

## Pope's *Ombre* Enigmas in *The Rape of the Lock*<sup>1</sup>

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To appreciate the *Ombre* allusions in *The Rape of the Lock* a modern audience must first understand how this complicated and counter-intuitive card game is played. Successive editors have exhaustively glossed Pope's many allusions to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century literature and the classics, but they have largely neglected to provide similarly comprehensive glosses to this long-obsolete card game.<sup>2</sup> Without a credible reconstruction of the three hands, informed readings of the card game Pope carefully describes in Canto III of his satire are not possible. Pope's correspondence, collected and re-edited by George Sherburn, gives no evidence that he withheld or revealed the reconstruction he had in mind; although common sense tells us that Pope must have had one.<sup>3</sup> Only when we know which cards were dealt can we evaluate how skilfully, or unskilfully, the players enacted the first mock-battle at Hampton Court that afternoon. That the combatants might be bewilderingly inept, but also defy Fate and foil one combatant's "Thirst of Fame" (iii.25) is consistent with contemporary recipes for mock-epic. Whether one or more of the players violate the tenets of good card play is a seldom asked, but important question: and one that can be addressed only after obtaining a reliable reconstruction.

It is astonishing that after almost three centuries no one has published an entirely satisfactory reconstruction. All are inconsistent with Pope's text, or the rules of the game, or both.<sup>4</sup> Over a half-century ago, William K. Wimsatt cautioned that by the extent to which any hypothetical reconstruction exceeded the evidence given it could have no critical bearing on the poem.<sup>5</sup> Wimsatt might also have pointed out

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the corollary, that by the extent to which any reconstruction falls short of all the evidence given—that is, it does not take full account of several somewhat opaque lines in the poem—it, too, must have diminished critical bearing. It is important to fully account for the content of Pope's forty couplets (iii.25-104). Some lines may serve several purposes. None are meaningless metrical fillers: Pope was far too skilled for that. For example, "At *Ombre* singly to decide their Doom," the adverb "singly" may mean Belinda will be *L'Hombre* for this *tour*, or that this contest will entail only one *tour*, or both (iii.27). Wimsatt concluded that a complete reconstruction was impossible, but he did not point out that such was unnecessary—indeed there is no unique solution.<sup>6</sup> The solution, like that to many enigmas, is ridiculously simple; unfortunately, given our distance from its early eighteenth-century interpretive context, the derivation of this solution is lengthy and tedious. The information not given directly by Pope must be inferred from close reading of his text, together with an understanding of the rules of the game, and knowledge of the tenets of good card play—the only reliable tools available: but tools readily available to Pope's contemporary audience. Outlines of the more important rules and a glossary of terms unique to the game are appended to this paper.

At least eight reconstructions have been published. The earliest was by William Pole in 1874,<sup>7</sup> followed by Henry Hucks Gibbs in 1878,<sup>8</sup> and George Holden in 1909.<sup>9</sup> Edward Fletcher published two in 1935,<sup>10</sup> and in 1940, Geoffrey Tillotson appended a modification of Pole's reconstruction to *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*.<sup>11</sup> This reconstruction, which he did not revise through the second and third *Twickenham Editions* of 1952 and 1962, remains that most commonly cited in the literature. Arthur E. Case published his own in 1944,<sup>12</sup> and Wimsatt, recanting his impossibility pronouncement, published a partial reconstruction in 1973.<sup>13</sup> Why these reconstructors, spanning a century from Pole to Wimsatt, five of whom were distinguished scholars, failed to untangle Pope's enigma would make a separate study. I believe that this is an extreme example of the accre-

tions of scholarship conflicting with the evidence of unbiased close reading, with the latter being ignored.

Only Holden and Case recognise that the values of the *plebeian* cards are of no consequence—in the game described by Pope only the *Mata-dores* and court cards take any of the nine tricks.<sup>14</sup> Fletcher, Case, and Tillotson recognise that all twelve court cards must be in play. However, all three violate close reading of Pope's text inasmuch as only Case lets Belinda play *sans prendre*. All, except Holden, follow Pole and assume that several, if not all, of the players discard and take-in new cards immediately after Belinda's *Ombre* bid. They claim that for poetic economy Pope suppresses the description of these discards and supply these 'suppressed' details. Only Pole lets the Knight recognise that attempting to 'improve' his 'as dealt' hand is not worthwhile.

It is unfortunate that Pole's speculation about a suppressed round of discarding and taking-in—for which there is no textual evidence—remained unchallenged by scholars, as it masks a number of playing alternatives the poet's contemporary audience might have seen and evaluated for themselves. Such an evaluation presents an opportunity for a reassessment of this portion of Pope's poem. In addition, no one has satisfactorily explained why Pope only describes one *tour* of the game. Most scholars have assumed that for poetic economy Pope also suppresses description of the earlier hands and that he only describes the last of many *tours* played that afternoon. Close reading of Pope's poem supports none of these 'suppression' assumptions. Occam's razor applies: when reconstructing the hands any assumptions must be the minimum necessary and be clearly stated. Most reconstructors are cavalier about seating and dealing.<sup>15</sup> As events turn out, where the players sit and who deals is inconsequential, but this should be a conclusion from a careful reconstruction, not an assumption. One clue that it is the Baron who deals is the order of play during the last trick.<sup>16</sup> None note that under most rule variants discarding and taking-in is not a bagatelle and will cost the player one counter per card exchanged.<sup>17</sup>

Tillotson speculates that Pope laboriously constructed one *tour* of this game for his poem.<sup>18</sup> But no matter how the three hands originated, Pope describes a simplified single *tour* of this game where, except for the deuce of spades, the numerical value of every non-court card—but not the suit—is inconsequential. If the game is to appear as a duel between Belinda and the Baron, the Knight's cards do not matter. Whatever the extent of Pope's 'as dealt' card simplifications, common sense tells us that he started with three real hands, "Each Band the number of the Sacred Nine" (iii.30). Whereas omitting the values and often the suits of the non-court cards results in descriptive economy, these omissions make any reconstruction more difficult, especially when it is not immediately apparent that a unique solution is unobtainable. Reconstructing the hands is further complicated by the devious provision of at least three playing options beyond the one played in the poem: but these are options Pope's contemporary audience would have readily discerned for themselves. These include: an alternative play in spades by Belinda, an alternative spades defence by the Baron, and a surprising game-ending *Vole* in clubs by Belinda.

