

## ALEXANDER POPE

In the Spring of 1688, Alexander Pope was born, an only child to Alexander and Edith Pope. The Pope family were recently converted to Catholicism and soon moved his family to Binfield, Berkshire from London in the face of anti Catholic legislation from parliament, it is where the poet's childhood was passed. Being debarr'd for his religion, Pope received very little formal education, partly also because of an unfortunate prejudice against Catholics in the public schools, partly because of his own weakness and deformity; ~~Pope~~ Pope received very little formal education out of such adverse circumstances which did not auger well for him at all. However, even after denying of such things, he browsed for himself among English books and picked up a smattering of the Classics. Described by his biographer, John Spence, as "a child of a particularly sweet temper" and with a voice so melodious as to be compared to the "little Nightingale", the child Pope bears little resemblance to the irascible and outspoken moralist of the later years. Very early in his age, he began to write poetry, and records the fact with his usual vanity:

As yet a child, or yet a fool to fame,  
I lisp'd in Opuscles, for the Opuscles Game.

Pope was a self taught person and largely self educated as well. He taught himself French, Italian, Latin, and Greek, and read widely, discovering Spenser at the age of six. However, being debarr'd by his religion from many employments considered as inappropriate for staunch Catholic; he then resolved to make religious literature his life work; and in this he resembled Dryden, who, he tells us, was his only master throughout its journey, though much of his works seem to depend on Boileau, the French poet and critic. When only 16 years old, he had written his "pastorals": a few years later appeared his "Essay on Criticism", which gained him a wider popularity and had contributed in raising him to fame amongst the literary reading class. And with publication of the "Rape of the Lock", in 1712, Pope's name was known and honored all over England, and this dwarf of twenty four years, by the sheer force of his own ambition had jumped to the foremost place in English letters. It was soon after this that Voltaire called him "the best poet of England and, may be the best in the world."