

Mythical Glossary

Odilia [Odyssey Parallel: Odysseus/Telemachus]

Odilia, the oldest of the Garza sisters, is the protagonist of *Summer of the Mariposas*, and her journey—or odyssey—is the backbone of the story. Like Odysseus, Odilia and her “crew” of sisters must make a long journey and defeat several evil creatures before they can return home.

Odilia also fulfills the role of Telemachus, Odysseus’s young son, who is left to grow up without his father and must defend his home and mother against the invading suitors.

La Llorona [Odyssey Parallel: Athena]

La Llorona, the “Weeping Woman,” is said to have drowned her children in order to be with her lover, and as punishment she is fated to weep and wander the earth forever in search of them. She is usually seen as a fearsome and reviled figure; her cry of “*Ay, mis hijos!*” (“Oh, my children!”) is sometimes taken as a sign of impending death, and she is said to carry off disobedient children.

La Llorona is also associated with Malitzin, the Aztec woman



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who became the mistress of the Spanish explorer Cortez. By some accounts, Malitzin helped the Spanish to conquer the Aztecs, and thus became known as La Malinche the traitor.

In *Summer of the Mariposas*, however, La Llorona is a sympathetic and misunderstood character, and acts as a spiritual guide to Odilia and her sisters. Her parallel in *The Odyssey* is **Athena**, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom, who is often seen in *The Odyssey* helping Odysseus and his men. However, instead of intervening directly, she usually stays in the background and offers him advice and encouragement, just as La Llorona assists the *cinco hermanitas* throughout their journey.

Cecilia [Odyssey Parallel: Circe]

The charming witch Cecilia takes in the Garza sisters and soothes them with kind words and sweets in order to make them forget about their quest. In *The Odyssey*, the witch-goddess Circe, after welcoming Odysseus and his crew to her home, drugs the men and turns them into pigs. (Swine imagery can also be seen in the piglet-shaped *marranitos* that Cecilia feeds the sisters and the fact that Odilia ends up giving Cecilia's actual pigs the drugged pies.)

With the help of the god Hermes, who shows him an herb called moly that protects him from Circe's magic, Odysseus is able to rescue his men and force the witch to undo the transformation, just as La Llorona uses jojoba juice to rouse Odilia and her sisters. The girls' sojourn at Cecilia's is also reminiscent of



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Odysseus's arrival to the land of the Lotus-eaters, where his men, after eating the fruit of the lotus, begin to forget their homes and wish only to remain on the island.

Chupacabras [Odyssey Parallel: Cyclops]

The chupacabras is a legendary creature said to kill livestock, especially goats, by sucking their blood. Though it might look strange to an English speaker, the term *chupacabras* is actually singular—it means “sucker of goats.” The girls encounter this creature in the form of Chencho, a goatherd with one eye who transforms into the chupacabras at night, much like a werewolf. As a chupacabras, Chencho only has one eye, paralleling the one-eyed Cyclops that Odysseus and his men must defeat.

The Cyclops, Polyphemus, initially appears hospitable (as does Chencho) but soon eats two of the men and traps the rest of the crew. Odysseus drives a wooden staff through Polyphemus's one eye and thus escapes the cyclops's cave with his men, just as Odilia blinds the chupacabras in order to save her sisters.

Lechuzas [Odyssey Parallel: Scylla/Sirens]

While the word *lechuga* simply means “owl,” it is also used to refer to a witch in the form of a bird, usually an owl. Lechuzas are also said to appear as a bird with a witch's face, as they do in *Summer of the Mariposas*, and much like the Erinyes, the winged deities of vengeance in Greek mythology, they are believed to punish evildoers. It is also said that not all lechuzas are



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necessarily witches—they may also be the spirits of scorned women who seek vengeance in the afterlife. As Teresita tells the Garza girls, the only way to get rid of lechuzas is to pray while tying seven knots on a string. While the lechuzas in *Summer of the Mariposas* are evil, it's interesting to note that owls are also associated with Athena, the (usually) benevolent goddess of wisdom.

The six lechuzas that first appear to the girls can also be seen as a reference to the six-headed monster Scylla, which devours six of Odysseus's men when he is forced to steer toward it in order to avoid the whirlpool Charybdis.

The lechuzas also fulfill the role of The Sirens. Like the creatures in *The Odyssey* that lured men to death with their wicked tongues, the lechuzas are able to speak and allude to pending death.

