Analysis of *The Author to Her Book* by Anne Bradstreet

Anne Bradstreet was an American poet in the mid to late seventeenth century. She wasn’t just any poet but the very first to be published while living in a Puritan colony in America. The book titled *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America* includes the poem “The Author to Her Book”. Many people believe the poem was about the book it was published inside. My first impression of “The Author to Her Book” was that it was painfully dull and lifeless, but upon closer examination there seems to be much more to the story. Although Bradstreet seems to be self-deprecating at every turn, when you look a little closer, she exhibits sarcasm and pokes fun at the social parameters of her time. Anne Bradstreet knew exactly how talented she was but because of the times she lived in, she had no choice but to tone down her talent and success so that this book, written by a woman, would be accepted by the masses and not criticized so harshly. The first four lines are quite interesting and upon reading them for the first time, one might believe she is talking about a child, but the actual words tell us that she is speaking about a book, we know this from the use of the phrase “of my feeble brain”. We can also ascertain that she is displeased with this work when she refers to the offspring as “ill-formed”. Her thoughts are crude and unpolished. She goes on to tell us that the book was published without her consent by well meaning friends. She implies that the book was not ready for public view or critique.

The next quatrain reiterates that Bradstreet is not ready for her work to be seen, she wants to stop the presses because the work lacks final touches. She is afraid of judgement and is embarrassed. We don’t know if the errors were not corrected or if perhaps were intentional. She is again self-loathing when she refers to her work as a “rambling brat”. “Rambling brat” might also be a reference to the book being disobedient, personification is a consistent theme throughout the work. She is not happy with this or so she wants us to think. Personification is a theme throughout the poem. She gives life-like qualities to an otherwise inanimate object which we now know is the book.

In lines nine through twelve we see further evidence that she wants us to believe this work is not good or “unfit for light”. What she sees annoys her; we can determine this from the use of the word “irksome” which means exasperating or irritating. Despite the obvious flaws, she is still reminded that they belong to her and so she still has attachment to them. Bradstreet would fix the mistakes if she could; it’s possible that she could not correct them because they had already been published.

In the following four lines she goes on to explain to us her process of editing which she refers to in line thirteen “I wash’d thy face”. Washing a child’s face roughly can make blemishes more noticeable just like overediting a poem can make it worse. When she says “I stretched thy joynts to make thee even feet” it is important to note here that a “foot” is a term used to refer to a unit or beat in a line of poetry. She meant that she had to stretch the feet to make the poem sound better. She may have also wanted further editions of her book to be more polished or presentable. In the last line here, she refers to the book hobbling. To hobble means to walk lamely which also corresponds to the feet. Although she has done what she could, the poem work still does not flow as smoothly she would like it to. In the article *A Short Analysis of Anne Bradstreet’s “*The Author to Her Book*”* the author writes that “Oblivion and obscurity, Bradstreet decides, is the best fate for her book.” Bradstreet is playful and doesn’t mind that the reader might have to work to understand.

In lines seventeen through twenty she lets us know when she says “In better dress to trim thee was my mind, But nought save home-spun Cloth, i’ th’ house I find” that she intended to do better than this but that it’s basically all she could come up with. This is an educated woman and talented poet. This is where the literal starts to blur with the intent. Bradstreet’s work here is actually quite good and flows well. She feels the need to remind us that she knows her place. Bradstreet feels the books appearance is vulgar but vulgar here doesn’t mean grotesque but more likely uneducated. She warns her book not to fall into the hands of critics.

In the final quatrain Bradstreet releases the book to encounter what opinions and judgements it may when she writes “In Criticks hands, beware thou dost not come; And take thy way where yet thou art not known,”. In line twenty-two she refers to the father of the work. There is no father, only a mother. This may be a comment on the fact that in this period of time poetry was mostly written or sired by men. If this book is so bad, perhaps it is because it is written by a woman. She talks poorly about herself and her ability again here. She needs to remind the reader that she is just a lowly woman and to have pity on her; don’t be so harsh. This may also be a joke and meant as sarcasm.  
 The book that in the poem is titled *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America*. This title refers to Greek mythology in which there were nine muses. The Nine Muses in Greek mythology have been used by artists to inspire for a very long time. The muses are Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia, and Urania. They are the daughters of Zeus, the Greek father of all gods. Bradstreet insinuates by the title, that she is the tenth muse. This tells us exactly what she really thought of herself and her talent. The poem is poking fun at society and their view on gender roles. Bradstreet seems to down play her talents but if you read into it, she is simultaneously showing you her true colors. The words are interwoven with double meanings that are literal, sarcastic, and metaphorical. The poem has faults but as you read through it, you can sense that the speaker comes to terms with this and you learn that the mistakes are part of the creative process and quite valuable. In the article *The Influence of Anne Bradstreet’s Innovative Errors* the author states: “Bradstreet makes the decision to model her poetry in a different kind of image, one that posits merit in the face of its difference, its fabrication out of distinct textiles, ingredients, and metaphors.” Bradstreet was before her time in her empowerment of not only herself, but all women.  
 The theme to this play and many of Bradstreet’s other works is femininity in a masculine world. Her bold and sometimes intricate use of metaphors is a playful way to get her message across. Her general point was to document what it meant to be a woman in those times and also to pave the way for future female authors to do the same. Unfortunately, Anne Bradstreet did not live in a time where a woman could express herself freely but with her creativity and cunning use of language, she still wowed those that cared enough to look deeper than the surface.

Works Cited

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