Chapter 4

García Márquez as Mythoclast

"It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments."

Franz Boas.

"Introduction to James Teit”.

The radical mythmakers or mythoclasts differ from the orthodox mythographers in their concept and creation of myths. For a mythoclast, all myths presuppose a previous narrative, and in turn form the model for future narratives. As Perter Münz very aptly puts it: “Every myth, we know, has both a past and a future” (ix).

The pattern of promise and fulfilment need never end. No sooner has one narrative been fulfilled than the fulfilment becomes in turn the promise for further mythmaking. Thus myths revoke other myths. Laurence Coupe terms this phenomenon as radical typology. According to him: “where orthodox typology works in terms of closure, radical typology works in terms of disclosure” (108). The term “mythoclast” is another word for radical typology.

The concept of mythoclast could be explained with the example of The Bible. When the New Testament was written, crucial figures from early Biblical myth as Adam and Moses were reaffirmed and yet also rewritten. To St. Paul, Jesus is the ‘second’ Adam, restoring the paradisal bliss lost in the
original fall from the garden of Eden: "For as in Adam all died, so in Christ all shall be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:22). As Laurence Coupe puts it: "the first correct impression of this kind of reading is it is an arrogant act of approbation. A whole body of scripture and belief is translated at a stroke into a mere prologue to an upstart religion. It becomes an 'Old Testament to the 'New' " (107). So, in a sense, the New Testament is a demythologisation of the Old and the New Testament could serve as a paradigm text for the mythoclast.

The mythoclast's approach to mythology is rational. Euhemerus, Sir James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Franz kafka, and Roland Barthes adopt a rationalist and radical attitude. They are often referred to as demythologisers. They could also be called mythoclasts. The mythoclast is usually a writer radically opposed to the existing state of affairs in society: usually the political and religious practises existing in society. In the hands of the mythoclast, writing becomes a weapon to oppose and perhaps change society. The mythoclast is usually a committed writer and one of the common features of mythoclastic writing is the obsession with the theme of apocalypse.

The theme of apocalypse has been a recurrent source of inspiration in literary and visual art for the mythoclast. As a mythic mode of expression, apocalypse is found in Hebrew (Ezekiel, Daniel, Zachariah) and in Christian (the thirteenth chapter of Mark, the twenty fourth chapter of Matthew, the second epistle of Peter, the Revelation of John) religious texts. In all these texts, the end of the world is described from the point of view of a narrator who is radically opposed to existing spiritual and political practises.
The apocalyptists threaten grave and severe punishment to the faithless but promise heavenly rewards for the faithful. The moral dualism of apocalypse is embodied in the metaphoric contraries of Christ and Anti-Christ, Whore and Bride, Babylon and Jerusalem, this world and the next. According to Lois Parkinson Zamora: "Apocalyptic narrative moves towards an ending that contains a particular attitude toward the goals of the narration and toward an end that implies an ideology" (14).

Apocalyptic writers, religious as well as fictional, consider profoundly important questions about human history and destiny, about the relation of the individual to the human community, about suffering and the transcendence of suffering, about the end of life and after. Apocalyptic modes of apprehending reality have great appeal because they imply that history possesses structure and meaning.

In Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye elaborates on three organisations of myths and archetypal symbols in literature. The first, he calls undisputed myth, generally concerned with gods or demons, and which takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification; one desirable and the other undesirable. He says: "these worlds are often identified with the existential heavens and hells of the religions contemporary with such literature: these two forms of metaphorical organisation we call the apocalyptic and the demonic respectively" (139).

Frye identifies four narrative categories of literature that are broader than or logically prior to the ordinary literary genres. There are four such categories: the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic or satiric. Frye
has classified apocalyptic literature in the fourth category. That is the ironic or satiric. Using irony and satire, the Latin American writers of the second half of the twentieth century, García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortazar, and Alejo Carpentier depict the political realities of Latin America. Apocalyptic narrative usually has specific objectives as the goal of narration and moves towards an end that implies an ideology. *One Hundred Years* is the most explicit example of this movement. The fiction of García Márquez presents the beginnings and ends of individual human beings and humanity as a whole. García Márquez's perspective is mythical as well as eschatological. He follows the temporal movement of religious texts dealing with apocalypse in his fiction. It is neither aimless nor endless but successive and purposeful.

García Márquez's novels move towards an end, which may be absurd to the characters in the novel but is significant to the novelist and the readers. *One Hundred Years* marks the apocalypse of a whole community. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975) the apocalypse is political. In this novel García Márquez elaborates on the moral degeneration and political travesties of the general. His dictatorship, as Zamora suggests is "an image of the loosing (sic) of Satan, his prolonged domination suggestive of the reign of the Beast which in Revelation signals the end of time" (25). In *The Chronicle of a Death Foretold* the end is neither social nor political but individual and wholly inevitable.

García Márquez employs the temporal patterns of apocalyptic narration for achieving mythological effect. His mythoclastic designs are achieved by yoking together historical events with apocalyptic mythology. So, his novels
are based on actual historical and cultural events taking place around him in Latin America in general, and in Columbia in particular. García Márquez mythifies these events by using apocalyptic images and phrases.

Numerous critics have commented upon the cyclical movement of the structure of One Hundred Years. The cycle of birth, growth, maturity, decline, death and rebirth seen in Macondo is described by Carmen Arnaud as Spenglerian cycle. Ricardo Galton and G. D. Carillo have drawn attention to the repetition of the Buendía’s names and personalities. How generation after generation, events recur and activities are repeated. Palencia-Roth discusses the apocalyptic archetypes in the novel, contrasting the linear with the cyclical. The seemingly endless generational cycles of the Buendias and the recurring sequence of events in Macondo are set against the progressive temporal structure of the myth of apocalypse.

