# Pan’s Labyrinth:
A Critical Analysis by Safia Southey

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Eyes and Obedience

Guillermo del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* is an exploration into the life of a young girl, Ofelia. Ripped from her home and forced into the world of her stepfather, Captain Vidal and the Spanish Civil War, she hides herself away in her books and fairytales. When she is told by a Faun that she is the Princess of the Underworld, she immediately leaps at the chance to prove that she’s not mortal in order to distract herself from the patriarchal and violent world around her. Every character in the film must decide what part they play in her story, whether they will obey their superiors or create their own path, whether they will see beyond their instructions or blindly follow orders. Symbolism of eyes and sight appear everywhere, posing as a theme to guide the audience through the story and raise questions about what it really means to see. In *Pan’s Labyrinth*, only those who are able to open their eyes and not blind themselves with rage and make decisions beyond what they are expressly instructed to do are able to succeed.

The film begins with a fantastical story about a Princess who lives in the Underworld realm who dreams of joining the human world. She escapes her captors, but as soon as she breaks out, the brightness of the sun blinds her (Figure 1). This is the first reference to both sight and obedience, as the Princess loses her sight as soon as she goes against her orders, and in doing so she loses her memory, suffers, and quickly dies. By introducing the viewer to the story with a fairytale, this scene immediately sets the fantastical tone for the rest of the film, as well as making the audience aware of the themes of eyes and disobedience.

The movie then leaves the storytelling perspective and begins the story of Ofelia, the protagonist. While on the ride to Captain Vidal’s house, Ofelia’s mother Carmen tells her
daughter to stop looking at her fairytale books. Soon after, Carmen stops the car to take a breath, and although Ofelia is instructed not to wander, she takes the opportunity to explore the nearby area. She comes across a statue, decrepit and somewhat hidden within the greenery surrounding it. Ofelia finds a stone eye on the ground and fits it into the statue, as if it was a puzzle piece (Figure 2). This action begins her fantastical journey, as it brings forth an insect that appears from the statue, an insect which later morphs into a fairy and guides her to the faun. Again, this unexpected and life-changing incident would never have occurred if Ofelia followed directions and stayed by the car. She disobeys, which may end badly as it did to the Princess in the prologue, but for now it is merely driving her story forward. Ofelia’s returning of the eye references the myth of Horus’ eye being restored by Thoth in ancient Egypt. The right eye is associated with factual information and logic, normally seen as the male side of the brain, while the left eye of Horus distinguishes the spiritual and mystical, noted as the female side of the brain. By returning the left eye (left to the audience and Ofelia), Ofelia is inserting her female and mystical presence into the male dominated world that she is currently living in, achieving the important balance that is needed to begin her journey and eventual transformation.

When the car finally arrives, both the audience and Ofelia are formally introduced to Captain Vidal. With a fixation on timeliness, anger about Ofelia shaking with the wrong hand, and specific shaving rituals, he is shown as a man who is obsessed with rules. Late one night, his soldiers bring him two men who they suspect of spying, while they claimed to be mere rabbit hunters. Vidal pierces the eyes of the younger man with a bottle, blinding and then killing him (Figure 3). This is especially ironic as rabbits were found in the man’s bag after it was searched, making it so that Vidal was literally blind to the rabbits and to the truth, and because of his
stubbornness, murdered an innocent as well. This scene explains who Captain Vidal is to the audience: he is a man who acts before he sees, a man who takes away the sight of others in fear of losing his power or respect, a man who values obedience over truth or what is “good.”

Despite Captain Vidal trying to enforce his ideals and rules on Ofelia, she begins her journey for the faun to prove her place as royalty. In one of her tasks, she must visit the Underworld and take a knife from a room filled with red food and a gruesome creature with eyes on his hands. She was given express instructions not to eat anything, but she ate a few grapes anyway, awakening the “Pale Man.” (Figure 4) The Pale Man is most likely designed after the Japanese legend of the Tenome. (Figure 5) Tenome was a blind man who was murdered by a mugger and became an angry ghost--so furious that he lost his eyes, but new ones grew back on his hands. He sought revenge on his murderer, killing everyone that he could lay his hands on, without even seeing who it is. Tenome’s intense anger rendered him forever figuratively blind (Scary for kids). The Pale Man is the fantastical reflection of Captain Vidal, a man who will kill whoever gets in his way in his quest for ultimate power and triumph, with an indifference towards children and the innocent. This is another example of how only those who are open to seeing the world around them, those who are not trapped in their own obedience and rules, will be successful. Ofelia breaks the rules, but it is her ability to create her own path and escape from the Underworld that allows her to triumph over the Pale Man in this situation, while he stumbled through the corridors, literally following her blindly.

The imagery of Ofelia running away from the Pale Man is repeated later in the film, the doctor Ferriero disobeys Captain Vidal’s orders and walks away from him. Ferriero euthanizes a rebel soldier that Vidal has captured, helping the captain realize where his
allegiance really lies. Vidal turns to the doctor and says, “I don’t understand, why didn’t you obey me?” Ferriero responds saying, “To obey without thinking, just like that, that’s something only people like you can do.” With that, the doctor walks away, and Vidal shoots him in the back as he walks. Before he collapses, Ferriero takes off his glasses. (Figure 6) Ferriero’s glasses can be seen as a metaphor for his character, as they hide his eyes, and therefore his true self, as he pretends to be a loyal friend to Captain Vidal while secretly working for the rebels. As well, his glasses act as a physical barrier between Vidal and himself as well as a protector of his eyes, which Hamilton believed to be “the windows to the soul.” When Ferriero is shot, he remains calm and collected, accepting his fate and not giving into the blinding anger that Vidal and the Pale Man possess. The act of taking off his glasses symbolizes that he no longer needs to maintain the illusion of obedience, and finally everything is honest and his eyes are clear. The Captain is similarly shown wearing glasses at point, although his glasses are sunglasses, making it so they obscure rather than illuminate. His vision, just like his behavior, is disruptive and effectively self-destructive.

When the film is nearing its end and everyone is exposing their true selves, Ofelia is given the most difficult task of all: taking blood from an innocent, her baby brother. She steals the baby from Captain Vidal and takes him into the labyrinth with the knife from the Pale Man’s room in the Underworld. Ofelia drugs Vidal, so as he chases her, he literally cannot see. His vision is blurred and he cannot cannot make his way through the maze; his violent behavior and obsession with rules and obedience has blinded him. This time, Ofelia is directly involved in the removal of sight. As the labyrinth twists and turns letting her through, she makes it into the center, where the Faun is waiting for her. Vidal follows her there, but he cannot see the Faun.
Again it is clear that Ofelia is the only one with perfect sight, which gives her the ability to make the “right” choices. Instead of taking the blood of her brother, she sacrifices herself. Her blood spills into the Underworld portal due to the bullet that the Captains shoots her with, and she is finally made the Princess that she dreamt of being. She is rewarded for her innocent disobedience by clarity.

All the character who disobey eventually triumph, even in their death. Ofelia becomes Princess of the Underworld, Mercedes (Vidal’s housekeeper) has the Captain killed, and the doctor Ferreiro helps the rebels and grants a peaceful death to his friend. Vidal, the man who believed in a strict following of orders, is the only man who is truly defeated. With his wife dead, child stolen by the rebels, soldiers shot, homebase bombed, and life taken, he has nothing. Ofelia, on the other hand, is the prime example of the opposite. She follows through and completes all the tasks that the Faun gives her, but what makes her different is her ability to do them in her own way. The balance that she creates in the beginning through the eyes of the statue, the harmony of logic and dreams, realism and fantasy, masculinity and femininity, stays with her through the movie, allowing her to be the only character that has the ability of true sight. She perceives everyone for who they truly are, forging her own path, and is literally the only character who sees both the violent world of war-ridden Spain and the mystical world of the Faun and the fairies. Ofelia lives up to the words inscribed above the labyrinth, “in your hands, lies your destiny,” as she refuses to follow the orders of anyone—her mother, Mercedes, Vidal, or the Faun (Figure 8). She creates her own destiny, something that is only possible with clear eyes, something that the anger of the other characters doesn’t make possible for themselves.
Ophelia’s eyes allow her to see things both visible and invisible, real and unreal, which starkly contrasts with the fascist villain, Captain Vidal, one who punctures the eyes of others and believes not in what cannot be physically seen. *Pan’s Labyrinth* is a film of moral struggles, where each character is faced with the question of whether or not to follow orders directly, of whether or not to give into their anger and rage, of whether they can find a healthy balance of fantasy and reality. The issue that the film finds with sight is, how can one know if something is real if only they see it? Is Ofelia’s fantastical journey to becoming a Princess just in her imagination? Does it matter? Still, Guillermo del Toro demonstrates how dangerous it is to blindly follow directions, and how important it is to always be watchful, as the answers can be found by those who have the eyes to see. As the last line of the movie states, everything is visible “to those that know where to look.” (*Pan’s Labyrinth*, 1:52:11)
Guillermo del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* can be seen as collage of different stories and fairytales, pieced together in the mind of a young girl. Although there are two distinct realms of fantasy and reality in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, there are clear reflections between them which provide deeper explanation for both worlds when compared. The characters in the film tell stories to create an artificial sense of power and control in their real lives.

