



## [Dulce et Decorum Est](#), by Wilfred Owen

### **In A Nutshell**

If you're not familiar with Wilfred Owen, don't worry, Shmoop is here to help. Though you may not have heard of Owen, he set the tone for an entire generation of men and women writing and thinking about the events that just rocked the world – World War I.

Between 1914 and 1918, over nine million people died. Entire cities were razed to the ground. Nations crumbled, only to be re-formed amidst political turmoil and enough bad blood to launch another war (WWII, to be precise) a few short decades later. American troops joined the war in 1918, bringing with them the deadliest weapon yet: influenza. More people died of flu than war injuries.

Caught in a war that was waged primarily in trenches (big ditches that filled with mud, rats, and rainwater), Owen began to find it hard to justify all the suffering and death he witnessed. He was perfectly willing to sacrifice his life for king and country, but, like many other people, he'd like to make sure that his sacrifice was actually *needed*.

Increasingly convinced that the war seemed to be carrying on beyond the point of reason, Owen began to write poetry that emphasized the irony of his situation. He was in good company: as it turned out, *lots* of men (including Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, John McCrae, and others) were feeling like their lives in the trenches were becoming farcical. Owen, however, managed to capture the division between the elevated language of

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nationalism and *his* reality, a world that suddenly seemed full of the blood of his nearest friends. Owen's experience rang true to a lot of the servicemen and women who contributed to the war efforts of the time.

Owen's gripping realism remains important today because, well, it's so *real*. When we read his poetry, we feel as though we're with him on the field, watching as men suffer in a frantic struggle to stay alive.

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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 Why end the poem with a Latin quote? Why not an English slogan?
- 2 How would the poem be different if the last stanza weren't addressed to people at home? How does this stanza change the meaning of the poem?
- 3 Do you think that the speaker creates a realistic picture of his own experiences? Why or why not?

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