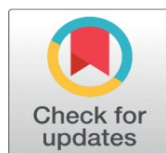
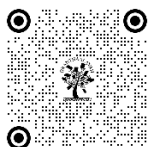


# RUPERT BROOKE AND PAUL NASH: THE POET AND THE PAINTER OF WORLD WAR I

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the artistic and aesthetic genius of the poet Rupert Brooke and the painter Paul Nash in their respective areas. Rupert Brooke is acclaimed as one of the finest representative war poets of the time. During the modern writings of fragmented, free, dense and long verses Brooke adapted the sonnet to share war experiences. These sonnets by Brooke have been placed among the supreme expressions of English patriotism and the few notable poems produced by the Great War. His best five war sonnets (1914) are entitled- 'Peace', 'Safety', 'The Dead', 'The Dead' and 'The Soldier'. Paul Nash was a British surrealist painter and war artist, photographer and writer. In 1917 he was officially announced as a war artist. Nash found his inspiration in landscape from the elements of ancient history. His artworks during the Great War are considered the most iconic images of conflict. Nash's works are often believed to be influenced by the Vorticist movement. The medium he used were water colour, ink and chalk, etc. His notable works are- 'We are Making a New World' (1918), 'The Menin Road' (1918), 'Spring in the Trenches' (1918), 'Wire' (1919), etc. How successfully has their artistic vision made people able to understand the need of the future world? The Relevance of these artistic and literary pieces for today's human race, etc. will be the focal points of discussion. The paper will be prepared with a comparative and analytical study of the subject matter.

**Keywords:** The Great War, War Poet, War Artist, War Sonnet, Painting, Surrealism, Modernism, Vorticist Movement, Conflict, Patriotism, Expression

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All war is a symptom of man's failure as a thinking animal. – Bertrand Russell.

Art, in its all forms is an instrument of expressing the emotions and expressions of the human experiences. This medium begets not only the pleasures but miseries and sufferings of human world. The present paper is an effort to analyze the role of two different mediums of expression: literature and drawing and painting. Two eminent figures of World War I, the poet Rupert Brooke and the painter Paul Nash, are the center of discussion of this paper. In English literature the term 'war poetry' brings forth the names of the quintessential war poets like Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Edmund Blunden, Edward Thomas, Robert Grave and Isaac Rosenberg. The War poetry and paintings proved to be the means of expressing extreme emotions of fear, anger and love for nation. Drawing and painting at that

time like literature was turned into a tool to glorify the war and alarm as well. This was not the emotion of a poet only but of a soldier who became the icon of innocence, courage, integrity and vulnerability in his own nation. A poet stretches his imagination; a soldier wrote a warning and dark truth. Wilfred Owen as poet expressed that 'All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poet must be truthful' (<https://warpoets.org/conflicts/great-war/>).

Rupert Brooke studied classical at first and then English literature at Cambridge. At Cambridge, Brooke's circle included Virginia Woolf along with James Strachey, Maynard Keynes, Lytton etc. He chose sonnet in his style of writing poems. Rupert Brooke limited or bounded the enthusiasm for war with feelings of idealism and patriotism. Eventually, with the themes of his works, he seems to talk about the honour and celebrate the glories of war. Brooke might be said to have forged the very concept of 'soldier-poet' in December 1915 with his five patriotic 'war sonnets': 'Peace', 'Safety', two called 'The Dead' and 'The Soldier' Mackean (2005), 245. Here is a precise and quick view of his most popular sonnets which showcases his perspective towards the war and its heartbreaking reality.

He was called or blamed to glorify the war scenario at the time. Let's peep into his words to get along his ideas or to find a bit new from them.

#### **'The Soldier'**

"If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is forever England". Carter and McRae (2001), 331.

The present sonnet is a discussion on the bond of a soldier with his country. He defends that a country is the identity of a citizen hence its worth defending for lives. Soldier is prepared to die as he believes that it's for the beloved homeland.

#### **'Peace'**

"Now, God be thanked who has watched us with His hour

And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping," (Sonnets of W.W. I)

The sonnet celebrates the fortune to be young and able to fight for the country. He advocates at the same time that war has given the sense of freedom to the young people. War has awakened us from a sleep and blessed us with courage to fight for our land.

"But only agony, and that has ending.

And the worst friend and enemy is but death"

Again, to die in the battlefield is no less than a blessing of feeling proud over the death. The death which is the only end of our life and is the only friend and enemy to us. Brook seeks the peace in this emotion of courage and patriotism.

#### **'Safety'**

"War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,

Secretly armed against all death's endeavour.

Safe though all my safety is lost; safe where men fall.

And if these poor limbs die, safest of all".

The second sonnet among the famous five sonnets of Rupert Brook 'Safety' defends the battle field safety of the country and people of this country. By glorifying the homeland what one receives from it the poet once again advocates that no one is safer than us as we are fighting for our country. This is the abode to all of us together where we gained peace. Therefore, even we face death in the battlefield that will be the safest thing to us (to turn into a dead body).

