



**Universitat de Lleida**

Laberinto y Minotauro: pervivencia  
del mito en *Labyrinth* y *El laberinto  
del fauno*

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Labyrinth and Minotaur: Prevalence  
of the Myth in *Labyrinth* and *El  
laberinto del fauno*

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## Resumen / Abstract

### RESUMEN

Desde el principio de los tiempos, las personas han intentado darle sentido al mundo. Una forma de hacerlo es mediante la creación de mitos, de los cuales la mitología griega es la más común en las culturas occidentales. Estos mitos se han utilizado para expresar los miedos y deseos del corazón humano, lo que los convierte en un interesante objeto de estudio de la psique humana. Los mitos se han transmitido de generación en generación y se han adaptado a la época correspondiente. Uno de ellos es el mito del Laberinto, que cuenta la historia de cómo Teseo entró en el Laberinto, derrotó al Minotauro y salvó Atenas en el proceso. Este estudio analiza las influencias de este mito en dos películas contemporáneas: *Labyrinth* (1986), en la que el laberinto es un lugar de transformación y rito de iniciación, y *El laberinto del fauno* (2006), en la que se convierte en un espacio de muerte y renacimiento.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** cine, Guillermo del Toro, Jim Henson, Laberinto, mito

### ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of time, people have tried to make sense of the world. One manner in which they have done so is through the creation of myths, from which Greek mythology is the most common in western cultures. These myths have been used to express the fears and desires of the human heart, which makes them an interesting object of study of the human psyche. There have been

transmitted from generation to generation and have been adapted to the correspondent time period. One of such myths is the myth of the Labyrinth, which tells the story of how Theseus entered the Labyrinth, defeated the Minotaur within and saved Athens in the process. This study analyses the influences of this myth in two contemporary films: *Labyrinth* (1986), in which the labyrinth is a place of transformation and rite of passage, and *El laberinto del fauno* (2006), in which it is a space of death and rebirth.

**KEYWORDS:** cinema, Guillermo del Toro, Jim Henson, Labyrinth, myth.

## **RESUM**

Des del principi dels temps, les persones han intentat donar-li sentit al món. Una forma de fer-ho és mitjançant la creació de mites, dels quals la mitologia grega n'és la més comuna en les cultures occidentals. Aquests mites s'han utilitzat per expressar les pors i desitjos del cor humà, el que els converteix en un interessant objecte d'estudi de la psique humana. Els mites s'han transmès de generació en generació i s'han adaptat a l'època corresponent. Un d'ells és el mite del Laberint, que explica la història de com Teseu va entrar al Laberint, va derrotar el Minotaure i salvar Atenes en el procés. Aquest estudi analitza les influències d'aquest mite en dues pel·lícules contemporànies: *Labyrinth* (1986), on el laberint és un lloc de transformació i ritu d'iniciació, i *El laberinto del fauno* (2006), en la qual es converteix en un espai de mort i renaixement.

**PARAULES CLAU:** cinema, Guillermo del Toro, Jim Henson, Laberint, mite

# 1 Introducción

Mitos, leyendas, cuentos... A lo largo de la historia, la sociedad humana ha intentado encontrar y otorgar un sentido al mundo en el que vive con distintos resultados. Los humanos buscaban sentido a la Naturaleza, como el cambio del día y la noche, el transcurso de las estaciones o los fenómenos meteorológicos, pero también intentaban comprender, en la medida en que podían, hechos más abstractos como el amor, el miedo, la vida o la muerte.

Una de las soluciones a las que llegaron fue la invención de los mitos. Estas historias narraban las vidas de dioses y las hazañas de los héroes, y todas servían un propósito, fuera este explicar el paso del tiempo o el origen de una ciudad. En el mundo occidental, sobre todo en Europa y América, la mitología más conocida y reproducida a través de los siglos es la mitología Grecorromana, también conocida como mitología clásica.

Los mitos griegos y romanos clásicos pueden encontrarse en cualquier ámbito de la cultura occidental, ya sea en arquitectura, política, medicina o arte. Asimismo, también forma parte de la cultura tradicional y de la cultura de masas. ¿Quién no ha oído hablar de los dioses del Olimpo? ¿O de Hércules? Quizás algunas personas no sepan que las sirenas griegas tenían cuerpo de águila y cabeza de mujer, y que eran las nereidas los seres con cola de pez. Pero lo cierto es que muchos personajes mitológicos han sobrevivido hasta nuestros días gracias a que sus historias se han repetido y adaptado a lo largo del tiempo.

En este trabajo se analiza un mito griego clásico en concreto: el mito del laberinto. El laberinto es más conocido por ser, en sus orígenes mitológicos, el

hogar del monstruo Minotauro. Se analizarán dos versiones distintas de este mito a través de la comparación de dos obras cinematográficas: *Labyrinth* (1986, dirigida por Jim Henson) y *El laberinto del fauno* (2006, dirigida por Guillermo del Toro), con el objetivo de hallar de qué manera ha evolucionado el mito del laberinto a lo largo de los siglos, y cómo se ha adaptado a la sociedad occidental contemporánea.

Para realizar esta comparación, el trabajo se divide en las siguientes partes. En primer lugar, una investigación acerca de los orígenes de los mitos en la sociedad humana, seguido por un resumen del mito del Laberinto. En segundo lugar, se ha realizado una investigación acerca de las interpretaciones que se han llevado a cabo del Laberinto, sobre todo como espacio literario, así como una recopilación de la interpretación y significación de la figura del Minotauro en el tiempo. Finalmente, se ha hecho el análisis de las películas *Labyrinth* y *El laberinto del fauno*, tomando en consideración anteriores críticas y comentarios académicos sobre ellas.

Como apunte final, es necesario destacar que este trabajo de fin de grado se ha realizado con el objetivo de ser validado en los grados de Filología Hispánica y Estudios Ingleses, por lo que ha sido escrito en dos idiomas: español e inglés. Asimismo, algunas citas han sido copiadas en el idioma del texto original, y se ha añadido la traducción personal de ellas en el idioma correspondiente según la redacción del trabajo como notas al pie de página.



## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Origins of the myth of the Labyrinth

Before proceeding with the study of the Labyrinth and the Minotaur, one must first inquire about the origins of mythology in general, and of Classical Greek mythology in particular. Everywhere one looks in our society, there are many references to Greek myths, from popular culture to language expressions. The fact that these stories are so intertwined in our normalcy brings about the question of how this came to be: what is the origin of myths? What is the relation between mythology and culture (particularly western culture), and why did it survive until our times?

As a starting point, I have chosen two books that have attempted to provide an answer to the above-mentioned questions: *Dictionnaire des mythes du fantastique* (2003), and *La naturaleza de los mitos griegos* (2002). These two books offer an overview of the origins of western mythology with a focus on Greek mythology, as well as various theories about how myths have evolved in time and their role in Western culture. This topic has been researched extensively in the two aforementioned texts; thus, the ideas extracted from them are the basis for this project.

Nonetheless, the information received from these two sources has also been complimented in different sections of the project with other texts. The authors included are P. G. Kuntz (1966), P. Borgeaud (1974), D. C. Camacho (1996), R. Graves (1996), Y. P. Casadiegos (2003), L. Gambón (2005), C. Fernández-Vara (2007), M. Á. Martínez García (2010), and B. Pahl (2017).

In the first book, *Dictionnaire des mythes du fantastique* (2003), a selection of authors described and analysed eleven of the most famous mythological figures in western culture, such as Atlantis, Cthulhu, Dracula, and Frankenstein, among others. The parts of the book which are of main interest for this project can be found in the first chapter, “Pour un dictionnaire des mythes du fantastique”, written by Roger Bozzetto.

In the sub-chapter “Peurs archaïques et figures mythiques”, Bozzetto introduces the idea of the archaic fear through a quote from Lovecraft: “la plus vieille, la plus forte émotion ressentie par l’être humain, c’est la peur<sup>1</sup>” (Vion-Dury & Brunel, 2003, p. 9). The first humans tried to give a face to this nameless fear, thus creating a figure with which they could interact and live with. At the same time, those people invented rituals which would help them deal with such fear. The first manifestations of these rituals can be found in burial rites, different styles of art, and magic.

Most known cultures created myths to question and to justify human existence in the universe. In a way, it could be argued that these myths are presented as a question to the Universe and, at the same time, as the answer the Universe gives to that question (2003, p. 9). These myths were often expressed in a vague manner, almost as if they were dreams; in fact, according to the Classical Greek mythology itself, the birth of myths is generally attributed to the figure of Ephialtes, a Giant who was in charge of dreams and nightmares and who was one of Hecate’s grandchildren, believed to be the Greek goddess

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<sup>1</sup> “The most ancient, the strongest emotion felt by human beings, is fear.” (This and the following translations have been done by me due to not having access to a version of the text in English.)

of magic. However, it was during Romanticism that the theories that tied together myths and dreams became wide-spread, and the concept of *émotion fantastique*, or feeling of the *fantastic*, was born and incorporated into literature.

In the next sub-chapter of the book, “Figures mythiques et émotion fantastique”, the author explains how the mythological and the fantastic are correlated, while indicating the subtle differences between the two. As stated previously, myths come from the collective experience of fear, as a question to and an answer from the Universe. However, the fantastic does not rely on fear, but on that which is unknown. Fantasy texts rely on reality and the idea that nothing is what it seems: “Le texte fantastique met en scène une sorte d’expérience démente, où les choses et les êtres changent en un instant de signe ou de situation dans l’espace de la réalité connue<sup>2</sup>” (2003, p. 10). In other words, fantasy is born from the explanations that people have tried, through time, to give to the liminal spaces present in our reality.

Myths offer a symbolic meaning to that which is nameless, they are used to create an order of things and give meaning to the human existence. However, it could be argued that fantasy serves a contrasting purpose: where mythology creates reality, fantasy questions this reality, it plants the seed of doubt in people’s mind, the doubt that what was once familiar, might not be as genuine as it was once thought.

Furthermore, where mythology expresses fear of the unknown, fantasy would express fear of the familiar. In this manner, fantasy and fantastic figures

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<sup>2</sup> “Fantasy texts portray a kind of demential experience where things and beings change signs or situations inside the space of the common reality in the blink of an eye.”

have been used as metaphors for issues more closely related to the human world. Figures such as vampires, werewolves, ghosts, etc., were metaphors used to process the social changes that occurred through history, and each figure can be traced to, at least, a specific social phenomenon (2003, p. 11).

