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Menstruation as Heroine's Journey in Pan's Labyrinth

Abstract

I propose that the Guillermo del Toro film, *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) follows the narrative outline of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey as experienced through the biological process of onset of menstruation in its young protagonist. I suggest a reading of the film that takes into account the visual and mythological symbolism of the figure of Pan, as well as the cultural context of menstruation in mythology and religion. I offer interviews from the director that support this interpretation, but ultimately I value a folk interpretation, or a "viewer's hunch" that the strange and fertile symbolism of the film represents a coming-of-age struggle intimately familiar to women.

Keywords

Campbell, Sexuality, Puberty, Spanish Civil War, Fascism, Myth, Pan

Author Notes

Richard Lindsay recently completed his PhD in art and religion at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, focusing on intersections of theology, cultural studies, gender and sexuality, and film. He is the co-editor of *PopTheology.com*, a site dedicated to progressive Christian exploration of popular culture.

Since the 1949 publication of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, scholars in fields of psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies have sharply critiqued the "hero's journey" and its concept of the unfolding of human psychological development along a stable mythological story arc. Additionally, since Campbell's death, biographers have struggled over his right-wing political views and possible anti-Semitism, positions that seem inconsistent with his expansive interest in global cultures.¹ The most important critiques leveled against the content of the mythology itself focus on the male-centeredness of the hero's journey, its immersion in discredited psychoanalytical theories of gender, and the imposition of a meta-narrative on the distinct and detailed mythologies of the world. Postmodern suspicion of overarching narrative structures would seemingly have driven the final nail in the coffin of Campbell's Monomyth. As one student in a recent film seminar I attended stated, with a doctrinal certainty typical of the ostensibly non-dogmatic field of cultural studies, "But we just know that Campbell is not *true*."

"True" or not, there is perhaps no modernist convention in film studies that has been more durable in defiance of postmodern academic wisdom than the hero's journey. In part because of the popularizing of Campbell's scholarship through the 1988 PBS television series, *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, and its purported influence on *Star Wars* creator George Lucas, the mythology

continues to be essential to constructing and interpreting North American and Western European film narratives. Particularly in film, the mythology plays itself out again and again in darkened movie theaters, especially in blockbuster franchises like *Spider-Man*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *Harry Potter*. This essay and analysis does not present the hero's journey as the key to all mythologies, but as an observable phenomenon in story, myth, and popular culture, one that must be understood by serious students of Western cinema. To say the hero's journey is not at the heart of every mythology is not to say it doesn't exist; just as to acknowledge Campbell's reactionary politics is not to eliminate a lifetime of influential scholarship. Most important to this paper will be analyzing possible meanings behind the subtle but significant departures taken from the structure of the hero's journey in *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) as written, directed, and visually conceived by Guillermo del Toro.

The most notable shift from the typical narrative of a hero's journey in *Pan's Labyrinth* is that the film is written from the perspective of a girl. Hero's journeys are often tales of initiation, the death of the child and birth of the adult. But this form of initiation, whether in rituals of ancient cultures or modern adventure stories, is frequently practiced in the socialization of male children, where the threshold between childhood and adulthood is not as easily divided. In the lives of most females, however, there is a distinct and naturally regulated moment when a girl becomes a woman, at the beginning of menstruation.

On viewing *Pan's Labyrinth*, one is struck by the repeated symbolism of the faun's head, echoing the goat-like visage of Pan, with its triangular face and curling horns. The faun's head appears in the form of a fig tree into which the heroine crawls, on the headboard of the bed where her mother sleeps, and in numerous architectural elements in the film. The faun's head mimics the appearance of a uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. In addition to the uterine symbolism, the film also repeatedly presents instances of bloodletting, through the troubled pregnancy of the protagonist Ofelia's mother, and culminating in the bleeding and dying adolescent Ofelia at the end of the film. The recurrence of the uterine/bloodletting symbolism leads to speculation that the story may be representing some other drama, something that may be taking place almost unconsciously in the life of the young protagonist. *Pan's Labyrinth* is a hero's journey told as a young girl's fairy tale, with the historical drama playing out around her paralleling her own drama of reaching sexual and spiritual maturity.

