

The Agentic Child: Redefining the Child
Seer in Contemporary Spanish Horror Film

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Summary

This thesis reassesses the actions of the child protagonists in *El laberinto del fauno / Pan's Labyrinth* (del Toro 2006) and *El espinazo del diablo / The Devil's Backbone* (del Toro 2001). I argue that the child protagonists of these films have often been regarded as the mute victims or witnesses to the violence of the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime. Thus, they have frequently been interpreted as ciphers for victimhood in the field of Visual Hispanic Studies.

In this study, I set out to make the case for instances of agency, for the child protagonist's capacity for social participation and for his/her ability to shape or change events within the filmic narrative. Much of the scholarship around child-centred Spanish cinema tends to present childhood as intertwined with victimhood. My analysis moves away from this trend and instead seeks to recognise instances of agency through multimodal analysis of mise-en-scène, dialogue, lighting and characterisation.

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Note on Style

I quote American sources verbatim, including use of American spelling norms.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction: The Child in Cinema or Cinema in the Child?

As we watch Razieh in The White Balloon and think of all the other kids we've seen, it maybe dawns on us that in their display, their road movie, their fleeting emotions, their desire to wreck, their dog-with-a-boneness, their...what's the word? Could it be...cinematic? (Cousins 2013)

The expressive or 'cinematic' nature of the child encapsulates the reason why psychologists, directors and scholars alike are often drawn to presenting youth on the cinema screen. Director Mark Cousins' essay film *A Story of Children in Film* (2013) looks at the portrayal of childhood in 53 films from 25 countries. His production is a monograph

about children in world cinema, seen through the lens of his own niece and nephew at play. He explores the discernible emotions of the children present in films from across the globe, after first seeing the manifestation of such emotions in the real-life interactions of his niece and nephew. The epigram



Figure 1 Still from the short film *Ten Minutes Older* (Frank 1978)

above is taken from the closing lines of Cousins' narration. What he skilfully captures, both through the film and with his words, are the unique qualities that children bring to narratives. The child's gaze offers a novel perspective for the audience and its otherness transgresses the structures of traditional narratives, especially those of war. In her acclaimed work *The Child in Cinema*, Karen Lury states that the presence of the child figure offers

[O]pportunities for transgression which usurp or ignore conventional modes of identification and expressions of sexuality. These qualities suggest that the child figure is a more complex and powerful agent than might otherwise have been expected (Lury 2010, p. 6).

Figure 1 is a still from Hert Frank's *Ten Minutes Older* (Frank 1978) which focuses entirely on the gaze of a child as he watches a thriller film, simultaneously capturing the child on the cinema screen as well as his interactions with cinema. We can trace the presence of the child character in cinema back for decades; both French new wave and Italian neorealist cinema are replete with child and/or youth characters. *The 400 Blows* (Truffaut 1959), *The Bicycle Thieves* (Sica 1948) and *The Children Are Watching Us* (Sica 1944) are but a few examples.¹ These films often tackle complex socio-political and historical issues, fronting their approach through the eyes of the child. Moving southwards to the Iberian Peninsula, we find that this 'child seer'² (Deleuze 1989) came to be a prominent trope of the New Spanish Cinema movement of the late 1970s in films such as *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976), *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973), and *El sur* (Erice 1983). Cousins' aforementioned film essay on the child touches on this in its segment on *El espíritu*, highlighting how child-centred cinema can often place importance on what has occurred out of frame, in this context the Spanish Civil War. He notes how Ana (Torrent) looks and tries to understand the monster and the situation before her. We see this enquiring gaze echoed in del Toro's cinematography. As he put it 'I always cast kids with an intelligent gaze. To me that is the essence of my childhood; a quiet inquisitive stare' (Olson 2016, p. 14). Spanish cinema's fascination with the child began long before this, as we will see. It was the 1970s, however, when the child became an apparatus for considering much darker subject matter and this tendency was sustained and expanded on by the contemporary

¹ In fact, the Lumière brothers featured children, along with animals, in a number of their early films such as *Le Repas de bébé* (Lumière 1895b) and *La pêche aux poissons rouges* (Lumière 1895a). The appeal of animals and children is likely their spontaneity and authenticity.

² According to Deleuze (1989) in Italian neorealist and French new wave cinema that followed the Second World War, the child character often became a witness or onlooker of the scene of violence or devastation. The child seer will be explored in detail in chapter 2.

horror films analysed in this study. My thesis is concerned with child protagonists of the contemporary Spanish language horror genre in two films: *El espinazo del diablo/The Devil's Backbone* (del Toro 2001) and *El laberinto del fauno/Pan's Labyrinth* (del Toro 2006). Previous scholarship focused on a similar genre has argued that the child in narratives of Civil War and dictatorship is metaphorised to articulate larger narrative of loss (Raychaudhuri 2014); other work has claimed that this does not deny the child agency (Weng 2016). This thesis explores this debate and the way film theory has adopted a dominant conception of agency as key to interpreting the role of children in post-Franco Spanish cinema. This conception allows the framing of children as victims, deprived of agency, and focuses on tracing a broader narrative of victimhood. Film theorists, then, are able to extend this interpretation of children's agency to Spain under the Franco dictatorship, arguing that this lack of agency is emblematic of the infantilisation of the Spanish people under the regime (see Kinder 1983).

I argue that such interpretation of children in Spanish cinema is based on a limited understanding of agency, and that it is possible to interpret the role of children in contemporary Spanish horror in a different manner. In this way, the role of children can be reinterpreted as more than a narrative of victimhood in which they are passive.³ This aforementioned tendency to focus on victimisation marginalises both the child protagonists and Spaniards who were subjected to the fascist regime, diminishing their acts of resistance, oppositional practices and their capacity for social and political agency. The cinema of Guillermo del Toro fits in to the category of child-centred cinema:

Many of del Toro's films feature children as central characters-whether witnesses, victims, or *agents*. Often, these children can perceive alternate realities and give expression to unfiltered emotions in ways that adults cannot. (Salvesen et al. 2016, p. 63, emphasis added)

³ It may be that the further away from the Civil War and regime historically, storytellers are less inclined to portray children as hapless victims.

In this thesis, I examine the child protagonists of del Toro's films in order to demonstrate their agency within the narratives, articulating a case against the tendency to interpret them as victims. While my focus in the case studies will be on two specific films—in order to demonstrate how my approach can be applied at the level of close reading—my thesis is also informed by knowledge of the body of Spanish cinema featuring child protagonists that has amassed since the nineteen-fifties. Throughout my work I will dialogue between the close reading and my broader research-based knowledge of the cinematic context to situate the novel insights of my analysis, and to illustrate how it contributes to the new critical approach to children and adolescents in Spanish cinema. My thesis blends history based cultural analysis, Lacanian analysis, and film studies. In this introductory chapter, I first present the various ways children have been portrayed in Spanish cinema both during, and after the Franco regime. I interlink these depictions with societal changes in Spain around the figure of the child, so as to provide historical context. I then turn my focus to the child in Spanish horror. Following this, I provide a brief introduction to director Guillermo del Toro. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how these areas meet in terms of my research and the objectives of this study. The confines of this study, along with the apparent lack of research published on the subject, render it impossible to present a complete history of the child in Spanish society and cinema.⁴ Despite this, I offer here an introduction to child-centred Spanish film and a considered contextual background. The objective of this next section is to deconstruct the critical perception of the Spanish child in society and observe if the child is understood as an active social agent within this sphere.

⁴ Two notable works are *The Formation of the Child in Early Modern Spain* (Coolidge 2014) and *A History of Spanish Film: Cinema and Society 1910-2010* (Faulkner 2013).

A Brief History of the Child in Spanish Cinema



Figure 2 A still from *La gran familia* (1962)

Although Guillermo del Toro, the director of the films analysed in this study, is of Mexican origin, his films are widely considered as examples of Spanish cinema due to their nature as transnational co-productions and their historical setting in the Spanish Civil War and Franco's Spain. To this end, it will be useful to situate this analysis with a brief look at developments around the child in Spanish cinema since the 1960s. One of the most well-known Spanish films concerning the role of the child in the nuclear family is *La gran familia* (Palacios 1962) a film that articulates the Franco regime's attitude towards the core of the family and the importance of reproduction. This popular comedy focuses on the lives of a traditionally large Spanish family and their highs, lows and comedic interactions. Now recognised by most Spaniards as a classic comedy, *La gran familia* was so well-received it led to various sequels including *La familia y uno más* (Palacios 1965). As to be expected from a narrative focused on the life of a family of 15 children, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of reproduction, a value heavily promoted by the regime.⁵ Sally Faulkner goes as far as to state that

⁵ The recent remake *La gran familia Española* (Arévalo 2013) can perhaps signify the continued importance of the family unit in contemporary Spanish society. 'La familia numerosa' is still an

'watching *La gran familia* is like watching a 104-minute version of Franco awarding a prize to the parents of a large family' (Faulkner 2006).⁶ The trilogy served to reinforce Francoist attitudes towards heteronormative reproduction and further embeds the belief that children are inferior to adults. Peter William Evans has noted that in a comedy such as *La gran familia*, children are 'a positive force, helping to cement the relationship of the parents' (Evans 2000, p. 83). This, again, aligns with the desires of the Franco regime, which sought to boost the population and birth-rate, following the losses of the Civil War. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was actioned by the United Nations in 1959, (which interestingly does not define when childhood begins and ends) and brought the rights of children into the political foreground, thus legally differentiating between the adult and the child. However, 'la filtración de este nuevo espíritu legal no fue posible en España hasta la Constitución del 78, que permitirá la redacción de unas nuevas normas sobre los niños con la consideración de sujetos de derechos.' (The inclusion of this new legal attitude was not possible in Spain until the Constitution of 78, which permitted the redaction of new laws on children and the consideration of their human rights) (Suarez Sandomingo 1998, p. 42). Despite certain advances in the treatment of youth then, children continued to lack social status in Spain. This is an attitude also reflected in the lack of academic attention focussed on young people in Spanish scholarship.

Los análisis sobre la juventud, las políticas dirigidas hacia ella, sus formas de vida, sus organizaciones, o su participación en la conflictividad social y política en el periodo anterior a los años 60 del siglo XX son escasos y no han tenido, hasta ahora, una gran continuidad, y como pasa con otros temas históricos, también son escasos los estudios de investigadores españoles sobre la historia de la juventud y de su organización fuera de España y las traducciones de obras sobre este tema. (Kustrín 2007)

[The analyses of youth, the policies aimed at them, their way of life, their organizations, or their participation in social and political conflict in the period prior to the 1960s are scarce and, until now, have been inconsistent.

important concept in Spanish administration and large families continue to access a number of benefits (García 2017). See also <<https://beneficiosfamiliasnumerosas.org/>>.

⁶ It is of note though that these financial prizes for reproduction from Franco were given to the fathers, not the mothers.

Just as with other areas of history, there are few studies by Spanish researchers on the history of youth and its organization outside of Spain and a further lack of translated works on this subject] (my translation).

Kustrin argues that this lack of child-centred studies in Spain was 'probablemente influido por el ya conocido «retraso» español por las décadas de *oscurantismo* de la dictadura franquista.' [Probably influenced by what is now known as the Spanish 'backwardness' during the extremely dark decades of the Franco regime] (Kustrín 2007, p. 182). Although the Franco regime brought with it a new attitude towards children—it placed high value on large families and the 'correct' upbringing of said children—it still neglected to consider them complete members of society. This is something we can note in cinema of the time, because as we move further into the 1960s, we encounter the original *cine con niño* genre. This child-centred genre consists predominantly of *españoladas* (musicals) featuring child stars including Pablito Calvo, Marisol, and Joselito (Lázaro Reboll and Willis 2004). These all-singing, all-dancing child stars were the embodiment of an imposed concept of 'Spanishness'. These children became a way for directors to package a politically-charged nationalist cinema. This is pertinent in the cinema of Marisol:

Marisol's roles and star persona were a composite of different conventions for representing Spanishness available from a range of established genres and new developments in such a way that she embodies both the past and the present. For example, the 'gentle and agreeable' version of realism (García Escudero 1962, pg 25) [sic] which produced church-approved representations of children, contributed particularly to the National-Catholic tone of her second role in *Ha llegado un angel* (Luis Lucia, 1961), in which she restores patriarchal values and 'redeems' a family. (Triana-Toribio 2003, p. 88)

Although these children transitioned into a more central role, their function was still part of a wider narrative and projection of nationalism. It is evident that the child is never regarded as a social actor or agent, or rather, in these musicals the child figure serves a greater purpose of projecting nationalist values such as family

and religion. In the Marisol films, this element is clearly demonstrated through the recurring themes of Catholicism, gender roles and traditional, conservative family values. In Joselito's films, however, these themes are disguised through a narrative that appears to centre itself on Joselito, his talent and longing for familial reunification. At a time when the Franco regime desired a reinvention of Spain and 'Spanishness', with the happy sixties, or 'los felices sesenta' as a backdrop, Marisol was the ideal protagonist. Her blonde curls and chic outfits represented the new European aesthetic for Spaniards and, 'during the socioeconomic transformations of the 1960s, Marisol came to embody a new discourse of Spanishness celebrated by the regime' (Triana-Toribio 2003, p. 87). Through the narratives of her films, Marisol was simultaneously able to emphasise traditional values of the regime and depict tales of morality and religion. Her 'adorable' qualities allowed her to present Francoist values and tackle complex issues of this regime-engineered Spanish nationalism within the framework of a seemingly light-hearted musical focused on an endearing child. Her childness becomes a vessel for political exploitation. Film criticism of this genre also tends to further the reception of the child as a vessel for manipulated meaning.

Marisol, for some critics, is synonymous with a certain 'entertainment's utopia' (Dyer 1992, p. 23) which pacified the masses in the years of economic development when these masses should have been acquiring a political conscience. (Triana-Toribio 2003, p. 85)

This political conscience is something we do begin to see in Spanish arthouse cinema of the 1970s, especially following the death of Franco in 1975. This arthouse, New Spanish cinema movement again sought to repackage the child through its cinema. Directors including Carlos Saura, Víctor Erice and Jaime de Armiñan created what Erin Hogan has called a 'nuevo cine con niño' genre that has followed on until the 2000s. Their revival and rebranding of cine con niño cinema can be characterised by the presence of a 'child witness' of sorts. This child is one who dominates the films of Carlos Saura, in films such as *La prima Angélica*

(Saura 1974), *Pajarico* (Saura 1997), *Deprisa, Deprisa* (Saura 1981) and, of course, *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976).

A cinematic impulse to interrogate childhood experience, including his own, drives the narrative and the message in the set of Saura's films that span the twilight of the dictatorship until 1982 and the establishment of full democratic elections. (Keene 2016)



Figure 3 Ana (Torrent) stares down at her dead father in *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976)

The children of Saura's films often act as a mouthpiece to address dark, political issues and societal rifts. Taking *Cría* as an example, D'Lugo (1991) has observed that Saura forces the audience to identify with the on-screen child (Torrent) through point of view shots and monologues from the protagonist's present day self (Geraldine Chaplin). The child narrator enables Saura to present a narrative that posits the child as spectator, witness and victim simultaneously. As Kinder has pointed out, this is a reflection of his own youth growing up as a child of Franco (Kinder 1983). It is true, then, that the children of the New Spanish Cinema serve a political function too, making comment on the regime's infantilising nature. Bergero has stated that

Francist and transitional films represent...whispering and tremulous children [who] are helpless and uncared-for orphans. (Bergero 2014, p. 635)

In their essay entitled *Visiones y representaciones de la familia (1889-1970)* (2011), Teresa M. Sala and Xavier Roigé have noted the changes in the representation of the family in Spanish cinema that occurred after the death of Franco in the late 70s. They note the satire of the family unit that began to appear in cinema, citing *Vivan los novios* (Berlanga 1970) as one example, a film which parodies the unyielding structure of the family unit and the repressive morality codes of expected social behaviour (Higginbotham 1988) through the lens of marriage and funerals. More importantly, in terms of my argument here, Sala and Roigé point to *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973) as exemplary of a film in which the family unit

[A]parece como desmantelada con unas protagonistas que deben buscar la figura paterna en otros horizontes, y no en la ensimismada figura del padre biológico (Gonzalez Manrique) [appears broken, with protagonists who must find the father figure in other landscapes, and not in the distant figure who is their biological father] (Roigé and Sala 2011, my translation)

The authors go on to elucidate that when the child protagonists, Ana and Isabel, come ultimately to reject their father as the film closes, they are in effect rejecting the established structure of the traditional nuclear family. In this sense, cinema began to show children as individual social actors, something which I argue should be more frequently acknowledged. Instead, film criticism tends to focus on the symbolism in films such as *Espíritu*, namely the way directors use children to represent victims of violence and oppression incurred by the war and regime. This is an idea that will be explored further in later chapters. For now though, it is interesting to note that, although models of the family and children were beginning to change in cinema, this was not a true reflection of the changes that were occurring in the actual attitudes towards the family in Spanish society during the 1970s:

Los cambios en la visión de la familia que nos ofrece el cine fueron mucho más rápidos que las transformaciones reales de la familia. Las películas sugieran una mayor descomposición del modelo de familia conyugal que el que se estaba produciendo en realidad

[The changes that cinema presented us of the image of the family took place much faster than the actual transformations of the family unit. The films suggested a greater disintegration of the model of the conventional family compared to what was actually happening in society] (Chacón and Bestard 2011, p. 839, my translation)

More recently, critically acclaimed films such as *Camino* (Fesser 2008) and *El bola* (Mañas 2000) have presented audiences once again with the child protagonist. The tendency of depicting a dark childhood, initiated by the New Spanish Cinema movement, has been upheld but also adapted slightly. Wright (2014) has noted the way both of these films offer us the presentation of a 'tortured' youth; *Camino* shows the trauma of religion and illness and the effects on a young girl, and *El bola* plays out the story of physical and emotional abuse experienced by a young boy. Wright (2013) highlights the understanding of the category of youth as a crisis point as one that has been intensified in Spanish society by 'la generación nini' (youths who neither work nor study), which has led to the perception of young people in Spain as a 'lost' generation.⁷ We can link this to contemporary Spanish cinema's fascination with the otherness of the child. 'Constructions of the child oscillate, therefore, between viewing the child as other and entering the child's world' (Wright 2013, p. 131). When examining the representation of children in Spain and the aforementioned youth as a crisis point that Wright outlines, it is also difficult to skirt around the issue of the declining birth rate that the country is experiencing. According to the 'Informe Evolución de la familia en España 2016' (2016), 143,423 fewer babies were born in 2014 compared to 1980, constituting a fall of 25.4%. As a result of this, it seems that while fewer children are being born, families are investing more sentimentally in those that are. Chacón and Bestard have articulated this as follows:

Parece una contradicción hablar de la infancia como el centro de las relaciones familiares cuando el índice de natalidad en España ha bajado

⁷ La generación perdida or the lost generation is a widely used term in Spanish journalism to refer to the high numbers of young people in Spain who suffered after the economic crisis, facing zero hour contracts, fixed term, and seasonal work and often are neither able to work nor study (la generación nini). The youth unemployment rate in Spain has been one of Europe's highest since 2008. In 2013, the unemployment rate for 16-19 year olds was 72% (20Minutos 2013).

bruscamente y se sitúa entre los más bajos de Europa. Podríamos decir que se tienen menos hijos y se busca el momento adecuado para tenerlos, pero se invierte sentimentalmente más en ellos. El deseo de descendencia se ha individualizado. No sigue los parámetros de un ciclo familiar clásico, un imperativo de la estructura familiar. En una sociedad con relaciones sociales cada vez más abstractas y anómicas, la búsqueda de relaciones concretas y personales se materializa en el deseo del hijo.

[It would be a contradiction to talk about infancy as the centre of familial relations when the birth rate in Spain has dramatically declined and is now one of the lowest in Europe. We could deduce that people are having less children and are waiting for the right moment to have them but *are investing more sentimentally in them*. The desire for offspring has individualised. It doesn't follow the parameters of a traditional familial circle, an imperative of the family structure. *In a society with social relations becoming more abstract and anomalous, the search for concrete and personal relations materializes in the desire to have children*] (Chacón and Bestard 2011, p. 978, my translation, emphasis added)

Considering these assertions, it may be that Spanish people, while having fewer children, are placing a greater importance on the child. If we link this to child-centred Spanish cinema, it is worth noting the rise in films that depict the missing child. *Ismael* (Piñeyro 2013), *Secuestro* (Targarona 2016), *L'Adopció* (Féjerman 2015), *Los sin nombre* (Balagueró 1999) and short film *Leones* (Arévalo 2017) are all films that are based around the missing/absent child or the search for a child. In *Cinema's Missing Children* (2003), Emma Wilson aligns this predilection to focus on the missing child with a desire to stage an encounter with the real and the Real.⁸ If we associate this idea of the disappeared child with the stolen children of Francoism that are now ever present in political media, and the rapidly declining birth-rate facing Spain, we can begin to detect the reasons behind the filmic missing child and the tendency of horror film directors in Spain to turn to the uncanny, monstrous child as a cinematic device.

Conventional horror films tend to use the missing child, or threats to the child's existence, in order to generate fear on the part of the spectator. However, the

⁸ Vighi (2006) has applied this Lacanian reading to Italian film *La stanza del figlio/The son's room* (Moretti 2001). He contends that the death of the son in the narrative opens up a traumatic void in the symbolic institution of the family (Vighi 2006, p. 164). This reading can be applied to many of the Spanish horror films mentioned; the family unit suffers a traumatic encounter with the Real as a result of the missing or monstrous child character.

desire to articulate the subject of the missing child in Spanish cinema can be further linked to the guilt or shared responsibility of the Spanish nation for the historical and contemporary suffering of the child. With all these factors in hand, it is perhaps difficult to interpret children in Spain as agentic social subjects. The declining birth-rate and increased sentimental investment in the child may indeed lead to adults fetishising the childness of the child, or childhood conceived as 'delay' and even the otherness of the child. Yet, it is the otherness of the child that we see so often in Spanish horror film, as the next section will examine.

The Child in Spanish Horror Film

The Spanish horror film is an extremely hybrid genre that intersects themes, aesthetics, and modes including the gothic, magical realism, historical, thriller, and black comedy:

Between 1995 and 2015, Spanish horror has evolved into a significant phenomenon: important films have been made, many of them combining elements of horror with psychological thriller, fantasy, science-fiction or humour. (Marí 2017, p. 1)

Its unique relevance within the Spanish film scene can perhaps be attributed to the country's own treatment of historical events that have quite literally been unspeakable horrors. Through the medium of cinema, filmmakers are able to articulate difficult subject matter. As with many of the Spanish films mentioned so far, the child in Spanish horror recurrently figures as a method of articulating trauma, memory, and entrenched fears circulating in Spanish society. We have seen this figure in recent contemporary Spanish cinematic outputs such as *El orfanato* (Bayona 2007), *Los ojos de Julia* (Morales 2010), *REC* (Balagueró 2007), and *Los otros* (Amenábar 2001). This child of Spanish horror is often one that transgresses boundaries, traversing themes of the abject, the other, the uncanny and the missing child. By considering the Franco regime's treatment of children, we are able to understand more about Spanish horror cinema director's recourse

to childhood to perform a critique of the dictatorship and to attempt to work through the traumas of the past by restaging memories around the figure of the child.

In this light, when considering the children of Spanish horror as the embodiment of repressed national trauma we must consider the stolen children of the Franco regime. Under the dictatorship (1936-1975), hundreds of thousands of children were forcibly removed from their families. From the early 1940s, babies were taken away from Republican parents, in some cases almost immediately after birth, and given to right wing Catholic families deemed worthier of children by the state. These proceedings initiated an ideological cleansing of sorts in which the regime carried out the systematic kidnapping of children. Many families were told that their babies had died, with no idea that they had been reassigned a family and would never know that they were adopted. 'Se cambiaban nombres y apellidos, se borraba toda unión, toda identidad, toda memoria' [they changed the names and surnames, they removed all traces of connection, identity and memory] (Banderas Republicanas 2016). This system was actioned by Franco when he decreed the 'ley de desaparición infantil' on 4th December 1941, allowing for the changing of children's names on birth certificates, thus impeding the reunification of parents with their own children, in most cases, forever.

The regime allowed children to be trafficked and adopted illegally. Franco ordered the return of many children that had been sent abroad during the Civil War for their safety, however, when they were returned, it was to the care of the state. This meant that many were 'reallocated' to families the regime viewed as suitable and were re-educated in 'centros de auxilio social' — regime led social welfare centres run by Falangist women (Payne 1999, p. 257). This process was principally facilitated by the Catholic Church; doctors, priests and nuns actively removed babies from their parents, collaborating with Franco's scheme for the elimination of his enemies (Gatti 2016). The amnesty law of 1977 was not repealed until 2012, meaning that there was no national investigation into the scandal, only specific

regional attempts.⁹ An investigation into the various atrocities of the regime was initiated in 2008 by Baltasar Garzón but it was short-lived, and he was forced to drop his inquiry.¹⁰ As has been the case with other countries including Argentina and South Africa, in Spain there has never been any sort of truth and reconciliation council to deal with the past or hold the perpetrators to accountability. As of 2011, Spain's judicial system began to examine cases of stolen children from the 1960s; however, it has been verified that cases of stolen children were occurring right up until the 1980s (M. Yagüe 2011). The regime had instigated child trafficking that continued for decades after the death of the dictator. A documentary from the European Journal covering the scandal rather fittingly compared these events to the plot of a horror film (DWEnglish 2011).

In today's Spain, the media and news coverage of the scandal has been continuous and extensive, with numerous reports and testimonies saturating the media.¹¹ The events were even dramatised in a television series titled *Niños robados* (Calvo 2013) that recreated the proceedings in a theatrical thriller style. As we saw previously, this motif of the missing or lost child is played out in notable examples of European cinema: *The Son's Room* (Moretti 2001) and *Three Colours Blue* (Kieślowski 1993) are two prominent examples.¹² In the Spanish context, we find numerous horror titles. *Los sin nombre* (Balagueró 1999), *El orfanato* (Bayona 2007) and *Secuestro* (Targarona 2016) are works that depict the missing child, and in the case of *El orfanato*, the monstrous missing child. Again, we are reminded of the previous discussion on the power of the child other to articulate an encounter with the traumatic, which in turn questions the symbolic structure of the institution

⁹ For more information see: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKx5q4v7Dzw>> and <<http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/informe-semanal/informe-semanal-ninos-robados-del-franquismo-reclaman-su-memoria/356136/>>

¹⁰ The first stolen baby case from the Franco dictatorship made it to court in August 2018. For more information, see <<https://www.npr.org/2018/08/14/638629411/first-stolen-baby-case-from-franco-dictatorship-goes-to-court-in-spain?t=1534593424356>>

¹¹ The latest in this steady stream of coverage is a documentary from German director Inga Bremer titled *Franco's Legacy – Spain's Stolen Children*. For more information see the following page <<http://soilfilms.com/project/francos-legacy-spains-stolen-children/>>

¹² See *Cinema's Missing Children* (Wilson 2003) and *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema Scahill* (Olson and Scahill 2012) for further examples and analytical study.

of the family. In the opening of *Sex, Sadism and Spanish Cinema* (2015), author Nicholas Schegel reminds readers of critic Robin Wood's words:

One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses and oppresses. (Wood cited in Schlegel 2015)

As Schegel has identified, this concept has a unique resonance in the Spanish context and I would further extend this to the specific experience of the child in Spain. This cinematic child also articulates the intensified child other; a child that was forcibly removed from the family environment. Esther Peeren has commented that

To declare someone missing may also be a way of denying death, of allowing those known to have perished to live on in a ghostly realm of indeterminacy. (Peeren 2014, p. 145)

Her thoughts can indeed be applied to many Spanish contemporary horror narratives, including those mentioned above, that perhaps align the missing child protagonists with the children that went missing and never returned during the Franco years. Where the missing child of post-Franco cinema came to be a stand in for the thousands of children who vanished during the regime, perhaps the missing child in contemporary output has also come to embody Spain's rapidly declining birth-rate.¹³ This, along with some 40% of Spanish children now living in poverty as of April 2017¹⁴, has formed part of the so-called social crisis that hit youth the hardest (Sedghi 2014). Whilst secondary school dropout rates are improving along with the percentage of young people that neither work nor study (la generación nini)¹⁵, these previously high statistics could all have contributed to the portrayal of the child in horror film as the uncanny 'other', reminding adults both of the traumas of the past and fears about wider, contemporary societal changes

¹³ This is perhaps seen in *REC* (Balagueró, 2007). The film is bookended with two key characters: the young innocent child at beginning and the abject monstrous elderly lady that ends the film, with the appearance of whom the film ends.

¹⁴ <<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2017-04-20/40-spanish-children-live-poverty>>

¹⁵ According to studies carried out by the BBVA Foundation, Spain, the percentage of school drop outs has decreased from 31.7% in 2013 to 18.3% in 2017 (Expansión 2018).

and cultural discourse that are quite literally embodied in the figure of the child of Spanish horror. In an effort to summarise this proclivity, Pramaggiore explains that

[I]n short, dictatorship and its complex aftermath, in addition to rapid secularization, declining birth-rates and increasing immigration, characterize the political economy of both Spain and Uruguay and play a role in the discourse of children in horror. (Pramaggiore 2017)

This is indeed a seemingly accurate summation of the role of the child in much of Spanish horror. The danger of the proliferation of this kind of cinema and consequential scholarship is a further othering of the child and a colonisation of the other. Pramaggiore further identifies that, while Spanish horror films that feature the child

[C]ertainly allude to the depredations of the Franco dictatorship, they also reflect contemporary histories, especially those related to the biopolitics of reproduction and migration in the 21st century. (Pramaggiore 2017, p. 67)

Pramaggiore reminds us here that the child character of Spanish horror intertwines historiographical approaches to interrogate trauma of the past, as well as contentions around futurity and the politicisation of the child figure in present-day society. In my examination of Spanish child-centred narratives, I recognise these reflections whilst foregrounding the agency of the child characters within del Toro's horror films, an element that has made his cinema distinct and captivating. In the following section, I briefly introduce the reader to director Guillermo del Toro and the films analysed in this study.

Guillermo del Toro

I argue that director del Toro offers audiences a new perspective and uses cinematic techniques to underscore the agency of the child character. Del Toro has featured the child protagonist in a number of films. However, this analysis will focus specifically on the films *El espinazo del diablo / The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *El laberinto del fauno / Pan's Labyrinth* (del Toro 2006) due to their setting in the context of the Spanish Civil War. It must be acknowledged that while del Toro's films are set in Spain, the director himself is of Mexican origin. Regardless, *El*

espinazo and *El laberinto* have generally been classed as examples of Spanish cinema. Del Toro worked with an international crew and cast during production, storyboarding, and shooting processes and the films focus on significant events in Spanish history — the regime and the Civil War. Further to this, *El laberinto* was also accepted in Spain's GOYA awards 'without controversy' as a Spanish film (Smith 2007). Furthermore, Mexico and Spain have certain parallels in terms of turbulent political history. Dolores Tierney (2014) points out the 'transnational political horror' present in del Toro's trilogy, citing the impact of NAFTA¹⁶ on Mexico and the question of the recovery of historical memory in Spain as fundamental when considering the contexts of del Toro's films. Thus, we can see that Praggiamore's previous assertion around the child character's reflection of contemporary histories (2017) sheds light on the socially engaged nature of del Toro's cinema. Del Toro has also noted his own childhood experiences as influential in creating the narrative for both films. His spiritual interactions through his Grandmother's influence and his time spent in a Jesuit boy's school, much like Luis Buñuel, both have clear influences on the cinematic content. *El espinazo* is set in an orphanage for young boys who are tormented by the caretaker. *El laberinto* focuses heavily on Ofelia's interactions with the mystical, spiritual world.

As a result of the political and social undertones present in the films, a great deal of scholarship has interpreted del Toro's child protagonist as a portrait of national allegory, an allegory that centralises the concept of victimhood, repression and suffering.¹⁷ Nonetheless, I argue that these films are also ideal case studies for re-examining the child protagonist's status as an assumed cipher of victimhood. While the films do react to the events of a traumatic Spanish past, my analysis will move beyond the limits of the equation of child as a vessel for victimhood. Instead, I concentrate on the ways in which the child demonstrates participation in social movement and active resistance to the systemic repression of Franco's Spain. This interpretative shift also corresponds to a wider reinterpretation of the Civil War period, which I will expand on in due course. Del Toro puts a heavy emphasis on

¹⁶ The North American Free Trade agreement of was expanded to include Mexico in 1994.

¹⁷ Examples include (Raychaudhuri 2014; Sabbadini 2014; Vargas 2014; Weng 2016). For further reading on the academic trend that places the child as a passive victim see Hogan (2011)

disobedience; a resistance to the 'norm'. In fact, when asked in an interview about his decision to set *El laberinto* in the Spanish mountains during the year 1944, del Toro explains

El momento de España en 1944 es el momento en el que la línea de pensamiento se vuelve a una zona en el que te dicen solamente lo que tienes que creer, lo que debes de pensar, se parece un poco al momento que estamos viendo ahora [2003] extrañamente, un momento en el que el péndulo está volviendo políticamente a la derecha, no solo en Estados Unidos sino en el mundo [...] y yo creo es un momento en el que la desobediencia es un deber [Spain in 1944 was a time when thought became another area in which they told you how to think, what you should be thinking, and this seems a lot like what we are going through currently [2003] strangely, a time when the pendulum is swinging towards the political right wing, not only in the United States but the world over and I think we're at a moment in time when disobedience is a duty]. (del Toro 2012, my translation)

This inclination towards disobedience is an important factor in my recognition of agency when studying the child protagonists of del Toro.

