

# RUPERT BROOKE: A Thematic Study of War Poetry and Politics of Representation

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## Abstract:

*This research explores expressionist streaks in Rupert Brooke's selected war poems. His war poetry employs different literary techniques like artistic volition, abstraction and interior monologue in order to depict the reality of war. He uses euphemism in detail. He expresses his intimate and subjective experiences through abstractions. The purpose behind the use of abstraction is to lessen the pains of a serious event like death. Rupert Brooke's poems glorify war and make the soldiers to believe in transcendent reward for those who has made the supreme sacrifice for home and country during the Great War. An expressionist artist does not focus on the objective reality. He seems to be more interested in subjective responses such as emotions, feelings and intentions. War poets are occupied with the question of representation, unlike other war poets, Rupert Brooke distorts traditional thematic division of writing poetry. His war poetry depicts mental and emotional distortion. This study provides a new insight to the readers to visualize Rupert Brooke's War Poetry in a new perspective.*

**Key Words:** Rupert Brooke, Expressionism, Artistic Volition, Abstraction, Interior Monologue

## INTRODUCTION

In Rupert Brooke's poetry, the artist applies artistic volition, abstraction and interior monologue to show the modern chaos and disorder. In his poem 1914 I, he introduces the concept of spiritual rebirth, a soldiers' participation in the war would wash out entirely his old sins and would give him a rebirth. It depicts his faith in high sounding abstraction like love, sacrifice and glory. He uses euphemism in detail. He expresses his intimate and subjective experiences through abstractions. The purpose behind the use of abstraction is to lessen the pains of a serious event like death. Rupert Brooke's poems glorify war and make the soldiers to believe in transcendent reward for those who has made the supreme sacrifice for home and country during the Great War. Winston Churchill viewed Rupert Brooke as a true voice which depicts the horror of war and his writing style is both audible and thrilling. This voice expresses the idea of self surrender among soldiers. It brings consolation and comfort for those who are far from the front.

Expressionism uses the technique of artistic volition for documentation of its ideas and to explore the epiphany of reality. Alois Riegl is most important critic of artistic volition. According him artistic volition is not based upon constantly emphasizing factors such as techniques, the character of raw materials, intention, historical conditions but the sum or unity on the creative forces – forces of both form or content – these forces organized the work from within.

Expressionism tends to verbalize emotions rather than to dramatize conflicts. It expresses reality subjectively by using different literary devices such as distortion, repetition, symbolism, artistic volition, abstraction, and nightmarish fantasy. Expressionist writers and poets build a symbolist world in look, tone and feelings. Rafati defines Expressionism as a tendency of an artist to distort reality for an emotional effect. It is a subjective art form. The artist's consciousness is depicted through the mere visualization, representation and replication of the outer universe. The politics of the heart are depicted through emotions. War poets often define war experiences from two angles; jingoist and pacifist. Jingoistic color is dominant in Rupert Brooke's poetry. Patriotic feelings often come up and dominate the other subjects. Edward

Salmon defines jingoism as a propensity to oppose anyone who thwarts the benefit of jingoist country. Jingoist does not give importance to justice or rationality and does everything entirely under the spirit of exaggerated and misapplied patriotism. (Salmon 2009, p.35) The major concerns of the Expressionist poetry are man's inner struggle to achieve his spiritual transformation – visionary or dreamlike scenes frequently presented this process against a back ground of actuality which is often distorted to point out grotesqueness.

The volitional character of Expressionism permitted artistic volition to apply its stylistic devices and methods to gain art of consciousness and for the purpose of art that leads to reality. Artistic volition is able to penetrate reality like realism but not as profoundly and adequately as realist art does. By pointing to reality, it inspires its public, whipped up the passions and mobilizes to action even more strongly than the realist artists.

