

NIGHT OF THE REPEATING DEAD: A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO THE
INTERSECTION OF CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE IN GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S *THE
DEVIL'S BACKBONE*

By

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To my Dad, for teaching me to love movies. And to my Mom, who puts up with us while we watch them.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Since the release of his first feature film, 1993's *Cronos*, director Guillermo del Toro has been attracting academic attention to his horrific, yet psychologically engaging works.

Repeatedly creating unique, gothic worlds populated by fantastic monsters, child protagonists and brutal violence, he has drawn multiple scholars to look at how he has been received by his home country of Mexico, why his work has found crossover success in the U.S., and what the implications of his transnational status are. At the same time, though, there are still numerous relevant aspects of his work that have gone all but untouched. His repeated use of child characters and the violence done to them may be the most consistent theme in his films to go unexplored, and his 2002 film, *The Devil's Backbone*, is one of the most important places to investigate this concept.

While there are multiple reasons to work with the figure of the child in del Toro's film (understanding the child's place in modern horror, understanding the child's place in depictions of trauma, using the child to analyze cross-cultural representations of trauma), the clearest starting point may be found in del Toro's own words about how he wants to change the way adults understand and avoid the subject of children experiencing violence. Because of this, I have

looked into of del Toro's past work and how he himself has specifically spoken about it. His words act as an excellent jumping off point for discussing his use of children in film.

While numerous approaches are relevant in studying such a concept, there are three I feel are particularly important in *The Devil's Backbone*. The first is an analysis of del Toro's use of paratext – specifically the film's opening credits – in order to defuse the audience's understanding of the film and to create a noticeable wall between the audience and the fictional events onscreen. Next, through a psychoanalytic approach using the insights of modern horror texts such as Adam Lowenstein's *Shocking Representation* and Carol Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, is discussing how del Toro uses these paratextual elements to replicate the idea of the “working through” process via the film's formal elements. Finally, Shoshana Felman's *Writing and Madness* lends insight into how this depiction of the psychoanalytic process involves viewers in the film's violent imagery in a way that gives them a further understanding of it.

The larger goal of studying del Toro is not only to look at the director himself but also to look at how his films lend themselves to a further understanding of representations of trauma. As trauma studies struggles to make sense of our cultural representations of horrific imagery in a post-9/11 world, numerous lenses have been pointed at American works that have recently been attributed to the cultural climate. By looking to del Toro and his use of children, we may be able to see how American understandings of cross-cultural depictions of trauma cast the field in a new light.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

That Guillermo del Toro has become one of the most successful foreign filmmakers in America is surprising. Del Toro has a reputation for twisting conventions and defying morals that U.S. audiences rarely see challenged. Whether he is telling a ghost story that makes sparse use of a ghost (*The Devil's Backbone* [2001]), a “children’s” fairytale that is too grim for anyone but adults (*Pan's Labyrinth* [2006]), or graphically depicting the harm or mutilation of young children (*Cronos* [1993], *Mimic* [1997], *Hellboy* [2004], etc.), del Toro is consistently finding ways to shock viewers and confront their views on violence and trauma in cinematic imagery. His films take numerous opportunities to display explicitly violent visuals, even when dealing with taboo or controversial subjects such as children or religion. In fact, he seems to relish opportunities to display bloodshed not just when audiences would find it unnerving but when most would see it as unthinkable or inappropriate.

Such has done little to curtail interest in del Toro; in fact, his notoriety amongst American audiences only seems to be rising. After a string of solidly performing films, his recent release *Pan's Labyrinth* became one of the all-time top performing foreign language film at the U.S. box office, and he was offered the opportunity to direct the eagerly awaited *Hobbit* prequels to the blockbuster *Lord of the Rings* films. And while he has received a warm reception in Hollywood, he has also garnered intense interest from the academic community. Scholarship on del Toro has addressed the masculinity/femininity, wartime parallels, and fantastic imagery of his work, largely in response to his first feature film, 1993's *Cronos*, and his most recent, 2006's *Pan's Labyrinth*. Scholarly views on del Toro vary little in tone or content, though; there is no overwhelmingly positive or negative tone to the criticism of his films, with most critics opting

for different readings of the political undertones found in his work. The only consensus to be found is that del Toro is undeniably of interest.

What most critics miss, though, is just how precisely and powerfully del Toro visualizes the child in the chaotic violence that inhabits his films. While most academic attention to del Toro acknowledges his child characters – mainly the protagonists of *Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, Carlos and Ofelia – rarely are they referenced *as* child characters. Instead, their actions and journeys are discussed no differently than if they were adult characters. However, audiences – particularly U.S. audiences accustomed to seeing children safely positioned in film, even violent genre film – will undoubtedly receive these characters differently than if they were adult characters. Therein lies a fascinating aspect of del Toro's work – how he manages to work with the image of the child in film but do so in a way that will not alienate the intended-audience of his R-rated films. The manipulation, mutilation, and destruction of the child's body has long been a harrowing issue in U.S. cinema, one that infamously gore-oriented horror directors such as David Cronenberg, Wes Craven, and John Carpenter have been hesitant to approach in their work. I will argue, though, that del Toro, when making the child the primary object of his films, manages to create complex scenarios by working with a mix of filmic paratexts and psychology that help make an adult audience comfortable with experiencing the visual interaction of the child and graphic violence.

The processes by which del Toro makes the audience comfortable in viewing this subject matter are various and psychologically complex. I will focus on del Toro's 2002 film, *The Devil's Backbone*, and the two major tactics the film uses to engage the audience with the film's more disturbing moments. The first occurs in the film's opening moments when the intertwining of abstract imagery with the film's paratextual elements, the opening credits, forces the viewer to

analyze the film as film; this juxtaposition dissuades the audiences from becoming so closely situated in the narrative that they disassociate from the idea that they are watching a film. In doing so, the film creates a particular kind of distance between the audience and film. I believe it is this distance that allows – even encourages – the audience’s interactions with the film and repositions how the audience feels toward the film’s child characters. In essence, I hope to discuss both why film as a medium is particularly problematic for exploring the abuse of children and how del Toro uses filmic devices to overcome the audience’s resistance to viewing children experiencing violence.

This argument will also be important in readdressing previous criticisms of del Toro’s work. While the child is important in del Toro’s films, it is by no means the only or most relevant aspect that needs to be engaged. Instead, by looking at the child figure and how it has operated in *The Devil’s Backbone* and *Pan’s Labyrinth*, we can gain further insight into how the child in del Toro’s films affects and enables his depictions of politics and history.

CHAPTER 2 GUILLERMO DEL TORO

Beyond just realizing that del Toro tends to focus on child characters, scholarship on him also needs to address how he filmically visualizes the child. Realizing the origins of del Toro's stylistic ideas and ideology is imperative to understanding his beliefs on both violence in film and children in film. Via a brief autobiographical sketch of del Toro, the sources for the ideologies, agendas or insights he hopes to pursue in his filmmaking become clearer. Del Toro's comments about his past act as an indispensable frame for seeing how he contemplates and constructs his signature filmic devices.

