



Juana Inés de la Cruz

Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana, better known as Sor **Juana Inés de la Cruz**^[a] OSH (12 November 1651 – 17 April 1695),^[1] was a New Spain writer, philosopher, composer and poet of the Baroque period, as well as a Hieronymite nun, nicknamed "*The Tenth Muse*" and "*The Phoenix of America*" by her contemporary critics.^[1] As a Spanish-criolla from the New Spain, she was among the main American-born contributors to the Spanish Golden Age, alongside Juan Ruiz de Alarcón and Garcilaso de la Vega "*el Inca*", and is presently considered one of the most important female authors in Spanish language literature and the literature of Mexico.

Throughout history Sor Juana's significance to different communities has varied significantly, having been presented as a candidate for Catholic sainthood, a symbol of Mexican nationalism, freedom of speech, women's rights, sexual diversity, and others, making her a figure of great controversy and debate to this day.

Life

Early life

Juana was born in San Miguel Nepantla (presently *Nepantla de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*) near Mexico City as the illegitimate daughter of Don Pedro Manuel de Asuaje y Vargas-Machuca, a Spanish navy captain from the Canary Islands involved in colonial transatlantic shipping and trade, and Doña Isabel

Sor
Juana Inés de la Cruz
O.S.H.



Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz by Miguel Cabrera

Native name	Juana de Asuaje y Ramírez de Santillana
Born	<div>Juana Ramírez de Asbaje</div> <div>12 November 1651</div> <div>San Miguel Nepantla,</div> <div>New Spain</div> <div>(near modern Tepetlixpa,</div> <div>Mexico)</div>
Died	<div>17 April 1695 (aged 46)</div> <div>Mexico City, New Spain</div>
Resting place	Convent of San Jerónimo, Mexico City
Pen name	Juana Inés de la Cruz
Occupation	Nun, poet, writer, musician composer
Language	Spanish, Nahuatl, Latin
Education	

Ramírez de Santillana y Rendón, a distinguished criolla, whose father leased the *Hacienda de Panoayan*, near Mexico City.^[2]

There are two different baptism registrations that have been attributed to her, one under the name of "Juana" in 1648, and another one under the name of "Inés" in 1651, still a matter of academic research and debate.^[3] There is, nevertheless agreement that she was one of the three children that Doña Isabel Ramírez de Santillana had out of wedlock with Don Pedro de Asuaje. Despite having had an occasional contact with her father as a child, Sor Juana's infancy occurred entirely around her mother's family in the *hacienda* of Panaoyan, in Amecameca, leased by her maternal grandfather, and home to the ample Ramírez de Santillana family.^[4] Among her relatives, several women with the name "Inés" have been noted, included her grandmother Inés de Brenes, her maternal-aunt Inés Ramírez de Santillana, and her first-cousin Inés de Brenes y Mendoza, married to a grandson of Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán, the first ever published American-born poet.^[5]

Later described as child prodigy, Sor Juana was educated at home at the *Hacienda de Papaya*, becoming fluent in both Latin and Nahuatl,^[6] and learning philosophy, and mathematics. She was given free access to her grandfather's private library.^[7]

During her childhood, Inés often hid in the *hacienda* chapel to read her grandfather's books from the adjoining library, something forbidden to girls. By the age of three, she had learned how to read and write Latin. By the age of five, she reportedly could do accounts. At age eight, she composed a poem on the Eucharist.^[8] By adolescence, Inés had mastered Greek logic, and at age thirteen she was teaching Latin to young children. She also learned the Aztec language of Nahuatl and wrote some short poems in that language.^[4]

In 1664, at the age of 16, Inés was sent to live in Mexico City. She asked her mother's permission to disguise herself as a male student so that she could enter the university there, without success. Without the ability to obtain a formal education, Juana continued her studies privately. Her

Self taught until the age of twenty-one. (1669)

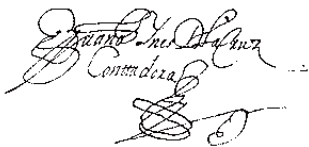
Period17th century Nun

Literary movementBaroque, *Culteranismo*

Years active~1660 to ~1693

Notable worksCarta Atenagorica
First Dream
Pawns of a House
Satira Filosofica

Signature



Hacienda of Panoayan in Amecameca, residence of the **Ramírez de Santillana** family.

family's influential position had gained her the position of lady-in-waiting at the colonial viceroy's court,^[7] where she came under the tutelage of the Vicereine *Donna* Eleonora del Carretto, a member of one of Italy's most prominent families, and wife of the Viceroy of New Spain Don Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, Marquis of Mancera. The viceroy Marquis de Mancera, 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 many questions unprepared 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. Her literary accomplishments garnered her fame throughout New Spain. She was much admired in the viceregal court, and she received several proposals of marriage, which she declined.^[8]

After joining a nunnery in 1667, Sor Juana began writing poetry and prose dealing with such topics as love, environmentalism, feminism, and religion.^{[9][10]} She turned her nun's quarters into a salon, visited by New Spain's female intellectual elite, including *Doña* Eleonora del Carreto, Marchioness of Mancera, and *Doña* Maria Luisa Gonzaga, Countess of Paredes de Nava, both *Vicereines* of the New Spain,^[11] among others. Her criticism of misogyny and the hypocrisy of men led to her condemnation by the Bishop of Puebla,^[12] and in 1694 she was forced to sell her collection of books and focus on charity towards the poor.^[13] She died the next year, having caught the plague while treating her sisters.^[14]

Religious life and name change

In 1667, she entered the Monastery of St. Joseph, a community of the Discalced Carmelite nuns, as a postulant, where she remained but a few months. Later, in 1669, she entered the monastery of the Hieronymite nuns, which had more relaxed rules, where she changed her name to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, probably in reference to Sor Juana de la Cruz Vázquez Gutiérrez who was a Spanish nun whose intellectual accomplishments earned her one of the few dispensations for women to preach the gospel. Another potential namesake was Saint Juan de la Cruz, one of the most accomplished authors of the Spanish Baroque. She chose to become a nun so that she could study as she wished since she wanted "to have no fixed occupation which might curtail my freedom to study."^[15]



Inside the Hieronymite cloister where Sor Juana spent much of her life.

