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Written by: Helen CunninghamReviewed by: Kate LeeUpdated on 30 August 2024Written shortly after the start of the First World War in 1914, Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier' was published in 1915 in a collection called 1914. The poem presents an idealised view of a soldier's willingness to fight and die for his country. Highly patriotic and omitting the harsh realities of war, it glorifies a soldier's unwavering devotion to England and his selfless allegiance to his beloved nation above all else, even his own life. Language, structure and form revision What happens in the poem?Language: Form: Iambic pentameterRhyme scheme (ABABCD, EFGFEG)Structure: Stanza One:The poet asks that the addressee be consoled by the fact that his body, wherever it is buried, will allow the spirit of England to live on. It will enrich the soil with Englishness and contribute to a more fertile and meaningful legacyStanza Two:The poet explores the notion of death cleansing away all evil and of transcendence for the soldier who becomes "a pulse in the eternal mind". Here the soldier's spirit is given to heaven and England which are conflated, stressing the divine power, beauty and magnificence of the nation for which he has diedPoems for comparison: 'Dulce et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen: war, death, sacrifice, loss of innocence'Mametz Wood' by Owen Sheers: impact of war, death, memory 'A wife in London' by Thomas Hardy: war, death, sacrifice, love'Sonnet 43' by Elizabeth Barrett Browning: love, sacrifice, devotionKey words Context: ImperialismWarNaivelyInnocenceThemes: PatriotismDeath/Sacrifice Devotion Transcendence'The Soldier' by Rupert Brooke.If I should die, think only this of me:That there's some corner of a foreign fieldThat is for ever England. There shall bein 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 lessGives 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.LanguageThe title suggests that the soldier is an archetype and links to the idea of selflessness and sacrifice "some corner" suggests an insignificance that is juxtaposed with repeated references to "England" and "English" to highlight the centrality and importance of his patriotismThe words "for ever" highlight the longevity and significance of the nation, contrasted with the fleeting and inconsequential nature of human existenceSibilance creates a soothing effect reflecting an overall sense of tranquilityPastoral imagery of "flowers" and "rivers" idealise England and create a sense of tranquility in juxtaposition to the reality of warThe metaphor "an English heaven" reminds us both of the context of war and death and the spiritual nature ofStructureThe full stop after "for ever England" stresses the poet's certainty in the eternity of the nation By dividing 14 lines into an octave and a sestet, Brooke divides the thematic focus: the octave explores all that England has bestowed upon the soldier, while the sestet focuses on the soldier's contribution to his countryThe volta signifies a shift from the physical ("bore", "body", "breathing") in the octave to the spiritual ("eternal mind", "dream", "heaven") in the sestet. The structure mirrors the movement from evil to peaceEnjambment adds a conversational quality between the speaker and listener Form Brooke adopts the style of a Petrarchan sonnet, often used in romantic poetry. This aligns with the idealised, reverential depiction of England and the pervasive patriotism throughoutBy writing in iambic pentameter, Brooke adopts a traditional poetic form that gives a sense of formality and timelessness. The rhythmic pattern aligns with the contemplative toneThe alternating rhyme scheme within each quatrain creates a musicality, which complements the Romantic imageryThe simplicity of the rhymes ("me/be", "field/concealed") are reflective of Brooke's surety; the words fit together as neatly as his moral conviction The rhyme scheme shifts at the volta, signalling the transition between life — "bore", "made" "room" — and the afterlife, "A pulse in the eternal mind"ThemesKey quotationsLanguage, form and structurePatriotism "That there's some corner of a foreign fieldThat is for ever England." "A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam" "In hearts at peace, under an English heaven"England transcends mere geography; the spirit of England is eternally interwoven with that of the soldier's, wherever he is buried. Alliteration of "foreign field" underscores its foreignness, which contrasts with EnglandPersonification of England as a mother with idealised language ("flowers", "love", "room") is typical of a Romantic idyll and elevates England into something celestial, thus highlighting the poet's adoration of his countryThe metaphor "under an English heaven" imbues the country with divine status, portraying the idea of dying for it as a noble and beautiful act of patriotismSacrifice/Death "If I should die, think only this of me" "In that rich earth a richer dust concealed""And think, this heart, all evil shed away"The grammatical separation of "think only this of me" shifts the focus away from the soldier and highlights England insteadThe dust is considered richer because it is English; the soldier and his country are