

THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

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THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

by

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### Preface

The aim of this thesis is to show that Pope's Rape of the Lock is a direct reflection of the social life and customs of the elite during the Age of Queen Anne.

I have read a number of books written about the period, essays by Addison found in the Spectator and works of other contemporary writers. With the picture of the social life in Queen Anne's London which I have found in these works I have compared the one which Pope draws in his Rape of the Lock.

The writer wishes to express her thanks and sincere appreciation for the supervision and splendid cooperation of her adviser, Dr. Lawrence Babb of the English department, and to Miss Margaret Walters, of the library staff, for her invaluable assistance.

## I

The Rape of the Lock contains several references to the London of Queen Anne's society. Besides the people, the dress, habits, manners and customs of the day, we find mentioned in the poem a number of places frequented by London society. Among them are: Hampton Court,<sup>1</sup> the Thames river, the Ring,<sup>2</sup> the Box,<sup>3</sup> the Mall,<sup>4</sup> and Rosamonda's lake.<sup>5</sup>

Close by those meads, forever crown'd with flow'rs,  
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising tow'rs,  
There stands a structure of majestic frame,  
Which from the neighb'ring Hampton takes its name.  
Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom  
Of foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home;  
Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,<sup>6</sup>  
Dost sometimes counsel take--and sometimes Tea.

.....  
Know, then, unnumber'd Spirits round thee fly,  
The light Militia of the lower sky:  
These, tho' unseen, are ever on the wing,  
Hang o'er the Box, and hover round the Ring.<sup>7</sup>

.....  
This the Beau monde shall from the Mall survey,  
And hail with music its propitious ray.  
This the blest Lover shall for Venus take,<sup>8</sup>  
And send up vows from Rosamonda's lake.

We find two methods of travel very popular with the ladies during the early eighteenth century: the barge and the carriage. People of

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1 A palace on the Thames river near London.

2 Fashionable place to drive in Hyde Park.

3 The opera or theater.

4 Upper side of St. James's park in London.

5 A pond near one of the gates of St. James's park.

6 Canto III, 1-8. (In quoting from The Rape of the Lock I have used the Stand. English Classics edition with Introduction and Notes by Thomas Marc Parrott.)

7 Canto I, 41-44.

8 Canto V., 133-136.

quality kept private barges and "put their watermen in livery."<sup>9</sup> We find the gay party of which Belinda, the belle in The Rape of the Lock, is a member, leaving for Hampton Court. They are on a boat,

Launch'd on the bosom of the silver Thames.<sup>10</sup>

Later when Belinda is bemoaning her fate she says:

Oh had I rather un-admir'd remain'd  
In some lone isle, or distant Northern land;  
Where the gilt Chariot never marks the way,<sup>11</sup>

Early in the eighteenth century the drinking of coffee was becoming very popular at both coffee houses and at social functions. The use of it instead of liquor "tended to create a respectable atmosphere in which women might appear"<sup>12</sup> At Hampton Court we find this beverage served.

For lo! the board with cups and spoons is crown'd,  
The berries crackle<sup>13</sup> and the mill turns round;  
.....  
At once they gratify their sense and taste  
And frequent cups prolong the rich repast.<sup>14</sup>

The outstanding figure in the Society of Queen Anne's London was the belle. When dressed in all her finery she wore patches and paint on her cheeks, curls about her neck, and in her hand she carried the fan which was indispensable to the art of coquetry. She was frivolous, vain, flirtatious, selfish, and pleasure-loving. Ned Ward gives us his characterization of one of these fair ladies, who was

9 H. D. Traill, Social England. London: Cassell and Co., 1897 IV, 592.

10 Canto II, 4.

11 Canto IV, 153-155.

12 Jay B. Pottsford, English Society in the Eighteenth Century. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1924.

13 It seems that the coffee was both roasted and ground in the drawing room. Parrott, op. cit., p. 95.

14 Canto III, 105-112.

At Hackney, Stepney, or at Chealsea Bred,  
 In Dancing perfect and in plays well Read.  
 .....  
 Impatient of Extreems, with Pride half Graz'd,  
 Then must her Head, a Story higher be rais'd.  
 In her next Gaudy Gown, her Sweeping Train  
 Is order'd to be made as long again;  
 All things must vary from the common Rode,  
 And reach a Size beyond the Decent Mode:  
 Thus Monstrously Adorn'd, to make a show,  
 She walks in State, and Courtesies very low,  
 And is a proper Mistress for the Fool, a Beau.<sup>15</sup>

The daily life of a belle generally consisted of lying in bed all morning, eating, drinking chocolate, nursing her lap dog, making an elaborate toilet, shopping, calling, card playing, and attending the opera. An amusing little pamphlet of the time gives a very vivid word picture of a fine lady's life:

'How do you employ your time now?'  
 'I lie in Bed till Noon, dress all the Afternoon, Dine  
 in the Evening, and play at Cards till Midnight.'  
 'How do you spend the Sabbath?'  
 'In Chit Chat.'  
 'What do you talk of?'  
 'New Fashions and New Plays.'  
 'How often do you go to Church?'  
 'Twice a year or oftener, according as my Husband gives  
 me new Cloaths.'  
 'Why do you go to Church when you have new Cloaths?'  
 'To see other peoples Finery, and to show my own, and  
 to laugh at those scurvy, out of Fashion Creatures that  
 come there for Devotion.'  
 'Pray, Madam, what Books do you read?'  
 'I read lewd Plays and winning Romances.'  
 'Who is it you love?'  
 'Myself.'  
 'What! nobody else?'  
 'My Page, My Monkey, and my Lap Dog.'<sup>16</sup>

Addison gives us a portion of the diary of a lady of quality:

Wednesday. From Eight 'till Ten. Drank two Dishes of  
 chocolate in Bed, and fell asleep after 'em.  
From Ten to Eleven. Eat a Slice of Bread and Butter,

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- 15 London Spy, quoted in John Ashton, Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne.  
 New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.
- 16 The English Lady's Catechism quoted in Ashton, Social Life, p. 68.

drank a Dish of Bohea, read the Spectator.

