

Belinda and Alexander Pope's Representation of Hysteria in The Rape of the Lock

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of Hysteria and its representation through the character of Belinda, the fashionable coquette, in "The Rape of the Lock." In this poem Pope represents fashion and the fashionable objects as tools that can induce hysteria. To achieve this, Pope represents Belinda as an imaginative, hysterical woman consistently following fashion and the fashionable commodities which contribute greatly to her feminine subjectivity. In the character of Belinda, Pope manages to represent hysteria as a case closely connected with fashion, commerce and femininity.

Keywords: Alexander Pope, hysteria, Clothes, Belinda.

• قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، جامعة مؤتة.

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شخصية بيليندا وتصوير الكساندر بوب لمفهوم الهستيريا في قصيدة

The Rape of the Lock

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ملخص

تناولت هذه الورقة مفهوم الهستيريا في قصيدة "The Rape of the Lock" وكيفية تصوير هذه الحالة في شخصية بيليندا، المرأة الأنيقة المدللة والحريصة على مواكبة الموضة. قام الشاعر بتصوير الأزياء والأناقة والحرص على مواكبة الموضة على أنها أدوات تعجل في حدوث حالة من الهستيريا، كما حرص الشاعر على إظهار شخصية بيليندا كسيدة هستيرية واسعة الخيال ودائمة الحرص على مسايرة الذوق العام السائد، وهذا أسهم بشكل كبير في بناء ذاتها وأنوثتها. تمكن الشاعر من خلال شخصية بيليندا من تصوير الهستيريا على أنها حالة مرتبطة ارتباطا وثيقا بالأناقة والتجارة والأنوثة.

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Fashion, in its modern sense of self-perpetuating and frivolous pursuit of "an irrational crowd of women," first developed as a construct around the turn of the eighteenth century, coinciding with the rise of credit and capitalism in Western Europe. As one critic, Erin Mackie, points out, it was clearly a "feminine construct." Fashion and finance were assigned the feminine attributes of "irrationality," capriciousness, coquettishness, and mystery. Fashion also became interchangeable with dress at this time due to the clothing trade's unsurpassed growth in England. Corresponding with this growth was a large increase in the rate of changes in dress fashions which prompted a great deal of commentary from critics. In the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, Addison and Steele continually criticized fashions in dress as ridiculous and one that encouraged sexual indiscretions. Although some critics do approve of the feminine consumption of luxuries like fashionable dress, along with Addison and Steele they simultaneously judge women as "vile" and full of "deceit," participating in the distrustful discourse on women and fashion in the early eighteenth century. Because the cultural criticism of fashion entered into the male discourse of finance and social reform, fashion did not simply signify a frivolous female sphere of consumption; it also represented ambivalence and anxiety about femininity and commerce, particularly about the effects of consumption on women.

A trait shared by fashion, commerce, and women in their critics' eyes is their sense of hysteria. In Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, hysteria manifests itself vividly in Pope's representation of the fashionable coquette, Belinda, specifically her hysterical subjectivity meditated through the poem's narrative. Filled with luxurious commodities such as ornate gowns, exotic accessories, and cosmetics, *The Rape of the Lock* is as much about fashion and commodities as it is about instability; in fact, it is the quality of the material goods in this poem which appear to induce the characters' and the narrative's hysteria. This paper explores Pope's representation of fashion and the fashionable object in *The Rape of the Lock*, especially how it induces hysteria. In addition, the paper proceeds to show how this hysteria reflects Pope's ambivalence about fashion, commerce and femininity. His use of madness in the poem acts as more than a didactic tool to show the senselessness of fashion. Instead, in these representations Pope reveals his

own ambivalent response to the commercial, the fashionable, and even the hysterical.

