

24 and 5.145-48); but he also makes us aware of its beauty and charm.

The epigraph may be translated, "I was unwilling, Belinda, to ravish your locks; but I rejoice to have conceded this to your prayers" (Martial's *Epigrams* 12.84.1-2). Pope substituted his heroine for Martial's Polytimus. The epigraph is intended to suggest that the poem was published at Miss Fermor's request.

## The Rape of the Lock

### An Heroi-Comical Poem

*Nolueram, Belinda, tuos violare capillos;  
sed juvat hoc precibus me tribuisse tuis.*

—MARTIAL

TO MRS. ARABELLA FERMOR

MADAM,

It will be in vain to deny that I have some regard for this piece, since I dedicate it to you. Yet you may bear me witness, it was intended only to divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humor enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own. But as it was communicated with the air of a secret, it soon found its way into the world. An imperfect copy having been offered to a bookseller, you had the good nature for my sake to consent to the publication of one more correct; this I was forced to, before I had executed half my design, for the machinery was entirely wanting to complete it.

The machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the critics, to signify that part which the deities, angels, or demons are made to act in a poem; for the ancient poets are in one respect like many modern ladies: let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance. These machines I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the Rosicrucian<sup>1</sup> doctrine of spirits.

I know how disagreeable it is to make use of hard words before a lady; but 'tis so much the concern of a poet to have his works understood, and particularly by your sex, that you must give me leave to explain two or three difficult terms.

The Rosicrucians are a people I must bring you acquainted with. The best account I know of them is in a French book called *Le Comte de Gabalis*,<sup>2</sup> which both in its title and size is so like a novel, that many of the fair sex have read it for one by mistake. According to these gentlemen, the four elements are inhabited by spirits, which they call Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs, and Salamanders. The Gnomes or Demons of earth delight in mischief; but the Sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable. For they say, any mortals may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a condition very easy to all true adepts, an inviolate preservation of chastity.

As to the following cantos, all the passages of them are as fabulous as the vision at the beginning, or the transformation at the end (except the loss of your hair, which I always mention with reverence). The human persons are as

1. A system of arcane philosophy introduced into England from Germany in the 17th century.

2. By the Abbé de Montfaucon de Villars, published in 1670.

fictitious as the airy ones; and the character of Belinda, as it is now managed, resembles you in nothing but in beauty.

If this poem had as many graces as there are in your person, or in your mind, yet I could never hope it should pass through the world half so uncensured as you have done. But let its fortune be what it will, mine is happy enough, to have given me this occasion of assuring you that I am, with the truest esteem,

MADAM,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

A. POPE

### Canto 1

What dire offense from amorous causes springs,  
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,  
I sing—This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due:  
This, even Belinda may vouchsafe to view:  
5 Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,  
If she inspire, and he approve my lays.

Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel  
A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?  
Oh, say what stranger cause, yet unexplored,  
10 Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?  
In tasks so bold can little men engage,  
And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?

Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,  
And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day.  
15 Now lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake,  
And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:

Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knocked the ground,  
And the pressed watch<sup>3</sup> returned a silver sound.  
Belinda still her downy pillow pressed,  
20 Her guardian Sylph prolonged the balmy rest.  
'Twas he had summoned to her silent bed  
The morning dream that hovered o'er her head.  
A youth more glittering than a birthnight beau<sup>4</sup>  
(That even in slumber caused her cheek to glow)  
25 Seemed to her ear his winning lips to lay,  
And thus in whispers said, or seemed to say:

"Fairest of mortals, thou distinguished care  
Of thousand bright inhabitants of air!  
30 If e'er one vision touched thy infant thought,  
Of all the nurse and all the priest have taught,  
Of airy elves by moonlight shadows seen,  
The silver token, and the circled green,<sup>5</sup>  
Or virgins visited by angel powers,  
With golden crowns and wreaths of heavenly flowers,  
35 Hear and believe! thy own importance know,

3. A watch that chimes the hour and the quarter hour when the stem is pressed down. "Knocked the ground": summons to a maid.

4. Courtiers wore especially fine clothes on the sovereign's birthday.

5. Rings of bright green grass, which are common

in England even in winter, were held to be caused by the round dances of fairies. According to popular belief, fairies skim off the cream from jugs of milk left standing overnight and leave a coin ("silver token") in payment.