inextricably linked. It implies that the glory and legacy of the nation are perpetuated through the sacrifices of its peopleThis line appears at the beginning of the sestet, marking a shift in focus towards spiritual and eternal life. Death is presented positively here, conveying the idea that such a sacrifice brings an end to evilDevotion "A body of England's, breathing English air" "Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home" The speaker's devotion to England is highlighted by the notion that his body belongs to the nation; it has been shaped by England, making his "dust" a lasting testimony of England's beauty and cultureEngland is omniscient like a divine power: in the air, the rivers and the sun. These religious connotations suggest the poet's devotion to his country is also a devotion to God Transcendence "A pulse in the eternal mind, no lessGives somewhere back the thoughts by England given" "Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given" Brooke describes the speaker's spirit merging with England and the "eternal mind" (God), suggesting he has transcended his earthly existence to endure in eternally death, all that England has bestowed upon the soldier returns to the divine power of his country's spirit; his thoughts do not perish but transcend to an "English heaven" Rupert Brooke was born in Warwickshire in 1887, privately educated at Rugby school and read Classics at the University of Cambridge:He was academically able and his friends included those in the Bloomsbury Group such as the writers Virginia Woolf and E.M. ForsterIn 1913, Brooke toured America and Canada, from where he wrote travel dairies for a newspaper called the Westminster GazetteHe enlisted at the start of the First World War in 1914 and was assigned to the Royal Naval Division:While on board a ship in Egypt, he was bitten by a mosquito and went on to contract sepsis, a type of blood poisoningDespite efforts to save him, he died in April 1915 aged 27, having never experienced first-hand combatHe was buried under an olive grove in Skyrros, where the ship was moored at the timeThere is a dedicated memorial for him in Skyrros called Brooke SquareLook at this exam-style question about 'The Soldier': How does Rupert Brooke present sacrifice in the poem 'The Soldier'?Choose one other poem from the anthology in which the poet also writes about sacrifice. Compare the way the poet presents sacrifice in your chosen poem with the way Rupert Brooke presents it in 'The Soldier'. In your answer you should: compare the content and structure of the poems — what they are about and how they are organised compare how the writers create effects using appropriate terminology how relevant compare the contexts of the poems, and how these may have influenced the ideas in themHow you could approach this question: Thesis/Essay introduction: In 'The Soldier' by Rupert Brooke and 'A Wife in London' by Thomas Hardy, both poets explore the themes of war and sacrifice through contrasting tone and imagery. 'The Soldier' presents an idealistic perspective, glorifying sacrifice as a noble act enabling the spirit of England live on. 'A Wife in London', in contrast, portrays the futility of war and the profound impact on the families left behind, suggesting that the true sacrifice extends beyond the battlefield to loved ones left behind.Similarities/Differences/Both poets explore the themes of war and the enduring legacies forged by the sacrifices made on the battlefieldThe tone of 'The Soldier' is idealistic and tranquil, presenting sacrifice as a noble act that enables the spirit of England to live on. In contrast, in 'A Wife in London', Hardy conveys the futility of war and the impact it has on both soldiers and their families, whose lives are altered by the consequences of warBoth poems use imagery of England to describe the nation's landscape, culture and spirit. Brooke portrays England as an idyllic homeland with a sense of reverence and adoration. Hardy juxtaposes the cold setting of London with the jarring intrusion of war, symbolised by the telegramIn 'The Soldier', Brooke employs pastoral imagery of England to portray an idealised depiction: in 'A Wife in London', Hardy uses the imagery of fog in London as a setting for the wife's tragic newsBoth poets explore the idea of loss and its significance, from the heroic sacrifice of a soldier to the grief experienced by those left behindIn 'The Soldier', loss on a human level is presented as a moment of transcendence leading to eternal peace and glory through sacrifice; in 'A Wife in London', the poem portrays loss from a personal perspective in all its devastationThesis/Essay introduction: In Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier' and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnet 43', both poets explore the theme of sacrifice, exploring the sonnet form to express a love and devotion that transcends into personal sacrifice, highlighting the speaker's complete emotional and spiritual dedication to her beloved, Brooke's poem elevates the sacrifice for the love of England, portraying the soldier's death as a noble act that eternally binds his spirit to the nation. Similarities DifferencesBoth poems explore the notion of sacrifice. Brooke's poem portrays sacrifice as a noble