In the final sub-chapter entitled “Substrats mythiques et textes fantastiques”, Bozzetto expresses that fiction is not a copy of reality, but the imitation and stylization of the experience of reality inserted into the collective imagination through a process of *mimesis* (2003, p. 12). As such, we find characters based on oxymorons, like the living dead, or representations for the fear of losing one’s identity, like werewolves, the character of Jekyll and Hyde or even Frankenstein’s creature.

Where *Dictionnaire des mythes du fantastique* gives the grand picture on the origins of mythology in general, *La naturaleza de los mitos griegos* (2002), by British classicist Geoffrey Stephen Kirk, offers an overview on the relation between classical myths, tradition, and society, and how these interact with each other.

One of the main points of interest in Kirk’s book is the way in which mythology interacts with popular tales, as explained in the second chapter: “La relación de los mitos con los cuentos populares” (Kirk, 2002, pp. 33–40). Myths are tales, and tales are the principal form of expression and communication in traditional societies, especially in illiterate cultures. Through the work of anthropologists, it has been possible to notice that, while the central themes and plots of these tales have not changed much through time, certain details were modified so that they suited the interests of the narrator and of the audience. This

is especially important when considering that many of these myths and tales were first passed down through oral tradition.

Kirk introduces studies by other authors and experts. For instance, Franz Boas published *Tsimshian Mythology*, in which he grouped and investigated numerous tales from the Native American Tsimshian tribe, in the Canadian Pacific coast. Boas had come to the conclusion that the contents between myths and tales remained fairly similar: “[...] el contenido de los cuentos y los mitos son, en términos generales, el mismo, y los datos demuestran un continuo flujo del material a los cuentos y viceversa [...]”<sup>3</sup> (2002, p. 34). Boas’s disciple, Ruth Benedict, had added to her master’s theories that myths could be considered religious narrations, as they seemed to be related to various rites and could explain the origins of each culture and their traditions.

However, in the decade of 1920, Bronislaw Malinowski proposed a different theory from Boas and Benedict. Malinowski, who had been confined in the southwest coast of New Guinea during the war, had been able to examine first-hand the relation between popular legends and the various aspects of the social life in the islands. He concluded that, “los mitos [...] no son un reflejo de acontecimientos cósmicos o de impulsos misteriosos del alma, sino más bien una «credencial» [...] para acciones e instituciones sociales, una validación de las costumbres, creencias y actitudes tradicionales”<sup>4</sup> (2002, p. 35). For Malinowski, myths did not have the intention of giving a reason and an origin to

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<sup>3</sup> “[...] the content of tales and myths are, in general terms, the same, and the data presents a constant flow of the material to the tales and viceversa [...]”

<sup>4</sup> “myths [...] are not a reflection of cosmic events or mysterious impulses of the soul, but rather a «credencial» [...] for social actions and institutions, a validation of traditional customs, beliefs and attitudes”

the universe but were a tool to dictate the traditions and social norms of a community.

Nonetheless, Kirk offers the idea that folk tales and myths are inherently similar yet different at the same time. This difference relies on the motivation behind each type of narration. Folk tales refer essentially to life, to the problems and aspirations of the common people while classical Greek myths tell the stories of gods and heroes, characters that are superior and estranged, due to the conditions of their birth and their context, from ordinary people. Furthermore, where folk tales focus on themes of family, of evil step-mothers and jealous siblings, of witches and giants and fairy godmothers, Greek myths revolve around topics such as the inevitability of death or the justification of the monarchical system, with gods and demigods at the centre (2002, p. 37).

The author also emphasizes that, despite their differences, both tales and myths follow similar narrative structures and devices. For instance, the hero of the story must surpass a dangerous quest in order to survive, win a prize or defeat an enemy; this quest is usually divided in three parts, each part being more challenging than the previous one. Thus, it would not be quite correct to affirm that tales and myths are identical, yet it would also be a mistake to assert that they are complete separate entities.

Kirk also shows interest in the relation between mythology and the human mind in the fourth chapter: "Los mitos como producto de la psique" (2002, pp. 71–91). While it has been generally interpreted that myths referred to the world of nature and the place of humanity in a society, there exist other theories that examine myths as references to each individual's feelings. As Kirk states, "si es

cierto que los mitos tienen un propósito y una referencia al margen de su aparente carácter de relatos [...] entonces deben estar principalmente interesados, no en la sociedad ni en el mundo exterior, sino en los sentimientos del individuo<sup>5</sup>” (2002, p. 71).

These theories are more concerned with the psychology of people and how it is represented in myths. It is argued that a myth could function as *catharsis* to the audience, since myths are able to express ideas and feelings which, in a different situation, would remain repressed or asleep inside a person; for instance, the myth of the Minotaur in the labyrinth would express the fear of unknown horrors, and the myth of Oedipus would reflect the fear of committing parricide (2002, p. 72).

Several experts have tried to explain myths from a psychological perspective. Kirk emphasizes the works of psychologists Sigmund Freud and Charles Jung, and of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Freud theorised that myths were related to the world of dreams and of the unconscious; Jung followed a different line of thought, and established his theory of the archetypes, while Lévi-Strauss defended that the myths were presented as answers to social contradictions. However, Kirk argues that there are not enough coincidences among any of these ideas and the actual commonalities of myths to support these theories; while they should not be ignored, they are too flawed to be seriously considered (2002, pp. 73–91). With this information as basis, it is time to

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<sup>5</sup> “If it is true that myths have a purpose and a reference separate from their apparent characteristics as tales [...] then they must be mainly interested not in society nor the outside world, but in the feelings of the individual person.”

investigate the origins of the myth that holds our interest for this project: the myth of the Labyrinth.

## **2.2 First manifestations of the Labyrinth in mythology: myth of the Minotaur**

When investigating the first mentions of the Labyrinth in classical mythology, the most renowned myth in Greek mythology is that of Theseus and the Minotaur. Nonetheless, as all myths explained by the ancient Greeks, the story of Theseus is not as simple as it may seem. For the purpose of making sense of his story, it is important to take into consideration all the previous myths that, one way or another, contributed to the existence of Theseus. As it is, the ancient civilisations tried to explain the world through stories of all-powerful gods and quick-witted heroes so, going over and beyond, it is not unexpected that some myths became intertwined with each other, to the point that the history of the ancient Greek society seems to be constructed purely on myths. Theseus story is not an exception: to tell his feats, it is important to know where he came from, and how his destiny and his fight with the Minotaur had been predicted a long time before he was born.

What is a Minotaur, and why did it live in a labyrinth? Who put him there? Why did Theseus have to fight it? For the sake of answering these questions, one needs to investigate the role of other characters present in Theseus myth; principally, what is of interest for this project is the collection of Greek myths that explain the birth of the Minotaur through the stories of Minos, which are intertwined with the origins of Theseus himself.



Finding the points of connection between myths has been possible due to Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* (1996), among others. This book is a recollection and explanation of all possible Greek myths spanning the creation of the Universe until Odysseus's return to his homeland in Ithaca. This part of the project relies heavily on Graves's book.

In order to understand the myth of Theseus, it is necessary to begin with the myth narrating the birth of the Minotaur. The version of the myth in Graves's work (Graves, 1996) explains that Minos, son of Zeus and Europa, had claimed the Cretan throne and declared that the gods would answer all his prayers, as proof of his right to reign. His first prayer was to Poseidon, god of the sea, and consisted in asking the god for a bull that he could offer as sacrifice. Poseidon sent a dazzling white bull to the island, but the animal was so beautiful that Minos decided to keep it for himself and sacrificed a normal bull instead.

Poseidon, in face of this act of disrespect, cursed Pasiphaë, Minos's wife, so that she fell in love with the white bull. Pasiphaë, overcome with desire, asked Daedalus, the famous Athenian craftsman, to help her. The craftsman built a hollow wooden cow that the queen used to trick the white bull into believing that the contraption was a real cow. The white bull mounted the fake cow, inside of which was Pasiphaë, and she later gave birth to the Minotaur, a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man.

When Minos realised what had happened, he consulted an oracle on how best to avoid a scandal. The oracle instructed him to have Daedalus construct him a retreat in Cnossus, and Minos followed their words. Consequently, Daedalus built a habitable structure in the form of a maze, known as Labyrinth,

and Minos hid Pasiphaë and the Minotaur in the heart of it for the rest of their lives.

Graves's cites this as one of the possible reasons as to why the maze received the name of "Labyrinth": "Sir Arthur Evans suggests that this [Minos's palace at Cnossus] was the Labyrinth, so called from the *labrys*, or double-headed axe; a familiar emblem of Cretian sovereignty" (1996, p. 278). However, there are other theories linked to a dancing ritual pattern, which take into consideration the fact that the maze seemed to have been a separate space from the palace: "[...]; it was a true maze [...], and seems to have been marked out in mosaic on a pavement as a ritual dancing pattern. [...] Homer describes the Cnossus maze (Illiad xviii. 592): Daedalus in Cnossus once contrived / A dancing-floor for fair-haired Ariadne" (1996, p. 278).

Minos is always described to be a cruel but clever ruler, who knew how to take advantage of the unfortunate situation. Minos won a war against Athens with the help of Zeus, who answered his prayers; the Athenians consulted the Oracle of Delphos who, after other advice, told them to give Minos "whatever satisfaction he might ask" (1996, p. 288), which proved to be a tribute of seven youths and seven maidens, sent every nine years to Crete as prey for the Minotaur.

Moving away from Crete for now, it is time to pay attention to the other protagonist of the story relevant to the project: Theseus. The story of his birth is befitting of a Greek hero, riddled with dubious parentage and various quests during his life. While he is generally considered the son of Aegeus, king of Athens, and Aethra, daughter of the king of Troezen, it is also mentioned in other versions of the myth that he is the son of Poseidon, thus proof of his dubious parentage.

This confusion is also explained in another myth. This tale explains that Aegeus had two wives, but none of them could birth him a son, so he decided to introduce the worship of Aphrodite in Athens, as she is the goddess of beauty, love and fertility. Aegeus also travelled to the Oracle of Delphos, who advised him against drinking from his wineskin until he had reached the highest point of Athens unless he wanted to die of grief one day – already foreshadowing his death.

On his way back, Aegeus went to Corinth, where he met Medea, who promised him a son in exchange of protection in Athens, and then went to Troezen with some old acquaintances. There, the king Pittheus was lamenting the exile of Bellerophon, his daughter Aethra's fiancé; he did not want his daughter to remain a virgin, and under the influence of Medea's spell, he got Aegeus drunk and invited him to lie with his daughter.

