

## Cinderella or Fiona?

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**Abstract:** *By the advent of technology and mass media, fairy tales appeared in animation forms. Walt Disney and Dream works companies are the pioneers of animated films industry in recent century. They masterfully used different fairy tales to make remarkable animations. As characterization is an important component of any fairy tale, in animations likewise, the spot light is mainly on characters. These known companies made the written heroes and heroines visual. Something that all these characters have in common is beauty but what the beauty is, is our concern. Two of the most renowned heroines of these fairy tales and animations are Cinderella and Fiona. Similar to other changes in history, beauty has also changed its concept from physical to moral. Cinderella was the protagonist of previous generations, a beautiful girl whose rights and belongings have been taken away by her cruel step-mother and sisters, is rescued by the prince only because she was physically beautiful and it was the time when children realized that since she is married to the richest boy in town, she would live happily ever after! Is physical beauty an essence for happiness?! Nowadays children are not amused by beautiful appearances but by confident characters who fight for their lives with love. Fiona, in Shrek animation made by Dream Works, could be just like other fairy tales heroines but she was not coward like Cinderella or other characters. She loved Shrek for his honesty and bravery and his other personality traits therefore she closed her eyes to her beauty and chose to live not as a beautiful princess in a castle but as an ugly ogre in a dirty swamp. This paper sets out to study the changes of beauty concept in classic fairy tales and modern.*

**Keywords:** *beauty, Children literature, fairy tales, characterization, Cinderella, Shrek*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Beauty has continuously been the controversial topic of most of literary works and akin to the changing process of other things, the concept of beauty has changed through time in fairy tales. Cinderella, for instance, is a renowned character in classic fairy tales who is not treated well by her envious step mother and sisters because of her physical beauty and later is rescued by the prince charming, again because of her physical beauty. In fact, beauty is the key factor in this fairy tale which it creates the problem and later the very same thing, fixes it. Not only in classic fairy tales but also in modern fairy tales which are appearing as animations, beauty is the main issue of the story with a slight difference. Classic heroines showed no evidence of confidence and spiritual features and they were mainly loved by the sense of pity not because of their unique features while in modern fairy tales, the heroine devotes her beauty to gain what she wants and fights for it. They are no longer the beautiful angels who wait for someone to rescue them but are those who believe in themselves and battle for their desires. Fiona in Shrek, an animation by Dream Works Company, chose to be an ogre but live with love! This paper will study the concept of beauty in classic fairy tales and modern fairy tales in children literature.

## 2. DISCUSSION

Storytelling has always been considered as an art in cultural form. It has existed in several festivals, cafés, pubs and formal recitals. It is full of professional features in terms of education, morality, therapy and mainly entertainment. It goes without saying that literature is vital to psychological, mental and social development of people therefore it can have a very strong impact on children since they are at the critical period of age when their characteristics are being shaped. As children enjoy the satisfaction of doing the right thing and feel the pain after doing the wrong thing, they develop the emotional side of their moral response to literature and their own lives. Literature warns children about the dangers around them and sharpens their awareness of surroundings; it forms the values and establishes proper social behavior, taking responsibility, generosity and devotion. Literature enables children to experience the pleasure of escaping into a fantasy world or an exciting adventure, it stretches attention spans and makes children empathize with other people's feelings and problems and teaches them how to deal with their own feelings and problems. As young children are developing their identity, they are learning about their features through media portrayals. In most of children literary works, female characters are busy with beauty or housework while men spend time outdoors. Literature is a bridge that transmits social and cultural values from generations to generations. It is childhood that determines the kind of adult to be expected in future hence parents, scholars, teachers and anyone who is in touch with children must be aware of the importance of their jobs. Children literature is a valid tool to breed responsible and cautious generations. Taking into account the short attention span of children, short stories and animations can be considered the most suitable literary forms for children. One of the most significant achievements of the last half of nineteenth century is short story but it does not denote that it did not exist before that. Short stories existed long time before nineteenth century but it was in middle nineteenth century when Edgar Allan Poe introduced it as a definite recognized type of literature. As he introduces the unity of effect in his review on Hawthorne, Poe declares:

“In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences--resulting from weariness or interruption.”

