The Poetry of Thomas Paine

Even the most fanatic devotees of Thomas Paine have had very little to say concerning his verse. Some of his admirers maintain that his prose has merit enough to secure him a respected place in American literature without the need of poetry. Others say that since he proved his talents in verse to be worthy of his prose, it is regrettable that he failed to encourage his poetic vein. Actually, Paine devoted more attention to poetry than most people realize. In *The Age of Reason* he discussed the differences between poetry and prose and illustrated the manner in which the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah could be transposed into English couplets. More important, he was the author of two poems of unusual merit, as well as a number of bagatelles in verse.

His early literary reputation rested in some measure on the first of these poems, an elegy on General Wolfe, published first in March, 1775, in the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, which Paine was editing. The second poem, a scathing denunciation of George III which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* shortly after the appearance of *Common Sense*, had a greater vogue than any of his other verse, but after the original printing it appeared under a variety of titles, which have completely obscured the full meaning of the poem for subsequent readers. The purpose of the poem may be seen only in the original text with the original title, not in the versions printed in any of the standard editions of Paine's works. Contrary to the suggestion in the most recent edition, moreover, this poem was not the only verse Paine wrote during the War for Independence. He wrote another of similar scope for the same newspaper on the subject of Governor Johnstone's attempts to bribe members of the American Congress. Fired by indignant wrath, he castigated the British as a people less

2 Paine wrote four poems which can be considered "patriotic." Only the two which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* were written during the Revolution. "Liberty Tree" was published in July, 1775, and "Hail Great Republic" was probably not written until 1795.
honorable than the devils in hell. Although not the equal of the poem against King George, this verse has a certain epigrammatic wit, as well as satirical vigor.

The poem on the death of General Wolfe has not received the critical attention it deserves. Better than any of Paine's other verse it illustrates his notion that poetry leads "too much into the field of imagination." This Paine asserted in the 1790's in *The Age of Reason*, adding that distrust of imagination had led him to repress rather than encourage his poetic talent. After his death, William Cobbett, repeating the testimony of Mme. Bonneville, asserted that Paine "rather delighted in ridiculing poetry. He did not like it: he said it was not a serious thing, but a sport of the mind, which often had not common sense." Near the end of his life, however, Paine had a good opinion of his verse. In a letter to Jefferson, January 25, 1805, in which he mentioned the possibility of collecting his works, he proposed to include "some pieces of poetry which I believe have some claim to originality." Paine's song on Wolfe reveals that at the time of its composition he had deliberately sought to penetrate farther into the realm of imagination than he felt contemporary poets were venturing. In his remarks introducing the poem to the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, Paine asserts that he has not "pursued the worn out tract of modern song," but has "thrown it into fable." This means that instead of eulogizing the fallen hero by means of simple statement, he had elevated his theme by the device of personification. His method derives from the method of Collins, who, in his well-known odes "Occasion'd by the Death of Mr. Thompson" and "Written in the Beginning of the Year 1746," expressed grief by means of pictorial—not abstract—symbols. To the personification of Collins, Paine added a fable based on classical mythology.

In the poem, Britannia is portrayed mourning in a "mouldering cave" for her fallen son, Wolfe. Jupiter sends Mercury to comfort her. Mercury reveals that Wolfe had been called to heaven to participate in a battle there between the gods and "the proud giants of old," who had broken out from their subterranean abodes. In a note Paine explains that "The heathen mythology after describing the defeat of the giants by Jupiter, says, that he confined them under

3 Foner, I, 496.
5 Foner, II, 1460.
mountains.” When Mercury announced to Wolfe on the plains of Quebec that he was needed in heaven, the hero begged merely to stay where he was until victory was won. The god, however, sealing his eyes, bore him away in an urn,

Lest the fondness he bore to his own native shore,
Should induce him again to return.

This final turn accords well with the ingenious conceit upon which the entire song is constructed.