The conflict appears when Athena also tricked Aethra to sleep with Poseidon that same night. However, Poseidon conceded the paternity of any child born to Aethra in the course of the next four months to Aegeus. When Aegeus woke up, he told Aethra that, were a son to be born, he must not be exposed, but raised in Troezen. Once he became of age, he should be able to find Aegeus's sword and sandals under a hollow rock, known as the Altar of Zeus, and thus sent to Athens (Graves, 1996).

From a young age, Theseus showed the signs of a hero, as he was fearless and ready to battle monsters. When he became 16, he recovered the sword and the sandals and, against Pittheus's warnings and Aethra's teachings, he travelled to Athens by land, not by the safe sea, because he wanted to imitate Heracles.

His arrival in Athens coincided with the nine-year mark in which Athens had to send seven young men and seven young women to Crete, and Theseus was one of the chosen youths. There exist various versions of how Theseus was chosen: one version argues that Theseus volunteered himself with the intention of sparing at least one family from losing their child; another one explains that the ballot simply fell on him, and a third version describes how Minos himself sailed to Athens to choose the victims, and that Theseus offered himself on the understanding that, if he killed the Minotaur with his bare hands, the tribute on the young victims would be remitted (Graves, 1996).

Regardless of the version of the myth, the animosity between Theseus and Minos is made clear from the beginning, and Theseus attempts to defy the Cretian king in more than one occasion. For instance, once the ship with the Athenian tributes reached Crete, it is said that Minos went to the harbour and, fancying one of the young maidens, attempted to force himself on her. Theseus stopped him and said that it was his duty as a son of Poseidon to protect young virgins (maidens) from tyrants such as Minos, to which Minos laughed and said that Poseidon was not known to show delicacy to young women, and dared Theseus to prove himself as a son of Poseidon by retrieving a bauble/golden signet from the sea.

At this, Theseus demanded that Minos proved his being a son of Zeus first, which he did by sending a prayer to Zeus, and a thunderclap (a sign of the god) was heard. As had been agreed, Theseus jumped into the sea and, with help of various sea dwellers such as the Nereids or the water nymph Thetis (depending on the myth), he retrieved the signet along with a crown.

Despite his intelligence and strength, Theseus would not have been able to defeat the Minotaur without another important player in the story: princess Ariadne, daughter of Minos. Theseus was favoured by Aphrodite and, as such, Ariadne fell in love with the hero at first sight. She promised to help him out of the Labyrinth under the condition that he brought her with him back to Athens and made her his wife.

Ariadne's plan was as follows: the princess had received from Daedalus a magic ball of thread to navigate the labyrinth; she had to open the entrance door and tie the loose end of the thread to the lintel. The ball would then roll along, diminishing as it went and reaching the innermost recess where the Minotaur lived. Then Theseus would just need to roll up the thread again to exit the maze (Graves, 1996). Theseus followed the plan and came out of the Labyrinth victorious, although it is not clear how exactly he killed the Minotaur.

Once the Minotaur had been defeated and Theseus had exited the Labyrinth victoriously, he met the rest of the victims and, along with Ariadne, sailed back to Athens. However, Theseus broke his promise to Ariadne and abandoned her on the island of Dia, now known as Naxos. The Cretian princess was found by the god Dionysus, who married her. As it occurs with all myths, there are different versions as to how this happened, and none of them agree on anything.

To finalise with the story of Theseus, the young hero had promised his father that, if he came back alive from Crete, the ship would sport white sails; on the contrary, if he failed and died, the ship would have black sails. Theseus had been sailing with black sails, and Fate decided that, upon reaching the Athenian coast, he would forget to change the black sails for the white ones. Upon seeing the

ships, Aegeus believed his son to have died and threw himself down a tower in despair, thus completing the prophecy that had been predicted for the king back at the Oracle of Delphos so many years ago (Graves, 1996, p. 318).

As has been exposed, myths are an intrinsic part of humanity. There are numerous investigations and theories about the origins of myths and their roles in our culture. It has been argued that myths are an answer to the fears of people, a way of explaining the parts of reality which are feared because of their lack of logical explanation, in contrast to the fantastic, which questions these same parts of reality (Vion-Dury & Brunel, 2003). At the same time, it has also been found that myths and folk tales are quite similar in structure, although different in their motivation, and myths may serve other purposes in society than simply trying to explain the world; myths are also a reflection of society and our needs and fears (Kirk, 2002).

The meanings that people attribute to classical myths have changed with time; their interpretations and significance are not the same nowadays as they were some millennia ago. Nonetheless, myths are still texts, and texts can be analysed from a variety of perspectives. The most pressing question, in this case, is about the meaning of the Labyrinth, and its role in the myths and stories where it appears.

### **2.3 The Labyrinth and its significance**

In the English language, there are two words used to define the types of spaces (both physical and metaphorical) in which people may be lost or confused: labyrinth, and maze. Although they have been generally used interchangeably,

these words define two different spaces. On the one hand, the classical labyrinth is a unicursal place, which means that it is “one single winding path that folds within itself” (Fernández-Vara, 2007, p. 74). On the other hand, the maze is a type of labyrinth which is more complex than the classical one: the maze is multicursal, and it presents “branching paths and dead ends so that the walker is forced to choose her directions” (2007, p. 74).

Visually, the labyrinth has an entrance that leads to its own centre and, to exit the space, one would need to retrace their steps; this image fits the narrative of the original myth of the Labyrinth, as seen when Theseus uses Ariadne’s magic thread to escape after defeating the Minotaur. However, it is important to note that some descriptions of the labyrinth in different translations of the myth are vague, and one cannot affirm whether the mythical labyrinth is truly unicursal or not. In contrast, the maze does not coil around itself but has a separate entrance and exit instead, and the main course branches into different routes and dead-end streets; mazes are especially popular as pastimes (for example, in newspapers) and as garden landscapes.

On a metaphorical level, the labyrinth has been used as a reflection of the complexities of living as a human being. Inside a labyrinth, the person must follow the path until reaching the centre; it is impossible to get lost, as there is only one way to go (Martínez García, 2010, p. 57). This has been described as an exercise of self-reflection and self-awareness of one’s condition as human, a search of one’s real self: “el ser humano debe iniciar ese viaje hacia el centro y allí sostener

un duelo consigo mismo en el corazón del laberinto<sup>6</sup> (2010, p. 57). Only through facing the real self are people able to find their real identity.

This interpretation on the symbolism of the labyrinth has been dominant in art and literature, especially in times of big changes, such as the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The labyrinth is a tool to represent the confusion and the loss of hope that humanity may feel when navigating through the changes of the time (2010, p. 57). Particularly, art, in all its forms, has always been a media that has functioned as a social catalyst through which people are able to analyse and process their feelings.

At first glance, it may seem that the idea of a unicursal labyrinth should be opposing to the process of finding oneself, as the concept of losing and finding one's own identity is, often, associated to the idea of the maze, of overcoming challenges, of losing the way and finding the correct path. Thus, how does a one-way labyrinth fit into this narrative? Paul G. Kuntz argues that the labyrinth is the perfect symbol to represent the transition of the human mind through different stages of the psyche: the labyrinth "conveys concretely an opportunity to experience the transition from fear of the unknown to mastery of the pattern" (Kuntz, 1966, p. 497).

The labyrinth has also been associated to the idea of death, rebirth, coming of age and the rite of passage. For instance, Philippe Borgeaud (1974) explains that the Labyrinth in the myth of Theseus functions as a place of transition from childhood to adulthood: for Theseus, the mythical hero entered the labyrinth as a

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<sup>6</sup> "the human being must initiate that journey to the centre and have a duel there with themselves in the heart of the labyrinth."



young man and exited it as a young king, for his return to Athens would mark the death of his father; in the case of the young Athenians that were to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, they transitioned from children separated from their families to young adults that had survived what should have been a certain death (Borgeaud, 1974, p. 5).

Borgeaud also cites the structure of rites of passage given by Van Gennep, which consists of three main stages: forgetfulness, wandering, and passage, to which Borgeaud adds a fourth stage of reintegration (1974, p. 25). As regards to the Labyrinth, these stages would correspond to different moments: forgetfulness is the entrance to the labyrinth, where the person is extracted from their usual environment; wandering occurs when the person is inside the labyrinth, which becomes a liminal space between the past and the future, and all the changes that take place there; finally, the passage is the exit from the labyrinth, which transitions to the reintegration of the person into society under a different role or identity.

## **2.4 The Minotaur: the monster inside**

For a proper analysis of the Labyrinth, the role of the Minotaur and its evolution must also be considered. The reason for this is as follows: the Labyrinth exists because of the Minotaur, and the Minotaur is allowed to live because he is imprisoned inside the Labyrinth. The Minotaur is a monster, an aberration; had Minos not decided to allow him to live, he would have been disposed of; instead, Minos ordered that a Labyrinth be constructed, a place where the Minotaur could be held prisoner and apart from the common people whilst serving Minos's cruel

plans. Thus, it is not farfetched to argue that the existence of the Labyrinth allows the survival of the Minotaur, the same way that the presence of the Minotaur justifies the existence of the Labyrinth.

As such, the figure of the Minotaur has been revisited, analysed, and adapted through time, in a manner not unlike the Labyrinth. The Minotaur has been the object of study and inspiration in several areas, from psychology to the world of the arts. For instance, its relevance was distinctly important among surrealist artists, as the birth of Surrealism occurred at a time when the world was entering World War II. Surrealism signified a return to the Greco-Roman mythology and, as it was the tumultuous time in-between wars, many artists and writers became interested in the figure of the Minotaur because “[t]he tale of the Cretan beast involved horror, rescue, along with a constant struggle to survive” and it was the “embodiment of death, violence, and despair” (Pahl, 2017, pp. 2–3), which reflected the general feelings of a world that was seeing a rise in fascist governments and the extent of humanity’s cruelty.

According to the myth, the Minotaur was born from Pasiphaë’s obsession with Poseidon’s bull. This bull had been a gift from Poseidon to Minos, who was supposed to sacrifice the animal to the same god that had gifted it to the king. Nonetheless, the end of this story is as previously mentioned<sup>7</sup>: Minos attempted to trick the gods, so they punished him by having his wife Pasiphaë bear its child: a half-man, half-bull creature.

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<sup>7</sup> See Section 2.2. First manifestations of the Labyrinth in mythology: myth of the Minotaur.

Generally, the Minotaur has been interpreted as a metaphor of human nature, especially of the battle between rationality versus instinct (Casadiegos, 2003): the rational side is represented in the human part of the Minotaur, while the instinct side is represented in the bull head. Taking this into consideration, it must be noticed that the Minotaur's body is a contradiction of what would be expected: rationality should be represented in the human head, and instinct should be found in the bull body. However, this is inverted in the Greek monster: the rational part is weakened by the bull head, which implies a certain bestiality, and the instinct part is hindered by the human body since it is not as powerful as a bull's body (Gambón, 2005, p. 7).

