

Once upon a time, there was a young girl who thought she was going to grow up happily ever after with her beloved mother and father. But her father died fighting in her kingdom's Civil War. As a result, she no longer trusted a world so dangerous that it could kill her father. This was the first turning point in the young girl's transformation.

The girl rushed to be comforted by her mother - the only important person left to her. Her mother tried to comfort her, but was understandably more preoccupied with survival during those difficult times. Bereft of her husband, the mother could only draw herself together in frightened desperation in order to continue living. She could no longer mother her daughter and protect her childhood world. After all, she herself no longer had much hope. Instead, she instructed her daughter to give up childish things like the ancient tales her daughter loved so much. This was the second betrayal and the second turning point in the young girl's transformation.

Now, we all know that most things in fairy tales come in threes, and the girl suffered yet one more decisive turning point. It came to pass when her mother met an evil king who was warring with the people in the kingdom who did not want to accept his ironfisted rule. The mother decided to marry the evil king out of loneliness and desperation, not knowing that he cared only about the baby prince she carried in her womb and cared not a fig about her. This was because killing had become so much a part of him that he was unable to care for people. Also, the evil king had lost his own father when he was very

young, and that loss seems to have hardened his heart so that he could feel no love for anyone else.

On the day that the girl journeys with her mother in their private car to join the Evil King and live with him in his kingdom, she comes to realize - in a deep and foggy place within herself - that she has truly lost her mother in their old kingdom long ago, when her father died. Mother seems to be lost even to herself, as the Baby Prince is eating her up from the inside and is destroying her strength.

Ofelia - for that is the young girl's name, comes to abandon her mother's heartbreaking world for a magical realm that she feels suits her better. After all, her name, Ofelia, means "help" in Greek, and it was used by Shakespeare for the name of Hamlet's lover who eventually goes insane and drowns herself. But *our* Ofelia seeks help from the magical realm of the labyrinth which will provide everything she needs to go on an extraordinary adventure.

Ofelia's call to adventure occurs as her mother is having yet another episode of baby sickness. When she emerges from the car in the fairy tale forest - and we all know that the forest is the metaphoric home of our deepest desires - she finds a magic stone carved with an eye. She is drawn hypnotically to a stone monolith carved with an ancient face - and a hole where the missing stone restores one eye. As she replaces the eye like a key into a lock, a large praying mantis lands on the yawning hole that is the stone creature's mouth.

In Ofelia's adventure, we will see that there are mouths and mouths and more mouths, both helpful and harmful.

Ofelia instantly realizes that the praying mantis is a fairy who has come to herald her adventurous journey. Her fairy will lead her to split her reality into the ordinary realm and the mythic realm into which he will help her cross the threshold.

But before that happens, Ofelia painfully feels the infinite gap between her mother and herself, the gap that is now filled with the baby Prince who the unconsciously rivalrous Ofelia never wanted to be there. Her mother asks her to soothe her brother with a magical tale, and she tells one of a magic rose that can make anyone who plucks it immortal. But the price of immortality is to be pierced by one of the rose's poisonous thorns just before its reward, thus pitting immortal life against the threat of death. It seems that all mortals are too afraid of death to risk immortality, and so, the rose is never plucked. Ofelia may not realize it yet, but her coming adventure will lead her to her own immortality because she is able to see beyond death.

Del Toro commented on the imagery in Pan's Labyrinth in a *Guardian* interview:

"I very deliberately designed the idea of the fantasy world to be extremely uterine. We used a fallopian palette of colours: we used crimsons and golds, and everything in the fantasy world is very rounded while everything in the real world is cold and straight. You can see it in the not-so-subtle entrance to the tree. When we did the poster for the movie for Cannes, somebody said they wanted to call the movie *A Womb With A View*. The idea is that this girl's idea of heaven, ultimately, is to go back into her mother's belly. That is why the first time she goes to the fantasy world, she goes through the baby in her mother's belly. She starts talking to her brother, and the camera goes into the belly and through that we go into the magical land where the rose grows and so on. It's a single shot, four or five minutes long, and the narrative is linked in that way." (Interview with Mark Kermode, November 21, 2006)

While Ofelia and her mother sense the movement in mother's belly, Captain Vidal, the Evil King, senses only the movement in the forest of

suspected rebels. A farmer and his son are killed mercilessly by the Evil King who only discovers afterward that they are innocent.

Meanwhile, back in mother's bed, Ofelia has awakened and re-encountered her fairy. When she shows it a picture from her storybook, the praying mantis transforms instantly into the fairy's shape to suit her imagination. With its now human arms, it can now call to her to follow him into the labyrinth. And so Ofelia's adventure begins - forever away from her mother and childhood, going only forward into puberty and growth.

