ISSN- 2395-7522 (Online), Imp. Fact.6.21 (IIJF)
Literary Cognizance:An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
e - Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol. – VII, Issue-1, June 2026

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INVENTING THE PAST: HISTORY, MYTH, AND NARRATIVE AUTHORITY IN GABRIEL GARCÍA MARQUEZ

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Abstract

This paper proposes to study the dynamic interplay of myth and history in the novels of Gabriel Garcia Márquez, positing his narrative strategy within the theoretical structure of New Historicism and myth criticism. Reading Márquez's three significant novels— One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), The Autumn of the Patriarch (1975), and Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981),this paper expostulates that the author builds an alternative historiography where myth works not as a means to escape from the historical reality, but as a critical mode to understand it. Drawing on the critical perceptions of Stephen Greenblatt, Hayden White, Northrop Frye, Mircea Eliade, and Linda Hutcheon, the present study shows how Márquez unsettles the authenticity of the official history by implanting socio-political and cultural realities within the archetypal characterisation, cyclical temporal structures, and communal memory. Moreover, insights from Angel Rama, Walter Mignolo, and Aijaz Ahmad situate Márquez within a broader decolonial discourse. Using magic realism and fragmented narrative techniques, his novels establish history as contingent, textual, and ideologically intervened. This paper contends that the mythogenic reworking of history in the works of Gabriel Garcia Márquez avows the cultural identity of Latin America while underscoring storytelling as an act of cultural memory, resistance, and reimagining of history.

Keywords

Cultural Memory, Historiography, Cyclical Time, Magic Realism, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

"Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it."- *Living to Tell the Tale* 7

The creative world of Gabriel Garcia Márquez counters the conventional difference between history and myth by underlining their mutual dependence. His works intend to construct an alternative historiography that is not just rooted in the lived experiences, but in memories and narratives. Hayden White writes, "I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (White, 2), which ultimately foregrounds the reclaiming of the narrative authority by the author to reconfigure and present it from his own perspective. This reclamation of the author brings into focus the tension between history and myth that assumes particular significance in the postcolonial contexts, marked by the domination of the official historiography that is firmly enmeshed in colonial epistemologies. In the context of Latin America, this tension is not merely literary, but deeply political, because the very act of narrating history appears to be inextricable from the struggle for historical agency and cultural identity. Gabriel Garcia Márquez writes against the background of twentieth-century Latin America and its historical conditions, characterised by recurrent political strife, colonial leftovers, and neo-imperial economic models that made him challenge the epistemological foundations of Western historiography by reconfiguring his narratives as a platform where history is not merely registered but vigorously constructed. The boom in Latin American Literature brought in a new consciousness

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that sought to recuperate their narrative from the Eurocentric historiography. Márquez contributes to this movement through synthesising mythic imagination and political realism. Instead of treating myth as a pre-modern remnant, his works retrieve it as a viable epistemological structure that can articulate history, transcending empirical facts and data. In his Nobel lecture, Márquez points out that reality; in the Latin American context is not just what has happened, but what is believed to have happened. This constructs the central assumption of his narrative strategy that historical reality is constituted of belief, memory and the very act of storytelling.

This paper primarily argues that Gabriel Garcia Márquez builds an alternative history that intends to recoup the authority of narration from the colonial discourses. In his Nobel Lecture, *The Solitude of Latin America*, he reflects, "The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary" (Garcia, 3). This inevitably asserts the need of a decolonized narrative practice that is not only free from Eurocentric historiography, but one that reclaims the legitimacy of indigenous myth, memory, and storytelling as modes of historical cognition. This decolonial stand of Márquez aligns him with Walter Mignolo's idea of "decolonial option" in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011) that aims at dismantling the colonial framework of power, and opening up scopes for epistemic possibilities. The study also purports to integrate new historicism and myth criticism in the context of postcolonial theory. While new historicism exposes the textuality of history and the historicity of the text, myth criticism will focus on the structural and temporal aspects of myth. A combined lens of the two will complicate the connection between modernity, literature and cultural identity in Latin America, and allow a layered and complex perception of Márquez's narrative technique as historical, annalistic, chronicle-based, archival, and decolonial.

The Discourse of History: The Narrative Construction of History:

New Historicism, as Stephen Greenblatt reflects, understands history as a discursive construct enmeshed within the power structure. Focusing on the idea of "circulation of social energy," he argues that "(T)he work of art is not itself a container of a stable aesthetic value but a product of a network of relations through which social energy circulates." (Shakespearean *Negotiations* 6), emphasising that cultural meanings are incessantly produced, restructured, and exchanged. The idea further strengthens his opinion in his *Renaissance Self Fashioning* (1980), where he observes that a text both shapes and is shaped by the cultural, social, and political structures within which they are produced. Thus, literature, according to Greenblatt, is not just compliant with history but actively contributes to its production. This insight is further extended and complemented by Hayden White's concept of historiography, which intends to posit that narratives of history are formed and structured through literary tropes and emplotment. In *Metahistory*, White claims that historians "encode events in terms of narrative structures" (White, 7) to emphasise that the narratives of history are not neutral descriptions or renditions of the past, but manufactured through the "encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures" (White, 7) that she calls emplotment. This not only undermines the claim of the objectivity of the historical narratives, but also establishes the scope of transforming them into recognizable narrative forms like tragedy, comedy, or the romance. The fictions of Márquez underline the narrativisation of historical facts by proving the instability of the facts through dramatisation. In his works, the state promoted or intitutionalised official accounts are continuously subverted, exposing their reliance on ideological frameworks and narrative controls.

Aijaz Ahmed critiques this over emphasis on textuality on the ground that it tends to obscure the material conditions of historical reality, particularly in postcolonial contexts, where a substantial inequality exists in the political and economic structures. He critiques the theories that tend to reduce the reality of the world to textuality, which ultimately removes the materiality of history

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Vol. – VII, Issue-1, June 2026

from it (Ahmed, 11-15). Here, Ahmed not only focuses on the material reality of history, but also claims that history must be grounded in the social, economic, and political realities. Ahmed's observation becomes relevant in the reading of Márquez, which is tightly connected to the historical materiality of Latin America along with its political violence, colonial domination and cultural hybridity. This dynamics get a stronger context through Angel Rama's concept of the "lettered city" that finds the Latin American literature functioning as a location for cultural negotiation, conciliating between the educated elite ("letrado") and the common mass, upholding the popular forms of knowledge. In *The Lettered City* (1996), Rama focuses on how the "letrados" were considered the custodians of political power and cultural authority exercised through their command over knowledge, writing, and official discourse. He writes, "[T]he principal explanation for the ascendency of the letrados, then lay in their ability to manipulate writing in largely illiterate societies" (Rama, 24) Rama's observation exposes how the official version of Latin American history is manipulated by the institutional authority regulated by the "letrados". They consolidated the discourses of colonial power with their command over writing the history. Márquez's creative world unsettles the monopoly of the "letrados" by subverting this tradition, and foregrounding oral memory, myth, storytelling and popular narratives. The subversion is followed by the incorporation of the popular forms of knowledge in his writing, thereby countering the control of the institutionalised and colonial epistemologies. The concept of Walter Mignolo's "border thinking" allows an extra lens to this act of subversion by focusing on the epistemologies that emerge from the margins. According to Mignolo, "Border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority…of those who have been placed at the margins of the modern/colonial world system." ("Theorizing from the Borders" 206), which inevitably points to the alternative methods to understand historical materiality and challenge the Eurocentric imperatives. The insistence of myth, oral memory, and the non-linear presentation of time can be accepted as Márquez's way of "border thinking" in the Mignolian way. This allows a system of knowledge that is born of colonial difference and resistance to the Western epistemology of history. Thus, Márquez's creative world not just combines myth and history, but also generates knowledge from the margins, thereby making his works not only an epistemic resistance, but also a historiography of decoloniality.

