Chapter – 2

The Autumn of the Patriarch: Gossiping History and the Carnival of Memory

One of the most prolific authors emerging from Latin America, the Columbian writer and journalist, Gabriel José García Márquez is known for his rich and extensive oeuvre, which includes novels like One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), The Autumn of the Patriarch (1975), Love in the Time of Cholera (1985), The General in His Labyrinth (1989) and his collection of short stories such as Leaf Storm and Other Stories (1955). Enlisted in the pantheon of the greatest writers, Márquez won the Nobel Prize for his literary creations in the year 1982. Born in 1928, Márquez was raised by his grandparents till the age of eight. His grandparents’ house was teeming with relatives, stories and legends and other worldly beings, awakening in him a literary spirit and zeal. His first literary output was LS in 1955. It won him an award from the Association of Artists and Writers of Bogota for his story “Monologue of Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo.” Márquez’s early years as a journalist saw him travelling to Europe and resulted in the production of two short novels In Evil Hour (1962) and No One Writes to the Colonel (1961), in which his grandfather, Colonel Nicolas Márquez Iguaran’s experiences in the civil wars at the turn of the century found a poignant voice. The novella portrays the social and political plight of people who have resigned themselves to the hegemonic coercions of a corrupt, authoritarian government. However, Márquez’s most famous work till date remains OHYS. It has won him many literary accolades and often overshadows his other, equally successful writings.
Márquez’s work is influenced by William Faulkner, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka. Exalted for their experimental literary techniques, which bear marked similarities to William Faulkner’s, his novels wrestle with the themes of power, love, solitude and the dissolution of time. The salient features of his literary works include: a circular or spiral conception of time, fragmentation, the creation of myth, repetition of names and history and the element of the fantastic. Márquez’s writings are renowned for the seamless blend of external events and internal reality, fantastic elements and the tangible Latin American reality, existential probing and journalistic depiction of the larger socio-political forces affecting the nation. His novels demand a willing suspension of disbelief. The fantastic or magic realist aspect of his work finds its predecessor in the early colonial writings by Spaniards, who described fabulous wonders such as monsters, mermaids and Amazons in their letters and official accounts of their voyages. Although his novels seem confined to the Columbian and Latin American terrain, they resonate with universal ideas and significance. Having faced a tempestuous history involving colonialism, Civil War, dictatorship and communism, Márquez documents the shifting historical and political realities through an exploration of the nature of power, love, human nature, knowledge and truth and time and repetition.

In his novels, Márquez explores the totality of Latin American historical experience and the way it continues to shape the modern, independent nation-states. To this end, memory is a pivotal element in the rich fabric of his thematic forays. Moreover, Memory, in conjunction with the splintering of time, pervasively manifests in the temporal arrangement of the plot. It is essential for reclamation and revision of the past as well as for the empowerment of the previously marginalized people. It helps the subjugated voices to transcend the social-political constraints of remembering imposed on them and foreground their lived experiences. Palencia-
Roth states that “Memory may even be considered to be the cornerstone of the Colombian’s work” (“Art” 353). Márquez’s texts as a form of counter-memory perform the task of recovering silenced and forgotten history. His novels reiterate that the loss of personal and collective memory is tantamount to a loss of history and identity. In *OHYS*, memory is intimately interwoven in the thematic concerns and structural organization of the novel. The insomnia plague brought to Macondo by the two Indian servants leads to a gradual loss of memory and history. Visitacion recognizes that

> when the sick person became used to this state of vigil, the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past. (45)

Each member of the Buendia family is entrapped between the ambivalent demands of memory—remembering and forgetting. The novel emphasizes the need to remember one’s past, the futility of escaping it and, paradoxically, the frangibility of history: “the past was a lie, that memory has no return, that every spring gone cannot be recovered” (408). Melquides’s manuscript, which is the novel itself, is an attempt to remember the future history that will be erased in an apocalyptic annihilation of the town of Macondo. *AP* is a continuation of this train of thought. While meditating on the metaphysical nature of memory, it more importantly evokes the social and political dimension of memory, in the form of the patriarch’s totalitarian discourse of history and the alternative discourse of counter-memory provided by the masses.

*AP* was written after his most successful novel, *OHYS*, and it took five laborious years to complete it. Although receiving outstanding critical response, the book was considered inaccessible by readers on account of its departure from the previous themes and locale of *OHYS*.
and its elaborate, meandering sentences and continuously shifting narrators. Despite its complex and abstruse narrative design, the novel is considered a brilliant creative output and a profound meditation on the theme of power and its maiden-hands violence, fear and repression. Márquez himself considers the novel as “a poem on the solitude of power, a poetic adventure” and a “highly personal book of confession” (Boldy 78). The central concern of the novel is power in the guise of dictatorship. Márquez has said that “every single line . . . in all of my books has a starting point in reality” (qtd. in Minta 2). The germ for AP was provided by an unforgettable scene that the then young journalist witnessed in Caracas in 1958, while waiting with other reporters for the ending of the political meeting that was to choose the next candidate to lead the nation after the termination of General Marcos Evangelista Pérez Jiménez’s dominion:

It was nearly four in the morning, when the door opened and we saw an officer, in combat gear, walking backwards, with muddy boots and a sub-machine gun in his hands . . . he went down the stairs, got into a car which took him to the airport, and went into exile. It was at that precise moment, when that soldier was leaving a room where the formation of the new government was being decided, that I had the intuition of power, the mystery of power. (qtd. in Boldy 78)

The genre of the dictator novel is not recent in Latin America. The theme of power that is central to this genre can be better comprehended by providing a contextual map of the turbulent realities of the Latin American region. Latin America was colonized by the Spaniards for over four centuries. Colonization began in 1500 and lead to the destruction of indigenous people and their ways of living. While thriving on agriculture and mining, colonialism and imperialism created a fragmented society. Persistent rebellion led to the independence of the continent from the clutches of the colonialists in 1810. Furthermore, the movement for liberation was aided and
abetted by the weakening of Spain’s clout in the wake of the expansion of the British Empire, leading to the eventual demise of colonialism in South America. However, the exit of the Spaniards from the nation in the early nineteenth century was followed by an era of political instability and mayhem. The brief period of freedom was followed by civil unrest which resulted in the horrific War of One Thousand Days and claimed more than 100,000 lives. Post-independence, Latin America has been inflicted by political conflicts and violence. This era of internecine clashes was characterized by the prolonged and seemingly relentless period of violence and fear in Columbia from 1946 to 1966, known as La Violencia, which claimed around 300,000 lives. The seventies witnessed a series of military dictatorships, mutinies and coups all over the continent. Latin America is plagued by many social and political evils arising out of their history of colonialism, civil wars, violence and neo-imperialism: increasing gap between the lower and the upper classes, political instability and corruption, exploitation by multinational companies and the presence of drugs mafia. From the resulting “confusion and instability, and in the absence of any clear structures of authority,” Stephen Minta notes, “emerged the caudillo, the classic nineteenth-century figure of the strong man, the man on horseback, a leader who grouped his followers around him on the basis of his own strength and ability, and for whom ideologies or political parties counted for very little” (98). Columbia was under the dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla from 1953 to 1957, a comparatively smaller period compared to the authoritative reign in the neighbouring countries: Juan Vicente Gómez in Venezuela (1908-1935), Rafael Trujillo in Dominican Republic (1930-1961) and Rodríguez de Francia in Paraguay (1814-1840) to name a few. Several writers like Miguel Otero Silva, Juan Bosch, Augusto Roa Bastos and Alejo Carpentier have covered this theme of political strife, dictatorship and violence that plagued their respective countries.
AP covers the entire historical trajectory of the South American Continent, beginning from colonialism to the neo-imperialist age of foreign investments and appropriation of national and human resources. It is about the rise and decline of a fictional dictator and the eventual termination of the period of his seemingly eternal rule, though not rendered in a chronological order. The portrait of the patriarch began with the image of an “incredibly old man alone in a presidential palace, which full of cows” (Palencia-Roth, “Labyrinths” 55). Once a legendary political figure who kept himself apprised on the state of crop yields and livestock and who visited the sick and the weary, the patriarch has reached the autumn of his reign, that is, his decline. He lives a cloistered life in the solitude of his palace with his troop of concubines, lepers, cows and a few trusted guards. The presidential palace is the focal point from which power emanates. It is not only a physical space, but a metaphor for the state of the patriarch and the nation. The decay of the palace is symbolic of the physical and mental decadence of the dictator. The novel is an exploration of the internal and external landscape of power. The reader not only views the savage and gory consequences of the regime, but also enters the mind of the ageing, senile dictator as well as that of the collective narrator, which from time to time dissolves into individual narrators before again merging into a collectivity. Much of the novel takes place inside the minds of the subjects.

The central character in the novel is the General, who identifies himself as the patriarch of the nation and, correspondingly, is addressed as such. He is invincible. He cannot be defeated at dominoes or cock fights because nobody dares to win against him. He accrues wealth by imposing tax on the most rudimentary amenities like water bodies of the nation and the right to walk in the shade. He is ruthless, formidable and unforgiving. His enemies are swiftly eliminated. Nobody is exempt from his sense of justice and punishment. He roasts and serves his
right-hand man, Rodrigo de Aguilar, to the assembled guests as a caveat against betraying him. He brutally tortures his soldiers into confessing that they had been forcibly enlisted to carry out an assassination bid against him, despite their unwavering love and devotion to him. Regardless of his gigantic, grand stature, the General is mostly invisible in the conventional sense of the plot. He is visualized, in this case remembered, through the memories of the collective narrator “we.” The novel is not a biographical sketch of one specific historical figure or political tyrant. Broadly, the novel situates the dictator in the local topography of Latin American politics and history. The location of the novel and the name of the dictator remain unspecified. The presidential palace with its stables, the miserable barracks of the patriarch’s concubines, lepers, paralytics, herds of animals and the court provides the primary setting of the novel. However, by maintaining an air of unknowability and anonymity, the novel creates an archetype of all the dictators the world has ever seen and hence universalizes the figure of the dictator. This makes the patriarch of the novel clearly distinct from any one particular autocrat. This is synchronous with Márquez’s wish that his dictator not resemble any one in particular.

