The Rape of the Lock

Study Guide by Course Hero

What's Inside

Book Basics

AUTHOR
Alexander Pope

YEAR PUBLISHED
1714

GENRE
Comedy, Satire

PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATOR
"The Rape of the Lock" is written from the viewpoint of a third-person limited narrator whose focus is primarily the young lady whose lock of hair is plundered, Belinda.

TENSE
"The Rape of the Lock" is written in the past tense.

ABOUT THE TITLE
The title "The Rape of the Lock" refers to the theft of a lock of a young lady's hair (Belinda's). The word *rape* is here used in the old-fashioned sense to mean "an act of plunder" rather than "sexual violation."

In Context

Mock-Epic Poem

Alexander Pope's (1688–1744) "The Rape of the Lock" is written in mock-epic style. A mock epic is a type of satire that uses the classical form of an epic poem, usually in a humorous way. One of the earliest examples of this form is French author Nicholas Boileau's (1636–1711) poem "Le Lutrin" (1674–83), which, like "The Rape of the Lock," deals with two sides of a trivial argument. In this case, two church dignitaries try to decide where to place the chapel's lectern. Another example is "The Battle of the Books," published in 1704 by Anglo-Irish author and clergyman Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), a friend of Pope's. Its argument is over the merits of ancient versus modern literature.

Most mock epics begin, as Pope's does, with the invocation of the Muse. Other features include speeches; beings with supernatural powers, such as the sylphs in "The Rape of the Lock;" and descents into the underworld. "The Rape of the Lock" also features an epic battle in the style of Homer (worked in the 9th or 8th century BCE), the Greek poet to whom the *Iliad* (c. 750–650 BCE) and the *Odyssey* (c. 725–675 BCE) are attributed. Like other mock epics, Pope's poem is played for humor, to amuse readers who will recognize these familiar tropes. It parodies the culture of the day as much as it parodies Homer. Finally, the ascent into heaven of the poem's

lock brings to mind another epic poem, English poet John Milton's (1608–74) *Paradise Lost* (1674).

In "The Rape of the Lock," Pope portrays all these tropes on a smaller scale than how they would appear in a traditional epic poem. One of his purposes is to create amusement for the audience through the manipulation of scale. Greek gods become sylphs, or spirits. An epic battle becomes a card game. The descent into the underworld is portrayed in Umbriel's discussion with the Queen of Spleen.

The Augustan Age

The Augustan Age in Latin literature ranged from 43 BCE to 18 CE. Because of the peace and prosperity that reigned during this time, it was the "Golden Age" of classical literature. During this era, writers penned sophisticated poetry, the dominant themes being love, love of Rome, and nature. Some of the major works published during this time were Roman poet Ovid's (43 BCE–17 CE) *Metamorphoses*, written around 8 CE; Roman poet Virgil's (70–19 BCE) the *Aeneid*, written from around 30 BCE until the time of his death; and the poetry of Roman poet Horace (65–8 BCE).

This term also applies to the period of British literature during which Pope, Jonathan Swift, and others emulated the Augustan poets. This took place during the first half of the 18th century, when "The Rape of the Lock" was published. Like the Latin poets before them, these British poets wrote about contemporary philosophy and political issues. However, they often did so through satire. Satire occurs when a writer uses humor, irony, or exaggeration to reveal or condemn human depravity or foolhardiness.

This political and philosophical discourse can be seen in several places in "The Rape of the Lock." It is particularly apparent in Canto 3 when the characters arrive at Hampton Court, a royal palace, and gossip about British statesmen and foreign tyrants.

Arabella Fermor and Robert, Lord Petre

Pope bases his poem on a true story: two Catholic families in Pope's circle were involved in a quarrel, and Pope thought to help by writing the poem. A young man named Robert, Lord Petre (1690–1713) had cut a curl from the head of Arabella Fermor (c. 1689–1738), a beautiful young lady he was courting. She took offense, and a feud between the two families ensued. John Caryll (1667–1736), a friend to both Pope and the families, suggested Pope write a humorous poem about the incident. The poem would be a parody to show how the families had blown the situation out of proportion. Pope obliged, treating the participants as if they had been fighting the Trojan War, the epic war between the Greeks and the Trojans in the 12th or 13th century BCE and the subject of Homer's *Iliad*.

While Pope may have planned that the poem would only be read by a few people, it proved a tremendous success. This success caused the Fermor family to again take offense, this time at Pope himself, presumably for the portrayal of Belinda/Arabella in the poem. As a result, Pope published subsequent editions of the poem with a disclaimer stating the difference between the extremely vain Belinda of the poem and Arabella, the real-life owner of the lock.

Regardless, Lord Petre and Arabella did not marry.

Author Biography

Early Life

Poet and satirist Alexander Pope was born on May 21, 1688, in London, England. His father was a wholesale linen merchant. The year Pope was born, his father retired and moved the family from London to Binfield, Berkshire. Pope was an only child. He was frequently ill, and as a result he suffered from a curvature of the spine and only grew to be four feet, six inches tall. He battled frequent headaches into adulthood.

Pope's family was Catholic. Because of prejudice against Catholics in England at the time, for the most part Pope did not attend school, but rather was tutored at home by Catholic priests. However, he was largely self-taught, teaching himself Latin, Greek, Italian, and French. He also read a great deal. At age eight he began reading Homer (c. 801 BCE–c. 700 BCE), a Greek epic poet. Pope is said to have written his first known poem, "Ode on Solitude," at age 12, but the first recognized copy of the poem dates to 1709, when he would have been age 21. The same year, he was afflicted with what was probably

Pott's disease, a form of tuberculosis that affected his spine. He was also frail and had asthma. He believed his ill-health was the result of too much studying, which seems unlikely. However, his inability to participate in many physical activities probably did help him concentrate on his studies. Although he enjoyed traveling and could ride horseback, most of his time was spent reading and writing.

Early Works

Pope wrote his "Pastorals" at age 16. He composed the poem in heroic couplets, paired lines of rhyming iambic pentameter, as many of his later works would be. This poem became well known and gained Pope friends, including satirists Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) and John Gay (1685–1732), with whom Pope would collaborate on later works. Together they would form the Scriblerus Club, a group of writers who satirized ignorance, pretentiousness, and poor taste. Jacob Tonson (c. 1656–1736), a leading publisher of poetry, published *Poetical Miscellanies* in 1709. Pope's "An Essay on Criticism" was then published anonymously in 1711. The essay contained amusing epigrams such as "A little learning is a dangerous thing" and "To err is human, to forgive, divine."

In 1712 Pope published the first two cantos of "The Rape of the Lock"; it was expanded to five cantos in 1714. This poem may be his best-known work. It describes a quarrel between two families over a young man's theft of a lock of a young woman's hair. Pope treated this humorous subject matter as epic, satirizing both the warring families and the social conventions of the day.

