

# Pan's labyrinth essay



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Pan's labyrinth is an intense movie of a young girl struggles to break free of the restraints of being a child and the cruelties of living through Spanish fascism. Pan's labyrinth is anything but your ordinary 'time filling' movie. It has great depth and an intricate web of occult and archetypal symbols. Guillermo del Toro, the director, does not shy away from exposing the harshness of reality and the intertwined fantasy. This one of a kind movie gives you a rare moment to see the world with a different light.

You begin to appreciate the beauty of Mother Nature and life. It brings up the question of have people living in the materialistic world of the 21st century lost sight of what is real. The movie's compelling storyline, rich mythological background and strange fantasy world give it the ability to be interpreted psychologically, sociologically, politically and myth-logically. Pan's labyrinth begins with the "once upon a time" theme which sets up the movie for the viewer. This theme makes the viewer unconsciously think of mythical archetypes.

For example the characters Captain Vidal, Ofelia and the Fauno each portray archetypes of the evil king, the heroine in distress and a chimerical creature respectively. In the first scene Ofelia, played by 11 year old Ivana Baquero, wanders off into the nearby forest and finds an old stone statue that looks somewhat like a faun with a missing eye. Ofelia finds the missing eye and places it back where it belongs. Once she does this a magical insect creature appears, Ofelia doesn't know this but it is the beginning of her magical journey.

This scene at the beginning of the movie gives a lot of importance to 'eyes' as an occult symbol that signifies the ability to see the invisible world. Telling us that Ofelia's journey will be occult in nature through her ability to see what others can't see. Once arriving at the military camp where she is to live from now on with her pregnant mother and new step father captain Vidal Ofelia finds a labyrinth but does not enter. Later that night Ofelia is lead by a fairy to the middle of the labyrinth where she finds the faun.

The faun tells her that she is the long lost princess of the underworld and that she must complete three tasks in order to go home. Her first task is to retrieve a key from a huge frog that is sucking the life out of an ancient fig tree. Fig trees over thousands of years were considered sacred. A fig tree is the symbol of life and enlightenment. The tree itself looks somewhat like a uterus and when Ofelia enters she finds it is soft and moist bringing back to the idea of the womb and the giving of life.

The frog stands for rebirth renewal and transition. Del Toro chose the frog and the fig tree for their emphasis on the giving of life. In contrast the frog and fig tree symbolize the authorities sucking the life out of the Spanish people during the time of fascism. Ofelia's second task is to retrieve a dagger from the pale man without succumbing to the temptation of food while there. Ofelia sees the pale man is sitting in front of a huge feast but she also sees stacks of children's shoes and depictions of the pale man eating them.

Children symbolise memories, a happier time where we were too young to really understand what is happening and how simple things used to seem. The pale man represents the fascist government and by eating children the

pale man or the government are sucking all hope and happiness from our memories. Once retrieving the dagger ofelia cannot help herself and eats a grape therefore succumbing to materialist wants. She only narrowly misses the death grip of the pale man. Ofelias third and final task is the ultimate sacrifice.

The faun has demanded Ofelia bring her baby brother to the labyrinth. The faun then asks Ofelia to hand over her brother, so he can take a few drops of blood from the innocent child to complete the initiation. Ofelia refuses to handover her brother for fear of what might happen to him. In the meantime, Vidal has found Ofelia but cannot see the faun and thinks Ofelia is talking to herself. Sergi Lopez does justice to the sadistic monster he is playing, as he takes the baby from Ofelia and shoots her dead, you can see his disgust for the child he just killed.

As she falls to the ground Ofelia's blood trickles down into the labyrinth thus completing the final task: self sacrifice. Pans labyrinth leaves the viewer with so many questions only answered only by self-interpretation. Was Ofelias soul really one of a long lost princess of the underworld or did she create this fantasy world to escape traumatic times in her life. Del toro uses archetypal symbols to depict the hardships and brutality of Fascism through the eyes of a little girl struggling to understand how un-just life and that age is not barrier to savagery.