GOTHIC AGENTS OF REVOLT: THE FEMALE REBEL IN PAN'S LABYRINTH, ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND AND THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Michail-Chrysovalantis Markodimitrakis

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Piya-Pal Lapinski, Advisor

Kimberly Coates
ABSTRACT

Piya Pal-Lapinski, Advisor

The Gothic has become a mode of transforming reality according to the writers’ and the audiences’ imagination through the reproduction of hellish landscapes and nightmarish characters and occurrences. It has also been used though to address concerns and criticize authoritarian and power relations between citizens and the State. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* are stories written during the second part of the 19th century and use distinct Gothic elements to comment on the political situation in England as well as the power of language from a child’s perspective. Guillermo Del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* on the other hand uses Gothic horror and escapism to demonstrate the monstrosities of fascism and underline the importance of revolt and resistance against State oppression. This thesis will be primarily concerned with Alice and Ophelia as Gothic protagonists that become agents of revolt against their respective states of oppression through the lens of Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt. I will examine how language and escapism are used as tools by the literary creators to depict resistance against the Law and societal pressure; I also aim to demonstrate how the young protagonists themselves refuse to comply with the authoritarian methods used against them by the adult representatives of Power.
To all the weirdos out there who were never the “cool” kids.

I know you were the best of the lot.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................................................................................... 1

The Gothic-Female Protagonists in Gothic-Gothic Children ............................................... 2

Theories of Imperialism, Fascism and the Depiction of Violence........................................... 8

CHAPTER I. A VIOLENT, IMPERIAL ALICE AND DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

WE GO! .................................................................................................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER II. PAN’S LABYRINTH, FAIRY TALES AND THE ABSURDITY OF

FASCISM..................................................................................................................................................................................... 41

CONCLUSION THE END OF INNOCENCE-THE BEGINNING OF POLITICAL LIFE ...... 64

WORKS CITED............................................................................................................................................................................... 71
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Alice drawn by John Tenniel for the 1865 <em>Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland</em></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Ofelia in the dress that her mother gave her from the 2006 <em>Pan’s Labyrinth</em></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Alice in 1951 Walt Disney’s adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s first book</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The praying mantis examining the fairy tale depiction of the fairy</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>The mantis transforms to what Ofelia expects fairies to look like</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

“If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary-wise; what it is it wouldn't be, and what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?” The quote above from the 1951 Disney animated adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) does not exist in the original book, but it could just as well be there. The story of the young Alice who finds herself in a fantastic world, where deck cards are soldiers, cats disappear and animals talk is one of the most popular children’s stories. Its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) has been one of the favorite readings for millions of children around the world; both books have been translated numerous times and have been adapted to a great variety of media, from the cinema to graphic novel erotica. One of the most interesting works that is directly connected to Carroll’s fantastic tale is Guillermo Del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006), a horror film that successfully combines elements of the fantastic, traditional gothic horror, the monstrosities of World War II and the fascist regime of Franco in Spain.

The young protagonists find themselves in fantastic worlds we can interpret through a variety of methods and theories; their surroundings sometimes even generate quite disturbing interpretations. Psychoanalysts have attempted to do readings of *Alice in Wonderland* as a text with continuous sexual allusions, while theories have even gone as far as identifying the author of the text as the notorious serial killer Jack the Ripper! The most modest of these theories, which to a great extent are attributed to the psychoanalyst theories of Freud and his contemporaries, would classify Charles Lutwidge Dodgson as a pedophile, a homosexual, a person with repressed sexuality due to his religious beliefs and many others, one more erroneous than the other. Del Toro’s movie on the other hand presents itself with different sets of challenges; it is a film that takes place in Spain during WWII (1944) and refers to fantastic stories set in an unidentified past.
However, it is filmed in 2006 with a certain historical and temporal distance from the WWII and the Spanish Civil War.

In this thesis, I will analyze Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass* along with Guillermo Del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* so as to examine each work’s Gothic elements and their relationship with power and authority. The research question this thesis will be primarily concerned with is whether Alice and Ofelia could be considered Gothic protagonists that operate both inside and outside the boundaries set by traditional Gothic motifs. On a secondary level, questions will be addressed concerning the agency of the protagonists in regards to their actions; I will examine whether or not one could classify Alice and Ofelia as agents of revolt and resistance against the respective state apparatuses they come up against. One of the main areas of focus will be the language used in these works as well as the fairy-tale elements employed to depict resistance against the law.

**The Gothic-Female Protagonists in Gothic-Gothic Children**

The Gothic has been since its very beginnings a revolutionary mode of expression. It is used by multiple authors as a means to convey ideas, beliefs and anxieties, any feelings in general the readers inadvertently suppress but can never escape from. The Gothic, as something that constantly changes forms, a revival of something, else is always challenging notions that society considers permanent and pristine, such as familial bonds, power and ideology. It might be now considered part of everyday discourse, from supernatural cable shows (such as *Supernatural*) to T-shirts with images from graveyards and death–metal bands (a term Gothic on its own) that advocate a horrific look to add a pinch of mystery to their origins; it inhabits everything, from movies to anything that triggers fear and uneasiness. Catherine Spooner very accurately notes in *Contemporary Gothic* that it is highly unlikely that contemporary users of the term would refer to
the fifth century’s Goths violent overthrow of the Roman Empire, an empire considered by the
West as one of the most significant of all times. The term practically emerges in medieval
cathedrals, and changes its meaning again during the eighteenth century. This shows that Gothic
has “always [been] [...] a revival of something else” (10).

David Punter and Glennis Byron in the introduction of their book *The Gothic* offer multiple
explanations as to what the Gothic really is, ranging from the historical phenomenon in literary
practice starting during the late eighteenth century to a psychological argument used by novelists
to allow otherwise repressed fears to appear in textual form. Others would state that the Gothic has
more to do with “particular moments, tropes, repeated motifs that can be found scattered, or
disseminated, through the modern western literary tradition” (xviii), or even that Gothic is after
all, in its modern manifestations, a collection of subgenres: the ghost story, the horror story, the
 techno-Gothic, cyberpunk and many others that are yet to be named.

The two World Wars scarred the collective soul of the world in the previous century and
served as an inspiration to a genre that is profoundly concerned with the past, as Spooner suggests,
a mode conveyed through both historical settings and narrative interruptions of the past into the
present (9). The external cosmic threat as expressed by H.P. Lovecraft in his stories later in the
20th century became equally threatening to the bourgeois safety with the “urban invisibility and
its criminal concomitant” that David Punter notes in his book *The Literature of Terror: The
Modern Gothic* (184). This “modern” theme that Gothic engages could be argued to blend with
the lore of the lost princess in Del Toro’s film, as we see that Ofelia’s actions are put in parallel
with a mythical royal heir to an unspecified “Underworld.”

In the second half of the 20th century a movement re-examining modernity and (among
others) its relationship with fantasy came to dominate most aspects of literary life;
“Postmodernism,” which Neil Cornwell sees as mingled with the fantastic genre and dominant in literary and ontological terms (145). A most significant parallel that Allan Lloyd Smith in *Modern Gothic* draws between the Gothic and Postmodern mode is their indeterminacy, which may be a narrative necessity for the first but for the second is its *raison d’être*. This indeterminacy is a key concept in both Del Toro and Carrol’s works, and directly connected to Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of the Fantastic. Both of them confront the “embattled deconstructed self, without sureties of religion and social place, or any coherent psychology of the kind observable in both the Enlightenment or modernist traditions” (Smith 7). Under the influence of postmodernism “Gothic fiction becomes a process of cultural self-analysis, and the images it throws up become the dream-figures of a social group, troubled now by international as much as national developments” (Punter 205). Maria Beville in *Gothic-Postmodernism* goes on to name a new genre:

I define Gothic-postmodernism as the same and further this idea by advocating a view of Gothic-postmodernism as an amplification of the Gothic language of terror to encompass the more recent terrors of our postmodern age and also the theories of terror that have been put forward as part of the enterprise of postmodern cultural theory. (9)

While her initiative might be considered radical, the theoretical justification she provides draws multiple parallels between the two movements, underlining the close relationship they have developed. The Gothic in Del Toro’s film is used to depict the terrors of postmodernity; the latter’s aspects on the other hand, “operate to establish ontological and epistemological standpoints that query accepted moral and ethical ‘realities,’ which have long been the focus of Gothic subversion” (Beville 16). The Underworld is a safe haven from the Nazi monstrosities, and yet it proves to be quite unsettling on its own, as the sacrifice to enter that domain has striking similarities with the
executions taking place at the cottage by the Spanish militants; the creatures that inhabit it, including the faun himself and the “Pale Man” are equally unsettling to the cruel military officers under the command of Vidal. One could also argue that the anxieties postmodernism echoes are an evolution of the late Victorian society, where industrialism, the creation of the bourgeois class and the colonial subjects seemed to threaten the traditional class system and way of life in the United Kingdom.

As the debate about what the Gothic is could go on indefinitely, it would be useful to situate Carroll’s stories and Del Toro’s film in this tradition. The Gothic is a mode that invades all others, rather than forming a single canon. In all three works I examine in this thesis the protagonists are female and they have significant similarities with Allison Milbank’s assertions in her essay “Gothic Femininities.” The author notices that in the Gothic tradition, unlike male counterparts that usually deal with supernatural forces and more than often are destroyed by them (as is the case with The Monk, Frankenstein etc.), female protagonists are by the end of the novel reminded that the ‘real’ world is more dangerous, and the uncanny elements are usually explained. This element of “female Gothic writing” as Milbank notes “has perplexed critics” (157); the “use of the explained supernatural […] evokes a spiritual world through unexplained ghostly visions and sounds, yet finally provides a natural origin for all the effects” (157). As the author confirms, sometimes the explanation turns out to be completely “awkward or belated” (Milbank 157). While this awkwardness is considered a trademark in female Gothic writers, it is not the case with either Alice or Ofelia.

The protagonists of the works I examine do not provide the reader with a definitive realistic explanation of their endeavors. Both girls seem to descend into worlds that, according to Todorov’s terminology can be interpreted in both ways: uncanny-fantastic, that is products of a dream state
the two protagonists were in or fantastic-marvelous, that is taking place within a supernatural context, and then requiring readers to suspend their disbelief and accept that rules of reality are bent to explain the impossible things taking place in the two stories and the film (41). Not only that, but in all three works the female is a revolutionary who claims her own agency and directly deals with supernatural threats, which she overcomes despite the great personal cost as in the case of *Pan’s Labyrinth*.

What comes to complement the reading I am doing of the protagonists as revolutionary Gothic characters is their age and their behavior. Alice and Ofelia are really young, with the first being seven-and-half years old and the second ten. Despite their age though, they exhibit a very interesting maturity, without escaping of course the childish behavior that is characteristic of their age. Sue Walsh in “Gothic Children” notes that the relationship between Gothic and childhood is rather complex, with critics describing it “in terms of a sense of ambivalence or contradiction” (183). One of the critics that expresses this ambivalence is Dani Cavallaro in his book *The Gothic Vision*. The author, having devoted a chapter to “Gothic and Children,” argues that children are in the Gothic mode usually associated with innocence, as their character and behavior are marked by “simplicity and lack of worldly experience . . . unsullied by the murky deviousness of socialized existence” (Cavallaro 135). However, precisely because children are not yet fully encultured, they are frequently perceived as a threat to the fabric of adult society (135). The Gothic writers have successfully noticed that in societies children are always the easiest victims to manipulate, and thus they develop very strong mechanisms for their self-protection. Cavallaro is very right to underline that the same strategies facilitated by adults to protect their personal life and thoughts are employed by children, who are trying even harder due to adult intrusion. As he notes “If human beings of all ages feel impelled to protect and even secrete facets of their existence which they
deem private from inquisitive eyes, this is pointedly the case with children due to the greater vulnerability of their physical and psychological territories to intrusion and violation” (Cavallaro 135). Ofelia and Alice are both facing problems with what adults are trying to impose on them. Audiences will find easy to trace the elements of oppression in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, with the director of the film clearly commenting on the young protagonist’s attempts to escape from societal and political repression. However, Alice’s story is quite different. In the case of Carroll’s works it is through the language and thoughts of the protagonist that a reader can realize the expectations Alice is imposed on and attempts to disregard. While traditional folklore tales did to a great extent include dynamic female characters who were successful in their endeavors and encounters with the supernatural, it was in seventeenth century France where “[t]he momentous role of fairy tales in the enculturement of the young” starting taking place, and it was from this tradition that Carroll was attempting to distance himself (Cavallaro 135). His Alice, along with Del Toro’s Ofelia rely on their natural instincts and their intellect to overcome the hardships they face, and engage in actions that their adult supervisors would disapprove of. The form of fairy tales that the two literary creators of two different eras attempt to escape from was identified by a “vested interest in inculcating the imperative of self-control and the importance of curbing natural instincts. Significantly, the socialization of children goes hand in hand with the domestication of the darker aspects of the traditional stories from which modern fairy tales stem” (Cavallaro 139). It is this aforementioned darkness that the contemporary Gothic mode exploits and it is this exact element that is used by Carroll and Del Toro to introduce something innovative; both construct female characters that are breaking away from a “properness” that they are expected to adhere to. It is indeed the case that their behavior is very different from their contemporaries, as Alice in many
cases ponders what her sister would think of her, while Ofelia is disciplined by both her mother and her fascist military stepfather in order to be more formal and adult-like.

Nicholas Royle in his book *The Uncanny* defines the term ‘uncanny’ by connecting it to the disturbance of the aforementioned properness and formality. He writes that

The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from the Latin *proprius*, ‘own’), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one’s so-called ‘own’ name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events. It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was ‘part of nature’: one’s own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world.

(1)

The definition here serves to explain exactly why *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are situated in this thesis as texts very close to the Gothic mode. On the one hand, *Pan’s Labyrinth* is a clear-cut Gothic film, with most conventions that one would expect in a film of that kind, with graphic violence, ambivalence over the supernatural elements, a villain’s nemesis and the sacrifice of the protagonist for the greater good. On the other hand, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* ponder all too often in the course of the story about the impossibility of what is happening around Alice, and establish that everything is possible in a world that the patriarchal order, societal structure, and gender stereotypes are either obsolete or mercilessly ridiculed.

