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Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers

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CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

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Ana Castillo
1953-

(Full name Ana Hernandez Del Castillo) American novelist, poet, essayist, editor, playwright, short story writer, and children's writer.

The following entry presents an overview of Castillo's career through 2000.

INTRODUCTION

Castillo is a highly respected contemporary Chicana writer. Her poetry sheds light on the struggles of victimized people, but at the same time highlights the simple joys and dreams of the downtrodden. Her novels and essays focus on the plight of Chicana women and challenge patriarchal societies that fail to recognize women's individuality. Castillo's strong beliefs in feminist and Chicana issues are reflected in her writings, which are noted as constituting socio-political demands for fairness and equality.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Castillo was born on June 15, 1953 in Chicago, Illinois, to Raymond Castillo and Raquel Rocha Castillo. Her parents were struggling working-class Mexican Americans. Castillo began writing poems at the age of nine, following the death of her grandmother. She attended public schools and during her childhood was constantly aware of her ethnic roots, which stood in contrast to Chicago's caucasian mainstream society. In high school, Castillo became active in the Chicano movement, utilizing her writing skills to compose protest poetry. She attended a secretarial high school, but soon realized that a career as a secretary held no promise for her. After attending Chicago City College for two years, she transferred to Northeastern Illinois University, where she received a B.A. in liberal arts in 1975. Castillo then moved to California, where she taught ethnic studies for a year at Santa Rosa Junior College. In 1977, she returned to Chicago, where she served as writer-in-residence for the Illinois Arts Council. Castillo's first chapbook of poems, *Otro Canto,* was published in 1977. In 1979, Castillo earned an M.A. in Latin-American and Caribbean studies from the University of Chicago. From 1980 to 1981, she served as poet-in-residence for Urban Gateways of Chicago, and in 1985, Castillo returned to California to teach at San Francisco State University and to serve as an editor for Third Woman Press. Her first novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters,* was published in 1986 and received the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award. Castillo was honored by the Women's Foundation of San Francisco for "pioneering excellence in literature" in 1987. Castillo taught Chicano humanities literature at Sonoma State University in 1988, creative writing and fiction at California State University from 1988 to 1989, and Chicana feminist literature at the University of California at Santa Barbara as a dissertation fellow/lecturer for the Chicano Studies Department. Castillo received a California Arts Fellowship for fiction in 1989 and a National Endowments for the Arts Fellowship in 1990. She received her Ph.D. in American studies from the University of Bremen in 1991, writing her dissertation on "Xicanisma," a term she created to describe Chicana feminism. This dissertation was published as *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994) and received the Gustaves Myers Award. Castillo's third novel, *So Far from God* (1993), won the Carl Sandburg Literary Award in fiction in 1993 and the Mountains and Plains Booksellers Award in 1994. Castillo subsequently received a second National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1995. In April 2000, a his-

torical mural featuring Castillo and other notable Chicagoans was unveiled on the 103rd floor of the skydeck of the Sears Tower building in Chicago, Illinois.

