

Baltasar de Alcázar

About Rhymes

translated by Robert Schechter

I'd like to tell my tale of woe,
oh Juana, but my curse is,
what I mean to say, I fear,
my verse sometimes reverses.

For if I try to say what seems
important, half the time
I end up saying something else
because I'm forced to rhyme.

Example: I would like to write
a verse to make it plain
Inez is *good* and *lovely*, but
the rhyme then adds *insane*.

And so I end up calling her
insane because it went
with *plain* to make a rhyme although
that isn't what I meant.

And if I praise the subtle wit
with which she's known to speak,
before I turn around, my rhyme
proclaims her nose a *beak*.

And thus in substance I allege
her nose, that's so sublime,
is hooked, although I have no cause
except the cause of rhyme.

So rhyme is an impediment,
a deadly burden that'll
make me stretch my tale of woe

with lots of pointless prattle.

And you won't understand the cause,
you'll just know something's wrong;
it's rhyme, and rhyme alone, you see,
that makes my tale too long.

And as I write, the facts get lost.
Verse lies, I now confess it.

A proper tale of woe in rhyme
needs lying to express it:

I hope my lies don't go too far;
you may forgive the crime,
since when I lie, as I have said,
the culprit is the rhyme.

I'm lying to you now, you know,
because the rhymes ordain
I tell you more than just the truth
to tell my tale of pain.

Powerless, although I try
to fix it, come what may,
with any luck you'll read my words
and strip the lies away.

Nonetheless, before too long
my verse will lose its wit,
since reading it too carefully
can blunt the edge of it.

And you'll dislike my rotten rhymes
and say you do not need them,
and I would have to twist your arm
to make you sit and read them.

But Juana, if I tell my tale
in prose, I'm far too wordy,
and you're so proper and refined,
my odd words might sound dirty.

You see, the fact that I'm advanced
in years means often I

write prose in ancient words I learned
in days and times gone by.

Words like *eftsoons*, *whoreson*, *lief*,
cocklebread, *piscarius*,
fluxol, *cockloft*, *cockmate*, *cronge*,
peever, *vaginarius*.

Diffibulate or *galantine*,
quister, *drenge*, *rotarious*,
brightsmith, *brownsmith*, *burgonmaster*,
currydow, *pannarius*.

Hostler, *mayhap*, *emerods*,
swoopstake, *usward*, *thole*,
hawker, *maugre*, *hatcheler*,
fletcher, *rantipole*.

And if I make you read such prose,
I might as well instead
bind the horrid pages up
and bonk you on the head.

Experience advises me,
if you read my immortal
tale of woe in prose you'd smirk,
guffaw, harrumph and chortle.

And so, if I am not deceived,
it would appear the case
that I should give up on my tale
and try to save some face.

These difficulties I describe,
you'll see, if you take stock,
would fill my verse with packs of lies,
my prose with poppycock.

I like to think I'm sensible
and honest, as a rule,
and so I'd hate for folks to say
I lie or I'm a fool.

I have decided, therefore,

that my story must be scrapped.
I would not wish in verse or prose
to prove such charges apt.