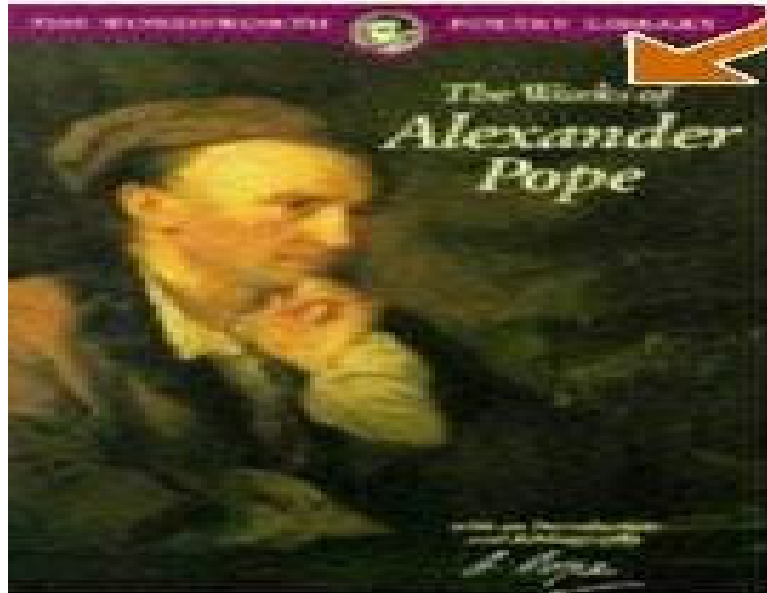


The Rape of the Lock

By Alexander Pope (1688-1744)



Setting

The action takes place in London and its environs in the early 1700's on a single day. The story begins at noon (Canto I) at the London residence of Belinda as she carefully prepares herself for a gala social gathering. The scene then shifts (Canto II) to a boat carrying Belinda up the Thames. To onlookers she is as magnificent as Queen Cleopatra was when she traveled in her barge. The rest of the story (Cantos III-V) takes place where Belinda debarks-Hampton Court Palace, a former residence of King Henry VIII on the outskirts of London-except for a brief scene in Canto IV that takes place in the cave of the Queen of Spleen.

Characters

Belinda Beautiful young lady with wondrous hair, two locks of which hang gracefully in curls.

The Baron Young admirer of Belinda who plots to cut off one of her locks.

Ariel Belinda's guardian sylph (supernatural creature).

Clarissa Young lady who gives the Baron scissors.

Umbriel Sprite who enters the cave of the Queen of Spleen to seek help for Belinda.

Queen of Spleen Underworld goddess who gives Umbriel gifts for Belinda.

Thalestris Friend of Belinda. Thalestris urges Sir Plume to defend Belinda's honor.

Sir Plume Beau of Thalestris. He scolds the Baron.

Sylphs, Fairies, Genies, Demons, Phantoms and Other Supernatural Creatures

Source: A Real-Life Incident

Pope based *The Rape of the Lock* on an actual incident in which a British nobleman, Lord Petre, cut off a lock of hair dangling tantalizingly from the head of the beautiful Arabella Fermor. Petre's daring theft of the lock set off a battle royal between the Petre and Fermor families. John Caryll-a friend of Pope and of the warring families-persuaded the great writer to pen a literary work satirizing the absurdity and silliness of the dispute. The result was one of the greatest satirical poems in all of literature. In writing the poem, Pope also drew upon ancient classical sources-notably Homer's great epics, [*The Iliad*](#) and [*The Odyssey*](#)-as models to imitate in style and tone. He also consulted the texts of medieval and Renaissance epics.

Plot Summary

Pope opens with a statement announcing the topic of his poem: A gentleman-a lord, in fact-has committed a terrible outrage against a gentlewoman, causing her to reject him. What was this offense? Why did it incite such anger in the lady?

The woman in question is named Belinda. She is sleeping late one day in her London home when a sylph-a dainty spirit that inhabits the air-warns her that "I saw, alas! some dread Event impend." The sylph, named Ariel, does not know what this event is or where or how it will manifest itself. But he does tell Belinda to be on guard against the machinations of men.

Belinda rises and prepares herself for a social gathering, sitting before a mirror and prettying herself with "puffs and

powders” and scenting herself with “all Arabia.” Afterward, she travels up the Thames River to the site of the social festivities, Hampton Court, the great palace on the north bank of the river that in earlier times was home to King Henry VIII. As she sits in the boat, “Fair Nymphs, and well-drest Youths around her shone, / But ev’ry Eye was fix’d on her alone.” In other words, she was beautiful beyond measure. She smiled at everyone equally, and her eyes-bright suns-radiated goodwill. Especially endearing to anyone who looked upon her were her wondrous tresses:

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.

Among Belinda’s admirers is a young baron at Hampton Court awaiting her arrival. He has resolved to snip off a lock of her hair as the trophy of trophies. Before dawn, before even the sun god Phoebus Apollo arose, the Baron had been planning the theft of a lock of Belinda's hair. To win the favor of the gods, he had lighted an altar fire and, lying face down before it, prayed for success.

After Belinda arrives at Hampton Court with her company of friends, the partygoers play Ombre, a popular card game in which only 40 of the 52 cards are dealt--the eights, nines, and tens are held back. It appears that the Baron will win the game after his knave of diamonds captures her queen of hearts. However, Belinda yet has hope, even after the Baron plays an ace of hearts:

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.

Belinda wins! Coffee is served, the vapors of which go to the Baron’s brain and embolden him to carry out his assault on Belinda’s hair. Clarissa, a lady who fancies the Baron, withdraws scissors from a case and arms him with the weapon. When he closes in behind Belinda, she bends over her coffee, exposing a magnificent lock. But a thousand sprites come to her aid, using their wings to blow hair over the lock. They also tug at one of her diamond earrings to alert her to the danger. Three times they warn her and three times she looks around. But all is for naught.

The Baron opens wide his weapon, closes it around the lock, and cuts. The rape of her lock enrages Belinda:

Then flash'd the living Lightnings from her Eyes,
And Screams of Horror rend th' affrighted Skies.
Not louder Shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast,
When Husbands, or when Lapdogs breathe their last,
Or when rich China Vessels, fal'n from high,
In glitt'ring Dust and painted Fragments lie!

A gnome named Umbriel descends to the Underworld on Belinda's behalf and obtains a bag of sighs and a vial of tears from the Queen of Spleen. With these magical gifts, he means to comfort poor Belinda. First, he empties the bag on her. A gentleman named Sir Plume--prompted by his belle, Thalestris, a friend of Belinda--then roundly scolds the Baron for his grave offense. But the Baron is unrepentant. Umbriel then empties the vial on Belinda. Grief overcomes her as her eyes half-drown in tears and her head droops upon her bosom. She says:

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!

Clarissa tries to mollify Belinda in a long speech, but fails. A bit of a melee ensues when Belinda attempts to retrieve her lost lock. "Fans clap, Silks russle, and tough Whalebones crack." Belinda proves a fierce combatant. She attacks the Baron "with more than usual Lightning in her Eyes" and throws a handful of snuff from Sir Plume's box up his nose. But, alas, when the battle ends, the lock is nowhere to be found.

