

**Stepping Away From the River: *La Llorona* as a Symbol of Female  
Empowerment in Chicano Literature**

By

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## **Abstract**

*La Llorona* is a much-maligned yet ever popular cultural icon in Mexican tradition. Her story is one of punishment and pain and it is oft told as a warning to children and adults who are considering breaking the cultural norms. She is mostly presented as a one-dimensional character whose sole purpose is to educate via terror and societal gender roles. This thesis argues that through the analysis of Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sandra Cisneros' work, that a new vision of *la Llorona* is formed against the traditional folkloric and limited interpretation of *La Llorona*. This work also proposes that she can be rethought of as a symbol of cultural empowerment and change.

## **Resumen**

La Llorona es un símbolo cultural mejicano que es muy difamado, pero retiene su popularidad en las tradiciones de esa cultura. Su historia es una de castigo y dolor, frecuentemente relatada a menores y adultos que consideran romper con las normas culturales. Usualmente es presentada como un carácter unidimensional con el único propósito de educar a través del terror. Esta tesis argumenta que a través del análisis de textos de Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, y Sandra Cisneros, una visión nueva de la Llorona es creada en contra de la interpretación limitada de la Llorona. Este trabajo propone que se puede repensar como un símbolo de empoderamiento y cambio.

To everybody who believed in me: my family, my boyfriend, my friends, and my committee.

And to my grandmothers, my mother, and all the strong women in my life who were to me symbols of *lucha* and never giving up.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Resumen</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>I Commenced to Wander: An Introduction to <i>la Llorona</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter II. Review of the Literature</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Death is Only the Beginning:</b>	
<b>Tracing the Possible Origins of the Wailing Specter</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Weaving the Fabric: Myth and Folktales Defined</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Genesis: The Three Potential “Births” of <i>la Llorona</i></b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter III</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Standing On the Borderlands:</b>	
<b>Global <i>Lloronas</i> and Textual Representations of the Spectral Figure</b>	<b>42</b>
<b><i>Llorona, yuki-onna, die wiesse frau?</i> The Global Roaming of a Ghost</b>	<b>45</b>
<b><i>La Llorona’s Debut: Bless Me, Última</i></b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Going Back in Time to <i>la Malinche: The Legend of la Llorona</i></b>	<b>58</b>
<b>I Write my Own <i>historia</i>:</b>	
<b>Gloria Anzaldúa’s <i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i></b>	<b>73</b>
<b>A Companion by the River: <i>Woman Hollering Creek</i></b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Chapter IV</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Drying the Tears: Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Gleaning Empowerment: Conclusions from <i>la Llorona</i> Texts</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Millennial <i>Llorona</i>: A Glance at <i>la Llorona</i> in Modern Media</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Recommendations for Further Study</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Implications</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>“Death Is Not the End”: Saying Goodbye to the Classical <i>Llorona</i></b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>118</b>

## Chapter I.

### I Commenced to Wander: An Introduction to *la Llorona*

In October of 2005, an apparent supernatural event occurred in Lajas, Puerto Rico. On a lonely rural road in the outskirts of that city, the apparition of a tormented and wailing female specter was alleged to have materialized after midnight. The revenant was described as a “celaje blanco,” a white figure that would throw itself on the floor and call out in a feminine voice for “mamá, papá, Carlos y Pablo.” Quickly enough people began to gather by the hundreds in the area, hoping to catch a glimpse of the spectral lady, creating a carnivalesque atmosphere in the neighborhood. Even a back-story was provided for the remorseful ghost: a local woman who had perished in a car accident several years earlier supposedly returned restless from her grave. While the setting quickly became a meeting point for the curious bystanders eager to see the entity, the family had a much different reaction, as described in the newspaper article from *Primera Hora* that was later reproduced in Axxón, an Argentine online magazine dealing with science fiction and the supernatural:

*Como creyentes de que así como existe lo bueno, existe lo malo, la familia se movilizó al área del puente junto a la representante Méndez. Fue el lunes y acudieron acompañados del padre Edgardo, párroco de la Iglesia Católica de Sabana Grande.*

*"Por aquello de que ella estuviera en paz con su alma, se trajo al párroco para bendecir el lugar y solicitó espiritualmente que su alma descansara en paz", añadió [Sonia, sister of the deceased Wanda Martínez Santiago, the woman thought to be the Lajas Llorona].*

As people who believe that where good exists, bad exists as well, the family went to the area of the bridge with city representative Méndez. The event occurred on Monday and the family was accompanied by Father Edgardo, parish priest of the Catholic Church of Sabana Grande.

“So that her soul would be at peace, we brought the parson to bless the place and he spiritually requested that her soul rest in peace,” added [Sonia, sister of the deceased Wanda Martínez Santiago, the woman thought to be the Lajas Llorona] (my translation.)

In 1972, Chicano novelist Rudolfo Anaya described the following similar supernatural event in his novel *Bless Me, Última*:

Along the river the tormented cry of a lonely goddess filled the valley. The winding wail made the blood of men run cold. It is la llorona, my brothers cried in fear, the old witch who cries along the river banks and seeks the blood of boys and men to drink!

La llorona seeks the soul of Antoniooooooooo...(Bless Me Última 28)

While both entities seem to have different behaviors and all they may have in common is their lamentation, they are equally identified as part of *la Llorona* myth. However, one is *la Llorona* of the “real world” and the other is *la Llorona* of fictional literary representation. She exists in many aspects of reality, but who is she? And why is she relevant enough to have a centuries old history of appearances across cultures, time and space?

The image and representations of *la Llorona* have had multiple origins, images, and stories attributed to her. Despite this some basics prevail in the way many describe her. She is



usually portrayed (or physically described) as a woman wearing a white robe, with long dark hair covering her face. Also, she perennially wanders, weeping for the children she has murdered. There is also a punitive element evident, since her wandering is meant to be an eternal condemnation to search for her dead children.

Through the analysis of selected works written by Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sandra Cisneros, this thesis will follow the premise of what Cordelia Candelaria contends: that “it is finally time to let go of a single, narrow understanding of the tale and to see *La Llorona* instead as an always evolving emblem of gender, sexuality, and power-and, too, as another female victim of history’s tender mercies” (Candelaria 115). Therefore as this thesis develops, the character of *la Llorona* will be transformed from an example of the transgressive female to a reinterpretation as a symbol of empowerment as supported in the selected Chicano/a texts for this study.

The objectives of this thesis are to analyze the uses of *la Llorona* motif as a character and unifier by exploring the specter’s possible origins and societal purpose. I also plan to illustrate how even though *la Llorona* is usually characterized as a negative presence, for these Chicano writers her effect on the individuals she interacts with (be it on a literal or metaphorical level) has been transformed into a generally positive and empowering one. In order to trace the complex identities and representations of *la Llorona*, I will analyze Anaya’s *Bless Me, Última* and *The Legend of la Llorona*; Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and Cisneros’s *Woman Hollering Creek*, novels in which main characters undergo positive change and evolution under the effects of *la Llorona*’s tale. Through the study of these texts I intend to show that although *la*

*Llorona* was utilized as a device to restrain and discipline women, she has also been represented as a symbol of empowerment and freedom.

The three most popular female characters in the Chicano culture are la Virgen de Guadalupe, la Malinche, and *la Llorona*; characters that are also entwined with legend and myth in the representation of women in Chicano literature. In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa considers them the three mothers to the Chicano community. These three figures also present the classical virgin/whore dichotomy, a belief that a woman could only be virginal or lascivious. The only apparent escape from these classifications was the in-between or gray area of being a wife. Of course, the Virgin of Guadalupe is the symbol of goodness and purity whereas la Malinche is the representation of the traitor. *La Llorona*, on the other hand, was once a wife (be it an official or a common-law wife); as a living human, *la Llorona* was once happily married, she had a man she loved, and she had children. However, due to certain circumstances (such as her husband abandoning her for another woman) this happiness was taken away from her. She was evicted from her gray area, she was no longer a wife, but a whore. When the older versions of the story began to make their rounds after the Spanish colonized Mexico, the personage of *la Llorona* was considered guilty by society and was thus condemned for eternity for what she had done. But in Anzaldúa's and Cisneros's literary works *la Llorona* has been transformed from a symbol of pity and discipline to a symbol of empowerment. The authors took this approach to *la Llorona* as an attempt to further the cause of and bring attention to the female situation in the culture they belong to. Also, it is meant to act as a resistance to the machismo inherent in their culture. Following this line of thought, according to Anzaldúa's interpretation of *la Llorona*, she takes revenge. *La Llorona* doesn't vent her rage

and frustration on the man, but on what she has left of her life with him: the children that were a product of their amorous relationship. Anzaldúa affirms:

*Guadalupe* has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and *mexicanos* and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted-*Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* [*La Malinche*] to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy (Anzaldúa 53).

As mentioned before, *la Llorona* has reportedly been around since pre-colonial times; thus it is natural that there are numerous collected tales and accounts of her presence. However, other than academic works at the level of thesis and journal publications, there had been no published books dealing with her critically until the summer of 2008, with the release of Domino Renee Pérez's *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*. Therefore, to gather information and pursue my study, the texts that will be reviewed are novels written by contemporary Chicano and Chicana writers.

Despite there being what Domino Renee Pérez describes as “countless versions of La Llorona” (Pérez 31), the Mexican American version of the tale is the one that seems to be most frequently addressed, with Chicana and Chicano writers such as Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, and Rudolfo Anaya, among others, using her figure in their works.

The novels will be discussed chronologically, in order to be able to trace the evolution of *la Llorona* as a contemporary symbol of empowerment. The first two texts to be reviewed are Rudolfo Anaya's debut novel *Bless Me, Última* and his version of the wailing woman's tale

simply titled *The Legend of La Llorona*. Anaya first mention of *la Llorona* occurs in *Bless Me, Última*. The novel is the bildungsroman of a young boy named Antonio, of the summers that made him grow from a boy into a man, and how one woman, the old and mysterious Última, helps shape him. Anaya introduces *la Llorona* in the second chapter of *Bless Me, Última* after Antonio hears what his brothers's tell him to be the wailing woman's cries from the river. Therefore, at the beginning, *la Llorona* is introduced as a sinister figure, one to be feared. Even though *la Llorona*'s presence in the novel is brief, it helps set the tone for many of the experiences that Antonio goes through: *la Llorona* both calls to him and pushes him away, just like his parents and his spiritual beliefs.

Anaya's second treatment of the specter is in *The Legend of la Llorona*. The short novel tells Anaya's version of *la Llorona*'s origin tale. Anaya's idea behind the version of the tale, while not original to him, is also one of the most popular origin stories of *la Llorona*. Anaya fictionalizes the story of la Malinche, who was the indigenous guide of Hernán Cortés. She also aided him in the conquest of Mexico through betrayal. Though in real life also referred to as Doña Marina and Malintzin, in the novel she is only called la Malinche. Like in the most commonly known forms of the story, la Malinche is abandoned by her lover and stands to lose her children. The final chapter of the novel, titled simply "*La Llorona*," explains how la Malinche goes mad and, in an attempt to prevent the loss of her children, she murders them. The novel ends with la Malinche wearing a bloodstained white gown, her hair wild, and constantly crying out for her children, effectively turning herself into a Llorona figure.

The third book to be discussed is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. *Borderlands* reads as a bilingual tale of self-discovery in prose and verse. While Anaya redeems

*la Llorona*, Anzaldúa takes the legend a step farther: she deifies *la Llorona*. Anzaldúa attributes the weeping specter's origins to that of being a goddess. She also discusses the mother figures of the Chicano and Chicana community, stating, "all three are mediators" (Anzaldúa 52), including *la Llorona*.

The fourth and final book to be discussed is *Woman Hollering Creek*. Penned by Sandra Cisneros, this is the most recent of the books to be analyzed and it ties together all the stories with the symbol of the Chicana woman, her struggles, and her overcoming these. The story from which the book garners its title is "Woman Hollering Creek." This vignette tells the tale of Cleófilas Enriqueta DeLeón, a Mexican woman who is trapped in an abusive marriage to a man from "the other side," meaning that he has successfully emigrated to the United States. Behind her house runs the so-called *Arroyo de la Gritona*, the Woman Hollering Creek, whose name holds a special allure to Cleófilas. Cleófilas is abandoned by the men in her life, both her father and her husband, and is left to literally suffer and weep throughout her life unless she escapes. She is destined to be like *la Gritona* unless she undertakes drastic measures, which she does.

Along with the discussion of the previously mentioned texts, my thesis will develop throughout four chapters in the following sequence:

Chapter II will discuss the origins, evolution, and various representations of the figure of *la Llorona* in Chicano culture and literature using the aforementioned texts and the works of Domino Renee Pérez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Betty Leddy, Bacil F. Kirtley, Michael Kearney, Shirley L. Arora, Ana María Carbonell, Cordelia Candelaria, and Helena Rivas, among others. These scholars have expounded upon *la Llorona* in various books, anthologies, and scholarly journals, deliberating on her origins and her meaning. Other female figures such as *la Malinche*

and la Virgen de Guadalupe will be discussed as part of the creation of the myth and legend of *la Llorona*. Another essential part of this chapter is the review of the literature: the concepts of bildungsroman, identity and societal constructs, borderland theory, magic realism, and Chicana feminist literature and others will be explored, as they contribute to what I intend to argue in this thesis.

Chapter III will be a comparison and contrast of the different versions of *la Llorona* illustrated not only in the aforementioned texts, but also how she is referenced in other works and cultures. As all publications and groups cannot be presented here, I have chosen those that have varying degrees of similarities between them and the Mexican American Llorona, reflecting upon the characteristics that they share. Apparitions and texts from Japan, the Philippines, Hawaii, and several European countries will be studied in order to elucidate how they may differ or coincide, if the tales intersect with one another at any point, and to show how *la Llorona* may be perceived as a global phenomenon. This part of the thesis will discuss Anaya, Anzaldúa, and Cisneros's contributions to the representation of *la Llorona*. Other topics to be discussed in this chapter are: the overall narrative construction of the text, focusing on the appearances of *la Llorona* and how they affect the circumstances of the story and the main characters.

The last chapter, Chapter IV, will summarize and review the facts gleaned from analyzing the works of Anaya, Anzaldúa, and Cisneros and the role of myth in their societies. It is expected that the information found in these texts will support my thesis's argument of *la Llorona*'s evolution from a symbol of oppression to one of empowerment and liberation, from a victim to a character that transcends the punishment given to her by society. It is a coming of age story of sorts for *la Llorona*, as it is for the characters that are in the stories that *la Llorona*

appears in. In light of this, my thesis will discuss how the character of the wailing woman is still relevant today, as can be seen with the associations made by various sectors of the media community between several mothers who committed infanticide and the figure of *la Llorona*.

*La Llorona* and her many depictions have returned from what is considered finite by many: death. And not only have they come back, but they have persevered and endured, being retold in many tales and re-imagined by contemporary writers, artists, and even filmmakers. She has even made it to Hollywood. Also, undoubtedly, she has most likely entered many homes, either through a movie, show or commercial playing in television, a book or news article, therefore silently becoming a part of our daily lives. According to Pérez, *la Llorona* has become a cultural symbol, representing the Mexican culture's strife. But it would not be bold to believe that she has become much more.

## Chapter II. Review of the Literature

Y quién soy yo? Qué busco por la orilla del hombre?  
(And who am I? What do I look for at the edge of man?)  
Julia de Burgos (Song of the Simple Truth) 466-7

### **Death is Only the Beginning: Tracing the Possible Origins of the Wailing Specter**

Death is defined by *Merriam-Webster Online* as “a permanent cessation of all vital functions: the end of life.” Religious beliefs aside, death is the end of life on this earth as we know it. However, in *la Llorona*’s case, life begins upon her death. With death as her starting point, the murders of her children and subsequent suicide mark the beginning of her never-ending search for absolution and peace. Her acts in life define the punishments in the afterlife and myth. She lives through death and eternal punishment. Her myth encompasses the realm of eternal punishment for deeds done on earth. Her existence begins in the realm of myth. After all, would she be remembered if her tale was not so full of earthly violence? If she had borne her lover’s indiscretions without reacting perhaps she may not have been known today. Death was a reaction to her partner’s behavior and the cause for her earthly punishment. In effect, death was only the beginning for her dire story.

However, despite her physical death, *la Llorona* remains undead and prominent. During a recent visit to Albuquerque, New Mexico for the 2009 *Southwest Texas Popular Culture Association* conference, four people volunteered their tales of *la Llorona*: a stranger at a souvenir shop, an artist and gallery owner from the area, and two fellow conference attendees: a visiting graduate student and a visiting professor. All four commented on chance meetings or stories of *la Llorona* that they or other family members had experienced. Furthermore, all of them were also



of Mexican or Mexican American heritage. The first story was volunteered by a young woman who walked up to me while I inquired at a store about Llorona merchandise. An Albuquerque local, she told me that as a child, she had heard of *la Llorona*'s murdering her children and then committing suicide along the Río Grande, the river that crosses through Albuquerque. Not only had this tale been passed down to her from previous generations, but she also claimed to have heard the wailing woman cry into the night for her children since her house was near the river. The gallery owner, a transplanted Texan, also told stories of *la Llorona* and *el Cucuy*, the bogeyman. While he confessed to know more about *el Cucuy* than *la Llorona*, he once again repeated the same story as the female stranger at the store. The graduate student reiterated the basics of the tale and the visiting professor told me that while he had never seen her, his father had and that it changed his life forever. What these conversations demonstrate is the fact that the *Llorona* myth is still alive and pertinent in southwestern culture.

The two aspects of the *Llorona* that all these reports shared were the consistent physical attributes and the other is the power of her myth to control behavior. Despite appearing in many variations and in many parts of the world and in many cultures, there are particular characteristics frequently attributed to *la Llorona*, the principal one being that of her crying or wailing. In her introduction to *la Llorona*'s entry in *Chicano Folklore*, Rafaela G. Castro encapsulates the typical physical descriptions of *la Llorona* as related by people who affirm to have seen her:

*La Llorona*, meaning "the weeping woman" or "the howling woman," may be represented as an Indian woman, an ugly old witch, or a beautiful woman in white with long flowing hair. She always appears late at night, and her crying and

weeping can be vividly heard as she shrieks, “*Ayyy, mis hijos!*” (Oh, my children!) (140).

Castro’s short description confirms the possibility of multiple Llorona facets. She is cataloged as being either a native, unappealing and aged, or attractive and all of these are part of her appeal and downfall. As a native, like Malinche, she would’ve been of interest to the arriving foreigners because they would consider her exotic. If she were ugly and old, she would have been perceived as someone who has served their purpose and as a being of no particular interest. Finally, her beauty is another plausible reason for her doom because she might’ve attracted unsavory men who sought her for only carnal fulfillment. Once this passion was pleased or when another pretty girl walked by, her lover would abandon her and so she would go on to perform the acts that make her into *la Llorona*.

Her late night appearances and wails are not only part of the story because they are punishment (after all, she is doomed to seek her children in order to obtain reprieve), but they also heighten the element of fear and warning. The idea of a woman appearing out of nowhere late at night is already a bit startling, and for some suspicious, but with the added component of crying the scene becomes truly frightening.

Other common variations in her physical description alter her state of dress (her clothing is described as ragged or stained with blood), and her age and attractiveness (some accounts craft her as a beautiful young woman while others depict her as a fearsome hag or even a skeleton). Perhaps Olga Loya summarizes the sundry descriptions of *la Llorona* best in her collection of Hispanic folktales:

Some say that La Llorona appears at night. Her long black hair lies in contrast upon her flowing white dress. She appears to people who are out late at night. Sometimes the people see her and say, “Oh, how pretty! We’re going to follow her.” Sometimes the people are never seen again.

Some say that when La Llorona turns, she has the face of a horse, or that she has the face of a skull. Sometimes she has no face at all. Her white dress lightly touches the earth, but her feet do not touch the ground as she walks. Her nails are long and shiny like knives. Sometimes only her wailing voice can be heard in the dark, dark night, calling out, “Oh where are my children.” She is always looking for her children (31-32).

These descriptions by Loya share details with the previous one by Rafaela Castro such as the late night appearance, the white dress, the long hair, and the crying. But Loya’s descriptions are ones that genuinely promote fear. They do not illustrate a friendly or approachable entity. The lack of face (either a human face or complete lack of features), the floating, and “knife nails” in conjunction with her wailing are characteristics that can induce horror thus making her more useful as a coercive device. These negative traits are even more noticeable when contrasted with the use of a white dress. White usually denotes purity, a characteristic that isn’t frequently ascribed *la Llorona*. On occasion, her dress is stained with blood. In that case, it would make sense with the white dress’ purity symbol relating to the perversion of motherhood she has committed: infanticide. Perpetuating ideas, cultural norms, and warnings, these physical attributes are connected to the purposes of myth. And in this case, the myth of *la Llorona* is one of punishment.

