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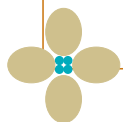
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# THE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF PAN'S LABYRINTH BY GUILLERMO DEL TORO AS A FANTASTIC FILM

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## ABSTRACT

*Using structural approach and Tzvetan Todorov's theory about 'absolute hesitation', this research discusses how the narrative and cinematographic elements build Pan's Labyrinth (2006) as a unique fantastic film. Directed by Guillermo del Toro Pan's Labyrinth is a film in Spanish about a little girl named Ofelia who has to live in a house in the middle of the forest and experiences many bizarre incidents, including meeting the Faun. The narrative elements discussed in this paper are motives and themes, while the cinematographic elements are settings, lighting and colours. To analyze the data, this research uses a qualitative method that lies on library research. The result of the discussion shows how the intrinsic elements successfully built 'absolute hesitation' in Pan's Labyrinth. Thus, Pan's Labyrinth can be categorized as a fantastic film with a dark twist that is Del Toro's irreplaceable characteristic in directing films.*

**Keywords:** *structuralism, fantastic stories, film studies, genre, absolute hesitation*

## ABSTRAK

*Dengan menggunakan pendekatan struktural dan teori Tzvetan Todorov mengenai 'keraguan mutlak', penelitian ini membahas bagaimana unsur naratif dan sinematografis membangun Pan's Labyrinth sebagai film fantastik yang unik. Disutradarai oleh Guillermo del Toro, Pan's Labyrinth bercerita tentang seorang gadis kecil bernama Ofelia yang harus tinggal di sebuah rumah di tengah hutan dan mengalami berbagai peristiwa di luar akal sehat, termasuk bertemu sesosok Faun. Unsur naratif yang dibahas di dalam tulisan ini adalah motif dan tema, sedangkan unsur sinematografisnya adalah latar, pencahayaan, dan warna. Dalam menganalisis data yang diambil dari Pan's Labyrinth, penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif yang bersandar pada penelitian kepustakaan. Hasil dari analisis menunjukkan bagaimana unsur-unsur intrinsik berhasil membangun 'keraguan mutlak' di dalam Pan's Labyrinth. Maka, Pan's Labyrinth bisa dikategorikan sebagai sebuah film fantastik dengan tambahan nuansa gelap yang merupakan karakter Del Toro dalam menyutradarai film.*

**Kata kunci:** *strukturalisme, cerita fantastik, kajian film, genre, keraguan mutlak*

## INTRODUCTION

In Hollywood, Guillermo Del Toro is famous as the director of action films with dark elements as the major characteristic of his works. Targeted for international market, his films like *Hellboy* and *Blade II* use English, but he also has directed films that use Spanish as the main language, one of which is *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). Besides directing *Pan's Labyrinth*, Del Toro also wrote the script. Most of Del Toro's fans think that *Pan's Labyrinth* is his masterpiece. Film critics shared the same opinion, and the film was nominated as Best Film in a Foreign Language in Academy Award 2006.

*Pan's Labyrinth* is set in Spanish Civil War era in 1944. In the midst of the government soldiers' hunt for the rebels, a little girl named Ofelia (played by Ivana Baquero) has to live in a big house in the forest because her mother married Captain Vidal (played by Sergi López). Captain Vidal is a rough soldier who holds a strong patriarchal view as we can see from his reason to marry Ofelia's mother. He married her for one purpose, which is to have a son to continue Vidal family. He never pays attention to his step daughter, Ofelia. During her pregnancy, Ofelia's mother is getting weaker so she cannot spend much time with her daughter. In her loneliness, Ofelia meets a strange creature in a form of a Faun. Guided by the Faun, Ofelia then tries to find her own happiness.

Penzoldt (Djoksujatno, 2005) listed down the motives in fantastic stories; some of them are devils, ghosts, and vampires. In other words, strange and mythical creatures often become motives in fantastic tales. In *Pan's Labyrinth* there are at least two motives of fantastic stories: strange creatures (Faun, fairy, and Pale Man) and labyrinth as an ancient place. Those two motives stand as the reasons for me to analyze how narrative and cinematographic elements build *Pan's Labyrinth* as a fantastic film. This research will contribute to not only studies about structuralism, but also to studies about genres of literary work. There are a number of literary critics who have analyzed fantastic stories and wrote theories about them. For this research, the main theory that is used is by Tzvetan Todorov about 'absolute hesitation'. Combined with structuralism that studies each element of literary work in details, Todorov's theory could reveal the fantastic elements of the film. The term 'fantastic' (which is different from the daily use of the word) will be later defined in the next part of this paper.

