



A Level Film Studies 'Pan's Labyrinth'

(2006, del Toro)

COMPONENT 2: GLOBAL FILMMAKING PERSPECTIVES

Section A: Global Film

Written examination: 2.5 hours

35% of qualification

AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of elements of film

AO2 Apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to:

analyse and compare films, including through the use of critical approaches

evaluate the significance of critical approaches

analyse and evaluate own work in relation to other professionally produced work

CONTEXTS

Production | Social and Political | Critical Debate

The representation of women (as passive to men's whims and overtly feminine) is evidence of the social problems women faced in this **patriarchal and macho era** - women / females are oppressed in a show of hyper / toxic masculinity.

A local priest, attending a meal held by the Captain, dismisses the possible pain felt by the rebels on theological grounds. His representation lacks humanity and is clearly a barbed commentary on an **'out of touch' and complicit Catholic church**: "God has already saved their souls. What happens to their bodies hardly matters to him." Del Toro uses the cinematic conceit of a banquet to heighten the corruption of the local middle classes and ruling elite. This complicity of the Catholic church is later echoed in future sequences.

Despite his criticisms of Catholicism as a dogma and institution it is clear that Del Toro **admires the spirituality of his native religion** (he himself is a 'lapsed Catholic') - in a later film *Crimson Peak*, a ghost story, he commented on his belief in ghosts.

The period featured, **1944 in Spain**, is intriguing to the non-specialist as it is clearly a period where the rumblings from the Spanish Civil War are still being felt despite the war itself having finished in 1939. Franco's support of Hitler belies Spain's direct involvement in World War 2 - although he did send volunteer forces to aid the Germans during the war. Fascism continued to be the predominant political system until Franco's death in 1975 (still relatively recently).

IDEOLOGY AND THEMES

Pan's Labyrinth offers a view of how war impacts on individuals and also on the value of storytelling as a critical aspect of human culture and experience.

Of *Pan's Labyrinth*, del Toro has said in a conversation that: "I happen to believe that... every deficiency we have in our social or personal behaviour comes from a moment that is rooted in our childhood. And I love to explore the idea of either conquering that fear or dealing with it very pointedly."

SYNOPSIS

In 1944 Falangist Spain, a girl, fascinated with fairy-tales, is sent along with her pregnant mother to live with her new stepfather, a ruthless captain of the Spanish army. During the night, she meets a fairy who takes her to an old faun in the centre of the labyrinth. He tells her she's a princess, but must prove her royalty by surviving three gruesome tasks. If she fails, she will never prove herself to be the true princess and will never see her real father, the king, again, within the Underworld.

TERMINOLOGY

MAGIC REALISM

FORMALISM

COMPOSITION

PRODUCTION DESIGN

IDEOLOGY

AUTEUR

CONTEXT

AUTEUR

Guillermo del Toro satisfies the way in which a filmmaker can bring a certain kind of creatively distinctive approach to a well-established genre that might often be seen in slightly pejorative terms.

Certainly, Guillermo del Toro stands as an ideal example of authorship, not only in terms of the ways in which 'his' films are promoted and then received and discussed but also in terms of his own discussion of them. of the director as 'source' of a film's meaning.

Pan's Labyrinth is critically lauded with 3 Academy Award wins in 2007 for Best Makeup, Art Direction and Cinematography. Widely regarded as Del Toro's definitive film.

LANGUAGE AND MISE EN SCENE

Sound | Lighting | Editing | Cinematography

del Toro's film luxuriates in its illusion-making and, in this age of digital effects, makes the effective and affecting choice for its title character to be rendered as a live-action performance (by Doug Jones) from beneath an intricate and mesmerising costume and facial make-up.

Del Toro has fashioned a reputation for a detailed and idiosyncratic approach to mise en-scène. Most of his production designs originate from sketch work that he produces in notebooks. He is consequently someone who prefers the physicality of animatronics and model work to CGI. The film received Oscars for its make-up and production.

SPECTATORSHIP

Pan's Labyrinth vividly manipulates our reference to reality by emphasizing the connection between a world we recognize and the application of various sophisticated filmmaking techniques to show us a fantasy environment that resonates with the world that we recognize.

While much of the cruelty in *Pan's Labyrinth* is very graphic, it is the explicit nature of what is experienced by children that makes the film hard to watch for some. The Pale Man's lair is littered with murals depicting him eating babies; Captain Vidal is very abusive towards Ofelia when she displeases him, and the Faun wishes to use a knife to prick Ofelia's baby brother.

NARRATIVE | GENRE

Although the film is clearly set in a defined geographical, historical and socio-political context, it is an example of a 'magic realism' text.

Pan's Labyrinth has a wide array of characters that fit in with the fantasy genre. For example, the faun, the pale man, the fairies, and the king and queen of the underworld. They fit into the genre because due to having an element to their character that looks like or belongs to that of a different world. The film utilizes special effects/CGI and creative costumes to bring the fantasy world to life (a common thing for films that belong to the fantasy genre). The film belongs to not only one major genre, but two. The film is set during the Spanish Civil War and gives the audience some insight into the army and totalitarian rule of Francisco Franco. These historical aspects of *Pan's Labyrinth* contrasts the generic fantasy elements of the film by showing the harsh realities of the real world.

KEY SEQUENCES

Opening Sequence

Ofelia encounters Pan

Ofelia encounters a toad

The Pale Man Figure

PAST QUESTIONS

(a) With close reference to the **two** films you have studied, explore how **either** performance **or** mise-en-scène create meaning. [40]

Or,

(b) With close reference to the **two** films you have studied, explore how **either** editing **or** sound create meaning. [40]