Fairy Tale Characters in *Shrek*: Subversion and New Canon

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Abstract

When William Steig wrote in 1990 *Shrek!* he did not know his 30 colorful pages, filled with rhymes and playful language, would be transformed eleven years later into one of the most successful animated feature films, both for children and adults alike, namely, *Shrek* (2001). This box office hit led to the production of three more films, *Shrek 2* (2004), *Shrek the Third* (2007) and *Shrek Forever After* (2010) which have modified the way the classical fairytale canon is understood in the twenty-first century. The entertainment offered by this film is the result of what Raquel Segovia has termed in Spanish *transferencia o trasvase* (223), which includes translation and adaptation in a process where the original text belongs to a printed means of communication (a children's storybook in this case) to be subjected to a transference process. This process transforms the literary text into a new audiovisual product.

The aim of this paper is to analyze how Dreamworks dealt with this transference process while taking into consideration the concepts of subversion of the classical fairytale canon and rewriting. The latter can be understood thanks to the definition given by André Lefevere: "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" ("Mother courage's cucumbers" 4). Examples extracted from the original fairytale will be contrasted with the work done by Dreamworks where characters subvert the traditional stereotypes and functions described by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*.

Key words: Fairy tales; Intersemiotic translation; Animation; *Shrek*; Subversion

Introduction

Fairy tales have always been part of our lives. Many of us were introduced to the magic of a fairytale world even before knowing how to read. Those stories heard first in bed read by our family members were afterwards our first readings in school. Nowadays, surrounded by so many forms of entertainment we still come across fairy tales in the form of comics, films, advertising, TV series and songs which evidence the fact that advances in the entertainment industry promote and serve as means of spreading these tales. Even traditional storytelling is becoming a popular socio-cultural activity among children and parents, the latter being those who appreciate the most the entertainment beneath a tale and the pedagogical nuances underlying them.

Finding out the origin of these stories is a hard quest, as well as learning if they appeared together in the same geographical area or if they were conceived in an independent and simultaneous way. Whether born in one area or in several places, which implies possible divergences in the plot and characters of each tale, traditional tales, as we may recall them, have undergone several transformations throughout history. And changes affecting their plot, characters and structure are being constantly introduced in the literary canon due to each society's comprehension of the story and the usage given to it.

Just as Jack Zipes has described, this is how we understand fairy tales:

> Fairy tales for children as universal, ageless, therapeutic, miraculous, and beautiful. This is the way they have come down to us in history. Inscribed on our minds, as children and then later as adults, is the impression that it is not important to know about the mysterious past of fairy tales just as long as they are there and continue to be written. The past is mysterious. The history of the fairy tale for children is mystery. (*Fairytales* 1-2)

Literature, Polysystem, Children's Literature and Fairy Tales

To underpin some of these reinterpretations of classic fairy tales, there is a need to discuss several key concepts, as will be introduced below, which will allow us to explain how the *Shrek* saga has been able to use fairy tales in a subversive way probably with the purpose of updating fairy tales to the needs of the twenty-first century western society.

Let us first begin by defining fairy tales, which can be considered as the first manifestation of literature in its narrative form and within whose pages there is space for: "lo real y lo maravilloso, la enseñanza y la diversion, lo trágico y lo cómico, el mundo cotidiano y el sueño misterioso, el mundo infantil y el del adulto, el amor y el odio, la crueldad y la bondad, la venganza y la generosidad" (what is real and marvellous, didactics and entertainment, what is tragic and comic, the household world and a mysterious dream, a children's world and the adult's, love and hate, cruelty and kindness, vengeance and generosity) (Diez). Due to the complexity which is found in the plot of any fairytale, these stories allow the representation of human feelings.