Before delving directly into fashion and hysteria in *The Rape of the Lock*, one must consider the historical context of hysteria in the early eighteenth century and its links to fashion. Kowaleski-Wallace (1997) argues that Plato's "wandering womb" theory of hysteria relates directly. Believing that women were fundamentally unstable creatures, Plato hypothesized that the womb was the source of their irrationality. He argued that the womb, a "living creature" within women, "had a desire for childbearing; if it be left long unfruitful beyond the due reason, it is vexed and aggrieved, and wanders through the body . . . blocking channels of breath [and] forbidding respiration. It brings the sufferer to extreme distress and causes all the manner of disorders." This "wandering womb" theory attributed the physical and psychological symptoms of hysteria, like irrationality of thought, to a physiological source. By the late seventeenth century, however, Plato's theory of hysteria had long been discounted as the medical perceptions changed the increasing knowledge about anatomy. Medical writers such as Thomas Willis theorized that the source of hysteria was a disturbance of the brain and the nervous system. "Animal Spirits" that normally directed the flow of sensation from the brain to the nerves became disordered in the hysterical patient, and as a result, melancholic symptoms developed, depending on "the unusual relaxation or tension of the system," in fluctuating rhythms of depletion or excess (Ingram 1991). Influenced by Willis's anatomically (and therefore, more "scientific") theories about mental illness, the discourse on madness "was a field of discourse that expanded more and more rapidly during the course of the eighteenth century" (16). Though more "anatomically correct" than Plato's theory of the "wandering womb," writing on hysteria and other mental disturbance during the first half of the eighteenth century was not restricted to medical experts; instead, the intended audience for such works as Richard Blackmore's *A Treatise of the Spleen and Vapours* was the educated person or anyone who thought they suffered from such afflictions (Mullan 1988). Making this crossover from "scientific" to popular medical discourse, terms such as "the spleen" and "the vapours" arose as synonyms for hysteria. Often used interchangeably" (Mackie 1998), each of these terms located a symptom or source believed to be connected with the disease. The "spleen" which Pope

himself employs in *The Rape of the Lock*, evoked the accepted physical source of hysteria, the spleen, which was thought to contain a large concentration of nerves (Mullan 1988). Also generously mentioned in Pope's poem, "the vapours" were thought to "arise" from the disordering of passions and spirits. This disordering would often occur when the hysteric eludes her affections; for example in Pope's poem, the evasiveness of the deaths of "husbands and lapdogs" (Rape 3.158) signal the occurrence of vapours in *Belinda*.

Because women in the eighteenth century were assumed to have weaker physical and mental dispositions than men, much of the discourse on hysteria during this time focused on them. For example, as John Mullan notes in *Sentiment and Sociability*, medical writers such as Nicholas Robinson, in his *New System of the Spleen, Vapours, and Hypochondriack Melancholy* of 1729, "draws parallels between male 'Hypochondria' [which resembled depression more than its present-day meaning] and female 'Hystericks,' but almost all his actual descriptions of the appearance of the body are of women—visibly heaving, sweating or shuddering. The physician interested in the 'nerves' most often observes women" (Mullan 1988). Robinson's focus on female patients here, besides employing a sexually suspect, male gaze, is also indicative of the growing acceptance that hysteria was somehow a natural ailment for women.

Sanity, at this time, was traditionally believed to be a balance between mental powers. If the "sensitive soul" was not properly ordered by the "rational soul," madness could result (Rumbold 1989). The "rational souls" of women were thought to be too inadequate to discipline the "overactive sensitive soul" (86), thus making them as a whole more susceptible to mental disorders. Activities such as the reading of novels and the attendance at theatres were thought to overstimulate "the imaginary desires," increasing the likelihood that women could become hysterical (Mullan 1988). The best prevention and cure of hysteria was to marry and have children, entering the safe sphere of domesticity (226), where the emotions could be channeled in the care of a husband and children. The conventional ring to this "solution" belied male anxieties about female autonomy. If men convinced women to believe that they should stay home because they were "naturally" susceptible to overstimulation, then men, as fathers, husbands or brothers, could more easily surveil women's "impressionable" minds at home.

One ostensibly "harmless" way for domesticated women to leave the house was to go shopping. In the comfort, safety, and allure of indoor shopping, women could legitimately escape into the city with their friends, purchasing items or just appreciating the attractiveness of shop displays. Women from the leisured classes, as Thorstein Veblen argues in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), were encouraged by their husbands and fathers to spend time engaging in non-productive duties, such as decorating their homes, ornamenting themselves with fashionable clothing, and doing the shopping to facilitate both of these leisurely activities. Veblen states that men encouraged their wives and daughters to consume in order to preserve or raise their status in the community (Veblen 1994). As Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace points out, the word "consumption" had a significant dual meaning in the eighteenth century: a "wasting away" or depletion of sources or a pattern of spending (Kowaleski-Wallace 6-7). Both facets of meaning evoked the eighteenth century ambivalence about trade as well; on one hand, it was praised as lucrative for England, and on the other, it was distrusted as a depletion of England's resources (7).

