

DE LA CRUZ, SOR JUANA INÉS (1648–1695)

Who shall bear the heavier blame,
When remorse the twain enthralls,
She, who for the asking, falls,
He who, asking, brings to shame?

Hombres Necios. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

The most famous writer of colonial Latin America, known in her own times as the Tenth Muse, was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Born out-of-wedlock to Isabel Ramírez y Vargas and Pedro Manuel de Asuaje, Sor Juana described herself as a child with a precocious desire for learning and pressured her mother to allow her to join her older sister's lessons with the local teacher for girls. When she learned to read and write at an early age, Sor Juana continued to teach herself a variety of subjects in the library of her maternal grandfather. Beautiful and intellectually gifted, she was taken to live in the viceregal court where she remained as a protégée of Vicereine Leonor Carreto. In 1667 she entered the Convent of Santa Teresa, of the spartan Carmelite order, but soon thereafter left that strict order to profess in the Convent of San Jerónimo where she lived for the next twenty-six years. Dedicated to her writing, Sor Juana's copious missives were eventually published in 1689 under the title *Inundación Castálida*. Sor Juana gained universal acclaim throughout the Spanish empire. But forced by church rules to a traditional conventual role, Sor Juana made a public renunciation of her writing in 1694, sold her books, and reconsecrated herself as a nun, signing the pledge with her own blood. In 1695, during an epidemic in San Jerónimo, she contracted the plague and died on April 15, 1695.