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# Postmodern mysticism: a study of the feature films of Guillermo del Toro

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Thesis

**POSTMODERN MYSTICISM:  
A STUDY OF THE FEATURE FILMS OF GUILLERMO DEL TORO**

by

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the work of the director Guillermo del Toro. In a career that spans 20 years working in feature films, del Toro has directed the Spanish-language art *Cronos* (1993) in Mexico, and *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) in Spain. Del Toro has also worked extensively in Hollywood, wherein he directed *Mimic* (1997), *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy* (2004), *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008), and, most recently, *Pacific Rim* (2013). Amongst these, del Toro regularly blends generic elements, and in doing so questions the boundaries dividing genres of: horror, sci-fi, fantasy, anime, melodrama, and the superhero.

Making use of auteur theory, this study discusses the entirety of del Toro's feature films in order to position the director as an auteur. As such, the motifs del Toro repeats in and across these 8 films are of central concern, as well as any biographical information to contextualize del Toro's personal and aesthetic concerns. In particular, this thesis looks at del Toro's stylistic and diegetic invocations of certain features of fairytales—the relation between reality and fantasy (*Pan's Labyrinth* and *Hellboy II*), the fairytale trope of the curse (as in *Cronos*, *Mimic*, and *The Devil's Backbone*), and the hunter archetype (which is emphasized in *Blade II*, *Hellboy*, and *Pacific Rim*). In addition, this study finds that the sacred and the profane constitute a central dialogue woven throughout del Toro's films.

Ultimately, this thesis concludes that del Toro can be considered an auteur in that he appropriates genre, fairytale motifs, and the sacred and the profane in order to explore bodies—human and nonhuman (that is, bodies of monsters, machines, and the divine)—as works of art that challenge the possibility of defining the body in singular terms (that is, as human, male, adult, white, etc.).

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## Introduction—The Curious Shaman

Guillermo del Toro is a curious filmmaker. In the postmodern era, he is an oddity: highly influenced by science fiction, fantasy, and horror films, del Toro continuously subverts genre conventions by merging disparate storytelling modes into new forms—for instance, *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), a film about the Spanish Civil War, is not interested in rousing scenes of war combat, but is instead a Gothic tale about an orphanage haunted by the ghost of a child; his *Hellboy* films (2004 and 2008) are not formulaic, action-fueled superhero movies, but in their rich mise-en-scène, they have more in common with Douglas Sirk's melodramas than they do with other superhero films like *The Avengers* (2012).

Other postmodern directors, such as the Coen brothers, are equally interested in appropriating and exploiting genre conventions as del Toro is; David Cronenberg and David Lynch share del Toro's interest in horrific and fantastical images. But often with these directors (and others), there seems to be even more of an interest in making a claim to authorship than a genuine interest in the subject matter of their films (Quentin Tarantino is perhaps the best example of this). Del Toro's efforts are unique in that they are the result of a genuine enthusiasm for the monstrous, and how the monster is an allegory for the other.

"It's only through art that you're able to glimpse otherness," del Toro writes in his production notebook for *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006).<sup>1</sup> Whether it is Jesús Gris, the unfortunate antiques dealer cursed with vampirism once he activates the Cronos Device, the creatures of all shapes and sizes comprising the Troll Market in *Hellboy II*, or the

exploited and abandoned Judas bugs of *Mimic* (1997), del Toro invites us to sympathize with the “freak.”

This is not to say that all his monsters are worthy of our sympathies, nor is it to suggest by extension that del Toro naively romanticizes the monster/other as necessarily “pure” and “good.” Rather, the Faun of *Pan’s Labyrinth* is an ambivalent character, and one is never certain if he is telling the truth to the young Ofelia—not to mention the Pale Man, who is by all accounts an unsympathetic character as much due to his grotesque appearance as to his penchant for eating children, and the kaiju of *Pacific Rim* (2013), though somewhat tragic given that they are manufactured and sent to Earth for the purpose of fighting and often being killed by jaegers (massive mechanical bodies piloted by humans), pose a threat to human existence. For del Toro, restricting the monster to rigid moral or allegorical roles would amount to replicating the cultural logic that marginalizes the other as such.

Thus del Toro is a curious figure in another respect: his refusal to ingratiate himself to Hollywood or to mainstream audiences. For his Hollywood films, he regularly casts Ron Perlman, with whom he quickly became friends while shooting *Cronos* and for whom he fought to have star as the titular character of *Hellboy*; del Toro also consistently casts other actors and actresses who, despite their great talent, are not “A list” stars as far as Hollywood is concerned, and thus offer little promise of attracting massive audiences (casting Doug Jones, the mime/actor as Abe Sapien in the *Hellboy* films attests to this). Indeed, Mira Sorvino is the biggest celebrity to star in any of del Toro’s films, playing the lead in *Mimic* shortly after winning the Academy Award for her performance in

Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995). (Of course, shooting *Mimic* proved to be a disastrous experience working in Hollywood, as del Toro suffered frequent intervention from Miramax during production, and the film was ultimately taken away from him.) And it is important to note that del Toro's superhero films—*Blade II* and the *Hellboy* movies—feature protagonists who are less familiar to most audiences than Batman, Superman, or Spider-Man. But despite his resistance towards conforming to Hollywood's conventions, del Toro has secured himself a position of great success and artistic freedom working as a Hollywood filmmaker.

But this is not to say that del Toro has abandoned his Latin heritage by working in Hollywood; on the contrary, for del Toro has proven himself able to transition from small Spanish-language films to larger Hollywood productions without forgoing certain aspects of Latin culture. He was born on October ninth, 1964, in Guadalajara, Mexico to Federico and Guadalupe del Toro. When del Toro was four, his father won the lottery, moved their family into a larger house, and began a series of successful Chrysler dealerships. Because of the demands of his father's work, as well the time his mother spent as an amateur poet, actress, and Tarot reader, del Toro's grandmother raised him largely by herself. A staunch Catholic, she advanced a distinctly Mexican strain of Catholicism, invested in guilt, suffering, and, of course, blood, in order to save her grandson. As such, del Toro regularly uses Catholic iconography—most often of Christ and his crucifixion—to subvert what he feels to be an oppressive dogma (see Chapter 2 on *Cronos* and *The Devil's Backbone*).

Furthermore, del Toro's Hellboy films can be read as allegories for immigration into the United States: the otherworldly Hellboy is brought to Earth to bring about the end of humanity—however, Hellboy ends up fighting to save humanity from the monsters of which it is unaware, and thus he receives no gratitude for his work; this is not so different from the plight of so many Mexican immigrants who have no choice but to work poorly paying jobs in the U.S, and instead of being praised for their devotion efforts, are vilified for taking jobs away from citizens—of course, del Toro himself immigrated to the U.S. after his father was kidnapped in 1997.

Additionally, del Toro has turned his attention to Spain, not only in terms of subject matter (*The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth* take place during the Spanish Civil War), but literary and cinematic style. The Spanish literary tradition of magical realism, embodied in Cervantes' Don Quixote, seems to account for the magical objects and beings throughout del Toro's work, though *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Hellboy 2* are more overtly concerned with the fundamentally porous divisions between reality and fantasy than any of his other films. Similarly, del Toro cites Alfred Hitchcock and Luis Buñuel as his favorite filmmakers—Hitchcock's influence is evident in del Toro's formalism (less in terms of specific repeated tropes and storylines than in del Toro's investment in mise-en-scène as the dominant carrier of meaning in narrative film) and Buñuel is present in all of del Toro's films, which are instantiated by the surreal opening up onto modern life—a ghost haunting an orphanage, alien creatures emerging from a vagina-like breach at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

In Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art, which is the only comprehensive study of del Toro's films, Keith McDonald and Roger Clark argue that *The Devil's Backbone* is del Toro's version of *Los Olvidados* [*The Forgotten*] (1950), Buñuel's film about a group of juvenile delinquents living a life of crime and violence in Mexico City. Though the authors observe similarities between *Los Olvidados* and del Toro's other films, they find that:

... *The Devil's Backbone* has the most obvious links to *Los Olvidados*, given its focus on a group of boys and their relationships—boys who have been shaped by trauma, in this case the effects of war rather than urban alienation. (33)<sup>ii</sup>

Additionally, the authors remark that "...it is the unflinching and unsentimental given to childhood that defines Buñuel's originality" (33).<sup>iii</sup> McDonald and Clark place del Toro in the lineage of Buñuel largely because of his unsentimental portrait of children, who, in films such as *The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth* are witnesses to and victims of (male) violence and historical trauma.

McDonald and Clark discuss another Spanish filmmaker and his influence on del Toro's work: Victor Erice and his *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973). Taking place in 1940, at the end of the Spanish Civil War and the beginning of Franco's dictatorship, the film is centered on young Ana, who is traumatized by James Whale's *Frankenstein* when it is shown in her village. As McDonald and Clarke observe, the film's "...recognition of the power of stories and storytelling informs the world of Ofelia in *Pan's Labyrinth*, who seems enveloped in stories and textuality" (35).<sup>iv</sup> The importance of stories to children is at the center of del Toro's cinema, which is highly influenced by fairytales.

In The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, Bruno

Bettelheim forcefully argues the value of fairytales lies in how they help children cope with their existence in a world ruled by adults. Indeed, as Bettelheim observes:

There is a widespread refusal to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our very natures—the propensity of all men for acting aggressively, asocially, selfishly, out of anger and anxiety. Instead, we want our children to believe that, inherently, all men are good. But children know that *they* are not always good... This contradicts what they are told by their parents, and therefore makes the child a monster in his own eyes. (7)<sup>v</sup>

In contrast, the fairytale makes no attempt to hide the ugliness of life from the child; as Bettelheim continues, in fairytales:

... a struggle against severe difficulties of life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious. (8)<sup>vi</sup>

As such, although the fairytale indulges the child in fantasy, the fairytale offers valuable lessons for the child's real-life circumstances. Thus, in order to help all children manage all possible dilemmas they might encounter as they mature, the heroes of fairytales are much more like everyday persons than the larger-than-life characters of myth (37).<sup>vii</sup>

Likewise, adults who only tell children of the inherent goodness of humanity project an idealized vision of human life onto the child, admittedly with the good intention of helping the child to not fear others and promoting a sense of morality as well as developing the child's social skills. Nevertheless, Bettelheim observes that the advent of psychoanalysis and child psychology "...revealed just how violent, anxious,

destructive, and even sadistic a child's imagination is" (120).<sup>viii</sup> As a result, Bettelheim continues:

Those who outlawed traditional folk fairy tales decided that if there were monsters in a story told to children, these must all be friendly—but they missed the monster a child knows best and is most concerned with: the monster he feels or fears himself to be, and which also sometimes persecutes him. By keeping this monster within the child unspoken of, hidden in his unconscious, adults prevent the child from spinning fantasies around it in the images of the fairytales he knows. Without such fantasies, the child fails to get to know his monster better, nor is he given suggestions as to how he may gain mastery over it. (120)<sup>ix</sup>

This seems to have formed so much of del Toro's work, given his unsentimental depiction of childhood and his refusal to romanticize monsters as misunderstood "others" faced with a cruel world dominated by humans; for del Toro, the monster is as much a positive allegory for resistance against dominant ideologies (for instance, Hellboy fights Nazism) as an existential threat (the Ogdru Jahad, the chaos gods whom the Nazis attempt to summon to Earth to end the war in *Hellboy*).

Given del Toro's recurring interest in childhood and fairytales, McDonald and Clark compare his films to those of another Hollywood filmmaker invested in monsters, sci-fi, and children: Steven Spielberg. The authors observe that while Spielberg's cinema can be categorized as realist (*Schindler's List* (1993), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and *Munich* (2005)) and fantastical (*Hook* (1991), *Jurassic Park* (1993), and *Minority Report* (2004)), but that del Toro "...portrays the blending together of real-world historic trauma with supernatural phenomena (*The Devil's Backbone*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Hellboy*)" (5).<sup>x</sup> What distinguishes the two even more is how each filmmaker depicts children—McDonald and Clark turn their attention to del Toro's *Mimic*, in which two

street-smart kids look to earn money by collecting insects for entomologist, Dr. Susan Tyler. While searching New York's subway system, the kids counter and are killed by a Judas insect. The authors remark:

These children are strikingly similar to those of Spielbergian cinema in that, "they are children out of their depth, forced for a time to explore a dangerous world without reliable adult supervision (a recurrent trope in Spielberg's films, not least in his take on the monster movie in *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* (1997))" (127).<sup>xi</sup>

But, as the authors continue, Spielberg's children:

...survive the bildungsromanian adventure through a combination of bravery and ingenuity (as in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1983)), the collective power of friendship (as in *Hook* (1991)), or the release of parental instincts (as in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)).<sup>xii</sup>

The death of del Toro's two street kids in *Mimic*, however, is "...unsentimental meaninglessness" (127).<sup>xiii</sup> Furthermore, the authors, citing Jason Wood's interview with del Toro, refer to the filmmaker's attitude towards Spielberg's sentimentality:

I feel that there is so much more danger in showing kids a movie about giant dinosaurs and claiming that the dinosaurs won't eat them. In reality, they would...for me my childhood was the most brutal and frightening period of my life...Horror is an extension of the fairytale and in fairytales ogres and wolves ate children and I think that it goes to the roots of storytelling to have children as vulnerable. (127-128)<sup>xiv</sup>

With this reference to Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (and, to a lesser extent, *The Lost World*), del Toro channels Bettelheim's concerns regarding the dangers of presenting monsters in fairytales as kindly toward children. As such, if there is a childlike sensibility to del Toro, it would be a mistake to hold it against him as a criticism—rather, it is precisely his

refusal to regard children as anything less than human that contributes to his challenging cultural norms.

But del Toro's interest is not narrowly limited to children; all of his films question humanity's relation to the nonhuman—not only the monstrous, but also the divine. Given del Toro's strict Catholic upbringing, and his rejection of Catholic dogma as an adult, the sacred and the profane constitute a crucial dialogue within del Toro's artistic universe. In The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, Mircea Eliade writes:

Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of *manifestation* of the sacred, we have proposed the term hierophany. (11)<sup>xv</sup>

This revelation of the sacred as distinct from the profane is not simply a matter of a spiritual vision, but as Eliade continues, is firmly grounded in objective reality, in that a hierophany constitutes "...the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world" (11).<sup>xvi</sup> Certainly, this coincides with the influence of magical realism on del Toro's work: whether it is the rotting archangel containing the Cronos Device, Ofelia placing the stone into the statue at the beginning of *Pan's Labyrinth* that sets the film's fantastical events in motion, or the special glasses that reveal to *Hellboy* and his team that the Troll Market is located under the east end of the Brooklyn Bridge, del Toro is continuously concerned with the effect of the sacred/beyond/fantastic on "ordinary" existence.

Furthermore, del Toro's films are characterized by worlds that have been consecrated and organized by rationalism but are faced with some form of intervention

from an irrational, unknown world—del Toro has most recently presented this in *Pacific Rim*, in which kaiju are sent to Earth by mysterious insect-like overlords. This corresponds to Eliade's finding that:

One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of 'other world,' a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, 'foreigners' (who are assimilated to demons and the souls of the dead). (29)<sup>xvii</sup>

Thus, the consecration of a territory, the definition of our world against the 'other world' is a matter of subjecting a vast, terrifying world to our will, which, as Eliade continues, is a kind of communion with the sacred: "It must be understood that the cosmicization of unknown territories is always a consecration; to organize a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work the gods" (32).<sup>xviii</sup> Thus characters such as Hellboy serve as rich palimpsests of meaning—Hellboy is transported from an 'unknown territory' but defends Earth against destruction, a conflation of sacred and profane (a demonic savior) and a figure for del Toro in that he is a Mexican émigré working in America/Hollywood (in other words, an émigré from an 'other world' to a 'cosmos').

Provided Eliade's paradigm, it would be difficult to assert that del Toro, because of his negative relationship with Catholicism, rejects the sacred as evil and instead exclusively celebrates the profane; it would be too simplistic to describe del Toro's work in these respects. Instead, it would be more accurate to refer to the sacred and the profane as an ongoing dialogue throughout his films, particularly when he (deliberately) problematizes the dialogue with his complicated view of the relation between the

human/the consecrators and the monstrous/the other/the unknown; del Toro does not settle for clear distinctions between the human and the monstrous, and as such his depictions of the sacred and the profane cannot be regarded in such simplistic terms.

With the recent rise in films and TV shows inspired by fairytales—*Once Upon a Time* (2011—), *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013), and the upcoming *Maleficent* (2014), based on the villain of “Sleeping Beauty,” in addition to the increased popularity of biblical narratives—the TV miniseries *The Bible* (2013), *Noah* (2014), *Son of God* (2014), del Toro’s unique approach to the fairytale and spirituality is even more relevant now than it has been in his 20 year career. Given mainstream film and television’s rediscovery of fairytales and biblical mythology, which requires the films and television shows produced to reinforce certain conservative ideologies (for example, as in Spielberg’s films, overly-sentimentalized misrepresentations of children) in order to draw in mainstream, middle class audiences, del Toro’s films are examples of more subversive and progressive alternatives.

Specifically, this study will address del Toro’s appropriation of the fairytale as well as his subversion of Catholic iconography to explore the distinctions between the sacred and the profane; similarly, del Toro’s films often explore the tensions between adult-oriented (“sacred”) and a childlike (“profane”) understandings of the world, with del Toro celebrating the latter (without sentimentality).

Additionally, of central importance throughout this study is del Toro’s use of film as a medium to reflect on his identity (as a Mexican, as an immigrant, a Catholic, etc.); in this respect, what makes del Toro’s work particularly interesting is his repeated attention

to the body as a means of investigating these issues, while simultaneously questioning the relations between different kinds of bodies (human, machine, monstrous, and divine).

From a young age, the body was a source of anxiety. Del Toro's father, in order to complete his family's newfound bourgeois image after having won the lottery, purchased a large collection of books. Among them, two texts stood out to the young del Toro: "The Family Health Medicine Encyclopedia" and "How to Look at Art." Reflecting on how he quickly became obsessed by them, del Toro remarks:

I became a very young hypochondriac because of that encyclopedia I was constantly thinking about tumors, and liver disease, and parasites in my brain, and I thought I was going to die really quick. And the art was great because I was learning about Degas, Picasso, Manet, Goya. (14)<sup>xix</sup>

With all of the curious, obsessive, and imaginative fervor of a child, del Toro experienced his body as a site of potential, horrific, afflictions—as a metaphysical threat. On the other hand, Degas, Picasso, Manet, and Goya all exposed him to aestheticized bodies immune to the very real vicissitudes of the body as documented in the encyclopedia, thus solidifying for del Toro the body as an entity caught between beauty and ugliness.

In addition to this horrific/artistic experience of the body, del Toro found his body to be a source of social and racial anxiety. As he reflects of his childhood in Mexico:

I was a very strange kid...I was an Aryan blond. I was like a German. And I was constantly ostracized because I had super-bright blue eyes and Roy Batty [Rutger Hauer's character in *Blade Runner* (1982)]—white hair and was very thin, incredibly thin. I was constantly berated as a wimp, and I identified with those shortcomings; I felt like a freak. The nice, healthy kids were all those outgoing kids with dark hair and a tan. (14)<sup>xx</sup>

In this light, it is interesting to note the parallel between del Toro's childhood experience as a freak and his depiction of the villain of *Hellboy II*, the elf prince Nuada. With a thin, frail body, blond hair, and porcelain skin, Nuada seems a projection of del Toro's Aryan appearance and his status as a freak—but, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, del Toro also identifies with Hellboy, another freak; this speaks to his refusal to reduce the monster to a simple good/bad or protagonist/antagonist binary.

Del Toro's ambivalence in this regard seems to have been informed, at least in part, by his relationship with his grandmother, who instilled in him a crippling fear and guilt because of his affection for the monstrous—the profane. As a child, he liked to draw movie monsters, particularly Frankenstein's monster and the Creature from the Black Lagoon, only to be faced with his grandmother's absolute horror; del Toro recalls: "My grandmother used to cry because I drew nothing but monsters. 'Why can you not do anything beautiful?' But I always thought my monsters *were* beautiful" (16).<sup>xxi</sup> To punish del Toro for his love of monsters, which seemed to condemn del Toro's young soul, his grandmother placed metal bottle caps in his shoes so that his feet would become bloodied as he walked to school, which seems to further illustrate del Toro's interest in the body as a site of tension between the sacred and the profane.

Provided del Toro's repeated interest in the body and its relation to the fantastical, the first chapter of this study discusses the body as a transitional space between reality and the fairytale world in *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*; the second chapter explores del Toro's take on the fairytale motif of the curse in the cursed bodies featured in *Cronos*, *Mimic*, and *The Devil's Backbone*; the third chapter is centered on his

use of the fairytale hunter—a figure whose vocational disposition to violence and ability to transition between a world of culture and a world of nature (for instance, as in Snow White) suggests the union of the rational/human and the irrational/primal—in exploring violence as (spectacular) performance in *Blade II* and the human’s relation to the inhuman in *Hellboy* and *Pacific Rim*.

It would be a mistake to dismiss del Toro on the grounds that he favors fantastical narratives over realistic ones that, ostensibly, have more to do with human existence than monsters, fairies, and other magical creatures. Instead, this study argues for del Toro as a kind of postmodern shaman, whose fables provide audiences with opportunities to reflect on their lives (not unlike how fairytales grant children an avenue of existential reflection) and, perhaps more importantly, with opportunities to experience the curiosity and wonder of childhood with a filmmaker who is himself genuinely curious.

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<sup>i</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>ii</sup> McDonald, Keith and Roger Clark. *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage Books, 2010. Print.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>x</sup> McDonald, Keith and Roger Clark. *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. Print.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>xv</sup> Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1987. Print.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xix</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxi</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "Guillermo del Toro on 'Pacific Rim,' monsters, Hollywood and other horrors." *nola*. NOLA, 2013. Web. 7 Feb. 2014.

## Chapter 1—Reality, Fantasy, Children

It is fitting to begin a study of del Toro's work by examining his two films that overtly convey the importance of the fairytale: *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008). With both of these films, del Toro uses a childlike perspective to reveal how fantasy is inscribed into reality as a trace, which thus positions the child as uniquely able to commune with a sacred, fantastical world hinted at within reality. In this way, del Toro focuses on the body as a point of access to the sacred.

Del Toro, it seems, is skeptical towards an over-investment in reality insofar as it is material reality. Instead of devoting ourselves to realizing broad material goals (such as wide scale social, economic, or political reform), or of looking to art to change the world, del Toro observes that:

In geological time, in five million years, we will be a stratum in a geological plate that is going to be found by no one, perhaps. All we can do is change the world in small ways. No work of art is so big that it's going to change the world, to make a difference, geologically. (211)<sup>i</sup>

Despite what it may seem, this is not a fatalistic or pessimistic worldview; del Toro is not suggesting that all human existence and all art is meaningless because there is nothing we can do to stave off oblivion—nor is del Toro arguing that we must accept the little things we can do to make a difference in the world as consolation for not being effect large scale social, political, or economic changes.

Instead, what del Toro seems to imply is that if we can only change the world in small ways, despite being destined (as historical persons) to be lost to time, what we must

do in order to achieve a sense of meaningfulness our individual and collective existence is to allow ourselves to imagine the world/our existence on a smaller scale, and to adopt a certain perspective that will allow us to recognize small traces of meaning in a world that seems to threaten to efface material reality (the political, social, economic, artistic, forces that influence culture) as time and space change. Therefore, as an heir to Bettelheim, del Toro presents fantasy not as an escape from reality, but as a way of understanding it.

### *Pan's Labyrinth*

Set in 1944, at the end of the Spanish Civil War, *Pan's Labyrinth* follows Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) as she and her pregnant mother Carmen (Adriana Gil) come to live with Carmen's new husband and father to her unborn son, the Francoist Captain Vidal (Sergi López), as he fights off what remains of the Maquis resistance. Ofelia's love of fairytales and fantasy produces a conflict with Vidal, who is obsessed with time (watches) and with leaving a legacy for his son, just as Vidal's father had done for him. While at Vidal's encampment, Ofelia befriends Mercedes (Maribel Verdú), Vidal's chief domestic servant who, along with Vidal's doctor (Álex Angulo), secretly aids the resistance.

As Vidal leads his small army, Ofelia is brought to a magical labyrinth within the forest just outside of Vidal's encampment. There she encounters the Faun (Doug Jones), who tells her that she is, in fact, Princess Moanna, daughter of the king of the underworld and the moon. In order to reclaim her place by her parents' side, Ofelia must complete three tasks in order to determine if she truly belongs to the fairytale world she adores. Her work in completing these tasks is paralleled with the increasing tensions within the camp: Vidal grows suspicious of Carmen and the doctor (which results in the doctor eventually

being murdered) and Carmen dies will giving birth to her and Vidal's son. The film ends with Vidal shooting and killing Ofelia, and soon after this, Vidal is shot and killed by the Resistance. Upon her death, Ofelia returns to her fairytale parents as Princess Moanna, and as the Faun tells us, ruled in the kingdom for centuries thereafter.

