

## SHREK SERIES AND THE TRADITIONAL FAIRY TALES

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### Abstract

Childrens' literature has always taken a new twist and new ending apart from the traditional ways of writing down anything. Here, evolution of the fairy tales can be traced to Grimm Brothers and Charles Perrault, who have put together the tales told orally and made into stories that have entertained children for a long period of time. The Shrek series focuses on these fairytales with the twist to the traditional roles played by the heroes and villains. Here, Shrek an ogre is the Hero, while the aspiring to be King of Duloc, Lord Farquaad is the villain. There is a role reversal of the qualities portrayed by the villain and hero. Shrek is caring, loving and is a one who can melt anyone's heart, while Lord Farquaad is a man who is obsessed with his possessions. On the other hand, Princess Fiona has to be rescued who is waiting in the highest room of the tallest tower, and she can only be rescued by her true love's kiss. Shrek and Fiona fall in love and live their lives happily ever after just like any other fairytale ending.

**Keywords:** fairytales, adventure, happiness, archetypes, friendship, belongingness.

*Shrek* is a comical animated fairytale based on literary archetypes. This fairytale has been over thrown using many presentational devices throughout the film. The themes of friendship, love, belongingness is seen in the movie. *Shrek* begins with a traditional opening of, 'Once upon a time there was lovely princess, but the characters and the sequence in which it is placed is not the same as a traditional fairy tale's storyline. *Shrek I* is a American computer animated comedy film based on the 1990 fairytale picture of the same name by William Steig.

It shares different genres such as adventure, animation, comedy and romance In this story, Shrek finds his swamp run over by fairy tale creatures who have been banished by a corrupt Lord Farquaad, aspiring to be the King. Shrek makes a deal with Farquaad to regain control of the swamp in return for rescuing Princess Fiona whom the soon to be King intends to marry.

With the help of the Donkey, Shrek embarks on his quest but soon falls in love with Princess Fiona, who is hiding a secret that will change his life forever where she had an enchantment upon her of a fearful sore which could be broken only by love's first kiss. She waited in the highest room of the tallest tower for her true love's first kiss.

Shrek, the protagonist is a territorial green ogre who enjoys the freedom and the company of his swamp. While he is enjoying, he is encountered by various fairy tale creatures who have come there with the order of Lord Farquaad, the antagonist and ruler of Duloc. Shrek wants to ask Lord Farquaad to vacate them somewhere else and finds a talking Donkey who is the only one who will be able to guide him to Duloc.

In the meantime Lord Farquaad has no clue of where these fairytale creatures have gone and tortures Gingerbread Man to tell him the whereabouts of the others. At that point his guards find something he had been searching for a long time, the Magic Mirror, he asks the mirror if his Kingdom is the fairest of all, where he gets an answer saying he is not even a King and if he has to be one, he has to marry a Princess. He decides to marry Princess Fiona who is trapped inside the castle by a Dragon out of all the Princesses he was shown. Unable to complete this task on his own, he organizes a tournament wherein the winner gets the chance to rescue Princess Fiona. While the tournament is going on Shrek and the Donkey arrive and defeat all of Farquaad's Knights. Lord Farquaad declares them champions and asks them to rescue Princess Fiona under the threat of death and promises to move the fairytale creatures from Shrek's swamp if he succeeds.

Shrek and Donkey start their journey to rescue the Princess, they travel to the castle where they get noticed by a Dragon. The Donkey tries to talk sweetly to the Dragon on realising it is a female, and she takes him to her chamber, while Shrek goes on to rescue Princess Fiona, but she is disappointed that Shrek is an ogre and her Prince Charming has not come to rescue her. Fiona is adamant that Lord Farquaad comes in person, but Shrek carries her all the way to Duloc. Shrek and Fiona find out that they have a lot in common and they begin to fall in love. On their way back, for one night the trio take shelter in a windmill, where the donkey hears strange noises from within and sees Princess Fiona being transformed into a ogre. She tells the Donkey that she was cursed during childhood to transform every night and that only her true love's kiss will change her to "love's true form".

Shrek had planned to confess his feelings for her, but overhears their conversation and is heartbroken when he misunderstands her comment about being an ugly beast. He assumes it to be told to him. Donkey insists Fiona to tell Shrek about her curse, but its dawn already and she turns back into the beautiful Princess she was. By then Shrek has already brought Lord Farquaad to the windmill and she being confused with Shrek's decision accepts Lord Farquaad's marriage proposal and requests that they get married before nightfall. The couple returns to Duloc, while Shrek abandons Donkey and with disappointment returns to the swamp which has already been vacated.

