Hyeona Park

ELIT 48A

Prof. Pesano

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*“If for thy father asked, say thou hadst none; And for thy mother, she alas is poor, which caused her thus to send thee out of door.” (*Bradstreet)

A Master In Disguise

As an offspring of the long-standing wealthy English society and the newly found faithful Puritan society, Anne Bradstreet valorously experiments on her poem, “The Author to Her Book,” in a way that no one from either era would dare doing so. She uses a continuous contrast between her deep anxiety and devotion to the book, her so-called “ill-formed offspring,” to successfully hide her true message behind the written words to challenge the expectations and arranged positions of women both in her society and the system of the Great Chain of Being.

Bradstreet devotes the majority of “The Author to Her Book” in establishing self-deprecation with such a very aggressive and shameful tone, displaying her desperate desire to get rid of any flaws in her book. To the eyes of her audience, it seems that she herself is the worst critic of her work, revealing every possible one of its flaws during the process. However, this idea of almost mocking herself later vanishes from her voice as some changes occur in her tone towards the end of this poem. Through the last part of the chosen quote, “which caused her thus to send thee out of door,” she creates, with personification of her work as a child, a vivid poetic imagery of a mother abandoning her little child to live on its own in the harsh world, the unprotected outside of this “door,” because “she alas is poor,” thus deeply evoking emotion and sympathy in her audience (Bradstreet 107). Therefore, one could easily make a mistake to conclude that Bradstreet is simply giving this mother a justifiable excuse for her actions, thus holding the financial instability of a society responsible for any possible disapprovals on her work. Nevertheless, as they begin to wonder why she suddenly switches off to a third person point of view from the first at this particular part of the poem, her audience can detect the real intention of Bradstreet behind this passage. This sudden change in viewpoints allows the audience to take a glimpse of the moment when Bradstreet gains her true independence by completely detaching herself from her creation. Because she no longer associates herself with the book upon its departure into the society, its criticisms are not be able to stain her reputation and competence as a writer in any way. Thereby, she will never consider her ability as a writer “poor,” despite what the critics may denounce of her work (Brastreet 107).

This phenomenon reveals its existence to her audience repeatedly throughout this poem, especially at the beginning of this quote where Bradstreet leaves her last, specific instructions to her creation in a letter format “if for thy father asked, say thou hadst none” (Bradstreet 107). Bradstreet thus acknowledges the fact that she, truly by herself alone, has created an art with a perfect form of heroic couplets and iambic pentameter in which she uses to reveal her capability as a poetess. Safely hidden behind this particular passage, Bradstreet casually challenges the pre-existing hierarchies within the category of humans in the Great Chain of Being with such a perilous, yet bold assertion: women are not inferior editions of men; they are as capable of creating finest literary works that have been loved and studied by so many people for ages.

On the surface, Bradstreet’s work is very easy for readers to comprehend, and seems as if the sole purpose of this “The Author to Her Book” is to illustrate her devotion and love towards her work regardless of her insecurity as a writer. However, because it wasn’t written in a plain style in which any typical literature from Puritan era uses to emphasize the existence of God over common men, and glorify the mercy of God upon their actions, the audience may choose to explore her book far beyond its literal meanings. Upon close-reading, the readers can conclude that Bradstreet is unique in every possible way. Every word that she chooses to use, every tone that she carries her message with, and every literary device that she hand-picks to support the bare bones of her story shout out to her audience that she is indeed a master of manipulating the words and cleverly hiding her true beliefs behind them, thus allowing herself escape from the Puritan perspective of women figures from her era.