

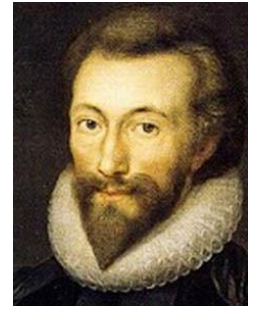


JOHN DONNE

Biography and Metaphysical poetry

John Donne – biography

John Donne was an English poet who can be regarded as the greatest English representative of **metaphysical poetry** during the Jacobean period.



Early Life and Family

↳ John Donne was born in **London** in 1572 into a **Catholic family**, during a strong anti-Catholic period in England. Donne's father, also named John, was a prosperous merchant. His mother, Elizabeth Heywood, was the grand-niece of Thomas More.

↳ Donne's father died when he was 4, and his mother remarried another man. He entered **Oxford University** at age 11 and later the **University of Cambridge**, but never received degrees, due to his Catholicism.

↳ At age 20, Donne began studying **law** at Lincoln's Inn and seemed destined for a legal or diplomatic career. During the 1590s, he **spent** much of his **inheritance** on women, books and travel. He wrote most of his love lyrics and poems during this time.

Family and Wife

↳ In 1593, John **Donne's brother**, Henry, was convicted of Catholic sympathies and **died** in prison soon after. The incident led John to question his Catholic faith and inspired some of his best writing on religion.

↳ 3 years later he joined the court of the **Earl of Essex**, and participated in the expeditions of the English nobleman to **Cadiz** and the following year to the **Azores**



↳ At age 25, Donne was appointed **private secretary** to Sir **Thomas Egerton**, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England. He held his position with Egerton for **several years** and it's likely that around this period Donne converted to **Anglicanism**.

↳ On his way to a promising career, Donne became a **Member of Parliament** in 1601. That same year, he married 16-year-old **Anne More**, the niece of Sir Egerton. Both Lord Egerton and Anne's father, George More, strongly **disapproved** of the marriage. Lord Egerton **fired Donne** and had him **imprisoned** for a short time.

↳ The eight years following Donne's release would be a **struggle** for the married couple until Anne's father finally paid her dowry.

Poems and Writing Career

↳ In 1610, Donne published an anti-Catholic polemic. This, won him the **king's favor**. In 1615, Donne was **ordained** soon thereafter was appointed **Royal Chaplain**.

↳ In 1617, **Donne's wife died** after giving birth to their 12th child. Donne devoted his energies to more **religious subjects**. In 1621, Donne became **dean** of St. Paul's Cathedral. That same year, Donne was appointed **Vicar** of St. Dunstan's-in-the-West and became known for his eloquent sermons.

Death

↳ His health deteriorated seriously due to contracting **typhus**. Shortly before he died, he delivered a pre-funeral sermon, "Death's Duel."

↳ He died on March 31, 1631.

Metaphysical Poetry

The term Metaphysical poets was coined by the critic **Samuel Johnson** to describe **a group of 17th-century English poets**, whose leader was John Donne.

Metaphysical poetry, both religious and profane, is characterized by the search for a **perfect balance between passion and intellect**. Feelings are described with ingenious and **paradoxical images**, drawn from philosophy, religion, science and everyday life, with an unusually mixed style of **high tone and colloquial language**. Irregular metrics and syntax help create dramatic tension.

The poets who wrote during this period had some common features:

- they were men of "**wit**", that was the capacity of dealing with lots of subjects, such as geography, alchemy, natural science, medicine and so on.
- Besides they made a large use of the "**conceit**", a particular **kind of metaphor** whose language was much more difficult and rich of latinisms and archaic words.
- **Dramatic element** are one of the most important characteristic of their poems, basing on different verse- forms.