A Cauldron of Chaos and Cultivation: Rediscovering Disney Animation of the 1980s

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Date of Award
Spring 5-19-2019

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
Master of Arts (MA)

Department
Film Studies

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Abstract
This thesis examines the four transitional Disney animated features of the 1980s—The Fox and the Hound (1981), The Black Cauldron (1985), The Great Mouse Detective (1986), and Oliver and Company (1988)—in order to reassess the significance of this period in Disney history. The Walt Disney Studio is internationally hailed for its animated features produced over the last eight decades, however, the animated films released in the 1980s have been ignored and neglected due to the negative evaluations of scholars and historians who favor Walt’s era and the 1990s renaissance period. A closer examination of the films reveals that Disney was not in a dark age but one of experimentation, excisement, and exploration in contrast to the perceived notions. Each film contributed to Disney animation’s return including a generational shift in creativity, application of computer animation, casting a celebrity as a voice-artist, and the use of theme songs and popular singers. These contributions were technically, thematically, and aesthetically important in reframing Disney’s animated products for future audiences leading to the 1990s successes beginning with The Little Mermaid.

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Recommended Citation

DOI
https://doi.org/10.36837/chapman.000112

The Black Cauldron is a 1985 American animated dark fantasy adventure film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation in association with Silver Screen Partners II and released by Walt Disney Pictures. The 25th Disney animated feature film, it is loosely based on the first two books in The Chronicles of Prydain by Lloyd Alexander, a series of five novels that are, in turn, based on Welsh mythology.