

## Witnessing Francoism: Ethics of Non-violence in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*

Monica Lopez Lerma

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (*El laberinto del fauno*, 2006) combines the imagery of dark fairy tales with images of torture and murder to look back at the Spanish post-Civil War years and the resistance of the anti-Francoist guerrillas. Set in 1944, five years after the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the film tells the story of eleven-year-old Ofelia, who is forced to move with her pregnant mother Carmen to a remote military post where her new stepfather, Francoist Captain Vidal, has been assigned to exterminate the guerrillas. In parallel, the film shows Ofelia's scary fairytale world,<sup>1</sup> where she encounters the Faun, who tells her that she is the reincarnation of a lost princess and that if she wants to recover her true identity she must fulfil three dangerous tasks before the moon is full (to retrieve a magic key from the entrails of a giant toad; to retrieve a golden dagger from a child-eating monster; and to shed a drop of her innocent newborn brother's blood). The film testifies to the horrors of these two worlds (the historical world of Francoism and the fantasy world of fairies and monsters) and challenges viewers to reflect upon their own responses to them.

Film critics such as Paul Julian Smith (2007), Mercedes Maroto Camino (2010) and Irene Gómez Castellano (2013) associate *Pan's Labyrinth* with contemporary legislative and civic efforts in Spain to recover the historical memory of the victims of Francoism and to revisit what has been referred as the "pact of forgetfulness" or "oblivion" reached during the transition to democracy (1975-1978).<sup>2</sup> The release of the film in 2006 coincided with Spanish Parliamentary debates around the so-called *Law of Historical Memory*, enacted in favour of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975).<sup>3</sup> In parallel, grassroots organizations such as the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (*Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria*

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- 1 Only Ofelia sees and experiences the fairytale world; the rest of the characters either dismiss or deny its existence or are unable to see it.
  - 2 After Franco's death in 1975, the prominent political forces of the transition agreed that securing a successful and peaceful transition required leaving the past behind. In the name of national reconciliation, a parliamentary majority passed the Amnesty Law of 1977 covering all "political crimes" committed before 1976 and precluding their prosecution.
  - 3 Ley 52/2007, de 26 de diciembre, por la que se reconocen y amplían derechos y se establecen medidas en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura. 53410, 27th Dec. 2007. BOE n. 310. See López Lerma: 2011.

*Histórica*) lodged an official request to open a criminal investigation to identify and exhume thousands of corpses that still today remain in unmarked mass graves.

In 2008, in response to that request, Investigating Judge Baltasar Garzón opened a criminal investigation into 114,266 cases of enforced disappearance perpetrated by Franco and his supporters during the Civil War and the early years of the dictatorship (1936-1951).<sup>4</sup> In his decision, Garzón accused Franco and thirty-four of his high commanding officers of designing a “preconceived and systematic plan” to end the “legitimate government of the Second Republic” (1931-1936) and to exterminate political opponents through mass killings, torture, exile, and enforced disappearance (illegal detentions). Yet on 3 February 2010, following a complaint filed by three far right wing organizations, the Supreme Court decided to prosecute Garzón for the crime of *prevaricación* (knowingly issuing an unjust decision). According to the complaint, Garzón had knowingly violated the principle of legality by applying international human rights law to circumvent the Amnesty Law of 1977.<sup>5</sup> Although Garzón was eventually acquitted on 12 January 2012, the decision of the Supreme Court closed off the possibility of investigating those crimes on the grounds that the Amnesty Law had already settled the issue, which is highly problematic from the perspective of the victims of those crimes. Indeed, in a preliminary report issued on 3 February 2014 by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-recurrence, Pablo de Greiff bemoaned the “immense distance” between the position of state institutions and victims.<sup>6</sup> He found it especially troubling that state institutions had not done more for the victims, considering the absence of risks to the stability of the democratic order, and recalling that “genuine reconciliation” requires giving full effect to the victims’ rights to truth, justice, and reparation.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of this article is not to argue that *Pan’s Labyrinth* makes the injustices committed by Francoism visible and thus participates in the recovery of the memory of the victims, as demonstrated by former analyses of the film. Rather, the aim here is to rely on *Pan’s*

4 Baltasar Garzón, Auto del 16 Octubre 2008. Diligencias Previas Proc. Abreviado 399/2006 V, Juzgado Central de Instrucción No. 5, Audiencia Nacional, 5.

5 See above n. 2 and accompanying text.

6 See UN preliminary report: “Observaciones preliminares del Relator Especial para la promoción de la verdad, la justicia, la reparación y las garantías de no repetición, Pablo de Greiff, al concluir su visita oficial a España,” 3 February 2014. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14216&LangID=E>.

7 Ibid. See also “Spain should trust its democracy and work for victims’ rights” – UN expert on transitional justice. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14220&LangID=E>

*Labyrinth* in order to show how the representation of graphic violence and the affective responses elicited in the viewer (i.e. outrage, fear, guilt, pleasure, contempt) invite viewers to interrogate the very *frames* through which violence is authorized and legitimized. This article is thus less concerned with what the content of these graphic images is, than with *how* this content is shown and witnessed.

