



Mycroft Lectures.
Adapted Transcript for:

Rupert Brooke's
The Soldier.

(Mycroft lectures always provide sentence-by-sentence parsing, paraphrasing and explanation of each poem. However, each lecture also presents extra information to enhance appreciation and understanding of the poem under discussion. As the Mycroft lectures are not read from a script, a transcript of a lecture contains the imperfections of a spoken presentation. To avoid the embarrassment of having the spoken performance thought to be an essay and being quoted as such, I have made occasional changes to the spoken lectures for the purposes of clarification. What follows is the transcript of a lecture, not an essay.)

Chronology of the Lecture.

1. The lecture starts by situating the poem as a pre-First World War poem and looks at Rupert Brooke's experience of warfare.
2. The poem itself can be very polarizing. Why was/is it so popular? Why can it be seen as insulting to the soldiers fighting in the trenches?
3. The way the lecture is set up is explained. There will be two interpretations given of what is happening in the second stanza: the first interpretation will prejudice a post-colonial reading of the poem, showing the poem's possible imperialistic leanings. The second interpretation sees the poem more as a love sonnet to England.
4. The poem is read through.
5. The poem is parsed, paraphrased, explained line by line in simpler English. The opening octet is explained first, and then two explanations are given for the sestet.
6. Various complications noted, or areas of interest raised and questioned, are:
7. From the octet (opening eight lines):

- The literal interpretation of the opening lines. Why will the place Brooke dies always be England?
 - Why will that earth be “richer” because Brooke died there?
 - Different interpretations of the line “ways to roam”.
 - The context of the soldier dying and being seen as a fertilizer is explored. Thomas Hardy’s poem “Drummer Hodge” is read through, with special attention paid to the last lines.
 - “The Soldier” is shown as an example of “writing back” to Hardy’s poem.
 - “Suns of home” is examined.
 - The biblical allusion of “dust”.
8. From the sestet (closing six lines):
- Karl Popper’s point on how to present an argument.
 - The first interpretation prejudices an imperialistic reading of the poem.
 - Heart as synecdoche.
 - The soldier’s possible belief in Manifest Destiny, in colonialism.
 - Where are the “Hearts at peace under an English heaven”?
 - The poem is seen as one that shows “the expectancies of British colonialism.”.
 - The second interpretation argues that the poem is more accurately seen as a love poem to England, and that the imperialism of the poem is often overstated.
 - What does “And think,” mean?
 - The relevance of recognizing that the second stanza is another thing the soldier wants us to think of him once he is dead.
 - The new significance of “English heaven”.
 - The relevance of the poem’s iambic stress.
 - The poem as a love sonnet.
9. The poem is read through one more time.
10. The lecture closes with a reading of Wilfred Owen’s *Dulce Et Decorum Est*.

From the lecture: “The First World War, and what that war is going to be, has not happened at the point when Rupert Brooke writes this poem.”

Transcript of the *The Soldier* Lecture.

Welcome. I am Dr. Andrew Barker, and this is the Mycroft Online lecture on Rupert Brooke's much beloved, very patriotic, pre-First World War poem, *The Soldier*.

Note I say pre-First World War here.

The Soldier is written in 1914, and the bloody carnage of the trench warfare, the senseless waste of life, the attendant horrors of that particular conflict have not been made apparent to either the British public, or those who are doing the fighting, or those who are reporting and writing on the fighting – that hasn't really happened at the point when Rupert Brooke gives us this poem, *The Soldier*.

I say this knowing full well that *The Soldier* is usually associated with the First World War poems; Rupert Brooke himself is usually associated with the First World War poets, like Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Edmund Blunden. What I submit to you is the date of composition of this poem and the knowledge of warfare of the person who writes the poem, means that it is more a pre-First World War poem than a poem actually relevant to the realities of the combat that took place in the First World War.

The poem was originally titled *The Recruit*. It wasn't called *The Soldier*, it was called *The Recruit*. And for me this would have made a lot more sense as the title.

It is written by someone who saw one day's limited combat, one day's limited engagement in the British retreat from Antwerp. The evacuation of Antwerp. That was the only actual combat that Rupert Brooke was to witness during the war.

