

For the post of Written Recruitment Test for the post of Postgraduate Assistants in Tamil Nadu Higher Secondary Educational Service.

Syllabus: English (Subject Code: P02)

Unit-II - MODERN LITERATURE (1600-1798)

The Rape of the Lock

About the author

Author: Alexander Pope

Born: 1688

Died: 1744

Age: Augustan age 18th Century

Introduced: Sylphs in the poem

Works

1. Pastorals - published in 1709: Pope composed this poem in heroic couplet when he was eighteen years old.
2. An Essay on Criticism - published in 1711: Pope composed this work of criticism in poetic form which was written in heroic couplet.
3. Windsor Forest - published in 1713: This pastoral was also written in heroic couplet.
4. The Rape of the Lock - published in 1712: It is a mock-heroic epic. After adding the machinery of the Sylph to the original text it was republished in 1714.
5. Iliad - published in 1720: It was translated from the Greek.
6. Shakespeare Restored - published in 1726: In this book Pope is seized by Theobald, a Shakespearian scholar.
7. The Dunciad - published in 1728: It contained the criticism of Theobald.
8. Imitation to Horace - published in 1735: This poem has another title Prologue to the Satires but it is better known by the first title. The poem contains the famous portraits of Lord Henry and Joseph Addison.
9. An Essay on Man - published in : This is the most famous philosophical poem of Pope. It discusses the man's place in the universe

About the work

Published in: Anonymously in Lintot's Miscellany in 1712 in two cantos

Revised and expanded in 5-canto version republished under Pope's name in 1714.

The final form was published in 1717 with the addition of Clarissa's speech on good humour.

Source: It was based on an actual incident recounted by Pope's friend John Caryl

Type: The poem is a mock-epic that satirizes the upper-class in London at the time. It is one of the examples of high burlesque.

Technique used: Heroic couplet

Theme: Satirizing the fashion of women

Genre: Roman à clef- a novel about real life, overlaid with a façade of fiction.

Elements (Sylphs) used:

Gnome - earth

Undine - water

Sylph - air
Salamander - fire

Pope added dedicatory letter to the second edition.
To Mrs. Arabella Fermour

The Machinery is a term invented by the Critics, to signify that part which the Deities, Angels, or Dæmons are made to act in a poem. The best account I know of them is in a French book called *Le Comte de Gabalis*, which both in its title and size is so like a novel, that many of the fair sex have read it for one by mistake. According to these gentlemen, the four elements are inhabited by spirits, which they call Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs, and Salamanders.

The poem satirizes a minor incident by comparing it to the epic world of the gods. It was based on an actual incident recounted by Pope's friend, John Caryll. Arabella Fermor and her suitor Lord Petre, were both from aristocratic Catholic families at a period in England. Petre, lusting after Arabella, had cut off a lock of her hair without her permission, and the consequent argument had created a breach between the two families. Pope wrote the poem at the request of friends in an attempt to comically merge the two. He utilized the character Belinda to represent Arabella and Baron to represent Petre. He introduced an entire system of "sylphs," or guardian spirits of virgins, a parodied version of the gods and goddesses of conventional epic.

Pope's poem uses the traditional high stature of classical epics to emphasize the triviality of the incident.

The abduction of Helen of Troy becomes here the theft of a lock of hair; the gods become minute sylphs; the description of Achilles' shield becomes an excursus on one of Belinda's petticoats.

He also uses the epic style of invocations, lamentations, exclamations and similes, and in some cases adds parody to imitation by following the framework of actual speeches in Homer's *Iliad*.

The poem is humorous but keeps a sense that beauty is fragile and that the loss of a lock of hair touches Belinda deeply. His introductory letter makes clear, that women in that period were essentially supposed to be decorative fashionable –elegant rather than rational and the loss of beauty was a serious matter.

The humour of the poem comes from the storm in a teacup being couched within the elaborate, formal verbal structure of an epic poem. It is a satire on contemporary society

Three of Uranus's moons, Belinda, Umbriel and Ariel are named after characters from *The Rape of the Lock*.

Characters

Belinda – Belinda is the pseudonym for the historical Arabella Fermor. She was the daughter of the aristocratic catholic Henry Fermor. She was the belle of the London society in the early 18th century. Belinda is based on the historical Arabella Fermor, a member of Pope's circle of prominent Roman Catholics.