However, the poem ends on a happy note for Belinda, Pope says, because the trimmed lock of her golden hair has risen to the heavens, there to become a shining star.

Theme

The central theme of *The Rape of the Lock* is the fuss that high society makes over trifling matters, such as breaches of decorum. In the poem, a feud of epic proportions erupts after the Baron steals a lock of Belinda's hair. In the real-life incident on which Pope based his poem, the Petre and the Fermor families had a falling-out after Lord Petre snipped off one of Arabella Fermor's locks. Other themes that Pope develops in the poem include human vanity and the importance of being able to laugh at life's little reversals. The latter motif is a kind of "moral

to the story.” Clarissa touches upon both of these themes when addressing tearful Belinda, shorn of her lock:

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?

Climax

The climax of *The Rape of the Lock* occurs when the Baron snips away one of Belinda's locks.



Epic Conventions

Because a mock-epic parodies a classical epic, it uses the same conventions, or formulas, as the classical epic--but usually in a humorous way. For example, a convention of many classical epics is a sea voyage in which perils confront the hero at every turn. In *The Rape of the Lock*, the sea voyage is Belinda's boat trip up the Thames River. Her guardian sylph, Ariel, sees "black omens" that foretell disasters for Belinda even though the waves flow smoothly and the winds blow gently. Will she stain her dress? Lose her honor or her necklace? Miss a masquerade? Forget her prayers? So frightful are the omens that Ariel summons 50 of his companion spirits to guard Belinda's petticoat, as well as the ringlets of her hair. Following are examples of the epic conventions that Pope parodies:

- Invocation of the Muse: In ancient Greece and Rome, poets had always requested “the muse” to fire them with creative genius when they began long narrative poems, or epics, about godlike heroes and villains. In Greek mythology, there were nine muses, all sisters, who were believed to inspire poets, historians, flutists, dancers, singers, astronomers, philosophers, and other thinkers and artists. If one wanted to write a great poem, play a musical

instrument with bravado, or develop a grand scientific or philosophical theory, he would ask for help from a muse. When a writer asked for help, he was said to be “invoking the muse.” The muse of epic poetry was named Calliope [kuh LY uh pe]. In “The Rape of the Lock,” Pope does not invoke a goddess; instead, he invokes his friend, John Caryll (spelled *CARYL* in the poem), who had asked Pope to write a literary work focusing on an event (the snipping of a lock of hair) that turned the members of two families--the Petres and the Fermors--into bitter enemies. Caryll thought that poking fun at the incident would reconcile the families by showing them how trivial the incident was.

- Division of the Poem Into Books or Cantos: The traditional epic is long, requiring several days of reading. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example, contains 34 cantos. When printed, the work consists of a book about two inches thick. Pope, of course, presents only five cantos containing a total of fewer than 600 lines. Such miniaturizing helps Pope demonstrate the smallness or pettiness of the behavior exhibited by the main characters in the poem.
- Descriptions of Soldiers Preparing for Battle: In *The Iliad*, Homer describes in considerable detail the armor and weaponry of the great Achilles, as well as the battlefield trappings of other heroes. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope describes Belinda preparing herself with combs and pins--with “Puffs, Powders, Patches”--noting that “Now awful Beauty puts on all its Arms.”
- Descriptions of Heroic Deeds: While Homer describes the exploits of his heroes during the Trojan War, Pope describes the “exploits” of Belinda and the Baron during a card game called *Ombre*, which involves three players and a deck of 40 cards.
- Account of a Great Sea Voyage: In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus (also known as Ulysses) travels the seas between Troy and Greece, encountering many perils. In *The Aeneid*, Aeneas travels the seas between Troy and Rome, also encountering perils. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Belinda travels up the Thames in a boat.
- Participation of Deities or Spirits in the Action: In *The Rape of the Lock*--as in *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *Paradise Lost*--supernatural beings take part in the action.

- Presentation of Scenes in the Underworld: Like supernatural beings in classical epics, the gnome Umbriel visits the Underworld in *The Rape of the Lock*.

Publication Information

Pope published three versions of *The Rape of the Lock*. The first was a two-canto version published in 1712. The second, published in 1714, was a five-canto version that added references to sylphs and other supernatural creatures. The final version, published in 1717 in a volume of Pope's poetry, added Clarissa's speech in Canto V.

Verse Format

Pope wrote *The Rape of the Lock* in heroic couplets. A heroic couplet is a unit of two rhyming lines in iambic pentameter. A line of verse in iambic pentameter consists of 10 syllables. The first syllable is unaccented, the second accented, the third unaccented, the fourth accented, and so on. The entire poem consists of one heroic couplet followed by another, as demonstrated by the first four lines of the poem:

What dire offence from am'rous causes **springs**,
 What mighty contests rise from trivial
things, [First Couplet: *springs* and *things*
 rhyme]

I sing-This verse to CARYL, Muse! is **due**:
 This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to
view [Second Couplet: *due* and *view*
 rhyme]

Each of the lines has 10 syllables in a succession of accented and unaccented pairs (iambic pentameter), as follows:

What **dire** offence from am'rous causes **springs**,
 What **mighty** contests rise from trivial **things**,
 I **sing**-This verse to **CARYL**, Muse! is **due**:
 This, **ev'n** Belinda may vouchsafe to **view**

You may have noticed that Pope turned *amorous* into two syllables by eliminating the *o* and attempted to turn *even* into a

single syllable by eliminating the second *e*. Poetic license permits poets to make such adjustments to achieve their ends.

Figures of Speech

The main figure of speech in *The Rape of the Lock* is [hyperbole](#). Pope uses it throughout the poem to exaggerate the ordinary and the commonplace, making them extraordinary and spectacular. In so doing, paradoxically, he makes them seem as they really are, small and petty. Examples of hyperbole include the following:

Sol through white Curtains shot a tim'rous Ray,
And ope'd those Eyes that must eclipse the Day.

Hyperbole: Belinda's eyes are so bright that they outshine a ray of sunlight

This Nymph, to the Destruction of Mankind,
Nourish'd two Locks which graceful hung behind

Hyperbole: Belinda is so beautiful--and her wondrous locks so inviting--that she can bring mankind to ruin with desire.

Examples of Other Figures of Speech in the Poem

Personification

Love in these Labyrinths his Slaves detains

Anaphora

He saw, he wish'd, and to the Prize aspir'd

Alliteration

Where Wigs with Wigs, with Sword-knots Sword-knots
strive,

Beaux banish Beaux, and Coaches Coaches drive.

The Rape of the Lock
By Alexander Pope
Complete Text With Detailed Explanatory Notes
Boldfaced Black or Colored Words Are Explained in the Notes

Canto I

Stanza 1

**What dire offence from am'rous causes
springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial
things,
I sing--This verse to **CARYL, Muse!** is due:
This, ev'n **Belinda** may vouchsafe to view:
Slight is the subject, but not so the
praise,
If She inspire, and He approve my lays.
Say what strange motive, **Goddess!** could
compel
A well-bred Lord t' assault a gentle Belle?
O say what stranger cause, yet
unexplor'd,
Could make a gentle Belle reject a
Lord? 10
In tasks so bold, can little men engage,
And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty
Rage?
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, 15
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 20
'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 Birth-night
Beau,
(That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to
glow)
Seem'd to her ear his winning lips to
lay, 25
And thus in whispers said, or seem'd to
say.

