

Fantasy Films of the 1980s

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Fantasy films have been a part of cinema since the very beginnings of the medium. Although fantasy films can be found in every decade of the last century, the genre only became persistently successful from the late 1970s onwards. Perhaps the relatively recent prominence of fantasy goes some way to explain why the genre lacks the academic discourse that other film genres have encouraged. Another reason why fantasy has evaded considerable discussion as a genre could be because of the difficulty in defining it. Fantasy can encompass numerous types of films, and features an array of different thematic and visual styles. Previous studies examining fantasy either fail to consider the mode as a genre, or only consider a limited array of films.

Using Tzvetan Todorov's assessment of *The Fantastic* as a framework, this thesis examines fantasy films from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. I reassert fantasy's position as a genre rather than a mode or impulse. Analysing a wide range of films from this period, this thesis outlines the preoccupations of the genre and identifies the various cycles and sub-genres encompassed by the term 'fantasy'. These categories include those that concern the style of film and those that concern the intended audience. Deconstructing the fantasy genre in these sub-genres makes it more manageable to appraise the genre as a whole. Consistent patterns emerge in the examination of these films, ranging from archetypal characters to a fixation with subversion. The 1980s was a critical time for fantasy cinema as it was the first sustained period of frequent successful films. Fantasy was the most commercially successful genre of the decade; Hollywood's output in this period still reverberates in today's industry. Thus, the fantasy genre is most worthy of the critical discussion afforded to other genres.

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