The Dead (III)

POEM TEXT

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain,
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage.

SUMMARY

Bugles, blow a fanfare for these dead soldiers, who are rich in honors! None were so poor and solitary in life that they haven't, in dying, given the rest of us gifts more precious than gold. They set the world aside; they shed their youthful blood like sweet wine. They sacrificed future years of work and happiness, and the old age whose peacefulness exceeds all hope. They sacrificed the children they would have had, the sons who would have carried on their names.

Blow a fanfare, bugles! When we were deficient, these soldiers brought us holiness (which we'd lacked for a long time), and love and pain. Honor has returned to earth like a king, lavishly bestowing its virtue on us. Nobleness is part of our lives once more, and our country has lived up to its lofty past.

THEMES

WARTIME SACRIFICE AND GLORY

A patriotic elegy written during wartime, "The Dead (III)" praises the fallen UK soldiers of World War I as heroic martyrs. In grand, celebratory tones, the poem calls for a fanfare on behalf of the "rich Dead" who have given their lives for their country. It frames the soldiers' sacrifice as holy and redemptive: a tragic, yet noble exchange of "youth" and "joy" for national honor and glory. Their martyrdom, the speaker argues, has reminded their fellow citizens what abstractions like "Love," "Pain," and "Holiness" are all about, proving the country worthy of its ancient "heritage." In other words, thanks to these soldiers' present-day heroism, the country has lived up to its heroic past.

The poem portrays death in war as a glorious, patriotic sacrifice that makes even the humblest soldiers nobler. It calls on military "bugles" to "blow out" a grand lament in honor of the fallen, whom it praises as the dead as "the rich Dead." This phrase suggests that even the "lonel[iest] and poor[est]" among these soldiers has become "rich" in glory.

By listing everything the dead soldiers "gave up"—including "youth," "work," "joy," old "age," and future kids—the poem further implies that they're selfless heroes for the cause. The poem acknowledges that, in sacrificing the "sons" they might have fathered (and who would have carried on their name), the soldiers gave up a kind of "immortality." But it suggests that they've gained another kind by dying nobly and ensuring that their country lives on.

In general, according to the poem, the soldiers' sacrifice has been profoundly redemptive: it has restored the country's integrity, its appreciation of life, and its ancient glory. The poem claims that the soldiers, in dying, have "brought" their country virtues it had long "lacked," including "Holiness," "Honour," and "Nobleness." It also suggests that their deaths have reminded the country what "Love" and "Pain" truly mean. The poem concludes that "we have come into our heritage": that is, the current generation has lived up to the heroes and legends of UK history (which the poet views with nationalistic pride).

"The Dead (III)" forms part of a longer sequence called "1914," written to mark the outbreak of World War I. It embodies the kind of patriotic war fever that other WWI poets, including Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, would soon begin to scorn as simplistic and false.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.

The poem begins with an apostrophe to "bugles," trumpet-like

instruments often used in military ceremonies. In an impassioned exclamation, the speaker urges these instruments to "Blow out," or play their call, "over the rich Dead."

As will soon become clear, these "Dead" are soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in wartime. "The Dead (III)" is part of a sonnet sequence called "1914," written after the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918); the broader sequence establishes that the speaker is an Englishman honoring the UK casualties of that war.

Bugles were once used in combat situations—for example, to signal a call to arms or ceasefire—so it's possible that the poem is set on or near a battlefield strewn with dead soldiers. However, the poem's ceremonious tone makes a funeral or memorial setting more likely.

The speaker stresses that, no matter how humble their background in life, these soldiers are equally glorious in death:

> There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
> But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.

That is, no matter how poor or solitary they were "of old" (in their pre-war lives), these soldiers now belong to a grand company of heroes, who have given their country "gifts" more precious than gold. These gifts fall into two basic categories: the things they've sacrificed (given *up*), and the benefits their sacrifice has brought. The rest of the first stanza will list items in the first category; the second will cover the second.

Since the poem uses musical imagery (the bugle call) as a framing device, it's no surprise that the language itself is highly musical. The poem is a sonnet and written in iambic pentameter. That means its lines consist of five iambs, poetic feet with an unstressed-stressed beat pattern. This meter features variations here and there to keep things interesting and add emphasis, as in line 1:

> Blow out, | you bu- | gles, o- | ver the | rich Dead!

The fourth foot here is a pyrrhic (unstressed-unstressed) while the final foot is a spondee (stressed-stressed). These variations on the iambic meter call readers' attention to the "rich Dead" the poem is honoring. (It's possible to scan the first foot as a spondee too, adding some oomph to the speaker's command to the bugles to "Blow out.")

