

Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" Revisited: A New Perspective

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Abstract: *Though Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" has often been interpreted, categorized or dismissed as a poem on idealized patriotism, its underlying nationalistic and colonialist/imperialist dimensions have not been duly treated alongside its patriotic dimension. Since the 1980s, there has been a resurgence of interest in such interrelated themes as patriotism, nationalism, and postcolonialism due to the engagement of some political, philosophical, and literary theorists with a wide range of conceptual and moral debates. The purpose of this paper is to re-examine Brooke's poem in greater detail and, consequently, to update the previous research on this poem in the light of these debates. The main thesis of the paper is that Brooke's "The Soldier" is a multifaceted poem which has a variety of different features which can be interpreted on various levels, namely patriotism, nationalism, and colonialism/imperialism.*

Keywords: colonialism, nationalism, patriotism Rupert, Brooke, "The Soldier", war poetry

1. Introduction

Previous studies of Rupert Brooke's poem "The Soldier" (1914) can be described as lacking in historical and cultural contextualization. Brooke's poem, therefore, needs to be analysed within the context of his biographies and his correspondence as well as against the background of recent political, moral, philosophical, and postcolonial theories. This is what the present study attempts to do. Traditionally, "The Soldier" has been discussed primarily as a patriotic poem, a clear simplification of the poem. By contrast, the current study presents the poem as a multifaceted/multilayered work which can be interpreted on various levels of signification. By analyzing the poem from the different but closely related perspectives of patriotism, nationalism, and colonialism/imperialism, and by contextualizing it within the poet's biographies and correspondence, I aim at placing this short poem into a broader context in order to have better understanding and evaluation. I will, therefore, discuss the poem not only through a textual approach that focuses on the speaker's personal patriotic sentiments but also against a broader biographical, historical, and philosophical background.

2. Literature Review

Brooke's poetry has often been studied as whole rather than individual poems. His five sonnets collection (1914) seems to have drawn more critical attention than the rest of his poems. Following Brooke's early death, a good number of reviews,

biographical and critical studies appeared. Most notable among the biographies is the extensive biography by Hassall (1964), which provides a full account of Brooke's life. Equally impressive is the collection of Brooke's correspondence edited by Stringer (1948, repr. 1972) which illustrates the diversity in Brooke's interests.

One of the critical studies of Brooke's works is Kahn's thesis (1972) which focuses on a critical evaluation of Brooke's poetry, trying to make some connection between the life, the personality, and the works of the poet. Khan also outlines the various influences on Brooke and provides a well-argued critical appraisal of Brooke's works.

Silkin (1972) asserts that Brooke's sonnets, particularly "The Soldier", are war poems in the sense that they perpetuate imperialist attitudes. Silkin treats this poem as well as Brooke's other poems as historical documents that reveal many things about the circumstances of World War I. Besides reading the poem within its historical context, Silkin examines it within its inherent moral values, trying to determine the poet's attitude towards war and the effect it had on the poem.

Bloom (2003) provides biographical, critical, and bibliographical information on Brooke's best-known poems, discussing Brooke's major life events and important literary accomplishments, particularly the famous *1914* sequence of five sonnets. Bloom's book contains thematic and structural analysis of each poem together with a selection of critical excerpts derived from previously published material by leading critics. Schoenle (1997) attempts a critical survey of Brooke's works and his development as a poet, including early reviews and a history of Brooke's publications. The study also provides useful biographical information and attempts a reappraisal of Brooke.

More recent studies concentrate on finding new perspectives to deal with Brooke's war poetry. In their essay, Kousar and Qasim (2015), for instance, examine expressionist elements in Brooke's war poems. The authors argue that Brooke employs different literary techniques like abstraction and interior monologue and maintain that Brooke seems to be more interested in subjective responses than in focusing on objective reality. Thus, the greatest part of the critical literature on Brooke's poem has focused on the view that this is a highly patriotic poem and an idealized and naïve reaction to war. This paper attempts to reinvestigate the theme of patriotism in the poem from a new perspective.

3. Discussion

The historical record indicates that Brooke saw his only action of World War I during the defense of Antwerp, Belgium, against German invasion in early October (1914), where British troops were forced to retreat. Brooke subsequently returned to Britain awaiting redeployment. During this period (November and December 1914) he wrote his best-known poems, the group of five-war-sonnets entitled *1914* which included "The Soldier". Following Brooke's early death, which was caused by blood poisoning, *The Times* published in 1915 an obituary notice for Brooke written by Winston Churchill, who said: "The thoughts to which he [Brooke] gave expression in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will

be shared by many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward into this, the hardest, the cruelest, and the least-rewarded of all the wars that men have fought” (qtd. in Bloom, 2003:38). Churchill’s words, combined with Dean of St. Paul’s (1915) remark that “the enthusiasm of a pure and elevated patriotism had never found a nobler expression” (qtd. in Schoenle, 1997: 27) have since then set the scene for future writings on Brooke’s “The Soldier” as a patriotic poem and launched Brooke’s status as a national hero and martyr. Of Brooke’s war poems, the best and the most famous is “The Soldier”, mostly because of its high-spirited patriotism. Written at an early period of World War I, the poem reflected the hopes and beliefs of a country that had not as yet witnessed the devastating effects of the war. As Bloom (2003: 12) observes: “Brooke became a national hero even before his early death at the age of 27, and many during this early stage of the war believed him to represent the ideal of patriotic and noble sacrifice”.

