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The Defiant Muse

Drama, by Nicholas A. Patricca



The Defiant Muse

Drama. By Nicholas A. Patricca. Cast: 9m., 4w. This play tells the story of how one extraordinary woman overcomes the restrictions of her family, church and culture to realize her identity as an artist, scholar and independent person. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz managed to develop a rich spiritual life as a nun while leading an astonishingly accomplished worldly life at the 17th-century court of the viceroy of New Spain. As an intimate friend of “Lisi,” the vicereine, and as an advisor to the Council of Mexico City, Sor Juana exercised a unique political and cultural power for the benefit of orphans, abandoned women, and women who wanted to act freely in civil society. *The Defiant Muse* explores in parallel scenes Sor Juana’s passionate private life as well as her carefully scrutinized public life. Through dynamic wit, the interplay between Sor Juana and her imaginary friend, Don Juan, permits the audience to see and hear, and to feel, the passionate spirit that drives Sor Juana to be true to herself. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is considered to be the greatest woman poet of Latin America. Sor Juana’s *La Respuesta*, her essay in defense of herself as a scholar and as an artist, stands for all time as one of the most elegant and learned defenses of the rights of women to equal opportunity in human culture. To this day, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is honored as Mexico’s greatest hero. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 2 hours, 15 minutes. Code: DA2.*

Cover photo: Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, Chicago, Ill., featuring Dan Kenney and Lisa Tejero. *Photo: Liz Lauren. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.*

ISBN-10 1-58342-618-3
ISBN-13 978-1-58342-618-0



9 781583 426180



Dramatic Publishing

311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
ph: 800-448-7469



Printed on recycled paper

www.dramaticpublishing.com

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THE DEFIANT MUSE

(The Story of the Life, Work and Times of
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz)

by

NICHOLAS A. PATRICCA

This excerpt contains strong language.



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THE DEFIANT MUSE
(The Story of the Life, Work and Times of
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-618-0

For all the strong women in my life, thank you.

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SCRIPT HISTORY: The research for and writing of *The Defiant Muse* has been an on-going process since 1993. Two professional workshop/readings of an early draft of the play were presented at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, in 1995 and 1997. Two equity readings were presented at Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago in winter 2002 and 2003.

The Defiant Muse premiered at Victory Gardens Biograph Theater Chicago, October 2007. Directed by Andrea J. Dymond it featured the following (in alphabetical order):

Lisi/Elvira. DAWN ALDEN
 Fernández/Ensemble DESMIN BORGES*
 Doña Maria/Ensemble MARIA ENRIQUEZ
 The Herald/Diego JOSEPH ANTHONY FORONDA*
 Góngora. RICARDO GUTIERREZ*
 Núñez KENN E. HEAD*
 Don Pedro/Statue/Ensemble RAOUL JOHNSON
 Don Juan. DAN KENNEY*
 Don Ottavio/Ensemble. NIALL MCGINTY
 Doña Ana/Ensemble LAURAN SEPTEMBER
 Sor Juana/Minstrel. LISA TEJERO*
 Ensemble. KEVIN VIOL

Understudies: Dawn Alden, Desmin Borges, Maria Enriquez, Joseph Anthony Foronda, Niall McGinty, Luran September, Kevin Viol

Set Design KEITH PITTS
Costume Design JUDITH LUNDBERG, USA
Lighting Design CHARLES COOPER, USA
Sound design and Original Composition . JOE CERQUA, USA
Fight Choreography NICK SANDYS
Tocotin Design WILFREDO RIVERA
Production Stage Manager TINA M. JACH, AEA

**Denotes a member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional stage actors and managers.*

THE DEFIANT MUSE

(The Story of the Life, Work and Times of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz)

CHARACTERS

SOR JUANA/MINSTREL: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana. Sister of St. Jerome, nun of the convent of St. Paula, advisor to the city council of Mexico, and poet to the court of the Viceroy of New Spain.

DON JUAN: Sor Juana's imaginary companion.

NÚÑEZ: Court confessor. Antonio Núñez de Miranda, priest of the Society of Jesus. Assigned to Sor Juana as her confessor.

LISI/ELVIRA: Vicereine. Condesa de Paredes. Maria Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga, Marquesa de la Laguna. Sor Juana's special friend and protector.

FERNÁNDEZ: Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz. Sor Juana's ecclesiastical protector.