Márquez’s sources for his dictator are eclectic, Julius Caesar and Stalin to name a few. His exhaustive scholarship that provides the foundation to his novel includes historical anecdotes and chronicles of dictators from all over the world. The eccentricities of the patriarch are reminiscent of some real life dictators and their oddities. Gomez of Venezuela used to make false declarations of his death in order to assess the response of the people and the state. Duvalier of Haiti ordered the execution of all the black dogs of the nation because of his unflinching belief that one of his opponents had turned into a black dog to evade his wrath. Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez of El Salvador invented a magic pendulum that would swing over his food
and detect the presence of poisonous substances in it (McNerney 71). Cicero’s fear of death led
him to employ his daughters instead of barbers for the task of shaving.

Márquez’s intention, therefore, was to make a synthesis of all the barbaric dictators Latin
America as well as the world, in the figures of Hitler and Stalin, had seen. The Patriarch is what
Minta calls, a “composite figure” (96), an amalgamation of tyrants from different periods and
locales. Márquez’s dictator, in the view of Bell, is to be seen as a “synoptical historical myth” (73),
a point attested to by the unusual longevity of the General’s life, somewhere between 107 to 232
years. This feeling of timelessness or stagnation of time has mythical resonance. It illustrates the
recurrence of repression, violence and fear—whether in the form of the colonial era, the
dictatorial phase or the American imperialistic period—in the region.

Márquez’s prose in the novel provides textual verisimilitude for the unruly political
experiences of the continent. Initially intended as the dictator’s monologue, the narration is in the
shape of a spiral structure that condenses several monologues and conflicting testimonies woven
around singular incidents. In this regard, Márquez says that he decided to go with “a structure
based on multiple monologues—which is very much the way life is under a dictatorship. There
are different voices who tell the same thing in different ways” (qtd. in Minta 95). The complexity
of the narrative is enhanced by chronological disjunction and sinuous sentences which feature
several narrators and ever-shifting pronouns, creating an atmosphere of overpowering
uncertainty, stagnation and suffocation. The novel is so intricately structured that Márquez
admits that “there were times when he realized he had forgotten something and could not find a
place to it” (James 88). Each of the six chapters of the novel is in the form of one long paragraph,
the last chapter, comprising around forty-five pages, is a paragraph containing a single line. The
reader feels as if trapped in an unending labyrinth of memories within memories. The structure
of the novel, in the form of a maze of long entwining sentences with no regard for the conventions of syntax and punctuation, express “the claustrophobia and unstoppability of the process in which the characters are trapped” (Bell 81). A sense of utter despair and inexorable disintegration is created by the narrative to signify the shape life takes under the shackles of absolute power.

Each chapter begins with the death of the dictator. An amorphous collective narrator, denoted by “we,” the first person plural, enters the palace timidly and finds the patriarch’s body on the floor of his bedroom. Each subsequent chapter, then, introduces unknown narrators or a collective narrator different from the previous ones who retell the past in their own way, thereby creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and speculation. Time is cyclical and repetitive, with the narrative making frequent flashbacks and flash forwards, often without any warning that the narrative has switched from one memory to another. Disjointed time, in the form of memories within memories, confounds the reader and creates an atmosphere of timelessness since the reader is never sure how much time has elapsed in this “uncountable time of eternity” of power. “This osmosis between different times is pertinent,” Stephen M. Hart says, as it recreates “the jumbled thought processes of an ailing, degenerate dictator” (114).

As the title of the novel suggests, the General is more than a mere ruler of the country. In his own view and those of the public, he sets up himself as a paternal as well as a god-like figure.

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1 Gabriel Garcia Marquez, The Autumn of the Patriarch. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996) 229. All subsequent references, unless mentioned otherwise, to the novel are from this edition and they have been absorbed into the text.
He is the creator, guardian and saviour of the nation. This kind of analogy is, according to Minta, “the real danger of dictatorship ... in its long-term psychological effects”:

The ability of some authoritarian leaders to establish themselves plausibly as the guardians, saviours, and father confessors of their people, to identify themselves so completely with the destiny of their country that they and the country are felt to be one and inseparable, this inherently duplicitous talent is the source of enormous potential power. (101)

This “enormous potential power” is exploited by the state machinery in interlacing the national and historical rhetoric with the religious discourse, attributing to the patriarch panoptic and mythical status. The seemingly incessant tenure of the dictator emphasizes his god like power. His alleged supernatural abilities include treating the sick, controlling the weather and the cosmos and changing of time and space. The expanse of his will and power reaches the dimension of time, when he changes the calendar and the day into night, thereby instituting his own perception of reality. Miraculous powers were attributed to him. Not only the masses, but nature itself shows obsequiousness to the will of the supreme leader. As the unidentified narrator observes that “the pensive hand” made “the sign of the cross in a blessing so that the rain would stop and the sun shine, and he gave life back to the drowned hens, and ordered the waters to recede and they receded” (86).

The patriarch, therefore, plays the role of God. Or, he displaces God as his subordinate. He “arrogates to himself the place of God in the universe” (Mart 113). God is refused admittance in his presence and the general feels older than God Himself. The people believed him to be their messiah, overlooking their affairs and “invulnerable to plague and hurricane, invulnerable to Manuela Sánchez’s trick, invulnerable to time, dedicated to the messianic happiness of thinking
for us . . .” (87). Other “dauntless adulators” consider him superior to God since he is the corrector of earthquakes, eclipses, leap years and other errors of God . . .” (7). The text abounds in references to the dictator as a king. His inescapable destiny was predicted in his infancy in the waters of a soothsayer. He is his own master.

Despite recognizing the familiar apparel and features of the dictator from his various photographs —his uniform, high boots, golden spurs and “his herniated testicle, which was the only thing that had escaped the vultures in spite of its being the size of an ox kidney” (5), the collective narrator in the first chapter is unable to decisively identify his body on several accounts. The patriarch has never been seen by the people in close proximity. Even his representation on official icons and artefacts is a mere simulation of an invented figure, of a “disembodied god” (Tobin 67). This partial and fabricated knowledge leads the narrator to recognize:

Only when we turned him over to look at his face did we realize that it was impossible to recognize him . . . because none of us had ever seen him, and even though his profile was on both sides of all coins, on postage stamps, on condom labels, on trusses and scapulars, and even though his engraved picture . . . was displayed at all times in all places, we knew that they were copies of copies of portraits that had already been considered unfaithful . . . (4)

His dead body bore no semblance to the grandiose image that is emblazoned on national coins and stamps and in history books. There are no consistent and authentic historical referents that could establish the identity of the dead body with absolute certainty.
The patriarch exercises power and fear by being inaccessible, elusive and invisible. He is rarely seen in the midst of the masses. The brief, shady glimpses that the public have of him are on a palace balcony or through the presidential car. To the people he was only an

... uncertain vision of pitiful eyes through the dusty peepholes of the window of a train, only the tremor of some taciturn lips, the fugitive wave of a velvet glove on the no man's hand of an old man with no destiny with our never knowing who he was, or what he was like, or even if he was only a figment of the imagination. .. (228)

This invisibility, however, serves as the source of his power. As Mayder Dravasa notes:

The people "know" that the patriarch exists, not despite his invisibility, but because of it. . . The desire to see the unseen dictator produces in the collective narrator a will to metaphorize his presence, a will which is also a symptom of an infinite search for a stability that would make present the elusive origin of authority. (400)

This appearance of stability is maintained by the perfunctory running of the state machinery. As the collective narrator confesses: "... no mortal had ever seen him since the days of black vomit and yet we knew he was there . . . because the world went on, life went on, the mail was delivered, the municipal band played . . ." (4).

In addition to the physical decay of the body, which was "sprouting tiny lichens and parasitic animals from the depths of the sea, especially in the armpits and the groin" (4), and which made it difficult to ascertain the identity of the body, one of the narrators informs the reader that it was the second time the patriarch had been found dead in similar circumstances, "... alone and dressed and dead seemingly of natural causes during his sleep, as had been
announced a long time ago in the prophetic waters of soothsayers’ basins” (5). Unable to visually corroborate the identity of the body, the collective narrative voice fragments into a first-person subject(s) only to conjoin again as the “we” at the end of each chapter.

The collective narrator’s incredulity at the general’s death is justified because they had been deceived earlier by him, when he staged his own death in the guise of his “perfect double” (8), Patricio Aragones. The patriarch had hidden and watched people’s reactions to Patricio’s Aragones death. Later, he punishes those who had shown infidelity to him. He brutally tortures soldiers into confessing that they had been forcibly enlisted to carry out an assassination against him despite their unflinching love and devotion towards him. The look-alike of the general is physically and mentally transformed through vicious means in order to make him imbibe the several eccentricities of the dictator. Patricio Aragones laments the torture he is subjected to, which included:

... flattening my [Patricio Aragones’] feet with tamping hands so that they would be those of a sleepwalker like yours, then by piercing my testicles with a shoemaker’s awl so I would develop a rupture, then by making me drink turpentine so I would forget how to read and write after all the work it took my mother to teach me, and always forcing me to go through the public ceremonies you didn’t dare face. ... (20-21)

Patricio Aragones becomes the patriarch’s substitute at official ceremonies. He is granted access to the patriarch’s concubines and in a stroke of uncanny coincidence, these concubines start giving birth to seven-month premature babies, as they do with the patriarch. With the passage of time, “neither of them or any of the women either ever knew whose child was whose or by whom . . .” (11). The patriarch uses his double to wield supernatural power over the populace.
and sustain his barbaric dominion. The presence of Patricio Aragones gives him protection from assassination attempts as well as allows him to be present at two places at the same time, giving him an impression of omnipresence. This uncanny ability to be present in different places of the nation at the same time and to resurrect three days after his first death convinces the collective narrator that "no evidence of his death was final" (37).