Conclusion

This chapter has been an introduction to the developments in conceptions of the child in Spanish society and a brief look at the evolutions of the 'cine con niño' genre and/or prominent Spanish child-centred cinema. Whilst I do not examine actual children nor children's testimony in this research, I have deemed it important to provide a background that considers changing perceptions of the child in Spanish contemporary society, as this has influenced both filmic representations of the child and consequent film scholarship. This foundation will serve as a background to the focus of this thesis, which is to propose new readings of the child in contemporary Spanish horror film that incorporate a more encompassing definition of agency. It seeks to analyse the child as a social actor in two horror films using several theories of agency, which will be discussed in the chapter on my theoretical framework, to bring about novel interpretations of the uncanny Spanish horror child.

In terms of the sources used, the focus is on *El espinazo del diablo/The Devil's Backbone* (del Toro 2001) and *El laberinto del fauno/Pan's Labyrinth* (del

Toro 2006), contemporary Spanish horrors that feature child protagonists. While there have been studies on the children in Francoist cinema and the New Spanish Cinema movement of the 1970s, scarce research has been published on this child of Spanish horror. Consequently, further research is both valuable and necessary in order to understand and explore the full potential of the child in the cinema of Spain. I will attempt to breathe life into perhaps well-worn, existing interpretations of Spanish culture from scholars and writers already active in the realm of Spanish cinema. This study of the child in Spanish horror seeks to illuminate new understandings of Spanish cinema and the value in understanding children as social actors. The following chapter offers a review of the relevant literature and explores the established readings of the child in Spanish child-centred film.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will outline the dominant interpretation of children in Spanish contemporary horror film as passive victims. I demonstrate where this reading has been established by academics and critics. Throughout the research that I undertook for this thesis, I found myself repeatedly faced with the notion that childhood is a stage of incompleteness and a phase to be surpassed. This idea suffuses a large part of Hispanic studies scholarship, thanks to the boom of memory studies at the turn of the century.¹⁸ What I have been able to discern is that children are not valued as complete human beings, and thus denied agency and often reduced to the status of passive onlooker. This attitude in cinema scholarship runs the risk of overlooking the potency of the child character. I have traced the presence of this outlook from filmmakers and critics alike. Of course, this phenomenon is not unique to Spain. What is unique to Spain, however, is the influence that the Civil War and the succeeding Franco regime has had on Spanish cinema's outlook on the child. One of the most prominent critics to address this in academic literature is John Hopewell in his book *Out of the Past* (1986), as evidenced in the following quotation taken from the blurb.

In his perceptive analysis of the 'difference' of Spanish film, with their frequent emphasis on the family, solitude, childhood and fantasy, John Hopewell argues that this difference can only be understood when it is related to the traumas of Spanish history. (1986)

Consequently, it is crucial that we explore the concept of childhood in Spanish cinema since the regime, in order to understand the distinctive nature of this cinematic child. Spanish citizens were wholly infantilised by the Franco dictatorship and its oppressive laws, regulations, surveillance, and censorship. Furthermore, Spaniards who suffered during the war and under the regime were condemned to a prolonged silence; their plights never acknowledged. The Law for

¹⁸ Memory studies is used to refer to the increase in scholarship that sought to examine the past.

Historical Memory that initiated the gradual process of recuperation and memorialisation that is evidently still on-going in today's Spain, was not decreed by the government until 2007. Zapatero's decision to pass 'la Ley por la que se reconocen y amplían derechos y se establecen medidas en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia durante la Guerra Civil y la Dictadura' [the Law by which rights are recognised and extended and measures are established in favour of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and the Dictatorship] meant that the gaping wounds of historical trauma were reopened. Whilst similar regimes have been imposed in other countries throughout history, some of which are ongoing into the present day, the case of Spain is idiosyncratic in its infantilisation of citizens, extension of trauma through an enforced silence and prolonged censorship regime.¹⁹ To this end, in much cinema and scholarship, the child has indeed been assigned the role of the 'motor-helpless' onlooker (Deleuze 1989, p. 3). In order to provide a critical evaluation of existing work, this chapter will offer an exploration of the perspective of this child character in the field of Hispanic studies, a glimpse into this outlook in broader critical perspectives on global cinema, a brief review of the relevant childhood studies literature and a summary of the field of Spanish horror film studies.

¹⁹ When remembering similar dictatorships the reader might consider the Argentina's 'Dirty War' and the 'Children of the disappeared', Mussolini's Italy, and Nazi Germany.

The Current Field of Scholarship



Figure 4 Ana goes to the cinema in *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973)

In one of the early sequences of Victor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973), the spectator follows the excursion of Ana (Ana Torrent) and her sister Isabel to the visiting cinema. The girls grow up in the small Spanish village of Hoyuelos during the years succeeding the Spanish Civil War. As Ana settles down to watch the screening of James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), Erice offers us an arresting capture of Ana's gaze as she drinks in the events that play out on the screen before her (see Figure 4). Evocative of Frank's *Ten Minutes Older* (1978) as we saw in the introduction (see Figure 1), the film immediately homes in on the gaze of the child spectator. This early emphasis on the young protagonist underscores the director's use of the child as a device to consider the intersecting themes of memory, the cinema, and the witness. These are consequently some of the main themes of analytical scholarship on Spanish film.

Sarah Wright is the author of what is currently the most comprehensive study on children in Spanish cinema with her monograph *The Child in Spanish Cinema* (2013), an extensive journey through Spanish cinema featuring child protagonists. Wright articulates this aforementioned capture of the child

protagonist in her analytical thought. Beginning in the nineteen-fifties with *Marcelino, pan y vino* (Vajda 1955), Wright weaves her way through the decades of 'cine con niño' up until the present day, from 'cine religioso' to films featuring angelic and demonic children, concluding with the film *Camino* (Fesser 2008). Wright concludes with a comment on the child's paradoxical motif:

The child emerges as a potent motif not just for the loss of historical memory, but also for its recuperation through cinema. [...] The child's relationship to time can speak to nostalgia and loss, but it can also be a malleable icon to project forwards into the future. (Wright 2013, p. 158)

For Wright, then, the child in Spanish cinema is always a motif, a symbol for either historical memory or indeed, the future. It works as a flexible instrument for directors to convey a panoply of meaning. This idea, of Spain growing up on film, through the figure of the child, is also something noted previously by John Hopewell (1986). Later, we will see other works that draw on Wright's twofold reading of this child, such as the writing of Fiona Noble. Wright's monograph serves as the ideal starting point for research into the child in Spanish cinema and its often-overlooked significance. As Wright's book does in great detail, in this section I trace the development of scholarship on the child protagonist in Spanish cinema to provide a context for the analysis of contemporary horror film.

Marsha Kinder published one of the earliest, most detailed studies on child-centred Spanish cinema. She has described the directors of the New Spanish Cinema movement as Franco's Children (1983). Like Wright, Kinder looks at the aims of directors when constructing child-centred cinematic narratives. Although it was published some thirty years ago now, her writing provides a critical insight into the work of the directors of the New Spanish Cinema of the 1970s, who were in fact children growing up during the Franco regime. Kinder assesses the work of Carlos Saura, Victor Erice, and José Luis Borau, among others. She studies the various types of child portrayed and contemplates the position of the directors themselves, who she states

were led to see themselves as emotionally stunted children who were no longer young; who, because of the imposed role of “silent witness” to a tragic war that had divided country, family and self, had never been innocent. (Kinder 1983, p. 58)

The cinematic child becomes a way for these directors to return to the past, giving them a form of agency to voice the perspective of the defeated of the war. The child here reflects the directors’ own infantilisation, through censorship under the regime. Thus, their inclusion of the child in the cinematic narrative works to create emotive and leftist sympathies about the damage of the Civil War. ‘Doomed attempts to escape from the present, to shelter in childhood, to rewrite the past have been key themes of post-Franco cinema.’ (Hopewell 1986, p. 25). Taking Saura’s *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976) as one cinematic example, it is possible to view Saura’s use of the suffering mother (Geraldine Chaplin) and the oppressed child (Ana) in the film to hint that the legacy and trauma of the dictatorship (the tyrannical deceased father) will continue to affect generations to come. Ultimately, though, the gaze of the child (Ana), is the gaze of the auteur; Saura. In other words, she comes to act as a stand-in for Saura to articulate the traumas of his own childhood under Franco on the cinema screen.

In this way, the child becomes emblematic of traumatic pasts. In fact, Karen Lury (2010) analyses the various ways the child is ‘anthropomorphised’ in narratives of war. Her analysis is familiar territory in terms of this thesis as she explores *The Devil’s Backbone* (del Toro 2001) and *Pan’s Labyrinth* (del Toro 2006). Taking the instantly recognisable face of Ana Torrent as illustration, Lury compares different critical reactions to the symbolical value of her large dark eyes.

The unreadable face of the child is therefore often interpreted or anthropomorphised to fit the political and emotional agenda of the interested adult critic. And the child as a vivid and emotive presence, is all too often a vehicle for adult concerns and fears, and fails to act or represent its own interests and desires. (2010, p. 109)

She continues to explain how the child also becomes a 'vehicle for adult agenda' in an autobiographical sense, remembering war-time narratives. Citing *Au revoir les enfants* (Malle 1987) and *Hope and Glory* (Boorman 1987) as examples, she outlines the cinematic double voice of the child; 'his limited and often unconventional view of the world and war is framed by the adult's knowingness and retrospective understanding' (Lury 2010, p. 109). We are reminded of Martin-Jones' theorisations of the (adult) child seer, derived from Deleuze's time image. (Martin-Jones 2011).²⁰ Although Lury does point out that ultimately children in narratives of war are not simply witnesses but agents, there are numerous arguments in film criticism and analysis that centre on the autobiographical role of the child protagonist. Anindya Raychaudhuri (2014) furthers Lury's claim that cinema and critics co-opt the child, maintaining that

child protagonists are created specifically as locations of innocent vulnerability against which aggressive violence can be seen to act and with which it can be juxtaposed. (2014, p. 208)

He evidences this claim by looking at the way children's voices are in fact overlooked in Spanish Civil War narratives, which at first seem to centre on the child and their perspective. In a similar vein, his PhD thesis *(En)gendered Loss: Gender, Mourning and Memory in Narratives of the Spanish Civil War* (2010) features a section titled 'Constructions of Childhood'. Through the study of a handful of child protagonists in 'coming of age narrative' films, whose themes are largely focused on the Civil War, Raychaudhuri analyses how childhood is mapped onto narratives of loss and is, 'metaphorized'. Concerning my own research, one of the most fascinating assertions made by Raychaudhuri is the following:

Much of the existing criticism on these films, including for example, Kinder's 'Children of Franco' thesis, implicitly assumes adulthood to be a more desirable condition [than childhood]. State censorship of directors is thus metaphorised as infantilization. (Raychaudhuri 2010, p. 219)

²⁰ In Cinema 2, Deleuze equates the role of the child in neorealist, post WW2 cinema is that of the seer, that gazes at or witnesses the optical situation. This child is the seer rather than the agent, according to Deleuze.

This idea touches on one of my own research aims which involves examining current constructions and conceptualisations of childhood and how traditional definitions of the child affect its use and reception in film. If directors and critics always understand childhood to signify an inferior, transitory period, a state of implied vulnerability and/or innocence, or a period of latency, it will continue to be 'metaphorised' in narratives and works of fiction as a stand in for a generalised victimhood. I argue for the dissemination of new readings and theories of childhood to produce original readings of child-centred Spanish horror film. It seems that Raychaudhuri's research looks towards this but without enough scope in his project at the time, it was perhaps not possible to explore this further as I intend to do with my research. Furthermore, Raychaudhuri's perspective is that of a historian, he does not speak or understand Spanish, meaning his interpretations of the films are restricted to an English translation that may not be absolutely reliable or culturally informed. Whilst his writing is extremely comprehensive in its explanation and exemplification of how directors constructing pro-Republican narratives were able to use the symbolic potential of childhood innocence to their advantage, the route it takes is one that veers more towards how these child protagonists are further conditioned to grow up into their normative gender roles. As I have found with the majority of critical scholarship, his work does not address the fact that despite many disagreements on other matters, Republicans and Nationalists were equally wedded to hetero-patriarchal normativity. This is a blind spot that calls for a queer reading, which I will introduce in my theoretical chapter.

When thinking about on and off-screen perceptions of the child, Miaowei Weng's doctoral thesis becomes relevant: *Franco's Children: Representations of Franco-Era Childhood in Contemporary Spanish Literature and Cinema*. (Weng 2012). Weng's writing looks at the historical figure of the child, taking stock of previously mentioned works. She studies childhoods shaped by the dictatorship both on and off of the cinema screen, noting that many directors express the need to 'confront the national past in order to leave it behind in the future' (Weng 2016,

p. 66). Focusing later on contemporary film, she categorises child-centred narratives as part of the 'memory boom' genre. As a consequence, she argues, there is a focus on children in art tasked with lifting the collective amnesia around the Civil War and the Franco regime. Fiona Noble, who also completed her PhD thesis in the area of Spanish cinema, highlights similar themes. Her thesis is titled *Post-Transition Transitions: Childhood, Performance and Immigration in Post-Franco Spanish Cinema* (2015). Further to this, I was able to watch her present her research at the Childhood and Nation in World Cinema Conference at Royal Holloway in 2016, with a presentation entitled 'Who Can Kill a Child? Childhood (and) Death in Contemporary Spanish Cinema' (Noble 2016b). She is also the author of the *Spanish Cinephilia* (2016a), a site she regularly updates with articles on Hispanic Cinema which feature the figure of the child. When explaining her general interpretations of the child in her thesis, Noble noted the difference between her work and Sarah Wright's (2013):

Though motivated by a shared interest in the relations amongst child, history and cinema, Wright reads the child as a means of animating the past, while I interpret this figure as a metaphor for the blockage of Republican memory under Franco. (2015)

Thus, we can begin to notice a variety of interpretations of the child within the current field of scholarship and use them to stimulate new readings. Noble's chapter within her thesis focuses on the intersection between childhood and history, specifically Francoism. In films such as *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976) and *El espinazo del diablo* (del Toro 2001), Noble analyses the narrative of exploration of the past through the lens of children and childhood. Pivoting skilfully around the themes of time, death, and gender, Noble forces us to question just what is so potent in child-centred cinematic works. The figural child enables directors to call up memory, and often construct a Republican narrative of the Civil War and thrust it into the spotlight. Noble concludes by confirming the potentialities of childhood as a device that conjures memory and alternative Republican narratives:

[T]hese cinematic articulations [*Espíritu*, *Cría*, *Laberinto* and *Espinazo*] of the child highlight the gaps and fissures of Francoist historiography and its post-memory retrieval. (Noble 2015)

If we move from strictly pre-pubescent children to consider instead, youth in general, it is possible to trace film criticism that does look at the mistreatment of children and youth by Spanish cinema. In his analysis of *Pasajes*, Ryan Prout concentrates on the representation of youth and the young Basque woman. Citing Palacios' (1998) argument that 'Spanish cinema featuring young people, and/or made by them, ends to regard youth as a malady which must be overcome by age', Prout then links this idea to Robert Cueto's writing that 'traces the reluctance to depict young people as transgressive agents of social change back to the regime' (2000). I believe this final thought is something we have seen exemplified in the cinema and scholarship analysed in this chapter. In Spanish society, the child is a figure which has not only been repressed, but as a concept has been constantly manipulated for political means and denied status as a social actor in their own right. Even in the films of Marisol, who brings about cultural change, she is more like a puppet of the regime (Hogan 2013). To summarise this section on the scholarship on Spanish cinema's child, I am drawn back to Prout's thoughts on the conception of the child in literature, film and criticism. In his monograph on the writings of Juan Goytisolo (2001), Prout points out that

[W]hilst gay men and women, disabled persons, and ethnic minorities struggle to establish rights for themselves, the voices of children, many of whom undoubtedly suffer untold abuses, horrors, and crimes, continue to go unheard. Goytisolo's forgetting of himself, of the creative and artistic child that he was, seems to be all too common a phenomenon and with regard to this feature his narrative can indeed be said to be comprehensive and global in that the oversight of children seems to know no cultural or social boundaries. (Prout 2001, p. 123)

In his analysis of the writings of Goytisolo, Prout moves towards the finding of Pedophobia. While I do not believe that the treatment of the child in the aforementioned works can be attributed to elements of Pedophobia, what is common of these Spanish cinematic works is their entrenched understanding that

childhood is a less important, transitory state that will be surpassed or overcome. This can be seen in the various ways that the children are used within narratives (and society). Children are destined to take on roles that render them as supplementary elements. As we have seen in this chapter and in the introduction, they are tools to cement matrimonial partnerships and ways to extend a family and thus achieve better status under the regime. They represent nationalist discourse of a so-called 'Spanishness'. Metaphorised as victims, anthropomorphised children are moulded into these various forms in order to portray trauma. Whilst this project acknowledges these tendencies, its objective is to instead focus on examples of agency in the narratives. The section that follows discusses the child used as a figural lens within cinema and how academic work has interpreted this cinematic trend.

The Child as a Lens

Marvin D'Lugo, in his work on Carlos Saura (1991) has offered important interpretations of the character that often bears witness and spectates events in Saura's films. This is the child as *spectator-in-the-text*:

The audience orients itself to the fiction initially through the classical conventions of on-screen "spectators-in-the-text". Nick Browne has described this type of visual-narrative enunciation so common to classical narrative cinema: "An impression of perceptual authority which the spectator assumes presents itself as being derived from places of characters within the fiction" (Browne 1981, 258). *Tellingly, the first of these on screen surrogates for the real spectator is an innocent child* beguiled by the impression of prowess of Juan's bullfighting gestures and movements. (D'Lugo 1991, p. 38, emphasis added)

In the writing that follows, D'Lugo describes in further detail the way that Saura uses this spectator character to 'engage his spectator actively in the process of inquiry' (D'Lugo 1991). The audiences of Saura's films are 'manipulated to view that fiction through cinematic conventions and the ways the character looks at the world around them' (D'Lugo 1991). *Los golfos/Hooligans* (Saura 1960) is the focus of D'Lugo's analysis and he evaluates how Saura evades traditional narrative

structures in the film and forces the audience to decipher what their onscreen spectator counterpart is viewing and understanding from illogical mise-en-scène and analepsis. D'Lugo further states that Saura is

exposing for the audience the ways in which their prior conditioning to certain habits of social as well as cinematic sight have led them into a number of critical impasses in their reading of the films narrative scheme. (D'Lugo 1991, p. 39)

Reminiscent of Tomas Gutiérrez Alea's illustrious *Dialéctica del espectador* (1982) and his aim to awaken the cinematic spectator from their passive trance, Saura attempts to make his audience aware of their own passivity, detachment, and social blindness to subjugation in history through subverting their expectations to follow a traditional narrative structure in the film. This process is carried out by the spectator in the text character. This is a character through/with whom we view events. As D'Lugo highlights, in *Los golfos* the first of these spectators is an 'innocent child'. This child spectator, D'Lugo argues, is common to Spanish cinema as a framing device. Saura utilises him to 'pair the cinematic, fictional looks of his characters with his spectators socially determined habits of looking' (D'Lugo 1991). In this way the child character can become part of a larger objective to urge the spectator to reassess their practices of looking in the social sphere. Equally though, it is still possible to regard the child as possessing agency within this wider narrative arc, as this research will later demonstrate.

This spectator in child form is also referred to as '*the child focalizer*'. Eduardo Ledesma (2012) explains that in Spanish and Latin American cinema there are two discernible kinds of child focaliser. Using the films *Rodrigo D: No future* (Gaviria 1990) and *El Bola* (Mañas 2000) as his case studies, Ledesma looks at marginalised children and youth and the presentation of violence. He notes that while both the films focalise the child, *Rodrigo D* uses internal focalization to approach 'the adult spectator to the youth's subjectivity' (Ledesma 2012, p. 154). *El Bola*, meanwhile, uses external focalization, incurring a 'less direct identification with its child protagonist, as the spectator adopts the position of the sympathetic

and protective (but distanced) adult.’ (Ledesma 2012, p. 154). Ledesma further claims that the internal focalisation in the former film ‘renders the adolescents as free subjects with a degree of agency’ (2012, p. 154). In the films discussed in this research, the child can be read as the focaliser. The events of both films, however, focalise the child by centring the action around them. Despite the external focalisation of the child, I believe it is still possible to read the child protagonists as possessing agency. Georgia Seminet articulates that the child focaliser is often used to embody history, and moreover, in terms of Latin American cinema, to ‘denounce the civil violence that has traumatized the citizens of the region’ (Seminet 2012, p. 65). This of course can be, and has been, applied in the Iberian context by many film scholars. The consequence of this as a device, then, is that, coupled with external focalization, the tendency can be to interpret this child figure as passive, blank slate. I tend to disagree with this and this will be demonstrated in the following film analysis.

This brings us to the concept of *the child seer* (Deleuze 1989) and by association, the adult child seer (Martin-Jones 2011). As Martin-Jones outlines, Deleuze first mentions the idea of the child seer in the first chapter of *Cinema 2* (1989, p. 3). He considers the movement from the action image to the time image, in which the seer becomes present as a witness to time passing (Martin-Jones 2011, p. 72):

The role of the child in neo-realism has been pointed out, notably in De Sica (and later in France with Truffaut); this is because in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing. (Deleuze 1989)

Martin-Jones reframes the child as seer, differentiating between films set in the past and those set in the present day. Through a comparison of neorealism and contemporary historical film, he defines the adult child seer in terms of time. The cinematic child’s future is the adult filmmaker’s past. He then underlines how this is linked to the ‘emotional identification of the adult viewer with the past’ (Martin-Jones 2011, p. 81). In other words, the temporality of childhood and the

play of the child and history is often used by filmmakers as political allegory or to construct narratives of the past.

In child films set in the past, then, the child seer has a different degree of agency due to the more informed relationship that the adult filmmaker has to history. (Martin-Jones 2011, p. 79)

The child is the retrospective eye of the director. As Martin-Jones notes, their agency derives from this, the director's privilege of his being within the present day. The child does not have its own 'agency' in this sense, as once again he is a vessel of allegorical meaning. 'This is a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent' (Deleuze 1989). A look back at the past from the eyes of a child immediately conjures the innocent and very often helpless witness. While my own research will also look at the question of the child's agency, I argue that reading the child from my proposed new theoretical stance recognises the child's agency within narratives. That is to say, the child may be conceived as more than a vessel that carries adult constructed meaning. This wealth of literature that situates the child as largely a framing device neglects to consider intricate and subtle demonstrations of childhood agency and runs the risk of homogenising the child character in cinema. The child as framing tool, coupled with the equation of the child with the figural victim in much cinema and scholarship, means that possible potency of the child character is often overlooked. It is important that I consider also the effects of the continued discourse of victimhood in Spanish culture. The following section presents and examines narratives of victimhood and their interpretations, in the context of Hispanic studies.

Narratives of Victimhood

Jo Labanyi famously points out the saturation of victim-centred stories produced and released after the end of the Franco regime in her essay *Testimonies of Repression* (Labanyi 2010). The influx of memory and victimhood accounts in cinema spiked in the 1990s, she argues, when the visual arts began to focus on wartime and post-war Francoist repression. Where Labanyi turns her attention to

documentary film (interestingly she examines *Els nens perduts del franquisme* (Armengou and Belis 2002) a Catalan documentary about the children effectively kidnapped by the regime) and the short-comings of film collections of testimonies in terms of agency affirming practices, I concentrate on contemporary fictional feature films. With both mediums, the danger is to see ‘those who suffered such repression overwhelmingly as victims, thus robbing them[...]of a sense of agency’ (Ferrán 2014, p. 118). Labanyi further explains that while testimonies play an important role in recognising the emotion of the speakers toward the traumatic past, it is also of value to recognise political agency of the ‘victims’, so that, ultimately ‘testimonies serve not only to recognise past injustices but also to work for a future that is not determined by them’ (Labanyi 2010, p. 193). Working through memory is of fundamental importance, especially in the case of Spain. The problem with this, however, is that it becomes easy to fortify victim-centred accounts that concentrate heavily on the suffering and traumatization of the persecuted, in turn positing them as overpowered and passive. This oblique denial of agentic practices results in effectively overlooking the fortitude and resistance demonstrated by the oppressed, through oppositional practices of resistance, resilience, and strategic navigation of oppressive structures of power. Furthermore, victim-centred narratives can also mutate into a form of avoiding shared responsibility.

If we are to consider the replication of victimhood narratives, it will be useful to again consider scholarly analysis of the Spanish contemporary documentary genre. Although this research focuses primarily on feature film and fictional narrative, parallels can be drawn between the testimonies and stories presented in documentaries. Estrada and Gonzalez (2014) demonstrate the possible risks that filmmakers take when presenting the stories of the victims of the Civil War and regime. Acknowledging the suffering that took place was particularly necessary in Spain and the explosion of ‘memory studies’ following the decree of the Law for Historical Memory in 2007 often centralise the ‘victim’ to memorialize and vindicate those whose memories and voices were silenced for so long, to fill the gaps in history in the public sphere. Estrada and Gonzalez present an analysis of *Los niños*

de Rusia (Camino and Tibidado 2002) that deconstructs this victimhood narrative, that is now seemingly a recurring feature of cinema categorised under the ‘memory boom’ genre. Citing the philosophical considerations of Badiou (1993), their essay highlights the problematic element of the foregrounding of the victim in film and documentary, in that ‘the recognition of victimhood in and of itself does not grant agency, but can perpetuate existing power relations’ (Estrada and Gonzalez 2014, p. 174). In fact, Badiou argues that the ethics of contemporary Western human rights presupposes that man is defined first as a victim, or ‘man is the being who is capable of recognising himself as a victim’ (Badiou 1993). Badiou’s radical philosophy critiques what he views as the tendency in neo-liberalist democracies to practise this version of human rights that understands humans as victims, leading to conservative politics in society. His writings have often been contested in favour of a more pragmatic conception of human rights. The fundamental concept I would like to highlight, however, is the idea that thinking of victims solely in a way that foregrounds their suffering is detrimental and that recognition of victimhood does not grant agency and instead perpetuates existing power relations.

Both the thinking of Badiou and Estrada and Gonzalez’ application of Badiou’s ethics in the Spanish context will be helpful to consider when now moving forward to reconsidering child protagonists and their propensity for agency. Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla (2011) explores the image of the victim in Spanish visual culture and brings to our attention the further dangers of depicting victimhood on screen for an ‘affective response.’ Drawing on Bennet’s writings on trauma (Bennet 2005), he notes the violation of the subject that can occur when portraying victimhood ‘as it may fail to respect the dignity, integrity and autonomy of the subject, thereby reducing her or him to a cipher of victimhood and enacting a form of colonisation of the other’ (Bennet 2005 cited in Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011). Reminiscent of the aforementioned philosophy of Alain Badiou, this notion criticises the portrayal of victimhood that undermines the subject’s independence and resilience. The process of the ‘colonisation of the other’ is something we see executed by

humanitarian, governmental and religious organisations constantly in contemporary Western societies. Consider, for example, the aid campaigns in which children are almost always presented as victims; we see replicated images and scenes of children malnourished or crying. There is no denial that these children need aid, but this practice cements the idea of the victimised other of the third world. Instead, Gutiérrez-Albilla argues that it is possible to present suffering to have an affective power that encourages critical reflection on the suffering of the other (2011, p. 146). As we have seen in the literature review, both directors and scholarship in the realms of contemporary Spanish cinema have underscored this narrative of victimhood, which in turn, has created an understood metaphor of loss and victimhood that is performed as the figure of the victim child. The films that make up the case studies in this research do not explicitly focus on foregrounding the victimhood of the characters; the fact remains that agency is often overlooked in analysis of the films, as I have demonstrated previously. When presenting children, they can often foreground suffering and anguish, in effect denying the child a voice within the narrative and in fact, their historical agency as political actors.²¹ I have deemed it important to present these ideas around the focus of victimhood in narratives in order to clarify the practice that I aim to oppose as I recognise the presence of agency of the child characters. In the following chapter, I present existing ideas around the recognition of agency and how it can be determined within films that are widely viewed as symbolic testimonies of victims and where the agency shown by the child characters is often disregarded.

²¹ Deidre Finnerty touches upon similar themes of suffering in her work on the representation of the Republican mother in Civil War narratives (Finnerty 2014).

A Brief Summary of Contemporary Childhood Studies

I would like to situate the figure of the child protagonist that is the focus of this study in my capture of agency. To do so requires a brief review of the New Sociology of Childhood Studies. The intersections of these fields have informed both directors such as del Toro's capture of the child on screen and our understanding of the child protagonist. We have already seen previously that this figure is often politicised and/or utilised metaphorically by directors. The move towards children as social actors in the new sociology of childhood has informed my study of the child character in Spanish cinema, hence in the following section I present brief overview of the field. In the present day, childhood studies is a multi-disciplinary field that unites sociologists, historians, psychologists, linguists and scholars from all across the academic spectrum. In this way, it has already evolved from its origin in the realm of the sociological. This study will focus on pre-pubescent child protagonists of Spanish contemporary horror film, normally under the age of 13. The Oxford English dictionary defines childhood as this, the period of life from birth up until before puberty. The RAE's definition is largely the same.²² It seems that both British and Spanish society understand childhood as a separate phase of life that is divided by puberty. It is imperative that we firstly acknowledge that, per contemporary sociology, the figure of the child is a construct (James and Prout 1997, p. 3). This outlook came to be almost universal in childhood studies around the 1980s. Sociologists began to find fault with the position of childhood as a developmental stage of life in which children were 'not yet social beings' (Prout 2005). In agreement with contemporary childhood studies, the child is a construct to serve adult purposes. Over time, adults have participated in the fetishization of the child and childhood, desiring it to perform functions that cater to the wants and needs of the adult. This is regulated by laws and adult practices that have been replicated throughout Western societies:

²² Real Academia de la lengua Española

The figure of the child is an unstable one, shifting with the larger social investments that shape its construction. In many cases, especially in the twentieth century United States, legal and social discourse articulates a difference from adulthood by calling for the child's protection and preservation of its innocence. (Degnan 2014, p. 760)

It seems that Western society has been moving toward a construction of a child that centralises its innocence and purity. Thus, concepts that are deemed adult are assumed to be threats to this innocence. While contemporary childhood studies points out the clear construction of the figure of the child, ideas surrounding childhood in Western society continue to be influenced by the idea of childhood as a developmental phase in which innocence is central and must be preserved. Childhood studies or the new social studies of childhood argues that this attitude is mistaken.

Ever since Philippe Ariès posited childhood as an invention of modernity, childhood studies has argued for recognizing the state of prolonged protection (and sometimes fetishization) generally ascribed to Western youth as relatively constructed, class bound, and historically varied. (Honeyman 2013, p. 167)

In his book *The Future of Childhood* (2005), Alan Prout highlights the need to move childhood studies from a multidisciplinary field to an interdisciplinary one. The New social studies of childhood examines childhood as a social construct and studies children as social actors in their own right. Alan Prout's critical examination of the New Sociology of Childhood Studies argues for a new, informed and interdisciplinary approach to childhood studies. Prout discusses the 'shifting boundary between adulthood and childhood':

[T]he distinction between adults and children, once firmly established as a feature of modernity, seems to be blurring. Traditional ways of representing childhood in discourse and in image no longer seemed adequate to its emerging forms. New ways of speaking, writing and imaging children are providing new ways of seeing them and these children are different from the innocent and dependent creatures that appeared to populate the first half of the twentieth century. *These new representations construct children as more*

active, knowledgeable and socially participative than older discourses allowed. They are more difficult to manage, less biddable and hence are more troublesome and troubling. (Prout 2000a cited in (Prout 2005, emphasis added))

I quote Prout at length here because I believe his assertions are fundamental in paving the way for open-mindedness towards the analysis of the child that I will be proposing. Perhaps my decision to look at the agentic child, the queer child, and the orphan child may seem contradictory in terms of childhood studies and essentialism it eschews. Despite this, I believe the queer child, through its incorporation of queer in terms of non-heteronormativity, achieves the interdisciplinary approach to childhood studies that Prout argues for. This research argues for a reading that recognises varying forms of agency in child-centred cinema, and therefore aligns with this shift in sociology and childhood studies towards a view of the child as active, or even, agentic. This idea was one of the central themes of the 2016 Childhood and Nation in World Cinema conference, as evidenced in the following exert:

Significantly, within the field of sociology, 'a new paradigm', 'often called the new sociology of childhood', has 'signalled a shift away from theories which see children as merely "becoming" skilled, knowledgeable members of society', towards a stance which views children as 'active participants or "beings" in their own right, who interpret and construct their own lives, cultures and relationships' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 340). (Childhood and Nation in World Cinema n.d.)

In her research on the figuration of the child in contemporary Spanish cinema (2000), Fiona Noble has noted the paradoxical status of children in the Western world. Noble explains that her conceptualisation of the figure of the child is one that is influenced by global discourse and readings of the child in contemporary society, in the same way as this research has been influenced. She follows this by describing how, in contemporary Western society, the child 'tends to be perceived in two different ways by adults, either as a vulnerable being in need of protection, or as a potentially threatening entity that must be managed,

controlled and contained.’ (Noble 2000, p. 164). We can see how Western societies have now moved to cater to the vulnerable being of the child, with the aim that it does not become threatening. Bearing in mind that, per contemporary sociology, children are social constructs, I address here the issue of still reading childhood essentially. We can accept the constructed nature of the child whilst still reading it as an acknowledged figure in society and cinema. Cinema has used the child to create unique protagonists ‘enabling filmmakers to depart from conventional modes of storytelling as they exploit an adult awareness to reflect the undoubted otherness of youthful experience’ (Iannone 2014). Furthermore, the impossibility of the child figure, the non-existent homogenous child, grants it a degree of fluidity within narratives ‘The fluidity of the child figure, coupled with its status as Other, allows for its configuration as a site of exchange’ (Noble 2000, p. 165). This study looks at Spanish horror films that take children as their protagonists, analysing how they have traditionally been understood and suggests a novel, alternative interpretation. To this end, it will be useful to examine the literature available on the child in Spanish horror film.