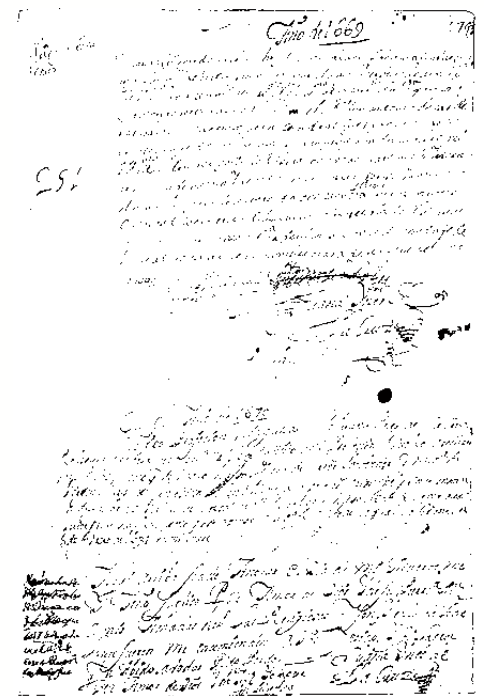
In the convent and perhaps earlier, Sor Juana became intimate friends with Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, who visited her in the convent's locutorio.^[14] She stayed cloistered in the Convent of Santa Paula of the Hieronymite in Mexico City from 1669 until her death in 1695, and there she studied, wrote, and collected a large library of books. The Viceroy and Vicereine of New

Spain became her patrons; they supported her and had her writings published in Spain.^[15] She addressed some of her poems to paintings of her friend and patron María Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga, daughter of Vespasiano Gonzaga, Duca di Guastala, Luzara e Rechiolo and Inés María Manrique, 9th Countess de Paredes, which she also addressed as Lísida.

In November 1690, the bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz published, under the pseudonym of Sor Filotea, and without her permission, Sor Juana's critique of a 40-year-old sermon by Father António Vieira, a Portuguese Jesuit preacher.^[12] Although Sor Juana's intentions for the work, called *Carta Atenagórica* are left to interpretation, many scholars have opted to interpret the work as a challenge to the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church.^[16] Along with *Carta Atenagórica*, the bishop also published his own letter in which he said she should focus on religious instead of secular studies.^[15] He published his criticisms to use them to his advantage against the priest, and while he agreed with her criticisms, he believed that as a woman, she should devote herself to prayer and give up her writings.^[17]

In response to her critics, Sor Juana wrote a letter, *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (*Reply to Sister Philotea*),^[18] in which she defended women's right to formal education.^[19] She also advocated for women's right to serve as intellectual authorities, not only through the act of writing, but also through the publication of their writing.^[19] By putting women, specifically older women, in positions of authority, Sor Juana argued, women could educate other women. Resultingly, Sor Juana argued, this practice could also avoid potentially dangerous situations involving male teachers in intimate settings with young female students.^[20] In 1691, she was reprimanded and ordered to stop writing after the exposure of a private letter in which she wrote of the right of women to education.^[7]

In addition to her status as a woman in a self-prescribed position of authority, Sor Juana's radical position made her an increasingly controversial figure. She famously remarked by quoting an Aragonese poet and echoing St. Teresa of Ávila: "One can perfectly well philosophize while cooking supper."^[21] In response, Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas, Archbishop of Mexico joined other high-ranking officials in condemning Sor Juana's "waywardness." In addition to opposition she received



Manuscript page from *Libro de profesiones y elecciones de prioras y vicarias del Convento de San Gerónimo*, 1586–1713, which Sor Juana signed in ink and her own blood

for challenging the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. Sor Juana was repeatedly criticized for believing that her writing could achieve the same philanthropic goals as community work.^[19]

By 1693, she seemingly ceased writing to avoid risking official censure. Although there is no undisputed evidence of her renouncing her writing, there are documents showing her agreeing to undergo penance.^[13] Her name is affixed to such a document in 1694, but the tone of the supposed handwritten penitentials is in rhetorical and autocratic, in contrast to her normally lyrical style. One is signed "*Yo, la Peor de Todas*" ("I, the worst of all women").^[13] She is said to have sold all her books,^[8] then an extensive library of more than 4,000 volumes, as well as her musical and scientific instruments. Other sources report that her defiance toward the Church led to the confiscation of all of her books and instruments, although the bishop himself agreed with the contents of her letters.^[22]



Of more than one hundred unpublished works,^[23] only a few of her writings have survived, which are known as the *Complete Works*. According to Octavio Paz, her writings were saved by the vicereine.^[24]

She died after ministering to other nuns stricken during a plague, on 17 April 1695. Sigüenza y Góngora delivered the eulogy at her funeral.^[14]

Works

Poetry

First Dream

First Dream, a long philosophical and descriptive *silva* (a poetic form combining verses of 7 and 11 syllables), deals with the shadow of night beneath which a person falls asleep in the midst of quietness and silence.^[25] There night and day animals participate, either dozing or sleeping, all urged to silence and rest by Harpocrates. The person's body ceases its ordinary operations,^[26] which are described in physiological and symbolical terms, ending with the activity of the imagination as an image-reflecting apparatus: the Pharos. From this moment, her soul, in a dream,

First known portrait of Sor Juana, by Juan de Miranda (c. 1680).