GÓNGORA: Scholar. Sor Juana's friend and mentor. Court astronomer-scientist. Confessor of choice to Sor Juana. Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. Priest, expelled from the Society of Jesus. Related to the noble Indian Don Juan de Alva Ixtilxóchitl, descendant of the kings of Texcoco.

THE HERALD/DIEGO: The companion to Don Juan.

DON OTTAVIO/ENSEMBLE: Intended husband of Doña Ana, et alii.

HERMIT/DON PEDRO/STATUE: Father of Doña Ana.

GUARDS/SCHOLARS/COURTIERS: Ensemble actors 1 & 2

DOÑA MARIA/DOÑA ANA: Ensemble actors 3 & 4

* * * *

SUBJECT & TIME: The life, times and work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Born 02 December 1648. Died 17 April 1695.

SITUATION: The city of Mexico (and the immediate governable area surrounding it), imperial seat of the Viceroy, the governor of New Spain.

UNIT SET: The elements of the set should be dynamically mobile and should create the following four general spaces: Sor Juana's space (mental, spiritual, emotional), *auto** space, court space, cloister space. The Ensemble make and unmake the settings for the scenes. The lighting should define the various spaces and describe the moods of each situation. Baroque theater is all about energy in transformation, breaking out of all limits, taking improbable shapes. The author envisions a production set that incorporates elements of 17th-century Spanish and Mexican baroque theater practices. Set and costume design should enable dynamic movement and transitions, not hinder them.

* The term *auto* (from the Latin *actus*) means “act” or “play” in the Spanish of this period.

SCENATION: *The Defiant Muse* is written in acts, not in scenes. The numbering of the “scenes” is solely to facilitate management of the text for production purposes. For me, the action is continuous, moving freely through time and space and the various worlds in which Sor Juana lives.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The Defiant Muse is a conversation within our Western civilization with the theater of Don Juan (Latin cultures) and Dr. Faustus (Germanic cultures) which sprang from the world-shattering changes produced by the High Renaissance. The legend of Don Juan/Faustus bridged the abysmal gap between the worlds being lost through Renaissance thinking and art and the worlds being discovered through reason, science, technology and enlightened thinking. We call this epochal transition the Baroque period: the time “between” when individuals and societies tried to keep the old and the new together in one harmonious world. I see Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a 17th-century scholar-poet Mexican nun, as the woman hero of this special time in our history. Sor Juana is a mythic hero like Don Juan and Faustus (who may or may not be based on actual historical individuals) because of her heroic genius and heroic individuality which mark her as “advanced” even for our times. Sor Juana differs from Don Juan and Faustus in how she makes and completes her journey as a “modern” hero. That is, how she interprets and plays out the meanings of power and love. Though she never wrote a play on the saga of Don Juan, Sor Juana did write two profoundly important and modern works, which, in my judgment, confirm my invention of Don Juan as her imaginary companion: *First Dream* and *Divine Narcissus* in which Sor Juana explores the mystery of human freedom and self-love as the key to human progress and to human access to the divine. Finally, Sor Juana’s *La Respuesta*, her essay in defense of herself as a scholar and as an artist, stands for all time as one of the most elegant and learned defenses of the rights of women to equal opportunity in human culture.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

The swordplay between Sor Juana and Don Juan is based upon the 16th-century martial art theories of Jeronimo de Carranza and Luis Pacheco de Narvaez, the principal creators of La Verdadera Destreza, or more simply, the Spanish School. In this martial form, the duelers dance the circles that describe their possible areas of combat. Because these areas are scientifically defined by the laws of mathematics, physics and mechanics, Carranza and Narvaez argued that a swordsman, who properly dances the circumferences, cords and tangents of the spheres of combat, can never be defeated. This style of swordplay is, therefore, primarily defensive. Each dueler waits for the other to make a fatal error in his (or her) dancing. Accordingly, there is, strictly speaking, no “parry” in this type of movement because he who errs is instantly slain. Inspired by this new scientific art of the sword, Girard Thibault constructed “a circle within a square” to describe the dynamic fighting spheres that are generated in actual sword combat. Thibault’s circle became the standard model for the training of swordsmen regardless of their schools and styles. It is Thibault’s circle or some version thereof that I envision coming to life on the set and in performance. Obviously, the director, fight choreographer and producer must decide what form of stage combat best suits their production. The play requires that only two values be maintained: 1) the circular form of swordplay as opposed to the straight-line form of fencing and 2) the intimate, elegant mood of the imminent possibility of death. *The Defiant Muse* is built upon this controlling metaphor: that with one misstep all is lost. [The Destreza style is only necessary for the swordplay between Sor Juana and Don Juan. Standard stage combat techniques may be employed for the other fight scenes.]

