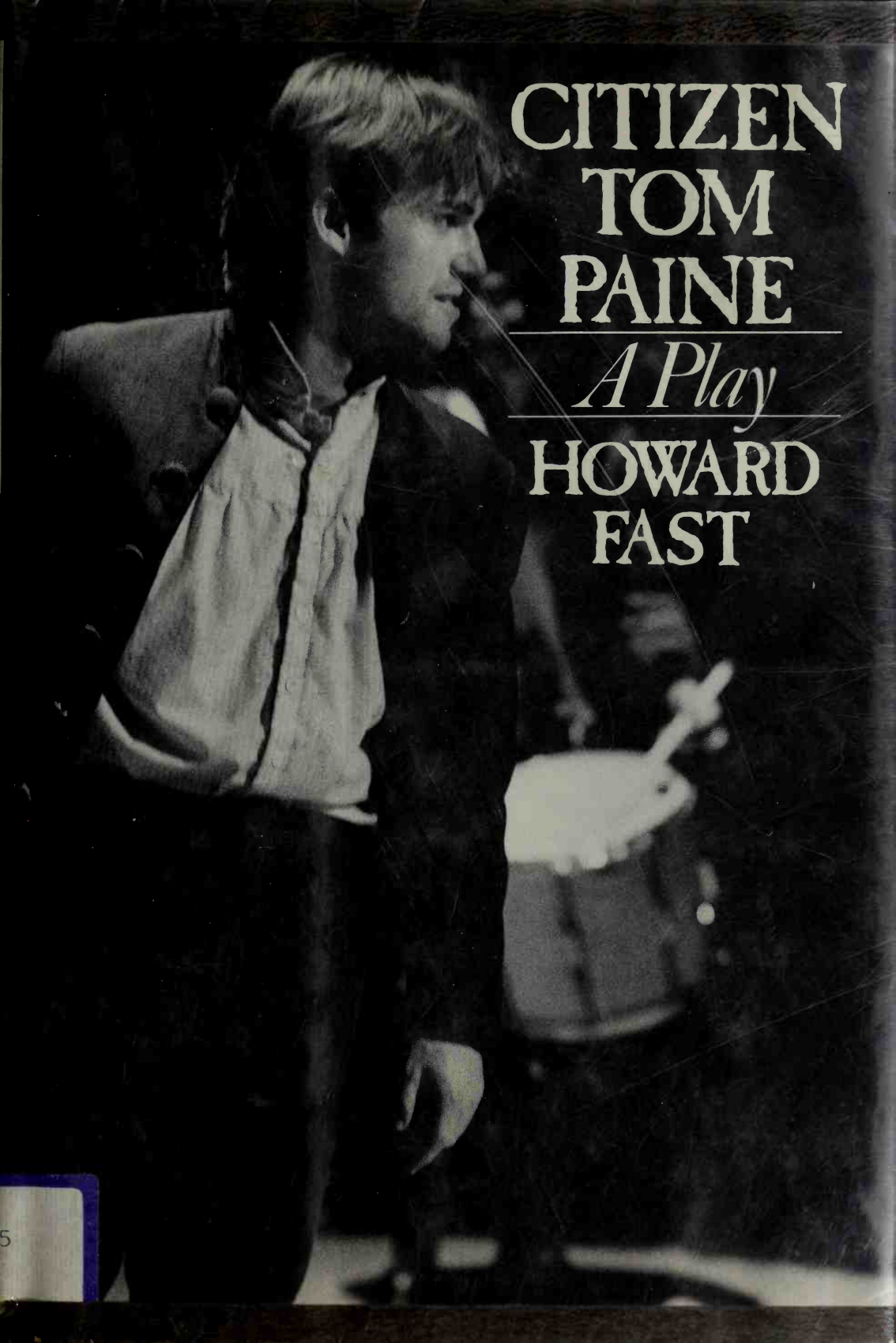
CITIZEN
TOM
PAINE
A Play
HOWARD
FAST

CITIZEN TOM PAINE

CITIZEN TOM PAINE

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

HOWARD
FAST

1986
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON

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Government, like dress, is the badge
of lost innocence; palaces of kings
are built upon the ruins of the
bowers of paradise.

COMMON
SENSE

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL

Nikos Psacharopoulos, Artistic Director

•

JULY 12–JULY 20, 1985

CITIZEN TOM PAINE

by

HOWARD FAST

Directed by James Simpson

Jim Sandefur
Scenery/Costumes

Patricia O'Halloran
Production Stage Manager

Arden Fingerhut
Lighting

Don Gregory presents
in association with the Williamstown Theatre Festival,
Nikos Psacharopoulos, Artistic Director,
Richard Thomas in Citizen Tom Paine
by Howard Fast.

Cast of Characters

Tom Paine	Richard Thomas
Ben Franklin	Jerry Mayer
Robert Aitkin, John Adams, Abe Dunn, 2nd Member, Napoleon	Zach Grenier
John Dickinson, George Washington, Anarcharsis Clootz	Daniel Davis
Peyton Randolph, James Monroe, 1st Member	Brian McCue
Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Bell, Auctioneer, Willett Hicks	Stephen Prutting
Amy Cutler	Phyllis Lyons
Slave Girl	Marguerite Hannah
Thug #1, Brother-in-law, Redcoat A, Robespierre	Ashton Wise
Thug #2, 2nd Guard, Man #1, Zeke Hopkins, Man #4	Robert Clohessy
Woman #1, Man #3, Mme. Bonneville	Allison Janney
Man #2, Abner Mason	Kevin O'Keefe
1st Guard, Brother, Thug	Marcus Giamatti
Painter, Redcoat B	Jonathan Baker
Drummer	Ronald Porembski
Flutist	Libby Bancroft
Violinist	Anne Colby

ACT I: America, 1774

ACT II: France, 1793

NOTE: *Where several characters are listed on the same line, they were played by the same actor in the original production.*

. Thomas Paine
was born in the year
1737. His age is thirty-
seven at the beginning of the play
and seventy-two at the final curtain.

During the course of the play, lighting and
a cyclorama backdrop will substitute
for built sets. However, various
props that are used — tables,
chairs, benches, et
cetera — should be
in the style of
the time.

ACT ONE

America, 1774

As the play opens, TOM PAINE *enters. He is neatly but poorly dressed in the style of the time.*

PAINE

England 1774! Where is he? Dr. Franklin? Dr. Franklin?

*(*FRANKLIN *enters. He is dressed in brown homespun, quite plain.)*

PAINE

(Trying to conceal his annoyance)

Well, sir, I've been waiting for an hour and a half. How long do I wait — until doomsday? Does he know I'm here? Will he see me at all?

*(*FRANKLIN *smiles slightly as he nods.)*

Well, what does that mean? Dr. Franklin will see me now? Thank you.

FRANKLIN

(Leading)

In here, please.

*(*PAINE *follows* DR. FRANKLIN, *as if exiting this room and entering* FRANKLIN'S *study. The lights go up on two Windsor-style chairs of the time, a coffee table between them; a decanter of wine and glasses are on the coffee table.* PAINE *stands and observes.)*

FRANKLIN

(Almost apologetically)

I am Dr. Franklin.

PAINE

(Turning on him and regarding him with surprise)

You, sir? But you're dressed like a servant.

(Pausing, realizing that his remark is inappropriate)

Well, sir, my name is Thomas Paine. I had an appointment with you at two o'clock.

FRANKLIN

(Attempting to mollify him)

And it is now half-past three. I am sorry, Mr. Paine. Circumstances over which I have no control. I was at an important meeting, and it took more time than I expected.

PAINE

(Controlling himself)

Naturally. Why don't you say it? My time is of no importance.

FRANKLIN

Ah, now please, please, sir, don't take umbrage.

PAINE

Oh, umbrage! It's quite all right. I'm not a gentleman, therefore, I'm not a man; not a gentleman, so I'm not human. Any

half-witted, incompetent gentleman of quality has the right to keep me waiting all afternoon, kick me out of his way, or cane me on the street and then have me taken into custody — or even have me hanged, if he only accuses me of stealing.

(His voice rises.)

Hanged, sir! And he has to prove nothing.

FRANKLIN

Oh, I don't think I'll have you hanged, Mr. Paine. After all, it was I who was late.

PAINE

You make light of it, sir. Do you know how many men are hanged in England every day for stealing a loaf of bread, a bit of meat, for their families? This stinking land chokes a man. Maybe you don't see that, Dr. Franklin. Well, sir, that is why I am unable to tolerate your tolerance.

(Now PAINE *realizes that he has gone too far. The impact of what he is saying comes home to him. He sighs, drops his hands, and starts for the door.)*

FRANKLIN

Where are you going, Mr. Paine?

PAINE

Out, sir. Before you have me thrown out.

FRANKLIN

(His face breaking into a smile)

Will you please sit down, Mr. Paine.

*(*PAINE *turns to him.)*

You are the first man in England who has spoken his mind to me, openly and truthfully. I am in your debt, Mr. Paine. Please sit down.

*(*FRANKLIN *pours a glass of wine from the decanter and offers it to* PAINE. *It lures* PAINE *to the chair. He sits and drinks.* FRANKLIN *pours another glass for himself.)*

Your health, sir.

PAINE

(He drinks, and then regards FRANKLIN *over his glass.)*

FRANKLIN

Mr. Paine. I am intrigued and puzzled. Your manner of speech and vocabulary.

PAINE

There speaks the man of science. He looks at Tom Paine sitting here, and he becomes understandably curious as to how such a common and worthless product of the British lower class communicates in words of more than one syllable.

*(*FRANKLIN *bursts into laughter.* PAINE *looks at him and then the laughter communicates itself.* PAINE *begins to laugh.)*

FRANKLIN

Precisely. You are aggressive, provocative, petulant, and rhetorical.

PAINE

I'll take that as a compliment.

FRANKLIN

Let's say, the provocation stimulates me and the rhetoric intrigues me.

PAINE

(He has finished his glass of wine and he points to the bottle.)

May I?

*(*FRANKLIN *nods.* PAINE *pours himself another glass of wine.)*

It's the rhetoric that catches you. A fine handle of rhetoric defines a writer.

FRANKLIN

So you're a writer, Mr. Paine. I should have known.

PAINE

Well, that's an exaggeration. I'm a writer in the way a man who spends his life in a seaside village is a sailor. Oh, I've written a few things.

FRANKLIN

I suppose you brought one of them with you.

PAINE

I thought you might be kind enough to look at it.

FRANKLIN

Fine, let's see.

*(*PAINE *takes a pamphlet out of his coat pocket and hands it to* FRANKLIN, *who leafs through it, reading here and there, as* PAINE *speaks.)*

PAINE

Only an exercise, Dr. Franklin.

FRANKLIN

An address to the Crown?

PAINE

A plea in the name of the customs agent, a plea for higher wages. I wrote it when I was a customs agent.

(He leans forward, talking earnestly.)

Still — a damn sight better than being a corset maker. You see, my father was a corset maker. If he were a beggar, I'd be a beggar. Corset maker. There's a craft. Did you ever try to enclose a fat lady in a corset? Fifteen stone of squash— tits like the heathered hills of Scotland.

*(*PAINE *goes through the motions as he speaks and, watching him,* FRANKLIN *begins to laugh.)*

And she hasn't had a bath since she last took the waters at Bath a fortnight ago. Head against her belly — yank — tug —

*(*FRANKLIN *is now convulsed with laughter. He shakes his head and studies the pamphlet again.* PAINE *stops clowning and watches* FRANKLIN, *silently and nervously.)*

FRANKLIN

(Looking up at PAINE, *nodding)*

I like it, Mr. Paine. You write with style.

PAINE

Thank you.

FRANKLIN

With grace and with vigor.

PAINE

Thank you, sir!

FRANKLIN

And with a degree of elegance.

PAINE

Oh, no, no, Dr. Franklin. Don't wish that on me. This land stinks of elegance. I'll have none of it.

FRANKLIN

What will you have then, Mr. Paine? I still don't know what you want of me. Not that it isn't a pleasant thing to meet you, but why? Why this appointment? This desire to see me? Surely it does no good to pour your anger out on my head.

PAINE

I want to go to America.

FRANKLIN

America. And why America, Mr. Paine?

PAINE

Very simple. It's the only place in the world where a man can breathe.

FRANKLIN

Even a man like yourself, Mr. Paine? What do you know of America?

PAINE

(Passionately)

Everything I could read, Dr. Franklin — every book that's been written about America, every pamphlet. I am a writer, as you just said, and there's a place for writers in America. Philip Freneau, Dr. Benjamin Rush, James Otis, even yourself, sir — you're a writer. So I thought, sir, if I came to you, if I made some sort of decent, palatable impression upon you, you might give me a letter of introduction to the colonies. I mean, a letter to someone who might offer me work as a writer or as an editor.

*(*PAINE *hangs on his last word, staring at* FRANKLIN. *Then he sighs.)*

You're absolutely right to hesitate after the way I've conducted myself here. You'd be right to throw me out. Well, sir, that's the way I am.

FRANKLIN

(Interrupting him)

There are times, Mr. Paine, when you talk too much.

PAINE

Silence is a virtue I don't pretend to.

FRANKLIN

A moment of silence can be very profitable. I understand you're a Quaker?

PAINE

We share the same faith.

FRANKLIN

A man of peace?

PAINE

Yes.

FRANKLIN

A man with a family?

PAINE

Family? Well, I've been married twice.

FRANKLIN

Twice, sir?

PAINE

Once for love, but she died. Then I married for money. Unfortunately the shrew still lives, but the money passed on. We are now happily separated.

FRANKLIN

You are a free man?

PAINE

I wish to be.

FRANKLIN

Of course, I'll give you a letter — if only to help you out of England before they decide to hang you.

*(*FRANKLIN *takes paper and quill and writes quickly; as he writes, he pauses to read a sentence, then writes again.)*

"The bearer, Mr. Thomas Paine, is well recommended to me as an ingenious and worthy young man. He goes to Pennsylvania with a view of settling there . . . I think him very capable."

*(*PAINE *cocks his head and listens.)*

PAINE

"Very capable." Well, I suppose that's a way of putting it. All things considered, it's damn generous. You could have said that you were introducing a hotheaded, angry oaf whom no one but a fool would pay a shilling to. Thank you, sir.

FRANKLIN

And now, Mr. Paine — off to America!

(Lights down. A brief musical passage, something very light, perhaps fife music or recorder music, to help indicate a time change.)

(The Philadelphia waterfront. Lights and some ropes and bales and baskets. A seaman's bag is tossed at PAINE *from offstage. He spreads his arms in the joy of accomplishment.)*

PAINE

Note that I am here! Tom Paine, pamphleteer, writer extraordinaire, and philosopher — mind you, philosopher — let it

be known that Tom Paine stands at the threshold of the New World. He has left England behind him, discarded it like a suit of ancient and ill-fitting clothes. This is the New World, and I stand here as a free man.

(He pauses and looks around him; boundless enthusiasm.)

My God, you can smell it. You can smell the freedom in the air. Freedom —

(He pauses to consider.)

— well, now, freedom is all very well, but what is overlooked all too often is the fact that a free man has to eat. Two days of tramping the streets of Philadelphia, an empty belly on top of that miserable journey from England.

(He begins to stroll slowly as he speaks, the spot moving with him.)

You know what begins to obsess me? How long can a man go without food before he keels over?

(Sitting on the ground and rejecting food offered by a passer-by)

Yes, I could have begged, but that's not my nature. So, I do the rounds of all the print shops. There's where a writer belongs, where the printing is done, and finally I come to the last one — Robert Aitkin's print shop.

(He takes the pamphlets out of his seabag.)

You notice that I carry my equipment. Published work, that's all a writer has to go by.

*(*PAINE *holds up a printed pamphlet. He is at center stage now. The spot widens and footlights come up on that area which the spot covers.)*

Mr. Aitkin!