Therefore, if we consider the degree of subjectivity used in each tale to narrate human feelings within different cultures and time, meaning the progress and settlement of the ideas of certain social classes of a given society as has been proven in Jack Zipes (*Happily Ever After*), the need to share these imposing ideas and feelings had as an initial form of expression the oral narration. However, the need to preserve tales and the pedagogical material which they included demanded the compilation of these stories in a written form becoming part then of a complex system known as literature.

Thus, based on the description made by the Russian Formalists, literature is considered by André Lefevere as "one of the systems that constitute the 'complex "system of systems"' known as culture" (*Translation* 14). And Even-Zohar (18) has posited that

> "literature" cannot be conceived of as either a set of texts, an aggregate of texts (which seems to be a more advanced approach), or a repertoire. Texts and repertoire are only partial manifestations whose behaviour cannot be explained by their own structure. It is on the level of the literary (poly)system that their behavior is explicable.

In other words, literature cannot be defined only as a set of texts, but a polysystem "in which diverse genres, schools, tendencies, and what have you are constantly jockeying for position, competing with each other for readership, but also for prestige and power" (Holmes, cited in Snell Hornby 24).

Within the literary polysystem, written fairy tales, which were reintroduced into the canonized children's system in the nineteenth century (Shavit 26), gained prestige, first, due to their educational value granted by parents and teachers, second, owed to the fact that these readings were, and still are, chosen by children as their first readings and, third, thanks to the magic in these tales capable of bringing adults back to their childhood. However, when comparing Children's literature to adult's literature,

> children's literature, unlike adult literature, was considered an important vehicle for achieving certain aims in the education of children. This belief, however, meant that children's literature could not be accepted by highbrow society as having a status equal to that of adult literature; consequently, children's literature suffered from an inferior status within the literary polysystem. (Shavit ix)

Despite including then fairy tales as one of the narrations of Children's Literature, there has been and still is a debate among scholars who do not accept Children's Literature as a literary system independent from literature. According to Gisela Marcelo Wirnitzer (13):

> Son muchos los teóricos que admiten que existe LIJ, pero bajo la categoría de "subgénero" o *Durchgangsliteratur*, y también hay quienes admiten y defienden que es auténtica literatura, con un intrínseco valor artístico, pero con unas características propias que la distinguen de la literatura para adultos.
>
> (There are many theorists who admit that an ICL (Independent Children's Literature) exists, but under the category of "subgenre" or *Durchgangsliteratur*, and there are also those who admit and defend that it is an authentic literature with an intrinsic artistic value, but with some intrinsic characteristics which distinguish it from adult literature).

Given then the existence of this literary system, for a long time Children's Literature has seemed to have occupied a marginal place within the literary polysystem. Yet, as Even-Zohar (46) has noted, several criticisms have arisen against this interpretation which, according to Pérez Díaz, demands "desmentir ese rumor harto escuchado de

que la literatura infantil es asunto de poca hondura, de esa gente rarita o incapaz de escribir algo mejor y otras especies por el estilo" (Pérez Díaz, cited in Pascua and Marcelo 211) (those false rumours heard *ad nauseam* that Children's Literature is a superficial matter written by that strange sort of people unable to write anything better or of another kind).

Being aware of this debate, the existence of Children's literature is undeniable and once again Gisela Marcelo Wirnitzer's words must be quoted to explain these researchers' opinion about Children's Literature:

> La literatura infantil y juvenil existe, fundamentalmente, por la presencia de un lector infantil que precisa una adaptación especial a su nivel lingüístico, cultural y literario. Aceptamos pues que la LIJ abarca tanto aquellas obras con valor literario y artístico, escritas específicamente para el público infantil, como aquellas otras que pertenecían a la literatura para adultos y de las que se apropiaron los niños por reunir unas características determinadas, y también aquellas obras que escriben los propios niños. (13-14)

> (Children's and young adult literature exist, fundamentally because of the presence of a child reader who needs a special adaptation to his or her linguistic, cultural or literary level. Thus, one must accept that Children's Literature encompasses those works of literary and artistic value, written specifically for children, as well as those which belong to literature for adults and have become part of children's literature because they combine specific characteristics, and there are those works written by children themselves).

