

The Rape of the Lock as a mock epic

Sometime during the summer of 1711, the circle of prominent Catholic families in the home counties was disturbed by the rash act of Robert, 7th Lord Petre, in removing part of her coiffure from a famous beauty, Arabella Fermor. The cutting of Miss Belle Fermor's hair was taken too seriously, causing an estrangement between the two families. A common acquaintance and well wisher to both families, John Caryll, an intimate friend of Alexander Pope, desired him to write a poem to make a jest of it and laugh them together again. Thus Pope conceived The Rape of the Lock as a satire moulded as a mock epic. All the three types of literary mockery- burlesque, parody and mock heroic, were blended together in The Rape of the Lock, which were the characteristic products of the age of reason. The mock epic is the product of the classical ideal, the imitation of classical writers, wedded to the modern spirit of criticism of the contemporary social life and values. Heroic poems like the Odyssey, the Aeneid, Paradise Lost deals with man in his exalted aspects. Their action is weighty, their personages are dignified and their style is elevated. Mock Epic is a type of parody, which imitates, in a sustained way, the elaborate form, elevated ceremonial style serious tone of an epic genre but applies it to narrate a commonplace or trivial subject matter and theme to make the subject and theme ridiculous. The discrepancy between the trivial subject and grandiose treatment gives rise to amusement. Pope himself declared: "The use of pompous expression for low actions is the perfection of mock epic."

The classical Epic had enjoyed an immense vogue and prestige from 16th to 18th century; every poet was ambitious of writing epics. The neo classical criticism posed the issue that the wit of Fables and Religions of Ancient World were well consumed, so it was high time to dismiss them specially because they were only Fictions. The classical myths and metaphors came to be regarded with grave suspicion as untrue. Milton solved the problem by turning to the Bible, the truth of which could never be