‘Peace’ by Rupert Brooke

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!
Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there’s no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

‘The Soldier’ by Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England’s, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Sir Edmund Gosse

War is the great scavenger of thought. It is the sovereign disinfectant, and its red stream
of blood is the Condy's Fluid that cleans out the stagnant pools and clotted channels of
the intellect. We have awakened from an opium-dream of comfort, of ease, of that
miserable poltroonery of the sheltered life. Our wish for indulgence of every sort, our
laxity of manners, our wretched sensitiveness to personal inconvenience, these are
suddenly lifted before us in their true guise as the specters of national decay; and we
have risen from the lethargy of our dilettantism to lay them, before it is too late, by the
flashing of the unsheathed sword.
Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, in August 1914, the British government discovered that Germany had a Propaganda Agency. David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was given the task of setting up a British War Propaganda Bureau (WPB). Lloyd George, appointed the successful writer and fellow Liberal MP, Charles Masterman as head of the organization.

On 2nd September, 1914, Masterman invited twenty-five leading British authors to Wellington House, the headquarters of the War Propaganda Bureau, to discuss ways of best promoting Britain's interests during the war. Those who attended the meeting included Arthur Conan Doyle, Arnold Bennett, John Masefield, Ford Madox Ford, William Archer, G. K. Chesterton, Sir Henry Newbolt, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Gilbert Parker, G. M. Trevelyan and H. G. Wells.

All the writers present at the conference agreed to the utmost secrecy, and it was not until 1935 that the activities of the War Propaganda Bureau became known to the general public. Several of the men who attending the meeting agreed to write pamphlets and books that would promote the government's view of the situation. The bureau got commercial companies to print and publish the material. This included Hodder & Stoughton, Methuen, Oxford University Press, John Murray, Macmillan and Thomas Nelson.

One of the first pamphlets to be published was Report on Alleged German Outrages, that appeared at the beginning of 1915. This pamphlet attempted to give credence to the idea that the German Army had systematically tortured Belgian civilians. The great Dutch illustrator, Louis Raemakers, was recruited to provide the highly emotionally drawings that appeared in the pamphlet.

The WPB published over 1160 pamphlets during the war. This included To Arms! (Arthur Conan Doyle), The Barbarism in Berlin (G. K. Chesterton), The New Army (Rudyard Kipling), The Two Maps of Europe (Hilaire Belloc), Liberty, A Statement of the British Case and War Scenes on the Western Front (Arnold Bennett), Is England Apathetic? (Gilbert Parker), Gallipoli and the Old Front Line (John Masefield), The Battle of Jutland and The Battle of the Somme (John Buchan), A Sheaf and Another Sheaf (John Galsworthy), England's Effort and Towards the Goal (Mary Humphrey Ward) and When Blood is Their Argument (Ford Madox Ford).
‘Vitai Lampada’ by Henry Newbolt

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night --
Ten to make and the match to win --
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

The sand of the desert is sodden red, --
Red with the wreck of a square that broke; --
The Gatling's jammed and the colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England's far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of schoolboy rallies the ranks,
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

This is the word that year by year
While in her place the School is set
Every one of her sons must hear,
And none that hears it dare forget.
This they all with a joyful mind
Bear through life like a torch in flame,
And falling fling to the host behind --
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"
Dulce et Decorum Est
BY WILFRED OWEN

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound’ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.
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;
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.

'Grotesque' by Frederic Manning

These are the damned circles Dante trod,
Terrible in hopelessness,
But even skulls have their humour,
An eyeless and sardonic mockery:
And we,
Sitting with streaming eyes in the acrid smoke,
That murks our foul, damp billet,
Chant bitterly, with raucous voices
As a choir of frogs
In hideous irony, our patriotic songs.
‘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?

'The Happy Warrior' – Herbert Read

His wild heart beats with painful sobs,  
His strain'd hands clench an ice-cold rifle,  
His aching jaws grip a hot parch'd tongue,  
His wide eyes search unconsciously.  
He cannot shriek.

Bloody saliva  
Dribbles down his shapeless jacket.

I saw him stab  
And stab again  
A well-killed Boche.

This is the happy warrior,  
This is he...

Ivor Gurney  
'To His Love'

He's gone, and all our plans  
Are useless indeed.  
We'll walk no more on Cotswolds  
Where the sheep feed  
Quietly and take no heed.  
His body that was so quick  
Is not as you  
Knew it, on Severn River  
Under the blue  
Driving our small boat through.  
You would not know him now...  
But still he died  
Nobly, so cover him over  
With violets of pride
Purple from Severn side.
Cover him, cover him soon!
And with thick-set
Masses of memoried flowers-
Hide that red wet
Thing I must somehow forget.

