

Essay on cinderella – anne sexton

[Experience](#), [Happiness](#)



What I especially enjoyed about this poem is its comic and sarcastic tone. The title 'Cinderella' leads us to expect a poem that deals with the world of fairy tales and a vaguely medieval setting, but Sexton achieves humor by defeating our expectations in the first four verses. The first four verses reveal a recognisably modern world and this creates humor - modern details are juxtaposed with a very well-known fairy tale. In each of the first four stanzas Sexton describes a rags-to-riches story. Someone who is poor and unimportant, by a simple twist of fate or by hard work, becomes rich and successful. But each stanza ends with the line "That story" or as she states in the opening line "You always read about it", implying rather cynically that you might read about it, but it rarely happens. In a sense these are modern fairy tales: in the second stanza, to take one example, the Danish nursemaid, falls in love with oldest son of a rich family and moves not from rags to riches but from diapers to Dior.

Then Sexton turns to the story of Cinderella. She changes the traditional plot slightly and she also uses modern terms and references to remind us of the real world we live in now. For example, Cinderella having worked all day cleaning the fire "walked around looking like Al Jolson." These juxtapositions of the traditional story with modern references maintain a slightly comic tone. Her step-mother and step-sisters treat her appallingly and her father showers gifts on them, but only gives Cinderella a twig. However, in this major change from the traditional story, the twig grows into a tree and a white dove lives in it.

The ball is described in modern terms as a "marriage market" and the dove dresses her appropriately for the ball where she makes a great impression

on the prince. The testing of the shoe follows the original story, but Sexton adds blunt, modern scenes of self-harm: the older step-sister cuts off her toe to fit the shoe; the younger cuts off her heel. Perhaps Sexton is suggesting the lengths that women will go to attract a husband. What is most striking is the deadpan, down-to-earth way that Sexton expresses all this:

The prince rode away with her until the white dove

told him to look at the blood pouring forth.

That is the way with amputations.

They don't heal up like a wish.

The other sister cut off her heel

but the blood told as blood will.

The prince was getting tired.

He began to feel like a used shoe salesman.

And, as in the traditional story, the prince locates Cinderella and they live happily ever after, but Sexton's final lines suggest that total happiness does not exist, and is unreal as the modern fairy stories she began the poem with:

never bothered by diapers or dust,

never arguing over the timing of an egg,

never telling the same story twice,

never getting a middle-aged spread,

their darling smiles pasted on for all eternity.

Regular Bobbsey twins.

That story.

And her decision to end the poem with “ That story” suggests that the pure happiness found in fairy tales is a myth, an illusion – just a story.