

**PAN'S LABYRINTH /
EL LABERINTO DEL FAUNO (2006)**

Dir. Guillermo del Toro
Study Guide

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Curriculum links: Contemporary Spanish Cinema; Latin America Cinema; Spanish civil war and post-war; the role of women in society.

AS/A2 Media Studies: *Pan's Labyrinth* is a contemporary film suitable for discussion in relation to media language, narrative and genre or as the focus for critical research/independent study.

WJEC A2 Film Studies: *Pan's Labyrinth* can be studied in relation to the research project in FS4, Film: Making Meaning 2 and in FS5, World Cinema. In FS6, Critical Studies, it could be a focus for work on 'Genre and Authorship'.

Introduction

As a media text, the film deals with themes such as gender, families and relationships, and the narrative of war and rebellion. The film mixes genre elements from horror, fantasy and war.

Credits

El laberinto del fauno / Pan's Labyrinth
(Spain and Mexico, 2006)

Written and Directed by
Produced by

Guillermo Del Toro
Guillermo Del Toro
Alfonso Cuarón
Álvaro Agustín
Berta Navarro
Frida Torresblanco

Executive co-producer

Edmundo Gil (Estudio Picasso)

Music by

Javier Navarrete

Film editor

Bernat Vilaplana

Production Designer

Eugenio Caballero

Director of Photography

Guillermo Navarro

Special make-up by

David Martí (DDT)

Make-up by

Pepe Quetglas

Special Effects

Reyes Abades

Costume Design by

Lala Huete

BBFC Certificate

15

Runtime

112 minutes



Leading players

Sergi López -	Vidal
Maribel Verdú -	Mercedes
Ivana Baquero -	Ofelia
Alex Angulo -	Doctor
Ariadna Gil -	Carmen
Doug Jones -	Fauno
César Bea -	Serrano
Manuel Solo -	Garcés
Roger Casamayor -	Pedro

Guillermo Del Toro



Image: Director Guillermo Del Toro

Guillermo Del Toro was born 9 October 1964 in Guadalajara Jalisco, Mexico. He studied make-up with short film director Dick Smith who was responsible for the special effects in films such as *The Exorcist*. For almost 10 years Del Toro was a make-up supervisor, and formed his own special effects company, Necropia, in the early 1980s. He also produced and directed Mexican television programmes and taught film.

In 1992 Guillermo Del Toro directed the Mexican-American co-production *Cronos*. His first feature won nine Mexican Academy awards and the International Critics Week prize at Cannes. This success allowed him to make his first Hollywood film five years later called *Mimic* (1997), starring Mira Sorvino. Unsatisfied with the experiences of working with a Hollywood studio, he returned to Mexico to form his own production company, The Tequila Gang.

His next feature was *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), a horror story set during the Spanish Civil War, produced by El Deseo, the company founded by the Almodóvar brothers. The international success of the film provided Del Toro with another possibility of working in Hollywood. In 2002, he was offered the chance to direct *Blade II*, the Wesley Snipes vampire sequel. This box-office success allowed him to adapt another comic book, Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* in 2004, starring one of Del Toro's favourite actors, Ron Perlman. Del Toro is currently working on the sequel to this film as well as *At the Mountains of Madness*, an adaptation of the novel by H.P. Lovecraft.

More perhaps than most filmmakers, he has maintained a personal vision in his interests on film and genre. His is a particular concern with the different pressures and allowances of working with a Hollywood studio and within a Mexican or Spanish production company: 'I've always been rather difficult to pigeon-hole, whether I was in Spain, Mexico or even the United States. (...) I believe that a filmmaker has to have the freedom to do what he wants, and speak about what he knows. You need to keep one foot on either side of the Atlantic to remain both independent and free'. *Pan's Labyrinth* meant Del Toro's return to a collaboration across the Atlantic. The Tequila Gang, Del Toro's Mexican production company, co-produced the picture with Spain's Estudios Picasso. This has been, according to Del Toro, 'the single most fulfilling creative experience' of his career.

The Spanish Civil War and Fascism

'The Spanish Civil War, I believe, is one of those wars that never ended. It just kind of wound down very slowly and it still to this day haunts the Spanish people. I don't think it was ever fully resolved. (...) And yet even when the Spanish Civil War was essentially a testing ground for most Fascist practices and tactics and weaponries, Europe remained largely uninvolved.'