Expressionist writers also use abstraction in their works. Abstraction is a technique for representing a subject in a way that trespasses the conventions of realism, thus accommodating a portrayal of the subject that bears little or no resemblance to any object, person or scene as it is found in nature. There is an abundant variety of artistic approaches towards abstraction and subjective expression. The third technique which Rupert Brooke has used in his poems is interior monologue. Interior monologue is used for representing the processes of character, and psychic content, partly or entirely unuttered, just as these processes exit at various levels of conscious control before they are formulated for deliberate speech. Interior monologues can be designated as 'direct' and 'indirect'. In direct monologue negligible author interference is shown and with no auditor assumed.

It presents consciousness directly to the reader with negligible author interference; it means that there is either a complete or near – complete disappearance of the author from the page, together with his guiding such as 'he said', and 'he thought' and with his explanatory comments. It should be accentuated that there is no auditor assumed. The character is neither speaking to anyone within the fictional scene nor he is speaking to the reader. To write in this way is not easy but it is a real one.

Rupert Brooke distorts traditional thematic divisions of writing a sonnet. Sonnets are traditionally used for love poems. Rupert Brooke has used Sonnets to express his passion for his land. He also makes variation in rhyme scheme. In this poem, '*Peace*' Brooke has also deviated from traditional thematic divisions of Octave and Sestet. Octave follows the rhyme scheme ABABCD CD that is the style of Shakespeare's Sonnet. Sestet follows the rhyme scheme of EFGEFG. It is a Petrarchan writing style. Brooke combines these two trends in his verse. But he does not follow the thematic divisions of Octave (question/ predicament) and Sestet (resolution/ solution).

The sense of artistic volition, the central concept of Expressionism manifests the intention, desire and purpose of the artist. The presence of Artistic Volition in the genetic process of a oeuvre of art is more acute as it uses non – mimetic methods and techniques than the calm and authoritative musical composition of artistic production which follows nature faithfully. Expressionism avoids representing the external reality. The main principle involved is that expression determines form and therefore imagery, punctuation, and syntax. Indeed, any of the formal conventions and components of writing can be bent or disjointed to suit the design. The volitional character of Expressionism permitted artistic volition to put on its stylistic devices and methods to gain art of consciousness and for the determination of artistic output that leads to reality. Artistic volition is able to penetrate reality like realism, but not as profoundly and adequately as realist art does. By pointing to reality, it inspires its public, whipped up the passions and mobilizes to action even more powerfully than the realist artists.

Rupert Brooke distorts romantic writing style. He makes enhancements to syllable ten in the fourteenth line of this poem. He makes the ninth line a full hexameter. He does so to show the modern chaos and disorder and achieves satisfaction in sonnet form. He endows thematic and structural flexibility to the

sonnet and introduces new themes such as memory, time, death, physical phenomena, growing up, lust, pain and pleasure.

Rupert Brooke has used artistic volition in his poem, 'Peace'. Artistic volition is depicted through various stylistic devices and methods such as rhyme scheme, imagery, symbolic language, simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, illusions and alliteration in this poem. Expressionism and Symbolism can be connected by way of their subjectivism. In fact symbolism, which in nearly every way, rejects what Expressionism stands for is a stage through which many Expressionists had to pass in order to reach their artistic destination.

He has used rhyme words such as hour – power, sleeping – leaping, weary – dreary, move – love, mending – ending, breath – death. Rhyme scheme in this poem is ABABCD in the first paragraph like the Octave. In the second paragraph rhyme – scheme is EFGEFG like Sestet. The poet has used religious images such as 'glad from a world grown, old and cold and weary' to depict a sort of conversion.

Virginia Woolf says about his style, that Rupert Brooke wrote freely, but not entirely without self – consciousness and it is apparent that his acquaintances have not cared to publish the more familiar passages in his letters to them. She further argues "whether or not it was for the good of his poetry he would be in the thick of things and one fancy... a subtle analytic poetry or prose perhaps, full of intellect and full of his keen unsentimental curiosity."

