

## **Playing María Sabida and María La Loca:**

### **My Personal Creative Non-Fiction Commentary on Judith Ortiz Cofer**

**By Rafael Ocasio**

The Latina-Puertorriqueña writer Judith Ortiz Cofer has developed her own style within the genre of creative non-fiction essays. These prose pieces stand out as items complementary to poems and short stories in an intra-textual process that provides elements for a rather cohesive, multi-thematic autobiography. In addition to the autobiographical data, the essays are grounded in a feminist viewpoint in which Ortiz Cofer discusses political strategies for women, particularly for women of color.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I intend to point out autobiographical elements in two of Ortiz Cofer's creative non-fiction essays, "Tales Told Under the Mango Tree" and "The Woman Who Slept with One Eye Open," as strategic and concrete defensive tools within the realm of feminist activism. Unlike in traditional critical essays, part of my argumentation is based on my own life experiences, partially organized as my own critical version of a creative non-fiction piece.

As for any good story, a personal anecdote led to conception of this paper. Physically, I started writing this essay in Williams, northern Arizona, where I had gone with some friends to visit the south rim of the Grand Canyon. For my earlier published articles or books, the inspiration was literary writers or their fictional characters, but for this one it was a single "real life" episode in which I, and others, became involved. We were, as in the Spanish phrase, "personas de carne y hueso"; flesh and bone people, turned into characters.

I am a Puertorriqueño. For twenty-three years I have taught Spanish and Latin American literature and film courses at a liberal arts private college for women. Now I am passing time pretending to be another tourist in this small, dusty town. I can't stop thinking about the historic importance of this area, a subject matter of my favorite course on Latin American and Latino cultures at Agnes Scott College.

"Hey, hold on," you may be thinking to yourself, "You had promised us a good story." The moment that "me puso de patas arriba"; "knocked me head over heels," as the popular Puerto Rican phrase goes, took place after a disturbing statement from one of my friends while we were eating at a Mexican restaurant: "Illegal aliens in this country are responsible for the depressed condition of the U.S. economy. They drain the financial resources by not paying taxes while enjoying free rides, such as receiving treatment in emergency rooms."

In my effort to find a suitable reply to this thorny remark, which perhaps has no definite answer, or at least none that will be agreeable to all parties involved, I thought of an essay by Ortiz Cofer, "The Woman Who Slept with One Eye Open: Notes on Being a Writer." Published as part of a collection co-edited by Ortiz Cofer and Marilyn Kallet, *Sleeping with One Eye Open: Women Writers and the Art of Survival*. Ortiz Cofer's piece introduces essays by women writers who comment mainly on their roles as writers. They also address the condition of being women writers, which often informs their literary production and, ultimately, their views on the role of literature written by women as a vehicle for social change. In one interview Ortiz Cofer spoke to me about the relevance of this project to her as a feminist activist:

Basically, the most interesting part of that project was that my essay has a particular focus and that the responses we got were very individual

because the book was subtitled “On The Art of Survival.” We were asking writers to “tell us what main impediments or obstacles they had in fulfilling the need to write or to become artists.” The range was really wide, it was from depression to childbearing to demanding jobs, mates. I feel that we gave each woman a way and a reason to communicate to others how to maintain her right to declare herself an artist no matter what was happening in her life. The comments I get from women as I travel are that they found one of the essays particularly helpful, “I suffer from depression, so this one article has helped me.”<sup>ii</sup>

What struck me as most interesting, however, in Ortiz Cofer’s “The Woman Who Slept with One Eye Open...” is the piece’s unusual lead character, an example of feminist activism.

The (pre)text in “The Woman Who Slept with One Eye Open...” is a story of María Sabida, a popular character from Puerto Rican folktale and often a protagonist of Ortiz Cofer’s grandmother’s didactic cuentos; stories, intended for women listeners. Ortiz Cofer heard these tales as a child, before and after her family moved to Paterson, New Jersey. María Sabida, as a character, first appeared in her early creative non-fiction piece “Tales Told Under the Mango Tree.” Published in *Silent Dancing*, it was part of her homage to the influence of Ortiz Cofer’s abuela’s “cuentos” on her development as a writer.

“Tales Told Under the Mango Tree” has a particular autobiographical importance. In it Ortiz Cofer remembers that as a child she began developing her own versions of María Sabida’s adventures. The one that Ortiz Cofer recalls in this piece is María Sabida as a witty child. The stories, as Ortiz Cofer states in “The Woman Who Slept with One Eye Open...,” are significant: “These cuentos have been surfacing in my poems and my prose since I decided to translate them for myself and to use them as my palette, the primary colors from which all creation begins” (3). The fictional María Sabida becomes

not only a literary interpretation, but, as I argue here, an unlikely model of feminist behavior.