In a *Guardian*/National Film Theater interview in London in November 2006, del Toro confirms much of this analysis of the film:

Mark Kermode: Obviously watching *Pan's Labyrinth*, there are Jungian archetypes in it, and there's definitely uterine imagery. I'm assuming that's not just me being crass.

del Toro: No. 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*.²

Understanding del Toro's film also calls for examination of his creative process. He has a strong sense of film as a visual medium, and carefully crafts the visual details and symbols in his movies. A *Guardian* page linked to the interview quoted above offers a flash presentation of del Toro's notebook, which he carries with him wherever he goes.³ Here we see the stirring images and characters of *Pan's Labyrinth* sketched in detailed drawings in the midst of pages of scrawled notes in Spanish, English, and the occasional Latin (revealing del Toro's Catholic heritage). There can be no doubt, therefore, that the visual symbolism of his films is a carefully chosen, not accidental, element.

Reading *Pan's Labyrinth* requires a similar kind of folk reading as Norman Iles attempts in his book, *Who Really Killed Cock Robin?* Taking an approach almost opposite from Joseph Campbell's wide-ranging and intensive academic survey of world mythology, Iles attempts to reconstruct the true meaning of European nursery rhymes using only the varying versions of the texts as supplied by the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*.⁴ His hunch is that most nursery rhymes actually deal with very adult themes having to do with life, death, and sex. As he says of the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill," "Let us not forget that this pair did *not* go up the hill to fetch a pail of water."⁵ According to Iles, most of

these tales have been bowdlerized, rendering them nonsense rhymes that have no real meaning for children *or* adults.⁶ His project requires that readers try to restore the rhymes' internal logic, and therefore, their wisdom. As he states:

The knowledge we want is folk-knowledge. All the slang, jokes, rugby songs, writing on bathroom walls...pub signs, patterns; the art in folk museums, the carvings in old churches. All these are from the same folk culture and relate to the same songs and carols. Books on them may, or may not, be enlightening. What you ought to know you may have to find out for yourself.⁷

Because *Pan's Labyrinth* is a fairy tale, there is a sense in which no analysis based solely on the surface story of the film will do. My folk perception is that in addition to the historical drama playing out on the screen, the movie is about the uterine and menstrual drama experienced by adolescent girls. The reading is a "viewer's hunch," something implicitly understood, not something that is overtly stated in the film. In working on the level of mythos, *Pan's Labyrinth* conjures up a pre-modern humanity that works by its own organically unfolding logic. In initiation myths, there is always a surface story that is adventurous and fantastical combined with a subtext—the real purpose of the story—that deals with the more mundane, but nonetheless vital dramas of everyday life.

The dramas of everyday life are essential to the structure of the hero's journey, because, as Campbell states, the hero emerges out of the quotidian:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. ...Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests) some of which give magical aid (helpers).⁸

In *Pan's Labyrinth* the heroine Ofelia is an 11 year-old girl who still immerses herself in storybooks and fairy tales. As a dreamer on the border between childhood and adulthood, she is particularly susceptible to instruction from mythical beings. Alienated and lonely, she is the daughter of a widow who has remarried a fascist captain after Ofelia's father was killed in the Spanish Civil War. Pregnant with the captain's child, her mother has taken Ofelia to join her stepfather at a rural outpost where he has been sent to suppress the last vestiges of the Republic carrying out an insurgency in the forests and hills.

In choosing a female heroine, del Toro takes an important departure from the traditional hero's journey mythology. Throughout history, men have created stories of heroes, knights, and warriors who commit and survive acts of bloodletting as a means of attempting to create worlds in the same way women create worlds through the natural processes of their bodies.⁹ According to Judith Ann Johnson, menstruation has traditionally represented a "taboo" in the truest sense of the term, in that it is both sacred and impure. As Johnson writes, "As much as a woman is capable of giving life, she is on the border of life and nonlife, and she should, therefore [according to patriarchal religions] be kept away from

the sacred."¹⁰ The tradition of blood sacrifice used in religion, including the Christian cycle of crucifixion and resurrection, comes in part from the attempt of men to create a "pure" that is, non-female, form of bloodletting that has the same power over life and death as the bloodletting of menstruation and birthing.¹¹ And even beyond the need for a masculine form of spiritual re-creation, the male line must be cleansed from the "evil" of intercourse with and birth through a woman.¹² The hero's journey thus represents the blood sacrifice of the male warrior, a descent into death, and a resurrection into semi-divinity without the spiritually "tainted" blood of a woman.¹³ In appropriating the hero's journey as a metaphor for female menstruation, therefore, del Toro transgresses the patriarchal cycle of womanless regeneration. In this way, although the film follows closely to and in some ways reaffirms the hero's journey as outlined by Campbell, it may also be read as a feminist critique of this mythology.