Del Toro begins the film by immediately calling into question a "realistic" notion of time. The film begins in darkness as we hear the sound of heavy breathing. The camera slowly pans to the left, finding Ofelia in a close-up, lying on the ground.<sup>1</sup> Staring straight ahead (as if into the camera, or at the audience), her bloodied hand outstretched (again, as if to the camera or the audience), Ofelia is far removed from the sentimentalized child of so many Hollywood films.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, Ofelia is bleeding from her nose—or, rather, she was: a closer look at the image reveals that the blood is running not out of her nose, but rather, back into it. Due to the shot's vertical composition, the blood moves from right to left, which directly parallels the camera's pan from right (darkness) to left (Ofelia), and suggests that we are moving back in time, watching the blood return to the spot from which it already poured out. With this, del Toro aligns: the autonomous camera (the camera pans without any sort of motivation from a character within the film), a facet of bodily function (bleeding), and the reversal of time (the backwards motion of the blood). Provided that it is only through the camera's right-to-left pan that we move from darkness to see Ofelia, it seems that del Toro's camera is returning the life (blood) to Ofelia, symbolized by the fact that the blood recedes in a right-to-left direction.

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<sup>1</sup> This close-up of Ofelia lying on the ground is vertical, rather than horizontal.

<sup>2</sup> See the comparison of del Toro and Spielberg's cinematic children in the introduction.

Given her supernatural “rebirth,” Ofelia is immediately established as a figure for the sacred. In “The Ground of the Image,” Jean-Luc Nancy writes of the sacred character of the image, noting that “The sacred, for its part, signifies the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off” (1).<sup>ii</sup> To avoid confusing his secular use of “sacred” and “sacred” in the religious sense, Nancy replaces “sacred” with “the distinct,” which he writes:

...is what is separated by marks (the word refers back to *stigma*, a branding mark, a pinprick or puncture, an incision, a tattoo): what is withdrawn and set apart by a line or trait, by being marked also as withdrawn [*retrait*]. (2)<sup>iii</sup>

In this regard, Ofelia is made sacred or distinct by del Toro’s camera not only in terms of the figurative rebirth the camera grants her (as if the camera is a deity), but the camera in effect traces the withdrawal of the mark of her death, and in doing so makes marks her as its own—in other words, the camera’s right-to-left pan seems to go back in time, erasing the line of blood that once flowed from her nose, implying that the camera separates her from her death (her bloodied body marked by punctures) while simultaneously inscribing her with its mark, film’s capacity to go back in time.

At the end of the film, del Toro returns to Ofelia’s death, but here the camera does not mark Ofelia as sacred by traversing time; her death takes place in linear time. As with the opening of the film, Ofelia is laying on the ground, breathing heavily, and bleeding—however, del Toro focuses on the blood that drips from her hand deep into the heart of the labyrinth, and the camera follows the blood in a tracking shot as it drips across the circles surrounding the pillar at the bottom of the labyrinth. In this image, it is as if the camera’s spell over Ofelia has been broken: instead of violating the linear progression of time, the

camera looks on as Ofelia's blood progressively drips across the circles; as time passes, more life drains out of her and onto the concentric circles, which seem to symbolize the order of linear time and of the cosmos. Though this image might seem to be pessimistic, it is important to note that Ofelia's drops of blood mark these circles, in Nancy's sense, and in that way, Ofelia—inadvertently so—“leaves her mark,” so to speak, on linear or “geological” time; thus the sacred manifests itself as a matter of “marking” according to two conceptions of time, advanced by the ancient Greeks: “chronos,” or linear time and “kairos,” opportune or aesthetic time—the former takes place with Ofelia's death at the end of the film, whereas the latter takes place with her rebirth at the beginning.

Similar to del Toro's binary presentation of time—one form linear and realistic, the other aesthetic and fantastical—*Pan's Labyrinth* offers real and fantastical spaces. It is important to note here that the difference between these two kinds of spaces is marked by their different visual representations—the space of fantasy is full of warmth, sacred in its abundance of light, and the space of reality is cold, profane in its darkness.

Del Toro begins his film not only by calling into question a linear conception (that is, perception) of time, but into the apparent divides between spaces. As Ofelia lies on the ground, her life restored to her, the camera accelerates toward her eye—or is it rather that her eye pulls the camera toward itself—until it passes ‘through’ her eye to reveal an immense fairytale kingdom. As this occurs, the Faun's narration speaks of a time long ago, of a princess “who dreamt of the human world,” and we glimpse at the princess, who is almost indecipherable as she runs into the darkness of the mountainous kingdom.

Provided that del Toro's camera passes ‘through’ Ofelia's eye, it is fitting to look

at the eye not only as a site of perception, or even a window to the soul, but also as what bridges the gap between, and therein allows the traversing of, reality and fantasy. Note it is the camera, guided by del Toro's artistry, that has the capacity to 'pass through' in this way—the camera, which is itself an eye directed at Ofelia's eye which looks at it, has the potential to perceive its movement across space and time as continuous precisely because perception is itself a metaphysical phenomenon; space and time, or reality and fantasy are connected insofar as they can be perceived as such. The eye, then, in its perspectival capacity, is separated from the body in which it is located, as well as from that body's spatiotemporal location, but contains within it altogether different spatiotemporal coordinates—hence, the camera passes 'through' Ofelia's eye to find the aesthetic cosmos located within it.<sup>3</sup>

But there is still a likeness between the real world Ofelia is contained within and the fantastical world she contains behind her eye: muted, blue-green dominates the floor, mountain range, and fantastical architecture that make up these two spaces. With this, the question arises: does the camera enter into a fantasy space that exists objectively and pre-dates both Ofelia and the camera (for, just before the camera 'passes through' Ofelia's eye, we hear the Faun begin his narration with "A Long time ago," after which we see the fairytale space, implying that events unfold there in linear, rather than aesthetic, time) or is this fantasy space located in Ofelia's mind? Put another way: does the camera enter into objective history or Ofelia's fantasy that she was/is Princess Moanna?

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<sup>3</sup> This begs the question: had the camera not recognized the blood flowing out of Ofelia's nose as a trace, and had not followed it over the course of aesthetic time, what do we lose out on by adhering solely to geological time?

The answer to these questions lies precisely in the fact that they must be asked in the first place: the color scheme that unites reality and fantasy also suggests a primordial quality to these spaces, not only calling up the geological end-of-times but space as it was in the beginning of time, before the cosmos (order) was created out of nothingness (chaos): amorphous, non-territorialized space existed prior to the differentiated zones of space that life would emerge onto.<sup>4</sup> Therein, del Toro begins his film by questioning the divide between the space of reality and the space of fantasy, of the beginning of time and time's end by positing them as undifferentiated, therefore embarking to answer the question of what makes once space different from another (and how they can be perceived as different) over the course of the rest of the film.

An exhaustive analysis of the difference of spaces in *Pan's Labyrinth* alone would prove a redundant task to undertake here, for this regularly comes up throughout all of del Toro's films. In the interest of efficiency, the following analysis will concern the two spaces that most closely resemble one another, and therein point to the interrelation between reality and fantasy. These spaces make up two scenes: Vidal's dinner and Ofelia's visit with the Pale Man, respectively.

The former, real space is found in Vidal's home, when he hosts a dinner for those sympathetic to the fascist regime. The table at which they are all gathered (with Vidal, of course, at the head of the table), is replete with food and drink—with more food brought to the table throughout the scene—as Vidal and the others discuss the food ration cards to be dispersed to the people of the 'new, clean Spain,' to borrow Vidal's words. While it is

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<sup>4</sup> The breaking up of Pangaea is an apt metaphor for this.

important to note that the political is manifested as a social ritual (that is, the pleasure that comes from gathering together over food for social purposes carries within it a kernel of a political decision, insofar as there is always someone forbidden to sit at the table so that it can be a pleasurable eating and social experience),<sup>5</sup> the scene does not resemble the blue-green primordial darkness found in the beginning of the film, with Ofelia's death—rather, there is a warm feeling to this fascist gathering: its reddish-brown color palette and chiaroscuro lighting (reminiscent of a Caravaggio or Rembrandt painting) contrast the earlier primordial colors of Ofelia's death, and suggest that these people behave (socially, politically) within an artistic cosmos, and that there is a degree of artistry, of artificiality, of beauty that necessarily haunts this kind of human interaction that makes it palatable and allows it to take place.

However, this is not to suggest that del Toro's point is that fascism is beautiful (if "beautiful" is to refer to something that is inherently "good" or "right"); nor do I mean to suggest that del Toro turns a blind eye to fascism, so to speak, finding that whatever real-world effects such a regime has are inconsequential compared to the "truth" a piece of art can reveal regarding the nature of fascism. Both of these arguments assume that beauty or art can help us to understand, or can give meaning to, reality better than we understand or find meaning in reality as we experience it in our daily lives. While such an assumption certainly may be true, the preceding arguments that are predicated on it miss del Toro's point: beauty and art stand in for, or try to symbolize, a fantasy that cannot be realized in

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<sup>5</sup> One is reminded here of the "kid's table," featured on so many holiday-themed episodes of American sitcoms—while the holidays are to be a time of joy and compassion, too much compassion can disrupt the joy found at the "adult's table."

material form—and it is fantasy that animates fascism (among other things).

This becomes clearer when we more closely consider the implications of Vidal's statement that he wants his son "to be born in a new, clean Spain." If nothing else, this is a highly utopian desire: Vidal wants his son (who, once he is born, will be new and clean; at the very least, he will be morally "clean" even if he is not physically so upon his birth) born into a "pure" Spain, implying that if he did not fight against the Resistance, his son's life would have less meaning if he were born into a Spain suffering from resistance to the fascist regime—in this regard, this utopian Spain has a divine quality to it (a state of bliss, of innocence beyond a more earthly world of struggle and suffering).

Of course, the irony of this utopian sentiment is that the fascists have already won the war; the promise of a new, clean Spain is no longer on the horizon, but is within their power to realize. In this way, Vidal's words seems to be those of a revolutionary, instead of someone who supports and enjoys the (fascist) status quo. Moreover, this discrepancy between Vidal's idealism and the reality his political position is underscored by the comfortable life the young Vidal will (likely) be born into: living among fascists, the child will not want for anything provided Franco (and his like-minded successors) remain in power, and Vidal remains true to the fascism.

But what does it mean for Vidal to *remain true to fascism*? Insofar as a utopia is a utopia because it has not been realized in material form (and as such, is a sacred fantasy), Vidal *remains true to fascism* in that he is driven to fulfill a fantasy that has more or less been realized in material form, but which he rejects or is unable to see, thus furthering his

drive to fulfill it in a material way.<sup>6</sup> Del Toro underscores this with his depiction of the dinner scene: as mentioned above, the amount of food on the table is excessive and there is a beautiful, painterly look to the entire scene. Among those sitting at the table, all interactions are pleasant, even when speaking to the rather sour Vidal, and all guests are served without complaint from the wait staff.<sup>7</sup> In other words, this scene is consistent with the fascist utopia Vidal imagines for his son; it is rather odd that Vidal would continue to want to drive out the Resistance when his home is the very image of warmth, and does not seem to be affected in the least by the Resistance, even when the guerilla fighters are stationed just outside Vidal's home and camp. In this regard, Vidal's desire for utopia is not only fascist, but irrational in that he already enjoys the comforts of such a utopia despite the fact that the political condition he desires has not entirely materialized (in that the Resistance has not been completely eradicated, only mostly suppressed).

It is also important to note that del Toro expresses this in the context of a dinner—a ritual that sustains people socially as well as physically. But what sustains Vidal and his guests (and likewise, what they all make up) is a scene marked by painterly beauty—by a degree of artifice, suggesting that the very material conditions all fascists enjoy and want to protect (food, property, social and economic opportunities, political positions, etc.) are the stuff of an beautiful illusion that misrepresents the truth of the fascist's desire for

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<sup>6</sup> “Material” in this instance refers to a political condition: the total eradication of the Resistance, and Franco's unopposed rule.

<sup>7</sup> The exception being the look of concern shared between the doctor and Carmen (who, as mentioned above, support the Resistance, unbeknownst to Vidal) when Vidal remarks that the guerilla fighters are losing ground.

utopia: the desire always exceeds whatever material conditions are met, but it is the artificial quality of the material conditions (Vidal's warm and beautiful home, for instance) that, in turn, reveal that in order to understand authentic fascism, which is not satisfied by material substance (found in reality), one must enter into the fantasy of fascism.

Moreover, it is not as if the horror of fascism is not represented in the film; rather, the sublime rendering of the fascists' dinner table functions as a trace within the circuitry of del Toro's reality-fantasy relation, which when followed leads to the full-bodied horror (and, the beauty) of the Pale Man's dinner table. Like Vidal, the Pale Man is seated at the head of the table, with a fire burning behind him, and while the table is full of food, there is no one other than the Pale Man sitting at the table. The high contrast lighting and earth tones of the earlier "table scene" return here (with gold and deep red mixing with the rest of the yellow-brown palette), therein connecting both scenes with a similar, painterly look. It is important to note that while art (beauty, artifice) is assimilated into the politics of the earlier scene, art is foreground in the Pale Man's dwelling: shortly after she enters his lair, Ofelia looks at the paintings on the ceiling, which depict the Pale Man stabbing and devouring children—art and horror are united—and which share the same color pattern as the Pale Man's dwelling (including Ofelia's cyan jacket, which matches the cyan skies of the paintings of the Pale Man).

More so than at Vidal's dinner, this is a warm and hallowed space, consecrated by art—not only to the paintings on the ceiling call up associations to fresco paintings found in some churches, but they suggest that the space itself is made under a cosmos (ceiling)

governed by art, and that the space, insofar as it resembles this cosmos that engendered it, is itself a work of art that simply cannot *be* in reality, within a profane cosmos subject to geological time.<sup>8</sup> Put another way: Vidal's dinner for fascists is nothing more than a profane trace (that is, within geological time and space) of the (sublime) horror of the Pale Man—a horror that is fully realized—or, to borrow from Nancy, is made distinct—within sacred (aesthetic) space and time. Again, this is not to say that del Toro is suggesting that fascism, torture, and sexism (represented by Vidal) amount to nothing because they occur only within a profane reality; quite the contrary, for del Toro's point is precisely that the horrors of fascism, torture, sexism, etc. are misrecognized as being less horrific than they truly are; and even if art cannot do anything to make a difference in geological time and space, it grants us the opportunity to perceive traces as full-bodied fantasy.

To put this more clearly, let us take Vidal and the Pale Man. While it is true of all the other characters sitting at the table as well, Vidal is positioned at the head of the table (Carmen sits to his right, a priest to his left, and so on). However, it is precisely because of this that when Vidal is featured in a medium or close-up, no other character is figured in the shot: Vidal is physically isolated even from those who share faith in his cause, whereas the frequent medium shots of other characters show their unity, and del Toro's point is precisely that it is the table, the symbol of a socio-political ritual, imparts onto Vidal the perspective that he is at the head of it politically, socially (that is, as if he were

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<sup>8</sup> Note that Ofelia places the hourglass that limits her time in this place just outside the doorway leading to the Pale Man; geological time flows on, limited to a geological space, whereas the Pale Man's lair is still, a tableau unmarked by geological time and space.

nothing but a metaphysical being, made up of social and political forces that grant him power), but in reality, he is a body, physically and therefore fundamentally disconnected from the space and those around him. In other words, it is his perspectival error (that he is purely a political and social being and not also a physical being at the same time) that instantiates Vidal as a trace of the Pale Man.

It is this perspectival error that manifests in the image of the Pale Man. (Note that Ofelia is not present at Vidal's dinner (and del Toro calls attention to this at before the dinner begins, when Carmen and the maids wonder Ofelia is); because of this, it would be difficult to suggest that the Pale Man embodies Ofelia's perception of Vidal (at the dinner); rather than being entirely subjective, del Toro's fantasy has its own objective status.) Whereas the artistry of Vidal's dinner scene suggests art as being complicit in masking the horrors of fascism, which therein contributes to Vidal's perspective error (the artist abstracts her or his human subjects and commonly subjugates their bodies to only the most expressive of bodily features, namely the face, so that the entirety of the physical body is overlooked in favor of one or a few of its parts), the Pale Man embodies the horror of art—that it has the potential to bring about such a perspectival error.

This is brought to our attention early in the scene, the moment we see the Pale Man. In a long shot, the Pale Man appears at the end of the table, in the background of the image. From that distance, it is difficult to tell if the Pale Man is separate from the space around him—from this perspective (shared with Ofelia, who stands in the foreground), it is difficult to differentiate the components of the tableau, for everything in the image is still and shares the same flesh-toned color palette. Even when Ofelia gets

closer to him, it is still unclear if the Pale Man is really separate from the space that surrounds him: because he is so still and silent (as the food on the table is), it is unclear if the Pale Man if he has a mind or soul to animate his body or if he is simply part of the table—regardless of a change in perspective (from further away to closer to the Pale Man), there is a degree of inscrutability to this body (is it *really* body, or does it only look *like* one). But this very inscrutability is del Toro's point: with art, it is not a matter of the body being this way *or* that way—it is not a matter of art abstracting the body and subordinating part of it to others, as mentioned above—but rather, that the body is at once *really* a body and looks *like* one.

This is why the Pale Man does eventually move; his body becomes a *real* body—in a fit of jerky movements that seem to agonize him—as he moves throughout a space consecrated by art. In this respect, for del Toro there is no divide between the body represented in art and the anatomical body:<sup>9</sup> the body is a work of art, a correspondence between the metaphysical and the physical—a correspondence the Pale Man figures for Vidal, who rejects the physical in favor of the metaphysical (in that he is obsessed with fascist utopia, time/watches, and leaving a legacy for his son), and who rejects fantasy in favor of reality, and as a result, dies without the promise of salvation (whereas Ofelia, at the end of the film, unites with her magical parents and becomes her other, metaphysical, transcendent self, Princess Moanna).

What the preceding analyses of these moments of *Pan's Labyrinth* suggest is this: the body is not simply found *within* reality or fantasy—it *mediates* reality and fantasy, as

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<sup>9</sup> Note del Toro's early encounters with anatomical and aesthetic bodies in books, as discussed in the introduction.

a trace of the interrelation between the two, and is marked (made distinct) by oppositions (for instance, life and death, linear and aesthetic time, and the sacred and the profane).

While *Pan's Labyrinth* explores the body's status as trace connecting the real and the fantastic, del Toro refines this idea with *Hellboy II*: rather than the body's form being affected by distinctions (for instance, del Toro presents Vidal/the Pale Man's body as real and fantastical, despite their separation), the fantastical bodies of *Hellboy II* perform so as to imitate real (human) bodies, and as such, disrupt the (adult's) conflation of reality with "meaning."

Del Toro's *Hellboy* (2004), based on Mike Mignola's comic, tells the story of the demon Hellboy, brought to Earth in 1944 by the Nazis in an attempt to end World War II, with the help of the occultist Rasputin (Karel Roden). Prof. Trevor 'Broom' Bruttonholm, an occult historian hired by President Roosevelt to lead a group of American soldiers to intercept the Nazis, discovers an infant demon during this exploit and raises the child as his son, calling him "Hellboy."

But the film is mostly set in 2004, wherein Hellboy (Ron Perlman), now an adult, works for the B.P.R.D (Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense) as a monster hunter. Still guided by Broom (John Hurt), who conceals his cancer and impending death from his son, Hellboy is also assisted by Abe Sapien (Doug Jones), a fish-man with telepathic powers, and Hellboy's on-and-off (human) girlfriend Liz Sherman (Selma Blair), who was taken in and trained by the B.P.R.D. soon after she exhibited pyrokinetic abilities.

As the film unfolds, Rasputin, along with his lover, Ilsa (Bridget Hodson) and

their compatriot, Kroenen (Ladislav Beran), plans to call on the Ogdru Jahad (the seven gods of chaos he attempted to summon in 1944) to annihilate humanity—a task for which he needs Hellboy, as the creature’s right stone hand is the key to opening the portal that will allow the gods to come to Earth. Eventually, Hellboy and the others succeed in stopping Rasputin, but in the process, Broom is killed by Rasputin and Kroenen, leaving Hellboy, Abe, and Liz without the father figure who offered them a family in the B.P.R.D.

Following these events, *Hellboy II* finds Hellboy struggling with his identity. On one hand, Hellboy wants to be accepted into the human world, to be appreciated for what he does as a monster hunter; on the other hand, Hellboy is fundamentally more connected to the world of magical creatures and monsters.

This conflict is exacerbated when the elven Prince Nuada (Luke Goss) declares war on humanity. As a young Hellboy learns from Broom at the beginning of the film, in ancient times humans and magical creatures were constantly at war. In order to upset the balance of the war, King Balor, Nuada’s father, commissioned the construction of the Golden Army, a band of indestructible automatons. While this magical army succeeded in decimating humanity’s forces, Balor was so upset over the slaughter that he locked the Golden Army away and proposed a truce: humans would live in cities and magical beings would keep to nature.

Nuada, resentful of humanity’s greed and its abandonment of the magical world, plans to call on the Golden Army once again. Hellboy, along with Liz—who is pregnant with Hellboy’s twin children—, Abe, and the new B.P.R.D agent, the ectoplasmic Johann

Krauss (voiced by *Family Guy* creator Seth MacFarlane), ultimately succeed in stopping Nuada's plot. The film ends with the four retiring from service as B.P.R.D. agents, all of them leaving behind their "home" to begin life anew, symbolized by Liz's pregnancy.<sup>10</sup>

As the film's ending suggests, of central importance to del Toro here is the child's capacity to create a meaningful existence for him or herself, and to be exposed to a world outside the home, beyond his or her parents' (sacred) authority.

Del Toro embodies the tension between two types of meaning—one belonging to the adult, and the other to the child—in the opening of *Hellboy II*, in which Broom reads the story of the Golden Army to young Hellboy. This scene occurs on Christmas Eve, at the Douglas Army Base in New Mexico in 1955. From a wide exterior shot of the base, the camera slightly pans to the left and slowly tracks in on a compound illuminated from within by a warm amber light; as the camera tracks in, it passes the Christmas tree that is just outside the compound, and once Broom begins speaking (from within the compound, but we hear it while in this exterior shot), del Toro cuts to the inside of the compound, to a medium shot of Broom, bathed in the amber light of his and Hellboy's home.

Provided that it is Broom's voice that seems to motivate this cut from a leisurely-paced tracking shot to the inside of the compound, it is as if Broom "invites" the camera, and, for that matter, the audience, into his home—in other words, the camera's very slow movement toward the compound suggests a simultaneous reticence and curiosity, and his voice seems to enchant the camera; as such, Broom is not only authoritative in telling his

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<sup>10</sup> This group's departure from their substitute home (the B.P.R.D) into an uncertain future echoes the ending of *The Devil's Backbone*, in which a group of orphaned boys abandon their substitute home (an orphanage) for an uncertain future.

son to stop watching *Howdy Doody* (1947-1960) and go to bed, but he is also authorial in that Broom seems to control what we and the camera see.<sup>11</sup>

When inside their compound, one is struck by the difference between Broom and Hellboy: bespectacled, with a perfectly trimmed goatee, and wearing a suit and tie under his flannel bathrobe, Broom is an academic within the comfort of his home (not the books populating the *mise-en-scène* of the compound); by contrast, Hellboy's horns, teeth, and stone hand are all comically oversized, and suggest a pubertal body that is in the process of overwhelming the young mind connected to it.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, this suggests Hellboy is at a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, though he is reminded of his status as a child by his father's stern commands.

In this regard, Hellboy is doubly presented as a freak: not only is he a demon, and in that way fundamentally estranged from the person he is closest to, but he is still a child in his father's eyes—he someone who has not been fully acculturated into a social system and as such, is an "other."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, provided that Hellboy's oversized body parts look artificial (that is, we do not take these horns, teeth, and this stone hand to really belong to Montse Ribé, the child actor who plays young Hellboy; they, along with Hellboy's bright red skin, are clearly part of a costume), del Toro parallels the artificiality of this child and the artificiality of the puppet on *Howdy Doody*: in a close-up of the TV just before Broom shuts it off, we see Howdy Doody "talking" and "moving" his arms and torso—such slow

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, it is not as if Broom is aware of the camera; unbeknownst to him, he invites the camera and us into the narrative.

<sup>12</sup> As this scene takes place in 1955, Hellboy is about 11 years old, a common age at which young boys enter puberty and observe significant bodily changes.

<sup>13</sup> Put another way, Hellboy has not yet subordinated his oversized, pubertal body to his mind in the way that his professorial father has.

gestures, they appear as too self-aware, unnatural, which is in keeping with the fact that it is being moved by an absent puppeteer. Likewise, Hellboy's movements (much to Ribé's credit) appear unnatural and stilted, as if being controlled by a puppeteer (del Toro); their similarity is underscored with Hellboy's insistence that Howdy Doody is real, and is not a puppet (even as he holds his Howdy Doody doll in his arm).

With this self-reflexivity, del Toro suggests that the "realness" of the puppet has little to do with its authenticity (that it "really" is talking and moving out of its will, and not that of a puppeteer) but rather, with the fact that the puppet's movements *imitate* real or authentic ones (those that belong to a naturally-animated body). Therefore Howdy Doody is not, as Broom puts it, a "wretched puppet" because of its cartoonish silliness—rather, its exaggerated and artificial gestures draw attention to its very "otherness," much the same way that del Toro's costuming for Hellboy draws attention to the boy's double "otherness" in relation to Broom. Therefore, del Toro uses the puppet—with both Howdy Doody and the young Hellboy—to figure the child, whose body and psyche are subject to biological and parental forces that are beyond her or his control. In this regard, for Broom (adults), "puppet" refers to a plaything, or a source of meaningless entertainment (*Howdy Doody*), but for Hellboy (children), "puppet" refers to his—very real—lack of agency.