(Loudly)

Robert Aitkin! Are you alive or dead? Come and open the door.

*(*AITKIN *comes out of the opening, or door of his shop.)*

AITKIN

Enough, man! Would you break down my door?

PAINE

You exaggerate, sir. I was not breaking down your door.

AITKIN

You were making a fine stir of commotion. Who are you?

PAINE

My name is Thomas Paine. I'm a writer and I seek employment.

AITKIN

(Appraising him, sourly)

If it's employment you seek, you seek it at the wrong place. Be off with you.

PAINE

No, sir, no, sir, Mr. Robert Aitkin. Too quick. I won't be off.

(Approaching AITKIN*)*

I am desperate, sir.

AITKIN

Then take your desperation elsewhere. I don't like the look of you or the smell of your breath.

PAINE

No, sir. Please, please. Contain yourself. Disregard my looks. I have come a long way, Mr. Aitkin. I have one suit of clothes,

my money is gone, and I have not eaten for two days. So, please, I beg you, disregard my looks.

(He goes into his seabag and brings out the pamphlets. He offers them to AITKIN.*)*

These are some things I've written. Just to look at and get a sense of my style and my skill. I'm not a fraud.

(He opens up one of the pamphlets, leafing through it, pressing it up in front of AITKIN*'s face.)*

Just read a line or two. A sense of my style.

AITKIN

I'm a printer. I have no need of a writer.

PAINE

All right, sir, you have no need of a writer, but suppose I were to tell you that I bring the need with me?

AITKIN

I'd say, are you daft? How do you bring a need with you?

PAINE

(Arguing quickly and earnestly)

Very simple. For days now, I walked the streets of this town. Mr. Aitkin, there is not, in this city, one journal. Not one single journal worth the money they ask for it. The stuff they hawk is trash, ramblings of pretenders to the art of writing, tributes to confusion and complacency.

AITKIN

I agree with you there. I have tried to make such a journal.

PAINE

But failed. Because you do need a writer.

(Pressing a pamphlet on AITKIN*)*

Read this — please — a few lines.

AITKIN

(Reading; then looking up slowly and surveying PAINE *with interest)*

It's not bad. It has some elements of style.

PAINE

(Seizing the opportunity)

Ah! Now what do I have in mind? Your *Pennsylvania Magazine.* We bring it back to life. Let us say, a format of twelve pages to begin. I go among the people, I ask questions, I get answers, I give them a mirror of themselves.

AITKIN

(Still suspicious; chuckling)

Sir? You, sir?

PAINE

What lies to you, Mr. Aitkin? My clothes, my shoes, my stockings — my breath?

AITKIN

All of them. A man who does things, who has the skill and talent — to organize — such a man —

PAINE

(Cutting in)

I have a letter here from Dr. Franklin.

(He roots out the letter.)

AITKIN

(Suspiciously)

Dr. Benjamin Franklin?

*(*PAINE *hands him the letter.* AITKIN *dons metal-rimmed glasses, squints, and reads.* PAINE *waits.* AITKIN *looks at* PAINE *again with new interest and hands him the letter.)*

It don't say you could edit a magazine, Mr. Paine. I'll admit this town needs a good one, but it don't say you could edit it.

PAINE

I'm Thomas Paine. If I say I can do it, I can do it.

AITKIN

(Uncertainly)

I'm a careful man, Mr. Paine, but not a dull one.

PAINE

Then I've got the job?

AITKIN

I'll try you. But no more than that—a trial. You understand me? Eight shillings a week.

PAINE

Eight shillings a week? How the hell is a man to live here on a bloody eight shillings a week?

AITKIN

(His patience exhausted)

Then take your pamphlets and your letter, Mr. Paine, and be off with you. I'm a good Presbyterian, and I will not have that language in my shop.

PAINE

Oh, please hold on. Forgive the language. I will manage my tongue. Thomas Paine is in your employ, sir, and both of us are bound for greatness.

(He thrusts out his hand, and, bewildered at this torrent of words, AITKIN *takes it.)*

Today, *The Pennsylvania Magazine* will be born. We shall blast the Philistines, and we shall seek for the truth.

*(*AITKIN *exits. To the audience)*

I don't believe it. A job. A writing job. America, I love you!

(He kisses the ground and then he walks slowly across the stage, talking.)

Philadelphia, city of brotherly love, 1774.

(Taps his chest)

Thomas Paine — seeking, looking, observing. Philadelphia — an amazing city, a positively incredible place. Oh, there are gentry here, but nobody steps aside and touches his forelock to let them pass, no kowtowing. And what a variety of human beings — black men, white men, red men, tall, and with a mouth full of teeth when they smile. You don't see that in old England, and the women — healthy and pretty as a picture. It's the style of it you have to see — the way they walk. It's the walk of free men. A vast land — an incredible land! I try to comprehend it but I walk on a single street in Philadelphia and I see Red Indians out of the wooded mountains, wrapped in their bright and dirty blankets. I see wooden-shoed Dutchmen, down on their flatboats from the Jerseys; gray-clad Quakers; sharp-nosed Yankees from Boston; tall Swedes from the Delaware country; dirty, leather-coated hunters from the back countries; buckskin men with great six-foot-long rifles. And there, on the same streets, the silk and tidewater gentlemen.

(He pauses; his expression changes to shock, astonishment.)

What goes on here?

*(*PAINE *walks into a slave auction in progress. A sixteen-year-old black girl, wrapped in a blanket, is being sold.)*

AUCTIONEER

This, gentlemen, my good friends, is sixteen years old, soft as a lamb, strong as an ox, virgin, and beautiful to look on, and old Solomon himself would have given a jewel of his crown to possess her. Her blood is royal, and as for her mind, already she speaks enough of the King's tongue to make herself understood. Her breasts are like two Concord grapes, her behind like the succulent hams of a suckling pig. I start the bidding at fifty pounds to give her away; and, gentlemen, make it a hundred and call out stout and strong; gentlemen, take her home, or to bed, or into the hayloft; make it sixty, gentlemen, make it seventy-five, make it eighty. The blanket goes off at eighty.

VOICE FROM THE CROWD

Eighty pounds.

AUCTIONEER

(Ripping off the blanket)

Virgin, gentlemen, virgin. Beautiful goods, new goods, fine goods! Do I hear eighty-five?

(Pause)

Do I hear eighty-five — will someone say eighty-five?

VOICE FROM THE CROWD

Eighty-five.

PAINE

(Astonished)

What in hell's name is this?

AUCTIONEER

Going once, going twice — fair warning. Sold! Eighty-five pounds!

(He bangs his hammer.)

RANDOLPH

*(*PEYTON RANDOLPH, *his first appearance, fifty-four, fashion plate — a bystander)*

Aren't you Paine — editor of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*?

*(*PAINE *stares at him, unwillingly diverted.)*

Of course. I read you. Damned if you don't write to my taste!

PAINE

Devil take my writing and your taste!

*(*AMY CUTLER, *a spinster, now joins them; she is tall, good looking, curious.)*

What is this?

AMY

A barbarian place, Mr. Paine. Unholy and unchristian.

PAINE

Children bought and sold? Have I stepped into hell?

AMY

A slave market, sir. A place where soulless men buy and sell the souls of God's creatures.

RANDOLPH

Young woman, you have a quick and impertinent tongue. You wear the clothes of a gentlewoman, but no gentlewoman walks alone in this part of Philadelphia.

AMY

I walk where I please, Peyton Randolph, and no one tells me where I may or may not walk.

PAINE

Hear! Hear!

(He turns to RANDOLPH, *speaks with quiet contempt.)*

And you, sir, is this a place where a gentleman walks — or am I mistaken in honoring you?

RANDOLPH

I don't understand you, Mr. Paine.

PAINE

Try. It would seem to me that I stumbled into a slave market, a place where human beings are bought and sold.

RANDOLPH

Naygras.

AMY

Oh, for shame!

RANDOLPH

Woman, will you be gone! This is no place for you and no conversation for you.

PAINE

(Facetiously)

Oh, let her stay, your honor. She does no harm. She simply questions the selling of human souls.

(Both RANDOLPH *and* AMY *regard* PAINE *suspiciously—each unsure of his seriousness, but from different points of view.)*

RANDOLPH

Where are you from, Mr. Paine? Your accent is neither Boston nor Virginia.

PAINE

England.

RANDOLPH

Then how do you moralize, Mr. Paine? The British grow rich by gathering the slaves in Africa and selling them to us at a very healthy profit.

PAINE

Which makes the seller swine. Now tell me of the virtue of the buyer, Mr. Randolph.

AMY

Hear! Hear!

RANDOLPH

The woman's a pestilence! We can discuss this without her.

(He takes PAINE*'s arm and moves him along.* AMY *tags along with them.)*

You edit a magazine, Mr. Paine. It is incumbent upon you to understand us. We do not keep slaves out of cruelty — we cannot live without them. The manner of our lives depends on them.

PAINE

Then with all due apologies, Mr. Randolph, I must say God's curse upon the manner of your lives! And let me tell you this, sir, I will not rest my pen until I have cut this filthy slavery business to shreds — until I have baptized every slave owner in the ink of infamy.

RANDOLPH

Mr. Paine, it is a pity you are not a gentleman.

PAINE

A blessing.

RANDOLPH

Perhaps a blessing, Mr. Paine, all things considered.

(He turns on his heel and strides off.)

AMY

(She has listened to all this. Softly)

Mr. Paine?

PAINE

Still here?

(He breaks into a grin.)

You are persistent, madam.

AMY

Only because it does my heart good to listen to you.

PAINE

Bombast, madam. I have a loose tongue.

AMY

An honest one, I think. Do you know why Mr. Randolph stated it to be a pity that you are not a gentleman?

PAINE

It's the one sensible thing he did say. I'll drink to that. Thomas Paine is not a gentleman, thank God.

AMY

Can't you be serious for a moment, Mr. Paine? What Mr. Randolph meant was that had you been a gentleman in his eyes, he would have challenged you, and since he is a famous pistol shot, tomorrow would be your last day.

PAINE

No!

(He shakes his head.)

I meant no insult to him as a person.

AMY

Oh, yes. Believe me. For God's sake, Mr. Paine, be more restrained.

PAINE

It is not in my nature, madam — what is your name?

AMY

Amy Cutler.

PAINE

I thank you for your concern and your warning, Miss Cutler. You are a fine, outspoken lady.

AMY

(Smiling and dropping a curtsy)

No more a lady than you are a gentleman, Mr. Paine. And what did you say is the name of that magazine you edit?

PAINE

The Pennsylvania Magazine.

AMY

I don't know it. But I shall. I shall read every word in it.

(She turns suddenly and dashes off. For a moment or two, PAINE *stares after her. Then he shakes his head and turns back to the audience.)*

PAINE

(To the audience)

How about that — challenge me. Fancy language for taking a pistol and shooting me through the head. Oh, yes, they'd give me a pistol, too, but I couldn't hit the side of a barn, and I wouldn't try. I don't fight duels. And believe me, this new world has a good many spots left over from the old. Don't be too quick to judge, Thomas, my lad. And Aitkin — in a right rage over me telling off Mr. Randolph.

AITKIN

That was a fine bit of insolence at the slave market. You've got the whole town talking.

PAINE

I know. Dreadful behavior. But that's the way you get the whole town talking. Not by being a proper gent. Oh, no.

AITKIN

Nevertheless, Mr. Paine, I live in this town and I do business in this town. You have much to learn about gentlemen. Mr. Randolph swallowed your insult, and you are still alive.

PAINE

Who is he? Who is Peyton Randolph?

AITKIN

He's a fine and excellent Virginia gentleman. And president of the Continental Congress to boot.

PAINE

Well, I don't give a fiddler's fart for your Peyton Randolph, or any other of your lousy tidewater gentlemen.

AITKIN

I am not looking for his ill will. Just remember, Mr. Paine, that it's my money that pays for your magazine.

PAINE

Is it your money, Mr. Aitkin? Well, it's my immortal soul.

AITKIN

It's my print shop. How you talk big. Indeed, you do. A lot bigger than you talked a few weeks ago when I hired you. Keep in mind that he who hires you can also throw you out.

PAINE

That you can do, Mr. Aitkin. That, sir, is your privilege. But I don't think you will. You're a canny Scotsman, and you're not cutting a hole in your own trousers.

*(*PAINE *rises; facing* AITKIN*)*

We ran a first issue of five hundred. Two weeks later, we ran a second issue of nine hundred. Our third issue was three thousand. That's money in your pocket, Mr. Aitkin. I work for eight shillings a week, eight lousy shillings a week, and if that doesn't give me the right to speak my piece, then you can take the whole thing and shove it right up your ass.

AITKIN

You've got a short temper, Mr. Paine, and a nasty turn of speech.

PAINE

Indeed, I have . . . when I'm ill-used. I am of the oppressed, and I will never forget that. So, if you have a mind to throw me out, I'll anticipate it. You can take your shop, your lousy eight shillings, and stuff it up your ass.

(With that, PAINE *starts off.)*

AITKIN

Hold on, Mr. Paine, not so hasty. I am not discharging you.

*(*PAINE *stops and turns.)*

PAINE

Oh?

AITKIN

I never discharged you. I resent your arrogance and lack of gratitude, but I am not throwing you out to starve.

PAINE

Come on, now. Haven't I given you eight shillings of gratitude?

AITKIN

I'll make it ten. You've got to live.

PAINE

(He stares at AITKIN *for a moment, then walks back.)*

What generosity! I am overwhelmed. But I'll stay. But not for you, sir, and not for your damn print shop. For the sake of a child who was sold the other day for eighty-five pounds. Eighty-five pounds for a human soul.

*(*AITKIN *stares at him, then turns on his heel and exits.* PAINE *starts after him.)*

And one more thing. Remember, I edit this magazine — not you. And I write as I please.

(As he speaks, AMY *enters behind him.)*

AMY

(With undisguised admiration)

Bravo, Mr. Paine. It is of your nature to write as you please.

PAINE

(Facing her)

Hello, Miss . . .

(Weakly)

Cutler, isn't it?

AMY

Amy Cutler. So much time and you meet so many people. I am the lady of the slave market. Don't you remember, Mr. Paine?

(She offers her hand to shake. He crosses to her and shakes it, then goes to the shop's back room.)

PAINE

(Calling from downstage)

You're here to see Mr. Aitkin?

AMY

No, no, Mr. Paine, to see you. Do you know how many weeks it has taken me to get up the courage? Oh, I said — he won't remember me.

PAINE

(Taking refuge behind a flat)

Why? Why come here to see me?

AMY

Please, allow me to explain, Mr. Paine. And don't think poorly of me until I do explain. I am a schoolteacher. A spinster-lady

schoolteacher. But I think. I read. I teach. So, we are alike. I have been reading you — here in *The Pennsylvania Magazine.* Oh, it's so good — and that makes me bold.

PAINE

(Hiding behind the flat and sticking his head out)

Thank you.

AMY

No. Don't thank me. I am privileged. You have ideas and imagination. We need them at this moment.

PAINE

(Still behind the flat)

And to be greeted like this by a woman . . . well, it's rare. You don't think of a woman that way . . . coming forward like a man.

AMY

Please don't misunderstand me, sir. I am forward. I admit that, and I must add that never before in all my life have I done such a thing as this. It is unwomanly. But who is to say that? I am tired of being told what is womanly and what is unwomanly. Just look at yourself, Thomas Paine. When have you last eaten a proper home-cooked meal? I mean to see that you have one. I am a good cook. I am not wed, but I am a good cook —

(She breaks off as PAINE *explodes all her thoughts.)*

PAINE

(Leaving his refuge carefully; to the audience)

Oh, shit. The luck of Thomas Paine. You want a warm breast,

Thomas, take it from a whore. Lady Greensleeves never tells you, "Surely we were destined to meet" . . . or, more to the point, she demands no conversation.