As stated before, del Toro has always shown an affinity for child characters. *Mimic* revolved around a plague that was specifically killing children; the supernatural protagonist of *Hellboy* is depicted as an often sensitive, adolescent-like being despite his size and age; and del Toro has taken integral production roles in child-focused Spanish horror films such as *The Orphanage* (2007). Time and again, del Toro's work is preoccupied with the child. And not only do all his films revolve around children, but every one of them revolves around children experiencing trauma, physical and emotional pain, and death. This use of the child in del Toro's films is an issue that merits academic investigation. Because of the nature of his films, such research cannot be done without specifically addressing the relevance that violence plays in relationship to children in his films. In particular, one of the most important questions this raises is how are adult audiences expected to respond to seeing children exposed to such graphic violence. A long-held taboo subject, del Toro not only approaches it but exposes his audiences to it with unrelenting imagery. What we must ask then is, how has del Toro made adult audiences comfortable with this subject matter? I will argue that he has done so by mastering numerous

filmic devices that force adult audiences to call into question exactly how they see the subject of children experiencing violence.

I argue that del Toro wants adult audiences to perceive these events through the eyes of the child character. We find support for this argument when looking at how del Toro uses his own childhood as the template for his films. Reflecting on his childhood, he links a particular kind of spiritual understanding to it. In the process, he implies the belief that certain moments of spirituality are only possible during youth. In particular, he has stated

The most spiritual time for me in childhood was actually at night, when I was alone. ... That's why the key scenes in *Cronos* and *The Devil's Backbone* happened to children in bed—the girl in *Cronos* leaves the bed to see her grandfather, the kid in *The Devil's Backbone* leaves the bed to go meet a ghost. *Pan's Labyrinth* is the same (qtd. in Mitchell 98).

With this comment, he equates childhood with a specific idea of spirituality. As he goes on to explain, though, his goal is to recapture these moments cinematically. In revealing his relationship to the onscreen imagery, he inherently assumes a particular reception of the film that all audience members are supposed to have. This process speaks to his larger filming concerns - how to envision a process that has become lost on adults but display it in a way that still manages to reconnect with an adult audience.

That said, for all his passion for finding ways to depict childhood, del Toro does not approach the subject matter with the cautious, conservative tones often related to cinematic depictions of the child. As he has also stated, his interest in filming the child stems just as much from his experiences as a young boy when his “hip” uncle would take him to ultra-violent underground horror films. Here, del Toro does more than encourage onscreen intersections between children and violence; he asks society as a whole to be more open in general about how the connection between children and violence can be viewed:

I want my child to experience life, including violence, hand and hand with me. If my child gets beaten at school, I'm not against a fight. I'm against me not having a chance to discuss it with her.

I think there's a difference between protecting and shielding. That's very hard to define, but you start to understand when you see the amount of domestic violence that's exerted against children versus the amount of caution that's exerted in favor of children in everyday things on TV. ...

... I think the problem with that kind of political correctness is how fast it extends to all of us. How vast the censorship is. It seems like they are trying to shield a nation of children against violence by censoring the content of a movie or TV program. Today, it seems, the way to deal with a terrorist attack is to negate violence in movies and TV. I find this absolutely atrocious" (qtd. in Chun 30).

Here, del Toro speaks to two ideas that challenge the filmmaking process. The first problem is the resistance to having children as an audience for violent material. Immediately, this resistance limits the outlets a director has for presenting material and finding the broadest audience for it. While the fantastic images and fairytale-like story of a film like *Pan's Labyrinth* may be a perfect replication of the typical fairytales told to children, the film loses a potential audience when it is deemed too violent for children. Del Toro points out that this urge to be shielded from violence often carries over to adult audiences, particularly in cinematic violence dealing with children. In the process, he asks the very question we will pursue further: in what way can a director defuse an audience's resistance to seeing violence and children in the same spheres without avoiding the subject altogether?

Interestingly, other scholars may have spoken to this question but not via a direct discussion of the child in del Toro's films. Instead, much attention has been paid to how he has adapted the style, or even just the marketing, of his films to fit the status quo. As Antonio Lazaro-Reboll points out in his article on *The Devil's Backbone's* transnational qualities, del Toro's Spanish-language films, while typically successful with U.S. audiences in the long run, start by struggling to get past cultural differences. In the promotions for the films, "the horrific

and melodramatic elements are pushed to the front, while the culturally and historically specific ingredients are downplayed” (45). With the cultural aspects of the film being too alien to Americans to be used as selling points, the marketing of the film relied on representing itself as a generic entry into a genre that was currently popular in the U.S. – the PG-13-rated, tension-based ghost film that included hits such as *The Sixth Sense*, *What Lies Beneath*, and *The Others*. However, these cultural signifiers are not the only thing that must be downplayed to cater to the sensibilities of U.S. audiences. Again, we return to the notorious squeamishness of U.S. audiences in regards to children and violence as another cultural norm that clashes with the culture that produced the film. And in that conflict, we see that if the producers wanted to get the film “outside of the art house” and turn it into a “global popular product” (Lazaro-Reboll 46), they would have to face a more globalized reaction to cinematic violence involving children.

However, the focus on the globalization of del Toro’s work has done little to explore depictions of the child in his films. Instead, most of it looks to how del Toro’s crisscrossing between Spanish-language and English-language films have affected his depiction of political inclinations. Much of the initial attention paid to him was brought about by his directorial debut, *Cronos*, in 1993. The film tells the story of an elderly antique dealer who becomes attached to a vampiric pennant in the shape of an insect. The film won the critics prize at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival, along with nine awards at The Ariels, the Mexican equivalent of the Oscars (Chun 28). However, just as much attention was called to del Toro as one of “the new Mexican filmmakers ... weaned on a heady mix of Hollywood movies, rock music, comic books, Looney Tunes, MTV, and Walt Disney.” (Tsao 30). He was categorized with other Mexican filmmakers, such as Alfonso Cuarón (who has since gone to direct American features such as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Children of Men*) and Carlos Carrera (*The Crime of Father*

Amaro), whose American influences were seen as responsible for a strong film style that gave them a chance to cross over to the American mainstream. At the same time, though, critics have called attention to the fact that these directors were less likely to approach political discussions relevant to Mexico. After the revolution in Mexican film in the 1970's during which it was looked at as the primary medium for voicing concerns about social unrests, the new breed of Mexican filmmakers had their eyes too trained on developing a glossy, Hollywood-oriented style to focus on issues such as political turmoil. Initial writings on del Toro's work were based just as much on the Americanizing effect of globalization on Mexican cinema as it was on any of the individual themes or visuals he explored in *Cronos*.

Such a categorizing of del Toro set the stage for him to be analyzed as a product of transnationalism and globalization. As soon as *Cronos* was released, multiple scholars asked the question of just how long it would take a director steeped in Americanized understandings of pop culture and genres to start fielding offers from Hollywood. Not long; del Toro's next film was an American horror production entitled *Mimic*. Since then, del Toro's filmic output has been split almost evenly between big-budget American spectacle films – *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy*, *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008) – and smaller scale, Spanish-language films that blend fantasy and war-torn realities – *The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth/El Labertino del fauno*. The American films have drawn little in the way of critical or academic attention (minus some surprisingly positive feedback from Christian publications generated by the Catholic imagery and values incorporated in *Hellboy*) (Stagnaro 15-16). The spiritual, political, and psychological implications of the *Cronos/Devil's Backbone/Pan's Labyrinth* have been much more appealing to scholars.

