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