Ofelia is the most powerful character in the film, as she is the only figure who can not only see both fantastical and realistic realm, but also the only one to freely cross over from one world to the next. This makes it so that she doesn’t have a fantasy world double, but her personal story has similarities in the fairy tales told throughout the film. The film begins with the narrator telling the story of the Princess in the Underworld dreaming of the human world and escaping her captors, only be blinded by the light of the Sun and dying quickly after. It is assumed that this is Ofelia’s prologue, her origin story - but maybe it’s a summary of her journey with Captain Vidal, her evil stepfather. Her life in Spain with her new stepfather and ill mother is her own form of the Underworld/Hell, and she dreams of another world where she is royalty, where her father is still alive and her mother is happy and healthy. Ofelia leaves behind this world, giving up her “royal” status as daughter of the esteemed Spanish captain. She is “blinded” by the beauty of this fantasy land, whether it is real or just in her imagination. This dream leads Ofelia to make poor decisions, kidnapping her brother and drugging Captain Vidal, leading to her death.

Another story that Ofelia can relate to is the one that she tells to her brother in the womb, before she knows of the Faun or her upcoming quest. She tells him of a blue rose on top of a
mountain whose petals offers eternal life, but its thorns contain poison that will immediately kill whoever they prick. (Figure 9) Soon after Ofelia tells this story, she is promised eternal life in the Underworld, acting as her rose. The dangerous tasks that she must go through--receiving a key from a greedy frog’s stomach, a knife from the Pale Man in the Underworld, and taking blood from an innocent--all function as the rose’s thorns, the obstacles in her way. The rose eventually wilts away and dies because none of the men try to take it, which is the same thing that would happen to Ofelia: if she doesn’t go through with her tasks, time will run out and she will have to remain mortal forever. This same fairytale could also mirror the circumstances of fascist Spain. Captain Vidal rules over the land with fear, forcing the people to remain complacent and oppressed. Their political freedom is represented by the flower, while the thorns in their way is the fascist regime and the fear of being killed by the Spanish soldiers. In the real world version of this story, Mercedes and Dr. Ferriero (Vidal’s housekeeper and doctor) are the ones attempting to climb the mountain to achieve political freedom by assisting the rebels in their cause and by deceiving and stealing from Vidal. Neither them nor Ofelia are willing to give up on their dreams or their fairytales, and follow the story’s lesson that risks are necessary in order to achieve greatness, and that one mustn’t let these opportunities disappear because of uncertainty and fear.

Captain Vidal’s way of ruling is not the only aspect of his life that is encapsulated in stories told within the film, as his entire reason for living is reduced to the story of his father. The men in his father’s battalion said that when General Vidal died, “he smashed his watch on a rock so that his song would know the exact hour and minute of his death, So he would know how a brave man dies.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 42:40) This story fuels Vidal’s obsession with time and
precision, and explains why he is constantly trying to fix his pocketwatch. (Figure 10) It also creates an almost romanticized version a death, as a death in battle will make him forever remembered as a brave hero to his friends, and more importantly, his son. Because of this story, Vidal is constantly prepared, even hoping, for death. He slices his reflection in the mirror while shaving (Figure 11) and later charges up a hill into guerilla gunfire, saying that it is “the only decent way to die.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:10:01) When his time finally comes, he asks Mercedes to give his son his watch and tell him about his father - but Mercedes ruins everything he has hoped for, noting that “He won’t even know your name.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:48:08) Vidal craved a story to pass on, just like the one that his father passed onto him, but he learns the hard way that a story cannot be forced.

Vidal’s life is also reflected in various ways in the fantastical tasks that Ofelia must enact. Visually, the scene where Vidal is at the head of a dinner table filled with food exactly mirrors the Pale Man’s position in the Underworld. (Figure 12) While people are starving in fascist Spain and children are hungry in the Underworld, Vidal and the Pale Men sit in excess with no desire to help those around them. Further, Vidal’s clock and obsession with time mirrors the hourglass that Ofelia must beat to survive. (Figure 13) When related to Greek mythology, Vidal can be seen as Cronus, god of time. Cronus was known for eating his offspring, connecting him to the Pale Man who is implied to have eaten hundreds of children and only leaving their shoes, in a Holocaust like image (“Cronus”). When Ofelia is in the Underworld, she is not allowed to eat any food on the table, similar to how she is sent to bed without dinner at the Captain’s party. As well, the Pale Man’s eyes on his hands make it so that he only sees the physical and nothing beyond it, just as how Captain Vidal is focused on only the reality, not allowing Ofelia to read
her fairytales, not seeing the Faun at the end of the movie in the labyrinth. The scene where Vidal is chasing Ofelia through the labyrinth with his arms extended to see where he is going because he was drugged is an exact visual quote to the scene earlier in the movie when the Pale Man is chasing Ofelia through the corridors of the Underworld. (Figure 14) Vidal’s connections to the Pale Man vilify him even further, turning him from a man into a grotesque, otherworldly, seemingly immortal being. Both the Pale Man and Captain Vidal represent evil, selfishness, and anger. They blindly follow directions and act before they think, acting under the idea that they must establish dominance and power through violence. The fantasy mirror image appears after the “real world” version, forcing the viewer to question how real this real this encounter in the underworld truly is. If Ofelia is imagining this fantasy world, then it makes perfect sense why she is turning her enemies into real monsters in her mind. She is creating stories which she can defeat the men who treat her wrong, giving herself power that she would not have otherwise.

There are clearly similarities between characters in both realistic and fantasy world, but specific objects also appear in both realms. In Ofelia’s first task, she must receive a key from the stomach of a greedy frog who is “growing fat while the tree dies,” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 36:15) which can be seen as yet another reference to Vidal’s greediness while his people starve. The key that she takes in the fantasy world is a mirror version of the key that Mercedes steals from Vidal in order to help the rebels. (Figure 15) Ofelia knew that Mercedes was working for the rebels long before her first task, so she would have been able to make this connection and implant the key and act as Mercedes the hero in her own world. Later, Mercedes takes a knife from Vidal’s kitchen that she later uses to slice open his cheek while saying “You won’t be the first pig I’ve gutted.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:33:21) Ofelia finds a dagger of her own in the Underworld, in the
Pale Man’s dining room. (Figure 16) This was supposed to be used at the end to spill the blood of her brother, but Ofelia refused to hurt an innocent. The stories that Ofelia tells are her own form of rebellion, a sophomoric version of what Mercedes is attempting to achieve. Both women have an extremely difficult time living in Captain Vidal’s world and escape in their own ways, one by joining the rebels and the other into her fairytales and dreams. Ofelia turns herself into the strong feminine figure that Mercedes proves herself to be, but Ofelia can only achieve this in her imagination.

Despite Mercedes being Ofelia’s main feminine role model, her mother Carmen also plays a part in Ofelia’s stories. While Mercedes encourages Ofelia imagination and stories about the fantasy world, saying “My mother warned me to be wary of fauns,” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 29:54) Carmen tries to get Ofelia to stop dreaming about other words and focus on reality. From her very introduction, Carmer tells her daughter that she’s too old to be reading fairy tales, to be filling her head “with such nonsense.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 3:21) When Ophelia claims to have seen a fairy, her mother completely ignores her, focusing on the the state of her muddy shoes instead. The only part of the film where fantasy and reality seem to directly coincide is when Ofelia puts a mandrake root under her mother’s bed to heal her, and it actually succeeds. This may have been a completely coincidence, but as soon as Carmen removes the root from under her bed, she becomes sick again. The mandrake is actually important in occult lore due to being in the shape of a human body, with arms and feet and all. It is said to have real healing abilities, which would bring it outside the realm of fantasy and into the realistic world, explaining why it helped Carmen. Despite this, Carmen throws the root into the fire, saying that “life isn’t like your fairy tales. The world is a cruel place, and you’ll learn that, even if it hurts. Ofelia! Magic does
not exist! Not for you, me, or anyone else!” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:23:01) Ofelia’s dreams and stories are continuously squashed by her mother, which explains even further why she creates this world where she is in control, and where her mother is a mythical queen that is proved wrong. Carmen’s constant desire to prove Ofelia into reality may seem like a horrible thing to do to her daughter, but maybe if she had succeeded and Ofelia had stopped telling all her stories, she would still be alive.

Ofelia uses stories and fairytales to create a world in which she is not a prisoner. Although there are similar tasks and obstacles in both her real world and the one she creates, she has control over her fantasy world and therefore she is the most powerful figure. Vidal tries to force his story into existence in a similar fashion, but fails as he is only ever able to see what was palpable, what was physically in front of him. Although Ofelia’s fantasies and imagination leads to her eventual death, it’s the only way to complete her story with ending that can satisfy her. As Guillermo del Toro once said, Pan’s Labyrinth is “not about a girl dying, but about a girl who is giving birth to herself the way she wanted to be.” (Kermode)
Hamlet Connections

Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* and Guillermo del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* share more than a character named Ofelia, essentially just telling two versions of the same story. Both works include a focus on sight and obedience, and force the audience to grapple with their own beliefs about what is real and what is not throughout the play and movie.