The Minotaur has also been analysed as a metaphor for every element that causes fear and terror: everything that is unknown, death, the fear of death (Casadiegos, 2003). It is interesting to note that, in modern representations of the labyrinth, the Minotaur has been replaced with different types of monsters. If one looks at some contemporary examples in popular culture, the horrors inhabiting a labyrinth have been adapted to the world to which they belong; for example, films like *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005, dir. Mike Newell) or *The Maze Runner* (2014, dir. Wes Ball) present a version of the Minotaur that has been transformed into other monsters, other representations of fear and horror.

Considering what has been said about the labyrinth and the Minotaur, it can be deduced that the Minotaur is not only a physical obstacle to whoever enters the labyrinth but also a psychological one. The Minotaur is considered an aberration of nature, a being that should not have existed; what is a human to do when encountering such a beast? Moreover, it can also be interpreted as the physical manifestation of human *hybris*, understood as the human desire to

surpass all limits and become something more than human. David C. Camacho argues that “ese impulso por transgredir los límites, aun a costa de la propia destrucción, es lo más propio del hombre<sup>8</sup>” (Camacho, 1996, p. 45), which proposes the question of what would happen if the final obstacle that the visitor of the labyrinth finds at the centre is not a Minotaur, but a reflection of the darkest impulses of humankind.

This last consideration is yet another approach to the figure of the Minotaur. In the instance that the Minotaur is more than just a monster, what should a person do? There exists the idea of a mirror situated at the centre of the labyrinth, in which case the monster that must be confronted is not a real being, but the person themselves. This idea seems related to the interpretation of the labyrinth as a place of transition and rebirth: by confronting and overcoming the deepest, most obscure parts of the self, which is manifested as a physical *Other*, the hero can become their best version. Thus, whether this *Other* being is represented as a Minotaur or as something different, the significance remains, and the death of the monster will allow the rebirth of the hero.

Nonetheless, one thing is clear: despite the form the Minotaur may have inside a story, his existence is inexorably intertwined with that of the labyrinth. The Minotaur can only exist inside the Labyrinth, and the Labyrinth exists because of the Minotaur. In this line of thought, it can be said that confusion and change, generally associated with the Labyrinth, are deeply connected to fear, represented in the Minotaur: they are two sides of the same coin.

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<sup>8</sup> “that impulse to transgress the limits, even at the cost of the destruction of the self, is the most typical of man.”

### **3 Film analysis: *Labyrinth* and *El laberinto del fauno***

To further observe the way the Labyrinth and the Minotaur have been interpreted and reinvented in contemporary times, I will proceed with the analysis of two films in which the Labyrinth is a key plot point: *Labyrinth* (1986) and *El laberinto del fauno* (2006). I have chosen these two films because, despite the 20-year difference between each of them, I have considered that they are a good case study of how the myth of the Labyrinth has survived in human society across cultures, how it has been reinterpreted and how one representation does not diminish the significance of the Labyrinth but enriches it.

#### **3.1 *Labyrinth***

##### **3.1.1 About the film**

*Labyrinth* was directed by Jim Henson, the creator of *The Muppet Show* (1976-1981), and it was first shown in cinemas in 1986. The story follows the 15-year-old Sarah Williams (Jennifer Connelly) on her quest to rescue her baby brother Toby from the hands of Jareth (David Bowie), the Goblin King. To do so, she will need to reach the centre of the goblins' lair: the Labyrinth. The documentary *Inside the Labyrinth* (1987) has proven to be a most valuable source of information regarding the origins of the film, from its first conception to the final product.

This documentary shows the process of making *Labyrinth*, several moments from behind the scenes, and interviews with actors, directors, and producers, among others. It also allows the fans of the film to see the process of fabricating

all the special effects and costumes that would be needed for the film. These procedures were unique to the *Labyrinth* film, for they relied on the ability of the puppeteers to breathe air into the characters. These techniques were not seen in other films in the 1980s, although they would be familiar to fans of Henson and his *The Muppet Show*.

It is interesting to see how the original idea for the film evolved from the initial stages to the final picture. Conceptual designer Brian Froud explains that he, along with Jim Henson, had first decided to create a film about goblins, and Froud filled numerous sketchbooks with concept art for the different types of goblins they could use (Saunders & Henson, 1987, 9:10-9:35). There were very few human characters in the film, such as Sarah, Toby, Jareth, Sarah's parents, and a few of the goblin guards; the others were all puppets.

To give life to all the creatures in the film, a huge number of puppets were made. There were the typical puppets the mechanism of which was no different from other puppets previously used. However, for characters like Hoggles, Ludo or the mechanical giant, the craftsmen had to create special suits to animate them. Hoggle was portrayed by a real person with a puppet mask: it was the most difficult puppet to move because the puppeteers had to move the mask as if it were a real face, not only when talking but also when reacting to the action. Ludo was a full-body suit that weighed roughly 45 kilograms; it was so heavy that they had two different people portray him during the film. Finally, the mechanical giant was 4 meters tall, and the challenge of it was being able to portray movement that was realistic enough, both in body and in its facial expressions.

All in all, this film became an opportunity to go beyond what any other filmmaker had tried before in terms of production and special effects. With a cast that is composed mainly of puppets and outwardly stage settings, it is easy to see why this film is considered a cult film, despite its mixed reception on its debut day. However, one thing to consider is that there are little to no interviews or documentaries where the director, writer and executive staff talk about the meaning of the story itself. For this study, this means that the interpretation of the story, and the role of the labyrinth in it, is quite ample and sets the stage for many different understandings.

### **3.1.2 Summary of the film**

Sarah Williams is a young girl of around 15 years old who loves to spend time enacting her late mother's biggest theatre play, *Labyrinth*. She loves fantasy stories and would want nothing more than to spend her life in the world of *Labyrinth*. However, reality is not so generous with her, for she must babysit her brother when her father and her stepmother leave for the night. Sarah feels misunderstood and uncared for by her parents and claims that "it's not fair!".

Once her parents have left, her baby brother Toby begins to cry. Sarah, in all her teenage rage at the situation her parents have put her in and at her inability of calming Toby down, wishes for the Goblin King to take the baby away. What she does not expect, however, is for Jareth, the Goblin King himself, to appear and kidnap Toby for real. Desperate and regretful, Sarah pleads with Jareth to get her baby brother back, to which Jareth concedes with one condition: Sarah must solve the labyrinth that is the Goblin City and reach the Goblin Castle in the

span of 13 hours to rescue the baby, otherwise the Goblin King will transform baby Toby into one of his goblins.

Outside the walls of the labyrinth, Sarah meets the goblin Hoggle, a dwarf that spends his days fumigating fairies. After much questioning, Hoggle shows Sarah the entrance to the labyrinth and warns her that she will not be able to go home even if she reaches the centre of the labyrinth. Sarah starts walking down the path on the right, yet the path continues without any turn or twist, which frustrates her. It is at this moment that Sarah meets a talking worm, which shows her another entrance hidden on the wall by an optical illusion. As Sarah starts going down the new path, the worm warns her not to go that specific way, to which Sarah decides to follow its words and goes down the opposite path. The worm talks to itself and says that it is a good thing that Sarah had changed paths, otherwise she would have reached the castle, which is ironic considering that had been Sarah's original goal. Thus, this is how Sarah's quest begins to complicate.

As Sarah goes further into the labyrinth, she has the idea of marking which way she has already passed with a tube of red lipstick. While this idea is good, it does not work for her because some goblins change the marked stones, making Sarah go around in circles. When she discovers the trick, Sarah complains that "it's not fair!". She then finds two doors guarded by four goblins: one leads to the centre of the labyrinth, and the other leads to certain death. The guards also tell her that one set of them always tells the truth, and the other always lies, so it is up to Sarah to choose one of the doors. Just as she thinks that she has chosen the right door, she falls down a trap and into an oubliette, a space under the labyrinth where the goblins put people to forget about them.



In the oubliette, Sarah meets Hoggle again. At Sarah's insistence, they reach a deal: in exchange for Sarah's plastic bracelet, Hoggle will take her as far into the labyrinth as he can. The dwarf begins to lead Sarah to the castle, but they meet Jareth on the way, who had been waiting for them. Jareth reveals that Hoggle was supposed to take Sarah back to the beginning so that she would give up on the quest and threatens to throw the dwarf into the Bog of Eternal Stench if he dares to betray his king. Then, Jareth asks Sarah if she likes his labyrinth, and the girl answers that "It's a piece of cake", to which the Goblin King decides to increase the stakes: he moves the clock forward so Sarah has less time left, and calls the cleaners on Sarah and Hoggle, dangerous machines that destroy everything on their path.

Sarah and Hoggle manage to escape and get aboveground again. When Hoggle says that this is as far as he is willing to lead her, Sarah steals his precious bag of jewels, blackmailing the dwarf into further helping her. They meet another dwarf and ask him for directions to the castle, but he is not of much help. They continue walking until they hear a terrifying roar and Hoggle runs away in fear. In contrast, Sarah goes towards the noise and finds Ludo, a big hairy monster, that is being bullied by some armed goblins. Sarah helps him and Ludo decides to go with her on her quest. After choosing from another pair of doors, Sarah and Ludo find themselves in a strange forest and get separated.

While running away from some forest beasts that want to take Sarah's head, Hoggle appears again and rescues her. Sarah is so happy to see her friend again, that she hugs and kisses him. What Sarah does not know, though, is that Jareth had talked to Hoggle and ordered him to give Sarah a poisoned peach, as well as threatened to make the dwarf prince of the Bog of Eternal Stench if he were

kissed by Sarah. Thus, as soon as they have escaped the forest, Sarah and Hoggle fall down a trap to the Bog. This place's smell is so foul that it can never be washed off, so all the inhabitants of the Goblin City fear it. Luckily, Sarah manages to save them both before they fall into the Bog, and they try to find a path out of it. On the way, they meet Ludo again and see a bridge that crosses the Bog.

However, before they get to cross the bridge, a small, energetic canine monster called Sir Didymus appears, blocking the way. The beast says that no one can cross the bridge but is surprised when Ludo is evenly matched in a battle against him, so decides to let Sarah and Ludo cross, since Hoggle had sneaked around during the fight. Sadly, the bridge breaks down, leaving Sarah to hang from a vine so as not to fall in the dirty bog water. Ludo makes a special noise that makes boulders move, thus creating a stone path for Sarah. Hoggle is waiting for them on the other side, and even Sir Didymus and his dog Ambrosius go with the group.