**Theories of Imperialism, Fascism and the Depiction of Violence**

The theoretical pieces that accompany my analysis of the three works cover a wide range of issues I have chosen to examine in this thesis. In Carroll’s work I argue that there are distinct
elements of late Victorian imperialism that Alice has to fight through, from the despotic Queen and peculiar duchess to the painting of roses that did not adhere to the Queen’s standards or even the maltreatment of animals that could be considered a depiction of 19th century slavery. Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* will be used to explain the historical background of Lewis Carroll’s time, with debates over social Darwinism and the position of women in Victorian society that Alice attempts to break away from, especial the “female mimicry” (62); the author uses the latter as a term to describe the way Alice is expected to act in accordance to her age. What the author also brings into my discussion of Alice’s revolutionary tales is the relationship between her adventures in Wonderland and the concept of “abjection”, especially in terms of discussing what is ‘proper’ (McClintock 71), and how she consciously deviates and becomes her own person despite the pressure she is under, even in the fantastic world she finds herself in. Canon Schmitt’s *Alien Nation* is also of vital importance in the analysis of Carroll’s work as the author directly connects the Gothic with national anxieties of the 19th century England, especially in terms of the notion of “Englishness” and identity (2,3). The latter, which is summed up in the question that the caterpillar asks her “Who are you” (Carroll 50) is indicative of what Schmitt calls the unstable identities that haunted Britain for over a century, referring to issues related to the nation, gender and the Gothic mode.

The second axis of analysis on which I will argue concerns the violence depicted in these two works and the response of the protagonists to violent acts and the various modes of it; my goal is to demonstrate how in all three works violence stems from both the environment itself as well as the characters that inhabit it. In Del Toro’s work, Ofelia finds herself at a cottage that is also the outpost of a local Spanish fascist military squadron, led by her stepfather Vidal. As Karin Brown argues in “Time Out of Joint,” the Spanish civil war left a nation divided, and that exact schism is
what allows for the temporal displacement of Ofelia’s adventures or fantasies (65). What is also rather interesting in the portrayal of Ofelia and the setting of the film is that the latter is set a few miles outside of the town of Belchite, a town that was destroyed during the clashes between fascists and revolutionaries and then left as it is as an example of Franco’s power (Brown 64). Violence in Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass is more subtle, even though in the case of the first, the Queen of Hearts continuously condemns her subjects to death, while in the second the Jabberwocky poem is much more violent than a quick reading would reveal. What’s more, violence in Carroll’s work is more than often verbal and this point will be explored under the lens of prominent theorists such as Hannah Arendt and Slavoj Žižek, in an attempt to realize the extent of resistance Ofelia has to exhibit and the obstacles she has to overcome towards her sovereignty.

Hannah Arendt’s On Violence is one of the central pieces of theory I am using to explain the various modes of violence that is exhibited in the literary works examined. In the second chapter of Arendt’s book, she analyzes the relationship between power and violence and how (modern) states use each or which one is more favorable depending on the nature of the state (democratic or autocratic). I am arguing that both power and violence, as Arendt defines them, are at stake in all three works, with Alice and Ofelia choosing very different ways to deal with them and defy their effect on them. The actions of Alice and Ofelia along with the death of the latter under the definitions Arendt provides constitute actions that diminish the power of violence and bring in the forefront of discussion Power as a force that defies the autocratic state and establishes the foundations of a revolution. As violence is based on “instruments” (Arendt 53), what the young protagonists do is expose their oppressors with various modes for the irrational actions and way of thinking of the latter, as well as for the (absence) of Power once the oppresors’ instruments fail to follow their command. I also use another work of Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, where the
author traces the origins of totalitarian and fascist regimes to argue that the portrayal of civilian population of Wonderland in both works of Carroll constitutes a mob that is prone to a totalitarian rule by their state officials. An example of the latter would be the trial scene at the end of the *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* piece, where we see Wonderland’s army uniting against Alice unanimously, despite Alice’s logical objections to the juridical process that was taking place, using violence to silence her and dominate over her enormous physical size.

In regards to the depicted violence, Slavoj Žižek’s *Violence* provides interesting concepts which I intend to use so as to justify and position the violent acts that the protagonists face. His classification of violence as objective (with subsections of systemic and symbolic) and subjective provides a terminology for the nature of the obstacles Alice and Ofelia need to overcome. For Alice systemic violence is mainly what she needs to come to terms with; a sanctioned form of violence that takes various forms, from the “Queen of Hearts” continuously handing around orders for her subjects to be beheaded, the maltreatment of other animals, and the absurd trial that takes place at the end of the first book, to the verbal violence that Alice faces in several parts of the second installment of Carroll’s literary work. In *Through the Looking Glass* Alice is hauled outside a train, is continuously (just like the first book) called to comply with societal rules that would apply to her gender and age and participates in discourses where words have lost their meaning, to the point where the abstraction of the meaning of words reminds the reader of totalitarian regimes. I use Žižek’s concepts of “subjective” and “objective” violence in the analysis of all three works as the distinction is rather useful in terms of how the protagonists of the literary works suffer and revolt against the various forms inflicted on them. In specific, Alice has to deal with a land where institutional (or objective) violence is administered by the Queens and their servants, while subjective violence (seemingly random acts of violence) is apparent in both the nonsensical
discussions she has with various animals in both stories as well as her encounter with the Duchess in the first book. Ofelia, on the other hand, faces the objective violence of the fascist state she finds herself in, and also experiences or witnesses the subjective violence enacted by the revolutionaries, her nanny, and of course herself in her descents to the underworld, up to the point of her sacrifice, which is a rebellious act on its own.

The last major theoretical pieces I am engaging in this thesis are Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* and his subsequent supplementary work *State of Exception*. In regards to the first, the concept coming from the Roman era related to the person that is invisible to the law, has no political entity and is stripped to a bare life, which can be ended by those that belong to a society the “homo sacer” is excluded from, even though (s)he is protected from any form of execution. This antithetical set of definitions, along the confusing way with which Agamben chooses to define “homo sacer” allows for a definition of the term through examples from contemporary history. A striking one would be the refugees and immigrants at refugee camps that have no identification on them, and therefore are subjects to their host state’s laws, while being invisible as political subjects. In the case of Alice and Ofelia this invisibility is expressed in very different ways, as Wonderland and the setting of *Pan’s Labyrinth* operate under very different rules. In both of Carroll’s works, Alice is a person who is not of that world, somehow invades the world she finds herself in and exposes its inconsistencies, nonsensical rules and inefficiencies which, to a great extent, allure to a mid-Victorian England. The rate of executions ordered by the Queen of Hearts accompanied by the nonsensical dialogues in *Through the Looking Glass* as well as the continuous changes of the environment in the latter without warning lead towards a paradigm of how Alice’s surroundings treat her. It is as if the young protagonist exists outside the rules of Wonderland, even if the young female wants to rule it, as she ends up doing at the end of Carroll’s second book. Ofelia’s status as
“homo sacer” is rather easy to determine, as her sacrifice at the end awards her has a martyr’s fate; however I argue that if one takes a closer look at the exact way the sacrifice takes place, what will be revealed is a very different story. Ofelia has actually become quite the opposite, the sovereign citizen that takes matters to her own hands and chooses to die as the ultimate act of freedom, not conforming to her expected gender role and breaking the convention of the inactive Gothic female character and that of the mindless totalitarian pawn.

Agamben’s supplementary theoretical work *State of Exception* is useful to the justification of the previous statement as well, as in his work the Italian philosopher sketches out the origins and modus operandi of such states and the conditions under which they are realized. In such conditions, authority and power is usually transferred to a certain group of people or a person, who can operate outside the law to protect it, creating a very interesting paradox. As Agamben argues all modern states, even the democratic ones, function as states of exception (2). Such was the case of course with the Nazi regime and its fascist concomitants, with the military in most cases assuming the role of the group that would protect the implementation of lawfulness, or would even establish one of its own. This concept allows for a reading of *Pan’s Labyrinth* as the attempt of Ofelia to overthrow this state of exception through her escape to the underworld, where she is part of the royal family, while at the same time she attempts to disintegrate the set of values that Vidal as part of the ruling class wants to impose on her. The young protagonist of Del Toro’s movie treats the miniature of the fascist regime, as it is realized in the small mill that Vidal and his military party have made their base, as an unnatural situation that prevents her from realizing her royal potential. Agamben’s documentation of how the Nazi regime took advantage of a long tradition of the states suspending their laws to protect them is used here to prove how the Gothic and fairy tale elements are used to criticize the compromises people do to protect either those they love or their
way of life. Ofelia revolts against that status quo and in effect attempts and to a certain extent succeeds to demonstrate the weaknesses of the states of exception; she exposes how heavy the loses are in terms of everyday life and personal freedom under oppressive regimes, as well as to what extent people are ready to stomach the casualties until they decide that they are not worth their passivity towards the respective ruling classes.

The desire to belong to the ruling class also appears in Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, where Alice journeys in most of the book in her attempt to become a queen just like the red and the white one. However, the suspension of logic she meets in a world that is organized very similarly to a game of chess indicates that this is a very peculiar state of exception. The law that is suspended in *Through the Looking Glass* is logic, with words changing their meaning and eggs arguing over semantics with eight year-olds, as in the case of Humpty Dumpty. The latter, that is the fundamental changes in the meaning of words, is a propaganda mechanism central in states that are totalitarian in their essence, as it aids them to ultimately suspend the law they uphold. This is also the case with *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* where we see the Queen of Hearts handing around death penalties that are sometimes suspended secretly by the king, reminding the reader of the justice system of England during the 18\(^{\text{th}}\) and early 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, when the death penalty was awarded for an unreasonably wide range of crimes.

The idea of degeneration, which came to be around the time of Carroll’s writing of the books as a way of viewing reality, is described in the introduction of *Degeneration* by Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman and plays a pivotal role in my reading of Carroll’s works (x). Alice finds herself in a reality that is completely different and yet uncannily similar to her own, with animals talking and noble people expressing behavior that is quite unusual for their social position. I examine in my first chapter the “autonomy of species” along with their respective “authority as
entities” (Chamberlin and Gilman x), along with the concern for this phenomena fueled various political and scientific theories. The idea of degeneration can be traced in both the anthropomorphic forms of the creatures in Wonderland in both of Carroll’s books, as well as with Vidal’s obsession with his heritage and Ofelia’s struggle to live up to her ‘royal’ bloodline. The protagonists find themselves in seemingly degenerative empires, a cacophony of the British society (Wonderland) and a miniature of the fascist regime in Spain, as the old mill that Ofelia and her mother have been transferred to functions as a military outpost.

The three works have a continuous discourse in this thesis, allowing for a continuity of interpretations and recurring motifs regarding the protagonists’ environment and actions. Even though each chapter works with them separately, they are very much connected by the theories I examine them with and the common narrative devices they use. The similarities of the works make them interesting and one could argue that Del Toro was somehow inspired from Carroll’s early works. Both protagonists are of similar age, and both of them are somehow uneasy with the social conventions they are expected to comply with. Interestingly they both descend to the underworld in various ways; for Ofelia, from an ancient labyrinth and ruins of an identified age to magic doors and tree-holes, while Alice reaches Wonderland through a rabbit hole and then again through a mirror (although technically it is not Wonderland as not many familiar characters appear). In all three works authority and power are present and attempt to dictate the female protagonists’ lives, while the fantastic elements in both tales are more than apparent and make the readers wonder if they are a figment of the protagonists’ imaginations. On the other hand it should be taken into consideration that they are written in very different times, with Carroll’s work being a forerunner of modernism, underlining the absurdity of institutions and the need for something fresh and anew, which would not necessarily be burdened with tradition and conformism; Pan’s Labyrinth has
distinct elements of postmodernism. The violence depicted has in some cases no real purpose other than to set an example; in this case along with the setting and the Nazi ideology they all constitute an excellent Gothic device to depict the monstrosities of WWII (and the Spanish fascist regime in particular) and drive Ofelia to escapist realms.

The first chapter is concerned with *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass* and how Alice responds to the authoritarian presences she encounters. I will explain how the language, the surroundings and the depiction of Alice’s adversaries are trademarks of the Gothic mode, and how the latter allows for a reading of the protagonist as a revolutionary child that attempts to disintegrate the autocratic regimes she finds herself, even if she initially persistently attempts to be part of them. The second chapter, regarding *Pan’s Labyrinth*, examines how Ofelia finds herself in a fascist state of exception that operates based on violence and revolts by escaping to another fantastic realm. At the same time, I will also examine her position in relation to the military regime of fascist Spain, her resistance to the imposed conformism and her sacrifice as an act that is ultimately her most efficient resistance and means of escape from the state of exception she finds herself in. The conclusion will bring together the outcomes of the approach I follow in each chapter, and will ultimately examine whether, despite the very large temporal, modal and literacy distance the three works have with each other, the authors ultimately address the same concerns of an era that is certainly Gothic regarding its repression of memory and history.
CHAPTER I.

A VIOLENT, IMPERIAL ALICE AND DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE WE GO!

