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Crèvecoeur and the Subversion of the American Revolution

The details of the publication of Crèvecoeur’s Letters from an American Farmer are well known. Crèvecoeur arrived in London in 1780 and published his celebrated book in 1782. That England was at war with the American colonies was one explanation for its immediate success, given that the War of Independence was on the verge of being concluded and that the war was going badly for Great Britain. Indeed, English public opinion had turned dramatically against an increasingly unpopular war that had been officially ongoing since 1775. The title page emphasizes this conspicuous political context, referring to “The Late And Present Interior Circumstances of the British Colonies in North America.” Crèvecoeur was playing on Britain’s continued interest in America and on his public role as the authoritative American farmer. Although we do not know precisely when the letters were composed (Crèvecoeur started some of the Letters in the 1760s), until recently most critics believed that the bulk of the letters were written between 1770 and 1774. Bernard Chevignard, however, has compellingly argued that an early version of the text as we know it was “at least partially rewritten as late as 1780 or 1781.” This is implicitly suggested in the Letters where, as I will argue, Crèvecoeur alludes to political events and publications occurring from 1776 on. Although many of the letters can be read dialectically, as opposing or supporting the Revolution, allowing Crèvecoeur to appeal to both sides of the Atlantic, the predominant texts and contexts are, in fact, hostile to the American Revolution. Moreover, since Crèvecoeur and/or his editors selected the essays that would appear in both the first and second editions, the fact that there are letters favorable to British America, supposedly written before the Revolution, has a political and ideological significance, since the Revolution is specifically addressed in the preface, allowing Crèvecoeur to establish an implicit thematic contrast between a prerevolutionary golden age and the postrevolutionary “fall” of British America. The political contexts of the Letters have been commented on by a variety of critics, but most discussion of Crèvecoeur’s Loyalist politics is overwhelmingly in the context of his letters in three notebooks that were not published until the twentieth century—letters revealing Crèvecoeur’s hostility to the Revolution. Consequently, Crèvecoeur’s Loyalist sympathies are usually couched in terms of the contrast between the public, favorable-to-America 1782 Letters and the private unpublished letters that reveal what Crèvecoeur “really” thought. In my essay, however, I demonstrate that the Loyalist contexts are more extensive and central to the 1782 Letters’ overall meaning and that Crèvecoeur intertextually evokes a series of oppositional American texts that he allusively subverts.

That the Letters can, however, be read diametrically may be explained in several ways. Crèvecoeur’s decision not to publish letters that were hostile to the Revolution, for instance, can be seen as an endeavor to cash in on what was, at that point, politically correct, not only in England but in France, where everything American was wildly popular. Previously, he had lived in England before coming to America and, after he arrived in the country, he married a woman whose family had Loyalist sympathies. Although Crèvecoeur was suspected and imprisoned briefly by the British during the war (he was also suspected of treason by the Americans), an examination of his papers (presumably writings on American subjects that would include the unpublished antirevolutionary materials) by British authorities in New York convinced them that he was pro-British. Crèvecoeur was, in fact, loyal to the king and was basically an Anglophile, even though he had seen enough British cruelty to make him, at times, an ambivalent admirer of the mother country.

In my essay, I provide a close reading of the texts and contexts comprising the Letters in order to crystallize the Loyalist subtexts energizing a covert counterargument against many of the revolutionaries’ pronouncements and proclamations. I do not deny that there is a pro-American, “Patriot” dimension to the Letters or that various passages can be read as promoting an American perspective. That Crèvecoeur incorporates both Loyalist and Patriot perspectives into his narrative accounts for the ideological ambivalence that many readers find. But because the Loyalist contexts have not been widely discussed or elucidated, I...
emphasize these contexts to balance the conventional pro-American reading of the *Letters*. Thus, my focus is restricted to a specific perspective rather than the whole panorama. It is not the entire picture but rather a significant, neglected and often obscured view that needs to be incorporated into our discussion of Crèvecoeur. Many of the political contradictions and ambiguities of the *Letters* can be explained, I think, by the following working hypothesis: From his unpublished notebook collection, we know that Crèvecoeur was actually hostile to the Revolution but that he chose not to publish various antirevolutionary letters. This active self-censorship, as noted, was in terms of a request by his English editors and may have culminated in a mutual agreement based on what they thought would sell. Because British public opinion had turned against the war and because revolutionary America was a hot topic on both sides of the Atlantic, Crèvecoeur, in effect, changed what would have been the book’s antirevolutionary emphasis had he included the other twenty-two essays in his notebooks. But the published *Letters*, nevertheless, include contextual criticisms of the Revolution that could be discerned by the informed reader. Taken in their totality, antirevolutionary arguments and contexts quantitatively dominate Patriot arguments and contexts, and the former sometimes take covert forms, as Crèvecoeur engages in acts of allusive camouflage and textual counterrevolution. Thus, despite his publishers’ intent, all twelve letters resonate with Loyalist echoes, because the letters in their totality are essentially an antirevolutionary text.

Although Crèvecoeur’s American side technically culminates in letter twelve’s condemnation of British aggression, there are a variety of subtexts that undermine the Revolution throughout, so that the experience of reading Crèvecoeur often involves a series of oppositional “texts” that are meant to modify or qualify each other. Crèvecoeur, I argue, purposely cultivates a strategy of subverting both the Revolution and “Patriot” America in ways that have not been previously explored. In this context, I focus on his formulation of an American mythos, specifically in letters three and twelve, where Crèvecoeur crystallizes a series of American myths that he qualifies with correspondent countermyths. Indeed, as will be seen, Crèvecoeur intends for us to read both letters against each other and back against themselves. Rather than writing this off as “contradiction,” I explore the allusive political contexts that underwrite the book’s semantic oppositions, including the tissue of intertextual evocations of other books and pamphlets, and I discuss how all this impinges on Crèvecoeur’s complex, ambiguous art. While the problem of overemphasizing letter three as the representative letter of Crèvecoeur’s collection has been discussed by critics, my contribution to the debate is to show how Crèvecoeur specifically intends letter three to be read against itself by the formulation of significant and celebrated myths that are subsequently undermined within the letter itself and, more specifically, how Crèvecoeur intends letter twelve to be read against letter three, resulting in an intertextual dialogue by which letter twelve subverts and undermines its predecessor. In addition, while critics have considered individual letters in the context of the Revolution, I analyze the entire corpus of Crèvecoeur’s *Letters* to illustrate how the Revolution and its significance is a continuous theme throughout. To begin this exploration, I first discuss how Crèvecoeur establishes the Revolution as his real subject from the very beginning, starting with the preface and proceeding through letters one to three. I then analyze how the subversion of the Revolution continues in other letters, culminating in letter twelve—a letter that has special intertextual links with Crèvecoeur’s previous discourse.

Starting at the beginning, the “Advertisement” that opens the book places its contents objectively in the context of the war between England and America, and hence the American farmer’s authoritative letters contain “much authentic information, little known,” in England, which cannot “fail of being highly interesting, to the people of England, at a time when everybody’s attention is directed toward the affairs of America” (paragraph one). The third paragraph is, however, a seemingly Loyalist lament from the farmer who has “long been an eye-witness of the transactions which have deformed the face of America. He is one of those who dreaded, and has severely felt, the desolating consequences of a rupture between the parent-state and her colonies: for he has been driven from a situation, the enjoyment of which the reader will find pathetically described in the early letters of this volume.” Crèvecoeur uses the traditional parent-child metaphor by which the English and the Loyalists abroad had described the hierarchic Anglo-American relationship—a metaphor and a relationship that had been attacked by Patriot writers in America. Rather than asserting a declaration of independence, the American farmer laments the “rupture between the parent-state and her [child-like] colonies.” Moreover, his wish that both countries’ “mutual wants” will “in due time … eventually reunite them” suggests that the “rupture” between “the parent state” and her colonial colonies may be eventually healed and that parent and children will be reunited (paragraph three). By making the case for
the previous colonial relationship and by referring to his own experience as one who had “been driven” from a happy situation because of the rupture, the narrator implies that he had been a Loyalist and had been driven from America by the Patriots—a common experience at this stage of the war. Although the reader finally discovers the cause of his exile in the last letter in which the narrator “plagues” both the British and American “houses,” the reader’s initial impression is that the narrator is sympathetic with the status quo ante bellum.

Indeed, one of Crèvecoeur’s fictions is that all the letters except the last were written before the Revolution and were solicited by an “enlightened” Englishman who had formerly visited Farmer James in Pennsylvania. This allows Crèvecoeur to continually praise England in the context of the parent-child relationship. Thus England is, in letter one, our “famed mother country” (11). In addition, Crèvecoeur subtly suggests that Farmer James’s wife is a Quaker by having her use the characteristic Quaker style of “thee” and “thou.”7 The Quakers, of course, were Dissenters who, in America, had generally good relations with the British government before and after William Penn had received Pennsylvania through a charter in 1681. Moreover, the Quakers were known for their pacifism, and their leaders had been attacked by Patriots who considered them disloyal to the American cause.8 Crèvecoeur praises the Quakers throughout the Letters and, in letter one, he suggests that Farmer James is an Anglican—a member of the established Church of England despised by American Patriots. Although the union of the Anglican farmer and his Quaker wife coheres with the theme of religious mixing celebrated in letter three and despite the fiction of the letters as supposedly written in a prerevolutionary time, the political significance resides in the marriage of two of the Revolution’s identifiable enemies.9

One of the ways in which Crèvecoeur responds to the Revolution intertextually is by using the code word “happiness” throughout the Letters. Specifically, it is the allusive happiness of the Declaration of Independence that he ironically evokes within a prerevolutionary setting.10 In letter one, for instance, Farmer James’s minister asks if the enlightened Englishman might be interested in knowing the “causes” that “render so many people happy” in British America as well as the reasons why the thirteen colonies exhibit such “political felicity” (14). The pursuit of happiness and its achievement is primarily what Crèvecoeur is suggesting. Indeed, the principal intertextual point is that the prerevolutionary American people were “happy” and hence that there were no legitimate reasons for the Revolution. The phrase “political felicity” (14), for instance, suggests that the basis of that happiness was the English government itself. The minister notes that everything in British America is “peaceful” and “benign,” and Crèvecoeur adds this clarifying note at the bottom of the page: “The troubles that lately convulsed the American colonies, had not broke out when this and some of the following letters were written” (15, n.1). If the Americans’ “political felicity” derives from the English government, then the Revolution itself is the source of the loss of happiness in America—something Crèvecoeur specifically suggests later in letter twelve.

