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FAERY LORE AND *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*

By PAT ROGERS

EVERYONE knows that Pope added the machinery of sylphs and gnomes when he revised *The Rape of the Lock* in 1714. And most people—aside from John Dennis—think it was a valuable addition. However, the precise imaginative territory opened up by this means has never been charted in any detail.¹ The declared Rosicrucian origins of the machinery appear to have disabled criticism in a puzzling way. I wish to offer a threefold argument. First, that the gnomes are as important as the sylphs in the design. Second, that Pope writes in a tradition of rustic ‘faery’ lore, involving Shakespeare, Spenser, Drayton, and others. And third, a relatively minor point, that the work of William Diaper—notably *Dryades*, published in December 1712—has a perceptible relevance to the additions Pope made.

On 1 July 1712, in the *Spectator* no. 419, Addison supplied the classic definition of the ‘fairy way of writing’. In this species of composition, he tells us,

the poet quite loses sight of nature, and entertains his reader’s imagination with the characters and actions of such persons as have many of them no existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are fairies, witches, magicians, demons, and departed spirits.

Addison then goes on to specify the qualities required of a poet attempting this mode:

It is impossible for a poet to succeed in it, who has not a particular cast of fancy, and an imagination naturally fruitful and superstitious. Besides this, he ought to be well versed in legends and fables, antiquated romances, and the traditions of nurses and old women, that he may fall in with our natural prejudices, and humour those notions which we have imbibed in our infancy. For, otherwise, he will be apt to make his fairies talk like people of his own species, and not like other sets of beings, who converse with different objects, and think in a different manner from that of mankind. . . . These descriptions raise a pleasing kind of horror in the mind of the reader, and amuse his imagination with the strangeness and novelty of the persons who are represented in them.

¹ The most extended discussion of the sylphs is Appendix B to *The Rape of the Lock and other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (London, 3rd edn., 1962), pp. 378–83. This is the edition followed throughout. On the Cave of Spleen, see the article by Lawrence Babb, *R.E.S.*, xii (1936), 165–76. K. M. Briggs (*The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London, 1967), pp. 156–8) is concerned with the status of the elementals from the point of view of folk history, rather than their imaginative function.

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They bring up into our memory the stories we heard in our childhood, and favour those secret terrors and apprehensions to which the mind of man is naturally subject.¹

Now Addison, of course, advised against the expansion of the *Rape* from two cantos to five. Perhaps he felt that Pope's imaginative endowments were not 'naturally superstitious'. But in the event Pope chose to fill out his cast-list with 'persons as have many of them no existence'. Moreover, the Cave of Spleen is enough to remind us that 'strangeness and novelty' are among the effects of the poem, and that 'terrors and apprehensions' are not always kept at bay even in the gracious world of Belinda.

In his discussion of the sylphs Geoffrey Tillotson rightly pointed out that Pope grafts the Rosicrucian mythology on to 'all the Nurse and Priest have taught' (i. 30), and remarked that by this stroke Pope 'connects the machinery with the beliefs of his own country, a connection required of an epic poet'.² Quite so: but Pope goes further. He makes pagan folklore act as a mock-heroic prop and a handmaiden of the social satire. But it also operates as a kind of poetic amplifier, enlarging the fantastic and surrealistic capacities of the work. The true proportions of the *Rape* are not defined by the habitual decorum of comic epic; they enclose the heathen psychology of 'spleen' and the dreamlike visions scattered throughout. The *Rape* is like Virgil, but it is also (designedly) like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Its dominant mood is one of a rapt and enchanted wonder.

This note is struck as soon as Ariel, who had caused 'The Morning-Dream that hover'd o'er her Head', wakens Belinda:

Fairest of Mortals, though distinguish'd Care
Of thousand bright Inhabitants of Air!
If e'er one Vision touch'd thy infant Thought,
Of all the Nurse and all the Priest have taught,
Of airy Elves by Moonlight Shadows seen,
The silver Token, and the circled Green,
Or Virgins visited by Angel-Pow'rs,
With Golden Crowns and Wreaths of heav'nly Flow'rs,
Hear and believe! (i. 27-35)

One does not have to seek far for an exactly contemporary evocation of 'the circled Green' and elves by moonlight. This comes from *Dryades: or, The Nymphs Prophecy*, which Swift found 'very good' on its appearance in December 1712:³

¹ *Critical Essays from The Spectator*, ed. D. F. Bond (Oxford, 1970), pp. 199-200.