Paine probably wrote this song in England when he was a member of a social, intellectual club at Lewes. According to legend, he recited it at one of the meetings of this society at an inn called the White Hart. This song has been more generally praised than any of Paine’s other verse. Benjamin Rush wrote to Paine’s enemy James Cheetham that this song, together with Paine’s prose reflections on the death of Lord Clive, gave the Pennsylvania Magazine “a sudden currency which few works of that kind have since had in our country.” Even Cheetham considered it a “beautiful song.” Perhaps Paine also considered it to be his best work, and it may have been this ode which he recited to Horne Tooke, who afterwards sneered at all of Paine’s work, prose and poetry. According to Tooke’s biographer, Tooke once repeated from Paine “a distich, replete with the bathos, . . . as it had been recited to him by the author, who deemed it his masterpiece.” A contributor to the Port Folio felt that the poem on Wolfe had more faults than virtues and that it did not deserve its “high and general popularity.”


7 Alexander Stephens, Memoirs of John Horne Tooke (London, 1813), II, 323. Stephens is responsible for preserving an amusing Paine item. Among the “Stephensia” in the Monthly Magazine, December, 1822, appears the following anecdote: Paine “wrote the following epigrams on the heir to the Onslow estates, who then signalised himself as a four-in-hand, by driving a team of little cropped horses, compared to tom-tits or tit-mice, and which begot him the nick-name of Tommy Titmouse:"

Pray what can Tommy Titmouse do?  
Why drive a phaeton and two.  
Can Tommy Tit do nothing more?  
Yes,—drive a phaeton and four!"

If any thing had been wanting to complete the climax of absurdity which marks this ballad, it is amply supplied in the four last lines. Where, we will not say in elegiac, but even in mock heroic poetry, can we find a more forced conceit, or a more ludicrous representation, than that of Mercury deliberately blindfolding the ghost of general Wolfe, cramming it into an urn, and, when thus disposed of, carrying it off under his arm, for the purpose of having it appointed generalissimo of the celestial armies. . . . Let those who deem it so denominate this a fine thought—a lofty conception; we cannot view it as other than an overstrained, distorted, and most ludicrous conceit—a caricature attempt at the sentimental sublime.

This opinion was echoed a number of years later in the *North American Review.* Here the song is described as "a paltry conceit, of Jupiter snatching General Wolfe from earth to fight his battles against some celestial rebels, . . . rendered in tripping Bacchanalian metre. . . . Dr. Rush must have been a better judge of pills than poetry, if he sincerely praised such stuff as this."

Paine also printed in the *Pennsylvania Magazine,* July, 1775, his "Liberty Tree," another song widely reprinted by his contemporaries. Although the subtitle "A Song, Written Early in the American Revolution" was added subsequently, readers of the song on its first appearance were still not aware that a revolution had begun. The first two of its four stanzas describe the transplanting of the Liberty Tree from the celestial regions to America. The third and fourth stanzas, printed below, describe the unrewarded efforts of the American colonists to support British maritime power, and complain of the tyrannical measures of "Kings, Commons, and Lords."

Beneath this fair tree, like the patriarchs of old,
Their bread in contentment they ate,
Unvexed with the troubles of silver or gold,
The cares of the grand and the great.

9 *North American Review* (April, 1843), 9-51, a review article by William B. Reed of "An Oration delivered at the Celebration . . . of the Birthday of Thomas Paine by John Alberger." This is the most denigratory account of Paine ever to be published. Unlike Paine's other detractors, this reviewer condemns even *Common Sense*, which he calls "trashy jargon."

10 We can be sure that three other poems in the *Pennsylvania Magazine* are Paine's: "Farmer Short's Dog Porter," "The Snowdrop and the Critic," and "An Account of the Burning of Bachelors' Hall." These were attributed to Paine by Mathew Carey in *Works of Thomas Paine* (Philadelphia, 1797) and by Richard Carlile, *Miscellaneous Poems* (London, 1819).
With timber and tar they Old England supplied,
And supported her power on the sea:
Her battles they fought, without getting a groat,
For the honor of Liberty Tree.

But hear, O ye swains ('tis a tale most profane),
How all the tyrannical powers,
Kings, Commons, and Lords, are uniting amain
To cut down this guardian of ours.
From the East to the West blow the trumpet to arms,
Thro' the land let the sound of it flee:
Let the far and the near all unite with a cheer,
In defense of our Liberty Tree.

Some time after the Revolution, Paine revised the song to make it
fit all popular revolts against autocratic government. The revised
version, a manuscript in Paine's handwriting found among the papers
of his friend Colonel John Fellows, has been previously printed only
once—in a very obscure deistical periodical, The Beacon, edited by
Paine's first sympathetic American biographer, Gilbert Vale.11 In re-
vising the song, Paine eliminated entirely the original third stanza,
and caused the fourth (which became the third in the new version) to
condemn Kingcraft and Priestcraft instead of merely "Kings, Com-
mons, and Lords."

