

# Esther Reed's Political Sentiments and Rhetoric During the Revolutionary War

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ESTHER REED'S POLITICAL SENTIMENTS  
AND RHETORIC DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

by

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for the Honors in the Major program in English  
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## ABSTRACT

In 1780, during the final leg of the American Revolutionary War, Esther Reed penned the broadside “Sentiments of an American Woman.” It circulated in Philadelphia, persuading citizens to turn over their last dollars to the cause. Reed’s broadside called to action the women of Philadelphia; they knocked on doors, campaigned with words, and stepped firmly into the “man’s world” of politics and revolution. Reed’s words were so effective that women in cities across the colonies took to raising money as well. Using New Historicist and feminist reading strategies, this study compares and contrasts Reed’s rhetoric to Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, another revolutionary propaganda piece of the era. I argue that the two pieces differ in key aspects due to Paine’s existence in the public sphere and Reed’s in the private. From her position in the private sphere, Reed was able to produce a provocative piece of rhetoric that stands out against other female literature at the time.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1780, Esther Reed, founder of the Ladies' Association of Philadelphia, penned a page-long broadside entitled "Sentiments of an American Woman" to be circulated around the city. Her language was bold, her intent was clear, and she was determined to make a difference in the name of patriotism. Reed's broadside called to action the women of Philadelphia during the final stretch of the Revolutionary War (1776-1783). The women she inspired "set out in pairs, dividing up the city among them, and went door-to-door asking for donations" (Roberts 125). After taking Philadelphia by storm, her rhetoric and movement spread to other colonies such as New Jersey and Maryland (Arendt 125).

Using New Historicist and feminist reading strategies, this essay argues that the financial and boundary-breaking success of the Association's campaign can be attributed in large part to Reed and the rhetorical aspects of her broadside. In what follows, I compare and contrast Reed's "Sentiments of an American Woman" with Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* in order to ask if the rhetorical elements that appear in both texts can be linked to Reed's success in fundraising. As *Common Sense*, published in 1776, came before "Sentiments of an American Woman," employed highly popular pro-revolutionary rhetoric, and undoubtedly influenced such figures as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams (Larkin, "Thomas" 1-3), I argue that Reed borrowed Paine's reference to the Glorious Revolution, his use of rhetorical questions, his calls to action, and his use of pathos while

also using her own, unique rhetorical elements such as ornamental language and anonymity in order to persuade the citizens of Philadelphia to donate to the war effort.

In a study of this nature, one might ask who Esther Reed was. Why is her literary contribution important to consider? Additionally, who were the ladies that fundraised beside her and took up the mantle once she was gone? Why compare Reed's work to Paine's? Why consider Paine's *Common Sense* in a literary light at all?

## LITERARY THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

To examine “Sentiments of an American Woman,” a product of its time and author, I utilized New Historicist theory. One fundamental assumption of this theory is “that literary and non-literary ‘texts’ circulate inseparably” (Vesser xi). History and literature are not considered separate; they inform on one another. The “*printscape*” during the time period in America consisted of “public sharing of private letters, its pirated editions and quick production of pamphlets, its intercepted communiqués and its clever forgeries, its broadsides and plagiaries” (Castronovo 7). All manner of print from letters to novels could circulate quickly or at a glacial pace, depending on human circumstances, distance, and weather. While a printing house could produce printed pieces in a matter of hours, newspapers, pamphlets, and novels circulated similarly in terms of speed over land, which could take months (Castronovo 16).

New Historicist theory allows this study to consider the similarities and differences between *Common Sense* and “Sentiments of an American Woman.” Since “no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature,” more genres and pieces can be considered (Vesser xi). Where Paine previously would’ve been the main authoritative, propaganda piece from the era, New Historicist theory considers all texts important. No text’s contribution is more important than another, which allows scholars to consider Paine and Reed’s writing on the same level.

During the wave of “writing women into ‘history,’” Judith Lowder Newton argued that “(once) untraditional sources, women’s letters and diaries, women’s

manuals... were juxtaposed with more traditional and public texts” (Newton 154). This juxtaposition enabled the study of women’s history during times when very few “traditional” women’s literature exists. This aspect of feminist theory, which aligns with New Historicism in this instance, permits the comparison of Reed and Paine’s texts.

While the comparison between Paine and Reed is justified, comparing them as a man and a woman is “problematic” (Butler 2). In feminist theory, “there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women” (Butler 1). Additionally, when dealing with these categories, “feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (Butler 2). Similarly to Butler, Simone De Beauvoir states that the problem with defining men and women lies in the connotation of the words; “the common use of *man* [is] to designate human beings in general... woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity” (xv). To combat the issue of emancipation when dealing with female representation, this study examines the differences between Paine and Reed politically, i.e. their existences in the public and private sphere, respectively.

When considering a text with feminist theory, scholars usually ask questions like: What is revealed about “the author’s [cultural] influence?” What is the author’s attitude toward women in society? Are primarily male structures of power inscribed? Is the text’s narrator male or female? How can this piece be “reread...from a female point of view”? What types of roles do women have in the text? How do women use speech or talk in the text? What stereotypes exist in the text and how do they portray men and women? What



kind of imagery is being used and how does it uphold or contradict the author's message? (Bressler 167, 168, 183-184).