² Tillotson, ed. cit., p. 380, n.

³ The text followed is that of *The Complete Works of William Diaper*, ed. Dorothy Broughton (London, 1951), pp. 57-81.

The Moon, with doubtful Rays, deceiv'd the Sight,
 And waving Boughs gave an uncertain Light.
 When my chill'd Spirits sunk with sudden Fear,
 And trembling Horror bid the Search forbear;
 My heedless Steps had touch'd the hallow'd Ground,
 Where airy Daemons dance the wanton Round;
 Where fairy Elves, and Midnight *Dryads* meet,
 And to the smiling Moon the Sylvan-Song repeat.
 Tall rifted Oaks, and circling Elms had made
 A central void amid surrounding Shade. . . . (40-9)

I am not here concerned with 'influence'—the argument is that Belinda was familiar with such verses, not Pope—but it is interesting to observe how Pope's lines 31-2 echo Diaper's 45-8 (*airy, elves, moonlight/midnight*—each in the identical metric position—*circled/circling, shadows/shade*, even the chime of *silver/sylvan*).

Ariel goes on to refer to 'Some secret Truths from learned Pride conceal'd, | To Maids alone and Children are reveal'd.' Similarly Addison had continued his *Spectator* paper with a caveat against scepticism: 'Men of cold fancies, and philosophical dispositions, object to this kind of poetry, that it has not probability enough to affect the imagination.' In Pope's terms,

What tho' no Credit doubting Wits may give?
 The Fair and Innocent shall still believe. (i. 39-40)

The gloss from Addison comes pat, and supplies an ironic edge to Ariel's persuasives:

Nay, many are prepossessed with such false opinions, as dispose them to believe these particular delusions; at least, we have all heard so many pleasing relations in favour of them, that we do not care for seeing through the falsehood, and willingly give ourselves up to so agreeable an imposture.¹

This is an excellent account of Belinda's approach to life. And it steadily dawns on us that the sylphs represent a kind of pretext for her. Their role in the plot is to be as a non-conscience, endorsing every impulse towards coquetry and vanity.

Soon afterwards, indeed, Ariel explains the cosmic transformation which underlies the fairy state:

For when the Fair in all their Pride expire,
 To their first Elements their Souls retire:
 The Sprights of fiery Termagants in Flame
 Mount up, and take a *Salamander's* Name.

¹ *Critical Essays*, ed. cit., p. 200.

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Soft yielding Minds to Water glide away,
And sip with *Nymphs*, their Elemental Tea.
The graver Prude sinks downwards 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. (i. 57–66)

This, shorn of its vibrant metaphysical wit, is what Pope found in *Le Comte de Gabalis*. But there are many riders to the passage. It is the first mention of the gnomes. That they should be made the avatars of prudish womanhood is significant—for Clarissa, the nearest voice to sanity we hear, is to be deemed a ‘prude’ by Thalestris (v. 36). According to *Gabalis*, the gnomes were ‘the Guardians of Treasures’, and also of precious stones (such as the sparkling cross, the easily lost necklace, the ear-rings).¹ In the source, as Tillotson remarks, all the faery creatures were friendly; it is Pope who makes the gnomes sinister. As for Diaper, he leaves them neutral:

The earthy *Gnomes*, and fairy Elves are seen,
Digging in lowest Mines with busy Men;
There labour on the fruitless Work intent,
While deeper Snows the wonted Dance prevent. (157–60)

The preceding lines themselves recall the next section of Ariel’s speech:

The Elfin Pow’rs (who can at Pleasure leave
Aerial Bodies, and new Forms receive)
Cast off their Vehicles and freed from Sense . . . (153–5)

Compare Pope:

For Spirits, freed from mortal Laws, with ease
Assume what Sexes and what Shapes they please. (i. 69–70)

Again it is not a question of ‘borrowing’ (there is a closer Miltonic analogue for Pope’s lines),² but of an affinity in mode and phrasing.