Questions about violence and witnessing are gaining urgency at a time when ever more images of suffering and death are being shown worldwide, whether on TV, cinema, video-games, internet, or the courts (i.e. Abu Ghraib torture pictures, war atrocities, decapitation of civilians, terrorism trials).<sup>8</sup> These images raise a host of issues: What kind of subjects do they show and address? What kind of gaze and perception do they create? What kind of affective responses do they produce? What kind of judgements do they invite? What sense of (in)justice do they create? Do they generate desensitization towards violence so that it would be preferable not to show or see them? Scholars such as Kelly Oliver (2007), Judith Butler (2009) and Alison Young (2010) have pointed out that these questions must be addressed in order to understand how these images shape our views and attributions of responsibility, blame, and (in)justice. What is needed, these scholars claim, is to create forms of responsible witnessing that enable viewers to self-critically reflect on how they engage with these images and to take responsibility for what and how they see (or do not see). In their view, only this kind of self-interrogation opens up the possibility for an ethical way of looking.

This article takes up that task by showing that *Pan's Labyrinth* constructs responsible witnessing. The film's graphic images of torture and murder may shock or disgust, stir feelings of pity or of revenge, but they always push viewers to reflect about the narrative and visual frames that delimit seeing or not seeing, the subject position and agency (or lack thereof) of victims and perpetrators, as well as their own investment in the scenes of violence. Rather than leaving viewers with a raw emotional response or ready-made value judgments, *Pan's Labyrinth* encourages viewers to adopt what feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver calls "vigilant witnessing" — "an ongoing process of critical analysis and perpetual questioning that contextualizes and recontextualizes what and how we see" (Oliver: 2007,

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8 Critics such as Roger Luckhurst (2010) and Frances Pheasant-Kelly (2013) locate the film in a post 9/11 context and the global War on Terror. Guillermo del Toro himself has stated that the film is inevitably addressed to a post 9/11 audience (del Toro: 2006b). For an analysis of the impact of visual culture in the courts see Douglas 2001; Sherwin 2011; Delage & Goodrich 2013; Delage 2014.

106).<sup>9</sup> Through a close analysis of the film, the goal is to explain in detail how the film accomplishes this. The analysis itself seeks to contribute to an understanding of how violence is (re)presented and how this (re)presentation affects viewers' responsiveness to it, and responsibility for it.

For these purposes, I have organized the analysis into five sections. Section I, focuses on the film's opening title sequence to examine the viewing position the film constructs. Then, I analyze the graphic images of violence and the kind of responses viewers are invited to make in the three main normative orders represented in the film: Vidal's world of Francoism (Section II), Mercedes's world of resistance (Section III), and Ofelia's world of fairies and monsters (Section IV). The article concludes by exploring the kind of responsible witnessing the film requires from viewers.

### Viewers as Witnesses

From its opening title sequence, *Pan's Labyrinth* confronts viewers with images of suffering and death and emphasizes the significance of witnessing. The sequence opens with a black screen, with the sound of a child struggling to breathe and a female voice (Mercedes) humming a lullaby in the background.<sup>10</sup> Superimposed white titles set the historical context of the story: "Spain, 1944. The Civil War is over. Hidden in the mountains, armed men fight the new fascist regime, military posts are established to exterminate the resistance."<sup>11</sup> As the titles fade away, the camera rotates clockwise to reveal a close-up of Ofelia's face lying on the ground and "a thick ribbon of blood running backward into her nostril" (del Toro: 2006a). The moment the last drop of blood disappears back into her nose (the scene is shot in reverse), Ofelia looks directly at the camera to the viewer and a third-person male voice-over (which is later recognized as the Faun) begins the fairy tale narrative. Then, the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up of Ofelia's eye, plunging the viewer, both narratively and visually, into two worlds at once: the fantasy world of Ofelia/Princess Moanna and the historical world of Francoism.

The title sequence is crucial to situate the film's stance towards the scenes of violence and the relationship it invites the viewer to establish with them, through the use of three

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9 This article draws on Kelly Oliver's definition of witnessing, by which she means both: the juridical sense of testifying as an eyewitness testimony to what one knows from firsthand knowledge and the political sense of bearing witness to something that cannot be seen, something that is beyond knowledge and recognition (Oliver: 2007, 160).

10 For the role of the lullaby in the film see Gómez-Castellano 2013.

11 All quotations from the film come from the script (del Toro: 2006a).

different but interconnected cinematic techniques: narrative reversal, third-person voice-over, and direct address (when a character looks directly into the camera at the viewer). First, through narrative reversal, the film tells the story “backwards”: that is, it opens at the moment of Ofelia’s death, which will take place in the future (in the final scene of the film). Then, in a single flashback of events it merges this moment with the events narrated in the present until the story reaches the scene shown in the title sequence, when the cause of the blood of Ofelia’s nose is finally revealed. In this way, the title sequence does more than look back in retrospect at events; rather, it activates or sets them in motion. As Alison Young notes in another context, such a reverse chronology “has a destabilizing effect on the viewer,” for the events are displayed “not just out of order but in a manner that calls into question the sense of linear temporal and causal progression relied on by the conventions of storytelling” (Young: 2010, 63, 65).

