

Block

4**ALEXANDER POPE: 'THE RAPE OF THE LOCK'**

UNIT 1**The Age of Alexander Pope** 183

UNIT 2**Life and Writings of Alexander Pope** 195

UNIT 3**Analysis of Canto 3** 206

UNIT 4**Character Analysis and Style** 220

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December, 2020

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ISBN – xx-xxxx-xxx-x

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Further information on the Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi 110068.

Laser Typesetting : Akashdeep Printers, 20-Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002

Printed at :

“Paper used: Agro based environment friendly”

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Block 4 which deals with Alexander Pope, one of the greatest poets of the earliest 18th century and best known for his satirical poetry. We will be taking up Pope's very popular poem— 'The Rape of the Lock', with special reference to Canto 3 of this poem.

UNIT 1 deals with a brief history of English literature up till the 18th century so that you can place the text that we are taking up, in context.

UNIT 2 deals with the life and writings of Alexander Pope and how they reflect the ethos of the age popularly known as the Augustan Age. It is always beneficial to know the personal details of writers because, more often than not, it is their life experiences that shape their works.

UNIT 3 gives you a detailed analysis of Canto 3. We have provided the complete text of Canto 3 so that you do not have to look elsewhere for it. We have also talked about the characteristic features of a classical epic so that you can easily identify how this mock epic is different from it.

UNIT 4 deals with the various characters that appear in this poem and the style of writing that has been used by Pope to present his poem.

We hope you enjoy reading this Block.



UNIT 1 THE AGE OF ALEXANDER POPE

Structure

- 1.0 Aims and Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 A Brief History of English Literature up to the 18th Century
 - 1.2.1 Old English
 - 1.2.2 Middle English
 - 1.2.3 Modern English
 - 1.2.4 The 18th Century
 - 1.2.5 Rise of the English Novel
- 1.3 Characteristics of Early 18th Century Poetry (Augustan Age)
 - 1.3.1 Differences Between Classicism and Romanticism
- 1.4 Glossary
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our aim through this Unit is to give you a brief history of English literature till the 18th century so that the text that you will be studying can be placed in context.

At the end of your study of this Unit, you will be able to:

- See how the ethos of the age was reflected in the poetry of the period
- Identify the characteristics of English poetry of the early 18th century (Augustan Age).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will give you a brief introduction to the History of English literature till the 18th century which had the distinction of the emergence of two distinguished poets, John Dryden (1631-1700) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Though Dryden died at the turn of the century, he and Pope are considered to be poets belonging to the Augustan age and they are among the greatest satirical poets of England. Besides their creative genius, they were also known for their critical works. They both were among the earliest poet-critics of England.

The period in which Dryden wrote was called the Restoration age though he is clubbed with Pope as an Augustan poet, as the age of Pope is known as the Augustan age. Dryden received classical education and was a graduate from Trinity College. But Pope had no formal classical education and he was a self educated person. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, both were celebrated poets of England who embellished their poetic genius with their critical insight and discernment during England's Restoration and Augustan period. They wrote about the effective qualities of a critic in their prose essays.

While they both wrote about the effective qualities of a critic in their prose essays, Pope wrote that effective qualities are needed not only in a critic but also in the author and the reader. While our focus in this Block is on Alexander Pope and poetry written in the first half of the 18th century, we will briefly present you the history of English literature leading up to the 18th century to facilitate your understanding of Augustan poetry of which Alexander Pope was the exemplar.

1.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE UPTO THE 18TH CENTURY

When we discuss the history of English literature, we look at it from three historical periods:

The first period is known as the Anglo Saxon age. In the context of language and literature written in this period, we refer to it as Old English.

The second period is known as the Middle English period or the Medieval age and the language and literature of this period is referred to as Middle English.

The third is known as the Modern period. The language is familiar to us as it is very close to the language of our times. The last mentioned i.e., the Modern period continues till date. We are familiar with the language of the Modern period as the spoken and written language is closer and reasonably similar to what we use today. But this cannot be said of Old English and Middle English. The archaic and outmoded use of language and syntax are difficult to comprehend. It is easy for us to understand the language of Shakespeare who wrote in the 17th century as compared to works written in Old English and Middle English.

1.2.1 Old English

Old English literature consists of sermons and saints' lives, biblical translations, translated Latin works of the early Church Fathers, Anglo-Saxon chronicles and narrative history works, laws, wills and other legal works and practical works on grammar, medicine, geography and poetry.

The most notable among these is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a historical record. This Chronicle was begun about the time of King Alfred's reign (871–899) and continued for more than three centuries. Old English poetry had for its content heroic actions and codes of conduct and Christian ideals and it employed various figures of speech to enhance the diction.

1.2.2 Middle English

The Norman conquest of the 11th century (1066 A.D) started the Middle English period, also known as the Medieval period. The French under the leadership of William the conqueror defeated the English King Harold. The conquerors brought with them French culture and French language that influenced and enriched the native literature and culture. Some themes of medieval literature were the lives of the Saints, religious morals, values and ethics as applied to everyday life, ancient classical history, poetry, prayer and meditations and the code of chivalry and courtly manners.

This was a period which believed in a theo-centric view of the world and placed God at the centre of the Universe. Hence the writers of the Medieval age used themes related to religion, chivalrous (heroic) deeds and love. This period saw the development of the lyric and the introduction of rhyme, rhythm and meter in English poetry. Geoffrey Chaucer is regarded as the Father of English poetry, best known for his *Canterbury Tales*. The prologue is interesting as it provides a basic descriptive list of the twenty-nine people who become pilgrims on a journey to Canterbury, each telling a story along the way. The narrator describes and lists the pilgrims skillfully, according to their rank and status. Chaucer begins with a Prologue and follows it with twenty nine tales.

1.2.3 Modern English

With the ascension of Queen Elizabeth I to the throne of England, the Elizabethan age begins which marks the start of the Modern age of English literature. Elizabethan age is best known as the Golden age of English literature. It could boast of a number of great writers like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Kyd and Ben Jonson. Poetry and drama reached the highest scale both in the quality and in the number of plays and poems written during this period. After Queen Elizabeth, there was a brief period of rule of Oliver Cromwell that displaced monarchy by Commonwealth, during which period there was strict enforcement of morality in all political and social spheres. Cromwell is best known for making England a Republic and he led the Commonwealth to govern England. This was followed by the Restoration age in the last quarter of the 17th century when monarchy was restored with the return of Charles II as the King of England. So the history of England moves from the 16th to the 18th century through the Elizabethan age to the Commonwealth to the Restoration age to the Augustan age through the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I, Charles I, Charles II and Queen Anne.

The change of government from Commonwealth to that of Monarchy brought about a social transformation that is well reflected in the literature of that period. The puritanical morality that was in force during the regime of Cromwell gave way to licentiousness and laxity of moral earnestness. But this was also the period that saw the rapid development of science and reason. Thus from the early times to the 18th century, we notice a progressive development from the heroic ideals of the early period to the theo-centric views of the medieval period to man centered works that reflect upon emotions, imagination and human interests.

1.2.4 The 18th Century

The first half of the 18th century is known as the Age of Science and Reason. 18th century English literature has the distinction of being variedly described as the Augustan age, the age of Enlightenment, the Neo-Classical age, the Golden age of Science and Reason, the age of Prose, the age of Satire, the age of Political literature, the age of the Novel etc. Even a cursory look at the labels will give us the clue that all that was written had at its core the exercise of reason and logic instead of emotion and imagination that characterized the previous Elizabethan age. It marked a return to the Classical age which laid emphasis upon elegance, beauty, order, precision and balance and hence was known as the Neo-Classical age. It is also known as the Augustan age. The name comes from the Roman emperor Augustus, who ruled when classical writers like Virgil, Horace and Ovid

were writing, and therefore 18th century literature, which was greatly influenced by classical writers, suggests a return to the Classical age. The elegant literature of the Augustan age thus acquired the additional name as the Neo Classical age.

For the first time, England adopted a mixed monarchy with two political parties fighting elections to rule the nation. These were known as the Whigs and the Tories (equivalent of the Labour and the Conservative parties of the present times). The only way to reach the electorate was through political pamphleteering which involved a generous use of satire to attack the opponent. Thus during this period, literature became a handmaid to politics and hence this was the age of Political literature. Political debates and political persuasion employed a generous amount of invectives and vitriol and this contributed to the rise of prose and poetic satire. Hence the 18th century is also known as the age of Satire.

All these needed clarity of communication. Science, politics, social etiquette, reason and logic all demanded straightforward prose —prose that uses everyday language of conversation resembling the way we speak, prose that articulates without being limited by metrical formalities, prose that is simple and elegant and not decorative and ornamental. Thus prose became the handy vehicle for expression employed in pamphlets, scientific treatises, political discourses and codification of social manners and conduct. Hence the 18th century came to be known as the age of Prose.

One other notable feature of this period was the rise of the middle-class. While the nobility and the aristocratic class were well educated in Latin and Greek and could appreciate high culture and high art, the middle-class wanted something that it could understand—something that was interesting and educative, entertaining and informative. This gave rise to *Periodical Essays* which were light and easy to follow for the middle class. Addison and Steele who were the pioneers in publishing Periodical essays, said that they wanted to “bring philosophy out of closets and libraries, colleges and schools to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables....” *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were two of the periodical journals that were popular in the 18th century. *The Tatler* was started by Richard Steele in 1709, a British literary and society journal and published for two years. Addison joined Steele and closed *The Tatler* and in its place started *The Spectator*. The two greatest gifts of the 18th century to English literature were the periodical essay and the novel. Both genres needed simple, uncomplicated prose. Hence this age is known as the age of periodical essay and the age of the novel.

1.2.5 Rise of the English Novel

The 18th century saw the rise of the English novel. Novel as a prose narrative depicting real life began in the 18th century. Earlier there was prose fiction but that did not present a true picture of real life. Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe* is considered to be the father of the English novel. Prior to novel writing, he was the author of hundreds of political and social pamphlets that reflect the major social, political, economic, and literary trends of his age.

At the age of 59 he wrote his first novel *Robinson Crusoe*. While at school, you must have read this as an adventure story. But this book by Daniel Defoe is important from the point of view of literature as it started the novel, a new genre in English literature. This novel for the first time presented a realistic description of a desert island where Crusoe was ship wrecked, followed by a narration of his

meeting with the native of the island, whom he names Friday and finally about his eventual rescue. The novel explores man's ability to endure and survive among hostile conditions and ultimately triumph over them. The novel moves through York in England, then London, then Sallee, in North Africa, then Brazil, then a deserted island off Trinidad, then back to England, then Lisbon, then overland from Spain towards England, then England, and finally the island again. Apart from the gripping narrative, this is the first novel that shows Augustan England's interest in "travel literature, religious allegory, and mercantilist economics." (Encyclopedia.com)

There are three major reasons for the rise of the novel in the 18th century. Firstly, many new innovations in printing technology reduced the prices of novels. This led to the expansion of the reading public. Secondly, novels presented a new world that was interesting and relatable. This world as depicted in books, however fictitious it may be, was a world that paralleled the readers' world and, therefore, was believable and readers could relate to it. Thus novels in their printed form attracted huge readership. The plots and the subplots were credible and transported the readers into the world and life of the characters. Thirdly, as stated earlier the rise of the new middle class seeking new forms of reading also contributed to the rise of the novel. The joy of reading, sharing and discussing novels was a welcome change for this new class who aspired to behave and act like the upper class or the gentry.