The collapse of reliable mimesis or the failure to incontrovertibly identify the body as the patriarch’s is the impetus for the act of recollection, which through “an avalanche of memories or remembered rumours about the dictator’s life” (Mejía 303) maps out the patriarch’s entire existence and, concomitantly, the nation’s history. Prima facie, the text is a predication on the crisis in memory, that is, a crisis in representation. At the same time, the narrative and epistemological disintegration is a reflection on the barbaric regime, in which structures and systems collapse resulting in confusion, chaos and loss of information. As Newell notes: “The dictatorship is presented as lacking in temporal coherence, giving rise to a permanent sense of uncertainty and political crisis on the part of the population. The narrative thus acts out the country’s ‘crisis of uncertainty’ ” (43).

Márquez’s endeavour in the novel is not to invalidate this crisis in memory and representation, which is a cogent deduction of life under dictatorship. Rather, he thwarts this crisis in memory from becoming a paralyzing event by transforming it into a liberating, performative act of storytelling that empowers the masses that had been repressed for decades. Therefore, the narrative structure of the novel is critical in understanding and broadening the readers’ perspective of the nexus between memory and power. The persistent narrative mode is that of the carnivalesque—which amalgamates the realistic, the fantastic, the historical, the mythological and the popular. The novel relies on the carnivalesque mode and its inherent
dissident tendencies to offer a narrative of countermemory that foregrounds the central theme of memory-power nexus and presents an alternative to the authoritative and traditional depictions of dictatorship in Latin America.

2.1. Bakhtin and the Carnivalesque

In his analysis of Gargantua and Pantagruel, a sixteenth century novel, Mikhail Bakhtin situates the origin of the carnivalesque in the popular festivities of the common people or “the second world” during the medieval and early Renaissance period. The festive culture included such rituals as throning/dethroning, carnival wars, abusing matches, gift giving and more. The carnival rituals parodied official practices and ideologies to gain liberation from the constant baggage of the official culture. It is a “bewildering constellation of rituals, games, symbols, and various carnal excesses,” in the words of Michael Gardiner, that constitutes “alternative ‘social space’ of freedom, abundance and equality” (qtd. in Gesicka 395).

Furthermore, polyphony and dialogism are central to the creation of the carnivalesque spirit. All are decentralizing forces that displace the omniscience of the traditional author with a plethora of interacting voices. Polyphony and dialogism denote a multitude of voices shaping the text and denying the author his former privileged authority on the background, personality and destiny of the characters. These voices do not coalesce or unify into a singularity of an overarching consciousness. Rather they establish a play and clash of different perspectives, each with its own claim to legitimacy and recognition within the fabric of the text. The author does not suppress these narrative voices; rather he engages with them and allows them to shock and subvert. The text is, therefore, shaped by these numerous voices, which set up a dialogue amongst themselves and with the author, in turn influencing his world view. The idea of a singular, absolute reality is shattered as the reader gets to perceive reality from each character’s
standpoint in the world. In a dialogic space, the author does not possess monological truths about
the characters and reality. He as knowledgeable and ignorant as the multitude of
consciousnesses. Monologism appears as an all-encompassing consciousness that unifies all
stories, practices, ideologies, values and desires under one roof. In such a space, alternative
perspectives are subordinate to the transcendental idea. Either they are placed at the margins or
simply forgotten. A Dialogic text, on the other hand, is a “double-voiced” or “multi-voiced”
discourse. It embraces openness to other voices, truths and perspectives.

Carnival is described as the temporary suspension of traditional societal hierarchies—the
strict division between the lower strata and the upper strata. The revelries in the festivities
challenge the status quo through the use of satire, jokes, contests, parades etc. Differences among
people based on social, economic and cultural standing are dissolved. As Bakhtin notes:

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\ldots \text{what is suspended first of all is a hierarchical structure and all the forms of}
\text{terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it—that is, everything}
\text{resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality}
\text{among people, \ldots All distance between people is suspended, and a special}
\text{carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. (PDP}
\text{123, Original emphasis)}
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All authorized boundaries, strictures and edicts are dismissed and the spectators become the
participants. Normative rules and categories are inverted and behaviourisms endemic to
hierarchical positions are suspended, creating a topsy-turvy world. All kinds of inhibitions are
removed, giving a free reign to emotions, thoughts and actions. Everything comes under the
purview of the carnivalesque spirit.
The carnivalesque is characterized by images of reversal and inversion. All religious, philosophical and moral conventions and expectations are reversed. Carnival is the manifestation of “life turned inside out . . . the reverse side of the world” (Bakhtin, PDP 122). Such a conception of the world is dynamic as it allows a free interface among people. It is a dialogic space that unsettles unitary thought and celebrates a multiplicity of voices. The carnival spirit is primarily an animated force that invades all. Described as a “syncretic pageantary,” carnival has evolved into a symbolic language that permeates all aspects of life from “complex mass actions to individual carnivalesque gestures” (Bakhtin, PDP 122).

Carnival encompasses life, growth, fertility as well as fear and death, everything that the official discourse marginalizes. It is a juxtaposition of “the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (Bakhtin, PDP 123). The dethroning of the lofty takes place through the use of marketplace, profane and blasphemous language, known as billingsgate. Such a language debases the official and the sacred. Bakhtin asserts that the conflation of the high and the low establishes a contact between mind-matter or the ideal-tangible realm by bringing people into contact with the reproductive, regenerative power of the earth and the body. This idea, which he terms as grotesque realism, is reinforced by images of violence, birth and copulation, laughter, cursing and defecating. In the grotesque aesthetic, Bakhtin claims, “the bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable” (RHW 19). The deflated, distorted, magnified, abnormal and the repugnant is embraced and celebrated. The carnival spirit, thus, foregrounds growth and regeneration as well as death and decay. As a result, ambivalence is pivotal to the carnival spirit. All carnivalesque acts contain the potential for binaries. As Bakhtin says:
All the images of carnival are dualistic; they unite with themselves both poles of change and crisis: birth and death . . . blessing and curse . . . praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and wisdom . . . .

This is a special instance of the carnival category of eccentricity, the violation of the usual and the generally accepted, life drawn out of its usual rut. (PDP 126, Original emphasis)

The carnivalesque is a space permeated by ambivalence which provides much-needed liberation from the ponderous constraints and norms that govern everyday political, social and cultural life.

The carnivalesque spirit connotes a time of inversion, transformation and interplay between contradictory truths and ideas. It, therefore, produces a plethora of meanings that violate the official world-view. Sacrosanct boundaries are eroded and an endless play of oppositions is set in motion. The carnivalesque relativizes unitary truths, mocking and undermining their validity. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam claim that carnivalization is not an external and immobile schema imposed upon ready-made content but an extraordinarily flexible form of artistic visualization, a peculiar sort of heuristic principle making possible the discovery of new and as yet unseen things. (qtd. in Geiscka 396)

Many features of the carnivalesque can be better understood by contextualizing Bakhtin’s writings. Bakhtin’s ideas were formulated under the doctrinaire regime of Stalinism. Statis, closure, fixity, stability, uniformity, seriousness, incontrovertibility are associated with any official system, most primarily with authoritative regimes. Carnival reverses these images with those of multiplicity, openness, playfulness—all providing new possibilities and growth. The world of carnival is a space of becoming. All identities, norms and meanings are in a constant
state of change. The carnivalesque eschews fixity, finality and closure. Change, fluidity and malleability are its central characteristics. It foregrounds the lack of structural, thematic and temporal closure. Monological worldviews are rejected in favour of constantly changing contradictions and nonexclusive opposites. It is “a feast of becoming, change and renewal” (Bakhtin, RHW 10). As Shanti Elliot notes:

The image of becoming expresses hope for the future, which Bakhtin contrasts to the “official” preoccupation with the past that renders life pre-determined and unchangeable. Bakhtin associates the past with mythology and authority, distant and impenetrable to human life, and understands interest in the open orifices of the human body as an artistic way of shaping the future by passing the material of the world through them. (131-32)

Any verbal discourse, in Bakhtin’s view, is a social phenomenon. Hence, “form and content in discourse are one” (qtd. in Tuglu 9). In AP, the carnivalesque mode of storytelling serves as a form of countermemory, both in methodology and content. It creates a space for the articulation of the history of dispossession, violence and enforced silence and forgetting. It upsets accepted, mainstream understanding of public consciousness and historiography under autarchy. The carnivalesque as a form of countermemory is especially pertinent to the interpretation of the novel since it foregrounds ambiguity, resists uniformity and homogenisation and unsettles oppressive and definitive construal of reality.

