



Animation Stagnation or: How America Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Mouse

by Billy Tooma

With all the animated films that come out these days, it can actually be somewhat difficult to distinguish a Disney-made one from the others, seeing as how the competition tries on a consistent basis to copy the style that Walt Disney himself unofficially trademarked as far back as the late 1920s. The very thought that something is being put out by Disney can lead to biased appeal. In 1994, Warner Bros. had produced an animated feature entitled *Thumbelina*. In one of its first test screenings, the overall audience consensus was low, discouraging the executives because they felt theirs was as fine a product as their competition. In an unprecedented move, Warner Bros. stripped their logo from the film's opening and replaced it with the Disney one. The next test screening results were up (Schweizer, Schweizer 135).

There is something about a Disney animated film that causes people to set out to movie theaters en masse each and every time a new one is released. Some would say that the

reason behind this is that Disney just keeps putting out one hit after another and audiences expect perfection each time. Unfortunately, for the company that has made Mickey Mouse a household name for over 90 years, that isn't the case. Even though people are showing up to the cinemas, they aren't doing it because they expect to see a screen gem. They're doing it because it's felt that they owe something, possibly their childhood, to Disney. But, does that mean people are being foolish for constantly shelling out money to see a Disney animated film every year or so? The answer is 'no,' because Disney was able to gain such an early monopoly on the industry that it allowed them to prevent the growth and maturation of animation and the American people's taste for it. Stagnation occurred; so, when the history behind Disney's success is examined, it can be seen that the quality of its pictures failed to stop evolving much earlier than most think, allowing the animation within its own walls, and those of its rivals, to

stop growing, causing the average American the inability to view the medium as anything more than something made for children.

So, what is this telling us? Could it really be so simple for a non-Disney company, in order to do well, just make people *believe* theirs is right out of the same studio that produced *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938)? According to the account written above, yes, but, there is much more to it than that. Even though the second test screening went well, *Thumbelina* tanked at the box office. That special something that helps generate Disney films' revenue has its roots firmly planted in the past, represented today by a castle-centered logo.

After the initial popularity of the early birds in animation, such as Winsor McCay and John Randolph Hearst, began to die down, the medium was starting to be seen as nothing more than a cute novelty, with the viewing public not taking it very seriously. Sure, they enjoyed the quirky shorts, but there was no substance to grasp onto. Leonard Maltin, in his book *Of Mice and Magic*, reminds us that, "He [Walt Disney] did not invent the medium, but one could say that he defined it. Disney innovated and perfected ideas and techniques that dramatically changed the course of cartoon production. Some were utterly simple while others were awesomely complex" (29). So, here we have a young Disney who is willing to take risks that no one else in the industry was prepared to do, either for financial reasons or, more than usual, sheer sluggishness. His legacy and everlasting effect on animation would result in numerous copycats who either missed the mark completely or got pretty close but couldn't seem to get it just a little further.

But, Disney wanted more. Even in his *Laugh-O-Grams* (1921-1923), the earliest in his work, there's a higher quality unseen elsewhere. And, while they may be of a simple, almost

crude style, it's their enjoyable stories that made them popular. This showed Disney that projects like those needed a strong group effort and work ethic in order for their continued success to be ensured. In fact, it was that belief that brought about one of the first techniques Disney didn't just innovate, in fact, him and his people invented it. Stephen Cavalier, in his very in-depth *The World History of Animation*, says of the man's eye for detail, "His talent, for instance, for reading a movie's storyboard and instantly knowing where the story slowed or needed improvements was legendary" (79). Although today the use of storyboards is seen as an essential part in the filmmaking process, when Disney set out to make his own animated projects, the very idea was completely foreign to the industry.

