

Lecture 2: The literature of Revolution: "Common Sense", A Pamphlet by Thomas Paine

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.

Thomas Paine: 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.

COMMON SENSE

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”.

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.

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 influencive 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.

Assignment: Follow the method of literary analysis and analyze the text below

From Common Sense

By Thomas Paine

Part III: "Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs"

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense; and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves; that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and enlarge his views beyond the present day.

Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and 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.

It has been reported of the late Mr Pelham (who though an able minister was not without his faults) that on his being attacked in the House of Commons on the score that his measures were only of a temporary kind, replied, "*They will last my time.*" Should a thought so fatal and unmanly possess the colonies in the present contest, the name of Ancestors will be remembered by future generations with detestation.

The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. '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. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time by the proceedings now. Now is the seedtime of continental union, faith and honor. the least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters.

By referring the matter from arguments to arms, a new era for politics is struck – a new method of thinking has arisen. All plans, proposals, etc. prior to the nineteenth of April, i.e. to the commencement of hostilities, are like the almanacks of the last year, which though proper then, are superseded and useless now.

...I am not induced by motives of pride, party, or resentment to espouse the doctrine of separatism and independence; I am clearly, positively, and conscientiously persuaded that 'tis the true interest of this continent to be so; that everything short of *that* is mere patchwork, that it can afford no lasting felicity – that it is leaving the

sword to our children, and shrinking back at a time when a little more, a little further, would have rendered this continent the glory of the earth.

... No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself, before that fatal nineteenth of April, 1775, but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England for ever; and disdain the wretch, that with the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul.