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COSMOPOLITANISM. THE CASE OF THOMAS
PAINE

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Language competence and forms of cosmopolitanism. The case of Thomas Paine

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ABSTRACT

Work on cosmopolitanism does not usually address the issue of language competence. This paper looks at Thomas Paine's competence in French, arguably a prerequisite for his qualification as a cosmopolitan radical and revolutionary. It will argue that although Paine's spoken production in French remained limited, it is important to take into account also his ability to read and understand it, to the extent that he could fully participate in French political debate. It will also assess the figure of Paine, and the issue of his language competence, in the light of some different views of cosmopolitanism.

KEY WORDS

Thomas Paine, cosmopolitanism, language competence, French

Introduction

Visions of cosmopolitanism on the whole do not prioritize the issue of language competence. Neither philosophical treatments, as for example, in the work of Martha Nussbaum,¹ nor cultural approaches, in the writings of Kwame Anthony Appiah for instance,² commonly link cosmopolitanism to the ability to express oneself in more than one language.

Some perspectives seem to presuppose multilingual contexts: this is the case, for example with approaches which focus on the micro-geographical location of cosmopolitanism, as for example, in sociological or historical accounts of cosmopolitan

¹ NUSSBAUM, M. C. (ed.), *For Love of Country: debating the limits of patriotism*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1996.

² APPIAH, K.A., *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Norton, New York, 2006.

city spaces.³ But despite the multicultural presuppositions of much work on cosmopolitanism, elaborations which take into account the ability to use fluently the language of the other are hard to find.

Nor is it easy to find linguists who attempt to connect *competence in foreign languages* with *cosmopolitan values*. Two exceptions may be those working on “translingualism” or in “Translation Studies”. “Translingualism”, the study of the use of different languages as part of the linguistic repertoire of a single person, is an area of studies which responds to the needs of the plurilinguistic environments of the global twenty-first century, and implicitly links familiarity with different languages and cosmopolitanism, as part of living practices in a global society.⁴ “Translation studies”, too, in its focus on the specific competence of moving between two or more languages, has on occasions sought to discuss this within a framework of cosmopolitanism.⁵

The relation between language competence and cosmopolitanism is a question which it is difficult even to articulate fully in a brief paper. Here, instead, we will look at the single example of a historical figure who is commonly taken to embody a certain form of cosmopolitanism, both in his writings and in his personal life, Thomas Paine, the late eighteenth-century revolutionary journalist and political theorist. It will look in particular at his competence in the foreign language which was key to his political activity, French, attempt to evaluate this competence, and discuss the extent to which this can be considered as an index of his cosmopolitanism.

The essay will first give a brief description of the life and writings of Paine (Part One) before moving on to discuss the evidence of his knowledge of French, both active and passive (Part Two). It will conclude with some comments regarding the relation between forms of cosmopolitanism and foreign language competence (Part Three). It has

³ SENNETT, R., “Cosmopolitanism and the Social Experience of Cities”, in S. VERTOVEC and R. COHEN (eds.), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism. Theory, Context and Practice*, Oxford University Press Oxford, 2002, pp. 42-47; JACOB, M. C., *Strangers Nowhere in the World. The rise of cosmopolitanism in early modern Europe*, University of Philadelphia Press, Philadelphia, 2007; EISENSTEIN, E. L., *Grub Street Abroad. Aspects of the French Cosmopolitan Press from the Age of Louis XIV to the French Revolution*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992.

⁴ CANAGARAJAH, S., *Translingual Practice. Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*, Routledge, London and New York, 2013.

⁵ See in particular CRONIN, M. *Translation and Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006; BIELSA, E., *Cosmopolitanism and Translation. Investigations into the experience of the foreign*, Routledge, London and New York, 2016.

its origins in two recent works on Thomas Paine, both published in 2018, which approach the life and work of Paine from very different angles, as we shall see. J.C.D. Clark's *Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution* attempts to reorient Paine studies diachronically and geographically.⁶ Its intent is to focus on the eighteenth-century determinants of Paine's work (rather than his legacy within the context of nineteenth-century radicalism) and to accentuate the British context and origins of his thought. Carine Lounissi's *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*,⁷ on the other hand, aims to highlight the importance of Paine's experience and activity in France in the revolutionary period. The appearance of two such different approaches in the space of just a few months testifies, in any case, to the enduring relevance of Paine and his work.