In letter one the minister alludes again to the theme of happiness, noting that the “reflecting traveller” in America would imaginatively think of the future happiness of the country “instead of submitting to the painful and useless retrospect of revolutions, desolations, and plagues” (15). The sentence compels the reader to consider retrospectively the loss of happiness coinciding with the desolating Revolution, a situation the narrator had already referred to in the Advertisement: “He is one of those who dreaded, and has severely felt, the desolating consequences of the rupture between the parent-state and her colonies” (paragraph three). Crèvecoeur continually evokes a before-and-after America—a colonial, prelapsarian America and its postlapsarian, revolutionary antitype.

Letter two continues the theme of happiness formulated in the Declaration. Farmer James is “happier now than I thought myself before”; he finds himself “happy” as his father was before him; he is “happy” in his “new situation” and asks rhetorically where is the “station [that] can confer a more substantial system of felicity than that of an American farmer, possessing freedom of action, freedom of thoughts, ruled by a mode of government which requires but little from us? I owe nothing but a pepper-corn to my country, a small tribute to my king, with loyalty and due respect” (24–25).11 Possessed of happiness and “freedom,” and by extension “life,” Crèvecoeur allusively contradicts the Declaration in that these “rights” preexisted in a colonial America governed by a benevolent king—the Declaration’s demonized George III. Indeed, the code words of the Declaration continue, as James considers it his “duty to think how happy” he is since his father left him property—he has only to “tread” his father’s “paths to be happy” and as soon as he steps on his “own land, the bright idea of property, of exclusive right, of independence, exalt” his mind (my emphasis).
Treading in the tradition of his father is ostensibly the tradition of the Anglo-colonial relationship that brought his father such happiness. The land, in fact, “has established all our rights”: “our freedom, our power, as citizens; our importance, as inhabitants of such a district;” in short, the Americans’ real “independence.” Consequently, the European, who has no land, crosses “the Atlantic to realize that happiness” (25, 26, 27). The explicit suggestion is that the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were inextricably intertwined in the very structure of colonial-American life.

This is not to suggest that the Letters comprise solely an antirevolutionary perspective. In letter three, for instance, the narrator observes that the “enlightened Englishman” must rejoice when he sees America and feel “national pride” when he considers that his “countrymen, who, when convulsed by factions, afflicted by a variety of miseries and wants … took refuge here,” where they “brought along with them the national genius, to which they principally owe what liberty they enjoy and what substance they possess” (40). The sentence simultaneously reminds the reader that the Puritans sought refuge in America when they were oppressed in England but that they also owe their “liberty” to their English “national genius.” The sentence, in fact, alludes to paragraph thirty-one of the Declaration: “We have reminded [our British brethren] of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here.” In Crèvecoeur’s reading, Puritan New England’s revolutionary response originates in the “national genius” of dissenting England, a standard Patriot argument at the beginning of the Revolution: by responding to British political oppression, the Americans were only reacting as their “free-born” English brethren had done in similar circumstances. Crèvecoeur, at times, also employs a fashionable republican rhetoric that clashes against the political reality of the mother country: in America there are “no aristocratic families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion” (40). But America’s democratic happiness stems from “the silken bands of mild government” (40), suggesting both the mildness of the local colonial government and the indulgent mother country.  

In addition, America is “British America,” and this includes Nova Scotia (44, 41). That America is British America was precisely what was being contested in the Declaration and in the War of Independence, so even though the fiction of a book written before the Revolution explains the phrase, Crèvecoeur uses the fiction to subvert a variety of Patriot claims. For instance, the inclusion of Nova Scotia as part of British America is not coincidental, since Crèvecoeur is intertextually evoking another Patriot text that made precisely the opposite claim: John Dickinson’s Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania (1767). In contrast to the American Farmer, the Patriot farmer from Philadelphia argues vigorously that the inclusion of “the British garrisons of Nova Scotia” unfairly requires the Americans to defray Nova Scotia’s expenses, because the British deceptively elevate Nova Scotia to the status of an American colony. Crèvecoeur additionally conjures up the Declaration, again, in letter three, after praising the “indulgent [British] laws” that protect immigrants in America: “Whence proceed these laws? From our government. Whence that government? It is derived from the original genius and strong desire of the people ratified and confirmed by the crown” (43). This is, in effect, Crèvecoeur’s rewriting of Jefferson’s claim, in paragraph two of the Declaration, that governments are instituted to secure “rights” and, consequently, derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Crèvecoeur subverts the democratic point by having the people’s desire “ratified and confirmed by the crown” (43)—precisely what the Declaration contests.

Letter three is most famous, however, for the crystallization of a series of American cultural myths, inter alia, American “newness,” American racial and religious mixing, American space, and the American melting pot. By cultural myth, I mean the core, archetypal national ideas by which people identify themselves. In this context, I use myth via Mircea Eliade as a set of defining phenomena that were supposedly there in the “beginning,” constituting the creation of a new culture and the characteristics that define it in opposition to other cultures or civilizations. While Crèvecoeur was not necessarily the first to articulate these ideas, he was the first to express them in a way that caught the imaginations of readers in both America and Europe. But for each cultural myth, he creates an antagonistic countermyth that subverts the correspondent foundation myth by which he celebrates America. This can be seen more clearly by discussing the dialectic formulation of the core myths in letter three. The theme of American newness, for instance, is perhaps the most celebrated theme of the Letters, just as “What then is the American, this new man?” is the most famous question (43–44). Thus, the immigrant who comes to America is regenerated with “New laws, a new mode of living, a new social system”; he receives “new” prejudices and manners “from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.” “Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men”; “The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain...
new ideas and form new opinions" (42, 44). The theme of becoming an American, a new man, by metaphorically exfoliating one’s European identity contains conspicuous biblical allusions that the eighteenth-century reader would recognize. In the King James version, St. Paul, in Ephesians 4:24, exhorts his listeners to “put on the new man,” and in Colossians 3:9–10, he reiterates “that ye put off the old man” and “put on the new man.” In effect, Crèvecoeur’s new American man is a refiguring of St. Paul’s 2 Corinthians 5:17—“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” In Crèvecoeur’s version, if any man be in America, he is suddenly a “new” man. The allusions suggest that becoming an American is tantamount to a religious transformation.

Concurrent with newness is the theme of racial mixing, which, in the eighteenth century, means “white” international mixing: The Americans “are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race, now called Americans, have arisen” (42). The adjective “promiscuous,” however, actually stigmatizes the new race, since it always denotes a grouping or massing together without order—“confusingly mingled, indiscriminate” (see definitions 1–5 in the OED) or as Dr. Johnson puts it in his 1755 Dictionary: “Mingled; Confused; Undignified.” The new American man “is either a European, or the descendent of a European: hence that strange mixture of blood, which you find in no other country” (44). Note that different European strains constitute a new national “race”: “Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men” (44). While the exception is the New Englanders, “the unmixed descendents of Englishmen,” perhaps the irony that the principal American resistance comes from “pure” English stock, the theme of international mixing dovetails with religious mixing—another prominent theme of letter three.

Religious mixing is paradoxically due to both proximity and space. There is no religious intolerance in America because the vast American space separates “sectaries” of the same religion who wind up settling “near” members of other religions. Consequently, religious mixing results in international marriages, in a “mixed neighborhood” that “will exhibit a strange religious medley.” For instance, “the daughter of the Catholic will marry the son of the Seceder and settle by themselves at a distance from their parents,” and their children will further demonstrate that religious indifference that characterizes the Americans by also moving away from their parents and hence their religion: “Thus all sects are mixed as well as all nations” (50). In Crèvecoeur’s formulation, the immigrant leaves Europe and is hence removed from his zealous parents, and his children, in turn, move to other parts of America, further dissipating the pernicious effects of religious homogeneity: religious “zeal, in Europe, is confined: here, it evaporates in the great distance it has to travel; there, it is a grain of powder inclosed; here, it burns away in the open air, and consumes without effect” (51). Consequently, “if the sectaries are not settled close together, if they are mixed with other denominations, their zeal will cool for want of fuel, and will be extinguished in a little time” (48).

Crèvecoeur hence seemingly celebrates American “newness” in terms of the space and distance that make national and religious mixing possible. But having formulated these core American ideas, he purposely crystallizes a set of countervailing myths that exist in allusive opposition to what America and an American “is.” This is specifically the function of the two long digressions in which he discusses the savage backwoodsmen in the wild woods and forests. There is, of course, the obvious contrast between the American farmer who plows the land and the backwoodsman who is transformed into a lawless hunter, but the point of the contrast is that Crèvecoeur is opposing his American agrarian myth to the myth of the “new” American Revolution. We can begin to see this by considering how the initial privileging of American “newness” takes on an ominous significance in Crèvecoeur’s description of the “separated” backwoodsmen.

We will remember that Crèvecoeur formerly celebrated the new American man who receives “a new mode of living” and new “manners” (42, 44). In his discussion of the hunters, however, he reintroduces this language in a startling new context: “That new mode of life brings along with it a new set of manners…. These new manners, being grafted on the old stock, produce a strange sort of lawless profligacy, the impressions of which are indelible” (51). Suddenly the theme and language of newness receive a semantic reversal, so that the implicit contrast between the real American farmer and the degenerate backwoodsman hunter contains covert similarities as well. In addition, Crèvecoeur reintroduces the previously positive theme of mixing into a new pejorative context: the promiscuous mixing celebrated as a new American race (although the adjective “promiscuous” actually subverts it) suggestively becomes the bastard mix in hunters.

Consisting of a combination of “old stock” (their former habits and inclinations as farmers) and “new [savage] manners,” the hunters are a depraved “European medley” (52), a phrase that evokes Crèvecoeur’s...
earlier celebration of the “mixed neighborhood” that exhibits “a strange religious medley” (50). Indeed, the positive promiscuous mixing now has its antitype, its opposite, in the wild hunters who “grow up a mongrel breed, half civilized, half savage” (52). Thus, America’s “bad people are those who are half cultivators and half hunters”; “As old plowmen and new men of the woods, as Europeans and new-made Indians, they contract the vices of both” (52, 53). The previous celebration of European mixing and American newness is now a bastard metaphoric mixing of Europeans and Indians, with the language of newness now signifying degeneration—the “new men of the woods” who are “new-made Indians.”