Finally, these opening lines are packed with alliteration; in line 1, for example, emphatic /b/ sounds ("Blow"/"bugles") mimic the powerful sound of the bugle call itself. In lines 2-3, alliterative phrases ("There's none of these"; "gifts than gold") begin and end the sentence on a harmonious note.

LINES 4-7

These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
That men call age;

Lines 4-7 start to describe what the fallen soldiers "gave up" for their country.

First and foremost, they gave up their own lives. Metaphorically speaking, they "laid the world away," or set aside the world as they knew it on behalf of their cause. They shed their blood and gave up their years of greatest health and strength; metaphorically, they "poured out the red / Sweet wine of youth." (This image alludes to the ancient ritual of *libation*—pouring wine as an offering to the gods—and suggests that there was something ancient, honorable, and even ritualistic about the soldiers' deaths. To the speaker, these soldiers are part of a long tradition of valor and glory.)

Not only did the soldiers sacrifice their "youth," they sacrificed their future ("the years to be") as well:

> [...] gave up the years to be
> Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
> That men call age;

Having died so young, they gave up all the "work" they would have done and "joy" they would have experienced in their adult lives. They also forfeited what people "call age"—that is, old age, imagined here as an "unhoped serene," or state of serenity that surpasses even our wildest hopes. (Here and throughout the poem, the language is so grandiose that it verges on hyperbole!)

LINES 7-8

and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Lines 7-8 round out the list of things the soldiers sacrificed. According to the speaker, not only did they give up their own lives, they gave up the lives of the children they might have fathered:

> [...] and those who would have been,
> Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Writing in the strictly patriarchal, male-dominated England of the early 20th century, the speaker emphasizes the loss of their future "sons." These sons would have carried on the family name via their own descendants; thus, they would have represented a metaphorical "immortality" for the soldiers.

Though not a specific allusion, the idea of losing one's "immortality" echoes various myths and religious stories about gaining or losing eternal life. Once again, the poem frames the soldiers and their sacrifice in grand, mythic terms.

These lines conclude the *octave*, or first eight lines, of the

sonnet. Sonnets conventionally feature a significant transition (called a *volta* or "turn") after the eighth line, and this one is no exception. Starting in line 9, which marks the beginning of a new stanza, the poem will shift its focus from what the soldiers *sacrificed* to what their sacrifice *accomplished* in the world. Again as in line 1, the speaker will address the "bugles"—as if the poem, in a small way, were starting over.

LINES 9-10

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain,

Line 9 echoes the apostrophe to the "bugles" in line 1. Recall that the poem began:

> Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!

Now the speaker repeats a version of the same command:

> Blow, bugles, blow!

With its greater concision and heavier alliteration (compare "Blow, bugles, blow!" and "Blow out, you bugles"), this second exclamation sounds more insistent. It seems to urge the "bugles" (a metonym for the musicians *playing* the bugles) to play more intensely, as if to match the speaker's own intense emotions.

Having already listed what the soldiers gave *up*, the speaker now describes what they gave *to* their country ("brought us"). First, the speaker claims they've given the gift of "Holiness," which the country had long "lacked." (In other words, the soldiers' deaths, and the war effort in general, have been morally and spiritually restorative for the country.)

Then the speaker credits them with giving the country "Love, and Pain," or at least a full experience of those feelings. (In other words, the soldiers' deaths have taught a previously desensitized country what love and pain really mean.) According to the speaker, the soldiers have given all these things "for our dearth": in other words, during a time when the country lacked them and needed them badly.

LINES 11-14

Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage.

The poem ends by listing other ways in which the soldiers have helped their country. The speaker uses anaphora to structure this list; the repetition of "And" (lines 12-14) suggests that the soldiers have provided one benefit after another. (It's as if the speaker's marveling: they've done this, *and* this, *and* this!)

In the speaker's view, the soldiers' deaths have restored their country's virtue. The speaker uses personification and metaphor to get this idea across:

> Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
> And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
> And Nobleness walks in our ways again;

The virtues of "Honour" and "Nobleness" are personified as regal figures gracing the country with their presence. (Notice that both of these words, especially in the UK, can connote high social status as well as high morality; think of the title "The Honorable ___" or the word *nobleman*.) "Honour" is compared to a generous English ruler bestowing his virtue on the country at large, as if handing out "a royal wage"; "Nobleness" is described as a previously departed figure who now "walks in our ways again," elevating everyday life. (The figure of "Honour," a virtuous "king" who has "come back [...] to earth," may also be an allusion to the biblical Second Coming of Christ.)

