

Rape of the Lock As epos - mirror of 18th Century England.

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'The Rape of the Lock' is a didactic representation of the 18th Century England. It represents the social and moral characteristics, the manners and literary tastes of the age in a light strain in a satirical vein. Pope writes of the society he knew, the fashionable ladies he saw and the aristocrats he lived with. Here, Pope's motive is to laugh at the little unguarded foibles and follies of the female sex. At one place, Pope remarks 'woman is a rack at heart'. Toilet was the great business of the fashionable ladies, adjustment of hair was the principal employment of their life and choosing a proper ribbon was a good work of the morning. Pope holds that the view that women are frivolous beings and their genuine interest lies in love making.

Here, Pope introduces this fashionable world with all its minutiae. The Rape of the Lock is a story of the quarrel between a young gallant and a young fashionable lady. The main cause of the fight is that Lord Peter, when refused love, cuts off a lock of hair from Belinda's head. On advice of his friend, Pope has entangled it by introducing machinery with great mastery and skill. Belinda represents the fashionable ladies of the age: She sleeps late in the morning and is wakened by licking of her lap dog. The ladies are very fond of lap dog.

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Belinda summons her maid servant by ringing bell and asks her to prepare her toilet. The toilet presents a variable picture of a cosmetic shop. She spends hours and hours in beautifying her:-

"And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed
Each silver vase in mystic order laid."

The fashionable ladies have a great interest in gilded coaches and playing cards, specially the game of ombre. It has been nicely revealed in the passage describing the supernatural machinery -

"Succeeding vanities she still regards

And though she plays no more, overlooks the cards
Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive
And love of ombre, after death reserve"

Belinda goes to the Hampton Court along with other fair nymphs and leisured youths. They play the game of ombre and attend a coffee bar where they pass their time in various talks. Their only business of the evening is to join the sumptuous parties, known as "trouts". The night is spent in enjoying the "masked ball" or a mid night masquerade.

Belinda is the queen of the world of fashion. She is the centre of attraction at every place. In the true fashion of the fashionable society, she takes great pains:-

"Repairs her smiles, awakes every grace
And call forth all the wonder of her face"

Pope becomes a little harsh, when he refers to the character of fashionable ladies. He compares their hearts to the topsy-turvy.

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"With varying vanities, from every part

They shift the moving toys-top of their heart."

The small pox is the most dreaded disease for it leaves frail marks on their face. The young men of the age are "aristocratic" and "tailor made". There is no room for the chivalry and the "beaux" can go down to the level of cutting hair from the lady's head. Moreover, they are habituated of snuff

"He first the snuff box opened, then the case"

The war is fought like the Trojan War. The machinery so dear to epic, is cleverly used. It gives to the trivial things an added interest and makes it appear more ridiculous.

The duty of the Sylph is -

"To save the powder from too rude a gale
Nor let the improved essences exhale"

There are references to the "Ball" and "Rosa Rosamund" which

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were the haunts of the lovers. The lovers have been mocked for the lack of their wit.

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"Now fire suspends his golden scale in air
weight the men's wits against the lady's hair."

Thus, we see that the Rape of the Lock is the mirror of the fashionable society of the 18th Century England.