Moreover, the space that previously accounted for the positive religious mixing in America is now the very thing that contributes to the creation of the new, bastard mix threatening Anglo-American civilization. Removed “beyond the reach of government,” the backwoodsmen slip into drunkenness and idleness, representing an earlier, barbaric America before it was civilized by the English: “He, who would wish to see America in its proper light, and to have a true idea of its feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments, must visit our extended line of frontiers, where the last settlers dwell” (47). “By living in or near the woods,” the back settlers absorb “the wildness of the neighborhood” (51), just as, similarly, Europeans contract the intolerance of their closely confined religions. In addition, the American space and distance that previously created the positive religious mix by dissipating religious “zeal” (50, 51) is suddenly that which contributes to the savagery of the back settlers: “To all these reasons you must add their lonely situation, and you cannot imagine what an effect on manners the great distances they live from each other has!” (52). Indeed, the religious presence happily missing in the “religious indifference” of the “good” Americans is now lamented because of the space separating the back settlers from the “sweet accents” of religion, “lost in the immensity of these woods” (53). The thematic space that previously made possible the positive religious mixing is now responsible for both the absence of religion and for the paradoxical presence of the “bastard,” barbaric hunters.

I have suggested that these antagonistic antitypes relate allusively to the Revolution, but I need to first establish the other contexts of Crèvecoeur’s argument. It is notable, for instance, that his discussion of “the back-settlers of both the Carolinas, Virginia, and many other parts” (54), in terms of a dangerous, “lawless people,” constitutes a kind of geography of rebellion, since Virginia was the state of Washington and Jefferson, and the Carolinas were the sites of some of the Revolution’s last battles. Indeed, the backwoodsmen of these states had encroached on Indian territory during and after the French and Indian War, causing Parliament to pass the Proclamation of 1763, which forbade Anglo-American settlement west of the Appalachians. The backwoodsmen, many of them squatters, ignored the proclamation and continued to give the colonial governments increasing problems. The fact that they were in Indian territory adds to the fatal “mix” of the forthcoming Revolution. If, as I will later suggest, the backwoods hunters represent both the revolutionaries and a regression to an earlier pre-English “past,” the remainder of letter three celebrates the “good” Americans as obedient and lawful subjects of the king.

After the backwoodsmen recede, “the path is opened for the arrival of the second and better class, the true American free holders” (54). In contrast to the lawless woodsmen, these true Americans are “respectable for their industry, their happy independence, the great share of freedom they possess … and for extending the trade and the dominion of our mother-country” (54–55). Crèvecoeur is again reorienting the language of the Declaration of Independence to establish the prerevolutionary happiness of the American colonists who have freedom and independence and hence are willing subjects who extend “the trade and the dominion of our mother-country.” Indeed, the Americans are “the framers of their own laws, by means of their [British] representatives” (55)—a representation that the revolutionaries vigorously contested—and hence Crèvecoeur suggests, again, that there were no reasons for the Revolution in free, happy, and independent British America. In addition, he returns to the positive idea of space and its paradoxical contribution to “useful” American subjects: “our distance from Europe, far from diminishing rather adds to, our usefulness in consequence as men and subjects.” Crèvecoeur implies that distance from the mother country meant that the colonists were primarily left alone and consequently were grateful subjects who happily enjoyed contributing to the “trade and dominion of our mother-country.” As useful exporters to the mother country, “Colonists are therefore intitled to the consideration due to the most useful subjects” (55). When the German immigrant arrives in Pennsylvania, he becomes “an American, a Pennsylvanian, an English subject” (58).

Crèvecoeur continually circles back to the idea that the true American is a happy and free British “subject.” Having arrived in America and having experienced a “great metamorphosis” into an American, the
immigrant, “with a heart-felt gratitude,” looks “toward that east, toward that insular [i.e. English] government from whose wisdom all his new felicity is derived, and under whose wings and protection he now lives. These reflections constitute him the good man and the good subject” (59; my emphasis). Enabled “to partake of our great labours and felicity,” the Americanized immigrant is an “industrious” and “happy” subject in Crèvecoeur’s intertwined myths of the American dream and work ethic (59).

The myths and countermyths coalesce in the last part of letter three, just before the extended narrative of Andrew the Hebridean and just before the voice of Nature tells the “distressed European” that she will confer on him “ease and independence” if he will be honest, industrious, and grateful “to that government, that philanthropic government, which has collected here so many men and made them happy”—the benevolent English government that has made possible the life, liberty, and happiness of prerevolutionary British America (66). Just before this declaration of Anglo-American dependence, Crèvecoeur contrasts the Scotch and Irish in America. The discussion is favorable to the Scots who are praised for their industry and frugality in comparison to the Irish who “do not prosper so well; they love to drink and to quarrel; they are litigious, and soon take to the gun, which is the ruin of everything” (60, 61). Although the lack of Irish industry in America is traced to the “ancient conquest” of their land by the English (61), there is a political significance to the superiority of the Scotch over the Irish in America.

In this context, I need to repeat a historical point about the Scots in America: By the time of the Revolution, the Scots had been unpopular in America for more than two decades. Specifically, John Stuart, the third earl of Bute, was a Scotsman who had been prime minister (1762–1763) under George III and was, in America, widely believed to be behind any policy that the colonists thought was unfavorable to their country, even after he was compelled to resign (April 1763) and after George Grenville made the king promise (May 1765) that he would neither employ Bute in office nor seek his counsel. In addition, the Scots were known for their vigorous implementation of English foreign policy and had, in fact, been strong supporters of English dominion in America during the Revolution. In America the Scots were represented as English agents or sympathizers. Thus, when Crèvecoeur privileges the Scots over the Irish, he is making a political point, since the Irish, in contrast, had always been viewed by the English as barbarous, rebellious subjects. The fact that many of the Irish had settled in New England, cradle of the Revolution, might also have some bearing on Crèvecoeur’s contrast.

The Irish, in fact, significantly resemble the backwoodsmen who are also idle and querulous, given to bouts of drunkenness, and who also take up the “gun” (46, 51). The Irish are additionally “litigious” (61), which was previously one of the characteristics of the “good” Americans: “As freemen they will be litigious” (46). The significance of all this is the suggestion that the backwoodsmen and the Irish represent barbarous American rebellion in the frontier and the cities and that American litigiousness was a contributing cause of the Revolution (all those legal petitions and protests)—a point that Crèvecoeur later stresses. The implicit contrast between the good colonial American subjects and the unruly, disobedient, and implicitly “bad” Americans who take up the “gun” and suggestively rebel against their mother country signifies that the antagonistic myths of letter three constitute, among other things, a deconstruction of the Revolution. In this context, the narrator’s former comment that anyone who wishes to see America “in its proper light, and to have of true idea of its feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments, must visit our expanded line of frontiers” (47) retrospectively takes on the following accumulated significance: the potential for returning to America’s barbarous origins was activated by the Revolution that caused the Americans to regress backwards and hence lose their prelapsarian connection to the mother country and, consequently, to lose the colonial American Paradise.

The dialectic myths of letter three compel us to read them against each other. The myths of newness, space, and mixing make sense in the context in which Crèvecoeur frames them: the “good” Americans existing in the protective colonial time and space that guarantee their freedom and happiness and the “bad” Americans existing in a space and time associated with remote, barbaric origins that seemingly prefigure the relapse into the savagery that the Revolution portends. That Crèvecoeur actually wrote various letters during the Revolution meant that he could create the fiction of a prelapsarian colonial America while simultaneously suggesting that the American Paradise could be destroyed or transformed into its opposite—the postlapsarian world of letter twelve. Indeed, this is, as we will see, precisely what happens in letter twelve: the positive
myths of letter three are inverted and revised into a commentary on the Revolution’s malignant significance. In the interval between letters three and twelve, however, Crévecoeur focuses on creating a myth of colonial, prelapsarian British America represented by the island of Nantucket.

It is not initially clear why Crévecoeur chooses to spend four letters on Nantucket (numbers four, five, seven, and eight) and one on Martha’s Vineyard (number six), another island fifteen miles west of Nantucket. Nor is it initially clear why Crévecoeur would make Nantucket, ceded by New York to Massachusetts in 1692, the paradigm of prerevolutionary happiness. But it eventually becomes clear, as we will see, that he privileges colonial Nantucket in order to contrast it implicitly with revolutionary Massachusetts.

Crévecoeur commences letter four by reintroducing the theme of American happiness and ends climactically in Nantucket: oppressed people will continue to become acquainted with “the happiness we enjoy,” as the narrator again emphasizes how “happy” the Americans are “having fortunately escaped the miseries which attended our fathers!” But the “spot” that he wants to celebrate “seems to have been inhabited merely to prove what mankind can do when happily governed!”—and it is the “happy settlement” of Nantucket that now centers his attention (83, 84, 85). The repeated references to American happiness are not, as I have suggested, coincidental, since they allusively evoke and oppose the Declaration’s proposal that the British were destroying American independence and happiness.

Nantucket’s linkage with Massachusetts initially puts it in a suggestive, rebellious sphere, since Massachusetts marks the origin of the Revolution. But Crévecoeur chooses Nantucket precisely because of its “closeness” to and independence from Massachusetts. Hence it exists as an implicit and allusive contrast to the revolutionary colony. The colonial people of Nantucket have life, liberty, and happiness and hence contradict the assertions of American Patriots. The opening paragraph, in fact, establishes this allusive theme: “The greatest compliment that can be paid to the best of kings, to the wisest ministers, or the most patriotic rulers, is to think, that the reformation of political abuses and the happiness of their people, are the primary objects of their attention” (83). Since the rest of the paragraph maintains that such is not the case in Europe, the reference to “the best of kings,” the traditional English phrase for the British king, in this case, George III, and the celebration of American freedom and happiness allusively contradict the Revolution’s polemical raison d’être. That the Americans are “happily governed” (84) continues Crévecoeur’s allusive argument that the Revolution, in fact, destroyed America’s independence and happiness. The establishment of general American happiness leads into his discussion of the specific independence and happiness of Nantucket.

In this context, it is significant that Nantucket is governed by the Quakers (Quakers had settled Nantucket in 1659): “Two-thirds of the magistrates … are of the society of Friends” (99). This distinguishes Nantucket religiously and politically from the rest of Massachusetts, which was essentially Congregationalist. Moreover, the history of the Quakers in Massachusetts allusively underwrites Crévecoeur’s narrative, for the Quakers had first appeared in Boston in 1656, where they were immediately persecuted and expelled. In May 1658 Massachusetts banned Quaker meetings, and in October the death penalty was imposed for any Quakers returning after the expulsion. From October 1659 to March 1661, four Quakers were executed by hanging, and this is one of the reasons that the Quakers subsequently expanded their activity in Pennsylvania. In other words, there was a Congregationalist/Quaker divide from the very beginning of the Society of Friends arrival in Massachusetts. That the Quakers were also associated with both pacifism and opposition to the Revolution figures, as I have suggested, into Crévecoeur’s strategy of subversion.

