



## G.MARQUEZ'S ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE FROM THE VIEW OF MANTRA

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the characteristics, functions, and applies mantras to approach the novel of *Hundred Years of Solitude*. Therefore, playing a role as a component and operating on the principle of similarity, contagion of magic, mantra expresses the notion of life as a world of coherent interactions, in which real and magic are intertwined, which is the basis for Magical Realism considered as atypical character of Latin American literature. Besides, mantra viewed from reception will touch again the problem of reading, understanding and textual interpretation, which is expressed by G. Marquez in *Hundred Years of Solitude* as the core of the novel, community's history and art.

**KEYWORDS:** mantra, literature, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, reception, magic

### INTRODUCTION

#### TRĂM NĂM CÔ ĐƠN TỪ GÓC NHÌN THẦN CHÚ

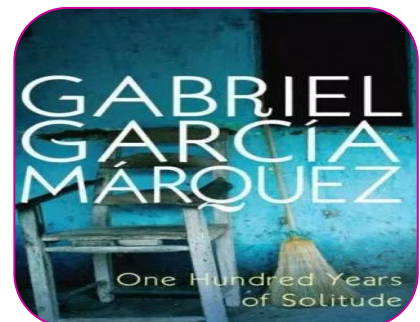
**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết này phân tích đặc điểm, chức năng và vận dụng thần chú vào tiếp cận tiểu thuyết *Trăm năm cô đơn*. Theo đó, như một thành phần và hoạt động trên nguyên tắc tương đồng, tương cận của ma thuật, thần chú thể hiện quan niệm đời sống về một thế giới tương tác chặt chẽ – thực và ảo đan xen – là nền tảng cho Chủ nghĩa Hiện thực Huyền ảo, vốn được xem là đặc trưng của văn học Mỹ Latin. Bên cạnh đó, nhìn thần chú từ phía tiếp nhận sẽ chạm đến, lần nữa, vấn đề đọc – hiểu – diễn giải văn bản được G. Marquez thể hiện trong tiểu thuyết *Trăm năm cô đơn* như cốt lõi của tiểu thuyết, lịch sử cộng đồng và nghệ thuật.

**Từ khóa:** thần chú, văn học, *Trăm năm cô đơn*, tiếp nhận, ma thuật

#### 1. Mantra– Definition and characteristic

Mantra is an ancient and powerful form of magic. When nature – man relationship was still homogeneous, human being had not been dependent on the divine, mantra is the means of active, initiative activity satisfying even the farthest wish of mankind. It is called "Mantra" by Indians because of Sanskrit root – meaning "the word, the spiritual form" which is derived from "Manyate" as "thinking"; for detail – "Man" is reflection (attached to the word) and "tra" is the tool, means. Mantra is the means of reflection and thinking. In Sino-Vietnamese, it is translated to "thần chú" (magic, holy spell) which emphasizes on speech in reception, therefore, Chinese calls the Buddhism sect using mantras Shingon-shū (眞言), which has replaced its purpose by nature, introversion by god focused. This is consistent with Indian mental instinct, however it inadvertently forgets the role of mind and body connection.

In the East, the *Book of Death* inscribed on the tombs wall with Egyptian hieroglyphics records 192 mantras guiding the dead into the light, praising the gods, keeping the individual parts and reuniting them together... Every sentence begins with *Ro* meaning mouth, chapter,



mantra. In India, Hinduism records its thoughts in the *Vedas* and dedicates the *Atharva Veda* to the mantras<sup>1</sup>. It is noteworthy that there is often sounds such as *Ja, Je...* to create rhythm, melody in these mantras. With Buddhism, the mantra, from a Dharma Method, has become a sect. Chanting mantras is one of eighty four thousand disciplines; mantras is read/recited to help the combination of body, speech and thoughts. In Theravada Buddhist, mantras were used to protect people from evil; in Mahayana Buddhist period, mantras help transform the spiritual life and it becomes the means of Vajrayana. In this process, Buddhism develops mantras close to the art of discourse; mantra is often put at the end of a sutra to promote the dharma meaning as well as transfer of merit. In China, the combination between mantra and writing makes a strong development of charm associated with Taoism. The most popular charms are of Zhang Tian Shi (張天師), Chu You (祝攢) and Jiang Tai Gong (姜太公).