For this reason, we share the opinion that Children's Literature must be understood as part of the system not as a subgenre but as a well-established system. Within this system there are certain works which are part of the canon, as, for example, fairy tales. These stories now set in the centre of the system have been translated into several languages, being spread worldwide.

To prove how Children's Literature is gaining more weight in the cultural system, moving further away from the periphery of this system, some data regarding 2012's year-over-year progress in the production of children's books in Spain can be discussed. This data has been collected by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports under the title *Panorámica de la edición española de libros 2012*.

Despite the consequences of the economic crisis currently hazarding household expenditure in Spain, the number of books published has increased since 2003, and exceeded the figure of 10,000 books per year. This increase responds to the demand which hopefully will continue rising in the following years.

The consequences of the rise in numbers reflect how publishing companies find in Children's Literature a main source of income independently of it being considered a genre or subgenre part of the literary system or not.

Another interesting fact regarding the number of published stories targeted to children is the 45.0% figure representing the percentage of translated books. Specifically 42.3% of the published books were translated from English into other languages in Spain which explains the importance of both Children's Literature and Translation within the cultural system.

Rewriting

Being aware of how fairy tales have been used as a dynamic part of the historical civilizing process within each society as mentioned above, there is a need to think about the role of translation in the writing of these fairy tales. According to Román Álvarez and Mª Carmen- África Vidal, Lefevere has defined translation as:

> […] una actividad que, por haber existido desde siempre, es casi inherente al ser humano en tanto que se trata de la acción interpretativa por excelencia, de la comunicación entre los pueblos. En efecto, las traducciones hacen posible el descubrimiento de otros mundos, puesto que mediante ellas expresamos, transmitimos –trasladamos – emociones y conocimientos, sensaciones y realidades. A lo largo de los siglos la actividad traductora, con su preciado bagaje, ha ido dejando tras de sí toda una estela de progresos y avances materiales, sirviendo, al mismo tiempo, de guía y luminaria para nuevos cauces de entendimiento entre los seres humanos. (Álvarez and Vidal 9)

> (an activity which is almost inherent to the human being due to its timeless existence, so much so that it is an interpretative action, par excellence, among peoples. To this effect, translations make the discovery of other worlds possible since through them emotions and knowledge, sensations and realities are transferred-transmitted-expressed. Throughout centuries, the translating activity,

with its highly-valued baggage, has been leaving behind a trail of progress and material gains, serving at the same time as a guide enlightening the source of understanding among human beings.)

This definition of translation fits within the concept of rewriting according to the point of view of this same scholar:

> [T]oda reescritura – entendiendo que la reescritura va desde las antologías y compilaciones hasta las traducciones, pasando por la historiografía, la crítica o la edición de textos - implica una manipulación; y que esa manipulación puede ser positiva o negativa según la incidencia que ejerza para perpetuar o para socavar el poder establecido . . . , y para que una cultura "superior" se imponga sobre otra . . . . (Álvarez and Vidal 10)

> (all rewriting - given that it encompasses anthologies and compilations to translations, from historiography, criticism to the publishing of texts - involves manipulation; and this manipulation can be positive or negative according to its incidence on perpetuating or destroying the established power . . . , and for a superior culture to overtake another . . . .)

According then to these definitions, translation can be seen as a rewriting process which allows the interpretation of texts and implies some sort of manipulation of the content in the ST to fit the demands of the established power in the target society. This situation perfectly fits within the idea Zipes expressed about how fairy tales have been changing their purpose throughout time and cultures. Rewriting these tales to adapt to the canon means complying with the power structures of each society. Zipes has pointed out how the literary fairy tale for children "became more an institutionalized discourse with manipulation as one of its components" (*Fairytales* 10).