act in service to England and Browning's poem explores the personal sacrifice in terms of the speaker dedicating herself to her beloved. In contrast, the soldier's sacrifice is motivated by his love for England Both poets use the form of a sonnet to explore the themes of love and devotion. Browning uses this form to explore the speaker's boundless affection and Brooks uses it to explore the speaker's devotion to their countryBrooke divides his poem into two stanzas, an octave and a sestet, whereas Browning's poem has a single stanza. The structure of 'The Soldier' allows the poet to initially focus on what England has bestowed on the soldier, followed by what the soldier reciprocates to England. The single stanza in 'Sonnet 43' allows the poet to allude the idea of completeness through loveBoth poems convey the idea of their everlasting devotion going on beyond death for all eternity, suggesting a timeless connection that persists beyond the realm of life and deathIn Brooke's poem, the soldier's spirit becomes one with England's forever; in Browning's poem, the eternal love is personal, with the speaker's spirit forever dedicated to her belovedCompare the ways poets explore the theme of devotion in 'The Soldier' and in one other poem from the anthology. Compare the ways poets explore the impact of conflict in 'The Soldier' and in one other poem from the anthology. Remember to analyse the poems you write about in depth so that you can demonstrate your understanding of the subtext. In other words, poets use lots of devices to create meaning that go beyond the literal. For example, think: why was this word used? Is there a double meaning?Did this phrase help you? 'The Soldier' A Detailed Look at a Criticized Poem Grief, death, devastation: with the strong exception of Rupert Brooke, these were the themes reflected in most war poetry during WWI. Brooke laced his poetry with sentimentality and nationalism, which was very different from the themes of other works during the time. Many people love and admire his poems, but despite his poetry being criticized by the public, Rupert Brooke was a talented young poet throughout World War I. This poem was first published in Brooke's book of sonnets, 1914 rightly named for the year they were authored. WWI was an influential time for poetry and a catalyst for an important movement in poetry; war poetry. The poetry of this time reflected the feelings of the general public at the commencement of WWI. Brooke's "The Soldier," though seen as a hymn to the great nation of England during WWI is today seen as overly sentimental and as romanticizing the horrors of the war through strong figurative language and symbols ("The Soldier"). The theme reflected most prominently in "The Soldier," patriotism, is seen again in many of Brooke's war sonnets, but not commonly in the poetry of emerging poets during the war. Brooke is notorious for his use of sentimentality and nationalism in his war poetry. The voice in "The Soldier" talks about his untimely death in a fiercely patriotic manner, undaunted by his likely demise. When referring to the foreign field in which he will be buried, he describes it with "...there's some corner of a foreign field that is forever England. There shall be in that rich earth a richer dust concealed" (Brooke). In these lines Brooke is saying that the dust, the earth, in which he is buried in will be richer because an English soldier lies in it; because a piece of England lies beneath the earth. Order custom essay The Soldier by Rupert Brooke with free plagiarism report 450+ experts on 30 subjects Starting from 3 hours delivery Get Essay Help Through this statement, Brooke is associating the soldier in the poem with England, making him not just English, but England. Patriotism shines through again in the next lines, "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..." (Brooke). "A body of England's" supports Brooke's embodiment of soldiers as not only English, but England. It is these examples of Brooke's strong patriotism reflected in his poetry that created the criticism for its maudlin nature ("The Soldier"). In continuation, the second most prominent theme employed by Brooke is the notion of transformation, which is distinguished clearly throughout "The Soldier." The second stanza was a prime example of the conversion displayed in the poem. The line in the second stanza, "And think, this heart, all evil shed away" (Brooke) implies a transformation from a soldier, ordinary and human, to a cleansed soul who will live forever through England. The second stanza is saying that with death for your country comes great honor and transformation into a pure soul, forever remembered for fighting to the end for their country. By making yourself a martyr, you have "cleansed your soul" and this is a great transformation. This idea is what inspired soldiers to be willing to die for their country, and to want to fight for England. Brooke is saying that there is a larger purpose that can be achieved through death, which is another example of Brooke romanticizing the war and death. To soldiers, the thought of being transformed into a great soul, forever linked to your nation because of your connection with England, is consistent throughout, which is why transformation is a prominent