The reconstruction developed below rejects Pole's suppressed discard assumptions, and uses Pope's text to support several critically important observations. There was only one deal; the entire game comprises one single *tour*; Belinda elects to play *sans prendre*; and, each for differing reasons, her opponents elect not to discard and take-in new cards, but were able to do so, if they wished. I adopt Holden's observation that Pope does not give the values of the *plebeian* cards, and Fletcher's observation that all twelve court cards must be in play. By happenstance this reconstruction is similar to the second of two proposed by Fletcher in 1935; but unlike his reconstruction, absolute values are not arbitrarily assigned to the *plebeian* cards. A close reading of Pope's text supports four critically important, but enormously simplifying inferences:

- All twelve *court* cards are in play,
- The numerical value of any *plebeian* card is unimportant,

- Belinda plays *sans prendre*—that is, she plays with her ‘as-dealt’ hand, and,
- Neither the Knight nor the Baron attempts to ‘improve’ his ‘as-dealt’ hand by discarding and then taking-in, that is, purchasing, new cards from the *talon*, although they are free to do so.

Pope gives detailed descriptions of the four full-length, kings, queens, and knaves, but notably only after the deal with the players seated (iii.29-30). From the following three couplets we infer that all twelve *court* cards are in play:

Behold, four *Kings* in Majesty rever’d,  
 With hoary Whiskers and a forky Beard;  
 And four fair *Queens* whose hands sustain a Flow’r,  
 Th’ expressive Emblem of their softer Pow’r;  
 Four *Knaves* in Garbs succinct, a trusty Band,  
 Caps on their heads, and Halberds in their hand;           (iii.37-42)

No court cards are left in the *talon*. Since ten are identified in the text, two are ‘missing’—the knave of hearts and the queen of clubs—but they are in play.

*Plebeian* card values remain unassigned because Pope’s text simply does not give them. All that he ever says about them is:

And Particolour’d Troops, a shining Train,  
 Draw forth to Combat on the Velvet Plain.                           (iii.43-44)

Pope’s text does not support a round of discards after Belinda’s bid. Quite the contrary, as play commences immediately following Belinda’s assessment of her cards and her pre-emptive declaration of the trump suit.

The skilful Nymph reviews her Force with Care;  
*Let Spades be Trumps!* she said, and Trumps they were.  
 Now move to War her Sable *Matadores*,                           (iii.45-47)

It is greatly to Belinda’s financial advantage—provided her bid is successful—to play *sans prendre*; whereas, should she decide to dis-

card any cards, it will cost her one counter for every replacement card she elects to draw. Moreover, while I believe that Pope's text indicates that Belinda does not draw new cards—once Pope's audience have reconstructed her hand, inevitably, they will assess whether she should, or should not have, and thereby judge for themselves whether or not she is a "skilful Nymph" when playing *Ombre* (iii.45).

A similar textual argument applies to the hands held by the Knight and the Baron. Once Belinda has declared the trump suit, each of these players—now defending and quasi-partners for this *tour* only—must independently decide whether the chance of improving his hand to impose *Remise* or possibly *Codille* is worth the risk. Each new card will cost one small counter, but the player must discard before drawing from the *talon* and there is the risk that he will make his hand worse. Although temporary partners, depending upon the strength of their hands, the two defenders may be in very different positions. Only when Pope's audience have reconstructed the two defenders' hands for themselves are they in a position to determine whether one or other of the defenders should have drawn new cards, while knowing that they did not, and thus assess individual playing skills. Play is anti-clockwise: that is, sitting at a triangular table, the Baron deals, with Belinda to his right. As the *Elder Hand* she leads to the Knight on her right, but in the simplified single *tour* of the game Pope describes even this seating detail does not matter.

The first logical step in any reconstruction attempt is to examine the whole forty-card Spanish deck, without regard to the three hands.

K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠, A♠  
 K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥  
 K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦  
 K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣, A♣

All twelve court cards are in play; as are at least three of the four aces; but only one of the twenty-four non-court cards is named by Pope. Since only sixteen of the twenty-seven cards in play are known in terms of both suit and rank with complete certainty, the 'simplified'

forty-card deck—comprising twelve court cards, four aces and twenty-four non-court cards—back into which the reconstructed hands must fit, will look as shown below. The values of the other eleven cards in play, and the thirteen in the *talon*, cannot be determined from Pope’s text and these values must not be arbitrarily assigned:

K♠,	Q♠,	J♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	2♠,	A♠
K♥,	Q♥,	J♥,	A♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥
K♦,	Q♦,	J♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦
K♣,	Q♣,	J♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	A♣

The non-court cards are losers. Nine tricks are to be won, and these tricks are taken by nine of the sixteen cards identified by suit and rank in Pope’s text. The reconstructive challenge is two-fold: what is the suit and, if important, the rank of the eleven other cards; and, who holds them.

Starting with Belinda’s hand, we already know a lot about her cards, and on which trick they are played. The suit and rank of only two of her cards are not given by Pope:

<b>Belinda:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	A♠,	2♠,	A♣,	K♠,	K♣,	X,	X,	Q♥,	K♥	card played

We know even more about the Baron’s hand. He has a void in clubs, but Pope’s text gives the rank of only one of his five spades:

<b>Baron:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	Q♠,	K♦,	Q♦,	J♦,	A♥	card played

Initially, and this may be part of Pope’s design to keep the Knight out of the picture, we know pitifully little about the nine cards in his hand. But we do know when all six of these completely ‘unknown’ cards are played:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	X,	J♣,	X,	X,	X,	X,	X	card played

One of the two named, non-court cards is the deuce of spades, and Belinda holds it (iii.51). We also know that the Baron holds the other named, non-court card, the ace of hearts (iii.95). Belinda holds both black aces (iii.49 and 53). Knowing that there are twelve court cards, three aces, and the spade deuce in play, this leaves only eleven *plebeian* cards, one of which might be the diamond ace, partially cloaked in mystery. Whether we can infer which cards Belinda and the Knight hold, and whether they have a void in some particular suit is another interpretive challenge.

We know that the Knight plays losing spades on the first two tricks, and the Baron plays losing spades on the first four tricks. Thus the suit of only five of these eleven *plebeian* cards remains to be identified, along with who holds them, plus, of course, who holds the two 'missing' court cards—the queen of clubs and knave of hearts. It cannot be the Baron. He has a void in clubs—because on the fifth trick he trumps-in on Belinda's king of clubs lead. In fact, we know that the Baron does not hold the 'missing' knave either, because, in addition to knowing the suit and rank of five of his nine cards, we know that his four unranked cards are losing *plebeian* spades. Thus Pope's text gives us everything that we need to know about the Baron's hand, which looks like this:

<b>Baron:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	Q♠,	K♦,	Q♦,	J♦,	A♥	card played