Homer Translations and Move to Twickenham

After writing several other poems, Pope turned his attention to translation. He began with a six-volume translation of Homer's epic poem *The Iliad*, arranging for the volumes to be available by subscription, one volume per year, beginning in 1715. By doing this, Pope was able to support himself entirely through his writing, something very few English poets were able to do.

After his father's death in 1717, Pope moved to the village of Twickenham. There he leased three cottages and built a villa facing the river. He also purchased five acres of land across the road, which he used for a garden. Since this land was separated from his house by the road, he began to construct a tunnel under the road. The tunnel led out of the basement of his house, and in a central section Pope created a grotto, which can still be visited today. The grotto had many interesting geological features, and the informal garden that could be reached through the passageway was considered avant-garde at the time.

At his new villa, Pope worked on a translation of Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. It was released by subscription, as *The Iliad* had been, in 1725 and 1726. He also published an imperfectly edited edition of playwright William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) works and was roundly criticized for doing so.

Later Works

Perhaps in response to this criticism, in 1728 Pope published *The Dunciad*, a three-book satire making fun of critics. Published anonymously, it was obviously his work. Written in the style of Virgil's *Aeneid*, it cast Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), a critic who wrote a "correction" of Pope's Shakespeare edition, in the lead role. Criticism of *The Dunciad* was so hostile, it was said Pope wouldn't leave the house without two loaded pistols. While some have criticized this work as petulant, it is also funny, and Pope reissued the book in 1729 with mock prefaces, indexes, and notes. A final, four book edition was published in 1743 with new material added.

Pope meant his philosophical poem "An Essay on Man," published in 1733 and 1734, to be the preface to a longer work. However, he never completed it. The following year, a collection of Pope's letters was released, supposedly without his permission, and scandal ensued. However, it turned out he had edited them and sent them to a publisher in secret.

Other later works included "Of the Use of Riches, an Epistle to Bathurst" (1732), "An Epistle to Cobham, of the Knowledge and Characters of Men" (1733), and "Of the Characters of Women: An Epistle to a Lady" (1735). He published "First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated" to great success in 1733. He went on to write 10 more paraphrases of the work of the Roman poet Horace (65–8 BCE).

Death and Legacy

Pope's prolific output slowed significantly after 1738 because he was in poor health. His last completed work was *The New Dunciad* (1742). He died on May 30, 1744.

Pope's legacy is felt daily, and not only by readers of poetry. He is considered one of the most epigrammatic writers in the English language. He is oft-quoted, even now, in expressions such as "Hope springs eternal" and "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." His quote "Act well your part, there all the honor lies" is the motto of the International Thespian Society and so has been known to thousands of theater students. Pope was the master of the 10-syllable rhyming "heroic couplet." He was also the first English poet to become famous in his lifetime in France and Italy and to see his works translated into other languages.

Characters

Belinda

Belinda does her best to look beautiful, styling her hair at great length and otherwise worshipping at the altar of beauty. She also plays quite a game of Ombre, a card game. But beautiful and popular though she is, she isn't a mean girl. In fact, she's known for her good nature. The theft of her lock, however, drives her to distraction.

Baron

The Baron is a brash young fellow. He knows what he wants and plots to get it. He pretends to be involved in an innocent game of Ombre, but all the while he is plotting to steal Belinda's curl. He has many other souvenirs from other young ladies and wants to add Belinda's curl to them. He is entirely without sympathy.

Ariel

Ariel takes his job very seriously. He helps Belinda get ready and does a much better job than her maid, Betty, ever could do. He and the other sylphs flutter around, trying to protect Belinda when she plays cards. Ariel is also a master delegator, rather like the commander of an army. He assigns all the other sylphs jobs of protecting Belinda.

Umbriel

Umbriel is a born mischief-maker. When he sees Belinda's distress, he calls upon the Queen of Spleen to take advantage of the situation. He beseeches her to make Belinda more angry and tearful, and the Queen of Spleen agrees to help him. Umbriel then fans the flames in Belinda's conversation with the Baron.

Thalestris

Thalestris isn't a great friend to Belinda, even though she calls herself one. When Belinda is upset, she exacerbates the situation, reminding Belinda how hard she worked to get her hair just right. She also tells Belinda her reputation will suffer if her hair is displayed—and that as a result, Thalestris's own reputation will suffer if she tries to defend her.

Clarissa

Perhaps Clarissa is jealous of Belinda, or else she is in some other way a frenemy. First she helps the Baron to steal Belinda's lock. Then she lectures Belinda about how she needs to get over it. According to Clarissa in her very long speech, women need to be nice because their beauty will fade.

Sir Plume

Sir Plume is a vain and fashionable dandy with an amber snuffbox and a fancy walking stick. He pretty much answers to Thalestris's command. When Thalestris orders him to demand the Baron return the lock, he does so. He isn't able to get the lock back, but he tries, appealing to the Baron's civility.

Character Map

- Main Character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character

Full Character List

Character	Description
Belinda	Belinda is a young lady with beautiful hair. She is the victim of a vile crime.
Baron	The Baron is a young man who plots to steal a lock of Belinda's hair.
Ariel	Ariel is a sylph, an airy spirit. Ariel and the other sylphs are in charge of protecting beauty from harm.
Umbriel	Umbriel is a gnome who wants to make Belinda more upset.
Thalestris	Thalestris is Belinda's friend. Her boyfriend is Sir Plume.
Clarissa	Clarissa conspires with the Baron to steal Belinda's lock. In fact, she hands him the scissors.
Sir Plume	Sir Plume is Thalestris's boyfriend. He tries to get the Baron to return the lock.
Affectation	Affectation attends the Queen of Spleen. She is a young girl who is something of a hypochondriac.
Betty	Betty is Belinda's maid. She believes she does a very good job getting her ready, but the sylphs do the heavy lifting.
Brillante	Brillante is one of the sylphs. It is her job to guard the diamonds.
John Carryl	John Carryl (1667–1736), a friend of Alexander Pope's (1688–1744), appears in the poem as C—, its muse.
Crispissa	Crispissa is one of the sylphs. It is her job to guard the lock.
Ill-nature	Ill-nature attends the Queen of Spleen. She is a dour old lady.
Jove	Jove, the chief of the ancient Roman gods, weighs the strengths of the men and women in the final battle.
Momentilla	Momentilla is one of the sylphs. It is her job to guard Belinda's watch.
Muse	The Muse sees Belinda's lock of hair rise upward into the heavens.
Queen of Spleen	The Queen of Spleen is in charge of all manner of female conditions. She can make young ladies more upset than they would normally be.
Shock	Shock is Belinda's dog. He licks her awake.
Zephyretta	Zephyretta is one of the sylphs. It is her job to guard the fan.