The story is relatively simple and brief: María Sabida was “the smartest woman on the whole island” (3). Her *maña*—that almost untranslatable quality—her natural wit—lands for her an unusual husband: the leader of “a gang of killers, kidnappers, and thieves that had been terrorizing the countryside for years” (5). An important part of the plot includes such details as how María Sabida came to meet the unlikely *galán*. (Ortiz Cofer does not mention the name of this “leading man” nor does she say whether he was handsome.) The remaining part of the action line stresses how María Sabida managed to tame a man so aggressive that he literally eats “arms and legs of little children” for supper! (5). By chance, María Sabida and a group of women friends discovered the hideout of the thieves, who apprehended them and drugged them with “*higos de sueño*, sleep-inducing figs” (5) that all of them ate except, of course, the “Know-it-All” María Sabida. Because the robber believed her asleep, María Sabida caught him off guard and physically defeated him, awakening the “sleeping beauty” friends, who fled to the safety of their *pueblo*.

To her father’s surprise, María Sabida asks his permission to marry this terrible man who had almost killed her. There is no mention of her mother, not even a reference to her death. Her father accepted María Sabida’s request, perhaps because, knowing that his daughter is, after all, the “smartest woman on the whole island,” he assumed that she must certainly have a plan. And, indeed, she did. The wedding took place in a social event that was celebrated with “a great *fiesta*.” “Everyone in the *pueblo* hoped that María Sabida would reform this criminal and they could stop fearing his gang” (5). The master

thief, now a newlywed, had, however, another plan in mind. He boldly announced to María Sabida that after the fiesta he would kill her.

How María Sabida's *maña* produced a plan of action to escape her death is central to the story's message. The husband, "drunk and ready for blood" (6) locked her up in the wedding bedroom and promised her that he would be back to kill her. Before he left, María Sabida asked him for one last wish: to go into the kitchen to get some honey. The wish granted, she went into the kitchen and started making with burlap bags a life-sized doll, very real because she had cut "some of her own hair to glue on its head" (6). For a heart, María Sabida gave the doll some honey.

As promised, the irate husband came back for bloody revenge. There was not much foreplay. (I suspect that this can be a result of Judith's *abuela's* censorship of sexual details.) The mean husband meant business. Immediately upon entering the room, "He struck the honey-doll, thinking that it was María Sabida" (6). After screaming and insulting the María Sabida look-alike doll, the thief stabbed its heart, at which point a stream of honey sprayed his mouth. Tasting the sweetness of María Sabida's "blood," he immediately repented: "'María Sabida, how sweet you are in death, how bitter in life. If I had known your blood contained such sweetness, I would not have killed you" (6). María Sabida came out from hiding immediately after hearing this unusual statement of love. Hey, this is the best you will get from a drunk murderer! The surprised thief begged for forgiveness, but, curiously, María Sabida did not answer him. The narrator simply states that "María Sabida embraced her husband. They lived happily together" (6). In the opinion of an omniscient narrator, however, there is a possibility that María Sabida's happiness was incomplete: "But on that night of her wedding, and every other night,

María Sabida slept with one eye open” (6). This is the last sentence of the story and, as in the traditional folktale, the moral of the fable.

In the remaining part of the essay, Ortiz Cofer abandons her role as folk narrator to become the interpreter of the story, giving it a strong feminist message:

On the surface the cuento of María Sabida may be interpreted as a parable of how a good woman conquers and tames a bad man. In the Spanish cultures, with their Holy Mother Mary mystique, the role of the woman as spiritual center and guide in a marriage is a central one. Men were born to sin; women, to redeem. But as a writer, I choose to interpret the tale of the woman who outmaneuvers the killer, who marries him so that she does not have to fear him, as a metaphor for the woman/creator. The assassin is the destroyer of ambition, drive, and talent—the killer of dreams. It does not have to be a man. It is anything or anyone who keeps the artist from her work. (7)

Although she does not make her point clear, I am assuming that the above interpretation would have departed from her grandmother’s intention in telling the folk story in the first place. Perhaps, as Ortiz Cofer mentions, for Mamá the moral of the story, could have been, “On the surface the cuento of María Sabida may be interpreted as a parable of how a good woman conquers and tames a bad man” (7). Ultimately, Ortiz Cofer, as a feminist literary critic, makes María Sabida an example of how only a *mujer mañosa*; a witty woman can face the potentially lethal strength of the male.

Ortiz Cofer’s character of María Sabida has another interesting angle closely related to the folk tradition that may have inspired it. Two interesting trends seem to be at play simultaneously. The first one is that of the Medieval didactic exemplum, that is the story written as a good example, a lesson to learn from the presence of a master teacher, who serves both as narrator and interpreter of the lesson, very much like Ortiz Cofer’s grandmother’s original cuentos on María Sabida and Ortiz Cofer’s renditions of these stories. Ortiz Cofer’s creative non-fiction piece is unique in that her María Sabida is the

triumphant protagonist of her own story, unlike the plentiful chauvinist examples of aggressive, bad-tempered women, who are often targets of men's cruel and tight control.<sup>iii</sup>

The strong-willed *María Sabida* is briefly contrasted to another prototype of womanhood in Puerto Rican society—*la mujer sufrida*; the long-suffering woman, represented in *María La Loca*, crazy *María*, a homeless woman who wanders around the *pueblo* after having been left standing at the altar on the day of her wedding. This character is part of the moral of Ortiz Cofer's "The Woman Who Slept with One Eye Open." These two stories with contrasting plot lines find themselves connected in a "Chinese box" intratextual narrative style.

*María la Loca* appears as opposite to *María Sabida*. Their gender roles are contrasted as the triumph of *María Sabida*'s *maña* over *María La Loca*'s craziness/passivity. Ortiz Cofer explains in "Tales Under the Mango Tree:" "Her main virtue [*María Sabida*'s] was that she was always alert and never a victim. She was by implication contrasted to *María La Loca*, that poor girl that gave it up, becoming a victim of her own foolish heart" (72-73). There is an obvious contrast between these opposite characters in "The Woman Who Slept With One Eye Open....," *María La Loca* appears as a passive loser: "Once a beautiful girl, *María La Loca* ends up, in my grandmother's cuento, a pitiful woman who retreats into insanity because she is shamed by a man, cheated out of the one option she allowed herself to claim: marriage" (3). *María La Loca* is clearly not Ortiz Cofer's favorite character, judging by the sparse details of her story, in contrast to the detailed narration about *María Sabida*. The surrealist elements in *María*

Sabida's strategy (such as construction of a honey-filled doll) must have appealed to the imaginative mind of the child Judith and to the poetic imagination of the adult poet.<sup>iv</sup>

At the personal level, this paper represents my attempt to face my own María Sabida/María La Loca forces, with which I came to deal during my trip to Arizona. In my conversations with my friends, I did not know how to make honey-filled dolls. Should I have used my wits like María Sabida, or remained silent, eating sleep-inducing figs, ignoring reality altogether, like María La Loca?

These are, in a nutshell, the cultural signifiers that I had in mind as I attempted to provide then an intelligent (academic?) response to my friend's offensive statement about "illegal" immigrants. Then, and still now, I have to refrain from barking at him "una descarga"; a shot. In almost untranslatable Caribbean lingo, "lo pude poner como una tusa,"—"I could chew him up like a cob of corn." That approach, as I now understand, would not have been María Sabida's way of dealing with that situation. How would she have handled herself? What tricks would she have used? This mañana, symbolized in María Sabida's permanently open eye is again central in Mamá's feminist lesson to her mainly women listeners. As Ortiz Cofer points out in "Tales Under the Mango Tree:" "María Sabida became the model Mamá used for the 'prevailing woman'—the woman who 'slept with one eye open'—whose wisdom was gleaned through the senses: from the natural world and from ordinary experiences" (72).

With no tricks up my sleeves I intended, however, to answer my friend's query. Is it true that "illegal" aliens drain the American economy? After all, as he vehemently claimed, he is currently experiencing just that in his own neighborhood, "rundown" and taken over by Mexicans, or is it Guatemalans?—he seems to get them confused. The

scared “whites” are fleeing, as in the so-called “white flight” that affected Atlanta beginning in the mid-sixties and early seventies. They left available to blacks entire neighborhoods in downtown and midtown areas, as scared whites sought refuge in booming suburban areas, comfortably separated from the inner city by a huge beltline, known in Atlanta as I-285. Today these formerly “bad” urban areas are gentrified and have become trendy centers and upscale destinations for Atlanta’s whites. In other areas of the city newly “ethnic” ghettos are being created, such as that of my friend’s formerly white neighborhood.

As I said, I am no sociologist, no expert on urban planning. I know these undocumented facts through other friends, who in the mid-seventies arrived in Atlanta as university students. Like many gays coming into the “big” city from less trendy cities or rural areas, they joined blacks and other social outcasts, gays and other colorful characters, remnants of the hippy era, in these forgotten urban areas. And, yes, my friend, also from a rural town in Georgia, lived in these neighborhoods of social outcasts.

While I am still listening patiently to my friend’s litany of today’s “illegal” immigrants’ uncouth behavior, (you have heard about them: loud music, laundry spread outside the house for everyone to see, cars parked all over, on the curb, on the lawn...), I am wondering about my personal standing in his eyes. If you are a Latino or a member of any marginalized group you may understand what I mean. He must be assuming that I will agree with his point. Otherwise, why bring it up? Will I say in front of women friends something like, “All women are emotional,” if I do not think that they will back me up? Of course, not! Maybe, like María Sabida’s women friends, I have eaten some higos de sueño.

As I began writing this piece about two days after the conversation took place, I was still haunted by others of my friend's statements, such as "illegals refuse to learn English" and "they insist on living in Hispanic ghettos." Did he attempt to separate the "illegals" from "legals"? I was, after all, one of those "legals," who have chosen to spend some time with "true" Americans, such as himself. Unlike his "Mexican" neighbors, I speak good English (well, the "good" part is my interpretation; he has never commented on my English, which is distinctly accented and peppered with grammatical constructions typical of a speaker whose first language is Spanish), and I observe (for the most part) the acceptable (bland?) social behavior of mainstream "white" America. In some way, I have become a *María La Loca*, not quite the "crazy type," but the complying type, the one that has not dared to express disagreement, not even when personally attacked.

Negative stereotypes have been historically a central part of heavily heated arguments among different generations. In the case of my friend, I cannot resist thinking about her own youth in the seventies. I have heard from other friends that, with limited funds, they became part of a colorful hybrid culture: hip and gay—urban and outcast. Even after so many years, they like to remember it perhaps as "the good old days." Of that I am certainly jealous, because as the nerdy graduate student, I was too busy to venture into that "hippie" world. I did not experience those seventies at all. As some of my friends' stories indicate, they fully enjoyed the marginal conditions of those pseudo-ghettoes, which in Atlanta were close to centers of booming gay entertainment centers. These places gave Atlanta a national reputation as a liberal heaven in an otherwise highly structured and racially segregated South. Was that how Atlanta got its motto—"a city too busy to hate"—because they were really busy having a good time? One example will

suffice: one of my friends had the pleasure of meeting performance artist Ru Paul, then not the glamorous drag queen she is today, but a punk transvestite selling homemade cards to supplement her income.

Why was it cool then, in the free-for-all living style of the seventies, to live in these so-called ghettos? Why do the same people who then inhabited those neighborhoods today criticize those who wish to do so? How many white professionals of my friend's age (nearing retirement age and bragging about their good retirement nests) will move into an emerging ethnic neighborhood? At the personal level, why is it that I prefer to live in the comfortable surroundings of my bungalow, white dominated neighborhood? Although there are no large Latino barrios in Atlanta, why do I not live in predominantly black or other ethnic areas, anyway? Will I continue to eat the higos de sueño in order to ignore what goes on around me?

So, although I knew a lot about my friend's background, again, in the Puerto Rican lingo, "sabía de qué pata cojeaba"; I knew on which paw he was limping, I chose not to confront my friend with his generational racist stands. After all, no one likes to be accused of turning into someone like his parents, particularly if the parents belonged to a controversial time period, most specifically that of the segregated South.

I attempted a more historical approach, because, after all, we were in Arizona, part of the Mexican territory "claimed" as American after the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. Did my friend know that Mexico lost roughly fifty percent of its national territory then to the U.S.? No, my friend answered, but that was then and this is now. I knew that my post-colonial defense (I did not name it as such) would fall upon deaf ears. I attempted to explain that Mexican immigration to the United States is closely related to

the imperialist processes that doubled the size of the United States and contributed to its becoming a world power. My friend dismissed my claim that Mexicans are coming back to their former territory, with a Southern saying that I had never heard of: “Well, as my mother used to say, ‘Two wrongs don’t make a right.’”

