

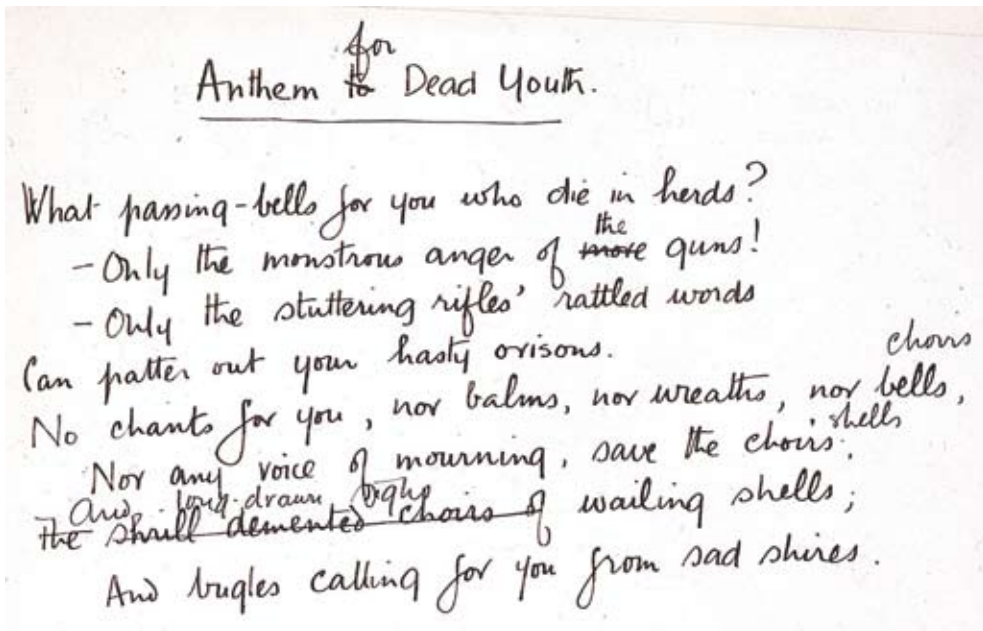
Mental Cases, by Wilfred Owen

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
 Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
 Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,
 Baring teeth that leer like skulls' tongues wicked?
 Stroke on stroke of pain, – but what slow panic,
 Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
 Ever from their hair and through their hand palms
 Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
 Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?
 – These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
 Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
 Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
 Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
 Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.

Always they must see these things and hear them,
 Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
 Carnage incomparable, and human squander
 Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.
 Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
 Back into their brains, because on their sense
 Sunlight seems a bloodsmear; night comes blood-black;
 Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.
 – Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,
 Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.
 – Thus their hands are plucking at each other;
 Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;
 Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
 Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.



Both CRW Nevinson's *La Patrie* (1916, right) and *Anthem For Doomed Youth* by Wilfred Owen, above, express the outrage and shame these artists felt at the violent disregard for young lives which they experienced at first hand. Owen's original manuscript survives, below. It was his friend Siegfried Sassoon who suggested changing the title to 'Doomed'



BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM & ART GALLERY/BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

Disabled, by Wilfred Owen

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
 And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
 Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
 Voices of play and pleasure after day,
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
 When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
 And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim, –
 In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
 Now he will never feel again how slim
 Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands,
 All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
 For it was younger than his youth, last year.
 Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
 He's lost his colour very far from here,
 Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
 And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
 And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
 After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
 It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,

He thought he'd better join. He wonders why ...
 Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
 That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
 Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts,
 He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
 Smiling they wrote his lie; aged nineteen years.

Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
 And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
 Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
 For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
 And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
 Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
 And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home,
 but not as crowds cheer Goal.
 Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
 Thanked him; and then inquired about his soul.
 Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
 And do what things the rules consider wise,
 And take whatever pity they may dole.
 Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
 Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
 How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
 And put him into bed? Why don't they come?