

You Men or You Foolish Men

Translation 1

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz

Published in the 1680s

- 1 Silly, you men—so very adept
at wrongly faulting womankind,
not seeing you're alone to blame
for faults you plant in woman's mind.
- 2 After you've won by urgent plea
the right to tarnish her good name,
you still expect her to behave—
you, that coaxed her into shame.
- 3 You batter her resistance down
and then, all righteousness, proclaim
that feminine frivolity,
not your persistence, is to blame.
- 4 When it comes to bravely posturing,
your witlessness must take the prize:
you're the child that makes a bogeyman,
and then recoils in fear and cries.
- 5 Presumptuous beyond belief,
you'd have the woman you pursue
be Thais when you're courting her,
Lucretia once she falls to you.
- 6 For plain default of common sense,
could any action be so queer
as oneself to cloud the mirror,
then complain that it's not clear?
- 7 Whether you're favored or disdained,
nothing can leave you satisfied.
You whimper if you're turned away,
you sneer if you've been gratified
- 8 With you, no woman can hope to score
whichever way, she's bound to lose
spurning you, she's ungrateful—
succumbing, you call her lewd
- 9 Your folly is always the same
you apply a single rule
to the one you accuse of looseness
and the one you brand as cruel
- 10 What happy mean could there be
for the woman who catches your eye,
if, unresponsive, she offends,
yet whose complaisance you decry?
- 11 Still, whether it's torment or anger—
and both ways you've yourselves to
blame—
God bless the woman who won't have
you,
no matter how loud you complain.
- 12 It's your persistent entreaties
that change her from timid to bold.
Having made her thereby naughty,
you would have her good as gold.
- 13 So where does the greater guilt lie
for a passion that should not be:
with the man who pleads out of
baseness
or the woman debased by his plea?
- 14 Or which is more to be blamed—
though both will have cause for chagrin:
the woman who sins for money
or the man who pays money to sin?
- 15 So why are you men all so stunned
at the thought you're all guilty alike?
Either like them for what you've made
them
or make of them what you can like.
- 16 If you'd give up pursuing them,
you'd discover, without a doubt,
you've a stronger case to make
against those who seek you out.
- 17 I well know what powerful arms
you wield in pressing for evil:
your arrogance is allied
with the world, the flesh, and the devil!

Translation 2

- 1 You foolish men who lay the guilt on women, not seeing you're the cause of the very thing you blame;
- 2 if you invite their disdain with measureless desire why wish they well behave if you incite to ill.
- 3 You fight their stubbornness, then, weightily, you say it was their lightness when it was your guile.
- 4 In all your crazy shows you act just like a child who plays the bogeyman of which he's then afraid.
- 5 With foolish arrogance you hope to find a Thais in her you court, but a Lucretia when you've possessed her.
- 6 What kind of mind is odder than his who mists a mirror and then complains that it's not clear.
- 7 Their favour and disdain you hold in equal state, if they mistreat, you complain, you mock if they treat you well.
- 8 No woman wins esteem of you: the most modest is ungrateful if she refuses to admit you; yet if she does, she's loose.
- 9 You always are so foolish your censure is unfair; one you blame for cruelty the other for being easy.
- 10 What must be her temper who offends when she's ungrateful and wearies when compliant?
- 11 But with the anger and the grief that your pleasure tells good luck to her who doesn't love you and you go on and complain.
- 12 Your lover's moans give wings to women's liberty: and having made them bad, you want to find them good.
- 13 Who has embraced the greater blame in passion? She who, solicited, falls, or he who, fallen, pleads?
- 14 Who is more to blame, though either should do wrong? She who sins for pay or he who pays to sin?
- 15 Why be outraged at the guilt that is of your own doing? Have them as you make them or make them what you will.
- 16 Leave off your wooing and then, with greater cause, you can blame the passion of her who comes to court?
- 17 Patent is your arrogance that fights with many weapons since in promise and insistence you join world, flesh and devil.

