

FINDING AGENCY: HORROR AND RESISTANCE IN *PAN'S LABYRINTH* (2006) AND
DONNIE DARKO (2001)

A Thesis

by

ERIKA RODRIGUEZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Chair of Committee,
Committee Members,
Head of Department,

Anne Morey
Daniel Humphrey
Joshua DiCaglio
Maura Ives

August 2020

Major Subject: English

Copyright 2020 Erika Rodriguez

ABSTRACT

In Guillermo del Toro's 2006 *Pan's Labyrinth* and Richard Kelley's 2001 *Donnie Darko*, the audience is presented with young protagonists that have the ability to see images beyond their reality. I define these images as "alternative perspectives," and they are a means for the protagonists in each film to gain agency and power. I utilize Sándor Klapcsik's concept of liminality in narratives alongside Judith Butler's ideas on resistance and vulnerability to identify the alternative perspectives as providing the protagonists with a liminal space and thus a space to conduct their respective forms of resistance or disobedience. These alternative perspectives also contain elements of horror that are critical to the protagonist's ability to venture towards empowerment. Alongside traditional horror film conventions, Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject is a means to identify the horror of experiencing an alternative perspective. Identifying films containing alternative perspectives is a means for analyzing horror with a specific focus on individuality and empowerment, as opposed to the more traditional analysis of horror on a grander socio-cultural scale.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supported by a thesis committee consisting of Professor Anne Morey and Professor Joshua DiCaglio of the English Department and Professor Daniel Humphrey of the Film Studies and Women's and Gender Studies program.

All work conducted for the thesis was completed by the student independently.

Funding Sources

Graduate study was supported by the Advanced Civil Schooling program through the United States Army.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II RESISTING GENRE AND SOCIETY IN <i>PAN'S LABYRINTH</i>	10
Entities and Artifacts Transcending Boundaries.....	15
Ofelia's Tasks, Resistance, and Abjection.....	23
CHAPTER III AMBIGUITY AND SOCIAL DEVIANCE IN <i>DONNIE DARKO</i>	30
Liminality and Abjection in Frank and liquid spears.....	32
Tasks to time travel.....	40
Confronting and Overcoming Horror.....	46
CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION	50
WORKS CITED	56

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In film, the camera often allies with the protagonist so that the audience sympathizes with that character as their story is unfolding. Yet sometimes this presentation of the protagonist's perspective shows perceptions of a reality that is available only to the protagonist, that deviates from the expected and accepted daily world they inhabit. I call these filmic representations the protagonist's "alternative perspectives." These alternative perspectives specifically privilege the main protagonist, being largely unavailable to any other characters in the film. That alternative perspectives are available solely to the protagonist and to film viewers while remaining unavailable to other characters in the story is an important distinction, as it is critical to understanding how alternative perspectives in film provide a means for the protagonist to discover their own agency. I also make this distinction of a privileged alternative perspective to avoid any misidentification of potential alternative perspective films, such as ghost stories, which provide images of protagonists experiencing alternative perspectives in the form of spirits or ghosts. These apparitions typically become available to other characters in the story and become the primary threat or conflict. The horror residing in such films, however, resembles a similar horror in alternative perspective films. Yet, in identifying a single protagonist that experiences alternative perspectives as defined above, we are able to also consider the character as residing in a liminal space, having access both to familiar daily reality and to their own experiences in another reality. This liminality presents possibilities for the character to discover their own agency and feeling of empowerment.

An analysis of two films from the early 21st century provides examples of these alternative perspective films, the elements of horror they contain, and the ability of the protagonists to find agency. In Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and Richard Kelley's *Donnie Darko* (2001), the audience is introduced to young protagonists that experience alternative perspectives. In discussing these films, we must consider the characteristics of representing alternative perspectives in film to include the liminality within the narratives and the horror they contain.

Regarding liminality in narratives, Sándor Klapcsik's *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach* claims that liminality is "a constant oscillation, crossing back and forth between social and cultural positions... the space of a continuous transference, of a never-ending narrative, forming an infinite process towards an unreachable end... [and is] created by transgressions, or traversals, across evanescent, porous, indefinite, ambiguous, evasive borderlines" (14). This definition provides a thorough foundation for examining alternative perspectives as a means for creating liminal spaces for a protagonist. As the phrase implies, an alternative perspective is individualized and mostly contained within the protagonist's mind, making the alternative perspective a place with potential boundaries. For a filmic representation of the human mind, it is necessary for a coherent structure and narrative to encapsulate perceptual situations within boundaries, or a place. Within *Pan's Labyrinth*, the place is specifically designated as the Underworld and for *Donnie Darko*, the place is considered to be the future. These boundaries, however, are also presented as permeable, providing the alternative perspective an ability to invade or trespass into daily reality, but any trespassing is available only to the protagonist. Thus, as each film presents the alternative perspectives of the protagonist, it must also create the liminal space with which each protagonist engages.

There are two primary avenues to approaching the liminality presented in films with alternative perspectives. The first is utilizing Judith Butler's ideas on resistance and vulnerability. A liminal space occurs for the protagonist as an initial resistance against the accepted reality in which they are living. Therefore, liminal space is important to the protagonist's desire to resist the societal and political structures they inhabit within their reality, as it is the space of resistance. According to Butler, "freedom can be exercised only if there is enough support for the exercise of freedom, a material condition that enters into the act that it makes possible" (14). When she says "freedom" she is referring to political acts, such as resistance, making the ability to resist dependent upon a material space. To further emphasize this importance she also states, "no one moves without a supportive environment and set of technologies. And when those environments start to fall apart or are emphatically unsupportive, we are left to 'fall' in some ways, and our very capacity to exercise most basic rights is imperiled" (15). To consider the alternative perspectives as providing a liminal space and thus a space of resistance for the protagonist is also to realize the lack of power and agency the protagonist maintains in their traditionally structured reality.

A protagonist that experiences alternative perspectives is generally one that also resides in a position of little to no power or agency in their usual reality. Having alternative perspectives presents the protagonists with some semblance of control on their own terms, providing a means for empowerment. To use Butler's terms, "people demonstrate to oppose the precarious conditions in which they live" (13), thus the alternative perspectives become a means of resistance, or a demonstration against the system that enables the protagonist's precarity. Yet what is critical to this understanding of resistance and spaces for resistance is also the connection to vulnerability that these acts entail. Butler examines vulnerability and resistance as qualities

that rarely exist without each other, meaning vulnerability often leads to resistance and resistance is a cause of vulnerability (13). This correlation between resistance and vulnerability is also true in the narrative of protagonists with alternative perspectives, as their particular form of resistance, created by inhabiting a vulnerable existence, often leads to increased vulnerability. A sense of a never-ending narrative, as a trait of liminality expressed earlier seems to apply to these definitions. That is, a narrative that is in a sort of feedback loop between vulnerability and resistance seems significant to alternative perspective films. However, Butler also recognizes a potential formula leading towards agency, in that the success of resistance against the powers that caused vulnerability in the first place may nonetheless lead to agency, effectively converting vulnerability into agency (23). However, Butler presents this conversion of vulnerability into agency as a question as to whether this conversion actually occurs or is possible. In an analysis of alternative perspectives in film, I propose an answer: the resistance of the protagonists through their alternative perspectives allows for the protagonist to overcome their own vulnerabilities so that they gain agency; in order to accomplish this transformation, their response to a sense of their vulnerability shifts from self-preservation to a desire to save other characters who are important to the protagonist.

One means of considering vulnerability in the context of films with alternative perspectives is to also consider how Butler explains resistance in political terms; she notes that “the freedom to gather as a people is always haunted by the imprisonment of those who exercised that freedom and were taken to prison” (20). Butler’s use of the word “haunted” evokes a sense of fear when considering resistance. This fear for Butler, however, entails imprisonment or other acts of violence against people choosing to resist, and therefore becomes a trait of the vulnerability at play when a person or people decide to resist. Vulnerability, then,

becomes inherently scary. This fear manifests in the alternative perspective as horror, which is represented visually using traditional horror film tropes and conventions, but also in the concept of abjection.

This brings me to the second approach towards examining these films, which is through Julia Kristeva's discussion of the "abject" in her *Powers of Horror* essay. Kristeva's discourse on the abject outlines ideas of being disturbed by the abject, which is something she continuously defines throughout her essay. At its base level, the abject is "not me. Not that. But not nothing, either" (2), as well as nausea, a corpse (death), and the purging of bodily fluids (blood, pus, milk, etc.). She also notes how it is "on the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (2). Ultimately, if something is abject, it can cause unease, perhaps physical or mental extinction, and therefore fear. Thus, the ability of these alternative perspectives in the film narratives to invade the protagonist's real-world perspective, being both part of the protagonist and separate at the same time, is an abject phenomenon, and therefore horrifying.

Kristeva also identifies "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4), which further suggests alternative perspectives as abject. This parallels the earlier definition regarding liminality as that which is created by transgressing boundaries. Kristeva continues to explain this idea of abjection as "any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law" (4). These conceptions of abject in relation to disturbing identity and order, or more specifically the law, are important nodes in understanding the abjection of an alternative perspective, as these perspectives inherently resist the natural order of the social or cultural structures that the

protagonist experiences. The alternative perspectives therefore become “a terror that dissembles” (4), creating an initial unease for the protagonist that manifests in elements of horror.

Before continuing with a discussion of genre, it is important to bridge the two methods containing liminal concepts considered through Butler and Kristeva. A protagonist’s alternative perspective represents the protagonist’s ability to inhabit a liminal space, which also permits the protagonist to resist the societal or cultural structure they inhabit, thus causing or enhancing their own vulnerability to that structure. This vulnerability and the abject phenomena these alternative perspectives create produce an obstacle for the protagonist to overcome, which consists of both abject horror and traditional filmic elements of horror.

A genre discussion, then, will serve to further recognize the liminality of films containing alternative perspectives by articulating viewer expectations engendered by genre conventions and how each film is able to subvert those expectations. In film, with the representation of alternative perspectives that are generally otherworldly, or rather distinct from a traditional representation of reality, it is safe to assume these films reside under the umbrella of fantasy; that is, they may be considered fantasy, horror, science fiction, fairy tales, or any combination of these. In Farah Mendlesohn’s *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, she outlines four varieties of fantasy: portal-quest fantasy, immersive fantasy, intrusion fantasy, and liminal fantasy. On the surface, it would seem likely that these films to be examined are liminal fantasy. However, Mendlesohn’s definition of a liminal fantasy is “that form of fantasy which estranges the reader from the fantastic as seen and described by the protagonist” (182). Intrusion fantasy, however is the primary definition I utilize. An intrusion fantasy consists of the fantastic entering the world of the non-fantastic. It is “the bringer of chaos. It is the beast in the bottom of the garden, or the elf seeking assistance. It is horror and amazement. It takes us out of safety without taking us from

our place” (Mendlesohn xxi-xxii). She uses horror as a primary example of intrusion fantasy, noting specifically the presence of monsters as a device that intrudes into reality (142).

Additionally, she distinguishes intrusion fantasy from liminal fantasy through the notion of doubt or estrangement, noting that “where the liminal fantasy is about doubt, the intrusion fantasy constructs its suspension through escalation” (116). For alternative perspective films, the protagonist’s fantastic visions become intrusions into their reality, but they still remain separate and exclusive to the protagonist. Mendlesohn also identifies the supernatural horror as the “quintessential intrusion fantasy” (142), noting a basic formula, within film specifically, where innocent victims “recapitulate the normality against which the horror will be tested” (143). This suggests that the alternate perspective *is* the horror forced upon the real world. While it is possible to categorize alternative perspective films as liminal fantasy, the construction of the narrative in these films is able to engage the audience to be complicit in the protagonist’s alternative perspectives, as opposed to the estrangement Mendlesohn attributes to liminal fantasy. Therefore, alternative perspectives may then be considered as residing within, or an attribute of, a horror genre, being both “horror and amazement.”

