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### God is...an Ofelia?

Growing up, my life was not dissimilar from *Pan's Labyrinth* protagonist, Ofelia's. No, I did not spend time in fascist Spain. *But* I did spend fifteen years in the Catholic education system in a wee, rural town. Like Ofelia's life with her mousy mother and the Captain, I learned about my place in the world and what was expected of me as a "young lady" through what I was restricted from doing and what would end with me receiving demerits. Not only was my education based on punishment, the entire system was created and maintained by fearmongering, self-righteous, decrepit men who refused to live in a world subsequent to Vatican II. There were no self-made atheists or agnostics in the world I came from—only "Catholics" or "lapsed Catholics seeking reunification to the Law." Wrongness was a key aspect of our mission statement, and it did not just apply to our conduct reports. As "young Apologists" we consumed literature deemed inappropriate for Catholic citizens and offered up our own opinions as to why exactly it was derogatory to the faith. Watching del Toro's film *Pan's Labyrinth* was a part of my strict curriculum's vendetta against the secular arts and the notion of growing out of your faith due to age and the desire to seek new information and experiences in life. Though I saw straight through the malarkey my school promoted, I could see why, at face value, the movie and del Toro himself were "anti-Catholic." In an interview with *Variety's* Ed Meza, he blamed the Church for contributing to his nightmarish childhood. The only clear nod to the Church throughout the entire movie is the Catholic priest seen attending Captain Vidal's ostentatious welcome banquet for Carmen and Ofelia. And all the priest is doing is eating gluttonously and

discussing money (and the fact that he desires more) and declaring his support on imposing severe rationing measures on civilians. Further, Del Toro himself said in an interview with Michael Guillen from Screen Anarchy that *Pan's Labyrinth* was his “most Catholic” film to date—and not in a positive way. He based his terrifying creation, the Pale Man on the notorious bishops and cardinals of the Catholic Church who feast on innocence and fetishize purity. Like the steadfast, Catholic Apologist my education preened me to become, I wrote a convincing essay about how, obviously, due to the points previously mentioned, *Pan's Labyrinth* was anti-Catholic and should be taken as such. Revisiting this movie six years later, there is no doubt that *Pan's Labyrinth* is anti-Catholic *establishment*. However, it is far from “anti-Catholic” *philosophy*; and, saying so is quite radical. The entire premise for the rebel's cause (*and*, arguably the entire movie), is the Greatest Commandment: “thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mt. 22:39). *Pan's Labyrinth* promotes selflessness, while selfishness is condemned. Not only is the movie's main arc based off a pinnacle verse from Catholic teaching, Ofelia's story closely mirrors the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Like Christ, she is a “child of both worlds”—one divine, one mortal—and both individuals suffered greatly while spending time on Earth; Ofelia possesses the power to perform *small* miracles—but miracles nonetheless; and a comparison between Ofelia and Christ would be incomplete without mentioning that both died martyrs, and their presence changed the mortal world forever.

The first point I covered in my Apologists' essay was that del Toro and *Pan's Labyrinth* had no right to even mention Catholicism because of the movie's ties to false gods under polytheism and its blatant use of magic. There are multiple mentions of opposition to false gods and idolatry in the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Ten Commandments—one of the cornerstones of Catholicism—explicitly forbid the worshipping of false gods in the

first commandment (Ex. 10:3-6). The Catechism of the Catholic Church “condemns polytheism...[since] idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God” (2112-13). In Acts of the Apostles, Paul spoke to the Greeks in Athens about the “false gods” they worshipped: the gods of Greek mythology. “The God who made the world and all that is in it...does not dwell in sanctuaries made by man, nor is he served by human hands...Rather it is he who gives everyone life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17: 24-26). Greek mythology’s belief system is analogous to Roman mythology; they are based off each other and include the same characters (with different names) and most importantly, both are polytheistic religions. Roman mythology brought about the faun, which is the half human-half goat creature that confronts Ofelia with her mystical destiny and acts as the namesake of del Toro’s film. Inviting mythological creatures into a world where God and Catholicism clearly exist is sacrilege and permits cross-contaminating belief systems that contradict. This argument proves faulty because while it is true that a faun is a creature from a polytheistic religion, there are works of *much* higher interest and influence that are deliberately Christian, like John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* or the story of Saint George and the dragon, that are categorized as holding some mythological characteristics. Not only are famous self-proclaimed Christian works mythological, Christian traditions stem from paganism, another (mostly) polytheistic religion. Easter, a supposedly Christian celebration of Jesus’ resurrection into Heaven, stems from a Babylonian celebration of the goddess, Ishtar, the goddess of love and fertility (Dunkle and Cobb). Since she is the goddess of fertility, symbols of her celebration included rabbits and eggs, which are included in modern-day celebrations of Christian Easter. In Catholic grade schools, children decorate Easter eggs and bunnies because they represent new life—that is, new life granted in Heaven through Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Demonizing *Pan’s Labyrinth* for its nods to polytheism is

hypocritical when the bedrock Christianity was built from came from other “heretical” ideas and practices.