Though the poem first attracted public and critical attention because of the speaker’s self-sacrifice, it gradually lost its glamour after many critics dismissed it as mere smugness as the Great War dragged on, causing the loss of a great number of lives and a lot of damage and destruction. Viewed as naïve, romantic, and idealized, the fervour of Brooke’s initially acclaimed patriotic poem was soon eclipsed by the more realistic poetry that emerged out of the trench warfare written by such poets as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, who depicted a more realistic picture of the war. As Bloom (2003: 36) succinctly asserts: “More recent critics have complained that ‘The Soldier’ is riddled with sentimentality and narcissistic fantasy”. Despite this, Brooke’s poem continued to attract critical attention as a reflection of the English pre-war mood and the English patriotic tradition. Indeed, the whole sonnets series has continued to be criticized for its shallow, unrealistic, and sentimental patriotic expressions and for its making a dividing line between the illusionary world created by Brooke and the genuine horrors of warfare.

In my opinion, the greatly popularized critical representation of Brooke’s “The Soldier” as a naive, romanticized, and idealized picture of war does not reflect a true understanding and interpretation of the poem. In a letter he wrote to his American friend, the poet Leonard Bacon, Brooke gave a complete and realistic account of his reaction to the war and of the horrors he observed following his actual participation in the British Expeditionary Force which attempted to check the German invasion of Antwerp at the start of the war. Because it illustrates Brooke’s realistic picture of war, the letter is worth quoting at some length:

I marched through Antwerp, deserted, shelled, and burning one night, and saw ruined houses, dead men and horses: and railway-trains with their lines taken up and twisted and flung down as if a child had been-playing with a toy. And the whole heaven and earth was lit up by the glare from the great lakes and rivers of burning petrol, hills and spires of flame. That was like Hell, Dantesque Hell, terrible. But there -- and later-- I saw what a true hell was....It's a great life, fighting, while it lasts. The eye grows clearer and the heart. But it's a bloody thing, half the youth of Europe

blown through pain to nothingness in the incessant mechanical slaughter of these modern battles. (qtd. in Kahn, 1972:94-95)

Brooke's realistic description of his war experience demonstrates that "The Soldier", which was composed during the two months following the Antwerp expedition as aforementioned, was based on a true war experience even though it does not try to give a realistic picture of the horrors of the war. Brooke was not simply a youthful idealist ignorant about what war really meant; he knew that war was not merely about patriotism and romantic idealism but involved fighting for English homeland and England's long-established traditions of what wars are fought for.

After his long friendly relations with the Germans, Brooke once wrote to Cathleen Nesbitt (an actress with whom Brooke was in love) a letter that showed his change of attitude towards them saying: "A central purpose of my life, the aim and end of it, now, the thing God wants of me, is to get good at beating Germans" (qtd. in Kahn, 1972: 99). Here, Brooke incorporates his personal feelings into a general statement of the thoughts of British youth and their attitude towards the Germans with whom the British were now at war. Brooke had several German friends and knew well from history that soldiers had been dying in English wars in foreign countries for centuries; nevertheless, he wanted to fight against his old friends, motivated by some strong feelings of patriotism and nationalism as well. Brooke's preparedness not to shy away from the horrors of the war, easily imagining how he might have to kill those he formerly considered his friends, underscores the enormity of the sacrifice he was willing to make for the sake of his country. When Brooke welcomed the arrival of the war, he was not expressing a young man's enthusiasm for war as much as he was reflecting the experience of a man who knew about the horrors of the war but nevertheless wanted to encourage young men to go to war as part of their national duty. Brooke's aim to recruit more young men to go to the front lines would have been counterproductive had he spoken about the real horrors of war like those he described in the aforementioned letter and several others.

To further investigate the theme of patriotism in the poem in a more comprehensive manner than what has been done until the present, it is necessary to re-examine it in light of recent theories of patriotism, which have added a lot more about the meaning and the different forms that patriotism can take. Defining patriotism, the Russian philosopher Primoratz (2015: 75) writes: "In modern usage, patriotism refers to love of and identification with the *patria* in both nonpolitical and political senses and to special concerns for one's compatriots both as people stemming from or living in one's own country and as one's fellow citizens". In an online article, White (2008), the well-known Australian novelist, also observes that patriotism "denotes positive and supportive attitudes to a 'fatherland' (Latin *patria*), by individuals and groups". White (2008: n.p.) adds: "Patriotism has ethical connotations: it implies that one places the welfare of the nation above that of oneself. It may also imply that one's nation is more important than other nations".