The Baron - The Baron is the pseudonym for the historical aristocratic catholic Robert, Lord Petre. He offended Arabella Fermor and her family by cutting off a lock of her hair. This had precipitated a rift between their two families.

Caryl - John Caryl, a friend of Pope. He suggested to write a humorous poem.

Goddess - The muse according to classical convention inspires poets to write their verses

Shock - Belinda's lapdog

Ariel - Belinda's guardian sylph, oversees an army of invisible protective deities

Umbriel - The chief gnome travels to the Cave of Spleen and returns with bundles of sighs and tears to aggravate Belinda's vexation.

Brillante - The sylph, assigned to guard Belinda's earrings

Momentilla - The sylph, assigned to guard Belinda's watch

Crispissa - The sylph, assigned to guard Belinda's "favourite Lock"

Clarissa - an attender at the Hampton Court party. She lends the Baron the pair of scissors with which he cuts Belinda's hair, and later delivers a moralizing lecture.

Thalestris - Belinda's friend, named for the Queen of the Amazons and representing the historical Gertrude Morley, a friend of Pope's and the wife of Sir George Browne. She was rendered as her "beau," Sir Plume, in the poem. She begs Belinda on in her anger and demands that the lock be returned.

Sir Plume - Thalestris's "beau, makes an ineffectual challenge to the Baron. He represents the historical Sir George Browne, a member of Pope's social circle.

The poem's opens with

What dire Offence from am'rous Causes springs,
What might Contests rise from trivial Things,
I sing—This Verse to *Caryl*, Muse! Is due;
This, ev'n *Belinda* may vouchsafe to view:
Slight is the Subject, but not so the Praise.
If She inspire and He approve my Lays.

Summary

The Rape of the Lock begins with a passage outlining the subject of the poem and invoking the aid of the muse. The sun ("Sol") appears to initiate the leisurely morning routines of a wealthy household.

Lapdogs shake themselves awake, bells begin to ring, and it is already noon, Belinda still sleeps. She has been dreaming and the dream has been sent by her guardian Sylph, Ariel. The dream is of a handsome youth who tells her that she is protected by unnumbered Spirits an army of supernatural beings who once lived on earth as human women. They are the invisible guardians of women's chastity. Of these Spirits, the Sylphs, dwell in the air serve as Belinda's personal guardians; they are devoted, loverlike, to any woman that "rejects mankind," and they understand and reward the vanities of an elegant and frivolous lady like Belinda. Ariel, the chief of all Belinda's protectors, warns her in this dream that some dread event is going to befall her that day, though he can tell her nothing more specific than that she should beware of Man. Then Belinda awakes to the licking tongue of her lapdog, Shock. Upon the

delivery of a billet-doux, or love-letter, she forgets all about the dream. She then proceeds to her dressing table and goes through an elaborate ritual of dressing. Her own image in the mirror is described as a heavenly image, a goddess. The Sylphs, unseen, assist their charge as she prepares herself for the day's activities.

Belinda, rivaling the sun in her radiance, sets out by boat on the river Thames for Hampton Court Palace. She is accompanied by a party of glitzy ladies "Nymphs" and gentlemen, but is far and away the most striking member of the group. Pope describes her as "the sparkling Cross she wore" on her "white breast," her "quick" eyes and "lively looks," and the easy grace with which she bestows her smiles and attentions evenly among all the adoring guests. Her crowning glories are the two ringlets that dangle on her "ivory neck." These curls are described as love's labyrinths, specifically designed to ensnare any poor heart who might get entangled in them.

The Baron, one of the young gentlemen on the boat, admires Belinda's locks, and has determined to steal them for himself. He rose early morning to build an altar to love and pray for success in this project. He sacrificed several tokens of his former affections, including garters, gloves, and billet-doux love letters. The gods listened to his prayer but decided to grant only half of it.

In the pleasure boat everyone is carefree except Ariel. He remembers that some bad event has been foretold for the day. He summons an army of sylphs. They assemble around him in their indecent beauty. He reminds them with great ceremony that one of their duties, after regulating celestial bodies and the weather and guarding the British monarch, is to tend the Fair, to keep watch over ladies' powders, perfumes, curls, and clothing, and to assist their blushes, and inspire their airs. Some dire disaster threatens Belinda. Ariel assigns her an extensive troop of bodyguards. Brillante is to guard her earrings, Momentilla her watch, and Crispissa her locks. Ariel himself will protect Shock, the lapdog. A band of fifty Sylphs will guard the all-important petticoat. Ariel pronounces that any sylph who neglects his assigned duty will be severely punished. They disperse to their posts and wait for fate to unfold.