According to Elise (2000), in a paper on women and desire, the labyrinth is associated with female sexuality, female power and creativity. She notes that

"...labyrinths actually exist as meditative pathways, situated originally in Chartres Cathedral in the 1200s and now in many Churches in North America, including Grace Cathedral in San Francisco... [T]he floor design is based on the flower pattern of the cathedral's rose window, which is associated with Mary, the Divine Mother. Given the frequent overlay of Christian theology on *pagan* sexual symbolism, it seems plausible that the labyrinth (distinguished here from a maze in having a clearly defined path to the center and back out, rather than, like a maze, being a trick or a puzzle) represents the maternal sexual body, the "flower" of the female genital, the "Source."Matriarchal spirituality celebrates the hidden and the unseen ... the inner map of knowing in women".

For a moment, at the centre of the labyrinth, Ofelia encounters only herself and her lonely echo, frighteningly claustrophobic. But then the space at the bottom of the labyrinth awakens with the presence of an elderly Faun - part human, part ram. This is the Pan character, although he is never named as such. He tells her of her true identity: *She* is Princess Moanna, daughter of the king of the Underworld. Now, Moanna means Ocean, and we all know that the

movement of the ocean is controlled by the Moon. Indeed, Ofelia/Moanna has always been controlled by the will of her mother. Echoes of the myth of Persephone and Demeter abound, and we know that Ofelia has left the lively but painful world of her mother to join the dark forces of her true father's realm. The Faun convinces her that she is a true princess and that she must complete three tasks before the Moon, her true mother, is full. To protect her, he gives her a book which will guide her through the tasks and lead her to her destined future. Ofelia surely needs a guide, as she has never before moved through life *on her own*.

When she opens the book once she is back with her mother, her first hero's task is revealed to her. Now our earthly kingdom of psychoanalysis tells us that the author of the gradually appearing story in the magic book is Ofelia's unconscious and that it will project onto the blank pages what her conscious self needs to become aware of in order to grow into her true self. Meanwhile, her mother wants her to look *not* like her true self but like a black taffeta princess for the Evil King. Here, I was reminded of the splitting of good and evil in the ballet *Swan Lake*, in which the black swan represents an evil temptation mirroring the white swan. It is at this moment in our film when Ofelia reminds herself, by gazing at the mark of the moon - her true mother - on her shoulder, that she is truly the princess of *another* mother, and not of her earthly one who makes her suffer so. With the invention of her internal family romance, she is able to protect her real mother from her unconscious aggressive attacks (Shapiro, 1978). She seeks out the kind housekeeper,

Mercedes, whose name means mercy. It is Mercedes who tells her about the difference in the beliefs of a child and an adult, as she no longer believes in fairy tales, but admits she once did. It is Mercedes who feeds her milk and warns her about dangerous fauns, as a good earthly mother should do.

At this point, it would be useful to contrast Ofelia's three - always three! - symbolic mothers in this film: her biological mother - fraught with limitations and engendering disillusionment, her substitutive earthly mother (Mercedes), and her fairy tale mother (symbolized by the Moon). Del Toro emphasized in an interview that Mercedes represents the mother we may all find as we continue through life, the mother we seek who is better than the mother we were born to. Mercedes is partly responsible for transmitting to Ofelia the courage to follow her own developing inner morality to fight the forces of societal evil. Now, as a latent adolescent, Ofelia has split her mother into good and bad, with her all-good mother surviving in her fantasy kingdom. In this way, she protects her biological mother from her immature destructive wishes, as Melanie Klein has elaborated. Yet it is from Mercedes that Ofelia learns compassion for the other, that aspect of reparation and guilt that characterizes a mature identity.

Left to her own devices, Ofelia follows the instructions in her magic book which lead her to a dying fig tree. Here is yet another symbol of life conflated with death. She must put three stones into the mouth of a monstrous toad living within the fig tree's roots in order to retrieve the key from its belly and bring the tree back to life again. In the magical realm that

we call psychoanalysis, these actions are recognizable as a pendulum of projection, incorporation and re-projection in the murderous game of life and death that Ofelia enacts repeatedly.

She descends into the bowels of the fig tree, ready to face her first monster for the sake of retrieving her true parents. For this is Ofelia's true goal - to find what she considers to be her true family in a romance of her own making, because her earthly family and social situation are too painful and horrific. Franco's fascism and the sadistic Captain who hunts, tortures and kills Republican rebels are terrifying realities from which Ofelia needs to escape... even if her imagination produces other frightening creatures for her to face. Indeed, the creatures of Ofelia's imagination are anodyne compared with the Captain because they can be controlled by her magical instructions. The wish for control guides her fairy tale fantasy and turns her into a heroine whereas in reality she is a victim and a martyr (Turkel, 2002).