Despite the similarities between the various proposed definitions, there remains a major disagreement on a pivotal question in patriotism theory, which is:

Is patriotism a moral or an immoral act, a virtue or a vice? The answer to this question will be dealt with only insofar as it will impact my discussion of patriotism and its correlates, nationalism and colonialism/imperialism as central themes in “The Soldier” and eventually my analysis of the poem as a whole. Moral philosophers and thinkers from Aristotle through Immanuel Kant and up to Alasdair MacIntyre have been debating this issue without final agreement. However, for the sake of focusing the discussion, reference will be made to only a few of these philosophers’ theories. Tolstoy (1987: 97), for instance, believes that patriotism is a moral error, an evil act that contravenes the basic principles of universal morality. For him, patriotism is “the root cause of war”. He condemns patriotism as both “stupid and immoral”. It is stupid, he writes, “because if every country were to consider itself superior to others, it is evident that all but one would be in error; and [it is] immoral because it leads all who possess it to aim at benefiting their own country or nation at the expense of every other” (1987: 98).

As seen through Tolstoy’s perspective, Brooke’s patriotism would be indefensible and unjustifiable. However, the kind of patriotism depicted in Brooke’s poem can be considered moral and justifiable on the basis of some recent philosophical theories such as those of MacIntyre (1984) and Nathanson (1989). Unlike Tolstoy, who views patriotism as an evil act that should be eliminated, MacIntyre defends Patriotism as a kind of mandatory loyalty to a particular nation, which can be considered a virtue so long as it observes certain moral constraints. Contrary to the “account” of morality envisioned by modern liberalism which requires that moral judgement be impersonal and committed to universal principles, MacIntyre proposes another type of patriotism (“robust patriotism”) which requires one to exhibit peculiar devotion to one’s country and others to their own (MacIntyre, 1984:5). From MacIntyre’s perspective, the proponents of patriotism as “nothing more than a perfectly proper devotion to one’s own nation which must never be allowed to violate the constraints set by the impersonal moral standpoint... are not patriotic” (6). MacIntyre’s point is that if liberal patriotism invariably makes loyalty subservient to universal morality which requires equal treatment in cases of vital conflicts and equal distribution in cases of scarcity of resources, then it is emasculated and unauthentic. Instead, MacIntyre suggests that patriotism be governed by the moral principles of separate, independent societies. Hence, in cases of conflict between rival communities, the moralism that prevails should be based not on the “neutral” moral constraints of universal liberalism which seeks impartiality, but on the “particular” moral principles of “genuine” and communitarian patriotism which requires that one strives to further the interests of their community even if this may entail a willingness to go to war on one’s community’s behalf and taking a “partisan” standpoint (6). For MacIntyre, this act is rational and moral, for any genuine form of patriotism can only be defended by reference to this community-bound morality: “Loyalty to that community... is on this view a prerequisite for morality. So patriotism and those loyalties cognate to it are not just virtues but central virtues” (11).

The type of patriotism that MacIntyre proposes requires that the patriots’ primary attachment be to a particular community, that some practices of the *patria*

must be beyond critical scrutiny, that in cases of conflict one prefers one's country to another, and that patriotism should not to be confused with a mindless loyalty to one's own particular nation (8-12). Genuine patriotism should, therefore, succumb only to those constraints. Apparently, MacIntyre's version of patriotism is devoid of all the constraints imposed by modern liberal individualism such as the view that morality is constituted by rational rules, that those rules impose constraints upon and are neutral between rival and competing interests and sets of beliefs, and that in moral evaluations all individuals count equally. For him, such a view of patriotism is "not only incompatible with treating patriotism as a virtue, but which requires that patriotism...be treated as a vice" (7-8).

Apparently in response to Tolstoy's "evil/extreme patriotism" and MacIntyre's "robust patriotism", Nathanson (1989: 535) advocated a variety of patriotism which he called "moderate patriotism", a type that does not basically imply indifference or hostility to people of other nations. Nathanson (1989:535-536) defends a conception of patriotism that views patriotism as a virtue, but shows sympathy with those who consider patriotism a vice. Placing his theory in a middle position between Tolstoy's extreme antipatriotic arguments and Macintyre's "robust patriotism", Nathanson proposes a different type that he calls "moderate patriotism", a version that "does not possess the evil features that he [Tolstoy] thinks are a necessary part of patriotism" (536). Though Nathanson agrees with MacIntyre that patriotism involves loyalty to and a preference for the well-being of one's own country over others, he raises a big question about this view: "Can it be a virtue to feel loyalty toward one's country and to be willing to promote its well-being, even if that can only be done at the cost of diminishing the well-being of other countries?" (536). As a way of solving this dilemma, Nathanson tends to agree with Tolstoy that morality requires that we take seriously the interests of all people, not simply those of our own nation's citizens, but he stops short of considering patriotism a vice. Nathanson further asserts that one can have a greater love for one's county without infringing on the rights of other countries: "If patriotism involves this sort of preference and leads people to do good things on behalf of their country but always within the limits of what is morally permissible, then patriotism would have none of the dreadful implications that Tolstoy attributes to it" (538).

