



# The Poetry Of Oliver Goldsmith: "Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies."

*Oliver Goldsmith*

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Oliver Goldsmith was born in Ireland either in Pallas, County Longford or Smith Hill House in County Roscommon. Whilst it is now believed he was born on November 10th, 1730 other accounts date it between 1727 to 1731. At age 2 the family moved to the parsonage at Lissoy, between Athlone and Ballymahon his father having been appointed the rector of the parish of nearby Kilkenny West. By 1744 Goldsmith was enrolled at Trinity College, Dublin but fell rapidly behind in his studies on Theology and Law. He did however graduate with a Bachelor Of Arts in 1749. His time at Trinity appears to have given him a much finer education in fine clothes, cards, playing the flute and singing Irish airs. A short stint at Edinburgh and Leiden Universities resulting in him embarking on a walking tour of Europe through Flanders, France, Switzerland and northern Italy living on takings of his Flute busking. By 1756 he was resident in London, going through a series of jobs including an apothecary's assistant and an usher of a school. In 1760 he began to write a series of letters in the Public Ledger entitled *The Citizen of the World*. He wrote it from the perspective of a Chinese traveller to England, named Lien Chi, using this fictional outsider's to comment ironically and moralistically on British society and its manners. He was always in debt mainly due to a gambling addiction. He embarked on writing on a large scale for many publishers in London, mostly for money rather than to produce work of great quality. Indeed given his undoubted talent as a playwright and poet he squandered a large part of his talent. Those great works though brought him a fame that endures to today but also, at that time, the admiration and the friendship of Samuel Johnson with whom he helped to found "The Club". Perhaps Horace Walpole's assertion that he was an 'inspired idiot' was more the general feeling given his determinedly bohemian and unorganised life style. It is said he planned to emigrate to America but missed his ship. He died somewhat prematurely on April 4th, 1774 of kidney infection and is buried in Temple Church. There is a monument to him at Westminster Abbey with an epitaph written by Samuel Johnson.

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