Original

- 1 Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón,
sin ver que sois la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis:
- 2 si con ansia sin igual
solicitáis su desdén,
¿por qué queréis que obren bien
si las incitáis al mal?
- 3 Combatís su resistencia
y luego, con gravedad,
decís que fue liviandad
lo que hizo la diligencia.
- 4 Parecer quiere el denuedo
de vuestro parecer loco,
al niño que pone el coco
y luego le tiene miedo.
- 5 Queréis, con presunción necia,
hallar a la que buscáis,
para pretendida, Thais,
y en la posesión, Lucrecia
- 6 ¿Qué humor puede ser más raro
que el que, falto de consejo,
el mismo empaña el espejo
y siente que no esté claro?
- 7 Con el favor y el desdén
tenéis condición igual,
quejándoos, si os tratan mal,
burlándoos, si os quieren bien.
- 8 Opinión, ninguna gana:
pues la que más se recata,
si no os admite, es ingrata,
y si os admite, es liviana
- 9 Siempre tan necios andáis
que, con desigual nivel,
a una culpáis por crúel
y a otra por fácil culpáis.
- 10 ¿Pues cómo ha de estar templada
la que vuestro amor pretende,
si la que es ingrata, ofende,
y la que es fácil, enfada?
- 11 Mas, entre el enfado y pena
que vuestro gusto refiere,
bien haya la que no os quiere
y quejaos en hora buena.
- 12 Dan vuestras amantes penas
a sus libertades alas,
y después de hacerlas malas
las queréis hallar muy buenas.
- 13 ¿Cuál mayor culpa ha tenido
en una pasión errada:
la que cae de rogada
o el que ruega de caído?
- 14 ¿O cuál es más de culpar,
aunque cualquiera mal haga:
la que peca por la paga
o el que paga por pecar?
- 15 Pues ¿para qué os espantáis
de la culpa que tenéis?
Queredlas cual las hacéis
o hacedlas cual las buscáis.
- 16 Dejad de solicitar,
y después, con más razón,
acusaréis la afición
de la que os fuere a rogar.
- 17 Bien con muchas armas fundo
que lidia vuestra arrogancia,
pues en promesa e instancia
juntáis diablo, carne y mud.

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz: Biography

Compiled from *Poets.org* and *My Poetic Side*

Born around 1651 in New Spain (n.k.a Mexico), Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez was the illegitimate daughter of a Spanish father and Creole mother. She grew up when the country belonged to Spain, but critics consider her one of Mexico's most influential poets, even though her male contemporaries did not believe women possessed either artistic talents or intelligence.

She practiced her religion (Catholicism) devoutly from an early age and lived at her grandfather's hacienda where she enjoyed reading. Despite not receiving a formal education, she demonstrated academic gifts and wrote her first poem when eight years old. By her teens she was mastering Greek logic and beginning to teach other children. She also learned Nahuatl, an Aztec language spoken in Central Mexico, and wrote some short poems in that language. As a female she could not attend university, so when she moved to Mexico City to stay with her mother, she continued to study by herself.

After her presentation at Viceroy Marquis de Mancera's court, the Viceroy's wife took her into service. Her level of learning and scholarly knowledge made her a celebrity. When she was 17, the Viceroy assembled a panel of scholars to test her intelligence. Soon after, throughout Mexico, the public learned about her vast array of skills and knowledge, and as her reputation grew, several men proposed to her, but she rejected them all, opting instead to dedicate herself as nun in a local monastery.

She possessed her own library and study and often enjoyed deep conversations with scholars and academics. She wrote poetry and articles and continued to learn. The Viceroy and his wife protected her as her patrons, but when they left for Spain

in 1688, people, particularly the religious leaders in Mexico, criticized her. In 1690, without her permission someone using the pseudonym "Sor Filotea de la Cruz" published a letter in which she criticized a well-known Jesuit sermon. Included with her letter was a letter from "Sor Filotea" (actually the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz) criticizing de la Cruz for her comments and for the lack of serious religious content in her poems. People have praised Sor Juana's reply, the now famous *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* as the first feminist manifesto. She defended a woman's right to education and presented varied other topics—leading to further criticism. The Archbishop of Mexico and others demanded that she give up any non-religious books or studies, but she continued to publish non-religious works, among them several *villancicos* (a poetic form typically sung as a religious devotional for feasts of the Catholic calendar) about St. Catharine of Alexandria, written in a more feminist than religious tone.

Perhaps to avoid censure, she discontinued her work; thus, considering the difficulty faced by all women who wanted to pursue an academic or artistic future and her short publishing career, she made a remarkable literary contribution. The quality and quantity she produced ranging from comedy, plays, and poetry to essays and letters, all testify to her desire to find new ways to express herself and to learn about the world around her.

After she was forced to give up her writing, de la Cruz undertook a penance period. In 1695, the plague visited the convent and she worked tirelessly to help her fellow nuns. She contracted the disease herself shortly afterwards and died at 44.