

Cultural event: pan's labyrinth



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

XI LIU Cultural Event Paper: Pan's Labyrinth I like watching movies, and I want to learn about different cultures from different countries. So I attended the cultural event of 2012 Foreign Film Series at 7: 00 pm in October 9th. I was so excited that the Art History Organization gave us a chance to watch a Spanish film called Pan's Labyrinth. I had heard of it before, but I had never watched it. This film combined the fantasy world and the real world perfectly. That is to say, it is a film of magic realism.

I was attracted by the plot of the film, and I was astonished by the director's conception and the visual effects even though a few scenes were a little bit disgusting and scary. The background of the story was traced to 1944, five years after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Spain was shrouded under the haze of fascist dictatorship. Those who were communist party members and the democratic persons were hunted down and killed savagely by the army. The plot of the movie develops with resistance against forces of General Francisco Franco, whose leader was Captain Vidal and who ruled Spain as dictator.

The protagonist Ofelia entered a magic world with three challenges that Pan gave to her. The film opened with the sound of a faint melody which was accompanied by the sound of Ofelia's breathing and the frames of blood streaming from Ofelia's nose while she was lying on the ground. With the background of white words showing on the screen and the voiceover telling us Ofelia's status of princess in underground realm, the story started. Ofelia, who was twelve years old, took her pregnant mother to the north to rendezvous with her stepfather Vidal, whose real identity was a fascist officer responsible for repression of the local guerrillas.

The purpose of Vidal's living with Ofelia and her mother was his flesh and blood son to be born, and Vidal's only pleasure was to study all kinds of ways to torture people who were caught. After watching her cold stepfather doing evil for fun, her sick mother and witnessing violence, Ofelia, who was surrounded by loneliness and fear, became addicted to fantasy for consolation. She was led to a deserted mill which was the entrance to the labyrinth by an insect elf, and the labyrinth porter who had long horns with goats and transparent eyes was waiting for her arrival.

Pan told Ofelia that she was actually a lost princess from the underground kingdom and she had to accept three challenges and complete the tasks in order to go back to her kingdom. The first task was to save an old tree. Because there was a huge toad living in the root of the tree, the tree was on the edge of death. She had to take out a golden key from the toad's stomach. The second task was to use the golden key to retrieve a dagger. In that room, there was an evil creature sitting at a table with a feast of beautiful foods which she could not eat.

She was within an inch of her life after giving in to temptation. At the same time, her stepfather began more offensive activities of killing people above ground. Ofelia's struggling with nightmares blurred the boundaries of reality and fantasy. The third task was to use her half-blooded brother's pure blood to open the door of underground. Ofelia refused this requirement due to her virtuous heart. She didn't realize that her stepfather had followed her, and she got shot by him.

The scene was back to the initial scene of Ofelia's streaming blood from her nose lying on the ground at the start of the movie. The ending of the movie

can be interpreted in two ways. If it was real, she rejoined the kingdom using her own pure blood and opening the door of entrance. If not, then she ended the movie happy and certain that she was going to a better place, with the dictator powerless to stop her. Pan's labyrinth is a movie based in a real historical background. It is clear to show us the antiwar attitudes with the development of the two main plots.

However, it combines the cruel reality and the beautiful fantasy world perfectly to indicate the damages and hurt of the Second World War from the angle of a girl's point of view. The role of Ofelia represents the whole group of children who were the victims who suffered most at that time. They were eager to live in a world of fairy tale. However, the war destroyed their real dream, leaving despair, hate and agony. One of the director's obvious artistic characteristics is that he did well in applying contrasts to achieve great artistic effects.

He uses the nice fairy tale to contrast the cruel reality and the darkness of humanity. The scene at the end of the movie, which was the same as the beginning, gives me a deep impression of an innocence girl. Thus it clarifies the abhorrence to the war and spiritual sustenance of longing for beauty. The question at issue that Pan's labyrinth brings to us is whether fantasies can rescue us from fascism. Around this theme, the director set out two main lines of the plot; one is the reality and the other is the girl's fantasy world. Three challenges that the girl faced with and the atrocities of Captain Vidal which center on the question at issue reveal that fantasies cannot rescue us from fascism finally. In terms of importance, relevance and sufficiency, a very famous writer Justin Zhang for Slant Magazine stated that this film used

a large number of symbolisms of blood to unveiled Pan's labyrinth god's mysterious veil (Zhang 24). This movie provides us sufficient and detailed content to reflect the inhumanity of Captain Vidal and the innocence of the little girl. The military executed justice with brutality, violence, cruelty, and no respect for civil rights.

The examples of Vidal executing the man that was telling the truth about hunting rabbits, the doctor without any trial, and shooting Ofelia for no real crime, in addition to the brutal interrogation methods, embodies the inhumanity of Vidal. When Ofelia's mother was in dystocia, he chose to save his baby son's life but not his wife. These examples are important and relevant to reflect the character of Vidal. The example of Ofelia's giving up using her half-blooded brother's pure blood to open the door to the underground kingdom indicates her essence of innocence.

All these examples of Vidal and Ofelia are important and relevant to the question at issue and the purpose. Pan's labyrinth is a movie with deep understanding and implications. At first, it conveys a meaningful anti-war topic. The three tasks that Pan gave to Ofelia were to see if she dared to question when she realized that she was wrong. Eating grapes without resisting temptation in the second task and her refusal of handing over her brother indicates that she was an innocent girl with a rebellious spirit. All the settings of the roles and scenes have their unique meaning.

For instance, the scene of Vidal having his mouth cut open by Mercedes is derived from a tradition of Chelsea Smile. British people will cut the traitors' or the enemies' mouth as the shape of smile for punishment. The painting of Saturn Devouring One of his Children which was drawn by Spanish painter

Goya, hung on the wall in the room where Ofelia finished her second task, is derived from a legend of Greek Mythology. It's a painting with dark humor to interpret anti-war means. The design of the name of the leading role Ofelia is from Hamlet, written by Shakespeare. This may imply the tragic destiny of the little girl.

In short, it is a film that has deep meaning regarding anti-war believing, rebellious spirit and challenges. Not only does it set out an issue that is worth thinking, but it also eulogizes justice and bravery. All these symbolism and settings reflect on its depth and make it a perfect film. However, Pan's labyrinth does not exist. It was made up by the director, but it is based on a real background. It is precise in describing all the characters of the roles in detail. And, also, it describes the violent scene more directly, such as the face with bloody pile of flesh and the scene of Vidal's sewing his own mouth which was cut open.

It has a visual power to make us know the cruelty of the reality. The scenes switch with accuracy and precision so that we do not feel the movie boring and long. It arranges all three challenges which interlace with Captain Vidal's atrocities within two hours. So, I think that the movie is a success in its precision of characterization and mysterious scenes. In all, I like this movie. It gives me both visual impact and strong emotional shock. It's a fantasy story based on the real history. The fantasy world gives me an illusion of beauty, but the cruel reality makes me sober enough to rethink profoundly and see the history clearly.

This movie arouses people's thinking about whether fantasies can rescue us from fascism. The director used the deep symbolism and settings to make

the film more thoughtful and have anti-war meaning in depth. The film also gives me a chance to do some research on the background and analyze the implications that the director made. I wish I could watch more movies like this in the future. Work Cited Zhang, Justin. " The Esoteric Interpretation of " Pan's Labyrinth". " Slant Magazine. 06 2006: 24. print