

Ekphrastic Representation of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*

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Abstract- Alexander Pope penned the satirical narrative poem *The Rape of the Lock*. This masterwork of high burlesque, comprised of two cantos and 334 lines, was initially published anonymously in Lintot's Miscellaneous poems in May 1712. The revised version, which Pope released in March 1714, had five cantos, 794 lines, and six engravings. The poem had its final publication in 1717, with the addition of Clarissa's oration on humour. The poem's widespread translations helped spread the trend of mock-heroic literature across Europe. The significance of *The Rape of the Lock* stems from the fact that it is a well-crafted Satire. It explores topics that are still relevant in today's culture, such as the importance placed on outward appearance and the tendency to make a big deal out of nothing. Pope, in the poem, is both scathing of society, witty in his satire, and tragic in his telling. This epic masterwork by Pope has been presented in a variety of forms, including theatre, visual art, and even opera. This essay intends to focus on the ekphrastic representation of *The Rape of the Lock*.

Keywords- Burlesque, Lintot's miscellaneous poems, engravings, Clarissa, mock-heroic, ekphrastic narration.

INTRODUCTION:

Alexander Pope was born in London, England on May 21st, 1688, and he passed away on May 30th, 1744, in Twickenham, a suburb of London. He was an English poet and satire of the Augustan period. His most famous works are the 1711 *An Essay on Criticism*, the 1712–1714 *The Rape of the Lock*, the 1728 *The Dunciad*, and the 1733–1734 *An Essay on Man*.

Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is a poem written in free cantos, which implies that it is written in rhyming couplets. Since it pokes fun at the heroic traditions of Homer's *The Iliad* and the English epic tradition, most notably the masterpiece *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, this work is sometimes referred to as mock-heroic or mock epic poetry. War, heroism, gods and nymphs, grandeur and iniquity are all elements that Pope employs from the epic tradition to depict a simple, domestic, and very un-epic occurrence in *The Rape of the Lock*. The title of the poem, *Rape of the Lock*, refers to the wicked Baron's stealing of a lock of hair from a young lady, Belinda. In a parody of Milton, who, for example, doesn't describe the Fall of Mankind until far beyond the halfway point of *Paradise Lost*, this doesn't happen until the conclusion of the third canto.

Pope dedicated the second printing of *The Rape of the Lock* to Arabella Fermor, a real lady who had a lock of her hair stolen by a suitor. This is generally accepted as the inspiration for Pope's poem. As a joke to Fermor, Pope writes in the dedication, "let an action be never So trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance". Pope uses this joke to imply that the epic is mocking the folly and minutiae of modern life, but also, maybe, that the epic is using these domestic happenings to tone down some of its exaggeration and grandiosity.

A contemporary of Pope's named John Dennis referred to *The Rape of the Lock* as a "trifling poem." In spite of this, it was called "the most airy, the most ingenious, and the most delightful" of all of Pope's writings by Samuel Johnson. Pope's satire in the poem was primarily aimed at females, and more especially at the "Belles" (the young women of Augustan high society who were considered to be the object of his scorn). Belinda, the poem's gorgeous heroine and unwitting target, is Pope's vehicle for satirizing a number of traditional "Female errors," most blatantly, superficiality and vanity. Irrelevant of whether or not his writing portrays things as distinctly "female" or makes the Belles particularly guilty for them. The poem includes examples of female vanity and the importance of superficial things. Belinda's Guardian sylph, Ariel, visits her in a dream at midday, addressing her as "Fairest of mortals" and urging, "they own importance know." Ariel's effusive praise echoes the adoring gaze of Belinda's social circle and, indeed, Belinda herself. A close imitation of Achilles' arming scene from Homer's *The Iliad*, Pope's lengthy description of Belinda's ritual at the dressing table is also satirical religion as her maid Betty, "the inferior Priestess," conducts "the sacred rites of pride." Inviting contrast between vain, frivolous Belinda and the powerful epic hero, the mock-epic aspect renders her laughable.

Pope's epic work has been presented in theatre, painting, and other artistic mediums. It's also feasible to interpret *The Rape of the Lock* as an ekphrastic text. Ekphrasis is a method of describing works of art in words. Many works of visual art have been produced by artists over a lengthy period of time, while authors have also engaged in extensive speculation over these creations. The description of Achilles' shield in Homer's *Iliad* and Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" are two instances of ekphrastic writings. The purpose of ekphrastic writing, as described by W.H. Heffernan in his paper "Ekphrasis and Representation," is to "deliver from the pregnant moment of graphic art is embryonically narrative impulse; and thus, make explicit the story that graphic art tells only ley implication."

