

Why need I say, Lavinia dear!  
How glad I am to see you here,  
A lovely convalescent—  
Risen from the bed of pain and Fear,  
And few'rish Heat incessant!

The fields so green, the Sun, the Sky,  
The little Birds that sing on high  
Their vernal loves commencing,  
Will better welcome you than I  
With their sweet influencing.

Believe me, while in pain you lay,  
Your dangers taught us how to pray;  
You made us all devouter!

Each eye look'd up, and seem'd to say,  
"How can we do without her?"

Besides (what vex'd us worse) we knew,  
They had no need of such as you

In the place where you were going:  
This world has Angels all too few  
And Heaven is overflowing!

#### 174. FRANCE: AN ODE

[Mar-Apr 1798]

The poem was written at a time when news of the final Swiss defeat at Berne forced the Opposition in England to recognise France's imperial pretensions

6. *SL* and later texts read "The sunny Showers, the dappled Sky,"
7. sing on] *SL* and later texts read "THE RECANTATION" (later "warble".
12. how] *SL* and later texts read *The Story of the Mad Ox*. C also called it "a *Palinodia*" (*BL* ch 10—
13. all] *SL* and later texts read *CC*—i 199-200; cf the comment in an unlocated copy of *SL*, cited in *PW*—
17. had] *SL* and later texts read *JDC*—588). The positioning of the

and admit the justice of the Government's long-standing argument. Hence the first title in *M Post* (16 Apr 1798), "THE RECANTATION". The same period was also for WW and C a time of disengagement, and they had already decided to withdraw for a year or two to Germany, outside the zone of war (*WL*—*E* rev—211-14). When C republished the poem later the same year and afterwards, he substituted a neutral descriptive title and appended a date which suggested that the poem had been written earlier, before French intentions became so brutally clear. Though there is evidence that his sympathy for radical politics had begun a process of modification several years before, the new title and the appended date pretend to greater prescience on his part, and imply that the argument of the poem is more controlled and balanced than it is. The impression of design was strengthened by the addition of a prose Argument in a further revised version published in *M Post* (14 Oct 1802).

C's references to the poem are few, slighting, and without affection (e.g. *CL* i 552: to RS [24 Dec 1799]; ii 912: to RS [8] Jan 1803). It was never among odes with which he was pleased—contrast e.g. 142 *Ode on the Departing Year* (*CL* iv 791: to J. H. Green 13 Dec 1817; 970: to the Author of "Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk" [Nov 1819])—and this surely has more to do with the witness it bears to his political views than with its qualities as a poem, as far as these things can be separated. RS touched on its sensitive application when he asked, in a letter of May 1799: "Coleridge's 'Ode upon France' is printed in the *Spirit of the Public Journals* under the title of 'the Recantation.' How will he like this, and how will they like it who do not allow it to be a recantation?" (*S Letters*—Curry—i 191).

C neglected to take the 1802 revisions into the reprintings of his 1798 pamphlet in 1812. The *SL* text recalls only a proportion of them, and the later collections allow small errors to remain and others to creep in. The text given here is the improved *M Post* version of 1802 (inserting the stanza-number at line 85). It formalises C's inspiration to an extent, but it is the text on which he lavished most care and after which his commitment to the poem waned almost to willed indifference. It is not quite the text he wrote in Mar-Apr 1798, but it is the text he would have liked to have written then.

#### ARGUMENT.

First Stanza. An invocation to those objects in Nature, the contemplation of which had inspired the Poet with a devotional love of Liberty. Second Stanza. The exultation of the Poet at the commencement of the French Revolution, and his unqualified abhorrence of the Alliance against the Republic. Third Stanza. The blasphemies and horrors during the domination of the Terrorists,

poem in *SL* and later collections im- *Departing Year* makes the same point. mediately following 142 *Ode on the*

