

**A Word is Worth a Thousand Sentiments: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Use of
Language as a Coping Mechanism in the Bilingual Works of Rosario
Ferré, Luz María Umpierre-Herrera, and Judith Ortiz Cofer**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama
May 5, 2013

Keywords: Ferré, Umpierre, Ortiz Cofer,
Bilingual Works, Coping Mechanism, Language

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Abstract

While much of the study of language as a coping mechanism has focused on private discourse, language can serve the same role when it is used in published creative writing intended for a public audience. This use of language to cope becomes even more complex when the author is bilingual and thus has two languages to choose from when writing. In this thesis, I examine how the bilingual works *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* by Rosario Ferré, *En el país de las maravillas* by Luz María Umpierre-Herrera, and *The Latin Deli* by Judith Ortiz Cofer serve to help their authors cope with the prejudice they encounter daily. All three of these books exhibit different styles of bilingualism, from side-by-side translation to an emphasis on one language over the other. By establishing a continuum of bilingual texts, I compare how three Puerto Rican authors all working in academia and who all have lived for considerable time in both Puerto Rico and the United States establish their unique bilingualism. Their differing takes on bilingualism helps the authors find catharsis based on their unique circumstances that a more generic, and less genuine, take on bilingualism could not accomplish.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the faculty in Auburn University's Foreign Language and Literatures Department for their continuous support and direction as I grew as both an undergraduate and graduate student. I would like to extend further thanks to the members of my thesis committee: Dra. Gilda Socarrás, for her help in navigating the linguistic side of my thesis and Chantel Acevedo, from Auburn's English Department, for her insightful additions. I especially would like to thank Dra. Jana Gutiérrez for the many hours of reading, editing, and general guidance and support that went into this thesis and the academic work that led me to this path, as well as for her constant encouragement to push myself academically throughout my entire career at Auburn.

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“A word after a word after a word is power.”

-Margaret Atwood

When an author strings together her words, either in prose or in verse, the result is communication exponentially more powerful than any of those individual words alone. Such articulation can be negative, the cause of prejudice against a group or an individual, particularly when the communication inhabits the space between two languages, one dominant, one in the minority. Nevertheless, language can be an equally positive force. It can be an outlet, a means of survival and coping when confronted with animosity and injustice, no matter the source or the cause. It is this use of language that is the specific focus of my thesis. This thesis aims to examine how three Puerto Rican authors, Rosario Ferré, Luz Maria Umpierre-Herrera, and Judith Ortiz Cofer, each bilingual in both Spanish and English, use both of their languages within their published creative works as a coping mechanism for the situations that they, or people like them, have had to confront to survive. Although all share a bicultural heritage and all have spent considerable time in both the United States and in Puerto Rico, their individual experiences, and their singular relationships with words have lead them to express their bilingualism in distinct ways, and each has developed a unique method of wielding their language to cope.

To begin, Ferré encourages acceptance of multilingualism and therefore writes in translation, giving equal time to both the Spanish and English languages, even if her emotional ties are skewed in favor of her native Spanish. Umpierre rebels against the

linguistic and dialectic prejudice she has experienced by maintaining a tight grip on her native Spanish, and often to her Puerto Rican dialect as well. Ortiz Cofer reflects on her childhood growing up in the United States reading books and uses predominately English to show how language serves not only as a cathartic experience like the two previous women, but also as a means of establishing relationships between people or within a group.

This thesis will consist of four chapters. The first is the theory chapter. In this chapter, I will delineate the theoretical background necessary to understand and analyze the primary works. I will begin with the psychological aspect, starting with a definition of coping mechanisms, and then move to the particular racial and semantic prejudice that might apply to these three authors. Next, I will examine to the linguistic component. I will define bilingualism, as a linguistic phenomenon as well as the emotional complications, both positive and negative, that might arise out of being bilingual and bicultural.

After the chapter on theory, I will devote a chapter to each of the three authors, beginning with the oldest and moving to the youngest. As such, I will begin with Rosario Ferré and her work *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*. In this work, I will examine how Ferré defines national prejudices against Spanish as a language, particularly within the United States. I will then examine Ferré's method of using language as a coping mechanism as I analyze her contention about the importance of bilingualism and how she defends the acceptance of both Spanish and English as equal and cooperative languages rather than enemies. Finally, I will look at how Ferré again unites the United States and Hispanic America by examining the history that they have in common, suggesting the cyclical nature of history and culture.

Next, I will examine *En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño* by Luz-Maria Umpierre-Herrera. As with the first chapter, I will begin by looking at how Umpierre defines language as a root for much of the prejudice that she experienced upon her arrival to the US. I will then move to how she uses language as a coping mechanism, specifically by firmly embracing her Puerto Rican identity, language, and dialect and in so doing how she defines it as equally valid as the dominate language and culture as well as a great source of comfort to her. Finally, I will examine how she defines language as a broader concept than Ferré does. Umpierre defines language as communication, not merely the language systems that we usually think about when we see the word *Spanish* or *English* and she justifies this definition through her manipulation of genres within her work.

Finally, I will investigate Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Latin Deli: The Lives of Barrio Women*. I will open my breakdown of her work with how Ortiz Cofer defines language first as a coping mechanism against ignorance, ironic in that it is often the language, as with the first two authors, that causes or delivers the prejudice. Second, I will discuss two other ways in which Ortiz Cofer uses language as a means of coping: language as a means of establishing intimacy and relationships between people or groups and language, both receptive and productive, as a coping mechanism for the personal troubles that Ortiz Cofer has had to confront in the past.

In referring to the speaker in each of these three works, I have decided to use the feminine pronoun *she*, even when the speaker's gender is ambiguous. It is true that each of the authors are women, but the separation between author and speaker cannot be forgotten and, by itself, does not justify the decision to use the feminine pronoun. However, all three poets have admitted that, to different degrees, their work can be seen as

autobiographical. As such, the speaker for the poems, short stories, and essays, although she cannot be named the same as the author, even in Judith Ortiz Cofer's autobiographical creative essays, draws heavily from the author. It is because of this autobiographical nature of the works that I feel it is most appropriate to use the pronoun *she*, even in instances when it there exists some ambiguity as to the gender and identity of the speaker.

There are some terms that will appear in this thesis that should be defined for clarity. First, when I use the word *American*, I am referring exclusively to citizens of the United States, that is the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. Unless otherwise stated, I am not referring to the Americas, and, more importantly, I am not including Puerto Rico or any other US territories when I use this word. I do this not to discriminate or exclude, simply for clarity and consistency and because often a boundary exists between these two groups in the three works studied here. I will refer to people from Puerto Rico with two terms, as Puerto Ricans or as Boricuas. *Boricua* is a popular term referring to Puerto Rico or its people and can be used as either a noun or an adjective. As it can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary, I have decided not to use italics within the text of this thesis, which would identify it as a word in Spanish only. *Boricua* and Puerto Rican would then become a subset of the *Latino*, referring to all people from Latin America, with *Latina* being the form of the word referring specifically and exclusively to the female portion of this population. The final word I want to define before beginning deals with the works themselves instead of the authors. I will often refer to *Language Duel/Duelo del Lenguaje* and *En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño* as a *poemario*. The word *poemario* refers to a collection of poems by a single author purposely published together in a single collection because they have at least one common thread among the several poems.

A *poemario* can be read in many ways similar to a novel in that there is a central theme or thesis (or multiple central themes or theses) that the individual poems help support when grouped together. It is not the same as an anthology, which could be comprised of several poets, but also does not necessarily have a single common theme or idea binding the works together. *The Latin Deli* would not be considered a *poemario* because it is a hybrid collection consisting not only of poems, but also short stories and creative essays.

Although scholarship can be found on each of these authors individually, and even some comparative studies between two of the three, no study examines specifically how their unique approaches to their bilingualism serves as a means of coping with their environment. Furthermore, this analysis of each of these poets and their bilingualism presents a new approach to considering bilingualism, particularly the combination of Spanish and English by Latino/a writers. Instead of simply considering the combination of Spanish and English as a defining factor of their work, this thesis presents a continuum between the two languages. It shows that there is no one definition or manifestation of this language combination; that each writer is uniquely responsible for setting the boundaries of her use of her two languages within her own body of work. This thesis aims to examine the curative power of language for these three authors, but also hopes to broaden the definition of *Spanglish* by examining the large amount of gray area that exists between the use of only Spanish or only English. To do this, however, it is first necessary to begin with a study of the theoretical basis, both psychological and linguistic, essential to examine the three creative works analyzed in this thesis.

Establishing the Theoretic Approach to the Texts

There is no single pre-established theory of literary criticism that encompasses the specific study of my thesis. However, there are important theoretical directions to consider before beginning an examination of the works of these three authors. This thesis is to be considered a sociolinguistic analysis of the works in question, since I am looking at cultural and societal uses and effects of language, in this case the interaction between two languages, Spanish and English within two societies, the American and the Puerto Rican. However, there are two main theoretical components that need to be considered. First is the psychological, dealing with coping mechanisms themselves. I will first establish the psychological definition of a coping mechanism, and establishing why, both psychologically and linguistically, the three authors' bicultural and bilingual natures create a challenging environment that requires coping. Second is the linguistic component, in which I will examine the definition and impact of bilingualism on individuals and their language as a crucial component of the individual's identity. Translation theory will play an integral role in the understanding of not only Ferré's work, which is consciously written in translation, but also will apply to the other two authors. Studying the impact of translation on a work and its meanings justifies the study of Umpierre and Ortiz Cofer in their original languages instead of reverting to a translation of one of the two works, even if the language variety between the works means that this thesis covers works from both Spanish and English. This combination of psychological and linguistic theories aims toward a deeper understanding of how both the form and function of the work create meaning within the text. I argue that the author's bilingualism, that is, their comparable competency in both Spanish and English, is a tool that each of the three authors takes advantage of, albeit in

different ways, to negotiate the dual cultural landscapes to which they belong. This mechanism becomes particularly useful in the American society, where the racial and linguistic hierarchy privileges English monolingualism over bilingualism or Spanish.

The Psychological Aspect

a. Defining a Coping Mechanism – How do psychologists define coping mechanisms?

If this thesis deals primarily with language and how it can be used as a coping mechanism, it is first vital to establish a working definition of a coping mechanism and explore its purpose in helping the individual confront stressors, particularly racial stereotypes and linguistic discrimination. In the preface to the book, *Psychology of Coping*, the editor Annette V. Lee explains, “If there is a single challenge a person faces in every stage of life from birth to death, it is the necessity of coping with life’s exigencies” (vii). The opening essay from the book *Coping: The Psychology of What Works*,” titled “Coping: Where Have You Been?” written by C. R. Snyder and Beth L. Dinoff provides a description of coping. They concede that there are various definitions in the psychological literature for coping, but they provide the following explanation of the term:

Coping is a response aimed at diminishing the physical, emotional, and psychological burden that is linked to stressful life events and daily hassles. Therefore, by this definition, coping strategies are those responses that are effective in reducing an undesirable ‘load’ (i.e. psychological burden).

(Snyder and Dinoff 5)

Thus, at its root, coping is the attempt to relieve stressors in our life, while coping strategies, or mechanisms, are the specific actions we take, passive or active, as part of the

coping process. Snyder and Dinoff go on to answer the question as to whether or not coping must be a conscious activity. If unconscious actions do not constitute a coping mechanism, it might negate the use of writing as a coping mechanism, because if the author or authors did not *deliberately* use their writing to cope, it might not serve as a psychologically defined coping mechanism. However, Snyder and Dinoff write, “Although some researchers . . . suggest that responses must be conscious to qualify as coping, this qualification seems unduly restrictive in that we so often may repeatedly respond to a recurring stressor that we lose our awareness of doing so” (6). Thus, an action does not have to be done with the desire that it serve as a coping mechanism for that action to help one cope. This does not mean that when these authors sit down to create their works, they are not performing a conscious act, nor that their works are the result of unconscious phrases and haphazardly thrown together words. Writing is by its nature conscious, particularly in the case of these three poets who have made it at least a partial aspect of their careers, if not one of the most defining characteristics of their lives. Furthermore, it can not be stated that these women did not understand the role of their writing as a source of comfort: Umpierre and Ortiz Cofer both explicitly mention in their the power of writing on their wellbeing. What this quote from Snyder and Dinoff does suggest is the text is a powerful coping mechanism by itself, completely separated from the original purpose of the authors. This is partially explained by the nature of their work. These are professional writers creating literature, which is inherently different than the kind of writing that took place in the studies. While both groups, the experiment participants and these three authors, are writing about personal trauma to different degrees, the writing of Ferré, Umpierre, and Ortiz Cofer have an additional layer of distance from the struggles portrayed in the work. Even when the

writing is autobiographical, they are writing literature for a wider audience; their writing is no longer private, but composed for the public. They are recreating a fiction on a much wider scale than the experimental participants. Creating these fictions allow these three authors the freedom not only to confront the difficulties in their life, but also to create an idealized universe, and in so doing to resolve the problems they must face in their real world. The two authors, Snyder and Dinoff, close their essay with the following statement: “It is through the coping process that we are able to survive the many challenges that life brings and to flourish as people . . . Coping is a precious gift” (14). They thereby establish the fundamental influence of coping in our lives and, by extrapolation, in the lives of Ferré, Umpierre, and Ortiz Cofer. Coping is not a luxury, but rather a necessity in life. The idealized universe and the solutions it provides serve as a crucial element not only in the lives of these three Boricua poets, but also in readers of those works.

It is also important to consider whether or not these coping mechanisms actually make a difference on a larger societal scale or if they simply stave off in the individual the inevitable negative reaction to personal stressors, particularly prejudice and discrimination. The answer appears to be that coping does positively affect us. In her article, “Positive and Negative Responses to Personal discrimination: Does Coping Make a Difference,” Mindi Foster affirms the logical assumption that experiencing personal discrimination does indeed create negative emotions in the person enduring that prejudice, including but not limited to symptoms of both anxiety and depression. Furthermore, she notes that some coping mechanisms do lead to positive outcomes and strategies to handle the discrimination:

Defining a personal experience as group discrimination involves a woman's recognition that what happens to the group (discrimination) has affected her personal life. As such, behaviors aimed at enhancing group status become more relevant to enhancing her own status.

In contrast, if a woman does not define a personal experience as group discrimination, she may be more likely to attribute it to other circumstances, such as her personal characteristics. (Foster 94)

Thus, not only do coping mechanisms help, but recognizing that the discrimination that one faces is group based rather than based individual traits, is also beneficial. I will examine in the next section what characteristics these three poets have in common that define their group and thus the causes of their discrimination. However, it is important that each poet does establish herself as part of a group composed of Puerto Ricans like herself, even if that group is smaller, more intimate than national. These writers thus become representative members of their group; they write personally but with the understanding and acceptance that their individual experiences speak for a larger community. These groupings, and the language or languages that are used to express their unique reality, help to enhance the coping strategies each poet uses in her writing.

Furthermore, there have been multiple studies suggesting that words and language serve as a powerful coping mechanism in and of themselves. In the essay "Sharing One's Story: Translating Emotional Experiences into Words as a Coping Tool," from the book *Coping: The Psychology of What Works*, Joshua M. Smyth and James W. Pennebaker allege that "[w]hen people put their emotional upheavals into words their physical and mental health seems to improve markedly" (70). Although most of the studies that Smyth and

Pennebaker cite focus on writing and/or talking as a cathartic strategy to process trauma, the autobiographical nature of all three poets of this thesis suggests that they too, albeit with more creative freedom, use their writing as a therapeutic tool. Smyth and Pennebaker suggest a myriad of hypotheses to explain the advantageous nature of writing, such as the belief that the act of expressing an experience through words makes the person more health conscious and able to change their behavior for the better, or that writing about a difficult situation allows them to confront their feelings and the situation as well as reducing inhibitions that might hinder coping with the event. Although the explanations for why language is so beneficial may vary, they all acknowledge that words, either written or spoken, do have a healing effect on the individual, no matter if that individual is writing privately for herself or publically for a wider audience. This evidence therefore establishes a psychological basis for the idea that the writing of Ferré, Umpierre, and Ortiz Cofer respectively helps them to handle the burdens of everyday life as subjects of cultural and linguistic hybridity.

b. Using Coping Mechanisms – What particular need do these authors have for coping mechanisms?

Everyone, author or not, experiences stress in his or her life that merits and requires the use of some kind of coping mechanism or strategy. However, these three poets are singular in that they share distinguishing traits that open them up to different prejudices and struggles in their lives, even if their individual circumstances or reactions are not identical. These common traits are two fold. First, there is the linguistic aspect – as bilinguals living in the United States, they experience a particular type of prejudice and stigma that their monolingual neighbors do not. Furthermore, Ferré, Umpierre and Ortiz

Cofer are all Puerto Rican, and as such, straddle two cultures, the Boricua and the American, which causes varying levels of personal discord through which they must define their own identities.

i. Linguistics

It is probably of little surprise that prejudice against minority languages is relatively common, regardless of the region or the languages involved. Indeed, in her article, "The Right to Speak One's Own Language: Reflections on Theory and Practice," Sue Wright explains the historical prejudice against minority languages:

The right to use one's own language has only recently gained acceptance as a fundamental human right. Until the end of the 20th century, whether or not a language community used its language in the public sphere depended on its political muscle or the tolerance of the dominant groups among which it lived (203)

She explains two of the reasons for this hesitancy to accept regional or minority languages. She notes that "language use is a good barometer of power" (Wright 204). The group in charge wants their language to dominate, and allowing and acknowledging other languages could infringe on that power. In the same vein, Wright also points out that governments in the laws and rights that they support, are often catering to their constituents as a whole rather than to a small minority:

Once one language is adopted, it outs the others. The local school will have a dominant language in the institution, even if others are taught. There will be a dominant language in the court, even if there is a provision for translation (204)

Thus, even if minority languages are recognized and validated, they will likely always remain minority languages out of force of habit and practical necessity.

Although the United States does not have an official language, or official languages, like many other countries, there is no doubt that English is certainly the dominant one. Any *other*, Spanish-speakers here being the focus, is in the minority, and its speakers become culturally less empowered because of their language, according to a study published in the article, "Power and Prejudice: Their Effects on the Co-construction of Linguistic and National Identities," by Linda Waugh. Waugh addresses prejudice even towards bilinguals who also speak the dominant language as she analyzes the interactions between a French/English bilingual whose native language is French (given the pseudonym Karim) living in the United States and a native French speaker, named Michel. Waugh writes in her conclusion about the symbolic power associated with language and national ties, and how that power is not often in favor of the bilingual:

What is striking is that in academic discourse, we tend to celebrate hybrid and transnational identities, show the advantages of bi/multilingualism, argue against a deficit model for those who do not speak the national language and need to learn it, and show empathy for the suffering of those who go from one language/nation/culture to another and who may not have fully formed linguistic and national identities. As this study shows (and many others have said; see Gee, 2005), there is a powerful public discourse in the United States and in France that argues just the opposite and is effective in providing a basis for the Karims of this world to be vulnerable to the Michels of this world. (Waugh 128)

While this study deals with the unique linguistic interaction between the United States and France, it is not absurd to extrapolate that this same taboo against language occurs in other language combinations, namely that of English and Spanish. Indeed, this taboo against Spanish specifically has been studied as well. Montrul, in her book *El bilingüismo en el mundo hispanohablante*, talks about Spanish as a minority language within the United States. She speaks to the fact that, despite the fact that Spanish is hardly a new phenomenon within what is now considered to be the United States, there continues to exist not only a resistance to Spanish as a language, even a minority language, but, in some parts, even a fear that the growth of Spanish as a minority language represents an attempt at cultural and linguistic overthrow:

En algunos segmentos de la población estadounidense la presencia actual de la población de habla hispana despierta sentimientos de rechazo al español. Estos sentimientos emanan de una ideología nacionalista que considera el monolingüismo en inglés un emblema de la ciudadanía y lealtad estadounidense . . . Muchos ciudadanos de tendencias políticas conservadoras, especialmente en el suroeste de los Estados Unidos, donde la población hispana es mucho más numerosa que en el resto del país, temen que el español reemplace al inglés como lengua mayoritaria . . . No obstante, a pesar de que muchos estadounidenses perciben la creciente presencia hispana en el suroeste de los Estados Unidos como una forma progresiva de invasión cultural y lingüística . . . esta presencia no es un fenómeno reciente. (Montrul 104)

This fear and rejection becomes more apparent in reading the works of Ferré, Umpierre and Ortiz Cofer, all of who highlight in their works discrimination against themselves or those of their same heritage based on their language. Writing then becomes their method of taking back power and reasserting the strength and value of their minority language against the backdrop of the dominant, English language.

ii. Culture

In the introduction to the book, *Images and Identities: The Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts*, Asela Rodríguez de Laguna observes the difficulties with defining the Puerto Rican identity:

The Puerto Rican experience is frequently one of dualities: between two worlds, mainland and island; between ghetto and mainstream America; between the richness and expressiveness of two languages and cultures, Spanish and English, Puerto Rican and American. (2)

This quote accurately summarizes the singular experience of Puerto Ricans, whether they reside on the mainland or the island. Boricuas define, as do many other Hispanic subgroups, the struggle of being bicultural and the tensions inherent in such a title. Not only are they straddling the fence linguistically between English and Spanish, but even Puerto Ricans living solely on the island cannot avoid a struggle between the two cultures, American and Puerto Rican. There are political reasons for this clash, namely the island's political condition of being a territory of the United States with commonwealth status. Despite popular and increasing support from Puerto Ricans to become the US's 51st state, the island remains in a limbo of identity. Its ties to the United States grant its citizens some rights and responsibilities of citizenship while denying them full voice in government or

full cultural recognition. Their dealings with the US mean that the island officially recognizes two languages, English and Spanish, while in practice Spanish is a far more predominant language. Puerto Ricans can neither reject nor negate the US influence, nor are they seen as entirely belonging to the United States, even if an individual has lived for considerable time stateside. This bond to the United States, which has not always been mutually beneficial or welcome, causes a unique, although not necessarily stronger, duality within Puerto Ricans.

