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Master of Arts.

STUDIES IN THE POETRY OF ISAAC ROSENBERG

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DEDICATION

To

My Noble and worthy parents

**Chief Sir Lawrence Amaefule Anyanwu (KSJ),
Ezinne Lady Cecilia Chisaraokwu Anyanwu (LKSJ)**

TO

Late Bro John Chukwunyere Anyanwu

My only Uncle whose death occurred on the 29th of July, 2009.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Title page..... | i |
| Dedication..... | ii |
| Acknowledgement..... | iii-iv |
| Table of Contents..... | v |
| Abstract..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER ONE: Introduction..... | 3 |
| Biography of Isaac Rosenberg | |
| Modernism and the First World War | |
| Poetry of the First World War | |
| CHAPTER TWO: Review of Literature..... | 22 |
| Review of Isaac Rosenberg and his poetry | |
| CHAPTER THREE: Analysis of selected poems..... | 49 |
| <i>August 1914</i> | |
| <i>On Receiving News of the war</i> | |
| <i>Break of Day in the Trenches</i> | |
| <i>Dead man's Dump</i> | |
| CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion..... | 70 |
| Isaac Rosenberg: The war poet indeed. | |
| WORKS CITED..... | 78 |

ABSTRACT

This research is carried out to explore the poetry of Isaac Rosenberg whose poetic works featured as war poetry. The First World War poetry of Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Ivor Gurney among others ushered in a new tendency in the history of English Literature distinctive in the Modern period. These men explored all the facets of the Great War which is also known as the First World War (1914-1918). In their poems are to be found ideas, writings which express extreme emotions like fear, anger, hatred etc. Their voices combined and were heard, each wrote their personal experience of the military events in Europe during the First World War. The poems they wrote became a call to national consciousness and conscience. Most of them were icons of innocence, vulnerability, courage and integrity. Among these poets is Isaac Rosenberg whose works form the topic for my thesis.

Isaac Rosenberg who was born in 1890, in a Jewish family and he belongs to the group of war poets whose writings gained prominence during the period of the First World War. He participated in the war until his death. Among the poems that gained prominence for him is the lyric *Drenched in the trench* among other poems.

The aim of this research is to explore the Poetry of the First World War by using Isaac Rosenberg as a case study. In this research, I explored the link between Isaac Rosenberg and the First World War, wrote about him, analyzed his poems and know what gained him a place among the war poets. The biography of Isaac Rosenberg seen against the background of modernism, the First World War, and war poetry will form the first chapter of my research.

In chapter two, I reviewed all the literature available concerning the poet and his poetry. What people have said about him, the things or ideas that dominated his poetry and what have written about the poetry of the First World War.

In order to find the link between Isaac Rosenberg and First World War poetry, four of his poems written between 1914-1918 were analyzed using literary tools. Background studies for each of the chosen poems were written. The Tone/mood, structure, language and other literary features were found in them.

The chapter four of my research revealed the fact that the First World War was a product of historical events in Europe; soldier poets told their own stories through poetic rendition like other writers who told their own stories from the other genres of literature and also in a non-fictional way. These war poets discussed one central theme which is the life, War and its destruction. This was expressed as their personal and social anxiety attached by writers to the subject of individual mortality. Hence, I argued that the poetry of the Great War used language as seen in the extensive use of metaphor and images which revealed atrocities, instabilities and lack in consolation. The period is seen as an era of human brutalities and modern legalized death. This is a clear examination of the emotional, intellectual, moral, ideological and aesthetic responses to the Great War in the poetry of Isaac Rosenberg.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BIOGRAPHY OF ISAAC ROSENBERG

Among the writers whose reputation had been established during the Great War is Isaac Rosenberg. Scholarship have it that Isaac Rosenberg was born on the 25 of November, 1890 in Bristol, England. He was the second child and first son of a Jewish family. According to Jean Moorcroft, “In 1897, when Isaac was seven years old, the family moved to London’s Jewish ghetto, settling in one of the Jewish quarters in the Eastern part of the city.”¹ His father is known as Dovber and his mother Hacha Davidov Rosenberg. While living in their new rural environment, Dovber changed his name to Barnett Rosenberg and opened a butcher shop to fend for a living but they authorities seized his shop and stopped him from doing his mini business which made him to spend the remainder of his life as a peddler and unable to provide the needs of his family. As a child, Isaac grew up in abject poverty and worked on daily bases in the afternoons as an apprentice engraver to help his parents and siblings put food on the table.

¹ Jean Moorcroft Wilson's introduction to *The Selected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg* Unlike the celebrated officer-poets of the First World War, Isaac Rosenberg was a private soldier. A Jewish East Ender and a talented artist, he was a reluctant army recruit. Jean Moorcroft Wilson argues that his poetry, unjustly neglected, gives a unique perspective on the horrors of war.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Rosenberg did not enjoy quality education like his contemporaries who came from different wealthy family backgrounds. He was not fortunate to have his education at the Jewish Free School in Spitalfields as proposed by his parents. His biography revealed that he attended the State school in Baker Street. In the school, the Jewish religious education featured mainly in the school curriculum, “...Rosenberg appeared to have been bored and inattentive to respond to the demands of his school curriculum due his tight schedules combined with his apprenticeship”² Despite his later interest in subjects concerning Jewish religion and history, “he does not seem to have learned very much Hebrew”³ At the Baker Street School, Rosenberg’s talent for sketching was visible and he was encouraged, supported and assisted by Rosenberg’s acquaintances at the Arts and Crafts School in Stepney Green. The quest for intellectual improvement saw Isaac enrolled in the school.

His ambition to study at the Slade School was made impossible due to lack of finance, Rosenberg enrolled for evening classes at the Art School of Birkbeck College in Chancery Lane, for nearly two years from 1907 and 1908. On leaving school, He began an apprenticeship at Carl Hentschel's, an engraving business in Fleet Street, in order to save money to take care of his needs and that of his family since his parents are financially derided. It was recorded that those whom Rosenberg met in his life were of a great help to him. In 1911, Isaac was admitted

² Representations of Jews and Jewishness in English Painting” 1887-1914 Vol. 1

³ ibid 1887-1914 Vol. 1

to the Slade School a part of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of London, where he studied drawing and painting for three years until 1914.

LIFE EXPERIENCES AND QUEST FOR WRITING

Isaac Rosenberg came from poor family background. The struggle for survival saw him unstable in his education. He underwent different levels of hardship but that did not undermine his quest for education and survival. As a talented child, he possessed great skills in drawing and in writing poems. At 14, Isaac left school to work for an engraving firm, a work that could not afford him much needed time for his drawing and reading. Books reviewed shown that Isaac began to follow his own muse for writing, he took a bold step of leaving Hentschel's in March 1911 and found himself in what Jean Moorcroft described thus “{...},he moved into drawing and writing, spending much of his time in copying some works in the National Gallery and writing poems that would appear in a private pamphlet publication called *Night and Day*.”⁴ This made him to get busy always at the National Gallery reading and copying. It was their he received the news that an artist friend, Lilly Delissa Joseph, along with two friends of hers, Mrs. Herbert Cohen and Mrs. E.D. Lowy, were prepared to give him support in his studies at the Slade. A news that made him happy and also an opportunity which linked Rosenberg to many people.

Rosenberg appeared more active and faithful in his vocation, it was believed that he was receptive to the emerging and innovative ideas in English cultural life. The tension between modernism and tradition played bigger roles in his poetry than in his painting. His talent as a painter garnered him a number of student awards. In

⁴ Connor, Steven *Isaac Rosenberg: Birkbeck's War Poet*: The text of a lecture given as part of Birkbeck College's *From Mechanics to Millennium* lecture series, October 30th 2000.

1911 he received a sponsorship for the Slade School, an important center for English painting.

More so, in the same 1911, Rosenberg met with a group of young intellectuals, who shared the same similarities with him, and all with future as writers ahead of them. According to Steven Connor, “They are called as the Whitechapel Boys, they include Simon Weinstein, who later changed his name to Stephen Winsten, Joseph Lefkowitz, who also changed his name to Joseph Leftwich and John Rodker, who was to be an associate of Ezra Pound and an important publisher of modernism in England.”⁵ With these young, Rosenberg found an audience for his writings. He started to attend meetings and conferences with the Young Socialist League to boast his career. In his two and a half years of study at the Slade, Rosenberg have been exposed to certain realities about life and realities about writings. He gained more prominence among his peers. It seems also to have been in these years which he began to move away from painting into poetry. In 1912, he published a small pamphlet of poems called *Night and Day*, with a small private printer called Israel Narodiczky. At that time, his prominence established him, and he made some contacts “with some important literary figures: like Laurence Binyon and Edward Marsh, a senior civil servant who was Winston Churchill’s private secretary as well as the publisher of an influential series of volumes called *Georgian Poetry*.”⁶ Rosenberg came to rely heavily on Marsh’s opinion and influence to explore the world of possibilities ahead of him. Marsh bought a number of Rosenberg’s paintings and gave him continuous encouragement in his poetry.

⁵ Steven Connor ...lecture series, October 30th 2000.

⁶ Steven Connor ...lecture series, October 30th 2000.

A meeting with Blake's poetry helped fashion Rosenberg in his poetry writings. Rosenberg who was introduced to Blake by one of his teachers at Birkbeck, Alice Wright, with whom he remained in contact for good number of years. Scholarship revealed that when it comes to similar life experiences, Rosenberg may have taken particular encouragement from the fact that Blake too was a painter and engraver as well as a poet in his time, who combined his real bluntness and to put in practice his visionary artisan. In fact, there are signs for example that Blake was almost too close to be a comforter to Rosenberg especially when it comes to similar life experiences as a writer as well as a painter. However, in one of the lectures he delivered, he affirmed roundly in his lecture that Blake was "the highest artist England had ever had", and praised his responsiveness to "that unimpaired divinity that shines from all things when looked at through the eye of imagination."⁷

Moreover, at different points of his life's experiences, Rosenberg wrote poems and exploited his environment and never fell for the condition he found himself in or the status of his family or what fate had in store for him. In June 1914, he flew to South Africa to stay with his newly married sister. These were times of continuing strain of pains and illness for Rosenberg. He suffered from bronchial inflammation, feared of tuberculosis. While there, he was busy with his poems. He found himself unexpectedly as a writer and he considered himself as an upcoming young artist despite his horrible state of his life. He saturated himself in turn to adopt a pose of weary aloofness: 'think of civilization, planted in this barbarous land'. Apart from painting series of increasingly effective portraits, he wrote too many poems and delivered a long and revealing lecture about the evolution of contemporary art. As a hardworking person, he wrote to Edward Marsh and made mockery of himself,

⁷ Steven Connor ...lecture series, October 30th 2000.

“a creature of the most exquisite, his ambition revealed itself in a strong competitiveness which would stay with him for the rest of his life”⁸. His works of art from drawing, painting and writing gained him good prizes. He was awarded prizes at the end of his first year for drawing from the antique and for drawing in light and shade. In his second year, “...the *Birkbeck College Students' Magazine* records that he was awarded another prize in a National Competition for drawing and in that year also he won the College's Mason prize for nude studies in the life class.”⁹ He exhibited in the Art School's annual exhibitions after leaving the college and in 1910, won another prize, the Pocock Prize, for a nude study in oil.

While Rosenberg was still in Cape Town, war broke out, and he composed a poem in response to the war. Like the best of his war poems, it registers shock at a far away distance. In 1915, he returned to England. Rosenberg was a man with a delicate principle and with poor health conditions too. He never saw that as an impediment but he upheld courage by joining in the war. He was enlisted as a private soldier as the war in Germany escalated. Rosenberg joined the Bantam Battalion of the 12 Suffolk Regiment. In 1916 he was sent to the Western Front. On April 1, 1918, while on night patrol by the south of Arras, Rosenberg was killed in action. His body was never found.

In 1922 his poems were collected and published in London. In 1979 all of his work was gathered and published in *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Painting, and Drawings*

⁸ Ibid ...lecture series, October 30th 2000

⁹ Ibid...lecture series, October 30th 2000

MODERNISM AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

One of the ever greatest events that happened during the modern period in the history of English Literature is the First World War. The First World War took the center stage during this modern period.

As Harmon William stated in *A Handbook to Literature (9th ed.)* makes a distinction between literature that is modern and other twentieth century or contemporary literature: “Modern refers to a group of characteristics, and not all of them appear in any one writer who merits the designation modern”¹⁰. The text continues:

“In a broad sense, modernism is applied to writing marked by a strong and conscious break with tradition. It also implies a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, despair, and loss. The period employs a distinctive kind of imagination that insists on having a general frame of reference within itself to create the world in the act of perceiving it...”¹¹

The Modernism rejected traditional values and the old system of aesthetic writings. With the emerging order from the Avant-garde movement and imagist group, “...Modernism gained powerful influence as many writers and movements of the

¹⁰ William Harmon (9th ed.) *A Handbook to Literature*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall 2003 p318

¹¹ William Harmon...p326

Period adjusted to its writing forms and norms.’’¹² These movements in the modern period shared most of the fundamental assumptions implied by the term modern which made the period popular and many writers responded to the new system of writing.

