

Today's poem is by RUPERT BROOKE and is called THE SOLDIER. Rupert Brooke became well-known as one of the WAR POETS who were famous for their poems about WORLD WAR I - the other two most famous war poets being WILFRED OWEN and SIEGFRIED SASSOON. Like Owen (who died a week before the end of World War I - so unlucky!) and unlike Sassoon (who died in 1967 at the ripe old age of 81), Rupert Brooke died during World War I. He died on 23 April 1915 from a mosquito bite that got infected, and was buried on the Greek island of SKYROS - which makes the first few lines of this poem (written shortly before this death) all the more powerful. But they also apply to explorers like ROBERT SCOTT, whose body is still somewhere under the ice in the Antarctic, and FRANCIS DRAKE, whose body is under the water somewhere off the coast of Central America. The poem goes as follows:



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.

The first verse is about what things will be like for THE WORLD after he dies - that he will be buried in some foreign country, but wherever he is buried will as a result become part of England, because his body was shaped by England. What's the second verse about? That's about what things will be liked for HIM after he dies - that he will be united with God ('the eternal mind') and will be enjoying all the good things that he got to enjoy while living in England (actually not that far away from Cambridge - he lived in The Old Vicarage at Grantchester, which is still there today, and has another writer living in it). A good poem, and one which brought a lot of comfort to soldiers who were having to leave their homes and family to fight in France during World War I, and to their families if the soldiers never came home.