Second, through the third-person voice-over the title sequence frames the entire film as a fairy tale. The voice-over tells the story of Princess Moanna, who dreamt of blue skies and sunshine and escaped the Realm of the Underworld to join the human world above. Once outside, however, she was blinded by the brightness of the sunlight that erased all memory of her past, later suffered “cold, sickness, and pain,” and she eventually died. The voice-over also tells that “[h]er father, the King, always knew that the Princess would return, perhaps in another body, in another place, at another time...[and that] he would wait for her.” As the voice-over speaks, the camera follows the tiny figure of Princess Moanna (Ofelia) ascending circular staircases to the outside human world. Then, as she reaches the top, a blinding light occupies the entire screen—reproducing the moment Moanna/Ofelia loses her vision as she confronts the devastating reality of the outside world: bombed-out buildings, ruins, and human skulls on the ground. The sequence closes with an image of a caravan of cars bearing fascist symbols approaching the emblematic war wreckage town of Belchite (Smith: 2007, 14).<sup>12</sup> The fairytale framing device (which opens and closes the film) affects the viewing experience as follows: On the one hand, it sets the film as a deliberate tale told from the Faun’s omniscient perspective, where “the viewer is placed less as a voyeur and more as an invited confidant” (Kozloff: 1989, 129). On the other hand, it draws attention to the double-layering of the story—reality and fantasy, history and myth, image and voice, sight and blindness, memory and forgetting, forcing viewers to take a critical distance from which to question what (and how) they see and hear.

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12 At the end of the war, Franco, who had won a victory over the Republican forces at Belchite, ordered that the town should be left untouched in memory of his triumph and declared a nationalist monument. Today, Belchite remains in ruins, kept as a historic site dedicated to reminding future generations of the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath.

Through the third and final technique of direct address, the film produces a face-to-face encounter between Ofelia and the viewer, parallel to the Levinasian face-to-face encounter between the self and the other, that establishes the conditions for ethical witnessing.<sup>13</sup> For Levinas, ethics originates in the encounter with the face (*visage*) of the other. The face is neither the assemblage of brow, nose, eyes, and mouth, nor the representation of the soul, self, or subjectivity. As Levinas puts it, “one can say that the face is not ‘seen.’ It is what cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond” vision and knowledge (Levinas: 1982, 86-87). In the face-to-face encounter, the other always appears in the uniqueness of her face and imposes an inevitable and asymmetrical ethical demand: “[it] asks me not to let [her] die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in [her] death. Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill” (Levinas: 1986, 24). Such an obligation is not a matter of imposing a moral obligation to act but of taking responsibility for the singularity of the other.

Through the technique of direct address, the film implicates viewers ethically in the scene of violence, in three interconnected ways: First, by looking back at viewers, Ofelia openly acknowledges their presence and challenges the idea of the viewer as voyeur.<sup>14</sup> In presenting Ofelia as able to exchange gazes with the viewer, the film prevents reducing her to a mere image to be looked at, while putting the viewer’s “all perceiving” self in question. That is, the film challenges the illusory totality of the viewer’s act of perception. Second, in returning her gaze to the viewer, Ofelia imposes herself as a speaking subject, challenging an objectifying and compassionate gaze at her suffering. Third, by directly addressing viewers (for there is no other addressee in the diegesis), Ofelia places them in the position of addressees of her suffering, that is, as witnesses to her testimony to which they must respond beyond vision and knowledge.

With the help of these three cinematic techniques (narrative reversal, voice-over, and direct address), the film constructs a position for viewers that enables them to return to the scene of violence as active witnesses, rather than as mere passive observers, of the

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13 In “Reality and its Shadow,” Levinas deprives art of ethics and responsibility. In his view, art consists in replacing the object with its image (a shadow, a caricature, a neutralizing vision of the object) (Levinas: 1982, 106, 112, 111). For discussions on the ethical dimension of art from a Levinasian perspective see, among others, Cooper 2006; Gerbaz 2008; Saxton 2008; and Panu 2008.

14 As Christian Metz argues, the voyeur possesses the privileged position of watching without being noticed (the object of perception does not know that it is being watched). For Metz, “[t]he practice of the cinema is only possible through the perceptual passions: the desire to see (= scopic drive, scopophilia, voyeurism)” (Metz: 2004, 827).

three normative orders it represents: Vidal's world of Francoism, Mercedes's world of resistance, and Ofelia's world of fairies and monsters.

### Vidal: Franco's "Politics of Revenge"

*I choose to be here because I want my son to be born in a new, clean Spain. Because these people hold the mistaken belief that we're all equal. But there's a big difference: the war is over and we won. And if we need to kill every one of these vermin to settle it, then we will kill them all, and that's that.*

Captain Vidal

Set in 1944, five years after the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), *Pan's Labyrinth* portrays the post-war years not as "the beginning of peace and reconciliation" but as a "continuation of the war by other means," what historian Paul Preston has called "politics of revenge" against the defeated (Preston: 1995a, 36, 29). After his victory in 1939, Franco himself defined the Civil War as a "national crusade" to liberate Spain from the public chaos of a Republic led by "evil and degenerate Marxists," and devoted his efforts to eradicating the values and institutions of the Second Republic (1931-1936). To keep the spirit of the crusade alive, Franco divided Spain into "victors" and "losers," "Spain" and "Anti-Spain," "patriots and traitors," a sharp division that would be the basis "for the most sweeping physical, economic and psychological repression" (Preston: 2005). Approximately 20,000 Republican men and women were executed after the war; tens of thousands died in prison and concentration camps because of the appalling conditions (overcrowding, malnutrition and disease) (Preston: 2012, xi, 477); many others committed suicide after suffering torture, maltreatment and humiliation (Richards: 1998, 11). In addition, more than half a million survivors were forced into exile. As historian Michael Richards puts it, Franco's "violence amounted to a brutal closing down of choices and alternatives" for the defeated (Ibid.). The vast majority "had no choice but to accept their fate": at worst prison, torture or execution; at best, a life of fear, humiliation, and hunger (Preston: 1995b, 230). Those few who decided to continue to fight against the regime (small guerrilla groups that launched occasional attacks against *Guardia Civil* barracks) had little option but to seek refuge in the mountains, having to prioritize survival over political activity (Richards: 2013, 110). Because the guerrillas depended on the support of the civilian population for their survival, the latter became the target of the regime's general retaliation (Ibid.).