I knew right then that my other option for a more “nostalgic” approach would also fail. Mexicans are returning to the mythical Aztlán, an area possibly in the American southwest, which the Mexican indigenous nation had left with orders to found what eventually became the home of the great empire known to the Spaniards as Tenochtitlán. My undergraduate students love this story and often quote it as a spiritual reason for the Mexican’s rightful ownership of the American southwest. I suspect this would also be a *María La Loca*’s strategy, because how can someone go crazy from disappointment in love? Would my friend, as a young man coming of age at the end of the hippy era and having witnessed the civil-rights movements--perhaps he even attended segregated schools--have understood the significance of such a myth?

I chose, however, to state facts about imperialism in the making of the modern United States. After all, as a Puerto Rican I know a lot about imperialist practices. “Americans had been, after all, imperialist pigs,” I found myself saying. Was this my *María Sabida*’s strategy finally coming through? Not really. By this point I had lost my academic impartiality. How could I not? I ask you, what would you have answered when confronted with such a statement?: “I would rather pay twenty dollars for a pound of grapes if they are processed by legal immigrants working part-time in the United States.” I had to wonder how much was a Puerto Rican worker paid for his/her time in a sweatshop at the peak of the Puerto Rican immigration into New York City. Were Puerto

Ricans on loan to the United States? Something like, “Come, work for a while and go back to your isla bonita.”

In my reading about imperialism, I tagged Americans as “imperialist pigs.” I stressed that immigrants created the empire that the United States is today, but it also produced many social inequalities abroad. Ok, I know, the idea is a bit overwhelming. The United States of America is responsible for social inequalities abroad? Of course, I was thinking about the many military interventions throughout the twentieth century (Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and most recently, Iraq)—do you want a more comprehensive list? Instead, I spoke about the way my native Puerto Rico became part of that imperialist process, in a “legal” immigration that transformed the Latino community in northeastern states and changed forever the demographics of the island and destabilized the core of the Puerto Rican family.

Ultimately, without statistics to back up a defense for the illegal immigrants, I could not make a concrete statement. In the context of some good friends addressing a controversial issue, another, more important, aspect remained unspoken...the proverbial white elephant in the room: the potentially xenophobic nature of my friend’s original statement and my feeling a lot like a *María Sabida*. Never lose sight of your surroundings, not even while sleeping; you do not know when you will need to defend yourself.

In our interview, Ortiz Cofer equated the paradigm of “ojo abierto”; keep one eye open, to her call for action, addressing in particular women writers who must avoid the temptations of eating the *higos de sueño*: “This is something that my mother still says: ‘¡ojo abierto!’ So I said that is the sacrifice that a woman or any artist has to make. You

can marry the assassin, and it does not mean it is a man, you can take that demanding job, you can give yourself to childcare but ‘¡ ojo abierto!’ because you can use that as an excuse. Just like the women who fell asleep who depended on María Sabida to stay awake.” But, what would it mean to me?

Why do I consider my friend’s statement racist? Just two questions: Who in mainstream United States spoke up when the conditions of the treaty after the Mexican-American War were ignored in order to benefit the white immigration that populated the South West? Who stood up for the rights of Puerto Ricans at the treaty of Paris of 1898, which ended the Spanish American War in favor of the United States? The answer is simple: no one, or at least, if some one did, their names and their actions have remained associated with María La Loca types. I am sure that there have been María Sabidas, because a few of them are visible in the margins of the mainstream in history, literature, political movements, or popular icons. Examples are some Puertorriqueños, such as the poet Julia de Burgos; the political activist, turned-guerrillero Pedro Albizu Campos; the community leader and baseball player Roberto Clemente; and some other patriots who dared to act. However, like María Sabida they had a price to pay—to sleep with one eye open.

While writing this conclusion several months after my trip to Arizona, on May 27, 2008 I met again with Judith Ortiz Cofer in a formal interview. She suggested that perhaps “legal” Americans who came up with anti-immigrant statements suffer from el olvido:

I have a poem called “El Olvido,” (The Forgetting) and thinking about your question, sometimes this entire nation, people who make statements like that in this nation, are victims of el olvido. They forget that this country was founded because of persecution. I have been watching a

fabulous drama on Showtime called “The Tudors”—Henry the VIII was never that sexy, I tell you—but it made me interested in the Reformation and in the fact that the original pilgrims had been Puritans who had been hounded out of Tudor England. The potato famine, World War I and World War II brought waves of immigrants that were willing to do all of this work, and every time that that happened there was an infusion of vitality into the nation, an infusion of people who wanted to work, who needed to work. I really think that everyone here should sit down and think about our origins. Unless they are descendents of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, everyone had to work in this country and everyone took a boat to come over here.

