

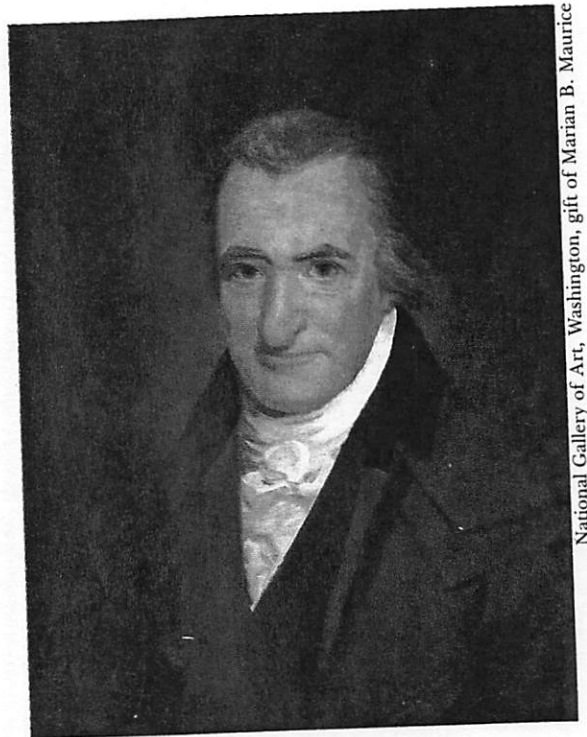
THOMAS PAINE  
1737–1809

In the war of words to win support for the American or the English side, America's hardest blows were struck by an Englishman—Tom Paine. The early events of his stormy life perhaps taught him sympathy for underdogs. He left school at thirteen and worked unsuccessfully as a sailor, teacher, grocer, tax collector, and corset maker. He read much and managed to educate himself, but by his mid-thirties he faced imprisonment for debt. A meeting with Benjamin Franklin during one of Franklin's stays in England persuaded him to emigrate to America.

For a man of Paine's bold opinions, America in 1775 was the right place and the right time. Early that year, only weeks after arriving in Philadelphia, he published an article blasting slavery as equal to murder and asking Americans to give it up. Later the same year he wrote a forty-seven page pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*, asking the colonists to think the unthinkable: that the English king was a "Royal Brute," that the very idea of monarchy insulted human dignity, and that war must come because "the period of debate is closed." *Common Sense*, published in 1776, sold 120,000 copies in three months. Reprinted around the world, it has been called the most important pamphlet in American history.

In 1776 Paine joined the Continental Army as it retreated across New Jersey, having been driven from New York by the British. Sitting on a log and using a drum for a desk, he wrote the first of his *Crisis* papers. On Washington's orders it was read aloud at camp to the defeated troops. How it affected them we can only imagine, but its first sentence remains moving: "These are the times that try men's souls."

Paine did not profit from the huge sales of his writings and paid dearly for his outspokenness. Poverty-stricken at the end of the American Revolution,



Thomas Paine (1806–1807) by John Wesley Jarvis (1781–1840).

National Gallery of Art, Washington, gift of Marian B. Maurice

he sailed for Europe to try to sell some inventions, only to be caught up in the French Revolution. Although no friend to kings, he urged that the overthrown French king be imprisoned rather than executed. His view angered the more violent French revolutionaries, who imprisoned Paine himself. It was probably only a guard's mistake in marking his door that saved him from being beheaded.

Paine was not treated much better when he returned to America in 1802. For his support of the French Revolution and for his attacks on organized religion, he was denounced as a "lying, drunken, brutal infidel" and even denied the right to vote. The "filthy Tom Paine" died in New Rochelle, New York, but abuse followed him literally to the grave. His tombstone was desecrated, and when his coffin was later dug up and taken to England, it was denied burial. No one knows what became of the body of the man who helped create American independence by his stinging plain words.

FROM  
The Crisis, Number 1

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 that triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods, and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as *freedom* should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has a right not only to *tax*, but "to *bind* us in *all cases whatsoever*"; and if being *bound in that manner* is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God. . . .

I have as little superstition in me as any man living, but my secret opinion has ever been, and still is, that God Almighty will not give up a people to military destruction, or leave them unsupportedly to perish, who have so earnestly and so repeatedly sought to avoid the calamities of war, by every decent method which wisdom could invent. Neither have I so much of the infidel in me as to suppose that He has relinquished the government of the world, and given us up to the care of devils; and as I do not, I cannot see on what grounds the king of Britain can look up to heaven for help against us: a common murderer, a highwayman, or a housebreaker has as good a pretense as he. . . .