Rupert Brooke himself was a highly articulate, very handsome, very privileged, highly educated, very sensitive young man. He wasn't a battle-hardened war veteran reporting on what he actually had witnessed, and his on-the-spot opinions of what warfare was actually like. He was a young man about to go to war, and this is what he thought the experience would be like. And because Brooke never actually experienced warfare, this means the poem itself can be very polarising. On the one hand, we have the idea that what he says is actually rather insulting to the soldiers who were involved in the actual realities of combat in that particular engagement., the guys actually fighting and dying in the trenches during the First World War. On the other hand is the idea that what Brooke captures here is the specific brand of patriotism that those joining the military are often inclined to.

The poem now, the poem today, is a very beloved piece. It is often read out at the funerals as a eulogy for departed soldiers, even to this day. And there is something in the poem that appeals to the British character. The poem itself is very beautifully constructed. It is a very beautiful poem, but whether those eulogising their departed, or choosing to be eulogised with these words, fully understand the complexities of this poem, I may question. Perhaps the simple paraphrase of *The Soldier* would be, 'if I were to die, all I want you to think about my death is that I have died for my country, I love my country, and therefore my death was not a waste'. Now, that is a simplistic paraphrase, but it is part of the story. What I would submit to you here is that it is not the full story. *The Soldier* itself was a very popular poem at the time when it was written. It was actually used as a recruiting poem. It was one of those poems that would encourage young British men to go and hurl themselves on German bayonets for the glorification of their country. There was a war going on, and this is the type of literature that a government wants to promote in order to rouse an army; to gather the working men of England behind one cause, as if they're going to go out to war and they know why they're going to do it. That much about the poem is not in doubt. The poem was - perhaps even still is - a recruiting poem for the British, or more specifically, English military.

But what is the poem actually saying?

In this Mycroft Online Lecture, I'm going to give you two different readings for the poem's second stanza. The first one of these readings is what we would call a post-colonial reading. And the post-colonial reading would seek to demonstrate, indeed, would seek to prejudice, presenting the poem as one that has absolute imperialist leanings. This would be a reading that will concentrate as much as we can on noticing the imperialistic leanings of the poem. The second reading I will give you is one which sees the poem more as a love poem of a very love-struck young man; a love poem to England, in fact. I'll present these arguments as best I can for both of these types of readings, and at the end, we'll look at which one is the most convincing to us. And remember, the way we look at this, what I say here, has to be justified by the actual words Rupert Brooke wrote. So I'll read the poem through, and then we'll set about the line-by-line analysis of this poem.

The Soldier by Rupert Brooke.

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

*That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.*

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.*

It's a beautiful-sounding sentiment, but with the line-by-line analysis that we're about to do, let's see if, once we fully understand the poem, the reality of what the poem is saying is still as beautiful to us.

Now, to analyse *The Soldier*, the way I'll do it, I'll look at the opening eight lines, the opening octet of the poem, and then I'll look at the final six lines later on. Rupert Brooke tells us this.

*If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England.*

What he's saying there is, 'If I die, all I want you to think about my death is that there will be a place in another country that will always be England'. 'If I die, doesn't matter, don't let it worry you, because there will be a place in another country that will always be England.'

Now, we have to ask ourselves, 'Why? Why will there be another place in another country that will always be England?' As daft as this may sound to you, the conceit that Rupert Brooke puts across here is that the place where he dies will always be England because he will rot into the earth there, his corpse will rot into the earth, and because he is English, that place is claimed as England by him rotting into the land, rotting into the earth.

The second sentence of the poem is this:

There shall be in that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

Okay, the piece of earth in which he dies, when he dies on it, will have a richer, a better piece of earth within it. And once again, we may ask, 'Why? Why is the piece of earth on which Richard Brooke dies going to be superior because he has died on it?'

And the answer is, because he is an Englishman. His English corpse will rot into that piece of earth and fertilise, make fruitful, improve the piece of earth that he dies on; because his English corpse is superior to the corpse of someone else.

I'm not making this up, I'm not trying to put this flippantly. This is literally what the idea behind this part of the poem is: an English corpse is better than another corpse. And Brooke explains this to us specifically,

There shall be

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,

Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,

A body of England's, breathing English air,

Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

What Brooke is telling us here is that his corpse, his English corpse, will be superior as a fertiliser because he was born in England.