In the search to explain how this manipulation can comply with the demands of the canon or subvert them, the intersemiotic translation of the storybook *Shrek!* into the four films produced by DreamWorks has been studied. Yet, before exemplifying some of these cases, this type of translation needs to be defined.

Intersemiotic Translation

Regarding translation then, there is a need to say that in this paper our attention will be focused on the procedure named by Raquel Segovia as "transferencia o trasvase" (transference or transfer) (Raquel Segovia 223). Segovia explains that there is a need to establish the boundaries between cinematographic adaptation and translation since many experts on both matters have noted the need to differentiate both activities. This scholar also considers that there is a problem in terms of the terminology to be used and for this reason she points out that although sharing common characteristics the introduction of a different term is required and necessary ("se hace necesaria la introducción de un término diferente") (ibid). Hence, this same author adopts the terms transference or transfer ("transferencia o trasvase") (ibid) as a higher level within itself bridging translation and adaptation ("como categoría superior que engloba dentro de sí a . . . la traducción y la adaptación") (ibid). Therefore the term transference will be used from now on when dealing with the materials studied herein.

In addition, the creation of a film or films based on a story book may fit within the first category described by Segovia, that is, the adaptation of a story book for the screen or the translation of the book into another format. The terminological dilemma explained above can be solved by considering the term transference. The transference of William Steig's book *Shrek!* into a saga of films responds to an intersemiotic transference process by which the ST belongs to a printed means of communication, a tale of an ugly ogre, in turn transferred into a TT classified as a set of audiovisual texts.

Once this literary text is positioned at the centre of the cultural system, as a children's literature work which undergoes an intersemiotic transference process, there are two more steps which must be taken in order to be able to find subversive elements in the TTs: first, the plot of each of the texts studied and, second, some of the most important characteristics concerning the characters of any fairytale.

The book and the films

In order to learn about the transference done in the creation of the *Shrek* saga, the content of the ST and TTs must be commented on. William Steig, famous for his illustrations and cartoons in the magazine *The New Yorker*, introduced his own children to the world of an ogre whose name is derived from the German word

Schrecken meaning "horror" or "terror" in Yiddish (see Zipes, "On re-reading William Steig's book *Shrek!*"). Shrek's ugliness and special qualities – he "could spit flame" and "vent smoke from either ear" – let the reader know how special Shrek is as a main character. The story of the green ugly monster presents an ogre whose parents have decided to literally kick him out of his home. The beginning of this adventure is similar in its structure to any other fairytale, yet the monster is the hero of this tale. In his way along the forest he meets a witch who foretells that he will meet a donkey, a knight and the ugliest princess he has ever met.

Excited about meeting the princess, Shrek begins to walk through the forest, where he meets a horrible dragon who is tamed thanks to Shrek's strength and powers. Shortly after, Shrek meets a group of children willing to play with him, which becomes his worst nightmare. Steig then chooses to let Shrek meet his companion in the tale, donkey. His role in the story is to carry Shrek to the castle where the princess lives. But, before that, Shrek must fight a knight to cross the bridge which leads to the princess.

This lady in distress is far from being the girl waiting to be rescued since her ugliness could scare any invaders to the castle. Despite her looks, Shrek falls for her, wanting to marry her as soon as possible.

As can be seen, this tale constitutes the pillar on which DreamWorks based the plot for the successful *Shrek* saga. The first film, with a homonymous title, presents the main character as well as Donkey, Dragon and the Princess, but the plot needs to be extended to cover the 86 minutes of animated work. For this reason, a few misunderstandings between Shrek and the princess, Fiona, take place as well as some dilemmas about the importance of judging people before knowing them, or distinguishing beauty or ugliness from good and evil.

