

SHAMI CHAKRABARTI – Director of Liberty

I first read this Wilfred Owen poem when a youth of fifteen or sixteen myself. I couldn't help but be touched by its special blend of beauty, anger and irony. Perhaps Owen was an original 'emo', exploring the contrast between the grand ceremony of militarism and religion, and the reality of doomed boys killed 'as cattle'.

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

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.

Wilfred Owen

What do you think about this poem?

Try to talk about the images that the poem creates in your mind and give examples using evidence from the text.

Are there words you need to look up? What do they mean within this poem?