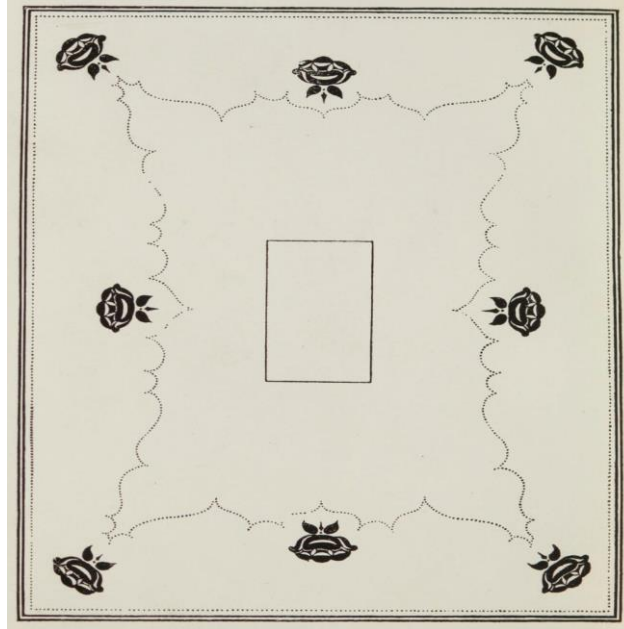
A pen pal use of ekphrasis is required, one that operates not just within the borders of literal and visual interpretation, but also of social, satirical, and literal discourse. *The Rape of the Lock*, by Alexander Pope, is an example of an ekphrastic portrayal. An ekphrastic piece can only exist in relation to the work of art it analyzes. With this in mind, it's easy to see how dependent *The Rape of the Lock* is on the artwork it portrays.

Graphical Representation and Analysis

Aubrey Beardsley

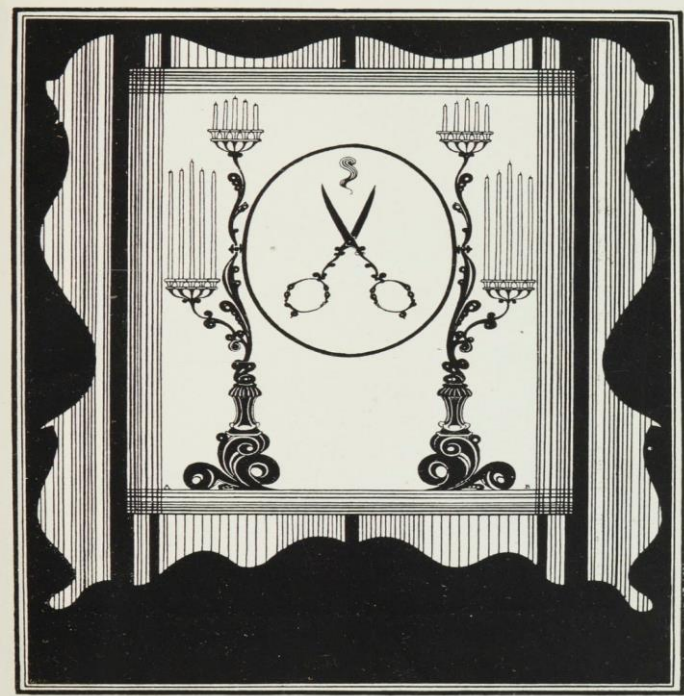
He was born in 1872, and Aubrey Beardsley passed away in 1898. In his brief life, he managed to complete all 10 illustrations for *The Rape of the Lock* and create its cover. His graphics for the weekly publications *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy* are what made him famous. Beardsley's stunning drawings for *The Rape of the Lock* are often regarded as some of the artist's finest. Beardsley's sexual imagery, in particular, is rife with his playful wit, and a closer look at the images exposes his talent for satire.

- Illustrations done by Aubrey Beardsley



Reduction of cover design, 1897

'The Rape of the Lock' (1896) cover art was simplified for the 1897 edition.



Here, in this illustration we can see how Beardsley, has exactly portrayed the visual imagery of the title *Rape of the Lock* by focusing on the subject of rape that is the lock and the object by which the act has been done i.e., a pair of scissors. The perfect use of illustration makes the reader easily understand and connect with the title.

- The Dream, 1897



Here in this picture, we can clearly visualise the lines of third stanza of the first canto. We can see Belinda’s guardian sylph in the picture.

“’Twas he had summon'd to her silent bed
 The morning dream that hover'd o'er her head;
 A youth more glitt'ring than a birthnight beau,
 (That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to glow)
 Seem'd to her ear his winning lips to lay,
 And thus in whispers said, or seem'd to say.”

Belinda laid her head on a pillow, and the sylph who watched over her extended the restful slumber. This sylph had called to her in silence at the side of the bed as she lay there with her head hovering over the morning dream. This sylph was dressed as a Youngman for the evening, appearing more handsome than a stylish courtier would on the night of a monarch's or queen's birthday celebration. She blushed even in her sleep because of him. It seemed as though he leaned up close to her and whispered all the compliments into her ear.