One would immediately assume that the character of Ofelia in both works represent the same character, but it seems that the Ofelia of *Pan’s Labyrinth* corresponds more directly with the character of Hamlet in *Hamlet*. In terms of plot, both Ofelia and Hamlet have mothers that remarry soon after the death of their father, and neither of them like their stepfather. They both witness an apparition, for Hamlet it is the ghost of his dead father, and for Ofelia it is the Faun. Neither of these otherworldly being seem entirely convincing of their goodness, forcing the protagonists to decide whether or not to trust them - they both do. They plan to avenge their father’s death, as it is subtly implied in *Pan’s Labyrinth* that Captain Vidal murdered Ofelia’s father in order to marry her mother Carmer, while it is expressly stated in *Hamlet* that Claudius killed King Hamlet to marry his mother Gertrude. Ofelia doesn’t directly claim to want to take revenge on Vidal or blame him for her father’s death, but she is doing all that she can to escape from his grasp with her mother.

Further, both Hamlet and Ofelia are both given tasks to complete by their otherworldly counterparts. While, Hamlet is given one task with three parts, Ofelia is given three separate job to do. Hamlet is instructed to avenge his father’s murder, leave his mother to her own conscience and Heaven, and to not go insane in the process, and Ofelia must retrieve a key from a toad, a
dagger from the Underworld, and finally, spill the blood of an innocent. Both Hamlet and Ofelia achieve parts of their quests, but not perfectly. Ofelia eats food in the Underworld when she was instructed not to and shed her own blood instead of her brother’s, while Hamlet inadvertently hurts his mother as she drinks poison that was intended for him, and it is debatable whether or not Hamlet truly goes mad. During Ofelia’s final task, she puts sleeping medication in Captain Vidal’s drink, effectively poisoning him just as Hamlet poisons Claudius with the same cup that his mother died from.

The final scene of Pan’s Labyrinth solidifies the connection between Ofelia and Hamlet. Vidal attempts to stop Ofelia from taking his son to the Underworld and from pricking him with a dagger. Although the dagger does not kill anyone in the film, it acts as a visual reference to when Hamlet is murdered at the end of the tragedy by a poisoned dagger. Both protagonist and stepfather are killed in these final moments. As well, it is in this scene that Ofelia sees the Faun and Vidal does not, just as Hamlet can see the ghost and his mother Gertrude is not able to. (Figure 7) In both works, the audience must ask whether or not these figures are real, or if the protagonists are going mad, or merely just creating stories. Both Hamlet and Ofelia prove to be powerful characters with strong wills and the ability to achieve what they set out to do, even if it’s in their own way. They both understand that blind obedience is not something that will lead them to success, and as Dr. Ferriero said, “to obey without thinking, just like that, well, that’s something only people like [Vidal] can do.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:24:10)

There are also similarities between Pan’s Ofelia and Hamlet’s Ophelia (note the spelling difference). Both characters are considered mad, but in reality, they may just be free thinkers and talkers. While Ofelia’s intense experiences have irreversible repercussions on mind, she is not
crazy. When looking at the realistic parts of the movie, all of Ofelia’s actions are logical and make sense with the story. Both Ofelia and Ophelia are instructed to follow the orders of the strong males around them, and although they occasionally obey, they eventually speak out and choose their own path, which leads to their death. Shortly before death, Ophelia distributes flowers to the people around her, and is always associated with flowers in modern references and imagery. Ofelia is similarly related to flowers, as her first task brought life back a fig tree, explaining the closing image of Pan’s Labyrinth as a flower blooming on the tree in memory of Ofelia. (Figure 17) Hamlet’s Ophelia commits suicide by drowning, which is visually quoted in Ofelia’s first task when she is soaked in water by the rain. Her green dress flies away, leaving her in a wet white underdress, a similar image to how Ophelia is usually conveyed in her death. Ofelia’s death is much more bloody, but is similar in the idea that it was a sacrifice. Both women had to end their lives and their suffering in order to achieve some sense of peace.

Despite these similarities, Ofelia is too strong of a character to represent Ophelia. With a strong will and independent choices, Ofelia relates closest to Hamlet. Hamlet’s Ophelia, on the other hand, seems to relate closest to Ofelia’s younger brother in Pan’s Labyrinth. As the only real innocent in the movie, he is used as a tool by other characters before he can even understand what is going on. In Hamlet, Ophelia has massive pressure put on her to be both the sexual object that Hamlet sees her as, as well as the virtuous daughter and sister. Even though Ofelia’s brother doesn’t know it yet, the same pressure is being put on him; he must act as the perfect son to Vidal, a sacrifice for the Faun, and soon, Prince of the Underworld/orphan (depending on how happy the ending is interpreted). Both the little bother and Ophelia will be forced to deal with unrealistic expectations and to live a difficult life that is underserved by such innocent people.
Also, both stories have a focus on sight. As mentioned previously, there is question as to whether the ghost and the Faun are real because Hamlet and Ofelia are the only ones to actually see them. This begs the question, is seeing necessary for something to exist? Mercedes, Vidal’s housekeeper, spies on Vidal, similar to how Horatio spies on Claudius and how Polonius spied on Hamlet. Watching is an extremely important part of Hamlet, as the audience watched Hamlet watch Claudius watching the play, demonstrating how it is always important to stay alert about what is going on, and to keep your eyes open and aware. Gertrude tells Hamlet, “Thou turn’st mine eyes into my soul:/ And there I see such black and grained spots/ As will not leave their tinct” (Shakespeare, 3.4, 100-102), conveying the idea that one’s eyes can somehow show their soul, an idea that is also prevalent in Pan’s Labyrinth. From the very first scene when Ofelia inserts the eye into the statue which began her journey, eyes have symbolized balance between the realistic and the fantastical, and sight has been a necessary part to success. (Figure 2) As well, the Pale Man, a gruesome creature from the Underworld, is outsmarted due to only having eyes on his hands. (Figure 4) In both works, there is a necessity to break away from the given path and to not blindly follow orders, as the people who make their own decision are usually the character who succeed in their quests.

Although one tells the story of a young girl trying to escape fascist Spain to the Underworld with the help of a Faun and the other other a story of a Prince trying to avenge the death of his father, both Hamlet and Pan’s Labyrinth share stylistic, character, and plot related similarities that make them extremely connected and referential. While these two works do share many commonalities, the characters do not match up perfectly and the plot varies tremendously. Despite that, Pan’s Labyrinth can definitely be considered a dark and modern spin on a beautiful
Shakespeare classic, with Ofelia as a strong, powerful, and willful protagonist that mirrors Hamlet himself.
**Cinematography and Sound**

In *Pan’s Labyrinth*, Guillermo del Toro uses filmography specifics such as colors, shapes, filming techniques, and sounds to make clear distinctions between the realistic and fantastical worlds that Ofelia seems to effortless walk through.

One of the first things the audience realizes while watching Pan’s Labyrinth is the color palette. The world of fascist Spain, Captain Vidal in particular, is associated with the colors blue and gray, and occasionally red. This world is dimmer, the colors giving off feelings of coldness. Subtle hints of different blues appear within the props as well, props such as the military uniforms and Ofelia’s coat when meeting the Pale Man. (Figure 18) The entire film actually begins with a blue coloring, displaying the melancholic atmosphere of a kingdom that has lost its princess. A blue hue is also initiated Captain Vidal is introduced, representing his dullness. The Faun’s Underworld is represented by contrasting colors, such as gold, crimson, and green. (Figure 19) These warmer colors are majestic more welcoming, with the green referencing natural and the non-manmade world. These gold hues were used by del Toro to reference a woman’s womb, which is why Ofelia first enters the fantasy world through her mother’s womb when talking to her little brother. (Figure 20) The overall tones of the colors and shadows are considerably dark and gloomy to display the ambience of the film.

Ofelia is associated with several colors throughout the movie, including red, green, and blue, as she doesn’t belong to only one world. These colors work to distinguish where Ofelia is physically and emotionally, as the colors that she wears represent the the world that she feels closest to. From the first scene when Ofelia steps outside the car and encounters the mysterious
statue and soon after a fairie, her surroundings seem covered in a warm glow, unlike anything reality has to offer. (Figure 21) These rich and vibrant colors bathe the image in a dreamlike aura, setting the stage for a beautiful fairytale journey. Vidal and his house is the exact opposite, often accompanied by dark and gloomy lighting that makes him seem like a villain. The three fairies that Ofelia encounters are different colors as well: red, green, and blue. (Figure 22) While on her second tasks, Ofelia eats food in the Underworld, awakening the Pale Man and allowing him to eat her red fairy. (Figure 23) The red demonstrates that this fairy represented more of the realistic world, the world that she is leaving behind. The green fairy is the first one she encounters and can be considered her guide in the fantastical world, which is fitting as green is the color most closely associated to the Underworld. (Figure 24) The different worlds are differentiated through shape as well, as the fantasy world has more circles and curves. The shapes in the Underground realm are more uterine, representing femininity and birth and the rebirth of Ofelia as a Princess. Vidal’s world is filled with straight lines, demonstrating how everything must be precise and exact in the realistic world.