Plot Summary

Canto 1

The narrator says sometimes a dire offense can be committed in the name of love, even though it may seem trivial. He states the muse for the poem is C——. This is John Carryl (1667–1736), the friend who asked Alexander Pope (1688–1744) to write the poem. He says "Belinda," the girl about whom the story is written, can see the poem as well. He will tell the story of a dire offense and answer two questions: Why would a young man assault a beautiful young lady? And why would a young lady reject a handsome young man?

As the story begins, it is morning. Everyone is waking, but Belinda is reluctant to rise. Her guardian sylph, a spirit or fairy of the air, apparently invisible, protects her. He has sent a wonderful dream of a handsome young man who whispers sweet nothings in her ear. Various sylphs, who are stand-ins for the gods often portrayed in epic poetry, all flutter around, protecting her. They always protect her, whether she attends the theater or takes a fashionable drive. These sylphs used to be fashionable people themselves, and now that they're no longer alive, they hang around and protect Belinda. They warn

her when something bad is about to happen. They guard the purity of maidens and protect them against false friends and young men who may wish them ill. Her special guardian sylph, named Ariel, protects her from all manner of things, but he mostly warns her to beware of men.

Belinda's lapdog, Shock, decides she's been sleeping too long and licks her awake. She sees a love letter, and all the sylphs' warnings fly out of her head. She sits down to prepare at her dressing table. Like a priest worshipping at the altar, she prays to the "cosmetic powers" and sees an image of a Madonna, which turns out to be Belinda's own reflection. The styling of her hair and face resemble the donning of battle armor. Her servant, Betty, helps her, bringing forth "unnumbered treasures" from all over the world: jewels from India, perfumes from Arabia. She brings out combs of ivory and tortoiseshell for her hair. The sylphs, though unseen, divide her beautiful hair and help with her gown. Betty gets all the praise for making Belinda beautiful, but the sylphs are really doing the work. They arm Belinda with great beauty to make her ready to do battle—or, as it turns out, to go to a party.

Canto 2

Belinda cruises on a boat down the Thames, a river in London and southern England. She is surrounded by many other beautiful young people, but none are as beautiful as she is. She wears a sparkling cross, and her beauty inspires even people who are not Christian to kiss the cross; they would put their religious differences aside to worship her. She can do no wrong. She has no faults, although if she ever seems to have any, the narrator says, "Look on her Face, and you'll forget 'em all."

In short, she looks very good, and everyone stares at her. She smiles on everyone, bestowing bright light like the sun.

Pope next introduces the lock that is the subject of the poem. Actually, there are two locks, hanging behind her:

> *In equal Curls, and well conspir'd to deck*
> *With shining Ringlets her smooth Iv'ry Neck.*

Belinda and her sylphs have trained her hair so a couple of stray curls fall down her neck, giving her a sultry, tousled look. These two enticing curls practically act like snares in which to trap unsuspecting suitors. Or at least, they definitely get their attention.

Specifically, they get the attention of the Baron, who has always admired them. He resolves to get the locks by any means necessary. He figures once he has them in his possession, no one will question how he got them. He has several other souvenirs from girls with whom he has been in love: purloined romance novels, gloves, and actual love letters. In fact, he has built a shrine with them, a shrine to love, and he means to have Belinda's curls ensconced there. He prays to the gods to help him get the curls. They hear half his prayers.

The boat sails onward. The delighted Belinda suspects nothing. But her sylph Ariel knows something's afoot. Ariel summons all the other sylphs to help. They come, dressed in various glittering, unearthly attire. Ariel gathers them and speaks: "Ye *Sylphs* and *Sylphids*, to your Chief give Ear, / *Fays*, *Fairies*, *Genii*, *Elves*, and *Dæmons* hear!" He says all the creatures have different functions, some more important than others. Their overall function, as sylphs, is to protect beauty—specifically, beautiful women like Belinda. This job may not have the glory of helping a soldier in battle, but it's still important. To them is entrusted the crucial tasks of making sure a lady's powder isn't messed up, her petticoat is straight, and her hair doesn't frizz.

Ariel warns them something bad will happen:

> *This Day, black Omens threat the brightest Fair*
> *That e'er deserv'd a watchful Spirit's Care.*

It is up to them to stop it. Ariel assigns them all different jobs. One sylph named Zephyretta is assigned to be in charge of Belinda's fan. One named Brillante is in charge of her diamonds. Momentilla guards her watch. Crispissa is to "tend her fav'rite Lock." Quite a few are assigned to keep her skirt in order. Ariel warns bad things will happen to sylphs who neglect their duties.

Canto 3

The boat finally reaches the shore, where Hampton Court, the palace of Queen Anne (1665–1714), awaits the occupants. Despite the importance of the company, they gossip ferociously about "foreign tyrants" and "nymphs." Pope refers to pretty girls as nymphs, though they seem to be entirely mortal. They wave their fans and take snuff, and "at ev'ry Word a Reputation dies."

It is noon. The narrator notes at this time of the day, judges decide cases quickly, letting "wretches hang," so they can leave for their lunch. Belinda plays a card game called Ombre, as prophesized in Canto 1. The sylphs sit on each important card, watching over them. She is winning. She plays against the aforementioned Baron, the man who had his eye on her curls, and another young man. She enjoys pretty good luck, possibly because of the sylphs' watchfulness: "The skillful Nymph reviews her Force with care; / *Let Spades be Trumps*, she said, and Trumps they were."

This whole section reads like a battle scene in an epic poem, much like Homer's portrayal of the Trojan War, fought in the 12th or 13th century BCE, in *The Iliad*. Belinda is winning the battle until suddenly "fate inclines the field" to the Baron, who gets in a good hand. He makes one solid move, then another. Finally, with "wily arts," he wins her queen. Belinda is shocked. The blood leaves her cheeks. However, she has something up her sleeve (not literally—she isn't cheating). She takes out a king and exacts her revenge. The narrator warns her not to revel in her victory.

The group sets about drinking coffee and tea. The Baron, energized by the caffeine, starts getting excited again about the idea of stealing Belinda's hair. The narrator warns him he shouldn't do this. After all, Scylla, a character from Greek mythology, stole a lock of hair from her father and ended up getting turned into a bird for punishment.

But he cannot be stopped. A girl named Clarissa, apparently the Baron's ally in treachery and no real friend of Belinda's, presents him with a "two-edg'd Weapon" (i.e., scissors) she's been carrying around for just such an occasion. She's like a lady assisting a knight. He takes it.

The sylphs try mightily to protect her. They fly around her neck like insects, attempting to make her turn back to see or maybe swat at them. She does this several times. Eventually Ariel somehow reads her thoughts as he sits on the nosegay, or flowers, she has at her breast. Ariel sees she is in love with someone, and this renders him powerless. Once she has an earthly lover, she can no longer be protected by the sylphs.

