Ana Castillo: Biographical Note

Ana Castillo (June 15, 1953-) is a celebrated poet, novelist, short story writer, and essayist. Castillo was born and raised in Chicago. She has one son, Marcel Ramón Herrera, born in Evanston, Illinois, on September 21, 1983.

Long considered one of the leading voices to emerge from the Chicana experience, Castillo is a prolific author whose work has been critically acclaimed and widely anthologized in the United States and abroad. Ilan Stavans writes "She is the most daring and experimental of Latino novelists." Castillo's books include the novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (Bilingual Review Press, 1986; Doubleday, 1992), for which she received the Before Columbia Foundation's American Book Award in 1987. *Sapogonia* (Bilingual Review Press, 1990), is a complex and engaging novel and a literary triumph, according to the renowned Chicano novelist Rudolfo Anaya who calls Castillo "one of our finest Chicana novelists." Her more recent books include the novel *So Far From God* (Norton, 1993), which earned her both the Carl Sandburg Literary Award in Fiction of 1993 and the Mountains and Plains Bookseller Award of 1994, and a work of non-fiction, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Reflections on Mexican-Indian Women in the United States 500 Years After the Conquest* (University of New Mexico, 1992). Michael Sinayerson writes in *Vanity Fair* that her essays "make the case for a new, aggressive brand of feminism she calls Xicanisma, to win brown women a place in a black-and-white country." The 1991 edition of Hispanic Writers describes Castillo's epistolary novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, as a probing description of the relationship between the sexes that encompasses both Mexican and United States Hispanic forms of love and gender conflict. That work has been hailed as having "ushered the Chicana voice into the feminist discourse with a bang." One critic of Chicana literature, Norma Alarcón, has identified the deft use of irony as one of Castillo's trademarks. Another, Alvina Quintana, believes that "her style reflects the influence and power of many of Latin America's greatest writers."

As a poet Castillo is the author of several works, including the chapbooks *Otro Canto* (1977) and *The Invitation* (1979); these were followed by several volumes of poetry which include *Women Are Not Roses* (Arte Publico, 1984), and *My Father Was a Toltec* (West End Press, 1988). In reference to *Women Are Not Roses* Marisa Cantu writes, "Castillo's artistry lies in her ability to discover the meaning in the random experiences that fill our lives and communicate directly to us in sensuous, heartfelt bursts of revelation."


Castillo, along with Norma Alarcon and others, co-founded the literary magazine *Third Woman*; she has since been a contributing editor to *Third Woman* and *Humanizarte* magazines. Castillo's speaking engagements are extensive and have been internationally sponsored, including the Sorbonne University (1985-1986), and a Germany reading tour (1987) sponsored by the German Association of Americanists. In 1988 Castillo was honored by the Women's Foundation of San Francisco for her "pioneering excellence in literature." She was
featured, along with three other renowned Chicana writers Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, and Denise Chávez, in *Vanity Fair* (September 1994) and *Hispanic* (March 1995).

Castillo’s education was in Chicago. Following her graduation from Jone’s Commercial High School, she attended Chicago City College for two years before entering Northeastern Illinois University, where she received a B.A. in 1975, majoring in Art and minoring in Secondary Education. Castillo then relocated to Sonoma County, California where she taught Ethnic Studies at Santa Rosa Jr. College in 1975-76. Between 1977 and 1979 she was a writer in residence for the Illinois Arts Council. Due to her keen interest in Latin America, she became a Graduate Fellow in 1979, earning an M.A. degree in Latin American and Caribbean Studies in the Social Science Division at the University of Chicago. She was a community activist throughout the 1970s. Throughout this period, Castillo taught English as a Second Language, Mexican and Mexican American history in community colleges in the Chicago and San Francisco areas. She returned to California from 1986 to 1990, where she taught feminist journal writing, women's studies, creative writing, and Chicano literature at various colleges and universities.

From 1989 to 1990 Castillo was a Dissertation Fellow in the Chicano Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. It was there that she continued her work on a new collection of poetry, *I Ask the Impossible*, her collection of essays and *Massacre of the Dreamers*. From 1989 to 1994, she taught fiction writing and Latina literature at several colleges, including the University of New Mexico, Mill College of Oakland, CA, and Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA. Supported partly by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in this period, Castillo finished *So Far from God* in 1993. It has been also published in Great Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. Castillo received a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Bremen, Germany, in 1991. In 1995, Castillo won a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for creative writing (fiction).

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