Women's "visual consumption" of goods (shopping without purchasing) was represented as both a cure and a cause of hysteria. Mackie describes an account in a letter to *The Spectator* (No. 336) of a female shopkeeper, Rebecca, who is upset by the "rakish" upper-class ladies who visit her shop, mess with her displays, and leave without buying anything. According to Rebecca, these "rakish women"—described by a term ("rake") which "comprises the femininity and characters of these ladies" (Mackie 80)—assert themselves in order to cure themselves of the vapours (for free) in Rebecca's shop. As Rebecca herself says, "One of these No-customers (for by the way they seldom or never buy anything) calls for a Set of Tea Dishes, another for my best Green Tea . . . this is too dear, that is their Aversion, another thing is charming but not wanted: The Ladies are cur'd of the Spleen, but I am not a Shilling better for it: Lord!" (*Spectator* 336 in Mackie 81). However, as Mackie points out, shopping also had the effect of overstimulating the fancy and disordering the spirits, therefore inducing hysteria. Window shopping caused women to fantasize about "consuming pleasures to come," and when these dreams of imagined consumption were extinguished by unpleasant financial difficulties, women would "sink into depression, fits, vapors, [and] the spleen" (82). Shopping, then, could

overstimulate the female imagination, already susceptible to fancy since women were supposedly deficient in the "rational soul."

As Mackie points out, the reason commodities such as fashionable dress and ornaments have an almost magical ability to cure or hasten hysteria is found in their fetishization. "Fetishization has to do with all the nonmaterial qualities and uses of the object. As Marx puts it, fetishization involves "the metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' of the commodity, the capacities it has to transcend its sensuous, material body" (82). A commodity's "fashionability" has everything to do with the intangible aura surrounding the object. As Veblen puts it, "A new style comes into vogue and remains in favor for a season, and, at least so long as it is a novelty, people generally find the new style attractive. The prevailing fashion is felt to be beautiful" (Veblen 109). Beauty in fashionable dress, according to Veblen, lies in its novelty value (providing "relief" from the prevalence of the previous mode). In a sense the imagined possession of the fetishized objects was, in fact, an imagined possession of the new possibilities they seemed to hold for female subjectivity. To entertain these fantasies, one could simply go "window shopping," or like Rebecca's "rakish" female customers, walk into a store and physically handle merchandise without buying.

Hysteria, however, was not only viewed as an avoidable outcome of too much window shopping. As mentioned earlier, it became fashionably feminine to be hysterical, which itself served as a good excuse for more shopping. Like the fetishized commodity, then, the state of hysteria became invested with an aura of its own—genteel, delicate, and unstable—allowing women to participate in a fantasy of power over men which could work in concert with the power of their beauty. Like the fetishized, fashionable commodity, the fashion of hysteria offered an alternate subjectivity, a temporary fantasy world where they could set their own limitations. Besides the benefit of offering a degree of agency, the fashion of hysteria had an aura of aristocracy to it. Women who belonged to the leisure class were able to devote more time and energy to cultivating this fashionable behavior since it required too much physical weakness and free time to be practiced by women who were busy with domestic duties or labor.

Pope's Rape of the Lock takes fashion as one of its main subjects. The theme manifests itself throughout the poem, most strikingly in the depiction of the female protagonist of the poem, Belinda. Dressed at the height of

eighteenth century fashion, she literally wears the possibilities of her subjectivity. All the material goods she wears or accessorizes her surroundings with have the aura of the commodity fetish, and consequently, overstimulate her fancy. Not surprisingly, Belinda's overstimulation eventually leads her to the "Cave of Spleen," where she fashionably withdraws from the narrative. Pope represents Belinda as an imaginative, hysterical woman, consistently following fashion; however, in doing so, he takes an ambivalent look at the possibilities that commodities provide for female subjectivity. In addition, he also employs a hysterical narrative throughout the poem which implicates himself in the poem's ostensible critique of the fashionable.