## **Weaving the Fabric: Myth and Folktales Defined**

*La Llorona* can be categorized as a myth and a folktale. Donna Rosenberg's *Folklore, Myth, and Legends: A World Perspective* defines myth. Rosenberg maintains:

a myth is a sacred story from the past. It may explain the origin of the universe and of life, or it may express its culture's moral values in human terms. Myths concern the powers who control the human world and the relationship between those powers and human beings.

*La Llorona*'s story may not be the same as *la Virgen de Guadalupe*'s, Mexico's most important religious icon: it is dark and speaks of punishment and despair. Even so, it is paramount in Mexican culture. Through *la Llorona*, children and adults are warned of the consequences of breaking the cultural mores. They are warned not to stray from the advice of parents, the church, and to not break the *machista* tradition in Chicano society. Therefore, *la Llorona* fulfills the role of projecting the dominant group's ideals and moral values. Since *la Llorona* is usually depicted as an unwed mother abandoned by her lover, the story tells of the consequences you would encounter if you engage in a carnal relationship outside of marriage. Women are told to wait until marriage and men are warned of the consequences of engaging with and later abandoning that sort of woman.

The importance of myth is clearly not restricted to ancient cultures, since *la Llorona* wanders to this day; and it plays an important role even in modern society. In analyzing the role of contemporary myths, the book *Deep Space and Sacred Time Star Trek in the American Mythos* offers a definition of myth that is useful in explaining our study and the role of *la Llorona* in modern literary Chicano/a usage. The book discusses Star Trek and how it became a

modern myth, so while the subjects may be different, it can still shed some light into the myth making process in modern society. In the book's "Myth, Chaos, Cosmos" section, Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen state:

Myths are a people's deep stories—the narratives that structure their worldview and that give form and meaning to the disconnected data of everyday life. There is not always a clear line separating myth in this broad sense from trivial fiction or from "factual" accounts (Wagner and Lundeen 5).

They go on to add, "myth confronts problems that in real life are the most unmanageable" (Wagner and Lundeen 5). Even in contemporary society, myth explains away that which seems too daunting to confront. Myth provides a framework for life and the understanding of everything life entails. Myth gives reason for our actions and the actions of the dominant class group. It also explains things that fall into the emotional and psychological. Why are we here? Are we alone? What happens when we die? Things such as death and what happens after it are commonly explained through myth and these explanations are usually embraced, since humanity has a seemingly insatiable need to have a reason, a story of origin, for everything. Since we have no tangible proof of what happens after death or why we are here, we must come up with ideas, no matter how plausible or not they may be, to calm the need for an explanation. Furthermore:

"...a myth is a form of traditional (usually oral) narrative that is set in a primordial time, that concerns the actions of supernatural beings, and that is revered within its cultural setting as sacred truth." (Wagner and Lundeen 6)

The weeping woman's story has been transmitted mainly through oral tradition, with many people hearing it as the story of a relative or a friend of a friend. Also, *la Llorona*'s myth dates back to pre-conquest times. Even then, *la Llorona* was supernatural, as one of her possible origins was that of a goddess. Her actions as a goddess were not doubted. In fact, they were considered signs; prophetic warnings of a doom to come. Hence, it was considered a "sacred truth", since prophecies were part of Aztec beliefs. Thankfully, this event was historically recorded through a translation of native's testimonies. It is proof of one of the possible origins for *la Llorona*, of which there are three. They are all equally important for they reveal different facets and ways to interpret the wailing ghost.

Jack David Zipes discusses folktales with an approach similar to myth. He also argues that folktales go back to ancient times:

Historical, sociological and anthropological studies have shown that the folk tale originated as far back as the Megalithic period and that common people have been the carriers and transformers of the tales...Gerard Kahlo has shown that most of the folk tale motifs can be traced back to rituals, habitats, customs and laws of primitive or pre-capitalist societies. (5)

Like Wagner and Lundeen, he affirms that folktales go back far in time and that they formed part of regular society in the form of cultural norms. He also points out a very important detail, that it is "the common folk" who maintains the tale alive. Even though myth and folktale are used to perpetuate social tropes, they remain alive because they are part of the masses. Much alike Romance languages, which were considered to be part of the *vulgus* versus the educated Latin of

the aristocrats, it is the Romance languages that survived due to their extensive use. Myths and folktales endure thanks to the masses repeating these stories again and again.

Zipes argues “that the impact of these works stems from their imaginative grasp and symbolic depiction of social realities” (4). This is parallel to myth since both picture events and situations from reality and go further than that; they both try to assign meaning or at least help in comprehending these events. As Zipes states, folktales “help bridge a gap in the understanding of social problems” (4). Thus like myth, folktales were used to justify or explain away cultural norms and situations that occurred. To further develop his idea, he refers to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in their discussion of the fantasy aspect of folktales:

That is fantasy is not a certain substance as one says ‘he has too much imagination,’ but rather it is the organizer of the mediation, i.e., of the special labour process through which human drives, consciousness, and the outside world connect themselves. (10)

Therefore, the fantastic element present both in myth and folktale is not there for mere entertainment. It is a tool to understand human thoughts and interactions. Fantasy is a way to explore and comprehend humanity. This further confirms myth and folktale’s purpose as attempts to grasp not only social realities, but also more complex themes like life and death. Through myth and folktale, humans link themselves to the world.

These texts by Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sandra Cisneros are part of the new revisionist approach of *la Llorona*, who is usually encapsulated in certain stereotypical roles. Bell Hooks summarizes that females can only be depicted as “victims, vamps, or castrators” (14); they can only be one-dimensional beings. They are not allowed to develop beyond these

roles. *La Llorona* is encased firmly in these three since she is first a victim of her lover, then she becomes a vamp and a castrator when she pursues men and kills children in retellings of the legend. Classical accounts also reinforce *La Llorona* in the gender conventions of the “aggressive male”, the “passive female” (Miess, 234), and “the female monster” (Miess, 235).

In the *Horriifying Sex* anthology, Julie Miess discusses the female as a “gendered other” (233). In her essay “Another ‘Gendered Other’?: The Female Monster Hero”, she elaborates upon “the human monster” (233) and how it is typically male. If the monster or villain of a horror narrative isn’t a mythical creature, then the male assumes the role. Miess explains that this placing of the male in the villain’s role is:

problematic as these distinctions start to generate hierarchies... This gendering also moves toward a dangerous naturalization by suggesting essentialist ideas: man is aggressive and active by nature; woman is emotional and passive (234).

This illustrates that chauvinism is prevalent even in horror and that female options are limited. If a woman decides to act out, Miess elaborates that “she may be the passive victim or, if she chooses not to inhabit the role, she is figured as the inhuman mythological female monster (234)”. Therefore, if a woman does not satisfy herself with the boundaries that are socially imposed, she will be stripped of her humanity and rendered monstrous. When the male is the villain, there is always a sexually charged atmosphere: his crimes are that of penetration. Either rape or penetration with a blade, or beatings with phallic objects, the man asserts his domain over a woman while still being recognized as a human male. For a woman to wield horrific power, she must lose her humanity (like the serpentine Lamia) in order to not be restricted. So according



to these gender roles, a woman cannot exert power without eliciting anxiety since she is supposed to be in the passive role.

Anxiety over female power is a theme evident in *la Llorona*'s possible origins. Considered at one point a goddess and later believed to have derived from la Malinche, an important figure in Mexican history, *la Llorona* is now more frequently known as an ordinary woman. The advent of patriarchy in Aztec culture led to the destitution and separation of a powerful *Llorona*-like goddess, thus allowing the male to reclaim power for himself. La Malinche is no stranger to being cast away, since she was once seen as a powerful and intelligent one and later demoted to a whorish turncoat. *La Llorona*'s origins are marked by a struggle for self-assertion, just like her present-day struggle.

### **Genesis: The Three Potential "Births" of *la Llorona***

There is no one clear origin for *la Llorona*; there are different cases brought forth from diverse areas of the world, each with compelling evidence. Ray John de Aragón briefly explores this in the introductory chapter of his book, pointing out that tales of *la Llorona* "bear a strong resemblance to those of the Angel of Death which stem from fourteenth century Europe" (4). But he travels further back in time by stating, "people have believed in stories similar to *La Llorona* all over the world since the earliest recorded times. The legend itself through variations reaches back many centuries before Christ to ancient Rome and Greece" (5).

De Aragón focuses mostly on Medea, affirming "similarities between the representation of Medea and the theme of *La Llorona* are too closely related to be dismissed as mere coincidence" (8). Briefly summarizing de Aragón's backstory on this character from Greek

mythology, Medea was the wife of Jason, leader of the Argonauts. She bears him two children, but he later abandons his wife to marry a princess. Consequentially, she murders the infants, but in a twist that differentiates her from *la Llorona* she is not eternally punished for her children's murder. But even Medea's tale cannot be pinpointed as the defining point in the birth of *la Llorona*'s global recognition and it must be noted that while de Aragón and other researchers believe in a connection between *la Llorona* and Medea, there is no clear proof as of yet of this European association. Still, in the Mexican American version of *la Llorona*'s nativity, there are several versions that characterize her as originally being one of the following: a goddess, a much-maligned historical figure, or a peasant woman.

The first of these possible origins, that of *la Llorona* being a goddess, actually has a loose time frame tied to a sighting of her. Though an exact date cannot be established, it is certain that she appeared around 10 years prior to the arrival of the first Spanish ship to the coasts of modern-day Mexico. This is stated in the *Testimonio de Muñoz Camargo*, a Spaniard residing in Mexico after the Conquest. Her first recorded appearance is chronicled in the centuries old text known as the *Codex Florentino* or *The Florentine Codex*. Its content dates her existence to the times of pre-conquest Mexico. In an article titled "Mexico: Forgotten Ruins and Ancient Astronauts," Scott Corrales describes the *Codex Florentino* as "a chronicle of Aztec events compiled by Franciscan priest Bernardino de Sahagún based on the testimony of native chroniclers, [that] indicates that paranormal activity in Mexico was in high gear since 1502." A particular part of this *Codex* is the mention of a series of eight omens that seemed to predict the arrival of the Spanish colonizers. And, most importantly, *la Llorona* was one of these apparent signs. In *Visión del los vencidos*, a book that seeks to tell the native's side of the conquest and

contains parts of the *Florentine Codex*, there are two versions of how this warning manifested itself. The first comes from Sahagún, or rather his informants and transcribers, since he was mainly a supervisor and occasional transcriber. Both versions are translations of texts or oral narratives in the native language of Nahuatl. Sahagún's original text reads as follows:

*Sexto presagio funesto: muchas veces se oía: una mujer lloraba; iba gritando por la noche; andaba dando grandes gritos:*

*-¡Hijitos míos, pues ya tenemos que irnos lejos!*

*Y a veces decía:*

*-Hijitos míos, ¿a dónde os llevaré? (4)*

Sixth baneful omen: heard many times: a woman wept; she went screaming at night; she wandered giving great shrieks:

-My children! We must go far!

And sometimes she said:

-My children, where will I take you? (my translation)

This is accompanied by a footnote, which explains that the text appears to refer to the goddess Cihuacóatl, who screamed and wept at night. The editor of *Visión de los Vencidos*, Miguel León-Portilla, ends the footnote by affirming that this is one of the antecedents of the “celebrated Llorona”. The description in Sahagún's translation of the native narratives is quite similar to the descriptions of *la Llorona*: a weeping woman calling out for her children. The only thing that changes is the message. While the *Llorona* that is most well-known nowadays usually calls out for her children and questions their whereabouts, this entity calls out for the children and states that they will soon have to go far. She also asks where can they go. This pre-conquest

Llorona is benevolent since she seeks not to produce harm upon, but rather save, her “children”: the Aztecs.

The second collected version of the omen that appears in *Visión de los vencidos* comes from the *Testimony of Muñoz Camargo*. This text was created around the same time, or closely after, Sahagún’s; both texts were made and published from the mid to late 1500s. Both speak of omens because they were meant to be a history of Mexico. It is established in a footnote in *Visión de los Vencidos* that Muñoz Camargo was acquainted with the original Nahuatl texts, thus emulating Sahagún’s approach of direct translation of native texts. Muñoz Camargo calls it “el sexto prodigio,” the sixth prodigy, understanding that prodigy at that time meant to have prophetic significance. His retelling:

*El sexto prodigio y señal fue que muchas veces y muchas noches, se oía una voz de mujer que a grandes voces lloraba y decía, anégandose con mucho llanto y grandes sollozos y suspiros: ¡Oh hijos míos! del todo nos vamos ya a perder...e otras veces decía: Oh hijos míos ¿a dónde os podré llevar y esconder...? (9)*

The sixth prodigy and sign was that many times and for many nights a woman’s voice was heard crying aloud, drowning in many tears and great sobs and sighs: Oh my children! We shall be totally lost...and other times it said: Oh my children, where can I take you and hide you (my translation)?

Muñoz Camargo’s translation of Nahuatl texts varies only in the message the weeping woman said. Instead of only wondering where she will take the children, this time she adds that they “shall be totally lost”. Muñoz Camargo’s text backs up Sahagún’s in providing evidence of the

existence of a Llorona-like specter during pre-columbine times. Like Sahagún's text, it also seems to refer to Cihuacóatl, the goddess.

Both texts are important because they are considered the first written record of Llorona-like events. Perhaps, even more importantly, is the fact that they are both translated from native stories in Nahuatl. They were translated and transcribed to create an early chronicle of Mexican history. Not all of the original text was translated however, but it seems that this section was important enough to preserve and translate.

The most significant quality that these texts have is that they are irrefutable proof that *la Llorona* is not a specter that "traveled" to Mexico with the Spanish. She existed before they arrived and this is evidence of it because these are translations of texts that existed 10 years before the arrival of the Conquistadors. Not only that, her existence was a pivotal and benevolent one, as she ruled over childbirth as well as death and she sought to warn her people of the incoming threat of the Spanish. If Sahagún and Muñoz Camargo had never thought of translating the native narratives, it is possible that we may have never known this, as the Spanish purportedly destroyed the original texts.

The discussion of the "sixth omen" mentioned in Sahagún and Muñoz Camargo's texts continues in the foreword for *The Weeping Woman: Encounters with La Llorona*, in which Denise Mann Lamb and Judith Beatty discuss this possible origin of *la Llorona* and note that Cihuacóatl was "a pre-Columbian earth goddess ruling childbirth and death," a charge that eerily coincides with *la Llorona*'s situation. Mann Lamb and Beatty later add that "ten years later, her [Cihuacóatl] dire warnings came to fruition with the arrival of Cortes." These accounts portray a figure similar to *la Llorona*, but at the same time, create a very singular rendering: where is the

filicide that is known today? However, while all of these have distinct differences, it is obvious that they have marked similarities. They all portray a woman lamenting over the forthcoming and seemingly inevitable loss of her children, in this case, the brood symbolizing her people.

The second likely genesis of *la Llorona* is also connected to the premise of the specter originally being a goddess. More specifically, to the goddess's prophetic cries that seemingly came true with the entrance of the Spanish in Mexico. While there had been previous attempts to colonize Mexico, it was the year 1519 that brought the more established presence of the Spanish culture on Mexican soil. 1519 heralded the appearance of Hernando Cortés and the critical meeting with Malintzin Tenepal.

Don Hernando, or Hernán, Cortés y Pizarro was a Spaniard that arrived in Mexico by way of Cuba. His conquering and conversion of pre-Columbian Mexico was aided by a series of factors: first, as Helena Alberú de Villava relates in her book *Malintzin y el señor Malinche*, there was a belief in an old legend that told of the return of one of their gods: Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent. It was thought that Cortés was the anthropomorphized version of Quetzalcoatl. A cybernetic timeline created for the PBS show *The Border* summarizes,

Cortes was unaware of the spiritual implications that surrounded his expedition.

His arrival in the Americas coincided perfectly with the predicted return of the

Plumed Serpent named Quetzalcoatl, the Aztecs main god, credited with creating

Man and teaching the use of metals and the cultivation of the land (“1519-1521

Hernan Cortes Arrives in Mexico”).

Second, there was a series of convenient similarities in significance of several symbols between cultures; in particular, that of the cross. While not all of the natives shared those beliefs and for

some, religious conversions were superficial, others still allowed the change. A passage from Henry Bamford Parkes's *A History of Mexico* illustrates:

He [Cortés] smashed the idols in their temples and erected a cross and an image of the Virgin. The bewildered Indians accepted the sudden change of deities without great opposition, chiefly because the cross was also the symbol of Tlaloc, the Indian rain god (41).

Finally, the third element in Cortés overtaking of Mexico was the series of coalitions forged with indigenous groups that disagreed with the Aztecs. This was possible with the aid of two interpreters, the first of which is Jéronimo de Aguilar. De Aguilar was one of two Spaniards that spent several years living with the Yucatecan Maya after surviving a shipwreck. The second interpreter was the woman who would be later baptized as Doña Marina, known today to many as *la Malinche*.

*La Malinche* is a vital component in the creation of what is known today as Mexico; in her book, Alberú de Villava stresses her importance:

*Desde el momento que se inició la cadena de intérpretes que necesitaba Cortés para darse a entender con los aztecas, resaltaba la labor que realizó Malintzin durante la Conquista. No solo fue el enlace entre ella, Cortés y los pueblos que hablaban náhuatl, sino que también fue la más efectiva fuente de información en relación a cuestiones políticas, costumbristas, y hasta en situaciones conectadas con el protocolo de la monarquía indiana (36-37).*

From the moment in which the chain of interpreters that Cortés needed to communicate with the Aztecs began, Malintzin's labor during the Conquest stood

out. Not only was it because of the link between her, Cortés and the towns that spoke Nahuatl, but she also was the most effective source of information in matters of politics, customs, and even in situations related to native monarchy (my translation).

Despite this there are many myths perpetuated about her, starting with her name: there is not one clear given name for her other than her baptismal Doña Marina. Some say her original name was Malinalli, others Malintzin. Next are the rumors about a life lived in grandeur; according to Karttunen, there were stories of her having “a long and prosperous life” accompanying her husband “[Juan] Jaramillo to Spain” and that “she was a celebrity at court (21).” From what is concretely known, her life was short, but not lacking in tumult. In *Malintzin y el señor Malinche*, Alberú de Villava relates that *la Malinche* was born to a noble indigenous family around 1503-1504; her exact birth date is unknown. Her father died when she was still a child and her mother married another man, a younger noble. In a twist that links *la Malinche* and her mother to *la Llorona*, *la Malinche*’s mother and her husband decide to eliminate the young Malinche from their lives after conceiving a child together. Her mother procured the body of a slave’s daughter and created an elaborate funeral to make everyone believe Malinche had died. After this, she was sold to the Aztec traders who in turn sold her into a Mayan household. At this domicile she would learn a second language, which in the future would enable her to become Cortés’s interpreter and mistress.

In an entry for the *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society & Culture, Volume 2*, Karttunen summarizes her first meeting with the Spaniard in one line; she “was given to Fernando (Hernán) Cortés in a group of 20 women by Chontal Maya on the Tabasco coast in the



spring of 1519” (775). Karttunen goes on to asseverate in *Between Worlds* that Malinche was baptized in March of that same year by Father Bartolomé de Olmedo. And this is when her liaison with Hernando Cortés begins. After the baptism, she was given to Alonso Hernández de Puertocarrero, but that was a short-lived arrangement due to the revelation of her value for the Spanish conquest. Karttunen details how Cortés took note of her bilingualism:

Aguilar was unable to interpret, but according to chroniclers, Doña Marina was observed speaking to members of the Indian delegation and pointing out Cortés to them as the leader of the Spaniards, whereupon Cortés set her immediately to work on mediating between Montezuma’s emissaries and Aguilar. Aguilar, in turn, conveyed to Doña Marina what Cortés wished to say to Montezuma’s chief representative (7).

After this event, Cortés took Malinche back from Hernández. She would go on to accompany him not only through the Mexican conquest, but also on a trip down to Central America. Despite being married, Cortés took Doña Marina as a lover and she would go on to bear him a son in 1522. Two years later, Cortés again handed off Doña Marina, this time to Juan Jaramillo. She would later conceive a daughter with Jaramillo, but Malinche would die shortly afterward. Karttunen proclaims in *The Encyclopedia of Mexico*, “the depositions in this case reveal that doña Marina survived less than a decade after falling into Spanish hands” (775). Such was the end of Malinche’s physical existence, but not of her story.