'A dust whom England bore.' He was 'shaped, made aware' in England, meaning he was educated in England. His body is a body of England's, it grew breathing English air, it was washed by the rivers of England, and blessed by the sun that shone on England, and all of those experiences that made him an Englishman made for a corpse that will improve the land on which he passes away.

Now, there are four things which are going on in the opening eight lines of this poem that I think it's worth bringing your attention to.

One I quite like is the line, 'the ways to roam'. England gave him English ways to roam. And I think we can see that in two different ways. One is that he had English ways to roam, 'ways' being the highways and byways of England, and as a young man he was able to

traverse the roads, the highways and byways of England. He was able to walk around England.

Certainly, that's one way of looking at it.

I think another way you could interpret that line that's quite nice is that he had English ways, not as roads, but 'ways' meaning 'experiences'. He had English experiences to explore. So 'ways to roam' can mean he literally, he had the roads of England to walk around, but it could also mean that he had the experiences of England to explore - which he did explore - and helped make him the person that he actually is.

What I think we also need to understand in this first stanza is this whole idea of the soldier dying and being seen as a fertiliser. Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier* is not the first poem to explore this particular idea. There was a - what we must call an anti-war poem - written by Thomas Hardy in 1899 called *Drummer Hodge*. This is a poem written some 15 years before *The Soldier* was written, about the military, and listen to this conceit that Thomas Hardy puts in the poem *Drummer Hodge*.

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest

Uncoffined -- just as found:

His landmark is a kopje-crest

That breaks the veldt around:

And foreign constellations west

Each night above his mound.

Young Hodge the drummer never knew –

Fresh from his Wessex home –

The meaning of the broad Karoo,

The Bush, the dusty loam,

And why uprose to nightly view

Strange stars amid the gloam.

What Hardy is telling us here is that Drummer Hodge has come from Wessex and he has died in Africa under a foreign sky. The third stanza is the one which is especially relevant to us when we look at this poem.

The third stanza is:

*Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.*

Thomas Hardy's problem with Drummer Hodge's situation is that he has been taken from Wessex and died on the plains of Africa, and that the waste of life there is increased by the fact that this young, English boy will rot into the sands or fields of Africa.

*Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow to some Southern tree.*

Hodge will fertilise a tree in Africa. So, for me, there seems to be in Rupert Brooke's highly patriotic, recruiting poem, *The Soldier*, an element of what we now call 'writing back' in the way that he opens the poem. 'Writing back' is to take an established narrative and write something that questions it, or contradicts it. Rupert Brooke's, 'if I should die, |think only this of me: That there's some corner of a foreign field |That is for ever England' seems to be saying, 'Look, I don't care if I die in a foreign field. I'll be proud to because that piece of field will always be England'.

It seems to me to be writing back against Thomas Hardy's conceit that it is a tragedy that Drummer Hodge will die in a foreign land, and strange-eyed constellations will reign his stars eternally above him: he won't know where he is.

The third thing I'd like to mention about that opening eight lines is the idea of 'suns of home'. When Rupert Brooke tells us that he is happy to have been - not just happy but proud and privileged - to have been raised in England, and one of the things about being raised in England that he has always loved is the 'suns of home', the English sun.

Anybody who has lived in England is likely to smirk at that particular line.

And we will smirk at that line not just because the English sun is not particularly the brightest and warmest that we are likely to have experienced. Aside from that rather comical

element, also, it's just factually inaccurate. The same sun shines on England, as shines on Timbuktu or Tanzania. English imperialism can't claim the whole of the sun. The sun of England that he speaks of here, that he feels very blessed by having had shone on him, is the same sun that shines on every other place on the planet. I think I can slightly redeem that line, actually, by the over-enthusiasm that the soldier demonstrates for all aspects of his country; it's as if there's nothing bad about England. The suns that shine on England, to the soldier, they are English suns. Okay, we know that as far as astrophysics goes, this is literally not true. But it is indicative of the way the soldier sees England. The suns which shone on him when he was in England were English, they *were* better than the suns of other places.