At the beginning of *Rape of the Lock*, when Belinda is still sleeping, she is presented as having the prerequisite for hysteria: repressed sexual desire. With the protective sylph, Ariel, hovering over her head, she dreams of "[a] Youth more glitt'ring than a Birth-night Beau, / (That ev'n in Slumber caus'd her Cheek to glow) / Seem'd to her ear winning Lips to lay, / And thus in Whispers said, or seemed to say" (*Rape* 1: 23-26). Judging from her flushed face and her imagined sensation that the lips of this attractive man are brushing against her ear, Belinda is having an erotic dream, and even Ariel cannot do anything about this. This dream sets the tone for Belinda's representation throughout the poem: she is simultaneously charged with sexual energy, yet her desire emerges from her subconsciousness to the surface. It sleeps within her, present in her dreams and remote thoughts, either carefully monitored by Ariel and the other sylphs or sublimated in her preoccupation with dress and fashionable activities.

One of the reasons that Belinda's desire is unknown to herself and beneath the surface has to do with the fact that she is the charge of Ariel, a spirit of the air. Pope designates spirits of the four elements for four different types of female souls in the afterworld:

For when the Fair in all their Pride expire,
To their first Elements of their Souls retire:
The Sprights of fiery Termagants in Flame
Mount up, and take a Salamader's Name
Soft yielding Minds to Water glide away,

And sip with Nymphs their Elemental Tea
The graver Prude sinks downward to a Gnome,
In search of Mischief still on Earth to roam.
The light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,
And sport and flutter in the Fields of Air. (1: 59-66)

Although here Pope speaks about what happens to women's souls after death, throughout the poem he gives us a "behind-the-scenes" look at the souls of living women and how these members of the spirit world in fact attend living women. Ariel, identified as a sylph, is accustomed to guarding "light coquettes" like Belinda. Pope's very selection of an airy spirit for Belinda reveals that her thoughts will also be airy and tend toward fantasy. Likewise, his assigning of the gnome Umbriel to Belinda while she is in the "Cave of Spleen" corresponds with abrupt change in disposition from the coquette to the prude, who in the state of hysteria, experiences earthly disappointment due to the "rape" of her lock. Later, Clarissa, who will be dismissed as a prude by Thalestris in Canto Five, is also attended by a gnome who earlier had impelled her to cause "Mischief" by offering the Baron the scissors to cut Belinda's lock.

Whatever dispositions these elemental spirits signify in this poem, they are always attendant on Belinda. The sylphs are present around her both to keep her externally primed for successful courtship and to keep her sexuality repressed. On one hand, they busily labor to make her beautiful in front of her dressing table; on the other, fifty of them rush to her "hoop-petticoat" to make sure she is sexually discreet before she plays Ombre with the Baron. The sylphs' conflicting duties reflect the paradoxical aims of the coquettish woman: "[f]avours to none, to all she Smiles extends" (2: 11). Though a coquette is flirtatious, she is still honorable. In this poem, Pope underscores the coquette's "lightness" of mind by removing the conflicting aims (chastity and flirtation) of the coquette from Belinda's head. The sylphs are responsible for managing these aims. However, the sylphs fail her at a crucial moment, and because of her lack of agency, she is passive and helpless. Ariel's consciousness that an "Earthly Lover" was lurking in Belinda's heart, a moment of unmediated desire from Belinda, surprised him so much that he was unable to shield her from the scissors. As it turns out, Belinda's dependence on Ariel and the sylphs to manage her self-knowledge is what helps to bring about her hysteria in Canto Four. Their protection and

management of Belinda has diverted her from her own subjectivity; her preoccupation with fashion and ornament has distracted her from harsh realities of male-female relationships.