In addition, that the people of Nantucket “are protected by a government which demands but little for its protection” and that they are “permitted to enjoy a system of rational laws founded on perfect freedom” signifies that the “mildness and humanity of such a government necessarily implies that confidence which is the source of the most arduous undertakings and permanent success” (86). The protection the mild government affords is locally Quaker government but implicitly the English government as well, and hence Crévecoeur clearly keeps Nantucket out of Massachusetts’s ostensible orbit. Nantucket’s geographical closeness to Massachusetts thematically illustrates the prerevolutionary happiness of England’s colonial subjects despite the prerevolutionary protests of Massachusetts. For instance, the reference to the “little” that is demanded for the government’s protection allusively crystallizes the central contention between England and her colonies following the French and Indian War (1754–1763): the English insisting that the Colonies pay an exiguous fair share for England’s protection and the Colonies protesting that England was seeking pretexts for new forms of oppression, all of which sowed the seeds leading to the Revolution. Crévecoeur notably takes the British perspective—England demanded “little” for her protection—and since the narrator...
seems to speak for the people of Nantucket, he aligns them with the British position. Indeed, Crèvecoeur concludes the letter by reiterating the British perspective on the Colonies’ defense: “A collector from Boston is the only king’s officer who appears on the shores to receive the trifling duties which this community owe to those who protect them, and under the shadow of whose wings they navigate to all parts of the world” (107). Note that Crèvecoeur also credits the British Navy for protecting American commerce, the ships of which sail “under the shadow of British “wings,” perhaps an allusion to the opening of Edward Waller’s patriotic “To the King on his Navy” (1645): “Where’er thy navy spreads her canvas wings / Homage to thee, and peace to all, she brings.” At any rate, such a representation contextually contradicts Patriot remonstrations that the English were, in fact, prohibiting American commerce and using their navy to intimidate and oppress Americans.

Letter five, in contrast, seemingly has nothing to do with the American Revolution. The discussion of whaling, however, is suggestively allegorical. Crèvecoeur emphasizes the discrepancy between the slender whaleboat and its diminutive occupants compared to the ferocious size of the whale:

It may appear strange to you, that so slender a vessel as an American whale-boat, containing six diminutive beings, should dare to pursue and to attack, in its native element, the largest and strongest fish that nature has created. Yet, by the exertions of an admirable dexterity, improved by a long practice, in which these people are become superior to any other whale-men, by knowing the temper of the whale after her first movement, and by many other useful observations, they seldom failed to harpoon it, and to bring the huge leviathan on the shores (110).

It is difficult not to read this allegorically, especially since the narrator seems to emphasize that we read between the lines by putting the American whale-boat in italics. Thus, the undersized and underestimated Americans defeat the British nation—the leviathan—in its own “native element,” a phrase usually associated with British maritime superiority. John Trumbull, for instance, in his mock-epic poem, M’Fingal (1776–1782), refers to England’s “boasted element, the sea” (4. 286). In his three-volume Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828 (Edinburg and London, 1829), Basil Hall, a British naval officer from Scotland, traveler, and writer, quotes an anonymous member of the House of Representatives boasting about an American naval victory in the War of Independence: “By it we became the conquerors of the conquerors of the world, and this, too, on that very element which they had hitherto considered as so peculiarly the element of their glory” (3. 61). Although the suggestion that the Americans have defeated the British Navy in its “own element” is exaggerated and unhistorical, England’s final defeat is appropriately “on the shores” of the American land, as the whale is dragged ashore. The pesky whalers could thus refer to American privateers, specifically the New Englanders, who wrecked havoc on British ships: by 1783, 2,000 American privateers were involved in the capture of 3,386 British vessels. Enabled to purchase even “larger vessels” (i.e., the French Navy), the Americans pursue the (English) whales “farther,” forcing them to quit “their coasts” (110–11). American whale ships were, in fact, used as cruisers: armed ships that captured or plundered enemy ships. Crèvecoeur places the American accomplishment in the context of their national manhood: “Such were their feeble beginnings, such the infancy and the progress of their maritime schemes; such is now the degree of boldness and activity to which they are arrived in their manhood” (111). Patriot writers, Paine in particular, had put the struggle against England in the context of America coming into national manhood.22

While the passage seems to be celebrating the American Revolution rather than subverting it, Crèvecoeur may be recording the perception of the world turned upside down, as a third-rate power defeats the strongest nation on earth. Indeed, the Americans are the wily aggressors, chasing the pitiful English whales from their coasts, although what the English whales are doing on their coasts is also allusively present. And while the whalers are technically the Nantucket seamen and the people of Nantucket who have been celebrated for their loyal connection to England, Crèvecoeur may be exploiting the fiction by which the revolutionary present always informs the prerevolutionary past. If this is the case, then the paradigm of the Anglo-American relation, Nantucket and its loyal people, is allegorically turned upside down: the Revolution destroyed the harmonious Anglo-American connection. Indeed, the Letters are not uniformly Loyalist, and it may also be that Crèvecoeur is reluctantly acknowledging his ambivalent American side by camouflaging the scene in an allegory that, nevertheless, points attention to itself. The allegory, however, was preceded by his
homage to the British Navy that protects the implicit whalers who sailed under the protection of its “wings,” so the passage illustrates the ideological ambivalence and ambiguity by which Crèvecoeur tries to navigate his covert theme.

Letter six deals with the island of Martha’s Vineyard and is only tangentially concerned with the Revolution. The letter, however, has some conspicuous historical inaccuracies, and it is possible that Crèvecoeur purposely misstates facts in order to subvert ironically what is being stated. For instance, the narrator asserts that the people of New England, in contrast to other colonies, had treated the native Indians honorably and well. Indeed, New England’s people “are remarkable for the honesty with which they have fulfilled, all over that province, those antient covenants which in many others have been disregarded, to the scandal of those governments” (115). The well-established fact, however, was that the people of New England were continuously warring with the indigenous native tribes, and Massachusetts particularly was known for its antipathy, culminating in its prosecution of King Phillip’s War (1675–1676)—the war that definitively destroyed indigenous Indian power in New England. In addition, New England’s Indian tribes had long complained that the white colonists had not lived up to their treaties and had violated or broken them in a variety of ways. Since the antipathy between New England and its indigenous Indian tribes was well known in the eighteenth century, it is possible that Crèvecoeur was stating what was clearly untrue as a way of indicating that any praise of New England was meant to be read ironically. The narrator is in fact, at times, purposefully unreliable.23

In the same letter, for example, he states that Presbyterianism “is the establish religion of Massachusetts” (115), when any informed person knew that Congregationalism was the established religion. But by making Presbyterianism the established religion, Crèvecoeur makes a subversive political point. The context of this point is the English Civil War of the 1640s, which culminated in the decapitation of Charles I in 1649. The Presbyterian religion was the established religion of Scotland, and Scotland’s participation in the war was crucial in the destruction of the monarchy. In fact, as everyone knew in the eighteenth century, the Scots tried to impose the Presbyterian religion on England as a condition for their support of the English Dissenters’ war against King and Church: The Solemn League and Covenant (5 February 1644), issued from the English Parliament, in conjunction with the Scottish Covenanters attempt to enforce Presbyterianism on England and Wales. The Independents, who included those who would be known as Congregationalists, vigorously opposed this establishment. After the Restoration (1660), Presbyterians were represented by conservatives as iconoclastic, left-wing, religious, regicidal fanatics. Crèvecoeur, in effect, projects Presbyterianism onto Massachusetts and hence suggests that the violent politico-religious extremism of the Civil War had found a new breeding place in Massachusetts. Since New England was associated with Protestant Dissenters and since the Patriots had publicly identified with the regicidal, religious politics of the 1640s, and since both sides (Patriots and Loyalists) referred to the conflict as a “civil war,” Crèvecoeur, in effect, smears Massachusetts with the radical Presbyterian label.24 Those who were ignorant of Massachusetts’s veritable established religion would take the association to heart, and those who knew better would read the error politically: Massachusetts was, in effect, a rebellious, political religious colony opposed to the English church and state.25

It is true that Crèvecoeur insists that Presbyterians also inhabit Nantucket where they are the second major population after the Quakers and that they predominate in Martha’s Vineyard (115), but the point seems to be the positive religious mixing in tolerant Nantucket where there is no extreme religious zeal and the neighborly relations that exist in Martha’s Vineyard between the Presbyterians and Indians. There is a thematic symmetry in the two islands that are related but not connected to the Massachusetts mainland: there is no suggestive Protestant, political dissent in suggestive contrast to the rest of New England. Like the people of Nantucket, the citizens of Martha’s Vineyard “live free and independent under the mildest government” (126)—the English government celebrated by Crèvecoeur throughout the Letters.

In letter seven Crèvecoeur returns to establish Nantucket as the preeminent American colonial paradise. This American paradise, however, lacks the fertile land that characterized the general description of America in letter three. In fact, Crèvecoeur emphasizes the sparseness of the land and the simple, rustic lifestyle of its inhabitants. Crèvecoeur’s recognizable eighteenth-century context is the critique of luxury—the voluptuous, enervating lifestyle of a consumer society based on commerce, speculation, and deficit spending. Luxury, according to this critique, softened and corrupted a people, making them “effeminate” and prone to moral decay. The critique of luxury had been in place for centuries and was, in the eighteenth century, employed by
both the Left and Right in England and America against the dominant Whig oligarchy in England. Crèvecoeur contrasts Nantucket with the majority of American cities. Thus, the ironically named settlement of New-Garden, North Carolina, famous for “the softness of its climate” and “the fecundity of its soil,” actually produces “too much … idleness and the effeminacy; for great is the luxuriance of that part of America” (130). The “New-Garden” becomes the luxurious antitype of the true colonial garden in Nantucket. The narrator consequently values Nantucket as “a country of health, labour, and strong activity … more than greater opulence and voluptuous ease” (131).

Consisting of a harmonious mix of Quakers and Presbyterians, unlike the rest of Massachusetts which supposedly has only Presbyterians (136–37), Nantucket flourishes because it has a bare minimum of lawyers, priests, and “medical professors”—all of whom Crèvecoeur suggests corrupt and enervate a society. Thus, Nantucket has only one Presbyterian priest (the Quakers have no priests), “two medical professors,” and only one lawyer (133, 135). Nantucket’s limitation of all these means that it has no “luxury,” and Crèvecoeur subtly contrasts the pure colonial island with the rest of America, especially Massachusetts: the island and people of Nantucket “are more detached from the rest, more distinct in their manners as well as in the nature of the business they pursue, and more unconnected with the populous province to which they belong” (136).

