The Soldier - Rupert Brooke

Translation:

Se dovessi morire, pensa solo questo di me:

Che c’è un angolo di una terra straniera

Che sarà per sempre Inghilterra. Ci sarà

In quella ricca terra, una polvere nascosta ancora più ricca;

Una polvere che l’Inghilterra generò, che ha plasmato, reso consapevole

Che diede, una volta, a lei i fiori da amare, le sue vie da percorrere,

Un corpo inglese, che respira aria inglese,

Lavato dai fiumi, benedetto dal sole di casa.

E pensa che, questo cuore, liberatosi dal male,

Una pulsazione in uno spirito eterno, nondimeno,

Da qualche luogo restituisce i pensieri ricevuti dall’Inghilterra;

I suoi panorami e i suoni; i sogni felici come il suo giorno;

E la risata, imparata da amici, e la gentilezza,

In cuori in pace, sotto un cielo inglese.

Analysis:

“The Soldier” is a poem written by Rupert Brooke at the beginning of the First World War in 1914. It belongs to a series of poems entitled “1914” and it is the finale of the collection.

Right from the title, the reader may expect to read a poem about a soldier’s feelings and life during the war. In addition, the reader can notice that the title speaks with the definite article. Therefore the poem may deal with a specific soldier instead of a generical one. In addition, during the period when the sonnet was published (1915) the reader approaches the poem referring to a soldier who was currently fighting in the war, since the context of the period was a crucial one.

Analysing the layout, the reader can understand that the poem is a sonnet and it presents a Petrarchan structure; it is made up by an octave and a sestet. In addition, the reader can notice that even if the sonnet follows the Petrarchan mode in terms of meter, it does not t follow the objective for which the Petrarchan sonnet was written. In other words, in the Petrarchan sonnet the octave presents the speaker’s problem and the sestet presents a possible solution, while in this sonnet the speaker does not develop his personal problem. Besides, on the one hand the structure of the poem follows the Petrarchan mode while on the other the rhyme scheme recalls to the Shakespearean or Elizabethan mode. Indeed, the rhyme scheme is: ABABCDCD EFGEFG.

The speaking voice of the poem adopts the point of view of a soldier who has not taken part of the war yet. Therefore, the speaking voice images what means participating actively in the war. The poem provides the reader with a perception of the war on a part of a young poet who lived during the period of the First World War.

The function of the octave is to present the situation of a soldier who might die and tell that thanks to his death he will enable England to expand. In particular, the octave expresses the speaker’s patriotism towards his country, that is England, and deals with the sacrifice of his life that will be the eternal ownership of England. Indeed, in the first four lines the speaker illustrates his possible death using the image of a “dust concealed” which will enrich the earth of a “foreign land” that will become a part of a “for ever England”. Indeed, the place where the poet will be buried is a part of “for ever England” since the soldier has fought for his country in order to get more lands. Considering the syntactical point of view, the reader can notice that in the 4th line “rich earth” is placed in the middle of the line, so it gets a positive connotation. The speaking voice says that the portion of earth, in which the soldier’s body will be buried, will become “richer” because the earth will be occupied by the body of somebody who has fought to defend England. Therefore, right from the first lines, the reader perceives a patriotic tone, since the soldier is presented as someone who has taken part of the war for noble ends. The volta of the sonnet occurs in the 4th line, because the poet moves from the description of the soldier’s death to the soldier’s life accomplishment.

In the second quatrain the speaker personifies England as the soldier’s mother. Indeed, the soldier was born and shaped by England. Therefore England acquires a central position and the soldier’s death is presented as a return to his mother-earth.

The octave conveys a Romantic atmosphere: it is a blissful state of the English soldier who accepts his death because he thinks of it as the most noble way to serve his country. Therefore sacrifice is worth to celebrate the greatness of England.

The speaker wants to celebrate immortality because the soldier’s sacrifice makes him and England living forever. In this way, the soldier is reassured in front of this eventual sacrifice because he will be rewarded in heaven.

Indeed, in the sestet the speaker develops the soldier’s accomplishment: the reward for his sacrifice is that in heaven the soldier will repeat all the positive and happy experiences that he has already lived in England. There is a romantic attitude to war: death is presented as the beginning of a new blissful but familiar life in heaven. Therefore there is a sort of parallelism between heaven and England which is suitable to convey the idea of England as a good place where people can live peacefully: “dreams happy as her day, and laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness…”. Indeed, the speaker says that the soldier will return in England in afterlife.

Considering the sound level, the reader can see that the word “England” is repeated six times inside the poem, so it is a key word. The repetition of the same word in the poem is functional to express the soldier’s devotion and love towards his country.

In addition the use of the alliteration in “f” (lines 2-3) is functional to say that England survives in a battle field abroad, while the alliteration in “b” (lines 7-8) underlines the bond between the soldier and England.

Right from the analysis of the poem, the reader can understand that the poem celebrates an ideal view of the war, where the real atrocity and horrors of the war are not mentioned. Indeed, the poem was written by Rupert Brooke when he hadn’t experienced the horrors of warfare yet. Therefore, thanks to this poem, the reader finds out Rupert Brooke’s perception of the war, which is perceived as an adventure taken for noble end. Rupert wants to convey the message that war requires sacrifice, which will benefit his country and make him immortal. Therefore, the soldier should not be afraid of death since his reward is that he will continue to live in afterlife in the same way he used to live in England. In addition, the poem reveals the current ideas about war during the First World War which were spread throughout the country; the poem was functional to celebrate war and the greatness of England.

1. I think a good soldier should possess some traits such as:
* discipline: he should obey his general’s orders;
* bravery: he should be prepared to fight in hard conditions and also risk his life.
* strength: his body should be prepared for physical efforts.
* partnership: he should be able to collaborate with the other soldiers.
* patriotism: he should follow some ideals connected to his country.

2.1. The speaking voice is a first person narrator who presents the soldier’s point of view.

2.2. The soldier is not afraid of death since he says that even if his dead body will be buried in a foreign land, his heart will pulse “in the eternal mind”.

2.3. The speaking voice affirms that, even if he will died in a foreign land, his grave will be placed in a field “that is for ever England”.

2.4. The soldier’s dead body will enrich the soil becoming a “richer dust” that will remain a piece of England for the eternity.

2.5. The speaking voice focuses on the aspects of patriotism and death, which are linked to the war. Right from the analysis of the sonnet, the reader is able to understand that the soldier’s love for his country led him to enlist in the army. Besides, the poem develops the reflection about death, that is a consequence of the war.

2.6. I think the poet is speaking to someone close to him such as his wife or mother since it seems as if he wants to justify his possible death: he wants to make his addressee aware of his decision. He thinks that his country is a valid reason to die for.

3. It is a Petrarchan poem and the rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFG EFG.

4. In the first quatrain the speaking voice presents death with the image of a “dust” which was born from England and it returns to earth as a piece of England.

5. In the last stanza the speaking voice illustrates some images which are connected with the landscape of England. In particular he draws a positive picture of England recalling images from his previous daily life such as: “her sights and sounds”, its dreams and happy days, and also its inhabitants who are cheerful and gentle.

As regards the soldier’s private feelings, right from the analysis of the poem, the reader can understand his love for his country since he conveys only positive remembers about his homeland

6. In the last stanza, the poet focuses on the good manners of British inhabitants: they seem to be cheerful and polite. Therefore the speaking voice conveys the idea of a unified community where people are friendly and live peacefully.

7. The tone of the poem is patriotic. Indeed, the speaking voice shows his pride towards England; therefore, dying in the war is presented as a noble way to serve his country.