### **The Dead**

'Holiness, lacked so long, and love, and pain.  
Honour has come back, as a king to earth'  
And paid his subjects with a royal wage.  
And nobleness walks in our ways again.  
And we have come into our heritage".

This sonnet again follows the path of sacrifice for the country. The poem acknowledges that they (soldiers) are selfless heroes. By sacrificing their sons, they gave up an immortality but at the same time they gained another kind by living of their country. The death of a soldier is considered as the action of high morality which the country was lacking before the war. Towards the end with concluding lines Rupert Brook suggests the death of a soldier developed the understanding of 'love' and 'pain' in the people of the country. Therefore, to live into the generation of heroes and legends of this war is a heritage to us which we have come into.

### **The Dead**

"These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,  
Washed marvelously with sorrow, swift to mirth".

The beginning of this sonnet seems to accepting that it was happy and joyous world, we were living, before the war. That peaceful world is destroyed by the sorrow of the war.

"And wandering loneliness. He leaves a white  
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,  
A width, a shining peace, under the night".

While towards the concluding section of the sonnet the poet returns back to the same emotion of patriotism. The poet defends his view by saying that how it is glorifying and attaining peace after all the blood we are losing in the battle field.

Though Rupert Brook is credited to capture the awful reality of the experiences. He integrated the raw reality of what men are- slaughtering each other massively, still Brook found room for emotions like patriotism, courage, peace of mind and much more that don't glorify the war. Therefore, when Wilfred Owen, in his Preface to poems remarks for war poetry as 'the poetry is in the pity' Carter and McRae (2001), 331., seems justifying for this art form of the time.

The Greek Platonist philosopher Plutarch once said, "painting is a silent poetry and poetry is painting that speaks" (<https://www.goodreads.com>).

Here, Paul Nash (1889-1946), is remarked as a pioneer of modernism in Britain who promoted the European Style of abstraction and surrealism in the 1920s and 1930s. He is a prominent figure of art in the inter-war period and was announced the first war artists. As an artist his inspiration was drawn from the English landscapes and tradition of mystical painters like William Blake and Samuel Palmer. He worked on landscapes with a sense of ancient history: grass burial mound, iron Age hill forts and the standing stones at Avebury and Stonehenge. For him these sites had a talismanic quality which he called *genius loci*, or 'the spirit of a place', and he painted them repeatedly (<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/paul-nash>).

In 1914 Nash enlisted in British army and was sent to the western front early in the 1917. He got injured and sent back to London to recover. This time, disturbed from the destruction he saw, he returned as a war artist. The artist made it his duty to convey the horror of war to the British public. With the end of the war Nash began

using water colours, in painting from the trenches as reference for his expression. His works includes some powerful views of the pitted and shattered landscape of No Man's land and are placed among the most memorable images of the conflicts.



We are making a new world (1918) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We\\_Are\\_Making\\_a\\_New\\_World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_Are_Making_a_New_World)), painting by Paul Nash is a visual definition of the reality of war and its consequences. Isolation, barrenness, lifelessness, deserted life etc. are strikingly defining the after effects of this human error. This painting is the genuine demo of human's demonic insight



The Menin Road (1918-19) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Menin\\_Road\\_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Menin_Road_(painting))). another remarkable work of Paul Nash he once described "Imagine a wide landscape flat and scantily wooded and what trees remain blasted and torn, naked and scarred and riddled" (<https://www.artnet.com/paul-nash/>). Spring in the Trenches (1917), contemporary to the previous paintings, is portrayal of battle field.

Battlefield (1917), Battle of Britain (1941) etc. are many paintings of Paul Nash with the theme of loneliness and destructive reality. These works of Nash showcases his artistic genius and love towards the human and the earth. Who loves a barren land? All of us want to appreciate the view of Spring, the season of life, fertility, new lives, hope, beginning and most importantly the season of love. The strongest and the most essential emotion a human need to survive as a human is the love only.

Therefore, how this love, peace, courage, and the passion for a country is depicted in Rupert Brooks poems and how Paul Nash portrayed it on the canvas cannot be discussed into limits of a bounded frame of the time. Every one of us will take different from these work with definitely many different rational thoughts. But there is one point for sure that we all relate together; the purpose or learning of these art forms must be serving today for the human values.

What they were trying to get from these? cannot be proved today. But today's world hopefully found from there for sure is the warning to live with harmony. Though we proved it wrong yet again in the recent past war. Arthur Clutton-Brock in one of his essays 'Sunday Before the War' writes "we are all men with the same

power of making and destroying, with the same divine foresight mocked by the same animal blindness” *Hundred Best Essays* (1999), 645.

Thus, art forms literature and paintings remained the most powerful medium to revive the memory of the first world war. This means is still there, marking other historical entries; wars are there to bring more sufferings and poets will be there to beckon us not just to console but to actively ‘warn’. Amidst the unfolding violence of the early twentieth century Art struggled to portray the warfare using any traditional visual style. War does not determine who is right – only who is left. - Gandhi.

T. E. Hulme before his death in the war in 1917 in his essays considered and declared that “war is not only the Romantic view of life and of art but also on the *Weltanschauung* ... of all philosophy since the Renaissance” Daiches (2022), 1122.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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