



## EXPLORING THE LANGUAGE OF POEMS: A STYLISTIC STUDY

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**Abstract:** Perceiving the meaning of literary texts requisites studying and understanding the language of these texts. Stylistic approach to literary texts does not only involve linguistic textual analysis but also encourages readers to interact with textual structure to infer meaning (Tutaş, 2006a). This paper focuses on the relevance of stylistics approach for the analysis of poems in Teaching English as a Foreign Language contexts. To this end, Siegfried Sassoon's *The Rear-Guard* and Wilfred Owen's *Anthem for Doomed Youth* are taken into consideration. After having explained in what ways stylistic analysis helps the reader to come to terms with the process of coding the meaning embedded in the text by focusing on the linguistic features, the two poems are compared and contrasted via a stylistic approach. The paper does not solely focus on analysing the texts, but also argues in favour of exploiting language-based approaches in literature study in English as a Foreign Language contexts, since stylistics is interested in what writers do *with* and *through* language.

**Keywords:** Stylistics, poetry analysis, literature teaching, English Language Teaching.

**Özet:** Bu çalışma, İngilizce'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretilmesi bağlamında, şiir incelemesinde, deyişbilimsel yaklaşımın uygunluğu üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu amaca yönelik olarak, Siegfried Sassoon'un *The Rear-Guard* ve Wilfred Owen'in *Anthem for Doomed Youth* başlıklı şiirleri deyişbilimsel yaklaşımla değerlendirilmektedir. Deyişbilimsel yaklaşımın okuyucuya metne gömülmüş anlamı çözme sürecinde, okuyucunun dilbilimsel öğeler üzerine yoğunlaşması sağlanarak nasıl yardımcı olabileceği açıklandıktan sonra, sözü edilen iki şiir deyişbilimsel yaklaşımla karşılaştırılmaktadır. Çalışma, sadece metinlerin çözümlenmesine odaklanmamakta, aynı zamanda İngilizce'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretilmesi bağlamında edebiyatın ele alınması sırasında, deyişbilimin yazarların *dil aracılığı* ve *dilin kendisi ile* neler yaptığı sorunsalını konu edinen doğası gereği, dil kaynaklı yaklaşımların geçerliliği ve yararlılığı görüşlerini de öne sürmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Deyişbilim, şiir incelemesi, edebiyat öğretimi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi.

### Introduction

The inspiration for the current paper comes from a statement that was made by Roman Jakobson almost half a century ago. In his frequently cited statement Jakobson (1960: 377) indicates the relationship between linguistics and literary studies stating that:

If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that ...linguists has been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science itself. All of us here, however, definitely realize that a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconservant with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms.

In order to illustrate how literary texts can be explored in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, as a methodological approach this paper adopts a practical stylistics approach which is defined by Carter (1995: 4) as a "process of literary text analysis which starts from a basic assumption that the primary interpretative procedures used in the reading of a literary text are *linguistic* procedures". Practical stylistics analysis focuses on learning about language, the workings of language in literature and on developing the confidence to work

systematically towards interpretations of literary texts. With such a focus, among all other approaches to literature study, practical stylistics offers itself as a suitable introductory mode of analysis. (ibid.: 6)

Stylistics and the teaching of literature have their roots in the works of Widdowson (1975), Collie and Slater (1986), Carter (1983), Carter and Long (1987), Short (1983), Lazar (1993), however, as is noted by Simpson (2004) stylistics in the early twenty-first century is very much alive and well. Upon the exploration of texts (may it be literary or non-literary) by the utilization of stylistics, Simpson (ibid.: 3) says “this method of inquiry has an important reflexive capacity insofar as it can shed light on the very language system it derives from; it tells us about the ‘rules’ of language because it often explores texts where these rules are bent, distended or stretched to breaking point. Interest in language is always at the fore in contemporary stylistic analysis which is why you should never undertake to do stylistics unless you are interested in language”.