In the film, sound designer Marin Hernandez portrays sound through Ofelia’s mind, such as with the noises the house makes when Ofelia and her mother first move in. The house timbers moan and creak, scaring Ophelia. Her mother Carmen explain that it’s “just the wind,” and that houses outside the city are old and creaky (Pan’s Labyrinth, 12:09). This sound is repeated later in the film when Ofelia is on her second task and just nearly escaped the clutches of the Pale Man in the Underworld. She slams the chalk door behind her and holds it shut, only to hear banging on the door. These sounds, although may be proof of the Underworld realm, also can be proof of the opposite. The creaks and haunting floor noises remain in the house no matter if
Ofelia is in the realistic or fantasy world, demonstrating that she might be amplifying it all in her
head. When Ofelia is dying, the lullaby that Mercedes, Vidal’s housekeeper, sang to her earlier
in the film plays. This may represent Ofelia thinking of Mercedes with her last thoughts, trying
to emulate the strong and willful female role model that she provided. Throughout the film, both
Mercedes and Ofelia are attempting to escape from the painful world that Vidal has created.
Ofelia attempts to replicate Mercedes’ rebellion and power through her own stories and
fairytales, but can only truly achieve this goal in her death. The fact that Mercedes’ song plays as
Ofelia dies demonstrates her finally completing her rebellion. Ofelia turns herself into the strong
feminine figure that Mercedes proves herself to be, but Ofelia can only achieve this in her
imagination. The first time that this song is played in the very first image of the movie, when
Ofelia is lying on the ground, blood running back into her body. The lullaby sharply contrasts the
gunshots and screams and shallow breathing in the background, which represents Ofelia’s
reality. While Ofelia dies, the lullaby grows louder and stronger, reflecting her joining the
fantastical realm of the Underworld and leaving behind the reality of dangerous fascist Spain.

The sounds of the different world are clear, but Hernandez designs it so that neither are
completely comforting to the audience. The fairies make squeaking sounds similar to that of a
mouse, their communication with the Faun seeming sneaky and concerning. The Faun’s voice is
darker and warm, but with a slightly different accent and dialect than the other character. His
voice seems to be constructed from the sound of lions and of old wood, giving him a sense of
antiquity, strength, and intimidation. The lack of sound is also utilized in the film, as
demonstrated in Ofelia’s first task. When having to take a key from a frog within a dying tree,
there is no music. The only sounds are the noises of the bugs in the tree and the squish of the
mud underneath her, and later the sounds of the toad slurping his own spit. The use of these sounds highlight how uncomfortable and disgusted Ofelia is in this environment, but demonstrate how she is willing to sacrifice her cleanliness and dignity to complete her tasks. When she completes this task, the light sound of rain contrasts the squish of the mud, demonstrating the sharp transition back into reality. Similarly, the sounds that accompany Ofelia during her second task in the Underworld are also disconcerting. The subtle crackles of the fire, shallow breathing, and lack of music creates an ominous and suspenseful feel, which is what makes the Pale Man so frightening. The sharp noises of bones cracking and throat gurgles as he awakens breaks the silence, making full use of the sound to provoke intense emotions from the audience. The Pale Man doesn’t speak, rather just projects a piercing scream that mirrors the internal shrieking of the audience and of all the children that he ate in the past. As Ofelia runs away from him in the Underworld, with the music increasing in volume and intensity mirroring her increasing heartbeat and fright.

As well, del Toro utilizes camera angles to put the audience in Ofelia place, and to demonstrate her importance in various situations. When filming Ofelia and Vidal, the angle is often looking up at the Captain, making it so that he is in control and the more powerful figure. The camera literally belittles Ofelia around Vidal, demonstrating his intimidating and aggressive character. (Figure 25) Fear and discomfort are evoked when using these extremely low angles, while the angel at eye level is used by del Toro when telling the most important information about the character it’s focused on. The bird’s-eye view, as utilized when Ofelia is looking into the portal of the Underworld, is used to disorient the viewer and portray Ofelia as unimportant and small compared to her greater surroundings. (Figure 26) Before Ofelia embarks on her first
task, a slow zoom accomplishes this same belittlement and sense of unsurity. As she delves deeper into the tree, the camera focuses more clearly on her, demonstrating that she is important and vital to this fantasy world, that she is finally in control. (Figure 27) These closer shots on Ofelia demonstrate her as brave and ready to do whatever it takes to complete her tasks, as they make her look much bigger than in real life. As well, del Toro uses a somewhat blurry oblique angle in one of the final scenes where Captain Vidal is drugged and stumbling through the labyrinth in order to achieve as sense of disorientation and drunkenness. These camera techniques place Ofelia in contrasting positions of power in the fantasy realm and inferiority in the realistic world, possibly reflecting not how important she truly is, but hot important she sees herself.

The camera does more that tell the audience how important Ofelia it is, it actually guides the viewers through the film and helps tell the story. In the initial shot, the audience seems to rise out of the ground, move to the left, and reverse time with Ofelia by moving away from her death. The camera enters Ofelia’s eye, and is immediately transferred into the story of Princess Mona. This moment of the fairytale being told almost in Ofelia’s eye makes it seems that the entire story is actually just in her mind, that she created her story as an escape from fascist Spain. (Figure 28) After the audience enters this fantasy realm, the camera moves back to the right, demonstrating that the story is now moving in a forward motion. Del Toro emphasized the importance of using vertical wipes in the filming (moving left to right), as the movie is actually two different stories. The filming techniques show the contrast between the two, and as the movie progresses, the fantasy and realistic world intertwine and eventually meld together at the end, with the camera techniques ceasing the swipes and focusing on the one outcome. This end
scene mirrors the first shot, with the camera showing Ofelia on the ground, but this time she is bleeding out instead of in. The camera moves from her face to the blood on her hands, which drip into the portal of the dark labyrinth below. The camera focuses on the pool of blood forming, with the full moon reflecting in the water, which represents Ofelia transformation to Princess of the Moon and of the Underworld. (Figure 29) A bright light appears behind her, demonstrating the final transition from fantasy world to realistic that is occurring in her imagination. (Figure 30) She may be entering her fantasy kingdom, but she might just be entering God’s kingdom instead.

Further, the individual beings and objects that the camera focuses on give the audience further clues to the plot. Del Toro focuses the camera on the fairies that emerge from the statue at the beginning of the film, demonstrating how the fairies are the guides of the story, the characters in the story that most progress the story. (Figure 44) As well, the camera often centers on feminine symbolism such as objects that resemble ovarian tubes. From the branches of the tree in Ofelia’s first task to the horns of the Faun in the Underworld, the cinematography focus on literal birth reflects Ofelia’s desire for a metaphorical rebirth and is just another way that del Toro relates femininity to the fantasy world. (Figure 31 and 32) The flower on the fig tree that ends the film as represents birth and femininity, symbolising not only the life that Ofelia saved through her completion of the tasks, but also the life that is saved through the death of Captain Vidal.

The camera techniques, colour, shapes, and sound in del Toro’s Pan’s Labyrinth are effectively utilized to represent the separation of fantasy and reality, and bring the audience into the film to bring out their emotions. Color is important due to its ability to add tension or relief
due to the scene and contribute to or change the overall mood, especially when combined with specific lighting. Del Toro uses these cinematic techniques to help the audience differentiate between evil, good, and innocence. Through the usage of these different elements, del Toro integrates the human spirit into the magical, fantasy world.
**Good vs. Evil**

Guillermo del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* constantly forces the audience to distinguish between good and evil. Despite there being some clear examples of heroes and villains, most of the characters are a mix of the two, having to deal with moral struggles to making ethical sacrifices to achieve what they believe is right.