Some roles that women might hold in the text are active, primary characters or secondary characters, only used as props. For example, in Esther Reed's "Sentiments of an American Woman," women are represented as the active audience and as heroic examples. When considering the "primarily male structures of power" in the text (Bressler 168), one could examine, depending on the time period, the actual act of publically writing itself, a public sphere action that was considered a man's purview during Reed's time. Additionally, an image within the text could be telling of the author's cultural influences; when describing women, the specific word choices of the author are products of their culture and attitude towards women. This attitude through imagery could present itself as an author who paints a picture of a woman in relation to a man instead of as her own character. How women are treated and considered within the text is informed on by the author themselves and the world that author and text exist in.

Moving on to past scholarship concerning this study, the Ladies' Association engaged in domestic activities like shirt making to practice politics within the confines of "feminine patriotism" (Arendt 181). The Association "justified" stepping into the public sphere (fundraising money) by grounding their actions in the private (turning proceeds into handmade shirts for the Continental Army) (Arendt 183). This justification for stepping into a different sphere, Mary Beth Norton similarly argues, occurs because of a belief that American women during the time period shouldn't involve themselves with the public realm ("Separated" 138). Where a women's role was "bounded," a man's was "universal" (Norton, "Separated" 145).

Despite the difficulties brought on by a culture that believed women should have little to do with active politics, Republican Motherhood, an “indirect” form of political discourse where women were politically educated for the purpose of raising Republican sons and daughters, was one of the few sanctioned ways for women to step into the public sphere (Zagarri 46). As literacy rates increased in women in “postrevolutionary” American, opportunities for taking part in the politics in the public sphere emerged; the lack of “[conducting] out of doors and in the streets” was one of the main drawbacks to Republican Motherhood (Zagarri 46). Zagarri argues that Republican Motherhood remained inferior to becoming a “female politician,” an independent, active political being outside of the role of motherhood (46).

Similarly to Zagarri’s statements about the virtues of “female politicians” vs. Republican Mothers, Linda Kerber argues that the Revolutionary War brought on a wave a politics, presenting women like the Ladies’ Association of Philadelphia with more opportunities in politics outside of Republican Motherhood (8). Kerber credits these women with being historically and politically significant for their daring use of “soft,” “female patriotism” and with forming a “tradition-bound, underdeveloped nation within a larger, more politically sophisticated one” (7-8). Reed and the Ladies’ Association were a little ahead of their time, their actions matching more closely with Zagarri’s “female politicians” of the early republic than Kerber’s Republican Mothers.

During the transition from Republican Motherhood to “female politician” and to “female patriotism,” a few, notable women took part in the written politics: rhetoric. One such woman, Mercy Otis Warren, artfully took into account her audience and the current political climate when crafting her satirical play *The Adulateur* in 1772 (Blundell 11). By

depicting Whigs as “noble freedom lovers,” (Blundell 11) she clearly stated her opinion, side, and the political worth of her writings to her fellow patriots. Additionally, Warren justified writing her “political sentiments” by utilizing a genre of writing more acceptable to her station (Blundell 11), as Reed would justify her political writings years later utilizing different means.

Another woman, Judith Sargent Murray, years later in 1798, utilized rhetorical elements in her essay “The Gleaner” to take part in civic discourse and argue the virtues of Republican Motherhood; her efforts helped give women the right to instruct a new nation (Eldred 88). While Murray preached Republican Motherhood, her actions of “affecting” politics define her, conversely, as a “female politician” by Zagarri’s definition (46). Not only did Murray “[feel] strongly that [the power of rhetoric] could and should be claimed by women,” she used her plays and other writings to attempt to sway her audience towards this view (Eldred 66-67). The direct action, instead of partaking in Republicanism by teaching it, is what sets Murray and her fellow “female politicians” like Esther Reed apart from Republican Motherhood.

Despite research that illustrates Reed’s importance as a political agent and a “female politician” who stepped out of her sphere, little work considers her literary and rhetorical significance in comparison to the rhetoric in Paine’s own successful propaganda.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Four years before Reed would pen her broadside supporting the Colonial army, in 1776, the Revolutionary War began over another piece of literature: the Declaration of Independence (Ackermann 4: 24). The war was brought on by the colonists' growing frustrations with being taxed without representation in parliament (Ackermann 4: 24). At first, many citizens of what would become the United States of America only wanted that representation. Slowly, however, under the pressure of increased taxation and unrest, pieces like Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* turned public opinion away from England, and before long, the "shot heard round the world" rang out at Lexington and Concord in 1775, and the war began (Ackermann 4: 23).