1. Thomas Paine: revolutionary and cosmopolitan

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was perhaps the most cosmopolitan of the journalists, activists, and theoreticians involved in revolutionary politics at the end of the eighteenth century. He would appear to embody the very idea of an "Atlantic Revolution" put forward originally by R.R. Palmer and Jacques Godechot many years ago in an attempt to wrest the historiography of the American and French Revolutions (not to say the reform movement in Britain in the 1790s and the uprising of the United Irishmen in Ireland in 1798) away from its nationalist commentators towards a vision of shared radicalism.⁸

His activity as a pamphleteer and activist spanned three countries: America, Britain, and France. His position in American political history as a one of the principal theorists of the American rebellion with his *Common Sense* (1776) is firmly established. His place in British radicalism is similarly uncontested: his *Rights of Man* (1791-92) was a best-seller as soon as it was published, and remained a touchstone for the radical movement in Britain throughout the nineteenth century. His writings are also seen as

⁶ CLARK, J.C.D., *Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2018.

⁷ LOUNISSI, C., *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2018.

⁸ PALMER, R.R., *The Age of Democratic Revolution. A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1959; GODECHOT, J., *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1770-1799*, The Free Press/Collier-Macmillan, New York and London, 1965. See also BAILYN, B., *Atlantic History. Concepts and Contours*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 2005.

fundamental in the history of political theory, in particular with regard to political and human rights.⁹ His activity in Paris during the revolution, in which he was close to the Girondin circle, is less well known, but has now been the topic of Lounissi's new work (2018), already mentioned, which documents this activity meticulously. As he wrote to George Washington, "a share in two revolutions is living to some purpose."¹⁰

Born in Thetford in England in 1737, after an unsuccessful career as an excise officer, Paine first became involved in radical politics in the early 1770s in Lewes (Sussex) and London. In 1774, he left for America on the advice of Benjamin Franklin, whom he had met in London, and became there the editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, in which he wrote articles promoting the cause of American freedom from government by Britain. In 1776 he published *Common Sense*, signing it anonymously as "an Englishman"; the pamphlet, arguing for American independence and attacking what he saw as the despotic and illegitimate rule over America by the English monarchy, became an immediate best seller. The success of this work led to more structured involvement with American politics: Paine was nominated member of the Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs, for which he made a mission to France in 1781. Returning to Europe in 1787, first to France and then to England, he threw himself into supporting the reform movement in Britain and the revolution in France, publishing the first part of his best-known book, *Rights of Man* (1791), a response to Edmund Burke's attacks on the French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The *Rights of Man* consisted of a forceful defence of the Revolution and of the rights of a people to rebel against a monarch, along the same lines as his attack on the British monarchy in his earlier *Common Sense*. Pursued by the Pitt government for libel, Paine fled England for France in 1792, where he was elected to represent the district of Pas-de-Calais to the National Convention, and nominated as one of the deputies whose task was to draw up a new constitution. With the flight of Louis XVI to Varennes in 1791, Paine moved to a more radical position in terms of French politics, opposing the constitutional monarchy and advocating a republican solution in France. In 1792 he published, in England, the second part of the *Rights of Man*, openly more republican in tone, and including innovative

⁹ CASADEI, T., *Tra ponti e rivoluzioni. Diritti, costituzioni, cittadinanza in Thomas Paine*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2012.

¹⁰ HOBBSAWM, E. J., *Uncommon People. Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1998, p. 2.

welfare solutions.¹¹ In this period in France, as Lounissi shows, he was strongly linked to the Girondin group, in particular with the Marquis de Condorcet and Nicholas Bonneville. Arguing against the execution of Louis XVI and in favour of his permanent exile, Paine became a suspect of the new Jacobin terror. In December 1793 he was arrested and spent nearly a year in prison, avoiding execution, it is said, only by the inefficiency of his jailors. He remained in France until 1802, when he returned to the United States, dying there in 1809.¹²