• The Billet-Doux, 1897

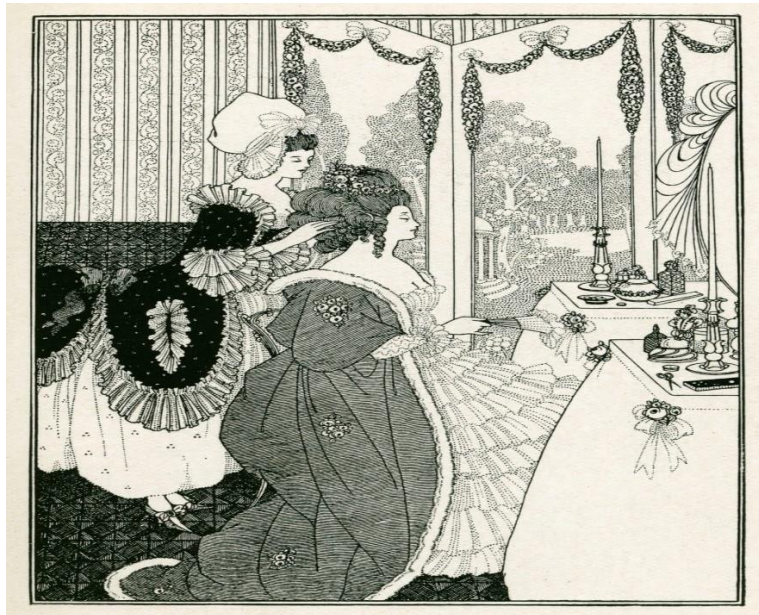


Here in this imagery, we can see the use of Japanese art and the face of Belinda in the portrait, shows the Japanese face pattern. The picture visualises the following lines of the canto I:

“’Twas he had summon'd to her silent bed
 The morning dream that hover'd o'er her head;”

It was then that Belinda got up, and if the Rumour was correct, the first thing that she saw on waking up was a love letter. It contained the conventional love phraseology of such a letter, i.e., the lover’s protestation of how Cupid had inflicted on his tender heart, how her exquisite beauty had cast a spell on him and how he burned with the fire of love, and so on. No sooner had she finished the letter than she forgot all about her dream.

- The Toilet, 1896



The picture very evidently represents the most famous scene of the poem i.e., the Toilet scene:

“And now, unveil'd, the toilet stands display'd,
Each silver vase in mystic order laid.

.....
And Betty's prais'd for labours not her own.” (Line 121-148)

The dressing table was uncovered. The various silver boxes of paints and powders were arranged in an order hardly understandable to layman. Then she worshipped the female adornments- paints, powders etc. She saw an image of Goddess in the mirror. The inferior priestess, Belinda’s, maid Betty, stood by the side of the alter, and then she began the dressing up of her proud mistress. There were many Jewelleries, treasures from around the world. From each of these ornaments she selected articles of adornment with fastidious taste and skill and thus she adorned her goddess. Belinda grew more and more beautiful every moment. Betty mended Belinda’s smiles and made them more effective. The watchful sylphs surrounded the dear object of their protection. And others did other things for Belinda. The credit for this fine toilet went to the maid Betty, though the sylphs had contributed a lot to it.

- The Baron’s Prayer, 1897



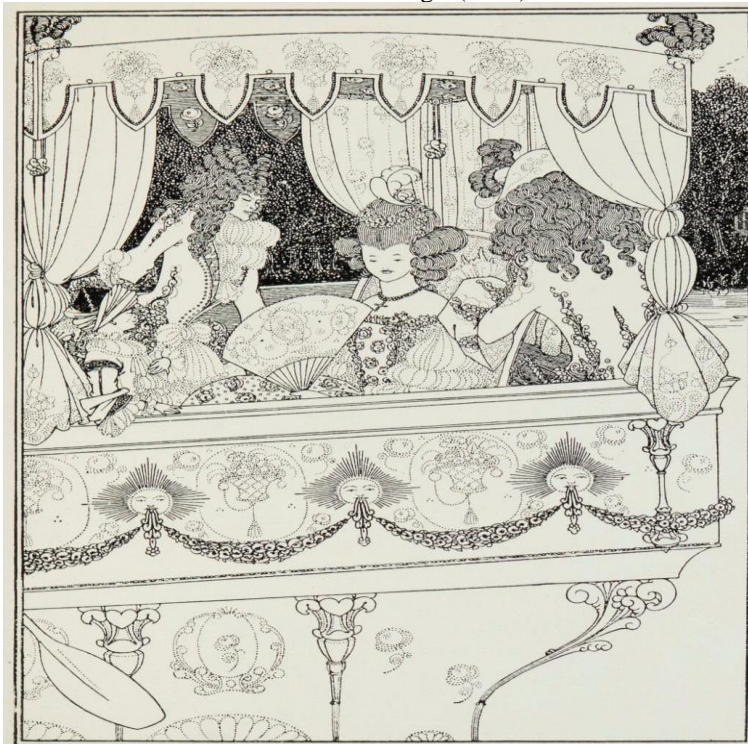
In the picture we can see how the Baron in praying for obtaining the beautiful locks of Belinda. The attar's unique depiction—composed of twelve humongous, gliding French romances, three garters, half a pair of gloves, and countless memories of his past loves—is the film's most compelling element. There is also billet-doux or love letters to kindle the heap of combustible material and thereafter breathed lovelorn sight into it in order to inflame the fire. The picture very finely visualises lines of canto II:

Th' advent'rous baron the bright locks admir'd;
He saw, he wish'd, and to the prize aspir'd.

.....
The pow'rs gave ear, and granted half his pray'r,
The rest, the winds dispers'd in empty air."