When the Cheshire Cat tells Alice that it does not matter which way she goes, as she does not know where she will end up, Alice responds “—so long as I GET SOMEWHERE” (65); the ingenious feline responded 'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough” (Carroll 65). The cat’s ambiguity and profound wisdom provide an excellent starting point for a close reading of Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass and the multiple paths this polesemy can potentially lead to. For this chapter I will use Žižek’s notions of subjective and objective violence, as he expresses and defines them in his seminal work Violence, to explain how Alice deals with implicit and explicit actions that are violent and are far more open to interpretation than they seem at first glance. I will discuss British imperialism and how it affected gender politics based on specific examples of Alice’s encounters with several creatures. I will also examine the bizarre incidents that take place in Wonderland and how the protagonist attempts to break away from a set of politics that prevailed at the time. I also use Agamben’s State of Exception and Homo Sacer and Hannah Arendt’s second chapter from On Violence and in specific the distinction she makes between power and violence. This allows me to examine Alice’s relationship with the representatives of power in both works and explain how she encounters a proto-fascist state, where words have changed their meaning and the citizens of Wonderland mindlessly obey whatever caprice their leaders have. The concepts of “homo sacer” and “sovereign” are investigated in the cases of Wonderland prisoners, and especially the case of the Knave of Hearts in the first book and the Mad Hatter (even if he is not directly referenced) in the second book. Alice’s doubts over the process under which their status as accused is established is a stepping stone in exploring a more general concern over the extreme amount of accused people sent to the gallows in Victorian
England and a judicial and societal system in general that was flawed and had very obscene notions of propriety. Finally, I will argue that the greatest acts of defiance Alice undertakes always take place at public gatherings, and in both books end in her being ostracized or even leaving her own Wonderland.

Alice enters Wonderland in two different ways in Carroll’s works, once through the rabbit hole, and the other time through a mirror. In both cases what drives her is her investigative spirit, and her desire to be active and explore the frontiers of logic and desire. Alice’s passage to Wonderland is a textbook Gothic descent into madness. In many stories following the Gothic mode, starting from *Castle of Otranto, The Monk,* or Poe’s short stories, as the protagonist descends into cellars and underground caves he abandons reason and develops maniac tendencies and homicidal desires. Alice taking from that tradition immerses herself into Wonderland and one would expect her to be treated by the narrator as crazy. However, Carroll uses this tradition for his own purposes, and departs from the subjective madness that prevails in the Gothic mode to a whole world where reality is suspended and everything is possible, despite the fact that it seems that some of the stereotypes of Alice’s world still apply.

Alice immediately breaks away from the set of rules present in Victorian stories in regards to following ‘sensible advice.’ As Ann Lawson Lucas observes in “Enquiring Mind, Rebellious Spirit” Alice shows signs of her inquisitive and rebellious character from the very beginning of the story. Alice, as Lucas notes, does not “submissively accept convention even in the reality of the riverbank”, and her journey “into unreality” serves a release from “everyday restraint”; “she is emboldened by strangeness and isolation, so her already individual thought patterns become unconventional, skeptical, and creative” (Lucas 160). The language at one point, when Alice is first called to adjust her size is rather interesting and underlines the sarcasm that is evident
throughout Carroll’s work. It is one of the first examples revealing Alice’s rebellion against moral prescriptions “…for she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them” (Carroll 17). She obviously does not adhere to her own advice and it is only the first of many times she will follow this pattern. Martin Gardner in *The Annotated Alice* notes that those “nice little stories” were in fact “not so nice” (Carroll 17); Carroll did away with morals and abstained from the (usual up to that point) horror scenes and pious proverbs. His choice opened up a “new genre of fiction” (Gardner 17), which essentially brought together the best elements of up to that point popular genres, while trying to eliminate their weaknesses and clichés.

Alice’s entrance into Wonderland in the first book is signified by her desire and need to ‘fit.’ As Gardner notes, Alice changes her size twelve times throughout the first book (17), as the protagonist uses various kinds of food and liquids she obtains or is provided by other characters for that specific purpose. Interestingly, it is the first of the many signs that Alice was attempting to be part of the world she found herself in. On many occasions her size brings her into conflict with the population of Wonderland and expresses an anxiety to be part of their conglomerate. She uses a potion to shrink so as to use the door to Wonderland, only to realize that then she will continuously need to change to fit the expectations of the various challenges she meets. Her change of size and the fact that she always has trouble with other creatures because of it seems to comply with the anxiety McClintock refers to when it comes to the Victorian era and the role of women as the boundary markers of imperialism (24). While the author talks about the feminizing of the land she specifically refers to the strategy of “violent containment” (McClintock 24). In Carroll’s story though, Alice’s containment is quite literal. In this dream-world the younger girl finds
herself, there are very few things that meet her needs. Alice does not fit through doors and houses, she is too small to grab a key and too big to go through it, so tall that a bird mistakes her for a predator and a unicorn ironically calls her a “fabulous monster” (Gardner 229). Alice’s struggle to find the ‘right’ size for Wonderland could be seen quite metaphorically as a literal version of the imperialist notion of containment; a land where anyone with a different set of mind finds him/herself constantly subject to different sets of expectations. The ideal size that Alice should have constantly changes, and as a result of that throughout her adventures in Wonderland she is constantly after an appropriate and universally acceptable size, a ‘perfect’ role that will allow her to ‘fit’ in that world as if she is one of their own, a native. Another example to demonstrate how hostile Wonderland is to Alice is the following; Alice in Carroll’s sequel *Through the Looking Glass* finds herself contained in a train car with other talking animals that initially dismiss her and then proceed to bully her by discussing how inappropriate it was for her to be among them and how she did not belong there and would need to prove her worth by doing some kind of hard labor; in this case pull the train wagons by herself (Carroll 150-151). By the end of both of Carroll’s book Alice fights through a Wonderland that constantly attempts to limit her, mold her into something very specific and ‘normal,’ stripping her of whatever makes her unique. The “male fantasies” McClintock associates with imperialist notions of containment are realized within this dream-world, with Alice struggling to come to terms with the changes that are being imposed on her and the ones she goes through due to her age. For the men in the passenger cart in *Through the Looking Glass* Alice has none of the defining characteristics they share; men dream of a land worth of “a thousand pounds,” and a chorus of male voices even goes as far as dictating her thoughts, advising Alice not to speak at all for it comes at a great (literal) cost (150). Alice in this short scene becomes the stage upon which a group of animals dressed as bourgeois and high-class British aristocrats
fantasize about the cost of lands, time, and setting criteria for the only female presence to join them in their endeavor. But to acquire the status necessary to be a part of their company, she must first overcome comments that attempt to convince them that she doesn’t belong there. She is “going the wrong way”, should be familiar with procedures despite her age, she belongs with “luggage” and unless she performs an impossible feat her place in the wagon of ‘privileged’ passengers is not safe (150-151). The whole sequence concludes just like it started, with an abrupt and abstract change of scenery, as everything around Alice dissolves and she seemingly leaves the nightmarish dream state she finds herself in.

Before the encounter with a bird, one of the first incidents where Alice begins to comprehend the changes she is going through is her encounter with the caterpillar. One of the first things the caterpillar asks her is the most basic question of existentialism; “Who are you” asks the peculiar sleepy hookah-smoking creature and in this question is hidden one of the most important themes of English Gothic; a mode that is to a large degree concerned with “fundamental questions of identity” and connects them with debates over the nation and national subjects of the British Empire (Schmitt 12). Alice’s confusion is expressed brilliantly in her notion that she knew who she was when she woke up this morning, but afterwards she underwent several consecutive transformations (47). She is aware in other words of her origins, but her present and future situation is currently unknown to her. And yet in her act of being very confused, Alice has already started revolting, as her memory, full of didactic poems and advice on proper behavior, serves as a sarcastic distorting mirror. It changes the meanings of anything she has been imposed on that affects her identity. Although it might be tempting to examine the psychoanalytic extensions of the implications of the changes in Alice’s memory, what is particularly of interest here is the political connotations of such changes in memory. The Socratic insistence of the caterpillar in his
discourse with Alice to make her understand the changes she undergoes and redefine herself in Wonderland is probably the best piece of advice she encounters in the two books in terms of how she could somehow preserve parts of her identity.

The reshaping of Alice’s identity and the confusion the protagonist experiences as she tries to recall part of her indoctrination reveals the power of memory and its role in the forming of the child’s personality; memory is central to the formation of Alice’s and societal and political role. Hannah Arendt in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* discussing the secret police of the totalitarian states has a very valid point to make about memory; it is the only thing that stands in the way of a totalitarian state that wants to assert its domination (434). If Wonderland prior to Alice’s visit is a state where memory has been bleached, and the royalty that rules it does not really face any kind of opposition from anyone, it would be an ideal proto-fascist state. Under that interpretation, the caterpillar is her greatest ally, as his interrogative nature will teach Alice a lesson on how to treat her encounters with the creatures of Wonderland throughout her adventures.

The other creature that Alice meets and somehow trains her to be rebellious and resistant to the pacifying and “normative” effects of Wonderland is the very famous Cheshire Cat, with its vanishing properties and the proverbial smile. As in the incident described in the beginning of the chapter indicates, the cat has a better understanding of the rules of Wonderland than Alice at that point, and blatantly admits what Alice has been suspecting all along, “We’re all mad here” (66). It seems then that in the state of Wonderland, it is madness that rules. A madness that is fundamentally connected to a regime that is absurd in its structure and a world that mindlessly follows it. The Cheshire is a revolutionary figure as it appears and disappears on its own accord, and in the case of its execution (which will be discussed later) strips the insanity of Wonderland and its rulers to their bare bones.
Of the encounters with the various creatures of Wonderland in both books, one that stands out and justifies the reading of Wonderland as a proto-fascist place, resembling somehow the mid-Victorian England is Alice’s encounter with Humpty Dumpty. The discussion debating semantics and pragmatics in terms of the use of words and the meaning we attribute to them serves to show one of the fundamentals of a totalitarian state. The arbitrariness of the meaning of words, serves in this discussion as an expressed concern over what meaning a word acquires over time. Humpty Dumpty argues at some point that when he uses a specific word, it acquires the meaning he chooses himself, “neither more nor less” (Carroll 213). Words have always been a subject of broad interpretation, and the example of a totalitarian state where meanings have been bleached by autocratic authorities is Orwell’s *1984*. In that novel, Newspeak, which is the language the totalitarian regime has been introduced to the public to restraint any kind of abstract thought and any heretic ideas outside the principles of IngSoc (the party that is in power in the dystopic version of England). The dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty at that point is illuminating and reveals an anxiety that repeats itself in literature of the 20th pre- and post-WWII literary history in terms of power play and language.

‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’

‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’

‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master—that's all.’

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. ‘They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they're the
proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot of them!’ (Carroll 213)

Totalitarian states need to erase memory to create their own version of history and control through that their citizens and their actions. In Carroll’s nonsensical books, the talking animals do things their own way, and what Alice usually says means something else to them.

It could then be argued therefore, after taking into consideration the Humpty Dumpty assertion that the egg-shaped character chooses himself the meaning for his words, that a more general concern over the evolution of language at the time is apparent into Carroll’s tales. The difficulty that Humpty Dumpty traces in his mastering the verb forms and adjusting them to his own needs can be explained by Eliza Kitis in her article “Emotions as Discursive Constructs”. While examining the emotion predicates, she reaches a very interesting conclusion as to why verbs seem a great puzzle to the big talking egg.

I submit that the resemanticization of the predicates is motivated by the human unconscious urge to blend the objective with the subjective experience (cf. Nagel’s notorious question: ‘What is it like to be a bat?’). Subjective feelings relate to mental states like fear, pain, etc., while objective experience relates to perceptions of the world. We don’t have a clue how a bat feels or senses the surrounding world, but we do when it comes to understanding and interpreting perceptions of outer external behaviors of similar creatures (other humans) because we can extrapolate from subjective experience. This is how we merge objective and subjective experience in understanding the surrounding world. (Kitis 159)

It is experience then and the sensory perception of the events around us that allow us to change the meaning of word and nouns. Gardner argues at this point in the story that Carroll expressed through
his writings an anxiety that was connected with the degeneration of the English language because of the “unmeaning sounds so far as speaker and hearer are concerned” used by some of the lower classes, to the horror of those belonging in higher social ones (213). In such regulated states as in Wonderland however, the senses are not to be trusted, as we clearly see that memories are altered, toddlers are being turned into pigs, animals talk and of course humans (and humanoids) change sizes at random points in the story. The uncanny transitions, indicative of the Gothic elements Carroll uses in his story, are only exacerbated by the hubris of Humpty Dumpty, who thinks that if he ever falls, someone will pick him up because of a traditional nursery rhyme he takes literally. Alice is not able to overthrow his (il)logical sequence of arguments, but does call him the most unsatisfactory person she ever met (Carroll 220). His actual fall right after her departure with a “heavy crash that shook the forest from end to end” at the end of the chapter is a violent incident, one of the many that are presented or even subtly hinted in both Carroll’s books (Carroll 220). Strangely it is the only death that is allured to place in real time in the course of the narrative of the two books. Carroll creates a mirror image of the Victorian society, where formalism and the dogmatic insistence to social structure and the institution of monarchy as protectors of Englishness prevail over logic. Alice in her dialogue with Humpty Dumpty contests a social and political structure that is inherently violent towards anyone who attempts to contest it or criticize it. The absurdity of this egg-like creature and the degeneration of language that Carroll seemed to worry about are precursors of phenomena quite common in the fascist states of the 20th century. The concern over the degeneration of language and the attempt to redefine words to include the messenger’s intentions along with an adhesion to formality and the desire to control memory and language are alliterations of a Victorian England that had started to feel the consequences of its
imperial politics and would blame the ‘degenerative’ lower classes for any disruptions of the desired normativity.