Del Toro furthers this distinction between meaning for Boom/adults and meaning for Hellboy/children with his animated sequence depicting the story of the Golden Army; particularly, del Toro turns his attention to two forms of sense: one logical (something is said to make sense if its meaning is apparent), the other phenomenological (any "apparent meaning" is less important than sensory experience); del Toro aligns the former with the

adult, and the latter with the child.

Once Hellboy convinces him to read him a story before bed, Broom reaches into a small chest and takes out book; in a medium shot, Broom is in the foreground, sitting in a chair as he begins reading with the book on his lap; in the middleground, we see Hellboy (out of focus) sitting and listening intently, as a fire burns in the furnace (out of focus) in the background. From this shot, the camera slowly tracks in over Broom's shoulder to see the elaborately illustrated pages of the book—it is as if the camera's curiosity from earlier has been reignited by Broom's voice as he begins the story, thus reinforcing Broom's role as a parent reading a story not only to his child, but the camera and the audience.

In contrast, soon after the camera looks at the storybook, del Toro cuts to a close-up of Hellboy. The camera slowly tracks in on Hellboy, and we see his eyes wide open as he dreamily looks at the fire (off-screen); Broom is out of focus in the background, and as the camera tracks in on Hellboy, Broom takes up less of the frame, suggesting the camera has suddenly become attentive to Hellboy's consciousness and his role as a listener. This is supported by del Toro's cut to Hellboy's point of view as he looks at the fire burning in the furnace; from a medium shot of the fire, the camera slowly tracks in on the fire (as if to imitate Hellboy's consciousness), and after an extreme close-up of the red flames, del Toro transitions to the reddish-brown color palette of the animated sequence—thus, it is as if we are entering into Hellboy's imagination as he visualizes the story Broom reads to him.

Despite the range of beings in this sequence—humans, goblins, ogres, elves, and the Golden Army—they are all presented in similar visual terms: they all look like dolls

or puppets. The humans are all the same in their simple design: carved out of wood, with only the most basic of features to distinguish them as humans—they have two eyes, arms, and legs, one nose, but no mouths.<sup>14</sup> The magical creatures also seem to be carved out of wood (with the exception of the Golden Army, which seems to have been made out of tin foil), but are presented with slightly more visual detail: for instance, an ogre is depicted not only with a mouth, but as having boil-like lumps on its back; whereas the humans are bald and unclothed, the elves—particularly the royal family of King Balor, Prince Nuada, and Princess Nuala—are clothed and have hair. Additionally, even though all humans and magical creatures depicted herein look like dolls or puppets, their movements are entirely natural: the human puppets charge the elven army with as much force as an actual human army might, the Golden Army lumbers about the battlefield, as is to be expected for such massive bodies, etc. Given that Broom’s narration, which we hear throughout the entirety of the animated sequence as a voice-over, does not provide such visual descriptions of the characters within the fairytale, it is as if Hellboy imagines those details. Therein, Hellboy effectively becomes the puppeteer who determines what the fairytale characters look like and how they move, which reflects Hellboy’s puppet-like status in relation to Broom and his rapidly developing body.

Nevertheless, Broom’s voice-over narration emphasizes his parental and authorial presence by locating that presence in his very disembodiment. Insofar as Broom reads the book to Hellboy, his narration “makes sense” in that it is logical, linear, thus allowing his narration to mean something (literally, the story of the war between humans and magical

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<sup>14</sup> This reflects Hellboy’s role as a listener, rather than a speaker, and suggests his identification with the human-like puppets.

beings, the Golden Army, and the truce separating the human and magical worlds). Given that Broom's voice does not change whether he is reading in the compound or his voice is heard throughout the animated sequence, his voice, an extension of his body, makes sense both within linear time and aesthetic time: his weathered, stern voice bridges the temporal gap between the linear time in which he narrates the fairytale (del Toro indicates that this scene between Broom and Hellboy takes place in 1955) in which he narrates the fairytale, and the aesthetic time in which the tale takes place (it occurs in an ancient, mystical time during which humans and magical beings coexisted)—in other words, his consciousness exists both in the real world and the fantastical world whereas his physical body can only exist in one.<sup>15</sup>

Broom's metaphysical status, as a disembodied consciousness that is equally part of reality and fantasy, is reflected in the intertextuality of this scene. Del Toro's choice to have John Hurt play a younger Broom than he plays in the first *Hellboy* film, and to have Hurt/Broom read from a storybook, deliberately references Jim Henson's television series *The Storyteller* (1988), in which Hurt played the titular role as the narrator of a number of European folktales. Each episode centered a single story—for instance, *The Soldier and Death*, *The Three Ravens*, and *Sapsorrow*—and puppets figured almost every character within the stories.<sup>16</sup> Thus Hurt's authorial status not only transcends the real and fantastic worlds of *Hellboy II*, but the worlds of *Hellboy II* and *The Storyteller* as well—within the twenty years that passed between the two texts, Hurt's body visibly changed, particularly

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<sup>15</sup> This opposes Hellboy's consciousness, which transforms from the point of view shot of the fire burning in the furnace to the fantastical animated sequence.

his face, which became more weathered, wrinkled (as featured in *Hellboy II*); in contrast, this span of time did nothing to affect Hurt's distinctly hoarse, commanding voice—thus, it is as if Hurt's voice, the voice of a storyteller, is as enchanted as it is enchanting, and as a result, is immune from the effects of linear time.

Nevertheless, it is not as if Hurt/Broom's disembodied voice during the animated sequence in *Hellboy II* is entirely bodiless; it might be more accurate to say that the voice is another, less corporeal, form of the body that constitutes the tension between sense and nonsense (meaning and meaninglessness). While Broom's voice makes sense insofar as it renders the story of the Golden Army intelligible, his voice also makes nonsense in that it renders this story perceptible. "Perceptible," here, refers to a sensation that is beyond any representation; del Toro expresses this much with Broom's voice-over: Broom's voice is literally *voiced-over*—voiced-above, voiced-on-top-of—the visual representations within the animated sequence. Likewise, Broom's voice-over is sacred (to borrow Nancy's sense of the term): it is distinct, set apart, cut off from the visual representation of Broom and in that way it is perceived beyond the ordinary order of representation, in which images and sounds are presented in unison.<sup>17</sup> As such, Broom's voice figures what is not represented, what cannot be represented, within the film: the audience.

In hearing Broom's voice, we commune with it differently than how we commune with his image or any other images in the film. It is not simply that his voice is distinct or sacred because it is separated from his body; Hurt's voice itself is distinct, unlike all other voices, and as such attests to the specific person/body that exists outside the fiction of del

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<sup>17</sup> At least, for contemporary mainstream narrative film.

Toro's film—in other words, whereas Hurt plays Broom within the narrative, and as such his must visually represent that role (by wearing a costume, behaving a certain way, etc.), his voice remains unchanged and exceeds the demands of the role. In this way, when we perceive Hurt's voice, we commune with it in a bodily way: the voice begins in the lungs, travels up through the chest, through the throat and vocal chords, into the mouth, onto the tongue, past the lips, and finally reaching our ears. Thus the voice, which is usually used, at least in daily life, to make meaning and communicate effectively between persons, for del Toro speaks to a certain enjoyment that the body finds in perception. As Nancy writes in "The Birth to Presence":

A lip, a finger, a breast, a strand of hair are the temporary and agitated whole of a joy that is each time temporary, agitated, in a hurry to enjoy again and elsewhere. This elsewhere is all over the body, in the corpus of the parts of all the body in the body of all the parts, and in all other bodies, which each can be a part for another, in an indefinitely ectopic corpus. (203)<sup>iv</sup>

Such bodies of indefinitely interconnected joy—comprised at once by the excitement of one body part and its relation of that excitement to other parts of the body—corresponds to the joy experienced when hearing Hurt's voice: in large part, this is a childlike joy for the consistent, comforting voice of a parent—a role played by Hurt not only literally so in del Toro's *Hellboy* films, but on *The Storyteller* as a narrator/figurative parent for all kids watching the show.

However, this enjoyment over the parent's voice has little to do with any logic or meaning imparted from parent to child; rather, as del Toro suggests, the parent's voice is

enjoyable to the child insofar as it opens up an opportunity for “meaningless” fantasy. It is important to reiterate that Hellboy does not simply start imagining a story involving all kinds of magical creatures at war with human beings; the animated sequence begins with Hellboy coyly asking Broom to read him a story, and in exchange, he will brush his teeth and go to bed—Hellboy does not ask to be read the story of the Golden Army, but rather, *a* story, thus suggesting that any story, regardless of what it “means,” will serve the same purpose as far as Hellboy is concerned. Therefore, what Hellboy asks for is not so much a story, nor does he simply ask to hear his father’s voice—instead, Hellboy asks Broom for a gesture, a kind of performance—the very act of reading a story aloud.

In this way, though Hellboy seems to imagine the fairytale characters’ puppet-like appearance, and as such imagines himself as the absent puppeteer fully in control of their movements (akin to how del Toro, absent from his film, is a kind of puppeteer in control of his fantastical production), Broom’s voice is very much present in both reality and the fantastical world Hellboy imagines. In this respect, it is as if Broom’s voice first agitates and excites Hellboy, thus prompting him to imagine the fantastical world of the animated sequence, and then his voice is *voiced-over*, *voiced-on-top-of* the puppets’ bodies so as to excite them, to animate them.

However, this is not to say that it is Broom’s consciousness, and not Hellboy’s, that determines this animated sequence—by all means, del Toro points to Hellboy as the one whose dreamy gaze motivates the transition from reality/their military compound to the reddish-brown fantasy world of the fairytale—but that the puppets react to Broom’s performative act of reading the tale, and that they move realistically, naturally (unlike the

way Howdy Doody, the object of Broom's disapproval, moves); to Hellboy, they blindly act in accord with Broom's narration of the story, with his authority over the tale—and thus, the animated sequence constitutes Hellboy's subversion of parental authority in that the puppet is a figure for mindless obedience to authority, an unimaginative being whose enjoyment stems from the meaning behind a command (for instance, Broom pronounces “Build me this army,” King Balor's command to the chief goblin blacksmiths, who then, gleefully, gets to work building the mindless army) rather than the nonsense of command (the sound of the voice that pronounces it).

However, with Hurt's voice and intertextual role as storyteller, del Toro offers us a sacred presence that excites us, that incites us to remember not the words spoken by the storytellers who enchanted us in childhood, but instead, the gesture, the performance that sustains the sense of imagination.

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<sup>i</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>ii</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Birth To Presence*. Trans. Claudette Sartliot. California: Stanford University Press, 1993.

## Chapter 2—Cursed Bodies

The following chapter will explore del Toro's appropriation of the fairytale motif of the curse. In fairytales such as *Snow White*, *The Frog Prince*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty and the Beast* (among others), the curse results in a transformation—either from a human to an animal form (as in *The Frog Prince* and *Beauty and the Beast*) or from a state of consciousness to unconsciousness (*Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*).

Across *Cronos* (1993), *Mimic* (1997), and *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), one of del Toro's key interests is how children (and a childlike consciousness) are impacted by, and what their relation is to, instances of enchantment, whether it be: Jesús Gris' transformation into a vampire; the growth of the little Judas into a monstrous, human-like creature; the ghost of a child condemned to exile and spectatorship of his family. With all of these films, del Toro also appropriates and questions the sacred (particular to Catholic imagery) and what its relation is to children, to fairytales, to monsters.

### *Cronos*

*Cronos* heralded the emergence of a filmmaker genuinely interested in horror, not as a method by which the filmmaker manipulates her or his audience, but as a (bodily) force that we must become aware of in order to understand. This is highlighted by del Toro's sympathy for the vampire of *Cronos*, who is addicted to and afflicted with vampirism, and is not some terrible creature fueled by evil desires.

Jesús Gris (Federico Luppi) is an antiques dealer who is devoted to his wife, Mercedes (Margarita Isabel), and his granddaughter, Aurora (Tamara Shanath). One day, a curious man walks into Gris' shop. The man is "curious" in two senses of the word: he

is rather anxious and aloof, but inspects one of Gris' archangel statues, looking for something. Later on, Gris and Aurora find the Cronos Device inside this (rotting) archangel, and they (Gris in particular) becomes curious about the beautiful little gold, scarab-like object (although Gris tells Aurora "Something like this happens once in a lifetime. Once in a lifetime," suggesting he knows what it is, but it is not clear to how much he knows). Soon it becomes clear that the curious man was working for the industrialist de la Guardia (Claudio Brook) and his nephew, Angel (Ron Perlman). De la Guardia is dying, and wants the Cronos Device to give him more time. Indeed it does: Gris unknowingly activates the device (which contains within it an undead insect) and finds him-self growing more youthful (and increasingly addicted to the device's charms) as he turns more and more into a vampire. When his thirst for blood is so great that he looks to Aurora, Gris destroys the device and breaks its enchantment over him, resulting in his death.

In *Cronos*, del Toro fuses his unique take on vampirism (as an addiction) with his experiences with Catholicism in his youth. Given that del Toro, from a young age, did not take to Catholic dogma, one might suggest that he was afflicted or cursed with the idea of sin and suffering—with an overwhelming guilt, which was, no doubt, redoubled when his grandmother (twice) attempted to exorcise him for his love of monsters.<sup>i</sup> (There is a sublime irony in that del Toro began his professional career in film by learning about makeup and special effects from Dick Smith, of *The Exorcist*.) But this is not to say that del Toro, today, has entirely abandoned the faith that was very much forced upon him as a child. In response to a question asking if he is a lapsed Catholic, del Toro remarked,

““Yes, I am. I think that once a Catholic, always a Catholic. You’re screwed, you know. I feel guilty 23 hours a day. I feel guilty even when I’m sleeping.”<sup>ii</sup> For del Toro, this Catholic guilt (and the suffering it entails) cannot simply be forgotten (repressed) and left to the past and the trauma of childhood; it is inscribed into him, body and soul:

Whatever arouses your spirit or arouses your body at an early age, that's what is going to arouse it the rest of your life. Everything will be subordinate to that. It's a personal choice and it's a personal experience. I don't shame myself about being a lapsed Catholic and so if that cosmology appears in my movies, I'm fine with it.<sup>iii</sup>

And certainly, Catholic cosmology does appear in his films, beginning with *Cronos*. Del Toro notes that Gris’ transformation from human to vampire references Christ. To begin: the name “Jesús Gris” translates to English as “Grey Jesus,” the injuries to Gris’ hand and chest mirror the injuries to the body of Christ, and three days after Gris’ death (as a more-or-less human), which is pronounced by a guardian angel (Angel de la Guardia), he resurrects as Christ had.<sup>iv</sup> For del Toro, Christ-as-vampire (or vampire-as-Christ) was not much of a stretch, for in remarking on the film, del Toro also notes:

Cronos is the only, really fully-fledged lapsed Catholic movie I could do...I wanted very much to reflect one of the first things I thought about vampirism. When I was a kid, when Communion time came in the Church, and they said ‘eat my flesh and drink my blood,’ the idea of Christian Communion and Catholic Communion, and vampirism became linked with me at a very young age.<sup>v</sup>

From a young age, del Toro perceived the resemblances between rituals: the vampire that is the subject of horror across media (novels, films, television, etc.) is akin to the body of horror that is Christ—the cannibalism that marks the Last Supper (‘eat my flesh and drink my blood’) and the trauma Christ suffers in his crucifixion. Perhaps only a child would be so willing to embrace the connection between the two; or perhaps only a child as invested in cultural images and rituals would see the distinctions between the sacred (the body that

suffers in the name of Salvation) and the profane (the body that seeks pleasure for its own sake) are no more than aesthetic distinctions—the sacred and the profane are ways of telling stories.

There is no more peculiar object in del Toro's films than the Cronos Device (which is saying a lot, given all of the oddities he is fascinated by and fascinates us with); there is also no object that better speaks to a childlike enchantment with the associations between things that are otherwise unrelated. The things (or fragmented ideas) the little gold object that contains within it an undead insect and the gears and mechanisms that move when it comes into contact with another body (through its "stinger") are: the discrepancy between surface (image) and its depths, motion and stillness, artifice and the body, the ornate and the functional, beauty and the grotesque, death and the prolongation of time. These associations characterize an object that is equally sacred and profane—the device's exterior is beautiful (gold and remarkably shiny) and is suggestive of that which is untarnished by the physical world; its interior is amber, dark, claustrophobic, and suggestive of a hellish space—highlighted by close-up shots of the device's mechanical movements so tight that they are oppressive and give the sense that these 'inorganic organs' (the insect, the gears, etc.) are perfectly orchestrated and are indifferent to the experiences of humans (or, at the very least, human spectators).

What makes the aforementioned associations (and perhaps others) enchanting has little to do with the larger themes they might point to; what makes them enchanting is that they impress one with a sense of freedom to be curious. Here, I do not mean "curious" or "enchanting" in their everyday, social/expressive senses (for instance, "I'm curious about

international affairs or “Enchanted to meet you”), but as states of experience, particularly rooted in childhood. As a child, one is free to be curious—to ask questions, to wonder, to imagine, to explore, to examine, to play—and this is commonly regarded as desirable, as far as those caring for the children are concerned, for this curiosity suggests a healthy desire for children to learn about the world around them. But this (adult) perspective is perhaps too restrictive: why should there be any reason to be curious (to question, to wonder, to imagine, etc.) other than for the experience of not fully knowing, or not fully understanding, what something is or what it means? Children understand better than adults do that curiosity is a liminal experience—a state of being between non-knowledge/understanding and knowledge/understanding: it is a state of not yet *having* to know or understand, and for that reason, not yet having to align oneself only with what can be known or understood (the logical) over what cannot be known or understood (the illogical).

To be enchanted is a similar experience, particular of course to fairytales. In fairytales, whether an enchanted character like a fairy godmother or an evil witch, or an enchanted object (the mirror or the apple of *Snow White*, Cinderella’s glass slipper, the magic beans of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the spindle in *Sleeping Beauty*), to be enchanted is to be overtaken by fantasy (by the magical, the illogical, the not-fully-knowable)—as if one is cast under a spell—and to experience pleasure or delight in being freed from the limits of a reality in which logic and knowledge dominate (at least, as far as adults are concerned). Certainly, there are unpleasant accounts of enchantment in fairytales—children are eaten and imprisoned in *Hansel and Gretel* and *Rapunzel*, respectively, or

are pursued for their beauty (of body or voice) as in *Snow White* and *The Little Mermaid*. But there is a kind of sadistic pleasure in reading or listening to how violence and cruelty erupt onto the world, and are in the end curtailed or negated, insofar as it is not socially permissible to enjoy an act of violence or cruelty in reality.

The Cronos Device is an enchanted object that arouses a great deal of curiosity. In looking at it, one is left with any number of questions, including but not limited to: “How can this insect be alive and dead? How can it be so pleasant to look at on the outside and so unpleasant on the inside? Does this object have ‘organs,’ and if it does, is it then more than an inanimate object? Is it autonomous and immortal, or does it rely on the contingency of the poor soul who happen upon it?” The Cronos Device figures the cinema of del Toro in that there is more value in being curious about such an oddity—and being enchanted by the fantastic, the illogical or unknowable it figures—than there is in knowing or understanding it.<sup>18</sup>

But del Toro does not eschew the problem of knowledge or understanding; he addresses them through the sacred/profane dichotomy of his vampire. Gris’s relationship to the Cronos Device is characterized not only by the imagery of Christ (as del Toro notes), but that of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit they take from the tree of knowledge—the guilt of original sin del Toro suffered so intensely as a child in the care of his grandmother. While Gris is not forbidden from activating the Cronos Device, he seems to know what it is (as his “once in a lifetime,” comment, noted above, suggests), and thus

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<sup>18</sup> The prologue of the film does little to offer sufficient answers to such questions. It explains who made the Cronos Device (the alchemist Fulcanelli) and why (appointed watchmaker to the viceroy, he creates the Cronos Device, the key to eternal life), but it does not explain why the Cronos Device is what it is and operates the way it does.

would seem to know that he will suffer the same fate as the alchemist who created it if he were to activate it. However, later in the film Gris is horrified that his skin is decaying and that he is turning into something inhuman (“vampire” is never used in the film), but de la Guardia is not surprised and tells Gris to pull away his decaying skin to reveal his new, pale skin underneath (a reference to the molting of an insect), implying that Gris either did not fully know or understand the device (if he was familiar with it beforehand) or had no idea what it was to begin with. For this ambiguity, Gris is a curious figure in that it is difficult to say that he was “punished” as Adam and Eve are for their transgression.

But Gris is also curious about the device, and interacts with it in childlike fashion when he first activates it. Del Toro begins this scene with a close-up of the device, accentuating its elegant beauty and shine. The device is so appealing and so close in this close-up that one almost wants to reach out and touch it but stops oneself from carrying out the irrational action (at least, this is always my experience with this image). The viewer is enchanted by the beauty of the device, and (almost) forgets about the boundary that divides viewer and viewed (the screen), as if giving over to a curious impulse that annihilates the knowledge of the difference between image and reality—put another way, it is as if, for a moment, we have to learn again what this difference is on a phenomenological level, and because of this we become temporarily “curious” or “odd” in forgetting ourselves.

Gris embodies this curiosity in how he interacts with the device in this scene. His curiosity is at first a timid one: in a medium shot, Gris and Aurora are sitting beside each

other, with Gris holding the device in the palm of his hand, careful not to damage it, both their eyes fixed on it. As Gris reaches out to wind the device, del Toro changes to a medium close-up on Gris, taken from Gris' side of the table so that Aurora is obscured by the position of Gris arms as he holds and winds the device. A moment passes before Aurora peeks over her grandfather's shoulder.

Del Toro's compositions here suggest a grandfather and granddaughter bound by their shared curiosity (in the first shot) but separated by different degrees of curiosity (in the second shot). With the medium close-up of Gris, del Toro suggests an intensification of Gris' curiosity forceful enough that he forgets about his granddaughter, visually expressed by Gris' arms obscuring her in the frame. In this way, when Aurora looks over Gris' shoulder she not only expresses her curiosity but also calls attention our more privileged (spectatorial) position: we experience the intensity of Gris' curiosity—we experience the curiosity of one who is able to reach out and touch the device, which as mentioned above is a curious spectatorial desire—and we do so without limit (Gris does not block us from seeing what he is doing). We feel that because we see more than Aurora, we know more than she does, that nothing can be kept from us; but this omniscient feeling is an illusion.

Once Gris winds the device, we share in his curiosity and anticipation as we look at the device in a close-up (with Gris still holding it), watching as its winding mechanism turns. Assuming that Gris does know about the device, we expect his curiosity to be similar to ours (in that the prologue provides us information about the device)—this curiosity is not to know what the device is, but to see how it works. Assuming Gris does

not know what the device is, we share in his curiosity and anticipation, but to a different degree: we know more than he does (what it is) and are thus curious not only about how it works, but how Gris will react to what will follow when the mechanism stops moving. In both respects, our knowledge of what it is screens out other ways of knowing the device—that is, in the tactile (bodily) way Gris experiences it when holding it. In other words, we do not know *everything* about the device.

After a few moments of watching the mechanism turn (and the camera tracking in on the device), del Toro moves to a close-up of the back of Gris' hand (holding the device), with Gris' face out of focus. The Cronos Device is almost entirely obscured by his palm, so that we are no longer in the privileged position we once were—perhaps we do not know the device as well as we expect, and we are equally curious about how it works *and* what it is, with the latter symbolized by our inability to clearly see/know the device from below Gris' hand.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, we cannot clearly see Gris' face (it is out of focus)—it is as if his puzzlement has caused him to forget himself (to be obscured) until he expresses his disappointment with the device and del Toro rack focuses, with Gris' hand and the device out of focus and his face in focus, suggesting he breaks free of his curiosity.

But then a curious thing happens—legs spring out of the device. This takes place in a close-up in which we see the device sitting in the palm of Gris' hand. The image is

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that we do not know the Cronos Device is the same one created in the film's prologue; rather, we do know what makes the device (seemingly) different from what it was in the past. Of course, this discrepancy arises because we did not see (in the prologue) and therefore do not know, that this is how the device works.

clear and it accentuates the appeal of the device even more so than earlier (when it was on the table): there is an irrational urge to snatch it away from Gris' hand, solely because he is holding it—that is, the image evokes a childlike jealousy and a curious spectatorial position (as before, where we forget the difference between image and reality). In this way, curiosity about the device gives way (there does not seem to be anything more to it than what appears—it is a device that does not work) to being curious or odd, estranged from one's rational self.

Being curious carries over into when the legs spring out of the device—it is a moment of shock, of being estranged from one's rational self. Because del Toro presents this moment in a close-up on the device, we do not see if Gris and Aurora are shocked—quite the contrary, for we first hear Gris' laughter (as we remain looking at the device) and then see him laughing in a close-up, in which his and the device are out of focus and his face is in focus. Gris is not curious or estranged from himself (he is not obscured by a lack of focus in his image); he is delighted with the device and its peculiarities, as if he overlooks the violent way in which the device's six sharp, insectal legs abruptly pop out of its body, sounding like knives or swords being brandished as they do so. In a medium close-up, we experience this moment from Aurora's side of the table: she is in the foreground, looking only mildly interested in the device, with a much more amused Gris in the middleground, splitting his attention between the device and his granddaughter. Gris holds the device off-screen so that he and Aurora can see the device, but we as spectators cannot. No longer are we granted a privileged position from which to view—Aurora has taken that position (as we had occupied it—from the other side—a moment

ago, when she looked over Gris' shoulder) and in that sense del Toro evokes a childlike jealousy: no longer has it anything to do with the device, but that Gris and Aurora share a moment that we are closed out of (in that Aurora's back is to the screen) and want to join (to know, to see); the device held off-screen expresses our exclusion, and the curious sensation that accompanies this being excluded (we are irrationally jealous of fictional characters and we are no longer omniscient spectators).

