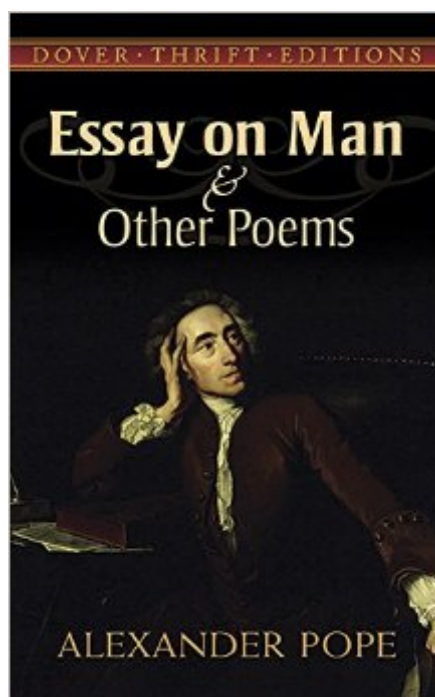


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Essay On Man And Other Poems (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Considered the preeminent verse satirist in English, Alexander Pope (1688-1744) brought wide learning, devastating wit and masterly technique to his poems. Models of clarity and control, they exemplified the classical poetics of the Augustan age. This volume contains a rich selection of Pope's work, including such well-known poems as the title selection—a philosophical meditation on the nature of the universe and man's place in it—and "The Rape of the Lock," a mock-epic of rare charm and skill. Also included are "Ode on Solitude," "The Dying Christian to His Soul," "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady," "An Essay on Criticism," "Epigram Engraved on the Collar of a Dog," "Epistle [IV] to Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington: Of the Use of Riches," "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot; or, Prologue to the Satires" and more. Taken together, these poems offer an excellent sampling of Pope's imaginative genius and the felicitous blending of word, idea and image that earned him a place among the leading lights of 18th-century literature.

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Customer Reviews

Pope's defining masterworks, "Essay on Man" and "The Rape of the Lock", are crystalizations of the 18th Century's defining impulses. The "Essay on Man" proselytizes on behalf of the deistic belief in an ordered, rational universe where humankind is no divine favorite but can understand its place on the Great Chain of Being and find happiness through knowledge and acceptance. Most will join with Voltaire in his hearty rejection of the doctrine "Whatever is, is right," yet it is impossible to deny the ennobling quality of Pope's optimism: "Grasp the whole worlds of reason, life, and sense, In one

close system of benevolence: Happier as kinder, in whate'er degree, And height of bliss but height of charity."Where "Essay on Man" expresses the rational principles of the Enlightenment, "The Rape of the Lock" exemplifies the love of the frivolous, the fashionable, and the feminine which gave such light and warmth to an era famed for its elevation of the intellect. The poem exemplifies the Rococo, that most playful of styles in literature; nowhere else in English lit does so much of the spirit of Boucher come through. Pope's verse swirls and sparkles in melodic luxuriance, his creamy couplets smooth and shapely as a woman's legs. This compact edition also includes the "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady", one of the most beautifully severe (and overlooked) poems in the language-- a rare triumph of Neo-Classical lyric. Here also are the famous "Essay on Criticism", the galloping satire of the "Epistle to Dr.

Samuel Johnson said that it may be a thousand years before another man comes along with powers of versification equal to Alexander Pope. It is a testament to Pope's greatness that this still does not seem hyperbolic. Indeed, in the nearly three centuries since he wrote, only a few English poets even rival his variety, and only Alfred Tennyson rivals his sheer technical mastery and quotability. The first thing one notices is his near-superhuman command of poetry's technical aspects; perhaps no one else in English has such an astonishing touch with meter, rhyme, stress, etc. His poetic variety is also notable; though best known for his unmatched heroic couplets, he mastered a diverse array of mediums. This is of course all the more striking since the moderns threw most of this out the proverbial window a century ago, making Pope a poet one essentially either loves or hates, though all can at least appreciate him. He is the acknowledged master to those who prefer formal poetry, while those who like free verse and other non-traditional forms may well think him stilted, old-fashioned, and portentous. His legend indeed became partly eclipsed when non-traditional poetry became standard, but the last few decades have seen a welcomed revival. It is clear that, whatever one prefers, Pope simply has no peer in terms of stately, precise English verse. But Pope was far more than just a technical wizard; he is at least as notable for intellectual depth. Indeed, only Percy Shelley and Thomas Hardy among English poets are even in his league for matching craft with philosophical vigor and other thought-provoking material. It is no coincidence that several of Pope's poems, including some of the most famous, have "Essay" in the title.

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