This idea of taking the time to put together a well thought out cartoon was something unique, at the beginning, to the Disney studio. No one had thought to do such a thing. The competitors in the business had a laid back attitude regarding their output, which meant that if the films were done on time and within the budget then that was a success for them. Even when Disney's first

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employee, Ub Iwerks, went solo for a short time period, that "magic," didn't go with him. Iwerks failed because he lacked Disney's story sense and comic know-how. He only wanted the cartoons to be well-animated and done on schedule (Maltin 191). This one thing, while seemingly so simple, in truth, kept Disney's contenders to the mantle of animation guru far from the prize.

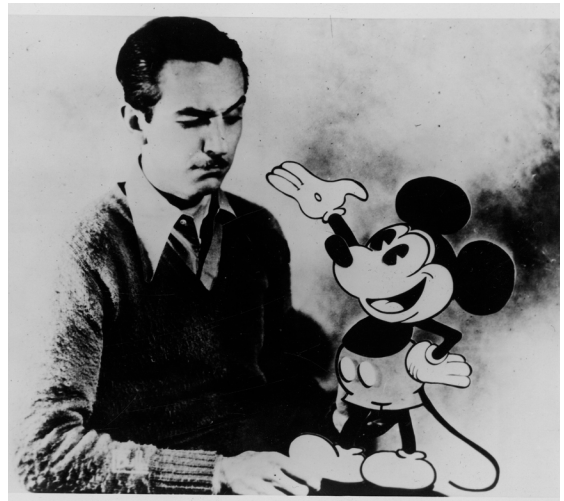
Perhaps the single greatest decision made by Walt Disney in his pursuit to be the best in the

business, was when he opted to convert a half-finished short to sound. *Steamboat Willie* (1928), featuring the debut of one Mickey Mouse, a character owned 100% by Disney himself, in a departure from the status quo at the time when distributors held the rights, was released to critical acclaim. Being the first to synchronize sound to a cartoon put Disney at the finish line first. With the short's success, Disney went ahead and added sound to the first, and unreleased, Mickey Mouse project, *Plane Crazy* (1929). Here, he gave American audiences a glimpse at their soon-to-be rodent prince of pop-culture trying to emulate the great Lone Eagle, Charles Lindbergh. Interesting how Disney made sure to produce a cartoon whose main character wanted to be just like Lucky Lindy, as did almost every young boy at the time. The connection is too obvious to ignore.

It was this work ethic and sense of what would or could be good for business that made him the best in the business and the one everyone else wanted to emulate. These things didn't happen by accident. Disney just didn't sit around hoping for lightning to strike. He put all he had into the work and the results were in his favor. So much so that upon the creation of the advent of the Technicolor process, Disney was financially able to secure a three-year exclusive deal for the medium of animation. Not only was his company producing cartoons with sound, now they would be sporting more vibrant colors than anything else out there.

Indeed, Walt Disney had so much confidence in this new asset that he ordered the current edition of *Silly Symphonies* to be scrapped and redone using the full-color three-strip process. The result was *Flowers and Trees* (1932), winner of the inaugural Academy Award for Animated Short Subject. It's important to note that the film itself isn't anything greater than what had come before it in terms of its style nor is the plot very gripping, but the fact that it'd been done in

color was enough to make audiences go gaga over it. Somehow, it can't go unsaid how in today's modern times, James Cameron succeeded in a billion-grossing effort by releasing *Avatar* (2009), an obvious retelling of *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and the John Smith/Pocahontas tale, but, done in a visually-stunning, grandiose fashion. The key was, and still is, all in the presentation.



Walt Disney with Mickey Mouse

Ironically, those in the industry who had scoffed at Disney's business moves early on were now trying to play catch up. But, the damage for them had already been done. It was their inaction that helped, in part, to give the Disney studio its monopoly over the industry. There would be no healthy competition in animation. Sid Marcus, a rival animating staffer, once said, "We were always trying to figure out why he [Walt Disney] was so successful, and were usually wrong" (qtd. in Maltin 29). This was because Marcus, like so many others, was looking in the wrong place. Style is something that can be mimicked, but, it's only a cheap imitation. Disney had been a quick victim of that in the early years and it never really went away. The problem with his competitors and the reason why they could make animated films that looked like Disney's, but that ultimately failed to succeed, was because their

work lacked the understanding of the reasons behind the style. Without story substance and personalized characters, things fall flat.