Modernism is a period of total overhaul in the literary world. The modernist Period in English Literature is first an instinctive reaction against the Victorian culture and its aesthetics, and the writing convention which had prevailed for most of the nineteenth century. Indeed; it was, ‘‘a break with traditions as one of the fundamental constants of the Modernist stance. New writers, intellectuals and the poets at the turn of the twentieth century believed the previous generation’s way of doing things was a cultural dead end.’’¹³ They established the period as they foresaw that world events were going into unknown territory and it is taking a new shape in writings and in world views. Hence, the writing culture and the convention of the Victorian period were rapidly becoming a thing of the past as Ezra Pound and others led the struggle to change the writing culture which gave birth to modernity.

In the Literary world, Modernism is marked as the beginning of the distinction between ‘‘high’’ art and ‘‘low’’ art. According to Josh Rahn, ‘‘ it is the reform of the Victorian Age had led to a rapid increase in literacy rates, and therefore a greater demand for literature of all sorts.’’¹⁴ Most of the good writers looked upon the new popular literature with scorn but some of these writers who refused to bow to the

¹² Saler T. Michael, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground*. New York: Oxford University Press 1999p3-5

¹³ Josh Rahn *Modernism*, Jalic Inc-2011, The Literature Network’s Literary Periods | <http://www.online-literature.com/periods/modernism.php> - accessed 16/03/16

¹⁴ ‘‘Modernism in Europe and the New World’’ <https://lit563.wordpress.com/modernism/> (March 16, 2016)

new system found themselves in a state of alienation from the mainstream of society. To some extent, “{...}this alienation fed into the stereotype of the aloof artist, who produced nothing of commercial value for the market.”¹⁵ The most active poets and novelists did manage to make profound statements that were absorbed by the whole of society and not just the writer’s inner circles. In the later years of the Modernist period, it is believed that a form of populism returned to the literary mainstream where regionalism and identity politics became a significant influence on the purpose and direction of artistic endeavor.

When Modernist writing conventions, forms, styles and their aestheticism emerged, it was identified that, “it is more like Hopkins, who brought a fresh way to look at rhythm and word usage. He more or less invented his own poetic rhythms, just as he coined his own words for things which had, for him, no suitable descriptor. Hopkins had no formal training in poetry, and he never published in his lifetime.”¹⁶ Hopkins is known as a self-taught artist-hermit have no desire for public adulation would become synonymous with the poet in the modern age. This stereotype continues unrivaled to this day, despite the fact that the most accomplished poets of the Modern period were far from recluses. Even though alienation was a nearly universal experience for Modernist poets, it was impossible to escape some level of engagement with the world at large. Even if this engagement was mediated through the poetry, the relationship that poets had with their world was very real, and very much revealing of the state of things in the early twentieth century. Many of these writers classified the modern period as “the great age of history writing,

¹⁵The Literature Network “*Modernism*”. Online Literature, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.online-literature.com/periods/modernism.php> on Wednesday, March 16, 2016

¹⁶ The Literature Network “*Modernism*”, Jalic Inc. 2000-2016

where the principal intellectual tool for interpreting existence came in good number of volumes.’’¹⁷

More so, many of the developments which would transform daily life in the modern era like, mass inventions and production of motor cars, the telephone, the airplane, the mass circulation of Newspaper, the new style of writing, intellectual revolts emerged in the modern period. Charles Pegny a French writer noted that, “the world has changed more in the last thirty years than in the last two millennia. His view of the world had to a large extent already been formed at the outbreak of war.’’¹⁸ Julian Jackson acknowledged that, “wherever one chooses to start the twentieth century, there can be no doubt that one of the central facts of European history in its first fifty years has been the experience of war after a century which saw no major international European conflict’’¹⁹ He concluded with a statement that “One of the central threads of this period must be a narrative of catastrophe and destruction brought by war’’²⁰. In turn, the progress of this era was shattered by an unexpected movement, senseless horror and devastation which took place between 1914-1918.

The modern period in English Literature emerged with huge changes in poetry and in criticism. Among the conflicts in different parts of Europe, the Great War was an imaging order that was meant to end all conflicts in Europe and the world.

¹⁷ Ibid..., Jalic Inc. 2000-2016

¹⁸ Charles Pegny a French writer noted that, “the world has changed more in the last thirty years than in the last two millennia”. His view of the world had to a large extent already been formed at the outbreak of war

¹⁹ BLANNING, T. C. W. (Ed) *The Oxford History of Modern Europe*, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996, Pp.1-4

²⁰ Blannin, T.C W, 1996, P4

THE FIRST WORLD WAR (1914-1918)

The Great War that ran from 1914 to 1918 had hardly run its course before it began, alarmingly very soon after the publication of *The First World War, 1914-1918* by Charles Repington (1858-1925), to be known as “the First World War or World War One.”²¹

From July-August 1914 an international crisis culminated in the outbreak of the First World War. According to Stevenson David, “the crisis had three phases. In the first, one of the six European Great Powers, Austria-Hungary, launched a war against Serbia. In the second, this war escalated into a Continent-wide conflict involving Germany, Russia, and France. In the third, the conflict spread across Western Europe as Germany invaded Luxemburg and Belgium, and Britain intervened. The sixth Great Power, Italy, remained neutral.”²²

The Great War which began with the assassinations on 28 June of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, at Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip. Franz Ferdinand was heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. It is in what Kerr Gordon described as, “they fell victim to what would now be called state-sponsored killing which essentially was the triggering event of the First World War, a conflict which

²¹ SFE-The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, *World War One* (January 8, 2016) http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/world_war_one

²² Stevenson David, *World War One: Origin and Outbreak*. British Library Newsletter, <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/origins-and-outbreak>

swept away all preconceived notions about the nature of so-called modern warfare.’²³

Scholarships account that the war was obvious, widening its power and might to Germany, Russia, and France. Austria-Hungary's leaders ruled a multi-national empire. They felt that Serbian-backed separatism threatened its survival. Already by 1913 they had decided that only force could solve the problem. But they knew a war against Serbia was almost certain to escalate, and before sending the ultimatum they consulted their ally, Germany, whose leaders urged Austria-Hungary to use force and promised backing if Russia intervened. The Germans' motives have been thoroughly debated. From their perspective, Austria-Hungary was their one reliable Great-Power ally, and enemies surrounded them. France and Russia had allied in 1891-94, and since 1904 Britain had co-operated with them. Germany had conducted a battleship building race against Britain and an army race against France and Russia, and since 1905 the two blocs had clashed repeatedly over Morocco and the Balkans. The German leaders were readier to risk war because they believed the current military balance favored them but would soon deteriorate. But if Germany threw down a challenge, Russia was quick to respond. Once Austria-Hungary sent the ultimatum Russia began military preparations, and after war was declared on Serbia, Russia ordered 'general mobilization' on 31 July, placing its forces on a war footing. Russia's leaders were willing to accept a European conflict rather than abandon Serbia, partly because of Slav solidarity but more to protect their own interests in the Balkans and because they saw Germany

²³ Kerr Gordon, *A short History of the First World War: Land, Sea & Air, 1914-1918*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials 2014 P.11

as a danger. They had recently strengthened their army, and they correctly expected France to support them.

Furthermore, another phase of the war is “the invasion of Luxemburg and Belgium by Germany.”²⁴ It was further stated that this invasion led to the intervention of Britain who declared war on Germany. The fallout started when Germany and France were at odds since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, after which Germany had annexed the French provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. The French remembered the loss, although they would not have started a war over it. Germany’s strategy for a war against France and Russia envisaged first defeating France quickly, outflanking France’s border fortresses by invading through Luxemburg and Belgium. Once Russia mobilized, which the Germans feared would undermine their war plan, the Germans declared war on both Russia and France (1st and 3rd August), and demanded that Belgium allow them to cross its territory. Britain, Germany, and France had all committed themselves to respect Belgian independence with the 1839 Treaty of London, and the issue of intervention swung the doubters in the British Cabinet. Then, when Germany failed to comply with a demand to respect Belgium according to 1839 London Treaty, on 4th August Britain declared war on Germany.

However, providing a concise history of the Great War is not an easy task. A war does not break out without causes. Events leading to a declaration of war can remain dormant for decades until a specific event triggers the war, like in the case

²⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (12th ed. 1922) comprises the 11th edition plus three new volumes 30-31-32 that cover events since 1911 with very thorough coverage of the war as well as every country and colony

of the First World War when the killing of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie sparked the conflict.

There have been hundreds of books written about this Great War. Each of them contains and gives adequate reference to the earlier volumes. Most of them contain histories and military development in Europe and beyond.

Finally, the factors that could lead to the First World War according to Kerr Gordon are “alliances to defeat perceived enemies, imperialism, nationalist interest, economic reasons, political dominance and influence, territorial crisis and continued conflicts among countries.”²⁵ It is also believed that the end of the whole scenario, roughly 10 million soldiers lost their lives in World War I, along with seven million civilians. The horror of the war and its aftermath altered the world for decades, and poets responded to these brutalities and losses in new ways in all their writings.

²⁵ Kerr Gordon, 2014:13

THE POETRY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The reality of the Great War came into English poetry. After the spate of patriotic verse at the beginning of the war, Eden R. Martin highlighted that “poetry ranging from the crude drum-beat of the journalistic poets to the meditations on the English countryside of Georgians, there gradually appeared indications of a more realistic attitude.”²⁶ Wilfred Wilson was quoted by Eden R. Martin in, *Collecting Isaac Rosenberg Journal of the Caxton Club* that “{... }between 1916-1917 in the volume of Georgian Poetry there appeared three war poems which gave rise to a strand of war poetry”²⁷.

Literature and poetry is a reflection of society. The words are reflected in various ways with some attached feelings that we can almost touch and felt deeply. Many poets expressed these feelings, perceptions and their emotions through poetic rendition. Fortunately; during this time, poetry explored one of these worst things human actions can do to one another. The action of legalized murder called ‘war’. Hence, this type of self-reflection called ‘poetry’ helped to create a new fundamental ideas and values toward our society in the modern period.

Poetry is one of the genres of literature, that involves a composition written in verse form. Poetry did not begin on paper; rather it started as an oral tradition, which is the ancient mode of expression. It is assumed that poetry started before classical

²⁶ Eden R. Martin, *Collecting Isaac Rosenberg Journal of the Caxton Club* Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

²⁷ Eden R. Martin, Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

times around 1000BC and it is believed that poets were the first to make use of written words.

Poetry from the middle English “poetrie” from old French and medieval Latin “poetria” which means metrical writing, the production of a poet, poem. From the Greek “poiesis” literally means fabrication, making. The act of writing, making in metrical form started with Homer and Hesiod. According to Anyanwu Sixtus, “Homer and Hesiod were among the earliest poets that lived around 800-850 B.C. The longest survival of an old English poem is to be found in “*Beowulf*”. After “*Beowulf*”, other poems and poets emerged.”²⁸ It was after these oral traditions that Poets started exploring their cultural heritage, their society, man and his experience.

Poetry is different from other genres of literature because it squeezes meaning into a small number of words and lines, uses the convention of meter, sound, rhythm and rhyme to achieve its poetic effect. This metrical rendition is written in a group of lines called stanza. Most poets present their poems in narrative form, dramatic form, satirical form descriptive form, and didactic, erratic, celebratory and personal styles.

The language of poetry is suggestive through exaggeration and comparison “Poetry as literary expression explores events, imitates, criticizes, and satirizes life.”²⁹ Poets sometimes use poetry when they want to express personal feelings, emotions, and experiences in a brief rhythmic colorful way like the way soldier-poets expressed their battle field experience. This is why some modern poets believed

²⁸ Sixtus C. Anyanwu, *Metaphysics and Poetry: A study of Some Selected Poems of John Donne and Andrew Marvell*. August 2009, Page 5

²⁹ Ibid... 5

that poetic faculty is a mode of access to individual and collective unconscious experience. Poets like William Wordsworth saw poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings which has its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility.”³⁰ As an imaginative and emotional writing, Thomas Hardy puts it thus “emotion put into measure” He explains that emotion is natural while measure is acquired by the work of an art.”³¹ For Aristotle, “Poetry is a mode of imitation as in music and dancing, while Samuel Johnson says, it is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason.”³²

Poetry is achieved by the constant use of poetic techniques, such as simile, symbolism, metaphor and comparison. It also exists in these basic elements such as, figures of speech, sound, language forms and meanings. According to various periods of English literature, poetry has evolved into many forms, from traditional to modern. It is now at a stage where poetry could be defined according to the philosophies and events of the period and time. This is why a new form of conventional writing emerged in English Literature during the modern period. A period that saw changes in the general outlook of traditional ways of writing with new ways as contained in the imagist conventions.

