

# Speech: "To be, or not to be, that is the question"

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*(from Hamlet, spoken by Hamlet)*

To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them. To die—to sleep,  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub:  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause—there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life.  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office, and the spurns

That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry  
And lose the name of action.

(1601)

# On my First Son

BY BEN JONSON

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;  
My sin was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy.  
Seven years tho' wert lent to me, and I thee pay,  
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.  
O, could I lose all father now! For why  
Will man lament the state he should envy?  
To have so soon 'scap'd world's and flesh's rage,  
And if no other misery, yet age?  
Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say, "Here doth lie  
Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry."  
For whose sake henceforth all his vows be such,  
As what he loves may never like too much.

(1603)

# ***Paradise Lost: Book 1 (1674 version)***

BY JOHN MILTON

OF Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,  
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top  
Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai*, didst inspire  
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,  
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth  
Rose out of *Chaos*: or if *Sion* Hill  
Delight thee more, and *Siloa's* brook that flow'd  
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence  
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,  
That with no middle flight intends to soar  
Above th' *Aonian* Mount, while it pursues  
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.  
And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first  
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread

Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss  
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark  
Illumin, what is low raise and support;  
That to the highth of this great Argument  
I may assert Eternal Providence,  
And justifie the wayes of God to men.

(1664)

# An Essay on Man: Epistle II

BY ALEXANDER POPE

I.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;  
The proper study of mankind is man.  
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,  
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;  
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;  
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:  
Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd;  
Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;  
Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

(1734)

# "This living hand, now warm and capable"

BY JOHN KEATS

This living hand, now warm and capable  
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold  
And in the icy silence of the tomb,  
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights  
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood  
So in my veins red life might stream again,  
And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—  
I hold it towards you.

(1819)