You will be surprised to learn that the most popular and distinguished novelists you may have read belong to the 18th century. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a well known novel that has been serialized also as a TV serial and has been adapted as a Bollywood film. Jane Austen's novels are known as the novels of Manners. The other kinds of novels of this period include the Picaresque novels of Henry Fielding, the Epistolary novels of Samuel Richardson, the Satirical novels of Jonathan Swift and the Sentimental novel or the novel of sensibility of Lawrence Sterne.

Check Your Progress 1

(i) Write a brief note on the three periods of English Literature.

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(ii) What are the different labels given to the 18th century?

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(iii) What were the main reasons for the rise of the novel in the 18th century?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit)

1.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY 18TH CENTURY POETRY (AUGUSTAN AGE) :

The foregoing history of English literature of the 18th century has been included to illustrate how 18th century poetry had elements of the characteristics of the novel, periodical essay, satire, prose and reason. From the above brief history of 18th century English literature, it is clear that the ethos of the age was fully reflected in the prose and poetry of the period.

Even when we read 18th century poetry, we will find a smooth flow of the poetic lines as we find in prose— direct, clear cut and forthright. There are no complicated poetic structures and poetry is written in rhymed couplets. How do we define rhymed couplets? Rhymed couplets are two lines of the same length that rhyme and complete one thought. There is no limit to the length of the lines. Rhyming words are words that sound the same when spoken; they don't necessarily have to be spelt the same.

Let us now enumerate the characteristics of 18th century poetry.

1. 18th century poetry is known as Neo Classical poetry. "Neo" means new and "Classical" means writings that follow the style and works of ancient Greek and Roman poets. So neo classical poetry is a return to and restoration of classicism which is associated with the art of antiquity— harmony, clarity, restraint, universality, and ideal
2. Rationalism: This is the most essential feature of Neo Classical poetry. It is an established fact that poetry is the vehicle of emotion and imagination while prose is the vehicle of reason and intellect. Can you write a scientific treatise in poetry? Not really. Can you express mathematical theorems through poetry? No again. In a similar way emotions are best expressed through poetry. Poetry is the natural and spontaneous overflow of our emotions and imagination. Abstract ideas, heightened feelings and deep emotions that cannot be directly expressed through prose need poetry which is a free flow of sounds, images and ideas.

But in the 18th century as pointed above, the poets preferred logic, reason, sound sense and judgement as against feelings, sentiments and emotions. The 18th century Neo Classical poets viewed reason as the mainspring and inspiration for their poetry. This emphasis on reason, in a large measure curtailed spontaneity and rejected fancy and imagination which

form the very source of Romantic poetry. As a result 18th century poetry often seemed artificial and manufactured and at times laboured.

3. Neo Classicism is distinctly different from Romanticism. If we understand this difference, it will be easy to figure out the characteristics of 18th century poetry. What are the differences? In English literature, we speak of 18th century as a return to the Classics while the 19th century as a revival of Romanticism.

1.3.1 Differences between Classicism and Romanticism.

- (a) The first difference is that Classicism stresses on reason, and Romanticism on imagination.
- (b) Secondly, diction in Classical poetry is more rigid and measured unlike in Romantic poetry which prefers simple diction of common people using their everyday idiom.
- (c) Thirdly, Classicists' emphasis is on form, simplicity, proportion, and restrained emotion. Even when Romanticists emphasize simplicity, they allow a spontaneous flow of emotion without any restraint. 18th century poetry is mainly in the form of heroic couplets. A heroic couplet is a rhyming couplet, or a pair of lines (two lines) with end rhymes in iambic pentameter, meaning there are five iambic 'feet' on each line. The heroic couplet traditionally appears in long, narrative poems called epics, but has been used by Dryden and Pope in their mock epics that parody the 'heroic' tone of epic poetry. Every couplet is a complete unit with a grammatical pause at the end of the second line. In Romantic poetry, there is an amazing variety of form, with stanza replacing the heroic couplet.
- (d) Fourthly, the world according to the Classical poets has a rigid structure. For them this meant enforcing morals and ethics in society that parallels the strictly divine world order,
- (e) Fifthly, Neo Classical poetry is objective, while Romantic poetry is highly subjective. The Romantics gave free and uninhibited expression of what they intuitively felt. The Romantic poets expressed their own ideas and beliefs. But the Classical poets followed the prescribed form and beliefs as they felt they were universal for all ages and there was no attempt to go beyond the codified order.
- (f) Sixthly, this strong belief in an unchanging rational and moral order made the Classicists believe that everything including nature and human nature can be rationally apprehended. Romanticists viewed nature as mysterious and ever changing and therefore, for them, the functioning of the universe cannot be rationally understood and at best can be intuitively and imaginatively apprehended.
- (g) Seventhly, Classicists believed in traditional values of humanity and would not challenge tradition and the laws of existence that it had sanctioned. They thought that it was literature's function to highlight these values that gave no quarter for even a trivial change. This again limits man's knowledge potential as he is not free to explore beyond the set values. As for the Romantics, they wrote about how man has no

boundaries and he has endless possibilities to help him in his spiritual growth and personal development.

- (h) Eighthly, as a result of this belief in strong traditional codes and ethical rules, the 18th century was conducive to the development of satire and mock heroic poems. Anyone who deviated from the set norms of behaviour or ethical living or moral conduct was severely mocked at. The Romanticists wanted to break away from the traditions and conventions that were so dear to the Classicists and make way for individuality and experimentation. One of the fundamentals of Romanticism is their belief in the natural goodness of man, the idea that man in a state of nature will behave well but is often hindered by civilization and enforcement of norms, whereby he loses his innocence. We see that the protagonists of the great Romantic poems are simple innocent rural folks like the Solitary Reaper, the Idiot Boy, the Leech Gatherer, Michael, Lucy Gray etc.

Check Your Progress 2.

- (i) What is Neo-Classical poetry?

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- (ii) How do you differentiate between Classicism and Romanticism?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit)

1.4 GLOSSARY

Augustan Age:	Early 18 th Century, ending in the 1740s after the death of Alexander Pope(1744) and Jonathan Swift(1745). The Augustan age in England saw the reigns of Queen Anne, King George I and George II
Restoration Age:	It marked the return of Charles II as King (1660–85) following the period of Oliver Cromwell’s Commonwealth.
Embellish:	Enrich
Discernment:	Judgement,

Exemplar:	Model, epitome, standard
Anglo Saxon Age:	From the 7 th century to the Norman Conquest in 1066AD
Middle English period: or the Medieval Age	From 1100 A.D to 1500 A.D
Modern period:	From 1450 to the present
Norman:	Member of the people of Normandy descended from the 10 th -century Scandinavian conquerors of the country and the native French
Norman Conquest:	The conquest of England by the Normans under William the Conqueror, especially the Battle of Hastings in 1066.
Chivalry:	Gallantry
Courtly manners:	Refined, elegant manners.
Mixed monarchy:	That includes monarchy with elements of democracy and aristocracy
Theo-centric:	Having God as the focal point of thoughts, interests, and feelings.
Lyric:	A category of poetry that expresses subjective thoughts and feelings, often in a song like style or form.
Rhyme:	Is similar in sound, especially with respect to the last syllable;
Rhythm:	The basic unit in poetry such as the beat
Meter:	The arrangement of words in rhythmic lines; poetic measure.
Canterbury:	A city of southeast England east-southeast of London. Its 11 th century cathedral was an important medieval pilgrimage center for the English people of the medieval period.
Elizabethan age:	A period in British history during the reign of Elizabeth I in the 16 th century; an age marked by literary achievement and domestic prosperity
Commonwealth:	The political structure during the period from 1649 to 1660 when England and Wales, later along with Ireland and Scotland, were governed as a republic after the end of the second English Civil War and the trial and execution of Charles I.
Periodical Essay:	A periodical essay is an essay (that is, a short work of nonfiction) published in a magazine or journal—in particular, an essay that appears as part of a series. The 18 th century is considered the great age of the periodical essay in English.

**ALEXANDER POPE:
'THE RAPE OF THE
LOCK'**

Genre:	A kind of literary or artistic work (literary genre)
Gentry:	People of genteel birth, good breeding or high, social position
Ethos:	Distinguishing character or disposition of a community, group, person, etc
Antiquity:	Ancient times
Delineate:	Define, characterize, depict
Diction:	Choice and use of words in speech and writing
Iamb (from iambic):	A foot of two syllables, the first short or unstressed, the second long or stressed.
Pentameter:	Verse written in lines of five metrical feet
Parody:	To mock, to caricature
Obviate:	Do away with
Intuitively:	Instinctually
Novel of Manners:	Fiction that re-creates a social world, conveying with finely detailed observation the customs, values, and mores of a highly developed and complex society
Picaresque Novel:	Prose fiction that depicts the adventures of a roguish, but "appealing hero", of low social class, who lives by his wits in a corrupt society
Epistolary novel:	Novel written as a series of documents. The usual form is letters, although diary entries, newspaper clippings and other documents are sometimes used
Satirical Novel:	Novel that ridicules a specific topic in order to provoke readers into changing their opinion of it. By attacking what they see as human folly, satirists usually apply their own opinions on how the thing being attacked can be improved
Sentimental Novel:	Novel which celebrates the emotional and intellectual concepts of sentiment.
Didacticism:	Communication that is suitable for or intended to be instructive.

Check Your Progress 3.

Attempt to paraphrase the following lines from Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*:

Those RULES of old discovered, not devised,
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodized;
Nature, like Liberty, is but restrained
By the same Laws which first herself ordained.

1.5 SUMMING UP

In this Unit we gave you a brief history of English Literature till the 18th century, so that you can now place Alexander Pope and his *The Rape of the Lock* in its proper context. We also gave you the characteristics of English poetry of the Augustan age. We also spoke about Classicism and Neo- Classicism. Let's go over these once again.

- belief in reason, civilized, modern, sophisticated, interest in urban society, human nature,
- interest in idea of order, urban society, and human nature and formal correctness in conduct and behaviour and unquestioning adherence to tradition and morals
- love of satire and mock-heroic writings
- emphasis on proportion, perfection in form and restraint
- focus on realism and public themes and
- use of impersonal objectivity
- make use of scholarly allusions such as literary, biblical and religious allusions in their poetry to convey their message to their readers effectively and easily. The literary allusions are generally from classical poets like Homer, Virgil and Horace.
- emphasis on Didacticism. Neo-Classical poets laid stress significantly on the didactic purpose of poetry. To inform and to entertain, to instruct and delight were the main purposes of their writings
- emphasis on Realism is the hallmark of Neo-Classical poetry. The Neo-Classical poets were realists who reflected the true nature of their society unlike Romantic poets, who were living in their own world of imagination. The 18th century writers were hard realists and they presented the true picture of their society. They were keen observers of human nature and faithfully reported what they saw and experienced in their poetry. Neoclassical poets were men of action and practically lived in the midst of people.
- adherence to Classical Rules: In their passion for order, they became adherents to classical rules and employed them in their poetry as much as possible.

1.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- (i) Old English Period; Middle English and Modern English
- (ii) The 18th century is variously called the age of science and reason; the Augustan age; age of Enlightenment; Neo- Classical age; age of prose and satire etc.

- (iii) The main reasons for the rise of the English novel in the 18th century were innovations in printing technology which reduced the price of novels. Secondly, novels presented a world which was interesting and credible and thirdly the rise of the middle class contributed to the readership as these people aspired to be like the upper class.

Check Your Progress 2

- (i) Neo- Classical poetry is characterized by its return to classicism by following the style of the Greek and Roman poets. So it used harmony, clarity and restraint.
- (ii) The stress of Classicism is on reason while Romanticism uses imagination. Classic diction is more rigid while Romantic diction is simpler. (For more differences please refer to 1.3.1)

Check Your Progress 3

(Hint) Rules are to be followed, rules are not new, but come from antiquity and therefore timeless, Nature with all its abundance is always remarkable for its order (such as the clocklike precision with which seasons appear) which illustrates the law that freedom and liberty are essential but have to be restrained.