If Belinda's sexual repression fuels her hysteria in the Cave of Spleen, then her preoccupation with inanimate objects is its symptom. Two scenes in the poem that strikingly capture Belinda's tendencies for consumption are her preparations at the dressing table in Canto One and her sail down the Thames in Canto Two. In each of these scenes, it is difficult to discern any subjectivity in Belinda. The space in her consciousness which the sylphs have left free of erotic concerns seems conspicuously vacant, at least of any thoughts that are not directed towards the luxurious commodities that always surround her. As Mackie puts it, Belinda is represented as a "fashion victim" who "merge[s] with commodity" and seems to lose her very self (Mackie 48). However, like the "rakish" female shoppers in Mackie's example, Belinda consumes not only the useful aspects of her material possessions, but more significantly, their fetishized aspects. Full of repressed sexual desires, she redirects her "libidinal" energies towards fashionable objects. In an analysis of letters on "fashion victims" in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, Mackie describes the investment of "libidinal" energy in the fashionable commodity:

Associated with the outside of the body, fashion is exterior and material; yet libidinally invested and so absorbed into psyche, the fashion commodity is interiorized and dematerialized, becoming part of an intangible realm of fantasy. In twentieth-century critical thought, these symbolic, fantastic capacities of the commodity are accounted for through various conceptualizations of fetishization—ethnographic, Marxian, psychoanalytic, sociological. (49)

In identifying the psychological absorption of the fashion commodity, Mackie also includes the "libido" as a factor with the object, the act of fetishization. Because, for example, Belinda's "Puffs, Powders, [and] Patches" (*Rape* 1: 38) promise to make her fashionable and beautiful, she entrusts them to do just that with the fervor of her repressed desires, which depend on her external beauty for their sublimation. As a result, Belinda places these items on her "Altar" of beauty. She needs these products not only to guarantee her external beauty, but also to feel that her use of them

essentially comprises who she is, her identity. Belinda's beauty is so important to her. In the words of Glenn Storey, "Belinda trusts her beauty to both protect and aid her in finding love," but later it renders her "a victim of her inherent beauty" (Storey 205).

Before Belinda goes to her dressing table, Pope describes her heart as a "Toyshop" and reveals its inner workings as containing material objects, "vanities" and "Wigs" and "swordknots" from the men she imagines are fighting over her: "With varying vanities, for ev'ry Part,/ They shift the moving Toyshop of their Heart; Where Wigs with Wigs, with Sword-knots Swordnots strive,/Beaus banish Beaus, and Coaches Coaches drive" (1:99-102). Here Belinda does not even have agency over her heart; the reference to "their" is, of course, the sylphs, who are responsible for its maintenance. What is perhaps even more striking is the material nature of this "Toyshop" heart and how it contains fetishized inanimate objects. The wigs, swordknots, and coaches in these lines are all synecdoches for the men Belinda desires. In fact, such objects and ornaments become an inherent part of her character. Umme Salma points out that "the whole poem ... alludes to her precious ornaments and cosmetics. She is the product of her cosmetics"(2).

The dressing table scene can be seen as a moment when fashionable commodities merge with Belinda's identity; however, Pope does not make Belinda the object of uncomplicated parody here. By incorporating fashionable objects from around the world, he evokes imperialism and foreign commerce, elements which focus his satire on England as well. In addition, Pope prepares Belinda's mind for its later outburst of hysteria by stimulating her fantasies in this scene. By placing Belinda in front of the fanciful objects of her dressing table, Pope suggests that Belinda's internal life feeds upon what she sees on her table. In accordance with the theories of hysteria at the time, Pope allows these objects to overstimulate her fancy.

In "The Commercialization of Fashion" Neil McKendrick (1982) notes that Belinda is "a child of her time" since she plays the role of the consumer of imported luxuries" (52). He points out that writers in the early eighteenth century made good use of the powerful metaphor of fashion and consumption, often revealing itself in conspicuous consumption (52). Belinda, as "a child of her time" wears what she consumes, and this display indicates her high status in eighteenth century society. Having an abundance of rich "spoils" from colonized countries on her dressing table, Belinda