THE DEFIANT MUSE

PROLOGUE

An empty stage

Discovered, a WOMAN, alone, simply dressed. She holds a Spanish rapier, arm extended, blade pointed down, ready to attack. The WOMAN commences an elegant circular movement. The point of her rapier describes a complex circle that becomes visible as she moves.

Suddenly, she engages an imaginary, invisible opponent in swordplay. Equally suddenly, she drops down into an extremely low lunge, traversing a cord of the circle, hitting her invisible opponent. The WOMAN laughs in delight. She speaks to the AUDIENCE. As she speaks she dons court attire.

SOR JUANA. I learned the lunge from the Italian masters of the sword. From books. My mother did not permit me to go to school. Only boys went to school. (*A light discovers books.*) My grandfather gave me the keys to his library. *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. With this book, I taught myself how to read and write proper Spanish. My native tongue was a

type of “rancho” Spanish, full of African, Portuguese and Indian words. Don Quixote became my Bible—my personal key to the universe. Like the noble knight errant I resolved to set out on my own quest. I cut my hair. I dressed as a boy. I stole a horse. Armed with Don Quixote and a wooden sword I’d made to silence all opposition, I defied my mother: I rode off to school. (*Laughs.*)

It was a “quixotic” victory. Through my own tuition I had far surpassed the learning of the boys in the class. I was too advanced for the schooling available for us on the rancho.

I returned to my grandfather’s library. Five thousand books. I read and read.

I found a play: *El Burlador de Sevilla* by Tirso de Molina. I am certain that each of you has some experience in your own life for what now happened to me: in this play, I found a dimension of myself. As Athena was born from the head of Zeus, there was my alter ego fully born in the words of the poet. There he was: Don Juan Tenorio, my Juanito.

(SOR JUANA summons DON JUAN. He is dressed in 17th-century courtly fashion.)

DON JUAN salutes SOR JUANA with his blade. She returns the salute. They assume the Destreza “upright” position wherein the point of the rapier touches the opponent’s cup hilt. They duel.

DON JUAN announces the movements that mark significant shifts in direction and tempo of the swordplay.

DON JUAN and SOR JUANA speak as they dance the circle of combat. The dance is intimate, elegant, lethal.

DON JUAN. Advance, advance, advance, retreat. It is a courting ritual. At the proper moment, you make the invitation.

SOR JUANA. What if the invitation is too subtle.

DON JUAN. He is a sophisticated man. He enjoys subtlety.

SOR JUANA. Precisely. He knows that the attacker is always at a disadvantage. He knows the invitation is a trap.

DON JUAN. Advance, advance, retreat. Scientifically, the attacker is not at a disadvantage. He closes the distance. He has momentum on his side.

SOR JUANA. He has committed himself to one course of action, and only one. If it fails, he's dead.

DON JUAN. Assuming one can deliver a mortal hit while finessing his blade.

SOR JUANA. That is conventional wisdom.

DON JUAN. The mathematics, the physics are all on his side. The force, the mass, the all-important tempo—all are with him.

SOR JUANA. Indeed they are.

DON JUAN. The geometry is exact and certain. The line, the angle, the distance—unless you are planning to step out of the circle—to run away.

SOR JUANA. That would be dishonorable.

DON JUAN. Advance, retreat.

SOR JUANA. I would hold my blade at an angle oblique to the axis of his torso.

DON JUAN. You would expose too much. Even I would have difficulty foiling an attack in such a position. Advance, retreat, retreat.

SOR JUANA. Yes, the invitation is too open, too large, too unconventional. He would pursue the quickest and shortest line to the mortal strike.

DON JUAN. Both the art and the science of the sword require it.

SOR JUANA. As well as his instincts. The scent of blood. Straight to the kill.

DON JUAN. Exactly what you want. Or, so it would seem. Advance, retreat.

SOR JUANA. I am most exposed. He is most powerful.

