Zeus who gathers cloud said: ‘Come, dear Phoebus, wipe away the blood mantling Sarpedon; take him up, out of the play of spears, a long way off, and wash him in the river, anoint him with ambrosia, put ambrosial clothing on him. Then have him conveyed by those escorting spirits quick as wind, sweet Sleep and Death, who are twin brothers. These will set him down in the rich broad land of Lycia, and there his kin and friends may bury him with tomb and stone, the trophies of the dead.’

Attentive to his father, Lord Apollo went down the foothills of Ida to the field and lifted Prince Sarpedon clear of it. He bore him far and bathed him in the river, scented him with ambrosia, put ambrosial clothing on him, then had him conveyed by those escorting spirits quick as wind, sweet Sleep and Death, who are twin brothers. These returned him to the rich broad land of Lycia.
Thermopylae

Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by,
That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

Translated from the Greek by William Lisle Bowles

* At Thermopylae, a narrow pass between mountain and sea, 6,000 Greeks including 300 Spartans fought off a vast army of invading Persians in 480 BC.
Fear and dread shall fall upon thee; thy people shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, which thou hast purchased.

Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for them to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

Translated from the Hebrew by William Tyndale

from The Second Book of Samuel

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.
THE BIBLE

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

Translated from the Hebrew by William Tyndale
Lament of the Frontier Guard

By the North Gate, the wind blows full of sand,
Lonely from the beginning of time until now!
Trees fall, the grass goes yellow with autumn.
I climb the towers and towers
  to watch out the barbarous land:
Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert.
There is no wall left to this village.
Bones white with a thousand frosts,
High heaps, covered with trees and grass;
Who brought this to pass?
Who has brought the flaming imperial anger?
Who has brought the army with drums and with kettle-drums?
Barbarous kings.
A gracious spring, turned to blood-ravenous autumn,
A turmoil of wars-men, spread over the middle kingdom,
Three hundred and sixty thousand,
And sorrow, sorrow like rain.
Sorrow to go, and sorrow, sorrow returning.
Desolate, desolate fields,
And no children of warfare upon them,
  No longer the men for offence and defence.
Ah, how shall you know the dreary sorrow at the North Gate,
With Rihaku’s name forgotten,
And we guardsmen fed to the tigers.

Translated from the Chinese by Ezra Pound
And when he saddest sits in homely cell,
   He'll teach his swains this carol for a song:
'Blest be the hearts that wish my sovereign well,
   Curst be the souls that think her any wrong.'
Goddess, allow this aged man his right,
To be your beadsman now, that was your knight.

JOHN DONNE
1572–1631

A Burnt Ship*

Out of a fired ship, which, by no way
But drowning, could be rescued from the flame,
Some men leaped forth, and ever as they came
Near the foe's ships, did by their shot decay;
So all were lost, which in the ship were found,
   They in the sea being burnt, they in the burnt ship drowned.

SIR WILLIAM DAVENANT
1606–1668

The Soldier Going to the Field

Preserve thy sighs, unthrifty girl,
   To purify the air;
Thy tears to thread instead of pearl
   In bracelets of thy hair.
To Lucasta, Going to the Wars

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.
And, pleased the rest.
Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the

ROBERT SOUTHHEY
1774–1843

The Battle of Blenheim

I
It was a summer evening,
Old Kaspar’s work was done,
And he before his cottage door
Was sitting in the sun,
And by him sported on the green
His little grandchild Wilhelmine.

II
She saw her brother Peterkin
Roll something large and round,
Which he beside the rivulet
In playing there had found;
He came to ask what he had found,
That was so large, and smooth, and round.

III
Old Kaspar took it from the boy,
Who stood expectant by;
And then the old man shook his head,
And, with a natural sigh,
‘’Tis some poor fellow’s skull,’ said he,
‘Who fell in the great victory.'
IV

‘I find them in the garden,
   For there’s many here about;
And often when I go to plough,
   The ploughshare turns them out!
For many thousand men,’ said he,
‘Were slain in that great victory.’

V

‘Now tell us what ’twas all about,’
   Young Peterkin, he cries;
And little Wilhelmine looks up
   With wonder-waiting eyes;
‘Now tell us all about the war,
And what they fought each other for.’

VI

‘It was the English,’ Kaspar cried,
   ‘Who put the French to rout;
But what they fought each other for,
   I could not well make out;
But everybody said,’ quoth he,
‘That ’twas a famous victory.

VII

‘My father lived at Blenheim then,
   Yon little stream hard by;
They burnt his dwelling to the ground,
   And he was forced to fly;
So with his wife and child he fled,
Nor had he where to rest his head.

VIII

‘With fire and sword the country round
   Was wasted far and wide,
And many a childling mother then,
   And new-born baby died;
But things like that, you know, must be
At every famous victory.
ROBERT SOUTHEY

IX

‘They say it was a shocking sight
After the field was won;
For many thousand bodies here
Lay rotting in the sun;
But things like that, you know, must be
After a famous victory.

X

‘Great praise the Duke of Marlbro’ won,
And our good Prince Eugene.’
‘Why ’twas a very wicked thing!’
Said little Wilhelmine.
‘Nay . . . nay . . . my little girl,’ quoth he,
‘It was a famous victory.

XI

‘And everybody praised the Duke
Who this great fight did win.’
‘But what good came of it at last?’
Quoth little Peterkin.
‘Why that I cannot tell,’ said he
‘But ’twas a famous victory.’

JAMES THOMSON

1700–1748

Rule, Britannia!

When Britain first, at Heaven’s command,
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sung this sacred strain.
His fall was destined to a barren strand,
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;
He left the name at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.

JOHN SCOTT OF AMWELL
1730–1783

The Drum

I hate that drum’s discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To thoughtless youth it pleasure yields,
And lures from cities and from fields,
To sell their liberty for charms
Of tawdry lace, and glittering arms;
And when Ambition’s voice commands,
To march, and fight, and fall, in foreign lands.
JOHN SCOTT OF AMWELL

I hate that drum’s discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns, and ruined swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widows’ tears, and orphans’ moans;
And all that Misery’s hand bestows,
To fill the catalogue of human woes.

THOMAS CAMPBELL
1777–1844

Ye Mariners of England