Ofelia is, in Campbell's words, "lured to the edge of adventure," when she follows a fairy disguised as an insect to the edge of her stepfather's compound. The fairy leads her into an ancient and overgrown labyrinth, and down a set of stairs into a deep well in the ground. Campbell calls this place where the hero meets adventure "the threshold."¹⁴ At the bottom of the well, she meets her "shadow figure," Pan. (He actually introduces himself as "The Faun.") The faun is a satyr, the goat-man, a Greek god of revelry and fertility that was associated with the rustic countryside. The most famous satyr was Pan, son of Hermes.¹⁵

According to Paul Grootker, the Roman name for Pan was "Faunus," "derived from the Latin *fari* meaning 'the speaker,' since the god could reveal the future through dreams."¹⁶ (This is an ability Ofelia is to find in her friend Pan.) Being creatures of fertility, satyrs were often portrayed in Greek art and literature with massive erections.¹⁷ It is not surprising then that in a tradition as suspicious of sexuality as Christianity, such graphic representations of pagan sexuality would become associated with the demonic. In fact, the common horned, hoofed creature associated with the Christian Satan is a derivative of the faun.¹⁸ During the Renaissance, the more pastoral form of the faun came back to the fore, as poets and artists celebrated Pan as a figure of music, storytelling, and love.¹⁹

Although the perception of this magical creature in mythology varies, there is a charged sexual symbolism of a young girl on the verge of adolescence encountering a creature with Pan's fertile history. In a discussion with Ofelia after the girl discloses meeting the faun ("He smelled like earth," she says, with a slight smile) the adult woman character Mercedes says, "My mother told me never to trust fauns." Good advice. And yet the faun is the mythological figure with whom Ofelia must spar in order to achieve spiritual and physical maturity. Read this way, the implied menstrual meaning of the film sprouts from the earth like the mossy form of Pan, who represents fertility and chaos, self-fulfillment and self-denial. He is not to be trusted, and to be trusted implicitly.

The Faun tells Ofelia she is a princess of an underground kingdom, born of the moon. Ofelia resists this story of origin at first, saying she was born of her mother and a tailor. This reflects another part of the hero myth Campbell mentions, the “refusal of the Call.”²⁰ But The Faun has no time for this and dismisses her objection. She is given a book, which she is told will show her future. The Faun tells her she must complete three tasks by the full moon to see if she is worthy of ruling the underground kingdom. As he reveals later, her completion of the task is also essential to the survival of this underground kingdom and its mythological inhabitants.

Ofelia's battle to save the underground kingdom is a parallel battle to the fight against fascism taking place around her. The fact that she is female is essential to her mythological resistance of the fascist system. Comparing *Pan's Labyrinth* to his earlier film, *Devil's Backbone*, del Toro states in The National Film Institute interview:

I had to make a movie that structurally echoed *Devil's Backbone*, and that you could watch back to back. *Devil's Backbone* is the boy's movie. It's the brother movie. But *Pan's Labyrinth* is the sister movie, the female energy to that other one. I wanted to make it because fascism is definitely a male concern and a boy's game, so I wanted to oppose that with an 11-year-old girl's universe.²¹

Margrit Shlidrick discusses feminine associations with monster figures like The Faun as part of the “othering” that takes place in the western binary between male and female.