Rodríguez de Laguna continues her description of Puerto Rican identity, saying that “Puerto Rican intellectuality has continued its search for definition and figuration of the traits of the Puerto Rican,” demonstrating the constant exploration for identities characteristic in being Boricua (4). Ferré herself, in the article, “On Destiny, Language, and Translation, or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal,” talks about this struggle as inherent to the Puerto Rican experience:

As a Puerto Rican I have undergone exile as a way of life, and also as a style of life. Coming and going from south to north, from Spanish to English, without losing a sense of self can constitute an anguishing experience. It implies a constant recreation of divergent worlds, which often tend to appear greener on the other side. Many Puerto Ricans undergo this ordeal, although with different intensity. (39)

The Boricua identity is by definition contrary and contradictory, creating within the Puerto Rican difficulty defining oneself and their culture. This straddling of the fence between two cultures is not unique to Puerto Ricans; many bicultural people must find their place in the two cultures they bestride. In Francois Grosjean’s *Studying Bilinguals*, he includes a section

on the bicultural person, whom he defines as a person “in contact with two (or more) cultures and [who has] to live, at least in part, within these cultures” (216). He points to some of the defining characteristics of this mixing of cultures within a single person. For example, he brings attention to the fact that “it is rare that the two cultures have the same importance in the life of the bicultural. One culture often plays a larger role than the other” (Grosjean 216). This cultural dominance can cause problems within the individual, not only in terms of self-identification, but also can cause discrimination if the culture that is dominant within the individual is not the majority culture. Furthermore, Grosjean observes the otherness that is inherent in being bicultural:

... [N]ot all behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes can be modified according to the cultural situation the bicultural person is currently in. A French-German bicultural, for example, blends both aspects of the French and of the German culture and cannot, therefore, be 100 percent French in France, and 100 percent German in Germany, however hard he or she tries (Grosjean 215)

This is significant because it forces the bicultural to live always in the outskirts of his or her society. Even if they reside in a society that they feel they belong to, their alternate cultural identity will interfere with the first. The bicultural person, in this case the Puerto Rican, is always seen as an outsider, as the *other* no matter how much effort they put into defining themselves by their dominant culture.

In addition to the internal tension caused by the sprawl over two languages and two cultures, Lisa Sánchez González documents the role that racism¹ has played and continues to play in the life of Puerto Ricans:

Racism has been one of the Boricua community's major obstacles in the twentieth century, and many Boricua writers have confronted and analyzed the sources, expressions, and consequences of racism as a social malaise in (and beyond) the United States (Sánchez González 3).

Although it would be inaccurate to say that a Puerto Rican experiences racism any more than any other Hispanic group, racism is a permanent and lasting part of the life of a Puerto Rican living in the United States. Their different dialect, distinct cultural traditions and beliefs, and darker skin color and features all have invited prejudice against them from white Americans. This racial discrimination is yet another aspect of the Boricua existence that these three authors share, and yet another reason that they have struggled to find a coping mechanism for their personal sufferings.

The Linguistic Aspect

a. Defining Bilingualism – How do linguists define bilingualism?

At first glance, bilingualism is easy to define. It is, after all, a person who speaks two (or more) languages. However, in practice, this definition is not so solid or so clear, especially when we consider where the boundaries of where these language competencies

¹ Racism is a controversial word to use with Puerto Ricans, who are identified largely as an ethnic group more so than a racial group. However, I have chosen to use the word racism here and throughout to mirror the word used by Sánchez González, Umpierre and others when referring to the prejudice against Puerto Ricans because of their cultural and ethnic heritage.

lie. I would not argue that there is any doubt that any of the three poets covered in this thesis are bilingual (although that does not assume that their bilingualism is equal), but in order to make that assertion, we must first examine what the linguistic literature defines as bilingualism.

Several authors have written extensively on the study and definition of bilingualism. For example, in his book, *Studying Bilinguals*, Francois Grosjean defines bilingualism at its simplest level as, “the regular use of two or more languages (or dialects)” and defines bilinguals as “those people who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives” (10). This parenthetical raises the question of the difference between language and dialect, which I will touch upon later. However, it is important to note that, despite the simplicity and apparent straightforwardness of the definition, there are many issues that arise, both in the understanding of that definition and in its practicality. Indeed, the section immediately following this description in Grosjean’s book is a chapter qualifying how he defines bilingualism. His first point is to discredit the monolingual view of bilingualism and its claims that bilingualism is just a combination of multiple monolinguals within a single person:

The bilingual has (or should have) two separate and isolable language competencies; these competencies are (or should be) similar to those of the two corresponding monolinguals; therefore the bilingual is (or should be) two monolinguals in one person. (Grosjean 10)

Grosjean argues that this way of thinking is not only flawed, but also causes problems in the study and understanding of bilingualism. These can be that the bilingual’s language competence is studied and their bilingualness evaluated based on monolingual standards

(i.e. if a bilingual cannot speak one of their two languages just as gracefully as the other, they are not a true bilingual). It also discredits contact and interference between the two languages: if the two languages are separate, then they rarely contact and cannot influence each other, according to this monolingual view. However, both of these assumptions are not only flawed, but detrimentally impact the study and understanding of bilingualism. Grosjean thus proposes a bilingual, or wholistic² definition of bilingualism as a synthesis of the two languages into a single individual:

The bilingual is an integrated whole which cannot easily be decomposed into two separate parts. The bilingual is *not* the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals; rather, he or she has a unique and specific linguistic configuration. The co-existence and constant interaction of the two languages in the bilingual has produced a different but complete language system (Grosjean 13-14).

Thus, the bilingual's two (or more) languages are integrally linked, and as such, in continuous contact. The two are not divisible as their interaction changes them in ways that a monolingual's language system would not experience. It is this combination *and* interaction that defines the bilingual and his or her language system. When I use the term bilingualism or bilingual throughout this thesis, I am referring to this final definition of bilingualism by Grosjean.

² Sources are not altogether agreed as to whether this word has the same or a slightly varied definition of the more common spelling *holistic*. Because Grosjean chooses this spelling of the word, I have maintained his spelling.

Suzanne Romaine, in her book, *Bilingualism*, calls attention to the fact that bilingualism is often described in terms of scales and degrees. She points out that there are linguists that focus on both sides of the continuum:

At one end of the spectrum of definitions of bilingualism would be one which, like Bloomfield's (1933: 56), would specify 'native-like control of two languages' as the criterion for bilingualism. By contrast, Haugen (1953: 7) draws attention to the other end, when he observes that bilingualism begins when the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language. (Romaine, *Bilingualism* 10)

Neither of these two definitions of bilingualism is perfect; nonetheless the essential concept presented here is that of a range of bilingualism functionality. This bilingual continuum was defined as such by Silva-Corvalán in 2001 (Montrul 26). Thus, a bilingual is not a simple combination of two languages of equal competence within the same person, and, following that same logic, no two bilinguals are bilingual to the same extent. The bilingual's proficiency of her two languages need not be equal. Indeed, Romaine clarifies that "[b]ecause the bilingual's skill may not be the same for both languages at all linguistic levels, proficiency needs to be assessed in a variety of areas" (*Bilingualism* 12). A bilingual may be able to *speak* two (or more) languages at similar proficiencies, but may only be able to *read* or *write* one of the two at native-like competence. Furthermore, as Montrul states in reference to Silva-Corvalán's 2001 work, a change in competencies is fluid over a person's life, especially when the bilingual being considered lives a considerable portion of his or her life in the United States:

Por lo tanto, su equilibrio bilingüe y competencia lingüística en cada lengua pueden fluctuar a lo largo de su vida. Según Silva-Corvalán (2001) los bilingües en una sociedad pueden desplazarse de un extremo al otro del continuo en cualquier etapa de su vida . . . [E]ste tipo de bilingüismo dinámico es muy común en los hispanos nacidos en los Estados Unidos y en los niños hispanos que inmigran a los Estados Unidos. (Montrul 26-7)

Consequently, we see that not only is there a continuum of bilingualism, in which we see a large degree of variation between a bilinguals two (or more) languages, but her competency between the two languages is fluid, and can change depending on her circumstances and her environment over her lifetime.

i. Defining a Dialect

Grosjean's initial definition of bilingualism was "the regular use of two or more languages (or dialects)" (10). It is therefore valuable to consider the difference between a dialect and a language, particularly when there is such significance placed on dialect in Umpierre's *En el país de las maravillas*. In her book, *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, Suzanne Romaine points out that sometimes the line between language and dialect is a difficult one because, according to her, "these [terms] are not linguistic but rather social matters" (*Language in Society* 1). She goes on to observe, however, that "[t]he term 'dialect' has generally been used to refer to a subordinate variety of a language," which the general definition that I will use when I refer to a dialect (Romaine, *Language in Society* 2). However, this definition in itself has a significant limitation, and that is the word "subordinate." In using this word, the author creates a hierarchy of appropriate dialectic differences, putting some dialects over others in acceptability. Nevertheless, Romaine

describes dialect as a societal, rather than a linguistic term, meaning that it is society, not Romaine herself, that establishes which structures and vocabulary create a subordinate, rather than a standard, dialect.

b. Practical Bilingualism – How might a bilingual express herself?

Once we accept that bilinguals are not the sum of two distinct monolinguals, and that their two language competencies might not be equal, but almost certainly are in contact, we must consider the practicalities of that bilingualism and how is that bilingualism expressed, both orally and in writing. Grosjean accompanies his definition of bilingualism with the following clarification:

The bilingual is a fully competent speaker-hearer; he or she has developed competencies (in the two languages and possibly a third system that is a combination of the first two) to the extent required by his or her needs and those of the environment. The bilingual uses the two languages – separately or together – for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. (Grosjean 14)

Just as Romaine discussed bilingualism in terms of degrees, here Grosjean echoes that component of the definition. Each language within a bilingual serves a different purpose, and thus the vocabulary and competence might not be balanced over the two tongues. An engineer who speaks English at her job and Spanish with her family might find it difficult to switch languages between the two contexts; she might find that she does not have the vocabulary in Spanish to talk to her coworkers, and might find that English with her children sounds cold and scientific. This does not negate her bilingualism, but rather defines it. It is because of this difference in purpose and use between the languages that a

study of bilingualism within literature becomes valid. The bilingual author, when he or she sits down to write, is drawn to one language over the other, depending on the context of the writing. Furthermore, the idea of a sliding continuum of bilingualism might help determine why, despite the fact that all three authors are bilingual in both Spanish and English, all are of Puerto Rican heritage, and all have lived for considerable time in both places, they all choose different languages for their works. Much as there is with bilingualism, there are whole books that count the production habits and strategies of bilinguals, so I will define two major topics that are most relevant to this thesis: Spanglish and code-switching.

i. Spanglish

It seems both incomplete and illogical to talk about bilingualism of Spanish and English speakers without discussing, or at least acknowledging, Spanglish as a phenomenon, particularly in that each author in this thesis combines Spanish and English to some extent in her work. However, Spanglish as a term and a phenomenon is highly illusive, perhaps because, like Suzanne Romaine's definition of dialect, it is a social, rather than a linguistic peculiarity. Gary D. Keller, in his article, "Cantos in Context" notes that, "We don't give any particular credence to the term 'Spanglish,' however, which we believe to be a pop culture term that is not particularly helpful for the analysis or appreciation of bilingual poetry" (69). Ilan Stavans, one of the editors of the 2011 *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* and an important name in Latino Studies in general, has also written the book *Spanglish: The making of a New American Language*, a book he intentionally wrote in his own version of Spanglish. In this book, Stavans provides his own definition of Spanglish: "The verbal encounter between Anglo and Hispano civilizations" (5). He defines his own

journey towards Spanglish: “It was only when I was already comfortable in both Spanish and English (as comfortable as one is ever likely to be) that I suddenly detected the possibilities of Spanglish” (Stavans 6). The definition that is best suited for this thesis combines both Keller’s take on Spanglish with that of Stavans. While Spanglish does arise out of a confrontation, sometimes amiable, sometimes violent, between English and Spanish speakers, it is far more useful as a pop culture term than as a defining fact of these three authors. While each does indeed write in what might be classified as “Spanglish” since they combine the two languages, a study of *how* they choose to combine those two languages is far more relevant and revealing than simply pointing out that they choose to use both languages and therefore my analysis will focus on that.

ii. Code-Switching

One linguistic term for how a bilingual might manage his or her two languages that has been well studied and documented is code-switching, which can be one of many ways in which Spanglish is represented. Simply defined, code-switching is, according to *Discourse Strategies* by John J. Gumperz, “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (59). In other words, code-switching occurs when a speaker combines two languages within the same communicative exchange. In *Language in Society*, Romaine provides several examples of code-switching in a variety of languages and points out that “learning to speak more than one language often involves putting together material from two languages,” pointing out that code-switching is a relatively common phenomenon amongst bilinguals (55). Montrul goes on to stress that code-switching is not an unorthodox linguistic occurrence, characteristic of incomplete knowledge of a bilingual’s two languages (120). Indeed,

Montrul points out that bilinguals with high language proficiencies in both of their languages are those that are most likely to be able to code-switch effectively (120).

Romaine, in *Language in Society*, also explains the importance of register in regards to code-switching:

Many linguists have stressed the point that switching is a communicative option available to a bilingual member of a speech community on much the same basis as switching between styles or dialects is an option for the monolingual speaker. Switching in both cases serves an expressive function and has meaning (Romaine, *Language in Society* 59).

Code-switching then becomes similar to how person might switch styles when speaking in a professional interview and when speaking with friends. Different contexts and situations require different uses of languages, a point touched on before. This quote emphasizes that code-switching is not arbitrary. Romaine explicitly states in another paragraph that “there is increasing evidence to indicate that this mixed mode of speaking serves important functions in the communities where it is used and that it is not random” (*Language in Society* 57). The code-switcher does so for a specific purpose, although it may not always be explicit. This is important in considering how and when the three poets of this thesis choose to switch between the primary language of their work and the secondary. Their decision to do so is not arbitrary, but rather, it serves a specific purpose.

Much the same as minority languages and dialects carry with them specific stigma, some see code-switching as a taboo practice. Romaine writes that “in practically all the communities where switching and mixing of languages occurs, it is stigmatized” (*Language in Society* 57). As all three authors point out in their creative works, there can be significant

reproach if one does not speak the predominant language in what society has determined to be the standard way, whether that be through a different language altogether, a mix of languages, or a non-standard dialect. However, Montrul also points out that socially, some bilinguals will use code-switching to identify themselves to other bilinguals, to establish an exclusive community: “En el plano social, la alternancia de códigos es un signo de identidad que afianza la solidaridad grupal. Por lo general, los bilingües alternan códigos en conversaciones con otros bilingües” (123). In using code-switching, all three authors dually identify themselves linguistically as part of the bilingual community and invite others from that same community to participate in the discourse of the works.

c. Emotional Aspects of Bilingualism – Why is it so important that you speak two languages?

One question exceptionally relevant to this thesis is how bilingualism, or language in any way, might serve as an appropriate coping mechanism, especially after we have already discussed how both biculturalism and bilingualism can, in a variety of cases, cause additional stress that a monolingual not straddling cultures would not experience. I have mentioned earlier the therapeutic effect of language from a psychological standpoint, but there exists a linguistic vantage point as well. In order to discuss how language might serve as a coping mechanism, we must examine the emotional affects of being bilingual.

In his book, *Tongue Ties: Logo-Eroticism in Anglo-Hispanic Literature*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat attests to the emotional connections and assumptions that are inherent in language. He states that “the language that we speak is a fundamental component of our nationality, and hence of our sense of who we are” (Pérez Firmat 2). He summarizes that, “language acts are acts of identity” (Pérez Firmat 2). Thus, for Pérez Firmat, choosing a language is

not merely a choice of which is the more appropriate based on context and register, but which emotion one wants to portray at the time. He even goes as far as to provide his own definition of bilingualism: “The true bilingual is not someone who possess ‘native competence’ in two languages, but someone who is equally attached to, or torn between, competing tongues” (Pérez Firmat 4). Although this is not a linguistic definition of bilingualism and not what I refer to when I say bilingual, it does emphasize that languages are not just linguistic phenomena. Often, Ferré, Umpierre and Ortiz Cofer associate strong emotions to one language over the other, although they speak both. Pérez Firmat uses the phrase, “Bilingual bliss, bilingual blues” to show the two sides of the emotional coin that is language (7). For better or for worse, language brings with it emotions that can make it harmful to the speaker, as we have seen with linguistic prejudice, but also can bring positive associations that make one forget, or at least survive, their troubles.

There are three words in Spanish that could serve as equivalents to the word “language” in English: *idioma*, *lengua* and *lenguaje*. Pérez Firmat continues his analysis of the emotional ties of language by explaining the differing connotations of these three words. First, *lengua*, also the Spanish word for tongue, has the connotation of kinship ties. He talks about “mother tongues” to establish this parallel in English (Pérez Firmat 15). The emotional ties are perhaps stronger with one’s *lengua* than they are with one’s *idioma* or *lenguaje*, and not all of these ties are positive. Pérez Firmat says that “a tongue can also inspire hatred, anger, despair, resentment” (15). Either way, one’s *lengua*, one’s tongue, represents the emotional and familial ties associated with a particular language.

Idioma, on the other hand, “reveals national or regional allegiances” (Pérez Firmat 16). There are emotions inherent in one’s *idioma* as well as one’s *lengua*, but the emotional

connotations are different. It relates more to one's *patria*, one's homeland, and thus is more external. Pérez Firmat continues with a comparison of *idioma* and *lengua*:

Whereas a speaker possesses his tongue entirely, an *idioma*, no matter how native is possessed incompletely . . . One belongs to an idioma as one belongs to a culture or a country, but my tongue belongs to me. What is more, it belongs *only* to me. While it may seem that others can share my tongue, it is not exactly "my" tongue that they are sharing, for the emotional tenor of my tongue ties the ways in which I am wont to possess my tongue, are mine alone" (Pérez Firmat 17).

Thus, one's tongue, as well as its emotional ties, are personal, but one's *idioma* is broader. It brings together communities and countries that share that language, but it can also divide in ways that one's *lengua* cannot do.

Finally, *lenguaje* is less personal still, as Pérez Firmat defines it as language structure, "detached from both person and place" (Pérez Firmat 18). Using the word *lenguaje* distances the speaker from the language in question, as there are no possessives involved. Indeed, Pérez Firmat points out that one Spanish poet, Pedro Salinas, in writing a defense of Spanish, chose to title his work "Aprecio y defensa del lenguaje," so that he could "depersonalize and delocalize his argument" (Pérez Firmat 18). *Lenguaje* becomes the third part of the language triad, the actual vocabulary and structure without the emotional or national ties binding it to its speakers. The combination of these three connotations for language, and their separate words in Spanish, again serve to reiterate that language can have enormous emotional baggage associated with it, for better or for worse. This explains

how for language can serve as a cause for prejudice against people, but also can be a defense against that same animosity.

d. Translation – What is the significance of a work written in translation?

Being bilingual introduces the difficulty of translation. I have previously discussed how some ideas and situations lend themselves to one of a bilingual's languages over the other. Nevertheless, that does not mean that language is always the most appropriate to use in that context, and translation occurs out of necessity, even if it is within the speaker's mind and is never seen or heard by another individual. Furthermore, just like bilingualism, there is a continuum of translation, represented satisfactorily by the three authors in this thesis. Ferré represents one end of the spectrum in that her work is overtly translated: the two poems, the original in Spanish and the translation in English, sit side by side on the page. Umpierre represents the opposite extreme. Although she uses both Spanish and English, instances of translation are incredibly rare; she uses Spanish and English to deliver two separate messages, not to compliment each other in delivering the same message as Ferré does. Indeed, Umpierre defies translations by building her own unique words in Spanish and reverting to Puerto Rican dialectic spellings that cannot be understood by someone not very competent in Spanish and that cannot be translated to accommodate any audience but her intended. Ortiz Cofer lies somewhere in the middle of this continuum. Her use of code-switching doubles as a method of translation. Instead of merely switching into Spanish when it is most appropriate, she almost always accompanies her Spanish with an English equivalent. Whereas Umpierre tries to alienate her English speaking readers by making translation impossible, Ortiz Cofer accommodates her non-Spanish speaking readers with her limited use of translation.

A work in translation, particularly one where the whole work is in translation alongside the original, like with Ferré, carries with it its own peculiarities that have to be considered when working with poems, or any other writing, that has been translated, even if, or perhaps especially if, that translation is done by the original author. Similar to how a bilingual is not just two equal, but separate language systems residing in the same person, a work and its translation cannot be seen as two separate, but inherently equivalent, works.

Translation has long been an integral part of Latin American literature. In the introduction to *Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature*, Daniel Balderston and Marcy E. Schwartz note that “[t]ranslation continues to be one of the main tools, and defining images, of Latin American culture in its relation to world cultures” (1). They clarify this statement by saying that “[t]he linguistic diversity throughout the region (especially in the Caribbean region, with its wealth of creole languages) has made translation a central characteristic of New World identities” (Balderston and Schwartz 2). Latin American authors from Borges to Paz have in the past lauded the necessity of translation. Latin America could not have united, nor could it have reached into the global scene, without translation.