At the end, what I find most striking in Ortiz Cofer’s “The Woman Who Slept With One Eye Open” is the fact that Ortiz Cofer does not seem to be bothered by the physical discomfort of such an unusual necessity. I recognize that this, like other feminist strategies, is a symbol of María Sabida’s distrust of her newlywed, former-thief husband. I am still struck, however, by the image in its graphic context. Does it mean that María Sabida will not find peace, not ever? Will immigrants suffer the same fate?

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> These non-creative fiction essays are often found re-published in anthologies, particularly in volumes dealing with issues on gender and ethnicity in contemporary United States. Some of Ortiz Cofer's essays re-printed in anthologies include: From *Silent Dancing*: "Silent Dancing," *The Best American Essays 1991*, ed. Joyce Carol Oates (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1991), 17-25; "Silent Dancing," *Short Fiction by Hispanic Writers of the United States*, ed. Nicolás Kanellos (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993), 176-184; "Silent Dancing," *In Other Words: Literature by Latinas of the United States*, ed. Roberta Fernández (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994, 308-315; an excerpt of "The Looking-Glass Shame," re-published as "From Silent Dancing," *Great Expectations and Related Readings* (Evanston, Illinois: McDougal Littell, 1998), pp. 651-658; "Talking to the Dead," *Readings in American Religious Diversity*, eds. Jon R. Stone and Carlos R. Piar (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishers Company, 2007), pp. 390-392; "One More Lesson," *Going Where I'm Coming From: Memoirs of American Youth*, ed. Anne Mazer (New York: Persea Books, 1995), pp. 12-17; "First Love," *Hispanic, Female and Young: An Anthology*, ed. Phyllis Tashlik (Houston: Piñata Books Arte Público Press, 1994): 110-116; "Vida," *Hispanic, Female and Young: An Anthology*, ed. Phyllis Tashlik (Houston: Piñata Books Arte Público Press, 1994): 148-155; "María Sabida," *Hispanic, Female and Young: An Anthology*, ed. Phyllis Tashlik (Houston: Piñata Books Arte Público Press, 1994): 159-163. From *The Latin Deli: "American History," Growing Up Ethnic in America: Contemporary Fiction About Learning to Be American*, eds. Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Guillan (New York: Penguin, 1999), 93-102 and *Iguana Dreams: New Latino Fiction*, eds. Delia Poey and Virgil Suarez (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 199-209; "The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria," *Fifty Great Essays*, ed. Robert DiYanni (New York: Longman, 2001), 94-101 and *Women Writing Resistance: Essays on Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Jennifer Browdy de Hernández (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2005), 109-115; "Nada," *Daughters of the Fifth Sun: A Collection of Latina Fiction and Poetry*, eds. Bryce Milligan, May Guerrero Milligan, and Angela de Hoyos, (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), pp.44-57; "Not for Sale," *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue*, eds. Josip Novakovich & Robert Shapard (New York: White Pine Press, 2000), pp. 21-27; "Twist and Shout," *Latina: Women's Voices from the Borderlands*, ed. Lillian Castillo-Seed (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1995), pp. 116-118; "Advanced Biology," *American Identities: Contemporary Multicultural Voices*, eds. Robert Pack and Jay Parini (Hanover: Middlebury College Press, 1994): 5-42.

<sup>ii</sup> This interview took place at the University of Georgia, on May 21, 2008.

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<sup>iii</sup> Such is the case in the tales of the Medieval Spanish writer Don Juan Manuel (1282-1349). His male protagonist in “Lo que sucedió a un mozo que casó con una mujer de muy mal carácter”; What Happened to a Young Man who Married a Woman with a Very Bad Disposition, tames a “woman of bad character,” who as in Ortiz Cofer’s story, has an arranged marriage, but he successfully turns his tigress wife into a tamed kitten.

<sup>iv</sup> The alluring honey-filled doll seems to me an unusual feminist strategy; however, it echoes another iconic literary doll found in the short story “La muñeca menor”; The Youngest Doll, by the Puerto Rican writer and feminist critic Rosario Ferré. This story is also part of the groundbreaking feminist short-story collection *Papeles de Pandora* (1976). In Ferré’s “La muñeca menor,” as in “The Woman Who Slept With One Eye Open,” the honey-filled doll is an integral part of a feminist scheme to seek revenge from the chauvinist power structure.