herself becomes a metaphor for imperialist and commercial England. Laura Brown notes the frequency of the trope of the ornamented woman in *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century Literature*: "In the discourse of early eighteenth-century mercantile capitalism, [the ornamented woman] is the most common trope of all, by which the agency of the acquisitive subject and the urgency of accumulation are concealed and deflected through the fantasy of a universal collaboration in the dressing of the female body" (Brown 116). Here Brown addresses the need for writers such as Addison to use the trope of commodity-adorned woman to project their desires for (and anxieties about) accumulation. Although Pope uses this trope in *Belinda*, the fact that he makes her hysterical suggests his own awareness that *Belinda* here is indeed a trope: by making her hysterical, Pope also satirizes the love-hate relationship that the English have with the rising capitalist system. *Belinda*'s dressing table includes the following "spoils" of imperialism: "This Casket India's glowing Gems unlocks,/ And all Arabia breathes from yonder Box. / The Tortoise here and Elephant unite, / Transform'd to Combs, the speckled and the white" (Rape 1: 133-36). In this scene, Pope calls these items the "various Off'rings of the world," characterizing them as products willingly given up to beautiful English women like *Belinda*. In making *Belinda* a fanciful coquette who literally worships these products to enhance her beauty, Pope points out that the relationship of commodity to consumer in this scene is actually in the reverse: *Belinda* is the one who offers herself to the altar of her imported beauty products. When taken into the larger context of trade, Pope satirizes England's dependence on foreign countries for its own frivolous enhancement.

In Canto Two, *Belinda* floats down the Thames in a "painted Vessel" (Rape 2: 47). At this moment in the poem, it is ambiguous whether "painted Vessel" refers to the ship, *Belinda* or both. Considering *Belinda*'s smiling passivity and her glittering artificial dress, she is powered, painted, almost doll-like. She is like a vessel. But her active mind disrupts the image of the passive, painted vessel: "Her lively Looks a sprightly Mind disclose, / Quick as her Eyes, and unfix'd as those" (2: 9-10). Her eyes reveal her excitement by the quantity of male attention, and by the end of this scene, it builds to such a height that the sylphs flock to carefully guard her petticoat. *Belinda* enjoys her objectification and delights in the gazes of the men around her.

Although we see very little subjectivity from her in this scene, Pope clues us into what is happening in her mind by the description of her "sprightly mind" and "unfix'd" eyes. Beyond simply expressing her coquettish reluctance to narrow down her male admirers to just one person, her "unfix'd" gaze and mind indicate her growing mental instability. Here Belinda may be experiencing an overload of fantasy which, because of the sylphs who enforce the rules of polite society, she has no way to express. A further clue to her near hysterical state is the "disordering" of her affections, the tell-tale symptom of the "vapours." The first instance of equivocation occurs at the end of Canto Two, just before the sylphs ring her:

Whether the Nymph shall break Diana's Law,
Or some frail China jar receive a Flaw,
Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade,
Forget her Pray'rs, or miss a Masquerade,
Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball:
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock must fall. (2: 105-10)

Although this comes from Ariel's speech to the rest of the sylphs, these lines well illustrate the disordering that was thought to occur when a woman suffered from the vapors. "Broken" laws of virginity are equated with a cracked china jar, a reputation with a brocade frock, piety with partying, and the loss of a heart with the loss of a necklace. Ariel's won confusing perhaps reflects Belinda's own unstable disordering of passions and priorities. Besides Ariel, the narrator of the poem also displays a symptom of the vapors. He alludes to an inversion of priorities in the following lines in Canto Three: "The hungry judges soon the Sentence sign,/And Wretches hang that Jury-men may Dine;/ The Merchant from th'Exchange returns in Peace,/And the long Labours of the Toilette cease" (3: 21-25). Here the usual priorities of judges, jury-men, merchants, and coquettes are disordered. Judges and jury would rather eat dinner than think about justice; merchants crave the peace of domesticity rather than making money on the stock exchange; and coquette's endless labors in front of the mirror finally cease. As Belinda's own hysteria approaches in Canto Four, Ariel and the narrator experience the vapors before she does. This adds to the instability of the narrative itself; what is supposedly just a feminine ailment afflicts the

male sylph Ariel and Pope himself. With characteristic ambiguity, Pope blurs the gender lines of hysteria with this "disordering of passions."