In the summer of 1780, the Ladies' Association of Philadelphia's fundraising efforts couldn't have come at a better time for the Continental Army. Were one to consider food, clothing, and salary shortages during the war, one may call to mind the suffering at Valley Forge in 1777/1778. However, problems with supplies, soldiers' wages, and the weather persisted throughout the entire war. In fact, just two years after the iconic suffering at Valley Forge, the army experienced its worst winter in the history of the Revolutionary War, with temperatures only rising above freezing once in Philadelphia during January 1780 (Raphael 52). The freezing temperatures would have been enough to burden a properly outfitted fighting force. Unfortunately, as a surgeon in Connecticut described, the average soldier had "bare feet...his legs nearly naked...his shirt hanging in strings" (Young 67). Unlike at Valley Forge, the soldiers throughout the rest of the war did not suffer their starvation and lack of protection against the bitter cold in

silence. Episodes of mutiny broke out, and once the roads cleared and the food situation had not improved, desertion rates picked up (Raphael 54). In January 1781, only months after Reed penned her broadside, there was a large-scale mutiny in the Pennsylvania line over lack of wages, and the soldiers deserted (Lutz 11). An epidemic of soldiers sneaking away under the cover of darkness spread through the ranks.

Enter the Ladies' Association of Philadelphia. Founded in 1780 after Reed wrote "Sentiments of an American Woman," the Ladies' Association of Philadelphia consisted of wealthy, upper-class women with just as much Revolutionary fervor as their male counterparts (Norton, "Ladies"). The Association consisted of thirty-six women, notably Sarah Franklin Bache (Benjamin Franklin's daughter), Anne Willing Francis (prominent lawyer Tench Francis Jr.'s wife), and Julia Stockton Rush (wife of founding father Benjamin Rush) (Norton, "Ladies"). Reed, like many of her female peers, was also married to a famous colonial, Joseph Reed, a lawyer who served during the war as an adjunct general ("Reed, Joseph"). He additionally acted as Washington's aide-de-camp in 1775 and served on the Continental Congress ("Reed, Joseph"). Unlike her husband, Esther Reed was born to an English family and had only been in America since 1770 when she married Joseph Reed (Norton, "Ladies").

Reed and her ladies, with their connections, wanted to do their part to help the Revolution. Reed, for one, as the governor of Pennsylvania's wife, sent letters to all the other "First Ladies" in all of the colonies (Roberts 127). Soldiers would only suffer the indignity of waiting for so long; they needed food, proper clothing, and pay. With the intention of making a difference in the war effort, the Ladies' Association banded together, writing letters to their friends and families to donate money to the cause.

Additionally, the ladies stepped foot outside their homes and into the public realm, going door to door within the city. On the doorsteps of the whole of Philadelphia, they “flirted” and “scolded” the populace into donating, persuading a war-fatigued and increasingly poor population to turn over their last dollar to the Continental cause (Arendt 182). Reed then wrote directly to George Washington for guidance on what to do with the large sum of roughly \$300,000 they had amassed (Arendt 172). They wanted to pay the soldiers, an action that might have prevented the mass mutiny over wages the next year. The General, however, thought a ‘sewing circle’ paying a soldier’s wages would reflect badly on the government (Arendt 174). Reed didn’t think the Association should provide clothing since the government was also responsible for clothing their soldiers. After a bit of back and forth, the Ladies’ Association of Philadelphia bought the raw material for clothing and made roughly 2,200 shirts to place on patriot backs (Kerber 102).

For George Washington and his suffering soldiers, Reed and the Ladies’ Association were only a partial solution to the problem of unclothed, freezing men fighting for their country. In February of 1780, there were approximately 35,000 soldiers serving in the army (Wright 154). 2,200 shirts compared to 35,000 men does not seem substantial. However, when you consider that a small group of women from a single city contributed enough shirts to clothe roughly 6% of the entire army, their contribution is shown in a more impressive light. Utilizing the army’s need, those women stepped into the public sphere of the Revolution. Additionally, the politics of an under stocked army and the Continental Army’s residency in Philadelphia gave Reed and her Association the immediacy for the problem of soldiers going without, furthering the rhetorical agenda of “Sentiments of an American Woman.”

Reed first circulated her “Sentiments of an American Woman” as a broadside, and it was later published on June 21, 1780, in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, a prominent newspaper (Bradley 273). Within days of its publication in the newspaper, the piece had reached a receptive readership of women who were eager to “set about finding ways to carry out the campaign” (Roberts 124). Its fiery language and bold “offerings” quickly caught the attention of men and women across the colonies (Reed). When the ladies of Trenton, New Jersey, heard of their peers’ success, they quickly published the accompanying piece “Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey” (Arendt 175). Maryland did the same (Arendt 178). These two cities that followed Philadelphia’s lead were far less successful in their fundraising; Maryland and New Jersey only raised \$60,000 and almost \$16,000 respectively compared to Philadelphia’s \$300,000 (Arendt 177-178). Putting aside different demographics in the cities, these wildly varying numbers could point to something different being done by the women involved in the Philadelphia-based movement.

Part of that difference was Reed’s rhetorical strategies, both the ones she appears to have borrowed from Paine and the elements unique to her station and sphere. “Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey,” a piece created to echo “Sentiments of an American Woman,” differs primarily in clarity and an intended audience. Where Reed features long sentences, “Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey” sports a first paragraph that demands a second read for understanding (“Sentiments” 575). Additionally, the New Jersey piece has hardly any mention of the women it is supposed to be speaking to, instead talking of the men who “highly merit our gratitude and sincere thanks” (“Sentiments” 576). The two pieces were meant to be somewhat identical, the New

Jersey piece citing “these feeling and these sentiments...manifested by the Ladies of Philadelphia” (“Sentiments” 577). Despite the intention to mirror “Sentiments of an American Woman”, the writings had varying levels of monetary success and effective persuasiveness.