In mythology, time is conceived as cyclic. This assumption is based on the cyclic patterns of nature: day followed by night, the cyclic nature of the seasons, the phases of the moon etc. Northrop Frye posits that the very structure of mythology is based on this cycle. He goes further to divide literature on the basis of this cyclic pattern, thus showing that literature and mythology are structurally alike. Frye divides myth into four cyclic phases based on what he calls natural divisions. The four periods of the day: morning, noon, evening, night; four aspects of the water cycle: rain, fountains, rivers, sea, or snow; four periods of life: youth, maturity, age and death (Anatomy 160). However, Judaistic mythology, particularly Christian apocalyptic literature is based on a linear concept of time.
García Márquez succeeds in yoking together the cyclic and linear designs in *One Hundred Years*. It is his mythoclastic design to question both the cyclic and linear patterns while making use of both. The seemingly endless generational cycles of the Buendias and the recurring sequence of events in Macondo are rendered in the progressive temporal structure of the myth of apocalypse. They do eventually reach the end: "The family was a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spiralling into eternity were it not for the irremediable wearing of the axle." At the beginning of *One Hundred Years* Macondo is described as a world, which is recent and very young. It resembles "The Book of Genesis" in *The Bible*. But in the last chapter, as Aureliano Buendia deciphers Melquiade's text the realisation dawns on him that not only he but the whole of Macondo is racing towards a cataclysmic end. The final chapter of *One Hundred Years* echoes "The Revelation" from *The Bible*. Therefore, in spite of all repetitions of proper names and events and the circular movement of time that the characters themselves experience, Macondo was moving forward and inexorably towards its inevitable end. Time, after all, in *One Hundred Years*, as in *The Autumn*, as in fact all apocalyptic literature moves in linear fashion. As Zamora puts it:

The fiction of Gabriel García Márquez presents an extended consideration of temporal reality, of the beginnings and ends of individual human beings and humanity as a whole. García Márquez's perspective is mythical as well as eschatological: Temporal movement in his novels is neither aimless nor endless but successive and purposeful, advancing on an end to which
significance can be assigned, if not by the characters in the novel, then by the novelist and the reader (25).

When they approach the end of apocalyptic narrative, the narrators become aware that the apocalyptic end will be the end of not only themselves but of the whole world. The tension that this awareness creates is reflected in the quickening of the pace of narration as time bears down heavily upon the apocalyptists. In apocalypse, the death of the individual coincides with the end of the world. For the apocalyptist there is no distinction between history and biography. So, he must balance the individual's need to reform against his vision.

At the end of the essay titled "The Mexican Intelligentsia" the Mexican poet Octavio Paz makes an observation that is particularly relevant to this context. Of recent literary visions of apocalypse referring to Mexico, he states:

Our cultural crisis for perhaps the first time in history, is the same as the crisis of the species. We are no longer moved by Valery's melancholy reflections on vanished civilisations, because it is not Western culture that is in danger of being destroyed tomorrow, as the culture of the Greeks and the Arabs, the Aztecs and the Egyptians were destroyed in the past: it is man himself. Every man's fate is that of man himself. World history has become every one's task and our labyrinth is the labyrinth of all mankind (171-73).

The mythoclast does not use apocalypse as found in religious literature. He uses parody and hyperbole to present a distorted and exaggerated picture of the facts. In his short story "Big Mama's Funeral" (1962), García Márquez
parodies the hyperbole of apocalyptic description and the magnitude of its terminal vision with his own exaggerated account of the end of Big Mama.

Senseless and meaningless waiting is one of the recurring themes in García Márquez’s fiction. In one of the early stories about Macondo, “Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo” (1955), Isabel describes time as a vicious, jelly-like thing, and the people as paralysed, waiting for the rain to stop. The theme of waiting is repeated in No One Writes to the Colonel (1961), where an aged colonel who fought alongside Aureliano Buendia has been waiting for decades for the pension, which the victorious generals had promised him. The colonel’s hope turns to self-delusion as nothing happens. He never receives his pension. If the apocalyptist promises rewards for the believers, the patient, and the good people, the mythoclast has nothing to offer.

In No One Writes to the Colonel all the characters are caught in the web of circumstances they cannot influence. The characters of One Hundred Years too are without hope. All the characters are swept to their inevitable ends. Only Aureliano Buendia, enlightened by Melquiade’s text is aware of what is happening around him. But he cannot stop the inevitable as he too meets his end.

In the Old Testament, the Biblical prophet’s vision promises the fulfilment of the history of the people of Israel. The prophet promised the establishment of a blessed community. But by the second century before Christ, the Israelites became more and more conscious of the contrast between their contemporary historical situation of exile and oppression with the promise of the blessed community. Their prophetic vision began to be replaced
by an apocalyptic vision, which insisted on a radical change or break in history as the only possible remedy for existing evils.

This biblical narrative pattern forms the basis of *One Hundred Years*. In the beginning of the novel, for instance, José Arcadio’s premonitions are not about death but about the establishment of a community. He is the prophet who like Moses guides his people to the Promised Land, which like Israel, represents the fulfilment of their history. But very soon Melquíades appears to write the apocalypse of that community. Palencia-Roth puts it succinctly:

To look toward the past is to look toward one’s beginnings; the farther back one goes, either in the life of the individual or the life of mankind, the more one tends toward the mythical past. To look toward the future is, evidently, to look to the end; and a concern with the end leads toward ideas of eschatology and apocalypse (37-38).

The mythoclast may use apocalypse for comic and satiric effect. In the short story “One Day after Saturday,” García Márquez treats the theme of apocalypse in a comic manner. Father Antonio Isabel de Santísimo Sacramento del Altar, the ninety-four year old priest of Maconda experiences a rain of dead birds. He tries but fails to remember if such a plague is described in “The Revelation.” He discovers the agent of the catastrophe: a peasant boy who missed the train from Macondo. The priest labels the boy, the Wandering Jew. The plague of dead birds as well as Padre Antonio Isabel reappear in *One Hundred Years* and here the inspiration of the Wandering Jew is an old man with wings.
In *Leaf Storm* (1957), however, García Márquez’s treatment of apocalyptic concerns is hardly comic. The epigraph is from *Antigone*, and its prologue describes the whirlwind of the U. S. banana company and the leaf storm, which follows it into Macondo. The entire novel is written in the same apocalyptic tone of the final pages of *One Hundred Years*. Whereas the biblical hurricane, which ultimately sweeps Macondo away arrives only at the end of *One Hundred Years*, the metaphoric leaf storm pervades *Leaf Storm* from its opening paragraph.