In light of the longstanding association of the feminine with disorder, in terms both of the rational mind and the leaky body... the conflation of women and monsters should come as no surprise. For all our cultural and technological sophistication, we have inherited, in western countries, an ideological burden that explicitly associates women with danger, particularly in the spheres of sexuality and maternity.²²

Rather than resisting or redefining the male/female binary as might take place in contemporary forms of feminism and queer studies, del Toro has proposed the monstrous possibilities of “feminine” “dis-order” and associations with nature as qualities to be embraced and preserved. In del Toro’s conception, the idea of fascist Spain is a representation of the worst of the masculine principle—cold, mechanical, and unfeeling—that must be resisted. O f e l i a ’ s world of *The Faun*, and symbols like the moon and the labyrinth represent a wilder, less controlled, and ultimately more humane and feminine principle.

The embodiment of cold, fascist masculinity is O f e l i a ’ s stepfather, himself a kind of monster—a ruthless military man of unspeakable cruelty who tortures and shoots victims at whim. In his daily life, he is stickler for detail, regulating the world with a pocket watch, carefully shaving and grooming himself, and upbraiding his servants for slightly burning the coffee. The precise, mechanistic symbolism of his character is maintained in the placement of his headquarters in an old mill, with the giant wooden gears of the mill’s wheel looming behind him in his office, framing him as he sits at his desk.

Ofelia's stepfather is what Campbell calls the "tyrant-monster," the "hoarder of the general benefit" that is the true adversary of the hero/heroine.²³

The inflated ego of the tyrant is a curse to himself and his world. ...Self-terrorized, fear-haunted, alert at every hand to meet and battle back the anticipated aggressions of his environment, which are primarily reflections of the uncontrollable impulses to acquisition within himself, the giant of self-achieved independence is the world's messenger of disaster, even though, in his mind, he may entertain himself with humane intentions. Wherever he sets his hand there is...a cry for the redeeming hero, the carrier of the shining blade, whose blow, whose touch, whose existence, will liberate the land.²⁴

Set against mechanical, and in del Toro's view, masculine, symbols of the tyrant, is the important feminine symbol of the moon. As a marker of months, tides, and seasons, and associated with the menstrual process of women, the natural, feminine time keeping device of the moon as it is used as a symbol in the film stands in direct contrast to the mechanical male time-keeping device of Ofelia's stepfather's watch. (The words "moon," "month," and "menstruation" share the common Latin root *mensis*.)²⁵ In addition to harkening back to Ofelia's mythical lunar mother, the moon acts as a tension-building device in the film.

As an example, the day after Ofelia is given her initial task from The Faun, she prepares to take a bath. The light in the room is natural, emanating from three non-symmetrical, moon-like windows above the bathtub. Here Ofelia sits and runs her hands over the previously empty book that Pan gave her, causing

white pages to dissolve into an intricately-illustrated instruction of her first task. Once her first task is completed, she returns to the bathroom, and the scene is cropped to show only two moons looming behind her, suggesting the second task is at hand. This two-moon symbolism is paralleled in a scene where Mercedes, who is actually a spy for the Republicans, walks to the edge of the woods to signal the guerilla fighters using a tin lamp with two asymmetrical holes cut in it. Even Ofelia's stepfather has the lunar imagery imposed on his body, as he wears a pair of round sunglasses that reflect light in a parallel of the two-moon symbolism. As Ofelia moves on to her final task, which must be completed by the full moon deadline imposed by Pan, the viewer waits for the final, singular moon that signals the completion of Ofelia's trial. The single moon appears, ironically, as Ofelia lays dying on the edge of the labyrinth at the end of the film. As her blood drips into the deep well at the center of the labyrinth, the full moon reflects in the blood that has collected at the bottom. When the camera pulls back to show Mercedes weeping over the dying Ofelia, the moon shines in its tragic fullness in the upper left hand of the night sky.

Although Ofelia is very close to her mother, she is closer in character to Mercedes. Ofelia and Mercedes represent adult and child versions of the same struggle: Mercedes is carrying out the adult struggle of resisting fascism and Ofelia is carrying out the child's struggle of preserving the world of The Faun and the underground kingdom. There are clear parallels in the actions of the two

characters. For example, in order to enter a vault for her second task, Ofelia must create a magic door using a piece of chalk. Likewise, Mercedes is shown in the kitchen of the house clearing away dirt from a floor stone to reveal a secret vault in which she hides supplies and messages for the resistance fighters. As mentioned before, Mercedes signals the guerilla fighters with the two moons of her lantern as Ofelia is preparing to undertake her second task under the two moons in the bathroom. Ofelia must also use a golden key in the second task that she retrieves in the first task, just as Mercedes gives a copy of a key to her guerilla brother, which opens a storehouse of supplies on the grounds of the mill. The juxtaposition of these symbols suggests that Mercedes and Ofelia are fighting the same fight, one of liberation from the tyranny of masculine symbols imposing themselves on feminine symbols of a more natural, spiritual, and humane existence. The two characters may even be seen as alter egos.