The group is back in the forest, and Sarah says that she is hungry. While the other companions walk ahead, Hoggle reluctantly gives Sarah the poisoned peach and runs away in shame when the poison starts taking effect on the girl. The poison causes Sarah to hallucinate, and she sees herself in a ballroom celebration, dressed in a beautiful ballgown, just like in her fantasies. In this hallucination, Sarah even dances with the Goblin King himself. When she wakes up, Sarah finds herself in a junkyard. She stumbles upon the Junk Lady, a goblin who collects junk and trinkets. Sarah has no memory of where she is or who she is looking for, and the Junk Lady gives her a teddy bear: Lancelot, Sarah's toy.

The goblin also takes Sarah into a copy of Sarah's bedroom, which makes the girl think that everything has been a dream. However, the Junk Lady appears again, and she begins to give Sarah all her favourite toys and presents, trying to bury her under the objects. Luckily, Sarah sees her copy of the novel *Labyrinth* and remembers everything, thus realising that saving Toby is more important than anything else. Ludo and Sir Didymus find her and help her, and the group finally reaches the entrance of the Goblin City.

Upon entering the city, Sarah and her companions are confronted by a mechanical, 4-metres-high guard, and only manage to escape thanks to Hoggle, who defeats the goblin who was controlling the mechanical monster. Hoggle apologises for tricking Sarah into eating the poisoned peach, and everyone forgives him. The group proceeds towards the castle, but they are stopped by the goblin army. After a ferocious battle of four against an army, they finally reach the castle, and Sarah decides to confront the Goblin King alone.

Sarah finds Jareth inside an infinite chamber, a room where there are no logical directions, and nothing is where it should be. She tries to get to Toby, yet despite going up all stairs possible, she cannot get closer to the baby. The chamber disappears, and only Sarah and Jareth are left. Jareth tries to persuade Sarah into staying in the Goblin City, promising that, so long as she stays under his rule and command, she will have anything that she desires. Nonetheless, Sarah does not fall to temptation, and defeats Jareth by realising and telling him that "You have no power over me!".

The clock strikes midnight, and Sarah opens her eyes to her home. She looks for Toby and sees that he is sleeping soundly in bed as if nothing had

happened at all. When her parents come home, Sarah is in her room and, in the mirror, she sees Ludo, Sir Didymus, and Hoggle, and says that she will always need them, even when she has no reason to do so. The film ends with Sarah laughing and dancing with her companions and other creatures that had helped them through their journey in her room, free of worries.

### **3.1.3 Analysis: the labyrinth as a rite of passage**

From the first minutes of the film, it is clear to the audience that *Labyrinth* is a fantasy story. The film begins with young Sarah playing in a park, acting as the heroine of her favourite novel, *Labyrinth*. The scene is fairy-tale-like, as if Sarah were a princess opposing the villain. The plot also follows the basics of any fantasy story: the young heroine must defeat the villain, who has taken something from her, and she will undergo a character change during the process, which usually implies maturing into an adult. In this case, Sarah must save her baby brother Toby from the hands of Jareth, the Goblin King: to do so, she must solve the labyrinth in 13 hours before Jareth transforms Toby into a goblin and Sarah loses him forever.

From a general view, the role of the labyrinth in this film is the rite of passage of Sarah from childhood to adulthood. Although the fantasy elements are dominant in the film, some authors argue that this journey is psychological more than real: "Sarah's psychological state and the parallels between Sarah's room and the labyrinth both indicate that *Labyrinth* is still a psychological journey rather than a "real" one" (Carroll, 2009, p. 105). Sarah's room is full of objects that represent the young girl's love for the *fantastic* because she has many toys and

teddy bears, as well as many fantasy novels. In fact, several objects from her room appear in the labyrinth: the novel *Labyrinth* narrates the same adventure that Sarah will live; she has a green labyrinth board, which is identical to the labyrinth she will have to solve; there is a doll in a white gown that will later be repeated in Sarah's hallucination of the ballroom scene and, on the wall, there is a picture of an optical illusion of stairs, an infinite chamber, which will be reflected during Sarah's last confrontation with Jareth.



*Figure 1 Labyrinth and the Goblin City*



*Figure 2 Sarah's room*

Sarah's rite of passage in the labyrinth can be divided into Borgeaud's (1974) four stages: forgetfulness, wandering, passage and reintegration, as mentioned in the theoretical framework<sup>9</sup>. Firstly, forgetfulness corresponds to the entrance to the labyrinth. This is the first part of the film: Jareth has taken Toby at Sarah's careless request and explains that Sarah can save the baby only if she finds him in 13 hours. Sarah is then prompted to enter the labyrinth and must find the path to the centre and the Goblin Castle. The heroine is taken from her usual environment (her bedroom) to a new, strange place (labyrinth). This is also the part where she finds the first of her companions, who doubles as her guide through the labyrinth: Hoggle, the dwarf.

Secondly, the wandering stage is the most extensive, as it comprises most of the adventure. This is the journey Sarah takes, from the moment she enters the labyrinth to her return home. During her quest, Sarah undergoes a character change that shows the audience her maturity through different set scenes. At the beginning of the film, Sarah is a childish girl for what is expected of her age: at 15-16 years old, she is stuck in a world of fantasy, shown in her room decoration and her obsession with the novel *Labyrinth*. She is overly attached to Lancelot, her teddy bear, to the point that she gets angry at her baby brother for taking the toy from her room and wishes for the Goblin King to take him away. This is especially telling of her character because there is no logical way Toby could have got the toy since he is barely a toddler; it is more probable that her father or her stepmother had taken it and given it to the baby, but Sarah does not even consider this.

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<sup>9</sup> See Section 2.3. The Labyrinth and its significance.

Another characteristic that reflects Sarah's immaturity is her catchphrase, which she uses at different times during the first part of the film: "it's not fair!". Whenever something does not happen the way she expected, Sarah is quick to complain about the situation not being fair to her. This happens many times, such as when she must babysit her brother, or when she cannot find the entrance to the labyrinth, and when Jareth decides to up the stakes of their bet: anything that is antagonistic to her is "not fair". Her attitude is especially immature during the first half of the film because the excuse of fairness is not an indication of her actively trying to surpass the situation: it is a call for someone else to change the situation in her favour.

Hoggle and Jareth are the two characters who actively reprimand her for this attitude. Hoggle explicitly tells her that the problem is that "you take too many things for granted" (Henson, 1986, 00:17:43), which is then reinforced when a worm tells Sarah that she "can't take anything for granted" (1986, 00:21:30). When Jareth decides to change the rules, Sarah once again complains that "it's not fair!", to which the Goblin King responds with "You say that so often. I wonder what your basis for comparison is" (1986, 00:35:42). That is Sarah's main problem: there is nothing that can defend her argument of a situation being unfair or not because her saying so does not correlate with the circumstances. In this case, she is forced to confront the question: that is not fair in comparison to what? After this conversation, Sarah tries to blackmail Hoggle into helping her cross the labyrinth, to which Hoggle says that it is not fair, and Sarah has a realization: the dwarf is right, it is not fair, but that is the way it is. In life, not everything will go the way we expect, and sometimes there is nothing we can do to change it.

Another scene that is pivotal to Sarah's character development is the ballroom scene. Sarah has eaten a poisonous peach, which causes her to have a hallucination or even a dream. In this vision, she sees herself dressed up in a beautiful gown, and she attends a glamorous ballroom dance, where she dances with Jareth. This scene represents the crux of Sarah's dilemma, as explained in the film's documentary: "We were trying to create a kind of an adult world; the cast is real people here. Sarah is still a child, she's walking to a very adult situation where she knows she's too young to be there; it's something that's attractive to her, and also repellent" (Saunders & Henson, 1987, 46:04-46:25).

This scene is linked to another from the beginning, in which Sarah's stepmother tells her that she should start dating boys because it is what girls her age should do. In this dream scene, the ballroom dance between Sarah and Jareth is inherently romantic; except for the presence of Jareth, which is possibly the result of the Goblin King's magic, everything is what Sarah has dreamt of: a ball in a castle, beautiful dresses, someone to dance with. However, it is also an image of the adult world. Becoming an adult implies certain societal expectations to be met, one of them being romantic relationships. In this dream, Sarah realises that life is not always as one would like it to be and, while she has dreamed about being an adult, she also knows that she is not ready for it yet.

The third important scene for Sarah's development occurs after the dream scene: the junkyard. Sarah awakens from her vision in a junkyard and is unable to remember her reason for being there or her purpose. A goblin named Junk Lady tries to trick her into staying there by giving her a copy of all her favourite objects, yet Sarah remembers Toby and escapes. In this scene, Sarah shows maturity by choosing the most challenging option: find Toby and rescue him. In a



situation where the easy thing to do would be to succumb to the Junk Lady's trickery, Sarah remembers what is important. Material possessions, while precious, are replaceable and not what she needs; what Sarah must do is save her baby brother.

Following the stages of the rite of passage, the next stage is the exit of the labyrinth, known as passage. This part coincides with Sarah's final confrontation with Jareth. The heroine has finally reached the castle and has found her baby brother, yet Jareth still tries to convince Sarah to stay with him. He promises to give her anything she wants if she swears loyalty to him and follows his rules. Nonetheless, Sarah is not tricked by his words and states the words that defeat the Goblin King once and for all: "You have no power over me". These words are extremely powerful when considering everything that Sarah has experienced in the labyrinth and along her quest; all her steps and all her moves were controlled by Jareth, who did everything in his power to make her abandon her quest and fail. After being led everywhere by him, Sarah's words represent her breaking free from the whims of the Goblin King and affirming her autonomy.

From the moment Jareth is defeated, Sarah is transported back to her home, thus initiating her reintegration into the real world. This stage is the culmination of everything the heroine has experienced, and it shows how she adapts to her new self in her old life. In Sarah's case, she is not the childish girl from the beginning of the film anymore because she has matured, which represents her entrance into young adulthood. For instance, she gives her bear Lancelot to Toby, although she had been furious when she first saw the toddler with the toy, and she also chooses to keep all objects relating to her fantasies (the novel, the doll, etc.) in a drawer, which represents her moving on from

childhood dreams. Nevertheless, this change does not mean that she is now an adult; it can be interpreted as Sarah becoming more comfortable in her own skin and her role as the older sister, yet she herself acknowledges that she will always need her friends from the labyrinth. Sarah has become a person who accepts her strong points and her own shortcomings and knows that her dreams do not need to compete with her reality.