Some secret truths, from learned pride concealed,  
 To maids alone and children are revealed:  
 What though no credit doubting wits may give?  
 40 The fair and innocent shall still believe.  
 Know, then, unnumbered spirits round thee fly,  
 The light militia of the lower sky:  
 These, though unseen, are ever on the wing,  
 Hang o'er the box, and hover round the Ring.<sup>6</sup>  
 45 Think what an equipage thou hast in air,  
 And view with scorn two pages and a chair.<sup>7</sup>  
 As now your own, our beings were of old,  
 And once enclosed in woman's beauteous mold;  
 Thence, by a soft transition, we repair  
 50 From earthly vehicles to these of air.  
 Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,  
 That all her vanities at once are dead:  
 Succeeding vanities she still regards,  
 And though she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.  
 55 Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive,  
 And love of ombre,<sup>7</sup> after death survive.  
 For when the Fair in all their pride expire,  
 To their first elements<sup>8</sup> their souls retire:  
 The sprites of fiery termagants in flame  
 60 Mount up, and take a Salamander's<sup>9</sup> name.  
 Soft yielding minds to water glide away,  
 And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental tea.<sup>1</sup>  
 The graver prude sinks downward to a Gnome,  
 In search of mischief still on earth to roam.  
 65 The light coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,  
 And sport and flutter in the fields of air.  
 "Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste  
 Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embraced:  
 For spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease  
 70 Assume what sexes and what shapes they please.<sup>2</sup>  
 What guards the purity of melting maids,  
 In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,  
 Safe from the treacherous friend, the daring spark,  
 The glance by day, the whisper in the dark,  
 75 When kind occasion prompts their warm desires,  
 When music softens, and when dancing fires?  
 'Tis but their Sylph, the wise Celestials<sup>3</sup> know,  
 Though Honor is the word with men below.  
 "Some nymphs<sup>3</sup> there are, too conscious of their face,

sedan chair

heavenly beings

6. The "box" in the theater and the fashionable circular drive ("Ring") in Hyde Park.  
 7. The popular card game (see n. 1, p. 2521).  
 8. The four elements out of which all things were believed to have been made were fire, water, earth, and air. One or another of these elements was supposed to be predominant in both the physical and the psychological makeup of each human being. In this context they are spoken of as "humors."  
 9. A lizardlike animal, in antiquity believed to live

in fire. Each element was inhabited by a spirit, as the following lines explain. "Termagants": shrewish or overbearing women.  
 1. Pronounced *lay*.  
 2. Cf. *Paradise Lost* 1.427-31; this is one of many allusions to that poem in the *Rape*.  
 3. Here and after, a fanciful name for a young woman, to be distinguished from the "Nymphs" (water spirits) in line 62.

80 These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,  
 When offers are disdained, and love denied:  
 Then gay ideas<sup>4</sup> crowd the vacant brain,  
 While peters, and dukes, and all their sweeping train,  
 85 And garters, stars, and coronets<sup>4</sup> appear,  
 And in soft sounds, 'your Grace'<sup>5</sup> salutes their ear.  
 'Tis these that early taint the female soul,  
 Instruct the eyes of young coquettes to roll,  
 Teach infant cheeks a bidden blush to know,  
 90 And little hearts to flutter at a beau.  
 "Oft, when the world imagine women stray,  
 The Sylphs through mystic mazes guide their way,  
 Through all the giddy circle they pursue,  
 And old impertinence<sup>5</sup> expel by new.  
 95 What tender maid but must a victim fall  
 To one man's treat, but for another's ball?  
 When Florio speaks, what virgin could withstand,  
 If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand?  
 With varying vanities, from every part,  
 100 They shift the moving toyshop<sup>5</sup> of their heart;  
 Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive,  
 Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive.  
 This erring mortals levity may call;  
 Oh, blind to truth! the Sylphs contrive it all.  
 105 "Of these am I, who thy protection claim,  
 A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.  
 Late, as I ranged the crystal wilds of air,  
 In the clear mirror of thy ruling star  
 I saw, alas! some dread event impend,  
 110 Ere to the main this morning sun descend,  
 But Heaven reveals not what, or how, or where:  
 Warned by the Sylph, O pious maid, beware!  
 This to disclose is all thy guardian can:  
 Beware of all, but most beware of Man!"  
 115 He said; when Shock,<sup>6</sup> who thought she slept too long,  
 Leaped up, and waked his mistress with his tongue.  
 'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,  
 Thy eyes first opened on a billet-doux;  
 Wounds, charms, and ardors were no sooner read,  
 120 But all the vision vanished from thy head.  
 And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed,  
 Each silver vase in mystic order laid.  
 First, robed in white, the nymph intent adores,  
 With head uncovered, the cosmetic powers.  
 125 A heavenly image in the glass appears;  
 To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears.  
 The inferior priestess, at her altar's side,  
 Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.  
 Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here