Carter (1996: 5) argues on the relevance of stylistics for literature teaching stating that stylistic analysis helps to foster interpretative skills and to encourage reading between the lines. He further posits the advantages of stylistics stating that “stylistics provides students with a method of scrutinising texts, ‘a way in’ to a text, opening up starting points for fuller interpretation. The method is detailed and explicit, it shows how you reach or begin to reach an interpretation. From a teaching point of view, students learn to open a text not only by osmosis but explicitly and consciously. A pedagogically sensitive stylistics can give students increased confidence in reading and interpretation.”

Carter’s (1996) emphasis on how stylistics can be a useful tool in the literature class is of paramount importance since literature study has generally caused a feeling of apprehensiveness in the pedagogy of teaching English as a foreign or second language. Turkish EFL context is no exception in this sense. In a very detailed survey regarding literature teaching in the Turkish EFL context, Akyel and Yalçın (1990) posit that the lack of pedagogical approaches that target development of language competence and awareness seems to be a prevailing fact. The aforementioned “apprehensiveness” is even more ascendant when it comes to analysis of poetry. In another study, Akyel (1995) argues that although poems have a lot to offer to EFL students, “because of the ‘unusual’ features of poetic language, teachers either do not seem to be much interested in using poetry in the classroom, or they cannot communicate their enthusiasm to their students”. Nonetheless, those teachers who refrain to indulge in the verbal analysis that reaffirms “the centrality of language as the aesthetic medium of literature” in their EFL classes fail to realize that “non-native students possess the kind of conscious, systematic knowledge about the language which provides the best basis for stylistic analysis. In many respects, therefore, non-native students are often better at stylistics analysis than native speakers.” (Carter, 1996: 6)

Literature teaching in the Turkish EFL context has increasingly been the concern of Turkish EFL practitioners. In a research, Arıkan (2005) interprets the views of prospective teachers in an English Language teaching department, and posits that students support the inclusion of literature courses in their curriculum since through literature they have access to the authentic use of the language. More and more research is being conducted to illustrate how literature can be a part of the EFL teaching in the Turkish EFL context. Arıkan (2009) in a recent study exemplifies how a short story can be approached through the use of visual materials. Researchers (see, for example, Çelik, 2000; Saraç, 2003; Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Tutaş, 2006a; Tutaş, 2006b) support the view that literature and understanding the language of literary texts

should be perceived as an important component of EFL teaching/learning and since the medium of literature is language, it is definitely worth focusing on the linguistic features of the texts. Tosun (2010), by the same token, argues that literature classes should be perceived as spaces where teachers and students enjoy linguistic and pedagogical tasks instead of classes in which the focus is merely on authors and periods.

In the following paragraphs, since relating linguistic descriptions to the interpretation of poetry is at the core of the current paper, certain linguistic features which are stylistically significant and therefore foregrounded through register, lexis, deviation, parallelism and metaphor, will be taken into consideration in Siegfried Sassoon's *The Rear-Guard* and Wilfred Owen's *Anthem for Doomed Youth*. Underlying stylistics features of the two poems, an attempt will also be made to explain how these stylistic features contribute to their overall meanings.

### **Stylistic Aspects of *The Rear-Guard* and *Anthem for Doomed Youth***

As is agreed by majority of literary critics, with regard to English literature one of the most outstanding aspects of World War I is the amount of excellent poetry it inspired. What is perhaps the greatest body of war poetry ever written was produced by British poets from 1914 to 1918. Roby (1993: 30) notes this fact stating those few bloody years 'spawned "two generations" of war poets: the first caught up in the awful and blind patriotism of the hour, among them Rupert Brooke, Julian Grenfel, Robert Nichols and the second "composed of" antiwar satirists and soldier poets of pity and disillusionment, among them are Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg and Robert Graves'. This paper focuses on the poems of soldier-poets of English literature; Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Via stylistic analysis Sassoon's *The Rear-Guard* and Owen's *Anthem for Doomed Youth* are compared and contrasted.

### **Register**

In Sassoon's *The Rear-Guard*, we have a poetic language of violence that the poet himself experienced as a soldier-poet in the World War I. The violent and terrible trenches of the war provided the subject matter for his poetry. In *The Rear-Guard*, we have powerful spontaneous observations of Sassoon and he portrays his suffering inflicted both on himself and on a generation of youth by the horror of hand-to-hand, man-to-man killing. Since Sassoon was convinced that the war had no longer any point, he decided to "protest" the war in a spectacular way through his poetry. Throughout *The Rear-Guard*, he uses a warfare register to note the violent scenes he saw and the emotions he experienced.