In terms of the presence of the Minotaur in the film, the role of the monster is assigned to the character of Jareth, the Goblin King. Jareth has kidnapped a human baby on a whim, which reflects his ignorance of human values. He is described by David Bowie, the actor who portrayed him, as a big kid who is kind of spoilt (Saunders & Henson, 1987, 5:04), and he will stop at nothing to achieve what he desires. His childishness is comparable to that of Sarah at the beginning of the film, only he has the magical abilities to bend the world to his liking.

In Section 2.4, it is explained that the Minotaur, or any monster that inhabits a labyrinth, can be interpreted as a mirror of the deepest feelings of the hero, a physical form of their wishes and fears, and the hero must defeat it to change. This is also true for Jareth and Sarah. Jareth is, in a twisted way, the reflection of Sarah: he is childish, impatient, and mercurial, and he wants the world to move at his words. If something does not work the way he wants, he changes it with magic with no regard for the consequences his actions may have on other people. Jareth reflects Sarah's most childish desires in the form of a character from her favourite book, *Labyrinth*. It is in defeating him that Sarah is able to change for the better and return home.

There are more parallels between *Labyrinth* and the myth of the Minotaur. For example, Hoggle is Sarah's guide in the labyrinth and is in charge of guiding her through to the centre; in doing so, he is betraying the Goblin King, much like Ariadne betrayed her father Minos by providing Theseus with the magic thread. This last element is also present in the film, although only to a certain extent: there is a scene where Sarah uses a red lipstick to draw a mark on the ground so that she can avoid walking twice through the same path, so the lipstick becomes her magical thread. However, this idea does not work for her because some goblins decide to change the directions of the marks, thus causing Sarah to be lost again.

All in all, the labyrinth in this film functions as the space for Sarah's rite of passage from teenager to young adult. It is a confusing space where nothing is what it seems, with constant changes and unknown dangers that challenge the heroine at every turn. Every part of the labyrinth is made to confront Sarah with her negative aspects since all of them are an obstacle between her and her goal: saving her brother. Only by overcoming the labyrinth and Jareth, both of which are reflections of her personal weaknesses, can Sarah mature and change into a better version of herself.

## **3.2 *El laberinto del fauno***

### **3.2.1 Acerca de la película**

*El laberinto del fauno* es una película de 2006, dirigida por Guillermo del Toro, conocido por su uso de los elementos propios del género fantástico para narrar historias con un trasfondo muy delicado y, a veces, incluso violento.

Guillermo del Toro es un director, productor y guionista mexicano cuyas obras están marcadas por la mezcla de los géneros de horror y fantasía histórica. En muchas de sus películas aparecen seres mágicos tales como hadas, faunos y monstruos que forman parte de la realidad de ese mundo cinematográfico. Del Toro siempre ha optado por presentar la “otredad” en sus películas, manifestada no solo en los seres de su propio imaginario fantástico, sino también en sus personajes marginales.

*El laberinto del fauno* se sitúa en la España de 1944, cuando la Guerra Civil termina con Franco como cabeza del gobierno fascista. Aunque para algunas personas puede parecer extraño que un artista mexicano hable sobre un período tan duro como es la dictadura franquista en España, del Toro nunca se ha limitado a las fronteras geográficas. De hecho, en varias entrevistas explica que las personas “nos debemos la oportunidad de fabular, no solo nuestro idioma sino nuestra tierra, nuestra historia, [...], y no nos la damos, tenemos esta automarginación que si somos latinos y de un país latino, solo podemos hablar de ese país, y solo podemos hablar de lo malo y lo terrible que sucede en ese país” (Rico, n.d., 1:10-1:30)<sup>10</sup>. Así pues, sus historias son tan transgresoras como él mismo: no debería haber fronteras para explicar sentimientos universales.

Uno de los temas que más división causó entre el público fue si el mundo fantástico de la película era real, o si solo era parte de la imaginación de la protagonista, hecho que da fe de la habilidad del director para combinar lo real con lo fantástico. En una entrevista a Warner Bros. Entertainment, del Toro

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<sup>10</sup> Es importante recordar que muchos de los republicanos que huyeron ante el progreso de las tropas franquistas fueron a Francia y, desde allí, llegaron y se establecieron México, por lo que el tema de la Guerra Civil española era bastante conocido en ese país.

explica que, para él, la fantasía de la protagonista sí es real, y cree que es muy curioso cómo la audiencia puede interpretar un mismo texto de maneras tan distintas (Warner Bros. Entertainment, 2019). Para el director, la fantasía y los cuentos que escuchamos de pequeños nos marcan tanto como la realidad.

No hay duda de que *El laberinto del fauno* es una obra compleja que se sirve de la fantasía para explicar el horror; al fin y al cabo, la fantasía se ocupa de llenar los vacíos de la realidad, la distancia entre lo conocido y lo desconocido. En este caso, la interpretación que se puede realizar del laberinto es oscura y más complicada que en *Labyrinth*.

### **3.2.2 Resumen de la historia**

La película empieza con la muerte de Ofelia. El tiempo parecer revertirse, y se oye una voz que narra un cuento. En este cuento se nos presenta un Reino Subterráneo, donde no existe la mentira ni el dolor. Un día, la princesa de este reino escapó al mundo de los humanos y la luz del sol hizo que olvidara quién era, por lo que la princesa envejeció en el mundo exterior y murió, pero su padre estaba seguro de que su espíritu volvería algún día (del Toro, 2006).

Con este cuento de hadas se introduce a Ofelia, la protagonista, y su madre, Carmen, en la España de 1944. Ambas se encuentran de camino a un molino en medio del bosque para vivir con el marido de Carmen, el capitán Vidal del ejército franquista. En un momento en que deben parar el coche por las náuseas de Carmen, que está embarazada, Ofelia encuentra una estatua similar

a un tótem, en el cual coloca un ojo de piedra. De la boca del tótem sale un insecto que Ofelia confunde por un hada.

Una vez han llegado al molino, Ofelia se distrae con el mismo insecto que acaba de ver y llega a la entrada de un laberinto, pero la criada Mercedes la detiene antes de que pueda adentrarse en él. Por la noche, el bebé no deja de moverse, y Carmen le pide a Ofelia que le cuente un cuento, porque siempre consigue calmarlo. Más tarde, la niña sale de la cama y sigue a un hada hasta el laberinto de piedra. Allí, Ofelia conoce a un Fauno, y él la llama princesa y le explica que es la princesa perdida del Reino Subterráneo; la prueba se encuentra en la marca en forma de luna que la niña tiene en el hombro. Para demostrar que no se ha convertido en mortal, Ofelia deberá pasar tres pruebas antes de la siguiente luna llena. El Fauno le entrega el Libro de las Encrucijadas, un libro que le indicará qué pruebas debe realizar.



*Figura 3 Ofelia y el Fauno en el centro del laberinto*

El día siguiente, el libro le muestra a Ofelia que deberá adentrarse en un árbol mágico y recuperar una llave mágica del sapo que ha absorbido la energía del árbol. Cuando llega al árbol, Ofelia lleva un vestido parecido al de *Alicia en el País de las maravillas*, y se lo quita antes de entrar en el tronco para no ensuciarlo, pues su madre se lo había hecho con mucho cariño. Dentro del árbol, Ofelia se arrastra por un túnel hasta que se encuentra con un sapo enorme. Ofelia le da de comer insectos hasta que el sapo explota y la niña consigue recuperar la llave que el animal guardaba en su estómago. Cuando sale del tronco, está a punto de llover y su vestido está manchado de barro.

Por la noche, Ofelia vuelve al laberinto con la llave. El Fauno le dice que conserve la llave y le da un trozo de tiza, que necesitará para la segunda prueba. Al día siguiente, la madre de Ofelia se levanta enferma. Ofelia pide ayuda al libro mágico, que le muestra imágenes de sangre; en ese momento, la madre de Ofelia empieza a sangrar, a riesgo de perder el bebé.

Unas noches más tarde, el Fauno aparece en la habitación de Ofelia para reprocharle que no haya llevado a cabo la segunda prueba aún. Ofelia explica que su madre está enferma, y el Fauno le entrega una mandrágora, que deberá colocar en un cuenco con leche bajo la cama y alimentar con unas gotas de sangre para que su madre se cure. También le entrega una bolsa con hadas y un reloj de arena para la segunda prueba. Para que todo vaya bien, Ofelia deberá volver antes de que caiga el último grano de arena y no comer ni beber nada de lo que encuentre.

Ofelia utiliza la tiza mágica para crear una puerta que la lleva a una sala escondida del molino. Una vez dentro, las hadas la guían hasta tres puertas

pequeñas: Ofelia debe escoger una y abrirla con la llave, y tras la puerta encuentra una daga. Cuando se prepara para irse, Ofelia desobedece las instrucciones del Fauno y empieza a comer fruta del fantástico banquete que hay en la mesa. Esto hace que despierte el Hombre Pálido, un monstruo antropófago con ojos en las manos. El monstruo devora a dos de las hadas antes de que Ofelia consiga escapar de milagro.

Al día siguiente, Ofelia sigue las instrucciones para la mandrágora y su madre mejora de salud. Por la noche, el Fauno regresa para recuperar las hadas, pero se enfurece al ver que solo ha sobrevivido una y que Ofelia no le obedeció, por lo que la abandona. Al día siguiente, el capitán Vidal descubre la mandrágora y manda a Ofelia que se deshaga de ella. Carmen lanza la raíz al fuego, lo que provoca que rompa aguas y entre en parto. Desgraciadamente, el nacimiento del bebé es demasiado estresante para su cuerpo y fallece.

Tras el funeral de su madre, Ofelia intenta escapar, pero el capitán Vidal la atrapa y la encierra en su habitación. Por la noche, el Fauno aparece de nuevo y le dice que le otorgará una última oportunidad si lleva a su hermano hasta el laberinto. Ofelia droga al capitán y cumple las instrucciones del Fauno. Sin embargo, cuando descubre que la tercera prueba consiste en derramar sangre inocente para abrir el portal, es decir, la sangre de su hermano, Ofelia se niega y renuncia a su derecho real de princesa del Reino Subterráneo.

El Fauno se enfurece y deja a Ofelia sola, a pesar de saber que el capitán Vidal la ha seguido. Cuando Ofelia se gira, el capitán coge al bebé y dispara a Ofelia, dejando que se desangre encima del portal. Cuando el capitán sale del laberinto, los rebeldes han conquistado el molino y lo matan, con la promesa de



que su hijo nunca sabrá su nombre. Ofelia muere en el laberinto, pero su espíritu vuelve al Reino Subterráneo.