Having met her shadow figure and crossed the threshold of adventure, Ofelia begins her “tests,” these “unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces” that she must face and overcome along her journey.²⁶ Her first trial involves finding a golden key, which she must extract from the belly of a frog by getting him to eat three stones. Led by the magically appearing instructions in the book *The Faun* has given her, Ofelia finds the frog inside an old, dead fig tree that echoes the uterine imagery of Pan's head, the “womb with a view” that del Toro mentioned. Ofelia crawls through the base of the tree and through the mud and muck below it,

and finds herself covered with squirming bugs. When she meets the frog, he sits fat and impassive, shooting his slimy tongue out and devouring bugs off her body. She gets the frog to eat the stones by getting him to shoot his tongue out at a bug disguised among the stones in her hand. The frog begins to vomit, and eventually a giant yellow ball of slime emerges from his mouth as his body deflates and collapses into the ground. In the ball of slime, Ophelia finds the key.

Continuing the parallels between Ophelia's struggle and the fight against fascism, the frog scene is juxtaposed with the servants in Ophelia's stepfather's household complaining about the cruel perfectionism of the captain as they prepare a feast for him, his family, and supporters. The frog represents Ophelia's stepfather, feasting in luxury while the country scrapes by on ration coupons. The task is also representative of Ophelia's childlike desire to re-enter the womb of her mother. Ophelia emerges from the womb of the tree, undergoing a tentative rebirth, covered with the mud and muck of the earth like the afterbirth of a baby. As del Toro states, "This girl's idea of heaven, ultimately, is to go back into her mother's belly."²⁷

But ultimately, returning to the womb is not a possibility for a girl on the verge of adulthood. This resistance to her physical destiny, a second manifestation of the "refusal of the call," leads to disaster. After undergoing her symbolic rebirth through the tree, Ophelia's determination to carry out the tasks is tested. As she consults The Faun's book to try to find out her second task she again finds the

book blank. Instead of illustrated instructions of the next task, two red swirls appear on either page of the book. A flow of red begins to trickle down the pages into the center of the book and down the center of the book. The shape formed by the flow of red is the familiar Pan's head/uterus image. Ofelia is horrified when the red liquid shape begins to spill and flow out of its uterine parameters and cover the blank pages in bloody pigment. Frightened, Ofelia rushes from the bathroom into the bedroom to find her mother bleeding from the womb and gasping for breath. The bleeding uterus that appears on the book turns out to be an omen of ill will, acting as foreshadowing of Ofelia's mother's troubled pregnancy and death. But more important, considering The Faun said the book would tell Ofelia *her* future, it represents Ofelia's coming menstruation and adulthood. At one point, faced with the reality of her emerging fertility, Ofelia even denies her body's potential for reproduction. Mercedes explains to Ofelia after she witnesses her mother's bleeding and sickness, "Having a baby is complicated." Ofelia responds, "Then I'll never have one." As in life, however, Ofelia will have no choice but to take on the burden of maturity and loss of innocence, a process that is central to the next task.

Campbell uses a mythological description particularly suitable to Ofelia's situation:

Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in by boredom, hard work, or "culture," the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. Like King Minos... whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death: a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide him from his Minotaur. ... One is harassed both day and night, by the divine being that is the image of the living self within the locked labyrinth of one's own disoriented psyche.²⁸

Ofelia is delayed in her second task by her concern for her mother, and in order to move her along, The Faun appears again to motivate her. He gives Ofelia a mandrake root, which he refers to as "a plant that dreamt of being human." Ofelia is instructed to put the mandrake in a bowl of milk and place it under her mother's bed, feeding it with two drops of blood. This will help her mother to get well, and will allow Ofelia to get on with the tasks. When she places the mandrake in the bowl and drips some blood from her finger over it, it squirms and cries like a grotesque infant. In a way, Ofelia has become a mother through the expenditure of her own blood, presaging her mother's letting of blood, and self-sacrifice, in the birthing of Ofelia's brother.