And on top of that, there's one other way I think we can make that line quite nice. When Rupert Brooke writes, 'blest by suns of home', of course 'suns' is spelled s-u-n-s, meaning big burning ball of gas. But we also hear all associated words when we hear a line in a poem. So, s-o-n-s, the 'sons of England', is something we also hear at the point when Rupert Brooke says, 'he was blest by the suns of home'. And don't we hear in that line that England is blest by her sons, of whom the soldier is, of course, one?

'England is blest by the sons of England': s-o-n-s of England.

That sentiment that I'm giving you there is certainly not out of place within the rhetoric of this poem. And we can have it both ways. Obviously, the reading we can't deny is that Brooke is saying he felt blessed by the suns of England, s-u-n-s. But we can also bring into that, if we want, s-o-n-s, the sons of England, who are the friends, the people he grew around, the fellow soldiers who bless England and are willing to - almost keen to - lay down their lives for their country.

The fourth thing I want to bring attention to from this opening part of the poem is the use of the word 'dust'.

*There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware.*

Dust has a specific biblical connotation. God, Yahweh, Jehovah, creates Adam out of dust. He says, 'from dust you come, to dust you will return'. That is a specific line from the Bible. 'From dust you come, to dust you will return'. (That is the line that Philip Pullman makes such wonderful use of in his *His Dark Materials* trilogy). But here, the use of dust rather than, say, mud or earth - 'there shall be in that rich earth, a richer mud concealed' -

gives the poem a specific and unavoidable Biblical allusion. And it is not the only time that there is a Biblical allusion in this poem. We'll see one later with, specifically, 'in hearts at peace, under an English heaven'. We cannot avoid that there is a Biblical allusion running through this poem,

*There shall be in that rich earth a richer dust concealed.
'From dust you come, to dust you will return.'*

Okay, I'll read that opening octet through again, so you get an idea of what's going on in it.

*If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.*

And now we come to the final six lines of the poem.

It is from the final six lines that I am going to get the different interpretations that I am going to present to you. The first one of course being this very anti-imperialist, post-colonialist reading that I'm going to find, and the second being the reading of the poem as the love song of a young man.

The final six lines of the poem are these:

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.*

The philosopher Karl Popper makes an interesting point on how to present an argument. He says the only way that you are ever going to convince somebody that their argument is wrong is if you can make the point *for* their argument stronger than they can make it. So you make their argument as strong as you can, until you've got the strongest points to support the argument that they want to make. And then, you disprove the argument you have just made that was stronger than any argument they have made. He says that if you try to change someone's mind on their weaker points, it won't make any difference, because they know the stronger arguments are still intact. So, what I am going to attempt to do here is make the point that this is just an imperialist poem, and I'm going to make the point from this post-colonial perspective as aggressively as I can.

This now is the post-colonial interpretation of the last six lines of *The Soldier*.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away

'Heart' here is synecdoche, and synecdoche is when the part represents the whole. He's not just saying his heart does it, he's saying he does it. I. I, all evil shed away. And this, 'this heart, all evil shed away'. There's two ways we can look at that.

Let's look at that the nicest way we possibly can.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away.

He is saying, 'there is no evil in my heart. I am a very good person.'

And think, this heart, all evil shed away

Can that not also mean, 'I kill evil people'? He is a soldier after all, and the sentiments of a 1914 British soldier, I don't think, to believe that you killed evil people would be an alien sentiment to someone engaging in military combat at that time.

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less*

'Eternal' means lasting forever. It's the mind that lasts forever.

Well, surely that's God. We've already had the Biblical allusion, 'from dust you come, to dust you will return'. So I don't think it's too much of a stretch to see the eternal mind here as God.

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less*

If I want to make that sentiment sound as brutal as I can, surely,

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less*

means, 'I kill people for God'.

Now, don't believe that that sentiment is so outrageous that a soldier in 1914 wouldn't think it. We are around the time of what the Americans were to call, 'manifest destiny'. 'Manifest destiny' is American, but it is the idea that God supported whatever America did, because it was obvious that God did, because they couldn't do it if God didn't support them. It was manifest, it was their destiny.

And that sentiment is not really out of place with ideas of British colonialism. The British believed it was pretty much their destiny to go and rule things. The colonial exploit was sold under the banner that it was bringing a civilising influence to the peoples that it was colonising and civilising.