(Striding over to AMY*)*

Please, madam, you mistake me.

AMY

Surely not, sir. If you only knew how I dreamed of meeting a man of your perception, your knowledge . . .

PAINE

Please, madam. I am afraid we can find no profit in each other. I am not a fit subject for love or marriage.

AMY

(Stiffening)

I did not mean . . . that. Why do you degrade me? I only thought to help you.

PAINE

I know what you meant, madam.

AMY

(Nettled)

Why, Mr. Paine? Why do you turn on me like this? How have I offended you?

PAINE

Oh, no, dear lady, you have not offended me. You have honored me. I offend myself, and you mistake me. You see what is not there.

(Raising his quill)

This is Thomas Paine. This pen, this quill. This is all that I am.

*(*PAINE *gives the quill to* AMY. *She stares at it for a long moment; then she lets it fall*

to the floor and exits. PAINE *picks up the quill.)*

The cursed truth of it! God help me.

(Mute, depressed for the moment, PAINE *walks slowly across the left of the stage. He is now at extreme stage left. A spotlight follows him and as it does the rest of the stage fades into darkness.* PAINE *stops, then stands facing the audience. The lights go up and the Coffeehouse Scene appears. Five men are seated around the coffee table:* JOHN DICKINSON, *forty-three years old;* BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, *sixty-nine years old;* JOHN ADAMS, *forty years old;* THOMAS JEFFERSON, *thirty-two years old;* PEYTON RANDOLPH, *fifty-four years old.*

Except for FRANKLIN, *who wears his habitual homespun — no different from his clothes in the first scene — all of them are elegantly dressed: lace cuffs, silk jackets, trousers of either soft leather or buckskin or fine worsted, silk stockings, buckled shoes. They are engaged in a discussion among themselves, but we hear no words. They are animated but not overly animated. They make points by tapping the table or bending over toward one another.)*

PAINE

(To the audience)

From the look of it, five men sitting around the table in the best coffeehouse in Philadelphia. Well, the fact is that they are members of the Continental Congress, and when the Con-

gress isn't in session you'll find them here in this coffeehouse discussing, arguing, arguing, arguing, discussing, discussing, discussing . . . to what end? I try to make some sense of who they are and what they have to do. Ideas? I have ideas. A lot of ideas. But would they listen? To Thomas Paine? Poor as any digger from a foreign country — never wore a buckle shoe in his life — scribbler not worth listening to. No, sir, he is no gentleman and he drinks too much! Well, the bitter truth of it is that they all drink too much except maybe for old Franklin and that blue-nosed gent over there — his name is John Adams — but they drink an excellent wine and that makes a difference. The old man standing there, Ben Franklin, I had a talk with him in London. He hasn't forgotten; he's just a little cautious about introducing me to the others. I'll bide my time.

The lanky young fellow with the red hair — that's Jefferson. And the one in the green silk jacket — will you recognize him? That's our friend Peyton Randolph. They tell me he's an intelligent man and a brilliant Virginia gentleman. He's the president of the Congress. All that and he's still enough of a barbarian to want to fight a duel with me. And the last of them — the one in that white and silver waistcoat — that's Dickinson. If a word of revolt comes up, Mr. Dickinson draws the line. He wants his rights and he wants to be a loyal Englishman. Well, as I said, they'll wake up — but damn it all, someone has to sound the bell. You go straight to the people.

*(*PAINE *now takes a step or two toward the audience. He is on the apron. The stage lights behind him go down. A single muted spotlight stays with him.)*

So how is it, my friends? Can you have your cake and eat it too, as Mr. Dickinson would put it?

VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

No, sir!

PAINE

Can you plead for rights and claim rights with nothing to back up your claim?

VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

No, sir, you can't.

PAINE

What are the rights of men?

VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

To worship God as we please!

VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

Sanctuary! In our homes!

VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

And keep the damn Redcoats out — out of our homes, away from our women!

VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

And to sell no man or woman for slavery!

PAINE

So do I say, citizens!

VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

As you say, sir! As you say!

PAINE

The right to farm our land without being set upon by Red Indians paid by the British to murder us, the right to go where we please and to live where we please in this wilderness of a million acres of land. Who gives a fat witless king of England the right to say he owns this land? The land belongs to the people who live there.

(Cheers from the audience)

MONROE

(In the darkness first. Appears onstage.)

Damned right! Damned right on the point! I salute you, sir!

(His voice resounding)

The right not to be slaughtered!

(A spotlight hits the stage and MONROE *is seen in the uniform of a Continental soldier. He carries a musket and a knapsack on his back.)*

PAINE

Who are you?

MONROE

James Monroe.

PAINE

Where to, Mr. Monroe?

MONROE

To Boston, where the slaughter has already begun.

BLACKOUT

(The lights go up to reveal the print shop, where PAINE *sits at his desk, writing furiously.* AITKIN *enters, staggering under a bundle of newsprint.)*

PAINE

(Pausing in his writing)

Well, sir, what have we published of the new issue?

AITKIN

Two reams.

PAINE

Throw it away!

AITKIN

What the devil do you mean, throw it away? Paper costs money!

PAINE

To hell with the bloody cost! The world has exploded! Do you know what's happened in Massachusetts?

(He picks up the page he has just written and reads.)

> The British decided to confiscate the supplies which the Minutemen had legally stored in their own depot at Concord. Two British columns with artillery and cavalry marched inland from Boston. At Lexington Green, fifty-two farmers had assembled to peacefully petition them to go no farther. Unprovoked, the British opened fire and a veritable slaughter took place. Then the British marched on to Concord. By the hundreds, the Minutemen responded to a patriotic call to arms. At Concord Bridge, they faced the British and turned them back in a pitched battle. And then, all the way back to Boston, the Massachusetts Minutemen fought the British Regulars, cutting the columns to pieces.

Do you understand, man?

AITKIN

Yes, I understand a bitter thing.

PAINE

Two British regiments hacked to pieces. America has raised her voice. She has declared.

AITKIN

Declared, Mr. Paine? Declared for what? Have you seen war? I saw it in Scotland where the poor gillie was slaughtered by British guns. Don't sell me war, Mr. Paine, or treason.

PAINE

(Now face to face with AITKIN*)*

There, up at Lexington in Massachusetts, Mr. Aitkin, those bastard Redcoats shot down man and child, and there the bodies lay on the village green like a bloody slaughterhouse. And you stand and tell me that you want no war or treason. Well, sir, my life is treason and my thoughts are treason, and you will either put out a new issue in which we deal with this abomination, or I walk out of the door, and you can take *The Pennsylvania Magazine* and you know what you can do with it —

AITKIN

(Cutting him off)

You're a hotheaded man, Thomas. Now, don't push me to what we may both regret. I want you to take time and think about this.

PAINE

No, sir. I will not take time to think about it. There is nothing to think about. We have started down a road from which there is no turning back.

(The lights go out, the drums sound, and after a few beats a spotlight picks up PAINE *at the opposite end of the stage from where the coffeehouse table stands. A broad beam picks out the coffeehouse with the five men seated there. As the scene progresses, the spotlight will merge with this broad beam.)*

PAINE

(To the audience)

Do you know, when I printed that account of the battle of Concord and Lexington in *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, the battle that sent Mr. Monroe off to Boston to join the army, things changed. No, I am not saying that what I wrote changed them. Maybe what I wrote enlightened some people, but it was

the battle that changed everything. And this day, when I walked into the coffeehouse, they noticed me, they certainly did!

(He begins to walk toward the coffeehouse table.)

The other day Peyton Randolph said to Jefferson, "Thomas Paine is a very hard man to like." Now, why would he say that? Because the truth is not likable, and I write a full measure of truth.

JEFFERSON

Paine!

PAINE

(To the audience)

Oh! Paine, is it? Not Tom, which would be a way of addressing the lower orders, but Paine. Right and proper. I could scorn them, but the truth is I dreamt of this.

(He turns toward the table.)

RANDOLPH

(As PAINE *approaches)*

Talk of the devil.

FRANKLIN

(Rising)

Devil, indeed. Come join us, Paine.

PAINE

Thank you, gentlemen.

FRANKLIN

(To JEFFERSON*)*

This is the young man I was telling you about . . . Thomas Paine, pamphleteer.

PAINE

A sampling, worthy gentlemen!

(Taking pamphlets from his jacket and distributing them)

JEFFERSON

(To FRANKLIN*)*

I've read his stuff. By God, he has a mind and a turn of phrase to go with it. He's an original.

RANDOLPH

I've heard him called other things. We talked about slavery. I almost challenged the man.

FRANKLIN

(To PAINE*)*

Randolph here still justifies the ownership of slaves. For the moment. Beliefs change . . . as Paine here has demonstrated.

JEFFERSON

But not quickly enough. No, indeed.

PAINE

Or more quickly than you might imagine, Mr. Jefferson.

FRANKLIN

(To PAINE*)*

Where, sir?

PAINE

Not in the coffeehouses, Dr. Franklin. In the fields, on the farms, in the streets.

JEFFERSON

Sit down and join us, Mr. Paine. I want to hear what you're saying.

*(*JEFFERSON *offers his chair to* PAINE; *he sits.)*

PAINE

Something for everyone. Enlightenment for some — treason for others.

RANDOLPH

(Somewhat hostilely)

Tell us, Paine, what the devil are you after? What are you buying?

PAINE

Not slaves, Mr. Randolph, not little girls, not human souls. I buy something else. It's called the New World. It is also called America, sir. As simple as that. I came to her as a stranger and, by God, I must know her.

(He leans across the table, grinning, picks up the bottle from the table, and pours himself a drink.)

RANDOLPH

You've a sharp tongue, Mr. Paine, and a loose mouth. Make sure it doesn't run away with you. We are aware of more things than you imagine. But we are not reckless fools. The walls have ears.

PAINE

(Leaning toward him)

Then let the walls listen. I want to be heard.

DICKINSON

So you say, Mr. Paine, so you say. But you also have illusions about America. We live here, but we are good and loyal Englishmen, and that is not to be forgotten.

PAINE

(With contempt)

"Good and loyal Englishmen!" A sickness worse than the bloody pox!

DICKINSON

(Angrily)

You are insulting, sir. And crude, as well. You impugn our loyalty and insult our intelligence.

PAINE

Loyalty to what? To a fat German fool who misrules Britain? Damn it, gentlemen, to what are you loyal? Here is my toast!

(He raises his glass.)

To free men in a free world.

ADAMS

(Countering his toast)

To the law and to tradition — whatever may come of all this.

DICKINSON

(Lifting his glass)

To England. The England of our ancestors, and may their sense of justice prevail.

RANDOLPH

(Toasting)

To reason, if you will have it, Paine. To the oaths and fealty we have sworn to our comrades.

PAINE

(Mockingly, raising his glass)

I toast you all, good gentlemen. You are patient with my presence and my tongue.

RANDOLPH

Treason. I despise it. Not out of fear, but because I despise traitors. Not you personally, Mr. Paine. It's the image of the traitor I hate.

PAINE

Treason, you say? Treason to what? By what right does a German king hold this vast, limitless land — this land which a hundred Englands would be lost to sight in — by what right?

FRANKLIN

(Curiously, in a whisper, as silence falls)

There's the question, Mr. Paine. And how do you answer it? With independence, perhaps?

PAINE

There, the word is out. That bloody dangerous word that nobody dares to speak above a whisper.

(Shouting)

Independence! I like it.

RANDOLPH

You forget, sir, that this land belongs to England.

PAINE

(Rising, angrily)

It bloody well belongs to the people who live here. And that's the crux of independence — the right of the people.

DICKINSON

I think you're playing the fool, Mr. Paine, a provocative and irresponsible fool. How dare you speak of our monarch as a witless German? You've no respect, sir, and it might well be that you lack the simple decency of a loyal subject. We de-

grade ourselves by sitting here and listening to him, and I for one will hear no more of this talk of treason.

(He rises, as to leave.)

Do you come with me, Mr. Randolph?

*(*RANDOLPH *also rises.)*

PAINE

Sit down, gentlemen. I am leaving. I will not drive you out of this warm, safe place. If it takes a fool to lead the way, Mr. Dickinson, I am damned willing to play the fool. And if there's a rope waiting for my neck, I tell you this — better to be hanged for a try at the future than to be hanged in a London slum for stealing a crust of bread. Loyalty! Gentlemen, your bloody loyalty gives me a pain in the ass.

*(*PAINE *turns and strides away from the table. The lights go down on the table. A spot follows* PAINE *to stage left, at the apron.)*

And do you know what the upshot of that was? Randolph began to spread it around that I had no manners. Manners! And that I drank too much . . . as if they never smelled a cork.

(The lights come up slowly as he walks across the stage and seats himself at the table again. He takes a piece of paper, dips a pen in the inkwell, and begins to write. He writes for a few beats; then he looks up at the audience.)

Well, damn it, Paine is ill-mannered. If I were like the rest of them, one foot in the Revolution, another foot in my own nest, feathering it . . . well, I wouldn't be Paine, would I? And I suppose if God wanted me to be something else, He would have made me different.

(He pauses and thinks.)

No, that makes no sense. It's just not that simple. Dickinson — well, not too long after that, Dickinson was with the army, facing British grapeshot and sleeping in mud. And Randolph — he never turned his back on us either, once it had started. History is a crazy bitch, believe me.

(Drumbeat and blackout; and then the lights come up on PAINE, *still writing. He writes quickly and furiously. Then he stops, pours himself a drink, and gulps it down. He begins to write again, finishes a page, throws it aside, and begins a new page. Offstage there is a loud knocking at the door. He responds impatiently, with annoyance.)*

No one here! Go away.

AITKIN

(Offstage)

I know you're there, Mr. Paine.

PAINE

Be gone! I am occupied!

AITKIN

(Offstage)

And what of the job you're supposed to occupy? Three days, and I've not seen hide nor hair of you.

(Renewed pounding on the door)

PAINE

Well, then, damn it to hell, come in. The door is open. Don't stand there trying to break it down. Turn the knob and come in.

(He swings around in his chair to face AITKIN, *who now enters.)*

AITKIN

What is it, man? Are you sick?

PAINE

Do I look sick?

AITKIN

Aye, that you do. Sick and drunk and slovenly.

PAINE

You have a damn nasty tongue, Mr. Aitkin.

(He holds out a hand.)

Is this the hand of a drunken man? Do you hear the voice of a drunken man? I am writing, Mr. Aitkin . . . writing.

*(*AITKIN *comes to the desk and reaches for the pages.* PAINE *pulls them away.)*

Oh, no. Leave it alone. You don't show a fool half-finished work.

AITKIN

You are drunk and insulting, Mr. Paine. You have neglected your work, and you have put me in a fine predicament.

PAINE

Predicament? Goddamn it, no. I am putting money in your pocket. I've been sitting here twenty-four hours, without food, without sleep, writing.

AITKIN

I am sure you have. And what masterpiece are you composing there and guarding so jealously?

PAINE

I'll tell you what masterpiece. I am writing what might be called a declaration of independence for these colonies, a bundle of common sense to be knocked into the heads of this population.

AITKIN

And you're the savior Providence sends us to teach us common sense? Tom Paine . . . foul mouthed, drunk, insolent.

PAINE

All of that. All of that, Mr. Aitkin, because I have one gift. I can recognize destiny.

AITKIN

Indeed?

PAINE

And you, sir, you are no different from Dickinson and Adams and all the rest of them. You could be walking down the street, and destiny would grab you by the balls, and you'd say, "Let go, get away."

*(*PAINE *acts as though he is going to grab* AITKIN *at his crotch.* AITKIN *jumps away.)*

AITKIN

You are drunk, Mr. Paine.