### Review of Related Literature

The most general definition of a fantastic story is '*cerita yang menyajikan pemunculan tiba-tiba suatu peristiwa supranatural dalam dunia nyata*' (Djokosujatno, 2005:1-3). Meanwhile, Todorov underlines the effect of the story to its readers as the most significant element in fantastic stories. In his perspective, a true fantastic story has to build 'absolute hesitation' (Jackson, 1981:27). Through syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects, a true fantastic story has to stir confusion in the readers' mind: did the strange incident really happen or was it only the imagination of the mentally unstable character? According to Todorov, a pure fantastic tale does not give the answer to such questions.

In his theory of fantastic stories, Todorov compares fantastic genre with two other genres, *étrangepur* and *merveilleux pur*. In *étrangepur*, bizarre events happen in real world but it does not cause hesitation, while in *merveilleux pur*, the events exist in an imaginary world, such as in fairy tale. A world that is different from real world is built in *merveilleux pur*, so that the strange incidents that are impossible to happen in our world can possibly occur.

In this research, Todorov's theory about absolute hesitation was used to analyze the narrative elements. The basic concept of structuralism, which is how each element has its own function, was used to analyze how cinematographic elements built the fantastic atmosphere in *Pan's Labyrinth*. By using the two theories, it is expected that this paper can show how genre analysis can be conducted.

*Pan's Labyrinth* has also been analyzed academically, as written in the article by Lindsay (2012). He suggests the film be seen by using the visual and mythological symbolism of the figure of Pan. Lindsay also offers a new perspective in viewing the movie by taking into account the cultural context of menstruation.

Analysis of fantastic stories have been previously conducted by scholars and students from various universities. One of which is written by Sambamoorthy (1997). Sambamoorthy discusses the children characters' perception that results in the confusion between the real and the imaginary world. Another research on fantastic stories was conducted by Müller (1997). If Sambamoorthy's research took literary approach, Müller took a different perspective in seeing fantastic stories, which is from an anthropological approach. With a purpose to contribute a new idea to research on fantastic stories, this paper takes a film as its main data.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The first step of this research is to find and select the data. The primary data were collected from a film directed by Guillermo Del Toro, *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), focusing on plot, setting, and characters. To analyze and interpret the data taken from a literary work, qualitative method and structural approach became the best option. Library research was conducted, either in libraries (Binus University libraries and Depdiknas library) or on the internet. In order to keep the analysis on academical and theoretical track, books and academic journals related to the topic were used as references. Moving on the next step, the data are then divided into analysis of narrative and cinematographic elements. This division is needed since films are visual art and the visual elements should be analyzed too. After data had been analyzed and interpreted, a conclusion was taken. After that, the result of the research was written down into a form of academic article.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Motives and Themes

As previously explained in the background of this paper, several strange creatures appear in *Pan's Labyrinth*. Suggested by the title, a character in a form of Faun appears in the film. Faun is a mythical creature with a mixed appearance of a goat and a man. Faun has appeared in other fictional works, such as Mr. Tumnus in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Different from Mr. Tumnus, Faun in *Pan's Labyrinth* is not friendly and portrayed as a scary and intimidating character. The Faun in this film has a significant role, which is to give a command to Ofelia. In order to be happy, Ofelia has to hunt for three things: a golden key, a blade and blood of an innocent person. These things will open the port to another world where Ofelia can transform into a princess and live happily ever after, just like in fairy tale.

Another character that steals the viewers' attention is Pale Man, a weird-looking creature who has eyes on both of his palms and feeds on children. If the Faun is adapted from creatures in Greek myths, Pale Man is originally created by Del Toro. Besides Pale Man, other fantastic creatures that appear in *Pan's Labyrinth* are fairies. Fairies in this film do not have a sweet appearance but are scary-looking instead. In one interview, Del Toro even admitted that he wanted the fairies to look like monkeys.

The appearance of those characters are the fantastic motives in *Pan's Labyrinth*. The characters were taken or adapted from myths and legends and added archaic atmosphere to the film.

These motives were juxtaposed with a real world frame (which is a world set in one particular historical event, Spanish Civil war), building a sense of hesitation, a crucial element of fantastic tales suggested by Todorov.

Another theme that often appears in fantastic stories is the magical door. A door is a medium that separates two spaces, and in fantastic stories, a door is often functioned as the connector between two worlds. For instance, in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (by C.S. Lewis, firstly published in 1950) the wardrobe door serves as the connector between the real world and the land of Narnia. The door in *Pan's Labyrinth* is a door to any place. The door will appear if Ofelia draws it on the floor or the wall by using a magical chalk given by the Faun. Through the door, Ofelia could enter the Pale Man's room and easily escape from Captain Vidal's house. This theme of a magical door seems to tear down the barrier between spaces and gives the fantastic element to the film.