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UNIT 2 LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ALEXANDER POPE

Structure

- 2.0 Aims and Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Life of Alexander Pope
- 2.3 Literary Works of Pope
 - 2.3.1 'An Essay on Criticism'
 - 2.3.2 'An Essay on Man'
 - 2.3.3 The Dunciad
- 2.4 'The Rape of the Lock' as a Mock Epic Poem
 - 2.4.1 Canto 1
 - 2.4.2 Canto 2
 - 2.4.3 Canto 3
 - 2.4.4 Canto 4
 - 2.4.5 Canto 5
- 2.5 Glossary
- 2.6 Summing Up
- 2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our aim through this unit is to familiarize you with Pope and his major works so that you can contextualize the poem given in your course for detailed study.

At the end of the study of this Unit, you will be familiar with:

- the life of Pope,
- his major works that include 'An Essay on Criticism', 'An Essay on Man', 'The Rape of the Lock' and 'The Dunciad' and
- 'The Rape of the Lock' as a mock epic poem and social satire

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit (Unit 1) you were given a brief history of English literature till the 18th century. Then you learnt about the characteristics of 18th century poetry. To refresh what you have read, we once again give you some of the distinguishing features of 18th century poetry such as the use of rhymed couplets, the employment of classical allusions, the elements of logic, reason and satire, a close adherence to form, restraint, traditional order and values, deep interest in society, men and manners, emphasis on realism, didacticism and classical rules. Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock' fulfills almost all the above features of the 18th century poetry.

Before we take up Pope's masterpiece, 'The Rape of the Lock' for a detailed analysis, let us talk about the life and writings of its author, Alexander Pope, one of the exemplary representatives of 18th century literature. Alexander Pope was a poet, critic, translator and satirist whose writings reveal his keen observation of men, manners and society. 'The Rape of the Lock' is a good example of 18th century Neo- Classical poetry for the following reasons:

1. this poem is remarkable as a mock epic, modelled on classical epics, featuring some of the features of the epic genre,
2. as a social satire, satirizing those who fail to adhere to the norms and standards of conduct and behaviour, and
3. as a poem that reflects in its poetic diction and format, the salient features of prose such as reason, logic, simple and straightforward and easily comprehensible words.

2.2 LIFE OF ALEXANDER POPE

Alexander Pope was born in a Roman Catholic family in London in 1688. Unfortunately, he contracted tuberculosis of the bone early in his years which affected his spine and he suffered from stunted growth, standing four feet and six inches. Pope with his physical impediment did not go to any university and was self educated with his avid reading. He also developed an appreciation for the natural world where he recognized Nature's order designed to keep on par with the Universal order. Though he remained in ill health throughout his life, he was able to support himself as a translator and writer.

Pope, a short man with a curved spine, was sensitive to physical appearance and developed a deep psychological complex with reference to his personality. He could not get admission in any university, which at that time in England was mainly Protestant and discriminated against the Roman Catholics. He did not have any physical activity because of his damaged spine that caused his short stature. But he had a sharp mind and diverted all his time to reading and writing. By the age of 12, Pope had written two of his best early poems – 'On Solitude' and 'A Paraphrase of St. Thomas Kempis'.

These two poems are significant as they reveal the poet's love of solitude, imposed on him by his physical deformity and his everlasting faith in God.

2.3 LITERARY WORKS OF POPE

A razor sharp witted satirist of public figures and their behavior, Pope had his quota of supporters and detractors. Jonathan Swift, the brilliant satirist of that period was among his select close friends. To read his work is to be exposed to the order and wit of the 18th century poetry that preceded the Romantic poets. Pope primarily used the heroic couplet, and his lines are immensely quotable. From "An Essay on Criticism" come famous phrases such as "*To err is human, to forgive, divine,*" "*A little learning is a dangerous thing,*" and "*For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.*"

2.3.1 “An Essay on Criticism”

Barely in his early twenties, Pope’s making of a poet -critic was in evidence in his ‘An Essay on Criticism’. Though titled an essay, it was written not in prose but in verse. This piece revealed the influence of ancient Latin and Greek critics, notably Quintillian, Horace, Aristotle, and his French contemporary, Nicolas Boileau.

We have the foreshadowing of Pope’s genius in this early poem “An Essay on Criticism” written in heroic couplets employing the language of conversational and straightforward prose. The content is about the qualities of a good critic which approximates to classical conventions of maintaining good and true taste. A good critic should know his limits and should not launch beyond his depth: “*Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet, / And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.*”

Pope’s commitment to order where art should imitate Nature and to the worth and value of the ‘Ancients’ has its beginning in his powerful maiden effort on literary criticism.

As stated earlier, 18th century is famous as the age of satire and one of the main reasons for the development of satire was the growth of political partisanship between the Tories and the Whigs. The two great poets of the 18th century who were famous as satirists were John Dryden and Alexander Pope. The third writer of the 18th century Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gullivers’ Travels* was a prose satirist. Dryden’s *Absalom and Achitophel* is considered to be the greatest political satire in English literature.

Alexander Pope was best known for his four major works: ‘An Essay on Criticism’ (1711), ‘The Rape of the Lock’ (1712–14), ‘The Dunciad’ (1728), and ‘An Essay on Man’ (1733–34), -- the two essays mentioned are in verse form while the other two ‘The Rape of the Lock’ and ‘The Dunciad’ are verse satires.

Dryden often considered as the father of English literary criticism, defined satire as “an employment of sarcasm, irony, or keen wit in ridiculing some prevailing vices, absurdities, abuses or follies in an individual or social group” He said the true purpose of satire is ‘amendment of vices by correction’. “Satire is a kind of poetry, without a series of action, invented for the purging of our minds; in which human vices, ignorance, and errors, and all things besides, which are produced from them in every man, are severely reprehended; partly dramatically.” Apart from political satires, this genre was employed in the 18th century to improve the morals and manners of people.

Satire is an essential feature of Pope’s poetry. While Pope was a genius, his satires were more of a personal nature, vindictive and harsh to cause pain to his enemies whom he targeted. He is considered one of the best of epigrammatic poets in English literature. Pope came from a Roman Catholic family. Pope had many close friends belonging to his religion. One of them was the wealthy squire John Caryll who persuaded him to write ‘The Rape of the Lock’, on an incident involving his relatives.

His earliest attempt at verse, “An Essay in Criticism” brought him success and fame as early as in his twenty- third year. His epigrams have become a part of our daily usage of English. Before we take up ‘The Rape of the Lock’ for a critical

study, let us briefly give the theme of Pope's other two major poems, 'An Essay on Man' and 'The Dunciad'.

2.3.2 'An Essay on Man'

'An Essay on Man' is a summary of Pope's belief that God's creation of the universe is perfect. He states that his objective in writing this poem is mainly to 'vindicate the ways of God to men'. So the assumption that he explores in the poem is almost close to what Robert Browning the poet who came a century later said: "*God's in His heaven — all's right with the world!*" Accepting the order designed by God is the first and foremost duty of Man. Man has his place in the hierarchical order that constitutes the 'vast chain of being' is next to the angels and above God's other creations like beasts and birds. To God all creatures are the same and He has no favourites and whatever He has designed should not be violated. Pope says even if man cannot know God's purposes, he cannot complain about his position in the 'Great Chain of Being' and must accept that "Whatever IS, is RIGHT" meaning that all is for the best and that everything happens according to God. This kind of acceptance is what later writers like Voltaire dismissed as fatalism. But at the time Pope wrote, it was regarded as 'optimistic philosophy'. Man should understand and accept his place in God's scheme of things. "Know thyself" is his exhortation to Man who should use the power of reason bestowed on him to regulate his behaviour. Pope then discusses Man's relationship with others in the society— his social contract with family, government, and religion. He focuses on the bonds that unite Man with others, in particular the bond of love. From instinct that guides Man in his infancy, he moves towards reason, then self love and finally universal love that bind him to all of God's creation. The poem written in four epistles dwells "On the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to Happiness" and depicts Man's various attempts to achieve true human happiness. Pope sounds moralistic when he says that virtue alone can generate such happiness. Pope's thesis of acceptance of the hierarchical order of the Divine that governs the vast chain of the universe is possible only if we accept the disparity among men as a part of reality and as a part of the heavenly design and not militate against it.

Pope wrote in the 18th century, which among other things is known as the age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment began in the middle of the 17th century and lasted until the end of the 18th century. With a strong emphasis on reason and on the advancement of science, the age of Enlightenment reflected the ideal that man could understand the world around him. This hope for understanding and outlining the human condition is at the heart of 'An Essay on Man'.

2.3.3 'The Dunciad'

Let us look at one more of Pope's celebrated poems, a mock heroic satire, 'The Dunciad'. What is a mock epic satire? There are three words- epic, mock epic and satire. Mock-epic is also referred to as mock-heroic which adapts the elevated heroic style of the classical epic poem to deal with a trivial subject. All the epic devices such as prayer or invocation to the Muses or the Goddesses of poetry, the intervention of supernatural agents in human affairs, grandiose speeches and exalted diction are employed by the mock epic poet to delineate a worthless and trivial subject. The outstanding English mock-epic genre was perfected by Alexander Pope. We will study his brilliant outstanding poem in this genre, 'The Rape of the Lock' (1712–14), which has for its theme a society gentleman's theft

of a lock of hair from a society lady. Pope treated the incident as if it were comparable to events that sparked the Trojan War.

More than a decade after the publication of the ‘Rape of the Lock’, Pope wrote ‘The Dunciad’, an equally powerful, vitriolic mock epic satire. The work exists in three versions, published in 1728, 1742, and 1743, the year before Pope’s death. This poem is a satirical attack on fellow literary figures, who Pope felt were the cause for the moral and intellectual decline both in England and Europe.

In the first two versions, Pope targets his rivals—the writer and editor Lewis Theobald and the playwright Colley Cibber attacking them of dullness and for their ambitious audacity to rise high in the literary world. The final version of The Dunciad uses mythological allusions portraying the goddess of dullness crowning a dull poet Bayes to be the King of the realm of darkness. Bayes is intended to be a reference to Colley Cibber. Pope then describes a competition among all dull literary figures of his time which is presented in vulgar and bad taste. The poem ends with the ultimate triumph of Dullness as a fulfillment of the prophecies that Cibber dreams. Pope presents both good and evil as allegorical figures representing good and evil. Those that represent good include art, science, religion, morality, logic, and so on. The poem depicts the defeat of reason and intellect and presents chaos as the triumphant force. It ends with a return to the earlier state of chaos from which the world had emerged due to the positive forces of reason and logic. In conclusion the poem conjures up an apocalyptic vision whereby England and Europe will be buried in universal darkness. Pope begins the poem on a light hearted note through the employment of the mock epic style and moves to an angry and bitter tone to attack his rivals. The classical allusions are not easy for an ordinary reader to make sense of, without proper annotation. *The Dunciad* is different from ‘The Rape of the Lock’ mainly because its subject matter is personal. The poem is more of an exercise in personal revenge.

Check Your Progress 1

(i) Give a brief summary of Pope’s ‘An Essay on Criticism’.

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(ii) How did Dryden define satire?

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(iii) What is the central idea of ‘An Essay on Man’?

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(iv) Give an example each of irony, sarcasm and wit.

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(Please check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.)