One of the strategies that the regime used to subjugate the guerrillas, and which is alluded to in the film, was the so-called "hunger pact." During the post-war years (also known as

the “years of hunger” (Arroyo: 2006, 66)), as part of the regime’s new economic policy of “autarky” or “self-sufficiency” an extended food-rationing system was imposed that gave local authorities unprecedented powers of social control (del Arco: 2010, 460). Through rationing, the authorities could control the food supply of particular hostile municipalities, and, just “as ‘war zones’ were decreed by the regime, a ‘hunger pact’ would be imposed to ensure that the families of fighters had no work and went hungry” (Richards: 2013, 110). In the film, a hunger pact is decided over the copious dinner that Vidal organizes with the representatives of the local authorities (among others, the Mayor and his wife, the Priest, the *Guardia Civil* captain and Doctor Ferreiro, who happens to be secretly helping the resistance), all of which underscores the divide between social classes and between the victors and the vanquished. At dinner, Vidal explains his strategy to his guests: to cut the supply to one ration card for each family (rather than one card for each individual), in order to prevent “anyone sending food to the guerrillas in the mountains” and force them to come down to the village. After examining the ration cards, the Mayor asks whether one card would suffice for an entire family. The priest replies, as he helps himself to another serving: “If people are careful, it should be plenty.” The priest assures that “God has already saved their souls. What happens to their bodies, well, it hardly matters to Him.”<sup>15</sup> Like the other guests, the Mayor too offers his support (“We’ll help you in any way we can, captain”).

In a subsequent scene, Vidal himself is seen supervising the distribution of food. Each ration is contained in a brown bag with a printed legend that the *Guardia Civil* captain reads aloud to a large crowd of people queuing for their ration with cards in hand. The legend, which reproduces real war propaganda, reads as follows: “This is our daily bread in Franco’s Spain! Which we keep safe in this mill. The Reds lie when they say there’s hunger in Spain. Because in a united Spain, there’s not a single home without a warm fire or without bread.” An image of Mercedes looking at the mountains, however, reminds viewers of the starving guerrilla fighters.

This paternalistic image of the Francoist State “feeding Spaniards” (del Arco: 2010, 460), is in direct contrast with the language Vidal uses throughout to depict the defeated as subhuman: “motherfuckers,” “pricks,” “bastards,” “losers” and “vermin”; language

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15 Del Toro explains that the Priest’s words “are taken verbatim from a speech a priest used to give to the Republican prisoners in a fascist concentration camp. He would come to give them communion and he would say before he left, “Remember, my sons, you should confess what you know because God doesn’t care what happens to your bodies; he already saved your souls” (Davis: 2011).



that justifies the need for a “new, clean Spain,” as Vidal tells his dinner guests.<sup>16</sup> Two specific scenes exemplify the violence carried out against the defeated in the name of “purification.” The first scene involves the brutal killing of two starving farmers, father and son, who were hunting rabbits in the forest and are captured on the assumption that they are resistance fighters. In one of the most graphic and violent close-up scenes of the film, Vidal is shown repeatedly smashing the son’s face with the bottom of a bottle (until no nose is left), for the simple reason that he has disobeyed his orders to keep silent. Then, he shoots the father twice in cold blood and turns to the son again to shoot him dead. A long shot reveals Vidal’s soldiers watching the “spectacle” of power and victimization impassively.<sup>17</sup> The soldiers’ impassivity contrasts with the horror and outrage that the scene provokes in the viewer, which foreshadows their different viewing positions: one complicit, the other condemnatory. After killing the farmers, Vidal finds the dead rabbits (proof of their innocence) in one of their pouches, but rather than showing regret, he takes the rabbits with him and scolds his subordinates who should “learn to frisk these motherfuckers” before bothering him, which illustrates that the murder of innocent civilians is inconsequential under Francoism (Davis: 2011).<sup>18</sup>

The second scene of violence involves the torture of a guerrilla fighter captured by Vidal’s troops after an attack on the food storehouse. The scene opens with Garcés, Vidal’s subordinate, tying the terrified prisoner to a post in the middle of a now empty storehouse. Vidal displays the “instruments of torture” and explains their uses and effects to the prisoner, while delivering the following routine: “At first I won’t be able to trust you. But when I use this one [the hammer] you’ll own up to a few things. When we get to this one [the pliers] we’ll have a closer relationship, almost like brothers. You’ll see. And when we get to this one [a blade] I’ll believe everything you tell me.” A series of reverse shots incorporates shifting points of view, so that viewers experience both the victim’s powerlessness and fear, and Vidal’s coldness and cruelty. Viewers’ anxiety increases when

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16 See Preston 2005. The justification for “purification” was provided by Antonio Vallejo Nágera, Director of Military Psychiatric Services and of the Psychological Research Bureau during the dictatorship. Vallejo Nágera claimed to have demonstrated through psychological experiments the inhuman, dangerous, and evil condition of the Republican enemies (Ruiz Vargas: 2006, 325-328).

17 As Scarry explains, torture denies, falsifies “the reality of the very thing it has itself objectified by a perceptual shift which converts the vision of suffering into the wholly illusory but, to the torturer and the regime they represent, wholly convincing spectacle of power” (Scarry: 1985, 27).