*(*AITKIN *turns to leave.* PAINE *grabs him by the arm, swings him over to the chair.)*

PAINE

Oh, no, you'll not be leaving now, Mr. Aitkin. Sit down.

(He practically flings AITKIN *into the chair, and then he begins to read.)*

There is something exceedingly ridiculous in the composition of a monarchy. The state of a king shuts him from the world, yet the business of a king requires him to know it thoroughly; wherefore, the different parts, by unnaturally opposing and destroying each other, prove the whole character to be absurd and useless.

AITKIN

(Interrupting)

Treason!

PAINE

Indeed, and here's more of treason.

(He reads again.)

> If there is any true cause of fear regarding independence, it is because no plan is yet laid down. Men do not see their way out. Wherefore, as an opening into that business, I offer the following hints.

(He pauses, looking at AITKIN *for reaction.)*

AITKIN

And if treason is not enough, Mr. Paine, you now offer a plan for others to engage in it. Do you know what you are doing? You are inviting death and execution. Death and hanging.

PAINE

(Reading)

> I propose the following: Let the assemblies be annual, with a president only. The representation more equal, their business wholly domestic and subject to the authority of a Continental Congress.

AITKIN

What a monstrous ego, Mr. Paine. You come here from England, an immigrant, and before you have as much as dried your nose, you are laying out a plan to govern these colonies. By what right, sir?

PAINE

(His voice drops, becoming gentle.)

My dear Mr. Aitkin, whatever I do, I do by right of the mind that God gave me. I think I need no other excuse.

(He reads.)

A government of our own is our natural right. It is infinitely wiser and safer to form a constitution of our own in a cool, deliberate manner, while we have it in our power, than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance.

AITKIN

(Rising)

I will not listen to any more of that, Mr. Paine. And, if you're thinking of a printer, I will print no word of it. My magazine will not stoop to rebellion and treason.

PAINE

(Resigned)

Very well, sir. You've given me your answer fair and square, Mr. Aitkin. You know, I am grateful to you. I wish we could work together. You're a good man beset by fear. Fear is always the weapon of the oppressor. Well, may we both live to see an end to fear!

*(*AITKIN *exits.* PAINE *turns to the audience.)*

Do you think I'm not afraid? All my life, I've lived with that specter of the gallows. You speak your mind in good King George's realm — well, you know the consequences. Nevertheless, it's done, and here it is, a small book which I have titled "Common Sense, Written by an Englishman." In fact, it's a very arrogant piece of work.

(He holds up the manuscript, tapping it.)

Because here, in these pages, are the seeds of a revolution and the plan for a nation . . . and also a rope for Thomas's neck.

(As PAINE *stands with the manuscript in his hand,* BELL *comes onstage.* PAINE *hands him the manuscript, and* BELL *pulls a chair*

away from the table and begins to read. The lights go down, but a spot remains on PAINE. *He moves downstage, leaving* BELL *in darkness.* PAINE *speaks to the audience.)*

Well, Dr. Rush read it, and he likes it. Dr. Benjamin Rush — he's one of that inside circle, but he thinks more independently than most of them. Oh, he has a head on his shoulders, be sure of that. He thinks there's common sense in it. He told me that if Aitkin wouldn't print it, I might bring it to Thomas Bell. I gave it to Bell yesterday.

(The lights come up.)

BELL

Mr. Paine.

PAINE

Mr. Bell. I see you have my manuscript.

BELL

I've been reading it.

PAINE

Well, sir, what is your opinion?

BELL

(Smiling slightly)

You do come to the point, don't you, Mr. Paine? Well, it's treason. No question about that. Cold, unmitigated treason.

PAINE

(With petulance)

Of course, it's treason! When I gave it to Dr. Benjamin Rush, I told him it was treason. It didn't burn his hands. He said he knew a printer, name of Bell, who was not afraid of treason.

I see that he was wrong. Give it back, and I'll go elsewhere.

*(*PAINE *starts to reach for the manuscript and* BELL *responds by putting his hand upon the pages, aggressively.)*

BELL

Hold on, Mr. Paine. You submitted the manuscript to me. Let me decide whether or not I'll print it.

PAINE

(Startled)

You mean, you're not rejecting it?

BELL

No, sir, I am not. I like it. It's treason. And I'll damn well print it.

PAINE

I'm speechless.

BELL

An uncommon occurrence, Mr. Paine, from what I've heard of you. Now, let's talk about payment. Suppose we say ten pounds for every thousand copies I bind and sell.

PAINE

That's generous, Mr. Bell. That's damn generous. May I ask how many copies you propose to print?

BELL

We'll leave that open. I'll bind up a thousand to start, and we'll see what happens.

PAINE

Then we'll shake hands on that, sir. Never mind a contract. A handshake is all I require.

(They shake hands.)

BELL

Now, what about a title? I see that you've put down here, "Common Sense, Written by an Englishman." If you want to go with that, I approve. I like that title. And I want to thank you, sir. Maybe we'll both hang on the same gallows, or maybe we'll be lucky and discover that there are too many of us for any British gallows to hold. Either way, sir, you've got guts, and I thank you again and I salute you.

*(*BELL *exits.)*

PAINE

Thomas Bell, there's a man for you. Oh, he printed it, all right. But neither he nor I had any notion of what would happen. What did happen? His presses never stopped. And everyone, mind you, everyone in every city of America was talking about that book and what it said — that now is the time for independence. I became a celebrity overnight. I even got a nickname.

(Now PAINE *begins to walk slowly upstage and across to where he will enter the coffeehouse, but as he walks, men appear. They pass him, they shake hands with him, they stop him.)*

FIRST MAN

Common Sense. Honor to meet you, sir. Honor to meet you.

SECOND MAN

A great book, Mr. Paine. I'm an American today — no longer English.

THIRD MAN

So am I. You've changed my colors, sir.

WOMAN

Read it through and passed it on to my brother and my

brother-in-law. I'll convert them if I have to break both their heads.

FOURTH MAN

There he is, Old Common Sense.

FIRST MAN

Give him a cheer. Three cheers for Old Common Sense.

(They cheer PAINE *three times and back off to exit. Now he turns and faces stage right, and the lights come up on the round table. Seated around the table are four of the group we have seen before:* DICKINSON, ADAMS, JEFFERSON, *and* FRANKLIN.*)*

PAINE

Well, there they are. The very respectable revolutionaries. This time, there is no looking down their noses at me.

(He walks toward them as he speaks, and the men at the table burst into polite applause, some of them clapping, two of them slapping the table.)

ADAMS

Mr. Paine, welcome.

FRANKLIN

Sit down, Paine. Sit down.

PAINE

Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you.

(He shakes hands with FRANKLIN *and* JEFFERSON.*)*

That's ink on my fingers, gentlemen. Bell has made me his printer's apprentice.

FRANKLIN

So, you're a printer now, Mr. Paine. You join a worthy fraternity.

PAINE

One among six. Six of us man the presses, and still he works his shop eighteen hours a day.

FRANKLIN

Wonderful! What is the print run at this point, Paine?

PAINE

Thirty thousand, midday. We'll be working the press tonight and tomorrow as well.

FRANKLIN

(To the others)

Now listen to me, gentlemen. Excluding the Bible, that's the largest print run for a book in the history of these colonies. So what do you make of it?

ADAMS

It set us to thinking — that's the truth. I never was for independence —

JEFFERSON

John Adams, man of courage.

ADAMS

I'll thank you to hold your tongue. You Southern aristocrats don't have enough brains to realize what independence means —

JEFFERSON

Would you vote it, sir? That's the crux of it.

ADAMS

Might — and might not, I don't rightly know. They're all

talking about Paine's book. Changed a lot of minds in the Congress.

FRANKLIN

Damn it, Adams, can't you understand that when a book sells thirty thousand copies and the presses still running, it's not only Congress where minds are being changed. There isn't a family in Philadelphia or Boston that isn't reading this book and talking about it.

(He turns to PAINE.*)*

You have heard that a committee has been appointed from the Congress to draw up a declaration of independence.

PAINE

I have heard —

FRANKLIN

I would have had you part of it, Paine. But you're not a voting member. Hancock was all for you — hot as a hound dog to damn the British — but you're still a bit of an outsider.

JEFFERSON

Which clears his sight. But you haven't convinced all of us, Paine, not by any means. Dickinson does not like your book. Randolph would have loved it; pity he didn't live to see it.

FRANKLIN

(Softly)

Dickinson is a man of honor. Give him time. I like a man who chews a problem.

PAINE

(To DICKINSON*)*

I would like to discuss —

DICKINSON

(Cutting PAINE *off)*

No, I will not argue this, Mr. Paine.

(He rises, takes Common Sense *from his pocket, and flings it on the table.)*

Cheap sophistry, cheap reasoning, and cheap treason.

FRANKLIN

Oh, now, hold on, hold on there.

DICKINSON

Proceed without me, gentlemen. I'm an Englishman. Something the rest of you might think about.

PAINE

(Almost sadly)

Perhaps one day you'll have the pleasure of watching me hang.

*(*DICKINSON *exits, leaving a strained silence.)*

JEFFERSON

Mr. Paine, I am a member of the committee, and I want to talk to you. I've been reading your book and stewing over it. Ideas and more ideas — the scope of it dazzles me. They want me to put together the Declaration. You've done it.

PAINE

(Rising)

Hardly. Hardly. We'll talk. Gentlemen.

(He nods at them and then leaves with JEFFERSON. *Lights down on the coffeehouse. The spot moves with* PAINE *and*

JEFFERSON *as they walk.* JEFFERSON *hands* PAINE *a sheet of paper.)*

JEFFERSON

A few notes I've put down. Would you read them?

(They pause as PAINE *reads.)*

PAINE

Truths to be self-evident, Mr. Jefferson? Well, yes, in a manner of speaking. The moon is in the sky; that's a truth — and it is self-evident, and it's quite true that we are born equal and, perhaps, even endowed with rights. But we must stress those rights, spell them out, as I have, and underline that we will not stop short of winning those rights. We must argue with facts — facts, sir.

JEFFERSON

(Somewhat puzzled)

I try to, sir. But would you list every fact in such a declaration as this?

PAINE

Absolutely! It must be an indictment, sir, a list of every injustice, his cruel punishments without jury, his star chamber hearings, his occupation of our homes and churches, his setting the Red Indians against us, his closing God's land to us, his summary taxation, his brainless rule from half a world away, his quartering his savage Redcoat troops in our homes, his murder of our citizens by those same Redcoats — every injustice, Mr. Jefferson — that is the heart of the matter.

JEFFERSON

And our right to become a nation, a republican form of government?

PAINE

Central to it, sir, central. It is our sacred obligation.

JEFFERSON

Sir?

PAINE

To create that nation. Do you think an opportunity like this will ever come again if we don't seize it?

*(*JEFFERSON *exits. The spot follows* PAINE *downstage.)*

I talked a lot — too much, perhaps. But he listened and he read what I had written. He wasn't too proud to have a teacher. I jolted him, but he damn well needed to be jolted. We didn't need a gentle declaration — we needed a bombshell.

(Lights down on PAINE. *Spot on* JEFFERSON *upstage)*

JEFFERSON

(Reading)

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

PAINE

(Lights up on PAINE. *He points to a document he holds in his hand.)*

This is a proclamation, entitled "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America in General Congress Assembled." It's based on a book called *Common Sense, Written by an Englishman*; namely, by one Tom Paine. A book

read and digested by every member of the Continental Congress. They put together a committee to draw up this document. The name of Paine is noteworthy by its absence. I didn't expect them to ask me to sign it. After all, I'm not a member of the Continental Congress. But I pleaded with all of them to make an end of human slavery. They ignored that, just as they ignored me. God help us for that, God forgive us. Because whatever we accomplish, slavery will eat at us and curse us. It's my country now — and slavery is a part of it, and Tom Paine is shucked off. And the hell with slave owners and Philadelphia. Angry? You're damn right I'm angry. Every thought in here is out of my book . . . even the phrases. I took these thirteen colonies and made them think alike. There isn't a man or woman on this continent, who can read English, who hasn't read what I wrote in *Common Sense.*

(He starts to walk.)

I'm going.

(Pause)

No! Not to get drunk! I'm going to the army. That's where this revolution is being made, with the army, not here in these damn coffeehouses.

(He holds out the Declaration.)

You think they've made a revolution and a nation with this?

(He crumples the paper and throws it away.)

Not so easily. Not so quickly.

(The lights go down, and there is a moment of darkness onstage. With the blackout, a mournful rendition of "Yankee Doodle" is heard. No words, but fife or flute and a drum. The tempo is slow and the drumbeat is sub-

dued. The lights come up — cold lights on a winter scene.)

Well, I'm here with the army now, and a good distance from Philadelphia. Not very much of an army anymore. They have bloody well had it. In July of 1776, there were twenty thousand of them — now, five thousand, if that many. The rest? Skewered by Hessian bayonets, shot, captured, deserted, chased out of New York, chased through the length of New Jersey. They're not soldiers. Not yet. Just farmboys, like Abner Mason, over there.

(As PAINE *speaks the last few words, a spotlight picks up* ABNER MASON. *He is crouching over a pile of twigs, striking a flint, trying to make a flame. His gun lies on the ground beside him, his coat is ragged, there are holes in the knees of his britches.* PAINE *calls out)*

Abner!

ABNER

(Looking up at PAINE*)*

Yes, sir, Mr. Paine.

PAINE

How old are you?

ABNER

Sixteen, come February.

PAINE

How do you feel about it?

ABNER

Feel about what, Mr. Paine? I'm so damn cold, I don't feel much at all.

PAINE

Our future.

ABNER

What future? We been beaten, licked, chased. I don't see much future, Mr. Paine. Just getting through one day after another.

(The light fades on ABNER.*)*

PAINE

(Turning to the audience)

Well, what did you expect? Patriotic sentiments? The boy is frightened. He wants to go home.

(As he speaks, PAINE *takes a few steps toward stage right, calling out)*

Zeke!

(The light goes up on an older man now — a man in his thirties with a ragged beard and ragged clothes. To the audience)

Ezekiel Hopkins.

(To ZEKE*)*

Your opinion of our progress, Zeke. Something we can print in the newspapers in Philadelphia.

ZEKE

You want my opinion? I'll give it to you plain and short, Mr. Paine. This war is a shit-filled outhouse. We're led by demented idiots. We don't fight. We run away. And as for those lousy bastards back there in Philadelphia . . .

PAINE

(Spreading his hands)

Hold on. Hold on, Zeke. That's enough. I can't print that. It's unprintable.

ZEKE

So is this filthy, fucking war.

(The light fades on ZEKE.*)*

PAINE

(To the audience)

Zeke's command of four-letter Anglo-Saxon words is astonishing, but not unusual. Neither is his opinion of the war and our officers. He has a wife and three kids at home. I suppose the future is even worse for them. That's Abe Dunn. He's fifty, if he's a day.

(To ABE*)*

Abe, one question — why is a man your age freezing his guts out here?

ABE

That's a matter of my conscience, Mr. Paine, and I'll thank you to let it be. My opinions are mine, not for them in Philadelphia. They do what they must do; I do what I must do.

(The light fades on ABE DUNN.*)*

PAINE

(Turning and walking toward stage left, close to the apron, and speaking as he walks)

Simple farm people, not given to much chattering; not soldiers. And they are led by a man who knows almost as little about war as they do.

*(*PAINE *pauses. Now upstage right there is a cot and camp chair, a bottle, two mugs, and a book.* GENERAL WASHINGTON *lies on the cot—either asleep or resting.)*

He sent word that he wanted to talk to me. General Washington wanted to talk to the man who wrote *Common Sense.* And he received me there. In a torn tent, in the frozen mud.

*(*WASHINGTON, *wearily, starts to rise.)*

No, please don't get up, your excellency.

