The Soldier

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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.

## Symbol Analysis - England

The word "England" or "English" occurs six times in this poem. That's a lot for a poem that is only 14 lines! In this poem England is like a mother to the soldier; she gave birth to him, nourished him, made him who he is. But England is also immortal. Even though, in death, the soldier must leave England, it's only for a little while. When he dies, the soldier will go to a heaven that's just like the England he left behind on Earth. Sweet deal!

* Lines 2-3: The soldier wishes to be remembered for making a foreign piece of land "forever England." This idea of a permanent, immortal England will return again soon.
* Line 5: The speaker compares himself to dust that "England bore." Dust here is a [metaphor](http://www.shmoop.com/literature-glossary/metaphor.html) for the speaker's relationship to the natural world and for the fact that he may soon be a corpse. Of course, England can't really bear children so this is an example of[personification](http://www.shmoop.com/literature-glossary/personification.html), the attribution of human qualities to non-human things.
* Line 7: The speaker refers to himself as a "body of England's, breathing English air." He's as English as the Queen!
* Line 11: The speaker will re-experience in heaven "thoughts by England given." England can't really give anything, so this is another example of personification (the attribution of human qualities to non-human things). It's also another example of how the experience of England will live on for our speaker.
* Line 14: When the soldier dies he will go to an "English heaven." Sweet. We bet they serve the best fish n' chips.

## Symbol Analysis – nature

There's a lot of nature in this poem. Fields, dust, flowers, rivers, suns—it's all over the place. The relationship between the speaker and the natural world is very close, even harmonious. When he dies, he returns to the earth (as dust). Moreover, as a child, he was "washed" and "blest" by the rivers and sun of his homeland (England). When he dies, his heaven will look like the England he knew as a child—including its natural characteristics.

* Line 2: The speaker imagines acquiring a "corner of a foreign field" for his home country, England. Nature is endowed with English-ness here, as it will be again soon.
* Line 4: The speaker imagines himself as a part of nature, a pile of "dust concealed" in the earth. Dust here is a [metaphor](http://www.shmoop.com/literature-glossary/metaphor.html) for both the speaker's status as a corpse and for his relationship to the natural world.
* Line 5: The speaker is a "dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware." England can't really do these things, so this is a case of personification (the attribution of human qualities to non-human things). Dust is a metaphor for the speaker's relationship to nature and for the fact that he may soon be dead.
* Line 6: England gave the speaker "flowers to love" and "ways to roam." England can't actually give anything, really (nice try, though), so this is an example of [personification](http://www.shmoop.com/literature-glossary/personification.html), the attribution of human qualities to non-human things.
* Line 8: The speaker was "washed" by England's rivers, and "blest" by her suns. Neither the suns nor the rivers can wash or bless, so this is also personification, the attribution of human qualities to non-human things. Both washing and blessing are metaphors for the way England nurtured the speaker.

## Symbol Analysis – heaven and afterlife

When you die, you go to heaven, which will be like paradise. That, at any rate, is what the second half of "The Soldier" tells us. Better than paradise, in fact, heaven for the soldier will be just like England! (We wonder if the angels fly on the left side of the clouds.) If the soldier dies fighting for his country, it won't be so bad, because he will get to go "home." His heaven apparently will be chock full of memories of England—her "sights and sounds," and a whole lot of other good stuff. Like figgy pudding.

* Line 10: The speaker describes a "pulse in the eternal mind." The "eternal mind" refers to God's mind (eternal here means that it has never been created and will never die). God, of course, lives in heaven (just in case you were wondering), which is described as being just like England.
* Line 14: It turns out that the speaker has been describing an "English heaven" in the last six lines of the poem. The soldier's reward will be both everlasting and intimately familiar to him.