The Baron admired the Locks of Belinda and had the desire of possessing them. He was determined to obtain them as a prize. He had no scruples, for he knew that once success crowns the efforts of a lover, nobody questions him regarding the method he adopted, whether of fraud or force.

• "The Barge" (1897).



Here, in the picture we can see the wonderfully crafted vessel of Belinda. She is fanning herself and her attendees are beside her. The picturization of the beautiful vessel is done perfectly by Beardsley. The lines where the mentioning of the vessel can be seen in the lines from canto II:

"But now secure the painted vessel glides,
The sun-beams trembling on the floating tides,
While melting music steals upon the sky,
And soften'd sounds along the waters die.
Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play,
Belinda smil'd, and all the world was gay."

Belinda's painted vessel moves gently and smoothly, free from care while the rays of the sun appear to be trembling on account of the motion of the water, receding towards the channel and music that dissolve one into ecstasies, quietly rise to the sky and the low sounds of the music die away on the water of the river.

- The Rape of the Lock, 1897



The most pivotal moment of the poem, when the Baron shatters Belinda's lock, is shown here. The verses of canto III contain this scenario:

“The peer now spreads the glitt'ring forfex wide,
T' inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.
Ev'n then, before the fatal engine clos'd,
A wretched Sylph too fondly interpos'd;
Fate urg'd the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again).
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!”

The Baron opened the bright scissors to cut the lock and joined the two ends to cut it from the rest of the hair. Even at the last moment before the scissors closed to the lock, a sylph foolishly tried to avoid the tragedy but he couldn't stop it from happening. The blades of the scissors converged, cutting the lock of hair from the beautiful woman's head forever.

- The Cave of Spleen, 1897



The picture shows the cave of Spleen. Here in the poem spleen is imagined as a goddess, the personification of a melancholic disorder much discussed in the eighteenth-century, and especially affecting women.

“For, that sad moment, when the Sylphs withdrew,
And Ariel weeping from Belinda flew,
Umbriel, a dusky, melancholy sprite,
As ever sullied the fair face of light,
Down to the central earth, his proper scene,
Repair'd to search the gloomy cave of Spleen.”

At that very unhappy moment when Belinda’s lock finally got cut and the sylphs withdrew from their posts and Ariel flew away from Belinda with a feeling of great regret, Umbriel, as black and melancholic spirit went down to the centre of the earth –a place suitable for him in search of the dark and secret abode of the goddess of Spleen.

• The Battle of the Beaux and the Belles, 1897



In Canto 5 we can see the fight between the females and the males. The Baron did not pay heed to Belinda’s appeal and after that Clarissa waned her fun peacefully by questioning in support of the lords. Belinda got angry. The dreadful female warrior calls her people to battle and throws herself into the fight. There was sound of chaos, creep of fighters, both male and female and all got mixed up and move upwards, so that deep as well as shrill sounds reach the skies.

“So spoke the dame, but no applause ensu'd;
 Belinda frown'd, Thalestris call'd her prude.
 "To arms, to arms!" the fierce virago cries,
 And swift as lightning to the combat flies.
 All side in parties, and begin th' attack;
 Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack;
 Heroes' and heroines' shouts confus'dly rise,
 And bass, and treble voices strike the skies.
 No common weapons in their hands are found,
 Like gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound.”

• The New Star, 1897



The picture represents the star that finally Belinda’s lock became. As the heaven decided that no mortals should be favoured with such a prize and none could counter that decree. As even the locks of Berenice as they were taken ley Jupiter, did not first shine so brightly. Therefore, the lovely maid is urged to cease mourning the loss of her hair, as it is now shining brightly in the skies as a star with the name Belinda.

“Restore the lock!" she cries; and all around
 "Restore the lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound.

.....
 Some thought it mounted to the lunar sphere,
 Since all things lost on earth are treasur'd there.

.....
 But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,
 Though mark'd by none but quick, poetic eyes:

.....
 This the beau monde shall from the Mall survey,
 And hail with music its propitious ray.

Then cease, bright nymph! to mourn thy ravish'd hair,
Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!

.....
This lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame
And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name."

