

# The Death of France



Landscape from Jura, Gustave Courbet, 1868

Heathen darkness  
Hovers over France,  
Whose kings called themselves  
Most Christian, once.  
Unbelief, cacodoxy,  
And Islam tear  
Her flesh and rip  
Her tender bowels.  
She writhes and shudders  
In her agony;  
She cries aloud  
To her self-made trinity –

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité –  
But it brings her no relief.

\*\*\*

Deep within  
The Jura Mountains  
Two lantern-lights  
Still flicker,  
Lit long ago  
By the Holy Ghost  
In the first flowering  
Of the Gallican Church:  
The glorious  
Ascetic strivers  
St Lupicinus  
And his younger brother  
St Romanus.

By the Cross and their prayers  
The demons were driven  
From the rocky crags.  
The roiling passions, too,  
Through fasting and modesty,  
Were calmed inside  
The caverns of their hearts.  
Having found healing  
For themselves,  
They were able to give it  
Also to others,  
Curing even  
Vile leprosy  
With a simple touch.

From them, the sweet fragrance  
Of monastic life  
Spread across the land.  
But who speaks now of them?

Their names, long forgotten.

\*\*\*

The soul of France is still,  
The suffocating shadow  
Of Death approaching her.  
With trembling, watery eyes  
She looks once more  
Towards the Jura,  
Where the two brothers,  
Radiating warm streams  
Of golden, crystal Light,  
Reach out their hands to her.  
She weakly lifts  
A withered hand;  
The demons lunge in anger . . .

The nations, anxious,  
Await the outcome  
Of the fearsome struggle.