

Literary Analysis

L2 S2



Dr. AMEL RAHMOUNI

ABU-BEKR BELKAID
UNIVERSITY- TLEMCEN

FACULTY OF LETTERS
AND LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

e - m a i l :

amelrahmouni89@gmail.com

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Objectives

The three chapters of this course introduce three periods of American Literature to L2 students of English. They define, discuss, identify, and clarify the characteristics of Colonial, Revolutionary, and Romantic texts. They also enable students to obtain necessary knowledge about the budding and development of American literature, and assure a better understanding through linking the chosen sample-texts with their socio-political and cultural contexts. More specifically, the lectures mainly aim to:

- Introduce American literature to L2 students of English.
- Identify the characteristics of colonial literature, the literature of revolution, and romantic literature.
- Differentiate between the characteristics of colonial literature and the literature of revolution
- Associate different authors with colonial, revolutionary, and romantic discourses
- Define the difference between American romanticism and British romanticism
- Explain the reasons behind the creation of each studied text
- Apply the principles of literary criticism into excerpts chosen from the studied texts
- Analyze a literary text by examining its type and context.
- Evaluate texts related to John Smith, Thomas Paine, and Washington Irving.

Introduction



Lecture Mind Map

Pre-requisites:

In order to better understand the three chapters in this lecture, students should be *familiar* with:

- A background knowledge of the *American War of Independence*.
- The principles of European *Enlightenment*.
- A basic knowledge of *literary analysis*.

I Literature of Reason and Revolution

1. Exercice : pre-test

[solution n°1 p.11]

How can literature be a revolutionary tool that encourages oppressed people to initiate effective paths towards actual political and economic revolution?

2. Introduction

Social and Political Background

The **Renaissance and Reformation** were continued into the 18th century through the **Enlightenment** during the period from c1660 to 1770, known also as the **Age of Reason**. The period was characterized by a deep faith in the power of human **reason** and a devotion to clarity of thought, harmony, proportion and balance.*

It was the time of rationalists and scientists like Diderot and Voltaire in France, and Lock and Newton* in England. Isaac Newton (1642-1727) was the founder of the mathematical principles and of natural philosophy. The universe stopped being a mystery and was accounted for and explained scientifically through the discovery of the mechanisms operating by a rational formula (the law of gravity explained the movements of objects, of the tide, etc.)

The beginning of modern science weakened people's belief in God's direct intervention. In the Age of Reason, people were in search for order and logic everywhere. They did not find it in religion but in the new science. Hence the appearance of Deism*.

3. Enlightenment in Literature

In literature, there was a return to the classics in the form of **Neoclassicism**. It was believed that the classical authors - and Horace in particular - had established and perfected the principal literary genres for all times and the rules of literary art could best be learnt by close study of the classical authors and by imitating their craft.

The **Neo-classicists** thought that reason and judgement were the most admirable faculties and that order and decorum were essential. In literature, the most desirable qualities were harmony, proportion, balance and restraint. Neoclassical authors aimed at correctness.

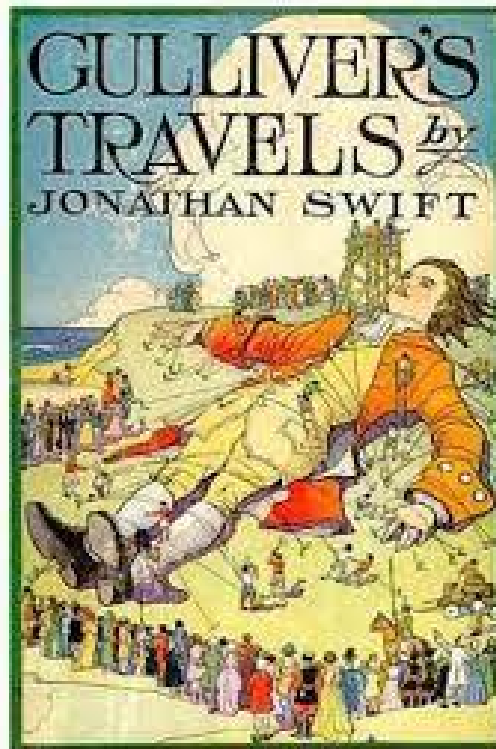
🔗 Example

Man and his activities were regarded as the main subject of literature, as Alexander Pope put it in “Essay on Man”:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,

The proper study of mankind is man.