The carnivalesque narrative as countermemory manifests itself through the juxtaposition of disparate elements such as gossip, rumour, hearsay, exaggerated tales or hyperbole, popular myths and jokes that “construct the semantic space of the communication” (Ortega 180). These carnivalesque juxtapositions operate at two levels: thematic and structural. This chapter studies
gossip and rumour as the primary constituting elements of the carnivalesque as countermemory in the novel. The narration or the act of remembering in the form of gossip and rumour forms a myth-making and carnivalesque space in the novel. It is a site where carnivalization of truth takes place, where the past is demythologized and re-mythologized, deconstructed and reconstructed. In the hands of the dictator and the purveyors of the political regime, memory becomes an instrument to exert power and to falsify the historical record. However, the endeavour undertaken by the masses is both deconstructive and reconstructive. Through their carnivalesque act of recollection, the narrative deconstructs epistemological certitudes and foregrounds the textual nature of reality. History is shown to be a compendium of lies and illusions.

Remembrance in the form of gossip and rumour challenges not only the authoritative regime, but also the totalitarian notions of history and knowledge. Gossip and rumour stand in stark opposition to the traditional view of history as composed of indisputable, objective, verifiable facts. Rather, they structure the narrative according to an “aesthetic of doubt” which defies all imposed, definitive meanings and opens up a space for the “emergence of a participatory creative narration of new, more dynamic myths of history and the nation” (Newell 50). It acts as a space suffused with distrust and suspicion, displacing all enforced absolutisms and suspending the logos of the patriarch. It interrogates established epistemological systems and conventions by offering a space for the confrontation and negotiation of a multitude of heterogeneous, clashing subjectivities. The interplay of official and unofficial memories creates incongruity that deconstructs the rationale of the official world and opens up new, alternative vistas for memory-making or textualizing the past. As González Echevarría says: “What appears to be direct transcription of a rambling monologue . . . is the furthest possible thing from a
dictation—it is rather a textual web, a game of mirrors that both reconstructs and deconstructs the figure of the dictator” (qtd. in Cornejo-Parriego 71). This makes the carnivalesque meta-reflective, that is, it demonstrates the arbitrary, contingent and relative nature of all meaning-making systems. The carnivalesque mode ascribes to the narrative a self-reflexive quality, which questions its own viability and exposes the arbitrariness and textuality of the historical past.

2.2. Gossip and Rumour

People tend to depend on their social environment in the form of formal and informal channels of information to gather knowledge of their changing historical and social reality. The penchant for gossip and rumour is as antiquated as the human civilization. The prevalence and significance of oral discourses such as gossip and rumour in disseminating information can be understood though a cursory look at the oral cultures. In certain oral societies, Luise White notes, “the word for rumor, talk and conversation is the same, ilyash. It refers to how people exchanged information, not the credibility of that information.” In their pantheon of gods, the ancient Romans reserved a special place for the goddess of rumour, Fame. This goddess figure was, in accordance with conventional views about gender, a woman with wings covered with eyes, mouths and tongues, spreading news, truths as well as falsehoods. Similarly, in ancient Greece, an altar was dedicated to Pheme (rumor), as homage to the speed with which the news of the victory at Eurymedon had reached Athens. The relevance of rumours and gossips can be seen even in the twentieth century. Theodore Caplow notes from his experiences during World War II: “[E]very major operation, change of station, and important administrative change was accurately reported by rumor before any official announcement had been made” (qtd. in Gelfert 15). Gossip and rumour have become the objects of interdisciplinary studies involving including psychology, social anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics and folklores.
Gossip and rumour are, therefore, integral elements of social discourses as well as the carnivalesque spirit. Although there are fine distinctions between the two terms as recognised by sociologists, they are often indiscriminately or interchangeably used. This follows from the “considerable overlap... or the ‘family resemblance’, which, Alex Gelfert says, cannot easily be broken down into non-overlapping domains” (6). The present study does not deal with the technical similarities, demarcations between the two, or with the terminological rationale behind the phenomena. Providing a tentative definition here, this work is mostly concerned with their subversive and performative role in a totalitarian society or one where information is managed and manipulated by the state. The most general definitions of the two terms, given by Jamuna Paine and Nicholas DiFonzo, are as follows:

What all forms of gossip have in common is that they concern individuals and their (often, though not always, private) conduct, or ‘personalities and their involvements in events of the community.’ Rumor, by contrast, is not restricted to information or speculation about specific individuals (or groups of individuals) and their conduct – even if the primary function of rumor is often described as ‘group sensemaking.’ (qtd. in Gelfert 7)

Gossip is described as conversation about a person who is not present within the group. It involves the element of judgement and evaluation as per societal morals or group ethics in assessing and commenting on the behaviour and actions of individuals. Gossip is usually concerned with the foibles, follies, vices and deviances of individuals. It is often characterized by an element of surprise and shock produced by contravening of normative expectations. Hence, gossip is instrumental in the creation and proliferation of discourses on behaviour and thought.

Using Foucault’s ideas, Luise White notes:
The very act of talking about oneself, or others, disciplines; the very practices of sorting out the epistemologies that shock and scandalize creates and catalogues ideas about deviance and virtue, which are enforced with each telling. Modern subjects are not only studied, counted, and classified; they speak about these things for themselves. It is how they are managed. The “task of telling everything” allocated to subjects not only “enlarged the boundaries” of the subject matter on which they might speak but “installed an apparatus” capable of producing more and more speech that eventually policed itself.

Rumours mostly vary from gossip in their subject matter and broader circulation. Gossip is more personal and often deals with the ethical and the normal, anything that has the potential to appal and scandalize. Rumour, on the other hand, usually pertains to larger themes such as the political, the national or the local and hence is diffused on a grander scale. Rumors are described by Ralph L. Rosnow and Eric K. Foster as forms of public discourse that contain “private hypotheses about how the world works” or “ways of making sense to help us cope with our anxieties and uncertainties” (1).

Gossip and rumours make veritable claims to knowledge. They are often described as explanations and interpretations of events. The speakers reinterpret, interrogate, and problematize the given through gossip and rumours. Prashant Bordia and Nicholas Di Fonzo’s rigorous work in this field claim that the circulation and perpetuation arises out of a collective need for meaning-making or a “collective process of interpretation.” By postulating and surmising in the form of stories, people explain things, tackle angst, and provide a rationale for events and behaviourisms. Tomatsu Shibutani depicts rumor as a “collective problem-solving” method that helps people in ambiguous situations to attempt to “construe a meaningful
interpretation...by pooling their intellectual resources” (qtd. in White). Gossip and rumour cannot be dismissed as idle talk since they originate from a deep, basic human need to understand reality, events and people. Rumor gossip create, in the words of Rosnow and Foster, an “inner-circleness” (1) which allows people with shared interests and concerns. They create bonds of kinship, intimacy and communality between the participants. “Gossip about people we don’t know,” Luise White says, “not only binds gossipers together in an imagined community of shared values, but binds gossipers to communities, states, and sanctions.”

Gossip and rumour are contextual, arising out of specific circumstances. They involve not only the creation and dissemination of knowledge, but also an element of enthralling storytelling or lip-smacking narration. A central element of gossip and rumour is the textualization of information according to social, cultural and linguistic codes. By their very nature, they are characterized by excess, exaggeration, hyperbole, paradoxes, contradictions and grotesque realism—elements central to the carnivalesque spirit. These vital elements must be plausible according to the rationale and codes of the contextual utterance and should produce believable incongruity and opposition that is the mainstay of their eventual circulation and credibility.

Primarily existing as a form of everyday or street or market talk, gossip and rumour are marked by the conventions of informal speech acts that include profanity, curses, blasphemies, obscenities and loose talk, which is in tandem with the grotesque and billingsgate aspect of the carnival. These unofficial and derided speech acts, Nair notes, “are legitimized in the discourse of gossip” (53). They undercut the seriousness and propriety of officialdom.

The question arises: What are the historiographic and political consequences of gossip and rumours as new epistemologies? They are social processes; hence embedded in historical and political events. They constitute a collective discursive process. Gossip and rumour are ways of
participating in states and civil societies that manage them. However, they do not enjoy official 
epistemic authority. They do not come under the rubric of scientific and rational investigation 
and are mainly derided as frivolous and trite. Gossip and rumour have not been considered 
appropriate object of study under Enlightenment conceptions of truth and falsehood. Considered 
unorthodox and disdained as unreliable purveyors of unauthorized information, they are opposed 
to institutionalized and authoritative bodies of knowledge. Often labelled as informal, unofficial, 
pejorative, untrustworthy, and even ribald and lewd, they are not banal speech acts that must be 
vigorously dismissed, but rather performative acts that cannot be effectively controlled and 
disciplined by the official or state machinery. “Unauthored, untraceable and unfixed in historical 
time,” Irit Rogoff says, they can “offer a troubling of simple faith in historical and political 
representation” (269).

To say that gossip and rumour are ahistorical is to deny them epistemological status on the 
basis of lack of evidence or factual verification. From an epistemic point of view, they cannot be 
discredited as specious categories. Complete fidelity and infallibility in the form of established 
 sources of evidence and first-hand testimonies are not the main criteria of truth-value and 
acceptability of gossip and rumours. Not all gossips and rumours are false or works of fantasy. 
They are often drawn from a store of historical allusions and experiences. Citing Jean-Noel 
Kapferer, White says: “Rumors contain ‘raw facts.’ Rumors do not take off from the truth but 
rather seek out the truth” (Original emphasis). Often originating from historical or social 
circumstances, their defining characteristic is the initial unavailability or corroboration by 
official mechanisms of knowledge dissemination. They are “typically communicated via 
informal pathways in the absence of independent corroboration by either first-hand evidence or 
oficial (authoritative) sources” (Gelfert 11).
Their privileged status as alternative forms of information arises because of their outsideness or otherness. Gossip and rumours function as peripheral categories of knowledge that fill the gaps in official documentation and chronicles of the past. They are alternative epistemes that deal with the probable or the plausible. They are characterized by suspicion and scepticism. Gossip and rumour communicate the everyday, objective reality through a subjectivized, often exaggerated or tempered, perception of empirical reality. This kind of narration marks a disruption and undermining of the logical and accepted rules of historiography. History in the form of gossip and rumour becomes an “apostasy text” and an “interventionist discourse” (Nair 54). They disturb the sacrosanct status of nationalist discourse and create an unsettling atmosphere in which historical truths are subjected to an endless play of reinterpretation and revision. As Luise White comments: “They are open to many interpretations and speak to different factions within the most homogeneous audiences. It is in their exchange and evaluation that they take on sophisticated analysis.”