Ariel passes on to describe the role of the sylphs in guarding the ‘Purity of melting Maids. . . . When Musick softens, and when Dancing fires’. Then, more specifically:

Oft when the World imagine Women stray,
The *Sylphs* thro’ mystick Mazes guide their Way,
Thro’ all the giddy Circle they pursue,
And old Impertinence expel by new.
What tender Maid but must a Victim fall
To one Man’s Treat, but for another’s Ball?
When *Florio* speaks, what Virgin could withstand,
If gentle *Damon* did not squeeze her Hand? . . .

¹ Cited by Tillotson, ed. cit., p. 380.

² Tillotson (p. 381) appositely quotes Burton in a related context. Puck, of course, was famous for Protean disguises.

This erring Mortals Levity may call,
 Oh blind to Truth! the *Sylphs* contrive it all.
 Of these am I, who thy Protection claim,
 A watchful Sprite, and *Ariel* is my Name. (i. 91-8, 103-6)

This is a feminization and domestication of the nymph's speech in *Dryades*:

Unbody'd Pow'rs are not confin'd to Floods,
 To purling Riv'lets, or to shady Woods.
 Kind Daemons on ungrateful Man attend,
 Observe their Steps, and watch the hated Fiend.
 The same good *Genii* guard the harmless Sheep,
 When weary'd *Damon* lies in thoughtless Sleep;
 The same, whose Influence aids th' unsettled State,
 And gladly hastens on the Work of Fate. . . .
 Inferior Orders, have a meaner Home,
 And here in Wilds, and woody Mazes roam,
 To learned *Magi* we strange Spells impart,
 Myst'ries disclose, and tell the *secret* Art.
 With Sacred *Miselto* the *Druids* crown'd
 Sung with the Nymphs, and danc'd the pleasing Round . . .
 Mortals to Earth, and mean Delights inclin'd,
 No Pleasure in abstracted Notions find. . . .
 Tho' to good Daemons they their Safety owe,
 Few are the Happy those, who their bless'd Guardians know. (318-49)

The comic ineptitude of the sylphs as guardians refers to a mock-pastoral, rather than a mock-heroic, framework. We are less with Ovid or the Rosicrucian philosophy than with druids and genii.

The next important addition of material in 1714 occurs in the second canto, with the famous description of the sylphs in their gossamer beauty.¹ It is unnecessary to quote this at length; but it is worth observing a fleeting Spenserian quality in the writing, closest perhaps to the description of the butterfly's wings in *Muiopotmos*, stanza 12 ('his shinie wings as silver bright . . .').² There follows another speech by Ariel addressed to 'Sylphs and Sylphids', styled by way of apposition.

Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves, and Daemons . . . (ii. 74)

¹ Brief but valuable comments on the sylphs are found in the following: Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn* (London, 1968), pp. 71-3; G. Wilson Knight, *The Poetry of Alexander Pope: Laureate of Peace* (London, 1955), p. 26; I. Jack, *Augustan Satire* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 80-4; W. K. Wimsatt (ed.), *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry & Prose* (New York, 1951), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii; J. S. Cunningham, *Pope: The Rape of the Lock* (London, 1961), pp. 38-9; R. A. Brower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 151, 155-6; Martin Price, *To the Palace of Wisdom* (Garden City, N.Y., 1965), pp. 151-4.

² Pope cites the description of the butterfly's wings from *Muiopotmos* in a note to *The Dunciad*, iv. 421. The section there quoted, from the second stanza of Spenser's poem, seems equally applicable to the sylphs ('the Empire of the Air'). The pervasive debt of Pope to Spenser remains to be fully investigated.

It is worth remarking that the term *elf*, by origin simply the Saxon word for a spirit, came to have a specialized sense—Sir Walter Scott, in his *Demonology and Witchcraft*, describes elves as ‘Sprites of a coarser sort, more laborious vocation and more malignant temper, and in all respects less propitious to humanity than the Fairies’.¹ As the *Rape* progresses, we see more and more of these malignant capabilities.

The various tasks performed by the aerial spirits are then presented in verse of self-conscious, almost parodic dignity and port. The special function of the sylphs, of course, is ‘to tend the Fair’. Pope then itemizes the cosmetic arts in which these spirits excel. The joke is that ‘in other poets [and, one might add, folklore generally] fairies are country creatures’.² What Pope does is to allot the routine of dress and make-up in the sophisticated society world to creatures traditionally identified with nature. He makes pastoral machinery serve not merely urban purposes (as the currently popular ‘town eclogue’, like Swift’s *City Shower*, did) but *courtly* ends. The sylphs are woodland fairies conscripted to boudoir duties.

