

# Anthem for Doomed Youth

Wilfred Owen

## The poet

- On March 18, 1893, Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born in Shropshire, England.
- Interested in the arts at a young age, Owen began writing poetry as a teenager.
- He was wounded in combat in 1917 and, diagnosed with shell shock.
- At the hospital, Owen wrote many of his most important poems, including “Anthem for doomed youth” and “Dulce et Decorum Est.”
- In September 1918, Owen returned to the front during the final stages of the war.
- Awarded the Military Cross for his bravery. Died at the age of 25.
- The news reached his parents on November 11, Armistice Day.

## Context

- The poem explores the darker side of war, aspects that some would rather ignore or gloss over.
- The poem’s success lies in the stark contrast between the furious, explosive reality of the battle and the calm holiness of the church ritual.
- The poem raises the important questions often ignored when countries commit to war.

## The title

- An anthem is usually a hymn to praise or celebrate but in this bitterly ironic title, Owen is criticising the praising of War.
- You wouldn’t usually associate the youth with being doomed, but these men were being sent to their deaths. Owen uses the association of death and youth to show the inhumanity of war.

## The poem

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?

— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now 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 goodbyes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;

Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,

And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.