

# A Fit of Rhyme against Rhyme

By Ben Jonson

Rhyme, the rack of finest wits,  
That expresseth but by fits  
True conceit,  
Spoiling senses of their treasure,  
Cozening judgment with a measure,  
But false weight;  
Wresting words from their true calling,  
Propping verse for fear of falling  
To the ground;  
Jointing syllables, drowning letters,  
Fast'ning vowels as with fetters  
They were bound!  
Soon as lazy thou wert known,  
All good poetry hence was flown,  
And art banish'd.  
For a thousand years together  
All Parnassus' green did wither,  
And wit vanish'd.  
Pegasus did fly away,  
At the wells no Muse did stay,  
But bewail'd  
So to see the fountain dry,  
And Apollo's music die,  
All light failed!  
Starveling rhymes did fill the stage;  
Not a poet in an age  
Worth crowning;  
Not a work deserving bays,  
Not a line deserving praise,  
Pallas frowning;  
Greek was free from rhyme's infection,  
Happy Greek by this protection  
Was not spoiled.  
Whilst the Latin, queen of tongues,  
Is not yet free from rhyme's wrongs,  
But rests foiled.  
Scarce the hill again doth flourish,  
Scarce the world a wit doth nourish  
To restore  
Phoebus to his crown again,  
And the Muses to their brain,  
As before.  
Vulgar languages that want  
Words and sweetness, and be scant  
Of true measure,  
Tyrant rhyme hath so abused,  
That they long since have refused  
Other cæsure.

He that first invented thee,  
May his joints tormented be,  
Cramp'd forever.  
Still may syllables jar with time,  
Still may reason war with rhyme,  
Resting never.  
May his sense when it would meet  
The cold tumor in his feet,  
Grow unsunder;  
And his title be long fool,  
That in rearing such a school  
Was the founder.



Ben Jonson's "Song to Celia" is known to millions as "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes." Jonson was educated at the prestigious Westminster School in London. He took up acting, and by 1597 he was writing original plays. Jonson's first widely acclaimed play, *Every Man in His Humour*, included William Shakespeare in its cast.