There is a much larger instance of “mythology” in *Pan Labyrinth’s* that ties Ofelia’s story to the root of Christianity: Ofelia and Jesus are both “children of two worlds”—one mortal and one divine. They lived with their fathers—power figures—in kingdoms detached from Earth, “free from pain or lies”, and sat at their right hand. One day, they were needed on Earth to demonstrate kindness and offer a “solution” to the turbulence in the world that they saw. Ofelia grew up in the midst of the Spanish Civil War under the brutal regime of Francisco Franco, a fascist dictator. The movie takes place in 1944, five years into Franco’s rule and restoration. Her biological father was merely a tailor and her young mother was only attributed for her childbearing abilities. When her father passes, she is forced to live with her stepfather, Captain Vidal, who acts as a representation of Franco and fascist ideologies (Lee). He is sinister, controlling, and selfish. He is not unlike King Herod, who ruled as a Mediterranean monarch in 4 B.C., the approximate birth year of Christ. Herod’s knack for mass terror rivaled that of Stalin, a contemporary of Spain’s Franco (Jenkins). Francisco Franco’s facsimile, Captain Vidal, also favors a command style embedded in violence. Ofelia, despite being highly attuned to living under a blanket of gloom in her stepfather’s headquarters, remains innocent and childlike throughout the entire movie. Not once does her purity falter. Like Jesus, she speaks only of kindness. She chastises the gargantuan toad for his greediness and gluttonous behavior, like Jesus berated the pharisees for making money off their religion (Mt. 23:1-36) and later in his ministry had an outburst in the temple over it being used as a marketplace as opposed to a place of worship (Jn. 2:1-25). Ofelia spends the majority of the film caught between her responsibilities to opposing worlds. She wishes to please her mother, Carmen, who makes her a

beautiful frock for the welcoming banquet, and yet she knows that the only chance she has to gather the key from the belly of the toad is while everyone is preoccupied preparing the banquet. While she wants to make her mother happy, she feels her duties to her other life calling her elsewhere. Similarly, when Jesus was only a few years older than Ofelia is depicted, he left his parents while traveling home from Jerusalem's Passover Festival. After three days of frantic searching, his parents found him in the temple speaking amongst and asking questions of the rabbis. When they asked why he had left and disobeyed him, he replied: "Why were you searching for me...Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk. 2:41-49). For Jesus, it was simple—he had a calling much greater than what his parents could understand. Ofelia's calling to complete this quest is only her own.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also condemns the use of magic, which is one of the most pronounced storytelling devices utilized in *Pan's Labyrinth*. "All practices of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others—even if this were for the sake of restoring their health—are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion" (2117). Ofelia partakes in a form of witchcraft: healing. She takes the faun's mandrake root to alleviate her mother's worsening sickness. It is laced with magic and while it heals Carmen significantly, it is tainted by unknown powers and therefore should not be trusted. Ofelia's mandrake root could be witchcraft; *or* it could be a miracle. Using her divine power, Ofelia was able to heal her sick mother, like Jesus healed the sick. For the mandrake root to successfully heal her mother, Ofelia is required to mix in a few droplets of her own blood. Every miracle that Jesus performed was because of his touch or his garments—not only his (admittedly captivating) presence. During his surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane, one of his Apostles, Simon Peter, severed the ear of a Roman guard, Malchus. That

is until Jesus took the cut lobe, touched the cut skin, and healed it (Lk. 22: 50-51). Ofelia's mandrake root was indeed healing her mother, yet neither Vidal nor her mother encounter it directly. They only hear a report from the doctor that her mother seems to be *miraculously* healed of her illness. The root works, despite only Ofelia believing in its power. One of Jesus' most powerful healing parables is about a girl who is healed of her hemorrhages by simply touching Jesus' robes because her belief in him is so strong. (Mk. 5:21-43). Neither Jesus nor Ophelia present harm to those they have helped, only acting out of goodness and kindness. Healing, like the mandrake root or Jesus' garments, is not witchcraft, but a miracle stemming from their divine powers.

