

AP Literature and Composition / Pipolo

The Author to Her Book

Anne Bradstreet Student Sample *In-Class*

Poetic Explication

Question 2 (Suggested time-40 minutes.)

AP Prompt: Read carefully the following poem by colonial American poet, Anne Bradstreet. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss how the poem’s controlling metaphor expresses the complex attitude of the speaker.

Student Response: Keep in mind that these high pressure timed responses **do not** need to be flawless. The AP graders expect them to be “excellent first drafts.”

Introduction:

In Anne Bradstreet’s “The Author to Her Book,” the speaker establishes a controlling metaphor comparing her book to a child. She does this in order to express her feelings towards *her* work. She equates the author to a mother and the book to a child while demonstrating the tension she feels between pride and shame. Although the speaker thinks that her child, the book, is imperfect, she cannot help but love it because it is her creation.

Notice how this writer does not restate the prompt. She answers it immediately

and effectively. She begins the analysis right off. She alerts the reader/grader that she understands the prompt's task and she understands the poem.

The opening lines introduce the extended metaphor, as she speaks to the writing as if it were her child. The negative connotation is apparent as the speaker refers to the book as the “ill-formed offspring” of her “feeble brain” (1). She expresses that “after birth” her child remained by her side, as her book was not yet published (2). The speaker admits that the book was “snatched” by “friends, less wise than true,” indicating her hesitancy and unwillingness for the book to be “exposed to public view” (2-4). She says she “made thee in rags,” expressing her belief that the book was unfinished and not yet perfected (5). Nevertheless, it went “to the press” and was printed anyway, “where errors were not lessened” (5-6). The speaker states, “all may judge,” to convey her acute disappointment and awareness that the book, her child, was not ready for the world to judge (6).

*Integration of quoted text is the **only** acceptable quoting style. No chunking of large excerpts. Be sure you are integrating with attention to grammar, usage, and antecedent agreement. Be sure you are quoting exactly as it is in the poem/text. Try not to change anything by adding brackets. (We will discuss this as a class) Also, notice how the parenthetical line numbers do not interrupt the flow of the sentence. They come at the end. This is cleaner. Notice how the writer is moving down the poem in a sequential and organized way. This is **not the only** way to explicate, but certain poems lend themselves to this. Bradstreet's does.*

The speaker confesses, “At thy return my blushing was not small,” emphasizing the degree of embarrassment she feels (7). She calls her book “My rambling brat,” again equating the book to a child and concurrently expressing her dissatisfaction with it (8). She is even scolding. Her unhappiness with her work is shown as she calls it “unfit for light” and “irksome” (9-10).

However, near mid poem, the speaker acknowledges, “Yet being mine own, at length affection would / Thy blemishes amend if so I could” (11-12). There is a slight tone shift here. Since the book is her creation, she still loves it. This is clearly like the unconditional love a mother has for a child. She attempts to perfect her work, but, ironically, the more she tries to fix it, the “more defects” she sees and the more errors she makes (13). She “washed” its face and “rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw” (13-14). The imagery here conjures a mother bathing her baby and trying to make that child presentable. Even as she stretches her child’s joints, the child is still left “hobbling” (16). The speaker expresses her wishes for the book to come out better, saying, “in better dress to trim thee was my mind” (17). The mother wants to dress her child nicely, but is only able to offer her “homespun cloth” which she feels is inadequate (18). This is another reference to humble attire and clothing (see ‘rags’ line 5). The dress and cloth are part of the metaphor and represent the actual words and characters of her book.

In the concluding lines, the author/mother/speaker sends her child out into the world. And, like a mother, she does so with advice and a caution. She says, “In critics’ hands beware thou dost not come” (20). However, the speaker knows that is exactly where the book/child will end up. That is exactly what this poem is about. By comparing her book to a child, the speaker is able to express her complex attitude of love, pride and shame. She does this as she struggles to come to terms with these feelings. She instructs her child, “If for thy Father asked, say thou had’st none,” conveying her sentiment of maternal pride and independence (22). In the closing rhyming couplet, the words “poor” and “door” ring as both a mother’s justification and her sad

acknowledgment that the child/book's fate is now out of her control (23-24). That said, although she sees all the flaws and shortcomings of her book, her child, she cannot help but feel love and a sense of satisfaction.

The concluding paragraph (of explications that move in sequence from top to bottom), ends in the end of what you are analyzing. In other words, use the poem's text and whatever the poet is doing in the closing moments, to conclude your paper. This allows you time to create a more complete analysis, rather than worrying about a formulaic conclusion.