Confronting Ghosts:
History, Trauma, and Aesthetics in Guillermo del Toro's *El Laberinto del Fauno*

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Abstract: Historically, the presentation of collective trauma has been fraught with moral and aesthetic contradictions. Hollywood, in particular, has long struggled to visually adapt national trauma into a collective whole without rendering it into a spectacle; moreso when it comes to non-Western narratives. Given the indispensability of magic realism in the history of Latin America, it stands to reason that a culture that is so steeped in alternative ways of storytelling would employ such techniques in its national cinema. In light of the sudden boom in the popularity of Latin American cinema, this paper attempts to look at how Guillermo del Toro's *El Laberinto del Fauno* incorporates elements of magic realism in the fabric of its narrative in order to speak of the collective trauma of the Spanish Civil War.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War, *Laberinto*, magic realism, fantasy, trauma

1. Introduction

For humans, isolated experiences in the form of trauma problematically defy efforts at representation, but at the same time paradoxically call for testimony on their behalf. To put it another way, stories of trauma demand to be told, but come up against limitations when being coaxed into expression and efforts at testimony. What is of ethical concern is whether the method of representing the experience of trauma stands in the way of its being understood and addressed authentically. In speaking of the representation of a traumatic event, in this case the Holocaust,

Adorno writes that it is "now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it" (312). The demand for a responsible and ethical expression creates a bridge between the imagination and the moral responsibility of trying to present an unimaginable historical event – a space wherein the power of cinema can be inquired.

Trying to represent an impossible and unspeakable historical event with a marked degree of verisimilitude is problematic, primarily in that it is difficult to avoid a betrayal of both a historical sense of fact and those in a position of victimhood—especially in the instance of collective suffering. If language and memory cannot support the burden of traumatic experience, how is the experience of the victim to be expressed? Just because these events seem empirically impossible surely does not mean that they cannot be imagined. Film attempts to navigate this impossible task of representation, despite being susceptible to the potentially burdensome accusation of inauthenticity.

The aim of this paper is to attempt an understanding of the dialogue between historic cinema in the realm of magic realism, established history, and the collective trauma of a nation. Attempts will also be made to look into the formal techniques of cinematic narrative and how they can provide a point of entry into addressing the integrity and expressibility of experiences and the functioning of memory. Primary focus will be on *El Laberinto del Fauno (Pan's Labyrinth)*, the Spanish film by Guillermo del Toro, and the engagement of its elements of magic realism with the collective history of the Spanish Civil War. Finally, I will try to come to an understanding of the aesthetic quality of the presentation of the traumatic event, and the moral question of whether it is appropriate to aestheticise the collective memory of a nation that is still struggling with the trauma of a past that remains largely obscured by historical amnesia.

2. Watching History on Film

In a 1935 letter that is highly revealing about professional attitudes in the industry, Louis Gottschalk of the University of Chicago wrote to the president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer:

> If the cinema art is going to draw its subjects so generously from history, it owes to its patrons and its own higher ideals to achieve greater accuracy. No picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticize and revise it. (qtd. in Rosenstone 50)

This is certainly telling, because what constitutes history has evolved past the idea of a certain kind of all-encompassing truth to incorporate its own theoretical self-awareness as a power construct. Hutcheon writes that historians constitute their subject as possible objects of narratives, and they do so by the very structures and languages they use to present those subjects (192). The events of the past are no longer seen to speak for themselves as actual facts, but are composed into a coherent narrative that is otherwise marketed as objective, for all intents and purposes.

While written history exists on paper because of certain empirical evidence and an acceptance of the idea that they offer a glimpse of what was important in the past, over the last few decades cinematic narratives of the past

have come to constitute a pronounced facet of historiography. Whilst garnering criticism such as operating periphrastically on an emotional level and evoking a nostalgic engagement with the past, the filmic medium, through its variegated, punctuated narrative temporality is not too unlike individuals' own fragmented, irresolute understanding of what constitutes history. But of necessity the rules of engagement of a director's works with the raw materials of the past are – and must be – different from those that govern written history. Information can never be conveyed neutrally, least so by filmmakers:

> Like the academic, the film maker can maintain such a viewpoint only through the very act of telling the past: whatever humanity has lost – runs the implicit message – is now redeemed by the creation of this work, by the witnessing of the historical wrongs that this film allows us to share. (Rosenstone 17)