The second film develops Shrek's personality by introducing him to his in-laws and Far Far Away. Shrek needed to accept himself before being able to meet Fiona in the first film and the next step in his life means accepting his responsibilities as a husband and trying to be part of Fiona's family. Yet this need makes the audience laugh at the scene of King Harold, who dislikes this ogre, trying to hire Puss in Boots to get rid of his son-in-law, twisted roles regarding characters as the Fairy Godmother or Prince Charming, and the parts played by Pinocchio or the Three Pigs, which turn to be quite unconventional.

Shrek the Third tells the story of Shrek being the next in line for the throne of Far Far Away. However, being an ogre king is not exactly in Shrek's plans. As a consequence, he decides to seek Artie, the next heir to the crown. This adventure is mixed up with Shrek's near fatherhood which worries him profoundly, especially since his own father had tried to eat him when he was a baby ogre.

To go one step beyond, *Shrek Happily Ever After* explores what happens when Shrek feels unhappy with his daily routine. To grant him a chance of enjoying a day as a real ogre, Rumpelstiltskin offers Shrek a tricky contract. Unaware of the consequences of his selfishness, Shrek loses his family and friends, having to fight the witches and Rumpelstiltskin with the help of an army of ogres searching for freedom.

Fairytale Structure and stereotypes

Before diving into some of the most outstanding subversive elements regarding the four main characters of this extremely successful saga there is a need to do a flashback bringing us back to the work carried out by Vladimir Propp.

Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) renamed fairy tales as marvellous tales, which matches the concept of characters being marvellous themselves; let us think of fairies, witches, gnomes, giants, etc. This scholar and literary critic noted that every tale followed a specific narrative structure in which certain character types were always used.

In his book, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928), the Russian structuralist proved that these tales were not as spontaneous as they seemed since each character fulfils a set function which enables the development and ending of the story. Each character has an event associated to him/her and in total Propp described 31 events named functions by him. The analysis of 100 tales allowed him to come to the conclusion that there are seven basic or fundamental characters which play a specific role in any tale:

1. The hero: He/She may be the victim of the circumstances or the plot of the tale. Although here a female hero is mentioned, in most of the traditional fairy tales the role of the hero is played by a single male searching for adventure or fighting the changes which have affected his early status of peace and wealth. This character is frequently helped by a donor or magical helper.

2. The donor: His/her role consists on helping the hero through his quest by supporting his decisions and following him throughout the story or by granting the hero with some kind of power, a magical token which will allow the main character's final success and the achievement of a happy ending.

3. The villain: The hero's success cannot exist without him having to prove his value by fighting the villain. This character changes the hero's situation of comfort and happiness and lacks any virtues.

4. The dispatcher: Often sent by the villain. This character is in charge of sending the hero out of his happy world and makes the villain known as well as his evil intentions.

5. The princess: She is the prize, the award deserved by the hero. If he is brave enough to fight the villain and win, she will be the end of the hero's journey since he will have power, wealth and love in return for his services.

6. The king or the princess' father: In some tales he gives the hero the task of saving the kingdom from the villain. He sometimes identifies the false hero and often gives her daughter's hand to the hero as a way of payment for his resolution of the evil attempts carried out by the villain.

7. The false hero: This character is not always included in every tale. The false hero tries to take credit for the hero's actions and sometimes even tries to marry the princess. It is the king or the princess who discovers the false hero's real intentions.

As can be noted these seven characters are part of almost any fairytale. And in *Shrek!*, the storybook and four films, the interaction of these stereotypes can be spotted with quite a few interesting changes which may lead to the possible idea that each of these roles is subject to some degree of subversion as will be explained in the following part of this work.

Subversion

Subversion means escaping from traditional conventions, mocking (making fun of) the concepts established by those who rule and impose their power on others. Subversion might also result in innovation of the literary canon, or the manipulation of the texts

which are being rewritten. Subversion can also mean a way of translating TTs for those thinking about visibility and "domestication" (Venuti).