MAJOR WORKS

Castillo began her literary career as a poet. Her first three published collections, *Otro Canto, The Invitation* (1979), and *Women Are Not Roses* (1984), are filled with poems that focus on women's issues. She embraces a woman's desire for identity and sexuality, traits that the Mexican male-dominant society and the Catholic church fail to recognize. Castillo continued to explore these ideas in her first novel, the epistolary *Mixquiahuala Letters.* This work examines the relationship between two women, Teresa and Alicia, solely through correspondence. The letters are in no certain order, and Castillo invites the reader to read these letters in three different arrangements to gain different insights: Conformist, Cynic, and Quixotic. The insights into the protagonists' personalities and beliefs remain the same, but with each different reading, the outlook of the novel changes. Castillo's next novel, *Sapogonia* (1990), features a male protagonist, Máximo Madrigal. Máximo fits Castillo's definition of an anti-hero, a man who believes his actions are above reproach and is a hero in his own mind. His abuse of and control over women is self-justified, and at times, even beneath his notice. He becomes obsessed with Pastora Aké, who refuses to be controlled by him, a defiance that he cannot allow and subsequently leads him to murder her. In 1993, *So Far from God* was published and became Castillo's first widely read and reviewed work. The novel follows the life of a strong Chicana woman, Sofi, and her four daughters, Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca. All of the women endure numerous trials and tribulations stemming from the male-dominated culture, the Catholic Church, and white American society. The four daughters each die unusual and untimely deaths, yet the novel emphasizes the importance of women taking control of their destinies. Castillo stresses the peace that may be realized by seizing control of one's life and underscores the underlying inherent magical properties of being a woman. In 1994, Castillo published her doctoral dissertation, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma.* Xicanisma is a word that Castillo coined to encompass feminist and Chicana issues. In the essays, she attempts to uncover sexual and gender-based discrimination and describes how white feminism has had little effect on the liberation of the Chicana. *Loverboys* (1996) is a collection of short stories that explore the dynamics of heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Several stories return to themes of discrimination, including an examination of the biases against homosexuality and overt sexual behavior by women. In *Peel My Love like an Onion* (1999), Castillo returned to the novel format. The protagonist of the book, Carmen, is a woman who is obsessed with becoming a flamenco dancer even though one of her legs is afflicted by polio. Her selfish and insensitive family is unsupportive of her endeavors and constantly ridicule her dreams. *My Daughter, My Son, the Eagle, the Dove* (2000) is a work consisting of two long poems based on Aztec and Nahuatal instructions to youths facing rites of passage. The poems relate teachings from Castillo's ancestry that are several hundred years old, yet are still applicable to the modern world. *I Ask the Impossible* (2001) is a new collection of poems, several of which focus on Castillo's young son as he grows and matures.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical reception to Castillo's work has been largely favorable. Critics have recognized Castillo's efforts to shed light on feminist and Chicana concerns in her poetry and prose. Commentators have complimented her poems for being lyrical, straightforward, and successful in capturing the essence of a proud Chicana woman in a society dominated by white males. Reviewers have consistently noted Castillo's natural poetic abilities that many claim are apparent in her fiction. Her first novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters,* received wide critical praise. The technique of offering three different courses of reading has been lauded as insightful and thought to contribute to a deeper understanding of the characters. Critics were divided over Castillo's third novel, *So Far from God.* While a handful of reviewers found the novel's magical realism unoriginal and a detraction from the overall message, others have praised the book for its important empowerment themes and believe this work to be Castillo's most important novel to date.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

i close my eyes (to see) (poetry) 1976
Otro Canto (poetry) 1977
The Invitation (poetry) 1979; revised edition, 1986
Clark Street Counts (play) 1983
Women Are Not Roses (poetry) 1984
The Mixquiahuala Letters (novel) 1986
My Father Was a Toltec: Poems (poetry) 1988; revised edition, 1995
This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color [editor with Cherríe Moraga] (poetry, essays, and short stories) 1988; also published as *Este puente, mi espalda: Voces de mujeres tercermundistas en los Estados Unidos,* 1988
Sapogonia: An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter (novel) 1990
The Sexuality of Latinas [editor with Norma Alarcón and Cherríe Moraga] (essays, short stories, and poetry) 1993
So Far from God (novel) 1993
Chicago Poetry [editor with Heiner Bus] (poetry) 1994
Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma (essays) 1994
Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe [editor] (essays, poetry, and short stories) 1996; also published as *La Diosa de las Américas,* 2000
Loverboys (short stories) 1996
Peel My Love like an Onion (novel) 1999

My Daughter, My Son, the Eagle, the Dove (juvenilia) 2000
I Ask the Impossible: Poems (poetry) 2001

CRITICISM

Norma Alarcón (essay date 1989)

SOURCE: "The Sardonic Powers of the Erotic in the Work of Ana Castillo," in *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings,* University of Massachusetts Press, 1989, pp. 94–107.

