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Spanish Cinema

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### Faun-tasy Vs. Vidal-ity

Guillermo Del Toro who was born on October 9, 1964 in Guadalajara, Mexico had always been intrigued by cinematography. He was especially interested in the horror genre. Del Toro has won numerous awards such as the Oscars for Best Director and Picture. Set in the year 1944 in Spain, Guillermo Del Toro shows his audience a dark fantasy and historical drama showing the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War through a young girl named Ofelia from the Academy Award-winning movie, *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). Under the Francoist Regime there were set roles, rules, and expectations placed on everyone under an oppressive rule that really restricted a good portion of the population. Each identity was supposed to live and be a certain way, especially the women during this time. While Guillermo Del Toro was born in Mexico and not Spain, it's not as if he was unfamiliar with the events as Mexico did take in some people escaping the war (Smith). The audience will see a dark and cruel reality while following Ofelia's escape into a fantasy world with the influences of fairy tales. Del Toro displays parallelism between fantasy and reality through an imaginative Ofelia and her fascist step-father, Captain Vidal.

The Spanish Civil War had already happened at this point where it lasted from 1936 to 1939. The two sides were the Republicans, who were fighting for equality, and Nationalists, those that were primarily traditionalists and conservatives and were led by General Francisco Franco. The war was a summation of a fight for class differences, religion, democracy, and

revolution. A fight for fascism and communism. The outcome of the war had the Nationalists coming out as winners. Though after the war had finished, there were still resistance groups around Spain leading the audience to where they are currently in the film with Nationalists groups being posted out in the country to finish off what was left of the resistance.

When Ofelia and her mother first arrive at Vidal's estate, he greets them in the masculine way as he's sure that Ofelia's mother is carrying a son, his main priority. The gray and blue tones of his uniform reflects the reality he is living in, and is always clean cut. Vidal can be seen by others as the "perfect man" as he exudes masculinity while having stories being told of his father and having followed that legacy. There was a story stating that his father had smashed a watch right before his death so that Vidal would know the time of his death. When he ultimately meets his demise at the end by the hands of the antifascist group. He asks Mercedes, the caretaker that was undercover, to tell his son the time of his death. Unsurprisingly Mercedes refuses. Vidal was always in a position to be giving absolute orders and someone that didn't want his time wasted. Whereas Ofelia was just a rebellious young girl trying to get through her life. It was important that the main protagonist was exactly a young girl who never listened. Vidal paid her no attention as she was just a girl which allowed Ofelia to do as she pleased. Though she was just seen as extra baggage her mother had brought, there was only one expectation placed on her- to be a quiet and obedient girl. Her only true value would be a vessel to give birth to a child in the future and care for it.

The only people that paid any attention to Ofelia were her mother and Mercedes while Vidal didn't care for her as long as she didn't cause any more problems than she was worth to him. This allowed Ofelia to do the three tasks that were given to her by the Faun. The first task she is able to do fine, but when time comes for the second task, things don't go as smoothly for

her. The audience sees Ofelia's inability to follow orders and taking them lightly as she ate the food on the pale man's table when she was told not to. She tells the Faun that she just ate a few grapes, and is told that she failed her quest. She is given one final chance later on and is told not to question the Faun if she wants to proceed. At the end she is told she must sacrifice her baby brother's life, and she ultimately refuses. Recalling back to the historical context, the audience can see parallels between Captain Vidal and the Faun as well as Ofelia and the resistance. This need to disobey and question authority is shown to be necessary when put in the perspective of Ofelia being told to end her brother's life. Ultimately Ofelia chooses not to, and is ultimately killed while seeing a vision of the underworld soon after. Blindly obeying is not progressive for society.

The clash between men and women is also strong throughout the film due to the hierarchy with the state and church being at the top. Due to young Ofelia being a woman, she is expected to be an obedient girl that will grow into a mother and like her mother, a vessel to hold a child. The value behind a fascist man such as Vidal is shown holding true value and interest to the baby boy which further divides the value between the genders. If the main protagonist had maybe been a boy, things would have definitely been different to the plot of the movie. Ofelia sympathizes with Mercedes and hides the fact she's helping the rebels. A young boy could have possibly seen Vidal to be an ideal man and followed Vidal around as well as attempted to surrender Mercedes to him. It would have been a movie just showing an ongoing cycle of the thirst for power, order, and inequality. The soldiers are always blindly following Vidal. It ultimately becomes his downfall at one point in the film, when Mercedes is caught and brought to question. Mercedes mocks Vidal saying it was his inability to see women as real people that she was able to get around completely unnoticed for so long. Her escape after stabbing Vidal is

only lightly questioned by the soldiers, allowing her to get as far as she was able to until Vidal comes out screaming to catch her. The lack of critical thinking and blind following of orders being Vidal's downfall was astoundingly ironic for the audience.

Captain Vidal was someone that could be tied with reality especially with his obsession with being timely. At the beginning of the film Vidal points out that they're late before meeting them. Time and reality are closely intertwined despite time being a man made concept. At one point in the film, there's a dinner being held at the estate and a story is brought up about Vidal's father. A story of how moments before his death, he smashed a clock so that his son would know what time he died. "It seems that Vidal seeks to control time in order to control both his own destiny and that of others, attempting to "fix" time and maintain the order and power of patriarchal law" (Clark and Roger). Though Ofelia is in her own fantasy, she cannot escape time as she still is timed during her second trial. As if it were a harsh reminder for the reality she lives in.

*Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) was a film that cleverly wove together different aspects of socioeconomic status, socio political differences, and gender roles. Guillermo Del Toro told a tale of the lengths people go to for their morals and beliefs through their own battles. Through the daily life and adventures of a cold and grim reality against a warm distant escape into fantasy. This was a film that can be rewatched multiple times to grasp different details and perspectives throughout all age groups. Messages that can be sent to young growing children to strengthen their morals, and to both children and adults- to question authority.

## Works Cited

Clark, Roger, and Keith McDonald. "A Constant Transit of Finding': Fantasy as Realisation in Pan's Labyrinth." *SpringerLink*, Springer Netherlands, 23 Jan. 2010, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-010-9099-7>.

Smith, Paul Julian. "Pan's Labyrinth." *Film Quarterly*, 11 May 2017, <https://filmquarterly.org/2007/06/01/pans-labyrinth/>.