Notes, Stanza 1

What . . . sing: I am writing (I sing) about a terrible offense resulting from an amorous cause.

CARYL, Muse: A friend of Pope, John Caryl, whom Pope addresses as the muse. An acquaintance of Caryl, Lord Petre, cut off a lock of hair of a young lady, Arabella Fermor. A quarrel erupted between the families. Caryl suggested that Pope write a poem to point up the silliness of the quarrel. Pope addresses Caryl as if he were a muse. For further information on "invoking the muse," see [Epic Conventions](#), above.

Belinda: Arabella Fermor. Belinda is a poetic name associated with gentleness. For further information about Arabella Fermor, see [Source](#), above.

Goddess: Another reference to Caryl as the muse.

Sol: the sun

curtains: the curtains on Belinda's bed

tim'rous: timorous, meaning *shy*, *timid*

oped: opened

must eclipse the day: Belinda's eyes are so bright that they rival the brightness of the sun.

lap-dogs: dogs small enough to be held in the lap

press'd watch: a kind of clock. Pressing a button on it caused a bell to sound the current hour or quarter hour.

Sylph: fairy, sprite

Birth-night: evening celebration of a royal person's birthday

Stanza 2

Fairest of mortals, thou distinguish'd care

Of thousand bright Inhabitants of Air!

If e'er one vision touch'd thy infant thought,

Of all the Nurse and all the Priest have taught; . 30

Of airy Elves by moonlight shadows seen,

The **silver token**, and the **circled green**,

Or virgins visited by Angel-pow'rs,

With golden crowns and wreaths of heav'nly flow'rs;

Hear and believe! thy own importance know, 35

Nor bound thy narrow views to things below.

Some secret truths, from learned pride conceal'd,

To Maids alone and Children are reveal'd:

What tho' no credit doubting Wits may give?

The Fair and Innocent shall still believe. 40

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.

Notes, Stanza 2

Fairest . . . Air: The youth in her dream (Line 23) addresses Belinda as the fairest mortal, saying she is watched over by a thousand sprites inhabiting the air.

silver token: coin left by a fairy as a gift for a favored mortal

Some . . . give: Certain secrets are revealed only to maidens like Belinda and to children, but not to highly educated people. Skeptics may doubt the truth of these secrets but Belinda and innocent children believe them.

Box, Ring: The spirits of the air hover around Belinda while she is in her theatre box or traveling in her carriage on a circular road (ring) in Hyde Park, a large park in the Westminster borough of London.

Stanza 3

Think what an equipage thou hast in
Air, 45
And view with scorn two Pages and a
Chair.

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. 50

**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'erlooks the
cards.

Her joy in **gilded Chariots**, when
alive, 55

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 fiery Termagants** in
Flame

Mount up, and take a **Salamander's**
name 60

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, 65

And sport and flutter in the fields of Air.

Notes, Stanza 3

Think . . . Chair: You now have an army of
sprites to look after you, not just two
pages

As . . . air: The sprites were once women
with beauteous forms. After death, they
became spirits of the air.

Think . . . dead: After a woman dies, she
retains an interest in amusements.

gilded Chariots: splendid carriages to ride
in

Ombre: a popular card game for three
players in which only 40 of the 52 cards

are dealt--the eights, nines, and tens are held back.

Sprites . . . Termagants: The spirits of quarrelsome, overbearing women.

Salamander: in myth, a lizard-like reptile that lived in fire; a spirit in the alchemy of Paracelsus (1493-1541), a Swiss physician

Soft yielding: Beginning here and continuing down to Line 66, the meaning is as follows: Other sprites live in water, keeping company with nymphs (minor goddess inhabiting the sea). Some sprites in the earth as gnomes (dwarflike creatures), and some of them live in the air.

Stanza 4

"Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste

Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embrac'd:

For Spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease

Assume what sexes and what shapes they please. 70

**What guards the purity of melting Maids,
In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,**

**Safe from the treach'rous friend, the
daring spark,**

**The glance by day, the whisper in the
dark,**

**When kind occasion prompts their warm
desires, 75**

**When music softens, and when dancing
fires?**

'Tis but their Sylph, the wise Celestials

know,
 Tho' Honour is the word with Men below.
Some nymphs there are, too conscious of
 their face,
 For life predestin'd to the Gnomes'
 embrace. 80
 These swell their prospects and exalt
 their pride,
 When offers are disdain'd, and love
 deny'd:
 Then gay Ideas crowd the vacant brain,
 While Peers, and Dukes, and all their
 sweeping train,
And Garters, Stars, and Coronets
 appear, 85
 And in soft sounds, **Your Grace** salutes
 their ear.
 'Tis these that early taint the female soul,
 Instruct the eyes of young **Coquettes** to
 roll,
Teach Infant-cheeks abidden blush to
 know,
 And little hearts to flutter at a
 Beau. 90

Notes, Stanza 4

What . . . Sylph: Sylphs (sprites) guard the purity of maidens from men who would take advantage of them.

daring spark: a bold gentleman; an aggressive beau

Some nymphs: From this phrase down to Line 90, the poem says that some sprites urge young ladies to be proud. In their vanity, these women refuse the offers of gentlemen.

Garters, Stars, and Coronets: the badges and other insignia of persons of high rank.

Your Grace: a member of the nobility.

Although the phrase is in second-person point of view, it is to be read in third-person point of view as if it says, "His Grace."

Coquettes: flirtatious women

Teach . . . blush: Teach young ladies to wear rouge

Stanza 5

Oft, when the world imagine women
stray,
The Sylphs thro' mystic mazes guide their
way,
Thro' all the giddy circle they pursue,
And old impertinence expel by new.
What tender maid but must a victim
fall 95

To one man's treat, but for another's
ball?

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; 100

Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots
sword-knots strive,

Beaux banish beaux, and coaches
coaches drive.

This erring mortals Levity may call;
Oh blind to truth! the Sylphs contrive it
all.

Of these am I, who thy protection
claim, 105

A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.
Late, as I rang'd the crystal wilds of air,
In the clear Mirror of thy ruling Star

I saw, alas! some dread event impend,
Ere to the main this morning sun
descend, 110
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!"

Notes, Stanza 5

Florio, Damon: Names commonly used in poetry in Pope's time the way we use Tom, Dick, and Harry--or John Doe--today. They do not refer to a specific person but to men in general.

Where . . . drive: The young gentlemen are vying for the attention of the young ladies.

sword-knots: A sword knot was a loop of fabric or leather attached to the handle of a sword. A swordsman placed the loop around his wrist as a support for maintaining his grip. Some sword knots were intended only as ornaments.

Beaux: plural of beau

This . . . all: Humans are wrong to think that young women are responsible for their frivolous and flirtatious behavior (levity). The truth is that sprites cause this behavior.

Of these: Beginning with this phrase and continuing down to Line 114, Belinda's guardian sprite introduces himself as Ariel, then discloses that a dreadful event is about to happen. He does not know what will occur, or how or where, but warns Belinda to beware.

rang'd: ranged

Stanza 6

He said; when **Shock**, who thought she
slept too long, 115
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. 120

And now, unveil'd, the **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, 125
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; 130

From each she nicely culls with curious
toil,

And decks the **Goddess** with the glitt'ring
spoil.