[In the following essay, Alarcón analyzes Castillo's writing in the context of male/female relationships and the politics of women's sexuality.]

Ana Castillo, a native of Chicago, first made an impact on the Chicano writers' community with the publication of her chapbook, ***Otro Canto*** (1977). Written mostly in English (as is almost all of Castillo's work), it ensured her reputation as a "social protest" poet at a time when it was difficult to be anything else. As a result, some of the ironic tones already present in the early work have been easily over-looked in favor of the protest message, which in fact is re-doubled by irony. It can be argued that irony is one of Castillo's trademarks. Irony often appears when experience is viewed after-the-fact or in opposition to another's subjectivity. In this essay, I would like to explore the ironically erotic dance that Castillo's speaking subjects often take up with men. Thus, my exploration will follow the trajectory of the traditional heterosexual, female speaking subjects in Castillo's published works: ***Otro Canto, The Invitation*** (1979), ***Women Are Not Roses*** (1984), and ***The Mixquiahuala Letters*** (1986).[1]

Otro Canto portrayed the burdens of the urban poor through the voice of a young woman who had learned the bitter lessons of disillusionment early in life. Thus, in the poem **"1975,"** we hear a sigh of relief when all those "proletarian talks"—the nemesis of many a left-wing activist—are finally translated into action. The speaker underscores the repetitiveness of mere talk by starting off every stanza with the line, "talking proletarian talks," which subsequently opens the way for details that give rise to such talk. We are not relieved from this tactical monotony "until one long / awaited day— / we are tired / of talking" (pp. 49–51). Though in **"1975"** the speaker is not gender-marked but is revealed as being in a "we-us" speaking position within a Marxist revolutionary stance, that speaker is transformed into a "we-us" who makes **"A Counter-Revolutionary Proposition."** In this poem we are called upon to make love and "forget / that Everything matters" (***Women Are Not Roses,*** p. 63). Given the litany of the things that matter in the stanza preceding the call, however, the poem urges me to ask if the speaker is wryly alluding to the well-known Anglo counterculture slogan of the sixties: "Make Love, Not War." As the poem notes, what matters to the proletarian (i.e., Marxist) revolutionary speaker is the struggle to overcome class oppression, a struggle that is spoken through a supposedly non-gendered we. However, juxtaposing the poem's title, **"A Counter-Revolutionary Proposition,"** with the implicit allusion to the slogan "Make Love, Not War," may help us to unravel a story with a difference for the underclass female speaker who addresses her partner, "Let's forget . . ." (p. 63).

Notwithstanding the recent involvement of women in revolutionary struggles (i.e., Cuba and Nicaragua), it is still the case that in opposition to the erotic, a revolution or a war is especially marked with a traditional male subjectivity that awaits analysis. In order for a female speaker to recover the full meaningful impact of herself, she still must address how that self figures in the "heterosexual erotic contract," revolutions not excepted. Within this contract, the female body continues to be the site of both reproduction and the erotic; despite class position, a speaker and her gendered social experience are imbricated in that age-old contract. Thus, **"A Counter-Revolutionary Proposition"** may now be understood as a call to explore the politics of the erotic. Let us actively explore the neo-revolutionary implications of erotic relations that have been constantly displaced, undervalued, and even erased by masculine-marked militancy, or at best rendered passively by the male poet, with the woman as the muse, the wife, the mother.