Alice’s encounters with the creatures of Wonderland (as described above) serve to indicate how the young protagonist’s character changes. The protagonist goes through a process that prepares her to react and rebel when she encounters power and violence in her travels throughout Wonderland. The latter I propose to be classified as a version of a state of exception. In Giorgio Agamben’s work *State of Exception* the philosopher examines the homonymous concept as a permanent state of emergency, which is one of the essential practices of contemporary states (2). If one is to consider Wonderland as a totalitarian proto-fascist state that adheres to Agamben’s idea, then we can see how the (theoretical) conflict in *Through the Looking Glass* between the White and the Red Queen serves to situate the definition the Italian thinker provides in his work. The establishment that according to Agamben is, “by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries, but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (2). The peculiarity of a land that has two kings and two queens, a large chessboard that has no visible winners and losers, dangerous creatures lurking in the woods and armies preparing for a war that does not actually take place at any point in the book. The only time we see an army at work is at the end of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, where it attacks the protagonist after the latter insulted the Queen of Hearts. The legal “civil war” Agamben mentions is embodied in Carroll’s books in the conflict that takes place among the Queen and its subjects in the first book. No one dares to contest the authority’s desires but for a cat and a crazy hat maker with close relations to Time itself; in the second book as Alice wanders through the giant chessboard, she hears of battles and narrations about them but never really experiences any. She only meets characters ready for
battle that never really clash. A permanent state of emergency that makes no sense, but is most certainly convenient for the establishment, as it allows it to continue its power play and jail whomever they want for no apparent reason, as it happens again in the case of the Hatta, who is none other than the Mad Hatter.5

The permanent state of emergency that Wonderland seems to be in eliminates any kind of resistance. Alice seems to quickly understand that, as she comes to meet the royalty of the land and its despotic characters, who are the only ones that somehow resemble humans in their looks. The royal couple and their court are the closest links to her reality, and consequently those resembling the adults she needs to revolt against. Wonderland in both of Carroll’s tales is a state where there is no law other than what the king(s) and queen(s) proclaim to be as such. In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* the whole plot is structured around a trial that seems to be of utmost importance to the whole realm. A realm where a character is wanted because he was “murdering time” (Carroll 74). Everyone in Carroll’s first installment of Alice’s adventures is rushing towards the trial, as the latter seems the raison d'être of the whole story, the event that somehow justifies the passivity with which everyone obeys the Queen’s absurd commands and death sentences (even though they are not realized as the King of Hearts admits). In the sequel *Through the Looking Glass* the state of exception matches Agamben’s assertions in a much clearer manner, as Wonderland is at war, and thus all the subjects on both sides are participating in their own way in it. We see armies marching, nonsensical imprisonments and forests with unspoken threats and a world where the threat of war is but a device to suspend any kind of control towards the exercise of power and a means for the pawns in power keep their people under control. The fact that by the end of the story both sides feast on the same table shows that Wonderland’s power play is nonsensical; Wonderland’s “state of exception” could thus be very similar to the “enemy within”
that degeneration theories of the Victorian era argued that prevailed in the society of the time, attributing the ‘misery’ of the lower classes to the ‘natural’ social Darwinism. Both Victorian England then and its counterpart Wonderland manufacture their own enemies from within to avoid criticism towards their institutions and justify the arbitrary exercise of power by the aristocrats and royalty.

In describing the power play and structure of Wonderland, it is also necessary to introduce the distinction Hannah Arendt makes between power and violence; I aim to demonstrate with those two terms in the analysis of the encounters Alice has with representatives of the Wonderland’s regime her true extent of revolt. Arendt in her work *On Violence* defines in a very clear manner what power and violence are, as well as how different states are that facilitate each of the two. One of her earlier assertions is that the power of the government depends upon the numbers that it is associated with, and therefore tyranny is the most violent and the least powerful form of government (41). One of the very important distinctions between power and violence is that power is in need of numbers, while violence relies on “implements” (42). Arendt elaborates on power and argues that the term describes a collective attempt, hence when the group disappears so does its “power” (44). What we mean, she says, when we say “powerful man” etc. is actually the term “strength”, which “designates something singular” (44). Violence on the other hand is distinguished “by its instrumental character” (46). The Queen of Hearts in the first book reasserts her authority only through violence; she awards death sentences for no apparent reason. Her tyranny is based on the executive orders she is giving, but it would be wrong to judge her effect based on the ineffectuality of the death sentences. Once Alice contests the absurdity of the process at the court of law, the Queen’s soldiers attack her with no hesitation. This is the only case of rebellion in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and the way the army of deck cards reacts to it is
indicative of a model of governance that is as authoritative and autocratic as England was with its colonies in the Victorian Era.

This instrumental character in the case of Wonderland is realized in various ways and at many different scenes in two books, especially towards the final chapters of Carroll’s works. To better understand the portrayal of violence, and the different kinds Alice faces, Žižek’s distinctions in his introduction of *Violence* are very useful in understanding what exactly Alice revolts at in each case. Žižek argues that violence is not one unified construct, but on the contrary is much more complex than we assume it to be. He finds it to consist of three distinguishable subcategories, those of subjective violence, and two objective ones, the symbolic and objective. Subjective violence which usually fascinates the observers is the one “enacted by social agents, evil individuals’ disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds” (11). These crowds will appear in the discussion of the trial scene, and they drive Alice over the edge with the seeming chaos they cause in the juridical procedure. The objective violence’s symbolic subcategory has to do with “language and forms” (Žižek 1), and that has to do first and foremost with the nonsense that Alice has to deal with in terms of her dialogues with the queens and kings she encounters, as well as the Duchess. Systemic violence is a result of the “catastrophic consequences” of the “smooth functioning” of the “economic and political system” (Žižek 2). These necessary concepts defined here will be applied now in cases of the queens and kings who represent the ‘system’ of ‘power’ that governs Wonderland in both books. I also aim to point out how executive decisions are being parodied by Carroll to demonstrate the weaknesses of Wonderland’s governance and its proto-fascist characters, as the latter are examined below.

Žižek’s and Arendt’s definitions and commentary of violence is of particular relevance in explaining how Alice responds to the various forms of oppression she suffers from despotic
characters in Wonderland. The first almost-royal character Alice meets is the Duchess, who resides in a house that Alice needs to enter herself, scratching to pieces the societal normativity. As Megan Lloyd very accurately notes in “Unruly Alice,” Alice realizes that in that world she can do anything she likes (10). She breaks away from the female-mother Victorian model, the submissive woman who must conform to traditional modes of expression and action to act her genre and is thus very successful in getting things done (Lloyd 11). In the kitchen of that house, Alice meets with the first representative of power, and –not surprisingly, it is a rather violent one. The Duchess is exactly the opposite of what Alice is becoming: she has no thirst for knowledge, is exceedingly violent with both the pig baby and Alice, and appears to be a completely traditional Victorian character, slave to the gender conventions of her time. Alice is faced with subjective violent actions such as verbal threats (“[C]hop off her head” (62)) and is also almost forced to enter a mode of living that she absolutely does not want to. When the Duchess abandons her baby to her, Alice feels uneasy with leaving it at that household, where a raging battle takes place between the cook and the Duchess, and thus takes the baby with her. However, the fact that she does not feel any motherly affection for it, not suffering from “‘cute baby syndrome’” (Lloyd 14) and does not seem to consider motherhood as “worth” makes Alice a true revolutionary against the Victorian model female (Lloyd 14). The degeneration of the baby into a pig and ugliness that Tenniel pictures her could be argued to depict once more the anxiety of the degeneration of the working classes, with their bestial characteristics, a “physically degenerate race” as Engels calls it (qtd. in McClintock 43). When Alice meets the Duchess again at the Queen of Hearts’ croquet ground, she is much like a nurse, full of proverbs and contradictions and set at the task of ‘educating’ Alice that “everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it” (Carroll 91). This statement would be really useful if not for the true purpose of the Duchess, which was none other than normalizing Alice.
Her last statement in the dialogue, right before she runs away scared at the sight of the Queen of Hearts, is that in response to Alice’s defiant comment “I have a right to think” (93); “Just about as much right…as pigs have to fly” says the traditional and conservative Duchess, and in her words echo a principle of a totalitarian proto-fascist state (93). The message is clear, and could not be said more directly; thinking out of the box is prohibited, and yet the young age of Alice and her lack of experience does not prohibit her from blatantly ignoring that advice. It is then at this point apparent that the limits of Wonderland are found. Wonderland is the place where everything Alice imagines can come true, but actually does not; it is regulated by those in power in ways that are clearly fascist. Thinking is prohibited, words change their meaning, and even flowers scold her for “not thinking at all” and calling her the most stupid person they’ve encountered (Carroll 159). Her thinking makes her an outcast, and she clearly is the Other in this world.

When Alice encounters the queens and kings themselves, that Otherness deriving from her sovereignty becomes even more apparent and threatening to the royalty of Wonderland. All three queens she encounters are violent in their way, and interestingly their violence is differently expressed in each case. Alice does not meet the Queen of Hearts until “The Queen’s Croquet-Ground”, after she has mastered her changes in size and manages to go through the door she initially had found herself in front of (Carroll 78). She is immediately dumbfounded by the soldiers that paint some white roses red to correct their mistake that might result in their beheading, soon after confessing that this would be the most probable consequence of their mistake. Their case is hopeless, but the way they are described by Carroll, with a very similar look to each other and exactly like deck cards, so when they bow they cannot be distinguished from one another and lose any individual character they have. This description is somehow comical, and at the same time serves to show the importance of the military in totalitarian regimes. As Michel Foucault notes in
Discipline and Punish, a soldier should be able to be distinguishable from afar, due to the certain signs he bore, namely his physique and the uniform (135). This is also the case here, as all the queen’s servants are the same, with their only signifiers the clubs they are carrying, indicating their role in the king’s and queen’s court (Carroll 81). The soldiers are “docile bodies” (138), eager to obey those in power, even though their effectiveness is quite debatable. The plasticity of their movements, as they become ornaments for the croquet game, along with their collective action against Alice in the trial scene shows how they are moving in accordance to what Foucault calls regarding troops “a sort of machine with many parts, moving in relation to one another, in order to arrive at a configuration and to obtain a specific result” (Carroll 162). This result is in the first case their beheading, a task that is undertaken by another set of soldiers, but is never accomplished as Alice hides the condemned trio. When the Queen of Hearts asks the executioners if they succeeded in their task, they respond positively, proving both their inefficiency as a “machine” in Foucauldian terms as well as the absence of power the queen has over her subjects. Their comical characteristics and the fact that Alice very easily tricks them somehow undoes the totalitarian state from within, showing its fragility. The same applies in Through the Looking Glass as well, where the troops are portrayed as “uncertain on their feet”, “always tripping over something or other” which at some point resulted in “the ground… with little heaps of men” (Carrol 221), another example of how the troops in these two books are nothing but deformed ornaments of completely incompetent but totalitarian regimes.

The Queen of Hearts is not a person that holds power in Wonderland, and neither are the Red or the White Queen with their respective kings. They are not thrifty in their use of violence, but in all cases Alice serves an agent of revolt, with the help of the most abstract creatures one can find in the books. The theme of beheadings could be Carroll’s nod to the English justice system,
which to a great extent had very unjust punishments for criminals of all sorts. In mid-Victorian England executions (mainly by hanging) were a very popular public spectacle, even though they had become quite less often by the time Carroll wrote his books. The crowds attending those executions are described by S. Ledger in *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination* as “concerned with spectacle and sensation rather than with justice” (59). That assumption was usually confirmed by the judges, who in most cases found the defendants guilty, even if the proof said otherwise in order to satisfy the common feeling or worse, because they had no interest in finding the actual criminals, just scapegoats. To justify the latter assumption, Ledger based on William Hone’s account mentions the case of Elizabeth Fenning, the execution of which the latter witnessed; that girl was a maid in an aristocratic house and was accused and convicted of poisoning her employers with arsenic, even though the food that was poisoned did not kill anyone and it got her violently sick as well, a fact that, according to the writer, proved that she did not commit the crime and that there was no real evidence to sentence her (39). That case influenced the cultural imagination of England for many years to come. Later, when Dickens came across the case was very strict against the “Government” of the time which “would have hanged anyone” (41). The fondness that the Queen of Hearts has for the capital punishment can be explained as a comical representation of a larger debate over the gallows, and the bibliography on the debate at the time is quite interesting⁶. Alice clearly takes a side in this conflict, in the process effectively becoming a very active political figure in both the dreamy Wonderland and the very real Victorian England⁷.

The importance of Alice as a political figure in Wonderland is underlined by the disregard she shows at the end of the first book, when she openly mocks both the Queen and the King of Hearts for their decisions and abuse of power. Hannah Arendt brilliantly notes that authority is undermined by laughter (70), and this is apparent in two cases. In the first example the Cheshire
Cat reveals the weaknesses of the system of justice and governance and in the second Alice ends a farcical trial in the most commanding way possible. In the case of the first, after having made only its head visible to discuss with Alice how unbearable the Queen of Hearts was, the cat does not pay its customary respects to the king, and the latter demands from his wife to execute the cat, a sentence that is gladly awarded, but not really delivered. The problem of how to behead a head without a body is equally absurd to the reasoning of the sentence. The impossibility of the task, is an incident that would make a reader laugh, and the fact that the Cheshire cat is always smiling creates a picture of defiance towards the authority of the royal couple, and underlines how void of real power her terror politics are.

The trial scene and all references to the violence described above are reminiscent of the atmosphere described in terms of the systemic violence the queens’ subjects undergo. The fervor with which the Queen of Hearts wants the Knave of Hearts executed without any real evidence, with misinterpretation when it comes to the witnesses’ testimonial, is only illuminating about the situation in Victorian England. It also confirms the notion that Wonderland is a proto-fascist state, where scapegoats are always to be found for any incidents that could harm the ‘face’ of the regime. Alice, having completed the first journey in Wonderland, is now ready to fully claim her agency in that fantastic land and does so as loudly as possible. She grows in size, rising both literally and figuratively over the farcical procedure, while even before that she criticizes the procedure and the arbitrary interpretation of nonsensical evidence (Carroll 118-125). By shutting down the whole procedure, and more than once undoing the Queen of Hearts’ authority, Alice does not gain power as Arendt defines it, as she is not supported by anyone. She regains her real size and immediately claims authority; Alice can finally have a perspective of the situation and realize how absurd the whole experience with power was. She then shuts down the final threat of the Queen of Hearts and
acts as a true Gothic revolutionary that has enough of the totalitarian rulers of Wonderland and disturbs the status quo.

‘No, no!’ said the Queen. ‘Sentence first – verdict afterwards.’

‘Stuff and nonsense!’ said Alice loudly. ‘The idea of having the sentence first’

‘Hold your tongue!’ said the Queen, turning purple.

‘I won’t’ said Alice.

‘Off with her head’ the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

‘Who cares for you’ said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time).

