

Disobedient Children in the Dystopian Past: Empowerment Through Liminal Futurity in Guillermo del Toro's Films

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Abstract

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *Pinocchio* (2022) blend the fantastical themes of children's narratives with the frame of a dystopian background.

This historical space offers no room for fairy tales, autonomy – let alone that of a child –, or individuality. Indeed, controlling adult figures in both films only value the protagonists as what theorists such as Lee Edelman describe as the social child. The aspirations of the mainstream public elevate the child's potential to perpetuate the political ideals of extreme political conformity.

However, Del Toro's historical frame enables his critique of such a rigid understanding of children's capabilities. Ofelia and Pinocchio learn to move in spaces beyond the control of fascist regimes, gaining autonomy rather than conforming, becoming neither subject nor object, but abject protagonists who flourish within fantastical liminal spaces. As a result, these films invite the audience to speculate about the power of a child's imagination.