As it was stated that the modern period in English Literature came with huge changes in poetry, criticism and writings. Poets like Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg among others were powerful poetic voices, though their careers ended with an untimely death during the First World War. The First World War became

³⁰ William Wordsworth saw poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings which has its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility.”

³¹ Thomas Hardy puts it thus “emotion put into measure” He explains that emotion is natural while measure is acquired by the work of an art.

³² For Aristotle, Poetry is a mode of imitation as in music and dancing, while Samuel Johnson says, it is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason

a product of the Modern period. One of the achievements of the modern period in the history of English literature is the birth of the First World War poetry.

The poetry of the First World War, according to Edmund Blunden, “{...} ‘war poetry’ or ‘war verse’, by contrast, starts gaining currency from 1917 and crests in popularity in the post-war years.”³³ Marion Scott, a friend and music teacher of Ivor Gurney noted that it is “‘enormous increase in poetic output’ related to the war, coming from geniuses. No matter how it was called, the conflict brought a change in fictional views of both war in general and future war in particular.”³⁴ Its unprecedented death toll made it clear that war could assume the proportions of such a man-made Disaster. Numerous poets and authors found creative inspiration and captured the horror and squalor of World War One, a trauma that gave birth to ‘realist’ as one of the modes of literature to represent its extremity as a human experience.

More than eighty authors responded to the challenge of war; each of them wrote their experiences using different genres of literature to include fictional and non-fictional works, essays and criticisms. All of them depicted the war, and memories of the Great War is always alive each time it is mentioned. From the poems written in the trenches which include elegies for the dead and mouthless soldiers, these poems commemorated the Great War.

More so, it was identified that “‘in the poetry of the First World War, Imagist poetry was dominating the scene, and sweeping previous aesthetic points of view under

³³ *Contemporary British War Poetry (1917)* in Santanu Das (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2013, pp5.

³⁴ ‘Preface’ in Jon Stallworthy ed. *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), pp192.

the rug.”³⁵ The Imagists among them is Ezra Pound who led the group sought to boil language down to its absolute essence. They wanted poetry to concentrate entirely upon “the thing itself,”³⁶ in the words of critic-poet T. E. Hulme who highlighted that, “to achieve that effect minimalist language was required, a lessening of structural rules and a kind of directness that Victorian and Romantic poetry seriously lacked. Imagist poetry was almost always short, unrhymed, and noticeably sparse in terms of adjectives and adverbs. At some points, the line between poetry and natural language became blurred.”³⁷ This was meant to drop all forms of verbose style of the Victorian era. Beauty and nature of the Victorian period left during the modern period. Subject-matters for poetry were now limitless, and poets took full advantage of this new freedom and everything happening in their immediate environment became subject of discourse. When the war broke out many writers, especially the poets used the opportunity to paint the true picture of war according to the new writing conventions of the modern period.

³⁵ “Word War 1 and English Poetry: Georgian Poetry, Imagism and War poetry” 2014. <http://wwi-andenglishpoetry.blogspot.it/>

³⁶ According to T. E. Hulme, the critic poet mentioned in Rahn’s article, poets began to focus on “the thing itself” rather than hiding from it or straying away from the idea.

<http://florahoa.wikispaces.com/file/view/Sample+IA+Modernism+in+Literature.pdf>

³⁷T. E

Hulme...<http://florahoa.wikispaces.com/file/view/Sample+IA+Modernism+in+Literature.pdf>

CHAPTER TWO

THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many writers have written extensively about the First World War without devoting much attention on the poet Isaac Rosenberg. This review of literature will focus on the comments addressed to Isaac Rosenberg, his poetry and First World War poetry.

Isaac Rosenberg may not be widely known as Wilfred Owen and others, but his poems speak volumes of him. As a beginner he encountered many challenges even his family background was challenging for him. When he began writing, he couldn't find an audience for his works but as a determined young man, he never gave up in his pursuit of writing. It was through the help of his friends that he got in touch with some publishing companies and editors that helped to publish some of his poems. According to a poetry collector R. Eden Martin, who profiled Rosenberg for *The Caxtonian*, a publication of Chicago's bibliophile society, Rosenberg tried sending his poetry to Ezra Pound, who initially dismissed him, but ultimately told Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry Magazine*,

“I think you may as well give this poor devil a show. Yeats called him to my attention last winter, but I have waited. I think you might do half a page review of his book, and that he is worth a page for verse.”³⁸

³⁸ Noakes Vivien (ed) *21st Century Oxford Authors: Isaac Rosenberg*. New York: Oxford University Press 2008, p 383

Pound added: “He has something in him, horribly rough but then ‘Stepney’ East...We ought to have a real burglar...”³⁹ His biographer had once described him as,

“a typical outpouring of a young mind, undisciplined, untrained, and highly imitative of the Romantic poets.”⁴⁰

John Rodker and John Amschewitz who were friends of Rosenberg’s recognized his talent as a writer during his early writing days. They encouraged the young zealous man to write poetry and helped to open up two world of literary possibilities as a writers and a painter/engraver. William Blake described him, “he was largely self-made, a fact which helps account in both for their fierce originality as well as occasional clumsiness.”⁴¹ Just like Frank Emmanuel who knew Rosenberg during his days of apprenticeship, remembered his circumstances had made him ‘very bitter and despondent’. Amschewitz added that “these poems were written under the most grinding which he [Isaac] still lives.”⁴² He further stated that:

“He will need all the friends he can get in the literary world, for his is a sad personality, but I think the rarest of all too, a true poet – very worthy to be fostered and encouraged.”⁴³

³⁹ Jean Moorcroft, Wilson. *Isaac Rosenberg: The making of a Great War Poet; A New Life* Illinois: Northwestern University Press 2008, 2

⁴⁰ Marjorie Ingall *The Forgotten Jewish Great War Poet Revived*, January 8, 2015 <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/188164/the-forgotten-jewish-great-war-poet-revived>

⁴¹ Jean Moorcroft, Wilson. 2008, 3

⁴² Eden R. Martin, Club Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

⁴³ Ibid..., Club Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

Among the greatest poets, Sassoon like most of his fellow war poets drew largely on the Christian and classical mythology, Rosenberg's different cultural heritage distinguishes his work in a number of ways from other poets. Sassoon himself claimed that, "A racial quality, biblical and prophetic, scriptural and sculptural..."⁴⁴ As early in 1932, the great iconoclast F.R. Leavis suggests that, though "Wilfred Owen was really a remarkable poet, and his verse...technically interesting", Rosenberg was 'equally remarkable, and even more interesting technically'⁴⁵. In his conclusion, he saw Rosenberg as "a 'conscious pioneer' of modernism."⁴⁶ R. Eden Martin is of an idea that,

"When we think of the World War I poets, the names that most readily come to mind might be Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, and Siegfried Sassoon – maybe Edward Thomas or Ivor Gurney. The name Isaac Rosenberg is not as familiar to most readers. Yet he was perhaps the best of them all."⁴⁷

In the same way, Laurence Binyon, a poet as well as a critic and an important literary figure, then working at the British Museum, was the first to take Isaac Rosenberg seriously for which he deserves great credit, for being a painter as well as a poet. Rosenberg who once told Laurence Binyon, "...I spend most of my time

⁴⁴ Adrian Grafe & Jessica Stephen(ed) *Lines of Resistance: Essays on British Poetry from Thomas Hardy to Linton Kwesi John*. USA: McFarland & Company Inc, 2012, p80

⁴⁵ Leavis F.R *New Bearing in English Poetry*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2015, p101

⁴⁶ Leavis F.R..., 2015, p101

⁴⁷ Editorial comments of Santanu Das and Kate McLoughlin(ed) *The War Poetry Review is the journal of the War Poets Association, Oxford:2014-2015*, p5

drawing. I find writing interferes with drawing a good deal, and is far more exhausting.”⁴⁸ He further stated that “Art is not a plaything, it is blood and tears, it must grow up with one; and I believe I have begun too late.”⁴⁹ Binyon who wrote a memoir of his first meeting with Isaac in 1912 which was published in Rosenberg’s first major collection of poems in 1922 after the War. In his memoir, Binyon described Isaac this way thus;

“Small in stature, dark, bright-eyed, thoroughly Jewish in type...a boy with an unusual mixture of self-reliance and modesty.... One found in talk how strangely little of second-hand (in one of his age) there was in his opinions, how fresh a mind he brought to what he saw and read.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, it was noted that from the beginning of his service, Rosenberg made it clear he intended to use his experiences as inspiration for his work. Turning away from the regular verse style he had already tried, he now adopted a wilder, more dynamic form to reflect the urgency of this moment. Then Edwin Muir reported Rosenberg’s responsiveness and his use of language in this way,

“as only the great poets have used it; as if he were not merely making it serve his own ends; but ends of its own as well, of which it had not known’ almost as though language were paint”.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Isaac Rosenberg letter to Lawrence Binyon, 1922. Delphi Poets Series, *Isaac Rosenberg: Complete works(1890-1918)*, UK: Delphi Classics, 2015.

⁴⁹ Isaac Rosenberg letter to Lawrence Binyon, 1922.

⁵⁰ Vivien Noakes (ed) *21st Century Oxford Authors: Isaac Rosenberg*. New York: Oxford University Press 2008, p230

⁵¹Jean Moorcroft, Wilson. *Isaac Rosenberg: The making of a Great War Poet; A New Life* Illinois: Northwestern University Press 2008, p10

His biographer, Jean Moorcroft Wilson added voice saying, “Rosenberg’s verse is at its best when, as here, his artistic vision is subsumed into his poetic one”.⁵² Carol Rumens highlights that,

“As a mere private soldier, he would be subject to the harshest and dismal conditions of any war poet. But he was determined nothing would stop his ‘poeting’”.⁵³

In describing the poetry of Isaac Rosenberg, Jon Stallworth identified that,

“Rosenberg's poems from the front show him to have absorbed the great tradition of English pastoral poetry, but his tone is different: more impersonal, informal, ironic, and lacking the indignation characteristic of the work of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.”⁵⁴

He further claimed that Rosenberg have succeeded in his intention of writing “Simple poetry - that is where an interesting complexity of thought is kept in tone and right value to the dominating idea so that it is understandable and still ungraspable...”⁵⁵ In response to his reputation and what people said about him, Rosenberg wrote to Marsh and others about his poetry as he puts it, “I’ve seen no

⁵² Jean Moorcroft, Wilson, 2008, 340

⁵³ Carol Rumens, In the Trenches. The Guardian, March 31, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2008/nov/10/in-the-trenches-isaac-rosenberg>

⁵⁴ Jon Stallworthy, wrote, “Rosenberg's poems from the front show him to have absorbed the great tradition of English pastoral poetry, but his tone is different: more impersonal, informal, ironic, and lacking the indignation characteristic of the work of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.” Poets.org From the Academy of American Poets. Academy of American Poets, n.d. Web. 1 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/287>>.

⁵⁵ Jean Moorcroft, Wilson, 2008, 306, p348.

poetry for ages now so you mustn't be too critical. My vocabulary small enough before is impoverished and bare"⁵⁶ By measuring his lines by the day, and finding his voice amidst of his destitutions, Isaac Rosenberg managed his time as he could.

Paul Fussell in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, expressed his judgment that Rosenberg's poem, *Dead Man's Dump*, was one of the best poems of the War. But he liked Rosenberg's *Break of Day in the Trenches* even more, calling it the "most sophisticated poem of the war" and also "the greatest poem of the war."⁵⁷ This is why Edwin Lutyen noted that "it is interesting to see how writers have attempted to make sense of Isaac Rosenberg."⁵⁸ While Bernard Bergonzi in, *Heroes' Twilight New 1980* called Rosenberg "undoubtedly one of the finest poets that the Great War produced"⁵⁹, and he added that, "Rosenberg's finest poem, and his most complete crystallization of war experience, is without doubt '*Dead Man's Dump*'"⁶⁰ According to A. Alvarez, he described the poem as "the greatest poem by an Englishman to have been produced by the War, and I am inclined to agree."⁶¹

T.S. Eliot (1953) quoted in Jean Moorcroft Wilson's *Isaac Rosenberg: The making of a Great War Poet; A New Life*, believed that Rosenberg was the,

⁵⁶ Jean Moorcroft, Wilson, 2008, 395: An apology Rosenberg sent to Marsh on the 28th March

⁵⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. London: Oxford University Press 1975, p 250

⁵⁸ Edwin Lutyen, 'it is interesting to see how writers have attempted to make sense of Isaac Rosenberg.' Commentary from Marius Bewley, *The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg: "Sudden the Lightning Flashed Upon a Figure. . ."* JAN. 1, 1949 <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-poetry-of-isaac-rosenbergsudden-the-lightning-flashed-upon-a-figure/>

⁵⁹ Bergonzi Bernard, *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the literature of the Great War*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980, p109

⁶⁰ Ibid..., 1980, p109

⁶¹ Bergonzi Bernard, 1980, p116.