“You’re nothing but a pack of cards!” (Carroll 124)

The latter comment directly defies the identity of the instruments of the Queen of Heart’s violence is what motivates the deck-soldiers to exhibit for the first time their efficiency as a battalion, as they attack Alice in an attempt to prove their royalty to their queen and also confirm their instrumental role. It is interesting that their reaction comes as a direct consequence of Alice’s contest of the whole structure of power and the identity of its members. As Lloyd very accurately notices, her physical growth “mirrors her social, psychological and emotional development” (16). She is a “fully realized young woman who is ready to challenge anyone, especially those who obfuscate the truth” (16). The Gothic mode of contesting the norm is applied to a maximum degree, as Alice overthrows in a sense the authority in the middle of the trial. Her actions trigger an immediate attack by the card soldiers whose essence she has doubted, and as a consequence of her defiance is transported back to reality. It is reality that sets her free (Lloyd 16), and it is also against reality that she is now more equipped to resist, as we see in the comparison to her traditional and conformist sister.
Alice’s encounter with the Red and White Queen along with the kings in *Through The Looking Glass* brings the protagonist into contact with more subtle and yet striking examples of the totalitarian regime she finds herself in. Starting from the more subtle one, the White Queen treats time in a very interesting manner, as she experiences the aftermath of events before they happen. A simple example of that would be that she feels the pain of being pricked by a thorn before she actually experiences that (Carroll 198). However the next example is quite indicative of “how things work here” as Carroll remarks, as we learn that a messenger, the Hatta is in jail for a crime he hasn’t committed yet (198). Alice clearly doubts that thinking process, the punishment of a person for a crime that might commit, resembling somehow the thought crimes of *1984*. Hatta even appears to have suffered during his imprisonment, as he continuously refuses to provide any information regarding his sentence, and his only reaction was “a tear or two…but not a word would he say” (227). The reader might remember that the Hatter was accused in the first book of murdering time, and this could be one explanation about his sentence, as Gardner also notes (197).

Could it be then that the murder of time would undo the perception the White Queen had of time, and thus disturb her position in Wonderland?

This kind of systemic violence described above seems absurd to Alice, but her concerns about the nature and the manner of the punishment are being brushed aside by the queen; she argues that preemptive punishment is for the best (Carroll 197), resembling somehow the random arrests by the secret police in totalitarian states. Fear is then the mode of government according to the White Queen, along with the control of how one thinks. The subtle but firm line “I’ll give you something to believe” along with the notion that one needs “practice” to believe impossible things are in effect a ruler’s advice to his subjects that whatever (s)he says is the case, so long as the subjects are willing to adhere to it (Carroll 199). Once more the systemic violence is tangled with
its symbolic half, as thoughts, words and actual actions are all presented as a pedagogical process in creating the ideal citizen for a state that needs citizens-pawns. The White Queen dictates what her subjects should believe, exercising a subtle form of systemic violence that derives from her status; the verbal orders and the careful choice of words she uses each time are nothing less than a perfect example of Wonderland’s symbolic violence. The chessboard that Wonderland resembles in *Through the Looking Glass* requires from its pawns a very specific behavior, and this is made abundantly clear in the case of the Red Queen.

Alice meets with the Red Queen right after she has been insulted multiple times by talking flowers, and it is probably the most implicitly violent incident one can find in Carroll’s books. The Red Queen as Adrienne Munich argues in *Queen Victoria’s Secrets* lives in a realm that takes arbitrary rules for granted (194). Her “ultimate destructiveness, just like the White Queen is comprised by the absence of rationality she exhibits (Lloyd 195), but that is not the most threatening thing about her manners. The White Queen is from the very first moment demanding Alice to respect her, and attempts to control the young protagonist’s body and thinking process so as to make the child conform, and ultimately become the White Queen’s “pawn” (Carroll 164). This aim is realized through a continuous mix of orders and advice, and Alice is “too much in awe of the Queen” (Carroll 161) to disbelieve anything of what is served to her as prerequisites to become a queen herself. Her curtseying and address to the Red Queen as “Your Majesty” is an attempt to fit into the norm she is dictated to. The violence that the Queen uses to impose herself on Alice is both subjective and objective. She is using both systemic and symbolic violence in the language and gestures she requires from Alice so as the latter to properly address her. A subjective, and thus almost invisible violent movement is her gesture to offer a cookie to Alice when the latter complains to be thirsty (Carroll 165). The Red Queen’s confidence that this will resolve Alice’s
desire and the actual (and obvious) failure to function as such is only indicative of the attitude of yet another of Wonderland’s representatives of state, one that thinks that she knows better than her subjects what is best for the latter. Ironically, in the first chapters Alice uses quite similar advice while nurturing her cat, whom she calls the “Red Queen” (Carroll 141). The circle is then complete when she becomes the subject of such Victorian nurturing. Or is it?

As much as Alice seems to respect the Red Queen, she does not quite adhere to everything she is asked to do. Or at least she does until right after the coronation ceremony, when she once more revolts against the representatives of power, who much like the trial scene in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland are all gathered in a certain place and witness her defiant actions and the undoing of the totalitarian State she finds herself in. What is common in both scenes of Alice’s rebellious statements of sovereignty, is a narrative choice by the author that is quite new in the genre. Carroll’s innovation, which is also to be observed in Carlo Collodi’s Pinocchio is that they allowed “the protagonists of their masterpieces to be independent of adult control, and thus be free to offer a challenge to received wisdom and to behave and speak in ways opposed to the contemporary norms of literature and life” (Lucas 159). Alice is the thus the agent of revolt in Wonderland, but she is very much alone in her statements of defiance of the totalitarian regimes. As evidenced by the trial scene as well as its coronation counterpart at the end of the second book, there is no desire by any of the inhabitants to overthrow their rulers. Not only that, but a careful reader will notice that those in power have created an external threat everyone must unite against. These hints of an enemy that threatens their way of life, but is nowhere to be seen are obvious in the second of Carroll’s books, and it somehow escapes the conflict between the red and white pawn chess conflict. There are several references to hideous monsters such as the Jabberwocky
and Bandersnatch, but we never meet any, and it is not clear if they exist in popular myths designed to scare Wonderland’s inhabitants.

Alice is clearly not afraid to overthrow the status quo in *Through the Looking Glass*, and that does not happen until she becomes a queen herself. During the tea party she has enough of the nonsense that takes place, and while making a last attempt to fit, she understands that such thing would be impossible. Her being squeezed by the two queens while attempting to make a speech (264), while a little before she took part in a nonsensical coronation examination, was what drove her over the edge. “‘I can't stand this any longer!’ she cried as she jumped up and seized the tablecloth with both hands: one good pull, and plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor” (Carroll 266). Her bringing down of the whole table with the dinner, the cutleries and the guests along with the arrest of the Red Queen that turns into her kitten is the epilogue in yet another adventure that end up in Alice disturbing the power balance of Wonderland. Once more, right after realizing how nonsensical the formalities and the authority of the royalty was, “the truth sets her free and wakens her into reality once again” (Lloyd 16). It would be worth noting that a few moments before waking up in the real world, the two queens have changed their size and have become significantly smaller than Alice. And much like *The Castle of Otranto*, where giant pieces of armor and statues fall out of the sky or are discovered in the forest, her actual size is a determining factor in bringing down the mode of government of Wonderland. This seven-and-a-half year old’s thinking process, which makes her a giant in comparison to the caricature of the Victorian society and imperial state, shows how fragile such regimes are. Most of all, it shows that the greatest threat to any proto-fascist states are none other than those that consider all the regimes want to be taken for granted as debatable; those and are not afraid to call nonsensical whatever seems to be as such, despite any propaganda arguing for
the opposite. A child undoes twice the totalitarian regimes of Wonderland, and is by the end of the stories mentally equipped to live a non-conformist life outside fairy tale worlds. The two stories of Lewis Carroll featuring Alice ultimately are a manual for political defiance, much more revolutionary than they seem to be.
CHAPTER II.

PAN’S LABYRINTH, FAIRY TALES AND THE ABSURDITY OF FASCISM

Guillermo Del Toro, as Robert J. Miles quotes him in his article “Reclaiming Revelation,” considered his preparedness to expose the horror in the fantasy as his “special touch” (200). Pan’s Labyrinth (2006), set in 1944 near the end of the Spanish Civil War and a year away from the end of WWII is described as a “drama, fantasy, war” film. However, the fairy tale elements of the story, the similarities it shares with Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass along with the historical context of the story leave ample room for all kinds of interpretations. By examining the Gothic motifs in Del Toro’s film and the manifestation of the fascist regime created by the director, I intend to argue in this chapter that Ofelia becomes a modern Gothic heroine; a sovereign political figure that opposes the (violent) passage to adulthood and at the same time becomes a symbol of resistance against both political and social nurturing that adults attempt to impose on her.

A fairly accurate synopsis of the film would be the following: “In the falangist Spain of 1944, the bookish young stepdaughter of a sadistic army officer escapes into an eerie but captivating fantasy world.” However, one of the main themes of the film is ‘hidden’ within the first minutes as Carmen, the mother of the young protagonist named Ofelia, asks her daughter to call her (fascist military officer named Vidal) stepfather “father.” “It’s just a word, Ofelia, just a word” says her mother. This seemingly innocent suggestion is one of the many instances in this film where adults attempt to impose rules of ‘proper behavior’ to Ofelia, and shape her behavior and social skills according to their expectations.

In the words of Guillermo Del Toro from the British Film Institute’s companion to the movie, “Pan’s a game of interpretation where the reward for repeated viewings is not the addition, but the multiplication of meanings” (qtd. in Dopido 24). One of the first things a viewer will notice
as the movie narrative commences is that the director purposely confuses the fairy tale settings with the actual ruins of a Spanish town ravaged by the war. These ruins belong to the old town of Belchite Zaragoza, in Aragón, Spain, which was destroyed during the Civil War and never rebuilt (movie-locations.com). However judging by the small talk of the women working in the kitchen, as Dopido informs us, we learn that the setting of the movie is supposed to be the rural Galicia. The latter is not only one of the earliest inhabited places in Spain, but also has a rich tradition that “regards the forests of the north of Spain as spaces inhabited by ‘hidden’ creatures” be those the rebels (the well-known *maquis*) or mystical creatures like fauns and fairies (Dopido 27). The main action takes place at an old mill outside the destroyed town and the forest that surrounds it. The stage is set and it is quite eerie; the color palette the director chooses for the film consists mainly of dark shades of all colors, while most scenes occur either at night or late afternoons and evenings.

The setting in the Gothic mode is of major importance to the plot, as it more than often advances or hinders the scenario. In the case of *Pan’s Labyrinth* it can be regarded as one of the main film techniques, as the viewer cannot until the very end of the movie distinguish between the real and the fantastic, as well as if what they see is filtered through a certain character’s perspective. However, a very important background element that needs to be examined prior to Ofelia’s interactions with her Gothic surroundings is the context the young girl finds herself in. Del Toro’s film, rich in symbolist elements, is set in 1944, towards the end of WWII and long after the Republican rebels lost the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Fascism according to Allan Todd’s *The European Dictatorships* has been quite difficult to define as he demonstrates by presenting S. Payne’s “clear definition” (7). However for the purpose of this chapter I will present the definition below, as it provides a very comprehensive platform to expand on how Ofelia experiences the effects of this ideology in Del Toro’s film.
S. Payne defines fascism as:

a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism for national rebirth that is based on a
primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilisation
and the Führerprinzip [leadership principle], positively values violence as an end
as well as a means and tends to normalize war and/or the military virtues. (qtd. in
Todd 7)

This classification finds its practice in the main plot devices the movie uses, such as the pregnancy
of Ofelia’s mother with Vidal’s son, and Vidal’s obsession with hysterophemy. Adding to the
definition above I offer Emilio Gentile’s elaborations, as he argues in “Fascism, Totalitarianism
and Political Religion” that fascism is an ideology based on myth; “virile and anti-hedonistic,”
practically “sacralised” in a political religion approving the “absolute primacy of the nation” (35).
The latter is to be understood as an ethnically homogeneous organic community, hierarchically
organized into a “corporative State,” with a “bellicose” mission to achieve “grandeur, power and
conquest” with the ultimate aim of creating a new order and a new civilization (Gentile 35). Del
Toro’s choice to have his protagonist entangle herself in a mythical plotline that is parallel to the
perilous and depressing reality she lives can be explained in terms of a counter-narrative or even
a defense mechanism of the girl’s unconscious. Its sole purpose is in fact to protect her from being
traumatized from the horrors she encounters and the oppressive upbringing she is subjected to.

Hannah Arendt’s commentary on fascism and totalitarianism will also help understand the
depiction of the regime in Pan’s Labyrinth as part of the setting of the film. The Spanish soldiers
and especially their leader (Captain Vidal) and his executive decisions seem to be a mixture of
what the theorist describes as major differences between fascism and totalitarianism. Regarding
the first, she argues that its “true goal” was “only to seize power and establish the Fascist ‘elite’ as
an uncontested ruler over the country” (325). Based on the fact that in this film we see as collaborators of the military the church, the local authorities and various other representatives of institutions, Del Toro seems to follow Arendt’s comment on fascism. However, the comment the theorist makes on the power of totalitarianism and its aspiration to be “never content to rule by external means, namely, through the state and a machinery of violence; thanks to its peculiar ideology and the role assigned to it in this apparatus of coercion, totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within” applies in the case of Vidal’s obsession with lineage and heritage (325). His dream for a “pure” Spain free of revolutionaries and any kind of dissidents reveals that the Spanish regime in the movie is depicted as a mixture of fascism and totalitarianism, taking the most dangerous and repulsive aspects of both to assert control over its subjects.

