the regressive school of thought that one's inherited nobility determines one's intelligence and strength of character through an innate goodness is finally metaphorically defeated through the defeat of Carlos's sister, Lady Nelson, in a scene near the novel's conclusion. She tries a final time to break up her brother's marriage to Olivia by pleading with her to sacrifice everything, enter a convent, and become a nun (54). Olivia, destroyed by the belief that Carlos still does not love her because of her Gothic origins, even after she has educated herself to be his intellectual match, tries to follow this malicious advice because, as she explains to Carlos: "Demasiado sé que no puedo inspiraros más que desprecio, porque soy la miserable hija de un verdugo," or, in other words, the monstrous woman presented at the novel's outset (61). Fortunately, Pérez de Zambrana ends the text with a more modern vision, and the readers see that because of Olivia's tenacity and work she is worthy of Carlos, her cultured equal, who exclaims to her that he "aborrecería la existencia sin el supremo encanto de vuestro amor" (62). Lady Nelson, who represents regressive ideologies about social class and gender roles, essentially vanishes from the story just as she ceases to have any influence over the couple.

Olivia's life in the public sphere, however, must still proceed within the stratified framework of her society. Accordingly, she accepts a role in the court, assuming a new identity as the "Duquesa de Plozk," a title created through a link to a Polish territory belonging to Carlos's family, and abandoning ties to her former life (63). Although she has achieved much through her studies, the couple does not publicly reveal her Gothic origins to the court as she must adapt to the restrictions of her society with the careful presentation of her persona. The narrator explains how she now serves as a paradigm of poise, despite her humble past:

> Nunca se vieron en la Corte de Luis XV modales más exquisitos que los modales de la Duquesa de Plozk. Nunca se vieron reverencias hechas con más gracia y más dulce dignidad; [. . .] nunca se vio sonrisa más llena de celeste dulzura ni mirada más llena de irresistible atracción; nunca se vio, en fin, lenguaje más distinguido ni encanto mayor en la conversación. (63)

After Olivia's education and intellectual reinvention, "era considerada como una modelo de gracia, de elegancia, dulzura, urbanidad, y buen trato" (67). Here, the author again sells her central message about women's study and self-improvement, as Olivia is now the surprising belle of the ball, having triumphed over horrific circumstances and infiltrated the court.

Finally, after freeing herself from her past through education, Olivia also experiences a newfound freedom of physical movement and an opportunity to literally bury the specters of her youth and reconcile them. While earlier she was typically depicted either inside her father's cottage or her husband's mansion, at the novel's conclusion, Olivia leaves behind the traditional solution for troubled women characters, the election of further seclusion behind convent walls, and instead ends with a voyage back to England to inter her father's remains properly (65). In this way, Olivia also metaphorically buries the hatchet, allowing her to make peace with the truth while tucking away gruesome realities that could endanger her new success and bright future. Speaking to the gravedigger, she demands the body for reburial herself: "Necesito que me entreguéis los restos de ese hombre, y exigid el dinero que gustéis por ellos" (66) and has the body inhumed in a "hermoso mausoleo de mármol blanco, de aspecto noble, triste y severo" (67), wishing to give the conflicted man a proper tomb. Olivia's direction of the burial also now depicts her as master, rather than victim, of Gothic space, in this case, the cemetery in her homeland. Beyond controlling the Gothic environment, Olivia's return trip to the British Isles after becoming educated shows a spreading of the liberal ideals that she now represents. Perhaps this is a subtle metaphorical push by the author to bring such values to her own homeland of Cuba. In the last few pages of the novel, illuminated through knowledge, Olivia has taken control of her future and has finally worked through the circumscriptions of her past.

Ultimately, through the use of a Gothic backdrop in *La hija del verdugo*, Pérez de Zambrana creates metaphorical circumstances for her protagonist that critique the ugly truth about women's exclusion from intellectual pursuits and learned society and the horrors of their domestic realities. The characterization of Olivia's dark origins also furthers the novel's goal to show the importance of tutelage and what it can help people to overcome,

subsequently promoting instruction for women of all backgrounds, as all people are educable. The protagonist's self-sought educational path elucidates a promising avenue for women who are confined or degraded by their circumstances, advocating the power of knowledge and undermining systems of inherited wealth and nobility.

