

MOCK HEROIC ELEMENTS in THE RAPE OF THE LOCK  
BY ALEXANDER POPE:

The students explored the question: what is a mock epic, defining the genre as a literary term.

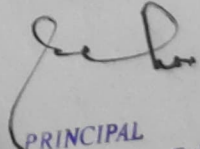
They explained that it is a form of satire that employs the elevated style of the epic, for a trivial subject. Some of the features of a mock epic are : the invocation of a deity, a formal statement of theme, elevated and hyperbolic speeches, use of the supernatural, battles, division into books and cantos. It could be viewed as a parody of the Classical Epic.

The Rape of the Lock is also referred to as a “heroicomic poem”, belonging to the genre of the burlesque.

The action of The Rape follows from a trivial action. The occasion of the poem was slight and Pope had been commissioned to make the incident light so that the two warring families could laugh it out. Pope’s work is a fine specimen of real wit and humour. Whereas the action in an epic is of stupendous volume, the action in this poem stems from a silly reason.

The theme of the poem is suggested in the Invocation, like that we find in an epic, but the theme is ridiculously trivial. In an epic, the Heavenly Muses or Gods are invoked to inspire the epic poet, but in The Rape, it is Pope’s friend John Caryll who mediated and requested him to write this poem.

Almost all epics have a woman at the heart of the narrative, whose actions, fate and beauty become central to the main action. In The Rape, Belinda is the central figure, goddess of beauty, the lustre of her eyes surpasses the sun who creeps in her room through curtains, shooting a timorous ray.

  
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Pope uses the sylph machinery in *The Rape*, in place of supernatural powers that are prominently visible in an epic. Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty rescues Aeneas in *The Iliad* when he is attacked by Diomedes.

The rituals performed by the Baron in the pre-dawn hours are another mock heroic feature of the poem, mimicking the epic tradition of sacrificing to the Gods before an important battle or journey. The fact that he discards all his other love tokens in these preparations reveals his capriciousness as a lover. In this case, earnest prayer is replaced by the self-indulgent sighs of the lover.

An epic is episodic in nature and epic games are almost a compulsion in any epic. In *The Rape*, however, we find the card game of ombre played and described in minute details. It suggests the mighty battle and the cards imply the soldiers described in great details. There is a battle between Belinda and the Baron, but in a true mock epic style, it is fought with fans and snuff instead of with swords and spears.

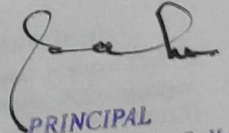
A long perilous journey on water is a compulsory feature in an epic. But in *The Rape*, Belinda takes a comfortable journey on the Thames in a boat to reach Hampton court to play the game of ombre.

We also get a picture of the fashionable society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century England, in place of the larger society in an epic.

Belinda's toilet has been given importance in the poem. It suggests the dressing up of the epic hero before setting off for the battlefield. In the *Iliad*, Homer describes the armour and weaponry of the great Achilles, but in the case of Belinda, these consist of pins and combs and puffs, powder and patches.

Heroic similes and grand style, characteristic of all epics, are used in *The Rape of the Lock* by the poet, for in issue that is trivial and far from being serious.

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