Dramatic films make special demands on both the traditional notion of history and the viewers because they engage in creating the past by selecting certain events and incorporating elements of storytelling such as plot, dialogue, and setting. This can be seen as contributing to the realm of discourse, and unlike written history, which provides literal truths, dramatic films provide metaphorical truths that serve to challenge the traditional discourse of history. As critics like Carlsten and McGarry have argued, popular discourses need to do away with the proclivity to judge the authenticity of film based on their factual accuracy, in lieu of ushering a new perspective with its own set of rules of engagement: it is

> precisely because of the liberties film takes with the past that it conveys to the public more successfully the central principle of historiography: that history is a process of interpretation, reflecting a dialogue between past and present. (8)

It is precisely because the telling of history depends on codified narratives that cinema can either legitimise those narratives or provide counter-narratives through its Daedalian plexus of symbolism, images, and sound. Despite the glaring difference between what historians claim as "proper" history and the fabrication that a historic film entails, certain directors in various parts of the world have been burdened enough by history to make them repeatedly turn to the past as a setting for films in which they try to raise significant historical questions (Rosenstone 130).

3. Magic(al) Realism and National Trauma

Much has been said and written about terms such as "marvellous realism", "magic realism" and "magical realism" as experiments in literature from marginal cultures. Originally seen in the post-Expressionist paintings during the 1920s in Germany, its artistic version was an attempt at "expressing a deeper understanding of reality witnessed by the artist" (Bowers 7), and therefore a break from preceding Expressionistic paintings. The term "magic realism", most critics agree, was first used by German art critic Franz Roh (1890–1965) in his 1925 book *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neusten europäischen Malerei (Post-expressionism, Magic Realism: Problems of the*

Most Recent European Painting). But it was Fernando Vela's translation into Spanish of certain chapters from Roh's book (and therefore Latin American writers' exposure to magic realism), along with influence of two writers – Arturo Uslar-Pietri (1906–2001) and Alejo Carpentier (1904–80) – that are credited with ushering in Latin magic realism. For instance, Carpentier

> used the term "marvellous realism" to describe a concept that could represent for him the mixture of differing cultural systems and the variety of experiences that create an extraordinary atmosphere, alternative attitude and differing appreciation of reality in Latin America. (Bowers 13)

While magic realism in European literature remains a genre for individualistic expression, in Latin American literature (or, rather, in most formerly colonised Third World countries' literatures) it performs a more salient social function: forming a distinctive national identity independent from that of Europe. As Kroetsch has observed, magic realism is inherently associated with an understanding of "living on the margins" (15), thereby providing an antithesis to imperialistic discourses and its dehumanizing systems. Viewed through the lens of post-colonial criticism, literature from the margins no longer required the Western eye as an imperative agent of perception. During the 1960s and 1970s, Latin America underwent an interval of political unrest due diplomatic strategies set in place during the Cold War. Writers became united in their desire for nationalisation after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and thus Latin American magic realism literature took off internationally.

The typical narrative of a magic realist text includes a battle between two oppositional systems, with each of them working towards the creation of two diametrically different kinds of discourses. However, since the ground rules of these two discourses are not cohesive, neither one can fully come into being. Consequently, they remain locked in a continuous dialectic, and in a state of suspension. This creates a certain kind of disjunction within each of the discursive systems, leaving them with absences and silences.

> So, what makes magic realism a good enough genre to capture trauma?
> Historical traumas are constructions of collective memories that cannot be verified through empirical research, or by ascribing an indexical relation between the image and the real. (Meek 10)

The indescribability of historical trauma and its quantification lends itself particularly well to the unreal elements of magic realism. Anchored in historical moments, magic realist texts confront violent and traumatic events, attempting to highlight the falsity or unreality of dominant discourses, hegemonic representations of history, and the canonical obsession with facts as undisputable foundations of history. A fitting example of this would be the massacre of thousands of banana-plantation workers in the fictional world of Macondo in Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien Anos de Soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude)*. Historically, on 6 December, 1928, workers of the Colombian United Fruit Company gathered around the main square of Cien Agas to protest against poor working conditions and inadequate pay. To prevent American interception, Colombian troops under the leadership of then-Colombian governor General Cortes Vargas open fired on the gathering. Reports of casualties have never been confirmed officially, with estimates ranging from

twenty thousand to forty thousand deaths. The event is completely erased from the popular discourse of history, suggesting how historical events in marginalised nations are characterised by referential uncertainty. In Márquez's text, José Arcadio Segundo, the only survivor of the massacre, is plagued with horror and guilt when he realises that not a single soul in all of Macondo remembers the event. Not only is the massacre completely erased from the collective memory, but torrential rains the next day erase any physical evidence left behind.

