

The Rape of the Lock as a Mock-heroic Poem (part-2)

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

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...Continuing from part 1

The ritual sacrifices the Baron performs in the pre-dawn hours are another mock-heroic element of the poem, mimicking the epic tradition of sacrificing/**invoking** to the gods before an important battle or journey, and drapes his project with an absurdly grand import that actually only exposes its triviality. The fact that he discards all his other love tokens in these preparations reveals his capriciousness as a lover. Earnest prayer, in this parody scene, is replaced by the self-indulgent sighs of the lover.

Then prostrate falls and begs with ardent eyes

Soon to obtain and long possess the prize:

In epic poem, we find active participation of God/Goddess/demi-god(s), angel/angelic figures, supernatural figure/forces etc. They all participate in human affairs in critical situations. This is quite similar to *Deus Ex Machina*. We find use of supernatural machinery just as Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, who rescues Aeneas in *The Iliad* when he is attacked by Diomedes. In *The Rape of the lock*, there are the sylphs and gnomes. These aerial spirits are small and insignificant things, and are, therefore, exactly in keeping with the triviality of the theme. They guard the person of the heroine and when there is fight between the followers of Belinda and those of the Baron, they take part in fight, like gods and

goddesses in the Trojan War. Pope has described the protecting sylphs under Ariel. In that the sylphs are the parodies of epic deities.

A long perilous journey (mostly on water) is a must in an epic. But here in the poem Belinda takes a comfortable journey on water without any tension and peril. She travels up the Thames in a boat to join Hampton Court to play the game of Omber adorning her attractively. Another important event of epic is to take an underworld journey. It is generally done in order to take some effective pieces of advice from the lower world, Hades. Like supernatural beings in classical epics, a gnome named Umbriel descends to the Underworld on Belinda's behalf and obtains a bag of sighs and a vial of tears from the Queen of Spleen. With these magical gifts, he means to comfort poor Belinda. First, he empties the bag on her instead. The reversal of the epic quality is nothing but mocking in tone.

The mock-heroic character of the poem is perceived in the very title. Rape is a serious moral offence which means the violation of a woman's chastity by force. It also refers to the seizure of a lady by some ruffians in grossly inhuman manner. In any case, rape is a grave crime, affecting the social decency of a human being. Pope has used this term in an amusing manner. The possession of the hair of Belinda by the Baron is described by him in a mock vein. The title evokes nothing but the mock heroic sensation and well indicates the mock-heroic character of Pope's work.

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid* all end happily for their respective heroes, though perhaps at the expense of their enemies. Pope, wisely following his own advice, likewise concludes the poem with a mocking consolation to Belinda that:

This lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And mid'st the stars inscribe Belinda's name!

Thus, Pope follows the epic conventions of Homer, Dante, Virgil and Milton very minutely but for trivial a matter. He employs the mock-heroic form, not to mock the epic form, but to show the triviality of mean things by contrasting them with great things. This is the true mock-heroic style. The poem *The Rape of the Lock* is, therefore, a successful mock-heroic epic.