In the West, amulets and mantras can take their origins from Jews, Near Eastern cultures and areas associated with Celtic, Nordic, and Germanic sacred traditions in the mainland. In Greek and Vikings mythology, the world is made up of sounds. Christianity has made the myth of God using words to create the world and kept its power over mantras and sacraments; anyone struggling for influence was found guilty through inquisitions for medieval witches. Unlike the divinities in the east where Buddhist or Hindu mantras are read, sung by masters or patriarchs who have been consecrated, in the West, mantra is quite popular for everyone.

This means that the roles of receiving and explaining mantras in the two regions are different from each other. The tendency for exchange, influence between East and West cultural civilizations has made mantra reception more and more popular. Westerners call the mantra spell or charm, they particularly like mantras from the East, typically Indian, such as Shanti (peaceful/ healing), Pushti (obtaining wealth). Applying the name of the Indian deities, Johann Reuchlin (in *De Verbomirifico* - 1494) recalls that people believed in the miraculous ability of words, names (Hebrew) which can carry a mystical connection between man and God.

Mantra is noticed in two points: the first is “being repeated” – (Mantra is) *a word, phrase or sound that is repeated again and again, especially during prayer or meditation*<sup>2</sup>. *Mantra: a word or phrase which is often repeated and which sometimes expresses a belief*<sup>3</sup>. The second is “magical function”: *Mantra (especially in Hinduism and Buddhism) a word or sound that is believed to have a special spiritual power* (Ibid, 773). *Mantra is mysterious sound is used to command deities*<sup>4</sup>. Mantra can find its origin in the ancient Indian's rudimentary materialism recorded in *Vedas*. Accordingly, this world is a Jagat which is moving; of course there must be a force starting and maintaining Jagat; that force must oscillate; if there is an oscillation, there must be a sound. Therefore, there must exist some natural names which can call motion, they are mantras. To sum up every relation to causal relationships are as universal as mythological thinking; mantra is not only read in Sanskrit but also in Tibetan, Chinese, and English. The length of mantra should be not too long for followers to repeat many times in spiritual numbers (81, 108 etc.). However, reciting/reading mantra must satisfy two criteria including adhering to the cohesive characteristics of the language, such as moderate

<sup>1</sup>In fact, the Veda itself contains rhymes incorporating choral performance with ritual sacrifices that call for great power. However, the Atharva Veda focuses on mantras for healing, preventing from devil etc., they are gathered into 18 volumes translated and divided into four parts by William Dwight Whitney. The first part is from the first to the seventh book containing short spells, the second part including five volumes from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> books of long mantras, the third part covers 6 volumes from 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> books presenting mantras, canonical expressions of cosmic unity and the last part is 19<sup>th</sup> book as appendices.

<sup>2</sup>S. Wehmeier, Ed. (2005). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 7 ed.. UK: Oxford University Press. p.899

<sup>3</sup>E. Walter, Ed. (2005). *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2 ed., UK: Cambridge University Press. p.773

<sup>4</sup>Hoàng Phê (Cb) (2003). *Vietnamese Dictionary*. Đà Nẵng: Đà Nẵng Publisher, Dictionary Center. p.924

speed, particular attention, and not rejecting the rules of speech as distinct, accent and rhythm etc..Applying mantra is an introverted process, attaching importance to the inner connection; the meaningful role of mantras is still controversy. Someone thinks that mantras are pure meaningless sounds/ structures like Frits Staal comparing mantras with birds sound which does not make sense but communicating, Shamans' mantras are compared to arias in Bach's oratorio; the meaning that they convey is of phonetics, not syntax. On the other hand, some say that mantra contains a profound meaning as the way Harvey Alper mentions to the philosophical value of Buddhist mantras. Actually, understanding meaning makes mantra more complete. Indian mantras often begin with Aum /Om sound because Indians think this is the beginning sound creating the universe<sup>5</sup>. Buddhism explains that this is "namas" – devote/entrust one's life through the body, speech and mind to Dharma, thus it creates a meaningful image for the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*<sup>6</sup>.