From Eleven to One. At my Toilet, try'd a new Head.

Gave orders for "Veney" to be combed and washed. Mem.

I look best in blue.

From One till Half an Hour after Two. Drove to the

Change. Cheap'd a couple of Fans.

Till Four. At Dinner. Mem. Mr. Froth passed by in his new Liveries.

From Four to Six. Dressed, paid a Visit to old lady Blithe and her Sister, having heard they were gone out of Town that Day.

From Six to Eleven. At Basset. Mem. Never set again upon the Ace of Diamonds.

From Eleven at Night to Eight in the Morning. Dream'd that I punted to Mr. Froth.<sup>17</sup>

In The Rape of the Lock we have a portrait of the typical belle in the character of Belinda. As the story opens we find her enjoying the usual morning sleep indulged in by the carefree girls of her class, but she is finally awakened by her lap dog, Shock.

Sol thro' white curtains shot a tim'rous ray,  
And oped 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 prest,  
Her guardian SYLPH prolong'd the balmy rest:  
'T was He had summon'd to her silent bed  
The morning-dream that hover'd o'er her head;<sup>18</sup>  
Shock, who thought she slept too long,  
Leap'd up, and wak'd his mistress with his tongue.<sup>19</sup>

As the toilet has been an important part of a woman's boudoir during the ages so it was with the belle of the eighteenth century. John Gay gives us a charming picture of the toilet of Queen Anne's day:

There stands the Toilette, Nursery of Charms,  
Compleatly furnish'd with bright Beauty's Arms;  
The Patch, the Powder Box, Pulbille, Perfumes,  
Pins, Paint, a flatt'ring Glass, and Black lead Combs.

.....

So Love with fatal Airs the Nymph supplies  
Her Dress disposes, and directs her Eyes.  
The Bosom now its naked Beauty Shows,

---

17 Spectator, No. 323.

18 Canto I, 13-22.

19 Canto I, 115-116.



Th' experienced Eye resistless Glances throws;  
 Now vary'd Patches wander o'er the Face,  
 And Strike each Gazer with a borrow'd Grace;  
 The fickle Head dress sinks and now aspires,  
 And rear's it's tow'ry Front on rising Wires:  
 The Curling Hair in tortured Ringlets flows,  
 Or round the Face in labour'd Order grows.<sup>20</sup>

Gay also wrote of the alterations in costumes and furbelows due to the intercourse with foreign lands. From lands overseas came gold, silver, diamonds, rubies, pearls and tortoise-shell, cosmetics and perfumes.<sup>21</sup> I consider woman as a beautiful and romantic animal," said Addison, "that may be adorned with furs and feathers, pearls and diamonds, ores and silks, ...the peacock, parrot and swan shall pay contribution to her muff, the sea shall be searched for shells and the rocks for gems; and every part of nature furnish out its share towards the embellishment of a creature that is the most consummate work of it."<sup>22</sup>

In Pope's poem, as Belinda rises from her bed, her

.....Toilet stands display'd,  
 Each silver Vase in mystic order laid.  
 First, rob'd in white, the Nymph intent adores,  
 With head uncover'd, the Cosmetic pow'rs.  
 A heav'nly image in the glass appears,  
 To that she bends to that her eyes she rears;  
 Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,  
 Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.  
 Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here  
 The various off'rings of the world appear;  
 From each she nicely culls with curious toil,  
 And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil.  
 This casket India's glowing gems unlocks.  
 The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,  
 Transform'd to combs, the speckled, and the white.  
 Here files of pins extend their shining rows,  
 Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.  
 Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;  
 The fair each moment rises in her charms,  
 Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,  
 And calls forth all the wonders of her face;

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20 Ashton, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

21 J. B. Botsford, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

22 The Tatler, No. 116, quoted in Ashton, *Social Life*, p. 126.

Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,  
 And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.  
 The busy Sylphs surround their darling care,  
 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.<sup>23</sup>

With the eighteenth century came the hoop. Over this was the petticoat skirt, and over that the furbelow. These petticoats were made of varied and rich materials: silks, quilted silks, satins, and plush.<sup>24</sup> Beautiful lace was an all important part of the ladies' apparel and wonderful flowering embroidery was much used.<sup>25</sup> They must have presented a colorful appearance, judging from this description:

Behold one equipped in a black silk Petticoat with red and white calico border, cherry-coloured Stays trimmed with blue and silver, a red and dove-coloured damask Gown flowered with large trees, a yellow Satin Apron, trimmed with white persian, and muslin Headclothes with crowfoot edging, double Ruffles with fine edging, a silk-furbelowed Scarf, and a spotted Hood.<sup>26</sup>

One of the duties of the sylphs, says Ariel, Belinda's guardian sylph, is-

"To change a Flounce, or add a Furbelow."<sup>27</sup>

When black omens seem to threaten the heroine of The Rape of the Lock, each part of her finery is to be guarded according to its importance. The outstanding garment was the petticoat.