As a radical reformist and revolutionary in three countries, encapsulating the independence movement in America with his *Common Sense*, writing a text which was to become the foundation stone for radical thinking in Britain for much of the nineteenth century, the *Rights of Man*, and participating actively in revolutionary activities in France, Paine is considered to be an emblematic cosmopolitan figure, spanning different traditions but consolidating them all within a shared transatlantic radical framework.¹³ While the first two of these areas of intervention are well-known, his activity in France has been somewhat neglected, despite the fact that, as one commentator observes, “Paine’s connections with reform circles in France are important to understanding him, even if much Paine scholarship almost entirely ignores them.”¹⁴ Lounissi’s recent work is entirely devoted to Paine’s activity in France and reinstates this as a fundamental part of his political activity. Thomas Casadei has also reinforced the perception of Paine as a constructor of bridges between different traditions, bringing them together in notions of sociability and contractualism, a theoretical activity nicely mirrored in his experience in designing bridges.¹⁵ This generally accepted view of Paine as an exemplary cosmopolitan figure, however, is not shared by Clark in his recent study. This points out, among other things, Paine’s lack of competence in French which, it is argued, is in contrast to this cosmopolitan image. In particular, says the author, “that so able a man should not acquire fluency in spoken French during that time [his stay in France from 1792 to 1802] suggests a degree of cultural parochialism in the presence of what was still Europe’s most

¹¹ KEANE, J., *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, Bloomsbury, London, 1995. pp. 324-344; CLARK, *Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution*, cit., pp. 292-301

¹² For biographical details of Paine’s life, the best account is KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit..

¹³ BATTISTINI, M., *Una Rivoluzione per lo Stato. Thomas Paine e la Rivoluzione americana nel Mondo Atlantico*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2012.

¹⁴ PHILP, M., “Paine, *Rights of Man*” in P. CLEMIT (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 40.

¹⁵ CASADEI, *Tra ponti e rivoluzioni*, cit., pp. 15-26. For Paine’s bridge-building, see KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, pp. 267-268.

prestigious and widely spoken language.”¹⁶ It is to Paine’s competence in French that we shall now turn.

2. Paine’s command of French

It is true that knowledge of French, for a radical involved at the highest level of political and journalistic activity in three countries, the new American Republic, Britain, and France, would seem to be a prerequisite. Leaving aside Clark’s charge of “cultural parochialism”, there is no doubt that Paine appears never to have acquired a strong competence in spoken French. Ample evidence is provided in Clark’s study, and, indeed, John Keane’s earlier biography (1995), and Lounissi agrees that in the early period in France, Paine “could read French well” but “could not deliver a whole speech in French.”¹⁷ His formal political interventions as a deputy in France took place mostly through a translator. Paine’s first speech in the National Convention, for example, on 21 November 1792, during the debate on the iron chest found in the King’s apartments in the Palais de Tuileries containing compromising documents, was translated by Condorcet and read out by Jean Baptiste Mailhe.¹⁸ In the debates over the punishment that was to be deemed appropriate for the condemned Louis XVI, Paine’s interventions were also relayed to the Convention by a translator. Paine’s biographer describes the moment at which Paine was called to give his verdict, based on the minutes of the sitting, as follows: “He steadied himself, paused, hands behind his back, and spoke slowly in practiced French: ‘I vote for the confinement of Louis until the end of the war, and for his perpetual banishment after the war.’”¹⁹ He also intervened on 19 January 1793, on the issue of whether a reprieve of the death sentence for the King should be given, and this speech was translated and read aloud in French by another deputy, Jean-Henry Bancal des Issarts. Indeed, the validity of the translation was contested by Jean-Paul Marat, who was proficient in English.²⁰

¹⁶ CLARK, *Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution*, cit., p. 99

¹⁷ LOUNISSI, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, cit., p. 139.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135; KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, p. 359.

¹⁹ KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit., p. 367.

²⁰ LOUNISSI, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, cit., p. 189; KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit., pp. 358-369. For Marat and his experiences in Britain, see HAMMERSLEY, R., *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-century France. Between the Ancients and the Moderns*, Manchester

His contributions to the Committee for drawing up the new constitution were mostly written rather than oral,²¹ and appear to have been in English. One note to the Commission with a proposal on sovereignty, he said, could not be handed over as a translation had not yet been made of it. Another written note in the records of the commission seems to confirm Paine's preference for making written rather than oral contributions to the discussion on the constitution: "I have taken this method because I cannot communicate with any other."²² A letter to Darnton reproduced in his *Collected Writings* begins "as you read English, I write this letter to you without passing it through the hands of a translator."²³

Paine's understanding of written French, then, does not appear to have been a springboard for speaking, or indeed writing, in formal political contexts. There is evidence also, unsurprisingly, that Paine was not at home in French in informal contexts either. On the day after the Flight from Varennes, 21 June 1791, Paine was surrounded by a suspicious crowd and only saved by the intervention of the French-speaking English radical, Thomas Christie.²⁴ On another occasion, arriving at the Convention on the day in which the Girondins were being expelled, 31 May 1793, and unable to make himself understood to Hanriot the leader of the National Guard, it was Darnton who explained the situation to him in English and who persuaded him to return to the safety of his home.²⁵

