

Anti-Cathartic Magical Realism: A Comparative Study of Trauma in *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to seek the relationship between trauma and catharsis through magical realism in Juan Rulfo's *Luvina* and Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*. It uses a comparative close-reading approach, to analyze, how both works depict historical and political trauma without narrative closure. In *Luvina*, the barren and spectral landscape reflects post-revolutionary disillusionment in rural Mexico. Here, the spectral voices and suspended time reinforce a condition of ongoing desolation rather than healing. Similarly in *Pan's Labyrinth*, trauma appears through the porous boundary between the fantasy and historical reality, by intertwining the fairytale imagery with the violence of Francoist Spain. The magical realism here, does not offer redemption, rather it coexists with brutality, by underscoring the limits of catharsis. The study argues that both the texts employ an anti-cathartic narrative mode, that sustains trauma, encourages ethical witnessing, and supports multidirectional memory rather than offering false closure.

KEYWORDS

Anti-Catharsis;
Comparative Analysis;
Magical Realism;
Multidirectional Memory;
Trauma Representation

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 27 January 2026

Accepted: 07 April 2026

Published: 10 April 2026

CITATION

Dharani, A., Naidu, T.N. (2025). Anti-Cathartic Magical Realism: A Comparative Study of Trauma in *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth*. *S3R Journal of English Language and Education*, 1(3), 57-71. <https://doi.org/10.70682/s3rjele.2025.01.035771>

1. Introduction

For a long time, magical realism has worked as a powerful way of telling stories about historical trauma and cultural dislocation. It shifts how we understand time, and it simply blurs the boundary between the real with the unreal. Because of this, the stories of marginalized voices do not simply disappear, rather they remain, they echo, and they continue within everyday life. The past here, does not fully fade or come to an end, but it just stays within the present. And quietly and often almost unnoticed it lingers in the present lives. For this reason, these narratives do not try to give a clear ending or restore balance, but instead, they stay with in fragments, with brief spectral returns, and with a feeling that actually never

fully settles.

The recent works on magical realism also moves in this direction only. It shows that, how trauma is carried through the form and structure in both the literature and film as well. And it again that shows how, these aesthetic choices do not resolve suffering but keep it in the motion (Das, 2020; Reed, 2022). Similarly, the work on memory and narrative modernity shows something simple that these forms shape how trauma is shared, how people remember it, and how it passes from one generation to another. But they do not pass it on directly, rather it is passed in layered and meaningful ways (Sharma, 2023).

The notion that trauma does not necessarily heal with the passing of time connects Luvina and Pan's Labyrinth, despite their seeming dissimilarity. When it comes to the short story Luvina, the trauma is reflected in a sense of stillness, with the barren environment and the constant wind retaining the effects of the Mexican Revolution, to the point where it feels as though time is not passing at all. When it comes to Pan's Labyrinth, things are naturally quite different, as there is no distinction between fantasy and reality, with the fairy tale world existing alongside the reality of fascism. Because of this, there is a sense of instability in the present, to the point where it feels as though the past was never truly in the past to begin with. Despite their differences, both stories circle back to the same place, with the trauma never truly going away, in spaces, in sounds, in memories, and in the way in which the stories unfold, though they do not necessarily explain this, they make it felt.

Although trauma theory has extensively examined repetition, witnessing, and historical responsibility (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2002), magical realism has also been widely discussed within postcolonial and comparative literary contexts. However, relatively limited attention has been given to magical realism as an explicitly anti-cathartic narrative strategy, especially when it operates across both literary and cinematic media. In the case of Juan Rulfo's *Luvina*, most of the existing scholarships mainly focus on irony and the sense of rural desolation. That which shapes the narrative landscape. Similarly, studies on Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* largely emphasize allegory, memory politics, or hauntological interpretations (Das, 2020; Reed, 2022). Because of this, sustained cross-cultural comparative studies which examines how both texts resist the model of Aristotelian catharsis still remains relatively underdeveloped. At the same time, recent interdisciplinary discussions on liminal landscapes also suggest that spatial environments can function as symbolic carriers of psychological and historical rupture (Sharma, 2025). Such perspectives become relevant in the case of Rulfo's wind-swept town and del Toro's labyrinthine forest, where space itself begins to function as an index of unresolved trauma.