The Child in Spanish Horror Film

Sarah Wright has described the childhood we see so frequently in Spanish cinema as one ‘poised between innocence and monstrosity’ (Wright 2013, p. 4). This child is the epitome of the uncanny, arguably more so than other European horror films, due to the Spanish horror child’s frequent ties with the past and the repressed trauma it often symbolises. While Wright does touch on the child in horror film, due to the lack of scholarly attention that the Spanish horror genre receives, there are not as many writings to interact with in order to stimulate new readings. One notable scholar on this specific area, however, is Jessica Balanzategui. Looking closely at contemporary Spanish horror films, Balanzategui studies the child as the personification of repressed collective national trauma (2015b). Similar to the aforementioned research by Fiona Noble (2015), who asserts that the child is symbolic of the blockage of Republican memory, Balanzategui claims that the protagonists of contemporary Spanish horror can be

viewed as mutations of the children of the New Spanish Cinema. These children are mutants, she claims, that inhabit the Deleuzian time-image. As these children became fully formed mutants in horror cinema, the slight loosening of the tight reins of censorship, initiated to a certain extent, by Manuel Fraga Iribarne in the 60s, meant that child seers could be more direct in their insinuation.

By evoking an allegorical moment, the child characters under discussion unravel the cultural narratives of national progress which previously worked to mask the cultural wounds of post-Civil War Spanish society. (Balanzategui 2015a)

Balanzategui's essay on *The Spirit of the Beehive/El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973), *Raise Ravens/Cria cuervos* (Saura 1976), *The Devil's Backbone/El espinazo del diablo* (del Toro 2001), *The Nameless/Los sin nombre* (Balaguero 1999) and *The Orphanage/El orfanato* (Bayona 2007), illustrates how the children in contemporary Spanish horror work to 'unravel' these previously engraved narratives. They are 'insects trapped in amber' (Balanzategui 2015a), or helpless victims, but they also possess power. As uncanny, haunting spectres not constricted to linear time, Balanzategui claims they remind us of the danger in 'misrecognizing history as a present that has long-since "passed" instead of a past that "is."' (2015a, p. 243). Whilst I have not come across any complete works in the way of academic books on the child in Spanish horror film, Maria Praggiamore (2017) has provided an illuminating glimpse into some notable films. In *Tracing the Borders of Spanish Horror Cinema and Television* (Marí 2017), Praggiamore's chapter entitled *Suspendido en el tiempo Children and Contemporary Spanish Horror* examines the role of the child in contemporary horror film. She argues that this child is not only a way to look backwards, to articulate the traumas of the past, but that this child also articulated the bio-politics of reproduction and migration in the 21st century (Pramaggiore 2017). In her analysis of *La habitación del niño* (de la Iglesia 2006) and *NO-DO* (Quiroga 2008), Praggiamore presents an interpretation that also notes the contemporary reflections of the films, including references to the instability of the economic boom of the 2000s and the desire to nurture the children of the future still present in post-Franco society. Praggiamore's

essay demonstrates that detailed study of the contemporary child protagonists of Spanish film is imperative and that this cinema continues to offer the spectator with fertile strands of analytical thought. Many of these films position the child between two worlds. Mark Kermode (2018) has explained how one of the key tropes of horror movies is a juxtaposition between two different worlds. This is a trope we see used in the film studied in this thesis, skilfully communicated by the cinematography of del Toro.

In recent years, more completed academic edited books have been released that centre on the films of Guillermo del Toro. An essential but by no means extensive list of key works would include the titles *The Supernatural Cinema of Guillermo del Toro: Critical Essays* (Morehead and Jones 2015), *Guillermo del Toro Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions* (Toro 2013), *Guillermo del Toro: At Home with Monsters: Inside His Films, Notebooks, and Collections* (Salvesen et al. 2016), *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art* (McDonald and Clark 2014), and *Guillermo del Toro's The Devil's Backbone and Pan's Labyrinth : studies in the horror film* (Olson 2016). It is interesting to observe that even 17 years on, scholars of Hispanic studies and Film studies continue to produce novel, insightful work on the interpretations of del Toro's works. Despite this, there is not yet a comprehensive study of the figure of the agentic child in the cinematography of del Toro. In many edited books that collate chapters on various elements of the films, there are usually one or two chapters that focus on aspects of the child protagonists. I would argue, however, that these multi-layered protagonists warrant a much more in-depth study. Much of the style employed by del Toro incorporates cinematic magical realism. Thus, the following section presents a brief review of key cinema and literature that considers filmic magical realism.

Magical Realism and the Child

Films featuring children in wartime that capture the child's experience of violence and loss are plentiful. Notable films including *Germany year zero* (Rossellini 1948), *Ivan's Childhood* (Tarkovsky 1962), and *Forbidden Games* (Clément 1952) are frequently referenced by film critics and academics alike.²³ In Spanish language works we often see this combined with elements of the child's imagination and magical realism. In both *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976) and *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973) Ana Torrent, the striking young actress, not dissimilar to Ivana Baquero's Ofelia, traverses the two worlds of reality and imagination, of life and death, and her powerful imagination and spiritual encounters enable her to



Figure 5 *Un monstruo viene a verme* (Bayona, 2016)

cope in the harsh day-to-day life of Franco's Spain.²⁴ We can trace the countless on-screen children going through anxiety-fuelling traumas who escape to a fantastical dream world of monsters, ghosts, and spirits. The child in a magical realist, fantasy scenario is one that is still prominent in the work of Spanish filmmakers today. A recent example of this comes from del Toro's protégé J.A. Bayona. His work *Un monstruo viene a verme* (*A Monster Calls*) (Bayona 2016) is a film which captures the journey of a child dealing with the illness of his mother, grief, and what he learns from the teachings of the giant tree-like monster that he

²³ For more information see <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-films-about-children-wartime>>

²⁴ In *Cría*, there is a temporal shift in which the narrative moves between the unfolding of the protagonist's childhood and the older protagonist looking back on the events and providing an interspersed narration. In comparison, *El laberinto* presents audiences with a modal shift; the narrative switches between fantasy and social realism.

discovers. The importance of the child's fantasy has been explored in detail by Karen Lury in her book *The Child in Film* (2010). Lury explores the fairy tale elements incorporated by del Toro that structure his films. These fairy tale and fantastical components enable the director to make comment on the war and the troubles of the adult world. Lury argues that through the fairy tale, the child provides access to incidents that are traumatic and significant 'historically, emotionally and politically but which cannot be "made sense of" by the child' (Lury 2010, p. 143). Del Toro's unique brand of magical realism does indeed successfully highlight the significance of fantasy in child-centred narratives

In order to analyse elements of magical realism as facilitators of childhood agency, it will be important to consider psychoanalytical interpretations of the fantasy. Scholars have also considered the turn towards the fantasy genre as a gesture that results from trauma, and Spanish gothic horror film that reflects on the Civil War lends itself to interpretations informed by psychoanalysis. In *Moving Images* (2014), Andrea Sabbadini dedicates one chapter to psychoanalysis and films on children. Notable in his writing is the analysis of Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973), exploring the reveries of the two young protagonists, Ana and Isabel. He first highlights the link between trauma and fantasy in relation to psychoanalysis, stating that human beings work through their anxieties 'by imagining worlds where such shortcomings are magically denied or overcome' (Sabbadini 2014):

We learn from psychoanalytic developmental theories that the origins of such grandiose fantasies may be traced back to the infants' primary narcissism and to their belief that the mother's breast (concretely and metaphorically speaking) will always be available on demand - a certainty to be challenged early enough, of course, by the disturbing intrusion into the child's life of the Reality Principle. (Sabbadini 2014)

Sabbadini notes this process occurring in the imaginations of protagonists Ana and Isabel. We can begin to note the similarities between *El laberinto* and *El espíritu*. Del Toro has explained how *El espíritu de la colmena* had a strong influence on *El laberinto*. Ana persists in her pursuit to meet the monster in *El*

espíritu, much like Ofelia's desire to please the faun in *El laberinto*. Her distant parents are absent, and she projects her desires onto the monster, hoping that encountering him will fill her lack:

They wanted to find someone sufficiently in touch with their inner world and sympathetic to their insoluble existential dilemmas about good and evil, life and death, bodies and sexuality (questions that all children have to struggle with) to help them dispel or at least reduce their anxieties). (Sabbadini 2014)

Thus, fantasy, seems in the first instance to be a block for anxiety; a replacement for the lack. In this light, the primary contentions of the scholarship mentioned in the literature review, which considers that children in Spanish contemporary cinema often come to act as a mouthpiece for Spain as a nation dealing with repressed trauma and newly acknowledged memories, are verified. While it is worthy grounds for study, this line of thought has been saturated with scholarship and also tends not to focus on the child as a social actor, but to see him or her as a cipher. This research, however, aims to shift the focus onto how the children draw agency, power and resilience from such fantasies. As Lury points out 'children *want* and they *act*, and they should therefore be understood as *agents* as well as subjects' (Lury 2010, p. 308). Children can be activists, political actors, and forces of change. Further to this, the films studies will demonstrate that we can detach fantasy from escapism.

Conclusion

It is my view that the oversight of children's agency in cinema studies cannot continue in a time when modern sociology and childhood studies call for the recognition of children as participants in society. That is to say, we must acknowledge that children are consistently demonstrating forms of political and social agency and/or resistance to oppression. Although, as I have mentioned, cinema scholars are beginning to notice the cinematic and scholarly reluctance to depict or interpret children as social actors or even fully-fledged humans, and the tendency to see childhood as a liminal phase or temporary malady, they are yet to

offer another way of reading the child that can counteract this.²⁵ I posit that applying new ideas around agency to the child of Spanish horror enables open interpretations of the changing child and its place in Spanish horror film. This chapter has been a brief look at the areas I have deemed as a crucial foundation in the understanding of my research. We have seen the child and the ways that it is employed in film. While it has not been possible in the current confines to expand on the works mentioned in depth, I have provided a clear summary of scholarship on the child in Spanish language cinema, its presence within the horror genre and some previously established works on the subject. While it has not been an extensive analysis, I hope to have illuminated the relevant points and changes in contemporary childhood studies and scholarship on the child of Spanish cinema. In sum, the aim of this thesis is to propose new readings of the child in contemporary Spanish horror film that incorporate agency. The following chapter sets out the theoretical approach for this thesis, presenting a detailed explanation of theories applied in the film case studies.

²⁵ With exception of Rocha and Seminet (2012) and Randall (2017)

Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach

Introduction

I argue that underpinning the dominant reading of children in Spanish film is a certain theory of agency, and that this theory is partial/by no means universally accepted or all-encompassing. I will show other definitions of agency and argue in favour of a broader theoretical approach to the study of children in Spanish film. Furthermore, by adopting a broader definition of agency in children, I also challenge the dominant way Spanish film studies allows a particular reading of the past, specifically one that understands children in Spanish Civil War narratives as ciphers for victimhood. In this chapter, I present the basis of my critical analysis, merging childhood studies and my capture of agency in the child character and explaining the theories applied in the film studies. This thesis takes a multimodal theoretical approach to the study of film to consider not only elements of filming and editing, but the numerous modes that create the moving image.

It [multimodal theory] looks for semiotic principles common to all forms of communication that are relevant in any given instance (for example, if we are analysing a film to consider how patterns of editing, spoken language and music might all contribute to the overall effect which we recognize as rhythm). And it looks for ways to describe systematically how these modes relate to each other. (Burn and Parker 2003)

Burn and Parker (2003) have elaborated on this approach to film studies,²⁶ and they outline how various modes of film can work to collaboratively highlight agency. My analysis in the two case study chapters will be multimodal, with attention to production, shooting, editing, special effects, mise-en-scène, sound, colouring, and dialogue. I also incorporate cultural studies, which seeks to 'embed media like the cinema in a larger cultural and historical context' (Stam 2017, p. 223). Thus, I take into account Spanish history, politics, and society, considering

²⁶ Burn and Parker (2003) coined the kineikonic mode. This is a multimodal theory of film studies which moves away from the analysis of film as solely the filming and editing and proposes instead to consider how filmmakers produce meaning through various elements and modes.

the cultural framing of the film. These approaches create an informed foundation, on which I apply theories of agency as will be discussed in this chapter.²⁷ This chapter outlines the move towards agency in childhood studies, taking up where the literature review left off, which has informed my re-reading of child protagonists in the films of Guillermo del Toro. It then suggests a rethinking of conceptualisations of children's agency. Following this, I explain narrative and historical agency situated in my analytical scope. I describe my process of establishing film texts for the case studies and the pillar concepts of my analysis of agency. Succeeding this is a section on my definitions and examples of agency in the figure of the child, as the later film analysis will consider in what sense we can account for agency in the child protagonists. It should be noted that there may be a danger in defining agency. Whilst a working definition of agency is necessary for this thesis, the definitions of agency are shifting, paradoxical and fluid entities that cannot be confined to one academic discipline or definition.

Children and Their Agency: Using Childhood Studies to Inform New Readings

In order to continue this analysis, a clear explanation of what is meant in terms of children's agency in childhood studies will facilitate a greater understanding of the aims of this thesis. One of the objectives is to argue that the child protagonists of Spanish Civil War filmic narratives possess agency. Although this research focuses on fictional children, a brief look at the field of childhood studies will help to unpick attitudes towards fictional young protagonists. This section presents selected understandings of agency and their possible applications in the child. Human agency, understood in plain terms as the capacity to act or to do in a situation or certain context, necessitates a participant in a structure who is active and/or not totally restricted. One may instinctively argue that the agency of children is non-existent in societies of the Western world societies which subscribe to an attitude of 'adultism' (Kennedy 2006, p. 63). Can a subjective identity,

²⁷For more information, see <<https://mode.ioe.ac.uk/2013/10/11/video-guide-analysing-moving-image-and-digital-film-production/>>

including that of a child, ever be free of manipulation or restriction? Are their actions always mediated, to a certain extent, by an other? Valentine (2011) highlights how 'childhood studies argues that children are excluded from participation because social spaces and conventions are adult-centric and do not allow for children's cognitive and physical particularities.' In the field of Hispanic Studies, Rachel Randall also highlights that children's subjectivity and therefore propensity for agency is often questioned as they are so regularly viewed as 'incomplete subjects.' They are often associated with the pre-symbolic thanks to their association with the pre-linguistic (Randall 2017, p. xxxiii). We will see, however, by allowing for more encompassing definitions of agency, that we can begin to relate agency to the figure of the child, even within adult-centric spaces. Whilst there are various social understandings of agency, the examples presented here best articulate the concerns with regard to defining the agency of children in this research. David Oswell has written extensively on the concept of children's agency and claims that:

[C]hildren cannot simply be assumed to fit within a normative teleological structure, and any understanding of contemporary children must take seriously the fact that childhood is negotiated through competing generationally located agencies. And agency, at some basic level, refers to the capacity to do things. *Thus, children are conceptualised as beings who have the capacity to do things in the world, where that doing may be physical, cognitive, emotional or other, but such that 'being able to do' implies that children are not passive 'blank slates'.* In this respect, the sociology of childhood is able to learn from earlier philosophies of childhood and psychologies of children that construe them as active. (Oswell 2012, p. 42, emphasis added)

Whilst I agree with Oswell in his supposition that children are not passive beings, in order to use the word agency, it is necessary to look closely at established definitions of agency. From Giddens' point of view, agency concerns the actor's capability to bring about an occurrence. His theory of structuration understands agency as intrinsically linked to power and also to the reproduction of structures. Fundamentally, Giddens argues that agency also requires 'reflexive

rationality' – or a consciousness of actions and monitoring (Giddens 1984, p. 5). This in turn means that Giddens' theory of agency is problematic in the case of children, as their 'developmental immaturity is equated to non-rationality and emotion; and whose actions and choices are constrained by their dependence on adults' (Valentine 2011, p. 351). Furthermore, childhood is an elastic category which spans a huge age range. This thesis, however, will focus on fictional prepubescent, fictional children.

As the field of childhood studies has developed, more encompassing definitions of agency have been suggested. Kylie Valentine argues that it is in fact possible to conceptualise children's agency and she outlines two conditions for this:

First, our understanding of children's agency should not require them to be like adults' and that 'our understanding of children's agency should not require them to have the social privileges that has been traditionally understood as bestowing adult agency. (Valentine 2011, p. 355).

Valentine comes to this conclusion after an exploration of liberal philosophy and childhood studies. Vitally, she notes how the various abstract interpretations of agency means that, in the study of the figure of the child, agency must be redefined. Agency can be linked to the social, psychological, and biological, it can be collective or individual. This ambiguous term can be linguistic, human or scientific. Agency is subjective and indefinable as it can be an action or a process. This multiplicity of definitions might mean that agency must be understood in innately general terms. Furthermore, the problematic nature of subjectivity points to yet more obstacles for a homogenous definition of individual human agency. If we consider specifically fictional narratives, however, it is possible to understand the agency of children at the aforementioned basic level of participative social actors with the ability to act. Oswell explains that agency is not something that can be attributed to one individual subject, stating that this view of 'agency' is rather something that manifests in narratives when we examine the actions and motivations of a character:

Rather, agency is understood as more akin to agency as discussed within narrative analysis inasmuch as characters might be said to have agency but only inasmuch as that agency is orchestrated within narrative structure and forms of narration and in the context of other characters with agency. (Oswell 2012, p. 269).

In fiction, this can be equated to the social actor's ability to make a choice and act independently. This definition is rooted in social sciences and although simplistic, enables us to understand agency of the child character in fictional narrative. This thesis also explores the potential for relational and social agency in film narratives with child protagonist. I look at the child protagonists' acts of resistance, resilience, defiance and their purposive acts as examples of agency. I argue that instances of these acts can be equated to examples of narrative agency, in order to counteract the scholarship which instead focuses on the examples of the child as a victim and/or witness to trauma within the narrative. I do not reject the examples cited by these analyses, however, I present illustrations of agency in a broader definition than the one presented by the ideology of adultism, in which arguably, children are not yet capable of the role of social actor.

It is vital to mention that the child protagonists I will go on to analyse, often locate agency within the very structures of oppression. In other words, the starting point is the encounter with an other (oppressor, etc.) which leads to subjectivation and agency. This is linked to the 'child's need for recognition by an "other" in order to develop subject status and the potential for agency' (Randall 2017, p. 30). This is explored by Judith Butler (1997), who claims that the process of subjectivation allows the subject a discursive agency; the subject's performative acts have a political potential. (Youdell 2006, p. 518). Incorporating this view, we can consider agency as a process; occurring throughout the narratives. This idea of the development of agency has been referenced in previous Spanish film scholarship; Ryan (2012) explores the development of agency in the child character of Moncho in *Butterfly's Tongue* (Cuerda 1999). Ryan contends that Moncho's interpretative, discursive, and burgeoning agency develops throughout the narrative, within the confines of the hegemonic structures of power in spheres of the school, the home

and the neighbourhood. This analysis of childhood as a site of resistance and agentic practices is also my own intended approach as I compare the films of this study. I combine the understandings of narrative agency with the changing definition of agency in New Sociology of Childhood Studies which affirm that children can make a difference 'to a relationship, a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints' (Mayall 2005, p. 131). By looking at examples of narrative agency in Spanish film, we can begin to reconsider the familiar reading of children in the Spanish Civil War narratives as ciphers for victimhood.

Rethinking Agency: The Child's Voice Off and On Screen

A confluence of global political maelstroms around the assertions and movement of very young people would seem to demand that scholars and activists grapple much more seriously with the "childness" of these collective actions and the forms of agency that generate them.
(Amar 2016)

The above quotation is taken from Paul Amar's work, which focuses on child led resistance movements in contemporary Egypt, the infantilisation and othering of these children propagated by humanitarian organisations and how children have responded to and resisted this form of oppression. I am interested in Amar's study of how these children demonstrate agency and the failure to recognise these acts for what they are, by the media, the state and analysts. Although Amar looks at current events and I look at fictional cinema narratives, his assertions are useful for my own argument. The article stresses not only the problem in the dismissal of agency demonstrated by the actions of children in political conflict but also their misrecognition and co-option, especially in the politicized media:

Dominant contemporary Egyptian representations tend to present children in contentious street politics as engines of extreme affect rather than as social subjects with histories, interests, and agendas. As Edelman (2004) contends, children also serve as visual shorthands for ideologically

overburdened metaphors like “risk” and “futuraity,” which haunt us with what is lacking or fragile in the political present or social structure. When children are seen in these cases, they are hypervisible while being sociopolitically inapprehensible. *They are seen everywhere in images of emergency journalism without being perceived, recognized, or engaged on their own terms as political actors or social claims-makers.* (Amar 2016, emphasis added)

This occurs too, if we look at the Spanish context. During the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime, hundreds of thousands of children were evacuated, kidnapped by the regime, or taken from their parents by the Catholic Church.²⁸ This of course is a fundamentally significant part of Spanish history I do not wish to disavow and that most certainly should be uncovered and articulated in historical discourse. Children were certainly victims of violent persecution and forced disappearances, perpetrated by the Franco regime, and this has been brought to light in contemporary society.²⁹ Nonetheless, in light of the narrative of victimhood now present in much fiction, non-fiction and analytical scholarship, the children who lived through the Civil War and regime are often viewed as a monolithic group of victims to the traumas of the period, without, as Amar states above, being ‘engaged on their own terms as political actors or social-claims makers’ (Amar 2016). Ryan (2012) supports this notion in the context of Spanish visual studies:

The child also serves to create empathy for the Republican plight, as their innocence makes the defeated’s suffering morally reprehensible, and also introduces a highly emotive component into viewers’ preconceptions of war. (Ryan 2012)

The tendency to homogenise children in this way overlooks any voice or agency on the part of the child. It is true, however, that agency is difficult to pin down, precisely in the case of children, and Rocha and Semiet (2014) raise this issue:

The representation of children’s agency is a slippery domain due to their reliance on adults and relative lack of autonomy in this respect, but recent

²⁸ For more information, see Navarro (2008)

²⁹ See Gatti (2016)

research indicates that children and childhood have become an object of scholarly interest (Rocha et al. 2014, p. xi)

While it may be that the representation of children's agency is at first a slippery domain, through my analysis of film, this thesis offers new ways of viewing agency and the child character in fictional historical narratives. There is potential for diverse interpretations of children's actions and agency in Spanish Civil War narratives. Scholars such as Rachel Randall have written on the potential of agency in the actions of children in Latin American Cinema; looking at the heterotopic space and the agency in play:

These characters, particularly given the audience's assumptions about them as children, cannot synthesise or contest broad historical processes. Instead, they attempt to exert some control over small areas of their immediate environment in actions that represent minor rebellions, but which provide some hope for the audience in the face of incomprehensible threats and irresolvable social problems. (Randall 2015, p. 219)

Furthermore, Randall has highlighted a change in the objectives of child-centred Latin American cinema: 'there has been a shift in the portrayal of childhood since the mid-1990s, toward an attempt to evoke a sense of children's subjectivities and their *propensity for agency*' (Randall 2017, p. xi, emphasis added). In the same vein, I highlight cinema that depicts Iberian history towards a focus on children's agency. Inspired by Randall's thinking, I seek to present examples of agency supported by broader more encompassing definitions. In the section that follows, I explain the concepts of narrative and historical agency which inform my capture of agency within my film studies.

Narrative and Historical Agency: Approaching Film Analysis

By presenting examples of narrative agency in the films, it is not my aim to argue that the narratives of the child protagonists are proxies, or stand-ins, for the complex and diverse lives of children who actually lived through the period. Nonetheless, this research may encourage a reconsideration of the potential

historical agency of children who did live through the period of conflict, one which has perhaps been overlooked. Scholars such as those mentioned in the literature review point out the ways in which del Toro's works can be seen to exhibit conventions that compartmentalise the child protagonist as a victim or suffering witness to portray the horrors of mid-twentieth century Spain. This research, however, presents an analysis of narrative agency in order to rethink interpretations which centralise narratives of victimhood and children's passivity. The examples of agency presented in the case studies support my argument that del Toro's films in fact transgress previous understandings of the passive or victim child. The narratives of the films present the struggles and trauma experienced by children in fictional, historical Civil War settings, but they simultaneously present the child's navigation of such society.

As we have seen, the concept of agency is intricate and difficult to define. Despite this, narrative agency can be understood generally as the ability to direct and shape the course of events. I explore themes of subjectivation, resistance, resilience, and the refusal of norms as examples of narrative agency. By conducting specific scene analysis, focusing on the actions of the child protagonists, I look at *mise-en-scène*, special effects, actions, and dialogue, considering film as a complex multimodal form, to present how instances of child agency are supported by the filmography. It is also important to mention the concept of historical agency, to underline the link between this research and the context of the Spanish past. Although this research does not claim that the depiction of children in the films presented is a stand-in for actual events in Spanish history, I posit that by revisiting films in which the child characters have been only recognised as oppressed, suffering figures or helpless witnesses, focuses can shift. By looking at *fictional* instances of agency of agency, it may be possible to begin to consider the *historical* instances of agency (be it resistance, resilience, oppositional practices) in Spanish history. Thus, this work also has a small historical component, as my aim is to look at how the child protagonists operate within oppressive power structures. In a similar way

[H]istorians have sought a way to understand the historical agency of relatively powerless groups, even as they operated within the constraints of their social and historical positions' (Seixas 2012).

Historians will look at historical agency and the ability of people in the past to act or influence situations in order to gain a better understanding of past conflicts. 'Historical agency: is broadly defined as 'power of individuals, groups, and institutions to resist, blunt, or alter historical conditions' (Levstik n.d.). I reflect on examples of narrative agency to recapitulate the child protagonists of these two films, affirming the presence, dignity and historical agency of children. In his essay on Spanish children in exile, Gutiérrez-Albilla notes the dangers of the image of the 'victim' in visual culture, stating that although the depiction may be well intentioned

[I]t could be seen as a kind of violation of the subject depicted, as it may fail to respect the dignity, integrity and autonomy of the subject, thereby reducing him or her to a cipher of victimhood and enacting a form of colonisation of the other. (Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011)

Reflecting on this, whilst I do not wish to enact a further colonisation of the other by presenting child protagonists as a monolithic group. I instead seek to afford the child protagonists of these films an agency through the recognition of their participation and action, even in subtle processes. It will be useful here to introduce the case studies of this thesis and the approach used to analyse agency.

Establishing Case Studies and Analysing Agency

I have selected *El espinazo del diablo* (del Toro 2001) and *El laberinto del fauno* (del Toro 2006) as the films which make up the cinematic corpus and focus of this research. The settings of the films at the time of the Spanish Civil War and their focus on the experiences of the child protagonists that resist, position them as ideal works in which to consider narrative agency. In both films, del Toro inverts the traditional film trope of fairy tales — blind obedience for courageous disobedience. The films are examples of transnational cinema (Davies et al. 2014), but focus in narrative terms on the Spanish national context. The journey through the child's role in Spanish cinema, presented in the introductory chapter, concluded

with contemporary Spanish child-centred films that foregrounded the darker side of childhood in the Spanish contemporary context. Taking this as a point of departure, del Toro's films, as fantastical, gothic horrors, pick up where those works left off; the films consider the Spanish historical context but present the child in a landscape that allows for the possibility of agency. As I am conducting a thematic analysis, I have chosen to focus specifically on the filmography of one director to refine conclusive findings. In choosing the films for the corpus, I selected the critically-acclaimed titles *El espinazo* and *El laberinto* as they have been the subject of academic scholarship and formed pedagogical bodies in the teaching of Hispanic culture and history.³⁰ The works are further recognised as part of the Spanish historical memory boom (in which the tendency to return to the repressed past was popularized) due to their use of the child focalizer, the inclusion of ghosts and 'generic blend of the literary Gothic...and the war film' (Rose 2009). Despite the gradual inclusion of agency and the widening of the parameters of the definition of social actors and resistance in scholarship focused on Spanish Civil War narratives, a distinct fissure has remained in analytical realms with regard to the voice and social agency of the child, even in works so widely studied.

Although del Toro is of Mexican descent, *El laberinto* and *El espinazo* are examples of Spanish cinema due to their setting and the transnational status of the productions. When selecting films to analyse for case studies, I deemed it important to cover some of del Toro's oeuvre due to the prominence of the child character in his works. In the research stage of this study, I found that a great deal of academic writing on the films posit the child protagonists as mute, powerless victims in the films of del Toro, or that note how the child characters come to act as a stand-in for national trauma.³¹ This research aims to provide an alternative analysis of del Toro's films, taking into account that hybrid, cross-genre films are open to a variety of interpretations. Indeed, the genre of both films sits somewhere

³⁰ *El laberinto del fauno* has been a prescribed film to study on the Edexcel, WJEC, and AQA Spanish A-Level course specifications in the UK at different points since its release in 2006. *El Espinazo* has also appeared on the AQA syllabus.

³¹ (Lury 2010; Vivancos 2012; Haddu 2014; Vargas 2014)

in the intersection of horror and fantasy.³² As noted in the introduction, the child is a recurrent character in Spanish language horror. By selecting these films, I seek to explore the propensity for agency of child actors even in horror films, a genre in which they have been widely regarded as a device co-opted for looking back to the past (Weng 2016; Wright 2013). As foundational elements of the horror of del Toro, haunting and fantasy are key in my detection of agency, as the following section outlines.

Haunting and Fantasy

In the two case studies that this thesis presents, I examine the concepts of haunting (in chapter 4 on *El espinazo*) and fantasy (in chapter 5 on *El laberinto*). I have deemed it important as these two concepts respectively are crucial to the detection of the child's agency in each film. *El espinazo* utilises the concept of haunting to bestow the child ghost Santi with agency in the narrative. *El laberinto* draws upon fantasy and magical realism to demonstrate the child protagonist Ofelia's narrative arc as a social actor capable of inciting change. In this section, I will introduce the concepts of haunting and fantasy and their influence on the manifestation of agency.

In *El espinazo*, haunting is used as a way to resist the attempt by Spanish ruling powers to gloss over the atrocities of the past. This alludes to the *Pacto del olvido* in Spain³³. Haunting in terms of Spanish visual narratives has been explored by academics including Labanyi (2000), Colmeiro (2011) and Davies (2014). My iteration of haunting and the exploration of Santi, the ghost who haunts the orphanage in *El espinazo*, explores the character's agency. The very idea that comes hand-in-hand with haunting is a refusal to resign to death and the past.

³² Interestingly, despite their child protagonists, the rating for both the films is R (restricted) by The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) film rating system (a rating system that has come under scrutiny in recent years). In the UK, *El espinazo* received a 12 certificate and *El laberinto* a 15.

³³ The pact of forgetting refers to the memory policies adopted in Spain around the time of the transition to democracy. Crimes committed by the Franco regime were essentially swept under the rug in the pursuit of a smooth democratic transition.

Haunting is also arguably an example of the return of the repressed and so, in effect, a form of resistance to repression. In the case study, I explore the ways that the child ghost, Santi (Junio Valverde), refuses to remain trapped in the past. Carlos's (Fernando Tielve) discovery of Santi's haunting further speaks to the work of the ARMH (Asociación para la recuperación para memoria histórica / Association for the recovery of historical memory) in Spain and efforts to uncover and liberate the repressed ghosts of Spain's recent past. I point to the haunting by the child as it also works to highlight the visibility of children as historical actors around the time of the Civil War. Esther Peeren (2014) has discussed the trope of the missing child, haunting and the redistribution of agency, illustrating that the passive innocence associated with the child going missing or dying can be challenged by recognising the forceful spectrality and disruptive form of agency that she calls 'spectral agency'. In a similar vein, I consider the haunting of the ghost child Santi in *El espinazo*, exploring concepts such as return of the repressed, spectral force, and the temporal nature of the ghost. Indeed, the ghost character almost has a supreme agency in the status as a continued presence.

Before exploring the temporal development aligned with the fantastical world in more detail, it will be first useful to set the parameters and outline specifically what I refer to with fantasy, especially as the element of fantasy or the fantastical in *El laberinto* is arguably also defined as magical realism. This rich literary tradition, emanating from Latin America is woven skilfully into the narrative in the form of the Faun's labyrinth. This mystical world of magical creatures, and often grave danger, is a clear example of the aesthetic that is magical realism. While there has been much debate around the exact definition of magical realism³⁴, it is widely understood as a literary narrative device in which the familiar and the marvellous converge:

The world of magical realist texts is one where the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist without conflict, without even calling attention to one another's otherness. In this sense, the Brazilian critic Irlemar Chiampi provides a working definition of magical realism that most critics would

³⁴ For more information, see *Magical Realism* by Siskind (2012).

agree with: “The denaturalization of the real and the naturalization of the marvellous”. (Siskind 2012)

This too, is an accurate depiction of the fantastical magical real that we find in *El laberinto*. It is left intentionally ambiguous to spectators as to whether the labyrinth is a world from Ofelia’s imagination or not, and this is where the film makes clever comment on the nature of what we perceive to be children’s fantasies, or even child’s play, concepts in which fantastical, magical worlds are usually associated with escapism. Fantasy is at once agentic and its very opposite, thanks to its surreal nature. In *El laberinto*, Ofelia ventures regularly into the fantastical world of the Faun, the underworld and the labyrinth. Thus, in the case study I explore the director’s recourse to fantasy as a form of exhibiting agency on the part of the child protagonist. We are made aware that the element of fantasy is of importance both in the narrative and as a part of Ofelia, as, at the beginning of the film, we are taken into the fantasy world through a rapid zoom into Ofelia’s eye. Fantasy as a cinematic resource is highlighted throughout the film with elements such as the colour palette, diegetic sound, and lighting. I examine Ofelia’s turn to fantasy as representative of her own agency. Using the frameworks of magical thinking and imaginative agency to support my analysis, I demonstrate how Ofelia harnesses the powers of fantasy to also navigate the labyrinth of the adult world. The concepts of haunting and fantasy function as cinematic devices which I go on to argue, highlight agentic practices of the child protagonists.