It is not difficult to understand why these women might want to emulate Reed. She utilizes an anonymous nature, signing her piece “An American Woman,” and references female figures for her audience to rally behind. Employing pathos, she plays with her audiences’ emotions, removing the distance between them and the battlefield. To prove her worthiness as a writer and politician, Reed penned sermon-like, ornamental language. Additionally, her writing, with one foot in the public sphere and one in the private, was a complete departure from other female political pieces of the time. Though her work was revolutionary for the time, Reed was far from the only woman writing for the cause. In league with Reed are Mercy Otis Warren with her propaganda plays and Phillis Wheatley with her poetic odes to George Washington’s majesty. Each of these three women wrote from their private sphere, only delving into the public one by writing about politics. Of the three, Reed was the most transparent in her efforts to persuade people to donate to her cause, and she was the only one that delved so far into the public sphere. Instead of allegories or flowery imagery about their Commander’s elegance, Reed used bold, purposeful language: “This is the offerings of the Ladies” (Esther Reed). Her intent to persuade wasn’t disguised in the least.



## THOMAS PAINE'S *COMMON SENSE*

One of Reed's male contemporaries, Thomas Paine, another citizen of Philadelphia, published the political pamphlet *Common Sense*, which is considered one of the most successful political pieces in audience and influence. Despite his influential part in the American Revolution, Paine was an English pamphleteer who didn't arrive in the colonies until 1774 (Ackerman 4: 320; Speck 2). Published in 1776, *Common Sense* was widely popular due to its simple language, which made the writing accessible to a wider audience. The reception of the piece was largely positive, even influencing figures Thomas Jefferson: "No writer has exceeded Paine in ease and familiarity of style, in perspicuity of expression, happiness of elucidation, and in simple and unassuming language" (Larkin, "Thomas" 1). According to Sharon M. Harris, the pamphlet's impact was "extraordinary"—"an unprecedented twenty-five editions appeared in 1776 alone, and the text was circulated hand-to-hand and read to many others who could not read" (1046). The piece, however, wasn't without its challengers. John Adams went so far as to write "Thoughts on Government" to answer *Common Sense* (Larkin, "Thomas" 3). Despite its controversial nature, the pamphlet was successful in reaching a wide audience and utilizing simple language and other rhetorical elements to influence that audience.

Previous to this study, *Common Sense's* rhetoric has been examined by a score of scholars, including Edward Larkin. In his introduction to an edition of the book, Larkin argues the reasoning behind Paine's popularity as well as the undercurrent of sophisticated rhetoric that appears in his pamphlet. Paine's experience in debating in Sussex and as editor of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* gave him the tools and connections

to create such a popular piece of propaganda (Larkin, "Introduction" 13, 16). His background in persuading allowed him to assume an identity that "gives the impression that he is merely informing or educating rather than persuading" (Larkin, "Introduction" 19). Similarly he speaks to the "common person" in a style this study refers to as simple or plain (Larkin "Introduction" 19).

Apart from his simple style, Paine utilizes both ethos and logos throughout his piece to persuade his readers. As Larkin states, Paine "[grounds] his argument...in science, nature, or the Bible" ("Introduction" 23). The references to God are a play on ethos, giving his ideas more credibility. Similarly, he references to science and logic employ logos. This sensible, logic-based approach help his ideas appear as "common sense." Additionally, Paine utilizes pathos, a rhetorical technique he shares with Esther Reed, when "[appealing] to sympathy" in his pamphlet (Larkin "Introduction" 23). All the above listed rhetorical elements and a few more that reiterate themselves throughout his work will be examined in this study.

In his pamphlet, Paine utilizes a simple, plain style of prose that is a departure from the typical political piece, making the writing accessible for the people of the colonies. Additionally, Paine utilizes logos, the rhetorical appeal to reason, which goes hand in hand with his simple prose, to present facts in a bold, logical argument. The use of logos allows the facts in the pamphlet to be perceived as "common sense" by the public. Also, Paine exhibits a literary flair by including alliteration to draw attention to and link certain words together. Lastly, Paine employs ethos, the rhetorical appeal to credibility, by citing figures such as God and famous men of the age, justifying his conclusions and adding to his credibility as an author.

The simple style Paine utilizes is the most numerous instance of rhetorical persuasion in the pamphlet. Clark, an expert on Paine rhetoric, refers to his style as “boldness of phrase” and “black-and-white” (318). The prose found in the piece presents the facts to the reader as “common sense,” spoken as one might speak to a friend. This is a departure from the political style of writing for the time period, which tended to be heavy and ornamental. For example, in John Adam’s “Thoughts on Government,” the first sentence reads, “If I was equal to the task of forming a plan for the government of a colony, I should be flattered with your request, and very happy to comply with it; because as the divine science of politicks is the science of social happiness, and the blessings of society depend entirely on the constitutions of government, which are generally institutions that last for many generations” (Adams 3). It continues on similarly for several more lines before a period appears. This style of writing, while successfully illustrating how intelligent Adams is, does not present the facts in an accessible manner. Paine, on the other hand, does.