The study here, attempts to address these gaps by examining magical realism as a narrative and formal strategy that resist, cathartic closure and allows trauma to continue to persist across different media and national contexts. Rather than treating the absence of catharsis as a narrative weakness, the study here, argues that, anti-catharsis functions as a deliberate aesthetic practice which encourages forms of ethical witnessing and multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009). By placing the context of post-

revolutionary Mexico alongside Francoist Spain, this paper tries to show how different historical traumas can resonate through similar formal disruptions. At the same time, these links do not erase the particular political realities which inform each individual historical experience.

The research in this study is anchored on the following research questions:

1. How does magical realism in Luvina and Pan's *Labyrinth* resist Aristotelian catharsis and reconfigure trauma as unresolved experience?
2. What formal strategies, such as liminality, uncanny return, suspended temporality, sound design, and non-redemptive endings, mediate trauma without narrative closure?
3. How does comparative reading illuminate multidirectional memory across post-revolutionary and post-authoritarian contexts?
4. What ethical implications appear when trauma is sustained through anti-cathartic narrative form rather than resolved through emotional purification?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Trauma theory and the limits of catharsis

Trauma theory helps us understand painful experiences which are very difficult to put into a clear and ordered form. According to Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is not fully understood at the moment it happens, rather, it returns later, again and again, through repetition. Because of this reason, traumatic experiences remain fragmented, partial, and hard to express in a stable way. Building on this, Dominick LaCapra (2002) distinguishes between "acting out" and "working through," where he warns that, narrative closure can romanticize violence and turn historical rupture into a kind of false comfort. For this reason, these ideas begin to question the classical notion of Aristotelian catharsis, which assumes emotional purification through narrative resolution (Aristotle, 2008). And because of this, the trauma scholarship slowly shifts, it looks at disruption, fragmentation, repetition, and unresolved endings. But not just as stylistic features, rather as a way of representing trauma and historical suffering in a more ethical way (Whitehead, 2004).

An important implication here, is that the narrative form can sometimes "hold" traumatic histories, without necessarily resolving them. From this perspective, the question is not only how trauma is represented, but also how certain aesthetic strategies prevent premature reconciliation, and it keeps historical violence ethically visible and legible (Luckhurst, 2008). Felman and Laub (1992) discuss witnessing as an encounter, that interrupts narrative mastery, where the testimony reveals the limits of language, and demands an ethics of listening, rather than narrative closure. Because of this, the study here, draws on these arguments. And it treats anti-catharsis as an aesthetic intervention, one that sustains traumatic affect, rather than attempting to purge or resolve it.

2.2 Magical realism as aesthetic mediation of unresolved history

Magical realism is often discussed in relation to colonial and postcolonial histories, yet the mode is not always directly theorized as anti-cathartic. Magical realism scholarship usually defines the mode through the presence of an “irreducible” marvelous element within ordinary reality (Faris, 2004). In such stories, the magical is woven into everyday life, unobtrusively and inexplicably. Zamora and Faris (1995) place magical realism within broader contexts of cultural hybridity, historical rupture, and epistemic contestation. These frameworks show that, how the mode often emerges from societies shaped by complex and layered histories. Boehmer (2014) further argues that postcolonial cultural forms frequently negotiate the persistence of historical violence within the present. Because of this, magical realism may resist narrative closure, allowing history to appear unfinished, unsettled, and still continuing.

Recent work makes this point clear, that the form matters just as much as the theme. Whitehead (2004) shows that trauma narratives often take on broken, and fragmented structures, because they reflect both psychological and historical rupture. Similarly, Quayson’s (2007) idea of “aesthetic nervousness” explains how this kind of formal instability brings out unresolved social tensions, and unsettles any easy interpretation. Building on this, Sharma (2023) suggests that memory does not have to be resolved, it can be sustained through the structure of the narrative itself. At the same time, Sharma (2025) shows how the liminal landscapes can carry this instability, both psychological and historical. Taken together, these views help us see at magical realism differently, not just as a style, but as an aesthetic mode where history returns in non-linear, uncanny ways, and it continues to resist easy closure.

