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AP Literature 2A

POD Response 3

Cinderella

Fairy tales are famous for the happily-ever-after ending of each and every story. However, Anne Sexton's version of *Cinderella* is different from the original. She tells the Grimm's version that is a darker and the complete opposite version from the happy fairy tale story that Disney makes it out to be.

Sexton starts off the poem by giving the readers an idea of the original Cinderella that everyone has heard before. Yet, when she starts telling her own version of the story, it's not quite the same as the happy version.

Cinderella is still depicted as being the poor girl who serves her family and is dressed in rags. However, her fairy godmother is not a fairy, but actually white dove. There is the original ball scene in which Cinderella wants to attend but her stepmother would not allow her to. Evidently, like the story goes, she makes it to the ball and meets her prince charming. Cinderella leaves hastily, the prince tries to find her by using her slippers as a guide, the step sisters try the slippers on and even cuts off parts of their feet in order to make it fit, but in the end it is Cinderella who is the rightful owner. The prince marries Cinderella and they live happily ever after or so the story may appear.

Not looking beyond the literal meaning of this poem, it appears as if Sexton's poem *Cinderella* is actually quite similar with some small yet obvious differences from the Disney version. The Grimm and original version of *Cinderella* has the basic idea of the story: Cinderella

is a poor young women who was able to find her prince charming. However, looking at Sexton's version of *Cinderella* in depth, it makes one question what is actually, truly being said.

The first four stanza of Sexton's version of *Cinderella* starts off in a parallel structure repeating "that story," and then goes on to give a brief summary of each one. Afterwards, Sexton dives into her own story about Cinderella and how her mother died and her father remarried a wicked woman who had two daughters. Cinderella is their maid and sleeps on the "sooty hearth" and is described to be "walked[ing] around looking like Al Jolson."

Al Jolson was an American singer, comedian, and actor who enjoyed performing in his blackface make-up. It is ironic how Cinderella is being described to him since he chose to put on this make-up while Cinderella has no choice because of the sad situation that she is in.

In this Grimm version of *Cinderella*, her father does not favor Cinderella as much as his two step daughters. He gave his step daughters beautiful gifts and only gave Cinderella a simple twig in which she planted on her mother's grave that later on grew to become a tree. There was a white dove that sat on this tree and anything that Cinderella wished for the dove would drop down for her.

Sexton makes it clear that the white dove is important and to take note of him. The dove is symbolic being white rather than black or a raven since it by doing so, it will give readers the vibe that the bird is dark and evil. This white dove appears to be a sort of replica of Cinderella's mother for she cries "Mama! Mama!" to the bird to help aid her in going to the ball. The white dove, or Cinderella's mother, then goes retrieve a golden dress and a pair of golden slippers for her to wear to attend the ball.

Cinderella dances with the prince for three days but would always leave hastily. The prince was able to obtain her golden slipper in order to help him find her. The prince took the

slipper to her house and had one of the step sister's try it on. The first step sister's big toe was cut off in order to make the shoe fit. Oblivious to the blood, the prince rode away with her. However, the white dove informed the prince of the blood and he then took her back. The second step sister did as the first and cut off her heel in order to make the slipper fit. In this stanza, Sexton wrote, "That is the way with amputations/They don't just heal up like a wish."

This is an interesting statement that refers to those who surgically change themselves in order to make themselves "perfect." Yet, cuts leave scars that never truly heal no matter how hard one wishes. Females especially undergo such procedures to mask their imperfections in hopes that they too, like Cinderella, will find their prince charming.

Eventually, Cinderella tries on the slipper and it fits so the prince marries her. There is some gruesome detail of the white dove pecking out the two step sisters' eyes when they went to attend Cinderella's wedding. However, probably the most interesting part of this poem is the final stanza itself. Sexton states that Cinderella and her prince lived happily ever after, but she describes them as being similar to two dolls that sit in a museum case—timeless with their forever plastered on smiles that lasts for eternity.

Cinderella and her prince are never aging. Hence, they will never have to deal with the things that come with age. They are timeless and therefore fake. This type of happy ending does not exist. Sexton's concludes with the words "that story" to emphasize her sarcasm and lack of belief of such a perfect ending as this. People desire this type of scenario that is not real. However, what is real is the moments that come with age and not the happily-ever-after that can only ever be a fairy tale.