

Gender Roles, Time and Initiation in *Pan's Labyrinth* and the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*

Classical influences on *Pan's Labyrinth* have not been uppermost in the minds of most scholars. Articles analysing the film's literary influences largely focus upon the ways in which it draws upon fairy tales and children's literature: traditional tales like Snow White and Little Red Riding Hood and more modern tales such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that del Toro has drawn from these and in the segment 'The Power of Myth', one of the extras on the extended DVD version (2006), these are the tales to which he refers. But in his director's commentary, del Toro also makes allusions to Classical myth; for instance he talks about how he has gone back to Classical myth for his representation of the Faun. Del Toro also discusses how Symbolist paintings have influenced the style of the film; he explains the reason that he likes these paintings is that they have roots in pagan motifs which reference archetypes tapping directly into the subconscious. Furthermore del Toro alludes to the 'game of interpretation' that can be played with the film for, as he suggests, each viewing of the film expands it and deepens its meaning. He observes that the film has a lot of layers.<sup>2</sup>

This article takes as its starting point the position that the fairy tale layer is only the most obvious one in the film<sup>3</sup> and that Classical mythological archetypes can also be discerned within the film's characters and narrative pattern. The scene with the most striking and immediate Classical parallels is the one in the hall of the Pale Man in which Ofelia succumbs to the temptation of eating some grapes. Del Toro (2006) has stated that the figure of Saturn/Cronos in Goya's painting *Saturn Devouring his Son* was his inspiration for the Pale Man (the implications of this identification and the symbolism of Cronos in ancient myth will be discussed later in this paper). But the depiction of the hall as a type of underworld and the implications of Ofelia's devouring of forbidden fruit are also strongly reminiscent of the myth of Persephone and Demeter.<sup>4</sup> The fullest and most influential narration of this myth is the seventh century B.C. Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*.<sup>5</sup> There are intriguing parallels between this hymn and del Toro's film on a number of levels. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, as we will see, there is a suggestion that Persephone eats the pomegranate seed deliberately because she wishes to become queen of the underworld. In *Pan's Labyrinth* Ofelia makes a conscious choice to eat the grape just as in the same scene she decides to go with her instincts and select a different box from the one that the Faun instructed her to choose. Del Toro (2006) states that issues of choice and disobedience are central to the film; he points out that Ofelia's decisions to go with her instincts in this scene foreshadow her final defiance of the Faun when he instructs her to kill her infant brother.<sup>6</sup> Issues of choice and disobedience also figure strongly in the *Hymn to Demeter* where Demeter's defiance of Zeus threatens his power base and Persephone's decision to eat the pomegranate seed creates a new world order. As in the film, the central characters of the hymn are women who are oppressed by or struggling with an authoritarian and controlling patriarchy. The hymn is also intriguing because it provides the earliest written testimony about the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries whose central preoccupations were taking the terror from death and offering a better afterlife for initiates;<sup>7</sup> we see similar preoccupations with mortality and immortality in *Pan's Labyrinth* (and other del Toro films such as his 1993 *Cronos*).

Thus by closely comparing *Pan's Labyrinth* with the *Hymn to Demeter* we should be able to identify and analyse important Classical mythological archetypes which underlie the film. I am by no means suggesting that this is a straightforward case of reception, i.e. that del Toro has in *Pan's Labyrinth* directly drawn from the myth as related in the *Hymn to Demeter*, although his writings do show a strong awareness and knowledge of Classical myths, authors and even Latin (del Toro: 2013, 60-61, 179, 186). But his reading of English literature is both wide and deep and he has been influenced by Jungian theory (del Toro: 2013, 13, 14-15, 61, 65; McDonald and Clark: 2014, 174, 178). The myth of Demeter and Persephone was of key interest to Jung who analysed the goddess and her daughter as archetypes of mother and maiden (Jung and Kerényi, 1963) and it was also a major influence on Victorian and early Modernist literature (Louis, 2009) upon which *Pan's Labyrinth* has drawn heavily.<sup>8</sup> Thus there is a strong possibility of indirect or unconscious influence of this myth on the plot and characters of the film.

In delving into one of the deeper layers of this film we are, as del Toro has observed, playing a 'game of interpretation' and, as we will see once we embark on this process, the parallels are not always straightforward (for instance, as will become apparent, many of the Classical mythological archetypes are split into different facets within the film or are inverted). This game is one which del Toro continually challenges the viewer to play in many of his films, weaving their tapestry with a distinctive language of symbols and figures which he terms 'eye protein' (del Toro: 2013, 13) and giving them intricate, elaborately plotted structures by using visual echoes to connect key scenes.<sup>9</sup> According to del Toro, 'fifty percent of the storytelling of a movie is submerged beneath the screenplay' for 'the vast freight of meaning lies...in the play between the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious' (2013, 13). Thus by exploring the mythological archetypes within the film, we are journeying into one of its subconscious layers; here, as del Toro has implied above, is where the deepest meaning lies. So this exercise should enrich the experience of the film for us by enhancing our understanding and appreciation of its themes and making us aware of how profound, universal and ancient its characters and concepts are.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, by examining notions of time within Classical myth and comparing these notions with the representation of time in the film, we should gain deeper insight into the interplay of mythic and historical time within the film.