2.3 Critical approaches to *Luvina*: voice, space, and non-resolution

Scholarship on Juan Rulfo’s *Luvina* often focuses on desolation, irony, and narrative voice. In this context, Thakkar (2012) reads Rulfo’s irony as something that disperses the meaning, moving outward, and in doing so, it unsettles any sense of closure. Similarly, Jordan (1996) draws the attention to sound, noise, and breakdown in communication, where silence itself becomes structural, and not just atmospheric. Because of this, these readings connect with trauma theory, especially its focus on the limits of representation. The story does not explain, or it does not console, instead, it holds on to a sense of disorientation, both as emotional and historical. At the same time, much of Rulfo criticism links this absence to questions of authority, family, and the social collapse. Even though Boldy (1986) works on *Pedro Páramo*, the ideas remain useful, especially in the understanding absence and the paternal authority as recurring patterns in Rulfo’s work. Building on this, the present study argues that in *Luvina*, the barren space and repeated sounds act as formal refusals of catharsis, where historical disillusionment continues, without any moral or emotional release.

2.4 Critical approaches to *Pan’s Labyrinth*: trauma, fantasy, and ethical ambiguity

The studies on *Pan’s Labyrinth* usually focus on allegory, memory, and the ethics of resistance. In this

sense, Orme (2010) reads Ofelia's disobedience not just as rebellion, but as a form of meaningful narrative desire. Similarly, López Lerma (2015) sees the film as a kind of ethical witnessing, especially in the context of Francoist repression. Building on this, Blich (2016) points out that transcendence in the film is never stable, the fairy-tale elements do not erase violence, instead, they remain closely tied to it.

More recent scholarly work brings the focus back to return and to form. In this sense, Das (2020) shows that trauma is not resolved through the story, it is carried through the structure itself. Similarly, Reed (2022) uses hauntology to explain how the past does not end, it lingers, and almost like a spectral presence beyond history. At the same time, Pheasant-Kelly (2013) connects temporality with multidirectional memory in the film, where time and memory do not move towards closure, but keeps circulating. Because of this, even sound becomes important, as Buljančević (2024) points out, where echoes and music deepen the sense of ongoing trauma. In parallel, Avilés Ernult (2023) brings in the Freudian uncanny, showing how familiar elements return in strange, unsettling ways within del Toro's magical realist design. Taken together, these readings make it clear that the film does not aim for catharsis, it stays with disturbance, and lets it continue.

2.5 Research gap and contribution: anti-catharsis and multidirectional memory

Even though there is a rich body of work on trauma studies and magical realism, one gap still particularly remains. In particular, magical realism is rarely understood as a deliberately anti-cathartic strategy, especially across different media and national contexts. In most cases, existing studies focus more on theme, on what is represented, rather than on structure, and on how form itself holds on to unresolved history (Whitehead, 2004). At the same time, the works on *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth* often stays within limits, either tied to a single medium or confined within the national frameworks.

This study responds to that gap by making three main contributions. To begin with, it reads magical realism as a formal refusal of Aristotelian catharsis, and links this to trauma theory's concern with premature closure (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2002). In this way, the study here, brings together a close reading of Rulfo, and also a scene-based analysis of del Toro. It shifts across forms, and through this, it moves across media, and shows how different forms sustain unresolved trauma. The movement here becomes very gradual. Alongside this, it draws on Rothberg's (2009) idea of multidirectional memory. And therefore, post-revolutionary Mexican disillusionment and Francoist repression begin to echo each other as they begin to overlap. Even though they remain historically distinct, the anti-catharsis is slowly reframed, as a kind of ethical endurance and we see no cathartic release here. And also here, the discomfort is not resolved, instead, it is held in place. In turn, the act of witnessing remains responsible, it stays with the pain, and it does not become a simple emotional release (Felman & Laub, 1992; Luckhurst, 2008).

3. Methodology and Analytical Framework

The research, in this paper, follows a qualitative and comparative interpretive method, and in this way, it looks at how magical realism works with trauma. It also shows how magical realism resists the cathartic resolution in *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth*. The study here brings together a close reading of the literary text, and a focused analysis of selected scenes from the film. It moves between the two forms. And through this, it becomes easier to see how both the narrative and the aesthetic forms continue to hold unresolved historical trauma.

Simultaneously, the study here uses trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2002), and also the idea of multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009), and on aesthetic nervousness (Quayson, 2007). And also, on concepts like liminality and spatial mediation, the study here, is guided by these ideas. In this sense, magical realism here is not treated as just a genre, instead, it is understood as a formal mode. A mode that disturbs closure, and it moves away from the traditional Aristotelian idea of catharsis.