Yet, let's think about the essence of the meaning of this word. Subversion is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as: "a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system by persons working secretly from within". Mínguez López has also used the Spanish definition of subversion from the R.A.E. (*The Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary*) "trastornar, revolver, destruir, especialmente en lo moral" (to overturn, stir, destroy, especially in the moral sense) to refer to the action of making fun of the control adults impose over certain moral conventions. This scholar also quotes Allison Lurie (1989) to explain the power subversion might have in the process of innovating and changing our surroundings: "Hacen una llamada a ese niño imaginativo, interrogante y rebelde que todos llevamos dentro, renovando nuestra energía instintiva y actuando como una fuerza que nos impulso al cambio". (A call to the inner child we all have inside is made – the imaginative, questioning and rebellious one – to renew our instinctive energy and act as a force to trigger change) (Lurie 13, quoted in Mínguez López 257-9).

These terms can be applied then to both, the book written by William Steig as well as the DreamWorks saga. About the storybook, Jack Zipes has recently made reference to how:

> This mock fairy tale plays with all the conventions of the traditional folk and fairy tale to provoke readers to consider the relative nature of evil and beauty. Instead of a handsome prince or a gifted third son, there is an outsider from the swamps, ugly and stinking, who wins a repulsive princess by overcoming fear of himself. The tale is obviously a parody of the Grimms' "The Young Man Who Went Out in Search of Fear," but is also more than that, for Steig levels the playing field for people considered to be despicable and evil. Shrek represents the outsider, the marginalized, the Other, who could be any of the oppressed minorities in America. He may even come from the streets of the Bronx, and the humor of the tale is clearly identifiable as New York Jewish humor. What was once a European folk tale has become, through Steig's soft water color images and brazen irreverent language, a contemporary literary fairy tale that thrives on playfulness, topsy-turvy scenes, and skepticism. This is a fairy tale that radically explodes fairy tale expectations and fulfills them at the same time: the utopian hope for tolerance and difference is affirmed in an unlikely marriage sanctified by a dragon. The ogre and his wife will continue to frighten people, but

they will be happy to do so in the name of relative morality that questions the bias of conventionality associated with evil. ("On re-reading William Steig's book *Shrek!*")

Which in other words can be summarized as:

> In keeping with the postmodern spirit of the last twenty-five years, Steig modestly produced one of the best examples of how the fairy tale has been fractured and continually transformed, indicating its radical potential in our digital age, especially with the production and success of the twenty-first century digitally animated films. (Zipes, "On re-reading William Steig's book *Shrek!*")

This irreverent language and this way of playing with the expectations any reader would have about fairy tales has then been rewritten and transferred into a new type of text: an audiovisual text which shows several subversive traits. Mínguez López (249-262) has systemized the latter into five categories:

1. The eschatology and restructuring of traditional roles.

2. The message about beauty.

3. The claim of women's active role in society.

4. The Unsweetening.

5. Demythisizing comments.

To exemplify these five cases of subversion which can be spotted in the audiovisual text, we would like to share the following cases which present a subversive role of the main characters not only in the book but also in the films. These subversive characters do not follow the stereotype and the fairy tale structure presented by Vladimir Propp.

Example 1 –The Restructuring of Traditional Roles

This first example belongs to *Shrek* and exemplifies the restructuring of traditional roles. In this sequence, Shrek and Donkey have saved Princess Fiona. Before going to sleep, Donkey and Shrek have a conversation because donkey does not stop asking him

questions. Shrek is annoyed because donkey would not leave him alone and he wants donkey to understand that he does not want to have any company. Shrek says that people are afraid of him and always try to escape from him. We can understand from his words that he feels lonely and that this loneliness has not actually been a choice, but rather the only option he has to live his life. He does not try to give an image of an ugly ogre. On the contrary, the audience feels sorry and pity for him. This scene shows that Shrek has feelings and that he has suffered as he has been forced to live on his own. He is not the stereotypical ogre who has to play the role of the villain in this fairytale.

