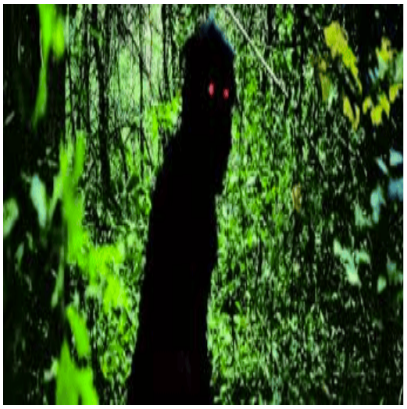


Uncle Boonmee Intersects With Panâ??s Labrynth

Description

Academic Paper

Worlds Real and Metaphysical

By

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In the two films, â??Panâ??s Labyrinth,â?• by Guillermo del Toro and â??Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,â?• by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, both directors take on the challenges of exploring the inner worlds of memory and imagination and how these components are ultimately an expression of the selfâ??s reality. In his influential 1975 essay, â??The Apparatus: Meta- psychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema,â?• French theorist Jean-Louis Baudry compared cinema to the lights flickering on the back wall of Platoâ??s caveâ?? an illusory shadow show from which we need to liberate ourselves. Apichatpong thinks exactly otherwise. His cinema cave is dedicated to recovering a repressed history, healing pain, and connecting our spirits with others.â?• Although still influenced by the aesthetics of the Old Thai Cinema with long takes Apichatpong takes on much larger risks in his metaphorical storytelling techniques combining human and animal, carnal with the marvelous and the surreal with the sublime. On the other side, Guillermo Del Toro uses fantasy with a plethora of traditional â??fairy-tale tropesâ??the testing of the heroine in her encounters with monsters and ogres, the forest as a liminal space between worlds, fabulous creatures such as fauns and fairies who guide the heroine on her journey toward becoming a princessâ??or, in the context of the film, towards death and transfiguration,â?• (according to Clark and McDonald in their paper, â??â??A Constant Transit of Findingâ??: Fantasy as the realization in Panâ??s Labyrinth.â?•) to navigate the politics of war and nationhood during a bloody civil war. Both approaches to tackling

experiences â?? often repressed due to emotional and psychological scarring â?? have transformative power in their cinematic expression with the potential to assist and aid the disturbed psyche.

Andre Bergstrom in his â??Cinematic past lives: memory, modernity, and cinematic reincarnation in Apichatpong Weerasethkulâ??s Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,â?• states â??In both its individual impact and cultural functions, cinema fulfills many of the same roles in modernity that spiritual practices â?? such as rituals, visions, conceptions of the afterlife, prayer, and meditation â?? have fulfilled and continue to fulfill across a wide spectrum of societies, serving as a connection between the individual and a larger, even transcendent, view of the worldâ?¦.Brazin *(from his famous essay on the â??Ontology of the Photographic Image,â?• italics, mine)* suggests that cinema goes even further in linking temporal representation, through memory, to a spiritual concern with the role of subjectivity beyond death.â?• (Bergstrom)

Uncle Boonmee, opens with a text box that reads â??Facing the jungle, the hills and vales, my past lives as an animal and other beings rise up before me,â?• as diegetic sounds of crickets and birds chirping and the visual of daybreak reveal a silhouette of a grazing, horned bull. Much like the scene from *Panâ??s Labyrinth*, this scene sets the tone for the rest of the film as the insects and the natural setting provide a setting for the film to deliver its message of life and the transitions to and within the life after. The dark gray hue provides a veil between the two worlds â?? this one we see and the metaphysical world we donâ??t see with just our vision â?? as the insects and chirping bird sounds help facilitate a transformative experience with a supernatural feel.