In his poem, Sassoon transforms the register of frontline experience into a colloquial and conversational tone. In *The Rear Guard*, a tired (*For days he'd had no sleep*) officer seeks for headquarters in a captured tunnel, it is dark and he sees a soldier who seems to be in a sleep, "*Get up and guide me through this stinking place*" he says, but there is no response. The officer's flashlight reveals an "*Agony dying hard ten days before*", and persona of the poem, "*with sweat of horror in his hair*", rushes towards to "*the twilight air*" leaving the hellish tunnel behind.

In another soldier-poet Wilfred Owen's poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, we see a register which shifts the relations with family, church, army and poetry. As Owen was an assistant to

a reverend in his childhood, from an early age he was exposed to the language of church and this opened him a field of a discourse (the topics, themes and ideology of religion) that he made use of in his poems. Like Sassoon, Owen also deals with the agonies of the war. He is “indeed one of the best English poets of the Army” (Roby, 1993), and army language is thematically prominent in his best known poems since they deal with the life and death of soldiers. In *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, Owen makes use of both army and church discourse in order to reveal the violence, agonies of the war and silence of a family in mourning, and the sorrow of the quiet house with “drawn blinds”.

### Lexis

In both poems, there are words related with battle and violence. In *The Rear-Guard*; *the tunnel, battle, headquarters, wound, tins, boxes, bottles, boom of shells* are the lexical items that remind us of war. Expressions such as; *unwholesome air, shapes too vague to know, a mirror smashed, stinking place, unanswering heap, the livid face, terribly glaring up, eyes yet wore, agony dying, blackening wound* give an idea of the violent and terrible conditions of the trenches of the war. In Sassoon’s poem, the idea of light is repeated by different lexical choices such as *torch, rosy, flashed, beam, glaring, dawn and twilight*. Although some of these lexical items have positive meanings, Sassoon makes use of these items in such a way that they turn out to be negative expressions. All these “deviant” elements will be taken into consideration in the following sections of the paper.

In *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, as a common fact with *The Rear-Guard*, we have words related with war. These are; *the guns, stuttering rifles, and rapid rattle*. On the other hand, in *Anthem for Doomed Youth* Owen uses another discourse as well; discourse of the church. Therefore in Owen’s poem we have some other lexical groupings. Words like *bells, orisons, prayers, mourning, choirs, bugles, candles, holly glimmers, pall* can all be included into the group of church lexis. Through these lexical items, Owen translates the speech and imagery of one community into that of another. In the octave of the sonnet for instance, the mad mechanical voices of the battlefield are the only accompanies of the funeral rites for dead soldiers. It can be said that Owen wants to show to the reader that there is nothing beautiful or romantic about the circumstances of the war.

### Foregrounding through Deviation, Parallelism and Metaphor

Deviation, as is defined by Short (1996: 11) is a “linguistic phenomenon and has an important psychological effect on readers (and hearers). In any literary text, if a part is deviant, it becomes especially noticeable or perceptually prominent. This psychological effect is called *foregrounding*”. Since “foregrounded “ elements in any given text is of vital importance for understanding the message(s) conveyed, I will dwell on the parts of the poems which are foregrounded through parallelism, metaphor, semantic, syntactic or graphological deviations. These areas of language are, as Short (1996: 19) in some ways on the borderline between grammar and meaning.

Sassoon’s poem *The Rear-Guard* begins with a deviation. Just before the first line of the poem, the line (*Hinderburgh Line, April 1917*) is an external deviation and it is graphologically deviant from the norms of the genre. The poet, by giving the setting and exact time, emphasises that everything he is going to tell in the poem is about his personal, more importantly “real” experiences and observations. He gives the impression of a person who records everything into his diary, and this foregrounded fact serves to the purpose of making

the reader believe in the reliability of the poet and reality of the poem. Moreover, this foregrounding reinforces previously mentioned fact that in his poems Sassoon expresses the scenes he saw and the emotions he experienced.