In this statement Poe introduces two dominant features of a short story or as he says, brief tale. First is the unity of effect which suggests that the writer must do her/his best to have the full impression on the reader; to do so, every single element of the story must lead to the creation of the same effect. Second, he believes that writing short texts let a writer compel the readers' soul. As he later elaborates on novel features, he claims that long fiction deprives itself of the immense force derivable from totality. Short stories can be divided into separate parts; fairy tales are a form of short stories which date back to very ancient times. They benefited from a short length that made it possible to be read at one sitting and finished before the readers lose their concentration and interest. In fairy tales, no one element predominates the other elements as in short stories. They possess some special features such as the starting phrase: Once upon a time, the happy ending and using ogres, fairy creatures, goblins and talking animals. Their narrators are neither "original" nor "godlike" nor "inspired." They have been circulating around the world by different writers and tellers in various versions. Telling fairy tales has been considered a "domestic art" at least since Plato in the *Gorgias* referred to the "old wives' tales" told by nurses to amuse and to frighten children. Although virtually all of the national collections of fairy tales compiled in the nineteenth century were the work of men, the tales themselves were ascribed to women narrators. The Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen and the German Brothers Grimm published remarkable works on this field. Later, by the advent technology and the development of mass media, lots of these masterpieces transformed into animations. By using visual aids and special effects they inspired more people around the world specifically children.

One of the main elements in fairy tales and animations is the concept of beauty. It has been said that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” which suggests that different people have different ideas about beauty but aside from this idiom, there must be a definite explanation of beauty. Beauty is the matter of relativity and appreciation; it is well described when it is positioned next to ugliness. Using binary opposition, one can say beauty is not what ugliness is. There was a study on beauty titled: The Real Truth About Beauty managed by a specialist applied research firm

based in New York – in conjunction with Dr. Nancy Etcoff of Harvard University and Dr. Susie Orbach of the London School of Economics. The study consisted of a 3,200-respondent telephone survey, conducted among women aged 18 to 64 in ten countries. Each interview lasted between 20 and 25 minutes (depending on translation length) and respondents were interviewed by native speakers in their own language. This study concluded some interesting facts on definition of beauty from females view points. Two thirds of the participants robustly agreed that physical attractiveness refers to how one looks whereas beauty shows who a person is. They not only agreed on physical attractiveness but also believed that to be beautiful one need to have some certain features such as kindness, confidence, dignity and humor. Beauty is not more equally distributed than is height or intelligence and its definition changes by time to time from culture to culture. In Cinderella story by Grimm brothers, despite the usage of the word “beautiful” for several times, there is no definition of beauty:

“His new wife brought with her two daughters, whose features were beautiful and white, but whose hearts were foul and black.”

In this part beautiful and white are opposed to foul and black which one may portray beauty as whiteness or blondness.

“It happened that one day the king announced a festival that was to last for three days and to which all the beautiful young ladies of the land were invited from whom his son might choose a bride.”

This announcement from the king palace represents the importance of beauty in this fairy tale. The prince is looking for a beautiful young lady as a bride and there are no other criteria such as high virtue or unique spiritual features. The following extract from the story shows the reflection of material life in people. Cinderella could not be recognized even by her step mother and sisters just because she was wearing a dress of gold!

“Her sister and her stepmother had no idea who she was. She looked so beautiful in the dress of gold that they thought she must be the daughter of a foreign king.”

In another part when the prince loses the bride, although they have danced and talked he does not know who she is, and according to the story, the only clue is the shoe size therefore any girl with small feet can be the bride.

“when she stood up and the prince looked her straight in the face, he recognized the beautiful girl with whom he had danced and exclaimed: "She is the true bride."