Nathanson's promotion of patriotism as a virtue is controlled by some essential constraints. First, he asserts that: "so long as devotion and loyalty to one's country do not lead to immoral actions, then patriotism can be quite laudable. When concern for their own country blinds people to the legitimate needs and interests of other nations, then patriotism becomes a vice" (538). The bottom line of Nathanson's argument is that so long as concern about one's country is not exclusive and is constrained by moral principles, then there is nothing wrong with it (530). Nathanson opts for a "moderate" version that strives to comply with the constraints of universal morality but only within a limited scope. In cases of conflict, moderate patriots would first try to find a just accommodation between the rival parties and would even accept making possible sacrifices if "the moral weight of the opposing side's claims is greater" (541). If no just accommodation of both sides' legitimate and vital interests can be devised, moderate patriots would

not be constrained by their commitment to universal morality and will be willing to fight for their community even though it has no greater moral claim than the opposition, albeit with deep regret (541). In one sense, the difference between MacIntyre's and Nathanson's positions would amount to a difference between an action taken indifferently, without caring the least about the well-being of the opposing community and the same action taken regretfully but preceded by strenuous search for compromises and alternatives.

Written during the first year of World War I, "The Soldier" represents many of the patriotic ideals that characterized prewar England. The patriot in the poem is loyal to his country or *patrie*. In fact, the poem evoked deep, heartfelt sentiments of patriotism to which Churchill felt all English soldiers should aspire, extolling Brooke for being "all that one would wish England's noblest sons to be in days when no sacrifice but the most precious is acceptable" (qtd. in Bloom, 2003: 37). Though Brooke is prophesizing the tragedy of his own possible death, his feeling of something higher than himself, a national cause, overwhelms any feelings of doubt or apprehension he might have. As a form of loyalty, patriotism requires a genuine willingness to sacrifice for the country. As Garner (2019: 83) remarks: "The perfect patriot goes knowingly to his death, that is to say, he accepts a degree of risk that amounts to certainty". This is exactly what the poet/speaker in this sonnet is ready to do.

Right from the beginning, the octave reveals the patriot's unquestioning devotion to and pride in his country. Brooke also portrays England as the noblest and the best country for which to die. As an essential component of the patriotic nature of this poem, the speaker depicts his country as a kind of a protective and nurturing mother that gives him his existence as well as his identity. The soldier's strong bond with England makes him feel that it is both the origin of his existence and the heaven to which his soul will return after his death:

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. (Brooke, 2006:5-8)

As a patriotic poem, "The Soldier" is primarily intended to give support to England during a critical time of hostilities with other opposing countries during The Great War of 1914-1918. It shows the patriot's readiness to sacrifice his life for the sake of his country, placing its welfare above his own personal life. Indeed, such sacrifice for the fatherland constitutes the idealized model of patriotism. Although the title refers to one soldier, the text as a whole suggests that it is meant to represent all British soldiers. The poem as a whole demonstrates that the identity of the speaker is closely connected to that of his country and that the "England" of the poem is a homeland for all British soldiers and the soldier is a true representative of every Englishman. The speaker in the sonnet ultimately loses his individual identity and identifies himself with his homeland.

Speaking in the first-person pronoun, the soldier expresses a self-sacrificial, martyr-like attitude toward his death. For him, it is an honor to die for his country, and no consideration should be given to personal interests. Such an attitude poses

an obvious case of altruism or self-abnegation which can be considered a good example of "robust" patriotism. From MacIntyre's perspective, patriotism involves a special kind of loyalty towards one's own nation due to its particular features, merits and achievements. Such view is embodied in Brooke's poem where the speaker shows fidelity to his country expressed through maternal or parental terms. MacIntyre (1984: 8) further argues that patriotism cannot be justified as a virtue on the grounds of the liberal concept of morality that has dominated Western thought over the last centuries. He emphatically rejects the liberal concept of morality in its general perspective of envisioning a universal and free moral impartiality and instead appeals to Aristotle's view of morality in its "particular" allegiance to a specific community in which one is raised and learns one's morals. As well known, Aristotle's conception of friendship, particularly virtue friendship, is based on mutual concern of each person for the other for his own sake rather than external factors.

In a modern sense, this concept can be extended to include someone's patriotic affection for his or her country. The implication is that patriotism emerges as a virtue when exhibited by a virtuous person towards a country or community that is also morally good. Thus, loyalty to that community, to the hierarchy of particular kinship, particular local community and particular natural community, is on this view [Aristotle's view of morality] a prerequisite for true morality. As MacIntyre observes: "Patriotism and those loyalties cognate to it are not just virtues but central virtues" (1984:10). Accordingly, the moral principles enacted in Brooke's poem are justifiable on the basis of their particularity rather than their universality or generality. The soldier's principles of loyalty are particular because they arise out of a specific community's (the patriot's homeland) unique historical experiences and are not constrained by impartial universality. However, MacIntyre maintains that such type of patriotism is not extreme, because it will be controlled by the constraints of morality and nationality. He argues: "The rules of morality are justifiable if and only if they are productive of and partially constitutive of a form of shared social life whose goods are directly enjoyed by those inhabiting the particular communities whose social life is of that kind" (1984: 11).

Further instances of this type of patriotism can be seen in the poem's introduction of various abstract concepts such as love, motherhood, sacrifice, selflessness, loyalty, glory, and eternity, which are often exaggerated to create a feeling that a soldier's death in the war would reduce the negative impact of war and death. Throughout the poem, Brooke tries to bring consolation and comfort for those who are far away, waiting in patience, from the front lines, waiting in patience. He also personifies and glorifies England, using the word "England" or "English" six times in total, apparently to create an impression of the great and invaluable things that England has done for the soldier, and to establish a great sense of patriotic intensity and a tremendous significance for the patriot's death.