*La Malinche* would fall from grace as the perception on her life changed, as Karttunen details in *The Encyclopedia of Mexico*:

In post-Independence, nineteenth-century Mexico, 300 years after her portrayal in both Spanish and indigenous sources as a powerful woman commanding respect, doña Marina began to be portrayed quite differently. These new depictions focused on her sexuality and condemned her role in the Conquest; the portrayals gave rise to the concept of *malinchismo*, which may be defined broadly as the pursuit of the novel and foreign coupled with rejection and betrayal of one's own. The modern focus on doña Marina's "willful betrayal" centers on the events leading to the Spanish massacre of the people of Cholula prior to the Spanish occupation of Tenochtitlan. According to both López de Gómara and Díaz del Castillo, doña Marina was offered an opportunity to leave the Spaniards for the protection of the Cholulans, even to the point of entering into marriage with a Cholulan noble- man, but she chose instead to inform Cortés of the Cholulans' plans to ambush the Spaniards. Her role in interrogating Cuauhtemoc, the last ruler of the Mexica, during his imprisonment and interpreting his confession prior to execution during the expedition to Honduras is considered confirmation of her treachery. Whatever her personal history and circumstances with respect to the Spaniards, these acts have been considered ones of free and reprehensible choice (776-777).

Karttunen illustrates how sentiments towards la Malinche changed drastically after a certain period of time. Instead of speaking positively of her, as most texts had done until then, the perception changed. She was seen as a voluntary and deliberant participant in the destruction of the Aztecs and the other tribes occupying what is now Mexico. The author speaks of particular

situations that were used to present Malinche as a traitor. However, said situations are only seen through either the eyes of the Spaniards or the eyes of the Mexicans who consider her a villain. Their interpretations of the events should be taken with a grain of salt since it is only their side of the story. We are never aware of Malinche's thoughts or motives for her actions. Even so, instead of being seen as an intelligent individual who managed to use her wit and skills to survive the disaster that was the Spanish conquest, she was made out to be a woman who sold herself out and used only her looks to carnally win her safety.

Alexandra Fitts says:

Malinche, doña Marina, Malinalli,--she has many names and many incarnations. What we know of her is that she was an Indian woman who served as interpreter and lover to Hernan Cortes while he conquered her land and massacred her people. Infamous as a traitor and a whore, her legacy has been to serve as representative of the victimization of the native people of Mexico at the hands of the whites, and as a shameful reminder of a woman's complicity.

Fitts' passage is a glimpse into the contemporary negative thoughts that are still common in regards to la Malinche. While at the beginning of the quote, Fitts appears to address the multiple thoughts there are regarding the cultural figure of Malinche, the excerpt quickly careens into a disparaging review of la Malinche. There is no mention of Malinche's difficult past or the fact that it was her knowledge of multiple languages and local customs that enabled her to be taken in (and be utilized by) the Spanish. Fitts simply presents her as an opportunistic and highly sexualized backstabber who watched as her land was destroyed. Fitt's account matches the *machista* thoughts that mar *la Llorona* and *la Malinche*'s reputations.

After reading these statements regarding *la Malinche*, perhaps it is no wonder as to why she is thought of as one of the possible origins for *la Llorona*. She is considered both a symbolical mother to the mestizo Mexican race and a traitor to her people. Not only did she sleep with the enemy, and thus mythically beget a new race, but many also believe that she helped destroy her own country, therefore effectively making her into a mother killing her own children.

Like *la Llorona*, surprisingly little is known about *la Malinche*, only what second-hand sources have told. The persona that is oft discussed is a creation of Spanish and Mexican perceptions, not of Malinche herself. Malinche has been turned into a *Llorona*; into a lesson to be wary of. Like *la Llorona*, Malinche is put forward as a woman who gave in to the impure and the carnal and sided with the invader in order to save herself. *La Llorona*, usually described as taking a lover, not a husband, also “gave in” to her sexual self outside of marriage, something that is frowned upon in highly religious Mexico, and was thus punished. As a result of being wanton or being abandoned, they both destroy their children. Since the most important icon in Mexican Catholicism is *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, the holy virgin mother of Jesus, Malinche and Llorona are punished for going against the standard of a “good woman”.

Karttunen explains in *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors*:

To say that Mexican attitudes towards this woman are ambivalent would be an understatement. As “Malinche,” she is perceived as the ultimate traitor, the collaborator who betrayed the indigenous peoples of the New World to the Spaniards. She is the mistress of Cortés, a woman driven by lust for the white man, who is resentfully called *gachupín*. She is identified with La Llorona, a ghost in the form of a beautiful woman who leads men to death in dark out-of-the-

way places and is heard weeping loudly in the night. La Llorona appears already in the *Florentine Codex*, as one of the omens of the fall of Mexico, wailing and lamenting the coming fate of the Aztecs (2).

Kartunnen elaborates upon the prevalent sentiment towards Malinche: that of a double-crossing whore. While she did indeed help Cortés out and become his lover, one has to think of her circumstances. Malinche was not an Aztec; in fact, she was part of one of the tribes that the Aztecs ruled over and demanded tithes from. Also, as someone who was traded and abandoned for much of her life, she most probably had a survivalist personality. It would make sense to ally with the invader in an attempt to overthrow Aztec rule. The comparisons to *la Llorona* are a way of placing blame on Malinche for her actions, since there is no evidence for her ever feeling repentant over them. Kartunnen also discusses one of the variants to *la Llorona*: the supernatural manhunter. Since she was considered “a woman driven by lust” in life, it only seems fitting to turn her into an attractive specter that seduces men to their death. She is also seen as *la Llorona* because a large percent of the Mexican population consider that she should regret aiding Cortés and therefore be condemned to weep for leading the Aztecs to their doom at the hands of the Spaniards. Mexicans believe she should suffer for the enslaving and death of indigenous Mexico.

It is only in modern times that *la Malinche* has been somewhat vindicated by contemporary Chicana writers:

Recently, however, women writers and artists, especially but not exclusively Mexicans and Mexican Americans, have begun a revaluation of doña Marina, seeking in her a positive model. The moral outrage of a violated, abandoned,

vengeful Medea/Lilith/Llorona remain, but the themes of strength, intelligence, and will to survive are coming forward (Karttunen, 777-778)

Now, perceptions of Malinche have begun to change, like those of *la Llorona*. She is being redeemed and turned into a positive and more realistic symbol. Instead of simply focusing on the dark side of la Malinche, which is mainly superimposed post-humously by an angry culture, we see a woman that uses all of her capabilities to survive in a world that continually undermined her. She is becoming someone that many people, especially Chicanas and Mexicans, can relate to because there is light and dark; a duality that every human possesses. This is what is needed when encountering *la Llorona*: a greater acceptance of both sides of her humanity.

In her entry for *la Malinche* in *Chicano Folklore*, Castro continues with this overthrow of the negative perceptions of Doña Marina:

Contemporary Chicanas have taken *La Malinche* as a positive role model to illustrate and explain the survivalist psyche of the Chicana in modern society. Her influence in the conquest of Mexico may be debatable, but there is no doubt that she is considered a heroine, almost on the same plane as *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (150).

Castro echoes Karttunen's reinterpretation of la Malinche. They see her as a survivor, a woman who did what it took to survive then and a parallel to modern day Chicanas who are still trying to escape *machista* cultural tropes. Unlike many Mexicans, Castro does not consider her the sole responsible for the Aztec downfall; in fact she doubts the degree of her effect upon it. Castro elevates her to the status of "heroine", a title that many would not place on her, and situates her

next to Mexico's holy mother: Guadalupe. Here, she is not considered a dark mark in Mexican history, but merely part of a stage. She is also set as an example for Chicanas to look up to.

Connections between *la Malinche* and *la Llorona* are not difficult to compose. Little is known concretely regarding both and what minimal information exists details a hard existence for these women. Both were betrayed by figures that are supposed to be loyal: *la Malinche* by her own mother and later on her lovers and *la Llorona* by her husband. While *la Llorona's* deception was a direct agent for her homicidal acts, *la Malinche's* repeated abandonments can be surmised to be catalysts for her behavior: one of survival. These two females are also much maligned by their actions of murder: one literal and the other symbolical. While in the narratives *la Llorona* actually murders her children, *la Malinche* metaphorically kills them by exposing them to the invader. Yet, can judgment really be passed upon women who were simply trying to make the best under situations of duress? It is unfair to glance at them in such a negative light without knowing their motives. Being aware of their reasons would make one realize that they were human beings that reacted to a situation, perhaps a bit carelessly at times, but undeserving of such drastic punishment.

Chronologically, the last potential, but not least important, beginning of *la Llorona* is that of her as an everywoman. By using the term everywoman, I mean to say that *la Llorona* was not a deity or a historical character, but a woman that was part or on the margins of society and led a conventional life. Initially, this version characterized her as a "peasant:" a woman belonging to a lower social caste. This is one of the most commonly told variants. The summary I provide is a condensation of Ray John De Aragón's *The Legend of la Llorona*, which in turn is a retelling of the stories his mother would acquaint him with. The earliest version of this origin story describes

*la Llorona* as a beautiful woman of indigenous or mixed origin that also belonged to the more humble spectrum of society. Her beauty entrances a man of higher socioeconomical echelon, either a criollo or a rich landlord. The accounts typically detail that the woman, sometimes called María, caught the attention of her lover with her extreme beauty, and so, became romantically involved with him. However, due to her poor social strata, her indigenous or bicultural origins, or a mixture of both, she could never marry her lover. Still, she was happy and lived in what can be denominated a common-law marriage with her partner. They had their own house and even had children. All seemed fine until the gentleman's family decided it was time for him to marry, but it had to be a union to a woman of a "good" family. In this case, good signified of equal social and ethnic "purity": a woman of the same class and who had no native blood in her, thus immediately ruling out María. She pleaded with her lover, but to no avail: he followed the will of his family.

The story concludes with the now familiar element in the story of *la Llorona*: in despair, María murders her children. After realizing what she has done, she commits suicide and now wanders searching for the children she has lost, crying and questioning as to their whereabouts.

It could be argued that this tale is derived from the other origin stories previously mentioned in this chapter (as a humanization of the deity, as a reintegration into society of *la Malinche*). Anzaldúa herself in *Borderlands* talks about how the goddess Coatlicue was divided into aspects by the new generation of patriarchal Aztecs. They could not have one female deity be both life and death, pure and dark. So they tore her apart into different deities, one of them being *Coatlalopeuh*, the "desexed Guadalupe". (Anzaldúa, 49). Later on, Anzaldúa adds that *la Llorona* is a "combination of the two" (52), meaning a mix of *la Malinche* and the degraded and



desexualized goddess *Guadalupe*. Perhaps they amalgamated Cihuacoatl's cries with Malinche's betrayal in order to create the ultimate ideological state apparatus. Through *la Llorona*, they exercise control through fear of breaking the social norms. *La Llorona* as everywoman is an interesting version of her genesis because it tells of not only the female situation in that time, but of the racial and caste tensions prevalent then. It is also the most prevalent version today. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, several people in Albuquerque approached me and told me their or their relatives' stories of *la Llorona*. Not one of them said that *la Llorona* had been a pre-Columbian goddess or *la Malinche*. They all claimed that *la Llorona* had simply been a neighborhood woman wronged by her philandering husband, and that in her rage she murdered her children and then herself. While it is obvious that four testimonies do not fully support this one version of *la Llorona*'s genesis, they at least provide a sampling of what the popular belief of her consists of now and how it seems to point at *la Llorona* as an everywoman.

All three variants of *la Llorona*'s origin are important and reflected in the texts selected for discussion in this thesis. The goddess origin is commented upon in *Bless Me, Última*, invoking the respect of Antonio. It is also evident in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* when she discusses the three most important Mexican symbols, which are all female: *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, *la Malinche*, and *la Llorona*. The Malinche origin is represented in Anaya's *The Legend of la Llorona*, in which he justifies not only *la Llorona*'s actions, but also those of *la Malinche* by explaining the influence of the Spaniards' actions and the commands of the Aztec gods. Lastly, the idea of *la Llorona* as everywoman is seen in Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek*. *La Llorona* isn't assigned any divine or Malinchista origins in this text, she is just called *la Llorona*. Furthermore, she helps a figure that represents the plight of many Chicanas that are living under

*machista* mores, Each origin provides insight and a new way to reinterpret *la Llorona*. They also illustrate how the female figure in Mexican culture has mutated through the centuries: from goddess, to traitor, to indentured female. Empowered female deities were stripped of their powers and divided into less powerful icons. A woman who was once revered for her intelligence and savvy, la Malinche, was later considered a traitor and destroyer. Finally, with the rise of *machismo* in Mexican culture, the woman must somehow be like *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, a virginal and ever-dedicated mother who follows the commands of men.

With time, the stories of her and her spectral birth have changed. Conceivably, this occurs so that *la Llorona*'s story adapts to each passing age and reflects the contemporary issues of that period. Presently, some authors have reinterpreted and placed *la Llorona* in situations that mirror those of present day Chicanos and Chicanas. A short story by Alcina Lubitch Domecq follows this direction.

Lubitch Domecq reinterprets *la Llorona* as a woman in a desperate, yet currently commonplace situation. Her husband has abandoned her and left her and their three children penniless. She wants to immigrate to the United States, but she can't for she doesn't have enough money to pay a "coyote" for the safe passage of the family. Faced with becoming a prostitute in order to make enough money to have them all cross the border or abandoning her children, she chooses the latter and attempts to enter the United States alone. She fails to gain entry and is later condemned to search for the children she has relinquished.

Another reworking of *la Llorona* also borders on moral issues that prevail in a culture that is mostly Christian or Catholic. The *BBC Mundo* website has an article on *la Llorona*, published in August of 2004, that finalizes with a listing of "más Lloronas," more spectral

wailing women. It discusses how other Latin American countries experience *la Llorona* and Colombia has a Llorona that presents situations that are becoming commonplace:

*Es el espíritu de una madre soltera que echó a su hijo al río para ocultar su vergüenza....*

*Otros dicen que fue una joven que se provocó un aborto, y terceros aseguran que fue la miseria que causó la muerte de los hijos de la pobre infeliz* (Valery, “El eterno lamento de La Llorona”).

It is the spirit of a single mother who threw her child into the river to hide her shame....

Others say that it was a young woman that induced an abortion, and third parties guarantee that it was misery that caused the death of the poor woman (my translation).

These portrayals of *la Llorona* are important because they illustrate how this apparition’s plight has been modified to render the situations faced in modern times. Two of the texts that will be analyzed at length for my thesis, *Woman Hollering Creek* and *Borderlands* evoke characters in states that are decidedly contemporary and who use *la Llorona* as an inspiration or comrade in their moments of difficulty.

The authors of the four texts I have chosen to extensively discuss also vary their interpretations of *la Llorona* from the traditional (a character to be condemned) to the revisionist (a woman who can be considered a symbol of empowerment). Their employments of *la Llorona* can be figured as empowering because they are utilizing her as an agent of enlightenment. By *la Llorona* as enlightenment, I interpret her as a proxy to query. These depictions revise what is

popularly believed in regards to *la Llorona*: the authors have taken a proscribed woman and reshaped the understanding of her. While before she was damnable, now, she can be considered as a woman misunderstood. At the very least, her situation and the way it has been presented by certain authors can be seen as an invitation to ponder the state of affairs of their cultures. By doing so, these authors invite their reader to contemplate and even challenge whatever perceptions they may have.

An author that contested the public's expectations and could have related to *la Llorona*'s experiences was Julia de Burgos's. While being from completely different times and leading markedly disparate lives, Julia de Burgos and *la Llorona* share several similarities. De Burgos was a Puerto Rican poet who, like *la Llorona*, did not have an easy life. De Burgos' childhood was marked by poverty and her adult life was no less tumultuous. While she fought for Puerto Rican independence, she loved and lost. She dedicated many a poem to the love of her life, Juan Isidro Jimenes Grullón, a romance that did not end well. De Burgos would later die alone in the streets of New York city and be buried in an anonymous plot, but her thoughts and feelings live on to this day in her poetry.

Like *la Llorona*, de Burgos was subject to discrimination for being a female, and what's more, a poet and activist. Many considered her poetry to be too strong, too full of feeling. Women weren't supposed to feel passion, but de Burgos and *la Llorona* did. They simply had different outlets of expressing said passion. In the epigraph of this chapter, de Burgos says, "Y quién soy yo? ¿Qué busco por la orilla del hombre? (And who am I? What do I look for at the edge of man?) (466-7)." This passage comes from the poem "El muerto universal", "The Universal Dead". A short poem, it speaks of marching dead and asks of the living to look at

themselves in her “face of fright” (467). It concludes “I am the most gigantic of the dead who never close his eyes until I see you saved” (467).

This poem is part of a sequence titled “The Voice of the Dead” and is a highly political piece that speaks of the horrors of war. However, when the masculine element is eliminated, “The Universal Dead” can be interpreted differently. The narrator wonders who they are and what they are searching for “at the edge of man”. In the context of the war-torn environment present in “The Voice of the Dead”, “the edge of man” can be many things: the fine line between sanity and insanity or the memories that soldiers cling to during particularly gruesome moments of the war, among other things. When removed from the idea of combat, it can be seen as the feelings of a ghost questioning who they are and why are they still there, in the borderland between death and life. *La Llorona* is in that borderland: undead and unable to find catharsis. If seen through *la Llorona*’s eyes, “the edge of man” has another meaning: *la Llorona* is a victim of *machista* thinking. She is punished for ignoring her role in society. So “the edge of man” can be thought of as the edge of the *machista* society that condemned her. She meanders in the haze, seeking resolution and a respite to her condemnation.

So who is she? What does she look for at the edge of man? A goddess, a misunderstood indigenous woman, and all women, she looks to stand on her own without being subjected to society’s rule. *La Llorona* and Julia de Burgos, each in their own way, fought and continue to do so, to assert themselves in the face of a society who demanded they remain silent. Through *la Llorona*’s weeping and de Burgos’ poems, they not only establish what they feel, but also reflect what many others are going through. Even after death, they are still well known. Living on in texts, oral narratives, and the memories of others, they carry out their message even after their

passing. For both of them, death was only the beginning since after their physical end, they still remain.

## Chapter III.

### **Standing On the Borderlands: Global *Lloronas* and Textual Representations of the Spectral Figure**

On June 25, 2009, *Newsweek* published an article written by Sharon Begley called “Face to Face”. It discusses a study conducted by psychologists Lisa Feldman Barrett and Eliza Bliss-Moreau in which participants were exposed to pictures of male and female faces in a range of emotions. Under these images, there would be a single sentence describing the reason for the subject’s disposition. The participants of the study would then try to explain the reasons for the individual expressions, but there’s the twist. Begley remarks:

They offered starkly different explanations for the emotions: that women in the photos felt sad, angry or afraid because they were "emotional," but the pictured men felt those emotions because they were "having a bad day"—even when the expressions and their explanation was identical.

But why does this occur? Why would there be two different conclusions about people’s appearances when they are visually the same and are also described with an identical sentence? Begley attributes these reactions to a frequently perpetuated gender stereotype, which contends that women react to things out of emotion and not because the situation genuinely merits such a response whereas men react truly act emotionally for they only respond to situations that call for an emotional response.

This stereotype undermines women since it argues against their credibility. Women’s feelings aren’t taken seriously since the stereotype popularizes the idea that women’s emotions are fickle. Consideration for female emotion is flippant. The problem is that this stereotype isn’t

restricted to modern times; it has existed for a long time, as it is evident in *la Llorona*'s story. Female feelings, in this case *la Llorona*'s aren't given the validity that they deserve. They are ignored, much like *la Llorona* was ignored when her partner abandoned her. Therefore, since her initial emotional response was not acknowledged by her lover, the situation escalated. Many people consider the murder of her children an exaggerated emotional reaction to her significant other's behavior. According to the *machismo* that Cisneros and Anzaldúa discuss in their works, *la Llorona* is supposed to be a good woman, a good Chicana and tolerate her abandonment with tranquility. Since she rose against the male's behavior and societal mores, she received "appropriate" punishment. *La Llorona* is like the women in Barrett and Bliss-Moreau's study: they are not allowed to express their emotions because they are considered too easily swayed. They are limited to two options: control emotional displays or emotionally escalate until their point is heard. Nonetheless, both have their consequences, which can be seen once again in *la Llorona*. If she expresses herself, it is considered trivial and ignored; she ends up losing her lover, in short a no-win situation. If she takes her emotions to another level, she is horrifyingly punished. While the study's subjects hopefully did not encounter Llorona-like consequences, it is evident that women, even in the throes of illness, can be chastised for the emotional calls for help. Women who have suffered from post-partum depression or psychosis have been denied treatment because their symptoms were considered normal or not too serious. An example of this is Andrea Yates.