For example, when the silhouetted bull comes into view it as if he is human. In a sense, he is as he represents one of Uncle Boonmeeâ??s past lives. Soon we see he is tethered to a nearby oak tree. This is a long take and is reminiscent of Old Thai Cinema aesthetics. The diegetic sound of his heavy breathing and shuffling hooves add to the bullâ??s powerful presence as the camera moves in for a close-up. The bull frees himself and makes his way down into the pasture transforming from a black silhouette into a massive gray bull moving away from the camera. A cut is made on action to a wide shot of a verdant pasture with a majestic mountain range in the background. The bull is shown crossing from right to left until it gets to the center of the frame when a cut is made and the camera still shooting wide but with only half as much space between. The camera tracks the bull now galloping in a pan until the bull exits frame left into a wooded area.

In his interview, â??Learning about time: an interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul,â?• Ji-hoon Kim discusses with Apichatpong his examination of the jungle and how it relates cinematically. The next sequence of shots take place in the forested area and provided a spirited experience of the bull snorting and plodding in the creek. Most of these shots are high angle. A reverse angle shot shows a man coming into frame and tracks him until he takes the bull by the lead back in the direction he entered the frame. *Uncle Boonmee* is about the final days of a rural Thai man, Boonmee, who is suffering from kidney failure. Boonmee has the ability to remember his past lives and shares the trek to where all his past lives life began with his dead wifeâ??s ghost and the return of his lost son in the form of a monkey ghost. Ultimately, Apichatpong is providing a cinematic experience with the spiritual significance of memory while preserving time.

Del Toro also illustrates alternating parallel worlds in *Panâ??s Labyrinth* while attempting to depict and deconstruct the harshest of realities in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. Roger Clark and Keith McDonald state in â??â??A constant Transit of Findingâ?•: Fantasy as Realisation in *Panâ??s*

Labyrinth,â?• â??Ofelia gains access to a transformative world in which fantasy acts both as an escape and also as a means of making sense of her situation.â?• (Clark, McDonald pg. 5) The scene where Ofelia enters the labyrinth is a prime example. The scene is shot in dark colors of violet and medium blues to contrast as it creates a subliminal, spectral backdrop. The film hinges here on this scene as the diegetic sounds of a creature or creatures scurrying around awaken her as she slowly comes out from under her covers with a lunar light essence. At a low angle close up her toes reach for the rug by the bed when a creature scampers across her toes. She recoils back under the covers as the edit takes place eventually switching to her point-of-view of the faun creature. His appearance is at once fearsome and fantastical.

Through Ofelia, we learn the importance of finding resiliency in the face of adversity. Her estate reality and her forest fantasy are juxtaposed much like adulthood and childhood and on a larger, a nationhood perspective, a juxtaposition between a competing democracy and dictatorship. In addition, the film represents â??an important addition to the literature of childhood itself, exploring as it does the intersection of childhood, war, masculinity, and monstrosity that Del Toro began representing in an earlier filmâ?¦â?• (Clark)

In her â??Lullabies and postmemory: hearing the ghosts of Spanish history in Guillermo del Toroâ??s *Panâ??s Labyrinth (El laberinto del fauno, 2006)* Irene Gomez-Castellano states â??â??Mercedesâ?? Lullabyâ?• serves as a structuring leitmotiv of the whole film and as an allegorical device that subtly extends the meaning of Ofeliaâ??s individual story to a national realm: that of the Spanish history of the twentieth century, its traumatic past and its historical process of forgetting and remembering its origins.â?• (Gomez-Castellano) del Toro vividly displays this notion early on as Captain Vidal, a Spanish military officer, begins his morning routine of shaving. The scene opens with a close-up of a refined-looking hand with smooth and toned skin. As the camera pulls out a rather rustic room is revealed briefly before the camera pushes back into a nicely carved razor handle in the Captainâ??s well-manicured hand. This sets the tone for the rest of the scene.