The mandrake represents the legend of the "Mandragora." As recounted by Carol Rose, "Like the appearance of the roots, the spirit of the mandrake is described as resembling a youthful, naked male or female human... The plant was used from earliest times for its alleged fertility and curative powers..."²⁹ The root is a symbol of the dual association of birth and death, as a mandrake's scream is supposed to produce death in the hearer.³⁰ Another folklore reference suggests

darkly that the mandrake is "Said to germinate from the spilled semen of hanged felons." ³¹ With the legend of the mandrake, there is a strong association with Original Sin—with the powers of creation usurped from the Divine, and the tragic consequences of this false appropriation.

Once Ofelia figures out the second task, the viewer can sense it has a strong association of sexuality in the context of the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. The instructions in the magical book include a drawing of a skeletal "pale man" Ofelia will meet in the chamber she enters during the task, and the illustration shows a girl opening the small door with a key that is placed provocatively between his arched legs. Invoking the biblical forbidden fruit, Pan's instructions to her include an admonishment that she will see tantalizing food in the chamber, and that her life depends on not eating it.

After entering and being led through the chamber by three fairies given to her as helpers by Pan, Ofelia finds the pale man to be grotesque and bulbous, with flaps of skin flowing over his emaciated body, a hideous adult manifestation of the infant mandrake root. He is seated at a table laden with sumptuous, but strangely bloody-looking food and drink. Painted on the ceiling of the room are ancient frescoes of the pale man impaling and eating small children. The pale man is surrounded by hundreds of old leather children's shoes, piled in a corner of the room, with an arched furnace-like fireplace flaming in the background. Here del

Toro borrows imagery from the Holocaust to magnify the feeling of the impending death of innocents (and innocence).

Ofelia uses her golden key from the first task to retrieve a shining dagger from one of three small doors placed in the wall behind the pale man. As she is leaving, however, she finds herself tempted by the food sitting on the table. In a moment of sensual bliss, she lifts a large, sugar-encrusted grape to her lips, swatting the fairies away as they try to stop her. As she eats the fruit, the pale man comes to life, places his eyes in his hands and glares at her with his palms. He begins chasing after Ofelia, devouring two of the fairies that have swarmed him to save her life. Ofelia escapes, but only one fairy makes it out alive.

Upon hearing of her misadventure, Pan is livid. He shouts, “You failed! You can never return. ... Your spirit shall forever remain among the humans. You shall age like them, you shall die like them, and all memory of you shall fade in time.” And, revealing his and all the mythical creatures’ interest this struggle, he says, “And we’ll vanish along with it.” There are echoes of the Fall and expulsion from Eden in her failure and in Pan's reaction. In eating the forbidden fruit, laden with sexual symbolism, Ofelia becomes mortal and subject to being lost to memory. The pale man, as an adult version of the mandrake baby, could be seen as the inevitable offspring of all humanity, which in its living automatically brings about dying. As with the disturbing imagery painted in the chamber, death is the monster that eats all human babies eventually, either as children or as adults. If

the first task represented O felia's avoidance of adulthood by a symbolic re-entry of the womb, the second task represents the inevitability of sexual maturity, lost innocence, and, eventually, death.

As suggested from del Toro's interview, the failure of O felia's second task is a necessary part of O felia's development as a character: "Frankly, I think that everything we try to deny about our bodies and our lives—about being fallible and mortal, that we're going to rot, and that our armpits smell, that we are imperfect, that we sin and screw up—all these are the things that actually make us human." ³²

O felia's fallibility, her sin, has consequences. When O felia goes to feed the mandrake again, her stepfather discovers what she has been doing and pulls the now stillborn mandrake baby out from under the bed, sniffing the curdled milk in the bowl and wincing from its sourness (like the human stench del Toro mentions). Her mother follows with her disapproval and throws the mandrake into the fire, where it begins to move again, squirming and screaming hideously. Her mother immediately lurches into labor, and after hours of suffering, the real human baby is born. It is a boy, and O felia's mother dies in childbirth. O felia is left in the house of her hostile stepfather, alone and bereft, her innocence gone.