A popular saying in translation is that of “*traduttore, traditore*,” Italian for “translator, traitor.” This phrase exposes the idea held by some that by translating a work we are inherently changing it somehow, specifically for the worse. Translation, when seen through this framework, then becomes a work in finding the closest equivalents possible, of ruining the work as little as can be managed. However, more contemporary translators present a more nuanced view. In “Metaphors for the Translator,” Michael Hanne suggests many different possible descriptions of the job that a translator performs, from one of

demolition and consequent reconstruction, to liberators of language, to transplanters of texts from one language (and culture) into another. In “Con las palabras del otro: La traducción literaria como reto de la crítica literaria,” Ottmar Ette expounds upon these metaphors by providing several descriptions of the literary translator, including both the difficulties and benefits inherent in the work. He begins by calling the translator a liar, and addresses the “traitor” part of the saying above. He talks specifically here not about the words themselves, but the context in which those words were written. Many times a translator must write cross-culturally, addressing both the cultural needs of the original audience, and the cultural understanding of the translation audience. Neither culture has the same needs or customs, and their differences often force the translator to make decisions that can either cause incongruity with the original, or misunderstanding within the translation. In the article, “Translation as Editing,” the author declares that the “debate about whether to adapt and risk losing the sense and flavor, or stay close to the author’s text and risk losing any resonance with the readership, has been running as long as translation has been practiced” (Paterson 58). Thus, the phrase “*traduttore, traditore*,” while not presenting the entire picture, is still an issue that must be considered today when facing a work in translation.

Nevertheless, translation is not an inherently malevolent task. In using all of these metaphors and comparisons to describe the act of translation, Paterson, Hanne and Ette all accent the poetic, creative nature of translation. Translating a text, or choosing not to do so in the case of Umpierre, is a work of creative expression just as valid as producing the original. Ette continues his analysis on the benefits of translation by illustrating that translation is an act of rereading and rewriting combined into one. Translation, he argues is

not just an act of redoing the work, it requires the art of first actively processing the work in hand: “La traducción literaria se convierte . . . en la forma más creativa de la recepción activa” (Ette 36). Translation then becomes requires exertive participation in the text, and can evolve into a critical text about the original. Ilan Stavans, a well known figure in not only Latino Studies but also in Translation Studies, a dual specialty that hints at the inherent connection between the two fields, echoes this view when he asks the question, “How much longer will we nurture the complex that a translator is by definition inferior? Originals can be unfaithful to the translation” (Sokol 85). The two works inform each other: the original forms the basis for the translation while the translation forms the basis for understanding of the original; neither must be seen as constitutionally superior or inferior.

Ferré herself writes about some of the same struggles in her role as a translator for her own creative works. She defines her view of the definition of translation:

Translators of literary texts act like a writer’s telescopic lens; they are dedicated to the pursuit of communication, of that universal understanding of original meaning which may one day perhaps make possible harmony of the world. They struggle to bring together different cultures, striding over the barriers of those prejudices and misunderstandings that are the result of diverse ways of thinking and of cultural mores (Ferré, “On Destiny, Language, and Translation, or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal” 33-34).

Thus, for Ferré, translating is the art of bringing together two different cultures, often unsuccessfully as she notes when she says, “Translating has taught me that it is ultimately impossible to transcribe on cultural identity into another” (Ferré, “On Destiny, Language, and Translation, or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal” 35). Here is where the phrase

“traduttore, traditore” can apply to Ferré’s work. Nevertheless, she says, “translation, in spite of its considerable difficulties, is a necessary reality for me as a writer” (Ferré, “On Destiny, Language, and Translation, or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal” 39). It gives her the ability to voice the Puerto Rican struggle of dualities, as well as confront her separate realities. This does not mean that it is the only way that translation serves these authors. Like previously mentioned, Umpierre chooses the opposite limit by creating works that, for various reasons, cannot be translated, rejecting those readers who fit into the same group of people who have in the past have rejected her. Ortiz Cofer uses minimal translation to invite in those same readers, allowing them to experience her life and hopefully find empathy. Thus, translation, no matter where a work falls on the continuum, is just another manipulation of language that is turned into a coping mechanism.

Conclusion

Although there may not be a single literary theory that encompasses the topic of my thesis, but there are two main components to consider, that dealing with coping mechanisms, and that with bilingualism. The psychological aspect, at least in this case, deals with the defining coping and coping mechanisms, as well as the psychological effects of being part of the minority culture or language in a larger, dominant culture. The linguistic component focuses on the bilingualism and translation aspects. However, these two, the psychological and the linguistic, cannot be separated easily. Studies, both psychological and sociolinguistic, have shown that language can both cause prejudice and discrimination as well as serve as a response to personal trauma caused by that same intolerance. Part of this adaptability comes the myriad filters and expressions of language.

It is not only the words we use, but it also refers to whole language systems, like Spanish and English, which, when combined within a single person, create a fresh and unique landscape of expression, both by using each language separately and by combining them in a single communication. Ferré, Umpierre, and Ortiz Cofer take this use of language one step further when they sit down to write. In creating fictions, written in poetry or prose, Spanish or English, or by combining any of these elements, they incorporate an additional level of manipulation to the words they express that would not be seen in more private or informal discourse. Language then becomes inextricably linked to emotion and allegiances that again explain why words serve as such a powerful coping mechanism for these three poets. Both of these aspects, the linguistic and the psychological provide a basis for the analysis of the next three chapters, in which I will look in detail about how language serves as a coping response for each of the three authors.

Two Crabs in the Same Shell: Rosario Ferré's *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*

Why is it that
in the year of our Lord 2,001
Americans have such a difficult time
learning Spanish?

(Ferré, "Language Duel" 1-4)

In this question from the first poem in her collection *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*, Rosario Ferré introduces the main conflict that she returns to throughout the work: the inherent tension between Spanish and English, both as languages and as cultures. Ferré presents the two as opposing forces multiple times throughout the *poemario*, yet she does not believe that this tension damns either or both cultures and countries. Instead, she sees the very languages that cause disagreements as the solution to the conflict, and proposes throughout the *poemario* that embracing each, Spanish as well as English, provides the coping mechanism and thus the solution for the disputes that have plagued the Spanish and English-speaking countries for centuries.

Biography

Ferré was born in 1938 in Ponce, Puerto Rico, which makes her the oldest of the three authors. However, she did not begin writing in earnest until 1970, when she wrote her first short story, which means that her creative work belongs in the same generation as the other poets (Stark, Lecheler, and Anunson). As a child, she grew up in one of the most well-known and politically influential families in Puerto Rico. Her father, active in both business and politics, served as Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico from 1969 until 1973 ("Luis Ferré"). Before taking office, he helped write the Constitution of Puerto Rico in 1952, and later, in 1967, he founded the New Progressive Party, which lobbied for Puerto Rico's

adoption into the United States as the fifty-first state of the union. While in office, he continued to advocate for statehood for the island. Ferré was highly influenced by her father and his opinions, both in her love of her native Puerto Rico and in her acceptance of unity with, rather than a continued separation from, the United States.

Like the other two authors, she too has a strong presence in academia, and like the other two, received advanced degrees in the United States. Her parents wished both her and her brother to receive their education in the United States so that they would learn to speak English fluently (Hintz, “Rosario Ferré”)³. Thus, she was educated at Manhattanville College, where she received a degree in both English and in French in 1960. She returned to her studies in Puerto Rico and received her Master’s from the University of Puerto Rico (Spanish and Latin American literature), and studied at the University of Maryland, from which she received a PhD in Latin American Literature in 1987. Her interest in politics, which stemmed from her father’s work, as well as an interest in publishing, led her to found a student literary magazine, *Zona de Carga y Descarga*, and to serve as publisher and editor of the same while at the University of Puerto Rico. This magazine allowed for the publication of previously unknown Puerto Rican writers, such as Ferré herself, despite the authors’ lack of literary recognition, which prevented their publication elsewhere. It was during the time that she was responsible for choosing the creations to publish in this magazine that Ferré first immersed herself in literary works that advocated for social and political change, a topic with which she has worked in both an academic and a literary sense since her time as publisher of *Zona de Carga y Descarga*. She also often works with feminist topics. As a writer and a poet, she employs feminist discourse, and as an academic,

³ All biographical information in this paragraph is paraphrased from this online source.

she has written many essays about the writing of other feminist authors. In the 1980s, she derived from this academic scholarship her own take on feminist literary theory in which she recognizes feminist literature as a search for identity. She maintains that all works, regardless of the sex or gender of their author, are autobiographical in nature, and thus, because of their different experiences, male and female authors will not only inherently express themselves distinctly, but also will approach similar subject matter in a unique way because of their gendered perspectives. She disagrees, however, that critics should read the works of the two genders differently, given that a work's value is independent of the sex of its author.

Although she currently resides in Puerto Rico, she has lived and studied for many years in the United States, and, like the other poets, has been on faculty at several universities in the United States, including the University of California, Berkley, Rutgers University and Harvard University (Stark, Lecheler, and Anunson). Her literary works include eleven novels, many of which Ferré herself has translated into English, several books of poetry, and a biography of her father.

Critical Response

Although *Language Duel/Duelo del Lenguaje* is perhaps too new to warrant extensive criticism at the present, a great amount of criticism exists on older works by Ferré. One possible explanation for this abundance of scholarly attention is the prolific nature of her work, another being that translation has expanded her audience by including those who do not read Spanish. Previous investigations have studied the way she has employed feminism in her works. For example, in *Rosario Ferré: A Search for Identity*, Suzanne S.

Hintz devoted four of the seven chapters explicitly to discussing Ferré feminist self-identification and its manifestation within her works, while multiple articles have studied Ferré's feminist discourse. Other studies, as such Aída Apter-Cragolino's article "De sitios y asedios: La escritura de Rosario Ferré" and Jessica Magnani's "Colonial Subjects, Imperial Discourses: Rosario Ferré's *The House on the Lagoon* and Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun*," have also examined how her works serve as a means to discuss Puerto Rican society and politics, often through a relatively strong postcolonial viewpoint. The latter is particularly interesting in that it provides yet another comparison that exists between two of the authors in this thesis. Nevertheless, perhaps one of the most relevant analyses of her work, at least for this thesis, deals with her work as a translator, particularly of her own work. Gosser Esquilín, in her article, "Rosario Ferré: Voice of the Writer, Voice of the Translator," notes that for Ferré, translation often serves as a means to rewrite and revisit a previous work through a new light (91). Ferré herself, in an article published in English in the book *Voice-Overs* notes that translation, despite the difficult and complex nature of the task, is also necessary (Ferré, "On Destiny, Language, and Translation, or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal" 39). Thus, the act of translation for Ferré is not merely one designed to open up her work to new audiences; it is an academic and creative assignment as difficult and as burdensome as crafting the original. Translation, therefore, melds actively with her concept of bilingualism and helps validate the study of her work not only in its original Spanish, but also of the translation, which can be as important a literary work as the original.

Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje

Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje is a collection of poems published originally in the United States by Vintage Books in 2001. The book explores exactly what the title suggests: the duality and conflict between two languages, English and Spanish. Interestingly, this dichotomy is explored not only in the subject matter, but in the language itself; each poem, originally written in Spanish by Ferré has been translated, often by the poet, into English. The English of each poem appears first of the two iterations, which is probably explained by the fact that the book is published within the United States rather than Puerto Rico or another largely Spanish-speaking country. The book is divided into three sections. The first, "Language Duel" contains original poems new to this collection, while the next two sections republish originals and translations of poems that appeared in *Las dos Venecias* (1992) and *Fábulas de la garza desangrada* (1982) respectively. All poems that are studied in this chapter come from the first section of the *poemario*.

My analysis of the work will be divided into four sections. First, I will analyze how Ferré addresses national prejudices against Spanish as a language throughout the collection. Next, I will study how the importance of bilingualism and embracing both languages serve as a coping mechanism, and then follow this study with an examination of how translation forms the backbone of Ferré's particular bilingualism. Finally, I will show how Ferré believes both cultures have common history and the significance of those similarities. Each of these sections is meant to show how Ferré brings together the two languages and encourages mutual acceptance, both linguistically and culturally, instead of animosity.

Analysis of the Work

a. *National Prejudices against Spanish as a Language*

Within the first section of the *poemario* in particular, Ferré establishes that there exists a prejudice against foreign languages, particularly in the United States, and most importantly against Spanish. Some of the most salient examples of this prejudice arise in the poem “Climbing Up the Archipelago”⁴ (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 12-19).⁵ The poem describes the evolution that Spanish speakers in the Caribbean experienced. It begins with pre-Colonial tongues, then moves to Spanish and finally to English. The speaker describes the languages in the poem as sustenance; she says, “We love to suck the bone to get to the marrow / and imbibe the strength” (Ferré, “Climbing Up the Archipelago” 4-5).⁶ The speaker tells the history of her ancestors:

⁴ The Spanish title for this poem is “Subiendo por el archipiélago.”

⁵ The citations for the page numbers for the poems will include both the English and the Spanish of the poems, as they are side by side throughout the entire collection.

⁶ Translation is a key element in this work. Citation therefore becomes difficult, as both the English and the Spanish play key parts to the understanding of a text. However, as both are separate poems, and often have separate line numbers, MLA does not have a simple way of reflecting both poems within a single citation. In the interest of space and clarity, I have chosen for short quotations (less than three lines) to choose the language most appropriate for the point I am making, and therefore will only cite one of the two versions. However, in block quotes, unless I am intentionally quoting only one of the two poems to clarify their differences, I have decided to cite the two poems side by side in two columns. I decided against having one follow the other to prevent appearances of hierarchy between the two works. This is different from the MLA style I follow in the rest of this chapter and thesis, which would indent a block quote. English will appear first in the quotations only because it is the first of the two poems that appears in *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*. Furthermore, at times, there will be a different number of lines, between the two citations. This will be reflected in the citations at the end of the quotes. If one of the two quotes is over four lines (thus requiring a block quote) and the other is less, I will still block quote the two poems.

When they arrived in Puerto Rico they ate
the Arawaks,
who were peaceful and planted manioc
root.

Then the Spaniards arrived and ate the
Caribs
who swallowed the Arawaks whole.

Then the Americans came
and ordered everyone to speak English.
(Ferré, "Climbing Up the Archipelago"
10-15)

Cuando llegamos a las Antillas Mayores
nos comimos a los arauacos,
que eran pacíficos y sembraban yuca.
Entonces los españoles desembarcaron
y nos engulleron sin compasión a su vez.
Cuando los americanos pisaron tierra
ya estábamos acostumbrados:
nos ordenaron hablar inglés
y olvidar todo lo demás. (Ferré, "Subiendo
por el archipiélago", 11-18)

The process of acquiring a new language is described here as a type of consumption, intriguingly, a consumption of the whole person, which indicates the importance of the language to a person's identity. It is not merely the tongue that is devoured, but the entirety of the person. This idea is echoed in the opening lines of the poem, which proclaim that "The words Carib and cannibal have the same root" (Ferré, "Climbing Up the Archipelago" 1).

This discourse of devouring also provides an explanation as to the difficulties with acquiring English for those of Caribbean descent. Whereas the previous tongues were eaten along with the bodies of those who spoke them, the speaker's ancestors neither devoured nor were devoured by the Americans. Instead, they were simply ordered to speak English. Such a command is impossible, partially because English is never absorbed, so it does not become a part of them. Furthermore, "Spanish (which had eaten Carib and had eaten /

Arawak before them) / bred strong on their tongue” (Ferré, “Climbing Up the Archipelago” 16-17). Spanish and the pre-Columbian tongues that contribute to the Caribbean dialect naturally predominate over any other language, causing tension with new tongues.

The poem also speaks to the urge to abandon Spanish so as to avoid the difficulties of maneuvering that language:

Spanish was a dangerous umbilical cord	Era una placenta peligrosa
that kept them connected to the islands,	que nos mantenía conectados a las islas,
to hunger and death,	al hambre y a la muerte,
to tattered humiliation. (Ferré, “Climbing	a la traidora humillación. (Ferré,
Up the Archipelago” 32-35)	“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 34-37)

Despite the maternal connotations associated with Spanish here with the use of the term “umbilical cord” and “*placenta*”, it is also connected to suffering, which the Spanish speakers wish to give up. The speaker points out that it is not stubbornness that causes Spanish speakers to hold on to Spanish, but rather difficulties with English: “They did everything they could / to learn an English so pure” (Ferré, “Climbing Up the Archipelago” 49-50). The poem also speaks to the importance of English to the American frame of mind when it says, “Next to an American passport, / perfect English was the second most convincing proof / of American citizenship” (Ferré, “Climbing Up the Archipelago” 56-58). English is portrayed as so intricately tied to being an American that it is seen as proof of belonging, even when that proof excludes some citizens in favor of others who are not. Therefore, in order to belong, “[t]hey picked Spanish from their tongues / as if it were a fish bone,” throwing it away as though it were garbage, more harmful than beneficial (Ferré, “Climbing Up the Archipelago” 61-62). It is through this history and the imagery of

consumption that the poem describes the prejudice of Americans, as well as the problems with the acquisition of English. Language is acquired through ingestion, but English was never digested, nor did it absorb those that came before it. It is simply forced upon others, with the expectation that if one wants to belong, English is the only solution. By portraying Spanish as a fish bone, and in combination with the imagery of consumption early in the poem, it implies that the Castilian language is waste rather than nutrition. Because it does not count as food, at the end of the poem, the Caribs, the speaker's ancestors, are so starved that they "chopped the English word 'tongue' in two / and swallowed it whole" (Ferré, "Climbing Up the Archipelago" 89-90). English is finally consumed, but out of famishment, and even then it is modified, cut up and devoured. The fact that the poem ends with the consumption of English also implies that such an action is an end to a cultural story rather than a beginning of a new life in a different country, contradicting popular immigration myths.

The *poemario* also censures the American idea that a good citizen is monolingual in English alone, and laments the loss of Spanish as a *lengua* for many immigrants who wish to assimilate. In "Tongue Less,"⁷ the speaker describes, from an apparently American point of view, the attempt to eliminate Spanish as a language (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 54-55). The English translation opens with the lines: "Warning! Spanish / might flare up at you one day / and put your life in danger" (Ferré, "Tongue Less" 1-3). Spanish is explosive, a danger that we must warn others about, no matter the origin of the language. She goes on to state that part of the danger of Spanish is its spread:

⁷ The Spanish title for this poem is "Deslenguado."

... The more you <i>habla español</i>	Mientras más se prohíbe,
the more Spanish	más se empeña este país
wants to be the official language	en hablarlo. (Ferré, "Deslenguado" 5-7)
of this country. (Ferré, "Tongue Less" 5-8)	

This statement echoes suspicions amongst monolingual Americans that Spanish is somehow parasitic to English speakers, who will lose their ability to speak their own language because of the prevalence of Spanish. This fear arises out of the idea that "an exemplary / monolingual, monotone / sparking clean citizen" is highly desirable, and that being bilingual, or even monolingual in a language other than English, is somehow inferior (Ferré, "Tongue Less" 16-18). The poem seems also to criticize the ironic lack of understanding of the importance of Spanish to those who speak it. "Tongue Less" states that "Fortunately, it's [Spanish is] easy to get rid of" and describes how being forced to speak English and because of prohibition on Spanish will make Spanish natives the ideal citizens Americans want in their country (Ferré, "Tongue Less" 9). The poem as thus: "Spanish will get rust, shrivel / and fall off / when you don't use it," a hope of English speakers that Spanish can, with just a bit of effort on the part of everyone, be eliminated (Ferré, "Tongue Less" 20-23). Such an attitude underpins the ignorance and prejudice of Americans that is often presented in the collection, the main cause of the tensions between the two languages in present day.

The prejudices within the English speaking community, particularly the United States, against Spanish as a language also appear in the titular poem, "Language Duel,"⁸ a poem in which Ferré explores the tensions between English and Spanish, both as languages

⁸ The Spanish title of this poem is "Duelo del lenguaje."

and as a diverse group of people, over several centuries (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 2-5). From the onset, she establishes several aggressive images:

English and Spanish have been at war	El inglés y el español han estado en
since Queen Elizabeth sank	guerra
the Spanish Armada in 1588.	desde que la reina Isabel
Language carries with it	derrotó a la Armada Invencible en el
all their fire and power. (Ferré, "Language	1588.
Duel" 15-19)	Las lenguas transportan a bordo
	todo su fuego y poderío. (Ferré, "Duelo
	del lenguaje" 17-21)

The identification of this date (1588), even if there have been other and more serious conflicts between the two cultures since then, establishes the longevity of this feud. She elaborates on this violence motif by providing more bellicose imagery. When she introduces the idea of even discussing the choice of one language over the other, she says, "I can hear the guns boom / and see the cannon balls roar / over my head" (Ferré, "Language Duel," 28-30). When she uses these images, the speaker strongly suggests that speaking in one language instead of the other, or choosing the wrong language might in itself be seen by some as an act of cultural war. Nevertheless, neither the speaker nor Ferré finds the situation hopeless. Rather, Ferré advocates, both in this poem and the rest of the collection, in favor of bilingualism. She sees the acceptance of bilingualism on a national level, culturally more so than legally, as a way of coping not only with the linguistic prejudices, but also as a means of solving the racial and cultural prejudices that exist between Hispanics and white Americans.

b. *Embracing Bilingualism as a Coping Mechanism*

The titular poem in this collection, “Language Duel” makes the strongest and most salient case for the importance of bilingualism. Despite the fact that the speaker pits Spanish against English, and in so doing creates a dichotomy, she also introduces several key images that unite, rather than divide. The initial images of duality are strong, however, and begin with the title of the *poemario*. In speaking the title *Language Duel*, the second word, *duel* plays with its homophone *dual*. Even in the choice of work to describe the tensions between the two, the pairing of the languages side by side is subtly emphasized. Furthermore, English pitted against Spanish, but the English people, and their tradition, such as Protestantism, also clash with the Spanish and their culture, including, for example, Catholicism. Her establishment of duality continues in the following lines:

Not to take advantage	No aprovechar la doble perspectiva,
of the double perspective	correr a toda marcha por los rieles
and run full speed ahead	paralelos de ambos mundos
down parallel rails	me parece una verdadera lástima. (Ferré,
seems a pity.” (Ferré, “Language Duel” 31-35)	“Duelo del lenguaje 31-34)

Here we see two separate instances in which the speaker introduces a binary. To begin, the speaker mentions “the double perspective,” a line that explicitly states that there are two perspectives to consider, presumably the Anglo perspective and the Spanish. The second image is that of parallel tracks, two lines that run side by side, congruently for all eternity without collision. This image contrasts with the concepts of singularity also presented in the poem.