2.4 THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

You have now read about Pope and his three famous works – ‘An Essay on Criticism’, ‘An Essay on Man’ and ‘The Dunciad’. The three poems give us an insight into Pope’s genius and mind as a poet and a satirist, as a creative artist and as a critical satirist. We find these views are present in ‘The Rape of the Lock’. For example his views that a critic should possess a true and refined taste, his strong belief in the hierarchical order of creation whereby Man has to accept whatever is bestowed on him and not complain about disparity in status and position in society and his intolerance of mediocrity and dullness among writers that is the root cause of intellectual and moral decline are presented in ‘The Rape of the Lock’, albeit not explicitly. Though ‘The Rape of the Lock’ was written a decade earlier than ‘The Dunciad’, it is a poem that exhibits all the views and brilliance of Pope where his sharp satire is tempered by good humour and geniality.

‘The Rape of the Lock’ is the most complete and the most popular of Pope’s works. It is a mock epic poem in five cantos and has for its subject a conflict between two Roman Catholic families, who were allied to his friend John Caryll. It depicts a trivial incident of a young man snipping a lock of hair from a young lady belonging to another family. Pope was requested by his friend, John Caryll to write a poem to reconcile the two families. Pope treated the dispute that ensued as a mighty epic war similar to the war between Greeks and Trojans in *The Iliad* written nearly 2500 years ago in 759 BC by the Greek poet Homer. The war in *The Iliad* was over the abduction of the legendary Greek beauty, Helen by the Trojan prince, Paris. Pope uses the pomp and grandeur of Homer’s epic to depict a story of such a trivial nature. Hence it is known as a mock epic where it ridicules the participants engaged in a quarrel over a courtly gentleman(the Baron) sniping a small curl of a genteel aristocratic lady (Belinda) more to keep it as a treasured lock. The poem also ridicules the elite society in which they lived but the tone is less serious, and more pretentious and lighthearted than what one comes across in ‘The Dunciad’. Belinda feels deeply flattered that her beauty has caught the fancy of the Baron, but she displays artificial anger that her modesty had been violated. Pope mocks the glitter and glamour of this elite world even though he has a sneaking appreciation and admiration for the heroine of the poem, Belinda. She is beautiful, charming, and her pretentious anger and resentment over the Baron’s act is in keeping with the 18th century morals and code of conduct.

Though the prescribed text is Canto 3, we will give you a summary of the entire poem so that it makes it easy to place Canto 3 in the overall scheme of the poem.

The poem is in the mock epic genre, using all the exalted epic style and devices in a narrative on a trivial subject. The main features of a mock epic include:

- a) A sarcastic (mocking) tone.
- b) The heightened or elevated style and form of the serious epic poem. (The classical epic had an exalted theme and an elevated style to complement it)
- c) Ridiculing a trivial or inconsequential subject

Among the many epic devices used at the beginning of a poem are an announcement about the theme of the poem; an invocation to the Muses i.e., prayers to the Muses to inspire the poet to write the poem and the use of supernatural elements. (The classical epic made the intervention of Gods in human affairs and thus there was no blurring of the link between the natural and the supernatural)

‘The Rape of the Lock’ begins with an announcement of the theme of love and war followed by an address to the Muse. The poet also dedicates the poem to his friend John Caryll who commissioned the poem.

The summary given is just an outline of the poem with no reference to the Classical gods and goddesses who interfere in human affairs. We will refer to them when we analyze the prescribed text Canto 3 in the next Unit.

Check Your Progress 2

(i) What are the main features of a mock epic poem?

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(ii) What epic devices does a mock epic poem employ?

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(For answers please refer to the end of this Unit)

2.4.1 Canto 1

Belinda, the heroine is still sleeping even as dawn breaks out. She dreams about a handsome youth telling her that she has the protection of a large number of Spirits—like the Gods and Goddesses we come across in the Classical epics

like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* who are the invisible guardians of women's chastity. Her personal guardians, the youth tells her, are the Sylphs and they specially protect women who reject Man and his overtures.

Ariel the chief of the Sylphs warns her that a dreadful event is likely to happen to her and that she should be wary of Man. When Belinda wakes up, she forgets the dream and gets ready to go to the card party at Hampton Court. Her dressing is an elaborate ritual similar to warriors putting on their armour before going to the battlefield. She looks at the mirror and feels happy to see her mirror image surpassingly beautiful almost like a goddess. While the classical reference to Helen of Troy is implicit, Belinda is not Helen of Troy. Belinda's battle field is the card table and the game of cards is the battle. Canto 1 sets the tone of the poem, mocking at the inane and meaningless activities of the elite women in society.

2.4.2 Canto 2

Belinda is the centre of attraction of the party she goes to by taking a boat ride to Hampton Court. While she looks arrestingly beautiful her crowning glories are the two ringlets that dangle on her ivory neck. One of the young gentlemen on the boat, the Baron, particularly admires Belinda and is determined to steal the ringlet and keep it as his priceless possession. The Sylphs, who are Belinda's protectors hover over her to protect her. The cutting of the locks is what the poem is all about and this is an euphemism for man's conquest over women. Pope questions the sexual mores of the period when he says

"When success a Lover's toil attends, / few ask, if fraud or force attain'd his ends".

'The Rape of the Lock' represents a threat to woman's chastity more serious than just the mere theft of a curl. The comparison is with Helen's abduction by the Trojan prince Paris

2.4.3 Canto 3

Belinda sits down to a game of cards, described as the battle field. The cards are troops combating on the "velvet plain" of the card-table. Belinda, under the watchful care of the Sylphs, begins to play. This frivolous pastime is followed by the next ritual amusement of the serving of coffee. The curling vapors of the steaming coffee remind the Baron of Belinda's swirling ringlet and of his intention to cut it. The Sylphs try to protect her, but when their chief Ariel, discovers "an earthly lover lurking at her (Belinda's) heart." he gives up protecting her. The implication is that she secretly loves being admired and feels flattered even if her honour is violated. Finally, the shears close in on the curl. The deed is done, and the Baron exults while Belinda's screams fill the air. But her screams are more of an affectation than genuine. Society demands such a reaction as the correct response when women's chastity is threatened.

2.4.4 Canto 4

While Belinda shows her anger and resentment over the incident, her friend Thalestris asks her to take revenge. Thalestris then goes to Sir Plume, "her beau," asks him to demand of the Baron that he returns Belinda's lock. Sir Plume makes a weak request to the Baron who disdainfully refuses to agree to part with the

lock. Belinda goes into a fit of sorrow and self-pity and regrets not having heeded the youth's dream-warning, and laments the lonely, pitiful state of her sole remaining curl.

2.4.5 Canto 5

The Baron remains impassive against all the ladies' tears and reproaches. This is followed by a moralizing speech by Clarissa (the wise woman who represents Pope's voice) but it falls on deaf ears. Belinda, Thalestris and the rest of the ladies assembled there ignore Clarissa and proceed to launch an all-out attack on the offending Baron. In the battle between the two opposing genders, Belinda gains an advantage and she demands the Baron return the lock. But unfortunately the ringlet gets lost in the chaos, and cannot be found. The poem ends on a note that the lock has moved from the earth and ascended to heaven and shines like a star in the sky. In this way, the poet reasons, it will attract more envy than it ever could on earth as a large number of people can now see the visible and beautiful star.

2.5 GLOSSARY

Exemplary:	Praiseworthy, commendable
Poet Critic:	The "creative" writer who also feels the need to write literary criticism, as if the creative act of writing poetry is not quite finished unless it is accompanied by some critical analysis
Salient:	Noteworthy, important
Roman Catholic:	One who belongs to the Christian Church based in the Vatican (near Rome) and presided over by a Pope
Stunted:	Undersized, diminutive
Impediment:	Hindrance
Protestant:	Western Christian, but not an adherent of the Roman Catholic
Discriminate:	Differentiate
Detract:	To defame, to disparage
Wit:	One who has the ability to express oneself intelligently in a playful or humorous manner,
Ancients:	The ancient Roman and Greek authors
Dunciad:	A World of Fools
Epigrammatic:	Terse and witty and like a maxim
Squire:	A dignitary, a gallant
Vindicate:	Show to be right
Hierarchical:	Classified according to different levels
Vast Chain of Being:	A hierarchical order of all beings arranged according to an order of perfection.

ALEXANDER POPE:
'THE RAPE OF THE
LOCK'

Fatalism:	Everything that happens is predetermined and therefore inevitable and unchangeable
Optimistic philosophy:	The theory of philosophy that the world is the best of all possible worlds
Disparity:	The condition of being unequal
Militate:	To oppose, to conflict with
Vitriolic:	Bitterly scathing, caustic
Allegory:	A form in which the action and other elements stand for something else in real life
Apocalyptic:	Foretelling of devastation or ultimate doom
Annotation:	Interpretation, explanation
Albeit:	Even though
Explicit:	Clearly expressed
<i>The Iliad:</i>	It is an epic poem. It narrates the story of the war between the Trojans and the Greeks. The war began after the abduction (or elopement) of Queen Helen of Sparta Greece) by the Trojan prince Paris. Helen's jilted husband Menelaus convinces his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, to lead an expedition to retrieve her. The poem presents a realistic view of human nature. Homer understands that human beings are flawed; they are driven by raw emotions and feelings. (Keep this in mind to understand why Pope designed 'The Rape of the Lock' as a mock epic poem, in imitation of <i>The Iliad</i>)
Muses:	Goddess of poetry, a source of inspiration
The Sylphs:	Spirits of the air
Hampton Court:	The palace at Hampton Court was once the secondary residence of the British monarchy. Located a few miles from London along the River Thames, it grew into and was often used to entertain foreign dignitaries; where British "statesmen" conduct important political affairs and where the queen receives the counsel of advisors. Pope also trivializes the queen's activities by emphasizing that, as well as counsel, she takes tea.
Implicit:	Implied rather than directly expressed
Inane:	Pointless, lacking sense
Euphemism:	A mild, indirect, or vague term for one that is considered harsh, blunt, or offensive
Shears:	Scissors
Thalestris:	In Greek mythology, Thalestris is the name of one of the Amazons, race of warrior women who excluded men from their society.

Beau: A male companion or friend with whom the woman has a romantic relationship

2.6 SUMMING UP

In this Unit we provided a brief introduction to Alexander Pope's life and some of his major works. These were 'An Essay on Criticism', 'An Essay on Man', 'The Dunciad' and 'The Rape of the Lock'.

We also gave you a summary of the five Cantos which form the poem 'The Rape of the Lock'. We also talked about the poem being a mock epic by having certain features of the epic genre. The poem was also viewed as a social satire.

Pope's satires all targeted his personal, political and social opponents. 'The Dunciad' was a brilliant satire, but full of anger and hostility that Pope inflicted on all his literary rivals and critics. This satirical poem is a scathing attack on the cultural decline of his age. His two poems- "An Essay on Man" and "An Essay on Criticism" articulate many of the central tenets of 18th-century aesthetics and moral philosophy. The other major works of Pope include his translation of Homer and his edition of the works of William Shakespeare. He is recognized as a great formal master, an eloquent expositor of the spirit of his age, and a representative of the culture and politics of the Enlightenment.

As a public figure unafraid to express his opinions, Pope faced public criticism throughout his career. But there is no doubt that he was respected as a major literary voice of the Augustan Age, a key figure in the sphere of letters, with a wide satiric range that was both sublime and vulgar.