After this comes one of the passages everyone remembers, in which Ariel foretells that certain ‘black Omens’ will be fulfilled—Belinda will ‘stain her Honour or her new Brocade . . .’. A note of bossiness apparent in his presentation from the start emerges more clearly in the series of orders Ariel issues to the other sylphs. And dire physical torments are promised to those who neglect their post: they will

Be stopt in *Vials*, or transfixt with *Pins*;
Or plung’d in Lakes of bitter *Washes* lie,
Or wedg’d whole Ages in a *Bodkin’s* Eye . . . (ii. 126–8)

Here we are close to the fate of another Ariel, at the hands of ‘the foul witch Sycorax’. But the electric atmosphere and genuine threat present in *The Tempest* are missing here; there is something reminiscent of Lilliputian bluster in the torments devised by the microscopic commander:

Gums and Pomatums shall his Flight restrain,
While clog’d he beats his silken Wings in vain;
Or Alom-*Stypticks* with contracting Power
Shrink his thin Essence like a rivell’d Flower.
Or as *Ixion* fix’d, the Wretch shall feel
The giddy Motion of the whirling Mill,
In Fumes of burning Chocolate shall glow,
And tremble at the Sea that froths below! (ii. 129–36)

¹ See K. M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck* (London, 1959), pp. 188–9. Pope added elves to the spirits in *Gabalus*: Tillotson, ed. cit., p. 164, n.

² Tillotson, ed. cit., p. 383.

Even these punishments fall in with the pint-sized drawing-room scale of the drama. One consequence is that Ariel's speech takes on an air of petulance and spite—qualities which had long been associated with the figure of Robin Goodfellow and the hobgoblin. 'Useful as they are', writes K. M. Briggs, '[the hobgoblins] are easily offended and are often mischievous'. Amongst other things, they 'do domestic chores, work about farms, guard treasure, keep an eye on the servants, and generally act as guardian spirits of the home'.¹ The sylphs would not have been seen dead on a farm, but otherwise they incorporate a sophisticated version of this way of life.

In Canto iii Pope added little except the game of ombre and the attempted intervention of a sylph to forestall the rape itself. But in the next canto some eighty crucial lines were introduced. The Cave of Spleen is a deeply imaginative section in its own right, but its full contribution to the poem has generally been missed. The best comment I know is that of J. S. Cunningham:

The whole episode of the Cave is partly a hilarious romp among well-to-do hypochondriacs, the devotees of 'sweet vicissitude', and partly a nightmare tour through the landscape of *ennui*, repression and distorted impulse which lies so close to the scene of Belinda's perilous gaiety. These are the bogeys behind Thalestris' fear of scandal and its aftermath, and behind Clarissa's warning to the maid who scorns a man.²

All this is well said; but it is not, I think, the whole story. One wonders how carefully Cunningham has selected the word 'bogy', for the passage does indeed give us something very close to a literal portrayal of demonic spirits. The sylphs had shown us the benign side of faery lore—nothing worse than the pranks of Puck. But the gnomes are clearly related to the various forms of 'bogy beast', malignant creatures whose role is to haunt, or to ravish, or to presage death.³ Besides this, the gnomes have a much more effectual leader in Umbriel.

The episode of the Cave fulfils many functions beyond the parody of a journey to the underworld, its official reason for being in the mock-heroic scheme. Substantively, it enlarges the tonal range of the poem. It brings in a more sinister colouring, as Cunningham's remarks suggest. But it also imports an element of fantasy and grotesque invention. Just as Timon's villa outgrows its original moral identity as an exemplum of [bad] 'taste', and takes off into a lunatic and almost independent existence, so the Cave moves from satire into surrealism. And just as *The Dunciad* works through strange epiphanies and contorted visions of unnatural

¹ Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, p. 15.

² Cunningham, pp. 50–1.

³ Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, p. 186 and *passim*. Pope in his dedication calls the gnomes 'Daemons of the Earth' (Tillotson, p. 143).

