

Summary Belinda, rivaling the sun in her radiance, sets out by boat on the river Thames for Hampton Court Palace.

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And there is some ambiguity about whether any of the admirers are really valuing the cross itself, or the "white breast" on which it lies—or the felicitous effect of the whole. The Baron, of course, is the most significant of those who worship at the altar of Belinda's beauty. The ritual sacrifices he performs in the pre-dawn hours are another mock-heroic element of the poem, mimicking the epic tradition of sacrificing to the gods before an important battle or journey, and drapes his project with an absurdly grand import that actually only exposes its triviality. The fact that he discards all his other love tokens in these preparations reveals his capriciousness as a lover. Earnest prayer, in this parodic scene, is replaced by the self-indulgent sighs of the lover. By having the gods grant only half of what the Baron asks, Pope alludes to the epic convention by which the favor of the gods is only a mixed blessing: in epic poems, to win the sponsorship of one god is to incur the wrath of another; divine gifts, such as immortality, can seem a blessing but become a curse. Yet in this poem, the ramifications of a prayer "half" granted are negligible rather than tragic; it merely means that he will manage to steal just one lock rather than both of them. Her crowning glories, though, are the two ringlets that dangle on her "iv'ry neck." These curls are described as love's labyrinths, specifically designed to ensnare any poor heart who might get entangled in them. One of the young gentlemen on the boat, the Baron, particularly admires Belinda's locks, and has determined to steal them for himself. We read that he rose early that morning to build an altar to love and pray for success in this project. He sacrificed several tokens of his former affections, including garters, gloves, and billet-doux (love-letters). He then prostrated himself before a pyre built with "all the trophies of his former loves," fanning its flames with his "am'rous sighs." In this, the mysteries of the lady's dressing table are akin, perhaps, to Pope's own literary art, which he describes elsewhere as "nature to advantage dress'd." If the secret mechanisms and techniques of female beauty get at least a passing nod of appreciation from the author, he nevertheless suggests that the general human readiness to worship beauty amounts to a kind of sacrilege. The cross that Belinda wears around her neck serves a more ornamental than symbolic or religious function. Because of this, he says, it can be adored by "Jews" and "Infidels" as readily as by Christians. He reminds them with great ceremony that one of their duties, after regulating celestial bodies and the weather and guarding the British monarch, is "to tend the Fair": to keep watch over ladies' powders, perfumes, curls, and clothing, and to "assist their blushes, and inspire their airs." Therefore, since "some dire disaster" threatens Belinda, Ariel assigns her an extensive troop of bodyguards. But Pope also shows a real reverence for his heroine's physical and social charms, claiming in lines 17–18 that these are compelling enough to cause one to forget her "female errors." Certainly he has some interest in flattering Arabella Fermor, the real-life woman on whom Belinda is based; in order for his poem to achieve the desired reconciliation, it must not offend (see "Context"). She is accompanied by a party of glitzy ladies ("Nymphs") and gentlemen, but is far and away the most striking member of the group. Pope's description of her charms includes "the sparkling Cross she wore" on her "white breast," her "quick" eyes and "lively looks," and the easy grace with which she bestows her

smiles and attentions evenly among all the adoring guests. This undergarment is described as a defensive armament comparable to the Shield of Achilles (see Scroll XVIII of The Iliad), and supported in its function of protecting the maiden's chastity by the invisible might of fifty Sylphs. Pope also exhibits his appreciation for the ways in which physical beauty is an art form: he recognizes, with a mixture of censure and awe, the fact that Belinda's legendary locks of hair, which appear so natural and spontaneous, are actually a carefully contrived effect.

Previous section Canto 1 Next page Canto 2 page 2 Popular pages: The Rape of the Lock Characters CHARACTERS Plot Analysis MAIN IDEAS Review Quiz FURTHER STUDY Take a Study Break Answer These 7 Questions and We'll Tell You How You'll Do on Your AP Exams Every Marvel Movie Summed Up in a Single Sentence QUIZ: Are You a Hero, a Villain, or an Anti-Hero? Commentary From the first, Pope describes Belinda's beauty as something divine, an assessment which she herself corroborates in the first canto when she creates, at least metaphorically, an altar to her own image. Yet the character of female coyness is such that it seeks simultaneously to attract and repel, so that the counterpart to the enticing ringlets is the formidable petticoat. This praise is certainly in some sense ironical, reflecting negatively on a system of public values in which external characteristics rank higher than moral or intellectual ones. In the first canto, the religious imagery surrounding Belinda's grooming rituals gave way to a militaristic conceit. This paradoxical situation dramatizes the contradictory values and motives implied in the era's sexual conventions. Ariel pronounces that any sylph who neglects his assigned duty will be severely punished.

60 YA Movie Adaptations, Ranked Pick 10 Books and We'll Guess Whether You're an Introvert or an Extrovert Sign up for our latest news and updates! Brillante is to guard her earrings, Momentilla her watch, and Crispissa her locks. The Sylphs, who are Belinda's protectors, are essentially charged to protect her not from failure but from too great a success in attracting men. The gods listened to his prayer but decided to grant only half of it. As the pleasure-boat continues on its way, everyone is carefree except Ariel, who remembers that some bad event has been foretold for the day. He summons an army of sylphs, who assemble around him in their iridescent beauty. By entering your email address you agree to receive emails from SparkNotes and verify that you are over the age of 13. They disperse to their posts and wait for fate to unfold. Her curls are compared to a trap perfectly calibrated to ensnare the enemy. Ariel himself will protect Shock, the lapdog. A band of fifty Sylphs will guard the all-important petticoat. QUIZ: Is This a Mark Twain Quote or a Line from The Office? Unsubscribe from our emails at any time. QUIZ: Which Greek God Are You? Here, the same pattern holds. You can view our Privacy Policy here. Privacy | Cookie Policy Do Not Sell My Personal Information