This **casket** India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.

The **Tortoise** here and **Elephant**
unite, 135

Transformed 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, 140

Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her
face;

Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her
eyes.

The busy Sylphs surround their darling
care, 145

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.

Notes, Stanza 6

Shock: Belinda's dog.

Billet-doux: love letter. From the French
billet (*note, letter*) and *doux* (*sweet*).

The French pronunciation is be yay DOO;
the English pronunciation is BIL ay DOO.

Toilet: dressing table or dressing room.

Th' inferior Priestess: Servant, maid.

decks . . . spoil: adorns Belinda with
jewels and other ornaments.

casket: box, case.

Tortoise: The shell of a tortoise was used
in making combs.

Elephant: Reference to ivory.

Bibles: Small Bibles were fashionable
accessories on ladies' dressing tables.

Now . . . arms: Here begins an [epic
convention](#), a warrior putting on his

armor. In this case, of course, it is a woman putting on her clothes in preparation for vying in the battle of the sexes.

Canto II

Stanza 1

**Not with more glories, in th' ethereal
plain,**
The Sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
Launch'd on the bosom of the silver
Thames.
Fair Nymphs, and well-drest Youths
around her shone. 5
But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.
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: 10
Favours to none, to all she smiles
extends;
Oft 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, 15
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.

Notes, Stanza 1

Not . . . plain: Here begins an [epic convention](#), the great voyage. In this case, Belinda is traveling in a boat on the Thames River with youths and guardian sprites. They all look so glorious that they rival the sunshine.

Which . . . kiss: An offensive line that is out of place in an otherwise delightful poem

Stanza 2

This Nymph, to the destruction of
mankind,
Nourish'd two Locks, which graceful hung
behind 20
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.

**With hairy [springes](#) we the birds
betray, 25**
**Slight lines of hair surprise the [finny](#)
prey,**

**Fair tresses man's imperial race
ensnare,**
And beauty draws us with a single hair.
Th' advent'rous Baron the bright locks
admir'd;
He saw, he wish'd, and to the prize
aspir'd. 30

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.

Notes, Stanza 2

Love . . . detains: Young men fall in love with her glorious curls (labyrinths) of hair, becoming slaves to her beauty.

With . . . ensnare: Just as we catch game birds in snares and fish ("finny prey") in nets, Belinda catches men with her hair.

springes: traps, snares

finny: having fins

Stanza 3

For this, ere **Phoebus** rose, he had
implor'd 35
Propitious heav'n, and ev'ry pow'r ador'd,
But chiefly Love--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; 40

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:

The pow'rs gave ear, and granted half his
pray'r, 45

The rest, the winds dispers'd in empty air.

Notes, Stanza 3

Phoebus: Apollo, the sun god. *Phoebus*

means *bright one*. In Greek mythology, Phoebus Apollo became the sun, driving his golden chariot across the sky. Thus, *Phoebus* became a synonym for *sun*.
he: the baron (mentioned in Line 29).
to . . . built: From here down to Line 46, the poem says the baron places mementoes of young ladies of his acquaintance on an altar. Then he burns them in a "funeral" fire (pyre) fueled with love letters; he is offering a sacrifice that the gods may grant his wish to obtain locks of Belinda's hair.

Stanza 4

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; 50

Smooth flow the waves, the **Zephyrs**
gently play,
Belinda smil'd, and all the world was gay.
All but the **Sylph**--with careful thoughts
opprest,
Th' impending woe sat heavy on his
breast.

**He summons strait his Denizens of
air; 55
The lucid squadrons round the sails
repair:**

Soft o'er the **shrouds** aerial whispers
breathe,
That seem'd but Zephyrs to the train
beneath.
Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of

gold; 60
 Transparent forms, too fine for mortal
 sight,
 Their fluid bodies half dissolv'd in light,
 Loose to the wind their airy garments
 flew,
 Thin glitt'ring textures of the filmy dew,
 Dipt in the richest tincture of the
 skies, 65
 Where light **disports** in ever-mingling
 dyes,
 While ev'ry beam new transient colours
 flings,
 Colours that change whene'er they wave
 their wings.
 Amid the circle, on the gilded mast,
 Superior by the head, was Ariel
 plac'd; 70
 His purple **pinions** op'ning to the sun,
 He rais'd his azure wand, and thus begun.

Notes, Stanza 4

Zephyrs: west winds or soft breezes.

Sylph: Ariel

He . . . repair: Ariel summons his helpers,
 and they gather around Belinda.

shrouds: ropes or wires attached to a
 mast and secured on the sides of a ship.

They keep the mast steady.

light . . . flings: The light displays a
 variety of colors.

disports: plays; amuses itself

pinions: wings

Stanza 5

Ye Sylphs and **Sylphids**, to your chief give
 ear!

Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves, and Daemons,
 hear!

Ye know the spheres and various tasks

assign'd 75
 By laws eternal to th' aerial kind.
 Some in the fields of purest Aether play,
 And bask and whiten in the blaze of day.
 Some guide the course of wand'ring orbs
 on high,
 Or roll the planets thro' the boundless
 sky. 80
 Some less refin'd, beneath the moon's
 pale light
 Pursue the stars that shoot athwart the
 night,
 Or suck the mists in grosser air below,
 Or dip their pinions in the painted bow,
 Or brew fierce tempests on the wintry
 main, 85
 Or o'er the **glebe** distil the kindly rain.
 Others on earth o'er human race preside,
 Watch all their ways, and all their actions
 guide:
 Of these the chief the care of Nations
 own,
 And guard with Arms divine the British
 Throne. 90

Notes, Stanza 5

Sylphids: Female sylphs, female sprites
Ye know: From this phrase down to Line
 90, Ariel describes the tasks assigned to
 the various kinds of sprites.

glebe: earth

Stanza 6

Our humbler province is to tend the
 Fair,
 Not a less pleasing, tho' less glorious
 care;
 To save the powder from too rude a gale,
 Nor let th' imprison'd-essences exhale;
 To draw fresh colours from the vernal

flow'rs; 95
 To steal from rainbows e'er they drop in
 show'rs
 A brighter **wash**; to curl their waving
 hairs,
 Assist their blushes, and inspire their
 airs;
 Nay oft, in dreams, invention we bestow,
 To change a **Flounce**, or add a
Furbelow. 100
 This day, black Omens threat the
 brightest Fair,
 That e'er deserv'd a watchful spirit's care;
 Some dire disaster, or by force, or slight;
 But what, or where, the fates have wrapt
 in night.
 Whether the nymph shall break **Diana's**
law, 105
 Or some frail China jar receive a flaw;
 Or stain her honour or her new brocade;
 Forget her pray'rs, or miss a masquerade;
 Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball;
 Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock
 must fall. 110
 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 fav'rite
 Lock; 115
 Ariel himself shall be the guard of **Shock.**

Notes, Stanza 6

Our humbler province: From this phrase
 down to Line 100, Ariel tells his sprites
 that one of their jobs is to tend to the
 needs of fair ladies--to keep their
 powders and perfumes in place, to curl
 their hair, to put color in their cheeks,

etc.

wash: skin lotion

Flounce: frill or ruffle

Furbelow: also a ruffle or any other ornament

Diana's law: the law of Diana (Greek name, *Artemis*), Apollo's twin sister and the virgin goddess of chastity. This law required young women to maintain their chastity.