From this point of view, the poem's title acquires a polyvalence that goes beyond the private, where the erotic has often been held "hostage," and is placed in the political arena. In a sense, then, "Let's 'make love'" is taken from the lips of an Anglo, male, left-wing activist by the most unexpected of speakers—Ana Castillo's poetic persona. In retrospect, Castillo's early work stands out as one of her first attempts to appropriate the erotic and its significances for the female speaker, with ironic repercussions. Given the assumed class position of the speaker herself, affirming the erotic, as she takes pause from the class struggle, is tantamount to speaking against herself, or so her "brother/lover" may attest. The implicit suggestion that the erotic and the class struggle may be incompatible in a patriarchal world, when both are made public, places the underclass female in a double bind, since she may be forced to choose between areas of life that, for her, are intertwined or indivisible. In my view, the speakers in Castillo's work refuse to make such choices. Choosing one or the other splits the subject into the domains that heretofore have been symbolically marked feminine or masculine.

In the seventies, Chicanas and other women of color had a difficult time within their fraternal group when they insisted that feminist politics, with its commitment to the exploration of women's sexuality and gendered identities, also applied to them. The supposed contradictory position of women of color, one that was between a male-identified

class liberation struggle and a middle- or upper-class, white, female-identified sexual liberation struggle, forced women of color to walk a tightrope in their quest for an exploration of gender.[2] Thus, a poem such as **"A Counter-Revolutionary Proposition"** was politically risky, as the speaker addresses another, ostensibly male, and asks that he forget that "Everything matters." Yet, it is only within this apparent self-contradictory situation that such a speaker may be able to claim sexuality for herself and explore the significance of the female body that is always, and already, sexually marked. Such a "proposition" simultaneously opens up a gap between the fact of economic oppression and the desire for erotic pleasure and significance that faces us when we perceive the separation between the first and the second stanzas in the poem.

In ***The Invitation*** (1979), a chapbook-length collection of erotic poems and vignettes, Castillo's speaker no longer requests that her interlocutor forget that "everything matters" but pursues, instead, a sustained exploration of her erotic, at times bisexual, desires. The appropriation of the erotic for the female speaker is again a motivating force. The emphasis, however, is not so much on the speaker's uneasy conjunction with "proletarian politics" as it is with "textual politics." That is, the appropriative process resonates respectively against, and with, two important books of our time: Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), and Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Isabel Barreno, and Maria Velho da Costa's *The Three Marias: New Portuguese Letters* (1975).[3] Consider, for example, that in the second chapter of his book, Paz affirms women's dormant and submissive sexuality that awaits discovery through male efforts, while "The Three Marias" reject this view throughout their book and protest women's political bondage that, at the core, is based on their sexuality. Notwithstanding the different approaches that each of "The Three Marias" would take to liberate women, there is very little doubt that they agree that male perception of women's sexuality pervades all levels of women's existence.

The erotic thematics of ***The Invitation*** openly declare the influence of those two books (pp. iii, 9). Castillo's text, when viewed in their light, becomes a purposefully glossed negation of Paz's view and an extension of the authors' own erotic vision. It is as if the relative absence of any sociopolitical debate of the Chicana/Mexicana's sexuality had made it imperative that Castillo explore instead her speaker's desire in the light of a textual milieu. Moreover, reading Castillo's work in this fashion enables us to clarify her struggle to place her erotic thematics and voices in the interstice of both her sociopolitical and textual experiences. In other words, if, due to her social position, the underclass female is called upon to address her class oppression with a ready-made, class struggle rhetoric, attempting to address her sexual/erotic oppression forces her to see it in relation to texts. Her own response to those texts enables her to give voice to her experience and make it public. If she does not make an effort to bring out that voice herself, it will remain muted, as she is forced to align herself with the heretofore masculine-marked class voice. Thus, she is reconfirming, from another angle, Gilbert and Gubar's call in *The Madwoman in the Attic* for our critical need to explore "the metaphor of experience" (in **"1975"** and **"A Counter-Revolutionary Proposition"**) and "the experience of metaphor" (in ***The Invitation***).[4] The speaker/writer and the critic must discern, insofar as it is possible, between the metaphors female speakers create to represent our sociopolitical and erotic experience and the metaphors these speakers inherit and that *a priori* inscribe our potential experience. Thus, a writer/speaker can unwittingly live out the experiences that the metaphors call upon her to duplicate (i.e., Paz's description of female sexuality) or she can struggle to lay them bare and thus reinscribe her evolving position (i.e., "The Three Marias" struggle to reinscribe women's sexuality).

