

**Societal Expectations for Women in *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of  
The Lock***

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
5. This thesis was conducted with the help of some authentic primary and secondary sources.
6. This study wishes to interpret some scholarly sources regarding its field of study.
7. The findings of this study are trustworthy and credible.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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## Approval

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## Abstract

In John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Alexander Pope's *The Rape of The Lock*, Eve and Belinda are depicted as innocent women who fall into the hands of objectification. Belinda's getting ready in her toilet is similar to the scene of Eve seeing her reflection in Eden's pool, because here Eve and Belinda both admire their physical or outer beauty. Besides, their beauty is always admired by the people around them. Therefore, in both epics, physical appearance is given so much importance that a woman's character, chastity, and aims depend on physical beauty. In the epic *Paradise Lost*, the character Eve is the first woman, and she is frequently depicted as the archetypal female character whose actions ultimately lead to the downfall of humankind. Over that, Eve is beautifully accessorized and created only to serve Adam. On the other hand, in *The Rape of The Lock*, Belinda beautifies herself for maintaining social class, impressing good marriage proposals, fancying her privacy, and saving herself from all the cruel manipulations of society. Eve and Belinda's portrayals reveal social expectations or gender dynamics manifested during the time periods in which the epics were written. Though Eve and Belinda are two different characters from two different worlds and situations, their representation reflects many similarities. These similarities include their innocence, unwise behavior, objectification, and inferiority. Society also thinks of them as sources of temptation.

**Keywords:** objectification; authority; epic; dominance; women; gender; stereotype; expectation.

## **Dedication**

This is for my mother, who inspired me to study literature.

To Musrat Alam ma'am for teaching *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* with meaningful understandings.

Also, to me for trying my best.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Epics have been a significant part of many cultures throughout history. An epic usually refers to a unique genre of literature that tells stories of legendary figures through poetic forms. These stories often involve gods, mythical figures, supernatural beings, and epic heroes who embark on heroic quests. The term “epic” originates from the Greek word “epos,” which denotes a word, tale, or song (Raaflaub 55). Epics are forms of lingual traditions that were passed through generations orally before people started transcribing them in authored forms. They are generally considered narrative poems written in verse. Therefore, epics differ in individual length, scale, and subject matter. Poets often focused on the socio-cultural or historical situation of their respected country or religion while writing epics in the past. The French medieval epic *Chanson de Roland* explores the heroic deeds of the knight Roland, who bravely fought in the battle of Roncevaux Pass (Raaflaub 55–57). The famous Renaissance epic *The Faerie Queene* celebrates Queen Elizabeth I and her virtues. It was written by Edmund Spenser in the late 16th century. This explores the themes of chivalry and morality (Raaflaub 58–63). The famous Mesopotamian epic, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tells the story of the king Gilgamesh, recorded in the Akkadian language (Raaflaub 65).

However, epics have evolved over time, and this evolution could be sketched through the differences in cultural and historical contexts. Many religious or literary changes have been made to epics over time (Whitby and Roberts, 221-224). They have been interpreted and transformed to reflect the different beliefs, values, morals, and concerns of different societies or time periods. Though the traditional form of epic may have changed, the essence of exploring the stories of human experiences remains at the center of an epic. Contemporary writers are more interested in

rewriting traditional epics while departing from traditional forms. These epics explore contemporary themes and issues such as family interference, drama, and struggles for the fittest. Some authors write epic stories as novels as well. *The Lord of the Rings*, written by J.R.R. Tolkien during 1954–1955, is a modern epic fantasy trilogy that describes the quest to destroy the “One Ring” (Whitby and Roberts, 225-229). It analyzes the themes of power, friendship, and the struggle between good and evil. *The Song of Ice and Fire*, written by George R.R. Martin in 1996, is a collection of epic fantasy novels. These novels are known for their complex characters and political intrigue. Its television adaptation, *Game of Thrones*, gained immense popularity as well (Whitby and Roberts, 230–225).

Researchers and scholars of epics often analyze the socio-political themes of the epics of the past (Whitby and Roberts, 236-240). When they analyze the epic characters more, they find a need to explore the female characters. Female characters in epics are often overlooked, and they need to be studied more. Researching their struggles and experiences is very important to understand the real meaning that an epic holds. Additionally, female characters in epics frequently represent cultural attitudes towards women. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were created during the 8th century BCE, and they are Greek attributions of Homer (Foley 187). They are among the most renowned epics of the earliest times. *The Iliad* narrates the story of the Trojan War and the adventures of Achilles. It explores the themes of fate, honor, and the consequences of war. *The Odyssey* conveys the story of Odysseus returning home from the Trojan War and explores the themes of loyalty and the challenges of the journey from war. At first, readers and interpreters focused on the hero and themes of the war of epics, but later they started analyzing the female characters in them. Women’s roles are viewed as trivial in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (Jupriono 620–628). For instance, they are considered sources of temptation. They are seen

through the frame of social norms as well. For instance, Penelope of *The Odyssey* and Helen of *The Iliad* are subjected to societal expectations. Their roles are largely defined by their relationships with men. Their characters often serve as symbols of temptation, a loyal wife, and a nurturing mother. Penelope personifies fidelity through her resolved loyalty to Odysseus during his long-term absence. On the other hand, Helen's action exacerbates the conflict in *The Iliad*. Her actions also highlight the stereotypical idea of the consequences of deviating from social expectations. Also, the notion of women being the guardians of virtue and morality is illustrated through Hector's wife, Andromache, in *The Iliad*. Andromache serves as a voice of conscience in the epic. She urges Hector to consider the impact of his actions on their family. Additionally, these epics feature female deities who can shape the destiny of other mortal characters. For example, Athena of *The Odyssey* and Hera of *The Iliad* exemplify goddesses who influence the fates of heroes.

The Italian epic *Divine Comedy*, written by Dante Alighieri between 1308 and 1321, tells the story of the author's journey towards God. It portrays the themes of religious ideology, the reality of heaven or hell, the Christian afterlife, and soon (Raaflaub 66–70). Women here serve as symbols of virtue and temptation. For instance, the representation of divine love and the temptress Circe symbolize earthly desires. Furthermore, epics frequently highlight the importance of marriage, with women playing central roles. They are expected to maintain family bonds very sincerely. One of the oldest English epics, *Beowulf*, revolves around the story of Beowulf and his battles with monsters and dragons. It was created around the 8th and 11th centuries and deals with the themes of loyalty, the nature of leadership, and heroism (Johns-putra 23–27). In this epic, Grendel's mother reflects the importance of familial loyalty by taking revenge for her dead son. *Aeneid*, written by Roman poet Virgil, is an epic constructed in Latin

that serves as the ancestral story of the Roman civilization. This famous Roman epic was created between 29 and 19 BCE. It is highly inspired by Greek traditions and talks about a Trojan hero named Aeneas' journey to establish Rome's heroism (Johns-Putra 29–34). The consequences of challenging social expectations and traditional roles are mirrored in this epic. Dido denied subservience to Aeneas, which made her face tragic consequences.

