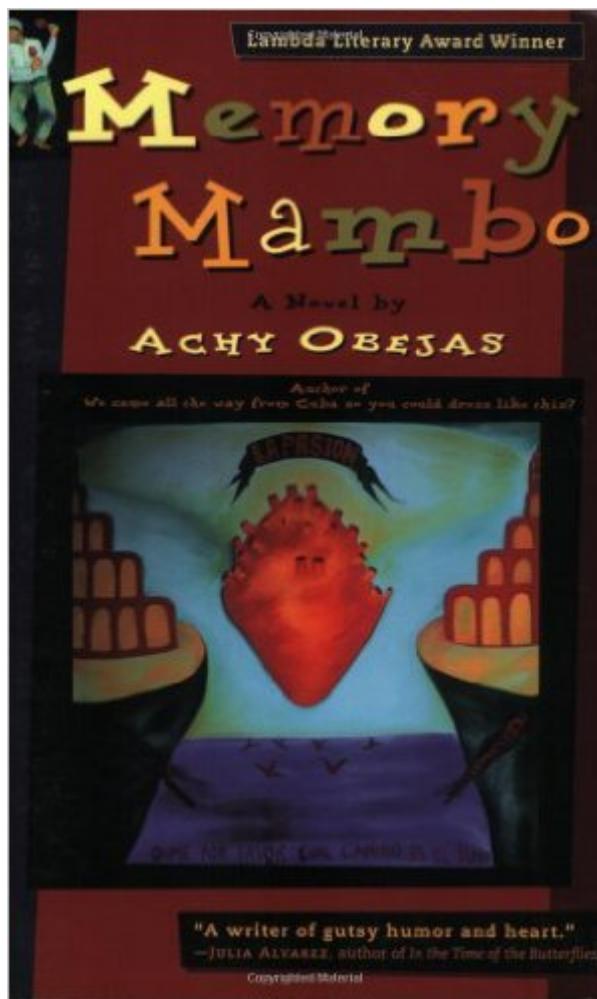


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# Memory Mambo: A Novel



## **Synopsis**

Memory Mambo describes the life of Juani Casas, a 25-year-old Cuban-born American lesbian who manages her family's laundromat in Chicago while trying to cope with family, work, love, sex, and the weirdness of North American culture. Achy Obejas's writing is sharp and mordantly funny. She understands perfectly how the romance of exile from a homeland as well as from heterosexuality; and the mundane reality of everyday life balance one another. Memory Mambo is ultimately very moving in its depiction of what it means to find a new and finally safe sense of home.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Achy Obejas, in her "Memory Mambo," writes creatively and cleverly of -- among other things -- as the title suggests, the very complex dance that our minds do when confronted with unforgettable (if altered) images that are subjectively recorded, subconsciously stored, and blurred by the rose-tinted lens of a hawk-like ego-defense! She does so via her creation of an alienated Juani Casas, a tormented romantic who recognizes that "lies destroy everything, but especially love," -- who "knows things in her heart," suffers in (and out of) love, and tends to obsess -- who wanders around wondering: "what REALLY happened?!?!" .... but she, alone, is not the only one perplexed by events, as Obejas masterfully manipulates her mental musings, and leaves her readers also to "first-and-second guess!" -- what really happened - between Juani and Gina? .... and not quite knowing what to make of the somnolently surreal Rosa and Jimmy "incident." With these "interactions," could the author be exploring and exposing early childhood trauma that has been (is

being -- in her characters) suppressed (?) -- and its connection/s to adult dysfunction, MALEstar and discontented unhappiness (?) Only Obejas knows for sure -- and why should she say?!?! when part of the attraction to her pages is written between the lines in spaces and places that are replete with ambiguity, uncertainty and wide "open-endedness!" "Lo misterioso y obsesionante is repeatedly evident -- especially in the evocation of three carefully chosen words: "te quiero verde" of a similarly anguished and lovelorn Spanish poet. Could they express Juani's desire for love's return, the return of its newness and (pre-lying) innocence (?)

Memory Mambo presents life, death, thoughts, stories, loves, politics, feelings and idiosyncrasies of a Cuban family. The focus is on the exiled family living in Chicago, but includes members living in other parts of the United States and those still in Cuba. Achy Obejas makes the work unique by presenting the biographically sounding fiction slice-of-life presentation through the eyes of Juani Casas, a 24 year old lesbian. Not only is the reader exposed to the family, but also the emotions of Juani in her search for love and truth. Mostly blood family members are presented in the book with mentions of "cousins in exile" and other nationalities they have married or dated. The cast of characters includes a Father highly agitated and indignant, believing the CIA stole his formula for duct tape, a wealthy artist Uncle who fought along side Castro and believes he accidentally caused one of his major defeats in the revolution, an Aunt that keeps failing in her attempt to leave Cuba and a support group of cousins. The two major exceptions to blood family are Jimmy, cousin Caridad's husband and Gina, Juani's girlfriend. Jimmy provides the human antagonist throughout the book. Though his un-asked-for actions possibly help Juani after a violent and devastating breakup with Gina, the price he demands is more than she can pay for his despicable actions. His attitude is summed by "No wife of his was going to be seen all over town with a gaggle of lesbians; what kind of man would people think he was if his wife was always hanging out with tortilleras?" With Gina, Obejas covers the depth and breath of feelings from total love to abject hate. The text is written in English and sprinkled with Spanish adequately achieving the meanings and feelings Obejas presents.

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