regarded by the Poet as a transient storm, and as the natural consequence of the former despotism, and of the foul superstition of Popery. Reason, indeed, began to suggest many apprehensions; yet still the Poet struggled to retain the hope, that France would make conquests by no other means, than by presenting to the observation of Europe, a people more happy, and better instructed, than under other forms of Government. Fourth Stanza. Switzerland, and the Poet's recantation. Fifth Stanza. An address to Liberty, in which the Poet expresses his conviction, that those feelings, and that grand *ideal*, of freedom, which the mind attains by its contemplation of its individual nature, and of the sublime surrounding objects (see Stanza the First), do not belong to men, as a society, nor can possibly be either gratified, or realised, under any form of human government; but belong to the individual man, so far as he is pure, and inflamed with the love and adoration of God in Nature.

I.

Ye clouds! that far above me float or pause,  
    Veering your pathless march without controul!  
Ye ocean waves, that wheresoe'er ye roll,  
Yield homage only to eternal laws!  
Ye woods! that listen to the night bird's singing  
Midway the smooth and perilous steep reclin'd,  
Save when your own imperious branches swinging  
Have made a solemn music of the wind!  
Where, like a man below'd of God,  
Thro' glooms, which never woodman trod,  
How oft pursuing fancies holy  
My moonlight path o'er flow'ring weeds I wound,  
Inspir'd beyond the guess of folly  
By each rude shape, and wild unconquerable sound!  
O ye loud waves! and O ye forests high!  
And O ye clouds that far above me soar'd!  
Thou rising sun! thou blue rejoicing sky!  
Yea, every thing, that is and will be free,  
Bear witness for me, wheresoe'er ye be,  
With what deep worship I have still ador'd  
The spirit of divinest Liberty.

II.

When FRANCE in wrath her giant limbs uprear'd,  
And with that oath, which shook earth, air, and sea,  
Stamp'd her strong foot, and said, she would be free,  
Bear witness for me, how I hop'd and fear'd!  
With what a joy my eager gratulation  
Unaw'd I sang amid a slavish band:  
And when to whelm the disenchanted nation,  
Like fiends embattled by a Wizard's wand,  
The Monarchs mov'd in evil day,  
And BRITAIN join'd the dire array;  
Tho' dear her shores and circling ocean,  
Tho' many friendships, many youthful loves,  
Had swoln that Patriot emotion,  
And spread a magic light o'er all her hills and groves;  
Yet still my voice unalter'd sang defeat  
To all, that brav'd the tyrant-quelling lance,  
And shame too long delay'd and vain retreat.  
For ne'er, O Liberty, with partial aim  
I dimm'd thy light, or damp'd thy holy flame!  
I blest the Pæans of deliver'd France,  
And hung my head and wept at Britain's name.

III.

And what? (I said) tho' blasphemy's loud scream  
With those sweet Pæans of deliverance strove?  
Tho' all the fierce and drunken passions wove  
A dance more wild, than e'er was Maniac's dream?  
Ye storms! that round the dawning East assembled,  
The Sun was rising, tho' ye hid his light!  
And when, to soothe my soul, that hop'd and trembled,  
The dissonance ceas'd, and all seem'd calm and bright:  
When FRANCE, her front deep-scarr'd and gory,  
Conceal'd with clust'ring wreaths of glory,

23. that oath] C almost certainly intends the Tennis Court Oath. During the first days of the French Revolution, on 20 Jun 1789, the commons (Third Estate) were barred from a regular meeting of the Estates General. They retired to a nearby indoor tennis court and took an oath to stand together until the constitution was reformed.

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When irresistibly advancing,  
Her arm made mock'ry of the warrior's ramp,  
While, timid looks of fury glancing,  
Domestic treason, crush'd beneath her fatal stamp,  
Writh'd, like a wounded dragon in his gore;  
Then I rebuk'd my fears, that would not flee,  
And soon (I cried) shall wisdom teach her lore  
In the low huts of them that toil and groan,  
And conqu'ring by her happiness alone,  
Shall France persuade the nations to be free,  
'Till love and joy look round, and lo! the earth's their own!