Moreover, *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* are two major ancient Indian epics. According to the historians, they were created from the 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE to the 4th century CE (Jupriono 619). *The Mahabharata* was attributed to the sage Vyasa. This is an extensive narrative that exemplifies the *Bhagavad Gita*. On the other hand, *The Ramayana* was attributed to the sage Valmiki. It narrates the life story of Rama. Both epics depict women in archetypal roles such as seductress, ideal wife or mother, and so on. The lead character Sita in *The Ramayana* embodies fidelity and endurance. They cover the themes of duty, righteousness, and the real consequences of war. The famous epics *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* reflect the cultural norms of the past as well. They also provide equitable socioeconomic viewpoints. These are the two primary materials for this study.

## **1.1. Contextual Background**

*Paradise Lost* by John Milton and *The Rape of The Lock* by Alexander Pope are epic poems that reflect the social ideologies of the time in which they were written. *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem in blank verse, was first published in 1667. It was officially printed as a book with a modified cover page in 1668. On the other hand, the first version of *The Rape of The Lock* was published in 1712. Later, the second version was published in 1714. Despite being written in distinct periods, both *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* illuminate a similar viewpoint concerning women in society by objectifying them while also viewing them as sources of beauty,

innocence, temptation, and negative influences. However, it is important to describe the representation of women in these works with an understanding of the cultural context in which the works were written. Each poem resembles distinct literary periods and cultural, social, and intellectual developments. They provide unique insights into the cultural contexts of their respective times. These epics give the readers a chance to appreciate the authors' intentions in addressing the social issues of that time.

*Paradise Lost* was written during the 17th-century Restoration period. Religious and political upheaval was taking place during that time in England. The English Civil War of 1642–1651 took place with the subsequent ruling of Oliver Cromwell. The execution of King Charles I established the Commonwealth under Cromwell (Goldsyone 12–18). Then the reconstruction of the monarchy under Charles II brought many traditional norms to society, and he brought an end to the Commonwealth. Anglican traditions were often challenged. Milton's political perspectives were highly influenced by Republican ideologies and opposition to the English monarchy. He was very active in politics, supported the Commonwealth, and served as Latin Secretary of the State Council (Stevens 94–118). Therefore, huge religious turbulence was going on between Puritanism and Anglicanism during that time. According to Radzinowicz, being a Puritan himself, Milton was deeply immersed in theological and religious debates (120–141). He wrote *Paradise Lost* during this socio-political transition, and it reflects the themes of free will, disobedience, and God's nature. Milton showcased his mastery of poetry by exploring moral or religious truths influenced by classical literature.

*The Rape of The Lock* was written during the 18th-century Augustan Age, during the reign of Queen Anne. Starting in 1702–1714, it continued within the early Georgian period. Power consolation under Hanoverian monarchs and the development of a stable socio-political

environment were seen during that time (Goldsyone 20–28). Writers were highly influenced by ancient Roman classical ideologies. Pope became engaged in social commentary through *The Rape of The Lock*. Focusing on satire, reason, and order was the most common characteristic of that era. Satire and wit gained the most popularity among the literary forms of that time. The literary circle known as Scriblerus shared a critical satirical approach to contemporary society (Delany 46–61). This circle included members like Jonathan Swift and John Gay. Pope wrote his name among these satirists by using satire to convey sharp commentary on social politics and behavior. The use of a heroic couplet that is in rhymed iambic pentameter gives *The Rape of The Lock* a unique and polished quality. This mock-epic uses the conventions of the epic genre to note trivial matters such as cutting a lock of hair.

Both *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* expound social norms through their female leads, Eve and Belinda, respectively. They are depicted as physically beautiful women, and they embody features that are admired and desired by those around them. Both characters are seen as objects of desire for men in the epics. Eve's beauty allures and tempts Adam, while Belinda's attractiveness captivates the men around her. In addition, both characters face limitations within their respective contexts; they exhibit fewer agencies in their actions and decisions. Eve makes choices that have profound consequences for her and humanity, and Belinda asserts her agency by defending her honor and engaging in social rituals. While there are some similarities in terms of their physical beauty and agency, Eve and Belinda differ greatly in their contexts and themes (Johns-Putra 47–55). These differences arise from the distinct literary genres and purposes of the epics, as well as the cultural and historical contexts. A major, noticeable fact is that both epics are written by male authors. Therefore, most of the renowned epics are written by male writers. Male superiority was a highly supported ideal in the 17th and 18th centuries. This brought up the

notion of female inferiority among people. The ideas regarding women's nature come from religion, myths, literature, and so on. Moreover, biblical stories and social strategies were the main themes of literature in the past. Eve and Belinda are very special individuals. Eve is the mother of all humans, and Belinda comes from the wealthy aristocratic family of her time. Hence, they were singled out because of the patriarchal ideologies of society. These ideas influenced the writers to describe female characters in a socially expected way. For this reason, when composing *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock*, John Milton and Alexander Pope were not exceptions. However, it should be noted that Eve and Belinda are not the representations of all women of the 17th or 18th centuries, but they represent social expectations of that time concerning women.

## **1.2. Overview of Primary Texts**

Past writers described their works in the shadows of cultural obligations and practices. Their writings, portrayals, interpretations, and interests were highly influenced by the socio-political environment. Their literary masterpieces have been read and analyzed closely for centuries because of their powerful storytelling, nuanced portrayal of characters, and exploration of complex themes that still resonate today. Society functioned quite differently in the past than it does now. Materialism and social expectations were prevalent in the past. Rather than electrical sources of recreation, social gatherings were the main source of entertainment. During the 17th and 18th centuries, people were merging from different places to confirm accommodations (Goldsyone 35–58). Distinct cultures were colliding, but Christianity and English culture were at their peak. People would like to act and believe according to Christian English. Society considered them to be more educated, classy, and superior. Most women were forced to maintain certain domestic roles and were controlled by male suppression.

John Milton was a famous English poet and intellectual. He is mostly known for his epic, *Paradise Lost*. It explores the biblical narrative of the fall of humans. The employment of blank verse and unrhymed iambic pentameter gives this grand epic a dignified quality. It focuses on the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Key figures such as Satan, Adam, and Eve drive the main story forward. Eve stands as the center of discussion regarding social expectations in this epic. Her creation, her actions, and her relationship with Adam show the prevailing perspectives towards women during the 17th century. Although Eve was created as a companion to Adam, her role is very limited. Her disobedience towards God is often interpreted in the context of traditional gender norms, which reinforces the idea of female subordination. "Humanity's fall" in *Paradise Lost* reinforces social expectations. Eve is easily tempted by Satan, and this is portrayed as the reason for humanity's downfall. Thus, Milton's narrative sheds light on the prevailing belief that women are the weaker sexes who are responsible for moral downfall.

On the other hand, Alexander Pope is considered the most prominent poet of the 18th century. He was a translator and satirist of the well-known Enlightenment era. The Enlightenment is known as the era of knowledge and reasoning (Goldsyone 66-73). Writers, intellectuals, philosophers, and authors emerged in that era and had the ability to think differently. Among these philosophers, John Locke, Italian Galileo, and Isaac Newton were renowned (Goldsyone 68–70). Alexander Pope's *The Rape of The Lock* is a mock-heroic epic. It satirizes the triviality of a social scandal in aristocratic society by focusing on a woman's lock of hair being cut. It serves as a strong commentary on the excessiveness of the upper-class society of the 18th century. It provides a humorous critique of the traditional norms of that time. This epic humorously highlights the importance of social rituals that include the symbolic "rape" of the lock of Belinda's hair. It is essential to note that the term "rape" in the title refers to the Latin word



"raptus," meaning "theft" or "abduction," rather than sexual assault (Hernandez 569–584). Through this, Pope critiques the superficiality of social norms imposed on women and the revolving of life around beauty and social position. This epic also focuses on the limitations of the roles assigned to women in society. Additionally, Belinda's value as a human is reduced to her physical beauty. This reinforces the notion of female objectification concerning desire and status symbols.