Primarily because one of the founding principles of magic realism is that reality cannot be explained in a singular and fixed way, it allows a space for the expression of the inexpressibility of trauma. The imagination, then, uses its power to shape language to turn what resists representation into an accessible reality. The realist narrative is ruptured by the unreal to present trauma, and at the same time acknowledge the problems of accurately representing it. The realness of the horror is left to the experience of the audience instead of being objectively stated, allowing them to experience the trauma and its overwhelming effects, which otherwise elude written narratives. As Márquez explains in his 1982 Nobel lecture:

> reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty, of which this roving and nostalgic Colombian is but one cipher more, singled out by fortune. Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude. (209)

As a crucial post-colonial tool, magic realism uses fantasy narratives in the same way that realist narratives are used in Western discourse, but with subverted premises. Discourses about magic are given equal urgency to political discourses, which leads readers to question the authenticity and veracity of both. Because these two strands are so intimately interconnected, the question of whether the reader should accept either as the genuine version of events is enfeebled by the existence of the other. Seen in a wider expansive sense, the strategies of magic realism point to the fortuity of representational choices in contemporary trauma discourse by questioning conventional narrative modes and epistemological assumptions through discursive techniques.

4. *El Laberinto del Fauno*

Guillermo del Toro's 2001 historic horror film *El Espinazo del Diablo* opens with a question:

> Que es un fantasma? Un evento terrible condenadoa repetirse una y otra vez?
>
> Translation: What is a ghost? A terrible event doomed to repeat itself over and over again? (00:00:57)

In a sense, any trauma that haunts, as trauma tends naturally to do, is a ghost. For decades the Spanish Civil War and its implicated trauma remained heavily censored and were collectively forgotten. Whatever remained of the historiography of the war was overrun with traditional overarching European narratives of good

versus evil, and the nationalist Spanish versus the democratic liberal anti-Spanish. At the time of the transition to democracy, there was an obsessive memorialisation of the Nationalist war throughout the Franco dictatorship, which led to a desire to break with the past. It is argued that this was not a determination to forget the collective history of the suffering, but a conscious act to no longer let the past affect the future. Archibald has suggested that, in addition to the "legacy of fear" caused by the post-war repression and the collective pact of oblivion, one reason as to why the Spanish Civil War has been less represented on screen in Spanish cinema and in Spanish culture in general is because, as a "holocaustal" event, it "may be unrepresentable by conventional artistic modes" (77–78).

For del Toro, who is of Mexican-Spanish descent, the Civil War was not an autobiographical memory, but a traditional one, transmitted to his generation by individuals who had lived through the war. Del Toro has often talked about growing up with tales of the Spanish Civil war in his home (Kermode). These tales have made their way into his films, particularly his incomplete Spanish trilogy: *El Espinazo del Diablo*, *Laberinto del Fauno*, and a third, as yet untitled, film, which is still in production (Hopewell and de la Fuente).

Laberinto offers a complex treatment of historical memory and its intersection with subjective personal memory. In the true fashion of magic realist texts, the film operates on both the realist and magic levels, with the realist narrative set in the context of the Spanish Civil War. The film opens in 1944, when armed anti-nationalists are still fighting against the Franco regime. The child protagonist of the film, Ofelia, who struggles with the recent loss of her father, must learn to adapt to the rules of her new stepfather, the obsessive Captain Vidal, and protect her mother and unborn brother. The magical aspect of the narrative, in true quest manner, requires her to complete a number of tasks so that she can be restored to her original position of princess of the underworld and be reunited with her family.

5. The Cinematography of *Laberinto*

The establishing shot, a visual element that is commonly used to open a film or a sequence within it, it helps establish the tone and the aesthetic of the film by grounding it in a certain geographical location and a fixed time of the day. It also shows the scale of the primary subject in relation to their environment. With genres like high fantasy or magic realism, where an entirely new world needs to be introduced, an establishing shot is crucial. *Laberinto* opens with a few establishing shots that provide the audience with almost all of the information that they require about the film: it is going to end with the death of Ofelia, and this death ultimately leads her to travel to her own kingdom, far away from the real world.