As for the Knight's hand, initially we know the suit and rank of only one of his nine cards—the knave of clubs. But we also know he holds two trumps, and, from the play, that the rank of these *plebeian* spades is unimportant—they, like four of the Baron's spades, are losers. This leaves us to infer the suit and rank, if important, of the Knight's six remaining cards. We are certain only that they cannot be spades, and that they cannot be cards known to be held either by Belinda or the Baron. Although the text does not say that the Knight follows suit on the ninth trick, we can infer that when the Baron leads his ace of hearts, and the trick is taken by Belinda's king, the Knight follows suit



and plays his last card—which can only be the ‘missing’ knave of hearts. The alternative, assigning the knave of hearts to Belinda, raises a problem—when does she play it? So far, the Knight’s hand must look like this:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	X,	J♣,	X,	X,	X,	X,	J♥	card played

The Knight does not follow suit on Belinda’s third spade trick. He sloughs “one *Plebeian Card*” (iii.54), but Pope’s text enigmatically does not reveal which suit. On the fourth trick, when Belinda leads her king of spades, the Knight sloughs his knave of clubs (iii.59-64). Logically, on the fourth trick, if he still holds a lower club, he would play that card instead. More importantly, if the Knight were to hold the queen of clubs as well as the knave of clubs, he will slough some suit other than clubs on the third trick to protect these second- and third-ranked clubs. This strongly suggests that his slough on the third trick is not a club, and furthermore that his sloughs on the third and fourth tricks are both losing singletons. Case argues that the lines:

Ev’n mighty *Pam* [knave of clubs] that Kings and Queens o’erthrew,  
 And mow’d down Armies in the Fights of *Lu*,  
 Sad Chance of War! now, destitute of Aid,  
 Falls undistinguish’d by the Victor *Spade!* (iii.61-64)

and in particular the phrase “now, destitute of Aid” must mean that the Knight holds more than one club.<sup>19</sup> Case’s argument ignores both text and context. *Pam* is the most powerful trump in the game of Loo, a different fight. In *Ombre*, this fight, *Pam* is merely the third-ranked knave of clubs, and for the Knight—a loser. The Knight would have to hold two *plebeian* clubs to protect or “Aid” his knave. From this, we can infer that the Knight’s slough on the third trick is either a heart, or a diamond: it is not a club.

If we believe that the Knight indeed plays the third-ranked knave of hearts on the ninth trick, he can only keep that card for so long if he also holds sufficient lower-ranked *plebeian* hearts to protect it—at least

two. This suggests that his slough on the third trick is a singleton diamond, not a heart. Consequently, we can infer that it is Belinda, and not the Knight, who holds the 'missing' queen of clubs. From this, we can see that, so far, the Knight's hand must look like this:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♦,	J♣,	X,	X,	♥,	♥,	J♥	card played

While inferring that the Knight holds at least three hearts to the knave, in addition to a singleton diamond, two spades, and a singleton club—the knave—this still leaves us to deduce the suit of his remaining two cards. Enigmatically, perhaps deliberately, Pope's text does not indicate whether the Knight follows suit with a club on the fifth trick, but we can deduce that he does not. We know that his remaining two cards are not court cards, and so they must be *plebeians* and can only be *plebeian* hearts. If we interpret Pope's text literally, when on the sixth and seventh tricks the Baron leads his king and queen of diamonds, we must infer that the twelve lines—

The *Baron* now his *Diamonds* pours apace;  
 Th' embroider'd *King* who shows but half his Face,  
 And his refulgent *Queen*, with Pow'rs combin'd,  
 Of broken Troops an easie Conquest find.  
*Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts*, in wild Disorder seen,  
 With Throngs promiscuous strow the level Green.  
 Thus when dispers'd a routed Army runs,  
 Of *Asia's* Troops, and *Afrik's* Sable Sons,  
 With like Confusion different Nations fly,  
 Of various Habit and of various Dye,  
 The pierc'd Battalions dis-united fall,  
 In Heaps on Heaps; one Fate o'erwhelms them all. (iii.75-86)

mean simply that Belinda and the Knight slough their losing clubs and hearts on the Baron's two diamond leads—a second disordered heap of Belinda's clubs and the Knight's hearts on top of the first—"Heaps on Heaps" (iii.86) indeed.

Pope might have made it easier for his contemporary and future reconstructors if line 79 were to read "*Diamonds, Clubs, Hearts*, in wild

Disorder seen," but that would have spoiled the metre. Consequently, the Knight's hand is as shown below: two spades; a singleton diamond; a singleton knave of clubs, and five hearts to the knave:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♦,	J♣,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	J♥	card played

Because Pope's text says so little about the Knight's hand, it is possible that the Knight's *plebeian* slough on the third trick, as argued by Case, might be another club—certainly it is not the queen of clubs—but it might be any low club, including the deuce.<sup>20</sup> If so, this makes no difference to the play, and however unlikely, both the Knight and Belinda would have a void in diamonds. One could speculate further that the Knight holds three clubs, the deuce to the knave-queen. But such a speculation would turn the Knight into a very poor player, as he should slough a heart on the third trick, and certainly not slough his knave of clubs on the fourth trick—which we know that he does (iii.59).

The suit and rank of seven of the nine cards held by Belinda are given by Pope, but we must infer what the other two cards might be. For a start, we know that these two unknown cards are not spades, as all eleven spade trumps are in play and accounted for in Pope's text. Furthermore, since the two 'missing' court cards are both in play and the Knight holds only one of them, Belinda must hold the other one. We can demonstrate that her two unknown cards are both clubs, and include this 'missing' queen.

During the sixth, seventh, and eighth tricks, Belinda and the Knight slough their losers on the Baron's diamonds, and we have already deduced that Belinda sloughs losing clubs on the sixth and seventh tricks. Pope tells us that on the eighth trick Belinda sloughs her queen of hearts on the Baron's third diamond lead (iii.87-88). Both Belinda and the Knight are void in diamonds by the sixth trick, which means that Belinda always had a diamond void. Belinda's hand looks like this:

**Belinda:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9      trick number  
 A♠, 2♠, A♣, K♠, K♣, Q♣, ♣, Q♥, K♥      card played

The hands held by the three players, just before Belinda makes her pre-emptive *Ombre* bid, are shown below. They are as complete as possible except that the values of all but one of the *plebeian* cards are unknowable. Given the popularity of *Ombre*, I believe that Pope's contemporary audience will have made this same reconstruction easily and quickly.<sup>21</sup>

<p><b>Knight</b>                  ♠, ♠                  J♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥                  ♦                  J♣                  [no voids]</p>	<p><b>Belinda [Elder Hand]</b>                  K♠                  K♥, Q♥                  Void in ♦                  K♣, Q♣, ♣                  A♠, A♣      [Matadores]                  2♠      [potentially a <i>Matadore</i>]</p>
	<p><b>Baron [Dealer]</b>                  Q♠, J♠, ♠, ♠, ♠                  A♥                  K♦, Q♦, J♦                  Void in ♣</p>

With this reconstruction we can now evaluate, rather than speculate about, Belinda's card playing skills and those of her two opponents. Just before she makes her bid, the Knight is already out of the picture. He has: two spades; two singletons; no voids; and five hearts to the knave, but no black aces. The Baron has: a singleton heart; five spades to the knave-queen; a club void; and three diamonds to the knave-queen-king, but no black aces. He cannot bid *Ombre*, but he is well-placed to defend against an *Ombre* bid—with or without help. Belinda has: three clubs to the queen-king; two hearts to the queen-king; a diamond void; two spades to the king, and both black aces. Recognising that if spades were trumps, her 2♠ becomes *Manille*, she then has all three *Matadors*, and her consecutive K♠ is promotable to *faux-*

*matador* status for payment purposes, Belinda makes her pre-emptive declaration, “*Let Spades be Trumps!*” (iii.46).