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grandeur, so the *Rape of the Lock* enlists a quality of deliberate freakishness, wild prodigies, sudden transformations.¹ The underlying feeling is hallucinatory:

A constant *Vapour* o'er the Palace flies;
 Strange Phantoms rising as the Mists arise;
 Dreadful, as Hermit's Dreams in haunted Shades,
 Or bright as Visions of expiring Maids.
 Now glaring Fiends, and Snakes on rolling Spires,
 Pale Spectres, gaping Tombs, and Purple Fires . . . (iv. 39-44)

The garish imagery perfectly expresses the hyper-intense effects reported by users of mescaline and similar drugs.

But there is more than tone and texture involved. The section includes a whole miniature psychomachia—a dramatization of conflicting forces within the poem at large. The sylphs have embodied frivolity, heedlessness, the 'lighter' impulses of women. The gnomes, on the other hand, represent what might be briefly termed biology:

Here, in a Grotto sheltred close from Air,
 And screen'd in Shades from Day's detested Glare,
 She sighs for ever on her pensive Bed,
Pain at her Side, and *Megrim* at her Head. (iv. 21-4)

Newspaper advertisements of the day, puffing some 'physick' to cure women's spleen, obviously have the effects of menstruation in mind.

Now all this can be directly related to the traditional beliefs relating to the fairy kingdom. In particular, where sylphs were ethereal spirits, gnomes were made from the terrestrial element itself. They were, in every sense, *earthy*. The contrast is well expressed by a seventeenth-century disciple of Boehme:

The Mole lives in his Hill, and the industrious Ant hath her little Cottage higher than the Surface of the Earth, and the bigger Mountains . . . are the dwellings of other Creatures, some lodg'd there by confinement or their own choice, others born and bred in the Earth, who delight in places abounding with strong Metalline and Mineral Vapours, both as suitable to their natures, and where the casual lying of the Rocky Ore makes handsome Caverns and Chambers for these darksome Guests. . . . Nor is the Aery Region disfurnisht of its inhabitant Spirits; Some of the *Jewish* Rabbins say, that by the creation of the Fowls

¹ It is interesting that the description of the Cave involves a reference to contemporary theatrical spectacles (iv. 43-6). This was to become an important feature of *The Dunciad*; and indeed there are numerous concrete parallels between the Cave of Spleen and that of 'Poverty and Poetry' in the later poem. Compare *Rape*, iv. 17-54, with *The Dunciad*, 'B' text, i. 33-84. Both 'domes' are chill, windswept places; the tutelary goddess on her throne is surrounded in each case by allegorical handmaidens; monstrous and abortive forms populate either cave alike; both locations are dark and inaccessible; both are filled by strange vapours, and so on.

of Heaven mentioned in *Genesis*, is understood not only those whose Bodies we see, and catch, and feed upon, but that far more numerous Progeny of Aerial Spirits, lodg'd in Vehicles of a thinner-spun thred than is (otherwise than by condensation) visible to our dim sight.¹

If one points out that Pope's diction associates the haunt of the gnomes with confinement, caverns, vapours, and darkness; or that it links the sylphs with fine threads, invisibility, the sky, vehicles, it is not in order to suggest anything resembling a 'source'. A more accessible analogue, besides, would be Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, the standard authority on spleen. Burton actually recognizes six classes of 'sublunary Devils'; *Gabalīs* and presumably Pope follow the commoner practice of amalgamating terrestrial and subterranean sprites. The former in Burton include fauns, satyrs, and Robin Goodfellow. The latter

are conversant about the center of the earth to torture the souls of damned men to the Day of Judgment, their egress and regress some suppose to be about Ætna, Lipari, Mons Hecla in Iceland, Vesuvius, Terra del Fuego, &c., because many shrieks and fearfull cries are continually heard thereabouts, and familiar apparitions of dead men, Ghosts and Goblins.²

Pope is content to peer under the volcano of feelings long enough to detect 'Sighs, Sobs, and the War of Tongues'. But tortured souls are everywhere.

One need not appeal to Freud or Frazer in order to maintain that Umbriel's descent is crucial to the imaginative logic of the poem. It is surely apt that a study of female manners (social as well as sexual) should allude to the physiological at some point. The older doctrine, gravely accepted by Pope, located the seat of affectation in the spleen. But perhaps by 1714 this was a genteel euphemism for the womb—we know that Pope studiously adopted a 'rather fastidious' attitude towards spleen³—though he is smiling behind his prim words. In terms of 'am'rous Causes' what matters is that the gnomes are much better at protecting treasures (as was their traditional role) than were the sylphs—mere domestic pets masquerading as guard-dogs. And there is a penetrating psychological accuracy in making gnomes the fairy equivalents of prudes, likewise trained to look

¹ Cited by Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, pp. 170–1.