Another deviant line in the first stanza of *The Rear-Guard* is the second line of the poem:

(2) *He winked his prying torch with patching glare*

In this line *prying torch* is a metaphorical expression. *Prying* is used as an adjective for *torch*, and this is not a proper usage for a noun like *torch* and therefore is deviant. On the other hand, *patching glare* is semantically deviant as *patching* normally does not associate with *glare*. Through these deviant elements, Sassoon foregrounds the idea that he is going to illuminate the realities of the war by the help of his “curious torch”. As a war poet, he is aware of the conflict between the indifference of the civilian population and unbearable sufferings of the soldiers. The poet also wants everybody to realize and see clearly what is going on in the trenches of the war. If other people could look at the things in the frontline and try to understand the sufferings of soldiers without any “patch” in their eyes, everything would be as visible as glare.

In the last line of the first stanza we have another deviation:

(7) *The rosy gloom of battle overhead*

In this line, *rosy* is used as an adjective to define the noun *gloom*. “Rosy” lexically means “pink and healthy in appearance and likely to be satisfactory, promising”. “Gloom”, on the other hand, refers to partial darkness and a feeling of sadness and depression. Normally we do not use a positive adjective with a noun that clearly has negative connotations. *The rosy gloom of battle overhead*, therefore, is a semantic deviation. Sassoon as an antiwar poet, emphasises his hope that other people may take a warning from the “gloom” of the terrible war. If people, who are seemingly indifferent to the sufferings of the soldiers in the battlefield, become more sensitive and understand the meaningless and evil side of the war, this “gloom” can be turned into a “rosy” future.

Nevertheless, Sassoon feels “alone” in his struggle to make people to see the evil side of the war, and his felt loneliness is also foregrounded through an internal syntactic deviation. When we look at the first lines of the first second stanzas, we see that these first lines begin with a gerund:

(1) *Groping along the tunnel, step by step*

...

(8) *Tripping, he grabbed the wall; saw some one lie*

...

(19) *Alone, he staggered on until he found.*

In this respect, there is a parallelism between line (1) and (8), but the first line of the last stanza internally deviates from these lines by exploiting an adjective instead of a gerund. As a result, we feel his loneliness even more strikingly.

In lines (11), (12) and (13) we have another internal deviation. In these lines Sassoon employs a colloquial language in a conversational tone:

- (11) *"I'm looking for headquarters". No reply.*  
 (12) *"God blast your neck!" (For days he'd had no sleep)*  
 (13) *"Get up and guide me through this stinking place".*

It is clear that Sassoon had learned to listen carefully to the conversation of soldiers. As noted by Roby (1993: 30) "...even in the midst of trench warfare Sassoon laboured over his poems, ...he constantly made notes of the scenes, so that the poems he would write from them later might have the ring of authenticity". The usage of dialogue (although there is no response from the "unanswering heap") and colloquial language indicates the immediacy of the poem.

Another syntactic deviation which foregrounds the violence of the war and the sufferings of the soldiers in the trenches is in line (17):

- (17) ***Agony dying** hard ten days ago.*

In this line, the noun *agony* precedes the attributive adjective *dying*. *Agony* is used as an adjective to define *dying* but this usage deviates from the forms of grammar and is foregrounded. When we consider the previous line;

- (16) ***Terribly glaring up**, whose **eyes yet wore***

we can come to the conclusion that Sassoon accentuates once again the sufferings of the soldiers and violence of the war. The idea is reinforced by other Determiner + Adjective + Noun structures which refer to "die in an unendurable way". These are; *the livid face* and the *blackening wound*.

In line (18), we come across a metaphorical expression which explicitly reveals the idea mentioned above:

- (18) *And **fists of fingers** clutched the blackening wound*

This line is semantically deviant as it is impossible for things like "fingers" to have fists. Consequently, this semantic deviation foregrounds the idea of soldier's suffering and his struggle, since a man with his fists usually reminds us his struggle with his opponents. Moreover, soldier's "fists of fingers" are on his deadly "blackening wound". A realistic, vivid description of a dead soldier who was shot in his trench, tried to stop bleeding but he could not and died-perhaps dreaming of his good days, wife, children, family-with *his eyes yet wore*.