The absence of lawyers is especially telling. We will remember that in letter three one of the characteristics of the Americans was their litigiousness (46). In letter seven, however, Crèvecoeur vigorously attacks lawyers in America for promoting “litigiousness” (135), corrupting the country, and causing it to lose its happiness and independence: like the Protestant Reformation, “a reformation equally useful is now wanted, to relieve us from the shameful shackles and oppressive burthen under which we groan.” Such a legal reformation is needed, since “mankind” is not “too happy” (136). Crèvecoeur is hence subtly qualifying and, in effect, revising parts of letter three (America as an abundant, fertile land and the vigorous litigiousness of free men). Nantucket emerges as that which the rest of America is not and, hence, the colonial example of a free and happy British America. The attack on lawyers (135–36) is consequently related to the Revolution that has, Crèvecoeur suggests, destroyed American independence and happiness.

The sudden critique of America litigiousness is in allusive context of the general English perception that American lawyers had contributed to the outbreak of the Revolution (all those legal petitions and protests) and that America’s statesmen and lawyers had convinced happy people that they were, in fact, unhappy. Edmund Burke’s famous Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775), a speech Crèvecoeur most likely read, is illustrative. Just after discussing how the Protestant Dissenters in America contributed to the spirit of rebellion, Burke adds the following comments on the spirit of law in America:

Permit me, Sir, up to add another circumstance in our Colonies, which contributes no mean part towards the growth and effect of this untractable spirit. … In no country perhaps in the world is the law so general a study. The profession itself is numerous and powerful; and in the provinces it takes the lead. The greater number of the Deputies sent to the Congress were Lawyers. But all who read, and most do read, endeavour to obtain some smattering in that science. I have been told by an eminent Bookseller, that in no branch of his business, after tracts of popular devotion, were so many books as those on the Law exported to the Plantations. The Colonists have now fallen into the way of printing them for their own use …. General Gage marks out this disposition very particularly in a letter on your table. He states, that all the people in his government are lawyers, or smatterers in law; and that in Boston they have been enabled, by successful chicane, wholly to evade many parts of one of your capital penal constitutions … when great honours and great emoluments do not win over [the law] to the service of the state, it is a formidable adversary to government. If the spirit be not tamed and broken by these happy methods, it is stubborn and litigious…. [Law] renders men acute, inquisitive, dextrous, prompt in attack, ready in defense, full of resources. In other countries, the people, more simple and of a less mercurial cast, judge of an ill principle in government only by an actual grievance: here they anticipate the evil, and judge of the pressure of the grievance by the badness of the principle. They augur misgovernment at a distance; and sniff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze. 27

It is this textual context, I suggest, that underwrites Crèvecoeur’s comments about the “litigious” spirit of American law and its lawyers—“a set of men so dangerous!” (135).

Thus, it is pertinent that he proceeds to distinguish law in Nantucket from that practiced in the rest to the country, especially Massachusetts. The civil code in Nantucket “is so light, that it is never felt.” Its happy and peaceful people never “apply to the law either for redress or assistance.” The principal benefits of law in Nantucket provide “the general protection of individuals, and this protection is purchased by the most moderate taxes, which are cheerfully paid, and by the trifling duties incident in the course of their lawful
trade.” Their municipal regulations are uncomplicated “because they are more detached from the rest, more distinct in their manners as well as in the nature of the business they pursue, and more unconnected with the populous province [Massachusetts] to which they belong” (136). Note that the moderate taxes in conjunction with the protective British law contribute to the Nantucket people’s happiness, in allusive contrast to the revolutionaries who had specifically contended that English taxation was excessive and English laws oppressive. Similarly, Crévecoeur concludes letter seven celebrating Nantucket for having no slavery, “whilst slavery prevails all around them,” and contrasting its people’s “happiness” with the allusive revolutionary commotion that is “all around” Massachusetts: “Happy the people who are subject to so mild a government! Happy the government which has to rule over such harmless and such industrious subjects!” Even when the narrator then claims that all of America is a “one diffusive scene of happiness,” a “happiness” significantly “interrupted … by our spirit of “litigiousness,”” the colonial felicity of Nantucket is allusively contrasted to the revolutionary war that is convulsing America: “May the citizens of Nantucket dwell long here in uninterrupted peace, undisturbed either by the waves of the surrounding element, or the political commotions which sometimes agitate our continent!” (136, 137). Although he employs the fiction that this and other letters are written before 1775, the presence of the real historical Revolution reverberates through the Letters.

The next letter (number eight) dealing with the “Peculiar Customs At Nantucket” actually constitutes a transitional chapter leading to letter nine and Charleston, a city meant to be contrasted with Nantucket’s colonial bliss. Crévecoeur reiterates some of his previously established themes: the absence of luxury in Nantucket, its Quaker influence, and its “unmixed English breed.” It is significant that the happiest place in America is purely English and that everyone calls each other “cousin, uncle, or aunt,” figuratively forming “the image of a large family” (145). The Revolution and the national family breakup implicitly clash with one of the last glimpses of prerevolutionary America before the revolutionary conflagration of letter twelve. The eighteenth-century reader would continually have the two Americas before him, whether implicitly within the text or within his own mind where the contemporaneous Revolution would interact with the text. Letter eight appropriately ends with the narrator’s tribute to the “substantial happiness” that exists in Nantucket where no one suffers “oppression either from government or religion”—suggesting again that there were no true preexisting causes for the Revolution. The four chapters devoted to the prelapsarian bliss of Nantucket form a contrast to the prefiguring “fall” represented by the slave world of Charleston, South Carolina.

Charleston, in letter nine, is associated with luxury and slavery and hence exists in conspicuous contrast to the absence of both in Nantucket. Crévecoeur compares Charleston with Lima, Peru to connect empires of luxury based on slavery (151–52). Thus, he allusively associates Charleston with Catholic Spain and its conquest of the Incas—a familiar theme in eighteenth-century Anglo-American discourse. The transition from Anglo-Nantucket to slave-marred Charleston is not coincidental, for Charleston was a city loyal to the Revolution, a city that had resisted British troops and that had been subsequently occupied. Crévecoeur chooses Charleston to illustrate the geography of rebellion and the loss of happiness and freedom. Although the “great contrast” between the planters and the slaves (153) seems to be between the happiness of the one and the misery of the other, Crévecoeur makes it clear that a society divided against itself is decadent and corrupt. To make sure the reader understands the significant distinction between British Nantucket and the South Carolina that will fall (but is already fallen) into the Revolution, Crévecoeur emphasizes that, along with the slave-owning planters and the merchants who sell the slaves, the other “principal” class is the lawyers (152)—a “class” that had been characterized as dangerous to America in letter seven (135–36). In that passage, I suggested that Crévecoeur was commenting about the role of lawyers in the Revolution, and in letter nine he continues to allude to their participation in the destruction of the country: “These men are more properly law-givers than interpreters of the law, and have united here, as well as in most other provinces, the skill and dexterity of the scribe with the power and ambition of the prince: who can tell where this may lead in a future day?” (152–53; my emphasis).

This rhetorically leading question directs the reader to the Revolution that has already conspicuously materialized. There is an obvious parallel between the themes of legal and racial slavery (both whites and blacks are and “will be” enslaved), and the parallel allusively refers back to the commentary in letter seven, where the narrator also discusses lawyers and then slavery (135, 137). Similarly, just as a narrator had argued that lawyers and “litigiousness” endangered America (135), so he notes, in letter nine, that the “nature of our laws, and the spirit of freedom which often tends to make us litigious, must necessarily throw the greatest
part of the property of the colonies into the hands of these gentlemen,” who, in another century, “will possess in the north what now the [Catholic] church possesses in Peru and Mexico” (153). In other words, the lawyers, via the Revolution, will possess America, and the deliberate blurring of American slavery with Spanish slavery makes the Revolution a reactionary revolt against the preestablished happiness and freedom of British America.

Although Crèvecoeur also mentions the “West-Indians,” that is, those English men who have made their fortunes from slavery there but who return to Charleston sick and exhausted (151), hence ascribing an English origin to slavery in the New World, the covert context is the Revolution that continues the heritage of slavery after America has broken its connection to the mother country. Thus, the references to slavery in a book supposedly celebrating America is in the context of ubiquitous anti-American English discourse: the English had repeatedly noted the irony of the Americans who were supposedly seeking liberty while they were simultaneously enslaving Africans. Consequently, when the narrator discusses how the great empires were founded on slave labor, he begins with “the Lacedemonians themselves, those great assertors of liberty,” who had enslaved the Helots (158; my emphasis). Given the context of the Revolution, it is difficult not to read that italicized phrase as ironically applying to “those great assertors” of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In fact, Crèvecoeur begins to initiate, in letter nine, a process that culminates in letter twelve: the inversion of the celebrated Americans in letter three. For instance, the European immigrants who seek freedom in America, in letter three, are, in letter nine, the Africans “[f]orced from their native country” (157). The contrast, in fact, subverts one of the foundation myths of letter three: America the land of the free becomes the alien home of the enslaved. The concluding scene of the dying slave suspended in the cage has, as most readers recognize, significance beyond its topical context. Just before that scene, the narrator had provided a pessimistic overview of human history that clashes with the optimism of the Anglo-American letters. Even Nature, celebrated in letter three, becomes a destructive force, as the narrator pointedly leads into a catalogue of its terrors: “111. the moments of our philanthropy we often talk of an indulgent Nature, a kind Parent, who, for the benefit of mankind … has spread peculiar blessings in each climate” (160). This is, of course, an allusion to letter three and the voice of Nature, “our great parent,” who promises the recently arrived immigrant food, land, “ease and independence,” if he will gratefully acknowledge “the government, that philanthropic government, which has collected here so many men and made them happy” (66; my emphasis).

But the import of letter nine also questions the Declaration’s “happiness” in anticipation of letter twelve. The narrator observes that what “little political felicity is to be met with here and there has cost oceans of blood to purchase; as if good was never to be the portion of unhappy man … Where do you conceive, then, that nature intended we should be happy?” (162, 163). Even though the narrator’s comments are in the context of the general, miserable condition of humanity, his language ironically evokes the themes of Patriot America. Thus, even when the discussion seems to be tangential or innocuous, Crèvecoeur is often allusively inscribing the mythic “fall” of America.

