How far do each of the films you have studied represent key characters in ways that challenge the audience’s expectations.

Stereotypes are always present in movies, restricting the characters to their roles, but additionally allowing them to break their stereotypes and challenge the audience’s expectations, growing as a character and developing their representation. In Guillermo del Toro’s Pan’s Labyrinth, representation of women in the 1940s was challenged through the characters of Ophelia and Mercedes, both powerful women who develop as characters, standing up to the men in the movie who’re represented as villains.

Use of mise-en-scene in the beginning of the movie presents Mercedes as a caring mother figure, especially towards Ophelia since her own mother is pregnant and unable to care for her. Her costume reinforces this representation, as one key aspect that reoccurs is her shawl, which has connotations of kind, caring female figures, and suggests that Mercedes has maternal instincts. Her lack of makeup additionally suggests her social standing, or lack of, as she is working class so cannot afford expensive products or clothes. Although, despite social standing, she suffers under the same patriarchy as Carmen, being ignored in society and dismissed, although this exclusion allows Mercedes to rebel against Vidal with ought his knowledge and supports the rebels by smuggling supplies to them, actively resisting Vidal and the fascists. This begins to subvert the audience’s expectations of Mercedes’ character, showing that her character is more than just a servant. In addition to this, Del Toro hints at her strength as a character through a prop that Mercedes carries around, as she has a pocket knife which she later defends herself with. This knife weaponizes her traditional role as a cook, already challenging stereotypes an audience’s expectations.

Her representation as a timid, weak woman at the beginning of the film reflects how women were viewed in the 1940’s, and this representation is majorly subverted towards the end as her character develops into a strong, empowered woman as she stands up to Vidal when he threatens to torture her. When Mercedes caught by Vidal towards end of film, Vidal is confident and not worried, laughing and saying that he can be left alone with her because 'she is just a woman', which emphasises the undermining of women in a patriarchal society. He turns his back on her as he doesn’t consider her a threat, allowing himself to become more vulnerable. However, Mercedes uses this moment when Vidal is unguarded to attack him and fight against her stereotypes as a woman and servant, stabbing him with the knife she was shown to carry around earlier and bringing him to his knees. Use of cinematography here is used to emphasis her newfound empowerment, a low angle shot of Mercedes standing over Vidal and the camera presents her as having more power and control over him, which is reinforced by a subsequent reverse high angle shot of Vidal on his knees. This reversal of roles shows how far the movie goes to challenge the audience’s expectations surrounding representations of gender in particular, as key elements are used to connotate Mercedes’s development as a character and her empowerment towards the end of the film.

In the 2002 film City of God, the film subverts the audience’s expectations, not by challenging stereotypes, but by developing characters in ways the audience don’t expect. A good example of this is the character Knockout Ned, who towards the beginning of the movie is nonviolent and attempts to get a job rather than join a gang. This alone is a contradiction to the other characters in the film, in particular Lil Zé, who enjoy killing and violence, getting into it from a young age. However, after Lil Zé rapes his girlfriend, Knockout Ned abandons his nonviolent lifestyle for revenge, joining a gang and becomes more and more corrupted by violence as the film progresses. This challenges the audience’s expectations by taking a character they might once have aligned with and presenting his as now corrupted by violence. This is one of the messages in the film that violence is inevitable in the favelas, exaggerating the danger. At the end f the film, Ned is shot by a boy who’s father he killed, which is a twist in itself, but additionally is unexpected. This could generate mixed reactions from the spectators who either see Ned’s death as well deserved, or feel sympathy for him for the life he ended up living, as he was trying to live a straight, nonviolent life.The aesthetic of violence in the movie and the favelas could additionally challenge the audience’s expectations, by presenting the children as violent, overthrowing the older men and taking the drug business, which is an extreme insight into what life in the favelas is like. This contrasts with representation of children in other movies, as being naive, young and immature, whereas ‘the runts’ are ambitious and violent. This reflects Lil Zé’s character throughout the film, who begins his life of violence at the beginning of the film and only gets more violent. A key use of cinematography shows Lil Dice growing into Lil Zé, a series of low angle, graphic match shots that show him joyfully shooting someone below the camera. This emphasis the violence of this character and the favelas, and shocks the audience.

All of these characters present to the spectators that the favelas are a violent, lawless place to live, but the film also presents anther character, Rocket, who successfully challenges the audience’s expectations. This is due to how Rocket develops throughout the film, or rather doesn’t, as he remains nonviolent, and ambitious to achieve his dream of becoming a photographer. He contrasts mostly to Zé, who is represented as a psychopath ad enjoys murder, but additionally to Ned, who couldn’t abstain from violence and ended up beginning a war. Rocket is a good example of how refraining from violence and having ambition could potentially lead to a life out of the favelas. This shows how far the films representation of characters challenges the audience’s expectations.