Horror, however, is able to oscillate between the alternative perspective and reality as both representations on film contain various elements of horror. In considering the origins of horror as more specifically Gothic in nature, we can identify various aspects that pertain to these films such as “the building, release, and re-building of tension through the creation of uncertainty, mystery, suspense, fright, and shock” (Tan et. Al 405). There is already some inherent mystery with presenting alternative perspectives, as the traditional narrative attempts to rationalize their occurrences through rhetoric of mental illness or trauma, while also presenting opportunities for the audience to believe in the reality of these perspectives as the protagonist

believes in them. This mystery, thus, creates uncertainty, and for films with alternative perspectives, also generates particular instances for “suspense, fright, and shock.” These instances vary based on the specific film; however, these films often have the ability to manipulate the horror that resides within each protagonist’s alternative perspective, while the protagonists also overcome the horror that originates in their traditional perspective. For *Pan’s Labyrinth* and *Donnie Darko*, neither film is specifically identified as a horror film. However, they each contain elements of horror, largely within their alternative perspective, but at times also within their traditionally represented reality. Therefore, the protagonists of alternative perspective films manipulate horror in order to overcome horror, thereby gaining agency and power outside the realm of protective or damaging fantasy.

The first chapter of this thesis will contain an explication of *Pan’s Labyrinth* in terms of identifying the alternative perspective, horror, and ultimately agency of its protagonist. Ofelia, as the protagonist, is a pre-pubescent girl in Francoist Spain, who travels to a remote mill with her mother to live with her new stepfather, the Fascist Captain Vidal. Meeting a faun one night, she is told, and comes to believe, that she is the long-lost princess Moanna of the Underworld. The film proceeds to present two distinct narratives--that of Ofelia’s fantasy adventure and that of the reality of a turbulent Spain during the Franco regime. It becomes clear early in the film that the audience will experience the both realistic horror of excessive violence and also the horror of an intrusion fantasy, in which Ofelia is faced with threats and monsters. As the film progresses, Ofelia is able to gain agency through her ability to overcome horror. An ultimate act of resistance at the end of the film causes her death, but it secures her brother’s survival.

The next chapter continues the discussion of alternative perspective films with an analysis of *Donnie Darko*. Donnie is the protagonist, as a teenager attending a private school

during 1982 America. It is clear from the beginning that Donnie does not fit into the mold of the society he inhabits, which is further solidified when Donnie and the audience are introduced to an ominous figure, Frank, who is a tall, seemingly monstrous, bunny. Frank belongs in Donnie's alternative perspective and manifests himself to encourage Donnie to commit vandalism in his community, which expresses resistance to the overall structure of the society he inhabits. Like Ofelia, Donnie is able to commit an ultimate act of resistance, which both causes his death and saves many characters he cares about.

Each film presents the protagonist's alternative perspectives as a liminal space, where there are elements of horror. This horror is a trait that characterizes parts of the protagonist's alternative perspectives, and one that also transgresses boundaries. Theorists of the horror genre, such as Jeffery Cohen, Noel Carroll, Cynthia J. Miller, and Bowdoin Van Riper primarily focus on the cultural or social representations within horror films and literature. In a collection of essays on cinematic horror, Miller and Van Riper note that "nationalism, religion, race, gender, and political economy are all widely acknowledged sources from which our notions about the monstrous rise up and manifest in films across genres" (1). While both *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Donnie Darko* also contain social and/or cultural commentary, I believe the horror elements within the films are working on a more individual level. Both Ofelia and Donnie must engage with their seemingly monstrous aberrations, which empower them to make their own decisions, leading them towards answers to their questions: Is Ofelia the princess of the Underworld? Will the world end in 28 days? The elements of horror in these particular films are significant because they provide a means through which the protagonists resist their situations and gain agency, suggesting that horror can also be individually empowering as opposed to merely terrifying, or operating only to confirm the expected social and cultural meanings typically attributed to it.

CHAPTER II

RESISTING GENRE AND SOCIETY IN *PAN'S LABYRINTH*

For Guillermo del Toro's 2006 *Pan's Labyrinth*, not only does the main character Ofelia transcend the boundaries between historical Spain and a fantastic world, but the film itself transcends the genre boundaries of fantasy, realism, and horror. According to critics such as Roger Clark, Keith McDonald, Kristine Kotecki, Rikke Shubart, Amanda Stonebarger, and Jack Zipes, *Pan's Labyrinth* is predominantly grounded within the conventions of fairy tales, but it also clearly subverts the expectation of fairy tales in various ways. Other critics, such as Laura Hubner and A. Robin Hoffman, highlight the horror aspects within the film, but also the film's resistance to those generic conventions. Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix suggest a new genre entirely for the film in "neomagical realism," which becomes a liminal genre that creates a plurality of worlds (64). These ideas all seem to encapsulate the film's ability to transcend various generic structures and deviate from their associated conventions. Just as the film may be said to "disobey" the instructions contained with generic conventions through this blending of forms, it echoes this structural disobedience through its exploration of resistance to malignant authority, which appears consistently in the film.

While I intend to spend some time examining the fluidity of the genre within *Pan's Labyrinth*, I will also extract particular entities and artifacts from the film that also serve to blur the lines of the portrayed real world and the alternative perspective, or fantasy world, Ofelia witnesses, then lastly analyze the tasks set before her as abject and settings for vulnerability, resistance, yet ultimately agency, which are intrinsic within the elements of horror represented. Throughout this analysis we will be able to notice how Ofelia as the main protagonist, is willing

to subject herself to victimhood, which causes horror to appear in different forms, yet through her own agency and power is attempting to control the world around her. Her success is contingent upon the acceptance of viewers into Ofelia's alternative perspective. As I noted, the blurring of the boundaries between the Underworld and the Fascist reality implies the former is real and Ofelia becomes Princess Moanna.

First, in examining genre, both horror and fairy tale reside under the umbrella of fantasy, and more specifically within what Farah Mendlesohn defines as intrusion fantasy, where “the fantastic enters the fictional world” (xiv). Horror is more central to Mendlsohn's treatment of intrusion fantasy rhetoric, while she considers fairy tale to be more in the realm of “fancy” (146). Yet, according to Tracie D. Lukasiewicz's chapter in *Fairy Tale Films*, the film *Pan's Labyrinth* contains “a much more ominous take on the fairy tale” (60) in that it deviates from the brightness and happiness of the well-known Disney franchise fairy tale films for children. Yet, she continues to argue that it is still linked to the fairy tale “through its use of elements, archetypes, and motifs in the original tales” (61), similar to that of the Grimm brothers with their graphic depictions of murder and mutilation. This link is based largely on the characters within *Pan's Labyrinth* where the audience is provided the fairy tale archetypes of a heroine, evil stepfather, and fairy godmother (Mercedes, or perhaps the faun), as well as the fairy tale element of an ending where good triumphs over evil (Lukasiewicz 60). The film's ending, however, diverges from this traditional fairy tale “happy ending” because the viewer is still left with the unknown fate of the resistance fighters. Thus, while we understand *Pan's Labyrinth* as a fairy tale, it is also worth examining those darker, more horrific elements that challenge our expectations of the fairy tale.

Referring back to Mendlesohn's treatment of an intrusion fantasy, she focuses on the intrusion of a fantasy world into the real world, "which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (115). Recalling her identification of horror within the rhetoric of intrusion fantasy from the introduction, it is important to remember that Ofelia's fantasy world can be considered as embodying the horror in the film. For *Pan's Labyrinth*, this horror appears ambiguous when the audience is introduced to the faun as a representative of the Underworld. Towering over Ofelia, with large horns and unnatural, ominous eyes, the faun is presented as a potential monstrous threat and must quickly tell Ofelia not to be afraid. He also lashes out at her after she disobeys in her second task, which keeps him and the world he represents as ambiguous. Additionally, the Pale Man seems to reside within this fantasy world, and he is undoubtedly horrific, as will be discussed. Even calling this fantasy world "the Underworld" connotes a place of darkness and death, as it is the name for Hell in Greek mythology, as ruled by Hades. Yet, this fantasy world is juxtaposed with a reality that seems similarly horrifying and so the horror becomes an element within the film that is able to transcend a definitive narrative location.

A subtle tone of horror is presented at the beginning of the film, as the viewer realizes we are taking a journey into a very secluded part of Spain, deep in the woods, where perhaps communications to larger populations, and consequently more military power, are not hasty, but also where strange things can happen. Caroline J. S. Picart and David A. Frank outline an intriguing parallel between Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) as both depicting horror based on real events. While their discourse utilizes an analysis based on similar camera techniques during crucial scenes in both films, along with an exploration of the use of male gaze and sexualized feminine bodies, *Pan's Labyrinth*

contains neither. Yet, considering the analysis of a war film, such as *Schindler's List*, in comparison to a horror film, resonates with considering the horror elements of *Pan's Labyrinth*, as a hybrid of war realism and horror. Picart and Frank note how the monsters in these films, although seeming ordinary, “exist outside and beyond social norms, leaving witnesses with a deep sense of nausea, terror, and sickness” (206). This definition of monsters may easily be said for Vidal, as well as the extraordinary monsters present in *Pan's Labyrinth*. Yet, in addition to this commonality of monsters, the film also evokes a sense of seclusion, taking place in rural Spain in a seemingly remote mill in the middle of the woods. This seclusion not only isolates the plot, but the characters, and provides a distinct tension that is also seen in numerous horror films, to include *Psycho*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974, and the innumerable remakes and sequels beginning in 2003), *The Shining* (1980), *Jeepers Creepers* (2001, sequel 2003), and *Cabin in the Woods* (2011), just to name a few. In *Pan's Labyrinth* without the seclusion, there is no labyrinth, or portal, for Ofelia to recreate her reality around, nor is there an opportunity for the success of rebel forces to win a victory over an organized Fascist military. Therefore, this trope of secluding the story and characters may be considered a common horror film convention and is generally an important element for the plot development, in particular in the films listed above, as in *Pan's Labyrinth*.

To further consider the horror genre within *Pan's Labyrinth*, Thomas M. Sipos identifies a horror story as one that “requires an unnatural threat, which is to say, in addition to being unnatural, the threat must be a *threat*” (6, emphasis his). It is possible to identify Vidal's sadism as unnatural, particularly as *Pan's Labyrinth* is situated in the first decade of the millennium, where torture horror films, such as *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005), were popular, grossing over \$103 million and \$80 million respectively. Thus, *Pan's Labyrinth* plays on the intertextuality of

these horror films in further creating an unsettling and horrific tone, which is in addition to the setting of seclusion. Vidal can be identified as an unnatural threat, at least to the resistance fighters and anyone who supports them, which Picart and Frank noted in relation to Nazism and Norman Bates in *psycho*, as both convey an extreme deviance of social order, thus a form of monstrosity (206).

For *Pan's Labyrinth*, however, it is within just 15 minutes of the film, the audience is presented with Vidal's brutality as he kills two rabbit hunters on mere suspicion that they are resistance fighters. The camera remains steady to ensure the audience has unimpeded view of this violence. It becomes clear that Vidal is the villain in the real world and soon the audience will be presented with a villain from the fantasy world when Ofelia encounters the Pale Man. Although the audience is presented with such subtle horrors, as well as the horrors of war early in the film, it is not until Ofelia is faced with her second task involving the Pale Man that the overall tone of the film becomes much more horrific. This will be discussed at greater length on an overall analysis of Ofelia's second task.

