

Rape of the Lock. Is a mock heroic epic poem - Satire.

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'The Rape of the Lock' is a mock heroic poem by Alexander Pope, the greatest of the verse satirists here, he has made an elaborate parody of all the ingredients of an epic. Traditionally, heroic Couplet has been used in epics and heroic Poetry to narrate the exploits of the heroes. Heroic Poetry is serious and presents something heroic or noble in the exalted style. But Pope has used this manner of Heroic Poetry to present something poor and ignoble and so this poem is called mock heroic poem. Let us see it in a brief.

The Rape of the Lock is a satirical presentation of the 18th century England, rather a mock heroic poem. The main event in the poem is the cutting of Belinda's hair, when she refuses love to Lord Peter. This accident leads to a fierce battle that is fought like anything. Pope is quite successful in producing mock heroic effect at every stage of the poem. In the true fashion of an epic, this poem also begins with the introduction of theme and invocations. Really, the opening is masterly and introduces serious tone.

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"What dire offence from amorous causes springs  
What mighty contests rise from trivial things  
Say what strange motive goddess! could compel  
A well-bred Lord to assault a gentle belle."

Another device of the epic is the use of supernatural machinery. The Rape of the Lock contains an extensive machinery of Ariel and sylphs. The supernatural machinery is based on the Ptolemaic philosophy - four elements, air, water, earth and fire - inhabited by the four classes of spirits, sylphs, nymphs, gnomes and salamanders. These spirits are interested in the affairs of human beings. However Pope has used it with a slight variation from the middle ages. They do not have obscure origin, they are -

Is now your own, our beings, were of old  
And once enclosed in woman's beautiful mould  
Thence, by a soft transition, we repair



From earthly vehicles to those of air"

The distinguishing feature of a true epic is its peculiar passion that corresponds to the character of the hero of the poem. This peculiar passion of 'Iliad' is anger for Achilles, the hero, and the soft and tender passion pervades 'Aeneid', because that is the character of 'Aeneas'. Similarly, the reigning passion of the 'Rape of the Lock' is Coquetry. Lord Peter, the hero of the poem, is a flirt. He is a lover who preserves all the trophies of his formal love. He tries to please the heavenly powers for possession of a lock of a Lady's hair.

"There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves  
And all the trophies of his formal loves  
With tender billet-doux he lights the pyre  
And breathes three amorous sighs to raise the fire"

Another ingredient of the epic is the descent of the hero to the under worlds. In the 'Rape of the Lock', the descent of Umbriel to the cave of spleen is a parody of this convention. Besides, the poem also displays the intensity of the vows of the epic characters. Belinda speaks out her mind in a very resolute manner. Lord Peter expresses -

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"Boast not my fall" (he cried) "insulting foe"  
Thus by some other shalt be laid as low  
..... ah let me still survive

And burn in Cupid's flames - but burn alive?

The battle between the sexes is also fought like a heroic battle. But, the centre of controversy is nothing royal or great, but a curl of hair that is trivial and ignoble. The game of ombre also reminds us of heroic battles. The cards are lined up like warriors and the chief cards perform their task as if they were generals in a battle field. Belinda's cries are so loud and unchained that they mock the triumphant cries

of heroes like Achille<sup>③</sup> and Ulysses.

The poem abounds in numerous instances of heroic speeches as well as mock-heroic images that enhance its mocking effect.

• Not forsooth Otthello is too loud a strain

Roared for the handkerchief that caused her pain.

There are also some images of the straight forward satire -

"With varying vanities, from every part

They shift the moving Toyshops of their heart."

Thus Alexander Pope is quite successful in parodying all the important ingredients of an epic and has made the poem a master piece out of nothing.

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