We can also re-evaluate the individual player’s skills immediately after Belinda’s bid, but before any cards are played. Although her bid is *sans prendre*, which, if successful, will enhance her winnings, her declaration does not preclude the two defenders from taking-in new cards, although it will cost them one counter per card exchanged. The Knight’s hand is dreadful. Wisely, he elects not to throw good money after bad by discarding and purchasing replacement cards. At best, the Knight can expect to win one trick and, with the Baron’s help, impose *Remise*. Conversely, since the Baron holds five of the eleven spade trumps, he should suspect that Belinda has bid the ‘wrong’ suit. Should there be a bizarre trump split with Belinda holding other six, her *Ombre* win is a *lay down* and there is no defence. The odds are against this. The Baron holds four certain winners. With help from the Knight, they can impose *Remise*; but with a lucky take-in—one more spade or a diamond—he can impose *Codille*.<sup>22</sup> Pope’s contemporary audience will see that the Baron must discard his fourth-ranked singleton heart. An almost certain loser, it is a liability. There is no chance that by doing so he will spoil his hand. By not doing so, the Baron demonstrates that he is either a novice or a nincompoop, or both.<sup>23</sup> Belinda has a fabulous hand, but she only holds four of the eleven spades she has declared as trumps; seven are out and may be in play. As the *Elder Hand*, she has the powerful privilege of leading. If she cannot draw all the trumps in play over her first four tricks, she risks losing control of the game on the fifth trick, whereafter her diamond void becomes a liability.<sup>24</sup> She plays with an eight-card hand—having inadvertently, perhaps while sorting and heading-up her cards, pushed her king of hearts ‘unseen’ behind her queen (iii.95-98). These are errors typical of a novice.<sup>25</sup> The actual card play is well known and is shown below, with Belinda’s hand rearranged for her spades bid. For clarity, the number of the trick on which a particular card is played is marked with a superscript:

**Knight**

♠<sup>2</sup>, ♠<sup>1</sup>  
 J♥<sup>9</sup>, ♥<sup>8</sup>, ♥<sup>7</sup>, ♥<sup>6</sup>, ♥<sup>5</sup>  
 ♦<sup>3</sup>  
 J♣<sup>4</sup>

**Belinda [Elder Hand]**

A♠<sup>1</sup>, 2♠<sup>2</sup>, A♣<sup>3</sup>, K♠<sup>4</sup>  
 K♥<sup>9</sup>, Q♥<sup>8</sup>  
 Void in ♦  
 K♣<sup>5</sup>, Q♣<sup>7</sup>, ♣<sup>6</sup>

**Baron [Dealer]**

Q♠<sup>5</sup>, J♠<sup>4</sup>, ♠<sup>3</sup>, ♠<sup>2</sup>, ♠<sup>1</sup>  
 A♥<sup>9</sup>  
 K♦<sup>6</sup>, Q♦<sup>7</sup>, J♦<sup>8</sup>  
 Void in ♣

From Pope's text alone, we can see there would have been no drama at all, if on the fifth trick Belinda had led her 'unseen' king of hearts. Having won her bid, the remaining cards would not have been played out; her *sans-prendre Ombre* and *consecutive Matador* winnings would have been claimed and the cards gathered in and shuffled for the next *tour*.

As a poet, Pope is perfectly at liberty to simplify the game he describes in Canto III, but he does not presume to simplify the rules that govern the game: rules his audience must use to reconstruct the hands. Fortunately, the simplified and abbreviated *game* he describes is straightforward, comprising a single *tour*, with *L'Hombre* (Belinda) playing *sans prendre*. In fact, although each for rather different reasons, neither of the two defenders attempts to improve his 'as-dealt' hand either. One outcome of this reconstruction is that it is obvious that "*Let Spades be Trumps!*" is not her 'best' *Ombre* bid at all (iii.46). Hearts is better, but she has misplaced her king.<sup>26</sup> Clubs is even more attractive: she holds three clubs to the queen-king.<sup>27</sup> By not bidding her strongest suit Belinda demonstrates that she is a novice and Pope's line, "The skilful Nymph reviews her Force with Care" is wickedly ironic (iii.45). How Belinda might better have played her hand in clubs with a game-ending *Vole* is explored next.

The following card play is entirely hypothetical. Belinda's 'as dealt' hand, with her two black aces and one potential *Matadore* held separately looks like this:

K♠  
 K♥, Q♥  
 Void in ♦  
 K♣, Q♣, ♣  
 A♠, A♣ [Matadores]  
 2♠ [potentially a *Matadore*]

Adopting Wimsatt's caution not to exceed the evidence given, this alternative play utilises several *Ombre* allusions in couplets previously ignored by critics. Any audience familiar with *Ombre* will recognise that adding the two *Matadores* to Belinda's three clubs to the queen-king gives her a powerful five-card trump suit which—depending on the club split—is almost a *lay down* for *Ombre*.<sup>28</sup> Belinda will hold five of the eleven club trumps, including four of the top five, missing only *Manille*—the second-ranked *Matadore*.