Asking the reader to speculate on life after death, the soldier is thinking about the soul rather than the body, leading the reader to speculate on the soldier's soul after his death, when "all evil" or sin has been washed away and the soul has become part of God:

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. (Brooke 2006: 9-14)

In the above excerpt, Brooke maintains that the patriot or martyr can transcend death by returning to life after his sacrificial death. Bloom (2003:36), in this connection, rightly maintains: “By identifying his own body and the soil of England in an almost mystical fashion, Brooke ensures that both he and England will transcend death and national boundaries by achieving immortality in the hearts and minds of English people everywhere”. Combined together, these images provide a kind of psychological satisfaction to the young recruits for risking their lives at the battle front.

The above-mentioned instances of “robust” patriotism can be defensible and justifiable as long as they are in the interest of a country fighting a just war against an aggressor or a hostile power, i.e., a defensive rather than an aggressive war. Undoubtedly, Brooke’s sonnet expresses a genuine love for one’s homeland, and so its patriotism can be considered a necessity and a virtue in view of the circumstances under which it was written and the need of the country for public support to enable it to pursue its policies of self-defence. Such type of patriotism is actually in compliance with the contemporary theories of moral philosophy as already explained. Anyhow, the sonnet portrays the image of a happy warrior endowed with a belief in the morality of war, an image that was perpetuated by the Anglican priest Dean Inge’s sermon in which he described “The Soldier” as “[t]he enthusiasm of a pure and elevated patriotism, free from hate, bitterness, and fear [that] had never found a nobler expression” (qtd. in Schoenle, 1997: 27). The same idea was later reiterated by Brooke’s biographer Hassall (1946), who showed that Brooke had “found a moral purpose in war” (qtd. in Schoenle, 1997: 33).

However, the poem is not all about patriotism; it is also about nationalism, in the sense that it contains some instances of extreme patriotism that bring it closer to nationalism in its general outlook. Though patriotism and nationalism are similar and are sometimes used interchangeably, most theorists prefer to treat them as close though different concepts. Various attempts have been made to distinguish between the two concepts. In this context Orwell said:

Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. ...By ‘patriotism’ I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality. (Orwell, 1968: 361)

Orwell's view of the distinction between the two concepts is very close to the approach of some modern theorists who view patriotism as moderate, in contrast to nationalism, which can be extreme or, more simply, a matter of "us versus them" mentality. Primoratz (2015:75-76) aptly maintains: "As patriotism means love for or devotion to one's country without ill thoughts about others, nationalism is loyalty and devotion to a nation while thinking ill of others and acting badly towards them". Kedourie (1970: 73-74) explains that patriotism is akin to pride, a natural sentiment in the sense that it arises among people of the same country while nationalism as a recent arrival is a complete political doctrine that originated in Western Europe during the turbulent early nineteenth century, triggered by colonial occupation. Like patriotism, nationalism is also a form of loyalty but in a more aggressive manner. For Kohn (1946), nationalism is "a state of mind, permeating the large majority of a people and claiming to permeate all its members. ... The supreme loyalty of man is therefore due to his nationality, as his own life is supposedly rooted in and made possible by its welfare" (Kohn, 1946:16). In the final analysis, nationalism is fundamentally a collective and public phenomenon, while patriotism can be exhibited by a single person.

Taking such arguments into consideration one can argue, as an ideology that stresses allegiance to one's nation as a major political virtue, the term nationalism is essentially political. Fellow nationals are bound to one another by mutual feelings of loyalty and obligations. Nationalism conceives of the nation as a kind of union in which members owe each other mutual assistance, care, and loyalty. Moreover, it upholds that the individual's loyalty and devotion to his/her nation is over and above the interests of any individual or group. Nationalism also inherently implies that wishing good for one's country is also wishing evil for another country. Additionally, it may imply a feeling of superiority over others and hostility towards other nations. As Anderson (1991: 6-7) puts it: "The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings". Anderson (1991: 7) again adds: "Nationalism is an idea so influential that people will die for their nations". Thus, nationalism can ultimately lead to interventionism, hostility, and war. Unlike patriotism, which is good and positive and mainly neutral, nationalism can lead the nationalist to become disrespectful of other nations and prideful of their own nation or country at the expense of others.

Further to my discussion above, I maintain that the bottom line in this matter is that one cannot continue talking about patriotism without evoking the concept of nationalism. When patriotism is deemed indefensible and aggressive, it means we are moving from patriotism to nationalism. While both patriotism and nationalism are the feelings of love people have for their country or nation, the values upon which those feelings are based are quite different. While patriots do not automatically denigrate other countries, nationalists do and sometimes call for their country's dominance. Though the effects of nationalism can be generally positive

and productive, they may, as well, be harmful. Whereas patriotism is often used for positive sentiments, attitudes, and actions, nationalism, by contrast, generally has negative connotations. It includes a more extreme and exclusionary love of one's country at the expense of other countries or nations, often on ethnic and racial grounds. All these views about patriotism and nationalism will have a direct bearing on our discussion of Brooke's poem, as shown below.