² *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, I. II. I. ii; ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York, 1938), p. 171. See also K. M. Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team* (London, 1962), pp. 48–54. As Miss Briggs observes, 'It is difficult to know where to start quoting from Burton, and where to stop': Babb and Tillotson have established many direct parallels in the text of the *Rape*. It is interesting that Burton cites Olaus Magnus as an authority on terrestrial devils (p. 168). The Swedish writer is used by Tillotson to gloss the almost contemporary *Temple of Fame*—see his edition, pp. 263, 264, 411.

³ Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 173. One notes that the onset of Belinda's 'grief' is produced by rending 'the swelling Bag' (iv. 91) 'and all the Furies issue at the Vent'. See also iv. 142.

after deep secrets and buried treasure. It is ironical that Belinda should trust her 'inestimable Prize' to the care of light-minded sylphs.

There is a further point about the Cave. Its visions and dreams bring to a head a whole current of allusion to such matters. Ariel himself had appeared to Belinda through this agency. Now fairies were in general regarded as the bringers of dreams. In its purest form the belief relates to one particular demon, the *mara*, whose name survives in 'nightmare' and 'mare's nest'. But it became attached to other creatures, notably Shakespeare's highly idiosyncratic Queen Mab.¹ Moreover, as 'ghosts appear and disappear among fairies, devils and angels',² it is natural that the task of inducing bad dreams should become overlaid with the function of the incubus (as Umbriel seems to act, iv. 71-2) and with the fulfilling of omens. On one level the *Rape* enacts a contest between the sylphs and the gnomes; Ariel can merely read the presages, but 'triumphant *Umbriel*' helps with his kind to bring about the climax (v. 83-6). Aptly, it is prudens not coquettes who aid Belinda's revenge.

The addition of the machinery, then, enabled Pope to reinforce a dialectic already visible in the action. If Patricia Meyer Spacks is correct in identifying two states of mind in Belinda—the serene self-absorption of the period before the 'rape', the hysterical self-indulgence afterward—then the fairy characters have much to do with this shift.³ Sylphs generate self-absorption; gnomes breed hysteria. Like the element he inhabits, Ariel proves insubstantial; his charm is vacuous, his moral identity negligible outside the 'purest *Aether*'. Umbriel's 'proper Scene', the underworld, is all too physical. In the first case we have 'Bodies half dissolv'd in Light', in the second 'Bodies chang'd to various Forms by *Spleen*'. One connotes the world of mooning adolescence and the other an atmosphere of neurotic repression. In both cases a degree of sexual hypocrisy is involved, and Belinda is equally liable to either affliction. Her 'secret Passions' owe as much to the gnomes as to the sylphs.

What is most striking, however, in the total satiric strategy is not the nature of this dialectic in itself. Rather, it is the way in which Pope seems drawn to import native faery lore to dramatize the conflict of elements. He adds 'Elves' to the spirits found in *Gabalus*; he borrows traditional items such as the nightmare; and he makes explicit allusions to Shakespeare. More generally, he constantly recalls the mood and feeling of earlier faery writers. For instance, the stress Pope lays on the miniature size of the sylphs (appropriate to his mock-heroic task) derives directly from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where 'the innovation that strikes us

¹ Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, pp. 21, 47.

² Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team*, p. 222.

³ P. M. Spacks, *An Argument of Images* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 233.

most is the fairy smallness, not new to folklore, but nearly new in literature.¹ Shakespeare's tiny beings, at once pert, delicate, and palpable, are as far removed from *Gabalís* as they are from Ovid. In fact Shakespeare drew on romance traditions (accorded only lightly mocking references by Pope), but he made much heavier use of indigenous folklore. With the small size and mischievous pranks of Puck comes a certain imaginative density, eagerly seized by Pope in creating the sylphs. Like Puck, the sylphs 'have none of that flimsy quality which strikes one in later fairy stories'.² Equally, Titania's famous description of 'contagious fogs', floods, and frosts overlooked by the moon, 'pale in her anger' (*M.N.D.*, II. i. 88-117), has several links with *The Rape*, notably Ariel's speech at ii. 73-90. But again, it is not so much precise echoes that one notes, as an over-all sense of delight and wonder, as though Pope's text had received a poetic infusion from the *Dream*.³ Both works concern bickering love-affairs, titillating fairies, potent philtres, sinister transformations. But what chiefly unites them is not narrowly fictive, but imaginative: an indulgence in weird and even apparently silly effects, combined with a strong moral awareness:

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigur'd so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images,
And grows to something of great constancy,
But, howsoever, strange and admirable. (*M.N.D.*, v. i. 23-7)

After Shakespeare came what has been termed 'the fashion for the miniature', embracing Drayton, William Browne, and Herrick amongst others.⁴ Pope certainly knew some work by all three, though he thought Drayton 'a very mediocre Poet'.⁵ Yet, as with the Spenser of *Muiopotmos* and the Milton of *Comus*, there is fitfully a coarser burlesque vein in Pope's *Rape*, not at all remote from *Nymphidia*—compare the parenthesis on Belinda's bodkin (v. 89-96), and its breezy garrulous chat, with Drayton's

¹ Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, p. 45. For a glancing comparison between the sylphs and Shakespeare's fairies (Pope's are of an 'inferior race') see *The Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. W. Elwin and W. J. Courthope (London, 1871-89), ii. 136.

² Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, p. 47.

³ For the imaginative uses of folklore in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see D. P. Young, *Something of Great Constancy* (New Haven, 1966), pp. 16-32. Many of Young's comments regarding 'the blending of folklore and myth' could be applied with little adjustment to *The Rape of the Lock*. See also pp. 155-66, on metamorphosis and dramatic metaphor. There is a recollection of Titania's speech in *The Dunciad* (A) 1. 69-76 (*Twickenham Edition*, ed. J. Sutherland (London, 1943) v. 68).

⁴ See Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, pp. 56-70.

⁵ *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. G. Sherburn (Oxford, 1956), iv. 428. A mock-archaic 'Fairy Tale, in the Ancient English Style' was printed by Pope in his edition of Parnell's poems in 1722, containing reference to 'Midnight Faeries daunc[ing] the maze'. The date of this work is uncertain (Parnell died in 1718).

knowing description of Queen Mab's chariot (129–52). Of course, Drayton is arch and archaic where Pope is prosily explicit: but the *area* of parody is very closely analogous.

More speculative is the impression left by Diaper when Pope came to rework the poem. But, bearing in mind the timing of the revision (late 1713) and the fast-developing friendship of Pope and Swift during this year, it is likely that Diaper's name came up at some time during their meetings. When *Nereides* appeared in March 1712, Swift had written to Stella of Diaper:

I think to recommend him to our Society to morrow . . . P— on him, I must do something for him. & get him out of the Way. I hate to have any new Wits arise; but when they do rise I woud encourage them. but they tred on our Heels, & thrust us off the Stage.

Swift's society did not yet include that other new wit, Pope. But it may well have done by the following December, when Swift in his best officious style presented Diaper to Lord Bolingbroke, 'with a new Poem, which is a very good one'.¹ Moreover, *Dryades*, the work in question, was designed to celebrate the Tory peace, and to laud Oxford and Bolingbroke. Since Pope was even then preparing for publication *Windsor Forest* (he mentions its progress in a letter of 5 December 1712),² it is in the highest degree improbable that he would have overlooked the appearance of such a poem. As for Swift, he kept in contact with Diaper for several more months, visiting him in 'a nasty Garret' in February³ and writing on 30 April with renewed promises to aid the other man's career.⁴ Direct association dwindled after this (Diaper lived only until 1717), but it has even been surmised that Swift persuaded Pope to drop a couplet in the 1728 *Dunciad* out of respect for Diaper's memory.⁵

That conjecture seems implausible. But another supposition of the Twickenham editor, that Pope was well aware of Diaper during the latter's active period, is altogether convincing. If so, Pope would have encountered in *Dryades* much in this vein:

Men led by Sense, and partial to themselves,
Nor roving Daemons own, nor wandring Elves.
But who can know th'intelligible Race,
Or guess the Pow'rs that fill th'aerial Space!
Oft the tir'd Horse is forc'd to scour the Plain,
When *Fairies* ride fix'd in his twisted Mane.
And I, ye Gods, have wondrous Circles seen,

¹ *Journal to Stella*, ed. H. Williams (Oxford, 1948), ii. 512, 586.