But in the next shot, we are again granted a privileged position to see/know about the device. In a close-up of Gris' palm with the device, and with Aurora's face out of focus in the background, we look—alone—as the legs rise (again sounding like blades of so-me kind) on the left side of the device. Once the final leg rises, del Toro racks focus and Aurora becomes aware of the potential danger we had just observed. Del Toro then cuts to a low angle close-up, in which Gris' palm/the device is out of focus in the foreground and Gris' face is in focus in the background. Just before the device clamps its legs down on Gris' hand, del Toro racks focus again so that the hand is in focus and Gris' face is out of focus—yet Gris still looks at the device in his hand (once prompted by Aurora's glance), but we are able to more clearly see/know the danger Gris holds in his hand, suggesting that his face is out of focus because his fate (his curious transformation, his estrangement from his ordinary life) has been sealed by his indulging in his curiosity, the temptation to hold, to see, to know the device.

And this is where we find the limit to our knowledge, and safety in our curiosity. When the device latches down on Gris' hand, and inscribes itself into his body (in blood, the Christ-like wound in the palm of his hand), we realize that we cannot experience the

device in the physical, bodily way Gris does: we cannot, from an image alone, know the feel of the device, its smoothness, its weight, the pain it inflicts—we cannot know the device as a body that responds (in weight, in smoothness, in pain, etc.) to our touch (as if it were possible for all of us to touch it with a single hand). Clearly, Gris’ intensely painful reaction to the device’s grip, as well as the bodily transformation Gris undergoes because of it suggest, there is a way of knowing the Cronos Device, but like Adam and Eve, the price of knowledge is the horror with the body (shame of the body, human or vampire); our curiosity, on the other hand, does not require such a sacrifice—we may want to know, but we are protected by our spectatorial position from being able to act on our curiosity (to touch the device); in our curiosity, we may defer our desire for knowledge by taking pleasure in speculating what we might know, how the device might feel. In this sense, curiosity (the desire to know/see) is a sacred state (as in being in Eden); the acquisition of knowledge is a profane act that requires punishment; this punishment is an enchantment, a curse resulting from temptation—for Adam and Eve, the curse is mortality; for Gris it is vampirism.

But the curse can be broken. By the end of the film, after he and Angel fall to their deaths, Gris is a corpse: he is bleeding profusely, his grey skin is starting to peel of his body—no longer is he the curious, even youthful, old man who activated the device. Moreover, but despite the horrific corpse that was once her grandfather, Aurora takes out the Cronos Device to revive her grandfather. Unlike when Gris held it in the palm of his hand, the device is no longer so appealing: in a close-up, Aurora holds it over the body of Gr-is (that is, of Christ)—Gris’ body is out of focus while the device is in focus,

indifferently ticking away like a clock (geological time) as it is activated (or aroused, given the phallic character of the legs that shoot out of its body), and hangs over the body that it knows no-thing of (in that Gris' body is out of focus, difficult to perceive, to see, to know); in other words, the curse is driven by a stupid compulsion, a little object-body that knows nothing other than that which drives it (a thirst for blood) and the necessary rapport that it must establish with another body by violating it, marking it with blood (such as when the stinger breaks the skin on Gris' chest, drawing a drop of blood onto the surface; or more broadly, that the Cronos Device marks Gris by causing his body to decay and transform).

But Gris, once revived by his granddaughter's love for him—a love as indifferent to corpse it sees on the ground as the Cronos device is—he refuses to give in to the stupid compulsion that would have him drink her blood and instead destroys the device (which raises it stinger as Gris raises a stone, as if to protest its destruction), fating his death by doing so. As his body begins to convulse upon the destruction of the device, Gris falls to his knees and remarks that he is “Jesus Gris” and “Grey Jesus”—he breaks the curse by embracing a love that returns him to a curious state of being: he is Jesus Gris (the soul) and he is not Jesus Gris because he is Grey Jesus (the body)—his names are literally mirror images of one another (in that the words are reversed), suggesting that he will always be and not be both Jesus Gris and Grey Jesus, insofar as mirror images forever reflect one another but cannot come into contact because they inhabit different worlds (one side of the mirror and the other, or the body and the soul). Gris is thus always forever himself (who saved himself and his granddaughter from succumbing to the

device) and forever not himself (who aimed to give in to his bodily drive).

### *Mimic*

*Mimic* was del Toro's first experience working for a Hollywood studio, Miramax (which was at the time still owned by Harvey and Bob Weinstein); because the studio interfered with production so much, del Toro disowned Miramax's version of the film released in 1997. It was not until 15 years later, in 2011, that del Toro was able to put out a director's cut of his version of the film on DVD and Blu-ray. My discussion is concerned only with del Toro's version of the film.

Adapted from the short story of the same name by Donald A. Wollheim, *Mimic* is a parable about the dangers of human arrogance and how the natural world is corrupted in the name of science. Dr. Susan Tyler (Mira Sorvino) is an entomologist called in to assist Dr. Peter Mann (Jeremy Northam) of the CDC in curtailing a plague in Manhattan brought on by cockroaches. Tyler devises a genetically engineered breed of insect: the "Judas," a combination of praying mantis and termite designed to mimic the cockroaches and destroy them from within their lairs. Once released into the city, the Judases neutralize the infestation and the plague ceases. Three years later there are signs that the Judas, which had been designed to be sterile, has not only reproduced but has grown large enough to mimic and seek revenge on the city's humans after having been exploited and destined to die up-on completion of their task.

As Tyler and Mann are confronted with the monsters they created (which is ironic given that, three years after they release their Judas they are a couple finding it difficult to reproduce), del Toro also turns his attention to the relationship between Manny

(Giancarlo Giannini), who shines shoes in the subway, and his autistic grandson Chuy (Alexander Goodwin). When Chuy goes missing, Manny joins Tyler and Mann in eliminating the Judas creations. After the Judas monsters are incinerated in an explosion, the film ends on a familial note: Tyler and Mann embrace, with Chuy holding close at their side, his grandfather having been killed in the course of events.

*Mimic*'s production was characterized by studio demands for a genre film and del Toro's artistic vision. The issue came down to the fact that "...Bob and Harvey [Weinstein] wanted more of an action-packed creature feature to unleash on movie-going audiences" (3).<sup>vi</sup> But del Toro did not see the film as being so simplistic or formulaic. Not surprisingly, his version opens with del Toro's personal interests: in a church hospital, children sick from the plague occupy beds that are "...draped in opaque fabric lit from within, like embryonic sacs or insect chrysalises" (87).<sup>vii</sup> Looking back on shooting this image, which Miramax cut out of its theatrical release of the film, del Toro recalls:

It was the first day of shooting of *Mimic*, and I thought it was a very beautiful, a very striking image...It was the first image that got me into deeper trouble because some of the producers hated that image from the start. They said, 'It doesn't look like a real hospital. It looks like something off another planet. What are you doing? Are you making an art film out of a B-movie bug picture?' And I said to them, 'Well, I think they are one and the same, I think that the movie needs to be sumptuous, look beautiful, but have a real emotional sense,' and so on and so forth. It was a losing proposition from the get-go. (88)<sup>viii</sup>

Indeed, it is a beautiful image, a striking image—a surreal image. But this combination of the insectal with children is integral to the film, for this image, and the credit sequence that precedes it, announce some underlying themes/questions of the film: what alienates children from adults (the producers' remark that the hospital looks of another planet, alien), and why do adults exploit children by burdening them with the responsibility not

only of safeguarding (the future of) humanity (as the Judas bug is meant to), but of having to become, or “mimic” (as the Judas comes to), those who exploit them? What makes the image of the child sacred and the body of the child profane (insofar as the body, in its individuality, violates the homogeneity of the child’s image)?

Provided that there is such value ascribed to the child’s mediated image, rather than actual individual children, *Mimic* can effectively be read as del Toro’s critique of the heteronormative ideology Lee Edelman refers to as “reproductive futurism.” As Edelman observes in No Future, the political is invested in the Child as the signifier of the future—that is, of the future brought about by a devotion to upholding heteronormative structures (social, legal) and rejecting queerness as a threat to the future insofar as queer sexual relations do not result in reproduction, thus bringing about the fear that if

...there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore are responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself. (13)<sup>x</sup>

But, for Edelman, queers must not reject this logic, but embrace it, so as to figure a resistance to this insidious futurism, “...far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning’s eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form” (6).<sup>x</sup> By assuming the status of the “queer,” Edelman proposes that one embodies (Lacanian) enjoyment [jouissance], “a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law”

(25).<sup>xi</sup> In other words, without being burdened with (re-)producing the Child, the queer figures an enjoyment so narcissistically-driven so as to disrupt the promise of a future (for the Child) that has not been, nor will it be, realized; as Edelman writes:

...the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address. (11)<sup>xii</sup>

Del Toro's treatment of the Child (and reproduction) accords with Edelman's rejection of reproductive futurism by dividing the Child into image and historical subject, wherein the former suggests an objectification and manipulation of the (historical) Child and the latter expresses the horror of being objectified and manipulated.

Del Toro begins his film with a credit sequence that calls into question the image of the Child by offering it for inspection alongside images and bodies of insects.

Photographs of children—smiling children, who are now presumably suffering from the plague—flash throughout the sequence. Interwoven with these photographs are insects: butterflies and dragonflies have been pinned down to pieces of paper; moths and moth wings broken off from their respective bodies have been placed under a microscope and X-rayed; beetles crawl across a map of the subway and someone's notes; a praying mantis looks over its shoulder (the sequence features far more types of insects than my limited list accounts for here).

Given that, for Edelman, the image of the Child is propped up by ideology as a sacred one (in that it figures a non-existent future, a utopia even, to which we all must

devote our political energies), del Toro problematizes the Child's image (that is, as image) by likening it with the profane—with insects. For del Toro, who incorporates insects (and insect-like things) into all of his films:

I think they are perfect. Humans are imperfect because we have two sides; insects are one-sided. If creation was perfect there would be creatures that would be purely spiritual, that would exist like angels in harmony with nature, and there would be other creatures that are just physical, their pure purpose embodied in the physical. Some insects are so specialised that they are born without a mouth or sexual organs because they only live for a few hours. They don't feed because they shouldn't take food from the colony, and they don't reproduce because they're useless. They finish their work and die, and then they are eaten by the others. They are almost like the perfect fascist creature.<sup>xiii</sup>

Humans may be imperfect, but this does not stop them from rendering children as perfect in the image. It is important to reiterate that the children in the photos are smiling, and as we look on them in close-ups (and hear voices over the radio that seem to be talking about the spread of some disease—like with Prof. Broom's voiceover *Hellboy 2*, del Toro calls up the logic/perception dualism of “sense”) we hear Marco Beltrami's haunting, discordant score, which features children chanting (or at least the chanting seems to come from voices that belong to children): it is as if the children are eulogizing themselves in song, a ritual, with their photographs acting as images placed about the room of a funeral service, and we are meant to inspect these sacred photographs (in that they suggest both an imperiled future and the elevation of the Child's soul beyond material or historical experience) just as an entomologist might inspect the insects also presented in close-ups. In other words, we are asked to confront the image of the Child as just that—an image. In this sense, the child is likened to the insect, for del Toro, because the children reduced to photographic images here have literally become one-sided: they are only surfaces,

appearances that are imbued with sentimentality (children who once were smiling but now suffer from the plague) that homogenizes the actual (historical) children who were photographed into an image of the Child whose joy (purity, love) is indifferent to the suffering of the body that plagues these once-photographed children—the children are made into the perfect Child, are consecrated as (almost) identical images, sacrificed to a divinity.

Provided del Toro's remark (above) that ascribes a fascistic quality to insects, it is not altogether surprising that they appear here (in such varied form) to undermine the sacred imagery of the Child. Insofar as the photographs of the children are imbued with sentiment and therefore effectively sterilize them (by ignoring anything having to do with the body except for a smiling face), the insects represent the impossibility of sterilization, or rather, of sterilization enacted as function. The reason being that, as del Toro points out in his remark, insects are impervious to emotion or sentimentality, that they are concerned only with the union of purpose and function (those born without sex organs are not meant to reproduce and so do not need them to carry out other functions). There is no need to figure the future for insects—they embody the past, present, and future in that their bodies are perfectly developed to function according to their necessary purposes, and that this is a mode of existence that does not need to be thought, debated, or politicized: it is experienced in and through the body, incessantly, instinctually, because the insectal body is divine, perfect. In other words, the insect—and not simply the image of the insect—is a truly natural and sacred entity that, in its rejection of all imperfections (its fascistic quality) reveals the fascism of reproductive futurism insofar as it relies on

the image of the Child (in that the Child negates all imperfections and difference in its unifying image)—but the image of the child is a failed attempt at the sacred (the authentic, natural perfection of the insectal) and is in truth a profane image—in other words, its profanity lies in the fact that children are sacrificed to the Child (the signifier of the future) without being sanctified by sacred violence involving an intimate relation between and of bodies (Abraham’s command to kill and binding of Isaac, Christ’s crucifixion, etc.)

I do not mean to suggest del Toro’s point is that, in order to be more authentic, we must ritually kill children so as to appease a divinity and guarantee its protection over our future and us. On the contrary: children suffer authentic violence without the guarantee of a divine goodwill presiding over us, and this violence we take to be *meaningless*.<sup>20</sup> In *Mimic*, this *meaningless violence* takes the form of the plague—which calls to mind the ten plagues visited on Egypt in the Book of Exodus, but this also reminds one of Job as well: Job suffers (he loses his children, is afflicted with boils, etc.) despite his faith in God, and the children suffer, too—they suffer the plague as it violently attacks their bodies, forcing them to cough, to gasp for air, their abdomens convulsing, staring open-eyed, looking death in the face (one young girl looks to Tyler, who is incapable of helping her). When looking at these striking images the church hospital, which is perfectly sterile (clean, white), one witnesses the discrepancy between the Child, whose image figures the future, and the child whose body is moments from succumbing to the plague—the child is made

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, children who are abused (physically, sexually, psychologically) or who are forced to live in destitute conditions and die as a result of war, famine, natural disaster, etc. evoke sympathy because they seem to be punished for no reason.

into the insectal, into an automaton animated by the violent motions the sickness brings about through the body. But this natural (or supernatural) violence that alienates the child from her or himself (one never quite feels like oneself, or behaves as one ordinarily does, when she or he is sick) is not the first violence del Toro exposes us to: it is first the image of the Child, in the credit sequence.

In The Ground of the Image, Jean-Luc Nancy remarks on the relation between violence and the image. “Violence,” Nancy writes,

...remains outside; it knows nothing of the system, the world, the set-up that it assaults (whether it is a person or a group, a body or a language). Rather than compossible, it wants, on the contrary, to be impossible, intolerable within the space of compossibles that it rips apart and destroys. (16)<sup>xiv</sup>

In this sense, violence manifests itself as an irruption because it *is* an irruption (it destroys what it assaults because it is that destruction) and it exhibits itself in an image:

The violent person wants to see the mark he makes on the thing or being he assaults, and violence consists precisely in imprinting such a mark. It is in the enjoyment [jouissance] of this mark that the ‘excess’ of defining violence comes into play. The excess of force in violence is nothing quantitative...it consists in imprinting its image by force in its effect and as its effect. (20)<sup>xv</sup>

This exhibitiv force also characterizes images—as Nancy observes:

Force itself is nothing other than the unity woven from sensory diversity...That is what all painting shows us, tirelessly and in constantly renewed modes: the working of or the search for this force. A painter does not paint forms unless, above all, he paints the force that takes hold of forms and carries them away in a pres-ence [being-out-in-front-of-itself]. (22)<sup>xvi</sup>

While Nancy centers here on painting, this nevertheless applies to photographic (and cinematic) images as well: no photographic image presents its corresponding photographed subject without the artist behind the camera coming to terms with a force, a violence, that unifies the subject and renders him/her/it ready to be photographed: for

Edelman and del Toro, the subject is the child who, has a smile *forced* upon him or her for sentimental affect and for figuring the future—in other words, children are violated with the future (with its promises that are endlessly deferred onto a utopia that is never realized) so as to create the image of the Child. In this sense, returning to del Toro’s fairytale sensibility, not only is the future a violence that is retroactively inflicted in the child, imprinting on him or her its mark of the (image of the) Child—we inflict this violence on children, and then are astounded by images of actual children suffering violence (the plague, abuse, poverty, etc.), as if astounded that our false consecrations did not prevent violence—it is also recurring curse, which must be broken in order to liberate children from the image, from the perfect Child.

Nowhere is this curse better expressed than in the evolved Judas, which embodies how children are effectively queered by embodying (and ultimately destroying) the Child and the concept of reproductive futurism. As mentioned above, the Judas is the “thought-child” of Susan Tyler—but it is not just a thought; the Judas was created by Tyler, and because it is suggested that Mann is the one who is sterile (as Mann puts it, this is “unnatural,” but we might rephrase it here as “queer”), the Judas is a kind of profane immaculate conception—that is, a figurative, symbolic “child” produced, not through (heterosexual) reproductive or bodily means but through science. In this way, the Judas is conceived in the image of the Child: the Child is not produced through biological means (but ideological and technological ones), and is sterile (both in the sense that the Child is free of being tarnished when locked into an image and that the Child, because it is an image, cannot reproduce—but still is reproducible), just as the Judas was designed to be

sterile. Like the child who is preserved by the image of the Child—that is, preserved *as* this unifying image that is meant to encompass all children, Tyler preserves a single Judas in a jar—or rather, consecrates it by preserving it apart from the rest—revealing it in a press conference (held once the plague is contained), offering it to the public as an image of one Judas that stands in for the rest that were released and have destroyed the plague-carrying cockroaches (in other words, all Judas bugs are just like the image of this singular one held up to the media, the city’s collective eyes).

But the child and the Judas deviate from their (collective) images, and in their deviation come to figure their queerness, their having been sacrificed to a future with which they have been cursed and are excluded from.

Actual, historical children cannot figure the future in themselves; they can only do so in an image. This is because, in the image of the Child, childhood is held up as state of bliss that is forever lost (a period of non-knowledge, not unlike Adam and Eve’s situation in Eden), and that cannot be recovered by going to the past but by plugging ahead toward the future. But children so rarely look on their existence with such nostalgic affection—is there a child who has expressed contentment with not-knowing and being confronted by a world that does not make sense to them? Certainly not: children are expected to *grow out* of childhood—physically, intellectually, psychologically, etc.—and mature into adulthood over time. And they are expected to do so by following—that is, by mimicking—the examples set by the adults in their lives, as well as select images of adults (celebrities, of any kind, who exhibit “proper” behavior for adults). In other words, children are used (by adults) to represent the future, but it is a future of adults and for

adults (only adult ideology governs). The child is always sacrificed to the image of the Child, which stands guard at the gates of a utopic future—in this sense, insofar as the child is always excluded from the future, knows nothing of it, the child occupies the same position that violence does, as discussed by Nancy, in relation to the system it assaults (provided the child wants to enter into this future—and why would the child not want to do this? After all, it is a utopia). In other words, whereas the Child figures the future, the child (children) figures the threat of destruction of the future at the hands of a real child that necessarily deviates from the image of perfection.

Likewise, the Judas deviates from its perfect image and embodies violence toward the future—after all, the film mostly takes place three years after the plague has been curtailed, i.e. the utopic future is realized (the plague is eradicated, the children are safe) within three years. But the violence of the image—of the photographed children in the credit sequence—has returned from the past to destroy the future; or more precisely, this violence is excessive to the point of destroying the image. This is expressed when Tyler is faced with a grown Judas in the subway.<sup>21</sup> Seeing the shadow of a tall man cast onto the wall on the other side of the subway platform, Tyler asks the shade for the time (referring to it as “sir”). In a close-up, we see the silhouetted profile of the man’s face with Tyler out of focus in the background—at a glance, the profiled face does seem that

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<sup>21</sup> The description and analysis that follows is preceded by a moment concerning the photographic image. Tyler sits on a subway bench, looking through photographs of the full-grown Judas bugs. She places two photographs together, and seeing that they complete a human-like face, realizes that the Judas has come to mimic humans. This image brought together through two separate images (and the realization produced therein) is brought together by a force Tyler draws on that both images are more than they appear—they must be ‘stitched’ or ‘edited’ together, as it were, and a stitch or an edit is a violent act.

of a man, but a closer look reveals that it is a Judas. In a medium shot the Judas retracts its skin, dissolving a human-like appearance to reveal the monstrous insect contained underneath, and pursues Tyler through the subway.

There is a decidedly phallic, oedipal quality to this moment. The peeling back of the Judas' "human skin" to reveal the true monster underneath is suggestive of the foreskin retracting over the penis—all the more suggestive given that this occurs during a meeting of mother and "son." Violent psychosexuality—the opposite of the sterilized child of the photographs in the credit sequence or the nascent Judas in Tyler's jar—forces apart a mimesis; or more precisely, the violent ("aroused") body forces apart the mimetic image, which the Judas was able to fashion (by mimicking the human form) by drawing on a force of evolution, by (self-)imprinting the image (the mimesis) onto its body as if it had been an artist drawing on a unifying force (in Nancy's sense).

In this way, the Judas tears apart the image of the adult and reveals it as an illusion that covers up the monstrous truth of the future: the child is excluded from the future because the future is an image, a fantasy form which all are excluded (it is never realized); but the child is included in all insofar as every adult was once a child who mimed what it meant to mature until the mimesis took on the force of truth (which is why Tyler, and anyone else, at first takes the shadow and silhouette of the Judas to be that of a man—the mimesis is a fact of life that is an illusion meant to ensure a future of adults). In other words, the future and its retroactive violence (in the image) not only curses the child, but enchants all with the promise of a utopia for all provided they act a certain way (as adults); thus the Judas, in its violence, figures the child and the queer repressed by

reproductive futurism, but it is only they who can break the fascist curse (the illusion) of the future.

In this sense, when the producers of *Mimic* complained to del Toro about his odd, insectal church hospital, they were mistaken: it is not a hospital or an image from another planet—it only looks that way to those who know the right way to behave, to mime.

### *The Devil's Backbone*

Of all del Toro's films, *The Devil's Backbone* might be the most important. After a disastrous experience shooting *Mimic* under the thumb of Miramax, del Toro was spiritually and artistically broken; as he tells Hero Complex: "I came out of that really thinking I didn't know what to make about making movies after *Mimic*. I didn't feel there could be joy, again, and when I did *Devil's Backbone*, all that joy came back."<sup>xvii</sup>

Originally, del Toro had written a script for *The Devil's Backbone* before *Cronos*, but was discouraged from making it when his filmmaking mentor Jaime Humberto Hermosillo threw the draft in the trash because the margins were wrong, telling del Toro to write it again. Instead of re-creating his script from scratch, del Toro decided to make *Cronos* instead.<sup>22</sup> This was rather fortunate, though, because *Cronos* caught the attention of Spanish auteur Pedro Almodóvar, who approached del Toro at the 1994 Miami International Film Festival and remarked how much he liked *Cronos* and that he would like to produce his next movie. This would turn out to be *The Devil's Backbone* seven years later, which Almodóvar produced with his younger brother, Agustín, resulting in a

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<sup>22</sup> When Hermosillo discarded the script in the mid-1980s, del Toro had no copies and no computer from which to print off a fresh copy.

film del Toro most prizes, remarking: “I seriously think it’s the best work I’ve ever done” (99).<sup>xviii</sup>

*The Devil’s Backbone* is set during the Spanish Civil War (as is *Pan’s Labyrinth*, five years after the release of ‘*Backbone*’) and centers on an orphanage for young boys. It is run by Carmen ((Marisa Paredes), the headmistress, and her assistant administrator, Dr. Casares (Federico Luppi), and the hired-hand Jacinto (Eduardo Noriega). Carmen, whose husband was a leftist, is reluctant to take on another boy, Carlos (Fernando Tielve), whose father was killed in the war, fighting for the Republicans. She relents, and Carlos is left at the orphanage, where he meets a number of young boys, of which Jaime (Íñigo Garcés) proves the most antagonistic.

But the true antagonistic of the film is Jacinto. In the past, Jacinto intended to rob the orphanage of its gold (given to Carmen and Casares for taking the boys), but was stopped when Santi (Junio Valverde) spied him at the safe containing the gold. Jacinto, perturbed by the interruption and the possibility of being exposed, shoves young Santi into a wall, cracking his head open and accidentally killing him. Jaime is present to watch as Jacinto sinks his (Jaime’s) dead friend’s body to the bottom of a pool of water in the basement of the orphanage. In the present, Santi’s ghost haunts the orphanage (though perceptible only to the boys), and Jacinto continues to eye the gold. Jacinto eventually detonates an explosive to open the vault he thinks contains the gold, and the resulting explosion results in Carmen’s immediate death, and, later on, Casares’. At the end of the film, the boys band together to kill Jacinto, plunging him into the same water he sank Santi in, and where he is attacked by the ghost of Santi.

