

Heather McMichael: "Writing for The Outsiders: Ana Castillo Covers the Boundaries of Overlapping Worlds"

For the better part of two decades, poet, essayist and novelist Ana Castillo has been writing about the complexities of living and working on the boundaries of her overlapping worlds. She writes boldly about Latina sexuality, challenging machismo in her ethnic community. She also takes to task the ethnocentricity of feminists. With *Loverboys*, Castillo turns her formidable gifts to short fiction.

The 23 stories in this collection represent a variety of perspectives and themes--from the chilling secrets simmering beneath the veneer of a perfect family to the whimsical fable of a cockroach made of pure gold and the cost of, well, breeding him. Some are exquisite vignettes--one-pagers that evoke a moment or a lifetime. The longer "La Miss Rose" takes a journey to love and prosperity with a canny and eccentric fortune teller. The superb "Subtitles" takes the gaze of the other and turns it back on itself.

Castillo often writes for the outsider. In the title story, the protagonist tells how her first heterosexual relationship in a long time has gone awry. She's addressing a silent listener present with her in a gay bar. *Loverboys* is for someone for whom this is an exotic situation, an eavesdropper, if you will. Any readers who could imagine themselves on the barstool of this listener will find the confessional tone self-indulgent and simplistic. They'll want to interject. They'll have a curious, third-hand sensation of observing an eavesdropper who is listening in on a conversation that they themselves are at once in but could never be having. In this way, *Loverboys* issues a challenge to attitudes of lesbians without ever once alluding to these attitudes.

And so Ana Castillo carries on her work: shaking up every community she's sought to describe. Not only do the stories dialog with the imaginary world in which they take place, the writing of the stories dialogs with the real world in which they're written.

From *Tuscon Weekly* (Sept. 29, 1997). Also available online ^[1].

Publication Status:

Excerpted Criticism ^[2]

Author:

Heather McMichael ^[3]

Criticism Target:

Ana Castillo

Source URL: <https://modernamericanpoetry.org/content/heather-mcmichael-writing-outsiders-ana-castillo-covers-boundaries-overlapping-worlds>

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