THE WASTE LAND *AS MAGIC INCANTATION / THE POET AS TRICKSTER WASTE LAND COMME INCANTATION MAGIQUE*[1]

***Abstract**: This paper demonstrates that T.S. Eliot's Waste Land is a magic incantation to restore the lost values of the Western culture on realistic foundations. The poem's intertextuality, together with its versification are analyzed in order to show Eliot's view on Western man's history: one of sin, fall and increasing decay. The main argument is that, through his poem, Eliot is attempting to restore humanity and its destiny away from the sad history in which it was cast from the beginning.*
***Key words**: magic, incantation, poetry, Modernism, intertextuality.*

The Waste Land (1922) is considered one of High Modernism's Ur-texts, an essential reference to understanding that time and TS Eliot's poetics. Yet, the text is notoriously difficult to read and intepret, as we can grasp from most of its commentators who, while making some effort at elucidating it, ultimately fail at it and admit it. The difficulty is owed mainly to the abundance of literary references, quotations and allusions in the text, for which Eliot even provided a reference list. This has led some critics to embark on the daunting quest of detailing all those references or merely disparaging them as irrelevant as Eliot himself implied. It would be counter-productive to ignore these references – be it only due to the fact that they make up a substantial part of the text itself – but equally futile to try to solve them as though they were pieces of a puzzle. This is impossible mainly because of Modernism's poetics of fragmentation, ambiguity and indeterminacy, collage, palimpsestic vision, collapse of the unity (or oneness) of significance and even self-irony directed at the possibility of extracting a single interpretation out of any one literary utterance. All these elements play an important role in understanding Eliot's poetry. But they leave us with very little as concerns his originality, voice and scope. I argue that the presence of intertextuality in Eliot's poem is an attempt at drawing a parallel (secret) history of the Western world, its unconscious contents while, at the same time, providing a poetic incantation – a sort of magic trick – by which the poet could deliver the wretched humanity presented in his poem from the doom and gloom in which it was cast from the beginning.

Most of the criticism related to the Waste Land revolves around these essential themes: the decay and mechanization of Modernity, the despair and horror of war, Eliot's own depression and mental illness, his poetics of fragmentation and indeterminacy and his great intertextual architecture. The last has been (fairly recently) interpreted as owed mainly to his "mythical method", which he defined in his interpretation of Joyce's Ulysses, his admiration for Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, to his affection for Academia (and why not, a certain academism) and not in the least to what the poet himself defined as the necessity for Modern poetry to relate to tradition, to enter dialogue with it. While it would be interesting to see how his choice of academic references has influenced the poetics of Modernism, I will rather focus on his "mythical method", his engagement with Frazer's text, in an attempt to show the particularities of this collage of references, the novelty they really bring to Modernist poetics and how they delineate Eliot as a poet.

I believe Eliot took up Frazer's challenge very seriously (a bit too seriously even), enacting in his poem, among other things, some of the rituals and archetypes

[1] Ioana **COSMA**, University of Piteşti, Romania, c_ioana05@yahoo.com

presented in *The Golden Bough*: in particular, the fertility and the dead god ritual. But while traditionally those rituals have some sort of redemptive power, in his poem fertility is translated into Modernity's utter sterility and the dead god is never resurrected. Still, they are re-enacted there firstly, to show their inadequacy for Modern man or rather Modern man's divorce from these vital forces of history, and secondly, to show they are still part and parcel of our (European) legacy, they have underscored various instances of literary and artistic expression. In a way, it's as if he were attempting to lay bare these archetypal contents throughout the whole history of literature, including his own writing. But in order to understand the greatness of his scope in this poem, we should add another motif, which is much more subtle because it is not derived from the quotations but from his own words: the motif of the trickster and the theme of play/magic.