showy images

a duchess

trifle

4. Emblems of nobility.  
 5. A shop stocked with baubles and trifles.

6. A long-haired poodle, Belinda's lapdog.

130 The various offerings of the world appear;  
 From each she nicely culls with curious toil,  
 And decks the goddess with the glittering spoil.  
 This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,  
 And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.  
 135 The tortoise here and elephant unite,  
 Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.  
 Here files of pins extend their shining rows,  
 Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles,<sup>7</sup> billet-doux.  
 Now awful<sup>8</sup> Beauty puts on all its arms;  
 140 The fair each moment rises in her charms,  
 Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,  
 And calls forth all the wonders of her face;  
 Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,  
 And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.  
 145 The busy Sylphs surround their darling care,  
 These set the head, and those divide the hair,  
 Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown;  
 And Betty's<sup>9</sup> praised for labors not her own.

Canto 2

Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,  
 The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,  
 Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams  
 Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames.  
 5 Fair nymphs and well-dressed youths around her shone,  
 But every eye was fixed on her alone.  
 On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,  
 Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.  
 Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,  
 10 Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those:  
 Favors to none, to all she smiles extends;  
 Oft she rejects, but never once offends.  
 Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,  
 And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.  
 15 Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,  
 Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:  
 If to her share some female errors fall,  
 Look on her face; and you'll forget 'em all.  
 This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,  
 20 Nourished two locks which graceful hung behind  
 In equal curls, and well conspired to deck  
 With shining ringlets her smooth ivory neck.  
 Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,  
 And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.  
 25 With hairy springes<sup>9</sup> we the birds betray,  
 Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey,  
 Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,

7. It has been suggested that Pope intended here not "Bibles," but "bibelots" (trinkets), but this interpretation has not gained wide acceptance.

8. Belinda's maid, the "inferior priestess" mentioned in line 127.

9. Snares (pronounced *sprin-jez*).

And beauty draws us with a single hair.

The adventurous Baron the bright locks admired,  
 30 He saw, he wished, and to the prize aspired.  
 Resolved to win, he meditates the way,  
 By force to ravish, or by fraud betray;  
 For when success a lover's toil attends,  
 Few ask if fraud or force attained his ends.  
 35 For this, ere Phoebus<sup>9</sup> rose, he had implored  
 Propitious Heaven, and every power adored,  
 But chiefly Love—to Love an altar built,  
 Of twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt.  
 There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves,  
 40 And all the trophies of his former loves.  
 With tender billet-doux he lights the pyre,  
 And breathes three amorous sighs to raise the fire.  
 Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes  
 Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize:  
 45 The powers gave ear, and granted half his prayer,  
 The rest the winds dispersed in empty air.

the sun

But now secure the painted vessel glides,  
 The sunbeams trembling on the floating tides,  
 While melting music steals upon the sky,  
 50 And softened sounds along the waters die.  
 Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play,  
 Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay.  
 All but the Sylph—with careful thoughts oppressed,  
 The impending woe sat heavy on his breast.  
 55 He summons straight his denizens of air;  
 The lucid squadrons round the sails repair:  
 Soft o'er the shrouds aërial whispers breathe  
 That seemed but zephyrs to the train beneath.  
 Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,  
 60 Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold.  
 Transparent forms too fine for mortal sight,  
 Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light,  
 Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,  
 Thin glittering textures of the filmy dew,  
 65 Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,  
 Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes,  
 While every beam new transient colors flings,  
 Colors that change whene'er they wave their wings.  
 Amid the circle, on the gilded mast,  
 70 Superior by the head was Ariel placed;  
 His purple<sup>1</sup> pinions opening to the sun,  
 He raised his azure wand, and thus begun:  
 "Ye Sylphs and Sylphids, to your chief give ear!  
 Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves, and Daemons, hear!  
 75 Ye know the spheres and various tasks assigned  
 By laws eternal to the aërial kind.