The speaker concludes that, thanks to these soldiers' sacrifice, their country has become itself again:

> And we have come into our heritage.

Clearly, for this speaker, the "heritage" of England (or the UK) is a glorious one. The gist of this whole second stanza is that the country was once holy, honorable, and noble; that it lacked those virtues for a while; and that it has reclaimed them once more. Brooke, who would soon die in World War I himself, ends his wartime poem on a note of nationalistic pride.

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

The poem uses a great deal of alliteration, both for its musical qualities and for dramatic emphasis. Take the first three lines, for example:

> Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
> There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
> But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.

The emphatic /b/ alliteration in line 1 mimics the sharp, startling call of the "bugles" themselves. Thanks to this sound effect, readers can almost hear the buglers loudly "Blow[ing] out" air through their instruments.

The second sentence of the poem (lines 2-3) both begins and ends with alliterative phrases: "There's none of these" and "rarer gifts than gold." Nearly every subsequent line contains some alliteration as well. It's as if the music invoked in the first line carries over into the rest of the poem, creating a highly musical whole.

In fact, the second stanza begins by repeating the alliteration that kicked off the first—and throws in two extra /b/ words for good measure:

> Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,

The intensified alliteration signals a heightening of the poem's emotions, as the speaker demands music worthy of the soldiers' sacrifice. In general, this second stanza is even more lavishly alliterative than the first, from the opening phrase right through the ringing final words:

> And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
> And we have come into our heritage.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Blow," "bugles"
- **Line 2:** "There's," "these"
- **Line 3:** "gifts," "gold"
- **Line 5:** "youth," "years"
- **Line 7:** "That," "those"
- **Line 8:** "Their," "they," "their"
- **Line 9:** "Blow, bugles, blow!," "brought"
- **Line 10:** "lacked," "long," "Love"
- **Line 11:** "come," "king"
- **Line 12:** "with," "wage"
- **Line 13:** "walks," "ways"
- **Line 14:** "we," "have," "heritage"

APOSTROPHE

The poem is framed as an apostrophe. In both stanzas, the speaker addresses a group of "bugles" played to honor fallen English soldiers. Bugle calls are a fixture of military funerals in many Western countries ("Taps" is a familiar American example), so the implied setting, here, is a funeral or memorial for "Dead" World War I veterans.

The first stanza begins: "Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!" The second stanza begins similarly: "Blow, bugles, blow!" Notice how, in both cases, the speaker seems to address the *instruments* but is really urging the *buglers* to play with all their might. (That means this apostrophe is also an example of the device called metonymy, in which a person or thing is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it.)

Of course, the bugles can't literally respond to the speaker. But the impassioned apostrophe—complete with exclamation points—conveys the speaker's intense grief, gratitude, and patriotic pride. In effect, the speaker is telling the bugles (or buglers) to play with the same emotional intensity.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!"
- **Line 9:** "Blow, bugles, blow!"

PERSONIFICATION

In lines 11-13, the poem personifies two abstract virtues: "Honour" and "Nobleness."

The first of these has several related meanings: integrity, high reputation, and the kind of righteous valor often invoked in military contexts (think of a phrase like *serve your country honorably*). It's worth noting, too, that veterans are buried with *military honors*. Meanwhile, "Nobleness" means loftiness or greatness, whether due to virtue or high social rank (as in the aristocratic *nobility*).

Lines 11-12 compare the personified figure of "Honour" to a "king" who has "come back [...] to earth." This is likely an allusion to Christ's Second Coming; it also evokes the illustrious kings of British history (remember, the poet is saluting his country's "heritage"). Metaphorically, this "king" has "paid his subjects with a royal wage." In other words, the UK and its soldiers are now rich in honor—flush with virtue and elevated in the eyes of the world. In fact, the poem suggests that the soldiers' deaths have *redeemed* the country's honor, which had previously been in a state of decline.

Line 13 adds that "Nobleness walks in our ways again." This personification implies that noble qualities are once again part of the country's daily life; they're no longer distant and abstract. Like "Honour," "Nobleness" can refer either to high moral integrity or high social standing. The poet is mainly invoking the first definition but probably has the second in mind as well. Through their heroic sacrifice, the poem implies, even the humblest of these soldiers has enhanced their country's character and reputation.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-13:** "Honour has come back, as a king, to earth, / And paid his subjects with a royal wage; / And Nobleness walks in our ways again;"

METAPHOR

The poem uses lofty metaphors and similes to praise the soldiers' sacrifice. In lines 1-3, for example, the speaker calls them "the rich Dead" and compares their sacrifice to a lavish act of philanthropy:

> There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
> But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.