‘Oppositional Practices’

In her analysis of Dulce Chacón’s novel *La voz dormida* (Chacón 2010), a story based on women’s testimony and agency during the civil war, Ofelia Ferrán (2014) presents the model of oppositional practices. Drawing on Michel de Certeau’s *On Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life* (1980). Ferrán explains that these practices are ways that individuals or small groups transform imposed structures, languages, codes, and rules in society for their own purposes in the realm of resistance (Ferrán 2014, p. 120). These practices, which we will examine

in further detail, work to affirm the agency, political activism, and defiance shown by the characters she analyses. Furthermore, Ferrán claims the noting of these practices functions extra-diegetically to consequently underscore the agentic practices and ways of resisting carried out by those who were themselves persecuted and silenced during the conflicts of the war. Thus, the scholarship is linked to the recognition of historical agency. In my study of two films from Guillermo del Toro, I apply the thinking of Ferrán to the child protagonists to highlight their use of oppositional practices, resistance and agency. Ferrán notes how female political prisoners during the Spanish Civil War ‘actively negotiated, worked within and often subverted those structures of power...to survive and to affirm their political identity’ (Ferrán 2014). Citing adaption and adoption (of a new family unit and of radical behaviours), Ferrán highlights the way the women challenge dominant gender roles, something which I have also found in my analysis of *El laberinto*. Where Ferrán concentrates primarily on the female characters of Chacón’s novel, I focus on the young protagonists of *El espinazo* and *El laberinto*. I note how the young protagonists adopt both new ‘family units’, and radical behaviours in order to resist oppression and work within structures of subjectivation.

In a similar approach to that of Dunja Fehimović’s reconsideration of child’s play in *Not Child’s Play: Tactics and Strategies in Viva Cuba and Habanastation* (Fehimović 2015), an article informed by a reading of Michel de Certeau’s theorisations of tactics ([1984] 2011), I rethink instances that may be at first glance considered child’s play. I show the ways that, upon closer inspection, these acts authored by the young protagonists are tactical ‘oppositional practices’ that enable the child characters to ‘navigate a complex and often hostile, social landscape’ (Breckenridge 2012). Similarly, this analysis will also apply the theory of the queer child (Bond Stockton 2009) to consider the child character’s navigation and restriction to imposed normative structures, as discussed in the following section.

The Queer Child

This section explains what the queer child is according to Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) and how it constitutes the critical theory applied in this research. I explain how Stockton's theory of the queer child can productively engage with my analysis of Spanish horror cinema. The construction of childhood that has been normalised by Western society features a binary; the child is either good/vulnerable/innocent and in need of care or threatening/wayward/bad and in need of constraint. Filmmakers, and often film critics, adhere to this binary when presenting and/or analysing the child. Noble further states that this means that

the child is consequently caught between the opposing poles of freedom and control, threat and vulnerability, past and future. In this way, the child is a liminal figure that somehow falls outside of traditionally opposed binary constructions, and therefore provokes anxiety for those intent on maintaining such boundaries. (Noble 2000)

Bond Stockton's queer theory of the child also suggests a child that does not adhere to this binary. Children, per this theory, are queer; there are sexual children, murderous children, gay children, ghostly children. It sets out that children exhibit qualities that we have deemed as 'adult' and are 'shockingly queer' and consequently do not fit neatly into a binary. Acknowledging queerness of the child in Spanish horror cinema will enable us to suggest new readings of horror that do not adhere strictly to the historical reading which posits them as representations of Republican victims of the war, or the embodiment of directors themselves infantilised by the regime. We can instead read a child in the films that is loquaciously queer and therefore, recognise its agency in the narrative that goes beyond their status in the binary centred structure by which children are commonly understood.

Children, like—and perhaps even more so than—adults cannot be contained within hetero-normative identity categories. Unlike the children of Franco, then, contemporary child figures are not incapacitated by the political, social, and historical circumstances under which they are raised, and thus proffer a potential interpretation of their bodies as reciprocal, *and themselves as agents*. (Noble 2000, p. 167 emphasis added)

This thesis questions whether contemporary child-centred Spanish horror is an evolution of the traditional filmic 'cine con niño' trend, reflecting the memory boom and voicing the trauma of repressed memories, or whether it also runs parallel to the changing understanding of the child in society as a subject that is not just latent, agentic, and queer. My aim is to apply this theory of the queer child to re-read films where children have often been interpreted allegorically, becoming symbols of loss or nostalgia.

Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) proposes that the adult drive to create separation between adulthood and childhood, and fetishize the innocence of the child, has strengthened the queerness of the child. The idea of a gay child then, contradicts notions of innocence and non-sexual nature of the child. In her theorisations, Stockton presents different archetypes of the queer child. She expands upon this, explaining that where children are expected to grow upwards into normative roles and futures, we often encounter the queer child in literature and cinema who do not conform to this presupposed normative ideal and instead grow sideways. In this research, I analyse the presence of the queer child, through close reading of the child protagonists and their resistance to heteronormative structures, the sense of anti-futurity in the ghostly child and their status as mutant child-seers (Balanzategui 2015). Another way that we can reconsider stereotypes that surround the child protagonist is through studying the identity category of orphanhood. The next section sets out how I analyse orphanhood within the film studies.

Orphanhood

This research considers the depiction of the orphan in Spanish film. While this may contradict the idea of essentialism that new sociology of childhood studies wishes to evade, by rethinking the conventions in fictional narratives that depict the orphan as a victim of sorts, I hope to suggest new ideas and thoughts surrounding orphans and the Spanish Civil War. Spanish creatives responding to the traumas of Civil War utilised women and children to portray victimhood. Thus, a growing

tendency has been to view the child, and particularly the orphan, as a cipher of victimhood and trauma. I argue there is a need for scholarship that contemplates the multi-faceted delineations of the orphan in present-day Iberian arts. Whereas the children in the Saura era films were orphans of history, the new Spanish child of crisis represents the child orphaned by history. This consequentially ties in very well with representing Spaniards, effectively orphaned after the Civil War.

Since the 1940s, the orphan character has periodically performed several roles in Spanish culture: a mouthpiece for the regime, a device for national allegory, or the embodiment of trauma. Recently, works that break with this template have begun to surface, depicting the Spanish orphan in a novel light, often as a transgressive, social actor. Scholars have commented on the use of orphanhood in the early films of *españoladas*, highlighting Joselito of *El pequeño ruiseñor* (Amo 1957) for the use of real or apocryphal orphanhood in terms of its melodramatic potential (Pavlović et al. 2013). The strictly Catholic, heteronormative society of the time presented a child without parents as dangerous and antithetical to the idea of the harmonious nuclear family, thus films from this period would often show the orphan in a search for reunification with the family or running into trouble.

Traumatic replaying of post-war devastation is another function of the orphan (Pavlović et al. 2013). This is true if we consider the orphans of the New Spanish Cinema movement, as we saw in the literature review. Fictional orphanhood around the years of the Law for Historical Memory at first seems to be closely linked to the replaying traumas of war, casting a spotlight on those who were literally or metaphorically orphaned by the disastrous effects. We see this in films such as *La prima Angélica* (Saura 1974), *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976), *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973), films that foreground real or apocryphal orphanhood. Further to this, the orphan has been utilised by directors of the Spanish horror genre as a marker for uncertainty and as a cautionary tale interacting with the dangers of denying national memories of trauma, exemplified by films such as *Who Can Kill a Child?* (Ibáñez Serrador 1976):

The child occupies a prominent position within national-cultural discourses and also solicits primal fears surrounding birth, death, bodily transformation and the uncanny. The child represents the past and the future, nostalgia, history, change and futurity, and causes us to look backward and forward at the same time, an act which in itself may evoke disorientation, if not discomfort and dread. (Pramaggiore 2017)

As we saw in the introductory chapter, this traumatic, uncanny child is perhaps linked with Spain's experience of the kidnapping of children under the Franco regime. Dan Russek (2012) and Sally Faulker (2013) have both explored the recourse to the orphan child in Hispanic Cinema in their writing, with Russek expanding on the identity directors explore using the orphan figure:

To be an orphan is a metaphor for an existential void, a state in which one suffers the painful effects of the absence of an authority figure (familial, cultural, and national). (Russek 2012)

The orphan we often see in post-Franco Spanish cinema certainly does allude to the missing children of the Franco regime and articulates memories of 'centros de auxilio social (state orphanage systems).³⁵ My analysis considers many of these representations and seeks to consider orphanhood as a childhood identity with a propensity for agency within narratives. As Ansell (2016) has pointed out in her study of AIDS-related orphanhood, the figure of the orphan is incongruent with Western assumptions of an appropriate childhood, and in this regard has become the quintessential vulnerable child. This child, along with 'street children, trafficked children, child soldiers' (Ansell 2016, p. 167), is frequently appropriated, as we have seen in the literature review, by Spanish cinema to represent angelic beings, pretexts for spectacle (Heredero 1993) or traumatised child witnesses that contrast with political violence and embodies the left wing ideology. (D'Lugo 1991).

³⁵ My research into the Cardiff University Special Collections 'Spanish Civil War Pamphlets' microfilm collection (for more information, see here: <<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/special-collections/explore/collection/spanish-civil-war-pamphlets>>) has been helpful in understanding the experiences of children in these orphanages and how this translates into cinematic representations.

I argue that the depiction of orphanhood in the films of this study breaks with the aforementioned narrative traditions surrounding the on-screen orphan in Spanish cinema. In the case study chapters, I examine orphanhood in relation to the agency demonstrated by the young orphan protagonists. To do so, I set out and deconstruct various stereotypes of the orphan child in cinema, including the child witness and the ‘motor-helplessness’ (Martin-Jones 2011) associated with it. Ansell has critiqued this approach to agency in orphanhood, articulating the dangers of the neoliberalist idea of autonomy and how the orphan ‘fairy tale- hero narrative’ seems to fit neatly within this ideology (Ansell 2016). While this argument does present a valid critique of such a view of the agency of the orphan, I argue that the use of the orphan as a symbol in the Spanish context has come to be used as a stand-in for citizens of Spain following the traumas and atrocities of the war. I look at how the character’s orphanhood displaces and questions traditional familial structures. I also consider the narrative arc of the characters that strive to continue resisting, thus not letting the category of orphanhood constrain them to the status of victim. By recognising agency, rather than claiming the ‘fairy tale- hero narrative’, we can recognise the ‘integrity and autonomy of the subject’ (Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011) and re-read the child as a social actor with the capacity to partake and affect the course of events.

Conclusion

The film analyses of this study look at the child protagonist from new perspectives which encompass agency and permits the child protagonist to be perceived as a socio-political/historical actor. My critical approach proposes a rethinking of agency when considering the child, to fill the gap in the scholarship highlighted by the literature review. It also sets out the components for analysis when working through films as case studies, as follows in the next two chapters. I combine these differing theoretical frameworks and theories in order to recognise agency in a broad spectrum through the films. I unpack the genres of haunting in chapter 4 and fantasy in chapter 5, as these cinematic styles themselves offer rich potentials for the detection of agency. I then apply the thinking of Ofelia Ferrán,

highlighting the presence of 'oppositional practices' within the films. This theory sets out adoption and adaption as demonstrative of active resistance in narratives. Following this, Kathryn Bond Stockton's angle of queer theory of 'the queer child' is applied to the protagonists of the films studied. Finally, I reconsider the conventional identity stereotypes around orphans and examine the idea of the child orphan in each film. In sum, this research brings together innovative and lesser-known critical theories to argue for the recognition of agentic practices on the part of child protagonists in Spanish cinema. This, in turn, points towards new ways of thinking about the past and the children of the Franco era. The following chapter marks the beginning of the film analysis and provides first a summary of the film *El espinazo del diablo* and then presents individual scene analysis that argues for the recognition of agency in the actions of the child protagonists.

Chapter 4: *El espinazo del diablo* (del Toro 2001)

Introduction

In the 2001 film *El espinazo del diablo*, del Toro presents childhood overshadowed by a violent war. This chapter looks at del Toro's film and its child protagonists, offering first a summary of the film itself, which is then followed by in-depth analysis. The objective of this chapter is to look at the child protagonists of this Civil War themed horror and query those interpretations, such as Raychaudhuri's, which assert that these young protagonists are representative of passive victims of the war: 'Child protagonists are created specifically as locations of innocent vulnerability against which aggressive violence can be seen to act and with which it can be juxtaposed' (2014, p. 208). Instead, this writing aims to suggest a reading that acknowledges the agency denied them in scholarship that foregrounds symbolic victimhood.

Theoretical Framework

In this first case study I apply my conceptualisation of children's agency and critical frameworks to redefine and read *El espinazo* (del Toro 2001) in a new light. For my analysis, I use the theories previously set out in the theoretical approach (chapter 3). I firstly explore the haunting, ghostly child, informed by Jo Labanyi's take on hauntology (Labanyi 2000) and Balanzategui's uncanny child (2015). Following this, I explore the 'queer child' (Bond Stockton 2009). Her work presents various archetypes of the queer child. 'These archetypes, or central versions, present children that embrace traits and characteristics that are antithetical to the idea of childhood, whether it be through sex, aggression, violence, closets, secrets, etc' (Matos 2013). I propose a reading of the queer child as a theory that works to acknowledge the agency of the child. The queer child, as Bond Stockton sets out, resists

regimes of the normal. It is a child that is queer in its refusal to fit the mould of the figural “Child”. I then examine specific examples of agency and analyse oppositional practices (Ferrán 2014) in the film and show that it is possible to interpret this contemporary Spanish horror film in a way that, while recognising the suffering and acknowledging the testimonies of those who experienced the Francoist repression, centralises instances of socio-political agency in the films rather than augmenting the narrative of victimhood. The two kinds of agentic child I observe in this chapter are the child as agent in a canonical sense (the collective group agency of the gang of orphan boys) and the anamorphic, ghostly child, Santi, who is uncanny in the Freudian definition and signifies the return of the repressed.³⁶ Finally, I consider representations of the orphan in the film and how these direct interpretations of the child characters. Where the case study featured in chapter 5 on *El laberinto del fauno* focuses solely on child protagonist Ofelia, this chapter divides its focus into the agency shown by Santi, the ghost child and Carlos and the young child orphan residents of the orphanage where the film plays out.³⁷ In the first instance, it will be helpful to situate this film analysis within the critical landscape that was touched upon in the literature review.

Critical Landscape

The literature review looked at the various ways that critics have noted how the child character has been co-opted for political and social agendas in Spanish cinema. It will be helpful here to remind ourselves of these analyses. Interpretations of children in films such as *El espinazo del diablo* frequently view these children not as social actors but as oppressed, immobilised and powerless. The child often comes to represent the suffering experienced by a whole generation in narratives of war, as Karen Lury argues (2010). Citing *El*

³⁶Agentic in the field of sociology describes the ‘capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life’ (Bandura 2001).

³⁷ The building is reminiscent of the house in Serrador’s *La residencia* (Ibáñez Serrador 1969)

espinazo as her specific example, Lury explains that the child in this Spanish Civil War narrative takes on a 'metonymic function' to represent all the victims of the Civil War and regime in Spain (2010, pp. 107-108). This iteration of victimhood means that the child protagonist is co-opted to represent adult interests. She explains that children, like animals, make the 'perfect victims' (Lury 2010), since they are effectively blameless in narratives of war. The viewer is consequently in a superior position and can sympathise easily with the innocent child, a notion that the film *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?* (Ibáñez Serrador 1976), turns on its head.³⁸ Similarly, Raychaudhuri (2010) notes how this co-optation of the child is often used to construct a narrative of loss—the child is the embodiment of innocence and the 'victim'. As such, s/he symbolises the wide scale loss after the Civil War and persecution carried out by the regime. In fact, much of the established scholarship, including the aforementioned examples, argues that it is possible to trace this victim narrative forward to films including *El espinazo*.³⁹ If we consider, for example, one of the final scenes in the film in which many of the children are killed in the explosion caused by Jacinto, it is easy to adopt this outlook. Over the course of the film, the boys at times play victim to Jacinto, the on-screen embodiment of war-time brutality. Consequently, we find scholarship which foregrounds this narrative of victimhood in *El espinazo*. This outlook, however, runs the risk of overlooking the vigour of the child protagonists and their capacity to effect change within the narrative.

³⁸ The plot features a mob of children that band together killing all the adults on a small island and has been recognised as symbolising the hypothetical vengeance of thousands of children affected by the violence of war across the world

³⁹ See Vivancos (2012)



Figure 6 A still from the explosion of the orphanage in *El espinazo del diablo*

Raychaudhuri does highlight the danger in misrecognizing the child, or rather, ‘assuming that children can stand in for adult versions of innocence and victimhood’ (2010, p. 216) in narratives like that of *El espinazo*. It is this assumption, that the child must always and only adopt this overall function of symbolising innocence, to serve as a direct contrast to the trauma and violence, which has led to scholarship that tends to ignore the significance of the potential agency in the child as a social actor. For example, Ana Vivancos asserts that

El espinazo del diablo reinforces the powerlessness of the innocent victims suffering the violence of a civil war. (Vivancos 2012)

As we have seen, Sarah Wright, Fiona Noble and Miaowei Weng, at different points in their work, all highlight the child as a means of memory recall of sorts and as something that lifts the collective amnesia around the events of the Civil War, brought on by the Pacto del olvido (the pact of forgetting).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Spain’s Amnesty agreement of 1977.

Wright explains that her work explores the way certain children in Spanish cinema

[A]rticulate anxieties that the past as depicted under Francoism (the endless retelling of the story of the victors of the war and the denial of an alternative memory) was a false, if seductive, reality. (Wright 2013, p. 157)

Noble's interpretation differs in its recognition of the child figure as one that reopens the blockage of Republican memory that the Franco regime imposed. Miaowei Weng explores the politicized childhood presented by authors and filmmakers as their attempt to 'construct and reconstruct a national-Catholic childhood to articulate their political voices' (Weng 2016, p. 66). While these established interpretations are valid and informed studies, the direction of my argument is to highlight that it is still possible to attribute agency to the child protagonists in *El espinazo*, and that these children can be viewed as socio-political actors that command agency in the narrative. It will be useful here to introduce the film and highlight some key elements of the narrative.

Del Toro and *El espinazo del diablo*

Many of the films of Guillermo del Toro explore the themes of childhood and trauma and *El espinazo* is no exception. The director has long been interested in the monsters and haunting children of Japanese horror film and we see these elements embodied in the ghost character Santi. The director has previously spoken about how he desired for the ghost to be a 'sentient, reoccurring presence' in his films (Parker 2002) and we find these characteristics in Santi, the ghost. Del Toro incorporates the haunting elements of his own childhood within a film that mixes the gothic and the surreal. Like Spanish auteur Luis Buñuel, del Toro was subjected to a strict Jesuit upbringing and often discusses how childhood was a terrible and traumatising period of his life. For del Toro, monsters are tangible, ever-present beings in the world. Prior to the release of this film, del Toro released the chillingly gruesome *Cronos* (1993), commencing his renowned trilogy. A

culmination of his increasing prowess in the world of special effects, del Toro's brand of chilling magical realism manifests in *Cronos*—a fantastical retelling of the traditional vampire story, also witnessed by a child. *El espinazo* and *El laberinto*, however, make up 'the first diptych in which children encounter the magical during the chaos of the Spanish Civil War' with 'a persuasively affecting mix of terror and sentiment' (Newman 2011, p. 511).⁴¹

Written by David Muñoz, Antonio Trashorras, and del Toro himself, *El espinazo* is a gothic horror film that centres on a group of young boys in an orphanage during the closing years of the Spanish Civil War. Located in an isolated, dusty and heat-stricken Spanish desert, del Toro explains that the eerie building that hosts the boys is just as much of a character as the people themselves (2001). The gothic structures and darkened corridors set the scene for the key moments of tension as the plot unfolds. As the boys are orphans whose parents are presumably Republicans (fighting, captured or dead), they are cared for by Carmen (Marisa Paredes), the one legged headmistress reminiscent of Buñuel's *Tristana* (1970), Dr Casares (Federico Luppi) the gentle old professor harbouring a secret love for Carmen, Jacinto (Eduardo Noriega), the janitor who bullies the orphans and has a secret affair with Carmen, and Conchita (Irene Visedo), the sweet-natured mother figure for the boys. As the story—based on the graphic novel *Paracuellos* (Giménez and Marsé 2007)—unfolds, we realise that the orphanage is also haunted; a

⁴¹ It is necessary to address again here the status of *El espinazo* as a transnational film. As a Spanish-Mexican coproduction (the collaboration of Tequila Gang, the Mexican Anhelos productions and the Almodovar brothers' El Deseo S.A.) the inclusion of this text identified as a Spanish film may raise some questions. Readers should note however, that both *El espinazo* and *El laberinto* and to a certain extent, *Cronos*, have been widely accepted as examples of Spanish cinema. This is due to their setting in and around the time of the Spanish Civil War. Also notable is that both *El espinazo* and *El laberinto* have won GOYA awards (*El espinazo* for Best Costume Design and Best Special effects in 2002 and *El laberinto* for best original screenplay in 2006) as Spanish films rather than the category of best foreign film. *El laberinto* was also accepted as a nominee best Spanish film rather than best foreign film (Tierney 2014) Whilst acknowledging the film's status as a transnational coproduction, this chapter will analyse the film as a Spanish cinematic text, situating explorative analysis in the context of the Spanish nation and Spanish children of the Civil War.

young boy, a ghost known as Santi (Junio Valverde) is often glimpsed at the end of corridors or hovering behind doors and around corners. The narrative largely follows the journey of Carlos (Fernando Tielve), a young boy brought to the orphanage by his tutor, unaware that his Republican father has already been killed. As we follow the character of Carlos and slowly piece together the internal cracks in the relationships of the characters and the haunting story of the orphanage itself, Santi the ghost appears more frequently. He repeatedly warns Carlos that 'muchos de vosotros vais a morir' ('many of you will die'); overtly foreshadowing the tragic explosion that occurs later in the film.

The presence of fear is constant for the boys; the bomb, the ghost and the overbearing and aggressive caretaker Jacinto combine to create a hostile and unfriendly environment throughout the orphanage.⁴² The film repeats the event of the traumatic encounter over and over again, emphasising the continuous suffering the war brought upon children. In the inevitable explosion in the later scenes of the film, and in the scenes of the crisis, the screen is bombarded with images of death and the bodies of children. The graphic and horrific nature of the traumas presented by del Toro is what makes this a horror film, rather than simply a gothic thriller. It is due to these aforesaid elements that a great deal of scholarship has foregrounded the *mise-en-scène* and characterisation to underscore the story as a microcosm of the nation of Spain at the climax of the Spanish Civil War. (Labanyi 2000; Vivancos 2012; Haddu 2014). At the same time, Olson has also noted that the rebellion of the child characters can also be aligned with the eventual resistance of the Spanish nation:

Del Toro goes on to explain that during the 1960s, Spain found the courage to resist the fascist dictatorship, and this newly found sense of rebellion and self-expression was not unlike that of the United States in

⁴² One striking feature of the orphanage is most certainly the bomb that sits silently unexploded and latent in the centre of the courtyard. It is later explained to Carlos that the bomb fell on the orphanage grounds one night and never went off. The boys are both curious about, and frightened by, the prospect of this bomb; they are told it has been defused but they are dubious. A ghost trapped between two worlds, this bomb functions as the symbol of trauma—of the past, present and future.

the 1960s (Kermode, 2006). This would indicate that Spain reached an age of independence, not unlike a teenager who reaches a certain age and suddenly desires independence from his or her parents. Thus, the link between childhood and nationhood becomes another way for del Toro to explore the trauma of the civil war and its aftermath. (Olson 2013)

This chapter, however, expands on previous academic works such as these, in order also to reinstate the agency of the child protagonists.



Figure 7 A still from the behind the scenes commentary of *El espinazo del diablo*

Indeed, a key notion relating to the child protagonists of *El espinazo* is that they are no longer confined to the ambiguous, more allusive nature we find in young protagonists of the New Spanish Cinema such as *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976) and *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973). The child protagonists of these arthouse films are 'quietly subversive' (Balanzategui 2015), whereas the children in *El espinazo* are fully formed 'mutants' of this previous genre, the directors now free to respond to the traumas of the Civil War outside the constraints imposed by the Franco regimes strict censorship apparatus. The period beginning after the end of the Franco regime saw a concentration of Spanish Civil War themed cinema. These films can serve as

artistic documentation and reaction to the ordeals of the war and the succeeding regime. The symbolism used by directors has been cited by many scholars as imagery used to allude to the trauma experienced by Spanish people during the conflict.⁴³ This is something that we can also distinguish in specifically child-centred Spanish cinema, as these kinds of films are very often the ones that interact directly with the themes of trauma and memory, so prevalent in art based around this subject. Some notable examples of these films include *La lengua de la mariposa* (Cuerda 1999), *La prima Angélica* (Saura 1974), *Las bicicletas son para el verano* (Chávarri 1983), *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?* (Ibáñez Serrador 1976) and *Secretos del corazón* (Armendáriz 1997). Sarah Wright has noted that this tendency to articulate experiences of trauma in Spanish cinema as being child-centred occurs because the child can function as ‘spectacle, narrative, and gaze’ (Wright 2013, p. 93). She states ‘the child might be seen as a lingua franca which allows directors to present an attractive and comprehensible face to investigations of the Spanish past (both for Spanish audiences and internationally)’ (Wright 2013, p. 93). In this way, the child figure incorporates memory and reaction through the various forms it takes as witness, monster, ghost, and as an architect of nostalgia, as Wright points out. I suggest that Wright’s statement would better postulate the child as a tabula rasa on which filmmakers and critics load highly contextualised meaning. If we compare these films with del Toro’s, I will demonstrate that agency can in fact be discerned in the protagonists he presents. In the succeeding section, I discuss how haunting can be conceived as a form of agency on the part of the child protagonists.

⁴³ This can be seen predominantly in the art house cinema of the late seventies, which often articulates through allegory and other rhetorical devices criticism of the regime and its horrors. We can trace this dialectic of political and social turmoil back to the films of Carlos Saura, whose films produced during and after the regime were subjected to state censorship: see *Los golfos* (Saura 1960) and *El jardín de las delicias* (Saura 1970).

Haunting Children

Del Toro's film has a clearly defined focus on haunting and haunting children. Where these haunting children have in the past been explored as solely victims, this section articulates the layers of haunting in the film that have come to demonstrate agency. This section first deals with the metaphorical haunting memories of the past and Spanish history; situating this, and previous research in the national historical context. It then looks at the haunting intertwined with the narrative and embodied through the child characters themselves.

El espinazo has often been read as a metaphorical warning of the dangers of denying memory. After Spain's pact of silence (1977), memories of extreme violence, trauma and injustice under the Franco regime were erased from public memory, consequently denying the traumatic experiences and memories of thousands of Spaniards, the violence of the victors never acknowledged. Influenced by Derrida's concept of hauntology in *Specters of Marx* (Derrida 1993), Jo Labanyi argues that the influx of spectres and ghosts in Spanish art, literature and film post 1977 can be attributed to the past 'making itself present' and traces of traumatic past in ghost form. Labanyi puts forward the ideas of a 'dustbin of history'— a reference to Marcus' collection of essays (1994) — and a 'historical hell', discernible in Spanish cinema as a space which the spectral living dead inhabit' (Labanyi 2000, p. 74). Labanyi's assertion highlights the blending of haunting in Spanish historical cinema and the apparition of haunting characters. I contend that is possible to read these motifs of haunting as instances of agency in the acts of the child character.

As we have seen, the child witness becomes a prominent trope of post war cinema. Judith Keene (2016, p. 105), and, notably, Marsha Kinder (1983), argue that this is a way for directors, including Carlos Saura with films such as *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976) and *Dulces horas* (Saura 1982), to explore their own childhood during the war and/or oppressive regime. Balanzategui has pointed out, though, that

[T]his association of childhood with traumatic pasts sits in tension with the socio-cultural investment in “the Child” as a symbol of “futura’s” unquestioned value. The a-temporal children of Spanish horror harness this symbolic splintering, traversing the gulf between personal and socio-cultural identities. (Balanzategui 2015, p. 227)

I argue that the ghost Santi in *El espinazo* not only problematises the idea of traumatic childhood pasts and the child as a symbol of the future, he further ‘harnesses’ this binary and asserts his ‘spectral agency’ (Peeren 2014, p. 148) to stimulate change in the course of events in the narrative. In the DVD extras, del Toro states that ‘un fantasma es un asunto pendiente’ (‘a ghost is unfinished business’) (del Toro 2001). As the ghost character, Santi, creates a rupture and hence has a force. Santi erupts in the traumatic return of the repressed. This is emphasised visually in the film, as Santi’s corpse floats in the amber cesspit of the basement whilst the ghost Santi roams the orphanage in an attempt to resolve outstanding issues. Referencing popular culture and canonical theatrical works (*Hamlet*, *Antigone* and *The Night of the Living Dead*), Žižek (1992) explains the concept of two deaths. The living dead occupy the space between the Symbolic and the Real. Žižek posits that the living dead return when there is some unfinished debt to be settled, an unpaid symbolic debt. As Antigone was stuck in the domain between her symbolic and her actual death, so is Santi the ghost. The idea of this ‘certain symbolic debt persisting beyond physical expiration’ returns us to del Toro’s previously mentioned articulation of a ghost as unfinished business. This is pure drive without desire. Furthermore, the proper, symbolic funeral process has not occurred:

It is precisely for this reason that the funeral rite exemplifies symbolization at its purest: through it, the dead are inscribed in the text of symbolic tradition, they are assured that, in spite of their death, they will “continue to live” in the memory of the community. The “return of the living dead” is, on the other hand, the reverse of the proper funeral rite. While the latter implies a certain reconciliation, an acceptance of loss, the return of the dead signifies that they cannot find their proper place in the text of tradition. The two great traumatic events of the holocaust and the gulag are, of course, exemplary cases of the return

of the dead in the twentieth century. The shadow of the victims will continue to chase us as “living dead” until we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory. (Žižek 1992, p. 23)

The Spanish Civil War is also an example of a ‘traumatic event’; the return of the living dead through the symbolic exhumation of mass graves across the country since the early 2000s is proof of this. The spike in historical horror films featuring ghostly children has been a way for filmmakers to react to these events. I assert that it is improper to view these on-screen children as solely representative of victimhood; rather, I acknowledge their agentic force as social actors and contend that, ghosts such as Santi in *El espinazo del diablo*, in rupturing timelines, embody a resilient force. The symbolic funeral process, much like the ‘proper’ burial of many killed in Civil War violence, only occurs a lengthy period of time after death.

Del Toro further accentuates Santi’s agentic, spectral force and presence as a social actor within the narrative through his subversion of traditional horror film



Figure 8 Santi the ghost

conventions. As the narrative progresses, Santi is increasingly more present on screen. The traditional conventions of Hollywood American horror film dictate that the frightening stems from what is not known, what is lying in wait for the protagonists off-screen. While del Toro builds tension using realistic and expressive diegetic sound including ominous footsteps and what seems to be liquid trickling and dripping, in the scene set in the dark basement, the audience is shown Santi the ghost in clear shot relatively early in the plot. The close up shot clearly exposes Santi’s face and visible visceral wounds (see Figure 8). From this point, Santi’s representation of the uncanny takes on a double meaning; he is uncanny as he is a living-dead child and he also blends

familiarity with the unknown when we see and know the 'monster'. Santi can be interpreted as a zeitgeist for the political movement around the time of the film's release, which sought to uncover past memories which were once suppressed. Thus, his subjectivation has a dual importance. He is, in the first instance, seemingly the embodiment of victimhood (he has been murdered, is clearly injured and is resigned to haunting the orphanage). Yet, Santi's desire to be heard by the other boys and his refusal to remain confined to the past instead highlights his voice as a social actor.

As the events unfold, we discover that Santi is the ghost of one of the orphans who disappeared the same night that the bomb landed on the orphanage. His presence in the orphanage signifies that he, like the bomb, is stuck—or trapped—in this other world. In fact, unexploded devices from the wars are still being discovered in present day Spain and, with their discovery, the buried reminders of the war are being uncovered. In her essay on the spectral children of Spanish horror, Balanzategui explains why Santi comes to represent the return of the repressed: 'Santi's death refuses to remain lodged in immobilized historical past - a present that has passed – but remains forever alongside the present as a past that "is" (Balanzategui 2015, p. 235). Santi can of course be interpreted as symbolising the many children who became victims of the violence of the Civil War. Despite this, he refuses confinement to the past and quite literally negates his repression and death by returning to help the orphan boys and warn them of danger. The spectral force and agency of the child is underlined by both his actions and image. Santi appears several times throughout the narrative and the structure reinforces this. We see flashback scenes of him alive before being murdered by Jacinto. In this way, Santi's spectral force knows no bounds and he

does not stop at invading the present from the past while threatening to reappear in the future, but inhabits all these temporalities and the associated generations to mark multi-generational sites of debt and responsibility. (Peeren 2014, p. 147)



Figure 9 Close-up shot of Santi

Santi's agency can be understood further if we consider the cinematic landscape in which we find the film. Under the dictatorship, the state encouraged films that acted as a vehicle for the dissemination of the ideology of the Franco regime. As the severe censorship was gradually reduced after the death of Franco and during the transition period, and some of the stricter thematic prohibitions were lifted—although we are still faced with orthodox forms of censorship today with the rating systems—more subversive cinema was able to thrive. Notable examples of this are the films of the *destape* period⁴⁴ - usually comedies, such as *Españolas en París* (Bodegas 1971) and *Tres Suecas para tres Rodríguez* (Lazaga 1975), in which nudity and sex were prominent. These films played mainly with the image of the bare-breasted woman and experimented with sexual desire and liberty, cinematic themes unheard of under the regime.

