



'You Have No Power Over Me': Reclaiming the Female Narrative in *Poor Things* & *Labyrinth*

Poor Things (2023) and *Labyrinth* (1986) convey narratives with complex messages and important societal critiques.

Over-shadowed by the whimsical fantasy genre, these narratives are often underappreciated and misunderstood by audiences.

Poor Things, upon its release, had been criticised for its explicit depictions of sex, while also being praised for its unique portrayal of the female protagonist, Bella Baxter.

Labyrinth is remembered for its catchy soundtrack, puppetry and casting of David Bowie and Jennifer Connelly. Yet the overall plot regarding the female protagonist, Sarah, is left out of the conversation.

In this project, I aim to highlight the significance of the female narratives of *Poor Things* and *Labyrinth* through feminist theory and analysis.

Investigating the workings of the male and female gaze, power dynamics, and autonomy in these films allows us to uncover the female narratives' strength. Laura Mulvey's theory of the Male Gaze offers insight into the critique of mainstream film, but it does not fully address what the female gaze entails. Joey Soloway's theory of the Female Gaze identifies the elements necessary for a film to be considered representative of the female gaze. This then supports the discussion of autonomy with the help of Teresa De Lauretis' book 'Alice Doesn't'. Simone De Beauvoir provides an understanding of womanhood in her book 'The Second Sex', and how the power structures between men and women are dictated and imposed by society and parental figures in adolescence..

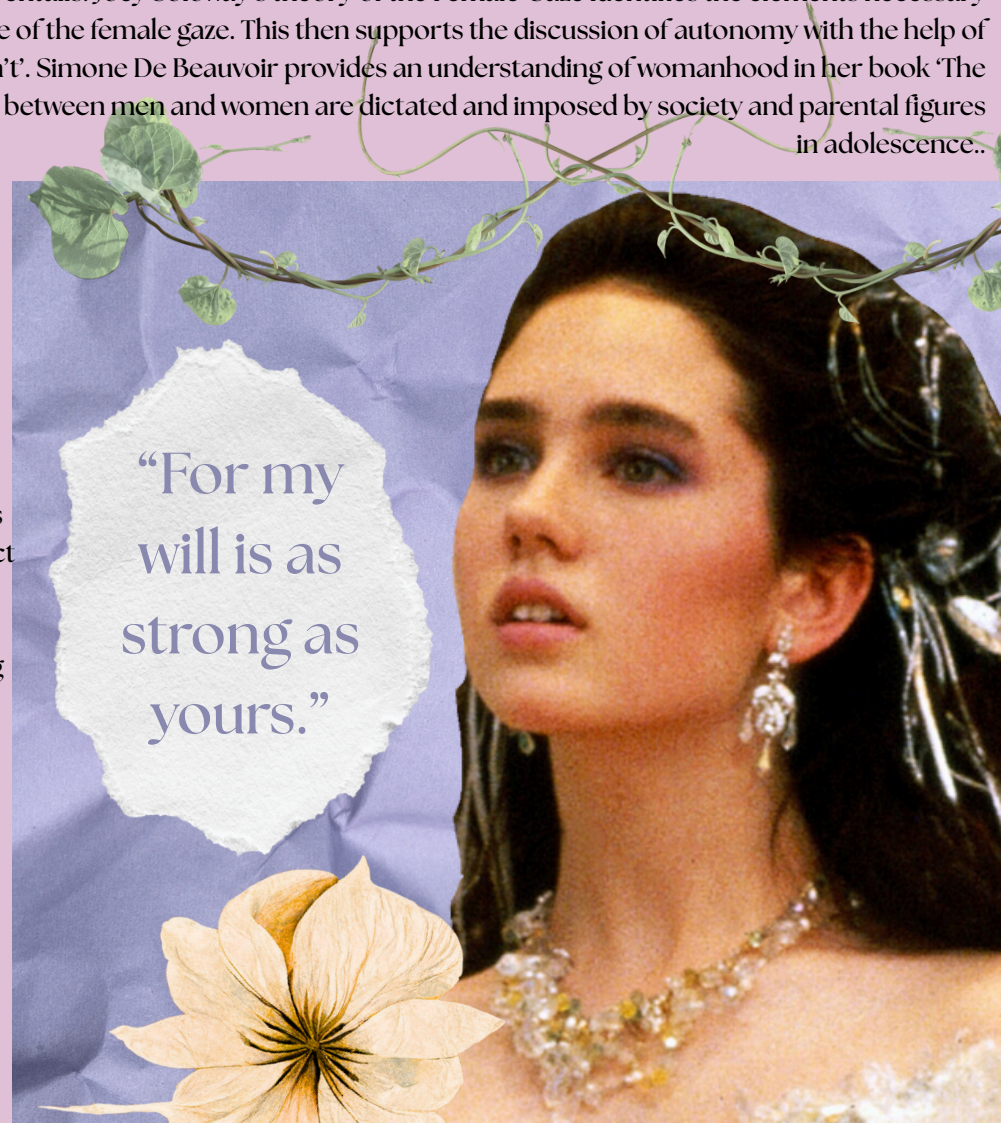
RESEARCH QUESTION:

How do *Poor Things* and *Labyrinth* use the female gaze to reclaim the female protagonists' power and autonomy within patriarchal worlds?

My research has concluded that while both films are created by male directors, Yorgos Lanthimos and Jim Henson, they each demonstrate a distinct awareness of the female condition. Though they share thematic parallels, *Poor Things* and *Labyrinth* present contrasting ways of exploring womanhood, the female gaze and power dynamics which enrich the female narrative.

References

- De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (Vintage Books, 2011)
- Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn 1975) pp. 6-18, doi:10.1093/screen/16.3.6
- De Lauretis, Teresa, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1984)
- TIFF Originals, 'Joey Soloway on the Female Gaze', YouTube, 11 September 2016, < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnBvppooD9I&t=3263s> > [accessed 05 March 2025]



"For my
will is as
strong as
yours."