Gossip and rumour, therefore, historicize and re-historicize the past; they are historical as well as intensely personal. They problematize historical knowledge and its claims to objectivity and accuracy. By highlighting the textuality of history and historical referents, they foreground the ideological underpinnings of historiography. They reinvent and reinterpret the past from a plethora of perspectives. They bring the subjugated and forgotten to the foreground. They articulate lived, human experiences which often do not find voice and space in official historical documents. Gossip and rumours have the power to correct the distortions of the written record and to provide another dimension to the official story. They affirm clamour, flow and flux of life and reject finality, closure and fixity.
All the above-mentioned ideas with regard to gossip and rumours are in consonance with the spirit of the carnivalesque. Gossip and rumour are satirical in nature and function as denunciatory tools against political suppression and malfeasance. They are powerful weapons against the monologism, invincibility and hegemony of the official discourse. As Nair claims: “Subversion/sub-versions of the grand narratives of history and religion might be effectively achieved through gossip, since the raison-d’-etre of this mode of discourse is the creation of doubt about established versions of facts” (53). Hence, they are inherently transgressive and subversive. They reveal, expose, explain, interpret and revise inexplicable and bizarre versions of truth that are officially sanctioned. They can be considered as critical, analytical and explanatory tools in the reconstruction of history. Gossip and rumours are historicist, heuristic and genealogical tools.

2.3. **AP: Gossip and Rumour as Countermemory**

**AP** is preoccupied with a search for origins and historical truth—of the patriarch, the nation and the elusive source of totalitarian authority. The patriarch’s brutal, seemingly eternal rule merges with the history of the nation in the sense that power and lies equate and control the historical reality. So the narrator’s retelling of the patriarch’s past is also a retelling of the nation’s reality.

Much of the text can be construed as the confluence of power and myth (in the weaving of historical/official discourse and mythic/popular discourse) as well as the deconstruction and reconstruction of the grand myth, or the demythologizing and re-mythologizing of power. It is an exploration of “how lives are turned into myth, in order to encourage an understanding of the process and of the illusions which always lie behind it” (Minta 97). Márquez himself has said
that “the figure of the dictator is the only myth that Latin America has produced” (qtd. in Minta 95).

The novel has been variously described as a study of “psychology of power” and “solitude of power” (94) by Minta and “a searing and riveting plunge into the psychology of an archetypal dictator” (113) by Stephen Mart. Rejina James claims that the purpose of the novel is to “embody and annihilate the figure of the dictator as he has flourished principally in Latin America but also throughout the historical past into the present” (88). The common denominator of all these descriptions of the novel is power (in the form of dictatorship). However, there is no consensus on the role of the collective narrator. Critics remain divided in their opinions. Because of its capricious retelling, the collective narrator is not considered an authentic and reliable source of knowledge or a figure of counter-revolution. It has also been perceived as submissive in its dependence and propagation of the mythology of the patriarch’s power. The text makes this point explicit:

... and yet we didn’t believe it now that it was, and not because we really didn’t believe it but because we no longer wanted it to be true, we had ended up not understanding what would become of us without him, what would become of our lives after him... (186)

The present study, however, envisages the collective narrator as the popular voice that recovers and re-textualizes their historical reality. In its quest for truth, it abdicates traditional, rational forms of knowledge and embraces alternative sources such as gossip, rumour, hearsay, legends and myths. What has been interpreted as the reinforcement, perpetuation and corroboration of official myth by “we’s” ambiguous narration, filled with inconsistencies and
silence, is taken as, in the words of Julio Ortega, “the carnivalized mythology of power,” “the deconstructed construction of power” (170, 185).

The novel AP abounds in references to a “lack of a sense of history” (41) of the people, the “unhistoried people who don’t believe in anything except life . . .” (132). In Latin America, people have been transformed into mute, anonymous spectators by authoritative regimes, which decide and sanction stories that are appropriate to be incorporated into the transcendental historical record. They proclaim themselves to be “the sole arbitrators of truth and the sole proprietors of the social imaginary” (Boeder 48). However, the collective narrator personified by “we” of the novel is not a passive subaltern. Like the state-machinery, the collective narrator is a rumour-mongering and another myth-making machine that does not neatly fit into the conventional image of the oppressed or the subaltern. Gossip and rumours in the hands of the collective “we” shatter certitudes, eventualities and inevitabilities by denaturalizing the normative and the expected. Acting as an exposé, they illuminate the tricks and illusions of history. They empower the previously marginal by making them the privileged purveyors of truth. Featuring mostly as anonymous voyeurs, eves-droppers and “comic, marginal peeping-toms” (52), in the words of Nair, they validate Foucault’s aphorism “knowledge is power.” “Their suppositions and rumours are ‘where historicity is produced in opposition to a history seized by power’” (Ortega 180). Once the death of the patriarch is tentatively accepted, the collective narrator is no longer circumscribed by the historical discourse imposed on them. Hitherto “forced to be no-where and no-one by the dictator’s supreme ‘I’” (Newell 42), they venture across the mainstream history, in which they are only peripheral, and take on the role of active agents of their history as victims of colonisation and then dictatorship.
The embalming of the Patriarch’s body and the decoration for display is a ritual of mourning and funeral. This ritual is accompanied by another ritual that of, in the words of bell hooks, “ritual of rememberance” by the collective narrator (qtd. in Boeder 10). Where noise, suspicion and debate are prohibited, remembering is a political act. This “ritual of remembrance” of the past is then an act of political praxis that challenges repressive political structures and interrogates the production of the historical canon. It is an epistemological and reconstructive project carried out through the use of gossip and rumour. The narrating we-subject is “in the broadest sphere of the textual carnivalization, the executant of the transgressive word because the official law is dissolved by the conversations of the popular culture . . .” (Ortega 182). The concurrence of a hallowed ritual and an almost sacrilegious ritual of narration composed of everyday talk results in incongruity that is central to the carnivalesque, characterized by ambivalence in the simultaneous presence of dualistic images of life/death and sacred/profane. While official decorum demands that the patriarch be addressed and talked about in the most reverential terms, the collective narrator(s) resort to comic, subversive expressions that question his ostensible omnipotence. “Long live the general” and “God Save the All Pure” (31) are replaced by “a comic tyrant who never knew where the reverse side was” (228) and “president of nobody” (21). The sanctity of the ritual of death and mourning associated with the official or formal culture, therefore, is undone and undermined by the cascade of gossips and rumours which turn the entire revered process into a carnival. Nair asserts that “gratuitous excess of trivial detail” and “Blasphemies, obscenities and scatological details” are “legitimized in the discourse of gossip” (53). The text is proliferated by images and language of degradation, distortion and exaggeration that signify the patriarch and the nation. The collective narrator’s discourse of gossip clearly uses expressions as a “nigger whorehouse” (28), shitty country” (5) and a “brothel
of idolaters” (116) to describe the “house of power” (5); while the general is described using words like “human size of a fagot” (24), “dragging his great feet of an elephant” (7). Manuela Sánchez’s disappearance and the patriarch’s obsessive infatuation for her becomes the object of historical and social speculation in humorous songs and writings, which claim to have seen her “... in the madness of Papa Montero’s wake, tricky, lowlife rumba bunch ... in the ticky-tacky of Barlovento over the mine, in the dance of Aracataca ...” (71). Gossip, therefore, according to Irit Rogoff, exemplifies in Derrida’s words: “a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy ... a law of abounding, of excess, a law of participation without membership” (269).

Gossip and rumours eschew fixity and stability; they facilitate a process of deferment and displacement. They preclude closure by keeping the stories circulated and giving fresh and renewed meanings. They are forms of discourse that once initiated become self-perpetual and which “use history as both a pre-text and a pretext” (Nair 52). AP, then in the words of Adelaida López Mejía, “can be read as a prolonged preparation for burial” (10). However, the “final rite of passage is constantly deferred, never actually takes place” (303). The protraction of the embalming ritual is coterminous with the rambling discourse of the collective “we.” This discourse postpones the truth and defers closure continuously through a chain of memories within memories. It encourages a free play of stories and truths. Information is withheld or half-told. This carnivalesque style of remembering eschews dominant, coherent worldviews and questions the construction of knowledge. It stresses the arbitrary nature, the inconsistency and discontinuity as inherent and indisputable properties of the collective narrator’s turbulent political reality. It problematizes the “processes of history-writing and transforms the text of history itself” (Boeder 10). It emphasizes a nuanced retelling of the past that implies a continual
retextualization of the past. Through the creation of a collage of gossip and rumour as countermemory, the narrative foregrounds that knowledge is produced through discursive or textual acts. History is no longer viewed as a hermetic capsule containing a verifiable progression of events; rather, it is understood as textual process entailing revision and directionality.

