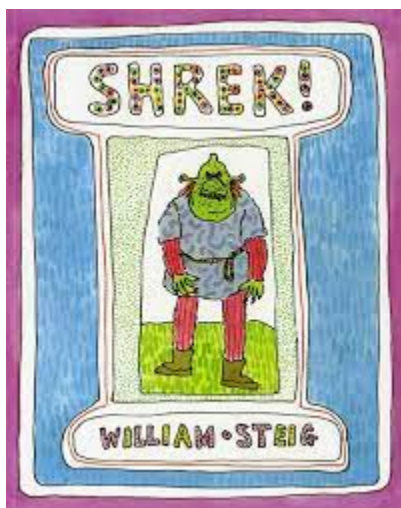


Shrek: Marxist Traditional Masterpiece or Satirized Millennial Modern Work?

Introduction:

When people mention “Cinderella,” most people would be able to describe a beautiful princess in a blue dress who has an evil stepmother and how she went to a ball, lost her shoe, and fell in love with a prince. Many people also can describe “Snow White,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and more. These stories are very popular, especially in Disney, but these aren’t the only fairy tales being told in modern day, however, because when someone mentions *Shrek*, not everyone will know it, but members of the millennial and gen z generations usually can recite the movie from memory. These generations have been invested in the *Shrek* franchise since the first movie. *Shrek* and *Shrek 2* remain immensely popular in these generational cultures, continuing to be some of the highest grossing animated movies of all time. The first *Shrek* movie has even been inducted into the Library of Congress National Film Registry (NPR).

The movie was based on the children’s book, *Shrek!*, by William Steig, which was a huge success when it was published in 1982.



(Amazon)

DreamWorks eventually acquired the rights to use the story and would release not one, but four *Shrek* movies. There would be animated shorts, a Broadway musical, and a plethora of merchandise. Memes would invade United States' pop culture. Fans would make art, fanfiction, and there is even an annual festival surrounding "Shrek." *Shrek* has a huge cultural influence, but is it simply a cute humorous fairy tale or is it a commentary on the harsh realities of our society? *Shrek* talks about body image, being true to who you are, and the capitalistic socio-economic cultural problems of society. The character, Shrek, deals with a fascist leader, being an outcast in society due to stigma, and seeing how the world exploits the lower class and outcasts. These social problems have been talked about for centuries, ever since the Grimm Brothers wrote their first fairy tales, and even before that. *Shrek* takes these historical problems and brings awareness to them in a modern way. Despite being made in the 2000s, *Shrek* encapsulates a lot of continuous problems and historical tradition. These generations still deal with these problems like prejudice, economic inequality, and many more. Millennials and generation Z are influenced by the *Shrek* franchise because of its ability to emphasize historical and societal problems of the past from Grimms Brothers and Marxism, bring forth light that these problems are still relevant today, as well as mix the traditional tropes of the past and the satirical anti-Disney modern ideals all within one franchise.

The Grimm Brothers

Shrek, as a fairy tale, influences society today, but it was not the first fairy tale. Oral folk tales have been going on for centuries within a variety of cultures talking about several topics. These tales come from various countries: China, England, and especially

Germany, and these tales would influence the stories of authors from the United States. Two of the United States' main influencers in American fairy tales lived in Germany. The Grimm Brothers created one of the first written fairy tale books in the world. These tales started as oral entertainments for peasants in the early 1800's. The Brothers collected these stories and created a book of fairy tales, *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, in 1812; it was translated into English in 1826 (Bronner). The Grimm Brothers lived during a time of huge social change. Germany was going through the Industrial Era, which forced their own family into a lower class when their family's jobs were replaced with machines. The brothers, who were 2 of 10 children, were distraught and poor. They sought comfort in oral stories told by their relatives. It occurred to them that these stories had never been written down. Their retellings became a worldwide phenomenon that has influenced writers for multiple generations.

In their retellings, the Grimm Brothers incorporated the struggles they, and many others in their country, faced, including class discrimination, social limitation, and financial hardships. Throughout their stories, they addressed how the lower classes were oppressed and abused by the higher government power. Such inferences were risky as the German government had strict control of the press and would execute those who opposed their rule. According to Jack Zipes,

[the]Grimm Brothers understood the dangers associated with openly expressing controversial issues about German society, and therefore decided to communicate the differences between the socio-economic classes through fairy tales (Zipes).

The Grimms Brothers were in a time period of economical and industrial change, and it was hard to oppose those in charge. They still spoke out about the problems of their country, regardless of what would happen. They are substantial influencers in the fight for change and would influence those in later generations. This is extremely important because today, the younger generations do speak out against the government and fight for change. Today, people in the United States don't have to worry about being executed for their beliefs, but it is still important to understand the fight for change has been passed down from generation to generation.