Interestingly enough, Eliot had an esoteric, trickster name, granted him by his friend, Ezra Pound. It was Old Possum. The nickname is derived from Native American trickster tradition. What is a trickster? A trickster is usually a male character who, through some sort of magic trick, overturns the old traditions, laying the foundations of a new order. This would make sense given that both poets saw themselves as bringing in the new modern ethos, disrupting rules, both stylistically and socially. The genesis of *The Waste Land* is marked by the exhange between these two kindred spirits: Pound heavily edited the poem's manuscript and Eliot fully accepted the changes. *The Waste Land* is also dedicated to Ezra Pound with a quotation taken from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*: "to the miglior fabro"- thus acknowledging his friend's superiority in terms of craft.

Of course, a mere nickname would not be enough to account for the poem's involvement with magic, the motif of the trickster and play. I will follow Eliot's own hints throughout the poem: first of all, the names of the five parts of the poem; secondly, the references to magic embedded in the poem's narrative; thirdly, the incantatory value of parts of the poem; lastly, the poet's own voice, which goes from the elegiac to the sarcastic, but mostly focusing on his ludic, non-comittal, apparently casual resolutions. But before proceeding to this analysis, I will try to present the main thematic lines of the poem, its "story" and characters.

The Waste Land, in its final version, is a poem structured in five main parts bearing the following names: 1. The Burial of the Dead; 2. A Game of Chess; 3. The Fire Sermon; 4. Death by Water; 5. What the Thunder Said. At a first glance, it would be nearly impossible to find a cohesive link among these names. I will return to this matter later on. Altough most things about the poem appear obscure, there is at least one certain aspect: the poem is divided into two main axes: the old world (which comes through in the intertextual references) and the new (Modern) world (which is presented through the imagery specific to Modernism and Eliot himself and also through intertext). These two worlds are juxtaposed and made to communicate (even if the communication is fractured and apparently impossible) by literally collapsing them textually and through the poet's casual commentary. The old world is represented by the major works of literature that Eliot alludes to: from the Old and New Testaments, going through Dante, Ovid, Shakespeare, Chaucer, ending with Baudelaire and the other symbolists. We have the whole Western canon there, so to speak. The new world is the Modern, post-war city and its deadened inhabitants. Between the lines, there is a seamless weaver who does not necessarily unite but really, points out, accuses and condemns a state of affairs that is clearly despicable. Time and again, Eliot has warned his readers not to see a redemptive idea underlying his text, nor a quest for the good: he was more of a conscience of the negative side of history, its utter evil and decay.

Those who have focused on the myriad references in the text (so many, indeed, that at times, we feel the poem is suffocated by them) have had a hard time showing exactly why those particular references are there and mostly failed at providing a valid interpretation for their presence. We should start from the premise that every writer is his own library and that, when embarking on a writing project, all his ideas are related to other ideas and texts that preceded him. This is also in line with the fact that the history of literature is a history of borrowings, palimpsests and intertexts. But we should also bear in mind that the poet is not merely a reproducer of a tradition, some sort of nympholeptic purveyor of unconscious content, as Frye seems to imply in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. The poet is a conscious person, most of the times with an agenda and a clear message to purvey. The difference is that the message may and should be indeterminate, polisemic and working on several planes. The way it must have worked for Eliot was that he had a few ideas/words he wanted to convey and then the references to these other texts came to his mind, either with a clear connection (as we can see in the parallel between Dante's Inferno and the inhabitants of London) or purely arbitrarily, drawn together as though by an image/motif (like the lacqueria or "those are pearls that were his eyes"referring both to the old and the new). Then indeed, we should see, within the limits of a non-unifying claim, whether these references have something in common. Why those references, for instance, and not others? For the purposes of clarity, let us illuminate some of them:

Eliot's title refers to the ancient legend of the Fisher King, the ruler of the Waste Land, so-called in the Perceval versions of the Grail legend because it was doomed to barrenness until the King, who was wounded in the sexual organs, was healed by a knight of great purity. So, from the headstart, the poem is set upon an (in)fertility myth which is however resolved in redemption by a hieratic figure, as Frye would phrase it. But there was an alternative, original title "He do the police in difference voices", which Eliot borrowed from Dickens and which may allude to the polyglossic nature of his poem, that I will not have the time to develop here. But in these two titles we have the encounter between the two worlds mentioned earlier, the old, hieratic world of myth and ritual and the new, modern world, of fracture, break from a tradition it was nonetheless suffused with. Then, the other references follow with enough clarity to bring them back to the source: the first two are Biblical references – Ezekiel 2: 7 (line 20) and Ecclesiastes 2:5 (line 23) – the first one, God's injuction on Ezekiel to prophesize but also the contention that men are "rebellious people"; and the second one referring to the recurrent theme of "vanitas vanitatum"which in Eliot's poem becomes: "And the dead tree gives no shelter/the cricket no relief". Then a passage in German from the beginning of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* chanted by a sailor who is longing for an Irish lover. While the reference here may be wholly personal to Eliot, we should note that the affair between Tristan and Isolde is essentially an adulterous one. Then there's the reference to The Hanged Man in the Tarot pack in line 46 which Eliot says he associates arbitrarily with the Fisher King (this plays out in his infertility God scenario, which we will discuss later); then there comes Baudelaire by the reference to the "unreal city"and all the implications of dream, surrealism and divorce from reality that were grafted on the city by Modernist aethetics and by, among other things, technology itself. Then we have, in lines 64 and 68, two references to Dante's Inferno: (63) "I had not thought death had undone so many and" (64) "Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled." This is perhaps one of the few instances when we see a cleacut parallel between the inhabitants of Dante's Inferno and the inhabitants of the Modern city (be it London, Paris or Vienna, etc.): they are both doomed with a special kind of punishment, that of seemingly repeating, *ad infinitum*, some sort of unpleasantness, some sort of labor which is dramatic in Dante and mechanical in Eliot. The first part ends with a quote from Baudelaire's Preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal* – "You!

Hypocrite lecteur! Mon semblable, mon frère!" – Eliot is thus engaging the reader, *via* Baudelaire's trenchant words, in some sort of trip, some sort of quest – author, reader, texts are all there; Eliot seems to be saying "we are all in this together". The second part has references to Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* – another love story of sin and downfall – to Virgil's *Aeneid* by the famous reference to the "lacqueria" there, so it represents a key moment in the creation of Western culture with the foundation of Rome but also hints at a love affair that Aeneas had on the way, which ended in tragedy, but was filled with passion and sexuality; then we have a reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost* "sylvan scene"- before Lucifer's fall from Paradise but also a story about the fallen state in which angels and men are; then, quite unexpectedly (and perhps arbitrarily) to Webster's "Is the wind in that door still", finally Spenser's *Prothalamion* – a story about the marriage of some noblemen and noblewomen surrounded by nymphs, gods and the like – which becomes, in Eliot's poem "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song"and "the nymphs have departed". Perhaps we have quoted enough evidence that the poem is saturated with references to texts that make up the whole of Western literature. For the purposes already stated, it would be absolutely futile to go through all of them – they are either there by means of free association or to make a point indeed. For the purposes of the present paper, I will merely provide those instances that I think are significant in the sense that they do have a common denominator with the ones mentioned and the ones following in the poem: Shakespeare's *Tempest*, which is a play about magic but also about founding a new world, Marvell's *To his Coy Mistress*, which is about seduction and ultimately, illegitimate love, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which speak about the gods'inclemency and the doomed fate of humans who are turned into animals or other genders at a whim, rape and violence, Tiresias, who is a central figure of the poem and relates to the Fisher King, infertility, etc., Saint Augustine's *Confessions* are quoted to refer to a host of "unholy loves", we have Hesse's *Blick ins Chaos*, which speaks of a crisis in the human spirit, a certain darkness and hysteria which are pervasive in Modernity; Ovid's story of Philomela – a story of rape and abuse; a reference to Kyd's tragic hero Hieronymo.