Zephyretta: Sprite in charge of regulating the wind generated by a fan.

drops: earrings.

Brillante: Sprite in charge of earrings

Momentilla: Sprite in charge of watching the time

Crispissa: Sprite in charge of guarding Belinda's favorite lock of hair.

Shock: Belinda's dog.

Stanza 7

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; 120

Form a strong line about the silver
bound,

And guard the wide circumference
around.

Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,
His post neglects, or leaves the fair at
large,

Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake
his sins, 125

Be stopp'd in vials, or transfix'd with pins;
Or plung'd in lakes of bitter washes lie,
Or wedg'd whole ages in a bodkin's eye:

Gums and **Pomatums** shall his flight
 restrain,
 While clogg'd he beats his silken wings in
 vain; 130
 Or Alum **styptics** with contracting pow'r
 Shrink his thin essence like a rivell'd
 flow'r:
 Or, as **Ixion** fix'd, the wretch shall feel
 The giddy motion of the whirling **Mill**,
 In fumes of burning Chocolate shall
 glow, 135
 And tremble at the sea that froths below!
 He spoke; the spirits from the sails
 descend;
 Some, orb in orb, around the nymph
 extend;
 Some **thrid** the **mazy** ringlets of her hair;
 Some hang upon the pendants of her
 ear: 140
 With beating hearts the dire event they
 wait,
 Anxious, and trembling for the birth of
 Fate.

Notes, Stanza 7

Pomatums: ointments
styptics: preparations that stop bleeding
rivel'ed: shriveled, shrunken
Ixion: In Greek mythology, King of
 Lapithae, who dared to fall in love with
 Hera, queen of the gods and wife of Zeus.
 To punish him, Zeus had him tied in Hades
 to a wheel that revolved nonstop.
Mill: chocolate mill.
thrid: threaded
mazy: like a maze

Canto III

Stanza 1

Close by those meads, for ever 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 5
 Of foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at
 home;
 Here thou, great **Anna!** whom three
 realms obey.
 Dost sometimes counsel take--and
 sometimes Tea.
 Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,
 To taste awhile the pleasures of a
 Court; 10
 In various talk th' instructive hours they
 past,
 Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;
 One speaks the glory of the British
 Queen,
 And one describes a charming Indian
 screen;
 A third interprets motions, looks, and
 eyes; 15
At ev'ry word a reputation dies.
 Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of
 chat,
 With singing, laughing, ogling, and _all
 that.

Notes, Stanza 1

meads: meadows

structure: the royal palace at Hampton
Court

Anna . . . three: Anne (1665-1714),
queen of England, Scotland, and Wales

from 1702 to 1714.

At . . . dies: There was much gossip at the court.

Stanza 2

Meanwhile, declining from the noon of
day,
The sun obliquely shoots his burning
ray; 20
The hungry Judges soon the sentence
sign,
And wretches hang that jury-men may
dine;
The merchant from th' Exchange returns
in peace,
And the long labours of the Toilet cease.
Belinda now, whom thirst of fame
invites, 25
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.** 30
Soon as she spreads her hand, th' aerial
guard
Descend, and sit on each important card:
First Ariel perch'd upon a **Matadore,**
Then each, according to the rank they
bore;
For Sylphs, yet mindful of their ancient
race, 35
Are, as when women, wondrous fond of
place.
Behold, four Kings in majesty rever'd,

With **hoary whiskers** and a forky beard;
And four fair Queens whose hands sustain
a flow'r,
Th' expressive emblem of their softer
pow'r; 40
Four Knaves in garbs succinct, a trusty
band,
Caps on their heads, and **halberts** in their
hand;
And particolour'd troops, a shining train,
Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain.

Notes, Stanza 2

two . . . Ombre: Ombre requires three players. Here, Belinda will vie with two gentlemen.

Straight . . . join: Here begins an [epic convention](#), the battle.

Each . . . nine: In Greek mythology, the nine muses of Mount Olympus. The cards, dealt in groups, correspond in number to the nine muses in Greek mythology.

Matadore (also Matador): card of the highest value in ombre

hoary whiskers: gray mustaches

halberts (also *halberds* or *halbards*): A halbert was a weapon with a shaft five to six feet long topped by a pike, or spearhead, and below the pike an axe blade. A warrior could thrust with a halbert, as with a spear, or hack, as with a battle-axe.

Stanza 3

The skillful Nymph reviews her force with
care: 45

Let Spades be trumps! she said, and
trumps they were.

Now move to war her sable Matadores,
In show like leaders of the swarthy Moors.
Spadillo first, unconquerable Lord!
Led off two captive trumps, and swept
the board. 50
As many more **Manillo** forc'd to yield,
And march'd a victor from the verdant
field.
Him **Basto** follow'd, but his fate more
hard
Gain'd but one trump and one **Plebeian**
card.
With his broad sabre next, a chief in
years, 55
The hoary Majesty of Spades appears,
Puts forth one manly leg, to sight
reveal'd,
The rest, his many-colour'd robe
conceal'd.
The rebel **Knave**, who dares his prince
engage,
Proves the just victim of his royal
rage. 60
Ev'n mighty Pam, that Kings and Queens
o'erthrew
And mow'd down armies in the fights of
Lu,
Sad chance of war! now destitute of aid,
Falls undistinguish'd by the victor spade!
Thus far both armies to Belinda
yield; 65
Now to the Baron fate inclines the field.
His warlike Amazon her host invades,
Th' imperial consort of the crown of
Spades.
The Club's black Tyrant first her victim
dy'd,
Spite of his haughty **mien**, and barb'rous
pride: 70
What boots the regal circle on his head,
His giant limbs, in state unwieldy spread;

The pierc'd battalions dis-united
 fall, 85
 In heaps on heaps; one fate o'erwhelms
 them all.
 The Knave of Diamonds tries his wily
 arts,
 And wins (oh shameful chance!) the
 Queen of Hearts.
 At this, the blood the virgin's cheek
 forsook,
 A livid paleness spreads o'er all her
 look; 90
 She sees, and trembles at th' approaching
 ill,
 Just in the jaws of ruin, and **Codille**.
 And now (as oft in some distemper'd
 State)
 On one nice Trick depends the gen'ral
 fate.
 An Ace of Hearts steps forth: The King
 unseen 95
 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. 100

Notes, Stanza 4

strow: archaic form of *strew*

Codille: A development in which the challenger failed to win the necessary cards. On the next play, Belinda wins the game.

long canals: The canals on the grounds of Hampton Court

Stanza 5

Oh thoughtless mortals! ever blind to
fate,
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate.
Sudden, these honours shall be snatch'd
away,
And curs'd for ever this victorious day.
For lo! the board with cups and spoons is
crown'd, 105
The **berries crackle**, and the mill turns
round;
On shining **Altars of Japan** they raise
The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze:
From silver spouts the grateful liquors
glide,
While **China's earth receives the**
smoking tide: 110
At once they gratify their scent and taste,
And frequent cups prolong the rich
repast.
Straight hover round the Fair her airy
band;
Some, as she sipp'd, the fuming liquor
fann'd,
Some o'er her lap their careful plumes
display'd, 115
Trembling, and conscious of the rich
brocade.
Coffee, (which makes the politician wise,
And see thro' all things with his half-shut
eyes)
Sent up in vapours to the Baron's brain
New Stratagems, the radiant Lock to
gain. 120
Ah cease, rash youth! desist ere't is too
late,
Fear the just Gods, and think of **Scylla's**
Fate!

