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ELA10FPT

31 May 2021

101 Dalmatians – Hidden Symbolism

Did you know that *101 Dalmatians* has more symbolism than you might first think? This animated movie from 1961, directed by Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske, and Wolfgang Reitherman, is full of all sorts of symbolism you might not recognize on your first or even second watch (“101 Dalmatians”). There is a lot of hidden symbolism in *101 Dalmatians*, with stereotypes including both the animals and humans, colors expressing emotions, and other objects which have more meaning than what might appear on the surface.

The first symbolism I want to mention is the stereotypes littered throughout the movie.

Starting with the puppies, we have Rolly. Rolly is a puppy who always asks for more food and is heavier than his fellow puppies (*101 Dalmatians* 23:58 – 24:15). He is the stereotypical ‘fat kid.’ He also was almost caught by Jasper and Horace as they were leaving the De Vil manor, as he couldn’t quite fit through the hole in the wall (*101 Dalmatians* 52:15 – 52:53).

The next puppy I want to mention is Patch. Patch is noisy and likes and to be rowdy and cause trouble. He is seen chewing carpet and is the most talkative of the puppies (*101 Dalmatians* 23:00 – 23:30). He is the embodiment of the ‘always causing trouble’ stereotype.

The last puppy of note is Lucky. Lucky is OBSESSED with the T.V. and is also the weakest of the 15 puppies. He is often seen standing in front of the T.V. and never wants to stop watching (*101 Dalmatians* 23:40 – 23:53). He represents the ‘technology obsessed’ stereotype.

Some other animals with stereotypes include the ‘army’ lead by the Colonel. The colonel is a dog in the later years of his life. He struggles to hear properly and always seems just a bit out of the loop (*101 Dalmatians* 38:10 – 41:30). He is the ‘old man.’

The cows which help the puppies get back home, are the ‘motherly figures’ or ‘sweet grandmas.’ They feed the puppies and wish they could stay with them forever. (*101 Dalmatians* 1:03:40 – 1:06:15)

Now, onto the humans. Cruella’s baddies, Jasper and Horace, are the ‘dumb and dumber’ of the story. They are T.V. obsessed and this leads to the escape of the puppies from the De Vil manor (*101 Dalmatians* 50:10 – 53:00). They also end up ruining Cruella’s plans due to crashing into her car with theirs, ruining both vehicles (*101 Dalmatians* 1:15:11 – 1:15:45).

Lastly, you have the main antagonist, Cruella De Vil. She is a stereotypical villain, dressing in red and black and smoking a noxious cigarette (*101 Dalmatians* 13:05 – 15:09). Her name is a twist on ‘cruel devil’ which summarizes her nature quite well.

The second symbolism I want to talk about is the use of colors. Lots of emotion was shown, just by using color. Often when the puppies were at home and playing, the colors were

bright (22:25 – 28:00). In shots where the puppies were gone, the house took on a more shadowed and deep blue tone (*101 Dalmatians* 28:40 – 30:23).

Orange was associated with the puppies a lot too, being a color that represents joy and happiness (*101 Dalmatians* 22:25 – 28:00). Once the puppies were taken, the orange begins to fade, and therefore the joy and happiness.

There also were transitions to cold and snowy weather when they were giving up, the first being where Pongo and Perdita are searching for their puppies, and the second, during their long journey home with the 99 puppies (*101 Dalmatians* 46:53 – 47:49, 59:25 – 1:03:55).

The third symbolism I want to talk about is some of the other various symbolism of note within the movie.

The first of these is the wedding scene. This is when both Anita and Roger are getting married along with Pongo and Perdita. During the wedding scene, some roses are seen weaving up the wall (*101 Dalmatians* 10:47 – 10:56). Roses symbolize love and romance, and I find this to be a nice touch.

Second, is the scene when right after the birth of the puppies, when one of them doesn't make it. Roger rubs the puppy with a towel and the puppy comes back to life. A big strike of lightning happens around this time, which symbolizes both the rebirth and foreshadows the appearance of Cruella (*101 Dalmatians* 18:20 – 20:00).

Another scene is where Roger is being pressured to sell the puppies to Cruella. Cruella sprays ink on both Roger and Pongo, making Roger look like a dalmatian. This shows that Pongo and Roger stand together, and this is furthered by the fact the right after this, Roger refuses to ever give the puppies to Cruella (*101 Dalmatians* 20:20 – 21:50).

In conclusion, *101 Dalmatians* is jam-packed with all sorts of symbolism. Based on all the evidence, it is clear that *101 Dalmatians* is full of different stereotypes, colors adding to the tone, and all sorts of various symbolism packing throughout it. *101 Dalmatians* is a movie that becomes deeper after every watch and is laced with symbolism which shows how great the movie was for its time. Next time you feel like watching a movie, consider watching *101 Dalmatians*!

Works Cited

- 101 Dalmatians*. Directed by Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske, and Wolfgang Reitherman, performances by Rod Taylor, Betty Lou Gerson, Cate Bauer, Ben Wright, and Bill Lee, Walt Disney Productions, 1961.
- “101 Dalmatians.” *Disney*, Disney Entertainment, <https://movies.disney.com/101-dalmatians>-1961. Accessed 31 May 2021.