The question becomes, though, why has the academic attention to del Toro's work become so narrow as to exclude the numerous other aspects of his films that are worthy of discussion? Mainly, scholarship on del Toro breaks down into three major categories: 1.) religious scholarship that speaks to the idea of spirituality in del Toro's films; 2.) scholarship on Mexican cinema that speaks to del Toro's place in a generation of upcoming filmmakers; and 3.) specific film articles that speak to multiple themes explored in del Toro's work. While the religious scholarship on del Toro is surprisingly prevalent, it is most often printed in Christian publications and only addresses spiritual themes related to Christianity in del Toro's work. While this work often makes passing references to the children in del Toro's work, the theme of 'the child' is rarely explored and the tone of the work veers away from the academic. Scholarship on Mexican cinema repeatedly speaks to the idea of the "new Mexican cinema", which includes directors like del Toro and the previously discussed Cuarón and Carrera. Such work is prevalent, practiced by scholars such as Andrew Willis and Lazaro-Reboll. However, the work on del Toro continually situates him in the status discussed above – as an upcoming Mexican filmmaker, defined by his American-influenced style and the absence of political discussions relevant to Mexico in his work. It rarely if ever focuses on more specific content in his work.

While one might assume that the full-length articles speaking specifically to del Toro and films are more varied, such is not usually the case. First, writing specific to del Toro's first film, *Cronos*, is based almost entirely on the Americanized-styled found in the "new Mexican cinema" scholarship discussed above. And while there is some commentary on *The Devil's Backbone*, most work on del Toro has been inspired by *Pan's Labyrinth*. Repeatedly, these articles speak to two ideas: the first is the paralleling of fantasy with war-time violence (with the depiction of war-time violence always being privileged over the depiction of violence done specifically to

children.) In articles by Michael Atkinson and Paul Julian Smith, the major point of discussion becomes how the fantastic elements of *Pan's Labyrinth* can envision war-time violence differently than the realistic elements and to what end. The other issue often discussed in regards to these films is how the depiction of this same political violence is inspired by the transnational qualities of the films' productions. Such articles, again worked on by scholars like Lazaro-Reboll, take the films' status as hybrid Mexican-Spanish productions (Del Toro is a Mexican director, while his frequent producers Pedro and Augustin Almodovar are Spanish) and speak to how this is reflected in their narratives and depictions of politics. Again, though, their major concerns return to how the films' fantasy elements act solely as references to war or politics. Gender and sexuality rarely are emphasized in analysis of del Toro's work, but I would be remiss if I did not at least mention Ann Davis's article on masculinity and femininity in *The Devil's Backbone*. Davis interprets images of the monstrous fantastic in *Devil's Backbone* as a way to combat the virile masculinity associated with fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War. While her reading does not speak specifically to the subject of the child, it does go further than most any article to break the rut of del Toro scholarship.

In the end, though, I do not wish to argue that the figure of the child in del Toro's films is more relevant than these subjects that have already been much-discussed. In fact, I believe further study of the child in del Toro's film would ultimately serve to benefit these current discourses on the director. How the representations of the child protagonists speak to specific cultures would be undeniably useful to further study of the cross-cultural, political inclinations of del Toro's films. And the fact that del Toro's films are representing the imagination of his child characters is integral to the study of how del Toro depicts real-world violence through fantasy imagery. Interestingly, many of these articles will make quick reference to the children-oriented

nature of the films, calling them “child-centric” (Akinson 52) or pointing to the young brother/sister dynamic of *Backbone* and *Labyrinth* (Kermode 22). However, these ideas are never actually explored, and the relevance of the child in these films is quickly forgotten or dropped. I hope to remedy this by speaking to what del Toro is able to accomplish filmically when depicting the child. In order to do so, I will show, via a study of *The Devil’s Backbone*’s paratext and a psychoanalytic reading of the film, how we can begin to see the child in del Toro’s films.

CHAPTER 3 PARATEXT AND THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

To understand del Toro's filmic representation of the child, we start at an obvious place: the beginning of the film. Del Toro opens *The Devil's Backbone* with a series of images that beg to be analyzed not just by academic scholars, but by the film's general audience. The introduction of a number of abstract scenes will be separated from the standard narrative plot by the film's opening credits. Once the narrative begins, the use of abstract imagery and experimentalism is pushed to the side. No fourth walls are broken, few complex camera angles call attention to the film as film, and the events unfold in a clear, chronological order. The audience is seemingly meant to respond to the film via the "window into another world" methodology that begs them to forget that they are watching a film.

In order to understand how this makes the initial imagery relevant, though, we must first understand the idea of filmic paratext and how it causes the audience to reassess a film in general. The idea of the paratext was initially presented by Gerard Genette, who wanted to define the information outside of a book that allowed audiences to understand the book as a singular text. He pointed to the "exterior presentation of a book, name of the author, title, and what follows as it meets the eye of the docile reader" as the defining elements of the paratext (261). It was roughly 14 years later that Georg Stanitzek attempted to redefine the idea of the paratext in the age of new media, applying it mainly to films, as they were exhibited theatrically, on VHS, DVD, television, and the internet. In doing so, he pointed out how the difference between book paratexts and new media paratexts played different roles in the viewer's understanding of the texts, specifically stating

a comparison of film and literary paratexts does have limitations; namely, both kinds of paratexts refer to texts as structures of individual works with their own contoured boundaries. Just as a book has two covers, a title, an imprint, and so on, a film-at least

this type of film-has opening and closing credits, and so on. And thus a book can function as a filmic organizer of communication, as a kind of natural delineation of the entire work (44).

Via Stanitzek's argument, we see that the opening and closing credits operate as the contours for an entire film. An important idea he raises in relationship to film, though, is how this organization ends up forming exactly what "the entire film" is. As can be seen in innumerable films over the years, the credits do not always frame every moment of the cinematic narrative. Credits can be overlaid over opening narrative images, or, as is the case with *The Devil's Backbone*, filmic credits can appear after narrative information has already been presented.

While this discussion of paratext may initially seem random in the larger issue of *The Devil's Backbone's* depiction of the child, an understanding of the film's paratext is integral to understanding how the audience's reception of the film operates. There are two forms of paratextual information in particular that are relevant to *The Devil's Backbone's* depiction of violence and the child. The most obvious occurs during the opening credits. When the film begins, the viewer is presented a dark background with the phrase "Augusta y Pedro Almodovar presentan" spelled out in glowing gold letters. This same gold-letters-on-black-background approach will go on for five sets of credits, announcing the producers of the film and that the film is by Guillermo del Toro. The information is consistent with the introductory credit information that opens most films. Before going further than these five credits, though, images begin to appear on screen without credit text. The image of a hallway door appears (Figure 3-1); as the camera moves through the door into darkness, the screen goes black. The image of a plane's bottom hatch then appears, and the viewer sees a bomb dropped to the ground below (Figure 3-2). The plane's hatch frames the scene of multiple bombs exploding on the ground before the screen fades to black. Next, the film fades into the image of a young boy lying on the

ground, bleeding from a head wound as another young boy cradles his head (Figure 3-3). The film fades again into a murky shot, and through a flurry of bubbles, the viewer begins to make out the image of the young boy, tied up, motionless, and still bleeding, floating in the water (Figure 3-4). Once again, the image fades, this time into a shot of the other young boy crying over a pool as a growing blood spot can be seen in the water (Figure 3-5). Finally, the film will fade into an ambiguous amber color as the words “Marisa Paredes” appear at the bottom of the screen (Figure 3-6). From here, the opening credits begin again, superimposed over the abstract amber coloring (which will eventually turn out to be the color of the rum or “limbo water” that the character of Dr. Casares sells to local townspeople.)