While both Eve and Belinda embody certain feminine ideals, they exist in different thematic narratives. The central female roles in both epics are constructed keeping the respective eras in mind. *Paradise Lost* has other prominent themes such as sin, disobedience, fate, and free will, while *The Rape of The Lock* focuses on morality and criticizes the aristocratic society. Nevertheless, both poems have illustrated females in a similar manner. The representation of women in each work reflects the respective authors' intentions. The aim of this thesis is to analyze how both epics share common perspectives while describing female characters.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

*Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* have collected many readers and critics over the years. Many scholars and researchers have interpreted the epics and have researched social norms, female characters, and other themes of these epics. Different readers have different observations about these. They have expressed their opinions in their articles and journals. Most of their arguments include the stereotypical perspective of women. Some also argued about Eve and Belinda together in their writings; they state that Eve and Belinda are connected through social perspectives. Many critics agree that in both epics, female characters are observed from the perspective of the social conduct of the respective eras when the poems were written. Some of them analyzed the issues through feminist literary theory, and some of them described the necessities through comparison or personal interpretations.

*Paradise Lost* reflects the religious and political turbulence of the 17th century. Eve's character in it represents various themes and concepts, such as the nature of temptation and sin, disobedience, the fall of humanity, and the potential for redemption. According to Pollak, Milton creates a gender-based economy where women function as male-desired objects (64). Eve is described as extraordinarily beautiful, with radiant features. She is beautifully accessorized to give Adam pleasure. Here, beautification is not working for self-satisfaction. Rather, it is playing the role of impressing society or a partner. Hsiang-chun said in one of his articles that *Paradise Lost* is frequently seen as a patriarchal text focusing on male dominance and female submission (200–201). Women from patriarchal societies at the time often performed traditional roles that they were expected to conform to. Examples of these roles include beautifying themselves, keeping their virginity for their respective husbands, acting in a way that would lead to

temptation, being foolish about many things, and so on. Another critic, Bare, discusses Eve's objectification as well as the gender inequality shown in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. According to her, Eve goes through "triple objectification at the hands of God, Adam, and Satan" (93). She analyzes gender inequality, the sense of temptation, and the contemporary traditional observation highlighted in *Paradise Lost* in her article (98–112). Adam has a strong introduction and is depicted as a wise person. Moreover, he is mentioned as God's favorite creation. According to Pecheux, there is a sense of maintaining hierarchy, and as a result, Eve's introduction is overlooked in *Paradise Lost* (359–366).

Additionally, Eve's character is shown as an archetypal woman's character. The meaning of archetypal is to be very typical of a certain kind of thing or person (Bradshaw et al., 154–176). Eve may be more easily manipulated than Adam. Therefore, Eve becomes easily tempted by Satan, takes a bite of the forbidden fruit, and then convinces Adam to do the same, ultimately causing them to leave the Garden of Eden. MacPhee said that Eve is highlighted as a weak and subservient human in *Paradise Lost* (1). Milton gives many references in his epic *Paradise Lost* about the creation of men and women not being equal. Eve's decision is mirrored as a curious, vulnerable, and unwise one. Eve's action is painted as the reason for the fall of humanity and the start of sin in the human world as well. Milton's story reinforces male superiority. According to Liebert, *Paradise Lost* represents "traditional patriarchy" and "female subordination to the patriarchal structure of Milton's created world" (152). She talks about Eve's subordination and adds that she "lacks privileges and knowledge" and "represents limitations" in her article (165). Adam never makes a foolish decision and acts like an ideal character. According to Bowers, though Adam was deceived by Eve's beauty, he was not deceived by Satan (264–273). He has knowledge about God, his creations, and his power. Gilbert states that Milton delivers "the story

of a woman's otherness. This otherness escorts Eve to commit sin that ultimately guides her to the exclusion of Eden” (368).

Similarly, in Pope’s mock epic *The Rape of The Lock*, women are shown in a way that highlights the point that women often make poor decisions. It provides a satirical commentary on the social values or manners of the aristocrats regarding women. Ferguson states that Pope presents Belinda as an inferior, narrow, and empty being to the men in his mock-heroic epic (141). According to the description of Pope, women’s chastity mainly depends on their clothing and physical beauty. Wilks states that Belinda’s beautification and clothes play a role in her armor (10). Another critic, Rudat, states that Belinda protects her privacy with her petticoat (65–69). She is very conscious about maintaining her petticoat and accessorizing perfectly. Her clothing is her protection from negativity and her only way to protect her purity. Sena describes in one of his papers that Belinda’s petticoat is a valuable garment to her, and she, like most other women of the early 18th century, values it as her most important possession (260). Also, through Belinda, it is highlighted that women of that time kept themselves preoccupied with making their appearance beautiful. Chico describes in his paper that Belinda’s ideological goal is to manage her beauty (1-23). She is particularly admired for her lustrous hair. Belinda’s lock of hair represents her false concept of self. Her irrational reaction after losing her lock of hair highlights the fact that women’s purity depends on their physical appearance. Smith states in his literary criticism that Belinda considers beauty to be her most powerful or admirable trait, so when she loses her locks of hair, which are representative of her beauty, she becomes devastated (1). She thought of it as losing her purity or chastity. According to Belinda, her beauty actually protects her from outside cruelty. Therefore, losing her beauty makes her valuable to society. Harol says

in her article that Belinda values the lock of her hair as a sign of her virginity (111–129). If her beauty is gone, there is no importance for her in society.

Furthermore, the upper-class aristocracy of that time valued useless facts and turned silly matters into large debates. They used to discuss these silly subjects at their social gatherings. They often considered these matters a part of their social reputation. According to Swaminathan, “Pope’s satire offers a critique of upper-class society’s penchant for turning silly things into serious conflict” (65). Pope speaks about the social conscience of contemporary society at that time in *The Rape of The Lock*. It mirrors the hypocrisy, pomposity, superficial gloss, humbug, banality, and littleness of 18th-century society. The reality of the age is described through the artificial fashion or formality obsession of Pope. The society described in the epic created values or customs without considering sense, nonsense, or right or wrong. Moreover, Belinda’s story is based on a real incident. According to Chico’s article, *The Rape of The Lock* was inspired by a real event of late 1711 or early 1712 regarding Arabella Fermor’s lock of hair being cut, and this starts the conflict between two aristocratic families, the Farmors and Pitrs (1-4). He states that this poem is about pride and the artificial behavior of women. Therefore, Pope uses satire to mock upper-class society in his epic. The poem does not specifically criticize any particular person. Instead, it goes against the feminine wisdom of society. It mainly oppresses immoderate female pride. The tendency to see women as unwise and easily deceived reveals traditional stereotypes or perceptions of society during the 17th and 18th centuries. MacPhee says that in the 18th century, these behaviors regarding women were very common, and women’s rights in society were not a public concern (1). It was the practice of a patriarchal society in which women are frequently suppressed under male dominance. Women were not regarded as wise or dependable characters at the time. Society expected them to behave in a patterned way. During

this time, men were seen as more dependable and superior in society. Belinda serves as a satirical representation of the triviality and shallowness of the aristocratic society of Pope's time. Khattab discusses in one of his studies that "Pope represents Belinda as an imaginative, hysterical woman consistently following fashion and the fashionable commodities that contribute greatly to her feminine subjectivity" (1). Her actions and concerns highlight the vanity and excessive importance placed on trivial matters. She has a lapdog, which she loves more than her lovers. Besides, she has many accessories for beatification, such as dresses, perfumes, jewelry, gloves, and so on. She spends a large amount of time embellishing her physical appearance with these accessories, and she loves to keep herself occupied with them.

