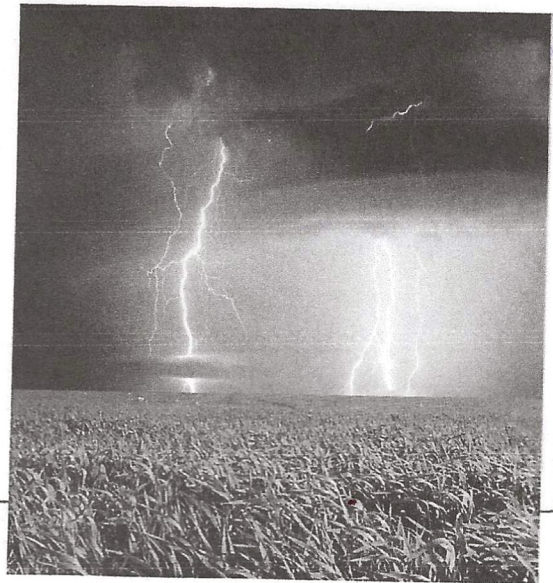


# What the Thunder Said

032

## WARM UP

- 1 What is 'thunder' usually associated with?
  - a fear
  - b water / rain
  - c God
  - d other (specify)
- 2 Consider the title of this section: 'What the Thunder Said'. Which tone do you expect to find in the passage?
  - a hammering
  - b martial
  - c prophetic
  - d lyric



*The excerpt you are going to read is taken from 'What the Thunder Said', the last part and the ideal conclusion of Eliot's The Waste Land.*

Here is no water but only rock  
 Rock and no water and the sandy<sup>1</sup> road  
 The road winding<sup>2</sup> above among the mountains  
 Which are mountains of rock without water  
 5 If there were water we should stop and drink  
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think  
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand  
 If there were only water amongst the rock  
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth<sup>3</sup> that cannot spit  
 10 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit  
 There is not even silence in the mountains  
 But dry sterile thunder without rain  
 There is not even solitude in the mountains  
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl<sup>4</sup>  
 15 From doors of mudcracked<sup>5</sup> houses  
 If there were water  
 And no rock  
 If there were rock  
 And also water  
 20 And water  
 A spring<sup>6</sup>  
 A pool among the rock  
 If there were the sound of water only  
 Not the cicada<sup>7</sup>  
 25 And dry grass singing  
 But sound of water over a rock  
 Where the hermit-thrush<sup>8</sup> sings in the pine trees  
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop  
 But there is no water  
 [...]

- 1 **sandy**: sabbiosa
- 2 **The road winding**: La strada che si snoda
- 3 **carious teeth**: denti cariati
- 4 **But red sullen faces sneer and snarl**: Rosse facce imbronciate ghignano e ringhiano
- 5 **mudcracked**: fatte di fango screpolato
- 6 **spring**: fonte, sorgente
- 7 **cicada**: cicala
- 8 **hermit-thrush**: tordo eremita

- 30 What is that sound high in the air  
Murmur of maternal lamentation  
Who are those hooded hordes swarming<sup>9</sup>  
Over endless plains, stumbling<sup>10</sup> in cracked earth  
Ringed by the flat horizon only
- 35 What is the city over the mountains  
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
Falling towers  
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
Vienna London
- 40 Unreal

- 9 **hooded hordes**  
**swarming:** orde  
sciamanti incappucciate
- 10 **stumbling:** inciampando

INTERACTIVE  
ANALYSIS



COMPREHENSION

3 Choose the correct word.

- 1 The passage is set in a *desert* / *forest*.
- 2 The speaking voice is constantly asking for *rain* / *food*.
- 3 In the land described by the poet there is no *water* / *life*.
- 4 The poet mentions cities that are *rising* / *falling apart*.

ANALYSIS

4 Read up to line 29 and underline all the references to water. What effect does the repetition of this word create in the reader? Choose the correct option.

- a It creates a sense of obsession.
- b It suggests that rain is coming.
- c It makes the poem sound repetitive.

5 Find in lines 1-29 a reference to the fact that in the Waste Land of the modern world:

- 1 there is no possibility of thinking: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 there is no comfortable position: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 it is not possible to find silence or peace: \_\_\_\_\_

6 Focus on line 9.

- 1 Find an example of personification: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Find an example of a metaphor: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 What effect does this metaphor create? Explain in your own words.

7 What figure of speech is contained in line 28? Choose the correct option.

- a oxymoron
- b onomatopoeia
- c litotes

8 Focus on lines 30-40.

- 1 What does the speaking voice hear?
- 2 Who does the speaking voice see?
- 3 What is happening to the cities mentioned by the poet?

9 The cities mentioned by Eliot in the last lines of this passage are all symbolical. Match them with their symbolical meaning.