At the same time, these images are accompanied by a voiceover. The voice – which sounds like a baritone old man – cryptically asks the question, “What is a ghost? A tragedy doomed to repeat itself time and time again? An instant of pain, perhaps. Something dead which still seems to be alive. An emotion suspended in time. Like a blurred photograph. Like an insect trapped in amber.” Again, without the development of a narrative, these words appear utterly abstract; they are as impossible to construct into a chronological story as the (seemingly) random images they accompany.

The question becomes what is to be done with these images when placed at this point in the film? As Stanitzek has previously stated, the book-oriented connotations of paratext theory lead to an understanding that these credits should frame the beginning of the film. The introductory credits do not actually end until the film fades into an image of a car driving in the desert at the 3:40 mark. At this point, the audience is introduced to the character of Carlos – on his way to a boy’s school – and a clear, straightforward narrative begins. Because Stanitzek’s filmic paratextual theory offers no firm understanding of how the framing of the initial images

inside the credits are supposed to operate, we must construct our own lens through which to view them.

Potentially the most immediate course of action the viewer can take is to create correlations between the introductory images and the descriptions in the voiceover. The abstract quality of the sequence all but demands such actions. The framing of the first shot – the entering of the door to the question “What is a ghost?” leads the viewer to believe that through the door lies an inevitable answer to the question. The opening of the plane’s hatch as the bomb drops clearly connects to the idea of war as “a tragedy doomed to repeat itself time and time again.” The child’s bleeding scalp is an obvious “moment of pain”; the position of the child never wavers as he sinks in the water, leading to image of “suspension” while the murky color of the water replicates the idea of “a blurred photograph.” And possibly the most obvious of all is the amber color that overtakes the screen as the voiceover references “an insect trapped in amber.” What can be gleaned from these connections is not just that the film is attempting to answer the question of “what is a ghost?”; the voiceover implies that images enfolding in front of the viewer are the very images that define a ghost.

Laura Mulvey’s notion of still and moving images reinforces this approach. As she discusses in *Death 24x a Second*, the notion of “life” on film is captured via movement. Once the film is slowed down to a single frame, the absence of motion reinforces the idea of stillness or death found in photography. Stripped of meaning or context, the image simply becomes a representation of death. Similarly, these initial images in *Devil’s Backbone*, while in motion, are still stripped of the motions that come before or after them. Such a presentation of the images robs them of a potential context. They float outside of the film, pinned in by the two sets of

opening credits and doomed to operate as nothing more than a dead representation of life without context.

The questions created by the tactic are a.) how are these images ultimately enlivened by the narrative that follows them and b.) to what end is this tactic being used? A reconstruction of the narrative using the film-opening images is all that is needed to explain the first question (though some degree of analysis will help explain how the recreation works, as opposed to just summarizing how the scenes are revisited.) But the explanation of to what end the images are being used is more complex. I will argue that del Toro is attempting to cinematically represent something like a psychological process onscreen, similar to the mental condition Freud describes in “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through.” When seeing how this visual dividing of the pre- and post-credit imagery creates a representation of this process, we will have a frame for discussing how the opening-credit enclosed shots function in regards to the audience’s reception of the violence that follows in the film.

The film’s more straightforward cinematic stylings begin as Carlos reaches the boy’s school. Thinking he is only visiting, Carlos is harassed by the other students who mock his posh attire and refer to him as “lil’ fag.” After this sequence, the viewer sees the car Carlos arrived in pulling away, and Carlos runs after it unsuccessfully. Carlos reluctantly begins the process of incorporating himself into the school; at the same time, he also begins to encounter the ghost of a young boy – a young boy that looks similar to the one the audience saw bleeding from the head in the film’s introductory images. The first encounter occurs as Carlos is trying to sneak out of a locked kitchen where he has gone – against the school’s rules – to retrieve water. As the ghost nears him, Carlos struggles through a doorway and refuses to lay eyes on the ghost. He breaks free of the door and runs into the school’s open courtyard just as the ghost is about to touch him.

Obviously, the interaction of children and ghosts is not a rarity, be it in children's fiction or simply fiction involving children. Children have figured prominently in modern ghost stories at least since 1898 with Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*, and the evolution of children's literature has relied heavily on fantasy and horror narratives that often feature the figure of the ghost. However, the depiction of the ghost can take innumerable forms, some that imagine it as a potentially abstract psychological force (*Turn of the Screw*) and some that depict the ghost as a character as fleshed-out and humanized as to relegate humanity to a background status in the narrative. While it would be stretching to say that no two images of the figure of "the ghost" are exactly alike, one of my goals here is to focus specifically on how the ghost in *The Devil's Backbone* can be read as being meant to appeal to a specifically adult sensibility.

Before addressing a potentially Freudian reading, though, one more specific example of paratext it might help to analyze is the option screen of the DVD menu. As title screens to DVD's (including the "Play Movie", "Subtitles" and "Special Features" options) often do, the introduction begins with a collage of images relating to the film. After the FBI warnings and previews fade, the image onscreen begins by passing through a window, passing an image of the film's ghost, and comes to rest on the image of a young boy staring at the waving streamers tied to the top of a bomb (Figure 3-7). However, whereas DVD menus most often continually repeat these opening montages, that of *The Devil's Backbone* remains on a relatively short loop. The young boy does not move; the bomb is still, and only the boy's clothes and streamers on the bomb move as both are blown by the wind. The image repeats, all but still, calling attention to the fact that the character is immobile despite the passage of time; understanding such a notion will go on to be integral to understanding how the ghost in the film functions.

The image of the child watching the streamers on the bomb blow in the wind acts as a perfect framing device for understanding the ghost itself. The visual acts both as a still and as a moving image. The fluttering of the streamers and the young boy's clothes clearly depict motion via a sequence of frames that are denoting a passing of time. However, the child appears still in the moment, unable (or unwilling) to move. The viewer is given just enough motion to know that time is moving forward, but the child is unable to move with it. The fact that the DVD title screen simply chooses to loop this image instead of returning to the other images it depicts before the loop begins reinforces the idea of being trapped in an inescapable moment of time. This sets up a reading of the ghost itself (Figure 3-8). Bodily, the ghost appears very similar to the boy with the head wound the viewer sees in the film's introductory credits. He appears in a dull blue-gray color, though, with lines tracing his face and wound. He looks to be in a state of decay, with small, unidentifiable debris floating around the outskirts of his form. Most importantly in this analysis, though, is the stream of blood that continually floats up from the child's skull before disappearing into an ethereal nothing. The image of decay helps the viewer to recognize the trapping of the ghost in a particular moment; as the decay never grows better or worse, it becomes easy to understand the image of the ghost is, in this way, static. What arguably does not remain static, though, is the continual blood flow from his head. It continues to flow throughout a period in the film (at least weeks) that would inevitably lead to the draining out of any real body. The persistent state of bleeding reinforces the idea of the loop; not simply that the ghost is trapped in time, but is reliving a certain moment time and time again. Interestingly enough, though, flashing back to the introductory DVD screen, the still image we see is not of the ghost. It is that of Carlos himself. And here, we can begin to explore how del Toro visualizes the correlation between the two.