But hear, O ye swains! 'tis a tale most profane,
How all the tyrannical powers
Of Kingcraft and Priestcraft are joining amain
To cut down this guardian of ours.
Fell Discord, dire torment of gods and of men,
Attacks the celestial decree,
With snake-twisted locks she creeps out from her den,
To strike at our Liberty Tree.

A new, highly optimistic concluding stanza forecasts the universal
triumph of freedom and good will.

11 Feb. 3, 1844. Vale also prints in the same issue "From Mr. Paine to Mr. Jefferson"
(Foner, II, 1101-1102). Conway printed these lines (Collected Writings of Thomas Paine [New
York, 1894-1896], IV, 493) from a manuscript among the papers of William Cobbett. They
had also been printed in R. D. Owen's Free Enquirer, Feb. 20, 1830, where they had been
forwarded by Fanny Wright.
Ye gods who preside o'er the empire of man,
Dispers'd o'er the face of the globe,
Look cheerfully down and survey thine own plan,
And spare not, if wanted, the probe.
Bid Concord descend from thy charming abodes,
Bid Discord and Jealousy flee,
And then in a bumper of nectar, ye gods,
Drink health to our Liberty Tree.

There is another poem in the Pennsylvania Magazine almost certainly by Paine which does not appear in the latest edition of his works. This is “The Tale of the Monk and the Jew Versified,” which appeared in March, 1775, and bears Paine’s most common pseudonym in the magazine, Atlanticus. It was printed as a Paine piece in an early, but undated, English collection made by William Dugdale of The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. The theme was apparently not original with Paine, for he introduced it with the following comment: “The tale of the Monk and Jew (versified) having appeared in some of the English magazines, but as I am no admirer of that sort of wit which is dashed with profaneness, I herewith send you a versification of the same tale, by a gentleman on this side of the water.” The importance of this poem, a satire, is that it reveals an early vein of anticlerical thought. One of the problems of Paine’s biography is to explain why Paine seemed to have turned abruptly from political to theological subjects during the French Revolution. It may be that his interest in religion was not at all a new development.

Paine’s next two poems, written when the American Revolution had reached its height, served as propaganda pieces, almost identical in purpose with the Crisis papers which were appearing concurrently.

In June, 1778, Governor George Johnstone, one of a British commission to restore peace, attempted to bribe a number of members of Congress to desert the American cause, and also inspired a number of publications designed to turn the people against Congress. His activities were immediately exposed and denounced. Among the denunciations hurled at Johnstone, none were more scathing than a

12 Conway includes it in his Writings of Thomas Paine, IV, 482–483.
hitherto undiscovered poem by Paine in the Philadelphia press. For the first time in his career Paine adopted the satirical style of Pope. He succeeded in capturing the sharp precision of Pope's couplets, but in a sense reduced the rigor of his scorn by the cumbersome length of his title—nonetheless typical of Pope—"To Governor Johnstone, one of the British Commissioners, on his late letters and offers to bribe certain eminent characters in America, and threatening afterwards to appeal to the public."

The poem appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet, July 28, 1778, bearing Paine's signature Common Sense. There can be no doubt that all contributions in this newspaper at this time with the signature Common Sense were written by Paine. The newspaper began publication in July, 1778. During the next twelve months two numbers of Paine's Crisis, as well as his two poems, appeared with the signature Common Sense, which was recognized as Paine's property. On February 4, 1779, Paine, over his initials T. P., condemned a writer in the rival Pennsylvania Journal for stealing his nom de plume. Since the poem on Johnstone has never before been reprinted, it is given here in full.

When Satan first from Heaven's bright region fell,
And fix'd the gloomy monarch of hell,
Sin then was honest; Pride led on the tribe;
No Devil receiv'd—no Devil propos'd a bribe:
But each infernal, while he fought, abhor'd
The meaner mongrel arts of sap and fraud;
Brave in his guilt, he rais'd his daring arm,
And scorn'd the heavens, unless obtain'd by storm.

