

Pan's Labyrinth (2006, Del Toro, Spain)

Component 2: Global Filmmaking Perspectives (AL)
Component 2: European Film (AS)

The Contexts of the Film

Historical: The film is set in Spain in 1944, this is only a few years after the Spanish Civil War, which ended in 1939. The Spanish Civil War had many facets, it was seen as a war against class, religion, a war between fascism and communism and a struggle between dictatorship and republican democracy. Spain was under the rule of Francisco Franco, leader of the Nationalists until 1975.

Institutional: The budget for Pan's Labyrinth was \$19 million and grossed \$83.3million worldwide. The budget is reflected in the extravagant set design, animatronics, large cast, costume and make up. The film was co-produced by a mixture of Spanish, Mexican and American production companies. It was distributed in the UK through Optimum.

Del Toro's filmmaking career includes a range of films from the fantasy/horror genre. He has directed Spanish dark-fantasy films as well as mainstream Hollywood successes such as *Hellboy* (2004) and *Pacific Rim* (2013).

Political: The fascist regime of the Nationalist party is presented as a negative force. The guerrillas have a positive representation and are viewed as resourceful and determined.

Social: The film is a commentary on the societal issues of a patriarchal ruling. Del Toro also draws upon the corruption of middle class and the elite.

Technological: Del Toro favours using animatronics over CGI, he learnt his make-up skills working alongside make-up artist Dick Smith, who was the make-up artist on *The Exorcist*. Therefore, most of the set design has been created using animatronics and green screen technology. The effect of this style is a more magical-realist production which mirrors the fantasy-realist narrative.

Themes

Death Fascism Fantasy Mythology
Pagan Patriarchy Republican
Spanish Civil War

Aesthetics: The hybridity of the film combines fantasy/horror with the violent historical portrayal of Spain after the Civil War. The film has been coined a magical realist text as it combines these elements. The film has been referred to by Del Toro himself, as a loose sequel to his film *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), a drama/horror set just after the Civil war.

There are Pagan motifs running throughout the film. The Labyrinth is covered in ruins and standing stones. Pan is blended into the ruins of the Labyrinth when we first meet him, he is covered in moss and nature. The fairies also provide the magical element.

The name Pan is for the sake of the English audience. The Spanish title *El Laberinto Del Fanno* translates as The Faun's Labyrinth. The fauns in the Spanish titles refer to fauns in Roman mythology, del Torro specifically mentions that the Pan in Pan's Labyrinth is not the Pan from Greek mythology, who was far more mischievous and sexual. This representation is not the Pan featured in the film, he is a far more ambiguous creature and the audience are never fully sure of his motive or alliance to Ofelia. That is until the end when the final task is revealed as a test of her loyalty.

The film follows a formula that is apparent in many myths, Ofelia is set three tasks that she has to complete in order to open the Labyrinth. This rule of three is present in many legends and myths, the hero must overcome three challenges/tasks in order to receive the treasure.

Ofelia is influenced by the books that she reads, the first thing her Mother says to her is "I don't understand why you had to bring so many books Ofelia", indicating to the audience that Ofelia's life revolves around stories. This in a way makes her an unreliable narrator, the audience are constantly left in doubt as to whether the magic is real or the fantasy world of a little girl trying to escape her reality.

Representation of Age: The film opens with the loss of innocence and the theme of children as victims runs throughout the film. The Pale Man is a monster that eats children. He destroys innocence and life; a link can be made between this monster and the ruling elite. His lair is scattered with his victim's shoes and paintings depicting child murder, the children's shoes make a haunting comparison to the Nazi death camps.

Representation of Gender: The film presents a critical view of the patriarchy. We learn from the start that Ofelia's Father died in the war and the next man to fulfil this role is the Captain. The Captain is depicted as a violent sadist to gains pleasure from torturing people. He is controlling and undermines, underestimates and abuses women, which ultimately leads to his downfall. Captain Vidal is equally obsessed by both his Father's military background and his son. The final scene as he is about to meet his end he tells the guerillas to tell his son the time he died, using his Father's watch. He dismisses his sick wife and step daughter Ofelia, who he ultimately kills. The main female characters suffer at the hand of men, this reinforces the negative view of a patriarchal society. Carmen dies as she gives birth to her son, her new husband does not mourn or appear bothered by her death. Ofelia is killed by her Step Father, after he gets his son back.

