

Pans labyrinth: real or fantasy? essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It has been well documented that children in order to cope with surrounding miseries and hardships often create make believe worlds, where they can somehow retreat and learn to cope with the events that may be affecting their lives. Such seems to be the case for the primary character in “ Pan’s Labyrinth”, named Ofelia. Ofelia is a beautiful loving child that has known many horrors in her short life. Her life is set amidst a war, where her life has been turned upside down by the passing of her loving father, her mother’s remarriage to a monster of a man and by the pregnancy that has gotten her beloved mother sick. Being taken from the city, where she has lived, and brought into the forest and country living fuels in her the necessity to believe the unbelievable and to create an alternate world when she stumbles upon an abandoned labyrinth, where she escapes to have some much needed control in her life.

There is no question in my mind that Ofelia’s imaginative world is very real for her. The first appearance of the faun lets her cope with her loneliness and fear of the unknown, creating the fabulous story of the long lost princess that is loved and awaited by her father throughout the years. She is given a pouch containing three stones and a book that is to be opened when completely alone. Then she will be given information to complete three important tasks that will ultimately enable her to prove her self worth. The first task comes alive when Ofelia is being forced to bathe and change into a dress for a special dinner that will make her “ father” (as her mom repeatedly calls her step-father) very proud. She opens her book and her first task appears.

Ofelia is to go to an ancient tree that is being made sick by a frog that lives in its roots. Ofelia is to feed the given stones to the frog in order to kill it and retrieve a golden key that she will need in the next task. She manages to kill the frog and retrieve the golden key. Her dress is ruined beyond composure and she misses the important dinner thus missing the chance of making her step-father proud of her.

Two birds with one stone so to speak. In the story she believes that her unborn brother makes her mother ill, the similarities between her mother and sick tree is interesting. Does she perceive that the destruction of the pregnancy will make her mother's health better? I believe that she is acting out in her fantasy what she perceives can be the ultimate fix for her mother's health. The second task comes to life, as she is sitting in her room hungry serving punishment. She receives a visit from the faun.

He tells her that she is being negligent in her tasks, and she replies that it is because of her mothers' poor health. The faun hands her a mandrake root with directions for its use to help with her mother's health, along with the order to get moving on the second task. He gives her some fairies to help her as guides, a piece of chalk to draw a door, a sand watch and a strict warning not to eat nor drink anything, no matter how tempted she is and to accomplish the task before the sand watch passes the last grain of sand. Ofelia goes off to complete her second task, where she encounters a pale man that eats little kids. He is sitting calmly as if in a trance at the end of a long, long table filled with scrumptious and tempting food. She finds the place where to insert the golden key and retrieves a dagger.

But as she is going back, she falls prey to the temptations of the table and eats two grapes. The pale man is awakened and goes after her. She starts running to go back, but just as she is about to reach the door it closes. She is left to think on her feet or perish by the hand of the pale man.

She draws another door and narrowly escapes the pale man. When she encounters the faun again, he is very angered by her inability to accomplish the task heading the warnings she was given. The faun tells her that she has lost her chance and that she has failed to prove herself worthy of returning to her lost realm. The similarities between this task and what is going on in her life is stunning. Is the pale man a reflection as to how she sees her step-father? The faun's anger and rejection of her methods, seems to go hand in hand with what her mother had told her when she was punished. It seems that Ofelia connects perceptions from the real world and mixes them in her fairytale story.

Ofelia's need to be able to do something for her mother's health brings forward the mandrake root under the bed episode. She is torn and makes a pact with her unborn brother creating a bond between the two. But as she is caring for the root (which represents her unborn brother to improve her mother's health) she is discovered by her step-father. He gets very angry and creates an ugly scene that wakes Ofelia's mother. The episode escalates to the point where the mom tells Ofelia that she needs to grow up and forget the fairytales, she grabs the mandrake root and throw it into the flames , burning and dyeing , the mother don't see the mandrake moving but Ofelia does and it shows how the mandrake is dyeing and then the mother goes into labor.

Needless to say Ofelia's mom loses her life giving birth. Ofelia often encounters violence and intrigue under her step-fathers' roof. Her response is to side with her step-fathers enemies against him. After her mother's passing the step-father is angered by her betrayal and locks Ofelia in her room. The faun comes to her room and offers her a last opportunity which she takes. In exchange she must do what she is told, without questioning.

The third and last task is to take her brother to the labyrinth. She is given some chalk to escape the locked room. She drugs the step-father and takes her baby brother to the labyrinth. The faun tells her she must hand over the baby to him so that the blood of an innocent can flow through the entrance of the portal and thus open it.

She refuses to hand over the baby. At that precise moment the step-father catches up to her, takes the baby and shoots Ofelia. As Ofelia is left there dying, some of the blood falls into the portal and opens it in her reality. She discovers her mother and father there. As she lays there drawing her last breaths the servant woman holds her and rocks her, making her feel safe. In the alternate reality her father explains that in her need to preserve innocence, and refusing to hand over the baby, she had passed the last task.

She is able to pass to her fairytale world with her deceased parents. Good defeats evil? Yes, it definitely does. Her heroic journey is rewarded. Her rebellion pays off.

She gets what she wanted, which is to be with her parents, and evil is exterminated by the ultimate death of the step-father. Fantasy served the purpose in this little girls' life. It helped cope with the ugliness of the life that

she was forced to live, and give her some form of comfort for what she was made to endure.