DON JUAN. No one could resist. (*He increases the tempo.*) Advance, advance, advance, retreat; advance, advance, retreat; retreat, advance, retreat; advance, retreat, retreat, retreat.

(SOR JUANA moves her rapier to the oblique angle. DON JUAN thrusts. SOR JUANA drops down into an extremely low lunge. She almost succeeds in striking DON JUAN mortally.

DON JUAN catches her blade in the hilt of his rapier, disarming her.

Delighted, DON JUAN takes SOR JUANA by the hand and raises her to her feet.)

DON JUAN. Magnificent. Simply magnificent. A most wondrous feint. You have converted the physics to your advantage. You have played a new cord on the circle. A beauteous composition, m'lady. Anyone but me would be dead.

SOR JUANA. If that is what I desired.

(DON JUAN salutes SOR JUANA with the hilt of his blade. SOR JUANA addresses the AUDIENCE. The light on DON JUAN fades.)

SOR JUANA. I hope you can understand how important it was for me to have a friend, albeit fantastical. Juanito and I argued about everything: philosophy, literature, morality. With my Juanito, I learned the art of the rapier. With my Juanito, I learned the art of dueling with words and ideas. I learned to think for myself.

It was not my fate, however, to take up the sword of Don Quixote. It was the pen of Cervantes I was destined to wield.

(SOR JUANA takes up the quill from the desk.)

END OF PROLOGUE

ACT ONE

“Friendship Discovered”

I. 1. The *Auto* [Episode One].

(The court of the Viceroy of New Spain.

Enter THE HERALD.)

THE HERALD.

“ATENCIÓN! ATENCIÓN!

Noble ladies and caballeros

A play by Juana Inés de Asbaje.

Don Juan Meets His Master

Auto the First in which our Hero is Introduced.”

(The ENSEMBLE moves rapidly into the action of the play.)

[If production values permit, puppets and pageant cart may be employed.]

THE HERALD. “Don Juan, Diego his servant, and a hermit.”

(DON JUAN and the DIEGO are masked. It is Carnival in Madrid. They are fleeing for their lives.

The HERMIT hiding behind a tree, peers at bobbing lights in the forest darkness. He is dressed in raggedy, filthy sack-cloth.)

HERMIT. What a commotion ensues! *(To AUDIENCE.)*

Forgive me, after thirty years alone with no one to speak to I speak to myself. Sweet Jesus, I espy a man, nay, two men. Holy Trinity, they're coming this way. What shall I do?

DON JUAN. What good luck, I espy a hermitage!

DIEGO. A hermitage! There's no good eating there!

DON JUAN. Diego, we are in danger of losing our heads and you are worried about your belly.

DIEGO. These masks shall protect us. The law forbids their removal at Carnival.

DON JUAN. The brothers of the once virgin Doña Luisa shall not trouble themselves with legal subtleties.

DIEGO. You really ought to have your pants stitched tightly to your shirt. Your prick's exploits greatly exhaust me.

DON JUAN *(hits DIEGO)*. You shall always be a servant, Diego, because you value your comforts over any challenge. Now go scout the hermitage.

(DIEGO goes off. DON JUAN hears a rustle in the bush, spies the HERMIT. DON JUAN draws his sword.)

DON JUAN. Come forward, coward, and state your business like a man, or die in whatever state of grace you be.

(DON JUAN starts to stalk the HERMIT. They play like cat and mouse among the trees.)

HERMIT. Though it be thirty years away from the world and all its temptations, I hesitate to bank on my graceful state, Your Grace. Such knowledge belongs to God alone, and his Virgin Mother perhaps, or whatever His Holiness the Pope, or the Holy Inquisition affirm to be the case, that I do affirm.

DON JUAN. Shut up, you silly fool, or you'll die just so I can hear silence.

HERMIT. I am forever mute, My Grace, from this very second, totally dumb, mute, and...

(DON JUAN catches the HERMIT.)

DON JUAN. ...and dead!

HERMIT. To slay a holy man is a sin most mortal.

DON JUAN. And to spy on a gentleman is any less!? Besides, you just said you knew not your situation with God.

HERMIT. Right you are, Your Grace, very on your toes mentally you are. I'm a little rusty with speaking and thinking as you are the first in thirty years.

DON JUAN. Stop repeating yourself. I bore easily. Say your prayers, Hermit!