Understood in the manner outlined above that feelings of nationalism can be felt in the text as well as the subtext of Brooke's sonnet. Apart from his love for his country, the speaker expresses feelings that show a strong belief that his home country is superior to all others. For example, "There shall be/In that rich earth a richer dust concealed" (Brooke, 2006: 3-4) contains an obvious exaggeration or hyperbole to evoke strong feelings and impressions. It is only for an extreme patriot, i.e., a nationalist, that the "dust" of the soldier's body is richer than the earth surrounding it because it was a part of his country. Even more, such statement provides an example of a jingoistic patriotism, a form of aggressive and proactive attitude that does not give importance to justice or rationality and views everything entirely from the perspective of an exaggerated patriotism. In this way, the speaker gives England an exaggerated favourable treatment, and unjustifiably considers it to be more important than other countries. Kousar and Qasim (2015: 492) assert that "Jingoistic color [sic] is dominant in Rupert Brooke's poetry. Patriotic feelings often come up and dominate the other subjects". Salmon (2009: 35) maintains that "a Jingoist does not give importance to justice or rationality and does everything entirely under the spirit of exaggerated and misapplied patriotism". Occasionally appearing as a jingoist, the speaker in the sonnet calls for a variant of patriotism that does not exhibit full respect for people beyond English borders. For instance, the line "there is some corner of a foreign field that is forever England" provides a good example of emotional appeal that reflects an idealized and self-centered patriotism. These feelings are also combined with connotations of disapproval of other countries and a somewhat exclusionist ideology that considers other countries as rivals that should be excluded as "foreign", or even dominated.

Taken as a whole, Brooke's sonnet reflects the interior monologue of a recently deceased soldier who reveals his fervent patriotism by declaring that his sacrifice for his homeland amounts to the eternal ownership of England of the small portion of land where his body is buried and from which English values will be dissipated all around. The crucial point here is the implicit idea of spreading English culture and values through the potential use of force against other countries. Obviously, such notions cannot be justifiable or defensible on the grounds of moderate or even robust patriotic considerations but can sound different and even tolerable when seen against a background of nationalism rather than patriotism. It is only under the banner of extreme/evil patriotism that such notions can occur. The fact is that genuine patriotism as such does not involve incursion against other countries; it is only when extreme patriotism develops into nationalism that such acts can happen, even though these notions can hardly be rendered tolerable under the discourse of nationalism, as will be explained below.

Though "The Soldier" falls generally within the language of patriotic discourse, nationalistic discourse underlies the poem, highlighting the supremacy of the nation and the absolute priority of its interest and values. In one sense at least, the speaker is subtly seeking power in order to unite and rally the English nation in its confrontation with other nations. Thus, the poet is asserting the interests of his own nation and downgrading the public interests of other nations. Reading the poem against the background of Brooke's attitude to the Germans, we find that after a period of genuine friendship with some German acquaintances, Brooke turned against his German friends after World War I broke out. In his biography of Rupert Brooke, Stinger (1948/1972: 74) recounts that on January 11, 1911, Brooke wrote that "he was just off to Germany, for the rest of his life. That was before the First World War threw him and his countrymen into an abyss of hatred and clouded his admiration for German friends". Apparently, it was the war that caused this shift in Brooke's attitude towards Germany and eventually led him to view the relations between Britain and Germany as those between two opposing nations whose national interests were hostile and conflicting. Stinger also mentions that Brooke "shivered at the thought of a prolonged stay on the Continent. ... In 1907, he had written that he would never go abroad again. He had no love for foreigners. The English, he admired, 'are the only race who [sic] are ever clean and straight and beautiful'" (Stinger, 1948/1972:106). Brooke's words and particularly the word "foreigners" seem to have been echoed in his sonnet: "some corner of a *foreign* field" (Brooke 2006: 2; italics mine). Overall, Brooke's sonnet and his letters clearly demonstrate that his anti-German attitude is not patriotic as much as it is nationalistic, expressing aggressive rather than defensive sentiments and showing feelings of rivalry and even hostility towards another nation.

Consequently, the traditional idea of Brooke's "The Soldier" as merely an idealized and romanticized picture of war may be in need for reconsideration. The underlying nationalistic sentiments can be taken as appropriate grounds to redefine Brooke's sonnet as a war poem. The sonnet embodies, besides its outward patriotism, a penetrating feeling of nationalism, a kind of excessive, aggressive patriotism which crops up when patriotism gets out of hand and becomes exclusionary, isolationistic, and chauvinistic. Such extreme nationalism tends to promote vigilant preparedness for war and an aggressive foreign policy. In other words, the poem is not merely a patriot's assertion of Brooke's love for his homeland but also a statement of his view of the relationship between his country and other countries with which it was presumably at war and in dire rivalry. In fact, it is not only the military side of war that the poem is dealing with but the political dimension as well, a theme that leads to a brief discussion of colonialist/imperialist connotations in the poem.

In addition to its outward patriotic text and its nationalistic subtext, "The Soldier" has its colonialist/imperialist overtones. The leader of postcolonial theory, Edward Said (1993) views imperialism as a discourse of domination where the colonizers are in a position to impose their culture on foreign countries since they consider themselves superior and the rest inferior. Said distinguishes between imperialism and colonialism by stating: "Imperialism involves the practice, the

theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory, while colonialism refers to the implanting of settlements on a distant territory” (Said, 1993:8). Fanon (1963), on the other hand, drew attention to colonization as being not merely a matter of political domination and economic exploitation but more as a system of exerting power by depicting the colonized as inferior and immature in comparison with the superior and civilized colonizer.