To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,  
 We trust th' important charge, the Petticoat:  
 Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to fail,  
 Tho' stiff with hoops, and arm'd with ribs of whale;

23 Canto I, 121-148

24 Ashton, Social Life, p. 126.

25 F. W. Tickner, Social and Industrial History of England. New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1916.

26 The Post-Boy Nov., 1709, quoted in Botsford, op. cit., p. 90.

27 Canto II, 100.

Form a strong line about the silver bound,  
And guard the wide circumference around.<sup>28</sup>

The use of the patch on the face was still in vogue but used in greater moderation than in the seventeenth century, "...when suns, moons, stars and even coaches and four were cut out of sticking plaster, and stuck on the face." If artfully placed the patch produced a lovely effect.<sup>29</sup> Addison tells us that one might even distinguish the party to which the lady belonged by the side of the face upon which she wore her patch, the Whigs wearing theirs upon one side and the Tories upon the other.<sup>30</sup>

As we are given a description of Belinda's Toilette we find that the patch is an important requisite for the fair and charming sex. Among the "unnumbered treasures" we find "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux".<sup>31</sup> And as she weeps and sighs and laments the loss of her curl, she realizes she should have heeded the warning of the early morning:

'Twas this, the morning omens seemed to tell,  
Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell;<sup>32</sup>

The instrument which seemed to be the most important part of the eighteenth century lady's costume, was the fan. This the coquet manipulated in such a manner as to express any emotion, but especially was it used in the art of flirtation. These little implements of coquetry were made of the finest materials. From John Gay's poem "The Fan" we learn much about them.

28 Ibid, 117-122.

29 Ashton, Social Life, p. 129.

30 Spectator, No. 81.

31 Canto I, 138.

32 Canto IV, 161-162.

The Fan shall flutter in all Female Hands,  
 And various Fashions learn from various Lands,  
 For this shall Elephants their Iv'ry shed;  
 And polish'd Sticks the waving Engine spread;  
 His clouded Mail the Tortoise shall resign,  
 And 'round the Rivet pearly Circles shine.  
 On this shall Indians all their Art employ,  
 And with bright Colours stain the gaudy Toy;  
 Their Pain shall here in wildest Fancies slow,  
 Their Dress, their Customs, their Religion show,  
 So shall the British Fair their Minds improve,  
 And on the Fan to distant Climates rove.  
 Here shall the Chinese Dame her Pride display,  
 And silver Figures gild her loose Array;  
 She boasts her little Feet and winking Eyes,  
 And tunes the Fife, or tinkling Cymbal plies;  
 Here cross-legg'd Nobles in rich State shall dine,  
 When on the Floor large painted Vessels shine,  
 For these, O China, shall thy Realms be sought,  
 With these, shall Europe's mighty Shops be fraught,  
 Thy glitt'ring Earth shall tempt their Ladies' Eyes,  
 Who for thy brittle Jars shall Gold despise.<sup>33</sup>

Addison tells us that "women were armed with fans as men were with swords and sometimes did more execution with them." In one of the numbers of The Spectator he pretends to have received a letter from a young man who had started a school for young ladies in the art of using the fan. The writer of the epistle says that in order to help the ladies to be entire "Mistresses of the Weapon" he has erected an Academy for their training in the "Exercise of the Fan, according to the most fashionable Airs and Motions that are now practised at Court". They were given instructions twice a day in the "Use of their Arms and exercised by the following Words of Command";

Hand your Fans,  
 Unfurl your Fans,  
 Discharge your Fans,  
 Ground your Fans,  
 Recover your Fans.<sup>34</sup>  
 Flutter your Fans.

By working diligently a woman of tolerable genius can in half a year "be

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33 Quoted in Botsford, English Society, p. 86

34 Spectator, No. 107.

able to give her Fan all the Graces that can possibly enter into that little modist Machine." After completing this course a lady can express anger, modesty, timidity, love, or any other "Emotion in the Mind" by a suitable movement of the fan.<sup>35</sup>

In The Rape of the Lock when Ariel gives his orders for the defense of Belinda the first is given for the protection of the fan:

Haste, then, ye spirits! to your charge repair  
The flutt'ring fan be Zephyretta's care;<sup>36</sup>

Thus he shows the importance of this little piece of finery. Again we have it shown when Clarissa with a simple motion silenced the crowd:

She said: the pitying audience melt in tears.  
But Fate and Jove had stopp'd the Baron's ears.  
In vain Thalestris with reproach assails,  
For who can move when fair Belinda fails?  
Not half so fix'd the Trojan could remain,  
While Anna begg'd and Dido rag'd in vain.  
Then grave Clarissa graceful way'd her fan,  
Silence ensu'd, and thus the nymph began.<sup>37</sup>

The painting of the face was a part of the make-up of the fair but was not always artfully done. Complaints were made of this practice, both because of the painted effect of the one who used it and because the "stuff" used in cosmetics was "worse than they daub sign-posts with."<sup>38</sup>

Clarissa, in giving her moral reproof to the young ladies speaks of this habit of painting thus:

Nor could it sure be such a sin to paint.  
But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,  
Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to grey;  
Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,  
And she who scorns a man, must die a maid;

35 Ibid.

36 Canto II, 111-112.

37 Ibid., Canto V, 1-8.

38 The Spectator, No. 425.

What then remains but well our power to use,<sup>39</sup>  
And keep good-humour still whate'er we lose?