As late as 1798, after six years of continuous residence in France, he communicated with a member of the French Directory, Bertrand Barère, through an interpreter.²⁶ While lodging with the family of the Girondin politician Nicholas Bonneville, in 1797 he was still able to speak French only with difficulty although his passive knowledge had improved. Mme Bonneville said that "he could not speak French;

University Press, Manchester, 2010, pp. 138-152. In the National Convention, Marat apparently shouted, "I denounce the interpreter. I maintain that it is not Thomas Paine's opinion. It is an untrue translation." Paine replied by standing next to his interpreter and declaring the sentiments to be his own (PAINE, T., *Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner, Library of America, New York, 1995, p. 390). See also KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit., p. 368).

²¹ LOUNISSI, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, pp 148-149; cf. GRIFFO, M., *Thomas Paine. La vita e il pensiero politico*, Rubbettino, Soveria Manelli, 2011, pp. 305-306.

²² LOUNISSI, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, cit., p. 151.

²³ PAINE, *Collected Writings*, cit., p. 392.

²⁴ CLARK, *Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution*, cit., p. 225. Cf. KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit., p. 313.

²⁵ KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit., p. 380.

²⁶ LOUNISSI, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution* cit., p. 198.

he could understand it tolerably well when spoken to him, and he understood it when on paper perfectly well.”²⁷ By his own admission, in the *Age of Reason*, Paine admits to having “no inclination to learn languages.”²⁸

On the basis of this evidence of Paine’s difficulties with speaking French, Clark assumes an underlying “parochialism”, as we have seen, and a political and intellectual framework which was “specifically English.”²⁹ But we should insist that, while Paine’s “active” spoken competence was in all accounts weak, he does seem to have learned to understand spoken French (according to Mme Bonneville) “tolerably well” and had no problems reading in the language. In fact, there is evidence, particularly that provided by Lounissi, that Paine spent his time in Paris actively contributing to the political debate not only in the National Convention but also through a number of written communications in French. It may be that these were not written in French by Paine himself, but he was happy to sign articles in French in his name, and there is evidence that he actively collaborated in translations of original writings in English into French. He was, for example, involved in various editorial ventures, mostly initiated by the Cercle Social, the publishing house managed more or less directly by the Girondin circle of revolutionaries Bonneville, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, Jean-Marie and Manon Roland, and Condorcet as well as Paine himself.³⁰ He assisted Bonneville in the creation of two newspapers, both published by the Cercle Social, *Le Bien informé* and *Le Vieux Tribun*, and was an editor of *Le Bulletin des Amis de la Verité* with Louis Sebastian Mercier and Condorcet. He acted as the editor-in-chief for the May 1792 issue of the *Chronique du Mois*, to which he contributed four articles serialized in May, June, July, and August 1792, apparently translated by Condorcet. In a later essay, Paine mentions an article which was “concerted between Condorcet and myself. I wrote the original in English and Condorcet translated it.”³¹

Paine contributed to a considerable extent, then, to the revolutionary newspapers which flourished in Paris in the 1790s. Leaving aside the two major texts he wrote during

²⁷ KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit., p. 437

²⁸ PAINE, *Collected Writings*, cit., p. 701

²⁹ CLARK, *Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution*, cit., p. 99.

³⁰ KATES, G., *The Cercle Social, the Girondins, and the French Revolution*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985.

³¹ LOUNISSI, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, cit, pp. 135, 178; 277-280; 126, n. 33.

his stay in France, *The Age of Reason* (1793-1794) and *Agrarian Justice* (1797), however, the authoritative edition of his *Collected Writings* includes just five speeches or articles in English relating to Paine's French experience, and makes no reference to other articles which were published in French under his name.³² Lounissi, instead, documents 18 separate speeches or articles published in Paris signed by Paine in the period 1791-1801 for which she has been unable to find an English original.³³ This does not mean necessarily, of course, that the articles were originally written in French, but only that any English original has not survived, suggesting that these originals, if they existed, probably never achieved the status of printed documents. The number of these publications testify to Paine's active involvement in French politics in this period, as does Lounissi's extended treatment of his writing and activity in Paris in general. She highlights Paine's difficulties in terms of competence in speaking French, but provides much evidence of his effective collaboration with the Girondins and others and his active participation in the political debates over a number of years. Many other supporters of the Revolution left Paris after the Jacobin decree outlawing aliens in 1793. Paine was arrested and spent nearly a year in the Luxembourg prison at the height of the Terror (from December 1793 to November 1794) but afterwards remained in Paris throughout the period of the Directory and the Consulate playing an active part in French political culture.³⁴