Time and narration are linked by García Márquez in *One Hundred Years*. In the early paradisal days described in the first section of the novel, the passage of time is harmonious and goes unnoticed. It is the breakdown of the patriarch’s perpetual motion machine that heralds the shift early in the novel, from prophetic to apocalyptic eschatology. Its failure makes José Arcadio realise that time is discontinuous and that Macondo is no longer paradise. The appearance of clocks coincides with the appearance of an old man with white hair. He is Prudencio Aguilar, whom José Arcadio had killed years before, and who signals the irruption of the past and death into Macondo. Zamoara conforms: “Prudencio’s appearance initiates Macondo’s apocalyptic history, just as the appearance of a man whose ‘hairs were white like wool’” (Rev. 1:14) initiates the apocalyptic events recounted in Revelation” (32).

José Arcadio and the progeny that he engenders are afflicted by solitude and alienation. It is memory of the paradisal Macondo that isolates and alienates the Buendías from their present time and place. In his article “The Dialectic of Solitude” Octavio Paz avers that the Latin American sense of
solitude originates as a longing for the idealised time and place in the mythical past—whether a paradise or a wholly centre of the universe. Paz relates this longing or nostalgia to the longing for the divine body from which humanity senses itself separated. He refers to the idealised history, which all mythologies describe:

A time when time was not succession and transition, but rather the perpetual source of a fixed present in which all times, past and future, were contained. When man was exiled from that eternity in which all times were one, he entered chronometric time and became a prisoner of the clock and the calendar. As soon as time was divided up into yesterday, today, and tomorrow, into hours, minutes and seconds, man ceased to be one with time, ceased to coincide with the flow of reality (The Labyrinth of Solitude 209).

Similarly with clocks in Macondo, the rhythms of nature are replaced by those of empire—rise and fall, beginning and end, institution and catastrophe. “Macondo’s history begins as an idyll,” says Zamora, “degenerates into an imperial epic, until—we understand at the end of the novel—it is reconstituted by the mythic vision of Melquiade’s text” (32).

Apocalypse is an emphatically inclusive mythical history: Christ’s statement: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” echoes throughout “Revelation.” The narrator of “Revelation” speaks from a point beyond time and feels compelled to write his history because God has compelled him to do so: “Write the things which thou hast seen, the things
which are, and the things which shall be hereafter” (Rev. 1:19). At the time John wrote “The Revelation,” early Christians were facing political persecution and John’s apocalyptic narrative tries to make sense of their suffering as well as give them the consolation that their persecutors will be punished.

José Arcadio Buendía leads an expeditionary force into a new world and hopes to create an urban civilisation out of the surrounding wilderness. Seeing a dazzling city spoken with a supernatural echo, he orders his men to make a clearing beside the river at the coolest spot on the bank, and there to found Macondo. José Arcadio foresees the establishment of a line that will continue forever, oblivious to the fact that history presses steadily towards apocalypse.

José Arcadio evokes the image of Moses who led his people into a Promised Land. He is trying to forget his past and begin history again. But the moral burdens of the past refuse to leave him. The curse of incest, which had plagued the Buendías in Riohacha continues to haunt them and they lose their Arcadian Macondo. The harsh realities of Macondo: the civil wars, economic exploitation of the land by alien usurpers, family tragedy, solitude and crushing personal loneliness eventually overwhelm paradisal visions.

In Macondo, past, present and future co-exist and run into one another. In Melquíade’s narrative, generations of Buendías repeat the same pattern until the end of the narrative, which coincides with the end of the Buendías. The importance of Melquíade’s narrative record of Macondo is suggested early on in the incident of the insomnia plague. The loss of sleep is not the most serious
effect of this plague, but rather the loss of memory that accompanies it. Whoever was affected forgot the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past. Gradually the whole town sinks irrevocably into the quicksand of forgetfulness.

It would seem that loss of memory of the past would do little harm as Macando did not have a past. However, Visitacion and Cataure, the Indian servants in the Buendia household identify the illness even before its symptoms are evident. They have been afflicted with this illness already and are the first to identify the illness. Because of it, they have lost their cultural past and this fact presages Macondo’s loss of its own Edenic past in the turbulence of civil wars and economic colonisation by the Yankees.

A temporary antidote to the plague is discovered, however. It is the written word. Every object is labelled and its use recorded. It was Aureliano who conceived the formula that protects them against loss of memory for several months and his father Jose Arcadio Buendia puts it into practice all through the house and later imposed it on the whole village: “With an inked brush he marked everything with its name: table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, pen. He went to the corral and marked the animals and plants: cow, goat, pig, hen, cassava, caladium, banana (One Hundred Years 48).

It is when Jose Arcadio works on his spinning dictionary that Melquiades returns to Macondo and begins to record One Hundred Years. Readers learn only in the final paragraph of the novel that it is Melquiades, rather than an omniscient narrator, as they have been led to believe, who has preserved the memory of Macondo beyond its cataclysmic end. Aureliano
Babilonia, the last of the Buendías realises just before Macondo is swept off
the face of the earth that Melquíades parchments are both history and
prediction. The novel ends with this realisation: “It was foreseen that the city
of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the
memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish
deciphering the parchments” (One Hundred Years 422).

José Arcadio demonstrates the power of language when he uses words
to preserve the memory of his people when they are afflicted by the plague of
insomnia. Zamora has rightly commented: “Language is for the apocalyptist
the sole remaining defence against historical chaos. His hermetic symbols
serves to testify the conviction that language may yet order and communicate
important, even serving truths to those who can read and interpret them” (39-40).

In the newly enlarged Buendía house, Melquíades is ascribed a room
where he spends hours on end “scribbling his enigmatic literature” on the
parchment that is brought to him. He tells José Arcadio: “I have found
immortality” (One Hundred Years 74) ironically, just before he dies.
Melquíades meant the verbal record of the Buendia history, and not that the
Buendías themselves, will endure. José Arcadio misunderstands him
completely and only the last Buendia-Aureliano Babilonia realises the
significance of Melquíades’s statement.

Though García Márquez lets the written document of its history to
survive the apocalypse of Macondo, he is not unaware of the impossibility of
this occurring. García Márquez himself subverts this view of language in One
About José Arcadio futile attempt to preserve the memory of his people by labelling everything, the novelist comments: “Thus they went on living in a reality that was slipping away, momentarily captured by words, but which would escape irremediably when they forgot the values of the written world” (One Hundred Years 48-49). Here, García Márquez subverts the Keatsean art versus nature dialectic. The so-called permanence of art when compared to nature is only relative, García Márquez seems to suggest, and not absolute. When words fail to signify, the communication system breaks down. So, the success of the apocalyptist is dependent on various factors like the preservation of the document, the correct decoding of it and also the correct interpretation of the cryptic symbols.

