

Break of Day in the Trenches

Analysing the poem “Break of Day in the Trenches” by Isaac Rosenberg

- Isaac Rosenberg is one of the famous British War poets.
- He was born in 1890, in United Kingdom and was killed in the action in 1918.
- He was a soldier-poet who stood against the idea of war.
- He portrayed realistic scenes from the life at trenches.

The Poem:

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever,
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass

Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver—what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe—
Just a little white with the dust. (Taken from Poetry
Foundation)

- Looking at the structure of the poem :
- There is no strict rhyme or rhythm.
- Writer has used free verse.
- It is a single paragraph, stream-of-consciousness form.

- As the title suggests, a new day is going to break: an image that stands for new hope, new beginning, freshness.
- But as first two lines suggest, night simply 'crumbles' away. The word 'crumble' gives the sense of destruction, damage.
- The Time, in the next line, with capital T is something which is authoritative and is the same... nothing new.

- All of a sudden a new life comes in. It is the rat which is lively and, thus, 'queer'
- Rat is free to roam in the no man's land between the German's and English'
- The scene can be compared with the story "The Dog of Tetwal" by Sadat Hasan Manto who was writing about the armed conflict between the armies of India and Pakistan just after the partition. In that story there was a stray dog, free to roam between the enemy groups, however, was brutally killed by the Indian when it decided to sit in the land that was under Pakistan.

The brutality and ignorance of those indulged in the war is highlighted through the usage of animals and innocent creatures who can easily be replaced by any innocent human being.

The rat, like the dog, must be cautious of his unbiased sympathies: “They will shoot you if they know your cosmopolitan sympathies”.

The writer in “Break of Day...” is however jealous of Rat’s agility and ability to move freely which he is unable to do in the trenches.

The writer wonders if this rat can understand the “quaver” that still fills the hearts of soldiers, the horror that, despite the number of years spent in war, fails to leave!

- The writer concludes the poem by suggesting that war drains all of soldier's life and energies, but he himself is smart to keep his secretly safe and hidden.
- Poppies stand for hope as well as the loss caused by the war.
- Writer's poppies are secretly safe which he might use for some good purpose after the war.
- The writer doesn't consider giving off himself completely for the cause of the war.

. The image is dark and hints at the monotonous, hopeless kind of life lived in the trenches.

Rat, an image from nature, is the only hope that inspires the hope about saved “poppy” in the writer.

THANK YOU