Representation of Nationality: As the film is set in Northern Spain in 1944 there are no range of ethnicities. The audience are made to align with the rebels, they are depicted as compassionate and comradely, unlike the supporters of Franco (The Falangists) who are depicted as corrupt, cruel and sadistic. These traits are personified in the character of Captain Vidal, who throughout the film executes a number of innocents including his own Step Daughter and takes pleasure in torturing those with less power.

Opening Scene

Mise en Scene: The pale dying form of the young girl Ofelia, is one of the first things we see. Her hand is covered in blood and she is bleeding out of her nose, this introduces the spectator to the violent element of the film's narrative. The lighting is low key establishing there will be horror. The shade of blue that tints the opening connotes the tragedy of the situation but also hints at fantasy within the film. As the Princess runs up the stairs to the outside she is greeted with a blinding white light denotes she is heading up from the underground realm, but with the connotation of the white light being heaven. The props of Ofelia's books tell us she has a vivid imagination, she refuses to relinquish her hold of her books when offering her hand to the Captain, leading him to reprimand her for using the wrong hand.

Cinematography: The camera pans into a canted close-up of our young dying protagonist. The camera slowly zooms into her pupil inviting the spectator into her imagination which is where we will visit for a lot of the film. The connotation of this zoom is that she is unable to tell us her story so instead we are being invited in to see it unravel for ourselves. A high angled crane shot pans across the underground realm. The camera then pans across the ruins of the Labyrinth before the convoy of cars containing Ofelia come into view. The next shot is a close-up of the book with the story about the princess, Ofelia is flicking through the book and the audience connect the dying girl in the beginning to the little girl in the car.

Sound: As the titles are still being displayed the non-diegetic sound of someone struggling to breathe is heard. A non-diegetic lullaby is being hummed by a female voice, it has a sad tone enhancing the tragedy. We see the dying girl who we realise the breathing belongs to. A non-diegetic male voiceover takes the role of narrator, we are told the story of the Princess who left the underground realm and died and how the King waits for her soul to return, as the narration finishes we meet Ofelia, alive this time, this links her with the story.

The Captain's watch ticking connotes he is a strict observer of time and order. This is supported by the first words he utters "15 minutes late."

Discovery of the Labyrinth

Mise en Scene: Ofelia is wearing a white nightshirt which connotes her innocence. The scene is very dark and lit with moonlight creating a blue tint, instead of being frightening it creates a mystical and magical atmosphere. The Labyrinth is dark and covered in moss, it appears deserted and untouched, where nature has been able to escape from the interference of man. The faun is disguised as part of the Labyrinth reinforcing it belongs to him. His appearance is impressive, both natural and fantastical, his movements are abrupt making the spectator unsure of his intentions. He lurks in the shadows which creates ambiguity regarding his motive, at this point we are unsure as to whether he is friend or foe. Compared to Ofelia who is bathed in moonlight throughout the scene, this supports what the Faun tells her “it was the moon that bore you.”

Cinematography: Ofelia approaches the clearing, she is framed in a wide shot which emphasises how small she is, this reminds us that she is just a child and could possibly be in danger. As Ofelia goes into the Labyrinth the camera swoops above her into a high angle as we watch her descend, her descent into the unknown creates unease as the spectator is positioned to watch her journey down alone. Throughout the scene a series of wide shots are used to signify her vulnerability.

Sound: Non diegetic classical music is played throughout the sequence along with the whirring of the fairy wings, both of these sounds reinforce the magical make-believe scene that is developing. Inside the Labyrinth Ofelia calls out ‘Hello’, her voice echoes around connoting her isolation. As she walks through her footsteps appear louder, this makes the spectator concerned as it signifies to whatever may be lurking down there that she is there. The Labyrinth appears cold and unwelcoming with water dripping and every sound echoed. As the faun awakens it emits animalistic growls which contrast with his human voice, showing he is part man and part beast. His movements creak and crack connoting he has been still for a long time and waiting for her return. As he speaks he tells her the story that we were privileged to hear at the beginning, this alerts the spectator to the fact that he was our unseen narrator at the beginning of the film.

The Pale Man

Mise en Scene: The hallway leading to the Pale Man is lit with warm filler lighting, this creates a false sense of security regarding the horror to come. The prop of the hourglass intensifies the scene as it adds the element of urgency. The appearance of the Pale Man is nightmarish, he has holes where his eyes should be, the connotation of him being soulless. He has extra flaps of skin hanging off of his body, his hands have long, dagger like finger nails and the fact his eyes are in his hands creates a disturbing image. Pictures around the room warn at what the Pale Man is capable of with children being slaughtered. The banquet is served on golden plates and made to look as tempting as possible, the biblical connotations of Eve eating the apple is replayed as Ofelia eats the fruit; despite being warned not to by both Pan and the Fairies.

