



## Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me

*Ana Castillo*

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## **Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me** Ana Castillo

"Paloma Negra," Ana Castillo's mother sings the day her daughter leaves home, "I don't know if I should curse you or pray for you."

Growing up as the intellectually spirited daughter of a Mexican Indian immigrant family during the 1970s, Castillo defied convention as a writer and a feminist. A generation later, her mother's crooning mariachi lyrics resonate once again. Castillo—now an established Chicana novelist, playwright, and scholar—witnesses her own son's spiraling adulthood and eventual incarceration. Standing in the stifling courtroom, Castillo describes a scene that could be any mother's worst nightmare. But in a country of glaring and stacked statistics, it is a nightmare especially reserved for mothers like her: the inner-city mothers, the single mothers, the mothers of brown sons.

*Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me* looks at what it means to be a single, brown, feminist parent in a world of mass incarceration, racial profiling, and police brutality. Through startling humor and love, Castillo weaves intergenerational stories traveling from Mexico City to Chicago. And in doing so, she narrates some of America's most heated political debates and urgent social injustices through the oft-neglected lens of motherhood and family.

**Ana Castillo** is one of the most powerful voices in contemporary Chicana literature. She is the author of *So Far from God* and *Sapogonia*, both *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year, as well as *The Guardians*, *Peel My Love Like an Onion*, and many other books of fiction, poetry, and essays. Her newest novel, *Give It to Me* won a 2014 Lambda Literary Award; her seminal collection, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* was re-released in a twentieth anniversary edition in November 2014; and the award-winning *Watercolor Women, Opaque Men* will be reissued in the fall of 2016.

## **Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me Details**

Date : Published May 10th 2016 by The Feminist Press at CUNY

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Author : Ana Castillo

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## From Reader Review Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me for online ebook

### Boo Walker says

#### **Lovely**

This woman tells a lovely tale of her life. And she's had an extremely interesting one. I'm going to go back and read her fiction.

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### Denise says

Read very quickly as consideration for BOTY 2018; need to go back and read thoroughly. Powerful.

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### sdw says

I recommend this book for those who would like to learn more about Ana Castillo, obviously. However, I also think it fits into a larger set of books by women of color feminists grappling with the relationship between their ideas of feminism and the lives they lead, especially in relationship to mothering. What does it mean to be a mother raising a son in the context of women of color feminism and the racist sexist world in which we live? Reading this book provides added context for those exploring the rise of a set of conversations in the 1980s by women of color authors around feminism and literature. I would not use this book as a primary text in that conversation, but as a secondary text to enrich the understanding of those who want to come more into depth after reading a number of the key works by these writers. If this is your interest, start with *This Bridge Called My Back*.

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### Janani says

This is a gorgeously written memoir by Ana. It covers her childhood growing up in Chicago as a brown kid on the South side, experiencing systemic racism and misogyny, coming into her sexual identity and her feminist values, and her relationship with her mother and her son. The chapters about her son's arrest and stint in prison, particularly their correspondence, was touching. A must read.

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### Hena says

Great collection of essays - both intelligent and compelling.

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### **Mona AlvaradoFrazier says**

The title of this memoir is taken from the Mexican song “Paloma Negra,” the second line of which says “no sé si maldecirte o por ti rezar” (I don’t know whether to curse you or pray for you). Castillo’s mother said these words to her when Castillo left home to make her way in the world. It seems those same words come to haunt the writer whenever she makes a choice outside of what is ‘culturally’ or gender acceptable during the years of this memoir (1970’s to present).

There is a thread of loneliness which permeates much of the book. As a reader, many of the issues Ms. Castillo faced, and faces, resonated with me: her struggles of poverty, single motherhood, and her worry for a child growing up in contemporary society with its harsh realities of drugs and racism. The love she has for her son really comes through and one could feel how difficult life must have been without him.

I found her interactions with her granddaughter especially interesting. Their talks about religion, Santa Claus, and such showed a different side of the writer. I think there's another novel in the future exploring the relationships between grandparent and grandchild.

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### **cat says**

I loved this book, this memoir of life as a daughter, a lover, a mother, a writer, a wife, a self-described Xicana navigating life carrying the ways of the old-world and the new, sometimes easily and other times at odds.

And this! This paragraph. It made the whole book sing (to me)... "So far in life, I've been truly in love only once with a woman. How it came to be was like a personalized meteorite had plunged from the sky faster than the speed of sound and left a radiating crater in my chest. It felt like a nonstop poem in progress and I couldn't get hold of its meter or rhyme, if, in fact, it held any. Identity, literature, and the G-spot combined in a single fuse."