Notwithstanding the lack of beauty explanation by Grimm brothers, technology made it possible to visualize beauty. Walt Disney as the pioneer of motion pictures and animation industry shared some elements in its animations such as charming princes, luxurious palaces, cruel step families and physical similarities between the heroines of its works. These features were mostly common among the heroines such as owning big eyes, small nose, red lips, slim body, long hair and fair complexion or to summarize it in one word, Barbie. In Cinderella, made in 1950, the heroine is a young fair skinned blond girl who is friend with animals. She is weak, innocent and does not show any sign of power and confidence. She could have defended her rights and stopped being abused by her step family but all she did was crying and waiting for someone to help her. Examining her characteristics, one might wonder why is she the heroine of the story?! As it was mentioned earlier, children are so influenced by these fairy tales and motion pictures hence it is very crucial to consider what kind of material they are close to. Cinderella is one of the known figures among children but does the story possess any didactic value?! Putting aside the point that it gives children hope that every cloud has a silver lining and behave well otherwise you will face the consequences, Cinderella directly leads children to physical and materialistic beauty. Cinderella survived only because she was beautiful and she wore dresses of gold and silver. It is far from the realistic world; children today must learn that it does not matter if you have some beauty features or not, rich or poor, there are always ways to improve and reach their goals.

Shrek is the first fairy tale hero who marries the princess despite his ugly and scary look. The Shrek story written by William Steig has the form of a traditional fairy tale; a knight rescues a captured princess and after the true love's kiss, they get married and live happily ever after. The

dissimilar point about this fairy tale is that the hero and heroine are so ugly. As Steig starts his fairy tale the first parts are devoted to explaining how ugly Shrek and his family are.

“His mother was ugly and his father was ugly, but Shrek was uglier than the two of them put together.”

Steig focuses even more on Shrek’s ugliness when he sets off to the jungle; he is so ugly and scary that the trees and flowers bend aside and lean away, people and animals escape and he even scares away thunder and lightning in the sky. On his way, a witch tells him that he would befriend a donkey and marry an ugly princess.

“Otchky-potchky, itchky-pitch,  
Pay attention to this witch,  
A donkey takes you to a knight,  
Him you conquer in a fight.  
Then you wed a princess who  
Is even uglier than you.  
Ha ha ha and cockadoodle,  
The magic words are Apple Strudel.”

As the word ugly is repeated several times in this fairy tale, one can claim that the main theme of the story is ugliness. According to the traditional fairy tales, ugly people did not have a chance of happiness as it belonged to a rich handsome prince who guaranteed his bride’s happiness. Considering Shrek as a creature who can not deny the fact that he is an ogre, shall he die alone?! Shrek not only inspired children but adults too. Shrek proved that no matter what your inevitable features are, you deserve happiness. The part when he finds his ugly princess follows as below:

“Said Shrek:

Oh, ghastly you,  
with lips of blue,  
your ruddy eyes,  
with carmine sties,  
enchant me.  
I could go on,  
I know you know,  
the reason why,  
I love so,  
you’re ugly!”

“Said the princess:

your nose is so hairy,  
oh, let us not tarry,  
Your look is so scary,  
I think we should marry.”

“Shrek snapped at her nose. She nipped at his ear. They clawed their way into each other’s arms. Like fire and smoke, these two belonged together.”

Steig heroine opposed to Grimm brothers’ heroines had neither dresses of silver and gold nor a Barbie like body. She is just an ugly ogre, with blue lips, ruddy eyes and carmine sties. There is nothing beautiful in her face and body but she finds her true love and lives happily ever after. The

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animated version of Shrek strongly puts beauty against ugliness for reaching happiness even more. It starts with the same way of how a fairy tale starts but not long after that the audiences realize that this time everything is going to be different:

“{Man} Once upon a time there was a lovely princess. But she had an enchantment upon her of a fearful sort which could only be broken by love's first kiss. She was locked away in a castle guarded by a terrible fire-breathing dragon. Many brave knights had attempted to free her from this dreadful prison, but none prevailed. She waited in the dragon's keep in the highest room of the tallest tower for her true love and true love's first kiss.

{Laughing}

Like that's ever gonna happen.

