



# Madre: Perilous Journeys with a Spanish Noun

*Liza Bakewell*

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**Why is the word *madre*, "mother," so complicated in Spanish?especially in Mexico?**

Leaping off the page with energy, insight, and attitude, Liza Bakewell's exploration of language is anything but "just semantics." Why does *me vale madre* mean worthless, while *!qué padre!* means fabulous, she asks? And why do one hundred *madres* disappear when one *padre* enters the room, converting the group from *madres* to *padres*? Thus begins a journey through Mexican culture in all its color: weddings, dinner parties, an artist's studio, heart-stopping taxi rides, angry journalists, corrupt politicians, Blessed Virgins, and mothers both sacred and profane.

Along the way, a reader discovers not only an invaluable lexicon of Mexican slang (to be used with caution or not at all) but also thought-provoking reflections on the evolution of language; its winding path through culture, religion, and politics; and, not least, what it means?and what it threatens?to be a creative female, a *madre*.

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