As o'er the **fragrant steams** she bends her
 head.
 Swift to the Lock a thousand Sprites
 repair, 135
 A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the
 hair;
 And thrice they twitch'd the diamond in
 her ear;
 Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the foe
 drew near.
 Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought
 The close recesses of the Virgin's
 thought; 140
 As on the **nosegay** in her breast reclin'd,
 He watch'd th' Ideas rising in her mind,
 Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her art,
 An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.
 Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r
 expir'd, 145
 Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd.

Notes, Stanza 6

fragrant steams: steam from the hot
 coffee

weapon: scissors

nosegay: small bouquet of flowers

Stanza 7

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; 150
 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!
 Then flash'd the living lightning from her
 eyes, 155
 And screams of horror rend th' affrighted
 skies.
 Not louder shrieks to pitying heav'n are
 cast,
 When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe
 their last;
 Or when rich China vessels fall'n from
 high,
 In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments
 lie! 160
 Let wreaths of triumph now my temples
 twine
 (The victor cry'd) the glorious Prize is
 mine!
 While fish in streams, or birds delight in
 air,
 Or in a coach and six the British Fair,
 As long as **Atalantis** shall be
 read, 165
 Or the small pillow grace a Lady's bed,
 While visits shall be paid on solemn days,
 When num'rous wax-lights in bright order
 blaze,
 While nymphs take treats, or assignations
 give,
 So long my honour, name, and praise shall
 live! 170
 What Time would spare, from **Steel**
receives its date,
 And monuments, like men, submit to
 fate!
 Steel could the labour of the Gods
 destroy,
 And **strike to dust th' imperial tow'rs of**
Troy;
 Steel could the works of mortal pride
 confound, 175

And hew **triumphal arches** to the
ground.
What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs
should feel,
The conqu'ring force of unresisted steel?

Notes, Stanza 7

The Peer: the baron

Forfex: Latin for *scissors*

Atalantis: Reference to *The New Atlantis*,
a popular gossip novel by Mary de la
Riviere Manley (1663-1724). It alluded to
real-life scandals.

Steel receives: From this phrase down to
Line 178, the poem tells of the power of
steel to endure, to destroy the work of
gods and men, and, of course, to trim a
lock of hair.

strike . . . Troy: In the Trojan War, the
Greeks--using swords and spears of steel--
slaughtered the Trojans and destroyed
their city after gaining entry to the city
inside a wooden horse.

triumphal arches: arches built to honor
and memorialize great men and heroes.

Canto IV

Stanza 1

But anxious cares the pensive nymph
oppress'd,
And secret passions labour'd in her
breast.

Not youthful kings in battle seiz'd alive,

Not scornful virgins who their charms
survive,

Not ardent lovers robb'd of all their
bliss,

And in a vapour reach'd the dismal dome.
 No cheerful breeze this sullen region
 knows,
 The dreaded East is all the wind that
 blows. 20
 Here in a **grotto**, shelter'd close from air,
 And screen'd in shades from day's
 detested glare,
 She sighs for ever on her pensive bed,
 Pain at her side, and Megrim at her head.
 Two handmaids wait the throne: alike in
 place, 25
 But diff'ring far in figure and in face.
 Here stood Ill-nature like an ancient
 maid,
 Her wrinkled form in black and white
 array'd;
 With store of pray'rs, for mornings, nights,
 and noons,
 Her hand is fill'd; her bosom with
 lampoons. 30
 There Affectation, with a sickly mien,
 Shows in her cheek the roses of eighteen,
 Practis'd to lisp, and hang the head
 aside.
 Faints into airs, and languishes with
 pride,
 On the rich quilt sinks with becoming
 woe, 35
 Wrapt in a gown, for sickness, and for
 show.
 The fair ones feel such maladies as
 these,
 When each new night-dress gives a new
 disease.

Notes, Stanza 2

grotto: cave

Megrim: melancholy, depression, low spirits; headache

Stanza 3

A constant Vapour o'er the palace flies;
Strange phantoms rising as the mists
arise; 40
Dreadful, as hermit's dreams in haunted
shades,
Or bright, as visions of expiring maids.
Now glaring fiends, and snakes on **rolling
spires,**
Pale spectres, gaping tombs, and purple
fires:
Now lakes of liquid gold, **Elysian**
scenes, 45
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: 50
A **Pipkin** there, like **Homer's Tripod**
walks;
Here sighs a Jar, and there a Goose-pie
talks;
Men prove with child, as pow'ful fancy
works,
And maids turn'd bottles, call aloud for
corks.

Notes, Stanza 3

rolling spires: spirals

Elysian: heavenly

bodies . . . chang'd: From this phrase
down to Line 54, the poem describes
people changed into objects by the Queen

of Spleen. Victims of certain psychopathic disorders sometimes report that they have been changed into an object.

Pipkin: small pot or jar made of baked clay; small earthenware container

Homer's tripod: In Homer's *Iliad*, a tripod capable of moving itself.

Men . . . child: pregnant men

Stanza 4

**Safe past the Gnome thro' this fantastic
band, 55**

A branch of healing **Spleenwort** in his
hand.

Then thus address'd the pow'r: "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, 60**

**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.

A nymph there is, that all thy pow'r
disdains, 65

And thousands more in equal mirth
maintains.

But oh! if e'er thy 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; 70

**If e'er with airy horns I planted heads,
Or rumbled petticoats, or tumbled beds,**

Or caus'd suspicion when no soul was
rude,
Or discompos'd the head-dress of a Prude,
Or e'er to **costivelap-dog gave**
disease, 75
Which not the tears of brightest eyes
could ease:
Hear me, and touch Belinda with chagrin,
That single act gives half the world the
spleen."

Notes, Stanza 4

Safe past: safely passed

Spleenwort: type of fern with healing powers. The reference to it is an allusion to Vergil's *Aeneid*, in which the hero, Aeneas, passes safely into the underworld because he is carrying a magical golden bough.

Who . . . way: The Queen of Spleen can influence the behavior of young ladies in various ways.

Make . . . plays: Some young ladies under the influence of a fit caused by the Queen of Spleen may take medicine. Others may scribble (plays, notes, love letters, drawings).

pet: in a bad mood

Citron-waters: an alcoholic beverage distilled from the rinds of the lemon and citron (a yellow, thick-skinned fruit that resembles the lemon but is larger and less acidic)

If . . . heads: If I have ever planted horns in the heads of men. This clause is an allusion to an old tale saying that men would grow horns if their wives were unfaithful.

costive . . . disease: gave a scolding to a slow-moving or constipated pet dog

Stanza 5

The Goddess with a discontented air
Seems to reject him, tho' she grants his
pray'r. 80

**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, 85
Soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing
tears.

The Gnome rejoicing bears her gifts
away,
Spreads his black wings, and slowly
mounts to day.