The Gothic mode in *Pan’s Labyrinth* functions through the appearance of multiple common themes that Del Toro applies to his movie. The eeriness of the setting and the rich history and mystification that surrounds it, along with the disbelief everyone exhibits towards the supernatural and the subjective point of view Del Toro has chosen, create the perfect cinematic setting for the Gothic to flourish and function as a language of rebellion against the various shades of oppression that make their presence felt throughout the film. As Milbank argues the “explained supernatural” (157) has perplexed critics, especially when it comes to works that are either written or have female protagonists. While the subjective view of Ofelia will be further discussed later on, it is evident in the first scene of the movie that Ofelia’s mother deeply disapproves fairy tales. In the course of the film in fact she repeatedly attempts to shut down her daughter’s fantastical endeavors. “You’re a bit too old to be filling your head with such nonsense” says Carmen to her daughter, and ironically it is that nonsense that comes to life in front of Ofelia’s eyes a few seconds
later. In a highly symbolic scene, Ofelia replaces the eye in an ancient statue, and that in turn releases a praying mantis that will follow Ofelia till the very end of the movie and would stand for all the fantastic elements of the movie.

Ofelia’s character in Del Toro’s film has many similarities with Alice from Carroll’s works in terms of both their appearance as well as the nature of adventures and hardships they endure in the fantastic worlds they merge themselves into. Kim Edwards in “Alice’s Little Sister: Exploring Pan’s Labyrinth” notices the similarities of Ofelia and Alice’s worlds as well as the protagonists’ appearance (Fig. 1.1-1.2) along with characters that seem to have the same fixations with certain objects. Vidal and his watch look like a distorted version of the White Rabbit (Edwards 142), while the Mad Hatter and his tea party are re-imagined as the Pale man’s festive dinner. What essentially sets the two stories apart, other than the obvious Gothic tone that the film has, is that the enemy in Pan’s Labyrinth is quite visible with a distinct institutional-systemic character. While for Alice Wonderland has significant similarities with her own world, with animals acquiring human characteristics and the royalty looking like caricatures of their real life counterparts, Ofelia encounters mythical creatures deriving from ancient Greek and European mythology and is addressed as royalty of a lost kingdom that needs to be reinstated.
Ofelia becomes a rebellious figure in terms of both her appearance as well as her behavior. Her first encounter with her stepfather is marked by a stark suggestion by the captain regarding the proper way to greet him; the captain from the very first acquaintance with Ofelia does not hesitate to physically discipline her. The dress that makes Ofelia similar to the animated version of Alice is provided by her mother to make her daughter ‘presentable’ for Captain Vidal’s dinner. The Francoist captain shows from the very start his fixations with order as he violently grabs the extended left hand of the young girl that was hesitantly attempting to greet him, noting that “It is the other one” (*Pan’s Labyrinth*) As any other Gothic tale, regardless of the mode it manifests itself, Ofelia’s adversary is realized in the face of her stepfather. He is (seemingly) in complete control of the cottage, and he finds himself there with the sole purpose of eradicating the rebels that hide in the forests around it.

Using Giorgio Agamben’s terminology from *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, Vidal has established at the mill, where Ofelia, her mother and various soldiers and local help reside, a sovereign sphere with him as the ultimate sovereign. If bare life and political existence are the two
complementaries of Western metaphysics as Agamben argues in Homo Sacer (8), then all people at the mill as well as the nearby village are homines sacri, whose bare life can be taken away with little to no legal consequence for the person that took it. For Vidal the old farmer and his son’s life are of no value to him; he executes them coldly after brutally torturing them and extracting the information he wanted. Jacqueline Ford in “Cover Your Eyes and Count to a Hundred” uses similar terminology to describe the power structure at the mill. Vidal, as she notes, is “order”, the fascist regime is also “order”, but the fascist world is “about reduction”; it is “bare life” (394). Life is “locked away in the store-room to be doled out to the chant of ‘This is the daily bread in Franco’s Spain,’” along with medical provisions and the torture chamber; ironically all occupy the same cellar (Ford 394). The fairy world that Ofelia escapes from time to time, like the world of the Republican resistance, is in opposition to this. From time to time however, in this clash of the three worlds, the notorious Gothic trope concerning the return of the repressed has a prominent role.

As Ford argues quite to the point, the political and the marvelous were according to the surrealists inextricable; the marvelous in accordance to Todorov’s classification is a neighboring domain to the uncanny (384). These genres are all present in the hybrid work of Del Toro, with multiple characters attempting to overthrow one way or another the fascist regime, or even align with it. Consequently, it is worth noticing that the “repressed” identity can be claimed by many groups in this film, with the latter being in more than one case contradictory to each other. The mythical proportions of Del Toro’s film allow first of all for an interpretation of fascism as a political topos that encourages the active comeback of repressed ideologies and actions. Gentile in his attempt to describe aspects of totalitarianism in order to better define fascism reveals a side of fascism that resembles a lot the portrayal of life at the mill and the ferocity with which Vidal treats any insubordinates. For Gentile then, an organic part of totalitarianism is its realization as a culture
that is based on “mythical thought”, a “tragic and activist” vision of life, conceived as the “embodiment of will to power.” This vision of life is heavily based on the “myth of youth as the creative force of history” and the “militarization of politics” as a life-model and a collective organization (Gentile 48). Ofelia has a very specific place in this culture and collective organization, one that functions as a passive receiver of commands and orders. Mercedes, the servant that Ofelia develops a rather close relationship with can be seen through that prism as the adult version of the young protagonist, should she grow up and accept the role that awaits her in a fascist regime. In their discussion Mercedes admits to Ofelia that she too believed in fairy tales when she was little, but growing up she realized that reality was cruel and left no room for fairy tales and fantastic creatures. Yet as the movie unfolds, we see that Mercedes might not have the innocence she did as a child, but that does not inhibit her from becoming a rebellious figure in Vidal’s household. While Ofelia persistently denies in the beginning of the movie any blood relation with the fascist captain, Mercedes quietly supplies the rebels with information and medication, and ultimately has complete confidence that the child (Ofelia) will protect her secret, after the latter steps in on her hiding maquis letters.

Ofelia rejects the life and the prospects she is offered by the micro-society she finds herself in at the mill under the command of Captain Vidal; the fairy-tale world she will frequent till the end of the movie though is not as simple as most children’s tales. To be precise, the fairy tale world in Pan’s Labyrinth reminds the viewer the tales the Grimm brothers published and not their Disney adaptations. The creature that in the course of the movie acquires mythical proportions and stems from the mouth of the statue Ofelia ‘repairs’ is a praying mantis, a personification of a fairy. Ofelia’s imagination though rebels from the very start; while mantises are associated with clairvoyance, magic, and “speakers with the dead” (Ford 389), Ofelia has certain expectations of
the magical creatures she would encounter. The mantis as an insect is also known for blending in any environment, and thus we see the insect changing its appearance with a somewhat uncanny and gory bodily transformation to look more like one of the fairies that appear in Ofelia’s books.

![Figure 2.1-2.2: The mantis that easily transforms (as legend has it) to the fairy that Ofelia expects her to look like.](image)

While for Ofelia it is quite clear that her escape from reality and the subsequent rebellion is a product of her desire for escapism and the Faun’s revelation of her royal lineage, before proceeding to a close reading of Ofelia’s journey to sovereignty it would be useful to see how her parents and guardians immerse themselves in their own worlds, even if they are not as visible as Ofelia’s fairy tale escapades. Carmen (Ofelia’s mother) chooses to marry Vidal despite his nature as well as the fact that her husband died during the Civil War and is hinted to be on the Republicans’ side. Her need to survive after losing the support of her husband is also noted by Dopido, as she claims that Carmen is “perfectly aware of the cruelty of her new husband” and even claims that there are hints that her first husband was killed by Vidal (12). When Ofelia asks her why she had to remarry, her answer is a “defeated” (Dopido 12), “When you are older, you’ll understand that it hasn’t been easy for me either” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Vidal himself embodies the mythical proportions that fascism wants to surround itself with; he fixates on his origins, his father’s legacy as well as his own through the birth of his son, who he believes is the only thing his wife is good for. Finally, Mercedes leads a double life as well, but her own world has strong
connections to the one of the *maquis*, as her brother is the one leading the insurgents against the fascist troops.

The trials Ofelia has to succeed in so as to reclaim her rightful place as princess Moana are directly connected to her rebellious nature and the ultimate undoing of the fascists’ operations at the area. The connections between fascism and obedience are central to my argument about the young protagonist’s trials, as each and every one of them is marked by her own deviations from given instructions and disobedience. As Del Toro himself admits, the choice of the age and the sex of the protagonist is of pivotal role to the plot of the film.

Her mother is saying, ‘You have to leave all that behind, the world is a horrible, disappointing place, you have to believe me and you have to obey your father.’ And I thought, this is the last moment when, as a kid, your spirit is still free, and if you give up that freedom then you become just another boring adult. And even more so when your father is a fascist. Because *for a fascist, a central virtue is obedience*, and I thought the young girl would be a more interesting figure of disobedience than the adult - she has even fewer social tools and so is able to resist from a genuine spiritual place. (qtd. in Dopido 11)

If for a fascist a central virtue is indeed obedience, then from the very start, when Ofelia receives the magical book with the blank pages from the faun, the child is hostile towards the fascist’s ideology. The viewer will notice that she is repeatedly warned by the faun do everything exactly as it says. And yet during her first trial, she will first revolt against the real world that restrains her behavior and rebellious spirit.

Ofelia, prior to her descent in a tree hole that is much similar to the rabbit-hole that Alice falls into, wears a dress that somehow connects her to Carroll’s character: a darker colored version
of the one worn by Alice in Tenniel’s illustrations of Carroll’s books. Despite Ofelia’s anticipation for a book, Carmen produces a costume that not only is extremely similar to Alice, but it also will make her look exactly like a princess for the captain’s dinner. As Ford confirms, Carmen’s fairy tale version of Ofelia “is not Alice, the curious adventuress but Alice, the docile and polite Victorian little girl” (390). As Carmen then attempts to impose her set of values and behavior on her daughter, Ofelia escapes before the dinner to fulfill the first of the trials she has to undergo to become a princess.

The first trial is marked not as much by the task itself (steal something from a frog that self-combusts after being fed a certain seed provided by the Faun), but to the defiance that Ofelia shows despite her innocence as a child and her good intentions. Prior to entering the subterranean lair of the giant frog, Ofelia removes the fancy dress and shoes that her mother gave her in an attempt to avoid displeasing her, hanging it on a branch that naturally (story-wise) breaks and the dress is destroyed in the mud. Ofelia’s crawling in the muddy tunnel is not the first time the young girl gets dirt on her; in the beginning of the film Carmen reprimands her daughter for getting mud on her shoes. In this case, however, the mud and the giant toad’s insides get all over her and create to both the reader and her (unaware) mother a sense of disgust and disapproval. Ford explains Carmen’s disapproval towards the dirt that Ofelia has in both cases (the shoes and later the dress) as a “pragmatic, mundane, down-to-earthness” (386), which directly contradicts with the “magical realistic” occurrences. With this apparently insignificant, generic maternal accusation the daughter is immediately introduced to signifiers “crucial” in the

...dissident-surrealist mythology: soil, dirt, abject waste on the bod- associated with abject bodily waste, which point toward formlessness, disorder and decay, depriving the subject of her ordered, civilized, sane subjectivity - thus taking
Ofelia’s fantastic quest cum tragic initiation rite to its next, philosophically charged stage. (Ford 386)

The idea that the soil and dirt disturb the order, as it is perceived in the film by both Carmen and Captain Vidal is also explored by other theorists that provide a theoretical background to my claim that Ofelia to a certain extent wants to be soiled, as the first act of rebellion connected to her first trial.

For the “clean” Spain that Vidal dreams, Ofelia’s dirt is both repulsive and dangerous. Kelly Hurley in “Abject and Grotesque” uses Bakhtin to explain the “degradation” that the abjection of dirt connotes. The abject according to the theorist is “‘the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract’” to “‘the material level’” (qtd. in Hurley 138). In other words, Bakhtin associates the grotesque with the human body in all its “coarse, clumsy earthiness and changeful” mortality, focusing on the “material thingness” of the human subject rather than intellect or spirit (Hurley 138). As Ofelia is crawling in the lair, she gets mud all over her body but does not pay any attention to it, as there is no adult around to discipline her. She does not hesitate to search the toad’s intestines and get dirt and slime all over her, which effectively goes against everything she has been warned against up to that point. Hurley identifies as abject any instance of uncleanness that, quoting Kristeva “‘disturbs identity, system, order’ and that ‘‘does not respect borders, positions, rules’” (138). Such phenomena elicit disgust and horror because they remind one of traumatic “infantile efforts to constitute oneself as an ego, or discrete subject, from out of an undifferentiated pre-Oedipal state, and of the fragile nature of an ego that remains threatened by and yet attracted to the possibility of dissolution” (Hurley 138). As Ofelia comes out of the toad’s lair, she chooses to wear the soiled dress and go back to the house, fully aware that she will be
disciplined for her disobedience. However through her dialogue with her mother, we see that Ofelia’s attitude and appearance is not as coincidental as it seems.

The soiled dress that would transform Ofelia to a “princess” in order to impress Captain Vidal becomes a symbol of resistance and the first clear proof of Ofelia’s disobedience. As Carmen reprimands her daughter and attempts to burden Ofelia with guilt for disappointing her mother, the latter asks (seemingly) innocently if that was also the case with Vidal. Her smile after Carmen responds “Him most of all” is indicative of an attitude that was not incidental. Quite the contrary, as Ford argues, Ofelia’s “small” secret smile tells us two very important things worth considering. First, Ofelia’s recognition that the grown-up world of order hides “its own secret heart of disorder” (394). It is not only in the fairy-tale world that Ofelia turns things inside out as she did with the frog; she has simultaneously successfully accomplished an act of resistance against her oppressive stepfather by destroying her “princess”-like image. The second and most important thing she realizes according to Ford is her recognition that the world of dirt is the world where she is fighting for “sovereignty” (394). In this case, sovereignty denotes the right to be the Princess Moana of the quest, along with the right to explore and claim her own identity, as well as the right to “get dirty,” the right to be a “butterfly for nobody” (Ford 394). Ofelia wants to be a person of her own, a person not suppressed by any ideology imposed on her, be that the fascist or even the maternal.