Mantra works on the principal of "Birds of the same feather stick together ". This was once written in Hermes Trismegistus' Emerald Tablet as: "*Quod est inferius sicut quod est superius, et quod est superius sicut quod est inferius, ad perpetranda miracula rei unius - That which is below is like that which is above & that which is above is like that which is below to do the miracles of one only thing*". Genesis cites: "God created man in his own image" (Gen 1: 26-27). Jesus gave Peter authority and commanded, "*I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven: whatsoever you hold on in the earth, so will it be bound on the heaven; whatever you untie in the earth, it will be as it were in Heaven*" (Mt 20:19). All of these preferences gather to a singularity of magic that mantra is the most important part which has the strongest effect; the feature of holy in mantra, from that, presents. In addition, mantras in Hinduism serve the desire of property, utensils. The original Buddhism kept the state of rebirth, but later on, it gradually refines and emphasizes that mantra helps concentrate completely in order to show a firm belief and strong power. It seems that each ideological system embraces mantra by a mantle that is both familiar and unfamiliar, but it is not out of these three basic qualities: indirect action through speech, impact on objects objectively (charmed, spellbind charms) et. and more powerful and faster effect than normal.

In literature, from Homer's time, mantra has appeared regularly with all these above characteristics: healing wounds – '*The sons of Autolycus, working over Odysseus, skillfully binding up his open wound— the gallant, godlike prince— chanted an old spell that stanching the blood and quickly bore him home to their father's palace*'<sup>7</sup>. Or Circe's spell (*Odyssey*) combined with poison, waving magical wand: '*Now, she cried, 'off to your sty, you swine, and wallow with your friends!*'<sup>8</sup> turns crew to pigs. Pamela J. Ball (in *The Ultimate Book of Spell: A Complete Guide to Using magic to Improve Your Life and the World around You*) says that there are three elements constructing a spell such as: the intensity and passion of the words itself, the speaker's power, energy and the beyond-human forces, powers called. Researching *Poetics*, Swami Sivananda Radha notes that: '*Aristotle in his Poetica states that language, rhythm and sound together make up poetry. However, he points also to another element that has neither name nor form, and that is the ability of both the power of the word and the power of sound to influence human thought*'. (Swami Sivananda Radha, 21). We think that is the mantra, but when it is placed in the literary and artistic context, mantra with the nature of a linguistic structure reveals larger, deeper dimensions deciding the model of world which is also structured as a language. Mantra also extends the realm for dream, mythology to enter in order to create a

<sup>5</sup> When Indian mantras arrived other cultures, Aum also migrated and joined to the process of changing under the native trend, Chinese called it *Án* (ma ní bǎt mē hòng – 唵嘛呢叭彌吽), Vietnamese called it *Úm* (Úm ba la xì bùa)...

<sup>6</sup> "Om" is the parvana mantra (root of all mantras), "mani" is the pearl of wisdom, "padme" is inside the lotus, "hum" is the noble meaning in life, in sum: The pearl of wisdom helps human escape the mud of ignorance, makes a beautiful life.

<sup>7</sup> Homer (1999). *Odyssey*. Robert Fagles trans. US: Penguin Classics. p.328

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.165

marvelous reality of Latin America and a literary movement of Magical Realism which is famous all over the world with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

## 2. Some forms of mantras expressed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Through speech as a thinking means which is based on a conception model of the world, mantra is both the part of a whole and the foundation, motive and purpose of people. It shows out a world that intermittently interacts in many relationships; understanding these relationship between phenomena is the first step for human to master the nature, at least in concept. These ideas, conversely, construct and reconstruct those relationships more and more complex to expand the scope of human's impact, possession and reflection. As a result of that process, it is believed that there is a general principle which is that if one is affected, the other is also influenced; Frazer calls this is the sympathetic law. It governs a lot of aspects from folk tips: *'They made her urinate over hot bricks in order to cure her of the habit of wetting her bed.* (G.G.Marquez 2003, 84)... to alchemy. Alchemists believe that everything in the world has the same composition but in numerous different orders, the alchemist's task is to rearrange these orders to transform things such as from stone to gold. If God transformed clay into man by blowing the heat into his nose, people also use the heat to do alchemy. Melquiades and Arcadio Buendia are passionate about burning to reconstruct things because they believe in the transformational ability of things in a profoundly integrated whole. Unsuccessfully transforming things during his life, to the death, Melquiades used himself as the object of transformation to burn:

*Then he smiled for the first time in along while and said in Spanish: "When I die, burn mercury in my room for three day".* (G.G.Marquez 2003,76).