The textualization of history displays an awareness of the interplay between different social and political relations. In AP, the relationship between the masses and truth is fraught with tension and ambivalence, a consequence of the perpetual, debilitating authority and subjugation to which they have been subjected. The collective narrator is not the traditional, innocuous historical witness and guarantor of historical memory. There is no overarching coherence and unity of the collective voice, a reflection on the tumultuous state of politics of the dictator’s world. The collective narrator is actively involved in the construction as well deconstruction of the patriarch’s myth of authority. As Mayder Dravasa says:

> Like the prophets of the Old Testament, the people are witnesses to absolute power. Clairvoyance and blindness colour their perception and their testimony: fascinated with the “divine” object of their vision, they are simultaneously empowered to see beyond material reality and condemned to see nothing but what the dictator determines they see. (398 Original emphasis)

The collective narrator is not a homogenous entity. There are factions, with their own yarn of gossip and rumours, who feature in each of the sections of the novel. This is made evident by the discrepant accounts of the discovery of the patriarch’s body. In the first three sections, the dictator’s body is discovered in the same position and condition—lying face down, with the golden spur and in his uniform—as had been presaged by a fortune-teller. The collective narrator
is not a naive imbiber of historical knowledge. In the fifth chapter, the collective narrator admits that it had put “a little order into the fabulous disarray,” yet had still not succeeded in making the corpse look like its “legendary image” (141). The text, thus, shows that the “we” is privy to clandestine information, incidents and agreements. However, the knowledge concerning the prognostication of the dictator’s death by a local clairvoyant could not have been disclosed as the patriarch killed the fortune-teller himself so as to prevent that piece of news from spreading in the public forum. By the last chapter, the embalming and decoration process is completed and the collective narrator claims that “for the first time it was possible to believe without any doubt whatsoever in his real existence, although truly no one looked less like him . . .” (184). However, towards the end of the book, the patriarch is visited by the figure of death which tells him that he would not die in his sleep as had been pronounced by the oracle, but in the full state of wakefulness, “barefoot and with beggar’s clothes” he is wearing. This information is rendered again through interlocking memories of one of the anonymous narrators who informs the patriarch that “it was death General sir” which had come with a long-poled hook and had called him “Nicanaor Nicanor which is the name by which death knows all of us men at the moment of death . . .” (227). These disparate accounts illustrate that the collective narrator intervenes and transforms the body according to their underlying motives or popular myths. There is no irrefutable proof on which the reader can rely to determine the truth. By redecorating the dead body in their own fashion, the collective narrator(s) re-appropriate and establish their version of history. It is in its transformation of the body that the collective narrator becomes an agent and teller of its reality. As Minta notes:

Those who say they found him, then, have lied in order to sustain a myth, as those who prepare the body for display will lie in order to sustain a different myth.
Neither of the versions that will emerge of the patriarch's death will be true; both are mythologized versions of a truth that has been so tortuously deformed that it can never be recovered. (110)

In AP, no-one is innocent—neither the oppressor nor the oppressed, as both engage in mythologizing or textualizing processes with their respective latent motives. The conventional binaries of real/unreal and truth/fiction are destabilized as truth sometimes turns out to be the biggest fiction whereas fiction at times offers a semblance of truth, an assertion of collective common sense about life and history.

The retelling of the past, therefore, is orchestrated by a polyphony of conflicting, gossiping voices which, to use Mark Morris's words, scatter the strands of their paranoid whispers in and out of the patriarch's mad soliloquy" (41), creating an environment of ambiguity and untrustworthiness. “This uncertainty,” Minta remaraks, “is part of the novel’s psychological project,” that is, to replicate “the psychological conditions of life under a dictatorship” (106).

The jarring narration becomes a syndrome of a society affected by totalitarianism. The reconstruction of the historiography of the nation is carried out in the form of a series of interlocking and often incompatible memories. These numerous memories, composed of gossip and rumour, provided by the collective “we” do not confer an easy access to the secret of the historical past, but rather defer it, in the Derridean sense, through withholding of key information and the entangled, interwoven memories. However, this unreliability and maze-like quality is not intrinsic to the narrators as much as is symptomatic of the fallibility, constructedness and slipperiness of the historical record. As the novel progresses, the reader is made aware of the dissolution of the official historical consciousness as a multitude of anonymous voices invade this former uniform, reverential space of historiography and repossess it through fragments and
traces of memory. The gossiping voices create “a mutual play of mirror images in which everything you see may be illusory” (Bell 78). The act of recounting upsets “the godly ‘I’ of the General” (Newell 42) by suspending imposed truths in a play of shifting, dissenting memories that displace and defer the past continuously.

This play of memories interrogates the notion of origin/original and foregrounds the textuality of the patriarch’s world. The double, Patricio Aragonés, is a case in point. The simultaneous presence of the patriarch at different places is not a consequence of his supernatural or mystical prowess; it is easily debunked as another official, “historical trick” (69) in the figure of the “official imposter,” Patricio Aragonés (9). “An artificial creation, a caricature,” in the words of José Anadón, Patricio Aragonés epitomizes the textual nature of reality and truth. The Patriarch’s double, Patricio Aragonés is a charlatan, a construct, symbolic of the textual nature of the past and reality. The official imposter created the illusion that the tyrant was everywhere, that his power reached every corner of the nation. However, the collective narrator recognizes that that simultaneous presence everywhere during the flinty years that preceded his first death, that going up as he went down, that going into ecstasy in the sea while in agony in unsuccessful loves, were not a privilege of his nature, as his adulators proclaimed . . . but his luck in counting on the complete service and doglike loyalty of Patricio Aragonés, his perfect double. . . . (10)

While the collective voice concedes to its own limited knowledge, its inability to provide definite answers to the mystery its history has become, it deconstructs the repressive identification between signifier and signified enforced on it by absolute power. Absolute vision and absolute power are mere fabrications, and “absolutes are grounded in the shakiest relativisms, the sublime in grotesqueries, Truth in farce” (Tobin 70-71). At the structural and thematic level, the chaotic jumble of unleashed memories disrupts a stable, imposed
referentiality. The rambling narration as part of the revisionist and reconstructive project denies any narrative coherence to official history. Traces of memories do not characteristically lead to their irrefutable, historical referents, rather to a world where “there was always another truth behind the truth” (37)—a world of simulations, illusions and manipulations. Like the official imposter, Patricio Aragónés, the patriarch is rendered into a political and “historical trick”, a grotesque parody of his projected absolutism by the carnivalesque act of recollection.

Much of the miraculous and unprecedented events are exposed as a function of distorting contrivances of the state-controlled media and political rhetoric. The story of the patriarch’s immaculate conception, promulgated by the state through textbooks, is a construct, “reconstituted by him ever since the most uncertain origins of his memory” (143). These books are the spaces where the “artifices of national history” (126) are circumscribed; they are sites of inventions, forgeries and falsifications. Official history conceptualizes the patriarch’s being—his conception, origin, his rise to power and his ultimate fate—in theological or biblical terms. Dravasa poignantly observes: “. . . [The] patriarch is defined and described by means of metaphors that also characterize the God of the Bible. Like the divinity of the Old Testament, the patriarch is represented through the attributes of light and sound” (400). Like God, he wields power and mystery by remaining invisible, which ironically confirms his presence to the people and prompts the mythologizing of his god-like status. Described as a “general of the universe,” he is “entire, complete, self-defining” (Minta103). However, through the gossiping and rumour-mongering collective narrator, the reader becomes cognizant of another account of his conception. Although school textbooks attribute to his mother, Bendición Alvarado “the miracle of having conceived him without recourse to any male . . .” (40). The biblical annotations to his being are distortions and manipulations of his mother, Bendición Alvarado’s memories in order
to exercise power over the nation. Living in the “suburban mansion” where she is regularly visited by her son, she decides to disclose “the family secrets that she didn’t want to carry to her grave . . . .” She confesses being a prostitute. Her admittance that she could not tell him with absolute certainty which of the several “blacktrail fugitives” was his father and that she had “conceived him standing up and with a hat on because of the storm of bluebottle flies . . . in the backroom of a bar” (111) is reinterpreted and misappropriated by the patriarch as having being conceived without recourse to any male and of having received in “a dream the hermetical keys to his messianic destiny. . . .” The lack of conclusive knowledge about his father is a validation for him that “he was a man without a power like the most illustrious despots of history . . .” (40), hence his patriarchal and godly status. The absence of any lines on the palms of his hands, says his mother, were considered an omen of his kinghood by a circus fortune-teller. The original testimony of her mother is considered by him mere “stumbling blocks in national history,” a result of “feverish deliriums . . .” (112). However, the few pieces of information that he receives are further manipulated to buttress his omnipotence.