In his pages are short snippets of information: “The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind” (Paine 2). This sentence is no less powerful for its brevity. In fact, judging by the pamphlet’s wide audience and positive reception, it’s more rhetorically effective than Adam’s piece. Even Adams, himself, noted that he “could not have written anything in so manly and striking a style [as *Common Sense*]” (Clark 316). Paine utilizes a form of approachable writing that can be understood by people of numerous levels of literacy. Additionally, his simple prose lends weight to his point about the subject matter being “common sense” to his audience. In addition to common language, Paine breaks the pamphlet into sections by adding headings,

increasing the ease with which one might tackle the subject matter. Every element in the piece facilitates a deeper understanding, followed by a rhetorical push away from England.

Apart from Paine's style of writing, "the rationalist Paine" employs logos to present his arguments, highlighting a "cause and effect" outline (Clark 328). In fact, many of his arguments follow the Socratic method of "if this is true, and this is true, then this must also be true." For example, when trying to derail his audiences' faith in the crown, he writes, "To say that the common is a check upon the king presupposes two things. First. -- That the king is not to be trusted without being looked after.... Secondly. -- That the commons... are either wiser or more worthy of confidence than the crown" (Paine 6). Paine submits this bit of logos as pure "common sense." If the king didn't need the House of Commons, it wouldn't exist. If the king needs the House of Commons to rule, why have a king at all? These are revolutionary concepts for the era. He goes on to use this "firstly" and "secondly" argument in other instances in his piece, adding a formulaic element to his writing that is pure logos. This utilization of a logical argument fits perfectly with his "no frills" style of writing in the pamphlet.

If Paine's use of the Socratic method and a simple prose are blatant, his rhetorical motivation for including alliteration in his piece is subtle. To persuade his audience, Paine "aimed to adjust to thought with such exquisite precision as to create exactly the impression he wished to produce and no other" (Clark 331). Throughout the pamphlet, Paine commonly links two words in a sentence through alliteration, creating a new association in the audience's mind. For example, Paine describes the monarchy as "corrupt influence of the crown" (Paine 16). By employing the similar sounds at the

beginning of “corrupt” and “crown,” he links these two words together, associating them for the reader. Instances of this rhetorical approach are littered throughout Paine’s writing. When speaking of England, the motherland, he associates “mother” with “monster” (Paine 20). Employing alliteration throughout his pamphlet is a subtle mode of persuading that his audience would likely not have been conscious of. The word association game he plays works on the subconscious and is infinitely more effective. It is easy to shrug off a political argument when it is so obviously an argument meant to persuade you towards a certain end. Conversely to that style of argumentation, Paine includes alliteration throughout his piece to work behind the scenes. If you read through an entire pamphlet that states over and over that the current situation is “repugnant to reason,” you’ll start to seriously ponder the issue (Paine 24). Alliteration, above all other rhetorical devices, proves Paine to be a writer firstly and a politician as a by-product. The literary device is not something that would be included in a pamphlet where a politician is just plainly speaking “common sense.” Paine, like any great writer in any era, puts thought into how best to express his ideas, and that conscious rhetoric influenced his prose.

Lastly, Paine utilizes ethos by referencing God and prominent men to give his ideas more credibility. Though it is said in the first couple of pages that the author is a man under “the influence of reason and principle,” Paine primarily utilizes another form of ethos throughout the entire piece (2). He uses the accepted wisdom of others to lend weight to his writings. Most commonly, the author employs God as the source of his inspiration, a powerful link to credibility and use of ethos. When disparaging the king, Paine writes, “for the will of the Almighty...expressly disapproves of government by

kings” (9). Essentially, Paine references God’s name to validate his ideas and to present himself as a credible author. In addition to God, Paine cites such figures as John Milton, an English poet (24).

## ESTHER REED'S "SENTIMENTS OF AN AMERICAN WOMAN"

According to Cokie Roberts, Esther Reed grew up in London around American politics; her father was a merchant and lobbied before Congress for his business interests in the colonies. Due to her proximity and education, Reed became so politically "savvy" that her father hired her as a clerk. This experience would lead to a lifelong interest in politics that would come to fruition after her move to America with her husband, Joseph Reed, future governor of Pennsylvania, in 1770 (118-119, 127).

Reed's initial impression of America was a poor one, and she did not begin to support the colonies in Revolution until 1775 (Ireland 99, 119). Once she had decided on independence, however, she became the political being she was raised to be, dining and debating with influential figures such as John Adams, Silas Deane, and George Washington (Ireland 199, 123). Starting with "hosting social-political events" in the summer of 1779 (Ireland 177), Reed became a more active, political being, displaying qualities of Republican Motherhood. She struck up a political and personal friendship with Martha Washington and named her son after George Washington when her husband and the future president were at odds to ease tensions (Ireland 180-181). These actions led her to write "Sentiments of an American Woman" and fundraise \$300,000 with her Ladies. Ireland argues that these "private and public [undertakings]" made her "one of America's best-known female patriot leaders" (182, 183). In fact, Reed's political actions during that summer in 1780 would influence women from the 18th century to the 20th century and beyond (Ireland 184).