2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress1

- (i) In 'An Essay on Criticism' Pope talks about the essential qualities of a good critic which include knowing one's limitations and not going beyond one's depth.
- (ii) Dryden defines satire as an employment of sarcasm, irony or keen wit in making fun of some prevailing vices or follies in society.
- (iii) 'An Essay on Man' is about Pope's belief that God's creation of the Universe is perfect.
- (iv) Irony: "A Fire station burns down"

Sarcasm: "That is what I needed today"- when something bad happens
Wit: "Congratulations is the civility of envy"

Check Your Progress 2

- (i) The main features of a mock epic are a mocking tone, an elevated style and ridiculing an insignificant event.
- (ii) Some epic devices are an invocation to a Muse, an announcement about the theme of the poem and the use of supernatural elements.

UNIT 3 ANALYSIS OF CANTO 3

Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
 - 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Theme of ‘The Rape of the Lock’
 - 3.3 Characteristics of a Classical Epic
 - 3.4 The Mock Epic
 - 3.5 Analysis of Canto 3
 - 3.5.1 Text
 - 3.5.2 Detailed Analysis
 - 3.6 Glossary
 - 3.7 Summing up
 - 3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our aim through this unit is to present a detailed analysis of Canto 3 from the poem ‘The Rape of the Lock’. At the end of the study of this Unit, you will understand:

- the characteristics of a classical epic
- what is a mock epic
- the detailed analysis of Canto 3
- how Canto 3 incorporates a majority of the epic features.
- what makes ‘The Rape of the Lock’ both an epic poem and a satire.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, you were given a brief summary of the complete poem ‘The Rape of the Lock’ that consists of five Cantos. It is important to know the entire poem so that it becomes easy to understand Canto 3 which is prescribed for detailed study.

The poem narrates a trivial incident involving two aristocratic families and this incident is exaggerated into a full blown battle, almost paralleling the classical battle between the Greeks and the Trojans depicted by Homer nearly two thousand five hundred years ago in his monumental epic *The Iliad*. *The Iliad* remains an epic poem and does not feature satirical elements like ‘The Rape of the Lock’ which is both a mock epic poem and a poetic satire. It is considered as one amongst the great satires of English literature. Alexander Pope and John Dryden were the chief poet satirists of this period while the celebrated prose satirist was Jonathan Swift.

3.2 THEME OF ‘THE RAPE OF THE LOCK’

Pope’s poem ‘The Rape of the Lock’ is based on a real life incident in which a British Peer, Lord Petre, fascinated by the beauty of an aristocratic lady, Arabella Fermor, clips a lock of her hair to preserve it as a memento. This results in a fight between the two families. John Caryll—a friend both of Pope and of the two families—requested Pope to write a poem satirizing the triviality and foolishness of the dispute and engineer a reconciliation between the two warring families.

Pope’s ‘The Rape of the Lock’ is a masterly satire where he interweaves a real but trivial incident into an epic. Pope modeled his poem on the theme and style of the Greek Classics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and juxtaposed the silly conflict between the two families with the battle between two mighty armies depicted in the great epics. Thus the poem is labelled a mock heroic poem. While the story is essentially about the triviality of the fight between two families over the cutting a ringlet off Arabella’s gorgeous hair, it also mirrors the vanity and the frivolous life of the aristocrats in the 18th century. Pope uses the grandiose devices of the ancient Greek epics to mock the inanities and vanities of 18th century courtiers and ladies. The basic themes of the poem are:

- the triviality of courtly life,
- the heroine Belinda’s (who represents all the elite women) narcissistic obsession with her beauty,
- the vanishing of her lock of hair pointing to the short shelf life of youthful beauty,
- the ascendancy of the lock of hair to heavens to shine like a star in the sky forever, thereby reflecting the immortality of beauty that is best captured in art and poetry in contrast to the evanescence of physical beauty,
- the gender disparity in a patriarchal society that shows the male conquest of women (the snipping of Belinda’s lock by the Baron) and
- lastly the wisdom in Clarissa’s speech (which is essentially Pope’s speech) about the fleeting nature of beauty with an inherent message to focus on moral uprightness rather than focus on physical beauty that is of a transient nature.

3.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF A CLASSICAL EPIC

The three major ancient epics that are known as the classical epics are Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (8th Century B.C) and Virgil’s *The Aeneid*. (between 29th—19th Century B.C). Later in the 17th century we have the classic epic *Paradise Lost* by John Milton which incorporates all the essential features of an epic employed by Homer and Virgil. The essential features of an epic are given below. It is not that every epic written thereafter follows all of them, but a majority of the main features are evidenced in most epics:

1. Every epic has one or two heroes like Achilles and Hector in *The Iliad*, Odysseus in the *Odyssey* and Aeneas in *The Aeneid*. When we refer to

someone as a hero, it is to be understood that he is an exceptional character, someone larger than life (like some of our Bollywood/Hollywood heroes), a skilled warrior, gifted with intelligence, strength and courage of an extraordinary kind. We have our epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* where the heroes are Rama and Krishna respectively. They are not gods, but gods who come down to earth and live and act like human beings. Ram is known as the *Maryada Purushottam*, the perfect Man. Krishna is known as *Purushottama* that is Supreme *Purusha* or Supreme Being, foremost among all men. The epics are not only about men and women, but also about the gods and goddesses who intervene in the affairs of men and direct the turn of events.

2. The classical epic is a narrative of a great historical event. In the ancient times, like our own *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, these epics were oral epics, sung to a listening audience by a bard or a singer, presumably of events that he had either himself witnessed or heard from others. It was only later that they were written. The oral epics are also known as the primary epics. When they later got written, they came to be known as the secondary epics or literary epics.
3. The plot of the epic involves a journey. In *The Iliad* it is a journey of the hero Achilles from Greece to Troy and back. In *The Odyssey*, it is the journey of the hero, Odysseus from Troy at the end of the Trojan war, back to Ithaca in Greece. In *The Aeneid*, it is a journey to Carthage. Similarly in *The Ramayana*, it is Ram's travel from Ayodhya to Lanka and back. In *The Mahabharata*, it is the Pandavas' journey across India and finally their ascent to the Himalayas. The intervention of the Gods during the journey and the resolution of conflicts with their help will finally show the balance between human will and divine will. Thus the epics are historical events as they actually happened. They are instructional as well.
4. The epic story begins in *medias res* ie. "in the midst of things", which is the practice of beginning an epic or other narrative by plunging into a crucial situation that is part of a related chain of events; the situation is an extension of previous events and will be developed in later action. In Homer's narrative poem *The Iliad*, within the first few lines, the poet narrates the ongoing events of the Trojan War, setting the stage for the action to unfold between the warring Greeks and Trojans. Similarly the *Odyssey* begins in *medias res*, or in the middle of things. *The Odyssey* is a sequel to *The Iliad*. *The Iliad* ends with the triumph of the Greeks in the Trojan war. *The Odyssey* does not begin at that point of the culmination of the Trojan War, but begins midway through Odysseus's wanderings. This device however is not noticeable in the Indian epics. In *The Mahabharata*, the background to the main action of the epic—the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas is in the *medias res* though it is a little confusing.
5. The style or the form of an epic is commensurate or proportionate with the theme. If epics deal with exalted themes, the style is equally elevated, elegant and formal. No use of colloquial and everyday language is allowed.

6. Since the epics started as oral epics, in order to make the listener not miss out any word or description, epics use repetition. Many epithets or descriptive words or phrases are repeated. For example when the poet describes rosy fingered dawn, the phrase 'rosy fingered' is often repeated.
7. All the epics begin with an epic invocation to the Muses to inspire the poet to sing the song, followed by an announcement of the theme and sometimes a brief description of the main action of the work.
8. Another feature of the epic is its size. Normally the classical epics of Greece were either in 12 books or in multiples of 12. Homer's epics are divided into twenty four books. *The Mahabharata* is in 18 books, one and a half times of twelve. The chief characteristic of an epic is its bulky size.
9. Another essential feature of an epic is the inevitability of exaggeration while presenting the hero and his valorous deeds, his physical attributes and mental traits.
10. Supernaturalism is an inherent feature of an epic to create awe and wonder. Supernatural elements include the presence of gods, demons, angels, fairies, and use of supernatural forces like natural catastrophes.
11. Epics have an edifying quality. Morality is a key characteristic of an epic and this lends to didacticism as an essential aspect of an epic.
12. Epics are universal in themes and therefore have an appeal to the entire humanity.
13. Use of Epic simile is another feature of an epic. Epic simile or Homeric similes compare two objects that have nothing in common. Epic similes which often employ images from nature are used to give the reader a sense of great size, number, or intensity.
14. Classical epics include epic games, a trip to the Underworld, a vision of the future, and an epic catalogue of heroes, ships, armour, and armies.

Check Your Progress 1

- (i) List some of the characteristic features of a classical epic.

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.)

3.4 THE MOCK EPIC

Mock epic or alternately called Mock Heroic is a literary work imitating the style of heroic poetry in order to satirize a trivial or un-heroic subject. In short, mock epic attempts to create the feel of an epic without the heroic content. The three essential features of a mock epic are:

- The tone employed is mocking or sarcastic

**ALEXANDER POPE:
'THE RAPE OF THE
LOCK'**

- Use of exalted style and form that one associates with an epic and
- Treatment of a trivial subject

The epic tradition “was honed to a fine art in the late 17th- and early 18th-century Neo-Classical period. A double-edged satirical weapon, the mock-epic was sometimes used by the “moderns” of this period to ridicule contemporary “ancients” (classicists). More often it was used by “ancients” to point at the un-heroic character of the modern age by subjecting thinly disguised contemporary events to a heroic treatment.... The outstanding English mock-epic is Alexander Pope’s brilliant tour de force ‘The Rape of the Lock’ (1712–14), which concerns a society beau’s theft of a lock of hair from a society belle; Pope treated the incident as if it were comparable to events that sparked the Trojan War.”

According to Oxford reference, “Almost invariably a poem in heroic couplets, the mock epic typically employs elevated poetic diction (which Pope said should generate ‘pompous expressions’), focuses on a single ‘heroic’ incident or action, and incorporates selected elements from the machinery of some classical epic. Although the mock epic satirical poem, which flourished in the later 17th and 18th centuries, portrayed real characters and events (often thinly disguised) in contemporary and local settings, its literary ancestry may be traced back to classical antiquity.”

A close reading of the entire poem will show how far Pope has employed epic features from the ancient epics in his poem that has a trivial subject as its theme. We have spoken about the announcement of the subject or the theme of the poem and an invocation of the Muses as two basic features at the beginning of an epic. The protective armour given by the gods and goddesses is another epic device we can see in this poem. The poem has a rich range of literary allusions and an ironic commentary on the contemporary social world with a sense of suppressed energy threatening to break through the veneer of civilization.

Check Your Progress 2

(i) What are the features of a mock epic?

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(ii) Why is ‘The Rape of the Lock’ known as a mock heroic poem?

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(iii) What epic devices are used by Pope in Canto 3

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Then each, according to the rank they bore;
For Sylphs, yet mindful of their ancient race,
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;
Four Knaves in garbs succinct, a trusty band,
Caps on their heads, and halberds in their hand;
And parti-colour'd troops, a shining train,
Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain.

40

The skilful nymph reviews her force with care:
"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.
Spadillio first, unconquerable lord!
Led off two captive trumps, and swept the board.
As many more Manillio 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,
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.

50

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Ev'n mighty Pam, that kings and queens o'erthrew
And mow'd down armies in the fights of loo,
Sad chance of war! now destitute of aid,
Falls undistinguish'd by the victor Spade!

Thus far both armies to Belinda yield;
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 died,
Spite of his haughty mien, and barb'rous pride:
What boots the regal circle on his head,
His giant limbs, in state unwieldy spread;
That long behind he trails his pompous robe,
And of all monarchs, only grasps the globe?