Donkey tells Shrek about the conversation and urges Shrek to go after Fiona before she is married. They quickly travel to Duloc by riding on the Dragon who had escaped and followed the Donkey. Shrek interrupts the wedding before Farquaad and Fiona can kiss and tells her that he is not her true love and is only marrying her to become the King. She says 'by night one way, by day another', Fiona tells this before nightfall, the sun sets and Fiona turns from a Princess into an ogre in front of everyone, where Shrek understands the reality of the conversation he overheard. Shrek kisses her and she still remains an ogre much to her surprise. They finally marry and leave for their honeymoon and return to the swamp where Shrek and his wife live happily.

In the second part of Shrek, the movie opens with 'Once upon a time in a Kingdom Far Far Away' the King and Queen were blessed with a beautiful baby girl and throughout the land everyone was happy, but when the sun went down they saw that their daughter was cursed with a frightful enchantment that took hold of everyone. Desperate they sought the help of a fairy godmother who had them lock the young princess away in a tower to await the kiss of the handsome Prince Charming. Prince Charming decided to meet his Princess by travelling through the scorching heat, blistering cold for many days and nights risking his life in the dragons cave. Once he arrives there, he goes up through the tower just to find out that

his princess is missing and gets a message from the fox that Princess Fiona is on her honeymoon and he stands there in shock.

The Fairy Godmother comes to meet Princess Fiona and as she introduces Shrek to be her husband, The Fairy Godmother too is surprised with that the fact how it is even possible, for which Fiona tells that she was rescued by Shrek. As the godmother bids farewell for that meet, she drops her card which says 'happiness is a tear drop away'. As she departs, she catches hold of King Harold and asks about the promise of getting Prince Charming married to his daughter Princess Fiona, but she is upset about the fact that his daughter has married a "gender confused Orge". King Harold does not accept the accusation made by the Fairy Godmother, for which he tells that it was Prince Charming's mistake that he didn't reach there on time to give her the kiss and free her from the tower.

Meanwhile Shrek has read Fiona's diary and reads her secrets and goes on a search for this Prince Charming as well as the Fairy Godmother with Donkey and Puss in Boots. They have met a new friend in Puss in boots who helps them with the directions. As they have arrived, they ask the Fairy Godmother about the secret of living happily ever after, for which she goes through all her fairytale books such as Cinderella, Tumberlina, Hansel and Gretel, The Golden Bird, The Little Mermaid, The Pretty Woman so on and acclaims that there have been no ogre who have ever had a happy ending.

The Ogre and his friends try to explore the experimenting hall of the Fairy Godmother and get along with them a 'happily ever after potion' which read 'for you and your true love', if one of you drinks this, you both will be find happiness, comfort and beauty divine. Shrek and Donkey drink this potion and by a night's time they have changed their appearance to a young and handsome man and to a white horse. As they get back to the Kingdom Far Far Away, Fiona isn't able to recognize either Shrek or Donkey. At that point the Fairy Godmother tries to execute another plan, but trying to entrap Shrek and make Fiona meet Prince Charming. Fiona being fooled by the disguise accepts Prince Charming to be her husband.

The wedding is arranged and both are happy about this fact. Prince Charming tries all ways and means to get the kiss from Fiona, but she is confused with the unusual behaviour of 'Shrek'. Shrek's friends have rescued him from the trap and all make a grand entry to the wedding ceremony and reveal the truth. While they fight among themselves, Fairy Godmother is very sure of the execution of her plan where she had asked King Harold to give her the potion before she walked down the aisle. Prince Charming goes on to kiss her, but nothing happens to Princess Fiona and in anger, slaps him. The Fairy Godmother tries to spell her curse on Fiona, which strikes King Harold who turns into Frog Prince. Shrek asks Fiona whether she would like to lead her life like this, for which she says 'I want to live happily ever after with the ogre that I married' and they transform back to the original appearance of how they were as Ogres and they share a kiss again.

In most traditional fairy tales, Ogre is the man eating beast and the prince is all charming who rescues, protects and is loved by all who later lives happily. But in the movie 'Shrek I', the protagonist Shrek takes the role of the Prince and does all that is required of a prince. Princess Fiona on the other hand does not realise the nature of her curse till she meets Shrek. Shrek portrays himself to be a mean, dirty and green ogre but deep down within he has heart that would melt anyone away. All along in the movie in both parts he is being portrayed as the one who helps, saves, rescues, takes all the trouble on himself and tries to solve

everyone's problems. Everyone tries to see him as a creature from a different world but they don't appreciate the efforts he puts in to make others life happy.

On the other hand Prince Charming is the villain along with his mother The Fairy Godmother. He uses his charming way to fool people. Lord Farquaad compliments the character of Prince Charming, by commenting that he not only wants his name and fame but wants the title as the King. He is not marrying Fiona because he loved her and wanted to take away the curse that was enchanted on her as soon as she was born.

