



Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings

Juana Inés de la Cruz, Margaret Sayers Peden (Translator), Ilan Stavans (Introduction)

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A bilingual edition of writings by Latin America's finest baroque poet

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648-1695) wrote her most famous prose work, *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, in 1691 in response to her bishop's injunction against her intellectual pursuits. A passionate and subversive defense of the rights of women to study, to teach, and to write, it predates by almost a century and a half serious writings on any continent about the position and education of women.

Also included in this wide-ranging selection is a new translation of Sor Juana's masterpiece, the epistemological poem "Primero Sueno, " as well as revealing autobiographical sonnets, reverential religious poetry, secular love poems (which have excited speculation through three centuries), playful verses, and lyrical tributes to New World culture that are among the earliest writings celebrating the people and the customs of this hemisphere.

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Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings Details

Date : Published March 1st 1997 by Penguin Classics

ISBN : 9780140447033

Author : Juana Inés de la Cruz , Margaret Sayers Peden (Translator) , Ilan Stavans (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 304 pages

Genre : Poetry, Nonfiction, Classics, History, Politics, Philosophy

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From Reader Review Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings for online ebook

LonewolfMX Luna says

This book gives us the perspective of Sor Juana Ines de La Cruz de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana who lived in the 17th century in Nueva Espana/New Spain (Now Mexico) in which this book would present her writings such as Hombres Necios in which it criticized the patriarchal colonial society and the subservient role of women especially Criollas (White Spanish) and La Respuesta a Sor Filotea calling the education of women and her poem El Sueno.

I liked it, but my friend Melo has the book in which the forbidden works of Sor Juana along with popular works these forbidden works caused a lot of controversy back in colonial times in which challenged the power of the Catholic Church who had a stranglehold on Mexican society with it's Holy office of the Inquisition which imprisoned and tortured many people who were suspected heretics, and women.

Raquel Casilla-Reynoso says

She is such a revolutionary figure, an exemplary example of a woman voicing her thoughts and opinions at all times. Situated in the seventeenth century Mexico, Sor Juana wrote many stories, plays, poems, apologies supporting the pure words of Christ and attacking the cruel, oppressive powers of the conquering Spaniards. I recommend her highly!

James Violand says

Don't bother. Although Ines appears to have been a wonderful, intelligent, saintly woman, she comes off through the introduction and editing as only an early, ardent feminist. I cannot believe someone so renowned could produce such mediocre prose and poetry. Her reputation cannot be by accident – yet the selection herein contained speaks otherwise.

Sandra Miksa says

My favorite part of this selected writing book of Sor Juana was not her poems and her dream but rather her protest at the very beginning. Her letter to Sor Filotea is what struck me the most, what made the biggest statement. To me, it wasn't her poems - though I enjoyed most of them - but the disguised protest in itself. A widely intelligent and humble woman that has made a statement about woman's right to educate and be educated.

Rhonda Browning White says

Sor Juana proved to be one of the most outspoken feminists of her century. That she emboldened herself to

speak out from the walls of a convent, challenging even the misinterpretations of the scriptures (her comments on the Apostle Paul's words are priceless, as these have been taken out of context for centuries to silence women in the Church), makes her a woman to uphold as an example.

Her poetry is amazing, and her response letter (the first full chapter of the book) is inspiring, at the very least. This isn't a fast read, and it requires time to mull over and reflect upon the meaning behind the words. I can't recommend it for everyone, but if you're a woman who doubts her value in society, or if you've any streak of feminism in your bones, this book is for you.

Cait says

2.5

I have, like, complex thoughts about Sor JdLC? Idk. This was like, an interesting read and stuff, but also not as compelling as I was hoping! But it was good in a like school text kind of way.

I'm having difficulty not giving a shoutout to the oxcom in the title. :(

Flora says

This is a very special book. Sor Juana was a seventeenth-century nun who wrote poetry and prose, and her secular love poems are sublime, and her philosophical writings exquisite.