In other words, even the poorest soldier has given something

more precious than gold by dying for their country. Not only have they given their lives (something obviously precious to them!), but their deaths, in the speaker's view, have renewed their country's "Honour," "Holiness," sense of "Love" and "Pain," and so on (lines 9-13). The gift has kept on giving beyond the battlefield.

The poem's other metaphors have this same grand, ringing tone. To the speaker, these soldiers didn't just shed their blood; they "poured out the red / Sweet wine of youth": an act that sounds both generous and ceremonious. (The speaker is alluding to the ancient custom of libation, in which wine was poured ritually as an offering to the gods or in honor of the dead.)

Likewise, old age isn't just old age; it's an "unhoped serene"—a state of peace (or peaceful stretch of sky, water, etc.) so blissful that it surpasses all hope. The speaker even compares the sons the soldiers will never have, the descendants who would have carried on their family names, to "their immortality." Claiming that these soldiers gave up immortality makes them sound like gods or other noble, mythical figures.

In a final metaphor/simile combination—which also involves personification—the speaker compares "Honour" to a "king" who's "come back [...] to earth" and "paid his subjects with a royal wage" (lines 11-12). To the speaker, then, the soldiers' sacrifice has brought honor to the whole country, as if honor were a resurrected king showering his people with royal treasure. (This description may also allude to Christ's Second Coming, implying that the soldiers' sacrifice has been spiritually as well as morally redemptive.)

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "over the rich Dead!"
- **Lines 3-5:** "But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold. / These laid the world away; poured out the red / Sweet wine of youth;"
- **Line 8:** "Their sons, they gave, their immortality."
- **Lines 11-12:** "Honour has come back, as a king, to earth, / And paid his subjects with a royal wage;"

REPETITION

The poem repeats several words that are important to its framing and overall meaning.

For example, it repeats the words "Blow" (three times) and "bugles" (twice) in lines 1 and 9. Both of these lines contain an apostrophe to the bugles themselves; the speaker is urging them—and, by extension, their musicians—to play for the "Dead" soldiers as passionately as possible. The repetition helps convey the intensity of the speaker's own emotions (pride, sorrow, gratitude, etc.), which the speaker hopes the funeral music will match.

The word "gave" also appears twice, in lines 5 and 8. In each case, the speaker is stressing how much the soldiers gave *up* in giving their lives for their country. (In fact, the speaker is listing specific things they forfeited: work, happiness, old age, and future children.) The repetition helps convey the enormity and nobility of their sacrifice.

Finally, a special kind of repetition, called anaphora, appears in lines 12-14. Each of these three lines begins with the word "And." This effect creates a list-like structure, as the speaker rattles off all the supposed positive effects of the soldiers' sacrifice. It's as if the poem is saying: their deaths have done this, *and* this, *and* this.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Blow," "bugles"
- **Line 5:** "gave"
- **Line 8:** "gave"
- **Line 9:** "Blow, bugles, blow!"
- **Line 12:** "And"
- **Line 13:** "And"
- **Line 14:** "And"

VOCABULARY

Bugles (Line 1) - Trumpet-like instruments often used, as here, in military ceremonies (including funerals).

Rich (Line 1) - Metaphorically rich in glory, honors, etc.

Of old (Line 2) - In former times (here meaning *in life*).

But (Line 3) - Here, part of the split-up phrase "There's none [...] But [...] has," meaning "There's none that hasn't" (or "All of them have").

Laid the world away (Line 4) - A metaphor meaning *put the world aside as if for storage*. In other words, these soldiers have given up mundane civilian life to go to war.

Unhoped (Line 6) - Unhoped-for. As part of the phrase "that unhoped serene, / That men call age," the word suggests that peaceful old age is something that we don't even dare hope for when we're young.

Serene (Line 6) - Serenity. (Brooke is using the adjective poetically as a noun.)

Immortality (Line 8) - Posthumous legacy. (The poet means that these soldiers' sons would have carried on their names, fathered new generations, etc., granting them a kind of immortality.)

Dearth (Line 9) - A state of deficiency or lack.