The biblical apocalyptist undertakes a communal service by mediating between the source of his text and its audience; between God and His believers. The Revelation is made to a select audience so that they may maintain their communal identity and ensure their communal salvation. However, in writing the apocalypse of Macondo and the Buendías, Melquíades is not compelled to do so by any feelings of communal service. He very categorically states that the last of the line is eaten by ants. Moreover, he deliberately writes his document in the “dead” language Sanskrit in order to keep his record a mystery. Even Aureliano Babilona who decodes the parchment is not governed by a sense of community. He has no intention of warning the community or saving it but reads the text rather out of curiosity and the pleasure of solving a riddle. Both Melquíades and Aureliano by refusing to and/or trying to communicate are practising the radical and rational
approach of the mythoclast. At the same time, the apocalyptists are well aware of the fragility of the words with which they forestall the inevitable apocalypse. They are greatly burdened by the pressures and structures of history and it is reflected in the tension evident in their style. Their sentences are often constructed with a running inevitability to them, the narrative never pausing but flowing on and on, as if impervious to the events it relates, synthesising everything as it flows towards its predetermined end.

Zamora refers to the eschatological pressure inherent in Melquíade's narration. Melquíade's phrases “many years later” and “a few years later” which begin the novel become “some years later,” “a few years later,” and then “a few months later”. Later Aureilano approaching the end of Melquíade's parchments, accelerates his reading, even skipping pages in order to keep up with time itself as Macondo hurtles towards its end. The narrative thus reiterates cosmic process.

Albert Einstein, through his theory of relativity has shown that time is not a separate entity but is relative to space. Physicists maintain that time moved at an accelerated pace the moment just after the big bang and will be accelerated during the big crunch. The movement of time will accelerate before it races to a stop, they tell us, in a black hole. The famous physicist and mathematician Stephen W. Hawking states:

According to the general theory of relativity, there must have been a state of infinite density in the past, the big bang, which would have been an effective beginning of time. Similarly, if the whole universe re-collapsed there must be another state of infinite
density in the future, the big crunch, which would be an end of time. Even if the whole universe did not re-collapse, there would be singularities in any localised regions that collapsed to form black holes. These singularities would be an end of time for anyone who fell into the black hole (183).

In One Hundred Years, the narrator's apocalyptist stance allows him to tell the story of the Buendías in a single breathless sentence, as it were, with the knowledge of the annihilating forces at work in history, and thus the need for haste. As Zamora puts it: “the apocalyptic ending of a novel is as fictional as its beginning or any other part of its fictional history. However, the novelist's choice of such an ending is important because the paradigms of apocalypse impose an ending that confers historical significance” (44).

The narrative structure of García Márquez's novel Chronicle of a Death Foretold is based on the relationship between individual vision and communal destiny. The theme of this novel is the fated history of an individual, Santiago Nasar, and not the entire world, yet the tone and perspective of the narrator is that of an apocalyptist. The narrator hopes to make sense of the 'senseless' death of Santiago Nasar, twenty seven years after the murder, by means of the narration. Though Santiago's death does not imply the end of a community or family, it is none the less, a group drama.

The biblical apocalyptist believes that the destinies of the individual and that of the community are foretold and therefore irrevocable. Yet he believes that his narration will induce his listeners and readers to modify their ways even as he shows that it is too late. The apocalyptist labours under the
belief that language has the power to reform (Christ is imaged as the word in Revelation). He implies that he may modify the history he foretells. This too is the narrator’s intention in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. If Aureliano Babilonia’s narration survives the end of Macondo, the narrator’s “chronicle” is the mitigating circumstance of Santiago’s murder. His dedicated effort to confer meaning on the events he recounts is in fact rewarded. Zamora makes this observation about the novel: “Through the process of returning, resounding, ordering, telling Santiago’s history, the narrator understands what he has suspected all along, that the murder was inevitable and that it cannot be justified -- only accepted” (43).

Santiago Nasar has been unconsciously created as a Christ figure in the text. His murder is interpreted as a sacrifice to save the collective primitive order of the town. As P. Krishnan Unni observes: “The reference to Santiago’s family name Nazareth and to ‘nailing’ him to the door of his house recalls Christ’s boyhood at Nazareth and his crucifixion” (25).

Apocalypse is directly related to political and social realities. The biblical apocalypse developed as a reaction to the political and moral crisis, which arose when the established authority of the history of a community was challenged. Apocalypse proposes to change the existing inadequacies and abuses of society and proposes radical changes in the organisation of future world governance. García Márquez’s leftist leanings and his opposition to autocratic governments and the interference of the U. S hegemony in Latin America are well known. He has observed that Latin American writers are mostly dissidents. He says that it is the highly charged political atmosphere of
Latin America that makes its writers write political fiction and non-fiction.

García Márquez has said:

In Latin America underdevelopment is total, integral, it affects every part of our lives. The problems of our societies are mainly political. And the commitment of a writer is with the reality of all of society, not just with a small part of it. If not, he is as bad as the politicians who disregard a large part of our reality. That is why authors, painters, writers in Latin America get politically involved.

I am surprised by the little resonance authors have in the U. S and in Europe. Politics is made there only by politicians. (Interview. Marlise Simmons 7)

By a strange coincidence, at the time The Autumn of the Patriarch was published in 1975, numerous Latin American novelists brought out books on the theme of dictatorship: the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier brought out Reasons of State, the Paraguayan author Augusta Roa Bastos's The Supremo and the Venezuelan writer Arturo Uslar Pietres's Office for the Dead were published. By a stranger coincidence, O.V. Vijayan wrote his dictator novel Dharmapuraanam in 1975 and it was in that year the Indian prime-minister Indira Gandhi announced a state of emergency in India and assumed dictatorial powers.