Owen's poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth* is also graphologically deviant. There is a gap between the octave and sestet of the sonnet. This graphological deviation foregrounds two different discourses used by the poet; army discourse in the octave, church discourse in the sestet.

There is a parallelism between the first lines of the octave and sestet. Lines (1) and (9) begin with interrogative sentences. However, the lines that proceed the line (1) deviate internally as there is an explanation to the question asked in the line (1) and this explanation is between dashes. Lines between the two dashes foreground the fact that the atmosphere of funeral rites "for those who die as cattle" is heartbreaking because the only available and appropriate funeral rites for these soldiers are mechanical voices of the guns. Moreover, the deaths of

these soldiers are not considered to be a normal one, it is a kind of slaughter and this fact is foregrounded by a simile in the first line of the poem:

(1) *What passing bells for these **who die as cattle?***

In the sestet, the poem reaches into silence with the description of a family in mourning. The house with drawn blinds is beautifully naturalised as a figure for dusk. In the last two lines of the poem, we have a syntactic deviation since there is no main verb:

(13) *Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,*  
(14) *And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds*

The absence of auxiliary and a main verb in the above lines indicate the motionless, lifeless of the situation which is the usual atmosphere of households in mourning. On the other hand, this deviation may foreground a cultural custom as well since in some cultures drawing down the blinds of a house is a custom which indicates either that a funeral procession is passing or that there has been a death in the house.

### **Verbs - Tense**

In *The Rear-Guard* there are more verbs than in *Anthem for Doomed Youth*. Most of the verbs exploited in Sassoon's poem are dynamic verbs. In Owen's poem, however, there are few verbs and these verbs are mostly static. When we consider the verbs used in *The Rear-Guard* we see that verbs such as *groping, winked, sniffed, smashed, grabbed, saw, humped, stooped, to give, looking for, get up, guide, kicked, flashed, clutched, staggered, climbed* all describe action. Sassoon uses these words to reveal the action and the horror of the trench combat. In the battlefield there is no room for slow motion, in order to survive soldiers have to be constantly on the move.

In *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, on the other hand, there are few verbs and they are mostly stative. These few words are; *die, can patter, may be held, shall shine*. When we consider the fact that the poem deals with elegiac moments it seems natural to have fewer verbs than a descriptive poem which focuses on the violent, horrible conditions of the trenches.

*The Rear-Guard* is in the past tense. Since an action in the past tense may be seen as having taken place at a particular point of time, one can claim that the poet's usage of past tense adds to the reality of the poem. Especially when we consider the diary writing style (*Hindenburg Line, April 1917*), this fact becomes even more prominent.

*Anthem for Doomed Youth* is in the present tense. In his poem Owen uses present tense to refer to a specific situation for a particular speaker. The situation is a specific one in Owen's poem, because it indicates the lamenting moments of funeral ceremonies of dead soldiers and families in grief which were all familiar scenes to Owen. Moreover, by the use of the present tense, the repetitive nature of these ceremonies and despite all these never-ending ceremonies the futility of war is also emphasised.

## Phonetic-Sound Pattern

In the *Rear-Guard*, there is an irregular rhyme pattern. *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, on the contrary, has a regular rhyme. In the first eight lines of the poem we have a regular rhyme of ab ab cd cd; the last six lines of the poem has a rhyme of abb acc.

The repetition of /r/ sound in *Anthem for Doomed Youth* builds up the idea of horror of the war and the awesome sounds created by rifles at the battlefield and also forms a harmony with the lexical choice in line (4); *patter*:

(2) Only the monstrous anger of the guns

(3) Only the stuttering rrifles` rapid rattle

(4) Can patter out their hasty orisons.

The first syllables of *rapid* /ræpid/, and *rattle* / rætɪl/ are both phonetically and graphologically identical. This phonetic parallelism reinforces once again the violent voices of the war, and also by the help of the existing assonance-as vowel sound are repeated-between *rifle*, *rapid*, *rattle* and *patter* makes the firing machine guns effect in the battlefield echo in the ears of the reader.