Following her death, the dictator proposes the canonization of his mother on account of the discovery of the painted body, on the shroud covering her dead body, without any “plague wrinkles or savages of old age.” The shroud is bestowed with the title “eternal linen” (113) and is taken as an affirmation of Bendición Alvarado’s sanctity. Her body is carried and displayed to the furthest, desolate reaches of the country so that “no one would go without the privilege of honouring her memory . . . .” (114). The patriarch uses his mother’s memories and her dead body as a religious symbol as part of the national narrative to fortify his political stronghold. She is proclaimed the “matriarch of the land by decree with the simple argument that there is no mother but one . . . .” (40).
However, the church rejects the “eternal linen” as the will of Divine Providence and installs a committee to excavate the truth from the lies. Monsignor Demetrius Aldous, the representative of the church, finds no “seeds of Bendicion Alvarado’s sainthood” (125) and concludes that the “miraculous” shroud was only “the work of a painter who was very skilled in the good and evil arts” (120). As a result, the patriarch proscribes the clergy and seizes all their assets after they refuse to bequeath canonized status to his mother. The truth, which had not been “perverted by the splendour of power” (125) and was widely circulated by the rumour-mongering narrator, corroborates with “the true image” that was told by Bendicion Alvarado to her son: she was a poor and innocent “birdwoman from the plains,” with “uncertain origins,” who used to sell “crippled hens” by passing them off as “birds of paradise” (126) and who used “her lower parts in order to eat . . .” (126). All traces of her are obviated from records of the church where she had been baptized and nobody could remember her original name; yet, everyone could tell that it wasn’t her original name as it wasn’t a name from those parts. In spite of the “presidential security thugs who tangled up the thread of the truth” (126), the collective narrator declares that “there were no secrets of the state that were not in the public domain” (111). Here again, the discourse of gossip and rumour reveals the political manipulations and fabrications behind the apparent pristine condition of Bendicion Alvarado’s dead body. The collective narrator points out that the attempt to canonize Bendicion Alvarado’s dead body was a “. . . carnival apparatus that he himself had put together without really thinking about it when he decided that the corpse of his mother should be displayed for public veneration . . . a circus trick which he had fallen into himself without knowing it . . .” (129). Power prevaricates truth and knowledge. Fictions become texts of truth and truth is easily refuted as legends and fables. Within the purview of power, “knowing and not knowing are easily confused” (Boldy 89).
Gossip and rumours as countermemory illustrate the textualization of reality, which is not only circumscribed to the patriarch’s personal identity, but rather is extrapolated to the nation’s history. In addition to his supreme authoritarian reign and his ability to influence cosmology, official history proclaims that the patriarch has the power to shape the teleology of the nation. He is the originator of all meaning, of logos. The patriarch is the alpha and the omega of the nation. Truths and values are created by him. The patriarch represents “The origin and stabilizer of all representations, the biggest Daddy of them all: The Phallus—signifier of the signifiers, Authorizer of the World, Law, Truth and the symbolic order” (Tobin 65).

The patriarch’s discourse is, therefore, logocentric. He sees no difference between himself and the nation and its history. The patriarch symbolizes the past of the nation since history and power act through and on him. He even transcends history by being its creator. “History has been usurped by the dictatorial power. Political tyranny,” Ortega claims, “with its violence, arbitrariness, and indulgence – replaces history, and the discourse of history is then in fact only a discourse of power” (169). OHYS refers to this politico-historical dimension by recovering the incident of the massacre of Banana Company workers that has been erased by official history and forgotten by collective memory. In an acerbic critique of North American imperialism in Macondo (South America), the novel portrays the arrival of giant corporates in the form of the Banana Company and its oppression of the workers, which leads to raucous protests by the people. In order to control the obstreperous crowd, the state, then, takes military action against thousands of men, women and children who are massacred at the train station in Macondo. The dead bodies are then put in a nocturnal train to be dumped into the sea. Subsequently, the state institutes historical amnesia among the people by manipulating and appropriating discourses (like school textbooks, newspapers, public language) in the social and cultural space. The official
version denies the very existence of the massacre, and gradually, the hegemonic version that insists “Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened and nothing will ever happen” prevails. With time, even the inhabitants come to accept it and positively affirm that the workers had “with a great spirit” had reduced their demands and gone back home to their families:

The official version, repeated a thousand times and mangled out all over the country by every means of communication the government found at hand, was finally accepted: there were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped. . . . In that way they were finally able to wipe out the union leaders.

(315-16)

Similarly, in AP the patriarch orders that the two thousand children, who were an indispensable element of his “infallible method for winning the lottery” (90), be carried in “nocturnal boxcars to the least-inhabited regions of the country” (92) and are blown up using dynamites. The regime had been using these children to pick out lottery numbers that would always declare the presidential ticket as the winner, resulting in “the miraculous bounty of the national lottery” (91). The fear that the children might disclose this state-secret led the army to hide them in the dungeons of the harbor fort. Increasing unrest among the people is conciliated as mere “rumors spread by traitors, lies of opposition” (90) and an investigatory commission is invited from the League of Nations that declares

. . . that they had found the jails closed down, the nation in peace, everything in place, and they had not found any indication to conform the public suspicion that
there had been or might have been a violation by intent or by action or by omission of the principles of human rights. . . . (93)

Truth is, then, not based on verifiable incidents and empirical observations; rather, it is a product of the official discourse. The patriarch is a man of immense power whose pen (logos) decided the history and fate of the nation. Not only does he create a double of himself, a caricature in the figure of Patricio Aragonés, but transforms the whole country into a grotesque mirror image of himself. History is conceived by the dictator in his own likeness. The origins of the nation as a unified entity and the patriarch’s rise to power are shrouded in mist, exemplified by the official version and the popular versions in the shape of gossip and rumours. Official history, as carried out by textbooks and national archives, is configured by and becomes synonymous with the patriarch’s distorted and unreliable memory. As the collective narrator says: “. . . in his vast realm of dreariness there was no other truth but the exemplary truths of the primer . . .” (146). The apotheosized history declares the patriarch as a saviour, lifting the nation from deep poverty and decrepitude. This version, no doubt, is provided by the patriarch who remembers towns so poor that people had to be buried without coffins. Historical archives relate “the times of the Goths,” “the evil times of the nation,” before the patriarch ascended to the throne and prohibited “everything that might awaken in one’s memory the ignominious laws that existed before his power . . .” (144). The patriarch recalls a childhood memory of “the disaster of the thirty grand pianos destroyed in abyss” that provided the impetus for the building of the railways to the upland plains. This event was extensively covered and written about outside the nation as well, although the patriarch claims that only he could give “truthful testimony.” He recollects a pack of thirty mules, carrying pianos for masked balls at the coffee plantations; in a stroke fortuity, he witnessed the rear mule slipping off the track and dragging the train of mules
into the abyss. His memory, apparently, is so meticulous that he can even recall “the endless chords of the pianos that fell with it playing by themselves in the void” (145). However, the dictator is not unequivocally sure whether these childhood memories are authentic, or yet another fabrication that he had invented reading travel books or conjured on bad nights of fever during the war. But the patriarch rebuffs any doubts by declaring that “a lie is more comfortable than doubt, more useful than love, more lasting than truth . . .” (228).

Even the collective narrator is not certain whether the nation was really in a state of abjection as the dictator’s memories claim or the memory is the creation of the propaganda machinery to justify the brutal regime that followed and present a progressive view of history. National history is therefore subject to the whims and caprices of the patriarch’s memory. As the narrator declares:

... during our time there was no one who doubted the legitimacy of his history, or anyone who could have disclosed or denied it . . . there was no other nation except the one that had been made by him in his own image and likeness where space was changed and time corrected by the designs of his absolute will . . . (143)

The origins of the patriarch and the nation are entangled and obscured in conflicting, disparate accounts of the past. At one point in the novel, the patriarch remembers the moment and the ensuing mayhem when the West in the figure of Columbus made contact with his land and its people. It was a “historic October Friday” when he found everybody in his lair “wearing a red biretta . . .” (34). He is informed that some strangers had arrived “who gabbled in funny old talk.” Wondering whether this “lunatic business” falls within “the incumbent of his government,” he sees “the usual battleship that the marines had left behind at the dock . . . [and] in the shadowy sea, he saw the three caravels” (36). The “three caravels” refer to the fleet of Columbus and the
battleship of the marines is an allusion to the American neo-imperialist forces. The general's regime, anachronistically, coincides with the "founding" of the nation by Columbus. This version, if true, places him already in power at the point of contact, when Columbus "discovered" the Americas, before the beginning of actual colonization and the post-independence period, an account highly opposed to the other versions. Conveniently, all "trace of his origins had disappeared" (40) so as to give the illusion of a rule without a beginning and an end. The patriarch has always been present as the saviour of the people since times immemorial. His origins and the nation's coincide, hence his interminable time in power for hundreds of years. This precludes the possibility of an alternative version of reality by the populace who are put under the spell of this apparently incessant reign, rendering them into political apathy. As Benjamin Hamborg remarks:

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\text{Just as the manipulation of history by colonial powers prevents the colonized from imagining a potentially bright post-colonial future, so too has the regime's manipulation of history impeded the people's ability to imagine a positive post-Patriarch future. (41)}
\]

Alternative memories and stories are simply erased from the official pages of history ensuring their eventual oblivion: "... he had them tear the pages about the viceroy out of school primers so that they would not exist in history..." (117). By erasing alternative accounts, he becomes the sole narrator of the nation, admitting "he alone was the government" (29) and "a nation is the best thing that was ever invented" (16). Hamborg notes that "By tracing his origin back to the moment of contact, the Patriarch becomes the beginning of the nation... The nation, in its modern form, begins with the Patriarch. Therefore he, like the colonist, "is the guarantor for its [the nation's existence]..." (42).
However, nothing escapes the ears and eyes of the rumour-mongering masses. According to some versions of the grapevine, the patriarch emerged as a leader out of the belligerent conflicts between the Liberals and the Conservatives during the era of civil unrest in the country, the post-independent period of many short-term governments. According to other versions of circulating stories, he was instated as the leader of the nation by English colonial forces and was then supported by the American neo-imperialists. Patricio Aragonés voices this popular opinion before dying: “. . . everyone says that you’re president of nobody and that you’re not on the throne because of your big guns but because the English sat you there and the gringos kept you there with the pair of balls on their battleship . . .” (21-22). History is distorted and manipulated by state-machinery via textbooks which 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, and who had the secret of a salt with the virtue of curing lepers’ sores and making cripples walk. (39-40)

All that the public has been fed over the years are fallacious images and stories that conferred the patriarch god-like status. The possibility of discerning truth from the numerous fictions available is frustrated by the fact that the official regime provides three different birth certificates and narratives of the patriarch, imagining him to be present at all the different junctures of the temporal history, thereby entangling “the threads of reality so that no one would be able to decipher the secret of his origins” (126). History, Ortega says, thus, becomes equivalent to politics: “the total historical experience, from the discovery of America by the colonial enterprise of Columbus to the geographical plunder of imperialism, is rendered by the text as a travesty”
However, the inscription of gossip and rumour in the sacred and privileged space of history-writing carnivalizes and subverts the hegemonic propensities of traditional historiography. The collective narrator speculates that contrary to the official representations the patriarch was a man of the upland plains because of his immense appetite for power, the nature of his government, his mournful bearing, 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. . . . (40)

While the state endeavours to project an inexorable historical rule of the patriarch by distorting his true origins and age, the masses seek solace in and undermine such strategic manipulation of the past through the “repeated and always denied rumour[s]” that prognosticate that he would ultimately succumb to one of his “regal illnesses” (186). The attempts made by the state-machinery to establish official versions regarding the state of the nation and the patriarch are easily debunked by the several circulating gossips and rumours. History is reconfigured as anticipatory gossips and rumours that demystify the legendary aura surrounding the patriarch and the progressive march of the nation.