But Britain—Oh! how painful 'tis to tell!
Commits a sin that makes a blush in hell;
Low in the ruins of demolish'd pride
She basely skulks to conquer with a bribe,
And when detected in the rank offence,
Throws out a threat—to turn King's evidence.

Yet while we scorn the lure, despise the plan,
We feel an angry sorrow at the man;
Was there no wretch, whose cold unkindl'd mind
Ne'er knew one gen'rous passion for mankind,
Whose hackney'd soul, the purchase of a pound,
No guilt could blacken and no shame confound?
No slave to act the dirty work—and spare,
From men of sentiment, the painful tear?

Must Johnstone be the man? Must he, whose tongue
Such able peals of elocution rung,
Whose tow'ring genius seem'd at times to rise,
And mix a kindred fervor with the skies,
Whose pointed judgment, and connected sense,
Gave weight to wit, and worth to eloquence;
Must he, Oh shame to genius! be the first
To practise acts himself so loudly curst?
Must he exhibit to a laughing mob,
A turn coat patriot conquer'd by a jobb;
And prove from under his adult'rous pen
How few are just of all the sons of men?

When the sad echo of St. Pulchre's bell
Tolls to the carted wretch, a last farewell,
Or when the tyrant sees the lifted steel,
They feel those pains which Johnstone ought to feel.
Man may a while in infamy survive,
And by deception think himself alive,
But time will prove to his eternal shame
_He dies in earnest who outlives his fame._

_Of Pitt and you this contrast may be said,
The dead is living; and the living dead._

Paine realized that unrestrained invective is seldom effective in satire. He condemned Johnstone indirectly therefore—but nevertheless forcefully—by complimenting the devils of hell for their political behavior, which seemed honest in comparison to Johnstone’s. Mingling praise of Johnstone’s intellectual qualities with condemnation of his moral corruption, Paine lamented instead of cursed his lapse from gentlemanly conduct. The somewhat theatrical final stanza concludes with an epigram disparaging Johnstone by contrasting him with the recently deceased Pitt. But lest he be accused of praising British statesmen, Paine retracts his compliment to Pitt in a footnote: “Late accounts from Europe mention the death of this honest, though haughty and ambitious statesman; and though his principles respecting America cannot be justified either by sound policy or
universal benevolence, yet, even his enemies must allow that he had a soul too noble for bribery and corruption.” Some years later in his *Letter to the Abbé Raynal* (1782), Paine even further reduced his estimate of Pitt. “Death,” he wrote, “has preserved to the memory of this statesman, that fame, which he, by living, would have lost.”

The archvillain of the Revolution, however, Paine considered to be George III. It is true that in *Common Sense* he attacked the political institution of monarchy without personal reference to the British King, but as time passed he grew more and more bold and sardonic in referring to “His Madjesty,” a later phrase of his own coinage for the insane George. The poem which appears in Paine’s works under the title “An Address to Lord Howe” was originally called “To the King of England” when it appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, November 14, 1778. There is nothing whatsoever in the poem to link it to Lord Howe; in fact, the line “From George the murderer down to murderous Cain” (“From Cain to George, and back from George to Cain” in the original version) clearly shows to whom it is addressed. Neither Lord Richard Howe, crown commissioner, nor his brother General William Howe, commander in chief of the American armies, was despised by the colonists; in fact, they were regarded as personally decent and honorable. Franklin, for example, in addressing Lord Howe on his mission to effect reconciliation spoke of the “well-founded Esteem, and . . . Affection” which he would always have for Howe as an individual. Even Paine in *Crisis* No. II treated the joint commissioners in a jocular rather than a bitter tone. His harshest words refer ironically to their announced policy of hanging all armed citizens found without an officer accompanying them. “This is the humane Lord Howe and his brother, whom the Tories and their three-quarter kindred, the Quakers, or some of them at least, have been holding up for patterns of justice and mercy!” This has little in common with the tone of hatred and contempt in “To the King of England,” which accuses George III of inhuman sentiments and prays for his death.

