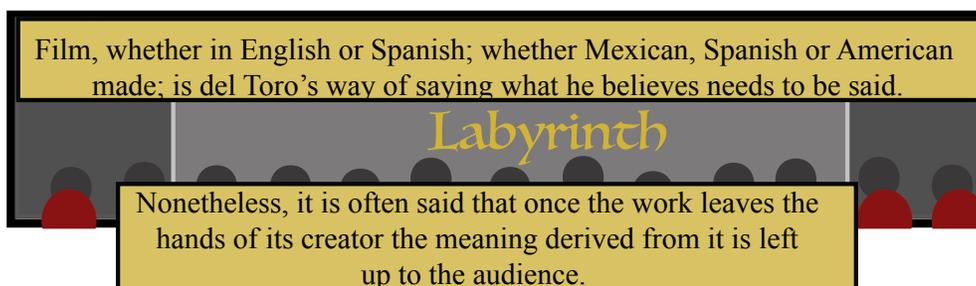


Regardless of genre, film is all about the human experience. The way del Toro deals with human experience is a unique way of exploring it.



But del Toro's way of saying and showing us what he believes needs to be said still shines through. It is in his way of showing us the real monsters that lurk within the shadows.

Cronos was a successful commentary on the state of US-Mexican relations. The interesting thing about Cronos is that it was made in 1992, released in 1993, and set in 1997. This was a film that had something like NAFTA in place already. It doesn't matter that the talks would not be completed for another year when the idea had been circulating since Reagan proposed a North American common market in his 1984 campaign (The Balance, 2018). From there the characters speak for themselves, an Argentine hero, North American-German-Mexican villains, an Italian inventor, the list and references go on. This is all an attempt by del Toro to show a break down of Mexican culture as a result of the trade agreement. Even someone who doesn't know Mexico can identify the Latin dance class and the language being spoken.

Most of the scenes could be anywhere. However that doesn't change the fact that as del Toro points out in the DVD commentary that what happens in the film can only happen in Mexico. For example, the Morgue scene is the specific example that del Toro cites when speaking on why he refused to give the rights of the film to Universal pictures.



In this scene, the music in the background could have been any cheerful Mexican song. The lyrics holding the key - 'muertito en la plancha' - 'the dead man on the slab' - with the Hispanic diminutive (muertito, literally 'little dead man') highlighting the affection for death in Mexican culture. It is something that if the lyrics had been translated would the US audience have understood? Or would they have seen a graphic demonstration of a death rite that they would rather not think about? This is not the last time del Toro would reference his culture in his movies but it would be the last time he did so on Mexican soil.

Cronos was made in Mexico with Mexican funding and del Toro's own money. It was to be the film that introduced him to the world. It would also appear to be the film that turned him away from Mexican cinema. According to Deborah Shaw, "IMCINE refused to take the finished product to international festivals as it was a horror film, and it provided only a tiny budget to allow him [del Toro] to take the film to Cannes." It would also be the film that ran del Toro into massive debts as he personally covered the rest of the cost of the movie. Add this to the fact that at the time, "the source of contention between the director and IMCINE appear to lie in opposing visions of what cinema should be, with the national film institute endorsing social realist/art cinema forms rather than popular genre formats." He has with his success since shifted in figure in Mexico, able to now influence the industry.

Even though del Toro started out in Mexico, it would soon become apparent that he could not finish there. We saw with *Cronos* that del Toro would not get the backing he needed from what film industry Mexico had. People often compare and contrast his Spanish language films and his English language ones. Hutchins would give the Spanish-language films more weight in that, a critical reason that del Toro's Spanish films have the reputation that they do is that they seem to be about something beyond genre, something historical and real.

It can be argued that this quality is not only present in his Spanish films, but in his English films as well. It is just a different clash of worlds. Perhaps one must know the story of the treatment of del Toro with his first US film, *Mimic*. It has become a legend within the American film industry.

"It highlights the disadvantages a foreign filmmaker is presented with when attempting their first English-language feature and reinforces the countless stories from that period about the endless meddling of the Weinsteins -- especially when it came to final cut. Still, while he deems the film itself "imperfect," del Toro has stated on numerous occasions that the experience of making "Mimic" was one of the most important of his entire life."

