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That hair is unbeweaveable!

“’What time would spare, from steel receives its date,…thy hairs should feel, The conquering force of unresisted steel?” (Canto 3 171-178)

Alexander Pope’s poem *The Rape of the Lock* is a witty satirical poem that mocks the gender roles in high society. The main characters of this poem are typical wealthy people that also possess magical powers. Pope explains that the story is fictitious and also uses the opening statement as an opportunity to single out women. He asks that women give him some extra time to make something of his work because men work so hard to have their poems understood by women. From the beginning of this poem, Pope establishes a bias against women. Alexander Pope incorrectly displays the inner desires and thoughts of women in his poem *The Rape of the Lock.*

As the poem goes on, we can see that the main character Belinda is just an object in the eyes of men. Canto 1 of the poem goes into depth about the magic of this world and closes with Belinda preparing herself for the day ahead of her. The description of her preparation, “The various offerings of the world appear;… And Betty’s praised for labors not her own” (Canto 1 130-148) gives readers the impression that she is preparing for a battle. What is interesting about this scene is that although Belinda is going to a social event, she has to adorn herself with protection in order to keep herself pure. This shows that if a single woman is to go out to a social event, she must prepare to be defiled. The language used throughout those lines conjures up imagery of a beautiful and magical transformation. Immediately after this description of Belinda’s transformation, Pope sexualizes her by heavily emphasizing the cross dangling around her breast area (Canto 2 lines 5-9). The bias towards women from Pope is evident in this description of Belinda. The purpose of sexualizing Belinda is to make it easier to dehumanize her in order to justify the actions of men. As Canto 2 comes to a close, Ariel is worried that a “dire event” will take place on this day that is supposed to be fun.

Canto 3 is where the action of the story takes place. The baron that wants a lock of Belinda’s hair finally gets cuts it after three failed attempts. The reason Belinda is left defenseless to the baron is because Ariel saw temptation in Belinda’s mind (Canto 3 140-146). The vagueness of this “temptation” could have been misinterpreted. Although an “earthly lover” does suggests the baron, “lurking” does necessarily mean Belinda is destined to be with the baron. When the baron finally cuts Belinda’s hair, it is obvious that he has offended and defiled her. Belinda is very fond of her looks and to have a piece of her hair cut off is like having part of her identity cut away for the pleasure of a man. The description of the scissors cutting her hair is most interesting because of the relationship between steel, stealing, and Belinda’s hair.

At the end of Canto 3, lines 171-178 compare the relationship between the scissors and the hair. An interpretation of this passage could be that Pope is suggesting that women can be reduced to nothing. A pair of scissors undoes the great beauty of Belinda. The steel that could “strike to dust the imperial towers or Troy” (Canto 3 line 173) could also chip away at Belinda’s beauty and it does. Belinda has a very negative reaction to the baron cutting her hair because it is a symbol of intrusion and defilement. Pope justifies the actions of the baron as the poem comes to an end. Belinda takes revenge on the baron in Canto 5 and attacks him after Clarissa made a speech about how women should behave. This is again a negative comment towards women because it shows how women act in anger rather than being calm and controlled like society has taught them. The lock of hair was lost during the battle and then becomes a star so that all can gaze upon its beauty. This is a clever way to let the baron off easy. The baron intended to keep the lock for himself, but because the lock ends up being a star for all to look at, Pope justifies his actions.