3. Language and cosmopolitanism: Paine as a "citizen of the world"

It is not possible here to enter into a discussion of the extent to which Paine's writings had their origins in English political culture, as Clark maintains.³⁵ Perhaps, as

³² These include two interventions Paine made during the trial of Louis XVI in the National Convention, two letters, one to Abbé Sieyès and one to Darnton, and an article on republicanism (PAINE, *Collected Writings*, cit., pp. 380-395).

³³ LOUNISSI, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, cit., pp. 21-25.

³⁴ As well as Lounissi's volume, see KEANE, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, cit., pp. 419-452.

³⁵ Clark emphasizes "the lasting importance in [Paine's] world view of the contexts set by Paine's English preconceptions" (*Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution*, cit., p. 16). In general, Clark is concerned above all to reassert the peculiarity of the American, French, and English experiences, and his book is a sustained argument against the "Atlantic Revolution" thesis of Palmer, Godechot, and others (see note 8). If there were links between the American and the French Revolutions, for Clark, "their differences outweigh their similarities" (*ibid.*, p. 10). For a different view of the importance of the Atlantic as a unit of analysis for historical inquiry, not only for the revolutionary period but for the whole of the eighteenth century, see BAILYN, *Atlantic History. Concepts and Contours*, cit., which also includes a useful summary of the "Atlantic Revolution" thesis (pp. 24-46). For a specific discussion of Paine in the context of the "Atlantic" revolution, see

many writers on cosmopolitanism point out, this is in any case a false problem: cosmopolitanism is predominantly seen not as an undifferentiated commitment to universalism but as a *dialogue between universal values and particular experiences*, between *internationalism and patriotism*.³⁶ But accepting for a moment the received notion of Paine as a militant cosmopolitan in terms of the context and impact of his writing and his political activity in three countries, is this image tarnished by his evident lack of productive competence in a language other than his own? This depends, to a large extent, on how we conceive of cosmopolitanism. Following, although not too strictly, the categorisation of cosmopolitanism outlined by Vertovec and Cohen, we may say that the term can be conceived of in three different ways: as *cultural cosmopolitanism*, *political cosmopolitanism* and a *cosmopolitanism of everyday life*.³⁷ We will look at these three versions of cosmopolitanism and see how they can be used to talk about the case of Paine.

For Vertovec and Cohen, cultural cosmopolitanism manifests itself as “an attitude or disposition”, or a “desire for and appreciation of, cultural diversity.”³⁸ This approach is the closest to the way the notion has been used in translation studies, the only area in which language competence figures prominently in discussions of cosmopolitanism. For translation studies, however, the focus has been predominantly on gauging the sort of translation strategy which embodies a cosmopolitan attitude. To summarize debates in this area, the production of a translation which is wholly consistent with the cultural, textual, and linguistic norms of the “target” text (the final, translated text) is seen as a strategy which effectively effaces the traces of the foreign and reinforces the norms and the culture towards which the translator translates. This “domesticating” strategy is seen as diametrically opposed to a “foreignizing” one, in which some of the traces of the original “source” language are maintained in the final translated text, thus demonstrating

BATTISTINI, M., *Una Rivoluzione per lo Stato. Thomas Paine e la Rivoluzione americana nel Mondo Atlantico*, cit.

³⁶ See for example, APPIAH, K. A., “Cosmopolitan Patriots”, in M. NUSSBAUM (ed.), *For Love of country*, cit., pp. 21-29.