In 2001, Yates was married with five children. She had been complaining of experiencing depression. However, since her family was highly religious, she was exited treatment and had another child. Not long after the birth of the fifth child, she murdered them all by drowning. She



is now in prison while her husband, who divorced her less than two years into her prison term, is free and in another relationship. Most of the press lambasted her with critics, amongst them Ann Coulter, who ridiculed her plight in an article for *Human Events*. Comparing her to Timothy McVeigh, Coulter mocks Yates by saying that her “ordeal was nearly incomprehensible” (5) and that her “burden” was “being supported by a man” (5). Despite this, several articles defended Yates and deemed this a “long-overdue” (McNamara, “Andrea Yates Found Not Guilty”) call to pay attention to mental health, and in particular, women’s suffering of post partum depression and psychosis. While not necessarily declaring her innocent, one of the articles posits that her actions were due to a series of events that were improperly attended to by her, her family, and her doctors:

Although Yates readily confessed to what she had done, and the crimes were committed in less than an hour, what led up to her killing her children had been building for years. Her story was complex and multifaceted. Odd family dynamics, fundamentalist religious beliefs, clinical care that was fragmented at best, and the quirks and inadequacies of the American medical- insurance system all had some role in the Yates’ family tragedy (McLellan, 1951).

An article written for *Pediatric Nursing* takes Yates’ defense even further. Titled “Andrea Yates: Where Did We Go Wrong?”, the text affirms how not only her family, but the medical and judicial system failed Yates by not properly diagnosing and treating her illness. Like *la Llorona*, Yates’ emotional displays were ignored and thus her cries for help became louder. Emulating the *Llorona* pattern, Yates reacted and so she was punished. In *Llorona* tradition, the man is not

necessarily fancy free, but he is not implicated in her life anymore. He lives to love again while she serves out a long prison sentence or, in this case, a life in an asylum.

However, it is mainly in the Mexican American tradition of *la Llorona* that she is so utterly penalized and a social outcast. Manifestations in other cultures that share similarities to *la Llorona* are not so condemned, and at times, are even revered.

### ***Llorona, yuki-onna, die wiesse frau? The Global Roaming of a Ghost***

There are a multitude of supernatural creatures that can be said to share characteristics with *la Llorona*. First of all, there are many *Lloronas* all throughout Latin America. Then there exist supernatural beings throughout Europe and Asia that share many similarities, such as the banshee and some of the vanishing hitchhiker accounts. For the sake of brevity, not all of the entities that are similar to *la Llorona* will be mentioned in this thesis, but there will be a glance at a few of them to see how these supernatural females share more than just a handful of qualities.

In Japan, two uncanny female figures appear in its supernatural folklore: the *yuki-onna* and the *kuchisake-onna*. Meaning snow woman and slit-mouth woman respectively, these personages appear not only in stories, but also in everyday life: anime, manga, newspaper articles, and oft-repeated urban legends have all featured these apparitions at various times.

Like *la Llorona*, there are different versions of *yuki-onna*. *The Obakemono Project*, a website that is meant to be a collection of all the supernatural creatures in Japan, briefly mentions the diverse accounts of her, some that are eerily similar to certain variants of *la Llorona*'s tale. According to *The Obakemono Project*'s website, her appearances and origins mutate with each telling. While some people say "the *yuki-onna* is considered the spirit of the

snow itself,” others argue that she is “the ghost of a woman who died in a snowstorm.” One of these is her use as a warning device: *The Obakemono Project* refers to the *yuki-jorō*, another way the *yuki-onna* is known, as:

an abductor of children, and she always has a great number of her adopted brood with her. The snow woman is often used to admonish children who stay out too long after dark or who cry at night, as this chilly surrogate mother will surely find them and spirit them away.

This description echoes *la Llorona*’s characteristic of searching for children, be it her own or others to make her own. Also, the use of the specter as a warning device for children is parallel to Chicano parents’ use of *la Llorona* to warn them not only of the dangers of staying outside, but of the penalty to be had for disobeying their (and society’s) mores. However, this is only one version of *yuki-onna*. There are many others with varying stories.

Perhaps *yuki-onna*’s most famous manifestation appears in Lafcadio Hearn’s collection *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*. Hearn related the story of Minokichi, a woodcutter, and his encounters with the snow woman. After a day of work, Minokichi and his master must endure a heavy snowstorm in a small hut. During the course of the evening, their hut is broken into by a strange yet beautiful “woman all in white” (Hearn 113). She breathes upon Mosaku, Minokichi’s master, effectively killing him. Minokichi was to have perished in much the same manner, however, she feels both pity and attraction for him and so spares his life. However, she warns Minokichi not to tell anyone of his encounter with her, or she will find out and kill him.

Minokichi is obviously traumatized by his encounter, but he eventually recuperates and begins logging again. When returning from work another day, he crosses paths with a young lady named O-Yuki (whose name means, again, snow). Eventually, they marry and years pass, children are born, but O-Yuki remains the same: ageless. One night, Minokichi feels compelled to share his encounter with the “White Woman...the Woman of the Snow” (Hearn 117). Yuki, enraged, reveals that it was she that Minokichi had encountered that night and that she would kill him if it were not for their children. After this, Yuki disappears forever.

At the beginning, Hearn’s rendering of *yuki-onna* seemingly characterizes her as death: she has come to claim the lives of two men trapped in a snowstorm. However, Hearn also makes death human. Instead of portraying death as an uncaring or emotionless entity, Hearn makes it clear that Yuki has feelings. If not, why would she have let Minokichi keep his life? Yuki clearly feels sympathy for and inclination towards Minokichi, thus giving him a chance at life. *Yuki-onna* goes even further: she makes herself “human” (in the sense that she is now accepted into general community) so she can attach herself to Minokichi. And perhaps this is where the deeper similarities to *la Llorona* begin: *yuki-onna*, like *la Llorona*, endangered herself into a particular situation but she did it out of love. *La Llorona* and *yuki-onna* are clearly supernatural beings, but *la Llorona* becomes one after death while *yuki-onna* seems to have always been one. Also, the two females have in common the idea of sacrifice: *yuki-onna* renounces her position of power and puts herself in danger of being recognized and persecuted by humans in order to pursue a life with Minokichi. *La Llorona* as an everywoman usually was a lover out of wedlock; a woman in a circumstance not favored by society, but she did it anyway in order to be with the man she loved. Finally, like *la Llorona*, *yuki-onna* was betrayed by her lover. While the lover in the *Llorona*

stories usually abandons the homestead with much more malice (he leaves his partner for another woman), Minokichi eventually breaks his deal with *yuki-onna* by relating his encounter to his wife, who unbeknownst to him is that very same entity. While this perhaps cannot be considered as grave a betrayal as the one committed by *la Llorona*'s lover, it constitutes a broken promise nonetheless, one that could have had fatal consequences for Minokichi.

*Kuchisake-onna*'s story is decidedly peppered with more significant amounts of violence and gore. Like *yuki-onna*, her story has different versions: some in which she is to blame and others in which she is innocent, but all end in the same gruesome way. Her once beautiful face is rendered horrible when her lover slices her faces open from ear to ear.

The original story has changed over time. Some say that the story dates back to feudal times and that she was the wife of a samurai. The more modern versions of the story claim that she was the victim of a failed plastic surgery. Finally, another report alleges that she perished in an automobile accident while chasing several children, and as a consequence, was disfigured.

Encounters with her usually follow the same pattern: wearing a surgical mask, she approaches her victim and asks them if they consider her beautiful. She will then remove the surgical mask and ask again if she is beautiful. This is where the story changes, depending on the variant answers. If you say yes, she will either slice your face or finally feel at peace. If you say no, she will kill you. If you say that she looks normal, she will either leave or become confused.

The victims of her revenge also change. While usually she preys on men, she is also described as attacking children. This parallels with the pattern of *la Llorona* either hunting down men (to punish them for the behavior of her lover) or minors (to adopt in place of her own defunct children). Another parallel is that *kuchisake-onna*, like *la Llorona*, is a victim of her

male partner's conduct. So once again, her lover's actions are the catalyst for her supernatural existence and wrath.

Not so far from Japan is the Hawaiian archipelago, which is rich with supernatural tales, amongst them the story of the goddess Pele. A Hawaiian goddess of Polynesian descent, Herb Kawainui Kane describes, "her personality is volcanic – unpredictable, impulsive, given to sudden rages and violence. Hers is both the power to destroy and the power to create new land" (7). In his book, *Pele Goddess of Hawai'i's Volcanoes*, Kane discusses Pele's origins, feats, and influence upon the people. Like *la Llorona* in Mexico and the United States' Southwest, Pele carries on in Hawaiian culture:

Today, when mythologies of the past appear to have been largely replaced by a mythology of the future, some may believe that Pele is now dead; for it was once said that the dogs of Hawai'i would die when there were no longer any priests to keep them alive, to feed them. So it may be with many of the gods of old Hawai'i; but I have yet to year a Hawaiian - or a geologist - suggest that it is time to cast Pele into the dustbin of superstitious nonsense (6).

*La Llorona*, while largely ignored by cultural groups outside her own, remains alive to this day. Neither *la Llorona* or Pele have been discarded by their societies as silly superstitions despite the advent of technology. Their presences are strong enough to conquer modernity. Still, Pele is wilder than *la Llorona*. The daughter of "the supreme female spirit" Haumea, she left for Hawaii while still a mortal. There, she was killed by her sister Na-maka-o-Kaha'i because Pele supposedly seduced Na-maka-o-Kaha'i's husband. With her physical death taking place in

Hawaii, she effectively is a Hawaiian goddess since her entrance to the spirit world occurred here.

Pele's elevation to deity was not one caused by innocence on her part and her behavior saw no slowing down when she became a goddess. Pele killed her favorite sister Hi'iaka because she suspected her of having an affair with Lohi'au, her mortal lover. On another occasion, she crashed another goddesses' wedding because she loved the groom. A final example of Pele's temper is her murder of a young couple because the male refused her affections. By all accounts, many societal mores would call Pele a "bad woman", much along the lines of *la Llorona*, but that is not the case. There is a good side to Pele, who has been known to warn her people of upcoming threats, like the deity origin for *la Llorona*. She has appeared in the guise of an old woman to warn them of tsunamis and eruptions. She is usually called "Tutu", "an affectionate term for grandparent" (7). In a touching illustration of Hawaii's esteem and fondness for Pele, Kane relates:

Hawaiians regard "Tutu Pele" not with fear but with filial respect; and with a touching resignation should a lava flow consume their homes. In December 1986, lava destroyed part of the village of Kalapana. A Hawaiian resident, interviewed while loading his possessions into a truck, said:

"I love my home; live here all my life, and my family for generations. But if Tutu like take it, it's her land."

When picking the 'ohelo berries which grow upon high lava fields and cinder plains, older Hawaiians still offer the first fruits picked to Pele before eating any.

(7)

While *la Llorona* has always been feared and respected for what she could wreak upon you, it is only now that she is being reinterpreted and viewed in a more sympathetic light. From what Kane depicts, Pele has been thought of dearly always despite the havoc she may cause upon Hawaii's population. This man has just lost his home, but he accepts it because it is Pele's will. There is an evident understanding of Pele's actions that *la Llorona* has been lacking until now.

Germany contributes to the global wandering of *la Llorona*-like specters with its own *die weisse frau*. Meaning "the white lady," *die weisse frau* shares some marked similarities with *la Llorona*. Her story is part of oral tradition and changes, but one version posted by Joe Nickell at the *Committee for Skeptical Inquiry* website tells of Kunigunde von Orlamonde, a widow courting another man. The only problem with this engagement would be that her lover told her that there were "four eyes between us". Von Orlamonde interpreted that her children were getting in the way of her happiness and so she murdered them. Guilt caught up with her and she later dedicated herself to Catholicism to atone for her actions.

Kunigunde's story is very similar to the Mexican *Llorona*, with only some slight exceptions. The man still betrays her. He doesn't abandon her, but he indicates that they cannot be together. So he continues to sacrifice both their feelings for the benefit of saving face in society since the four eyes referred to his parents, who did not agree with the match. While the Mexican *Llorona* is still considered guilty and even selfish for murdering her children, the German tale takes it further by establishing that her interpretation of her lover's words made her decide to kill her children. She did not hesitate to eliminate that which stood in the path to her happiness whereas *la Llorona* is generally described as being out of her mind (enraged, mad, or in despair) when she commits these acts and she immediately repents by taking her own life.



However, that is perhaps the most important element: Kunigunde lives and makes up for her indiscretions while in every single version, *la Llorona* dies by her own hand. Her sin is so great that she must doom herself in this life and the next. Even so, Kunigunde, who has at first glance acted out an even greater fault is pardoned.

The real Kunigunde never murdered anyone, but that doesn't stop the story from circulating and functioning as a warning. Kunigunde fell prey to her emotional needs, something that must seemingly be sacrificed when a woman becomes a mother. She put herself over her children and therefore she must be punished or ceased to exist. *La Llorona* and similar specters share both of these characteristics since they are caught in an endless undead loop. They do not exist in an earthly plane and they only feel a need to atone for what they've done.

These Llorona figures are relevant because, like the Mexican Llorona, their origins are varied: a deity, a spirit, a wife, a woman. They mirror the various Mexican Llorona roots that have been discussed. They are also important because they help us understand just how bad the Mexican Llorona has had it. This means that while they are relative equals in characteristics and actions, the Japanese, Hawaiian, and German Llorona figures are viewed in a more positive and powerful light. Yuki-onna is a deity who takes the dead, yet she is able to become human, find love, and have a family. Kuchisake-onna is a victim who in death commands a respect and power that she couldn't obtain in life. Pele is a goddess that is revered and feared as such. Finally, die Wiese Frau may be the guiltiest of all discussed, but she achieves forgiveness in the end. Therefore, if these female entities can be seen through a relatively positive light, why can't the same be done for *la Llorona*?

In these global *Lloronas*, there is a clear sense of empowerment and absolution. It is easy to see this line of revisionist thought reflected in the texts of Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sandra Cisneros. They take *la Llorona*, a much maligned, yet ever popular cultural icon, and see her differently, positively. Perhaps, with the eyes of those who are acquainted with Yuki-onna, Kuchisake-onna, Pele, and die Wiese Frau.

### ***La Llorona's Debut: Bless Me, Última***

While Anaya has admitted in an interview with *Learner.org* that he believes “*la Llorona* is just a story,” he goes on to add “But when you are growing up in the environment I grew up in, she was real. She still is, because I keep writing about her... She appears in all of my novels, in all of my work.” And so Anaya features *la Llorona* in his debut novel *Bless Me, Última*. The novel tells the story of Antonio Márez, a young Chicano boy who experiences a series of pivotal summers under the influence of Última, an old and wise woman. Throughout this story, Antonio grows from a boy to a man and struggles with becoming who he wants to be versus what his family desires him to transform into.

Última moves in with Antonio’s family due to her age and the respect that they have for her as a wise and powerful woman. With this move, Antonio begins his path to adulthood. Alongside Última, he fights against evil, but he realizes that good and evil are not so clearly defined as he thought they were. His family, with all their good intentions, truncates him. The women from the brothel are evil, but why? And if they are sinful, why do the men seek them out? And, of course, *la Llorona* is malevolent to many even if her so-called sinful actions are never described.

Antonio lives in the town of Guadalupe, New Mexico. He is a first generation Mexican American while his parents are from the old country. Antonio is troubled by the changes that this difference has brought upon his family. His parents moved to Guadalupe so they could provide “opportunity and school” (2) for their children. Instead, this new world of “opportunity” has divided the Márez family. His parents are tied to the old ways: his father to the “llano” and his mother to the strict Catholicism she was brought up in. On the other hand, their six children are developing their own dreams, which are separating them from the family. It is important to note that the reader is never made aware of their wishes for their daughters: they are not main characters of the novel and are seemingly free to develop as they wish, perhaps as long as their desires fit into the role of a woman in their culture. What is constantly discussed is the future of Antonio and his older brothers and how their parents desire to see their dreams realized through them. Disagreeing with their parents’ wishes, the brothers leave the family home. First because of the Vietnam War and then to pursue their own fancies. Due to this Antonio feels the pressure of choosing his path or continuing down the road that his parents will make for him. With this weight thrust upon Antonio, he feels that he should be a good son and that through this goodness, he may perhaps save his family, his brothers particularly. It is through his brothers that Antonio “meets” *la Llorona*.

Anaya introduces *la Llorona* in a dream featured in the second chapter of the novel. She “appears” after Antonio hears what his brothers’ tell him to be the wailing woman’s cries from the river:

Along the river the tormented cry of a lonely goddess filled the valley. The winding wail made the blood of men run cold. It is *la Llorona*, my brothers cried in

fear, the old witch who cries along the river banks and seeks the blood of boys  
and men to drink!

La llorona seeks the soul of Antoniooooooooooo...(28)

At first glance, *la Llorona* is introduced as a sinister figure, one to be feared. Which would go in accordance with what Domino Renee Perez calls “*La Llorona*’s traditional position as a threat to motivate the actions of their characters” (17). Perez indicates that due to the scope of her work being the study of the “revitalization and revisions of the legend,” she does not discuss Anaya’s version of *la Llorona* at great length. She does recognize that Anaya’s text, in conjunction with Helena María Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus*, “demonstrate *La Llorona*’s power in the Chicano/a community” (17). However, I believe that Renee Perez’s approach to Anaya’s *Llorona* is too superficial.

Perez affirms that *la Llorona* appears in *Bless Me, Ultima* “as a significant threat to men and additionally as a representation of the ‘monstrous feminine’” (18). She adds:

Antonio, the young protagonist, has nightmares about the feminine demon who wails along the shores of the river and “seeks the blood of boys and men to drink” (23). Here, *La Llorona* is positioned as a vampire who desires Antonio’s innocent soul....Antonio learns to fear *La Llorona* and never knows her redemptive or healing powers (28).

Perez’s statements of *la Llorona* should definitely be taken into consideration because they represent what the weeping woman is meant to instill: fear. This is the most common interpretation of her: a ghost searching for her lost children or her lover, with the chance of your becoming the next victim looming over. But it is clear that the threat of *la Llorona* doesn’t come

from *la Llorona* herself. It is not even from Antonio, who in his dream describes her as “a lonely goddess” (28). The negative perception of her comes from his brothers who taunt him by saying that *la Llorona* wants his soul. She inspires fear in them; in response, they call her a vampiric “old witch” (28). The way that Antonio mentions her indicates that he feels a degree of respect and reverence towards *la Llorona*, since he calls her a goddess. This obviously goes against his brothers’ opinions of her, who not only take away her divinity, but any youth and beauty she may possess.

There also seems to be a sense of sadness and pity in the way Antonio perceives *la Llorona* since he attributes loneliness to her. And there is a hint of fear as well, which is cemented in her second “appearance” in the novel, while Antonio ponders the fate of Lupito, a character who was murdered in the previous chapter. While reflecting on Lupito’s soul, Antonio thinks the following:

Or perhaps he was doomed to wander the river bottom forever, a bloody mate to *la Llorona*...and now when I walked alone along the river I would always have to turn and glance over my shoulder to catch a glimpse of a shadow-Lupito’s soul, or *la Llorona*, or the *presence* of the river (30).

This is the last time *la Llorona* is mentioned in the novel, but her presence echoes through it nevertheless. Even though she is briefly alluded to, she helps set the tone for many of the experiences that Antonio goes through. This is the reinterpretation of the tale: she can represent Antonio’s feelings of ambiguity in regards to growing up, religion, and his parents’ very different points of view. *La Llorona* both calls to him and pushes him away, just like his parents and his spiritual beliefs.

Despite never actually being seen (she is only heard in Antonio's dreams and imagination), it is clear that she is a significant symbol loaded with different meanings. Superficially, she is a scary phantom. But when a deeper study is made, she seems to reflect Antonio's emotional distress. *La Llorona* and Antonio both suffer because they cannot assert themselves: others label and shape them without their consent. And while it is clear that Antonio grows up, gains the ability to make his own choices, and empowers himself by taking control of his destiny and telling his own story, *la Llorona* was doomed to forever cry and search the river. So, she is not a villain, but a victim of men's perceptions of her. Furthermore, she can be considered emblematic of Antonio's struggle.

It is important to note that while *la Llorona* herself is not threatening (except through the eyes of Antonio's brothers), there is a Llorona-like character that does directly menace Antonio: María Luna, his mother. María spends the majority of the novel weeping: crying for the sons she has lost (Antonio's brothers who go to war and return, only to later completely abandon the family unit) and for the son she still has, Antonio, and the hopes she has for him. So in this case, the actual Llorona, the specter, is harmless; it is the real mother that Antonio has to worry about.

This migration of menace is interesting because it furthers the concept of *la Llorona's* innocence. *La Llorona* herself is not forcing Antonio to choose the path she has laid out for him, it is his own living mother.

### **Going Back in Time to *la Malinche: The Legend of la Llorona***

Anaya's second published work is dedicated in its entirety to the weeping woman, or more appropriately, to her "birth". Titled *The Legend of la Llorona*, the short novel tells Anaya's version of *la Llorona*'s origin tale. Anaya's idea behind this version of the tale is not particular to him; however, it is one of the most popular origin stories of *la Llorona*. Anaya fictionalizes the story of *la Malinche*, providing its own version of the Spanish arrival, Malinche and Hernán Cortés's meeting and subsequent relationship, her role in the conquest, and the events that lead her into her Llorona transformation.