This is particularly the case of letter ten, which deals with, among other things, snakes. The narrator’s discussion concerns a variety of dangerous snakes in America, and it is striking that Crèvecoeur relies on exaggerated folklore rather than the natural facts that he himself would have observed in America. Thus, a man bitten by a copperhead becomes mad and thrusts and hisses just like the snake that bit him, and the black snake, able to climb trees and move as fast as a horse, mesmerizes its victim with the power of its eyes (166, 169). The reversion to folklore suggests that we are to read this section mythically—snakes in America foreshadow the Fall of the American garden. The section on rattlesnakes (167–69), for instance, would be notable for an audience who knew that rattlesnakes adorned various American revolutionary flags—the most famous bearing the motto “Don’t tread on me.” In addition, the rattlesnake’s image symbolized revolutionary America: it was used “on paper currency and uniform buttons”; John Paul Jones “used the rattlesnakes flag on the Alfred,” and South Carolina adopted the rattlesnake on its banner. One of the most successful American privateers was named the Rattlesnake, taking “prizes worth $1 million in a single cruise against British trade in the Baltic.” Thus, the British associated rattlesnakes with both America and the Americans. Dr. Johnson, for instance, in his anti-American pamphlet “Taxation, No Tyranny” (1775), sarcastically refers.
to America as a country consisting of three million people, “not of men merely, but of Whigs fierce for liberty, and disdainful of dominion,” multiplying “with the fecundity of their own rattlesnakes, so that every quarter of a century doubles their numbers.”

More to the point with regard to mythic imagery, the ominous black snakes “present themselves half in the reptile state, half erect. Their eyes and their heads, in the erect posture, appear to great advantage: the former display a fire which I have often admired, and it is by these they are enabled to fascinate birds and squirrels” (169). The emphasis on the snakes’ “erect” posture and their fiery eyes allusively evokes Milton’s description of Satan in Eden. In book nine of Paradise Lost, Satan takes the form of a snake and pursues Eve, moving “erect / Amidst his circling spires”—his “carbuncle” (red) eyes flashing—he seeks to “lure her eye” (11. 500–2, 518). Eve is soon entranced and mesmerized by Satan’s seductive story. In letter ten, the satanic revolutionary snake, the New World’s dangerous, mesmerizing Tempter, underwrites the narrative’s surface story. Even American hummingbirds “tear and lacerate flowers into a hundred pieces”: “they are the most irascible of the feathered tribe” (170), like the irascible Americans themselves. In the fallen world of American Nature, Crèvecoeur concludes with the strange story of the death struggle between a black snake and a “water-snake” (171–72).

Although the passage can be dismissed as more local lore and color, it bears a connecting resemblance to Crèvecoeur’s discussion of the American whaleboat that attacks and kills the “leviathan” in letter five (110). I suggested that that discussion is actually an allegory of the aggressive Americans who attack the more powerful English in their “native element” (110). Now compare the battle of snakes in letter ten. The black snake, already allusively compared to Satan, is the aggressor, attacking the water snake, which holds its own, until it is ironically defeated and drowned in its own native element (172). If the water snake represents England and the satanic black snake revolutionary America, the allegory can be read as a celebration or a lament for the “forthcoming” fall. All these allusive snakes in America, however, seem poised to suggest that the Revolution itself, in its various satanic forms, was the mesmerizing Tempter in the American garden. Since Crèvecoeur was, on one level, cashing in on the antiwar sentiment in England, as well as the prorevolutionary enthusiasm in America, the allusions and allegories allowed him to subvert the surface story he was telling.

Letter eleven marks a pointed contrast to the potential fall and its realization in letter twelve. Indeed, it marks our last view of prelapsarian, British America before the Fall, in pacifist, Quaker Pennsylvania. The narrator is a fictional Russian visitor who has come to the farm of John Bertram, that is, John Bartram (1699–1777), the “Celebrated Pennsylvania Botanist” (173). Bertram, of course, is a Quaker, and the narrator expands on the theme of Pennsylvanian “happiness.” Thus, there is “a diffusion of happiness … in every part; happiness which is established on the broadest basis.” Indeed, Pennsylvania is the best of all the American provinces, and the Russian visitor (Iwan) has come to see Bertram’s celebrated “garden” (173–74). Pennsylvania, in other words, represents the American Garden just before the Fall, as Iwan ecstatically exclaims, “Happy the country where nature has bestowed such rich treasures … happy the country which is cultivated by a society of men, whose application and taste lead them to prosecute and accomplish useful works” (176, 179). Crèvecoeur, in effect, returns to the language and themes of the earlier letters, in which the reader is given a last glimpse of happy, colonial America. In the narrative, Bertram has followed General Bouquet, the successful British officer in the French and Indian War (1754–1760), to Pittsburgh in order to explore its flora and fauna, and he has “been employed by the King of England to visit the two Floridas” (177). The point is that the Pennsylvania American farmer is in complete harmony with the mother country, and this is why he and Pennsylvania are flourishing. When Iwan exclaims, “O America! … thou knowest not as yet the whole extent of thy happiness” (179), the reader is meant to visualize the contrast between a happy, unfallen America and the unhappy, postlapsarian America of the revolutionary era.

Certainly the happiness of the Declaration is again allusively being evoked to remind the Americans of the happiness they had supposedly lost. And as Iwan predicts that Russia and America will bring forth “revolutions” in the future (175), our last glimpse of Pennsylvania as the unfallen America that has liberated its slaves like the Quakers of Nantucket (182–84) is precisely a world before the Revolution—a time that the Russian remembers as his “golden days” (186). The contrast between these two dialectic times culminates in the thematic contrasts of letter twelve.

Crèvecoeur, in fact, constructs letter twelve to be read in the context of letter three. While the problem of overemphasizing letter three as the representative letter of Crèvecoeur’s collection has been discussed by
critics, I want to illustrate how Crèvecoeur intends letter twelve to be read against letter three, resulting in an intratextual dialogue by which letter twelve subverts and undermines its predecessor. The theme of happiness, for instance, established in letter three with reference to the Declaration of Independence is, in letter twelve, now inverted in an America where there is no happiness. Thus, the narrator, the new frontiersman, laments “the dreadful scenes to which I have been witness; therefore never can I be happy! Happy! Why would I mention that sweet, that enchanting, word? Once happiness was our portion; now it is gone from us, and I am afraid not to be enjoyed again by the present generation” (187). Since this letter deals specifically with the American Revolution, the “present generation” is precisely the revolutionary generation of Americans that lost their happiness in the rebellion. The narrator states this more clearly when he bemoans being torn in his allegiance to his mother country and his fear of revolutionary innovations: “I am divided between the respect I feel for the antient connection and the fear of innovations, with the consequence of which I am not well acquainted, as they are embraced by my own countrymen. I am conscious that I was happy before this unfortunate revolution. I feel that I am no longer so; therefore I regret the change” (191).

While he misses the ancient connection with England and fears the iconoclastic innovations created by the Revolution and supported by his countrymen, the regnant fact is that he admits he was happy before the Revolution and hence regrets the “change” the “unfortunate” Revolution has engendered: the American farmer was a happy colonial subject before the Revolution, suggesting again that there was no real cause or reason for the American Revolution.

When the narrator laments that he is no longer “connected” to English society and that he “finds himself surrounded by a convulsed and a half-dissolved one” (187), Crèvecoeur ironically evokes the Declaration’s assertion that the American people have “dissolv[ed] the political bonds which have connected them with another” people and that “all political connection between” the thirteen colonies “and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved” (Declaration, paragraphs one and thirty-two). In Crèvecoeur’s reading, the tragic dissolution results in the loss of life, liberty, and happiness. Likewise, the narrator complains that “before these calamitous times,” he never “studied on what the security of my life and the foundation of my prosperity were established” (since he already had them, 188)—the “foundation” of which the Declaration claims to have made self-evident. Crèvecoeur ironically has the Declaration allusively make his antirevolutionary points by inverting its propositions: the Revolution itself destroyed life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Moreover, Crèvecoeur emphasizes the inversion of the happy colonial world by reevoking the pejorative myths of letter three and making them the predominant realities of letter twelve. For instance, the narrator, in letter three, who had criticized the backwoodsmen as the “impure,” bad Americans (47, 52), is himself suddenly a frontiersman and is hence in the very woods that he previously linked to savagery and barbarity (46, 51, 53). In addition, the narrator plans to have his family escape to the Indian “woods” where he and they will be safe from the ravages of the war (203, 206, 209, 210, 213, 215). The Revolution, in other words, has reduced him to the very state that he had previously deplored. Letter twelve is titled “Distresses of a Frontier-Man,” and the narrator rhetorically asks what “are we in the great scale of events, we poor defenseless frontier-inhabitants?” He later refers to himself as “a poor frontier-inhabitant” (193, 194). In the “great scale of events” (193)—as in the “course of human events”—“we” count for very little, especially since the narrator had previously stated that he who wished to see America “in its proper light, and to have a true idea of its feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments, must visit our extended line of frontiers, where the last settlers dwell” (47; my emphasis). Living on the frontier, the narrator of letter twelve has “built many” quirns (an apparatus for grinding com between two flat stones) “for our poor back settlers” (210). Suddenly the narrator is not only in the very place (the wild woods) and pejorative position (a backwoods frontiersman), but the Revolution has allusively returned him and America to “its feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments.” That the narrator insists that he prefers to be there rather than in the space occupied by the bellicose Anglo-Americans intensifies the ironic inversions of letter three.

For instance, the positive American space that kept Americans separated from European intolerance and American children removed from their religiously zealous parents is now pejorative space. The houses of the distressed frontiersman and the people of “our settlement” are “at a considerable distance from each other,” thus exposing them to attacks from “our dreadful enemy” (most likely the Indians, although the sentence is ambiguous, 188). If the narrator attaches himself “to the mother-country, which is 3000 miles from me,” then he will become “an enemy to my own region” (191). We will remember, in contrast, that in letter three the
distance of the mother country from America was positive (55), but here the absence of the mother country guarantees massacres, suggesting that he wishes the mother country were metaphorically “here.” But letter twelve suggests that the Revolution has also barbarized the English. Thus, while the Revolution is dangerously immediate, the “cool, the distant, [English] spectator, placed in safety, may arraign” the narrator “for ingratitude” and can call him “by the most opprobrious names” (193). American “ingratitude” was, of course, a perennial theme in British anti-American discourse. Ambiguous “ruffians” (contextually the Indian allies of the English), “acting at such a distance from the eyes of any superior,” enact a “hard” fate on their victims (195; similarly, in letter three, the barbaric backwoodsmen are “beyond the reach of government,” 46).