Because the *Manille* is missing from her hand, such a trump selection means that her club king and queen cannot be promoted to *faux matadore* status for payment purposes. But her nominally less illustrious hand is powerful, if not unbeatable. Rearranging her hand as shown below, Belinda can bid clubs, play *sans prendre*, and consider a *Vole* amendment after the fourth trick:

A♠, A♣, K♣, Q♣, ♣  
 K♠, 2♠  
 K♥, Q♥  
 Void in ♦

Missing the second-ranked *Matadore*—in this case the 2♣—does not matter, as under the rules the *Manille* is 'forced' by a *Spadille* lead. It is absolutely useless to whoever happens to hold it, assuming that it is even in play. With any but a bizarre distribution of clubs, an *Ombre* win is trivial. Depending upon how play develops, her deuce of spades—no longer *Manille*, as clubs are now trumps—may be a loser, leaving her one trick short of *Vole*. Play is anti-clockwise; Belinda leads, and the trick in which each card is played is superscripted:

**Knight**

J♣<sup>1</sup>  
 ♠<sup>6</sup>, ♠<sup>2</sup>  
 J♥<sup>9</sup>, ♥<sup>8</sup>, ♥<sup>7</sup>, ♥<sup>4</sup>, ♥<sup>3</sup>  
 ♦<sup>5</sup>

**Belinda [Elder Hand]**

A♠<sup>1</sup>, A♣<sup>5</sup>, K♣<sup>6</sup>, Q♣<sup>7</sup>, ♣<sup>8</sup>  
 K♠<sup>2</sup>, 2♠<sup>9</sup>  
 K♥<sup>3</sup>, Q♥<sup>4</sup>  
 Void in ♦

**Baron [Dealer]**

Void in ♣  
 Q♠<sup>8</sup>, J♠<sup>5</sup>, ♠<sup>4</sup>, ♠<sup>3</sup>, ♠<sup>2</sup>  
 A♥<sup>1</sup>  
 K♦<sup>9</sup>, Q♦<sup>7</sup>, J♦<sup>6</sup>

By the eighth trick the Baron will realise that the Knight's earlier diamond slough was a singleton, and that Belinda has yet to play a diamond. Paradoxically, it is his absolutely correct play that ensures Belinda's *Vole* triumph. Her lowly, off-suit, *plebeian* deuce of spades takes a king and a knave on the last trick. Both court cards fall "undistinguish'd by the Victor *Spade!*" (iii.64). Good manners demand that Belinda suppresses any urge to crow; but a well-concealed gloat and silent cackle, while exchanging the counters to line her pockets with their guineas, would be understandable.

To digress, the earlier concession—that it is just possible that the Knight does not have a singleton diamond, but a second, or perhaps a third club—makes no difference to Belinda's *Vole* attempt. Even if his second club is the 2♣ (*Manille*), the outcome in this hypothetical *tour* is unchanged, as his *Manille* is 'forced' on the first trick. Furthermore, even if the Knight holds both the *Manille* and the 'missing' queen of clubs—a reconstruction which violates both Pope's text and the tenets of good card play—the result is unchanged. Belinda should ensure that all trumps are drawn—and she can tell by the sloughs—before she tries to deceive her opponents into believing that her king of spades is a singleton.

In some playing agreements *Vole* is deemed so rare that it *Sweeps the Board*: no more *tours* can be played because all the stakes on the board, not just those in the *pool*, go to the winner. Unlike the paltry winnings for a five-trick *Ombre* win, Belinda, should she play this *tour* in clubs, *sans prendre*, then bid and make *Vole*, will safely pocket her initial



stake plus one hundred and ten counters from each opponent for a total of two hundred and twenty counters, thereby ending the game and fulfilling those wishful lines:

Belinda now, whom Thirst of Fame invites,  
Burns to encounter two adventurous Knights,  
At *Ombre* singly to decide their Doom; (iii.25-27)

Of course, this is not the *tour* they played: far from it. But Belinda celebrates her clumsy *Ombre* win as if it were a game-ending *Vole*.

The Nymph exulting fills with Shouts the Sky,  
The Walls, the Woods, and long Canals reply. (iii.99-100)

All card play ceases and coffee is served (iii.105). The *Vole* opportunity this reconstruction reveals might be dismissed as mere coincidence, but coincidences are often just explanations waiting to happen. Pope's heroi-comical poem is partly a caustic satire on contemporary high society, and the role which the privileged *beau monde* presume they are entitled to play at court. Pope's satire includes the hint that they cannot even play this *de rigueur* card game properly.<sup>29</sup> There are many other explanations, but these are beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly out of scope, and not supported by close reading of the whole poem, is the notion that Belinda and the Baron are exceedingly skilful players—she sees the *Vole* opportunity, but not wishing to humiliate the Baron, deliberately bids *Ombre* in the 'wrong' suit; while the Baron, in turn, aware that she must be in the 'wrong' suit elects not to strengthen his hand to inflict a humiliating *Codille*.

Using this reconstruction, in the literal sense, it is evident that each player was presented with a number of playing options, whereas Pope's satire describes only the playing options they took. Eighteenth-century English Literature scholars can further evaluate the individual players' *Ombre* skills and speculate about their possible motives for not pursuing obvious alternative plays. Beyond this evidence of close reading, scholars can engage whichever theoretical approach suits the

needs of their literary analysis of the characters, motives, and social context of Pope's poem; although readings that claim Belinda is a "skilful Nymph" will be somewhat harder to defend.

### *Ombre* Rules

The rules for playing *Ombre* at Hampton Court during the first two decades of the eighteenth century cannot be known with certainty. The game came to Restoration England from Spain via France with Catharine of Braganza. As Tillotson and Holden note, *The Court Gamester*, written by Richard Seymour in 1718, was based on a French handbook from the previous century, but both scholars claim that Seymour's "Game of Hombre" chapter is a verbatim translation of the earlier French work.<sup>30</sup> Seymour's 120 page octavo volume, which covers three games, *Ombre*, *Picquet*, and *Chess*, devotes 72 pages and over 16,000 words to *Ombre*. A 1710 edition of *The Compleat Gamester*, written by Charles Cotton, was also available.

It is fair to argue that these two works reflect rather than dictate fashionable gaming practices in London, and that these rules and conventions are close to those in effect in 1712 and 1713 at Hampton Court. But Cotton and Seymour caution that their works are not absolute, and they are aware of other conventions, some of which they do not favour. These other conventions may well apply, provided they are mutually agreed upon before the players commence their game.<sup>31</sup> The object of each *tour* is to win more tricks than either of your opponents, preferably five; or, to win all nine, if your cards are absolutely fantastic. One counter-intuitive feature of this frustrating and complicated game is that it is often more 'rewarding' to successfully defend against an *Ombre* bid, than it is to successfully make that bid.

The game is played with the forty-card Spanish deck. To make this, take a conventional fifty-two card French-suited deck and remove the four 10's, 9's, and 8's. Three of the most confusing aspects of *Ombre*, at least for those familiar with modern card games, are that the red aces

rank below the knave except when one of the red suits is declared the trump suit, when the ace ranks above the king; the two black aces are always trump cards irrespective of which suit is declared trump; and, the rank of the non-court card depends on the colour of the suit—black or red. The ranked *Ombre* deck with the two black aces separated is shown below:

K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠	A♠
K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥	
K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦	
K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣	A♣

Card ranking is fixed only after the trump suit is chosen. The highest-ranked cards (*Matadores*) enjoy special rule breaking, or rule immunity privileges. The two black aces, A♠ and A♣, are invariably the first- and the third-ranked trumps, regardless of which colour suit—red or black—is declared trump.