At the same time, another kind of cinema manifested itself, 'con marcadas pretensiones político-intelectuales' (with defined politico-intellectual objectives) (Collado Alonso 2011, p. 199), demonstrated by the filmography of Carlos Saura. The children of his brand of New Spanish Cinema films were child seers, witnessing sociological politically generated trauma, but still restricted from being overt mouthpieces for the directors to speak out against the

⁴⁴ The *destape* period, *destape* meaning the uncovering, is widely understood as the period towards the end of Franco's rule in the late sixties and earlier seventies. This was a period of liberalisation, with more freedom for expression, sexuality and hedonism which was reflected in Spanish cinema.

dictatorship by the continued political censorship. The alternative horror genre also subverted conventions but for working class audiences rather than art house cinema.⁴⁵ In

the cinema of del Toro, however, the child characters are granted social force and their actions have a clearly defined impact within the narratives. This is not made overtly



Figure 10 Carlos approaches Santi

clear from the film's beginning, as del Toro uses conventions of the horror and gothic mode: the haunted house, the setting of war, the orphan children in a war-torn environment, the villain. Through the character of Santi, the ghost child, though, del Toro subverts traditional conventions of the horror film, as we have seen. The ghost is presented to the audience in full view through a close up shot. This is a unique take on the uncanny and Santi is also later seen in full daylight and the use of a tracking shot allows us to follow Carlos as he approaches the ghost, whose entire form is in full view (see Figure 10). Notable throughout the film is a continuous effort from the two characters to know and be closer to each other, both physically and emotionally. This is perhaps most clearly played out visually in the scene shown in Figure 10. The

⁴⁵ For more information on censorship during the regime, see Higginbotham (1988) Furthermore, the horror genre was also thriving as a way for oppositional filmmakers to channel their dissidence into satirical and critical cinema and they were able to exercise more freedom than those working in the domain of New Spanish Cinema, an art cinema that 'was easily assimilated by the interests of the regime as an example of their increasingly liberal attitudes' (Willis 2003, p. 74). Frances Stonor Saunders has shown in her book *Who Paid the Piper?* (1999), that there is evidence that artistic outlets such as cinema were co-opted by foreign interests, namely, the USA. Willis (2003) traces the move of oppositional directors into the horror genre, which offered them opportunities to work dissident attitudes into films that, unlike the arthouse productions of the New Spanish cinema, would reach working class audiences.

combination of the moving close up and the tracking shot, much like the extended tracking shot at the end of *The 400 Blows* (Truffaut 1959), functions to accentuate their individual agency, and their coming together as a joint force.

In the final moments of the film we see that Santi was not simply a metaphor or part of hubristic imagination, he was a real force within the film. (West 2015, p. 138)

We have discussed in this section, the layers of haunting present within the film and how in fact they buttress the notion of Santi, the undead child, as a character with agency. On first viewing the earlier scenes of the film, it seems logical to interpret Santi solely as the child victim, due to his death under mysterious circumstances and distressed and wounded, ghostly state. Upon further close analysis, however, we are able to note how his actions as a defiant spectral force are examples of his assertion of his own agency.

Additionally, we should consider the temporal disjunction triggered by the ghostly child (in this case, Santi). As Balanzategui (2015) sets out, the uncanny, spectral Santi in *El espinazo* combines the past, present and future and thus collides with the intertwined socio-political futurity tied to the traditional figure of the child. Santi is a ghostly force stuck in a traumatic present. The process of subjectivation helps to underline Santi's difference. Žižek further expands on the subject and subjectivation with his famous *Che voi? Or What do you want from me?* (Žižek 1989). This is the idea that the subject 'comes about through their very doubt or uncertainty as to what the Other wants' (Butler 2014). Just as the young child wants to discover how s/he figures in the world, the subject is tied to this uncertainty, questioning just what the desire of the Other is and how it can form an identity around what fulfils its



Figure 11 Santi stares through the keyhole

desire.⁴⁶ I argue that the ghost Santi is subjectivised. 'In *Frankenstein*, the monster is fully subjectivised: the monstrous murderer reveals himself to be a deeply hurt and desperate individual, yearning for company and love' (Žižek 2015). Over the course of the film, it is revealed that Santi was a young boy in the orphanage, murdered by Jacinto the caretaker. What Santi wants is vengeance for his death and to warn the boys about the murderous drive of Jacinto. As Santi's appearances on screen increase and more of his back story is revealed, the subject is born. 'The process of subjectivation is our answer to the uncanny otherness we experience in external reality' (Vighi and Feldner 2010).

This notion is visually supported by the way del Toro introduces the ghost of Santi very casually; we see several glimpses of him at the end of corridors and through keyholes (see Figure 11). Over the course of the film, Santi is shown in full view many times as we come to learn about his background. This subjectivation of Santi allows him to become an active participant in the happening in the orphanage; he seeks to be recognised and physically seen by the others (the boys of the orphanage) to 'develop subject status and the potential for agency' (Randall 2017, p. 30). Del Toro's subversion of traditional horror conventions by presenting Santi to the spectator in plain sight very early in the film, coupled with his embodiment of the Freudian uncanny, mean that he is an aberrant ghost. Critic Paul Julian Smith has argued that this detracts from the potential potency of Santi's ghostly force within the film's status as a horror; 'If the uncanny is diagnosed too well, then surely its potency is lost?' (Smith 2011). While this might be the case if we were upholding the film up to a strict gauge based on horror film structural aesthetics, in the case to be made for the agency of the child character, Santi's frequent appearances underline his potency as an agentic social actor. Jessica Balanzategui delves further into these aspects in her analysis of Spanish horror film's children, paying close

⁴⁶ For a concise explanation of Žižek's thought in both *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, see M (Sharpe 2004, pp. 126-167).

attention to how these spectral, ghostly children dislodge the association between children and futurity:

As this period of “hypermodernity”⁴⁷ drew to a close, the eerie child character began to emerge regularly in Spanish horror, becoming a prevalent figure during the late 1990s and subsequent millennial turn - a transitional period in which narratives of progress seemed to waver. It is at this juncture that the figure of the child, typically the ultimate symbol of cultural futurity, appears to enforce a reconsideration of the interlacing past and present. (Balanzategui 2015)

Thus, del Toro presents a wholly different child. Del Toro has explained his hatred for Hollywood movies in which children appear as ‘happy’ and ‘brainless’ and describes his intention for *El espinazo* as being to demonstrate, in fact, how ‘unsavoury it is to be a child’ (Kaufman 2004). Combining this with themes of guilt and vengeance, and the backdrop of the Civil War, ultimately means that del Toro’s cinematic children do exactly what Balanzategui claims. Through their divergence from this traditional ‘Hollywood’ romanticised aesthetic of the child, these uncanny and queer children provoke a reassessment of the child and the ‘interlacing past and present’ (2015). We can see, then, that these child characters develop an agency both extradiegetically and intradiegetically. In the following section, I will review the theory of the queer child and its relation to my capture of agency in *El espinazo*.

The Queer Child

Following on from her work in the area of queer theory, Kathryn Bond Stockton examines the strangeness of children in her seminal writing *The Queer Child* (Bond Stockton 2009). Stockton demonstrates the ties of her work to film analysis and her work has actually been used previously to analyse child centred Spanish cinema by Fiona Noble (2015). I argue that Stockton’s

⁴⁷ This period of hypermodernity refers to the government projected image of a modern Spain, supported by campaigns promoting tourism and Spanish culture from the 1980s into the 1990s. For more information see (Hooper 2006)

iteration of the queer child is one that is discernible in *El espinazo*. In order to apply Stockton's theory of the queer child to this film, the premise itself of the queer child should be reiterated:

In spite of Anglo-American cultures, over several centuries, thinking that the child can be a carefully controlled embodiment of noncomplication (increasingly protected from labor, sex, and painful understanding), the child has gotten thick with complication. Even as idea. In fact, the very moves to free the child from density – to make it distant from adulthood – have only made it stranger, more fundamentally foreign, to adults. Innocence is queerer than we ever thought it could be. (Bond Stockton 2009)

Stockton suggests that the actual notion itself of the gay child occasions new perceptions of the child in general. Stockton uses the idea and explanation of a child that is gay as grounds to reconsider potential 'queerness' in every child, rather than being restricted to a homosexual child. She does look in close detail at the 'ghostly gay child' – a child that is 'not allowed to be conscious of his/herself as gay, and so, conceptually, exists only in memories of childhood. What happens to gay children in twentieth-century novels and films, according to Stockton, is that they 'disappear, or are ghosted through metaphors.' (Owen 2010, p. 256). Stockton outlines specific versions of the queer child and presents them through close analysis of film. By taking her conceptualisation of the queer child and widening the parameters, as she explains is possible, we can see there are many types of queer child.

As it emerges as an idea, it begins to outline, in shadowy form, the pain, closets, emotional labors, sexual motives, and sideways movements that attend all children, however we deny it. A gay child illuminates the darkness of the child. (Bond Stockton 2009, p. 3)

In my analysis of Spanish cinema featuring the child, I apply the ideas of Stockton, in the sense that allowing for the queerness of the child permits us to understand the child in ways that are not tied to the 'politics of futurity' (Edelman 2004).



Figure 12 Santi the ghost child

Thus, we can then move to read the ghostly child, or the orphan child beyond the confines of adultism's romanticised construction of the child. The eerie, ghostly child of Spanish cinema is subversively queer because it presents the child in an uncannily monstrous state. As a ghost, Santi transgresses multiple boundaries, presenting us with Kristeva's definition of the abject (1982). His unsettling characteristics as dark, sullen and deathly directly contrast with literature's traditionally romanticised image of the innocent child. As we have seen, Stockton's study *The Queer Child*, traces the presence of the queer child in a range of different films. Stockton explains her thesis with the following words:

Estranging, broadening, darkening forms of the child-as-idea are my pursuit, with a keen eye on the ghostly gay child (emblem and icon of children's queerness) as a figure hovering in the twentieth century – and a figure braiding with other forms of children who are broadly strange. (Bond Stockton 2009, p. 3)

In *El espinazo*, we see children who are also 'broadly strange', in the way they subvert the traditional image of the innocent, pure and victimised child. The orphans, and Santi the ghost, are the subjects of my analysis and I use Stockton's queer child as theoretical background to my reading of them, before later presenting my case for their agency within the narrative. Del Toro presents the traumatic effects of the Spanish Civil War on children, placing



Figure 13 The stages of creating Santi

them in an environment that is dark yet fantastical. His presentation of a surreal childhood filled with ghosts and horror through this film means that we see the queer child: Santi, the ghost. As a spectre, he is stuck between two worlds and haunts the orphanage. His echoing warnings of danger are heard frequently by Carlos and del Toro's skilled design of his screen presence using special effects arguably means he is one of the chilling cinematic spectres. Visually, Santi is a greyish shade of white, and parts of his skin resemble cracked porcelain. The special effects used create a swirling smoke which enshrouds him as he enters shots. The special effects extra on the DVD edition (del Toro 2001) expands on the various layers and sequencing involved to create the finished product

of Santi. Indeed, 460 stills were used to create the overall visual effects as Santi the ghost child moves through the liquid (see Figure 13). Blood streams out of his head injury as he walks towards Carlos down the corridor as if he is still floating in the amber liquid of the cess pit. The CGI effects used to create Santi slightly blur his facial detail, which helps to emphasise his surreal and watery image.

Santi's presence accentuates the death of the child, severing any connection between the child and the idea of heteronormative reproductive futurism, making him a queer child.⁴⁸ He is further a queer monster, as rather than terrorising the boys or chasing them to their death, he instead warns them of the danger of the genuinely monstrous and murderous Jacinto, the adult caretaker. Santi is a sweet nightmare, an oxymoron that reflects the uncanny embodied by Santi. Santi is essentially antithetical to the classic idea of childhood as a carefree, joyous period of life. He is the queer child in light of

⁴⁸ This figural Child is investigated by Lee Edelman (2004) in further detail.

Stockton's thoughts and the uncanny child as discussed by Balanzategui (2015). McDonald and Clark (2015) have also highlighted del Toro's tendency towards the Queer Gothic within the film. Noting the inclusion of the outcast monstrous figure in much of del Toro's work, they demonstrate how del Toro synergises the queer, the gothic and magical realism. I argue that this is embodied precisely in the figure of the child ghost Santi, whose gothic, ghostly and spectral form pits him 'against the grain of heteronormativity, questioning the binary opposition between the monstrous and the normal' (McDonald and Clark 2014, p. 78).



Figure 14 Carlos inspects the children in 'limbo water'

Further use of striking iconography throughout the film cements the concept of suspension between two worlds and the child that refuses the constraints of normativity. For example, the visceral foetuses in jars of amber liquid that Doctor Casares calls 'limbo water. These foetuses allude to the title of the film, *The Devil's Backbone* in English, a term used in Spain to refer to the condition Spina Bifida; a common birth defect in which the spine is exposed. They depict a strange preservation of the past (see Figure 14). Discussing the foetus and the amber liquid that preserves them, Dr Casares calls them 'los niños de nadie' (nobody's children).⁴⁹ Film critics Max O'Connell and Loren Greenblatt (2013) have noted del Toro's inspiration in David

⁴⁹ This idea of forgotten children, or children of nobody, has been further inspiration for current-day Spanish visual arts including the transnational film *The Others* (Amenábar 2001) and *Psiconautas: Los niños olvidados* (Vazquez 2016).

Cronenberg's body horror. The dead fetuses are floating in the jars of the amber liquid and Dr Casares explains how people in the town buy the liquid due to the superstition that it is a cure for impotency.⁵⁰ The fetuses not only evoke this body horror as they float unnervingly in the liquid, but they are also examples of uncanny 'children' to an extent, their form is familiar yet eerie. Like the ghostly Santi, they are also antithetical to the futurity that is traditionally associated with children, and due to this presence of the abject, this quality is underscored:

Here del Toro takes a common trope in post -Frankenstein Gothic film in particular – the mix of scientific knowledge, superstition and the grotesque-in order to construct an internal narrative that tells the story of adults literally feeding upon children (yet another classic fairy tale trope) in their search for power. This in turn echoes the film's main narrative depicting the victimization and traumatization of children in war. (McDonald and Clark 2014, p. 75)

I disagree with this final claim, as the children later turn this dynamic on its head. Imprisoned inside these liquid-filled jars, these pre- "children" can be conceived as another manifestation of the queer child in the way they refuse the constrictions of linear time, as the children in this film do, reminding us also of the capture of children on the cinema screen. This scene is evocative, furthermore, of the Spanish children that never came to be – the children kidnapped during and after the Civil War – los niños robados. The camera shot shown in Figure 14 uses the camera angle to place Carlos within the line of jars, explicitly highlighting the link between him and these children of nobody: both Carlos and the children behind the glass both take hold of their own agency when their humanity and propensity for agency has been either denied to them or negated by the assumption that they are victims. Carlos later leaves the orphanage and the orange water that holds the children later consumes the adult Jacinto, instead of the adults consuming this liquid. This amber liquid is also in the cess-pit in which Santi eventually reunites with his murderer, Jacinto. This nexus between the

⁵⁰ The associated element of impotency further serves to underscore the concept of anti-futurity

coloured water in both locations highlights the agency of both the children – the unborn babies, Santi the murdered child and the oppressed boys of the orphanage. This is frequently highlighted in the film's scene transitions with graphic match shots focused on the amber colour. This can be seen from the film's opening scenes. Figure 15 shows the amber liquid of the title-card transitioning to become the amber hues of the desert scene where the orphanage is located. Figure 16 shows Jaime, a young orphan staring down into the amber liquid which in turn becomes the amber liquid in which Dr Casares stores the unborn children in jars. This colour continuity serves to link the agency of children in different spheres of the narrative. Jacinto the caretaker's own childhood is highlighted at the end of the film as the photographs he owned of his past are shown floating in the amber liquid. The liquid flows throughout the film, linking events and child characters, which previously entrapped the floating children. This is an abstract yet tangible demonstration of the agency and resistance of the children. The children escape the confines of the prison-like orphanage, perhaps evocative of so many of the centres of 'auxilio social' that were home to thousands of children during the conflict. The amber colour seeps out and infiltrates aspects of the entire film to emphasise this.



Figure 15 A title sequence transition



Figure 16 Jaime looks at the cess pit

Del Toro incorporates elements of art house cinema and the horror genre but subverts both conventions in order to present us with agentic social subjects. As we have seen previously, Balanzategui (2015) views the children of contemporary Spanish horror as 'mutant child seers.' She states that by evoking their ancestral children of New Spanish Cinema (such as Ana Torrent), these uncanny and spooky, queer children mutate and, through their deaths, manage to 'escape the confining bounds of linear narrative time entirely' (Balanzategui 2015). The 'mutant' children of Spanish contemporary horror, in their spectral state, transcend the restrictions of both time and censorship. Where it has been interpreted that these children are victims and in death, more so as they have suffered the ultimate price, I propose that these ghostly queer children in fact warrant an agency within the Spanish Civil War narrative. This allows for a re-interpretation of the discourse of the power and resistance of children. In Santi's direct contrast to the traditional romanticised child, he is a child that rejects the socio-political futurity frequently associated with the child. Lee Edelman (2004) tells us that the image of the child serves to regulate political discourse: it allows for a discourse that supports the fantasy of the future. Turning this on its head, we find the undead, ghost child that forces the (traumatic) past wholly into the present.

Lee Edelman also argues that the child has come to represent the 'telos of social order' and shapes socio-politically charged structures. Symbolising heteronormative futurity, the child 'remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention' (Edelman 2004). 'Queerness' runs contrary to this, clashing with the heteronormative reproductive sense of the 'future'. Edelman explains that queers are positioned against futurity and the figural Child and that the politics surrounding the figure of the Child warrants a reproduction of the status quo.⁵¹

⁵¹ Forming part of what is called the 'antisocial' queer theory movement, along with the works of Lauren Berlant and Jack Halbertstam (2011), Edelman proposes that instead of assimilating with the heteronormative neoliberalist capitalist structure of society, in which heteronormativity is associated with success (earning money, progressing in a career, consuming and being 'stable'), or resisting this ideology through queer activism, that queers should celebrate queer shame and negativity. 'Rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse,

Edelman appropriates some of Slavoj Žižek's ideas on the space between the Symbolic and the Real, and the 'obscene immortality of the undead'. 'The Symbolic uses the figure of the Child to fill in its lack, guaranteeing its continuity in the future' (Nagypal 2015). The boys in *El espinazo* disturb the status quo of the orphanage when they topple the oppressive tyrant, Jacinto. Their actions, and the political agency derived from them, means they greatly differ from "The Child" to which Edelman refers (i.e., one that represents the heteronormative future). The boys resist and rebel against the oppressive force of Jacinto, active rather than passive, not innocent and adorable like the children of many Francoist cinematic works that projected the regime's ideology.⁵² Alternatively, reading the children as social actors as I do, could also lead to them being interpreted as connoting a kind of futurity – conscripting children into the service of historical revision, rewriting the past, making it more encompassing, for the future. While this is a valid contention, the aim of this research is to highlight the importance of recognising the children of horror cinema as social actors and to underline the significance of children in Spanish horror.⁵³ To reaffirm their status as active participants rather than emotive tools. Kathryn Bond Stockton's work deconstructs the queer child, explaining that every child is inherently queer. I argue that Carlos, Jaime and the group of boys in del Toro's film are closer to Stockton's iteration of the queer child than to Edelman's politicised, figural Child.

Instead of symbolising an ideology of futurism through the discourse, the boys are queer; they demonstrate agency by acts of resistance,

this ascription of negativity to the queer, we might, as I argue, do better to consider accepting or even embracing it' (Edelman 2004, p. 4). Here Edelman's work turns to, quite literally, a big Fuck You to 'The Child' – 'Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Is and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop' (Edelman 2004).

⁵² Notable examples are the films of Marisol and Joselito, as we saw in the Introduction chapter

⁵³ This thesis aims to move away from the idea of children as representative of victims. This also aligns with current movement in the horror genre to move away from idea of women as 'victims of crazed monsters' For more information, see <<https://qz.com/1016753/horror-is-the-only-film-genre-where-women-appear-and-speak-as-often-as-men/>>

oppositional practices, and reverse the status quo of the orphanage rather than, as Edelman argues, affirming the structure and authenticating social order (Edelman 2004, pp. 2-3). Michael Warner (1993, p. xxvii) argues that we queer things when we resist regimes of the normal. The children of *El espinazo* do exactly this, challenging the normative perception and interpretation of the passive victim child in cinema. As we have seen, however, this resistance is somewhat mediated by the Other.⁵⁴ In the section that follows, I examine in further detail the agency of the boys.

Agency, Resistance & 'Oppositional Practices'

The haunting ghostly child or the queer child are agentic social actors and in *El espinazo* we see clear archetypes of them, in the group of boys and the ghost Santi. The concepts of agency and resistance, however, are multifaceted and it is worth examining specific examples and scenes in which clear examples of agency are demonstrated. To do so, it is first important to consider the debate surrounding agency in social structures.

The debate about the relationship between structure and agency often comes up when sociologists study the lives of disenfranchised and oppressed populations. Many people, social scientists included, often slip into the trap of describing such populations as if they have no agency. Because we recognize the power of social structural elements like economic class stratification, systemic racism, and patriarchy, to determine life chances and outcomes, we might think that the poor, people of color, and women and girls are universally oppressed by social structure, and thus, have no agency. (Cole 2017)

Similarly, critical and academic scholarship on the children of post-Franco Spanish horror, as we have seen, tends to regard children as without agency,

⁵⁴ Moreover, according to Foucault, resistance is locked in to the discourse of power and he deconstructs the subject, to the extent that he seems to negate the possibilities for agency and change and the very idea of a social actor. 'Instead, passive 'subjects' who are the conduits, bearers or sites of discourses of power/knowledge replace the individualist belief in agency as a universal manifestation of rationality, autonomy, choice and reflexivity' (Caldwell 2007).

or simply representative of the Republican victims of the Civil War and/or the political left oppressed by the Franco regime. In spite of this, I argue that human agency is exhibited by the oppressed group of boys. In contrast with this narrative of victimhood and the oversaturation of childhood innocence in memory-themed cinema, we can instead look to the presence of acts of resistance and oppositional practices.

A simple yet clear example of resistance in the film is in one of the later scenes where the children group together to overcome their oppressor, the caretaker Jacinto. Prior to this uprising by the boys, we see said eruption foreshadowed in an earlier classroom scene. The schoolteacher, Carmen, is teaching the boys about the hunting of mammoths in the Stone Age, explaining how the hunters would work together as a group successfully to hunt the mammoth (see Figures 17 and 18). It is a lesson which seems to capture the attention of most of the boys. Later in the film, Jacinto sets the orphanage alight to spite Carmen, after she refuses to hand over the orphanage gold to him and publicly rejects him. After this explosion, we see some of the most horrifying scenes of the film; corpses are strewn across the courtyard. The surviving boys are locked in a cupboard by Jacinto as he searches for the orphanage gold. Knowing that Jacinto will almost certainly kill them all when he finds it, the boys begin to engineer their plan of attack. In the basement, the boys launch their surprise attack, encircling Jacinto and stabbing him with their makeshift spears (see Figure 19). Thus, we witness the replication of the hunting illustrations from the classroom scene as the boys act as a group of hunters and eventually kill Jacinto, perhaps suggestive of an essentialising apologia for violence and its cyclical nature. In fact, the structure of the film itself is cyclical: the same narration that considers what a ghost really is, can be heard at the beginning and ending scene of the film. With the child ghost of Santi also in mind, we can see that the film highlights the effects of the war on children (the futility of war as an endless circle).



Figure 17 Carmen shows the boys a mural of a hunting scene



Figure 18 Carmen teaches the boys about hunting



Figure 19 The boys hunt Jacinto



Figure 20 Jacinto sinks into the amber liquid

Despite this we can continue to discern agency in their actions. As Jacinto stumbles, wounded, he falls into the murky orange cesspit, where Santi the ghost floats in wait (see Figure 20). Realising that the gold bars in his pockets are weighing him down, Jacinto struggles as he sinks further into the pool and is eventually caught in the arms of Santi's corpse in a haunting embrace. The boys manage to overthrow their oppressor and facilitate Santi's revenge. What we see through this act is the agency of the group in action. By imitating what they saw in class, the boys demonstrate an act of resistance. Applying the sociological understanding of human agency, we can note how the oppressed group comes together to exert agency; working together against the authoritarian Jacinto. My argument is supported by David Archibald:

The factor of human agency is embodied in the film by the actions of the group of boys who overcome Jacinto. (Archibald 2005, p. 177)

Arguably, though, the actions of the boys have to some extent been mediated by an other, in this case their teacher. In psychoanalytic terms, their actions have been informed by a specific use of language and symbolic agent. Jessica Davidson argues that 'only through embracing the hyper masculine violence endorsed by Francoism, do the orphans destroy the corrupt patriarch' (2018, p. 209). This interpretation looks towards a reassessment of the

opposing sides of the conflict and considers, perhaps, the violence carried out on both ideological sides. If we turn our focus to the flourishing agency of the child protagonists, it is crucial that we recognise their agency in order to lessen the emphasis in much scholarship on their role in the allegory of victimhood. Robinson points out that

the weakest and most oppressed, orphan children trapped in a state of exception and effected by extreme violence, become the agents of restitution and justice. (Robinson 2017, p. 250)

Robinson's analysis focuses principally on the child's body as a site of trauma, justice and memory, and while I find that her study at times presents quite an abstract, broad representation of the boys as 'agents of justice', I find her argument to complement my own, in the sense that she recognises the children as agents. In this light, it is further pertinent to recognise the oppositional practices of resistance carried out by the child protagonists, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

Following on from the exploration of agency and resistance, the idea of oppositional practices is one that has been applied to Spanish literature and film in the past. These are practices that aid the resilience and resistance of the children in *El espinazo*. Ofelia Ferrán has explained the processes of adoption and adaption as oppositional practices in her analysis of the women in the novel *La voz dormida* (Chacón 2010):

To begin with, the women in the novel recurrently establish alternative families by figuratively adopting fellow prisoners or friends as if they were their own family members. Through this practice of creating alternative families of various kinds, the characters not only subvert the conservative, traditional view of the family so central to Francoist ideology, but they also assert their political activism and defiance, often (although not always) affirming a political and ideological affiliation crucial to their sense of themselves as agents. (Ferrán 2014, p. 120)

In the film, Carlos, Jaime, and the other boys constitute a family unit of sorts; they grow close after Carlos and Jaime bond over their shared love for

comics⁵⁵ and later carry out smaller acts of resistance against Jacinto. Their games and dares, for example when Carlos and Jaime venture to acquire jugs of water in the middle of the night, are small demonstrations of their resistance to their own subjugation and the other boys adopt Carlos into their group. This is an example of collective agency. In one of the earlier scenes of the film, we see Carmen, the schoolteacher, showing Carlos to his bed in the dormitory. Whilst she is explaining to Carlos the way the orphanage functions, she states 'aquí no hay rejas, esta no es una prisión' ('Here there are no bars, this is not a prison'). A strange atmosphere is communicated when Carmen tells Carlos that many boys have tried to run away from the orphanage but due to its isolated location, they never get far. The structure of the orphanage as the primary setting of the film has previously been interpreted as a microcosm for Spain during the Spanish Civil War. If we consider the bomb that stands ominously in the centre of the courtyard, the overbearing bullying of Jacinto, and the strict rules of the orphanage, it seems that the boys are often placed in the context of a prison structure, power through surveillance. Ultimately, this oppressive structure incurs the active resistance of the boys and the idea of escape is hinted at throughout the narrative.⁵⁶ As Archibald asserts, the film is also 'open to readings which suggest that human agency allows the possibility of breaking out of predetermined cyclical behaviour patterns' (Archibald 2005, p. 189). They adopt each other as a new family unit and further to this, they adopt and adapt certain behaviours that challenge the role of the passive child witness. Ferrán has shown how the adaption of certain behaviours and communications are 'the tricks of the weak within the order established by the strong' (De Certeau et al. 1980, p. 8).

⁵⁵ Also, being a fan of comics since childhood, del Toro based the story on Carlos Gimenez's "Paracuellos" comic series, which takes place in a Francoist orphanage. It is no coincidence that Carlos and Jamie are both a fan of comics. See <<https://film340filmtheoryandcriticism.wordpress.com/2014/01/28/the-devils-backbone/>>

⁵⁶ When Carlos first arrives at the orphanage he is reading *The Count of Monte Cristo* and he speaks with Doctor Casares about the escape from prison. The themes of entrapment and escape are constantly in dialogue throughout the film (Rose 2009).

When the boys eventually resist physically and launch their violent attack on Jacinto, they directly contrast the romanticised image of the victimised, passive child we have seen referred to in prominent scholarship.⁵⁷ Cole (2017) has asserted that ‘individual and collective agency may serve to reaffirm social order by reproducing norms and existing social relationships, or it may serve to challenge and remake social order by going against the status quo to create new norms and relationships’. Considering the boys and their group agency, it might be that they action both of these interpretations of agency simultaneously. They succeed in temporarily reversing the status quo of the orphanage, plunging Jacinto into the amber liquid but they do not succeed in symbolic rearticulation of the status quo altogether. This is underlined by the ending of the film which I analyse later in the chapter, when the boys leave the orphanage and venture out into the empty planes of the hot Spanish desert. The repressive structure of the orphanage — a common trope of Spanish gothic horror — though partly destroyed by an explosion, remains standing and the cadavers of their peers and teachers remain entombed under the rubble. This is arguably emblematic of the current ongoing quest of many Spanish citizens as they navigated post regime society in their campaign for the proper burial of relatives killed and buried in unmarked graves under Franco’s rule.

In his article *The Violence of (In)visibility: Queer Adolescence and Space in Lucia Puenzo’s XXY*, (2017) Guillermo Olivera explores the link between queer agency and political articulation. Concentrating on the adolescent characters Alex and Alvaro in XXY, Olivera illuminates the relational agency achieved by the character Alex in rejecting the ‘oppressive limitations of the closet imposed on her’ by her village, in ultimately rejecting the idea of choosing one gender. Olivera lists ‘articulatory practices’ as expressions of agency. It is important to notice these practices in order to assess the hegemony of heteronormativity. The youth characters that Olivera analyses demonstrate self-affirming practices of agency and thus are political actors

⁵⁷ See Ansell (2016)

who resist the dominant hierarchy of heteronormative society. Despite this, queer theory is not exclusively concerned with sexuality, rather, its parameters stretch further into questioning normativity, problematic assumptions of identity and socio-political structures. While the teens in *XXY* identify as part of the LGBTI community, the youth characters in my own analysis do not explicitly explore gender or sexual orientation. Carlos, Jaime and the boys in *El espinazo* resist the regime of the normal, whilst simultaneously breaking the mould of the figural Child that represents innocence, futurity, the heteronormative societal structure of Spain, and the Western world. In one of the early scenes of the film, Carlos and Jaime attempt to retrieve fresh jugs of water after they were spilt. They venture out of the dormitory, through the courtyard and into the kitchen after hours – breaking the rules. Carlos, after the boys pelt him with stones and smash his jug, is caught by Jacinto. The next morning, Dr Casares attempts to discover which other boys were involved in the rule breaking. Carlos refuses to betray his peers and name who was with him. This is one of the first examples of solidarity and resistance shown by the boys in the face of authority figures. This resistance and resilience from the boys grow and is exhibited verbally later in the film. In a later scene, the boys have been locked in a cupboard by the tyrannical Jacinto and his associates. Most of the boys are tired and disheartened, leading Jaime to give a rousing speech:

- *Hay que salir de aquí.*
- *Si nos quedamos aquí, nos van a matar a todos ¿Queréis quedaros aquí esperando? ¿Creéis que nos va a dejar en paz? ¿Creéis que, si os portáis bien, se acaba todo esto?*
- *We have to get out of here*
- *If we stay here, they will kill us all. Do you want to stay here just waiting? You think they're gonna leave us in peace? Do you think if you're good, all of this will go away?*

As Olivera explains, these are examples of articulatory practices demonstrative of agency. Referencing Laclau and Mouffe's (2001)

understanding of transformative articulatory practices which are ‘transformative not because they might contribute to changes in dominant ideologies or norms, but because they transform both the very identity of the “new” element (or subject) that is articulated— even if through reproduction or reinforcement of dominant norms—as well as the socio symbolic field in which it is articulated’ (Olivera 2017). In other words, the way that the boys now relate to their conditions has changed; the dominant (and oppressive) conditions remain the same, but Jaime urges the boys to change their behaviour and actions. Jaime seems to question the concept of ‘good’ behaviour and future consequences. Although they change the status quo with their later decision to kill Jacinto, it is these instances in which their relational agency manifests. It is also crucial that we call into question the idea of the orphan and its typical relation to the victim status, hence the following section will examine and deconstruct this stereotype.

The Orphan

This brings us to the subject of the orphan in contemporary Spanish horror. It is first important to remind ourselves of the general conception of the orphanhood in post Franco cinema. José Colmeiro (2011) has discussed this in his work:

[T]he trope of orphanhood, like the trope of ghosts, has a well-established connection in post-civil war Spanish culture, by referring elliptically to the unspeakable horrors of the past and the traumatized identities of its victims (*Nada, Primera memoria, Cría cuervos, El desencanto, El Sur, Los niños de Rusia, El espinazo del diablo*, just to name a few) (2011, p. 31)

Russek concurs with Colmeiro, clarifying that ‘Spanish cinema uses the orphan focaliser to represent the Spanish people after the trauma of violence of the Civil War and ensuing Franco dictatorship’ (Russek 2012, p. 135). Thus, the orphan in cinema represents the abandonment and isolation felt by

Spaniards. I argue that it is worth reconsidering the orphan as we trace the examples of political agency in the actions of the child characters. In *El espinazo*, the boys group together as an act of resistance against their tyrant ruler. As I have demonstrated, they create a family unit, a practice Ferrán has called adoption (Ferrán 2014). In this regard, the orphanhood of the boys is transformed from a state that is traditionally seen as negative and representative of loss, into a strong unit of resistance. Nonetheless, the orphan is, more often than not, interpreted as an emblem of the loss and trauma experienced by Spaniards as a result of the horrors of the war and regime. In order to examine agentic practices demonstrated by the boys in del Toro's film, we should first consider the tendency that denies agency to orphan children. Children tend to be interpreted as lacking agency in narratives and this is even more routinely the case when they are orphans. In her research on orphanhood in Russia, Marina Kudasova questions the tendency to treat orphans as an amorphous, indiscriminate mass in the country's media:

It is hard to believe that all the children who were born under the shadow of orphanhood have to fail in their lives unless adopted ... Then, why is there a tendency to silence their stories? ...Why is the agency and resilience of children ignored not only by the mass media, but many of the scholars as well? Thus, I believe that analysis of the social construction of orphanhood within the field of academia also deserves special attention, and alternative approaches should be developed while discussing orphans. (Kudasova 2013, p. 22)

Kudasova calls into question the attitudes towards orphan children in mainstream Russian media and government. She also highlights this same attitude in the works of scholars.