When Paine’s friend Thomas Clio Rickman published the poem in *Letters From Thomas Paine to the Citizens of America* (London,

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14 Foner, II, 255.
15 Smyth, VI, 461.
90 A. OWEN ALDRIDGE January

1804), the first British publication of the poem that I know of, it bore the title "Verses to a Friend After a Long Conversation on War." Richard Carlile gave it the shorter title "Verses on War" in his London edition of Paine's *Miscellaneous Poems* (1819), and further shortened it to "On War" in his deistical periodical, *The Republican*. In other English editions the poem appeared completely without a title. I have seen in European libraries outside England, as well as in the British Museum, an undated pamphlet, *Address and Declaration of Universal Peace and Liberty, Held at the Thatched House Tavern, St. James's Street. August 20th 1791. By Thomas Paine. . . . Together with some Verses by the same Author, which were printed in a Pennsylvania Newspaper*. The verses, printed without title, are those on King George. None of Paine's other poems seem to have been used as propaganda pieces in this way. English publishers of the poem were obliged to drop the title referring to the King or they would have been prosecuted for treason. This does not explain, however, why the title "An Address to Lord Howe" was substituted in America.

Since this work seems to have circulated more widely than any of Paine's other poetry—both because of its sentiments and because of its inherent aesthetic value—and since the original version from the *Pennsylvania Packet* has never been reprinted verbatim, the entire text is printed here.

The rain pours down—the city looks forlorn—
And gloomy subjects suit the howling morn.
Close by my fire; with doors and windows fast,
And sweetly shelter'd from the driving blast,
To gayer thoughts, I bid a day's adieu,
To spend a scene of solitude with you.

So oft has black revenge engross'd the care
Of all the leisure hours man finds to spare;
So oft has guilt in all its thousand dens
Call'd forth the vengeance of chastising pens;
That when I fain would ease my heart on you,
No thought is left untold—no passion new.
From flight to flight the mental path appears
Worn with the steps of near six thousand years,
And fill'd throughout with ev'ry scene of pain,
From Cain to George, and back from George to Cain.

17 *The Republican*, II, 390-391.
Alike in cruelty, alike in hate,
In guilt alike, and more alike in fate;
Both curs’d supremely (for the blood they drew)
Each from the rising world while each was new.

Go second Cain, true likeness of the first,
And strew thy blasted head with homely dust—
In ashes sit—in wretched sackcloth weep—
And with unpitied sorrows cease to sleep.
Go, haunt the tombs, and single out the place
Where earth itself shall suffer a disgrace.
Go, spell the letters on some mould’ring urn,
And ask if he who sleeps there can return.
Go, count the numbers that in silence lie,
And learn by study what it is to die.

For sure that heart—if any heart you own—
Conceits that man expires without a groan;
That he who lives, receives from you a grace,
Or death is nothing but a change of place;
That peace is dull; that joy from sorrow springs,
And war the royal raree-show of things.

Else why these scenes that wound the feeling mind,
This sport of death—this cockpit of mankind.
Why sobs the widow in perpetual pain;
Why cries the orphan—"Oh my father's slain."
Why hangs the sire his paralytic head,
And nods with manly grief,—"My son is dead."
[Why shrieks the maiden, (robb’d of ease and sense,)
"He’s gone—He's kill’d—Oh! Heavens take me hence."]
Why drops the tear from off the sister’s cheek,
And sweetly tells the sorrows she would speak.
[Why lisps the infant on its mother's lap,
And looking round the parlour—"Where is pap."
Why weeps the mother when the question’s ask’d,
And kiss an answer as the easiest task;
Or why with lonely steps does pensive John
To all the neighbour's [sic] tell—"Poor master's gone."

Oh! could I paint the passions I can feel,
Or point a horror that would wound like steel,
To thy unfeeling, unrelenting mind,
I'd send a torture and relieve mankind.
Thou, that art husband, father, brother, all
The tender names that kindred learn to call,
Yet like an image, carv’d in massy stone,
Thou bear’st the shape, but sentiment has none;
Allied by dust and figure, not by mind,
Thou only herd’st but lives not with mankind,
[And prone to love like some outrageous ape
Thou know’st each class of beings by their shape.]

Since then no hopes to civilize remain,
And all petitions have gone forth in vain,
One prayer is left, which dreads no proud reply,
That He who made you breathe, would bid you die.

In this early version—written and published in haste—some lines are painfully flat and prose-like. One could read thousands of contemporary couplets without finding a line to match the ludicrousness of

. . . looking round the parlour—"Where is pap."

