

## 6. John Donne

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**Sonnet 10** (1609)  17

The following poem is a typical example of a metaphysical sonnet built around a paradoxical image of death.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
 Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
 For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow<sup>1</sup>,  
 Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
 5 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be<sup>2</sup>,  
 Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
 And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
 Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
 Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
 10 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell<sup>3</sup>;  
 And poppy<sup>4</sup> or charms can make us sleep as well  
 And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?<sup>5</sup>  
 One short sleep past<sup>6</sup>, we wake eternally,  
 And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die<sup>7</sup>.

1. **thou dost overthrow:** you defeat by killing them
2. **which but thy pictures be:** that are simply images of you
3. **dwell:** live, be connected with
4. **poppy:** a flower grown to produce opium, used by doctors to cause sleep (it. *papavero*)
5. **swell'st thou then?:** do you swell with pride
6. **One short sleep past:** After a short sleep which marks the passage between life and after-life
7. **thou shalt die:** you will not exist any longer, replaced by eternity

## John Donne A Valediction (1611)

### Forbidding Mourning 18

The following poem celebrates the power of refined and harmonious love, which is able to elevate the lovers beyond the material world of physical contact.

- As virtuous men pass mildly away<sup>1</sup>,  
And whisper to their souls, to go,  
Whilst<sup>2</sup> some of their sad friends do say,  
'The breath goes now', and some say, 'No';
- 5 So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move<sup>3</sup>,  
'Twere<sup>4</sup> profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity<sup>5</sup> our love.
- Moving of th' earth<sup>6</sup> brings harms and fears,  
10 Men reckon what it did and meant,  
But trepidation of the spheres<sup>7</sup>,  
Though greater far, is innocent.
- Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense)<sup>8</sup> cannot admit  
15 Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented<sup>9</sup> it.
- But we by a love, so much refined,  
That our selves know not what it is,
- 20 Inter-assured<sup>10</sup> of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.
- Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach<sup>11</sup>, but an expansion,  
Like gold to aery thinness beat<sup>12</sup>.
- 25 If they be<sup>13</sup> two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses<sup>14</sup> are two,  
Thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move<sup>15</sup>, but doth, if th' other do.
- And though it in the center sit,  
30 Yet when the other far doth roam<sup>16</sup>,  
It leans, and hearkens<sup>17</sup> after it,  
And growes erect, as that comes home.
- Such wilt thou be to me<sup>18</sup>, who must  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
35 Thy firmness makes my circle just<sup>19</sup>,  
And makes me end, where I begun<sup>20</sup>.

1. **pass mildly away:** die silently

2. **Whilst:** While

3. **No tear-floods ... move:** it. *Né inondazioni di lacrime né tempeste di singhiozzi*

4. **'Twere:** It would be

5. **the laity:** it. *i profani*

6. **Moving of th' earth:** The earthquakes, which were attributed to the movements of the stars

7. **trepidation of the spheres:** the oscillations of the stars

8. **Dull sublunary ... sense):** Earthly lovers, i.e. common people whose experience is only based on senses

9. **elemented:** composed

10. **Inter-assured:** Sure of our mutual felings

11. **endure ... breach:** do not undergo a traumatic separation

12. **to aery thinness beat:** turned into a thin layer by the goldsmith

13. **If they be:** If they are

14. **compasses:** it. *compasso*

15. **makes no show / To move:** does not seem to move

16. **far doth roam:** wanders abroad

17. **hearkens:** listens

18. **Such wilt thou be to me:** You will be like that for me

19. **Thy firmness makes my circle just:** Your presence at home / constancy attracts me home

20. **begun:** began