

Summers of Las Lloronas in the Novels of Michael Chabon and Guadalupe Garcia McCall

La Llorona, the weeping woman, is one of the most famous figures in Mexican and Mexican American folklore. Known for haunting the shores of rivers, lakes, and other waterways, she is the woman who murdered her children and wanders for eternity, as punishment, in search of their bodies. Such a terrifying tale about a child killer might not seem like a subject that would lend itself to younger audiences. Over the years, Latinx authors have imagined La Llorona as more than a villain for children of all ages: she is a protector, healer, guide, and most importantly, a means of educating and empowering young Latinx readers.

In 2002, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon put his own spin on La Llorona, featuring her along with mythological figures and lore from around the globe, in the “YA fantasy” *Summerland* about a baseball game that determines the fate of the world. Notably, Chabon takes power away from La Llorona, has her figure prominently in a convoluted doomsday plot, and then erases her completely from the story. La Llorona, along with disgraced baseball player Rodrigo Buendía are the only Latinx characters in the novel, and sum total of their roles is to reinforce the heroic superiority of the eleven-year old white male protagonist.

Whereas, Chabon’s anthropological collection of characters serve as victims or villains, Pura Belpré award-winner, Guadalupe Garcia McCall in *Summer of the Mariposas* (2012) includes figures from Mexican and Mexican American folktales to create a vast cultural and geographic landscape through which the Latinx sisters, whose adventure begins in a river, travel on the road to self-discovery and the fortification of their sororal bond. Garcia McCall borrows narrative and structural elements from Homer’s epic the *Odyssey*, while populating her story with chupacabras, luchezas, and La Llorona, who serves not as an antagonist to the sisters but instead as a guardian. In *Summer of the Mariposas*, culture and community are the means by which the five sisters discover their own strength and power, while La Llorona watches over them.