The poem ends with the following lines in the English version: “But there’s nothing to be done. / Two male crabs / can’t root in the same lair.” (Ferré, “Language Duel” 36-38). These lines serve two purposes. First, it recalls the violent imagery previously introduced with bellicose allusions. By identifying in a straightforward manner that the two crabs are male, the speaker evokes the idea of two aggressive animals in a battle over the same land. Because it is a belligerent action, it calls to mind the conflict between England and Spain, implying that if the two continue with their aggression, neither will win nor lose; rather, they will continue fighting each other, literally or metaphorically, forever, both locked in a losing battle. However, the images of singularity and unification are also called to mind, if for no other reason than for the contrast with the hostility. While there may be nothing that can be done for the two aggressive powers, the powers that chose unification over hostility – that is, the Americas as a whole instead of its divided and separate parts – do indeed stand a chance of progress. Indeed, a common theme in Ferré’s work is one of acceptance instead of rejection of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. For example, Jessica Magnani points out that in one of Ferré’s first published works, *The House on the Lagoon*, “Both narrators – Quint’in and Isabel – support Puerto Rico’s continued relationship with the U.S.” (Magnani 160). Thus *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* is just one more in a long line of Ferré’s works that support a mutually beneficial relationship between the two cultures. If the Americas, unlike Spain and England, choose to embrace their differences and diversity and live as in unity, progress and improvement can be made.

As previously mentioned, the words “double perspective” imply that there are two different ways that need to be considered to fully understand the poem, “Language Duel”, in this case the English way and the Spanish way. That is, both the Spanish original and the

English translation must be read side by side to get the full message of the speaker.

However, the strongest proof that the speaker's message requires a reading of both poems surfaces in the following lines, first in the Spanish: "De hecho, yo les juro / que mientras discuto en español / sobre mi derecho a hablar inglés" (Ferré, "Duelo del lenguaje" 25-27).

The English is similar, but with one important, but subtle difference. The speaker manipulated the mention of languages are switched, so that the right to speak both in English and in Spanish appears over the two poems:

In fact, I swear
that as I talk to you
in English
about my right to speak
in Spanish . . . (Ferré, "Language Duel" 23-27)

The difference in these two lines, although subtle, proves that the full message is only achieved through an analysis of both poems. The poems do not discuss a Puerto Rican's right to speak in Spanish within the United States or an American's right to speak Spanish. Rather, the two poems argue for a right to speak both, a right to not have to choose between the two languages. The speaker asserts her right to embrace both languages side by side and to accept both as "her" languages. Through mutual acceptance, she finds her own way to cope with the tensions that arise between her native and her second languages. Both, in her mind are useful, and each should be accepted and employed so that the speaker can live and express herself to the fullest.

c. Translation as a Brand of Bilingualism

As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, many articles that discuss the art of translation cite the phrase *traduttore, traditore*, Italian for “Translator, traitor,” which suggests that through the act of translation, you are inherently changing the work, somehow harming it. However, in his article “Con las palabras del otro,” Ottmar Ette makes the argument that translations can be, and often are, one of the most intense means of literary criticism that exists, and that reading both the original alongside its translation can provide new insight into both works. This is a theory of studying literary translation that Ferré, through “Language Duel” as well as *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* as a whole, points to as crucial to a full understanding of her poetry. The two poems are best seen as two halves of the same whole rather than two separate iterations of the same idea. The aforementioned poem introduces the proof for this reading of the collection. By mentioning both languages, but only over the two poems, Ferré subtly provides the importance to her translation. Multiple analyses of Ferré as a translator have shown that the importance she has placed on the creative and analytic value of her translations. According to Mary Ann Gosser Esquilín, Ferré rejects the idea of a translation as the equal of the original, but rather sees it as an evolution:

The more she [Ferré] does translation of her own work, the more she has found herself justifying the changes not only to herself but to those who expect translations to be as close to the original as possible. Ferré does not see the need for the translations to be mirror transpositions of an original text. On the contrary, she does not believe the written text to be a static form of art, but a living organism that grows and changes as its creator evolves as writer. (Gosser Esquilín 92)

Thus, Ferré herself sees the translation as a means of growth as a writer, not only in that it gives her an opportunity to reflect on older works, but because of the creative nature of translation. In *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*, she does give her readers the option of examining only one of the two poems, either the Spanish or the English, but only those readers who are capable and willing to examine both can appreciate the subtle differences between the two that solidify her position as advocate for bilingualism. The subtle manipulations between the two poems, the original and the translation, provide one important facet of Ferré's bilingualism that she uses to bolster her thesis.

Take, for example, the poem, "Tongue Less." The title of the Spanish original of this poem provides further insight into the sarcastic tone behind the poems. It is titled "Deslenguado," for which "Tongue Less" is not a direct translation (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 54-55). A translation provided by a Spanish monolingual dictionary might be shameless, or offensive, which can be used to describe both sides of the tension. English speakers see Spanish speakers as offensive because they fringe upon the monolingual ideal that Americans have established, while Spanish speakers see those who try to eliminate Spanish, which is also described as "el idioma / de sus abuelos," as an offense to their identities and the memories of their homes (Ferré, "Deslenguado" 16-17). The word also has a connotation of action that the English title does not; using the participle implies the loss of the tongue is a result of an act by another. The implication is not only that the victim is left without a tongue, without a *lengua*, but that it was stripped from them, an implication is that missed if the reader does not examine the way that the word *deslenguado* is actually used in Spanish.

An equally subtle, but important choice was made in between the two versions of the title poem. The English version opens with an inquiry as to why Americans struggle to learn Spanish (Ferré, “Language Duel” 1-4). The Spanish version opens with a very similar question:

¿Por qué será
que en el año 2001
a los americanos se les hace tan difícil
aprender a hablar el español? (Ferré, “Duelo del lenguaje” 1-4)

An interesting point of comparison is the use of the word *americanos* as the equivalent for the English version’s “Americans”. The word “American” makes sense to native English speakers, who have no other singular word for a citizen of the United States. However, the Spanish equivalent used by Ferré is more ambiguous, as it can refer not only to citizens of the United States, but any resident of the Americas, which could, and in many dialects does, include all of North and South America. The choice of this word (*americanos*) instead of the more specific *estadounidenses*, which would refer specifically to US citizens, unifies the two continents rather than separates as the images of duality have done. This is further emphasized with the speaker’s use of the phrase *E Pluribus Unum*, or *Out of Many, One*. As the motto of the United States, it adds yet another reference to America that talks of singularity instead of duality. Indeed, the phrase explicitly embraces, rather than challenges, the value of diversity even in a united society and provides yet another subtle, yet key proof in favor of Ferré’s stance in favor of bilingualism instead of monolingualism.

This right to embrace both languages does not imply that the two languages she embraces are seen as exact equivalents, either in a linguistic sense, but more importantly in

an emotional sense. Although Ferré asserts her right to use both languages, in her poetry she points out that she doesn't see the two as the same, either in their use or in the emotional attachment that the speaker feels with the language. The best analogy for her view of the two languages is that of the two halves of a single brain. Both sides are necessary for the brain to function at its highest capacity and people who only have access to one hemisphere are at a distinct disadvantage. However, the two hemispheres are not used equally. Both have their own specialties and purpose, although in the absence of one of the two halves, the other does step in, albeit with less strength. It is because of this difference in emotional attachment that both languages become equally valid and important.

"A *Beso* is Not a Kiss"⁹ defines this concept well (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 52-53). The title in itself hints at the concept that the act of translation is not about finding equalities, mostly because that equality does not exist. Despite the fact that these two words (*beso* and kiss) have the same denotation, their connotations and associations can be quite distinct, as the two poems explore. The speaker defines the differences between the two from the beginning of the poem:

A *beso* is like
eating leeches on a mountain top.
In a kiss Cleopatra
draws the asp to her breast
so as not to enter Rome

⁹ The Spanish title of this poem is "Un beso no es un *Kiss*."

in chains (Ferré, “A *beso* Is Not a Kiss” 1-6).¹⁰

Not only are the two words associated with different images, but both images are perceived as negative. The eating of leeches makes the reader consider not only the consumption of insects, but also the bloodsucking nature of the leeches, which adds an additional factor of horror and the grotesque to the scene. Cleopatra allowing a snake to fatally attack her also rings of desperation, the last act of a woman trying not to be arrested and carried from her homeland.

These images, however, do not carry over into the Spanish original. Although a kiss is still associated with the image of Cleopatra and her asp, the words are different:

Kiss trae consigo
el silbido de áspid
que Cleopatra acercó a su pecho
cuando rehusó entrar a Roma
encadenada. (Ferré, “Un beso no es un *Kiss*” 4-8)

In these lines, the scene still remembers Cleopatra’s suicide, but the act is no longer one of desperation; she brings the asp to her breast because she *refuses* to be chained. It is therefore an act of determination, of rebellion and strength. The first image, that associated with the *beso*, is also considerably different. Instead of eating leeches, a *beso* becomes a young woman who vociferously enjoys of a fruited plant on the mountaintop: “...una joven / comiéndose una pomarrosa / en la cima de una montaña” (Ferré, “Un beso

¹⁰ The Spanish original is not included alongside this particular block quote because it follows almost immediately after. Likewise, the English will not precede the Spanish quote below as its text is quoted here.

no es un *Kiss*" 1-3). In contrast to the image of eating leeches, this image carries with it an association of sustenance, of fulfillment.

The difference between the two images underscores the dissimilarity that exists between the two words despite the fact that they hold the same definition, an idiosyncrasy the speaker herself refers to in the final lines of the poems: "There are mysteries of the tongue / that cannot be explained" (Ferré, "A *Beso* Is Not a Kiss" 7-8). Even the distinct phonetics of the two words is highlighted in the image of the snake in the Spanish poem; although the two both have the [s] sound, only "kiss" has the whistling sound of the snake. The figures in the two poems also highlight the emotional connection to the two languages. The metaphors in the English version are more negative, more grotesque, while the ones in the Spanish original, although distinct mostly in wording, display a much more positive, strong image. The speaker may not be able to explain why these two words have such a strong deviation, but she knows that the difference exists, and it affects the words that she chooses in a given situation. Her bilingualism and the inherent flexibility therein allows her opportunities to handle whatever prejudices and stresses may arise because of her use of one language over the other.

The difference between the two languages in use is further explored in "Language Current"¹¹ (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 6-7). It is in these two poems that it becomes most clear the analogy to the two separate hemispheres of the brain. In the two poems, the speaker expounds on the two languages, their sounds and their use. English is portrayed as scientific, with modern and sleek language: "El inglés es un lenguaje aerodinámico" (Ferré, "Corriente alterna" 1). English is therefore compared to the more

¹¹ The Spanish title of this poem is "Corriente alterna."

analytic left hemisphere. The image of a nuclear reactor is used not only to emphasize the scientific, precise nature of the language, but also the speed with which the speaker feels it moves. She elaborates, “No excess baggage is allowed. / No playful, baroque tendrils / curling this way and that;” (Ferré, “Language Current” 10-12). In so doing, the precise nature of the language is pointed out, ironically through the application of metaphor and “playful baroque tendrils” that, according to the poem, should not be possible in English (Ferré, “Language Current” 11). However, the frustration with the lack of playfulness and decoration does highlight the decisive nature of the language, as well as the harsh way in which the speaker views English, at least in comparison to Spanish.

Spanish, on the other hand, lacks the same scientific imagery. It is characterized as the more thoughtful, emotional right hemisphere. The speaker, who uses a plural, first person possessive when talking about Spanish to identify her relationship with it, uses images of exploration and navigation to depict her native language. Images of jewels provide associations not only with exploration and treasure, but also with beauty and inherent worth, while Ferré’s word choice reminds us of the act of exploration:

Spanish is a very different tongue.

Nuestra lengua es muy distinta.

It’s deeper and darker, with so many

Es húmeda y profunda,

twists

con tantas curvas y meandros que nos

and turns it makes you feel you’re

hace sentir

navigating

astronautas del útero . . . (Ferré,

the uterus. (Ferré, “Language Current”

“Corriente alterna” 15-18)

19-21)

The image here is something hidden, just about to be discovered for the first time, as those who navigate experience both the perils of the unknown, but also the jewels and treasure that they will eventually find. The multiple mentions of birth in the Spanish poem tie the language back to a mother figure, a juxtaposition that is often exploited in the *poemario*. A play on words in the Spanish version between the “Canal de la Mancha” (English Channel), and the “canal / por el que llegamos al mundo” (a reference to the birth canal, or the birthing experience), once again deepens the connection between the mother and Spanish while placing the latter as inherently better than English in the opinion of the speaker (Ferré, “Corriente alterna” 23-24). Because Spanish is deeper, more profound than the English Channel, and almost as deep as a birth canal, this second image becomes to one of utmost important symbolically. The speaker also elevates the emotional significance of Spanish. It is the language of her birth; it is her *lengua*. Her emotional connection to Spanish is strong enough to provide comfort and solace, despite the fact that it is not universally accepted.

d. Common Cultural Chronicles

Another central theme of the *poemario* deals with colonial histories. Emphasis is given to the fact that the English were not the only colonizers of the United States, and that the Spanish conquistadors were also central figures that deserve recognition for their influence in the states. In providing this recognition, Ferré hopes to highlight the fact that English and Spanish, as well as English and Spanish speakers, are not as different as they think. Their heritage is much the same, yet another argument for their mutual acceptance.

For example, the poem, “Juan de Oñate”¹² opens by with the question as to why Plymouth is considered the first colony in the United States if Juan de Oñate arrived in New Mexico ten years earlier (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 32-35). The speaker asks the question to a “you,” as a means of creating distance between herself and those who fail to recognize Juan de Oñate as an American colonizer. She does not defend the conquistador himself, however, and admits that he was “a beast” by telling a story of how he cut the legs and feet off of twenty-four native warriors, an act that did not bother him because he was, according to the poem, accustomed to doing so already:

¹² The Spanish original of this poem has the same title: “Juan de Oñate.”

... used to killing hogs	Estaban acostumbrados a degollarlos,
at Christmas	y les encantaba comer
and so though nothing of	morcilla y chicharrón
blood sausage, <i>chicharrón</i> , and feet	para la Navidad. (Ferré, "Juan de Oñate"
hanging from hooks ... (Ferré, "Juan de	23-26)
Oñate" 22-26)	

Such images imply that Oñate saw the native people he conquered as beneath him, as animals fit for slaughter and consumption (although in the case of the natives of the poem more metaphorical than literal) by those who were superior.

The end of the poem returns to Americans, who "claimed / English as their Mother Tongue" centuries after this incident (Ferré, "Juan de Oñate" 36-37). The Spanish version uses the words "única lengua" to describe how Americans view English, but the message is the same: Americans have rejected Spain's influence on their country as colonizers and choose only to recognize those English speaking colonizers (Ferré, "Juan de Oñate" 40).

The English poem ends with the following warning to those who rejected Spain's influence:

But today the Pueblo are back	Hoy los acomas
marching without a limp	están de vuelta
both feet planted firmly	marchando sin el menor asomo
on the <i>Madre Patria</i> ground. (Ferré, "Juan	de una cojera,
de Oñate" 38-41)	ambos pies plantados firmemente
	en la madre patria. (Ferré, "Juan de
	Oñate" 42-47)

Two key points are raised in these lines. First is the reference to the Pueblo, to the Latino immigrants who are returning to the United States. They come “marching without a limp,” having healed from the cruelties that Juan de Oñate bestowed upon them because he saw them as animals (Ferré, “Juan de Oñate” 39). The suggestion is that they are whole, human again, that they are not to be seen as animals nor as inferior. The last line, and the reference to the *Madre Patria*, also provides profound insight. Not only are the Pueblo coming into America as humans, whole and hale, but they are *returning*, which implies that they too have a right to this land. The speaker emphasizes the shared history of the two groups, and, as with language, which provides evidence that both histories have a valid claim to the land.

The iteration of the importance of remembering history continues in “Saguaro Countdown,”¹³ in which the speaker of the poem is the plant named in the title (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 36-39). The personified cactus describes the many groups of conquistadores he has seen travel ahead of him, up to and including the “English speaking conquistadores” (Ferré, “Saguaro Countdown” 30). The plant identifies these as “an eccentric lot”, who “have been here less than three centuries / and have already forgotten / what came before them” (Ferré, “Saguaro Countdown” 31-34). The plant chastises the English speakers for their forgetfulness, not only in describing them as eccentric, but also in the claim that, “I never would have dared / claim I was the first *saguaro* / to march in the Sonoran desert” (Ferré, “Saguaro Countdown” 35-37). The plant recognizes that its place in history; nevertheless, the saguaro also recalls another equally valid history, with experiences worth valuing and remembering.

¹³ The Spanish original of this poem is titled “La marcha de los saguaros.”

Adaptation and multilingualism are also key features of the poem. Twice the speaker points out the change in language that occurs with the change in presence:

A hundred thousand <i>sagueros</i>	nadie me cree cuando insisto
speaking Hopi to the Pueblos	que los hopis coversaban con los pueblos,
speaking Navajo to the O'odhams	que los pueblos conversaban con los
speaking Spanish to the Navajos (Ferré,	o'odhams
"Saguaro Countdown" 38-41)	que los o'odhams coversaban con los
	navajos
	al llegar los castellanos. (Ferré, "La
	marcha de los sanguaros" 38-42)

By changing the language spoken, the plant is able to emphasize two concepts. First, language is important to a group or a culture, and groups do not adapt as easily to change in language as individuals can. Second, an individual *can* adapt to the language changes around him, while still maintaining her own status quo. The difference of languages did not change the *saguaro* speaker, it merely allowed for her conversant to understand him¹⁴. This concept of adaptation is continued in the final lines of the poem, in which the *saguaro* “suspect[s] / there are a hundred thousand *saguaros* / marching right behind us” (Ferré, “Saguaro Countdown” 42-44). The cactus recognizes that he is merely one in a long line of his kind that has come to claim this particular spot of land. Those that came before him shape him, just as those who come after him will be shaped by his own actions.

This idea of return and of a future of change is echoed in “The Bones of Conquerors”¹⁵ (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 30-31). The speaker iterates the history of Miami, pointing out that it is still alive, evidenced even by the street signs, named after Conquistadores such as Ponce de León, Coronado and Cabeza de Vaca. Here is one city where history has been allowed to thrive. The speaker claims, “But nothing perishes / Yesterday is all around us like a breeze / swaying the palm trees” (Ferré, “The Bones of Conquerors” 7-9). Just like the history of the *saguaro*, the history of those who have traveled through Miami is allowed to flourish because of the recognition that, although people may have died, their influence on culture, land and other people has not.

Furthermore, history is not yet complete. Almost cyclically, the “conquerors” are returning: “Today the conquerors are here again: / Cubans, Haitians, Puerto Ricans. / The ocean is

¹⁴ The Saguaro here is classified as male to reflect the masculine nature of the word in Spanish, which is not translated to cactus or any other word in the English edition; rather, *saguaro* is maintained in both poems.

¹⁵ The Spanish original is titled “Los esqueletos de los héroes.”

paved with their bones” (Ferré, “The Bones of the Conquerors” 10-12). However, just like Cabeza de Vaca and Coronado have not perished completely and continue to be remembered, so will the new conquerors who attempt arrival today.

Once again, as in many of the poems that address the two languages, there is a shift in connotation between the words used in the Spanish original and the English translation. Although the English version uses words like “Conquistadores” (Ferré, “The Bones of Conquerors” 1) and “conquerors” (10), the Spanish original refers to these same people not only as “Conquistadores” (Ferré, “Los esqueletos de los héroes” 12) but as “héroes” (2). The historical figures are heroes, not merely conquerors and certainly not invaders. In the English translation, they are “vanquished in turn”, a statement that leads one to believe that they were defeated by an outside force (Ferré, “The Bones of Conquerors” 6). The Spanish heroes, however, died in glory after the defeat of their enemy: “Llegaron, vencieron y perecieron / bajo los cascos de la ambición y de la gloria” (Ferré, “Los esqueletos de los héroes” 6-7). The immigrants who try, and often fail, to make their way into the States are also described as heroes. Such a difference in connotation plays with the earlier message that the two languages have their own inherent biases and uses; English has an opposing interpretation of the lives of the Spanish conquerors and immigrants than Spanish has of the same people.