³⁷ VERTOVEC, S. and R. COHEN, “Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism”, in VERTOVEC, S. and R. COHEN (eds.), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism. Theory, Context and Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 1-22. The authors, in fact, list six perspectives: socio-cultural condition; philosophy or world-view; political project (transnational institutions); political project (multiple subjects); an attitude or disposition; and a practice of competence (pp. 9-14). I have grouped these together as above.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

an openness to diversity.³⁹ This, in turn, has been seen as an opening to the language of the other and thus as an index of cosmopolitanism.⁴⁰ This discussion is not central to our concerns here, although it might be interesting to look in more detail at the translations of Paine into French in this light, also with a view to tracing more closely how far notions which, in Clark's view, derive above all from an English context, are manifested in the French translations of his writings. Translation studies, in any case, does prioritize a notion of discrete languages and discrete cultures and, insofar as work focuses on translators rather than texts, valorizes those individuals who have the necessary linguistic competences to move easily between them. Those who, like translators, inhabit the "intercultural space" between cultures⁴¹ are implicitly seen as cosmopolitan figures.

In this conception of cosmopolitanism, in which openness to another culture implies linguistic competence, Paine's apparent reluctance to speak would indicate in some way a closure towards the culture he was inhabiting. If we conceive of cosmopolitanism precisely in these cultural terms, the ability and desire to welcome the language of the other, hypothesised as representative of a culture which is, in some overriding sense, absolutely foreign, Paine is not a cosmopolitan. In this we might contrast him with other revolutionary figures such as the German writer, translator and revolutionary Georg Forster, also active in three countries, Britain, Germany and France, who boasted a knowledge of a large number of languages.⁴² or, indeed, figures such as Marat who were confident in their knowledge of both English and French.⁴³ However, we may make one or two reservations here. First, although Paine was clearly trying to understand and interact with French political culture, a knowledge of France and French culture in general was not, we may assume, one of his main priorities. His principal

³⁹VENUTI, L., *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, pp. 16-22. See also . BERMAN, A., *L'épreuve de l'étranger. Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1984.

⁴⁰ BIELSA, *Cosmopolitanism and Translation*, cit., pp. 9-13.

⁴¹ PYM, A., "Humanizing Translation History", *Hermes - Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, no. 42, 2009, pp. 23-48.

⁴² GILLI, M., *Georg Forster. L'oeuvre d'un penseur allemand réaliste et révolutionnaire (1754-1704)*, thèse présentée devant l'Université de Paris X, Honoré Champion, Paris, 1975. Georg Forster said of his own language abilities, "j'écris le latin et je comprends un tant soit peu le grec. Je parle avec facilité et j'écris de meme le francais, l'anglais et l'allemand; je lis facilement le hollandais et l'italien; et avec un peu de routine, je pourrais me perfectionner dans la connaissance de l'espagnol, du portugais et du suédois, dont je possède les rudiments, Je comprends même un peu du polonais et de russe..." (ibid., p. 4).

⁴³ For a discussion of Marat as a translator, see LEECH, P., "How to do things with translation. Jean-Paul Marat's translation of Newton's *Optics* (1787)." *mediAzioni*, n° 24, 2019, <http://mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it>.

intention and motivation was instead a radical political one: his objective was to communicate and propagate his political views in different countries and not to embark on a study of the specificities of a foreign culture. As he himself said, he had no particular inclination to learn French; the foreign language, it seems, for him, was a vehicle for his ideas and not a door into another culture. Viewing cosmopolitanism, through the lens of culture alone does not appear to appreciate fully Paine's political objectives and principal frame for his actions. Second, his ability to live and work in a foreign culture, although with limited linguistic resources at least in terms of speaking the language, does not seem to have been particularly impaired his activity, and we shall return to this point.

There are other ways of conceiving cosmopolitanism which may fit better with Paine, as we shall see. To remain within the ambit of cultural cosmopolitanism for an instant, however, we may note that it relies on an underlying framework which presupposes a close "fit" between a language and a culture. This correspondence between language and culture, however, does not go wholly unchallenged. Those working on translanguaging today, for example, the way in which individuals in a globalised world use a number of different languages according to their communicative objectives, see language competences not in terms of adherence to, or distance from, particular identifiable cultures, but instead as a set of different linguistic resources to be used according to appropriacy. This view is highly critical of the monolingual assumptions of much language study, and its basis in romantic notions which prioritize a "Herdian triad" of language/community/place which is restrictive and can lead to a certain essentializing of languages, and cultures.⁴⁴ To focus on Paine's reluctance to speak French may also be to give undue attention to a single linguistic ability (speaking) and to ignore his competences in others (understanding the spoken word, reading and, perhaps, writing). Paine clearly had sufficient linguistic resources to operate in French political culture with some success for more or less ten years.