Figure 3-1 The hallway door

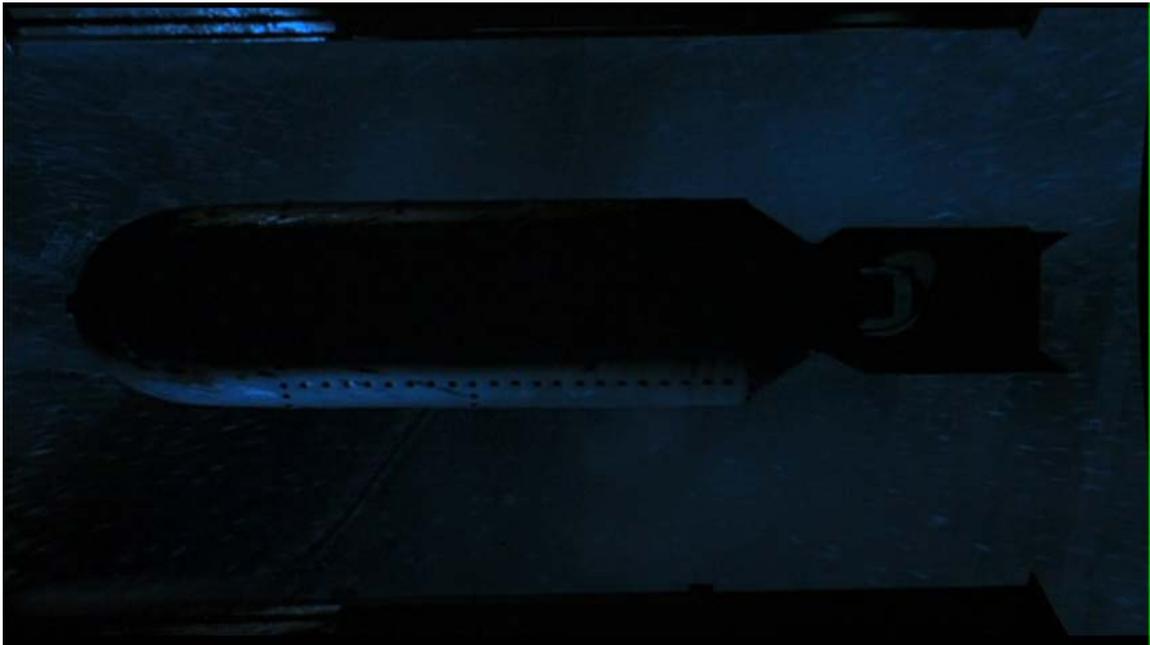


Figure 3-2 The bomb being dropped



Figure 3-3 The wounded young boy



Figure 3-4 The young boy in the water



Figure 3-5 The blood in the water



Figure 3-6 The opening credit



Figure 3-7 DVD option screen



Figure 3-8 The ghost

CHAPTER 4 FREUD AND THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

To understand what the visualization of Carlos and the ghost accomplishes, it may help to first turn to Adam Lowenstein's 2005 text on trauma in horror film, *Shocking Representation*. Lowenstein points to the horror genre as a genre obsessed with the idea of loss and death, and the trauma created by them. What he asks, though, is how the horror film as a visual medium is able to represent these concepts. In particular, he turns to Freud's 1914 essay "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through," where he states, "Freud draws clear distinctions between the two different processes individual may undergo when found with the traumatic loss of a deeply valued object" (3). He goes on to state how past works that have been acclaimed for representing this psychological process attempt to depict it via "'realist' rather than 'modernist' modes" (4). In other words, past artistic works have simply tried to represent or discuss this process in the most straightforward manner possible; horror film, however, uses moments of abstraction and allegory to shock the viewer into seeing alternate ways to understand this trauma.

The question we face is, where does del Toro's work stand in this process? How has he managed to filmically achieve the same moments of shocked representation that Lowenstein sees in the work of Mike Powell, Wes Craven, and David Cronenberg? And most importantly to our discussion, how does del Toro's use of the child in particular allow his filmic representation of this idea? The Freudian concept that Lowenstein is discussing is crucial to answering these questions. One of Freud's best known works, the article focuses on an evolution of the diagnosis and treatment process in psychoanalysis. Previously, psychoanalytical technique had "consisted in bringing directly into focus the moment at which the symptom was formed, and in persistently endeavoring to produce the mental processes involved in the situation, in order to direct their discharge along the path of conscious activity" (Freud 147). After further study, the method was

changed to focus on studying what was currently on the mind of the patient. Instead of immediately trying to jump into the past and see what the patient remembered, this new technique first looked for a sign of some kind of resistance in the patient's current life. In doing so, the flaws in focusing only on memory and its ability to heal were revealed. Only by focusing on the present could the relevance of the past be fully understood.

By finding the point when the film's narrative and cinematic style stabilize, we can see how del Toro might represent that idea. As stated before, the narrative begins to stabilize when Carlos reaches the school. At that point, the film does away with the abstract imagery, and the audience is presented clear establishing shots of Carlos reaching the school, meeting the other children, and his tutor telling Carmen, the head of the school, about him. It is at this point when we learn of the trauma Carlos has unknowingly experienced; his father has died in the war. However, the depiction of events gives Carlos no time to realize or understand what is occurring. After Carlos is abandoned at the school, the film's pace increases dramatically. Carlos is depicted incorporating himself into the school's culture, learning the adults' and children's rules, and trying to find way to make peace with the other boys. Through this rapid pacing, though, the film quickly makes all traces of Carlos's father absent. By introducing the information about Carlos' father's death just before a flurry of active scenes, the film manages to bury this integral information before the audience has time to incorporate it and what it means to Carlos. With such pacing, del Toro manages to mimic the idea of having crucial everyday information be buried under the hectic pace of everyday life. What the audience sees the adults doing to Carlos – in scenes such as the one where Dr. Casares tries to drum up conversation about a book Carlos is reading – is actually what the film is doing to the audience. It is presenting information to them only to try and make them forget it as quickly as possible.