IV.

Forgive me, Freedom! O forgive those dreams!  
I hear thy voice, I hear thy loud lament  
From bleak Helvetia's icy caverns sent—  
I hear thy groans upon her blood-stain'd streams!  
Heroes! that for your peaceful country perish'd;  
And ye, that flying spot your mountain snows  
With bleeding wounds; forgive me, that I cherish'd  
One thought, that ever blest your cruel foes!  
To scatter rage, and trait'rous guilt,  
Where Peace her jealous home had built;  
A patriot race to disinherit  
Of all that made their native wilds so dear,

And with inexorable spirit  
To stain the bloodless freedom of the mountaineer—  
O FRANCE! that mockest Heav'n, adult'rous, blind,  
And patient only in pernicious toils,  
Was this thy boast, champion of human kind!  
To mix with Monarchs in the lust of sway,  
Yell in the hunt, and share the murd'rous prey—  
T'insult the shrine of Liberty with spoils  
From freemen torn! to tempt and to betray!

V.

The sensual and the dark rebel in vain,  
Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game  
They break their manacles, and wear the name  
Of Freedom graven on an heavier chain.  
O LIBERTY! with profitless endeavour  
Have I pursued thee many a weary hour;  
But thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever  
Didst breathe thy soul on forms of human Pow'r!  
Alike from all, howe'er they praise thee  
(Nor pray'r, nor boastful name delays thee),  
Alike from priestcraft's harpy minions,  
And factious blasphemy's obscene slaves,  
Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions  
To live among the winds, and brood upon the waves!  
And there I felt thee! On yon sea-cliff's verge,  
Whose pines just travell'd by the breeze above,  
Had made one murmur with the distant surge—

53-4. C marked these lines, in an annotated copy of the 1798 pamphlet: "Milton Samson's *Agonistes*." S.T.C.; and in an annotated copy of *SL*: "*Samson Agonistes*, but never published the acknowledgement." The allusion to *Samson Agonistes* 136, 139 is clearer in the pamphlet and other texts, which read "insupportably" for "irresistibly".

C had been attacked for "gross plagiarism" from *Samson Agonistes* in the poem (Anon "Fears in Solitude" *New London Review* 1—1799—98—100). DeQ continued to echo the same charge as late as 1834 in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (*DeQ Works* II 144—

84. C wrote at the end of the stanza, in a copy of the 1798 pamphlet he annotated c 1807: "alluding to Venice, and Holland.—" The Austrians ceded Belgium and parts of the Venetian Republic to France at Campo Formio, 17 Oct 1797.

84\*, 85-8. In the first printed version of the poem C summarised an intervening stanza on the slave trade, which he alluded to in the first printed version of lines 85-8. No trace of the stanza has been found, and it is likely

that C's summary represents merely his unease at the transition to the conclusion. The present *M Post* text in fact omits the stanza-number, and this may not be accidental.

The revised form of lines 85-8, as given here, embodies the substance of a prose note: "At Genoa the word, Liberty, is engraved on the chains of the galley-slaves, & the doors of Prisons.—" (*CN* I 206; also *TT* 14 Aug 1831—CC—II 142). Cf line 105f.

Yes! as I stood and gaz'd, my forehead bare,  
And shot my being thro' earth, sea, and air,  
Possessing all things by intensest love—  
O LIBERTY! my spirit felt thee there!

### 175. FEARS IN SOLITUDE: WRITTEN IN APRIL 1798, DURING THE ALARM OF AN INVASION

[Apr 1798]

Fears of a French invasion were exacerbated by rumours of new conspiracies at home during Apr 1798; the citizenry were armed and preparations were made along the coasts. On 18 Apr C returned from a visit to Ottery, where his brother James was at the time Major-Commandant of the Exmouth and Sidmouth Volunteers and during which time 174 *France: An Ode* had been published (16 Apr). The next ten days were spent visiting the Wordsworths and walking on the hills (Reed 1 233-4), presumably discussing and meditating on their projected two-year withdrawal to Germany, outside the war zone. C was careful to subjoin the place and date of writing to each printing of the poem.

