

## ***The Rape of the Lock* as a Mock-heroic Poem (part-1)**

[BA (Hons.), Part-1, Paper-II]

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Before explaining Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712/14) as Mock-heroic Poem, we need to know about epic poem. According to M. H. Abrams, "it is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or (in the instance of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*) the human race" (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*). Abrams also argues that a mock epic or mock-heroic poem "imitates, in a sustained way, both the elaborate form and the ceremonious style of the epic genre, but applies it to narrate a commonplace or trivial subject matter."

Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is a famous mock-epic in English literature. We can find many qualities of an epic in it, like invocation to Muses, proposition of subject, battles, supernatural machinery, and journey on water, underworld journey, long speeches, feasts (coffee house), Homeric similes and grand style. Instead of a national/universal struggle, Pope uses these features for a simple and trivial family dispute. The following arguments can establish this poem as mock-heroic poem. These are as follows:

An epic poem starts with invocation to the Muses. For example, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a long epic poem begins with the proposition of justification of God's way to man with

nice invocation to the Muses. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* follows the same trend. The subject matters in both of the epic poems are grand. Like the epic poems, the poem *The Rape of the Lock* opens with the proposition of the subject matter and Pope's invocation to the Muses to help him compose the literary art. Such a grand treatment of a trivial subject matter like the clipping of the lock of fashionable lady Belinda provokes laughter when the poet says:

I sing – this verse to Caryl, Muse! Is due:

This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view:

Epic poem contains conflicts, roaring of arms and weapons in battlefields. In *The Iliad*, Homer describes in considerable detail the armour and weaponry of the great Achilles, as well as the battlefield trappings of other heroes. In *Paradise Lost* of Milton, we can find such description when Satan/Beelzebub declared war against God. In the poem *The Rape of the Lock* Pope describes Belinda preparing herself with combs and pins-with "Puffs, Powders, Patches"-nothing that "Now awful Beauty puts on all its Arms." This is nothing but funny. In keeping with the episodic narration of an epic poem, Pope has introduced the episodes of the Game of Omber which suggests the mighty battle and the cards imply the soldiers described in great detail. Then there is the battle between the lords and ladies just like the battles in epic poetry. But in true mock-heroic style this battle is fought with fans and snuff instead of with swords and spears. There are single combats also between Belinda and the Baron, and between Clarissa and Sir Plume. This symbolizes nothing but a battle of sexual perversion just the opposite to the mighty battles that we find in other epic poems like in *The Aeneid* and in *The Faerie Queene*.

**...To be Continued...**