Myth, Memory, and the Cyclical Time:

Gabriel García Márquez's works, as already mentioned, can be read as significant challenges to Eurocentric historiography, as they tend to subvert the ideology of logical progress. Here, myth criticism, specifically found in the works of Northrop Frye and Mircea Eliade, offers a strong critical ground to explore the symbolic compositions fundamental to his narratives. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Frye writes, "Literature is a total order of words… in which recurrent images, symbols, and narrative patterns form an underlying structure" (Frye, 17). Márquez emphasises repetition and continuity in his narratives that expose the assiduity of colonial and authoritarian structures of history. His novels, especially *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, reflect cyclical temporality and the repetitive character patterns, which can be read in the light of Frye's archetypal structure that transforms literary texts into universal patterns of meaning. The cyclical pattern of time in Márquez's works also aligns with Mircea Eliade's linear historical time and cyclical sacred time, where the former is progressive and irreversible, and the latter allows a continual reenactment of the mythic patterns, eventually collapsing the temporal differences. Eliade writes, "An object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype" (Eliade, 34). Connecting myth to history, Eliade further reflects, "(M)yth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time…a time different from profane time" (Eliade, 5). Precisely, a myth critical reading of Márquez's works points to the concourse of archetypal structure and scared temporality, where the recurrence of names, their stories, and historical events put forward no linear

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e - Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
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progression, but an archetypal repetition. Márquez does not merely fuse myth in history, but redesigns history as a mythic narrative, thereby questioning the Western discourses of historiography and emphasising the repetitive and symbolic structure that forms cultural memory.

Memory, Myth and Coloniality in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*:

Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* not only exemplifies his historiographic decoloniality, but its narrative structure also applies Frye's archetypal structure and Eliade's sacred temporality. The cyclical pattern of time in the novel counters the linear idea of Western temporality and eventually aligns with Eliade's mythic time. This cyclical time unsettles the chronological movement and indicates the historical reality of Latin America, permeated with recurrence, and free from the logical foundations of colonial discourses. The cyclical pattern of time can also be seen through the decolonial lens that critiques the colonial concept of time. Walter Mignolo in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011) observes that modernity conceptualises time with a linear motion, and he comments,"[H]istory as "time" entered into the picture to place societies in an imaginary chronological line going from nature to culture, from barbarism to civilization following a progressive destination towards some point of arrival" (Mignolo, 151) Thus, Mignolo's idea critiques Eurocentric modernity for placing the non-West cultures in a past that Europe has already surpassed. Márquez also intends to unsettle this Western temporal hierarchy and claims back a diverse historical time that upholds a mythic temporality. The novel opens with "The world was so recent that many things lacked names…" (García, 1), which evokes a primordial setting that reminds one of Eliade's "illud tempus" or the primordial sacred time. The establishment of Macondo by Jose Arcadio Buendia becomes analogous to the cosmogonical myth, making the place both a historical and symbolic space. The journey of Macondo from an utopos to its catastrophic cessation reflects the history of Latin America affected by the arrival of Western imperial capitals, particularly in the name of the Banana Company in the novel. The foreign corporate exploitation has been represented through the massacre of the strike of the plantation workers in 1928. Márquez refuses to document the event realistically in alignment with the government report, insisting "There were no dead…nothing had happened" (García, 360). On the contrary, Márquez's narrative instantiates what Hayden White points to as the dependence of history on authority and emplotment. The novel does not record the event as a documentary, but delineates it with hyperbolic intensity, along with a collective amnesiac ending that makes the tragic event "officially" nonexistent. The mingling of facts with narrative distortion emphasises the New Historicist perception of how discourse and power mediate history. Thus, the state narrative of the event tends to erase the collective memory with the establishment of the "official" truth, but it survives in the fragmented memories that underscore the powerful role played by storytelling and myth-making as counter history. The fusion of myth and history also focuses on the importance of hybridity in the transcultural identity of Latin America, where indigenous, African, and European traditions intersect (Rama, 56). This hybridity in the Latin American history and culture is not merely aesthetic, but also epistemological, resisting the binary of myth and history.