The relationship between mother and child in relation to the clean/dirty dipole is also explored by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* and is very relevant to Ofelia’s revolt. The theorist argues that as a product of the “immersion” of the child into the symbolic power of language another “authority” emerged as an addition to it. This authority is described as a—chronologically and logically immediate—repetition of the “*laws*” of language (Kristeva 72). Ofelia is being disciplined by all the adults she encounters, in both the mill as well as the magical world she moves
in and out of. She receives orders from Vidal, Mercedes, the doctor that takes care of her mother, the faun and of course Carmen (the mother) herself. It is only natural then that what Kristeva describes as frustrations and prohibitions, become the means through which “this authority” attempts to shape the body into a “territory having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows,” where the “archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted” (72). The passage from childhood to the world of adulthood is realized through the dress her mother gives her, along with the implied notion that books (fairy tales in specific) are a thing best to be left behind on Ofelia’s path to womanhood and adulthood.

Ofelia is wearing her soiled dress as a symbol of defiance to all the nurturing that has been imposed on her. José Antonio Quiñones in “Fairies, Maquis, and Children without Schools” while discussing the film notices that throughout history, it is through adults we understand childhood and not through children (50). The author argues that deciphering the keys to a particular representation of childhood serves “not only to attain a more exact understanding of childhood but also, and most importantly, to understand a culture that projects its dreams and anxieties in that same representation” (Quiñones 50). We are to understand of course that the film is also a product of adults, thus there is no originality in Ofelia’s voice, but in the movie her journey is marked by the clashes she purposely triggers between herself and her adult caretakers. After being found by Mercedes, Ofelia is immediately put into a bathtub, to cleanse herself from the dirt and become ‘clean’ again. This antithesis of clean and dirt is what Kristeva calls a “binary logic,” a “primal” mapping of the body that she call “semiotic” to underline its dependence upon meaning, “but in a way that is not that of linguistic signs nor of the symbolic order they found” (72). Maternal authority is the “trustee of that mapping of the self’s clean and proper body” (Kristeva 72); Carmen
then, having naturally assumed the role of the person that will guide Ofelia to adulthood essentially identifies Ofelia’s fantasies with the improper and the dirty, adding the paternal disapproval to strengthen its validity. This motherly authority as Kristeva argues is distinguished from paternal laws within which “…with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape” (72). The behavior of Vidal in the course of the film can be seen then under a different light, especially in lieu of the dinner he expected Ofelia to attend, which is also parodied and horrifically recreated in Ofelia’s second trial.

The dinner Vidal organizes at the mill is attended by representatives of all institutions of power in a Western community. There are representatives of the institution of religion (a priest), from the army (Vidal and other officers), and traditionally highly esteemed ones such as a doctor and presumably the local mayor and town officials. During that dinner scene Del Toro effectively displays all the institutions that one way or another sanctioned Franco’s regime and consequently Vidal’s behavior. Francisco Sanchez in “A Post-National Spanish Imaginary” underlines the role of the Military and the Church in the Spanish branch of Fascism. The Military and the oligarchy, together with some segments of the Catholic Church, “…were the groups that supported the repression and persecution of democratic resistance in the aftermath of the war. The film’s scene of the meal reflects this alliance perfectly well” (139). The priest in the film argues that reduced portions of food should be enough for people should they be careful, quite at the same moment as he dines at a table that is shockingly full of delicacies and all kinds of food. At some point the Captain coldly admits that what it all connects them is their will for a “clean” Spain for the next generations, as well as the determination to realize that version of the country, even if that means eradicating all the rebels; those same rebels that according to Vidal falsely believe that “we are all the same” despite having lost the war. The priest affirms his determination by adding that “their
[revolutionaries] body does not concern Him,” as they are already forgiven by God, thus completing a circle of cold affirmation of all kinds of violence as a means to the fascist regime’s goals.

The Pale Man that Ofelia encounters in her second trial is a monster that serves multiple Gothic motifs and most of all that of the Sandman from E. T. A. Hoffmann’s tale (1817)\textsuperscript{10}. The monster that takes children’s eyes is a quite old motif, but in this case he is directly juxtaposed to Vidal, and somehow reality seems to overcome Del Toro’s Gothic fantasies. The monster is in the domestic space Ofelia inhabits, essentially contained in the same premises that Vidal exercises his sadistic torturing. As Edwards describes it “rather than a parallel universe, the underland is inside reality, like a kernel of truth or an essence made manifest” (144). The Pale Man is a horrific figure, with elastic skin and his eyes places in the middle of his palms. His unsettling and gory appearance and behavior is only exacerbated by the iconographic insinuation of the horrors he is responsible for; the drawings on the wall show the fate of other visitors in his lair, while the pile of shoes in his room are tangible proof of the child-eating lore that accompanies him. Vidal on the other hand might look human, but his actions indicate otherwise. He sadistically kills a farmer and his son, bashing the latter’s face repeatedly and ultimately shooting both. He also tortures an insurgent both psychologically and physically exploiting a speaking problem he has, making the rebel beg the doctor for a merciful death. Vidal, in contrast to the Pale Man has no lore to accompany him and justify his cruelty and sadistic behavior, thus making the Spanish officer scarier and a more realistic threat to the viewer. Nevertheless, Ofelia in her second trial invokes the mythical creature’s wrath by defying the Faun’s warnings not to touch the ludicrous delicacies that were placed in front of the sleeping figure of the monster on the head of the table to lure young victims.
Ofelia’s second trial was about recovering a ceremonial dagger from the Pale Man’s lair. For this assignment the Faun had provided her with three fairies that would guide her and protect her should something go wrong. However it is Ofelia that clashes when the time comes with the fairies, as when it comes to choosing the correct locker, she disregards the fairies’ advice and is rewarded for this rebellion with the prize she was looking for; she essentially revolts against what Ford calls “the fascism of the unconscious” (396). The revolt against this fascism of the unconscious is not limited only to the choice of the locker but also extends to the interactions she has with the Pale Man himself. As the temptations become more and more desirable for Ofelia, so are the consequences more serious and almost fatal. Hence in this second trial, Ofelia revolts against the father figure of the movie as well, if one is to consider the Faun as such. However the price of this revolt takes its toll immediately afterwards, as she eats two grapes from the table and wakes up the monster, which proceeds to devour two of her companions before Ofelia draws a door with a chalk to escape the Pale Man’s premises. While the cost of defiance is the bloodiest so far for Ofelia, the patterns of rebellion is being established, and Ofelia beings to realize that her actions will have consequences.

The young protagonist directly experiences in the Pale Man sequence what Žižek calls “objective” violence, in specific its “systemic” branch (2). As systemic I consider the limitations that are set for her quest from the faun during her trials, as well as the institution of “motherhood” in the first trial; she (unintentionally) destroys the clothes her mother made for her to impress the Captain, and thus gets disciplined by not eating dinner. As a result of her prior actions though during the second trial she gets hungry and tries some food from the Pale Man’s table she has been explicitly not to touch. The pile of shoes in a corner of a room and the wall paintings indicate that the Pale Man counted on the edible temptations to lure his victims into his arms. The reduced
resistance children have to (edible) temptations along with a predisposition to defy parental advice were also significant parts of the traps set by fairy-tale villains, and Del Toro here connects his monster flawlessly with that tradition. However in the case of Pan’s Labyrinth Ofelia’s encounter with the Pale Man serves to prove another significant purpose; the young girl in the process of acquiring a distinct political identity needs to experience how her defiant ideology would have dangerous and even fatal repercussions to her and others. Prior to her waking up the Pale Man that same defiance has been successful; she acquired the knife she was sent there for by disobeying the fairies that would insistently point her towards a different locker than the one she chose. Whatever has happened to Ofelia up to that point has been a direct result of her actions, which slowly makes her a sovereign person that grows apart from the oppressive nurturing of her mother.

By the end of the second trial it is established that Ofelia is responsible for the death of two of her fairy companions, as they sacrificed themselves so that the young girl could save herself after she woke up the Pale Man by eating from his table. However, despite having great responsibility for their demise, Ofelia is as far as the viewers understand the only child that successfully escapes the Pale Man’s lair. She might have succumbed to her hunger, but it is her imagination and strong will that allow her to open another door and escape the monster’s lair. The mentality she has acquired though by the end of the second trial brings her dangerously close to her demise; she becomes along with the maquis a visible threat for the fascist and depraved dreams of Vidal as Ofelia gets in his way in her attempt to save her newborn brother and fulfill the prophecy that will restore her royalty and reunite her with her real family.

Ofelia’s third and final trial towards royalty and sovereignty is inextricably tied to her stepfather. That trial becomes the ultimate battleground for the ideological conflict that takes place in the film from the very beginning over who gets to shape the future generations. After Carmen’s
death Vidal keeps his newborn son in the room, only to be drugged by Ofelia that steals her baby brother and attempts to find sanctuary at the labyrinth. As her third trial involves a blood sacrifice, in specific that of her brother, Ofelia takes the final step towards sovereignty by essentially sacrificing herself and let herself be shot by Vidal, who acted in such a way after realizing that due to the maquis attack his plan for the future of his son and Spain is in danger due to the attack of the rebels at his compound. Vidal is an agent not only of systemic violence, as a military officer, but in multiple instances his sadistic behavior seems to come from a personal depravity, a “subjective” form of violence in Žižek’s terminology. Though this might somehow seem an isolated incident—the crazy fascist officer that shoots a child which incidentally serves the plot and provides a martyr’s death for the young girl—his final violent outbreak could also be interpreted otherwise. Ofelia’s sudden murder significantly darkens the tone of the end of the film, while Vidal’s execution at the hands of the rebels indeed provides some kind of sentimental satisfaction to the audience. However, his actions throughout the movie are backed up completely by his ideology and have a quite strong political background.

As Sanchez quite on point argues while explaining Vidal’s actions, his erratic and sadistic behavior should not be taken out of context. In turn it should be seen in connection to the mythical proportions that fascism wants to associate itself with. Violence enacted by military officers is not to be considered subjective in Pan’s Labyrinth; on the contrary, it is an organic part of its ideology, thus acquiring a systemic classification. As the writer argues:

While it is true that Fascism resorts to violence and terror to accomplish its political goals, such violence results from a systematic and calculated plan. This plan was the outcome of a rationalization of the interests of the social classes and groups supporting Fascism, and not merely the product of pathological individuals. In
other words, Fascist terror was a calculated practice to attain a political goal—the elimination of all opposition and, in particular, the opposition of popular classes. Certainly, pathological individuals may have supported and practiced Fascist violence, but pathology alone did not motivate Fascism. Pathology cannot explain the State’s systematic recourse to violence. (139)

Vidal is certainly acting in accordance to his ideology. He follows orders blindly, as the doctor remarks right before he is coldly executed by the captain; in Ofelia’s execution he sees all the rebels that go against him and his attempt to establish a “clean” Spain. Quiñones also agrees that both Ofelia and the *maquis* are the ultimate threats to the Francoist regime, and that they need to be disciplined and eliminated for the goal of the dictatorship to be realized (53). The Gothic “other” here has become quite political and there is no other way to treat it but by eradicating the agents of revolt carrying it.

Ofelia’s death in the hands of Vidal is the third and most emotionally charged sacrifice in the film. Carmen dies because of complications with her pregnancy and the doctor the night before is murdered because of his political allegiance to the rebels and his resistance to the mental indoctrination of fascism. Ofelia’s death on a surface level embodies the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice; she dies so that her brother can live and refuses to sacrifice him to save herself and secure her passage to the Underworld. This altruism is rewarded eventually at the end of the movie as this selfless behavior is essentially what allows her to enter Underworld that resembles a version of the proverbial Heaven. However Ofelia’s sacrifice, Christian as it might seem, has distinct political connotations. The actions she takes could be argued to lead to a form of redemptive sovereignty, as we see the faun actually approving her behavior, as if it was somehow expected from her to sacrifice herself. The latter would mean though that there is no real cost or repercussions associated
with Ofelia’s actions, as the only reward of her rebellious behavior at the end of the film would be a spiritual place that was a lot better than the reality she lived, a very individual reward.

A purely “Christian” interpretation of Ofelia’s actions would leave something to be desired. Considering that all people at the mill are subjects of a ruthless fascist regime and its military representatives, I argue that the complete absence of a political dimension of their life would classify them as—in accordance to Agamben’s terminology— homines sacri. The residents of the mill only have the bare life part of their identity, following the dyadic structure of zoe (bare life) and bios (political identity) that would constitute a person’s existence (Agamben 1). Vidal can at any moment deprive them of that bare life at any given moment as he is the only sovereign figure at in the mill, making the latter small scale of a State of Exception. Thus the murder of Ofelia could be the termination of another homo sacer, with no consequence for the enactor of the murder in accordance to Agamben’s definition of the concept, but it is not. For the omniscient viewer Ofelia elevates her political status by her self-sacrifice. Her death is a paradox for a person that has a homo sacer status; those that were deemed as such could not be sacrificed, as their life was of no value to anyone but the gods, hence their name and “holy” attribute. A “sacrifice” of such people would have no cost to anyone, therefore was deemed unworthy. Her self-sacrifice in this case is a political statement; the young protagonist has a quite meaningful and important death defying both the indoctrination of fascism that includes blind disobedience to a superior (a person and/or ideology) as well as the self-centered prospect of saving herself and leave her half-brother behind harmed or even dead.

