




---

## Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Our thanks to Sarah Arvio for today's Poet's Pick!

We are bringing you a special poem and commentary each weekday in April as part of our annual fund-raising campaign and in celebration of National Poetry Month. Please help us to continue our service to you and to poetry by making a tax-deductible contribution to *Poetry Daily*! [Click here](#) to find out how you can contribute online or by mailing a check or money order.

Thank you so much for your support! Enjoy today's special poem and commentary!

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Don Selby &amp; Diane Boller".

Don Selby & Diane Boller  
Editors

---

## Sarah Arvio's Poetry Month Pick, April 18, 2014

"Stay! Shadow ... "

by **Juana de Asbaje**

(aka Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana) (1648-1695)

Stay! Shadow of my shifting joy,  
 image of the magic I most love,  
 pretty sham for which I happy die,  
 sweet ruse for which I aching live.  
 If to the magnet of your charms  
 my chest is amenable metal,  
 why do you smoothly sweet talk me,  
 only later to mock me and shun me?

And you cannot braggingly proclaim  
 that your tyranny has trumped me:  
 tho' you have mocked and slipped the knot  
 I tied tight around your chimera,  
 who cares that you mock my chest and arms  
 if my imagination has caged you.

\* \* \*

Detente, sombra de mi bien esquivo,  
 imagen del hechizo que más quiero,  
 bella ilusión por quien alegre muero,  
 dulce ficción por quien penosa vivo.  
 Si al imán de tus gracias atractivo,  
 sirve mi pecho de obediente acero,  
 para que me enamoras lisonjero,  
 si has de burlarme luego fugitivo?  
 Mas blasonar no puedes, satisfecho,  
 de que triunfa de mí tu tiranía:  
 que aunque dejas burlado el lazo estrecho  
 que tu forma fantástica ceñía,  
 poco importa burlar brazos y pecho  
 si te labra prisión mi fantasía.

*translated by Sarah Arvio*

### ■ Sarah Arvio Comments:

My first word is Stay! It could be stop, or slow down.

I am speaking to a shadow; the shadow of the one I love: my love, my joy, my life. You, my joy, are shifty, shifting, elusive, fugitive.

You are not the magic spell but an image of it.

I love this magic, and live for it: a sham (illusion), a ruse (fiction). The illusion is pretty and the fiction is sweet. I die with a happy heart, I live with an aching heart. Your magic is a magnet—and my chest is metal (steel), amenable, compliant, obedient. The magnet is your charms. I can't help being drawn to them. My chest, your charms. You're a sweet talker, a gallant, a flatterer. You smoothly sweet talk me, and then you mock me, shun me.

You're a love tyrant.

I have tossed a rope—a lasso—around you—and tied it tightly. Not around you: around your chimera (your fantastic form). You mock the rope, you slip the knot.

You mock, you scorn, my chest and arms.

But you can't brag that you have trumped me; you can't boast that your tyranny has triumphed.

For even if you have slipped the knot (the rope, the lasso); even if I am mocked and shunned, my imagination holds you, my fantasies contain you. I hold you in the cage (the prison) of my mind.

\* \* \*

Juana moves deftly from image to image: love (beloved), shadow, magic, magnet, chest, tyrant, rope, chest and arms, chimera, imagination, cage.

Is there love here? Or is this merely a play of infatuations, knots and shadows. She longs for the spell. The love alludes her. She tells it to stay, to stop, but it will not.

The same idea turns over and over in words with near meanings: *esquivo*, *fugitivo*, *burlar*; *hechizo*, *ilusión*, *ficción*. That which shifts and eludes, that which enchants and deceives and slips away. Note that the word *burlar* appears three times. *Burlar*=to mock, and also to dodge or evade.

She may have wanted her love to stop flitting away from her. Or she may have been content to keep love at a distance. A tyranny and a chimera.

Is this a coy, courtly game, or an expression of true longing?

Arch, coy. Impassioned—.

\* \* \*

Much is known about Juana de Asbaje, as a result of some tenacious investigators and thinkers, Octavio Paz above all others. That she was born in Nepantla, Mexico, on the flank of Popocatepetl; that her mother was an unmarried woman; that she probably never knew her father; that she had an extraordinary brilliance and thirst for knowledge and mastered, at a young age, Latin, Greek and Nahuatl, among many other subjects; that she was beautiful and utterly unprotected; that she was sent to live with rich relatives at the age of 8, who took her to live at the court of the Viceroy at age 16; that the Vicereine, a literate woman, took this young prodigy under her wing; that she lived at court until she was 20; that she took the veil in order to pursue an intellectual life, and because she did not want to marry; that she lived the life of a celebrated authoress from her convent cell for more than two decades; that she had no religious zeal whatever; that the next Vicereine also took her under her wing; that she wrote a magnificent paeon to the wisdom of women, and to the defense of education for women, invoking the Queen of Saba, Minerva, the Sibyls, Santa Teresa; that she was vindictively persecuted by grand men of the church, forced to renounce the life of letters and relinquish for sale her books, and musical and scientific instruments; that she died two years later. There remain many mysteries and questions.

Paz notes that her love poems are often directed to shadowy figures, chimeras—which may represent the absent

father, and therefore the absent beloved. “Stay! Shadow...” is one of these.

She also wrote many love poems to the second Vicereine, María Luisa Manrique de Lara, the Condesa de Paredes de Nava. It was the Condesa who arranged for the publication of her works in Spain, because they could not appear in Mexico.

As Paz also points out, Juana used the conventions of courtly love and also surpassed those conventions with passionate intensity. The poems therefore became personal.

I like her simple, beautiful name, Juana de Asbaje, or Juana Inés de Asbaje—bearing no crosses.

The poems were published with explanatory opening epithets by way of titles; I have left this one off, since it was attached by someone other than Juana.

### ■ About Sarah Arvio:

Sarah Arvio is the author of *night thoughts: 70 dream poems & notes from an analysis* (2013), *Visits from the Seventh* (2002) and *Sono: Cantos* (2006), all from Alfred A. Knopf. She has won the Rome Prize of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Guggenheim and Bogliasco fellowships, and the National Endowment for the Arts Translation Fellowship, among other honors. For many years a translator for the United Nations in New York and Switzerland, she has also taught poetry at Princeton; she now lives in Maryland, by the Chesapeake Bay.

---

**Don't forget!** If you enjoy our regular features and special events like this one, please join Sarah Arvio in supporting *Poetry Daily* [by making a tax-deductible contribution](#).

---

Copyright © 2014. All rights reserved.