Provided that del Toro found such joy in making *The Devil's Backbone* after such a negative experience shooting *Mimic*, it would not be fruitless to read aspects of the film as allegorizing del Toro's 'rebirth' into filmmaking. This allegorical reading also benefits from addressing the fact that in 1997, while making *Mimic*, del Toro's father was kidnapped, and after negotiating his release, del Toro exiled himself from Mexico, his home, vowing never to make a film there again, and moved his family to the United States. One can observe the imprint of the kidnapping on del Toro in his films that, beginning with *The Devil's Backbone*, address stories of children with imperiled or absent fathers.<sup>23</sup>

Santi's ghost, both of these biographical notes. The ghost functions as the figure of del Toro, the child who is exiled (in death), cursed, from his home (the orphanage). Furthermore, del Toro fuses this self-inscription with the sacred: fatherless (and motherless) boys, including Santi's ghost, inhabit an orphanage with an undetonated bomb sitting in the middle of its grounds, an image not inconsistent with that of a cross. Thus, in a film where children are abandoned to an imposing "cross," *The Devil's Backbone* can be read as del Toro's re-enunciation of Christ's words on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

One of the first images of the film is the bomb being dropped, an act suggestive of

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<sup>23</sup> Blade must recover his surrogate father, Whistler, from a vampire holding cell in *Blade II*; Hellboy's surrogate father, Prof. Broom, is killed in the middle of *Hellboy*, and in *Hellboy II*, Hellboy struggles with the absence of his father's guidance and the prospect that he will become a father himself; Ofelia's father in *Pan's Labyrinth* is the King of the Underworld, to whom she ultimately returns, and Vidal (Ofelia's stepfather) is haunted by his father's death; in *Pacific Rim*, Mako's surrogate father, Pentecost, is suffering a fatal illness due to radiation from the jaegers and ultimately sacrifices himself for his daughter.

divine violence. From a black screen, we hear an unpleasant, mechanical sound, which is quickly revealed to be that of bomber doors opening to drop a bomb into the stormy night below. In this image, we are granted a mechanical perspective: the doors, filmed horizontally, resemble eyelids opening (eradicating the darkness of closed eyes/the black screen), putting our eyes in a privileged position to watch as the bomb is dropped. Moreover, because this occurs from such a height, from the heavens, it is as if our eyes are the eyes of a cold, mechanical God who looks at the world below as if it were a film screen, indifferent to the violence It casts downward—this is underscored by the fact that from this height, it is impossible to see onto whom the bomb is dropped, as if it does not matter who is affected by divine violence or cruelty; the bomb falls as the rain does—indifferent to all.

Additionally, one can also read this mechanical or divine indifference to be that of Hollywood, particularly in terms of the genre films it mechanically distributes, indifferent to who makes or consumes them (as in the case of *Mimic*). Provided this opening imagery suggests a war film, one might expect to see action-filled depictions of combat, with soldiers suffering the pains and enjoying the spoils of war—but this is not the case, for this is the single image depicting warfare in the film (at least, in terms of what one expects of all of Hollywood’s action/war films, like *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Saving Private Ryan*, et-c.).<sup>24</sup> Therefore, when the bomb is dropped—a surprising departure from the formerly dark, still screen—it falls with the weight of Hollywood expectations, as if it

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<sup>24</sup> Though this is not the only perspective from which we see the bomb dropped: in Jaime’s flashback to when he witnessed Jacinto kill Santi, we see the bomb fall to the ground beside Jaime.

were going to launch us into a film full of screaming men engaged in a violent spectacle we are already too familiar with, but is forced upon us regardless (Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor* was released the same year). Likewise, whoever opened the doors, whichever individual is responsible for the violence—and for satisfying generic expectations—is nowhere to be found: it does not matter who perpetuates the act (the production of violence); anyone who can follow commands (from on high, from the producers) is just as good as anyone else.

But instead of cutting to a frenzy of violence as the bomb explodes on impact with the ground, del Toro remains with the bomber as the doors slowly close, returning us to the black screen: the Hollywood genre film/product is being sealed off from the rest of del Toro's film, contained to that singular shot, and the film will begin anew with the image of a young boy (Santi) on the ground, shaking, bleeding profusely from his head—not exactly a Hollywood image (it is not, after all, the image of the Child appearing in the opening credits of *Mimic*). However, the bomb itself remains, standing in the middle of the orphanage, in one sense a symbol of Hollywood's impotent genre films; in another sense, it stands in for the cross, patiently awaiting crucifixion and the violence that will connect its body to that of a human.

Of course, the bomb sitting in the middle of the orphanage does not (immediately) resemble a cross; it looks like a bomb stuck in the ground, and no more represents a cross than it does a flag planted in the ground, as if the orphanage had been colonized. Yet because the bomb was dropped from high above, and stands upright in the ground, it calls up a cross-like image in that a vertical line intersects with a horizontal line, suggestive of

the intersection between the divine (vertical, coming from the heavens) and the natural or human (horizontal, the earth) world. Del Toro underscores this by aligning the human world with the earth and horizontality: just as the credit sequence, after a slow dissolve, there is a wide shot of a reddish-brown desert with a purplish-blue sky above (a rather beautiful image), across which drives a car (in the middleground), parallel to the sky and the earth. Though this image depicts no humans, one assumes some person must be driving the car across this (horizontal) landscape, thus aligning humans with the ground, the body of the earth which supports their lives and onto which their lives unfold. Just a few moments later, we see the bomb standing upright in ground, a clear opposition to the horizontality of the car driving across the desert. In this sense, the curious, cross-like bomb effectively stands in for del Toro's relationship with Catholicism (discussed in detail earlier in this chapter): it is the indifferent, immovable, indestructible thing that cannot be eradicated, repressed, or ignored—as del Toro has remarked (above): “Once a Catholic, always a Catholic.”

Furthermore, del Toro aligns the earth more precisely with children (that is, rather than all humans in general). As mentioned above, one of the film's first images is of Santi laying on the ground as he trembles and bleeds; and Jaime, when watching Santi's body dragged down to the bottom of the pool, crouches nearer to the ground. Likewise, almost immediately after walking into the orphanage, Carlos crouches down beside the bomb to pick up a slug off the ground (note the child's fascination with the insectal); when the boys attack Jacinto at the end of the film, he falls to the ground, and they force

him into the pool with spears.<sup>25</sup> With this, del Toro calls attention to a child's special relationship with the earth: all humans begin walking by crawling on the ground, where they most intimately experience the body of the earth (in that a crawling infant touches the ground with all four limbs); slightly older children tend to play outside, not caring much that their clothes might be covered with dirt, expressing a freedom to have their bodies come into close contact with that of nature—in other words, del Toro centers his attention on humans whose bodies are coming into being (in that they are not fully developed) and whose identities are in the process of forming.

While del Toro is attuned to children in each of his films, his interest seems to be particularly relevant in this film given his father's kidnaping in 1997. A highly successful businessman who owned a series of Chrysler dealerships, Federico del Toro was abducted by bandits in Guadalajara and held captive for 72 days. Assisted by hostage negotiators arranged by James Cameron (of *Terminator* and *T2* fame), del Toro and his brothers negotiated their father's release. After this, del Toro and his family left Mexico (kidnappings are notoriously high there, and del Toro is a public figure); but he could not leave behind the imprint of the experience, remarking to *Time* ten years later: "Every day, every week, something happens that reminds me that I am in involuntary exile [from my country]."<sup>xix</sup> In this sense, one might read the ghost of Santi as a figure for del Toro's exile: distanced from the cruel world around him, a forced spectator looking onto the lives of children without fathers.

We first meet Santi's specter, it appears as a spectator. Just after Carlos puts the s-

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<sup>25</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of all the occasions on which a character comes into close contact with the ground.

lug he picked up off the ground into his box of treasures, he casually looks up, seeing the transparent image of a child standing in a doorway, looking back at Carlos. The ghost stands rigidly, as if it were not aware that it is no longer a human boy and cannot physically touch its body to that of the earth. For a moment, Carlos is distracted and looks away (as do we) and when he returns his gaze to the doorway, the strange figure has vanished: was it merely an illusion, an image that seemed to be present but was really absent? Or does it only seem, now, to be absent but could just as well be present (as a God that refuses to re-veal himself might be present and absent)? Curious (like so many of del Toro's characters), Carlos walks over to the doorway: in a long shot looking from within the darkness inside the building out onto the incredibly bright orphanage grounds, we watch Carlos walk away from the bomb toward the darkened interior—it is as if this interior is the inside of a screening room (completely dark, still, silent) looking onto the bright world of the film, even as one of its characters (Carlos) walks toward us. With this, we are reminded that all photographic images are essentially ghosts of subjects who are visually present (as an image) and physically absent (as a body). At the same time, our perspective within the interior of the building approximates Santi's perspective (though we are receded much further back into the darkness than the ghost was when standing in the doorway—has it retreated into the darkness, along with us?): there is something ghostly not just in the image, but in the spectator, too—we look, forgetting ourselves, detaching our consciousness (our spirit or soul, if you will) from our bodies.

In addition, this image looking out from a dark interior onto a bright exterior is also suggestive of imprisonment. This relates both to del Toro's father having been held

captive against his will and del Toro's forced (though voluntary) exile from Mexico, where-in one looks out from abject darkness into light and freedom (and at the bomb/cross, as a symbol of the communion between earthly limitations and the divine). In this image, del Toro seems to wonder if film has become a prison for him (calling back to his nightmarish experience with Miramax on *Mimic*). In addition, del Toro seems to wonder what future awaits him on the other side of the border (the doorway that divides exterior light from interior darkness), provided that he moved his family into the United States from Mexico, in exile. Therein, del Toro inscribes himself into the position of the ghost: he is cursed in that he is estranged from himself, as Santi is; a child lost.

This is further addressed by one of the final images of the film: Santi's ghost stands atop of the sepia-toned pool of water (into which he and Jacinto were immersed), which is suggestive of the miracle of Jesus walking on water. It is a curious image—in a medium long shot, the ghost stands upright looking straight into the camera, as if it knows it is being photographed (again the specter/spectator correlation): in a reversal of the image of the Child in the credit sequence of *Mimic*, the ghost offers its entire body to the image, and as such is not reduced to a smiling face, figuring the future—melancholic, lonely, condemned figuring the trauma of the past, Santi's ghost suggests that there is no immanent purity to a child's soul or spirit, that it cannot be protected against the cruelties of the world whereas the soul of an adult is compromised; adult and child suffer alike (as father and son, God and Christ, Federico and Guillermo del Toro). As the camera backs away, and the ghost continues to look, one cannot (in the face of this Christ-like figure) help but think of Christ's words of doubt: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken

me?” Of course, Santi’s ghost is not affixed to a cross/the bomb, as would seem appropriate for such a reference; but that is precisely the point—the child is not pure enough to be sacrificed so as to cleanse humanity of its sins; the child is left to suffer, alone (as if in exile).

But there is a measure of hope in the film’s final image. Echoing the image from earlier of looking from within the dark interior of a building onto the orphanage’s bright grounds (with Carlos walking toward the doorway and the darkness), del Toro again invokes imagery analogous to watching a movie of being imprisoned: Carlos, Jaime, and the other boys stand in the darkened interior, as silhouettes in the darkness standing before a doorway (a frame within a frame) looking out onto the incredibly bright landscape (again, reminding us of the correlation between the human/natural and the horizontal). But rather than remaining shadowy figures, ghosts, trapped within one of the orphanage’s buildings, they cross the doorway, walking into the bright world outside—it is as if they have stepped into another film (by walking through the frame into the landscape image), into another life and an uncertain future (they are, after all, isolated from the rest of the world). But we are not left alone as we watch the children abandon us in the shadows: another spectating specter figures in the darkness, that of Casares, who is now cursed, exiled to the past, alone—again, del Toro seems to wonder if he is like the children who cross into a world of light, or if he will remain locked away in darkness, helpless and abandoned.

This final image, like the beginning of the film with the dropping of the bomb, also calls back to a violent Hollywood genre: the western, notably those of John Ford. The

image calls to mind *The Searchers* most immediately (in that the boys, like Ethan Edwards, venture out into the harsh landscape),<sup>26</sup> and del Toro seems to be appropriating Ford's suggestion of the incompatibility of the domestic world (the symbolic family set up in the orphanage, with the boys and Jacinto as brothers and Carmen and Casares as their parent-s) with the natural world, and grating that onto his concern with ghosts and curses, as if to suggest the domestic is a curse from which all children must break free (as del Toro must, if he is going to progress as person and as an artist).

*The Devil's Backbone* is perhaps del Toro's most important film because it seems the only one in which he reflects on his liminal status between roles as a son, a filmmaker, a (lapsed) Catholic, and perhaps through this artistic reflection, was able to cross, as the boys do, into a new life full of filmmaking, marked by his personal and artistic integrity.

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<sup>i</sup> "Guillermo del Toro biography." *bio*. The Biography Channel. Web. 8 Feb. 2014.

<sup>ii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "Guillermo del Toro." *theguardian*. The Guardian, 2006. Web. 8 Feb. 2014.

<sup>iii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "The Evening Class with Guillermo del Toro." *The Evening Class*. The Evening Class, 2006. Web. 9 Feb. 2014.

<sup>iv</sup> "Guillermo del Toro" (supplementary interview with Guillermo del Toro). *Cronos*. DVD. Criterion, 2010.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>vi</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "Exclusive Interview: Guillermo del Toro Discusses Director's Cut of *Mimic* and More!" *Dread Central*. Dread Central, 2011. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.

<sup>vii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>ix</sup> Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that *The Searchers* returns in *Blade II*. In the beginning, when Blade discovers Whistler, he intends to kill him (he is, after all, a vampire), as Ethan planned to kill Debbie; instead he looks into his (surrogate) father's eyes and says, "Let's go home," referencing Ethan's words to Debbie.

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<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "Insects and Violence." *theguardian*. The Guardian, 2001. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.

<sup>xiv</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "'Devil's Backbone': Guillermo del Toro reflects on his 'dearest film'." *Herocomplex*. Los Angeles Times, 2013. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.

<sup>xviii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>xix</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "Ten Questions for Guillermo del Toro." *Time*. Time Magazine, 2011. Web. 27 Feb. 2014.

### Chapter 3—The Hunter, the Hunted, and Hunting

This chapter will discuss del Toro's conceptualization of the fairytale archetype of the hunter, as it differs across *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy* (2004), and *Pacific Rim* (2013). In *Blade II*, the hunter's violence is positioned as a performance of violence; in *Hellboy*, del Toro explores hunting for identity within a world populated by iconography and the inhuman; with *Pacific Rim*, he suggests the hunter/hunting can be a playful means of resistance against an otherwise oppressive world.

#### *Blade II*

*Blade* (1998), directed by Stephen Norrington and based on the Marvel Comics character written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by Gene Colan, stars Wesley Snipes in the title role. Blade is a half-human/half-vampire, his (human) mother having been bitten by a vampire just before giving birth to him. Unlike other vampires, Blade is a "daywalker," a vampire who can withstand the sun's light; however, Blade is still driven by a thirst for human blood. At a young age, he comes under the guidance of Whistler (Kris Kristofferson), an old mystic who trains Blade to control his thirst for human blood and to hunt and kill vampires. In *Blade*, the vampire hunter comes up against Deacon Frost (Stephen Dorff), a "turned" vampire (like Blade's mother, Frost was once a human, who was bitten by a vampire and subsequently infected) who has designs to resurrect LaMagra, a blood god, to grant him power over vampires and humans alike. In an attack on Blade and Whistler's base, Frost and his thugs "turn" and abduct Whistler, and while Blade eventually kills Frost, he does not recover Whistler.

Thus begins the production history and backstory del Toro inherited with *Blade*

*II*, with Snipes and Kristofferson reprising their roles. In the opening of the film, Blade attacks a gang of vampires, hunting them to their base, where he finds Whistler, and instead of killing him as he planned (he is, after all, a vampire), Blade takes him back home and restores his mentor's health. Concurrently, within the vampire population, there has been an outbreak of the "reaper" virus, turns "ordinary" vampires into deformed creatures who are driven to feed on other vampires, thus spreading the virus by turning normal vampires into monstrous reapers.

To curtail the outbreak, Damaskinos (Thomas Kretschmann), vampire overlord, enlists Blade to work with the Bloodpack, a group of vampire assassins trained to kill him. Principle among the Bloodpack are Nyssa (Leonor Varela), Damaskinos' daughter (and Blade's romantic interest, and Rheinhardt (Ron Perlman), who most resents the prospect of working with the vampire hunter. In addition to this narrative template, we learn of Nomak, (Luke Goss), the principle reaper spreading the virus and the ostensible antagonist of the film. But the true villain is Damaskinos who, in an attempt to genetically modify vampires to be "day-walkers" like Blade, experimented on Jared Nomak, his son, inadvertently bringing about the reaper vampire; therefore Nomak's antagonism was a matter of seeking revenge for having been betrayed by his father. In the conclusion, Nomak is successful in murdering his father, as well as biting (and turning) his sister, but is killed in a final fight with Blade.

Del Toro's interest here in fairytale types pervades the superhero genre. Damaskinos is a vampire king, Nyssa a princess, and Nomak a fallen prince. In addition, Blade is a figure for a hunter (as in *Snow White* or *Little Red Riding Hood*) or a knight

coming to the rescue of a princess by slaying a monster (while Blade kills Nomak, he does not rescue Nyssa from her brother); and like many fairytales, it is incredibly violent. Indeed, as del Toro remarks on how he made the film according to what his teenaged self would have liked to see, therefore making *Blade II* “...almost like a musical of violence” (117).<sup>1</sup> As surprising as it may seem, *Blade II* (and for that matter, *Pacific Rim*) does remind one of an integrated musical. There is a balletic quality to the fight sequences, suggesting an aestheticized play of movements that drives the narrative toward its end. This returns us to del Toro’s interest in the difference between aesthetic time—here marked by highly aestheticized acts of violence—and linear time, *Blade II*’s linear narrative progression. For del Toro, it is in this slippage between aesthetic and geological time that the body cries out, violently so, as a sacred intensity—visual, aural, physical—that is distinct from the other intensities which surround it.

Here, I use the term “integrated musical” in its most conventional sense: a song and dance performance interrupts and suspends the narrative, while at the same time moving it forward by commenting on events that occurred during, or are related to, the narrative (while quite often drawing out the romantic/sexual rapport between the leads, exemplified by the films of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers); thus performance and narrative are integrated, unified into a cohesive whole. Following this logic, one might suggest that the fight sequences suspend narrative development of *Blade II* while drawing out the lent rapport between bodies that cannot be elucidated any other way than through violence—that is, these characters are related to each other most intensely when violence becomes a performance.

Moreover, I use “intensity” to refer to the manner in which something presents itself, and how it makes itself distinct from other such presentations—in other words, how forceful something is in distinguishing itself from others. In this respect, “intensity” is a matter of imagery, of an image that presents a thing; as Nancy writes:

The image is the imitation of the thing of a thing only in the sense in which imitation *emulates* the thing: that is, it rivals the thing, and this rivalry implies not so much reproduction as competition, and, in relation to what concerns us here, competition for presence. The image disputes the presence of the thing. In the image, the thing is not content simply to be; the image shows *that* the thing is and *how* it is. The image is what takes the thing out of its simple presence and brings it into pres-ence, to *praes-entia*, to being-out-in-front-of-itself, turned toward the outside. (21)<sup>ii</sup>

Because of its presentational quality, Nancy argues, “The image is the order of the monster; the *monstrum* is a prodigious sign, which warns (*moneo, monstrum*) of a divine threat” (22). “What is monstrously shown,” Nancy continues, “is not the aspect of the thing; it is, by way of the aspect or emerging from it (or drawing it up from the depths, opening it out and throwing it forward), its unity and force” (22).<sup>iii</sup> In this regard, an intensity, insofar as it is an image, is a monstrous presentation of unity and force; lesser intensities manifest when things require less force to draw them into unity, to come into a *monstrum*, and greater intensities are symptomatic of things that require greater force to be unified, drawn into, a sign. In this regard, intensity-as-image is a fitting notion for *Blade II*, wherein intensities of violence bring bodies into presence, into the sacred order of the *monstrum*.

Though the film is replete with musical-like performances of violence that bring bodies to presence, del Toro begins *Blade II* with a scene depicting the coming into presence of Nomak’s body in contrast to the bodies of the vampires running the blood

bank in Prague, who aim to drain him of his blood. Presumably, Nomak intends to donate his blood with the intention of spreading his reaper virus; a nurse leads him into a torture chamber of sorts, in which an illuminated seat awaits his body, along with an odd contraption containing tubes of a blood-like substance. Other than the fire in the back of the room, a muted blue pervades the chamber, imbuing it with a cold, sterile feeling: it is no longer simply a matter of survival that the vampire drains humans of their life in order to sustain its own—this survival impulse has been subtended by cruelty. No longer is the vampire forced, by some horrible curse, to feed on blood (as Jesús Gris of del Toro’s *Cronos* is); the vampire enjoys it as spectacle and ritual. Hence the sterile, modern look of the chamber: the spectacle of cruelty is proffered to Nomak (and for that matter, us) as a presentation, as the anticipation of the cruelty that is to become spectacle when Nomak takes his seat under the light (it is as much a spectacle of cruelty for the audience as it is for the vampires). This is underscored when the “surgeon” and the “nurse” share a look of glee just before the surgeon puts on the surgical glove connected to the contraption—but this is not a glove intended for cleanliness, but cruelty: its four fingertips perversely affixed with needles, thus resembling incredibly long fingernails. Furthermore, this glove is the image of efficient cruelty—the four needles drain the blood faster than a single one would, and likewise bring about four times the intensity of pain to the body they touch. In this regard, although the vampires here are compelled by cruelty, this glove suggests an intimate relation between the bodies endured in this mechanical form of vampirism (it is still a matter of one body touching another, of life moving from one body into another); there is still a kernel of intimacy that carries over into this new form of vampirism, an

intimate force that draws bodies into the presence of spectacle.

But this spectacle's gory potential never comes to presence; del Toro does not indulge in "torture porn" does not depict bodies drawn into presence with a protracted scene of cruelty, with the glove penetrating Nomak's skin, turning him into a spectacle of agony for the vampires to take pleasure in (as we take pleasure in it). Rather, del Toro protracts the coming in-to presence, the not-there-yet of the spectacle; we anticipate the form of the spectacle (the struggle between Nomak and the other vampires, the glove piercing his skin, blood pouring out. Del Toro centers this protraction in Nomak's crying in the face of the torture that he (and, for that matter, we and the vampires) is expecting. Much to the surprise of the vampires (and us), this crying gives way to laughter, as if Nomak has withdrawn from the cruel spectacle that he has been brought into the chamber to face, to suffer. With a look of complete surprise that reverses the look of glee from a moment earlier, the surgeon and nurse look into one another's eyes in the face of this radical departure from the spectacle they anticipated; as if their eyes (which had looked with gleeful anticipation) could negate the displeasure of this interruption. In other words, the surgeon and nurse look away from the spectacle that is taking place before their eyes, the laughter that brings Nomak into presence before them: the laughter brings Nomak to presence in that it makes an image of him and turns him out-in-front-of-himself—in his laughter, Nomak ceases to be the passive, ill-fated creature subject to the cruelty of the vampires; he becomes an absurd image of one who laughs as if he has nothing to fear (as if this laughter is a defense mechanism against the threat of violence), and thus his image halts the process of cruelty because he is not "himself," as far as the vampires are

concerned—that is, he is no longer part of the spectacle that requires him to be passive, terrified.

The rupture between Nomak, as the passive victim, and Nomak, as the aggressor, is embodied in the scar on his chin that begins to tear apart as he laughs. As the skin on his chin tears, his blood races and veins come to the surface of his face and neck, resembling tattoos. In this regard, his body presents itself as a monstrum, in Nancy's terms, as a sign of a divine threat—the laughter and the bodily transformation are not natural (neither are the vampires surrounding Nomak) but come about as divine intervention that destroys the spectacle of suffering. Here, I use “divine” not to refer to a god(s) that intervenes through Nomak, but to refer to an intensity, a force, coming from a “beyond” that is not found in the torture room—in other words, an intensity that cannot be tortured because it cannot be confined to the presence of a body, that it makes itself known through the body as a sign of the fact that it (the divine) does not have a body (a corporeal presence) and in that regard cannot be subjected to spectacle in the way Nomak is; rather, it is through Nomak that divine intervenes into the spectacle and thus appropriates it to signify its authority to turn life into spectacle (for its own pleasure?).

In this respect, once the spectacle of suffering is reversed by this divine intervention that overtakes the body (as one might be possessed or enraptured by a spirit), it is violence that erupts onto the spectacle space (the chamber, the chair, the contraption, the walls, etc.) and not the cruelty envisioned and anticipated by the vampires. Still overtaken by delirious laughter and his veins/tattoos, Nomak attacks the nurse, pushing her against the wall. Rather than del Toro indulging in a moment of protracted cruelty

wherein Nomak's teeth sink into the nurse's skin as he takes sadistic pleasure in draining the life out of her, Nomak's back is to the camera as he holds the nurse against the wall, her blood spattering onto the wall behind them as he drains her blood. Del Toro's camera does move in closer, around Nomak's back to his right side to view the nurse's agonized face: her mouth is wide open, and her eyes are just barely open and her head looks upward as Nomak bites the right side of her neck. However, this image of agony is not a spectacle of cruelty—it is an intensity, a violent force that flows from Nomak's agitated body (his laughter, the tearing apart of the scar, the veins/tattoos) into the nurse's and drawing her face into an image of agony. Del Toro does not fetishize this flow of violence by turning his attention to Nomak's face as he drains the life from her body and into his, that is, the camera does not look for the pleasure in the violator's face but the agony in that of the violated. By denying us the perspective to see Nomak's face, del Toro denies us a perspective from which we can discern a psychological motivation for why Nomak attacks, which contrasts the gleeful look shared by the surgeon and the nurse (since they clearly take a sadistic pleasure in draining the life from their victims). We are therefore deliberately denied a perspective that would allow us to take pleasure in this moment of agony; because we cannot see Nomak's face as he inflicts pain, we cannot share a knowing look with him, as the surgeon and nurse do—in other words, we cannot see in someone else's eyes a look of excitement that matches our own.

