

The Rape of the Lock by Alexander Pope

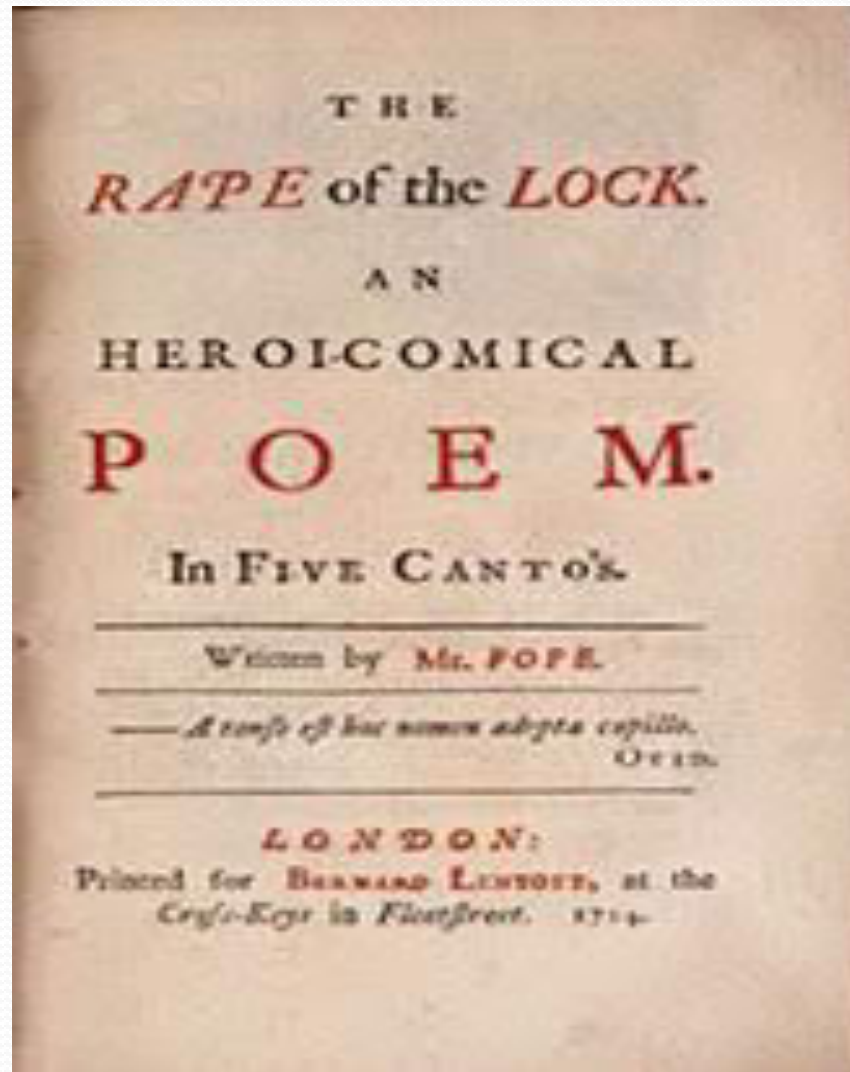
Material Prepared by Dr. Trayee Sinha for Second
Semester Honours Students

About the Poem

- The Rape of the Lock is a mock heroic epic by Alexander Pope.
- It was first published anonymously in Lintot's miscellaneous poems and Translations (May 1712) in two cantos.
- A revised edition followed in March 1714 as a five canto version.
- The final form of the poem appeared in 1717.
- The poem narrates the story of the cutting of a lock of Belinda by Lord Petre.

- Pope, in this epic, has merged the two worlds - the heroic and the social
- He parodied the conventional gods and goddesses
- He sketched the character of Belinda on the model of Miss Arabella Fermor.
- Pope derived the sylphs and gnomes (supernatural machinery) from the French Rosicrucian novel *Le Comte de Gabalis*.
- Pope was also inspired by Boileau's mock-epic poem *Le Lutrin* while composing his own mock-epic.

The Text



About the Poet Alexander Pope

- Born May 21, 1688 (Restoration Age) , London.
- He wrote Pastorals in 1709.
- Two most important poems were Essay on Criticism(1711) and The Rape of the Lock (1714).
- Translated Iliad in 1715.
- Translated Odyssey in 1726.
- Composed Dunciad in 1728 and Essay on Man in 1734.