An extensive discussion involving entities and artifacts of the fantasy world, which is a world inherently resistant to and disobedient of the authority vested in Vidal as man, paterfamilias, and officer in Franco's army, permits us to further examine how the genre conventions are also utilized as tools for representing resistance and disobedience, particularly in the form of political and social resistance. As mentioned, the film is often explicated using fairy tale and fantasy conventions at great length by various critics, yet the use of horror conventions and the film's deviation from those conventions prove to be the most pertinent to representing resistance, as the horror is able to better transcend the boundaries of the real world and fantasy, much like the various artifacts to be discussed. This can be seen throughout *Pan's Labyrinth*, as

the narrative presents horrors in the real world through Vidal and the war he is waging against resistance fighters, and horrors in Ofelia's fantasy world through the use of monsters and danger she encounters. These horrors appear to represent one another, making it the element that transcends generic boundaries.

Entities and Artifacts Transcending Boundaries

Resistance throughout the film is not only represented through deviations from expected genre conventions, but also in creating an alternative reality for the main character, Ofelia. In other words, fantasy itself is a form of disobedience. The film is conscientious in ensuring that the viewer accept Ofelia's perspective through the use of various entities and artifacts presented in the fantasy world that are then used or echoed in the real world. That Ofelia experiences another perspective on reality through her fantasy world indicates an overall resistance to the status quo in Francoist Spain in 1944. Therefore, it seems important to the theme of disobedience and resistance for the viewer to empathize with Ofelia and her perspective, to, in effect, join her in her acts of disobedience. Within the film, the viewer witnesses Ofelia interact with an insect, the Book of Crossroads, a mandrake root, and a piece of chalk, all of which originate in the fantasy world but that also appear to operate in and affect the historical, material world her parents inhabit. Each of these objects or entities registers Ofelia's resistance to the world of her stepfather.

Early in the film, the audience meets Ofelia riding in a car with her mother, Carmen. The vehicle, traveling through the woods, stops for Carmen to step out due to pregnancy sickness, and Ofelia is able to wander briefly. The camera takes Ofelia's point of view, angling up towards the tops of looming, tall trees; it then cuts back to show Ofelia continue to walk down the road. A gentle song is playing as she seems to investigate the wooded area around her, and a light

breeze blows her hair. These elements depict the woods as a safe, gentle, and perhaps magical place for Ofelia, who smiles slightly throughout her investigation. Yet, we are also aware that Ofelia and her mother are traveling into a secluded location, which has the potential for unfortunate events, as previously mentioned. Thus, it is when she finds the rock with an eye on it and the statue to which it belongs that the happier, magical tone changes. As Ofelia steps off the road towards the statue, a more ominous music plays, and an insect jumps out of the statue's mouth. Now it appears that the magical woods may not be as safe or gentle as they seemed.

Ofelia, however, is not threatened by the insect but rather is curious about it. Carmen's calling for Ofelia sends the insect flying away. When Ofelia tells her mother that she saw a fairy, the audience becomes aware of Ofelia's imagination and belief in the magical woods. Yet the camera begins to align with this belief as it maintains a long shot from the car to watch the family return to the car, and it shows the insect flying across the screen to a tree on the left of the frame. The camera then assumes an over-the-shoulder point of view for the insect as it watches the family get in their car and drive away. The camera remains focused on the insect in the foreground, panning around the tree as the car drives by, maintaining the insect's point of view. The insect then jumps from the tree, and the audience sees it fly after the cars. This time spent on the insect's point of view makes the audience wonder if it really could be a fairy, or perhaps some other magical creature from the woods, as an ordinary insect would not have such agency.

The insect makes itself visible to Ofelia again shortly after she first arrives at the mill. Once again, the camera places the insect in a close-up in the foreground, while the audience sees Ofelia in a long shot from a small distance. The audience also sees Mercedes, the housemaid, in the background staring after Ofelia. Ofelia closes this distance and tries to catch the insect, only to find herself chasing it towards the labyrinth. After Ofelia loses the insect and Mercedes

explains the labyrinth to Ofelia, the camera pans up the arch opening to the Labyrinth to reveal the insect again. It is shown looking down at Mercedes and Ofelia as they walk back to the house. Again, the audience is given the insect's point of view as it watches Ofelia walk away. The film then cuts back to face the insect and the audience can see how intense and interested it is in Ofelia. This use of the camera on the insect early on in the film implies an alternate world that is available to the audience. Even though no one else sees the insect, it is presented as an entity that potentially exists in the real world but that has some other-worldly intelligence and agency.

Both the insect and Mercedes seem vested in the well-being of Ofelia, and they are her allies throughout the film, thus providing the audience with a real-world resonance of the insect through the character of Mercedes. Ofelia also confides in Mercedes about seeing fairies and the faun; by this time the insect has presented itself as a fairy to Ofelia. The pairing of the insect and Mercedes is most evident when Ofelia is given her second task, in which she must retrieve an object from the lair of the Pale Man. The film presents Mercedes and Dr. Ferreiro leaving the mill to aid the resistance fighters in the woods, then cuts to the faun providing Ofelia instructions for her second task, along with providing her fairy companions (the insects), the mandrake root, and a piece of chalk, the latter two being other important artifacts discussed later. The film then cuts back to Mercedes and the doctor in the moment when the doctor is going to amputate a leg right before cutting back to Ofelia about to draw a door and begin her task. This cross-cutting suggests a parallelism between the danger of the second task for Ofelia and the danger of aiding the resistance in Francoist Spain. Within both tasks, the human characters represent resistance and disobedience through their actions of either aiding the resistance fighters (Mercedes and Dr.

Ferreiro) or breaking the faun's rules (Ofelia). These disobedient actions as representative of resistance remain the common ground that connects Ofelia's fantasy to reality.

Lastly, the insect solidifies its importance by the end of the film as it appears in the final shot. Mercedes as the real-world echo is also evident in this sense, as she is with Ofelia when she dies in the real-world. Yet, in having the insect appear early in the film, and then in the final shot, the insect/fairy is an entity that frames the film itself. While Mercedes also appears in the beginning and end in a similar manner, it is with the insect that the viewer is intended to empathize and, through it, witness the happier ending for Ofelia as Princess Moana. In the last shot of *Pan's Labyrinth*, a voiceover speaking about Princess Moana says "and . . . she left behind small traces of her time on earth, visible only to those who know where to look." Meanwhile, the camera cuts through shots of the forest to include the tree where Ofelia defeated the toad, until it begins a slow pan up to a branch with a small white flower about to bloom. The flower opens its petals and simultaneously the insect flies on to the branch and looks at the flower as if it is an entity that knows where to look for Princess Moana's "small traces" of being on earth.

While the insect is a living and seemingly intelligent entity able to exist in both the magical and real world, doubled in the real-world by Mercedes, the Book of Crossroads given to Ofelia by the faun is an artifact that performs similar functions. When it is introduced to Ofelia, the faun says "open it when you are alone and it will show you your future," which the audience and Ofelia interpret as revealing her assigned tasks. Yet the audience is made aware that the prophetic aspect of this storybook transcends its origins in the magical world.

After the book reveals the first task, Ofelia sets off into the woods and the film begins to juxtapose her journey through the woods with Vidal's hunt for a rebel campsite, suggesting a

correlation between the two characters. The film first shows Vidal and his men on horses traveling up a slope into the woods, and their passing of a tree creates a transition cut to show Ofelia going up what looks like a similar path with her storybook. It is as if they are on a similar journey. She opens the book and a voiceover narration of her reading says,

Once upon a time, when the woods were young, they were home to creatures who were full of magic and wonder. They protected one another and slept in the shade of a colossal fig tree that grew on a hill, near the mill. But now, the tree is dying, its branches are dry, its trunk is old and twisted. A monstrous toad has settled in its roots and won't let the tree thrive.

As this story is spoken over images of Vidal and his men finding the rebel camp within the woods, there is a correlation between the story and the reality of events occurring in the film, as if the book is relating Spain's history--the rebels are the magical creatures, the toad is Vidal (or Fascism), and the fig tree is Spain. In this scene Vidal even discovers a vial of antibiotics and a lottery ticket, both items that assist the rebels to survive, but he confiscates them, refusing to let the rebels "thrive." Accepting this relation between fantasy and reality, the film presents Ofelia as the foil to Vidal within her first task, but this mirroring between protagonist and antagonist reoccurs and resonates throughout the rest of the film.

As Ofelia anxiously awaits her second task, the audience is presented with another demonstration of the power of this prophetic storybook when it reveals a red stain that assumes the shape of fallopian tubes and a uterus. Ofelia looks confused and concerned as the blood-red image that erupts from the center of the book seems to continue to bleed to the margins of its pages. The camera cuts to Ofelia's face as she looks towards the bathroom, where her mother is. She seems instinctively to know that the image is ominous. When she looks back down at the image, the red continues to grow as if bleeding all over the pages, and sounds of faint screams seem to emanate from the book. Scared, Ofelia slams the book shut and those faint sounds stop.

She drops the book and the camera cuts to where the book falls and where Ofelia's feet are seen hesitantly walking towards the bathroom door. Ofelia pulls the double doors open to reveal her mother, bleeding in her nightgown from her pelvis to the floor, in pain and asking for help. Additionally, because Ofelia is a pre-adolescent girl, this imagery foreshadows the arrival of menstruation for Ofelia and thus her transformation into a woman. Directly following this scene, Ofelia is separated from her mother and given her own bedroom, which isolates her as newly mature. The film, then, provides a clear interpretation of the Book of Crossroads transcending its fantastical origin into Ofelia's real world through predicting the future of both Ofelia and her mother.

While the insect-as-fairy and the storybook are never seen by any character other than Ofelia, the mandrake root given to Ofelia is seen and handled by both Vidal and Carmen. This makes the mandrake root exceptional as an artifact that transcends, indeed operates in, both worlds. The mandrake root also resonates in the real world through Dr. Ferreiro and the medicine he is providing for Carmen. Early in the film, he presents a vial of medicine to help Carmen sleep, which is to be administered as just two drops in her drink. The same prescription recurs when the faun presents the mandrake root to Ofelia. He first refers to it as a plant that dreamt of being human, and that, with some fresh milk and two drops of blood, it will help her mother get better. After Ofelia completes her second task, she does what she is told with the mandrake root, placing it under her mother's bed. The root comes alive once Ofelia pours the milk on it, making noise like a cooing infant. Shortly after, the doctor is shocked at how well Carmen is responding to the medicine. If the mandrake root is a simulacrum for Ofelia's baby brother in the womb, it seems that blood sacrifice, rather than the two drops of medicine from Dr. Ferreiro's vial, is the best medicine for keeping the baby and Carmen healthy. Since the audience empathizes towards

Ofelia throughout the film, the mandrake root seemingly becomes the effective remedy for Carmen and further implies that Ofelia's fantastical world can truly operate on the "real" one.

To further emphasize this idea that Ofelia's world exists, her foil, Vidal, discovers the mandrake root, and physically interacts with it. Vidal pulls the bowl with the milk and mandrake root from under the bed, rips the root out of the bowl and shoves it in Carmen's face. Vidal then leaves Carmen to deal with Ofelia. While Ofelia tries to explain the root to her mother and asks to leave the mill, Carmen responds that things aren't that simple and soon she will realize "the world is a cruel place." The latter is said as Carmen nears the fireplace with the mandrake root; she then says "and you'll learn that, even if it hurts" right before throwing the mandrake root into the fireplace. Ofelia screams "no" and Carmen explains how magic doesn't exist for anyone, at which point the audience and Ofelia hear the mandrake root screaming in the fire. The camera cuts to the burning root, now seen writhing in pain, then cuts back to Carmen, whose eyes glaze over and who is also in great pain. It is unclear whether she also hears the mandrake root screaming, which remains ambiguous because she dies in childbirth shortly thereafter. Yet given that Carmen seems to be getting better when the root is under her bed and that she took a sharp turn for the worse, leading to death, once the root is destroyed, it seems that the mandrake root operates powerfully in both the real and the fantasy worlds. As a fantastical artifact in the real world it represents not only a transgression of boundaries, but a form of disobedience since Ofelia uses it as a magical remedy in contradiction to her stepfather's expectations and sensibilities.