Before we proceed to draw comparisons between film and hymn, I would like briefly to examine visual echoes within *Pan's Labyrinth* that are employed to link scenes and draw the real and fantasy worlds together. This will not only serve to draw out some of the film's key themes and images relevant to the analysis of its archetypes but also illustrates the complexity of the film's structure which, rather like a labyrinth, leads the viewer along a path that continually bends back upon itself. The stones that are swallowed by the greedy toad have a parallel with the food that Vidal's guests feast upon above ground and later with the grapes that Ofelia consumes in the hall of the Pale Man. Indeed food is a central motif of the film: Mercedes is depicted preparing food in the kitchen, Ofelia is sent to bed without food as a punishment and a father and son are shot when they venture out to hunt rabbits for their hungry family. There is a struggle over supply and control of food: 'Those bastards are going to starve... you'll see'<sup>11</sup> Vidal says of the rebels at the start of the film. Vidal centralises the food supply within a storehouse and doles it out to the villagers sparingly; later the rebels manage to break into the storehouse with the aid of Mercedes the housekeeper who has given them her copy of the key to the storehouse padlock. The key that Mercedes possesses resembles the key that Ofelia acquires in her second task: both keys offer them the power to fulfil their desires. The two characters also possess or acquire knives which play crucial roles in important scenes: Mercedes' concealed kitchen knife enables her to wound the Captain and make her escape to the rebels and Ofelia's refusal to use the knife she has acquired against her baby brother results in her death and escape to the other world. In addition, vegetation motifs are prominent right from the start of the film where Ofelia wanders off into the woods after the car has halted. Ofelia's first vision of the other world is of a flower of immortality and her first task involves finding and descending beneath an ancient fig tree. The flower motif recurs with the carvings of flowers and leaves on Carmen's bed head, the red flowers that are printed upon Ofelia's dress when she wakes as a princess in the underworld and the white flower that unfurls on the branch of the fig tree at the end of the film.

When we start to compare film and hymn we see that the relationship between mothers and daughters is central to both: Demeter's maternal love for Persephone shares similarities with the bond between Carmen and Ofelia. Although Carmen doesn't understand her daughter's preoccupation with fairy tales and often chides her, the two are physically close (they share a bed) and Ofelia is constantly at her mother's side (e.g. playing cards); the doctor describes her as Carmen's 'little nurse'. The bed they share is carved with flowers and leaves, associating both of them with vegetation and fertility: the central carving of a flower with its curving leaves echoes the curves of the Faun's horns, the twisted branches of the ancient tree and the curving fallopian tubes of Carmen's womb which are depicted in blood red hue in the Book of Crossroads. Like Persephone at the beginning of the *Hymn to Demeter* who wanders in a meadow, oblivious to the dangers of the adult world, Ofelia wanders off into the countryside a number of times. Besides her initial foray into the woods at the start of the film, she also wanders away from her mother when they arrive at the Old Mill and comes across the labyrinth; she is lead back by the housekeeper Mercedes who gives her a motherly warning against it: 'better you don't go near it—you could get lost'. This is a warning she disregards: not only does she venture into the labyrinth at night but the first task assigned to her by the Faun involves going into the woods to find an ancient fig tree. She descends beneath this into a grimy version of an underworld and, it could be argued, undergoes a symbolic rape by the monstrous toad that inhabits it.<sup>12</sup> At one

point in her battle with the toad, its long, fleshy tongue reaches out to lick a bug from Ofelia's face and although she is ultimately victorious and kills the toad, she comes back home with her dress dirty and tattered. This first task is thus a form of initiation and Ofelia has metaphorically lost her virginity; increasingly she begins to act and think in a much more independent manner.<sup>13</sup>

The melancholic, passive character of Carmen has some similarities with Demeter at the start of the hymn when she goes through a period of extended mourning after Persephone has been abducted; likewise del Toro (2006) refers to Carmen as a 'feminine icon of despair'. Carmen has been placed in a situation where she has to show complete obedience and acquiescence to her male 'protector' who disregards and belittles her opinion ('Please forgive my wife. She hasn't been exposed to the world. She thinks these silly stories are interesting to others.' Vidal says to the guests at the dinner party.) Vidal's insistence that Carmen uses a wheelchair instead of walking (Carmen: 'I don't need it—I can walk by myself'... Vidal: 'Then do it for me') has reduced her to the infirm and dependent status of an old woman and, just like Demeter when she adopts the guise of an old woman in the hymn and becomes the nurse of someone else's male infant, Carmen is regarded by Vidal as little more than a vessel or nurse for his unborn son.<sup>14</sup> In the course of the film mother and daughter are physically separated, just as Demeter and Persephone are; firstly when Carmen has difficulties with her pregnancy and Ofelia is moved to a different bedroom and then ultimately when she dies giving birth. The reasons behind the separation are, however, inverted, for in the hymn it is the daughter's marriage that separates them; in the film it is the mother's.

After Carmen has died, the housekeeper Mercedes takes over the maternal role and attempts to rescue and protect Ofelia, both when she tries to leave the mill secretly with her and when she threatens the Captain ('Don't you dare touch the girl... You won't be the first pig I've gutted'). Mercedes' active resistance to the authoritarian regime in the shape of Vidal can be compared with Demeter in the hymn when she begins to realise and wield her own power. Like Demeter, Mercedes has potential control over the food supply<sup>15</sup> and the male in charge is not immediately aware that she has a source of power that can threaten him. Vidal thinks that Mercedes has given him the only copy of the key to the storeroom when in fact she has a spare and he is slow to realise that she is helping the rebels because he regards her as a simple serving woman. 'For God's sake she's just a woman' Vidal comments when his subordinate objects to leaving him alone with Mercedes and Mercedes responds, 'That's what you always thought. That's why I was able to get away with it. I was invisible to you.' In a rather similar fashion in the hymn Demeter is 'invisible' to Zeus: he ignores her in his decision to marry off her daughter and pays no attention to her distress at her daughter's disappearance. But when Demeter withholds grain from the earth, Zeus is finally forced to take notice of her because the resulting depletion of the human race means that there is no one to do honour to him. Thus Demeter and Mercedes both use their power to threaten the resources of their enemies, ultimately resulting in the authority figure (Vidal/Zeus) being brought to his knees.