Though Esther Reed adopts her own rhetorical style to persuade her city to her cause, no one writes in a vacuum. Since *Common Sense* and “Sentiments” share similar elements, an argument could be made that Reed “imitated Paine’s *Common Sense*” (Ireland 186). For example, both writings reference the Glorious Revolution of 1688 as a precedent for the situation the colonies now face. Additionally, Reed and Paine include rhetorical questions in their pieces to get their audience thinking and to play with dramatic prose. Also, the authors share a use of the rhetorical call to action. Both pieces try to convince the audience to do something, and the call to action nudges the reader towards the author’s intended action. Lastly, both authors employ pathos to persuade their audiences towards a certain reaction. Reed’s piece displays a large amount of pathos for the purpose of removing women’s separation from the war. With passionate statements crafted to elicit powerful emotion, Reed makes the fight for independence and the Colonial soldiers’ welfare deeply personal to her audience. Conversely, Paine utilizes pathos by changing the text in his piece to create separation between pathos-driven drama and the rest of the dramatic piece.

First, Paine and Reed are identical in referencing the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The Glorious Revolution was an instance where the then current king of England was overthrown by some English Parliamentarians and replaced by a new king (Ackermann 3: 150). This revolution is one of the few in world history that can boast of being bloodless and fairly quick. It is not surprising that Paine, writing his piece before most of the fighting took place, would cite such a revolution. When he compares 1776 to the instance “when the world was over run with tyranny the least remove therefrom was a glorious rescue,” he is being unduly optimistic (Paine 5). The idea of a quickly won war



and painless overthrow, however, was appealing to his audience. Additionally, Paine utilized the Glorious Revolution as a fine example of the people fighting back against the divine right of kings. If Paine was to persuade his audience to overthrow a king supposedly backed by God, it was a shrewd idea to illustrate that it had been done before with little effort.

Reed, roughly four years later, incorporated the smartly utilized rhetorical element in her own piece. Instead of the hope for an easy war, Reed plays on the Glorious Revolution as precedent, like Paine, and as a beacon of hope. She demands that her readers offer “more than barren wishes for the success of so glorious a Revolution” (Reed). Simultaneously, she reminds them that such a revolution is possible and that revolutions take more than “barren wishes.” If the colonies want to win their freedom, then everyone must contribute. America, she implies, can have the same, desirable outcome as the Glorious Revolution, but work has to be done first: namely, a sizable donation to her fundraising campaign.

Second, Reed emulates Paine in her use of rhetorical questions, a characteristic aspect of Paine’s writing. In fact, there are almost fifty rhetorical questions throughout Paine’s piece, which is only fifty-eight pages long. As rhetorical questions are a common persuasive device, the conclusion of Reed copying Paine’s specific usage would not be conclusive without the similar grouping of questions and the dramatic nature of the questions. Paine tends to group his rhetorical questions together. For example, Paine writes “Hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on?” (24). Similarly, Reed groups more than one rhetorical question together in her piece: “Who

knows if persons disposed to censure...may not disprove our appearing acquainted even with the actions of which our sex boasts? We are at least certain, that he cannot be a good citizen who will not applaud our efforts for the relief of the armies which defend our lives, our possessions, our liberty?" (Reed). Exempting the length of sentences and ornamental language, these two passages resemble each other. There is a similar flair for the dramatic. Neither is asking a simple question; the words are weighted and intended to elicit a reaction. The similarities do not end there. Both authors' rhetorical questions in this instance have a similar objective. The former is meant to shame the audience for not considering those less fortunate. The latter is meant to shame women who have been content to do nothing for the less fortunate soldiers.

Third, both Paine and Reed employ the call to action. Both are persuasion pieces that are only successful if the audience acts after reading. For Paine, that act is fighting against the tyranny of the British government. For Reed, that act is donating to the soldiers doing the fighting. At the end of her piece, Reed implores the women reading: "Let us not lose a moment; let us be engaged to offer the homage of our gratitude at the altar of military valour, and you, our brave deliverers" (Reed). She elicits immediacy by ordering her readers to "not lose a moment" and clearly states the action she is trying to bring about. Similarly, Paine states a specific action in the majority of his calls to action. Though they both employ a tone and rhetorical elements to create a sense of emergency, their methods for doing so differ. For example, Paine writes "O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth!" (33). Instead of clearly stating the issue of time, Paine creates a tone of urgency through style and the use

of exclamation points. His calls to action are screams on the page, while Reed politely states a time and an action, making a plan for fundraising.

These differences in the style of the two calls to action element arise from the varying social and political spheres to which the authors belong. For instance, Paine is a man in the public sphere, writing to other men in the public sphere. His entire pamphlet takes the tone of a man in a bar, yelling over the noise. A political man speaking to a political audience can use simple calls to action and focus on developing his ideas. Reed's audience, conversely, is primarily the women of Philadelphia. These women would not have been accustomed to taking part in a political conversation or taking part in political fundraising. These were acts outside their sphere. For this reason, Reed has to revise Paine's style of calls to action to fit her needs. Members of the private sphere need more persuasion towards actual action, which is why Reed's piece reads more like an inspirational sermon than a bar chant.