This means that phenomenon and thing are needed to be reconstructed in order to be understood, rearranged to make sense. This is interpreting under the view of reader; mantra and the paradigm of an interactive world have a profound relation to the act of reception in that way. In reception, people begin to divide the interaction of magic into two types: similarity and contagion. The former can be understood as the same thing/ action will call each other; so that Petra Cotes and Aureliano Segundo can rationalize the affair with economic efficiency as the more they have sex, the more the animals grow up and flourish. Only for one night *frolicking there until dawn* (G.G.Marquez 1998,193), *Segundo: 'saw the courtyard paved with rabbits, blue in the glow of dawn. Petra Cotes, dying with laughter, could not resist the temptation of teasing him.*

*'Those are the ones who were born last night,' she said.* (G.G.Marquez 1998,194)

When his wife knew this, he also confirmed that:

*I had to do it so that the animals would keep on breeding.* (G.G.Marquez 1998,212).

Thus, the sound produced by sex is also described by Marquez in a broad association: *orange whistles* (G.G.Marquez 1998,399); in this tendency it is also a type of mantra that promotes motion. The same principle of mantras clearly expresses in the novel is that the repetitive words *Cease, cows*<sup>9</sup>... of Aureliano Segundo makes livestock and poultry non-stop develop.

The contagion principle proposes that what communicated with each other will maintain that relationship even when the contact is finished. So after nights of passion for sex, *'All he had to do was to take Petra Cotes to his breeding grounds and have her ride across his land in order to have every animal marked with his brand succumb to the irremediable plague of proliferation.* (G.G.Marquez 1998,193). In this field, but on another expression, the principle of contagion governing mantra provides a new insight into the action of calling god, except for begging something passively, this form links to magic in order to create a divine effect from that name. Colombia and Latin America are Christian; in everyday speech, God-related languages are very popular. It is different from asking the God for something, in daily communication, there is a reference to God as a habit, a reminder of relationship to call a vague effect on something, in some

<sup>9</sup> There is an interesting issue that in Vietnamese version, as a reader, Nguyen Trung Duc translated this phrase as: *Hey cows, lets stretch out yours groins.*

situations even God does not accept or there is no thing related to the God, user just want to express extreme emotion. At that time, the principle of contagion expressed through mantra appears: Recognizing that Macondo is surrounded by water, Jose ArcadioBendia shouted: *God damn it!* (G.G.Marquez 1998, 16); colonel Gregorio Stevenson fired so well that his enemy must exclaim that: *Jesus Christ* (G.G.Marquez 1998, 122) because they thought that there must have had more than 20 soldiers fought against them.

As a means of thinking, mantra is not just sound. Many mantras do not need to be spoken out, it is just necessary to focus on repetitive expressions to extend their operations; the aspect of mind in mantra is really important but sometimes is forgotten. In fact, the mind is the most important factor for an effective mantra. If the magician does not pay attention enough, big mouth and waving hands are useless. In that sense, the mind creates the power that governs the handwriting of the magician on paper, on the water; it brings great effect, at least in the notion of psychology – the desire. Thus mind can change things, love charms, beautiful dreams charms are born on that foundation. The Buddhist Jingtūzōng (淨土宗) uses this basis to practise: belief, desire and liberation. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Marquez also shows the strength of mind associated with magical principles as Aureliano hopes to meet Remedios Moscoite:

*Tantas veces se lo repitió, y con tanta convicción, que una tarde en que armaba en el taller un pescadito de oro, tuvo la certidumbre de que ella había respondido a su llamado. Poco después, en efecto, oyó la voz infantil, y al levantar la vista con el corazón helado de pavor, vio a la niña en la puerta con vestido de organdy rosado y botitas blancas*<sup>10</sup>(G.G.Marquez 2003, 30).

From “convicción” (belief) to “certidumbre” (the state of believing) and “en efecto” (the fact) at the end is the way to think, the path of mantra started from mind to affect, construct reality. Applying *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, mantras lead readers to the genesis legend of Christianity: world is set up by sound: ‘*And God said, Let there be light : and there was light... And God called the light Day... (Ge 1,3-5). And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters,... and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven’ (Ge1,6-8)*<sup>11</sup>. The series of “said – there/it be – call” is the process of realizing holy sound, supporting the power of mantra and making clear such a complex detail in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: insomnia – amnesia. Up to now, this detail has been usually explained as the serious result of forgetting the past and language which connect people to the progress of understanding and explaining the life, especially in the situation of Latin America of which the native past including language, religion and characteristic were buried for a long time in the colonial period. This grand narrative is so big that it obscures the fact that the language they've forgotten are Spanish, which came from the other side of the ocean and could push the issue into the opposite direction. It seems that the possible solution is the reception dimension: the process of interpretation is hindered by the stuttering of names and words because of the change of this system. The structure of a system changes with the appearance of a new element – the arrival of Visitacion and her younger brother (two aborigines are often neglected in the novel) who made the children (Arcadio, Amaranta) speak aboriginal languages before they know Spanish; they themselves also had run away from the epidemic of insomnia that had destroyed their community. The linguistic war taking place within the interpretive community, thus, becomes a central issue that governs this detail and at the same time connects the meaning, plot and theme to the whole novel. The novel itself becomes a progress of reading and explaining the meaning of goat skin roll written by Melquiades one hundred years ago. In another word,