A particular sub-plot has its own function in *Pan's Labyrinth*. The Faun regularly tells a story to Ofelia that once upon a time, there was a princess named Moanna who ran away from the underground kingdom where she lived because she wanted to see the upper world. When she arrived at the upper world, princess Moanna forgot her royal blood and died as an ordinary human being. Faun believes that Ofelia is that princess Moanna. This tale about princess Moanna causes Ofelia to trust Faun and to be willing to find the three things. This sub-plot appears with a function to build the rising actions in the plot. Not only that, it also creates the fairy tale atmosphere in *Pan's Labyrinth*, and the viewers are given hope that the film will have a happy ending.

After analyzing the fantastic motives and themes, the absolute hesitation will be explained in the next paragraphs. Based on fantastic stories that have previously been analyzed, the strange events that happen often originate from the characters themselves, who think they witness bizarre incidents due to psychological disturbance (Djokosujatno, 2005:89). Ofelia is a character that receives a lot of mental pressure. As a little girl, she has to live in an isolated house in the middle of a forest with no entertainment at all. Added to that condition, she does not have friends as well. Ofelia is the only child in that house. Her step father is also very strict and does not like her existence in the house.

To overcome the loneliness, Ofelia tries to find friends. These friends appear in a form of Faun and fairies. The Faun promises to give Ofelia a happier life as long as she obeys his command. These creatures can only be seen by Ofelia. When Captain Vidal follows Ofelia to the labyrinth, he cannot see the Faun. This is where the hesitation occurs: does Faun really exist or is it only an imagination of a lonely girl. Another scene that supports the uncertainty of Faun's existence is that Ofelia likes to read fairy tales.

The next scene that shows hesitation is when Ofelia is shot by Captain Vidal near the labyrinth. Through Mercedes' perspective (by using indirect subjective point of view camera), Ofelia is soaking in blood, dying. However, in Ofelia's point of view, she does not die but teleports to another world where she can gather with her parents. In that world, she lives as a princess and her parents as the king and the queen: a typical dream of a girl in Western culture. With the help from camera arrangement and editing, *Pan's Labyrinth* shows two perspectives in viewing Ofelia's death scene. This, again, creates a sense of uncertainty and hesitation.

The indecision between the real and the unreal world keeps appearing as the plot goes. Besides taken to follow Ofelia's adventure, the viewers are also offered the conflict between General Franco's soldiers (under Captain Vidal's command) and the rebel soldiers who hide in the forest. This sub-plot gives the real world effect to *Pan's Labyrinth*. In one scene, Ofelia brings the viewers to a cave inhabited by a giant frog. In another scene, the viewers are taken to witness the violence committed by Captain Vidal's soldiers. The rough and strict world of Spanish Civil war is contrasted with the Faun's world that is full of uncertainty, magic and archaic aspects.



From narrative perspective, *Pan's Labyrinth* has fulfilled the requirements of a fantastic film. The appearance of mythical creatures has a function to construct archaic and primitive atmosphere. However, according to Todorov, it is hesitation that essentially makes *Pan's Labyrinth* a fantastic film. If seen from psychological point of view, the story about the Faun might be merely Ofelia's hallucination, as the effect of her being depressed. However, as a pure fantastic story, *Pan's Labyrinth*, does not provide the answers to the viewers.

## Setting of Place

Phillips (2009:10) defines setting as “the place where filmed action occurs—either on a set, a constructed place used for filming, or on location, a real place that is not built expressly for the filmmakers.” Space and place have an important role in building a fantastic atmosphere in a film. For example, Hogwarts, the school for wizards in Harry Potter series, is described as a place that is mysterious and behind the times. Furthermore, Djokosujatno (2005:62) explains that an ideal fantastic setting is the rural area or any other place that is far from civilization, added with details that hintcreepiness. In the beginning of the film, *Pan's Labyrinth* leads the audience to an isolated place that is distant from the cities when the protagonist character Ofelia has to live in a big house in the middle of the forest. This next part will discuss how places in *Pan's Labyrinth* build a fantastic ambiance in the film, and the places analyzed will be the cave under the tree, the Pale Man's room and the labyrinth.

The Faun ordered Ofelia to find a golden key that is placed inside the stomach of a big frog living inside a cave. The entrance of the cave is under a huge tree that stands out among the other trees. Even though the tree is no longer alive, the tree still looks grand. Meanwhile, the cave under it also creates a fantastic atmosphere because of its ceilings and walls that can cause claustrophobia. In addition, the cave is also full with insects and mud which indicate a place that cannot be inhabited by human beings.

The next place is the Pale Man's room. The creepy atmosphere is not only contributed by the owner of the room, but also by its decoration. The aisle into the Pale Man's room is decorated by pillars, an archaic detail that seems to trap Ofelia. The wall of the room is full of illustrations that show the real characteristic of Pale Man, a child-eating monster. The lighting used is minimum lighting, which creates a haunting and mysterious atmosphere. The silence inside the room also enhances the eeriness and strengthens the idea that the Pale Man's room is isolated from civilization and even might be in another dimension.