The Nagual [Odyssey Parallel: Charybdis]

The nagual that forms the first part of Cecilia's Evil Trinity is a warlock with the ability to transform into an animal. Naguals can appear as common animals such as a donkey, turkey, or dog, but are also known to take the form of more powerful animals such as the jaguar.

The whirlpool-like concoction that the nagual creates to cook the Garza girls is reminiscent of Charybdis, the whirlpool that lies near the monster Scylla in the narrow channel that Odysseus and his men must navigate. Just as the walls of the



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nagual's cave are littered with the bones of a thousand children, the force of Charybdis's swirling currents is said to have caused the capsizing of countless ships.

La Sirena [Odyssey Parallel: The Sirens]





La Sirena first appears in *Summer of the Mariposas* during a game of Loteria, a popular Mexican game similar to Bingo. The girls' father ominously jokes that *La Sirena*, the card bearing the image of a mermaid, is “*la mujer* that wants to take your papá away.” Later on, it is revealed that Papá has been having an affair with a woman named Saraí, whose “eyes glittering with something like malice or spite” belie her sweet demeanor.

Much like Saraí, the sirens of *The Odyssey* are known for leading men astray. The sweetness of their singing lures sailors to their deaths on the rocky shores of their island. Odysseus has his men plug their ears with earwax in order to avoid their being tempted by the sirens' song, although he, out of curiosity, leaves his own ears unplugged and has the men lash him to the ship's mast.

Incidentally, Saraí and her daughters also fulfill the role of the suitors. Showing no remorse, Saraí and her daughters replace Mamá and the cinco hermanitas and fawn over Papá, as he will be divorced soon and belong to them. They have no qualms about taking over the house or the personal belongings of the family, much like the suitors in *The Odyssey*.



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Teresita [Odyssey Parallel: Tiresias]

Teresita is a prophet, or seer, who gives the Garza sisters advice after they escape from Cecilia. She warns the girls that their road is a difficult one, but tells them, “You can save yourselves . . . if you are brave and cunning and stick together through these nightmares.”

Similarly, Odysseus is instructed by Circe to consult Tiresias’s spirit in Hades, the realm of the dead. Tiresias was a famous blind prophet of the city of Thebes. He assures Odysseus that he will return home safely, but tells him that he will continue to face hardships on his journey.

Cihuacoatl

Cihuacoatl, also known as La Serpiente, or the Snake Woman, is one of many Aztec goddesses of motherhood and fertility. In some accounts she is also thought to be a more dreaded aspect of the mother goddess Tonantzin. She is sometimes depicted as a fierce warrior, and in this she is somewhat similar to the goddess Athena.

Huitzilopochtli

The Aztec god of war and the sun, Huitzilopochtli is also known as the wizard god. He is believed to be the son of Cihuacoatl and a ball of feathers. Ashamed by the fact that Cihuacoatl had become pregnant, Huitzilopochtli’s sister Coyolxauhqui attempted to kill her. When Huitzilopochtli learned of this plan,



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he sprang from Cihuacoatl's womb armed and, fully grown, killed his sister and their brothers, and threw them into the sky, where they became, respectively, the moon and stars. The legend of Huitzilopochtli is reminiscent of not only Athena's own birth story (she sprang from her father Zeus's head also fully grown and in armor), but also of how La Llorona, in her transformation at the end of the book, becomes a new constellation in the sky.

Tonantzin and La Virgen de Guadalupe

Tonantzin was an Aztec mother goddess who later became associated with the image of the Virgin Mary during the spread of Christianity after the fall of Tenochtitlan. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* was a manifestation of Mary that is said to have appeared in the 1500s to an indigenous peasant named Juan Diego who had been converted to Christianity.

While on his way to church, Juan Diego met a beautiful indigenous woman on Tonantzin's holy hill, Tepeyac. She revealed herself to him as both the Christian mother Mary and the indigenous Mother Goddess, and speaking to him in the indigenous language of Nahuatl, she asked Juan Diego to visit the Archbishop and tell him to build a church there in her honor.

To prove her identity, she instructed him to gather flowers from the top of barren Tepeyac, where he found Castilian roses, which are not native to Mexico, and gathered them in his cloak. When presenting the Archbishop with the roses, Juan Diego found that the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe had become



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imprinted on the fabric of his cloak. A chapel was built at the site of the miracle, and thus, the image of the Virgin and the goddess Tonantzin became combined.

The Castilian roses echo the roses that Tonantzin tells the sisters to pick and bring back home for their mother. Ultimately, the roses turn out to be a gift for La Llorona to ease her pain and set her free.



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