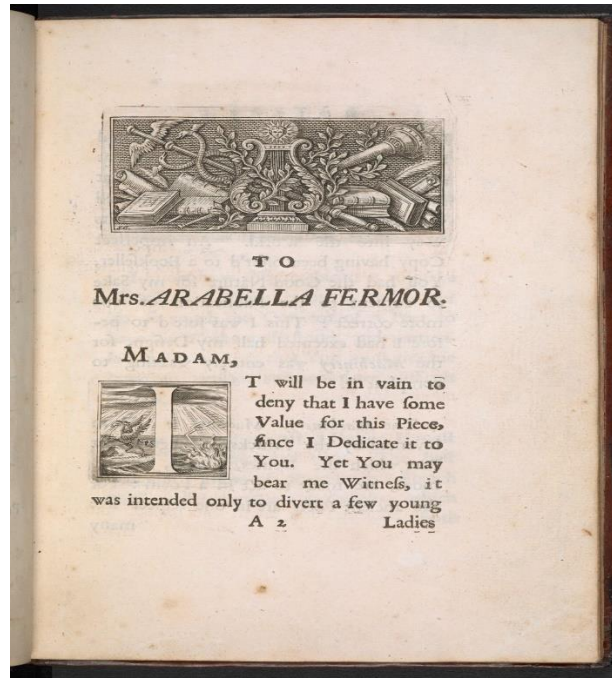
Louis Du Guernier: -

French-English engraver Louis Du Guernier. In 1677, he entered the world in Paris. He attended the Great Queen Street academy and learned the trades of design, etches, and engraving. Six of his plates appeared in the 1714 run-out edition of *The Rape of the Lock*, which he co-authored with Claude du Bosc. That edition sold over 3,000 copies in only four days. This lavish edition of *Rape of the Lock* was created by the book's publisher, Bernard Lintot, and initially appeared in 1714. It features six pictures, ornate initial letters, and decorative head- and tail-pieces. It was the little book of English poems that had been given the fancy treatment, and it was a huge hit. In Latin, "Ex dono authoris" means "the gift of the author," which is what Pope termed himself. Louis du Guernier illustrated the poem by creating one illustration for each stanza and a frontispiece that combines significant moments from the poem.

- 1714 edition of *The Rape of the Lock*, illustrations by Louis Du Guernier



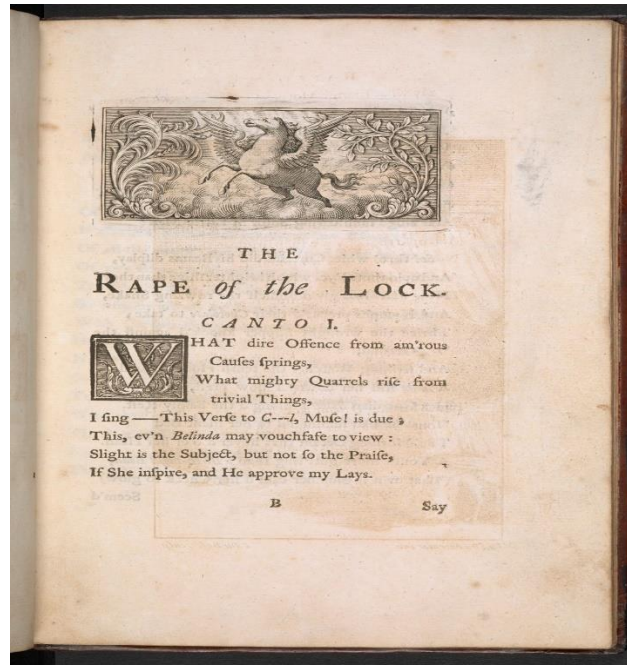
Belinda's display of leg while the Sylphs hover around her is a classic example of feminine vanity. A sylph is holding out a mirror, and another is decked up in heels. Belinda's hair, which has been magically changed into a shooting star, is pointed out by one of the other Sylphs. Pope's sarcastic goals are shown by the satyr in the foreground of the painting.



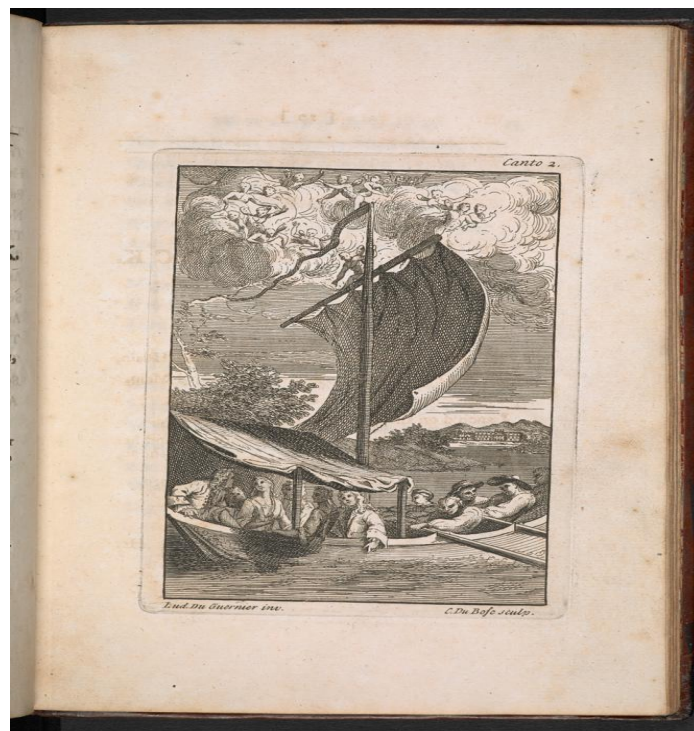
Alexander Pope wrote this letter to Arabella Fermor, and here it is shown. In 1712, she consented to the poem's publication by Pope. Later, however, she voiced her displeasure with the poem, citing its use of the double entendre between "rape" (which can refer to either physical or sexual assault) and the concept of "virginity." In the 1714 edition, Pope writes a dedicatory epistle to Arabella in which he tries to appease her by assuring her that the play's characters are fictional.