The Brothers would deal with the struggles of classism and inequality and these insights would be similar to Karl Marx's philosophy, which would follow a few decades later. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published their doctrine, *The Communist Manifesto*, in 1848 (Zipes). Their ideas are defined as: the theory and practice of socialism including the labor theory of value, dialectical materialism, the class struggle, and dictatorship of the proletariat until the establishment of a classless society (Merriam Websters). Marx and Engels and the Grimm Brothers shared concerns about how the upper class and unfair leadership made the lives of the poor more difficult. They acknowledge the hardships laborers must face when they are alienated from the rest of society and exploited by those who control all the wealth (Cicalese). These ideas were embedded in the Grimm Brothers' tale and would influence future writers of fairy tales. Writers of the future, such as DreamWorks writing *Shrek*, would take these ideals and problems and relate them to present time, as they still remain relevant.

As time has gone on, fairy tales themselves have changed drastically. They have traveled outside Germany to other countries and have been influenced by a

variety of cultures and translations. These fairy tale stories are influenced by society, technology, and politics in which they are created. One such adaptor is the United States' own Walt Disney, who would create a multi-billion dollar enterprise surrounding the adaptations of the Grimm Brothers' work.

Changing Fairy Tales: Disney

During the twentieth century, the Disney company took over the entertainment industry with movies, TV shows, theme parks, and merchandise. Many of Disney's works were influenced by the Grimm Brothers, including: "Snow White," "Cinderella," and "Pinocchio." The Grimm Brothers have their version of these stories and the Disney company adapted them for their own work. For example, Disney's version of Cinderella would still have the evil stepmother and stepsisters, a pumpkin carriage, a lost shoe, and a beautiful dress for the ball, but would not include death like in the original.



(Bustle)



(Pinterest)

Since Disney infiltrated the market, people typically are most familiar with the Disney version of these stories. Zipes reflects that, "In our own time, the younger generation [millennials and generation z] is probably best acquainted with the Disney versions of Snow White and Cinderella, only loosely based on Grimms' plots and characterization with much simplification." Many people do not know that originals of these fairy tales came from Grimms Brothers, they just know the Disney version. A Disney version of a fairy tale is full of happy endings and beautiful creatures and everything is described as perfect. The beautiful princesses get their happy ending and the ugly villains do not. In "Snow White," Snow White gets married to a prince and the evil queen is defeated. The Grimm Brothers have the same plot, but they include the Queen wearing a pair of red-hot iron slippers and dancing in them until she drops dead. Not many people know this fact, so they gravitate towards the happy Disney version. The idea of the overwhelming influence of Disney on fairy tales is equated to 'Disneyization' which is "the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world" (Nieguth). Disney has completely taken over many aspects of our society today. The biggest change that the Disney company changed over the years was this idea of a 'happy ending' in fairy tales. The Grimm brothers offered a real outlook of the realities of the world, but Disney pretended like these problems were non-existent. Part of Disneyization is the happiness culture which is pretending like your life will be like Disney movies and everything will turn out fine, which made Disney so popular; people want happy endings. Unfortunately, that is not the reality. There are many problems within the world that younger generations still deal with today, like greed and prejudice,

but Disney creates stories where people always overcome every obstacle. This idea of happiness culture would be implanted into children's minds for decades to come.

The audience for fairy tales is different than in the 1800s due to Disney's drive to make happy endings. Grimm Brothers wrote more for adults, while Disney created content for mostly children. According to *New World Encyclopedia*,

They [Disney] have been accused of simplifying the tales and creating the "fairy tale" ending, in which everything goes right, as opposed to the pain and suffering—and sometimes unhappy endings—of many folk fairy tales (New World Encyclopedia).

Disney chose children to be the key audience for his work. This is different from the Grimms Brothers because their audience was adults who would then teach the lessons from the stories to their children. Walt Disney realized that adults didn't like these fairy tales anymore, so he simplified them, got rid of the suffering, and used a child audience in order to profit as they are the most impressionable viewers. Most Disney movies have this happy ending, as this gives optimism for children. Children love the fluffy, forest animals, the singing animals, and beautiful princesses. They were popular because they offered a happy escape from reality, where everyone was beautiful and everything worked out. This happiness culture has been implanted on millennials and generation z when they were children, so they have grown up with this culture their whole lives. As they became adults, they realized that was not reality and many adults shy away from Disney.

