

ISAAC ROSENBERG



He was born in Bristol (England) on 25th November 1890 to Russian-Jewish parents and grew up in the East End of London. Some benefactors paid for him to complete his training as a painter and encouraged him to pursue his vocation as a poet. He participated in the First World War from 1916 until he was killed in action on April 1st 1918. He was only 27 years old.

Isaac Rosenberg was considered one of the finest First World War poets and "*Break of Day in The Trenches*" is generally considered to be the greatest poem of the war.

His poem reflects his outlook and feelings of abhorrence and detestation towards the war, in which he had experienced the horrible involvement of the trench warfare as a soldier. The poet uses vivid imagery, symbolism, phonetic techniques and a lot of irony. In *Break of Day in the Trenches*, Rosenberg reveals his perspective on the futility of war using symbolic images of a "cosmopolitan" rat and a poppy as a flower that can grow from dead corpses. Generally, the world sees the rat as being a demonic creature; in this case the poem gives qualities to the rat as if it seems to understand the significance of the situation. Men are dying and suffering while the rat freely crosses the sleeping green. Here all is tragic, surreal and upset by war. The only hope of living is represented by the poppy that is bleeding and that everyone owns. The poet puts it behind his ear, he thinks that his poppy is safe as his life, but for only a little while, because it becomes white with the dust.

Break of day in trenches

*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 men's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe,
Just a little white with the dust.*

L'albeggiare nelle trincee

*L'oscurità si sgretola
E' lo stesso vecchio druido Tempo di sempre
Solo una cosa vivente salta la mia mano
Uno strano topo sardonico
Mentre colgo il papavero dal parapetto
Per metterlo dietro il mio orecchio
Comico topo, ti sparerebbero se sapessero
Le tue simpatie cosmopolite
Ora che hai toccato questa mano inglese
Farai lo stesso con una tedesca
Presto, senza dubbio, se è tuo piacere
Attraversare il prato dormiente
Sembra che tu sorrida intimamente quando passi
I forti occhi, gli arti sottili, atleti altezzosi
Meno fortunati di te nella vita,
legati ai capricci dell'assassinio,
Stravaccati nelle viscere della terra,
Campi lacerati di Francia
Cosa vedi nei nostri occhi
Allo stridente ferro e fiamme
Scagliati attraverso i cieli tranquilli ?
Quali tremiti -quale cuore attonito?
I papaveri le cui radici sono nelle vene dell'uomo
Cadono, e cadono sempre;
ma il mio nel mio orecchio è al sicuro,
solo un poco imbiancato dalla polvere.*

QUESTIONS

Who is Isaac Rosenberg? He is the most important First World War poet

When was he born? He was born on 25th November 1890

What did he do during his short life? He was a poet, a painter and he participated in the First World War where he was killed in 1918.

What did he write? He wrote a poem called *Break of day in trenches*

What does this poem reflect? It reflects the poet's feelings of abhorrence and detestation towards the war that is horrible and vain.

What are the main characters? The main characters are the rat and the poppy.

What does the rat and the poppy represent? The rat represents the indifference towards the men who are dying, it freely crosses the sleeping green. The poppy represents the life and the death at the same time. It is the only hope of living for the poet who picks up it and put it behind his ear, he thinks that his life is safe as the poppy, but for only a little while, because it becomes white with the dust. In addition it is red like the blood.

What does the poet use? He uses symbolism and irony

In which sentences or words can you find irony and symbolism?

You can find irony in the words "*sardonic rat*", "*droll rat*", "*cosmopolitan sympathies*", "*haughty athletes*".

You can find symbolism in the sentences "*At the shrieking iron and flame*" (war), "*Poppies ...Drop, and are ever dropping*" (soldiers); "*But mine in my ear is safe*" (life), "*Just a little white with the dust*" (death).