{Paper Rusting, Toilet Flushes}

What a load of –”

Shrek's chuckle mocks the way the traditional fairy tales seem to us today and using the last page to clean himself shows how this story is going to be; as if he flushes all traditional fairy tales in the toilet and begins a new one. Shrek himself is familiar with the way traditional fairy tales proceed because when goes to the castle he knows exactly how to find Fiona. Shrek can be considered an anti-fairy tale, with beginning and ending just like the traditional ones but full of contrasts in between. Shrek portrays a different look for female character in a fairy tale; Fiona in the beginning is a Barbie like figure just like Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping beauty and etc. Shrek presents the ideal woman image in today world when women are so concern about their physical beauty and appearance, Fiona disregards her beauty and stays and ogre. She was cursed as a child and turned into an ogre every night, which was why she was locked in the castle. She had to wait for the prince charming to kiss her and stay in human form but later she realized that Shrek loves her for who she is and that is what true love is all about. A woman in classic never considered herself beautiful for who she is, but to be framed in some structured rules of beauty to present herself as beautiful. Fiona, as a modern woman changes the expectations of the world towards women.

“I can't just marry whoever I want. Take a good look at me, Donkey. I mean, really, who can ever love a beast so hideous and ugly? “Princess” and “ugly” don't go together. That's why I can't stay here with Shrek.”

Saying these words by Fiona manifest how she knows about the rules and traditions of how fairy tales end but she does not surrender. She fights for what she believes and does what she wants. Fiona could easily break the spell forever by kissing prince charming and riding the white horse to the palace pursue her living happily after project but she did not. She kissed Shrek instead, befriended a donkey and stayed in a swamp. In Shrek the third, the Dream works brilliantly challenges Walt Disney heroines. Disney characters have not changed at all; they are a group of Barbies who are jealous of each other's beauty. Their sarcastic comments about each other to ruin confidence not only make the audiences laugh but also highlight the differences between Disney's heroine and Dream work's.

“Sleeping Beauty:

Everything's always about you, isn't it? It's not like your attitude is helping, Snow.

Snow White:

Well may be it just bothers you that I was voted fairest in the land.

Rapunzel:

You mean in that rigged election?

Snow White:

Oh, give me a break [gesturing toward hair] “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down thy golden *extensions!*”

Their differences are highlighted even more when Fiona is encouraging them to fight and defend themselves.

“Snow White:

Who cares who’s running the kingdom anyway?

Fiona:

I care. [Fiona steps forward and challenges them.]

Queen:

And you should all care too.

Fiona:

Alright everyone, we need to find a way out, now. [The Princesses nod in agreement.]

Snow White:

You’re right. [to the other Princesses] Ladies, assume the position!

[Sleeping Beauty falls asleep standing up. Snow White quickly assumes her position by lying down and puckering her lips. Cinderella dusts off a spot, sits down and crosses her legs.]

Fiona:

What are you doing?

Sleeping Beauty:

Waiting to be rescued.

Fiona:

You have got to be kidding me.

Snow White:

Well, what do you expect us to do? We’re just four . . . [notices Doris] I mean, three, super hot princesses, two circus freaks, a pregnant ogre and an old lady. [The Queen smiles and then casually walks by the Princesses.]

Queen:

Hmmm. Excuse me. Old lady coming through. [She walks right up to the brick wall, takes a deep breath and lets out a yell.]

Modern women no longer imprison themselves with housework and wait for male figures to rescue them but they have active roles in society and do not need men to support and take care of them. Fiona’s attempt to change the views of Disney’s heroines is guidance for all women around the world. The message which Shrek gave was that physical beauty is the last important factor of happiness.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Literature is one of the most influential devices in shaping human behavior, attitude and thoughts and its strong impacts can be both beneficial and destructive. Children as one group of the audiences receive several messages by short stories, fairy tales and animations. According to classical fairy tales which their main concerns were physical beauty no wonder that our past children are now so obsessed with plastic surgeries and spending a lot of money on designer clothes. I powerfully believe that if we let our children read proper literature and be exposed to important values we can expect a better society. Starting by Shrek, there are many other animations made for children which are totally didactic and lead children to better future. Today we can say that beauty is no longer the issue; the path to happiness is paved when you select your goals and pursue them. Cinderella and Fiona are the representatives of classic women and modern women; they both have had their ups and downs but the only difference is that Cinderella was rescued by someone else but Fiona rescued herself; now it is time for us to rescue ourselves from wrong beliefs and free ourselves from chains and captivities of tradition.

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