“most remarkable of the British poets killed in the first world war, considered that his work does not only owe its distinction to its being Hebraic: but because it is Hebraic, it is a contribution to English Literature.”⁶²

The fact that Rosenberg had been exposed to an English education and would eventually read widely among the English poets only added to his interest as his work displayed ‘a fruitful fusion between English and Hebrew culture.’⁶³ This is the reason why many see Rosenberg’s poetry as “closely related to his Jewishness and a variety of poetic traditions and registers.”⁶⁴

In the first published edition of Isaac Rosenberg’s collected works, Siegfried Sassoon described the qualities he believed that separated Rosenberg from other war poets of the era as:

“his experiments were strenuous for impassioned expressions; his imagination had a sinewy and muscular aliveness; often he saw things in terms of sculpture, but he did not carve or chisel; he modelled words with fierce energy and aspiration, finding ecstasy in form, dreaming in grandeurs of superb light and deep shadow his poetic visions are mostly in somber colors and looming sculptural masses, molten and amply wrought”⁶⁵

⁶² Jean Moorcroft Wilson’s 2008, p3

⁶³ Ibid...p3

⁶⁴ Preface to Das, Santanu (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2013, xxii

⁶⁵ Bergonzi Bernard, 1980, p110

According to Charlotte Barrett who added a comment in her work *The Art of Mourning in First World War Poetry* says that

“Sassoon identified an artistic dimension in Rosenberg's work which draws upon aspects of sculpture and painting to essentially carve from language of distinctive images of painting and Jewish culture. These themes are prominent throughout Rosenberg's work, exemplified via his 'painting' of distinct images through the use of pictorial tropes, the infusion of Biblical themes, and his preoccupation with the human rather than the nature as he said things the way it happened. The human subject appears as the main differentiation between his presentation of mourning and the pastoral lamentation found in Edward Thomas' poetry.”⁶⁶

However, when Rosenberg was enlisted in the army without a special zest, in his own words he said, “I never joined the army from patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war.”⁶⁷ He further concluded it thus, “I suppose we must all fight to get the trouble over.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ CharlotteBarrett, *The Art of Mourning in First World War Poetry* | *Great Writers Inspire*
In the first published edition of Isaac Rosenberg's collected works, Siegfried Sassoon described the qualities he believed separated Rosenberg from other war poets of the era:
... Sassoon identifies an artistic dimension to Rosenberg's work which draws...
<http://writersinspire.org/content/art-mourning-first-world-war-poetry>.Thursday, March 31, 2016.

⁶⁷ Das, Santanu, 2013, p107

⁶⁸ Vivien Noakes (ed) *21st Century Oxford Authors: Isaac Rosenberg*. New York: Oxford University Press 2008, p288

The war did not make him stop him from writing. Rosenberg himself said he have been able to work within the time frame in the following words, “I must measure my letter by the light”⁶⁹. Rosenberg remained resolute to his poetry writing. He kept exploring the war as the fighting continued. He resolved to subject the experiences of the War to a kind of symbolic transfiguration. In a letter he addressed to Laurence Binyon which he wrote in the Autumn of 1916,

“I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting; that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right, I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on.”⁷⁰

During his free time, he kept Writing and sending them to his friends who published them. The poems he sent home from the barracks, trenches and infirmaries according to Steven Connor are, poems centering on faces, hands, feet, ears, skin and teeth, that testify more and more to the clownish innocence of the body, and the equally fragile body of the language that clings about it. When Rosenberg wrote his verse play called *Moses*, the play suffered criticism from many writers and from a publishing company as portraying anti-Christian views. In his thematic analysis, Professor Cohen thought is *Moses* was Rosenberg’s “culminating poem on the theme of his rejection of God.”⁷¹ And he verse-play, Cohen described it as “composed amid the throes of a dying civilization, tyrannically oppressed by a

⁶⁹ Vivien Noakes, 2008, p364

⁷⁰ Vivien Noakes, 2008, xv

⁷¹ Eden R. Martin, *Collecting Isaac Rosenberg* Journal of the Caxton Club Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

harsh spiteful omnipotence.”⁷² Although Eddie Marsh did not understand or appreciate Rosenberg’s work generally, he liked some of the lines of “Moses” well enough to include them in his anthology of *Georgian Poetry, 1916-17*. It was the only passage of Rosenberg’s writing he ever included in any of his five anthologies. Scholarship revealed that Ralph Waldo Emerson showed unwillingness to include any of Walt Whitman’s verse in his own anthology for reasons known to him. Perhaps because of huge criticism in the verse-play *Moses*, some critics suggested that Rosenberg aspired to embody Jewish themes or in some sense represent Judaism in his work. Ian Parsons, the editor of the 1979 *Collected Works*, offered a persuasive response when he pointed out that,

“Rosenberg never learned Hebrew and had only small interest in Judaism as such...” he continued, “No, his vision was cosmic rather than sectarian, personal and unique rather than specifically Jewish”⁷³.

While in France at an army desk job, he received an extravagant letter from his friend Gordon Bottomley, praising the verse-play from the following lines:

“There is no doubt there was never a more real poet in the world than you are; to have such a gift as yours is a great responsibility.... I cannot tell you the deep pleasure in which I read *Moses*. It is a prodigious advance... It has the large fine movement, the ample sweep which is the first requisite of great poetry...”⁷⁴

⁷² Eden R. Martin, No 12, Dec., 2009

⁷³ Eden R. Martin, 12, Dec., 2009

⁷⁴ Ibid...12, Dec., 2009

Harriet Monroe who published Isaac's *Break of Day in the Trenches* and *Marching* in (1916 in Poetry Magazine Chicago) observed the following about the *Break of Day in the Trenches*, thus: "*Break of Day...*'is Rosenberg's most widely anthologized poem. If you have read anything of Rosenberg's, it is probably this poem. It is not long."⁷⁵

In 1917, Rosenberg sent a poem, *Dead Man's Dump*, to his friend Bottomley to be published. Isaac added a note to Bottomley, "I think it commonplace"⁷⁶. But Cohen characterized it as "one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century literature. It is too long to reproduce in its entirety"⁷⁷ The Poetry Foundation said that Rosenberg "found a truly distinctive voice, one particularly indebted to the Old Testament and his sidelined Jewish identity."⁷⁸ Three of his poems appeared in the *Above the Dreamless Dead. Break of Day in the Trenches* which Paul Fussell described as "the greatest poem of the war" and *Dead Man's Dump* that was seen by Geoff Akers as "the greatest and most profound war poem ever written"⁷⁹ While discussing the letters in his poems, William Plomer who was quoted by Jean Moorcroft believed that "the Jewish strain" was "more seen in him"⁸⁰ And concluded it thus;

⁷⁵Robert Magella, *Rupert Brooke and Isaac Rosenberg: Myth, Modernity, and the Destabilization of "Georgian War Poetry"* An International Journal of the Humanities, 2014, 15

⁷⁶ Vivien Noakes, 2008,p389

⁷⁷ Eden R. Martin, Club Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

⁷⁸ Marjorie Ingall *The Forgotten Jewish Great War Poet Revived*, January 8, 2015 <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/188164/the-forgotten-jewish-great-war-poet-revived>

⁷⁹ Marjorie Ingall, January 8, 2015

⁸⁰ Jean Moorcroft, Wilson. 2008,3

‘Especially Rosenberg choice of themes and color, his sensuousness and eroticism, provided a particular richness and warmth not to be matched among his contemporaries’.⁸¹

Rosenberg claimed that his Jewishness gave him and his fellow artists “that which nothing else could have given”⁸². In his review, he noted,

“I have given life a more poignant and intense interpretation, while the strength of the desire of age has fashioned an ideal which colors all our expressions”⁸³

Having a view of his fate, Rosenberg saw no advantage in his situation despite his poor background. The muse of writing pushed him forward even he wrote from the trench. Frank Emmanuel a painter who knew him during his apprenticeship remembered how “very bitter and despondent” his circumstances had made him.”⁸⁴ According to Harding who edited the second collection of Rosenberg’s work in 1937, believed that the complexities in the poetry of Rosenberg arose from the fact that,

“he brought language to bear on the incipient thought at an earlier stage of development. Instead of the emerging idea being racked slightly so as to fit a more familiar approximation of itself, and words found, he manipulated words almost from the beginning, often without insisting on the control of logic and intelligibility”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Jean Moorcroft, Wilson. 2008,3

⁸² Ibid...3

⁸³ Ibid...3

⁸⁴ Ibid...53

⁸⁵ Ibid...10

This was probably what Rosenberg meant when he told Winifred Seaton that any apparent “‘blindness or carelessness’ in his work was ‘really a result of the brain succumbing to the Herculean attempt to enrich the world of ideas’”⁸⁶

On January, 1918, Isaac wrote to Marsh complaining of his poor health, the weather, and life in the trenches thus:

“‘What is happening to me now is more tragic than the ‘passion play.’ Christ never endured what I endure. It is breaking me completely.’”⁸⁷

On March the same year, as Isaac was writing another letter to Marsh, the Germans renewed their attack, overrunning the English line. Isaac wrote to Marsh:

“‘We are now in the trenches again and though I feel very sleepy, I just have a chance to answer your letter so I will while I may. It’s really my being lucky enough to bag an inch of candle that incites me to this pitch of punctual epistolary. I must measure my letter by the light...’”⁸⁸

On March 31, the Germans carried out an attack that claimed Rosenberg’s life. Because he could not be individually identified, he was buried in the British cemetery near Arras alongside with others. His name along with those of 15 other

⁸⁶ Ibid...10

⁸⁷ Ibid...387 Rosenberg wrote to Marsh in January,1918: What is happening to me now is more tragic than the ‘passion play.’ Christ never endured what I endure. It is breaking me completely.

⁸⁸ John H. Johnson, *English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Forms*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1964,p214

War Poets is engraved on a tablet in the Poets Corner of Westminster Abbey. On hearing the news of Isaac Rosenberg's death, Edith Sitwell in the *New Age* wrote:

“Rosenberg was one of the two great poets killed in the War, the other being Wilfred Owen.”⁸⁹

However, even in death, Rosenberg's poetic reputations kept widening to the populace. Frank J. Piehl noted Rosenberg's reputation thus,

“In the decades immediately following the Great War, Rosenberg was grouped with the War Poets. This was natural since he was a victim of the War, and many of his greatest poems were about the War experience. But only about 10 percent of his poems were in some sense “war poems.”⁹⁰

He further stated that,

“As his reputation has grown over the years and as people have had occasion to read the collections, they have realized that Rosenberg was much more than a War Poet.”⁹¹

He concluded with the following questions, where does Rosenberg fit in the great river of English poetry? With the Georgians? Or with the Modernists? In response, Philip Hobshaum explained that “Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry, have a prevailing “tradition or style” and at the end of the 19th Century it had been

⁸⁹ Bernard Bergonzi, 1980, p65

⁹⁰ Eden R. Martin, Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

⁹¹ Ibid...Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

Victorian. They Georgians preserved that tradition by “mummifying” it.⁹² Then Eliot, Pound and the rest of the Modernists came along and attacked the old tradition substituting it with what Philip Hobshaum described as “American literary revolution”⁹³ This is where he called them “Modernist flowering as an unattractive weed patch, for a couple of reasons.’ First, he thought it ignored Thomas Hardy, the ‘one great Victorian.’ Second, he thought that because the Georgians lacked the gifts to create a springboard to modern sensibility, Eliot and his followers ‘filled the gap’ with an alien product which included ‘some of the worst writing in English.”⁹⁴ Philip Hobshaum in his theory and analysis further explained that, the tragedy occurred because the Georgians had so little to offer. Readers were forced to choose between “a reactionary, moribund Victorianism, and a revolutionary American transplant.”⁹⁵ This would not have happened but for the War. “At least three poets died who, if they had survived, would surely have constituted a challenge to the prevailing standards in poetry.”⁹⁶ These three, according to Hobshaum, were Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg. Hobshaum placed Thomas at the pinnacle because of his “modern sensibility”, Owen, because of his technique and his “distinctively modern ambivalence” and Rosenberg, because of his innovations, his “sprung verse,” his use of myth, and his distillation of an “overmastering experience” into new forms. Owen’s work resembled Keats, he believed, but Rosenberg’s “mature poems

⁹² Ibid...Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

⁹³ Jenny Stringer,(ed)*The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-century Literature in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p308

⁹⁴ Jenny Stringer, 1996, p308

⁹⁵ Eden R. Martin, Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

⁹⁶ Ibid... Vol. xvii, No 12, Dec., 2009

resemble nothing but themselves.”⁹⁷ Hobsham concluded that if these three had lived,

“there would have been no question of having to choose between revolution and reaction...what is best in English poetry generally is what we find in the uncompleted work of these three poets... ‘Vigor within the discipline of shape, freedom won..., not through breaking down a form but through reshaping it.’” In the end, it matters little whether Rosenberg is regarded as the greatest war poet or whether he produced greater work than Wilfred Owen.⁹⁸

More so, June 1922, Isaac’s sister Annie advised Bottomley and Binyon to compile and to make a publication of the collected poems of Isaac Rosenberg. This they did and was published in an edition of a plain blue jacket book. The volume contained some of the extracts of his letters to Bottomley and Marsh. Although, some of his poems received few favorable notices.