The Baron's scissors close around the curl. One sylph, still fluttering around, gets cut in half. But fortunately, since it's so airy, it joins right back together. The lock of hair, however, is not as fortunate. It is severed from her head forever. Belinda screams a terrible scream, worse than if her husband or even her lapdog had died. The Baron gloats, saying the noble prize is his and his feat will be remembered forever in glory.

The narrator assures the reader—and Belinda, perhaps—it was pointless even to defend herself against the scissors. The scissors were, after all, made of steel. Steel can destroy the labors of the gods and even the "imperial Tow'rs of *Troy*." Poor Belinda's hair didn't stand a chance.

Canto 4

Belinda, profoundly upset about the loss of her lock, feels worse than a king taken prisoner in battle, worse than a virgin whose virginity has outlasted her beauty, worse than an older lady refused a kiss, worse than a tyrant who died unrepentant. She's just really, really mad.

And her sylphs can do nothing to help. They go away. Immediately after, we are introduced to Umbriel, a gnome. A gnome is a different kind of spirit, one not as wonderful and protective as the sylphs.

Umbriel knows what he must do. He goes to the Cave of Spleen. There he finds the Queen of Spleen, who has taken to her bed with a migraine. She has two servants attending her. One is named "Ill-nature" and the other is "Affectation." Ill-nature is an old lady, while Affectation is a pretty young girl. Many horrors dwell in the Cave of Spleen, from living teapots to visions of death. There are also pregnant men, walking tables, and talking goose pies. Umbriel struggles through all this, holding a branch of healing spleenwort to protect him. The Queen "rule[s] the Sex from Fifty to Fifteen," so basically she is in charge of all women. It is she who gives them the vapors, which was how women having a temper (or, possibly, a personality or an opinion) were described in Pope's time. In fact, she has a whole cavalcade of illnesses at her disposal. She is also in charge of the most horrific of all symptoms,

"Female Wit," which might make women "scribble Plays." Umbriel tells the queen Belinda isn't usually a mean girl. She's usually immune to the powers of the queen, but this would be a good opportunity for the queen to infect her.

Umbriel is a mischievous sort. He is bound to raise pimples on a beautiful face or cause women to have temper tantrums when they lose a game. He makes their lapdogs sick or rumples their petticoats, and now he wants to mess with Belinda. He begs the queen to help him.

The queen hesitates but finally obliges by giving him a bag filled with "Sighs, Sobs, and Passions." Pope notes it is similar to the bag given to Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*, which was filled with winds to help his ship get home. The gnome is ecstatic and goes happily off with his bag of tricks.

Umbriel finds Belinda, who still suffers from upset, sitting with her friend Thalestris. Her name is another classical reference, this time to the Queen of the Amazons, who legend has it seduced Alexander the Great (356–23 BCE). Umbriel looses his bag upon them, and Thalestris reminds Belinda of what she endured to get her hair just right. She used a curling iron, set her hair in papers, and all matter of other tortures just so a rude young ravisher could steal her hair and display it to his friends. This will cause such damage to Belinda's reputation, even Thalestris won't be able to defend her, because to do so would hurt Thalestris's own reputation. Does Belinda think the Baron will display her curl honorably in a ring upon his hand? Thalestris asks. She concludes it is very doubtful.

Therefore, Thalestris says, Thalestris's boyfriend, Sir Plume, should try to reclaim the lock. Sir Plume is a dandy with an amber snuffbox and a walking stick. Sir Plume confronts the Baron and demands the hair back. The Baron refuses. He won it fair and square, and it's never going back to the lovely head from which it grew. He's going to wear it forever.

Umbriel, "hateful gnome" that he is, breaks a vial of tears and sprinkles them all over Belinda. She makes a tearful plea. She sobs while wishing she had never gone to Hampton Court. It was her favorite curl, and now it is lost forever. She wishes she had gone to some distant northern land where they don't even have chariots. She wishes she'd never learned to play Ombre and had kept her beauty concealed like a rose in the desert. She relates all sorts of portents that occurred the morning before this happened. Her dog was mean to her, her china decorations were shaking, and she thinks she even heard sylphs whispering warnings to her. She should have listened to them and not gone out.

She now has only one curl, hanging all alone. She worries something may happen to it. She wishes the Baron had stolen a less visible lock of hair, or any other hair at all.

Canto 5

Belinda continues her pleading. Everyone listening is moved to tears except for the cruel Baron, whose ears are stopped up against her pleas.

Then Clarissa, the girl who helped the Baron to steal the lock in the first place, makes a plea for civility. She says it is all well and good to be beautiful, but women must also have a good nature and common sense: "How vain are all these Glories, all our Pains, / Unless good Sense preserve what Beauty gains." After all, beauty will eventually fade. Hair will turn gray. Where will women be, she asks, if they scorn men? The greatest power of a woman is her good nature. Basically, Clarissa tells Belinda she should just deal with the Baron stealing her hair because otherwise she looks like she is being difficult.

No one buys it. Belinda and Thalestris remain angry. Umbriel is having a wonderful time because of everyone's anger. This prompts another Homeric battle, this time involving whalebone corsets and rustling silk. People even hit one another with fans. This is no civilized game of cards. Thalestris kills people with dirty looks. Sir Plume even gets Clarissa involved.

Jove, the Roman king of the gods, weighs the relative strengths of the ladies and gentlemen. Finding that the men have wit while the women only have hair, he decides the men should win. But Belinda, in a display of her own wit, puts her finger and thumb over the Baron's nose:

> *She with one Finger and a Thumb subdu'd,*
> *Just where the Breath of Life his Nostrils drew.*

She throws a pinch of snuff at him. He sneezes, and she threatens him with a hairpin.

Then he confesses his love for her. He's not worried about

death, only about leaving her. He asks her to let him live to burn with love for her.

> *Rather than so, ah let me still survive,*
> *And burn in Cupid's Flames, — but burn alive.*

She demands the lock back, yelling like Othello, the title character in the play by William Shakespeare (1564–1616) when he demanded his wife's handkerchief. Everyone shouts for him to give the lock back. But, alas, no one can find it.

Everyone wonders where it has gone. They wonder if it has perhaps gone to the special place where all lost things go, a place of lost snuffboxes and broken vows. It has not. The Muse saw it rise up into the sky, where it takes its place among other objects that have inspired poets. In fact, it will inspire this very poem the reader is reading right now.

Thus, Belinda should not mourn the loss of her lock. It has risen to eternity. Through the poem it inspired, it will live on forever:

> *This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to Fame,*
> *And mid'st the Stars inscribe Belinda's Name!*

Plot Analysis

Form

"The Rape of the Lock" takes the form of a mock epic, a form that shares several traits with actual epic poems. These traits include calling upon the Muse at the beginning of the poem, characters (such as Clarissa) giving lengthy speeches, epic battles, heaven and hell, and the use of supernatural powers. The poem is divided into five cantos, or subsections.