Ladies wore their hair in various fashions, from the high commode which originated in the Court of Louis XIV (also called a "head" or "top knot") to a much simpler "rolled" style.<sup>40</sup> Most of the belles of the period followed the latter style. Two little curls on their necks, one on either side, were their pride and special care. It was because of the cutting off of one of these locks that Pope was requested to write the poem The Rape of the Lock.<sup>41</sup>

In the story we find Belinda with two very pretty locks of which she was proud:

This Nymph, to the destruction of mankind,  
Nourish'd two Locks, which graceful hung behind  
In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck  
With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.  
Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,  
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.<sup>42</sup>

.....  
Th' advent'rous Baron the bright locks admir'd;  
He saw, he wish'd, and to the prize aspir'd.  
Resolv'd to win, he meditates the way,  
By force to ravish, or by fraud betray;  
For when success a Lover's toil attends,  
Few ask, if fraud or force attain'd his ends.<sup>43</sup>

Again the importance of the lock is shown when Ariel places a special

39 Canto V, 24-30.

40 Ashton, Social Life, p. 124.

41 Elizabeth M. King, The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1905.  
(Lord Petre had offended Miss Fermor by cutting off a lock of her hair. Pope was asked to write a poem which through ridicule, might end the quarrel which ensued between the two families.)

42 Canto II, 19-24.

43 Ibid, 29-34.



snip to guard Belinda's "Lock":

Do thou, Crispissa, tend her fav'rite Lock;<sup>44</sup>

The Baron was willing to give up all former conquests if only he could snip off and keep one bright curl.

.....to Love an Altar built,  
Of twelve vast French Romances, neatly gilt.  
There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves;  
And all the trophies of his former loves;  
With tender Billet-doux he lights the pyre,  
And breathes three am'rous sighs to raise the fire.  
Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes  
Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize:<sup>45</sup>

Feeling that even all the glory of Hampton Court is not worth the loss that she has sustained Belinda said:

"For ever curs'd be this detested day,  
Which snatch'd my best, my fav'rite curl away!  
Happy! ah ten times happy had I been,  
If Hampton Court these eyes had never seen!  
Yet am not I the first mistaken maid,  
By love of Courts to num'rous ills betray'd.  
Oh had I rather un-admir'd remain'd  
In some lone isle, or distant Northern land;  
Where none learn Ombre, none e'er taste Bohea!  
There kept my charms conceal'd from mortal eye,  
Like roses, that in deserts bloom and die.  
What mov'd my mind with youthful Lords to roam?  
Oh had I stay'd, and said my pray'rs at home!"<sup>46</sup>

Again we find a reference to the two locks when we are told that after the one has been shipped off a lone one is left.

The sister-lock now sits uncouth, alone,  
And in its fellow's fate forsees its own;  
Uncurl'd it hangs, the fatal shears demands,<sup>47</sup>  
And tempts once more thy sacrilegious hands.

It seemed to be the custom in the eighteenth century to set a lock of hair under a bit of crystal in a ring. It was thought that this was

44 Ibid, 115.

45 Ibid, 37-44.

46 Canto IV, 147-160.

47 Ibid, 171-174.

probably what the baron would do with Belinda's lock.<sup>48</sup>

And shall this prize, th' inestimable prize,  
Expos'd thro' crystal to the gazing eyes,  
And heighten'd by the diamond's circling rays,  
On that rapacious hand forever blaze?<sup>49</sup>

At the watering places and in the city of London card-parties for high stakes, in which "the ladies played as eagerly as the men,"<sup>50</sup> were frequently given. The passion of women for gambling was much satirized in those days. She is "as expensive to her husband as his Coach and six Horses."<sup>51</sup> If she is unfortunate enough to lose, she will sell her jewels; if bad luck continues with her, her wardrobe must go; and if misfortune continues to haunt her, her "Waiting Woman must dive into the Bottom of her Trunk, and lug out her green Net Purse full of old Jacobuses in hopes to recover her losses."<sup>52</sup> She must keep the knowledge of her losses from her husband.

This itch for play has likewise fatal been,  
And more than Cupid draws the Ladies in,  
A Thousand Guineas for Basset prevails,  
A Bait when Cash runs low, that seldom fails;  
And when the Fair One can't the Debt defray<sup>52</sup>  
In Sterling Coin, does Sterling Beauty pay.

Ombre, piquet, basset and cribbage were favorite games.<sup>53</sup>

At the time that Pope wrote his Rape of the Lock, ombre, a game of Spanish origin, seems to have been the fashionable diversion. It was generally played by three people. The deck consisted of forty cards and

48 Parrott, op. cit., p. 98.

49 Canto IV, 113-116.

50 Tickner, op. cit., p. 474.

51 Ashton, Social Life, p. 80.

52 Epilogue to The Gamester, Ashton, Social Life, p. 80.

53 Tickner, op. cit., p. 474.



contained no 8's, 9's, or 10's.<sup>54</sup> Each player received nine cards and the one who named the trump became the "ombre," who played against the other two. The "ombre" had to take more tricks than either of the opponents. If he did not, the opponent winning the most took the stake and the ombre had to replace it for the next hand.<sup>55</sup> The stakes were high and the ladies played as eagerly as the men.<sup>56</sup>

In the late afternoon at Hampton Court the belles and beaux are entertained at cards. Belinda, the coquette, yearns to try her feminine wiles upon two knights and to decide their doom at ombre. As the game is about to begin Ariel and his sylphs perch themselves upon the cards. As high ranking members of Queen Anne's Court are seated to dine, so the sylphs are "perched" according to their rank. Pope is lightly making sport of the privileged class.