At the heart of the film are two parallel narratives: the actual world where Vidal and his soldiers are trying to weed out the resistance hidden in the mountains, and Ofelia's three tasks that she must complete to be reunited with her real family in the Underworld. It is only through the eyes of Ofelia that the audience glimpses the two worlds colliding at certain instances in the film; for her, the magical world is just as real as the non-magical one. Although both Vidal and Carmen can see the mandrake, they are only able to see it in its inanimate stage, which makes Ofelia the only person to seamlessly see and navigate both the worlds at the same time. This strict separation of the worlds

for the other characters emphasises the surreality of the Faun's world. This surreality, in turn, positions the reader to feel, rather than know or necessarily understand, the situation. In this way, the "felt" reality might, in Anne Hegerfeldt's terms, convey a "sense of horror … more profound than could have been expressed in words" (87). The representation of the unreal is, then, as capable of affecting an emotional connection between the reader and the text as more "objective" and "realistic" forms of narrative (88).

One of the most crucial shots in the film, which also serves as the master shot, comes at the 04:45 mark (*El Laberinto,* New Line version). It is a typical layered shot, showing Ofelia and the broken bust in the forest in the foreground while Vidal's men help her mother in the background. Considering that it is a deep space shot, it stands to reason that every element in this shot plays an important role in the narrative, and, as in all master shots, it clarifies the importance of the characters in the scene, and where they are in relation to each other. All of the elements in the shot remain visibly lit (out of focus, but still visible for the audience to notice). Since the frame is so cluttered, it gives a sense of urgency: the eye is drawn to the broken bust, letting the audience know that Ofelia's interaction with it will be exclusively pivotal.

Figure 1. Ophelia sees the bust. *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 00:04:45–00:05:17

On a technical level, the shallow focus helps to isolate the subject, and, usually in films with multiple characters, helps single out one subject whose direction the camera primarily follows. On a narrative level, shallow-focus shots are also used to determine a turning point in the character's life.

The master shot in *Laberinto* foreshadows how Ofelia must exist in the two worlds simultaneously, and must ultimately make a choice between them. However, the one character making her present to both the worlds in equal measure is Carmen, her mother, which is why she remains in the background in this scene. Ofelia has moved to Vidal's camp because of Carmen, and it is in order to find a better world for her mother and brother that she must undertake all the Faun's tasks.

Laberinto not only stores and replays the traumatic energies in the cultural container viewed by the public, but it also processes and transforms

these energies into the more culturally complex spectrum of magic realism, which in itself defies imposed imperialist narratives. The shape of the trauma is changed, made symbolic, turned into a more readable form that might arouse less of a society's fear than the historical event itself.

The "unspeakable" forms a characteristic of trauma and at the same time prevents its expression. According to Stampfl, those who wield the language of the unspeakable are aligning themselves with the victims by choosing a way out. The choice not to represent the trauma allows for more room to misrepresent or even erase bits of the trauma itself (15). One of the most enduring qualities of the film is how obstinately Ofelia insists on the reality of the world that only she can see, but others cannot. The final voiceover in the concluding section of the film is a reiteration of this:

> she left behind small traces of her time on earth, visible only to those who know where to look. (01:52:00)

Therefore, Ofelia demands to be seen, and the film demands that the audience come face to face with the horrors of the real world. Historically, other countries across the globe chose for a long time to turn a blind eye to the horrors of the Franco regime so as not to upset the European political balance. Organised purges of Republicans took place, but were effectively removed from official records and, consequently, from history. A number of parallel scenes are drawn up in the film to emphasise the fact that the other world is not without its fair share of violence, death, and horrors. This is the trauma of a war and a nation that demands to be seen.

Figure 2. Vidal's feast. *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 00:39:50–00:39:58

Figure 3. The Pale Man's feast. *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 00:59:35–00:59:40

Figure 2 shows a scene wherein Vidal has thrown a feast for his comrades in war, during which he declares the reduction of civilian rations. Figure 3 shows Ofelia at the frozen feast of the Pale Man, attempting to retrieve a key as instructed by the Faun. The cinematic imagery in both of these scenes is startlingly similar. Both in terms of colour schemes as well as object-to-space ratios in the mise-en-scène suggests the analogous nature of the two worlds: Ofelia is absent from Vidal's feast, only to be present in a similar one in the world down below.