The preservation of order, balance and correctness was important, hence the frequent use of satire (as by Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*) as a corrective, a means of controlling excess, folly stupidity and corruption in society.



Gulliver's Travels

4. The Budding of Actual “American” Resistance.

The ideas of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism taking place in Europe reached America at the same time as news of The Glorious Revolution (1688-89) which deposed James II as a result of John Locke's writings. His TCG* (1690) set forth a theory of government based not on divine right but on contract (J. J. Rousseau's The Social Contract) and affirmed that the people, endowed with the natural rights of life, liberty and property, had the right to rebel when the government violated these natural rights*.

As George III imposed more and more taxes on the American colonies (Molasses Act, Stamp Act, Quartering Acts...), the famous slogan emerged “No taxation without representation” and was followed by the Boston Tea Party, which signaled a new era in the relations between England and her colonies*. Thomas Paine published his famous pamphlet Common Sense attacking the ideas of hereditary monarchy and calling for independence.

Settlers' Literature	Revolutionary Literature
justify colonial enterprise	standing for civil liberties
take possession of land	affected by European Enlightenment
provide guidance for future settlers	Seeking a pure American identity
attract the greatest numbers of settlers	Creating an American democratic nation

Comparing colonial and revolutionary literature

5. “Common Sense”, a Pamphlet by Thomas Paine

5.1. The Pamphlet

Definition

The pamphlet is a **brief** booklet containing a speech written usually by an **influential** person about a **political or religious** topic, meant to teach people and raise their awareness. It is particularly characterized by the use of the **rhetorical** style and poetic language.

5.2. Thomas Paine

Definition

Thomas Paine was born in Thetford, England, in 1737, to a Quaker father and an Anglican mother. Paine received little formal education but did learn to read, write and perform arithmetic. At the age of 13, he began working with his father as stay maker (the thick rope stays used on sailing ships) in Thetford, a shipbuilding town. Some sources state he and his father were corset makers, but most historians cite this as an example of slanders spread by his enemies. Thomas Paine was an influential 18th-century writer of essays and pamphlets. Among them were "The Age of Reason," regarding the place of religion in society; "Rights of Man," a piece defending the French Revolution; and "Common Sense," which was published during the American Revolution. "Common Sense," Paine's most influential piece, brought his ideas to a vast audience, swaying the otherwise undecided public opinion to the view that independence from the British was a necessity. He died on June 8, 1809.