Walt Disney was able to use his successful animated fairy tales to boost a major franchise and bring the fairy tales of the past to the 20th and 21st century. Without

Disney, many stories may have been lost, but without the Grimm Brothers, Disney would not have gotten as much success. The Grimms Brothers set up the platform for Disney and other companies to thrive and in turn, the whole world knows these fairy tales. Today, Disney dominates the animation field, and continues to create and adapt fairy tales, but it is not the only modern animation company in the 21st century. The company DreamWorks, for example, was founded by writers who left the Disney company. Just like Disney, DreamWorks would not have succeeded without the Grimms Brothers. They also would not have succeeded without Disney as they chose to be different from Disney in regards to adapting fairy tales. DreamWorks has created successful movies like *Shrek*, *Shark Tales*, and *Kung Fu Panda*. Like Disney, DreamWorks also adapts fairy tales, but their company transformed the fairy tale into a satirical social commentary.

Changing of Fairy Tales: DreamWorks

The DreamWorks franchise differs from Disney because instead of taking original stories and re-inventing them for children, DreamWorks aims to satirize the tales of the past like from Grimms Brothers. DreamWorks aims to take stereotypes from past fairy tales and change them. These stereotypes are embedded in fairy tales. According to Summer,

“Shrek” aims to undermine the idea that in fairy tales, as Jack Zipes puts it, characters are ‘as-signed a task, and the task is a sign. That is, his or her character will be stereotyped.... the notion that you are only suitable to perform the role that society has assigned you is instinctively unappealing (Summer).

DreamWorks aims to have characters that don't fit the assigned role in society. *Shrek* isn't the first movie which the company used to satirize the common fairy tale. They parodied "Little Red Riding Hood" in *Hoodwinked*, making Red a powerful fighting machine. DreamWorks uses fairy tales in their movies, but they make fun of them as well. They don't put their characters in stereotypical roles.

Shrek is an ogre, but he doesn't fill that role all the way. The Brothers even have stories of horrible ogres. However, Shrek does not follow this particular trope of being a monster, in fact he is the protagonist. According to World Encyclopedia in regards to fairy tale history, "The idea of the ogre has been used as a method of instilling good behavior in children by suggesting that bad behavior attracted and excited ogres, who would then attack, kidnap, or even eat the perpetrator" (World Encyclopedia). Shrek pokes fun at this stereotype in the very beginning of the movie. He is not a monster like the world says he is. He says, "Now is the part where you run away." He does not actually harm them or eat them. In fact, other than for self defense, he doesn't really attack anyone, he doesn't even kill the dragon when saving Fiona. This Shrek is much more than just a fowl monster. He is just living his life and is actually the hero of the story, which differs greatly from the past fairy tales. He doesn't follow the rules that have been decided for him by common fairy tale tropes. He goes against Farquaad and he even falls in love.

Fiona goes against stereotypes too. According to Summer, Dreamworks is "poking fun at and lightly subverting the clichés of fairy tales as a whole," (Summer). These new fairy tales make fun of the fairy tales that came before them. Fiona, for example, would burp and this is not typical princess behavior. DreamWorks makes fun

of princesses by showing that they aren't perfect, they burp just like the average person. This is important because DreamWorks would teach younger generations that you don't have to follow society. They are saying just because you look a certain way or come from a certain background, that doesn't mean you can't follow your dreams and be happy. This is different from the happiness culture brought on by Disney because it offers the cruel reality that some people have to face. This relates to younger generations because it shows that one can overcome bullying, prejudice, and more. DreamWorks uses fairy tales to show that life isn't perfect, but that doesn't mean it isn't great. It is clear that DreamWorks is not Disney and this was the company's goal

Shrek attacking Disney

Disney and Dreamworks have their similarities and differences, but Dreamworks has always been the underdog. This is seen in their networth, as DreamWorks has a net worth today of \$3.8 million (Forges) and Disney has a net worth of \$54.34 billion (Go Banking Rates). DreamWorks was formed because workers from Disney left the company due to unfair treatment. In 1994, Michael Eisner, Disney's Chief Executive, fired his studio chief, Jeffrey Katzenberg. Katzenberg would be joined by David Geffen and Steven Spielberg in creating DreamWorks, which would result in a major lawsuit between DreamWorks and Disney. On top of that there would be a shareholder dispute with Roy Disney (Masters). This shows that there was a major dispute within these companies during this time. DreamWorks took this anger and put a lot of jokes in their movies.