If a red suit is declared trump, then the seven of that suit 7♥, or 7♦, also becomes a *Matadore* and is the second-ranked trump. In addition, the ace of that suit A♥, or A♦, also becomes a *Matadore*, and is the fourth-ranked trump, ranking higher than the corresponding red king. If a black suit is declared trump, then the deuce of that suit, 2♠, or 2♣, becomes a *Matadore* and is the second-ranked trump. Consequently, when players are sorting and ranking their hands, it is important to initially separate the cards into the four suits, plus a fifth category of *Matadores* and potential *Matadores*—black aces, black deuces, red sevens, and red aces.

In the single *tour* of this game described in Canto III of *The Rape of the Lock*, Belinda declares a black suit—spades—as trumps. The eleven cards in that suit will rank—highest to lowest—as follows:

A♠, 2♠, A♣, K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠

Should clubs be declared trump, that eleven-card suit will rank as follows:

A♠, 2♣, A♣, K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣

Should hearts or diamonds be declared trump, those twelve red trump cards—noting that the five non-court cards are in reverse numerical order—rank as follows:

A♠, 7♥, A♣, A♥, K♥, Q♥, J♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥

or,

A♠, 7♦, A♣, A♦, K♦, Q♦, J♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦

When either spades or clubs are declared trump, the ten hearts and ten diamonds rank as follows:

K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥

or,

K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦

Note that the red aces rank below the knave, and that the six non-court cards—seven if the aces are treated as ones—rank in reverse numerical order.

When either hearts or diamonds are declared trump, the nine spades and nine clubs rank—highest to lowest—as follows:

K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠

or,

K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣

Note that both black aces are 'missing' but that the six non-court cards rank in the usual numerical order. The card ordering is confusing, and the complicated rules of the game even provide for forfeits—paying extra stakes into the *pool*—whenever players are *beasted*, that is, they are caught committing any one of a number of playing errors.

After the deal any player holding one or both black aces—*Matadores*—should quickly scan their hand for a potential second-ranked *Matadore*, either a black deuce, or a red seven, and then decide if their hand is strong enough to warrant a bid, or whether they can more effectively defend against another's bid. If no one believes that they have a winning hand, that is, everyone *passes*, then each player enhances the *pool* stakes with an additional wager, the cards are col-

lected, shuffled, and re-dealt. If necessary, this process is repeated and the stakes increased for each new deal until one of the three players believes their hand warrants a bid.

## Nomenclature

*Ombre* has its own nomenclature for both the cards and the rules, which Pope uses freely in Canto III of his poem, confident that his readers are familiar with it. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain the myriad rules and conventions of this long-obsolete card game. Fortunately for the single *tour* the poet describes, there are only a few terms to learn. Unfortunately they are anglicised seventeenth-century French words, some of which are based on earlier Spanish terms, and others are special French words used only in card games. Previous editors have glossed some of these for modern readers, but have either omitted or incorrectly glossed several critical terms, thereby obscuring, if not defeating, Pope's contemporary allusions. For metrical reasons, Pope slightly alters the spellings given in Cotton and Seymour, but the more important terms, several of which are found in Pope's text in italics and others that must be inferred from the context, are glossed as follows:

***Basto*** — The ace of clubs is invariably the third-ranked trump card.

***Beasted*** — *L'Hombre* is *beasted* [rhyming with *pasted*], or suffers *Remise*, when he or she fails to win, but none of the other players wins more tricks than they. A player is also *beasted*, when he or she makes one of a number of rule or etiquette violations, and forfeits to the *pool* at least one counter for each transgression.

***Codille*** — There are several ways that *L'Hombre* can lose his or her bid. Should one of the other players win five tricks instead of *L'Hombre* doing so, *L'Hombre* has suffered *Codille*. Should *L'Hombre* win no more tricks than another player, this is called *Remise*, or *Repuesta*, or *Reposte*.

***Elder Hand*** — The player to the right of the dealer. It is this player who has the privilege of bidding first, and leading—not *L'Hombre*—that is, playing the first card. Bidding and play is anti-clockwise, so the dealer will bid last, if at all.

*Forced* — One of the privileges of a *Matador*, in a rule probably unique to *Ombre*, is that if a *Matador* is led, the other players are obliged to play their lower-ranked *Matadores* on that trick. Thus a *Spadille* lead will 'force' both of the other players to play their *Manille*, or their *Basto*, and, if applicable, their *Punto*, if they hold them. Similarly a *Manille* lead will 'force' *Basto* and, if applicable, *Punto*, but not the *Spadille*.

*L'Hombre* — The player, or challenger, who selects the trump suit, and who will attempt to win five of the nine tricks against the other two players, or at least more tricks than any of the other players: the latter, now defenders, will become quasi-partners for this *tour* only.

*Manille* — The second-ranked trump: it is either a black deuce or a red seven in the trump suit, depending upon which colour suit is selected by *L'Hombre* as trump.

*Matadores* — The top three (or four) trump cards are called *Matadores*, or *Mats*. But if *L'Hombre* holds consecutively ranked trump cards plus all the *Matadores*, those lower than *Basto* (or *Punto*, if a red suit is trump), the king, queen, knave, and so on, are promoted to *Matadore* status for payment purposes, in which case they are called *Faux Matadores*.

*Ombre* — This is either the name of the card game [rhyming with number], or the bid for five tricks, or somewhat confusingly, another name for *L'Hombre*—the player who makes the bid. *L'Hombre* wins his or her *Ombre* bid by taking five tricks, but can also win by taking only four tricks, when the other five are split three-two among the two defenders (see Seymour 24, C6<sup>v</sup>).

*Punto* — The ace of the red suit which is declared trump; it becomes the fourth-ranked *Matadore*, ranked below *Basto*, but above the red king.

*Remise* — This is when *L'Hombre* is *beasted*, but when *Codille* is not imposed by one of the other players. *Remise*, *Repuesta*, and *Reposte* all mean the same thing. For a *Remise* to apply, *L'Hombre* must fail to win more tricks than either opponent. If *L'Hombre* wins fewer tricks than one opponent, then that is *Codille*.

*Sans Prendre* — This is a pre-emptive bid. *L'Hombre* plays the *tour* 'as dealt' without first discarding and then taking-in replacement cards from the *talon*. If successful, the challenger will receive three additional counters from each defender: making it greatly to the challenger's financial advantage not to discard. Should this bid fail, *L'Hombre* must pay the defenders directly three counters each for his or her arrogance. But the '*sans prendre*' option does not preclude either defender electing to discard and take-in new cards if they wish.

*Spadille* — The ace of spades which is invariably the top-ranked trump card.