The structure of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is deeply mythic, and it also resists linear historiography. The pattern of cyclical time has been created by the repetition of proper names like Jose Arcadia, Aureliano, or Amaranta, which produces an effect of déjà vu. The characters appear to be trapped in ancestral archetypes, echoing generations, and evincing a mythic idea of time that is clearly different from linear time. If Aurelianos are contemplative and isolated, Jose Arcadios are impetuous and corporeal. The distinction of time also collapses with the prophetic manuscripts of Melaquiades, disclosing Buendia's predestined history that has already been written. Thus, the convergence of the past, present, and future of Buendia creates a mythic totality that reflects Mircea Eliade's eternal return. The events of the novel participate in sacred patterns of cyclical time, where

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e - Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol. – VII, Issue-1, June 2026

history recurs as ritual. The end of Buendia has already been inscribed at the beginning, unsettling distinctions of linear time and converting the narratives of history into mythic destiny.

Márquez's use of magic realism also disturbs the epistemic hierarchical structure that privilege logic over imagination. It not only complicates the connection between history and myth, but also works as a mode of mediation. Extraordinary events— Remidios the Beauty's ascension into heaven, the raining of yellow flowers, or the insomnia plague— are narrated with equal journalistic objectivity and detachment as political strife and economic manipulation. This narrative strategy challenges Western historiographic rationality and legitimizes alternative epistemology grounded in oral traditions, myth-making, and indigenous cosmologies. Precisely, Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* challenges colonial hierarchies' epistemology, thereby building an alternative non-western historical consciousness founded on cultural hybridity.

The Archetype of the Dictator: Tyranny and Myth in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*:

If *One Hundred Years of Solitude* explores the mythology of collective history, Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* focuses on the connection between political power and myth. The novel graphs the trajectory of a dictator from a figure of authoritarian power to a mythic archetype. The long extended tenure and omnipresence of the unnamed patriarch, "He was Supernatural" (García, 12), make him almost a mystical figure, one who is both historically discreet and archetypally pervasive. Rolland Barthes observed, "Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (García, 143). The mythic construction of the patriarch lines up with Rolland Barthes idea of the myth to show how it works to naturalise social hierarchies and the despotic regime becomes the fate of the nation. The myth of the symbolic authority of the patriarch, incessantly ruling in a putrescent Caribbean nation, has been deconstructed by Márquez in the novel. The grotesque physical feature of the despot, his absurd activities, not only reflect the weakness of his rule, but also the moral decadence of the state, inducing the archetype of the Fisher King in *The Waste Land* (1922). The body of the patriarch turns out to be a pertinent site of political allegory, epitomising corrupt power. Márquez raises the political authority of the patriarch into an allegory of myth through hyperbolic and grotesque imageries, establishing it as constructed and not something inherent, reflecting Linda Hutcheon's idea of the historiographic metafiction that is " both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, 5). The postcolonial reading of the novel situate it within Walter Mignolo's "colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo, 78), a structure where authority, economy, gender, and knowledge intersect and control. This intersection sustains hierarchical patterns through "material and symbolic means" (Mignolo, 78), exemplifying the rule of the patriarch, coalescing political control and authority with legitimisation of myth.

The fragmented pattern of the narrative, with long looping sentences, free of logical breaks, underlines the disorientation of time and volatility of factual history under the dictatorial regime. The repeated proclamation of the death of the patriarch not only lends an ambiguity to the narrative but also points to the malleability of historical truth. Along with dismantling the validity of the official discourse, the fragmented narrative of the novel sanctions the legitimacy of the alternative voices. These voices lend a polyphonic configuration to the narrative, emphasising the dialectic between dominant discourses and popular memory through storytelling. Therefore, Márquez's techniques of mythologizing the despotism and autocracy of the patriarch lays bare the resilient oppressive legacy, while contesting its narrative universality.