1. In 18th-century poetic diction the word might mean bloodred, purple, or simply (as is likely here) brightly colored. The word derives from Virgil's

*Eclogue* 9.40, *purpureum*. An example of the Latinate nature of some poetic diction of the period.

Some in the fields of purest ether play,  
 And bask and whiten in the blaze of day,  
 Some guide the course of wandering orbs on high,  
 80 Or roll the planets through the boundless sky.  
 Some less refined, beneath the moon's pale light  
 Pursue the stars that shoot athwart the night,  
 Or suck the mists in grosser air below,  
 Or dip their pinions in the painted bow,<sup>2</sup>  
 85 Or brew fierce tempests on the wintry main,  
 Or o'er the glebe<sup>3</sup> distill the kindly rain.  
 Others on earth o'er human race preside,  
 Watch all their ways, and all their actions guide:  
 Of these the chief the care of nations own,  
 90 And guard with arms divine the British Throne.  
 "Our humbler province is to tend the Fair,  
 Not a less pleasing, though less glorious care:  
 To save the powder from too rude a gale,  
 Nor let the imprisoned essences<sup>4</sup> exhale;  
 95 To draw fresh colors from the vernal flowers;  
 To steal from rainbows e'er they drop in showers  
 A brighter wash;<sup>5</sup> to curl their waving hairs,  
 Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs,  
 Nay oft, in dreams invention we bestow,  
 100 To change a founce, or add a furbelow.  
 "This day black omens threat the brightest fair,  
 That e'er deserved a watchful spirit's care;  
 Some dire disaster, or by force or slight,  
 But what, or where, the Fates have wrapped in night:  
 105 Whether the nymph shall break Diana's<sup>2</sup> law,  
 Or some frail china jar receive a flaw,  
 Or stain her honor, or her new brocade,  
 Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade,  
 Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball;  
 110 Or whether Heaven has doomed that Shock must fall.  
 Haste, then, ye spirits! to your charge repair:  
 The fluttering fan be Zephyretta's care;  
 The drops<sup>3</sup> to thee, Brillanté, we consign;  
 And, Momentilla, let the watch be thine;  
 115 Do thou, Crispissa,<sup>4</sup> tend her favorite Lock;  
 Ariel himself shall be the guard of Shock.  
 "To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,  
 We trust the important charge, the petticoat;  
 Oft have we known that sevenfold fence to fail,  
 120 Though stiff with hoops, and armed with ribs of whale.<sup>5</sup>  
 Form a strong line about the silver bound,  
 And guard the wide circumference around.  
 "Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,  
 His post neglects, or leaves the fair at large,  
 125 Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins,

2. Diana was the goddess of chastity.  
 3. Diamond earrings. Observe the appropriateness of the names of the Sylphs to their assigned functions.

4. From Latin *crispere*, "to curl."  
 5. Corsets and the hoops of hoopskirts were made of whalebone.

Be stopped in vials, or transfixed with pins,  
 Or plunged in lakes of bitter washes lie,  
 Or wedged whole ages in a bodkin's<sup>6</sup> eye;  
 Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain,  
 130 While clogged he beats his silken wings in vain,  
 Or alum styptics with contracting power  
 Shrink his thin essence like a riveled<sup>7</sup> flower:  
 Or, as Ixion<sup>8</sup> fixed, the wretch shall feel  
 The giddy motion of the whirling mill,  
 135 In fumes of burning chocolate shall glow,  
 And tremble at the sea that froths below!"  
 He spoke; the spirits from the sails descend;  
 Some, orb in orb, around the nymph extend;  
 Some thread the mazy ringlets of her hair;  
 140 Some hang upon the pendants of her ear:  
 With beating hearts the dire event they wait,  
 Anxious, and trembling for the birth of Fate.