Alexander Pope



Epic : Its Characteristics

- A long narrative poem
- Elevated grand style
- Great heroes and heroines
- The setting is vast in geographical range
- Supernatural power

Mock Epic

- A work designed to ridicule attitudes, style or subject matter by handling either an elevated subject in a trivial manner or a low subject with mock dignity.
- The Rape of the Lock as a mock epic takes the journey to the underworld: “Repair’d to search the gloomy cave of spleen/Swifts on his sooty pinions flits the gnome”.
- Compares small things with something great.
- Renders a trivial subject ridiculous by treating it with the elaborate.

Structure

- Heroic Couplet

Rhymed in every two lines.

- Iambic Pentameter

Ten syllables in each line

Alternate with stressed and unstressed syllables.

Background of the Augustan Age

- This age is bracketed between the rigid scholarship of the 17th century and scientific/ religious scepticism of the 19th century.
- Society was ruthlessly satirized
- Printing press came of age.
- The expansion of healthy economy.
- The concept of a civilized society where the exotic ideas were admired.
- The pure standards of taste and judgement should control man's artistic endeavours.

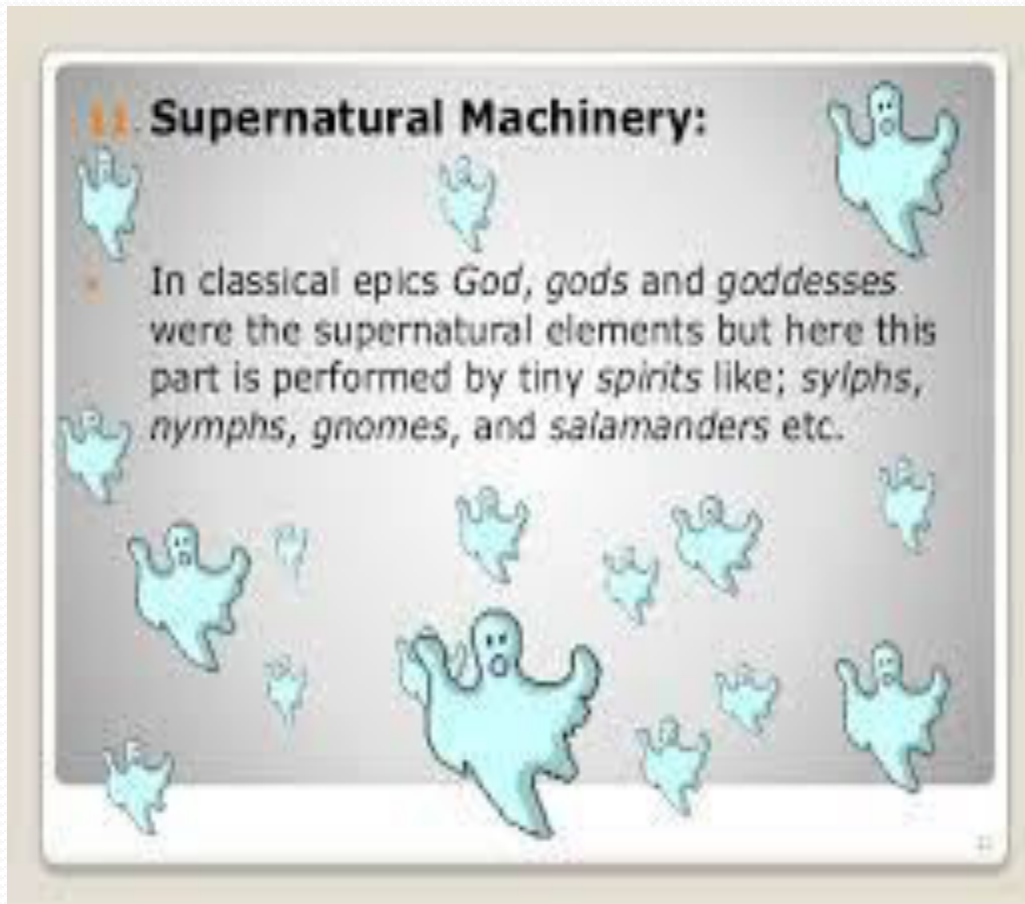
Epic Conventions of The Rape of the Lock

- Invocation to the Muse
- The arming of the hero
- Battle Scenes
- Catalog of the armies
- Supernatural Machinery
- Descent into the underworld
- Intercession of the gods
- Ascension of the dead into the heavens
- Grand style and high formal diction