And just as we can read the depiction of Carlos's introduction as a mimicking of a psychological process, so can we with the ghost he will encounter. If we see the ghost as existing in a constant state of repetition, we find further evidence of this mimicry not just in the appearance of the ghost, but in its actions. Each time the ghost is introduced, the scene is the same. The location – be it a kitchen, a hallway, or an underground pool – will be dark, isolated, and cramped. The ghost appears at the furthest possible distance from Carlos. While there seem to be few rules as to where the ghost can materialize and how it must move, it continually allows Carlos to be just outside of its grasp. Here, the audience begins to realize the sense of repetition involved in the encounters. Moving back to Freud and the idea that a trauma is repeated when not dealt with, the audience experiences this repeated pattern only to question, “What will end it?” Whereas the fact that information is being hidden from Carlos is actually being hidden from the audience as well, this repetition calls the audience's attention to it. In doing so, the audience is led to question when the break in the visual pattern (isolation of Carlos, appearance of the ghost, fleeing of Carlos) will occur.

The difference between these two processes – how the film disguises Carlos's situation by not visualizing signifiers of it but makes the repetition involving the ghost clear – will extend to how they are completed. Again, the reality of Carlos's situation is buried amongst straightforward interactions with the older males at the school. It cannot be experienced through filmic style but must read through narrative interactions. Viewers will find Carlos, upon arriving at the facility, is at first outspoken and resistant to the wills of those around him. Once he fails to catch the car that abandons him at the school, though, his demeanor changes noticeably. He quickly becomes subservient to those around him and takes orders from Carmen, the old man, Jacinto, and Jaime, the oldest boy. None of these characters seem especially happy with Carlos's

presence. Carmen keeps the same distance from him that she does all the children; the old man humors him by talking about Carlos's surface interests; Jacinto avoids him and goes as far as to slice his cheek when the child infuriates him; and Jaime consistently torments him by ordering him around and forcing him to suffer indignities. Carlos seems to continually look up to these characters in order to find one that acts as a father figure. He, however, has yet to ever acknowledge the death of his actual father. And while he seems to be performing a desperate acting out in the process, nothing of the film's form calls attention to it. There is no clearly structured repetition that finds Carlos going from one father figure to their next. There are no formal recreations of this psychosis. Again, it lies buried, not to be spelled out for the viewer, but only to be read if the viewer so chooses. Even in the film's finale, when Carlos seems to evolve beyond this, there are few formal signs of the change. Carlos does take on the role of an authority figure; he organizes the children's escape from their prison, he sets up the children's attack on Jacinto, and he is ultimately the one who delivers Jacinto to Santi. In the film's final moments, his leading of the boys out of the school seems to realize clearly that he, as a child, has taken on the role of the adult. But del Toro offers no simple visual signifier to inform audience of this potentially upsetting concept.

If we continue to see how the film depicts these parallel paths of Carlos and the ghost, we can see an obvious end to the repetition envisioned by the ghost that we cannot see in Carlos's search for a father. To create a visual representation of the repetition psychosis, we must remember that such a psychosis is ended by a remembering of events. Constant repetition displays an avoidance of the problem; or at least a cue to viewers that there is still some change to be made in the pattern. And the moment this pattern is broken occurs when Jaime telling the story of Santi's death to Carlos. Here, the recollecting of the past will lead to a change in the

depiction of events between Carlos and the ghost. Whereas we had formerly seen a constant fleeing from the ghost, Carlos now interacts with the ghost, asking what it wants. During this scene, their interaction occurs under brighter lighting, the ghost's transparent form makes its first contact with Carlos, and opposed to cryptically repeating "everyone will die," the ghost is finally able to offer a direct edict: "Bring me Jacinto." The change in the pattern is not only understood by the events but felt by the audience via the breaking of the repetitive visualizing of Carlos and the ghost's interactions.

What we see here is that del Toro's dual visualizing of the characters, burying one's condition and exposing the other's, making them two sides to a single coin, may be casting them as the same person, or may be visualizing the ghost as only part of Carlos's condition. Such is the most common reading of del Toro's similar fantasy film *Pan's Labyrinth*, in which a young girl must move to the home of her mother's new husband – a fascist captain during the Spanish revolution. In the process of withstanding the atrocities she sees, the girl, Ofelia, meets a magical talking faun and begins a fantastical journey. However, she remains the only person who ever sees these magical elements, and the viewer is left to debate whether they were real or simply a coping mechanism. Oddly, a similar reading of the ghost in *The Devil's Backbone* is unavailable. This despite the fact that the ghost – while rumored earlier in the film – is never seen by anyone until Carlos arrives, never speaks to anyone outside of Carlos, and its only notable interaction outside of Carlos, the grasping/drowning of Jacinto once he falls into the murky pool, can also be read as Jacinto simply being unable to move after being stabbed by the young children. In fact, the audience will see another ghost at the end of the film – the ghost of Dr. Casares. However, unlike Santi's ghost, Casares's ghost at one point interacts with all the students; when they have been imprisoned by Jacinto at the end of the film, the audience hears the lock to their door click.

Seconds later, the audience sees the image of Casares, who had previously died in an upstairs room, pass by the screen. The film ends with him watching as the children strike out on the road outside of the school. The question this begs is, why are the ghosts visualized differently? Why do we see Dr. Casares perform a task that all but proves his existence yet we never see Santi do anything that could have occurred outside of Carlos's imagination?

We may be able to answer this by reading Santi's ghost as not only part of Carlos' imagination, but also his double. Carolyn Steedman speaks to a similar idea in her text *Strange Dislocations*. In her chapter on the child and the uncanny, she references an anecdote in *Wilhelm Meister* during which Wilhelm develops an obsession with a number of puppets he discovered at a puppet show, specifically because of their "littleness." Steedman states, "This delight in littleness, in the manipulability of these figures... and of the world the child events for them, all describe the little boy's situation, and his understanding of his own childishness" (150). Steedman's description parallels how Carlos, while afraid of the ghost, can also see almost everything about himself in the ghost. They are of the same age, same sex, same appearance; the ghost's frozen moment, bleeding out in the water, reflects Carlos's entrapment in the school. The ghost's inability to speak about his situation reflects Carlos's inability to name his own trauma. And Carlos's acting out only occurs in isolation where he is free to master (or attempt to master) the otherworldly realization of himself. In locating their interactions in these isolated, privileged spaces, del Toro is able to externalize and depict the specific condition Steedman discusses. Once the subject is externalized, Carlos recognizes what the ghost wants; it is the same thing Carlos wants - information that neither of them has the ability to access. The audience's understanding of Carlos's situation has been prevented by the film's focus on surface-level activities at the school. The audience's understanding of the ghost's situation has been prevented

by the film's repetitive visualization of the ghost's plight. With their need for information satiated, the audience becomes aware of how Carlos is also able to move forward with his desire to stop looking for a father-figure. The audience sees Carlos and the ghost's duality reinforced by how their traumas are rectified at the same point in the film.

This is not to say the audience is meant to concretely understand that the ghost is imaginary. Instead, this duality plays a role in horror films that is integral to the genre. Carol Clover has mapped out the idea of the uncanny in the horror film, explaining how it is represented as an "intellectual uncertainty" that occurs when experiencing unworldly events that are grounded in enough reality that the human characters can still make sense of the events. Clover points out that it is not the destruction of an understanding of reality that makes the horror genre frightening, but only a twisting of reality that still allows the protagonist to understand the unreal. As stated above, Carlos's interactions with the ghost seems entirely driven by their similarities whether the ghost is read as completely real or nothing but a figment of Carlos's imagination. It is ultimately this similarity that makes the ghost understandable yet terrifying to Carlos. This disconnect between perceived and actualized ideas of reality returns us to the notion of inaccessible information. Again, the disconnect is made frightening by the information that both the audience and Carlos lack in order to make the existence of the ghost understandable.