Many critics who saw Rosenberg through his war poems, maintained that the war was only a subject for Rosenberg, or perhaps a challenge for which he was eminently suited. Maybe he forgot that, Rosenberg have many poems written before the outbreak of the Great War. In many ways, Rosenberg's vision of the human relationship with God depends on his Jewish heritage; it depends on the metaphors of the Old Testament, at least. Rosenberg’s Judaism is perhaps most

⁹⁷ Hobsham placed Thomas at the pinnacle because of his “modern sensibility”, Owen, because of his technique and his “distinctively modern ambivalence” and Rosenberg, because of his innovations, his “sprung verse,” his use of myth, and his distillation of an “overmastering experience” into new forms. Owen’s work resembled Keats, he believed, but Rosenberg’s “mature poems resemble nothing but themselves.”

⁹⁸ Merry Williams, *Wilfred Owen*. Bridgend: Seren, 1993, p71

apparent in his dramatic fragments, *Moses* and *The Unicorn*. David Daiches in *commentary 10 of July-December* stated,

“Had Rosenberg lived to develop further along the lines on which he had already moved, he might have changed the course of modern English poetry, producing side by side with the poetry of Eliot and his school a richer and more monumental kind of verse, opposing a new romantic poetry to the new metaphysical brand.”⁹⁹

However, there are some critics who intended to dismiss Rosenberg based on his brief literary career and his thin contribution to English letters urged differently. But in his final poems, Rosenberg offers something more than war poetry or Jewish English poetry as “the tragedy of war gave his affinities full expression in his later poems”¹⁰⁰ Staley concluded that “as war became the universe of his poetry, the power of his Jewish roots and the classical themes became the sources of his moral vision as well as his poetic achievement.”¹⁰¹ In reference to his use of language, D.W. Harding was quoted in Bernard Bergonzi’s, *Heroes’ Twilight: A Study of the literature of the Great War*,

“Rosenberg allowed his words to emerge from pressure of very wide context of feeling and only a very general direction of thought. The result is that he seems to leave every idea partly embedded in

⁹⁹ Harold Bloom(ed) *Comprehensive Research and Study Guide: poets of the World war 1, Wilfred Owen & Isaac Rosenberg*. Broomall PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002,p73

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, *Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918*, Poetry Foundation. April 2nd, 2016. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/isaac-rosenberg>

¹⁰¹ Anonymous, *Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918*, Poetry Foundation. April 2nd, 2016. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/isaac-rosenberg>

the undifferentiated mass of related ideas from which it has emerged.’’¹⁰²

¹⁰² Bernard Bergonzi...1980, p111

THE FIRST WORLD WAR POETRY

The First World War has accrued much criticism and commentaries since the end of the conflict. Here I will put down some if not all these opinions and I will make reference to them during the discussion of this research. The First World War was probably the occurrence that has had the most profound effect on people's views about the principles of war and patriotism. Before the War there was a glamorous, even attractive idea of war stemming from different conflicts in all Europe. Hence the massive amounts of voluntary enlistment during the first few months of the War with the introduction of dangerous weapons and sophisticated war technologies. According to Cara Alvarez "this was the first war that confronted all the European powers, and it became a war of deterioration in which trench warfare, heavy artillery and barbed wire played a major role".¹⁰³ She further quoted Stephen Martin thus;

"The First World War was the point at which that revolution came of age. Starting in Great Britain in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution began to turn society on its head. It pushed the British, then a predominantly rural population, into becoming urban dwellers. It revolutionized manufacturing, transport, communications, the production of wealth, and placed immense pressure on the country's whole power base. It helped to make an empire, and to sustain it when it had been made. Its impact on warfare was even more startling (...) Industry had replaced the

¹⁰³ Cara Álvarez, Diego, *THE IMAGERY OF LANDSCAPE IN THE ENGLISH POETRY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR*, Revista Semestral de Iniciación a la Investigación en Filología Vol. 4 (Marzo 2011) pp51–62.

slow, cumbersome and inaccurate muzzle-loading musket with the breech-loading rifle [...] One rung higher up the ladder of technological development was the machine-gun. Properly handled and positioned, a machine-gun could decimate a whole battalion [...] At the very foot of the ladder was simple barbed wire [...] Simple as it was, it presented an impenetrable barrier [...] Above all, the great weight of the civilian populations, male and female, was called on and used in addition to the large numbers of people in uniform, ensuring that this was indeed ‘total’ war. (Cara Alvarez, 2011, 54)¹⁰⁴

The traditional idea of war and death for each society and country was shattered during the Great War. It was seen that these abled men were sent out to be delivered to death. All forms of inhuman suffering were made available to reduce the most determined soldiers to a state of total distraction mentally, physically and otherwise. In his view, Richard Anthony stated that,

“No conflict has ever been so closely linked with the poetry and literature of its age than the First World War.”¹⁰⁵

According to Paul Fussell, a historian and a literary critic noted in *The Great War and Modern Memory* that “Dawn has never recovered from what the Great War did to it.”¹⁰⁶ He further argues that

¹⁰⁴ Cara Alvarez, Vol.4, Marzo, 2011

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Richards, *How First World War poetry painted a truer picture*, The Telegraph, 28 Feb 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/inside-first-world-war/part-seven/10667204/first-world-war-poetry-sassoon.html>

¹⁰⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. London: Oxford University Press 1975,p84

“World War I, with its unprecedented trench warfare and mass devastation across the European landscape, left a dark cloud hanging over the world. Despite the patriotism, optimism, and idealism held by the young men who eagerly fought for their respective country, World War I was fraught with widespread destruction and loss.”¹⁰⁷

According to James Campbell who contributed through writings about the war said that, the war which was fought on the water, land and air saw huge populace of people entered into it. He highlighted that,

“Modern war criticism began with the First World War because it was the first war which included among its combatants a significant number of educated writers with access to means of publication.”¹⁰⁸

Among the poets whose names were mentioned were synonymous with war poetry because their poems exploited the great war. Although, they considered themselves as poets before they became combatant officers. They are Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Rosenberg who wrote poetry which privileges direct combat experience and its ostensible purpose is to inform the ignorant civilian populace and mouthless people about the brutal realities it would prefer to ignore. The anthropologist Tim Kendall said that the First World War never “(...)has a conflict been so closely defined by the poetry that it inspired.”¹⁰⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that the substance of myth “does not lie in its style, its original music, or its

¹⁰⁷ Paul Fussell, 1975, pp84-85

¹⁰⁸ James Campbell, *New Literary History. Vol.30. No 1, Poetry & Poetics* (Winter 1999) pp. 203-215

¹⁰⁹ Kendall, Tim, *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, New York: Oxford University Press 1977, xxvii

syntax, but in the story which it tells’’¹¹⁰. Like many ideologies that followed each of the periods in the history of English Literature, the modern era has an ideology different from that of other periods. This ideology is not far from the new system of writing in which the modern period ushered in. Andrew Sanders described what happened in 1914 as ‘‘the outbreak of hostilities that brought an abrupt if temporary end to easy international exchange such as expensive and overtly Germanic public display in the opera house.’’¹¹¹

The war provoked what I called an international general strike, political instabilities, real despair with no hope of a return to the status quo. The violation of treaties of Versailles and compromised in the face of political circumstances that molded not simply by the disaster of war but also by the presumptions of the social and national revolution. D.H Lawrence while writing about the war said that

‘‘the spirit of the Old London collapsed in the winter of 1915-16; the city in some way perished, perished from being a heart of the world and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears and horrors’’¹¹².

¹¹⁰ Grenander, M.E., *Science, Scientism, and Literary Theory*, *Annals of Scholarship*, 2 (No. 3, 1981), pp65-84.

¹¹¹ Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1996, p507

¹¹² Peter Childs, *the Twentieth Century in Poetry: A Critical survey*, USA: Routledge, 1999, pp73

Fussell noted that, “humankind is experiencing how’s and to-what-ends in the work of Sassoon, Graves, Blunden, David Jones, Rosenberg and Owen.”¹¹³

However, Santanu Das stated that, “it is the poetry of the trenches, as represented by a small group of ‘anti-war’ soldier-poets that has come to dominate First World War memory”¹¹⁴ While David B. Pirie acknowledged thus:

“First world war poetry is merely used as a vehicle to express outrage about the long-drawn-out war and to depict with horror the anguish of the battlefield limits the works to being little more than protest poetry ad anti-war propaganda”¹¹⁵

Moreover, War poetry is relatively a new classification in the world of poetry. It conveys a number of different messages which include “being anti-war, the ideas of chivalry and glamour involved in the fight, and poems trying to recruit young men into the war which are all common, especially in WW1.”¹¹⁶ The emotion portrayed by the war were mostly depressive, somber and bitter. The main purpose of the poems is to convey the poets’ stance as against the war, for example Isaac Rosenberg was an avid anti-war activist, maybe because of the fact that he fought in WW1. A popular theme for poets in the last century was war. Many famous

¹¹³ Louisa Young, *Book Of A Lifetime: The Great War and Modern Memor*, INDEPENDENT, Friday 8 April 2011. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/book-of-a-lifetime-the-great-war-and-modern-memory-by-paul-fussell-2264683.html>

¹¹⁴ The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War, Santanu Das, *Reframing First World War Poetry: An Introduction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp3-4

¹¹⁵ David, B. Pirie, *How to write Critical Essays: A guide for students of Literature*. London: Taylor & Francis group 2002, pp71

¹¹⁶ *World War One Poetry*, 123HelpMe.com, 04/April/2016. <http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=137679>

poems written then was about the First World War. The subject matter of their poems is obviously generally the same. Most are about soldiers dying/dead because of war. As C.N. Trueman in his work *Poetry and World War One* said that, “there was no standard blueprint for a war poet even if the common perception is that they were all officers from a privileged background”¹¹⁷. This was clearly not the case. The War Poets came from a variety of backgrounds. The whole variety of backgrounds gave a clear idea that the impact of war in the trenches hit everyone who served there. I guess both those in the trenches and those outside the trenches. Everyone got their own portion of the war. Apart from writing with a high degree of accuracy about the life they lived, some put their thoughts into a diary that could be kept secret. Some of these diaries survived to this day. Others put their thoughts into poems. As many of these poems relied on interpretation as opposed to being clear facts, the poets bypassed any form of military censorship that certainly would have occurred if they had simply written out their thoughts as prose.

Steven Connor told us about the experience at the war front by poets who fought in and wrote during the First World War as “it served to tear apart the inherited forms and conventions of Romantic poetry, giving them access to a new harshness and documentary directness, though only rarely shaping them into wholly new poetic languages.”¹¹⁸ Rosenberg was forced into a new kind of poetry, perhaps the war that gave him a voice of conception of poetry which he had when he entered the War. He was determined that his life’s work was to be known through an epic conception and he spent the years before the War breaking bridges of impossibilities and unachievable poetic posture. He as well found his voice in the

¹¹⁷ C N Trueman *Poetry and World War One*, The History Learning Site.co.uk. The History Learning Site, 04 Apr 2016

¹¹⁸ Steven Connor, lecture series, October 30th 2000

face of the war. In fact, the poetry he discovered, or that was discovered in his situation was “poetry of snatching spasms and fragments of pouncing and falling short rather, which it took the savage tedium of war to force out”¹¹⁹. He became the voice of the voiceless.

Herbert Read, when writing in *The Criterion in 1930* sees “the poet who responded to the war in literature ‘the debris of its emotional conflict’ before he could begin to transform his experiences into literature”¹²⁰. There are many poets who used these ideas a lot in their poetry. This is to say that the war poetry was produced across Europe, by poets of diverse nationalities. Edwin Lutyen, who visited the battle field in North-eastern France in July 1917 to investigate the need for permanent memorials for the vast number of British and Empire casualties, described in a tone of horrified amazement the strange interaction of man and nature he had witnessed. While contemplating on the war, he described it as “what humanity can endure and suffer; it is beyond belief(...)the wasteful devastation of the war”¹²¹.

However, the First World War was seen as one of the events of the Modern period, Eric Hobsbawm, saw the Great War in the modern era in his book as “as an age of extremes”¹²² he referred the period up to (1945) being an “age of

¹¹⁹ Steven Connor, School of English and Humanities, Lecture series, October 30th 2000

¹²⁰ Herbert Read, A Novelist in *The Criterion in 1930* sees “the poet who responded to the war in literature ‘the debris of its emotional conflict’ before he could begin to transform his experiences into literature”

¹²¹D.L. Jones, *WAR POETRY: an anthology*. Edited with introduction and commentaries. UK: Pergamon Press. [1968]. xii, 142 pp.

