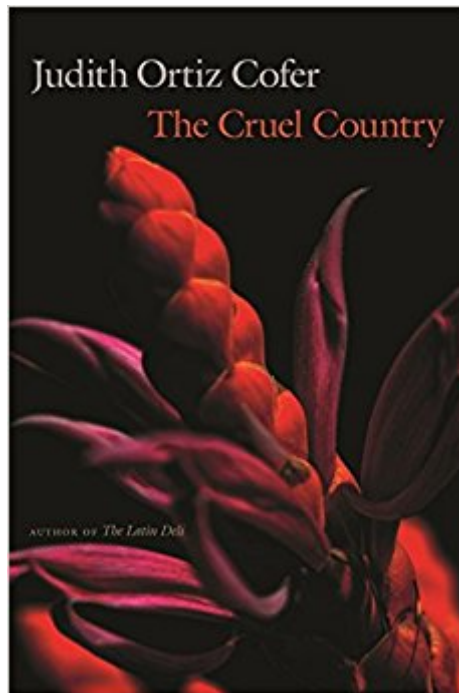




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# The Cruel Country



## Synopsis

“I am learning the alchemy of grief—how it must be carefully measured and doled out, inflicted—but I have not yet mastered this art,” writes Judith Ortiz Cofer in *The Cruel Country*. This richly textured, deeply moving, lyrical memoir centers on Cofer’s return to her native Puerto Rico after her mother has been diagnosed with late-stage lung cancer. Cofer’s work has always drawn strength from her life’s contradictions and dualities, such as the necessities and demands of both English and Spanish, her travels between and within various mainland and island subcultures, and the challenges of being a Latina living in the U.S. South. Interlaced with these far-from-common tensions are dualities we all share: our lives as both sacred and profane, our negotiation of both child and adult roles, our desires to be the person who belongs and also the person who is different. What we discover in *The Cruel Country* is how much Cofer has heretofore held back in her vivid and compelling writing. This journey to her mother’s deathbed has released her to tell the truth within the truth. She arrives at her mother’s bedside as a daughter overcome by grief, but she navigates this cruel country as a writer—an acute observer of detail, a relentless and insistent questioner.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How do we deal with loss? What motivates us to reflect on transience? Judith Ortiz Cofer offers some answers in her marvelous disquisition on pain in this her best book. (Ilan Stavans author of *On Borrowed Words* and editor of *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*) Judith Ortiz Cofer has

done it again: let us into her life and her heart, brilliantly. A must-read for anyone who has lost a parent or straddled two cultures, *The Cruel Country* is a wise and generous memoir of exile, love, and homecoming. (Joy Castro author of *Island of Bones*)

A writer's journey deep into the cruel country of bereavement

I cried, shivered, laughed, and marveled my way through *The Cruel Country* in two days at the beach. I had set it aside to read there, in beauty and relative solitude. I read many parts aloud to my husband. Cofer's gift for portraying the most intense, as well as the seemingly insignificant, moments of her life make this book a blessing for anyone who reads it. Anyone with a mother. Anyone who experiences cultural duality. Anyone who has rejected religion and is surprised to find a spiritual connection. Anyone.

Instead of being depressing as I somewhat expected this book to be, I found it absolutely beautiful, and touching on the deepest of levels. If you have lost anyone close to you, the words of Judith Ortiz Cofer will ring true to you and you will easily be able to identify with her position. The writing in this book is so personal, that I felt like the author was speaking directly to me. Her memories and grief combine together to portray her emotions and to honour the life of someone she clearly held very dear. This book made me stop and think about all of the things we take for granted in our daily lives. It made me think about the relationships we have with those who are closest to us, and helped me to reflect on my life with my own mother. I recommend this book to anyone who is going through the grieving process. *The Cruel Country* is haunting, intelligent and the kind of book that will make you laugh and cry simultaneously. This review is based on a complimentary copy from the publisher. All opinions are my own.

Judith Ortiz Cofer in her latest work, *The Cruel Country*, published by UGP, takes us "behind the veil" and reveals the myriad of emotions that she experienced as her mother was hospitalized and her death imminent, and the affect her death had on her. It is a remarkable memoir where Ortiz Cofer delineates her fears, doubts, loneliness, and guilt as she recounts the memories of her mother, the loss of her father and her father-in-law. She writes, "I came home to face the heretofore unacknowledged fact that death is not a surprise; death is the given" (216) and "When grief has made me heavy and slow, only making the difficult walk to my desk and the empty page or screen, only the ritual of putting down words, fills the empty place, but it does not stay full....there are the

loses wrought by time, distance, and aging; there is sorrow; and there are restless spirits that haunt me, that sneak in during the night and empty the shelf again. There is, always, the hueco" (219). I find that words are insufficient to adequately express how phenomenal this memoir is. What can I say, when as I read I was reminded of my own feelings towards my own parents, who are both deceased? What can I utter, when I had to come up for air, as if I were drowning, to deal with similar emotions that invaded my being as I recalled and reflected upon memories of both my parents, and tried to make sense of their lives as Puerto Ricans who came and died in this country? Everyone should read this memoir.

The Cruel Country is a beautifully written memoir about the illness and death of the authors mother. Author, Judith Ortiz Cofer writes even the most painful scenes with such eloquence you can't help but be drawn in. I am all too familiar with the loss of a parent, and I can say that Cofer does a fabulous job working through the many stages of grief as she helps the reader understand. What makes The Cruel Country unique is not only Cofer's perspective but in the way she ties in psychology, history, and poetry as well. I learned quite a bit while reading this well written memoir. Thank you to Cofer for braving her way into the land of bereavement and allowing readers to join her in such a personal journey. The Cruel Country is well written, well edited, and is a book I can definitely give 5 stars!

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