One of the film's central themes posits how children are often victims of adult violence within the context of social constrictions imposed by the Spanish Civil War. Ofelia does not watch children being killed or mutilated, does not actively take part in the war, and therefore all those traumas would apparently remain invisible to the audience. However, the remains of the shoes of the children that were literally eaten by the Pale Man and the sacrifice that she must make of her brother are all lingering implications of what an actual child would have had to suffer during the war. Thus, as a magic realist narrative, the film keeps alive the illusion and mystery inherent in phenomenal knowledge, moreso when the object of that knowledge experiences inexplicable pain.

One of the most telling sequences in the film happens at the 33:16 mark (*El Laberinto,* New Line version), where scenes of both Vidal and Ofelia's pursuits are intercut using the technique known as the match cut. In such transitions, the shapes or movement of two events are matched to suggest a relationship between two disparate objects and create a visual metaphor. However, even as a continuity edit, the match cut, ironically, shows the incongruity of the two time-space locations. In this case, one sequence shows Ofelia crawling through the mud to reach the poisonous toad that is killing the magical tree, and on another level, Vidal and his men are riding through the mountain to intercept a smoke signal. Of course, Vidal fails to find any of the members of the Resistance, but Ofelia manages to complete the first task of retrieving the key. As the narrative progresses, Ofelia manages to complete all of her tasks and returns to the Underworld, while Vidal meets frustrations and

dead ends, and is ultimately shot. This is all the more illuminated in the light of the tagline of *Laberinto*: "Innocence has a power Evil cannot imagine".

Interestingly, a majority of the shots situated in the Underworld or of the tasks that Ofelia undertakes are either low- or high-angle shots, in which the cameras are situated below or above the usual plane of focus, respectively. In sharp contrast to this, almost all the scenes in the real world are shot at eye level. This allowed cinematographer Guillermo Navarro to subtly differentiate between the two worlds, and allowed the viewers, at least at a subconscious level, to pick up on the aesthetic differences between the worlds.
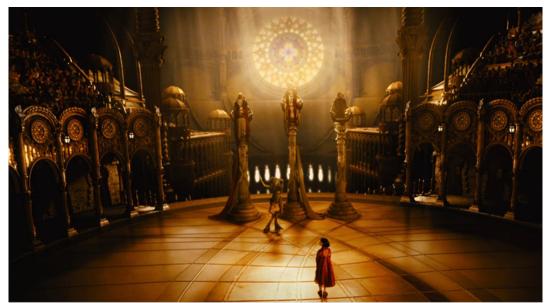

Figure 4. Ofelia returns to her kingdom. *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 1:50:28–1:50:35

Figure 5. The rebels surround Vidal. *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 1:47:18–1:47:25

The low-angle shots are mostly used when Ofelia is in conversation with the Faun. In cinema, the low-angle shot is typically used to showcase a sense of

power imbalance by making one of the subjects appear larger and seem to be looming. Navarro's use of the low-angle shots makes the Faun appear large, almost like a hulking beast. In contrast, Ofelia appears much smaller, and therefore vulnerable. These shots show from the outset that Ofelia is as powerless in the fantasy world as she is in the real world, and that to survive, she must do as she is told. It is interesting to note that when she is reunited with her family in the concluding scenes of the film, a high-angle shot is used (Figure 4). This shot focuses on Ofelia (with the help of saturated lighting) and shows the sheer scale of the expectations foisted on her: she has been burdened not only with returning to her primordial home, but with the fate of an entire kingdom.

Fantastic cinema, then, explores trauma by remembering it and repeating it in the form of diagetically mediated symbols of loss. The narrative of *Laberinto* chooses to focus on the sites where ideologically dominant models of individual identity is formed, dismantled by trauma and finally re-formed in a post-traumatic context. Ofelia's journey is one where she must shed her grounded identity in the real world to make the ultimate sacrifice and become one with where she actually came from – the Underworld. At the centre of this metamorphosis lies her journey through a literal battlefield. While her physical identity is forged as a citizen of "a clean Spain" under the Franco regime, the primary foundation of which, like any dictatorship, lies in civilian obedience, she must shed this identity to becomes Princess Moanna. Throughout the narrative, demands are made on the audience to not only work through the anxiety engendered by trauma, but also to question the dominant ideological model from which all of the characters in the film derive their identities.