The Disney-aimed jokes are seen in hidden parts of the movies. The song sung in Duloc mirrors "it's a small world." Lord Farquaad consults a mirror, saying, "is this not

the fairest kingdom of all?," making it similar to the evil Queen in "Snow White." It is also rumored that the villain Lord Farquaad is made in the image of Roy Disney, as well as Hitler, making a mocking comparison. The movies, however, are not always subtle. Shrek "open[s] the film by literally wiping his backside with a typical, Disney-esque fairy tale princess story", (Summer). Fiona is not the typical 'Disney-esque' fairy tale princess. She acts helpless in the beginning, but is really a burping princess with fighting moves. Shrek also makes fun of the fact he's an ogre throughout the whole movie, saying stuff like "ya know, grab your torches and pitchforks." Their characters are not the typical Disney heroes. Many Disney princesses break the curse that they are put under, but Fiona chose to be happy instead of breaking the curse. Her true love was an ogre, so she stayed an ogre. They go outside society's standards and this concept is different from Disney's movies at this point prior to the early 2000s. Making characters different from the norm shows how much DreamWorks wanted to be their own company with their own ideas, but still creating fairy tales in their own right.

The *Shrek* franchise not only attacks Disney-like characters, but the animated scenery as well. Summer also states,

"The clearest attack on Disney in the first Shrek film also serves as a useful illustration of another key element of animated parody: representing a more perfect iteration of a genre's setting than can exist in the physical world, and therefore in a purely live-action film" (Summer).

The scenery in the *Shrek* universe is not a beautiful and majestic landscape. Shrek lives in a swamp with mud and bugs. It's not filled with cute woodland creatures and beautiful flowers. DreamWorks shows the ugly and asymmetrical scenery through Shrek. They

insult Disney with the pristine and symmetrical town of Duloc that look suspiciously like the castle in Disneyland.



(Disneyland Resort)



(Australasia)

After all, the song goes “Duloc is a perfect town,” and the Disney franchise aims for perfection, with beautiful people being the good guys, and happy endings.

DreamWorks, however, aims for a broader view of fairy tales that includes the good and bad. They have ogres who burp and live in a muddy swamp, but who are the good guys. DreamWorks influences the younger generations because of their way of describing true reality, but that is okay. Not everything is perfect in this world, and DreamWorks wants to show that that is okay. DreamWorks does change fairy tales, but their *Shrek* franchise does possess some traditional aspects of fairy tales.

Shrek: Traditional Fairy Tale

Shrek takes a lot of very traditional fairy tale tropes and keeps it in the story. In fact, the *Shrek* franchise is much more faithful to traditional fairy tale plots than Disney. According to Alison Lurie, it says that the traditional European fairy tale’s plot contains a:

usual plot a poor boy or girl, through some combination of luck, courage, beauty, kindness, and supernatural help, becomes rich or marries into royalty. In variation, a prince or princess who has fallen under evil enchantment, or been cast out by a cruel relative....Usually the social system is implicitly unquestioned and remains unchanged; what changes is the protagonist. (Lurie)

Shrek follows this traditional plot. Shrek is poor and on the outskirts of society. He had some sort of courage because he rescued Fiona from the tower. A talking donkey could also be described as supernatural help. He would eventually marry Fiona, and while he never leads as king, he is royalty as seen in *Shrek 2* and *Shrek 3*. This quote also applies to Fiona, as she had fallen under an evil enchantment that made her an ogre. Finally, the protagonist, Shrek, does change. He starts the franchise by saying the world has a problem with him and he's better alone, but his family slowly grows. He marries Fiona, has friends, and will eventually have children. He allows people to love him and he is indeed not alone. The traditional plot of a fairy tale is implanted in "Shrek" and this is important because it shows how encapsulating this work is. It can be a modern work, but still can have traditional tropes. It encompasses history, including topics that would be the same as the Grimm Brothers. This is important because it shows how diverse and expansive the *Shrek* franchise really is as works of art.

This story is very similar to traditional plots of fairy tales, but it is not the only example of *Shrek* being influenced by tradition. According to Zipes,

The original fairy tales, that is, the oral folk tales in their Urform, contain elements of political protest and wish-fulfillment that demonstrate the ways through which

oppressed people can withstand and overcome the power of rich and exploitative rulers (Zipes).

This is not only an original fairy tale trope, but overpowering the rich is also a Marxist ideal as the two go hand in hand. The Grimm Brothers had Marxist ideals in their stories and *Shrek* picks up on these themes. In the movie, Lord Farquaad takes the place of the greedy dictator. He is the rich and powerful and the one who orders the actions of his subjects. The dictator is aware of his status, but he knows that he needs a princess to become king. His dictatorship will be a point of political protest. Shrek does not want Farquaad to send fairy tale creatures to take over his swamp, so he travels to Duloc to confront him. He refuses to allow the Bourgeoisie to do whatever they want. So when he does reach Duloc and sees the large tower of the castle and walls, Shrek says, "Do you think he's maybe compensating for something?" This is more than just a humorous anecdote about phallic overcompensation. Shrek did what no citizen of Duloc would dare to do: make fun of Farquaad. For this reason, Shrek is politically protesting him by means of humiliation which makes the movie similar to the original intent of fairy tales. Grimms Brothers did this in their own right, like for example, *The Juniper Tree* talks about a boy who stands up against his stepmother's prejudice and greed (Cicalese). Shrek stood up to Lord Farquaad because he refused to have Lord Farquaad tell him what to do. This shows how much Grimm Brothers influenced the creators of *Shrek* indirectly because of the evidence of political protest. Shrek questions authority and it influences others to do so too.