On the contrary, the nurse's agonized expression, the only face with which we are able to see, is by all means a withdrawal from looking and being looked at. As spectators, we discern the face of pain as it makes itself known in her agonized face, but we cannot

feel this pain; it will not overtake our bodies as it does hers. In this regard, her agonized face is a withdrawal from being looked at in that her face becomes a sign (the eyes just barely open, the mouth wide open, the head directed upwards) of what can only be expressed as a sign and cannot be experienced or known directly; in other words, of what comes to presence, to being out-in-front-of-itself, in the image. Thus the nurse's face becomes the sign of a divine threat: "divine" in that it is a sign of the sublime, of what cannot be adequately represented; "threat" in that it signifies an intensity of agony that cannot be experienced by anyone other than the nurse; we, we with the other vampires in the room, are threatened by the divine with her agonized body.

But the nurse is not simply a figure of a divine/sublime withdrawal manifested in a painful intensity; something escapes this withdrawal—the nurse's blood. Just before the camera moves around Nomak's right side to see the nurse's agonized face, blood spatters onto the wall behind the nurse and Nomak—and because this is del Toro's vision, it is not a few drops of blood that land on the wall, but an enormous blot of blood that energetically flings itself against the wall, as if it were paint thrown onto a blank canvas. Here, an image irrupts onto the wall/canvas as a result of the violent force, the intensity that comes about from the physical contact between two bodies. This sets in motion the musical quality of the violent spectacle that is to unfold throughout the rest of the film: bodies come into intimate contact with one another (which we do not directly see, here) and art (the spatter of blood) emerges as a result, as in the case of those (classical period) integrated musicals wherein the musical performance represented (substituted for) the sexual relations between the leads. Moreover, because we do not directly witness the

physical contact between Nomak and the nurse (again, Nomak's back is turned to the camera) this blood/life/art comes about from a space we cannot see, that cannot be represented in this spectacle of violence (though not of cruelty): thus the interaction between bodies is sublime, and what we come to see and know (sense) of their relation is always based on our inability to relate to them as bodies.

In proceeding with a discussion of the fight sequences as being analogous to musical performances, I will limit myself to the sequence in which Blade is visited by two assailants, who turn out to be Nyssa and Asad, (another member of the Bloodpack) delivering the message that Damaskinos requests Blade's assistance in handling the reapers. Not only does this fighting sequence resemble the aesthetic of a musical performance between romantic leads of an integrated musical, but it foregrounds del Toro's distinction between a spectacle of cruelty (in the scene just discussed with Nomak) and that of violence—that is, del Toro's description of the film as “a musical of violence” should not be mistaken as del Toro celebrating cruelty but the violence that is part of images and performance—part of the spectacle of performance.

The sequence in which Nyssa and Asad infiltrate Blade and Whistler's base suggests not only a musical performance of violence, but also a circus of violence—in either case, del Toro foregrounds violence as performance (spectacle). Before Blade, Whistler, and their new teammate Scud (Norman Reedus) fight Nyssa and Asad, del Toro grants us (the audience) a privileged point of view: high above in the hanger, we see two figures cloaked in black, skintight bodysuits dangling and leaping among the beams in the ceiling. They move with such speed and grace, silently flinging their bodies from one

pole to another, they look like circus acrobats: because Blade and his company are on the ground and thus we cannot possibly be seeing from any of their perspectives, and in that sense we are granted access to a spectacle that is “groundless.” Here, I use “groundless” in both sense of the word: the assailants/acrobats are essentially dancing without touching the ground (not unlike the levitation for which Fred Astaire became famous); and this acrobatic spectacle is “groundless” in that it is without reason or purpose insofar as the narrative is concerned—we do not know who these figures are at this point, but we do know Blade, Whistler, and Scud: thus there is no reason for del Toro show us figures with whom we cannot identify (insofar as they threaten the characters we know/can identify with and because we cannot identify them as human or non-human). Therefore, this spectacle of aerial dance is a curiosity—it is a moment of aesthetic beauty, in which two bodies harmoniously twist and fly about as if the violence to come is not a matter of cruelty or brutality, but of playfulness (in that all acrobats make all their difficult training seem effortless in their performance, as if it were a matter of playing in the face of death) and beauty.

Moreover, this acrobatic digression is also spectacle for the camera’s consciousness rather than just that of the audience). From a low angle (that is, from the ground) the camera scurries around Whistler and looks up, over his left shoulder catches a glimpse of two distant figures moving about in the hanger’s ceiling; the camera tracks in for a closer look until it passes the left side of Whistler’s head and his left shoulder—in other words, del Toro’s camera movement looks up and rises from the ground to the sky, to the spectacle that takes place within it—in other words, the camera moves towards the

source of the image, as Nancy notes:

The image always comes from the sky—not from the heavens, which are religious, but from the skies, a term proper to painting: not heaven in its religious sense, but sky as the Latin *firmamentum*, the firm vault from which the stars are hung, dispensing their brightness. (5)<sup>iv</sup>

In this respect, the camera movement from the chaos of the ground—Blade runs to grab his sword, Scud yells at Whistler for grabbing a gun (he is skeptical of how easily Whistler overcame his vampirism, his thirst for blood) and in turn, Whistler strikes Scud with the gun, knocking him to the ground, spilling a few drops of Scud's blood onto the floor in the process—to the “firm vault” above, from which the assailants effortlessly hang and dance in unison. Del Toro furthers the orderly aspect of the sky/the above by cutting to the long shot in which the camera steadily, slowly tracks in on the assailants as they fling and fly about the ceiling (thus providing the spectacle of aerial dance previously discussed)—as if, by tracking on them from this height, the camera motion mimics the acrobatic assailants by leaving those fixed on the ground (Blade, Whistler, and especially Scud, whose body lies on the ground), in order to levitate as it follows the assailants' groundless bodies as they dance away from the camera. Provided this digression heavily contrasts with the frenetic style in which Blade, Whistler, and Scud prepare themselves for the intruders, it is as if the camera becomes transfixed by a divine threat, a *monstrum* from the sky as it interrupts the narrative (that is, as a purely aesthetic digression from who we identify with/can identify, the protagonists on the ground).

Moreover, this divine/sacred interruption from above that calls for the camera's consciousness is analogous to the style of the integrated musical in that a song and dance performance interrupts the progression of the narrative's plot with spectacle. This is

underscored here by the fact that Marco Beltrami's harsh, dissonant score is suspended as the camera looks up and levitates along with the attackers: in a sense, this is a reversal of the integrated musical (in that the interruption does not celebrate the interplay between image and music), but more precisely, insofar as music always entails the appropriate timing of the interplay between sounds in order to produce certain effects, the suspension of Beltrami's score suggests a (symbolic) suspension of time—as if these assailants are “dancing” without music, thus reinforcing their “groundless” dance in that there is no (logical) reason to dance without music, and further separating them from the linear (logical) progression of the narrative—in other words, this groundless spectacle of aerial dance takes place within aesthetic time, rather than the linear time in which the narrative chronologically unfolds.

But the assailants/acrobats/dancers do not remain suspended in the air or in time; from above, they drop to the ground, where their confrontation with Blade takes place on a kind of stage. Soon after one of the assailants (they are identical in their masks and skintight bodysuits) subdues Whistler (by knocking him to the ground) and aims Whistler's gun at Scud, Blade emerges onto the scene. Assessing the danger, Blade orders Scud to turn on the guard lights, and Scud does so. In a long shot, Blade stands upright, prepared to do battle: behind him we watch as a wall of guard lights come on—there is a rather theatrical aspect to the lights coming on so suddenly, as if they were being turned on for a show; this is complemented by the empty, flat floor on which Blade stands (and which reflects the light from the guard lights), as if it were a stage, and with Blade ordering the “stage light-s” turned on, it looks as if he were preparing to direct or

choreograph a stage production, perhaps a musical (accented by the “costumes” Blade and the assailants wear).

By centering on a sword fight, del Toro emphasizes the choreographed musical/stage production quality of this sequence, and therefore highlights these bodies as they move about the stage; instead of creating a spectacle of gunfire and explosions, del Toro creates a spectacle of bodies and their relation to the sky and the ground. Blade is as much a “dancer” as Nyssa and Asad are: whether he is on the attack or defending himself, Blade moves with his entire body—his arms, his legs, his chest are all engaged in this violence. As a result, Blade makes no small gestures: he dashes to an away from his attackers, he slashes at them with his blade and strikes them with his hands and legs, but in particular, he leaps into the air: in doing so, it is as if he is drawing on a *monstrum*, a divine threat from above to bring down hard on his attackers on the ground (put another way, the image falls from the sky onto the ground).

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Blade’s isolated fight with Nyssa; though her identity (as a heterosexual woman) is not revealed, this brief fight is akin to the musical performance shared by the romantic leads of an integrated musical. Del Toro begins this confrontation with a long shot in which Blade and Nyssa stand opposite each other on the “stage” with the lights behind them—again, del Toro calls on an extraordinary, theatrical presentation for violent spectacle. Blade “leads” this “dance,” so to speak, with his movements being the more aggressive of the two, attacking Nyssa with the energy of his entire body; Nyssa, on the other hand, is much more defensive, with her bodily energies devote-d to deflecting Blade’s attacks—in other words,

following Blade's lead by matching his physical efforts, as if dancing with him (which, in terms of the musical, amounts to a sexual encounter between the two).<sup>27</sup>

Del Toro underscores their aestheticized play of movements (insofar as “theatrical” implies an aesthetic presentation, such as a musical, as opposed to realism or naturalism—of course, Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) makes this point) by imbuing their movements with a peculiar, estranging look: in these long shots of the two fighting, Blade and Nyssa move with such supernatural capacity (for instance, leaping into the air and landing flawlessly) that their interaction seems unreal—unreal indeed, as del Toro uses CGI for these long shots in order to present Blade and Nyssa's extraordinary combat. Rather than using CGI for cheap effects, del Toro uses it more precisely: it further aestheticizes these characters and highlights their supernatural bodies, implying that there is something more supernatural (or divine) in their movements than a world in which vampires are common-place.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the use of CGI, combined with the long shots in which the two silhouettes fight, suggest a videogame aesthetic—highly artificial graphics that defy the limits of reality—, such as the combat games produced by the “Mortal Kombat” or “Tekken” franchises; del Toro attests to the influence of video games on *Blade II*, along with two other “base” forms of popular culture, anime and comic books.<sup>v</sup> Provided that video games are characterized by the player(s) intervening in the world of the given video game (and often participating and progressing through an

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<sup>27</sup> This is not a matter of del Toro reinforcing heterosexual gender norms, with the man taking the more aggressive position in a relationship; on the contrary, as Nyssa is a fighter of such skill (to the extent that her speed and aggression are identical to Assad's) that Blade, who is unaware that he is fighting a woman, holds nothing back (once she takes off her mask, Blade even looks on Nyssa's face skeptically, as if baffled at the thought he was met with such skill by a woman).

<sup>28</sup> In other, closer, shots, “real” bodies are used.

elaborate story) and controlling characters, there is something of a divine intervention implicit in video games (in that the player ultimately decides what happens in the world of the game). Thus, like Nomak, who in the previously discussed scene seems to be overtaken by some divine force (intervening in the spectacle of torture), Blade and Nyssa seem possessed as if they were videogame characters, enraptured by the spirit of play. It is in this sense that they, like Nomak, embody a *monstrum*, a divine threat; but unlike the violence we anticipate is to befall Nomak in the earlier scene, the violence in which Blade and Nyssa are engaged is not characterized by the subjection of a body to cruelty inflicted onto it by another body (the surgeon's "gloved" hand in the torture chamber of the earlier scene). But instead their violence is characterized by a dance, a play of movements (that is, of bodies freely moving, as opposed to being restrained as Nomak is the chair) that together make up a spectacle, an image, a *monstrum*.

Nowhere is their status as *monstrum* more apparent than in the image that concludes this isolated fight. In a very brief long shot, we see Blade standing with most of his body (his chest, his torso, his legs) facing the camera as he looks and points his sword downward, at Nyssa; she is crouched close to the ground, her body more withdrawn from the camera's look than his—her chest and torso are directed towards the ground (with her left arm covering her chest) as she looks on, roughly at eye level with Blade's groin, which is where she directs her blade. As they hold their positions (the positions from which they threaten one another with violence), the camera moves in for a closer look: it tracks in from a medium shot of Blade and his sword pointing downward to a close-up of Blade's face with his sword in the foreground, and then quickly follows

Blade's sword as it leads to medium close-up of Nyssa's right shoulder and head, follows her gaze into a c-close-up on her blade directed at Blade's groin; the camera concludes its movement by pulling out of this intimate close-up and briefly returns to the previous long shot as a freeze frame.

The camera's choreography in this respect, combined with the "frozen" long shot that it ends on (as well as the fact that Blade and Nyssa are still rendered in CGI both in these closer shots as well as the long shots that bookend the camera's movement/varying perspectives) highlights the conclusion of their fight/dance as image, as *monstrum*: it is as if the camera, in its movement, excitedly "draws" a variety of perspectives from which to look at the single image (perspective) of Blade and Nyssa in conflict—in other words, the camera "draws" or "paints" these different perspectives into the otherwise distant vantage of the long shot as if it were a pen (as in Alexandre Astruc's "caméra-stylo") or paintbrush producing an image (perhaps even a pencil or paintbrush used by a deity to produce a divine threat). Moreover, it is important to note that Blade's striking position comes from above (the sky) and Nyssa's from below (the ground) and together they balance out the composition: in this sense, the image is forged from the union between sky and ground, from their interaction, which the camera/pen/paintbrush tracing out:

...the stroke that marks the surface, the hollowing out and pressing up of this surface, of its substance (canvas, paper, copper, paste, clay, pigment, film, skin), its impregnation or infusion, the embedding or the discharge effected in it by the pressure applied to it. (7)<sup>vi</sup>

In this regard, del Toro's choreography of the camera's movement traces the production of the image as an intensity (of the antagonism between the two), or the tension between

sky and ground that characterizes the image (here, the balanced frame); as Nancy puts it, the image is:

detached from a ground [*fond*] and it is cut within a ground. It is pulled away and clipped or cut out. . . This cutout or clipping creates edges in which the image is framed: it is the *templum* marked out in the sky by Roman augurs. It is the space of the sacred, or, rather, the sacred as a spacing that distinguishes. (8)<sup>vii</sup>

For del Toro here, this sky/ground dualism of the image is expressed by bodies: it is from above (from the sky) that Blade draws the force of his threat from the sky as he points his blade at Nyssa—his feet firmly planted on the ground and right raised, he holds his sword (which, one might suggest, resembles a violent pen or paintbrush that uses blood as ink or paint to produce a violent image); Nyssa, on the other hand, draws the force of her threat from the ground (and her blade is no less a pen or paintbrush than Blade's)—they present themselves to each other as images of violence-to-be-enacted (an anticipation of violence, as in the case of Nomak's anticipated torture), as a strike from above or from below, which in turn balance out the frame's composition. This image is then distinguished from the rest of the linear narrative in that a freeze frame is in a way cut or clipped out of the linear progression of the narrative (and the ordinary pace at which images are projected).

Thus, for del Toro, the hunter operates as a performer marked by violence and the image: the hunter's violence toward the hunted, and the violence the hunted returns to the hunter, is not a matter of inflicting cruelty onto one another, but of drawing on intensities of violence that render their bodies aesthetic, and even playful.

## *Hellboy*

*Blade II* was done, partially at least, to be able to do *Hellboy*...I mean, literally, my agent at the time called me and said, 'Do you want to make *Blade II*?' And I said 'No, I don't want to do *Blade II*.' And he said, 'Do you ever want to do *Hellboy*?' And I said, 'Yes.'" 'Well, if you want to do *Hellboy*, you gotta do *Blade II*, because no one's going to hire you to do *Hellboy* based on *Mimic* or *Cronos*.' And he was absolutely right. (113)<sup>viii</sup>

But as the previous discussion of *Blade II* should suggest, just because del Toro was more or less obligated to direct *Blade II* does not mean that he is a hack who compromised his artistic vision by making a film he did not want to make in order to realize his vision in a film he truly did want to make; del Toro's aesthetic permeates all of his films, even those most subject to the difficulties of Hollywood financing (*Mimic* alone can attest to this). In this regard, with his love of the monstrous, del Toro's work in Hollywood can be taken as his declaration of his celebration of the abject (and of the popular) within a system whose financial and cultural practices seek to normalize filmmakers, films, and audiences with the (misguided) assumption that the greatness of Hollywood is only expressed in those films released in the months leading up to the Academy Awards, which are always helmed by the most "serious" filmmakers willing to tackle the more "serious" issues that plague our existence. If anything, del Toro's willingness to make *Blade II* so that he could make *Hellboy* is indicative of del Toro's integrity and individuality: he did not subject himself to making a film about serious subject matter (racial tensions, AIDS, a biopic, etc.) so that he would be recognized (legitimized) as a serious filmmaker with an Academy Award; instead, he made a film he did not want to make so that he could make

a film he did want to make because *he wanted* to make it, even though it would never win the Oscar for Best Picture.

Perhaps nothing better encapsulates del Toro's aesthetic integrity apropos the prestige films Hollywood typically produces than his reflection on the Academy's reception of *Pan's Labyrinth*, "I didn't have to do a serious piece about Edwardian drama to be nominated for an Oscar" (177).<sup>ix</sup> Thus, even though del Toro may be forced to adhere to the demands of Hollywood production practices on films such as *Hellboy*, this does not mean his work is tainted by a blind desire to satisfy those who control the purse strings, or who guard the wells of "good taste" (for instance, Edwardian drama)—instead, he is a pragmatist who endeavors to realize projects for his own sake, and to inscribe each with his authorial signature regardless of the distinctions between high and low art. This sensibility allowed del Toro to make *Hellboy* (and then *Hellboy II*), which, along with *The Devil's Backbone*, he notes as his favorite film, "...which contradicts the prevalent opinion that *Pan's Labyrinth* is the zenith of his part of his career (Wood: 2006b: 45)" (6).<sup>x</sup>

Del Toro's longstanding love of popular culture—video games, fairytales, anime, comic books, genre cinema—and his incorporation of the popular into his films (which in turn become part of popular culture) suggest that he, as a historical subject, exists within a world overpopulated by popular iconography. But del Toro's position does not seem to be one of bemoaning popular culture for alienating humans in social/economic/political structures invested in prescribing what is "acceptable" in mass media; instead he seems to look (or to hunt) for the human within the popular—not to "rescue" the human from the

inhuman (popular culture), but to recognize that the two are immanently inscribed into one another. In *Hellboy*, del Toro localizes this in exploring the human contained behind or within popular—and sacred—iconography. This in turn foregrounds *Hellboy* as a cultural artifact (a Hollywood production, borne out of the dealings of Hollywood discussed just a moment ago) produced by and for humans (in particular, del Toro himself).

Adapted from the “Hellboy” comic series by Mike Mignola and published by Dark Horse Comics, del Toro’s *Hellboy* is emblematic of del Toro’s preoccupation with the monster-as-child (for instance, the Judas insects in *Mimic*, Santi in *The Devil’s Backbone*, and Nomak in *Blade II*), and the *monstrum*, the image as a divine threat. The film starts in 1944, when the Nazis, desperate to overpower the Allies, turn to occultism and to Rasputin (Karel Roden), who has promised Hitler a “miracle” in the Ogdru Jahad, seven gods of chaos, to reverse the course of the war and ensure victory for the Nazis. Aware of Rasputin’s plot, Professor Trevor Broom, who is himself an occult historian, leads a small group of American soldiers off the coast of Scotland to disrupt Rasputin and the Nazi’s attempts to bring the Ogdru Jahad to Earth. While Broom and the soldiers succeed in preventing this from happening, something does pass through the portal Rasputin sets up between Earth and the celestial world of the Ogdru Jahad: a little red ape-looking creature with small horns on his forehead and a massive right hand made of stone. Broom adopts the demonic infant, bestowing upon him the name of “Hellboy,” he raises Hellboy as his son, training him in mysticism in order to hunt and subdue creatures that, as Broom puts it, “go bump in the night.”

Now an adult, having lived on Earth and been looked after Broom for sixty years, Hellboy (Ron Perlman) works for the B.P.R.D (Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense) as a monster hunter.<sup>29</sup> Still guided by Broom (John Hurt), who conceals his cancer and impending death from his “son,” Hellboy is also assisted by Abe Sapien (Doug Jones physically plays this character, but David Hyde Pierce lends his voice), a fish man with telepathic powers that the Bureau discovered and trained, and his sometimes girlfriend Liz Sherman (Selma Blair), who was taken in and trained by the B.P.R.D. soon after she exhibited pyrokinetic abilities. Looking for a replacement to look after Hellboy once he dies, Broom hires FBI agent John Myers (Rupert Evans) to work with Hellboy.

Meanwhile, as Myers is exposed to the workings of this group of “freaks,” Rasputin, who was sucked into the abyss when he attempted to summon the Ogdrū Jahad in 1944, is resurrected by his followers, Ilsa Haupstein (Bridget Hodson), who is Rasputin’s lover, and Karl Ruprecht Kroenen (Ladislav Beran). Present day, Rasputin intends to call on the gods once again—a task for which he needs Hellboy, as the creature’s right, stone hand is the key to opening (new) portal that will allow the gods to come to Earth. Eventually, Hellboy and the others succeed in stopping Rasputin’s plot, but in the process, Broom is killed (by Rasputin and Kroenen), leaving Hellboy, Abe, and Liz (and to a lesser extent, Myers) without the father figure who offered them a family in the B.P.R.D.

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<sup>29</sup> It is amusing to point out that in *Blade II*, when we are introduced to Scud, one can see under his jacket his t-shirt, which reads “B.P.R.D.” and bears the organization’s insignia, a hand (Hellboy’s) clutching an enormous sword.

Provided del Toro's interest in how children relate to their families—and how the familial bonds such as those in *Cronos*, between grandfather and granddaughter, in *The Devil's Backbone*, between the orphaned boys challenge the sentimentalized nuclear family—and his exile from his homeland of Mexico upon his father's having been kidnapped, it is not altogether surprising that del Toro would be drawn to the figure of Hellboy. Indeed, for as Marc Scott Zicree notes, del Toro, "...saw himself in this ungainly, unlikely superhero, this extraordinary outsider, this child-man striving to find a place for himself in a world ill-suited to his dimensions and diversions" (133).<sup>xi</sup> Of particular interest here is Zicree's use of the term "child-man," which better describes del Toro's version of Hellboy than Mignola's, who remarks:

My Hellboy is modeled on my father in some way, a guy who's been in the Korean War, and he's traveled and he's done a lot of stuff, and he's kind of got a 'been there, done that, attitude... And del Toro's change was to have Hellboy bottled up in a room and mooning over the girl he can't have [Liz Sherman]. My Hellboy, there were just no girl problems. That element of the character was completely not in the comic. (134)<sup>xii</sup>

This emphasizes the demon's child-like character in that "mooning" is a form of love that is particular to adolescence, as one might long for the affections of a classmate but cannot manage to overcome the fear of rejection (and ridicule) should s/he express such sentiment. Furthermore, in Mignola's comic, Hellboy refers to Broom as "sir," whereas del Toro's Hellboy refers to him as "father," and when first Myers meets Hellboy, Broom has grounded him for breaking out of his room and risking being noticed in

public,<sup>30</sup> and the two are not on speaking terms as a result. In these ways and others, del Toro appropriates Mignola's work (a pop culture artifact) and assimilates it into his particular fascination with children (and families) and the monstrous, and in doing so he reinforces his film not only as a pop artifact, but a site of human collaboration and of the development of meaningful relationships—it is well known that del Toro and Mignola have become good friends while working together (on both *Hellboy* films, but del Toro also brought Mignola onto *Blade II* as a visual consultant), and as Mignola describes his feelings about working with the director:

I not only got to have Guillermo del Toro adapt my comic book character to film (which in my world is pretty much like winning the lottery) but I got to watch him do it. It was an amazing experience. And if I never set foot in another production office or sit on another film set, it will be okay, because I've done it—and I got to do it with him. (232)<sup>xiii</sup>

Contrary to the view that popular art (here, comic books and Hollywood action-adventure and horror genre films) is less personal than independently-produced art because it is subject to the economic demands it must satisfy, the del Toro-Mignola relationship illustrates that the popular can allow for bonding and authentic relationships to form even during the very process of contributing to popular art.