Abebe (2009) points out that the global media produced the representation of orphanhood as a 'crisis-childhood' and 'ticking time-bomb,' which often goes hand in hand with the discourse on disability. According to Abebe (2009), such representations complicate the socialization process of orphans, affect their ability to cope with marginalization, and generally ignore children's agency and resilience.

On the one hand, the concepts of dependency and care seems appropriate when talking about orphans, yet on the other, they might totally overthrow the orphans' agency, which in turn, leads to marginalization and stigmatization. (Kudasova 2013)

Orphans in post-communist states have been read as an index of the failures of socialist administrations, and/or as an index of the failure of the post-communist administrations. Orphans have come to be an index of the horror of bolshevism in Francoism too: children orphaned by the bellicose communists. This interpretation of orphanhood as a 'crisis childhood' or the orphan as a necessarily subordinate state, effectively delegitimises the agency discernible in children as resilient political actors participating in resistance. The orphan boys we find in del Toro's film have been interpreted as victims that symbolise a nation of Spaniards after Franco, during the regime and after the Civil War. Indeed, 'in this orphanage-set film children serve as sentinels of their community of lost boys' (Davidson 2018, p. 204). Del Toro's intention for the child characters is, in many regards, for them to represent the traumas and horrors of childhood that he himself experienced. Despite this, the child protagonists he presents us with are still exemplary of a sense of resilience and social agency. In the director's commentary, del Toro explains how Santi the ghost warns the other boys of the danger awaiting them; the ghost is not promising that many will die, but rather it is a 'concerned warning'. This is just one example of del Toro's twofold representation of the children and it is imperative that we consider differing interpretations of the film with the objective of encouraging Spanish historical film analysis that acknowledges resilience, agency and resistance. The boys act as a unit, supporting each other and are watched over by Santi. Consequently, the stereotypical notion of orphanhood as tragic and isolating is counteracted by their presentation of group agency. As explored previously, they adopt a family unit of sorts (Ferrán 2014).



Figure 21 Carlos chases after his tutor's car in an opening scene



Figure 22 Carlos and the boys leave the orphanage in the closing scenes of the film

It is useful here to incorporate this interpretation into specific visual analysis. There are some scenes with symbolic imagery which is aligned with a narrative arc that supports the development of agency. In the opening scenes of the film, Carlos is left at the orphanage by his tutor. Upon realising he has been left there, Carlos chases after the car taking away his guardian. (see Figure 21). He runs into the hot Spanish desert which is vast and desolate. At this point in the narrative, Carlos is extremely upset and frustrated and it is difficult to recognise his individual agency in the traditional sense. This depiction fits narrow conceptions of orphanhood, as he represents feelings of abandonment and victimhood. Contrastingly, in one of the final scenes of the film, we are presented with a shot of the boys leaving the orphanage (see

Figure 22). Framed by the dark archway of the now destroyed orphanage, the group leave its constraints and are venturing out into the desert. A large part of the shot is made up of the blue sky. In the centre, our eyes meet the group of boys. The rectangular shape of the orphanage exit within the frame to highlight the transition from the domain of the orphanage to the outside world that awaits, evoking tones of the road movie. The rectangular and dark framing represents the dark, oppressive nature of the orphanage they are leaving behind and the rectangular framing view of the outside world foregrounds the vastness of the desert and the transgression of the boys into their next challenge of trekking through the searing open planes (see Figure 22). 'In the closing scenes of the film, the orphans face an uncertain and undefined future as they venture out into the deserted plains of the unknown' (Haddu 2014, p. 146). Just as the orphanage has been interpreted as a microcosm of the Franco regime (Davidson 2018, p. 198), this departure from the building could be seen to signify the uncertain, altered world that awaited children following the Civil War. Conversely, I would argue that the open ending of the film instead spares the orphan child protagonists of what Rachel Randall has outlined as the burden of symbolic national futurity:

The child-figure's link to future uncertainty is therefore not suppressed; however, it is spared the burden of assuming the form of one specific version of national futurity. (Randall 2015, p. 226)

I argue that this shot also calls into question associations of dependency and weakness so often associated with the orphan child. As a literary device, orphanhood has often been used as a way to strengthen the alienation of the child character. This shot can be interpreted in a positive light, as the boys make their way into a new, open landscape in the bright light of day.

Despite this, the scene of boys walking away from the haunted orphanage gives us an elevated sense of their accomplishment as they have passed through an explosive event and come of age in the face of the adult duplicity of Jacinto. (Hartney 2009, p. 197)

Conclusion

The young orphan boys in del Toro's narrative have frequently been read as witnesses, victims and 'losers' in a narrative of war and oppression. As I have demonstrated, however, these readings should not be the dominant interpretations. Moving away from the narrative of victimhood, which can delegitimise the agentic practices and resistance during the war and regime, it is fundamental that we consider analysis that recognises the resilience and oppositional and articulatory practices from the young protagonists of Spanish horror, in an effort to avoid colonising the children who were persecuted and suffered other the Franco regime, overlooking any potential for their socio-political agency. Queer theory of the child runs parallel with this aim, as we find a child that negates the hegemonic heteronormative structure which demands a romanticised child representative of futurity and normative reproduction. In del Toro's film we find resilient orphan boys and a spectral undead child. These uncanny children exhibit force and agency to resist their oppression (the orphan boys) and the bounds of the repressed traumatic encounter, previously confined to the past (Santi). By examining the queer, uncanny child in Spanish horror, it becomes possible to realise new discourses that 'displace the figure of "the child"' (Bohlmann and Moreland 2015, p. 23) and encourage memorialisation that acknowledges children as social actors. I argue for the recognition of children within the narrative as social actors. The repeated focus on historical trauma in Spanish horror and the repetition of the traumatic event itself forces the reliving of the event on the audience, transforming it into a spectacle and essentially fetishizing the atrocities of the past to generate horror film. This cycle of negativity is impossible to mediate or navigate. If we instead concentrate on viewing the children as capable socio-political actors, who demonstrate resistance and the desire to 'act otherwise' (Caldwell 2007), we can begin to reframe the historical Spanish horror film and the role of the child in such narratives. In the same way, the haunting element of this film gives agency to the repressed voices of the Spanish Civil War violence, in efforts not to let repressed memories shape the future. This is evidenced

through the presence of ghosts in the house at the end of the film, remaining inside the house, acknowledged and not forgotten. Viewers are presented with the image of Dr Casares remaining in the house and the child protagonists move out into the desert plains beyond the house. It is possible for Spanish film, then, to articulate political points around memory and trauma, without resorting to the child figure to represent solely victimhood, anguish and suffering. I will further demonstrate this in the following case study chapter on *El laberinto del fauno*.

Chapter 5: *El laberinto del fauno* (del Toro 2006)

Introduction

Five years after the release of *El espinazo del diablo* (del Toro 2001), Guillermo del Toro presented *El laberinto del fauno* (2006) to audiences worldwide.⁵⁸ Childhood in wartime is again presented, along with the fantastical monster (in this case, the faun). This is a factor of its genre hybridity, which mixes horror with the fantastic and the gothic.

On child-centred Spanish cinema, Raychaudhuri has proposed that

[C]hildren are diegetically required to suffer to fulfil their symbolic potential, for example, by being orphaned, so that their vulnerable innocence can be contrasted with, and further traumatized by, a violent adult world. (Raychaudhuri 2014, p. 199)

This chapter will examine the child protagonist of *El laberinto*, Ofelia, with due reference to this notion, as expressed by Raychaudhuri, that the role assigned to children is that of the victim. It will then offer an alternative reading, informed by discussions such as those stimulated by *The Queer Child* (Bond Stockton 2009) and by 'Oppositional Practices' (Ferrán 2014), with the objective of highlighting the agency and resistance in fact demonstrated by the child protagonist. The following section will place previously explained theories within the context of this film study.

Theoretical Framework

In this case study, I apply theories previously explored in my analysis of *El espinazo* along with new concepts. Beginning with the agency that is

⁵⁸ *El laberinto del fauno* incorporates similar themes and motifs. Labelled by the director himself as a sister film to *El espinazo*, this magical realist, gothic horror went on to win the Goya award for Best Screen Play and a BAFTA for Best Foreign Language film in 2007 and is frequently cited as one of the most popular Spanish language films, not only by audiences in Spain and the Spanish speaking world, but by film enthusiasts and academics internationally too. Likewise, there are hundreds of essays, papers and academic scholarship focused on the film - a work overflowing with potential angles for analysis.

drawn from fantasy, I analyse Ofelia's interactions with the fantastical world she discovers. Following this, the focus is through the lens of the Queer Child (Bond Stockton 2009). The Queer Child, as Bond Stockton sets out, resists regimes of the normal. It is a child who is queer in his/her refusal to fit the mould of the figural Child, stereotypically a symbol of futurity. The deep-rooted association of children with futurity comes from the heteronormative, hegemonic structure of reproductive futurism in present-day society, and was a fundamental ideal of the Franco regime.⁵⁹ This research engages with the politics of representation in order to propose a reading of the child that moves away from the child as a symbolic vessel for suffering and instead works towards an analysis which evidences the child as a 'competent social actor who makes meaning and actively interprets the world like anyone else' (Cook 2002, p. 2). This will consequently help us to diminish the persistent idea of the narrative of victimhood and a sense of futurity where children are figured as proxies for past, present or future scapegoats. Subsequently, I note the 'oppositional practices' (Ferrán 2014) that can be seen in the actions of Ofelia. Finally, I examine the child as an orphan, an identity that has stereotypically been associated with vulnerability and defencelessness. I explore specific examples of agency and resistance and resilience through individual scene analysis and support my contentions with reference to interviews with the director himself where he has spoken about his own intentions with regard to the meaning accorded to child protagonists. As this thesis will interact with established scholarship, it will be useful to remind ourselves of the key texts from the literature review that are relevant to this film.

Critical Landscape

As in my previous film case study, it will be useful to centre this analysis in the context of prior scholarship. A review of the literature finds mention of

⁵⁹ The pro-natalist attitude of the Franco regime promoted the idea of 'La familia numerosa', encouraging families to produce numerous offspring, even offering financial prizes for women who had the most children. The slogan of Falangist female institutions told society 'the real mission of the woman is to provide sons for the homeland. And this is therefore her supreme aspiration.' For further reading, see Blasco Herranz, (2017).

works such as *The Child in Spanish Cinema* (Wright 2013) and “*Franco’s Children*”: *Childhood and Memory as National Allegory* (Weng 2016) that discuss the child and the representation of victimhood on screen. The connotations of innocence (Raychaudhuri 2014) and blamelessness (Lury 2010) embedded not only in treatments or representations of children, but also in spectatorship, mean that viewers will perhaps be persuaded to consider child protagonists as solely suffering victims. *El laberinto*, however, in fact shows viewers an intricate fantasy world, only known to the child, a world in which she is not a suffering victim, but a resilient agent. Furthermore, scholars have highlighted how the return to childhood⁶⁰ in films based around the traumas of the Civil War alludes to the recent importance placed on historical memory in Spain.⁶¹ The timing of this coincides with the resurgence of the child protagonist in cinema, as directors have started to look back to the past. This has the corollary effect moreover, of making children act as mouthpieces for previously repressed voices.⁶²

In an article entitled *Commemorating the Spanish Civil War – Eighty Years of Victimhood* (2016) Raychaudhuri problematizes the trope of female victimhood in texts based on the Spanish war such as Conchita in Guillermo del Toro’s *El espinazo del Diablo*, Ofelia and Carmen in *El laberinto del fauno*, by the same director, Carmela in Carlos Saura’s *¡Ay Carmela!* (Saura 1990) and Carol and Aurora in *El viaje de Carol* (Uribe 2002). He goes on to state:

It is easy to see why this is such an effective trope, but it also brings with it certain problems. Female victimhood during times of war is so common that it requires little glossing – it is a convenient shorthand for authors and directors that ultimately relies on an unquestioned assumption that war is not an appropriate environment for women. It is also no coincidence that this list of texts comprises most of the cultural output of the Spanish Civil War that has been allowed general

⁶⁰ This is a deliberately ambiguous term as return encompasses the return to childhood within the narrative of the films and further to this, the comeback of child-centred films in Spanish cinema in the 80s and 90s.

⁶¹ Recent legislation in Spain includes the Law for Historical Memory (2007).

⁶² See Hopewell (1986, p. 139).

circulation outside Spain. The Spanish Civil War has become, in the Anglophone world at least, the ultimate symbol of loss, a loss which can most easily be described using the symbol of the female victim. (Raychaudhuri 2016)

I contend that there is a very similar situation occurring with the representation and interpretation of the Spanish child protagonist in film and scholarship respectively. The child in Spanish cinema has arguably become synonymous with the idea of Spanish loss and victimhood around themes of the Civil War and regime. Without seeking to dismiss previous interpretations, in my analysis of *El laberinto*, I focus on the agency and resilience demonstrated by the child protagonist through an examination of fantasy and magical thinking, the queer child, oppositional practices and a rethinking of orphanhood. This chapter will demonstrate that Ofelia, the child protagonist, is a socio-political actor with force, much like the boys in *El espinazo*. This is to say that, her clearly delineated actions and choices, centred by the dramatic development of the film, mean that she is not simply a vessel carrying loaded meaning or purely representative of victimhood and loss that symbolises post-Civil War Spanish society.

Del Toro and *El laberinto del fauno*

As the follow up film to *El espinazo*, *El laberinto* is representative of the change in the world del Toro saw in post 9/11 society. The director cites themes of 'choice and disobedience' present in the 2006 production, noting also that the film intends to juxtapose violence and fantasy, reality and magic (2007). We see this contrast emphasised through obvious elements such as characterisation—the harsh and aggressive character of Captain Vidal (Sergi López) contrasted with the imaginative and inquisitive nature of Ofelia (Ivana Baquero)—the swirling soundtrack composed by Javier Navarrete and the settings of scenes themselves. We also see it emphasised by more layered elements such as the colour palette and horizontal screen wipes for transitions between the cold, hard, violent reality and the golden, fantastical world of the faun and fairies. The agency of children is evidenced in the film's montage, in

its mise-en-scène and its aesthetics underscores the significance assumed by the processes of decision making and choice intradiegetically. Some obvious similarities also work to produce thematic continuity between the earlier and the later film. Like *El espinazo*, Ofelia's adventure takes place in a dark and gothic building. She arrives in a car, ferried by adults exerting control and constructing boundaries around her. She, like Carlos, encounters the fantastical creature on the first night in her new home. The films feature strong historical symbolisation in terms of the divide between right wing fascist Spain and oppressed liberal Spain. Both children are eventually orphaned and both films challenge the stereotypical conceptualisation of the figural "child" as one who embodies life and futurity by articulating the death of the child.⁶³ Furthermore, the film challenges the stereotype of the moribund victim child by presenting us with an independent, autonomous child protagonist. Where previous scholarship has interpreted the narrative as one of escapism and victimhood, presenting Ofelia as the female victim, I argue for the recognition of agency in her actions.



Figure 23 Ofelia meets the Faun in the labyrinth.

The child's fantasy is a key part of the film's narrative. Ofelia is obligated by her Mother (Ariadna Gil), to move to the home of her new husband, Captain Vidal (Sergi López), after Ofelia's father (a tailor) is killed during the Civil War.

⁶³ For more on the death of the child, see Noble (2017).

The year is 1944 and there are still Republican resistance fighters hiding in the mountains (the Maquis), resisting the fascist regime. Del Toro (2007) points out that the antagonist in this film, Captain Vidal, is unlike Jacinto, the antagonist of *El espinazo*, since, whereas Jacinto was a proto-fascist, Vidal is a fully fledged violent fascist and the story fleshes out his character to highlight that he sincerely believes what he is doing is right. Thus, Ofelia must come up against this frightening, powerful, and vicious patriarch. In the fantasy narrative, that runs parallel with and eventually intertwines with that of the outside world, Ofelia enters a fantastical kingdom. On her first night, she is led to this kingdom by magical insects and crickets. In the underworld, she meets the faun, a mysterious, mythical creature played by Doug Jones, who towers over her and invites her to take part in his chilling game (see Figure 23). The film follows Ofelia's quest to please the Faun, who desires that she take up her role as princess in the world of the labyrinth. At the same time, she must navigate her way through her new home.⁶⁴ Through these two films, we come to see del Toro's fascination with child protagonists and the power they have through their engagement with fantasy. He advocates that adults and cinema alike should 'deal with children as if they were the ambassadors of a higher culture and not the other way around' (del Toro 2007). Where fantasy in the literary realm has often been viewed as perhaps pejoratively childlike, del Toro presents us with the fantastical, where children are unique in their access to the world and indeed, become ambassadors for the fantasy world. Ofelia is a prime example of this, as exemplified in some of the final scenes of the film. The spectator is made aware that the faun is only visible to Ofelia (see Figures 24 and 25), emphasised by the over-the-shoulder shot underscoring Ofelia's view of the faun, contrasted with the long range POV shot we see in figure 25,

⁶⁴ Secondary characters are also vital to the story: the head maid, Mercedes (Maribel Verdú), a secret Republican who is helping the cause through aiding the resistance fighters; and Ofelia's mother Carmen, as she goes through a harrowing part-miscarriage; and the dissident fighters in the mountains. The interactions and dialogues involving these characters later function to highlight the connections between the world of the Faun and the cold reality of post-war Spain.

depicting Captain Vidal's view of Ofelia, without the faun. The power of the child's access to fantasy is thus accentuated by these shots and I will explore this in closer detail in the following sections.



Figure 24 Ofelia looking at the faun



Figure 25 Captain Vidal's view of Ofelia, without the faun

Fantasy in *El laberinto*

In order to move away from this narrative of victimhood, in which the child may be understood to use fantasy for coping or indeed, escapism, rather than for developmental agency, it will be necessary to reinterpret the fantasy and Ofelia's encounters with the mystical world. Ben Woodard (2007) posits

that, unlike the traditional fairy tale narrative, which usually concludes with a return to reality, Ofelia's narrative differs, he writes:

This is not the case in *Pan's Labyrinth*, where, if anything, Ophelia ends up in the fantasy world, if it is in fact a separate place. Kenneth Turan, a reviewer for the *New York Times*, stated that *Pan's Labyrinth* is 'more real than reality.' In an interview with NPR, del Toro makes a related comment in that he sees all reality as artifice (Lacanian imaginary anyone?). (Woodard 2007)

This interpretation of the fantasy world as a real place underlines the potential power of the realm that is alluded to at the beginning of the film. The way the narrative shifts between the two worlds (reality and fantasy) also works to highlight the importance of the fantasy world. In other analysis that draws on psychoanalytical thought, Ofelia's retreat to the world of the labyrinth has been interpreted as her refusal to comply with the symbolic order of the fascist world and instead return to the pre-symbolic stage:

Instead of assimilating with the symbolic realm of law and language, she retreats into the underground fantasy world and begins to carry out the tasks assigned to her. Ophelia, whose name links her with the mad components of the rewritings of Shakespeare's Ophelia, holds a strategic positioning of distance with regard to the rational realm of the symbolic, which in this case is represented by the callous actions of Captain Vidal. (Lapolla Swier 2011)



Figure 26 Ofelia enters the Pale man's abode

At first glance, the fantasy could be viewed as helpful coping mechanism for the trauma Ofelia is experiencing. Nonetheless, the breakdown and blurring of the dichotomies in the film (represented by the change in scene transitions between the fascist world and the labyrinth) clarifies that the fantasy world is more than what it seems to be. It is actually a positive tool for Ofelia's agency to manifest itself. Fantasy then, is a type of agency for the child protagonist. Del Toro himself mentions in the director's commentary the contrast between the harsh, violent, reality and the fantasy world. Supported by the change in colour palettes from harsh blues and greys to greens and golds, the transitions between worlds highlight that the fantastical world discovered by Ofelia is in stark contrast to that of Vidal, the fascist captain's. In the commentary, the director explains that 'it is very important to feel that the fantasy world is internal. You can see that the cold world is outside and the warm world is inside' (del Toro 2007). This is exemplified by the scene in which Ofelia enters the dining room of the Pale Man—perhaps one of the most chilling monsters—and leaves behind the cold, blue hues of her bedroom in Vidal's house for the golden browns of the fantasy world's banquet hall (see Figure 26). It is through witnessing these experiences with the fantasy world of the labyrinth that we, the audience, realise that Ofelia has some of her own ideas about navigating a path through her own very real, harrowing circumstances. The motif of pathways, doors and bridges and of children have become a commonplace of the fantasy narrative often demonstrative of the idea of *bildungsroman*.⁶⁵ ⁶⁶ Ofelia's encounters with the Faun evoke the images of Ana (Torrent) in *El espíritu* gazing at Frankenstein's monster on the cinema screen. With their inquisitive, dark-eyed stare, both girls are anxious to know the monster. Whilst Ana in *El espíritu* channels this fascination into befriending the wounded soldier, Ofelia in *El laberinto* becomes enthralled with the games of the Faun and the challenges he sets for her.

⁶⁵ See *Bridge to Teribithia* (2007), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005).

⁶⁶ A formative or educational journey, sometimes a coming-of-age trajectory.

A further way that fantasy is a form of agency for Ofelia is how it aids her to transgress boundaries. From its origins in literature, fantasy is connected with the magical and/or imaginary. In fantasy, we find elements of 'anti-realism' and the fantastic. Rosemary Jackson links fantasy with subversion, elaborating on this idea by saying that it is an 'imaginative genre of desire and rebellion, through which the forbidden and repressed are expressed, boundaries are transgressed, and 'subversive' ideas explored through metaphors of monsters, magic, aliens, and other fantastical elements.' (Jackson, cited in (Herman et al. 2010). We can also acknowledge here that *El laberinto* brings about ideas of the monstrous and the abject, not only in its interaction with images of abjection such as bodily wastes, slime and vomit. Present also is the idea of subversion, as mentioned by Jackson, and the transgression of the boundary between the world of fascism and the fantastical realm: 'It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva 1982). The surreal dreams and mystical worlds experienced by children onscreen, are clear examples of fantasy, although in del Toro's work they feel very realistic, much like the surrealist transgression achieved by Dalí by applying photographic quality realism to unreal landscapes. Ofelia indeed transgresses boundaries between reality and fantasy. She harnesses the fantastic that she encounters and draws power from it. The film blends fairy-tale with historical narrative, producing an alternative storyline in which the child is resisting the perils of both worlds. The plot has a duality to it—it moves back and forth between the events in the house of Captain Vidal and Ofelia's exploration of the fantastical world as she simultaneously deals with the loss of both her parents. Contrary to his name (which is traditionally associated with life in the Spanish meaning 'vida'), the oppressive fascist Captain is more concerned with ending lives, killing, and torturing - in scenes often played out in darkness. Meanwhile, scenes with Ofelia are drenched in hues of brown and gold as she interacts with nature, fairies and frogs (see Figure 30, p. 124).

The parallel worlds have a strong connection with the development of Ofelia's agency in the narrative, and the editing of the film further supports this. Clearly and self-consciously evoking elements of Carroll's classic, *Alice in Wonderland*, Ofelia begins to take frequent trips into her own magical land.⁶⁷ It is not, however, serene escapism. In the Faun's world she is also subjected to the need to make tough decisions, and ultimately is asked to sacrifice her own new-born brother. These tasks and experiences in the labyrinth with the faun equip her with a strength she then takes back to her difficult reality. The colour palette changes help to emphasise this, along with the scene transitions. In early scenes, horizontal screen wipes (see Figure 28, p. 122) separate the two worlds with a harsh divide. In a one transition Ofelia is lying on her mother and as the scene changes to the bleak blues of the fascists, the golden brown of Ofelia's face fades out gradually (see Figure 28, p. 122). This use of visual match cut of graphic and colour similarity is also key. The black darkness shown as the camera pans downwards towards the bedsheets which Ofelia and her mother lie on becomes the darkness of the night sky above the fascist soldiers in the scene following this transition. As Ofelia's agency begins to manifest itself, spreading between the two worlds, these transitions become softer. Del Toro states 'I wanted the golden hues of the fantasy world to start seeping into the scenes of real life' (2007). This works to highlight how the personal and political traumas of the real in Ofelia's world lead her to look toward fantasy and the labyrinth, also emphasized by her gaze into the distance (see Figure 29, p. 122).

⁶⁷ In fact, the film boasts a wealth of intertextuality. From the red shoes that Ofelia wears, to Greek mythology (the labyrinth), to the paintings of Goya (Saturno eating a baby).



Figure 27 Ofelia creates her own doorway with the magical chalk.

Ofelia's journey of growing empowerment is emphasised in the structure of the film, as every other scene is either magical or possesses a magical element. As she becomes a social actor, changing her own surroundings, the two worlds start to blend. The doorways and passages we often see Ofelia climbing in and through, traversing between her two worlds, highlight the transition and difference between reality and fantasy. Further to this, they demonstrate the way Ofelia steers her own journey. This is also symbolised in the magical chalks which she uses to create doorways to the fantasy world wherever she needs to (see Figure 27). Ofelia's harnessing of her strength and growing assertiveness is analysed in detail by Jane Hanley in her essay 'The walls fall down: Fantasy and power in *El laberinto del fauno*' (2007). Hanley points out that the doorways Ofelia draws 'facilitate both her tasks, or passage to agency and power, and her escapes or refusals of rules and authority (Hanley 2007, p. 43). Thus, the fantasy world underlines Ofelia's power. The grave nature of the Faun's harsh treatment of Ofelia and the testing challenges she faces, clarify that the labyrinth is far from being a site of care-free, imaginary child's play.



Figure 28 An earlier scene transition highlighting the separation between the two worlds



Figure 29 A scene transition in which the two colour palettes start to blend

Many scholars have drawn parallels between Ofelia's plight to recover her life in the underworld with a national allegory of the nation of Spain attempting to come to terms with its traumatic past: 'Like the tale of Ofelia...Spain's recent past can be retold as the tale of a fallen princess that runs the risk of forgetting her true identity if she keeps avoiding a traumatic encounter with her past.' (Gómez-Castellano 2013). This is a strong argument

and again we can see the figuration of the child being utilised as a way to unpack narratives of war and post-war historicising and memorialisation. As I have argued previously, the danger many of these analyses create is the possible dissemination of a narrative of victimhood that threatens to deny the agency of children and of many of those who were oppressed during the war and regime. For example, Vivancos argues that ‘Ofelia opts for a gradual disappearance into her fantasy world, one in which she can obtain the agency that is denied to her in real life.’ (2012, p. 884). I would argue that, on the contrary, the narrative arc is of Ofelia’s growing empowerment. Rather than a disappearance (which arguably implies she prefers not to deal with the distressing challenges of her reality) we see transferences of the knowledge she acquires in the labyrinth into her interactions in her own harsh, cold, and blue world. It is important to note that the subterranean world — a kind of Dostoevskian or Orphean underworld only painted in the colours of fantasy — is not an escape to paradise, nor a break with reality: ‘Ofelia bears witness to a world in which death and conflict are impossible to escape and it is resilience rather than respite that keeps her alive for so long’ (Clark and McDonald 2010). Thus, she possesses agency in both worlds, in both parallel narratives.

Another element of Ofelia’s agency that should be of consideration is in her imaginative agency. In the next scene following Ofelia, we see her take the ‘mandrake baby’ given to her by the Faun and place it in a bowl of milk under her mother’s bed, as he has instructed, in order to save her mother.⁶⁸ Ofelia sees this magical mandrake (see Figure 30) as representative of her mother’s unborn child and is determined to help her mother fight the imminent part-miscarriage. Her resilience is shown in this act, in a world that often seems hopeless. It is apparent that Ofelia is benefiting from ‘magical

⁶⁸ The mandrake has been seen as a symbol of fertility. Western superstition has it that the mandrake root brings good fortune and cures sterility. It has also been used in the past as an anaesthetic and to treat melancholy and mania.

thinking'⁶⁹ (2014). Thomas argues that magical thinking is an imaginative practice that affords the child a sense of agency. Thomas directs her analysis towards the Peruvian film *Las malas intenciones*, in which the young protagonist, Cayetana, often has day-dream periods in which she imagines being able to influence or change a situation.



Figure 30 Ofelia prepares the mandrake baby which she believes represents her mother's unborn child

The film's repeated recourse to this imaginative practice also allows Cayetana to claim a form of agency in that the practitioner of magical thinking can believe that such thinking influences circumstances beyond his or her control. (Thomas 2014, p. 61)

We can see a similar process occurring in the ideas Ofelia enacts as a result of her interactions with the magical Faun. It is made clear to us, in one of the final scenes of the film, that the Faun is either imagined by Ofelia or does not appear to the adults in her world, as when the Captain chases Ofelia to the centre of the Labyrinth, he cannot see the Faun. Like Cayetana, Ofelia turns to her magical thinking to animate a change within the realm of reality. In this way, the fantasy world combined with 'magical thinking' mean that she has agentic force. This is otherwise known as 'imaginative agency'. Del Toro has stated that he prefers his work to be open to a variety of interpretations (2007). While there is a clear trend in analyses that document convergence between the tragedy of Ofelia's situation and the national allegorical connotations of the two Spains, we can also note the progression of her

⁶⁹ Magical thinking is a term used to describe the process of thinking or willing something to happen and, in many instances, the subject believes their willing or thinking has caused certain actions or events. For more information see (Subbotsky 2010) Further studies have also argued that magical thinking in children is key to developing a sense of agency and cognitive creativity. See Van Elk et al. (2015).

individual agency, with help from magical thinking, fantasy and other relatively unexplored aspects of her identity. I argue that Ofelia as a character is not simply the child witness who is often co-opted by directors and critics to come to symbolise victimhood. I further posit that Ofelia is an exemplar/iteration of the queer child, resisting a dual regime of heteronormative futurity and fascist oppression simultaneously. The following section elaborates on my application of this theory to *El laberinto*.

The Queer Child

While some scholars have disagreed with Stockton's broad use of the term queer,⁷⁰ by looking at Ofelia through the lens of Stockton's Queer Child, we can examine her resistance to both heteronormative structures and fascist repression. Stockton sets out the queer child as one who transgresses the boundaries of normative growth and disputes the heteronormative futurism associated with the image of the figural child. On the perception of the child she comments that

their supposed gradual growth, their suggested slow unfolding, which, unhelpfully, has been relentlessly figured as a vertical movement upward (hence "growing up") toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childlessness. (Bond Stockton 2009, p. 4)

We often encounter the queer child in literature and cinema who does not conform to this presupposed normative ideal:

The tendency of metaphor, narrative, and temporal tricks of the camera (or the cinematic image) to reconfigure relations and time will prove why fictions uniquely nurture ideas of queer children. (Bond Stockton 2009, p. 16)

The queer child instead grows sideways, as Stockton posits. The planar linearity of the labyrinth also favours this sort of sideways development, as

⁷⁰ For further explanation, see <<https://angelmatos.net/2013/09/02/the-queer-child/>>

Ofelia's journey leads her round the sideways twist and turns of the Faun's labyrinth. I argue that del Toro's character of Ofelia in *El laberinto* is an archetype of Stockton's queer child. Her status as the queer child allows her to oppose regimes of the normal in both spheres of her world. Del Toro states 'it is not a film about a girl dying but about a girl giving birth to herself the way she wanted to be' (del Toro 2007).

As the story unfolds, Ofelia develops and thus turns on its head the image of the suffering child and the innocent child, repeatedly used as a literary device and now disseminated so frequently by Western media. This politicised image of the innocent suffering child-other is used to control certain discourses concerning third world developing countries and nations in crises of conflict⁷¹. When this child is not deemed as innocent enough, trauma and suffering is inflicted upon it in film and media narratives for the larger purpose of specific story lines, thus overshadowing from the agentic force the child possesses in any given narrative. This happens in many films which historicize the Spanish Civil War.⁷² Ofelia finds ways to 'grow sideways' and as a result, we see her as a genuine social actor. An example of this is her disidentification with the gender roles imposed on her and the structure of the fascist house of Captain Vidal. This negation warrants her agency as she turns to the world of the labyrinth, and, later, turns away even from the Faun, finding her own personal agency. Thus, while Ofelia does not grow in the normative way encouraged by her mother, we do see her growth in terms of agency and as an autonomous social actor. She steers her own path - sideways. In fact, throughout the film, Ofelia's mother is intent on constraining Ofelia to her expected gender role through dress and behaviour; she also repeatedly quashes her attempts to take part in the complex world of adults. The adults seem to want to protect Ofelia and her innocence. As we have seen, Stockton

⁷¹ Here we can consider images that flooded the media in 2016 in the Syrian crises as one recent example.