Bloom comments on *1914 I: Peace* that 'Peace' reveals Brooke's romantic – even sentimental vision of the war, a vision unencumbered by much of his actual experience. The poem celebrates the discovery of a cause and the eager anticipation of the regeneration of a world grown old and cold and weary.

Rupert Brooke has used onomatopoeia by calling death as 'friend and enemy' in the last line. It depicts that death has a power to deprive of spirit but it also brings eternal peace. This poem is a declaration of self- realization and self- determination. He has used symbolic language to create an enthusiasm among soldiers. He pronounces that 'God be thanked who has looked on us with this hour', 'Wakened us from sleeping', 'with hand made sure', 'clear eye' and 'sharpened power' to provoke the idea of glory, honor and valor.

Bloom comments on *1914 I: Peace* in such words as 'Peace' reveal Brooke's rather romantic – some might even say sentimental – vision of the war, a vision of unencumbered by much actual experience. The poem celebrates the discovery of a cause and the eager anticipation of the regeneration of a world grown old and cold and weary (Bloom 2003, p. 14). (Again the same problem)

He has used simile in this line, 'Swimmers into cleanness leaping'. It creates an image of baptism, absolution and 'muscular Christianity'. Brooke is a pre-war poet. He is a product of 'muscular Christianity'. In this poem he has sentiment of cleansing like Siegfried Sassoon's poem 'Absolution'. According to 'Muscular Christianity' war is a path to cleanse society. He desires to state that by soldier's participation in the war would wash off entirely the old sins. This sacrifice of the soldiers would bring a rebirth. The best approaches to understanding and appreciating the poetry of Brooke are to uncover the ideas of place and sentiment that dominate his works and to organize the fascinating manner in which he blends structural integrity and eloquence, which appears spontaneous, passionate and boarding, and the experimental.

Rupert Brooke says: 'Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary'. In the above mentioned line, we also find a repetition of the words of 'a' and 'o'. This repetition provokes a fresh signature to the verse form. He has employed a metaphor, 'half – men' to describe those people who are against war. It also evokes an idea of those human beings who are interested in young women and sex. Lines from six to eight are reacting against Bloomsbury friends. They had pacifist ideas about war.

He promotes the young person by using the line 'where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending'. He calls forth the thought that purity is in dying, it will cleanse society. The image 'sleep' shows death. Brooke has also used personification in the poem, '1914 I: Peace'. He calls a friend and enemy at the same time. The tone of the poem is lofty. Rupert Brooke's poem *Peace* deals with the transcending reward



for those who has made the Supreme Sacrifice for home and country during the Great War. His diction is classical and romantic. This poem is like a thanksgiving to God. God has furnished an opportunity to be brave and honest enough. He gives strength to fight for a noble cause. He has made the soldiers to rise above the masses in society.

By dying for this noble cause, soldier's all sins dissolves and they enter into heaven. By using stylistic methods he gains art of consciousness. He understands the purpose of art and leads his readers to reality. Bloom writes about the Rupert Brooke's poem '1914 me: Peace' in such language that this poem reveals Brooke's romantic and sentimental view about the war, a view unencumbered by real experience. This poem keeps the feeling of rebirth and regeneration. In his view war purifies and cleanses the sickly and corrupted society. Reisman says about Rupert Brooke: The best approaches to understanding and appreciating the poetry of Brooke are to discover the ideas and sentiment that dominate his works and to recognize the fascinating wall in which he blends structural integrity and eloquence, which appears spontaneous, passionate, and abutting on the experimental.

Artistic Volition is also present in the poem, '1914 III: The Dead'. It is a Petrarchan sonnet. In the Octave the rhyme scheme is ABBA CDDA. The rich images and delicate music of this Sonnet constitute something of an achievement is strangely out of contact with the actuality that inspired it (Johnston 1964, p. 12) The rhyme words Rupert Brooke has used dead – red, old – gold, serene – been, dearth – earth, pain – again and wage – heritage. It creates a sense of deep reverence for the dead soldiers in war. He has used literary technique assonance (repeated vowel sounds in the next lines and row). The first line of the poem has repetition of 'o' and 'you' for example:

Blow out, you bugles, over the dead!