The Autumn of the Patriarch presents a chaotic and pre-apocalyptic world, a world without moral discrimination and ruled by a tyrannical and cruel autocrat. The Autumn is located in a nameless Latin American country ruled by an ageing dictator, a political Anti-Christ. García Márquez employs
grotesque images and exaggerated horrors in *The Autumn* to describe the apocalyptic reign of the general with strategies akin to those of biblical apocalyptic symbolism. The naturalistic setting and causal sequences of *One Hundred Years* is abandoned in *The Autumn* for a more expressionistic aesthetic. The traditional sequential narration of Melquiade's manuscript is replaced by the long winding, circulatory prose of post-modern writing in *The Autumn*. The general is repeatedly indicated by a series of highly suggestive metonyms suggestive of the beast in biblical apocalypse: "hernicated testicle", "the elephantine feet", "the buzzing ears".

In "Revelation," the period just before and during the apocalypse is described as a transition time which does not properly belong to either the old world or the new, but the interval which has its symbolic embodiment in the three and a half years' reign of the beast. John describes the beast: "He is like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion" (Rev. 13:2). He destroys his political opponents. Biblical scholars and commentators posit that he is meant to represent the state, with its seven heads symbolising the seven Roman emperors who had been given divine honours and were thus guilty of blasphemy.

The beasts appear during the period of transition described in "Revelation". The first reigns for forty two months and the second, the duration of whose reign is not stated, probably represents the priesthood of the imperial cult. John describes the second beast: "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, he spake like a dragon, and he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and
causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast’’
(Rev. 13: 11-12).

The transition period is marked by its nightmarish atmosphere. Mutual trust is lost in public and personal relationships. The dominant features are fear of the future and confusion between reality and appearance. Disorder and atrophy are all pervasive. In The Autumn, it is the governing mood of the president’s palace and his realm. On the death of the president when the people invade his palace they are greeted by:

the stench that came to us from the rear of the garden and the stink of the hen-house and the smell of dung and urine ferment of cows and soldiers . . . . We saw the ruined offices and protocol salons through which the brazen cows wandered; eating the velvet curtains and nibbling at the trim on the chairs, we saw heroic portraits of saints and soldiers thrown to the floor among broken furniture

(Autumn 6).

The general himself is not unaware of this disorder. For he keeps repeating: “What a mess!” This disorder that pervades the president’s palace could be explained through the second law of thermodynamics in physics which states that entropy of an isolated system increases with time.

In apocalyptic narration, natural calamities and wars are the outcome of human misdeeds. In “Revelation,” John describes the poisoning of water, and the drying up of the sea during the time of transition. The general in The Autumn actually sells the sea to the Americans to pay off the national debt. American engineers carry it off to Arizona and the country is left a veritable
blazing hell.

The political chaos and moral degradation of the general is complete and irreversible. Even order is diabolic and the efficiency and organisational capacities of Jose Ignacio Saenz de la Barra are directed at torturing and persecuting the general's subjects in an efficient manner. He describes his activities as "peace within order" and "progress within order," and justifies his cruelty in terms of that order. So complete is the moral and political corruption of the dictator's world that it subverts and destroys the very conception of order. What Umberto Eco says of *Finnegan's Wake* is also true of *The Autumn*. According to Umberto Eco: "It [*Finnegan's Wake*] is a profoundly paradoxical book in that it assumes both order and disorder simultaneously: it constitutes 'chaosmos' a mixture of cosmos and chaos" (87).

The character of the general is not based on any specific dictator of history or of Latin America. "My original intention was to make a synthesis of all Latin American dictators, especially, the Caribbean ones," says García Márquez.

However Gomez's personality was so powerful and he exercised such an intense fascination over me, that the patriarch contains much more of him than any of the others. In any case, the mental image I have of both men is the same. This doesn't mean, of course, that he is the character in the book—it's more an idealisation of his image (Interview, Fragrance 82-83).

The theme of power has been a constant source for Latin American literature as it has been for García Márquez. He says: "The dictator is the only
mythological figure Latin America has produced and his historical cycle is far from over" (Fragrance 88).

Through the demythologisation of mythic heroes, García Márquez creates his anti-hero. Mythical heroes are usually marked by their physical prowess, physical beauty, valour and moral uprightness. The general of The Autumn is marked out by his ugliness, cowardice and moral depravity. Repeated references are made to the general’s feet of an elephant, his dog whimper and his hernicated testicle, all of which remind the reader of the Beast in “Revelation”.

The general holds absolute sway over his subjects. He controls his country’s resources, the weather and even the time of day. His power and dominance is more pervasive than Big Mama’s as described in the story: “Big Mama’s Funeral.” The general controls the weather: “The inconceivable evil of a heart which had sold the sea to a foreign power and condemned us to live facing this limitless plain of harsh lunar dust where the bottomless sunsets pain us in our souls” (The Autumn 39).

The general controls even the time of day:

While he opened a way lighted by the sudden day through the persistent adulators who proclaimed him the undoer of dawn, commander of time, and repository of light, until an officer of the high command dared stop him in the vestibule and came to attention with the news general sir that it’s only five after two, another voice, five after three in the morning general sir, and he fetched a ferocious clout with the back of his hand and howled with
all his aroused chest so that the whole world would hear him, its
eight o’clock, God damn it, eight o’clock, I said, God’s order (The
Autumn 55).

The general passes himself off as God’s replacement and his activities
are an ironic parody of Christ’s. He is besieged by mobs of lepers, blind people
and cripples who begged for the salt of health from his hands, and lettered
politicians and dauntless adulators who proclaimed him “the corrector of earth-
quakes, eclipses, leap-years and other errors of God” (The Autumn 10).

The greatest sacrilege of the general is neither his cruelty nor his
ruthlessness but rather his pretension that he is the Christ. Thus, when his boat
enters the rural settlements, the people receive him with Easter drum, thinking
that the “times of glory” have arrived. Meanwhile all the activities of the
general indicate that he is the Anti-Christ. He is ruthless in his authority and
the general wreaks reprisal at the slightest hint of revolt or disobedience. He
rapes a woman and then has her husband cut into small pieces because he
would be an enemy if allowed to live.