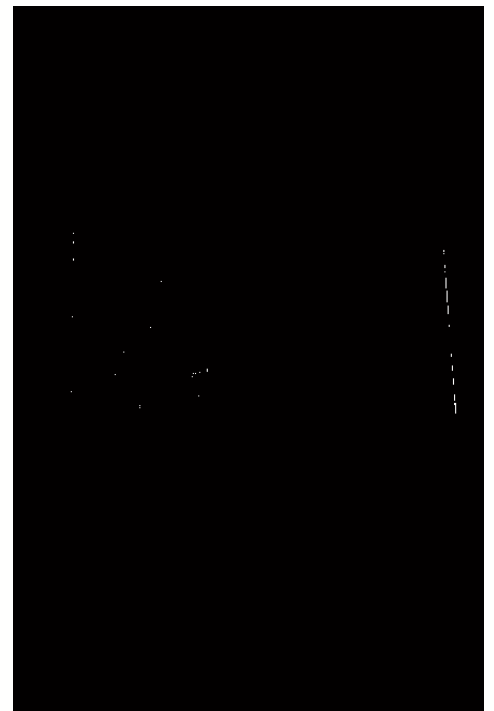
sees itself free at the summit of her own intellect; in other words, at the apex of a pyramid-like mount, which aims at God and is luminous.^[27]

There, perched like an eagle, she contemplates the whole creation,^[28] but fails to comprehend such a sight in a single concept. Dazzled, the soul's intellect faces its own shipwreck, caused mainly by trying to understand the overwhelming abundance of the universe, until reason undertakes that enterprise, beginning with each individual creation, and processing them one by one, helped by the ten categories of Aristotle.^[29]

The soul cannot get beyond questioning herself about the traits and causes of a fountain and a flower, intimating perhaps that his method constitutes a useless effort, since it must take into account all the details, accidents, and mysteries of each being. By that time, the body has consumed all its nourishment, and it starts to move and wake up, soul and body are reunited. The poem ends with the Sun overcoming Night in battle between luminous and dark armies, and with the poet's awakening.^[29]

Love poetry

Sor Juana's first volume of poetry, *Inundación castálida*, was published in Spain by the Vicereine Maria Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzága, Countess of Paredes, Marquise de la Laguna.^[30] Many of her poems dealt with the subject of love and sensuality. Colombian-American translator Jaime Manrique described her poetry thus: "her love poems are expressions of a complex and ambivalent modern psyche, and because they are so passionate and ferocious that when we read them we feel consumed by the naked intensity she achieves."^[31] One of Sor Juana's sonnets:



Libro de obras poéticas de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1693) in the Museo Internacional del Barroco

Soneto 173

*Efectos muy penosos de amor, y que no
por grandes se igualan con las prendas de
quien le causa*

Sonnet 173 in Edith Grossman's 2014 translation^[32]

*The very distressing effects of love, but no matter
how great, they do not equal the qualities of the one
who causes them*

argues that by utilizing impurity and the concept of "fall from grace", *Hombres Necios* implores the double standards men use on women that creates a path for women leaving them in situations they cannot win.^[34] While also including the names of Thais and Lucretia along with the concept of prostitution to add on how men use women and leave them helpless with nothing but the blame and hatred.^[34]

Hombres necios explored the idea of why women were frequently held guilty for the sins that men incited onto them.^[35] Sor Juana expresses her voice through the use of the Baroque literary style, which was prevalent at her time, in a manner that can be understood.^[35] Today it is often seen as a pro-feminist love letter, and even in a "machista" Latin American society it has been popular among the population.^[35]

Hombres Necios, Satira Filosofica Poema **92^[36]**

Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón,

sin ver que sois la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis:

si con ansia sin igual
solicitáis su desdén,

¿por qué queréis que obren bien
si las incitáis al mal?

Combatís su resistencia
y luego, con gravedad,
decís que fue livianidad
lo que hizo la diligencia.

Parecer quiere el denuedo
de vuestro parecer loco,

al niño que pone el coco

You mulish men, Philosophical Satire Poem **92**

Translated by David Frye^[36]

You mulish men, accusing
woman without reason,

not seeing you occasion
the very wrong you blame:

since you, with craving unsurpassed,
have sought for their disdain,

why do you hope for their good works
when you urge them on to ill?

You assail all their resistance,
then, speaking seriously,
you say it was frivolity,
forgetting all your diligence.

What most resembles the bravery
of your mad opinion

is the boy who summons the bogeyman

y luego le tiene miedo.

Queréis, con presunción necia,

hallar a la que buscáis,

para pretendida, Thais,

y en la posesión, Lucrecia.

¿Que humor puede ser más raro

que el que, falto de consejo,

él mismo empaña el espejo,

y siente que no esté claro?

Con el favor y el desdén

tenéis condición igual,

quejándoos, si os tratan mal,

burlándoos, si os quieren bien.

Opinión, ninguna gana;

pues la que más se recata,

si no os admite, es ingrata,

y si os admite, es liviana.

Siempre tan necios andáis

que, con desigual nivel,

a una culpáis por cruel

y a otra por fácil culpáis.

¿Pues cómo ha de estar templada

la que vuestro amor pretende,

and then cowers in fear of him.

You hope, with mulish presumption,

to find the one you seek:

for the one you court, a Thaïs;

but possessing her, Lucrecia.

Whose humor could be odd

than he who, lacking judgment,

himself fogs up the mirror,

then laments that it's not clear?

Of their favor and their disdain

you hold the same condition:

complaining if they treat you ill;

mocking them, if they love you well.

A fair opinion no woman can win,

no matter how discreet she is;

if she won't admit you, she is mean,

and if she does, she's frivolous.

You're always so stubbornly mulish

that, using your unbalanced scale,

you blame one woman for being cruel,

the other one, for being easy.

For how can she be temperate

when you are wooing after her,

si la que es ingrata, ofende,
y la que es fácil, enfada?
Mas, entre el enfado y pena
que vuestro gusto refiere,
bien haya la que no os quiere
y quejaos en hora buena.
Dan vuestras amantes penas
a sus libertades alas,
y después de hacerlas malas
las queréis hallar muy buenas.
¿Cuál mayor culpa ha tenido
en una pasión errada:
la que cae de rogada,
o el que ruega de caído?
¿O cuál es más de culpar,
aunque cualquiera mal haga:
la que peca por la paga,
o el que paga por pecar?
Pues ¿para qué os espantáis
de la culpa que tenéis?
Queredlas cual las hacéis
o hacedlas cual las buscáis.
Dejad de solicitar,

if her being mean offends you
and her being easy maddens?
Yet between the anger and the grief
that your taste recounts,
blessed the woman who doesn't love you,
and go complain for all you're worth.
Your lover's grief gives
wings to their liberties,
yet after making them so bad
you hope to find them very good.
Whose blame should be the greater
in an ill-starred passion:
she who, begged-for, falls,
or he who, fallen, begs her?
Or who deserves more blame,
though both of them do ill:
she who sins for pay,
or he who pays for sin?
So why are you so afraid
of the blame that is your own?
Love them just as you have made them,
or make them as you seek to find.
Just stop your soliciting

y después, con más razón,
 acusaréis la afición
 de la que os fuere a rogar.
 Bien con muchas armas fundo
 que lidia vuestra arrogancia,
 pues en promesa e instancia
 juntáis diablo, carne y mundo.

