



Ana Castillo

Biography

Chicana poet and writer Ana Castillo was born and raised in Chicago, but has spent most of her writing career studying her Mestiza heritage. In her first novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986), Castillo explores the relationship between two women who travel to Mexico in search of a better understanding of their place in both the U.S. and Mexican societies. The novel, written in the form of letters between the two women, is considered the landmark novel that made Castillo a leading Chicana feminist writer, winning the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation.

Castillo's interest in race and gender issues can be traced through her writing career, culminating in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*, published in 1994. In this collection of essays, Castillo explores the notion of Xicanisma, a term she herself created in order to give name to the struggles of Brown women in the racially polarized U.S. In the U.S., much debate of racism becomes constructed in a Black-White paradigm, leaving little room for others. In *Massacre of the Dreamers*, Castillo explores the Chicana feminist movement of the 70's and where that movement is headed. Castillo notes that U.S. history, especially, seems to neglect the struggles of Mexico and the indigenous peoples who became involuntary migrants into what is now the Southwestern U.S. By exploring the history of Mexico and Central America, Castillo hopes to integrate ideas about the patriarchy and oppression of these societies with that of the United States, looking at how Brown women must cope in both societies.



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1953
- * Chicana poet, novelist, and anthology editor
- * First published book of poems was *Otro Canto* (1977)

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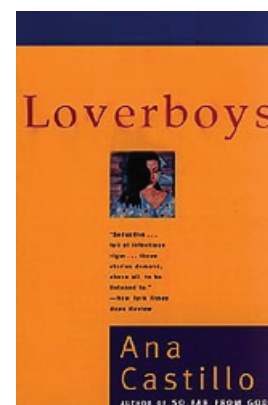


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Castillo was schooled in Chicago for the most part, attending the Chicago City College for two years before entering Northwestern Illinois University. Here, she received her B.A. in art. After receiving her degree in 1975, Castillo moved to Sonoma County, California to teach. In 1977 she moved back to Chicago and earned an M.A. in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the University of Chicago. Throughout this period of time, Castillo was not only writing, but was also an activist -- something she still continues to be. In 1986 Castillo moved back to California and taught at various colleges. She eventually found herself at the University of Bremen in Germany where she earned her Ph.D. in American Studies.

Not only is Castillo a noted poet and novelist, she has edited many works with other Chicana-Latina writers including Cherrie Moraga and Norma Alarcon. It was with Alarcon and others that Castillo co-founded *Third Woman*, a literary magazine, for which she is a contributing editor. Her most recent publication, *La Diosa de las Americas/Goddess of the Americas*, is an anthology about the Virgin of Guadalupe with Castillo as editor. Castillo proclaims herself a “devotee” of the Virgin of Guadalupe who is considered the Mother Goddess in Mexican, Mestizo, and Mexican-Indian societies, but largely ignored by the patriarchal Catholic church. It is the Catholic church and patriarch that led Castillo to incorporate sexuality as one of the main themes in her writing. Because the Catholic church does not condone sex unless it is for the sole purpose of having a child, many women in Catholic cultures, including much of Latin America, lose a segment of their “self” by being denied their sexuality. Castillo believes that women have lost their sense of self on many levels, including psychologically, physically, and spiritually, and need to reclaim themselves. Castillo herself does this through her writing and activism.





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Fiction

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Peel my Love Like an Onion (Doubleday, 1999).
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Ana Castillo reading from her works (sound recording) (Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, 1994).
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