When *The Rape of The Lock* was written, individuals could utilize items from various states because society was transitioning from an agrarian to a business-based one. People could afford new items. As an aristocrat, Belinda is idle and has many servants and guardians, such as Sylphs, to assist her in getting ready. The Sylphs guard young women like Belinda and protect her from social pleasures that could tempt her heart. Hence, Eve's character is deeply rooted in religious and moral themes, while Belinda's character serves as a satirical critique of societal norms. They are frequently presented as objects of desire that embody temptation and beauty. These portrayals further reinforce gender stereotypical ideas and reveal social attitudes and norms regarding women at that time. Therefore, similar themes regarding the depiction of female characters are evident in both epics. For example, in both poems, women such as Eve and Belinda are seen as less wise than men, and they are also seen making bad decisions. Both characters represent familiar qualities of women during that time.

In addition, women in these epics are represented as less autonomous and inferior. The author Agy says in one of her articles that both the religious Bible and Pope's *The Rape of The*

*Lock* draw a picture of women as inferior, and it is agreed that women necessarily have to be in a lower position in society than men. Agy also describes Belinda as another Eve in her essay (226). According to her, Eve and Belinda go through similar societal perspectives and feelings of inferiority. The notion of femininity, or women in general, advances from Eve. She also describes that, despite being a modern aristocrat, Belinda portrays equal behavior as Milton's Eve. These behaviors include confining in social norms or dominance, innocence, being unable to take proper decisions, and so on. She also focuses on other themes, such as morality and free will, while describing the epics. Therefore, in Milton's renowned epic *Paradise Lost* and Pope's famous *The Rape of The Lock*, female characters are objectified. Women's portrayals in both epics are clearly influenced by the socio-cultural context in which the poems were written. Mohammadi and Kalantari state that the patriarchal injustice of Alexander Pope's epic suppressed women and their environment in the 18th century (9–12). Thus, in both epics, women are seen through the lens of stereotypical standards. There were many social norms and expectations towards women during that time that are highlighted by Eve and Belinda. They are described as subordinate to men who embody less free will. A very big mistake makes them face the hard consequences of not following social expectations. Also, their beauty lies in serving others. They portray zero values for their own.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Questions

This thesis examines how social expectations and stereotypical ideas regarding women are mirrored through the characters of *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock*, and how the characters represent similar behaviors. In order to analyze these questions, relevant secondary interpretations have been collected from secondary sources such as published books, journals, and articles. These sources are not only reliable but also relevant. The primary sources include John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Alexander Pope's *The Rape of The Lock*.

#### 3.2. Rationale

This paper examines how *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* reflect societal expectations and perceptions regarding women. The portrayal of female characters Eve and Belinda is seen through the lens of the social norms of society. As prevalence regarding women's status is a debatable topic and a significant problem worldwide, this paper has taken on the challenge of sketching and discussing the situation of the female characters in these two famous epic poems. This thesis attempts to deliver answers to the rising questions about women's autonomy. Additionally, the analysis of this study strongly focuses on patriarchal society's perspective towards women. Also, this study has the potential to contribute knowledge in the field of feminist studies. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to sketch the similar consequences faced by Eve and Belinda because of traditional observations. The arguments of



this study could encourage understanding female struggles and the unjust views of society towards women.

### **3.3. Data Collection Method**

*Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* have been interpreted and criticized for a long time, and there are enough materials related to the topic of this thesis. For examining the primary texts, this thesis employs the qualitative method. This particular method helps to explore literature in a deeply descriptive way. Additionally, for organizing the information, a systematic data collection method has been appointed by this study, which relies on contextual and thematic analysis of the primary texts. They assist in interpreting content in a meaningful way and help build logical arguments. Furthermore, research on these texts largely depended on databases of well-known library research articles or journals. To make this study more effective, the secondary sources include materials that directly address *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock*. These sources have been found on JSTOR, Cambridge University Press, Duke University Press, Oxford University Press, and other reputed and credible sites. These referred sources are not only from the past but also from the recent period, which makes the analysis stronger. Therefore, this study seeks to prove its authenticity by referring to renowned researchers' and authors' opinions and works. Also, this study mentions prominent intellectuals, including Rebecca Ferguson, Ellen Pollak, Howard June, and so on. Furthermore, this thesis employs feminist literary theory to analyze the representation of females present in *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock*. This theory is ideal to work with since this thesis is trying to shed light on patriarchal social norms showcased by the primary texts concerning women.

### **3.4. Theoretical Framework**

This thesis is going to employ feminist literary theory. It is a branch of literary criticism that interprets literature in terms of gender. It examines the ways in which gender shapes characters, narratives, and societal norms depicted in literature. Feminist literary theory emerged between the 1960s and 1970s. It was a major part of the feminist movement of that time. Feminist literary theory is the propagation of feminism's criticism. It combines aspects of other theories such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, post-structuralism, and so on (Eagleton 1). It explores female characters' navigations or challenges concerning social norms and pursuing agency. Therefore, this particular theory focuses on the roles of genders, stereotypes, and power dynamics, especially in relation to the representation of women and their experiences. This theory also criticizes patriarchal norms and gender biases prevalent in literary works. In addition, this theory tries to promote equality concerning gender in society and literature. Feminist literary theory demands understanding and challenging traditional interpretations and patriarchal perspectives presented in literature. It examines the dissemination of gender dynamics in literary pieces as well. It contributes to social change and encourages critical reflections about entrenched beliefs. Feminist literary theory encourages readers to critically engage with literature. It fosters an extensive understanding of the gender complexities of literature. This theory is also renowned for its concern with women's authorship politics and representations of female characters in literature. The study and recognition of female writers' works that are often overlooked is also a major concern of feminist literary theory. Feminist literary theory has evolved over time. At present, it examines ideas of sexuality outside of literature. This new examination field includes film, economy, and even geography (Eagleton 1). It is amplifying

voices that are marginalized and strongly promoting a more comprehensive literary canon that showcases different experiences of literary works.

Feminist literary theory originates from revolutionary thinking concerning women's struggles for rights. Mary Wollstonecraft introduced it in the 18th century in her famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Along with her, many feminist theorists emerged during the 20th century. Among these theorists, Adrienne Rich, Betty Friedan, Carol Gilligan, Julia Kristeva, and others were renowned (Howard, 167–190). These theorists try to acknowledge that gender intersects with race, sexuality, and class. Incorporating this fact increases our understanding of literature. Riley, Torrens, and Krumholz state that “Feminist writers’ collective bodies of work envision a world that does not devalue and separate people, a world connected to ideals of justice grounded in the interrelationships of words and deeds” (91). They further add that feminist writers often argue that it is essential to see the world in a new way. Also, “For recognizing individual responsibilities and for creating better communities, a society must be created that sustains people regardless of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, or access to resources” (Riley et al., 106). Moreover, feminist theorists analyze language as a form that highlights gender biases. They try to advocate for non-sexist language.