The chalk is the final artifact from the fantasy world that also crosses the real and fantasy boundaries, as well as further assisting Ofelia in her disobedience and resistance. Given to Ofelia by the faun for her second task as mentioned above, the piece of chalk has the ability to create

doors for Ofelia to travel through. This artifact thus becomes the most important magical object since it literally creates avenues of entrance and escape, providing greater agency for Ofelia, who first uses the chalk to draw a door to her second task where she encounters the Pale Man. When she is delayed in attempting to complete her task, Ofelia neglects the fact that her door begins to close, but she quickly draws a new door to escape when she realizes her peril. As mentioned previously, this second task is paralleled with Mercedes and Dr. Ferreiro aiding the resistance fighters. Once again, the film presents a resonance for the chalk in the real world through the importance of the cellar key, which is presented to the resistance fighters by Mercedes. This key unlocks food and medicine being stockpiled and rationed, making it an important artifact in the real world, as it removes the boundaries Vidal is imposing on families and the resistance.

Additionally, the key and chalk are both items that Vidal notices as being out of place. First, with the key, he realizes the cellar door lock was not broken in to during the raid, but that someone used the key. Vidal is a very orderly antagonist, making the displacement of the key and what he thinks is order in his household, suspicious. The same occurs when Vidal discovers the chalk in his quarters. He notices it as something out of place and his suspicions are aroused. Ultimately, both the chalk and the key are critical to the survival of Ofelia and the resistance respectively.

Lastly, as the film draws near its end, the chalk becomes a useful artifact for Ofelia's final task. She is tasked to retrieve her baby brother and bring him to the labyrinth, but she is locked in her room. The faun provides her another piece of chalk and tells her to create her own door. The audience never sees her do this; however, we see her appear in Vidal's chambers where he is keeping her brother and we see she has the chalk. The audience is made aware of how real the chalk is when Vidal discovers it on his desk, picks it up and breaks it. Similar to the mandrake root, the chalk then becomes another artifact that is handled in the real world by a

person other than Ofelia, providing additional evidence of the reality of Ofelia's fantasy world. Additionally, after Mercedes returns to retrieve Ofelia so that they can escape, the camera pans to where Ofelia drew her chalk door to escape, which is in Mercedes' point of view. This acknowledgement by Mercedes of the drawn door, even though she may not know why it is there, provides further validity to Ofelia's world.

Ofelia's Tasks, Resistance, and Abjection

Now that we may consider Ofelia's world, or alternate perspective on reality, as valid, albeit an intrusive world, we can further dissect the implications of this world on Ofelia as a resistant, abject, and therefore terrifying alternative that provides Ofelia with power. As Ofelia is presented and completes her tasks, she becomes increasingly resistant, slowly gaining more agency in her precarious circumstance as the step-daughter to Vidal. Her first task she is disobedient towards Vidal, in the second, she is disobedient to the faun, and in the third she completely makes her own decisions, while still completing each task. This progression of power for Ofelia is ultimately the result of her recognition of the fantasy world as a valid space for her resistance, even though it has proven to be an abject and horrifying place.

The first visual we receive of Ofelia's fantasy is embodied in the faun. I already noted the ambiguous nature of the faun, which can be further identified through Julia Kristeva's ideas on the abject in that the faun "does not respect borders, positions, rules [and is] the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Therefore, if we consider this idea on the abject in relation to the faun, we may conclude that the entire Underworld which the faun is seen to represent is also an abject place. In other words, it is a place that bleeds into the real world, and is as ambiguous as the faun, being both beautiful and terrifying. Yet, for Ofelia, the intrusion of this fantasy world into Ofelia's reality becomes her space for agency, or more specifically, her resistance. In an

examination of resistance and vulnerability, Judith Butler also recognizes the importance of mobility of subjects to demonstrate their resistance; subjects that either have inherent power to do so, or require a material condition to make it possible, such as the pavement, street, or public square (15). In a secluded location within the woods, ruled under a Fascist government, a pre-adolescent girl has little to no agency with which to demonstrate resistance. Yet, if she has a fantasy world where she is able to move freely, she is able to slowly progress her agency and power.

In considering the first task provided by the faun, where Ofelia must retrieve the key from the toad, the audience is presented with one of what may be multiple fantastical settings that provide Ofelia an infrastructure for her disobedience and resistance. Initially, however, each task begins with the Book of Crossroads, which we already recognize as a boundary-crossing artifact, and thus is also able to provide Ofelia with a means for her agency. In following the book's instructions, Ofelia finds the dead tree and realizes, looking at her already muddy new shoes, she will likely get dirty in this task, and so takes off her new dress. The tree, then becomes a portal into a fantastical scene that features slime, bugs, mud, and the toad. The aesthetic is dark, dirty, and suffocating, and potentially dangerous, thus terrifying. Yet, Ofelia tells the toad that she is not afraid of it, and she is Princess Moanna, declaring her role as someone who has the power to resist, or otherwise make her own decisions. This is the only task where she makes this declaration, but it is important as it marks her ability to increasingly gain agency within these fantasy scenarios that are seemingly dangerous and horrifying.

Upon beginning her second task to retrieve the dagger, Ofelia is presented with a set of rules that include a time limit and requirement not to eat any food. As Ofelia enters the secret passage she creates with her chalk, the walls are stained a blood red color with a rough texture

reminiscent of raw flesh. Once Ofelia enters the dining area where the immobile Pale Man sits, the audience is presented with various images of the ogre through Ofelia's perspective. The images include the ways in which the Pale Man kills children, whether eating, impaling, or tearing them apart. The camera then invites the audience to see a stack of shoes nearby, presumably from the child victims consumed by the Pale Man. This entire aesthetic is threatening and horrifying, which is something Ofelia must overcome to continue her journey.

These elements of horror continuously transcend the fantasy and real-world narratives within the film, as mentioned previously, but complies with the ideas of abjection, being horrifying and transgressing boundaries. Ofelia is able to make use of this horror as a backdrop, as she, and the horror she experiences, inhabit the ability to operate within the fantasy and her real-world. Ofelia's ability, then, is implying resistance. As noted, *Pan's Labyrinth* breaks from expected fairy tale conventions, and presents a potentially horrifying fantasy world that intrudes on the horrifying real-world Ofelia lives in. The intrusion of this horror, which we also determined is something unnatural, or rather abject, identifies the horror in *Pan's Labyrinth* as an element of resistance, but one which Ofelia is able to utilize in order to pursue her own agency, in particular as Princess Moanna.

Curiously, Ofelia's actions during the second task are largely resistant and disobedient, but she is able to still complete the task and survive. Ofelia is led by three fairies that guide her to use her key on the middle lock, but as Ofelia goes to try it, she realizes the middle lock is incorrect and opens the left lock to find the dagger. From here, all Ofelia has to do is leave, but she is tempted by the food on the dining table. Although the fairies plead with her not to eat the grapes, Ofelia disobeys and eats two grapes, which awakens the sleeping Pale Man. Although

Ofelia barely makes it out alive, this task becomes a precursor to a series of horrific events in the real world.

Shortly after Ofelia's second task and her banishment from returning to the Underworld, the resistance fighters stage a raid on the mill for food and medicine. This raid resonates with Ofelia's second task as the resistance fighters need food, which is what tempts Ofelia. Once Vidal realizes the cellar has not been forced open, he quickly knows that Mercedes may be helping the resistance behind his back. In capturing one of the resistance fighters, Vidal brutally tortures him, mutilating his hand. When Vidal asks Dr. Ferreiro to take the fighter's pain away so he can continue torturing him, the doctor instead euthanizes the fighter, which in turn causes the doctor's own assassination at Vidal's hands. Shortly after, Vidal confronts Mercedes, who in trying to escape is captured and set up for torture at the hands of Vidal in the same way as the resistance fighter. Yet Mercedes is able to fight back, stabbing Vidal in his back, chest, and slicing his mouth open. This continuous, excessive violence in the second half of the film is representative of the horror of Francoist Spain.

It is important to understand Franco's Spain, which lasted from 1939 until his death in 1975, as strictly authoritarian. The film clearly depicts this harsh environment through Vidal's characterization and scenes such as the distribution of food at the mill and the dinner party discussion. The audience can assume that a majority of the people living under these circumstances are living under precarious conditions, which Butler identifies as emphasizing a vulnerability among people (12). She goes on to examine how vulnerability leads to resistance in noting that "we are first vulnerable and then overcome that vulnerability, at least provisionally, through acts of resistance" (Butler 12). Yet, she also identifies how this relationship between vulnerability and resistance may be reversed, where resistance leads to vulnerability and argues

that “all public assembly is haunted by the police and the prison” (20). These correlations between vulnerability and resistance stated by Butler seem to also contain a connotation of horror behind the scenes, especially with her use of the word “haunted” in reference to order-maintaining institutions such as the police and prisons. We may also consider that “a horror story requires *sympathetic* and *vulnerable* potential victims” (Sipo 7, emphasis his), which further connects Butler’s ideas of vulnerability and resistance to the horror genre. As resistance and disobedience are critical themes throughout the film, the sense of horror within both the real and fantasy worlds serves to strengthen and enhance these themes, making horror a genre of resistance.

Therefore, in considering the Pale Man scene and the remainder of the film as largely horror, the audience also begins to see an escalation of resistance and disobedience. As mentioned, the resistance fighters ultimately execute their plan to attack and raid the mill, and Vidal becomes aware of Mercedes and Dr. Ferreiro’s involvement with the resistance. Yet, we also are presented with Ofelia’s disobedience towards Vidal and the faun. This disobedience towards the faun, in particular, comes with harsh consequences for Ofelia, as he removes her ability to become Princess Moanna, attempting to strip her of the agency that she gained while in her fantasy worlds. Butler notes how “when those environments start to fall apart or are emphatically unsupportive, we are left to ‘fall’ in some ways, and our very capacity to exercise most basic rights is imperiled” (15). In other words, for Ofelia, her infrastructure whereby she gained some agency, was taken away from her in the faun’s denouncement of her being Princess Moanna. After this, Ofelia begins to rely heavily on Mercedes to find a new means of resistance through escaping the secluded mill, but just as in many of the horror films mentioned previously, characters do not easily escape these secluded settings.

Ofelia is captured by Vidal and locked in her room, only to be visited once again by the faun, which is likely due to her new precarious condition of being unable to move freely and exercise her right to resist. The faun gives her a new piece of chalk and explains her final task, but she must agree to obey completely. She must bring her baby brother to the labyrinth. Once Ofelia escapes her room and acquires her baby brother, she is seen by Vidal and a chase sequence is enacted. The scene becomes reminiscent of slasher horror, where the villain lumbers around chasing his victim, yet this is the case for Vidal because he is drugged. Also, even though the labyrinth opens for Ofelia to help her escape, Vidal eventually closes in on her shortly after while she is speaking with the Faun. Throughout this scene, we are able to see how freely Ofelia is able to move in her surroundings even though it is not occurring in a fantastical location. This scene, however, is encased in horror, with Vidal as the clear monster. The remainder of the task takes place in the center of the labyrinth, where the audience understands is also the location of the last portal to the Underworld. This provides a blurring of the real and fantasy worlds, but is enough for Ofelia to regain full agency, as she deliberately disobeys the faun's instructions to hand him her baby brother. This disobedience leads to her death at the hands of Vidal, yet her disobedience in taking her brother leads to Vidal's death at the hands of the resistance fighters. If Vidal was not distracted to follow Ofelia into the labyrinth, he could have escaped. Ofelia's disobedience, while leaving her vulnerable to death, ultimately becomes necessary to defeat the villainous Vidal and save her brother.