70

The baron now his diamonds pours apace;
 Th' embroider'd King who shows but half his face,
 And his refulgent Queen, with pow'rs combin'd
 Of broken troops an easy conquest find.
 Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wild disorder seen,
 With throngs promiscuous strow the level green. 80
 Thus when dispers'd a routed army runs,
 Of Asia's troops, and Afric's sable sons,
 With like confusion diff'rent nations fly,
 Of various habit, and of various dye,
 The pierc'd battalions disunited fall.
 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
 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

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,
 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,
 Trembling, and conscious of the rich brocade.

Coffee, (which makes the politician wise,
And see through 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 'tis too late,
Fear the just gods, and think of Scylla's fate!
Chang'd to a bird, and sent to flit in air,
She dearly pays for Nisus' injur'd hair!

But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!
Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace
A two-edg'd weapon from her shining case;
So ladies in romance assist their knight
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight. 130

He takes the gift with rev'rence, and extends
The little engine on his fingers' ends;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,
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,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd.

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,
And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.
Not louder shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast,

When husbands or when lap-dogs 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 cried, “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 at *Atalantis* shall be read,
 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,
 And hew triumphal arches to the ground.
 What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel
 The conqu'ring force of unresisted steel?”

3.5.2 Detailed Analysis

Lines 1-4 describe the place where Belinda and the ladies have arrived. This is Hampton's court (Line 4), a place for social gathering where there is much talk about the affairs of the Nation and historical forecast of the fall of foreign tyrants. But the reference to the fall of Nymphs (line 6) is a veiled attack on the aristocratic gentlemen of the society who gossip about women with as much ease as they discuss serious national issues. The mixing of the serious political talk with the trivial talk about women reflects Pope's satirical ingenuity to mock at the vacuous, inane talk among the high society men and women.

Lines 7-8 make an explicit reference to the British monarch Queen Anne, where she “sometimes counsel take and sometimes tea.”, once more an attempt to ridicule the monarch and the people assembled in the court mixing serious conversation with the leisurely activity of taking tea.

The gossip of the courtiers is punctured with a sarcastic comment that every word they uttered was towards bringing down the reputation of someone or the other. The parting shot is “at every word a reputation dies.”(16))

The ladies and gentlemen disperse to enjoy the pleasures of a day at court—namely, gossiping with one another about everything from the glory of the Queen to the décor of the Court. The boat ride on the River Thames to Hampton Court is Belinda's journey.

Pope spares nobody in that elite group. He targets the judges who sign death sentences in a hurried manner so that they can quickly adjourn for lunch. Thus

the opening lines of Canto 3 presents the haughtiness and arrogance of the British elite who mix levity with serious business and who conduct court work with no empathy or concern for those on whom they pass severe judgement.

Belinda sits down to a game of ombre with two gentlemen "to decide their doom" and arranges her cards. The word "doom" in connection with the card game enhances the triviality of the pastime of modern aristocratic ladies and courtiers as it is juxtaposed with serious events on a battle field where every brave warrior awaits his doom.

In the next few lines Pope borrows the epic characteristic of gods and goddesses descending to protect their protégé when he makes a reference to the Sylphs. The Sylphs descend from heavens and perch upon the cards, their hierarchical rank corresponding to the card value. This is a veiled pointer to female vanity and social hierarchy.

The card game now begins. The card table is the battlefield. Lines 46-64 are a brilliant description of the battle of cards, paralleling epic battles between humans and gods. Here the Sylphs are perched on the cards of Belinda and because of their support she wins in the early stages. Soon the Baron dominates the game.

The see-saw battle (65-100) between Belinda and the Baron is vividly described as they play their cards to gain advantage over each other. Like the epic battle, the card game witnesses battle between equal contending rivals. Pope's use of epic grandeur to depict the silly card game once again highlights the triviality of life at the court. The next fourteen lines give a visual documentary of the game of cards. Line 99 affirms Belinda's triumph; "*The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky*"

Just when Belinda celebrates her success, we hear the poet's (the narrator's) voice that poor mortals cannot foresee their future, as all the honours that Belinda had gained will be snatched away at her hour of glory. The rape of her lock by the Baron is presented in epic terms amounting to the loss of her honour.

Meantime coffee is served in exquisite chinaware. The steam arising out of hot coffee reminds the baron of his plan to steal Belinda's ringlet. In an aside, the narrative voice foresees the consequence of such a disastrous act comparing it with 'Scyllas fate(105-124).

The mythological reference to Scylla is when she plucks a single lock of her father, Nisus' hair (which granted him and the city invincibility) to present it to Minos whom she loved. Disgusted with her lack of filial devotion, she is punished by her father and transformed into a sea bird.

The Baron goes ahead with his premeditated action of cutting Belinda's lock. Surprisingly he gets a pair of scissors from Clarissa who later in Canto 5 finds this incident trivial and sermonizes about the need to focus on leading a life of moral uprightness than on the transient nature of physical beauty. But initially she is the one who hands the Baron the scissors to chop off Belinda's lock (127-130) drawing a parallel between the epic female characters arming their knights for the war.

When the Baron tries to cut the lock all the protective guardian Sylphs spread themselves on Belinda's neck. Thrice he tries and thrice he fails (135-138.)

Pope introduces a twist. The Chief of the Sylphs discovers much to his surprise and shock that "an earthly lover (*is*) lurking in her heart"(144) in spite of all

her(Belinda’s) efforts to conceal it. In a state of shock and surprise, he abandons his vigil and gives the Baron the opportunity to snip her lock.(139-154). Pope satirizes the ladies and gentlemen belonging to the aristocratic class stating that they do not possess genuine moral chastity. Baron’s attempts to cut a lock of her hair and Belinda’s pretension of anger and distress that her honour has been violated are indicative of the sexual undertones in the poem. Ariel who had earlier tempted her with the vision of a handsome young man now feels shocked at her unspoken sexual desires. And shies away from protecting her.(139-146)

Belinda cries in protest even as the Baron exults in victory. Her cries are compared to the lamentations at someone’s death. The Baron on the other hand is overjoyed at his victory . Canto 3 ends on this note of the triumph of Baron and the violation of female chastity.

Two major symbols are seen in Canto 3- The Lock and the Card game. Just as Helen’s abduction in the Greek classic, *The Iliad* triggered the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, Belinda’s lock is the cause of the gender war between the two sexes. The Lock also symbolizes female chastity. ‘The Rape of the Lock’ is thus made into the rape of Belinda’s honour and reputation. The Lock also stands for Belinda’s obsessive vanity over her beauty. The two ringlets have such an alluring power that the Baron wants at least one of them. The 18th century had its strong views on female chastity. Women should guard themselves against disreputation to their honour. It is not clear if Pope endorses this view or not. But what is clear from a reading of the whole poem is that he relishes mocking at the pretensions of the aristocratic society that flaunts high morality mainly for the female gender. He is equally scathing about the ladies who seem to place great emphasis on beauty, seeking to attract the opposite gender.

The Game of Cards is equated with the epic battles in the Greek Classic, *The Iliad* .The contrast between the battle of heroes and warriors, with the Card game Ombre, shows Pope’s savage use of mockery at the expense of the latter. The contrast is to highlight the inane and vacuous pastime of the upper class at the court. Pope uses dextrously the rituals associated with a battle once again to show by contrast the seriousness of epic narratives and the triviality of the 18th century court narrative.

Check Your Progress 3

(i) What are the two main symbols in Canto 3? Explain their significance.

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(ii) Give examples of Pope’s satirical comments about the 18th century aristocratic society in Canto 3.

.....

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.)

3.6 GLOSSARY

Memento:	Keepsake marking the memory of an incident or an event or a particular time and experience
Engineer:	To arrange for something to happen, especially in a useful and skillful way
Inanities:	Lack of sense, meaning, substance and ideas
Narcissistic obsession:	Excessive preoccupation with or admiration of oneself
Muses:	Greek Goddesses who are a source of artistic inspiration
Euphemism:	A mild, indirect, or vague term for one that is considered harsh, blunt, or offensive
Evanescence:	Disappearance/vanishing
Patriarchal:	A society where the head of the families are men
Transient:	Passing with time
Commensurate:	Corresponding, proportionate
Nymphs:	Water elementals who live in streams, rivers, cloud...
Levity :	Lack of seriousness
Ombre:	A card game with three players
Ariel:	Angel in Christian and Jewish mysticism
Sylphs:	In classical mythology sylphs are imaginary beings-both male and female that inhabit the air.
Matadore:	In Card games, one of the highest trumps
Spadilles:	In card games cards (in ombre and quadrille) known as the ace of spades
Manillio :	The second best trump
Basto:	The ace of Clubs
Plaebeian:	One of the common people
Knave:	Jack in a pack of cards, A playing card showing the figure of a servant or Soldier
Pam:	The Knave of clubs
See-saw:	Oscillating from one extreme to another
Codille:	In the game of ombre a term indicating that the game is won
Scylla:	The mythological reference to Scylla how she was changed into a bird forever after she plucked one of her father's hairs, a magical hair on which his power depended.

3.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have discussed the following:

- what is a classical epic
- what are the characteristics of the classical epic
- what is a mock epic. How do you distinguish a mock epic from a classical epic
- the analysis of Canto 3 of 'The Rape of the Lock' and
- the interweaving of satire into the mock epic poem

3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- (i) Some characteristic features of a classical epic include larger than life heroes, narration of a great historical event; plot involves a journey; repetition of phrases; invocation to the Muse; mammoth size and inclusion of supernatural elements etc.

Check Your Progress 2

- (i) Features of a mock epic include a mocking or sarcastic tone and use of an exalted style while dealing with a trivial subject.
- (ii) 'The Rape of the Lock' is a mock heroic poem because it uses the epic form which is a genre meant for serious subjects. Here the style is applied to a trivial issue.
- (iii) Pope uses epic devices like invocation of the Muses, armour given by gods, rich literary allusions and irony among other things.

Check Your Progress 3

- (i) The two main symbols are the lock of hair and the game of cards. The lock of hair symbolizes female chastity and the game of cards is compared to the epic battles in the Greek tragedy *The Iliad*.
- (ii) Pope uses satire to comment on the 18th century aristocratic society. He ridicules the Queen who mixes serious conversations with the leisurely activity of drinking tea; he comments that the courtiers gossip and tear down others' reputations all the time. His use of grand epic style to present a trivial card game is also part of his satirical strategy.

UNIT 4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS AND STYLE

Structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 A Brief Introduction to the Characters in Canto 3
 - 4.2.1 Belinda
 - 4.2.2 The Baron
 - 4.2.3 Clarissa
 - 4.2.4 The Sylphs
 - 4.2.5 Thalestris
 - 4.2.6 Sir Plume
- 4.3 Character Analysis in Detail
 - 4.3.1 Belinda
 - 4.3.2 The Baron
 - 4.3.3 Ariel
- 4.4 Style
 - 4.4.1 Picture of Society
 - 4.4.2 Genre of Mock Epic / Heroic
- 4.5 Glossary
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

After your study of Canto 3 of ‘The Rape of the Lock’ and the full story given of the five Cantos of ‘The Rape of the Lock’, this Unit gives you an analysis of the different characters who appear in Canto 3.

At the end of your study of this Unit, you will be able to:

- evaluate the specific traits of the characters presented in Canto 3
- evaluate the role they play in the story
- analyze characters while critically examining the poem and
- appreciate the style in which the poem has been written.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading a text or a story or a poem is basically a subjective experience. It is either exciting or interesting or it fails to hold the reader’s attention. The pleasure of reading is proportionate to the way we relate to the written piece. A story grips our attention if we can relate to the characters. It is not necessary that we like a

character because we see something of ourselves in him/her. That is being subjective and biased. But it is also possible that we like a character when s/he emerges as representative of a society or of a particular period in history or shares traits common to all human beings. Hence character analysis is an important dimension to one's study of a novel or a poem or a play. While theme, i.e. content or plot and its presentation i.e. form, are important, the analysis of characters assists in a critical evaluation of the narrative.