² Pope, *Correspondence*, ed. cit., i. 162.

³ *Journal*, ed. cit., ii. 619 (wrongly indexed as 519).

⁴ For a history of the dealings of Swift and Diaper, see Broughton, ed. cit., pp. xvi–xx.

⁵ *The Dunciad*, ed. J. Sutherland (London, 1963), p. 173 n.

Where wanton Sprites in Mid-night Dance have been,
And press'd their rounding Steps on ev'ry new-mow'd Green. (74–82)

When Pope comes to imagine the powers 'that fill th' aerial Space', he will inevitably clothe this diction of elves, sprites, and demons with a fresh perception. Thus, Diaper's 'Circles' become 'the giddy Circle' (i. 93), suggestive of the social round; 'aerial Space' is subtly amplified as 'Fields of Air' (i. 66) or 'Crystal Wilds of Air' (i. 106), pseudo-pastoral variants that make their own point. Equally, Diaper's description of the woodland genii as

Bless'd Beings, whom no earthy Fetters bind,
Nor to the pressing Weight of Clay confin'd!
Of un-mixt *Aether* form'd. . . . (89–91)

appears curiously metaphysical beside Pope's exact vision of the sylphs' condition.

Yet, if the detailed treatment is different (that is partly a difference in talent, partly a question of genre), there remains a bedrock of shared allusion and parallel diction. Diaper is full of delicate imagery, drawn from insect life or fibrous growth. He even dilates upon the microscopic visions made possible by 'wondrous Opticks', though Marjorie Hope Nicolson left him out of her famous study of Newton and the eighteenth-century poets. So we have 'Strange puny Shapes, unknown to vulgar Eyes. | So shadowy Forms, and sportive Daemons fly | Wafted on Winds, and not perceiv'd when nigh' (547–9). Or again:

Th' indulgent Pow'rs have giv'n a second Sight,
That kens the airy Silph, and wand'ring Sprite.
No fitting Elf the subtle Eye escapes,
When wanton *Genii* sport in antick Shapes. (554–7)

This is too near Irish blarney to resemble what Pope does with his faery machinery; but the material is similar. Diaper even sets the Great Chain of Being briefly rattling in an evocative passage:

If to the finish'd Whole so little goes,
How small the Parts, that must the whole compose!
Matter is infinite, and still descends:
Men cannot know where lessening Nature ends. (564–7)

This is cited less to establish a connection with the first epistle of *An Essay on Man* than to illustrate Diaper's ability to work on a tiny scale without the waggish air of Drayton.

Let me reassert that the aptness of *Dryades* in this context has little to do with sources or analogues. It is more a matter of finding out what kind of poem *The Rape of the Lock* is. The revised work, as it seems to me, is

a fantasy of enchantment as well as a social satire. It is about sprites and goblins, visions and nightmares, and not just beaux and belles—still less judges and jurymen. To this end Pope has gone far beyond the Rosicrucian scheme, and indeed far beyond ‘machinery’ in its habitual inert embodiment. He has constructed a psychodrama within Belinda and her circle.¹ But the real colliding forces are supernatural. The *Rape* provides a battle of the pigmies in which spleen and coquetry compete for Belinda’s soul. Despite the ironic pseudo-compliment at the end, her reputation *is* lost (note the gossiping speculations, v. 113 ff.) and ‘Airs, and Flights, and Screams, and Scolding’ are all that Belinda can summon. The central fact is that the sylphs are unheeded, the gnomes triumphant. And these were creatures that Pope could never have taken straight out of the Rosicrucian manuals. He found them in some deep recess of the poetic imagination, among the rural hobgoblins where Shakespeare discovered *his* fairy beings.

¹ Here my views have been partly anticipated by Brower, who writes, ‘By deftly linking his invented deities with popular country beliefs, and with the “Heathen Mythology” of Fate and Jove, Pope makes us feel the presence of forces greater than Belinda and the Baron and their friends’ (p. 156). Brower and Jack are among the few critics to indicate the ‘marvellous’ as opposed to the ‘social’ component in the poem; but neither draws out at all fully the native fairy element.