But del Toro is not content to fetishize popular culture; from the first moments of the film, he problematizes popular iconography, questioning the sacred façade of Christ's suffering and that of Nazism. At the beginning of the film, as the Americans scramble about in the rain and prepare their assault on the Nazis, we faintly hear Marco Beltrami's

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<sup>30</sup> The existence of Hellboy and the B.P.R.D is adamantly denied by Tom Manning (Jeffrey Tambor), Head of Special Operations at the F.B.I. and who in fact works closely with the B.P.R.D., though he and Hellboy share an antagonistic relationship.

somber score as plays alongside sounds of rain falling and thunder. The moment the score builds to a crescendo so loud and harsh that it reminds one the music used to reveal some abject being in horror film, del Toro cuts to a medium shot of a statue of Christ's crucifixion, and as the camera begins to tilt down the statue, we see lighting and hear thunder—as if we are looking upon Dracula (as discussed with *Cronos* in the previous chapter, del Toro knowingly conflates vampirism with Catholic iconography), In this regard, del Toro does not treat this statue of Christ as a sacred artifact, but profanely reimagines the iconography of Christ as something monstrous, or perhaps more precisely, as an icon that, by virtue of its popularity, is comparable to the iconography and popularity of “low” art, such as the conventions of monster movies.

Del Toro underscores this when, just after Broom and Sgt. Whitman's brief discussion about what they will need for the intervention (Broom insists that the soldiers carry rosary beads, and Whitman insists that Broom carry a gun; neither of them concede), the camera lowers itself so that, in a low angle, it is looking up at Broom as he stares (off-screen) at Whitman walking away, but at the statue of the Crucifixion, occupying the right side of the frame, just above Broom's left shoulder. The low angle suggests that the statue, cloaked in shadows and rain (as if it were a figure right out of film noir, which was just coming to form in postwar America in the 1940s, around the time this scene is set) is an imposing, threatening figure that overwhelms Broom (in the shot, where our attention—and soon Broom's as well—is drawn to the statue). Thus, far from a statue of the Crucifixion symbolizing divine love and sacrifice toward and on

behalf of humanity, del Toro reimagines it by coding it as monstrous, as alien to those it overlooks.

This profane reimagining of Christ is not particular to this singular instance in all of del Toro's work (as the previous chapter illustrates), but his subversion of the iconography of Christ—literally, an icon, a statue—is remarkably declarative here. As such, it is fitting to refer back to Nancy's discussion of forbidden representation and the idol. Concerning the commandment in the book of Exodus that forbids representation of the divine, Nancy writes that the commandment primarily:

...forbids the making of *sculpted* images...The commandment therefore concerns the production of forms that are solid, whole, and autonomous, as a statue is, and that are thus destined for use as an idol. The question here concerns idolatry and not the image as such or 'representation.' The idol is a fabricated god, not the representation of one, and the contemptible and false character of its divinity derives from the fact that it is fabricated. (30)<sup>xiv</sup>

In this regard, it might seem that del Toro's monstrous depiction of the statue of Christ is simply a conservative reinforcement of the commandment: that del Toro posits the statue as a monstrous idol that violates divine law, and thus must be regarded as a threat from the shadows. However, it is precisely because del Toro recasts this statue as something out of shadows, imperiously looming a "believer" (responding to Whitman's snarky question, Broom acknowledges that he is a Catholic—"among other things"), just as a monster out of a horror film might, the statue is stripped of its status as idol insofar as Nancy's use of "solid" and "autonomous" imply that the idol is divine because it cannot be appropriated and subjected (thus, removed of its autonomy) to mortal will or artistic vision. Indeed, del Toro's subversion of the iconography of the Crucifixion violates the divine character of the idol in that, as Nancy continues, it "...is an image to be valued

for itself and not for what it represents, and image that is itself a divine presence...” that “...asserts its presence only through itself, a pure presence in a certain sense, a massive presence that amounts to its being-there...” (30-31).<sup>xv</sup> In this regard, the idol refers only to itself, as if cut off from any cultural or historical influences that it might otherwise “represent.” Therefore, in appropriating the statue as one of many cultural artifacts within a web of popular representations (such as noir and horror films), of popular iconography, del Toro rejects the easy, conformist idolatry of Christ’s crucifixion: he does not reject the statue as a profane “fabrication” but instead, he rejects the divine character of the idol precisely because its self-referential, closed off character is what marks it as inhuman—a shadowy, “other” figure indifferent to Broom’s look of concern as he watches Whitman walk away.

Del Toro further problematizes the iconography of Christ’s suffering by visually associating the statue with Kroenen, who is conceived as a Nazi idol both as an inhuman, masked figure and as a naked, monstrous-human body; in this regard, Kroenen embodies the blending of the hunter (the exterior of the masked Nazi) with the hunted (the interior of human body “within” the exterior of the Nazi).

When we first look on Kroenen, he is a figure who wavers between human and (sacred, inhuman) idol. In a medium long shot, Kroenen stands on the left of the frame, upright, alert, as he surveys the Nazis scrambling around in preparation for the summoning (note that the Americans, too, scramble around while preparing to interrupt the event); to the right of the frame hang two Nazi banners featuring swastikas, which implies that he is, like the banners, part of the iconography of Nazism. His Nazi cap, his

suit, and tie, and the jacket he wears set him apart from the common soldier, and distinguish him as “above” or “beyond” those he watches over (as the statue of Christ suggests a divinity “above” or “beyond,” literally in that it looms over Broom’s shoulder). Kroenen is further distinguished by the gas mask that completely covers his face (and causes him to breath slowly, mechanically, not unlike the breathing of Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* films—yet another popular icon): though his body resembles that of a human (one head, two arms, two legs, etc.), the mask renders him ambivalently human (or uncannily human) at best: the mask prevents anyone looking on it from recognizing, interpreting (and understanding), and identifying with a human in the form of facial expressions that would convey a (human) soul or consciousness. In this way, Kroenen is doubly withdrawn from the human—not only is he a Nazi, but one without a face.<sup>31</sup>

Kroenen’s double separation from humanity echoes Nancy’s remarks on the idol, which “...does not move, does not see, does not speak...and the idolater, facing the idol, also doe not see and does not understand” (31).<sup>xvi</sup> In this respect, while Kroenen is able to move and see (though he does not speak, notably unlike Mignola’s version of Kroenen), he imitates the inhumanity of the idol, which is best expressed by his mask, an object that imitates a face. Likewise, as we look on his “face,” we are placed in a precarious spectatorial position involving our inability to see and to understand this figure: we see

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<sup>31</sup> Although, it might be more appropriate to say that Kroenen has a mechanical or modern face: provided that it is a gas mask, it would protect him against the effects of Zyklon B. However, provided that we later learn Kroenen is an undead figure, the mask is a superficial or aesthetic gesture—he wears a face to conceal the horror of his authentic face (removed of eyelids and lips).

the gas mask, but do not see the face contained under its surface—however, we do not *know* that there is a face contained by the mask, but we are, I think, curious to see if there is a face behind the mask, or if he is perhaps an automaton, and what we are looking at is not a mask but his face—therefore, should our curiosity be satisfied by either result, we would be able to understand the reason for this “face.”

Of course, our curiosity with respect to Kroenen’s “face” resembles another, earlier moment of curiosity, when we (and Broom) look on the “face” of the statue of Christ’s crucifixion. After Broom turns around and looks up at the statue looming behind him, del Toro cuts to a close-up head-and-shoulders shot of the statue, with the camera tracking in slightly. In this close-up, we see a series of cracks on the statue, mostly minor ones along the shoulders leading down the chest, but in particular there is a long crack reaching from the top of Christ’s head, running down his eye, and ending just under where his hair falls on the top of his chest. It is a curious image, reminiscent of the decaying archangel holding the Cronos Device in *Cronos*: who or what caused the cracks to appear? Has the statue been violated, robbed of the divine essence it contains within itself? Or even worse, is the statue a false idol that ruptured precisely because it was false (whereas otherwise it might have been protected by its divine aura), but was worshipped anyway, unknowingly? That is, we are looking on this “face,” which imitates that of the human, what do we see? And, perhaps more importantly, what can we understand of this “face,” of why it looks the way it does?

Such questions arise regarding this idol because in order for the statue to maintain its divine character, it must remain withdrawn, a “pure” body, untainted by the forces of a

world that would result in its “perfection” being diminished (a logic not inconsistent with the goals Nazism and the preservation of the Aryan). More precisely:

...the idol is not condemned as imitation or copy, but rather in terms of its full and heavy presence, a presence of or within an immanence where nothing opens (eye, ear, or mouth) and from which nothing departs or withdraws (thought or word at the back of the throat or in the depths of a gaze). (31)<sup>xvii</sup>

And, as Nancy continues with respect to commentaries on Talmudic prohibition against representation, “...if it is permissible to paint—more than to sculpt—faces...these faces must never be complete: completion is an end or culmination that closes, without access and without passage” (31).<sup>xviii</sup> Therefore, in the context of *Hellboy*, upon closer inspection the statue of Christ is not simply monstrous, impassively looming above as one of history’s greatest evils prepares to summon Chaos to Earth: the statue is cracked, passages are opened up on and in its body as the rain falls onto it and perhaps also into it—the statue is imperfect, and therefore human. This should not be taken to mean that del Toro is, in a surprising turn, aligning himself with Catholicism or that he is implying that the iconography of Christ allows one to commune with that which is human. Instead, it is important to reiterate that the cracks about the statue are not (or do not seem to be) openings or passages sculpted into the idol: for some reason, somehow, the idol was opened up, subject to some force (trauma?) that forced it to rupture, to open up, to be incomplete again (that is, to return to a stage in the sculpting process before it was completed, closed, “perfect”). From a distance (for instance, when looking at the statue over Broom’s left shoulder), the statue’s imperfections are imperceptible, and it appears monstrous; but when coming into close contact with the statue, by looking on the human

face of Christ, we face the imperfections (cracks) in the divine, which engender a child-like curiosity, a fearless wondering why Christ's image is not perfect.

But del Toro does not romanticize imperfection as something that distinguishes the (imperfect) human from the (perfect) monstrous—imperfection is contained within the perfect, and the borders that separate the human from the inhuman are not so clearly defined. Del Toro vividly expresses this with Kroenen's "true" body during the scene in which Broom performs an autopsy on Kroenen.<sup>32</sup> During Broom's report, we hear that Kroenen was born in Munich in 1897. While this historicity does imply that Kroenen is human, by the time Broom conducts the autopsy, the year is 2004, which would mean Kroenen has aged 107 years, well above what one might expect for a human. Moreover, as Broom proceeds to inspect his body, we see that Kroenen indeed has all the features of a human: two eyes, two ears, a nose, two arms, two legs, all appearing where they ought to in order to resemble the form of a human. Kroenen's human form has an element of the monstrous to it: his skin is covered with scars and stitches, which reminds one not only of the sutured body parts that constitute Frankenstein's Monster (though Kroenen is not made up of disparate body parts), but also the cracks we see featured on the statue of Christ much earlier in the film. Likewise, in a close-up of Kroenen's face, we see that he has no eyelids or lips (as Broom indifferently tells his voice recorder/us, Kroenen had them surgically removed): his body is a site of imperfections, of pain and suffering so

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<sup>32</sup> In order to get into the B.P.R.D to kill Broom, Kroenen effectively gives himself a heart attack by turning a dial on his upper left chest so that he convulses and soon lies motionless on the ground. Hellboy, who along with Abe and other members of the B.P.R.D has been searching the tunnels surrounding New York's subway system in order to find the eggs of Sammael (a creature capable of being endlessly resurrected and of reproducing itself) finds Kroenen and brings him back to the Bureau.

great as to be inhuman (not wholly unlike those naked and emaciated souls who suffered the cruelty of the Nazis)—with eyes and a mouth that can never be closed, Kroenen figures a historical trauma/horror that one can never stop seeing or speaking about (for instance, those films, *Hellboy* included, that revisit Nazism).

Furthermore, it is important to note that in this autopsy scene, even Kroenen's human body is characteristic of the idol. While Kroenen's face is evocative of a consciousness that neither stops looking nor speaking, his lifeless body implies the absence of such a consciousness—as Broom notes, “The blood in his veins dried up decades ago. Only dust remains,” which makes Kroenen's body into something of an idol: like the statue of Christ, Kroenen's body is inanimate and lifeless (both are without blood), but moreover, Kroenen's eyes are forever open, his gaze always fixed (as is the statue's)—but as there is no life behind his eyes, there is nothing to motivate the gaze (as there is nothing to motivate the statue's gaze). In this regard, Kroenen's similarities to the statue of Christ are not simply a matter of his Nazi iconography being a façade that conceals (or represses) his naked and imperfect human body as his “true” or “sacred” form—instead, del Toro positions the body as a kind of profane perversion of the idol. Insofar as the idol is divine because it, at least as far as Nancy is concerned, is autonomous and as such closed off to all else, Kroenen's body suggests an idol that has been opened up (as the statue of Christ is), the result of the fact that it is not autonomous (in that Kroenen's body is marked by his many, elective surgeries) and is in fact produced, a historical artifact created by another consciousness (in other words, an artist). Thus the human (and the human body) is not depicted as the imperfect and therefore the

“true” sacred opposed to the “false” divinity of the perfect and autonomous idol—whether adorned in Nazi iconography or stripped naked, Kroenen is an idol of the human and the monstrous; it is as if being imbued with iconography is, for del Toro, a condition of (modern) existence.

This is redolent of Christ, a figure characterized by the divide between historical person and religious icon. Insofar as Kroenen’s naked body figures a historical trauma that is endlessly seen and spoken of, his body figures the historical trauma of Christ’s crucifixion—Christ, the historical subject, the Jew, the body nailed to the cross is endlessly seen and spoken of as myth, worshipped and reproduced in religious iconography, but in this way, is never understood as anything other than icon; in other words, popular iconography (a category to which Christ and his suffering no doubt belong) offers a myth, an icon, in the image of a historical person—a sentiment not lost on Kroenen’s fundamental dualism: at once the image of a Nazi and the image of one subject to Nazi cruelty (though it is not suggested that Kroenen was once targeted by the Nazis), of the hunter and the hunted, Kroenen figures the cultural (and largely cinematic) fetishization of the monstrous-human particular to Nazism.

But these dualisms associated with Kroenen and the statue of Christ—dualisms of hunter/hunted, monstrous/human, and icon/historical subject—extend to Hellboy, a figure with which del Toro identifies. As mentioned above, del Toro’s version of *Hellboy* makes a romantic relationship out of the platonic one between Mignola’s Hellboy and Liz. Aside

from imbuing the film with a more youthful take on the superhero,<sup>33</sup> this offers Hellboy as cipher for del Toro, allowing the filmmaker to inscribe himself into the demon-child-man-icon. Late in the film, shortly after Broom's funeral, Hellboy and the B.P.R.D. are to go to Moscow to stop Rasputin from (again) attempting to conjure up the Ogdru Jahad. Just before this trip, Liz visits a despondent Hellboy, who, believing her and Myers' sudden relationship driven by Liz's desire to "fit in" with "normal" people (as expressed by the dull, milquetoast Myers), remarks: "I can promise you two things. One: I'll always look this good. And two: I'll never give up on you. Ever." Hellboy's line, said in a joking fashion, "I'll always look this good," is in fact a direct quote from del Toro, who said it to his (future) wife, Lorenza Newton, when she complained about his casual way of dressing.<sup>xix</sup> Not only does this line suggest Hellboy and Liz are allegories for del Toro and Newt-on (and who also reference the fairytale of *Beauty and the Beast*) but also, it injects the history of their relationship into the film—high school sweethearts, they were married in 1986, well before production began on *Hellboy*), and in that way, Hellboy's joke, wonderfully performed by Ron Perlman (who starred as the Beast, alongside Linda Hamilton, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1987-1990)), documents the human (soul, subjectivity) within the popular. But in contrast to Christ, or those persecuted and dehumanized by the Nazis, whose historicity is lost to myth and popular iconography (statues, films, etc.) del Toro and Newton's relationship remains embedded within the

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<sup>33</sup> For instance, there is a protracted scene in which a jealous Hellboy leaps across rooftops while spying on Liz and Myers during their "coffee date," which at one attests to Hellboy's immaturity and is a subversion of other, hyper-masculinized superheroes who scramble about rooftops, such as Spider-Man and Batman.

popular as a memory (in that the line calls back to particular moment in their relationship when del Toro spoke it), which remains private to all but a few watching the film (family, friends, or fans of del Toro), who can access the human within an artifact of popular culture.

Thus del Toro does not reduce the popular to a rigid, dehumanizing structure that simply replaces historical subjects with myth and iconography (therein creating a cultural memory and history based on images, not people),<sup>34</sup> but rather posits it as an opportunity to encode historical (and personal, human) experience into a larger culture without allowing the experience itself (del Toro and Newton's relationship) to be just another item circulating within popular culture.

This tension between the documentation of history and experience, and the potential for such a document to become yet another cultural artifact is expressed even earlier in the film, when the American soldiers take a photo with the infant Hellboy, soon after they successfully intervene in the plot to summon the gods of chaos. When the photograph is taken (the soldier/photographer who takes it is absent from the photo), it fills the screen in a wide shot of the soldiers grouped together, with Broom and Whitman standing in the middle of them. Hellboy, like the soldiers adjacent to him, kneels down in the front row, and is positioned between Whitman and Broom (who are just behind the boy). The photograph is a document, and an iconic one at that. To be sure, it documents the historicity of the Americans, Broom, and Hellboy (in that they were all present in this

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<sup>34</sup> Which, for Christ, resulted in the actual, historical person being replaced with Christian/Catholic images of suffering and redemption; in other words, "Christ" never seems to refer to anything other than a religious figure and savior, certainly not to the actual historical person, who was not white, despite what is suggested in so many visual representations of him.

place and at the time the photograph was taken in 1944), but even more so, it historicizes the triumph of Americans not only over the Nazis, but also the “unknown,” the “beyond.” In this regard, Hellboy—the historical, non-human subject—is positioned as a signifier of the hunted (the Nazis, the monstrous whose turn to dark magic produced Hellboy), and of the hunter (the result of the monstrous, Hellboy is “Americanized” by the way he imitates the soldiers around him, those who stalked and hunted the Nazis to this location); in other words, this child is appropriated as an icon of American exceptionalism, which calls back to the ideological function of the photographs of children in the opening credits sequence in *Mimic* (discussed in the previous chapter).<sup>35</sup>

But the photograph also operates as a memory, distinct from its status as an iconic document, which contains a kernel of the human within it. Del Toro suggests this in large part with Broom’s voice-over narration (voiced by John Hurt, who plays the elder version of Broom) that opens with the film, in which he reflects on and explains the events of that night in 1944 when he came to be a father to Hellboy.<sup>36</sup> With this reflective narration, this returning to the past, del Toro positions the photograph as memory, as the documentation of a moment in one’s history. Del Toro underscores this when, after the camera minutely, slowly, moves in closer to the image, the photograph pulls back, withdrawing from the

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<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as Keith McDonald and Roger Clark note in *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art*, Hellboy’s birth “...in late 1944 coincides with the final development stages of American atomic capability first tested in New Mexico in 1945, which ushered in a period of human history during which the threat of Armageddon becomes a first line of defense” (177).

<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that Broom’s narration, particularly his questions “What is it that makes a man a man? Is it his origins, the way things start, or is it something else, something harder to describe?” resonates with the narration that opens and closes *The Devil’s Backbone*, in which Casares questions what a ghost is, and even wonders if a ghost is “...an emotion suspended in time. Like a blurred photograph.”

camera's gaze as it flies about (as if caught in a gust of wind), revealing a crimson red and black hallway, into which it recedes. The camera quickly pursues the photograph (though it does not "catch" it), following it straight down the hallway. Suddenly, the camera turns, and the screen becomes black; after a moment, fiery occult iconography appears, and the camera continues to rush through what seems to be a maze, and in the process is confronted with a constellation of iconography and media—we see occult symbols with equal frequency as we see newspaper articles, photographs, video footage, a comic book, and tabloid magazines referencing Hellboy. Once the camera finds its way out of this maze of iconography, it is revealed that the maze and hallways constitute the name "Hellboy," which appears in stone-like font, yet another icon, which announces del Toro's film as part of this iconography.

In this regard, the camera functions as a kind of hunter, searching for the memory of the events that unfolded in 1944. The camera is ultimately unsuccessful in its attempts because the photograph withdrew from the camera's gaze/the screen, as if to separate itself from the gaze that engenders its iconicity (particularly because the photograph fills the screen, foregrounding the photograph as a document of a historical moment and object of the film's attention). The camera's frenetic and fruitless search for the photograph seems to suggest that it is the hunt for the memory, for a record of the past—even such a hunt is unsuccessful—constitutes the name, the identity suffused with iconography (for instance, "Hellboy" as the title of the film and as historical subject within the film). In other words, historical/personal experience may withdraw into the social order (maze) in which names and identities are formed through popular iconography, but memory instantiates the hunt

for that which is beyond—yet within—iconography (in that the photograph is beyond the camera’s gaze and recedes within the maze/title as it moves away from the camera); thus the human and the icon constitute one another, and the hunt for the human (memory) within the idol makes us aware of this fundamental dualism, and as such prevents is from becoming impassive, blind, speechless idols.

Del Toro’s films are not generally interested in simplistic binaries that explain the world in terms of good/evil, monster/human, fantasy/reality, and *Hellboy*, in terms of del Toro’s ambivalent presentation of the relationships between hunter/hunted and human/inhuman/icon, is no exception. And like del Toro’s other films, *Hellboy* is a mixture of genre conventions, but it seems to be even more (than the other films) invested than his other films in the notion of film as a site of cultural appropriation and production, especially in terms of iconography (or cultural artifacts). But rather than regarding del Toro as an advocate for what once were capitalist products (for instance, Hollywood genre films), it is perhaps more fitting to describe him as a child playing with the toys (artifacts, idols) at his disposal: a child does not find much value in the toys themselves, but in the process of playing with the-m, of opening them up to imagination, and of imbuing them with memory.

### *Pacific Rim*

None of del Toro’s films is more imbued with a spirit of playfulness as intensely as *Pacific Rim* (2013), and in many ways, the film is the apex of del Toro’s cinema, after his twenty years of feature film production since 1993’s *Cronos*. His obsessions are fully on display in the film: the beauty and horror of the monster, the “low art” of the B movie,

anime, and of videogames, families ruptured by and formed as a response to trauma, and, of course, the fairytale (certainly, this is not an exhaustive list). But *Pacific Rim* adds yet another dimension to del Toro's already complex oeuvre: stylistically, it is a remarkably schizophrenic—in the best sense of the word—movie that revels its destabilization of the distinctions between the human, technological, and monstrous body. This destabilization is in large part due to del Toro's interest in playful destruction (of bodies and of the Hong Kong cityscape) and how he mobilizes the fairytale hunter as an agent of “meaningless” (that is, playful) violence and destruction.

Set in the near future of the 2020s, *Pacific Rim* is an apocalyptic—but ultimately, hopeful—vision of humankind's place in the cosmos. In response to the sudden irruption of kaiju (Japanese for “giant beast”) from an inter-dimensional portal located in the depths of the Pacific Ocean—referred to as the “Breach”—nations across the globe ignore their geopolitical differences and have invested their resources in the Jaeger Program: requiring the collaboration of two pilots, a jaeger (German for “hunter”) is a gigantic mechanical body, operated from within by a neural link between the two pilots (and through which they can access one another's memories), which in turn connects the pilots to the jaeger and allows them to move and fight with the body of a massive machine.

Raleigh Becket (Charlie Hunnam) and his brother Yancy (Diego Klattenhoff) are two such pilots who operate the jaeger named “Gypsy Danger,” until one night, when they combat a Kaiju (code named “Knifehead”) and Yancy is killed, leaving Raleigh to pilot Gypsy Danger himself (a feat deemed virtually impossible for a single pilot due to

the overwhelming neurological demand of operating the mechanical body). Raleigh narrowly escapes being killed himself, and the result of losing his brother and almost being overpowered by a kaiju, he retires from active service in the war. Five years later, the Jaeger Program, headed by Marshal Stacker Pentecost (Idris Elba), is being abandoned by the nations that once supported it in favor of the Wall of Life, a construction project designed to keep the Kaiju from reaching land. Pentecost, one of the first jaeger pilots (the only other than Raleigh to have piloted a jaeger on his own), still believes in the Jaeger Program and looks to gather all the pilots and jaegers he can for a final assault on the Breach. Thus, he finds Raleigh, who has found work in constructing the Wall of Life, and convinces him to return to active service.

Pentecost brings Raleigh to the Shatterdome, an enormous facility that houses the four remaining jaegers and the last of the jaeger pilots. There, Raleigh meets Pentecost's protégé, Mako Mori (Rinko Kikuchi), whom Pentecost rescued and raised as his daughter after her family was killed in a Kaiju attack, and whose dream is to pilot a jaeger in order to avenge her family. Raleigh meets the other jaeger pilots, Chuck Hansen (Rob Kazinsky) being the most antagonistic towards Raleigh. Hansen and his father Hercules (Max Martini) pilot the Striker Eureka, the fastest of the jaegers, and Pentecost's final assault on the Breach consists of attaching a nuclear bomb to Striker and detonating it in the Breach; Gypsy Danger, and the other jaegers, are to provide defense against the kaiju coming out of the Breach.

After a breathtakingly beautiful battle with two kaiju in Hong Kong that results in the destruction of two jaegers (Crimson Typhoon and Cherno Alpha) and their respective

pilots, Raleigh and Mako prove themselves compatible copilots of Gypsy Danger by killing two kaiju without assistance. Thus only Gypsy and Striker remain to destroy the Breach and seal off the kaiju, and in the last moments of the film, Striker is severely damaged and cannot deploy its bomb into the Breach—thus Chuck and Pentecost (who became Chuck’s copilot after Hercules was injured during the Hong Kong battle) explode the bomb and sacrifice themselves, destroying two kaiju in the process so that Raleigh and Mako can self-destruct Gypsy Danger (whose core, unlike the other, digital jaegers, is nuclear) within the Breach, thus finally closing it. Raleigh and Mako succeed in this, and in the final image embrace, having descended into and returned from a hellish landscape within the Pacific Ocean in order to put an end to the war.