The *poemario*, in warning that we all share history, also warns us to be aware of the future. The aforementioned “Saguaro Countdown” explicitly mentions the *saguaros* that have not yet come to pass. Similarly, “The Colonial Experience”¹⁶ plays on the concept that, despite differences in names and places, we all share a common history and, thus, a

¹⁶ The Spanish title of this poem is “La experiencia colonial.”

common experience (Ferré, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* 90-91). The poetic voice juxtaposes British iconography (Yeats and Cuchulain, the mythological Irish hero) and Puerto Rican people (Aguybana and the Taino Empire) to reiterate the shared histories. The speaker asks, “Does it matter which island? / Which century we live in?” (Ferré, “The Colonial Experience” 13-14). She then responds to those questions with the following statements: “It’s always the same story, / only with different heroes, / and in another language” (Ferré, “The Colonial Experience” 23-25). Not only is the importance of language to colonization repeated, but once again, the poem emphasizes that our histories, those of Puerto Ricans and those of white Americans, are not so different; given our shared histories, the poem encourages mutual respect. Furthermore, it serves as a subtle warning to the future. Powerful figures, no matter their native tongue, or the century of their birth, have, in the past, gone through the colonial experience; it is only a matter of time before the story repeats itself.

Conclusion

In the book, *Rosario Ferré: A Search for Identity*, author Suzanne S. Hintz, “Rosario Ferré describes her own development and maturation as a result of hybridization between the United States and Latin America” (36). Perhaps more than the other two authors of this thesis, who find themselves drawn strongly towards one side or the other on this continuum between the United States and Puerto Rico, Ferré situates herself in the middle of the spectrum. Because of this, Ferré advocates that a symbiotic relationship between the two cultures and languages is the most desirable. The first poem of this collection summarizes the point the poet attempts to convey rather succinctly, that of

mutual acceptance between the two languages and cultures. It does this through its use of images of duality juxtaposed with images of unity. Despite the prejudice that exists in regard to Spanish as a language and as a culture that has, in the past, torn the two groups apart, Ferré makes the argument for an alliance between these two languages and for cooperation between the two tongues. She acknowledges that there will always be emotional ties that separate, but still highlights the parallel experiences that the two languages and cultures share in regards to their history and their future, and that by taking on both languages at the same time, the languages themselves can serve as a unifying factor, a means of communicating in new, more complex and more complete ways. Ferré herself uses this mechanism through her use of translation. No poem sits alone; it is always accompanied with its twin, sometimes identical, sometimes not, written in a second language. It is through this play that Ferré makes her point of singularity rather than duality. Translation is how she fights against and copes with the prejudices she has seen on a more national level against her home island and her first language. Through the recognition of both languages, she not only goes further into her argument than she could with only one tongue, but she also proves what she argues to be true: both languages can reside peacefully within the same culture.

You Can't Silence Me: Luz Maria Umpierre-Herrera's *En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño*

I am simply one more voice demanding the end of hatred
towards our own people in exile.

-Luz María Umpierre-Herrera, "Biography"

Whether she defines her own people as women, minorities, particularly Latinos/as within the US, or members of the LGBT community, Luz Maria Umpierre-Herrera has lived for most of her life on the outside of societal norms. She has spent much of her poetic career coping with prejudice. She fights what she sees as unjust power structures through her community work, her academic publications and her teaching, and, most importantly for this thesis, through her poetry. Her works, published in both her native Spanish, as well as English, another language she was exposed to as a child, reflect the struggle of a Puerto Rican woman to fit in with the US society, which she perceives and describes as a fantastical land. The discrimination she addresses in her poems has been both ethnic, linguistic, and against her sexual orientation.

Biography

Most of the biographical information found in this thesis comes from a self-published autobiography from Umpierre on her personal website, www.luzmaumpierre.com. This is important in that an autobiography provides a very different perspective of an individual than does a life account written by another person. An Hispanic refrain notes that man, in the sense of human, has three faces: the one he wants, the one he thinks he has, and the one he actually has. An autobiography raises difficulty in that only the first two portraits are shown. A person can never know his or her true face; indeed, the only means of to do so, a

mirror, yields a distorted, backward image. Thus, while there is no cause to dispute the facts presented in Umpierre's biography, the reader must also keep in mind Umpierre's self-motivation and non-objectivity. Her autobiography thus serves as much to construct her identity as to present it to others; the fiction she has created for herself and her life becomes inseparable from the reality that others might see.

Like many other poets, Umpierre herself points to the battles in her life as motivation and muse for her poetry and its themes. She experienced many struggles in her early years as well as through her academic career, and feels that these fights have influenced and defined her academic and poetic works. In her autobiography, Umpierre defines herself as, "a Puerto Rican woman, a poet, teacher, and human rights advocate" (Umpierre, "Biography"). Through such a description, her worldview and her identity become explicitly defined. She is, through her own eyes, first and foremost a Puerto Rican woman, and expresses herself primarily through her culture and through her gender. Only after these labels does Umpierre expose her careers: poet, teacher and human rights advocate. It is after each of these professions that she discusses her academic work, first her doctoral work at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, then her tenured work as an academic at Rutgers University. In this opening paragraph of her autobiography, her self-characterization as a Puerto Rican is worth noting. She is, by this definition, most importantly, a Puerto Rican woman. However, her repetition of the indirect article "a" before "poet, teacher and human rights advocate" separates her cultural identity from her professions. She is not a Puerto Rican poet, nor is she a Boricua teacher nor a Latina human rights advocate; she is merely a poet, as well as a teacher, and also a human rights advocate. These are global, not to be divided through cultural boundaries. Even when she

reiterates her cultural lineage when she boasts of being “the first Puerto Rican woman to receive tenure in the Spanish Department at Rutgers University,” her heritage as Boricua is again linked to her gender identity, not her professional identity (Umpierre, “Biography”). She is a Puerto Rican woman who received tenure; she is not a Puerto Rican tenured professor. Her phrasing not only emphasizes her gender, but also erases a perceived professional marginalization that would otherwise exist by separating Puerto Ricans within that profession from others of different cultural heritage. Thus, in her autobiography, we can see the strongest personal and emotional ties for Umpierre lie in her bilingual homeland, which provides explanation for why she would try so intensely to find ways to cope and to embrace that heritage rather than assimilate into her second, less familiar country.

a. Upbringing

Born in 1947 in Santurce, Puerto Rico to a large family living in a poor neighborhood, Umpierre encountered many struggles early in life. Not only was her family poor, but she admits that a neighbor sexually abused her at a young age. She is a Lesbian¹⁷ and came out as such during difficult times for anyone who did not fit into hetero-normative stereotypes. She admits that these obstacles, faced early in her life, as well as her domineering father with whom she often fought as a child, taught her “to have a strong voice and to stand by [her] points of view, not blindly, but out of conviction” (Umpierre, “Bio”). She found that her strong voice and convictions were not easily accepted. She faced racism¹⁸ as a graduate

¹⁷ I have capitalized the word Lesbian to reflect the style preferences of Umpierre and many others of this sexual orientation.

¹⁸ Umpierre uses the word racism herself to describe some of the discrimination against her, thus implying that she sees herself as a separate race than the white Americans that she often criticizes.

student (Umpierre, “On Still Standing”), and her employers persecuted her for teaching LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) texts in her classes at Rutgers University (Umpierre, “Bio”). Such persecution, particularly for her sexual orientation, reached the point where she was banned from teaching, and Rutgers considered dismissing her on the grounds that, in Umpierre’s own words, “anyone who spoke openly about being a Lesbian then and wanting to teach Gay Literature was labeled as mentally ill” (Umpierre, “Bio”). Her poetry serves, to a large extent, as part of her protest of such racial, cultural, and sexual persecution within her academic community, although *En el país de las maravillas* focuses on the racial, cultural and linguistic, over the sexual, aspects.

Umpierre says she was raised Catholic, but now defines herself as “more spiritual than religious,” claiming to “take from a lot of different faiths and make things [her] own be it Buddhism to Espiritismo to the Bible” (Umpierre, “Bio”). Her Catholic upbringing, as well as her comfort with religious syncretism will help to better understand the questions and parodies of faith found within her poetry in this *poemario*.

b. Professional Life

As previously mentioned, Umpierre is an active member of academia, particularly in the fields of Puerto Rican, Caribbean, Latina/o Studies, poetry and Gender Studies (Umpierre, “Professional”). She has published, according to her own autobiography, more than one hundred scholarly articles on these subjects in well-known and prestigious journals, such as *Hispania*, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, and *Bilingual Review*, two books of literary criticism, as well as more recent cyber articles on current events pertinent to her interests. She has chosen not to limit her academic focus to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, and as such, her work covers scholarship on a variety of Latin American and Latino/a authors and

poets. She also points to scholarly work done on authors whose works were less well-known or studied at the time of her publication, such as Julia Alvarez, Sandra Esteves, and Daniel Torres.

Her academic work is not limited solely to publication. As a result of the prejudice she personally encountered during her life both for her cultural heritage as well as for her sexual orientation, her academic and community work both focus, to a large degree, on bringing issues of race, culture, and ethnicity to the forefront. She has chaired the Department of Multicultural studies at Western Kentucky, instituted new courses on Latin America and Latina Literature and Culture and served on the Women's Studies faculty at a variety of colleges in the states. She has also helped to develop the Pennsylvania Association for Bilingual Education. She states that many of the courses she has taught on Latin American Studies either included new "alternate" texts, particularly those by Lesbian and Gay writers, used her "own theory of reading (Homocriticism)," or were not part of the curriculum before she chose to implement them (Umpierre, "Professional"). Her community work also reflects her interest in multiculturalism and the LGBT community.

Her own poetic works, which include an anthology, *I'm Still Standing: Treinta años de poesía/Thirty years of poetry*, published in 2011, also discuss many of the same issues that she has encountered in her life, particularly the discrimination she experienced and fought to eliminate in the universities in which she worked. She herself claims in an article introducing her anthology of poems, "I have always thought that my poetry is a reflection of my life in all its many capacities. Thus, this collection [*I'm Still Standing*] is brought to you as a form of biography" (Umpierre, "On Still Standing," 17). The *poemario* touched upon in this thesis in particular, was written during her time as a graduate student at Bryn Mawr

College, and discusses the racism she exhibited, as well as a “defense of [her] Puerto Rican culture and language,” an important topic in the new American culture she found herself surrounded in (Umpierre, “On Still Standing” 18).

Critical Response

Umpierre appears to be better known for her own academic contributions than for her poetic creations. While many scholarly articles and even whole books have been written on the works of Rosario Ferré and Judith Ortiz Cofer, there is a dearth of scholarly work on the poetry of Luzma Umpierre. Even in her own autobiography, she spends considerable more time discussing her academic and scholarly achievements than her poetic works. This thesis therefore addresses a significant gap in the academic literature about the creative work of this particular academic.

There are multiple reasons why there might be a shortage of scholarly work on Umpierre, especially compared to the other two authors in this thesis. This could partially be due to the wealth of material that can be studied; both other poets have published significantly more creative works than Umpierre has. Furthermore, the publishers that Umpierre has used can also be a factor. Many of her poems have been cyber-publication online, and all three of her *poemarios*, *En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño, ... Y otras desgracias*, and *The Margarita Poems* have been published by Third Woman Press, a small publishing house based in Berkeley. The publishing house refers to itself as an alternate press, which could also play into the politics of her readership. Because she was published by a less well known and possibly less respected publisher, academics might be more hesitant to study her work. Her most recent anthology, *I'm Still Standing: Treinta años*

de poesía / Thirty Years of Poetry was published by her own website, luzmaumpierre.com.

When Umpierre uses smaller publishers for her work, her audience is severely diminished, meaning that less academics will read, and therefore comment, on her work.

En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño

En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño (1982) was the first book published by Third Woman Press. Before Third Woman Press, Umpierre struggled to find a publisher for her poems, even among Latino publishing houses because, according to her, she “did not write ‘like a woman,’” that is to say that she did not write about “flowers, gardening and domestic chores” (Umpierre, “On Still Standing” 18). However, Third Woman Press, run by Norma Alarcón, agreed to publish not only *En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño*, but also two other books of poems, *...Y otras desgracias* and *The Margarita Poems*. Umpierre states that Third Woman Press allowed her an opportunity to publish “without pressure from the establishment on thematic” (Umpierre, “On Still Standing” 18). She was able to express herself without censorship with the support of this publishing house.

The title of *En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño* is significant and deserves a few notes before beginning the analysis. The first part of the title makes explicit reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, which in Spanish is often translated to *Las aventuras de Alicia en el país de las maravillas*. Here, Umpierre Herrera uses the idea of the Wonderland to describe the United States, her immigrant country. Several connotations arise in this comparison. For example, Alice’s adventures in her Wonderland are not of the nice, tranquil variety. Often there are things she does not understand, things that, in her

world are impossible or completely inexplicable. Alice, like Umpierre, must learn to navigate this new world with different rules and customs, and must do so while also avoiding the unfamiliar dangers of that strange world

Also important to mention is the work *Kempis*, which does not appear in *Real Academia Española*, the most distinguished world authority on the Spanish language. However, Umpierre does give a definition to this word: manual. It is possible that the origin of this word makes reference to Thomas Kempis, the medieval author of *The Imitation of Christ*, a very well-known book of Christian devotionals that provides its readers with spiritual instructions. The Kempis is Puerto Rican, thus, this *poemario* serves as a kind of spiritual guidebook for new immigrant Puerto Ricans to consult when they first enter the Wonderland of the United States.

En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño, is divided into three sections by the author, all three designed as parts of the Kempis that she writes through her poetry. The first section is titled, “Exodo: Una Puertorriqueña en Penna,” a reference to both Pennsylvania (Penna being a popular shortening of that state name in Spanish), but also includes a play on the Spanish word *pena*, meaning pain. Umpierre is in the United States, and she is suffering. In this section, she discusses the racism she has encountered in her time in the United States and combats it by embracing and elevating her own Boricua identity. She follows the first section with her second section, “Jueces,” a section which judges the American life and habits she finds around her, and finishes the Kempis with her third section, “Lamentaciones de Luz María,” in which she discusses herself and her writing, and all of the masks inherent therein. All of the poems contained within *En el país de las maravillas: Kempis puertorriqueño* appear primarily in Umpierre’s primary language,

Spanish, although she does use a significant amount of code-switching into English throughout her poems.

My analysis of the work will consist of three parts. First, I will discuss instances in the work in which she notes language and culture as a cause for the prejudice she experiences. Next, I will examine her manipulation of that same language as a defense, as a coping mechanism for discrimination. Finally, I will touch on the definition of language according to Umpierre and how she plays with genres within the *poemario*.

Analysis of the Work

a. Language as a Cause for Prejudice

Umpierre presents a convincing case for her language, as well as her Puerto Rican identity, to be a significant factor in inciting some of the intolerance she endured during her studies at Bryn Mawr College. One of the first and most clear examples she provides of language being a springboard for criticism and judgment is within "Pointing Marginals," a poem from the first section of the work that delineates various critiques that are raised against Puerto Rican dialectic Spanish (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 8). The entire poem, with the exception of the last two lines, is written entirely in capital letters, which gives the impression of strongly yelled negative judgment. There is also a great deal of English, which serves to imply that the speaker of much of the poem is not Umpierre, but a native English speaker. The primary speaker of the poem thus represents the societal voice, complete with linguistic prejudices, that the second speaker must endure. The linguistic evaluations are thus not critiques Umpierre poses toward an enemy audience but rather harsh appraisals others pose, presumably at Umpierre herself, or at those in her position.

The attacks serve to belittle the recipient of those supposed corrections (Umpierre and other Puerto Ricans living in the United States) and the recipient's use of her native language. For example, consider the following first lines of the poem:

ANGLICISMO

COCHE NOT CARRO

PUERTORRIQUEÑISMO

CENA NOT COMIDA

REGIONALISMO (Umpierre, "Pointing Marginals" 1-5).

"COCHE NOT CARRO" (2) and "CENA NOT COMIDA" (4) both imply a hierarchy of vocabulary, in which the speaker places Boricua words firmly at the bottom beneath other, presumably more appropriate, terms. The speaker then repeats this same idea in the lines, "PUERTORRIQUEÑISMO" (3) and "REGIONALISMO" (5), both of which pass judgment on a term or phrase, indicating that it is only appropriate in certain, presumably informal settings. The final touch to the criticism of language within the poem is in the last few lines: "FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE CASTILLIAN WORD! / I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO SAY!" (Umpierre, "Pointing Marginals" 14-15). The first line serves to define, rather ironically in English, Puerto Rican Spanish as so inferior a dialect of Spanish that academics and other Spanish speakers barely consider it to be Spanish and that its speakers must "familiarize themselves with the Castilian word" so that others can understand them, a sentiment the second line highlights (14). In the article "Delegitimizing Oppressive Culture: The Voice of Counter-Discourse in Umpierre's Poetic Work", Alma Simounet brings attention to the hierarchy that exists of Spanish dialects, particularly in the academic community, and how that hierarchy is reflected in "Pointing Marginals":

Even today, Castilian Spanish, one of the many dialects or varieties of Spanish, still enjoys a privileged position among many academics, a perception to which the author of this article [Simounet] personally attests. The power of the prestige-laden language variety in academia, Castilian, is felt through the professors' attempt at imposing this variety's lexical entries on perfectly viable substitutions taken from the author's [Umpierre's] own language variety . . . As a result, the pointing of "marginals" refers not only to her so-called mistakes, which sprang from the use of "her peripheral dialect," but, ironically, to the professors' comments, which are the reflection of the marginality of their thinking as a result of being guided only by the variety of the Peninsular metropolis." (Simounet 28)

At the same time as Umpierre is showing how she and her dialect have been criticized, she also marginalizes and attempts to delegitimize the view of the professors, arguing that there exists no objective reason why her dialect is substandard in comparison with their own. The first speaker, who represents the professors and society, expects the addressee to elevate her language skills, even in her native Spanish, and states that not only are such regionalisms not appropriate, but are somehow inferior to the accepted, intellectual vocabulary, a view the second speaker, at the end of the poem, disputes. She states, "(¡mierda!) / (bullshit!)"¹⁹ (Umpierre, "Pointing Marginals" 17-18). These two words, repeated in both languages so that any of her critics can understand her message, portray her disdain for the criticisms, and for the assumptions of superiority inherent in them. The spacing (the two lines are separated from the rest of the poem by a break in stanza) and

¹⁹ Although it cannot be clearly shown in the citation, these two verses are both right aligned as well, in contrast with the rest of the poem, which is left aligned.

punctuation, particularly the parenthesis, as well as the fact that the two lines are right aligned, rather than left, give them a sense of understatement, as if spoken under one's breath. This is also emphasized by the fact that these words are all lower case and the rest of the poem uses excessive capitalization. This introduces an idea of strength into the words of the poem. The first speaker is strong and can openly and loudly voice the societal view of the second speaker's dialect. The second speaker, however, cannot, or will not, openly voice her criticism, her skepticism, and must do so only after the judgment is passed, and then only when separated from the original speaker and critic. Nevertheless, it is spoken, emphasizing that the first speaker and society's opinion is not the only opinion of value. Those who are marginalized by discrimination also have a voice.

"Los intellectuals" also appears in the first section of the *poemario* and is one of many poems in which she criticizes the intellectual, academic community (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 5-6). The title of the poem introduces an important aspect of Umpierre's *poemario*, that of subtle manipulations of the language and word plays. For example, here, the title presents a subtle code switch from the definite article in Spanish, *los*, to a word in English, *intellectuals*, different from its Spanish counterpart (*intelectuales*) in only two letters. Janet Pérez, in her article "Biculturalismo, resistencia y asimilación en la poesía y diálogo intertextual de tres poetisas puertorriqueñas transterradas" talks about the various word games and Tricks that Umpierre uses, as well as how she emphasizes dialectic differences:

En la poesía de Umpierre, abundan los retruécanos, los juegos de palabras de raíz bilingüe, onomatopeya, transliteración de palabras inglesas a la ortografía castellana o viceversa, y neologismos. Juega con el lenguaje de

manera consciente, cosa que no sucede realmente en la obra de Esteves o Ortiz Cofer. Además, Umpierre incorpora el dialecto peculiar puertorriqueño, a través de transcripciones fonéticas, mezclando el español académico, universitario. (Pérez 278-279)

Umpierre's subtle plays with her language, whether it be in Spanish or English are conscience digressions from the norm, and serve to make a certain point, often a critique of the white Americans who are discriminating against her. These plays with language also subtly make reference to the *poemario's* namesake, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In that book's sequel, one of the English language's most well known neologisms appears in the poem "Jabberwocky" in which Carroll combines neologisms and pure nonsensical words within his poem. The word creations within this *poemario*, particular to Umpierre, also help establish her as the opposite of Ferré on the translation continuum, as each of these words, much like Carroll's poem, make translation exceedingly difficult. By making translation difficult, if not impossible, Umpierre is able to alienate possible members of her audience that have, in the past, alienated her for her own language.

In "Los intellectuals", the speaker describes the academics that she has encountered, their way of life, and her disapproval of what she perceives as their close-minded and closed-off point of view. Perhaps more important than merely criticizing their work, the speaker passes judgment on the superior attitude that she has observed among the erudite community. She accuses them of thinking that they know about everything ["dicen que saben de to'" (Umpierre, "Los intellectuals" 8)], yet later in the poem she criticizes them for their ignorance about the realities of life that many people face. She impeaches their conceit and their inflated egos: "Cuánta pérdida de tiempo en sentirse

superiores,” (Umpierre, “Los intellectuals” 35). In her use of the word “sentirse” instead of a word of definition such as “ser,” the speaker points out that their feelings of superiority, rather than their actual state of being superior, however common and however often stated, are unjustified. The speaker stresses such critiques to point out the distance between academics and the common individuals. Academics live in their own world, surrounding themselves with rhetorical problems instead of focusing on solving the problems that face those living in reality. Their ignorance about realities of daily life is so extreme that they cannot even see how separated they are from those they consider beneath them.