The Captain is meticulous about his uniform, his boots, and his appearance. He is the embodiment of the Franco regime and its repression. His arrogance is not only displayed in his hygenic physicalities, but it also becomes blatantly apparent in his verbal complaint to Mercedes about the coffee being burnt. He strokes Mercedesâ??s shoulder in a semi-sexualized manner after vocalizing his displeasure while requesting she look into it. Mercedes recedes smoothly and relays the Captainâ??s remarks to the servants in the kitchen who refer to the Captain as a dandy and a â??hussy fussy.â?• Mercedes fills a tub for Ofelia. The camera cross-cuts to Ofelia being directed about the eveningâ??s dinner party. Ofelia quickly escapes with her Crossroads book and its illusory world of magic as an escape to the traumatic world of the estate. The non-diegetic music score augments the visual world and assists Ofelia to feel her past and to come to terms with it.

Similarly, Jonathan Romney states in his review, â??Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall Past Lives,â?• that â??If, as Apichatpong suggests, cinema can be a means of erasing consciousness and the past, its more exalted function is to reconcile â?? to bring together past, present and future (â??I have no concept of time anymore,â?• says Huay). And in a similar vein to Del Toroâ??s cinematic backdrop, the Spanish Civil War, Apichatpongâ??s modern Thailand had experienced high political tension surrounding immigration from Laos and it appears in the scene with Boonmeeâ??s sister-in-law, Jen, and her suspicion of immigrants as killers and smell. (Romney)

While *Panâ??s Labyrinth,* doesnâ??t dell as deeply into the metaphysical realm of reconciling past, present, and future as *Uncle Boonmee,* it does attempt to represent a differing aspect of memory: one is chronological time represented by Captain Vidalâ??s pocket watch and the other being the illusory myth and its erasure of chronological time represented by the faun, the labyrinth, the underworld, and Princess Ofelia. In the end, we see a dying Captain Vidal asking Mercedes, as she holds the Captainâ??s baby boy in her arms, to remind the boy how his father died. Mercedes refuses to break the hold and the perpetuation and the legacy of violence. Thus, Spain has been freed from the past. (Gomez-Castellano)

Del Toro allows Ofelia to sacrifice herself in order for her baby brother to have a life free from the harsh memories of the past as Ofelia refuses the faunâ??s request to pour a drop of her brotherâ??s blood. This causes Ofeliaâ??s real death. Yet, briefly, Del Toro allows for the assimilation of worlds with Ofelia the Princess of the Underworld, dying in the space between worlds. This visual unites Ofeliaâ??s real world and her kingdom. Mercedes hums a lullaby and an image appears in the book of Ofelia at a Royal Court. Likewise, Apichatpong toward the end of *Uncle Boonmee* e manipulates time and space. Tong, the monk canâ??t sleep and has violated his vows visiting the hotel room of Jen and Roong. He showers and puts on civilian attire. Jen invites him to go with her to get food and takes his hand. Tong looks back and the camera reveals the three of them still sitting on the bed. This is Apichatpongâ??s way of saying the material world and the spiritual world, are not far apart. (Gomez-Castellano)

In conclusion, both Guillermo del Toro and Apichatpong Weerasethakul, illustrate memory and imagination as an expression of the selfâ??s reality through their filmâ??s respective characters, Ofelia and Uncle Boonmee. As the films are set in differing cultures, the representations are also differing. Del Toroâ??s film utilizes myth juxtaposed against real-time while Weerasethakul juxtaposes the metaphysical aspects of past, present, and future. Furthermore, both films make use of social commentary on troubled individuals within dominating nationalistic parameters of their respective countries. Spain is in the Civil War and Thailand is under enormous political pressure due to Laotian immigration Interestingly enough, *Uncle Boonmee* contains strong spiritual overtones while *Panâ??s Labyrinth* is steeped in strong violence and harsh reality. Yet, the respective characters suffer from thematically conflicting maladies. Ofelia suffers from a spiritual malady while Uncle Boonmee suffers from a physical malady. Nevertheless, in closing, both films represent each respective individual characterâ??s own self reality.



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