The height of the general’s cruelty is displayed in the manner he treats
his trusted deputy general Rodrigo de Aguilar when he turned a traitor:

Major general Rodrigo de Aguilar entered on a silver tray stretched
out full-length on a garnish of cauliflower and laurel leaves, steeped
with spices, oven brown, embellished with the uniform of five
golden almonds . . . and a sprig of parsley in his mouth, ready to be
served at a banquet of comrades by the official carvers to the
petrified horror of the guests as without breathing . . . and when
every plate held an equal portion of minister of defence stuffed with pine nuts and aromatic herbs, he gave the order to begin, eat hearty gentlemen (The Autumn 98).

The general is here parodying Christ’s act of dividing bread to his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion telling them that it was his body. The symbolic act of eating Christ’s body absolves his disciples of their sins. The general, on the other hand, is asking his closest associates to literally feed on the dead body of his traitor. While Christ’s act is symbolic, simple and bestowing grace on his disciples; the general’s act is cruelly ostentatious, literal and intended to shock and threaten his underlings.

This is not the only sacrilegious act of the general. He claims that his birth is immaculate: “He was a man without a father like the most illustrious despots of history . . . his mother of my heart Bendicion Alvarado to whom the school books attributed the miracle of having conceived him without recourse to any male and having received in a dream the hermetical key to the messianic destiny” (The Autumn 39). His people proclaimed that the general was endowed with miraculous powers. They said: “All he had to do was point at trees for them to bear fruit and at animals for them to grow and at men for them to prosper, and he had ordered them to take the rain away from the places where it disturbed the harvest and take it to the drought stricken lands” (The Autumn 72). The general has the audacity to attain the canonisation of his mother Bendicion Alvarado “on the basis of the overwhelming proofs of her qualities as a saint. He named her patroness of the nation, curer of the ill and mistress of birds and a national holiday was declared on her birthday” (The
The general declares war with the Holy See at Rome for refusing to recognise the canonisation of his mother. The general has his adulators declare to the whole world that, “he had skin given back to lepers, sight to the blind, agility to cripples” (The Autumn 191). Schoolboy texts referred to him as a patriarch of huge size “who never left his house because he could not fit through the doors, who loved children and swallows, who knew the language of certain animals, who had the virtue of being able to anticipate the designs of nature, who could guess a person’s thoughts by one look in the eyes” (The Autumn 39). The general and his adulators try to create an image that he is a saint and a saviour. The mythoclast foregrounds the dichotomy that exists between reality and image and The Autumn thrives on this disparity.

If the mythmaker creates heroes remarkable for their physical prowess, beauty and valour, the mythoclast creates anti-heroes notorious for their ugliness, moral depravity and cowardice. The general is never fully described. Instead he is repeatedly referred to by his “hernicated testicles,” his spurs and his elephant feet. The partial descriptions suggest the paranoia of the general. He never stands fully in view of his people. Although the general is more specifically described than the beasts and monsters of Revelation, like them, he becomes a universal symbol of political repression and hence, inversely of human suffering.

As in One Hundred Years, García Márquez’s apocalyptic vision in The Autumn allows him to explore individual and communal ends. The general is terrified of time’s passing, and his obsessive concern is how not to die; how to
prolong his era. Biblical apocalypse assures the believers that time is on their 
side and the passing of time is necessary for the appropriate moment for the 
destruction evil. The general of The Autumn is very well aware that he is on 
the losing side of time. For him, according to Zamora, “Time becomes his 
personal enemy, the only opposition that has ever threatened his absolute 
power, the only assassin who will inevitably succeed” (48).

The use of irony as a mythoclastic technique is evident in the self-
delusion of the general. In mythology, saints and prophets achieve self-
realisation and after this have been able to dedicate their lives for the common 
good of humanity. The most celebrated case being that of the Buddha.

In his essay, “The Dialectics of Solitude” Ocatvio Paz posits that, 
“Myth, biography, history, and poetry describe a period of withdrawal and 
solitude—almost always during early youth—preceding a return to the world 
and to action. These are years of preparation and study, but above all they are 
years of sacrifice and penitence, of self-examination, of expiation and 
purification. Paz quotes Arnold Toynbee who cites the instances of “the myth 
of Plato’s cave, the lives of St. Paul, Buddha, Mohammed, Machiavelli and 
Dante” (204-05).

While these prophets and saints have achieved self-realisation through 
solitude, the Anti-Christ and the wielders of absolute power are forced to self-
delusion. If the saints through giving up of their egos attain the divine, the 
autocrat through the excessive indulgence of his ego experiences despair. The 
autocrat’s self-delusion is abetted by his sycophants and adulators who tell him 
only what he wants to hear and so increase his self-delusion.
In The Autumn, the general orders the murder of two hundred children. He has the officers who had the order carried out, killed. He denies the responsibility of the death of the children by simply denying and destroying all evidence of their existence. So inclusive is his self-delusion that he writes his own graffiti on the walls of his bathroom. “Long live the general, long live the general, God damn it . . . ” and surrounds himself with adulators who proclaim him “undoer of dawn, commander of time, repository of light,” “general of the universe,” with a rank “higher than that of death.” As he grows increasingly terrified, he begins to insist that his sycophants call him “the eternal one,” and that shouts of “long live the general” are taken in the most literal sense. When his double dies and everyone thinks that it is the general, he reappears and kills his cabinet members for the crime of imagining that they had survived him. The mythoclastic technique of irony is again used by García Márquez to ridicule the attempts at immortality of the general. Each chapter begins with a description of the death of the general, so, in fact, he seems to die not once but six times.

The ending of The Autumn follows the pattern of biblical apocalypse and does not subvert it in the manner of One Hundred Years and Chronicle. In The Autumn, the general’s subjects live to see his death and escape his oppression. They ecstatically celebrate “the good news that the uncountable time of eternity had come to an end” (206).

Though García Márquez’s novel The General in His Labyrinth is one of the last novels he wrote, the character of Simon Bolivar has perhaps influenced García Márquez in the creation of his earlier tragic heroes. As Gerald Martin
avers:

Clearly García Márquez believes this is an even greater side to the liberator, whose ultimate greatness, perhaps, lay in his becoming an ordinary Latin American in his last months, the predecessor of all those other magnificent failures who struggle through the pages of Latin American fiction in arduous Kingdoms of this world (293).

If this were so, than far from becoming a García Márquez adaptation, we could say that it was Bolivar who has created all García Márquez’s earlier characters, who had, in short, created the character of the Latin American with his magnificent dreams, seemingly endless struggles, transient victories and shattering disappointments.

