John Donne (21 January 1572 –31 March 1631)

Basic Biography

Born: 21 January 1572; London

Died: 31 March 1631 (59 years)

Occupation:

Poet, Priest, Lawyer

Genres:

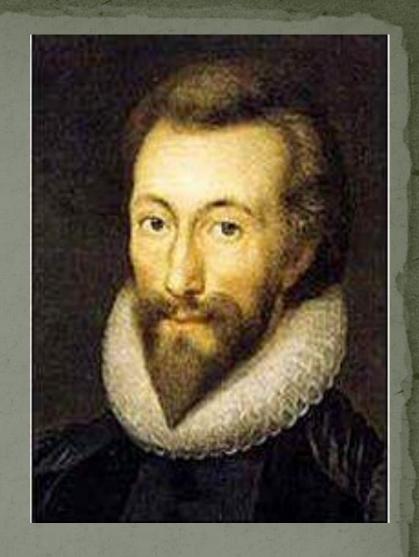
Satire, Love poetry, Elegy, Sermons

Subjects:

Love, Sexuality, Religion, Death

Literary movement:

Metaphysical Poetry



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 solid theological foundation.
- ❖ But his brother Henry Donne died of the plague, leading John Donne to begin questioning his Catholic faith.

❖ 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. (19 years old)

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



Thavies Inn



* Adult life:

- In 1601, Donne married Anne More, the niece of his employer, Sir Thomas Egerton. Egerton was outraged and had Donne imprisoned until the marriage was verified.
- John & Anne had 12 children

 Anne died a few days after giving birth to the 12th in 1617.
- He was certainly in communication with the King, James I of England, who urged him to accept the Anglican priesthood.
- He finally gave into the King's wishes and in 1615 was ordained into the Church of England.

Early Poetry

When "Jack Donne" was a young man, he helped establish what came to be known as "Metaphysical Poetry"— which "represented a strong break in the English lyric tradition, marking the beginning of what was later called the metaphysical school, poetry characterized by intellectual argument, wit, and use of metaphysical conceits, unusual comparisons often employing mundane objects to convey spiritual or emotional ideas" (Maynor).

Wrote funny, smart, sexy poems that were probably recited for amusement at parties and poker games. ("The Flea," "Song")



Later poetry

- *"Dr. 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 <u>Meditation XVII</u>

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

❖ 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 Cathedral in London, where a memorial statue of him was erected, with a Latin epigraph he probably composed 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)

Meditation XVII

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.