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"The Changeling" is a poem written by Judith Ortiz Cofer that was published in 1993. The poem discusses the situation of a young girl in the 1950s in Puerto Rico. The poem reveals the struggle of this particular situation as it is analyzed from a feminist perspective, a cultural perspective, and a gender perspective.

From a second-wave feminist perspective, this poem would go against what they stand for which means that they would not like the poem. First of all, feminists believe that "feminine and masculine personalities play a crucial role in women's oppression since they make females overly attentive to the needs of others" (Mikkola). They then believe that this can be solved if "both male and female parents [are] equally involved in parenting" (Mikkola). Due to this particular idea, feminists would be unhappy with the poem because the girl is not raised equally by both parents, which can be seen as the

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"young girl [is] vying for [her] father's attention" (Cofer 1-2).

This portrays the idea that the girl is not being parented by her father and will do whatever is necessary to gain her father's attention, which according to feminist beliefs would ultimately cause oppression. Feminists would also dislike the poem because they stood against the idea "That the way women look is more important than what they do, what they think, or even whether they think at all" (Krolokke 8).

Taking that idea into consideration, feminists would then believe that women should be allowed to look however they want as that is not what is truly important, leading to their disapproval of the poem as the girl in the poem would go into her "brother's closet [and] change into his dungarees—the rough marmalade molding [her] into boy shape" (Cofer 6-8).

Although feminists would be happy with this aspect of the poem, as the girl expresses herself in a way which

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is different than what society had established as normal for a woman, the disapproval of the poem would come in as the girl's mother "sternly forbid[s] her from sitting down with them as a man" (Cofer 22-23). Feminists would be angry with this aspect of the poem as it portrays what they were trying to change: "women [as] victims of a patriarchal, commercialized, oppressive beauty culture" (Krolotke 8). They would also be upset with this part of the poem because this sense of oppression is being brought on by another female who should be understanding towards the girl. Lastly, feminists would also dislike the poem because they fought against ~~any~~ any idea "that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by a patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home" (Rampton). Most of the poem portrays this idea as the girl is forced to "shed [her] costume, to braid [her] hair," (Cofer 25-26) and to

return to the kitchen. This would be upsetting to feminists who believe that she shouldn't be defined by her beauty, seen as the girl is forced to braid her hair, and that she should be allowed to express herself how she pleases, and not be forced to be chained to "home" duties. Overall, feminists, particularly second-wave, would not enjoy "The Changeling" because it goes against everything they stand for.

"The Changeling" may also be analyzed from a cultural perspective of native Puerto Ricans in the 1950s. This particular culture would enjoy the poem and would be able to relate to it as it portrays every aspect of their culture. A major factor of their culture is that "Puerto Rican children [...] cherish the love and approval of their parents" (Christoforo-Mitchell). This element of their culture is displayed as the young girl yearns for her father's attention so badly that she

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"invented a game that made him look up from his reading" (cofer 3-4). This culture would then easily understand and relate to that part of the poem as an aspect of their culture is parental approval which is what the protagonist is attempting to receive from her father.

Another element of Puerto Rican culture is that "male authority is invoked and appealed to, but women's authority [...] is recognized" ("culture of Puerto Rico"). This element is evident in the poem as the girl seeks the father's attention/authority but ultimately obeys her mother's orders. This can be seen as her father merely laughs at her little performance, but her "Mother called [her] to dinner" (cofer 20) and then "order[ed] [her] back to the dark cubicle" (cofer 24) to remove the costume and return for dinner. Due to this example, it can be concluded that this culture would enjoy

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the poem as they can identify with the motherly control, whether they've dealt with ~~the~~ it, or been the one enforcing it, as "mothers have the major responsibility for disciplining children" (Garcia-Preto 246). In addition to this, a "characteristic of Puerto Rican women is their hembrismo, which means 'femaleness'" (Garcia-Preto 246). Taking this factor into consideration, mainly the Puerto Rican culture would understand this particular concept, which causes them to understand why the mother forced the girl "to shed [her] costume [and] braid [her] hair" (Cofier 25-26). From this cultural perspective they would understand the mother's motives. Due to the various elements of Puerto Rican culture, this culture would be able to completely understand the poem, relate to it, and ultimately enjoy it.

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In addition, a gender criticism may also be applied to 'The Changeling' as gender roles in the 1950s in Puerto Rico (seeing as this is the era Cofer is referring to) are evaluated and applied to the poem. The gender role for Puerto Rican women during the 1950s was to be "submissive wives and self-sacrificing mothers" (Cofresi). The mother from 'The Changeling' represents the gender role perfectly as she submissively doesn't say anything about the fact that her husband is "reading" (cofer 4) while she is "call[ing] [the children] to dinner" (cofer 20) and then disciplining the children as she quickly puts her daughter in her place by "sternly forbidding" (cofer 22) her from sitting in her brother's clothes. The father also portrays the gender roles of the era which was ultimately "machismo, [having] courage to fight, [have] honor and dignity, [...and] protect

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one's name" (Zalazueff). This element is portrayed in the poem as the reader becomes aware that the father was in the army as the young girl hides her "long hair under an army helmet [that had] been given by Father" (cofer 9-10). Being in the army is a perfect example of machismo and having the courage to fight. Thus, both the father and mother live up to the gender roles present during the 1950s in Puerto Rico. On the other hand, the young girl does not fit the gender roles as her role would be "to do the double duty of workplace and household labor" ("Culture of Puerto Rico"). The young girl goes against these gender roles as she spends her time in her brother's clothes "strutting around the room" (cofer 13) and then emerging "transformed into the legendary chē" (cofer 11). Rather than fulfilling her duties, she goes against her gender role and attempts



to portray the gender role of a male at the time as she pretends to be a male revolutionary leader, showing that she is attempting to portray the male gender role of machismo. ultimately, the parents fit the gender roles of 1950s Puerto Rico while the young girl goes against her gender role.

overall, "The changeling" by Judith Ortiz Cofer portrays the Puerto Rican culture. It may be analyzed in multiple ways. These specific ways would be through a second-wave feminist perspective, a Puerto Rican cultural perspective, and a 1950s Puerto Rican gender perspective.