On the other hand, the figure of Mercedes also has similarities with Hekate in the hymn. Hekate is one of the few deities who hears and acknowledges Persephone in her plight:

But none of the immortals nor the mortal humans  
heard her voice...  
Except for the daughter of Persaios, whose mind was youthful.  
She heard it from her cave. She is Hekate, of the bright headband.<sup>16</sup>  
(Hymn to Demeter 22-25)

Hekate who like the rebels lives in a cave, is the only deity who actively seeks out Demeter and tries to help her in her search for her daughter:

...But none was willing to speak the truth to her  
none of the gods nor the mortal humans...  
But when the tenth dawn came bringing its light upon her,  
Hekate came to her, holding a torch in her hands  
(Hymn to Demeter 44-45, 51-52)

Hekate's readiness to reveal the truth to Demeter about her daughter's abduction when everyone else is unable or unwilling to speak has a certain resemblance to Mercedes' courageous stand against the

fascist regime. When Persephone is reunited with her mother, the hymn states that from then on Hekate became 'her [Persephone's] attendant and queen companion' (*Hymn to Demeter* 440). This mirrors the close relationship between Mercedes and Ofelia for del Toro (2006) has made it clear that Ofelia and Mercedes are aspects of the same character (Mercedes is Ofelia a few years older). Moreover, Hekate in Greek myth and religion was assimilated with Artemis, the goddess of the hunt. As a virgin goddess Artemis wielded more power than other female deities and often acted in masculine ways: she wore the short chiton of a boy and carried a bow and arrows (Burkert 1985: 150). Hekate is likewise depicted in a short tunic but carries a torch instead of a bow (Burkert 1985: 171; as stated in the *Hymn to Demeter* 52 above). Like Hekate/Artemis, Mercedes often acts in male ways (her knife, although initially merely a kitchen implement, is then turned against Vidal). Like Hekate she sometimes carries a light (a lamp) with which she signals the rebels.<sup>17</sup> Her active aid of the rebels (who inhabit Artemis' domain, the woodlands)<sup>18</sup> helps to undermine and ultimately topple Vidal.

According to Classical scholarship, Demeter and Persephone are also aspects of the same goddess,<sup>19</sup> so when Demeter rescues Persephone, it is in a sense Persephone rescuing herself or Demeter rescuing and retrieving a part of herself.<sup>20</sup> At the end of both film and hymn, daughter and mother are reunited; in the film this reunion is achieved by the daughter's rather than the mother's actions but the inversion underlines how closely Ofelia and Carmen are linked, alternating between the roles of mother and daughter.<sup>21</sup> Another aspect of this reunion that is inverted is the fact that Ofelia descends underground to meet her mother rather than coming above ground like Persephone.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Persephone who, as is suggested in the hymn, yields to Hades' temptation to become a powerful queen by allowing Hades to feed her the pomegranate seed (she later tells her mother that she was tricked), Ofelia ultimately rejects the Faun's offer to make her a princess because it involves sacrificing her brother. But her defiance of the Faun is linked to her consumption of the grapes<sup>23</sup> earlier on for, as del Toro (2006) has observed, both are an assertion of her independence and her ability to trust her own judgement. Ofelia is depicted as dead at the beginning and end of the film with blood dripping from her nose but at the beginning time runs backwards and the blood reverses itself back into her body; according to del Toro (2006) this signifies that Ofelia isn't so much dying but giving birth to herself the way she wants to be. She is transformed into Princess Moanna of the underground realm, just as by the close of the hymn, the maiden Kore has become Persephone, powerful queen of the underworld.<sup>24</sup> Ofelia, like Persephone in her ability to travel between the underworld and earth, has become a 'Mistress of Two Worlds', a princess in the underworld and also a figure of inspiration to the rebels above.<sup>25</sup> For although both Ofelia and Persephone are physiologically barren, their fertility is channelled in other directions. Just as at the end of the hymn, fertility has returned to the world ('And all the broad earth with leaves and blossoms/was heavy.' *Hymn to Demeter* 472-73), the final shot of the film is of a flower unfurling itself on the branch of the ancient fig tree, signifying the renewal of hope.

Set against the three primary female figures in *Pan's Labyrinth* (Ofelia, Carmen, Mercedes) are a number of important male figures. The Captain and the Faun (whose negative manifestation is the Pale Man) are the most dominant but the kinder and gentler aspects of masculinity are represented in the film by Ofelia's absent father (whom it is suggested the Captain killed) and Dr Ferreiro (whom the captain kills in the course of the film). Thus Ofelia's father and Dr Ferreiro appear to be representations of the same character archetype. In a similar fashion to the way in which the Demeter archetype is split into two aspects in the film (Carmen/Mercedes), the Zeus archetype is also split into two: the Captain and Ofelia's father/Dr Ferreiro. The Captain in murdering both these men has done away with the gentler, nurturing side of himself, just as Zeus, in disregarding his daughter's and sister's feelings, has dismissed the nurturing, gentle aspect of fatherhood. For both Vidal and Zeus patriarchy means obedience without question or challenge: Zeus arranges Persephone's marriage without consulting or even informing Demeter and Vidal appears mystified as to why Dr Ferreiro defied his order to keep the stutterer alive ('I don't understand—*Why* didn't you obey me?' he asks, to which the doctor replies, 'To obey for the sake of obeying without question, only people like you can do that captain.') Like Persephone, Ofelia has been placed in a situation against her will (her exile at the Old Mill) and the father figure is detached from her plight, preoccupied with his own power and prestige; Vidal is more concerned with the way in which she greets him than in welcoming her warmly. This can be compared with Zeus' detachment at the start of the *Hymn to Demeter*:



He [Hades] snatched her against her will and led her away on his golden chariot  
lamenting. She cried with shrill voice  
calling for her father [Zeus], the son of Kronos, the highest and best...  
...But he, aloof,  
was seated far apart from the gods, inside a temple which was full of prayers.  
He was receiving beautiful sacrificial offerings from mortal humans.