### Canto 3

Close by those meads, forever crowned with flowers,  
 Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,  
 There stands a structure of majestic frame,  
 Which from the neighboring Hampton<sup>9</sup> takes its name.  
 5 Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom  
 Of foreign tyrants and of nymphs at home;  
 Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,  
 Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.  
 Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,  
 10 To taste awhile the pleasures of a court;  
 In various talk the instructive hours they passed,  
 Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;  
 One speaks the glory of the British Queen,  
 And one describes a charming Indian screen;  
 15 A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;  
 At every word a reputation dies.  
 Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat,  
 With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that.  
 Meanwhile, declining from the noon of day,  
 20 The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray;  
 The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,  
 And wretches hang that jurymen may dine;  
 The merchant from the Exchange returns in peace,  
 And the long labors of the toilet cease.  
 25 Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites,  
 Burns to encounter two adventurous knights,  
 At ombre<sup>1</sup> singly to decide their doom,

6. A blunt needle with a large eye used for drawing ribbon through eyelets in the edging of women's garments.

7. To "rive" is to "contract into wrinkles and corrugations" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).

8. In the Greek myth, he was punished in the underworld by being bound on an overturning

wheel.

9. Hampton Court, the royal palace, about fifteen miles up the Thames from London.

1. The game of ombre that Belinda plays against the baron and another young man is too complicated for complete explication here. Pope has carefully arranged the cards so that Belinda wins. The

And thus broke out—"My Lord, why, what the devil!  
 Z—ds! damn the lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil!  
 Plague on 't! 'tis past a jest—nay prithee, pox!  
 130 Give her the hair"—he spoke, and rapped his box.  
 "It grieves me much," replied the Peer again,  
 "Who speaks so well should ever speak in vain.  
 But by this Lock, this sacred Lock I swear  
 (Which never more shall join its parted hair;  
 135 Which never more its honors shall renew,  
 Clipped from the lovely head where late it grew),  
 That while my nostrils draw the vital air,  
 This hand, which won it, shall forever wear."  
 He spoke, and speaking, in proud triumph spread  
 140 The long-contended honors<sup>2</sup> of her head.  
 But Umbriel, hateful Gnome, forbears not so;  
 He breaks the vial whence the sorrows flow.  
 Then see! the nymph in beauteous grief appears,  
 Her eyes half languishing, half drowned in tears;  
 145 On her heaved bosom hung her drooping head,  
 Which with a sigh she raised, and thus she said:  
 "Forever cursed be this detested day,  
 Which snatched my best, my favorite curl away!  
 Happy! ah, ten times happy had I been,  
 150 If Hampton Court these eyes had never seen!  
 Yet am not I the first mistaken maid,  
 By love of courts to numerous ills betrayed.  
 Oh, had I rather unadmired remained  
 In some lone isle, or distant northern land;  
 155 Where the gilt chariot never marks the way,  
 Where none learn ombre, none e'er taste bohea!<sup>3</sup>  
 There kept my charms concealed from mortal eye,  
 Like roses that in deserts bloom and die.  
 What moved my mind with youthful lords to roam?  
 160 Oh, had I stayed, and said my prayers at home!  
 'Twas this the morning omens seemed to tell;  
 Thrice from my trembling hand the patch box<sup>4</sup> fell;  
 The tottering china shook without a wind,  
 Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind!  
 165 A Sylph too warned me of the threats of fate,  
 In mystic visions, now believed too late!  
 See the poor remnants of these slighted hairs!  
 My hands shall rend what e'en thy rapine spares.  
 These in two sable ringlets taught to break,  
 170 Once gave new beauties to the snowy neck.  
 The sister lock now sits uncouth, alone,  
 And in its fellow's fate foresees its own;  
 Uncurled it hangs, the fatal shears demands,  
 And tempts once more thy sacrilegious hands.  
 175 Oh, hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize  
 Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!"