Meter and Rhyme

"The Rape of the Lock" employs heroic couplets, or pairs of lines that rhyme at the end, written in iambic pentameter. In iambic pentameter, each line has ten syllables and five feet. A foot is the basic unit of measurement of a poem's meter, and the foot of iambic pentameter contains an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Iambic pentameter is one of the most common forms of traditional poetry. Alexander Pope (1688–1744) is considered a master of it, though it was also frequently employed by Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1342/43–1400), Robert Browning (1812–89), and William Shakespeare (1564–1616) in his sonnets.

Sylphs, Nymphs, and Gnomes

Mythological creatures protect Belinda. But rather than the Greek gods of an epic poem, Pope included sylphs, which are tiny little air fairies that flutter around like dragonflies or hummingbirds.

Sylphs differ in size from nymphs, who are life-sized. For example, there is a Greek myth that tells about a nymph named Daphne, who turned herself into a tree to avoid being chased by the god Apollo. In "The Rape of the Lock," when Pope refers to nymphs, he means life-sized people, not the tiny, invisible sylphs.

Umbriel, who appears in Canto 3, is a different kind of creature: a gnome. Unlike sylphs, the gnomes in this poem are not protective. In fact, they actually want to create mischief. They are perhaps smaller than nymphs but bigger than sylphs. It is difficult to say since no human seems to come into contact with Umbriel.

An Epic Battle

Every good epic needs an epic battle, and "The Rape of the Lock" is no exception. The first battle in the poem begins with Belinda's preparation for a larger battle—the party. When she prepares her face, hair, and clothing, Pope equates these actions with putting on armor. She also prays to the gods of beauty, much as soldiers might pray for strength the night before an actual battle. Indeed, Belinda's entire beauty ritual seems like worship at an altar.

The battle itself takes place in the form of a game of cards. Belinda strategizes, then sends in her various soldiers, in the form of trump cards and "Particolor'd Troops," or the rest of her cards. The face cards carry weapons, such as swords. Her top three trump cards are called Spadillio, Basto, and Manillio. Belinda, acting as commander, sends these soldiers into battle. Unbeknownst to her, the sylphs are also there to protect and help her. Eventually Belinda wins the battle—but not the war. Her opponent, the Baron, does not take defeat well. Taking a double-edged weapon (scissors) from a false friend of Belinda's, he severs her curl. He is victorious.

A second battle takes place later. This one seems to involve some physical weapons, such as fans, but also vicious stares and frowns. Here, the actual gods get involved, not just sylphs. When he describes the bodkin, or hairpin, with which Belinda threatens the baron, Pope makes sure to tell the entire history of it. The pin has been handed down from generation to generation, similar to how the weaponry in an epic battle would be.

Victim-Blaming?

The narrator describes how Belinda's curls hang *so* seductively down her back. She has, he remarks, arranged them this way specifically, as a temptation. They create a sort of trap for unsuspecting men to make them fall in love with her. Is it any wonder, the narrator seems to ask, that men would want them? This is interesting because it parallels the idea still common today that a woman somehow invites physical assault through dressing seductively or from her actions. It should be noted that Pope, by parodying this idea, probably recognized its ridiculousness.

Later in the poem, however, the narrator states Belinda could not possibly have defended herself from the scissors because, being made of steel, they were too strong. Therefore, even though he was writing in the 18th century, Pope seems to have understood an important fact. Though Belinda may have played cards with the Baron and even flirted, she wasn't asking to have her lock "raped."

Female Hysteria

But how did Pope *really* feel about Belinda's—and, therefore, Arabella's—reaction to having her hair cut off? He may have thought it was a little over the top. Immediately after the theft, Belinda weeps and sighs in misery while the gnome Umbriel goes to the Cave of Spleen. The spleen is the organ in the body that was thought to control ill humors and anger. (This is where the expression "vent your spleen," meaning "let out your anger," originated.) Umbriel meets the Queen of Spleen, attended by two servants called "Ill-nature" and "Affectation." (Affectation is putting on a show to impress others, such as pretending to be sickly and delicate.) The queen is also in charge of vapors, a word used in Pope's time to refer to "hysterical" nervous conditions, and of "female wit." Thus, one might deduce Pope believes women who think themselves witty and entertaining to be simply hysterical. This seems especially likely a few lines later when it is mentioned this queen "make[s] some take Physick, others scribble Plays." Pope apparently thought female creativity arose from hysteria or hormones. However, Pope does have Umbriel say that Belinda is ordinarily good-natured, and fits of pique are out of character for her.

It is interesting to note that Pope wrote one of his best-known poems, "An Essay on Criticism," in an apparent attempt to strike back at critics. Additionally, he had so many enemies, he felt the need to carry two loaded pistols every time he left the house. Therefore, it seems he might have been a little reactionary himself.

It is worth examining if Belinda really did overreact. A lock of hair was a token commonly given as a symbol of affection, much as a lady might give a knight a handkerchief or ribbon as a token of her favor. As such, it was the lady's choice to give, not a young man's to steal. Unlike some other tokens, such as the purloined gloves referred to in the poem, a lock of hair was actually attached to the lady's head. Cutting it off against her will does seem to be a form of assault. Even if a lady gave her curl willingly, and from true affection, she would probably like to choose from where it should be cut, to keep her from looking like a scalped pigeon.

Clarissa's Speech

Clarissa's speech calls to mind Katharina's long speech at the end of Shakespeare's play *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1590–94), wherein the previously shrewish Katharina goes on and on about the obedience women owe to their husbands. The speech begins with Katharina cautioning her previously

more agreeable sister, Bianca, to "unknit that threatening unkind brow, / And dart not scornful glances from those eyes / To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor." Such unkind looks, Katharina says, mar women's beauty. Katharina goes on to talk about how ugly anger makes women, eventually saying she is "asham'd that women are so simple / To offer war where they should kneel for peace." Pope eventually published a revised edition of Shakespeare's complete works, so perhaps he had Katharina in mind when he wrote Clarissa's speech. The feisty Katharina's speech seems out of character in Shakespeare's play, but it is supposed to symbolize how she has changed through love. Clarissa's speech seems even more out of character because Clarissa caused all the trouble by helping the Baron to steal Belinda's hair in the first place. One wonders if Pope wished to characterize Clarissa as the soft voice of reason. Or perhaps he wished her to come across as the type of catty girl who causes all manner of trouble and then steps back and says, "Who, me?"

In any case, no one in the poem buys it.