The boat arrives at Hampton Court Palace, and the ladies and gentlemen disembark to their courtly amusements. After a pleasant round of chatting and gossip, Belinda sits down with two of the men to a game of cards. They play ombre, a three-handed game of tricks and trumps like bridge begins favorably. She declares spades as trumps and leads with her highest cards, sure of success. Soon the Baron fate inclines the field. Belinda is in danger of being beaten, but recovers in the last trick and wins back the amount she bid.

The next ritual amusement is the serving of coffee. The curling vapors of the steaming coffee remind the Baron of his intention to attempt Belinda's lock. Clarissa draws out her scissors for his use, as a lady would arm a knight in a romance. Taking up the scissors, he tries three times to clip the lock from behind without Belinda seeing. The Sylphs endeavor furiously to intervene, blowing the hair out of harm's way and tweaking her diamond earring to make her turn around. Ariel, in a last-minute effort, gains access to her brain, where he is surprised to find an earthly lover lurking at her heart. He gives up protecting her then. The implication is that she secretly wants to be violated. Finally, the shears close on the curl. A daring sylph jumps in between the

blades and is cut in two; but being a supernatural creature, he is quickly restored. The deed is done, and the Baron exults while Belinda's screams fill the air.

Belinda's anxious cares and secret passions after the loss of her lock are equal to the emotions of all who have ever known rage, resentment and despair. After the disappointed Sylphs withdraw, an earthy gnome, Umbriel flies down to the Cave of Spleen, an organ that removes disease-causing agents from the bloodstream. It was traditionally associated with the passions, particularly malaise; "spleen" is a synonym for "ill-temper. In his descent he passes through Belinda's bedroom, where she lies prostrate with discomfiture and the headache. She is attended by two handmaidens, Nature and Affectation. Umbriel passes safely through this melancholy chamber, holding a sprig of spleenwort before him as a charm. He addresses the Goddess of Spleen, and returns with a bag of sighs, sobs, and passions and a vial of sorrow, grief, and tears. He unbridles the first bag on Belinda, fueling her tire and despair.

Belinda's friend Thalestris, one of the Amazons, a race of warrior women who excluded men from their society delivers a speech calculated to further foment Belinda's indignation and urge her to avenge herself. She then goes to Sir Plume, "her beau," to ask him to demand that the Baron return the hair. Sir Plume makes a weak and slang-filled speech. The Baron disdainfully refuses to acquiesce. At this, Umbriel releases the contents of the remaining vial, throwing Belinda into a fit of sorrow and self-pity. With beauteous grief she bemoans her fate, regrets not having heeded the dream-warning, and laments the lonely, pitiful state of her sole remaining curl.

The Baron remains impassive against all the ladies' tears and reproaches. Clarissa delivers a speech. She questions why a society that so adores beauty in women does not also place a value on good sense and good humour. They run after fashion. Women are frequently called angels, but without reference to the moral qualities of these creatures. Beauty is so short-lived, we must have something more substantial and permanent to fall back on. This sensible, moralizing speech falls on deaf ears, Belinda, Thalestris and the rest ignore her and proceed to launch an all-out attack on the offending Baron. Belinda and the Baron meet in combat and she emerges victorious by peppering him with snuff and drawing her bodkin. Having achieved a position of advantage, she again demands him to return the lock. But the ringlet has been lost in the chaos, and cannot be found. The poet avers that the lock has risen to the heavenly spheres to become a star; stargazers may admire it now for all eternity. The poet reasons that it will attract more envy than it ever could on earth.

Closing lines

These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown;
And Betty's prais'd for labours not her own.

Pope says that after many years have passed, after Belinda and all those involved in this trivial affair will have died,

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

The fashionable world, the belles and the beaux, will all have passed away, but Belinda's name, like Belinda's lock, will still exist. Belinda will be immortal not because of her beauty or her charm but because Pope has written about her.

Pope called the poem "An Heroi-Comical Poem," but critics like to call it a "mock epic,".

The poem contains two major battles: one is a military description of a card game called ombre and the other the battle that ensues after the lock has been cut.