Shrek isn't the only one who shows Zipes' statement of political protesting. Donkey, for example, also fills the role of political protest and is a lower class character

expressing concerns of oppressed groups aka the fairy tale creatures. He's the one who questions the situation that Shrek should not have to go on a quest to get his swamp back. Donkey is the revolutionary that questions the power of these rulers and this concept is one of the original ideals that influenced fairy tales at the time of Grimm Brothers. Zipes states, "Through history emphasizing the utopian efforts of particular groups to formulate the concerns and needs of oppressed groups." The concept of oppressed groups fighting back against society is also a Marxist ideal, which mixes with the tradition of Grimms Brothers. While Shrek fights back against Lord Farquaad with humor, he ultimately agrees to work for him and retrieve Fiona. Donkey, on the other hand, protests this to Shrek, saying it is not fair that Shrek has to work for Lord Farquaad in order to get back what was his. He thinks Shrek should just take back his land through force if necessary, which is a revolutionist idea. Donkey questions the authority of Lord Farquaad in the traditional sense that Zipes talks about.

All throughout history, dictators take things that don't belong to them and Donkey is someone who questions that. He wonders of the concerns of the oppressed group according to Zipes. He asks Shrek, "Hey, what's your problem Shrek, what you got against the whole world anyway, huh?" This may seem like just a sarcastic dig at Shrek, but Donkey is wondering why Shrek hasn't emerged into society. The bourgeoisie have shut Shrek out and labeled him as 'lesser,' Donkey might be aware of this and phrased it just this way in order to get a reaction. He emphasized the utopian effort of how they've oppressed Shrek in order to get a rise out of him. He was correct as Shrek responds with, "Look, I'm not the one with the problem, okay? It's the world that seems to have a problem with me! They judge me before they get to know me - that's why I'm

better off alone...” Donkey pressured Shrek to talk about his feelings and the audience now realizes that ogres do have feelings. Society has made Shrek the bad guy, despite him not being a bad guy at all. Donkey helped Shrek as ‘an oppressed group’ to realize his concerns.

Oppression is a Marxist ideal as well as a traditional trope of Grimm Brothers. These concepts go hand in hand and integrate their way into the *Shrek* franchise. The ideas of oppression within utopian society as explained by Zipes were relevant in the past and in *Shrek*. This is important for younger generations because it shows that one can stand up for their beliefs in society. Just because someone in power says something, doesn’t mean it should be followed. Younger generations understand this as they grew up with parents of different ideals and different leaders in American society. Marxism was created after the Grimm Brothers and there would be Marxist writers after Karl Marx. Marxism would be influential throughout history and play a key role in the *Shrek* franchise.

Shrek and Marxism

The whole *Shrek* franchise expresses Marxist tropes in some type of way. In the previous section, Jack Zipes describes how in history there would be ‘political protest’ from ‘oppressed groups’ and how this is prevalent in Grimms Brothers traditional tropes. These ideals are also a part of Marxist tropes and are seen in the *Shrek* franchise. There are many Marxist ideals that are particularly relevant in the franchise, for example, Marxist author, Williams, states one of the ideals of ‘Idealization or fantasy, or as an exotic residential or escape leisure function of the dominant order itself’ (Williams). This idea of Marxism is basically saying that society creates a fantasy

environment to escape its own problems. This Marxist ideal is particularly seen in *Shrek* and *Shrek 2* as the seemingly perfect land of Duloc and Far Far Away seem ideal, but they contain a plethora of societal and economic problems. One of these problems is the separation of class.

The Grimm Brothers would write about how their community was separated by the classism of the time. Germany had been going through an industrial revolution and World War I, so certain types of people, social outcasts, were being left in the dust. The term in literature was called *Volksgemeinschaft* and according to *Representing Political Regimes in the Shrek Trilogy*,

Volksgemeinschaft racially defined national community, The whole “Shrek” story starts with the will of Lord Farquaad to get rid of the magical and fairy-tale creatures from his world in order to build a perfect world. They do not fit in, like the Jews, Gypsies, disabled, and homosexuals did not fit in (Nieguth).