Ofelia surely mirrors Jesus in her backstory and her performance of miracles, but there is no similarity more uncanny than that both Christ and Ofelia died as martyrs. Jesus died after carrying a cross symbolizing the weight of the world to save humanity from its wretchedness, and the only thing Jesus wished in return was for each of us to "love thy neighbor as thy self". But his death was also brutal and highly political. Jesus' teachings and massive following were a threat to the Sanhedrin *and* the governing body appointed by the Romans. The Sanhedrin brought his case to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who called for Jesus' execution. He was taken captive, tried, found guilty of treason and blasphemy, and crucified. In Ancient Rome, crucifixion was "used for those who systematically rejected imperial authority, including chronically defiant slaves and subversives who were attracting a following" (Borg). Though not as calculated as the historic crucifixion of Christ, Ofelia's murder is a political death. General Vidal has a vehement dislike for his stepdaughter. His disgust towards her grows as he becomes more aware of her intelligence and more suspicious of her connection to the rebels; she "systematically rejected imperial authority" and was a "defiant subversive". Ofelia flees with

Mercedes, who works with the rebels. However, she is caught by Vidal. Like Jesus at the hand of the Roman government, Ofelia is held captive in her room by Vidal. *Pan's Labyrinth* reaches its climax when Ofelia receives her last quest from the faun: to go to the labyrinth with her newborn brother in tow. Ofelia obeys and successfully escapes to the labyrinth with the baby. This is Vidal's breaking point, because if Ofelia escapes with the baby and joins the resistance, his legacy dies with him. This is like the fear members of the Sanhedrin had—that Jesus' popularity and message would overthrow the religious and secular government existing ("Who Killed Jesus?"). Throughout the movie, Ofelia learns virtues like kindness and patience. Yet, the greatest virtue she learns is sacrifice. She makes the greatest sacrifice of all: her own life. Because of her bloodshed, she becomes the face of the rebel's cause. Her blood also symbolizes the end of General Vidal's reign; he is surrounded by rebels and his stepdaughter's blood. His heir has been taken from him. He knows his death is looming and his crusade against socialism has no real chance. The blood Jesus shed at his crucifixion mirrors the blood his Apostles shared in during his Last Supper, to later share with the world. Jesus' blood was his greatest sacrifice and the center of his story and of the origin of Christianity. Both Jesus and Ofelia face brutal, bloody deaths, though their deaths lead to no physical harm against anyone else. Neither fought back against their fate—against the plan their fathers had for their lives. As stated in the Gospel of Mark, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). Jesus' story survived the ages—the largest religion in the world stemmed from his story. Despite her wound, Ofelia dies peacefully. The movie ends as her soul descends to the underworld. Though Ophelia leaves the mortal world forever, her story will live on as a part of the rebel resistance because her death is a direct result of the violence of fascism. A child dying at the hand of a manic stepfather is daresay *the perfect* reason for a socialist

movement to gain momentum. And the faun will keep the story of Princess Moana and her mortal counterpart, Ofelia, alive. She followed her destiny wherever it led her, even to her death. The epilogue comes to its conclusion with the knowledge that while Princess Moana left the mortal world, her impact is permanent—for those who know where to look.

A Catholic education stresses the importance of living a solid, virtuous life that pleases the Pope, our father on Earth, and God, our Father in Heaven. But, unfortunately these teachings tend to stress more on the negative aspects of life and call attention to those that do not please our Fathers. Anything that does not please them is *immoral* without question. Consequently, *Pan's Labyrinth* was one of these immoral things, because Guillermo del Toro has repeatedly spoken out against the Catholic Church and the upbringing he had in the Church, and made one of the creepiest villains of a movie into a metaphor for this institution. *Pan's Labyrinth* is entirely anti-Catholic establishment, but that does not make it anti-Catholic in its philosophy. In fact, Ofelia is a mirror of Christ. Like him, she is a divine person and a mortal child, and she serves as a figure of hope and light (and confusion) for her environment. She can perform miracles! And most importantly, she died a martyr for a political cause and for an even greater cause: love. Her story, like the story of Christ that shaped Catholicism, will live on for centuries as a story of courage and as a beacon of hope in times of strife.

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