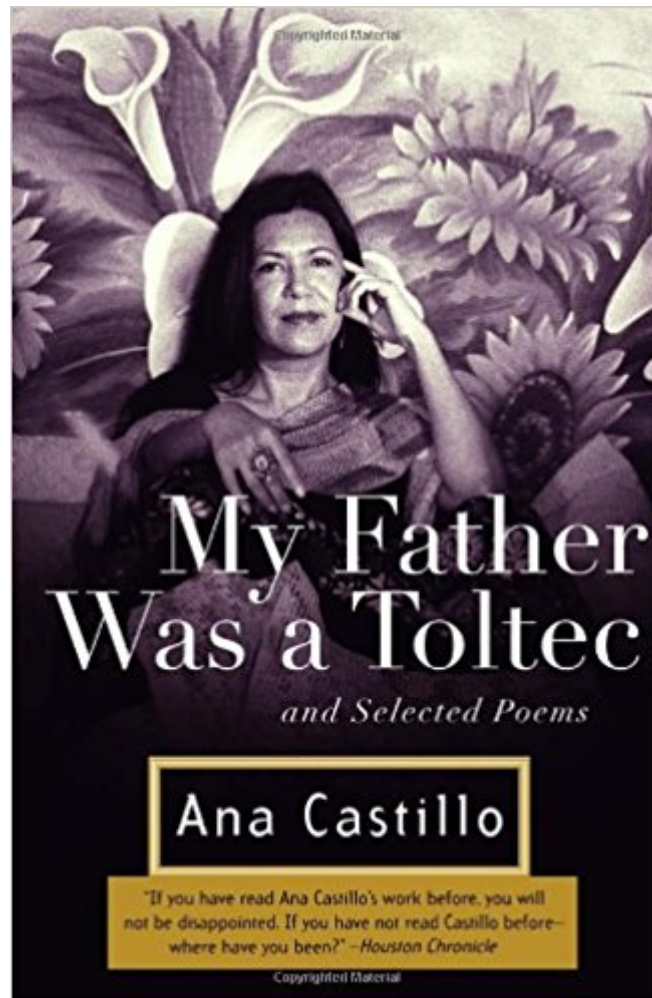




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My Father Was A Toltec: And Selected Poems



Synopsis

Mixing the lyrical with the colloquial, the tender with the tough, Ana Castillo has a deserved reputation as one of the country's most powerful and entrancing novelists, but she began her literary career as a poet of uncompromising commitment and passion. *My Father Was a Toltec* is the sassy and street-wise collection of poems that established and secured Castillo's place in the popular canon. It is included here in its entirety along with the best of her early poems. Ana Castillo's poetry speaks "in English and Spanish" to every reader who has felt the pangs of exile, the uninterrupted joy of love, and the deep despair of love lost.

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Customer Reviews

I have never connected with a collection of poetry so immediately and fully as I have with "My Father was a Toltec." I have wanted to love poetry my whole life, but I failed to find a poet that really reached me. That ended when I found Ana Castillo. Her poetry is powerful, precise, angry and emotional, totally vulnerable, and unspoiled by conventional training. She tells the story of everything it is to be a woman. All the women I have shown this collection to have loved it as intensely as I do.

Call them what you will, street poetry, poems from the hood, or beauty personified, Ana Castillo's work speaks to all the mature themes of the American experience during the past half century or so --- racism, sexism, ethnic pride and ethnic struggle. With such an ethnocentric title as "my Father was a Toltec," it is no wonder that Castillo harbors a contradictory image of gangster father: on the

one hand, proud of her Mexican heritage and that her father hailed from such a great civilization, on the other, having no illusions as to who he really was, a member of the Toltec gang of Chicago's West Side and all that goes with it. These poems are important for two reasons: one, they give us a glimpse into the Latino culture in America and the struggle they and she endured, but two, it forces us to confront the very differences that drive people and races apart. While the image of her father is a bit steeped in stereotypical themes of the lazy, mambo-dancing, womanizing, fedora-donning, silk-suit-and-tie-wearing Chicano, we must conclude by saying 'if the shoe fits, wear it.' The themes in this collection are strong in flavor and not for the faint of heart which is why I will have trouble with sleep tonight. These poems titillate, teach, but most importantly, touch us with their humanity.

To begin with, I will announce that this wonderful collection is coming back out in print. This came to my attention in my panic to get copies for a class I am teaching on Women of Color poets. These are the poems of an original voice. If anyone with a sense of the struggle of Mexicans in this country reads this book and remained unmoved I would wonder if they had a soul. Much more powerful, is the powerful message of a woman whose voice was previously unheard. Castillo's internal assonance, her skill as a poet to make the most difficult moves look easy on the page is among her assets as a poet out of this generation of activists. The fact that Castillo's later success with her novels "seemed so easy" is actually an indication of how she perseveres. I will continue to use this collection until retirement and then I will pass it on to my grandchildren--to remember that it wasn't easy at all.

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