

# Fall in, suicide in the trenches and who's for the game

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

This essay will look at three poems from the period before and during the First World War, each giving different impressions of it. *Fall In* by Harold Begbie, a journalist, author, poet and playwright, was written in September 1914 and is pro-war propaganda written to persuade young men to enlist. *Who's for the Game?* by Jessie Pope, a journalist and a poet, was written in 1916 and is also pro-war propaganda. It displays the war as something that is enjoyable and harmless in order to encourage enlisters.

*Suicide in the Trenches*, by Siegfried Sassoon, a soldier and poet, was written in 1918 and shows a contrasting picture, the grim and horrid truth about the war. *Fall In* portrays the war as something that, while not "fun" or pleasant was still necessary. This is clearly seen in the quote "Right is smashed by Wrong", as this shows that the war is about high morals and being correct. *Who's for the Game* as its name implies, gives the impression that the war was a game for young men who were bored.

It has references to sports all the way through it, for example "Who'll toe the line for the signal to 'Go!?' "*Suicide in the Trenches* contrasts both of these very strongly by depicting the war as neither necessary or fun, merely awful. It uses the quote "The hell where youth and laughter go" to really enforce this. The subject of *Fall In* is that those who sign up are glorious heroes, while those who don't will be ridiculed and reduced to being old men with their "old head bent and shamed". This shows the belittlement and almost persecution of those who did not sign up at the time.

*Who's for the Game*, on the other hand, focuses more on how much fun the war is going to be enjoyable, with quotes indicating it will be a breeze, such

as " the red crashing game". It does also add a sarcastic rhetorical question at the end of each stanza suggesting that there was another option for those who weren't man enough to enlist. Suicide in the Trenches has a very clear message, the " hell" of war. In the last two stanzas, it shows the horror of the trenches, flying in the faces of the other two poems.

It serves as a wake up call to those who believe the propaganda. The structures of Fall In and Who's for the Game? re very similar, both having four stanzas and having alternate rhyming lines. This gives both of these poems an almost jaunty feel that fits the images brought up in these poems. However, Fall In's stanzas are eight lines long compared to Who's for the Game? 's lines, which are only four lines long. This allows room for the extra theme of necessity. Suicide in the Trenches features rhyming couplets to keep the poem progressing. They cut the four line stanzas into two, allowing each couplet to describe different things. That allows the strong feelings and images of the poem to cut through far more deeply.

Begbie uses colloquialisms in Fall In to aim the poem towards the young audience the poem is trying to reach. Examples of this include the term " sonny", used in the first line of every stanza and the phrase " cuts you dead" at the end of the first stanza. It refers to embarrassment in the first two stanzas, for example, " your cheeks are red". It uses vernacular that is humiliating in the third stanza, with " slink away" and " shamed and bent". The fourth and final stanza uses language that makes the war seem more important, using the ideals of " Right and Wrong" to show importance.

In *Who's for the Game?*, Pope uses a sporting vernacular to give the impression of a rough and tumble sport, but still just harmless fun. Examples of this include "grip and tackle" and "toe the line for the signal to Go!" The third stanza could be relating to a rugby match, where you may come back with a crutch or a broken arm, but no more than that. The fourth stanza uses the word "lads" as if to imply everyone is in this together and the last two lines are appealing to the masculine need to protect the womenfolk and a sense of patriotism by calling the country a damsel in distress.

Sassoon uses very simple vocabulary in *Suicide in the Trenches*, which makes the message easily understood by all. Use of the phrase "empty joy" when referring to how the "simple soldier boy" sees life shows the pointlessness of what they are doing. The use of the adjectives "cold" and "glum" paints a depressing image of the trenches whilst Sassoon is very blunt with the line "He put a bullet through his brain". This is a gruesome image, which shocks you to the bone. In the final stanza, Sassoon comes across as angry at the crowds who cheer the men on as they leave for the front, calling them "smug-faced".

In *Fall In*, Begbie uses the poetic device of rhetorical questions as does Pope in *Who's for the Game?* The poets both use rhetorical questions to make the reader think about what they are saying and question themselves. An example of this from *Fall In* is "What will you lack?", while "Who'll give his country a hand?" appears in *Who's for the Game*. Begbie also makes you think by using an image of the future, "an old man's chair", allowing time for mental reflection.

The future is something everyone thinks they can control by what they choose and by telling people that if they make a choice, their future will turn out a certain way scares people. Pope uses juxtaposition in combination with her rhetorical questions to make people think that one option is 'right' while the other is 'wrong'. She uses personification, personifying the country in order to appeal to men's sense of bravado. This also appeals to their patriotism as no man at the time could say they would not help their country without being fiercely criticized and shunned.

She ends the poem with a direct appeal to the reader, " she's looking and calling for you". This drives forward the opinion that it is not enough for other people to volunteer, the reader needs to. Sassoon, in Suicide in the Trenches uses alliteration to slide the poem along, " slept soundly" and " bullet through his brain". These enforce the reader to keep the poem moving almost hurtling to the end, the poet's final point. All three poems use strong imagery to put their point across. Fall In uses the image of failure, of shame and of pointlessness to show the reader that signing up for the war is the right thing to do.

It uses the image of " Right" and " Wrong" to convince people that they are fighting for the right side and it ends with the image of God, an omnipotent being, being on England's side. This implies there is no possibility of defeat. Who's for the Game? uses the imagery of sport, something that is familiar to all young men to reassure and make comfortable the intended reader with what is being discussed. Pope also uses the imagery of childhood with the word " fun", a period everyone enjoys.

Suicide in the Trenches uses dark images to convince people of evil and wrong. Silence" leaves an ominous feel while " crumps and lice" make people feel uncomfortable and unsure. Use of the word " hell" when referring to the war zone brings up images of pain and suffering. Hell is one of the most strong images in the English language, an eternity of pain, stretching on for infinity. All these combine to give a dark and menacing mood to the poem. In conclusion, all of the poets put across a different point of view on the war, something that is fun, something that is necessary and something that is wrong. All of these ideas are backed with strong images and concepts.

They all get their point across very well, but Pope's poem, Who's for the Game? seems to be missing something as if it is almost too good at making you feel like the war is going to be fun. Maybe that is only due to hindsight but it seems somehow wrong. The other two poems, Fall In and Suicide in the Trenches give other points of view that both seem very strong and have a finished feel to them. These poems show a great deal about the war and opinions prevalent at the time and are good examples of varying thoughts throughout the war.