18 Del Toro explains that he based this scene on “an oral account of a post war occurrence in a grocery store, where a fascist came in and a citizen inside didn’t take off his hat; the fascist proceeded to smash his face with the butt of a pistol and then took his groceries and left” (Davis: 2011).

Vidal offers the prisoner, who turns out to be a stutterer, a deal: if he can count to three without stuttering he can go free. With much self-control, the prisoner manages to count until two, although he is finally unable to overcome his anxiety and fails to say number three without stuttering. The scene closes with the sound of a sickening thud and a blank screen, leaving the viewer with a nauseous feeling of realization and horror.

Even though viewers are spared most graphic details of the torture, its dreadful consequences are not, making it hard to dismiss the pain of the victim (and the sadism of the torturer): a series of close-ups shows the prisoner's body curled up on the ground—his battered face with swollen eyes and a trickle of blood flowing from his lip, and his bloody and badly deformed hand. The prisoner is now desperately begging doctor Ferreiro to kill him because he has given up some information. This transformation from victim to “traitor” is the ultimate spectacle of power of Vidal, and of the regime he represents, where the prisoner is now “speaking their words” and, moreover, “is to understand his confession as it will be understood by others, as an act of self-betrayal” (Scarry: 1985, 36, 47). Viewers find themselves relieved when the doctor acknowledges the prisoner's pain and, with great risk to his own life, helps to euthanize him (“You won't feel more pain” he tells him). When Vidal learns that the doctor has disobeyed his orders to keep the prisoner alive and asks him why he disobeyed, the doctor responds with a sentence that effectively seals his fate: “To obey, just like that, for the sake of obeying, without questioning... That's something only people like you can do, Captain.” As the doctor turns his back on Vidal as though trying to leave his presence, Vidal shoots him in the back, re-establishing his authority (Hanley: 2008).

While on a superficial, non-attentive reading it would be easy to impute Vidal's violence to individual symptoms of pathological evil, the fact is that they are the result of a planned and systematic effort to persecute and annihilate the defeated. The film situates Vidal's actions in the context of the collective conditions that structure and motivate them, which enables viewers to assess the causes, and not just the consequences, of violence. At the same time, the film neither exonerates Vidal nor excuses his actions by presenting them as part of impersonal social forces, for he remains responsible for the (sadistic) violence he inflicts on his victims. By granting individual agency to Vidal in the midst of the social conditions that frame his actions, the film enables viewers to witness, interpret, and judge the acts of violence he performs.

## Mercedes: The “Heroic Memory” of the Resistance

*That’s why I was able to get away with it. I was invisible to you.*

Mercedes

The second part of the film shows how the guerrilla fighters are still able to maintain their humanity and dignity despite the brutality of the regime. It is no coincidence that the story is set in 1944, when thousands of *maquis*—Spanish Republicans who had fought in the French resistance—returned to Spain to continue their fight against fascism, hoping that with the end of World War II the Allies would join them in their struggle against Francoism (Maroto: 2010, 51). In October 1944, approximately 7,000 well-trained, well-armed men entered Spain through the Pyrenean Aran Valley with the aim of triggering off an uprising of the anti-Francoist resistance and establishing a Republican government (Preston: 1995b, 233); the invasion was called, not without irony, “The Reconquest of Spain.” Although the *maquis* managed to take several villages and towns, the vast numerical superiority of Franco’s troops forced them to retreat (Preston: 1995b, 233). Despite their defeat, many of the guerrilla fighters refused to return to France and opted instead to penetrate the interior, where they could either reinforce existing guerrilla bands or create new ones with more military experience (Anonymous: 1996, 25). The incursion of the *maquis*, together with the strong belief that the downfall of Hitler and Mussolini would also bring Franco’s downfall, raised the morale of the guerrillas and reactivated their struggle (Ibid., 24). The peak of the guerrilla action took place between 1945 and 1947. After that, as it became clear that the Allies’ assistance would never materialize and Franco’s repression would intensify, the guerrillas gradually disintegrated until their disappearance in the 1950s (Moreno: 2012, 4; Maroto: 2010). By the end of Franco’s dictatorship, most of the guerrilla fighters had been incarcerated, executed or forced into exile.

*Pan’s Labyrinth* turns the defeat of the resistance into a narrative of “heroic memory” that presents the guerrilla fighters and their supporters not as helpless victims but rather as fighters and heroes (Maroto: 2010, 49). To construct this “heroic memory,” the film uses two interconnected strategies: First, it locates the historical narrative “in a moment of choice between surrender, death or exile” (Hanley: 2008, 39). This momentous decision is made explicit in a conversation between Doctor Ferreira and Pedro, Mercedes’s brother and leader of the guerrilla band. Pedro tells the Doctor that they will “soon have reinforcements from Jaca” and then they will be able to “go head to head with Vidal.” The Doctor is skeptical: “And then what? You kill him, they’ll send another just like him. And another ... You’re screwed, no guns, no roof over your heads... You need food, medicine. You should take care of Mercedes. If you really love her, you would cross the border with

her. This is a lost cause.” Despite the logic of the doctor’s argument, Pedro concludes: “I’m staying here, Doctor. There’s no choice,” thereby choosing to fight before surrender or exile.