Royal wage (Line 12) - A metaphor. "Honour" is here personified as a king who grants people the virtue of honor, and/or high honors (praise, fame, etc.), like a reward from his royal treasury.

Heritage (Line 14) - Cultural inheritance.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Dead (III)" is a sonnet, meaning that it's a rhymed, 14-line poem in iambic pentameter. (Lines of iambic pentameter contain five strong stresses and alternate between unstressed and stressed syllables. Their rhythm sounds like this: da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM.)

This poem uses a variation on the structure of the Italian (a.k.a. Petrarchan) sonnet. Like a typical Italian sonnet, it's divided into an *octave* and a *sestet*: a stanza of eight lines followed by a stanza of six lines.

The transition between them, which usually occurs in line 9, is known as the *volta* or "turn." In this case, line 9 starts with a revision ("Blow, bugles, blow!") of the phrase that began line 1 ("Blow out, you bugles").

However, the rhyme scheme here is different than in a typical Italian sonnet. Whereas the octave would conventionally rhyme ABBAABBA, this one rhymes ABBACDDC—thus bringing it a bit closer to the English sonnet, whose first eight lines conventionally rhyme ABABCDCD.

In fact, most of the poems in Brooke's "1914" sequence combine features of the Italian and English sonnets (only "Safety" fits the English pattern perfectly). Despite their nationalistic names, both kinds of sonnet are fixtures of the English-language poetic tradition. The sonnet is also traditionally associated with love, including tragic and sacred love. Brooke is drawing on all these associations as an English poet writing about "Love," "Pain," "Holiness," and patriotism (love of country).

METER

As a traditional English-language sonnet, "The Dead (III)" is written in iambic pentameter. This means that its lines generally contain five *iambs*, or metrical feet with a "da-DUM" rhythm. The rhythm of a full iambic pentameter line sounds like "da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM."

Readers can hear this pattern clearly in line 8, for example:

> Their sons, | they gave, | their im- | mortal- | ity.

However, the pattern varies sometimes. Metrical variations keep a poem's rhythm from becoming too predictable and are sometimes used for emphasis or dramatic effect. Readers can hear one example in the very first line:

> Blow out, | you bu- | gles, o- | ver the | rich Dead!

Here, the first three feet of the line are iambic, but the fourth is a pyrrhic (it contains two unstressed syllables) and the fifth is a spondee (it contains two stressed syllables; it's possible to read the first foot, "Blow out," as a spondee as well). This metrical variation draws the reader's attention to the phrase "rich Dead"; in other words, it places special emphasis on the soldiers the poet wishes to honor.

RHYME SCHEME

"The Dead (III)" is a traditional sonnet with a slightly unconventional rhyme scheme:

> ABBACDDC EFEGFG

For the most part, the poem follows the conventions of the *Italian sonnet*: it's divided into an *octave* (eight-line unit) and a *sestet* (six-line unit) that rhyme in different configurations. However, the octave of a traditional Italian sonnet rhymes ABBAABBA, not ABBACDDC. By bringing C and D rhymes into these first eight lines, Brooke is drawing on the conventions of the *English sonnet*, which rhymes ABABCDCDEFEFGG.

In terms of its rhyme scheme, then, the poem is an Italian sonnet with a little touch of Englishness! Despite their nationalistic names, however, both the "Italian" and "English" variants have a long history in the English poetic tradition. No wonder Brooke used the sonnet form to explore English tradition, or "heritage" (line 14).

SPEAKER

The speaker of "The Dead (III)" is a voice of patriotic pride and fervor, a strident supporter of their country's cause in World War I. The poem is part of a longer sequence titled "1914," after the year the war broke out, and the most famous sonnet in the sequence, "The Soldier," refers to the speaker's English nationality. (Its opening lines are: "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England.")

Here, there's no explicit mention of the UK or England. However, the "king" simile in lines 11-12 gestures toward the history of English royalty, and the speaker's references to "us"/"our" (lines 3, 9, 13-14) seem to encompass their entire country. Basically, the speaker adopts the role of "voice of the people."

The speaker expresses deep gratitude toward those who "gave" everything for their country (lines 5-8), along with the opinion that their sacrifice has been worthwhile. Lines 9-14 make the case that the fallen soldiers have restored their country's "Honour," "Nobleness," and so on. These lines express the real-life views of the poet, Rupert Brooke, who died while serving in the British navy during the war.