*Swept the Board* — This expression is reserved for *L'Hombre* whose *Vole* bid is successful. Depending upon the rules in effect, the winnings can be several times the total *pool* stakes, and in some cases a *Vole* 'sweeps all of the stakes from the board' not just those in the *pool*, and ends the game. As in all gam-

bling, when all but one player, or the house, has been cleaned out—the game is over.

*Talon* — Thirteen cards are left over after twenty-seven have been dealt to the players, from the French *le talon*, meaning [card] stock. It is from this *talon* that replacement cards are drawn. Under most rule variants these must be paid for by contributions to the *pool* (from the French *la poule*, meaning pool or pot), thereby increasing the stakes for that particular *tour*. The players' discards do not go back into the *talon*, but are held out until that *tour* has been completed.

*Tour* — One deal or hand in the game, from the French *le tour* meaning turn or revolution. A complete game comprises ten, twenty, or more *tours*, the number is agreed upon before play begins and may depend on how much time the players have available for play.

*Vole* — The bid for all nine tricks is from the French word used in card play *la vole*, which means 'all the tricks.' This declaration is made by *L'Hombre* just before the fifth trick in the *tour* is played.

Sloughing, discarding, and taking-in are terms not used in Pope's poem. When playing out the hand, if a player cannot follow suit, he or she may take that opportunity to get rid of, or slough, whatever they perceive as a 'losing' card. I have used 'slough' to indicate when a player is tossing a certain 'loser' onto a trick they cannot possibly win to avoid confusion with discarding—the attempt to enhance one's hand by exchanging cards before play begins. To speed up play, a *lay down* is permitted, if not encouraged by the rules. The challenger simply shows his or her cards to the two defenders and claims the *Ombre* or *Vole* win. Pope uses the term *plebeian* to denote any non-court, or numbered card; I have retained his usage.

### Gambling at Court

*Ombre* is a card game with both stakes and forfeits dependent on the options selected for play and the error committed. These are not *friendly games* and the stakes will be "guineas."<sup>32</sup> The losers will not be ruined, but if they play twenty, thirty, or more *tours*, continually draw dreadful cards, or play badly, never imposing *Remise*, let alone never winning a *tour*, the cost of covering their losses will be enough to

sting. The stakes are marked with special counters, the Queen Anne equivalent of poker chips. There is a greater counter—called a 'fish' from the French *la fiche*—and a lesser counter—usually just called a 'counter'; the 'fish' is worth ten 'counters' or whatever the players agree before play begins.

The card game commences by distributing the stakes to each player, usually comprising nine fish and twenty counters, with the three players agreeing beforehand on the monetary value of the counters and to how many *tours* will be played to make a complete game. When the agreed number of *tours* has been played the game ends, and any player holding fewer than one hundred and ten counters must 'buy back' the required number from those opponents who hold more than their starting stakes. Depending upon their agreed monetary value, there could be a considerable sum 'on the board.'

Before the first *tour* is dealt, each player will place one fish in the *pool*. If a player later enhances their hand by drawing replacement cards, each new card will 'cost' one additional counter. During the play, should a player make a rule or etiquette blunder, that too, will 'cost' at least one counter, depending upon the infraction. If all three players *pass* on one particular deal, that *tour* is neither played nor counted toward the agreed number of *tours* to be played. In this case, the initial stakes and any rule violation 'forfeits' will remain in the *pool*, with more counters added to enhance the total stakes in the *pool* before the next *tour* is dealt.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>If the genesis of this article was under Mr. W. E. Markham, the revelation was during a hilarious seminar conducted by Dr. T. R. Cleary. The author also acknowledges the guidance of Dr. J. E. Foss, Dr. G. D. Fulton, Dr. D. J. Leeming, and Dr. E. Miller. Whereas all of the aforementioned may virtuously claim to possess not even the faintest clue about cards or card games, any such pious claims by either Dr. Foss or Dr. Leeming—the unwary be warned—should be disregarded.



<sup>2</sup>Richard Seymour, Esq., *The Court Gamester: or, full and easy instructions for playing the games now in vogue* [...] *Written for the Young Princesses* (London: Printed for E. Curll in Fleet-street, first ed. 1719 [1718]). His "Of Hombre" chapter is found on pp. 1-70 (B<sup>r</sup>-G5<sup>v</sup>) of the PDF which is available on Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ESTC Number N002071).

<sup>3</sup>See George Sherburn, ed., *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, 5 vols., vol. 1, 1704-1718 (Oxford: OUP, 1956).

<sup>4</sup>All quotations and line numbers are to the Twickenham Edition *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 11 vols., gen. ed. John Butt, vol. 2, *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen; New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1962).

<sup>5</sup>William K. Wimsatt, Jr., "The Game of Ombre in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Review of English Studies* 1 (1950): 136-43, 137.

<sup>6</sup>Wimsatt ("The Game of Ombre") 141. As Wimsatt points out, without knowing the numerical values (ranks) of the eleven non-court cards in play (ignoring the thirteen left in the talon), a complete and therefore unique reconstruction of the three hands is impossible. However, for the *tour* they play, these unknowable values are irrelevant and a simplified generic, rather than a unique reconstruction is entirely possible.

#### Forty-card Spanish *Ombre* deck

A♠, K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠  
 K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥  
 K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦  
 A♣, K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣

#### Pope's simplified *Ombre* deck

A♠, K♠, Q♠, J♠, ♠, ♠, ♠, ♠, ♠, 2♠  
 K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥  
 K♦, Q♦, J♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦  
 A♣, K♣, Q♣, J♣, ♣, ♣, ♣, ♣, ♣, ♣

Pope's poem gives insufficient information for a complete solution that will fit back into the Spanish card deck, where all forty cards are known by suit and rank. Many reconstructors have failed to recognise that their solutions need only fit into Pope's simplified *Ombre* deck, where twenty-four of the forty cards are known only by suit.

<sup>7</sup>[Dr. William Pole], "Pope's Game of Ombre," *MacMillan's Magazine* 39 (Nov. 1873 – Apr. 1874): 262-67.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Hucks Gibbs (first baron Aldenham), *The Game of Ombre*, 2nd ed., printed privately (London: Chiswick, 1878).

<sup>9</sup>George Holden, ed., "Appendix: The Game of Ombre," *Pope's Rape of the Lock* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1909) 93-98.

<sup>10</sup>Edward G. Fletcher, "Belinda's Game of Ombre," *Texas University Studies in English* 15 (1935): 28–38; and "'Belinda's Game of Ombre': Some Corrections." *Texas University Studies in English* 16 (1936): 138.

<sup>11</sup>Tillotson, "Appendix C," *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 2: 383-92.

<sup>12</sup>Arthur E. Case, "The Game of Ombre in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Texas University Studies in English* 24 (1944): 191-96.