Feminist literary theory plays a crucial role in reshaping literature by challenging social norms and contributing to an inclusive understanding of literature. Applying it to interpreting *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* allows a critical inspection. This inspection helps to reinforce gender roles and provides a deep understanding of the socio-cultural context in which these epics were written. Also, feminist literary theory will help to examine the societal constructions of the epics in a deeper way. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve's characterization and the consequences of her actions represent a patriarchal narrative. On the other hand, in *The Rape of*

*The Lock*, the satirical representation of the aristocrats' triviality, along with Belinda's portrayal, highlights gendered rituals and the limited agency of most women. Exploring these epics through a feminist lens will unveil the nuances of traditional perspectives and gendered biases.

## Chapter 4

### Eve's Struggles with Societal Demands

#### 4.1. Role and Status

In the epic *Paradise Lost*, John Milton discusses the fall of humankind through the biblical story of the first humans, Adam and Eve (Reimer 4). Milton writes the story according to his own interpretations, inspired by the actual biblical one. Milton explores the fundamental questions about the consequences of women's choices through Eve's character. Eve is characterized by her intellectual curiosity and desire for knowledge. This curiosity, however, becomes vulnerable when she succumbs to Satan's temptations. This highlights the social taboo concerning female desires, which often carries disaster. The archetypal idea of females being less wise than men has been deeply ingrained in society for a long time. Society expects women to be shy and innocent. Being wise or wanting something outside of social expectations is never entertained by society.

Furthermore, Eve's character in *Paradise Lost* carries profound theological and moral weight. Her actions contribute to the original sin and the expulsion from paradise, exploring themes of temptation, disobedience, and redemption. She exists in the biblical context of the Garden of Eden and plays a role in the fall of mankind. Milton himself had complex views on gender relations, and scholars have debated the extent to which he intended to endorse or subvert prevailing notions of gender roles. Graham identified Milton's narrative as a "system of Western patriarchy" in his critical survey of *Paradise Lost* through a feminist view (133). He adds that *Paradise Lost* is all about 'male hegemony.' It stands out Eve's 'secondariness' to Adam" (136). During the past, society thought women did not need to have much knowledge other than

domestic ones. According to society, women's aim should only be to please their partners. Swan interprets through a feminist lens that Milton conceptualizes women through Eve (59–69). She adds that women are not equal to men in *Paradise Lost* (66). Eve frequently receives instructions from Adam. On the other hand, Adam gains knowledge directly from the angels, such as Raphael. Moreover, the creation order itself implies a certain hierarchy, as Adam is created first and Eve is formed from Adam's rib. This sequence is often cited as evidence of Adam's precedence and a hierarchical structure in the divine plan. This fact highlights the fact of men's superiority and women's inferiority. The idea of valuing men first and women next is constructed from this idea. Patriarchal society gives great importance to this fact and treats women as second-class citizens of society. Again, God creates Eve from Adam, as these lines describe: "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my self / Before me: woman is her name, of man / Extracted" (Milton, Book 8, lines 495–497). Also, Milton highlights Eve's unimportant value when an invisible voice says that Eve is not supposed to think much. She just has to give Adam pleasure, and she has to see herself according to Adam. She never enjoys enough privileges to be equal to Adam as well. According to society, the perfect example of an ideal female is a good mother and wife. A good mother is expected to sacrifice or compromise for her child and husband. A mother doing something for herself is merely appreciated by society. On the other hand, society thinks a perfect wife's aim should only be to please her husband. She is expected to never be involved in anything else. In a patriarchal society, working outside the house or fulfilling other dreams besides domestic responsibilities is considered a negative thing. According to Milton's descriptions, the aim behind Eve's creation was to serve Adam and erase his loneliness: "Made so adorn for thy delight the more" (Milton, Book 8, line 576).

The feminist lens helps to clearly see these matters of social oppression against women. Margarita Stocker has also argued about *Paradise Lost* and states, “Feminist criticism has been the most fundamental recent growth area in Milton studies, but the general issue of Milton’s attitude towards women has been standard critical equipment for some time” (50). Furthermore, God’s punishment for Adam and Eve was very different. Adam receives the punishment of hard work, while Eve receives “endless pain” from her period and childbirth (Milton, Book 3, lines 30-34). Periods come in every month with huge physical and psychological turmoil. Giving birth to a child is considered the most painful and responsible matter in the world. Compared to these painful responsibilities, maintaining a stable job is less stressful. Society expects women to be brave enough to face these pains but not brave enough to gain the same privileges as men. Also, women’s work is often overlooked. Where men’s bare minimum is highly appreciated. Moreover, after the fall, Adam showcases his authoritative role. For example, Adam asserts his authority over Eve, expresses his disappointment, and suggests that Eve is subordinate to him. This can be interpreted as Milton reflecting the cultural and religious norms of his time, where male authority was often emphasized. Society makes men think that they should always have the privilege to control or dominate women in their lives. The idea of women being weaker than men erodes these ideals. Females are first brought up under their father’s dominance, and during their elderly years, they come under the dominance of their husbands. This is considered the accurate life circle of a woman living in a patriarchal society. The fact that women are often neglected is highlighted clearly through Eve's character.

#### **4.2. Physical Appearance and Objectification**

In *Paradise Lost*, both Eve and Sin can be seen as symbolizing complex theological and moral concepts; their objectification raises questions about the representation of women in the

poem. Also, this objectification aligns with contemporary views on women. Women are often considered objects rather than human beings. Society decides their roles and expects them to maintain them with perfection. Milton's political ideals are also expressed in *Paradise Lost* while explaining the context and characters of his epic. Milton criticizes King Charles I in these lines and compares him to Satan: "Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds, / Fearless, endangered Heav'n's perpetual King." King Charles I was defeated because of his pride. His government was based in London, and he increased revenues by supporting the military group. The parliament refused to support him. He ignored the parliament and took laws into his own hands. According to Goldsyone, he dismissed the parliamentary system, which caused civil wars between him and the parliament. Charles I and his loyalists were defeated and captured. He was on trial for murder, treason, and tyranny. After convicting Charles I, the parliament executed him. Through his execution, people understood that a monarch should not act according to divine rights. Rather, a ruler must rule according to the law (Goldsyone 4–50). While Satan is compared with a king, Eve is considered a gift. God creates Eve as a 'gift' for Adam to give him company, and Adam thanks God for being generous: "Giver of all things fair, but fairest this / Of all thy gifts" (Milton, Book 8, lines 493–494). The purpose of Eve's creation showcases objectification. Therefore, Eve is never mentioned as a partner or companion to Adam. Society represents women as objects that are owned by men related to them in a certain way, such as a father or husband. Women are basically identified by their father's or husband's name. Their individual identities are often neglected. On top of that, through Eve's character, it is clarified that women are objects of temptation. Eve becomes the object of desire and temptation, first for Adam and then for Satan in the form of a serpent. Adam disobeys God's commandment because of Eve.