Furthermore, the labyrinth becomes a real-world abject location in its ability to be both a means to the fantasy world, and a real-world location. It is the location of the visual presented at the beginning of the film where the audience sees Ofelia lying with a bloody nose, yet the blood is returning to the body. To see what appears to be a child dying, or near death causes an

unsettling feeling in the audience from the very beginning, but this feeling may be abject as “the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost” (Kristeva 15). The labyrinth, therefore becomes “the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (Kristeva 2). In other words, it is the abject place that Ofelia ultimately becomes aware of, accepts it as abject, thus accepting her death in her resistance; she gains overall control and agency of herself at the expense of her own life in the real world, but her rebirth in the Underworld.

Just as the real and fantasy worlds within *Pan's Labyrinth* seem to coexist and at times overlap, the elements of horror presented throughout the film are able to do the same with regards to emphasizing resistance and gaining agency. We are also able to consider Ofelia's ability to gain agency as a means of converting her vulnerability into power, as Butler suggests. For Ofelia, her power is constrained to her own agency and provides little influence over those around her, except for those who have less power than her, which would be her baby brother. Thus, it may be that while a vulnerable character may be able to convert their vulnerability into power, their vulnerability does not completely dissipate, but rather transform into a self-sacrificing method of preserving the lives of other vulnerable persons. In other words, the protagonists who find themselves as victims in a horror narrative are able to accept their victimhood, use the horror to their advantage and gain some power and control over their situation through their ability to resist. In doing so, these victims are likely to also accept death as their fate, but only in the interest of saving others.

CHAPTER III

AMBIGUITY AND SOCIAL DEVIANCE IN *DONNIE DARKO*

As Richard Kelly's 2001 *Donnie Darko* begins, the audience hears thunder layered over the opening production credits backdropped by the usual black screen. Then the viewer sees and hears something that is common throughout the film, namely a clear blue dawn sky and the thunder transitioning into birds chirping. Just mere seconds into the film, Kelly is thus disorienting the viewer, hinting that things are not going to be what they seem. After we see Donnie awaken from what appears to be some sort of sleepwalking adventure to a scenic overlook, the title *Donnie Darko* appears and a song by Echo and the Bunnymen begins to play while we watch Donnie ride his bike through the neighborhood, establishing the location and time of the action. The first "nod towards horror" (King 44) is the image of a sign advertising the Middlesex Halloween Carnival, placing the film during a traditionally scary time in American culture. While this opening scene is providing the audience with visual representations of time, setting, and characters, it may also be that, the viewer is being taken down the rabbit hole and into Donnie's perspective, which we become privileged to witness. As his bike ride concludes, Donnie reaches his grand suburban home, walking past "another horror-related hint" (King 44) as his mother is reading Stephen King's *It*, a horror novel revolving around a group of children who are terrorized by a supernatural clown that the town adults do not acknowledge. Although we may perceive that something similar is happening with Donnie and his visions of Frank in the film, the overall tone of *Donnie Darko* is not horrifying or sinister, although the theatrical trailer implies that it is. The trailer utilizes the intercutting of scenes that include Donnie staring at the camera with thunder and lightning flashing behind him, swinging an ax down on pipes, and

taking a knife from the kitchen, to imply Donnie is a violent threat. Text is presented between scenes in the order of “dark, darkest, Darko” to blatantly suggest the film is “dark,” which in turn takes on a tone of horror. Ultimately, the “horror-related hints” and the theatrical trailer seem to establish an audience expectation for horror and fear, increasing the importance of analyzing the horror elements that do reside in the film.

In considering the scholarly work on *Donnie Darko*, there is not much written on the horror expressed in the film. There is, however, an overall concern with interpretations of the film, which includes the validity of Donnie’s alternative perspective. Emma Radley is concerned with Donnie being “in the midst of a psychotic break” (393), while Jessica Raschake identifies the film as asking “questions about fate and free will and how a single event can lead to incredible transformations” (118). Paul Booth, on the other hand, includes the film’s accompanying website, www.donniedarko.com, as a multi-structured and multimedia narrative. The film was released in 2001 and the internet was not then as accessible as it is now, but the narrative of *Donnie Darko* is extended in a website that augments the experience for viewers by providing more narratives for characters and conveying further themes of time fluidity. Thus, the website provides a layered narrative design of mixed media, which, according to Booth, “reveals a disturbance in our understanding of narrative form itself” (399). While narrative structure is useful to consider how alternative perspectives are visually represented, my focus will emphasize identifying the horror elements in the film and examining the consequences of Donnie’s resistance to social structures. Donnie’s resistance and ability to traverse the horror he experiences conclude in his ability to gain agency and power. I argue that the horror resides primarily in the image of Frank the bunny, who is often portrayed against a dark backdrop. Furthermore, the visions Donnie experiences, which include the liquid spears, are presented as

possible occurrences through their connections to the reality Donnie inhabits. To be more precise, both Frank and the liquid spears appear as projections from the future, inviting the audience to accept their presence in Donnie's alternative perspective as a form of reality and ultimately creating the liminal space that Donnie inhabits, as this space oscillates and transcends boundaries.

Liminality and Abjection in Frank and liquid spears

Frank's ambiguity resides both in his appearance as a potential monster (dressed as a disfigured, oversized bunny, he appears to be half-human, half-animal, with curled and twisted ears, large eyes, and large human teeth that protrude from what should be a bunny mouth, and he stands distinctly taller than Donnie); his human appearance is later revealed to include a missing an eye, thus suggesting a ghost-like apparition. Monsters and ghosts traditionally present an unnatural threat towards protagonists, yet Frank is never aggressive towards Donnie. Whether monster or ghost, however, Frank is a supernatural presence and guides Donnie towards actions that place him in danger within his reality. Therefore, Frank is presented as an ambiguous presence in the film. He is also the dominant feature of Donnie's alternative perspective; in examining each interaction between Frank and Donnie, I explore the liminality of Donnie's perspective and his ability to manipulate and overcome the horror he experiences, which provides a means for Donnie to obtain a greater sense of agency and power.

Frank appears to have the ability to materialize for Donnie in order to reconstruct Donnie's reality. In this sense, Frank may be considered more than a figment of Donnie's imagination. He is instead a projection of the future and ultimately an unnatural threat to Donnie's present reality as a traditionally structured society. Yet the audience is not provided a clear view of Frank when we are introduced to him early in the film. An extreme long shot

captures Frank from so far away that we can make out only the bunny silhouette in the distance, across what we soon learn is a golf course. We then hear Frank give Donnie a countdown to the end of the world. This distancing and dialogue quickly set up an unease about the narrative of the film, creating questions that the audience must answer--who is this entity? Is he good or bad? Is he real or imaginary?

A close analysis of Frank's appearances throughout the film may urge the viewer towards an inability to delineate a structured definition of Frank, who can more readily be seen as the entity able to transcend fixed borders and thus defy definition. After Donnie's first interaction with Frank, he meets with his therapist, Dr. Thurman, and tells her he has made a new friend, to which she asks, "Real or imaginary?" and Donnie replies, "imaginary." Then he explains, "he said to follow him into the future." Thus, Frank becomes a harbinger of the time travelling narrative interwoven into the film's plot. Additionally, the audience becomes more comfortable with identifying Frank as imaginary, adopting Donnie's perception. Yet, as the film continues, it becomes clear that this imaginary character is a destructive force in the reality in which Donnie lives. Frank's next appearance, after his introduction on the golf course, is in Donnie's bathroom. This scene is filmed from only two angles, one being straight on at Donnie, whom we see take some medication that is at a sink with a mirror above it, and the other in Donnie's POV facing Frank in a medium shot, but from which we are able to notice some detail in his presentation. In this scene, Donnie attempts to reach out to touch Frank but is met with an invisible barrier. This barrier is representative of the malleable and liminal nature that is Frank, being able to exist in Donnie's reality and alternative perspective, which becomes a representation of Donnie's whole worldview. As the barrier is invisible, Donnie is able to see through it, suggesting that he is seeing into a material alternate reality, which the audience learns is a future reality. As the film

progresses, Donnie's worldview appears to become fragile, similar to his interactions with the barrier, further suggesting Donnie's ability to interact and eventually overcome the liminality of his alternative perspective.

The malleability and dual representation become more distinct in the next appearance of this barrier, which is again in Donnie's bathroom. Yet instead of Donnie and Frank having a brief conversation, this instance is intercut with a meeting between Dr. Thurman and Donnie's parents discussing Donnie's behavior. Dr. Thurman tells the Darkos, "Donnie's aggressive behavior, his increased detachment from reality seem to stem from his inability to cope with the forces in the world that he perceives to be threatening." However, the "forces in the world" are never clearly described. As the scene cuts back to Donnie, the audience is made aware that he has acquired a large kitchen knife. As presented in the film, knives convey threats, and with the knowledge that Donnie has "aggressive behavior" and feels threatened by the vague "forces in the world," it becomes unnerving to watch his wielding of a knife in his bathroom. To add to the unease in the scene, lightning and thunder occur outside as seen through flashes in the windows behind Donnie. The audience then discovers that instead of aiming the knife towards anyone in his household, he is stabbing the invisible barrier directly over Frank's right eye. After Donnie's multiple stabbings, Frank's eye begins to glow bright white, as if he is made of light under his costume. After multiple viewings of the film this sequence can be read as foreshadowing, but it is also a representation of the permeability of the invisible barrier, which further suggests that Donnie's two realities permeate each other, and that Frank can (ominously) also travel between them. In other words, both Donnie's alternative perspective and Frank have the ability to collapse into each other, crossing the invisible barrier that seems to stand between the two.

As the film progresses, it seems that this barrier is slowly beginning to deteriorate, as both the audience and Donnie begin to learn more about the mysterious Frank, who appears outside of Donnie's bathroom, and in a public space. In Frank's next appearance at the movie theater with Donnie and Gretchen, who is asleep, Frank and Donnie have more dialogue with each other. Frank's voice has also changed to more of a human whisper, as opposed to the digitized other-worldly voice-over from his previous appearances. This voice change indicates that Frank has, or has the ability to fully transcend the boundary in the bathroom and Donnie's alternative perspective, but also that Frank exists as more human than monster. However, when Donnie asks Frank to take off his bunny suit, Frank obliges and we see a bloodied right eye. Once again, we are provided with foreshadowing but also an indication that Donnie transcends the invisible barrier when he earlier stabs Frank in the eye. Ultimately, this appearance of Frank is unsettling because the audience becomes unsure of both Donnie and Frank's ability to transcend an imaginary barrier. Meaning, the audience is attempting to reconcile the previous scene when Donnie stabs Frank in the eye as well as the human form Frank reveals to suggest he is more human than monster. If both Donnie and Frank are able to transcend the imaginary boundary, then a larger threat is presented to the reality perceived by the other characters in the film, as their ability could cause a greater intrusion of the alternative perspective. I utilize the term "intrusion" as it relates to Mendlesohn's treatment of intrusion fantasy, discussed at length in the introduction, as being a quality and rhetoric of conveying horror.