[35]

and then, with all the more reason,
 you may denounce the infatuation
 of the woman who comes to beg for you.
 With all these arms, then, I have proved
 that what you wield is arrogance,
 for in your promises and your demands
 you join up devil, flesh, and world.

Dramas

In addition to the two comedies outlined here (*House of Desires* [Los empeños de una casa]) and *Love is but a Labyrinth* ([Amor es mas laberinto]), Sor Juana is attributed as the author of a possible ending to the comedy by Agustín de Salazar: *The Second Celestina* (La Segunda Celestina).^[37] In the 1990s, Guillermo Schmidhuber found a release of the comedy that contained a different ending than the otherwise known ending. He proposed that those one thousand words were written by Sor Juana. Some literary critics, such as Octavio Paz,^[38] Georgina Sabat-Rivers,^[39] and Luis Leal^[40] have accepted Sor Juana as the co-author, but others, such as Antonio Alatorre^[41] and José Pascual Buxó, have refuted it.

Comedies

Scholars have debated the meaning of Juana's comedies. Julie Greer Johnson describes how Juana protested against the rigorously defined relationship between genders through her full-length comedies and humor. She argues that Juana recognized the negative view of women in comedy which was designed to uphold male superiority at the expense of women. By recognizing the power of laughter, Juana appropriated the purpose of humor, and



The former Convent of St Jerome in Mexico City.

used it as a socially acceptable medium with which to question notions of men and women.^[42]

Pawns of a House

The work was first performed on October 4, 1683, during the celebration of the Viceroy Count of Paredes' first son's birth.^[43] Some critics maintain that it could have been set up for the Archbishop Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas' entrance to the capital, but this theory is not considered reliable.^[43]

The story revolves around two couples who are in love but, by chance of fate, cannot yet be together. This comedy of errors is considered one of the most prominent works of late baroque Spanish-American literature. One of its most peculiar characteristics is that the driving force in the story is a woman with a strong, decided personality who expresses her desires to a nun.^[44] The protagonist of the story, Dona Leonor, fits the archetype perfectly.^[43]

It is often considered the peak of Sor Juana's work and even the peak of all New-Hispanic literature. *Pawns of a House* is considered a rare work in colonial Spanish-American theater due to the management of intrigue, representation of the complicated system of marital relationships, and the changes in urban life.^[43]

Love is but a Labyrinth

The work premiered on February 11, 1689, during the celebration of the inauguration of the viceroyalty Gaspar de la Cerda y Mendoza. However, in his Essay on Psychology, Ezequiel A. Chavez mentions Fernandez del Castillo as a coauthor of this comedy.^[45]

The plot takes on the well-known theme in Greek mythology of Theseus: a hero from Crete Island. He fights against the Minotaur and awakens the love of Ariadne and Phaedra.^[46] Sor Juana conceived Theseus as the archetype of the baroque hero, a model also used by her fellow countryman Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Theseus's triumph over the Minotaur does not make Theseus proud, but instead allows him to be humble.^[45]

Music

Besides poetry and philosophy, Sor Juana was interested in science, mathematics and music. The latter represents an important aspect, not only because musicality was an intrinsic part of the poetry of the time but also for the fact that she devoted a significant portion of her studies to the theory of instrumental tuning that, especially in the Baroque period, had reached a point of critical

importance. So involved was Sor Juana in the study of music, that she wrote a treatise called *El Caracol* (which is lost now) that sought to simplify musical notation and solve the problems that Pythagorean tuning suffered.

In the writings of Juana Inés, it is possible to detect the importance of sound. We can observe this in two ways. First of all, the analysis of music and the study of musical temperament appears in several of her poems. For instance, in the following poem, Sor Juana delves into the natural notes and the accidentals of musical notation:^[47]

Propiedad es de natura
que entre Dios y el hombre media,
y del cielo el be cuadrado
junto al be bemol de la tierra.
(Villancico 220)

Professor Sarah Finley^[48] argues that the visual is related with patriarchal themes, while the sonorous offers an alternative to the feminine space in the work of Sor Juana. As an example of this, Finley points out that Narciso falls in love with a voice, and not with a reflection.

Other notable works

One musical work attributed to Sor Juana survives from the archive of Guatemala Cathedral. This is a 4-part villancico, *Madre, la de los primores* (<http://www.cpd.org/wiki/images/f/f3/Cru-mad.pdf>).

Other works include *Hombres Necios* (Foolish Men), and *The Divine Narcissus*.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote a letter to her Confessor, Antonio Núñez de Miranda, titled *Autodefensa Espiritual* (*Spiritual Self-Defense*) in 1690, ten years before she severs ties after sending the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*.^[49] However, unlike the *Respuesta*, the *Autodefensa* has much more biting and frank language used. In the *Autodefensa*, Sor Juana defends her intellectual pursuits and criticizes the restrictions placed on women's education and opportunities to pursue knowledge. She argues that women have the same rational souls as men and should be able to study and engage in intellectual pursuits. In the *Autodefensa* letter, Sor Juana uses this more forceful and confrontational language to reprimand and dismiss her Confessor.^[50] This has led scholars to suggest that the *Autodefensa* was a rehearsal for the arguments she would later make in the *Respuesta*. In both letters, Sor Juana defends her right to pursue knowledge and critiques the restrictions placed on women's intellectual development.^[49] Many of these themes were feminist in nature with one of the most notable being the right of women to be able to study intellectual pursuits. This theme is prevalent in the lines,

“But who has prohibited women private and individual studies? Do they not have a rational soul like men? Why should it then not enjoy within them the privilege of enlightenment in an education? Is it not as capable of earning God’s glory and grace as yours? Why should it not be capable of such news and science, a trifle? What divine revelation, what determination of the Church, what dictate of reason made for us such a severe law?” (translated from Tapia Mendez 1993).^[50]