Catherine Corman says

the magic lantern throws
on a white wall
the contours of delineated figures
in thrall as much to shadow as to light

-Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, "First Dream"

Kimberly Ann says

The last long comment I had about this book was supposed to be on the Anne Bradstreet collection I'm reading. I read a good lot of this text & hope to someday come back & read the rest of it, as it's wonderful & Sor Juana is memorable & wonderful. So not abandoned at all because of lack of wanting to read, but abandoned temporarily due to time!

Northpapers says

"The impeded stream sings." - Wendell Berry

I know people who think that biography shouldn't matter when reading an individual piece of work. I think these people must never have encountered Sor Juana's writing.

I'm not saying that our society is untroubled by racism and sexism these days. It certainly is. But for a great talent such as Sor Juana to meet such oppressive circumstances and navigate them with such humor, skill, and political nuance is unprecedented, and will probably never be duplicated.

Her canon is a masterpiece of subversion, with an exceptional mind and lively personality insinuating themselves with extreme restraint as she navigated the patriarchal, hierarchical world into which she was born to make her Latin America's first great writer.

Her "Response to the Most Illustrious Poetess Sor Filotea de la Cruz" is the most striking example. But to me her poem "First I Dream" was the highlight of this collection. It's a piece of surrealism before such a thing existed. It's prophetic, multifaceted, and difficult.

Some of the other pieces in this collection are minor, and her drama about the religious conquest of America seems to argue for military force as an instrument of conversion. But even there, she lodges several historically novel complaints as well, and although it seems to serve the mentality of the age, it also contains a weird syncretism and subtle environmental complaints.

To say her greatness is unimpeded by her world would be a confusion. It's perhaps better to say that every impediment she faced gave her work an opportunity to sparkle, shimmer, and turn in remarkable ways.

Rachel says

Juana Inés de la Cruz, born in Mexico in 1648, was a scholar, poet, musician, courtier-turned-nun and defender of reason and women's rights, which things she did quite exceptionally well, in spite of humongous obstacles like her illegitimacy and ecclesiastical impediments to secular study *particularly* by a woman...and all this before dying at 47 while nursing other nuns through a plague. Pretty intriguing woman, no?

Well, want to know what's embarrassing? This is embarrassing: I lived within a two-hour drive of Mexico for 22 years, and I had never even *heard* of Sor Juana until reading *The Savage Detectives* this January, much less read any of her work.

Clearly a problem I needed to fix.

Since I can't read Spanish, I decided to start with *Poems, Protest, and a Dream*, as it contains English translations of one long poem, a bunch of short poems, some plays, and her blockbuster essay on her intellectual journey and why other women should be able to do the same – a sort of Sor Juana sampler platter, if you will. And wow. She kind of blew me away with her diverse treatments of reason and faith; intellect, beauty and gender; the human and the divine.

Here are some highlights:

Long poem: "*Primero Sueño*" ("First Dream")

This is a pretty spectacular poem: far-reaching and personal at the same time. In it, a Soul goes on an epistemological quest that actually reminded me of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But this Soul has no Beatrice or Virgil to guide it. It's questing alone, with tellingly ambiguous results.

Short poems

These were a real grab bag: some secular, some sacred, some even saucy. It's pretty tough to know how much Sor Juana I was getting in these short gems, though, since she uses elaborate word play in the Baroque style, and a lot of the poetry of poetry gets lost in translation. In the note for one poem, the translator flat-out says, "This is admittedly an imitation, not a translation."

Theater

I loved the deceptively simple *The Divine Narcissus*, an allegorical meeting between the religions of native peoples and the encroaching Spanish. Sor Juana approaches her subject with humanity, a lack of dogmatism, and more complexity than initially meets the eye. Plus, this play has what may be the first concern with environmental degradation due to Spanish activities in the continent's recorded history. *A lot* there.

