



An Essay on Criticism

Alexander Pope

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An Essay on Criticism was the first major poem written by the English writer Alexander Pope (1688-1744). However, despite the title, the poem is not as much an original analysis as it is a compilation of Pope's various literary opinions. A reading of the poem makes it clear that he is addressing not so much the ingenuous reader as the intending writer. It is written in a type of rhyming verse called heroic couplets.

The poem first appeared in 1711, but was written in 1709. It is clear from Pope's correspondence that many of the poem's ideas had existed in prose form since at least 1706. It is a verse essay written in the Horatian mode and is primarily concerned with how writers and critics behave in the new literary commerce of Pope's contemporary age. The poem covers a range of good criticism and advice. It also represents many of the chief literary ideals of Pope's age.

Pope contends in the poem's opening couplets that bad criticism does greater harm than bad writing:


'Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill Appear in Writing or in Judging ill, But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence, To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense: Some few in that, but Numbers err in this, Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss; A Fool might once himself alone expose, Now One in Verse makes many more in Prose.

Despite the harmful effects of bad criticism, literature requires worthy criticism. (*Quote from wikipedia.org*)

About the Author

Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744)

Alexander Pope (21 May 1688 - 30 May 1744) is generally regarded as the greatest English poet of the eighteenth century, best known for his satirical verse and for his translation of Homer. He is the third most frequently quoted writer in the English la

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