

Suicide in the trenches analysis

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Suicide in the Trenches – an analysis What is the meaning of war? What is war like? How do soldiers feel in a war? Glorious? Depressed? This poem accurately shows the harsh but sadly true reality of war - death, suicide and depression. Indeed, as quoted by Sir Williams Henry - “ Nobody in his right mind would enjoy war”. The point of view is third person. This is effective in showing one case of suicide, in third person observation, representing the depression and desire to quickly die in everyone else. Life is really worse than death - and this is shown through the eye-catching title “ Suicide in the Trenches”.

The word “ trenches” further emphasized that not only is this depression possessed by one young soldier boy, but also by many others in war. The setting is in depressing, smelly, and stuffy trenches as the title has blatantly stated. The story is about a young soldier boy’s transformation from a happy and innocent person into a depressed soldier who desires to kill himself, because life is really worse than death. The poet deliberately uses the small boy as an example to gain the reader’s sympathy. The structure of the poem is three stanzas with four lines in each. The rhyme scheme is A-A-B-B in each stanza.

This seems to be a rigid structure, but it really does bring out how one’s initial carefree innocence and freedom is being lost once he enters the cruel and depressing battlefield, or in this case, trenches. The tone in the poem is obviously a bitter and sarcastic one as we can see from the last stanza - “ You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye... ”. Sassoon strongly feels the general public is unable to empathize with soldiers because there is no way to understand what war is like. Through this bitter and sad poem, the poet

tries to bring out the theme of the poem - nobody can understand what war is like without personal experience.

The language the poet uses is clever in conveying the theme - a balance of symbolism, diction and alliteration is put to effective use in this poem. Something we cannot miss is the alliteration in the first stanza "slept soundly". The repetition of the letter 's' produces a harsh hissing sound, and this contributes to the bitter tone throughout the poem. Also, it puts emphasis on the phrase "slept soundly". As we all know, people who can sleep soundly are those who have no worries and nagging troubles before going to bed. This highlights how the boy was so innocent, without any worries at all, at the start of his experience in war. This is also brought out in "whistling", an action done only when one is happy and carefree. The trenches symbolize the rotting function of war in the case of the poem. Throughout the year till winter, the trenches had apparently transformed a carefree, innocent and happy boy into a depressed, boy who "put a bullet through his brain". The alliteration of the letter 'b' here also further creates a harsh, brute and bitter sound that adds on to the bitter mood, especially at the climax of the story told - the suicide.

The clever rhyme of "brain" with "again" at line 8 tries to strike a connection that although a young innocent boy was dragged into war and fought violently for his country and himself, in the end, when he is being pushed to his limit, still "nobody spoke of him again". This shows how cruel and selfish war is. It forces you to help - at such a young age - but yet does not remember or appreciate what you have done and sacrificed. In this case,

the boy sacrificed his childhood fun, laughter, innocence and carefree life in return for nothing at all - not even a memory of him.

How is war cruel? This is the perfect example. The diction used in the poem is especially strong. In the last stanza, the word "kindling" is being used to describe the "eye(s)" of the "smug-faced crowd". One must notice that this line is only devoted to facial description, and the "kindling" seems to be also a superficial countenance feature only. However, Siegfried tries to show with a sarcastic tone that they think that war is a glorious thing, they feel proud of these children, and seem to understand and appreciate what they are doing.

But in reality, they can never imagine what these children are going through, and in reality, they don't care or feel appreciative of what the children did. Therefore, the word kindling reveals the hypocrisy behind people who support war. In my personal opinion, the last stanza is the strongest and most impactful stanza. While the previous two stanzas show the transformation of a single boy when he enters war, the last stanza directly attacks people who support war itself, at the thought of its glory and honor, but not give a thought about the "pawns" dying and suffering in war. "Sneak home and pray you'll never know" shows that while the hypocrites support war, under the glorious facade, they are not willing or are too afraid to think of the consequences, sacrifice and price of this meaningless war - a big price that separates thousands of families and destroy tens of thousands of children. The poet is just trying to use an extreme and most serious example to illustrate his point. Indeed, war is just so cruel - it takes away, but does not return - not even a single memory for dead people.

It totally transform people from their happy and carefree state, into murderers constantly depressed and worried for their lives, yet guilty they killed their own kind. In war where humans are just pawns for a game of chess, nobody will understand how a soldier feels - constantly killing his own kind to defend himself, lacking in sleep, separated, maybe forever, from their families and friends - unless they undergo war itself. I would like to end off with this quote from the U. S. Military force - " Nobody would understand a soldier, except for the soldier himself".

Contrastingly the Second Stanza curtails the mood of happiness and innocence, abruptly introducing the horrors of war, using descriptive language such as describing the trenches to be, " Winter trenches. " It is Sassoon's Juxtaposition in the swing of mood and ultimately the contrast between the characters love of life to his sudden hatred of life, resulting in suicide... " He put a bullet through his brain" that shows the audience both the thematic idea and Sassoon's criticism of War's destruction of Innocence.