The clearest example of a character that walks the line of good and evil is the Faun, Ofelia’s introduction to the Underworld. The Underworld in itself is commonly related to hell and immoral beings, and the Faun does not appear to be a kind being. Although he welcomes Ofelia, his jerky movements and old, creaky, dusty body make him frightening and intimidating. His voice is low and woods, and he speaks in a different dialect than Ofelia, making him even more strange and foreign. The Faun introduces himself as “the mountain, the woods and the earth,” as a natural and pure figure (*Pan’s Labyrinth*, 22:44). This connection to nature is intended to make him more welcoming and “good” compared to the manmade world of Captain Vidal’s fascist Spain. Despite this, when Ofelia tells Vidal’s housekeeper Mercedes about the creature, she responds by saying, “my mother warned me to be wary of fauns.” (*Pan’s Labyrinth*, 29:54) This cautionary advice is intended for the viewer just as much as it is intended for Ofelia, opening their eyes to the possibility of evil within this creature from the Underworld. The audience does not know whether or not to trust the Faun and the promises that he makes to Ofelia. He acts as her guide by giving her “The Book of the Crossroads” and treats her as royalty, but his wide smile seems fake. (Figure 33) Later in the film, the Faun yells at Ofelia for disobeying him, threatening her, “You failed. You can never go back. The moon will be full in
three days. Your spirit will stay forever among humans. You’ll live among them, you’ll get old like them, you’ll die like them-- and your memory of us will fade.” *(Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:17:35)*

This again makes us scared of the Faun and his anger, and especially sceptical of him when he gives Ofelia a second chance. The fact that he asks for Ofelia’s little brother is troubling enough, but the desire to take his blood--even if only a pinprick--is worrying, as the audience does not know his true intentions. The fairies that accompany him also warrant some confusion within the viewers. The fairies gruesomely morph from frightening locust-like insects into what we commonly think of as fairies, molding themselves after what Ofelia shows them. *(Figure 34)*

They devour the meat that the Faun feeds them, distinguishing them from the peaceful creatures that Ophelia most likely imagined them as. *(Figure 35)* This moral struggle that Ofelia goes through is necessary, as if the tasks were clear and she knew she was doing the right thing, her quest would be too easy. This internal question of whether or not to trust the Faun and his fairies and her decision to believe him demonstrates how strongly she wants to escape the horror of fascist Spain. Ironically, the audience never gains the answer to whether the Faun truly wants the best for Ofelia while she is alive. If the final scene with Ofelia in her kingdom is only in her imagination, then maybe putting her faith in these Underworld creatures was not the best choice.

In the *real* world, Ofelia also puts her trust in morally questionable characters. Ofelia loves her mother Carmen, which is made obvious by how much she cares about her health. Carmen, on the other hand, seems to care more about her financial security than the quality of Ofelia’s life. By not only forcing Ofelia to live with Captain Vidal, but also demanding that she stops reading her fairy tales, Carmen does not try to ensure Ofelia’s happiness. Further, she even throws Ofelia’s mandrake root in the fire, saying that “life isn’t like your fairy tales. The world is
a cruel place, and you’ll learn that, even if it hurts. Ofelia! Magic does not exist! Not for you, me, or anyone else!” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:23:01) Carmen is also not a good feminine figure to look up to, as she directly obeys every order of the Captain even when she disagrees in order to maintain his happiness and in return, her spot in his house. Ofelia’s mother, on one hand is a kind mother that is just lonely and wants to secure her family, but on the other hand is a selfish and unethical role model for Ofelia.

The other female that Ofelia learns from is Mercedes, Vidal’s housekeeper. While Mercedes seems complacent at first, the audience soon realizes that she is in fact a traitor to the men she is working for and is assisting the rebels. She steals medicine and supplies for the soldiers hiding in the woods, feeding them information to help their cause. She keeps herself protected with a knife hidden in her apron that she stole from Vidal’s kitchen, a knife that she later uses to slit his cheek and stab him in the chest. At times, Mercedes acts more like a mother to Ofelia than Carmen does, singing lullabies to the young girl and allowing her to escape with her to the forests after her mother’s death. In the final scene, following Ofelia’s death, Mercedes takes Ofelia’s brother, the Captain’s son. At her request, her brother shoots Vidal in the eyes, just after she informs him that his son “won’t even know [his] name.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:48:08) While Mercedes counters Carmen by acting as a strong and powerful female that refuses to follow orders, she also acts as an immoral figure by lying, stealing, betraying, kidnapping, and killing. Although the audience roots for her throughout the film, it is obvious that she is not a pure or innocent character, and that she has made many decisions that cannot be considered righteous by normative standards. Mercedes forces the viewer to consider their own sense of good and evil when making such a problematic character one of the heroes of the film.
The only character that can be seen as pure evil is Vidal, who has no qualities that redeem him throughout the film. In an interview with the Writers’ Guild of America, Guillermo del Toro commented on Vidal’s character, saying:

*I consider him to be a sociopath; a guy who does not have compassion because he does not have compassion for himself. He hates himself. I think that what he does is absolutely evil, but if you watch the movie, you can see moments that kind of delineate his flaws. If you want to create an absolutely evil character, you have to make him completely hermetic. You have to make him almost evil incarnate. This guy is just a really screwed up sociopath.* (Faye)

In this quote, del Toro explains that Vidal is psychologically unstable and a destructive force rather than “evil.” The moments with his watch that reference the death of his father, his desire for a legacy, and the slitting of his own throat in his mirror all demonstrate a different side to him, a softer and self-hating side. Alternatively, Ofelia’s brother is the only character that embodies pure virtue and complete innocence, having not lived long enough to do anything distinctly bad. Ofelia can also be considered a righteous character, as she continues to make decisions that help people. Although she makes the occasion dishonourable decision, such as disrespecting her mother to complete the first task, eating the forbidden grapes during the second task, and kidnapping her brother and drugging Captain Vidal for the third task, she never directly harms anyone (although inadvertently her actions have the fairies cannibalized). Although her tasks are completed to prove her “goodness,” her quest can be seen as a completely selfish method of escaping her harsh reality and leaving everyone else she cares about behind. As well,
the possibility that her entire fantasy journey is all in her mind adds an element of concern to the audience, making it so that Ophelia is neither entirely sane nor innocent and righteous.

Entire worlds fall into clear categories upon first glance, but this is complicated throughout the film. It seems that the realistic world is the evil realm, while the fantastical world is where everything good lies, an hypothesis that is supported by the use of warm and welcoming colors in the Underworld and the contrasting dark and gloomy hues in Vidal’s fascist Spain. The two worlds never interact outside of Ofelia, seemingly oppositional, but are more similar than the audience is lead to believe. As demonstrated through individual characters, both evil and goodness can be found in both realms.

Although del Toro maintains that Pan’s Labyrinth has clearer good and evil characters than his other films, the movie contains nobody that can be considered completely one or the other (except for the infant, but he hasn’t had a chance to make any substantial decisions yet). Superficially, Pan’s Labyrinth is a story of good versus evil, but upon deeper inspection, there lies a duality within all the characters. This mixture of both virtue and immorality places the audience into the story, forcing them to question their own trust and beliefs, and what it truly means to be “good.”
Folklore and Religion

Guillermo del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* abounds with subtle and clear religious and folkloric references, further shading an already richly complex palate by offering even greater depth and context to the genre-defying film.

The film begins with a short story about a young princess in the Underworld who escapes her captors and enters the human world. On an artificial level, this story mirrors Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, in which society is trapped inside a cave and can only see shadows and darkness. When they are let out, they are blinded by the light—just as Ofelia is when she reaches the human world. But unlike Ofelia, Plato poses that the information benefits them, instead of causing them to suffer and die such as in *Pan’s Labyrinth*. When looking at the film as a whole, it seems that the human world is actually the cave. Ofelia is used to her reality, but the fantasy world of the Underworld realm is where the true information lies. Although this new world is confusing to both Ofelia and the cave dwellers, both del Toro and Plato posit, it is in fact a better life for both of them (though perhaps Machiavelli would disagree).

In Ofelia’s second task, she encounters a gruesome creature in the Underworld called the Pale Man, which has direct connections to Japanese myth. The Japanese legend of the Tenome has been handed down in the Iwate prefecture, usually including the following first hand account:

*I had walked the field that night a traveler when a blind man came closer. He was blind in that he had no eyes in his head, but one in each palm. He held his hands forward, looking at me. Surprised I escaped and ran to an inn. The innkeeper*
explained the man 'some time ago in Echigo a blind man was killed by a bandit. Before death he saw a glimpse of the bandit's face. He came back as a monster with a strong grudge against his hands which failed to defend him, now with eyes capable of sight in the palms of his hands, yet none in his head as he was blind in life.

The Tenome is said to be driven by rage, constantly searching for the bandits that murdered him but killing anyone he can get his hands on. This seems to directly reference the Pale Man, who devours anyone who enters his Underworld home and awakens him. In another version of the story, the Tenome kills a young boy by sucking all the blood and bones out of the boy’s body, leaving only his limp and sagging skin. This description matches how the Pale Man is depicted in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, and was most likely used in the character design. The myth of the Tenome reinforces the idea that the Pale Man (and Vidal, his realistic world equivalent), are stubborn in their anger and only have the ability to see what is palpable, both literally and figuratively.

Despite this, Ofelia’s encounter with the Pale Man relates more to the story of the Garden of Eden than to the Tenome. The Garden of Eden story first appears in the introduction to the film, when the narrator tells the story of a Princess in the Underworld. The girl escapes her captors to join the human world, only to be blinded, her memory erased, and eventually killed by pain and starvation. This story is a reference to Adam and Eve choosing to leave their perfect world (well, cast out, but they created their own fate by eating the apple), and having to suffer as mortals. This metaphor is further accentuated during Ofelia’s second task, when she is instructed to retrieve a dagger from the Underworld. Despite her instructions to not eat or drink anything, she is enticed by the delectable feast in front of the Pale Man and eats several red grapes. These
orders and the blatant disregard for them mirror Eve’s behavior in Eden, and in turn, Ofelia receives a similar punishment. After being chased by the Pale Man and only narrowly escaping, the Faun yells at Ofelia, saying, “your spirit will stay forever among humans. You’ll live among them, you’ll get old like them, you’ll die like them.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 1:17:35) This mirrors God’s remarks to Adam and Eve in the Bible when he states that “man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” (Genesis 3:22) Just like Adam And Eve, Ofelia ruins her chance at immortality by refusing to follow the strict directions of her superior. But unlike her Biblical counterparts, Ofelia’s eventual disobedience is what brings her to the fantastical kingdom that she has worked so hard to reach.