King Harold and his wife, parents of Princess Fiona try to be good and caring parents but everything takes a toll on them as they realise the curse. After she is sent to the tower, they saw her only after she married Shrek when they had come for a visit to her father's kingdom. They try to be protective parents, but fail to realise that their love was more important than other material things that they wanted to possess in the kingdom. Ultimately they fail to fulfil their wish and had to accept their daughter's decision of wanting to lead her life with Shrek. King Harold is not happy about the decisions his daughter has made, but in the end he blesses her and her husband and asks them to live happily.

The other characters that appear in *Shrek I* and *II* which are minor representations of characters from various other fairy tales such Snow White and the Dwarfs, the Fox of Red Riding Hood, Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, Rapunzel, Pied Piper, Three Little Pigs, Ginger Bread Man, The Magic Mirror of Snow White, King Harold, Sleeping Beauty, Hansel and Gretel, Puss in Boots, Dragon, Tumberlina, Three Blind Mice etc.

All these minor characters in one or other way try to help Shrek and Princess Fiona, trying to bring Shrek and Fiona together defying all odds. Major role of assisting Shrek is done by Donkey and Puss in Boots, they stand by his side and are happy for everything that he accomplishes. Their bond of friendship has been so strong that they are even ready to risk their lives for the joy that they want to see on their friends face.

The film *Shrek* is unlike traditional fairy tales and is complete reversal of traditional writing methods. The opening scene shows the pages of book being turned where it begins as 'Once upon a time, brave Knights and imprisoned princess all written in old Calligraphy. Suddenly a green hand tears a page from the book and tries to clean himself, an indication that this fairy tale is unlike traditional fairy tales where the handsome Prince saves the Princess and they live happily ever after. In *Shrek* there is a role reversal where an Ogre who is the hero. There are a series of characters who play each other's roles and magical creatures behaving strangely. The film is exactly opposite of what an expected fairy tale story is. To the audience, *Shrek* is initially portrayed to be a wild beast who is a monster eater, but as the movie progresses we come to know the true nature of *Shrek*. He takes the role of a conventional Prince defying the law of fairytale writing by being the one who rescues, saves everyone from trouble, who has a happily ever after life and has meaningful friendships. In contrast to *Shrek*, Lord Farquaad is very cruel, greedy and a mean person. Even though he is not able to marry Princess Fiona because she turned into an ogre, he calls off the wedding and proclaims himself the King. With such a proclamation he does not truly become a conventional King and truly not the way the traditional fairy tales portrays the King to be.

The hero is the villain and the villain is the hero. Having such a role reversal has done away the mindset of having handsome, young and charming fellows as Princes and dirty, wild beast like looking creatures to be villains. The nature of the character is highlighted than its appearance. Prince Charming and Fairy Godmother turn out to be the villains, whereas *Shrek* and his wife, Donkey, Puss in Boots be the Heroes. They stood by each other fighting all

odds in order to help their friend Shrek. Prince Charming is actually the hero in almost all the tales narrated till now and Fairy Godmother acts as a saviour in times of needs and with her magical spells brings out the best in anyone.

Even in the character of the Princess, Princess Fiona is also an ogre, who turns into a beautiful lady and returns to her original form because the curse is portrayed not like the traditional fairy tale Princess. Princess Fiona is a bold, intelligent and is able to fight all odds than sit quiet waiting for help. Princess Fiona is also good at decision making where she tries to keep everything in her life on track and also shares a beautiful married life with Shrek.

The other characters such as the Donkey and the Puss in Boots, even though they play their roles as minor characters they have a major influence on whatever happens to their friend Shrek. They can be called as the masterminds behind the execution of most of their plans and it is only with their effort that Shrek is able to execute all his plans successfully. They act as a backbone for Shrek and Fiona, thinking only good for their friends.

There are many other minor characters, all fairy tale creatures of different fairy tales who in some way or other try their level best to help the hero and his wife. Their cooperation in getting any task done is commendable. Shrek first encounters these fairy tale creatures in his swamp when they have been sent by Lord Farquaad. He does not know them, but he sets them free, they get closer to him and his swamp. They act as support systems to Shrek and celebrate in his happiness and console him in sadness or in his unhappy times.

This movie not being a mere adaptation of the traditional fairy tale, is in its own way beautiful with the deep message that appearance does not matter much, character matters. Shrek and Princess Fiona true nature is revealed when others mingle and be a part of them, otherwise they are portrayed as ugly beasts. Traditional fairy tales have a set standard as to how each character should look like, but here each character is appreciated for the role that he or she is playing.

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