Moreover, England “herself first inspired the most unhappy citizens of our remote districts with the thoughts of shedding the blood of those whom they used to call by the name of friends and brethren” (197). Note the lexical connection, since “the unhappy citizens of our remote districts” deliberately echoes the narrator’s characterization of the “bad” citizens in letter three: “When discord, want of unity and friendship, when either drunkenness or idleness prevail in such remote districts, contention, inactivity, and wretchedness, must ensue” (46, my emphasis). Crèvecoeur hence suggests that the remote, barbaric woodsmen, the bad Americans of letter three, have supported the British in their slaughter of the “good” Americans, and the narrator is compelled to write a letter explaining his reasons for his family’s migration, lest his “countrymen should think” that he has “gone to join the incendiaries of our frontiers” (207). The ambiguous “incendiaries” can, however, refer to either the unhappy backwoodsmen and/or England’s Indian allies. Since incendiary is a noun signifying the burning of dwellings, something the narrator has blamed on the savage Indians (188, 189, 193, 194, 195), the primary suggestion is that the Indians are doing this and that the narrator will be accused of joining them, since he will be soon fleeing to their “space.” The backwoodsmen, however, are connected with England’s Indian allies who are principally associated with the massacres in letter twelve (188–89, 193,194–96, 206). This is reinforced in yet another bastard “mix”: bad Indians, “a few hundreds of the worst kind, mixed with whites worse than themselves”—hired by Great Britain to massacre the American people (206). Crèvecoeur’s language, in fact, returns self-reflexively to letter three, where “our bad people are those who are half cultivators and half hunters; and the worst of them are those who have degenerated altogether into the hunting state” (52–53; my emphasis). Since the backwoodsmen were denigrated as “new-made Indians” in letter three (53), Crèvecoeur now suggests this ominous “mix” was a product of the Revolution, secondarily inspired by the reactive English. Moreover, the narrator himself suddenly resembles the backwoodsmen: he is “distant … from any places of worship or school of education” (200), just like the backwoodsmen of letter three (52, 53). Thus, the “so great a distance” (207) that the narrator proposes removing his family to actually encodes a thematic similarity and “closeness” to the demonized space of letter three.

That the narrator imagines himself and his family fleeing into the Indian world to escape the revolutionary war evokes another inverted similarity to letter three: suddenly the anonymous Indian village is metaphorically the new America—the refuge and asylum previously sought by the European emigrant (42). Like the emigrant, the narrator, and his family seek “a foreign soil,” and the narrator is “a man seeking a refuge from the desolation of war” (199, 215). In letter three, the European immigrant is the “distressed European” (66); in letter twelve, the narrator is the distressed frontiersman. This core American idea—America as a refuge and asylum—ironically becomes an Indian village in the very woods that were so ominous in letter three. Indeed, since the Indian world will ensure his family “bread, safety, and subsistence” (198), it now takes the place of prerevolutionary America—a world providing, mutatis mutandis, “land, bread, protection, and consequence,” so “the motto of all emigrants” is Ubi panis ibi patria (letter three, 43). But it allusively becomes the distressed frontiersman’s motto as well: “Thus, becoming truly inhabitants of their village, we shall immediately occupy that rank, within the pale of their society, which will afford us all the amends we can possibly expect for the loss we have met with by the convulsions of our own”(208). The metaphoric approximation of the new America and Crèvecoeur’s “new-made Indians” is also reflected in the parodic language of letter twelve: the Indians are without “temples, without priests, without kings, and without laws” (203), just as the Americans, in letter three, are without “aristocratical families,” courts, kings, bishops, and “ecclesiastical dominion” (40). The American dream is radically transformed into the Indian
Indeed, the Indian world seemingly embodies all the virtues of prelapsarian, colonial America and the life, liberty, and happiness of the Declaration. Commenting on why so many whites choose to stay with the Indians, the narrator notes these reasons: "the most perfect freedom, the ease of living, the absence of those cares and corroding solicitudes which so often prevail with us; the peculiar goodness of the soil they cultivated" (202). Similarly, we will remember that the voice of Nature in letter three promises the immigrant the "rewards" of "ease and "independence" and "the fields to feed and clothe thee." … I shall endow thee besides with the immunities of a freeman" (66). In letter twelve, the contrast between the loss of American happiness and the pastoral happiness of the Indians is encapsulated by the narrator who prays that God "will be pleased to restore peace to our unhappy country" and who is "determined" to pursue "a system of happiness as may be adequate to my future situation" in the Indian village (215). Referring to the Indian world, the narrator had earlier asked rhetorically, "What system of philosophy can give us so many necessary qualifications for happiness?" (203). That the Indians are also allusively and metaphorically associated with the backwoodsmen (the unhappy, "bad" Americans of letter three) illustrates how Crèvecoeur inverts the initial antagonistic myth into the final telling myth of the Letters.

Even when the Indians are allusively distinguished from the backwoodsmen, the contrasts conjure up a connection. If the backwoodsmen of letter three were contaminated by the wildness of the woods and represent "the most hideous parts of our society"—"[t]his impure part [that] serves as our precursors or pioneers" (47, 51, 53)—the Indians, in letter twelve, are "the inhabitants of the woods" and constitute Nature's "un-defiled offspring," while the Indians "of the plains are her degenerated breed" (203), just as the backwoodsmen "degenerate" in letter three (52). In addition, we will remember that the backwoodsmen possess the "gun" which makes them hunters (51), and I suggested that the association of the Irish who "take to the gun" (61) links them both with the degeneration of the forthcoming Revolution. The linkage of the Revolution and guns returns in letter twelve where the narrator wants to move to the Indian village because two of his sons are "verging toward that point of their lives when they must necessarily take up the musket, and learn, in that new school, all the vices which are so common in armies." His wish that his sons may "become inhabitants of the woods" (214) continues that remarkable transformation of the pejorative myths of letter three into the predominant myths of letter twelve. The very things condemned become allusively privileged as the frontier woodsmen and Indians become the model of the new America.

For instance, the language of newness that receives its dialectic significance in letter three is refigured into the new Indian world of letter twelve: "I have considered, in all its future effects and tendencies, the new mode of living we must pursue … the new manners we must adopt, the new language we must speak" (201). In letter three, the narrator refers first positively to "a new mode of living" and to the new manners of the immigrants (42, 44), but then pejoratively to the "new mode of life" and the "new set of manners" of the backwoodsmen (51). Since the frontiersmen in letter twelve are the backwoodsmen and are associated with Indians, the subversive suggestion is that the celebrated Indian village is metaphorically "America" in her "feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments" (47)—a regression to the savage past so denigrated in letter three. Thus, the ironic, allusive evocation of the Indian woods and village as the new America ironically becomes, as I will suggest, the distressed narrator’s subverted American dream.

Even though these "changes may appear more terrific at a distance" (201), the narrator, in effect, imagines himself and his family turning into "new-made Indians"—that bastard mix of white European hunters and Indian influences condemned categorically by the narrator in letter three (53). Thus, in considering the new Indian modes that must be adopted by his family, the narrator refers to "the art of hunting we must acquire" (201). Suddenly the hunters demonized in letter three become the subversive model for what his family must imaginatively become. While his younger sons will metaphorically become Indians by learning to swim and "to shoot with the bow," "talents as will necessarily raise them into some degree of esteem among the Indian lads of their own age," "the rest of us must hunt with the hunters" (208). The narrator’s wife will "slice and smoke the meat of our own killing" (209)—a sentence that is clearly meant to evoke the strictures against hunting and eating meat (because they make people savage and wild) in letter three (47, 52). The narrator plans to bring a young white neighbor along who will marry his daughter, and he "will make an excellent hunter"; the narrator’s children "will consider labour as the most essential
qualification, hunting as the second” (213). As “a fellow hunter,” the narrator will industriously endeavor to achieve “a system of happiness” in the future (215). By the conclusion of the letter, the narrator imagines himself and his family transformed into “new-made Indians,” in which the previous language of transformation—this “great metamorphosis” by which Europeans become changed into Americans (59)—now has its inverted parallel in the metamorphosis of letter twelve: “Thus shall we metamorphose ourselves, from neat, decent, opulent, planters … into a still simpler people … to dwell under the whigwham” (211; likewise, the narrator anticipates “this proposed metamorphosis,” 214). As noted before, rather than see his sons “take up the musket” and fight in white armies, he wishes instead that they would “become inhabitants of the woods” (214)—the suggestive “new-made Indians” of letter three (53).

It is true that the narrator is ideologically ambivalent about the Indians: on one hand he romanticizes them with European cliches of a pure, indigenous people uncorrupted by Western civilization; on the other, he is afraid that “the imperceptible charm of Indian education” will, in effect, cause his children to become completely “Indianised” (208, 201; cf. 211–12). Moreover, he plans to bring the young white neighbor so that his daughter will marry him and remain racially unmixed with the Indian tribe they live among. But two sentences later, he refers to how his family will “metamorphose” themselves into Indians (211). In contrast, he imagines himself trying to civilize the Indians by converting them from hunting to planting, even though he recognizes that hunting is a necessity (210–11). But since the predominant paradigm is a mix between hunting and planting, the narrator metaphorically transforms himself into one of the pejorative “new-made Indians” of letter three: “As old plowmen and new men of the woods, as Europeans and new-made Indians” (53). As the narrator notes, in letter twelve, his sons “will consider labour [planting and harvesting] as the most essential qualification, hunting as the second,” and he himself can “plow, sow, and hunt, as the occasion may require” (213, 208). Thus the pejorative, bastard mix of letter three turns hauntingly into the model of the “new American”—the mixed, white Indian man of letter twelve.

In the end, the narrator’s frantic plan to move his family to the imaginary Indian village comes across as sheer madness. Just how seriously could the eighteenth-century reader consider a move to an Indian world that had been demonized systematically in American and European texts, including Crèvecoeur’s Letters? Indeed, the narrator had suggested, at various points, that the desperate plight of his family was driving him insane (187, 189, 190, 194, 198), and his bizarre fantasies of emigrating to the “new” Indian America ironically underscore the antirevolutionary message of the book: the Revolution had destroyed prelapsarian British America, causing it to revert back to its savage origins. In this sense, the mythic Indian village becomes the new anti-world engendered by the Revolution, and the American farmer degenerates into the American frontiersman and, ultimately, “the new-made Indian,” who imaginatively flees from a destroyed civilization toward and into the savage “Other.” Crèvecoeur’s irony comes full circle, as the theme of American Translatio studii is subversively inverted.

Indeed, throughout the twelve letters, Crèvecoeur’s strategies of subversion are intended to transform the Patriot image of the new America into a covert Loyalist reading of the “new” American myths and texts. In this context, the primary contradictions contain a semantic significance, since they paradoxically undermine the textual foundations of the American republic. The book’s principal contradictions coalesce into the paradoxical formulation that colonial British America was the only true and “new” America while the “new” American Revolution transformed prerevolutionary America into the old precolonial wilderness of savagery and lawlessness. This suggests that a fruitful way of approaching Crèvecoeur’s ambivalent art is through the political discourse of the Anglo-American world. Historically, the Letters are a continuation of the Anglo-American battle over the significance of both the Revolution and America. In his paradoxical Letters, Crèvecoeur linguistically undermines the American Revolution, which he implicates in the subversion of the mythic free and happy British-American world that had previously served as an asylum for the distressed European. In the end, when the distraught narrator of letter twelve laments that “every thing [is] now subverted among us” (188), he is openly articulating Crèvecoeur’s covert strategy.