Colour plays an essential role in the world-building of *Laberinto*. Psychologically, spectators tend to associate certain colours to specific feelings, which in turn triggers an entire array of associations. Therefore, Cinematographers will often use certain colours in specific ways to take advantage of viewers' tendency to associate colours with particular feelings. But that does not necessarily make colour usage exclusive. Sergei Eisenstein in his essay "Colour and Meaning" talked about the inherent objectivity of colours, and how they could be used in storytelling:

> ... the emotional intelligibility and function of color will rise from the natural order of establishing the color imagery of the work, coincidental with the process of shaping the living movement of the whole work. (151)

In *Laberinto*, vivid and highly saturated colours are used to reflect the dispositions of the characters. For instance, Ofelia and Mercedes are always cast in warm, orange tones and usually placed in medium- to highly lit settings, while Vidal is almost always cast in colder, more muted tones like blues and blacks (Figures 2 and 5). It is also quite evident that two complementary colour palettes are used to designate the two worlds: the fantasy world is mostly saturated with golden, red, and orange hues, while the real world is saturated with browns, blues, and purples; the middle world – the one where the Faun firsts tasks Ofelia with her challenges – is a vibrant green. The palettes of the two main worlds lie on the opposite ends of the colour wheel, and offer a visual key to the two competing realms. The colour scheme itself pushes the audience to recognise which of them is more nurturing and embracing, and therefore

more real to Ofelia. In contrast to the parallel elements that link both worlds (Figures 2 and 3), the difference in colour palettes helps separate them into two different realms.

Figure 5 is significant in that it shows how the two worlds have finally started to bleed into each other, as much in narratological terms as in visual codes. Vidal following Ofelia into the labyrinth and shooting her during his attempt to take his son away from her is his active denial of the fantastic (and the Faun, until the very end, remains invisible to him), but it is his killing of Ofelia which, to all intents and purposes, allows the fulfilment of her third task and effectively brings her back to her own realm. Since this scene is set at night, the primary colours are colder blues, muted greens, and greys. However, the one contrast present, and which has so been associated with Ofelia throughout the film, is the bright yellow of the fire and smoke bleeding through the trees (blue and yellow lie on the opposite sides of the colour wheel). This, combined with the mise-en-scène, suggests that the rebels are going to take over and that Vidal's idea of a clean, new Spain will not be fulfilled; the fire that Ofelia's rebellion has started will not die out any time soon.

6. Conclusion

The trauma resulting from historical events can be theoretically located, but in practice, a prolonged trauma becomes very difficult to localise. This is further complicated in the case of the Spanish Civil War, which has been littered with lost voices and discarded fragments of history, in a country pushed to the margins by imperialism's centralising cognitive structures. Consequently, traumatic hauntings like these are characterised by period of latency and a tendency toward repetition.

Lichtenberg-Ettinger suggests that from the archaic foundations of the human consciousness stems the yearning for encounter with the traumatic feelings and a desire for shared eventing with an unknown other (90). As an attempt to master the past, the human subject moves beyond the blocked presentness of the trauma in an attempt to give it a semblance of coherence. As the published history of and commentary about the war during the Franco regime came forth not only highly propagandised, but also heavily censored, it was not surprising that the legislation enacted in the 1960s that allowed greater freedom for authors to publish led to a boom in reactionary voices.

Guillermo del Toro's repeated return to the Spanish Civil War is a performative regeneration or relieving of the trauma. Both Santi's ghost in *El Diablo* and Ophelia's spectral fantasy in *Laberinto* hauntingly return, not as the repressed consciousness of the individual, but as the ghost of a generation forgotten in history. For an individual like del Toro, rewriting the history of a nation that is not entirely his own, and addressing its repressed trauma, would involve a different kind of performativity, one that involves simultaneously remembering and taking leave of it. By attempting to put faces, names, and individuality to the stories of the Spanish Civil War, del Toro breaks the cycle of the structural trauma, retroactivating historical events by not allowing historical repetition. With its twofold narrative style, *Laberinto* engages itself in a rebellious act of remembrance and by extension: the removal, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, of the pact of silence of the Transition years.

In its chronicling of a fantastic tale of an ordinary girl, *El Laberinto del Fauno* claims the ownership of a suffering that had otherwise effectively been forgotten by history. The scenes alternate between factions of a country at war over ideological differences, where murders and overwhelming torture dangerously turn into casual matters of routine, and a capricious, chthonic world thirsty for innocent blood. Fantastical tropes actively deconstruct the dichotomy between fact and fiction, and del Toro, particularly, is able to rewrite the historical trauma that still haunts Spain. In *Laberinto*, history therefore becomes another postmodern narrative that crafts its own discourse, relying on memory, written and oral history, polyphony, intertextuality, and dialogism, while the magic realism invites its audience to contemplate alternative models of history.

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