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Autodefensa Espiritual* and *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* are considered some of the most significant feminist writings of the 17th century. Her advocacy for women's intellectual rights was particularly groundbreaking, as women in her time were often restricted from pursuing academic and intellectual pursuits. Sor Juana's writings challenged patriarchal structures and called for greater gender equality and opportunities for women to pursue their passions. Sor Juana's writings were not only feminist but also expressed her thoughts on politics and religion.^[50] She was known for her strong defense of her beliefs and refusal to be silenced, which resulted in her being criticized by the Church and other powerful figures of her time. Despite facing backlash and opposition, Sor Juana continued to write and publish her works. Her work continues to inspire feminists and scholars today, and she is celebrated as a feminist icon and a leading voice in Latin American literature and intellectual thought. Sor Juana's writing also had a significant impact on the development of Mexican literature and culture, and she is considered a national treasure in Mexico.

Translations and interpretations

Octavio Paz is credited with re-establishing the importance of the historic Sor Juana in modern times,^[51] and other scholars have been instrumental in translating Sor Juana's work to other languages. The only translations of *Carta Atenagorica* are found in *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Selected Writings* by Pamela Kirk Rappaport and *The Tenth Muse: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* by Fanchon Royer.^[52] Translations of Sor Juana's *La Respuesta* are credited to Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell, Edith Grossman, Margaret Seyers Peden, and Alan S. Trubeblood.^[52] These translations are respectively found in *The Answer/La Respuesta, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz: Selected Works, A Woman of Genius: The Intellectual Biography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* and *Poems, Protest, and a Dream*, and *A Sor Juana Anthology*.^[52]

Since Sor Juana's works were rediscovered after her death,^[51] scholarly interpretations and translations are both abundant and contrasting.

Octavio Paz

Octavio Paz was a Mexican Nobel Prize laureate and scholar. In his 1982 book, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe* (translated to English by Margaret Sayers Peden as *Sor Juana: Or, The Traps of Faith*), Paz examines and contemplates Sor Juana's poetry and life in the context of the history of New Spain, particularly focusing on the difficulties women then faced while trying to thrive in academic and artistic fields. Primarily, Paz aims to explain why Sor Juana chose to become a nun.^[24] In Juana Ramírez, Octavio Paz and Diane Marting find that Sor Juana's decision to become a nun stemmed from her refusal to marry; joining the convent, according to Paz and Marting, was a way for Juana to obtain authority and freedom without marrying.^[53]

In his analyses of Sor Juana's poetry, Octavio Paz traces some of her influences to the Spanish writers of the Golden Age and the Hermetic tradition, mainly derived from the works of a noted Jesuit scholar of her era, Athanasius Kircher. Paz interprets Sor Juana's most ambitious and extensive poem, "First Dream" ("Primero Sueño"), as a representation of the desire of knowledge through a number of hermetic symbols, albeit transformed in her own language and skilled image-making abilities. In conclusion, Paz makes the case that Sor Juana's works were the most important body of poetic work produced in the Americas until the arrival of 19th-century figures such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman.^[24]



Monument of Sor Juana in Chapultepec.

Tarsicio Herrera Zapién

Tarsicio Herrera Zapién, a classical scholar, has also devoted much of his career to the study of Sor Juana's works. Some of his publications (in Spanish) include *Buena fe y humanismo en Sor Juana: diálogos y ensayos: las obras latinas: los sorjuanistas recientes* (1984); *López Velarde y sor Juana, feministas opuestos: y cuatro ensayos sobre Horacio y Virgilio en México* (1984); *Poemas mexicanos universales: de Sor Juana a López Velarde* (1989) and *Tres siglos y cien vidas de Sor Juana* (1995).^[54]

Feminist analyses and translations

Scholars such as Scout Frewer argue that because Juana's advocacy for religious and intellectual authority would now be associated with feminism, she was a protofeminist.^[55] In the twenty-first century, Latin American philosophers and scholars generally interpret Sor Juana as a feminist before the time of feminism.

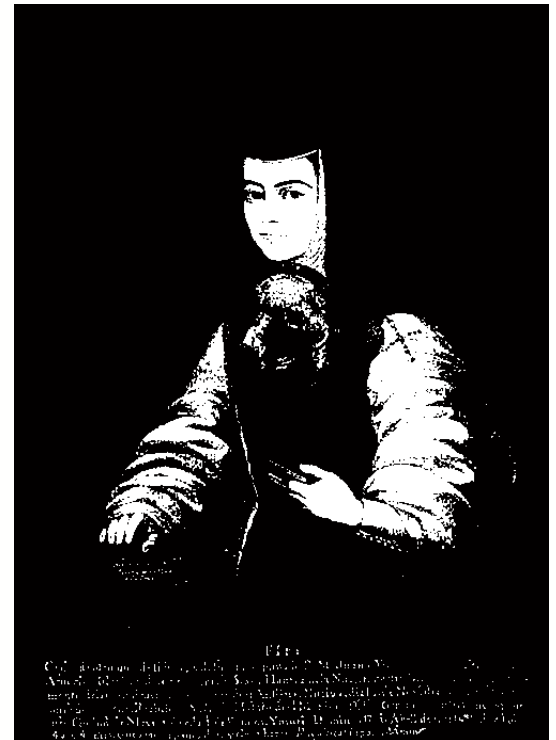
For instance, scholars like Rachel O'Donnell argue that Sor Juana occupied a special place in between socially acceptable and socially unacceptable roles in seventeenth century Mexico. By examining Sor Juana intersectionally, they prioritize the context of New Spain, specifically the influence of religion, race, and social norms, in understanding Sor Juana as a female theologian and poet.^[56]