Violence and Communal Memory: Cultural Myth in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*:

Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* transfers the focus from the authority and control of the state to social rituals and norms, exploring how individual activities and reactions are informed by cultural myths. Revolving round the murder of Santiago Nasar, the novel adopts an

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e - Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
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almost quasi-journalistic way of presenting it as something inevitable like a mythical trope of sacrifice, " There had never been a death more foretold" (García, 3), making it a communal act. The acts unfold as a communal event anticipated yet unhindered. Everybody knew about the crime that was about to happen, but social norms and customs restrained them from intervening. The narrative pattern underlines ritual enactment where recurrence of evidences and testimony re-create the event, making it into a legend of the community. The code of honour associated with the murder of Santiago is not just a part of the cultural legacy, but an ideological formation born of particular social connection. Taking cue from Aijz Ahmad's observation that all types of consciousness are social, it can be deduced that communal approval of the honour killing surfaces from the intersection of class interests, patriarchal codes, and community expectations, and not out of any fixed cultural value. The murder of Santiago, which has been considered an act of honour, functions as a firmly rooted narrative governing behaviour. The codes of honour instrumental for the murder worked as a sacred law that is absolute and beyond question. Thus, seen through the lens of the collective cultural myth, Santiago becomes a sacrificial victim of the community, whose death reinstates social equilibrium. The connivance of the community to the murder reinforces the absorbance of the myth; it establishes how cultural scripts work as the mechanisms of social regulation.

The fragmented narrative of the novel underlines the unreliability of factual history, whereas multiple perspectives establish its subjectivity, conforming to Hayden White's idea that "a historical work is a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse" (White, 2), emphasising the practices of interpretation that build a meaningful past. Decades later, the narrator of the novel tries to reconstruct the past from the contradictions and gaps of memory. Thus, Márquez in this novel testifies to White's idea of historical events that "are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and highlighting of others" (White, 6-7) and represents history as a site of contestation where fragments of memory, contradictory evidence, and personal recollections converge. The use of myth in *Chronicles of a Death Foretold* does not figure as superimposed supernaturalism, but as inexorable rituals, where the foretold crime gathers the stature of fate, thereby blurring the difference between re-building of factual history and mythic storytelling. The coexistence of multiple ways of perceiving the historical fact through the interaction of official records, personal memories, and collective recollections underline the importance of multiple and heterogeneous epistemologies in the formation of history.

Conclusion:

Seymour Menton, in his study of the history of Latin American novels, observes that they are "[T]he conscious distortion of history through omissions, exaggerations, and anachronisms" (Menton, 23). This particular attribute pertinently matches with the novels of Gabriel Garcia Márquez that challenge the chances of recuperating objective history by constantly questioning conventional historiography. Throughout his creative career, he had consistently emphasised the textuality of history, affirming the power of mythical imagination, storytelling, and collective memory as alternative discourses. Therefore, his use of myth becomes a powerful instrument that unearths personal experiences that are erased or suppressed by authorial archives.

His mythopoeic historiography becomes an integral part of the Latin American identity. He asserts the universality of Latin American history by rooting in into archetypal frameworks, but simultaneously preserving its regional specifics. The devastation of Macondo does not point to meaningless life and the rejection of traditional structures, but the termination of a cyclical time period. Even though the town disappears, the unravelling of the Melquiades' manuscripts posits the continuation of the narrative memory. In parallel, the death of the patriarch confirms that despotism and autocracy can be recurrent, but not eternal. Similarly, the death of Santiago remains alive in

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Literary Cognizance:An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
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collective memory, denying the official archives of history. Thus, the Latin American history in the creative works of Márquez becomes an epic narrative, emphasising the subjective value of historical interpretation, where the past is revisited by storytelling. This reimagination of history through myth making and storytelling does not ignore the political reality, rather resonate it, emphasising that collective identity is not constructed with official history, but with imagination, memory and subjective narratives. His novels redefine the accepted conception of history as the unchangeable record of the past, making it a moving and contested process, informed and rewritten by literature.

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Article Received:15/06/2026
Article Accepted:22/06/2026
Published Online:30/06/2026

To Cite the Article: Chowdhury, Pradipta. "*Inventing the Past: History, Myth, and Narrative Authority in Gabriel García Marquez*." *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VII, Issue-1, June, 2026, 107-114. www.literarycog nizance.com

ISSN- 2395-7522 (Online), Imp. Fact.6.21 (IIJF)
Literary Cognizance:An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
e - Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol. – VII, Issue-1, June 2026