2. Ornaments, hence locks; a Latinism.  
 3. A costly sort of tea.

4. To hold the ornamental patches of court plaster worn on the face by both sexes.

She said: the pitying audience melt in tears.  
 But Fate and Jove had stopped the Baron's ears.  
 In vain Thalestris with reproach assails,  
 For who can move when fair Belinda fails?  
 5 Not half so fixed the Trojan<sup>5</sup> could remain,  
 While Anna begged and Dido raged in vain.  
 Then grave Clarissa graceful waved her fan;  
 Silence ensued, and thus the nymph began:  
 "Say, why are beauties praised and honored most,  
 10 The wise man's passion, and the vain man's toast?  
 Why decked with all that land and sea afford,  
 Why angels called, and angel-like adored?  
 Why round our coaches crowd the white-gloved beaux,  
 Why bows the side box from its inmost rows?  
 15 How vain are all these glories, all our pains,  
 Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains;  
 That men may say when we the front box grace,  
 'Behold the first in virtue as in face!'  
 Oh! if to dance all night, and dress all day,  
 20 Charmed the smallpox, or chased old age away,  
 Who would not scorn what housewife's cares produce,  
 Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?  
 To patch, nay ogle, might become a saint,  
 Nor could it sure be such a sin to paint.  
 25 But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,  
 Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to gray;  
 Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,  
 And she who scorns a man must die a maid;  
 What then remains but well our power to use,  
 30 And keep good humor still whate'er we lose?  
 And trust me, dear, good humor can prevail  
 When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding fail.  
 Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;  
 Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul."<sup>6</sup>  
 35 So spoke the dame, but no applause ensued;  
 Belinda frowned, Thalestris called her prude.  
 "To arms, to arms!" the fierce virago cries,  
 And swift as lightning to the combat flies.  
 All side in parties, and begin the attack;  
 40 Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack;  
 Heroes' and heroines' shouts confusedly rise,  
 And bass and treble voices strike the skies.  
 No common weapons in their hands are found,  
 Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound.  
 45 So when bold Homer makes the Gods engage,  
 And heavenly breasts with human passions rage;

5. Aeneas, who forsook Dido at the bidding of the gods, despite her reproaches and the supplications of her sister Anna. Virgil compares him to a steadfast oak that withstands a storm (*Aeneid* 4.437–43).

6. The speech is a close parody of Pope's own translation of the speech of Sarpedon to Glaucus, first published in 1709 and slightly revised in his version of the *Iliad* (12.371–96).

'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms;  
 And all Olympus rings with loud alarms:  
 Jove's thunder roars, heaven trembles all around;  
 50 Blue Neptune storms, the bellowing deeps resound:  
 Earth shakes her nodding towers, the ground gives way,  
 And the pale ghosts start at the flash of day!  
 Triumphant Umbriel on a scone's<sup>7</sup> height  
 Clapped his glad wings, and sat to view the fight:  
 55 Propped on the bodkin spears, the sprites survey  
 The growing combat, or assist the fray.  
 While through the press enraged Thalestris flies,  
 And scatters death around from both her eyes,  
 A beau and witling perished in the throng,  
 60 One died in metaphor, and one in song.  
 "O cruel nymph! a living death I bear,"  
 Cried Dapperwit, and sunk beside his chair.  
 A mournful glance Sir Fopling upwards cast,  
 "Those eyes are made so killing"—was his last.  
 65 Thus on Maeander's flowery margin lies  
 The expiring swan,<sup>8</sup> and as he sings he dies.  
 When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down,  
 Chloe stepped in, and killed him with a frown;  
 She smiled to see the doughty hero slain,  
 70 But, at her smile, the beau revived again.  
 Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air,  
 Weighs the men's wits against the lady's hair;  
 The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;  
 At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside.  
 75 See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,  
 With more than usual lightning in her eyes;  
 Nor feared the chief the unequal fight to try,  
 Who sought no more than on his foe to die.  
 But this bold lord with manly strength endured,  
 80 She with one finger and a thumb subdued:  
 Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew,  
 A charge of snuff the wily virgin threw;  
 The Gnomes direct, to every atom just,  
 The pungent grains of titillating dust.  
 85 Sudden, with starting tears each eye o'erflows,  
 And the high dome re-echoes to his nose.  
 "Now meet thy fate," incensed Belinda cried,  
 And drew a deadly bodkin<sup>9</sup> from her side.  
 (The same, his ancient personage to deck,  
 90 Her great-great-grandsire wore about his neck,  
 In three seal rings; which after, melted down,  
 Formed a vast buckle for his widow's gown:  
 Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,  
 The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew;  
 95 Then in a bodkin graced her mother's hairs,

7. A scone is a candlestick fastened on the wall.  
 8. The Maeander, a river in Asia Minor, was famous in mythology for its swans.