The final appearance of Frank within Donnie's imagination occurs in Dr. Thurman's office and presents Frank as more antagonistic than in his other appearances. Dr. Thurman has Donnie under hypnosis and their discussion is centered around Frank. He tells Dr. Thurman, "I have to obey him, he saved my life. I have to obey him or I'll be left all alone, and then I won't

be able to figure out what this is all about.” As Dr. Thurman attempts to decipher what Donnie is talking about, Donnie becomes more infantile, using a child-like voice and clutching a stuffed animal to his chest. Donnie begins to cry and says, “time’s up, Frank said.” It is clear that in a state of hypnosis, Donnie is subservient to Frank’s demands. As Donnie stands to walk around the room he says, “Frank is gonna kill” which becomes a clear threat to other characters in the film, as we already understand that Frank is able to use Donnie for actions against the society he lives in as a deviant, or disobedient force in the community. Suddenly Donnie screams, “I can see him right now!” and is evidently terrified, as the camera cuts suddenly to Frank with a screeching dissonant sound; he is shown standing in the room and looks up. The camera then cuts to an image of the sky with clouds speeding through. Donnie interprets this and says, “the sky’s gonna open up.” Donnie slowly falls to his knees, panting. Frank appears to be the villain, presented in this scene as a murderous and controlling monster of Donnie’s imagination but also with a clear ability to influence the reality in which Donnie lives.

Thus, as the film progresses with Donnie’s visions of Frank, it appears that Frank is the horror element within the film that Donnie is able to utilize as a means to resist the real world he inhabits. Frank is an unnatural threat and appears monstrous in his bunny costume; even without the costume, as a human with a bloodied eye, Frank would still appear unsettling. Donnie does not appear afraid of Frank when he is conscious; rather, he attempts to use Frank to evade the consequences of his own deviant behavior by blaming Frank for his actions. As I will discuss in greater detail, Donnie performs his own acts of disobedience within his community, but he is always punished for his actions in some way. With Frank, however, he is able to perform even greater acts of deviance, which ultimately lead to positive consequences for Donnie, until he is given the decision to time travel.

Just as Frank is seen to transcend the boundaries between real and imaginary by embodying a horror element within the film, the spear projections Donnie is able to see, which serve as another manifestation of the future in Donnie's alternative perception, are able to do the same. These liquid spears erupt from Donnie's father, then his sister Samantha, before flowing from Donnie himself. They appear as abject entities, being neither properties of the individual, nor separate objects. This otherworldly entity is visible only to Donnie, and he interprets them as projections of the future, outlining the paths of the individuals from which they emerge. As projections of the future, the spears embody a quality that is both self and not-self, further identifying the spears and their representation of the future as abject visions. In this interpretation, Donnie is witnessing the blurring of lines between his reality and the one he is perceiving, the latter being manifestations of the future.

The first scene with the liquid spears is introduced with a football game on the television, then a cut to Donnie waking up in a chair where he has been watching the football game but has fallen asleep out of boredom. This small detail suggests, first, that Donnie finds no stimulation in the typically masculine social activity that is watching football, and, second, that Donnie is in a sleepy state of mind, which is often when his visions occur. The next cut shows Samantha skipping across the living room in front of the television, which further solidifies the gender division occurring in Donnie's household. Shortly after, Donnie looks at his surroundings and begins to notice the oddity emerging from his father's chest just before his father asks if his guests want anything. The camera provides an extreme close up of Donnie's eyes, suggesting this oddity is visible only to Donnie. The liquid spear begins to move and outline his father's path to the refrigerator, then back. Donnie then sees the same spear coming from Samantha as she continues to skip around the house. Yet this entity seems to take on a life of its own when it

emerges from Donnie and expands to form a hand, beckoning Donnie to follow. The hand formed appears cartoonish. Even before the hand appears, Donnie chuckles to himself, yet when Donnie follows the orders of this hand and the path of his own spear, we realize he has been led to a hidden pistol. A symbol of violence and death, the pistol is framed center-screen as something important for the story, and something ominous. Thus, while the spears appear harmless and cartoonish, there is a malevolence behind their presence, similar to the ambiguity behind Frank.

This same ambiguity is revealed again when Donnie sees the spears for a second time in the film, during the Halloween party at his house. Once again viewers are witnessing Donnie in a common social situation, which is this Halloween party, as he begins to experience his visions of the liquid spears. In this scene, however, the audience sees Donnie's spear before we see Donnie, and the music underscoring the action takes precedence, as the party sounds are faded out. The song, "Under the Milky Way" by The Church provides the lyrics, "wish I knew what you were looking for / might have known what you would find..." as Donnie is led by his liquid spear to the refrigerator on which there is a note that reads, "Frank was here went to get beer." This deliberate overlapping of the song and Donnie's liquid spear suggests the continuation of Donnie's mission to uncover what is going to happen when the world ends--to find what he is looking for. The scene continues like a music video as we watch Donnie seeing people at the party and their liquid spears marking their paths. In creating the scene this way, the film focuses viewer attention on what Donnie is witnessing as opposed to the stimulus of a party occurring around him, placing the viewer in Donnie's perceptual world as he recalls all the strange visions and events from earlier in the film. These images layered with the music, which is upbeat, provides a tone of contentment for the viewer and Donnie, but continues to also present clues to

the mystery Donnie is attempting to uncover. These clues being the song lyrics, the writing on the refrigerator, and the appearance of the liquid spears.

Similar to the first sighting of the liquid spears, this second appearance renders the spears cartoonish, as the film depicts Donnie looking into the middle of a spear with his eyes enlarged. From this cartoonish image, the camera cuts to what appears to be Donnie's POV through the spear and into the clouds, with the phrase "cellar door" voiced over. Donnie is then revealed to be with Gretchen, and he is urgent to leave the party. This juxtaposition of a contentment just moments before Donnie's abrupt urgency to see Roberta Sparrow suggests his manifestations of the future are ambiguous. The spears, for example, ultimately lead Donnie towards violence, making them a potentially dangerous element in Donnie's perspective.

This recurring ambiguity in Donnie's alternate perspective solidifies his alternative perspective as a liminal and abject space, being both inside and outside; harmless and violent; fantastic and horrific. This imagery, however, also influences Donnie's actions throughout the film, which I briefly mentioned regarding Frank and the spears. While Donnie's real-world actions reside largely in disobedience and an overarching subversion of the societal norms in his community, the actions that are influenced by his alternative perspective, allow Donnie to commit deviant acts, but they are without consequences. This disobedience and resistance to society that Donnie enacts also becomes ambiguous and liminal, as his acts are violent and destructive, but they also provide a sort of agency and power for Donnie and a few other characters. I aim to further analyze these actions as they occur in the film as tasks that Frank sets up for Donnie to complete, as each task presents Donnie's ability to traverse within his traditionally accepted reality and his alternative perspective. As Donnie completes each task, he

is closer to understanding the presence of his alternative perspective and gaining power and a greater sense of agency.

Tasks to time travel

Like the faun in *Pan's Labyrinth*, Frank provides Donnie with three tasks, each one testing Donnie's ability to obey Frank and simultaneously disobey the societal structures to which Donnie adheres. In another echo of *Pan's Labyrinth*, the tasks Donnie has to complete lead the audience into the alternative perspective of the protagonist. Each task presents the protagonist's motivations and means for resistance, aligning the audience with their endeavors and varied perspectives. Each task also consequently becomes more perilous and horrific, ending with a decision to die. Yet each task for Donnie is provided with a real-world motivation that allows the viewer to consider whether Donnie's alternative perspective is valid. In other words, I will be working with the idea that the film permits two opposed interpretations--one that identifies Donnie as mentally unstable and the party solely responsible for his actions, and the other that accepts Donnie's understanding of Frank as an entity from the future who sends him along a path towards time travel. However, a closer analysis that includes these motivations in the real-world alongside the tasks Frank provides, ultimately present a more complex understanding of the film that seems to attempt a deconstruction, or resistance, of viewer interpretations. This analysis also includes the consequences of Donnie's actions, and his ability to traverse both perspectives as also creating a complexity to understanding the film.

Following the incident of the jet engine crashing into the Darko home, the film introduces us to Donnie's school life, which becomes the integral representation of a strict and structured society, the society Donnie is resisting. After a montage tour through the school using both increased and decreased film speeds, we begin with Donnie's English class, where they are

discussing Graham Greene's "The Destroyers." The English teacher explains the basic plot of the story, which provides a potential motivation for Donnie's first task. The teacher explains how a group of kids flood a house after they break in, find a fortune in money, then burn the money. In attempting to identify why these kids flood the house, Donnie replies, "well, they say right when they flood the house and tear it to shreds... they just wanna see what happens when they tear the world apart. They want to change things." This interpretation is echoed after Donnie's first task when he is talking to Gretchen about what he wants to do when he is older: "I'll write a book and draw the pictures. Then maybe people will understand me, I don't know, change things." Thus, it appears that Donnie identifies with wanting "things" to change, meaning altering the structured society he currently lives within. It may thus be possible to interpret Donnie's first task as simply an extension of his current psychosis and not as the product of obeying an apparently imaginary rabbit.

Even the presentation of the first task provides a means for interpreting Donnie's actions as an extension of his troubled mind, although this presentation is coupled with subtleties that also suggest otherwise. The task begins with an establishing shot of Donnie asleep on the couch in his home, then a cut to school lockers standing in the middle of a body of water under a bright blue, clouded sky. These cuts suggest Donnie is dreaming this image, when we hear Frank's voice say "wake up, Donnie," and Donnie quickly sits up. The camera cuts to a medium shot of Frank, which is only the second time the audience is presented with an image of Frank and it is still dark and ominous. The image is closer to the audience than the first extreme long shot on the golf course, but he is still an unsettling entity. Frank turns his head slightly, then the camera cuts to Donnie holding an ax over his shoulder and walking, with a blurred silhouette of Frank in the background, as if he is the mastermind behind Donnie. The background blurs, and we then see

Donnie walking in a basement, hearing a dripping from pipes, until he takes a powerful swing down on a pipe. As the ax hits, the camera cuts back to Donnie sitting on the couch as if he just woke up again. This series of cuts and images provides ambiguity to the first task Donnie performs. Did we witness Donnie breaking a pipe, or did that occur only in his dream? Furthermore, does Donnie think he was only dreaming?

The following scene at the bus stop suggests that Donnie is unsure of the reality of his dream from the previous night, when a girl runs up to him and the others at the stop to explain that the school is closed because it is flooded. A quick cut to Donnie's face suggests that he may be confused or surprised at the news, perhaps both. When the audience is given a look at what the school is like flooded, we are also shown an ax imbedded in the school mascot's statue and the words, "they made me do it" in over-stylized handwriting on the concrete. While it is never proven what the statue is made of, in a close listening to the film, the audience can hear one of the onlookers claim "yeah, that's unbelievable, that's solid rock, isn't it?" Thus, to have the ax penetrating the top of the statue so deeply that it remains stuck in the statue suggests a supernatural strength, which is never explained or reexamined in the film. However, it is this supernatural occurrence that provides the audience with a form of material proof that Donnie's actions transcend simply a troubled mind, but instead actually represent a force (his alternative perspective) that may be threatening the reality that Donnie inhabits.

The second task Frank sets is preceded by the human manifestations of the societal structure that appear to threaten Donnie: Jim Cunningham and Kitty Farmer. After Frank explains to Donnie that he "got away with it" in reference to flooding the school, the audience is presented with the lifeline exercise, created by Jim Cunningham, in Ms. Farmer's class. This exercise contains a line with two polar opposites of love and fear, requiring each student to read

a scenario out loud and place an “x” on the line to define the scenario as a product of love or fear. When it is Donnie’s turn to participate, he resists and attempts to explain how life is not as simple as love and fear, but Ms. Farmer refuses to listen to him. After more aggressively disobeying Ms. Farmer, Donnie sees the principal with his parents, suggesting a form of punishment to be enacted on him for his disobedience. Thus, it appears that the societal structure that Donnie is threatened by includes a strict adherence to rules and a simplified notion of human emotions.