Still descending into the labyrinth of her unconscious, she encounters the evil toad-mother who greedily incorporates Ofelia's stones only to project the viscous mass of her insides holding the key that Ofelia desires. She has killed the evil mother of her childhood in order to move forward. In this task of facing what is most disgusting to her in her unconscious, she discovers courage and the key to self-knowledge. In Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1977), we learn that it is often animals in fairy tales that guide the hero, suggesting that relying on one's animal nature or on the primitive forces within us, is what guides us toward living with higher moral purposes.

When Ofelia returns, muddy from her efforts, it is Mercedes who shows true concern and her earthly mother who berates and punishes her. Again, it is when her earthly mother criticizes her that she connects with her fairy herald, this time to bring the prize of her first adventure back to the faun in the labyrinth.

When the Faun explains the ancient sculpture on the monolith as depicting himself and her, she asks about the third figure, the baby. His evasion is the first clue that this faun is not always to be trusted. He tells her to keep the key for future use and gives her a piece of chalk. Even she asks him how she can know that he is telling the truth. His mocking response is “Why would a poor little faun like me lie to you?” Obviously, this fantasy Faun is like many opportunistic people who use others for their own purposes. Ofelia is learning that she cannot trust everyone, even when they seem to be helpful.

Compared with the Evil Captain who controls the key leading to food and medicine during a war while enjoying an obscene feast with friends, all the while speaking of his plans to starve the Republican rebels, Ofelia holds the key of her past and future lives. She dives back into her magic book of instruction, and slams it shut when the pages she gazes at seem to become soaked with blood. Knowing this is related to her earthly mother, she runs to her and discovers her hemorrhaging. Mother’s sickly state leads to another disappointment and another turning point for Ofelia. In this fairy tale, there are so many turning points that Ofelia is drawn deeper and deeper into her

labyrinthine fantasies because they are all she can trust and control. In this turning point, Ofelia is banished from her Mother's bed forever. Her only remaining tie to the real world is the motherly Mercedes.

When the Faun comes to tell her to perform the second task, he counsels her not to eat or drink anything and to remain aware of earthly time. This instruction presents the need for the child to learn to transcend her primitive orality in order to live in the world on her own (Bettelheim, p. 15). Ofelia passes through a fantasy door into a fantasy corridor that resembles yet another vaginal passage. At the end of the corridor is a long table set with elaborate food for a grand feast, and at the end of the table is a motionless, pale, wrinkled manlike creature with empty eye sockets. Ofelia sees the wall portraits depicting the Pale Man torturing and murdering babies and then the pile of children's shoes in the corner. The fairies tell her to open the middle door with her key, but her intuition tells her to do otherwise. She finds a ceremonial dagger, begins to leave, and is hypnotically drawn to eat a single grape. Denying her moral reason awakens the monster that represents her own blind, devouring greed. Like the monster, Ofelia is powerless over the world while she is in the act of voracious devouring. Dealing with the Pale Man teaches her to be conscious of her primal inner forces instead of repressing or denying them as the Fascist order demands. Again, she escapes because of her ingenuity.

The cannibalism of this fantasy scene is contrasted with one of the rebels losing a gangrenous leg to amputation. The starving rebels contrast

with the illusionary feast in Ofelia's adventure. Del Toro said in an interview that the cannibalistic Pale Man is a metaphor collapsing both the Fascists and their collaborators, the Church, who "ate children" by starving them while they feasted perversely at overly abundant banquets; Del Toro felt that there is a hunger in the Catholic Church to eat innocence and to seek redemption by blood and rebirth by sacrifice. Of course, we also recall Captain Vidal's banquet, and the rabbits he ate at the cost of killing the farmers who killed them, and the storeroom in which he hoarded food. The Pale Man represents Catholicism: his hands have holes like the stigmata, and he punishes children for eating the forbidden fruit.

When Ofelia uses the mandrake root as a magical fetish to help cure her mother's infection, it comes alive like a baby, and greedily drinks her two drops of blood. Again, this image of succor associated with blood contrasts with the murderous cannibalism of the Pale man. But when Ofelia overhears the Captain tell the Doctor that he must choose the baby over the mother, she feels that she has lost control again and she tries to bargain with her fetal brother. If he doesn't hurt mother in being born, she will make him a prince in her private kingdom, a kingdom that she feels he will desperately need, just as she does, to escape the awful reality Ofelia lives in.