This fact primarily serves as a message about the dangers of disobedience brought on by women through temptation. It highlights the fact that women ultimately call upon chaos.

Additionally, Eve is accessorized beautifully for Adam's visual pleasure. The social notion that women should accessorize for pleasing others is portrayed through this matter. Her physical beauty is described when she is looking at her reflection in the Garden of Eden's pool. Her physical beauty and allure are emphasized, contributing to the idea of Eve being an object of attraction and temptation. Her physical beauty reinforces the concept of objectification. Therefore, Milton discusses another female character, Sin, who is the daughter of Satan himself and is represented as evil and chaos. Their incestuous relationship is a source of horror and revulsion. This familial dynamic can be interpreted as a form of objectification, reducing Sin to a product of a perverse relationship rather than an independent entity. Moreover, Sin is created and named after Satan's disobedience towards God. She gives birth to Death and Satan gets the key to the opening gate of heaven from Sin in order to take revenge on God. Sin and Death guide Satan towards heaven through the bridge they guard, which connects heaven and hell. These represent stereotypical ideas regarding women and are the reason for the chaos. Moreover, Sin represents the allegorical representation of the sin Satan commits against God, which is disobedience. Sin is also described as "fair," "Heav'nly fair," "goddess," and so on. Though the lower half of her body is similar to that of a serpent because she was created due to disobedience, she was born out of Satan's head when he disobeyed God (Milton, Book 2, lines 648–1055). These descriptions of Sin, being beautiful and half of her body being cruel represent her origin. This personification can be seen as a form of objectification, as Sin is given a physical form that serves symbolic and narrative purposes. Thus, Sin's beauty and objectification focus on the

stereotypical fact that women bring or represent chaos. This fact represents the false assumption, according to women, that no matter how beautiful women are, they bring negativity with them.

### **4.3. Agency and Decision Making**

Eve is further described as a compound character because she embodies not only innocence but also vulnerability. Eve is fashioned to fulfill the role of a companion rather than being created as an individual with agency. Eve is innocent, and she is able to be easily tempted by Satan. This sheds light on her inferiority. According to social expectations, women represent inferior and innocent characters. Strong, wise, and dependable characteristics are reserved for the males of society. Furthermore, Eve is not wise and has fewer agencies than hers. With this in mind, Satan's easy target was Eve. As a result, she eats the forbidden fruit. After that, she experiences guilt and remorse. Her self-awareness and admission of wrongdoing suggest recognition of her agency in making a decision with negative consequences. Therefore, Eve's actions are influenced by gendered perspectives and highlight the traditional view that women are more susceptible to temptation and emotional manipulation. Also, Milton describes Eve as more sensitive to temptation than Adam, which brightens the concept of women being spontaneously swayed by their strongest desires. Her decisions align with cultural stereotypes rather than reflecting individual agency. However, her agency is evident in her initial decision to explore the Garden of Eden alone. Her agency becomes compromised when she encounters Satan in the form of the serpent. Despite her initial resistance, she allows herself to be persuaded, highlighting a moment of vulnerability and a potential lapse in agency. The social concept that female desirers will ultimately carry negativity is also showcased through Eve's surrender to Satan's temptation. Therefore, through the poem, Eve's actions are explained as the reason for Eve and Adam's exile from Eden. This fact reinforces the traditional belief that the fall of

mankind and their corruption are caused by women's temptation. It can easily be argued that though Eve is described as a beautiful being, her curious behavior and desire for knowledge finally cause the downfall of humanity.

On the other hand, Adam is described as a superior being compared to Eve. Milton's biased view towards women is clearly seen in Eve's descriptions in *Paradise Lost*, which show patriarchal behavior. Therefore, Adam's descriptions come first in the epic. God created Adam as a male and in his own image. Thus, one can see God through Adam's eyes (Milton, Book 7, lines 524-527). Patriarchal societies are much more comfortable prioritizing men than women. The limited roles of women make them subordinate to men. Furthermore, Adam is wiser than Eve, since he is knowledgeable and full of information that Eve lacks. He is described as "art" (Milton, Book 4, lines 472-473). He also recognizes the creation process and God's power: "needs must the power / That made us, and for us this ample world / That raised us from the dust and placed us here" (Milton, Book 4, lines 412-416). Eve knows about the world through Adam. Adam teaches Eve about obedience to God and his requirements: "he who requires / From us no other service than to keep / This one, this easy charge, / not to taste that only Tree / Of Knowledge, / The only sign of our obedience left / Among so many signs of power and rule / Conferred upon us," (Milton, Book 4, lines 419-430). He knows about death, and it has to be paid for. On the other hand, Eve could not make sense of the word "death." Compared to Adam, Eve is innocent and naive, as her speech in Book 4 is also sentimental and has no historical value as Adam's words. Satan takes Eve's innocence as an advantage and manipulates her to not fear death. (Milton, Book 9, line 695). According to Milton, innocence could easily attract evil. Additionally, a female gaining knowledge despite maintaining innocence shatters happiness. For instance, Eve's curiosity about gaining knowledge carried her downfall from Eden. It highlights

the patriarchal ideology that women should maintain innocence and perform socially expected roles only. Otherwise, she will face danger.

Moreover, Eve acknowledges her guilt and expresses her willingness to be subordinate to Adam after their exile from Eden. She feels responsible for their fall from heaven and for making Adam eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Society often makes women feel responsible for certain matters without considering the circumstances that made them do so. Furthermore, women brought up in a patriarchal society are taught from childhood to take responsibility for their actions, whatever the circumstances. Eve's action represents this traditional practice in society. This also highlights the fact that Eve demonstrates fewer agencies and makes decisions that lead to negative consequences. Generally, social expectations and norms concerning women have not changed much. Still, society expects women to behave in a particular way. Women in modern society are still not prioritized. They are seen as sources of temptation and are often objectified. They have fewer agencies and are seen as inferior beings as well. In a patriarchal family, women are taught to remain inferior. They are considered a burden for her parents. Families try to marry their female children as soon as possible. Additionally, needy families' often treat their female child as a burden. Most of them are not much interested in even making their girls properly educated. According to them, educating a male child is more profitable than educating a female child. The idea that a female will be married off ultimately and will leave her paternal home for good makes families less interested in educating their girls or fulfilling their needs. Therefore, when Satan inspires Eve's dream, Adam tries to comfort her, which shows the mature and responsible behavior that Eve displays. She is often confused about her tasks. Adam also has instant knowledge, and animals were named after what Adam called them (Milton, Book

7, lines 352–354). Eve never receives such opportunities, and her desires are often overlooked, like most of the women in a patriarchal society.