### **3.2.3 Análisis: el laberinto como muerte y reencarnación**

La película empieza con un cuento de hadas al que se hará referencia a lo largo de la historia. En este cuento se narra la vida de la princesa del Reino Subterráneo, de cómo ella murió al ir al mundo de los humanos y que su familia espera que vuelva algún día con ellos. Esta primera escena introduce al personaje de Ofelia, nuestra heroína. Ofelia es una niña de unos ocho años que va a vivir con su madre y su padrastro, el fascista capitán Vidal, a un molino en el campo. La madre, Carmen, se encuentra en las últimas semanas de embarazo, y se han trasladado a vivir con el capitán porque él quiere que su hijo nazca cerca de él. Nos encontramos en la España de 1944, cinco años después de la Guerra Civil.

El cuento que Ofelia lee en la primera escena permite que los espectadores sepan enseguida que la niña es muy soñadora y ama la fantasía. Es también muy curiosa, por lo que se da cuenta de que un insecto es en realidad un hada, aunque a primera vista parecía un saltamontes. De hecho, su curiosidad la lleva a encontrar un laberinto de piedra en las tierras que rodean el molino. Este laberinto tiene un único camino que lleva al centro. Una vez allí, el suelo se abre y da acceso a una habitación subterránea, donde Ofelia conoce por primera vez al Fauno. Este ser mágico le dice a Ofelia que ella es la princesa perdida del Reino Subterráneo y que, para volver allí, necesitará cumplir tres tareas. Es en

este momento cuando la realidad y la ficción se mezclan por completo: el cuento favorito de Ofelia se convierte en una realidad.



Figura 4 Ofelia en la entrada del laberinto

Igual que en la película anterior, aquí también pueden distinguirse las cuatro etapas de Borgeaud mencionadas en la Sección 2.3: el olvido (la entrada en el laberinto), el viaje (la experiencia de atravesar el laberinto), el paso o iniciación (la salida del laberinto) y la reintegración del héroe en la sociedad. Sin embargo, a diferencia de *Labyrinth*, estas etapas no se muestran de manera tan directa en *El laberinto del fauno*, y no todas cumplen su función. Por ejemplo, a pesar de que la fase del olvido es clara (Ofelia entra en el laberinto y conoce al Fauno), el viaje no ocurre en el laberinto físico, sino que tiene lugar fuera de él en distintas partes de la finca.

Curiosamente, el viaje de Ofelia por el laberinto sigue la estructura de los cuentos de hadas: hay tres pruebas que deben superarse para poder conseguir su premio, la entrada al Reino Subterráneo. La primera prueba consiste en adentrarse en un árbol antiguo y recuperar una llave; es una hazaña complicada

y sucia porque la llave se encuentra en el estómago de un sapo gigante. La niña, manchada de barro y secreciones del sapo, consigue la llave dándole una piedra al animal que lo fuerza a escupirla.

La segunda prueba es más peligrosa aún: la niña debe adentrarse en una sala secreta y recuperar una daga custodiada por el Hombre Pálido. Ofelia se siente insegura y evita realizar la prueba hasta que el Fauno la despierta por la noche. La niña se excusa diciendo que su madre está enferma, a lo que el Fauno le entrega una mandrágora que, si la cuida bien, curará a su madre. Siguiendo con la prueba, el Hombre Pálido es un monstruo antropófago que se alimenta de la carne de niños, tal como se puede observar en las pinturas de la pared, que muestran al monstruo comiendo niños cual Cronos comiendo a sus hijos. Para evitar despertarlo, el Fauno prohíbe a Ofelia que coma nada de su banquete.

Esta escena muestra varios niveles de interpretación. Para empezar, la sala del monstruo solo puede accederse con una tiza mágica; con ella, Ofelia puede dibujar una puerta dentro del molino que la llevará al hogar del Hombre Pálido. El Fauno también le entrega una bolsa con hadas en su interior, que la guiarán a través del peligro, y un reloj de arena que marcará el tiempo límite para realizar la prueba. En segundo lugar, la imagen del monstruo en la mesa recuerda a la escena del banquete organizado por el capitán Vidal. Se crea un paralelismo entre Vidal y el Hombre Pálido porque ambos se sientan a la cabeza de la mesa, en un lugar dominante, y los dos son violentos y crueles. En este sentido, el Hombre Pálido podría interpretarse como una representación fantástica del capitán; para una niña es más lógico que el monstruo tenga una apariencia monstruosa en lugar de parecer un hombre.

Recordemos que el Minotauro es, entre sus numerosas definiciones, el monstruo que habita dentro del laberinto y, por consiguiente, el mayor peligro para el héroe. En esta película, la figura del Minotauro se puede asignar precisamente a estos dos personajes: el capitán Vidal y el Hombre Pálido.

Esta representación se corresponde con el mundo desdoblado de la finca, pues el capitán Vidal sería el monstruo en el mundo real y el Hombre Pálido lo sería en el mundo fantástico. Ambos se encuentran en el centro del pequeño universo que forma la finca, con Vidal en la casa y el Hombre Pálido bajo los cimientos de ésta, y ambos se encuentran en posiciones de poder respecto a Ofelia.

Las similitudes entre los personajes y el Minotauro no terminan aquí. Del mismo modo en que la bestia del laberinto clásico recibía jóvenes humanos como sacrificio, también Vidal y el Hombre pálido sacian su sed de sangre a través de la muerte. Por una parte, el capitán Vidal se encarga personalmente de torturar y ejecutar a los rebeldes que sufren la mala fortuna de ser descubiertos y capturados en la finca; por otra parte, el Hombre Pálido se alimenta de las hadas que no consiguen escapar de su guarida.

Los dos personajes monstruosos son la principal fuente de peligro para Ofelia y, al mismo tiempo, son el reflejo totalmente contrario a ella. Ofelia, por ser una niña pequeña, representa la inocencia y la capacidad de hacer el bien. En contraste, el capitán Vidal y el Hombre Pálido son seres monstruosos que se mantienen a base de derramar la sangre de sus enemigos.

Antes de la tercera prueba, Ofelia sigue las instrucciones del Fauno, coloca la mandrágora en un cuenco con leche debajo de la cama de su madre y le da

unas gotas de su sangre. Al instante, la salud de la madre de Ofelia empieza a mejorar. Este es uno de los momentos en los que se observa explícitamente el efecto que las pruebas de Ofelia tienen en el mundo real. Ya sea magia o brujería, la mandrágora del Fauno ha curado a Carmen, pero no lo ha hecho sin intenciones escondidas; al contrario, la mandrágora es un elemento esencial para la tercera prueba.

Cuando el capitán Vidal y Carmen descubren la mandrágora, la madre de Ofelia la tira al fuego, matando así la raíz mágica. Desgraciadamente, en el momento en que la mandrágora empieza a morir, Carmen rompe aguas y se pone de parto. Teniendo en cuenta que su salud apenas había empezado a mejorar, Carmen se encuentra físicamente débil y muere en el parto. El niño, sin embargo, nace sano. A causa de haber matado a la raíz, se ha producido un intercambio de vidas; para poder dar vida al bebé, la madre tiene que fallecer. Si la mandrágora hubiera sobrevivido, es posible que la madre también lo hubiera hecho. No obstante, las criaturas mágicas no siguen las mismas normas que los humanos y se han tomado su venganza con Carmen.

La tercera prueba sucede cuando Ofelia, tras un intento fallido de escapar del molino, se encuentra encerrada en su habitación. El Fauno la visita y le ordena que vaya con su hermano al laberinto, pues será su última oportunidad para poder ir al Reino Subterráneo. Ofelia, tras drogar al capitán Vidal, cumple las órdenes del Fauno. Aun así, su esperanza se desvanece cuando el Fauno le revela que el portal para poder ir al Reino Subterráneo solo se abrirá tras derramar la sangre de un inocente, es decir, su hermano recién nacido. Ofelia se niega y el Fauno, en un arrebato de furia, desaparece y permite que el capitán Vidal, que ha seguido a Ofelia hasta el laberinto, dispare a la niña. Irónicamente,

la sangre de Ofelia se derrama sobre el portal; dado que ella es inocente por virtud de ser una niña, consigue volver al Reino Subterráneo, aunque su cuerpo mortal fallezca en el mundo real.

En la tercera prueba se mezclan los momentos de iniciación y de reintegración. La iniciación, que se corresponde con la salida del laberinto, no se produce de forma literal, puesto que Ofelia entra de hecho en él. En este caso, la muerte de la niña se puede considerar la salida del laberinto porque implica que su deber ha terminado: ha cumplido todas las tareas y no es necesario que siga viva. Seguidamente, la fase de reintegración en la sociedad sigue dos líneas distintas. La primera implica una reintegración fallida, puesto que Ofelia no consigue sobrevivir. La segunda línea tiene en cuenta el epílogo de la película, donde se ve a Ofelia en el Reino Subterráneo; en este caso, la reintegración habría sido un éxito, puesto que la niña consigue su deseo: llegar a su familia.

La interpretación del laberinto en esta película no es sencilla de realizar. El hecho de que los elementos fantásticos sean predominantes en la historia lleva a analizar el laberinto, o las tareas de Ofelia más concretamente, como un lugar de escape: las aventuras de Ofelia son imaginarias y “se explica como una forma de escapismo, tratando de huir de la crueldad del presente” (Rodero, 2015, p. 43). De esta manera, el laberinto no es un lugar de transformación o rito de iniciación, sino que se convierte en un medio que ayuda a entender la realidad a través de la fantasía.

Una última interpretación que se puede hacer es la del laberinto como representación del útero materno. El laberinto a veces se ha identificado como un símbolo tanto de la tumba como del vientre de la madre (Borgeaud, 1974, p.

5). La entrada en el laberinto representa el regreso al útero, volver al nacimiento. Entonces, este espacio se convierte en lugar de muerte y nacimiento: es necesario fallecer para renacer. Esta perspectiva es muy cercana al destino que sufre Ofelia porque la niña debe perder la vida para volver a nacer en el Reino Subterráneo. Frente a un mundo violento y cruel, la única solución que se nos presenta es la liberación a través de la muerte.

### **3.3 Comparación: dos soluciones al laberinto**

A pesar de que ambas películas giran en torno a un laberinto, *Labyrinth* y *El laberinto del fauno* no podrían ofrecer dos soluciones más distintas al mito. Es posible que estas diferencias se deban a varias razones: la diferencia de 20 años entre una película y la otra, la diferencia de estilos entre los directores, incluso las diferencias culturales entre los contextos de las películas. Sin embargo, no por ello es menos interesante observar el contraste entre ambas.