Cinematography: Deep focus wide shot is used to reveal the expanse of the hallway, this emphasises how far she is from the safety of her room. The camera repeatedly zooms into a close-up of the hourglass throughout the sequence, this creates the notion that time is running out, creating panic for the spectator. As Ofelia walks towards the Pale Man the camera tracks her progress with the banquet in the foreground of the shot, this highlights the temptation she is under with the food constantly on show. As Ofelia glances up at the paintings a POV shot is used as she takes in the horror of the images. This establishes for both Ofelia and the spectator of what her fate could be. As Ofelia notices the fruit a reverse zoom shot is used to show she is considering eating one. As the Pale Man awakes a mid-shot focusses on his jerky movements. A close-up is used of his eyes being put into his hands, showing this in gruesome detail so the spectator is unable to look away. Shallow focus is used as Ofelia continues to eat the fruit as the blurred form of the Pale Man slowly approaches her from behind, this empowers the spectator as we are aware of the danger she is in. Another close up slows us to see the gruesome detail of him biting off the head the fairy. As he pursues her wide shots are used to view his approach.

Sound: The sounds coming from the Pale Man enhance the horror of him. When he awakes he emits a rattling breathing sound, his hands creak and crack to imply he has been still a long time. As he places his eyes into his hands they crack and squelch creating an abhorrent image of him. His noises are animalistic, like a bat, he creates a high-pitched screaming sound as he moves.

Final Scene

Mise en Scene: The blue colour palette is ever present throughout the final scene. This time it creates a melancholic atmosphere and the scene is tragic. The gun is a significant prop as it is responsible for both Ofelia and the Captain’s death. The Captain’s costume is drenched in blood and yet he still continues to chase Ofelia, this shows how determined and unstoppable he is. As the Captain shoots Ofelia his body language is casual, he doesn’t hesitate at shooting a child showing just how callous and evil he is. After the gun is fired Ofelia remains standing, this gives false hope that he missed her, as she raises her hand it is covered in blood, the red creates a striking contrast against the blue hue. This is the point she collapses, this is the position we found her in at the beginning of the film and the audience realise we have come back to that point of her story. As the blood seeps through her white nightdress it creates a striking contrast, this connotes the loss of her innocence. The prop of the watch also appears in the final scene as he asks the guerillas to tell his son what time he died, the watch is cracked which connotes how his life has fallen apart.

Cinematography: As the Captain approaches Ofelia we get to view his POV, she is framed in a wide shot talking to thin air, this allows the spectator to see that Pan is in her imagination. A deep focus wide shot captures Captain Vidal sneaking up on Ofelia, this creates tension and mirrors the shot with the Pale Man sneaking behind here. The spectator is constantly positioned to view the danger approaching Ofelia. An extreme close up is used to focus on Captain Vidal’s watch, this shows that in his final moments he is still thinking about his Father and the hold he had over him. The camera slowly zooms into the lifeless figure of Ofelia, her hand is covered in blood as it drips into the Labyrinth. The meaning of this is if the blood of the innocent drips into the Labyrinth it will open, this creates enigma as we wonder whether the Labyrinth is going to open or if it is all a dream.

Sound: Pan tells Ofelia that he needs the blood of the innocent to open the portal, she refuses telling Pan “My Brother stays with me.” The tone of Pan’s voice changes to anger as he shouts, “You would give up your sacred rights for this brat you barely know.” His response makes the audience question this character, has he been manipulating her all along? As Captain Vidal enters the scene he says nothing as he retrieves his son and shoots her, the non-diegetic music is dramatic, reflecting the tragedy of the situation, the Captain’s silence only reinforces the little care he has for Ofelia. As Ofelia dies the lullaby we heard at the start is sung again, this time around we realise it is sung by Mercedes, this knowledge holds more emotion this time around as we understand the relationship she had with Ofelia. This magnifies the tragedy even further.

Assessment Question:

To what extent does the social, historical, political and institutional context of Pan’s Labyrinth have an impact on its style.

Assessment Question:

How does mise en scene and cinematography help to drive the narrative forward?