The Rebels blow up a train as a decoy to lure the fascists away from the storeroom, which they pillage for supplies. Every scene with the Captain shows him to be stone cold, sadistic, and merciless, resembling some sort of amphibian creature from prehistoric times, yet he doesn't kill for food but just

for his own perverse pleasure. Here too, the real world echoes the fairy tale world as human torture, blood and death are contrasted with food preparation, blood and knives. Mercedes hides a food knife in her apron to defend herself from human torturers. And, for her uncontrolled greed in helping herself to two grapes, Ofelia's punishment is: being abandoned to the unhappy world of humans. When she returns to care for her mother, she even loses the healing power of the mandrake root which is thrown on the fire, a screaming dying baby, like the tortured stuttering rebel in the barn. Both the Captain and her mother insist that fairy tales and magic - symbolizing imagination and creativity - don't belong in a world of cruelty and death, and they are right. Trauma destroys the imagination. With the death of creativity, mother falls into her last illness, because here too, there is a link between life and death. And the Doctor is killed because he challenges the fascist ideology of obedience by daring to think for himself. His punishment echoes Ofelia's punishment by the Faun for disobeying his instructions in the room of the Pale Man.

When mother dies in childbirth, we can imagine, as analysts, that Ofelia will always blame herself for the loss, as she needs so much to feel that, somehow, she must control the sad and cruel world around her. But that world spirals out of control when the Captain discovers that both Mercedes and Ofelia are on the side of the rebels. Mercedes fights back with her knife and slashes the Captain's mouth, making him uncannily resemble the Pale Man in his cannibalistic perversion. His gaping and distorted mouth looks like it will swallow anything in its path. When he sews up the gash himself, one almost

thinks he is hiding his true self, his gaping destructive vacuum cleaner of a mouth that destroys everything in its path.

Ofelia, abused and abandoned, is given a last chance by the Faun. In stealing her brother from the room of the Captain, she hopes to save him from an unloving and murderous world, but she misses being saved herself by Mercedes through her altruistic gesture. When she produces the baby to the Faun, his wish is to pierce the baby with the knife she retrieved for a drop of his blood... and again, she refuses to obey, like the Doctor before her, and Mercedes, and all the rebels and all free thinking people. This last task is for Ofelia to be able to make her own decisions and live with her choices. With this act of concern beyond her own wellbeing, Ofelia becomes a sentient adult capable of living morally in a community of human beings. But yet again, this moment of birth becomes clouded by death when the Captain shoots her.

The Captain dies only moments after he kills Ofelia, and we marvel at the irony of this random sequence. When Mercedes discovers the dying Ofelia, her blood is dripping into a pool of the labyrinth whose waters reflect the image of the moon, her fairy tale mother. Ofelia feeds her mother even in death. The camera spans the carved funerary monolith at the heart of the labyrinth, reminding us of Ofelia's earlier encounter there with the Faun, when he refused to tell her about the baby within it. We now realize that the baby is Ofelia herself, a child who dies because of the failure of her mother to protect her. "Without a mothering other, there is no universe, no God, and no life" (Auerhahn and Laub, 1998).

Mercedes sings her wordless lullabye to the dying girl, wordless perhaps because in this world of hate and pain and brutality, words can no longer be trusted and only notes from the heart can communicate love. And in Ofelia's last tragic moments, she brings her fairy tale to a joyous conclusion, which is how fairy tales are supposed to end. She discovers that the secret to a well-lived life is to care for the other rather than for herself. Her selfless gesture of saving her brother (despite the command of the Faun) is the mark of a mature adult identity. She has also identified with Mercedes in developing into an ethical subject of a social community (Thormann, 2008).

With regard to individual versus group morality, Klein suggested that only individuals can experience the moral behaviour of reparation as a response to guilt at the depressive position. In contrast, groups are stuck with a primitive talion morality or the morality of revenge (rather than reparation) at the paranoid-schizoid position, and this is what is so frighteningly represented by the behaviour of the Fascists in the film. The primitive guilt of group morality leads to fear of persecution while the more mature guilt achieved by the individual leads to constructive acts of reparation (Alford, 1990).

Thus, Ofelia's resistance against the Captain represents the development of a freethinking individualist identity in the context of the counter-repressive forces of the fascist group. She achieves this in three steps, of course: first, when she refuses to address him as Father (thus refusing the name-of-the-father when she recognizes him to be a false authority); second, when she keeps the secret of Mercedes' collaboration with the resistance against the

false authority; and third, when she steals her brother from the Captain's room, with a little help from magic realism. With Ofelia's resistance against Spanish Fascism, the film plays out a collective family romance that injects hope into a future society living in freedom (Thormann, 2008).

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**EIGHTH ANNUAL FILM AND ANALYSIS PROGRAM
OF THE
OTTAWA PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETY**

THEME: "TURNING POINT"

Pan's Labyrinth / El Labyrintho del Fauno(2006)

Director: Guillermo del Toro

Presenter: Rosemarie Krausz, Ph.D., C.Psych., FIPA

Presented to the Ottawa Psychoanalytic Society on February 6, 2009