On My First Son

Ben Jonson

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy; My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy: Seven years thou wast 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 'scaped world's and flesh's rage, And, if no other misery, yet age? Rest in soft peace, and asked, 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.

Text Analysis

1. Clarify  Reread lines 1–2. What is the speaker’s “sin”?

2. Interpret  How do you interpret the statement in lines 9–10, “Here doth lie / Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry”?
Song: To Celia

Ben Jonson

Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,  
And I’ll not look for wine.  

The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine:  
But might I of Jove’s nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine. 

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honoring thee,  
As giving it a hope that there  
It could not withered be.  

But thou thereon didst only breathe,  
And sent’st it back to me;  
Since when it grows and smells, I swear,  
Not of itself, but thee.  

COMPARE SPEAKERS
Reread lines 1–4. What emotion does the speaker express?

Jove’s nectar: the special drink of the Greek and Roman gods. Jove is another name for Jupiter, chief of the Roman gods.

RHYME
Which end rhyme in the poem is an example of slant rhyme?