According to O'Donnell, in colonial Mexico, education was an undertaking reserved for men, especially activities like writing and reading.^[56] Consequently, scholars like Octavio Paz argue, religion became a way for women to avoid marriage. Since Sor Juana was opposed to marriage, Paz argues, entering the convent was a socially acceptable way to be a single woman in seventeenth century Mexico.^[53] Entering the convent also meant that Sor Juana could read and write about religion despite the barriers to formal education for women. O'Donnell argues that Sor Juana was called a rare bird because although theology was only an acceptable pursuit for men in the Catholic Church, she actively studied religion.^[56] Sor Juana likely perceived wisdom and religion as inseparable, so she probably also believed that to follow God was to pursue wisdom.^[53] A third perspective suggests that considering the colonial context of New Spain and Sor Juana's background as a *criolla*, she represented colonial knowledge in a way that defied colonial religious structures.^[57]

Luis Felipe Fabre criticized 'Sorjuanista' scholarship as a whole, arguing that the discourse is binary rather than complex and multilayered.^[58]

Luis Felipe Fabre

Luis Felipe Fabre, a Mexican writer and scholar, ridicules other scholars, whom he collectively calls Sorjuanistas, who idolize Sor Juana.^[58] In his book, *Sor Juana and Other Monsters*, Fabre argues that the appropriation and recontextualization immanent in scholars' interpretations of Sor Juana construct Sor Juana as either a heretic or a lesbian.^[58] Fabre suggests that such representations constitute Sor Juana as a monstrosity or abnormality rather than as a complex woman.^[58] He suggests that rather than locating Sor Juana in a fixed identity, scholarship on Sor Juana should be a fluctuating and multilayered conversation.^[58]



Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz by Friar Miguel de Herrera (1700-1789),

Margaret Sayers Peden

Margaret Sayers Peden's 1982 *A Woman of Genius: The Intellectual Autobiography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, was the first English translation of Sor Juana's work.^[59] As well, Peden is credited for her 1989 translation of *Sor Juana: Or, the Traps of Faith*. Unlike other translations, Peden chose to translate the title of Sor Juana's best known work, *First Dream*, as "First I Dream" instead. Peden's use of first person instills authority in Sor Juana as an author, as a person with knowledge, in a male-dominated society.^[52] Peden also published her English translations of Sor Juana's work in an anthology called *Poems, Protest, and a Dream*. This work includes her response to authorities censuring her, *La Respuesta*, and *First Dream*.^[60]

Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell

An equally valuable feminist analysis and interpretation of Sor Juana's life and work is found in *The Answer/La Respuesta by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* by Electa Arenal, a Sor Juana scholar who is recognized among feminists who changed America, and Amanda Powell, a poet and translator.^[61] The original publication, released in 1994 by The Feminist Press, was re-released in an updated second edition in 2009, also by The Feminist Press. The bilingual publication includes poems, an annotated publication of Sor Juana's response to Church officials and her impassioned plea for education of women, analysis and a bibliography. *The Answer* applies a valuable gender lens to Sor Juana's writings and life.^[51] In their feminist analysis, Powell and Arenal translate the viewpoint of Sor Juana's writing as gender-ambiguous. Released in an updated second edition in 2009, also by The Feminist Press, the bilingual publication includes poems, an annotated publication of Sor Juana's response to Church officials and her impassioned plea for education of women, analysis and a bibliography.^[51]

Theresa A. Yugar

Theresa A. Yugar, a feminist theologian scholar in her own right, wrote her Master's and Doctoral theses on Sor Juana. Her book, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Feminist Reconstruction of Biography and Text*, discusses the life of Sor Juana through a feminist lens and analysis of her texts, *La Respuesta* (The Answer) and *El Primero Sueño* (First Dream).^[62]

Yugar aims to understand why individuals in Mexico in the twenty-first century have more knowledge of Frida Kahlo than Sor Juana.^[62] She celebrates poet Octavio Paz for crossing national borders with his internationally acclaimed work on *Sor Juana: Or, The Traps of Faith*. However, while Paz establishes Sor Juana's historical relevance, Yugar expands on his work to establish Sor Juana's importance in the twenty-first century.^[62]

Yugar argues that Sor Juana is the first female bibliophile in the New World. She also argues that Sor Juana's historic focus on gender and class equality in education (the public sphere) and the household (the private sphere), in addition to her advocacy for language rights, and the connection

between indigenous religious traditions and ecological protection were paramount in the seventeenth century. Today's similar advocacy ignores her primal position in that work which is currently exclusively associated with ecofeminism and feminist theology.^[62]

Historical influence

Philanthropy

The Sor Juana Inés Services for Abused Women was established in 1993 to pay Sor Juana's dedication to helping women survivors of domestic violence forward. Renamed the Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse (CORA), the organization offers community, legal, and family support services in Spanish to Latin American women and children who have faced or are facing domestic violence.^[63]

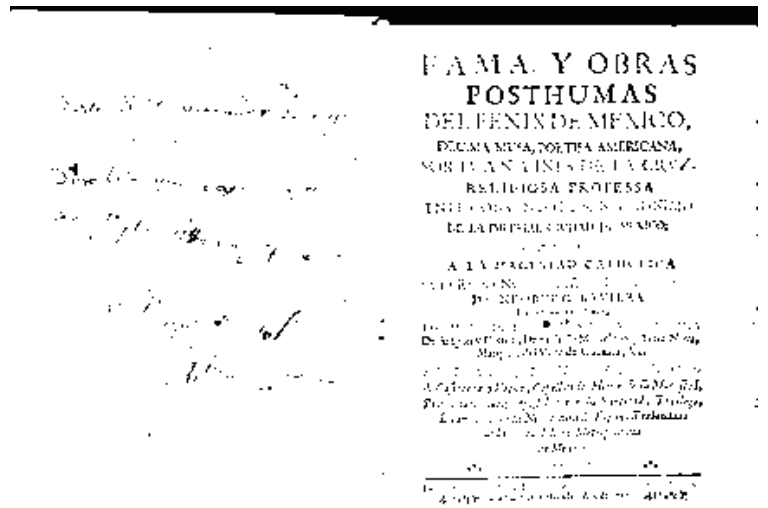
Education

The San Jerónimo Convent, where Juana lived the last 27 years of her life and where she wrote most of her work is today the University of the Cloister of Sor Juana in the historic center of Mexico City. The Mexican government founded in the university in 1979.^[64]

Political controversy

While Sor Juana was a famous and controversial figure in the seventeenth century, she is also an important figure in modern times.