## Chapter 5

### Of Vanity and Virtue: Belinda's Struggles

#### 5.1. Role and Status

Belinda belongs to the 17th- to 18th-century British aristocracy, serving as a satirical commentary on the frivolous nature of high society. She is portrayed as someone who follows the latest fashion trends, highlighting her awareness of social conventions and her desire to conform to the standards of her class. Her beauty and social standing make her a coveted figure, and the trivial events surrounding her life are elevated to epic proportions in a satirical manner. Minsariya argues that “The poem moves from an opening mockery of coquettes to a closing seriousness assessing women’s social position. Pope’s physical challenges resonate with women’s struggle for authority in the public sphere” (4). Belinda’s character is focused on social conventions and superficial concerns, offering a critique of the vanity and excesses of aristocratic society. Though Belinda is admired for her beauty and charm, she is satirized by Pope in the poem because of her obsession with physical appearance and social status. Clarissa criticizes Belinda because she is always concerned with her appearance and spends most of her time in front of the mirror. Belinda places undue importance on her own beauty and social reputation, allowing a minor incident to disrupt her composure and sense of self. The poem overall critiques the obsession with superficial beautification and banal matters in aristocratic society. The majority of the aristocratic women of that time liked to spend their days maintaining beauty and attire. They were obsessed with looking lustrous and young as much as they could. They strongly believed the idea that if their physical beauty was gone, their social status could also go along with it. These ideas are even entertained in present-day society. Women’s worth and future

highly depend mostly on their physical appearance, which is still a socially maintained idea. Society often makes women think that beautifying themselves will grant them a perfect suitor and grand status in society. Also, if a woman is considered less beautiful by society, everyone around her starts to humiliate her hurtfully. As a result, they become obsessed with accessorizing and beautifying themselves from a very early age.

Therefore, people during the 18th century had items from different places and states, such as clothes, accessories, perfumes, and so on. Most of them had lap dogs as their pets, and this was the representation of upper-class societies during that time. They were highly conscious of useless subjects. The epic's trivialization highlights the violation of one's personal position through the manner of Belinda's lost lock of hair. This directly raises questions about neglecting women's autonomy. Pollak describes in one of his analyses that Pope's work represents dominant themes and the fact that "women are marginal beings" (429–444). Additionally, he argues that "Pope's fictive history of a single virgin's severed hair is nothing less than emblematic of the birth of the female as a social being in eighteenth-century English culture" (443). The event of the lock of hair being lost works as the main turning point of the poem. In the poem, it is depicted that women maintaining traditional expressions is their only way to have a respectful place in society. These facts are installed in most women's minds by society from a very early age. Storey criticizes that "Mastery in these traditional feminine qualities could be enough to protect a woman or ensure the success of her scolding or virtuous speech. Similarly, each of these traits could also be used to attract the proper suitor at a party" (203). Also, the fact that women have childish emotions is described by Pope in Canto 4 by portraying objects becoming alive due to Belinda's sadness. Additionally, when a woman is unable to meet social expectations, dies in this epic, her soul becomes spirits, or Sylphs. They serve as guardians of the

living women until they keep meeting societal practices. The Sylphs only aspire to matrimony. Belinda's only concern is finding a suitor at a party and accessorizing for it. People around her make her understand the so-called importance of finding a perfect husband. As if it should be her only aim in life. For instance, Clarissa, who feels she has a responsibility towards Belinda, wants her to marry and start a family of her own. Therefore, after going through the poem *The Rape of The Lock* and the criticisms regarding it, it can be argued that the character Belinda brightens an ideal example of a large number of women of that time, where she is described as a vain character. Hence, it can be stated that *The Rape of The Lock* is a mirror of the social norms of a patriarchal society.

## **5.2. Physical Appearance and Objectification**

In the mock-heroic epic *The Rape of The Lock*, the character Belinda embodies the invasion of beauty, femininity, and innocence from her era. She is innocent, conscious of her outer beauty, and showcases less wise behavior. Minsariya states that "*The Rape of The Lock* functions as a parable for women, illustrating the superficiality of women's empowerment through consumption and the materialization of beauty and social relations" (1). Beautiful Belinda is often in charge of the spirits, which are the sylphs. Pope makes this fact clear: "Fairest of Mortals, thou distinguish'd Care / Of thousand bright Inhabitants of Air!" (Pope, Canto 1, lines 27–28). The Sylphs are also determined to make Belinda understand her importance and not settle for less, as these lines follow: "Hear and believe! thy own importance know, nor bound thy natural views to things below" (Pope, Canto 1, lines 35–36). These Sylphs are the guardians of the young virgin Belinda. They guard her chastity by increasing their self-consciousness. The Sylphs help Belinda accessorize with different attractive objects. Moreover, Belinda's clothing needs to be protected because it represents her purity. Saving virginity for a future partner is a



very common expectation of society, even in the present day. Most women who lose their virginity are considered impure, and they face many harsh consequences from society. People start to treat them disrespectfully. Therefore, after analyzing through the feminist lens, it could be said that Belinda's character illustrates the tendency of objectifying women in literary works, and women are frequently diminished into undiluted objects of desire. Salma argues, "Belinda becomes an object of desire because of her ornamented locks" (1). In the beginning of the poem, Belinda is seen preoccupied with beautification. She is very conscious of her appearance. According to the guardian, Sylphs, her appearance can keep her safe from negative influences. If anything happens to her beauty or appearance, she will become vulnerable and impure. Besides, through Belinda's character, the representation of women being objectified is easily seen in the epic because someone's vulnerability or being pure could never depend on their physical appearance.

Belinda's objectification in the poem is primarily centered on the elaborate and hyperbolic descriptions of her physical appearance, particularly her hair. The lock of hair itself becomes a symbolic object of desire. In the end of the poem, when Belinda's lock is cut off by Baron, she tries to restore it as the lines follow: "Restore the Lock! She criers, and all around / Restore the Lock! The vaulted Roofs rebound" (Pope, Canto 5, lines 447–448). This desperation suggests the ideas of how important someone's physical purity is and that physical beauty is the only thing that holds women's honor. Pope personifies Belinda's hair, describing it as having a life and will of its own. This personification reinforces the notion that Belinda's beauty, particularly her hair, is an entity separate from her as an individual. The lock's chastity is so pure that it has the ability to become a star that no one could touch, adding new light to heaven. This again represents the idea of artificiality. It also reduces Belinda's essence to a mere physical

attribute. This plays a great role in stating the shallow appreciations of upper-class society. Also, the meticulous portrayal of Belinda's physical preparations contributes to her objectification by emphasizing her external beauty. After waking up, Belinda stands in front of the mirror in the toilet, where all the cosmetics are displayed: "And now, unveil'd, the toilet stands display'd, each silver vase in mystic order laid" (Pope, Canto 1, lines 121–122). Belinda is compared to mythical beings like nymphs and goddesses, further objectifying her by placing her on a pedestal of idealized beauty. The exaggerated comparisons contribute to the satirical nature of the poem. Belinda's reflection in the mirror is described as "a heavenly image" as she admires it, and then she starts decorating herself with all the cosmetics she has from different states: "Unnumber'd Treasures ope at once, and here / The various Offerings of the World appear; here Belinda becomes an object of desire (Pope, Canto 1, lines 129–130). When Belinda is done decorating herself, Pope compares her beauty to "Bright as the Sun," and all her beauty is described beautifully by Pope (Pope, Canto 1, lines 149–166). It showcases the importance of maintaining beauty as a woman. Therefore, *The Rape of The Lock* renders gender stereotypical ideas. This gives a chance to see the poem from a feminist perspective and explore how most women are painted in the society described in *The Rape of The Lock*. It could be easily said that in the poem, women are seen as objects of desire. For instance, they are always conscious of their physical appearance and beauty. The reason for their beauty is their representation of self, class, and chastity.