There's none of these so lonely and poor of old

The line 'but dying has made us rare gifts than gold' contains the repetition of consonant s – sound. He has used both literary terms assonance and consonance to memorialize the dead recruits. Bugles are military instruments that are used for celebration.

He has employed a metaphor 'rich dead' for the dead soldier in warfare. The lines 'there's none of These so lonely and poor of old', 'but dying has made us rare gifts than gold' create a metaphorical paradox. These lines also recall Shakespeare's Drama Henry V: Act IV: Scene III where he talks that to die for country gives nobility to the present. Repetition of words 'blow out you bugles' at the beginning of both Octave and Sestet insist on the remembrance of the dead soldier. The poet provokes the patriotic feelings among soldiers that the dead soldiers' sacrifice of their lives has brought back peace and love. They have redeemed the fallen world. Rupert Brooke has used personification in this poem. 'Rich dead' is personified as a dead soldier. He has used 'Dead' with capital D to give it an identity. He has used words such as 'Holiness', 'Love' and 'Honour' in the second paragraph of the poem. He uses personification when he says, "Honour has come back, as the king, to the earth". King to the earth personifies the Christ. Christ has sacrificed for the salvation of the humanity. It also causes us to recall the old myth 'the return of the king' that brings back new life and return to the earth.

He uses a metaphor in the line 'and paid his subject with a royal wage'. The poet says that the sacrifice of life is a great gift for the whole nation. The Octave talks about the soldier's loss of his life while Sestet reminds us the benefits that soldier's death brings to his country. In the last lines he thanks all the soldiers who have helped to find an ennobled country. Brooke has used a metaphor in the lines; 'poured out the red sweet wine of youth' glorifies the bloodshed of the soldiers. He sees bloodshed as a very honourable. The poem is full of imagery. In the eleventh line of the poem, the poet has used simile 'honour as a king' to create jingoistic feelings among the youth.

*III: The Dead*'. The tone of the poem is patriotic and it is a pre – war poem written for the nation who has to suffer the bitter realities of death in the front line. Rupert Brooke uses artistic volition in '*1914 IV: The Dead*'. Like the other poem by him, this has patriotic tone . He creates a dreamy world where the young ones live carefree. He says that the dream world disappears with the start of First World War. Now this youth would participate in war and serve their country. *1914 IV: The Dead* is a sonnet (a lyric poem of the fourteen lines). It is a Petrarchan sonnet which has two parts; Octave (eight lines) and Sestet (six lines). In the Octave the rhyme scheme is ABABCD and rhyme scheme in the Sestet is EEFGFG. Rhyme words are cares – theirs, mirth – earth, known – alone, friended – ended, laughter – after, dance – radiance and white – night. The tone of the poem is severe and shows sadness at the end of the poem.

Brooke is remembered as the author of the war Sonnets, and it is as if one should characterize Wordsworth by The Happy Warrior; and the Zeal of His less critical admirers has projected on his public image a sentimental gloss. A kind of patina of 'quaintness' said Brooke himself, 'which swathes dead books as sentimentality Swathes dead people, has little hold on the living. Mrs. Cornfield says about Rupert Brooke: "I can't imagine him using a word of that emotional Jargon in which people usually talk or write about poetry. He made it feel more like carpentering".

Rupert Brooke has started the poem with long sentences in *1914 IV: The Dead*. He uses commas to separate different feelings such as 'washed marvellously with sorrows', 'swift to mirth', 'And the sunset and the colours of the earth'. He has used juxtaposition, 'and sunset and the colours of the earth' to emphasize. Brooke has started this poem with third person plural. The omniscient narrator narrates the feelings, thoughts and motivations about the death of Frontline. In the middle of second stanza the subject is changed into third person singular. He does so to emphasize the death of a pure heart at the front.