⁷² For example, *Pa negre* (Villaronga 2010), *El viaje del Carol* (Uribe 2002) and *Secretos del corazón* (Armendáriz 1997)

claims that this is what queers the child, as it distances them from adult experiences and qualities. In order to protect the innocent child, adults fetishize this delay. Henry Jenkins (1998) and James Kincaid (2004) have discussed how childhood innocence is effectively a myth, which voids the child of political agency. Perhaps this partly to do with the way that our societies insist that with agency comes responsibility. I argue that children can exercise agency without also assuming responsibility. Del Toro illustrates this in the film, by having Ofelia twist and turn, struggling under the constraint of the adults who fetishize her innocence. This is exemplified in one scene, in which her mother asks her to put on the babyish dress she has made for her. Ofelia enters the bathroom to change and instead finds the Faun's 'book of crossroads'. She is already more fascinated by the fantastical world of the labyrinth and choosing her own path rather than conforming to the identity of the supposed innocent child that her mother desires.



Figure 31 Ofelia's dress swings in the wind, abandoned.

Exploring the position of the queer child requires us to reconsider the assumed heterosexuality in which children are assumed to grow upwards into their heteronormative futures. Queer theorists studying the child claim that society has become preoccupied with protecting the assumed 'innocence' of children, something made manifest in efforts to protect them from sexuality and 'adult' topics. In *Curiouser: on the queerness of children*, the child explored is one that 'doesn't quite conform to the wished for way that children

are supposed to be in terms of gender and sexual roles' (Bruhm and Hurley 2004, p. x). Ofelia resists things imposed upon her in alignment with her normative gender role. As we have explored, in one scene, Ofelia's mother sews her a green dress, and presents it to her to be worn at the dinner party to be held by Captain Vidal. Ofelia is indifferent to the outfit proposed. Her mother states it is one she would have given anything for as a child and explains her intentions for the outfit:

CARMEN: Quiero que estés preciosa cuando te vea el capitán. Parecerás una princesa

(I want you to be beautiful when the Captain sees you. You will look like a princess)

Her outfit displays obvious similarities with the traditional Alice in wonderland image, as per Arthur Rackham's illustrations. (see Figure 32) Instead of attending the dinner, Ofelia chooses to enter the fantasy world. Upon entering, she symbolically casts her dress aside. As she enters the trunk of the tree, the camera pans backwards to show her Alice in wonderland dress hooked on a branch, blowing in the wind (see Figure 31). One of the ribbons comes loose and is taken by the wind. This scene has been analysed frequently in scholarship based on the film⁷³ and is often shown to be Ofelia's rejection of the constraints of her reality, and of what is expected of her.⁷⁴ Whilst this is valid, we



Figure 32 Arthur Rackham's Alice in Wonderland illustration

⁷³ See (Clark and McDonald 2010; Noble 2015) Orme (2010).

⁷⁴ See Lebeau (2008) and Vivancos (2012).

can also see Ofelia's shedding of the dress as her metaphorical refusal of patriarchal heteronormative society.

We also see this very visceral and almost grotesque scene, following Ofelia's entrance to the tree. Crawling through thick layers of mud, branches, and writhing insects, she finally stumbles upon a bulbous toad who extends his long tongue and covers her in saliva. Here, Ofelia is subverting gender stereotypes that queer the child by fetishizing innocence and gendered expectations. Karen Lury (2010) has explored this iteration and the relationship between the child and mud. First focusing on *Ivan's Childhood* (Tarkovsky 1962) and later on *El laberinto*, Lury notes that



Figure 33 Ofelia climbs into the tree

[T]he contact with inanimate matter [mud] enhances the visceral, bodily sense in which the child has been 'thrown' into an encounter with the world. (Lury 2010, p. 133)

Covered in mud and without her 'princess' dress, we can see Ofelia here as noncompliant to the constraints of the child in the fairy tale. In the same way del Toro rejects the pre-determined and fixed structure of traditional fairy tales, Ofelia's journey through the muddy forest highlights her taking a hold of her own quest and rejecting norms in the process. Ofelia's frequent contact with nature, earth and mud is not purely representative of her quest to journey to the labyrinth. It is further symbolic of her quest to find herself and to choose her own path. Her contact with nature and the very real of the earth affirms this. Dolores Tierney (2014) has also analysed the dirtiness and the images of Ofelia covered in saliva, mud and dirt, linking these sequences to the manifestation of the abject in the film. Previous scenes in the film show Captain

Vidal cleaning pedantically and spouting fascist imagery about his desires for his son to be born into a ‘new and clean Spain’. Tierney contrasts this with Ofelia’s emergence from the tree— ‘the locus of the abject’— and her dirtiness and equates it with political opposition. Interestingly, Tierney further links abjection in the film as a protest against her ‘father’s law’ and a return to the pre Oedipal order. ‘In *Ofelia* we get a turn of the untrained, unsymbolised body. Abjection is constructed as a rebellion of filthy female flesh’ (Tierney 2014, p. 174). This line of analysis can be linked to Creed’s (1986) idea of the filthy female child as a site of resistance to patriarchal repression and Ofelia’s previous attempt to break away from her mother and her imposed rules refers to the construction of the maternal figure as abject.

Furthermore, Ofelia’s movements are often her crawling, climbing or moving sideways through the earth, mud, and gaps in trees (see Figure 34).



Figure 34 Ofelia crawls into the tree

Here we are reminded of Stockton’s concept of sideways growth. As I have mentioned, Stockton uses the term queer more broadly in her work to describe strangeness and/or deviation from the norm.⁷⁵ In this way, Ofelia is exemplary of the Queer Child, as she does not necessarily ‘grow up’ and also refuses to be fetishized by the idea of innocence. Fiona Noble traces the path of the queer child in contemporary Spanish cinema, using Stockton’s queer theory of the child, in her analysis of childhood temporalities and she, too, argues that Ofelia refuses the boundaries of heteronormative structures:

⁷⁵ In some ways childhood fantasy might be in fact conceived as the norm. However, the fantasy in *el laberinto* presents very real, traumatic, and problematic situations.

This refusal of heteronormative reproductive futurism is confirmed by Ofelia herself when she asserts, having witnessed her mother suffer traumatic complications in the late stages of pregnancy, that she has no desire to have a child of her own – a prophecy the viewer knows will prove true, having already witnessed her death at the start of the film. (Noble 2017, p. 442)

Noble's analysis of Ofelia's refusal to submit to the heteronormative status quo supports the idea that Ofelia takes control of her own narrative. Despite her existence being divided through forced boundaries and the numerous obstacles she must work around in both parallel worlds, she nevertheless actively refuses presupposed norms, rejecting both the dress and the assumed maternal drive. Western ideas around progress and stable growth into normative identities mean that dominant ideology creates an expected path for children. Children are seen to be vulnerable beings that need to be steered and educated. Del Toro and Stockton both critique adult steering of the 'correct' growth of children. Stockton's theory further posits that queer children veer away from the upwards trajectory of 'straight' (in both the directional and heteronormative sense) and instead grow sideways (Bond Stockton 2009, p. 11). Ofelia's journeys into the world of the labyrinth can be seen as somewhat representative of this sideways growth. Her dealings with the challenges in the labyrinth also allow her to transfer her resilience into the world of fascist Spain. Rejecting things like the dress, dinners, and compliance with formalities, she chooses instead to grow and quite literally move sideways towards the fantastical world. Ofelia's mother tells her she is too old for fairy tales, and Mercedes claims to have given up hope in magic and fairies. By pursuing her path through fantasy, rather than giving it up, Ofelia thus rejects both these seeming role model figures, and physically travels further into the realms of the labyrinth. We can begin to see Ofelia's negation of patriarchal hegemonic structures and gendered expectations, and her turns instead towards the fantastical realm as examples of various practices of resistance, a concept explored in the following section.

‘Oppositional Practices’ in *El laberinto*.

Ofelia’s instances of rejection and resistance can be defined as examples of ‘oppositional practices’. In this section, I recapitulate this theory and outline its presence within the narrative of *El laberinto*. The application of this theory will enable me to illustrate my analysis with examples that support my reading of the child protagonist, Ofelia, as a social actor with agency. As outlined in the methodology, my capture of ‘oppositional practices’ is taken from Ofelia Ferrán’s application of the theory to the novel *La voz dormida* (Chacón 2010). In her essay *Affirming Women’s testimony and agency* (2014), Ferrán explains that testimonies and fictional works historicising the Spanish Civil War are often susceptible to the victimisation of women. She takes her inspiration from the work of Richard Vinyes (2002), who, she states, is:

[A]ware of the complex and interrelated networks of political and social power throughout this “universo carcelario,”⁷⁶and the many ways that women political prisoners and their families actively negotiated, worked within, and often subverted (inasmuch as they could) those structures of power with two interrelated objectives: to survive *and* to affirm their political identity. (Ferrán 2014, p. 119)

Ferrán uses the term ‘oppositional practices’, first coined by Michel de Certeau (1980), to present different forms of resistance demonstrated by the women in *La voz dormida*, who are prisoners of a Franco prison camp. One of the variations Ferrán examines is adoption. Generally, adoption as a form of resistance necessitates the women grouping together to form a novel family-esque unit. From this they gain solidarity and support each other in resisting the repressive power regime. Ferrán notes that these adoptions also undermine the traditional family unit,

not only by creating alternative and ever-shifting family structures but also because the female protagonists “adopt” ways of being that radically challenge dominant gender roles (2014, p. 126).

⁷⁶ Both Vinyes (2002) and Ferrán use this term to refer to the imprisonment of Republican women during the Civil War and the Franco regime itself.

We can note this radical resistance to gender structures too in the relationships between Ofelia, Mercedes and Carmen in *El laberinto*. Ofelia's aforementioned active rejection of gender roles is emphasised in her rejection of heteronormative futurity, as seen in the following exchange:

MERCEDES: No te preocupes. Tu madre se pondrá buena muy pronto, ya lo verás. Tener un hijo es complicado.

OFELIA: Entonces yo no voy a tener ninguno.

MERCEDES: Do not worry. Your mother will recover very soon, you'll see. Having a baby is complicated

OFELIA: Then I will not have one.

Thus, Ofelia adopts a radical behaviour that allows her to resist the patriarchal structures and gendered expectations by her rejection of motherhood as a predestined role. What is more, Ofelia adopts Mercedes as her support network, whilst her mother Carmen is suffering complications in her pregnancy and later dies. Where Carmen is often quick to tell Ofelia that she should move on from fairy tales, forget magic, and grow up, Mercedes becomes a support for Ofelia. In one scene, she grants Ofelia's request for a lullaby. One may argue that Ofelia is leaning more towards the idea of a victim within this structure, looking for an alternative mother figure to grant her the support that she needs. If we are considering the practice of adoption, however, it is clear that she is adopting a new unit, as she develops bonds with Mercedes, the faun and her new baby brother. Through this, she is ultimately able to resist the aggressive repression of Captain Vidal. This manifests in one of the final scenes of the film in which Ofelia refuses to hand over her brother to the Captain, who is often interpreted as symbolic of the Franco regime.



Figure 35 Ofelia (left) and Mercedes (right)

In this chapter we have discussed the resilience shown by Ofelia, that in turn allows her a personal agency. In many Spanish Civil War narratives, we see children, like Ofelia, who are exposed to trauma and/ or abuse. This occurs in a multitude of narratives centering on both female and child characters. In a recent publication, McDermott argues that

One of the primary ways we learn to read and recognise strength and resilience in female characters is through their overcoming of trauma. In particular, the types of trauma are often gendered [...] This kind of narrative offers us an affectively congruent femininity, one that incorporates traditional notions of fragility or passivity, so that they can be triumphantly overcome, producing a resilient subject with which we can identify. (McDermott 2017)

Bordering on what we have previously seen regarding the narrative of victimhood in Spanish Civil War narratives and the innocent child narrative entrenched in society, this assessment shows how, in many cases, suffering must be endured prior to the recognition of agency. In terms of the child figure, they usually undergo a process in which they must overcome a problem, perhaps having to 'grow up' in some way.⁷⁷ This tendency towards the narrative of victimisation and gendered suffering can be applied to the case of Ofelia, who is bullied by Capitan Vidal, repeatedly called a whore, and locked in her room. This is also affirmed to a certain extent by the influences of the fairy tale structure in del Toro's work. As Jones posits, 'the position of the often female child within the classic fairy story narrative is one of abandonment or loss, of peril and subsequently of growth' (Jones 2010, p. 35).

Despite this, del Toro breaks with the trend of female and child protagonists who 'triumphantly overcome' trauma. *El laberinto* finishes with the death of Ofelia at the hands of Vidal. By sharing her name with the female character in *Hamlet*, Ofelia's tragic end is foreshadowed from the beginning of the film. The narrative therefore subverts traditional 'happy endings' and Ofelia never grows 'up'. Her death, however, reinforces her status as a socio-political

⁷⁷ Vargas (2014) refers to this with a theory of the preliminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases to outline the trajectory of the child's journey in the films of del Toro.

actor, demonstrating agency in standing by her cause. In this way, as a character she opposes traditional narratives of fragile or passive femininity and childhood. Prior to this, Ofelia's resilience and agency is able to manifest best in scenes in which her role as a social actor is affirmed, such as those with the Maquis, the faun and with Mercedes. Her refusal to give up her baby brother to the Captain, her ultimate decision to say no to the Faun (who asks for the blood of her brother), and the solidarity she shows with Mercedes all work to highlight her resilient spirit. In this sense, she becomes another example of what horror theorist Carol Clover has outlined as 'the final girl' who 'turns the tables on her tormenter by daring to look back' (Ross 2015).

Acts of resistance authored by Ofelia are further shown in the two scenes which feature dinner parties. The first is the dinner party of Captain Vidal (See figure 36), in which he discusses (with other fascist figures) the rationing of food whilst they feast on various dishes and debate ways to quash the surviving resistance movement of Maquis. Ofelia chooses not to be present at his dinner, casting aside the dress her mother asks her to wear for it and instead enters the fantasy world to complete her first challenge set by the Faun.



Figure 36 Captain Vidal's dinner party



Figure 37 Ofelia enters the Pale Man's dining room

This dinner party scene is later replicated in Ofelia's second challenge within the fantasy world. She enters the dining room of El hombre pálido (the Pale Man) in order to complete the faun's test (see Figure 37). One of the rules she must adhere to is not to eat any food from the Pale Man's dinner table. Choosing actively to rebel, Ofelia eats some grapes from one of the platters. Figures 36 and 37 show that where the Pale man's dinner party scene is evocative of Vidal's own table, there are clear differences between the two shots. The block colours and harshly lit, sharp geometric lines of Vidal's supper scene compared to the round, organic lines and warmly lit banquet scene with the Pale man work to differentiate the oppressor (the cold fascist world) from the oppressed (Ofelia and the fantasy world). Ofelia's presence in the foreground of figure 37 and absence from the previous dinner emphasises her rejection of Vidal's hierarchy and her move towards the fantastical labyrinthine world.

Relational and social agency are often overlooked by society in favour of definitions that only understand agency as autonomy. Agency understood on this basic level is antithetical to traits associated with children traditionally 'the vulnerable, innocent child of our mnemonic heritage which comes together

in Romantic and religious configurations' (Higonnet, 1998, cited in (Wright 2013). Nonetheless:

alternative definitions of agency can be recognized in the social interactions of children. As adept social beings, children navigate complex social hierarchies, relationships, and spaces imbued with unequal power relations, where their status is predominantly (but not always) a subordinate one. Such social positioning requires agency but not the normative individualized concept of agency where self-interest and individual choice are privileged. (Castro et al. 2017, p. 135)



Figure 38 Ofelia eats a grape as the Pale Man approaches

Ofelia's resistance to rules and normative power hierarchies is articulated through her symbolic stealing of the grapes. We can also consider her bond with Mercedes as social agency. Ofelia manages this relationship, assuring Mercedes that she will not speak of her meetings with the Maquis and therefore negotiating a friendship that offers her support. Her further act of defiance in stealing the grapes from the dining table, rather than heeding the multiple warnings of the fairies and the faun, is also of great significance

In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault offers the idea that in the power relations that structure society, where there is power, there is always resistance. While Ofelia obeys the commands of the faun to complete his tests and challenges, she also finds ways to defy him. Her defiance is a fundamental element in the overall recognition of her agency, affirmative of her identity as

a social actor. The defiance of this act is supported by the frightening risk, emphasised in figure, the camera manipulates the planes of action, showing Ofelia eating the grape in the foreground with the fairies urging her to stop. In the background we see the Pale Man approaching. As Ofelia looks behind her to her right, the camera cuts to a nightmarish close up shot of the Pale Man, ferociously consuming a fairy, mimicking the Goya painting *Saturn Devouring His Son* (Goya 1819–1823). Goya's work is echoed here for a reason, as it has most notably been interpreted as a symbol of Spain's 'consumption of its own children in wars and revolutions' (Licht 1983, p. 288). Ofelia's subsequent escape from the Pale Man's lair alludes to the growing voice and dissenting unrest of the younger generation of Spaniards.

It is important to acknowledge too, the process of subjectivation (1978) (1993) when considering matters of children's agency, which examines the way power and subordination creates a subject. In other words, power over and subordination of a subject leads to the subject realising their own agency.⁷⁸ This idea is explored by Robinson and Davies (2008) in their article on constructions of childhood innocence. They consider how two children in a beauty pageant come to be agentic subjects, applying Butler's take on subjectivation.

Although Asia's and Brooke's desires to participate in the beauty pageant can be seen as collusion with the 'instruments of their oppression' that perpetuate the objectification of the female body, the reinforcement of hegemonic discourses of feminine adolescence, and the reproduction of subordinate gendered relationships, it can simultaneously be read as a site through which they both become self-conscious agentic subjects (2008).

In the same way, Ofelia gains agency inside the structure of oppression. We have touched on this previously, when we analysed the way she navigates her world, exhibiting relational and social agency.

⁷⁸ This dialogue involving power, agency and subordination is discussed in further detail in *The Psychic Life of Power* (Butler 1997).

This paradox, known as subjection (Butler 1997), acknowledges that the 'very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination' are also the means by which the subject 'becomes a self-conscious identity and agent' (Mahmood 2001, 210). Through the conceptualisation of power and subject formation in this process, we are encouraged to consider 'agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable' (2001, 210). (2008)

Ofelia is referred to as a princess by the Faun, who desires that Ofelia return to her supposed kingdom in the labyrinth. In a scene following this, Ofelia is admiring a birth mark in the mirror. After her mother tells her she will look like a princess in her new dress, Ofelia repeats 'una princesa'. The Faun also repeatedly tells her that in the world of the labyrinth she is a princess. Thus, along with the fascist captain Vidal, Ofelia's mother's gendered expectations and the Faun's assertion of her true role as princess of the labyrinth, are instruments of Ofelia's oppression that create a capacity for action and become sites through which Ofelia becomes a self-conscious agentic subject. Along the lines of co-opted identity, in the following section, the analysis moves to focus on the construction of Ofelia as an orphan, and how it further shapes her agency.

Orphanhood

The child experiencing trauma is a particularly powerful concept, as it plays on Western romantic, traditional conceptualisations of childhood as a carefree, joyous period of life, as we explored briefly earlier in the chapter. When the child experiences hardship, sympathy is enhanced on the part of the supposed adult spectator. Images or news that evoke this narrative are highly politicised. This also stems from the idea that children symbolise futurity, a concept examined by Lee Edelman (2004). Children in danger, or orphan children lacking parents do not fit in with the positive nuclear family aesthetic and are consequently used by media and politicians to steer discourse in favourable directions that necessitate support of their own various ideologies. Again, this occurs in cinema and is especially the case in narratives of war:

By being orphaned, these children are immediately constructed as innocent victims placed outside immediate parental control and therefore left vulnerable to further attacks in a dangerous, war-torn adult world over which they have no control. Children are diegetically required to suffer to fulfil their symbolic potential, for example, by being orphaned, so that their vulnerable innocence can be contrasted with, and further traumatized by, a violent adult world. (Raychaudhuri 2014)

Thus, the portrayal of children is clearly linked to the exercising of power and authority. 'The cultural power of childhood innocence is constituted and mobilised by adults for adults in order to maintain critical power relationships' (Randall 2017). As we saw in the previous chapter, Dan Russek has claimed that:

Spanish cinema uses the orphan focalizer to represent the Spanish people after the trauma of violence of the Civil War and ensuing Franco dictatorship. (2012, p. 135)

*New Sociology of Childhood Studies*⁷⁹ has made a case for childhood as a social construct. In *Symbolic Childhood* (2002), Cook notes that we can take apart and reconstruct childhood. I contend that we can do the same with orphanhood on film. While it has been argued by scholars (see Raychaudhuri, 2014 and Weng, 2016) that del Toro uses orphanhood as a way to elicit sympathy for the child character, it does not mean to say that this is the sole available interpretation of the film. Benjamin Lawrance states that:

the shifting terminology associated with the kinless child is just one in a series of fluid and changing conceptions of children and childhood. The childhoods of the orphaned and adopted are deeply articulated by global discourses, by international laws, and by the transnational processes associated with global mobility. (2014, p. 17)

⁷⁹New sociology of childhood studies is the umbrella term for the scholarship that started to appear in the 1980s which took the study of children more seriously and made room for children as a distinct field of study in the realm of Sociology (Matthews 2007).

If we consider the orphan within the Spanish socio-political and cultural context, the idea of an orphan having force and agency is almost paradoxical. The strong emphasis on the importance of the family unit in Spain is an idea that has been propagated, at different points, by both the Franco regime and the Catholic Church. The Church and regime converge in their political discourse that constructs childhood as positive within the family structure and orphanhood as a negative category, outside of this structure.

Films from the New Spanish Cinema movement, such as *El espíritu* (Erice 1973) and *Cría cuervos* (Saura 1976) have previously scrutinized the suffocating structure constituted by the Spanish family unit. The child protagonists in these films have notably demonstrated resilience in the ways that Ofelia does in *El laberinto*, with instances of magical thinking, oppositional practices and recurrent discourse that aligns them with queer childhood. Nonetheless, Ofelia is unique in the way that her orphan status does not, I maintain, cast her as an innocent victim. After the loss of both her mother and father, Ofelia does not adhere to stereotypical projections of orphanhood and fragility, as her upward trajectory of empowerment continues. As Ryan states

A marked difference is evident insofar as these child protagonists do not suffer from the debilitating self-doubt of Erice's and Saura's characters, but are rather resolute in their resistance...such portrayals reconfigure the image of children from passive victims to active agents. (Ryan 2012, p. 451)

Ofelia's actions after losing both her parents are in fact the most decisive and bold decisions she makes in the plot. She stands up to both Captain Vidal and the faun, denying both the possession of her new-born brother. After the death of her mother, there follows a scene in which Ofelia solemnly enters her bedroom and collects a handful of her belongings. As she exits the room, we are presented with a shot of Ofelia looking over to her mother's old wheelchair in centre screen. At the same time, a flock of birds shoot past the window in

the outside light. This shot signifies the path that Ofelia turns towards after the death of her mother. The light of the window and the side profile shot of Ofelia directs the eye of the audience to focus first on the wheelchair and then the outside light through the



Figure 39 Ofelia crosses her Mother's old bedroom

window. She moves further away from the cold, fascist world - represented in the dark hues of the bedroom and the empty chair – journeying closer down the pathways of the labyrinth. The wheelchair, in earlier scenes, came to symbolise her mother Carmen's own concession to Fascist Captain Vidal, who insisted in her confinement to the wheelchair throughout her pregnancy (Jones 2010). Through the window, we see the greens of the trees and the birds shooting past, underscoring Ofelia's turn towards nature and the magical wildlife of the earthly labyrinth. The audience is reminded that she no longer has her mother, but the bright light of the window and the world beyond it tells spectators that she will continue to navigate the complex hierarchies and oppressive structures of her world. In his examination of del Toro's trilogy Vargas considers both Ofelia, and Carlos in *El espinazo* and their status as orphans at the beginning of the films:

In the first two films, the orphans Aurora [Cronos] and Carlos precede Ofelia as agents of responsible change and solidarity. But it is Ofelia who is the most complex and powerful representation of the liminal child, who embarks on a journey of initiation and discovery that is complicated and tortuous. (Vargas 2014)

This idea of the liminal child also serves to underscore Ofelia's move towards agency during the trajectory of the film. Jamie Fisher has critiqued Deleuze's explanation of the Child seer, or the spectator in the text (D'Lugo

1991) as one that evokes a certain 'motor helplessness' that serves to strengthen the child's capabilities of hearing and seeing. Steering away from the concept of the child witness, Fisher (2007) points to the flaws in Deleuze's argument, stating:

Deleuze's concept of the child as a naturally weak observer reeks of an imaginary discourse about youth, particularly because children, even in Italian neorealism, are anything but simply weak or passive. (2007, p. 33)

I would extend this imaginary discourse to one that includes ideas around orphanhood and the weak, vulnerable and passive child. Ofelia's status as an orphan with agency and a visible force means that as a character, she decentres the nuclear family oriented, patriarchal, fascistic tendencies of the antihero, Captain Vidal. This dynamic is established in the chase scene of the film's finale, when Ofelia makes off with her new-born brother and Captain Vidal gives pursuit. Ofelia's decisive action here highlights the character development towards agency. The pursuit takes Captain Vidal out of the structure of the gothic house (that represents the regime) and leads him in to the realm of the labyrinth and the portal to the fantasy world. In this way, Ofelia quite literally succeeds in displacing Vidal, forcing him to navigate around the fantasy realm and the labyrinth where he becomes lost. Scenes depicting Vidal's confusion are cross-cut with scenes of Ofelia successfully orienting herself through the winding corridors and reaching the centre. Thus, we can view this visual metaphor as symbolic of Ofelia's deviation from the stereotypical lost and weak orphan role. Her actions here displace Vidal's projection of his own ideals of patriarchal lineage and heteronormative futurity, seeing his son as heir to his line and continuation of his own self and supposed legacy even after his death. Instead, the female and orphaned child interrupts this structure and questions its nature. By reframing orphanhood and incorporating a more encompassing definition of agency into our analysis, this definition allows agency to be considered as part of actions, relations and identity formation. While we have seen examples of Ofelia demonstrating agency through traditional understandings of it as participation and/or

dissidence, it is also vital to rethink stereotypical, simplistic interpretations and assumed symbolism to uncover subtler forms of agency.

Conclusion

Henry Jenkins pointed to the dangers in 'embracing a politics of appropriation and resistance' saying that to do so 'runs the risk of romanticizing child play as the seeds of cultural revolution' (Jenkins 1998, p. 30). This plays into the debate around the agency of the child, as we saw in the methodology. *El laberinto* takes the idea of child's play and turns it on its head, showing a world full of tests, monsters and difficult choices. I do not argue that Ofelia is representative of cultural revolution; however, through this film, audiences are forced to call into question preconceived notions of children as innocent victims within wartime narratives, and further to this, to question their preconceptions surrounding definitions of agency and meanings of childhood agency.

In this chapter we have considered a multitude of ways in which Ofelia, rather than epitomising victimhood, is a self-conscious, agentic subject. We saw how the fantasy world empowers her through magical thinking and encourages her to transgress boundaries. The fantasy world and the heavily symbolic labyrinth enables Ofelia to work against the constraints placed upon her in both worlds and to move strategically and magically within them – constructing her own path. We then explored the queer child and its intrinsic agency, opposing the child as symbol of futurity and rejecting heteronormative hegemonic discourses. Following this, we explored how oppositional practices can be discerned within the narrative, and how the child protagonist gains agency and power from social and relational forms of agency. We reconceptualised orphanhood, moving away from its stereotypical definitions as vulnerable and focusing on subjectivation and the resignification of the orphan.

By re-evaluating the extensively studied work of del Toro, we can begin to reconsider the child as the agentic social subject in narratives of the Spanish Civil War. Further to this, we can align this reconsideration of children in film scholarship with the move towards agency in New Sociology of Childhood Studies. Finally, we also combat the tendency in scholarship on Spanish cinema to focus on the narrative of victimhood. As I have argued, both *El laberinto* and *El espinazo* are successful in their depiction of the child as social actor in the setting of the Spanish Civil War. The overarching themes of childhood loss, control and disobedience, and the presence of the monster/spectre link the two films⁸⁰ present a novel account of the child as a social actor. *El laberinto* subverts the conventions of the traditional fairy tale narrative and underscores the agency in the actions of the child.

⁸⁰ Another fascinating Easter egg is that Carlos and Jaime from *El espinazo* reappear in *El laberinto* as adult Maquis on the hills, emphasising the on-going fight of the Republicans.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes. (James and Prout 1997, p. 8)

Introduction

Whilst researching children's experiences of the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime, I was repeatedly drawn to children's drawings. I have come across children's drawings in articles, books and archived resources such as *And They Still Draw Pictures* (Weissberger 1938), *They Still Draw Pictures* (Geist and Carroll 2002), the documentary archive of the Grup Escolar LLuis Vives (Padrós Tuneu et al. 2015) and *Dibujos de los niños de la Guerra* held by the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica of the Spanish National Library. The activity of children drawing is also reflected in filmic representations (Bramley 2014), such as *El espinazo*, *El espíritu*, *A Monster Calls* (Bayona 2016), and *The Others* (Amenábar 2001), Spanish films which all feature children's drawings. The reason why I highlight the significance of the child's drawing in Spanish contemporary child centred horror film is twofold. Firstly, the presence of the child's drawing serves to highlight the primacy of the child's perspective.⁸¹ Secondly, it serves as an example of agency, a resistance and resilience in children responding to traumas of the war and regime. By responding, through the act of drawing, children can be viewed as active in making meaning from the events of the conflict and dictatorship. The digitisation of collections of children's drawings such as these, along with the presence of the child social

⁸¹ As mentioned in chapter 3, childhood is a modern notion and often also connected with futurity. The modernity associated with the child goes hand in hand with modern aesthetic art forms including the cinema. The child featured heavily in the first films made by the Lumière brothers. Rachel Randall (2017) also highlights this in her monograph, further exploring scholars who have pointed out how the child on-screen articulates the adult desire to 'see and know the child' (Lebeau 2008). The child's drawing and the depiction of the child's drawing on-screen adds another layer of authenticity that the child brings to narratives and also becomes a vehicle for their agency.

actor highlighted in film and scholarship, work to amplify children's voices in history and culture.⁸² A consideration of children's capacity to represent their perceptions visually will also help us to consider whether it is possible to link the filmic portrayal of the agentic Spanish child to real children who lived through the conflict, with the aim of moving beyond a narrative of victimhood in both cinema and historical study. In this chapter, I first briefly consider the child's drawing with the idea of bringing together the various strands of agency considered in this thesis through the visual lens of the drawing. Limitations including word count mean it was not possible to fully explore the child's drawing in the case studies; I make mention of the child's drawing here to consider future directions for this research. It also interlinks the films featured in this thesis, thanks to the reoccurrence of the child's drawing in both films. Following this, I summarise the research aims and objectives, and consequently give an overview of the findings and limitations from the case studies. I then suggest other directions and opportunities for future in-depth study and finally propose some closing remarks.

Erice's 1973 film *El espíritu de la colmena* opens with a sequence of poignant children's drawings which allude to the events depicted in the film's narrative.⁸³ These images also serve as a precursor to the child centred nature of the narrative; the viewer is immediately made aware of the importance of the child's subjectivity in the film that will follow. The title sequences showing Ana Torrent's own drawings of clocks and the cinema hall fuse the importance of both time and intertexts (Noble 2017).

⁸² This was one of the key themes of the Children's History Society's recent conference *Children and Youth on the Move*, 21st-23rd June, 2018. For more information, see <<https://histchild2018.wordpress.com/2017/07/02/call-for-papers/>>

⁸³ The young actors who played Ana and Isabel in fact produced these drawings.



Figure 41 Title sequence of *El espíritu*

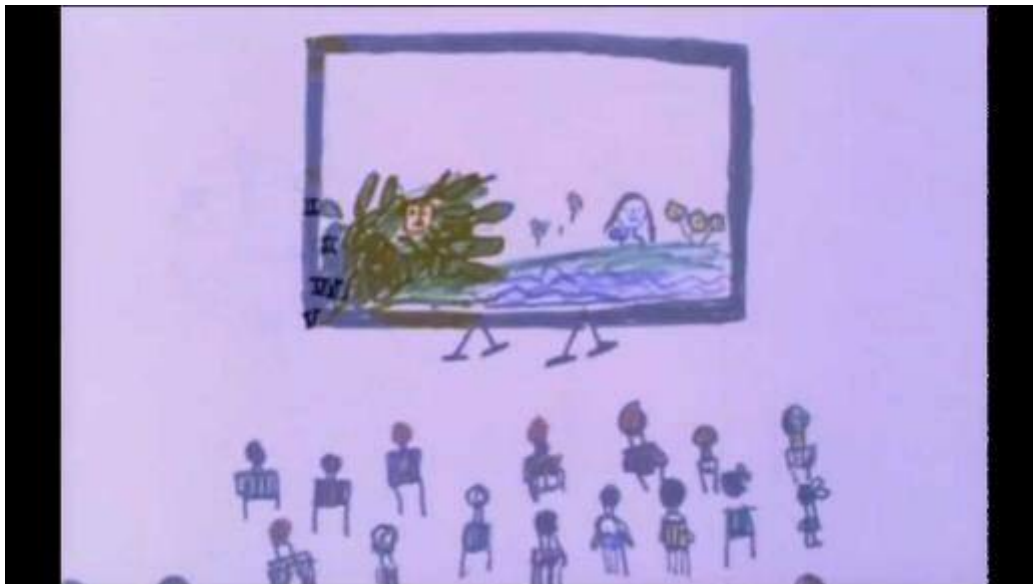


Figure 40 Title sequence of *El espíritu*

Furthermore, these drawings by the child protagonists expose the nexus between the cinematic children in Civil War narratives and those who themselves lived through the period. The child's drawing of the cinema screen (see Figure 41)—which foreshadows the scene in *El espíritu* when the children gather to watch James Whale's *Frankenstein* (Whale 1931)—ties together the themes of the child and cinema, the child's drawing, and the child-spectator's gaze and reaction to the experience of trauma. Fascinatingly, we also find the act of cinema-going depicted in one of the drawings that forms part of the collection '*And They Still Draw Pictures*' (Weissberger 1938) (see Figure 42). As Randall has stated,

Both cinema and childhood therefore are notions linked to ideas of modernity, progress and the formation and projection of a national imaginary or ideal. (Randall 2017, p. xxv)

Clearly, the drawings of children offer rich potential for insight into both history and cinema and investigation into the fictional representations of children's agency in Spanish cinema has been both necessary and timely.