Despite the meddling and the imperfectness of the film del Toro was able to insert his political commentary. *Mimic* is a story about cockroaches spreading a deadly disease that claims hundreds of New York's children. Dr. Taylor creates a superbug, the Judas, that can kill the cockroaches and everything seems fine. A few years later it is discovered that there is a huge colony of the Judas bug underneath the city that has evolved to appear human, the heroes must then race to stop the bugs. This was a film from 1997, a time when an immigration and homeless scare was coming to head in the United States. Del Toro was quite possibly commenting on the United States treatment of immigrants. And the way that they like bugs go unnoticed unless there is a 'hoard' of them in the public eye.

Consequently having been mistreated by both the United States and Mexican film industries how does one tread? When it is not safe to go home but when the other home is as foreign as the reality del Toro creates, where he is powerless to really change the world around him, what does one do? Through his film del Toro has chosen to take a look at the bigger picture of the world around him. Not just Mexico, the US, or Spain, the realities del Toro creates are all reflections of the world around them.



His films are commentary on what del Toro sees as necessary to point out. Whether it be through war, the death of children, murder, all the horrors in the world we see but do not witness, he has witnessed.

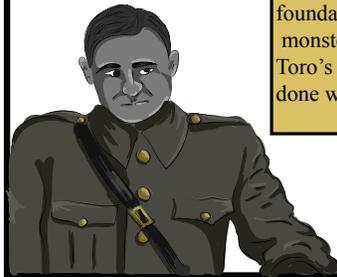
"It would be a cliché to say that, because I am a Mexican, I see death in a certain way. But I have seen more than my share of corpses, certainly more than the average First World guy. I worked for months next to a morgue that I had to go through to get to work. I've seen people being shot; I've had guns put to my head; I've seen people burnt alive, stabbed, decapitated ... because Mexico is still a very violent place. So I do think that some of that element in my films comes from a Mexican sensibility."

In fact, a lot of del Toro's political commentary comes from the real monster he chooses to display: man. "What makes a man a man? A friend of mine once wondered. Is it his origins? The way he comes to life? I don't think so. It's the choices he makes. Not how he starts things, but how he decides to end them." It is the way del Toro has evolved in his storytelling, in his commentary on the politics through symbolism, in his exploration of the human in the way the human acts that demonstrates how del Toro himself has decided to end things.

When one speaks about del Toro one gets stuck on the monsters, on the language, on the context for they are the way del Toro speaks on the political. But what about the human within the film?

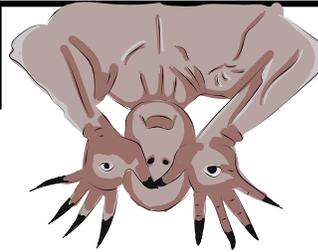
In del Toro's films one has to question the Humans due to the significance they bring in that the audience is human. It has been claimed that, "only a human being or a humanoid can be a true monster . . ."

Often in del Toro's work the monsters are humanoid in some way, the Asset from the Shape of the Water, Hellboy from the Hellboy chronicles, Jesus Gris from Conos. All of these films make it so that we empathize with and see the plight of the monster. It is then significant that those doing harm to the monsters are ordinary humans.



If, as Davies claims, monsters are challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking, then the monsters are the reflections of the humans in del Toro's films. In fact most of the monstrous things done within the movies are done by humans.

In Pan's Labyrinth for example, it is Ofelia's step-father that kills her. Not the Pale Man.



