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women “some small acknowledgment” of their abilities. If women’s underrepresentation in intellectual pursuits were purely because of their own inferior abilities, there would be no use in asking men to grant them more opportunities; they would be incapable of taking advantage of them. Clearly, she recognized that the patriarchal society was, to some extent, withholding privileges that women deserved.

The same sentiment is also hinted at in “The Author to Her Book,” where she compares her writing to a blemished, defective child. When she attempts to ameliorate her child’s condition with better clothing, she finds “naught save homespun cloth” in her house. While this could be a reflection on how she viewed the shortcomings of her own talent, it could also be a comment on the fact that women were not given the same resources as men. Their education, expectations, and opportunities were vastly different and mostly inferior. The “house” or society that she lived in simply didn’t provide anything more than “homespun cloth” for her to work with.

Other examples of her poetry give the reader a glimpse into what Bradstreet believed women were capable of if given the opportunities they deserved. Her expressions about Queen Elizabeth I are an excellent case in point. In “The Poem,” she says that Elizabeth “wiped off the’ aspersion of her sex, / That women wisdom lack to play the rex.” Bradstreet alleged that claims about women’s inferiority were an “aspersion” and that Queen Elizabeth’s rule was proof. She depicts the queen as mighty monarch and warrior who eluded restrictive gender norms, calling her a “virago” and an “Amazon.” She hails instances where Elizabeth surpassed or conquered male monarchs. She favorably compares her to a string of historical female rulers, such as Semiramis, Tomyris, and Cleopatra.

In lines 77 and 78 she brings up that there are those who still wonder if women have merit, or if perhaps the only female merit died with Queen Elizabeth. She gives her reply in lines 81 and 82 where she states, “Let such as say our sex is void of reason, / Know ’tis a slander now but once was treason.” Bradstreet felt that even with the queen gone, such sentiments were so untruthful that they constituted slander.

Taken as a whole, Anne Bradstreet’s poetry could appear to be a contradiction. On one hand, she presents herself as a self-effacing individual who doubts her talents, views men as superior and asks that the reader not expect too much from her as a woman. On the other hand, she calls similar derogatory ideas slander, asserts that women are deprived of recognition and opportunities, and that they’re fully capable of outperforming men. How can these dichotomous viewpoints be reconciled?

First of all, with the context of Anne Bradstreet’s high regard for women, we see much of what appeared to be pure self-deprecation transform into irony. Going back to “The Prologue,” she states, “To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings, / Of cities, founded commonwealths begun, / For my mean pen are too superior things.” She adds that she will leave the discussion of such important topics to poets and historians and that her “obscure lines shall not so dim their worth.” She carries the theme of

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Obviously, depreciating herself and her sex was not the goal of “The Prologue.” Instead, this poem shows the nonsensicality of sexism. The author ostensibly accepts the stereotypes of women being incapable of intellectual pursuits, while simultaneously refuting them with her

*the costs to their children. Currently, she is working on a book that explores her relationship with her three Sudanese children whom she foster-parented for seven years and who have remained her children.*