Second, the film transforms the seemingly futile choice of the guerrilla fighters into a heroic (albeit transient) triumph. Two important scenes exemplify this: first, Mercedes’ unexpected escape from Vidal, after he discovers that Mercedes has been secretly helping the resistance and detains her for questioning; and second, the final confrontation between Vidal and the guerrilla fighters, when Vidal is shot dead in the end. What is crucial about these two scenes is how staging, cinematography and editing both mirror and invert the two previously analysed scenes of violence, and are meant to provoke opposite reactions from the viewer.

The first scene opens with Vidal’s subordinate Garcés tying Mercedes to the same post as the stuttering prisoner. Vidal orders Garcés to leave because “she is just a woman,” to which Mercedes replies: “That’s why I was able to get away with it. I was invisible to you.” The rest of the scene works to prove Vidal wrong, highlighting how “the very core of the masculinity-power association is what makes it vulnerable” (Hanley: 2008, 41). Mercedes manages to cut her ropes with a kitchen knife she had hidden in her apron while Vidal prepares his instruments of torture. As he begins to recite the same torture routine he employed with the stuttering prisoner, she interrupts him by stabbing him repeatedly (Orme: 2010, 230). Caught by surprise, Vidal falls to his knees, and she sticks the knife in Vidal’s mouth. Replicating his torture narrative, she says: “You won’t be the first pig I’ve gutted!” With a brutal slash from the inside out, which the viewer is forced to see, Mercedes slices Vidal’s mouth open, drawing a grotesque joker smile on his face.

As in the previous torture scene, a series of reverse shots incorporates shifting points of view, so that the viewer can experience both the power and agency of the victim, now turned torturer, and the powerlessness and objectification of the torturer, now turned victim. In contrast to the stuttering prisoner’s battered face, which encouraged the viewer’s identification with him, Vidal’s grotesque face “represents that for which no identification is possible, an accomplishment of dehumanization and a condition for violence” (Butler: 2004, 145). By depriving Vidal of humanity, the film provokes a double effect upon the viewer: it desensitizes viewers to Vidal’s suffering and legitimizes Mercedes’ “spectacle of power.”

This desensitization is further reinforced in the second of the scenes, the final confrontation between Vidal and the resistance fighters, who surround him right after he shoots Ofelia.

Surrounded by them, Vidal hands over his newborn son to Mercedes. Then, while holding his father's pocket watch in his hand, Vidal asks them to tell his son the time of his death, trying to perpetuate his father's legacy. Despite this being Vidal's only "humane" moment in the film (Maroto 2010, 59), Mercedes interrupts him once again and denies him his last wish: "No. He won't even know your name" and then Pedro shoots Vidal in the face. A long shot reveals the resistance fighters looking at Vidal's dead body impassively, just as Vidal and his troops had looked at the bodies of the two starving farmers at the beginning of the film, which accomplishes a reversal of the initial power relations and provides viewers with a sense of just punishment and closure.<sup>19</sup>

The comparative analysis of the scenes of violence of these two normative orders shows how viewers' capacity to respond either with outrage and horror or else with indifference to the suffering of others depends on the narrative and visual frames through which violence is authorized and legitimized. These frames not only function as markers of what is visible or invisible, what can be heard or not, who is included or excluded, who counts as a subject or not, whose voices are significant or insignificant. They also map a repertoire of appropriate or inappropriate affects (either encouraging, or repressing them) in response to certain images, sounds, and narratives. As Judith Butler points out, paying attention to these frames may help us to acknowledge that moral horror in the face of violence is not a sign of our humanity, because "humanity" is actually divided between those for whom "we feel urgent and unreasoned concern and those others whose lives and deaths simply do not touch us, or do not appear as human at all" (Butler: 2009, 50). Therefore, as viewers, we have to ask ourselves how these conceptions of justified and unjustified forms of violence are built into the narrative. In this vein, it can be suggested that the film's "domain of justifiability is preemptively circumscribed by the definition of the form of violence at issue" (Ibid., 155). While inviting viewers to condemn Vidal's brutal process of national purification as abhorrent, the film justifies the counter-violence of the resistance, including Vidal's cold blooded execution, as "punishment," "justice" and even "heroism."

The analysis thus far raises serious ethical questions, including whether such a desensitized view of the gutting and death of Vidal is compatible with *ethical witnessing*. Is there something in the film that saves it from becoming a Manichean reversal of good and evil, humane and monstrous, legitimate and illegitimate, innocent and culpable,

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19 As Hanley points out, viewers familiar with Spain's recent past "know that the historical moment is located at the beginning of Franco's dictatorship and that the triumph of the resistance in the historical realm becomes a fantasy itself" (Hanley: 2008, 39).

justified and unjustifiable violence? Furthermore, if the film seems to engage the viewer in the objectifying logic it tries to criticize, to what extent is a critical and responsible view of the title sequence even possible? In the following section, I suggest that, through the fairytale world of Ofelia, the film constructs a position for viewers that enables them to engage in vigilant witnessing.

## Ofelia: The Two Worlds and Vigilant Imagination

*I'm Princess Moanna and I'm not afraid of you. Aren't you ashamed of eating all the pill bugs and getting fat while the tree dies?*

Ofelia

*Pan's Labyrinth* presents Ofelia's two worlds—the fantasy world of fairies and fauns and the historical world of Francoism and the anti-Francoist resistance—interlaced in such a way as to make it impossible for the viewer to understand either without taking the other into account. Parallel editing reinforces this interconnection (Smith: 2007). Ofelia's incursion into the muddy and insect-infected roots of the tree to confront the giant toad during her first task is crosscut with Vidal's incursion into a forest cave where he expected to find the guerrilla fighters. At the same time, the tasks that Ofelia must perform in the fairytale world parallel the "tasks" that Mercedes must carry out in the "real" world of the resistance (Smith: 2007; Picart et al.: 2012). For instance, the magic key, which Ofelia must retrieve from the entrails of the giant toad in her first task in order to save an ancient fig tree from dying, evokes the secret key to the warehouse that Mercedes retrieves from Vidal to save the resistance fighters from starving. Similarly, the golden dagger, which Ofelia must retrieve from the Pale Man's den in her second task, echoes the knife Mercedes retrieves from Vidal's kitchen, and will later use to slice his mouth open.

