

# KUSHMAN AND "SHREK"

Rick Kushman wrote an article, "The Cast May be Multiracial but the Messages are Still Mixed". He discussed how the New Disney's Cinderella didn't do a very good job at living up to the producers' efforts to present enlightened messages or to revise traditional stereotypes. In the Dreamworks creation of Shrek, I believe that Kushman would not be able to find the same flaws in this movie. Enlightened messages that producers said were to be in the NDC movie, were not supported as well as the enlightened messages in the movie Shrek. The changing of the roles of hero and heroine to present the enlightened messages were far better developed in the movie Shrek as compared with NDC. The efforts of the producers to change old stereotypes in NDC were not as well revised as the old stereotypes in Shrek. Changing the views on women's roles, love relating to beauty, and ugliness relating evil villainy has been changed in Shrek yet not in NDC.

To show my point, let me first begin by briefly reviewing Kushman's major objections to the NDC movie. ABC television and Disney wanted to create a new Cinderella where they said they have an obligation to tweak it enough to send out enlightened messages'. They did so by creating the new revised "Cinderella" in 1997. By expressing their intentions, Kushman states that "the producers invited close scrutiny of their messages so he took up the task of seeing if they lived up to their word. In his article, "The Cast May be Multiracial but the Messages are Still Mixed" he explains why he feels that Disney didn't make the movie as well as the movie producers

lead the media to believe He showed the lack of enlightened messages and how the old stereotypes were still present.

The animated feature, Shrek, was created recently by Dreamworks productions and released in May of 2001. Although the movie producers did not say that they were going to do everything right in this movie by inserting enlightened messages and changing old stereotypes, I believe, however, that it is apparent that it was their intent to do so, making this film more than a typical fairy tale. The movie makes several references to many other fairy tales in a comical fashion as in the capture and disbanding of fairy tale creatures from the city of Dulock. However, to show this is still a fairy tale, the producers also tie in some of familiar fairy tale storylines, for example, Shrek has to rescue a cursed princess that only her one true love can save. Since Shrek shows all the typical signs of a fairy tale, I think we can compare it to the remake of Cinderella. Since both movies are directed at young children, even though one is a cartoon and the other is a live adaptation of a musical, they have both been created for the same audience. Shrek was based on the children's book, Shrek, written by William Steig that was published in 1990. The movie was similar yet not altogether the same. The original books deals with an ugly ogre who finds his love in an ugly princess and together they live ugly ever after. This short picture book only discussed Shrek's journey to find the ugly princess that a witch told him he would marry. So a lot credit has to be given to the film's producers for changing the messages of the original story in a positive way.

Kushman argued that NDC failed to present the new and enlightened

messages proposed by the producers. On the other hand, I believe that Shrek does in fact present new and enlightened messages. The producers stated that the prince in NDC was supposed to be in search of his soulmate, a hero that is looking for more than just another pretty face. However, Kushman states in his article that "the prince falls in love with the beautiful woman at the top of the stairs before he's even spoken to her". This shows the producers' failure to their intended message effectively. In Shrek, he was not looking for a soulmate but just wanted the disbanded fairy tale creatures out of his swamp. But to do this, he had to rescue Princess Fiona from a dragon and bring her back to Lord Farquod. At their first encounter, Shrek realizes how beautiful she is and how ugly he is, yet he focuses on his task of getting her back to Lord Farquod. As they journey back, he discovers her personality and begins to enjoy their time together. Even though she is beautiful and he doesn't believe that anyone so beautiful could love a "hideous beast" like him, he loves her anyway since he likes who she is and not so much what she looks like. Unlike the NDC, Shrek shows that Shrek's love is based on his knowledge of the Princess and not just on how beautiful she might be.

The Disney producers said that they also wanted to portray a heroine, Cinderella, who would take control of her own life. But despite their intent, Kushman shows how her fairy god mother is the one who takes control of Cinderella's life when she "sends Cinderella to the ball to charm the prince with her looks and lets him save her". Kushman argues that "Cinderella is still helpless because she needs a beautiful gown and good wheels and can't afford them" and that "Cinderella's rushing home must mean she no longer has the power within her". This shows another enlightened

message that the producers intended to portray yet was ineffective in communicating. Assuming that the producers of Shrek wanted to do the same thing by showing a woman who can take care of herself, they presented a better argument. Even though at first glance, it may seem that the princess was helpless and wanted to be rescued by her "one true love", she showed she could kick some butt when put to the test. Momentarily taken from Shrek by Robin and his merry men of the forest, she lets loose with a barrage of flying kicks in a kung fu type fighting style while Shrek and donkey, can only watch in amazement. This shows a woman that can take care of herself and doesn't have to depend on a man to protect her, which is the message I'm assuming the producers intended to portray.