The analysis here, draws on both the textual and the cinematic elements, and it also moves between the two forms. To begin with, in *Luvina*, the narrative voice, suspended time, irony, sound and silence are highlighted and as a result, these details remain central, and they come together, and they create a sense of desolation, and also a kind of narrative stillness. On the other hand, in *Pan's Labyrinth*, the attention shifts to specific scenes, like the Pale Man's episode, and Captain Vidal's violence, and also the ending of the film, which refuses redemption, and here, the focus becomes more visual. Across these moments, recurring motifs, spatial symbols, sound, and formal disruptions are read closely, and through this, these elements begin to show how the texts work at a structural level, and they point towards an anti-cathartic mode of representation.

This study establishes a framework in this manner, and it is not intended to be exhaustive. It stays limited in its scope, and it focuses only on the two primary works. Because of this, it does not attempt a complete or exhaustive historical account. Rather the intention here, remains specific, and clearly focused. Through this approach, it looks at magical realism as an aesthetic mode. It carries trauma, and it also sustains it, across both literary and cinematic forms.

4. Comparative Analysis: Anti-Catharsis Across Literary and Cinematic Form

4.1 Suspended Temporality and the Refusal of Narrative Progress

Both *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth* disturb linear time, and in this way, trauma does not stay in the past. It continues, and it returns again and again. In *Luvina*, the town is shaped by the constant wind, where the narrator keeps saying it "never stops," and that it "keeps on blowing." Because of this, the narrative slows down and it becomes circular, almost unmoving. Here in the short story the time does not move forward, rather it lingers within. At the same time, the villagers remain mostly silent, their voices are

always faint, and it looks like almost lost in the stillness. And the communication feels fragile, and totally incomplete. In this way, it reflects what Cathy Caruth describes, trauma that returns belatedly, and cannot be fully understood in the moment it occurs. As a result, the story ends without change and without any escape, only persistence remains.

Similarly, in the film *Pan's Labyrinth*, time is disrupted through fantasy, and in this way, Ofelia's death appears like an escape. But at the same time, the historical world does not change, and Captain Vidal's violence continues, as part of the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. Because of this, even in the final moment, when Mercedes says that Ofelia's name "will not even be known," the idea of heroic remembrance is totally denied. And so, trauma here does not resolve, it remains, and it stays suspended in time. In this sense, in both the works, this suspended temporality becomes an anti-cathartic strategy, and because of this, it refuses emotional purification.

4.2 Space as Liminal Threshold and Historical Residue

In *Luvina*, the space itself carries the weight of the history, and also the rupture. And because of this matter of fact, the town feels totally abandoned, broken, and almost without life. The narrator here, calls it "a place where even the dogs have died," and likely, the image brings in silence, decay, and a deep sense of lifelessness. The houses in *Luvina* appear "as if they were hollowed out by the wind," and because of this, the town feels worn out, absolutely eroded, and slowly disappearing. Like this, the details here, do not just remain as a mere atmosphere. Rather, they turn the landscape into a quiet record of post-revolutionary failure. At the same time, the town stands on barren hills, it feels very distant, isolated, and cut off from everything else. And yet, even here, there is no escape, and there is no sense of transcendence.

Instead, the environment holds the inhabitants in place and the space here does not redeem them, rather it traps them. And trauma therefore becomes part of the geography itself, which is embedded in the land, in the houses, and in the structures that surround the people

In *Pan's Labyrinth*, the labyrinth appears like a threshold space, between fantasy and fascist violence, and in many ways it connects the magical world with the harsh political reality. Inside this space, the Pale Man's sequence becomes a strong example. Here, Ofelia enters a dark chamber, dim, silent, and almost frozen in stillness, where a strange monstrous figure sit before a large banquet. Even though the table is filled with food, the place immediately feels uneasy and threatening, and slowly the tension begins to grow. Then Ofelia eats the grapes kept on the table in front of the Pale Man, and because of this, the creature slowly wakes up. He lifts his hands, places his eyes into his palms, and then start chasing her. Because of this strange movement, the moment becomes disturbing and almost grotesque. Vision itself looks displaced, unnatural, and always watching. In this way, the scene begins to suggest the repression and surveillance, something that echoes the mechanisms of authoritarian control. Even though Ofelia manages to escape, the threat do not really disappear, instead, the violence here is

only delayed, and never removed. Therefore, this scene here, creates fear without any resolution, and the feeling of suspended threat continue to remain

Both the works therefore use liminal space in a similar way, not really as a place of transformation, but more as a space where trauma continues to endure. In the short story *Luvina*, the endurance is felt through the landscape itself. In this sense, the weight of historical failure is carried by the barren hills, the empty houses, and the constant wind. As a result, the trauma does not remain separate, instead, it becomes part of the place, slowly, and almost absorbed into it. On the other hand, *Pan's Labyrinth* presents trauma differently, it appears through visual intensity, and through disturbing imagery.

