

LA LLORONA MYTH, REVISED

Alicia Gaspar de Alba, award winner

(In Mexican folklore, legend goes that a Weeping Woman haunts rivers and lakes in search of the son who died at her own hands. Some say that *La Llorona* is the soul of La Malinche, Aztec interpreter and mistress of Cortéz, who, it is believed, gave birth to the first Spanish-Indian child, and then sacrificed him when Cortéz threatened to take the boy to Spain.)

1.

The High Priest of the pyramids feared La Malinche's power of language—how she could form strange syllables in her mouth and Speak to the gods without offering the red fruit of her heart. He had visions of a white man who would change her ways with an obsidian knife.

2.

La Malinche hated the way Cortéz rubbed his cactus-beard over her face and belly. The way his tongue pressed against her teeth. She was used to smooth brown lovers who dipped beneath her, who crouched on the ground and rocked her in the musky space between their chests and thighs.

3.

When the child was born, his eyes opened Aztec black, his skin shone café-con-leche. His mother wet his fine curls with her saliva to make them straight. His father cursed the native seed in that first mixed son.

4.

They slept under the black silk of a Tenocha sky, the hammock molded around the two bodies: a woman's buttocks heavy after childbirth, an infant weighted by the shadows in his skull. A coyote lurking near the river could smell their blood.

5.

The woman shrieking along the littered bank of the Rio Grande is not sorry. She is looking for revenge. Centuries she has been blamed for the murder of her child, the loss of her people, as if Tenochtitlan would not have fallen without her sin. History does not sing of the conquistador who prayed to a white god as he pulled two ripe hearts out of the land.