Belinda now, when thirst of fame invites,  
Burns to encounter two advent'rous Knights,  
At Ombre singly to decide their doom;  
And swells her breast with conquests yet to come.  
Straight the three bands prepare in arms to join,  
Each band the number of the sacred nine.  
Soon as she spreads her hand, th' aerial guard  
Descend, and sit on each important card:  
First Ariel perch'd upon a Matadore [trump],  
Then each, according to the rank they bore;  
For Sylphs, yet mindful of their ancient race,  
Are, as when women, wondrous fond of place.<sup>57</sup>

The game which follows is an exciting one, the outcome being in doubt until the end.

The skilful Nymph reviews her force with care:  
Let Spades be trumps! she said, and trumps they were.<sup>58</sup>

54 Oxford Dictionary.

55 Parrott, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

56 Traill, *op. cit.*, p. 473

57 Canto XII, 35-36.

58 *Ibid*, 45-46.

At first Belinda wins, but when she runs out of trumps and leads the king of clubs, it is trumped by the baron.

Now to the Baron fate inclines the field.  
His warlike Amazon her host invades,  
Th' imperial consort of the crown of Spades.<sup>59</sup>

Finally when Belinda and the baron have each taken four tricks everything depends on the last one. When the baron leads the ace of hearts she takes it with the king,<sup>60</sup> winning the game. She shows the enthusiasm of the gambler as she fills the sky with exulting shouts.

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:  
He springs to Vengeance with an eager pace,  
And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace.  
The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky;  
The walls, the woods, and long canals reply.<sup>61</sup>

The beau of this period was not to be outdone by the belle. He was an institution of the time. He was modeled on the messieurs of the Time of Louis XIV. Francis Mission, traveler and author of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, describes the beaux as "Creatures compounded of a Perriwig and a Coat laden with Powder as white as a Miller's, a Face besmear'd with Snuff, and a few affected airs; they are exactly like Moliere's and want nothing but that Title..."<sup>62</sup> Ward describes them:

A Beau is a Narcissus that is fallen in Love with himself and his own Shadow....He's a strolling Assistant to Drapers and Taylors, showing every other Day a New Pattern, and a New Fashion....He's a very troublesome Guest in the Tavern; and must have good Wine chang'd three or four Times till they bring him the worst in the Cellar, before he'll

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 65-68.

<sup>60</sup> The red aces were inferior to the face cards-Parrott, op. cit., p.94.

<sup>61</sup> Canto III, 94-100.

<sup>62</sup> Ashton, Social Life, p. 108.

like it....He's a Bubble to all he deals with, even to  
 Flatter him....He's a Coward amongst Brave men, and a Brave  
fellow among Cowards; a Fool amongst Wise men and a Wit in  
 Fool's company.<sup>62</sup>

One might see the young gallant or beau strutting about at the  
 coffee-houses or public gardens dressed in his flowered silk waistcoat  
 reaching to the knee and his coloured silk knee-breeches. Red silk  
 stockings and shoes with red heels and gold or silver buckles were  
 often worn. About his neck were beautiful lace ruffles and a neckcloth.<sup>63</sup>  
 "But it was the periwig, the Falbala, or Furbelow, the dress wig of the  
 age, that all care was centered, and in which all the art of dress cul-  
 minated."<sup>64</sup> The wigs were made from women's hair and were very expensive,  
 the hair selling for about three pounds an ounce. Often men traveled  
 the highways in search of it.<sup>65</sup>

The periwig was not the only type of wig worn; there were several  
 kinds, among them one called the Night Cap and another called the  
Black Riding Wig. There were wigs of different colours, especially black,  
 brown, grey, and white. Sometimes, according to a vivid description of  
 Gay's, beaux were robbed of their prized wigs.

Nor is thy Flaxen Wigg with Safety worn;  
 High on the Shoulder, in the Basket born,  
 Lurks the sly Boy; whose Hand to Rapene bred,  
 Plucks off the curling Honours of the Head.<sup>66</sup>

One of the habits of these gay young men was to carry a snuff box.  
 They were chiefly of silver, tortoise-shell, or mother-of-pearl. Inside

63 Tickner, op. cit., p. 470.

64 Ashton, Social Life, p. 108.

65 Ibid, p. 108.

66 Ibid, p. 111.

the lid he would often have either a looking glass or the portrait of a lady.<sup>67</sup> We see his pride of this article displayed and reflected in

The Rape of the Lock in a partial portrait of Sir Plume.

(Sir Plume of amber snuff-box justly vain,  
And the nice conduct of a clouded cane)<sup>68</sup>  
He first the snuff-box open'd, then the case,<sup>69</sup>

Throughout The Rape of the Lock the beau plays a very important part. Speaking to the sylphs, Ariel says:

Then gay Ideas crowd the vacant brain,  
While Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train,  
And Garters, Stars, and Coronets appear,  
And in soft sounds, Your Grace salutes their ear.  
'T is these that early taint the female soul,  
Instruct the eyes of young Coquettes to roll,  
Teach Infant-cheeks a bidden blush to know,  
And little hearts to flutter at a Beau.<sup>69</sup>  
.....  
With varying vanities, from ev'ry part,  
They shift the moving Toyshop of their heart;  
Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive,  
Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive.<sup>70</sup>

When Belinda becomes very angry because of her stolen lock it is her beau upon whom she calls for help:

raging to Sir Plum 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 snuff-box open'd then the case,  
And thus broke out—"My Lord, why, what the devil?  
"Z--ds! 't is past a jest--nay prithee, pox!  
Give her the hair"--he spoke, and rapped his box.<sup>71</sup>