Language is one of many points of departure between the intellectuals within the poem and the rest of society. The second line of “Los intellectuals” starts by discussing their “*elitist tongue*,” and points out from the beginning that they believe themselves different because they speak in a different, theoretically superior, way. This is echoed later in the poem when the speaker states that they (academics) believe that because of their superiority and intellect their language should be immaculate, both in its pronunciation and its use:

disque por ser inteligentes

al hablarle a los humildes

deben elevar el idioma –

usando veinte latines

y pronunciando hasta las comas. (Umpierre, “Los intellectuals” 30-34).

The intellectuals see language as a way of means of separation between themselves and the rest, regardless of their nationality. In disdainfully highlighting the unrealistic use of

language by the academics and their overly pretentious attention to diction, the speaker points out the ridiculousness of their intolerance towards other dialects. The speaker also identifies the senselessness of their routine and their work alongside their linguistic prejudice. This not only manages to highlight the linguistic prejudice they show, but also, because of the juxtaposition of the two, manages to belittle and discredit that same prejudice.

The speaker also makes a point to separate herself from the intellectuals. The first clue to this separation is the line “y dicen que saben de to” (Umpierre, “Los intellectuals” 8). When she uses a dialectic abbreviation for the word “todo,” the speaker, who identifies herself in this line as Boricua, separates herself from the intellectuals and their “*elitist tongue*” (Umpierre, “Los intellectuals” 2). She continues this separation when she states, “a mi gente no la entienden porque viven encerrados” (Umpierre, “Los intellectuals” 36). Not only does she explicitly reiterate that intellectuals are so closed off from the real world that they cannot understand those who do not live in their ivory towers, but Umpierre firmly and unequivocally relates to those who live in what she deems to be the real world (“a mi gente”). Not only is she not an intellectual, living a life of presumed imperiousness, but she also feels misunderstood, both linguistically and as a human being, by those who claim to know about everything. Thus, this poem introduces the opposing side of language. Not only does language elicit criticism from others, but in embracing it, it becomes a powerful coping mechanism.

b. Language as a Coping Mechanism for Prejudice

For Umpierre, just as for Ferré, language is an integral part of managing the struggles of her life caused by her bilingualism and Puerto Rican heritage. While she plays

with the English language, she strongly embraces the Spanish language, in particular, her Puerto Rican dialect, as a means to cope with the pressures to integrate into the American Wonderland. Even when she dapples in the English language, she does so to assail at those who have already attacked her for not assimilating.

Like the aforementioned Umpierre poems, “Pase de Lista” also serves to censure the academic, American world in which Umpierre finds herself and also expresses the nostalgia she feels for her homeland of Puerto Rico (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 7). In her nostalgia, the speaker inventories things from her homeland that she treasures and juxtaposes them with the American lifestyle that she neither appreciates nor values. Through the things Umpierre finds missing in the United States, she manages to fully define Puerto Rico as she sees it. For example, she talks about the natural beauty of Puerto Rico that she does not find in the United States, and contrasts that with the cold, grayness that she sees in her new home:

Cielo gris, árboles desnudos, pinos enormes.....Presentes, ahora, aquí
El azul límpido del cielo, el flamboyán, el verdor.....Faltan, ausentes
Vegetación sin vida, civilización helada, rostros sin sonrisas....Presentes,
Presentes
Ausente el mar.....Ausente
Ausente la gente alegreAusente
Ausente Puerto Ricotodo está ausente.

(Umpierre, “Pase de Lista 10-15)

Her homeland is beautiful, green, flamboyant, whereas the United States is grey and cold. This is further reflected in the people; the Puerto Ricans are described as happy, whereas the Americans do not smile.

Of the things listed that are missing, one is her language, her metaphorical voice, which she contrasts with the English language: “El American idiom en la radio y la televisión.....Presente. / Mi idioma que es mi voz.....Ausente” (Umpierre, “Pase de Lista” 6-7). Interestingly, the American tongue is heard over the radio, whereas the speaker’s language, Spanish, is her voice, which suggests that Spanish is much more personal, more personable, whereas English is detached, distanced from the listener by the technology that pervades the American lifestyle.

Perhaps most pertinent of the things listed among those presented is in the first line: “Aquél, el otro Presentes, aquí, presentes²⁰” (Umpierre, “Pase de Lista” 1). The speaker not only sees herself, but is also seen by everyone else as alien, someone different who, for whatever reason, doesn’t fit into the standard paradigm, and thus must be singled out as distinct, as needing change, which once again underlines the linguistic and cultural divide. This poem appears in *Exodo*, the first section of the work, and it is important to note that an exodus implies a mass of people, not a single immigrant. When she uses the plural (“Presentes”), the speaker reiterates that this idea is not unique her personal situation. The experience of racism and other prejudice she had encountered while writing this section is universal to all those that don’t easily fit into the American paradigm. She chooses to embrace her status as the *other*, acknowledging only the

²⁰ The caesura in this line reflects the separation in the original poem. This line mirrors the style of the one listed above in block quote, where the two parts of the line are separated, although the first two lines of the poem do not have ellipses to connect the two ideas in each verse.

language and the dialect that, at least in part, serve to make her so. This not only allows her to point out that she is fundamentally distinct from the Americans around her but also that all of those identified as *others* may not be the same.

Language is also introduced as a means of returning fire to those who attack her. One of the things Umpierre criticizes in *En el país de las maravillas* directly is the American way of life, presumably voiced by those that that same way of life considers outsiders. One such example from the second section of the work, *Jueces*, is in the poem “La Jogocracia,” an example of a neologism that Umpierre uses to describe the American obsession with exercise (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 15). The initial stanza of this poem reiterates this obsession with jogging and exercise for the sake of exercise. She uses yet another made up word, *teníscratas*, or players of tennis (Umpierre, “La Jogocracia” 2). These two words (*jogocracia* and *teníscratas*) echo a play on the words “*democracia*” and “*demócratas*.” The first combines the English word “jog” with the Spanish word “*democracia*” (democracy), while the second combines the two cognates *tenis* and *demócratas*, or those who pertain to a democracy. By turning English words into Spanish neologisms, Umpierre allows herself the kind of assimilation she prefers but has not been allowed: the ability to take tiny parts of English and the American life and add them to her Spanish, Puerto Rican life. By playing with words in Spanish that refer to government and its participants, Umpierre suggests that the country not only depends on this exercise, but that it is the very thing that runs the country. When the country is run by this kind of physical obsession, the US and its citizens become trivialized to the unimportant. However, since these words are entirely made up, they cannot be translated, nor can they be sought in a dictionary, the reader must fully grasp Spanish to understand the meaning. Umpierre

manipulates her vocabulary to jab back at those who are intolerant of her by making her poem accessible to a Spanish speaking crowd alone and by using the English not to laud, but to criticize Americans.

Here, Umpierre is as punitive as others have been against her. She opens her final stanza with the word “*Castigar*” (to punish), and refers to the country’s racism, and its otherwise exuberant lifestyle (Umpierre, “La Jogocracia” 8). She describes the United States as a nation living in excess [“nación en decadencia” (Umpierre, “La Jogocracia” 11)] yet counterpoints this extravagance as destructive and empty [“destrucción y desquite, carente sin carencia” (10)]. The last phrase especially suggests that, despite the lack of want materialistically in the United States, the country still lacks what is truly important, particularly in regards to American values. In criticizing this way of life, as well as bringing up the discrimination and destruction touched upon in the first section, the speaker implies that in spite of, or perhaps because of, their luxurious, tangible way of living, the American way of life allows the material to run the country and thus lacks the deeper morals and values that should run their lives. Such discourse allows Umpierre to defend her own choice to embrace her Puerto Rican heritage and Spanish language rather than assimilate into the morally inferior Wonderland.

One of the most important poems of the *poemario* comes in the final section, “Lamentaciones de Luz Maria,” a section largely consisting of metapoetry. In “Mascarada la Vida,” the speaker describes the various situations in which we, as individuals, wear masks in our everyday lives (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 32). Her use of the subject *tú* implies that she is speaking directly to the reader, and includes him or her in her

description of the masked life. Some of these masks are masks we wear out of self-preservation and vanity:

Mascarada la vida...

Como cuando saludas a un extraño creyendo conocerle
para luego darte cuenta de que no le conoces: ¡Rubor en la cara!

Mascarada la vida...

Como cuando te vistes con ropas nuevas para cubrir
apariencias, apariencias vanas.” (Umpierre, “Mascarada la Vida” 7-12)

These are masks that we wear to protect ourselves from shame, either because we have done something embarrassing or because we are ashamed of our appearance, whether that shame is warranted or not. Some are masks that we wear to protect our emotions from being seen from the outside world: “Como cuando tienes que callar y reír, tragar y reír, llorar adentro y lanzar una carcajada externa para sentirte afín con un mundo al que poco le importas” (Umpierre, “Mascarada la Vida” 20-22). Disguises may not only protect us from judgment about our physical countenance, be it our appearance or our actions, but also protects our innermost thoughts and feelings from being viewed. Masks also allow us to perform up to the expectations of others: “unas palabras huecas de pesar para cumplir con requisitos y ... a otros temas” (Umpierre, “Mascarada la Vida” 31). At times, masks allow us to continue with our duties, no matter how distasteful we may find them, and give us a way to hide our own opinions and feelings when they are not welcomed. Some of these masks deal with the spoken language, such as when we have to be quiet or when we have to give presentations full of useless rhetoric just to fulfill the expectations of others,

whereas other masks are more body language, laughing to hide internal tears or a red face of embarrassment.

Despite the utility of some of these masks, the speaker laments their necessity. All of the examples she gives are everyday experiences, some in which we put on a mask to protect ourselves from the judgment of others, others that we must put on to maintain our place in a world controlled by others, others with expectations that we cannot always comfortably fulfill. In her final lines, she describes the masks that we wear as endless: “Mascarada interminable / Disfraz, antifaz o velo, la mascarada continua más allá de la vida” (Umpierre, “Mascarada la Vida” 36-38). We may not like these masks, but all of us, the speaker included, continue to wear them out of both choice and obligation.

Although not explicitly a meta-poem, its placement in a section with several other such poems, suggests that it too provides commentary on the use of poetry. Two possibilities exist. First, that poetry could be in itself a kind of masking, that the masks extend to her poetry as an integral part of her life. The second possibility is that poetry is the exact opposite; poetry allows us to take off the masks that we wear out of both will and necessity in the outside world. This second option seems much more in line with the rest of the work. The first two sections of the *poemario* exalted the Puerto Rican way, as well as pointed out the discrimination that the speaker experienced regularly. However, this poem points out that sometimes we are masked because we cannot be ourselves: “Cuando te dicen que no puedes sentir lo que sientes, que debes callar lo que opines, que no debes pensar lo que piensas –” (Umpierre, “Mascarada la Vida” 34-35). The speaker must wear a disguise because her thoughts and feelings are censured, and it through her poetry that she can drop the pretense and not be afraid of judgment. She can say what she feels and thinks

with no censorship necessary. Poetry, and the linguistic freedoms that she can take within that genre, then, is not only how she defends herself against the prejudices of the Americans surrounding her, but is also how she manages in a world where she feels she must wear a mask of some kind in order to survive, even if the mask does not hide her Puerto Rican identity.

The idea that poetry serves as a way to manage anxieties and struggles within a bigoted society is reiterated in the poem, "A Lee Bretz" (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 33). In the poem, a child, presumably Lee Bretz herself, asks the speaker questions of identity. She asks "¿Tú quién eres? ¿De / dónde vienes? Hacia dónde te encaminas? ¿Quién te / daba a ti la leche? ¿Quién te arropó con la frisa?" (Umpierre, "A Lee Bretz" 8-10). These questions serve to encapsulate the more simple and fundamental question: "Who are you?" The speaker has no answer at first, either because she dares not answer, or because she can't find the words to describe her far away homeland, "una isla allá perdida" (Umpierre, "A Lee Bretz" 5). Finally, she responds, stating that these questions, asked of herself with a child's simplicity, answer the question of why she writes poetry: "Niña, niña, me has hecho crear poesía" (Umpierre, "A Lee Bretz" 13). Poetry is, in Umpierre's own words, her way of answering the questions of who she is, and where she is going. It is how she is able to take off the disguises that she must wear in society, and how she explores her identity freely, without having to hide herself from the rest of humanity.

Lee Bretz might be a personal friend of Umpierre, perhaps the child referred to within the poem's text. It is possible that this Lee Bretz refers to Mary Lee Bretz, Professor Emeritus of Rutgers's University and author of Spanish language textbooks. If there were the case, Bretz could represent an actual figure that has shown prejudice against Umpierre and

served as inspiration, albeit negative, for her poetry. Nevertheless, Umpierre's subtitle to the poem, "En el año internacional de los niños" combined with the reference to a child within the text of the poem complicates this association between Mary Lee Bretz and the Lee Bretz of the poem. However, it does not necessarily negate the possibility. Bretz might not be the person being spoken to in the poem, or in referring to Bretz as a child, Umpierre could be pointing out the childishness and naivety of the criticisms raised against her during her academic career. Either way, the poem accounts how, for Umpierre, poetry, while cathartic, is not always written out of joy, often it is the expression of sadness for her experiences and for the experiences of those who, like her, do not fit perfectly into the expected American norm. It is, in short, her reconciliation with herself, the one excluded from American mainstream. Poetry allows her to process the discrimination that characterizes the hostile Wonderland, and gives her a voice to finally speak out in her own defense.

c. Defining Language as Communication; Playing with Genres

Whereas Ferré's definition of language lies mostly in the traditional definition of a spoken and written codified language, such as Spanish and English, Umpierre plays with the definition of language. In the parodies of various genres that she uses within her work, she defines language as communication, allowing all forms of communication, to play into her use of language as a coping mechanism.

Umpierre opens her *Kempis* with "La Recta" (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 3). This poem begins:

Moody, Puerto Rican

Spic, Hot-Tempered

Difficult, Unconformist

Perfunctory and Sketchy

Rebellious and Violent

Regionalist (Umpierre, “La Receta” 1-6)²¹

The “recipe” for a Puerto Rican woman is written in English, which points to its authorship, people within the United States. Indeed, the next line identifies the authors of such a recipe, “las Betty Crocker gringas,” who fear the strangeness and differences of the Puerto Rican personality (Umpierre, “La Receta” 7). This recipe is indented in regards to the rest of the poem, which draws attention to it, and, like all the words in English within the poem, is italicized, Umpierre’s way of separating the two languages. English is italicized, indicating its foreign nature; her code-switching is not within two languages she sees as her own, but rather between her language, and the language of the others.

This poem introduces a domestic discourse that Umpierre uses to subvert that same stereotype. Just as, despite being an academic, she criticizes and separates herself from other academics who have rejected her and her language, here, despite being a woman, she distances herself from other women who disapprove of her culture. Maria DiFrancesco, in the article, “Gastronomic Discourse in Luz María Umpierre’s *The Margarita Poems*, states the connection between Umpierre’s code-switching and the domestic discourse:

Umpierre not only inhabits the domain of Spanish and English, but she also surpasses these to write in the language of food and drink, a semiotics that does not simply point to a literary motif in her writing, but to the larger question of cultural organization and power. (DiFrancesco 155)

²¹ In the original poem, these lines are one indent to the left of the rest of the text, a decision from the author that could not be represented here in the block quote.

Although this article focuses on examples from the later collection, *The Margarita Poems*, the same parallels are appropriate in this poem as well. Umpierre combines English and Spanish in order to invalidate American fears about her culture.

The fear the Americans feel about Puerto Ricans is highlighted in yet another indented section, also in English, which shows the origin of the opinion:

EXPLOSIVE

HANDLE WITH CARE (Umpierre, "La Receta" 17-18)²²

The Americans who write the recipe not only fail to understand, but fear the differences in personality. They see the other and her differences not merely as outsiders, but as truly dangerous, something that white Americans must handle delicately, if at all, something that they have to defuse lest it explode, destroying part of what they hold dear. And because of this fear, they wish alternately to change ["Había que cocinarme y amoldarme" (Umpierre, "La Receta" 9)] or to contain ["y mantenerme enlatada para que no me saliera" (11)]. Once these two actions are complete, they are free to show her off, an exceptional delicacy from far away, now contained and safe, but never the same as the rest of them: "Quisieron etiquarme, las Julia Childs cocineras, / para luego señalarme en *supermarkets* y tiendas / como aquél producto raro que vino de lejanas tierras" (Umpierre, "La Receta" 19-21).

However she rejects these efforts in their entirety: "Pero yo no quise aloldarme ni conformarme a su esquema" (Umpierre, "La Receta" 22). In so doing, she states that her own definition, unmarred by the efforts of those who wish to change her, is just as valid

²² Although these are only two lines and are not usually cited in block quote, I have chosen to do so to maintain the same format in the original poem. These two lines are also indented from the majority of the poem, like the first six are. Some editions of the poem also have a break in between these two lines, although I have chosen not to represent this break here since it does not appear in the version that I am citing it from.

and worthwhile as their definition of themselves. The speaker does this through manipulation of the recipe template throughout the poem.

The last word/line of this poem stands as the most significant, and serves as her basis for the rest of the section, if not the rest of the *poemario*. In response to the “Betty Crocker gringas” (Umpierre, “La Receta” 7) and “Julia Childs cocineras” (19) who wish to mold and shape her, the speaker takes her own stance: “Yo misma me forjé una bonita bandera que leía una palabra / seis letras. / HUMANA” (23-25). In response to their criticism and their lack of understanding, the speaker points out the one thing they all have in common: their humanity. She is just as human as they are, despite their different cultures, languages, and personalities. It is this title of HUMANA, written in all caps to show its strength that validates her not only as a person, but also validates her culture and all its idiosyncrasies. Embracing these idiosyncrasies, making them legitimate, thus becomes her purpose of the rest of the section, a purpose defined through her skillful manipulation of a new genre, recipes twisted into poems.

Recipes are not the only other genre that Umpierre plays with within the *poemario*. “Oración ante una Imagen Derrumbada” mirrors, at least in style and wording, the Nicene Creed, the Catholic prayer recited during service that enumerates the various beliefs of Christians, specifically in regards to the Holy Trinity and Their characteristics (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 17). Despite this phrasing, the specific items listed in the poem serve to, once again, point to deficiencies and inappropriate obsessions in the American way of life. The first part, which in the actual Nicene Creed talks about the belief in God Himself, instead talks about Disney: “No creo en Donald Duck / Que está en la casa blanca / creador de mil películas” (Umpierre, “Oración ante una Imagen Derrumbada” 1-3). God no

longer holds His place of high honor in the American lifestyle; Disney and the rest of Hollywood have usurped their place in American homes. Pérez highlights how Umpierre intentionally dismisses major aspects of the Wonderland that she finds offensive and materialistic, even if those are characteristic not only of the US but also her homeland:

Umpierre rechaza la mayor parte de los valores de ambas órbitas culturales, denunciando lo tradicional, patriarcal y machista de la cultura hispana al mismo tiempo que se burla de los íconos de Hollywood y de la televisión norteamericana como Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Pluto, y Bonzo el payaso.

(281)

The materialistic is a major source of criticism for Umpierre. Americans focus too much on Hollywood and other vain and ultimately meaningless things, and in so doing, lose what is truly important.

The manipulation of the prayer adds an additional, religious element to the fixations of the American people. In her parody of the Nicene Creed, Hollywood, as well as its sexual overtones, the speaker implies that a new religion has taken over the United States: the Cult of Hollywood and the movies. Thus, the poem points to yet another American obsession that is judged in the second section; in addition to a fanaticism about exercise and unhealthy body image as well as technology, Americans have allowed the entertainment industry to become yet another fixation. Americans have abandoned God and replaced Him with Walt Disney. The speaker places her own judgment on such a way of living in the penultimate line of the poem: “No creo...ni en Alicia en el país de las maravillas” (Umpierre, “Oración ante una Imagen Derrumbada” 20). The speaker makes explicit, through reference once again to the Wonderland that represents the United States,

that she does not believe in such a way of life, a point she is able to get across by playing with the structure of the well-known (at least in Catholic communities) Nicene Creed.

“Jaculatoria in Nomine Domine” is the final poem in this collection that parodies prayers and calls and responses that serve as traditional parts of the Catholic service (Umpierre, *En el país de las maravillas* 20-21). It too serves to point to the disparity between the life and lifestyles of an affluent, typical American and the Hispanic, especially Puerto Rican, immigrant. The majority of the poem is written in tercets, with the first line naming a religious aspect or description of God, echoing the first part of a call and response that might be done during a Christian service. The second line, written in phonetically Boricua Spanish, reflects a much more earthly, common struggle, while the final line is the congregation’s part of the call and response, often a generic call for mercy or prayer directed at God Himself. Often the first two lines directly contrast each other, such as the following stanzas:

Torre de Marfil

Que salga de premio mayol el billete que yo llevo

Rogad por nosotros

Casa de oro

Que la financiera me renueve el préstamo pa’ sacal loh malbete

Rogad por nosotros

(Umpierre, “Jaculatoria in nomine domine” 16-21)

The first two lines of each tercet, talking about marble and gold serve as an ironic prayer for those who, according to the second lines, are praying for the much more realistic, but still far reaching hope for winning the lottery or having a loan renewed. The juxtaposition

of these two ideas within the two stanzas creates an irony that serves to emphasize the difficult situation for those doing the praying. The second lines of both stanzas are also written dialectally. The speaker uses dialectic Puerto Rican Spanish, evident by several changes to the presumed correct spelling of the words. For example, several [r] sounds are replaced with the [l] sound, for example, in the words, “mayol” (mayor) and “sacal” (sacar). Furthermore, there is some aspiration and removed sounds that are often left out of Puerto Rican speech, such as the [s] in “préhtamo” and the [r] in “pa” (para). It is also important to note the use of *Rogad*, a form of command that typically is used by Spaniards only, except in religious contexts, when other dialects also use this form of the command. The fact that the second lines of these stanzas are written dialectally, especially when contrasted with the “correct,” or more standard Spanish used in the other lines of each stanza, show that the bitter living conditions of the second line prayers are not universal to those who reside in the United States, or even to all immigrants; they are problems that Boricua immigrants specifically encounter when they enter the country. The poem then boils down to a series of expectations upon arrival that contrast the reality of the life of a Hispanic immigrant in the United States. The irony of the rather large gap between these two ideas serves to censure the American way of life that is, as previously seen, judgmental and which makes it difficult for anyone who does not fit perfectly into a preordained stereotype to move up in the world. Thus, once again, Umpierre plays with and parodies a prayer to criticize, using her own language skills to draw attention to hypocrisies, which becomes her method of handling such duplicity in her daily life.