SETTING

The poem's implied setting may be a military cemetery, where English soldiers, fallen in World War I, have been laid to rest. Another possibility is that it takes place near a WWI battlefield, where the "Dead" have spilled their blood ("poured out the red / Sweet wine of youth"). The "bugles" (typically featured at military funerals) appear to be playing a call to honor the dead.

The poem also implicitly refers to the UK, the poet's home country. According to the speaker, the soldiers fighting and dying abroad have had a major impact back home. Lines 9-14 describe a society where "Honour" seems to have returned like "a king, to earth," and where "Love," "Pain," "Holiness," and "Nobleness" are now a part of everyday life.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Rupert Brooke was an English poet who lived from 1887 to 1915. He wrote poetry from an early age, attended Cambridge University, and joined the English Navy during the first year of World War I (1914). However, he died the following year—not in warfare, as the patriotic tone of "The Dead (III)" might lead the reader to predict, but from an infection following a mosquito bite. His poetic influences include W.B. Yeats, Charles Baudelaire, John Keats, and Oscar Wilde.

Brooke's poetry was immensely popular from its first publication, capturing the nervous excitement of a nation at war. "The Dead (III)" is part of a sonnet sequence titled "1914," which also includes a companion sonnet, "The Dead (IV)," and his most famous poem, "The Soldier."

Brooke's death early in the conflict—before it became an exhausting multi-year bloodbath—helps explain why his poems present a romantic vision of war and nationhood. His poetry came to exemplify the spirit of the patriotic soldier, willing to lay down his life for the good of his country. In fact, Winston Churchill, England's prime minister during World War II, described Brooke as "all that one could wish England's noblest sons to be."

Of course, Brooke's idealized vision doesn't reflect the horrific realities of a conflict in which millions died. Accordingly, it's worth comparing "The Dead (III)" with other examples of English WWI poetry, which became extremely grim as the war dragged on. Wilfried Owen's poems, for example, are jaded, weary, and disturbing; his famous "Dulce et Decorum Est," for example, could serve as a retort to Brooke. Siegfried Sassoon and Isaac Rosenberg fought in the same conflict and wrote many gritty, skeptical war poems, including Sassoon's "Attack" and Rosenberg's "Break of Day in the Trenches."

At the same time, Brooke follows a long tradition of English writers who have idealized England. "The Dead (III)" touts the UK's proud "heritage," as well as the "Holiness," "Honour," and "Nobleness" its people have supposedly regained in the course of war. Essentially, the poet believes his country is a force for good in the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the time it was fought, World War I was known as "the war to end all wars." This phrase, of course, proved tragically inaccurate when World War II broke out a generation later. Around 16 million people died directly in WWI, and many more perished in the great flu outbreaks and genocides (for example, the Armenian genocide) that followed.

WWI began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who was the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which ruled a large section of Central and Eastern Europe at the time). The assassin, Gavrilo Princip, wished to see an end to Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Previously arranged allegiances soon brought Germany and Russia into opposition, and before long, this conflict pulled other European countries into the war as well. In 1915, the Germans sank a British passenger ship called the *Lusitania*, killing many civilians. This event, among others, drew the United States into the conflict as well.

WWI was horrendously destructive. Life in the trenches of Europe was terrifying and deadly, and unsanitary conditions at the front caused frequent disease. But Brooke saw virtually none of this horror; the bloodshed in his poems remained symbolic and redemptive, a "pour[ing] out" of "the red / Sweet wine of youth." His early death gave him a kind of mythic status, bolstered by his handsome looks and patriotic sensibilities.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Bugle in World War I — An article detailing the military uses of the bugle in the WWI era. (https://legionmagazine.com/en/2018/11/the-mons-bugle/)
- A Film on WWI Poetry — Watch a video introduction to the poetry of the First World War, courtesy of the British Library. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrOsIeUt90Q)
- The Poet's Life — Read a biography of Brooke at the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/rupert-brooke)
- Poets of WWI — Check out the Poetry Foundation's introduction to World War I poets, including Brooke. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/101720/world-war-i-poets)

- "The True Story of Rupert Brooke" — An in-depth look at Rupert Brooke's life, via The New Yorker. (https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-true-story-of-rupert-brooke)
- The Rupert Brooke Society — An organization devoted to Brooke's literary legacy. (https://www.rupertbrooke.com/)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER RUPERT BROOKE POEMS

- The Soldier

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Allen, Austin. "*The Dead (III)*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 17 May 2022. Web. 23 May 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Allen, Austin. "*The Dead (III)*." LitCharts LLC, May 17, 2022. Retrieved May 23, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/rupert-brooke/the-dead-iii.