Walt Disney wanted more from his pictures. He feared the medium was on a downward spiral and that if his staff didn't improve their drawing skills, everything he'd been working for since he left Kanas City as a young man, would be for nothing. So, in order to make his desires real, Walt said to his men, "You know, there's really no limit to what we can do. . . . The only limits are our imaginations and our abilities. That's why I've decided to send you boys to school" (qtd. in Neupert 77). Not only was he going to employ his animators, he was going to pay for them to become full-blown, educated artists. Thus, at a time when any average Joe off the street who could draw a stick figure or, at the very least, copy one from a preexisting piece of paper, were getting jobs with the competition, Disney was pushing his animators to the very edges of perfection, because, in his mind, he truly felt that the medium could reach photorealism.

But, that wasn't enough for Disney's more-than-a-Mickey Mouse operation. Aside from the newly learned skills of his staff, he continued to expand upon the importance of the storyboards mentioned earlier. "Disney's cartoons had a beginning, middle, and an end, at a time when other studios were just trying to find a way to fill six minutes" (Maltin 38). Again, it is this idea that Disney could take something like a cartoon and make an audience care about it, that helped solidify his position at the top. Much of what was being put out by Columbia or Terrytoons didn't even come close to a fulfilling story. Funny enough, Paul Terry himself had an oft repeated motto that said he was the Woolworths' of animation and Disney, its Tiffanys' (qtd. in Cavalier 96). Scripts were the key at Disney, but one should not overlook the personalities that had been developed for each of the characters comprising the Mickeyverse.

In the early days, Walt Disney issued a manual to his animators that spelled out the guidelines for not only on how to draw the characters but that there'd be no drinking, smoking, off-color humor, or swearing. The manual also made it clear that Mickey and Minnie were in a platonic relationship (Schweizer, Schweizer 139). Personality within the animation was what he was stressing. Distinguishing the characters from one another, making an audience like or dislike them, was huge in selling success.

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It was put into effect as early as 1933, with *The Three Little Pigs*. Had it been done by any other company, the titular characters would have been indistinguishable. As it stands, animation-wise, they are exactly the same, albeit for their clothes, but it's their general attitudes and demeanors that make a viewer quickly realize which pig is Practical, Fiddler, or Fifer. This strict control over his property allowed Disney to maintain uniformity among the output of his animators. No one would go off now and create a film that incorporated anything that went against the canon of Disney's character manual. They knew better.

The Three Little Pigs, while pushing forward with Disney's hold on the mechanics behind animation, played just as strong a part in lassoing a loyal audience. As the Disney biographer, Neal Gabler explains, regarding the short, "Critics immediately acknowledged that it bored into the national consciousness, both reflecting and somehow ameliorating anxiety over the Depression" (185). This could very possibly be one of, if not *the* reason Disney was able to take control of the American palette for cartoons, turning the dial to his brand. While

other works of the time showcased the plight of the blue-collar man of the 1930s, such as Terrytoons' Farmer Al Falfa character, Disney did it in a very covert way, and that has to have been what helped create a love for his studio's animated films: Americans like their messages, good or bad, to be covered in pretty colors and memorable songs. There's nothing wrong with that, however, one should at least realize why they like or dislike certain things, right? Well, the truth is, most American moviegoers think very little of that. In a time when economic hardship plagued almost everyone, Disney pushed, whether deliberately or not, values that he deemed to be downright wholesome. The animated works that were coming out of the studio at this time capitalized on the country's need to remember a time when anything seemed possible. Even for an escape of merely ten minutes or less, Americans got their fix and thanked Walt Disney for it. Indeed, the man behind it all was responsible for uplifting downtrodden spirits during the Depression.