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### **Melissa McGowan says**

Castillo is a poet and her poetry weaves throughout her prose. It was interesting to read about the progression of her life and evolution as an artist and the to see Chicago history through her eyes.

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### **M R says**

I thought that this book was a beautiful, poignant collection of stories, thoughts and musings on love and relationships. This definitely makes me think of all the people, experiences and relationships that craft who we become. This book felt intimate and personal and personable. Although I am not a Xicano, I am a woman of color who considers myself a feminist and someone who identifies with the queer community so reading her experiences was powerful. I recommend if you're a woman, a feminist, a mother, a child, a daughter,

Latino/a/x, a person of color or someone who just wants to take a peek into someone else's life that will cause you to consider your own existence.

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### **Zacarias Rivera, Jr. says**

Magnificent. I had such a pleasure reading the behind-the-scenes experiences of this strong, phenomenal Chicana. I highly recommend it.

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### **Ola Hol says**

I've found some essays/chapters really moving, esp. a description of a mother agonizing over her son's growing up process, a feminist bringing up a boy with all the efforts and her own failures.

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### **willowdog says**

Autobiography of her life. Only one chapter about her bisexual/polyamorous experience. Most about family life. Interesting as a feminist author and woman.

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### **elissa says**

I really enjoyed this book! It is not an autobiography, but essays which describe scenes from her life. For the most part the book is chronological, although it is in no way a full account of her life. Each essay stood alone, and as a whole left you with more feeling about the author than any full recounting of her life could have done. I especially like the essays which discuss her mother and the family members who emigrated to Chicago from Mexico. The essay about returning to Mexico with one of her Tia's was especially poignant. This is a great before bed read, as each essay stands alone and is satisfying in its own right. Really loved it.

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### **Reema says**

I wanted so much to love this book. I found the storytelling very choppy, with large time gaps missing. I didn't feel connected to the characters or the details of the story. It didn't feel like someone sharing their life's story with me. I felt like I was in a lecture hall listening to someone cram their life into 30 minutes of snippets.

I did love her son's story, and started to feel like things would pick up when we learned about him. But overall, a disappointment.

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## David says

### A TOP SHELF review, originally published in the May 20, 2016 edition of The Monitor

American author, essayist and poet Ana Castillo has had a storied and critically acclaimed career, garnering national recognition like the American Book Award given her first novel, a Carl Sandburg Award, a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in fiction and poetry and in 1998 Sor Juana Achievement Award by the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago.

In both her scholarly and creative work, Castillo has explored with unflinching truthfulness issues of race, gender, ethnicity, class and orientation. Perhaps most significant has been her tireless championing of what she terms Xicanisma, intersectional Chicana feminism in an increasingly backward and hostile political climate.

Though she has taught classes on memoir writing down the years and mined her own life to craft her literary projects, Castillo had never written a truly autobiographical work until her latest book, *Black Dove: Mamá, M'ijo and Me* (The Feminist Press). The title is taken from the famous song “Paloma Negra,” composed by Tomás Méndez, the second line of which mourns “no sé si maldecirte o por ti rezar” (I don’t know whether to curse you or pray for you). These were the words Castillo’s mother said to her as she left, a rebellious youngster, to make her unique way in the world.

This tension between mother and daughter infuses the emotionally charged reflections in *Black Dove*, as Castillo gradually comes to a hard-won understanding of the vicissitudes of (single) motherhood and a renewed respect for the struggles of poverty and racial tension Latinas face as they raise children in the United States.

Topics in the memoir range broadly: the contrast between Castillo’s sexually empowered, big-dreaming Tía Flora and her more reserved mother; the role of tortillas in Mexican-American culture and her own childhood; her teen years in late ’60s and early ’70s Chicago, balancing her own heritage with Black popular culture and hippie leanings; her family’s lack of interest in her college studies and the multiple horrible encounters with men that began to color her view of that sex.

But the beating and bruised heart of Castillo’s tale is her love for her only son, his many struggles as an adult and his eventual arrest. Watching her child be swallowed by the unwieldy and ugly penal system is one of the most difficult moments in her life. As she grapples with her own disappointment and the healing of their relationship, the author weaves a cohesive weft of communal plight from her family’s roots, her personal journey across the globe, and her son’s harrowing incarceration.

Embedded in this beautifully written tapestry are candid examinations of her own sexuality — including her long-term relationship with the woman who helped her raise her son — the restorative nature of writing, and the realization of how her own mother’s stern, solitary personality is reflected in her own

*Black Dove* is a masterful addition to American literary non-fiction, both solidly a work of Xicanisma and a moving life story that will resonate with readers of any background whose voices have been forced into the margins. Ana Castillo stands as one of the pillars of Chicana literature and scholarship — alongside other greats like Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros — I encourage you to give the book a read.