This German term is very relevant to *Shrek*. Lord Farquaad wants to get rid of the fairy tale creatures because they don't fit his version of perfection. He calls the creatures “fairy tale trash.” Shrek does not fit his version of perfection either. When Shrek and Donkey come to Duloc to talk to Lord Farquaad, they are greeted with a song:

Welcome to Duloc, such a perfect town

Here we have some rules, let us lay them down

Don't make waves, stay in line

And we'll get along fine

Duloc is a perfect place

This song may be humorous, but it establishes the tone of the town. Shrek does not stay in line or follow the rules. He barges into Farquaad's arena and demands his swamp back. Farquaad sees Shrek and immediately calls him 'hideous,' because he does not match Farquaad's expectations. This relates to Germany during the 19th century as classes of people were pushed aside during this time, especially those of the lower class.

The theme of social class continues in the second movie. In *Shrek 2*, Shrek, Fiona, and Donkey have to go to Far Far Away to meet Fiona's parents. Far Far Away is a kingdom modeled after Los Angeles, where Fiona used to live. As Shrek predicts, the family is not happy to see that Fiona is still an ogre and has married an ogre. A key character in the film, the Fairy Godmother, is introduced, who at the surface seems like a sweet old fairy who wants happy endings for all, but the audience realizes she is cruel and controlling. Her son is Prince Charming, whom the Fairy Godmother and the king and queen had picked to marry Fiona. In this movie, the Fairy Godmother is the reason for class segregation. Nieguth states,

Social class is caused by the fundamental economic structure of work and property. Nonhuman fairy-tale proletariat with run down clothes and the predominantly human-like good looking, nicely dressed bourgeoisie (Nieguth).

This quote directly relates to the second movie where fairy tale creatures are still treated like second class citizens as seen particularly in the scene of Fairy Godmother's factory, despite Fairy Godmother being a fairy tale creature. When Shrek, Donkey, and Puss in Boots travel to the Fairy Godmother's factory to ask her for help, they are greeted by an elf receptionist. In order to trick him into letting them into the back part of

the factory, Shrek says to the elf, “We represent the workers in all magical industries, both evil and benign...Are you feeling at all degraded or oppressed?” He responds with “a little” and points his speaker away so the bourgeoisie Fairy Godmother can’t hear. This scene shows that this working class of fairy tale creatures is under harsh conditions. As Shrek and his companions walk through the factory, they see unregulated conditions, putting the fairy tale creatures in danger. The Fairy Godmother deliberately treats the fairy tale creatures like second class citizens because she sees them as lesser. The economy of Far Far Away was defined by this treatment, so the fairy tale creatures had no choice but to work, or they would not survive in that society. This relates back to the class discrimination that the Grimms Brothers and Marx faced. Yet, the working class fairy tale workers don’t leave the factory and continue to do Fairy Godmother’s bidding. This mistreatment of the fairy tale creatures continues throughout the *Shrek* franchise.

Shrek isn’t the only fairy tale creature that is cast aside, in fact many of them live on the outskirts of society within this movie universe. This prejudice is especially explained in *Shrek 3* which starts with a dying king, who pushes Shrek to be the next heir. Shrek does not want that, so he, Donkey, and Puss in Boots set out to find Arthur, the next heir. Despite accepting his son-in-law, the king still wants Shrek to find a human heir. Even though the king accepts him, he is still seen as an outcast. This is true for other fairy tale creatures in the third movie as well. The three pigs, Pinocchio, the Bad Wolf, and more are seen as good and welcomed in the castle. However, there are ‘unworthy’ fairy tale creatures who are banned from Far Far Away. Prince Charming goes to visit them at a bar and explains to them that they “are more alike than you

think.” He then describes how Captain Hook, The Queen, Rumpelstiltskin, and the ugly stepsister were all done wrong. He says, “Once upon a time, someone decided that we were the losers...who wants their happily ever after?” His manipulation of these fairy tale creatures makes them believe that he is on their side. However, Prince Charming was a part of the Fairy Godmother’s scheme to control the business of the king and the happiness of illusion. Prince Charming, or now the bourgeoisie, seeks to take back control of his status by praying on the lowest of outcasts in society and promising them ‘happily ever after.’ It is a cycle of this classism within the movies that Marxism predicts. The illusion of happiness is a key aspect of Disney movies and so describing the falseness in *Shrek* shows that it doesn’t exist. In Disney, only beautiful creatures get happy endings, just like how Shrek was forced to believe. Shrek was made to believe that he would never be happy because of this illusion of happiness brought on by the bourgeoisie. Despite being accepted, he questions if it is really real, he questions the illusion of happiness.

