

# WILFRED OWEN (1893-1918)

## \* TEXT ONE

### DULCE ET DECORUM EST (1917)

Although written in 1917, this poem was published in 1920. It is based on Owen's experience of trench warfare.

Look at the lay-out of the text. What do you notice about the way the poem is divided up?

- Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
 Knock-kneed<sup>1</sup>, coughing like hags<sup>2</sup>, *we* cursed through sludge<sup>3</sup>, *we* refers to...  
 Till on the haunting flares<sup>4</sup> we turned our backs,  
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge<sup>5</sup>.  
 5 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,  
 But limped<sup>6</sup> on, *blood-shod*. All went lame, all blind;  
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots<sup>7</sup>  
 Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.
- Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling<sup>8</sup>,  
 10 Fitting the clumsy helmets just *in time*, *in time* for...  
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
 And floundering<sup>9</sup> like a man in fire or lime<sup>10</sup>. –  
 Dim through the misty panes and thick green light<sup>11</sup>,  
 As under a green sea, *I* saw him drowning. *I* refers to...
- 15 In all my dreams before my helpless sight  
*He* plunges at me, guttering<sup>12</sup>, choking, drowning. *He* refers to...
- If in some smothering<sup>13</sup> dreams, *you* too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung *him* in,  
 And watch the white eyes writhing<sup>14</sup> in his face,  
 20 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
 If you could hear, at every jolt<sup>15</sup>, the blood  
 Come gargling from the froth<sup>16</sup> – corrupted lungs,  
 Bitter as the cud<sup>17</sup>  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, –  
 25 *My friend*, you would not tell with such high zest<sup>18</sup> *My friend* refers to...  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
 The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
 Pro patria mori<sup>19</sup>.