theme of the poem ("The Soldier"). The figurative language in "The Soldier" defines the poem and displays the message, but also supports the fact that Brooke's poem approaches the horrors of war in an indirect and romantic manner. When Brooke refers to "some corner of a foreign field" he is using the field as a symbol for the simple graveyards soldiers were buried in. Here, Brooke is addressing the war in a lighter tone, which critic Chris Semansky criticized Brooke for. The line in "The Soldier" addressing how the earth in which an English soldier is richer again uses a light symbol for a serious subject of war. Brooke refers to dust as a body in the line, "In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;" (Brooke). Dust is used again in the next line, "A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware..." (Brooke). In both lines "dust" is a symbol for a dead soldier. Another example of Brooke's figurative language is his repetition of England in his poem. This is another prime example of the theme of patriotism that is presented throughout in "The Soldier." Critic Bruce Meyer calls attention to more use of symbols in the poem, including the line, "And think, this heart, all evil shed away" (Brooke) which is symbolizing a man being purified before offering himself as a lamb to the slaughter (Meyer). The poem also uses an Petrarchan and Shakespearean rhyme scheme, using an alternating rhyme scheme of ABABCD rhyme scheme in the first stanza, which is Shakespearean, and then in the second stanza, a EFGFEG rhyme scheme, which is Petrarchan. Many of Brooke's poems use a Shakespearean alternation rhyme scheme consistently. The entire style of the poem remains "English," polite and "gentlemanly," and the style matches the figurative language and poetry techniques used: symbols to lighten the poetry's subject and a Shakespearean rhyme scheme ("The Soldier"). Furthermore, the time in which Brooke's "The Soldier" was written is crucial to understanding not only the poem, but why "The Soldier" has slipped from a famous to infamous piece of literature. The poem was written in 1914, at the beginning of WWI, during which Brooke had enlisted in the Royal Naval Division. Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Sarajevo, his wife, were murdered by Serbian nationalists, which had catapulted England into WWI ("The Soldier"). This was a time when England was sending their young men off to fight, without the assurance that they would return home. The public was coping with the deaths of their sons and husbands, and Brooke's poem was playing to the times. It was a reassurance to the general public about the war and the death occurring, and its strong level of patriotism was met with the public's own patriotism, as critic Semansky reiterates ("Semansky"). Brooke had war experience himself, through the Royal Naval Division, but was not fighting on the front lines or having any major experiences in war. He spent his first assignment assisting civilians in the evacuation of Antwerp, though he was originally assigned to help hold down the Channel ports with the navy. He did not complete his next assignment, to take back Constantinople from the Turks, because of his death, of fever, on the way to Gallipoli. Brooke did not have the immense war experience many other poets of the war had, and it influenced the demeanor of his poetry. Other war poets, Sassoon, Owens and Rosenberg did not adopt Brooke's heavily patriotic views, but rather questioned his attitude towards the war. By the public, "The Soldier" was revered, but as the war continued, and the horrors of the war made themselves more evident, "The Soldier" was thought of as sentimental literature, and not as a personification of the war ("The Soldier"). In conclusion, Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" reflected the attitude of England during the start of WWI, a comparison which has made it both famous and infamous. The historical context of the poem, the background being WWI, is a key to complete understanding the poem and the reason for its notoriety. "The Soldier" gives you a small insight into the ideology of soldiers and the public, who were looking for a deeper meaning for the death and destruction occurring. Through this, the poem informs your understanding of Rupert Brooke's reactions to England, the war, and the mayhem of the beginning of the war. His general attitude towards the war was strongly patriotic, and criticized for being as sentimental as it was. Brooke, as you can determine through the poem, felt that death during the war was a sacrifice for England that would ultimately be rewarded in the afterlife, and that it was the greatest show of devotion that one could show for their country. He felt strongly for England, and appealed to the people, but his poetry lost its appeal as the war progressed and the lightness in which Brooke regarded the war was recognized (Semansky). Through the fact that "The Soldier" was accepted during 1914, you can make the connection that the public shared Brooke's view of hope for a deeper meaning to the war and death. "The Soldier" meshes with Rupert Brooke's ideology, experiences and style, as well as with the time period. Though Brooke's fiercely patriotic and light take on WWI in "The Soldier" strongly appealed to the public as they coped with loss during the commencement of WWI, its sentimentality has been criticized for romanticizing the war and masking the true horrors England was experiencing. 