In later versions, however, Paine eliminated his amateurish phrases. The lines in brackets above he simply dropped. The above text should not, therefore, supplant the revised version printed in standard editions, but the original title should be restored. In its improved form this poem deserves the wide circulation it seems to have enjoyed. It successfully creates a somber mood and then rises to a high degree of emotional intensity over the evils of war. This is a rather difficult achievement, since Paine deals with war considered in the abstract, not with a specific campaign or particular fallen hero. Without its title, this poem has nothing even to connect it to the American Revolution.

Although not modeled on any single precursor, the first stanza resembles eighteenth-century poetry of the melancholy tradition. The next three stanzas anticipate the concern of later romanticists with malevolent influences. To be sure the later romantic hero ordinarily portrayed himself as the embodiment of diabolic forces, whereas Paine associates the British monarch with Satan. Nevertheless, the essential theatrical properties are the same: Cain, mental guilt, cruelty, hate, and unreasoned bloodshed. It is precisely because these sensational qualities are attributed to a historical personage
rather than to the author himself that the work is saved from affectation and artificiality.

In addition to the final line, hoping for the death of George III, the poem has another very neat conceit. In comparing the British monarch to Cain, the author cleverly refers to the recent nativity of the American nation.

Both curs'd supremely (for the blood they drew)
Each from the rising world while each was new.

“To the King of England” is a notable work, and certainly Paine’s best poem.

The most recent editor of Paine’s works has included as a Paine piece an “Epitaph on General Charles Lee” found in manuscript in a volume in the John Carter Brown Library entitled Anecdotes of the Late Charles Lee, Esq. (London, 1797). This epitaph is almost certainly not by Paine. It appeared in the Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal, July 23, 1783, where it was ascribed to the London St. James’s Chronicle. Had Paine been the author, he probably would not have sent it to the London press for its first publication. The title of the epitaph in the newspaper, which differs from that in the manuscript, shows, moreover, that it was written by an Englishman, not an American or sympathizer with the American cause: “To the MEMORY of General LEE, who died in America, having served more Nations than Britain.” The text itself also shows that the author is an Englishman, who condemns Lee for defection. The newspaper text has a few verbal differences from the manuscript text, giving further proof that Paine was not the author. A line in the manuscript version

At best a true republican at heart

appears in the newspaper version

At best a sad republican at heart.

Paine could hardly have written the latter. Paine also would not have described Lee as “Above all kings, and yet of gold the slave.” A very close friendship existed between Lee and Paine. It was Lee who invented the famous expression concerning Paine—“he burst forth

18 Later it appeared also in the American Museum, IV (1788), 189.
upon the world like Jove in thunder.”¹⁹ Paine was always on the best of terms with the controversial general, and after Paine fell out with Washington he suggested that Lee had been Washington's superior in strategy.²⁰ Paine cannot be held responsible for the half-hearted elegy, admirable as it may be as a poetic composition.

Paine continued his poetic activity during his sojourn in France. A crude version of the song published in collections of his works under the title “Hail Great Republic” was printed in Tom Paine's Jests (Philadelphia, 1796). The first two stanzas of this text are almost identical with later printed versions, but the subsequent stanzas, printed below, later went through great modifications.

From thee may rudest nations learn,
To prize the cause thy sons began;
From thee may future, may future tyrants know,
That sacred are the Rights of Man.

Chorus.

From thee may hated discord fly,
With all her dark, her gloomy train;
And o'er thy fertile, thy fertile wide domain,
May everlasting friendship reign.

Chorus.

Of thee may lisping infancy,
The pleasing wond'rous story tell;
And patriot sages in venerable mood,
Instruct the world to govern well.

Chorus.

Ye guardian Angels watch around,
From harms protect the new born State;
And all ye friendly, ye friendly nations join,
And thus salute the Child of Fate.

Chorus.

¹⁹ This expression appears in the preface to Memoirs of the Life of the Late Charles Lee (London, 1792). Richard Carlile, by printing this preface in Paine's Miscellaneous Letters and Essays on Various Subjects (London, 1819), suggests that Paine was the author, but this is unlikely since the editor of the Memoirs remarks that Lee's papers had been delivered to him in London in 1786, and Paine did not return to England until 1787. The complimentary sentiments of the preface, nevertheless, accorded well with Paine's opinion of Lee.