Source: <http://www.reallyscary.com/interviewdeltoro.asp>

Written, directed and produced by Guillermo Del Toro, *Pan's Labyrinth* provides a look at the horrors of war as seen through the eyes of a young girl who takes refuge in an imaginary world. The genesis of the film goes back to the beginning of Del Toro's career and, like *The Devil's Backbone*, takes place after the Civil War, during Franco's dictatorship. Both feature films are related thematically in their depiction of war as the destructive force of childhood and through the confrontation between innocence and brutality. *The Devil's Backbone* is a horror story set in a school orphanage at the end of the Spanish Civil War. Although the orphanage lies on a remote and deserted area far away from the frontline, the threat of war is omnipresent, especially through the unexploded bomb that sits in the middle of the patio. *The Devil's Backbone* begins with a childhood rite of passage for ten-year-old Carlos who has to confront the bullying Jaime and the school's intimidating caretaker, Jacinto. Nevertheless the more threatening and scary experience for Carlos is seeing the porcelain-like spectre of Santi (Valverde), a fellow orphan who was brutally murdered before his arrival. The film presents the concept of ghosts as 'something pending, something incomplete, something left undone', as defined by the filmmaker. The school is presented as a microcosm of the war, with children becoming the 'new born Spain' and the adults representing the Republican Spain. Guillermo Del Toro considers that *The Devil's Backbone* was constructed as a rhyme and it shares with *Pan's Labyrinth* a *brotherhood relationship* ('películas hermanas') not only thematically but also in their 'mirror structure'.

Pan's Labyrinth has links with *Hellboy*; both are set during 1944, a year of changes in the world, and especially in Spain, where the arrival of the allies to end Franco's dictatorship was expected. While *Hellboy* is set in Hitler's Germany, *Pan's Labyrinth* deals with the very essence of fascism, but not in a direct way, 'rather horizontally, somewhat coded', according to the director. Del Toro chooses to represent fascism through a fable – an influence of his Catholic upbringing – mixed with a fairy tale, as the best way of representing fascism, 'a form of the perversion of innocence, and thus of childhood'. (Press notes).



In the film, Captain Vidal, played by Sergi López, represents the essence of fascism trying to destroy the anti-Franco fighters hidden in the area. The Spanish *maquis* were the guerrilla fighters who resisted the Francisco Franco regime after the Spanish Civil War. In fact, the guerrillas started fighting on July 18th, 1936, when contingents of Republican soldiers who felt separated from the government's army set up their own isolated groups who fought from behind enemy lines. After the Spanish Civil War, Franco did not try to create a pact of reconciliation; on the contrary, some talk about a 'revenge policy'. Tens of thousands were forced to flee Spain and went to France where they joined the Resistance. Some historians believe that there were more than 6,000 who refused to accept defeat and sought refuge in the mountains where they found other ways of fighting Franco's regime, despite the isolation and hardship. World War II was seen as a sign of hope for the anti-Franco fighters. The different Republican guerrilla groups, called the National Guerrilla Army or Libertarian Action Groups, formed a resistance movement widespread in many mountainous regions (Extremadura, Andalucía, Galicia, León, the Cantabrian coast, Catalunya, Aragón and the provinces of Castellón, Valencia, Alicante and Murcia). The period between 1937 and 1944 was the hardest period, with massacres by Franco's army against the guerrilla fighters, who also retaliated. The end of World War II meant there was no longer any threat of an attack by the Allied Forces. The international situation put pressure on the guerrillas to disband, but many went on fighting until 1963.

Genre and visual style

Guillermo Del Toro has a fascination with the horror genre. For Del Toro, this genre 'can transcend reality and become like a fairy tale image generator' and is the one that has best reflected the political changes in the different decades. Among his favourite directors in the genre he includes Terry Gilliam, David Cronenberg, James Whale, F. W. Murnau, Terence Fisher, Mario Bava, George A. Romero, Alfred Hitchcock, and Britain's Hammer Films. He also includes in this category filmmakers such as Jean Cocteau, Luis Buñuel, David Lynch and Pedro Almodóvar.

The Mexican filmmaker has pointed out the importance of genre in his filmography, from his feature directorial debut, *Cronos* (1992), a revision of the meaning of vampirism, to *Pan's Labyrinth*, a hybrid from a generic point of view: 'I've always preferred genres to be mixed. Like combining horror with an historical narrative, for example. For me, *Pan's Labyrinth* is therefore a drama rooted in a context of war, with fairytale and mythological elements grafted on' (*Pan's Labyrinth* Press notes).