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1 Jerusalem  | a The prototype of the modern city.           |
| 2 Athens     | b The capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. |
| 3 Alexandria | c The city where Western culture was born.    |
| 4 Vienna     | d The capital of Hellenistic culture.         |
| 5 London     | e The holy city of Christianity.              |



**10** The passage ends with the adjective 'unreal', which Eliot uses also at the end of 'The Burial of the Dead'.

- 1 What does it refer to in 'The Burial of the Dead'?
- 2 What does it refer to here?

### INTERPRETATION

**11** Eliot wrote that the first part of this excerpt (lines 1-29) contains references to the journey to Emmaus, i.e. the journey Jesus' disciples took after Christ's death and before his resurrection. What elements in the passage make you think that:

- 1 the action takes place in the desert: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 the speaking voice belongs to a group of people: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 the speaking voice constantly oscillates between hope and despair: \_\_\_\_\_

**12** In lines 32-33 Eliot uses the image of 'hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains'. Who do you think this image refers to?

- a soldiers
- b poor people
- c people who survived a catastrophe
- d other (specify)

**13** The cities mentioned by Eliot in lines 38-39 represent the capitals of famous political or religious empires.

- 1 Which of them are modern? Which are ancient?
- 2 What happened to these empires?
- 3 What message about Europe is Eliot conveying with these images?
- 4 Is Eliot's message positive or negative?

### YOUR VOICE

**14** Eliot's poem is only apparently chaotic. In fact, there are many images, symbols, cross-references and motifs that give it a 'structure'. List them and say how they contribute to bringing order to the apparent 'chaos' of Eliot's poem.

Possible ideas:

- the theme of water and sterility
- the theme of the quest
- the theme of the fall of the modern world



## Summing up

This part is the last section of *The Waste Land*. It is centred on the opposition between desert images and water images. The speaking voice is collective and oscillates between hope and despair. There are references to the journey to Emmaus that Jesus' disciples took after Christ's death and before his resurrection, when the disciples oscillated between hope and despair too; there are also references to war in the hordes of soldiers 'swarming over endless plains' and to cities both ancient and modern that are 'unreal' because they share a common destiny of destruction and doom. The landscape described is an example of Eliot's effective use of the objective correlative, the dry land representing the spiritual wasteland of the modern world where no hope can flourish.





# John McCrae (1872-1918)

## A brief bio

John McCrae was a **Canadian poet** and **soldier** during World War I, and a surgeon during the **Second Battle of Ypres**, in Belgium (22 April-25 May 1915). He is best known for writing the famous war memorial poem *In Flanders Fields*. McCrae died of pneumonia near the end of the war.

T52

## In Flanders Fields (1915)



JOHN MCCRAE

Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, a Canadian officer and McCrae's friend, was killed by a German shell in the Second Battle of Ypres. He became one of the 54,896 soldiers who have no known grave in the battlefields covered by red poppies in the Flanders. McCrae wrote the poem to honour the dead and urge more soldiers to fight on. The poem is a **rondeau**, a 15-line poem organised into three stanzas, with two short lines that build up a refrain at the end of the second and third stanza and very few sounds for end rhymes. This enables poets to show their mastery because the fewer the sounds, the more difficult it is to find a lot of words with the same end rhyme.

### Enjoy!

*Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori*, It is sweet and honorable to die for your country, said the Ancients. What can we add, we the many, many, many dead soldiers buried in the Flanders, with just a cross, and no name? That we have our poppies. We have our larks. We have the courage of the living to honour us. Remember us. Fight for us.

### Translation

1. poppies\_papaveri
- 0 papaveri
- rossi fiorirono
- spontaneamente
- sul terreno del
- campo di battaglia,
- e McCrae li include
- nella poesia. Il
- tradizionale omaggio
- floreale posto sulle
- tombe nei cimiteri
- è sostituito dalla
- crescita spontanea
- dei papaveri fra le
- file di croci.)
2. crosses\_croci
3. larks\_allodole (Le
- allodole si levano in
- volo all'alba, e nella
- tradizione letteraria
- sono il simbolo del
- nuovo giorno.)
4. Take... foe\_
- raccogliete la nostra
- lotta contro il
- nemico
5. torch\_torcia
6. ye break faith\_
- rompete la parola

In Flanders fields the poppies<sup>1</sup> blow  
Between the crosses<sup>2</sup>, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks<sup>3</sup>, still bravely singing, fly  
5 Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

10 Take up our quarrel with the foe<sup>4</sup>:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch<sup>5</sup>; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith<sup>6</sup> with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
15 In Flanders fields.

Rhyme scheme: \_\_\_\_\_

Symbols

Contrast life/death

Courage