The meaning is not created through the use of silence or stillness. Instead, the meaning is created through many different elements, such as the use of visual moments, strange creatures, dark spaces, and uncomfortable scenes that linger. As a result, the film has a sense of moving through the use of its visual moments, which at times could be considered excessive. However, the literary text is very different, moving through the use of sound, silence, and the empty atmosphere, which is at times indirect. Nevertheless, the two texts are also seen to contain the elements of historical trauma, which somehow makes its way into the visible, although they are very different. Here, the trauma is seen in the unstable spaces, the landscapes, and the labyrinth-like structures, which constantly return to them. As a result, the trauma is not forgotten; instead, it is seen to linger in the present, even when it is quiet.

4.3 Sound, Silence, and the Ethics of Witnessing

The trauma in *Luvina* does not really come through any action, rather it comes more through silence and repetition. Because of this, the experience in the story feels stretched out, and almost like as if not moving forward. The narrator says the voices in the short story “sound as if they come from far away”, and this distance matters a lot. The voices in the short story are heard, but they do not fully arrive. And something in the communication begins to break. Then the wind takes over, or maybe it just drowns the speech slowly. The wind here is always constant, always making sound, but it doesn't carry any meaning at all. In a way, this becomes what Jordan (1996) calls noise without any communication. The narrative here, also holds back, it does not explain too much. And because of this, the silence and the repetition begin to shape the atmosphere. The narrative here is not direct, rather it stays and unsettles. This feels very close to Quayson's (2007) idea of aesthetic nervousness, where the fragmentation does not fully resolve, and rather the reader is left without any clear sense of cathartic release.

In the film *Pan's Labyrinth*, trauma is conveyed with a far greater sensory force, especially through its striking visuals and sound design. Violence is brought to the forefront in a direct and unsettling way rather than remaining in the background. It invades the fantasy world repeatedly, sometimes disrupting it, so that there is no clear division between reality and fantasy. This is exemplified in the bottle scene,

where Captain Vidal brutally kills a farmer's son, thus making violence immediate, visceral, and impossible to ignore. This moment is shown with harsh realism, without any stylization and without any narrative justification, and because of this direct brutality the illusion of fantasy in the film collapses. As the violence becomes unavoidable, the escapist expectations suddenly disappear. From this point onwards the narrative continues the tension through Ofelia's final act, where she refuses to spill her brother's blood, and because of this refusal she is killed. As she dies, the camera remains on her bleeding body, lingering on the moment of her death. Only after this moment, the scene shifts slowly and ambiguously towards the imagined underworld. Because the transition remains uncertain, the viewer begins to question whether the kingdom is real or only a dying hallucination, so the film therefore, never confirms the answer, so the ethical tensions continue because of this uncertainty.

In both the texts, the aesthetic form creates a mode of ethical witnessing, and because of this the reader and the viewer are not given an emotional purification. Instead, they remain within the discomfort, and the tension continues without relief. Here, we see that the narrative withholds resolution, and the audiences are forced to stay within this unease. From this point, this sustained tension allows another layer to emerge, the one that reflects what Rothberg (2009) calls multidirectional memory, and through this idea the different histories begin to echo each other. In this way, the post-revolutionary Mexican disillusionment is placed alongside the Spanish Francoist repression, and a resonance begins to form across these contexts. At the same time, this connection does not merge the two histories, and they do not even become the same. Instead, each experience remains distinct, holding on to its own historical weight.