WASHINGTON

(Still not fully awake)

Who are you?

PAINE

Thomas Paine.

WASHINGTON

(Sitting up)

So, you're the Englishman who put us into this hellish situation.

PAINE

Good God, I never thought of it that way.

WASHINGTON

You started this war as much as anyone. Sit down, Paine. Pour yourself a drink. And one for me.

PAINE

I see you have my book there.

WASHINGTON

Yes, there it is. You're a persuasive writer. It's a damned important book. When you are the way we are . . . broken, defeated . . . you lie awake at night trying to find a purpose and a reason. You lie awake because you're in pain. My gums

make eating agony, and my back goes out each time I sit my horse. You have a solution for everything else. What about that?

PAINE

(Offering the bottle)

Here. It dulls my own pains.

(He pours.)

WASHINGTON

Pour again. I admire your practice of medicine, Paine.

PAINE

I'm a quack. But then they all are. At least I've spent years testing this cure. Here's to you, sir.

WASHINGTON

Your health, sir.

PAINE

Not the last of your cellar, I hope?

WASHINGTON

No fear. We lost all our cannons but six. We are reduced to four thousand men fit for service, and our ammunition is almost gone. But . . . we saved eleven kegs of rum.

PAINE

Very foresighted, if I may say so, sir.

WASHINGTON

You're a man of parts, Paine, but unappreciated.

PAINE

Deeply unappreciated. They call me a drunkard.

WASHINGTON

Do they? I admire your practice of medicine, but they don't

dare call me a drunkard. And now that you're here, what can we do for each other besides getting drunk?

PAINE

Damned if I know, your excellency. It's too late in life to make me an officer and a gentleman.

WASHINGTON

Gentleman, is it? Well, I'll tell you something in confidence, Paine. I've already got too many gentlemen in this fucking army of mine. I don't need any more gentlemen and their damned horses. I need a thousand foot soldiers. Can you give me that?

PAINE

You want a miracle, sir.

WASHINGTON

A miracle, yes, if you put it that way. I want us to survive. I want the desertions to stop. And I want those righteous revolutionary gentlemen in Philadelphia to stop talking and send us food, clothes, and gunpowder. You wrote the book that made this war; now use your damned magic to keep it going.

PAINE

You want a bloody large miracle, sir.

WASHINGTON

I do, mister. I certainly do. Now get your limey ass out of here and do it.

(The lights fade; a very soft drumbeat is heard; and then the spot falls on TWO BRITISH OFFICERS *in full regalia. They stand upstage on a low platform.)*

REDCOAT A

The war is over.

REDCOAT B

The hell it is! There's a traitorous little bastard—name of Paine.

REDCOAT A

I know him.

REDCOAT B

He writes.

REDCOAT A

We'll burn what he writes!

REDCOAT B

The little bastard won't let up. Wrote a thing called "The Crisis Paper." Stopped their desertions, pulled their lousy rebellion together. Just listen to this:

(He reads.)

> These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. . . . I should suffer the misery of devils were I to make a whore of my soul by swearing allegiance to one whose character is that of a sottish, stupid, stubborn, worthless, brutish man.

REDCOAT A

Bloody treason!

REDCOAT B

Deadly treason!

REDCOAT A

What do we do?

REDCOAT B

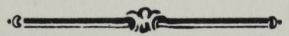
Catch the bloody bastard and hang him.

(The spot falls on PAINE, *downstage. Three soldiers huddle around him as he writes.)*

PAINE

You know something, they never did.

(He looks up and grins as the lights fade for



THE END OF
ACT ONE.)

ACT TWO

France, 1793

A spotlight goes on upstage right. In the spot is the round table that was in the previous scene, with the chairs around it. On the table is a model of PAINE*'s iron bridge.*

PAINE *leans against the table. He holds that position for a moment, and then he walks slowly toward the audience. His whole manner has altered.*

PAINE

(To the audience)

New jacket, new britches, excellent shoes. You see before you an eminently respectable man. Congress voted me three thousand dollars, a gratuity for my services. New York gave me three hundred acres of land in New Rochelle, a heavy forest. Good for hunting, but I don't hunt.

(He takes out a pipe, lights it, coughs, and then tosses it away.)

I don't smoke either. Of course, I tried. I tried snuff, too. Give me a tot of rum any day.

(He sighs.)

These, my friends, are the responsibilities of success, or respectability. Your eighteenth-century gentleman is a rounded man. He dabbles in farming, philosophy — and science. Oh, science is very much in vogue. Jefferson designs houses. Dr. Rush explores medicine. Dr. Franklin — well, you all know about Dr. Franklin. And Paine —

(He goes to the table, picks up the bridge model, and exhibits it to the audience.)

— and Paine designs an iron bridge. Oh, no, don't laugh. Just look at it carefully. It's a damn clever invention, and it works.

(Glances at the audience as he moves the model for them to see. Then he puts it back on the table.)

A little ahead of its time. "Work on it, Thomas," Dr. Franklin said. "Science wants a man's devotion."

(Thrusts his hands in his pockets, takes a few steps, then turns to the audience.)

Well, damn it, I'm no scientist. I'm not a farmer either . . . gentleman or otherwise. Truth is, I'm no gentleman. I'm a pamphleteer, a scribbler, a gadfly — a revolutionist. And, by God, I almost pulled it off in England, too. Wrote a book called *The Rights of Man* that set them on edge and lit a few fires, too, but England is not America — hardly. And since a hangman's noose solves nothing, I got out of England with my skin on.

(Serious)

Do you know, Jefferson said to me once, "Where freedom is — there is my country." I look at it differently. "Where tyranny dwells — there is my place." The wind was blowing from

France — the wind of revolt, the wind of anger, the wind of revolution. Of course, I went to France! When my ship docked at Calais, there were thousands of citizens of a new France, a revolutionary France — cheering, shouting, "Citizen Paine! Citizen Paine."

(He pauses, gripped by his emotion. We hear the shouts.)

VOICES

Citoyen Paine — Citoyen Paine.

(The spot follows PAINE *as he walks upstage to a raised platform.)*

PAINE

Do you know, they elected me a member of the Convention. To represent the citizens of Calais in the Revolutionary Convention.

ROBESPIERRE

(From offstage)

Citoyens, je vous présente Citoyen Thomas Paine.

(There is a roar of applause from a crowd.)

PAINE

Thank you, Citizen Robespierre. Citizens of France, I salute you. I salute the Revolution. I salute liberty! I salute fraternity! I salute equality! You have made me a citizen of France.

(Applause — timed between his statements)

Here in Paris, standing here in this Convention, I address you as Thomas Paine, citizen — citizen of no land, citizen of wherever men dream of freedom. Let the whole world hear the sound of our Convention! Citizens of France, Citizen Tom Paine salutes you!

(Walking downstage)

The applause went on and on. I was drunk — drunk with praise and emotion, feeling my own importance, believing that my self-styled title, "Citizen of the World," really meant something.

*(*PAINE *walks to stage left, and the light increases over the table.* TWO MEN, *wearing dark clothes, are already seated at the table. They are members of the Revolutionary Convention. On the table are mugs, a bottle, and sheets of heavy paper.)*

FIRST MEMBER

We have been at this all night, Citizen Paine. We have argued enough. You must make a decision.

SECOND MEMBER

It comes down to one thing, Citizen Paine, and one thing only. Will you, or will you not, vote as the people vote?

PAINE

No, monsieur, I cannot accept that. You mean, will I or will I not vote as Robespierre would have me vote. But I am not Robespierre. I am Tom Paine, and Tom Paine cannot vote for the death — the execution — of a poor fool and his vain and foolish wife. Why this terrible insistence that I vote for the death of the king and queen of France?

SECOND MEMBER

They are the symbols of all that has gone before. They must be done away with. The line must be ended. There must never again be a king of France.

FIRST MEMBER

Our arguments are very strong, Monsieur Paine; do not think of us as your enemies. You have real enemies, and you must protect yourself.

PAINE

By signing a death warrant. Is that how I protect myself?

SECOND MEMBER

Better their death warrant than yours, Citizen Paine.

PAINE

And that's the choice you give me? To become a murderer or be murdered?

FIRST MEMBER

Murder. Who speaks of murder? This is not murder, this is the people's will.

PAINE

What of my will? Why do you need my vote?

SECOND MEMBER

So that you may live, Citizen Paine. We need you. We do not need them.

PAINE

So, if I do not sign the death warrant, I will die? Is that what the Revolution has turned into? A parade of death? Do as we tell you to do, or you must die? Is free will gone? Is the independence of man gone?

(He shakes his head, unhappily.)

Then I say that your Revolution has turned into a beast and a lie.

FIRST MEMBER

Isn't it possible that truth remains with the Revolution, and that the life of Monsieur Paine has become the lie?

SECOND MEMBER

Are you a fraud, citizen? You make very light of our suffering.

PAINE

(Angrily)

I've been accused of many things, monsieur, but never of fraudulence — and never of lying. You, the French, have made me into a great figure, a symbol of world revolution. I am something else, my friends. A boaster, an egotist, a brawler with words, a drunkard — all these things. But a murderer I am not! And if I stand up in the Convention and raise my hand to vote to send the king and queen to the guillotine, I take part in a murder, in a senseless, stupid murder. This I will not do.

FIRST MEMBER

As you will.

(Members exit. PAINE *turns to the audience.)*

PAINE

Do you know, I think that was my best moment. I liked myself then. I didn't think of myself as a hero. I was never more frightened in my life.

MARAT

(Offstage)

You have not been recognized, Citizen Paine! Stand down!

PAINE

I will be recognized, Citizen Marat! I am a delegate to this Convention, and I will be recognized. And I will speak.

MARAT

You will take your seat, Citizen Paine. You are out of order. Take your seat, sir.

PAINE

I will not take my seat, Citizen Marat, unless this Convention so desires.

(He raises his voice.)

I ask the Convention! Monsieurs, what is your will? Shall Citizen Thomas Paine speak?

(A flurry of offstage voices)

OFFSTAGE VOICES

(Chanting)

Speak! Speak! Speak! Speak!

SINGLE VOICE

(With the chant)

Speak, Citizen Thomas Paine.

(The voices blend into shouts, and then die away.)

PAINE

There is your answer, Citizen Marat.

(To the audience)

I have spoken to you in the past as Citizen Paine. I have said that the world is my village. I speak to you now as Tom Paine, soldier of the Revolution. I ask you to go back — go back in your memory, eighteen years. Two thousand half-naked, sick, tired, beaten soldiers stood for mankind against all the tyranny in the world. Not like the National Guard today, which stands a hundred thousand strong in the streets of Paris.

(Cheers and muted applause are heard through the above. But at this point, the applause stops. Then dead silence)

Shall I tell you how we survived, citizens? We survived because Dr. Benjamin Franklin spoke to King Louis of France, and he pleaded with the king. And the king heard Dr. Franklin's plea, and gave us money, an army, the ships of his navy. He

made possible that thing which we call the United States of America. Now, you ask me to vote for the execution of this same man. Can the vote of Citizen Paine testify that gratitude is dead, that memory is gone, that the past is meaningless? No, citizens, not even if it means that Citizen Paine must take their place in the guillotine. I vote against it! In the name of gratitude, in the name of compassion, and in the name of the great American Revolution which brought into being, on this globe, the first republic that man has known, the first place of equality and democracy.

(His voice has become somewhat choked toward the last of this. He pauses now, and spreads his hands.)

Revenge is beneath the dignity of the Revolution. Compassion is not.

(Blackout. Lights up on PAINE, *sitting at the table. The sound of boots, marching men, is heard. He cocks his head to listen to the sound.)*

I've been expecting them, and I'm not unique in that. There must be ten thousand men and women in Paris who are also expecting them.

(Hard knocking at the door)

Be patient. No need to break the door down. There's no place for me to hide. I am not going to crawl up the chimney. A moment or two more, and I am yours.

(He turns back to the audience.)

I need a moment to explain that I am not complaining. This is something I brought on myself. I know the consequences. Only sometimes, I ask myself — what are the odds for the

man who plays the hero? Who watches me perform? Who demands that Paine do this and Paine do that? God help me, I don't know. Well, I can't keep them waiting any longer.

(He smiles.)

That would be bad manners.

(He sighs and rises.)

Come in, citizens.

*(*TWO MEN *dressed in the uniform of the National Guard enter.)*

Good morning, citizens. You make your rounds early today.

FIRST GUARDSMAN

I am sorry, Citizen Paine.

(He exhibits a pair of manacles.)

PAINE

No, no, no, citizens. I am aware of your discomfort. You've arrested more distinguished people than Citizen Paine.

(He holds out his hands.)

FIRST GUARDSMAN

(Uncertainly)

Well, sir, I only wish to say —

PAINE

What can you say? Truly . . . what is there to say? I understand your reluctance. No apologies, please.

(The GUARDSMAN *snaps the manacles onto his hands.)*

In a sense, I am relieved. I have been waiting for this these past three days. I am glad the waiting is over.

(Walking between the TWO GUARDSMEN, PAINE *marches off upstage right. The three of them circle the stage and stop at* CLOOTZ's *house — which is not seen, only indicated.)*

I recognize this place. Why do we stop here, citizen soldiers?

FIRST GUARDSMAN

We have a duty to perform here.

PAINE

Oh, no. No. But it's incredible, absolutely incredible. You are going to arrest Citizen Clootz.

SECOND GUARDSMAN

We must do what we must do.

(The SECOND GUARDSMAN *waits beside* PAINE. *The* FIRST GUARDSMAN *marches off into the darkness upstage center.)*

PAINE

(Turning to the audience)

You know, there comes a point where the tragic and the hideous join hands with the humorous. And the joke becomes gargantuan and unspeakable, but a joke nevertheless. They go to arrest Citizen Clootz. I call myself a citizen of the world; Clootz calls himself the orator of the human race. He comes of a family of the German nobility. He became fanatically dedicated to this whole business of liberty and equality and fraternity. He was a rich man once, but he spent every penny he had on the Revolution. He came to France, calling himself an Ambassador of the Human Race to the Glorious People of France. You know, that's the kind of thing that always touches a Frenchman's soul — at least for a moment or two.

*(*PAINE *turns and walks upstage, where a spotlight appears. In the light are the* GUARDS-

MAN *and* ANARCHARSIS CLOOTZ, *a small man with a large head, about fifty years old, witty, humorous, wearing a constant air of mockery. He speaks with a slight German accent. His hands are manacled.)*

"Happy is the country that has no history." Paraphrase: Happy is the man who is not famous. I quote myself.

CLOOTZ

(Smiling as he joins PAINE*)*

Always quoting yourself, Thomas. You are absolutely enchanted with the sound of your own words.

PAINE

True, very true, old friend. Nevertheless, I bid you welcome. We wear the same ornaments.

(Holding up his manacled hands. The soldiers urge them to march.)

Please, citizen soldiers, one moment.

CLOOTZ

There is no hurry. The Lady Guillotine is never impatient.

PAINE

(To CLOOTZ*)*

Tell me, Clootz, old friend, why are they arresting you? My own situation isn't perplexing. But you? Why you?

CLOOTZ

Why me? Why not me? Robespierre never trusts a rich man, regardless of his ideals and beliefs. Of course, at the moment, Clootz is as poor as a church mouse, but in the eyes of Robespierre, I'm still a rich nobleman.

*(*CLOOTZ *laughs, a cynical, bitter laugh.)*

Well, old friend, at least I'm in good company. If I were not manacled, it would be a pleasure to take your arm.

(The GUARDS *are heard laughing at some joke upstage right.)*

PAINE

(To the GUARDS*)*

All right, citizen soldiers, we are ready. I know you have other duties, but after all, it is not every day that you arrest Citizen Paine and Citizen Clootz. That will be something to tell your grandchildren, won't it?