The Ending

In the battle that follows Clarissa's speech, Belinda demands her lock be given back. And here we find another Shakespeare reference, as she yells for the lock with even more ferocity than Othello roared for Desdemona's handkerchief in *Othello* (1604):

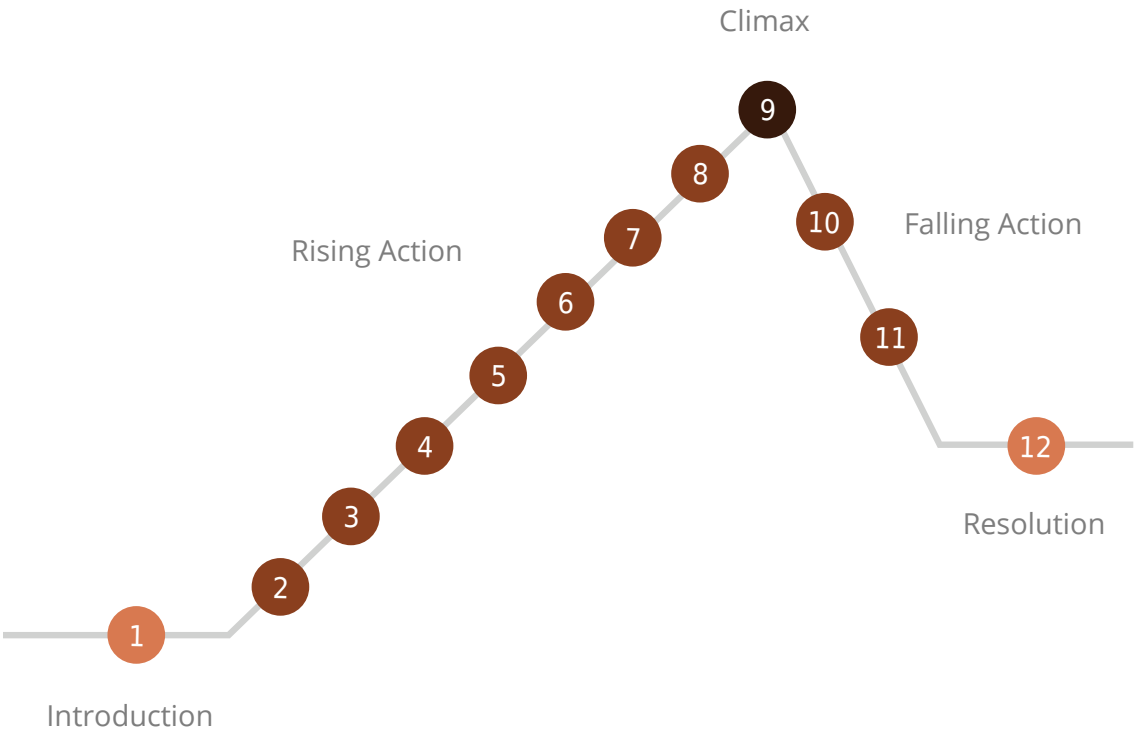
> *Not fierce Othello in so loud a Strain*
> *Roar'd for the Handkerchief that caus'd his Pain.*

Here Pope uses hyperbole by comparing the handkerchief in *Othello* to Belinda's lock of hair. Othello believes his wife, Desdemona, gave her handkerchief to her lover, a belief that eventually drives him to murder her. So again, Pope is telling the reader Belinda is overreacting.

When, finally, the Baron seems to agree to return the lock, he can't find it. It has, in fact, risen to the "Lunar Sphere," where it has inspired a muse to write a poem. This is reminiscent of the heaven of John Milton's (1608–74) epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1674). Although the lock is gone, it and therefore its owner will live forever.

This has proved to be true. Over 300 years later, modern readers are still reading the poem. Indeed, they may even be familiar with Arabella Fermor (c. 1689–1738), the owner of the real lock of hair that inspired it.

Plot Diagram



Introduction

1. Belinda readies for the party.

Rising Action

2. Belinda enjoys herself on the boat.

3. Ariel rallies to protect Belinda from an unknown threat.

4. Belinda and the Baron play Ombre and Belinda wins.

5. The Baron cuts off Belinda's lock.

6. Umbriel and the Queen of Spleen torment Belinda.

7. Thalestris, Sir Plume, and Belinda try to get the lock back.

8. The Baron rejects their pleas and a battle ensues.

Climax

9. The Baron declares his love for Belinda.

Falling Action

10. Everyone searches for the lock but it can't be found.

11. The lock has been taken up to the sky.

Resolution

12. The lock inspires the Muse to write a poem.

Timeline of Events

A sunny day

Belinda readies for the party.

Later

Belinda enjoys herself on the boat.

Meanwhile

The Baron plots to steal Belinda's lock.

Meanwhile

Ariel masses the sylphs to protect Belinda.

In the afternoon

Belinda and the Baron play Ombre and Belinda wins.

Then

The Baron steals Belinda's lock.

Afterward

Umbriel finds the Queen of Spleen.

Then

The Queen gives Umbriel a magical bag.

After that

Umbriel lets the bag loose on Belinda and Thalestris.

Next

At Thalestris's bidding, Sir Plume demands the lock back.

A moment later

Belinda gives an emotional speech, and an epic battle ensues.

During the battle

The Baron declares his love for Belinda.

In the end

The lock inspires the Muse to write a poem.

After this

The Baron cannot find the lock because it has risen to the sky.

“” Quotes

"What dire Offense from am'rous Causes springs, / What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things."

— Narrator

These lines begin the poem, and they are a sort of call to action. Love, war, and trivial matters are the subject of the poem, summed up nicely in these first two lines. The poet's desire to answer these questions provides the inspiration for this poem.

"Say what strange Motive, Goddess! cou'd compel / A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle Belle?"

— Narrator

The narrator poses another question: Why would a nobleman assault a nice lady? Continuing on with the theme of the poem's first two lines, these questions would make someone want to know more about the story the poet is about to tell.

"Of these am I, who thy Protection claim / A watchful Sprite, and Ariel is my Name."

— Ariel

After describing the duties sylphs, or fairies, carry out in protecting innocent young women, Ariel introduces himself as the particular sylph assigned to protect Belinda.

"First, rob'd in White, the Nymph intent adores / With Head uncover'd, the cosmetic Pow'rs. / A heav'nly Image in the Glass appears."

— Narrator

Here the narrator describes Belinda worshipping at the altar of beauty and vanity. She's praying to the cosmetic gods, and the graven image she sees in the mirror is her own face.

"If to her share some Female Errors fall, / Look on her Face, and you'll forget 'em all."

— Narrator

The narrator goes on and on about Belinda's perfection. She's not merely beautiful but flawless. If anyone dares to think she has flaws, all they have to do is look at her to forgive them.

"In equal Curls, and well conspir'd to deck / With shining Ringlets her smooth Iv'ry Neck."

— Narrator

This is the first description of the lock that is the subject of the poem. It is one of two ringlets hanging down Belinda's neck.