Divided into 14 succinct sections, *The Legend of la Llorona* begins by establishing a timeline: it is the year "One-Reed" (9) and Moctezuma is the leader of the Aztec nation. According to their calendar, the Aztecs were going through a time of transition; the end of one era and the start of another. The Aztecs were also expecting the return of Quetzalcoatl, "the plumed serpent, god of wisdom and culture, Lord of Light" (10). They were anxious about this possible return because Quetzalcoatl was exiled and replaced by Huitzilopochtli, the god of war and a secondary character that will have a key role later on.

It is amidst this shift in their culture that rumors began to spread about the arrival of "houses with sails" (12), ships. The Aztecs expected these to be the abode of Quetzalcoatl and his priests, but in reality these vessels that would later shipwreck were transporting the arriving Spanish Conquistadors. The second chapter, titled "Malintzin", introduces our heroine and marks the beginning of Anaya's revisions of the tale. Anaya makes her the daughter of the coastal tribe's chief that saved the shipwrecked Spaniards. The narrator also established immediately that Malintzin was not as marveled by the Spaniards as her fellow tribesmen were:

One woman of the coastal village did not believe that the poor, bedraggled soldiers she helped pull from the sea were the messengers of the gods. This woman was Malintzin... She had looked closely at the soldiers when they lay on the beach, coughing and gasping for air. These are not priests or gods, she thought, these are men (14).

Anaya wants to make it explicit that Malinche is no fool. Despite the obvious physical and technological differences that these men had with her people, she did not consider them deities. She had analyzed them and determined that they were human, just like her and her clan. Furthermore, "When messengers were sent to Moctezuma telling of the strangers and their houses which sailed upon the water, she argued that the report should state that pale men were found, not the priests of Quetzalcoatl" (15). This is significant empowering of Malinche since neither the so-called gods nor her tribesmen could manipulate her into believing that there were otherworldly processes occurring. Additionally, not only does she refuse to waiver in her beliefs, she is also strong enough to defend her opinions in the face of authority.

The narrator continues to feed this positive depiction of la Malinche with a description of her that characterizes her as a woman in a position of power in her tribe physically, politically and metaphysically. She is renown as a great beauty and thus had a hold on the males of her tribe, but it is her political and supernatural strengths that elevate her:

Because she was not married she was allowed to sit with the village council when it discussed the social ceremonies of the village. Before her eighteenth summer she had already argued before the council that the village should not be dominated by the Aztec empire and tribute should not be sent to Moctezuma. The argument



continued among the tribes of the coastal region, whether to be independent and constantly face the wrath of the giant Aztec federation, or to join the Aztecs as a tributary state. (14-5).

But there was more to this young woman of oval face and high cheekbones. At the time of Malintzin's birth the village priest read the signs of the planets, and it was foretold that the baby Malintzin would live to be a legend in the time of the new era. At an early age she was sent to study with the priests and the village shaman. Her powers were exceptional. Flames sputtered and died or rose into lively dance when she walked by, obeying her wish, because fire was the element of her ascending sign. Even the unclean waters of the swamps grew clean at her touch, and later when she had learned all the remedies of the shaman she cured many illnesses with water and herbs (15).

The first quote details her involvement in tribe politics. Malinche was not limited to merely observing the political environment of her clan, but she actively participated. However, the quote begins by stating that her not being married allowed her to engage in the government of her tribe. Since this fact is pointed out, the reader may surmise that by marrying, Malinche would have to defer all political involvement to her husband. Still, her being alone meant that she was under nobody's rule and thus she was able to argue her stance on critical matters such as the annexation or independence of her people.

The second quote briefly mentions her beauty, but focuses on her mystical powers. In Anaya's book Malinche had power over the elements and seemed to be one with nature, as she could control fire and water. She also had the power to cure, which is also to possess the faculty

of restoring life. All of this combined would be enough to strike fear in anyone, yet the narrator concludes his rendition of Malintzin/Malinche by stating that “She was truly a gifted woman, a noble person, and full of kindness when she went to heal the old and the infirm. An aura of light seemed to glow around her” (15). Despite all of her capabilities, she is depicted as a woman that exuded good and shared her gifts with her people. Therefore, Malinche’s origin is changed and she is removed from the position of disgrace and objectification that was discussed in Chapter II. She is not given away or traded; she is in control of what happens to her. This is not the way that either *la Malinche* or *la Llorona* are typically illustrated as. Usually presented as traitors and deviants due to their straying away from their social norms, this reimagining and empowerment of *la Malinche* (and consequently *la Llorona*) gives the female more agency in her own tale, as is the case of *The Legend of la Llorona*.

After this set-up of who *la Malinche* is, the novel segues into the next chapter, “The Captain”. This is the moment in which Hernán Cortés, who is referred to in the novel as “the Captain”, arrives in Mexico and meets Malinche, who has been brought to him as an interpreter:

He stepped forward and looked at Malintzin.

A heathen who can speak the language of Castile, the Captain thought. What a beautiful creature. He took her hand and felt Malintzin’s strength. Then he smiled.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“I am Malintzin,” she replied.

“Malinche,” he repeated the name, changing the sound, assuring she would thereafter be known as Malinche.

“Tell your people we come in peace,” he told her, and she interpreted the message. The natives nodded in approval.

Then the Captain looked around and claimed the land for His Majesty, the King. (18).

Here, one can see how Malinche’s position of power in her culture is mostly irrelevant in the eyes of the Spaniards, specifically in those of Captain Cortés. When he glances upon her, he denigrates Malinche by calling her a heathen and a creature: he belittles her religious beliefs and equates her to an animal. Immediately, Cortés desires and objectifies her, thus making her an object and not his equal. His ethnocentrism is present, only slightly obscured by his desire for the formidable Malinche. And his trivialization of Malinche does not preclude his utilizing her later on in the conquest: the chapter later establishes how the alliance between the Spanish and other tribes was cemented due to the Spaniard’s interest in rumors of Tenochtitlan’s great wealth and the tribes’ desires to be freed from the Aztecs.

The next chapter informs the reader that Malinche works with the Captain “closely” (21) because her “village had cast their lot with the Captain and his soldiers” (21). Superficially, this decision seems to be one made out of convenience, but later in the same paragraph the narrator reveals:

But there was another reason for the decision. Since their first meeting she had felt much admiration and affection for the Captain. She felt excited when she saw him, delighted when she heard his voice. She was falling in love with the Captain, she was binding her life to his (21).

Clearly, Malinche tells herself that she was cooperating with the Spaniards for purely political reasons. Still, she has come to realize that her motives for assisting Cortés were not altruistic. She was doing it because she felt more than a deep attraction to him, since, after all, the quote explicitly states “she was binding her life to his” (21). The narrator goes on to further describe their feelings for each other:

It was a natural thing to happen. He was a strong and brave warrior, a fearless soldier. He had turned back the warriors of other villages who had always threatened the peace of her people, and he was wise enough to make peace when he could. He was a handsome man. His eyes glowed and he smiled when he saw Malinche. He too was falling in love with the lovely interpreter who went with him everywhere. Only one thing remained between them. The Captain and his friars insisted that the natives give up their own religious ceremonies and take the religion of their god. Christ, not Quetzalcoatl, was their divine inspiration (21-2).

Unquestionably, the novel has taken a turn for the romantic, but at first glance, one thing is obvious: Malinche’s feelings seem to be much more intense than Cortés’s. It is evident that her admiration for Cortés is not limited to the physical. She thinks of him highly while Cortés’s affections are seemingly limited to his libido. After all, no mention is made in regards to how he thinks about her. The reader knows he believes her to be beautiful, but that’s it. He also has reservations about his feelings for her, while Malinche seems to have none.

The night before leaving Malinche’s village, Cortés asks her to accompany them to Tenochtitlan and Malinche promptly answered:

“I am ready to serve you, my Captain,” Malinche said. While the quick answer surprised the Captain, it surprised Malinche even more. She knew the soldiers were leaving, and she had felt a sadness because it meant the Captain would be gone. She had even thought vaguely about going with them, but she hadn’t realized that her decision would come so quickly once he asked. Yes this was love, she thought. She was truly ready to serve this warrior. (22-23)

Malinche is upfront about her feelings, but it is obvious that she has put herself in a lesser position by stating that she is “ready to serve”. The narrator attempts to depict their desire for each other as equal, but Malinche is already surrendering to him so their affections for each other dissimilar. She is assuming the attitude that he is the Captain and therefore she must follow. The author wants to make it look like he asks her not only because she is their best interpreter, but because he is in love with her as well:

“It is more than that,” he said and looked closely at her. “Since the day I met you, I have respected and honored you. And now you know I love you.” He paused, afraid he had gone too far with this noble woman whom the villagers revered as a goddess.

“As you profess your love for me, so I give mine to you,” Malinche told him.

“Love has conquered my heart. I will follow you wherever you go.”

The Captain gazed softly at Malinche. He touched her cheek then kissed her lightly on the forehead. “I will respect your love and never dishonor it. You will be my equal partner in this adventure which awaits us.” (23)

Cortés proclaims his love for her, one that the reader knows is not that true due to his thoughts upon their introduction. He claims to respect and honor her, but he dislikes her spiritual ways and considers her as less than him. He never refers to her as a goddess. He simply thinks that “the villagers revered” her as such. Once again, Malinche reaffirms her subservience with the concept of following: she puts him in the position of leader. He pledges equality between them, but this was never present, nor will it be in their future. However, Malinche is not thinking about this. She is happily envisioning their future together:

Malinche smiled. Now the happiness she had kept in check flooded her being and made her body tingle with excitement. The Aztec prophecy had brought this man to unite with her. She would give up her home and family to follow him. Such a strong emotion was her love, she would give up everything to go with this warrior who had come from the land of the sun. So, she thought as she stood with him in the perfume of the sweet night and felt his arm around her, so this is what the prophecy at my birth meant. That I should give my love to this man, and bear his children (24).

Malinche is already being blinded by love and letting her position of power erode. She believes that they were fated to be together and will readily sacrifice everything she knows for him. The Captain’s last words in the previous quote hint at the broken promise that leads her to become *la Llorona*. And this quote reflects her state of pure devotion. The process of her Llorona transformation has now truly begun.

The rest of the chapter details how they approach Tenochtitlan (how they join with the natives, strengthen their armies while the Captain still claims to be a friend of Moctezuma), but

that is treated as an afterthought. They are described as “gods of war” (24). With little detail, they talk about the rebellion in Cortés’ groups and how he solved it: by burning the ships so no one could desert. This is telling of his cold-heartedness and how he will not hesitate to perform certain acts in order to achieve what he wants. This is additional foreshadowing to what Malinche will endure.

The following chapter, “March to Mexico”, opens depicting the rise of the Spanish in Mexico and how Cortes, his armies, and missionaries decimate the natives’ old ways. The Captain is already being openly depicted as “ruthless” (27). La Malinche has already completely submitted to him; even though she secretly still believes in the ways of her people she has become a Christian in Cortés’ eyes:

The conquest was a ruthless affair, the people were divided and conquered.

It saddened Malinche to see the temples destroyed. True, she had accepted the Christian teachings of love and mercy, but she had not forgotten the ways of her people.

“Why must you destroy the temples?” she asked the Captain.

“To destroy they will of the people you must destroy what they believe,” he said.

“We believe in only one God, not in heathen idols.” (27-8)

Cortés also grows upset with her because she prays to her gods. She hides her devotion to her culture on the inside, because she cannot reveal it around her lover:

“You are not to pray to heathen idols!” he shouted, and he ordered that all the statues which represented her gods should be smashed. The temple was cleared

out and a cross placed on top. Malinche never again prayed to her gods in public, but still she carried them in her heart. (30)

It is made clear that *la Malinche* has subjected to Cortés, since she appears to be Christian, but she is also noticing that Cortés isn't all that he had appeared to be. While there had been hints of ruthlessness and calculation on his part in the previous chapter, Malinche hadn't noticed them. Perhaps this oversight occurred because of her love for him or maybe because he was cautious to not reveal that side to Malinche because she was of use to him. But now, Cortés's true self is revealing itself to Malinche and fast. It made her question her love for him, in particular after an unprovoked attack to Cholula:

How, she wondered, can I keep my love for the Captain when he rises so cruelly against my people. Again, she sought out the shaman, as was her custom wherever she went.

"We cannot speak of love now," the old man said. "Our hearts are filled with grief as we bury our dead. Our hearts are cold with fear. Your love has bound you to the man known as the Captain of this cruel army. Now you must stay at his side. You are fixed to his side, even as the female mountain is fixed to the male mountain."

He said this and placed his hand on Malinche's stomach. "His sons grow in you."  
(28-9)

Despite appearing to be Christian, Malinche still secretly respected and followed her old ways, therefore she looked for the shaman for advice. The shaman makes her aware of everything that is happening and what Cortés has caused. Perhaps deepening her sorrow in regards to him. The



shaman later indicated that she must raise the children in the old way, the Aztec way. After leaving the shaman, she tells Cortés that she is child. Happy, Cortés orders for a feast to be prepared. But why does he feast? Is it truly because he will have children with his lover Malinche? Or is it because they are near Tenochtitlan and he is drunk with power? It is never revealed to the reader, but it can be surmised that it is the latter due to the way he is depicted; as a man hungry for power.

This chapter illustrates the dramatic changes in Malinche and Cortés' relationship and how the inevitable is bound to occur. Cortés is depicted with increasing violence, ruthlessness, and ethnocentrism here and it will only become more marked as the chapters progress. The next chapters illustrate the arrival of the Spanish in Tenochtitlán, its conversion into Mexico, and the birth of Malinche and Cortés' twin sons, Olin and Tizoc. *La Malinche* is "respected and admired" because of her "great powers" (35); the Aztecs even believed she was a goddess. The natives still recognized her supernatural power while Cortés only saw her as a tool.

Despite her love for Cortés, she follows the shaman's commands and makes her children follow the old Aztec ways. She takes them to a hidden underground temple behind the Captain's back. Malinche is alone most of the time since Cortés was usually on tours around the country making sure that no skirmishes occurred and that his power was absolute. These continued absences did not help to conciliate the couple. Neither did they remedy Cortés ethnocentrism, which would also reflect itself in his relationship with his children: when the twins grew, Cortés wanted them to be soldiers. He gave them swords so they would practice fighting each other. Tizoc refused and Olin replied that they exercised their bodies by playing the old Aztec ball

game, but the Captain said “That’s a silly game” (37) once again showing disdain and disrespect for the native’s culture:

“All of our great warriors play in the ball courts,” Malinche replied.

“And look what we did to them with our swords,” the Captain laughed. (37)

After that, Cortés urges them to fight him and attacks Olin. Olin bests him easily, which injures Cortés pride. Cortés thinks ethnocentrically: that his culture is superior to hers therefore it is difficult for him to accept that the child has overtaken him so easily. Cortés is also upset because Malinche has not integrated their children into his cultural mores.

Seven years after Malinche has arrived into Tenochtitlán and the land that she knew continues to disappear. The arrival of more soldiers and more missionaries resulted in the even more forceful imposition of the Spaniards’ religious and social practices. Malinche and Cortés relationship continued, but the repeated summons from Spain and the fact that the people’s respect and affection seemed to be reserved for Malinche and not for Cortés did not help them. In one particular situation, the people came to her due to a food shortage. Malinche demanded that the reserves of the Spanish be opened and that food be handed to the people. Not only was Cortés furious because Malinche had gone against his will quite publicly, but he then realized that Malinche’s power goes beyond being a tool for him. The people would rather talk to her than to him and he “resented this favor she had with the people of the city.” (40)

By this time, Malinche has already found the body of water that would later be tied to her as a *Llorona* figure:

But Malinche’s favorite, quiet place was by the edge of the lake near one of the great causeways which led to the mainland...

Since her arrival, Malinche had been fascinated by the rich waters of the lake...

Here she could pass a quiet, reflective time....At the edge of the lake, near some rocks, and protected by a growth of bullrushes, there was a peaceful pond. There, in the clear water of the spring, they found a school of golden fish, fish so big and bright with orange scales that Malinche thought she had never seen anything as beautiful. This was a secret place she shared with her sons, and each day they went to the edge of the lake...(41)

Malinche is now tied to the water, like *la Llorona* traditionally is. This sacred pond is a place that she shares with her children, so it will be all the more relevant when the pivotal moment of her transformation into a *Llorona* figure occurs. Anaya repeats this traditional element of *Llorona* imagery again in this novel, since in *Bless me, Última la Llorona* also roams near water, in that case, a river. He also repeats the motif of golden fish, as *Bless Me, Última* also had a a sacred golden fish: a carp.

As Malinche finds some measure of peace at the sacred pond, her life is about to spiral down even more. Spanish women have arrived in Mexico: some adapt to the native's ways, but most refuse. However, many usually make fun of Malinche. She was "envied" and "feared" because "she was married to the Captain" and "because she had so much power with the Indians." (43-44) They also reflected upon her role in the Spanish conquest, "It was secretly whispered that without her the Captain could never rule the city, much less the provinces where there was always unrest." (44) This reasserts the power that she has over the people, and sheds light on another reason why Cortés may resent her and thus consequentially betray her. People

saw her, not him, as pivotal to the conquest. His achievements were undermined in a doubly insulting way: by a woman who is a native.

The arrival of the Spanish women also brings forth Princess Isabela, a character that would be directly influential in the dissolution of Malinche and Cortés' relationship. Isabela was sent to Mexico by the king of Spain to persuade Cortés to return. Malinche was jealous of Princess Isabela. Isabela makes it clear that she thinks the New World is a savage place and that there is nothing to gain by remaining there, meaning that Malinche is also worthless and worth leaving. The scene is set for Cortés' betrayal: he is lured by the promise of more. Malinche asks him why what he has there is not enough (50-2). He also intends to take his children, but not Malinche. It is in this conversation that she realizes that she has been used (53). He also makes her see that people think of her as a traitor.

So Malinche's role as the interpreter and pacifier is once again reinforced trying to unite two worlds: her children with their father and the natives with the Spaniards. She must also complete these functions to soothe the relationship between her and Cortés, who had grown more distant as time passed. However, despite everything that he had done, she still loved him:

When Malinche caught sight of him, her heart was filled with pride and love. He was a handsome man. Even with her doubts and concerns over the wars he had waged with her people, she still loved him. She felt her heart beat faster when she saw him, and as he felt her gaze, he looked toward her and smiled (48).

Clearly, Malinche's feelings run deep enough to forgive (or at least, ignore) her anxiousness in regards to his actions. She is a woman that has given up much to be with the man she loves, but her love for him is not the same as the love she has for their children. Malinche may love Cortés

with every fiber of her soul, enough to hide her true self, but when it comes to their children, Malinche will not stop until she is sure they are out of harm's way and still close to her.

Like in the most commonly known forms of *la Llorona's* story, *la Malinche* is abandoned by her lover and stands to lose her children. The final chapter of the novel, simply called "*La Llorona*," explains how *la Malinche* goes mad and, in an attempt to prevent the loss of her children, she murders them. The novel ends with *la Malinche* wearing a bloodstained white gown, her hair wild, and constantly crying out for her children, effectively turning herself into a Llorona figure.

Once again, Anaya seemingly grants a limited space to *la Llorona*: the final chapter of the novel. But in reality, the entire novel is dedicated to seeing how *la Malinche* arrives at the point of becoming *la Llorona*. *La Malinche* undergoes a series of transformations: from being a woman in a position of power to sacrificing her beliefs to be with the man she loves and later being betrayed. But even her lover's betrayal does not hurt her as much as the thought of losing her children, a loss that she perceives as two-fold: an agony for her to be physically separated from them, but this pain is further intensified when she realizes how they would be treated in Spain when Cortés takes them there with him.

In Anaya's second interpretation of *la Llorona*, she is extricated from blame in several ways: first, the Aztec God of War orders her to murder her children so they will live forever as spirits and leaders of the Mexicans. Most emphatically, Malinche does not wish to do this. She tries to find a way to escape and trick the god to no avail. She consults him again and he repeats his order. Malinche feels bound to his will because she had abandoned her people and so she

follows his request. She also acquiesces because she knows her children would not survive if taken away to Spain.

Secondly, she appears to be above reproach because the men who have perpetuated injustice to her realize that they drove her to speak to the God of War and thus to carry out his commands:

“Malinche,” the Captain [Cortés] called. “Show yourself! Have no fear of us, for it is we who must ask your forgiveness!” (88)

The group in front of her fell to their knees and prayed for forgiveness.

“Malinche,” the Captain whispered her name softly. “Our wrongs have led you to this terrible deed. Our wrongs are beyond all human understanding” (88-9).

Cortés and his soldiers realize that they are responsible for her actions for several reasons: not only did they destroy her country, they intended to trade her as a gift, and they wanted to remove her sons from her side. It is understood from the character of Isabela that in the Conquistador’s country, the women utilized lies and manipulation to achieve what they wanted. Malinche, to the end, retained her position of power by striking at Cortés where it hurt him (and her) the most: his children. So by making these revisions, Anaya has made Malinche as *la Llorona* feared but also understood.