(*Hymn to Demeter* 19-21, 27-29)

The distance between Ofelia and important male figures in her life is apparent not only in the relationship between her and her stepfather but also with her real father who, far off in the underworld, cannot help her directly. But by the end of the film Ofelia is reunited with her real father just as Persephone is reconciled with her father Zeus at the close of the hymn:

they [Demeter and Persephone] returned to Olympus, to join the assembly of the  
other gods  
where they dwell with Zeus, who delights in thunder.

(*Hymn to Demeter* 484-5)

The Faun who is associated with both labyrinth and underworld (both as the Pale man and in his appearance in the underworld at the end of the film) can be compared with Hades in his role in the hymn.<sup>26</sup> Like the Faun, Hades is an ambiguous figure. He abducts Persephone against her will and at the start of the hymn there isn't much to distinguish him from Zeus (he is referred to as 'the son of Cronos' just as Zeus is).<sup>27</sup> However, when Hermes comes to take Persephone back, Hades shows that he is capable of both charm and a shrewd cunning:

...Hades, lord of the underworld, smiled  
with his brows, and he did not disobey the order of King Zeus...  
...But he himself  
secretly gave her the honey-sweet seed of the pomegranate to eat,  
turning it over in his mind, so that she wouldn't remain for all time  
over there by the side of the dark-veiled honourable Demeter

(*Hymn to Demeter* 357-58, 371-74)

Hades recognises that force will not ultimately work against Persephone and that if he wants her to stay he must offer her something that she unconsciously desires: to become an independent person with her own power base:

...'If you are here  
you will be mistress of everything that lives and moves  
and you will have the greatest honour among the immortals'...  
So he spoke. And thoughtful Persephone was glad.

(*Hymn to Demeter* 364-66; 370)<sup>28</sup>

In a rather similar fashion, the Faun uses cunning and trickery in his dealings with Ofelia. Like Hades he offers Ofelia power and status. He tells her not to eat any food when she goes to the hall of the Pale Man and pretends to be angry when she reveals that she has disobeyed him and lost one of his fairies ('You broke the rules!...Your spirit will stay forever among humans. You'll live among them, you'll get old like them, you'll die like them'). But in 'breaking the rules' Ofelia has actually chosen the correct path, the one towards independence and power. In the course of the hymn Hades undergoes a transformation from brutal abductor to respectful husband;<sup>29</sup> similarly throughout the film the Faun grows ever more youthful and attractive, appearing at the end in a kindly and beneficent guise with the fairies that he ate as the Pale Man restored to life.

Apart from Zeus and Hades, the most important male figure in the *Hymn to Demeter* is the baby Demophon whom Demeter nurtures in her first attempt to make up for the loss of her daughter and, perhaps, to challenge the power of Zeus and Hades.<sup>30</sup> She feeds him with ambrosia and places him in the fire at night to make him immortal (*Hymn to Demeter* 237-39). This male infant becomes the centre of a power struggle, just as Ofelia's brother does in *Pan's Labyrinth*. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter nurtures someone else's infant by feeding it with ambrosia; in *Pan's Labyrinth* Ofelia

nurtures someone else's infant (her mother's) by feeding a mandrake root with milk and her own blood. Although Ofelia's purpose in doing this is not the same as Demeter's, to make the baby immortal, the figure of the baby in the film does have strong associations with immortality and the other world. The first time we see Ofelia's brother he is sharing the womb with the flower of immortality and later Ofelia promises him that if he doesn't hurt their mother when he emerges she will make him a prince of her underground kingdom; in the final scene the Faun tells Ofelia that the infant's blood will open the portals of the underworld.

In both film and hymn the act of nurturing the infant is misinterpreted by those who are grounded in the world of mortals (Metaneira, the baby's mother, in the hymn, Vidal and Carmen in the film). In the *Hymn to Demeter* Metaneira's objections result in baby being taken *from* the fire; in *Pan's Labyrinth* Carmen throws the mandrake root *onto* the fire. Both Metaneira and Carmen suffer for their actions: Carmen goes into immediate labour and dies, separating her from both her baby and Ofelia; Metaneira suffers the anger of the goddess and the distress and alienation of her son ('his spirit could not be soothed/ for inferior nursemaids held him now' *Hymn to Demeter* 290-91). Some scholars have interpreted Demeter's attempts to make Demophon immortal as a selfish and hostile act, depriving a mother of her mortal child without consultation, rather similar to the way in which she herself has had her child stolen from her.<sup>31</sup> Whether Demeter learns anything from episode when she then goes on to challenge Zeus' power by withholding crops from the earth is debatable; she is still using humans as pawns and allows them to suffer to make her point with Zeus. Ofelia, in contrast, refuses to allow her baby brother (or anyone else for that matter) to suffer in order to achieve her ambitions.

In *Pan's Labyrinth* del Toro deliberately has the first fantasy scene appear through the womb of the mother. Ofelia fantasises about a flower of immortality that grows at the top of mountain which men are too afraid to pluck because it has thorns of poison. A flower also appears at the beginning of the *Hymn to Demeter* and although it is not actually a flower of immortality it is a source of wonder and presages the appearance of Hades from the underworld:

And the narcissus, which was grown as a trap for the flower-faced maiden  
by Gaia according to the will of Zeus and to please the receiver of many [Hades]  
It was a flower marvellously bright. It bestowed a sense of awe on all who beheld it  
both immortals and mortal humans...  
She [Persephone] in amazement stretched out both hands  
to take the lovely plaything. And the wide-pathed earth opened underneath her.