From storyboards to sound; from Technicolor to good scripts; from personalized characters to the numerous awards he was winning, Disney took all these key elements under his wing as his company claimed the monopoly over the animation business. The only thing left to do was now blow away the rival studios all together, once and for all. To do this, Disney set his sights on something that had yet to be done before: a full-length, animated feature. "Increasingly restricted by the limitations of the one-reel cartoon, Disney had had his eye on the longer form for at least four years, and had approached it cautiously and from a variety of angles" (Kaufman 157). Nothing happens overnight, at least, not at the Disney studio.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs spent nearly four years in production before its

premiere. No one thought it could be done and be received the way live-action features had been up to that point. They were all wrong. What everyone in the industry had dubbed as "Disney's Folly" attracted audiences of all ages and made the man behind it all very wealthy. Utilizing the multiplane camera, an extremely large and expensive apparatus designed and built for the studio in order to create a greater depth-of-field, the film showcased everything Disney had been working on over the previous decade and a half. "Disney's peoplesucceeded in making the more realistic characters stylized enough to feel like cartoons and the cartoonish characters were crafted with enough realism to make the blend work" (Cavalier 126). This perfect storm of artistic expression pushed Disney light years ahead of anyone who thought they might have had a chance to go up against him. He was now free to take all that money he'd earned and put it back into his company; the creation of more features was on his mind.

To not build a comparison between Disney's first feature and one of his rivals' would be foolish. If one is to understand the significance of *Snow White*, they should examine, briefly, its chief competition, and the word "chief," is being used loosely here. Fleischer Studios, run

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by brothers Max and Dave, who would become famous for their visually-stunning *Superman* series, were told, in the wake of Disney's success, by their financiers, to go forward with their own feature-length film. The problem was that the Fleischers had no real interest in doing the large amount of preparatory work that Disney had

invested time, and money, in. But, when the ones who pull the strings demand something, it has to get done. *Gulliver's Travels*, based off of the first portion of the source material, has been criticized for the inconsistencies between the main character's realistic look and those of the inhabitants of Lilliput. When one views the finished product, the style used is up to par for the time, but in terms of the story that is presented, it fails to make an audience care about anyone or anything. Not too surprising was Walt Disney's personal take on what was supposed to be his competition. He once quipped, "We can do better than that with our second-string animators" (qtd. in Maltin 118).

The next four features created by the Disney studio were probably the greatest body of work produced there. *Pinocchio* (1940) was praised by critics for its near-perfect animation and flawless storytelling. No one seemed to mind that the film featured an anthropomorphic fox and cat amid a world of humans, although, the movie is about a little wooden puppet coming to life, so, in that regard, Disney succeeded in making the tale itself a believable one.



"Get In The Scrap!" (WWII poster)

Fantasia (1940), considered today to be Walt Disney's *magnum opus* was, at the time of

its release, something the public wasn't quite ready for. Disney defeated itself by breaking its own formula and trying to push the limits of what animation was. Over time, however, it's now said that, "In studying *Fantasia*, critics of music on film can learn much about the chemistry of sound and image, especially with regards to how audiovisual alignment can articulate form, how gestures of melody and motion reinforce one another, and how musical rhetoric and image fuse to create meaning" (Clague 92). Fortunately, for Walt Disney or, not-so fortunately, because he didn't live to see it, time seems to have softened the general public's attitudes towards what he thought would be the future of the medium.

Dumbo (1941) and *Bambi* (1942) were too very different films when compared side-by-side, but in terms of their plots and themes, they couldn't be more alike. Both feature the young titular characters coming of age and forging friendships along the way. After the commercial failure of *Fantasia*, Walt Disney had his animators go back to childhood innocence and happy endings. The payoff was substantial.

