Wilfred Owen

- Wilfred Owen, 1893-1918
- Like other WWI poets, Owen gave a brutal and direct account of war.
- Perhaps most known for his widely anthologized poem, "Dulce Et Decorum Est" that captured the horrors of chemical warfare.

"Dulce Et Decorum Est"

- The poem’s title, translated as “How sweet to die for one’s country,” captures Owen’s growing skepticism of war.
- Note the graphic detail and the lingering effects of war:
  
  Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
  Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
  But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
  And floundering like a man in fire or lime.—
  Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light
  As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

  In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
  He plunges at me, drowning, choking, drowning.

“1914”

War broke: and now the Winter of the world
With perishing great darkness closes in. The foul tornado, centred at Berlin,
Is over all the width of Europe whirled, Rending the sails of progress. (ll. 1-5)

“Cramped in that Funnelled Hole”

Cramped in that funnelled hole, they watched the dawn
Open a jagged rim around; a yawn
Of death’s jaws, which had all but swallowed them
Stuck in the bottom of his throat of phlegm.

They were in one of many mouths of Hell
Not seen of seers in visions, only felt
As teeth of traps; when bones and the dead are smelt
Under the mud where long ago they fell
Mired with the sour sharp odour of the shell.

“Mental Cases”

- Graphic poem set in mental hospital.
- Dramatizes severe effects of what was known as “shell shock,” today known as post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Series of rhetorical questions add tension to the poem.
- Intense, detailed physical descriptions create nightmarish mood.
“Mental Cases”
- Second part of poem focuses on never-ending memories as the horror of war replays in the minds of the soldiers.
- Note the death images throughout.
- Nightmarish images of war as hell appear throughout the poem.

“Disabled”
- The first part of the poem focuses on life before war, recounting the young man’s life and desires to join the fighting.
- His views are youthful and romantic as he imagines impressing the girls with his uniform.
- Owen presents a stark contrast to the young man’s former life and his life after wounding.

“Disabled”
- Again, note the high level of description and detail to bring the intimacy and reality of the effects of war home to the reader, especially the young soldier’s loss of his legs.
- Owen emphasizes the soldier’s lack of understanding of the realities of war.
- Lines 28-29 make the point that the soldier was underage but was accepted.