This leads to the final stage of the hero's journey, the apotheosis, or breaking open and dissolution of the ego, which is integrated into O felia's third and final task. ³³ Shortly after O felia's mother's death it becomes apparent to

Mercedes that the captain has figured out she is a spy for the Republicans, and she realizes she must escape into the woods with the guerillas. Taking Ofelia with her, the two try to leave the compound, but are captured and taken captive. Ofelia is banished back to her bedroom while Mercedes is taken away, presumably to be tortured into giving information about the guerillas. Ofelia is about to despair, when suddenly Pan appears in her bedroom. He has decided to give her another chance. In order to survive, Pan and Ofelia must both accept her humanity and fallibility. Her innocence is gone, but the purity of her spirit remains, as will be demonstrated in the last test. Pan tells Ofelia to go get her infant brother and come to the center of the labyrinth.

Ofelia does as instructed, but her stepfather follows her into the labyrinth as she runs with her brother. She gets to the center and finds Pan standing menacingly with the dagger she pulled from the chamber of the pale man. Pan instructs her to give him the infant, so that the final task can be completed by spilling “just a drop” of the blood of an innocent, “A pinprick, that’s all.” (Having committed mortal sin in the chamber of the pale man, Ofelia is no longer innocent.) Here Ofelia follows the advice of Mercedes, not trusting the faun to take “just a drop” of her brother’s blood. She refuses to hand him the child. Pan bristles and shouts at her, “You would give up your sacred rights for this brat you barely know? [...] You would give up your throne for him? He who has caused you such misery, such humiliation?” She answers yes. At this point her stepfather

catches up with her and takes the baby. Having retrieved his son, he shoots the now expendable Ofelia.

Ofelia's reaction to being shot by her stepfather is not horror or pain, but more a look of shock and sickness. We do not see the wound; the camera frames her from the chest up. We see her look down, 'below,' and hold up her hand, which is covered in blood, in a shade of red in considerable contrast to the blue filtered background. At this point, the climax of the film, the music swoons as she watches the blood drip from her hand. The wound she receives is both literal and symbolic. It represents the bloodletting of the bullet wound, but also the inevitable death of all little girls in adolescence, in the bloodletting of menstruation.

Joseph Campbell outlines this stage of the hero's journey: "When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's [...] divinization (apotheosis) [...] intrinsically, it is an expansion of consciousness (illumination, transfiguration, freedom)." ³⁴

And indeed, Ofelia does gain a reward. As she bleeds and dies in the real world, in the fantastical world she is brought to the underground kingdom, ruled by her real father and mother and attended by Pan. Ofelia is dressed in a red satin jacket, and takes note of her red sneakers, symbols of both her sacrifice and her menstruating adulthood. The court applauds her loudly, and Pan and her parents

welcome her, saying that she has passed the final test, spilling her own blood rather than that of an innocent. Although in the real world she dies, here she is reborn to reign as the princess of the underworld. Demonstrating the unmistakable subtext of Ofelia's fertility in the film, in the last scene, the final image on the screen is the uterus-shaped fig tree, the "womb with a view," which had been barren and void, sprouting a white flower on one of its fallopian tube branches.

As Campbell writes, evoking the book of Jonah, "The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into the sphere of rebirth is symbolized by the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would have appeared to have died."³⁵ But in Campbell's model, the mythical death is supposed to be followed by a resurrection a "flight" from the "threshold forces," and a return "from the kingdom of dread."³⁶

Here, del Toro resists the mythological model, and does not give Ofelia a literal resurrection. In del Toro's world, Ofelia's death must be real. Del Toro explains his aversion to resurrection scenes in the National Film Institute interview. He recounts that he was the first director to be contacted to direct *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Fitting with del Toro's pattern of almost masochistic denial of lucrative film projects (he also turned down the first two *Harry Potter* films) he said he would only direct the *Narnia* movie if Aslan the

lion wasn't resurrected. (Obviously, this wasn't acceptable to the film's Christian backers.) As del Toro says,