This scene also mirrors classic Greek mythology, intertextually referencing the myth of Psyche, the mortal wife of Eros, the god of love. According to the Greek legend, Psyche is instructed to complete several tasks in order to win back her husband: sorting out a huge pile of seeds, retrieving the Golden Fleece, filling a flask from the water that fills the River Styx, and finally, returning from the Underworld with a box of the beauty ointment. Ofelia must also embark on a journey fraught with obstacles to prove herself worthy of joining these otherworldly beings, and although the specific tasks are different than those of Psyche, they lead to a similar end. In order to reach the Underworld and complete her final task, Psyche plans to commit suicide. While she was on top of the tower she intended to throw herself off of, she was told of a route through Taenarum through which she could enter the Underworld and return again as long as she didn’t eat anything while beneath the Earth. She follows these orders and is rewarded with immortality (Atsma). Unlike Psyche, Ofelia disobeys her orders from the Faun and is punished.
for it. Having broken the rules, she is no longer completely righteous and her chance at immortality is swiftly taken away.

In this same scene, other Christian references are hidden in the room itself. On the ceiling of the Pale Man’s home are murals, showing him murdering innocent children by eating or stabbing them. These images and the scene in its entirety reference the works of Francisco de Goya, in particular, his “Saturn Devouring his Son,” while being vaguely representative of “La Vis Crucis,” the paintings that cover Roman Catholic churches. (Figure 36) The vaulted ceilings in the corridor, Romanesque paintings, and Corinthian columns are all reminiscent of a church. (Figure 37) This connection is ever furthered foregrounded in the dinner party scene in the realistic world that mirrors that of the Pale Man. For, at that dinner party, there is an actual Catholic priest sitting next to Captain Vidal who agrees to everything that Vidal says. When discussing the rebel soldiers, the priest adds that “God has already saved their souls, what happens to their bodies hardly matters to Him.” (Pan’s Labyrinth, 39:52) These Catholic references with both Vidal and the Pale Man demonstrate a lack of appreciation and respect for human life, highlighting the focus on punishment and anti-human qualities that can be found, yet are often ignored, in Christianity.

Ofelia is granted one more chance by the Faun, but now she must obey without question. In the final task, Ofelia is instructed to kidnap her brother from her stepfather and spill his blood into the portal of the Underworld. This task is similar to that of God’s test in Genesis 22 when he instructs Abraham to “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” While Abraham follows God’s direction and seemingly intends to murder his only son, Ofelia refuses
to take even a drop of her brother’s blood. Abraham is rewarded for his faithfulness and trust, while Ofelia is rewarded for her disobedience and suspicion.

All these tasks are completed in order for Ofelia to become “Moanna” the moon princess. The name Moanna directly translates to “the sea” in Hawaiian and Maori, and synchronically alludes to the goddess Selene. In Greek mythology, Selene represents the goddess of the moon. Selene’s legend is that while driving her horses across the sky, the shepherd Endymion caught her eye. Despite him being asleep, Selene immediately fell in love with the mortal. Zeus grants Endymion eternal youth and eternal life, leaving him to sleep on for eternity, dreaming that he held the moon in his arms (Atsma). This classical myth mirrors Ofelia’s journey throughout the film: despite being initially enamored with the human world, she eventually returns to her throne in the Underworld. As well, Selene is seduced by the god Pan when he disguises himself with a white fleece and coaxes the goddess into riding him (Atsma). Pan’s Labyrinth mirrors this aspect of the narrative too, in that although the Faun is distinctly not Pan according to del Toro, they have the same function in both stories. The Faun and Pan seduce Ofelia and Selene into leaving their home and entering the forest and the natural world, which represents the Underworld in Pan’s Labyrinth.

The references to Greek mythology move past Selene and Pan to more well-known myths and gods, such as Apollo and Dionysus (Kreis). The Faun, although seemingly more connected to Pan, is actually most related to Dionysus, the god of the grape harvest, wine, ritual madness, fertility, theatre, and religious ecstasy (Hedreen, 1). With his twitchy, frightening, volatile and unpredictable nature, the Faun can easily be considered as mad. The film’s many connections between the Underworld and femininity, especially ovarian tubes, also relate the Faun to fertility.
His dramatic speeches storytelling and theatrics further highlight his similarity to Dionysus. Additionally, the Faun promises and provides Ofelia with religious ecstasy, an altered state of consciousness that includes greater spiritual awareness, visions, and emotional euphoria--all examples of what Ofelia experiences throughout her journey. Vidal contrasts the Faun’s Dionysus with Nietzsche's idea of Apollo, which represents order, structure, and beauty. Del Toro camouflages Apollo’s beauty in the greenery and curves of the natural world, clothing the chaos and violence in the world of fascist Spain.

Del Toro reconciles the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of the movie, by not only delineating the different worlds but also underscoring how they interweave through each other and thus compliment each other. *Pan’s Labyrinth* as a whole is obviously a fairytale, but relates more to the darker German myths with troubled endings, vs the often utopic Disney stories that mark contemporary Western fairytales. Most fairytales are actually dark warning for children, full of horror and despair to instill in them proper rules, etiquette and obedience. Although *Pan’s Labyrinth* does include its fair share of hope and wonder, its use of gloomy colors, violence, and death provide the film with a dark and pessimistic feel. Del Toro makes use of classic fairytale tropes, such as the wicked stepmother. Instead of a good mother that dies at the beginning that is replaced by a father’s villainous new wife, it is Ofelia’s father that dies and is supplanted by a monster. As well, the film references Grimms’ Fairy Tales’ villains, such as the Big Bad Wolf. In an interview with the A.V. Club, Del Toro says in filming the scene in which Captain Vidal sews up his own cheek after Mercedes slits him, he “wanted that to be a moment in which he really, fully turns into the ogre of the movie. The Big Bad Wolf, you know?” (Murray) This scene includes the only over-the-top moment of violence in the film, effectively
bringing Vidal from simply a bad man to a full fairytale villain. (Figure 38) Del Toro filmed Vidal sewing up his mouth in a single shot to demonstrate how relentless he is, and the fact that the camera never shifts from the image of Vidal performing this procedure on himself illustrates how he will not stop until he is forced to—until he is killed. Vidal is presented as truly terrifying in order to make Ofelia’s refusal to obey the faun a terrifyingly difficult decision. Instead of camouflaging himself in “grandmother’s clothes,” Vidal disguises himself with bureaucracy and violence. The Captain, the Big Bad Wolf, must die in order to transform the horror story into a fairytale. Vidal being shot at the conclusion of the film, serves a bigger purpose than a simple death, but rather provides the movie with a symbolic ending of good defeating evil in the classic fairytale tradition.

Captain Vidal’s character of the Big Bad Wolf is particularly depicted as evil when explored in conjunction with Greek mythology. Cronus was one of a dozen monstrous Titans, but feared losing his power at the hands of his children. To prevent this, he swallowed all of his children as they were born, but his wife and sister Rhea hid away their youngest son Zeus. Eventually, Cronus is overthrown by Zeus and placed in prison in Tartarus (“Cronus”). In Pan’s Labyrinth, Vidal is an aggressive and power hungry man, forced into a father figure role when Ofelia enters his life. Like Cronus, Vidal metaphorically eats his children through violence (such as when he grabbed Ofelia because she reached out the wrong hand) and through crushing Ofelia’s fantastical dreams in order to maintain control in his home. He suffers from a “Cronus complex,” which ironically posits that ‘if a child cannot think or act independently, he or she will not be a threat.’ (Bolen, 22) The Pale Man represents Cronus in a more literal sense, as he actually devours children, just leaving their shoes.
Cronus is often confused with Chronos, the personification of time. However, this figure connects just as well to Captain Vidal and the Pale Man, due to their obsession with time. The audience sees Vidal’s watch before they see the character, demonstrating what is most important to him. (Figure 39) His fixation with precision and time not only reflect his all consuming need for control over his environment, but also his desire to connect to his father. At the dinner party, it is explain that when General Vidal died, “he smashed his watch on a rock so that his song would know the exact hour and minute of his death, So he would know how a brave man dies.” (Pan's Labyrinth, 42:40) This story fuels the Captain’s desire for an heir so he can pass down his own legacy, and explains why he is constantly fiddling with and trying to fix his watch. In this film, Vidal is Chronos, he is the personification of time and precision. Even in his room, there is a waterwheel in the background that resembles the gears of a clock, demonstrating that he cannot escape time. (Figure 40) Captain Vidal’s Underworld counterpart, the Pale Man, has a similar connection with time. Seemingly timeless, Ofelia is just a small moment in his campaign of violence. Her excursion to the Underworld is timed by an hourglass, making it so that she can only stay there with an escape for a certain amount of time--beyond that, she’s dead. In both worlds of reality and fantasy, Ofelia is governed by the power hungry and cannibalistic (figuratively and literally) men around her and their obsession with time.