Both Paine and Reed employ a significant amount of pathos in their pieces to persuade their audience. Reed exhibits one blatant usage of pathos when she makes the consequences of inaction deeply personal to any woman reading the broadside. Speaking of a woman living peacefully with her children, far from the war, she paints the image of nourishing a baby and pressing "it to my bosom" (Reed). Evoking the emotion of fear and outrage, she talks of being "separated from it, by a ferocious enemy" (Reed). The emotion a mother would experience reading this goes without saying. Moving back towards the discussion of helping the Continental soldiers, Reed then reminds her audience that "if the house in which we dwell; if our barns, our orchards are safe at the

present time from the hands of those incendiaries, it is to [the soldiers] that we owe it” (Reed).

The purpose of mentioning helpless children only kept safe by the actions of the Continental Army is a deliberate play on the emotions of the readers. Reed uses the fear that lives in the heart of people in a war zone to draw attention back to her cause. For many women in the colonies, the actual cannons and flying bullets were a far-off possibility. Their fathers, brothers, and sons might be fighting this war, but in their private sphere, women were removed from the action. According to Mary Favret, this removal was codified in “eighteenth-century moral philosophy which insists that our feelings diminish as the objects of suffering are removed by distance, temporal or geographical” (Favret 24). Essentially, the reality of your people dying is hard to grasp when it happens miles away, and you might not hear about the violence for weeks or months. Without immediacy, it was difficult for women to empathize on the same level as they would if someone was shot two feet from their person, the carnage happening right before their eyes. Through pathos, Reed brings women right into the thick of the fighting, making it a deeply personal and emotional issue for her audience. They are not removed, she argues; they are made safe by the actions of the soldiers she is raising money to support. After making the soldiers into each reader’s personal hero, she speaks of the “valiant defenders of America” and their “painful toils” and the “rigours of seasons” (Reed). After making each soldier a savior, the author utilizes that newfound affection in the reader’s heart to paint a picture of suffering that will pull at the heartstrings. These men give their lives to keep you and your children safe, she says, and they need “extraordinary and unexpected relief” (Reed).

Unlike Reed, Paine does not paint a picture with his pathos. Instead, his instances of rhetorical emotion blend into the scenery of his dramatic pamphlet. He evokes pathos by altering text instead of words. Clark describes his unique brand of pathos as “an appeal to feeling and a regard for those niceties of composition” (321). For example, he says, “How impious is the title of sacred majesty applied to a worm...!” (Paine 9). Of course, describing the king as a “worm” is dramatic, but it is the added exclamation point at the end that gives the sentence an emotional punch. Paine’s pathos is a scream, while Reed’s is a heart rendering, cautionary tale told in a hushed voice. In addition to exclamation points, Paine utilizes large chunks of capitalization to play on his reader’s emotions, blasting his ideas off the page: “WE HAVE ADDED UNTO OUR SINS THIS EVIL, TO AS A KING” (Paine 12). Paine’s piece is already filled with drama, so when he wants to drive an emotional point home, he has to change the text to elicit the emotional reaction he is looking for. Reed, conversely, uses the language within the text in her deployment of pathos. Despite the differing uses, however, both authors’ intentions are to elicit an emotional response in their audience.

When contrasting Reed’s work to Paine’s, it becomes apparent that Reed employs numerous unique, rhetorical elements in her broadside. First, the broadside utilizes its anonymity to create a bond with her female audience. As the broadside is signed “an American Woman,” any woman could have written this piece; this aspect of anonymity calls the women of Philadelphia to Reed’s side as one “American Woman,” creating powerful, female identities for them to rally behind. Additionally, the actual language that Reed selects in her piece is a deliberate play on ethos. In sharp contrast to her other communication, Reed utilizes an elevated, sermon-like prose to convince her reader of

her intelligence and writing prowess. This gives her an authority that is crucial for a rhetorical, propaganda piece that is trying to convince people to donate. Utilizing these methods, Reed crafted her piece for the purposes of aiding the war effort and bringing women partially into the public sphere of politics; each rhetorical aspect of her broadside highlights that intention.

One of the most prominent elements of persuasion is the act of signing the broadside “an American Woman” (Reed). Though many written works of the era have no identified author due to a culture leaning towards anonymity, Reed chooses to leave her name out of it for a deliberate, rhetorical reason. This bit of anonymous publishing serves to mobilize and inspire the female population of the colonies into action. Utilizing “I,” “our,” and “we” statements, Reed paints the picture of a uniformed force of women. Her intention is to make this a piece that any woman could write, creating an “American Woman” identity.