During renovations at the cloister in the 1970s, bones believed to be those of Sor Juana were discovered. A medallion similar to the one depicted in portraits of Juana was also found. Margarita López Portillo, the sister of President José López Portillo (1976–1982), kept the medallion. During the tercentennial of Sor Juana's death in 1995, a member of the Mexican congress called on Margarita López Portillo to return the medallion, which she said she had taken for safekeeping. She returned it to Congress on November 14, 1995, with the event and description of the controversy reported in *The New York Times* a month later. Whether or not the medallion belonged to Juana, the incident sparked discussions about Juana and abuse of official power in Mexico.^[65]



The first part of Sor Juana's complete works, Madrid, 1689.

Contribution to feminism

Historic feminist movements

Amanda Powell locates Sor Juana as a contributor to the Querelles des Femmes, a three-century long literary debate about women.^[66] Central to this early feminist debate were ideas about gender and sex, and, consequently, misogyny.^[66]

Powell argues that the formal and informal networks and pro-feminist ideas of the Querelles des Femmes were important influences on Sor Juana's work, *La Respuesta*.^[66] For women, Powell argues, engaging in conversation with other women was as significant as communicating through writing.^[66] However, while Teresa of Ávila appears in Sor Juana's *La Respuesta*, Sor Juana makes no mention of the person who launched the debate, Christine de Pizan.^[66] Rather than focusing on Sor Juana's engagement with other literary works, Powell prioritizes Sor Juana's position of authority in her own literary discourse. This authoritative stance not only demonstrates a direct counter to misogyny, but was also typically reserved for men.^[66] As well, Sor Juana's argument that ideas about women in religious hierarchies are culturally constructed, not divine, echoes ideas about the construction of gender and sex.^[66]

Modern feminist movements

Yugar connects Sor Juana to feminist advocacy movements in the twenty-first century, such as religious feminism, ecofeminism, and the feminist movement in general.

Although the current religious feminist movement grew out of the Liberation Theology movement of the 1970s,^[67] Yugar uses Sor Juana's criticism of religious law that permits only men to occupy leadership positions within the Church as early evidence of her religious feminism. Based on Sor Juana's critique of the oppressive and patriarchal structures of the Church of her day,^[68] Yugar argues that Sor Juana predated current movements, like Latina Feminist Theology, that privilege Latina women's views on religion.^[67] She also cites modern movements such as the Roman Catholic Women Priest Movement, the Women's Ordination Conference, and the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual, all of which also speak out against the patriarchal limitations on women in religious institutions.^[67]

Yugar emphasizes that Sor Juana interpreted the Bible as expressing concern with people of all backgrounds as well as with the earth.^[62] Most significantly, Yugar argues, Sor Juana expressed concern about the consequences of capitalistic Spanish domination over the earth. These ideas, Yugar points out, are commonly associated with modern feminist movements concerned with decolonization^[67] and the protection of the planet.^[62]

A symbol

Colonial and indigenous identities

As a woman in religion, Sor Juana has become associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe, a religious symbol of Mexican identity, but was also connected to Aztec goddesses.^[69] For example, parts of Sor Juana's *Villancico 224* are written in Nahuatl, while others are written in Spanish.^[23] The Virgin of Guadalupe is the subject of the *Villancico*, but depending on the language, the poem refers to both the Virgin of Guadalupe and Cihuacoatl, an indigenous goddess.^[23] It is ambiguous whether Sor Juana prioritizes the Mexican or indigenous religious figure, or whether her focus is on harmonizing the two.^[23]

Sor Juana's connection to indigenous religious figures is also prominent in her *Loa to Divine Narcissus*, (Spanish "*El Divino Narciso*") (see Jauregui 2003 (https://www.academia.edu/6991029/_El_plato_más_sabroso_eucarist%C3%ADa_plagio_diabólico_y_la_traducción_criolla_del_can%C3%ADbal), 2009 (https://www.academia.edu/11767784/_Cannibalism_the_Eucharist_and_Criollo_Subjects_)). The play centers on the interaction between two Indigenous people, named Occident and America, and two Spanish people, named Religion and Zeal.^[23] The characters exchange their religious perspectives, and conclude that there are more similarities between their religious traditions than there are differences.^[23] The loa references Aztec rituals and gods, including Huitzilopochtli, who symbolized the land of Mexico.^[23]

Scholars like Nicole Gomez argue that Sor Juana's fusion of Spanish and Aztec religious traditions in her *Loa to Divine Narcissus* aims to raise the status of indigenous religious traditions to that of Catholicism in New Spain.^[23] Gomez argues that Sor Juana also emphasizes the violence with which Spanish religious traditions dominated indigenous ones.^[23] Ultimately, Gomez argues that Sor Juana's use of both colonial and indigenous languages, symbols, and religious traditions not only gives voice to indigenous peoples, who were marginalized, but also affirms her own indigenous identity.^[23]

Through their scholarly interpretations of Sor Juana's work, Octavio Paz and Alicia Gaspar de Alba have also incorporated Sor Juana into discourses about Mexican identity. Paz's accredited scholarship on Sor Juana elevated her to a national symbol as a Mexican woman, writer, and religious authority.^[19] On the contrary, Gaspar de Alba emphasized Sor Juana's indigenous identity by inserting her into Chicana discourses.^[19]

Connection to Frida Kahlo



Statue of Sor Juana Inés in Madrid, Spain.

Paul Allatson emphasizes that women like Sor Juana and Frida Kahlo masculinized their appearances to symbolically complicate the space marked for women in society.^[19] Sor Juana's decision to cut her hair as punishment for mistakes she made during learning^[70] signified her own autonomy, but was also a way to engage in the masculinity expected of male-dominated spaces, like universities. According to Paul Allatson, nuns were also required to cut their hair after entering the convent.^[19] These ideas, Allatson suggests, are echoed in Frida Kahlo's 1940 self-portrait titled *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, or *Autorretrato con cabellos corto*.^[19]



Juana Ines de la Cruz in art by Mexican artist Mauricio García Vega.