Tanto *Labyrinth* como *El laberinto del fauno* siguen la estructura del rito de iniciación, pero las conclusiones a las que llegan son totalmente distintas. Ambas protagonistas entran en el laberinto e intentan superar obstáculos para salvar a sus hermanos pequeños, pero la evolución de Sarah y la de Ofelia siguen caminos muy diferentes. Donde la historia de Sarah es una de superación personal y amistad, la historia de Ofelia es una tragedia marcada por la pérdida y la esperanza más allá de la muerte.

Por una parte, *Labyrinth* sigue el tema del rito de iniciación en su forma más clásica. Sarah entra en el laberinto como una chica malcriada y sale de él como una joven madura. En el laberinto ha luchado contra sus propios demonios, que

se reflejaban en los obstáculos del laberinto y en el mismo rey duende, y ha salido victoriosa. La historia tiene un final feliz, y el laberinto queda olvidado en un recuerdo.

Por otra parte, *El laberinto del fauno* muestra un laberinto que funciona como escape de la realidad: para huir de la crueldad del mundo real, Ofelia conoce a criaturas fantásticas y se enfrenta a tres tareas que le permitirán abrir el portal hacia el Reino Subterráneo. Sin embargo, el laberinto representa para Ofelia su muerte y su renacimiento: Ofelia tiene un destino trágico y es asesinada por el capitán Vidal, pero es su muerte la que le permite acceder al Reino Subterráneo.

Aunque los resultados son distintos, las películas también presentan una serie de semejanzas, entre ellas y con el mito clásico. Para empezar, ambas protagonistas son chicas jóvenes: Sarah es apenas una adolescente y Ofelia es aún una niña. Anteriormente, se ha mencionado que ambas protagonistas intentan salvar a sus hermanos: Sarah quiere salvar a su hermano bebé Toby, mientras que Ofelia se niega a sacrificar a su hermano recién nacido.

La presencia de los bebés crea un nuevo paralelismo entre las películas y el mito clásico del Laberinto. En la mitología clásica, Teseo se adentró en el Laberinto para rescatar a sus jóvenes compatriotas atenienses, que habían sido entregados como sacrificio al Minotauro. En las películas, los bebés también son víctimas, sacrificios inocentes a los respectivos Minotauros (el Rey Duende Jareth y el capitán Vidal). Sus muertes, tanto en sentido literal como metafórico, conllevarían la libertad de las protagonistas: Sarah no tendría que enfrentarse al laberinto y quedaría exenta de sus responsabilidades como hermana mayor,



mientras que Ofelia podría abrir la puerta al Reino Subterráneo si derramara la sangre del recién nacido. Sin embargo, lo que marca a nuestras protagonistas como heroínas es su dedicación por hacer el bien. Las hermanas arriesgan su vida para salvar a sus hermanos, al igual que hizo Teseo al luchar contra el Minotauro.

Finalmente, y después de analizar las películas, es curioso ver que ninguno de los directores menciona directamente el mito del Laberinto, por lo que se interpreta que las similitudes entre el mito griego y los elementos que aparecen en las películas no son conscientes. Esto demuestra cómo el mito está tan integrado en el imaginario colectivo, que su influencia supera la intención de transmisión de la mitología clásica.

## 4 Conclusión

Desde los inicios de la humanidad, las distintas civilizaciones han intentado explicar la realidad y la propia existencia, así como otorgar un sentido comprensible al mundo de su alrededor. Una de las primeras técnicas de las cuales se han conservado pruebas son los mitos de la antigüedad. Antes de que naciera la ciencia tal como se conoce actualmente, las sociedades se apoyaban en la magia y en la religión para explicar los fenómenos extraordinarios que ocurrían a su alrededor y su propia existencia humana.

Existen mitos en todas las civilizaciones humanas: desde la antigua civilización mesopotámica hasta la civilización romana, pasando por las civilizaciones griega y egipcia e incluso en la actualidad. Los mitos clásicos, estas historias con qué las personas daban forma a su mundo en la antigüedad, se han conservado durante milenios y aún impregnan los tiempos actuales. Uno de los mitos clásicos que se ha analizado en este trabajo es el mito del Minotauro y el laberinto.

En primer lugar, se han recopilado varios estudios acerca del significado del laberinto clásico como figura literaria. Algunos destacan la diferencia entre las palabras en inglés *labyrinth* y *maze*: el primer término indica un recinto creado por un único camino que se recoge sobre sí mismo hasta llegar al centro, mientras que el segundo se adhiere a la imagen más recurrente en la cultura contemporánea, la de un camino con entrada y salida que se divide en varias ramificaciones y que lleva a la confusión de quien intenta atravesarlo; en español, sin embargo, no se realiza esta diferencia conceptual.

Generalmente, el laberinto se ha interpretado como un rito iniciático con cuatro etapas diferenciadas: el olvido (la entrada en el laberinto), el viaje (la experiencia de atravesar el laberinto), el paso o iniciación (la salida del laberinto) y la reintegración del héroe en la sociedad. También se considera un lugar de transformación, puesto que sus misterios y sus secretos empujan al héroe a enfrentarse a sus propios miedos, lo que le lleva a cambiar de una manera u otra.

Al analizar el laberinto, también es importante pensar en la figura del Minotauro. Se ha interpretado que esta bestia mitológica sea una representación del miedo: para que el héroe pueda superar el laberinto, primero debe vencer su miedo, personificado en el Minotauro. También se puede considerar una transgresión de los límites humanos, puesto que es el fruto de un adulterio cometido en bestialidad. Su forma mixta también representa un reflejo de la humanidad, de sus características más negativas y escondidas, de la lucha entre la racionalidad y el instinto.

El mito clásico del Laberinto y del Minotauro ha perdurado en la cultura occidental en muchos ámbitos distintos, desde el arte hasta la ingeniería. Esto incluye también lo que se conoce en inglés como *popular culture*, que abarca toda la cultura de masas. Un medio muy accesible al público general es el cine, a través del cual se han transmitido numerosas adaptaciones de este mito; por ello, en este trabajo se han analizado dos películas en las que se observa su influencia: *Labyrinth* (1986) y *El laberinto del fauno* (2006).

En primer lugar, *Labyrinth* es una película dirigida por Jim Henson, creador de *Los Teleñecos*<sup>11</sup>. La historia sigue a Sarah, una joven adolescente que debe atravesar un laberinto para salvar a su hermano pequeño Toby de las garras de Jareth, el rey de los duendes. A través de su viaje por el laberinto, Sarah deja de ser una niña malcriada y se convierte en una chica más madura. En este caso, el laberinto es parte del rito de iniciación de Sarah, puesto que el laberinto le obliga a enfrentarse a sus miedos y a los aspectos negativos de su propia personalidad. Además, Jareth cumple el rol del Minotauro como reflejo de la parte más oscura de Sarah, dado que es un personaje de carácter infantil, descuidado y temperamental. Para derrotarle, Sarah debe observar y aceptar las partes de sí misma menos agradables; solo así consigue rescatar a su hermano y salir del laberinto.

Por otra parte, *El laberinto del fauno* fue dirigida por Guillermo del Toro. La historia se sitúa en la España de 1944, al haber terminado la Guerra Civil y habiendo subido Franco al poder. Ofelia es una niña que, junto con su madre embarazada, se muda a vivir con su padrastro, el capitán Vidal, a un molino. El hilo argumental sigue dos líneas paralelas: por una parte, se muestra como Ofelia conoce a un fauno y arriesga su vida por cumplir tres tareas que le permitirán ir al Reino Subterráneo, donde le han dicho que aguarda su familia verdadera. Por otra parte, se sigue a Mercedes, una criada que ayuda a los resistentes republicanos en secreto para sabotear al capitán Vidal.

En esta película, el laberinto adopta una forma compleja. Físicamente, el laberinto que aparece en escena es una estructura de piedra relativamente

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<sup>11</sup> *The Muppet Show* en inglés.

pequeña; muestra un único camino que llega al centro, donde unas escaleras llevan a un nivel inferior. Sin embargo, la finca donde viven los personajes es también un laberinto, si bien de manera metafórica. La casa, por ejemplo, tiene habitaciones secretas que solo conoce Ofelia y a las que puede acceder gracias a la magia. Además, las pruebas que la niña debe superar son reflejos de situaciones que tienen lugar en el mundo de los adultos, que es mucho más violento y cruel. En esta historia, los monstruos no son seres fantásticos, sino seres humanos que presentan la versión más viciosa de la humanidad.

Entonces, el laberinto en esta película se transforma en un lugar de escape para Ofelia; los seres que pretenden ayudarla a llegar al Reino Subterráneo y las pruebas que debe superar son paralelos a la situación que se vive en la finca. Así pues, las aventuras de Ofelia son la solución que la mente de la niña ofrece para procesar el trauma causado por la violencia de la guerra y el terror del fascismo. Además, el laberinto es también el lugar de muerte y renacimiento: para poder llegar al Reino Subterráneo, Ofelia debe sacrificar una vida inocente. Cuando se niega a sacrificar a su hermano recién nacido, es ella quien muere a manos de su Minotauro personal, el capitán Vidal. En este caso, si el espectador considera que el laberinto era solo una fantasía de la niña, la fase de renacimiento resulta un fracaso, puesto que Ofelia no consigue llegar al lugar que se le prometió. Sin embargo, se puede interpretar que sí renace y llega al Reino Subterráneo, donde ya no deberá sufrir más.

Ambas películas ofrecen dos versiones distintas del mito del Laberinto. En primer lugar, *Labyrinth* presenta un espacio de transformación en el que la protagonista se enfrenta a reflejos de sí misma para evolucionar y madurar, llegando así a convertirse en la mejor versión de sí misma. No hay sacrificios en

esta historia, y la violencia es mínima. En cambio, *El laberinto del fauno* es una gran metáfora de la crueldad humana a través del fascismo. Por eso, el laberinto se muestra como un lugar de escape para la joven protagonista, un lugar donde puede darle sentido a las atrocidades de la guerra. También se convierte en tumba y cuna: es el lugar donde la protagonista muere, y también la entrada a una nueva vida más allá de la muerte.

El mito del Laberinto es tan solo un ejemplo de cómo la cultura se transmite y vive de generación en generación. Existen unos tópicos universales que son inseparables de la experiencia humana tales como el amor, pero también el miedo y la muerte. Así pues, no existe duda de que estos temas, que se empezaron a transmitir a través de los mitos clásicos y las leyendas, perdurarán a lo largo de la historia adaptándose de una manera u otra a los nuevos tiempos. La necesidad de repetir y ofrecer la sabiduría de nuestros ancestros a generaciones futuras es algo muy propio de los seres humanos; mientras perduren las civilizaciones, sobrevivirán los mitos.

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