Supernatural Machinery : The Sylphs, Gnomes and Salamanders



Supernatural Machinery



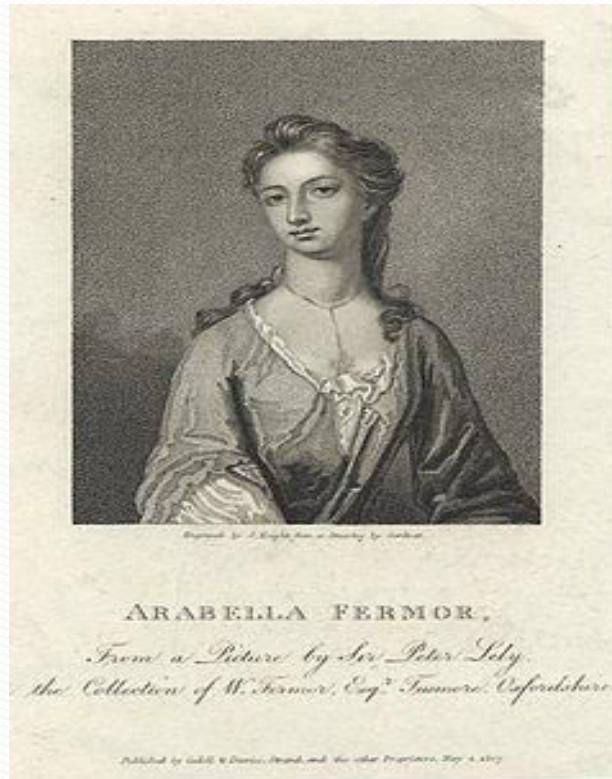
Supernatural Machinery:

- In classical epics *God, gods and goddesses* were the supernatural elements but here this part is performed by tiny *spirits* like; *sylyphs, nymphs, gnomes, and salamanders* etc.

The families and the text at a glance

- The Fermors and the Petres were the prominent families.
- Fermors had a daughter named Arabella.
- Petres had a son called Lord Petre.
- Lord Petre cut off a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor's hair.
- John Caryl asked Pope if he could write a poem to heal the enmity.
- Pope refashioned Virgil's Aeneid or Homer's Odyssey.
- Pope ridiculed the shallowness and arbitrariness of the upper classes.

Miss Arabella Fermor



Canto 1

- Belinda Awakes from sleeping
- Her dream
- Belinda prepares for the day's social activities

Belinda's Bed Chamber



Canto 1 Text

CANTO I.

Fairest of Mortals, thou distinguish'd Care
Of thousand bright Inhabitants of Air!
If e'er one Vision touch'd thy infant Thought,
Of all the Nurse and all the Priest have taught,
Of airy Elves by Moonlight Shadows seen,
The silver Token, and the circled Green,
Or Virgins visited by Angel-Pow'rs,
With Golden Crowns and Wreaths of heav'nly Flow'rs,
Hear and believe! thy own Importance know,
Nor bound thy narrow views to Things below.
Some secret Truths from Learned Pride conceal'd,
To Maids alone and Children are reveal'd:
What tho' no Credit doubting Wits may give?
The Fair and Innocent shall still believe.

Canto 2

- The journey on the Thames River
- The prayer of the Baron
- The sylph's mission to “tend the Fair” to protect Belinda- Brillante was in the responsibility of protecting the earrings, Crispissa the locks, Momentilla the watch and fifty chosen sylphs the petticoat.

The Journey on the Thames River



Canto 2

CANTO II.

Some to the Sun their Insect-Wings unfold,
Waft on the Breeze, or sink in Clouds of Gold.
Transparent Forms, too fine for mortal Sight,
Their fluid Bodies half dissolv'd in Light.
Loose to the Wind their airy Garments flew,
Thin glitt'ring Textures of the filmy Dew;
Dipt in the richest Tincture of the Skies,
Where Light disports in ever-mingling Dies,
While ev'ry Beam new transient Colours flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave their Wings.
Amid the Circle, on the gilded Mast,
Superior by the Head, was Ariel plac'd;

Canto 3

- The Game of Cards – the ombre

- The Rape of the Lock

Canto 3

CANTO III.

The pierc'd Battalions dis-united fall,
In Heaps on Heaps; one Fate o'erwhelms them all.
The Knave of Diamonds now exerts his Arts,
And wins (oh shameful Chance!) the Queen of Hearts.
At this, the Blood the Virgin's Cheek forsook,
A livid Paleness spreads o'er all her Look;
She sees, and trembles at th' approaching Ill,
Just in the Jaws of Ruin, and Codille.
And now, (as oft in some distemper'd State)
On one nice Trick depends the gen'ral Fate.
An Ace of Hearts steps forth: The King unseen
Lurk'd in her Hand, and mourn'd his captive Queen.

As a Social Satire

Pope, in this epic satirizes

- Fashionable ladies
- Nature of husbands and wives
- Justice and judges
- Queen
- Friendship
- The entire aristocratic society



Thank You