

Significance of Belinda's Toilet Scene in *The Rape of the Lock*

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The Rape of the Lock (1712) truly shows Pope's genius for satirical poetry. This poem expresses, in a witty manner, the follies and frivolities of the high society of the 18th century. The principal target of satire in this poem is the aristocratic ladies who were the epitome of artificiality and feminine frivolity. Toilet was the chief concern of these aristocratic ladies. Like the 'cave of the spleen' the toilet scene of Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock* (Canto I) is significant and startle.

In the dressing table one sees Belinda's beauty both as a mere ornamentation governed by pride and as the realisation of a genuine aesthetic ordering. Though the poet is making fun of the excessive attention that women paid (even today pay for their beauty), but the passage, is not all satire. It contains a genuine homage to the beauty and charm of Belinda.

Belinda's toilet table displays a number of silver vases arranged in a magic order, as if to observe some rituals. At first wearing a new white robe beautiful Belinda addressed a prayer to the 'cosmetic powers'. Then she looked at her heavenly reflections in the mirror. This gesture of her shows how conscious is Belinda about her dressing. By Belinda's side

stood Betty, the 'inferior priestess' who was to assist Belinda in the sacred ceremony of toilet. Then numerous caskets were opened and they revealed their precious contents brought from different countries of the world:

Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here

The various offerings of the world appear;

From each casket Betty selected some bright and precious articles to decorate the goddess Belinda. From one casket she selected the most brilliant pearls and diamonds of India, while from another she chose the perfumes of Arabia.

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,

And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.

Next she examined the spotted combs made of tortoise shell and the milk-white combs of ivory which lay together. Then she turned her attention to the rows of shining pins, puffs, powders, patches, bibles and love letters:

Here files of pins extend their shining rows,

Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billets-doux.

Pope's satirical attack is poignant here as in the dressing table the Bible lying with other cosmetic things. This is the absurdities of the 18th century's aristocratic ladies who give their priority in their self-embellishment and a gild-edged Bible was usually placed on the table as a part of their decoration:

An untouchable Bible graced her toilet

No fear that hand of hers should spoil.

The beauty of Belinda was greatly enhanced by cosmetics and by ornaments. Her smiles became more winning and her glances acquired the quality of lightening. All these effects were created by the busy sylphs who looked each detail of her toilet through Betty received Belinda's thanks for helping her.

The description of Belinda's toilet fully exposes Belinda's vanity and her love for fashion. Of course these were the characteristic of all 18th century aristocratic ladies who like a warrior decorate themselves with all weapons to get ready for battle or gallant-hunting. By the description of the dressing "Pope first makes his heroine the chief priestess then the goddess herself" (Bishop Warburton) as she is the mistress of the 'bidden blush' and the culmination of nature.