¹²²Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A twentieth-Century Life*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2002, pp xiii

catastrophe’’¹²³ As Henry James saw it as ‘the most heinous crime ever perpetrated against the mind of man’. The immediate legacy of the Great War was one of the most fragmentation and insecurity among peoples and nations. The war cast its ugly shadow on each society and these societies invented rituals of memory and mourning each time they pass homage to the war.

As Santanu Das highlighted that ‘‘the poetry of the soldier-poets has been amalgamated beyond literary history and cultural memory, into a recognizable structure of feeling. Herein is an undeniable part of its power and some of the larger critical problems(...) the scope of First World War poetry is much wider than that of the trench lyric, that is, there were substantial and distinguished body of war poetry by male civilian poets, including Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling and D.H. Lawrence, as well as by women-poets such as Charlotte Mew, Mary Borden, Vera Brittain, Rose Macaulay and Margaret Postgate Cole.’’¹²⁴

David B. Pirie is of the idea that,

‘‘First world war poetry is merely used as a vehicle to express outrage about the long-drawn-out war and to depict with horror the anguish of the battlefield limits the works to being little more than protest poetry and anti-war propaganda.’’¹²⁵

¹²³ Eric Hobsbawm, 2002, pp15, 47

¹²⁴ Das Santanu, *World war One: Reframing World War One Poetry*, The British Library, Extracted from the introductory chapter ‘Reframing First World War Poetry’ in Santanu Das ed. *The Cambridge Companion to First World War Poetry* (2013) - See more at: <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/reframing-first-world-war-poetry#sthash.uc7MBuTK.dpuf>

¹²⁵ David, B. Pirie, 2002, p71

While John Singer agreed with Dan Santanu said in his article when he argued that,

“First World War poetry knows no habitation or rest. Mixing cultural memory with linguistic desire, First World War poetry has ranged far beyond the covers of the book. It appears on postcards, posters and in politicians’ speeches, in memorials and epitaphs, and has inspired every art form”¹²⁶

Santanu Das further posited that

“the poetry of the First World War have certain linguistic style which is often regarded or have a peculiarly ‘English flavor’, but many of the soldier-poets had a conflictual relation to ‘Englishness’: Sorley was Anglo-Scottish, Rosenberg and Sassoon (on his father’s side) were Jewish, Ledwidge was Irish, while Owen, Jones and Thomas could trace their recent family history to Wales.”¹²⁷

According to James Campbell in his Mainstream criticism stated that “the First World War poetry has been primarily biographical in approach. Such an approach has tended to result in a criticism that implicitly (or occasionally explicitly) argues for its subject.”¹²⁸ Supporting his argument on the poetry of the first world war, Campbell further opined, “the war poetry criticism has not so much read its subject in a critical manner as it has presented various apologies for its subject; that subject

¹²⁶ Dan Santanu, *The Cambridge Companion to First World War Poetry* (2013) - See more at: <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/reframing-first-world-war-poetry#sthash.uc7MBuTK.dpuf>

¹²⁷ Dan Santanu, 2013, <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/reframing-first-world-war-poetry#sthash.uc7MBuTK.dpuf>

¹²⁸ LITERATURE ONLINE, Campbell, James.: *Combat Gnosticism: the ideology of First World War poetry criticism*. *New Literary History: a journal of theory and interpretation* (30:1) [Winter 1999], p.203-215.

being both the war poem and the war poet. Like Sassoon and Owen going back to the trenches to make an effective protest on the behalf of their men, war poetry critics have protested in their poems the sufferings of *their* subjects, Rosenberg, Sassoon and Owen themselves.’’¹²⁹ Since after the publication of Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* in 1965, most critics have argued for the acceptance of war poetry on its own terms. Whether it should be seen as a poetry of pity, or a political poetry. This is what war poetry criticism has offered mankind. In my arguments, I pull my weight behind what most of the trench lyric critics have stressed about those soldier-poets who are witnessed to the Great war. These are the men whose biographies remain important because there and capable of providing us with all the Truth of War. James Campbell in his criticisms concluded that ‘‘the Mainstream war poetry critics have thus absorbed rather than critiqued the ideology of their subject, and they continue to replicate this ideology to the exclusion of other voices.’’¹³⁰ This is why Gordon Bottomley wrote to Harding about reviews of the *Completed works of Isaac Rosenberg 1937* stated,

‘‘no one makes the point that used to strike me most, that Rosenberg was of a first generation to use our tongue, and had no atavistic or subconscious background with regard to it and this must have conditioned his freshness of usage.’’¹³¹

Then, Jean Moorcroft Wilson in his book, *Isaac Rosenberg: The making of a Great War Poet; A New Life*, quoted Edwin Muir saying

‘‘Rosenberg uses language ‘as only great poets have used it; as if he were not merely making it serve his own ends; but ends of its own

¹²⁹ Campbell, James, In *New Literary History: a journal of theory and interpretation* (30:1) [Winter 1999], pp.203-215.

¹³⁰ Ibid.... pp203-215

¹³¹ Jean Moorcroft, 2008, p11

as well, of which it had not known' almost as though language were
paint.''¹³²

¹³² Ibid...2008, p10

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS

Flore Costenoble 2003 in *The Great War Poets Entrenched: A thematic and stylistic approach of the poetry of Edmund Blunden, Leslie Coulson, Julian Grenfell, Robert Graves, Ivor Gurney, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Charles Sorley and Siegfried Sassoon* said that *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* contained two hundred and fifty poems of sixty eight poets is capable of moving the readers “through the war's different stages from conscription through to its aftermath”¹³³ She further said that “it is an anthology which aims to cover all aspects of the Great War, with all the major poets writing in English, irrespective of their age and sex, it might on a rough estimate represent the work of two hundred poets.”¹³⁴ Among all the poets who were considered First World War poets, I chose to analyze the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg. His war poems that were written between 1914 and 1918. Four of his poems selected for this research will be discussed and analyzed. The background study for these poems will help us to identify some notable poetic devices, the structure, the tone/mood and the use of language in all of them. These poems are: *On receiving News of the War, August 1914, Break of Day in the Trenches, Dead Man's Dump*

¹³³ Flore Costenoble, *The Great War Poets Entrenched: A thematic and stylistic approach of the poetry of Edmund Blunden, Leslie Coulson, Julian Grenfell, Robert Graves, Ivor Gurney, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Charles Sorley and Siegfried Sassoon*, 2003 **pp4**
http://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/002/060/421/RUG01-002060421_2013_0001_AC.pdf

¹³⁴ *Ibid...*pp4

On Receiving News of the War

Snow is a strange white word.
No ice or frost
Has asked of bud or bird
For Winter's cost.

Yet ice and frost and snow
From earth to sky
This Summer land doth know.
No man knows why.

In all men's hearts it is.
Some spirit old
Hath turned with malign kiss
Our lives to mould.

Red fangs have torn His face.
blood is shed.
He mourns from His lone place
His children dead.

O! ancient crimson curse!
Corrode, consume.
Give back this universe
Its pristine bloom.¹³⁵ (pp111)

BACKGROUND

The poem *On Receiving News of the War* is one of the poems written from Cape Town, South Africa, in August 24th, 1914 as a response to the outbreak of the First World War.¹³⁶ This poem describes Rosenberg's reaction to the outbreak of the

¹³⁵ Bernard Bergonzi, 1980, p111

¹³⁶ Jon Stallworth & Jane Potter, 2011, p138

First World War, conveying the poet's sense of anxiety and bitterness at the thought of the horrors ahead through series of symbols of life, death and rebirth. The poem begins with a comparison between the arrival of winter in Europe and the beginning of the war, thus:

*Snow is a strange white word.
No ice or frost
Has asked of bud or bird
For Winter's cost*

The argument in the poem boils down to the inevitability of death which is seen as the theme in both scenarios.

*O! ancient crimson curse!
Corrode, consume.
Give back this universe
Its pristine bloom.*

The conclusion of the poem invokes an emotional weight to Rosenberg's appeal to this cry of pain as presented in the title. The beginning of the poem has to do with Rosenberg receiving news of the beginning of the war.

TONE AND MOOD

The poem takes its tone from the symbolic style used to express the ideas of loss and renewal. The poem shows a much less conventional and more genuine response. He writes in the fourth stanza thus, '*... blood is shed/ He mourns from His lone place/ His children dead*'. This entails that there is no heroism but only divine pity.

STRUCTURE OF THE POEM

A well organized, precise and regularly constructed poem of 20 lines with a total of 5 stanzas in quatrains. Each of the stanzas is written in interlocked rhymes of ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GHGH, and IJJJ.

In his comparison to the season in Europe and the time when the war broke out, Rosenberg structured his poem as to capture the reality of war and the destruction that followed. It also takes an anti-war stance in contrast to much of the initial patriotic poetry produced during the early months of the war.

MEANING AND LANGUAGE

The poem opens with a comparison between the period in Europe and the time the war broke out. As the war was declared in full summer in Europe, Rosenberg's first verse is a comparison of metaphorical 'winter' in Europe and that in Cape Town. As we know that winter of course, heralds' death, just as war does. There was a feeling of inevitability both in war as in death.

There is a simple use of images to create mental pictures in the comparisons. The evidence is seen in the second verse. Thus: *'Yet ice and frost and snow / From earth to sky / This Summer land doth know,*' Rosenberg describes the arrival of the news of war as the arrival of "ice", "frost" and "snow". In choosing to describe the arrival of the news of the war like this, he lets mysterious *things* stand in for and symbolize events, rather than describing the situation at length. The deliberately simple description gives the poem a feeling of being stripped down to essential images, a feature of Rosenberg's writing.

More so, there are other images in the poem like taking words from religion such as, '*Some spirit old*', '*malign kiss*', ... *blood is shed*. The way these images are used is shocking as one can assume that perhaps, God's blood is for those who will die in the war. Also '*He mourns from His lone place / His children dead*' is an image of God that is far away, which could explain how evil can exist in a world made by a good God. At the end, '*Give back this universe / Its pristine bloom*' creates a hope of renewal as Rosenberg has begun his poem with a wintry word, "snow": yet with this word "bloom", he ends with a hint of spring and possible renewal.

The use of alliterations in the first lines *Snow is a strange white word*; the phonemes /S/ and /W/ alliterate. Also other examples are, *bud or bird* /b/ and *crimson curse!* /Corrode, consume... /c/ /Some spirit/ /s/ and /s/

August 1914

What in our lives is burnt
In the fire of this?
The heart's dear granary?
The much we shall miss?

Three lives hath one life –
Iron, honey, gold.
The gold, the honey gone –
Left is the hard and cold.

Iron are our lives
Molten right through our youth.
A burnt space through ripe fields
A fair mouth's broken tooth.¹³⁷ (pp60)

BACKGROUND

This poem was almost certainly written in the “summer 1916 in France and was enclosed in an undated letter to Mrs. Herbert Cohen.”¹³⁸ The title refers to the first month of the war. It was written in a series of precise, symbolic images questioning what has been lost in war. The poet was enlisted in the war and was trained as a private soldier for the front line. This poem reflects on the beginning of the First World War, questioning the consequences and the destruction it has caused. The poem starts thus:

¹³⁷ Jon Stallworth & Jane Potter, 2011, pp60

¹³⁸ Ibid...p.143

*What in our lives is burnt
In the fire of this?
The heart's dear granary?
The much we shall miss?*

As a protest poem it expresses a condemnation of the effects of the war. The poet declared that a hard and cold age of fire, iron, and death was ushered in by the war. The “fire” of the second line may suggest bullets and the devastation done by the war.

*Iron are our lives
Molten right through our youth.
A burnt space through ripe fields
A fair mouth's broken tooth.*

The poem concluded on a difficult note, leaving his readers to ponder how the desires of the people were cut short. Their everyday necessities that involved in the fire; the fire of war, the decay brought by war and the violence everyone lives with.

STRUCTURE

This is typical for Rosenberg, a poem of precise images that carry symbols of broad interpretation. ‘August 1914’ offers these images and symbols in fragmentary style.

This is a poem of 3 stanzas of 12 lines, written on four equal lines, with rhyme scheme of ABCB, DEFE, and GHGH.

The poem seeks to express the feeling of universal loss generated by the war. The poetic voice is audible about the impending doom. It is the use of symbols carries the whole weight of this loss: *the vanished gold, the broken tooth, the burnt space.*

TONE/MOOD

The poem evokes pity by using words that attract emotions '*the heart's dear granary*' here the emotions are stored like grain after harvest but they have all been consumed by the war. The poet personified the war as it continued because it was capable of destroying, purifying, and molding. This is to say that war is a desire, it is life, and it is death.