Perhaps the oldest myth referenced in Pan’s Labyrinth is that of Horus in ancient Egypt. In one of the opening scenes of the film, Ofelia returns a stone eye to a statue in the forest, resonant with the myth of Horus’ eye being restored by Thoth. When Set and Horus were fighting for the throne, Set gouged out Horus’ left eye, the eye representing the moon, femininity, feelings, intuition, and spirituality. The eye is returned by Thoth, and is often used to
symbolize healing, sacrifice, and protection. Ofelia’s act of returning this eye represents her restoring balance, and inserting her own femininity and imagination into the harsh and cruel reality that she lives in. (Figure 2) From the statue appears a fairy that will guide Ofelia through her journey to the Underworld to become the princess of the moon, directly connecting Ofelia’s statue restoration to the protection and fantastical elements associated with Horus and his eye.

Further, the labyrinth itself is fraught with myth and meaning. A phrase above the labyrinth reads, “in your hands, lies your destiny,” demonstrating how personal choice is fundamental to this journey; a higher power is not guiding Ofelia’s fate. The labyrinth is where both worlds collide, as it functions as the portal to the Underworld, yet ironically it lies just outside Vidal’s home. In the final scene, the labyrinth is where Vidal attempts to enter the fantastical world but as he cannot see the Faun, fails. The labyrinth is a sentient being, twisting and turning around Ofelia to guide her to the center, while making the Captain more and more aggressive as it doesn’t let him through. The myth of the labyrinth is that Daedalus and his son Icarus designed the labyrinth in order to trap the minotaur ("Myth of Daedalus and Icarus"). In the film, Vidal acts as the oafish minotaur, stumbling through the labyrinth without the grace or knowledge of Ofelia. In most mythology, the labyrinth is a method for getting lost, which contrasts with del Toro’s labyrinth offering instead a route of discovery. The winding pattern in all labyrinths represent circulation of energy within the body, connecting the mind and body and therefore creating wholeness (“Labyrinths”). In the labyrinth, Ofelia not only finds the Underworld, but also her own true identity and sense of self.

In one sense, the Faun represents God, immortality, and temptation. Pan’s Labyrinth is an exploration of myth, a fairytale about fairytales and an homage to their power. This film
demonstrates how stories are the lifeblood of a culture, something that can never die, something that is outside the restrictions of the realistic world - just like the Underworld is for Ofelia. Through religious, folklore, and mythological symbols, images, and metaphors, del Toro’s film offers deeper significance to his already meaningful work and teaches that stories last forever.
Time

In *Pan’s Labyrinth* Guillermo del Toro champions the fluidity of time in the fantasy world compared by demonstrating how reality and precisely measure time leads to certain death.

The film begins with the imagery of blood returning to Ofelia’s face, the life being returned to her. This signifies the beginning of the Ofelia’s story, but also alerts the audience to where the story will end. The reversal of time mirrors our protagonist’s rebirth in the film, her creation of the person that she wants to be, her second chance in a way. Although this initial image is the same death as at the end, it is only with full context that the viewer realizes that it is in fact a happy ending. The repetition of Ofelia’s death, but in the opposite direction, provides the film with a sense of infinity, making it so that Ofelia’s story is simply an endless loop where time never runs out. For all of time, she will be stuck in this process of escaping her life in the human world due to the suffering that lies there, only to return to the Underworld and eventually escaping her captors there due to her fascination with the other realm. Further, Ofelia’s excursion to the Underworld in her second task is timed by an hourglass, counting down until her door to reality closes and essentially, her death. Ofelia allows her time to run out but is still able to escape by creating her own door, demonstrating that time cannot control her and that she has power over her own life. For Ofelia, time and life is boundless.

For Captain Vidal, time is limited. Vidal’s pocketwatch is shown before he is, representing his obsession with timeliness, his need for control, and also his stubbornness. This craze about precision and time stems from his father, who left him his watch so he would know the exact time of his death. Because of this story, Vidal wants an heir that he can share the time
of his own death with. Even in his room, there is a waterwheel in the background that resembles the gears of a clock, demonstrating that he cannot escape time. He takes the life of innocents, terrorizing and threatening most of the people around him. Vidal’s blatant disrespect for the lives of other by forcefully taking all the time they have left foreshadow how his time will be stolen from him. Due to his lack of fluidity about time, Captain Vidal is awarded with the worst ending he could imagine: his life is over and his child (and legacy) has been stolen. Unlike Ofelia, his life is not infinite.

The Faun, unlike Vidal, acts outside of the realm of time. Having lived and been waiting for Ofelia to return to the Underworld for so long, he is creaky and stiff when the audience first meets him. As the film progresses, color returns to the Faun’s hair, he becomes more limber, his voice breaks less, and his eyes become more clear. (Figure 41) This reversal of time show how Ofelia’s success at completely her tasks literally give the Underworld creatures life, due to the fact that once she proves her immortality, the Faun and the fairies can return to their fantasy world for good. Ofelia and the Faun work together to both extend their lives, to increase the amount of time that they have even beyond their time on Earth.

Similar to Ofelia and the Faun, Ofelia’s mother Carmen literally creates life. Carmen obeys the Captain’s strict orders, placing her under the harsh grasp of time and precision. While under Vidal’s influence, Ofelia grows sick due to several pregnancy complications: her time is running out. Ofelia attempts to delay her mother’s impending death by placing the mandrake root under Carmen’s bed, essentially inserting the fantasy world into her reality. When Carmen discovers the magical creature that been improving her health, she throws it into the fire while claiming that magic does not exist. By doing this, Carmen is choosing Vidal’s way of precision
and “reality” over her daughter’s otherworldly assistance, limiting her own time. Carmen dies during childbirth, as her decision to pick reality over fantasy reflects her choice of limited and measured time over fluid time, but she still manages to give birth to a baby boy. This birth symbolises her sacrificing her remaining time to a being of importance to the Faun, Vidal, Ofelia, and to the viewer, as he is essentially the only truly innocent character in the film.

Life and death are closely related within Pan’s Labyrinth, as like Carmen, Ofelia also created life by bringing death. In her first task, Ofelia is instructed to retrieve a key from a large and greedy toad within an ancient fig tree. She kills the toad with three magic stones, but in doing so, she allowed the tree and the creatures living on it to flourish. In the last moments of the film, a flower is shown growing on the tree as a subtle hint as to the life that Ofelia created and left behind. This flower represents Ofelia’s ability to reverse time, to bring things back from the dead just as she symbolically does for herself at the beginning of the film. As well, the fig tree’s flower contrasts the flower in the story that Ofelia tells to her baby brother in the womb: a flower whose petals have the power to make people immortal lies on the top of a blue mountain covered in poison thorns, but because everyone was afraid of the poison, they never tried to take the flower and it eventually died away. This is a perfect example of how those who ignore the fluidity of time and the possibility for immortal are only met with disappointment and failure. The story acts as a warning to Ofelia to not allow these opportunities to pass her by, she cannot allow her version of the flower and its powers to be lost forever. This fairytale explains the consequences of time while also acting as a metaphor for the film: the “real” world is represented by the men limited and controlled by linear and fleeting time, while the fantasy world is represented by the flower that promises eternal life and time. The motif of the flower repeats
again in one of the last scenes of the film where Ofelia returns to the Underworld, appearing on Ofelia’s dress. (Figure 42) This flower functions as another reference to the fantasy world, representing the circularity of and endlessness of time.

In this same scene, Mercedes confronts Vidal after he shoots Ofelia. She takes his child, and when her brother points a gun at the Captain’s head, all he does is ask them to give his son his watch. (Figure 42) Mercedes refuses to take it so as to not give the child anything to remember his father by, but her disobedience symbolises more than that. As one of the only remaining living character in the film, she has lots of remaining time to live, reflecting her refusal of the strict measuring of time that Vidal champions.

In *Pan’s Labyrinth*, time and life world together to illustrate the difference between the fantastical and the real world. While the world of fascist Spain calculates time precisely and will take away life without thinking about it, the Underground realm considers time infinite and unquantifiable, and gives life a higher value. Guillermo del Toro effectively conveys the idea that in order to succeed, one cannot live life harshly and inflexibly.
**Femininity**

In *Pan’s Labyrinth*, Guillermo del Toro uses female characters and feminine symbols to reflect the ideas of the time as well as the true power of women.

