

## ***Dulce et Decorum Est - Wilfred Owen***

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.  
Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And flound'ring 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, guttering, choking, drowning.  
If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

**Overview:** The soldiers are bent over like beggars on the street. They are so tired their knees knock together and cough like old people. There are flares in the sky behind them and began to walk in mud to their camp. Men were so tired they nearly fell asleep. and lost their boots. They continued anyway So tired they were drunk walking and deaf to the overhead bombs which crashed behind A chlorine gas attack happens and they all fumble to get their masks on. One soldier cannot get it on in time and begins to fall and chokes to death His eyes are not moving behind the mask The sea of chlorine is green and he looks as if he drowns. Owens can't do anything but watches him slowly die in front of him He then wants us to imagine this horrific sight of a young man being thrown into a wagon without any identity dying painfully. The chlorine gas makes you gargle blood and slowly die. This is what he describes and compares it to other horrible things so we too can understand the atrocities of war. He then tells us if we have seen what he has seen we would not speak of war so fondly or think of it as a nice place to be. He also tells us children looking for glory should not go to war.

This poem is set in World War one. It was written by Wilfred Owen and is one of the best known First World war poems. It speaks of his experiences and how he feels that the way war is perceived by the public is false and that war is really just a waste of life. He also feels it is not a place where hero's are

made and no child should ever want to go, this is different to the thoughts about war back then. On the right hand side of the table there is a commentary explaining the poem and what some of the lines mean.

**Glossary:**

1. DULCE ET DECORUM EST - the first words of a Latin saying (taken from an ode by Horace). The words

were widely understood and often quoted at the start of the First World War. They mean "It is sweet and right." The full saying ends the poem: Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori - it is sweet and right to die for your country. In other words, it is a wonderful and great honour to fight and die for your country.

2. Flares - rockets which were sent up to burn with a brilliant glare to light up men and other targets in the area between the front lines

3. Distant rest - a camp away from the front line where exhausted soldiers might rest for a few days, or longer

4. Hoots - the noise made by the shells rushing through the air

5. Outstripped - outpaced, the soldiers have struggled beyond the reach of these shells which are now falling behind them as they struggle away from the scene of battle

6. Five-Nines - 5.9 calibre explosive shells

7. Gas! - poison gas. From the symptoms it would appear to be chlorine or phosgene gas. The filling of the lungs with fluid had the same effects as when a person drowned

8. Helmets - the early name for gas masks

9. Lime - a white chalky substance which can burn live tissue

10. Panes - the glass in the eyepieces of the gas masks

11. Guttering - Owen probably meant flickering out like a candle or gurgling like water draining down a gutter, referring to the sounds in the throat of the choking man, or it might be a sound partly like stuttering and partly like gurgling

12. Cud - normally the regurgitated grass that cows chew usually green and bubbling. Here a similar looking

material was issuing from the soldier's mouth

13. High zest - idealistic enthusiasm, keenly believing in the rightness of the idea

14. ardent - keen

## ***Analysis of the Poem:***

### Alliteration:

- "Knock kneed" It is used to show us just how tired the men were that their knees were knocking together.
- "White eyes writhing" It is used to illustrate the horrific pain the young soldier is in by the fact he is nearly passing out and his eyes are rolling in his skull because of the pain.

### Assonance

"Many had lost their boots" By using the 'o' sound it creates a mournful effect. It shows the bad conditions that the soldiers had to put up with.

### Metaphor

"Drunk with fatigue" This metaphor is used to show us just how tired the soldiers were and uses good imagery. It helps us to imagine the soldiers tripping up and falling around the place.

### Simile

- "Bent double, like old beggars under sacks" This gives us the image of old beggars too tired to do anything
- "And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime" This gives us the image of the choking man struggling to stay alive and slowly dying.
- "As under a green sea" This simile is used to show the vastness of the chlorine gas and comparing it to a vast ocean
- "Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud" Used to show just how horrific the death of the young soldier was and comparing them both to an evil things such as cancer.

### Paradox

"Men marched asleep" This is used to show us just how tired the men were and that they were so tired that they were nearly asleep.

### Onomatopoeia

- "Deaf even to the hoots" The use of the word hoots shows us that the men were so deaf due to the overhead bombs and other explosions that they now could not actually hear the bombs which produce a "hooting" sound when whistling through the air.
- "He plunges at me guttering, choking" This use of onomatopoeia is used to show how the soldier was suffering slowly due to the inhalation of the chlorine gas.
- "The blood come, gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs" The use of the word gargling gives us the image of the man slowly dying and losing his life. It better conveys the emotion Owens is trying to put behind his heart felt beliefs on war.

### Imagery

"Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues" This imagery gives us the horrendous description of the death of the soldier and comparing it to the sores an innocent child would have on its mouth after using an old form of medicine common in Owens time.

### Why do you like the poem?

- Very descriptive Written in the first person therefore giving a better insight
- There are many emotions, it is very emotionally written and conveys emotion well.
- The anxiety and suspense created makes the poem more interesting.

### Tone of the Poem

In the first part of the poem there is a tone of tiredness. In the second part it changes to a tone of rush when he is faced with death In the third part there is a tone of sadness after the death of the soldier.

### Mood of the poem

The mood of the poem is one of sadness as it looks at how terrible the lives of soldiers are.

### Theme

1. Soldiers
2. War
3. death
4. hardship
5. lies

### Key Quote:

"To children ardent for some desperate glory, The Old Lie;  
Dulce et decorum est pro, pro patria mori"