Obviously, it would be wrong and counterintuitive to group all these references under headings, categories or rubrics: they are as different from one another as they are similar. The first thing to say about them is that most of them pertain to the great European tradition – they are hallmarks in the history of literature from Antiquity to Modernism. Secondly, it could be noted, given the plethora of such examples, that what most of them have in common, is a parallel, darkened history of mankind, namely the history of sin, punishment and violence. This impression is somewhat mollified/tempered in the poem through poetic imagery which, at times, verges on mannerism, opulence and ostentation. However, Eliot's picture of (literary) history is just as bleak as it is of his own time, it portrays a world after the fall, where everyone seems doomed to some sort of tragic ending or sordid demeanour, and moreover, where there is no relief: neither from the merciless and sardonic gods nor from the God of the Old Testament for that matter. Besides this, there are the archetypes that Eliot borrows from Frazer: the hanged god (whom Eliot might identify with to some extent), vegetation and fertilization myths which are always coupled with images of barrenness and infertility (the recurrence of the rocks and the austerity of the mountain climb, the lack of water, etc.), the Buddhist references which I would say, need to be set apart, and, not in the least, Eliot's own (implied) instantiation as a jester/trickster/magus. This is the summary of Eliot's take on the "mythical method": as I stated, he may have wanted to give a shape to the archetypes from Frazer throughout the history of human psyche. What I'm interested in at this moment is the myth of the fall (which we can find in the story of Lucipher and Adam and Eve in the Bible): there are certaintly instances of *mise en abyme* in the text for this myth: Milton's very own *Paradise Lost*, the curious and

contemporary Lil, who may well be an abbreviation of Lilith, according to some traditions, the first wife of Adam, who also fell due to sin, various fallen heroes from Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, "falling towers", and towards the end of the poem, the obsessive repetition of "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down". My assumption is that Eliot presents here a perspective of the history of humanity as essentially fallen, corrupt and miserable which has come now to its climax (maybe even to its end? – as we can infer from the quasi-apocalyptic "Hurry up, it's time") but with a twist: contrasted to the long history's grandiose instantiations, Modernity offers us but mechanization, death, boredom, apathy, mindlessness, lack of meaning, hysterics in a vulgar and trite environment, sterility, ugliness and triviality. In the following, I will detail this second axis of Eliot's poem, namely his depiction of Modernity.

The scenery of the poem, in its modern depiction, is mainly bleak; even its most promising images are undermined from within by the corruption of death: "lilacs out of the dead land", "dull roots with spring rain", "went in the sunlight/and drank coffee"; "under the brown fog of a winter dawn"; "I think we are in the rats'alley/where dead men lost their bones"; "the river's tent is broken"; "trams and dusty trees"; "the broken fingernails of dirty hands"; "here is no water but only rock/rock and no water and the sandy road". It is almost a post-apocalyptic landscape, where there is no joy or liveliness, no hope and no continuation in sight. The characters inhabiting these derelict spaces are equally dismal: we have Madame Sosostris, "famous clairvoyante"(juxtaposed with the prophetic tradition of the Bible or the vision in some of the works cited in the text, she appears the very image of the clichéization and ridicule this prophetic tradition has been reduced to); the poet's war comrade, Stetson, who could appear innocous were it not for a peculiar "corpse" that he had planted the previous year in his garden (we will come back to this detail); a disrupted and fractured dialogue between a man and a woman on the verge of mental breakdown and despair; the gossiping woman who talks about her friend, Lil and her husband in a bar – Lil herself, who doesn't have any teeth due to pills she had taken for an abortion – the typist woman and her casual lover, the clerk, held together by what looks like boredom - finally, the, I must say, wholly mysterious figure of a third, hooded person, always walking by the side of two partners. These are the landscape and characters of Modernity. As compared to their previous conterparts, they appear utterly decayed, compromised and locked up in a world of convention. So far so good. Up to now, we can only infer that Eliot is saying that the history of humanity is one of sin and depravity which has come to its apogee in Modernity by banalization and fall in the mechanical and mindless. But the poem says much more than that. To begin, let's take a closer look at two instances by which Eliot completely explodes the apparently mundane surface he is presenting: first of all, there's the matter of the corpse buried in Stetson's garden which Eliot mentions casually, as if it were the most normal thing in the world: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,/ Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?/Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?/ Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, /Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!" (Eliot, *The Waste Land)*