After World War II and a workers' strike came to an end, Walt Disney had started to distance himself from animation, choosing to focus on live-action films instead. By doing this, he was handing off the reins to a group of animators who'd grown up under him. The new directors, ". . . were capable men, but some of them feared for their position and wanted to avoid displeasing Walt at all costs. Consequently, they bore down on animators and artists and discouraged invention and new ideas that Walt himself would have approved" (Maltin 58). So, with the absence of the man who made the studio what it was, the work never went beyond the quality-level it had been at prior to 1941. This is not to say that the films made after Disney began neglecting animation were duds. *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), while at the time was seen as nothing

more than a *Snow White* carbon copy, stands today as of the most beautifully done pieces by the studio.

People still went to see these films, however, because Disney had become a household name. So, any kind of animated film, even if it didn't show evolution of the medium, would be met with success based on past work and ingrained love of all things Disney. It is biting, though, that the stagnation of animation appears to have occurred because of the very man who helped make it more than a one-reel theater-filler. Walt Disney felt that animation, while being the very foundation of his empire, had just become sustained more out of tradition and habit than for profits; it had to just keep going, regardless of whether it grew as an art form or not (Gabler). And, it is a shame that this happened, because if Disney had stayed as interested in his animation department as he'd been during the early days, the output of the studio could have been staggering in terms of style and overall concept. Anything could have been possible for the innovator who'd made all the right decisions for his company before his name became a part of the American lexicon for all things warm and fuzzy.

The first five feature films of the Disney studio were the only original pieces created. Everything after them was a rehash. Success, even though welcomed, can lead to those benefitting from it to stick with what works, to not rock the boat, and to generally hold strongly to the old saying that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The problem, however, is that kind of consensus led to the medium of animation to become an industry geared towards children. Walt Disney, after watching *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), said, with great sadness, that he wished he could make a film like that, but, as Gabler points out, ". . . he couldn't. He was Walt Disney, and Walt Disney was now committed to making films that were

innocuous enough to be enjoyed by the entire family" (587). Disney had tied his own hands. Even though he'd made sure to incorporate dark themes and characters in his studio's early material, subsequent work would only feature watered-down versions of those elements.

Does that mean, then, that adult-themed animation is wrong? Should cartoons only be limited to kids? Absolutely now, and, a perfect example of one man who aimed to showcase a more mature animation, was Ralph Bakshi, who, said of the medium and its artists, "What bothers me about animation and the heat that I took for my R- and- X-rated films is why anybody would spend their whole lives doing the same thing over

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and over again; how artists don't grow; how if you're a cartoonist you have to continue to grow, to evolve" (qtd. in Gibson, McDonnell 58). In his films *Fritz the Cat* (1972) and *Heavy Traffic* (1973), Bakshi explored the urban life of New York City through animation. Both received critical praise from the aimed-at audience who embraced it, and hatred from animators and those who had grown up on a healthy diet of all things Disney. If anything, Bakshi was trying to push against the waves of the perceived American ideal of doe-eyed bunnies and princesses in distress, the likes of which Disney's films pushed heavily onto its viewers.

When he set out to make *Wizards* (1977), a science fiction piece set in the far distant future, Bakshi was trying to prove that he was more than just about sex and drugs. He wanted to show people that just because his first animated movies involved those themes that he had more to offer up (Gibson, McDonnell 132). But, he still was

met with hostility. It probably didn't help that Nazi symbolism ran rampant throughout and that the female protagonist had erect nipples the entire run of the film. But, if one wants to examine the artistic approach in *Wizards* there is a scene that is so powerful, yet in its simplicity, it gets overlooked. A seasoned elf soldier discusses war with the mutants with a young cadet. At the end of the battle sequence, where the mutants have slaughtered all in their path, the young cadet is shown cowering, an obvious victim of PTSD. And the seasoned elf soldier? All we see is his pipe, laid on the ground, blood trickling across the screen. Staggering in its depth of emotions being evoked, it is no less important or significant than, let's say, when Cinderella's misplaced glass slipper finds its home.