<sup>13</sup>William K. Wimsatt, Jr., "Belinda Ludens: Strife and Play in *The Rape of the Lock*," *New Literary History* 4 (1973): 357-74.

<sup>14</sup>Those unfamiliar with *Ombre* should refer to the nomenclature section of this paper for full explanations for seventeen of the more important, if not unique terms used in this card game. Their use is convenient shorthand, so the terms will always appear italicised.

<sup>15</sup>Belinda leads (iii.47-50) not because she is *L'Hombre*, but because hers is the *Elder Hand*, and she therefore sits to the right of the dealer—see Seymour 21-22 (C5<sup>r</sup>-C5<sup>v</sup>). Leading gives her initial control of the game—an enormous advantage.

<sup>16</sup>The Baron plays his ace, and the next card mentioned is Belinda's winner, her king—the unknown card played by the Knight is obviously a loser (iii.95-98). Since play is anti-clockwise, the Knight must be to Belinda's right. As *Elder Hand* she bids first, but since her bid was pre-emptive, the Baron who sits to her left must have been the dealer.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester: or, instructions how to play at all manner of usual and most gentile games, either on cards, dice, billiards, trucks [...]* (London, 1709). His short chapter "L'Ombre, a Spanish Game" is found on pp. 71-77 (F4<sup>v</sup>-F7<sup>v</sup>) of the PDF which is available on Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ESTC Number T064307). The payment rule for discarding and taking-in is on pp. 74-75 (F6<sup>r</sup>-F6<sup>v</sup>). See also John Cotgrave, *Wits Interpreter; The English Parnassus, or the sure guide [...]* (London, 1662). His short chapter "The Noble Spanish Game, called L'Ombre" is found on pp. 353-357 (Bb<sup>v</sup>-Bb3<sup>v</sup>) of the PDF which is available on Early English Books Online (Wing / C6371). Cotgrave's payment rule reads, "Of the greater Counters, each man stakes one for the Game, and one of the lesser for passing, and for the hand when Eldest, and one for taking in, that is for every card taken in one Counter."

<sup>18</sup>See Tillotson 120 and 388. More plausibly, Pope started with a real *tour* where *L'Hombre* failed to bid a fantastic hand correctly and Pope simplified this *tour* for his poem. The enormity of the task attendant with Tillotson's speculation, where the poet must create three hands, makes it most unlikely—the number of different situations is an astronomical thirty-three digit number. The mathematics of combinations tells us that there are hundreds of millions of ways to select just one nine-card hand from the forty-card Spanish deck. The expression is  $nCr$  which expands into  $n! \div r! (n - r)!$  and equals 273,438,880 when we set  $n = 40$  and  $r = 9$ . Even if the numerical values but not the suits of the twenty *plebeian* cards (two to seven inclusive, excluding the black two's and red seven's) are ignored, there are over three million different nine-card hands—the algebra and arithmetic to derive

this number (3,149,800) is messy—and if we stipulate that both black aces are included, there are still hundreds of thousands of different hands.

<sup>19</sup>Case 194-95.

<sup>20</sup>Case 194-95.

<sup>21</sup>Scholars may never know why none of Pope's contemporaries ever formally published their reconstructions. Perhaps they elected not to spoil the enigma for others; perhaps they decided that those who did not *get it* would not appreciate their solution or its surprising implications.

<sup>22</sup>Pope's audience can work out the contents of the *talon*: no spades; two hearts; five clubs; and six diamonds—possibly including the ace. Should the Baron discard his singleton ace of hearts, he cannot make his hand worse, even though he will not know that all of the spades are in play and there are none left in the *talon*. If he takes in a club then he has a heart void instead of a club void; if he takes in another [losing] heart he still has his club void; and (we know), he has a 6 in 13 (or an almost even) chance of taking in a fourth [winning] diamond.

<sup>23</sup>Alternatively, we might surmise that the Baron is a very skilful player. Recognising that his queen of spades, the fifth-ranked trump, precludes any successful game-ending *Vole* attempt by Belinda, for any number of reasons, he deliberately makes no attempt to improve his hand. Although a bit unfair to his partner, perhaps he decides to 'let' her win this one *tour*—if she can—although such patronising 'gallantry' is inconsistent with his subsequent behaviour, and inconsistent with the rest of Pope's satire about *le beau monde*.

<sup>24</sup>From Pope's text (iii.66-70) we know that the Baron's queen of spades—the eleventh and last trump, if Belinda was counting—takes the fifth trick on her king of clubs lead. Pope's text leaves his audience to infer that her 'unknown' cards are both clubs, including the 'missing' queen of clubs; and, that she must have a diamond void.

<sup>25</sup>"The *King* unseen / Lurked in her hand" (iii.95-96) is difficult to reconcile with the line "The skilful *Nymph* reviews her *Force* with care" (iii.45). Eighteenth-century playing cards are full length and must be 'headed up' while being sorted in the hand into ranked suits. Belinda has pushed the king behind her queen, and failed to fan out or count her cards properly. All are a novice's mistakes, even if she was flustered by her proximity to the Baron.

<sup>26</sup>Here the reasoning is tricky and depends on higher-ranked *Matadors* being able to 'force' lower-ranked *Matadors*. Should she bid hearts, she will hold four of the top six: A♠, A♣, K♥, Q♥, missing the 7♥ (*Manille*) and the A♥ (*Punto*)—the second and fourth ranked *Matadors*. Given the 'as dealt' hands, both will be 'forced' (the Baron's A♥, and the Knight's 7♥, if he holds it) by her top-ranked A♠ (*Spadille*) lead.

<sup>27</sup>See Fletcher (1935) 32. The reconstruction presented in *Macmillan's Magazine* by Pole in the late nineteenth century was rejected by scholars because it made Belinda's hand too strong in clubs. Unfortunately, Fletcher, whose second reconstruction contains precisely this same 'error' and matches the one derived in this

paper, does not give further scholarly consideration to what this card distribution and apparent bidding anomaly might imply.

<sup>28</sup>Seymour appends lines iii.25-100 to his "Of Hombre" chapter in *The Court Gamester*, but gives no reconstruction of the hands (67-70, G4<sup>r</sup>-G5<sup>v</sup>). His expository text includes over forty minimum-strength examples of 'ombre biddable' hands and explanations, but he gives no examples of likely *Vole* hands (34-43, D5<sup>v</sup>-E4<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>29</sup>See Seymour iii, A3<sup>r</sup>. He opens his Preface by stating that "Gameing is become so much the fashion among the *beau monde*, that he who in company should appear ignorant of the games in vogue, would be reckoned to be low bred, and hardly fit for conversation."

<sup>30</sup>See Tillotson 383, and Holden 94.

<sup>31</sup>Seymour 32, D4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>32</sup>Pole 269.