The last place setting that will be discussed is the Faun's labyrinth. Labyrinth is an archaic space, and McCullough (2004:4) even mentions that labyrinth is ‘one of mankind's oldest artistic creations’. The labyrinth often appears in myths and old stories. One famous example is the tale about a Minotaur inside a labyrinth. Labyrinth could symbolize many concepts in life; some of them are birth and fertility (McCullough, 2004). However, the main point is a labyrinth is an archaic space that is functioned to trap or hide something.

The labyrinth in *Pan's Labyrinth* appears in two forms. The first one is the labyrinth where Ofelia meets the Faun. Mercedes, a maid in Captail Vidal's house, tells Ofelia that the labyrinth has existed for a long time, even before the Vidal family's house was built. The labyrinth where the Faun lives is an abandoned place because nobody wants to get closer to it. The other labyrinth is the small labyrinth in the middle of the Faun's labyrinth and appears as an illustration on the ground. The Faun states that the blood of an innocent human will open the gate to the underground kingdom. The small labyrinth might not be as archaic as the Faun's labyrinth, but through the Faun's story, it has become a fantastic object.

## Setting of Time

The next setting that will be analyzed is the setting of time, which also has a unique function in constructing a fantastic story. There are two time settings in *Pan's Labyrinth* that will further be studied, which are the real time setting and the fantastic time setting. The real time setting is mentioned in the beginning of the film, which is in 1944. By mentioning the time setting, the viewers are taken to a real historical event, Spanish Civil war. This real time setting also functions to build a real world, and this real world is contrasted with the unreal world of the Faun. This contrast increased the absolute hesitation in *Pan's Labyrinth*.

The scenes in *Pan's Labyrinth* are mostly set in night time, and how the night time is portrayed is also worth-analyzing. The night time is the most perfect setting for a fantastic story (Djokosujatno, 2005:62). The night time is the time for human beings to take a rest, but it is the time for other creatures to come out. In *Pan's Labyrinth*, Ofelia could meet the Faun only at night. The night scenes in the film are also full of violent scenes, such as the death of Ofelia's mother and the killing of Ofelia.

Full moon is identical with strange creatures or inexplicable events, and this setting holds an important role in *Pan's Labyrinth*. During full moon, the port to the other world can be opened, as told by the Faun. The climax part of the film, when Ofelia runs away with his little brother, also happens during the full moon. Through its presentation, the night time setting in *Pan's Labyrinth* turns into a fantastic setting due to eerie and incomprehensible incidents that happen at night.

## Lighting and Colours

After the discussion on narrative aspects in the previous part, this part will analyze the cinematographic elements, particularly the lighting and the colours in *Pan's Labyrinth*. In most of the scenes, the lighting is made dim to build a gloomy and unreal atmosphere. There are not many candles and torches in Captain Vidal's house so the house, which is supposed to be a source of life, looks dark and lifeless. Even during the day time scenes the lighting is still minimum. To point one example, during one scene when Ofelia is roaming the forest in the forest, the sunlight is covered by the lush trees. The only lighting that suggests warmth is during the last scene, in which Ofelia meets both of her parents. The light that penetrates through the space between the walls and brings warmth enhances this scene that focuses on the unity of a family.

Boggs (2008:76) states that colours have various functions in a movie, and one of them is to build a particular atmosphere. The movie *Pan's Labyrinth* is dominated by gloomy colours like dark brown, grey and black that build a fantastic sense. Green, which often symbolizes nature, also appears in the film through Ofelia's dress but in a dark tone that, again, suggests misery. Later in the final scene, red appears as a symbol of love and spirit. The colour is also worn by Ofelia when she becomes a princess because red is often associated with royalty.

## CONCLUSION

After analyzing the narrative aspects, it can be concluded that *Pan's Labyrinth* is a pure fantastic film. One of the factors is the appearance of mythical creatures as the motive of the story. Furthermore, it has been mentioned that absolute hesitation as the main element of a fantastic story (based on Todorov's theory) can be found in *Pan's Labyrinth*. The film constantly gives questions to the audience whether the events really happen or only exist in Ofelia's mind. Cinematographic elements such as setting of time and place, lighting and colours also have been analyzed to see how they contribute the fantastic aspects to the film. As a fantastic film, *Pan's Labyrinth* can be

categorized as a unique story since it gives a dark twist to a fairy tale about a princess. Besides the artistic setting, the dark mood is also built by the tragic events in the movie, such as the death of the main protagonist.

This paper has discussed the film *Pan's Labyrinth* by using structural approach and Todorov's theory of absolute hesitation. For further research on this film, other approaches can be used. To analyze Ofelia's mental condition, psychoanalysis is the most suitable approach. The comparison of *Pan's Labyrinth* and other films by Del Toro can also be conducted since Del Toro always puts his own signatures to his films even though the scripts were not written by him.

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