

How do the makers of Shrek subvert the usual conventions of a fairytale using presentational devices?

This essay will explain how the makers of Shrek subvert the usual conventions of a fairytale using presentational devices. To do this I will write about what conventions the makers of Shrek borrow from other fairytales, what presentational devices they used and the characters. The presentational devices I will look at will be the special effects, camera angles, music, lighting and scenery.

In the following paragraph I will talk about the characters in Shrek. The conventional characters of a fairytale are, the hero, the hero's sidekick, the villain and the damsel in distress. The hero is conventionally a young prince or a valiant knight in shining armour and the villain is conventionally an ogre or dragon. In Shrek these roles are reversed. Shrek is the hero/protagonist of the story and he is the ogre and Lord Farquaad is the villain/antagonist, though he is the prince. However only the physical appearance of these characters is not conventional, their personalities still resemble that of their proper roles. Shrek is a good person; he does not like to kill people like ogres are supposed to. He demonstrates this when this when he only scares people off instead of hurting them:

‘This is the part where you run away’

This shows he has characteristics of a ‘good guy’ in that he does not like hurting innocent people, even though they were coming to attack him, he let them be. Farquaad has all the characteristics of a conventional ‘bad guy’:

‘Whoever kills the ogre wins the tournament’

He has no mercy and instantly thinks of death and killing, both evil traits, common to conventional villains. His ambition is also to get rid of the ‘fairytale nonsense’ that is ‘poisoning his perfect world’. This sounds like the same visions of ethnic cleansing as Hitler and Slobodan Milosevic's visions, his physical appearance also resembles that of Napoleon. This may lead us to believe that his character may have been based on previous rulers of countries. Donkey is Shrek's (the hero's) sidekick. Conventionally he should be, as Fiona calls him, a ‘valiant steed’. However he is quite the opposite, he is small and weak and does not help Shrek in any physical way. However he does help Shrek emotionally:

‘Where there's a will, there's a way’

He helps Shrek realise that he will regret it if he doesn't go after Fiona and stop the wedding, so Donkey does help out in his own way, even if it isn't conventional. Fiona is the princess of the story. Conventionally she should be the damsel in distress, the one who needs rescuing and protecting. Even though

she does need rescuing, she proves after that she can protect herself when she beats up Robin Hood and his merry men. Princess Fiona is more of a strong heroine than a weak damsel in distress.

The following paragraph will talk about what conventions the makers of Shrek borrow from other fairytales. One of the biggest things in Shrek that was borrowed from other fairytales are the characters. These characters play on the audiences existing knowledge of fairytales and then at the last second do something that the audience does not expect them to do because it is not in the fairytale. An example of this is when Pinocchio says 'I'm a real boy' and just like in the fairytale his nose grows. The unexpected thing here is when his nose grows it almost hits one of the guards standing near by. Another example is when one of the three pigs says 'He huffed and he puffed and he, signed an eviction notice'. This is used throughout the play as humour and is constantly reminding people of other fairytales. The three main types of intertextuality are all used in Shrek. Parody is demonstrated when the villagers come to attack Shrek. This is a parody from beauty and the beast where the villagers come to attack the beast, however in Shrek he scares the villagers off instead of fighting them, this has been done for comic effect. Imitation is demonstrated at the start when a story is being read from a book. This is an imitation of a start to a classic Disney fairy tale. There are changes though; the voice is Shrek's voice, which is a Scottish accent and conventionally in a Disney the accent would have been English. Also at the end Shrek rips out the page, this is done for humour and comic effect. As Shrek rips out the page he also says 'like that's ever going to happen.' This adds irony because it happens to him. Two allusions are created in the scene where donkey flies. There is an allusion from *Peter Pan* when the pixie dust makes donkey fly and there is an allusion from *Dumbo*:

'You may have seen a house fly, maybe even a superfly but I bet you've never seen a Donkeyfly'

This is done for humour and comic effect again. There is also an allusion that hints at another movie, which is not a fairytale:

'You're going about the right way for a smack bottom.'

Shrek says this line to donkey. Shrek's voice is done by Mike Myers who also stars in *Austin Powers*. This line sounds like something that his character, Austin Powers, would say. This has been done for humour for the older members of the audience. Shrek also borrows parts of plots from fairytales. An example of this is when Shrek has to rescue Princess Fiona from the 'highest room in the highest tower'. This part of the plot is taken from *sleeping beauty*, in which the hero has to slay a dragon and rescue the princess. In Shrek it

was done slightly differently:

‘You haven’t slain the dragon yet?’

This is what princess Fiona says shortly after she has been rescued. Unconventionally Shrek doesn’t slay the dragon and instead gets the princess and runs away.

I will now talk about the presentational devices used in Shrek. The movie was one of the first C.G. (computer generated) movies created that focuses mainly on humans. This meant that new technology had to be used such as P.D.I., which allowed the makers to create complex facial expressions. The makers then combined the P.D.I. program with another called ‘shapers’ to create realistic layers of bone, muscle, fat, skin and clothing, hair and fur. The makers then included other special effects such as fire and liquids to make the movie seem even more real. To create the fire, the makers used motion simulation and shading techniques. As the movie is C.G. this is unconventional of a fairytale because most fairytales are cartoons.

All of the scenery in Shrek has also been computer generated so a lot of thought has gone into it. Many different types of foliage were created inside a ‘digital greenhouse’ and hundreds of trees were made with leaves that react with the slightest breeze. The first scene that we see Shrek in is his swamp. The scenery is very brightly lit and very green and natural. This is to give the audience the impression that Shrek is a good ogre and is not evil like a conventional one would be. The scenery that we first see Lord Farquaad in is a dungeon. The dungeon is very dark a gloomy and is only lit by fire. The whole scene is all very artificial as well. This is to give the audience the impression that Farquaad is evil.

Camera angles and effects are important presentational devices in any movie. ‘*The matrix*’ was a movie that used many different types of innovative camera effects and Shrek has copied a lot of these, for example when Fiona is fighting Robin Hood’s merry men the camera does a 360° external pan and the action all stops, just like ‘*the matrix*’. However Fiona does her hair while this is happening. This plays on the audiences’ expectations and adds humour. Bullet time, a technique where the action is slowed down, is also used when Fiona, Shrek and donkey are running away from the dragon; this is also used for humour. Different camera angles are also used for humour. When we first see Lord Farquaad a low angle shot is used to give the impression that Farquaad is a tall man, the camera then pans vertically upwards to reveal that Farquaad is actually very short. This is also for humour. When donkey first meets Shrek a vertical pan is used from the eyes of Donkey. It shows how large Shrek looks from Donkey’s perspective and adds to the humour when you see that Donkey is still not afraid of Shrek.

Shrek has taken all of the normal conventions of fairytales and subverted them very well to create humour. It has used characters from original fairytales to play on the audiences’ expectations and then changed the characters slightly, away from the audiences’ expectations, to add humour. It

copies classic fairytales as well as modern day movies, such as '*The matrix*', and combines them in an original fairytale. It reverses the roles of ogres and princes and goes totally against all conventional stereotypes. I think that the makers of Shrek were successful in creating an unconventional, exceptionally funny fairytale with a twist.