### **I Write my Own *historia*: Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza***

*Borderlands/La Frontera* is Gloria Anzaldúa’s exploration into her psyche, Chicano life and history, and the mores tying down Chicanos and Chicanas. *Borderlands* is Anzaldúa’s

recognition of these boundaries in which many people live in for various reasons. Heritage, sexuality, and the self are just a few of the borderlands that Anzaldúa enumerates throughout the work. As Anzaldúa explores and connects with herself, she goes back to the beginning of her people, the Chicanos, but she doesn't stop with the arrival of the United States into Mexican territory. She goes all the way back to the Toltec tribes; she returns to the time when the *Aztecas* were not yet the leaders in Mexico.

In her introduction to the second edition, Sonia Saldívar-Hull defines *Borderlands* as “a socio-politically specific elaboration of late twentieth-century *feminista* Chicana epistemology (1)”. Saldívar-Hull later adds, “Anzaldúa’s *historia* offers a new way to write History.” (3) Since the dominant area of culture is usually the one that writes history, minority voices are silenced. With the creation and subsequent publication of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa has defeated the dominant area of culture. She has written her story in her own words. She has empowered herself because she is telling her tale; nobody else is doing it for her. This is a luxury that many such as *la Llorona* do not have and this is something that Anzaldúa elaborates upon later in the book.

The text of *Borderlands* itself consists of 7 sections: most of the book’s girth comes from introductions, interviews, and notes. There is no particular writing style that encompasses the entire book; it is a fusion of “autobiography, fiction, poetry, theory, criticism” (Anzaldúa, 232) and historical analysis. Anzaldúa goes back and forth between discussing the history of Chicanos in the United States and her own story. The reader senses that there are parallelisms and disconnections in Anzaldúa’s experiences. She feels the discrimination that Chicanos do, but for reasons other than being Chicano: she is a lesbian Chicano feminist. She faces prejudice not only

from mainstream society in the United States for being Chicano, but from her own family and cultural group because she doesn't conform to their cultural norms either.

The text's main focus then becomes the struggle for the Chicano woman to self-discover and free herself from the shackles of "Anglo" discrimination and Chicano *machismo*.

Interweaved with poetry, Anzaldúa tells both her tale of self-realization and argues for the validity of it. Anzaldúa asserts:

The struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one. As long as *los hombres* think they have to *chingar mujeres* and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and therefore culturally favored over *la mujer*, as long as to be a *vieja* is a thing of derision, there can be no real healing of our psyches. (106).

Referring to the Chicana community as *mestizas*, she enumerates just a few of the reasons for which the women have to rise against the conventions of Chicano culture. She argues that Chicano *machismo* hurts both sexes as well. In the above quoted passage, she says that men are "taught that they are superior" and that they "think they have to *chingar mujeres* and each other to be men". She explicitly states that these are learned behaviors that can and should be eliminated from the culture. After all, men are *chingando*, literally fucking or fornicating. In this sense, it can be interpreted as "fucking over", hurting, destabilizing themselves by following this social construct. She adds, "men even more than women, are fettered to gender roles" (106). She also states:

I've encountered a few scattered and isolated gentle straight men, the beginnings of a new breed, but they are confused, and entangled with sexist behaviors that



they have not been able to eradicate. We need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement. (106)

So there are men who are struggling to break free from the social conventions, but are in perhaps even more of a mess than Chicanas. There appears to be no place for them since they are not following the cultural norm; they most surely feel that to survive and be successful within the community they must adhere to the learned behavior that follows them since childhood. Still, they want to change and so are very much like the struggling Chicana: caught in a borderland in which they seek to define themselves and change the world.

Anzaldúa argues that an important step in overcoming the *machismo* hurdle is recognizing that there is no “*puta/virgen* dichotomy” (106), or more precisely, casting it out from society’s mores. She calls out that few men “have had the courage to expose themselves to the woman inside” (106) and so the perpetuation of stereotypical gender roles continues.

Anzaldúa is tired of women being spoken for. She wants them to break from the extreme dichotomies that mark them. A virgin or a whore, a wife and mother or a nun are seemingly the only choices provided to Chicana women in their culture; Anzaldúa wants *las mestizas* to realize that there is another world out there that they can be protagonists of as they create their own stories. She doesn’t want women to be the Llorona as stereotypically depicted in their culture: caught weeping helplessly in an endless loop of punishing traditions.

*La Llorona* figures into Anzaldúa’s writing because she is discussing Chicano heritage and *la Llorona* is an inextricable part of it. Unlike the other texts discussed in this thesis, Anzaldúa’s work does not dedicate a chapter or section to the Llorona. Rather, *la Llorona* appears sporadically through the novel as herself, her deity ancestor, and her “relatives”

(Coatlicue). While Anzaldúa's discussion of *la Llorona* is limited, it is tied to the deliberation regarding three very important female figures in Mexican culture.

In the second chapter of the novel, *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan* (Rebel Movements and the Cultures that Betray), Anzaldúa discusses the roles assigned to Chicanas. They cannot talk back or expect their husbands to participate in household chores or child-rearing. If they do this they will be chastised not only by the men, but by the women who are *machistas*. *Machista* women have internalized their culture's belief system and so they see themselves as less than man and recognize that the only way they can attain power is by being good mothers and wives. The definition of good here being what "the culture and the Church insist" (39): "that women are subservient to males" (39). *La Llorona* broke this convention by reacting to her husband's abandonment and so she has to be punished and be made an example of. As Anzaldúa states, "if a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish" (39). *La Llorona* didn't accept her husband's leaving her and therefore she is a selfish woman because she did not agree to her lover's decision. She put her feelings above the man's; she did not remain silent. Anzaldúa adds on the subject:

Much of what the culture condemns focuses on kinship relationships. The welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe is more important than the welfare of the individual. The individual exists first as kin-as sister, as father, as padrino- and last as self.

In my culture, selfishness is condemned, especially in women; humility and selflessness, the absence of selfishness, is considered a virtue. (40)

This just reaffirms the belief in *la Llorona*'s selfishness and "deserved" punishment. *La Llorona* did not follow her culture's rules: she put herself above the feelings of her husband and her children. In fact, the culture would argue that she imposed her feelings upon them: she refused her lover's discarding of her and she killed her children as a reaction. She valued herself as an individual instead of concerning herself with the community's well being first. Anzaldúa abounds more on the subject:

*Respeto* carries with it a set of rules so that social categories and hierarchies will be kept in order: respect is reserved for *la abuela, papá, el patrón*, those with power in the community. Women are at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants. The Chicano, *mexicano*, and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for deviance. Deviance is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants. (40)

By protesting her condition, *la Llorona* not only asserted herself as an individual, but committed deviance. She disrespected her culture's rules and castes. Therefore, society got "rid" of her. They made sure that this incident would not repeat itself so while *la Llorona* still forms part of the culture, she is now simply a story instead of a human being who can tell her own tale. Power has been taken away from her because she cannot tell her own story; we cannot know her side. Society did indeed get rid of her: they took away her voice and used her to their advantage thus obliterating her existence as an individual. She is now a warning to other women who desire to assert themselves. Anzaldúa laments that, "like *la Llorona*, the Indian woman's only means of protest was wailing" (43). So, the women have chosen to simply weep instead of acting out. The story has served its purpose: to keep the women in check.

Anzaldúa concludes the section by discussing Malinche and Coatlicue, whom she connects with *la Llorona* throughout the novel as women wronged by their culture. Not only where they wronged because of the cultural retribution to their acts, but because the culture made them out as “the betrayer” (44). She focuses particularly on the woman of Indian descent, but this can be applied to all women, since up to this day, there are women who have been blamed for things beyond their control simply because of the way they spoke, dressed, or carried themselves.

The next section that discusses *la Llorona* is “Entering Into the Serpent”. In it she discusses her encounters with the serpent, who is related to the female deities present in the culture, specifically *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. Anzaldúa explains that “*La Virgen de Guadalupe*’s Indian name is *Coatlalopeuh*. She is the central deity connecting us to our Indian ancestry.” (49) Anzaldúa describes the transformation of *Coatlalopeuh* into *Guadalupe* and how this all relates to the ousting of women in their own culture. She explicates that *Coatlalopeuh* “is descended from, or is an aspect of, earlier Mesoamerican fertility and Earth goddesses. The earliest is *Coatlicue* or ‘Serpent Skirt’”(49). Her appearance is impressive; she is described as having “a human skull or serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents and taloned feet” (49). Still, she was a “creator goddess” and “mother of the celestial deities” (49). But with the advent of “Azteca-Mexica” culture, a change in female societal roles was coming. Female divinities were demoted, made into negative entities, and replaced by male gods. Coatlicue was torn apart:

They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects. *Coatlicue*, the Serpent Goddess, and her more sinister

aspects, *Tlazolteotl* and *Cihuacoatl*, were “darkened” and disempowered much in the same manner as the Indian *Kali*. (49)

Here began the repression of the female. A human being, male or female, has multiple facets, but in the female’s case the more softer and “benign” aspects of her are usually preferred by society. The female is being separated from the carnal, sexual, and power-related characteristics. They kept the good and evolved it until it became *La Virgen de Guadalupe* who is considered the epitome of a good woman: a quiet, faithful mother and wife who somehow managed to preserve her virginity. Anzaldúa states, “they desexed *Guadalupe*, taking *Coatlalopeuh*, the serpent/sexuality, out of her” (49). However, there lies the contradiction. The most important religious figure in “Mexico, Central America and parts of the U.S. Southwest” (51) is a female, *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. But in order to be revered, she must be exorcised of all the darkness that is stereotypically tied to females. *La Virgen* is derived from an adulterated version of the original native goddess. She is a watered-down deity, but at least, in a way, the Mexican community still is connected to its Indian roots. Anzaldúa upholds that “*la cultura chicana* identifies with the mother (Indian) rather than with the father (Spanish) 52.”

Anzaldúa maintains that the Chicanos have three mothers:

*Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada* (*Malinche*), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two. (52)

*Guadalupe* has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and *mexicanos* and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted-*Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada*

to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy. (53)

In her book, the author connects all of these women thus bringing them back to the time they were one female with many facets. In this excerpt, Anzaldúa explains the purpose of separating the figures because that way they can be used to control the Chicano community. It controls both men and women because even though the control apparatuses used here women, men must also participate in the sustaining of these conventions. If both sexes had not participated, perhaps *la Llorona* wouldn't exist. Anzaldúa also makes it clear that the Chicano community is responsible for the continued existence of these societal tropes, since she keeps utilizing the word "us" to refer to herself and the Chicano community. Instead of fighting back, like Anzaldúa is doing, they keep perpetuating these ideas.

The chapter concludes by explaining that crying, "wailing", was the "Indian, Mexican and Chicana woman's feeble protest when she has other recourse" (55). However, she adds that "these collective wailing rites may have been a sign of resistance in a society which glorified the warrior and war and for whom the women of the conquered tribes were booty" (55). So the crying is both a sign of oppression and protest. *La Llorona* is crying for all she lost, crying because she has been condemned, but also crying out against the crime committed against her by her own culture. She also cries to be whole again, as Anzaldúa believes that she is "traveling the dark terrains of the unknown searching for the lost parts of herself" (60).

Finally, Anzaldúa relates:

Back then, I, an unbeliever, scoffed at these Mexican superstitions as I was taught in Anglo school. Now, I wonder if this story and similar ones were the culture's

attempts to “protect” member’s of the family, especially girls, from “wandering.”.

. . There’s an ancient Indian tradition of burning the umbilical cord of an infant girl under the house so she will never stray from it and her domestic role. (58).

This reinforces the idea that has been discussed throughout her novel; that women who stray from their pre-assigned cultural rules are meant to be punished. She now sees the role that *la Llorona* has assumed in the culture: the unwilling advertisement against asserting the self as an independent female entity.

The last section that discusses *la Llorona* is the relatively short “La herencia de Coatlicue: The Coatlicue State”. This chapter has significantly more verse than the other ones as it talks about her realizing her fears and overcoming them, so she utilizes verse to relate her experience. It talks about the power of seeing and being seen, how one can be “held immobilized by a glance” (64), which is what has occurred to *la Llorona*. The cultural eye has been fixed upon her for centuries. She has not been able to evolve because the culture has not allowed her to.

She concludes by recognizing all of *Coatlicue* in her:

that power is my inner self, the entity that is the sum total of all my  
reincarnations, the godwoman in me I call *Antigua, mi Diosa*, the divine within,  
*Coatlicue-Cihuacoatl-Tlazolteotl-Tonantzin-Coatlalopeuh-Guadalupe*-they are  
one. (72)

She has evolved because she has recognized all the aspects and unified them, yet, she does not know “when to bow down to her and when to allow the limited conscious mind to take over.” Even Anzaldúa faces the hurdle of when to assert *Coatlicue-Cihuacoatl-Llorona* or follow the

customs that society has implanted with her mind. But at least Anzaldúa stands on *la Llorona*'s side and that is a step forward in *la Llorona*'s commendation and the transformation of the *machista* culture.

Anzaldúa, like *la Llorona*, experiences all this pain in order to expedite a warning. They are both examples to learn from and not repeat their mistakes, which are initially giving in to the roles society wants to assign them. Their escape was late and at a great cost: Anzaldúa suffers from alienation due to her identity as a lesbian Chicana academic and *la Llorona* is condemned to wander forever because she initially conformed to the *machista*'s way of treating women. Even so, Anzaldúa had to compromise some of her newfound self in order to achieve publication and understanding with her audience. In interviews, she admits:

if I had made *Borderlands* too inaccessible to you by putting in too many Chicano terms, too many Spanish words, or if I had been more fragmented in the text than I am right now, you would have been very frustrated. So there are certain traditions in all the different genres...and certain standards that you have to follow" (232).

So in order to herald more change, even Anzaldúa had to compromise parts of herself. Like *la Llorona*, she has been encased while trying to fight, but Anzaldúa has been heard. And thanks to that, so has *la Llorona*.

### **A Companion by the River: *Woman Hollering Creek***

Penned by Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek* is the most recent of the books to be analyzed. All its stories are bound together with the symbol of the Chicana woman, her struggles,



and her overcoming these. The story from which the book garners its title is “Woman Hollering Creek”, the first text from the section titled “There Was a Man, There Was a Woman.” This vignette tells the tale of Cleófilas Enriqueta DeLeón, a Mexican woman who is trapped in an abusive marriage to a man from “the other side,” meaning that he has successfully emigrated to the United States. The *Arroyo de la Gritona*, the Woman Hollering Creek, runs behind her house and while the townspeople fear it, Cleófilas seems particularly entranced with the place. The promise of success that lies within the American dream turns into suffering for Cleófilas, who has been relinquished by her father and husband. Cleófilas must escape her dire situation or become a Gritona.

The story begins by establishing the concepts of love and abandon: the title page for the story contains the following quote taken from the song “Puñalada Trapera”:

Me estoy muriendo

y tú, como si nada...

(I am dying

and you are acting as if nothing was wrong) (Cisneros, 41)

When the actual story begins, it starts by saying that at Cleófilas’ wedding, her father promised, “I am your father, I will never abandon you” (Cisneros, 43). It adds that her father had some sense of foresight and knew since then that she would yearn to return home to him, but years have passed and she is alone on the other side of the border, with only her son and *la Llorona* to keep her company. These two quotes set the stage for the situation that Cleófilas is in: she had dreamed of a life like those depicted in Mexican *telenovelas*: full of passion. She thought that’s how it would be with the arrival of Juan Pedro, a man who had achieved the “American dream”.

Instead, Juan Pedro turned into an abusive and philandering husband who on certain nights just “did not come home” (44). So, as “Puñalada Trapera’s” lyric says, Cleófilas is languishing and nobody notices or helps.

The story’s narrative shifts from Cleófilas’ perspective and “gossip”. This means that those parts of the story are told like tittle-tattle by the townsfolk in Seguin and Mexico. The gossips discuss Cleófilas’ life, but they also pass judgement. In Mexico they talk about her motherless life and how she is such a resourceful girl in the face of living with all those men. On the other side, it is both men and women that discuss Cleófilas,

These tatlers echo in Cleófilas’ mind when she considers returning to Mexico:

Sometimes she thinks of her father’s house. But how could she go back there?

What a disgrace. What would the neighbors say? Coming home like that with one baby on her hip and one in the oven. Where’s your husband?

The town of gossips. The town of dust and despair. Which she has traded for this town of gossips. This town of dust, despair. Houses farther apart perhaps, though no more privacy because of it (50).

Gossip surrounds Cleófilas, but it hurts her because in Seguin, the only way she can be part of it is to be the juicy news. It further excludes her from the community since she can’t communicate in English. The possible scandal at her return to the family stead paralyzes her at the beginning. She cannot bear to go back there because she thinks of the public’s opinion. However, despite all the harm that the gossip does, it is one of the gossips who saves her life by putting her in contact with Felice, the woman who helps her cross the border.

Cleofilas' neighbors were two women with names that described her situation, "The woman Soledad on the left, the woman Dolores on the right" (44). Soledad meaning loneliness and Dolores meaning pain, Cleófilas was experiencing these on multiple levels: first in her own house through spousal abuse; second in society since her neighbors never had time for her and she had no friends; and third all the way from her natal Mexico. The one person who had promised to never let go of her, her father, was nowhere to be found when Cleofilas was being abused, despite his promise.

Behind her house was "El Arroyo de la Gritona," Woman Hollering Creek. Unlike others, she was keenly interested in finding out about the creek. She would ask, but she would receive no answer: the origins of the name had been forgotten. But Cleófilas did not forget *la Llorona*, and it is her that helps her escape.

In *la Llorona*, Cleófilas finds the company that she cannot achieve anywhere else. Her female neighbors are Lloronas "too busy remembering the men who had left through either choice or circumstance and would never come back" (47). To her, *la Llorona* and her creek are a happy place where she can escape her ruined marriage, the barrier of language, and the abusive men in her life (her husband and his drunken friends). But *la Llorona* also reminds her of what she may eventually become if she continues to stay with her husband.

Cisneros has already rewritten *la Llorona* by casting her as a companion to Cleófilas. Now Cleófilas has the chance of rewriting her story and choose not to reenact the Llorona legend: rather than being abandoned, she will leave. But this does not come easily for Cleofilas. Several times throughout the story, Cleofilas remembers her feelings for Juan Pedro and how, occasionally, he becomes the man she loved:

In the morning sometimes before he opens his eyes. Or after they have finished loving. Or at times when he is simply across from her at the table putting pieces of food into his mouth and chewing. Cleófilas thinks, This is the man I have waited my whole life for (49).

This man who farts and belches and snores as well as laughs and kisses and holds her. ...this man, this father, this rival, this keeper, this lord, this master, this husband till kingdom come (49).

These small things that Cleófilas mentions are small details that one picks upon during love. Tiny things that go unnoticed by most except the person you share your life with. These were the things that reminded Cleófilas of her feelings towards Juan Pedro. But as things got worse, not even they would be strong enough to weaken her resolve of leaving Juan Pedro. It all began with “a doubt. As slender as a hair” (50). Cleófilas began having suspicions of her husband being unfaithful and that, coupled with the physical abuse he was perpetuating upon her, was enough.

What ultimately steels her decision to leave Juan Pedro is not clear: a combination of *la Llorona*, Graciela’s intervention, or just plain having enough is possible. It is not written in the story. What is known is that she insists that her husband take her to a doctor’s appointment in which she breaks down and is aided by Graciela. It is not clear whether Graciela is a nurse, an assistant, or the doctor herself, but it is Graciela who calls up Felice and coordinates Cleófilas’ drop-off at the Greyhound station. From there, she will go with her children back to her home in Mexico.

Instead of murdering her children in despair, she saves them and herself. In her revision of *la Llorona*, women aren’t destroyers; they are creators for it is other women, Graciela and the

liberated Felice, who become her vehicle of escape. They are empowered women since they have jobs and speak their minds, unlike Cleófilas, who hasn't even "been allowed to call home or write or nothing" (55). As Felice drives Cleófilas and her children away from Juan Pedro, they cross the Woman Hollering Creek. While doing this, Felice starts yelling. She explains that since it's the name of the creek, it's only appropriate to do so.

The conclusion of the story illustrates the differences between Felice and Cleófilas, but unites them in the action of escaping. They both break societal boundaries of behavior. Felice acts whichever way she wants, despite the fact that it may be considered masculine behavior while Cleófilas flees an abusive marriage that she may have been forced to endure. Felice celebrated *la Llorona's* creek with a holler, instead of weeping. Cleófilas stops her tears and escapes instead of risking becoming a permanent Llorona by Juan Pedro's side.