What is character analysis? It is the process of evaluating the specific traits of characters who figure in the text. The characters can be major players in the story or minor ones. The reader has to understand the role the characters play in a story, their behaviour, the conflicts they face, their personality traits that come through in the author's description and presentation. Character analysis involves an objective study of the words, emotions and actions both in isolation and in their engagement with other characters. In this Canto, we have two major characters Belinda and the Baron. They take centre stage as on them hinges the lead action of the poem. The Baron acts and Belinda responds. Action triggers response. In particular, a negative action elicits a counter measure that can be equally harsh or just the contrary, positive. It ultimately rests on how the action is viewed. Here Pope cleverly presents the Baron's action not as altogether negative, certainly not as constituting a heinous rape but as arising out of infatuation with a beautiful woman. So Belinda's mixed response of awe and anger along with inner satisfaction of being appreciated for her beauty reveals her character. She inwardly enjoys such attention from her admirer though for the sake of society she has to sob, sigh, scream and show a sense of outrage.

Check Your Progress 1

- (i) Who are the other characters in this Canto? Read the poem and list them out.

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.)

4.2 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS IN CANTO 3

We are giving you a bird's eye view of the characters that appear in Canto 3. Try and think of the characters of classical epics and see how Pope upends the traditional hero / heroine to suit his purpose of a mock epic satire.

4.2.1 Belinda

Belinda in real life was Arabella Fermor, who hailed from a Catholic family known to Pope and his lifelong friend John Caryll. Arabella was the victim of a real-life 'rape'. In the year 1711, Pope's friend John Caryll's relative Robert, Lord Petre (the Baron in the poem), caused a serious quarrel by snipping a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor's hair (Belinda in the poem). Caryll requested Pope to

write a humorous poem to laugh the families out of their anger, and Pope obliged him by writing 'The Rape of the Lock'. The first two cantos were written in 1712 i.e., a year later after the incident as requested by John Caryll with the sole objective to bring about a reconciliation between the two feuding families.

Thus Arabella Fermor was the historical inspiration for Pope and he made her the heroine of his poem, basing his plot on the real life incident of Lord Petre (the Baron in the poem) snipping off a lock of hair from Arabella Fermor's unsuspecting head precipitating a rift between their two families. Pope turned the real time misfortune of Arabella into a heroic comical poem. Fearing that his poem might further hurt Arabella the real life heroine -victim by adding insult to injury Pope wrote a dedicatory letter to Arabella Fermor, prefacing the 1714 edition of 'The Rape of the Lock'. Alexander Pope claimed that his poem 'was intended only to divert a few young Ladies, who have good sense and good humour enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own'.

Belinda thus serves Pope to satirize the foolishness of aristocratic, privileged young women of the 18th century society, in particular their vanity, hypocrisy and triviality.

4.2.2 The Baron

This is the pseudonym for the historical Robert, Lord Petre, the young gentleman in Pope's social circle who offended Arabella Fermor and her family by cutting a lock of her hair. As stated earlier, Pope was commissioned by his friend John Caryll to write a humorous poem that could bring a reconciliation between the two families without offending either of them. The Baron's action is not condemned by Pope but he uses it to expose the inane and juvenile actions of the Lords and the vanity and hypocrisy of the ladies of the 18th century belonging to aristocratic families. The hypocrisy is seen in Belinda's feigned anger as though her chastity had been violated even as she inwardly experiences her deep sense of happiness and satisfaction over the attention she receives from the Baron. The Baron has no worthy quality to have a worthy stature as an antagonist though he is made the antagonist of the poem. His stealthy action is far removed from any act of heroism and manly courage. Pope uses the incident to expose the shallowness that surfaces in the upper classes enjoying their wealth, status and leisure.

4.2.3 Clarissa

Clarissa is the only character with a brain. She is among the many ladies in attendance at the Hampton Court party. Hence it is surprising that she lends the Baron a pair of scissors when he is fumbling to reach Belinda to cut off her hair. But the same Clarissa later in Canto 5 emerges as a wise woman and delivers a moralizing lecture to patch up the rift between Belinda and the Baron. Effectively she becomes the voice of Pope. She alone has the ability to discern that beauty is transient- 'frail beauty must decay' and that coquetry is ultimately self-defeating and one must cultivate good humour to laugh at human follies. Her name Clarissa is from Latin *clarissima* that means 'the most famous' and suggests her illustriousness and clarity of vision. Here in Canto 3, her role is the opposite of what she is in Canto 5 as she encourages the Baron in his attempt to cut the lock of hair. Maybe she is broadminded and liberal as she regards the Baron's attempt

as something insignificant and inconsequential. She ridicules Belinda and the host of ladies with her, that their sense of outrage over such a trivial incident is nothing but an act of juvenile reaction.

4.2.4 The Sylphs

The Sylphs are the Guardian spirits of the air, designed to protect virgins and their chastity. There are four sylphs and a Gnome:

Ariel — Belinda’s guardian sylph, who oversees an army of invisible protective deities

Brillante — The sylph who is assigned to guard Belinda’s earrings

Momentilla — The sylph who is assigned to guard Belinda’s watch

Crispissa — The sylph who is assigned to guard Belinda’s “fav’rite Lock” and

Umbriel — The chief gnome who travels to the Cave of Spleen and returns with bundles of sighs and tears to aggravate Belinda’s vexation. Umbriel, who comes after Ariel leaves to take care of Belinda is a melancholy gnome who receives horrible noises, tears, sorrows, and griefs from the queen of bad tempers. He pours his magic substances over Belinda, magnifying her rage and sorrow.

4.2.5 Thalestris

Belinda’s friend, named to stand for the Queen of the Amazons and represents the historical Gertrude Morley, a friend of Pope’s and the wife of Sir George Browne (rendered as her “beau,” Sir Plume, in the poem). She eggs Belinda on in her anger and demands that the lock be returned.

4.2.6 Sir Plume

Sir Plume is Thalestris’s “beau,” who makes an ineffectual challenge to the Baron. He represents the historical Sir George Browne, a member of Pope’s social circle.

4.3 CHARACTER ANALYSIS IN DETAIL

Now let us analyze the major characters in detail

4.3.1 Belinda

She is a wealthy and beautiful young woman, belonging to the nobility. It is her beauty that attracts the Baron who in his infatuation snips off her lock of hair. Pope’s lines

If to her share some female errors fall,

Look on her face, and you’ll forget ‘em all

are a tribute to her beauty, almost to the point of exonerating the Baron’s action. Pope satirizes the 18th century society’s moralistic stand that woman’s honour can be violated even if it is an innocuous act such as cutting a ringlet off Belinda’s lovely tresses. The shock and awe of Belinda and the women appears puerile and immature because cutting a lock is not the same as raping a woman. Pope without overly saying that it is not a heinous act makes the point that since Belinda is

ravishingly beautiful, the desire to possess a lock of her hair cannot be viewed as an immoral act. This is Pope's ingenuous way of bringing rapprochement between the two fighting families.

Pope subtly introduces Ariel, the chief guardian Sylph to warn her of a lurking danger to her virginity and that he is there to protect her. The fact that Belinda does not take Ariel's warning seriously is seen when she exquisitely dresses and goes to mingle with peer groups of lords and ladies in Hampton's Court. She loves socializing with people of her class. Belinda does not bother about Ariel's early warning and the vial of sobs and sighs and sorrows that Umbriel, the Gnome pours later on her, does not affect her response to the Baron's action. They are simply hypocritical manifestations of the 18th century societal norms and are presented as dictated by the supernatural powers like the Sylphs and the Gnome. Belinda covertly relishes the Baron's infatuation and all the sighs and sorrows are artificial, engineered by the Gnome. Ariel who has the duty to protect her virginity recognizes there is really no sense of wounded pride in Belinda over the Baron's passion; on the contrary she loves such attention paid to her beauty that satisfies her vanity. Ariel gives up his assigned duty to protect her:

*Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought
The close recesses of the virgin's thought;
As, on the nosegay in her breast reclined,
He watched the ideas rising in her mind,
Sudden he viewed, in spite of all her art,
An earthly lover lurking at her heart.
Amazed, confused, he found his power expired,
Resigned to fate, and with a sigh retired.*

Belinda is the heroine of the poem as she is the cause and the prime mover of all actions. She is the central character almost like Helen of Troy whose face, it is said, "launched a thousand ships and who was fairer than the evening air/ Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars". The comparison stops there. But she has no quality to make her claim the status of a hero of an epic poem. Belinda displays no heroic quality and her prowess in the card game amounts to registering an early win over the Baron. Look at the contrast. We have a heroine in place of a hero. Remember this is a mock epic poem. She is an attractive young woman and she is vain about her looks, far removed from the classical hero known for his strength and power. Her power lies in her beauty manifest in the lovely tresses that the Baron wants to cut and preserve.

Is she chaste? Again for all outward purposes she is seen hurt and offended by the violation of her honour. But deep within she is not and she only feigns anger. Pope was given the task of bringing about a reconciliation between the two families. Hence the portrayal of Belinda is softened and muted. She displays no genuine anger and the artificial outburst of sighs and sorrows are more of Umbriel's making than hers. Her display of heroism is limited to playing cards, a far cry from the battlefield where the classical hero reveals his awesome superior fighting prowess over the enemy forces he confronts. Unlike the classical hero of the epic straddling like a colossus, Belinda is here reduced to a heroine, whining, pretending to be hurt and wounded. Belinda is capricious, impulsive and mercurial and hides

her innate coquettishness under a false pretence of moral and behavioural norms expected of a 18th century woman in society

4.3.2 The Baron

The Baron is based on the real character Lord Petre who cut Arabella Fermor's lock of hair that caused a rift between the two families. In the poem he thus becomes the antagonist. If you recall the classical epic, *The Iliad*, the single action that triggers the mighty war is when the Trojan prince Paris elopes with the Greek beauty. Thus Helen was responsible for the epic war between the Trojans and the Greeks. When Ravan abducted Sita, the war ensued between Ram and Ravan. Here the Baron's foolish action triggers the conflict between Belinda and the Baron. He falls in love with Belinda's beauty. Besotted and captivated by her beauty he rashly snips her lock and refuses to give it back, thereby bringing about a conflict between the two families. Since his initial attempts to win over Belinda do not succeed, he settles on "raping" her lock. "And while his cutting of the lock is not equated with rape in the modern sense—in the context of the poem, it means "theft" or "pillaging"—Pope is still using the word to connote injustice, and to unequivocally state that he has taken what he had no right to take. The fact that the Baron is only referred to by his title, revealing his masculinity and his station but nothing else, or else is satirically figured as a "knight," the height of courtly masculinity, allows Pope to metonymically cast a kind of witty judgement over *all* noblemen, and to question the contemporary assumption that they were the intellectual and moral leaders of their day." Again Pope is not presenting any valiant hero as a worthy antagonist for Belinda. Just as Belinda as a heroine is given the pride of place solely for her beauty without any heroic quality to go with it, the Baron, has no chivalric attribute that could give him an exalted status.

In keeping with the mock epic genre, Belinda and the Baron's characters have no heroic trait and despite belonging to the gentry and enjoying the highest status of the society as aristocratic nobility, Pope deflates their status as epic characters. The seemingly trivial episode shows the triviality of court life as lived by the nobility. A foolish and juvenile action is shown to trigger a courtly war. The war here as in *The Iliad* is a war of erotic passion, but in the case of the Trojan war, it was wounded pride while here a whimsical and mischievous action sparks the fight, and ironically even the fight is infantile and immature.

