DULCE ET DECORUM EST1

by Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,    
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,    
Till on the haunting flares2 we turned our backs    
And towards our distant rest3 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 hoots4   
Of tired, outstripped5 Five-Nines6 that dropped behind.

Gas!7 Gas! Quick, boys! –  An ecstasy of fumbling,    
Fitting the clumsy helmets8 just in time;    
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,    
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime9 . . .    
Dim, through the misty panes10 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,11 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 cud12   
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,    
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest13   
To children ardent14 for some desperate glory,    
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est    
Pro patria mori.15

8 October 1917 - March, 1918

15 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.