67 Ibid, p. 120.

68 Canto IV, 123-124, 126.

69 Canto I, 83-90.

70 Ibid, 99-102.

71 Canto IV, 123-124.

There were a great many superstitions among both men and women, and both expressed their belief in the supernatural freely. Two of the grosser ones were the "consulting of astrologers, and the belief in witches." The astrologers were very unscrupulous. Here we have part of an advertisement:

In Cripplegate Parish, in Whitecross Street, almost at the farther End near Old Street (turning in by the sign of the Black Croc in Goat Alley, straight forward down three steps, at the sign of the Globe) liveth one of above Thirty Years Experience, and hath been Counsellor to Counsellors of several Kingdoms, who resolveth these Questions following--

Life Happy or Unhappy? If Rich, by what means attain it. What manner of Person one shall Marry? If Marry the Party desired. What part of the City or Country is best to live in? A Ship at Sea, if safe or not. If a Woman be with Child, with Mail or Female, and whether Delivered by Night or by Day? Sickness, the Duration, and whether end in life or death? Suits at Law, who shall overcome, With all lawful Questions, that depend on that most Noble Art of CHRISTIAN ASTROLOGY.<sup>72</sup>

The astrological superstition of the time is reflected in Pope's poem when Ariel becomes worried about Belinda. In the early morning he had seen in the "Mirror" a foreshadowing of impending evil.

Of these am I, who thy protection claim,  
A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.  
Late, as I rang'd the crystal wilds of air,  
In the clean Mirror of thy ruling Star  
I saw, alas! some dread event impend,  
Ere to the main this morning sun descend,  
But heav'n reveals not what, or how, or where:  
Warn'd by the Sylph, oh pious maid, beware!  
This to disclose is all thy guardian can:  
Beware of all, but most beware of Man!<sup>73</sup>

After losing her favorite lock Belinda feels that she should have heeded the warnings of these omens:

72 Ashton, Social Life, p. 89-90.

73 Canto I, 105-114.

't was this, the morning omens seem'd to tell.  
 Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell;  
 The tott'ring China shook without a wind,  
 Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind!  
 A Sylph too warn'd me of the threats of fate,  
 In mystic visions, now believ'd too late!<sup>74</sup>

One of the old superstitions in which those of the eighteenth century still believed was that everything lost went to the moon.<sup>75</sup> When Belinda's lock disappeared it was thought by many to have gone to the "Lunar sphere."

Some thought it mounted to the Lunar sphere,  
 Since all things lost on earth are treasur'd there.  
 There Hero's wits are kept in pond'rous vases,  
 And beau's in snuff-boxes and tweezer-cases.  
 There broken vows and death-bed alms are found,  
 And lovers' hearts with ends of riband bound,  
 The courtier's promises, and sick man's pray'rs,  
 The smiles of harlots, and the tears of heirs,  
 Cages for gnats, and chains to yoke a flea,  
 Dry'd butterflies, and tomes of casuistry.<sup>76</sup>

The most famous of almanac makers of Pope's day was Partridge. Because he was given to prophesying future events, Swift had issued a mock almanac foretelling that Partridge would die on a certain day. On that day Swift got out a pamphlet giving a full account of Partridge's death. After that Swift and his friends always insisted that he [Partridge] was dead.<sup>77</sup>

The muse in The Rape of the Lock, who had been watching the lock as it rose upward, says:

This Partridge soon shall view in cloudless skies,  
 When next he looks thro' Galileo's eyes;

74 Canto IV, 161-166.

75 Parrott, op. cit., 100.

76 Canto V, 113-122.

77 Parrott, op. cit., p. 100.

And hence th' egregious wizard shall foredoom  
The fate of Louis, and the fall of Rome.<sup>78</sup>

It was customary in Queen Anne's day for epic poems to have a "machinery." This "machinery" was a term invented by the critics to signify that part which the deities, angels, or demons are made to act in a poem.<sup>79</sup>

A short time before Pope wrote his second version of The Rape of the Lock he had read "La Comte de Gabalis" a book by a French abbe on the doctrines of the Rosicrucians. The book was quite widely known and a number of Rosicrucian societies were in existence in London. Because of this Pope decided to use these Rosicrucian sylphs and gnomes and make his poem a true mock-epic. In his letter to Miss Fermor<sup>80</sup> he explains who they are.<sup>79</sup>

...the four elements are inhabited by Spirits, which they call Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs, and Salamanders. The Gnomes, or Daemons of earth, delight in mischief; But the Sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable; for, they say, any mortal may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a preservation of chastity.<sup>81</sup>

When first we see Belinda she is being guarded by a sylph:

Belinda still her downy pillow prest,  
Her guardian SYLPH prolonged the balmy rest;  
'Twas He had summoned to her silent bed  
The morning-dream that hovered o'er her head;<sup>82</sup>

According to the Platonic Theology there is a continuance of the

78 Canto V, 137-140.

79 Parrott, op. cit., p. 85.

80 See note 41, p. 10.

81 King, op. cit., p. 166.

82 Canto I, 19-22.



passions in "another state" if the mind, before its leaving this, has not been purged and purified by philosophy;...<sup>83</sup> Pope gives us "a beautiful fiction of his own,"<sup>83</sup> based on this theology.