Donnie’s interaction with Jim Cunningham during a school assembly provides further insight into the societal structure that Donnie attempts to resist, as this assembly appears to imply more than just Cunningham and Ms. Farmer are perpetuating the societal structure, as the larger community as a whole also appears complicit in this societal structure. As Cunningham takes questions from the audience about how to cope with traditional adolescent social life, it becomes Donnie’s turn to ask a question, which he formulates as “how much are they paying you to be here?” Cunningham attempts to reply and use Donnie as an example of harboring a great deal of fear, but Donnie continues to resist, eventually calling him “the fucking antichrist” at which point he is escorted out of the assembly. Half of the audience appears to cheer his rebellion, while the half is outraged by his outburst. The film audience assumes that Donnie is punished by the school system once again for his disobedience to their societal structures.

After Donnie’s displays of resistance, the audience sees him walking along the sidewalk in front of a large home with sprinklers, as he stumbles upon Jim Cunningham’s wallet. Frank as a voice over is heard to say “now you know where he lives.” This is the build-up towards Frank’s second task to Donnie, which occurs in the movie theater. I already outlined much of this interaction between Frank and Donnie to highlight the horror that resides in Frank, but this

horror emanates throughout the scene. As Donnie and Gretchen go into the movie theater, we learn they are seeing *Evil Dead*, a horror film. The two are also the only audience members in a large auditorium, but when Frank appears, Gretchen is asleep. She remains in the frame each time Donnie responds to Frank, foreshadowing her death. Frank then asks Donnie to watch the movie screen, which coincidentally is during a part of *Evil Dead* where a clock is ticking and chiming, but the screen warps into what Frank calls a portal. The film viewer then is able to assume that Frank is in control of Donnie's alternative perspective, transitioning the image of the portal that is revealing a cloudy blue sky to an image of Jim Cunningham's house. "Burn it to the ground" Frank says, officially setting the task for Donnie to perform.

The presentation of this task is intercut with the school talent show, as hosted by Jim Cunningham and which features the dance team, Sparkle Motion. After Donnie exits the movie theater on his mission, the audience sees him smiling. He appears in control of his own actions and also happy to commit the vandalism against Cunningham. Meanwhile, at the school talent show, Cunningham introduces Sparkle Motion as "the moment we've all been waiting for," suggesting that these five young girls are the main attraction of the entire show. Cunningham's generalizes and assumes the desires of the audience with this comment, but the comment also becomes poignant as the dance number concludes and is intercut with Donnie walking into Cunningham's house holding a can of gasoline. The music and the camera speed slow while Sparkle Motion finish their dance routine and the applause and cheers from the audience are presented. In juxtaposition to this with a normal camera speed is Donnie throwing gasoline all over Cunningham's home, where the latter has a larger-than-life painting of himself. As Donnie prepares the house to burn, it appears that Donnie is also performing for the talent show. His talent is arson, or rather social deviance, which is Donnie's method of resistance. As the house

begins to burn, the camera continuously cuts to images of the talent show audience cheering and applauding, suggesting they are also applauding Donnie. Donnie is then seen exiting the house, similar Sparkle Motion's departure from the stage. According to Peter Matthews, the scene "subtly points to the moral blindness of the general public in [Cunningham's child pornography] by intercutting images of Cunningham's burning house with shots of the sexualized dancers in Sparkle Motion." However, it also appears that the intercutting also serves to celebrate Donnie for his deviance, which uncovers the sinister nature of Jim Cunningham. This celebration of Donnie serves to assure the film audience that it is acceptable to identify or side with Donnie, as his resistance is necessary, deviant behavior notwithstanding.

The third and final task for Donnie is not directly set by Frank, but it becomes the task Donnie must choose to complete to save the people he cares about. During the Halloween party at his house, Donnie experiences the liquid spears, which I have discussed earlier in this chapter. The image that Donnie sees in the liquid spear is similar to what the film audience sees when identifying the plane engine that travels through time and crashes into Donnie's house. This imagery is suggesting that Donnie may also time travel, but, before he decides to do so, he decides to visit Roberta Sparrow, also known as Grandma Death. While her nickname is a joke by the youth based on her death-like image and inability to exist within the societal structure, making the moniker of "death" inhabit both a physical and social meaning, it may also represent the events that are to occur around her and her home during Donnie's final task, as Gretchen and Frank are both killed and Donnie determines his own sacrificial fate.

During the events of this final task, Donnie and the film audience are enlightened to the meaning behind many of the events that occur throughout the film. These events, largely determined by the tasks that Frank set for Donnie, progressively enable Donnie to enact his

resistance to the societal structure. His final task, to time travel, not only becomes his ultimate means of resistance in that he effectively reclaims his own fate, but it also restructures the lives of those close to him. A voice-over of Donnie and Professor Monitoff's conversation on time travel is heard first, as the time travel experience is about to begin. Next is heard a voice-over of Gretchen saying "what if you could go back in time, take all those hours of pain and darkness, and replace them with something better?" as she is seen lifeless in Donnie's car, while Donnie smiles at her. This quotation prefaces Donnie's official act of time travelling, as his smile indicates he is going to do what Gretchen wonders about--go back in time to replace his own pain and darkness, which includes Gretchen and Frank's death, with his own death. The camera begins to accelerate with images from the film going in reverse to suggest that Donnie is effective at his time traveling mission. The final scene of Donnie laughing in his bed before the jet engine crashes in his room suggests that he is successful, aware and in full control of his situation. At this, he has effectively confronted the horror in his life and within his alternative perspective and has used it as a means for his own power and agency.

Confronting and Overcoming Horror

If we consider Donnie, as Dr. Thurman notes, to be threatened by forces in the world, which we can assume entail the societal structures Donnie inhabits, then we can eliminate the emergence of his alternative perspective as a consequence of trauma. Additionally, it is made clear that Donnie is in fact taking his medication, although his sister claims otherwise at the start of the film. Therefore, even though Donnie explains his alternative perspective as "imaginary" or that he is "troubled," by the conclusion of the film, the audience is aware that Frank exists as a real entity and is thus a more complex phenomenon within Donnie's alternative perspective. With each interaction with Frank, Donnie is confronting an abject phenomenon, something that

is horrifying, not only as monstrous, but as a physical manifestation of Donnie's alternative perspective. This confrontation with horror allows Donnie to traverse his structured reality alongside his alternative perspective, gaining power to dismantle the social structure he feels threatened by. Within this societal structure, Donnie understands that he is deviant and expresses his desire of not wanting to die alone. This concern of death becomes the root of Donnie's fear and likely why he resists this societal structure. If he is able to convince those around him that the structure is flawed, then perhaps he will not be alone.

This social deviance that Donnie exhibits can be considered as creating the abject phenomenon that is his alternative perspective. Kristeva notes that there is a "logic of *exclusion* that causes the abject to exist" (emphasis hers 65). As she begins to outline this logic, she references "filth" as what is being excluded, which becomes "defilement" (65). More specifically she claims that

Defilement is what is jettisoned from the '*symbolic system*.' It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals and, in short, constitutes a *classification system* or a *structure*. (65)

Therefore, if abjection is created from the "logic of exclusion" it is because a system or structure is effectively rejecting (excluding) particular things or people. This is not to say that Donnie is himself abject, but that for Donnie, being excluded from his societal structure, or being a social deviant, he becomes more aware of the abject. This awareness and overall acceptance of abjection is critical for Donnie to maneuver within his alternative perspective and gain his own agency.

Thinking through this exclusion from a societal structure and gaining an awareness of abjection recalls the concepts of liminality from Klapcsik. He identifies the origin of ideas on

liminality as anthropologically based, and arising from “a period of social transition, either that of the tribal subject or that of the community itself” (7). A member of a community is in a liminal status when they are in a transition, generally from an adolescent stage towards maturity (Klapcsik 8). As an adolescent, Donnie may be considered as inhabiting a liminal space in his community; however, his presence in the liminal space is not based on any rituals from the community, but rather his own exclusion and attempt to resist and restructure the community. As Donnie is able to successfully resist and become empowered by the end of the narrative, it may be that his liminality is as a member of society transitioning to a position of power. Yet, as Klapcsik’s definition of liminality explains, there is a constant oscillation between Donnie’s social position and his individual position, which is perceived as Donnie’s ability to experience both his reality and alternative perception.

Additionally, the film inhabits the qualities of “a never-ending narrative, forming an infinite process towards an unreachable end” (Klapcsik 14), in that viewers are left with varying questions or interpretations of events and there are instances where no closure can be reached. The science fiction narrative seems to be at the foundation of this liminal trait in the film, specifically the notion of time travel. It is perhaps with this examination that Mendlesohn’s definition of liminal fantasy is useful; however, it should be combined with the traits of an intrusion fantasy because it appears that the time traveling motif in the film is explicit and leaves no room for the viewer to doubt its existence. Time traveling for *Donnie Darko* ultimately creates questions of alternative timelines, or dimensions, which would render the narrative never-ending. It also leaves the issue of the societal structure in play, as Donnie’s time traveling task implies that Jim Cunningham’s child pornography dungeon is never discovered; does the

structure, then, stay intact? If so, the narrative does not end with the roll of credits but instead causes the viewer to consider its continuation.

Overall, it is clear that Donnie is traveling along two parallel narratives in the film: that of his traditional reality, and that of his alternative perspective. As the narrative progresses, the horror in Donnie's reality is heightened, as he interacts with Ms. Farmer and Jim Cunningham, attempting to resist their authority. These attempts are met with equal resistance from the societal structure, as Donnie is seemingly punished for his disobedience. Within his parallel narrative, however, Donnie is able to interact with Frank (an abject entity), utilizing him as a means for enacting vandalism, in which he is successful because he is never caught or punished. By the conclusion of the film, as Donnie assumes the power of time travel, and thus a new form of agency beyond that of an individual, he has fully confronted and overcome the horror in both narratives.

Yet, as Judith Butler wonders, with gaining agency, what happens to vulnerability (23)? For *Donnie Darko*, although the audience is sympathetic with Donnie throughout his journey towards time travelling, the characters surrounding Donnie are also vulnerable to the power in the societal structure. Therefore, when Donnie is able to resist the structure and gain a greater sense of agency within the structure, his vulnerability shifts to self-sacrifice so that he may save others he recognizes as vulnerable, such as Gretchen, Frank, his mother and younger sister. The individuality of Donnie's narrative throughout the film concludes with his ability to recognize his power to save others.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Another consideration for discussing the horror in alternative perspective films is to identify the horror that permeates beyond the alternative perspective and into the accepted reality presented in the film. In *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Donnie Darko*, the accepted reality is presented as a past time--1944 Francoist Spain and 1982 suburban America respectively. Thus the films are not only recreating a specific alternative perspective for the protagonists, but also a historic time period for their viewers. In an attempt to analyze this trait of the alternative perspective film, we would venture beyond the individual protagonist to a more social and/or cultural analysis. As Michel Foucault responds to his own question about why he wrote a history of the prison, he states, "simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing the history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present" (31). In other words, he wishes to write about a past that remains alive, creating sociocultural commentary. A similar notion might be attributed to the filmic recreations of the accepted reality in alternative perspective films, suggesting that the medium of film becomes an alternative perspective of history for the viewer. Therefore, if we examine the horror that resides in these recreations, we may uncover social and/or cultural meanings, or perhaps reinterpret the sociocultural forces in effect for the protagonist in the film as causing their alternative perspective.

Yet *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Donnie Darko* are not the only films within the category of alternative perspective films. Other films to consider for analysis are Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island* (2010), where the alternative perspective becomes a mix of apparent hallucinations and a

performance; Jeff Nichols's *Take Shelter* (2011), where the protagonist's alternative perspective appears in dreams but eventually results in reality; and Ken Russel's *Altered States* (1981), where a scientist utilizes a sensory deprivation tank to experience alternative perspectives, which eventually physically materialize. Within each of these films, the alternative perspective contains elements of horror from the protagonist traversing the dark corridors of a mental institution and witnessing a woman burning (*Shutter Island*), or abrupt attacks on the protagonist (*Take Shelter*), to images of monsters and demons (*Altered States*). In each situation the protagonist experiences alternative perspectives with varying levels of control. These alternative perspectives cause severe disruptions in the protagonist's accepted realities largely with revealing a fragility in their agency.