By realizing how the depictions of these characters rely on inaccessible information, we can understand exactly what function del Toro was trying to mimic in the framing of the film's opening sequence. As we will recall, placing those introductory credits did two things: separated the images from the events of the narrative and stripped them of any potential context. By doing so, del Toro can try to create a visual mimicry of the psychoses of the characters for the audience to experience. As Freud discusses, one of the most important forms of memory to understand

when looking at the repeating, remembering, working-through process is “experiences which occurred in very early childhood and were not understood at the time” (149). While no presentation can genuinely replicate this experience, del Toro’s presentation of the information can make the audience understand what it is to take information they cannot comprehend and have to push it to the back of their minds to interpret the rest of the film. At the same time, he can create a cyclical pattern that mimics the repeating process. And finally, he can reveal information that mimics the idea of have remembered and worked through a process. So when the audience sees the information revealed, they may not understand what it is to genuinely work through the process they see onscreen, but they can at least have it mimicked in the medium before them to gain some understanding of it.

During this final reveal – 1:18 into the film – Jaime explains to Carlos what he actually saw. Playing near the pool in the underground chamber, Santi hears a noise, rushes upstairs to check it out, and finds Jacinto checking the safe. Santi runs back down to the pool but is caught and interrogated by Jacinto. Jacinto restrains him, Santi bites Jacinto’s hand, and in a movement that is half Santi running away and half Jacinto pushing him, Santi slams forehead first into the brick wall. He falls over, head busted open. As the boy shakes and bleeds, Jacinto disappears. Jaime – in the scene from the beginning of the film – returns to the child’s side to help him, but must hide again when Jacinto returns with rope. He watches Jacinto tie up the boy’s body and chuck him into the pool, and then leave the room. Jaime starts to cry at the poolside and then runs outside into the school courtyard to be in the rain. While outside, he watches the bomb dropped earlier in the film fall from the sky and bury itself in the ground. During the film’s present time, tells Carlos, “I was always afraid of Jacinto. Very afraid.”

In this moment, del Toro reveals the opening images for what they are: an incomplete memory. He shows the audience that as the children – both Carlos and the ghost – have compulsively acted out on their inability to understand past traumas, the audience themselves were working with too little information to understand what they had seen. By choosing to leave out particular information, the film has created a path for audiences to reconstruct the original events that is inherently problematic. The original presentation of chronology does not lead the viewer to believe the bomb was dropped after Santi's death, nor does it present any information about Jacinto to enter into the equation. In doing so, del Toro visualizes both the ability to remember an event incorrectly (the chronology of the bomb falling) or incompletely (the presence of Jacinto.)

In forcing the viewer to reinterpret their understanding of these events that occurred during the credits, del Toro manages to align the viewer with the children in the film – both in how they associate with the children and how they begin to mentally mimic the children. How this revealing of the events forces the viewer to align with the children may be obvious – the children are now the possessors of the knowledge that the audience sought, and with it, become the most powerful point of identification. Whereas it is arguable that the children (specifically Carlos) always acted as the central point of identification, enough time is spent with the heads of the school – Carmen, Jacinto, the old man – that viewers may not initially align with the children's perspective. However, the realization of the information allows the viewer to experience Carlos's perspective. They too have had information withheld from them, and just like Carlos, are now being indoctrinated into a secret circle of knowledge. From here, the film's narrative becomes even more specifically oriented around the children (though, to be fair, almost everyone else is dead at this point.)

At the same time, though, the viewer not only aligns with the children because of their perspective but is also forced to carry out the same psychological process as the children. The goal of the remembering – as Freud states – is to activate the patient’s memory and cause them to acknowledge information that they knew all along but had not realized the importance of. As the memory activates a change in both Carlos and the ghost that causes them to alter their repetitive actions, the memory also activates a change in the viewer. As opposed to passively accepting the information that is now presented onscreen, the viewer must now actively think back to the initial moments of the film and re-frame them using the newly acquired information. During this process, the intention of isolating of the original images seems clearer. Without the film coding them as a memory, the viewer would simply be trying to establish the narrative coherence of the entire plot. But via the placement and approach we discussed earlier, del Toro manages to isolate these images so that viewer must specifically reconstruct them into an understandable story. And in doing so, they experience a process that mimics Carlos’s and the ghost’s.

CHAPTER 5 FELMAN AND THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

Through this psychoanalytic take on *The Devil's Backbone*, we understand how del Toro has visualized a process that allows the adult audience to align with child characters. But while this helps the audience to identify with the children, it does not free them from acknowledging that violence is now occurring to these same children. In fact, this mode of identification risks implicating the viewer in the violence. Not only are they made to watch a child suffer, they are actively engaging the scenario and working through it. Being asked to watch the child suffer alone implicates the viewer via the viewing of the scene; the viewer, however, can resist by refusing to watch or engage in the scene. Or simply clear their conscious by saying, "I did not want to see that." If the viewer aligns with the child and works through the film the way it is set up to be worked through, acknowledging their need to piece together the opening images not just as to see them explained but actively engage how they work in the film, one must acknowledge their participation in the violence and commit him or herself to actively work with it. They must, in this way, put hands on the dead child.

The process of this audience implication is complex, as is the reason that the audience may avoid a feeling of implication. While I've quoted del Toro on his feelings about the intersection of childhood and violence, the psychological process of watching the film is nowhere as direct. Returning to Carol Clover's notion of intellectual uncertainty, the horror genre does less to construct a singular alternate reality and more to play with reality. The goal becomes not to inform the audience that their perception of the event is the incorrect one but to confuse them into admitting that something is less concrete or stable about their perception than they realized. While del Toro's films tend to be densely loaded with mythological inclinations – to even the least discerning viewer – Clover's idea speaks to the possibility that there is no one

correct reading. As Paul Julian Smith has stated, *Pan's Labyrinth's* complex parallels between fantasy and reality repeatedly interfere with any singular reading of the film's fantasy imagery. By creating such confusion, del Toro does not ask for the audience to emerge with a clear reading but tries to dislocate the audience's perception of children and violence and force them to admit that conventional attitudes on the subject may not be correct.

Shoshana Felman advances a similar idea about this kind of audience disruption in her text *Writing and Madness*. In the chapter "Henry James: Madness and the Risks of Practice (Turning the Screw of Interpretation)," Felman puts forth a myriad of theories on how the adult reader interacts with and justifies a reading of a text that features the harm of young children. Through her point of view, "there is no such thing as innocent reader of text" (144). No matter how the reader may interpret (or resist) the text, any understanding of the unfolding events reveals something of the viewer in how they choose to respond to the events. But most importantly, the viewer chose to be exposed to them to begin with.