For when the fair in all their pride expire,  
To their first Elements their Souls retire;  
The Sprites of fiery Termagants in Flame  
Mount up, and take a Salamander's name  
Soft yielding minds to Water glide away,  
And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental Tea.  
The graver prude sinks downward to a Gnome,  
In search of mischief still on Earth to roam.  
The light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,  
And sport and flutter in the fields of Air.<sup>84</sup>

It is the sylphs all through the poem that try to protect the nymph Belinda, and it is the gnome that causes her to be affected with the "spleen." It is Ariel who gives orders for her special care, thus:

Haste, then, ye spirits! to your charge repair:  
The flutt'ring fan be Zephyretta's care;  
The drops to thee, Brillante, we consign;  
And, Momentilla, let the watch be thine;  
Do thou, Crispissa, tend her favorite Lock;  
Ariel himself shall be the guard of Shock.  
To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,  
We trust th' important charge, the Petticoat:<sup>85</sup>

When Ariel "weeping from Belinda flew,"<sup>86</sup> the gnome Umbriel true to character, saw his chance to get into mischief.

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,  
Repaired to search the gloomy Cave of Spleen.<sup>87</sup>

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83 George Sherburn, The Best of Pope, New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons-Note, P. 78.

84 Canto I, 57-66.

85 Canto II, 111-118.

86 Canto IV, 12.

87 Ibid, 11-16.



The most fashionable disease of Queen Anne's England was "spleen" or "vapors". It was so prevalent in England that it "was sometimes called the 'English malady.'"<sup>88</sup> It was much satirized by the wits, even though they may have believed in it themselves. "England lay under the curse of 'Spleen.'"<sup>89</sup> By many, music and dancing were believed to be the most reliable cures. Patients were not willing to let their disease go by its right name for fear of the raillery of those who had never been troubled with it. "The symptoms were looked upon as an imaginary and fantastic sickness of the brain, filled with odd and irregular ideas."<sup>89</sup> A letter to the Spectator<sup>90</sup> called the spleen "the distemper of the great and the polite."

When Belinda flew into such a rage over her "ravish'd Hair," Ariel and the sylphs left her, and Umbriel went down into the earth "to search the gloomy Cave of Spleen."<sup>91</sup> The east wind was supposed to be one of the main causes of the disease.<sup>92</sup>

No cheerful breeze this sullen region knows,  
The dreaded East is all the wind that blows.<sup>93</sup>

.....  
A constant Vapour o'er the palace flies;  
Strange phantoms rising as the mists arise;  
Dreadful, as hermit's dreams in haunted shades,  
Or bright, as visions of expiring maids.  
Now lakes of liquid gold, Elysian scenes,  
And crystal domes, and angels in machines.

---

88 Lawrence Babb, "The Cave of Spleen," quoted in The Review of English Studies, April, 1936. p. 165.

89 Oswald Doughty, "The English Malady of the Eighteenth Century," quoted in The Review of English Studies, July 1926. pp. 257-269.

90 No. 53.

91 Canto IV, 8-16.

92 Parrott, op. cit., p. 96.

93 Canto IV, 19-20.

A constant Vapour o'er the palace flies;  
 Strange phantoms rising as the mists arise;  
 Dreadful, as hermit's dreams in haunted shades,  
 Or bright, as visions of expiring maids.  
 Now lakes of liquid gold, Elysian scenes,  
 And crystal domes, and angels in machines.

Unnumber'd throngs on every side are seen,  
 Of bodies chang'd to various forms by Spleen.  
 Here living Tea-pots stand, one arm held out,  
 One bent; the handle this, and that the spout:  
 A Pipkin there, like Homer's Tripod walks;  
 Here sighs a Jar, and there a Goose-pie talks;  
 Men prove with child, as pow'rful fance works,<sup>94</sup>  
 And maids turn'd bottles, call aloud for corks.

One of the remedies of the eighteenth century against the "spleen" was supposed to be Spleenwort, a kind of fern.<sup>95</sup> When the gnome Umbriel went down into the cave he carried with him for protection a branch of this herb.

Safe past the Gnome thro' this fantastic band,  
 A branch of healing Spleenwort in his hand.<sup>96</sup>

Reaching the place where the queen of the cave is, we get a picture of some of the results of the disease:

.....: "Hail, wayward Queen!  
 Who rule the sex to fifty from fifteen:  
 Parent of vapours and of female wit,  
 Who give th' hysteric, or poetic fit,  
 On various tempers act by various ways,  
 Make some take physic, others scribble plays;  
 Who cause the proud their visits to delay,  
 And send the godly in a pet to pray."<sup>97</sup>

Because Belinda had always been so light hearted and frivolous she had never been affected. The gnome, happiest when causing trouble, begs the queen to give him the symptoms of the spleen that he may carry them to the nymph.

94 Ibid, 39-54.

95 Parrott, op. cit., p. 97.

96 Canto IV, 55-56.

97 Ibid, 57-64.

A nymph there is, that all thy pow'r disdains,  
 And thousands more in equal mirth maintains.  
 But oh! if e'er the Gnome could spoil a grace,  
 Or raise a pimple on a beauteous face,  
 Like Citron-waters matrons' cheeks inflame  
 Or change complexions at a losing game;<sup>98</sup>

.....  
 Hear me, and touch Belinda with chagrin,  
 That single act gives half the world the spleen. <sup>98</sup>

As the gnome continues to beg the favor of the Goddess of Spleen  
 we learn some of the mischievous things he is supposed to have done.

If e'er with airy horns I planted heads,<sup>99</sup>  
 Or rumpled petticoats, or tumbled beds,  
 Or caus'd suspicion when no soul was rude,  
 Or compos'd the head-dress of a Prude,  
 Or e'er to costive lap-dog gave disease,  
 Which not the tears of brightest eyes could ease:<sup>100</sup>

When she reluctantly gives him the "bag" and "vial," we find contained in them all the evils that are caused by the spleen.