Additionally, Reed references famous women from the bible and Roman mythology: “Deborah, Judith, Esther,” and “Volumnia” (Reed). Esther, for example, was a Jewish woman in the Book of Esther that risked her life for her people multiple times (Branch 2-3). In the Book of Judith, Judith defeats the Assyrian army (Branch 3). She even pluralizes some of the famous women referenced for their deeds throughout histories. Instead of calling them Bathilda, Elizabeth, Mary, and Catherine these women become “The Bathildas, the Elizabeths, the Maries, and the Catherines” (Reed). They are the inspiring identities and are far from average. The women in Reed’s broadside represent the most impressive history and mythology has to offer, and by adding these examples, Reed creates a tie between past women and her audience. The formed

relationship lets the women in Philadelphia and eventually the whole of the colonies see themselves in a powerful light. They can be this “American Woman” identity Reed has designed. They can write like her, take action like her, and make a difference like her. Reed goes so far as to say “if the weakness of our Constitution, if opinion and manner did not forbid us to march to glory by the same paths as the Men, we should at least be equal, and sometimes surpass them in our love of the public good” (Reed). Not only does this “American Woman” inspire women to action, it gives the audience hope for a time when the “American Woman” will be readily allowed in the public sphere. The resulting written sisterhood was effective enough to allow Reed to bind together a group of wealthy women in her city and inspire women across the colonies to fundraise as well.

Apart from her use of anonymity to create identities, Reed displays elevated, formal style throughout the broadside to heighten the audience's opinion of the author, an act that would be unnecessary if she were not a woman stepping where she was not wanted: the public sphere. In her piece, she utilizes a style of language that is reminiscent of a preacher on a pulpit. Her language is deliberately ornamented to resemble a “higher” prose that the author likely believed would be her best chance at being persuasive despite her sex. For example, “Who, amongst us, will not renounce with the highest pleasure, those vain ornaments, when she shall consider that the valiant defender of America will be able to draw some advantage from the money which she may have laid out in these” (Reed). The sentence continues on in a similar manner for three more lines. In another instance, “it was the Maid of Orleans who drove from the kingdom of France the ancestor of those same British, whose odious yoke we have just shaken off; and whom it is

necessary that we drive from this Continent” (Reed). Her words would not be out of place in a Great Awakening sermon if their message were different.

This style of prose is a complete departure from Paine’s, though both demonstrate instances of their own, unique uses of ethos. It is also a departure from Reed’s own, personal writing. In a letter during the early days of her courtship with her future husband, Joseph Reed, she speaks sweetly and simply: “Since I received your last letter, I imagined what made you so dull, but I dare say this will remove it. I am sometimes almost angry with my eyes, that they should say so much; but why should I, since they only speak the language of my heart?” (Reed, Life 36). Her writing here is deceptively complex. She builds sentences that are beautiful in their clarity and romantic in their sentiment; there is no mention of “odious yoke,” but she is perfectly persuasive in professing her love.

Most of her letters take a similar shape no matter whom she is corresponding with, so it can be concluded this is her natural writing style. Her purpose for changing this style is to justify her right to put political thoughts on paper and send them out into the public sphere. Reed wrote in this ornamental style, because as soon as she signed the broadside “An American Woman,” she opened the piece up to scrutiny. This is a public broadside written by a member of the private sphere, an almost unheard of occurrence. Reed needed to present herself as an extremely educated and qualified woman if her piece was ever to succeed as a fundraising tool. She needed shock and awe, a sensationalist piece that would make a statement. If the Association’s monetary triumph is any measure, she was successful.



## CONCLUSION

In contrast to her female contemporaries, Esther Reed penned a broadside that was larger than life and made a real difference in her community and to the colonies as a whole. Her piece worked to create a political identity under which women could rally, and if monetary success is anything to go by, she was wildly successful. Additionally, Reed crafted prose that was beautiful and complex, proving herself as a worthy writer and not just a political figure. Whatever her rhetorical technique, Reed didn't shy away from being bold and stepping into a sphere that had been traditionally understood as off limits to her.

When examining "Sentiments of an American Woman" next to *Common Sense*, the similarities become blatantly apparent. Both pieces reference the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to give their audience hope and a precedent of a successful revolution. Additionally, the two writings, though they differ in style, both have similarly utilized rhetorical questions incorporated throughout. Also, both pieces employ a call to action to convince their readers to take the next step. Lastly, the authors of the two pieces grip their readers with pathos, persuading them with their prose, and proving themselves to be great authors as well as great political figures.

Unlike previous scholarship, this study explores Reed's significance as a writer instead of a political figure. The importance of this recognition stems from Reed not receiving the accolades she deserves. A "sewing circle" of Philadelphia women collecting as much money as they could for the war effort was plenty groundbreaking, but Reed, as an individual, contributed more (Arendt 174). Every aspect of "Sentiments of an

"American Woman" shows careful thought and rhetorical planning on her part. The document's writing was so powerful that it spread to other colonies. This makes Reed one of the first leaders of a female movement, not just a soldier's wife doing her part for the army.

Finally, this study's limits are mostly of a timely nature. If I had the time and the resources, I would have incorporated more of Reed's writing into this essay, namely her letters. Unfortunately, few of these exist outside of far-off archives. Similarly, I would've liked to compare more of Paine's writings to Reed's "Sentiments of an American Woman." For the time I had, however, *Common Sense* was a better fit to this study than *Rights of Man*, etc. Lastly, I would've liked to explore more of Reed's influences: both the pieces she read and the people she surrounded herself with during her life.

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