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On the Promotion of American Independence

During the eighteenth century, many felt America should become its own independent nation separate from Europe and Britain. One American patriot, Thomas Paine, held this belief strongly and furthered the idea among his fellow citizens. Using promising language, Paine wrote to promote the separation from Britain. By challenging the views of his fellow Americans, he carefully and successfully demonstrates his ability to debate and foster the goal of American independence. In his revolutionary work, *Common Sense*, Paine uses encouraging language and natural metaphor to persuade his audience towards separation and gain their support.

Having introduced his initial argument for American revolution and independence, Thomas Paine uses a mother-child metaphor to explain the upstart of America and where the relationship is headed. He acknowledges the other point of view that the current relationship of Britain and America must be maintained for future contentment. Paine rebuttals by stating, “We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty” (444). The metaphor positions America as the child and Britain as the mother. Here, Paine argues that just because the child required the mother’s milk for the beginning years, does not require the mother to be present in the future years. The child must wean off of milk and move on to meat eventually, to further Paine’s metaphor. By stating the relationship between the two countries in this way, Paine presents the problem with the continuation of America’s dependence on Britain. He claims that at one point, America did need Britain to survive, but like a child, America has grown and is ready for independence.

Paine extends this metaphor when discussing Britain’s position in the relationship as the mother. Paine turns focus to the mother and her motives: “We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was *interest* not *attachment*; and that she did not protect us from *our enemies* on *our account*; but from *her enemies* on *her own account*” (445). Using italicized, directed language as to where Britain’s focus lies, Paine uses this incredibly powerful metaphor to describe America and Britain’s relationship. As Paine unravels his metaphor, he discusses how America is dependent on Britain, but Britain only cares about “her own account.” Paine allows the metaphor to speak of the reality that Britain protects America not out of love for her child, but for her own benefit and assets. This creates a strong foundation for Paine’s promotion for American independence as he begins to discuss why American separation from Britain hold important advantages.

Discussing benefits of an American revolution and independence, Thomas Paine examines the gains America would receive by becoming a sovereign nation. Observing the crops and trading among nations, Paine states that America can easily export what commodities they have and still have a profit, and there are plenty of countries to trade with outside of Europe. He argues, “as Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it” (446). With secure sources of profit and resources, there is no need for America to be reliant on Britain for trade. That being the case, Paine presses the issue that America can capably handle itself, so why make exporting and importing tougher by having a dependence on Britain? Paine purposefully uses the word “connection” for this reason. If America continues to rely on the connection with Britain, other relationships with different countries can be muddied.

This brings Thomas Paine to another benefit in which he discusses military entremets to encourage American revolution and separation. Paine claims that Europe, as a whole, contains so many kingdoms that peace rarely lasts, so Americans will eventually be required to help if Britain need it “because, any submission to, or dependence on, Great Britain, tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint” (446). Paine develops this argument that because of America’s reliant connection with Britain, America cannot have its own mind and decision making. Furthermore, due to the nature of America and Britain’s relationship, America cannot choose its own alliances or enemies. Pushing for independence, Paine promotes revolution will allow America to thrive, maintain its own government and philosophies, and make its own decisions on who to work with or against. To fight for this belief, Paine passionately urges revolution, “Everything right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, ‘TIS TIME TO PART” (447). Using violent, war-influenced language like, ‘pleads,’ ‘separation,’ ‘blood of the slain,’ ‘weeping voice,’ ‘cries,’ creates powerful imagery, which compels his audience and strengthens his dialog towards revolution. Provoking this enticement of revolution, Paine demonstrates a profound ability to move his audience and drive them towards his ideals. The fact that America is bound to Britain, there continues to be this impending reliance to fight for Britain if they were to go to war. This graphic language purposefully catches the reader’s attention to encourage movement towards support for separation.

Thus far, having used enriching language to enthrall his audience, Paine relates his argument to history as a motivation for his audience to agree with his beliefs. Using convincing language, he affirms, “Tis repugnant to reason, to the universal order of things, to all examples from former ages, to suppose that this Continent can long remain subject to any external power” (448). Proposing that the idea to think revolution and independence can be prevented is a foolish thought, Paine clearly states what he believes in a captivating way. Instead of putting out his argument and telling his audience they are wrong to not believe him, he sets out to use the language to encourage the support of his ideas. He tells his audience in a firm, persuasive voice that history repeats itself and America will inherently gain independence from Britain, so the time for revolution is now.

Creating a thoughtful and solid argument for revolution and independence for America, Paine returns to his child-mother metaphor to sum up his work in a thorough fashion. Laying down the last bits of details of the relationship between Britain and America, Pain states: “The last cord is now broken, the people of England are presenting addresses against us” (449). The use of “the last cord is now broken” symbolizes an umbilical cord between mother and child being severed, adding onto his extended metaphor. Paine alludes to a point he makes earlier in his work here. The ties, or umbilical cord, between the two nations at one point served a nurturing purpose, but now the ties have to be cut; America needs to stand on its own. This language also serves as a fitting end to his piece as well. By stating this is the end of being dependent, this is also a new beginning of something new, something revolutionary.

Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* is a brilliant piece of influential promotion and a well thought out work of persuasive language. In a superb method of writing, Paine successfully gains the support and honor of his audience, which later proves to work tremendously as the American Revolution and Declaration of Independence follow soon after. Paine creatively takes his beliefs and presents them in a way that is inciting and encouraging. Reading philosophies, debates, and beliefs of others can be dry and complex, but Paine brings life to his literature by including understandable metaphors, provocative symbols and imagery, and effective language. Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* continues to be a pivotal piece in American history as a great factor in the fight for American independence.

Works Cited

Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. *The Concise Heath Anthology of American Literature*. 2nd ed. Ed. Paul Lauter, et al. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014. 1: 443-49.