Example 2 –The Message about Beauty

The happy ending of any fairytale is sealed with a kiss and this is what happens at the end of *Shrek*. Fiona needs to be kissed by her true love in order to break her ugly night-time ogress spell. But, when Shrek kisses her, the spell does not disappear. She is still an ugly ogress. She seems to be disappointed as she is not beautiful. Yet, Shrek replies, "But you ARE beautiful". This scene wants to teach us about the concept of beauty. Ever since the beginning of the first film, we learn that Fiona will become a beautiful princess forever, once kissed by a prince. However, when Shrek kisses her, the spell does not break. Shrek does not care as he has fallen in love with her when she was an ogre, and for him Fiona is more beautiful than a traditional princess.

Example 3 – The Claim of Women's Active Role in Society

In *Shrek The Third*, Fiona is having a baby shower. She starts opening the presents that her friends have brought for her. Snow White brings the biggest one. She offers one dwarf as a 24/7 baby sitter. Fiona is surprised and she asks what it is for. Snow White says that it can be in charge of the cleaning and the feeding. Fiona asks what she and Shrek are supposed to do. The girls say it is necessary as they will have to work on their relation once the baby is born. Fiona states her intention to take care of the baby together with her husband, and no one else. She refuses to have help around and thus reinforces the defence of the active role of women who share domestic duties with their partners.

Example 4 – The Unsweetening

In *Shrek 2*, physical appearance seems to be one of the main plot elements. In this particular scene, Prince Charming, pretending that he is Shrek, who has become a beautiful man, attends a party at Far Far Away with Fiona. He overacts his role as a haughty Prince. Fiona does not love him any longer as she cannot recognize the man she fell in love with. Looking at his lips, she realizes that he had put some glitter on them. She decides to leave angrily. Fiona is not a girl worried about her appearance. Once again, the traditional princess role has been broken and the fairytale is unsweetened.

Example 5– Demythisizing Comments

In *Shrek* (the first film), Fiona, Donkey and Shrek are on their way to Lord Farquaad's castle. They have just had breakfast and Shrek burps. Donkey scolds him for having done it in the presence of a princess, as it is "no way to behave in front of her". Shrek does not seem to understand it and even laughs at him. At that moment, Fiona does exactly the same, astonishing both Donkey and Shrek. The latter tells her that he would never expect that of her, and she, who had overhead the conversation Shrek had with Donkey about appearances the night before, insists on the fact that, "You should not judge people before you get to know them". This example shows that we cannot judge people before getting acquainted with them.

In addition to that, Fiona is giving an example to the audience, once again that she is not a traditional princess. The film also uses certain lines to break the myth of how a fairytale should be understood, or how its characters should behave.

Conclusions

As seen, a fairytale is that story that is perpetuated through generations. Excluded once from the canon and literary systems, Children's Literature seemed to be just that, those stories heard and read by children, which would be occasionally translated on demand. Despite this first erroneous impression, Children's Literature has now its own market, selling, for example, every year thousands of books in Spain.

But the power of these not-so-innocent tales has conquered more than the printed page. Several cases of intersemiotic translation have modified the

presentation of these materials leading to the release of films which narrate in an apparently new way those old stories.

The Shrek saga is a good example of a transference by which a book is transformed into a set of subversive films. However, we must not forget that Steig's original story had already included subversive elements.

The analysis of the subversive content extracted from the four animated films produced by DreamWorks SKG has allowed the classification of these phenomena into five different categories, as stated above.

The subversive message can be clearly spotted in four of these five categories. In fact, the claim of women's active role in society is not clearly traced in the four films due to the existence of certain contradictions with regard to the creation of Fiona's identity and personality. She is independent, does not need to be rescued, but marries Shrek and stays at the castle while Shrek lives the adventure of finding Far, Far Away's new king. And, what is more, in the fourth film, *Shrek Happily Ever After*, Fiona's independent role only belongs to a parallel world close to a dream or Shrek's worst nightmare.

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