"This Day, black Omens threat the brightest Fair / That e'er deserv'd a watchful Spirit's Care."

— Ariel

The sylph Ariel claims to have seen portents telling him something bad is going to happen to Belinda.

"At ev'ry Word a Reputation dies."

— Narrator

This describes the gossip of the partygoers who have taken the boat to the castle. They are destroyers of reputations.

"The hungry Judges soon the Sentence sign, / And Wretches hang that Jury-men may Dine."

— Narrator

In a bit of social commentary, the narrator says judges are unconcerned about human rights. In fact, they would allow a man to hang simply to get a quick verdict so they can go home for lunch.

"Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her Art, / An Earthly Lover lurking at her Heart."

— Narrator

The sprite Ariel can see inside Belinda's thoughts. He perceives she is in love with someone. This makes it impossible for him to protect her, as sylphs can only protect those whose hearts aren't given away. The poem does not elaborate on who owns Belinda's heart. Perhaps it is the Baron, or perhaps it is someone else.

"Not louder Shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast, / When Husbands or when Lap-dogs breath their last."

— Narrator

The narrator describes traumatic events that may cause a lady to shriek with sorrow or rage. The death of a husband is such an event, but with a touch of black humor, the narrator asserts the death of a dog is equally traumatic.

"Hail wayward Queen! / Who rule the Sex to Fifty from Fifteen, / Parent of Vapors and of Female Wit."

— Umbriel

These words are used to describe the Queen of Spleen, a deity dedicated to female fits of temper. She is in charge of women aged 15 to 50. Notably, these are approximately the ages at which women begin and end menstruating. During these periods, she inflicts upon them many horrors, including vapors (a disease of ill temper) and female wit. Thus, Alexander Pope (1688–1744) was saying female cleverness is some sort of fit of pique.

"Oh hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize / Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these!"

— Belinda

Pope is making sort of a dirty joke here. Belinda wishes the Baron had stolen hair that was less visible—any hair.

"How vain are all these Glories, all our Pains, / Unless good Sense preserve what Beauty gains."

— Clarissa

Clarissa, who earlier helped the Baron to steal Belinda's hair, now tells her to calm down and be nice. A woman needs a good personality to make up for fading looks, she says.

> *"This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to Fame, / And mid'st the Stars inscribe Belinda's Name!"*

— Narrator

As the poem ends, the lock is nowhere to be found. The muse told a poet (Pope) about the lock. He then wrote a poem about it, making it famous so it will be remembered forever.

Symbols

The Lock

The lock of Belinda's hair referred to in the title is also a powerful symbol both of vanity and of the power of female beauty over men. According to the poem, Belinda has nourished her locks, meaning she has trained them to be at their most fabulous, hanging temptingly down her neck. As such, they are portrayed as "Chains" or even "Sprindges," or snares, to entrap an unsuspecting young beau. When Pope initially introduces the locks, he says they have been nourished "to the destruction of mankind," meaning they have great power and have been groomed in such a way as to have even more power. They are doing their job—in fact, they do it too well, causing the Baron to fall so completely in love (as it turns out later) with Belinda that he simply has to have her locks, or one of them, as a souvenir. This results in the entire battle and, indeed, the resentment between the two that comes as a result of it.

Cards

In Canto 3, Belinda plays a game of Ombre against the Baron, at which she is apparently very good. Alexander Pope (1688–1744) uses the strategic game of Ombre as a symbol of war, spelling out each move. In Ombre, the top three trump cards are called Matadores. Each of these trump cards has a different name. One is *spadille,* one is *basto,* and one is *manille.* In the poem, these are the names of the warriors in the battle being fought. For example, Spadillio is the "first, unconquerable Lord." Pope describes the troops in the battle as being "particolour'd," meaning the different suits of cards. He also describes the appearance of the face cards as if they are the features of real soldiers, noting how one king "puts forth one manly leg," for example. Here a queen is taken, but there an ace makes its appearance. In the end a king saves the day. Since the actual order of the day is not just cards but romance, one can assume the cards are symbolic not just of war, but of love.

The Bodkin

Near the end of the final battle, Belinda draws "a deadly *Bodkin* from her side" and threatens the Baron with it. A *bodkin* is a pin for putting up hair. Like in the epics of the Greek poet Homer (9th or 8th century BCE), this weapon has a history. Belinda's great-great-grandfather wore rings that were melted down after his death to make "a vast *Buckle* for his Widow's Gown." It was reformed again into Belinda's "infant Grandame's *Whistle*." Then it became the bodkin it is now, which was first worn by Belinda's mother. Therefore, the bodkin symbolizes the storied swords and spears used by heroes in epic poems. For example, the Scandinavian mythical hero Beowulf, in the old English poem of the same name, has a sword, *Hrunting,* which is given to him and with which he attempts to kill the monster Grendel's mother. Although it was a very storied sword, it didn't work. He tried another weapon, which worked, although it melted upon contact with Grendel's mother's blood. Similarly, the great warrior Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* has a weapon that only he has the strength to wield. The sword had been passed down through generations.

Themes

Love is a Battlefield

Since "The Rape of the Lock" is a parody of an epic poem, it must have an epic battle. Alexander Pope (1688–1744) keeps this metaphor going throughout the poem. In Pope's time, the making of a proper romantic match was critical for a young lady. Perhaps it would feel like a matter of life and death to her, and just as important as war to a soldier. For this reason, in Canto 1, Belinda prepares her hair and face as if going into battle. All the sylphs, or spirits of the air, help her, recognizing the importance of what they are doing. When "awful Beauty puts on all its Arms," Pope doesn't specify what she is arming herself against. Perhaps it is the wrong suitors, or perhaps girls, like Clarissa, who wish her ill and would gossip about her and spoil her chances. It is unlikely she imagines what may lurk ahead: a young man so presumptuous as to steal her hair for a souvenir. Nonetheless, she prays to the gods of beauty, the "*cosmetic* Pow'rs," as fervently as a soldier on the eve of battle.

The first battle comes in the form of an extended metaphor in Canto 3, in which Pope analogizes flirting over cards to war. Belinda's sylphs have prepared for battle, unbeknownst to her. The young man, her opponent, is also ready. He thinks about how to attain his desired object, by force or by fraud:

> *Resolv'd to win, he meditates the way,*
> *By Force to ravish, or by Fraud betray.*

He decides on force.

During the game of Ombre, the card game played in Canto 3, Belinda strategizes like a general. She reviews her force with care, taking stock of her armies. Her "Particolor'd Troops," the various suits of cards, go forth into "Combat on the Velvet Plain," the green tablecloth upon which the game was played.