(The four of them begin to walk slowly across the stage.)

CLOOTZ

Grandchildren? The world comes to an end, Paine. We walk knee-deep in blood, the madmen are loose — and you talk about grandchildren?

PAINE

You're too pessimistic, Clootz. The world goes on. There will be grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I'm not sure it will matter a great deal to us, but who knows? The difference between us is that I believe in God and you believe in nothing —

CLOOTZ

But in the end, it will make no difference to the Good Lady Guillotine. She will go chop once, chop twice, and that's the end of it, Citizen Paine. The end of us and our beliefs.

(Blackout. The lights come up on PAINE *and* CLOOTZ *in a prison cell.* PAINE *is kneeling at a stool, writing.* CLOOTZ *is on the floor with a blanket.)*

PAINE

(Looking up and around him)

Luxembourg Prison. Very difficult to anticipate prison. Don't you think so, Clootz?

*(*CLOOTZ *ignores him; does not answer.)*

It's amazing. Absolutely amazing how many writers end up in jail. Practically an affliction of the profession. And the irony of it is that one has time for writing in jail. It's really an excellent atmosphere, Clootz. Few interruptions, few obligations, very few visitors, and ample time for reflection.

(At this point, CLOOTZ *breaks into laughter.)*

Clootz, don't laugh. This manuscript is a defense of my deepest beliefs. A defense of my belief in God and the sanity and purpose of the universe.

CLOOTZ

(Mildly)

But, Paine, you believe so easily. Ah, what a lovely joke. Tom Paine, revolutionist, iconoclast, who waits for the guillotine in Luxembourg Prison and believes in God.

(His voice sharpens.)

Look around you. Look around you, Paine, and forget about God, for he has surely forgotten about you. Even if I were to believe in God, which I don't, it would be a cruel, whimsical God, one who has forgotten that this hellish place of misery, called the planet Earth, exists.

PAINE

That's beside the point. I have written a book. I am asking your opinion of what I have written.

CLOOTZ

What do you intend to call this ridiculous manuscript?

PAINE

The Age of Reason. Because it is an attack on superstition, on ignorance, on the poverty of the mind.

CLOOTZ

Wonderful.

(He laughs. PAINE *stares at him.* CLOOTZ *looks up, speaks through his laughter.)*

Consider my friend, Citizen Thomas Paine, Citizen Anacharsis Clootz, two of the most famous men in Europe, both of them waiting to have their heads chopped off in a world gone mad, discussing a book called *The Age of Reason.*

(Reading)

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy. But, lest it should be supposed that I believe many other things in addition to these, I shall, in the progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe and my reasons for not believing them. I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

*(*CLOOTZ *laughs.)*

PAINE

Well, whoever said that Germans don't have a sense of humor? Why are you laughing?

CLOOTZ

You are simply obsessed with self-destruction, my dear Thomas. If, by some miracle, you should escape the guillotine, your pious, blue-nosed friends in America will crucify you for what you are writing.

PAINE

Why? Tell me why.

CLOOTZ

Mainly because you have no sense. Churches are the most precious possessions of man. Even Robespierre, who claims he hates churches, has erected his own church. It is called the Terror, but it is still a church, where he worships madness. So what can I say, my dear Thomas? You are an Arschloch.

PAINE

Which means what in English?

CLOOTZ

Asshole.

PAINE

Thank you, my friend. I read you a statement of faith in God, and you describe me as an asshole.

CLOOTZ

I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I have such admiration for you, for your courage, for your mind; but we all have blind spots.

PAINE

Clootz, Clootz, don't you ever think of these things? You walk out in the night, and you look at the stars, and you see a

million of them. All the old superstitions gone, every star a sun — and heaven only knows how many planets circling them — and you look at all this incredible wonder and beauty. Or you wake up in the morning, and the sun is shining, and the trees are wet with the dew, and the birds are singing; and you believe there's no meaning to this? That the whole world is not tied up into one single creation, one single living, supreme thing? My God, Clootz, if there is no meaning to it, what are we? What have we done with our lives? Why are we here, in Luxembourg Prison, waiting to have our heads chopped off?

CLOOTZ

(Sadly)

Because we dream too much.

PAINE

This is the last book I shall ever write.

CLOOTZ

Thomas, I will not laugh at you anymore. I will be serious. Today, Danton, the soul and spirit of the Revolution, went to the guillotine.

PAINE

(Staring in amazement before he speaks)

You're lying. That can't be.

CLOOTZ

I am not lying. He was put to death today, and do you know what his last words were, Paine, his testament to the Revolution? I quote him: "A foolish, foolish world, fit only for children and idiots."

*(*PAINE *covers his face with his hands. They sit in silence a moment. And then, in the distance, we hear the sound of marching boots.)*

Paine, listen.

*(*PAINE *drops his hands and listens.)*

Here is our truth, Citizen Paine. Here is the one testament we can believe. Our own poetry, the sound of boots in the Luxembourg Prison. I read that sound better than I read what you have written. If they come with a new arrival, another prisoner . . . that is one sound. When they come as the envoy of Madame La Guillotine . . . there is another sound entirely. I hear that sound.

PAINE

We have heard the boots before.

CLOOTZ

Different. Different, my friend. This is our moment of truth. They are coming this way. For which one of us, old friend? For you? For me? Which shall it be?

*(*PAINE *stares at him.)*

It is all right. They come for me.

PAINE

How do you know? God forgive me, how do you know?

(Now the TWO GUARDSMEN *enter the circle of light. They stand there for a long moment.* PAINE *and* CLOOTZ *rise and face them.)*

FIRST GUARDSMAN

Citizen Clootz.

(Blackout. The lights go up on PAINE, *who sits on his prison cot. In the course of his speech, he puts on his shoes, gets into a jacket —tries to make himself presentable.)*

And then one day it ended. Robespierre was dead. Saint-Just was dead. The blood-lust consumed itself. The thirst for death became satiated — the Terror was over.

(Addressing the audience)

Question. Is a man ever free again after he has been to prison? There is a time when a man should die. Clootz understood that. I did not. I left something there. Maybe I brought something else out with me. But whether it's a sense of humility or a sense of defeat, I cannot properly say. There was a time when I knew who I was. I was Citizen Paine, and that was enough. Now, I ask myself, who am I? And it's like asking the question of Citizen Clootz. The only reply is his laughter.

(He pauses in an attitude of listening.)

But Clootz is dead in a pauper's grave, with that massive head on his chest, and I am alive. And I still have hope . . . a very simple hope . . . nothing so grandiose as to set the whole world free. That was my dream once; now it's only to go home — to go back to America. So, I've managed an appointment with the American ambassador. Not easy. Much easier to see Dr. Franklin, in London in 1774. It's one thing to deal with a tiny band of revolutionaries who have a dream of making their thirteen colonies free; it's something else entirely to deal with the United States of America. But I do have one advantage. The ambassador is Mr. James Monroe, old friend, old comrade-in-arms, from those days when I marched with General Washington's army.

*(*PAINE *begins to walk slowly. He speaks as he walks. Now he carries a cane, and walks with a pronounced limp.)*

He expects me. Said he would be pleased to see me. Well, that's not the best word in the world. Pleased. He might have

said he would be delighted to see me, thrilled to see me — yet, one thanks heaven for small favors.

(Inside the Embassy. MR. MONROE *is having his portrait painted. A painter, easel, palette, and brush are onstage. There is also a pedestal.* MR. MONROE *stands at the pedestal with his fingertips resting on it. He is at center. The artist is stage right. There is no canvas, only the easel.* PAINE *starts from downstage left. He approaches to a distance of about six feet.)*

Mr. Monroe.

MONROE

Mr. Paine. It is a pleasure to see you again. May I say that I fervently hope your bad days are over.

(Taking his hand)

PAINE

I can't say how pleased I am to see you, to be here, to stand on American soil.

MONROE

(Raising a brow)

American soil, sir?

(His manner is neither friendly nor unfriendly — totally neutral.)

PAINE

I mean, the Embassy, sir. A little bit of the United States here in France.

*(*MONROE *shrugs, not impressed. He is far more interested in the portrait that is being painted, and he resents* PAINE*'s intrusion on the artist's work. As the scene between* PAINE

and MONROE *progresses,* MONROE *will ease* PAINE *out of the line of sight when* PAINE *steps between* MONROE *and the artist.)*

What a splendid room this is! As it should be, befitting the dignity of the United States.

MONROE

(Attempting enthusiasm)

You're a free man, Mr. Paine. That's what counts — not enough to be free — to have your health. Yes, sir. To have your health.

PAINE

Well, my health is subject to my freedom. I'm alive and at liberty. That is what counts.

MONROE

And what are your plans, Mr. Paine?

PAINE

Very simple, Mr. Ambassador. I want to go home.

MONROE

You mean, to England, Mr. Paine. I think that can be arranged.

PAINE

(Staring at him uncertainly)

England? No, sir, not to England. That is not my home. Not today. There is only one place I call home — America. If you knew how I had hungered for those green hills, for the woods and the valleys, for that pure, blue sky, that is like no other on earth. I want to walk the streets of Philadelphia again. I want to smell the cordage and the tar on the waterfront. I want to drink good corn whiskey. I want to smell a thousand miles of wilderness when the wind blows from the west.

MONROE

(Interrupting him)

I can understand your hopes and your dreams, Mr. Paine. But what you desire is very impractical, most impractical. Your book *The Age of Reason* has been published in America. There was your lack of wisdom, sir. I am afraid we can't undo what was done. If you return to America, you may well be treated as the anti-Christ himself.

PAINE

I don't understand, Mr. Monroe.

MONROE

You have no idea of the anger and the bitterness you've aroused with your book? If you return to America, you will provoke mobs to attack you and, as awful as it is to say it to you, the possibility exists that you may be destroyed at the hands of contentious people. That would not be a good thing for our country, sir. Not good at all. Better to stay here, Mr. Paine. You have been a long time in France. Remain here awhile longer.

PAINE

All I ever dreamed of was the publication of *The Age of Reason* in America — the one place where it would be welcomed.

MONROE

Well, Mr. Paine, it was not welcomed. Not in years has a book been so bitterly condemned. It is taken as the credo of an atheist.

PAINE

(With growing excitement)

Have you read it, Mr. Monroe? Believe me, it is not the credo of an atheist. I am a Quaker, sir. I've never been false to my beliefs. You must read the book yourself. How can a believing Quaker be the anti-Christ?

MONROE

And the fact that you are a Quaker, Mr. Paine, has not helped things. Not at all. The Quakers are liked no better in America than they were during the Revolution when they refused to engage in the struggle for our very existence.

*(*MONROE *gives a letter to* PAINE, *who looks at it.)*

PAINE

Gouverneur Morris's letter to Mr. Jefferson? But you must understand, Mr. Monroe, that Gouverneur Morris has always hated me, ever since I exposed his war-profiteering during the Revolution.

(His anger and excitement growing)

He was here in France when they sent me to prison. He laughed. He ignored me. He sat on his fat ass and waited for me to go to the guillotine.

MONROE

(He reaches out and takes the letter from PAINE*'s hands. He reads the letter.)*

I must mention that Thomas Paine is in prison. Perhaps, if he remains quiet, he will be forgotten. He amuses himself with publishing a pamphlet against Jesus Christ.

PAINE

Lies! That's inconceivable! All anyone has to do is read the book itself.

MONROE

I haven't read your book, Mr. Paine. My days are full since I undertook this mission, so it is unlikely that I will read it in the near future. My advice to you, sir, is to remain in France.

PAINE

I come to you with only one desire — to return to America — and you tell me to stay in France. What shall I do here in France? There is no need of me now. The Revolution is over; Bonaparte is in command. What shall I do here in France?

MONROE

That, Mr. Paine, is up to you. I have given you the best advice I can. I cannot prevent you from returning to America. I can only advise you that it would be foolish. Very foolish, sir.

PAINE

Mr. Monroe, I think that if you were to write to General Washington, he might provide me with a place where I could spend my declining years. He will not have forgotten me.

MONROE

Yet he might remember you as a man who brought Christianity into contempt.

PAINE

(His voice rising)

No, sir. There are other reasons for him to remember me. You yourself, sir — think back, think back to the time we met on a street in Philadelphia and you embraced who I was and what I stood for.

MONROE

(With a supercilious tone)

Don't presume upon old General Washington's friendship, or on mine, sir. You are what you are. We are what we are. And that street in Philadelphia — my dear Mr. Paine, that was an eternity ago, another time, another world.

PAINE

Yes, I suppose that's true. I suppose that's always been true.

(The light narrows and moves with PAINE *as he walks to the apron at stage left and faces the audience.)*

Well, there it is. Not very inspiring. After all, more than twenty years have passed since I wrote *Common Sense.* The Revolution is over. The United States of America is a nation, a very powerful nation, and Mr. Monroe has his own dreams and ambitions. I'm ready to accept that. Of course, you may ask, what was my alternative? None. I have very little money. I live in a tiny room at the home of two French people, Monsieur Bonneville and his wife, who are kind enough to have me as their guest. I don't go out much. I prefer to stay in my room.

(He walks upstage, the light following him to a chair. He takes off his jacket and puts it over the back of the chair. Then he drops into the chair.)

What now? Where to? What do I do? Who am I? What is my function? But I have no function. Day after day, I sit here in my room, and I wait. I have no will to write, no desire to write. I just wait.

(The sound of someone knocking on the door)

Who is it?

MADAME BONNEVILLE

(Offstage. She has a French accent, not too pronounced.)

It is I, Monsieur Paine. Madame Bonneville.

PAINE

(Tiredly)

What do you want, Madame Bonneville?

MADAME BONNEVILLE

(Offstage. With rising excitement)

Monsieur Paine, General Napoleon Bonaparte is downstairs in my parlor asking for you.

PAINE

(Rising slowly)

What? Come in here. Come inside, woman.

(The circle of light broadens and MADAME BONNEVILLE *enters it, very excited. She is a middle-aged woman, wearing an apron.)*

What are you telling me, woman? What are you talking about? Have you lost your senses?

MADAME BONNEVILLE

Don't you listen to me? Don't you understand French? I am telling you that Citizen Napoleon Bonaparte sits in my parlor. You understand me — in my parlor — and he asked to see Citizen Thomas Paine.

PAINE

(After a moment)

All right, woman. All right. I will be down. Ask him to please wait.

MADAME BONNEVILLE

(Almost screaming)

Are you out of your mind? Let Napoleon Bonaparte wait?

PAINE

Yes, let him wait. And now leave me alone.

(To the audience)

You must understand that history didn't wait for Thomas Paine; it moved on. And suddenly, a man who was . . . not too long ago . . . a corporal in the French army has come

to power in France. The First Citizen, as they call him, the General, the Commander, Napoleon Bonaparte. He took the National Guard of the Revolution and turned it into the finest fighting force on the European continent. Nothing can stand before him. England is driven off the continent and secure only behind the wooden walls of her navy. And this—this man who is on his way to becoming the master of the world—is downstairs, waiting to see me. Who am I? You see, I still have no answer to my question, Who is Citizen Paine?

*(*PAINE *puts on his coat, smoothes the lapels, smoothes back his hair, adjusts his trousers. He takes a few steps toward center stage and a spotlight goes on at extreme stage right. In the spotlight, we see* NAPOLEON, *standing in the pose that is so familiar.)*

Ah, there he is. Not very impressive, I must say. Posing.

(He pauses, staring at NAPOLEON. *Then he glances at the audience, then at* NAPOLEON *again.)*

Maybe I misjudged the man. Very well, I go to him with an open mind, politely ready to hear what he has to say.

(The light on PAINE *goes off and he walks across and enters the circle of light where* NAPOLEON *stands.)*

General Bonaparte—

BONAPARTE

(Cutting PAINE *off)*

No, no, Citizen Paine. It's Citizen Bonaparte. Citizen Bonaparte comes to Citizen Paine.