In its postcolonial context, imperialism also includes the questions of power, marginalization, and subjugation as a direct impact of colonization. This theme has been extensively dealt with by Said (1978) who, as Yousef (2019: 72), points out, emphasized the “fixed binary oppositions particularly of the social relations between the imperial center and the colonial periphery”. Additionally, imperialism is concerned with the way some countries assigned themselves a “civilizing mission” that they thought gave them the right to colonize what they considered as other inferior and less civilized peoples. As Pomeranz (2005:35) notes: “The groups most closely tied to historic imperial centers often made their alleged cultural superiority a justification for empire”. Though “civilizing” remained a vague and contested concept, most nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires invoked this rationale to justify their rule over what they labelled uncivilized societies. Brooke’s poem reflects the colonial discourse of an empire trying to wield political authority over other countries. When “The Soldier” was written, the bodies of British servicemen were buried nearby where they had died. The reference to “foreign fields” shows Brooke portraying these burial places as representing a part of the world “that will be forever England”, a clear indication of imperial and colonial leanings that underlie the poem and a symbol of what the persona sees as a “rich soil” containing the soul of glorious men who died for their country. This means that if English soldiers are to die in a land other than England, the soil will be made better because there would now be a piece of England within it. Originally published as “The Recruit”, this Petrarchan sonnet has occasionally been seen by some contemporaneous critics and reviewers as a propaganda poem trying to urge young English men to join the war by expressing the idea that it is honourable and glorious to die for one’s country.

Before proceeding any further into the discussion of the poem, it is necessary to define the relationship between nationalism and imperialism insofar as this will reflect on our discussion. Imperialism is closely related to nationalism; indeed, nationalism is an important element in the conception of imperialism, providing a motive force for imperialist domination. As Li (2014: 683-684) explains, nationalism: “plays an essential role in shaping people’s ideas, national identity, perceptions, and international relations”. Scholars have debated the question of how national identities had been shaped under the impact of imperialism and colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For Hobson (1902:91), imperialism was a product of capitalism and nationalism. Hobson defined imperialism as “the endeavor of the great controllers of industry to broaden the channel for the flow of their surplus wealth by seeking foreign markets and foreign investments to take off the goods and capital they cannot sell or use”. Hobson uses the term “colonialism” to refer to the transformation of nationalism into a general

tendency of states to expand beyond their national boundaries. He says: "Colonialism in its best sense, is a natural flow of nationality, its test is the power of colonists to transplant the civilisation they represent to the new natural and social environment in which they find themselves" (Hobson:91).

An extreme case of nationalism is when a person and/or country feel a strong desire for dominance over other countries. As a result, imperialism materializes when a nation forcefully expands and takes over other nations, subjugates them and absorbs them into its empire.

In short, as nationalism is an extreme patriotism, imperialism is an extreme nationalism. Actually, "The Soldier" was written amidst a period which witnessed a fervid movement toward nationalism and imperialism. The rise of nationalism led nations to absorb the near or distant territory of other peoples, a move that marked the passage from nationalism to colonialism and imperialism (Hobson: 4). A careful scrutiny of "The Soldier" reveals that both nationalistic and imperialistic sentiments are closely linked and form two basic layers of the poem's political discourse as illustrated below.

An essential issue regarding imperialism is whether it was harmful or beneficial. The anti-imperialism historian, Hobson (1902) criticizes imperialism for its expansionist policy abroad for economic purposes to satisfy the needs of the capitalists. He also asserts that imperialism may benefit only a small favoured group but never the colonized nation as a whole. Pointing out some of the flaws which the imperial system brought about, Hobson states that the system was not improving the colonies' quality of life, but instead was exploiting their wealth (Hobson, 1902:2). On the other hand, the well-known British historian, Ferguson (2008) argues that the British Empire was a force for good. Though Ferguson admits that imperialism had its "triumphs, deceits, decencies, kindnesses, cruelties and all", he opines that the British Empire spread civilization around the world; even more, he wanted the Americans to perform the civilising mission which he claims the British Empire carried out in its heyday. Nevertheless, because it always involves the use of power, whether military, economic or some subtler form, imperialism has often been considered morally reprehensible, and the term is frequently employed to denounce it as a means of forceful expansion. Brooke's poem seems to revolve around the notion that war can serve the interests of the empire. Like many other war poets of World War I, Brooke welcomed the war as clearly evidenced by "The Soldier". The poem portrays an idealistic picture of war and the feelings of pride and love of a young soldier for a particular English landscape and culture that culminate in the belief of sacrifice in battle for a just cause as the most desirable way to die. However, this ostensible aim cannot hide the imperial lining of the poem. The sonnet as a whole displays many of the masculine traits of pre-World-War-I era such as imperialism, nationalism, self-effacement, glory, and the willingness to die for the sake of the homeland. It is also noticeable that the poem does not focus on the horrors of death; in fact, death is turned into a victory because with their death, the soldiers will conquer another piece of land for the British Empire.