Conclusion

Umpierre titles the *poemario*, *En el país de las maravillas*, a rather direct reference to Alice in Wonderland. In the *poemario*, Umpierre herself serves as Alice, and the United States is her Wonderland. Like Alice, Umpierre finds herself disillusioned with the world that she finds, and in turn seeks to reject it. Instead of the American dream she, and so many other immigrants, expect to find, she finds herself in a strange world with value systems different than, and often opposite to, her own, a world where she is seen as an outsider with no hope of assimilation without completely changing herself, and in which she and many like her struggle instead of flourishing like their white, English speaking, neighbors. Many of these criticisms are made through her use of language. Whether she expresses her censure through parodies of other genres that she interweaves into her poetry, or she is firmly embraces her own Puerto Rican dialect and chooses it over more standard Spanish or over English, she uses her poetry to fight back against those who have caused her so much angst. It is through this fight that Umpierre manages to deal with the struggles in her life. As she notes in "A Lee Bretz," her poetry defines her; when she is without spoken word, she uses her poetry as a cathartic expression of her own critique of the less than perfect world that judges her, which allows her to proudly continue with her Puerto Rican way of life and language despite the pressures placed upon her to abandon them and become just like everyone else around her.

Paterson Puerto Rican: Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Latin Deli: Telling the Lives of Barrio Women*

I needed to write.

(Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli*, 166)

These words appear in *The Latin Deli* in one of the later essays, and echo some of the same feelings that analysis of both Umpierre-Herrera and Ferré has revealed: a need to write, to manipulate and take advantage of their languages, in part, to cope with the struggles of life. Like the other two poets, Ortiz Cofer was raised biculturally in the United States by Puerto Rican parents, a struggle that has appeared throughout her life and her writing. Indeed, many of her works contain this tension of straddling, particularly in youths, between their Puerto Rican traditions and culture and the culture of the mainland where they live and are raised, including the struggles with the prejudices inherent in both cultures (Acosta-Belén, "Judith Ortiz Cofer"). It is through this creative process that Ortiz Cofer, similar to Umpierre-Herrera and Ferré, has found a way not only to express the challenges she encounters in her life, but also to find a means of surviving those same difficulties and prejudices.

Biography

Judith Ortiz Cofer was born in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico on February 24, 1952, which makes her the youngest of the three authors in this thesis (Sather and Curtright)²³. Her father was in the US Navy, and as such, she spent her early years moving between Paterson, New Jersey, where her father was stationed, and her grandmother's home in Puerto Rico, where she lived with her mother and her grandmother when her father was on extended leave for his job. It was in Puerto Rico, while listening to her grandmother's

²³ All biographical information on Ortiz Cofer is paraphrased from this online source.

stories that Ortiz Cofer learned to appreciate the art of storytelling, a common motif in her work.

Despite the fact that both of her parents were Puerto Rican, they had two separate ideas about how to instill in Ortiz Cofer her Puerto Rican heritage. While her mother tried to maintain her own heritage and held on to many of her family traditions, Ortiz Cofer's father wanted his children to have the best educational and career opportunities, and did not see his Puerto Rican heritage, or that of his children, as a means of providing those opportunities to his children. This struggle in her own parents translated to a discord that Ortiz Cofer has felt within herself for much of her life.

Ortiz Cofer was educated mainly in the United States, either in Paterson, New Jersey, or in Augusta, Georgia, where her family moved when she was fifteen after riots broke out near their home in Paterson. In 1974, she received her BA in English at Augusta College and three years later, finished her Masters in English at Florida Atlantic University. It was not until she finished her Masters that Ortiz Cofer found herself writing and publishing her own creative works. Although she admits that she has a particular affection for producing poetry, she has not limited herself to only poetry, publishing also essays, novels, short stories, and creative non-fiction. Her works have won her many prizes, as well as several national fellowships and grants. Ortiz Cofer, like the other authors, currently works in academia as the Franklin Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Georgia. Like Ferré and Umpierre-Herrera, continues to write and publish her works. Unlike the other two, however, her work in academia has focused on her work as a creative writer, rather than on academic criticism of other authors.

Critical Response

Perhaps because of her continuous publication, Judith Ortiz Cofer has received the most critical attention of the three authors in this thesis. This might also be due to the fact that many of her works, in contrast to both Ferré and Umpierre-Herrera, are originally written predominately in English rather than in Spanish, although she does write comfortably in both. However, three themes tend to arise in the scholarship written about Ortiz Cofer's work. First, as with both other authors, the idea of feminism is introduced in criticism about her work, for example, in the articles, "Señora, Niña, O Señorita: The Story Of Puerto Rico As Nation, Commonwealth, Or Ethno-Nation Through Women In Judith Ortiz-Cofer's *The Meaning Of Consuelo*" by Susan C. Méndez or "Ethnicity, Feminism and Semantic Shifts in the Work of Judith Ortiz Cofer" by Darlene Pagán. However, it is not the most predominate theme. Also, a good amount of scholarship has been devoted to her bicultural identity, or an exploration of bicultural identity within her works. Often this discourse revolves around the autobiographical aspect of many of her works and the experiences of the author herself living in both the US and Puerto Rico. Articles such as "Con la casa a cuestas: Identidad y escritura en la obra de Judith Ortiz Cofer," by Antonia Domínguez Miguela, or Janet Pérez's "Biculturalismo, resistencia y asimilación en la poesía y diálogo intertextual de tres poetas puertorriqueñas transterradas" have focused on examining how Judith Ortiz Cofer straddles her two cultures and how that hybridity has influenced her writing. Finally, another major theme that arises in the academic work about Ortiz Cofer is that of the creative process and the art of storytelling, especially in the many interviews with her that have been published. Nevertheless, there is little about the combination of the creative process and the idea of a multicultural identity and how

writing, both the creations of others absorbed through avid reading and the act of producing one's own art, permits her to cope with discrimination and other daily struggles of life.

The Latin Deli: Telling the Lives of Barrio Women

The Latin Deli, published in 1993 in the United States and subtitled "Telling the Lives of Barrio Women" is a collection of reflections, written in both prose and verse. Told principally in English, the book examines the lives of different Puerto Rican women in the Barrio, reference to an immigrant, working class, largely Latino neighborhood in the city. Their ages range from stories of young children, to women in the last stages of their life. Some of the women were raised in Puerto Rico and moved to the Barrio as adults searching for a new and better life; some were raised, and some even born, in the United States, and must search for their identity between the experiences of their Hispanic heritage and their American upbringing. Because the book is a mix of many different stories, there are many different speakers, not all of whom are named. Some mirror presumably the author's own voice speaking autobiographically, but these narratives are interspersed with the experiences of other speakers, some in first person, and others in third person. The main focus is on women from Puerto Rico, but men also serve as key figures in some of the works. Despite the mix of speakers, the experiences all meld together to create one common experience for female Puerto Rican immigrants to the United States who see themselves as Americans as much as, if not more than, Puerto Ricans.

The analysis of this work will also be separated into three sections. I will first explore how Ortiz Cofer defines language as a coping mechanism for ignorance, then how it serves

as a way to establish intimacy between two or more people. Finally, I will look at specific ways in which Ortiz Cofer sees language as a coping mechanism for her personal troubles. These three sections come together to reflect the complex and comprehensive relationship Ortiz Cofer has with language, and the myriad ways in which it has served and continues to serve as a reliable coping mechanism that she turns to in times of hardship.

Analysis of the work

a. Defining Language as a Coping Mechanism for Ignorance

Ferré defines language in the most traditional way (English, Spanish, etc.) and Umpierre expands this definition to include far more types of communication with her use of parody. These two approaches to languages definitely echo in Ortiz Cofer's collection. In *Latin Deli*, she plays with genre and with means of communicating. The work contains a mix of short story, creative nonfiction, and poetry. The stories that are told throughout the work glorify both the written and the spoken word, and contain accounts of all four methods to consume and produce language: writing, reading, speaking and listening. While these two previous definitions of language (Spanish/English, as a means of communication) apply to the work of Ortiz Cofer, language also includes a transmission of ignorance. That is, it is through our language, often verbal, that we show our ignorance and prejudice. However, much as in Ferré and Umpierre, where language causes the problem as well as provides the solution, language is also used as a means of coping with the ignorance that the speaker often is forced to confront.

"The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named María" touches heavily on the idea of prejudice and stereotypes associated with appearing Latina (Ortiz Cofer, *The*

Latin Deli 148-154). Verbal language here is usually the way that this prejudice is conveyed or perpetuated, even if the cause for such prejudice is more subtle. For example, the story opens with an experience in which a man, slightly inebriated, chooses to recognize the speaker's Latina heritage with a loud and exuberant interpretation of "María" from *West Side Story* (Ortiz Cofer, "The Myth of the Latin Woman" 148). Later in the essay, the same protagonist is greeted by a man dressed in a tuxedo and staying in a "very classy metropolitan hotel" as "Evita!," followed by a very loud performance of "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina," which was encouraged by his daughter and the crowd and led to an encore of "La Bamba" (Ortiz Cofer, "The Myth of the Latin Woman" 152). Throughout his performance, the man seems oblivious to the offensive stereotypes he is immortalizing with his songs, nor do either man recognize that the differences between Latinos: the protagonist is neither Mexican nor Argentinean, but is expected to respond to both cultural stereotypes. The narrator also points out that: "this same man...would not have been likely to regale a white woman with a dirty song in public" (Ortiz Cofer, "The Myth of the Latin Woman" 152), indicating the racism inherent in his performance. These stereotypes can also often endure through other, more everyday use of language, as the speaker observes in the following passage:

"[m]ixed cultural signals have perpetuated certain stereotypes – for example, that of the Hispanic woman as the 'Hot Tamale' or sexual firebrand...In [the media's] special vocabulary, advertisers have designated 'sizzling' and 'smoldering' as the adjectives of choice for describing not only the foods but also the women of Latin America (Ortiz Cofer, "The Myth of the Latin Woman" 150).

This language used by advertisers not only serves to bolster such stereotypes, which has in the past been identified as a positive step. In the introduction to *Woman of her Word: Hispanic Women write*, Evangelina Vigil talks about how even Latina writers had exploited this stereotype: “The Latina as a sensuous woman is another persona elaborated in the literature. This is significant in that it represents a breaking of the stereotype of the sexually inhibited woman” (9). Despite this fact that these stereotypes might have liberated in the past, the narrator of “The Myth of the Latin Woman” sees it as inaccurate, and in this case, leading to harassment from those who take them serious. However, within the same essay, the narrator notes that she has developed mechanisms for dealing with the anger and hurt she felt based on such prejudicial experiences, and that these mechanisms were acquired through her education. She feels fortunate to have had the benefit of a more privileged upbringing, complete with a strong education:

Yet I am one of the lucky ones. My parents made it possible for me to acquire a stronger footing in the mainstream culture by giving me the chance at an education. And books and art have saved me from the harsher forms of ethnic and racial prejudice that many of my Hispanic *compañeras* have had to endure (Ortiz Cofer, “The Myth of the Latin Woman” 154).

Indeed, she continues with a story about how, at her first public poetry reading, she was mistaken as the waitress, an experience that “gave [her] reading fire” (Ortiz Cofer, “The Myth of the Latin Woman” 153). She continues: “That day I read to that woman and her lowered eyes told me that she was embarrassed at her little faux pas, and when I willed her to look up at me, it was my victory” (Ortiz Cofer, “The Myth of the Latin Woman” 153). Her

manipulation of language in her poetry, both written and delivered orally in a public reading contradict the older woman's ignorant assumption.

Stereotypes and prejudice also come to the forefront in the various sections of the essay, "The Story of My Body" (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 135-146) One particular example in which language is used to portray the ignorance of whites to those they considered outsiders, particularly Hispanics. The narrator describes how, as a child, she coveted a particular doll in a store, and one day, she dared to touch the doll, after which she was run out of the store, and the following was shouted after her: "Don't come in here unless you gonna buy something. You PR put your dirty hands on stuff. You always look dirty. But maybe dirty brown is your natural color" (Ortiz Cofer, "The Story of My Body" 138). The word *dirty* is emphasized multiple times, and the store clerk uses it in a derogatory, metaphorical sense. The speaker, however, because of her young age took the word to be literal:

I could not understand how my skin looked like dirt to the supermarket man. I went in and washed my hands thoroughly with soap and hot water, and borrowing my mother's nail file, I cleaned the crusted watercolors from under my nails. I was pleased with the results. My skin was the same color as before, but I knew I was clean. Clean enough to run my fingers through Susie's fine gold hair when she came home to me. (Ortiz Cofer, "The Story of My Body" 138-9)

When the connotations of the word are taken away in other words, when language is deprived of some of its power through the innocence of the young girl, it no longer is

hurtful. Furthermore, the action here of the speaker washing her hands directly contradicts the hurtful words and the speaker is left reassured that she is worthy of the coveted doll.

b. Language as a Means of Establishing Intimacy

Action alone need not be the only coping mechanism against the ignorance portrayed by language. Language itself can be a means of coping with ignorance. It also serves as a means of establishing relationships and intimacy that also help assuage ignorance and prejudices. For example, in the story "American History," the speaker uses books and reading as the foundation for intimacy between herself and her childhood crush, the boy next door, Eugene (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 7-15). She can see his from his bedroom, and feels that their evenings, although in two different houses, were shared because of their mutual passion for reading: "I liked my secret sharing of his evenings, especially now that I knew what he was reading" (Ortiz Cofer, "American History" 10). Through the knowledge of which world Eugene immersed himself in the evenings, the speaker felt herself even closer to the boy. Even their time spent in each other's presence, whether in her imagination or in real life, is centered around books. She imagines them growing old together, sipping on coffee and talking about books in their kitchen. Even their first "date," or the first time they planned to spend time together outside of their school environment involved books: "He had asked me to come over after school to study for an American history test with him. We had also planned to walk to the public library together" (Ortiz Cofer "American History" 13). Their bond existed around knowledge they found in the books, which created the platform, not only for their mutual attraction, but also for the moments of intellectual intimacy they shared.

Not only the protagonist in “American History” uses knowledge and books as a form of intimacy. “Advanced Biology” echoes many of the same sentiments (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 120-129). Judith, the speaker of “Advanced Biology” discusses her relationship with her Ira, “best friend and study partner” (122). She had apparently “chosen” Ira as her boyfriend “because [she] needed tutoring in biology” (122). Thus, even from the beginning, their relationship, platonic or otherwise, was centered upon the pursuit of knowledge. The narrator chooses associations and love interests not based on physical attraction, but on the intellectual gains that could be achieved through the partnership. Knowledge and learning, instead of physical attributes, are paired with the sexual:

No one that I knew in school thought that Ira was attractive, but his brains had long ago overshadowed his looks as his most impressive attribute. Like Ira, I was a straight A student and also considered odd because I was one of the few Puerto Ricans on the honor roll. So it didn’t surprise anyone that Ira and I had drifted toward each other. Though I could not have articulated it then, Ira was seducing me with his No. 2 pencil and the laboratory photograph of his fetal pig” (Ortiz Cofer, “Advanced Biology” 123).

Their academic commonalities, more so than the way they looked brought them together and sparked the attraction between the two. The metaphor of erotic captivation and learning continues. When they discuss biology, he uses “the seductive language of the scientific laboratory” to explain the human reproductive system (Ortiz Cofer, “Advanced Biology” 124). For Judith, sex and seduction are the subjects she and Ira study together, both in the intellectual and, to a more limited and metaphorical sense, the physical senses. Their discussion about the lack of God, another foray into the logical intellectual world, is

described as “the last shred of [her] innocence” falling away, once again juxtaposing the gaining of knowledge with sex (Ortiz Cofer, “Advanced Biology” 125). Thus, books and knowledge, even in its most academic sense, serve as a substitute for more physical representations of intimacy.

The intimacy that is provided in the written word is not limited to carnal intimacy between young couples. One example of this can be found in the essay “Not for Sale” (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 16-21). In this work, the speaker talks about how, as a younger girl, her father “had spent hours every evening playing with me and reading to me in Spanish” (Ortiz Cofer, “Not for Sale” 19). Their time together, spent both playing but also in reading together, established a close bond between them, one that no longer exists when these activities together wane. As with Eugene and with Ira, the connection fades when the exchange of knowledge and the sharing of books stop. When the language connection is no longer present, the foundation for their intimacy fades away, and with it the closeness of the relationship.

However, the use of books and words as a form of intimacy is also, to an extent, a double-edged sword. In “Absolution in the New Year,” a new way of seeing words is introduced: words as a form of escape and catharsis (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 39-40). In the poem, the speaker’s father finds her diary and reads it. Her written words are what her father finds when he searches for “evidence / of a secret other life” (Ortiz Cofer, “Absolution in the New Year” 11-12). The speaker explains to her father how she felt as he read her private thoughts:

I suffered²⁴

²⁴ This indentation is meant to mirror the indentation found in the original poem.

biblical torments as you turned the pages. Unworthy,
exposed before your eyes, I wondered where
I would go, if you should cast me out
of your garden of thorns, but I swore, that day
my faith to the inviolable self (Ortiz Cofer, "Absolution in the New Year" 20-
25)

While her diary was her own form of catharsis, it came with its own dangers. Written down, the speaker's emotionally bare ramblings could be read, and that reading brings with it the risk of exposure and humiliation. However, the catharsis of words is too great to give up. Even as she awaited her father's judgment, she knew that she had to remain faithful to herself and to her drive to write. The speaker therefore finds a way around such humiliation: "To this day / I cannot leave my notebooks open anywhere: / and I hide my secrets in poems" (Ortiz Cofer, "Absolution in the New Year" 32-34). She still uses the written words as a talisman to protect herself; however, her effort to hide these same words suggests that there is shame within these words and to avoid that embarrassment, she must protect them. Nevertheless, the shame is not enough to abandon the telling of her story; the catharsis is more powerful than possible disgrace.

The speaker's words, when offered, do come to serve as a form of intimacy. As an adult, more understanding of her father's motives in reading her diary, she exhibits her forgiveness of her father:

If I could travel to your grave today,
I'd take my books of poetry as an offering
to your starved spirit

that fed on my dreams in those days (Ortiz Cofer, "Absolution in the New Year" 41-44).

As with Ferré, language can be consumed, although for Ortiz Cofer, the nourishment is not linguistic, but rather more powerful, as it feeds the spirit, not just the tongue or stomach. She describes her offering to her father as "like a Chinese daughter who brings a bowl of rice / and a letter to set on fire – a message / to be delivered by the wind..." (Ortiz Cofer, "Absolution in the New Year" 48-50). Offered freely, these words serve as a form of forgiveness and, as suggested in the title, absolution, for her father's prior humiliation. It serves to recreate the bond that can otherwise not be forged because of her father's death. She directs the end of the poem directly to him:

... Father,

here is more for you to read.

Take all you desire of my words. Read

until you've had your fill.

Then rest in peace" (Ortiz Cofer, "Absolution in the New Year" 50-54)

The words, the daughter's poetry, are meant not only to absolve, but also to sustain and fulfill. Their power lies in their ability not only to bring the two, father and daughter, together, but also to nourish and comfort both, her in a means of catharsis, him as nourishment for a "starved spirit" (Ortiz Cofer, "Absolution in the New Year" 43).