LANGUAGE AND MEANING

There is use of symbolic meanings and figurative use of words mentioned in the poem, '*Iron, honey gold*', where "Honey" may suggest sweetness and softness while "gold" has associations with wealth and preciousness. It is the cold hardness of "iron" which remains in the world in 1914

The much we shall miss? This is an image of great ("much") personal loss. In this extract, we also have alliteration on the stressed syllable of these two words that signify plenty and its loss.

The use of metaphor '*The heart's dear granary*' comparing the heart to a granary seems to emphasize the emotional cost of the war.

Break of Day in the 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 man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe -
Just a little white with the dust.¹³⁹ (137-138)

BACKGROUND

One of the greatest poems that earned Rosenberg a place among the war poets is *Break of Day in the Trenches*. It was 'written in June, 1916.'¹⁴⁰ It is indeed one of

¹³⁹ Tim Kenedall, 1977, pp137-138

¹⁴⁰ Jon Stallworth & Jane Potter, 2011, p141

the great masterpieces of First World War poetry that expresses the momentary respite and everyday horror of the war without sentimentality.

It is considered being amongst the best of the First World War lyrics. A poem he sent to Eddie Marsh while in the trenches. The poem started with a dawn that is not limited to one particular morning in the trenches which suggests a perspective within which the whole catastrophe of warfare is taking place. Rosenberg told us about day-to-day experiences, to include the horrors of life in the trenches. The trench life was horrific; Noise, death, decay and destruction were all around. As a participant in the First World War and as a witness to the war too, he tells us real life experiences of life in the trenches. The poem starts;

*The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever,
only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat ...*

The persona in the *Break of Day in the Trenches* is a man who is at the war front, watching the darkness ‘*crumble*’ into dawn, a dangerous time for an attack on enemies in the trenches. The only sign of life in the trenches, besides our speaker, was the ‘*queer sardonic rat*’ that grazes his hand as he reaches for a poppy on the parapet. In the nightmare world of war according to the poet, it is only the rat who can afford ‘*cosmopolitan sympathies*’ that is, without fear of death the rat is moving freely and feeding well on both sides of no man’s land. The speaker addressed the rat bitterly:

*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,*

Here the speaker in the poem seems to be alone at dawn, however, in a thoughtful or whimsical frame of mind. He expresses sympathy for the soldiers who were always at the war front whose lives and carcasses are seen as mere things since a rat had a better hope to live than those soldiers in the trenches. He presents an outcry about soldiers who are abandoned to their fate and concludes:

*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.*

The poem ends with the soldiers leaving themselves behind as dust in their own footsteps, and seeing that they are all, as they have always been, already dead.

STRUCTURE

Break of Day in the Trenches is written in free verse poem, a trench poem that is not long but full of comparisons. A poem of 26 lines with strong feelings, almost, of sleepy slow-motion. There is no regular meter and no true end-of-line rhyme unless it is in the ghostly rasp of the most dubiously poetic words in the poem ‘...*what heart aghast?*’ as against the last flat line: ‘*Just a little white with the dust*’. Though there is some assonance and consonance, with words such as ‘*hand*’ and ‘*German*’; ‘*heavens*’ and ‘*veins*’. This lack of rhyme and meter gives the impression that the poet might write what he feels without restrictions.

A poem that gave insights about the sun that is not yet set to rise, but rather the darkness crumbles gently away. The vowel sounds in ‘*The same old Druid time*’

increased this effect. Nothing moves, except for a rat on the poet's hand that moves more freely than the soldiers.

TONE AND MOOD

The poet himself recounted horrible experiences of the soldiers in the trenches. Rosenberg simply described things as they are, he used images and words to demonstrate the melancholic fate of each soldier on the daily basis but keeps his poppy in ...*his ear, 'safe Just a little white with the dust'*. This is no sentimentality or lust for glorious death, but harsh realities combined with hope for those that will make it daily. The tone is quite resigned to his fate and the fate of his fellow soldiers on the potential death that awaits them. The mood is terrible as a rat stands a better chance to have free movement than all of them.

LANGUAGE AND MEANING

The poem is ironical, critical of the war and melancholy. The poem begins when the night is ending and like the earth at the top of the trench, '*crumbles away*'. This is a poem that constantly reminds us of the presence of earth and dust. As seen in the poem, the perspective of the rat who scurries close to the earth among the corpses, to the soldiers who are in constant close proximity to the dirt of the front in life as in death. The soldier poet reflects on the animal's presence on the front line.

*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.*

This is direct comparison between restricted human beings and the rat and the swapping of human and animal roles.

The irony in this poem lies in the image created by the poet when he says ‘...a *queer sardonic rat...*’, ‘...*Cosmopolitan rat*’ by which he realizes that this rat has more freedom of movement than any of the soldiers in the trenches. He also ponders on the truth of a mere rat having a better chance of life than any soldier, which sounds scornful.

The use of alliteration ...*parapet's poppy, fields of France*, /p/ and /f/ alliterate respectively.

The image of death such as “Poppies”, that could mean sleep and death. There are other symbols such as the poppy, plucked, will die, and the dust could also suggest an inevitable end of humankind. ‘*Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes*’ were images of broken bodies in the trenches, now broken in death. Their bodies lying in the dirt seem to figure the end of an ideal of heroic manhood.

The poet makes reference to religion when he mentions ‘...*old druid...*’ which could mean a sacrifice of the ancient British pagan religion.

There is use of an extended metaphor where France is used to create image of helplessness of the soldiers in the trench, ‘*Sprawled in the bowels of the earth, / The torn fields of France*’ this image was metaphorically used to describe the bodies of dead soldiers lying beneath the earth and how the country of France is being destroyed violently by the war.

There is also the use of a question mark in the poem. ‘*Hurled through still heavens?*’

What quaver - what heart aghast?’

Dead Man's Dump

The plunging limbers over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
To stay the flood of brutish men
Upon our brothers dear.

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched,
Their shut mouths made no moan,
They lie there huddled, friend and foeman,
Man born of man, and born of woman,
And shells go crying over them
From night till night and now.

Earth has waited for them
All the time of their growth
Fretting for their decay:
Now she has them at last!
In the strength of their strength
Suspended—stopped and held.

What fierce imaginings their dark souls lit?
Earth! have they gone into you?
Somewhere they must have gone,
And flung on your hard back
Is their souls' sack,
Emptied of God-ancestral essences.
Who hurled them out? Who hurled?

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half-used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,
When the swift iron burning bee
Drained the wild honey of their youth.

What of us, who flung on the shrieking pyre,
Walk, our usual thoughts untouched,

Our lucky limbs as on ichor fed,
Immortal seeming ever?
Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us,
A fear may choke in our veins
And the startled blood may stop.

The air is loud with death,
The dark air spurts with fire
The explosions ceaseless are.
Timelessly now, some minutes past,
These dead strode time with vigorous life,
Till the shrapnel called 'an end!'
But not to all. In bleeding pangs
Some borne on stretchers dreamed of home,
Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts.

A man's brains splattered on
A stretcher-bearer's face;
His shook shoulders slipped their load,
But when they bent to look again
The drowning soul was sunk too deep
For human tenderness.

They left this dead with the older dead,
Stretched at the cross roads.
Burnt black by strange decay,
Their sinister faces lie;
The lid over each eye,
The grass and coloured clay
More motion have than they,
Joined to the great sunk silences.

Here is one not long dead;
His dark hearing caught our far wheels,
And the choked soul stretched weak hands
To reach the living word the far wheels said,
The blood-dazed intelligence beating for light,
Crying through the suspense of the far torturing wheels
Swift for the end to break,

Or the wheels to break,
Cried as the tide of the world broke over his sight.

Will they come? Will they ever come?
Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,
The quivering-bellied mules,
And the rushing wheels all mixed
With his tortured upturned sight,
So we crashed round the bend,
We heard his weak scream,
We heard his very last sound,
And our wheels grazed his dead face. ¹⁴¹ (141-142)

THE BACKGROUN OF THE POEM

“This poem was written in May 14th 1917, immediately after the battle of the Somme (1916)”¹⁴² After the battle of Somme which claimed many destructions, so everyone’s views and attitudes towards war had changed. However, it is a very negative one. It started with a story line of a soldier going wiring, that is, setting up entanglements of barbed wire in No Man’s Land, he took limbers (carriages) full of wire across the battlefield. These carriages, pulled by mules, pass near the bodies of the dying and run over the bodies of the unburied dead. The poem portrayed the ugly and raw brutality of First World War at the soldiers on the war front. What they saw and how some of the soldiers ended in death. In details with all clarity and descriptive realism, the persona told us about his horrible battlefield experience in the poem. It started thus;

*The plunging limbers over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,*

¹⁴¹ Tim Kendedall, 1977, pp141-142.

¹⁴² Jon Stallworth & Jane Potter, 2011, p145

*Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
To stay the flood of brutish men
Upon our brothers dear.*

In *Dead Man's Dump* one sees a battle field that was destroyed by the war and the bodies of dead soldiers lying everywhere. The way the poet describes the gruesome detail of the dead troops, 'A man's brains splattered on a stretcher-bearers face;' we can see how destructive the war was. Rosenberg used spectacular imagery in this piece. The general picture that Rosenberg tries to get across to us is that of the bodies just lying around all over the ground. Carnage exists everywhere the reader can imagine.

In totality, the poem revealed bitter truths on the realities of the War. The soldiers' attitude towards the death of other soldiers as war and its horrors goes on, nonetheless with an unending hope to survive or not to survive.

The poem also portrayed total negligence and disrespect towards the soldiers at the war front who have given their lives for the sake of their country. Those who are nearly dead are treated as corpses anyway; no effort to help them or ease their pain, there is a total lack of respect for them, as they are seen as useless. The poem also reminds mankind that both sides of the war are equal in death, just as the bodies and corpses are seen as useless in the war front. No one is ready to mourn over or even identify with the dead. Here the plights of the seriously wounded soldiers are terrible as nobody is ready to help them. At the end of the very last stanza, one could see the agony and desperation of a dying man reaches its greatest height as he waits for a fellow human being to find him. It ended thus;

*...Will they come? Will they ever come?
Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,
The quivering-bellied mules,*

*And the rushing wheels all mixed
With his tortured upturned sight,
So we crashed round the bend,
We heard his weak scream,
We heard his very last sound,
And our wheels grazed his dead face*

The poem is filled with terrible pathos and irony as it ended with a total loss of hope and the death that ends all deaths. Rosenberg effectively organized the narrative of the poem so that a response of horror or shame is unavoidable. On the other hand, it seems that it is only by reconstructing and then reflecting on such a grim battlefield scene that the dehumanized battlefield can be made human once more. The *'Dead Man's Dump'* attempts to reclaim the thousands of anonymous deaths that took place in no-man's land back to the world of memory and the living, reclaiming them from the insensible wheels of war that turn throughout the poem.

STRUCTURE

This is a long poem written in 12 stanzas of about 79 lines. It is written in both Long and short lines; each varies from 5-9 lines according to their respective stanzas.

Each of these stanzas has a message that takes us deeper into the journey through war and some aspects of unexpected events. This can reflect the length of war and the length of pain.

With the use of free verse, there is no rhyme. Enjambment is used frequently in this poem, mainly towards the end of each stanza. This therefore allowed the poem to constantly change pace. This could be a reflection of the constant activities going on at the war front, and its fast pace kept the reader on edge, almost feel the tension as if he is involved.

There is no rhyme pattern however there are occasional rhyming couplets, e.g. *foeman* and *woman*.

THE MOOD AND TONE

The mood and tone in *Dead Man's Dump* is defined from the first stanza. The mood and tone rely on the frequent use of Onomatopoeia such as "*racketed*", "*splattered*" that bared the horrible effect of the war on the soldiers. Also the actual movement of the horses that pull the gun carriages over battle wounded men, "*plunging limbers over the shattered track*" creates a very negative tone and negative image in the mind of the readers and promotes an attitude against the war. There is also a religious allusion in the poem, "*crown of thorns*" which links us to the death of Christ where Christ was crowned with thorns. Also, '*man born out of man*' is another religious undertone used in the poem. All these invoke emotions and strong fear for war.

LANGUAGE AND MEANING

In the use of language, there are many poetic devices found which contribute to the meaning of the poem. In *Dead man's dump*, we saw the use of the following:

Lexical onomatopoeia which is used frequently throughout the poem; '*Shattered*', '*Racketed*', '*Crunched*', '*Spurts*', '*Splattered*', '*Crying*'. This allows us to really understand the experience and trauma the soldiers went through. The onomatopoeia really pierces us with all the emotions the soldiers could be feeling, and therefore allows us to have a real insight of the brutalities of war.

The use of oxymoron in the poem is to buttressed the idea that, *'Earth has waited for them'* that is, mother earth has waited for them, and she can now have them and take care of them. It could also be interpreted that she feels like she has them at last, though having waited for a long time. We can also infer that she (mother earth) knew they would die during this war and hopefully has them at last. Here, it could be possible that mother earth is seen as a beautiful thing or natural thing yet she wants men to die and to come to her. Also, *'Our lucky limbs as on ichor fed'*. The lucky limbs are the soldiers dealing with the bodies, they are lucky to be alive. *Ichor* is a white puss coming out of the wound which creates a negative image too. All of these features portray the ugly brutalities of war.