It would be a mistake—and an all too convenient one at that—to liken del Toro’s film to those making up Michael Bay’s *Transformers* franchise (2007—), simply because *Pacific Rim* is a Hollywood summer spectacle consisting of giant “robots” engaged in noisy, protracted fight sequences. Indeed, as Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* comments in the opening of his review:

The *Pacific Rim* trailer gave me nightmares. For all the wrong reasons. Seeing machines bumping fenders made me think the great Mexican filmmaker Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *Hellboy*) had transformed into Michael Bay, the Antichrist of techno fantasy. Bay's films feel untouched by human hands. *Pacific Rim*, thank the gods of cinema, is the work of a humanist ready to banish cynicism for compassion. Don't get me wrong. Robots and aliens still do thrilling battle, but del Toro drives the action with a heartbeat. It makes all the difference.  
(1)<sup>xx</sup>

It is interesting to note that Travers’ nightmarish reaction to the (unspecified) trailer does not make reference to the monsters featured therein; even the briefest glimpse at gigantic “robots” is enough worry Travers that a director he purportedly likes has traded his soul,

so to speak, in order to direct a film that is nothing more than marketing material for toys (as one might say the *Transformers* films are, which also largely act as feature length ads for General Motors' automobiles).

Though Travers's review is generally positive, his enthusiasm for del Toro's work does not extend to a discussion of the film as an homage to the Japanese kaiju films of the 60s, initiated by Ishirō Honda's *Gojira* [*Godzilla*] (1954), of which del Toro has been a fan since childhood, having grown up seeing the films in Mexican theaters.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, Travers is not quite correct in referring to the jaegers as robots: in geek culture (in which del Toro is a major figure), "robot" refers to an autonomous mechanical being—for instance, the sentient, form-changing entities of the *Transformers* films—where "mecha" describes massive machines, often with humanoid bodies, piloted by humans (as featured in anime such as *Patlabor* (1988-1994) and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996)); the jaegers of *Pacific Rim* are precisely this type of machine.<sup>38</sup>

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While this distinction may seem trivial, it is important to note that the humans in Bay's films are largely incidental to the plot (though Bay highlights the bravado of America's military forces—to an intolerable degree—in fighting with the good robots against the evil ones). However, by focusing on mecha, del Toro foregrounds human

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<sup>37</sup> The film is dedicated to the memory of Honda and Ray Harryhausen, another of del Toro's idols.

<sup>38</sup> Travers is certainly not the only critic to have made the mistake of conflating the two.

<sup>39</sup> Though the *Transformers* films are referenced in numerous reviews, few critics make note of *Pacific Rim*'s likeness to the *Power Rangers* franchise (1993—), which feature battles between kaiju and mecha-like machines piloted by teenagers. The earlier seasons of the show are especially redolent of kaiju films, with their rather low production values (people wear foam suits made up to look like kaijus and mecha-like warriors).

agency (that is, in nations joining forces to build the jaegers and the pilots who skillfully pilot them) in the most extraordinary of circumstances—hence why the *Transformers* films “untouched by human hands,” whereas *Pacific Rim* “is the work of a humanist” (at least, as far as Travers is concerned).

But del Toro’s attention to humankind’s potential for greatness, in addition to his unabashed love of kaiju films and mecha, suggest a “fanboy” sensibility that for some is too juvenile to adhere to the standards of “good taste” and “mature” cinema. In his review of the film, Joe Neumaier writes:

There will be some 9-year old boys who’ll go crazy for the overcomplicated, disappointing “Pacific Rim.” Robots! Robots fighting sea monsters! And it takes *two* humans to run a robot! But if your adult pulse doesn’t jump at all that, “Rim” will be as gripping as seeing a Transformer battle a toy dinosaur in a bathtub. (1-2)<sup>xxi</sup>

Neumaier acknowledges that del Toro’s purpose with the film is to honor the kaiju tradition, and to capture a childlike enthusiasm thereof (3).<sup>xxii</sup> Neumaier never states what exactly enlivens the “adult” pulse, but his condescending characterization of a young boy’s reaction (that is, of being titillated by the premise of the film) reinforces the highly conservative view that children (particularly young boys) are excited by the most inane of cultural artifacts because they have not been fully acculturated and conditioned to discriminate between low and high art—thus, children are “innocent” in their lack of taste in films and other forms of media.

But del Toro readily embraces the childlike sensibility with which Neumaier takes issue. In an interview with NPR’s Audie Cornish, del Toro remarks:

I think *kaiju* are sort of the revenge of kids, because we are born in a world we don't fit in, a world that is too big for us. And I think *kaiju* are then sort of the

ultimate avengers of size. They make adults feel inadequate all over the world. There is always that fantasy. There's primal fantasy, certainly for a male child ... where you give them a robot and a dinosaur, and the instinct is just to have them fight. It's truly a primal thing.<sup>xxiii</sup>

This primal play to which del Toro refers contradicts Neumaier's assessment of the male child's fascination with the film as being comical and trivial: insofar as adults have outgrown the appeal of robots and dinosaurs, (male) children play out their fears and anxieties of their existence in a world organized by and for adults—that is, a world that recognizes the agency of adults, and effectively ignores that of children—with the detritus of an adult-oriented world. In other words, robots and dinosaurs (or any other such toys) offer kids an opportunity to suspend the rules of a highly regulated, even oppressive, adult world (in that adults set rules, teach children how to behave, etc.) by playing with objects that symbolize their limited agency (in that toys have no control over themselves).

Likewise, kaiju films offer a fantasy centered on the suspension of adult authority. But as del Toro observes, the kaiju films of his youth did not claim a realistic aesthetic—as such, their appeal resides not in the illusory promise that giant monsters will some day attack major cities across the globe (thus freeing children of adult rule), but instead, their appeal lies in a spirit of playfulness encoded within spectatorship and the production design of the films:

There was an implicit code in watching these movies, even as a kid, where I knew they were miniature. They were miniature cities, miniature planes, miniature tanks. So there was no real-life impact to me. They became spectacles, almost ballets of elemental creatures.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In their transparent artificiality, one might suggest that the balletic spectacles operated as

a spectacle of play, of a suspension of disbelief—on the part of both the audience and the filmmakers—particular to a “miniature world” that metonymically stands in for the larger world outside of the film, similar to how a child imagines the “miniature world” of his or her toys to be closed off from the rest of the world. Additionally, kaiju films, relegated to B movie status due to their low production values and simple narratives, operate as a kind of cinematic detritus when compared to the polished aesthetic of Hollywood cinema. This is underscored by del Toro’s experience of watching kaiju films in Mexico’s “one brick” cinemas—patrons of these run-down B-circuit theaters were armed with a brick to kill the rats infesting the theater, further reflecting the disparity between non-American “detritus” (particular to B movies and theaters) and a bourgeois cinema (comprised of films and theaters catered to affluent tastes and sensibilities—for instance, high production values and cleanliness).

In this respect, Neumaier’s rejection of the film seems conservative not only in his characterization of a 9-year old boy’s response to the film, but also in its reinforcement of the standards of bourgeois cinema, or as he puts it, the “adult pulse.” Thus, one might say there is something profane in del Toro’s gleeful homage to kaiju films, produced with the funds of bourgeois cinema (Hollywood), all the while working against sacred (or “adult”) tastes and sensibilities towards more refined (less playful) films—in other words, *Pacific Rim* operates as a destabilization of the oppressive, regulated, mechanical world of which Hollywood (particularly, Legendary Pictures) is representative.

In opposition to the *Transformers* films, *Pacific Rim* is a celebration of difference, specifically in terms of appropriating cultural detritus as the material of a subversive kind

of play. One of the more overt examples of this can be located in the relationship between the two scientists in the film, Dr. Newton “Newt” Geiszler (Charlie Day) and Dr. Herman Gottlieb (Burn Gorman). Working out of their lab in the Shatterdome and reporting directly to Pentecost, their efforts are devoted to studying the kaiju, their attack patterns, and the Breach. Characteristic of del Toro, they represent oppositional ideologies with respect to knowledge: Geiszler is a fanboy obsessed with the kaiju, his body tattooed with images of the giant beasts (Gottlieb refers to him as a “kaiju groupie”), and he is an ardent collector of their body parts (particularly brain fragments). By contrast, Gottlieb’s obsession is with numbers and predictability—a rejection of the body in favor of rational thought.

Moreover, as an exaggeration of their dichotomous relationship, del Toro presents their lab as a symbol for the fundamental dualism of the human brain—the left/logical hemisphere and the right/illogical/creative hemisphere. Particularly when Pentecost and Hercules visit the scientists for a briefing, during which Gottlieb offers his prediction for the progressive increase of kaiju attacks unless the Breach is destroyed, with Geiszler making his plea to establish a neural connection (as the jaeger pilots do) with a kaiju brain fragment); Pentecost and Hercules ultimately side with Gottlieb’s numbers. Throughout this scene, Gottlieb’s side of the lab is presented on the left (logical) side of the frame, whereas Geiszler’s is located on the right (illogical/creative) side.

Furthermore, Gottlieb’s side is largely comprised of an immensely tall blackboard consisting of four panels, all of which feature Gottlieb’s calculations. As such, Gottlieb’s blackboard and his meticulous inscriptions onto it are suggestive of a painter and a polyp-

tych painting appearing on high cathedral walls, or even of the Commandments inscribed into stone tablets. Both suggestions are highlighted by Gottlieb's belief that "Numbers are as close as we get to the handwriting of God" (Geiszler laughs this off). In this respect, not only is the left side of the brain immanently rational, but sacred.

By contrast, Geiszler's side is comprised of tanks preserving kaiju fragments, and he sits at his dissection table, fully equipped with surgical utensils as he dissects and inspects a kaiju fragment—thus, the imaginative/right side of the brain is characterized by the profane and a childlike curiosity of the body: of touching the body, of experiencing it as a sensation, of penetrating its skin and rooting around in its interior—by contrast, Gottlieb, irritated by his collaborator's flippant attitude toward his calculations, kicks back the kaiju entrails that have fallen onto his side of the lab back to Geiszler's.

Moreover, this childlike enthusiasm and curiosity—in that children are not known to take issue with playing in dirt and mud or ingesting insects and plant life, with learning of the "detritus" the adult world largely ignores—contrasts Gottlieb's professorial airs. In his tweed jacket, sweater vest, white-collar shirt, tie, and khaki pants, Gottlieb is an exaggerated image of a professor (the exaggeration is further exploited for comical effect with Gottlieb's effete and pedantic behavior his unexplained reliance on a cane to walk). In this way, Gottlieb is a custodian of the bourgeoisie, of intelligibility and meaning, and his rejection of Geiszler's enthusiasm for the kaiju seems an allegory for an adult-oriented high culture's rejection of the supposed insipidity of low art forms (such as kaiju films), which threaten "good" taste (just as kaiju embody the threat of the end of the

world).<sup>40</sup>

Of course, del Toro's sympathies lie with Geiszler, the child-man whose affection for kaiju disregards the difference between the whole/human and partial/inhuman, and as such, mirrors the schizophrenic relation between the jaegers and their pilots. Consider the scene in which Geiszler successfully merges his mind and memories with those of a kaiju brain fragment: the scene begins with a close-up on a pile of discarded mechanical pieces, and the camera slowly tilts up and tracks in on a long shot of Geiszler, occluded by the contraption that allows him to merge with the kaiju, as he throws the contraption's unnecessary pieces to the ground. The close-up on the pile of the contraption's discarded pieces calls back to the close-up shot of the kaiju entrails that Gottlieb kicks back over to Geiszler's side of the lab (mentioned above), and as such del Toro suggests a similarity between the organs of an organic body and a machine (the contraption), which is underscored by the fact that he is rooting around in the monster/organic body and machine/inorganic in both instances, discarding the parts (organs) from the whole (kaiju/contraption).

Additionally, the contraption itself reads less as a tool used for scientific research and knowledge and more as a toy used for play. This is largely due to del Toro's baroque presentation of the contraption: a riot of flashing lights, spindly tubes and wires, switches, what seems to be a pulsating fireplace bellow, and a large, spiked, bulb-like thing, the entire contraption is imbued with whimsy, almost too peculiar and antiquated to be of use

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<sup>40</sup> It is perhaps fitting here to note that Neumaier's list of the top ten films of 2013 lacks any imagination—among other Oscar bait, he cites *Gravity* as the best film of the year (for which Alfonso Cuarón would win the Best Director Academy Award), with *12 Years a Slave* coming in second (which ended up winning the Academy Award for Best Picture).

in a world wherein jaeger technology is possible (in other words, it looks like it belongs in a cheesy, low-budget sci-fi movie, not polished Hollywood spectacle). Thus, in the style of German Expressionism, the contraption, in its whimsical peculiarity, directly corresponds to Geiszler's disenfranchised position among the other members of the resistance (against the kaiju) and his "delusional" aspiration of merging with a kaiju (of course, this turns out to be a successful endeavor, yielding crucial information about the kaiju, and in a later scene in which Gottlieb joins Geiszler, about the Breach).

Geiszler's "delusion," in addition to being presented in comically whimsical (and thus, playful) way vis-à-vis the contraption, may be taken as schizophrenic, at least as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's conceptualize schizophrenia in Anti-Oedipus.

Apropos not only to Geiszler's situation but also to *Pacific Rim* in general, Deleuze and Guattari write of an immanent process of production, carried out by machines endlessly connecting, coupling, and driving one another. As the authors write:

An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source machine: the one produces the flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth a machine coupled to it. The mouth of the anorexic wavers between several functions: its possessor is uncertain as to whether it is an eating-machine, an anal machine, a talking-machine, or a breathing-machine...Hence we are all handymen: each with his little machines. For every organ-machine, an energy-machine: all the time, flows and interruptions. (1-2)<sup>xxv</sup>

Del Toro visualizes this relation between organ and energy-machines when Geiszler plugs one of the contraption's tubes into the outlet of the tank that contains the brain fragment, suspended in greenish-yellow liquid: first, the contraption itself is an energy-machine, a site of lights and pulsations (not only the fireplace bellow but glass jars full of bubbling water) that has been removed of its organs (the pile of the pieces Geiszler

discarded from the contraption)—thus, the kaiju brain fragment functions as an organ-machine connected to the contraption/energy-machine and interrupting its flows.

But Geiszler, too, functions as an organ-machine, interrupting the connection between the contraption and the brain fragment. It is through the contraption that Geisler draws on the flows of the brain fragment—flows of memory, of knowledge—and in turn, the brain fragment draws on Geiszler's flows: del Toro expresses this with the "Drift," the phantasmatic, psychic intersection that enables the jaeger pilots to jointly control and fight using their jaeger's body; only here, Geiszler and the kaiju "drift" together with the contraption, a peculiar and rudimentary piece of technology compared to the jaegers. While in the Drift, we are exposed to both Geiszler's memory and the kaiju's: in a rapid flow of blue images, we glimpse fragments of Geiszler's life—a man taking a young Geiszler fishing, an older Geiszler in a lab with other scientists—only to be interrupted by fragments of the kaiju's life: on a strange world, insect-like overlords manufacture kaiju, in what looks to be a communal process of production (several arms reach out and touch a kaiju body lying on a table, as if to animate it).<sup>41</sup>

It is important to note that the kaiju's memories appear so abruptly that they seem to interrupt the flow of Geiszler's memories. Adhering to Deleuze and Guattari's paradigm, this suggests Geiszler is the energy-machine (producing a flow of memories) to which the brain fragment/organ-machine is connected, drawing on his flow. Simultaneously, the fragment is an energy-machine to which Geiszler/an organ-machine is connected; thus he interrupts the flow of his memories into the kaiju's brain and draws

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<sup>41</sup> As Geiszler later explains, the overlords are extraterrestrial colonizers who have sent kaiju to Earth to decimate the human population before the colonizers arrive.

the kaiju's memories into his brain (expressed by the fact that the images of the insectal overlords and kaiju literally interrupt the flow of images featuring Geiszler, creating another flow of fragmentary images in the process, until we exit the Drift and find Geiszler unconscious). This binary relation between Geiszler and the brain fragment corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's continued discussion of the productive machines undergirding existence, discussed not simply as energy and organ-machines, but desiring machines:

Desiring-machines are binary machines, obeying a binary law or set of rules governing associations: one machine is always coupled with another. The productive synthesis, the production of production, is inherently connective in nature: 'and ...' 'and then...' This is because there is always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or draws off part of this flow (the breast—the mouth). And because the first machine is in turn connected to another whose flow it interrupts or partially drains off, the binary series is linear in every direction. Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. (5)<sup>xxvi</sup>

In this regard, it is important to note that there is no meaning gleaned from this rapid flow and interruption of images; presented in a frenetic, purely expressionistic fashion, it is unlikely that del Toro intended for the images to make sense in terms of audiences understanding why or what they are looking at (for instance, there is no logical reason, judging from the images alone, to refer to the insect-like creatures as "masters," as Geiszler does when he recounts his experience to Pentecost, nor is it entirely clear that the kaiju are manufactured).<sup>42</sup> Thus, instead of producing "meaning," del Toro

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<sup>42</sup> Of course, organ/energy-machines and desiring-machines are embodied in the dynamic between jaegers and their pilots, organic and inorganic bodies intimately working together to produce motion. Likewise, just as Geiszler experiences the kaiju's memories in as a series of frenetic impressions, so do we, the audience, experience the fight sequences between jaegers/pilots and kaiju as frenetically-paced in their editing.

foregrounds “the production of production,” of desire’s continuous process of coupling “fragmentary and fragmented” machines, which are necessarily separated from the whole to which they belong (Geiszler to the other, “sane” members of the resistance, the brain fragment to its corresponding kaiju, the peculiar contraption to a more fitting time and place); in other words, for del Toro desire—conceptualized in (but is not exclusive to) this scene as something playful, whimsical, comical—couples garbage with garbage, resulting in the production of a kind of ecstatic knowledge. “Ecstatic knowledge” refers to the fact that in interpreting the series of image fragments (making sense/meaning out of sense/experience), Geiszler is something of a mystic or a Roman augur, interpreting signs from the beyond (the insect-like masters dispatching the kaiju to Earth). Of course, this knowledge contradicts the scientific know-ledge that Geiszler’s vocation requires him to pursue: the Drift is pure subjectivity, constituted by memory and impressions, far from the scientific/objective knowledge Gottlieb is invested in *vis-à-vis* his numerical calculations and predictions.<sup>43</sup>

Thus Gottlieb and Geiszler are sacred figures—the former a figure for rationalism insofar as the Enlightenment consecrated rational thought, and the latter a figure for an older mysticism—but only Geiszler figures the schizophrenic. Insofar as Geiszler connects himself and his other desiring-machines (the brain fragment, the contraption) in the name of production (of knowledge), he maintains the process of production. Thus he is a kind of schizophrenic character in that “[t]he schizophrenic is the universal producer. There is no need to distinguish here between producing and its product. We need merely

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<sup>43</sup> Though it should be noted that Gottlieb’s predictions regarding the increased frequency at which kaiju will emerge from the Breach turn out to be correct.

note that the pure ‘thisness’ of the object produced is carried over into a new act of producing” (7).<sup>xxvii</sup> In illustrating the pleasure that arises from producing production, Deleuze and Guattari turn to Richard Lindner’s painting, “Boy with Machine,” which “...shows a huge, pudgy, bloated boy working one of his little desiring-machines, after having hooked it up to a vast technical social machine—which...is what even the very young child does” (7).<sup>xxviii</sup> Geiszler is a kind of reworking of Lindner’s boy in the sense that Geiszler is closed off from a world of “meaning,” consumed by impressionistic productions and interruptions of flows—akin to the boy in the painting who plays with his machines, rather than playing with either of his parents (as if the machines sustain the pudgy boy in place of his parents), Geiszler plays with his machines, his plea to do so having been initially ignored (though subsequently embraced by) Pentecost/the patriarch. This accords with the child playing at robots and dinosaurs (or watching kaiju films) in that play is a process of production in opposition to a stultifying adult world.<sup>44</sup>

Geiszler’s work with his desiring-machines parallels the work of the jaeger pilots; though the fight scenes between jaegers and kaiju are not strictly comical, they are nevertheless characterized by a spirit of playfulness. In large part, this is conveyed through the unison between movements of human bodies and the movements of mechanical bodies—for instance, when fighting off Knifehead, we see inside the cockpit of the Gypsy Danger as the brothers prepare to strike with their right hands, and as they thrust their bodies ahead, del Toro cuts to a long shot of the Gypsy Danger completing the action, striking Knifehead in the mouth. Thus, the Gypsy Danger acts as an organ-

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<sup>44</sup> In the middle of the film, Pentecost insists that he must remain a “fixed point” within the Resistance—in other words, a point at which productive flows are stopped up, redirected, etc.

machine interrupting the flow of energy produced by its pilots' movements, and this is playful because it calls back to del Toro's video game aesthetic (discussed in this chapter's section on *Blade II*)—part of what makes a video game pleasurable is the relation between the player who comes in-to the world of the game, learning how it operates as she or he plays along, and the game itself which at first resists the player (with challenging levels, time-consuming tasks, etc.) while at the same time, its world (characters, levels) is altered by the player *regardless of who he or she is*. In other words, video games offer a loss and reinforcement of identity through play, insofar as “identity” is formed from psychic/social/cultural/economic factors that operate in the “real world” outside the game, and a separate identity is formed within the virtual world of the video game. Thus del Toro presents this loss and reinforcement of identity in *Pacific Rim* with the jaegers and the pilots—within jaegers, humans fight, but their physical strength is no match for that of a massive kaiju (just as a child cannot fight off an adult), and thus their fighting stances are formal expressions of their physical inability to fight these elemental creatures. Therefore, it is within the powerful, massive movements of the jaeger's body that the pilots lose the insufficiencies of their human identities (or bodies) to a kind of dance within the jaeger—a dance at once cut off from, but immanently connected to, the larger, imperiled world outside of the cockpit.

In this respect, the fairytale hunter is reimaged—whether as a hunter of knowledge or the bodies of kaiju—as a figure of childhood and of play. Thus *Pacific Rim*, in del Toro's celebration of “low” culture, operates as a subversion of the oppressive tastes and sensibilities of sacred/”high” culture, wherein the hunter is a liberating figure:

the hunter crosses the barriers separating human from machine, and human from kaiju, and as such calls into question the worth of such barriers (between high and low, adult and child, human and inhuman).

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<sup>i</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>ii</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Capture Mag. "Interview Guillermo del Toro Blade 2 Part 2." Online video clip. *Vimeo*. Vimeo, 2013. 14 March 2014.

<sup>vi</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>x</sup> McDonald, Keith and Roger Clark. *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

<sup>xi</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo and Marc Scott Zicree. *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions*. New York: Harper Design, 2013. Print.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiv</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xix</sup> "Hellboy (2004)—Trivia." *IMDB*. IMDB, n.d. Web. 27 March 2014.

<sup>xx</sup> Travers, Peter. "Pacific Rim." Rev. of *Pacific Rim*, dir. Guillermo del Toro. *Rolling Stone* 11 July 2013. Web. 1 April 2014.

<sup>xxi</sup> Neumaier, Joe. "Pacific Rim movie review: As gripping as Transformers toy battle in the bathtub." Rev. of *Pacific Rim*, dir. Guillermo del Toro. *The New York Daily News* 10 July 2013. Web. 2 April 2014.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Del Toro, Guillermo. "Guillermo del Toro, On Monsters and Meaning." NPR, 12 July 2013.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxv</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. London: Penguin Books, 2009.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion—The Storyteller

The cinema of Guillermo del Toro is a cinema of curiosity. As this study suggests, del Toro is a filmmaker—a storyteller—less interested in satisfying the demands imposed on him by Hollywood or in appeasing critics with works of “high art,” if this requires him to abandon his love of “low art” and popular culture; instead he is compelled, obsessively so, to pursue his curiosities—the beauty and horror of the body; the relationship between the human and the monstrous/inhuman; calling into question the distinctions between the sacred and the profane, as well as the distinctions between film genres; and, perhaps most of all, the importance and relevance of fairytales.

But it is in this regard that this study is lacking any discussion of del Toro’s work outside of directing feature films. Of particular interest is how he collaborates with other storytellers. For instance, along with the American author Chuck Hogan, del Toro wrote “The Strain Trilogy,” a series of novels that sees del Toro return to curiosity with Eastern European vampire mythology (which inspired the design of the vampires of *Blade II*). In addition, del Toro has served as a producer and mentor for less experienced directors on J.A. Bayona’s *The Orphanage* (2007), Guillem Morales’ *Julia’s Eyes* (2010), Troy Nixey’s *Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark* (2010), and Andrés Muschietti’s *Mama* (2013). He has also executive produced the children’s films *Puss in Boots* (2011), *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011), and *Rise of the Guardians* (2012), and *The Strain* will premiere in July on the FX network. As his remarkable productivity attests, del Toro is wholly invested in the power stories and storytelling, and as such future studies of del Toro’s work would benefit from exploring the impact of his curiosities on narrative film/television in addition to how they

already influence his directorial efforts.

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## Curriculum Vitae

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### Special Skills:

- I require little guidance when assigned tasks pertaining to academic research and writing.
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