

Oxford Reference

The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States

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Publisher: Oxford University Press

Print Publication Date: 1995

Print ISBN-13: 9780195066081

Published online: 2005

Current Online Version: 2005

eISBN: 9780199891054

La Llorona,

the weeping woman of Mexican legend often viewed as the mythic form of the historical woman LA MALINCHE. The hundreds of variants of the tale share a kernel plot: as punishment for her offenses a woman is condemned to wander forever (often by rivers) in grief-stricken search for her lost children. Variants concern the nature of her offenses, from adultery, infanticide, child abandonment, homicidal revenge, and excessive pleasure-seeking to combinations of these and other transgressions. Often told as a *bruja* (WITCH) or GHOST tale to coerce obedience from children (such as, she will steal them to replace the babies she drowned) and adolescent girls (such as, her suffering will be theirs if they emulate her reputed sexual misconduct), some folklorists trace the story to the 1600s in colonial New Spain. She (and La Malinche) has been interpreted as emblematic of the vanquished condition and reputed fatalism of Mexico and its people. However, some writers (Rosario Castellanos, José Limón, Cordelia Candelaria) have sought to rehabilitate her iconography by emphasizing her attributes as a resisting woman (like Antigone) who wills her own destiny by choosing eternal suffering for herself and merciful death for her children over enslavement by unjust classist, sexist laws and conventions.

CORDELIA CANDELARIA