The Goddess with a discontented air  
 Seems to reject him, tho' she grants his pray'r.  
 A wond'rous Bag with both her hands she binds,  
 Like that where once Ulysses held the winds;  
 There she collects the force of female lungs,  
 Sighs, sobs, and passions, and the war of tongues.  
 A vial next she fills with fainting fears,  
 Soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears.<sup>101</sup>

Swiftly the gnome flies back to Belinda and Thalestris [Belinda's friend], and lets loose all the evils contained in the bag. They have their effect and Belinda flying into a rage is at last affected with the "spleen."

Sunk in Thalestris' arms the nymph he found,  
 Her eyes dejected and her hair unbound.  
 Full o'er their heads the swelling bag he rent,  
 And all the Furies issu'd at the vent.

98 Ibid, 65-70, 77-78.

99 Made men suspicious of their wives- Parrott, op. cit., p. 97.

100 Ibid, 71-76.

101 Ibid, 79-86.

Belinda burns with more than mortal ire,  
And fierce Thalestris fans the rising fire.<sup>102</sup>

The attitude of men toward women in this age of Queen Anne is quite an interesting one. There seemed to be a great deal of chivalric regard for them but very little respect for their mental powers. Men treated women much as they would children, expecting only frivolous, pretty actions. They were expected to amuse and entertain men, to be flattered by them, but never to be taken seriously. Writers of the period, particularly Addison, wrote continuously of their vanities and frivolities. Lord Chesterfield in a letter to his son wrote:

A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humours and flatters them as he does with a sprightly, forward child; but he neither consults them about, nor trusts them with, serious matters, though he often makes them believe that he does both, which is the thing in the world that they are proud of ...No flattery is either too high or too low for them. They will greedily swallow the highest and gratefully accept of the lowest.<sup>103</sup>

Pope reflects this attitude through-out the poem. The vanities of women were so strong that not even death put an end to them.

Think not, when Woman's transient breath is fled  
That all her vanities at once are dead;  
Succeeding vanities she still regards,  
And tho' she plays no more, o'er looks the cards.  
Her joy in gilded Chariots, when alive,  
And love of Ombre, after death survive.  
For when the Fair in all their pride expire,  
To their first Elements their Souls retire:  
The Sprites of Termagants in Flame  
Mount up, and take a Salamander's name.  
Soft yielding minds to Water glide away,  
And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental Tea.  
The graver Prude sinks downward to a Gnome,  
In search of mischief still on Earth to roam.  
The light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,  
And sport and flutter in the fields of Air.<sup>104</sup>

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102 Ibid, 89-94.

103 Letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son quoted in John Dennis,  
The Age of Pope, London, George Bell and Sons, 1909, p. 15.

104 Canto IV., 51-66.

Again the guardian sylph, speaking of a belle, says:

When Florio speaks what virgin could withstand,  
If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand?  
With varying vanities, from ev'ry part,  
They shift the moving Toyshop of their heart;<sup>105</sup>

As Pope gives us a portrait of the belle who is the heroine of his poem, we get not only a description of her physical make-up but an idea of the kind of mind she possesses and an insight into her character. We see that Pope regards her mental ability in much the same light as his contemporaries.

On her white breast a sparkling Cross she wore,  
Which Jews might kiss, and Infidels adore.  
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,  
Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those:  
Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;  
Of she rejects, but never once offends.  
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,  
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.  
Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,  
Might hide her faults, if Belles had faults to hide:  
If to her share some female errors fall,  
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.<sup>106</sup>

After the clipping of the lock we find in Belinda and the other belles reaction, the pettiness of the group when they respond in the same manner to the loss of husbands or lap-dogs.

Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,  
And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies.  
Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast,  
When husbands, or when lap-dogs breathe their last;<sup>107</sup>

The highest attainment possible to woman, Pope seems to think, is the possession of common sense, merit, and good humour. This attitude we have revealed in Clarissa's speech when she gives moral reproof to the belles.

105 Canto I, 97-100.

106 Canto II, 7-18.

107 Canto III, 155-158.

Even then she recommends "good-humour" only because one's beauty soon fades,  
but merit of character remains.

How vain are all these glories, all our pains,  
Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains:

.....  
Oh! if to dance all night, and dress all day,  
Charm'd the small-pox, or chas'd old-age away;  
Who would not scorn what housewife's cares produce,  
Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?

.....  
But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,  
Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to grey;  
Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,  
And she who scorns a man, must die a maid;  
What then remains but well our pow'r to use,  
And keep good-humour still whate'er we lose?  
And trust me, dear! good-humour can prevail,  
When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding fail.  
Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;  
Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.<sup>108</sup>

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108 Ibid, Canto V, 15-34.

### Conclusion

No better description of what Pope has accomplished could be given than the one by Parrott:

In The Rape of the Lock, Pope has caught and fixed forever the atmosphere of this age. It is not the mere outward form and circumstances, the manners and customs, the patching, powdering, ogling, gambling, of the day that he has reproduced, though his account of these would alone suffice to secure the poem immortality as a contribution to the history of society. The essential spirit of the age breathes from every line. No great English poem is at once so brilliant and so empty, so artistic, and yet so devoid of the ideals on which all high art rests....There are sermons and satires in abundance in English literature, but there is only one Rape of the Lock.

I have attempted to show that in the poem The Rape of the Lock Pope very definitely reflects the social life and customs of the Age of Queen Anne, in his inimitable picture of the gay, frivolous society of the period. Since the "spirit" is so elusive an element, it is difficult to demonstrate that it has been reproduced, but I believe with Parrott that the poem "breaths the spirit of the age in every line."

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