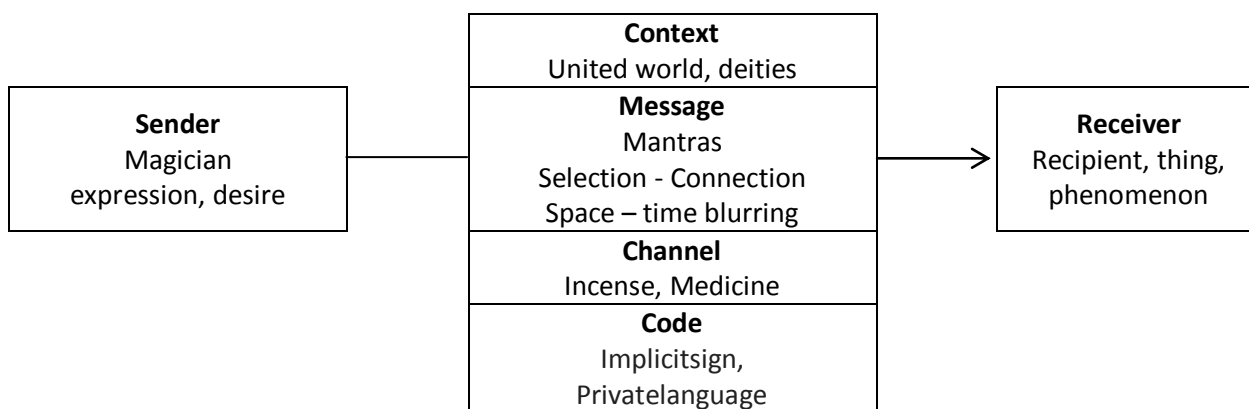
<sup>10</sup>*The presence of Amparo Moscoite in the house was like a premonition. ‘She has to come with her’, Aureliano would say to himself in a low voice. ‘She has to come.’ He repeated it so many times and with such conviction that one afternoon when he was putting together a little gold fish in the workshop, he had a certainty that she had answered his call. Indeed, a short time later he heard the child's voice, and when he looked up his heart froze with terror as he saw the girl at the door, dressed in pink organdy and wearing white boots.* (G.G.Marquez 1998, 68)

<sup>11</sup>*Holy Bible* (King James Version). (2010). UK: Oxford Press.

there is another notion of the novel appears in a close relationship with mantras, language expressed. It requires to see the issue in a larger, more comprehensive perspective of both mantra and art.

### 3. Mantra as the tool clarifying the artistic value of *One hundred Years of Solitude*

As mentioned, mantra is the thinking tool that regulates many aspects of life and *One hundred of Solitude*, the interpretation from reception view clarifies and connects the systems of artistic detail, theme etc. As a result, the novel proposes an artistic paradigm in which the author as magician (sender), uses his own desires and beliefs to create a spell blurring space, time in the principle of similarity and contagion to send a message to recipients. In addition, the effectiveness of mantras is also governed by other factors such as the context (the united world, divine invocation, the God), the corresponding code (implicit sign, private language) and contact/channel (incense, pharmacy). In fact, these factors can be attributed to Roman Jakobson's communication model as follows:



[Figure 1. Model of magic communication]

Applying the above model, the details of the insomnia – dementia epidemic associated with the goat text decoding, explained from the sender's viewpoint can suggest many noticeable points. An action to explain that forgetting the past will lose the present, forgetting words expresses the power of the linguistic decoding process and the reminiscing of the historical period when the native in the middle and the south of America was spellbound, infected and destroyed by the white... will lose its power unless not to ignore the author of goat skin text; he is the one who rescued Macondo from sleepiness, who frequently spellbound Buendia generation to generation from start to finish: Melquiades.

*But Melquiades' tribe, according to what the wanders said, had been wiped off the face of the earth because they had gone beyond the limits of human knowledge.* (G.G.Marquez1998,42)

The origin of Melquiades is reminiscent of a fragment in the Babel tower legend: In those days, people were building a tower together; the higher the building was, the greater the complacency was; the God decided to divide people by making them speak many languages; languages were born and people went away. Once again, the impasse in interpretation and reception appears. Melquiades himself carried the curse and passed it on to Macondo, where he cured dementia but left goat skin roll, which means that he replaces darkness with a destructive fate. That is the cost to understand, to succeed, to write the next myth: When Babel collapsed people left to find their own Babel, which is a unified memoir, a work, a novel etc. but each one understands and interprets it in his own ways. Borges visualized it by labyrinth. The labyrinth is a novel; escaping from labyrinth is finding out the entrance to the novel with numerous philosophical interpretations<sup>12</sup>. G. Marquez inherits Borges here, but he focuses on his own subject: loneliness. The loneliness is often understood as the curse of the Buendia family as well as Latin America. In Vietnam,

<sup>12</sup>Borges (1962). "The Garden of Forking Paths". *Ficciones*. US: Grove Press

researchers have completely agreed with Nguyen TrungDuc's interpretation of loneliness as the back of unity and expected a second chance to unite the Buendia family as a metaphor of Latin America to overcome the curse. However, there are other turns, as Amaranda uses the rest of her life to sew cloth and shroud:

*It might have been said that she wore during the day and unwore during the night, and not with any hope of defeating solitude in that way, but quite the contrary, in order to nurture it.* (G.G.Marquez1998, 260).

From the author, creator of the text, the need for loneliness to create is real, as well as the desire for a myth that is not hybridized, to avoid from the US' influence to Latin America.

Melquiades not only cures the disease of Macondo but also leaves a spiritual heritage, it means creating an interpretive community. Some speeches of G.Marquez regulates the explanation of *Hundred Years of Solitude*, ideas of Nguyen TrungDuc – translator and all of researchers' works etc. also affect and join to the interpretive community. Thus, the act of reading and explaining should be placed in the center of the labyrinth to figure out the meaning or actually the link to decipher the meaning of novels in a particular context, channel (factors determining, forming interpretive community) as long as it resolves a conflict in the text. Back to *Hundred Years of Solitude*, Why can AurelianoBabilonia read the goat skin text? Firstly, because he knows that the text is written in Sanskrit (Sanskrit is an unexpected contradiction within the text is solved). Secondly, it must be AurelianoBabilonia who can see and link the history of his family to the text. Thirdly, that is the way of reading (a reason associated with the essence of mantra):

*He began to decipher them aloud. It was the history of the family, written by Melquiades, down to the most trivial details, one hundred years ahead of time... Aureliano read aloud without skipping the chanted encyclicals that Melquiades himself had made Arcadio listen to...* (G.G.Marquez 1998, 414).

Reading loudly satisfies a double purpose: understanding and promoting reality to change as mantra directed. Mantra often repeats important codes, therefore, in the goat skin sketch and the text of the novel, readers recognize the constant repetition of Buendia family's names and some events keeping revolving around. Ucsula, by her own view, had early recognized more and more clearly, especially when she became blind. It means that the text can be explained in different ways; it is not important whether the goat skin roll is written in Sanskrit or even in Vietnamese; the core is that if the sender and receiver attend, focus carefully enough, even a blank text can become sutra, mantra. Deciphering of the novel or studying author, literary movement etc. perhaps also must accept and take into account the dynamics of non-stop elements affecting to the reader and shaping interpretive community.

In that sense, mantra should be understood as not just a manifestation of superstition but a tool of thinking; especially in literary language, it does not attribute a direct object or an interpretation only. The mantra itself is also a dynamic part engaging in a larger whole of magic, it makes literary studies large enough to cover discourse of mantra and structure of ritual, avoids Magical Realism from contradictory between indigenous thinking and Western method.

In summary, this article applies mantras in two aspects, which are mantra itself and mantra in the structure of magic with two principles of similarity and contagion, to approach and explain some problems of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This process helps clarify not only some main details, themes of the novel but also consider mantra from the artistic side, interpret the work from the perspective of reception and open the possibility of participating more actively in reading and understanding novel in particular and literature in general.

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