Ofelia’s death is in fact the final and most obvious declaration of her sovereignty, as the child chooses to defy both her stepfather and the Faun, effectively cutting herself out from both worlds. Quiñones in commenting Ofelia’s murder argues that it encodes the “crushing not only of
a social protest but also of certain ethic/moral values (like innocence, exercise of imagination, or romantically understood freedom)” (57). Within Ofelia’s character both the fairy tale world and the Republic struggle are intertwined and, as such, in the conclusion of the film her death comes to represent “not only the defeat of a concrete political project but also that of those timeless metaphysical merits” (Quiñones 57). On one hand, as Quiñones argues, Guillermo Del Toro suggests that the arrival of Francoism involves the destruction of a “pure being” (57). On the other hand, as he quite brilliantly observes, this director seems to historicize the virtues embodied in Ofelia and her particular epistemology of fairy tales. One of the main themes of Pan’s Labyrinth is the close connection between this character and one of the two enemy sides. This connection is two-way process though; Del Toro “historicizes Ofelia’s purity and innocence by associating them with the anti-Fascist maquis, and he simultaneously dehistoricizes this side by bestowing on it the aura of certain virtues, which are alien to the historical order” (57). In other words, Ofelia was not as pure and innocent as a quick interpretation of the movie would suggest. She is very well aware that her actions will lead her to her death, and chooses to proceed with them anyway. She, along with the doctor, do not show any kind of fear towards imminent death, but choose to face it armed with their conviction and beliefs, even though they know that the latter are not nearly enough to save their life.

Ofelia’s death is a conscious choice to control her life and her death away from nurturing of all the adults around her. As a Gothic hero living in troubled times, her descent is both metaphorical and literal, as she admits defeat by giving her brother back to her stepfather; while doing so, she knows that her life would be of no value to Vidal who shoots her in cold blood, only to suffer the same fate in a mirror sequence in the hands of the maquis. As Edwards correctly notes, the only consolation for a viewer is that Ofelia’s life and death comes on her own terms, despite
her gender, her age and the “royal lineage” she has (146). Her death is marked by the objective violence that fascism is based upon, and through that sacrifice she gains passage to the Underworld, where she is welcomed by her family. In the end, she is with no one. She has refrained from violence, and has followed her convictions to the very end. It might well be that some would claim that her actions make her a martyr, but her overall behavior in the film shows quite the opposite. She is the future of the Republic, the offspring of the maquis, the child that rebels not only through her actions, but also through the political conscience she grows. Even in the face of death, she does not compromise despite the monster she faces is more horrific than the Gothic figure of the Pale Man. By choosing to die instead of her brother, thus completing successfully the trials, Ofelia redefines what a Gothic hero is, adding to its dimension the resistance to (super)natural horrors and the control of her own life and death as an act of defiance against the fascist regime and expression of her sovereignty. During a historical time when under Franco’s regime all citizens had been stripped of their political entity and had virtually become expendable, Ofelia rebels by stripping the captain of the pleasure of breaking her spirit, thus becoming an ideological rebel, the kind that is far more dangerous to autocratic regimes, and certainly more than the –soon to be defeated –maquis.
CONCLUSION

THE END OF INNOCENCE—THE BEGINNING OF POLITICAL LIFE

The end of Carroll’s stories and Del Toro’s fable finds the protagonists in very different places. On the one hand, Alice returns to a Victorian society that will rigorously attempt to mold her after the established societal norms and transform her to a neutral political subject with no room to develop an independent and strong personality. On the other hand, Ofelia is dead, and her murder could very well be read as the inevitable end of innocence for the Spanish Republic and its rebel supporters. Set in two distinct eras and societies the future of the two protagonists could not be any more different than they already are. The political circumstances though of their world(s) is what unites both young girls, along with their motivations for their rebellious actions.

Alice returns at the end of *Through the Looking Glass* with a refueled confidence to defy the indoctrination inflicted to her by family and societal norms. She has gone through several (not so obvious) changes in size and status. In her (chronologically) first adventures in Wonderland Alice attempts to find the “right” size for her throughout the tale, while experiencing changes in her memory and nurture. Her investigative nature prevails and soon after her arrival the caterpillar poses a question to Alice that is compelling to the formation of her (political) identity. The “Who are you” question is not only existential in nature; in the absurd world of Wonderland Alice is faced with a task almost impossible for her age (Carroll 50). The young protagonist needs to choose very early in her path a course of action and develop a mentality towards her upbringing. Will she obediently follow the Duchess’s nurturing and the Queen of Hearts’ despotic orders and become a ‘proper’ girl, or will she revolt? The question becomes pertinent in Carroll’s second installment, as the stakes have risen. Alice here will be rewarded with a royal title; she will become queen if she obeys the Red and White Queen’s advice, if she uses words and concepts like Humpty Dumpty
and if she believes in imaginary cakes or works to prove she deserves a place in the train car of bourgeois suited animals.

For Ofelia on the other hand, things are not so easy. She finds herself in the middle of a political struggle, a fight between two completely opposing ideologies, the Republican rebels and the fascist soldiers of Franco’s regime. Her struggle to escape from this state of exception she finds herself in and her tragic end at the hands of her stepfather would—in any other case—reduce the protagonist to the status of a ‘homo sacer.’ Her life is of no importance for Vidal, an embodiment of fascism and totalitarianism who applies a variety of systemic and subjective violence to the inhabitants of the mill and the villagers nearby. The desire of the regime to control the life and thoughts of their subjects and strip them of every political aspect they might have ends up with the latter having only a ‘bare life’ status. Ofelia’s choice to be sacrificed is an attempt to reclaim her sovereignty which has been denied to her by fascism. She succeeds in the trials set by the faun by exhibiting a defiant spirit and deviates from every single piece of advice given by her mother, her governance, even the father figure of the faun. Her sacrifice so that her brother can live could be read as a Christian notion to selflessness. However, Ofelia’s death is ultimately the greatest step she takes towards her sovereignty; she chooses to depart the conflict of the Fascists with the Republicans on her own terms. Her life becomes meaningful through the choice of her death, and is ultimately rewarded with passage to the Underworld and the restoration of her royalty and the same political identity that was denied to her by the regime she lived in.

Ofelia and Alice’s roles, in the worlds they escape to, are all about sovereignty. By the end of their adventures they might not know what they want to be; that is to be expected based on their age and maturity. As any other child, the young protagonists search for an identity that will suit them, while are being disciplined and indoctrinated towards certain behavior and roles. What they
acquire at the end of their journey though is a very important trait; they know what they don’t want to become. Alice does not want to be part of a world where defying a royal command might mean losing her head. She definitely does not want become a queen in an oppressive and nonsensical regime, where women need to prove that they are worth to be equal to men, with the latter considering the power structure as their birthright. Alice leaves Wonderland completely disillusioned with the roles she is given there, incidentally leaving the dream world when she feels that she has had enough and there is nothing more to learn there. Ofelia on the other hand seeks to escape from a version of reality that is oppressive on both her body and behavior. Seeing her adult counterpart, her mother, being completely submissive to her stepfather and participating in an attempt to indoctrinate her and raise her in accordance to Vidal’s demands, Ofelia revolts and escapes to a realm of fairy tales. The reclaiming of her royal lineage becomes identical to the reclaiming of her sovereignty; however, for a fascist regime, sovereign citizens are obstructive of its well-being. Ofelia’s fate might have been foregrounded as whoever had revolted in the domestic space so far had been tortured and/or executed, however the girl still follows the same course of action and defiance and demonstrates her free and rebellious spirit against all adults that attempt to nurture her. At the end the nine year-old girl falls victim of both systemic and subjective violence, as Vidal is acting as both the fascist whose legacy is in danger as well as the sadist distorted version of the father figure in the film.

The politicization of the fairy tale worlds the young protagonists visit is directly linked to the role of fairy tales in the upbringing of children and how it prepares them for the responsibilities that adult life would include. Through that prism, Alice’s Wonderland and Ofelia’s Underworld are in both theory and practice the testing ground for the protagonists’ political defiance and formation of political identity and sovereignty. Both Lewis Carroll and Guillermo Del Toro use
caricatures, mythical creatures and oppressive adult figures with distinct Gothic elements to present an enemy-adversary as visible and tangible as possible. The appearance of the royalty and creatures in Wonderland, the faun in *Pan’s Labyrinth* along with the Pale Man and the other creatures of the Underworld all share extravagant physical traits. And yet in all three works the most tangible threats to the characters come from the most human-like characters that also represent the top of the power structure; the Queen of Hearts, the Red and White Queen along with Vidal look (to a certain extent especially the latter) and sound more human than the monsters of both worlds. At the same time though they are the most violent creatures, exercising upon the young protagonists several forms of systemic and symbolic violence attempting to control their life.

What is at stake essentially in all three tales is the ongoing attempt of all kinds of regimes, democratic or not, to control their citizens’ lives. This control must start from a very early age, in order to shape obedient citizens and mild-mannered characters. The Gothic mode in these stories serves as the mediator that brings to light those oppressing and oppressive practices. The grotesque, authoritative and sadistic villains in the examined works serve as the embodiment of oppressive ideologies; the fantastic and uncanny settings prove themselves to be nightmarish distortions of the children’s dreams and desires. Alice and Ofelia eventually realize that the most threatening figures of their journeys, the ones they should really be afraid of, are not monstrous and distorted animistic figures of Wonderland and the Underworld, but the ones that look like humans, those that hold power in their everyday life. For the young female protagonists, their gender and submissive role they are supposed to serve in their respective societies do not leave room for action or disobedience. As a result of their rebellious way of thinking they will suffer dire consequences; Alice will twice depart her fairy tale land, while Ofelia will be murdered in
cold blood. What they do demonstrate though is far more important than what they suffer. In their course of rebellion, Alice and Ofelia strip the regimes they fight against of any last pretenses of logic and force them to show their true violent and authoritarian face. If two children, with no experience or broad understanding of politics can do that, what stops adult citizens from following their example? The authors implicitly pose this unsettling question to their readers and audiences and the latter are left pondering: How much of their life and ideology is really their own?
Endnotes

1 Evidence of Ofelia’s and Alice’s similarities are both visual (the dress Ofelia receives from her mother is a darker version of the one Alice is depicted in the 1951 cartoon version of Carroll’s work) as well as narrative, with the descent of both protagonists into underground realms and encounters with magical creatures.

2 One of the first things that makes Carroll’s works drastically different and revolutionary in terms of storytelling and narrative devices is the absence of moral lessons and didactic tone. There is distinct evidence though that Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (as was Lewis Carroll’s real name) was very upset with himself for not inserting “virtuous opinions” as Jenny Woolf calls it in The Mystery of Lewis Carroll. (228) His goal to morally improve children’s minds along with his resentment for his younger self for this failure (Woolf 28) seems to have influenced his –not so successful– subsequent book Sylvie and Bruno, which was closer to his desires as he grew older, but certainly did not nearly have the success of his early works. The lack of morality was definitely unusual for a Victorian tale, especially since as Woolf pointedly remarks, most of them had even a tag at the end of the story “…proclaiming the moral message, just in case anyone had possibly managed to miss it” (193). The success of Alice in Wonderland in particular is the absence of every single convention that was considered essential in children’s literature up to that point. As Anna Jackson and Roderick McGillis argue in their introduction of the Gothic in Children’s Literature, Carroll’s work might not be Gothic, but it certainly used the same pastiche techniques like The Castle of Otranto to turn the didactic narratives inside out. Much like the Gothic, they conclude their argument, children’s literature is concerned with both the future and the past.

3 The versions referenced in this thesis are The Annotated Alice with introduction and notes by Martin Gardner and The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll interchangeably.

4 http://www.newspeakdictionary.com/ns-prin.html

5 It would be interesting for a future research to examine the relationship between the Mad Hatter and the power structures of Wonderland. In both of Carroll’s books he is the only visible enemy, probably because of his relationship to time. He is accused of murdering time itself and one could only wonder if this subtle comment by Carroll is connected to the childish innocence or if it includes a more general comment about child labor or even the importance of being (sometimes) idle.

6 The laws the English justice system was based on had not elaborated much on sentences, which resulted in the sentencing of various criminals to death for crimes of dissimilar importance. The public executions of these criminals were very often and the reason is ironically expressed by Dickens in his book The Tale of Two Cities, who states that “Death is nature’s remedy for all things, and why not Legislations?” (56), a book set a little before the French Revolution, but written in 1859, with clear references to the time the author lived. Dickens himself, as Michael Goldberg argues in his work “From Bentham to Carlyle: Dickens’s Political Development” cast great doubts on the capital and corporal punishments the sum of which were characterized as “‘Bloody Code’” (Dickens 73). This criticism against the brutality of the penalties inflicted on the
criminals did not originate in his sympathy for the latter, but for the people, for whom he
considered it bad “to be familiarized with such punishments” (73). Malcolm Andrews in Dickens
on the England and the English reproduces an article written by Dickens in 1849 for The Times
where he argues that public executions are a ruin for London and his inhabitants due to the
“wickedness [they] exhibit” and attempts to persuade his readers to consider the abolition of them
(92).

7 Further information on Alice and the anti-gallows movement can be traced in Michelle Ann
Abate’s “‘The Queen Had Only One Way of Settling All Difficulties. . . “Off with His Head!”’: Alice’s
Adventures in Wonderland and the Anti-Gallows Movement.” Bloody Murder: The Homicide

8 The synopsis as well as technical information has been taken from imdb.com. While the website
does have user-edited sections, the technical aspects are verified and therefore credible.

9 As Sanchez explains, the narrative of the film acknowledges the economic interests that support
the “repression of democratic resistance” (138). A direct reference to the above statement comes
in the scene in which members of the oligarchy and church enjoy a “copious” (138) meal right
after the army under Vidal’s orders distributes food to villagers as a symbol of “la Espana de
Franco.”

10 In E.T.A. Hoffman’s tale the readers follow the protagonist Nathaniel through letters and
narrations, as the latter is haunted by a mythical figure that according to the lore throws sand at
children’s eyes to gouge them out of the sockets and feed them to his own children that live at the
moon. This mythical figure of the Sandman is present at key moments of Nathaniel’s life and
ultimately seems to be the cause of the protagonist’s madness and consequent suicide. The tale
itself is used as a case study by Sigmund Freud in his famous essay “Uncanny” (1919), where the
psychoanalyst coins the term “uncanny” (unheimlich) and connects it with the tropes of
(un)familiarity of everyday occurrences.
WORKS CITED


*Pan's Labyrinth.* Dir. Guillermo Del Toro. Perf. Ivana Baquero and Doug Jones. 2006. DVD.