We may concede, perhaps, that Paine's reluctance to speak French was, as Clark says, a limitation in an age in which French was, to a large extent, the *lingua franca* of the late Enlightenment. However, he was not alone in this. Even such an exemplary eighteenth-century English figure such as Horace Walpole, we should remember, was not proficient in French, as a well-known account of his dining with the d'Holbach coterie

⁴⁴ Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice. Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*, cit., p. 20.

and Abbé Raynal relates.⁴⁵ Paine, moreover, came from a relatively humble, artisan background, and cannot be put alongside elite cosmopolitanism figures such as Condorcet, Benjamin Franklin and others. In his introduction to *The Age of Reason*, as we have seen, he admits little interest in language and also recounts that although he went to a grammar school, he never learnt Latin.⁴⁶ Other English radicals resident in Paris at the time such as Thomas Christie (who, we have seen, acted as an interpreter for Paine on some occasions), David Williams or Mary Wollstonecraft all came from educated backgrounds in which language learning was a part of their development.⁴⁷

A second way of imagining cosmopolitanism is one related to a political project which can be imagined above the level of the nation.⁴⁸ It is clear from all that Paine wrote that it was precisely this *transnational and transatlantic political context* which constituted one of the fundamental frames for Paine's actions and writings. Clark, as we have seen, has tried to portray Paine's work as rooted in its English context, but most work has, as he himself recognizes, taken the opposite approach and seen Paine's approach to rights as somewhat out of the main path of English radicalism. Whereas the latter commonly rooted rights in appeals to historical precedents, for example to the "Norman Yoke" and an "ancient rights" matrix,⁴⁹ Paine instead stresses the *importance of the claim to rights in the present, as a prerogative of each generation*.⁵⁰ Too strong a distinction between English and continental traditions may in any case not be a useful one: some recent work, for example, has stressed the extent to which the English republican tradition had a pervasive influence on French political thought in the eighteenth century.⁵¹ The political project that Paine was involved in, although finding its

⁴⁵ The anecdotes can be found KORS, A.C., *D'Holbach's Coterie. An Enlightenment in Paris*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976 (p. 103). Walpole relates how he was ashamed to speak his hesitant French in front of the servants at Baron d'Holbach's weekly dinner parties, and on one occasion pretended to Abbé Raynal that he was deaf, only to be found out later.

⁴⁶ PAINE, *Collected Writings*, cit., p. 701.

⁴⁷ For the English radicals in Paris, see ROGERS, R., "White's Hotel: A Junction of British Radical Culture in early 1790s Paris", *CALIBAN. French Journal of English Studies*, no. 33, 2013, pp. 153-172.

⁴⁸ VERTOVEC and COHEN, "Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism", cit., pp. 11-13).

⁴⁹ HILL, C., "The Norman Yoke", in *Puritanism and Revolution. Studies in the Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century*, Mercury Books, London, 1958, pp. 50-122.

⁵⁰ See CASADEI, *Tra ponti e rivoluzioni*, cit. pp. 43-71; THOMPSON, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1963, pp. 93-113. Thus Paine in the "Preface" to the *Rights of Man*, Part One: "I am contending for the rights of the living, and against their being willed away, and controlled, and contracted for, by the manuscript-assumed authority of the dead" (Paine, *Collected Writings*, p. 439).

⁵¹ HAMMERSLEY, *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-century France*, cit.

particular articulations in differing national contexts, was precisely a cosmopolitan one, relating to and bringing together different radical traditions in England, the new American republic and France. Paine's radicalism, here, can perhaps be seen as part of the revolutionary consequence of the "Radical Enlightenment" proposed by Jonathan Israel similarly cosmopolitan in scope.⁵²

A final way of conceptualising cosmopolitanism brings these theoretical notions down to earth. Vertovec and Cohen also indicate cosmopolitanism as a "practice."⁵³ Thus some approaches have focused on the ways in which everyday practices and living experiences can contribute to the construction of a cosmopolitan attitude. Elisabeth Eisenstein, in her study of the material processes underlying the production and distribution of books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, has stressed the way that booksellers and printers operated in a *de facto* cosmopolitan environment in which religious refugees, artisans and entrepreneurs from different cultural, religious and linguistic background, mixed freely.⁵⁴ Margaret Jacob has similarly stressed the way that cosmopolitanism can be found beyond (or perhaps, we may say, below) the overarching philosophical cosmopolitanism characteristic of Enlightenment universalism. She argues that we need to go beyond the history of cosmopolitanism as an idea, for example in Kant's *Perpetual Peace*⁵⁵ or as an idea implicit in Enlightenment thought in general,⁵⁶ and find it in everyday "practices, behaviors, social habits."⁵⁷ It was this sort of *de facto* cosmopolitan sociability, she argues, which gives us the chance to understand the peculiarly "infectious" movements for reform and revolution in the late eighteenth century and the "emerging international republican conversation."⁵⁸