9. Here, an ornamental hairpin shaped like a dagger.

Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)

"Boast not my fall," he cried, "insulting foe!  
 Thou by some other shalt be laid as low.  
 Nor think to die dejects my lofty mind:  
 100 All that I dread is leaving you behind!  
 Rather than so, ah, let me still survive,  
 And burn in Cupid's flames—but burn alive."  
 "Restore the Lock!" she cries; and all around  
 "Restore the Lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound.  
 105 Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain  
 Roared for the handkerchief that caused his pain.<sup>1</sup>  
 But see how oft ambitious aims are crossed,  
 And chiefs contend till all the prize is lost!  
 The lock, obtained with guilt, and kept with pain,  
 110 In every place is sought, but sought in vain:  
 With such a prize no mortal must be blessed,  
 So Heaven decrees! with Heaven who can contest?  
 Some thought it mounted to the lunar sphere,  
 Since all things lost on earth are treasured there.  
 115 There heroes' wits are kept in ponderous vases,  
 And beaux' in snuffboxes and tweezer cases.  
 There broken vows and deathbed alms are found,  
 And lovers' hearts with ends of riband bound,  
 The courtier's promises, and sick man's prayers,  
 120 The smiles of harlots, and the tears of heirs,  
 Cages for gnats, and chains to yoke a flea,  
 Dried butterflies, and tomes of casuistry.  
 But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,  
 Though marked by none but quick, poetic eyes  
 125 (So Rome's great founder to the heavens withdrew,<sup>2</sup>  
 To Proculus alone confessed in view);  
 A sudden star, it shot through liquid air,  
 And drew behind a radiant trail of hair.  
 Not Berenice's locks first rose so bright,<sup>3</sup>  
 130 The heavens bespangling with disheveled light.  
 The Sylphs behold it kindling as it flies,  
 And pleased pursue its progress through the skies.  
 This the beau monde shall from the Mall<sup>4</sup> survey,  
 And hail with music its propitious ray,  
 135 This the blest lover shall for Venus take,  
 And send up vows from Rosamonda's Lake.<sup>5</sup>  
 This Partridge<sup>6</sup> soon shall view in cloudless skies,  
 When next he looks through Galileo's eyes;<sup>7</sup>  
 And hence the egregious wizard shall foredoom  
 140 The fate of Louis, and the fall of Rome.

1. *Othello* 3.4.

2. Romulus, the "founder" and first king of Rome, was snatched to heaven in a storm cloud while reviewing his army in the Campus Martius (Livy 1.16).

3. Berenice, the wife of Ptolemy III, dedicated a lock of her hair to the gods to ensure her husband's safe return from war. It was turned into a constellation.

4. A walk laid out by Charles II in St. James's Park (London), a resort for strollers of all sorts.

5. In St. James's Park; associated with unhappy lovers.

6. John Partridge, an astrologer whose annually published predictions (among them that Louis XIV and the Catholic Church would fall) had been amusingly satirized by Swift and other wits in 1708.

telescope

Then cease, bright nymph! to mourn thy ravished hair,  
 Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!  
 Not all the tresses that fair head can boast  
 Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.  
 145 For, after all the murders of your eye,  
 When, after millions slain, yourself shall die:  
 When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,  
 And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,  
 This Lock the Muse shall consecrate to fame,  
 150 And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.

1712

1714

**Eloisa to Abelard** Like Ovid's *Sappho to Phaon*, which Pope had translated in his teens, *Eloisa to Abelard* is a heroic epistle: strictly defined, a versified love letter, involving historical persons, which dramatizes the feelings of a woman who has been forsaken. Pope took his subject from one of the most famous affairs of history. Peter Abelard (1079–1142), a brilliant Scholastic theologian, seduced a young girl, his pupil Heloise; eventually she bore him a child, and they were secretly married. Enraged at the betrayal of trust, and what he regarded as the casting off of Heloise, her uncle Fulbert revenged himself by having Abelard castrated. The lovers separated; each of them entered a monastery and went on to a distinguished career in the church. Yet their greatest fame derives from the letters they are supposed to have exchanged late in their lives (some scholars have cast doubt on the authenticity of Heloise's letters). It is this correspondence, made newly popular by French and English translations of the original Latin, that inspired Pope's poem.

