



The Rape of the Lock

by Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

The Rape of the Lock is a mock-heroic narrative poem first published anonymously in *Lintot's Miscellany* in 1712 in two cantos, but then revised and reissued under Pope's name in 1714, in a much-expanded 5-canto version. The final form was available in 1717 with the addition of Clarissa's speech on good humour. The poem satirizes a petty squabble by comparing it to the epic world of the gods. It was based on an incident recounted by Pope's friend, John Caryll. Arabella Fermor and her suitor, Lord Petre, were both from aristocratic recusant Catholic families at a period in England when all denominations except Anglicanism suffered legal restrictions and penalties. Petre, lusting after Arabella, had cut off a lock of her hair without permission, and the consequent argument had created a breach between the two families. Pope, also a Catholic, wrote the poem at the request of friends in an attempt to "comically merge the two." He utilized the character Belinda to represent Arabella and introduced an entire system of "sylphs," or guardian spirits of virgins, a parodized version of the gods and goddesses of conventional epic. (Wikipedia)

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Read by Rhonda Federman

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