²⁰ Foner, II, 922.
The New-York Historical Society has a manuscript text of this song in Paine's handwriting, signed T.P. It is endorsed on the recto in another hand "presented by the author to Mr. R. L. Livingston Paris July 1802." This text is closer to the final form of the poem, but there are still a number of divergences.


The first of these, the only one with any claim to literary merit, was printed by Joseph Dennie in his Farmer's Weekly Museum, June 12, 1797. In the critical essay in the Port Folio which we have already discussed, "Remarks on the Pretensions of Thomas Paine... To the Character of a Poet," the author repudiates the song on Wolfe as evidence of Paine's poetic reputation, but adds that while the "Castle in the Air" remains to testify in its favour, its case is not desparate. In that sprightly and fine effusion of fancy we perceive much to praise and very little to blame. Although wild and irregular, the imagery is highly picturesque and beautiful; and in no instance does it offend either the judgment or the taste. The conceptions, too, are lofty and spirited, the sentiments unexceptionable, and the language, for the most part, appropriate and chaste.21

There are miscellaneous comments to be made on other poems. "Lines Extempore, by Thomas Paine, July, 1803" appeared for the first time in the Philadelphia General Advertiser (Aurora), August 6, 1803. Cheetham in his highly derogatory life of Paine maintains that Paine wrote his description of three peddlers traveling to a fair ("Star in the East") at the house of a mutual friend, William Carver, while Paine was drunk. Carver later accused Cheetham of deliberate misrepresentation, asserting that the poem had been written in France. Cheetham knew that his statement was false, Carver alleged, since Cheetham had heard Paine repeat the poem long before Paine

21 Foner remarks (II, 1096), "The original manuscript of this poem, in Paine's handwriting, is in the New York Historical Society... There is another copy in Paine's handwriting in the manuscript division of the New York Public Library." Actually neither manuscript is in Paine's handwriting and neither has any authority whatsoever as a text. The best is still that of Carlyle's Miscellaneous Poems (London, 1819).
took up residence with Carver. Paine's well-known epigram on Washington, which Foner prints from Barlow's notebook, Cheetham says was written at the same time as the famous letter to Washington and was given to Cheetham soon after Paine's arrival in New York.

A piece of doggerel satire in the *Pennsylvania Packet* of December 29, 1778, is probably Paine's. Entitled "By the Goddess of Plain Truth, A Manifesto and Proclamation," the verse pretends to be a repudiation by the goddess of Truth of the writings which had been appearing against Paine under the pseudonym Plain Truth. Another brief poem in the Philadelphia press may also be Paine's. In the *Federal Gazette*, May 18, 1789, appears a short poem written at a tea table. When the author was asked what kind of woman he would prefer, he replied:

Give me kind Heav'n—if this wide world has one—
The girl that loves me for myself alone. . . .

The poem is signed Common Sense. It is possible that some other writer had adopted the name after Paine's return to England, but the title previously had been reserved to Paine in Pennsylvania, and he had used it in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* as late as March, 1787.

There are three other of Paine's poems which do not appear in the latest edition of his works. Rickman in *Letters from Thomas Paine* (1804), published an "Epigram on a Long-Nosed Friend," written in Paris in 1800. This appears also in Carlile's edition of *Miscellaneous Poems* (1819), and in an undated collection of *The Theological Works of Thomas Paine* printed by William Dugdale. The chief interest in this epigram is that it concerns an actual historical personage, Count Zenobio, whom Paine knew in Paris.

Going along the other day,
Upon a certain plan
I met a nose upon the way,
Behind it was a man.
I called up to the nose to stop.
And when it had done so,—
The man behind it—he came up,
They made ZENOBIO.

22 *Beacon*, Mar. 14, 1840. The text in the Foner edition (II, 1103-1106) is said to be based on "the original, undated manuscript . . . in the New York Historical Society." Actually the manuscript in the New-York Historical Society is not in Paine's handwriting, and this text has no authority whatsoever.

23 Foner, II, 690; Cheetham, 109.
Carlile and Dugdale also printed "The Strange Story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Numbers, Chap. XVI, Accounted For," a doggerel ballad too long for quotation here, and "On the British Constitution," a doggerel epigram. Dugdale alone printed the following "Epigram:"  

Some, for the sake of titles grand
Oft stoop to kiss a sovereign's hand;
Others, at Rome, will stoop so low,
They'll kiss the holy father's toe;
But I exceed them all in bliss
When Flora's ruby lips I kiss.