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less.*

If I want to make that seem as nice as I possibly can, it would be, 'I have no evil in my heart, and I work for a higher power'.

If I want to make it seem as unpleasant as possible, I would make it say, 'I kill people for God'.

I'll read that stanza from the start.

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less*

Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given

So, the things which England gave me, I give somewhere back to other people. All of my Englishness, my English character, my English mind-set, I give that to other people. Where those people are, we will look at in a minute.

He says, 'gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given'. The thoughts that England gave me, I give back to other people. And he now gives us a list of five of the things that England has given him.

*Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness*

Well that's the sights of England, the sounds of England, the happy dreams that he had in England, the laughter he had with his friends in England, and the gentleness of being English.

Ok, now I think we can sum all that up as Englishness.

I think the easiest way to understand what's going on in that the end of this poem is to remove the things which basically just sum up what Rupert Brooke believes to be Englishness, which are those five things mentioned in lines 13 and lines 12, or the last but one line and the last but two lines. We can just take those out.

If you imagine the way I have the poem written here, at the moment, the poem reads,

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;*

*And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.*

If you remove

*Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness*

which is just 'Englishness', cut that out, and you get this.

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.*

So, what does 'gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given; |In hearts at peace, under an English heaven' mean? It means, 'All the things England has given me, I will give them back in hearts at peace under an English heaven.'

So where are those hearts at peace under an English heaven?

The simple answer would be England.

But are they?

There's only two places they can be - they can be in England or not in England. If 'the hearts at peace under an English heaven', if those hearts are in England, what he's basically saying here is, 'I am willing to die to protect the people of my home country'.

This poem is written at a time when England owns India. It is a massive colonial power. England hadn't been invaded since 1066. The First World War and what that war was going to be has not happened at the time when Rupert Brooke writes this poem. It's only about a year away. But it hasn't happened at the point when he writes this poem. What this poem is, is rather than a poem of the First World War, a poem of the expectancies of British colonialism.

I think it is indicative of the ideas of soldiers at that point, that they were doing a civilising mission, they were on a civilising mission to go to other countries and bring Englishness to those countries, to create in other countries 'hearts at peace under an English heaven'.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away

'There's no evil in my heart, I work for God, and God wants me to bring Englishness to non-English peoples.'

So that's the post-colonial reading of the last six lines of *The Soldier*. The reading that seeks to relate the last six lines to the imperialism of its time - or of the time when the poem

was constructed - in the most aggressive way possible. And I would be loath to say that that reading has no worth. I think that there is a lot of truth demonstrated in the reading that I've just given you.

But I also believe that that reading overstates the case. And let me demonstrate why. Let's have a look at the opening line of that sextet,

And think, this heart, all evil shed away

The way I think this line should be interpreted is with reference to the opening line of the poem, the opening line being, 'If I should die, think only this of me'. Meaning, 'this is what I want you to think about, if I die'.

The sextet, the second stanza of the poem starts, 'And think, this heart, all evil shed away'.

What Rupert Brooke is saying here is, 'Here is another thing I want you to think if I die'.

'Think *only this* of me, *and* think this as well.'

If I should die, think only this of me: That there's some corner of a foreign field that is for ever England.

But also think,

this heart, all evil shed away, a pulse in the eternal mind, no less Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given.

Now, this very much changes the imperialist connotations of the last line of the poem.

What Rupert Brooke is saying is 'And think, this heart, all evil shed away', is that this is another thing he wants you to think about once he is dead. He is not telling us what he is doing while he is still alive, as the post-colonial reading that I have just given you would seek to demonstrate.

He starts off 'another thing I want you to think about if I die is, *this heart, all evil shed away*, is that I have become a pulse in the eternal mind.'

He is not saying, 'I work for God, I do God's will in my soldiering'. He is saying, 'now that I am dead, I have become a pulse in the eternal mind. I have become one with God, or

one with Gaia', if you want to use a modern terminology that I quite like. 'And think, now I'm dead, this heart has no more evil in it', which then suggests that he acknowledges that the act of soldiering is an evil. There is no more evil in his heart because he's dead and he is no longer soldiering.

So when Brooke tells us that, 'he gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given', what follows is a list of five things that he gives back to the eternal mind which came from England.