The scenario that the *Devil's Backbone* places the viewer in is similar to that Felman sees of the *Turn of the Screw* reader. As the viewer, often unwittingly, participates in *The Devil's Backbone* by trying to assemble abstract pieces of information, the reader of *Turn the Screw* is also replicating the madness of the lead character – the governess – as she struggles to understand the unexplainable phenomena occurring around her. As with *The Devil's Backbone*, the reader does not actually experience her madness but must work through a mimicry of it. In this way, both texts rely heavily on establishing questions in the reader's mind –not just questions about the content of the film, which arguably any text relies on, but also questions of the form it has taken. The reader/viewer must actively ask what the director or writer is choosing to tell them or conceal from them. In constructing such an understanding, the viewers experience

more than a “cognitive observation of the text’s pluralistic meaning”; they act it out, incidentally, to come to an understanding (161).

In doing so, though, the film creates a boundary, a “thickness” as Felman refers to it, where the viewer acknowledges a buffer, a noticeable fourth wall, that distends them from the events onscreen. As Felman discusses how *The Turn of the Screw* is told through a multitude of points of view – 1.) the initial listener who wrote the transcript the reader is reading, 2.) Douglas, the narrator whose story the unnamed listener is retelling, and 3.) the governess who originally told the story to Douglas – we begin to see how the continual Other-ing of the various narrators creates space between the reader and the story. Instead of watching the tragic events unfold before them in the present, they are given third-hand information that has long-since occurred in the past. Such is the difference between hearing tragic stories that occurred long ago and the more immediate, visceral sensation people experience when seeing something occur in front of them, or, to a degree, hearing it replayed as late breaking news. The paratextual elements of *Devil’s Backbone* also cause the viewer to question how they are receiving the film. By introducing the film with the abstract images and narrator’s voice (who will ultimately be revealed to be Dr. Casares), the viewer goes on to understand this introduction in the context of the following narration/images. At the same time, the resulting narrative operates under the question of how it relates back to the narrator and the original images. Instead of erasing viewers’ consciousness that they are watching a film, the bulk of the narrative is now experienced in its relationship to the opening sequence.

Such a tactic has a double effect, evident in Carolyn Steedman’s work with the child as the projection of a “little self.” The distance the paratext offers directs the viewer to view the film as a film. Such can be helpful in that it allows the viewer a distance from the violence they

are not seeing done to children. At the same time, though, it also forces the viewer to see the children more as children and less as identifiable personalities. Such can be seen as problematic as the viewer finds it harder and harder to situate him or herself in the story. Through what lens do they identify? The adults in the film are often too far removed from the events; the viewer's desire to be inline with the lens of most knowledgeable character places them firmly in relationship to the children. What Steedman argues, though, is that often the adult impulse is to project their own personality on to images of the child. The very image of the child's "littleness" calls to mind "the visceral sense of the smallness of the self that lives inside" (171). This sense of "smallness" is even further stressed by the vision of the child on film; as opposed to the text in which the reader is not constantly reminded of the sight of the child, the film viewer is more likely to see the child for its smallness, for its characteristics, in an attempt to be able to read the child and find meaning in it. Such causes the viewer to more readily identify the child as a character and forces the viewer to project personality onto the child. I would argue that, in this way, the film creates a dislocated sense of identification for adult audiences. The adult characters offer them too little information or too few entry points into the larger story, which steers the viewer to the owners of information, the children. Desiring the ability to have their knowledge but unable to identify with their age, the audience is left needing to project themselves onto the children to find a place in the film.

Again, though, this leads less to an identification with the character and more with an identification with the scenario; the audience finds their place in the film not by relating to the characters' personalities but by projecting their personality onto a person to identify with the situation and how the child operates in it. What may be of the most interest here is how this projection onto the child will eventually find more filmic grounding as the narrative progresses.

While the audience may initially have to project onto the miniaturized body that is Carlos, Carlos's actions near the end of the film will take on the mature qualities that the viewer will relate to their own adulthood. For example, the film begins with depictions of Carlos in a small suit that highlights his size, as do his interactions with the adults around him. He reads comic books, attends school, and gets bullied. Watching these processes continually correlates his age with his size; during the film's finale, though, Carlos will begin planning the other boys' escape, and in the climatic scene, lead the violent, sharp-stake driven charge against Jacinto. Here, the audience's projection comes in-line not with the children's personalities but their actions. In fact, the children's move from acting in childish ways to acting in ways thought of as 'adult' can be understood as the moment when viewers' projections find their most stable grounding.

In this way, the film's envisioning of the child and how it seeks to have the audience project on to them accomplishes something else Felman discusses. Instead of simply identifying with the child, the viewer actively engages with the scenarios as they play out. The viewer allows their personality to be projected onto the children, and as the children are transformed by the events so is the viewers' projections of themselves into the film. They start off distanced from the characters but find their entry into the film via the characters' actions. The film comprehends how the viewers will come to find this mode of identification, and if they act accordingly, they have unwittingly agreed to take part or become invested into the interaction of children and violence on screen.

In this case, the child – Carlos – begins to take on a complex role in the film. He is a character, distanced by the paratext and projected upon by the audience. But as the lead character, as the one who knows of Santi's existence, he is the one with knowledge that transforms the audience. As Felman points out, knowledge is located in the Other. The audience

must come to understand what Carlos understands. At the same time, Carlos's character is faced with a similar scenario. While Carlos may be the Other in the film that the audience projects upon, Santi becomes the Other in the film that Carlos projects upon. As Carlos must try to read Santi for information, the audience sees their journey, their psychological experience, literally mimicked onscreen. The power Carlos is granted by this understanding resembles the power that the audience is granted by the film's request to be read as anything more than a straightforward narrative. Returning to Steedman and her discussion of *Wilhelm*, in the way that the character of Wilhelm identifies with the smallness of the dolls, Carlos sees Santi (similar, but notably smaller than, Carlos), and the audience comes to feel toward Carlos. In interacting with the film, the viewer not only participates with it as a text, but they may also see themselves spelled out in the film in the process. Here, the film creates the opportunity for the audience to see their own realization played out in Carlos's revelation of the knowledge he seeks through Santi.. They are both distanced enough from the child character to stomach his situation, yet through this thickness, entangled with him to the point that they can both experience his enlightening and witness how the very same thing is happening to them.

It is this process that gives us the clearest understanding of how del Toro has managed to use the film. Pushing the viewers away with the film's form but entangling them in the multifaceted identification process, del Toro sneaks up on viewers in order to make them relinquish hold on beliefs that they would otherwise hold to steadfastly. In doing so, he takes a controversial step toward working with child characters in the horror genre that has rarely been bridged before, especially not in the mainstream. This is not to say his work with the child and identification stops here. Ultimately, such research should go on to be important to the political and transnational discourses already existing on del Toro today. But hopefully it can act as a start

at looking at one of the most important aspects of del Toro's films that has repeatedly gone untouched.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joshua Coonrod was born in 1981 in Rolla, MO. He was raised there by his father, Joe, and mother, Connie, with his sister, Amy. In 2000, he attended the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he studied English and journalism. After graduating with dual degrees in 2004, he spent the following year working as a region consultant for Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity.

In May of 2006, he began graduate school at the University of Florida. For the next two years, he focused on the study of horror films and depictions of childhood intersecting with violence. He graduated in May of 2008, intent on taking a year off of school and returning to Gainesville to pursue a PhD in English in fall of 2009.