It is interesting to note in connection with Paine's verse that many years after his death an effort was made to father upon him a long poem with pretensions to epic grandeur. The attribution to Paine was apparently a puffing scheme on the part of some unknown to attract attention to his merits. Although it excited nobody, the work deserves some attention as one of the curiosities of American literature.

The author used the names of both Paine and Thomas Jefferson to promote his work. In August, 1826, an Albany weekly reported on the authority of the *Boston Courier* that "Thomas Paine, near the close of his life, committed to the care of Mr. Jefferson . . . a manuscript work entitled 'The Religion of the Sun.'" The *Port Folio*, reporting the same story, joined with "the editor of one of our Philadelphia papers in condemning anything of that description, from such a source, to the hands of the common hangman." The moment for launching the story had been well chosen. Since Jefferson had just died, he could not be called upon to deny or confirm this report. The *Escrítor* had to be content with inquiring "whether such a manuscript was left by Mr. Jefferson among his papers? and if so, what disposition is to be made of it?" Needless to say, such a manu-

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24 The lines on Zenobio and "The Strange Story of Korah" appear in the Conway edition, but the epigram printed by Dugdale does not. So far as I know, "The Strange Story of Korah" was first printed in Cheetham's *Life of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1809), 272-278. It was dropped from the London edition.

25 *The Escritor: or Masonic & Miscellaneous Album*, I, 239.

26 *Port Folio*, XXI (September, 1826), 261. After the publication of the poem a Boston paper echoed the view that it should be burned by the hangman. The *New York Correspondent*, Apr. 7, 1827, replied with a defense of Paine, toleration, and free speech.
script has never appeared among Jefferson's papers. Two months later, however, on October 7, 1826, the Escritor reported the discovery of the manuscript and quoted an ecstatic report from the Philadelphia Album:

The poetical world will doubtless be thrown into a ferment at the discovery of a celebrated poem, entitled The Religion of the Sun, which, for dignity of diction, sublimity of metaphor, elegance and perspicuity of period, sprightliness of fancy, and sally of genius, I understand from accurate judges who have had an opportunity of examining this recently discovered manuscript, will not find a parallel in the calendars of Parnassus. These excellencies, combined with the irresistible talent of the author, will render it the Iliad of America.

The poem itself, which appeared in Philadelphia as a pamphlet of twenty-eight pages in November, 1826, contains a confused preface signed S.Y.A. (Samuel Yorke Atlee?), asserting that he had found the manuscript signed by Paine in a secondhand bookshop. The highly Latinized blank verse imitates Milton, but the structure of the poem has more in common with Blake's prophetic books. The device of a war taking place on the sun has some resemblance to the battle between the good and the bad angels in Paradise Lost, but the philosophical concepts of the piece belong to the deistical tradition. To the commonplace notion of a plurality of inhabited worlds, the author adds the more original concept of a hierarchy among the planets. He indicates that a being which seems to be a man in one world is only an ape in another.

The following descriptive passage illustrates the style of the whole.

The mighty God, eternal, infinite,
Omnipotent, omnivident, omniscient,
Whose grandeur is announc'd, from the nerv'd wing
Of viewless insect, to the mighty mass
Of worlds—his hand pancreatic knit the tendons
That wheel, with instant revolution, round
The insect's eye; and arm'd the vivid storm.

It is perhaps unfair to introduce The Religion of the Sun in a discussion of Paine's poetry since it has nothing in common with the verse Paine actually wrote, which is ineffably superior. Even though Paine was not the greatest poet of the American Revolution, he was a poet.
Unlike other masters of political prose, like Bolingbroke, Burke, and Jefferson, who seldom or never followed the lyric impulse, Paine amused himself with a variety of verse forms. Despite a conscious effort to discourage his own poetic vein, he continued to write verse during every period of his life. In France he wrote one or two pleasant songs, and on his return to America he continued to cultivate the Muse. It is of some significance that the first work from his pen to achieve more than local fame was in verse, his ode on the death of Wolfe. Although his address to King George, his most forceful poem, seems to have enjoyed its celebrity primarily as a propaganda piece, it has intrinsic merits to justify our attention to it as a work of art.

*University of Maryland*  
A. Owen Aldridge