Response to the Most Illustrious Poetess Sor Filotea De la Cruz

This one's crazy fascinating. It's Sor Juana's response to a letter from the nun, "Sor Filotea De la Cruz," who lovingly enjoined Sor Juana to abandon reason and apply herself to the spiritual. It gets especially weird, because the letter was actually from a (view spoiler) male bishop who'd previously published one of Sor Juana's works (which she knew he knew she knew), who just *signed* himself a nun, and both parties, apparently, had every expectation their letters could be made public. So much intrigue.

Sor Juana's response opens with her personal history as a girl thirsty for knowledge, so thirsty that she'd hack her hair off short if she hadn't learned something by a time she set, "for there seemed to me no cause for a head to be adorned with hair and naked of learning." In spite of admonishments (girls shouldn't learn, learning should be confined to spiritual matters, etc.), teacherless Juana read widely in humanist arts and sciences. And wrote. To close the essay, she marshals various religious and historical arguments why women should be free to learn and to teach.

It's all brilliant and not a little heartbreaking. I don't know quite how to take it. Is this essay a reasoned clarion call? A cry for help? Apologetic? Defiant? Could be all of the above.

But throughout this anthology, what struck me again and again is the discontinuity between seventeenth-century Mexico, which was a rather hostile environment for her, and other times and places in which her talents may have been valued more. As she described how her studies in the convent environment were inhibited by:

"all the attendant details of living in a community: how I might be reading, and those in the adjoining cell would wish to play their instruments, and sing: how I might be studying, and two servants who had quarreled would select me to judge their dispute; or how I might be writing, and a friend come to visit me..."

I thought of nothing so much as college dorms, where Sor Juana would have thrived. And where her most pressing obstacle might have been whether the R.A. had addressed those noise complaints yet.

Reese Lightning says

Sooo this is pretty much my Bible now.

Greg says

This collection of Sor Juana's writings is masterful, and upon reading it, one emerges incredibly impressed by the forceful intelligence of this 17th century nun, and the rebuke against her age that should be, but is not, a well-known classic of feminist literature. Her letter, La Respuesta a Sor Filotea, is a masterful, sarcastic, learned defense against the authority of her time in defense of the education of women. It should be a part of the standard curriculum, as should be her poem, Primero Sueno, probably the finest poem written in the western hemisphere until the age of Whitman. What makes her great was her truly devout nature and precise mind. Her arguments are laid out as finely and as well-read as the finest of legal arguments, but with an emotional wit approaching Shakespeare, and referenced in her arguments by the writings of scripture and the saints. The poems are highly symbolic, but in a way that survives the translation. This is a must read, and I am embarrassed to say that I only found it because of the Penguin Classics series. That it is not more widely known to American readers is a shame.

Cecilia Durán says

Inteligente y maravilloso

Collin says

There aren't many obscure classics like this one that I willingly give 4 stars to, but there were SO many times when I was pumping my fist and going YEAH and GO SOR JUANA and OOOOOOH SHE WENT THERE that I can't help myself!

As someone who somewhat uncomfortably rejects the feminist label yet still remains a firm, immovable supporter of gender equality, I have a hard time with more modern iterations of feminist writings. It's impossible not to root for a 17th century nun-poetess, though, because, as evidenced by her Respuesta (spelling?) and much of her poetry, women then had a hard time! A really fricking hard time! And yet Sor Juana is outspoken, intelligent, fervent, humble (I mean, humble for the 17th century), pointed, witty - all the good stuff. It's obviously stuff that can and did get her into a lot of trouble, but she SAID it, and she was GOOD at saying it. At least she was from the perspective of someone who can only just read translations of her work.

I want to say Sor Juana Inés was born in the wrong century but she was born in exactly the right one, even if she maybe didn't make enough of a splash to carry her to fame in the 21st century. I'm really interested in getting my hands of more of her work.
