Anne Bradstreet Essay, Research Paper

The Struggles and Fears of a Puritan Mother

Being a Puritan woman, Anne Bradstreet had trouble writing poetry in a patriarchal, unimaginative world. Although Bradstreet grew up in affluence with the luxury of an excellent education, she was expected to behave as a normal Puritan woman. She was the wife and child of colonial governor, but her status could not save her from the maltreatment and contempt of a women stepping over the line. The Puritan belief that a women?s place is in the home, perturbed Bradstreet. She did not agree with the cultural bias toward women in her time. Bradstreet was criticized harshly for her role as a female writer; nonetheless, she wrote more and more about being a woman. Bradstreet used her feminine side in her poetry to fight her inner struggles. She showed the world that being a woman was to her advantage in the realm of her poetry. Bradstreet uses a variety of metaphors throughout her poetry, but the metaphor that shows her struggles with being a woman is her metaphor of a mother to a child. This metaphor is seen in two of her poems, ?The Author to Her Book,? and, ?In Reference to Her Children, 23 June 1659.? In these two poems, Bradstreet uses the metaphor of a mother to her child to accentuate her role as a female and a mother.

In the poem, ?The Author to Her Book?, Bradstreet uses the metaphor of a mother to a child to cope with her struggles of shame and pride toward her book. She addresses the book as if it was a child and compares it to one that is misbehaving and embarrassing. Bradstreet is embarrassed by her, ?ill-form?d offspring of my feeble brain (l. 1).? Even though she is embarrassed by her work, she lets the reader know that it is by her own fault that it is deformed. ?Who after birth did?st by my side remain, / Till snatcht by friends, less wise than true / Who thee abroad expos?d to public view, (ll. 2-4).? She nursed the child from birth, but it was unexpectedly taken from her and that is why the child is ?ill form?d?. Her brother with out her consent published Bradstreet?s works therefore; the poetry was not ready to be published. She likens this embarrassment to that a mother would have dealing with an unruly child.

Made thee in rags halting to th? press to trudge,

Where errors were not lessened (all may judge).

At thy return my blushing was not small,

My rambling brat (in print) should mother call;

I cast thee by as one unfit for light,

Thy visage was so irksome in my sight; (ll. 6-10).

In this passage, she uses the word mother. Along with the words offspring and birth, she builds up her metaphor of her poetry as a child. As would a mother birth a child into the world, Bradstreet has birthed her poetry.

Bradstreet goes on to expand her metaphor to show her feelings of pride toward her work. She shows her feelings toward her work in the metaphor of parental love. ?Yet being mine own, at length affection would/ They blemishes amend, if so I could: (ll.11-12).? As a mother of eight, Bradstreet knows how to raise her children to the best of her ability and tries to do the same with her poetry. As a mother would try to further the movement, physically and spiritually, of her child, Bradstreet tries to do the same with her poems.

I wash?d thy face, but more defects I saw,

And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.

I stretcht thy joints to make thee even feet,

Yet still thou run?st more hobbling that is meet; (ll.13-16)

Bradstreet tries very hard to make her child perfect. While a parent is always striving for perfection in their child, likewise, Bradstreet is searching for the same perfection in her writing. Even though she cannot reach this unattainable perfection, she still feels pride and ?affection?. Bradstreet knows that even though the child has faults and is not perfect, that she must let go. ?In this array, ?mongst vulgars may?st roam (l.19).? The child is on his or her own now and left to the prey of the critics.

This poem, ?The Author to Her Book,? shows the struggles of the first American writer. With that writer being a woman, the struggles are even greater. Bradstreet is struggling with feelings of both embarrassment and pride toward her work. In the end she lets the child (her writings) go, knowing that she has done the best she could to raise them. The next of Bradstreet?s poems, ?In Reference to Her Children, 23 June 1659,? is also about a mother and her children, and letting go.

Bradstreet uses the mother to child metaphor in, ?In Reference to Her Children, 23 June 1659,? to cope with the flight of her children from the nest. She is fearful of her children in a world where she can no longer protect them. In the poem she is literally suffering from empty nest syndrome. ?I had eight birds hatcht in one nest, / Four cocks there were and hens the rest (ll.1-2).? Bradstreet has eight children, four boys and four girls, whom she spent the majority of her life caring for. She discusses the pains of each child leaving her nest, till she is left with no one. ?If the birds could weep, then would my tears/ Let others know what are my fears (ll. 41-42).? As a mother, she is worried as to what might happen to her children when she is no longer in control of their care. ?Whilst pecking corn, and void of care/ They fall un?wares in fowler?s snare (ll. 45-46).? Her fear here is that one of her birds will be shot by a hunter while her child is carelessly feeding on some corn. Feelings of fear fill the mother when she thinks of her children being caught on a tree coated with lime, or being the prey of a hawk. The mother bird wishes that she could still have her birds with her to spread her wings over them.

And knew what thoughts there sadly rest,

Great was my pain when you I bred,

Great was my care when you I fed,

Long did I keep you soft and warm,

And with my wings kept off all harm, (ll.54-58)

Although the mother bird wants to keep watch over her chicks, she realizes that they must leave the nest.

The mother bird now begins to think of the day that she too must leave the nest and die. This is the fear that correlates with empty nest syndrome. Now that the children are gone all the mother can do is wait till it is her time to go. ?Mean while my days in tunes I?ll spend, / Till my weak lays with me shall end (ll. 67-68).? The mother bird still has her poems and song to sing. She will sit in the woods and sing till it is time to go to heaven.

But sing, my time so near is spent,

And from the top bough take my flight,

Into a country beyond sight,

Where old ones instantly grow young,

And there with seraphims set song:

No seasons cold, nor storms they see,

But spring last to eternity (ll.74-80).

The mother bird is having allusions to heaven, which is all she has to look forward to now that her children are gone. Even when the mother bird is in heaven she will still be with her children. ?Thus gone amongst you I may live/ And dead, yet speak, and counsel give: (ll. 91-92).? In the hearts and conscious of her children, she will always be with them. With the thoughts of heaven, the mother?s fears subside. Even though she must say good-bye to her beloved children, she is happy as long as they are happy.

Being a Puritan woman in the seventeenth century, and also a writer, Anne Bradstreet faced many adversities. For the soul purpose of her being a woman, she was criticized to every extent. Bradstreet rose above the criticisms and hurdled the obstacles that faced her. Her biggest challenge in the literary world was her womanhood. Bradstreet used her biggest downfall to her advantage in her writing. In the poem, ?The Author to Her Child,? she likens her book to that of a child and tries to over come the struggles between pride and embarrassment. With her poem, ?In Reference to Her Children, 23 June 1659,? Bradstreet also forms a metaphor with her children leaving the nest. Her fears of empty nest syndrome are over come by her Puritan beliefs that she will one day be able to reside over her children in heaven.