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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to evaluate John Donne (1572–1631), foremost among the Metaphysical Poets and one of the greatest preachers in Britain, as a historical person working and writing in the later Renaissance. Born into a Catholic family, he received an elitist education, and his poetic genius flowered in his twenties and his social career seemed set on smooth sailing when he was employed as secretary to a high-ranking politician and courtier. His secret marriage to a niece of that dignitary was his undoing, marking the beginning of his period of hardships. It lasted a decade, during which he wrote a number of elegies and poems (privately circulated) dedicated to his patrons.

In 1610 he won the favour of James I with *Pseudo-Martyr*, and recanted his Catholic faith. He took Anglican holy orders and then was made dean of St. Paul's.

There seem to be four preoccupations with him, one with Woman and Love, one with Death and Eternity and one with God, but foremost, was one with getting on in the world. He seems always in two minds, wavering between divineness and mundanity, which are reflected on his character and work. He was divine as a poet but mundane as a man of religion.