

# Spiritism by Puerto Rican Women: From Remarkable Pioneers to Contemporary Heirs

Researched and Written by Dr. Clara Román-Odio,  
Translated from Spanish to English by Henry Hirschfeld '22



## Abstract

During the summer of 2021, I worked with Professor Emerita of Spanish, Dr. Clara Román-Odio, to translate her collection and interpretation of primary works written by Puerto Rico’s most influential spiritist women.

Her project, entitled “Spiritism by Puerto Rican Women: From Remarkable Pioneers to Contemporary Heirs,” examines **how Spiritism has empowered Puerto Rican women to demand social change**. Dr. Román-Odio analyzes the life and works of ten pioneer spiritist women, each of whom dedicated herself to spiritist practice through writing, activism, or mediumship.

**My role as a Summer Scholar** was to translate Dr. Román-Odio’s writing from Spanish to English. I focused first on the ten biographies of the pioneers, which describe each of their personal backgrounds and contributions to Spiritism. Then, I translated Prof. Román-Odio’s literary analyses of eight primary works, which include various excerpts from the original sources. I also translated the introduction to the study, afterword, and acknowledgements.

For eight weeks, we exchanged texts on a regular basis. This academic and mentorship experience enhanced my ability to handle translation of academic content. I became more fluent in both English and Spanish, and I gained a greater understanding of women writers and appreciation for the history of Puerto Rico.

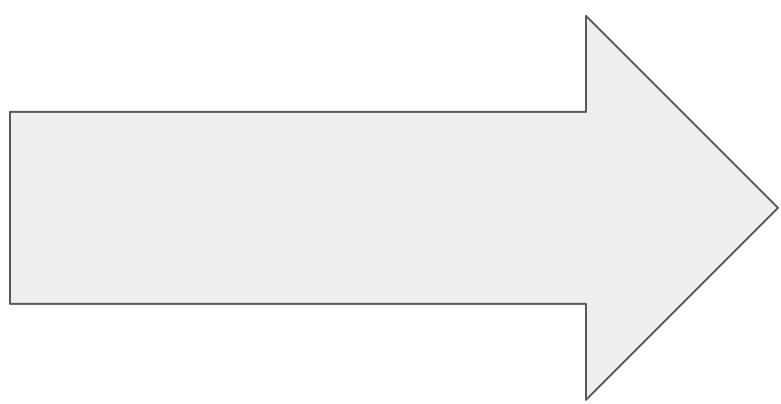


Figure 1:  
Pioneer  
Spiritist  
Writers

## Example

“El trabajo es la base de la regeneración social, pero para que la mujer comprenda su misión sobre la tierra, á más del trabajo práctico, necesita pensar; que ella es sin ó con el hombre, una parte necesaria de y para la sociedad, y por lo tanto, para nada tiene que esperar su aplauso, teniendo para todos sus actos un juez en su razón ilustrada.”

Excerpt *Ramo de azucenas. Colección de artículos* by Simplicia Armstrong de Ramú, Mayagüez, P.R. Tipografía Aurora, 1908.



“Work is the basis of social regeneration, but in order for women to understand their mission on Earth, in addition to doing practical work, they need to think; whether or not she is with a man, education is necessary for society. If she is able to work and think, the woman does not have to wait for her applause, since she will already have an audience in her intelligence.”

## Methods

My translation process consisted of three main steps.

1. **Literal Translation**: Translate the literal meaning of Spanish words into English words. This step was perhaps the most tedious, but also the most straightforward. I used both Spanish and English dictionaries for this step.
2. **Initial Revision**: Transform the literal translation to avoid awkward word choice and improve sentence fluidity. This step required the most patience and it helped me notice the differences in syntax between Spanish and English. I relied on an English thesaurus for this step.
3. **Final Revision**: After receiving feedback from the author, I revisited step two. The final revision allowed me to reflect on my previous word choices and better understand the author’s intentions. This step required consistent collaboration with the author.



Fig. 2: Contemporary Spiritists

## Conclusions and Acknowledgements

This experience improved my proficiency in both Spanish and English by expanding my academic vocabulary and deepening my understanding of the grammar of each language. It taught me how to collaborate, having worked closely with Dr. Román-Odio for the entire summer. Translating this particular project also deepened my knowledge of Puerto Rico. I now have a fuller understanding of how spiritist women played, and continue to play, an instrumental role in demanding social change on the Island. Many thanks to Dr. Clara Román-Odio and the Kenyon Summer Scholarship program for giving me this opportunity.