Pope also mocks the mere follies of females by depicting the Cave of Spleen through satire, which includes "sobs," "sighs," "soft sorrows," "wild shrieking tantrums," and "flowing tears." The Goddess of the Cave of Spleen is very concerned with appearance as well. She is another example of the fashionable women of that time. She is an elderly lady who tries to look

young and has servants to help her maintain her beauty. She often paints her “withered cheeks,” “assumes lisp,” “pretends swoons,” “languishes airs,” and embodies habitual sorrowful expressions. Also, the gift bag given by the goddess to Umbriel contains women’s important artificial weapons, such as anger, curses, quarrels, sobs, sighs, screams, and so on. This bag serves as a representation of the social expectations of society towards women. They are obsessed with embellishing themselves, wearing artificial makeup, shopping, gossiping, flirting, card playing, and so on. Their cosmetics, or vanities, are worshipped and well-cultivated. The importance of their vanity does not go away, even after death. They are also filled with pettiness and vacant pride. To them, breaking a Chinese vase is similar to a catastrophe of fate; losing virtue is not important, as losing hair locks and staining brocade attire is equal to staining one’s honors. Lap dogs and husbands are seen with equal importance. Above it, the poem elucidates different practices or rituals regarding marriage and courtship in society, which actually turn women into changeable objects.

### **5.3. Agency and Decision Making**

*The Rape of The Lock* provides insight into Belinda's character and her actions. According to Minsariya, “*The Rape of The Lock* addresses social issues experienced by women. Pope is sympathetic towards Belinda and the confined role of women within the male-dominant public sphere of eighteenth-century London” (10). Belinda has very little agency over herself and makes decisions that contribute to the satire and comedic elements of the poem. Her decisions and reactions are often influenced by societal expectations and vanity. Her agency is somewhat diminished in the poem, as she appears to be more concerned with her social standing, appearance, and frivolous pursuits than with more meaningful matters. This emphasis on superficiality suggests a lack of agency in making decisions that truly matter. For instance,

Belinda's decision to engage in the card game symbolizes her participation in the frivolous and trivial pursuits of her social circle, ultimately leading to the disastrous event that becomes the mock-epic's central incident. Attending social gatherings and presenting perfection in front of people holds great importance. Even in the present world, showing the best version of oneself is appreciated rather than showing the unfiltered one. If someone showcases the broken or depressed version of them, they are often ignored or humiliated. The practice of women meeting all social expectations also represents weak agency for women.

Belinda admires her locks of hair with great care. The lock could also protect her from falling in love with the wrong people and from attracting men (Pope, Canto 1, lines 167–176). When Baron cuts Belinda's lock of hair, she “Screams of Horror” and becomes terrified (Pope, Canto 3, lines 437–447). From the poem's description, this event is clarified as the central plot of the poem. This seemingly works as a very significant event in the society of the poem, and this event is described with the famous grandeur of a mock-epic by Pope. This much reaction to a mere matter is very unnecessary. Belinda also fails to protect herself from the event. She was solely dependent on the Sylphs, who also failed to protect her. Her preoccupation with trivialities and her self-absorption are evident in her reaction to the loss of her lock of hair as well. Instead of addressing the situation with reason or poise, Belinda becomes excessively distressed and sees the incident as a grave offense. This overreaction is highlighted through Pope's satirical lens, emphasizing the triviality of the conflict in the grand scheme of things. The fact that women could merely stand for themselves or resemble emotional characteristics is highlighted through this event. Besides, losing the lock of hair becomes a matter of violating Belinda's privacy.

It could be said that during the time when *The Rape of The Lock* was written, women were not introduced to education much; they were confined to the domestic sphere. People saw

them as sources of temptation and second-class citizens of society. Women were seen as subordinate to male dominance, and most of them were bound to men's authority. They were often considered innocent beings and less knowledgeable than men. Additionally, women's petticoats need to be strongly protected in the epic. If the petticoat is unprotected, it will violate women's autonomy. Therefore, most of Belinda's life decisions are taken by her guardian, Sylphs. They are her protectors, and Belinda does what they advise her to do, including how to dress or look and what initial steps to take for finding the best suitor. Women are often considered unreliable characters that are highly dependent on male sex. Taking decisions for oneself or doing something without proper instructions from others is not entirely entertained when it comes to females. The Sylphs could manipulate Belinda easily. For example, Ariel warns Belinda in her dreams about men's behavior and how foolish it is to fall into their trap, reject good marriage proposals, and ultimately get vain items (Pope, Canto 1, lines 78–90). The Sylphs' aim is to make Belinda as flirtatious as possible so her heart can never be fixed on a single gallant. Viewed from a feminist perspective, these events clearly show how much limited agency Belinda has and how much social expectations are placed on her by society. Her life is restricted through courtship, social etiquette, and physical beauty, as showcased in the poem.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Both *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* draw on various themes, but this study is concerned with how most women were particularly seen or treated during the 17th or 18th centuries. Therefore, this study is limited to social perceptions, expectations, and norms regarding women, and it aims to understand these issues from a feminist perspective. Furthermore, the qualitative method has been used, applying feminist literary theory only. The analysis of this paper contributes to answering only the research questions of this study. This thesis does not include any other primary texts other than John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Alexander Pope's *The Rape of The Lock*. Also, it analyzes relevant sources accordingly with personal interpretations, including a competent literature review. To further analyze the literature review, this thesis tries to capture almost all the relevant information for this study. However, future researchers could find many other concepts and theories while analyzing this thesis.

Milton and Pope sketched Eve and Belinda's characters through a societal lens. These female characters and their experiences should be highlighted because they serve as a central part of both epics. Nevertheless, after understanding both epics and after going through the criticisms of other researchers, it can easily be argued that in *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock*, women are showcased through social expectations or norms. The society expects them to live according to the environment and people of that society. They embody the female struggles of a large number of women of their time. Due to social perspectives, their individual specialties were ignored. The patriarchal views or treatments towards them portray the subordination of women. The social expectations of the 17th and 18th centuries positioned them as second-class citizens with limited agency and traditionally defined roles in their respective times. They were

acknowledged through their domestic performances towards husbands or suitors. It does not matter if they do or do not perform their duties well; they were often considered carriers of chaos and temptation. Their lack of knowledge and innocence made them inferior to men.

Therefore, after going through the feminist view, it is clearly seen that Eve and Belinda's portrayals awaken questions regarding gender stereotypes while amalgamating notions concerning weakness and temptation. The representation reflects cultural attitudes toward women and societal conduct about gender roles. Considering females as inferior beings is a very common trait in patriarchal societies. Patriarchal ideas are constructed in a way that highlights women as weaker beings who cannot but live under male dominance. These false ideas influenced the male writers so much that they described their female leads according to social expectations. These expectations covered the individual specialties of the female characters, whether they were first-born Eve or wealthy Belinda. Although *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of The Lock* are considered classical literature, they should be included in literature studies more often. Understanding these epics meaningfully could foster knowledge in the field of literature. The number of similarities these epics hold is very thought-provoking when learning about 17th- to 18th-century religious and social customs. It is crucial to analyze these works, understanding the historical context of the 17th and 18th centuries. Also, understanding them and recognizing the evolution of perspectives on gender roles and patriarchal norms showcased in literature and society over time is equally crucial. Though they were written in different periods, they are indirectly collected through the portrayals of gender biases, social norms, and patriarchal perspectives. Readers should examine these more and describe their interpretations of them as well.

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