The illusion of happiness is designed by the bourgeoisie and often influenced the working class into thinking that everything is okay. In Marxist terms, “the modern bourgeois methods of production have so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of social process of production” (Parker). The upper class needs the illusion of happiness for the working class so as to stay productive. This is also prevalent in Disney movies as ‘happiness culture’ as Disney made audience members believe that everything turns out happy. *Shrek* aims to combat this ideology and show how society can’t control oneself and one has a right to decide their own destiny. In the *Shrek*

franchise, business controls the state, as only the Fairy Godmother can maintain the 'happiness' and the rule of the king, who under the dictates of the prevalent," (Nieguth). Fairy Godmother runs a factory based on the idea of happiness. The flashy city of Far Far Away gives material goods an illusion of happiness. The king and queen have a lavish lifestyle and seem like the upper class people in charge, but the Fairy Godmother lets them believe that. Once the king fights back against the Fairy Godmother, everyone is allowed to be truly happy and choose their own path. The king and queen are no longer under control of the Fairy Godmother and Shrek and Fiona can live in their love. This is important because it shows younger generations that they don't need to follow society's rules in order to be happy. Shrek did not let the Fairy Godmother dictate who he loved.

The Fairy Godmother controlled the illusion of happiness and this included the ideology of beauty. The ideology of beauty is prevalent in Disney's work, as all the good characters are beautiful and all the villains are ugly. Marxists pushed away from these beliefs, as many bourgeoisie were described in stories as beautiful, but that didn't make them good people. The Fairy Godmother pushes this concept of beauty. People in Far Far Away are beautiful, which is why they are shocked when Shrek and Fiona come to visit. She does not understand why Fiona chose Shrek instead of her handsome son, Prince Charming. One of the Marxist ideals says that one "must act according to his ideas," must therefore inscribe his own ideas a free subject in the action of his material practice"(Althusser). The idea from Althusser basically describes that ideology or a collective bunch of ideas embedded itself into the consciousness of society. This can be seen in material ideas like the concept of beauty. The Fairy Godmother wants people to

act according to what she sees fit. Her idea of happily ever after is beautiful people falling in love so her potion factory is just that. When Shrek and his friends visit her, asking for advice, she references these ideas, “Well, let's explore that, shall we? Ah. Princess. Cinderella. Here we are. Lived happily ever after. Oh! No ogres! Let's see. Snow White. A handsome prince. Oh, no ogres. Sleeping Beauty. Oh, no ogres!” and ends this rant with “ogres don't live happily ever after.” In her world, no one as ugly as Shrek could be happy, because in her world, everything is perfect and under her control. The forced ideology cannot stand with Shrek. Marxists fight against society's standards and so Shrek realizing that he doesn't need a potion or good looking to deserve love, is substantial which is very important to younger generations. It shows that appearances don't matter for the ones you love.

Dealing with prejudice in society is a key concept in Marxism. As the first movie starts, the audience sees that Shrek is alienated by society. They learn through Donkey that Shrek feels like the world is against him. According to Nieguth,

Shrek is reluctant to enter into the social world because he equated it with problems....he remains overly skeptical about the benefits of living within a society. His actions are mainly motivated by his will to go back and live in his swamp with his true love, Fiona (Nieguth).

The audience realizes in the first movie that Shrek is afraid of the social world. He is often faced with animosity and called names like “thing” or “ugly.” He still continues to live and love in the way he wants to. Society may put restrictions on him, but he stays true to himself. This idea of social outcasting is a Marxist ideal and happens throughout the Shrek series. In *Shrek 2*, when Shrek and Fiona are with the king and queen at

dinner, the king says, “at least we don’t eat our own young.” The Fairy Godmother constantly says, “ogres don’t live happily ever after.” The upper class people of the movie constantly berate him just for being who he is. Even though the king and queen accept Shrek in the third movie, his outcast feelings do not go away. When the king is dying, he says that he needs Shrek to be king, to which Shrek responds, “an ogre? A king?” This concept of being an ogre is so embedded in Shrek’s mind due to the long standing prejudice within the bourgeoisie. It shows how powerful prejudice can be. He overcomes a lot of this prejudice. Marxism has influenced *Shrek* because of this discussion of prejudice. Overcoming prejudice is important in today’s society as many people fight to make sure no one is excluded in their lives. There are laws and movements to prevent such prejudice from happening in the modern world in the United States. *Shrek* influences younger generations today because it shows a character that overcomes this prejudice despite the many obstacles.