(*Hymn to Demeter* 8-11, 15-16)

It is interesting that it is Gaia (Mother Earth) who causes this flower to grow; the flower thus grows from the 'womb' of the oldest matriarch of all. Like the narcissus which lures Persephone into the underworld and thus, in effect, into the 'womb' of Mother Earth,<sup>32</sup> the flower of immortality that Ofelia envisages draws her further away from the 'real' world to the underworld and the world of fantasy which is depicted in red and gold tones and associated with the female element in the film (the mother's womb, fallopian tubes and vagina).<sup>33</sup> Carmen's womb also functions as a kind of underworld and is associated with the ancient fig-tree;<sup>34</sup> the fig-tree is the last remnant of a primordial stage of the world and it used to nurture creatures 'who were full of magic and wonder'. Thus Carmen's womb, the flower and the tree are all associated with the magic of the other world and appear to possess the secret of eternal life. When Ofelia first descends into the labyrinth (another kind of underworld) she sees a carving on the stone at its centre of a faun embracing a girl and a baby; the Faun explains that they are Ofelia and the Faun (and, presumably, her baby brother). This stresses the cyclical nature of the fantasy narrative within the film, just as in the first shot where time reverses upon itself as the blood goes back into Ofelia's nose and the last shot when the ancient fig tree revives.<sup>35</sup> The *Hymn to Demeter* too, speaks to a process that is eternally present and endlessly recurrent.<sup>36</sup> Thus in both *Pan's Labyrinth* and the *Hymn to Demeter* the feminine and maternal are associated with a mythic time which because of its cyclical nature means that things never really die.<sup>37</sup>

The cyclical time of myth is contrasted with another type of time in both film and hymn which is the product of a masculine perception.<sup>38</sup> This is associated with the relationship of father to son. While father/son relationships are not a central focus of the *Hymn to Demeter*, a common epithet of Zeus within the hymn is 'the son of Cronos'.<sup>39</sup> Although a standard epic formula, it is also a reminder to the reader of the story of how Zeus deposed his own father. According to Hesiod's *Theogony* (which was

probably composed prior to the hymn and known to the author)<sup>40</sup> Cronos swallowed his offspring to prevent one of them usurping him. But after his wife Rhea appealed to her mother Gaia, Gaia foiled Cronos' plans to swallow his youngest son Zeus, tricking him into swallowing a stone disguised as a baby in his place. When Zeus grew to manhood, Cronos was then tricked by Gaia and Zeus into regurgitating his offspring and was subsequently deposed by Zeus (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 459-505). As we have already observed, the Cronos myth is directly referenced in the film with the scene of the Pale Man devouring the fairies. It also finds an echo in the scene with the monstrous toad: Ofelia tricks the toad into vomiting up the key she needs by deceiving it into thinking that the stones she offers are the bugs it desires. Given Vidal's association with the toad and Carmen with the fig-tree, we can see how the myth of Cronos is echoed and inverted in the film with the greedy and selfish behaviour of a husband resulting in daughter helping mother (rather than mother aiding daughter) to combat it.

In the film Vidal's most significant relationships are with his father and son. As we have seen, he is preoccupied with the birth of a son on the grounds of succession ('a boy will bear his father's name' he states). Vidal's father, although deceased, also has a significant presence in the film. His presence is apparent from the start of the film with the pocket watch that Vidal checks; it is revealed during the dinner party that this was the property of Vidal's father who, dying in battle, smashed his pocket watch to let his son know the exact time he died.<sup>41</sup> Vidal's perception of time is as something which is linear and precise; he is preoccupied with inheritance because, as far as he is concerned, passing on his name and memory to the next generation is the only true form of immortality.<sup>42</sup> The scholar Eliade has suggested that the abandonment of mythical thought and the full acceptance of linear, historical time, with its 'terror', is one of the reasons for modern man's anxieties (Eliade 1954: 150-52). Vidal (who constantly checks and tends his watch)<sup>43</sup> is caught up in the march of historical, linear time. This is the significance of the scene in the mill house where Vidal is depicted tuning his watch gears; del Toro (2006) has pointed out that these are echoed by the mill's wheels behind him, implying that the captain is trapped in time. When Vidal hands over his son to the rebels at the end of the film and asks them to let him know the time at which he died the reply 'your son won't even know your name' is devastating and del Toro (2006) states that this is what kills Vidal rather than the bullet. Mercedes' reply brings him to the realization that he will be erased from history and historical time; his destruction is thus absolute.<sup>44</sup>

It is significant that the myth of Cronos was also associated in antiquity with the destructive ravages of time. Cronos was not infrequently identified by the Ancient Greeks as Chronos the personification of time (*LSJ* s.v.) and the Roman politician and philosopher Cicero interpreted the myth of Cronos/Saturn allegorically as referring to the way in which time devours everything: 'But Saturn is so called because he is satiated with years; the story that he was in the habit of consuming his offspring means that Time devours the ages and gorges himself insatiably on the passing years'.<sup>45</sup> Thus in the film Vidal, who is linked with both the Pale Man and the toad<sup>46</sup> and through them their archetype Cronos is associated with a type of time which devours insatiably (just as the toad does) and which makes the world ill.<sup>47</sup> While Vidal and his guests feast at his dinner party, villagers are starving and while the toad feasts beneath its roots, the tree of life withers. This is in contrast to Ofelia who, as we have seen, is part of the mythological *cycle* of time, what Eliade refers to as the 'eternal return' (Eliade 1954: 88-90). This is why Ofelia is associated with renewal rather than an all-consuming destructiveness and why when she dies she is not obliterated utterly as Vidal is.

