

On Friday nights, teens gather in basements and engage in exhilarating battles where they display their heroism by defeating terrorists in the video game *Call of Duty*. In reality, however, a soldier possesses only one life to give for the glory of patriotism. Wilfred Owen depicts the harsh realities of warfare through imagery and allusion in his poem “Dulce Et Decorum Est.” The speaker’s bleak yet cynical attitude towards the war reveals the disparity between the glorified expectations of war and the bitter truths of battle.

Through imagery, Owen depicts the horrors of death on the battlefield of World War I and displays the speaker’s despairing, somber, and bleak view of war as a result of what he has experienced and endured. The poem begins with a figurative description of the marching soldiers who look more like “old beggars under sacks” or sickly “hags” than they do like warriors. He portrays them “trudg[ing]” toward their deaths, “asleep,” “drunk with fatigue,” and deaf to the sounds of the shells that drop around them. Clearly unable to survive in this condition, the soldiers walk blindly into the dangers of battle, ignorant of their predicament. The exclamation “GAS! Gas! Quick, boys!” rouses the soldiers from the listlessness into a state of desperation and panic. Though most of the group “fuml[e]” and “fit [their] clumsy helmets just in time,” one suffers a horrible death, witnessed by the “helpless” speaker. The speaker must watch his fellow soldier “fumbling like a man in fire or lime” gasping for survival. The image of this man “drowning” in “a green sea” of poisonous gas haunts the speaker as he can do nothing but watch his fellow soldier die.

The speaker and his soldiers are not fighting for idealism, glory, or patriotism—but simply for their survival. Thus, the speaker is especially bitter towards those who employ “the old Lie” that it is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country in order to convince innocent young men to sacrifice themselves in war.