Belinda herself does not experience the vapors until the end of Canto 3, when she suffers the sudden trauma of the rape of the lock. Curiously, the fact that she is supposed to be the "weakest" and the least self-aware character in the poem does not immediately cause her to experience the vapors. Compared with the "episodes" from Ariel and Pope, Belinda's vapors seem the most justified; the Baron has cut her lock when she was not paying attention. Although he is probably the "Earthly Lover" who is the subject of her daydream, his disrespect for her personal space legitimates her reaction. Her moment of subjectivity, when her desire finally rises up within her in its purest form (without being sublimated or repressed), makes the Baron's rape resonate with even more injustice. Added to the senselessness of this theft is her own state of vapors which immediately precedes the rape. Shortly before Belinda's epiphany, the Baron gets the idea to cut her lock from the vapors which rise from his cup of coffee: "[The coffee] sent up in Vapours to the Baron's brain / New Stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain" (3: 119-20). Again, it is the men's hysteria in the poem which appears to be the most irrational. Belinda's case of the vapors, coming on the heels of her moment of self-realization, is justifiable. In fact, the shock and hysteria which take place after the rape fuel her vindication at the end of the poem. Belinda, though the most obvious target of Pope's satire on fashionable hysteria, shows a greater degree of subjectivity than men. Hysteria actually allows her a degree of agency by the end of the poem.

Belinda's seclusion to the Cave of Spleen is a distinctive moment when Belinda withdraws from the airy and artificial outside world and literally comes down to earth. What is remarkable about this scene is that Pope seems to be doing two things at once: he satirizes the fashionability of the vapors, over-exaggerating its mind-altering effects, yet at the same time, provides Belinda with an environment that allows her to recover, emerging from her splenetic state with a calm realization of what has happened to her. In a sense, the Cave of Spleen is what makes Belinda a more rational person and endows her with more agency. In spirit of parody, Pope creates a theatrical backdrop for this Cave, setting it in a "Grotto," itself a picturesque and ornamental part in landscape paintings. In the manner of a play, the backdrop changes, and so do most of the "actors." Ariel has taken flight, and

instead, Umbriel, a gnome for the center of the earth attends Belinda. Surrounding her are new attendants with names that seem to come out of a morality play: Pain, Megrim, Ill-nature, and Affectation. Pain and Megrim represent two common, medically acknowledged symptoms of hysteria (Mackie 129). Ill-nature stands for hypocritical advice from other women, prayers and advice in one hand, but "lampoons" in her breast (Rape 4: 27-30).

Also contributing to the satire is the dramatic transformation that occurs among inanimate objects in this world:

Unnumbered throngs on ev'ry side are seen
Of Bodies changed to various forms by Spleen.
Here living Teapots stand, one Arm held out,
One bent; the Handle this, and that the Spout:
A Pipkin there like Homer's Tripod walks;
Here sighs a Jar, and there a Goose-pye talks;
Men prove with Child, as pow'rful Fancy works,
And Maids turn'd Bottles, call aloud for Corks. (4: 47-54)

Here Pope parodies the effects of an overactive imagination gone splenetic. In this satire, the Spleen animates fashionable commodities such as china teapots, metal pans and jars. Fetishized in a normal state of mind, they actually dance around in the Cave of Spleen. The rules of reality are tossed away as natural laws are reserved. All the animated commodities here are vessels, all metaphors for women. The metaphor turns into one of sexual repression in the line: "And Maids turn'd Bottles, call aloud for Corks" (4:54). This sexual metaphor, standing for a woman's need for a man, underscores the theme of sexual repression throughout the poem. At least in the Cave of Spleen, these "Bottles" assert their need aloud. Rebecca Ferguson notes that "[s]trikingly, china, earthenware and glass, those artifacts symbolic of fragility, imbalance and tenuous chastity, overrun the underworld in semi-human form" (Ferguson 58). Ferguson suggests that the chaste has gone wild in this poem, even in its commodified, inanimate forms of teapot and pipkin.

