Notes on Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock”

Originally 2-canto version, republished as 5-canto
- Cantos: Latin for “song”

Based on true account

Arabella Fermor
- Engaged to Lord Peter/Petre
- Cut her hair because he lusted after her
- She became enraged
- Caryll wanted Pope to write it as a joke to bring the couple back together via humor

Mock-Heroic Convention
- Mock—make fun of
- Particularly Greek epics and British high society

Epic conventions relevant to Pope’s “Rape of the Lock” (see below)
- Arming the heroes: Belinda’s petticoat (undergarment)
- Combat: pulls out scissors
- Apotheosis: the lock is deified (made into heavenly/celestial item)

The lock of hair is a metaphor for chastity; locks were love tokens
- Giving of oneself unwillingly/possession taken without permission
- Word “rape” may be defined as “theft” or “assault”

Story takes place in Hampton Court (see images on my web)
- Popular place for socialites to hang out at the time
- During Queen Anne’s reign
- Like Beverly Hills 90210
  - A bunch of rich people with huge amounts of time on their hands lusting after one another
  - It’s focused on one woman’s consumption with her hair

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Freytag’s Pyramid:

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I Exposition

II Rising Action

III Crisis/Climax

IV Falling Action

V Resolution
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Modern Films:

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Rising Action

Falling Action
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Belinda wakes up at noon
- Name of the dog is Shock, who wakes her up
- “Shocks” her out of her slumber

Lengthy description of her toiletries
- Arsenal for her to get ready for gender battle
- Takes 2 hours to get ready—ridiculous!

Goes on boat up Thames River (11-14 miles SW of London)
- Just to hang out
- She is the most popular of all her friends

They play cards (“ombre” = “man”)
• Symbolizes going to battle
• Cards are a man’s game
• It’s a woman in a man’s world, playing a man’s game—and she wins

Then they have coffee
Clarissa’s name = “clarity” but promotes the opposite in story
Many little mythological creatures are referenced
• Women who have died = sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, salamanders
• Based upon temperance they become:
  • Coquettes = flirts = sylphs (forest nymphs)
  • Protect female chastity
  • These are assigned to protect Belinda’s petticoat
  • Salamanders = women with fiery temperaments = bright orange coloring
  • Gnomes = nymphs who live underground and protect treasure
  • Nymphs = inhabit watery areas, especially lakes
  • Each sprite is assigned to protect some part of Belinda
Several premonitions and omens in story
• “Vapors” convince Peter to take a lock of Belinda’s hair
Belinda’s creatures try to protect her but are eventually powerless
• Exaggeration: she reacts as though he cut off her arm
• He took it from her, robbing her; represents chastity
Umbriel is sent underground to talk to the Queen of Spleen to get her to touch Belinda with chagrin
(embarrassment, humiliation)
• Umbriel (name of the gnome) = umbrella: translated from Latin as “shade” (from the sun)
The spleen was thought to harbor emotions (see humors below)
• “Splenetic” = “spleeny” = irritable
  • If you act really emotional, it means your chemicals are unbalanced
Umbriel is given a bag of sighs and moans, tears and fears, to take back to emotional Belinda
Queen Spleen’s attendants:
  • Megrim: comes from “hemi-cranium” (“½ head” = “migraine”)
  • Spleenwort = protective plant (as in St. John’s wort)
  • Thalestris = rue plant
The final battle
• The women challenge the men to a fight
• Sir Plume: “plume” means ostentatious, showy, self-congratulatory
• Seems really harmful, but is actually harmless
• Belinda’s weapon is a hair pin, a bodkin (the long hair sticks to keep hair in a bun)
• Snuff is pulverized tobacco (as in “up to snuff”)
• Jupiter was the supreme Roman god, judge
  • Greek equivalent is Zeus
This story is a caution against vanity; appearance is fleeting, unimportant
The lifestyles of the rich and the famous lead to all kinds of vice
Pope recognized this

Epic Conventions (as you’d find in Homer’s Iliad or Odyssey):
• Long narrative poem
• Use of elevated language
• Invocation of the muse
• Formal statement of theme
• Division into books or cantos
• Grandiose speeches, challenges, boastings
• Descriptions of warriors and their battles
• Homeric simile (elaborate comparison extending over several lines)
• Heroic couplet (rhymed lines of iambic pentameter)
Epic Conventions Relevant to Pope’s Poem:

• A dream message from the gods
• Arming the heroes
• Sacrifice to the gods
• Exhortation to the troops
• Single combat
• Epic feast
• Journey to the underworld
• General combat
• Intervention of the gods
• Apotheosis (someone or something becoming a god)
• Examples of extravagant – or epic – similes

Humors Defined

<table>
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<th>Humor</th>
<th>Body Substance</th>
<th>Produced by</th>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Complexion &amp; Body Type</th>
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<td>liver</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>hot &amp; moist</td>
<td>red-cheeked, corpulent</td>
<td>amorous, happy, generous, optimistic, irresponsible</td>
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<td>choleric</td>
<td>yellow bile</td>
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<td>red-haired, thin</td>
<td>violent, vengeful, short-tempered, ambitious</td>
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<tr>
<td>phlegmatic</td>
<td>phlegm</td>
<td>lungs</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>cold &amp; moist</td>
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<td>sluggish, pallid, cowardly</td>
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<tr>
<td>melancholic</td>
<td>black bile</td>
<td>gall bladder</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>cold &amp; dry</td>
<td>sallow, thin</td>
<td>introspective, sentimental, gluttonous</td>
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