Apart from these, there are other alliterative and repeated sound patterns in *Anthem for Doomed Youth*:

(8) And bugles calling from sad shires

(11) Shall shine the holly glimmers of goodbyes

(12) The pallor of girls` brows shall be their pall;

(13) Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds

(14) And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

The repetition of consonant /s/ throughout the poem stresses the importance of visualising “passing-bells” which clearly indicates saddening sounds of ringing in a context of endless sadness.

In both poems /s/ sound appears to be a common sound. In *The Rear-Guard*, /s/ sound is used to emphasise the eerie, scary atmosphere of the tunnel:

(3) From side to side, and sniffed the unwholesome air.

(4) Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know:

(5) A mirror smashed, the mattress from a bed:

Here we have a repetitive /s/ sound that echoes just like the hissing of a snake hidden in the unearthly and spine-chilling darkness of the tunnel.

## Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations for the EFL Context

Throughout the current paper two poems were analysed by the help of stylistic approach to literary text. The main focus has been to illustrate how stylistic features of these poems contribute to the meaning making. As I mentioned in the introductory bit of the paper, a

systematic language-based approach to literature bears the potential to pave the way towards a better understanding of a literary text. As Short (1996: 27) also accentuates “detailed and systematic analysis can be seen as an aid to our understanding and appreciation of the text under discussion as well as providing a rational language-based account to support interpretation and giving insights into the process by which we interpret when we read”. As a result of such an analysis, it would suffice to say in *The Rear-Guard*, the feelings of a person who has seen and endured the sufferings of the troops in the war, and can no longer be a party to prolong those sufferings for ends which he believes to be evil and unjust have appeared to be foregrounded. In Owen’s poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, through linguistic devices we were given the idea that there is nothing beautiful or romantic about the circumstances of the war.

As much as I believe in the relevance of a linguistic oriented approach to text analysis for better appreciation and understanding, I am thoroughly convinced that such an approach offers plenty of opportunities in the EFL teaching/learning context (see Timucin, 2003: 178-81 for practical teaching activities that can be utilized for the poem *The Rear-Guard*), for teachers of English in the EFL settings. And all these opportunities are too valuable to miss in the TEFL context since “what language teachers teach is a very complex issue which requires linguistic, pragmatic, pedagogical and cultural competence” (Tercanlioğlu, 2000: 185). As is also researched and illuminated by Akyel (1995) in actual EFL setting, language activities prepared around the “distinctive features of the language of the poem help EFL learners develop an awareness of how language is used to produce a particular meaning”, and the stylistic and language-based approaches discussed throughout the present paper provides both the teachers and students in the EFL class, with necessary tools to explore these “distinctive features” of the language.

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## Appendix A

### The Rear-guard

by Siegfried Sassoon  
(Hindenburg Line, April 1917)

Groping along the tunnel step by step,  
He winked his prying torch with patching glare  
From side to side, and sniffed the unwholesome air.

Tins, bottles, boxes, shapes too vague to know,-  
A mirror smashed, the mattress from a bed; 5  
And he, exploring, fifty feet below  
The rosy gloom of battle overhead

Tripping, he grabbed the wall; saw some one lie  
Humped and asleep, half-hidden by a rug;  
And stooped to give the sleeper's arm a tug. 10  
"I'm looking for Headquarters."  
No reply....

"God blast your neck" (for days *he'd* had no sleep),  
"Get up and guide me through this stinking place."  
Then, with a savage kick at the silent heap, 15  
He flashed his beam across a livid face  
Horribly glaring up; and the eyes yet wore  
Agony dying hard ten days before;  
And twisted fingers clutched a blackening wound.

Alone, he staggered on until he found  
Dawn's ghost, that filtered down a shafted stair 20  
To the dazed, muttering creatures underground,  
Who hear the boom of shells in muffled sound.  
At last, with sweat of horror in his hair,  
He climbed through darkness to the twilight air,  
Unloading hell behind him, step by step.

## Appendix B

**Anthem for Doomed Youth***by* Wilfred Owen

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; 5  
 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. 10