I once felt all that kind of anger which a man ought to feel against the mean<sup>1</sup> principles

that are held by the Tories.<sup>2</sup> A noted one, who kept a tavern at Amboy, was standing at his door, with as pretty a child in his hand, about eight or nine years old, as I ever saw, and after speaking his mind as freely as he thought was prudent, finished with this unfatherly expression, "Well! give me peace in my day." Not a man lives on the continent, but fully believes that a separation must sometime or other finally take place, and a generous parent should have said, "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace"; and this single reflection, well applied, is sufficient to awaken every man to duty. Not a place upon earth might be so happy as America. Her situation is remote from all the wrangling world, and she has nothing to do but to trade with them. A man can distinguish himself between temper and principle, and I am as confident as I am that God governs the world, that America will never be happy till she gets clear of foreign dominion. Wars, without ceasing, will break out till that period arrives, and the continent must in the end be conqueror; for though the flame of liberty may sometimes cease to shine, the coal can never expire. . . .

The heart that feels not now is dead; the blood of his children will curse his cowardice who shrinks back at a time when a little might have saved the whole, and made *them* happy. I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink; but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death. My own line of reasoning is to myself as straight and clear as a ray of light. Not all the treasures of

1. **mean:** here, small-minded.

2. **Tories:** those colonists who supported the British.

the world, so far as I believe, could have induced me to support an offensive war, for I think it murder; but if a thief breaks into my house, burns and destroys my property, and kills or threatens to kill me, or those that are in it, and to "bind me in all cases whatsoever" to his absolute will, am I to suffer it? What signifies it to me whether he who does it is a king or a common man; my countryman or not my countryman; whether it be done by an individual villain, or an army of them? If we reason to the root of things we shall find no difference; neither can any just cause be assigned why we should punish in the one case and pardon in the other.

### For Study and Discussion

#### Analyzing and Interpreting the Selection

1. In the first paragraph, Paine criticizes the "summer soldier and the sunshine patriot." To what sort of people does his phrase refer?
2. Where in *The Crisis* does Paine reaffirm the Puritan belief that America is divinely guided?
3. In the third paragraph, Paine uses his own experience to argue a point. What point does he make in telling his readers about the tavernkeeper at Amboy?
4. In the last paragraph Paine uses a common persuasive device, the **argument by analogy**. In arguing by analogy, a writer compares two similar situations, implying that the outcome of one will resemble the outcome of the other. What conclusion can be drawn from Paine's analogy between the political situation in America and the case of a thief who breaks into someone's house?

### Literary Elements

#### The Aphoristic Style

Although Paine's language is simple and blunt, he composes some sentences with extra care, achieving what is called an **aphoristic** style. These sentences are not links in the chain of argument but memorable statements in themselves: "What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly"; "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered." In each case Paine cuts and polishes the sentence to make it stand out.

To write in the aphoristic style involves applying to prose many devices ordinarily used in poetry. For example, the force of "These are the times that try men's souls" arises in part from the emphatic rhythm and from the slight alliteration in *times-try, these-times-men's-souls*. Select at least one other aphoristic statement and explain what devices Paine uses to make it effective.

### Focus on Persuasive Writing

#### Using Order of Importance

You may want to use **order of importance** to arrange your support in a persuasive essay. In this order you begin or end with your strongest appeal (from the *audience's* point of view). Thomas Paine, for example, begins with an emotional appeal to divine aid for the Revolutionary cause.

Choose one of the issues considered earlier in this unit or select a new issue. Make an outline for a persuasive essay or speech on this topic. Use order of importance to organize your supporting reasons, facts, and details. Save your outline.

### Literature and History

#### Loyalists During the Revolution

History tends to remember the winners and forget the losers. Thomas Paine's powerful words may make us think that Americans were of one mind about the Revolutionary cause. But many colonists opposed revolution. The Loyalists, or Tories—those colonists who remained faithful to England and the king during the Revolution—are the forgotten Americans of the period. Almost one-quarter of colonial society held Loyalist views and thought the move to revolution unwise. Because of their large numbers, the Loyalists were an important part of colonial America.

#### Making Connections: Activities

You have read an example of persuasive writing and speaking in favor of the Revolutionary cause (another example is Patrick Henry's "Speech in the Virginia Convention," pages 90–92). Now write a speech proclaiming the Loyalist cause. Decide who your audience will be before forming your speech: Revolutionaries or fellow Loyalists? How will this determine the tone of your speech?