4.4 Similarities and Differences in Anti-Cathartic Strategy

Systematically compared, the works reveal both convergence and divergence:

Table 1 Similarities and Differences in Anti-Cathartic Strategy

Dimension		<i>Luvina</i>	<i>Pan's Labyrinth</i>
Medium		Literary minimalism	Cinematic visual spectacle
Primary Device	Aesthetic	Wind, silence, narrative voice	Liminal fantasy, violent imagery
Historical Context		Post-revolutionary Mexico	Francoist Spain
Closure		None; desolation persists	Ambiguous; fantasy unresolved
Catharsis		Denied through stasis	Denied through ambiguity

As can be seen in Table 1, both works are moving away from the concept of Aristotelian catharsis. Thus, there is no emotional purgation, and there is no resolution of the tension. However, in both works, there is a withholding of the conclusion, though in a different manner. In the short story "Luvina," here this may be seen as a form of narrative stillness, where the atmosphere is quiet and the narrative again moves

very slowly, as if not moving at all. The sense of past trauma is seen through the barren landscape, the empty houses, and the howling wind in "Luvina. In "Pan's Labyrinth," this may be seen as a form of contrast, where fantasy and violence are seen together. A sense of unease arises, since they are seen together. In this way, the literary work maintains a sense of trauma through the silence and the empty space, and the film maintains a sense of trauma through visual shock.

5. Discussion

5.1. Reconfiguring Catharsis: From Emotional Purification to Ethical Endurance

The comparison here, makes one thing clear, that is both "Luvina" and "Pan's Labyrinth" move away from the Aristotelian concept of Catharsis. In other words, they do not promote Catharsis among the audience. But instead, they hold on to the trauma, and let it remain unresolved. To understand this further, Aristotle (2008) describes catharsis as the purging of pity and fear. However, the trauma theory shifts this idea. As Caruth (1996) explains, trauma does not simply end, but it returns, it repeats, and often after a delay. Because of this, both the texts avoid closure, and they do not really resolve what they present. In this way, this connects with LaCapra's (2002) argument, where he cautions against moving too quickly into "working through," since it can turn violence into something aesthetic, something too easily contained.

The change in catharsis, as seen in this particular text, is not arbitrary, but is embedded within the form itself. In a way, therefore, the magical realism in this text, far from being an accident, is the form that delays resolution and eschews resolution itself. At the same time, the absence of closure does not mean that the narrative is incomplete. Rather, as Luckhurst (2008) suggests, it becomes a form of resistance, especially against the idea of easy or therapeutic containment. As such, anti-catharsis manifests as an ethical as well as an aesthetic stance. In this way, anti-catharsis does not attempt to assuage the historical pain; instead, it keeps the discomfort alive but does not make it symbolic.

5.2. Aesthetic Mediation and the Ethics of Witnessing

Both the works suggest that the form itself carries the weight of historical trauma. In this sense, trauma is not just represented, rather it is built into the narrative and the cinematic structure. Because of this, how the story is being told becomes as important as what is being told. In this way, the idea here, connects with Whitehead (2004), who shows that trauma fiction reflects a fractured mind through disrupted form. Similarly, Quayson (2007) speaks of "aesthetic nervousness," where this kind of structural instability begins to reveal the deeper and unresolved social conflicts.

In the short story *Luvina*, meaning itself begins to slip, the communication slowly breaks down, and time itself feels suspended, and almost as if it has stopped moving. At the same time, in *Pan's Labyrinth*, the fantasy world exists alongside fascist violence, but the two never really meet in an

unresolved or clear way. Because of this, both the texts avoid giving the reader or viewer any sense of certainty or closure. In this sense, their form reflects what Felman and Laub (1992) call ethical witnessing, where engagement is not comfortable, rather it interrupts, and it unsettles. So, rather than offering an easy emotional ending or empathetic closure, both the works ask for something else, that is a sustained attention to historical violence which will not fade away.

Recent scholarships move in this same direction. For an instance, Das (2020) shows that del Toro's film deals with trauma through its form, rather than through any clear plot resolution. In a similar way, Reed (2022) explains how the hauntological return unsettles the idea of a fixed or finished past. Likewise, Sharma (2023) points out that narrative structures themselves can carry unresolved memory, instead of resolving it. Building on this, the present study takes these ideas further, and shows that magical realism, as a mode, and it works as an anti-cathartic mechanism across both literary and cinematic forms.