Evidently, *la Llorona's* complexity as a symbol can be easily dismissed when viewed one-dimensionally and superficially just like female reactions are in Begley's article. Labeled as a ghost, a monster, a bad woman, and an infanticide, many people simply do not question if there is more to the character. But there is a story behind her tears and in these texts, one can see that she is not a monster, but a human being that did the best she could.

These authors have transformed the stereotypical notions of *la Llorona*. Transforming her from a villain to a hero, a companion, and ultimately a human being is the greatest victory for this figure. Her message has been lost in her tears, which we have not been able to interpret correctly until now. Hopefully, there will be more authors willing to see this side of *la Llorona* and not simply cast her as a mere horrific device; a shadow of all that she could be. In Anaya's

*Bless Me, Última* she is a companion, a symbol, and a guide. A companion because Antonio always senses her, either in the river or the presence of nature. Therefore, Antonio is never alone: he is always accompanied by empowering female figures: Última and a reinterpreted Llorona. She is a symbolic warning of the person Antonio could become if he doesn't assert himself and the path he desires to follow. Finally, she is a guide who, like Última, leads him to a better understanding of himself, of nature, and towards the future.

In *The Legend of la Llorona*, *la Llorona* is fleshed out into an empowered woman who is completely justified in her actions by the author. She makes it clear that the children were not the only victims of a crime; she is also preyed upon and forced into her actions. Unlike most tales of *la Llorona* that do not discuss her feelings and reasons for committing murder, here we see a woman who is battered on all sides: displaced by her lover, considered a traitor to her people, and objectified by the foreigner. When one reads the tale, one cannot help but understand why *la Llorona* acted as she did.

In Gloria Anzaldúa's text, *la Llorona* is used as a tool and as a weapon. A tool for self-discovery and acceptance: she is one of the many deities that Anzaldúa "encounters" when searching for herself. A weapon because Anzaldúa empowers her by returning her to her goddess origins and uses her to fight the Chicano's *machismo*. Anzaldúa turns the concepts around in order to not only celebrate Chicanas, but also the entire Chicano community as well. But above all, she represents the Chicana that is struggling to free herself from years of oppression. Instead of a perpetuation of *la Llorona* as a punished victim, now the weeping woman is leading the fight for change.

Finally, Sandra Cisneros visits *la Llorona* in *Woman Hollering Creek*. While, like Anaya, she doesn't develop her background, the way she is presented obliterates the classical villainess vision of *la Llorona*. Her role in Cisneros' story is very similar to *Bless Me, Última*, but with several important differences. *La Llorona* now leads and empowers a female who is in a situation frighteningly similar to the specter's. Also, Cleófilas is not afraid of *la Llorona*; in fact, *la Llorona* is company for the poor woman who is all alone in the United States. In this story, the villains are those perpetuate the Chicano stereotypes of *machismo*, like her husband and her neighbors Soledad and Dolores. While *la Llorona* is usually used as an example of *machismo* perpetuation (stay within *machista* boundaries or suffer the consequences), here she is leading Cleófilas out of her desperate situation and her weeping is turned into triumphant hollering through Felice, the woman who helps Cleófilas escape.

Thankfully, the canonical writers of Chicano literature have already headed in the right direction. It is just a matter of time until many follow. As Anzaldúa states in *Borderlands*, crying was once "feeble protest", but now it is a call to arms, a "sign of resistance". It is a wailing to empower and cast out the old interpretations of *la Llorona* and see her plainly: a human, full of thoughts and feelings. A human that is fighting against the injustice of oppression.

## Chapter IV.

### Drying the Tears: Concluding Remarks

“How, then, do we stop crying?”  
Tom Lutz, *Crying*

Tom Lutz begins *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* by stating “weeping is a human universal” (17). He affirms, “throughout history, and in every culture, emotional tears are shed-everyone, everywhere, cries at some time” (17). As children, we cry because we cannot express our thoughts coherently. As adults, we weep at the loss of a loved one or from happiness when overcoming something that was particularly difficult, among other things. However, as Lutz says, “we know surprisingly little about it” (18). He goes on to discuss how the body produces tears, but goes on to conclude that our knowledge beyond the physical aspects of crying is extremely limited. We feel pain and we cry, but how does our body translate emotional pain into physical consequences? Lutz himself explains, “tears often resist interpretation” (19).

*La Llorona*’s tears are open to analysis because of her use by writers. Is she crying in repentance? Does she regret having murdered her children? Or are her tears fueled by anger, anger at being doomed to roam the earth and at losing her lover. All of these meanings are valid since *la Llorona* herself has not stated otherwise. Her curse is that she can be interpreted and yet not assert her own reasons for her actions. However, the significance assigned to her tears is usually one of regret for her actions. Once again, this is a credible idea, but what I sought to do in this thesis is explore other interpretations of *la Llorona*; in this case, an anti-patriarchal and more empowering interpretation that has been also explored by the Chicana feminist movement. One whose cries are not of punishment and suffering, but of empowerment. They can be seen as



calls to independence, to feminist-battle, and self-assertion. *La Llorona* now leads the way into an era of better understanding for all, as evidenced in the texts analyzed throughout this thesis. Anaya, Anzaldúa, and Cisneros have all played a part in transforming *la Llorona*, be it willingly or subconsciously, they have brought forth *la Llorona* into a new age.

### **Gleaning Empowerment: Conclusions from *la Llorona* Texts**

Anzaldúa argues that Chicanos were “dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history” (*Borderlands*, 30). However, is this not the very same thing that Chicanos have done to *la Llorona*? No one knows who she really is; she has no name, no history, just a story issued as a warning to all those who dare trespass the cultural conventions. She becomes a cultural icon. In effect, *la Llorona* perfectly mirrors the Chicano struggle. She, like them, has been deprived. Of a name, of an identity, of love, and acceptance, among other things. To top it off, they cast away the one who “predicted” their downfall: as discussed in the second chapter, a Llorona figure foresaw the Spanish conquest and warned them with wailing. So not only have her efforts to warn her “children” been forgotten, but she has been punished for them as well.

However, this all changes in the texts of Anaya, Anzaldúa, and Cisneros. Reinterpretations of *la Llorona* abound in the texts discussed throughout this thesis, although sometimes they are not evident at first glance. Initially, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Última* presents *la Llorona* “as is”, as she has always been characterized in Mexican and Mexican American culture: the terrible specter who seeks absolution and/or revenge by bringing death. This is the way everyone in the community sees her except for Antonio, the novel’s main character. The men of the town, including his brothers, see her as a terrifying entity that seeks to

claim their souls. Antonio is also afraid of her, but not for the same reasons as his brothers or the other men.

Antonio's fear of *la Llorona* can be traced back to several sources. The first, and most obvious one, is the influence his older brothers have upon him. The second is the connection he may feel with *la Llorona*, as she mirrors his helplessness in regards to the choices he can make. Antonio will become a Llorona figure if he cannot trace his own destiny. The last source is the fact that she is tied with the mysteries that Antonio has yet to know. *La Llorona* is "the presence"; she is a part of nature. She is the connection between life and death, the boatwoman of the river Styx. She is the connection between the world Antonio knows and the unknown world that Última introduces him to. He respects this world because he senses that it involves everything: both man and earth spirit and thus he must be at peace with it, unlike the men of the town. He doesn't feel a need to push *la Llorona* as "the presence" down, he simply seeks to understand and respect them. Therefore, he is not following the townsfolk's steps in recoiling from *la Llorona* and denominating her the "monstrous feminine", but he is respectfully edging closer to her with the help of Última. He is casting away the stereotypical behaviors of his community and thus evolving along with *la Llorona*.

*The Legend of la Llorona* takes Anaya's revision of *la Llorona* even further. He has already covered *la Llorona* as an everywoman figure (by making *Bless Me*, Última's Llorona a normal woman), he now approaches the idea of *la Llorona* as Malinche. Furthermore, he imbues her with goddess-like powers of control over nature and populace, he purposefully merged the ideas of the ancient Llorona goddess with Malinche. Adding another layer to *la Llorona*, Anaya makes her human. He imbues her with feelings and words; he does not limit her to wailing and

searching for her children. For the first time we really see *la Llorona* see and feel. Neither Cisneros nor Anzaldúa flesh out and represent *la Llorona* as a full human being. They defend and reinterpret her, but it is Anaya's depiction that helps us further understand *la Llorona's* situation.

In *The Legend of la Llorona*, Anaya renders *la Llorona* as innocent and blameless in the murder of her children. The one thing she is truly guilty of is sacrificing so much of herself and her people to the man she loved. This is made clear in the last pages of the novel, when she commits the act that will convert her into *la Llorona*. Cortés realizes that he is responsible for the murder of his children and the damning of Malinche. He may not have wielded the knife, but it was his actions that drove Malinche to seek council from the gods and to protect the children from whatever fate may have waited for them in Spain.

This novel illustrates Malinche's gradual metamorphosis into *la Llorona*. Anaya disarms the reader's misconception of *la Llorona* by illustrating a woman that is headily in love, both with her husband and her children. Because of this she is also a woman bound to fate. A likeness to Judas Iscariot is inevitable: they were both destined to engage in a horrible, but necessary act. If Judas never sold out Jesus, Christians wouldn't have been pardoned for their sins. If *la Llorona* never murdered her children, she wouldn't have freed them from slavery and, in the case of Chicano culture, become an example of what type of woman not to be.

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* can be interpreted dually: as theory and as literature. It is the former because it is on the forefront of Chicana feminist theory, but it is also the latter since it illustrates Anzaldúa's self-discovery through verse and prose. In *Borderlands*, *la Llorona* is one of several female Mexican icons that are revised in order to guide not only Anzaldúa, but

Chicano consciousness to an evolved state of mind and place. Here, they would all be equals and there would be no oppression. Anzaldúa calls this “Aztlán”. But before they can arrive to this mythical place, they must overcome cultural values that restrict and bound them. *Machismo* not only torments the woman, but the male as well. Women are victims and perpetrators of it and the men who wish to escape it cannot due to fear of societal repercussions. To truly be able to arrive in Aztlán, they must first cast away these cultural norms. Anzaldúa has commenced this purge by vindicating *la Llorona*.

Anzaldúa argues that *la Llorona*, is “the heir of Cihuacóatl, the deity who presided over women in childbirth.” (*Borderlands*, 6) In her text, Anzaldúa returns *la Llorona* to her origins as a deity. By doing this, *la Llorona* is no longer subject to anyone. In fact, she now is a figure of power and instead of only being a dealer of death, as she is known today, she is now the goddess of life with Anzaldúa’s reinterpretation. She helps bring children into this world instead of taking them away or murdering them. *La Llorona*, along with Malinche and a revised Guadalupe, help give birth to Anzaldúa as well. It is through self-analysis and encounters with these deities within herself that Anzaldúa comes to terms with who she is and allows it to flourish. *La Llorona* is a positive enabler, a bringer of life to Anzaldúa. In Anzaldúa’s work, *la Llorona* becomes a guardian for all those women in the borderlands.

Though Anzaldúa is afraid of the deities at first, she achieves self-recognition and realization. By using these deities as her guides, in “For Waging War Is My Cosmic Duty: The Loss of the Balanced Oppositions and the Change to Male Dominance” (53) Anzaldúa comes to accept the good and the bad of Mexican culture and of herself as an individual. But she doesn’t just take the bad and receive it favorably; she sees the negative and decides to fight it. Otherwise,

nothing will change. When she perceives the reality of things, she feels bound to act upon it, to not limit her resistance to the feeble protest of crying, as she refers to *la Llorona*'s classical interpretation. Later in the book, she declares:

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue-my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence (81)

Anzaldúa is determined to fight the role that has been culturally assigned to her. She will not give in. After years of suffering in silence, she declares that she will follow "the tradition of silence" no longer. She is her own weapon, with *la Llorona* and Malinche by her side, and with the original native Guadalupe, Coatlolopeuh, accompanying her as well. These are represented by the "serpent's tongue". She will withstand the "Cultural Tyranny" (41) no longer. She will use her voice and text to fight against it.

Lastly, in the first page of Sandra Cisneros's story "Woman Hollering Creek", the narrator says "how when a man and a woman love each other, sometimes that love sours. But a parent's love for a child, a child's for its parents, is another thing entirely" (43). "Woman Hollering Creek" is Cisneros's revisionist interpretation of *la Llorona*, the fearsome Mexican cultural icon that ostensibly murdered her children out of hatred and wrath towards her lover. However, by saying that at the beginning of the story, Cisneros is already preparing the reader for another Llorona: one who comforts and enables Cleófilas to escape an abusive spouse. By opening her story with that reference to filial love, Cisneros is establishing that whatever actions *la Llorona* or Cleófilas may do are born out of love. *La Llorona* might have killed her children out of love's wrath or love-induced hysteria, but love is what drives her to search for her children

and protect Cleófilas. If *la Llorona* was still a menacing figure, then why was she Cleófilas' only source of comfort in Seguin?

*La Llorona* is Cleófila's sole company for everybody in town has cast her away. Cisneros illustrates the negative and positive qualities of women, for it is her neighbors who ignore her while they live in their perennial male-driven grief and it is the female gossips that talk of her continuously, beating her down when she can't even defend herself due to the language barrier. The positive qualities of woman are manifested with *la Llorona*, as she is along with Cleófila's children, the only provider of company and comfort. At the Woman Hollering Creek, Cleófilas does not feel abandoned or lonely; on the contrary, she thinks it's a happy place. It is also other women, Chicana females that are free from Chicano *machismo*, that help coordinate and realize her escape.

Cleófilas only seems to feel at peace at the creek where *la Llorona* lives. In a sense, *la Llorona* is the mother Cleófilas never had, with the creek's water representing the womb and the sense of calm and comfort provided by the creek and *la Llorona*'s presence standing in for the safety of the womb. She came to the United States seeking a life of passion, of beautiful romance and emotion, but she only found love and affection in the one place everyone avoided: *La Llorona*'s creek.

Cleófilas wanted passion. As the story says:

what Cleófilas had been waiting for, has been whispering and sighing and giggling for, has been anticipating since she was old enough to lean against the window displays of gauze and butterflies and lace, is passion. Not the kind on the cover of the *¡Alarma!* Magazines, mind you, where the lover is photographed

with the bloody fork she used to salvage her good name. But passion in its purest crystalline essence. The kind the books and songs and *telenovelas* describe when one finds, finally, the great love of one's life, and does whatever one can, must do, at whatever cost (44).

The Llorona was a victim of passion. The headlines in the *¡Alarma!* Magazines can be applied to *la Llorona*, but more importantly, one in which Cleófilas' difference and similarity to *la Llorona* is cemented. Unlike *la Llorona*, she has not reacted violently to her husband's abuse. She has endured it without attacking him or their children. Therefore, she hasn't succumbed to the violent passion that abounded in the *¡Alarma!* magazines and in *la Llorona*'s life. She is similar to *la Llorona* in the sense that they are both suffering because all they wanted was love that could withstand anything. Tragically, Cleófilas and *la Llorona* never received that kind of love. Thus, *la Llorona* is not only a companion to Cleófilas, but also a warning of what Cleófilas could become if she didn't break the cycle of *machismo*.

Bell Hooks' discussion of female roles applies to *la Llorona* perfectly. She is encased by mainstream culture in the role of "victim, vamp, and castrator" but through the reinterpretations in Anaya's, Anzaldúa's and Cisneros's texts she escapes these one-dimensional roles. Her resistance to remaining in the stereotypically passive female role occurs even in the original versions of the tale. *La Llorona* attempts to rebel and thus she is cast as a monster, which according to Julie Miess is a classically male role. *La Llorona* refuses to let the man continue his authoritative role any further so she combats his *machismo*. In all the texts discussed in this thesis, *la Llorona* combats the idea of "the monstrous feminine" in a way that goes along with Miess' argument:

One way contemporary writers oppose the positioning of female as victim is by recovering and celebrating the figure of the female monster, creating the female monster-hero. This figure interrogates the situation of the male predatory position as the cultural norm, and posits that the position of the male predator as source of aggression, activity and power is generated from a hegemonic perspective. This figure also revisits the conventional depiction of the inhuman female monster, discovering from within this figure positive models for female action and power (234-5).

When adapting this train of thought, *la Llorona* is no longer villainous, but empowered. The male as leader concept is cast away because the female has discovered her own strength and has acted out. But not only is it important because the so-called female monster now has agency beyond the malevolent, it is significant because this change in the female's presentation means that there was a change in the consideration of the female and her role in life. Females are now the subject rather than the object. Miess affirms it is a "signifier of cultural change" (235). She is not a predator or a monster anymore; she is now a hero. She has defeated the classic categorization of her persona.

Miess refers to Derrida to discuss the concept of the cultural norms that restrict not only *la Llorona*, but all of society:

Faced with a monster, one may become aware of what the norm is and when this norm has a history-which is the case with discursive norms, philosophical norms, socio-cultural norms, they have a history-any appearance of monstrosity in this domain allows an analysis of the history of the norms" (235).



This fits into *la Llorona*, her role as a warning device, and her transformation. As Anzaldúa details in *Borderlands*, women are supposed to fulfill certain roles in Mexican culture. Be a good mother and wife, or be a nun; accept your lot in life silently and serve the men. Live to be a grandmother and finally obtain some degree of respect. In Chicano culture, the woman is supposed to function within these roles, not escape them. When Anzaldúa not only invests her time in reading (for which she is seen as lazy because she does not serve her brothers), but decides to pursue a career in academia, and come out as a lesbian, she is faced with not only with general culture's discrimination and fear of the Other, but heavy intolerance from her own culture because she disregarded its cultural norms.

Like Anzaldúa, *la Llorona* refuses the cultural norms. When her lover abandons her, she complains. She does not silently accept his abandon. When she isn't acknowledged, she escalates her protest in a way that is considered horrific: murdering her own children. She then murders herself. Not only has she shunned the patriarchal aspect of her culture by criticizing her lover's actions, she has killed her kin, something that is considered unnatural. After all, a mother is supposed to protect her children, not destroy them. As a monster, her function is to "instill social value" (Cole, 142). She is setting an example of what not to be. Through her story, many taboos are illustrated and prohibited, with the consequences clearly drawn out for whomever wishes to trespass. When her role as a monster is seen as the role of a hero, she is a woman who engages in protest against the prohibitive mores of her culture. She is no longer an icon for discipline; she is a companion and a guide.

Jack D. Zipes shares the same ideas in "Once there was a Time: an Introduction to the History and Ideology of Folk and Fairy Tales." While *la Llorona*'s story is certainly no fairy tale

(after all, no Prince Charming came to sweep her off her feet nor did a fairy godmother prevent her from suffering or murdering her children), it is most definitely a folk tale that is a central part of Mexican folklore. He discusses how folk and fairy tales evolved from discussions of cultural norms to purveyors of the ruling class' beliefs. Zipes asserts, "the impact of these works stems from their imaginative grasp and symbolic depiction of social *realities*" (4). So folk tales are not solely for entertainment; they are devices to record and transmit a culture's history and stories. They are also necessary to depict, albeit in a fantastical way at times, the "social *realities*": the norms and mores that are to be followed. He continues:

Moreover, such acts which occur in folk tales...were all based on the social reality and beliefs of different primitive societies. Characters, too, such as water nymphs, elves, fairies, giants, dwarfs, ghosts were real in the minds of the primitive peoples and had a direct bearing on social behaviour, world views, and legal codification (6).

This perfectly describes the Chicano communities thoughts' on *la Llorona*. For them, *la Llorona* is real. Without a doubt, they believe she exists. When somebody relates an encounter with her, the listeners believe not just that they saw something, but saw *her*. Even Rudolfo Anaya, who claims to not be convinced of her existence, clearly does on some level. Otherwise, why would she figure in every single one of his works? Just because *la Llorona* is an otherworldly creature does not take away her existence. That is one step towards a revisionist view of her: acknowledging her as real. It is this belief that has allowed her to survive from pre-columbine times to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Zipes adds:

as August Nitschke has demonstrated, the tales are reflections of the social order in a given historical epoch, and, as such, they symbolize the aspirations, needs, dreams and wishes of the people, either affirming the dominant social values and norms or revealing the necessity to change them (5).

In *la Llorona*'s case, both definitions apply: she is used as a symbol of what a woman should not become: rebellious and indomitable, not to mention murderous. The *machista* society needs to perpetuate *la Llorona*'s story in order to keep women in the position they want them to be, docile. Therefore, it is promoting the dreams and wishes of the dominant class. Nowadays, it also points out to the need for revisions of the legend. With feminist Chicanas taking her as their icon, *la Llorona* now represents past and present mores. She can be a sign of oppression or liberation, depending on the ideals being fostered by culture.

Zipes later enumerates several characteristics of folk and fairy tales, of which numbers 2 and 4 are the most relevant to this thesis:

2. Folk tales were rewritten and made into didactic fairy tales for children so that they would not be harmed by the violence, crudity, and fantastic exaggeration of the originals. Essentially the contents and structure of these saccharine tales upheld the Victorian values of the status quo.