In Ombre, the top three trump cards are called Matadores, and they are given different names in the game: spadille, basto, and manille. Pope refers to these as if they are the names of warriors in battle. Thus, Spadillio is the "first, unconquerable Lord" and he leads off "two captive Trumps." Manillio is next, and he forces other cards to yield, then marches like "a victor" from the field. Finally, Basto follows, but he doesn't do as well. Pope also describes the appearance of the face cards as if they were the features of real soldiers. For example, the king of spades carries a "broad Sabre," a type of sword. All the cards yield to Belinda's superior army. Although there is a brief point where her victory is in doubt, she rallies and is victorious. Celebration ensues.

Her opponent, however, is not so easily discouraged. He takes up another weapon, this one "two-edged," and moves in for the kill. Just then, Belinda's sylphs realize they cannot protect her because she is in love with someone. She is on her own. Abandoned by her troops, she falls in battle. Or, at least, she loses a lock of her hair.

Another battle takes place later in the poem, in which fans and hairpins are employed as weapons, along with frowns and stares. This battle ends with the Baron declaring his love for Belinda.

Beauty Is Fleeting and Must Be Protected

The theme of the fleeting nature of beauty and its need to be protected makes its appearance several times in the poem. First, in Canto 1, the reader meets Ariel and the other sylphs who watch over Belinda and make sure she comes to no harm. The reader learns the sylphs watch over all the fashionable ladies. Ariel supervises Belinda's dressing, hairstyling, and application of perfume and jewels because such things are important. In Canto 3, Ariel and the other sylphs fight valiantly to save Belinda's lovely lock, while in Canto 4, Thalestris reminds Belinda of all she has gone through for her beautiful hair. As electric curling irons had not yet been invented, Belinda curled her hair on papers and rags or with metal curling irons heated over a fire.

Also in Canto 4, the poet describes the most miserable people in the world, comparing them to Belinda at this moment. Two categories of people included are "scornful Virgins who their

Charms survive" and "ancient Ladies when refus'd a Kiss." The message here is that if a lady is still a virgin, and presumably unmarried, after her beauty has faded, she will be miserable. This is also true of older ladies whom no one wants to kiss.

In Canto 5, Clarissa makes a speech about the fleeting nature of beauty. She makes a plea for good sense to "preserve what beauty gains." Virtue is more important than beauty, she says, as is learning useful skills. Clarissa reminds Belinda and the assembled group that beauty, even painted beauty, will one day fade:

> *But since, alas! frail Beauty must decay,*
> *Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to gray.*

Thus, Clarissa says, women should be nice to men so they can get husbands. They must have good humor and merit so their husbands will love them even when they are no longer pretty. This is a rather trite little speech, and no one pays attention to her. However, the poem ends with the thought that Belinda's lock, unlike most other beautiful hair, will live on forever, adding "new Glory to the shining Sphere." In the end, the poet preserves Belinda's beauty, ensuring it will be remembered long after it should have faded.

Don't Fret over Trivial Things

A real-life fight between two families inspires the poem "The Rape of the Lock." The son of one family steals a lock of hair from a daughter of the other. Clearly Pope thought this was an incident not worthy of a fight. He calls it trivial in the opening lines of the poem:

> *What dire Offense from am'rous Causes springs,*
> *What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things.*

In the poem, when Belinda's lock of hair is stolen, she shrieks like a woman whose husband or pet dog has died. Pope utilizes this bit of hyperbole to show how Belinda is overreacting. For one thing, husbands and lapdogs aren't—or shouldn't be—equally important. But, while the husband, or even the lapdog, will be lost forever, hair will eventually grow back. While Pope recognizes the importance of beauty to a young woman, he still thinks she is overdoing it, egged on, perhaps, by the Queen of Spleen.

Later on, Belinda completely loses it. After her friend Thalestris gets her even more upset, telling her the theft of her hair will ruin her reputation and make it hard for her to have friends, Belinda demands her lock back. In another bit of hyperbole, Pope compares Belinda's demand to a husband's jealous raging over his wife's handkerchief in William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) play *Othello* (1604). This ramps up even further what an unimportant matter the lock is.

Indeed, the entire poem is hyperbolic. Ultimately Pope describes people hitting one another with fans as if it is an epic battle comparable to those of the Trojan War (12th or 13th century BCE) and the subject of Homer's *Iliad*, a major conflict between ancient kings that lasted ten years. The epic poem is 12,000 lines long, arranged into 24 books. By using the style of the *Iliad,* Pope compares the spectacular war between ancient kingdoms to a spat between ruling-class families, showing the insignificance of the family spat.

Narrative Voice

The style of "The Rape of the Lock" can be thought of as Homeric epic poetry meets celebrity gossip magazine. In some places, Alexander Pope's (1688–1744) poem is a pretentious, over-the-top parody of the style of Homer, the Greek epic poet from the 9th or 8th century BCE. Everything is larger than life. Belinda isn't just beautiful; she isn't just the most beautiful young lady in the world. No, she is without flaw and groomed by fairies. In other places, he fills readers in on the doings of the rich and famous, by way of Belinda and her associates and even the English monarch, Queen Anne (1665–1714).

At the poem's beginning, Pope uses the elevated vocabulary of Homer, speaking of "dire Offense" and "mighty Contests" inciting "Rage in softest Bosoms." The presence of the mythological sylphs also shows this story is delivered in the

style of Homer. The offense in question is played up to epic proportions, as the narrator asks:

> *Say what strange Motive,*
> *Goddess! cou'd compel*
> *A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle*
> *Belle?*

But later the tone becomes more gossipy, as he outlines the various entertainments at which the sylphs may witness Belinda, the theater outings and the travel in coaches. He grows still more catty when he talks about the sylphs' work on Belinda's appearance in religious language: "the sacred Rites of Pride." When he describes her on board the boat on the Thames in Canto 2, she is the most fabulous creature to be seen, even in fabulous company:

> *Fair Nymphs, and well-drest*
> *Youths around her shone,*
> *But ev'ry Eye was fix'd on her*
> *alone.*

One can almost hear Pope as a red-carpet announcer saying, "Here she is, ladies and gentlemen, the beautiful Belinda! She's greeting her adoring fans. Who dressed you tonight, Belinda? Was it sylphs?"

At the end of Canto 2, Pope describes the various spirits of the air in Homeric detail, but at the beginning of Canto 3 he is back to gossiping. Though he does so in grandiose terms, he isn't very respectful to his subjects, describing them as "singing, laughing, ogling, and all that."

In Cantos 3 and 5, Pope's style becomes even more like an epic poem when he describes two glorious battles: a game of cards, and ladies and gentlemen glaring and hitting each other with fans. He references the poets Homer, John Milton (1608–74), and William Shakespeare (1564–1616) to give these trivial battles an elevated feel. This reaches full-on grandeur at the end when Pope describes the lock going up to heaven, where it inspires a muse and makes Belinda live forever. Phrases such as "consecrate to Fame" and "shining Sphere" give the poem an epic ending.