

= Fears in Solitude =

Fears in Solitude , written in April 1798 , is one of the conversation poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge . The poem was composed while France threatened to invade Great Britain . Although Coleridge was opposed to the British government , the poem sides with the British people in a patriotic defense of their homeland . The poem also emphasizes a desire to protect one 's family and to live a simple life in harmony with nature . The critical response to the poem was mixed , with some critics claiming that the work was " alarmist " and anti @-@ British .

= = Background = =

Coleridge , a radical and Jacobin , was an early supporter of the French revolution and believed that it would bring much @-@ needed political change to Europe and to Great Britain . However , the actions of the French government after the beginning of the revolution , especially their invasion of other nations , caused him to lose faith in their cause . Although Coleridge was opposed to the British government under prime minister William Pitt , he supported the British nation and the national defense when France threatened to invade Britain ; the belief held by many Britons was that France would invade the Irish kingdom , which was experiencing rebellion at the time .

These fears of an invasion manifested in April 1798 , and Britons began to arm themselves . In April , Coleridge traveled to his childhood home at Ottery and then went to visit William and Dorothy Wordsworth ; during this time Coleridge wrote " Fears in Solitude : Written in April 1798 , During the Alarm of an Invasion " . Fears in Solitude was first published in a small pamphlet collection that included Frost at Midnight and France : An Ode It was eventually printed seven times in various collections . One of the later printings of the poem , by Daniel Stuart , removed lines that directly attacked Pitt and the British government . This change reflected Coleridge 's own changing political views from radical to more conservative beliefs .

= = Poem = =

The poem begins with a Quantocks setting before moving onto politics :

A green and silent spot , amid the hills ,
A small and silent dell ! O 'er stiller place
No singing skylark ever poised himself . (lines 1 ? 3)

The poem continues by pointing out that the best life is a simple life and that there are men that live with nature :

And he , with many feelings , many thoughts ,
Made up a meditative joy , and found
Religious meanings in the forms of Nature ! (lines 22 ? 24)

However , some of the British are like a plague that spreads their poor behavior to other nations :

Like a cloud that travels on ,
Steamed up from Cairo 's swamps of pestilence ,
Even so , my countrymen ! have we gone forth
And borne to distant tribes slavery and pangs ,
And , deadlier far , our vices , whose deep taint
With slow perdition murders the whole man ,
His body and his soul ! (lines 47 ? 53)

Although he attacks the corruption of British politicians , the narrator supports Britain :

O native Britain ! O my Mother Isle !
How shouldst thou prove aught else but dear and holy
To me , who from thy lakes and mountain @-@ hills ,
Thy clouds , thy quiet dales , thy rocks and seas ,
Have drunk in all my intellectual life ,
All sweet sensations , all ennobling thoughts ,

All adoration of the God in nature ,
 All lovely and all honourable things ,
 Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel
 The joy and greatness of its future being ? (lines 183 ? 192)
 The poem ends with the narrator praising his home at Nether Stowey and nature :
 And now , beloved Stowey ! I behold
 Thy church @-@ tower , and , methinks , the four huge elms
 Clustering , which mark the mansion of my friend ;
 And close behind them , hidden from my view ,
 Is my own lowly cottage , where my babe
 And my babe 's mother dwell in peace ! With light
 And quickened footsteps thitherward I tend ,
 Remembering thee , O green and silent dell !
 And grateful , that by nature 's quietness
 And solitary musings , all my heart
 Is softened , and made worthy to indulge
 Love , and the thoughts that yearn for human kind (lines 222 ? 233)

= = Themes = =

The politics within the poem emphasizes the problems within British politics and expresses Coleridge 's views that the conservatives were warmongering and that there was corruption within the government . Although he feels this way , he still feels loyalty to the country and wants the British to be safe regardless of their problems . His other poem on the same topic , *France : an Ode* , describes how his view about the French revolution changed over time , especially with France 's invasion of Switzerland .

The images of the poem operate in a circular pattern , and the poem begins and ends with the Stowey dell where Coleridge lived . The peaceful home at the beginning is a parallel to the " Valley of Seclusion " in Coleridge 's *Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement* , which is a quiet place that allows for a pleasant life . The ideas about nature also found in " *The Eolian Harp* " are brought up , following Coleridge 's familiar Plotinian view . The poem also includes Coleridge 's views on the unity of mankind and nature and the fear that an invasion would destroy this unity . To safeguard it , the narrator protects his family and the dell , along with the rest of Britain . There is also an emphasis on simple living , and the poem 's conclusion , a return to the dell , represents a return of Coleridge to his own family .

The gothic elements of the poem connect it to many of his other works , including *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* , " *Ballad of the Dark Ladie* " , *France : An Ode* , *Frost at Midnight* , *The Nightingale* , " *Three Graves* " , and " *Wanderings of Cain* " .

= = Critical response = =

A letter sent to Coleridge from his friends Robert and Edith Southey described the poem as " beautiful " . There were four contemporary reviews of the original pamphlet collection including *Fears in Solitude* . The *Critical Review* believed that the poetry expressed alarmism . The *British Critic* thought he was anti @-@ Britain . A review in the *December Monthly Visitor* emphasized the " beautiful lines " starting with line 129 until the end . Another review , in the *January 1799 Monthly Mirror* , claims , " The author 's Fears are , perhaps , not highly honourable to his feelings as a Briton , nor very complimentary to the national character . "

The Victorian poet Algernon Charles Swinburne , in the Preface to the 1875 edition of *Christabel* , argues ,

Compare the nerveless and hysterical verses headed ' *Fears in Solitude* ' (exquisite as is the overture , faultless in tone and colour , and worthy of a better sequel) with the majestic and masculine sonnet of Wordsworth [...] for , great as he is , I at least cannot hold Wordsworth ,

though so much the stronger and more admirable man , equal to Coleridge as a mere poet ? speaks with a calm force of thought and resolution ; Coleridge wails , appeals , deprecates , oburgates in a flaccid and querulous fashion without heart or spirit . This debility of mind and manner is set off in strong relief by the loveliness of landscape touches in the same poem .

In a September 1889 Fortnightly Review article called " Coleridge as a Poet " , Edward Dowden writes , " Coleridge still declaims against the sins of England , and protests against the mad idolatry of national wrong @-@ doing [...] yet utters himself before the close with all the filial loyalty of a true son of England , and he declares in a noble strain of eloquence how the foundations of his patriotism have been laid in the domestic affections " .

During the 20th @-@ century , Virginia Radley points out that " The most serious charge that can be brought against the poem is that it is not poetry as Coleridge generally conceived poetry to be . In fact , it is the one poem in this group that may mean but is not [...] Like ' France ' too , the poem suffers from a lack of ' heart ' . " George Watson declares that the poem " shows how precarious Coleridge 's new achievement was . It is a shameless return to the older , effusive manner , evidently written in a white heat of patriotic indignation against the degradation of English public opinion during the French wars , and it is only by stretching charity that it can be considered a conversation poem at all . "

Following this , Geoffrey Yarlott states , " though disproportionate in qualities of thought and feeling (and one of the less successful therefore of the major ' annus mirabilis ' poems) , [Fears in Solitude] exemplifies the problems Coleridge had to wrestle with in assimilating didacticism to the requirements of poetic organization . " Richard Holmes claims Fears in Solitude as " one of the most difficult of [Coleridge 's] Conversation Poems " . The ending , to Holmes , is " evoked with the magic , pastoral power of a Samuel Palmer picture " .