

Apocalyptic, lyrical, and erotically charged, Sor Juana or the Breath of Heaven is a novel of genius, obsession, and mystery surrounding the Baroque-era Mexican nun, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz. When she died in 1695, she was arguably the greatest writer working in any European tongue, though she never lived outside her native Mexico. Juana was a child prodigy whose beauty and wit provoked a sensation at the vice-regal court in Mexico City. At nineteen, though still a royal favorite, she chose to enter a convent. In the twenty years that followed, Juana created plays, theological arguments, and graceful, often sensuous poetry — insisting upon a life of the mind for women, while jousting with the enforcers of the Inquisition. Then, at forty, Juana signed a vow of silence in her own blood, five years before succumbing to plague. This book plumbs the mystery of why such a gifted writer silenced herself. In his remarkable debut, Anderson unfolds three intimate journeys: a great poet's withdrawal from the world; a man's forced march to self-knowledge; and a mystic's pilgrimage into modern Mexico, where the bones of the past continually intrude into a present built on the ruins of the vanquished.

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