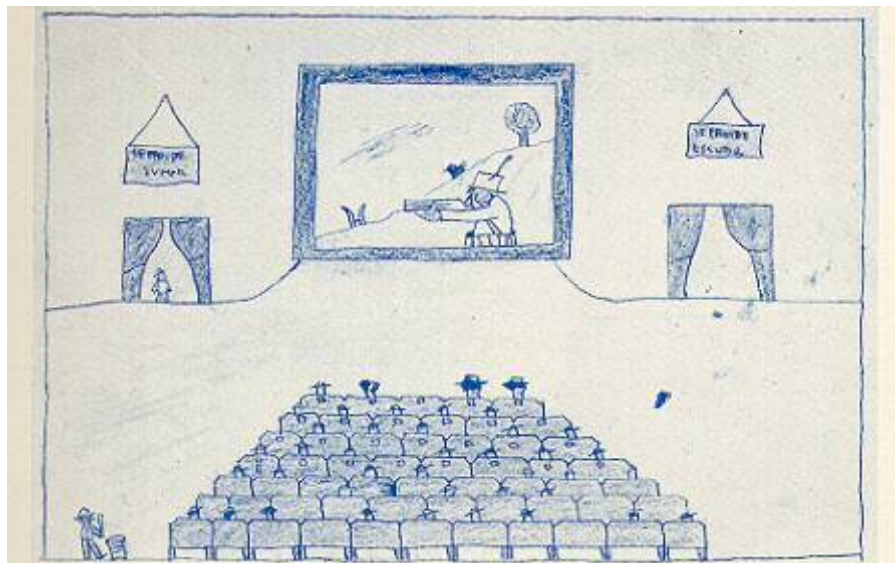


Plate 39

Julian Arjonilla, 12 years old, Children's Colony of Olivia, Valencia Province. Inscription on reverse says: "Movies before the war." Inscription on left: "Smoking forbidden." To right: "Spitting forbidden." The child remembers a Wild West film. The broad-brimmed hats of spectators seem to indicate that Julian Arjonilla's home was in Andalusia.

Figure 42 A child's drawing from *And They Still Draw Pictures* (Weissberger 1938).



Figure 43 Carlos looks at the drawings of Jaime in *El espinazo del diablo* (del Toro 2001)



Figure 44 Ofelia looks at the Book of Crossroads in *El laberinto del fauno* (del Toro 2006)

I make mention of the prominence of children's drawings because the act of children drawing under challenging circumstances was something I found to reoccur as I researched both the experiences and testimony of children in the Spanish Civil War—*Los niños de Rusia* (Camino and Tibidado 2002), *VILLAR- Los hijos de Manuela* (Koch 2001), *Los niños de la Guerra* (Vanmeirhaeghe et al. 2007)⁸⁴—and filmic representations. This prominence of the child's drawing highlights the capacity of agency in the child character that is often overlooked by film scholars. Maria Praggiamore has stated that extradiegetically the child figure in Spanish horror film 'offers insight into the relationship between cinematic form, confounded temporalities, and Spanish national identity' (2017, p. 221.8/823), and I further argue that this coalescence is made concrete in the image of the child's drawing. Cheri Robinson has echoed this link in her PhD thesis exploration of the relation between filmic representation and the historical archive, and postulates that children's archived drawings can be seen as 'a means of resisting the obliteration of the Other and as a reclamation of existence, the drawings attest to a violence that

⁸⁴ For more information see, <<http://www.indymedia.be/index.html%3Fq=node%252F29704.html>> and <<http://www.lef-online.be/index.php/6892-vlernikalosniosdelaguerra>>

“disappeared people” (Robinson 2017, p. 243). Thus, the child’s drawing can be a way of reclaiming an agency within and outside of the fictional text. The significance of drawings is especially marked in del Toro’s practice as a filmmaker and in his narratives; his drawings becoming cinema, his cinema turning its focus to drawings of, and authored by, the child.⁸⁵ In the films studied in this thesis, I found instances of the child’s drawings in sketchbooks (*El espinazo*) and magical books (*El laberinto*). If we consider the drawings made by the child as responses to ‘traumatic knowledge’, they can be seen as a way of expressing subjectivity and a framework that allows for interpretative agency. As Robinson sets out, traumatic knowledge ‘positions the children in both *El espinazo* and the human rights campaign in Argentina as *agents capable of choosing* based upon a full knowledge of the traumatic’ (Robinson 2017, p. 203, emphasis added).⁸⁶ Bergero (2014) also points out the

transformative power (agency) conveyed by Del Toro’s protagonists, steadfastly committed to memory, truth and justice – three civil human rights still denied to the victims (and their relatives) not just by Franco’s dictatorship but also by the Transition’s politics of oblivion. (Bergero 2014, p. 635)

We can link the fictional drawings of the fictional child protagonists, to those real drawings of children who participated in the historical conflict and detect agency in both narratives, historical and filmic:

drawings in both instances employ similar strategies and functions to unveil violence and seek justice, demonstrating children’s agency in the process. (Robinson 2018)

⁸⁵ Del Toro himself underscores the importance of image, demonstrated in texts such as *Cabinet of Curiosities* (Toro 2013) and *At Home with Monsters* (Salvesen et al. 2016) that document the significance of del Toro’s own sketchbooks and notebooks.

⁸⁶ Robinson also analyses the human rights campaign that took place in Argentina to advocate for children’s rights during conflict. This campaign circulated children’s drawings of conflict produced during the 1976–1983 Argentine military dictatorship

The appeal of drawing to Del Toro as an element of storytelling can be traced back to his own notebooks and sketchbooks. His intricate designs (shown in beautiful detail in Figure 45 (Toro 2013)) of houses in exquisite, unfathomable detail or chillingly realistic monsters often form the basis of the costume or set design for the production of his films.⁸⁷ Del Toro too links these sketchbooks to childhood:

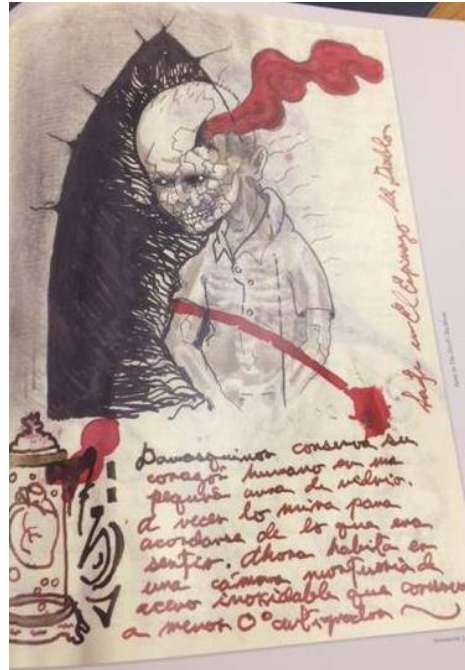


Figure 45 A drawing from del Toro's notebooks

Guillermo continues to draw and write in the notebooks, and in truth, he does so for both his daughters and himself. “When I start a screenplay or a movie, a shoot, I carry all of them with me, and I browse through them because it’s like having a dialogue with a younger me.” (del Toro 2013)

The introduction chapter also reminds us that he also dedicated his notebooks to the boy he once was (del Toro 2013, p. 27). As set out in the methodology, I apply an understanding of agency that encompasses various forms of assertive action and resilience/resistance. A consideration of children’s real and fictional drawings may enrich further studies of similar subject matter. I have offered this brief glimpse into the child’s drawing in this final chapter to demonstrate that the manifestation of children’s agency is dynamic and be detected in various modes of communication. Whilst I could not dedicate space to this in the main body of the thesis, it serves as a fertile strand of thought for future development and links the two works approached

⁸⁷ Figure 45 is an image from *Cabinet of curiosities : my notebooks, collections, and other obsessions* (Toro 2013), photographed on one of my visits to the British Library.

in my case studies, allowing me here to form some concluding thoughts. In the following section, I present a recapitulation of the aims of this thesis.

The Research Aims and Questions

The idea that the child in Spanish cinema represents more than a victim is one I have discussed in previous research.⁸⁸ Viewing the child solely as a focaliser depreciates the capacity of the child as a social actor with a potential for agency. Further to this, reducing the subjectivity of the child to that of a witness/victim/infantilised gaze can tend to overlook instances of social participation that can be equated to instances of agency. While there is an abundance of films in which the child character has been seen to take on this function of passive onlooker or victim⁸⁹, the objective of this study has been to illuminate novel considerations of the child protagonist. This has been accomplished through the close reading of two Spanish language films set around the Civil War that focus on a child protagonist. My analysis has centred on the role of the child in Spanish contemporary gothic horror film. Through the case studies presented, I have suggested that there are various potentials for agency to be read into the narratives of the child figure. If we recognise the limited definition of agency associated with the child in the current field of scholarship, which offers a binary understanding of the child as either “good and “innocent” or “evil” and “threatening” (Randall 2017, p. 197), it is possible to broaden the parameters of definitions of the agentic child social actor. By informing my close analysis of child protagonists with concepts drawn from haunting, fantasy, The Queer Child, oppositional practices and orphanhood, I have presented a multifaceted, interdisciplinary exploration of the agentic child protagonist.

⁸⁸ My undergraduate dissertation focused on the paradoxical roles of the orphan child in both Francoist and New Spanish cinema.

⁸⁹ Films including *To an Unknown God* (Chávarri 1977), *Butterfly's Tongue* (Cuerda 1999), *Secrets of the Heart* (Armendáriz 1997), and *Carol's Journey* (Uribe 2002) all exhibit this paradigm.

Del Toro has explained that the intention for *El espinazo* was to film children in the way they want to be filmed (2001). In fact, like many Spanish born directors such as Luis Buñuel, Carlos Saura and Carla Simón, del Toro has underscored the influence of his own childhood experiences, and therefore, supported the direction of the child characters in the film. On *El espinazo*, he remarks

I wanted to show infancy in the way I remembered it: fevered, full of fears and desires, all of a dimension we were unprepared to face. (Olson 2016, p. 14)

This can be seen in the trajectories towards agency of the child protagonists, through their interactions with drawing and art. In *El espinazo*, we saw how Jaime's drawings of the death of Santi in the basement grant him the agency to work through the trauma. Carlos and Jaime's shared passion for drawing, reading, and comic books bestowed them with an agency not afforded to them by the adults of their world. Films such as *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973), present the child figure as symbolic of a return to the director's own childhood, where the child functions as a mouthpiece for trauma. Other films use the child to display a politically charged critique of the Civil War and Francoism; exemplary of this angle are films including *Camada negra* (Aragón 1977), and *A un dios desconocido* (Chávarri 1977). In the films of del Toro, however, we can clearly discern examples of the child as an agentic social actor; a child informed by del Toro's own childhood experiences of the spectral and of fantasy. These children draw upon similar experiences and thus demonstrate a capacity or desire to invoke change. Just as this study has done, Clark and McDonald (2014) have commented on del Toro's recurring depiction of the child's agency, branding it as unusual and a marker of resistance to the Hollywoodization of the child figure (2014, p. 109). They further highlight the emancipatory possibilities that are offered to the child when they begin to articulate their own narratives, in writing, write, in the case of Ofelia, or in drawings, in the case of Jaime, their own narratives. In the

following section, I discuss the conclusions of this project, as well as the limitations I have faced in collating my research.

A Summary of Findings and Limitations

My thesis has presented an analysis of agency that is based on the subsections Haunting and Fantasy, The Queer Child, Oppositional Practices and Orphanhood. In this section, I present some conclusions under these headings in order to summarise these four generic or narrative components on which my re-evaluation of agency sits. The identification of these parameters forms part of my findings.

Haunting and Fantasy

In the two film case studies, haunting and fantasy were examined as stylistic and narrative devices that are incorporated into the films. Santi's spectral force demonstrated another worldly agency, as he transcended the boundaries of death and affirmed his presence through haunting. We also saw the extradiegetic agency of the haunting child in the context of Spanish national memory. We also explored Ofelia's encounters with the fantastic in *El laberinto*. My consideration of concepts such as magical thinking, the abject, and visual analysis of colour palettes and scene transitions has presented Ofelia as an empowered social actor. Her narrative journey has presented a discursive development of her agency that is supported by fantasy as a cinematic device. Considering these stylistic and thematic devices in the context of the child's agency has enabled us to reread key scenes and discover their relation to the development of agency.

The Queer Child

This thesis has considered and applied the ideas of Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009). By applying the theory of the queer child to the children of del Toro's films, we have been able to contemplate the queer child as a site of resistance and one that refuses to be moulded into the cipher of futurity that Spanish society has so long assigned to the child. Lee Edelman's thoughts, I think, have a unique resonance when considering Spanish culture:

We are no more able to conceive a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the child. (Edelman 2004, p. 11)

Del Toro's queer children, in contrast, call into question heteronormative society's tendency to coalesce notions of futurity, hope, and heteronormative reproduction into figurations of the child. We have seen queer children that transgress boundaries, incorporating elements of the abject. This research has demonstrated that we can no longer allow our interpretations of film to be tied to a construction of the child that negates queer potentialities and socio-political agency. Again, Clark and McDonald also consider the queer status of del Toro's cinema, focusing on the process of 'queering' and how del Toro's films 'raid the vaults of the Queer uncanny' (2014, p. 59). This research has further shown that recent Spanish child-centred films invite us, through narrative and aesthetic signals, to make interpretations that are no longer tied exclusively to a construction of the child that negates queer potentialities and socio-political agency.

Oppositional Practices

The theories of Ofelia Ferrán (2014) have also been applied in order to read the actions of the filmic children as passages of resistance. This theoretical framework has aided me in recognising the behaviours and navigational strategies of the child protagonists within the confining power structures presented in the narratives. In *El espinazo*, we saw how the boys

adopted a family unit of sorts in order to resist and overthrow the proto-fascist Jacinto. In *El laberinto*, we investigated the tactical actions of Ofelia, her befriending of Republican housemaid Mercedes and the relational agency and her refusal to comply with Captain Vidal's repressive practices that seek to control. This application has been useful, as the idea of oppositional practices has already been applied by Ferrán in the field of Hispanic scholarship to Spanish Civil War narratives. Both the original exposition of the theory and my own analysis explores the agency discernible in the actions of the characters through their use of oppositional practices, along with the potential link to historical events. This theory has enabled my analysis to shed light on the tactics employed by the child protagonists as they navigate the power structures of their cinematic worlds. I explored the practices of adaption and adoption. Both child protagonists symbolically adopt other characters in the narrative to form non-traditional 'family' units that allow them to subvert the Franco regime's ideological construction of the nuclear family and assert their political agency. Furthermore, they adapt radical behaviours and ways of navigating their worlds that command agency.

Orphanhood

Finally, I have offered a reconsideration of the orphan child. The notion of vulnerability and helplessness has long been portrayed in literature and film through the use of the orphan child or the foundling. As Allen states,

Metaphorically, the figure of the orphan is inherently queer: the orphan figure represents a breakdown in the system of reproductive futurity. (Claire Allen 2011, p. 107)

Seen in this light, a child outside of the normative familial structure often comes to represent the other. This child has frequently become an ideological stand-in for victimhood. I have promoted a redefining of the status of the orphan in historical Spanish cinema. As orphanhood is a sub-identity shared

by both protagonists of the two films, I have shown how such a subjectivity cannot be a way to homogenise these child protagonists or be a stand-in for victimhood. In order to do so, I presented the way both Carlos and Ofelia reclaimed and reappropriated the identity of the orphan. Carlos is left at the orphanage by his tutor and has lost his father to the war. We see, in the final frames of the film, that the boys overcome the 'explosive event' (Hartney 2009) and walk out into the desert as a new unit of solidarity. Ofelia's journey into the realms of the labyrinth aids her in becoming a defiant and resilient social actor, contrary to the stereotypical attributes of orphanhood such as vulnerability and fragility. It will also be pertinent to mention some of the limitations and confines that have emerged as slight obstacles to my film analysis. In the section that follows, I outline both the limitations and findings of the research, with a view to further considering how it can be developed.

Limitations

The two films come from the initiative of Mexican director Guillermo del Toro. Both films are set in the Iberian Peninsula and depict elements of real historical events. The works look at the period of the Spanish Civil War, centring events principally around the figure of the child. It might be contested that; del Toro's view is that of an external director, or that, as a Mexican director, his interpretation of the Spanish child could be classed as somewhat of an outsider's perspective. Nonetheless, the wider reading for this research has led me to concur with the classification of his films as Spanish transnational works with a Spanish setting. Del Toro experienced some of the same horrors as Jaime and Carlos in *El espinazo* due to his upbringing in a Jesuit boys' school in Mexico and his interaction with spirits in the home of his grandparents. Del Toro has also noted previously the parallels between Spain during the Civil War and the social realities of the 21st century, and that the attacks of 9/11 changed his perspective on brutality and innocence. *El espinazo* was first screened two days before the attacks of September 11th

and *El laberinto* was released five years after they occurred. Clark and McDonald (2014) have pointed out the 5 year period between the two films settings (1939 and 1944) is echoed here. In this way, these transnational films encourage the viewer to consider society and structures of power not only in Spain but throughout the world. Furthermore, as Martin Hurcombe (2008) sets out, del Toro's multi-national production of the film and intended international audience 'adumbrates the possibility of a new understanding of the Civil War for non-Spanish audiences' (Hurcombe 2008, p. 30).

This research has combined sociological research in the field of childhood studies and the study of film as artistic medium. It has also fused a historical and psychoanalytical approach. While sociology has informed the research and steered it in a direction which reinterprets agency in children, this approach, at times, has blurred the line between children in society and the child character of cinema. Whilst it is important to acknowledge parallels between the two, especially in terms of Spanish society's perception of the child, this can also lead to broad generalisations in the findings. What we must be wary of, then, is considering del Toro's construction of the child as paradigmatic of historical subjects. It may seem obvious, but it should be clarified that this child is not representative of *all* children in Spanish society around the time of the Civil War. In contrast with scholarship that aligns the actions and speech of child characters such as Carlos and Ofelia in a wider narrative of victimhood, in which they come to represent only the suffering experiences by children during the war and regime, this research primarily looks to consider and highlight examples of agency in the child. Another potential limitation may be that, by considering the children as social actors, I am foregrounding my reconstruction of childhood, and thus, this is an adult construction. Thus, the risk here is of repeating the tendency to universalise, only universalising the agentic child instead of the passive or victimised one, as representative of a generation, or of a national experience. Similarly, and as Randall has outlined:

[T]herefore, the concept of universal “rights” for children is inevitably problematic and risks reinforcing a mythologized monolithic experience of childhood. (Randall 2017, p. xxiv)

This paradox is echoed by Ansell in her work on the image of AIDS orphans:

Focusing on the ways in which the freedoms children exercise are discursively constructed in policy and research, a number of authors have suggested that the focus on children as social actors is just another historical construction of childhood, related to the international economy and the free market’s need for autonomous entrepreneurial individuals or rational unitary subjects. (Ansell 2016)

My interpretation does indeed stem from an adult perspective. Nonetheless, I have pointed to ways in which child protagonists within narratives have become agentic social actors who have moved away from the control of adult interventions or the idea of childhood as a precursory development period that precedes adulthood. In order to produce analysis which is critically engaged, it is possible that I have in fact presented another historical construction of children that presents them as a monolithic group of social actors capable of exercising agency. Despite this, in the current context of Spanish society, I believe it is important to make room for analysis of childhood that negates the amalgamation of victimhood into the figure of the child. What then, is unique about the child protagonist of contemporary Spanish horror film? I believe it is important to allow for diverse interpretations of the child character as, since the Franco regime, Spain has had a unique attitude towards the child as a victim or as one in need of protection and to some extent, has fetishised the innocence of the child. This began with the notion of the child as a symbol of the future that was intensely propagated by the Franco regime. This child has transfigured into an uncanny other in much of present day Spanish horror film. These films feature a representation of the child that speaks to the missing or kidnapped children of Franco’s Spain; a manifestation of traumatic memory that has now resurfaced. Moving then to

the films of del Toro, we have seen that the child has been represented as a social actor with a voice. Despite the aforementioned limitations, this research contributes to a broader understanding and perception of children in Civil War narrative films. In the text that follows I highlight a selection of novelties presented in this thesis and look to possible future strands for exploration.

Findings

This work has intergrated a broad range of scholarship that focuses on narratives of victimhood and therefore disseminates the burdened image of the child victim in works based around the Civil War and regime. It has then discerned new readings of films that have previously been interpreted as art that seeks solely to voice trauma through the mouthpiece of the child in order to provide new insights. We have reconsidered practices of agency, in which the child protagonists demonstrate their potential to incite change and movement within the narrative of the films. This research combines a multitude of theories that work to complement each other by looking to unique manifestations of agency in the actions of the child character. I have examined children's subjectivities and how they have been co-opted to express political ideologies and fragilities between the two Spains. This work, however, offers an understanding of cinematic childhood that acknowledges *that children may depend on an 'other' intrinsically*, but centralises the capacity for agency of the child character in Spanish Civil War narrative. This research will be of value within a specific research network and established cluster of scholarship. With help from the Childhood and Nation in World Cinema network and the Children's History Society, research on cinema's child is gaining ground and interest.⁹⁰ As many studies in these networks are interdisciplinary in their merging of film theory, psychoanalysis, and sociology, they cross the boundaries between academic fields in the same way the agentic cinematic

⁹⁰ The proceedings of the 2016 Childhood and Nation in World Cinema network conference have now been published in the book *Childhood and Nation in Contemporary World Cinema: Borders and Encounters* <<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/childhood-and-nation-in-contemporary-world-cinema-9781501318597/>>

child refuses the mould that has been assigned to the figural Child. This research, then, serves as a novel contribution to knowledge in the field of Spanish cultural studies.

Recommendations for further research

I have already acknowledged that the limitations of this thesis led me to direct my focus to two films specifically. It may be that the continued presence and agency of the child protagonist is unpacked further by future analytical scholarship. In fact, during the last five years, and even since I began this research in 2016, many works have surfaced that explore the oeuvre of director Guillermo del Toro; *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art* (McDonald and Clark 2014), *Guillermo del Toro's The Devil's Backbone and Pan's Labyrinth: Studies in the Horror Film* (Olson 2016) *Guillermo del Toro: At Home with Monsters* (Salvesen et al. 2016), are just some examples. Thus, it is clear that the cinema of del Toro continues to offer a plethora of potential analyses and readings and to inspire novel scholarly work. In this project, I have been limited in word count and subject matter and I hope in the future to delve further into the films through papers based on themes including the monstrous and the gothic in del Toro's works.

When I began this MPhil research, I was fascinated by the trope of the child other in Spanish language horror. I would still like to consider the uncanny child other in Spanish horror and the idea of the monstrous child in further research. I have touched upon elements of Spanish horror, due to its hybrid nature, and indeed, the multi-generic quality of the films presented. Further analysis of the recurring child of Spanish horror is necessary due to the very frequent use of this figure in the genre. It is far from a coincidence that one of the first horror movies that centres on the child - *Who can Kill a Child?* (Ibáñez Serrador 1976) – was released the year after Franco's death. The fascination with the child in horror continues into the present day with Paco Plaza's *Veronica* (2017) also based around the child's experiences of trauma, history

and the occult, debuting in Spanish cinemas and Netflix in 2018 (which features a nod to Serrador's aforementioned feature film, which happens to be playing on the family television in one scene).⁹¹ As stated previously, the hybrid, alchemic nature of del Toro's horror has also encouraged me to touch upon queer theory. While the exposition of queer theory in this work has only begun to scratch the surface, future works may contemplate the broad reach of queer theory and its applicability to the filmic oeuvre of del Toro.

The film's alchemic melding of modes is a direct invitation for the viewer to look beyond the aesthetic conventions and assumptions that underlie film genre as well as, crucially, to resist and challenge blind allegiance to repressive ideologies. (McDonald and Clark 2014, p. 159)

His uncanny, fantastical monsters and transgressive, inquisitive child protagonists suggest an alternative to the traditional stereotypes of grotesque monstrous villains and innocent, passive children.

One of the defining features of New Queer Cinema is the reinterpretation of canonical or familiar stories whilst simultaneously 'queering' them in order to highlight alternative scripts and counter discourses. (McDonald and Clark 2014, p. 8)

I am fortunate enough to have the opportunity to further this research by moving into doctoral study. In this further research, I will focus specifically on the figure of the orphan in Spanish visual cultures. This future research will trace the changing trope of orphanhood and its socio-political relevance in contemporary Spanish society and culture. Wider reading/viewing and research has led me to the conclusion that there has been a distinguishable shift in the depiction of the orphan figure in child centred Spanish film (*cine con niño*) and this is where I will begin my preliminary research for this next project. Somewhat influenced by drawings and visual narratives that centre on the child figure, I also intend to broaden my consideration of fictional visual

⁹¹ *Verónica* (Plaza 2017) also references Saura's *Cría cuervos* through the actress Ana Torrent in the role of the mother, as does the film *NO-DO* (Quiroga 2008). Ana Torrent and her infamous, distinctive gaze is a recurring figure in subversive Spanish cinema.

narratives about orphans through a consideration of the graphic novel also. The popularity of the Spanish graphic novel has increased in recent years, with comics such as *Todo Paracuellos* (Giménez and Marsé 2007)⁹², *Psiconautas* (Vazquez 2016) and *Un medico novato* (Llobell 2014) enjoying success. According to Carla Suarez Vega (2018), the graphic novel aids in showcasing the need for dialogue around past trauma and helps to educate later generations about Spain's traumatic past. The visual nature of the comic succeeds in conveying feelings that were oppressed for so long by institutions and the establishment. Often, themes of orphanhood, testimony and the Spanish Civil war intersect in the graphic novel in a similar way to how these themes are articulated in Spanish cinema. *Paracuellos* is one of the most famous examples of this and also served as part of del Toro's inspiration for *El espinazo del diablo* (del Toro 2001). With this in mind, I hope to carry out some comparative analysis of child centred cinema and comics.

Closing Remarks

This research began with an exploration of Mark Cousins's film essay *A Story of Children and Film* (Cousins 2013). In his film, Cousins speaks about the idea of authenticity of the child on-screen and about the agency of children within narratives. Examining a range of films from *The White Balloon* (1995) to *The 400 Blows* (Truffaut 1959) Cousins illustrates that when child characters actively participate in the world around them, when their actions have an effect on happenings and situations, it produces some of the best cinema.

Many children in films are, of course, projections of adult concerns but, some of the best films about kids are *the ones where children have a degree of agency*. (Cousins 2016)

⁹² The comics of Carlos Giménez were in fact published sporadically throughout the 1960s. This 2007 edition collates all volumes of the comic. For more information, see <<https://scroll.in/article/838704/what-happened-to-children-after-the-spanish-civil-war-this-graphic-novel-tells-their-horrific-tales>>

I believe that further acknowledging the agency of the child within these 'best films' in scholarship and demonstrating this in public facing exhibitions will promote a diverse academic interpretation of the child protagonist. This work has proposed that agency can be discerned in the actions of child protagonists in a broader sense. The binary understanding of agency as either likely or impossible for the child, lacks an understanding of relational agency, identity, oppositional practices and other understandings of agency that are more complex than many binary understandings of power and the child. The role and space of the victim has taken centre stage in recent years, following the Law of Historical Memory. Historical memory of trauma, once forcefully repressed, has now transcended the private sphere to enter the public one.⁹³ We have too seen this transfer played out in the realm of Spanish cinema. I posit that the figure of the child has moved from being a mouthpiece of the regime, to a symbol of collective trauma, to an agentic participant in the films of del Toro.⁹⁴ Lorraine Ryan's thoughts on this contemporary, agentic cinematic child (2012) can be applied here:

A marked difference is evident insofar as these child protagonists do not suffer from the debilitating self-doubt of Erice's and Saura's characters, but are rather resolute in their resistance[...]such portrayals reconfigure the image of children from passive victims to active agents. (Ryan 2012, p. 451)

⁹³ This has been aided by the return to power of the PSOE Spanish socialist party, led by Pedro Sánchez. Thanks to the party's more liberal ideology, the subject of exhuming graves from the Civil War is now back on the table. For more information, see <https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/07/12/inenglish/1531388057_522551.html>

⁹⁴ In a recent conference paper at the Children's History Society 2018 conference, I argued that the role of the child is evolving again to also articulate personal trauma.

By suggesting new readings of Spanish horror films, we have not only unpacked the tendency to interpret the figure of the child to explore repressed trauma or to look back at the past, we have also explored different perceptions of the child as a social actor that intervenes and is present in narratives of political conflict, in order to propose a new hypothesis. In June 2018, the figure of the migrant child appeared repeatedly in frontline media, amidst the immigration crisis occurring in the United States. The reader may also recall the image of Aylan Kurdi, a young Syrian migrant whose body in 2015 was washed up on Turkey's

Mediterranean coastline, near Bodrum and was subsequently photographed and circulated worldwide on the front page of newspapers. In 2016 we saw Omran Daqneesh, the three-year-old Syrian boy injured in the 2016 air strike in Aleppo, Syria, whose image was also utilised in politically charged reports on the crisis. One may note the similarity of these images with that of the scene presented in figure 46, a poster issued by the Madrid Defence Council during the Spanish Civil War. Geist (2002) has explored how the image of the dead child here speaks to sensibilities not only to extract empathy but also to encourage ideological change and political mobilization. Imogen Bloomfield (2018) has highlighted this recently in regard to the Spanish Civil War:

As photographic subjects, child victims of war met the requirements of high-energy propaganda of agitation: the need to address and affect individuals within a collective, and to elicit and capitalise on base sentiments against an enemy. (Bloomfield 2018)

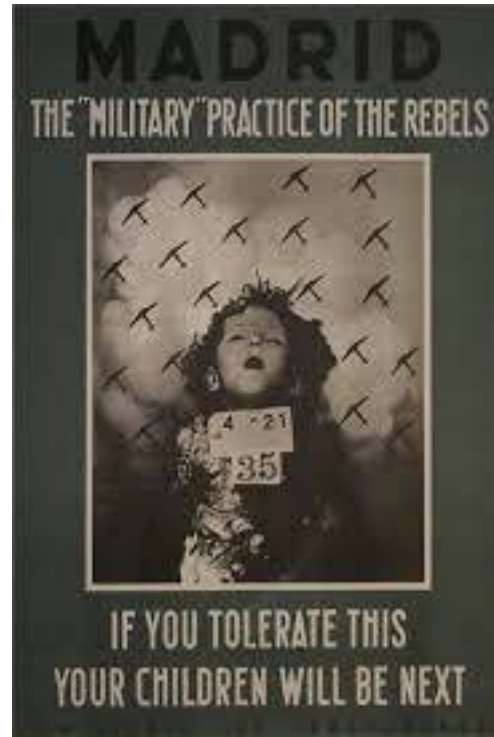


Figure 46 Poster produced during the Spanish Civil War

Is the victim-child in much of Spanish cinema, then, both victim and scapegoat, a sacrificial lamb, whose victimhood misdirects attention away from the wider responsibilities of social and political groups? And can we turn away from this image and instead, fathom a representation of the child as an agentic social actor? Whilst both Spanish and international media continues to manipulate this image of the suffering child as means of ideological influence, I deem del Toro's portrayal of the agentic child as a considered alternative, reminding us of the potency and potential of the child actor and the dangers in disregarding their status as autonomous beings with an agentic force. Figure 48 provides a contrast to the aforementioned poster. Although Ofelia too lies dead, her eyes remain open, staring pointedly off-camera. The horizontal shot reminds us of her ties to the subterranean fantasy world which worked throughout the narrative to support the explicit realisation of her agency. Perhaps her death is inevitable as diegetically, if the traditional feminine victimhood narrative is to be fulfilled as symbolic of the Republic, she must die. Nonetheless,

The end of the Republic was a tragedy, but it is important when representing that tragedy that new metaphors of loss that do not reinforce normative readings of gendered bodies are found. (Raychaudhuri 2011, p. 78)

Whilst del Toro perhaps does exploit the image of the dead child for cinematic potential, this work has unpacked a multitude of means in which the child protagonists demonstrate agency, and Ofelia's assertion of her own agency through resistance, oppositional behaviour and queering of symbolic childhood demonstrates this. Like Ofelia, Carlos's (see Figure 47) longing to

know the monster (Santi) in *El espinazo*, to unravel the secrets of the orphanage, positions him on the trajectory towards agency.



Figure 47 Carlos approaches Santi



Figure 48 Ofelia lays dead in *El laberinto*

Spain is just commencing the process of uncovering what was occluded by the expediciencies of the Pacto de olvido. This means that the study of films that explore the past and the figure of the child, such as *El espinazo* and *El laberinto*, is perhaps more relevant than ever. More than 200,000 children were displaced or became refugees during the conflict and around 30,000 children came to be known as the stolen children of Francoism. This is now starting to be considered in society and scholarship, with memory organisations and academic networks appearing throughout Europe and America, interacting with each other.⁹⁵ Both *El espinazo* and *El laberinto* are representative of del Toro's desire to incorporate the agency and subjective identity of the child protagonist. As Spanish society longs to reclaim and seek justice for stolen and lost children, this research has promoted a more open and critical reading of the child protagonists of Spanish Civil War themed

⁹⁵ For example, The Association for the UK Basque Children <<http://www.basquechildren.org/>> supported a one-day conference at the University of Southampton entitled 'The Basque Child Refugees from the Spanish Civil War- History and Memory'.

cinema, that acknowledges the capacity for agency and moves away from relegating childhood to the status of a 'convenient symbol' (Lury 2010).

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