4. Serious artists created new fairy tales from folk motifs and basic plot situations. They sought to use fantasy as a means for criticizing social conditions and expressing the need to develop alternative models to the established social orders (15).

While in the case of Chicano culture we are not talking strictly of minors and it is obvious that *la Llorona*'s story contains violence. Nor is *la Llorona* Victorian; nonetheless these ideals still uphold for the Mexican specter because like classic fairy tales, *la Llorona*'s story was mutated from her goddess origins into an everyday woman in order to promote the tropes of Mexican culture. *La Llorona*'s tale is distilled to the barest facts: she is abandoned, she kills her children and suicides, and finally, she is punished. With these simple facts, many a child, man, and woman in Mexican culture were scared enough to not trespass societal boundaries.

Characteristic number 4 is essential to the reimagining of *la Llorona*, as it shows the path that Anaya, Anzaldúa, and Cisneros have taken. They have taken the exact same story of *la Llorona* and turned it on its head simply by changing a few key elements, mainly by portraying her as benevolent and misunderstood. While usually the villains in folk and fairy tales are flat and undeveloped, these authors add details here and there that completely transform the reader's interpretation of her. By morphing *la Llorona*'s story, they are criticizing the machismo inherent in the culture and the need for *la Llorona*'s punishment to stop. By revising her, she is an agent of change as well.

Zipes concludes his text by saying:

we must bear in mind that folk and fairy tales perse have no actual emancipatory power unless they are used actively to build a social bond through oral communication, social interaction, dramatic adaptation, agitatorial cultural work, etc. ...As we shall see, the best of folk and fairy tales chart ways for us to become masters of history and of our own destinies. To become a human being, according to Novalis, one of the great German fairy-tale writers, is an art, and the fantastic

and artistic designs of folk and fairy tales reflect the social configurations which lead to conflict, solidarity or change in the name of humanity (17-8).

In closing, the author reminds us that a story is nothing without humans to interpret it and charge it with meaning. It is up to us to give life to the tale and empower it to effect change upon the community. Since humans create the tales, they are already infused with a degree of power, but it is our responsibility to comprehend and reshape these ideas for the benefit of all, not just the dominant group. While for some *la Llorona* may still be an icon of evil transgression, for others she is a portrait of a woman wronged. For her revisionists, she is more than that: she is a woman who shows the way to other Chicanas out of the traps of their culture. Humans, like oral and written tradition, are ever-evolving. They must adapt to the times, like *la Llorona* is doing in these novels.

Even so, for all the transformation evident in Anaya, Anzaldúa, and Cisneros' texts, what is occurring with her other media manifestations? She has joined the seventh art, cinema and has branched out to television and advertising. But are her depictions in these media as favorable as the reinterpretations done textually?

### **Millennial Llorona: A Glance at *la Llorona* in Modern Media**

As the new millennium dawns, *la Llorona* is right here with us. Humanity's growth and evolution is also present in *la Llorona*. While in the beginning her story was passed on through oral tradition and later via written tales, she has broken into film and television. Sadly, despite her empowering revisions in text, her manifestations in recent media outlets can be seen as marred by stereotypes and instead of progressive, are regressive.

In his book, Charles Ramírez Berg states that “the history of Latino images in U.S. cinema is in large measure a pageant of six stereotypes: *el bandido*, the harlot, the female buffoon, the female clown, the Latin lover, and the dark lady” (66). This perfectly illustrates *la Llorona*’s characterization in recent visual media. In fact, *la Llorona* has been presented as each of the female stereotypes listed in Berg’s quote, albeit for different productions.

Since 2001 *la Llorona* has been appearing in film and television with impressive regularity. She has been represented in movies such as *J-ok’el* and *The Cry*; commercials for major companies Verizon, Doritos, and the California Milk Processor Board; and the television show *Supernatural*, to name a few. While the use of her as an important element in these projects can be considered reformist since she is a Hispanic icon being represented in mainstream media, the overall feel in regards to her in these channels is mostly demeaning. In the films, her part is restricted to her being an element of horror and punishment, despite the movies’ titles having allusions to her (or a variant of her name, in the case of *J-ok’el*). The Doritos commercial was created strictly for Mexico, therefore it followed the concepts of their Llorona: a terrifying specter haunting an individual. The Verizon and California Milk Processor Board commercials are interesting because they were created specifically to reach out to the Hispanic community in the United States. That means that the Hispanic community’s power has been recognized up to the point that their cultural icons have been integrated into promotion distributed in mainstream media. Finally, *la Llorona* (or an amalgam of all the known worldly Lloronas) made an appearance in the debut episode of the television series *Supernatural*. Once again, *la Llorona* proves that her notoriety transcends cultural boundaries, as *Supernatural* is a program that airs

on a channel that usually does not cater to the Hispanic community, but to the mainstream Caucasian American population.

Again, while the use of *la Llorona* in popular mainstream media is a step forward in reinterpreting her, these images of *la Llorona* are marked by the stereotypes that plague both women and the Hispanic community. Some attempt is made in the films to justify her behavior, but the horrific actions she commits on-screen nullify whatever compassion the viewer may have developed. She continues to be the horrific device dedicated to terrify and inflict pain and remind women of their place in the order of things.

The commercials skirt an explanation for *la Llorona* completely. They simply assume that the viewer is familiar with whom *la Llorona* is, which shows the limited scope: if you do not know who *la Llorona* is, then you will not understand the commercial. Aired in 2002, the oldest television ad is the California Milk Processor Board's Got Milk? Commercial, which follows this formula. It simply illustrates *la Llorona* walking through the halls of a home into the kitchen, while the couple sleeps. *La Llorona* is weeping until she enters the kitchen and opens the fridge, whence she spots the milk carton and almost seductively whispers, "Leche!" "Milk!" She tries to drink milk, but the carton is empty and so she returns to her weeping.

Chronologically, the next commercial is for Doritos. It was created as part of 13 advertising spots for a Mexican television series titled *Mi3dos*, Fears. The commercial begins with a young man running away from *la Llorona*, who can be heard weeping loudly, and quite terrifyingly, in the background. But he cannot escape the stairs. Finally, *la Llorona* catches up to him and unlike the Got Milk? Llorona, she is quite hideous. She looks dead and putrefying.

Seemingly terrified at first, the male protagonist then says, “Ay, no seas tan llorona” which means, “don’t be such a crybaby.”

The last commercial is for Verizon and is also a part of a series: the Dead Zone. Like the Got Milk? commercial, it was created specifically for the Hispanic audience. A Hispanic-American family is driving around a creepy looking area when they pause at a rest stop. Out of nowhere, *la Llorona* pops up, and the family knows who it is. She attempts to scare them by saying that they are at a “punto muerto”, a dead zone and that their calls will not be able to use their phones. The father of the family seems non-plussed and immediately tells her that with Verizon, they don’t have to worry about that. So she turns around to see the entire Verizon network behind her and she is actually scared by them.

These televised depictions of *la Llorona* establish that the Hispanic community is a huge influence in the United States. After all, the two American Llorona commercials were created specifically for Hispanics. However, there are more drawbacks than advantages. First of all, she is not a person, but merely a comedic device. *La Llorona* has been reduced to a simple catalyst in the overall marketing plan. Additionally, while she is marketed as the main plot point of these commercials, she’s just a lackey for the product. Finally, her original purpose in the afterlife has been changed: before, she searched for her children or her lover. Now, she simply covets the products that are being introduced in the commercial. She then represents lack.

These characteristics further cement the stereotypical uses and depictions of Latinos in the United States. As Clara E. Rodríguez states in *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media*, depiction of and outreach to Hispanics varies with political and economic needs (7). Hispanic cultural icons (therefore Hispanics themselves) are secondary characters, which



means that they continue to be underrepresented and misrepresented. In these commercials, *la Llorona* is changed to suit the needs of the advertisers, up to the point in which she really is rendered harmless. So it can be supposed that Hispanics are useful only when they are needed in the economy; other than that they are worthless.

*La Llorona* also continually crops up in literature and her descriptions here are usually more forgiving than those in visual media. Some of her most recent literary manifestations being in Marcela Serrano's *La Llorona* and Domino Renee Perez's *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*. Serrano's novel deals with the trafficking of children, so *la Llorona* is more of a background character for the main character's story. Still, she is redeemed, and seen as a victim of not only her situation, but of society since she is judged so harshly. Renee Perez's book has been quoted repeatedly throughout this thesis, and it is a critical look at modern-day Llorona depictions; usually focusing on the reinterpretations of the wailing woman. She is not an agent of terror, at least not deliberately. *La Llorona* is an agent of terror due to the perceptions society has created of her.

An article by Mariana Chavez, published on November 2009 in the Mexican magazine *Contenido*, that states:

La maldición de "La Llorona": esta mítica mujer representa en el imaginario popular a aquellas que han cometido el abominable crimen de matar a sus propios hijos. Mas no siempre es fácil juzgarlas, pues suelen ser tanto victimarias como víctimas de circunstancias más allá de su control.

The curse of "La Llorona": this mythical woman represents in the popular imagination those who have committed the abominable crime of killing their own

children. However, it is not easy to judge them for they frequently are culprits as well as victims of circumstances beyond their control (my translation).

This ultimately reflects the change and transformation that *la Llorona* is still undergoing. She is now liminal: on a borderland between villainess and victim. The lines are blurring in the understanding of her, but she can now be more frequently viewed as a human instead of just a one-dimensional spook.

In her book *Mujeres perversas de la historia, History's Perverse Women*, Susana Castellanos de Zubiría asserts the following:

Algunas divinizadas, otras santificadas, un hecho cierto es que muchas de las mujeres que aparecen en este libro rompieron los esquemas convencionales, el imaginario social que ha sido construido en torno a la mujer...Es posible argumentar que, aunque sus homólogos masculinos han hecho lo mismo, ellas tienden a ser juzgadas más ferozmente porque además de crueldades que han cometido se les acusa de haber trasgredido los límites propios de su género.

Some deified, some sanctified, it's a fact that many of the women who appear in this book broke with the conventional schemas, with the social imaginary that has been built around the female...It is possible to argue that, even though their male counterparts have done the same, they tend to be judged more harshly because in addition to the cruel acts they have committed, they are accused of transgressing the boundaries of their gender. (356)

*La Llorona*, like the women that Castellanos de Zubiría discusses, has been much maligned. As she states, she did not follow society's conventions. In the tales, she commits her first "crime" by

loving a man that is either not of her social class or of her race, both grave taboos in the beginning of the Spanish conquest that still linger today. Then, when he abandons her, she reacts instead of being docile and coming to terms with her fate. Last, she revolts. Whether it is in wrath, madness, or despair, her actions are universally known. She breaks her role as a mother: she is no longer the protector, but the predator.

As Castellanos de Zubiría later adds, what of the men? Men who are considered saints or great leaders had lives that were full of crimes greater than *la Llorona*'s, but since society has followed a patriarchal slant from then until present times, their cruelty is usually obscured or forgotten in the face of their accomplishments. The female must seemingly never stray from her role as the angel in the house, otherwise she risks becoming the monster, like *la Llorona*. But now that she can be the hero instead of a monster, what happens?

So in the end, a revised version of Lutz's question looms: how does *la Llorona* stop crying? Perhaps, like Medea, she never did cry and these stories made her into a weeping woman in order not to encourage similar forceful and anti-patriarchal behavior. Maybe she truly searches eternally for her children amidst wails, either to protect them from looming threats or to find her way into heaven and rest. Effectively, all the accounts presented throughout this thesis never disregard the crying: in fact, it is a crucial element. But what made the stories different than the so-called Llorona canon is what was done in face of and in regards to her weeping. In actual fact, what have been accomplished are reconfigurations and revisions of her crying: the audience is still part of her now-revised story, but not as recipients of warnings and control apparatuses. They are now invited to question her condition and what led her there, instead of meting out blind judgment upon her. Furthermore, she is now a symbol of empowerment and

companionship. She now provides comfort in situations of abandon and leads the path of transformation in the novels discussed throughout this thesis.

Perchance it has been these reconfigurations that have allowed *la Llorona* to remain pertinent even now in the nascent 21<sup>st</sup> century. Or it very well could be that there is something in her story that generates a reaction from everyone, be it anger, pity, or fear. Whatever the reason may be she still exists. Whether she is directly represented in advertisements or more apparent in aspects of television and movie characters, she is there. She is in books, songs and paintings, but more importantly, she still carries on in the voices of those who tell her story. She does not fade, she simply transforms. Once a maligned icon, she has been reinterpreted as a symbol of *lucha*: fight.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This thesis' focus can be broadened to include other works and continue expanding upon positive Llorona reinterpretations, but the course of this work is not the only significant approach towards *la Llorona* studies. A noteworthy subject that received limited attention in this thesis is the study of Llorona representations in media and their implications. While her increased appearance in mainstream United States media is a positive sign towards greater acceptance of minority groups, the way she is depicted is not conducive to reinterpretations of her or of the Latino community. Her representations in television and film have heightened, but it is mainly for pure shock value in commercial or as a one-dimensional boogeyman in horror films. It would also be interesting to compare icons from other cultural groups and their use in mainstream

United States media as well to see how they are represented against United States' own societal figures.

Another possibility is the analysis of tale variations per region in the United States and Mexico. This research option would have a much larger scope than this thesis since *la Llorona* is rumored to appear in most of the Southwestern United States and all of Mexico. It would record and analyze the depictions in each tale and attempt to connect them to local history and customs, if possible.

### **Implications**

When choosing a subject for my thesis, I deliberated extensively as to what to select and develop. I needed something that would interest me and had something to do with literature. I must admit that my thesis has not been designed or researched with an educational purpose in mind therefore it is difficult for me to relate it to the situation of Puerto Rican education. However, it came forth out of a subject that interests me. Thus, there is a connection between what I feel as a student and researcher and what other students might perhaps feel: the sense of having a choice in their studies. My argument is that when students have a subject that is culturally relevant, interesting, and of their choice, they will do their best to excel in the subject.

While in my thesis I focus on *la Llorona* and her multiple representations in Chicano literature, I also note that this female specter is an international figure. Different "versions" of *la Llorona* circle the world, spanning from Japan, with the *kuchisake-onna* and *yuki-onna*, meaning slit-mouth woman and snow woman, respectively, up to Ireland, with the *bean sídhe*, which

translated means woman from the mounds, from Ireland, the screaming banshee that announces the deaths of whoever sees her. Even Puerto Rico has its own version of the weeping woman. Oral tradition from the island tells tales of women in white heard wailing near the places where supposedly their loved ones or they themselves perished. Other accounts of the tale talk of a woman in white walking down dark deserted roads, asking for a ride or throwing herself on top of an incoming vehicle, only to disappear. So clearly, *la Llorona*, and, in consequence, supernatural literature, are relevant to modern Puerto Rican culture.

To drive home even more the significance and recency of the subject, as little as five years ago the subject occupied headlines in Puerto Rican media. A supposed apparition of *la Llorona* in the municipality of Lajas took the island by storm. While the ghostly vision eventually proved to be a hoax, hundreds of people flocked to the area where *la Llorona* was said to appear, to catch a glimpse of the supernatural. Thus, proving that there is an interest in the paranormal on the island.

Nevertheless, as I have remarked before, my thesis was not designed with educational purposes in mind. It was planned to be an analysis of how *la Llorona* was and is a symbol of the Chicanos. Still, upon further contemplation and examination of my thesis subject, I determined that the following application possibilities exist when the limitation of studying one particular character is eliminated:

- how the character and/or story and the way they are represented illustrate the culture it belongs to

- what kind of statements (social or economical, for example) are the character and/or story making

-the possibility of comparing the supernatural characters in Puerto Rican stories with other characters in global literature to determine similarities, differences, and how they may have possibly influenced each other

Another important feature is the fact that the subject would appeal more to the student, as it seems something fun (or perhaps even funny), spooky, and interesting. If an English course would focus on the study and comparison of the supernatural literatures of Puerto Rico and other countries, prospective students would have a choice. And I believe that they would choose something that has both the possibilities of education and entertainment (though, I honestly believe their decision would be based more on the entertainment factor than the educational factor).

### **“Death Is Not the End”: Saying Goodbye to the Classical *Llorona***

In 1988, Bob Dylan released his album *Down In the Groove*. Amongst its tracks there is a song titled “Death is Not the End” which spoke about depressing situations: abandon, confusion, and violence, to name a few. Yet, the refrain of the song is:

Just remember that death is not the end

Not the end, not the end

Just remember that death is not the end (Dylan).

Clearly, for *la Llorona* death was not the end. It was merely the beginning of an afterlife full of unrest. Doomed at first to roam eternally, searching for either her children or revenge, now she appears to march towards the future while leading Chicano culture into a new era. Through this thesis, it is clear that *la Llorona* just keeps changing in order to progress and lead us.

By analyzing the texts in a chronological order, we can see the changes in modern Chicano interpretation of *la Llorona*. The first book, *Bless Me, Última* by Rudolfo Anaya is, at a glance, a stereotypical and limited depiction of *la Llorona*. Upon closer inspection, the reader realizes that *la Llorona* is more of a companion to Antonio, who can appreciate her connection to nature. *La Llorona* is antagonized only by those who are tied to stereotypical *machista* culture. Since Antonio is in the process of breaking away from *machista* tradition and embracing *Última*'s way of life, he can see beyond his peers' beliefs about *la Llorona*.

Anaya's next book features la Malinche becoming *la Llorona*, thus combining two important Mexican cultural figures. Instead of portraying her one-dimensionally as the opportunist and traitor that many believe la Malinche is, *la Llorona* as Malinche is portrayed with a level of tenderness and humanity that other depictions of *la Llorona* lack. At the end of the story, *la Llorona* isn't condemned; she is justified by her peers and by the conquistadors, for it is they that drove her to commit murderous acts. The death of her children was something that Malinche/Llorona wanted to avoid at all costs, but fate would not allow her to escape. But instead of being punished, she is asked for forgiveness, something that *la Llorona* had never experienced until then.

Anzaldúa's approach takes *la Llorona*'s reinterpretation a step further: not only is she absolved of any act she may have done, but she is also turned into a leader of the Chicana feminist revolution. *La Llorona* is returned to her deity status and she guides Anzaldúa in her journey of self-discovery. *La Llorona* becomes a weapon against the *machismo* of Chicano culture and her cries, once of despair, are now of protest and rebellion.



In Cisneros' work, *la Llorona* is not a perpetrator of loneliness or pain. Instead, she is a companion providing the main story's character, Cleófilas, with moments of happiness and companionship. The Woman Hollering Creek is forgotten or avoided by most of the population of Seguin except Cleófilas, who goes there to find calm and connect with nature. Cleófilas even takes her children there. A battered woman, Cleófilas escapes her abuse through the encouragement of *la Llorona* and the aid of two Chicana women that are free of the culture's *machismo*. In the end, *la Llorona* and Felice's hollering are ones of elation and freedom, not despair and suffering as before.

Along with the theoretical framework of Wagner and Lundeen, Zipes, Hooks, Miess, and Derrida, one can see that *la Llorona*'s story goes far beyond the realm of death. She is no longer just a story passed down generationally. She has gone from being just an ideological state apparatus meant to control to a symbol of empowerment and affirmation. *La Llorona*, like Julia de Burgos, seeks not only to assert herself, but also to be a part of modern Chicana activism. *La Llorona* has become an invitation for discourse on the roles of women and men in Chicano culture, the changing borderlands, and the discovery of the self. Like Julia de Burgos, she has not been forgotten after death; their presence has become heightened. In stories, films, songs, and television commercial, *la Llorona* is there, waiting to engage in dialogue. She is no longer "at the edge of man" (467), but at the very center of the stage, for all to see.

In the end, it is time to dry the tears. But how is this achieved? *La Llorona*'s cries are being transformed, even now. Slowly, perceptions of *la Llorona* are shifting to reinterpret her in a much more positive manner. The change in judgment towards *la Llorona* also signifies an evolution in Chicano consciousness as well. In the works of Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa,

and Sandra Cisneros, *machista* thoughts are being dispensed for more positive beliefs of empowerment and companionship. In these texts we have seen a Llorona that has been redeemed and now leads us to a closer relationship with nature, ourselves, and our cultures through the critical debate she inspires. *La Llorona*'s tears may never cease, but now they have a different purpose: to call out injustice and fight. Ours can be dried in the realization that *la Llorona* is steadily shedding her characterization as a "female monster" (Miess, 235) and becoming a hero. Like the ancient Aztec deity who warned her children of the incoming doom of colonization, *la Llorona* warns us of dangerous cultural tropes and encourages us to fight them or risk suffering like herself. *La Llorona* remains a cultural icon, but this time, one that is a device of encouragement, not of control. The classical punished Llorona is displaced and we now have a figure that works positively. No longer in the borderlands or under misinterpretation, she is proof that "death is not the end"; it is merely the beginning.

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