What the critics said of Ralph Bakshi's work was that they could, "accept the fact that realistic satire of modern urban life cannot ignore these subjects [drug use, violence, and open sexuality], but, again, there was a feeling that the subjects were not suitable for animated film" (Holte 107). The very idea that because a cartoon is analyzing the themes Bakshi found interesting would make it unacceptable is a saddened state of affairs. How can any medium, animation in this case, be allowed to grow out of its shell if it's stuck in the realm of Disney's Golden Age? No matter how different the times get and how people change, the world of animation stays stuck on a conceived notion of an ideal time period.

It's that kind of misguided belief structure that caused Don Bluth, head of Disney's animators at the time, to leave the studio with half of its staff in 1979. He swore to bring back to animation the frills and extras Disney had forsaken. In a way, he was basically saying that he'd be going back to formula. His films, while impressive visually, lack the heart that even the old Disney recipe possessed. They had the Disneyesque feel, but lacked the spark of originality. Bluth and his

people failed to evolve the medium and simply went backwards (Maltin 353). It looks like in his attempt to emulate the old school Disney style, he fell victim to its own stagnation. One should never attempt to repeat what has been done already and leave it at that. The goal of evolution is to push forward, improving the structure and form as you progress. So while Bluth-made films like *An American Tail* (1986) and *The Land Before Time* (1988) did well at the time of their releases, one can't help but wonder why. Perhaps, just maybe, it was that little bit of Disney essence mentioned above that drew people to them? It isn't hard to see the footprints of Bluth's self-professed mentor's style: each movie displays the slick lines and dimpled cheeks that anyone would see in a Disney animated production.

Bakshi hadn't posed any threat to Disney's money-making machine nor did Bluth's departure from the company cause it to plummet. Truth was, animated features were still being produced and making a profit. However, their overall quality had greatly diminished, not just in the sameness of the style, but in the script department as well. One of the biggest issues people have raised about the films of this time period was the lack of a real villain who could give momentum to the story (Cavalier 214). Coming of age, or puberty, seems to be a young King Arthur's primary foe in *The Sword in the Stone* (1963). Shere Khan appears nearly two-thirds of the way in *The Jungle*

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Book (1967), leaving the beginning to be filled up with would-be-baddies like Kaa the python and the orangutan, King Louie. In *The Aristocats* (1970), an inheritance-denied butler is supposed to represent danger to the film's feline heroine and her family.

By the time Walt Disney had passed away, the studio had gotten far too relaxed with itself. While rotoscoping, a process where live-action is shot on film then animated over, had been used in the past (interestingly enough, Ralph Bakshi had utilized this technique and had been called cheap and gaudy), and the Xerox process had been discovered as a sure-fire way to make *101 Dalmatians* (1961) possible, the Disney animators reached an all-time low when they reused an old dance sequence from *Snow White* in *Robin Hood* (1973). For a company that had once prided itself on innovation, this could be seen as the ultimate display of laziness and corner-cutting.

So, how did they rise up from this? It wasn't easy. Through the 1980s, after a series of poorly put together films, *The Little Mermaid* (1989) was released to rave reviews and box office takes to match. What had happened? To start with, it was a film unlike Disney had ever done. Thanks in no small part to the composing team of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, the feature was turned into a Broadway-style musical. Success was once again Disney's. Something original had come out from the depths of a studio so deep in its own misplaced nostalgia that such breath of fresh air catapulted it to the stars. However, like the Disney studio of the past, this era was no different.