These things are:

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;

And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness, in hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

'Gentleness, in hearts at peace, under an English heaven' is one of the things that he gives back somewhere.

Even with the best will in the world, we can't claim that he's not attempting to colonise the six feet in which he dies. That piece of land in which he dies will still be 'forever England', but I think it's vastly overstating the case to say that the poem claims that where he dies, everywhere behind it will be a piece of England. The only piece of England that he is claiming is the place on which he dies, which will be infused by:

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;

And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,

In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

So the English heaven that we made such a big deal of in the post-colonial reading is merely the place where he was when the things which will fertilise the soil of the foreign land were given to him.

I can't help thinking that some of this confusion comes about due to the way the stress falls on that opening line of the sextet,

And think, this heart, all evil shed away

The iambic stress which it falls on would normally be:

And think, this heart, all evil shed away

But that isn't the way that it needs to be read. It needs to be read as:

And think, this heart, all evil shed away.

It's quite an interesting difference, isn't it? If you hear the line with the traditional iambic stress, it's:

And think, this heart, all evil shed away

But no, the 'And' needs to be stressed because he's telling us that what follows is another of the things he wants you to think about if he dies.

Note, incidentally, in this poem, how often England itself is mentioned and the absolute awe with which England is seen by the soldier of this poem. If he dies it will be for the glorification of England, it will be a wonderful thing for the piece of land that he dies on to have his body, blood, and bones seep into it. If you've ever seen 'Black Adder Goes Forth', Brooke here always reminds me of Lieutenant George in it. The guy who doesn't seem to understand that by the time he actually gets into the thick of the warfare, it's going to be absolutely awful. He seems to think at the point when he goes there, it's going to be like some extended game of rugby. That England is an absolutely unimpeachable, wonderful place, he can see no wrong in it. And he is absolutely glad to lay down his life, and feels privileged to do so for the betterment of that Land.

The poem itself is a sonnet. It's a 14-line poem, written in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter is a 10 syllable line with five alternate stresses. Di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is for ever England. There shall be

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

That's iambic pentameter and we respond to iambic pentameter because - one of the theories is - we are conditioned to by our mother's heartbeat. At the point when we are born, we have heard the di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum for nine months. So when poets put lines together in perfect iambic pentameter, we respond to it.

This being a sonnet, and an accomplished sonnet, I think we cannot avoid the fact that this is a sonnet to England. This is a love poem to England. The sonnet is the go-to guy for love poetry. It's the go-to poetic form, if you want to write a love poem. Not all sonnets are love poems, and not all love poems are sonnets, but the very fact that Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, all of which are love poems, gives it a great deal of credibility.

This particular sonnet, incidentally, is a Petrarchan sonnet, a version of a Petrarchan sonnet. It has an octave, the first eight lines, and a sestet, the final six lines, in the classic example of the Petrarchan sonnet.

This love poem to England was used as a recruiting poem to get young boys to go and fight in the First World War. And it was very successful. It was read out in Westminster Abbey, Winston Churchill was involved in the promotion of the poem itself, it was the poster child for the early years of that horrific tragic conflict.

It's still possible to read this poem, whereby the message of it is, 'I love my country very much. I would be willing to lay down my life for my country because of the privileges that being English has afforded me, and I would be willing to lay down my life to pass on those privileges to other people'. It is still possible to read the poem in that way.

My problem with it is that as a war poem, it is not written by someone who experienced warfare.

I'll read the poem out to you now one more time, and then I'll read a poem by Wilfred Owen, one of the war poets.

This poem I'm going to read out is Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et decorum est*, and this is the poem by the guy who actually experienced the horrors of warfare.

So, a final reading of Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*.

*If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;*

*A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.*

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.*

Rupert Brooke, 1914. Now this is Wilfred Owen from 1918. *Dulce et Decorum est*

*Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired outstripped five nines that dropped behind.*

*Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.*

*In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.*

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace

*Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

That was Wilfred Owen from the very end of the war, the soldier who has actually experienced the attendant horrors of the trench warfare.

That was the Mycroft Online Lecture on Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*.

I am Dr. Andrew Barker.

Thank you, I hope you enjoyed the lecture.

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