Throughout the poem, Pope uses the tradition of epic poetry—poems about serious conflict and heroism—to show, by comparison, the triviality, hollowness and conceitedness of court life. Unlike epic poems with a serious and lofty theme about heroism and brave warriors, Pope's poem is about an insignificant incident about the loss of a lock of hair to institute a close comparison between the intensity of battle and the triviality of court culture. The Baron's clumsy use of scissors is a contrast to the dexterous use of swords in the classical epic. The battle of cards on the green table highlights the contrast between the noble activities of Homeric men and the vain activities performed by these courtly lords and ladies.

4.3.3 Ariel

In an earlier Unit you have studied the features of a classical epic narrative. The intervention of the supernatural elements in the lives of men and women is an important aspect of an epic. The point to note here is these guardian sylphs are

not visible to the characters. They are airy incorporeal (in substantial, without body or form) beings, believed to have powers to affect the course of human events.

Ariel is the chief of the sylphs. He is the guardian sylph. As Canto 3 opens, he warns Belinda through a dream that he is given the responsibility to protect her beauty and chastity. He warns her to be careful of men, 'beware of man,' and tries to ward off danger that would happen to her in the near future. He calls his army of sylphs to guard her. But when the Baron is about to scissor her lock, Ariel discovers "An earthly lover lurking at her heart," and that she is not as chaste as she should be. At the vital moment he does not come to protect her. Ariel who is tasked with protecting Belinda's morality by ensuring her chastity, abandons his responsibility. Ariel's withdrawal reinforces Pope's contention that the courtly lords and ladies do not have any genuine respect for chastity and morality and this trivial incident is an example of laxity in their approach.

Check Your Progress 2

- (i) Attempt a character sketch of Belinda.

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- (ii) Attempt a character analysis of the Baron.

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.)

4.4 STYLE

Pope's reputation as a poet has undergone several fluctuations down the ages. His reputation at the time of his death was immense. His mastery of the heroic couplet, which he put to many uses, made all other forms of verse redundant. The heroic couplet, which Pope wrote his poetry in, is a traditional form for English poetry commonly used for epic and narrative poetry. It refers to poems constructed from a sequence of rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines. The pattern of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one is called iambic and because there are five stresses in each line the meter is called pentameter. The iambic pentameter couplet came to be called heroic because in the 17th century it was regarded as the proper form for dealing with heroic subjects. The mock heroic style that Pope used created a lot of humour in his works. He mingled the trivial with the grand. With his knowledge of the epics and the manners of the society of his times, he successfully created a sort of anti-climax, leading to

humour. ‘The Rape of The Lock’ is perhaps the best example of a mock- heroic poem that is replete with wit, humour and irony.

The neat epigrammatic style of Pope brought him many admirers besides enriching the English language. No one could dress up a commonplace sentiment in finer clothes than Pope. Epigrams like “An honest man is the noblest work of God” or “Hope springs eternal in the human breast” have passed into the common speech of men. Although he lacked the easy breadth and vigour of Dryden in his satirical verses, yet he excelled his predecessor in exquisite finish achieved through his choice of words.

Pope was the chief of living satirists in verse, as Swift was easily the greatest master of prose. Pope’s morbid sensitivity of his disposition caused him to pick up quarrels with many people like John Dennis, a writer and Ambrose Phillips, a pastoral writer among many others whom he satirised in his famous ‘Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot’. Pope’s fame created many envious foes who often ran him down. He never forgot those who maligned him and was determined to take revenge when the right time came. Theobald who had criticized his edition of Shakespeare, was ridiculed by him in ‘The Dunciad’ and later Colley Cibber met the same fate as he had made fun of a play produced by Pope’s club.

4.4.1 Picture of Society

‘The Rape of the Lock’ is a delicate, cynical and witty poem. It embodies not only the peculiar flavour of Pope’s genius, but the light tone and shifting colours of his time as well. As an expression of the artificial life of the age — of its parties, cards, toilets, lap-dogs, tea-drinking, snuff taking and other idle vanities. ‘The Rape of the Lock’ is as perfect an expression of the Augustan age as *Tamburlain* by Marlowe is of the boundless ambition of the Elizabethans. In its blending of mock-heroic satire, and delicate fancy, this exquisite specimen of filigree work, as Hazlitt called it, remains unmatched. We cannot emphasise enough the capacity and power of Pope as a delineator of social manners of his age.

Even though Pope, Addison, Swift, Steele and Fielding, all depicted the social conditions of their time in their works, it was Pope’s success in ‘The Rape of the Lock’ that he drew the picture of the society of his times so well and in such a fine satirical vein. It is a social satire and the purpose of the poem as Pope himself declared was to “laugh at the little unguarded foibles and weaknesses of the female sex, through the portrayal of Belinda”. It is a masterpiece of a satire upon feminine frivolity. The ladies drove in guilt coaches or in sedan chairs. A pleasure trip on the Thames and delightful social meetings at the Hampton Court were pleasurable diversions to break the monotony of theatres and balls. Drinking, gambling, playing cards, lovemaking and coquetry were the little activities with which the ladies of the day kept themselves socially engaged. The young gallants of the time were equally busy with gay frivolities and fashions. The young men lounged about fashionably in their wide-skirted coats and high-heeled shoes, flaunting their snuffboxes and their canes during that time. The moral of the poem presented through Clarissa’s speech in Canto 5 is that young ladies should not care so much for attractiveness and beauty but for virtues. Beauty without virtue is useless and virtue alone can bring happiness.

4.4.2 Genre of Mock Epic / Heroic

The poem perhaps is the most outstanding example in the English language of

the genre of mock-epic. The epic had long been considered as one of the most serious of literary forms. It had been applied, in the classical period to the lofty subject matter of love and war and by Milton to the intricacies of the Christian faith. The strategy of Pope's mock-epic is not to mock the form itself, but to mock its society in its very failure to rise to epic standards. He exposes its pettiness by casting it against the grandeur of the traditional epic subjects and the bravery and fortitude of epic heroes. Pope's mock-heroic in 'The Rape of the Lock' underscores the ridiculousness of a society in which values have lost all proportions, and the trivial is handled with the gravity and solemnity that ought to be accorded to truly important issues. The society he displays through this poem is one that fails to distinguish between things that matter and things that do not. The poem mocks the men it portrays by showing them as being unworthy of a form that is suited to a more heroic culture. Thus the mock-epic resembles the epic in that its central concerns are serious and often moral, but the act that the approach must now be satirical rather than earnest is symptomatic of how far the culture has fallen.

Pope's use of the mock-epic genre is intricate and exhaustive. 'The Rape of the Lock' is a poem in which every element of the contemporary scene conjures up some image from epic tradition or the classical world view, and the pieces are wrought together with the cleverness and expertise that makes the poem surprising and delightful. Pope's transformations are numerous, striking and loaded with moral implications. The great battles of epic times become bouts of gambling and flirtatious tiffs. The great, if capricious, Greek and Roman gods are converted into a relatively undifferentiated army of basically ineffectual spirit. Cosmetic, clothing and jewellery substitute for armour and weapons, and the rituals of religious sacrifice are transplanted to the dressing room and the altar of love. Running true to the literary forms of the eighteenth century English Poetry, Alexander Pope presented a parody of the heroic style and made it into a comical poem. "It would be almost true to say" observes Holden "that in this heroic comical poem it is the comical part which most appeals to us, as the heroic part did to our ancestors. In the mock heroic, lofty incidents, characters and style are applied to a trivial subject. The theme of 'The Rape of the Lock' is the cutting off a lock of a ladies hair. The subject is too trivial for any epic treatment. Yet Pope gives to this absurd subject the dignity of an epic treatment. Like an epic poet makes an invocation to some gods in the beginning of the poem, Pope too invokes the muse and proposes his theme. Following the convention of an epic which must have some peculiar passion as the distinguished feature, coquetry may be regarded as the reigning passion of 'The Rape of the Lock'.

Similarly an epic must contain many episodes. Pope has introduced in this poem several episodes such as the episode of the game of Ombre which is the prelude to the central action. Supernatural machinery is introduced in epic poetry. But instead of the Gods and Goddesses of Homer and Virgil and the angels and devils of Dante and Milton, Pope has introduced the gnomes and sylphs of the Rosicrucian system. The light militia of the lower sky is more appropriate to a mock heroic poem and Pope has achieved this triumph in his art. The description of weapons in the poem is also in the mock heroic way. The pair of scissors with which Lord Petre performs the "rape" has been described as "two edged weapons", "little engine", "glittering forex", "fatal engine", "sheers", and "meeting points". The game of Ombre is similarly dignified with several similes. Therefore, we see that no words are spared in using poetic diction to describe the smallest things. This is the perfection of the mock heroic.

Check Your Progress 3

(i) Explain the form in which Pope wrote his poems.

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(ii) How does Pope present the society of his times through his poem?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit)

4.5 GLOSSARY

Feuding:	Engaging in a bitter quarrel
Dedicatory:	Note prefixed to a literary, artistic, or musical composition dedicating it to someone in token of affection or esteem.
Inane:	Empty, pointless, lacking in sense
Juvenile:	Not fully grown or developed, characteristics appropriate for children
Hero comical:	Combining both the heroic and the comical
Pseudonym:	A fictitious name adopted, especially by an author
Feigned:	Pretended
Gnome:	One of a fabled race of dwarflike creatures who live underground and guard treasure hoards
Innate:	inherent, natural
Innocuous:	Harmless, having no adverse effect
Puerile:	Immature, especially in being silly or trivial; childish.
Rapprochement:	The state of reconciliation or restoration of cordial relations
Covertly:	Not openly practised
Coquettishness:	Quality of a woman who flirts insincerely with men to win their admiration and attention
Beau:	Boyfriend of a girl or woman
Infatuation:	Foolish or extravagant passion
Besotted:	Infatuated
Metonymically:	In a metonymic manner, a figure of speech in one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of <i>the sword</i> for military power.

Conceitedness:	Holding or characterized by an unduly high opinion of oneself; vain
Dexterous:	Having mental skill and adroitness or deftness or mastery
Incorporeal:	Insubstantial, without body or form
Chastity:	The condition or quality of being chaste, especially the condition of not having had sexual intercourse or of abstaining from sexual relations.
Dichotomy:	Division into two exclusive, opposed, or contradictory groups eg. <i>a</i> dichotomy between thought and action.

4.6 SUMMING UP

In this Unit we provided you with material to:

- understand the story in relation to different characters that appear in Canto 3
- analyze the characters both major and minor
- recognize the roles played by the characters
- appreciate the distinctive style used by Pope
- understand how Pope makes use of epic tradition to satirize the 18th century society of lords and ladies.

4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- (i) The other characters include Clarissa, Thalestris, Sir Plume and the five sylphs-Ariel, Umbriel, Brillanta, Momentilla and Crispissa. They do not have any significant role to play but their actions in many ways influence Belinda and the Baron.

Check Your Progress 2

- (i) Character sketch of Belinda: she is a bundle of contradictions. She is very beautiful and well aware of her beauty. Therefore, she is vain. She is based on a friend of Pope's called Arabella Fermor.
- (ii) The Baron is based on Lord Petre, a gentleman in Pope's social circle. He is the antagonist of the poem as he snips off Belinda's lock of hair.

Check Your Progress 3

- (i) Pope wrote in the heroic couplet consisting of rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines.
- (ii) Pope presented the society of his time in a satirical way exposing the frivolities and artificialities of his age.