Define the following:

Sonnet:

Octave:

Sestet:

1. Why is onomatopoeia so effective in the octave of this poem?
2. What is the tone of Owen’s extended analogy between customary funeral rites and those experienced by the “doomed youth’? (You can begin with “anthem” in the title).
3. How is the tone of the poem varied in the sestet?
4. What is the meaning and significance of the poem’s concluding image?
5. Why is the sonnet form appropriate in this poem?
6. How do specific image in this sonnet enhance its general subject?

Anthem for Doomed Youth is a poem from World War I (1914-1918) by Wilfred Owen, a British soldier and poet. Owen's greatest work was inspired by his experience in the trenches of France during the war. He wrote "Anthem for Doomed Youth" in 1917, during an intense period of creativity that included a stay in a war hospital in Scotland. The poem is a sonnet, a 14-line poem with a formal arrangement of rhyme and meter. Many sonnets are love poems or lyric expressions of religious feeling. In this poem, however, Owen uses the sonnet form to pose bitter questions about death and war.

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| http://www.worldbookonline.com/assets/common-asset/images/spacer.gif | What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?Only the monstrous anger of the guns.Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattleCan 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 eyesShall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.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. | http://www.worldbookonline.com/assets/common-asset/images/spacer.gif |
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The poem begins with the deliberately shocking image of men in war dying like cattle, pointing out that they will have no stately funerals or mourning bells. Instead, their passing will be marked only by the "wailing shells," which Owen compares ironically to "choirs." Bugles call men to war rather than honor them in processions. The noisy battlefield has become a cruel mockery of the funeral service.

The second stanza, though still bitter, takes on a gentler tone. The glow of candles at a funeral service is found in the "holy glimmers" in the eyes of dying men. The pale faces of waiting women become a *pall* (covering for a coffin). The substitute for flowers shall be the "tenderness" of those at home. The "tenderness" Owen describes is also reflected in the poetic language and imagery. Owen has, in a sense, created a beautiful funeral service for the dying men; his angry poem has also become an *elegy* (formal lament for the dead).

Wilfred Owen was influenced from an early age by the rich language and imagery of the English Romantic poet John Keats. The Romantics valued emotion, sensation, the beauty of nature, and the power of the imagination. Some critics, looking for realism in war poetry, have complained about Owen's "lapse" into Romanticism, particularly in the poem's second stanza. But Owen has a natural lyricism that combines well with the darker war imagery. "Anthem for Doomed Youth" recalls Romanticism in an ironic way, making the horror of an unromantic death in war more powerful.

Unlike many war poets, Owen was already a practicing poet when his experience on the battlefields inspired him to write. The horror of the war, and the bitterness of realizing its futility, gave a new and harder edge to his poetry. Another important influence was the older poet Siegfried Sassoon, whom Owen met while in the hospital in Scotland. Sassoon helped Owen to refine and focus his writing on the reality of war. Sassoon edited and published Owen's *War Poems* in 1920, after the younger poet's death. (See [Sassoon, Siegfried](http://www.worldbookonline.com/advanced/article?id=ar725090).)

Wilfred Owen returned to the front in 1918 and was killed just a week before the armistice on Nov. 11, 1918. In 1962, the British composer Benjamin Britten used Owen's war poems for his highly acclaimed *War Requiem.*

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