Dulce Et Decorum Est

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 gas-shells dropping softly 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.

(Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.) This mean, “Tis Sweet and Beautiful to Die for One’s Country.”

Discussion Questions
1. What image does Wilfred Owen create with the first two lines?
2. What happened to the wounded men walking back to the medics, how were they wounded?
3. Then what happens next, and what does “gas” have to do with it?
4. What type of gas can you think of that is green?
5. What is the warning that Owen is trying to pass on?
6. What does he call war “obscene” as?
7. What lie does he accuse other people of telling their children?
8. Why do you think that this is was a lie?
9. Is there any truth to it?
Another man once said, “The point of war is not to die for your country, but to make the other man die for his.” Which do you think we should pay more attention to?