Michael Bell avers that Chronicle of a Death Foretold does not have the mythic ambition or the sweep of historical vision attempted by One Hundred Years and The Autumn but The General in His Labyrinth ‘answers’ One Hundred Years on a comparable plane of historical vision and in doing so it once again changes and amplifies the meaning of the Buendia story.

In a sense, the story of the Buendias, is being firmly consigned to the past, while the General is doing the opposite. Here, a real historical figure whose life and ambition had been a failure is presented as a figure having a potential impact even in the present. As Michael Bell puts it: “Bolivar is always looking over the head of his own immediate situation to large historical vision which makes him at times the contemporary of the reader rather than of the other characters” (128).
García Márquez's use of hyperbole is rather ambiguous. He sometimes uses it for comic purposes, sometimes for satire and at times for irony and parody. García Márquez himself claims that disproportion is part of Latin American reality and reality itself is out of all proportion. In his “Nobel Acceptance Speech”, García Márquez reiterates the argument. He says:

Exaggeration and hyperbole are a legacy that Latin Americans inherited from “Antonio Pigafetta, a Florentine navigator who went with Magellan on his first voyage around the world, [who] wrote, upon his passage through our southern lands of America, a strictly accurate account that none the less resembles a venture into fantasy. In it he recorded that he had seen hogs with navels on their haunches, clawless birds whose hens laid eggs on the backs of their mates, and others still, resembling tongueless pelicans, with beaks like a spoon. He wrote of having seen a misbegotten creature with the head and ears of a mule, a camel’s body, the legs of a deer and the whiny of a horse. He described how the first native encountered in Pentagonia was confronted with a mirror, whereupon that impassioned giant lost his senses to the terror of his own image (“The Solitude of Latin America” 17).

García Márquez claims, in that speech, “this short and fascinating book, which even then contained the seeds of our present day novels,” is by no means the most staggering account of Latin America reality in that age. He goes on to enumerate stories about the fabulous wealth of Latin America;
about El Derado and numerous other stories. He then goes on to enumerate the cruelty and madness of the dictators of Latin America:

General Antonio Lopez de Santana, three times dictator of Mexico, held a magnificent funeral for the right leg he lost in the so-called pastry war. General Gabriel García Moreno ruled Ecuador for sixteen years as an absolute monarch; at his wake, the corpse was seated on the presidential chair, decked out in full dress uniform and a protective layer of medals" ("The Solitude of Latin America" 117).

García Márquez cites the case of general Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, the theosophical despot of El Salvador who had thirty thousand peasants slaughtered in a savage massacre, who invented a pendulum to detect poison in his food, and had street lamps draped in red paper to defeat an epidemic of scarlet fever.

García Márquez is labouring to prove to his European audience that the magical realism and exaggeration that the Europeans had come to associate Latin American literature with, was to the Latin American, nothing but stark reality. Seen in this light the fictional general of García Márquez seems no different from his virtual counterparts. The heroics of mythical heroes is usually described in exaggerated terms. García Márquez uses exaggeration, not to describe the heroics of his heroes but rather the misadventures and misdeeds of his anti-heroes:

Colonel Aureliano Buendia organised thirty two armed uprisings and he lost them all. He had seventeen male children by seventeen
different women and they were exterminated one after the other on a single night before the oldest one had reached the age of thirty five. He survived fourteen attempts on his life, seventy three ambushes, and a firing squad. He lived through a dose of strychnine in his coffee that was enough to kill a horse (One Hundred Years 106).

The Patriarch in The Autumn is also presented in hyperbolic terms: “It was calculated that in the course of his life he must have sired five thousand children, all seven monthers, by the countless number of loveless beloveds he had who succeeded each other in his seraglio until the moment he was ready to enjoy them” (The Autumn 39).

The inability to love is the root cause for the diabolic nature of the patriarch. Christ symbolises love and his teachings underscore the importance of unconditional and absolute love for realising God. The Anti-Christ, on the other hand, symbolises hatred, and the inability to love. García Márquez posits that it is the inability to love that drives the patriarch and the colonel Aureliano Buendia to seek consolation in power. The lieutenant of In Evil Hour was García Márquez’s first portrayal of a character who substituted power for love. García Márquez observes: “I don’t think there’s any human misery greater than that [the inability to love]. Not only for the person afflicted but for all those whose misfortune is to come within his orbit” (Fragrance 109).

All the Buendias are cursed by the inability to love but they express it in different ways. Jose Arcadio’s sexual frenzy as the sexual frenzy of the general in The Autumn are an expression of their inability to love. García
Márquez says that, "history demonstrates that powerful people are often afflicted by a kind of sexual frenzy" (Interview, Fragrance 108). Colonel Aureliano Buendía and the general in The Autumn seek consolation in power. The innocence of Remedios the Beauty and her absolute detachment to the entreaties of her suitors is another example of this inability to love. Amaranta’s timidity and misgivings whenever her suitors propose to her is again on account of the inability to love.

Connected and related to hyperbole is García Márquez’s attempt at deconstructing and subverting official version of history. History, the mythoclast holds, is a blatant perversion of truth, by the ruling class, and the mythoclast labours to subvert official versions of history. In One Hundred Years, José Arcadio Segundo becomes the mouthpiece for the mythoclast. His point of view, contrary to the general interpretation, was that Macondo had been a prosperous place and well on its way when it was discovered and corrupted and suppressed by the banana company, whose engineers brought on the deluge as a pretext to avoid promises made to the workers. He describes with precise and convincing details the massacre of the workers:

the army had machine gunned more than three thousand workers penned-up by the station and how they loaded the bodies onto a two-hundred-car train and threw them into the sea... This was radically opposed to the false one that historians had created and consecrated in the schoolbooks (One Hundred Years 354-55).

In The Autumn too, official version of history is often at logger heads with the truth. So, all the stories about the miracles performed by the general
and his mother, propagated by the general and his adulators have no takers.
The official history which the ‘triumph of the West’ has ordained for itself is
that of rationalism, progressive development and linear chronology. However
contradictory and repressive this history may seem to any non-conformist
European, it is, for the typical Latin American and other third world countries,
organic and coherent by definition whereas his own history is fragmented,
discontinuous, absurd. Gerald Martin thinks,

this [One Hundred Years] is not as much a literary narration of
Latin American history as a deconstructive rending of that history.
The apocalypse of the Buendias is not the end of Latin America but
the end of primitive neo-colonialism, its conscious or unconscious
collaborators, and an epoch of illusions (233).