Artistic volition is also found in his poem '*The Soldier*'. The rhyme – words in this poem are me – be, field – concealed, aware – air, roam – home, away – day, less – gentleness, given – heaven. And rhyme scheme in the first paragraph is ABABCD. The second paragraph has a rhyme scheme of EFGFEG. This new variation in his writing style makes him unique to the other poets of his time. It also fits his role to provoke patriotic ideas among his young.

Brooke has used many images to show the idealized selflessness of a soldier. This line 'there is some corner of a foreign field that is forever England' provides an image of pathos and patriotism. 'Corner of a foreign field' provides an image of the anonymous nature of death in war. Bergonzi says about Rupert Brooke's poem the soldier in the following words that *1914 I: The soldier* is among the most famous short poems in the language. If the Tolstoyan theory of art had any validity it would be one of the greatest.

Rupert Brooke has used personification in the poem '*The Soldier*'. He has personified England as a mother, who gives life to the Soldier, moulds his character, educates him and gives him future directions. He says:

... England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love her ways to roam,  
A body of England's breathing English to roam air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home  
... Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;

He has used the word England six times in the poem to create an understanding what England (as a mother) has done for a soldier. He does this to gain patriotic intensity. This also reminds a soldier his duty. He should sacrifice his life to keep English clean. He has used a metaphor in this poem, 'In that richer earth, a richer dust concealed' to create a value of soldier's death. Churchill comments *1914: V: The Soldier* that the thoughts to which he gave expression in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will be shared by many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward into this, the hardest, the cruellest and the least – rewarded of all the wars that men have fought (Churchill 1915, p. 5).

He also uses alliteration in this poem. The repetition of 'f – sound' in 'foreign field that is forever England' provides a gentle tone to the poem. Like the poem *1914 I: Peace* Rupert Brooke had used a combination of two traditional writing styles of a sonnet in *1914 V: The Soldier*. He combines Octave with Sestet in this poem. He likewise employs a combination between Iambic Pentameter and Troche in this poem. The line, 'And think, this heart, all evil shed away' is a best example of Iambic Pentameter. The technique of troche is used in the eight line of the poem, 'washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.'

He has used a variation in imagery; natural imagery and after life imagery in the poem *1914 V: The Soldier*. In nature imagery he has used images such as fields, dust, flowers, rivers and suns to create a feeling of homeland. Heaven is an image of after – life. Brooke has used the word 'heaven' to console the soldier that their death will lead them to heaven.

Panofsky says that abstraction is the simplest comprehensible forms of the 'non real' in diverting contrast to the 'real'. Brooke uses the term abstraction in this poem, '*1914 I: Peace*'. In this poem the poet has used the word 'swimmer' for mental relaxation. This word calls forth the young person who is failing to contend for their land. The youth thinks that all blood – shed in war is for a noble deed. This thought makes them happy and patriotic.

The creative method of Expressionism accelerates the process of abstraction and transforms its formal orientation. The impressionists and symbolists subjectivized their creative method more and more while as "the expressionist precisely abstracted away from these typical characteristics in as much as he proceeded like the impressionists and symbolists, from the subjective reflex in experience ... emphasized precisely what in this appears from the subject's standpoint – as essential in as he ignored the 'little', 'petty', 'inessential' aspects and uprooted this 'essence' from its causal connection in time and space.

Abstraction is used to lessen the pains of death and to dramatize the jingoistic ideals such as bravery, honor, valor and 'die for one's country' in the poem, *1914 III: The Dead*. He used words 'bugles', 'rich dead', 'rare gifts than gold', 'sweet wine of youth', 'joy', 'holiness', 'king', and 'nobleness' to create joyous tone. Abstraction takes us away from the bitter realities of life to the happy and dreamy land. The above mentioned words also do the same job. According to Munch the urge to abstraction is the result of a great inner unrest in man caused by the phenomena of the external world. It corresponds in the religious sphere, to a strong transcendental coloring of ideas. We should like to call this condition an immense spiritual agoraphobia.

