

# Sor juana by octavio paz book report



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Corrections " Sor Juana" is a biography of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz written by Octavio Paz and translated by Margaret Sayers Peden. It is a book of 470 pages divided in six parts that besides Sor Juana's life and work, explain the difficulties of the time for an intellectual woman.

It was published by The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1988. Reading this book gave me the best opportunity to know more about someone that although has been very influential in my entire life, I didn't know all her history. My admiration and respect for Sor Juana started since I was a child and one of my sisters used to read her poems. Through my literature classes I knew a little more about her and the admiration and respect continued growing. Sor Juana became for me a stereotype of intellect, power, femininity, persistence and freedom combined with the devotion to God. Her story makes me learn to follow my dreams, to be ambitious, and over all to never ever give up. Juana Ines de la Cruz was born in Mexico in 1648.

She grew up in the Panayan Hacienda, which was run for her mother for more than thirty years although she never learned to read. Sor Juana started to take lessons at age or three. During a long period of her childhood, she didn't eat cheese because " It made one slow-witted," and " Desire for learning was stronger than the desire for eating. " By the time she was six or seven, she knew how to read and write. As she couldn't go to the university (because she was a woman), she studied and read by herself. She used to cut-off several inches of her hair (when hair was considered one of the most important female features), as a challenge for new learning " A head shouldn't be adorned with hair and naked of learning" If she didn't meet the

goal, then she cut it again. Sor Juana was sent to Mexico City when she was eight to live with her grandfather, who had one of the biggest libraries of those times.

By age 15, as one of the most learned women in Mexico, she was presented at court with the Viceroy and his wife (maximum authorities in Mexico). As a lady-in waiting, Juana Ines would become known at court for her wit and beauty as well as for her erudite intelligence. To ascertain the extent of her learning, the Marquise gathered together some of the most astute minds of the day, poets, historians, theologians, philosophers, and mathematicians. Juana Ines answered the questions and arguments directed at her, impressing them all with her mental prowess. At age 20 she entered the Convent of San Jeronimo, known for the mildness of its discipline. The convent was not a ladder toward God but a refuge for a woman who found herself alone in the world. She lived in a two-storey cell where she read insatiably and amassed an impressive library while pursuing her writing and intellectual pursuits.

She brought the elegance of the court with her by transforming the convent locutory into an intellectual salon. The next Viceroy, the Marquis de La Laguna and the Marquise Maria Luisa, the Countess de Pareda, were among the court society and literary devotees who came to talk and debate with Sor Juana. Sor Juana wrote sacred poems and erotic love poems, vocal music, villancicos performed in the cathedral, plays, secular comedies, and some of the most significant documents in the history of feminism and philosophical literature. Her use of language, though characterized by the Baroque style, has a modern essence. Her public face reveals the impiety of an

undaunted spirit who appears, not as a nun, but as an independent woman. One of Sor Juana's archetypes was Isis, Egyptian goddess inventor of writing, a symbol of intellect. She also identified herself with maidens of antiquity, poetically divinely inspired to produce poems and prophecies thinking "There were not enough punishment or reprimands to prevent me from reading."

"The life and work of Sor Juana lines can be summed as: knowledge is a transgression committed by a solitary hero who then is punished. Not the glory of knowledge (denied to mortals) but the glory of the act of knowing. Sor Juana was a pivotal figure who lived at a unique point in history bound by two opposing world views: one the closed universe of Ptolemy and of the Inquisition, which still held sway in Mexico/New Spain; the other characterized by the new science of Copernicus, Newton, and Galileo. On her monumental philosophical poem *Primer sueño/First Dream* the soul is pictured as intellect, not a religious pilgrim. At the height of the journey, at the fullest understanding reason can attain, there was no vision. Instead, the soul drew back at the immensity of the universe and foundered in confusion. In 1690, requested by the Bishop, Sor Juana wrote her only theological criticism, which she insisted not for public view.

However, the Bishop published and censured it with an imaginary name of "Sor Philotea." In defiant response, Sor Juana wrote "La Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Philotea de la Cruz," a feminist manifesto defending women's right to be educated and pursue learning, citing over 40 women who had made significant contributions throughout history. This work ignited the church's wrath. In a climate of intimidation and fear Sor Juana

signed “ Protesta que rubricada con su sangre, hizo de su fe y amor a Dios” a statement of self-condemnation in blood. She renewed her vows and surrendered her musical and scientific instruments, as well as her library of 4,000 volumes, considered at that time to be the largest in Mexico. Two years of silence and penance followed. Then in 1695, while ministering to nuns struck by an epidemic, she herself succumbed and died. Sor Juana has been an inspirational model to follow through all the situations that she faced.

She succeeded in a world that was completely against her. The lack of father, which was almost a crime in that time, the lack of freedom to study, to talk, even to think, and over all the prohibition to be herself were some of her obstacles. Every time I am facing an obstacle, I just recall her story and imagine the innumerable sacrifices she had made to get the freedom of learning. After reading her story, I see the world in a different way. Now I know that all those small decisions that I take every day, such as the cloth I wear, what to eat, to read, what to say, and even what to feel are privileges granted for marvelous people like Sor Juan Ines de la Cruz. I also know that all those people had to pay a high price for these privileges; some of them pay with their lives. I feel not just impressed, but grateful to Sor Juana, her cultural heredity, and woman's worth.