In *Pan's Labyrinth*, as in his previous films, Guillermo Del Toro pays an extraordinary amount of attention to the production design. The result is a film full of richness in its visual style. Guillermo Del Toro includes a wide range of sources of inspiration. His main references in *Pan's Labyrinth* come not only from films, but also from literature and painting. It evokes *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, among other fairy tales. Del Toro and cinematographer Guillermo Navarro, who is also a frequent collaborator with director Robert Rodríguez, has captured the imagery of the best Victorian children's book illustrations, with the creations of Arthur Rackham as a main model:

'I tried to reconnect with the perversity and very sexual content of his work. In fairy tales, all stories are either about the return to the womb (heaven, home) or wandering out into the world and facing your own dragon. We are all children wandering through our own fable' (Press notes).

Del Toro has pointed to the paintings of Goya, in particular the 'black-paintings', as a referent for the tone ('grotesque') and atmosphere ('chiaroscuros') of *Pan's Labyrinth*; in particular the painting *Saturno devorando a su hijo* (Saturno Devouring His Son) is quoted in the scene of The Pale Man eating the fairies, a metaphor for cannibalism and anguish. Finally, apart from the references to comics – Mike Mignola, for example – Del Toro has manifested his admiration for the symbolist painters, mainly Carlos Schwabe, but also Arnold Böcklin and Feliciens Rops.

Suggestion for essay titles, discussions on research projects

1. The imagery of *Pan's Labyrinth* connects with the tradition of fairy tales and fantastic literature. Research the importance of these elements in the film. How does the film's conception of fairy tales and monsters conform and break with fairytale mythology in terms of characterisation, iconography and resolution? Compare Guillermo Del Toro's film with other examples of this genre such as *Harry Potter* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*.
2. Examine some of the recurrent motifs in Guillermo Del Toro's films (children, insects and monsters). Consider the different representations of each category in *Pan's Labyrinth*.
3. Discuss the different ways in which Guillermo Del Toro explores gender roles in the film, particularly the roles of women in Spanish society during the 1940s.
4. How does the film present fascism? As a starting point for your discussion, you can consider Guillermo Del Toro's definition: 'I was interested in seeing fascism, which is the absolute lack of imagination, the absolute lack of choice and the most masculine expression of power, juxtaposed with the most feminine, most beautiful expression of power, which is imagination. (...) Male power is exclusive. Female power is inclusive; it's about the ability to nurture, embrace and grow.'
<http://www.chud.com/index.php?type=interviews&id=7360>
5. Research the pictorial references of the imagery and poetics behind *Pan's Labyrinth* (Goya, Rackham and the symbolist painters). Consult Guillermo Del Toro's blog at <http://www.deltorofilms.com/blog/> and <http://www.bpib.com/illustrat/rackham.htm>, <http://rackham.artpassions.net/>
6. Try to watch *The Devil's backbone*. Compare it with *Pan's Labyrinth*. Find the analogies and differences in terms of content, structure and style.
7. Guillermo Del Toro chose Sergi López to play the Fascist Captain Vidal, although he is usually cast in very different types of roles in Spain; the Spanish actor is more know internationally for his roles in the French comedy thriller *With a Friend Like Henry* (Dominic Moll, 2000) and in *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, 2002). Examine Sergi López's star persona in *Pan's Labyrinth*.



8. Compare Guillermo del Toro's film with other Spanish examples in which the Spanish Civil War and post-war are presented through the children's perspective, for example *El espíritu de la colmena / The Spirit of the Beehive* (Víctor Erice, 1973); *La lengua de las mariposas / The Butterfly's Tongue* (José Luis Cuerda, 1999); or *El viaje de Carol / Carol's Journey* (Imanol Uribe, 2002)
9. Research the resurgence of contemporary Mexican cinema by looking at Mexican films that have received international commercial success and critical acclaim, for example *Amores perros / Love's a Bitch* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000), *Y tu mamá también / And Your Mother Too* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001) or *El crimen del Padre Amaro / The Crime of Father Amaro* (2002).
10. Discuss the importance of 'trans-national imagery' in Latin America cinema: actors, directors, and co-productions, by examining the reading and reception of this film in Mexico, Spain, UK and/or USA.



GUILLERMO DEL TORO: FILMOGRAPHY

- 1993 *Cronos*
- 1997 *Mimic*
- 2001 *El espinazo del Diablo / The Devil's Backbone*
- 2002 *Blade 2*
- 2004 *Hellboy*
- 2006 *El laberinto del fauno / Pan's Labyrinth*
- 2007 *Hellboy 2*

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