Rupert Brooke uses Abstraction in *1914 III: The Dead*. Like lyric poetry, this poem also expresses feelings and thought through abstract language. The use of abstract language makes a serious issue (like death) into the less threading issue. Words such as 'human joys and cares', 'swift to mirth', 'dawn', 'the colours of the earth', 'heard music', 'touched flowers and furs and cheeks', 'laughter', 'lit by the rich skies', 'dance', 'loveliness', 'a white unbroken glory', 'a gathered radiance' and 'a shining peace' remind us about the expressionist tem abstraction. These words with positive connotation takes us away from the prolonged sufferings, political errors, official insincerities and the callousness and agonies of war which are portrayed by both Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

Abstraction has multiple meanings as Langer says: "In one sense (abstraction) it means something foreign to art, lifeless and inexpressive; in another sense it means formal, pure and expressive beyond the power of words". Langer further says that there are at least four or five independent sources of abstractive techniques and the interplay of logical projection which they engender creates the semblance of irrationality and in definability which is delighted of artists and the despair of aestheticians.

Elements of abstraction are also found in this poem '*1914 V: The Soldier*'. These elements provide psychological satisfaction to the idea of being dead at the front of the young recruits. The words, 'dreams happy', 'laughter', learnt of friends', 'in hearts at peace', 'an English Heaven' provides a soothing effect to the terrific idea of death. This soothing effect is what we call abstraction.



It is an expression of the most intimate thought that lies nearest the unconscious, in its form. It is produced in the direct phrases reduced to minimum of syntax. It is a technique that is used to represent the psychic content and processes of character that are entirely or partly unuttered according to Humphrey: “the speech of a character in a scene, having for its object to introduce us directly into the interior life of the character, without author’s intervention through explanations or commentaries...”

Rupert Brooke uses interior monologue in the poem, *1914 III: The Dead* when he says:

Blow out you bugles over the rich Dead!

Rupert Brooke has also used interior monologue in the poem, *The Soldier* to depict his own ideas about the patriotic feelings and ideals of bravery and valour. He says:

If I should die, think only this of me,  
That there’s some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England ...

He further uses this technique in these lines:  
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less...

Brooke’s poems were rejected by saying as Shallow and a lie. Hynes calls them as ‘Plaster rhetoric’ and criticizes that in a poem like *The Soldier* Brooke had to fill an empty rhetoric with too – easily weighted words – England four times and English twice in fourteen lines, lines, dreams, heaven, eternal mind, and the vaguely comforting somewhere...’ and he further comments that he did so ‘to falsify the truth of dying and glorify death by calling it sacrifice’.

Charles Sorely has criticized Rupert Brooke that he has clothed his sacrifice and attitude in nice words. In reality he has sentimental attitude devoid of personal experiences at war and spiritual insight. Moeyes concludes Brooke’s poetry as ‘amateur’ and ‘poseur’ and further criticizes his poetry it does not analyze and investigate the truth, but helps to escape from and compensate for a reality he could not cope with. To conclude, we can say that Rupert Brooke has different and pre – war ideals. His use of Expressionism leads to a different reality than Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. He died soon after participating in war and could not get ‘the reality’ which Wilfred Owen called ‘old lie’ in his poem, *DULCE ET DECORUM EST*.

Rupert Brooke applies artistic volition, abstraction and interior monologue in his poems. He does so to show the modern chaos and disorder. His poetry is somewhat patriotic written before the starting of First World War. In his poem 1914 I: Peace he says that soldiers’ participation in this war would wash away all the previous sins and would bring rebirth. These poems express feelings and thoughts through abstract language. The use of abstraction lessens the pains of a serious issue like death. Rupert Brooke’s poems deal with the transcending reward for those who has made the supreme sacrifice for home and country during the Great War.

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