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. WORKS CITED: Brooke, Rupert. "The Soldier." "Poet's Corner." 1914. theotherpages.org/poems/brooke01.html. Meyer, Bruce. "The Soldier." Poetry for Students. Ed. Mary Ruby and Ira Milne. Vol. 7. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2000. 217-227. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. Springfield Township High School. 9 Nov. 2008 < . galegroup.com/itweb/?db=GVRL>. Semansky, Chris. "The Soldier." Poetry for Students. Ed. Mary Ruby and Ira Milne. Vol. 7. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2000. 217-227. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. Springfield Township High School. 9 Nov. 2008 < . galegroup.com/itweb/?db=GVRL>. The Soldier by Rupert Brooke. (2017, Dec 12). Retrieved from What we've got here, gang, is a sonnet. And that means a few things as far as form and meter are concerned. Let's start with the overall form of the poem, shall we? We shall. So check it out: like... The speaker of 'The Soldier,' is the... soldier. Need we say more? Oh, we do? Well, then. There are a few things to note about this guy, since he's pretty revealing in the way he goes about this po... We can sum up the setting of this poem in one word for you, gang. Two syllables. Ready? Here they come: England. That's right: England from the speaker's past, England in a foreign field, heck--ev... This poem deals with a kind of immortality, really. In his speculation about entering into "English heaven," the speaker alternately comforts the reader (in case they were going to grieve for his d... The Soldier. It's not "a soldier," but "the soldier," as in "the soldier, par excellence," or "the ideal soldier." That, at any rate, is what Brooke's title seems to be telling us his poem is about... Rupert Brooke is often criticized for not being realistic about war. To put it another way, his poetry—and the war sonnets in particular, of which "The Soldier" is one of the most famous—is ide... "The Soldier" isn't too difficult of a poem, if we do say so ourselves. There aren't any of those super-crazy, old-school words that sometimes make poems difficult. At times, though, it can be kind... Just as the poem predicts, Brooke died in the war—from an infected mosquito bite. He died on April 23, the traditional birthday of Shakespeare. (Source.) A young Winston Churchill, who gave Brook... "The Soldier" imagines a soldier dying for his country on the battlefield, and then going to a peaceful, heavenly afterlife. This is a serious, sometimes somber, poem in which sex would just be out... Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. 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There shall bein 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,10 A pulse in the eternal mind, no less11 Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;12Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;13 And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,14 In hearts at peace, under an English heaven. A vietnamese soldier at night A quiet night in the barracks,around midnight he starts it again,he's yelling about some damned ambush,and calling some Viet woman's name.He always yells out he's sorry,so sorry for all of the pain,but every night around midnight,he kills her all over again.His life's in a kind of a freeze frame,he can't move on from the war,and every night just after twelve,he's back in the Nam once more.Back with the old 'Victor' Company,back in that same Free-Fire-Zone,and no bastard told those young Kiwi Grunts;they patrolled near a woodcutter's home.When the Lead Scout signals it's Charlie,the Platoon melts quietly away,the 'Immediate Ambush' signs given,and the Safety Catch slips onto 'play'.There's five in the group in pyjamas,as black as a midnight in May,and the Killing Ground moves into picture;then the Gun Group opens the way.Black figures are falling around him,now he's up on his feet running through and they're sweeping the ground where they dropped them,as he 'double taps' a screaming torso.At the Re-Or'y his fingers are trembling,the Platoon Sergeant gives him a smoke,then it's back to the bodies to check them,and his round hit a woman in the throat.There are blood trails leading behind them,and entrails are spilled on the track,but the woman who screamed once is silent,two rounds exit right through her back.The jungle seems silent and empty,as they dig down and bury the mess,then it's check ammunition and weapons;and don't dwell on the past just forget.Another night in the barracks,and Jimmy is yelling again,it's that same old Vietnam movie,that's spinning around in his brain.He always yells out he's sorry,so sorry for all of the pain,but every night around midnight,he kills her all over again. A proud british soldier If I should die, think only this of me:That there's some corner of a foreign fieldThat is for ever England. There shall bein 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 lessGives 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. 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