This picture shows the bedroom scene when Belinda Sleeps in her bed and guardian Sylph comes and warns her about the mishap that is going to happen. Belinda Sleeps till 12'o clock as the lovers are used to wake all the night in thinking and imagining about their loved ones. It can be seen that Shock, Belinda's lap-dog is awake and is trying to make its owner awake too. Her Slippers are lying in the ground messily and she still rest her head on a downy pillow.



A stanza calling for the muse and pointing at the subject's skeleton opens the first canto of the poem, "The Rape of the Lock." Then Sun appears through the Curtains and starts the day. Shock, Belinda's lap-log also wakes up but Belinda Still sleeps though it already noon.



Canto two describes Belinda's journey to the Hampton court bey her enigmatic vessel. the Baron, who is fascinated by Belinda's beauty is also introduced in this Canto. He falls in love with Belinda's beautiful Locks and plans, to steal them from her. He prays to Love who is demonstrated as a divine entity in the poem, for obtaining those locks. Here, in this picture we can see Belinda is in her vessel and some boatmen are sailing the boat, zephyrs gently play the wind. The Sylphs are roaming in the sky over the boat and the mighty Sail moves the boat forward in the Thames.



Canto three describes the card game, 'Ombre' and it shows the life at court which is nothing but self-centred. The picture shows the Baron with the cut off lock of Belinda and she is mourning over that, two persons are holding Belinda in order to console her.



The picture here shows the fourth Canto where Belinda's anger turns into melancholy and sorrow. Gnome Umbriel rushed to the Cave of spleen to bring her a bag full of sighs and Sobs, a bottle of fainting, fear and flowing tears. The picture excellently portrays Pope's imagination power.



The picture visualises canto five, where Belinda despite of Clarissa's wise words, with Thalestris and other women attacks on the offending Baron. Umbriel can be seen in a self-congratulating posture. Belinda can be seen victorious over Baron. The lock on the other hand is lost in the Chaos and has risen to the heavenly spheres to become a Star for the stargazers to admire it for all eternity.

Some other Visual Representations of *The Rape of The Lock*

- Snuffbox with a scene from "The Rape of the Lock" etched on the top.



Canto IV, line 121 depicts an event that takes place after Belinda's lock has been cut. The Baron is the man on the left, who is using his right hand to grasp the sheared lock. Sir Plume, who is holding a "clouded Cane" like Pope describes, is the man he is speaking with. Sir Plume goes to the Baron to demand the return of the lock when Thalestris urges him to do so, but he is unsuccessful. Belinda and her four-gal pals are seated around a tea table in the background. The table is a key symbol of the upper-class position of the protagonists, and the presence of pricey paintings and tea draws attention to the superficiality of the fight.

“She said; then raging to Sir Plume repairs,
And bids her beau demand the precious hairs:
(Sir Plume, of amber snuff-box justly vain,
And the nice conduct of a clouded cane)
With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face,
He first the snuffbox open'd, then the case,
And thus broke out—"My Lord, why, what the devil?
Z—ds! damn the lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil!
Plague on't! 'tis past a jest—nay pritheee, pox!
Give her the hair"—he spoke, and rapp'd his box.”

- Another picture that describes the scene when the Baron cuts the beautiful golden locks of Belinda.

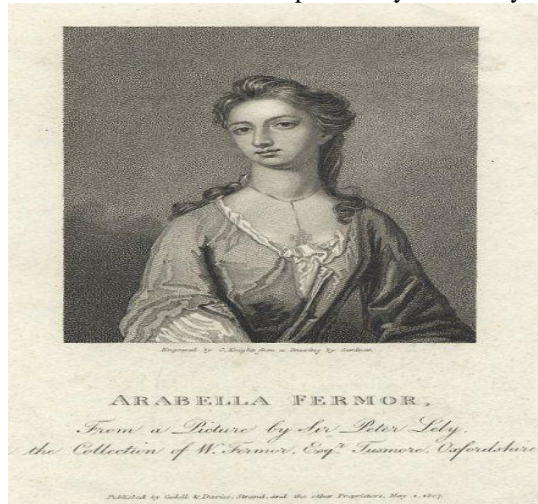


The peer now spreads the glittering forfex wide,
 T' inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.—p. 65

“The peer now spreads the glitt'ring forfex wide,
 T' inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.”

The Baron opened the bright scissors to enclose the lock, and joined the two ends to cut it off from the rest of Belinda’s hair.

- A 19th-century lithograph of Arabella Fermor based on a portrait by Peter Lely.



This is a 19th-century print of a portrait by sir Peter Lely of Ms. Arabella Fermor. She was born at Oxford and was the daughter of Henry Fermor, a recusant from Tusmore. Poets and artists alike praised her attractiveness and charisma. Alexander Pope's poem The Rape of The Lock centres on a feud between her and Lord Petre.

- Drawing by Charles Robert Leslie for his 1854 novella "The Rape of the Lock."