When he first repeated or read the poem to the Wedgwoods, he had "great ap-parent confidence" in it, or so Thomasina Dennis reported in Aug 1798 (Francis

105<sup>\*</sup>. In c 1807 C wrote in a copy of the 1798 pamphlet, following the poem:

Southey in a review made some (me judice) unfounded Objections to this last Stanza—as if I had confounded moral with political Freedom—but surely the Object of the Stanza is to shew, that true political Freedom can only arise out of moral Freedom—What indeed is it but a *Dilatation* of those golden Lines of Milton—

"Licence they mean, when they cry—Liberty!  
For who loves that must first be

wise & good."

S T C

The review to which C refers must be the unsigned "Fears in Solitude" *Critical Review* 2nd ser xxvi (1799) 472-5 at 474. The verse lines are (var) from Milton's Sonnet xii. One might also compare Burke *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791) 69 "Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters."

Doherty "Some First-hand Impressions of Coleridge in the Correspondence of Thomasin Dennis and Davies Giddy" *Neophilologus* LXIII—Apr 1979—300-8 at 303; cf R. S. Woof "Coleridge and Thomasina Dennis" *UTQ* xxxii—1962—37-54 at 42-3). Before a year was out, when he transcribed it for Carlyon in Germany, his confidence had waned, and he added the following postscript:

N.B. The above is perhaps not Poetry—it is but rather a sort of Middle thing between Poetry & Oratory—Sermoni propior.—Some parts are, I am conscious, too tame even for animated Prose.—

The reference is to Horace *Satires* 1.4.42: see 129 *Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement* headnote (also 84 *To a Young Ass* headnote).

The parts C had in mind were lines 160-76 and possibly lines 46-54, which he omitted from the Carlyon transcript. When he annotated Sir George Beaumont's copy of the first printing in 1807, he drew a line alongside lines 160-76 and wrote in the margins:

All the Lines so marked convey, according to my Conscience, sound good sense; but unfortunately they are neither poetry, nor any thing—as eloquence for instance—which approximates to it.—They are *Prose* that in a frolic has put on a masquerade Dress of Metre, & like most Masquerades, blundered in the assumed character.—What follows, I hope, will redeem it, for tho' in religion abhorring, yet in poetry, I cleave to the Catholic Doctrine of *supererogation*—& easily forgive many faults, where I find any true beauty, when the faults are purely *literary*, not moral ones. And surely, with reason—for such faults are merely *negative*—they do us *no harm*—surely the reading of a little innocent dullness is no worse, than looking (half-vacantly) at the Paper of a Room (I speak, as one of that rank of Life, in which Rooms are papered). But the Good, that which is good to the Recipient, is a positive gain—it either awakens him to new Thought or Feeling or both combined (as is *always* the case in Wordsworth's Poetry, & forms perhaps an unexampled Instance) or it recalls &—permit the word—*vivifies* Thoughts & Feelings already acquired. S. T. Coleridge—

It will be noticed that C defers to literary standards here almost as a way of defending the "sound good sense" of his matter. There is reason to think that his opinion of the poem was affected by the use made of it by the *Anti-Jacobin*, which accused him of reneging on his family (see 146-54<sup>RC</sup>).

There are two ms and seven full printed texts of the poem, and lines 130-98 were reprinted with omissions and slight revisions in *M Post* and in the 1809 (and 1812) *Friend*, but the texts differ very little. Phrases, passages, and parallels appear (var) in C's published and unpublished writing: e.g. 139 *The Destiny of Nations* 416-17 (cf lines 48-9 here); *CL* 1 478; to TP 6 Apr 1799; *EOT* (CC) ii 363; *SM* (CC) 22; *CL* iv 963; to M. Starke 28 [=30] Oct 1819; *C&S* (CC) 178. The present text reproduces that of *SL*, correcting an error in line 113.