Sunk in **Thalestris'** arms the nymph he
found,
Her eyes dejected and her hair
unbound. 90

Full o'er their heads **the swelling bag he
rent,**

And all the Furies issu'd at the vent.
Belinda burns with more than mortal ire,
And fierce Thalestris fans the rising fire.
"O wretched maid!" she spread her hands,
and cry'd, 95

(While Hampton's echoes, "Wretched
maid!" reply'd)

"Was it for this you took such constant
care

The **bodkin**, comb, and essence to
prepare?

For this your locks in **paper durance**

bound,
 For this with **tort'ring** irons wreath'd
 around? 100
 For this with **fillets** strain'd your tender
 head,
 And bravely bore the double **loads of
 lead?**
 Gods! shall the ravisher display your hair,
 While the **Fops** envy, and the Ladies
 stare!
 Honour forbid! at whose unrivall'd
 shrine 105
 Ease, pleasure, virtue, all our sex resign.
 Methinks already I your tears survey,
 Already hear the horrid things they say,
 Already see you a **degraded toast**,
 And all your honour in a whisper
 lost! 110
 How shall I, then, your helpless fame
 defend?
 'Twill then be infamy to seem your
 friend!
**And shall this prize, th' inestimable
 prize,**
Expos'd thro' crystal to the gazing eyes,
**And heighten'd by the diamond's circling
 rays,** 115
On that rapacious hand for ever blaze?
 Sooner shall grass in Hyde-park Circus
 grow,
 And wits take lodgings in the **sound of
 Bow;**
 Sooner let earth, air, sea, to Chaos fall,
 Men, monkeys, lap-dogs, parrots, perish
 all!" 120
 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, 125
He first the snuff-box 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!'t is past a jest--nay prithee,
pox!
Give her the hair"--he spoke, and rapp'd
his box.

Notes, Stanza 5

A wond'rous . . . winds: In Homer's *Odyssey*, Ulysses (Greek name, Odysseus) received a bag of winds from Aeolus, the god of the winds. When opened, the bag would release winds favorable to Ulysses on his sea voyage home.

Thalestris: See [characters](#), above.

the swelling . . . rent: The gnome ripped the bag open.

bodkin: hairpin

paper durance: confinement in paper. Belinda had apparently had her locks wrapped in paper while receiving a permanent.

tort'ring: torturing

fillets: bands of ribbon worn to keep hair in place

loads of lead: leaden ends of paper wraps encircling curls. The curls were wrapped in paper before treatment of them with chemicals that created a "permanent wave." The lead on the ends of the paper made it easy to attach one end of the paper to the other.

Fops: Vain men who pay undue attention to their clothes and manners.

degraded toast: a woman who has been toasted for her beauty but then degraded or embarrassed by some event

and shall . . . blaze: Belinda worries that the baron will display the prize (the lock of hair) in a diamond ring he will wear.

Hyde-park Circus: The circular road in Hyde Park where Londoners drove their carriages.

sound of Bow: Bow was a commercial district of London. It was unlikely that a fashionable person would want to live amid the hubbub there.

clouded cane: Sir Plume carries a cane, or walking stick, made of wood with dark (clouded) grain

Z--ds: zounds (pronounced ZOONS), a mild oath. *Zounds* is a corruption of *by His wounds*, meaning the wounds of Christ. When spoken quickly, *by His wounds* becomes *zounds*.

Stanza 6

"It grieves me much" (reply'd the Peer again)

"Who speaks so well should ever speak in vain.

But by this Lock, this sacred Lock I swear,

(Which never more shall join its parted hair;

Which never more its honours shall renew,

135

Clipp'd from the lovely head where late it grew)

That while my nostrils draw the vital air,

This hand, which won it, shall for ever wear."

He spoke, and speaking, in proud triumph
spread
The long-contended honours of her
head. 140

Notes, Stanza 6

In this passage, the baron says that pleas for him to return the lock of hair are in vain, for he means to keep and display it.

Stanza 7

But Umbriel, hateful Gnome! forbears not
so;
He breaks the Vial whence the sorrows
flow.
Then see! the nymph in beauteous grief
appears,
Her eyes half-languishing, half-drown'd in
tears;
On her heav'd bosom hung her drooping
head, 145
Which, with a sigh, she rais'd; and thus
she 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! 150
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 the gilt Chariot never marks the
way, 155
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! 160
'Twas 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, 165
In mystic visions, now believ'd too late!
See the poor remnants of these slighted
hairs!
My hands shall **rend** what ev'n thy rapine
spares:
These in two **sable** ringlets taugt to
break,
Once gave new beauties to the snowy
neck; 170
The sister-lock now sits uncouth, alone,
And in its fellow's fate foresees its own;
Uncurl'd it hangs, the fatal shears
demands,
And tempts once more thy sacrilegious
hands.
Oh hadst thou, cruel! been content to
seize 175
Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!"

Notes, Stanza 7

But Umbriel: From this phrase down to
Line 145, the poem says Umbriel breaks
the vial of tears he obtained from the
Queen of Spleen, enabling Belinda to vent
her sorrow in a storm of tears.

Bohea: type of black tea grown in a mountain region of China
patch-box: box containing a preparation for making beauty marks
Poll: pet parrot
Shock: the dog
rend: tear out
sable: black

Canto V

Stanza 1

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, 5
While Anna begg'd and Dido rag'd in vain.
Then grave Clarissa graceful wav'd her fan;
Silence ensu'd, and thus the nymph began.
"Say why are Beauties prais'd and honour'd most,
The wise man's passion, and the vain man's
toast? 10
Why deck'd with all that land and sea afford,
Why Angels call'd, and Angel-like ador'd?
Why round our coaches crowd the white-glov'd Beaux,
Why bows the **side-box** from its inmost rows;
How vain are all these glories, all our pains,
15
Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains:
That men may say, when we the **front-box** grace:
'Behold the first in virtue as in face!'
Oh! if to dance all night, and dress all day,
Charm'd the small-pox, or chas'd old-age
away; 20
Who would not scorn what housewife's cares produce,
Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?

To patch, nay ogle, might become a Saint,
Nor could it sure be such a sin to paint.
But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,
25
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? 30
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."

Notes, Stanza 1

Jove: Jupiter, Roman name for Zeus, the king of the gods in Greek mythology.

the Trojan: . . . vain: allusion to Aeneas, the hero of Vergil's *Aeneid*. While sojourning in Carthage, Aeneas became the lover of Carthage's queen, Dido. Although Dido and her sister, Anna, pleaded for him to remain in Carthage, Aeneas abruptly left her to continue his sea voyage to Italy. There, according to Roman mythology, he founded a colony that would blossom into Roman civilization.

side box, front-box: In the theatre, young ladies preferred the front boxes, facing the stage. Young men sat in the side boxes

Stanza 2

So spoke the Dame, but no applause
ensu'd; 35
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; 40
 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.
 So when bold Homer makes the Gods
 engage, 45
 And heav'nly breasts with human passions rage;
 'Gainst **Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes** arms;
 And all Olympus rings with loud alarms:
 Jove's thunder roars, heav'n trembles all around,
 Blue **Neptune** storms, the bellowing deeps
 resound: 50
 Earth shakes her nodding tow'rs, the ground gives way.
 And the pale ghosts start at the flash of day!
 Triumphant Umbriel on a **sconce's** height
 Clapp'd his glad wings, and sate to view the fight:
 Propp'd on the **bodkin spears**, the Sprites
 survey 55
 The growing combat, or assist the fray.
 While thro' the press enrag'd Thalestris flies,
 And scatters death around from both her eyes,
 A Beau and Witling perish'd in the throng,
 One died in metaphor, and one in
 song. 60
 "O cruel nymph! a living death I bear,"
 Cry'd **Dapperwit**, and sunk beside his chair.
 A mournful glance **Sir Fopling** upwards cast,
 "**Those eyes are made so killing**"--was his last.
 Thus on **Maeander's** flow'ry margin lies
 65
 Th' expiring Swan, and as he sings he dies.