Initiation in and knowledge of the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter resulted in a new way of seeing and interpreting the world and one's place in the cycle of life and death. How this occurred though the rituals of initiation is not known but there is some speculation that part of the initiation process involved initiates wandering or walking in circles (possibly through a subterranean labyrinth-like structure)<sup>48</sup> where they may have encountered frightening apparitions before they emerged from darkness to light and beheld the ultimate vision which conferred a sense of blessedness;<sup>49</sup> Foley points out that the concept of seeing is emphasised in the *Hymn to Demeter*, stating, 'The *Hymn* privileges seeing, and especially seeing with understanding and pleasure, over hearing, and the highest level of initiation in the Mysteries is *epopteia*, or seeing' (Foley 1994: 39). We can draw a comparison with the notion in *Pan's Labyrinth* that those who see the world in a different way are special. This is apparent from the start of the film where Ofelia replaced the stone eye in the carving of the satyr's face; del Toro (2006) says that this signifies an alternative way of viewing the world. The stick insect which crawls out of the statue's mouth is then interpreted by Ofelia as a fairy. Ofelia's way

of viewing the world is contrasted with the vision of ordinary mortals throughout the film: she sees the mandrake root respond like a baby when she feeds it milk but when the captain pulls it from under the bed he perceives nothing but a rancid vegetable; when at the end of the film Vidal chases Ofelia into the labyrinth his perception is that she is talking to empty space, Ofelia's that she is talking to the Faun. At the end of the film this different way of seeing and interpreting things is extended to the audience when the narrator states that Ofelia/Princess Moanna left behind small traces of her time on earth 'visible only to those that know where to look'. And the interpretation of this film and its two alternate endings, one that the girl has died, the other than she has been reborn in triumph, depends very much upon whether the viewer adopts Ofelia's way of viewing the world.<sup>50</sup> We can draw a comparison with the way in which initiates emerged from the Eleusinian Mysteries with an altered perspective which gave them confidence in the face of all-devouring death by taking away its terror (Kerényi 1967: 16; Burkert 1985: 289); del Toro (2006) seems to convey a somewhat similar notion when he states in his director's commentary that 'immortality is the act of refusing... to give any importance to death'. Indeed in a sense *Pan's Labyrinth* can be viewed as a form of mystery initiation for the viewer who journeys through the labyrinthine paths of the film with all its multiple levels and manifold echoes and progresses, just as the Eleusinian initiate may have done, from horror, disgust and terror to a new perspective on the place of death in life and in the world.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance Clark and McDonald (2010: 58), Gavela-Ramos (2012: 15-17), Orme (2010: 220), Kotecki (2010: 244-45) and DeCius (2008: 26-57). On the other hand, DiCius also discusses parallels with the myth of Echo and Narcissus (2008: 8-25) while McGillivray (2012: 14-15, 18, 26) draws some comparisons with the myth of Demeter and Persephone (see further note 10 below) and Spector (2009) does draw parallels between Vidal and Cronos (see note 47 below).

<sup>2</sup> See also Kotecki (2010) on what she describes as the hypertextuality of the film which enables multiple identifications and interpretations.

<sup>3</sup> And while the fairy tale layer is obvious, the ways in which del Toro utilises fairy tale motifs within the film is not. See Orme (2010: 225), Hanley (2007: 37) and Kotecki (2010: 236, 240-41) on how the narrative processes of the film challenge and disrupt traditional fairy tale patterns.

<sup>4</sup> McGillivray (2012: 25) also makes this comparison.

<sup>5</sup> It is also one of the earliest narrations of the myth, apart from a fleeting reference to the abduction in Hesiod's *Theogony* 913-14. Scholars argue for a date for the hymn between 650-550 B.C.; see further Foley (1994: 29-30).

<sup>6</sup> See also Orme (2010: 219).

<sup>7</sup> 'The mysteries, taking from death its terror, are a guarantee of a better fate in the afterworld' (Burkert 1985: 289).

<sup>8</sup> Del Toro has stated that the film owes a direct debt to writers of this period such as Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany and Algernon Blackwood; see Hodgen 2007: 17.

<sup>9</sup> This is true, for instance, of both his 1993 film *Cronos* and his 2001 film *The Devil's Backbone* (the companion film to *Pan's Labyrinth*). *Cronos* 'offers an early compendium of del Toro's symbolic and imagistic vocabulary' according to McDonald and Clark (2014: 110) while Brinks observes that *The Devil's Backbone* 'generates a number of recurrent, uncanny images' (2004: 296). Thus del Toro, in effect, turns each viewer into a scholar who has the challenge of negotiating the complex, recurring symbolism of his films to gain greater understanding of them. As McDonald and Clark observe on del Toro's films, 'This deeply layered cinema filled with ancient lore and mythology, complex and arcane references to fiction, art and intertextual pop-cultural artefacts is labyrinthal in itself and has something of the academic about it.' (2014, 11)

<sup>10</sup> As indicated in note 1 above, there has already been some work done on mythological archetypes within the film. Tsuei (2008: 232-33) has suggested that del Toro has employed an ancient resurrection myth based upon the Mother Goddess archetype in this film and Perlich (2010) has offered a reading of the film through the lens of Campbell's theories of the monomyth of the hero, which draw from Jung. More significantly, McGillivray (2012) in a wide-ranging article on law, myth and children, has drawn some interesting parallels between *Pan's Labyrinth*, the myth of Demeter and Persephone and the Eleusinian mysteries which will be acknowledged at the appropriate points in this article. But this is not the main focus of her article and she does not develop these comparisons. Similarly Spector (2009) concentrates upon the associations between Vidal, Cronos and devouring time without analysing other Classical associations within the film (although he fleetingly compares Ofelia to Persephone).

<sup>11</sup> All quotations from the film are taken from the English translation of the script which is available online.

<sup>12</sup> The fig tree, of course, has long been employed as a symbol of the acquisition of sexual knowledge; see Shoulson (2000:885-87) while the figure of the toad also conveys strong sexual overtones; see Vivancos (2006: 886-87) who argues that the toad 'symbolizes the dangers of masculine sexual power'. Indeed Perschon (2011) suggests that the toad is meant to symbolise Ofelia's stepfather who is metaphorically devouring Carmen by 'occupying' her womb. The identification between Vidal and the toad will be analysed later in the article.