'My Company' – Herbert Read

I
...we've fought together
Compact, unanimous;
And I have felt the pride of leadership.

In many acts and quiet observances
You absorbed me:
Until one day I stood eminent
And I saw you gathered round me,
Uplooking,
And about you a radiance that seemed to beat
With variant glow and to give
Grace to our unity.

But, God! I know that I'll stand
Someday in the loneliest wilderness,
Someday my heart will cry
For the soul that has been, but that now
Is scatter'd with the winds,
Deceased and devoid.

I know that I'll wander with a cry:
"O beautiful men, O men I loved,
O whither are you gone, my company?"

2
My men go wearily
With their monstrous burdens.
They bear wooden planks
And iron sheeting
Through the area of death.

When a flare curves through the sky
They rest immobile.

Then on again,
Sweating and blaspheming—
"Oh, bloody Christ!"

My men, my modern Christs,
Your bloody agony confronts the world.

A man of mine
lies on the wire.
It is death to fetch his soulless corpse.

A man of mine
lies on the wire; And he will rot
And first his lips
The worms will eat.

It is not thus I would have him kiss'd,
But with the warm passionate lips
Of his comrade here.
In his book Falsehood in Wartime, Arthur Ponsonby explained the role of wartime propaganda. People must never be allowed to become despondent; so victories must be exaggerated and defeats, if not concealed, at any rate minimized, and the stimulus of indignation, horror and hatred must be assiduously and continuously pumped into the public minds of 'propaganda'.

Hiliare Belloc, letter to G. K. Chesterton (12 December, 1917)
It is sometimes necessary to lie damnably in the interests of the nation. It wasn't only numbers that lost us Cambrai; it was very bad staff work on the south side. Things like thought oughtn't to happen.

After the war William Beach Thomas wrote about his report on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in his book, A Traveller in News (1925)
I was thoroughly and deeply ashamed of what I had written, for the good reason that it was untrue. The vulgarity of enormous headlines and the enormity of one's own name did not lessen the shame.

Philip Gibbs, Adventures in Journalism (1923)
We identified ourselves absolutely with the Armies in the field. We wiped out of our minds all thought of personal scoops and all temptation to write one word which would make the task of officers and men more difficult or dangerous. There was no need of censorship of our despatches. We were our own censors.

C. E. Montague, Disenchantment (1922)
The average war correspondent - there were golden exceptions - insensibly acquired a cheerfulness in the face of vicarious torment and danger. Through his despatches there ran a brisk implication that the regimental officers and men enjoyed nothing better than "going over the top"; that a battle was just a rough jovial picnic, that a fight never went on long enough for the men, that their only fear was lest the war should end this side of the Rhine. This tone roused the fighting troops to fury against the writers. This, the men reflected, in helpless anger, was what people at home were offered as faithful accounts of what their friends in the field were thinking and suffering.

Robert Donald, press release (February, 1918)
I have been asked to become the Director of of a section of propaganda work. I could not undertake work of this kind if it interfered with my editorial responsibilities or my political independence, or if it did not give me liberty of action within the sphere allotted to me. After all, this is a newspaper man's job. It consists simply of presenting the British case in neutral and allied countries in a form which is at once interesting and informative.
Aftermath by Siegfried Sassoon.

Have you forgotten yet?...
For the world’s events have rumbled on since those gagged days,
Like traffic checked a while at the crossing of city ways:
And the haunted gap in your mind has filled with thoughts that flow
Like clouds in the lit heavens of life; and you're a man reprieved to go,
Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.
But the past is just the same—and War’s a bloody game...
Have you forgotten yet?...
Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget.
Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at Mametz—
The nights you watched and wired and dug and piled sandbags on parapets?
Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench—
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, 'Is it all going to happen again?'
Do you remember that hour of din before the attack—
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you then
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back
With dying eyes and lolling heads—those ashen-gray
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?
Have you forgotten yet?... Look up, and swear by the green of the spring that you'll never forget!

This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them.
Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might,
majesty, dominion, or power, except War.
Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.
My subject is War, and the pity of War.
The Poetry is in the pity.
‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard’ by G.K. CHESTERTON

The men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And bees and birds of England
About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England
They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England,
They have no graves as yet.