Notes, Stanza 2

whalebones: horny plates in the jaws of baleen whales that catch plankton. Tough and flexible, they were used to stiffen women's corsets.

Pallas: Another name for Athena (Roman name, Minerva), goddess of wisdom and war

Mars: god of war (Greek name, Ares)

Latona: mother of Apollo and Artemis (Diana). Her Greek name was Leto.

Hermes: messenger of the Olympian gods (Roman name, Mercury)

Neptune: god of the sea (Greek name, Poseidon)

sconce: bracket on a wall for holding a candle or a torch; candlestick holder affixed to a wall plaque.

bodkin spears: pins

Witling: a person who tries to be witty

Dapperwit: character in the comedy *Love in a Wood; or St. James Park* (1671), by playwright William Wycherley (1640-1716)

Sir Fopling: character in the comedy *The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), by George Etherege (1635-1691)

Those . . . killing: words from an opera

Maeander: winding river in Western Turkey. The modern name for this river is Menderes.

Stanza 3

When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down,
Chloe stepp'd in, and kill'd him with a frown;
She smil'd to see the doughty hero slain,
But, at her smile, the Beau reviv'd again.

70

Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air,
Weighs the Men's wits against the Lady's hair;
The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;
At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside.
See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,

75

With more than usual lightning in her eyes:
Nor fear'd the Chief th' unequal fight to try,
Who sought no more than on his foe to die.
But this bold Lord with manly strength endu'd,
She with one finger and a thumb

subdu'd: 80

Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew,

A charge of **Snuff** the wily virgin threw;
The Gnomes direct, to ev'ry atom just,
The pungent grains of titillating dust.
Sudden, with starting tears each eye
o'erflows, 85
And the high dome re-echoes to his nose.
Now meet thy fate, incens'd Belinda cry'd,
And drew a deadly **bodkin** from her side.
(The same, his ancient personage to deck,
Her great great grandsire wore about his
neck, 90
In three seal-rings; which after, melted down,
Form'd a vast buckle for his widow's gown:
Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew;
Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs,
95
Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)

Notes, Stanza 3

Jove: King of the gods (Greek name, Zeus)

endu'd: *endued*, meaning *endowed*

Snuff: tobacco reduced to a powder. It is inhaled through the nose, rubbed on the gums, or chewed.

bodkin: dagger of her great-great grandfather. It was melted down to form a buckle, then a whistle. Part of it eventually became a pin (another meaning of *bodkin*).

Stanza 4

"Boast not my fall" (he cry'd) "insulting foe!
Thou by some other shalt be laid as low,
Nor think, to die dejects my lofty mind:
All that I dread is leaving you behind!
100
Rather than so, ah let me still survive,
And burn in **Cupid's** flames--but burn alive."
"Restore the Lock!" she cries; and all around

"Restore the Lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound.
Not fierce **Othello** in so loud a strain

105

Roar'd for the handkerchief that caus'd his pain.
But see how oft ambitious aims are cross'd,
And chiefs contend 'till all the prize is lost!
The Lock, obtain'd with guilt, and kept with pain,
In ev'ry place is sought, but sought in vain:

110

With such a prize no mortal must be blest,
So heav'n decrees! with heav'n who can contest?
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,

115

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,

120

Cages for gnats, and chains to yoke a flea,
Dry'd butterflies, and **tomes of casuistry**.

Notes, Stanza 4

Cupid: god of love (Greek name: Eros)

Othello: In Shakespeare's play of the same name, Othello wrongly believes his wife has been unfaithful because her handkerchief was found in the possession of another man. He shouts condemnations at her. Click here for the [Othello Study Guide](#) if you wish additional information.

Hero: priestess of Aphrodite. She commits suicide after her lover, Leander, drowns. This word may also refer to a character in Ludovico Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (1516), in which the title character loses his wits. They are thought to be on the moon.

riband: ribbon

tomes: books

casuistry: (1) system that attempted to answer moral

questions by applying the principles of ethics and theology to specific cases; (2) method of attempting to justify a seemingly sinful act as moral through the application of deceptive reasoning.

Stanza 5

But trust the Muse--she saw it upward rise,
Tho' mark'd by none but quick, poetic eyes:
(So **Rome's great founder** to the heav'ns
withdrew, 125

To **Proculus** alone confess'd in view)
A sudden Star, it shot thro' liquid air,
And drew behind a radiant trail of hair.
Not **Berenice's** Locks first rose so bright,
The heav'ns bespangling with dishevell'd light.
130

The Sylphs behold it kindling as it flies,
And pleas'd pursue its progress thro' the skies.
This the **Beau monde** shall from the **Mall** survey,
And hail with music its propitious ray.
This the blest Lover shall for **Venus** take,
135

And send up vows from **Rosamonda's** lake.
This **Partridge** soon shall view in cloudless skies,
When next he looks thro' **Galileo's** eyes;
And hence th' egregious wizard shall foredoom
The **fate of Louis**, and the fall of Rome.
140

Then cease, bright Nymph! to mourn thy ravish'd hair,
Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!
Not all the tresses that fair head can boast,
Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.
For, after all the murders of your eye,
145

When, after millions slain, yourself shall die:
When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,

And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.
150

Notes, Stanza 5

Rome's great founder. Romulus. According to Roman mythology, he and his brother, Remus, founded Rome. Romulus became the city's first king. After he died in a storm, the Romans assumed he was carried into the heavens, and they worshipped him as the god Quirinus.
Proculus: Roman senator. After Romulus died, Proculus had a vision in which Romulus said Rome was destined for greatness.

Berenice: Reference to Berenice's Hair, a star group that astronomers call *Coma Berenices*. This northern constellation is between the constellations Boötes and Leo and north of the constellation Virgo. Berenice herself was the wife of Egypt's Ptolemy III Euergetes. When he went off on a dangerous mission to Syria, Berenice cut off a lock of her hair as a votive offering in praying for his safe return. Legend says that it was taken into the heavens to form a new constellation.

Beau monde: French for fashionable society

Mall: avenue in the St. James district of London's Westminster borough. It is near St. James's Palace, the royal residence after fire destroyed Whitehall Palace in 1698. The Mall was a popular walkway for the well-to-do residents of St. James.

Venus: goddess of love (in Greek mythology, Aphrodite).

Romsamonda's lake: lake in St. James's Park.

Partridge: allusion to John Partridge, an astrologer who made unfounded predictions in almanacs

Galileo's eyes: lenses of a telescope

fate of Louis: fate of the King of France