

Break of Day in the Trenches

By Isaac Rosenberg

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.

n/a

Source: The Norton Anthology of Poetry Third Edition (1983)



Isaac Rosenberg was born in England to a Jewish family and later, he was trained at the Slade School of Art. During his training, he started writing poetry and gained a reputation among London's literary establishment. His career was cut tragically short when he was killed while fighting in World War I. His poetry shows an innovative approach to imagery, rhythm, and dramatic

effects, and reveals the promise of a great poet. In his poem "Break of Day in the Trenches," he uses intensely direct language to involve the reader with the physical realities of war.