Paz's work, as well as *The Three Marias* and ***The Invitation*** itself, are, in a sense, all glossed over in Castillo's epistolary narrative, ***The Mixquiahuala Letters*** (1986), which more closely approximates the sociopolitical images of ***Otro Canto.*** In a sense, ***Letters*** is more aggressive in its conjugation of "the experience of metaphor" and "the metaphor of experience" as it pertains to the erotic, for it is yet another link in Castillo's exploration of sexuality and its significance for women. If in ***Letters,*** however, the negation of Paz's view of women's sexuality is continued, even as it is ironically reconfirmed by some of the males represented in the text, the work of "The Three Marias" is honored by adapting its epistolary form. However, the letters of "The Three Marias" are also supplemented by Castillo's Anglo-American political and sexual angle of vision. Castillo's sole speaking protagonist—Teresa ("Tere")—takes up the position, initially, of a free agent, while the narrative web of *The Three Marias* starts out by recognizing that women are not free agents in any sense whatsoever. Moreover, as Darlene Sadlier's essay makes clear, "The Three Marias" did not have the political freedom to explore women's sexual oppression or question its nature even textually, let alone in practice.[5] As a result, they were placed on trial for publishing their book. Ironically, the trial itself corroborated their point; women have not been free to express an uncensored subjectivity. Ana Castillo's ***Letters*** supplements "The Three Marias" insofar as her protagonist projects a subjectivity, free to express and practice her sexuality, but still imprisoned by an intangible heterosexist ideology, a heterosexist ideology for which we may posit Paz's view as the model. Thus, in ***Letters*** we have a protagonist who, by virtue of North American political practices and feminist influence, had "forgotten" what it is like to live in the world of "The Three Marias" or even in Paz's world. As a result, Tere, the main speaker in ***Letters,*** undergoes a trial by fire when Mexico's cultural configuration is put into play. She is forced to recall that she is not as free as she thought. Since Teresa is a woman of Mexican descent (a Chicana), she should not have forgotten but, insofar as she wants to be a freer agent, she would want to forget. The complexities of her diverse levels of consciousness may be located in the push and pull of divergent political countries, i.e.,

the United States and Mexico. As Gloria Anzaldúa states in "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness":

> Within us and within *la cultura chicana,* commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. . . . In a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another . . . and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?[6]

Indeed, this may explain the rationale behind addressing the letters to Alicia, who was Tere's traveling companion and ought to have known what they experienced. Nevertheless, the technique enables Tere to bring out, through Alicia, the Anglo-American cultural influence that, in any case, does not save either of them in the face of the erotic, as we shall see.

Before further consideration of ***The Mixquiahuala Letters,*** however, other important points must be brought up that will clarify its social and literary importance as well as my necessarily complex critical approaches. The critical conjugation of "the metaphor of experience" and "the experience of metaphor" is as complex as its literary elaboration.

Selections from both chapbooks, ***Otro Canto*** and ***The Invitation,*** as well as sixteen new poems, have been made available to a wider audience in Castillo's book, ***Women Are Not Roses.*** As happens in "selections" books, the evolution of a writer's work is often cut short in favor of the "best" that a writer has produced, a factor that is the prerogative of editors. As a result, ***Women Are Not Roses*** does not provide the reader with many clues to the intertextual observations made above. Theorists of the text, of course, have taught us that one does not need to have recourse to direct intertextual sources for the pursuit of such considerations. However, it is also the case that writers do respond consciously to their textual milieus and effect a revisionary dialogue. As such, it is of paramount political importance to identify the textual milieu of culturally marginalized writers such as Chicanas, as well as to clarify the appropriative strategies at work in the struggle to construct and reconstruct an identity despite its instability, lest a writer appear to speak in a vacuum. Moreover, writers and critics often rely on a textual milieu and an actual experience, insofar as that milieu assists with the verbal translation of our cultural experience. In this fashion, a variety of discourses can be negated, supplemented, modified, and repeated, though it may not always be possible, or even necessary, to make clear-cut source identifications.[7]