Kushman says that NDC also failed to revise some old stereotypes that were present in many fairy tales including Cinderella; however, I believe that Shrek addresses some of the same stereotypes that Kushman brings up in his arguments. One stereotype that Kushman saw in NDC was that women are limited in what they can do and that the only thing they have to look forward to is marriage. In NDC, the "evil stepmother reminds Cinderella's stepsisters that 'this isn't about love, it's about marriage.'" Kushman argues that "although the stepmother is the villain, we still get the classic, destructive images of women as gold diggers." In Shrek, however, love and not wealth and power is what is really important in life. At first, Princess Fiona believes that she needs a handsome prince to break the evil spell so she can be beautiful. And if she is beautiful, she and her true love will live happily ever after. But in the end, even though she can have the wealthy and powerful Lord Farquod, she is willing to go

for the one she loves instead, even if that means she has to face her greatest fear and show her ugly side. She chooses the love of Shrek and becomes ugly herself forever which revises the old stereotype of women as gold diggers and that women only marry for money.

Kushman also brings up the stereotype of the prince falling in love with the woman just because she is beautiful. In NDC, the prince sings the "10 Minutes Ago" song and asks the question, "Do I love you because you're beautiful or are you already beautiful because I love you?" Kushman argues that he already answered the question by "knowing her for all of 10 minutes and not yet established an intellectual bond". This stereotype of equating love with looks is not present in Shrek. Lord Farquod falls in love with Princess Fiona when she sees her picture in the mirror. He assumes that she will love him because he is rich. On the other hand, Shrek is ugly and knows it. He is very self-conscious because he feels that no one could love anyone as ugly as him and that people "judge" him before they "get to know" him. Fiona is beautiful but only during the day. She is also self-conscious because she thinks that if her "true love" knew the truth about her, then he would not love her. It is clear that she is ashamed of the way she looks at night because, as she says, "I am a princess and this is not how a princess should look." But at the end of the movie, Fiona decides that instead of marrying Lord Farquod, she will show everyone what she looks like after the sun goes down. As I said, Lord Farquod expresses his disgust and threatens her saying, "I will have you locked back in that tower until the end of your days!" His threat was short lived because he was eaten by the dragon. But when Fiona finally gets a chance to kiss her true love, Shrek, something goes wrong. She is

covered by a magic cloud that shows that the old curse has been broken. But when she stands up, she still looks like an ogre. She says, "I don't understand. I'm supposed to be beautiful." That is when Shrek shows his love for her and says, "But you are beautiful." He knows her and loves her regardless of what she looks like. This shows how the film revises the old stereotype of a man loving a woman simply because she is beautiful.

Lastly, Kushman argues that NDC perpetuates the stereotype where, "the stepsisters aren't really evil, but they're villains because they commit the sin of being unattractive and clumsy". In Shrek, Lord Farquod believes that he is gorgeous and must have a princess that is as beautiful as he is. From our point of view, he is considered evil, not because he is short but rather because of his beliefs and motives in the whole situation. He only wants a princess so he can become a king. Also, he is evil because he cannot see the beauty that lies within a person. For example, when Fiona shows her ugly side at the end, his first reaction is "uh, it's disgusting" and he even holds a knife to her neck. So he is evil because of who he is and because of what he looks like. Also, he is cruel to the fairy tale creatures and even tortures the Gingerbread man. So Shrek changes yet another stereotype that Kushman points out is still present in NDC.

Kushman argued that the NDC did not show the new and enlightened messages that were promised by its producers Through Shrek's journey to rescue the princess and his discovery of his love for Fiona, the movie showed the enlightened message that one has to get to know a person before one can truly love that person. Shrek's producers show also that a woman is capable of taking care of herself and doesn't always need

someone else to help her. Fiona's change from a helpless princess to a kick butt princess also shows the new and enlightened message they intended to communicate. Kushman also argued that NDC did not revise old stereotypes. But by the producers showing Fiona going for Shrek instead of the wealthy prince, they revise old stereotypes and show that all women are not gold diggers out to marry their handsome prince. Shrek also shows that beauty is only skin deep and that what really matters is what a person is like inside. Therefore, Shrek revises the stereotype of falling in love with someone only because they are beautiful or rich and powerful. Lastly, in Shrek, the stereotype that evil people are evil because they are ugly has been changed as well. Lord Farquard shows he is far and above the vilest of all even though he is not the ugliest. So because of these new and enlightened messages in Shrek, I believe Kushman would find it superior to NDC in every way.