HERMIT. Spare my life and I vow I'll pray every day for the salvation of your eternal soul.

DON JUAN. For thirty years you have contemplated and that is the best plea you can make?!

HERMIT. I'll make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and...

(DON JUAN hears men coming.)

DON JUAN. Your clothes, quick. Off with your clothes.

HERMIT. I can't go about naked. What would our Catholic monarchs think? Are you a Moor?

DON JUAN. Off with your clothes. *(They exchange clothes.)* Do you never bathe?

HERMIT. One must never see one's private parts, lest...

DON JUAN. Shut up and go off that way. Quickly, or die here at my hand. *(Starts scratching uncontrollably.)*

What creatures gave you home in these putrid rags?!!

HERMIT. Every louse that would have them.

DON JUAN. Off! And forget not your vow to pray for me in Jerusalem at the tomb of Our Savior! You stinking liar!

HERMIT *(as he moves off as commanded)*. We shall meet again, Don Juan, you cannot escape your fate.

DON JUAN. How know you my name, false Hermit?

HERMIT. As surely as the lice on my holy cloth are feasting on your blood so truly shall we meet again.

DON JUAN. Be gone, you lying spy! In whose pay are you?

HERMIT. ...and change our roles we shall, and servant shall you be.

DON JUAN. You're a dead man! Your lice shall have to find another host.

(Men burst onto the scene. Their LEADER (CAPTAIN) is dragging DIEGO with him.)

LEADER. Liar! Your master is not here.

DIEGO. I left him here. I swear by the Holy Faith.

DON JUAN. No need to swear, my son, when one speaks truly.

LEADER. Holy Hermit, did you see a scoundrel fleeing this place?

DON JUAN. I saw a man, sir, the first in thirty years. As for fleeing, I cannot say, but going he certainly was.

LEADER. Was he foppishly attired, with clouds of cheap perfume scenting his dishonorable progress?

DON JUAN. A well-dressed gentleman he seemed. Perhaps, he is not the man you seek.

LEADER. Which way his path, good Hermit.

(DON JUAN points in the direction the HERMIT took.)

The men take off in pursuit. DON JUAN trips up DIEGO, landing a covert blow as he falls.)

LEADER *(to DIEGO)*. Make your peace with God.

DON JUAN. Gentle sir, may I take this man and try to save his soul. Then, on your way back, you can kill him with good conscience.

LEADER. Take him. Be careful. He's a clever rogue.

DON JUAN. A rogue, yes. Clever, not. *(The LEADER exits. DON JUAN knocks DIEGO down.)* Traitor!

DIEGO. I saved your life!

DON JUAN *(drawing his sword)*. Because you knew you'd be the first to die by my sword if you spoke my name.

DIEGO. Kill me then. And you shall never know what I found out.

DON JUAN. I shall know your news, and then kill you.

DIEGO. You drive a hard bargain. Have I no rights?

DON JUAN. None. Speak!

DIEGO. The most beautiful, the most virtuous...

DON JUAN. Doña Ana?

DIEGO. The one and only...

DON JUAN. Out with it!

DIEGO. The noble Doña Ana has gone to Rome with her noble father Don Pedro the governor of the noble city of Sevilla to marry the noble Don Ottavio, nephew of the noble Pope...

DON JUAN. Diego, I must have her.

DIEGO. Of course you must. She is that greater than which cannot be imagined, and she said no to you.

DON JUAN. She does not love this Don Ottavio.

DIEGO. But she will marry him. And she will be faithful to him.

DON JUAN. Not if I take her first. Come, let us flee this place.

DIEGO. I thought you promised to kill me.

DON JUAN. Diego, you aren't worth the effort. To Rome, you lazy lout. I must have her.

End of Episode One of the *Auto*

I. 2. SOR JUANA aside to the audience.

SOR JUANA. That is my Juanito! (*Laughs.*) So brash, so full of energy. It was a beginner's sketch. Not the sure strokes of the mature artist.

The little scene you just witnessed was performed in the court of the Viceroy of New Spain in Mexico City. In the year of Our Lord 1664. I was 16 at the time. That

scene was my official introduction to the court, my debut as a lady in waiting to the new Vicereine, Maria Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga, Marquesa de Laguna, Condesa de Paredes. I think three of her many titles will suffice.