As discussed in the previous chapters, *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Donnie Darko* as alternative perspective films use horror in similar ways within the protagonist's alternative perspectives, that is, to permit the protagonist to gain agency. However, considering the manifestation of these perspectives as differing between protagonists may provide a means for uncovering the diversity of ways in which the protagonists manage their agency. For example, Ofelia's fantasy world not only includes characters or objects (the insect, Book of Crossroads, the faun, the piece of chalk, and the mandrake root discussed in chapter II) that intrude into her reality, but also physical settings, such as the Pale Man's chamber and the throne room at the end of the film. Donnie's alternative perspective, on the other hand, places Frank in the space of Donnie's real world without a solid origin or setting besides a vague notion of the future. This disparity in the manifestation of the alternative perspectives may be a product of the protagonist's gender or age; however, additional films, such as those listed above, would be required to attempt identifying potential patterns.

From the aforementioned list, *Take Shelter* may be useful for considering the differing manifestations of alternative perspectives. The film centers on the protagonist, Curtis, and what appears to be his descent into a mental disorder. Contrary to Ofelia's or Donnie's circumstances, Curtis is an adult with a wife and daughter and is the primary provider for his household in a small rural town in the United States. Since Curtis appears to already have a sense of agency, the manifestation of his alternative perspectives in the form of dreams and, at times, disassociated sounds, is one differentiating factor of *Take Shelter*. I described Ofelia's alternative perspective as fantasy, and Donnie's alternative perspective as cartoonish at times; these aspects are remote from the realism conveyed with Curtis's alternative perspective. Yet what remains the same for all three films is the presence of horror in the alternative perspectives.

Take Shelter represents Curtis's alternative perspective through his dreams, which are rendered visually the same as the reality Curtis inhabits. In other words, there is no filmic cue to suggest that the audience is witnessing one of Curtis's dreams. It is only when there is an occurrence of odd, or seemingly out of place events (often containing horror) that concludes with a scene of Curtis waking in his bed to indicate the viewer has witnessed his alternative perspective. The first instance of this pattern is shown when Curtis is outside playing with his daughter, Hannah, while his dog is barking in the background. A cut to what the dog may be barking at, and also what Curtis and Hannah are seeing, shows large, dark, ominous storm clouds producing tornadoes in the distance. The dog's barking becomes faster and he pulls on the leash that ties him to the tree, breaking free and running at Curtis to attack. The dog bites Curtis on his arm with what seems like further intent to harm or kill Curtis. Curtis screams in the dream as we hear the sound of his arm possibly breaking under the dog's jaw. This pain causes him to jolt awake and sit upright in his bed, holding his arm. He is visibly afraid and later comments that his

arm hurt for the remainder of the day. Since Curtis's alternative perspective is manifested through dreams, it is difficult to consider his alternative perspective as liminal, as the representation of dreams in the film appear contained within Curtis's mind. However, the horror produced in this instance is able to permeate into Curtis's real world, as a physical manifestation of pain remains with him.

Another dream presented early in the film begins with a transition from Curtis spending time with his family at a school for his daughter in the real world to a strong storm occurring at their house, where we see Curtis getting in his truck with Hannah. I mention this transition because once again the audience is initially unaware that we are in one of Curtis's dreams until events become jarring and scary. Driving in the storm, unable to clearly see in front of him, Curtis suddenly must veer off the road to avoid hitting a person standing in the middle of the road. Crashed on the side of the road, Curtis and Hannah are attacked by unknown persons from outside the truck. They break through the truck windows, grab Hannah and run away before also grabbing Curtis and attempting to pull him from the vehicle. These people seem crazed, almost like zombies, but the quick motion of the camera makes discerning the people difficult. Once again, as Curtis is in peril in his dream, appearing to be suffocating, his distress in the dream wakes him. He appears visibly ill afterwards. In this dream, the abruptness of the horror and the inclusion of zombie-like persons incite fear in Curtis, but it is not until much later in the film that he reveals to his wife, "it's not just a dream, it's a feeling. I'm afraid something might be coming. Something that's not right." Therefore, the horror within Curtis's dreams has the ability to motivate Curtis to action. His actions, however, appear detrimental to his social and financial standing within his real world, but they are ultimately necessary for the protection of his family.

Curtis's actions to protect his family are therefore effectively diminishing his agency and consequently emasculating him. With this deteriorating agency, his aim to inhabit the role of savior is continuously challenged and ultimately unresolved by the end of the film. With the inclusion of Curtis's daughter, Hannah, in almost every dream presented, it appears that Curtis's fear for her safety and survival, as articulated through the horror in his dreams, is the root cause for his actions in the real world. While the trait of being a savior was discussed with Donnie and Ofelia, as they ultimately sacrifice themselves for their family and others they care about, they do not reach this role of savior until the end of their narratives. Therefore, it appears alternative perspectives not only manifest differently depending on the agency the character possesses in ordinary life, but also vary because of the way in which the horror is manipulated within these perspectives, which is dependent upon the maturity of the protagonist that experiences them.

Ofelia, as the youngest protagonist in this discussion, becomes fully immersed in her alternative perspective, accepting it at face value, which is that there is a plausible parallel realm. Donnie, although older than Ofelia, is still an adolescent and is hesitant to fully accept his alternative perception, questioning why it is happening and when it will end. Both Donnie and Ofelia are able to identify and accept the horror in their alternative perspectives and utilize those occurrences to build agency. However, if we take Curtis into consideration for this discussion, as the oldest protagonist among these films, he does not want to accept his alternative perspective (indeed, he is not permitted to by authority figures such as bosses and doctors), but he is unable to resist its persistence. In attempting to reject his dreams, the horror and consequent fear that Curtis feels is what he mobilizes to protect his family, inadvertently rendering him jobless, socially ostracized, and financially unable to provide for his family. However, as Ofelia and Donnie are able ultimately to gain power and agency at the conclusion of their narrative, Curtis

realizes the validity of his dreams, but he has already lost his ability to regain a job, friends, or money, as he succumbs to the belief that his dreams are the result of a mental disorder. Thus, in the abrupt realization that Curtis's apocalyptic storm is becoming a reality, his ability to regain his agency is unresolved, as we are unsure that he will ultimately be able to protect his family.

While none of the films discussed is considered explicitly a horror film, they contain elements of horror specifically within the representation of the protagonist's alternative perspective. As I discussed with *Pan's Labyrinth*, generic conventions can be subverted and a film may contain multiple genres, but why include horror in a protagonist's personal and exclusive perspective? I believe the answer entails a new means of interpreting horror as it relates to filmic representations of the human mind. This new method of interpreting horror maintains a more individual focus, as opposed to a social or cultural critique, so that we may be able to better understand individual challenges such as trauma or being a social outcast. It appears we are unable to escape horror, yet it also seems that the human mind has the ability to harness the power of horror for better purposes.

WORKS CITED

- Atkinson, Michael. "Moral Horrors: In Guillermo Del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*, the Supernatural Realm Mirrors Man's Inhumanity to Man." *Film Comment*, vol. 43, no. 1, Feb. 2007, pp. 50 – 53.
- Blicht, Savannah. "Between Earth and Sky: Transcendence, Reality, and the Fairy Tale in *Pan's Labyrinth*." *Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, pp. 33–40. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.3390/h5020033.
- Booth, Paul. "Intermediality in Film and Internet: *Donnie Darko* and Issues of Narrative Substantiality." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 38, no. 3, Fall 2008, pp. 398-415. *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41304894>.
- Butler, Judith. "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance." *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Edited by Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, Duke UP, 2016, pp. 12-27.
- Carroll, Noel. *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*. Routledge, 1990.
- Clark, Roger, and Keith McDonald. "'A Constant Transit of Finding': Fantasy as Realization in *Pan's Labyrinth*." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 41, no. 1, Mar. 2010, pp. 52–63. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1007/s10583-010-9099-7.
- Deveny, Thomas. "Once Upon and Time in Spain in 1944: The Morphology of *El Laberinto del Fauno*." *Cine y...: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies on Film in Spanish*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1-12.
- Diestro-Dopido, Mar. *Pan's Labyrinth*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Penguin, 1975.

- Hubner, Laura. "Pan's Labyrinth, Fear and the Fairy Tale." *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries*, vol. 61, 2010, pp. 45–62.
- Hoffman, A. Robin. "'This Movie is Like a Rorschach Test': Disputed Allegory and the Image of the Child in Pan's Labyrinth (del Toro 2006)." *Genre*, vol. 43, no. 1-2, Jan. 2010, pp. 137-62. *Read Duke Press*, doi: 10.1215/00166928-43-1-2-137.
- King, Geoff. *Donnie Darko*. Wallflower Press, 2007.
- Klapcsik, Sándor. *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach*. McFarland & Company Inc., 2011.
- Kotecki, Kristine. "Approximating the Hypertextual, Replicating the Metafictional: Textual and Sociopolitical Authority in Guillermo del Toro's Pan's Labyrinth." *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2010, pp. 235-54.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1982.
- Lukasiewicz, Tracie D. "The Parallelism of the Fantastic and the Real: Guillermo del Toro's Pan's Labyrinth/El laberinto del fauno and Neomagical Realism." *Fairy Tale Films*, edited by Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix, UP of Colorado, 2010, pp. 60-78.
- Matthews, Peter. "Spinoza's Stone: The Logic of Donnie Darko." *Post Script*, vol. 25, no. 1, Fall 2005, pp. 38-48.
- Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Wesleyan UP, 2008.
- Miller, Cynthia J. and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, editors. *Dark Forces at Work: Essays on Social Dynamics and Cinematic Horrors*, Lexington Books, 2020.
- Orme, Jennifer. "Narrative Desire and Disobedience in Pan's Labyrinth." *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2010, pp. 219-34.

- Picart, Caroline J.S., and David A. Frank. "Horror and the Holocaust: Genre Elements in *Schindler's List* and *Psycho*." *The Horror Film*, edited by Stephen Prince, Rutgers UP, 2003, pp. 206-223.
- Radley, Emma. "'Where is Donnie?'" Psychosis and Agency in Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko*." *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, vol. 17, no.4, 2012, pp. 392-409.
- Raschake, Jessica. "'Where is Donnie?'" Dreams and Delusions in 'Donnie Darko.'" *Australian Screen Education*, vol. 44, no. 14, 2006, pp. 115-118.
- Sanchez, Francisco J. "A Post-National Spanish Imaginary: A Case-Study: Pan's Labyrinth." *Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association*, vol. 36, May 2012, pp. 137-46. *EBSCOhost*.
- Schubart, Rikke. *Mastering Fear: Women, Emotions and Contemporary Horror*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Sipos, Thomas M. *Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear*. McFarland & Company Inc., 2010.
- Tan, Sabine, Peter Wignell and Kay L. O'Halloran. "From Book to Stage to Screen: Semiotic Transformations of Gothic Horror Genre Conventions." *Social Semiotics*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2016, pp. 404-423. *JSTOR*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2016.1190082>.
- Tierney, Dolores. "Transnational Political Horror in *Cronos* (1993), *El espinazo del diablo* (2001), and *El laberinto del fauno* (2006)." *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo del Toro*, edited by Ann Davies, Deborah Shaw, and Dolores Tierney, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 161-82.
- Walters, James. *Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema: Resonance Between Realms*. Intellect Books, 2008.

Zipes, Jack. "Pan's Labyrinth." *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 121, Spring 2008, pp. 236–40. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.2307/20487600.