Parallelisms can also be drawn at the level of the characters, for example between Vidal and the Pale Man (Smith: 2007). Like Vidal, the Pale Man sits at the head of a large table with a cornucopia of delicious food he uses to lure innocent victims—children, as evidenced by the piles of children's shoes on the floor.<sup>20</sup> Vidal and the Faun are also presented as parallels (Picart et al.: 2012; Maroto: 2010). This is most evident in the scene

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20 This image makes a clear historical reference to the Holocaust (Picart et al.: 2012, 274). Two mirror-like scenes further emphasize this parallelism: Lured by the Pale Man's food, Ofelia disobeys both the Faun's and the fairies' warnings not to eat anything from the monster's table, which awakes the Pale Man, who, after placing his eyeballs into his palms, begins to gauchely chase her down to the hallway, devouring two of the three fairies before Ofelia manages to escape. Moments later, Vidal, with the ghastly joker smile on his face, is also seen gauchely chasing Ofelia through the labyrinth.

in which Ofelia refuses to follow the Faun's orders to relinquish her newborn brother to him to complete her final task. The Faun angrily reminds her that she had promised to obey him blindly. Is she "willing to give up her sacred rights for her brother, who has caused her such misery and humiliation?" he asks. At this moment, Vidal enters the labyrinth and sees Ofelia standing alone, speaking to no one. A reverse shot visually places him in front of the Faun as if mirroring each other. Ofelia reaffirms her decision: "I will," she says. The Faun disappears into the darkness and Vidal takes his son from Ofelia and shoots her.

Film critics and scholars have differently interpreted the role and significance of the fairy tale in the film. For some, the fairytale world is just a reflection of Ofelia's personal and psychological experience, a fantasy created by a child, either to respond to (Hodgen: 2007), or to escape from (Cochrane: 2007, Arroyo: 2006), the brutality of the "real" world. A second group of scholars views the fairy tale not as fantasy but as a form of resistance. Kuhu Tanvir, for instance, reads the imaginary world as "an extension of the [anti-Francoist] revolutionary forces" (Tanvir: 2009, 2). In her view, the fairy tale "facilitates and almost demands disobedience" of Vidal's fascist order (Ibid.). Jennifer Orme sees the fairy tale as disobedient both to the audience's expectations of the genre as entertainment, as well as to "the rigid totalitarian narratives of fascism and patriarchy" (Orme: 2010, 232).

A third group of scholars argues that the significance of the fairy tale lies in its ability to render visible the invisible and to speak the unspeakable. In this vein, Laura Hubner claims that the fairytale elements function "as subversive allegories for the taboo" (Hubner 2010: 54). Likewise, Kim Edwards suggests that the fairy tale undermines Vidal's authority "by exhuming that which has been hidden and silenced" (Edwards: 2008, 144). In turn, Jack Zipes argues that del Toro uses the fairy tale "to penetrate the spectacle of society that glorifies and conceals the pathology and corruption of people in power," offering "a corrective and more 'realistic' vision of the world" (Zipes: 2008, 236).

A fourth and final group of critics calls attention to the ideological purposes of the fairy tale. According to Enrique Ajuria Ibarra, in the ideological "exposition of fairy-tale universal values of good and evil and moral doings and wrongdoings" the film undergoes a careful process of mythification of the horrors of Francoism (Ajuria: 2014, 161): "Vidal embodies Francoist hegemony as a realist monster whose ogre-ization has been naturalized with the significative thrust of the fairy tale" for the audience's enjoyment (Ibid., 161, 163). In a more positive reading, Janet Thormann suggests that Ofelia's fantasy "becomes the vehicle for the film's vision of redemptive history, and the film

presents itself as the transmission of the unfulfilled potential of the past to the generation of the future” (Thormann: 2008, 176).

Whereas critics debate the role of the fairy tale in the film—either fantasy, resistance, disclosure, or ideology—I want to emphasize differently that the fairy tale enables construction of vigilant witnessing, which is underlined from the outset. *Pan’s Labyrinth* opens with an image of Ofelia and her pregnant mother, Carmen, travelling in one of the cars shown in the title sequence. Ofelia is reading a book with an illustration of a little girl playing with flying fairies. The mother scolds her because she is “too old to be filling [her] head with such nonsense.” When Carmen asks to stop the car because she feels nauseous, Ofelia takes advantage of this to walk into the woods. There, she stumbles upon a stone that resembles a human eye and finds an ancient Celtic stone sculpture with a missing eye and the mouth wide open. Ofelia puts the missing stone eye back into the sculpture, at which point a large insect emerges from the sculpture’s mouth and looks at her. A reverse shot shows Ofelia’s face from the insect’s point of view. Ofelia identifies the insect as a fairy—who will guide her through the labyrinth to meet the Faun. The sequence closes with a camera-angle from the insect’s perspective, as it looks at Ofelia and her mother returning to the car and follows them to Vidal’s military post. While as explained in the first section the title sequence had invited viewers literally to enter the two worlds through Ofelia’s eyes (engaging viewers in what she sees and experiences), this sequence encourages viewers to adopt the vigilant perspective of the insect-fairy and critically examine both worlds.