Thomas Paine

5.3. Common Sense

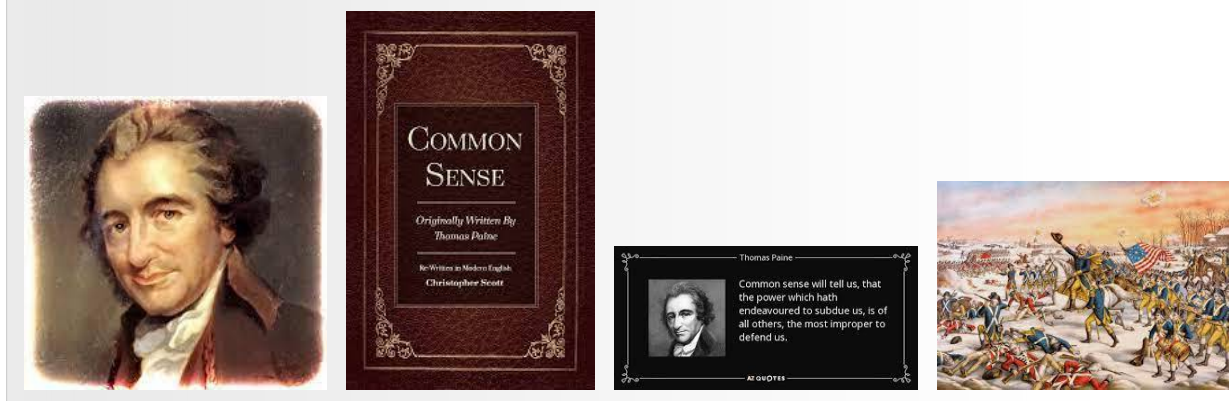
💡 Fundamental

Common Sense is a **pamphlet** composed of 47 pages written by **Thomas Paine**. It was originally published anonymously in January 1776. The ideals and values defended in this pamphlet were influenced by the principles of the Enlightenment, which were also direct factors in the American revolution and Independence later. In this pamphlet, Thomas Paine argued against the British tyranny, scorned the monarch for being careless about his citizens in the colonies, and called for the American Independence. The American revolution was led merely to fight for the rights of property and liberty of the colonists in America, because the British monarch (King Georges III back then) imposed very high taxes on them. The rejection of the taxes led to protests and bloody incidents which increased the tensions between the two parties.

The text in hand begins with an invitation to the reader that they will read the text **without any judgement** in order to decide for themselves what is **right to do for their country**. In the introduction the author explains that by writing this call for revolution he is not led by motives of revenge. Through the text the readers learns that **there have been attempts at settling the quarrel between the colonists in America and the British Monarch in peaceful ways** different times before and that Thomas Paine was himself one of the people who called for peaceful solutions. Yet, when the British monarch decided to use violence against his people all attempts at peace were rejected and America was ready to fight *"the period of debate is closed. Arms as the last resource decide the contest: the appeal was the choice of the king, and the continent has accepted the challenge"*.

Apart from the apparent themes of revolution and liberation that are defended by the author in the entire text, other themes have occurred in an indirect manner. The author chose his words carefully to make everyone in America feel concerned about the fight. Using the statement *"Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom; but of a continent, – of at least one-eighth part of the habitable globe"*, the author makes everyone in American feel like they belong to the fight and must take part of it. The author emphasizes the theme of universality and multiculturalism by stating that one-eight part of the habitable globe is concerned by the cause. The reference to the continent (instead of city or province) is also meant to stress the aspect of plurality. The revolution began with the boycott on British products, which could only be successful by the devotion of all the inhabitants of the country. In the same pamphlet Thomas Paine mentions that *"Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America"* to insist on the aspects of plurality and the idea that America actually belongs to everyone and England had no right to exercise so much tyranny over a people who have themselves escaped persecution when they left Europe.

Thomas Paine's Common Sense



 *Reminder: The Widespread of the Pamphlet*

This pamphlet made **more than 120000 sales** and was printed both in Europe and America. It was read in town meetings throughout the colony and served as one of the most influential texts that have led to the American independence. The language of this pamphlet was made simple to be understood by the people of different origins who lived in America.

[cf.]

Exercises solution

> **Solution** n° 1

Exercice p. 5

How can literature be a revolutionary tool that encourages oppressed people to initiate effective paths towards actual political and economic revolution?

Literature has for long proven its power as a very effective power that opens people's eyes towards the necessity of standing against tyranny. This happens when an author reflects his/her political ideas and beliefs through the use of the pen as an actual power that awakens people's thirst for freedom and equal treatment in any given society. literature changes from being a written text into an actual power.

in case of failure to answer this question, check the book entitled "Caliban's Voice" by Bill Ashcroft. This book shows specifically the role of postcolonial literature and its role in changing realities and encouraging the fight against colonial powers and their tyranny.

Glossary

Deism

the belief in the existence of God based solely on natural reason without reference to revelation (a clock requiring a clockmaker).

Diderot and Voltaire in France, and Lock and Newton

European Thinkers who supported and spread the ideas of reason, liberty, democracy, and religious tolerance in Western Europe.

Abbreviation

TCG: Treatise of Civil Government

References

Enlightenment

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/philosophy/philosophy-terms-and-concepts/enlightenment>

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Resource credits

Gulliver's Travels p. 6

Kobo.com

Thomas Paine p. 8

villagepreservation.org