For 10 years they churned out one film after the other, all musicals in nature. Another formula had emerged and the studio ran with it. And, as each subsequent one saw its release, the overall quality of story lagged. Apparently, true originality comes and goes. When one looks at that new formula for animated films of the 1990s, it was Don Bluth himself who took to realizing that Disney had been on to something, maybe not special, but something that caught audience's attention. The product of this observation was his only successful movie of that decade: *Anastasia* (1997), which, I myself mistook for a

Disney-made feature upon first viewing. It had all the makings of its rival's contemporary spin on the medium: an angelic-looking, but rough-around-the-edges heroine, street-smart male love interest, a sinister foe complete with comic relief sidekick, musical numbers up the wazoo, and, for the cherry on the top, a celebrity voice cast. Truth be told, it seems to have combined the most popular elements of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992). Anastasia is a clear carbon copy of the former's Belle; Dimitri, the con-artist, a clone of the latter's main character;



Walt Disney and model

and, Rasputin, is an obvious combination of both Gaston and Jafar right down to each one's bumbling fool cohorts: Lefou and Iago being joined and altered into Bartok the bat. But, some would say that the nature of this Bluth film was different because it told a tale based in the historical record rather than a fairytale. Looking back, I don't think the general public ever really cared to make the distinction.

Interestingly enough, only one Disney film of this period covered American culture, and *Pocahontas* (1995) was really about the early days of English colonization. In fact, the rest of the films took it upon themselves to distort

classical stories to the point of the original material losing much of its luster. Although entertaining for children, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996)'s lack of religious overtones and the survival of the character Esmeralda, leads the movie asunder. Even in *Hercules* (1997), we see a hatchet job with the classical tales of the demigod son of Zeus. One Greek newspaper, *Adsmevtos Typos*, claimed it as, "another case of foreigners distorting our history and culture just to suit their commercial interests" (qtd. in Smith and Byrne). This alteration of source text isn't something Disney was new to, but with a newer generation of viewers, one would think they'd at least have tried to be faithful. The reason as to why the American audience doesn't take issue with this is due to its own ignorance of history, because, for nearly the last century, Disney has been at the forefront of it.

But, the problem is, without Walt Disney, the animated films can never transcend the kiddie-centered medium.

It's been over a decade now since the Renaissance came to an end. In that time, Disney has released a series of very different films. *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000), *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), and *Bolt* (2008) are just three of the ones that have come out. Each one's look was completely outside the realm of what the studio had done in the past. Perhaps, they are trying to figure themselves out again. One could go so far as to compare these newer films' purpose with what the studio had been doing between *Snow White* and *Bambi*. Americans, however, like their princesses, and, those damsels-in-distress evidently trump quality. *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), was supposed to have been

Disney's marriage of its two most successful eras. It sported hand-drawn animation, an original score, and several high-profile voices, including Oprah Winfrey and Terrence Howard. To say that the movie fell flat is an understatement. While the company touted it as the first Disney animated film to feature a black princess, she spends the majority of her screen time as a green frog. It felt, on average, to have a different song play every five-eight minutes, and its prince was racially ambiguous, hailing from an equally vague nation. Although it managed to recoup its budget, the film did not meet the expectations of the American public. Paradoxically, the studio had failed at copying itself.

Without a guiding force, nothing comes easily. "It was said of him [Walt Disney] that he was a director of men, not a director of movies; in other words, he directed the directors, writers, and animators, and was the driving force behind every other area of his movies" (Cavalier 79). But, the problem is, without Walt Disney, the animated films can never transcend the kiddie-centered medium. Had he not turned his back on his animation department to tend to the theme parks, Ralph Bakshi might've been working for him, overseeing an adaptation of *Catcher in the Rye*, a project the latter hadn't been able to secure the rights to.

John Lasseter, co-founder of Pixar, the studio that gave birth to CGI-animated movies, and countless imitators, once said, "You can have an hour and a half of blank film leader with the Disney name on it and people will go see it" (Schweizer, Schweizer 135). The scary, sad reality is, even though he was joking, it's probably true. It would seem that somehow, because they were the first to do pretty much everything in animation, Disney, the House that the Mouse built, has earned the right to it.

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