Women Are Not Roses does not provide any clues to Castillo's appropriative strategies and experimentations, though the word "roses" in the title points to, and plays upon, the masculine textual production in which women are represented as flowers/nature. In this book, however, there are at least two poems that resonate intertextually and intratextually, and their examination may also help us in the reading of ***The Mixquiahuala Letters.***

Both **"An Idyll"** (pp. 8–10) and **"The Antihero"** (p. 24) warrant a closer look because they not only evoke the Western romantic tradition that has underpinned women's erotic image within patriarchy but also, in this instance, further the female speaker's appropriation of that tradition to explore her sexuality and revise the image. Moreover, since Tere, the letter-writing protagonist of ***Letters,*** does not explicitly speak of her erotic illusions and ideals but instead reconstructs, from a ten-year distance, a period of her life that she calls a "cesspool" (Letter #2), a consideration of these two poems may help us come to terms with the nature of her failed erotic quest. Though ***Letters*** represents sexual encounters with men, Tere often assumes a sarcastic, pragmatic, and even distant tone that contrasts sharply with whatever illusions and ideals may have led her (Letter #1) and her friend Alicia to actively explore their sexuality. This is an exploration that falls short of erotic bliss, to say the least: hence, the label "cesspool." In a sense, the expectations of heterosexual erotic bliss constitute the partially repressed aspects of ***Letters,*** which on occasion contains such startling confessions as "i was docile" (p. 113) or "i believed i would be placed in the little house and be cared for . . ." (p. 118).[8] These occasional confessions are barely audible. They tend to get lost in Tere's latter-day, after-the-fact sardonic anger. As we shall see, she has been framed *a priori* by certain "semantic charters,"[9] and Castillo mocks her further by framing her with the "reading charts" offered to the reader.

"An Idyll" and **"The Antihero"** reinscribe two aspects of the erotic/romantic hero—the god-like and the demonic—from the point of view of a female speaker. Their representation, however, is complicated by the different spatiotemporal positions that the speaker takes, consequently putting into question how one translates and interprets (writes/reads) the experience. Since **"The Antihero"** is a significant inversion of the hero in **"An Idyll,"** the speaker's relational position to each becomes very important, adding another dimension to their inscription. A speaker's position in relation to such monumental and heroic figures cannot be all that simple. The speaker is probing not only a relationship to the symbolic, that is, how the romantic hero has figures in textual tradition, but her social experience as well, that is, how she has lived her sexuality in, and through, such figurations.

In these two poems, the speaker filters her position through an intricate use of the first- (**"An Idyll"**) and third- (**"The Antihero"**) person pronouns in combination with temporal distance and proximity, respectively. These spatiotemporal, positional techniques are employed in ***Letters*** as well; though most of the letters are first-person accounts, Letters #21 and #32 are examples of speaker shifts. **"An Idyll"** is

a first-person narration of past experience, punctuated by contemporaneous evaluations of that experience that is represented in fantastic terms, a virtual parody of male literary figurations:

> now
> i can tell
> of being swept b
> y a god a michael
> angelo's david a
> man of such phys
> ical perfection,
> one could not be
> lieve him human.
>
> (P. 8)

In this poem, the very columnar shape points to a phallic symmetry that distorts the potential plasticity of language for its own sake. It takes a very well-programmed machine to reproduce that form. It is akin to a divine hierarchical account that only "now," by stepping outside of it, can be apprehended. The narrator, who only "now" can represent her enthrallment with the beautiful stony hero, assesses that erotic dance as "truer" because it was satisfying, in some measure. Enthrallment itself may have its own temporary erotic rewards. The romantic interlude—an idyll—as a symbolic fantasy may be spellbinding, but the effort to transform it into a social reality literally enslaves her:

> i ate
> with it slept wi
> th it made its b
> ed in the mornin
> g when it disapp
> eared . . . i waited
> for its return—
> each night.
>
> (P. 9)

Indeed, like language, she is immobilized and transfixed by "it," a god-like man. "It" has turned her into a robot. The murder of this fantastic being is due to her almost sudden awareness that her union with him, despite its insane and masochistic pleasures, is tantamount to her own self-destructive collusion. In the poem, his murder is anonymous, perhaps collective. As a crowd gathers to demand his expulsion, one of them shoots him when he refuses to leave:

> until one of us c
> ould not stand it
> any longer and
> shot him.
>
> (P. 10)

Now that the fantasy, with its perverse truth, is over, the first-person speaker is free to recall her delusion. Indeed, it is the newer, after-the-fact consciousness that makes it possible to see the enthrallment as a delusion. The one who narrates, however, is distanced from the one who lives the fantasy, that distance itself muting the emotional charge of the actual experience that was once lived as true and is now viewed through the lens of fabulous fiction. It is as if there was something inherently ironic in an experience recollected from the now-distant point of a changed consciousness. This is precisely the ironic tone effected in many of the letters (see, for example, Letter #16 where Tere's attraction to Alvaro is later viewed as a weakness). Tere mocks her initial enthrallment. She "Believed that beneath his rebellion was a sensitive human being with an insight that was unique and profound" (p. 48). Years later, however, either Tere's narrative hindsight or that of an unidentified narrator reports, "This is a woman conditioned to accept a man about whom she has serious doubts . . ." (p. 48).

The ironies of **"An Idyll"** take a more cruel turn in **"The Antihero,"** who exhibits a reckless disregard for his partner's erotic desires: "the antihero / always gets the woman / not in the end / an anticlimax instead" (p. 24). If the heterosexual dance in **"An Idyll"** is paradoxically viewed as a true fiction by the first-person narrator, the lyrical speaker of **"The Antihero"** views him as purposely playing his partner false. He obfuscates erotic desire by rendering sexual experience anticlimactic, as against pleasure and dénouement. He manipulates her desire so as "to leave her yearning lest / she discover that is all" (p. 24). She is double-crossed by the anticlimactic ruse into continuing to conflate desire with him. It is clear, as Luce Irigaray comments in another context, that "man's desire and woman's are strangers to each other."[10] If she discovered the infinite power of her own desire, then certainly the cruel dance would undergo a transformation or come to a stop. The poem presents the anticlimactic sexual event in the present-tense lyrical mode, through the lens of the third person. The couple is objectified in the present tense to suggest an ongoing, unsatisfactory scenario of desire that brings them together, yet keeps them apart. Thus, contrary to the dictates of the lyric, which calls for a personal account of sensual experience, the poem switches the speaker's position to suggest a model of contemporaneous behavior that distorts erotic desire. For Castillo, then, angles of perception, which may be both spatial and/or temporal, are sites for discrete eruptions of meaning that may be subsequently juxtaposed, thus effecting additional meanings. In a sense, the significance of any one thing is highly unstable and much depends on the angle of vision.

Conventionally, the letter form has shared at least two important features with the lyric, notwithstanding the fact that the first is prose and the second is poetry.[11] Both reveal the intimate events in the life of the speaker, *combined* with the speaker's emotional response to them, thus exploring the personal states of mind at the moment of the event or with respect to it. It should be noted, in passing, that ***Letters*** is a mixture of poetic and prosaic forms, but the speaker, who may not always be identified with Tere, does not feel bound by conventions. This disruption of conventions signals, in my view, a pursuit of narrative approaches that may be beyond Tere's simple "i." In a sense,