This vigilant perspective is constructed by a double mediation, where history is mediated by fantasy and fantasy is mediated by history. On the one hand, Ofelia’s experiences in the fairy tale are located in the historical and political context where she is situated. As an eyewitness, Ofelia occupies a particular subject position in a concrete socio-historical context: She is the daughter of a Republican father killed in the Civil War and is forced to move to a remote military post with her pregnant mother (who has remarried) and her new stepfather Vidal, whose mission is to exterminate the Republicans and subjects her to cruelty and humiliation. Ofelia’s mother dies in childbirth and, as a result, she becomes responsible for her new-born brother. Ofelia only finds solace in Mercedes, who becomes her surrogate mother (Thormann: 2008, 177). As an eyewitness, Ofelia testifies to what she sees and experiences as a (Republican) child under Francoism, including what she sees and experiences in the fairytale world. By locating her fairytale experiences in the concrete historical context in which they take place, the film presents them neither as a mere fantasy, nor as a way of coping with the “real” world, but as part of the same way of seeing and interpreting it, that is, as part of her individual eyewitness experience. This requires



viewers to critically examine the ways in which her specific socio-historical circumstances mediate her fairytale world.

On the other hand, Ofelia's experiences in the historical world are located in the realm of the fairy tale, forcing viewers to pay attention to the ways the fairytale world affects and transforms such experiences. It is in and through the fantasy world that Ofelia reasserts herself as both subject and agent: She confronts the giant toad ("I'm Princess Moanna. I'm not afraid of you") and successfully retrieves the magic key from his entrails; she manages to retrieve the golden dagger from the Pale Man's den; and she disobeys the Faun by not shedding the blood of her innocent brother. The reassertion of her sense of agency allows her to intervene in history (Thorman: 2008, 179), which becomes most significant during her last task: Using a magic chalk she manages to escape from her guarded room, enter Vidal's, drug him with her mother's sleeping medicine, take her baby brother from him and bring the baby to the Faun in order to complete the task. Ofelia's final decision to both take the baby from Vidal and refuse to spill her brother's blood as the Faun demands, marks her resistance to the two worlds (Lapolla: 2011, 74). In doing so, Ofelia refuses to allow Vidal and the Faun to determine her and her life in terms of violence and victimization. At the same time, her final choice of nonviolence differentiates her from Mercedes, and therefore from the kind of resistance the latter represents. By distancing Ofelia from the violence of both the fairytale world and the historical world of Francoism and anti-Francoist resistance, the film blurs the Manichean binaries of fantasy vs history, good vs evil and challenges viewers to rethink their own implication in the scenes of violence. It is precisely such a rejection of violence that the film encourages viewers to reflect upon in its closing scene.

### Conclusion: The Return

In its closing scene, the film returns to the title sequence to show Ofelia lying on the ground, her face looking at the viewer, and with the blood running (this time naturally) from her nose, while Mercedes kneels next to her humming a lullaby. A voice commands Ofelia to rise, and as she comes to life, a blinding golden light occupies the entire screen. Once viewers recover their sight, Ofelia is seen standing in a spacious and sumptuous hall where her mother Carmen, her newborn in her arms, and her father, are all alive and well sitting on golden thrones. Her father, the King, says: "It was your blood and not that of an innocent that made you worthy of the throne. It was the last task. The most important one..." The Faun, who stands to the right of the King, adds: "and you chose well." "So, come sit by your Father's side, my child? He's been waiting so long", says her mother, now Queen of the Underworld. The three fairies, alive again, celebrate Ofelia's return by flying

around her, as in the book illustration she saw at the beginning of the film. A large crowd surrounds them and applauds their reunion. Ofelia smiles and the blinding golden light reappears and then fades away to merge with a close-up of Ofelia as she dies in the “real” world. The camera then cuts to an image of Mercedes crying over her dead body. The voice-over of the title sequence tells that the Princess “went back to her father’s kingdom. And that she reigned with justice and a kind heart for many centuries. ... And like most of us, she left behind small traces of her time on earth. Visible only to those that know where to look.” As the voice-over speaks, the camera shows the fig tree she saved flowering again and the insect-fairy vigilantly looking at it.

The closing sequence brings back the three cinematic devices of the opening title sequence (narrative reversal, direct address, and voice-over), reframing the scene of violence in such a way that opens up a space for viewers to rethink their position as witnesses. First, the fact that Ofelia’s death is merged with her return to the Realm of the Underworld (not with her escape from it as in the title sequence), implies a “reverse causality,” whereby the image of a future has the ability to affect the past through witnessing (Oliver: 2001, 136). Second, through the face-to-face (re)encounter with Ofelia’s death (now finally revealed on screen), the film constructs a position for viewers that enables them to critically self-reflect on their own act of witnessing and to take responsibility for it. Finally, through the voice-over and the image of the insect-fairy that accompanies it, the film encourages viewers explicitly to look both for the causes of Ofelia’s death and for the “traces” she left in her life on earth. By merging past and future, fantasy and reality, the film withdraws from viewers the senses of causality, moral certainty, and closure of the given normative world. Instead, Pan’s Labyrinth posits imagination, responsibility, and self-reflection as necessary to ethical witnessing: one that challenges the subject-object relationship and moves beyond the spectacle of suffering.

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