Anthem for Doomed Youth (Wilfred Owens 1893-1918)

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
       - Only the monstruous anger of the guns.
       Only the stuttering rifles' [rapid](http://users.fulladsl.be/spb1667/cultural/owen/anthem-for-doomed.html) rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries [now](http://users.fulladsl.be/spb1667/cultural/owen/anthem-for-doomed.html) for them; no prayers nor bells;
       Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, -
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
       And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
       Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
       The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their [flowers](http://users.fulladsl.be/spb1667/cultural/owen/anthem-for-doomed.html) the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

**‘Anthem for a doomed youth’ explores the subject matter of Wilfred Owen’s experience of war and the poem makes a strong statement on the useless nature of war and the youths who are ‘doomed’ to die on the battlefield. The poem reflects on the horror of trench warfare and the brutality of the First World War.**

**Wilfred Owen skillfully explores the theme of war and its social effects on the soldiers and their families and loved ones left behind. The ‘passing bells’ ring for the death of the soldiers and this reinforces the message that war is death, useless and futile.**

**The poem is written as an elegy, a lament for the dead. An elegy is a sad poem that explores loss and death. Owen does not personalize or individualize death; instead he maintains a detached view that highlights more strongly the issue of death and the multitude of its victims. The first eight lines, the octet, sets the scene of the destruction and madness of warfare set against the more subdued and somber images of the church.**

**At the opening of the poem, the tone is one of bitter passion and then moves to a more quiet thoughtful tone. By the end of the poem, the mood is somber and solemn. This is reinforced by the ‘drawing down of blinds’ as loved ones are informed of the death of a family member or friend. The poem quietly closes.**

**Wilfred Owen uses poetic techniques to enhance the horrific images of war and its effects. The simile ‘die as cattle’ in the first line shocks us with the image of a slaughterhouse, the soldiers likened to animals. The octet shows the sounds of war, the weapons of destruction, the guns, rifles and shells that are all linked to religious imagery. The use of onomatopoeia, alliteration and personification create a brilliant image in the line, ‘Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle’. The contrast of ‘choirs’ and ‘wailing shells’ is a startling image. The bugles sounding in the eighth line leads into the next stanza (sestet) with the muted, silent sound of the Last Post. As dusk falls in the last line, the poem has a feeling of finality and sadness. The ‘slow dusk’ haunts the ones who mourn for the dead soldiers.**

**‘Anthem for doomed youth’ shows the injustices of war and how people in society are cruelly affected by the deaths of their young men. Owen has chosen to silence the people who send these young men to war: the politicians and leaders. Instead he has placed in the foreground the soldiers and their loved ones, and the senseless nature of war. Through his use of poetic techniques, Owen has highlighted the theme that the young are doomed in war.**