It is important to see this progression over the course of the *Shrek* franchise and that Marxism, despite being almost 200 years old, is still influential to literary work today. The *Shrek* franchise encapsulates the Marxist tropes of fighting against prejudice, classism, and illusion of happiness and influences other generations to fight against these concepts too. While Marxism is very influential to this work of art, it is still a work of the 21st century, so it does have some modern interpretations.

Shrek: A Modern Interpretation:

Technology, culture, and environment has changed throughout the ages all throughout the world. Like Germany, the United States also went through an industrial revolution as well as several societal led revolutions. These revolutions would influence

the Grimms Brothers and their work. When their work was translated into English in 1826 and brought to the United States, they would also go through wars, revolutions, technology advances, etc. Society changes, so stories may change as well. Money would be one of the ways that things were advanced.

People would pay money to change their houses, to create different inventions, and they would do that with stories. As many things are moved by money, the fairy tale business began to revolve around that; the stories revolve around the world we live in and what the people want. New worlds of fairy tales are parodied, ironized, meta fictionalized, politically adjusted and pop culture saturated (Poniewozik). This is very relevant with *Shrek* as it is somewhat designed for the modern young person. It constantly makes fun of how old fairy tales worked. Shrek says he is no “prince charming,” and Fiona isn’t necessarily the typical princess as she burps and eats rats. It references pop culture as the opening song of the first *Shrek* movie is the song: “All Star” which became a pop culture musical success. The “fairy tale things” as Shrek calls them, are significantly different than the originals: the Wolf in “Little Red Riding Hood” is docile and a cross-dresser, the three blind mice are used for comedic relief and even little fairies are usually used as light lamps. The *Shrek* franchise is a modern work and goes with the time it is set in. It works with the environment and updates lessons and values based on society, especially lessons for children.

Just like Disney, DreamWorks’ *Shrek* does have messages that are more catered to children. They are not telling the same conclusions as Grimm Fairy Tales. According to *The End of Fairy Tales? How Shrek and Friends have changed children’s stories*, “There are messages aimed at kids. What parent today wants to raise an entitled prince

or a helpless damsel?” and that Dreamworks “sanitized the far-darker originals” (Poniewozik). As a modern company, Dreamworks caters to children, but what makes it so unique and important is that the messages in these stories are really influenced by our society. Parents do not want their children to behave like Cinderella and wait for a prince to come or have someone think they’re entitled to everything as described in happily ever after culture. In the first movie, Fiona may seem like a damsel in distress, but she beats up the Merry Men, entirely by herself. She is perceived as messy and tough, and Dreamworks shows that it’s okay to be yourself. Shrek loves Fiona, not because she was a princess, but because he loved who she was on the inside. When they are captured by Prince Charming with Fiona and locked away, they even say, “we are waiting to be rescued.” However, they turn into fighting machines and help save the day. DreamWorks knows that stories can be extremely influential to kids and the company is writing stories so the coming generations can learn from them. DreamWorks influenced children in a different way than Disney because it didn’t show perfect worlds. It showed realities and every part of the characters, the strength and weaknesses, the beauty and the ugliness. *Shrek* showed how strong children could be and what they could do if they only put their minds to it.

Conclusion:

The *Shrek* franchise has made its impact on society and the world. It changed from a little children’s book into a multi-billion dollar legacy. The funny family movie contains lessons of classism, acceptance, prejudice, and so much more. Despite the early 2000’s animation and the fact that DreamWorks was less successful than Disney, the movie is a key factor in American culture. This movie offers humor, but it really

emphasizes the problems within society. Shrek was an outcast because he was different, the fairy tale creatures were expelled to the swamp because they were different. Lord Farquad, Fairy Godmother, and Prince Charming all represent corrupt leaders as there are still corrupt leaders in this world today. In 2021, millennials and generation z fight for change in society. There's a plethora of movements fighting for economic change, social justice, and against racial prejudice. Many of these movements align with Marxist traits when dealing with the fair treatment of everyone. Millennials and generation z want fair treatment for everyone regardless of color and social background in society, so did Marxists. Millennials and generation z want fair treatment within the working class specifically, so did Marxists. These concepts, along with Grimms Brothers' traditional tropes, influenced *Shrek* and the movie franchise emphasized these traits in order to help future generations. *Shrek* has revolutionized this idea of traditional Marxist ideals with modern societal problems and made a work of art that not only relates to the young people of this generation, but also gives them valuable lessons to live by. It fights against 'happiness culture' derived from Disney and shows that one can be happy without society telling them how to be happy. This generation group loves this movie franchise and has a safe space to express these ideas and fight for change. Shrek is a comedic art, but it is popular for the ideas it enacts, its fight against the wrongs of society, and its ability to call for change.

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