There is an evident sarcasm in Eliot's remark, implied by the very casualness with which such a monstrous thing is uttered: as though he were pointing to a world where people's gardens would be filled with corpses and the formers'sole preoccupation would be their maintenance like a mere plant. The image is disturbing and short-circuits the scene. Another moment of apparent casualness is when the typist is left alone after the departure of her lover –"She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,/And puts a record on the gramophone." It's typical of his time, a time of the decay of romance hurtled forward by the advent of mechanization. These are two instances by which Eliot short-circuits the two worlds – both old and new – with a sort of attitude which is no

longer academic, scholarly or detached. Now we witness a sort of ludic Eliot, mimicking a blazé attitude in front of sheer horror (coincidentally, he also meant to reference Conrad's "the horror the horror" from *The Heart of Darkness* in his poem). In these instances we have a hint that Eliot, notwithstanding the multitude of voices he is impersonating, is constructing a peculiar persona for himself as far as his own involvement with the poem goes. In the following, I will detail on this persona which I define as the archetype of the trickster.

Jung wrote about the archetype of the trickster noting, among other things, that he is an expression of the collective unconscious, one repressed heavily by the Modern age, who has the function to heal. The trickster's methods are not the most Orthodox ones: he short-circuits the boundary between good and bad but usually with beneficial results. The main characteristics of the trickster are: shape-shifting capacities, resolving tensions through ruse and cunning, wit and sarcasm, questioning the established order and rules, the use of magic and the display of unconscious, almost animal-like contents. I argue that Eliot assumes the trickster role in his poem mainly due to the fact that, after portraying a fallen state of humanity, he realizes that only some form of magic would do in order to make room for healing and peace. Also, as a creator, the trickster role affords him the freedom to play on a great number of registers and personas, ranging from the highest (the scholarly) to the lowest (meaninglessness, disarticulation of speech). There are several arguments for this interpretation: 1. He does shape-shift a lot, we can almost never tell for sure if it is he who is speaking or some other character; 2. There are certain comments that he makes which hint at a larger viewpoint but are also full of wit, irony and sarcasm up to the point of total abandonment; 3. His text is suffused with magic; 4. Bits of his poem are what could be called nonsense poetry but also mantras. 5. He questions the established paradigms and even proposes a solution to the impasse humanity has reached.

1. Shape-shifting

This is what has been mainly interpreted as the heteroglossic, multivocal nature of Eliot's voice in the poem. This is certainly true and the way we could interpret this is Modernism's refusal to accept a single auctorial voice, the recognition of the role of tradition in the creative act, the deconstruction of the idea of an individual versus the presence of a corpus in which we all seem to blend in, etc. But, as a cultural phenomenon, this idea also relates to the *topos* of metamorphosis (present, in the poem, through references to Ovid, Tiresias, the *Tempest*, etc.). Eliot "confuses" us from the beginning of the poem when as we read the first lines we expect to hear his voice but in fact it's a girl called Marie. The use of the deictic "I" is also more than problematic in a text where so many personas are glossed: where is indeed the poet's voice, when can we tell for sure that it is he who speaks? The most conscpicuous example is that of Tiresias, who resembles the poet in some ways:

> I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
> Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
> At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
> Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
> (Eliot, *The Waste Land)*

Here, Tiresias has a sort of omniscience only an author can have. In any case, throughout the poem, the mixing and fading is so great that it would be nearly impossible to assess the author's impersonation of voices to any reasonble degree. It is so great that we cannot even tell if he doesn't identify more with the characters he displays than with his own utterances (some of which are identifiable, again, to some extent). In this way, Eliot erases any trace of himself, he is everywhere but nowhere to be found. Typical of a trickster. But also in line with his notion that the ego

should be overcome in one way or another – an idea which also appears in the poem via Buddhist philosophy.