PAINE

(Startled)

Ah, yes.

(Slowly)

Citizen Bonaparte, I hardly know what to say. I am overwhelmed.

BONAPARTE

Why, Citizen? You see before you an admirer. I have read *Common Sense*. I have read *The Rights of Man*. I have read *The Age of Reason*. It is I who am honored.

PAINE

(Shaking his head)

You know, sir, there is one thing that no writer can resist — a reader who says he has read every word the writer has written.

BONAPARTE

Not simply read, Citizen Paine. I have gone through *Common Sense* a dozen times. I can quote it to you by heart.

PAINE

Please — Citizen Bonaparte, you are too kind.

BONAPARTE

This is no matter of kindness. Someday a statue will be erected to Citizen Paine in every city on the civilized earth.

PAINE

Please, sir, that kind of flattery is too much. I would have to be more than human to resist it.

BONAPARTE

The truth need not be resisted.

PAINE

It's not true, but it's good to hear it.

BONAPARTE

You and I, we are the only true republicans, in the deepest sense. Only you and I share the dream of a United States of Europe. And in God's good time, the nations of the world united — an end to war.

PAINE

If that is really your vision, then I will admit that I have shared it. It's the stuff of dreams, Citizen Bonaparte.

BONAPARTE

A dream that will soon be realized. I come to you because I need you.

PAINE

You need me? For what, sir?

BONAPARTE

To be my voice. The voice of the continuing Revolution.

PAINE

(His voice thickening)

What can I say? I have misjudged you. I have misjudged France. What can I say, Citizen Bonaparte, except to put myself at your service. If we work together, there will be no end to our dreams. But tell me how.

BONAPARTE

First by eliminating the single obstacle to the culmination of both our dreams — England.

PAINE

England, sir? I don't understand.

BONAPARTE

We must invade England. There must be a popular uprising there that will coordinate itself with our invasion. And in

preparation for that, you, Citizen Paine, must return to England. You are not afraid?

PAINE

No, sir. I am not afraid to return to England. I have friends there, many friends. But to return to England and prepare a popular uprising that would welcome your invading armies with open arms —

BONAPARTE

Precisely. We understand each other.

PAINE

(After a long moment)

No, Citizen Bonaparte. I think not. I think you want the truth. Otherwise you would not have sought me out. If you land troops in England, no matter what anyone does, the people will resist. I think they will cut your army to pieces. I think that if you invade England, not a man of the invading force will return to France.

BONAPARTE

(Sudden anger, his mellow mood gone)

What is this, sir? Do you seek to make a fool of me?

PAINE

No, sir, I am not trying to make a fool of you. I am trying to make you understand that in England there are two things — the Crown and the people. The Crown can be destroyed, but the people cannot be conquered. Force would only unify them. If you land an army on their shores, they will forget that they work for sixpence a day and they will remember only that they are English.

BONAPARTE

(Angry)

And who are you, sir, to instruct me on England and to instruct

me on revolution. You are nothing. I honor you by seeking you out. You are a man without principles, a traitor to himself.

PAINE

No, no, citizen, I will not be spoken to that way. And I will not have you accuse me. You talk about principles. Look around you! I live here, a lodger in a small room upstairs. I have never sold myself, sir. And if you want the counsel of Citizen Paine, then listen to me.

BONAPARTE

(Starting to push past him)

I've heard enough. Get out of my way.

PAINE

(As NAPOLEON *pushes past him, following* NAPOLEON, *the light moving with him)*

If you want England, I will tell you how you can have England.

BONAPARTE

Get out of my way!

PAINE

Cry out for the rights of man, win back the glory of republican France. Make an alliance with republican America. Make an end to war and poverty. Abolish duties, open every port—and then see how long Britain can resist you. The English people will rise up and join you.

*(*NAPOLEON *exits.)*

You think only of guns! I tell you, you can never conquer England, but you can win her. You can win the world.

(As PAINE *speaks, the light narrows. His shoulders slump. He walks slowly across the stage to his chair and falls into it. The light remains upon him. The spotlight widens and* MADAME BONNEVILLE *walks into it.)*

MADAME BONNEVILLE

(Angrily and with contempt)

You fool! You pig! Tom Paine! Who is Tom Paine? I will tell you. He is nothing. He is not worth two sous. He is a puffed-up, insignificant fool — who dares to insult the First Citizen, in my house. Who dares.

PAINE

Leave me alone. Woman, for God's sake, leave me alone.

MADAME BONNEVILLE

(Beating him with her sewing bag)

Oh, yes. I will leave you alone. All of France will leave you alone. I tell you, it is a testimony to the compassion of the First Citizen that you sit here instead of being back in the Luxembourg Prison where you belong. I heard you. I heard every word you said.

PAINE

(Leaping to his feet)

Get out of here and leave me alone!

*(*MADAME BONNEVILLE *spits, turns, and exits.* PAINE *stands there for a long moment.)*

Stupid, frog bitch.

(Sighing and shaking his head)

Well, Thomas my lad, you've done it again. You certainly have become adept at putting your best foot forward. Where to now?

(He walks slowly across the stage.)

I'll go home. The devil with Monroe! The devil with all those righteous citizens! They have a short memory. They'll forget about me. They'll forget about Tom Paine, the atheist — just as they've forgotten about the soldiers of the Revolution who

are not yet cold in their graves. That's it. I will go back to America. I will go home.

(By now, he has reached upstage right, and as he exits, the lights go down. Blackout. A brief musical interlude, while the stage remains in darkness. As the music dies down, children's voices, in the distance, shout this refrain as a play song.)

CHILDREN'S VOICES

Paine, Paine, cursed be his name.
He turned on Jesus, and that's his shame.

(Lights up. Now a single spot goes up on stage right. PAINE *lies in a simple bed, propped up by a couple of pillows. He wears an old dressing gown, and the crumpled blankets are pulled up to his waist. His face is slack and loose, the face of an old man who has suffered a stroke. When he moves his hands, they tremble. Next to the bed, there is a small table and on it a glass and an empty bottle. A chair stands beside the bed, and* PAINE*'s jacket is draped over it.)*

PAINE

(Supporting himself in bed, and listening)

There's a bit of doggerel for a man to take with him when he goes. And I'm going.

(His voice rises.)

Which I tell you is good riddance to bad rubbish — because I'd rather be in hell than here.

(He sits up and reaches out a shaking hand, tilts the bottle over the glass. Nothing comes out of it. He sighs.)

Ah, the devil with it.

(Suddenly mustering his last bit of strength — loudly)

You fools! You stupid, mindless fools! I have written a book of devotion. I pleaded with you to see God as love and mercy and compassion — above all, as reason. To see the universe as God's mind.

(His anger passes. He begins to laugh, coughing at the same time.)

Who am I shouting at? A dying man, arguing with ghosts. Is that what I deserve? A dying man who can't find a cemetery that will take his body, in a land I made.

(He pauses and thinks about this.)

Well, as much as anyone made it, I'll say that. And I'll say it again and again, as long as I have breath left. As much as anyone made it.

(His voice rises.)

Ask them! Ask Jefferson! Ask Washington! Ask Hamilton! Ask them! When they didn't know what was tomorrow or what had to be done or which way to turn — ask them who told them what to do! Who gave them a direction, a belief? When they were frightened and confused, who did they turn to?

(There is a knocking at the door.)

Come in.

*(*WILLETT HICKS, *a minister, enters. He is a tall, thin man, dressed in black clergyman's garb. He walks slowly into the circle of light and stands looking at* PAINE.*)*

HICKS

How are you, sir?

PAINE

Close enough to the end not to care a great deal, Preacher Hicks.

HICKS

I'm sorry to hear that.

PAINE

I'm not. Sit down, sir.

HICKS

(Seating himself)

I come with no good news, Mr. Paine. I really don't know what we should do. I cannot find a burial spot for you.

PAINE

Not even in the Quaker burial ground? They will not give me space in the Quaker burial ground?

HICKS

I'm afraid not.

PAINE

Why? For what reason? I have done nothing unbecoming to a Quaker. I will be dead. You show mercy to the dead.

HICKS

I'm sorry, Mr. Paine. It grieves me to tell you. I, myself, am a Methodist. I pleaded with them.

PAINE

And they deny me? And the Presbyterians deny me?

(Plaintively)

Then where will my body be put? In a lime pit, in a field of

garbage? There isn't six feet of ground for me? A lousy bit of earth where they can bury me and be rid of me once and for all, and put up a piece of stone that says, "Here lies Thomas Paine."

(Almost at the point of tears)

This is New York City. It isn't Boston. What of the Episcopalians — they're no blue-nosed bastards.

HICKS

Peace, Mr. Paine. I went to the Episcopalians. They refused me. They were the most vehement of all.

PAINE

In the name of God, Preacher Hicks, what have I done? What am I blamed for? This is my own land. I adopted it as a beloved child is adopted. I gave it strength. I gave it sustenance. I brought it together. Do you know what Franklin said to me once? Yes, sir, Benjamin Franklin, the old man himself. I have a letter somewhere, a letter that Franklin wrote to me. I've been reading it.

(He goes through the pockets of his jacket and finds a letter, exhibiting it to HICKS.*)*

Look at it. It's Franklin's own writing. If you show them this letter, Preacher Hicks, it will make a difference.

HICKS

I'm afraid not, Mr. Paine, but I will try. I will keep on trying.

*(*PAINE *lies back—in despair. The letter falls from his hand.)*

I must go now.

PAINE

(In a whisper)

Thank you, Preacher Hicks.

HICKS

Is there anything else I can do for you?

(As he speaks, he realizes that PAINE *is dead. He stands transfixed for a moment. Then he pulls the sheet over* PAINE*'s face. Then he picks up the letter and reads.)*

You, Thomas Paine, are more responsible than any other living person on this continent for the creation of what we call the United States of America.

*(*HICKS *freezes with the letter and* PAINE *flings off the sheet and rises.)*

PAINE

Dead — in a loathsome, miserable manner. Well, it comes to all men. It came to Clootz. It came to the others — and after it's done, it doesn't matter a devil of a lot how it came.

*(*PAINE *takes the letter from* HICKS*, who exits as if nothing were unusual.)*

The results are the same, and as for the good Dr. Franklin's letter, well, maybe he was right — maybe not. And if you're curious as to where they buried me — well, it's still something of a mystery. Some say it was in an unmarked pauper's grave in New Rochelle. On the other hand, an Englishman, name of Cobbett, claimed that he had dug up my bones, and he did make a shilling or two exhibiting them — if they were my bones. But you know, I kind of like the notion of no grave. After all, the world was my village, and in any case, here it is, the United States of America, for better or worse, and a part of the birthing was mine, and goddamn it, it always will be!

(Fade light to blackout.)

THE END

AFTERWORD

THOMAS PAINE, a man whose writings shook the world and whose preachments on democracy have endured almost two centuries, was born on January 29, 1737, in the town of Thetford in England. His father, Quaker by religion and corset maker by trade, was poor and not blessed by any great good fortune — but beyond these bare facts, we know little of him or of Paine's mother, or indeed of what Paine's life was like when he lived with his parents.

If Paine's father had that regard for education common among Quakers of his time, poverty prevented him from indulging his son. At best, Paine had four or five years of primary education in a village school. He learned to read, to write, to do simple arithmetic — and not much more. At thirteen he was learning the trade of corset making in his father's shop and his formal schooling was done, a fact that his enemies made much of in later times.

However, like so many self-educated men, Paine was compulsively driven to inform himself. His education continued through all the years of his life; and at the height of his powers, the years when he produced his political essays, he was a man of enormous knowledge, whose grasp of history, ethics, science, and religion was on a par with that of the finest minds of his time.

It is important to note and remember this, for any factual recitation of Thomas Paine's life during the years before he appeared on the American Colonial scene during 1774 is bound to be deceptive and puzzling. Paine himself never produced any coherent account of those first thirty-seven years. They were not years that he enjoyed remembering or recalling; and unquestionably, they were years of grim poverty, severe emotional conflict, and heartbreaking humiliation.

During this period, Paine married twice. His first marriage ended after a year with the death of his wife; his second marriage, also of short duration, resulted in a legal separation. In neither case were there children involved — nor do we find thereafter any consequential relationship with a woman as a determinant in Paine's life. Never did he make any real effort to establish a home or a family situation, or to sink his roots deeply in any one place; his internationalism, so important a factor in his philosophical development, was an outgrowth — and a splendid one — of his rootlessness, his loneliness, and his homelessness. Though born and raised in England, where he spent most of the first four decades of his life, he was as much a citizen, subjectively and objectively, of France, America, and indeed the world.

♥

It is curious that knowing so much of Thomas Paine — at least during the post-English years — we also know so little of him. For every friend, he had an enemy; he was loved greatly and hated violently, praised and slandered, mocked and revered. The only emotion he failed to provoke was indifference. He was a volatile, angry, and outspoken man. When he believed something, he was incapable of hiding such belief or even tempering it. He worshiped reason and logic, and despised the absence of these qualities in others; and he him-

self loved and hated with the same intensity he provoked in others.

Somewhere in his own Quaker childhood a basis was laid for his lifelong and unremitting hatred of superstition, bigotry, and inherited class privilege — and in these areas he was capable of neither charity nor tolerance. Essentially, he was a Utopian, and as with so many Utopians, he was incapable of accommodating himself either to ignorance or to expediency.

His hunger for knowledge was never satisfied, and he wore his own lack of education like a cross and a burden. During his years in England he read constantly, borrowing every book he could find, spending his own poor pittance on books and scientific instruments. He set up a sort of laboratory in his corset shop, neglecting his tottering business and spending hours on his experiments — one of the many reasons why he had to sell all he owned to avoid debtors' prison. He attended every lecture he could get to, particularly those in the school of Newton, given by James Ferguson and Benjamin Martin. Taunted and mocked through all the years of his life for his ignorance, he drove himself to become one of the most learned and erudite figures in a time that sparkled with men of learning, erudition, and wisdom.

He was highly conscious of his battle to know. "I seldom," he said, "passed five minutes of my life however circumstanced, in which I did not acquire some knowledge."

Yet for the scholars he has never emerged from that peculiar shadow they cast upon self-education. There are few biographers of Paine who have not felt the necessity to disparage his style, his scholarship, his arguments of fact and reason. Alfred Owen Aldridge, on comparing Paine's style in *The Age of Reason* to the style of Edmund Burke, against whom Paine polemicized, tells us, "From the point of view of style, however, the superiority probably rests with Burke. His measured eloquence and classical thundering, on one side, his subdued

irony and epigrammatic scorn, on the other, enrich and enliven his thoughts. Burke can be reread with great pleasure — Paine with somewhat less."

I would think otherwise. I derive little pleasure and less profit from the rereading of Burke, who is more often ponderous than witty and whose "measured eloquence" falls again and again into unadmirable snobbery and fancy wordage — nor do I find *anything* new or even diverting in his ideas. Paine, on the other hand, still evokes my excitement, my imagination, and my interest. I find his style excellent because he writes to the point, plainly, directly — with heart, humanity, and honest anger. He writes with passion, but his arguments, unlike Burke's, rest upon a foundation of reason and logic.

Of course, the disparagement of Paine was not limited to comparisons with Edmund Burke; but it arises most often because the first part of Paine's *Rights of Man* was written in answer to Burke's attack upon the French Revolution, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, published in England on November 1, 1790. The business of attacking and disparaging Thomas Paine, even during his lifetime, attained an almost professional status. The very fact that Paine could never temporize or equivocate encouraged a permanent open season for his detractors and their slander.

But Paine and his work survive — and both the man and his writing grow in importance through the years. It is not likely that Paine even sensed this during his lifetime; and though he made many good and important friends, among them George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and James Madison, he made more enemies.