Let us return to Paine. It would seem that his personal life trajectory embodies the sort of overarching republican conversation that Margaret Jacob hypothesizes. The

⁵² ISRAEL, J., *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

⁵³ VERTOVEC and COHEN, "Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism", cit., pp. 13-14).

⁵⁴ EISENSTEIN, *Grub Street Abroad*, cit.

⁵⁵ See for example NUSSBAUM, M., "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism", *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 1, March 1997, pp. 1-25.

⁵⁶ SCHLERETH, T.J., *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought. Its form and function in the ideas of Franklin, Hume, and Voltaire 1694-1790*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1977.

⁵⁷ JACOB, *Strangers Nowhere in the World*, cit., pp. 3-4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 122.

conversation took place first in England, as a radical involved in local politics in Lewes and as an articulator of the grievances of the excise officers in the 1770s; in Pennsylvania with the American revolutionists; in London in the early 1790s with booksellers and radical movements such as the Society for Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society; and perhaps particularly in his intense involvement in the events of the Revolution in France from 1792 onwards.⁵⁹ This was a commitment to a shared cosmopolitan or universal radicalism which found a concrete environment in the specific contexts of his militancy. His was a life lived as a political activist in an *Atlantic context*: first as a journalist and writer in Britain, in revolutionary America and subsequently in Paris and London.⁶⁰ All these experiences took place in specific social contexts which can be seen as local exemplifications of cosmopolitanism, as the lived cosmopolitanism of intercultural spaces. An example in France was undoubtedly the Girondin group in Paris, and the Cercle Social, the publishing venture set up by them.⁶¹ These experiences also went beyond the sphere of shared political commitments. Paine's relations with Nicholas Bonneville and his family, for example, were an example of a personal and psychological commitment to a friendship which spanned different cultures. Paine lived in Bonneville's house for a considerable period, and when he left for America in 1802, he offered Bonneville and his family the asylum that they had provided for him in France. He departed with Bonneville's wife, Marguerite and their three children, Nicholas Bonneville joining his family only in 1814 after the fall of Napoleon. As promised, Paine left a considerable amount of property to Mme Bonneville in order to maintain and educate her children, whose godfather he was.⁶²

Paine's ability or inclination to speak French, viewed from the perspective of the acceptance and interest in other cultures, may constitute a limit to his cosmopolitanism. But his political activity testifies to a strong adherence to a political project spanning three countries and both sides of the Atlantic and thus to an overall cosmopolitan perspective. This activity, moreover, involved a personal life-history which was similarly one of a "citizen of the world". We may note also, with regard to Paine's linguistic abilities, that his competence in reading and interacting on a written level in French is not contested

⁵⁹ KEANE, *Tom Paine*, cit., pp. 62-75; 129-137; 328-342; Lounissi, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, cit., passim.

⁶⁰ See BATTISTINI, *Una Rivoluzione per lo Stato*. cit.

⁶¹ KATES, *The Cercle Social, the Girondins, and the French Revolution*, cit.

⁶² KEANE, *Tom Paine*, cit., p. 533

and constituted a linguistic resource which enabled him to contribute also in terms of political activism in France.

Ulrich Beck has made us aware of the extent to which contemporary thinking replays a foundational “methodological nationalism”⁶³ in the sense that nations and national identity are taken as stable and given. This is increasingly coming under discussion in the globalised world of the twenty-first century, for example, as we have briefly mentioned, in the example of “translingualism” in language studies. It may be worth reconsidering the eighteenth century and its revolutionary conclusion not only as a period of the “forging” of nations⁶⁴ but in terms of the shared transnational geographical and political magma from which these nations were hammered into being. In this eighteenth-century context, Paine’s status as a *revolutionary cosmopolitan intellectual* can be reaffirmed.

⁶³ BECK, U.W., “The Cosmopolitan Condition. Why Methodological Nationalism Fails”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, n° 24, (7-8), December 2007, pp. 286-290.

⁶⁴ COLLEY, L., *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Pimlico Press, London, 1992.

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