

## About Sor Juana



She was born Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez in 1651 near Mexico City, born to Isabel Ramírez and Spanish captain Pedro Manuel de Asbaje who, according to all accounts, was always absent from her life. She grew up in her maternal grandfather's hacienda as a devout child, where she would hide in the chapel in order to read all of her grandfather's books from the adjoining library, something forbidden to girls at the time. She learned to write by the age of three and composed her first poem at age eight. By age thirteen she was teaching Latin to young children and had also learned Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, language in which she also composed some poems.

At age 16, Juana was sent to live to Mexico City. She attempted to attend university disguised as a male student in order to study, but her family never allowed it, so she continued her studies privately. She arrived at the Viceregal court of Mexico around 1664, where the Viceroy's wife, Leonor de Carreto, became her patron. The viceory, wishing to test the learning and intelligence of the 17 year old, invited several theologians, jurists, philosophers, and poets to a meeting, during which she had to answer, unprepared, many questions, and explain several difficult points on various scientific and literary subjects. The manner in which she acquitted herself astonished all present, and greatly increased her reputation. At court, which at the time was one of the most illustrated places in Mexico, she continued developing her intellect. Having expressed a wish not to marry, in 1669 she entered the convent of San Jeronimo, where she was allowed to continue to study, write and receive visitors. In 1680, a new viceroy for New Spain was appointed and he and his wife, María Luisa Manrique, were so impressed by her work, that they quickly befriended her.

In 1690, she was involved in a theological dispute in which the Bishop of Puebla published a work signed under the pseudonym Sor Filotea in which he recommended Sor Juana she stopped her "human letters" and dedicated herself to divine ones. In response, she wrote the letter *Reply to Sister Philotea*, which is one of her most renowned writings, because, among other things, she defended women's right to education. In response, the Archbishop of Mexico joined other high-ranking officials in condemning Sor Juana's "waywardness". By 1693, Sor Juana seemingly ceased writing rather than risk official censure. However, there is no undisputed evidence of her renouncing devotion to letters, though there are documents showing her agreeing to undergo penance. Her name is affixed to such a document in 1694, but given her deep natural lyricism, the tone of these supposed hand-written penitentials is in rhetorical and autocratic Church formulae; one of them is signed "*Yo, la peor de todas*" ("*I, the worst of all the women*"), which also became one of her most renowned work.

She died in 1695, but her work was already famous during her lifetime and has been recognized in all Spanish speaking countries for her contributions to Hispanic literature. Her life and work have continued to inspire generations of artists, including Mexican Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz with the publication of *The Traps of Faith* and Daniel Krozier and Peter Krask, creators of *With Blood, With Ink* the Fort Worth' Opera's upcoming premiere on April 20, 2014.