The symbolism of ovarian tubes appear throughout the film, representing birth, femininity, and spiritualism. This imagery first appears with the Faun in the Underworld, as his spiral horns visually reference fallopian tubes, the part of the female body which provides passage from the the egg from the ovary to the uterus. (Figure 35) This references combines of femininity and the Underworld, with the shape of the horns creating a sense of circularity and flow that does not appear in the male dominated and straight-edged “real” world. In Ofelia’s first task, she is instructed by the Faun to save a dying fig tree in the forest by ridding it of a hungry and selfish toad. The tree’s branches also reference ovarian tubes, but a most distorted and broken version, reflecting the tree’s impending death as the toad steals all of its nutrients. (Figure 32) The entrance to the door is visually reminiscent of a vaginal opening, demonstrating how as Ofelia is beginning her journey, she is being reborn. (Figure 45) The tree symbolises a portal, just like the one in the labyrinth, into the fantasy world of womanhood where she finally has complete power and control over her surroundings. When Ofelia completes her task, she crawls out of the tree and into the pouring rain outside. (Figure 46) This furthers the symbolism of rebirth with the water acting as a type of baptism, especially as her green dress flies away so she’s forced to wear only her virginal white under garments.

When preparing for her second task, Ofelia looks through her book of instructions that the Faun gave her. The words in the book disappear, giving way the deep red blood that takes
over the page. (Figure 47) The blood builds into the shape of fallopian tubes and also the Faun’s horns, scaring Ofelia into leaving her bathroom and witnessing her mother stumbling and asking for help with an outstretched hand covered in blood. (Figure 48) In this scene, the fallopian tubes work as more than just a connection to the fantasy world, actually becoming a warning to the power of women and the suffering that they must go through. Not only does Ofelia’s mother, Carmen, have to put up with the aggressive and selfish Captain Vidal, but also create life. Through the placement of the ovarian tubes in the fantasy world, del Toro implies the woman are more powerful than they were meant to seem in the world of fascist Spain. The combination of femininity and the Underworld provides women a sense of passion, imagination, and strength.

Despite Carmen’s power, she is possibly the weakest character in the film. In her first interaction with Captain Vidal, she is instructed to sit in a wheelchair that she doesn’t need it. Although she initially said that she “can walk by myself,” she gives in after nearly no debate in order to please her husband (Pan’s Labyrinth, 6:31). Throughout the play, she continues to obey Vidal without hesitation, even when it hurts her own daughter and herself (such as throwing the mandrake root in the fire). This works as a negative influence on Ofelia, making it seem that a woman’s role is to give birth, listen, and follow the instructions of the men. Del Toro uses Carmen to reflect the opinions of time when the play is set, but also to show that this is the wrong choice. Her inability to stand up for herself leads to her failure and her death, showing that although women are powerful, they must use their power and not allow themselves to be pushed around and abused by the patriarchy. In historical settings, women were stopped from reading in order to hinder their thinking, and in turn, their power. Captain Vidal limits Ofelia’s reading in order to hinder her happiness and creativity, while Carmen denounces Ofelia’s
Southey, 2016

fairytales in order to have her focus on reality. She does not want her daughter to hide herself away in her books, blinded by the world’s corruption. Rather, Carmen wants Ofelia to learn that she does not need a man to save her like the damsels in distress in her unrealistic stories. Carmen is not a powerful character, so the least she can do is help her daughter become aware of the prejudiced society that she lives in and hopes that she makes use of her strength as a woman.

While Carmen’s character both hinders and promotes female power, Vidal’s housekeeper Mercedes is the clearest example of a strong and independant woman in the film. Although she appears to follow the orders of Captain Vidal, she is taking advantage of his trust by stealing his supplies and taking them to the rebel forces. Mercedes is a determined and autonomous character, smiling at the man who abuses her while slowly plotting his downfall. She encourages Ofelia’s reading, demonstrating her connection the the fairytale fantasy world, the world of freedom and self-power. Mercedes is able to protect herself with the knife that she steals from Vidal, contrary to Carmen who needs protection from Vidal himself, yet even he cannot save her. With her knife, Mercedes escapes from Vidal’s control both physically and symbolically, slitting his cheek and making him into a grotesque monster and saying “I’m not some old man! Not a wounded prisoner! Sonofabitch, don’t you dare touch the girl… You won’t be the first pig I’ve gutted!” *(Pan’s Labyrinth*, 1:33:21) She stands up for herself and Ofelia, who acts as a daughter to her. Although she betrays Vidal, she stays true to herself and what she believes in. She is the character in the “real” world that most shares the fantasy world ideals, while Carmen is strictly in the human world. Mercedes represents the strong female presence that was not only not expected in the time that this movie was set, but not allowed.
As well, Ofelia herself is closely associated with the moon, with her tasks being timed by the moon, a birthmark in the shape of the moon on her shoulder, and the name “Moanna,” the Moon Princess. The moon is closely related with feminine power because of its cycles mirroring the life of a woman. Ancient myth relates the phases of the moon (new, full, and old) to the phases of woman (maiden, mother, and crone) (“Triple Goddess”). As well, the 28 day cycle of the moon closely matches a menstrual cycle, further connecting femininity with the moon. The moon is also closely associated with ideas of immortality, enlightenment, and the dark side of nature—all characteristics of the fantasy realm of the Underworld in the film. Acting as phase between the light of day and the dark of the night, the moon can represent the middle ground between the conscious and unconscious. Ofelia is also in this middle phase during the film, as she in not entirely mortal, yet she hasn’t proven herself to be immortal yet. The moon and Ofelia act as one, both representing femininity and female power. Del Toro gives the same attributes of creativity, free-thinking, and spirituality with the moon and the fantasy world, providing both with connections to women in order to demonstrate the power that they have, despite being seen as weak beings in the time of fascist Spain.

The moon is also included in ancient Egyptian mythology, which is referenced in the very beginning of the film. When Ofelia gets out of the car due to Carmen’s pregnancy pains, she goes wandering in the forest and comes across a statute meant to represent Horus, god of the sky. In ancient myth, Horus lost his eye in a battle, but it was later returned by Thoth. The right eye of Horus is meant to symbolize factual information, the Sun, and masculinity, while the right eye symbolizes esoteric thoughts, feelings, the moon, and femininity. Ofelia returns the left eye to the statue, representing her inserting her female power and intuition into the “real” world.
Vidal is the counterpoint to all the feminine power in the film, acting strictly in the realm of reality and fact. Focused only on logic and timeliness, the Captain only cares about maintaining his control over the people around him. He embodies the patriarchy, ordering around the women around him and forcing them into demeaning and offensive gender roles. Vidal is constantly afraid of his father beyond the grave, desired to live up to the legacy that he left behind. He adheres to typical roles of masculinity, made especially clear through his shaving scenes, smoking, and unnecessarily extreme acts of violence. He uses the women around him, not for sex or love, but to bore a son and further his legacy. Because of his father’s brave death, Vidal has romanticized death, making it necessary for him to have an heir to pass down his story to. As well, Vidal suppresses Ofelia’s imagination in an attempt to keep herself from realizing that her norm is harsh and that there are better ways of life out there. Vidal’s masculinity, further shown by the phallic objects that he uses such as his blade, gun, and bottle, contrasts the female power and strength of the film. Even though he is physically strong and able to take the life of others, his stubbornness and lack of imagination make him distinctly weak. His obsession with precision and control hinder his ability to succeed, allowing the femininity of the fantasy world to bring him down.

Ofelia, under the influence of Carmen, Mercedes, and Vidal, has to find her place in the patriarchal world outside her. While her mother and stepfather suppress her individuality by placing her into stifling gender roles, Mercedes and the creatures of the Underworld encourage her to find her true self. She completes the tasks by herself, making up her own rules as she goes along. Ofelia refuses to obey the controlling male figures around her, embracing the moon, the Underworld, and her own femininity. She becomes a mother in her own way, bringing life back
to the tree in her first task and by taking care of her brother in her third task. Ofelia chooses to save her brother rather than spill his blood, representing her healing feminine forces which contrast with Vidal’s destructive masculine force. Despite her aggressive and male dominated upbringing, Ofelia grows to be a strong and powerful woman who makes her own way through the world and proves herself to be royalty.

Guillermo del Toro creates strong female characters that fight against the patriarchy. The woman are represented by strength, fantasy, the moon, and imagination, while the men are represented by weakness, reality, the Sun, fact and ignorance. Ofelia acts as a princess unlike any other, creating her own happy ending. Both she and Mercedes prove that women don’t need a man to take care of them, as the strength of their femininity can and will always overpower the aggressive male dominance that surround them.
Figure 1

Figure 2
Figure 5

(Kyōgoku and Tada)

Figure 6
- such humiliation?
  - Yes, I would.

(Vidal’s point of view)

we can open the portal.

(Ofelia’s point of view)
Figure 8

Figure 9

that made whoever plucked it immortal.
They're losing ground, and one of them is wounded.
Figure 13

Figure 14
Figure 16

You won't be the first pig
I've gutted!
Figure 17

Why is that in your hand?

who know where to look.
Figure 20

At sunset,

Figure 21
Figure 26

Figure 27
Figure 30

Figure 31

It's you.
You've returned.
Figure 32

and won't let the tree thrive.

Figure 33
Figure 36

(Goya, “Saturn Devouring his Son”)
Figure 37

Figure 38
Figure 39

Figure 40
Figure 41

The portal will only open
Figure 42

Figure 43
Figure 44

Figure 45
Figure 48

Ofella... help me.
Works Cited


*Pan’s Labyrinth.* Dir. Guillermo Del Toro. 2006. Film.