In a similar vein, GHL demythologizes the figure of Simon Bolivar through a reconstruction of his last days of his life. Through alternative memories and anecdotes, Bolivar is shown to share some similarities with the general in AP. Like the patriarch, he abhors defeat in games, political or recreational, and is sensitive to criticism: “He was so sensitive to everything said about him, true or false, that he never recovered from any falsehood, and until the moment of his death he struggled to disprove them” (114). Reminiscent of the patriarch, who is responsible for the countless murders of innocent men and children, Bolivar is also seen as a
ruthless and unforgiving man, passing the decree for the execution of eight hundred men including “the patients in the hospital at La Guayra” (123). The novel deconstructs the collective memory and image of Bolivar’s heroic status by presenting a realistic sketch that concedes to his human frailty and mortality, in addition to his military and strategic prowess. The novel, in the words of Palencia-Roth, replaces a “man of legendary, even mythical proportions with an all-too-human person in the last weeks and days of life” (360).

In AP, the apparent omnipotence and omnipresence of the patriarch camouflages a more sinister reality, that is, uncertainty which reigns under his command. This unknowability and uncertainty is foregrounded by the inability of the collective narrator to arrive at a concrete singular truth about its historical past. The obscurity around historical truth focalizes the manipulation of reality by power. The patriarch sustains his dominion by instilling fear in people, making them oblivious to the truth and by keeping them misinformed. As José Anadón says:

The absolute power of the tyrant is not based on his intellectual acuity, on an imposing physical presence, nor in his ideals of justice, moral conduct, wisdom to rule, vision of the future, sense of compassion; although he will appeal publicly to these and all other virtues. It lies rather in creating a world of illusion and lies . . .

(56)

The patriarch assumes god-like authority and prerogative in ordering their existence. The populace is rendered as puppets in a pantomime, with their historical reality being generated by the dictator, for instance his weekly win in the national lottery and the changing of soap operas. As Fernando Alegria notes: “History . . . resembles the Patriarch’s eternity: a poor and unfortunate act of illusionism . . . a contemptible manipulation” (qtd. in Anadón). History, like the Patriarch, is an unending reign of lies, deceptions and manipulations.
The entwined morass of memories within memories blurs the boundaries between gossip, rumour, myth and history. Numerous, contradictory memories underlie the myth-making machinery in the text. They do not give the reader an objective, untrammelled view of the patriarch and the working of his regime. They engage in speculation, embellishments and conjecture—elements central to the re-historicizing and demythologizing enterprise. The text is punctuated by phrases such as “It was thought,” “they murmured,” “the story went around,” “many versions of his state were becoming more and more intense while in the stables he measured out the milk for the garrisons” (60). “The people express a kinetic, doubt-full conception of history and the nation” (Newell 44). All the accounts provided by the collective narrator seem credible and equally precarious. The collective narrator’s discourse of gossip and rumour rejects all imposed origins of meaning and truth. Attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding the origin, personal and historical, leads to, as Minta says, a “progressive disenlightenment” (107), as the reader is pulled into a labyrinth of memories, each displacing and deferring the origin and illustrating that there was always another truth behind the truth. They “deterritorialize the founding center into the locus of indeterminacy, inconsistency and noise” (Tobin 66). What the reader witnesses is the questioning of the notion of origin and the construction of historical knowledge, which are rendered as highly mythologized events, caught in a textual play of memories. “The origin,” Ortega says, “is thus only a projection of the present . . . a draining of historical meaning and its occupation by power” (177).

The epistemological status of the narrators’ gossips and rumours is not as important as the actual telling of the past. Dispossessed of history and repressed through fear and violence, the collective narrator reclaims the past and makes it their own by recounting it. Deprived of their most basic right, narration is a privilege for them. Truth they recognize has been irrevocably
disfigured and corrupted by the dictatorial regime. Instead, they come up with provisional and contingent narratives of the past in the form of gossip and rumour, which become modes of entering and challenging the official historical discourse. By highlighting the processes behind the creation of a singular, transcendental historical consciousness, they show that remembering is a form of empowerment. Official history is mutilated and transfigured by the torrent of countermemories. Historical teleology is dismantled and rehistoricized by the discourse of gossip and rumour as the “age of the comet” (reference to the patriarch’s infatuation with the local beauty queen, Manuela Sánchez, in opposition to the state version of the victory of regime over the forces of evil), “era of hearse of progress” (reference to the horrific reign of José Ignacio Saenz de la Barra, who, the patriarch hired to investigate the murder of his wife and son), the “age of the epidemic” (reference to the American marines’ evacuation and the subsequent transformation of the “house of power” into a “gypsy encampment”), “the first century of peace,” and “the days of black vomit” (3-4). These new historical placards subvert the atypical temporal markers and linearity of official historiography and assert the subjective, textual process of knowledge creation.

However, gossip and rumour do not purport to offer complete knowledge; they self-consciously give partial and fragmented view of an event or behaviour. They foreground discontinuity, inconsistency and fragmentation of the historical record. The narrative style of the novel is then collateral with the fluid structure of gossip and rumour. The past is narrated, as Nair notes, in “scrap, shreds, fragments” (57) allowing the holes and gaps in the historical record to become conspicuous. The entangled memories and shifting narrators are characteristic of the shape of narration in gossip and rumour where the narrator remains unspecified. As Kenji Nakagami claims:
Gossip is related to the matter of narration. With gossip, the pronouns (that is, who is narrating what) are concealed, the narration floats free by itself. Naturally since pronouns are effaced, it's not I who narrates, just someone – that’s how it happens. And yet in this instance, narration will take on a compound significance. Even if it doesn’t develop into polyphony or a chorus, it is, well, something akin to a chorus. (qtd. in Morris 38)

Through their circularity and self-reflexivity, gossip and rumour reject the linear and teleological representations of history. Instead, they emphasize the textual nature of the referent, which is divested of all essentialized or natural meanings and is revealed as a product of discourse.

The fragmented, jagged narrative style is not only the inevitable result of the repressive circularity of the regime, but also an indication of the defining feature of rumour and gossip. While these discourses function to reveal and explain, they also leave meaningful gaps and omissions to create an air of gripping suspense and expectancy as well as to facilitate a play of meanings through insinuation and innuendo. As Luise White says:

The silence here is not an additional, repressed version of the spoken, but a kind of socially constituted understanding of memory, loyalty, and accountability; the silence described here is what the gossip is really about. . . . Silence carries hints, allusions, references, and opinions that are not contained in the other information, but it remains silence, powerful because it is not spoken, and cannot be pulled—or decoded—into speech. . . . silences are not sites of repression but eloquent assumptions about local knowledge.

Silence manifests as gaps, holes, slips, projections and displacements in the historical unconscious. In AP, silences in the discourse of the collective narrator can, then, be construed as
the “politics of intentional omissions” (Boeder 63). This kind of narration “marks a shift in the practices of voice in the field of historiography,” raising such questions as: what are the rules governing history writing and memory practices? Who remembers? What is remembered? What is the relationship between textuality and power structures? It encircles the dictator within the polyphonic voices of the people who had been politically and historically disenfranchised.

AP, classified under the genre of the dictator novel, therefore, defies conventional norms of the historical novel. Much of the history presented as countermemory in the novel is an amalgamation of official story, gossip, rumours, legends, myths and hearsay. This form of countermemory denaturalizes and unsettles the conventional modes of historical representation as well as interrogates sanctioned versions of the past.

Carnivalesque storytelling in the form of gossip and rumour deconstructs and re-mythologizes the archetypal dictator figure, not to bestow him with titanic power and dignity, but to reveal the facade of absolute power. This facade manifests as distortions and gaps in the historical record. Rumour and gossip are symptomatic markers of uncertainty and the “crisis of information” (Ortega 181). In the course of their narration, they foreground the problematics of the history-construction which is entangled in a quagmire of political interests. The collective narrator “undertakes a historical and nationalist intervention” (Newell 43). The patriarch fails to acknowledge the fragility and transient dimension of power. His obliviousness of the real nature of time and human existence leaves him trapped in a perpetual solitude of power. The collective narrator, on the other hand, accepts doubt and ambiguity, in both their limiting and empowering potential, as conditions of a “real life” which they had lived, despite the oppressive rule, “with an insatiable passion that you [the patriarch] never dared even to imagine out of the fear of knowing what we knew only too well that it was arduous and ephemeral but there wasn’t any other” (228).