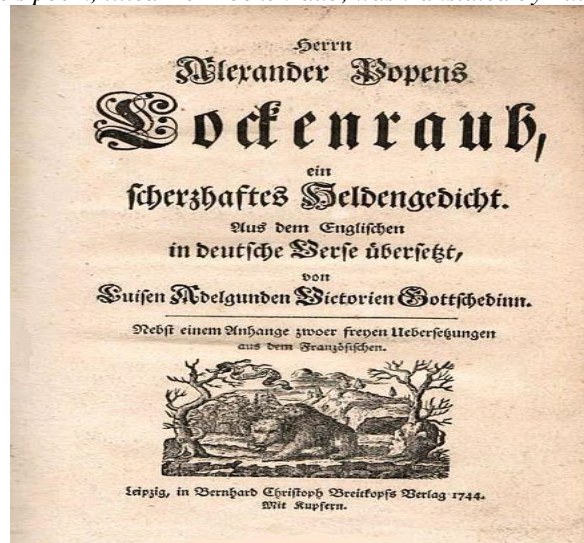
Charles Robert Leslie's 1854 drawing of *The Rape of the Lock*. The major scenario of the poem, the cutting of Belinda's magnificent lock, is shown here in an oil painting on wooden canvas. Sir Plume has requested that the Baron repair the lock. 'Sir Plume Demands the Restoration of the Lock' is the title of the artwork. The setting is a sophisticated drawing parlour with a dish on the floor for the lapdog who appears in several of the artworks.

- Belinda and her sylphs sail down the Thames toward Hampton Court in this 1744 copperplate print by Anna Maria Werner.



When the German translation of *The Rape of the Lock* was published in Leipzig in 1744, it was accompanied with five copperplate engravings by Anna Maria Warner, the court painter of Saxony. Belinda and her sylph companions float peacefully down the Thames toward Hampton Court in this picture. This image was taken as far back as 1744.

- *The German version of Pope's poem, titled Der Lockenraub, was translated by Luise Gottsched in 1744.*



Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* was widely translated in the first half of the 18th century, appearing in French, Italian, and German among other languages. The earliest German version, *Der merckwürdige Haar-Locken-Raub* (1739), was based on Luise Gottsched's 1728 French prose original.

Some Modern Illustrations of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*

Bangladesh University of Business and Technology student Shahidul Hasan Bilash's updated take on Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.



Belinda, who is the protagonist of the poem is a wealthy and beautiful young woman awestruck all lords and barons with her splendid beauty. At the end the Baron charmed by the beautiful locks of Belinda wants possess them and in order to do that spins of a lock of her hair.

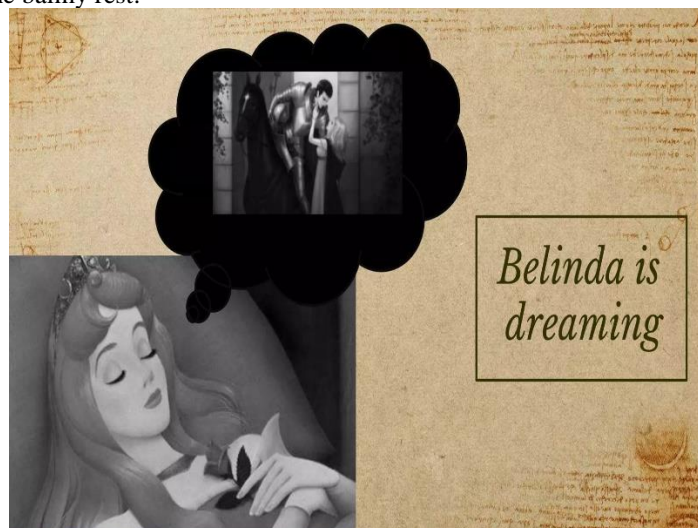


It was the fashion for the beautiful ladies in the 17th century to have a lapdog with them, so Belinda had one too, named Shock. The young females used to shriek at the death of their lapdogs as they would do when their husbands died.
 “Not louder shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast,
 When husbands or when lap-dogs breathe their last,”



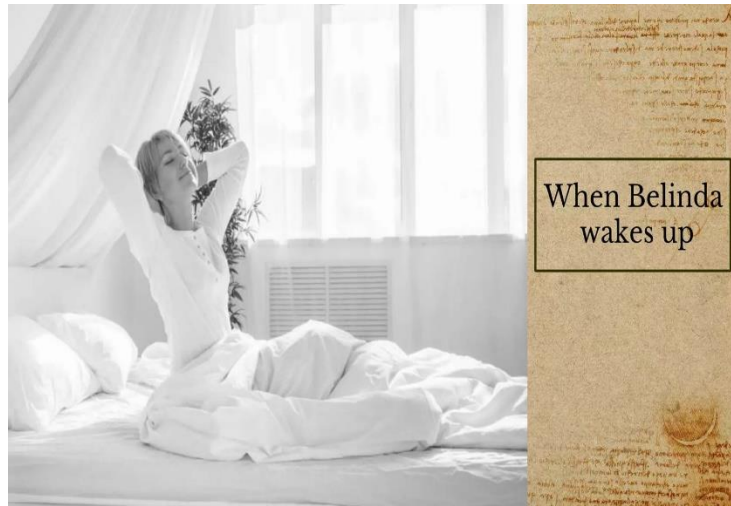
In this picture we can see the use of a Disney character as Belinda and she is sleeping. In the poem there is a detailed description of Belinda's sleep:

“Sol thro' white curtains shot a tim'rous ray,
 And op'd those eyes that must eclipse the day;
 Now lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake,
 And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:
 Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knock'd the ground,
 And the press'd watch return'd a silver sound.
 Belinda still her downy pillow press'd,
 Her guardian sylph prolong'd the balmy rest:”



Belinda dreams of a handsome youth who tells her that she is protected by “unnumber'd spirits”

“’Twas he had summon'd to her silent bed
 The morning dream that hover'd o'er her head;
 A youth more glitt'ring than a birthnight beau,
 (That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to glow)
 Seem'd to her ear his winning lips to lay,
 And thus in whispers said, or seem'd to say.”



Shock, Belinda's lap dog, leapt up when Ariel finished talking and licked her awake, waking her since he assumed she had been sleeping for a long time. Then Belinda finally opened her eyes. As soon as she opened the first envelope, she found a love note, and after reading it, she promptly forgot about her dream.

“He said; when Shock, who thought she slept too long,
 Leap'd up, and wak'd his mistress with his tongue.
 'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,
 Thy eyes first open'd on a billet-doux;
 Wounds, charms, and ardors were no sooner read,
 But all the vision vanish'd from thy head.”

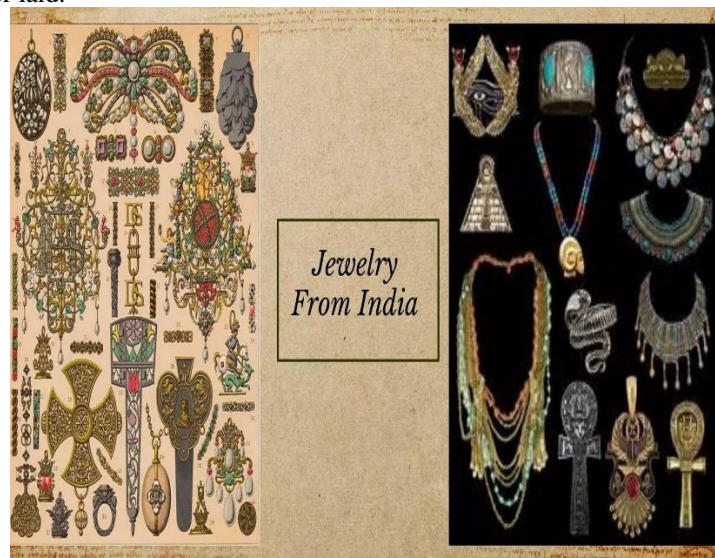


According to ariel, the sylphs are the spirits of women who have died.

“As now your own, our beings were of old,
 And once inclos'd in woman's beauteous mould;
 Thence, by a soft transition, we repair
 From earthly vehicles to these of air.”

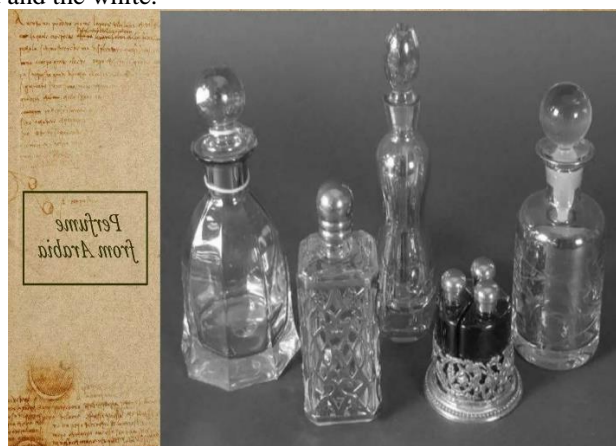


Belinda's toilet was displayed with a number of silver vases arranged in a mystic order as if it were a place of worship.
 "And now, unveil'd, the toilet stands display'd,
 Each silver vase in mystic order laid."



There were unnumbered jewelleries in Belinda's toilet. One of the caskets was full of Indian jewelleries, the combs were made of tortoise shell and white ones were made of ivory and they all were laid together. Another box contained shining pins of different sizes, arranged in glittering rows.

"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."



Belinda uses the perfume brought from Arabia. Arabian gums or resins were famous source of perfumes.
 "And all Arabia breathes from yonder box."

Dryden's translation of Juvenal's Sixth satire also shows this:

"For him the Rich Arabia sweats her Gum

And precious oyls from distant India come" [Juvenal's VI th satire, by Dryden]

CONCLUSION:

All the events in the poem are depicted by Alexander Pope so clearly that the poem itself conjures up distinct images in the minds of each reader. However, that description has had a far greater impact on the creative processes of artists. Pope's goal in *The Rape of the Lock* was to give readers an image of the 18th century's social follies. Shows, via Belinda Pope, that 18th-century upper-class women were primarily adored for their beauty. It's clear that women at the time were neglecting their studies and social lives in favour of attending lavish parties and engaging in pointless pursuits. One can see Pope's critique of patriarchy, despite his satire of women, as a vindication of women's rights.

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