

Joann Andrushko  
English 46 B  
Analytical Response

*“What dire offense from amorous causes springs,  
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,  
I sing - this verse to Caryl, Muse! is due:”*

The first two lines from “*The Rape of the Lock*” neatly sum up the action of what is to follow in this Restoration mock epic. Together they form a rhymed couplet and could stand alone as a poem. As an apostrophe to the Muse, both lines begin with the word “*What*”. This repetition acts as a charm - an incantation. It is the timelessness of Pope’s calling out to the Muse, just as did Virgil and Homer in their epics ages ago.

Lines 1 and 2 are balanced in true neoclassical form: they are perfectly parallel in structure. Both express a singular outcome (“*dire offense*”, “*mighty contests*”) that results from unexpected circumstance (“*amorous causes*”, “*trivial things*”). According to Edward Hirsch, “parallelism is a device of the early epics” (p.290). The final word of each line, “*Springs*” and “*things*”, rhyme exactly, and each functions to not only end the line but also to connect the lines in meaning: i.e. things spring.

The third line, the invocation to the Muse, is a powerful feature of epic writing, as seen in the Virgil’s Aeneid 1.1. - 11:

*“Arms and the man I sing, who forced by fate...”* ([https:// fas.harvard.edu/](https://fas.harvard.edu/))

Neoclassicism imitates the grandeur and symmetry of the Greek classics. An Invocation to the Muse is a plea for enhanced creativity, for powers of expression that go beyond one's own human capabilities. While the Muse is not named, she is probably "Calliope" the Muse of Epic. It is interesting to note that in his invocation, Pope adds the word "due" in regard to his friend John Caryll. Pope wants to reduce the friction among his warring friends, and probably hopes that the Muse will help out there too.

*"I sing - This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due."*

It is well to note that the subject matter of Lines 1 and 2 could just as well refer to the great epics of old as to the mock epic that will follow. "*What dire offense from amorous causes springs*" could surely refer to Homer's Iliad, in which Paris' amorous seizure of Helen precipitates the disastrous Trojan War. Similarly, "*What mighty contests rise from trivial things*" could describe an event of 1914: the shooting of one prince, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, and the war that followed, World War I, in which millions died.

Pope seizes on connections. He is the great wit of the Restoration era, able to draw on human events, whether great or trifling, and show how they can proceed from modest beginnings. He does it in exact Neoclassic style, never misses a beat in perfect iambic pentameter.

Edward Hirsch, "How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry", Harcourt Inc., 1999