2. Comments

In the poem, Eliot presents a vision of the world which is highly original, coupled with an attitude which ranges from passionate to non-comittal, from sartorial to disparaging in the most ludic way. Given his gloomy vision of the world, he takes a stance that is neither directly incriminating, nor salvific, nor fully ironic, nor victimizing. Instead, he makes certain comments which are so far-off that they seem to be uttered by a madman, or a prophet, in any case a mind that transcends even the most elaborate perspectives on the world. This is also typical of tricksters: they bring in a worldview that's very different from the accepted norms but do so in jest and with a laugh – a feat of courage, I should say.

The first such comment is when Eliot references the Old Testament's voice by addressing his reader with "son of man":

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
> (Eliot, *The Waste Land*)

Here, Eliot has quite a postmodern vision where he shows he is aware of man's blindness and limits of perception. Unlike other thinkers, he does not attribute this to man's limitations but to the world as it is presented to him, a mere collage of symbols that have lost their significances which are moreover obscured by the blinding light of the sun. He seems to imply that his task will be to shed a bit of light in this night of perception that surrounds the reader. He follows on this idea when he says:"I will show you fear in a handful of dust."

So the experience will not be a congenial one but one similar to a feeling – fear – accompanying most spiritual awakenings. He assumes the role of guide, mentor, but not in an enthusiastic sort of way which is particular to the traditional masters: his attitude is again one of sarcasm – as we can grasp from the unusual collocation of "fear" with "handful of dust" (Eliot does this in other instances too – by coupling "memory"with "desire": there is paradox and frustration inherent in such an association).

There is also self-irony directed at his own scholarly sophistication:

> "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"
> But
> O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—
> It's so elegant
> So intelligent
> (Eliot, *The Waste Land*)

The tension inherent in this scene is quite impressive: we have, on the one hand, a man who not only does not speak but does not even seem to think, or so he is perceived, and on the other, a man acquainted with the great works of literature. The irony implied in such a juxtaposition is evident and it is enhanced by the repetition of "so". This is someone (I'm not saying it's Eliot himself but could be) who displays erudition maybe for the sake of elegance, intelligence, etc, but who is unable to communicate with his partner. A modern tragedy of sorts with the touch of self-irony (not self-pity though).

More on Modernity's fall from myth and sense comes from the scene on Mrs Porter and her daughter:

O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
(Eliot, The Waste Land)

"Soda water"is blatant and impactful: it is one of modernity's by-products, an image of consumerist culture: however, the washing of feet is a ritual of purification performed, for instance, by Jesus for his disciples and by Mary Magdalene on Jesus. Again, Eliot couples the high and the low, the sense and senseless, as can be noted also from the antithesis between the classical poetic image "the moon shone bright" and the washing of feet in soda water. The irony is there again, terse and succinct, what's more, in rhyme form.

Irony is also present in the following verses:

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience
(Eliot, The Waste Land)

These are complex lines and deserving perhaps of a closer scrutiny – for instance, who is "he"and who are the "we", the dead and the dying but for now I will focus just on "with a little patience": coming after the first two lines which are uttered in an elegiac, Yeats-like tone, this line is almost cruel in its cynicism. But there is all the humanity and intimacy in this poem by Eliot, as we can infer from the following lines:

My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
(Eliot, The Waste Land)

Is there a confession here? Perhaps. This passion that Eliot alludes to here and which permeated the lives of the tragic heroes presented in his references may as well be his too but it is and will remain hidden due to social constraint –"age of prudence"- but he affirms its importance here as the only significant thing in our existence. In this story of fall and sin, we have also the stories of our passions which might not make for a redemption but for sure make for an outstanding drama.

