



# ***John Donne***

***(21 January 1572 –31 March 1631)***

- Religion in Donne's Time
- The Protestant Reformation (1517–1648) was the European Christian reform movement that established Protestantism as a constituent branch of contemporary Christianity. The separation of the Church of England from Rome under Henry VIII, beginning in 1529 and completed in 1536, brought England alongside this broad Reformation movement; however, religious changes in the English national church proceeded more conservatively than elsewhere in Europe.

- Culture and Thoughts
- the Renaissance began at the 13<sup>th</sup> century and reached its peak at the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. People 's thoughts get away from the restriction of feudal belief of god and religion and became more realistic and human. This was a great emancipation, which led to the appearance of a lot of great people, such as Francis Bacon and Shakespeare.



# Basic information

**Born:** 21 January 1572; London

**Died:** 31 March 1631

**Nationality:** English

**Occupation:**

Poet, Minister, Lawyer

**Genres:**

Satire, Love poetry, Elegy, Sermons

**Subjects:**

Love, Sexuality, Religion, Death

**Literary movement:**

Metaphysical Poetry



JOHN DONNE

# Life

❖ Early life:

❖ John Donne was born **on Bread Street in London, England**, into a **Catholic family** at a time when Catholicism was illegal in England.

❖ Despite the obvious dangers, Donne's family arranged for his education by the Jesuits which gave him a deep knowledge of his religion.

❖ But his brother Henry Donne died of black death, leading John Donne to begin questioning his Catholic faith.

# Life

## ❖ Study:

Donne was a student at **Hart Hall**, now Hertford College, Oxford, from the age of 11.

After three years at Oxford he was admitted to **Trinity College, Cambridge**, where he studied for another three years .

In 1591 he was accepted as a student at the **Thavies Inn** legal school, one of the **Inns of Chancery** in London.

In 1592 he was admitted to **Lincoln's Inn**, one of the **Inns of Court**.





- Thavies Inn





Chancery Lane entrance



Library (left) and  
Bencher's rooms  
(right)



# Life

## ❖ Later life:

**In 1602, Donne was elected as Member of Parliament for the constituency of Brackley.**

Donne left the Catholic Church In the late 1590's or early 1600's.

1598 Appointed Private Secretary for Sir Thomas Egerton

In 1601 married Egerton's 17 year old niece w/o permission.

Imprisoned by Egerton for marrying his niece w/o permission

# Life

## ❖ **Later life:**

**Struggled to support his family for 12 years..**

He was certainly in communication with the King, James I of England.

In 1610 and 1611 he wrote two anti-Catholic polemics

He finally acceded to the King's wishes and **in 1615 was ordained into the Church of England.**

# Life

## ❖ Death

- **It is thought** that his **final illness was stomach cancer**.
- He died on 31 March 1631, having left a body of work fiercely engaged with the emotional and intellectual conflicts of his age.
- though **only in manuscript** - his poems would not be printed and published until two years after his death
- **John Donne is buried in St Paul's** where a memorial statue of him was erected , with a Latin epigraph probably composed by himself.





- Part of the house where John Donne lived in [Pyrford](#).



- A portrait of Donne as a young man in 1595
- (In the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London)

# Early poetry

❖ **Donne's earliest poems:**

**Knowledge of English society coupled with sharp criticism of its problems.**

❖ **His satires:**

- **dealt with common Elizabethan topics**, such as corruption in the legal system.

- **deals with the problem of true religion**, a matter of great importance to Donne. He argued that it was better to examine carefully one's religious convictions than blindly to follow any established tradition, for none would be saved at the Final Judgment.



# Early poetry

## ❖ His erotic poetry:

- Donne's early career was also notable for his erotic poetry(sexy poetry), especially his elegies.
- He **employed unconventional metaphors**, such as a flea biting two lovers being compared to sex.

# Later poetry

❖ **Donne focused his literary career on religious literature.** He quickly became **noted for his sermons and religious poems.**

- His early **belief in the value of skepticism** now gave way to a firm faith in **the traditional teachings of the Bible.**

- The lines of these sermons come to influence future works of English literature.

E.g. **Ernest Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls**, which took its title from a passage in **Meditation XVII**

**Thomas Merton's No Man is an Island**, which took its title from the same source.

# Later poetry

## ❖ **Works at the end of his life: challenge death**

Towards the end of his life Donne wrote works that challenged death, and the fear that it inspired in many men, on the grounds of **his belief that those who die are sent to Heaven to live eternally.**



# Donne's Style

Style: (1) The use of conceits: Donne is considered a master of the metaphysical conceit, an extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery.

One of the most famous of Donne's conceits is found in "[A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning](#)" where he compares two lovers who are separated to the two legs of a [compass](#).



# Donne's Style

(2) The involvement of a certain kind of **argument**: Donne's poetry involves a certain kind of argument, sometimes in rigid form. He seems to be speaking to an **imagined hearer, raising the topic** and trying to **persuade, convince or upbraid** him. With the brief, simple language, the argument is continuous throughout the poem.

## *metaphysical poetry*

The term 'metaphysical' can be applied to any poetry that **explores spiritual or philosophical matters**, it is usually used in reference to the poems of a group of 17th-century English poets.

Attempts to take the unexplainable and make it tangible. Like trying to explain love, or faith.

Metaphysical poetry are the poets in the 17c England who often unconventionally use conceits and wit. The imagery is draw from everyday life. The form is the form of **argument (with God, lover, himself)**. The diction is simple and the language is colloquial but powerful.



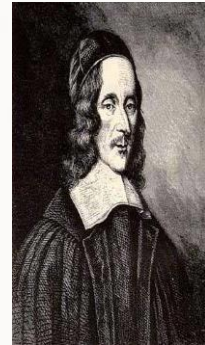
# Metaphysical Poets

☞ John Donne

the **leading** of "metaphysical school"



☞ George Herbert



☞ Andrew Marvel