5.3. Liminal Space and Multidirectional Memory

One of the key ideas that emerges out of this comparison, is the role of liminal space in carrying multidirectional memory. In this context, Rothberg (2009) explains multidirectional memory as the movement of historical trauma across different cultural settings, and without losing its specific meaning. Seen this way, both *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth* reflect this idea. In both the texts, space itself begins to matter, the deserted Mexican town and the maze-like Spanish forest act as the threshold spaces where the real and the magical co-exists. Because of this, these places hold on to the traces of violence, where history does not pass, but continues to remain within the landscape itself.

Sharma's (2025) anthropological reading helps us see more clearly, that how a space itself carries rupture of both psychological and historical. In this sense, in both the works, the environment does not offer any escape or transcendence, rather the trauma continues. At the same time, when post-revolutionary Mexican disillusionment is placed alongside Francoist repression, a quiet resonance begins to emerge, but without reducing them to the same experience. Because of this, the trauma moves across these different contexts, yet it remains rooted in its own history. Seen this way, this comparison strengthens the idea that magical realism is not limited to one nation or tradition, instead, it works as a transhistorical mode, which is capable of carrying collective memory across the different geopolitical spaces.

5.4. Anti-Catharsis as Political and Ethical Intervention

In *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth* both, the refusal of catharsis also becomes political. In this sense, the closure becomes neutral, and it can impose a kind of symbolic reconciliation on histories shaped by deep, and systemic violence (LaCapra, 2002). Because of this, both the texts hold back on to redemption, and

resist softening or containing trauma within neat narrative limits. As a result, Ofelia's uncertain ascension, and the ongoing desolation of *Luvina*, do not offer any sense of triumph. Instead, these endings stay with vulnerability, rather than moving towards victory.

This kind of resistance connects with recent critiques of redemptive storytelling in the postcolonial and the trauma studies. As Luckhurst (2008) suggests, when a story rushes too quickly toward healing, it can end up covering over the deeper, and structural violence beneath it. In contrast, the anti-cathartic forms in these works do something else, that is they insist on remembering, and on staying accountable to the history. Because of this, magical realism does not become an escape into fantasy, rather it becomes a refusal to forget. Seen together, both the texts show that when trauma is sustained through form, it allows for an ethical engagement, by without slipping into a complete despair. As a result, the audiences are not given an emotional relief, instead, it is placed in the position of a witness. In this way, the magical realism works as a mode of endurance, and not as a source of narrative comfort.

Conclusion

This study shows that magical realism in *Luvina* and *Pan's Labyrinth* works in a very specific way, that is it moves against catharsis, and does so deliberately. In this sense, instead of offering emotional release or neat resolution, both the texts hold back, and let trauma remain as it is. Drawing on trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2002), along with Quayson's (2007) idea of aesthetic nervousness and Rothberg's (2009) multidirectional memory, the analysis makes this clearer. Because of this, what we see in both works is a refusal of Aristotelian catharsis, where purification and reconciliation are withheld. At the same time, historical violence is not resolved, it continues, through the suspended time, liminal spaces, sound, ambiguity, and endings that do not allow for redemption. So, anti-catharsis does not appear as a weakness in the narrative, rather it becomes a form of ethical endurance, and becomes a refusal to close too soon. Seen comparatively, the post-revolutionary Mexican desolation and the Francoist repression begin to resonate with each other, yet they are not reduced to the same thing. In this way, magical realism moves across texts, media, and cultures, working as a structural mode that keeps historical discomfort alive, while also asking the reader or viewer to remain as a witness.

Future research can take this further by looking at similar anti-cathartic patterns in other magical realist texts and films, especially in post-authoritarian and postcolonial contexts. In this way, the framework can move beyond these two works and open into a wider, and transnational field. At the same time, bringing in film theory, sound studies, and memory studies together can help us better understand how form itself carries and shapes collective trauma. In this way, the focus on anti-catharsis at the center of this study is beginning to rethink magical realism, not as escape, but as continued ethical engagement with unresolved historical violence.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive suggestions, which have significantly improved the quality, clarity, and rigor of this article. Their valuable feedback helped me to enhance the presentation and strengthen the overall contribution of the work.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Declaration

This manuscript is original work and has not been submitted or published elsewhere in full or in part. The research, analysis, and arguments presented in this article are the author's own. AI tools, if used, were solely for language refinement, grammatical clarity, and formatting assistance. No AI tool was used for generating the core ideas, analysis, interpretations, or findings of the research.

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