García Márquez has consistently held that official history is false. In the
description of the massacre of the workers in One Hundred Years, in the
depiction of the disappearance of the children, in The Autumn, in the depiction
of events in The Chronicle and in his “Nobel Acceptance Speech”, García
Márquez has consistently held that the official version of history is false.

Gerald Martin holds that at the dawn of modernism in Latin America—
when it entered the “Finneganian” or possibly “Borgesian” moment—the
moment may be defined as the moment where myth and history became totally
confused, “appearing at different moments diametrically opposed, as they were
at the dawn of modernity, totally interpretative, as they had been during
modernism, according to the point of view of the observer” (8).

A mythoclastic technique employed by García Márquez in One
Hundred Years and The Autumn is the literal treatment of metaphor. Thus the torrential rain in One Hundred Years lasts not for several years but for four years, eleven months and two days. Old age and physical decay are manifest as “green slime on the teeth,” colonel Buendia’s distance from reality is a “white chalk circle demarcating ten feet of space around him” and Amaranta Ursula leads her devoted husband into Macondo “by a silk rope tied around his neck.” Kumkum Sangari has rightly put it: “Metaphor is turned into event precisely so that it will not be read as event, but folded back into metaphor as disturbing, and resonant image” (114). In The Autumn, the general sells the sea to the Americans and the Americans collect the sea not as repayment of the loan but as a surety for the interest on unpayable debt which is then neatly parcelled and transported to Arizona.

The postmodern concept that there is not one truth but there are different aspects of truth is developed by García Márquez in One Hundred Years. Different versions of an incident or occurrence are narrated and any aspect may be privileged by the author without ever laying claim that that is the true vision. Every event described, no matter how fantastic it might appear, has a perfectly logical explanation. What the novel does is to present events, not as they actually occurred, but as they were perceived and interpreted by the local people. Thus, for example, the narrative points to the real explanation of Remedio’s disappearance by recording that outsiders were of the opinion that she had run off with a man and that the story put about by her family was an invention designed to cover up the scandal, but it is the family version—that she ascended into heaven—which the text privileges and recounts in full and
plausible detail, since it was the one which was widely accepted in the community. Gregory Rabassa offers a still more prosaic explanation:

Legend becomes caricature, in a sense, as certain features are over emphasised to the exclusion of others: the episode of Remedios the Beauty and the wash, for example, is based on the cover up by parents whose lovely daughter ran off with a commercial traveller, taking along the family linens. Reality leads to imagination, which is part of us and therefore certainly real; history—the past, which has happened - becomes just a version, one of the many possibilities ("A Reader’s Guide to . . ." 138).

Many of the fantastic occurrences in One Hundred Years could thus be explained as the outcome of the popular collective memory which blows events up to larger than life proportions. James Higgins has this explanation to give: "Cien Anos transmits the history of Macondo as it was recorded and elaborated over the generations by popular oral tradition, and by so doing, it permits a rural society to give expression to itself in terms of its own cultural experience" (147).

The mythoclastic function of subversion is carried further by subverting oral and written narratives. The story of One Hundred Years which had appeared as an oral narrative turns out in the final pages to be recorded in Melquiade’s manuscript. He also highlights the relativity of all events. Events which appear fantastic to the reader—Remedio’s ascent into heaven, trips on flying carpets, yellow butterflies following Mauricio Babilonia, the continuous torrential rain, the survival of Aureliano Buendia after shooting himself in the
chest, the parish priest’s feats of levitation, are all accepted as everyday realities in the cultural environment of Macondo and by contrast modern amenities and technology which the reader takes for granted—the compass, the sextant, ice-cubes, false teeth, the locomotive—is greeted with awe as something wonderful and magical. In the opinion of James Higgins:

‘Cien años’ thus not only challenges conventional assumptions as to what constitutes reality, but subverts the novelistic genres, conventional Euro-centricism, and indeed, the whole rationalistic cultural tradition of the West. At the same time, though, the narrator writes in an ironic, tongue-in-cheek manner which distances him from the oral history which he is transmitting (147).

In short, One Hundred Years, sets out to debunk official myths but it has no alternative history to offer.

Mythic and historical heroes are presented as belonging to a prestigious family or clan. Even today, monarchs and politicians proudly parade their family name and family history. At the same time, it is equally true that many of the famous figures in mythology and history have been bastards. It is this aspect of history or mythology that García Márquez employs in developing his anti-heroes. The Buendías in One Hundred Years can hardly boast of purity of the clan. The general in The Autumn is presented as “a man without a father like the most illustrious despots of history” (39).

Gregory Rabassa draws attention to this fact:

José Arcadio Buendia is the paterfamilias, the prophet, the patriarch; The origin of the Aureliano name is not clear. It may be
the hidden self, the other, . . . . A look at the family tree shows us that the line descents from José Arcadio the second, rather than from his brother colonel Aureliano, and yet the spirit of the descendants leans more toward the failure Aureliano than it does toward José Arcadio, the unrefined, the breeder . . . There are always gaps in epic descent, as is the case with all those heroic bastards of the gods in Greek Mythology ("A Reader’s Guide to . . .") 139).

The most cynical view of nobility of birth is expressed by Fernanda when a nun brings the baby of her daughter who had given birth in seclusion in a cloistered monastery. Fernanda said: "We’ll tell them that we found him [the baby] floating in the basket." She said smiling. 'No one will believe it,' the nun said.

‘If they believe it in the Bible ’Fernanda replied: ‘I don’t see why they shouldn’t believe it from me’ ” (One Hundred Years 305 ).

Fernanda is here parodying the story of the origin of Moses. In short, García Márquez has deployed demythification and subversion to create his own myths.

Thus García Márquez exploits the mythoclastic possibilities thrown open by the myth of Apocalypse to depict the end of the world of Macondo in One Hundred Years, and the end of the diabolic world created by the dictator in The Autumn. In the latter, García Márquez poses fundamental questions about the nature of power and also about the nature of fiction and history.