As well, the University of the Cloister of Sor Juana honored both Frida Kahlo and Sor Juana on October 31, 2018, with a symbolic altar. The altar, called *Las Dos Juanas*, was specially made for the Day of the Dead.^[71]

Official recognition by the Mexican government

In present times, Sor Juana is still an important figure in Mexico.

In 1995, Sor Juana's name was inscribed in gold on the wall of honor in the Mexican Congress in April 1995.^[65] Sor Juana also appears on the Mexican currency obverse. She was first included on the 1000 pesos AA family bill in 1978, which was in circulation until 1992.^[72] Between 1994 and 2020, she appeared on the 200 pesos C, D, D1, and F family bills.^[73] She currently appears on the 100 pesos G bill, which has been in circulation since 2020. The town where Sor Juana grew up, San Miguel Nepantla in the municipality of Tepetlixpa, State of Mexico, was renamed in her honor as Nepantla de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Veneration

In 2022, the Episcopal Church of the United States gave final approval and added her feast to the liturgical calendar. Her feast day is April 18.^[74]

Saint
Juana Inés de la Cruz

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- 1701 - *Fama, y obras posthumas, tomo tercero, del fenix de México, y dezima musa, poetisa de la America, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, religiosa professa en el Convento de San Geronimo, de la imperial ciudad de Mexico*. Barcelona: Rafael Figuerò
- 1709 - *Poemas de la unica poetisa americana, musa dezima, soror Juana Inés de la Cruz, religiosa professa en el monasterio de San Germonimo de la imperial ciudad de Mexico*. Valencia: Antonio Bordazar



Monastic and Theologian

Venerated in Episcopal Church

Feast 18 April

Attributes Hieronymite habit;
Seated at a desk;
Nun's shield depicting the Annunciation;
Rosary belt

Popular culture

Literature

- American poet Diane Ackerman wrote a verse drama, *Reverse Thunder*, about Sor Juana (1992).^[75]
- Canadian poet and novelist Margaret Atwood's 2007 book of poems *The Door* includes a poem entitled "Sor Juana Works in the Garden".^[76]
- Puerto Rican poet Giannina Braschi wrote the postmodern Spanglish novel *Yo-Yo Boing!* in which characters debate the greatest women poets, acknowledging both Sor Juana and Emily Dickinson.^[77]
- Canadian novelist Paul Anderson devoted 12 years writing a 1300-page novel entitled *Hunger's Brides* (pub. 2004) on Sor Juana.^[78] His novel won the 2005 Alberta Book Award.^[79]
- Sor Juana was the subject of a 2007 fictionalized novel entitled *Sor Juana's Second Dream: A Novel* by Alicia Gaspar de Alba.^[80]

Music

- American composer John Adams and director Peter Sellars used two of Sor Juana's poems, *Pues mi Dios ha nacido a penar* and *Pues está tiritando* in their libretto for the Nativity oratorio-opera *El Niño* (2000).
- Composer Allison Sniffin's original composition, *Óyeme con los ojos* – (Hear Me with Your

Eyes: Sor Juana on the Nature of Love), based on text and poetry by Sor Juana, was commissioned by Melodia Women's Choir, which premiered the work at the Kaufman Center in New York City.^[81]

- Composer Daniel Crozier and librettist Peter M. Krask wrote *With Blood, With Ink*, an opera based around her life, while both were students at Baltimore's Peabody Institute in 1993. The work won first prize in the National Operatic and Dramatic Association's Chamber Opera Competition. In 2000, excerpts were included in the New York City Opera's Showcasing American Composers Series. The work in its entirety was premiered by the Fort Worth Opera on April 20, 2014, and recorded by Albany Records.
- Puerto Rican singer iLe recites part of one of Sor Juana's sonnets (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3eQAURs2t2gC>) in her song "Rescatarme ([https://www.vevo.com/watch/ile-official/Rescatarme-\(Cover-Audio\)/USSD21600344](https://www.vevo.com/watch/ile-official/Rescatarme-(Cover-Audio)/USSD21600344))".
- In 2013, the Brazilian composer Jorge Antunes composed an electroacoustic musical work entitled *CARTA ATHENAGÓRICA*, in the studio of CMMAS (Mexican Center for Music and Sound Arts) in the city of Morelia, with the support of Ibermúsicas. The composition, which honors Sor Juana is called "Figurative Music", in which the musical structure and musical objects are based on rhetoric with figures of speech. In the work Antunes uses the chiasmus, also called retruécano, from poems of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Film, television and video

- Mexican actress Andrea Palma played her in the 1935 biopic "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz"
- A telenovela about her life, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, was created in 1962.
- María Luisa Bemberg wrote and directed the 1990 film *Yo, la peor de todas (I, the Worst of All)*, based on Octavo Paz's *Sor Juana: Or, the Traps of Faith* based on Sor Juana's life.
- The Spanish-language miniseries *Juana Inés* (2016) by Canal Once TV, starring Arantza Ruiz and Arcelia Ramírez as Sor Juana, dramatizes her life.

Theater

- Helen Edmundson's play *The Heresy of Love*, based on the life of Sor Juana, was premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company in early 2012 and revived by Shakespeare's Globe in 2015.^[82]
- Jesusa Rodríguez has produced a number of works concerning Sor Juana, including *Sor Juana en Almoloya* and *Striptease de Sor Juana*, based on Juana's poem "Primero Sueño".^[83]
- Playwright, director, and producer Kenneth Prestininzi wrote *Impure Thoughts (Without Apology)*, which follows Sor Juana's experience with Bishop Francisco Aguilar y Seijas. "[2] (http://newdramatists.org/sites/default/files/impure_thoughts_without_apology_june_2016_1.pdf) Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20171011130342/http://newdramatists.org/sites/default/files/impure_thoughts_without_apology_june_2016_1.pdf) 2017-10-11 at the Wayback Machine".
- Tanya Saracho's play *The Tenth Muse*, a fictionalized 18th-century drama about women in a convent in Colonial Mexico included seven female characters and their discovery of and

relationship to Sor Juana's writings, debuted at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.^[84]

See also

Notes

- a. English: Sister Joan Agnes of the Cross

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