

# Rupert Brooke

(1887-1915)



**The writer and his work.** Rupert Brooke was born in 1887 at Rugby, England, and educated at Rugby School and then at King's College, Cambridge. He embodied the virtues of the brave and gifted British gentleman, and became an officer in the Royal Navy. As a poet, Brooke belonged to the movement of the **Georgian poets** (so-called because most of them were writing during George V's reign). They advocated a return to nature and simple emotions in contrast with the cultivated artificiality of the Aesthetic and Decadent movements (→ p. 98). On leave in December 1914, Brooke wrote the 'war sonnets' that made his fame; they show **the heroic side of war**, very much in the old classical tradition. In 1915 he died of an infection on a troopship bound for Gallipoli, and was buried on the Greek island of Skyros. Brooke's *The Soldier* (1914) is surely the best-known poem in the English language about modern war; as such, during wartime it was even read by the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, London, from the pulpit.

## BUILD UP YOUR COMPETENCES

### Work out the key ideas

1 **Reading** Answer the questions.

1 To which movement did he belong as a poet?

2 What kind of poetry did this movement support?

3 What do Rupert Brooke's war sonnets show?

## The Soldier T87

Rupert Brooke  
*1914 and Other Poems* (1915)



Practise your listening  
with the karaoke



TRACK 045

This is Rupert Brooke's most famous sonnet; it was written in the first months of World War I, when patriotism and old heroic ideals had not yet faded. Its tone reminds us of Queen Elizabeth's praise of England and her men's valour. We find the same **identification of the soldier with England** in the first quatrain: the foreign field where the soldier is buried becomes "for ever England", and as a consequence that foreign earth becomes "richer". The identification of soldier and mother country is restated in the tercets: the dead soldier's heart beats with English sights and sounds, recreating a **late Victorian world** of quiet dreams and laughter, peace and gentleness.

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<sup>1</sup> concealed;<sup>2</sup>  
5 A dust whom England bore,<sup>3</sup> shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam<sup>4</sup>  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest<sup>5</sup> by suns of home.  
And think, this heart, all evil shed<sup>6</sup> away,  
10 A pulse in the eternal mind,<sup>7</sup> no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of<sup>8</sup> friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

- 1 a **richer dust**: cioè il suo corpo.
- 2 **concealed**: nascosta.
- 3 **bore**: ha generato.
- 4 **roam**: esplorare.
- 5 **blest**: benedetto.
- 6 **shed**: ha buttato.
- 7 **A pulse... mind**: una parte della mente di Dio.
- 8 **of**: da.