The use of imagery and symbols create mental pictures of what the battle field looked like. Throughout the poem the poet used very graphic, sometimes grueling imagery. The imagery *'they left this dead with the older dead.'* is quite horrifying. How the dead or corpses were treated is terrible as if they were animals or not even living things. Their bodies are chucked away with the rest of the dead, piled on top of each other. The poem ends with this graphic image. *'We heard his very last sound and our wheels grazed his dead face'*. This indicates that the soldiers collecting the bodies and dealing with them are emotionless. It appears to be an everyday thing to them that they have to get used to, because they are not seen as humans anymore.

Repetition is used throughout the poem such as *'We heard his weak scream, we heard his very last sound.'*

There is use of Alliteration to help the poem flow well. *'spirits' shadow shake the grass* /s/ alliterate, *'racketed with their rusty freight'* /r/ alliterate, *'stakes like sceptres'* /s/ alliterate *'Burnt black'* /b/ alliterate. These roll off the readers' tongue when reading, helping to create a visual image as occurs with pastoral imagery.

The use of Personification of the Earth, wanting to claim the men, '*now she has them at last*' this represents loneliness/emptiness of the dead soldiers, '*emptied of god-ancestral essences*'. In the description of the stretcher-bearer being covered in a man's brains, he is perceived as being emotionless, as there is nothing else he can do, he drops the body and leaves it with '*the older dead.*'

There are religious connotations such as '*crowns of thorns*', reflecting the crown of thorns that Jesus was made to wear during his crucifixion, '*Rusty stakes like sceptres old.*' The stake, representing possibly the cross that Jesus was crucified upon, or the religious edifice of the stake used to sacrifice unbelievers or heretics by fire. Others are '*Man born of man, and born of woman.*'

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Isaac Rosenberg: The war poet indeed

As Robert Graves pointed out in *The Poets of World War II*, “The war poet’ and ‘the war poetry’ where the term ‘First’ was used in World War One are perhaps peculiar to it.”¹⁴³ He further said that, “From the Anglo-Saxon time to the Boer war, war poetry in English was written mostly by the civilians who wrote usually after the war. Those civilian poets who wrote, did not have clear and well defined idea in the event that happened between 1914-1918 until there emerged soldier-poets in the First World War.”¹⁴⁴

In this research, my priority has been to write about the poet Isaac Rosenberg, the First World War and to reassess his poetry in order to get a factual picture of First World War Poetry. The process is to put the selected poems for my research into the literary context of the modern period in English Literature. Many materials, textbooks were consulted for the research. However, it is difficult to revise and to review everything about Rosenberg and his poetry but my attention is on the war poetry that made him popular in the Modern Period.

Isaac Rosenberg was a great painter and a poet before the outbreak of war. According to him, “I never joined the army from patriotic reasons. Nothing can

¹⁴³ Robert Graves, *'The Poets of World War II' (1942)* in *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p307

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid...* p307

justify war. I suppose we must all fight to get the trouble over(...)¹⁴⁵ He became an anti-war poet and his voice was heard during the war. His poetry explored in great detail these testimonies of the broken bodies, havoc and human destructions, bitter memories and the brutalities of war. I found out that he wrote poems and poured out his grievances and the grievances of other mouthless people who could not voice out their sentiments and their emotional melancholy. In-as-much as Poets have different ways of perception and writing, Rosenberg is more humane when compared with other soldier-poets and he tells his story as it comes, digging deep into reality. In Rosenberg's *On Receiving News of the War*, and Wilfred Owen's *The Ballard of Peace and War*, when compared, Isaac Rosenberg is more perceptive, and more real in painting the picture of the Great War. His attitude and writings is clear and encompassed every other possible response to the war. He was involved in the war, died in the war and earned himself a name among the war poet.

From the Literature review for my research, Isaac Rosenberg's poetry accrued many criticisms ranging from the things that influenced his writings, his social and poor educational background and the way he wrote. In general opinion, some critics said that his poems are historical stories of the Great War because he never lived to either re-write or review them after the war. On my part, I disagreed with this criticism because his poetry found its place in the literary histories of twentieth century poetry. Rosenberg's poems have a clear poetic structure that portrayed the greatest event of his time. These poems among the ones written from 1914 to 1918

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous, *Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918*, Poetry Foundation. April 2nd, 2016. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/isaac-rosenberg>

followed the modern poetic views. This is why I agree with Das Santanu in *Reframing World War One Poetry; An Introduction*,

“Isaac Rosenberg’s poems and other soldier poets like Wilfred Owen, Sassoon, and Ivor Gurney provided one of the earliest examples of what we now regarded as the classical features of the First World War poetry.”¹⁴⁶

Moreover, these soldier-poets responded to the new style of poetic writings ushered in by the imagist group led by Ezra Pound in the Modern period. The modern period allowed any interested persons and individual poets to write on any subject-matter of their choices. Rosenberg found his voice in the aesthetic realism of human sufferings in the Great War. His poetry met war; his poetry looked beyond war, joining the past and the future, combatants and civilians as its victims. He wrote in varying cadences not just of combat but also of life at large, the beautiful longing, the nature, animals, allies and historical change with poetic responsibility and as all were affected by the war. All these horrible events were explored by a poet who used iconic images to write about the horrific nature of the First World War. Rosenberg’s moods as found in his lyrics are horrible and his messages are filled with lamentations, satire, criticism, elegies, melancholic, destruction, and anti-war. ‘*August 1914*’, ‘*On Receiving News of the War*’, ‘*Break of Day in the Trenches*’, ‘*Dead Man’s Dump*’ explored this realistic ideology of war as each of these poems powerfully carried the true harsh realities of the First World War.

¹⁴⁶ Das Santanu, Extracted from the introductory chapter ‘Reframing First World War Poetry’ in Santanu Das ed. *The Cambridge Companion to First World War Poetry* (2013) - See more at: <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/reframing-first-world-war-poetry#sthash.YDIA0gPE.dpuf>

Findings from the poems studied and analyzed in chapter three of my research revealed that Isaac Rosenberg's poetry is significantly powerful in portraying several aspects and perspectives of war. He is sophisticated in his choice of words, use of language and use of poetic devices in conveying his message stood out amongst other poets. Each of these poems expressed deep emotions in differing tones and mood. Rosenberg presented his own personal experiences of the war. He conveyed his messages with the use of images/imagery and symbolism, metaphor, repetitions, alliterations, distinct combinations of concrete and abstract words. In *On Receiving the News of the War* Rosenberg made a metaphorical comparison thus; *Snow is a strange white word* (line 1) to tell us about destruction that is about to fall on the people. *Break of Day in the Trenches*, portrayed the bodies of dead soldiers lying in France thus; *Sprawled in the bowels of the earth, The torn fields of France* (lines 17-18). In *August 1914, The heart's dear granary?* (Line 3) is about the emotional cost of war and loss. Rosenberg used the images in his poem to tell us about the arrival of war in *On Receiving the News of the War* thus; *Yet ice and frost and snow, from earth to sky, This Summer land doth know* (lines 5-7), in *August 1914, The much we shall miss?* (Line 4), *Iron, honey, gold* (line 6) is an image of loss for precious things. In *Break of Day in the Trenches* the images of death were pointed out thus; *As I pull the parapet's poppy* (line 5), *Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,* (line 14) while in *Dead Man's Dump, they left this dead with the older dead,* (lines 54), *We heard his very last sound, And our wheels grazed his dead face.* (Lines 78-79) are all images of battle field and unfair treatments of the soldiers in the trenches. My research also revealed that Rosenberg used more of mythical and deliberate ambiguities and also he borrowed words from religion in *On Receiving the News of the War, Some spirit old* (line 10), ... *malign kiss*(line

11), *Blood is shed* (line 14). In *Break of Day in the Trenches*, ...old druid... (Line 2) are words borrowed from his Jewish religion. Rosenberg's use of words, special diction and poetic styles in his poetry presented him as a man self-concerned with realism, ironical, and a great poet among the poets of the First World War poetry. This is why I agreed with Dalya Alberge who opined that "Rosenberg in his poems applied his painter's eye to the scene he was viewing, and blended the use of his words and images for the readers to interpret."¹⁴⁷

In addition, the Central theme that dominated Rosenberg's poetry is the theme of life, war and death. This is the same theme found in the entire poems written during the First World War. These poems explored the horrific nature of man then and huge destructions war brought to mankind. The soldiers, the youth, the women, the water, the air, the land are the victims of war. The battlefields, the blood, the loyalty, the loss; no one is able to understand the situation unless having been there. This is why many war veterans have chosen to recount their experiences in an effort to share the timeless stories that only a soldier would know, or even compose poetry describing their own experiences and their perceptions of war. Among these famous soldier poets is Isaac Rosenberg who wrote varieties of war poems from the trenches in Europe during World War One. As a soldier-poet, he died in the war. The review of literature from books consulted revealed that he died on the 1st of April, 1918 when the German soldiers struck while he was on duty. Although the war took his life; his poems survived. In his poems I find powerful images of death. from Cape Town, he responded to the outbreak of the war in his *On Receiving the News of the war* and he predicted the horror ahead of mankind. In *August 1914*, he told us about the fire that is burning; that was, the fire of war.

¹⁴⁷ Dalya Alberge, "War Poet Isaac Rosenberg Recognised in Archive Footage from the Trenches", First world war Observer, Sunday 7 December 2014

Break of Day in the Trenches painted the pitiful conditions of the soldiers in the trenches as all living with fear for death or fear of unknown, if the war should continue. *Dead Man's Dump* is a poem that evoked pity where the reader feels as though he is really involved in all of the action. Rosenberg tried to show us how every human life is the same and constantly struggling to live. That is, the life in the trenches was a personified death. In various tones and images, he portrayed the theme of life and war end in death.

I also argued that, Rosenberg's life experience, background and poetry distinguished him. He differed among his contemporaries and among other Great War poets by class, race, education, upbringing, experiences, and techniques in his writings. Having studied the events of war, the poetry written during the war and the backgrounds of other few war poets, I am of an opinion that, Owen appeared more or less like Keats when it comes to approach towards poetry, while Isaac Rosenberg is like William Shakespeare whose educational background was not clearly known but he featured as one of the greatest writers (dramatist, poet). The writing of poetry is not a competitive sport, and there are no generally accepted standards by which to judge the best poet. Siegfried Sassoon, who was among war poets that wrote forward to the Rosenberg's collected works (1937) commended Rosenberg's *Break of Day in the Trenches*,

“he has for a poignant and nostalgic quality which eliminates critical analysis, Isaac Rosenberg was naturally empowered with something of the divine spirit which touches our human clay to sublimity of expression. Also the contrast between the notable war poets and their responses to the war, despite differing social, financial and ideological outlooks, Rosenberg stood tall as differed little. The Great War changed all the three fundamentally, bringing

their intellectual and aesthetic approaches into a horrible cry of despair; in unionism these poets echoed the great disturbance in their heart and minds of humanity as a whole. He was also a great painter and a brilliant poet”¹⁴⁸

In my research, I was confronted with constant tension in the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg, if my studies should fall on the poetry, on the war, on the Poetry of the First World War, on the cultural history or on the literary forms of this period. Researches have already been devoted to the poetry of the First World War without much emphasis on Isaac Rosenberg whose poetry captured my attention. I put the poetry which was composed in the trenches and on the battlefield in a broader perspective to get a sharper image of the experiences behind their words. I addressed different aspects of Isaac Rosenberg’s life, poems and war experiences. I brought out some elements found in the poems studied. All these elements, techniques, result findings reflected a holistic perspective towards First World War poetry. Rosenberg wrote great varieties of war poems from the trenches, he fought in the war, the war took his life, and his poems have survived. He is now a subject of discussions and researches. Generations have contemplated the horror, anguish and the contradictions of the Great War by studying the war poems of Isaac Rosenberg. I join my voice in the support of Vivien Whelpton, (June 2014), who argues for both a deeper and a wider reading of the poetry of the war, and concludes:

“It is a diverse and challenging body of work, but its range, vividness and imaginative power have contributed hugely to the place of the Great War in our cultural heritage. That this writing, rather than historical texts, should be the primary mode of access for

¹⁴⁸ extract from Jean Moorcroft Wilson's introduction to *the Selected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg*.

the non-specialist is not a situation to be deplored. Rather, we should be insisting that the reading of the poetry should be more perceptive and wide-ranging.’’¹⁴⁹

I call for further research in the poetry of the First World War.

¹⁴⁹ Andrian Barlow *The War Against the War Poets* WAR POETRY REVIEW: THE JOURNAL OF THE WAR POETS ASSOCIATION, 2015-2015,p14

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