

*It makes monsters of us all*

*The Films of Guillermo del Toro*  
*CUFA Film Club Week 3*



# Who is Guillermo del Toro?

Known for his fantasy and horror films, Guillermo del Toro is one of the most unique filmmakers today. Del Toro began his career in Mexico, starting out as a special-effects makeup artist. His debut feature, *Cronos*, was released in 1993 and received international acclaim, launching his directorial career.

In 2006, del Toro released his most celebrated film, the disturbing yet alluring *Pan's Labyrinth*, a Spanish-language film set during the Spanish Civil War. Written and directed by del Toro, the film was a critical success, with del Toro winning the Academy Award for Best Direction.

Since then, del Toro has continued to release critical and awards-season darlings, such as *The Shape of Water*, which won the Best Picture Oscar in 2017. Outside of his own work, del Toro is also an avid reader of 19th century gothic romance and obsessed with classic horror films, of which he has an extensive memorabilia collection in his home.

Read more about Guillermo del Toro here:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/02/07/show-the-monster>

# What Makes a Guillermo del Toro Film?

## 1. Fantasy/Horror Elements

Ever since he was a child in Mexico, del Toro has been heavily influenced by classic horror films, Victorian/Edwardian gothic novels, and mythology. All of his films contain some exploration of fear, unnerving/uncanny imagery, or fantastical, magical elements.

## 2. Violence

Del Toro cites a childhood memory of a boy getting injured while playing as the inspiration for the violence in his films. Unlike the stylized gore of Tarantino or the Kingsman films, del Toro deliberately makes the violence inflicted realistic, gory, and brutal, intending to draw out a visceral, uncontrollable reaction in the audience.

## 3. Practical Effects

Like the classic films he adores, del Toro makes an effort to use as many practical (non-cgi/afx) effects as possible. This is most evident when considering his partnership with actor Doug Jones, who frequently dons heavy makeup and prosthetics in order to play characters like the Faun in Pan's Labyrinth or the ghosts in Crimson Peak.

## 4. Protagonists that are underestimated

Many of del Toro's films feature a protagonist who is somehow overlooked or maligned. Ofelia in Pan's Labyrinth is dismissed because of her young age and gender, while Eliza is perceived as harmless because of her muteness. However, these underestimated protagonists quickly reveal themselves to be strong, formidable individuals.

Now on to the featured movies!



# Crimson Peak

Year Released: 2015

Directed by: Guillermo del Toro

Country of Origin: USA

Available on: Netflix

Running Time: 119 min

CW: Violence, sexual content, incest

When American heiress and aspiring author Edith Cushing meets the mysterious English baronet Sir Thomas Sharpe, she instantly falls in love. The two marry, but when Thomas takes her to his mansion to live with him and his sister, Lucille, Edith soon discovers a horrific secret lurking beneath the surface.

An opulent homage to 19th century gothic romance, *Crimson Peak* embodies del Toro's love for the eerie yet beautiful. Though the characters and storyline are rooted in the traits of the genre, potentially leaning a bit into stock tropes, it is the beauty of the visuals that make this film such a rewarding watch. Del Toro bathes the screen in blacks, reds, and golds, creating a velvety and tactile style. The production and costume design add to this excess; the Sharpe's estate seems to bleed from the red earth beneath, a visual indication that all is not what it seems.

# The Shape of Water

Year Released: 2017

Directed by: Guillermo del Toro

Country of Origin: USA

Available on: YouTube (Rent £3.49)

Running Time: 123 min

CW: Violence, nudity, sexual content



Eliza, a mute janitor, works at a government research facility in Baltimore. She discovers "the Asset," a fish-man creature being tested on in the facility. Forming a bond with the creature, Eliza decides to set him free.

More than any of his other films, it is *The Shape of Water* that has divided audiences.

A critical and awards success, the film has nonetheless confused and even disturbed viewers for its depiction of a romance between the human Eliza and the fish-man creature. This exploration of the taboo is not new to del Toro, who often includes provocative topics in his work. But aside than this one element, *The Shape of Water* is also a film that depicts the people who are excluded from, and abused by the dominant society; this is metaphorically represented by the creature, but also with the characters of Eliza, Zelda, and Giles.

# Pan's Labyrinth



**Year Released:** 2006

**Directed by:** Guillermo del Toro

**Country of Origin:** Mexico, Spain

**Available on:** Prime Video

**Running Time:** 118 min

**CW:** Violence/gore

Set during the Spanish Civil War, Ofelia lives with her mother and stepfather, Captain Vidal, a Francoist officer. Amidst war, torture, and treason, Ofelia discovers a wonderful yet dangerous secret world, and is led by a faun to complete a series of magical tasks.

Perhaps the most fantastical of del Toro's films, Pan's Labyrinth was del Toro's first global success, leading him to his first Oscar wins. Described as an "anti-Wizard of Oz," the film alternates between the real and fantasy worlds, but the looming sense of danger, death, and violence remains regardless of where the heroine goes. As a portrayal of a girl's loss of innocence, as well as the capability for humans to be utterly inhuman in their treatment of others, it emerges as a poetic and tragic tale, a myth that leaves one shaken to their core.

# More Stuff!

## Other films to check out:

By Guillermo del Toro:

*Cronos* (Mexico, 1993)

*The Devil's Backbone* (Mexico, 2001)

*Hellboy* (USA, 2004)

## From Guillermo del Toro's Adventures in Moviegoing (Criterion):

*Vampyr* (France/West Germany, 1932)

*Beauty and the Beast* (France, 1946)

*The Spirit of the Beehive* (Spain, 1973)

*Blood Simple* (USA, 1984)

## Other Articles to Read:

How Guillermo Del Toro Uses Violence - Screened:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gp-YzVCcus>

Bloody Victoriana: On *Crimson Peak*:

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/bloody-victoriana-on-crimson-peak/>

The Shape Of Water, shame and perversity:

<https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/guillermo-del-toro-interview-the-shape-of-water-shame-and-perversity/>

Pan's Labyrinth: The Heart of the Maze:

<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/4262-pan-s-labyrinth-the-heart-of-the-maze>