Pope complicates his satire on the fashion of hysteria by making the Cave of Spleen the place in the narrative where Belinda experiences self-realization. Thalsteris, Queen of the Amazons, who stirs Belinda into awareness takes a significant part of her instruction. She says: "Was it for this you took such constant Care / The Bodkin, Comb and Essence to prepare [?] / . . . Gods! Shall the Ravisher display your Hair, / While the Fops envy, and the Ladies stare!" (4: 97-98, 104-1-5). Tapping into Belinda's humiliation, Thalestris voices the concerns which Belinda feels internally: "Methinks already I your Tears survey, / already hear the horrid things they say, / already see your degraded Toast, / And all your Honour in a Whisper lost!" (4: 107-10). By speaking Belinda's fears, she causes Belinda finally to consciously acknowledge the impact of what happened. At the end of this scene, Thalestris finally causes Belinda to not only burst into tears, but also to voice her regret at being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Belinda becomes, in hindsight, conscious of ill omens which passed unnoticed by her that day: " 'T was this, the morning Omens seem'd without a Wind, / Poll sat mute, and Shock was most Unkind! / A Sylph too warn'd me of the Threats of Fate, / In mystic Visions, now believed too late!" (4: 161-166). For the first time in the poem, Belinda expresses reasoned thinking in her regretful words. Though many of the omens which passed her by are superstitions, Belinda at least becomes aware of the cost of not paying attention to her instincts. What is more, she reaches a point where she expresses her desire for agency: "See the poor Remnants of these slighted Hairs! / My hands shall rend what ev'n thy Rapine spares" (4: 167-168). At this moment, Belinda vows to rip off the curl that the Baron left untouched before he could get to it. In this self-destructive avowal, Belinda at least sees to it that she will be the one to do the damage before he or any other man will. Here it is apparent that Thalestris has done her job in bringing Belinda into clarity and justified anger. Pope's representation of hysteria, then, actually offers Belinda more subjectivity than her "normal" state as a coquette.

However, in Canto Five, when Belinda emerges from the Cave of Spleen with Thalestris to confront the Baron, Pope never reforms Belinda's nature from coquette to prude. The "lesson" Belinda learns from the Spleen is the right to assert herself, to exact justice for the loss of her lock. Contrary to traditional readings of Canto Five as capping off the familiar literary theme,

the "reform of the coquette," this last segment of *Rape of the Lock* exposes prudery as an unsatisfactory and even hypocritical subject position for Belinda to occupy. Clarissa's speech at the beginning of this canto, a call for less vanity and more "good sense" in women, is received by Belinda and Thalestris as more than a joke: "Belinda frown'd, Thalestris call'd her Prude" (5: 36).

Pope's apparent critique of fashionable hysteria also becomes complicated by Belinda's favorable fate at the end of the poem. If Belinda reforms at all here, she has only become a more assertive coquette, and strangely, it is her experience at the Cave of the Spleen and her alliance with Thalestris which brings about this transformation.

This state of transformation may be only "temporary." Dwight Coder (2016) argues that "[Belinda] has the right, responsibility and even duty to transform herself into a social being, but only so long as this transformed state is recognized as temporary" (190). By making the Cave of the Spleen a site of "improvement" for Belinda, Pope complicates his satire on fashionable hysteria. As with his satire on the fashionable woman, he admits enough positive points to his critique to make his parody an unstable one. His shifting positions on fashionable commodities as both hysteria-inducing fetishized objects and sites of creativity-inspiring imagination and self-assertion undermine an attempt to read this poem as one or the other.

In conclusion, *The Rape of the Lock* offers conflicting stances on hysteria and fashion—an ambivalence which can be extended to Pope's well-known ambivalences toward gender and commerce. His ambivalent representation of Belinda reflects his conflicted attitudes toward both of these much-debated cultural issues. Moments when Pope endows the unlikely Belinda with a measure of subjectivity are in line with his well-known support and encouragement of women writers of his day. At the same time, the moments when he degenerates Belinda's "Toyshop" heart seem more consonant with his misogynist portrayals of women writers in the *Dunciad*. Similarly, Pope's distrust of commodity fetishism is complicated by the fact that, as a "self-made" writer, he depended on the literary marketplace to gain entry into literary fame and financial security; the hysteria of Pope's text sheds light on contemporary anxieties about the increasing commercialization of the culture and how these fears and hopes played themselves out in constructions of female subjectivity. His conflicted construction of Belinda as the trope of the coquettish, hysterical woman

Belinda and Alexander Pope's Representation of Hysteria in *The Rape of the Lock*

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uniquely captures the hysteria surrounding this cultural transition and, by giving Belinda a measure of subjectivity, offers hope for a moment of clarity in the acceptance of cultural change.

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