As with Ferré and, to a lesser extent, Umpierre-Herrera, there is a certain intimacy established and surrounded by the use of one language over the other in *The Latin Deli*. However, while in Ferré and Umpierre-Herrera, the language associated with intimacy is clearly Spanish, this is not always the case in for Ortiz Cofer, perhaps because of the wide

variety of protagonists within the work. Each of the different protagonists and speakers has a different relationship with Spanish and English. For example, for the protagonist in “American History,” who grew up and was raised primary in the United States, Spanish is a language that holds her back, preventing her from taking honors classes, not because her English was not good enough, simply because it didn’t come first (Ortiz Cofer 9). However, as a whole, the work does portray a sense of intimacy with Spanish and with Puerto Rico as a homeland. The language is not only one often seen with affection by its speakers, but often establishes quick intimacy between two people. This is particularly clear in the opening poem of the work, “The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica” (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 3-4). The poem describes a neighborhood café and in particular the woman who runs the market, who is portrayed as a mother figure, a source of comfort for the many Hispanic immigrants who frequent her store. The poem describes how and why the patrons speak to her:

all wanting the comfort
of spoken Spanish, to gaze upon the family portrait
of her plain wide face, her ample bosom
resting on her plump arms, her look of maternal interest
as they speak to her and each other
of their dreams and their disillusion (Ortiz Cofer, “The Latin Deli: An Ars
Poetica” 18-23)

The speaker of the poem establishes the good feelings associated with speaking Spanish, as well as the idea that Spanish speakers are, in some ways, members of the same family. The woman at the Latin Deli represents the mother, the figure that brings all of her children, all

those who speak Spanish, together under one roof. In the article “Active and Passive Citizenship in Emma Lazarus’s “The New Colossus” and Judith Ortiz Cofer’s “The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica,” author Daniel Morris compares the shopkeeper to Lazarus’s Lady Liberty. He makes a key distinction, however, in the fact that Lazarus’s Lady Liberty distances herself from the immigrants, while Ortiz Cofer’s shopkeeper is part of them, particularly linguistically:

What the patroness adds [to the deli] is also what separates her from the Lazarus Liberty figure: the dialogic, interactive, and linguistic unassimilability of her relationship to the exiles. It challenges the “them-ing” of the exiles and provides an inadequate but nonetheless desirable locus of empathetic caring (rather than sympathetic noblesse oblige). (Morris 295-296)

The language here is the key difference. The shopkeeper speaks their language, and encourages it in her shop. There they have safe harbor there to use their native tongue, also to make themselves vulnerable by divulging their hopes and the realities of their lives in the United States. Thus, words can serve as a coping mechanism by establishing intimacy with others who use the same tongue to communicate, as well as among those with similar experiences.

Words need not be limited to merely the academic and the written form to establish their importance. As we see in “The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica,” the spoken language also establishes considerable intimacy, and oral storytelling serves as an important part of the work overall. For example, “The Witch’s Husband” is centered around the story that the grandmother tells the speaker (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 42-49). The grandmother asks

her granddaughter if she would like to hear a story, a pleasant surprise for the speaker, who admits, "These were the same words that stopped me in my tracks as a child, even in the middle of a tantrum" (Ortiz Cofer, "The Witch's Husband" 44). The oral tales of her grandmother hold so much power that they can stall any emotion, even the uncontrollable anguish represented in a child's tantrum. Stories need not have been written down to hold meaning and to influence those who hear them. Oral narratives hold as much power as the printed books in the Paterson Public Library. In an interview with Edna Acosta-Bélen, Ortiz Cofer cites the importance of storytelling in her family, both as a form of empowerment and of coping:

So early on, I instinctively knew storytelling was a form of empowerment, that the women in my family were passing on power from one generation to another through fables and stories. They were teaching each other how to cope with life in a world where women led restricted lives. (Acosta-Bélen "A MELUS Interview" 86).

Thus, Ortiz Cofer cites oral storytelling as one way to cope with a specific aspect of the realities of life as a Puerto Rican Woman. "The Witch's Husband" expands on that coping mechanism to one that brings together the two women, storyteller and speaker and creates a bond of understanding not possible without the narrative. The grandmother tells the story of a young witch whose husband follows her on her nightly flight and is punished for following his wife. The story echoed the grandmother's own flight to New York as a younger woman, and the love and trust of the grandfather overpowered that of the husband in the story, and not only exemplifies the female empowerment Ortiz Cofer speaks to the love between the real-life grandparent couple, but also is influential and moving to

the person who heard it. The speaker was able to understand her grandmother's resolve to care for her husband, despite her own failing health, and resolved herself to stand by her grandmother's decision. The mutual agreement of both women, reached and understood because of the story exchange, also creates a bond. Like the books between the young girls and Ira and Eugene, the story becomes a verbal form of emotional intimacy between the speaker and her grandmother throughout both their lives.

As a final note, it is important to note that not only language, but also sometimes silence, the absence of language, can also serve to lay the foundation for personal connections. At the end of "The Story of My Body," the author describes how she, due to her heritage, was rejected for a date with a boy she was highly attracted to in high school. Instead of language serving as a means of sympathy, the silence is described with the same sympathy. The narrator states, "Nobody said anything," and after the date is called off, the woman tells how her mother did not bring it up again or point out that she had been right and the gratitude that the subject felt at her parents reaction: "And I remember my parents' respect for my pain and their gentleness toward me that weekend. My mother did not say 'I warned you,' and I was grateful for her understanding silence" (Ortiz Cofer, "The Story of My Body" 146). For Ortiz Cofer, language is so versatile, that the way it is transmitted is unimportant to its utility. Silence, the absence of language, is more sympathetic and caring than language would be in this instance, and thus establishes the same level of intimacy that spoken or written language has in other contexts.

c. Language as a Coping Mechanism for Personal Troubles

Lastly, the final way in which language serves as a means of coping develops when personal troubles are introduced. Through the use of poetry and creative essay, we can see

much of Ortiz Cofer's own turmoil, presented both individually and universally. Ortiz Cofer's attachment to Puerto Rico is not deterred by her largely American upbringing, as Janet Pérez stresses in her article "Biculturalismo, resistencia y asimilación":

Sus escritos evocan la importancia obsesiva de la cultura y herencia puertorriqueñas en su formación, y recuerdan el impacto para ella y su hermano menor de saberse siempre diferentes, marginales, en el ambiente que fuera, puesto que por ser bilingües y biculturales, les tildaban de imperfecciones en ambas esferas." (Pérez 279)

Despite her love of Puerto Rico, its influence on her significantly impacted her as she grew up, always by making her a cultural pariah. While racism is not a central theme as it is with Umpierre-Herrera, there are multiple instances of racism in daily life within the work, because it is a daily experience not only for her, but also for her characters. It can start as early as childhood, and can be as simple as access to classes. The speaker in "American History," for example, is denied access to honors classes "because English was not [her] first language, though [she] was a straight A student" (Ortiz Cofer 9). Her academic opportunities are closed, not because she herself, or even her English skills, are unable or somehow lacking, but because she did not speak English first and foremost. This subtle discrimination and culture clash is also described in "The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named María," where, in addition to the experiences already mentioned, the protagonist describes how her Puerto Rican way of dressing, with colorful and loud clothing, often made her feel isolated and out of sync with her more conservatively dressed white classmates and teachers:

I remember Career Day in our high school, when teachers told us to come dressed as if for a job interview. It quickly became obvious that to the barrio girls, “dressing up” sometimes meant wearing ornate jewelry and clothing that would be more appropriate (by mainstream standards) for the company Christmas party than for daily office attire. (Ortiz Cofer, “The Myth of the Latin Woman” 149)

“The Story of My Body” also talks about the various ways that the speaker’s looks made her feel inconsistent with those around her, from her darker skin, to her five foot stature, to her overall Puerto Rican and Hispanic appearance, all of which caused her to experience prejudice that other, white friends or colleagues of hers never knew. Both of these stories, “The Story of My Body” as much as “The Myth of the Latin Woman” highlight ways in which the narrator’s culture, appearance, and language attributed to the struggles that she had to face on a routine basis.

Not only is there racism involved in daily life, but there is also a hierarchy of minorities. Racism is not limited to just disdain that whites show to minorities, but something that minorities use against each other to improve their own self-worth and cope with the discrimination that they too experience. For example, in the story “American History,” the speaker, a young Puerto Rican girl, is “taking a lot of abuse from the black girls for not turning the rope hard and fast enough for them” (Ortiz Cofer 7). The young black girls ridicule the speaker, pointing to her lack of athletic ability and taunting her with jokes about stereotypical Boricua foods. The Puerto Rican girl is left humiliated and envious of the black girls:

I felt a burning on my cheeks, and then my glasses fogged up so that I could not manage to coordinate the jump rope with Gail. The chill was doing to me what it always did, entering my bones, making me cry, humiliating me . . . I envied the black girls who could jump rope so fast that their legs became a blur. (Ortiz Cofer, "American History" 8)

The girl is left feeling out of place even amongst other minorities who, at least in Paterson, New Jersey, have higher social standing than she does.

"The Paterson Public Library" also explores this idea of prejudice between racial minorities (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 130-134). The child narrator also has conflict with a young black student, Lorraine, in her classes, describing the "hostility" between the two of them as "inevitable" (Ortiz Cofer, "The Paterson Public Library" 131). Because the adult narrator recounts the events years later as she reflects on her childhood, she is able to explore the dynamics between the two, commenting on the "politics of race" that the two races are forced to face because of "the awful reality of the struggle for territory that underscored the lives of blacks and Puerto Ricans in Paterson" (Ortiz Cofer, "The Paterson Public Library" 132). Just as in "American History" there is a hierarchy of minorities, but that hierarchy is reestablished and revised on a daily basis, through a constant struggle for land, jobs and respect. Subconsciously, even the two young girls understand the importance of claiming a territory as their own and the conflicts that arise when there is clashing over the rights to claiming a territory as home.

(a) Book Learning and Reading

Despite and in the midst of this racism, the speaker underscores the importance of language as a means of surviving. Often this is done through the written word, particularly

when read. Perhaps the most explicit story in which the author discusses the importance of books as a means of escape comes in “The Paterson Public Library.” The speaker, an adult looking back on her childhood, discusses the undeniable influence that reading, books and libraries, had on her as a child, a feeling that held strong throughout the speaker’s adult life. She opens the story with a description of the building itself:

It was a Greek temple in the ruins of an American city . . . Enough marble was used in its contraction to have kept several Michelangelos busily satisfied for a lifetime. Two roaring lions, taller than a grammar school girl, greeted those brave enough to seek answers there. Another memorable detail about the façade of this important place to me was the phrases carved deeply into the walls – perhaps the immortal words of the Greek philosophers (Ortiz Cofer, “The Paterson Public Library” 130)

These architectural descriptions infuse the building with a mythical, religious symbolism. The library represents a form of sanctuary and becomes her religious temple. Indeed, as a grown woman, she admits that books “taught [her] to depend on knowledge as [her] main source of security” (Ortiz Cofer, “The Paterson Public Library” 133). She also says, “I read to escape and also to connect: you can come back to a book as you cannot always to a person or a place you miss” (Ortiz Cofer, “The Paterson Public Library” 133). For her, books contained abstract ideas and imaginary worlds that ironically allowed her to remain grounded; knowledge was her source of comfort during multiple moves and the prejudice she endured with each move, either because of her race, or simply because of her status as the new girl. Books allowed her to learn English quicker, knowledge that helped her succeed where so many like her had not: “Reading books empowered [her]” (Ortiz Cofer,

“The Paterson Public Library” 134). They were also a means of escape, to get away from a world she didn’t feel comfortable in. Thus, the public library was seen not only as a temple, but also as a sanctuary. The speaker freely admits that books “represent [her] spiritual life” (Ortiz Cofer, “The Paterson Public Library” 134). The Catholicism with which she was raised was second to the religion she was forced to find as a child, the religion she found in the knowledge and inherent escape of her books.

Despite the racism that is portrayed in various sections, “The Paterson Public Library” also introduces the trope of Cinderella. In the speaker’s childhood, she fell in love not only with the knowledge and facts she found within the books, but also with fairy tales. One of the most lasting impressions she gained from those tales was the universality of the tales, but how each culture also somehow managed to remain loyal to its own ideals and culture when narrating their own version:

Here I discovered that there is a Cinderella in every culture, that she didn’t necessarily have the white skin and rosy cheeks Walt Disney had given her, and that the prince they all waited for could appear in any color, shape or form. The prince didn’t even have to be a man.” (Ortiz Cofer, “The Paterson Public Library” 131-2)

This concept of a Cinderella in every culture introduces the idea that there is beauty in every culture, although “white skin and rosy cheeks” might be neither the norm nor even desirable (Ortiz Cofer, “The Paterson Public Library” 132). Despite the prejudice and discrimination that the various speakers in *The Latin Deli* experienced, they too are beautiful in their own culture. Furthermore, it introduces the idea that all young girls desire and wait for something, their own concept of the prince, yet another means of

uniting rather than separating. This prince may not always be handsome to all; as with female standards of beauty, men may only be considered attractive in some cultures. But this desire does not always have to be for a man. Indeed, the story in which the speaker discusses Cinderella implies that the speaker's own prince is not a person at all, but rather the books that she turns to for escape and knowledge. By introducing this trope, the speaker emphasizes that, although her own appearance may cause prejudice against her, her reading helped her overcome the distress of being considered different. Not only was the act of reading cathartic in itself, but also by reading things like the Cinderella story across many cultures, her reading at times directly addresses the specific cause of her prejudice and allowed her the means of coping by battling her own ignorance.

(b) Producing Language

Although language produced by others to be more passively consumed does serve as a means of great comfort, the act of producing one's own language is also seen as cathartic. In "Absolution in the New Year," mentioned above, Ortiz Cofer speaks to the purification inherent in writing in her diary, as well as the importance of the secrets hidden in poems for much of her life. Perhaps more poignant, however is her description of the creative act in "5 AM: Writing as a Ritual" (Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli* 166-168). In the essay, Ortiz Cofer describes how she came to realization that there was a void in her life:

There was something missing in my life that I came close to only when I turned to my writing, when I took a break from my thesis research to write a poem or an idea for a story on the flip side of an index card. It wasn't until I traced this feeling to its source that I discovered both the cause and the answer to my frustration: I needed to write. (Ortiz Cofer, "5 AM" 166)

She claimed that, despite a comfortable lifestyle, a job teaching that she was content with, and “all the things that [her] women friends found sufficiently fulfilling in a ‘woman’s life’” she felt “spiritually deprived” (Ortiz Cofer, “5 AM” 167). This void was her writing, and she discovered within herself a drive to share herself through words, which she describes as both “the cause and the answer to [her] frustration” (Ortiz Cofer, “5 AM” 166). This idea that language serves as both a cause and a coping mechanism to problems has arisen in both Ferré and Umpierre-Herrera, and is repeated explicitly here by Ortiz Cofer. According to Ortiz Cofer, her writing, particularly poetry, was “demanding a place in [her] life” (Ortiz Cofer, “5 AM” 167). She describes the need to use her language not only as an explicit need, but also as her “storytelling impulse” (Ortiz Cofer, “5 AM” 167). The word “impulse” indicates that not only was writing necessary to her, but it was also instinctual, something that her mind and her soul told her were essential to her being. Finally, she discusses the result of actually taking the time to write. Her writing serves as a form of empowerment to her, giving her the “feeling that [she is] in control” (Ortiz Cofer, “5 AM” 168). Therefore, her writing allowed her not only to scratch the itch that she felt throughout her graduate years and beyond, but also to establish a routine of writing that allowed her, despite the ignorance and prejudice of others, to take control of her own life for the better.

Conclusion

In *The Latin Deli*, language is often described as cathartic, and is much more explicitly, at least compared to Ferré and Umpierre-Herrera, a coping mechanism. However, the ways that language comes to serve as a means of battling with daily pressures is more complex in Ortiz Cofer. First of all, language often is used to cope with

the ignorance that harsh words and stereotypes can communicate. However, it also serves almost the opposite purpose as well, as a means of establishing intimacy, either by the love of learning and reading shared by two people, by the familial ties of a particular language over another, or by the stories passed down over generations. Finally, language explicitly becomes an escape from daily troubles; it can fill a void within us, and did fulfill a need within Ortiz Cofer, that allowed that the general anxieties of life became softer, less urgent as one of her primal needs, that of communicating her story through words, both prose and lyric, was fulfilled. Thus, language here, as well as the reasons for exploiting it, becomes more a personal form of coping, although it is equally as valid and satisfying as in the other two authors of this thesis.

Conclusion

“The sole end of literature should be to enable the reader better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.”

-Samuel Johnson

Language can and often does have an intensely cathartic element. Despite the fact that language is often a source of discrimination for those in the minority, it also can be manipulated to the advantage of the speaker or writer. Being bilingual can amplify the possibilities of language become a positive influence, just as the act of writing increases the beneficial effect of language. All three authors examined in this thesis have developed this advantageous relationship with language. Ferré defines language the most traditionally of the three poets, talking about language in terms of Spanish and English. She argues in favor of bilingualism or multilingualism, and of the acceptance of both languages side by side instead of cultural monolingualism. Umpierre broadens the definition of language to that of general communication but in many other ways takes the opposite approach as Ferré in that she clings to her Puerto Rican Spanish dialect as a means of establishing her identity amongst the prejudice she personally experienced upon coming to the United States. Ortiz Cofer most explicitly defines language, both oral and written, as a coping mechanism, both as an escape from stressors and as a way of bringing people together and creating intimacy between people or within groups.

The question arises when considering coping mechanism as to whether or the coping mechanism is actually effective in *resolving* the trauma that the authors, or the groups they represent, experienced. I have already described how language can be used as an effective coping mechanism and how writing can be beneficial, but this does not answer whether or not this coping mechanism actually resolves anything. In the study published in

the article, "Leisure as a Coping Mechanism," the author, Jacqueline Specht quotes others when she says that, "Lazurus and Folkman (1984) identified coping as a process. This view is still the one currently held in the field of psychological coping" (188). This quote and view of coping as a process, within the psychological community is an important one to consider. Just as no one action can allow an individual to cope comprehensively with his or her stressors, no one poem or collection can serve to achieve total catharsis from a lifetime of damaging experiences. This is further emphasized by the fact that each of these writers have created and published more than a single work: Ferré and Ortiz Cofer in particular have multiple collections of both prose and poetry to their name, published over a span of more than ten years. All of these works suggest that, for these poets, writing is a multi-step progression of coping that continues over a long period of time. It helps manage the strain of prejudice in their lives temporarily, but over time, as the prejudice continues to the same, lesser or greater degree, the need for redemption and a survival mechanism returns, and these three must sit down again to produce their healing fictions.

This need for a coping mechanism that all three authors felt combined with the idea of coping as a process does not necessarily mean that these three authors start as utterly broken down and are then forced to struggle to regain normality in their lives. The purpose of this thesis is not to be so negative about the Latino/a or the Boricua experience. It is true that these three authors, in publicly presenting their creative productions, assume the responsibility of representing in many ways a common Puerto Rican experience of marginalization and discrimination, although that process of turning a group into pariahs comes in different forms and varying degrees for every individual. However, this act of writing and exploring the collective experience of a group should be seen in a positive light.

These wordsmiths give voice to a group that, because of their language and culture, have been denied a space to make their words public. Their creations, like those of any other Hispanic writer, may not be revolutionary but do exploit a negative experience by capsizing it into a positive release, a constructive process to triumph over trauma and injustice. These books are not bitter attempts to overcome the insurmountable; they are celebrations of three individuals in their culture and lifestyle that help them to overcome the casting away that society has tried, unsuccessfully, to accomplish.

I have mentioned many times the inseparable ties that exist between the United States and Puerto Rico, both culturally and, to a lesser extent, linguistically. All three authors have also spent considerable time in the United States, and all use English to some extent in their work. Ortiz Cofer stands out among these three in particular for her preference for English as well as for her extensive time spent living and growing up in the United States. The question then arises as to how this thesis fits within the Spanish or Hispano-American cannon. An argument could be made, more strongly for Ferré and for Ortiz Cofer that these poets are not so much Hispanic writers as US Latina writers, and the placement of US Latino writers in general within established cannons has presented issue before. The immediate impulse is to place works in Spanish into the Hispanic cannon, while works in English fit into the US cannon. However, the nature of the three works examined in this thesis, which are all bilingual in unique ways, help to prove that boundaries cannot be so clearly delineated. A different argument places the loyalties and the culture of the authors over the language used to convey their stories. In this manner, Ferré, Umpierre and Ortiz Cofer are more clearly Latina. Each has a strong affinity for their Puerto Rican homeland and the culture of that island, although their fondness manifests at different

levels and in different ways, which speaks to their Hispanic heritage. Ilan Stavans and the rest of the editors of the 2011 *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* also validate each of these authors as part of the Latino, Spanish American canon by including each of these authors in the anthology. The anthology is also published in English, further suggesting that the language is one of the lesser considerations when classifying a work as either in the Hispanic or American canon. Either way, there is no reason why any work cannot fit into multiple canons simultaneously. Indeed, the hybrid nature of each of these works might suggest their flexibility in canon placement.

Considering both the psychological evidence of the benefits of writing about suffering or the characterization of coping as an extended process, it would be disingenuous to assume these works are singular in their usefulness as mechanisms of grappling stress. An expansion of this study could easily include other works in the repertoire of these authors to examine the consistency with which these authors view and manipulate their work to help them surmount their struggles. Furthermore, this work has studied a very limited subset of Latino writers, three female writers all from Puerto Rico, all bilingual, and all having spent considerable time in both Puerto Rican and the United States. While these three have similar experiences about which they comment, their experience, while representative of a larger group, cannot be so all-encompassing as to be an appropriate model for all Latinos, regardless of country of origin, sexual orientation, gender, age, or language. Another amplification of this thesis could study a broader group of Latinos, examining how, or to what extent other groups of Hispanics, bilingual or not, use their own particular language as a way to cope with their own unique struggles in life.

The epigraph that I have chosen to introduce this section speaks to how literature affects the reader. Johnson notes how reading has a helpful effect on the reader – not only does she enjoy what she is consuming, but she also takes away something cathartic from the text. Ortiz Cofer speaks to this use of language in *The Latin Deli*. However, Johnson only considers one half of the language exchange. Not only does the reader get a sense of renewal from a work, but also the writer gains some of the same benefits. Writing for a poet, author, essayist, or playwright, is not merely the act of communicating their ideas to an audience. This public sphere plays a huge part on the work, but the private sphere, where the work is originally created and inspired, cannot be forgotten either. Just as the reader uses a given work to endure the stresses of life, so does the writer in creating it. Language is versatile, especially when the speaker has access to two language systems. This versatility and power allows language and creative production to provide a powerful coping mechanism against life and the attacks it delivers against us on a daily basis.

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