❦

Thomas Paine was thirty-seven years old when he made his decision to leave England forever and to settle somewhere

in the thirteen colonies that were beginning to be called America. He had been a staymaker, an exciseman, and an amateur scientist, and aside from a pamphlet written in defense of the excisemen's plea for more wages, he had done no writing of any importance. He had lived, worked, and educated himself; he had observed with pain and sorrow the lot of the British common man of the time; he had experienced poverty, misery, and human suffering; but if he had died then, the world would not have known him or remembered him. His appointment with destiny lay in America, not in England.

George Romney's portrait of Paine, done years later, is the best likeness of him that we have. We see a man with a rough-hewn, large-featured face, a fleshy, slightly hooked nose, a wide and sensitive mouth, and heavy black brows. His blue eyes are curious and skeptical, more examining than inviting, and lines of bitterness are etched about his mouth and chin. Not a good-looking man, but one whose face is alive and alert, whose brow is high and broad, and whose eyes are almost damning in their cold intentness. We are told that he was of middle height, that he stood well, was possessed of strength and endurance, and had that calm acceptance of physical conditions that is one of the few rewards of poverty.

He arrived in America, in Philadelphia, on November 30, 1774, sick with fever, and with no more in his pockets than a few shillings and a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin to his son-in-law, Richard Bache. Franklin had thought well enough of Paine to give him the letter, but the measure he took of Paine then was that of "a worthy young man" fit perhaps for a "clerk, or assistant tutor in a school, or assistant surveyor."

But in spite of the need for teachers in the Colonies, Paine found work with a printer named Robert Aitken, did his work well, and became editor of a faltering periodical, *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. Paine's influence on the magazine

was felt immediately; he brought important writers to it, increased its circulation, and turned it into an organ of considerable influence. The times, it should be noted, were ripe for this kind of achievement. The Continental Congress was in session. The Colonies were in a ferment, and the heart of this ferment was Philadelphia. In Paine's mind, there was no question of taking sides or of which side he should be on; as far as he was concerned, the issue had been decided years before he ever thought of coming to America. He was on the side of the people, on the side of the Revolution, and against monarchy, inherited privilege, and tyranny of every kind.

He was partisan, decisive, and, above all, articulate; he was a voice that might have gone unheeded in another time, but that was welcomed and listened to in Philadelphia of 1775 and 1776. Poems, articles, exhortations, poured from his pen. The idea of independence was in the air. Others debated it, considered it judiciously and carefully; Paine embraced it — and embraced a whole vision of a new nation, a new world, a new society made clean, and free from all the degradation and superstition and inequity of post-feudal Europe.

Armed with this vision, Paine fixed upon the purpose that was to result in a little book of fifty pages, entitled *Common Sense*. He became the apostle of Independence — as the focus of all the revolutionary tendencies then current in the Colonies, as a political movement, and as a utopian step toward that society, based upon reason, justice, and plenty, which was maturing in his own mind. Eventually, all of Paine's political experience and thinking would mature in *The Rights of Man*, in my opinion the finest statement of a philosophy of political democracy to be produced in the eighteenth century. Now, in *Common Sense*, he had taken his first important stride in that direction.

One of Thomas Paine's great gifts was a sensitivity to currents of thought and action already present among the people. He could take the inchoate longings and aspirations of an inarticulate mass and make these beginnings whole and marvelously articulate. The superstructure of scholarship and experience upon his own poverty-defined beginning enabled him to talk to plain and often barely literate people, to expound the most complex political ideas in straightforward, understandable, and dramatic language. He did this without writing down; he simplified by going directly to the heart of the matter, to the crux of the issue, not by writing in pidgin English.

Common Sense, which was signed, *Written by an Englishman*, became an immediate success. In relation to the population of the Colonies at that time, it had the largest sale and circulation of any book in American history. No one knows just how many copies were actually printed. The most conservative sources place the figure at something over 300,000 copies. Others place it just under half a million. Taking a figure of 400,000 in a population of 3,000,000, a book published today would have to sell 24,000,000 copies to do as well — and this sale was not over a period of years but within a matter of three months. And since the Colonies at that time contained a divided population, and since we may assume that the enemies of the Revolution did not extend themselves to buy the book, it is safe to infer that everyone who adhered to the cause of Independence either read *Common Sense* or had it read to him. For in addition to actual copies sold, sections of the book were printed in every patriot newspaper.

I know of no other case in recent history where the convergence of a statement and a sentiment was so dynamic as with the publication of *Common Sense*. Not only did the book become the most talked-of, the most pertinent publication of the moment, but its author was lifted out of his comparative

obscurity, first into national and then into international prominence. More than any other in America, he became the spokesman, the pamphleteer, of the Revolution. He was admitted into the circles of the best minds in America, the most important and influential people, the leaders of the newborn state and army.

Certainly, Paine was as surprised as any at the turn things took; certainly, he enjoyed his fame and importance. He refused to profit financially through the sale of this or any of his subsequent writings, but he accepted his role gladly, gave his time, his strength, and his unswerving loyalty to the patriot cause — and continued, through the course of the war, to produce a series of exhortations, narrations, and exposures, directed toward the Colonials and against the British, which are known as *The Crisis Papers.*

At the end of the Revolutionary War in America, Paine had made his name and reputation as a part of the beginnings of a nation. More than any other single individual, he had turned the sentiment of the people toward Independence, had armed them with the trenchant tools of fact and reason and purpose. He had made out of their own aspirations a clear and concise ideology, a philosophy for action and government, and a firm justification of their cause in the eyes of the world. He was a national figure and a world figure — and if he had died at this point, he would have stood in our gallery of recognized immortals along with Jefferson, Washington, Franklin, and others of the time.

But even as he had lived through and beyond his first thirty-seven years of misery and obscurity, so did he live through and beyond his time of national honor and adulation. He lived for his own purpose and his own dreams — and having made his contribution to the cause of democracy in America, he returned to England. When revolution broke out in France, Paine went to France. It was a matter of course, a matter of

the inevitable, as far as he was concerned; but whereas he had come to America as a penniless stranger, he went to Revolutionary France as a man of world renown — a pillar and an apostle of the democratic cause.

❦

When Thomas Paine returned to England after the American Revolution, one of the men he sought out was Edmund Burke, statesman and author. Ever since 1775, when Paine first read Burke's address "On Conciliation with America," he had admired Burke and had thought of him as a friend of the vast worldwide democratic and anticolonial movement that had been set in motion during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Certainly his early relations with Burke must have been cordial; even after Paine had read an utterly vicious and biased attack upon the French Revolution that Burke had delivered to the English Parliament on the ninth of February, 1790, he wrote to Burke, reasoned with him, and attempted to point out errors in fact and conclusion.

Not only Thomas Paine had been shocked by the violence and intemperance of Burke's attack on the French Revolution; thousands of other Englishmen had reacted to it with disgust and disappointment, and such writers as Joel Barlow, James Mackintosh, and William Godwin had replied to Burke. When it was announced that Burke planned to expand his remarks into a book, which would be entitled *Reflections on the French Revolution* and which would be a polemic against that revolution, a number of prominent English liberals begged Paine to answer Mr. Burke. Paine agreed that when Burke's book appeared and when he had read it, he would write his reply to it.

Thereby, *The Rights of Man* came into existence. Burke's *Reflections* appeared November 1, 1790. Paine read the book the day after it was published, and a few days later he began

work on his refutation — destined to become the most important essay on political democracy of that era. He worked on it almost continuously until sometime in February of 1791, when he completed the manuscript of what was to be Part One of *The Rights of Man*. At the time, he conceived of it as the entire book, and he dedicated it with affection and respect to George Washington.

A printer-publisher (the two occupations were generally combined at that period) who had done a great deal of radical publishing, and who was part of the liberal-radical circle in which Paine moved, had contracted in advance to issue the book. This man, J. Johnson by name, had already set the book in type and had pulled enough sheets for about a hundred copies, when government pressure was brought to bear upon him. Exactly what the nature of that pressure was, we do not know; but Johnson withdrew and refused to go on with the book. Paine, meanwhile, had made arrangements to return to France, where he was an accepted part of revolutionary circles and coeditor, with Condorcet, of *Le Républicain*.

Since Paine had written *The Rights of Man* as what he esteemed to be a public service and had no desire to profit through it — nor did he, ever — he turned over the publication and future of the work to a committee consisting of Thomas Holcroft, William Godwin, and Thomas Hollis. On the thirteenth of March, in 1791, the book was published in a large edition and priced at three shillings, the same price at which Burke's *Reflections* sold. At that time it was a very high price for a small book, the equivalent of fifteen or twenty dollars today; and concluding that this would limit its circulation and keep it out of the hands of the poor, the government made no attempt at interference. In spite of the price, however, the book sold over fifty thousand copies in a matter of weeks, and immediately became a factor in changing and tempering a nurtured sentiment against the French Revolution.

Paine had made provision for the profits from the sale of the book to go to the Society for Constitutional Information and certain other liberal organizations in England. These groups disseminated *The Rights of Man* through the British Isles and held hundreds of meetings at which parts of the book were read aloud. Paine's vivid and exciting prose and imagery took hold of the farmers and working people, who memorized sections of the book as they would a bit of verse.

How much of an effect the book had can be surmised from the fact that Edmund Burke felt called upon to answer it, publishing his reply under the title *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs.*

On July 13, 1791, Paine returned from France, was greeted with excitement and curiosity as an actual participant in the French Revolution. Anxious to place himself on record, he went back to the style of his earlier *Crisis Papers* and wrote a throwaway, entitled *Address and Declaration to the Friends of Universal Peace and Liberty*, in which he declared, "We fear not proud oppression, for we have truth on our side. We say, and we repeat it, that the French Revolution opens to the world an opportunity in which all good citizens must rejoice — that of promoting the general happiness of man."

The task remained of replying to Burke's increasingly hollow pleas and justifications for the cause of monarchy and privilege; but Paine saw no point in endless rounds of name-calling and petty debate. As far as he was concerned, Burke's party was bankrupt. The need was not to knock over straw men, but to frame and put forward a positive program for democracy and the equitable society. Into this full and positive statement of the democratic cause and aspirations would go all that Paine had gathered out of study, discussion, and his personal participation in two great revolutionary movements. He felt that he was now prepared to deal in a realistic and constructive fashion with the pressing problems that beset the

world at that time, the question of incessant warfare between European nations, the rise of poverty on an unprecedented scale, the savage and inhuman treatment of criminals (even the so-called criminals who stole only a crust of bread), the degradation of the working people, the poverty and humiliation of the aged. He had conceived of measures unheard of at the time, an income tax to support social welfare, laws for the protection of workers, limitation of armaments by treaty — to mention only a few.

All of this and much more went into the writing of Part Two of *The Rights of Man* — the most stirring, the noblest, and the most advanced statement of democracy in action that the world had at that time. This book was the sum of Paine's life and work and experience, the maturity of his social philosophy, and the signature to the expression of his life.

As might have been expected, this second part of *The Rights of Man* had a bombshell effect upon the social fabric of Great Britain. As with *Common Sense*, a statement of political aims coincided with a ripening social condition; and again, as with *Common Sense*, Paine became the clear and logical spokesman for the inarticulate dreams and hopes of thousands of Englishmen. Determined that this book should not have class limitation imposed by price, Paine specified a thousand pounds of royalties for cheap editions. Although himself constantly in need of funds and living in poverty, he invested every penny earned by the book in cheap editions, which were spread by the thousands among the poor.

It is estimated that over a hundred thousand copies of Part Two were sold in the British Isles — among a population so largely illiterate. The book was also reprinted in America and widely used by the Jeffersonians in their struggle against the Federalists. But unlike America in 1776, there was no revolutionary situation in Great Britain, no masses of people in motion, no Continental Congress in session. At first the British

government moved quietly and behind the scenes, believing that, as with the first part of *The Rights of Man*, its effect would be limited if little attention were called to it. They attempted to bribe and intimidate the printer; when this failed, they opened an attack upon Paine, slandering him and causing to be published a false and libelous biography. They attempted to turn the name of Thomas Paine into a national epithet like that of Guy Fawkes; they spurred mobs to burn him in effigy, and built up a national case for a Jacobin plot in which Paine and his friends were supposed to be deeply involved.

On September 12, 1791, Paine spoke at a meeting of "The Friends of Liberty." The following day, William Blake, the poet, warned Paine of his impending arrrest. Paine fled to Dover and caught a boat for France. Minutes after the boat departed, the police arrived to arrest him.

Paine never returned to England.

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Welcomed at first in France as a national hero and as a victim of British tyranny, Paine was subsequently caught up in the fate of the Girondists and thrown into prison — where he wrote his tragically misunderstood plea for a rational faith, *The Age of Reason*. Released from prison, he found himself in a France that had moved beyond him and forgotten him, an old man in poor health. In 1802, in response to an invitation by Thomas Jefferson, he returned to the United States; but here too was a new world, a new generation, a new way of life. Paine, the old man, was slandered as a drunkard and attacked as an atheist, an enemy of God and of the family. His last years were bitter ones, full of loneliness, poverty, and illness.

Writing to the mayor of Philadelphia, three years before his death, Paine said:

> My motive and object in all my political works, beginning with *Common Sense*, the first work I ever published, have been to rescue man from tyranny and false systems and false principles of government, and enable him to be free, and establish government for himself; and I have borne my share of danger in Europe and in America in every attempt I have made for this purpose. And my motive and object in all my publications on religious subjects, beginning with the first part of *The Age of Reason,* have been to bring man to a right reason that God has given him; to impress upon him the great principles of divine morality, justice, mercy, and a benevolent disposition to all men and to all creatures; and to excite in him a spirit of trust, confidence, and consolation in his creator, unshackled by the fable and fiction of books, by whatever invented name they may be called. I am happy in the continual contemplation of what I have done, and I thank God that he gave me talents for the purpose and fortitude to do it. It will make the continual consolation of my departing hours, whenever they finally arrive.

In this he wrote his own best epitaph. He died in a lodging house on Fulton Street in New York City, forgotten by so many he had once inspired, badgered by two clergymen who wanted to know his opinions on God and religion, misunderstood by millions who greeted the news of his death with indifference or satisfaction. The date was June 8, 1809.

But not forgotten entirely. In America and in Europe, thousands mourned the passing of a great mind and a great heart. He had been the spokesman for an age in which man took a mighty step into the future, and his dreams of what man might make of himself and his governments are still unrealized. He spoke in the name of reason — and his voice is still important, fresh, and startling. And with each generation of youth, hundreds of thousands rediscover Tom Paine, a man whose mind was unfettered and unafraid, who dreamed brave and bold dreams and who shattered icons of ignorance and superstition.

I cannot deny that in writing this play about Paine, I took liberties — even more liberties than I took in my novel on the same subject. One cannot possibly crowd into a two-hour dramatic structure anything more than a breath of the essence of a man's life; and even to bring this validity to life in the theater, one must alter, compress, change — and invent. But if the invention grows from understanding, sympathy, and knowledge, it can be justified.

Mankind has always been divided — the oppressed and the oppressor, the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor — and always there have been men who saw through the lies and the indignities and the suffering visited upon the poor and the oppressed, and who fought with mind as well as body to do away with this suffering. This was the essential quality of Thomas Paine, and this quality I attempted to thread through the play. Thus it is more a play about such a man than simply about a man named Paine.

And finally, a word about the language. The eighteenth century was far more free in its use of "people's English" than the Victorian era or, for that matter, modern times. Words pertaining to bodily functions and sexual habits were used freely among men of all classes of society, though less frequently in the company of women or in written material. While their use had lessened during the hundred years before 1776, it was still noted — and quite proudly — by General Washington's officers that no one in his army used four-letter Anglo-Saxon words with more facility than the general himself.

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