3. Magic

As has been noted by many commentators, Eliot was deeply concerned with myth, ritual and magic. He recognizes this interest in his notes when he talks about the influence of Frye and Weston on his writing this poem. There are specific myths enacted here, the vegetation/sterility and dead god myths being some of them and the most discussed so far. But how did Eliot see the function of magic/ritual in his writing? It would be useful to refer to his references to Buddhist religion here. We have already discussed his vision of the world. According to Buddhism, men, along with angels, animals and demons are all part of a wheel of fortune (the motif of the wheel appears twice in the poem) and the only deliverance is by somehow escaping the cycle of birth/death/rebirth this wheel enacts. Ritualistic thought has many affinities with this philosophy – it is also based on cycles, birth/death/rebirth schemes, repetition, etc. While in Christianity deliverance comes from an outside – i.e. Christ, the Saviour – in Buddhism man is invited on a spiritual quest that he does himself or

guided by a master. So to me it appears that Eliot, while pointing to some of the ritualistic practices in the history of the Western world, is attempting to draw on the wisdom of the East to at least come up with something new if not redeem from the fallen state. Let's see how he does this.

First of all, the name of the poems parts are telling: they speak of rituals: the burial of the dead; the fire sermon; death by water; what the thunder said. They are all religion – related, be it normative or outside the boundaries of the Church. Here again, he is mixing religions and the occult with the normative – the burial of the dead is canonical but the fire sermon has only "sermon"as a canonical reference – fire comes mostly from pre-Christian mythologies; death by water accentuates the plunge into the occult and what the thunder said is plainly pre-Christian. But there is one remaining title – and this must be the reason why most critics have been unable to see a connection among the titles of the poem: The Game of Chess. As compared to the wilder, more pre-modern titles, this one is right in the middle of modern Western civilization and culture – and indeed we are presented with a civilized – if desolate – interior of a man and woman playing chess. Well, first of all, chess is a game too, play, which is the matrix of myth and ritual. So it is the contemporary link to the old rituals playing again on the passionate/dispassionate opposition.

There are references to all sorts of magic in Eliot's poem – from Tarot magic via Madame Sosostris, where we learn, for instance, about the wheel and the hanged man, to Shakespeare's Tempest, to the magic tricks performed by gods to transform humans into animals, the magic trick that turned Tiresias from man into woman, visions of "crowds of people, walking round in a ring", repetitions of mantra-like phrases – the bridges falling, "the violet hour", "the nymphs have departed", "burning, burning, burning", etc.

4. Buddhist mantras

In a way, we could say that the whole mythopoetic scenario enacted in *The Waste Land* leads to a form of Buddhist resolution. For a reason which he does not make available, Eliot does not find salvation from a Western or Christian source but rather from the East. This appears in his poem, towards its end, in the form of mantras and incantations:

> Then spoke the thunder
> DA
> *Datta:* what have we given?
>
> Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
> Shantih shantih shantih
> (Eliot, The Waste Land)

This is from the Upanishads and the splitting of DA into Give. Sympathize. Control is double-edged in my view – on the one hand, it can be related to the Christian tradition of gift (which Derrida criticized in his essays) which is fraught with guilt, victimizing and manipulation as the final word also shows. On the other hand, it could merely be a way of living that helps get out of the wheel I was mentioning earlier. Shantih, the words ending Eliot's poem and incidentally The Upanishads, mean (inner) peace. So this is Eliot's resolution and sort of plea: for himself, a man wrecked at the time by mental problems, for the world and its history of sin and suffering, for the Modern world in the aftermath of war. Quite a shamanic posture, one which almost seems, at the end, to relinquish poetic phrasing of the most elaborate kind to mere incantations and magic words.

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Ioana Cosma is an English lecturer at The University of Pitești and a writer. She has a PhD in Comparative Literature from The University of Toronto and specializes in twentieth century literature.