<sup>13</sup> Swier associates this task with the European myths of slaying dragons that 'represent a deeper psychological growth of the individual' (2011: 69). See also Agha-Jaffar (2002: 54) on the psychological significance of Persephone's rape in the underworld.

<sup>14</sup> He dismisses Doctor Ferreiro's advice that Carmen should not have travelled with the curt 'a boy should be born wherever his father is. And that's that.' And later tells him 'If you have to choose, save the baby. That boy will bear my name and my father's name too'.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that in the scene where food is being doled out to the villagers, the focus is on the *bread* that they receive. The elderly women Conchita and Paz come out of the granary carrying baskets of bread and the Guardia Civil Capitan states 'This is our daily bread in Franco's Spain!...Because in a united Spain there's not a single home without a warm fire or without bread.' As goddess of the grain, Demeter is strongly associated with bread; indeed her name in the ancient world was employed as a metonym for bread (*LSJ* s.v.).

<sup>16</sup> All translations of Greek and Latin material are my own.

<sup>17</sup> Lindsay comments that this lamp has two round holes cut out of it which visually echo the moon-shaped openings in the wall which are depicted behind Ofelia when she is in the bath (2012: 12). As both Artemis and Hekate were associated with the moon, this provides another link with these goddesses.

<sup>18</sup> *Homeric Hymn* 27.4-9. In the film the rebels are depicted as marginalised figures outside society just as Artemis' wild beasts are; del Toro (2006) equates them with 'magical creatures from the forest'. See further Deveney (2008: 2), Gavela-Ramos (2012: 10).

<sup>19</sup> Richardson states that even in the classical period Mother and Maiden were hardly separable (1974: 14). According to Kerényi (1967: 33), Demeter represented the earthly aspect of the goddess, Persephone another aspect which was rather ghostly and transcendent.

<sup>20</sup> McGillivray (2012: 14) also makes the point that 'if Demeter's descent is a descent into the unconscious, then her rescue of Persephone is the rescue of herself'.

<sup>21</sup> In many ways Ofelia has the more maternal role, for she looks after Carmen with a tenderness that is not always reciprocated by her mother. She alternates between the filial and maternal roles throughout the film but the fact that she saves herself at the end suggests that she grows into Demeter's more active, heroic role. As McGillivray correctly observes (2012: 18), Ofelia's mother in the final scene can be identified as Persephone for she is seated on a throne beside her husband (Hades). (But she also on the same page identifies Ofelia as Persephone.) Or, as Perlich comments, 'At the end of the film, Ofelia has become a synthesis of Mercedes and Carmen — she celebrates their strengths and chooses not to embrace their flaws' (2010: 125).

<sup>22</sup> The fact that Ofelia goes below rather than above ground to meet her mother is reflected in the duplication of the Persephone archetype for, as Kerényi (1967: 148-150) observes, in one of her roles Persephone rules in the underworld ready to receive the dead at whatever time of the year they descend but in pictures she is represented as standing beside Demeter. Thus in cult she is simultaneously in the underworld and reunited with her mother, just as Ofelia is. Ofelia's journey begins below ground (as Princess Moanna), Persephone's above but both women end up 'occupying' both realms with a dual sphere of influence over the dead and the living.

<sup>23</sup> Although the fruit that Ofelia consumes is different, it is interesting that in a conscious or subconscious echo of the Persephone story, there is a pomegranate in the bowl from which Ofelia takes the grape.

<sup>24</sup> On the likely change of identity in the hymn from Kore to Persephone see Foley (1994: 39).

<sup>25</sup> See also Perlich (2010: 121) and Spector (2009: 83) who make a similar observation.

<sup>26</sup> To a lesser extent he can also be compared with Hermes who is sent by Zeus to retrieve Persephone from the underworld in the hymn (335-37). Like Hermes, he acts as a guide between the upper and lower worlds although in the film his journey is inverted, for his task is to take Ofelia below rather than above ground (on this, see note 22 above).

<sup>27</sup> Hades is given the epithet 'the son of Cronos' twice within the hymn (at vv. 18 and 32), Zeus seven times (see note 39 below). Hades is the first to be given the epithet at verse 18 when he abducts Persephone and then a few lines later Zeus is also given the epithet when Persephone calls upon him for help. The application of the epithet to Zeus and Hades in quick succession suggests that the shared bond between the two brothers (which is defined in patrilineal terms by their descent from their father) is more important to them than any of their relationships with women.

<sup>28</sup> See further Foley (1994: 129), Agha-Jaffar (2002: 43-44). Later in the hymn, Persephone will tell her mother that Hades *forced* her to eat the seed (v. 413) but, as Richardson observes, at verses 371-72 no mention of compulsion is made. He suggests that Persephone is 'protesting too much' in her narration of the events to Demeter' (1974: 287).

<sup>29</sup> On this see Agha-Jaffar (2002: 129).

<sup>30</sup> It is suggested by some scholars that Demeter chooses to focus on a male infant because he will not be taken away from her by marriage; on this see Foley (1994: 114). Alternative possibilities are that Demeter is trying to produce an immortal male champion who will challenge Zeus or that she is attempting to deprive Hades of a victim he is owed (Foley 1994: 113).

<sup>31</sup> See Arthur (1977: 231), Felson-Rubin and Deal (1994: 190-193), Agha-Jaffar (2002: 20).

<sup>32</sup> Dobson points out that the Greek word for meadow, *leimon*, which is employed in verse 7 can also be used of female genitalia and suggests that 'as the 'bloom' is plucked from the 'meadow,' the virgin is deflowered and the genitalia open to disclose the yawning chasm which is the original place of birth and death, the womb of mother earth' (1992: 45)

<sup>33</sup> See Lindsay (2012: 3) on the extensive womb imagery of the film.