What is the worth of that sacrifice if he knows he's coming back? I really enjoy the uncertainty of a guy or a creature going to die for something without knowing if there's anyone to bail him out. What's beautiful about the death of Jesus is him saying to his father, 'Why have you forsaken me?' That incredibly mysterious and moving passage is so precious because he doesn't know. If he knew, screw that.³⁷

The only possible reading of *Pan's Labyrinth* where a resurrection of sorts happens is in the life of Ofelia's parallel character Mercedes. With her help, the rebels succeed in destroying the outpost and killing the captain, taking the baby brother and presumably saving him from being raised by a sadistic father. The hero's journey started by the child may be seen to carry on in the figure of Mercedes as an adult woman. In this way, the image of Mercedes kneeling and weeping over the dead Ofelia at the end of the film could be seen as the necessary grief of all adults, weeping for the loss of innocence, as the child disappears to reign as monarch of the "underground" realm of the psyche, to be re-summoned in myths and fairy tales. In many ways, Mercedes is weeping for herself.

Echoing this adult need to contact the fantastic world of the child that reigns within,

Campbell writes:

The first step [to spiritual and psychological wholeness] consists in the radical transfer of emphasis from the external to the internal world, macro-

to microcosm, a retreat from the desperations of the waste land to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within...All the ogres and secret helpers of our nursery are there, all the magic of childhood...In a word: the first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects to the causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside.³⁸

Informed by this understanding of the power of mythology as an exploration of internal conflicts, a suspicion about barely disguised uterine imagery, and del Toro's own words, the symbolism of this strange and fantastic film opens like the blooming flower of the final scene. Del Toro brings this resonance with Campbell's model full circle in a quote posted as part of a review on the British Film Institute website. Quoting a Clive Barker story, he mentions the line, "Deep in her, in a place touched only by monsters." He explains, "In my case, I really think that the most creative, most fragile part of the child that lives within me is a child that was literally transformed by monsters. Be they on the screen, or in myth, or in my own imagination."³⁹

¹ Robert Ellwood addresses these concerns in a careful and balanced assessment of Campbell's political views in *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

² Guillermo del Toro, Mark Kermode, Guardian/National Film Theater Interview, November 21, 2006, <http://film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,,1955212,00.html> (accessed May 21, 2007).

³ "Pan's People," *The Guardian*, November 17, 2006, <http://film.guardian.co.uk/flash/page/0,,1949730,00.html>, (accessed August 25, 2008).

⁴ Norman Iles, *Who Really Killed Cock Robin?* (London: Robert Hale, 1986), 13.

⁵ *Ibid.* 51.

⁶ Ibid. 16-18.

⁷ Ibid. 14.

⁸ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, commemorative edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 227.

⁹ Judith Ann Johnson, "Shedding Blood: The Sanctifying Rite of Heroes," in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: a Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity*, eds. Kristin De Troyer, Judith A. Herbert, Judith Ann Johnson, Anne-Marie Korte (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2003), 190.

¹⁰ Ibid. 206.

¹¹ Ibid. 190-191.

¹² Ibid. 205.

¹³ Ibid. 203.

¹⁴ Campbell, 54.

¹⁵ "Faun," Paul Grootkerk, *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Sourcebook and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 207-208.

¹⁶ Ibid. 208-209.

¹⁷ Ibid. 208, 210.

¹⁸ Ibid. 211, 212.

¹⁹ Ibid. 212-213, 216.

²⁰ Campbell, 54

²¹ Del Toro, Kermode.

²² Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 30.

²³ Campbell, 14.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, s.v. "moon," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moon> (accessed February 12, 2008).

²⁶ Campbell, 227.

²⁷ Del Toro, Kermode.

²⁸ Campbell, 54-55.

²⁹ Carol Rose, *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins: An Encyclopedia of the Little People* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1996), 210.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Alison Jones, *Larousse Dictionary of World Folklore* (New York: Larousse, 1995), 217.

³² Del Toro, Kermode.

³³ Campbell, 138.

³⁴ Ibid. 227.

³⁵ Ibid. 83.

³⁶ Ibid. 228.

³⁷ Del Toro, Kermode.

³⁸ Campbell, 16.

³⁹ Mark Kermode, "Girl Interrupted," *Sight and Sound*, December 2006, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/49337> (accessed April 20, 2012).

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