Pope gives some significant pairings. One set of alternatives, breaking Diana's law that is, losing one's virginity or breaking a piece of China, offers a telling comment on the inherent value of Belinda's virginity.

Giles Jacob published his bawdy parody, *The Rape of the Smock*.

Samuel Johnson summed up *The Rape of the Lock's* reputation in 1781: "To the praises which have been accumulated on The Rape of the Lock by readers of every class, from the critic to the waiting-maid, it is difficult to make any addition."

Lord Byron wrote to a friend,
"Your whole generation are not worth a canto of *The Rape of the Lock*."

Edith Sitwell called *The Rape of the Lock* "a poem so airy that it might have been woven by the long fingers of the sylphs in their dark and glittering Indian gauzes." John Dennis wrote that "Nothing could be more ridiculous than the writing . . . upon so empty a Business as this trifling Poem." "As there is no Creature in Nature so venomous, there is nothing so stupid and so impotent as a hunch-back'd Toad."

Mary Wortley Montagu insults about his "wretched little Carcass."

She was after attacking his translation of Homer and his imitations of Horace, she declared Pope the enemy of mankind:

When God created Thee, one would believe,
He said the same as to the Snake of Eve;
To human Race Antipathy declare,
'Twixt them and thee be everlasting War.

The Rape of the Lock in particular is all about incongruity: it is a combination of high style and low matter, beautiful poetry and scurrilous behavior, the most delicate imaginative fantasies and the coarsest dirty jokes. It's the most famous English example of "mock epic"—it takes a trivial tale of squabbling lovers and treats it in the most serious and elevated poetic style, the sort usually reserved for subjects like the foundation of empires and the downfall of civilizations.

Pope himself puts it in his opening lines, *The Rape of the Lock* is about "What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things." Pope was a strange creature Pott's Disease, a tubercular infection of the bones, "crippled him,". One biographer writes, "and fixed his stature permanently at about that of a twelve-year-old boy" only about four feet six inches tall. The condition caused both physical and mental pain throughout what he called "this long Disease, my Life." Mary Wortley Montagu's insults about his "wretched little Carcass."

His greatest strengths were satirical: no poet has been better at putting fools in their place. He is a master of the stinging irony.

The two sides of Pope's life, the bitterness and the beauty, the imagination and the malice come together in more perfect equipoise than in *The Rape of the Lock*.

The Rape of the Lock is all about the distance between these two worlds—the minutiae of everyday life on the one hand, the grandeur of poetic imagination on the other. His favorite technique is to transform the everyday into poetry. In his Life of Pope, Samuel Johnson called The Rape of the Lock the world's "most exquisite example of ludicrous poetry." Johnson recognized that Pope's greatest distinction was his ability to bring the exquisite together with the ludicrous and not merely to bring them together, but to metamorphose the one into the other. In this way the minutiae of everyday life become a subject of real fascination, even beauty. "are exhibited, in a very high degree, the two most engaging powers of an author. New things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new."

Pope's descriptions of all the quotidian items in an eighteenth century dressing room: fans, screens, watches, romance novels, love letters, all of which are metamorphosed into the stuff of legend. The items scattered across Belinda's dressing table:

This Casket India's glowing Gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder Box.

The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,
Transform'd to Combs, the speckled and the white.

A jewelry box, a container of perfume, and two combs (one of tortoise-shell, the other of ivory) nothing special here.

He describes coffee as "grateful Liquors" poured into "China's Earth" is absurdly inappropriate but that's the comic point of the passage.

He worked with the trivial knick-knacks of modern fashionable life. He had all the enduring resources the literary tradition: Homer's epic poetry, Ovid's Fasti, his title recalls the rape of the Sabine women, Shakespeare, Ariel's name comes from The Tempest, and Milton, the battle scenes are inspired by Paradise Lost.

The French critics Boileau, Rapin, and Le Bossu and Rymer and Dennis in England fashioned a unique brand of criticism which set in place a formidable line up of rules for and demands on artistic composition and its evaluation.

Questions

1. Pope was a master of
A) Blank Verse B) Heroic Couplet C) Pastorals D) Limericks
2. Who wrote the following line?
A little learning is a dangerous thing.
A) Dr. Johnson B) Pope C) Shakespeare D) Byron
3. The Rape of the Lock is
A) an epic B) an ode C) a mock-epic D) a satire
4. Sylphs are the spirits of