The heroic epistle challenges authors in two ways: they must exert historical imagination; projecting themselves into another time and place; and they must enter the mind and passions of a woman, acting her part, and showing everything from her point of view. Historically, Pope draws on his knowledge of Roman Catholic ritual to envelop Eloisa in a rich medieval atmosphere. The dark Gothic convent, situated in an imaginary landscape of grottos, mountains, and pine forests, embodies the eighteenth-century sense of the romantic: fantastic, legendary, and extravagant. Here Eloisa is cloistered, not only physically but mentally, by religious mysticism that surrounds her with a melancholy as palpable as the image of her lover. The greatest triumph of the poem, however, is psychological. In *Eloisa*, for the only time in his career, Pope tells a story wholly in another's voice. Confused and tormented, the heroine tosses between two kinds of love: an erotic passion for the earthly lover whose memory she cannot quell and the divine, chaste love that must content a nun. Abelard and God, within her fantasy, compete for her soul. Pope brings these internal struggles to the surface by externalizing them in bold dramatic rhetoric, formal and intense as an aria in an opera (the poem was long a favorite for reading aloud). Eloisa views herself theatrically, if only because, in the letter, she is trying to make Abelard visualize the pathos of her situation. There is literally no way out for her, and at the end of the poem, she can break the static circle of desire and loneliness only by picturing herself in the peace of death. Yet the high reputation of the work, well into the Romantic era, owes less to its theatrics than to its convincing image of a mind in pain. "If you search for passion," Lord Byron wrote more than a century later, "where is it to be found stronger than in the Epistle from Eloisa to Abelard?"

For a depiction of an incident in this famous love story, see Angelika Kauffmann's painting *The Parting of Abelard from Heloise* (ca. 1778), in the color insert in this volume.

## Eloisa to Abelard

*The Argument*

Abelard and Eloisa flourished in the twelfth century; they were two of the most distinguished persons of their age in learning and beauty, but for nothing more famous than for their unfortunate passion. After a long course of calamities, they retired each to a several<sup>1</sup> convent, and consecrated the remainder of their days to religion. It was many years after this separation, that a letter of Abelard's to a friend which contained the history of his misfortune, fell into the hands of Eloisa. This awakening all her tenderness, occasioned those celebrated letters (out of which the following is partly extracted)<sup>2</sup> which give so lively a picture of the struggles of grace and nature, virtue and passion.

In these deep solitudes and awful cells,  
 Where heavenly-pensive contemplation dwells,  
 And ever-musing melancholy reigns;  
 What means this tumult in a vestal's<sup>3</sup> veins?  
 5 Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?  
 Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat?  
 Yet, yet I love!—From Abelard it<sup>4</sup> came,  
 And Eloisa yet must kiss the name.

Dear fatal name! rest ever unrevealed,  
 10 Nor pass these lips in holy silence sealed.  
 Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,  
 Where mixed with God's, his loved idea<sup>o</sup> lies.  
 O write it not, my hand—the name appears  
 Already written—wash it out, my tears!  
 15 In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays,  
 Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys.

Relentless walls! whose darksome round contains  
 Repentant sighs, and voluntary pains:  
 Ye rugged rocks! which holy knees have worn;  
 20 Ye grotts and caverns shagged with horrid<sup>o</sup> thorn!  
 Shrines! where their vigils pale-eyed virgins keep,  
 And pitying saints, whose statues learn to weep!<sup>5</sup>  
 Tho' cold like you, unmoved, and silent grown,  
 I have not yet forgot myself to stone.

All is not Heaven's while Abelard has part,  
 25 Still rebel nature holds out half my heart;  
 Nor prayers nor fasts its stubborn pulse restrain,  
 Nor tears, for ages taught to flow in vain.  
 Soon as thy letters trembling I uncloze,  
 30 That well-known name awakens all my woes.  
 Oh name for ever sad! for ever dear!  
 Still breathed in sighs, still ushered with a tear.  
 I tremble too, where'er my own I find,

1. Separate.

2. Pope's source was a highly romanticized English version of the letters by John Hughes, published in 1713.

3. Nun's. Here, as elsewhere, Eloisa substitutes a

pagan form for a Christian; nor is she in fact a virgin (vestal).

4. The letter to which Eloisa is replying.

5. In damp places, stone "weeps" through condensation.

mental image

bristling