**Notes – from “The Rape of the Lock”**

**- Alexander Pope**

Many consider Alexander Pope the greatest poet of the eighteenth century and, along with Chaucer and Byron, one of the greatest verse satirists in English. Pope’s **satire** may seem to demand much knowledge of eighteenth-century life, but in truth it does not. As a satirist, Pope aims at universal follies. “The Rape of the Lock” is one of the finer examples of the **mock epic**, where trivial subjects are presented on a grand scale. Our other experience with this form was in the Medieval age, with Chaucer’s “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale.”

**Canto III**

ll. 1-8 – Hampton Court, the royal palace about 15 miles up the Thames from London,

was associated with wits as well as statesmen.

ll. 11-12 – visiting was part of the daily routine of the fashionable young lady –

Belinda’s voyage up the Thames parallels Aeneas’ up the Tiber.

l. 16 – **hyperbole** – gossip can be destructive, but this is a somewhat extreme claim.

ll. 21-22 – **satire** – implies that hungry, tired judges and juries make hasty decisions in

order to eat dinner.

l. 24 – “and the long labors of the toilet cease.” – **satire** – Pope is alluding to the

many long hours women spent in front of the mirror – “toilet” in this era referred

to the dressing room.

l. 27 – “Ombre” was a Spanish card game, hence the Spanish names for some cards

ll. 34-36 – **satire** – Pope here pokes fun at the aristocratic female preoccupation with

social status and position.

ll. 43-44 – nice visual images – suggest brightness, lightness – also, “velvet plain”

refers to the card table.

l. 45 – “skillful nymph” refers to Belinda

ll. 55-64 – **diction** – Pope describes the hands of the cards in language usually

reserved for epic heroes.

ll. 65-69 – at this stage in the game, the Baron’s hand is strong enough to threaten,

but Belinda has the cards to win.

l. 80 – **metaphor** – the green felt table covering is described as a battlefield – Pope

also refers to it as “velvet plain” (l.44) and “verdant field” (l.52)

ll. 87-91 – at this point, for a brief moment, it appears that Belinda is in real danger of

losing, as her pale look indicates.

l. 99 – Belinda’s reaction to her victory is pretty undignified for a woman of this era

(especially when the victory is over a man!)

ll. 101-104 – **foreshadowing** – a little commentary here on humanity that hints at

coming events and sets it in a universal context.

l. 113 – “airy band” refers to the sylphs, assigned to protect Belinda – they parallel the

angels assigned to protect Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*.

ll. 115-116 – the sylphs are guarding Belinda’s expensive dress against spills.

ll. 122-124 – **allusion** – refers to a story in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book VIII.

ll. 133-134 – as she is pouring coffee, Belinda is bending her head down, making her

lock of hair vulnerable.

ll. 135-136 – In Canto II all the sylphs are given particular duties in defense of Belinda-

Ariel is the chief of the sylphs.

ll. 139-146 – at this crucial moment, Ariel looks into Belinda’s mind and discovers that,

in reality, she *loves* the Baron!

ll. 149-152 – in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Book VI, Satan is cut in two by the archangel

Michael, with the same result.

ll. 155-160 – hilarious section, where Belinda’s screams over the cutting of her hair are

described.

ll. 161-178 – the Baron’s “celebration” at the capturing of his prize is completely over

the top! Excellent example of **hyperbole** and **satire** – lines 173-174 are

an **allusion** to *The Iliad* – supposedly the walls of Troy were built by the

“labor of the gods” Apollo and Poseidon.

**Canto V**

(the climactic “battle” which is described here is a classic device of **epic poetry**)

l. 8 – **simile** – the lords and ladies fight “like gods” in an essentially trivial battle

ll. 17-18 – **allusion** – another a parallel with Homer – during the battle of Ulysses

and the suitors, Minerva sits on a roof beam to see the action.

l. 28 – **allusion** – Sir Fopling’s swan song echoes words of an aria in the opera

*Camilla* by Bonocini.

ll. 35-36 – **allusion** – Jove (Jupiter), as father of the gods, made decisions in this way

when he presided over the games in Roman mythology.

ll. 51-52 – a “bodkin” is a large needle with decorated head used in the hair –

Belinda’s bodkin’s history may be satirically compared to that of

Agamemnon’s scepter in Homer.

ll. 61-62 – **satire** – Belinda’s triviality is accented by the comparison here with one

of the great tragic heroes in English drama.

ll. 79-82 – a consolation for Belinda – she has been immortalized by the lock of hair

she lost, not by the many tresses she kept.

ll. 87-88 – **allusion** – Belinda will be like Berenice, whose locks were stolen from

Venus’s temple and placed in the heavens in a constellation called

*Coma Berenices.*