By and large, English imperial literature, as well known, falls mainly into two different camps that reflected the different attitudes of the time. The first camp, represented by such writers as Rudyard Kipling, thought that it was the Empire's obligation to expand its borders to improve the quality of life in the world. The other camp, represented by such literary figures as E. M. Forster, believed that the Empire's goal of improving the world was a facade meant to mask the exploitation of the Empire's foreign citizens. Brooke's poem appears to have a clear propensity towards the first camp. The speaker is implying that he has no evil intentions and all he aspires to do is to bring "Englishness" to other less civilized non-English peoples. Seen from a postcolonial perspective, this claim can be considered an indicator of the imperialist and colonialist nature of the poem. We cannot say that Brooke does not attempt to appropriate and colonize the area of land in which his corpse will be buried, for according to him, that piece of land in which he dies will be "forever England". Viewed against these geopolitical and cultural backgrounds, "The Soldier" can be seen as a reflection of a certain English and European public opinion that created a pro-imperialist mood that contributed to the worsening of relations among the great powers prior to the 1914-1918 World War. In fact, strong and effective colonial pressure groups across Europe pushed for colonialist and imperialist expansion. European expansion beyond national borders was often justified by the idea of the so-called "civilizing mission". This concept, as explained above, also served as a powerful ideological framework to proclaim not only European technical and military superiority, but also cultural dominance. Consequently, the powerful colonizing countries often tried to spread their culture and values to the less powerful countries to the detriment of local cultures, a theme that clearly underlies the main thrust of Brooke's poem.

Some previous studies have seen Brooke's poems as reflecting imperial connotations, if not obvious tendencies. For instance, Silkin (1972: 67; qtd. in Bloom, 2003:42) asserts that "Brooke's sonnets are 'war poems' —'The Soldier,' especially—in the sense that they are vehicles for imperialist attitudes". From my own perspective, Brooke's poem seems to maintain a sense of ambiguity about its potential imperialist tendencies, and only a careful reading would unravel such tendencies. Apparently, the poem appears to be about sacrifice for the sake of England, but on a deeper level, it turns out to be a poem with imperialist inclinations. The speaker feels it is his destiny to go away and fight in order to rule and civilize other people: "And think, this heart, all evil shed away,/ A pulse in the eternal mind, no less,/ Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given" (9-11). The speaker's words imply that he is working for a higher power that can spread civilization to other dominions. In addition, the exaggerated sense of self-importance that the poem displays has been noted by Kahn (1972:103), who pointedly writes: "It ['The Soldier'] is an egotistical sonnet, yet British in its arrogance [sic]". The concluding lines of the poem also describe England as the ideal place of happiness, laughter, tenderness, and "hearts at peace", a description that savors not only of a sense of superiority but also helps create the traditional imperial notion of a "civilizing mission" as mentioned above. Moreover, the sky that the soldier's corpse will be buried underneath is depicted as "an English

heaven", an image that connotes a feeling of the superiority of English culture and lifestyle that ordinarily characterizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as earlier explained. Above all, the poet's understated and subtly insinuated tendency to transfer English culture to other "foreign" parts of the world cannot be denied.

Finally, the poem's apparent self-centered, egoistic, and self-assertive attitude reflects an insinuated imperial mentality that looks down upon the political systems of other peoples and their ways of life. Early in the poem, the soldier is apparently fascinated by his superiority over the natives and by his ability to dominate other nations by making their land part of "some corner of a foreign field /That is forever England" (Brooke, 2006:2-3). Such assertion is characteristic not only of patriotism and nationalism discourses as explained above but quite possibly of an imperialist discourse to which it is closely related. It can be argued, therefore, that the speaker's dominant and domineering attitude and the poem's depiction of England as an exceptionally civilized and cultured place inevitably imply a downplayed intention of imposing English culture and civilization on other countries. Speculating on his future after his death, the soldier claims that his demise will mean that there is a piece of England in that foreign country which will transport English civilization and culture to a foreign country (Brooke, 9-11). All this leads us to conclude that as a writer, Brooke seems to have been indirectly encouraging the British government to pursue its policies of territorial expansion and cultural colonization, an implied gesture that would have been highly appreciated by both English government and church at the time.

4. Conclusion

The above discussion has shown that in addition to its traditional patriotism, Brooke's sonnet "The Soldier" contains nationalistic and colonialist/imperialist attitudes. They all overlap and are intricately entwined, and a subtle and complex combination of these three main constituents produces the multilayered text of the poem. Under careful scrutiny, Brooke's most famed sonnet reveals a multifaceted and a multilayered work that can be approached from a multiplicity of perspectives particularly when enlightened by recent developments in moral, philosophical, political and literary theories. By making reference to the biographical studies of the poet and to his war correspondence in particular, a more representative reading of the poem can be achieved which can be utilized to avoid the previous reductive and restrictive approaches which have tended to ignore such crucial sources when addressing the theme of patriotism that outwardly characterizes this work. Given the interpretations that occur in much of the previous critical studies, Brooke's poem merits reconsideration. The sonnet depicts not merely a romanticized and idealized picture of war as most previous studied represented it, but an all-round view that portrays war from its national, cultural, and colonial/imperial perspectives.

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