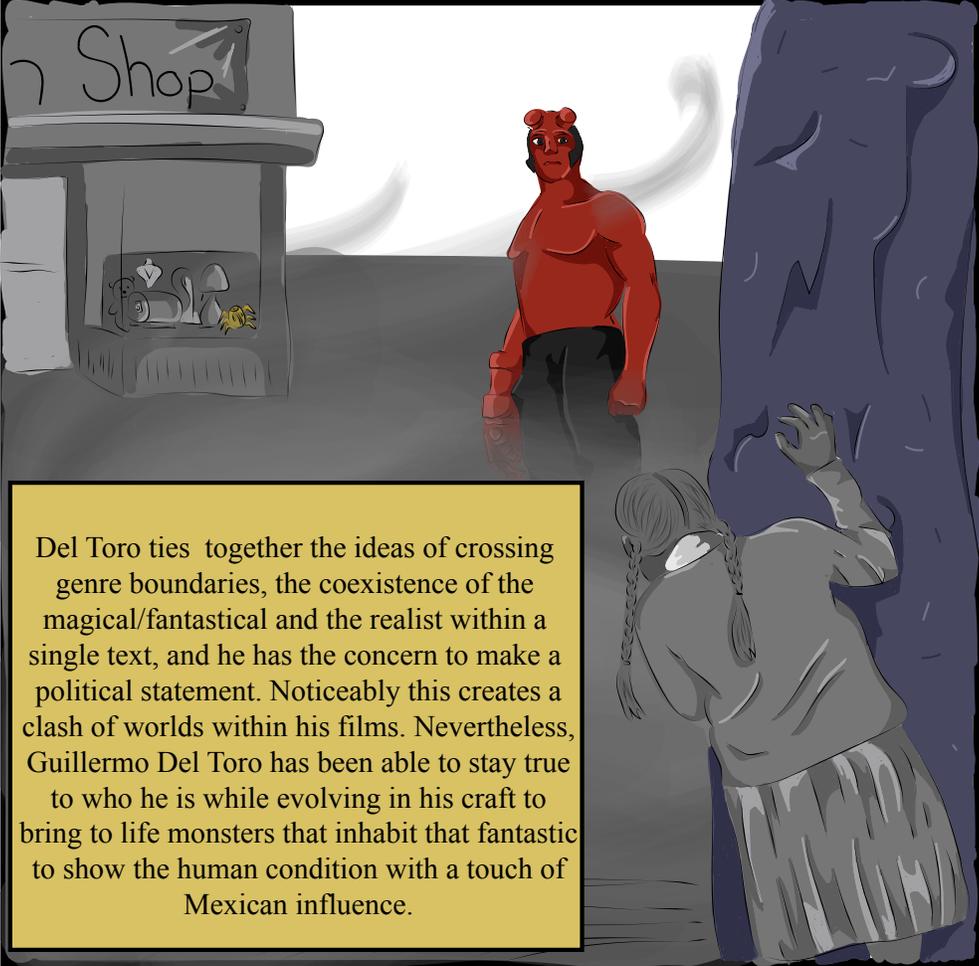
Another example is in Crimson Peak, there are ghosts that do no harm, but a line from the movie, "Love makes monsters of us all" is spoken by an ordinary woman who has been shown to be the true 'monster' in the house. It is all at once an exploration of the Human experience when encountering these often times traumatic events and a reflection of the way monsters can save us by showing us the less than savory parts of our ways of life.

"In fairy tales, monsters exist to be a manifestation of something that we need to understand, not only a problem we need to overcome, but also they need to represent, much like angels represent the beautiful, pure, eternal side of the human spirit, monsters need to represent a more tangible, more mortal side of being human: aging, decay, darkness and so forth . . . I feel that monsters are here in our world to help us understand it. They are an essential part of a fable."

Therefore, no matter why or who the monster is within del Toro's films they serve to allow us to see the human condition explored through the experience of living with a monster that might demonstrate our worst fears about who we are, what we are doing, and what the consequences of the actions we take.

Remarkably it is perhaps not that US film culture has affected Mexican film culture or vice versa but rather it is one man from Mexico living in the US and Canada promoting his own way of doing film.

And by his success del Toro has been able influence both industries in his own way. In Mexico by serving as a guide to the younger generation of filmmakers and in the US by changing the way mainstream US media is genre-filled with an approach to more art house pursuits.



Del Toro ties together the ideas of crossing genre boundaries, the coexistence of the magical/fantastical and the realist within a single text, and he has the concern to make a political statement. Noticeably this creates a clash of worlds within his films. Nevertheless, Guillermo Del Toro has been able to stay true to who he is while evolving in his craft to bring to life monsters that inhabit that fantastic to show the human condition with a touch of Mexican influence.

"I'm really a freak in every place I go. I don't quite fit in the independent scene, I don't quite fit in the art scene, and I don't fit in the Hollywood scene, so I'm a weird strange fat motherfucker. I'll tell you this: I plan to stay that way, because there is something to be said... I think when you get comfortable, you start growing old. You are doing something wrong."

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