<sup>34</sup> Del Toro (2006) states that when the camera 'slices' through the walls of Carmen's belly in the first fantasy scene, the walls are meant to remind the viewer of the roots of a tree.

<sup>35</sup> As Swier observes, del Toro has stated that in dying Ofelia is going back to the belly of her mother (2011: 66). Thus she completes the ultimate cycle of going back to where she came from.

<sup>36</sup> 'To enter into the figure of Demeter means to be pursued, to be robbed, raped, to fail to understand, to rage and grieve, but then to get everything back and be born again. And what does all this mean, save to realise the universal principle of life, the fate of everything mortal?' (Jung and Kerényi 1963: 123). 'The promise of happiness in the Mysteries was almost certainly linked with the natural cycle itself, with its endless and necessary alternations between procreation and death.' (Foley 1994: 139).

<sup>37</sup> Lindsay states that the moon is used as a time keeping device in the film 'in direct contrast to the mechanical male time-keeping device of Ofelia's stepfather's watch' (2012: 11). The phases of the moon are of course cyclical, waxing and waning in a recurrent pattern. As Eliade states, 'We may



note that what predominates in all those cosmico-mythological lunar conceptions is the cyclical recurrence of what has been before, in a word, eternal return.' (1954: 88).

<sup>38</sup> Dobson observes that 'The language of the Hymn operates at two levels, the first of which works through image and metaphor, implicitly evoking a matristic world of cyclical, agricultural ritual. The second works on the linear, narrative level, and tells the story of patriarchal domination.' (1992: 44).

<sup>39</sup> Zeus is given the epithet 'the son of Cronos' seven times within the hymn; at vv. 21, 27, 91, 316, 408, 414, 468.

<sup>40</sup> 'The weight of evidence tends to suggest that the *Hymn to Demeter* was composed later than, and with an awareness of, at least the *Theogony*, and perhaps also the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.' (Richardson 1974: 5).

<sup>41</sup> Vidal denies this 'My father didn't have a pocket watch' but del Toro (2006) says that this is a lie which demonstrates the importance of the watch to him. There is a certain ambiguity in this scene as it comes across in the script: Vidal is described as grimacing and chewing his food nervously when one of the officers discusses his father. And del Toro has recently commented that the captain is 'a guy that has the shadow of his father suffocating him' (2013, 100), so it would seem that Vidal's attitude to his father is as ambivalent as Zeus' was to Cronos: Zeus' descent from Cronos is the source of his authority ('the son of Cronos') but in order to rule he has to stop him destroying his own offspring and then depose him. Vivancos also labels Vidal's attitude to his father as 'Oedipal' and suggests that Vidal's attempt to cut the throat of his own reflection with a razor could be interpreted as a stand-in for the dead father (2006: 890).

<sup>42</sup> See also Swier (2011: 68) who makes a similar observation.

<sup>43</sup> It is interesting that clocks are a leitmotif in Edith Wharton's *The Buccaneers*, which owes a similar debt to the myth of Persephone according to Wentzel, who observes that the Duke's obsession with clocks, 'represents the pressures of his duty, namely to marry and produce sons' (2012: 55).

<sup>44</sup> Orme (2010: 229) points out that the scene depicting the rose of immortality which is 'unable to bequeath its gift to anyone' fades to a shot of Vidal sitting alone in his study, tending to his watch. According to Dobson, 'Because the male connection to the natural rhythms of life and death are not as immediate, a man experiences his mortality as a devastation of his individuality.' (1992: 49)

<sup>45</sup> *Saturnus autem est appellatus quod saturaretur annis; ex se enim natos comesse fingitur solitus, quia consumit aetas temporum spatia annisque praeteritis insaturabiliter expletur.* Cicero *de Natura Deorum* 2.64.

<sup>46</sup> See Tsuei (2010: 239-40) on the triangulation between Vidal, the Pale Man and the toad. Tsuei points out that like the Pale Man, Vidal hates children and uses food to achieve his fascist objectives and like the toad, he feasts and deprives others of nutrients.

<sup>47</sup> '[Vidal] is...utterly enslaved by and forced to enact upon others the curse of Kronos' Spector (2009: 83). See also DePaoli (2012) who argues that Vidal suffers from a 'Cronus Complex'.

<sup>48</sup> McGillivray (2012: 16) states that the initiation process appears to have involved journeying through a labyrinth-like structure where the initiate died and was reborn but she offers no citation for this although the Plutarch fragment (note below) does make a reference to 'some frightening paths in the darkness that lead nowhere'. Kerényi (1967: 117) does refer to a late and hostile account of the Mysteries by a Christian Bishop, Asterios of Amaseia which has a vague reference to a dark, subterranean passage playing a part in the initiation.

<sup>49</sup> There is a fragment of Plutarch (178 Sandbach = Stobaeus *Anthologium* 4.52.49) which suggests that wandering, walking in circles, frightening marches through the dark, encountering terrible things and finally being met by a wonderful light may have been part of the process for those initiated into the great mysteries; for a discussion of this fragment see Sourvinou-Inwood (2003: 33-34). On the final beatific vision see Kerényi (1967: 95-102); on the initiates' sense of blessedness which enabled them to live more happily and to die with greater hope see Kerényi (1967: 15).

<sup>50</sup> As Orme observes, '*Pan's Labyrinth* presents both the ending in which Ofelia dies and the open conclusion in which she lives on in the Underground Realm as possible at the same time.' (2010: 232). Thus it is up to viewers (and their way of looking at the world) as to which ending they choose.

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<sup>51</sup> The idea for this article arose from my undergraduate *Classical Mythology* course in which *Pan's Labyrinth* forms the basis of the last tutorial topic. I am grateful to my summer research scholarship student, Max Cooper, for proofreading and formatting this article and making a few suggestions of his own in regard to the Classical mythological parallels. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewer for his/her perceptive criticism and suggestions.