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Notes

[1] Jarlath Killeen explores the history and development of Gothic trends in *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* (2009), arguing that the genre's early stages from the 1760s, with the printing of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1764), to the 1820s created its more stereotypical themes such as mystery, a historical setting, horror, and supernatural forces (1). As Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy describe, the "Gothic has continued until the present day, albeit in constantly evolving forms" (1). Accordingly, the Gothic began to negotiate questions of modernity during the nineteenth century, and, thus, "as a mode it walks a tightrope between being a force for modernization and preforming a bitter critique of such social transformations" (Killeen 26). These tensions play out in *La hija del verdugo* with the juxtaposition of women's education with Gothic themes.

[2] *Angélica y Estrella* (1864) is also an understudied novel that merits more critical attention and offers precursory examples of themes present in *La hija del verdugo*. Like in *La hija*, the protagonist of *Angélica y Estrella* also lifts herself out of misery after being orphaned by moving to her uncle's home and demonstrating her virtue and intelligence to other characters.

[3] At play here too is the idealized paradigm of female domesticity, the self-negating "ángel del hogar" figure, who offered a roadmap for women's proper behavior. The Spanish writer María del Pilar Sinués de Marco outlines this domestic ideal in 1859, and modern critics, such as Nancy LaGreca in *Rewriting Womanhood* (2009), have expounded upon theories of its function.

[4] Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez posits that the Latin American Gothic employs a process of "*tropicalization*," which he defines as an appropriation of "the images and values of a dominant culture (in this case, European) in order to generate autochthonous products, maintaining a bond with the 'original' while discussing and questioning issues and images of the dominant culture" (14). He believes that nineteenth-century Gothic writers "generat[ed] playful and subversive texts that are structured in terms of agency and resistance" (14), by founding "otherness," not in Latin America, but in the Old World, a framework that applies to certain aspects of *La hija* (21).

[5] As modern critics and historians, such as Carol Mattingly, have detailed, substance abuse, physical violence, and rape were widespread, genuine plagues of an unequal society that played out in women's writings of the nineteenth century from diverse locations (3). Critiques of these crimes are present in reform writing, particularly prohibitionist discourse (Mattingly 3).

[6] Nancy LaGreca has explored the use of Decadent themes in the aforementioned *Álbum Cubano de lo Bueno y lo Bello*, directed by Gómez de Avellaneda, to argue that the inclusion of such motifs highlighted women's lack of rights ("The Sublime Corpse"). While the themes appearing in Pérez de Zambrana's novel are more Gothic than Decadent, their usage may foster a similar dialogue.

[7] Interestingly, this short story and *La hija del verdugo* emerged at the same time from distinct geographic regions. Both texts also use similar techniques: Gothic depictions of the upbringing of daughters who may be judged for their father's behavior, but who act independently out of their innate virtue. While "La hija del mazorquero" appears to argue for women's goodness, *La hija del verdugo* also proposes their

malleability through education. It is difficult to say definitively if one text influenced the other, but it is true that Gorriti was well-known.

[8] Or, as Diane Long Hoeveler has argued, albeit less kindly to a female gothic tradition, "[t]he typical female gothic novel presents a blameless heroine triumphing through a variety of passive-aggressive strategies over a male-created system of oppression and corruption" (9).

[9] See, for example, Cirilo Villaverde's seminal novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1839, 1882) or Ramón Meza y Suárez Inclán's *Mi tío el empleado* (1887), which denounce exploitation of Cubans.

[10] While the British setting allows the novelist to connect to Gothic literary traditions, the characters (including the men), are also pictured in tragic imprisonment there, solidifying the connection between the British Isles and colonialism. Perhaps this depiction stems from Britain's position that Cuba should remain a Spanish colony and from its influence on the island's economic practices during the nineteenth century (Watterson 390). In contrast, France is the space of learning in the novel, as it symbolized more liberal ideals after the French Revolution. For Cuba specifically, French immigration to the eastern part of the island, Pérez de Zambrana's birthplace, after Haiti's independence may have also affected perspectives on France. Additionally, Eastern Cuba was a hotbed for separatists during the Ten Years' War, which started shortly after *La hija* was published. In effect, Cuba's status as a colony experiencing demographic and political shifts likely influenced the interpretation of themes of sovereignty, national space, and gender in subtle ways in Pérez de Zambrana's novel, in keeping with the idea of the "*tropicalization*" of the Gothic.

[11] Another key argument for women's education was to hone practical skills for the work force, but this concept, best illustrated in texts such as Teresa González de Fanning's "Trabajo para la mujer" (1892), does not appear to play a major role in Pérez de Zambrana's text.

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