NOTES

and the second-edition *Letters* was published in the year that the Treaty of Paris (September 3, 1783) formally ended the War of Independence. It was hence clear that the war was ending or essentially over by the time both editions appeared in England.

2. J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Susan Maiming (New York: Oxford University Press [Oxford World’s Classics], 1998). His edition is based on the 1783 revised second edition, which included brief emendations and an “Accurate Index.” Aside from this, the 1783 edition is essentially the same as the 1782 edition. The title page and the Advertisement that precede the letters in all editions are unnumbered. Consequently, the appropriate paragraph number will be placed in parentheses. Citations from the above edition, except for the title page and Advertisement, will appear with page numbers parenthetically within the text.

3. Bernard Chevignard, “St. John De Crèvecoeur in the Looking Glass: *Letters from an American Farmer* and the Making of a Man of Letters,” *Early American Literature* 19 (No. 2, Fall 1984): 178, 180–81. For other evidence that Crèvecoeur composed some of the letters after 1775, see Nathaniel Philbrick, “The Nantucket Sequence in Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*,” *The New England Quarterly* 64 (No. 3, September 1991): 426–27; Norman S. Grabo, “Crèvecoeur’s America: Beginning the World Anew,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 18 (No. 2, April 1991): 163. Crèvecoeur’s fiction that the letters were written before the Revolution is contextually implicit throughout and specifically explicit in footnote one: “The troubles, that lately convulsed the American colonies, had not broken out when this and some of the following letters were written” (letter 1, 15). Note, however, that “some of the following letters” suggests that others were written during the Revolution.


5. According to Everett Emerson (45), Crèvecoeur’s English editors were sympathetic to the American cause and apparently chose not to publish some of Crèvecoeur’s more antirevolutionary papers. “Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and the Promise of America,” in Fluck, *Forms and Functions of History in American Literature*, 44–55.


7. Crèvecoeur employs the Quaker style of speaking in other letters, especially letter eleven, dealing with John Bartram, the American Quaker botanist. Compare “The Commissioners” in Moore, *More Letters from the American Farmer*, where the hostile, revolutionary commissioner tells a Quaker to “go to Your good King the Tyrant of Britain, Thee & Thou him & see what he will do” (310).

Declarations of Independence was signed there), the largest number of Loyalists lived in Pennsylvania, a number so large that Timothy Pickering, a prominent officer in the Continental Army, described it as the "enemy's country," and John Adams noted that if "New England on one side and Virginia on the other had not kept [it] in awe," Pennsylvania "would have joined the British." Cited by Moses Coit Tyler, The Literary History of the American Revolution, 1763–1783 (1897; second reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1963), 1: 298. Crèvecoeur emphasizes prerevolutionary Quaker Pennsylvania to underscore the emerging contrast between prelapsarian, colonial British-American and postlapsarian, revolutionary America.

9. Farmer James's minister tells him that, since James intends one of his children "for the gown" (i.e., the Church), a Mr. F. B., in London, "may give you some assistance when the lad comes to have concerns with the bishop. It is good for American farmers to have friends even in England" (17). The reference to the gown and bishop initially identifies Farmer James as an Anglican, although Crèvecoeur seemingly drops this fiction in later letters. For the religious contexts of the American Revolution, see J. C. D. Clark, The Language of Liberty 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

10. Although he does not deal with the references and allusions to the declaration, Paul Downes notes, "For Crèvecoeur, the American Declaration of Independence" was, ironically, "a threat to individual independence. Individual sovereignty, that is to say, was threatened by the transfer of political power from a monarch to a republican political system" (Democracy, Revolution, and Monarchism in Early American Literature, 65). The allusions to the Declaration's life, liberty, and "happiness" occur repeatedly throughout Letters and, as I will show, are overwhelmingly conspicuous. Since the Declaration of Independence is short and accessible and because it has neither line numbers nor numbered articles, I will cite the specific paragraphs that are pertinent to the letters. For brevity, I sometimes refer to the document as the Declaration. All references to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are from paragraph two.

11. The reference to the "pepper-corn" paid for tax is a political allusion to a famous debate in Parliament regarding the repeal of the Stamp Act (1765). (On January 14, 1766, Robert Nugent, Lord Clare, the member for Bristol, argued against the repeal of the Stamp Act, contending that Parliament must assert its authority against the Americans: "a pepper-corn, in acknowledgement of the right [to tax]" was "of more value, than millions without it." In response, William Pitt, later earl of Chatham, replied that the Americans had contributed amply to the British economy: "And shall a miserable financier come with a boast that he can bring a pepper-corn into the exchequer, to the loss of millions to the nation?" Crèvecoeur's point, of course, is that the Americans were not overtaxed unfairly—hence the proverbial peppercorn signifying the lowest, most nominal rent in England—and the context is the aftermath of the French and Indian War and the beginning of the Anglo-American tensions that led to the Revolution. See Fred Anderson, Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766 (New York: Knopf, 2000), 698, 700.

12. The "silken bands of mild government" become, in letter five, a "uniform silk cord" which holds the people of Nantucket together (108). The imagery is telling, since Ecclestone, the faithful Loyalist in the unpublished "Landskapes," bemoans the Revolution that made the Americans "exchange y' silken cords of our antient [government] for the rattling Chains of our Timocracy." See Moore, More Letters from the American Farmer, 257.

13. John Dickinson, Empire and Nation: Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania, ed. Forrest McDonald (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), letter 8, 47. Nova Scotia had been part of the British Empire since 1713. Dennis Moore notes that "one of several immediate sources or models for Crèvecoeur's series of ostensibly epistolary essays would certainly have been" John Dickinson's Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania (More Letters from the American Farmer, xxxii).


15. Referring to Europeans being transformed into new-made Indians, Doreen Alvarez Saar notes that "while the modern reader, educated in these cultural codes, may be aware of the racism implied by [Crèvecoeur's] description, [his] comments expressed a commonplace of English colonial thought, the idea that the intermixture of an original English stock in the native population would lead to a mongrel breed of unpleasant and immoral character." "The Heritage of American Ethnicity in Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer," in A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America, ed. Frank Shuffelton, 251 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). In another racial context, the index to the revised 1783 edition denominates the Native Americans of Nantucket as "Native blacks" (223), and the next indexed category is "Negro-slavery," which includes the "blacks at Charles-town" and "Blacks well treated in the more northern provinces" (224). To my knowledge, no one has called attention to the racial association of Native Americans with African Americans via the descriptive adjective "black."
stadiastal theory of history—that universalizes temporality within a predictable Enlightenment structure of savagery, farming, commerce, and decline. Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694), the famous German jurist and historian, had also formalized an influential theory of civilization in which agriculture ranked above hunting and vied with commerce. See J. A. Leo Lemay, “11e Frontiersman from Lout to Hero: Notes on the Significance of the Comparative Method and the State Theory in Early American Literature and Culture,” Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 88 (1978): 187–223. Nascent Enlightenment ethnography conceived the separation of barbarity from civility in terms of a movement out of the spatial European center and hence a movement back in time (Johannes Fabian, Time and Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object [New York: Columbia University Press, 1983], 1–31). William Robertson in his renowned History of America (1777) concluded that the Americans were “destined to remain uncivilized” and that any civilization transplanted to American soil would inevitably regress and degenerate to barbarism (The History of the Discovery and Settlement of America [New York: Harper, 1829], 123, 128). After the Revolution, there was a fear by some Americans that their countrymen, especially in the western frontier areas, might slip back into savagery, given the revolutionary antiauthoritarian ideology that was in place. One worried observer believed that “Americans were reversing the civilized process, going backwards in time,” moving from “civilization to barbarism.” Gordon S. Wood, The Radicalism of the American Revolution (New York: Knopf, 1992), 308, 310. All these paradigms constitute an ideological matrix within which Crèvecoeur was working.

20. Webster's Guide to American History: A Chronological, Geographical, and Biographical Survey and Compendium (Springfield, MA: G. & c. Merriam Company, 1971), 19–20. In his diary of 12 September 1776, Ambrose Serle, who served as the secretary of state for the American colonies (1772–1775) and who was private secretary to Admiral Lord Howe (1776–1778), refers to a 1657 Massachusetts law against the Quakers: anyone who helped conceal a Quaker had to pay a fine as did the Quaker (forty and one hundred pounds respectively). If there was a second offense, the man who concealed the Quaker “was to lose one Ear” and the next time the other ear. If it were a woman, she was to be “severely whipped,” but the third time, whether man or woman, the guilty party had “their Tongues bored through with a red hot Iron.” The Quakers suffered the same punishments, but, “finding this not enough,” the New Englanders “made it Death for a Quaker to appear in the Province; and accordingly hanged some.” John Rhodes, ed., The American Revolution: Writings from the War of Independence, (New York: Library of America, 2001), 213–14. In 1805 Mercy Otis Warren insisted that “the treatment of the Quakers in Massachusetts can never be justified either by the principles of policy or humanity.” History Of The Rise, Progress And Termination of the American Revolution, 2 vols., ed. Lester H. Cohen (1805; repr. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1989), 1: 9.

21. See Fred Anderson, Crucible of War (New York: Knopf, 2000). The French and Indian War and its aftermath provide the allusive context of many of the “prerevolutionary” letters, and Crèvecoeur had fought in the war on the French side. The fictional date nearest to the Revolution in the letters is the account of Andrew the Hebridean who is in America in the year 1770 (letter 3, 68).


23. The most conspicuous example is Crèvecoeur’s misleading and contradictory map references to Nantucket in letter four (87–90). Crèvecoeur was, in fact, a competent cartographer and seems to have, in this case, created a mythical prerevolutionary island in harmony with the mother country. For a different discussion of Crèvecoeur’s deliberate geographic displacement, see Yael Ben-Zvi, “Mazes of Empire: Space and Humanity in Crèvecoeur’s Letters,” Early American Literature 42 (1, 2007): 82–3.


27. The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, 3: 123–24. Burke’s speeches were quoted and reprinted throughout the Colonies. In letter one, Farmer James’s wife refers to Burke’s eloquence and his “speeches” which she often sees “in our papers” (21). It is likely that Crèvecoeur is actually alluding to Burke’s critique of the American cult of law in letter three: “As free men they will be litigious. ... As citizens, it is easy to imagine that they will carefully read the newspapers, enter into every political disposition, freely blame, or censure, governors and others” (46). The apparent praising of American litigiousness becomes retrospectively ironical in the context of letter seven. See also note 18 above.

28. The British commander, Henry Clinton, had tried to take Charleston in 1776 but failed. He returned in 1780, two years before Crèvecoeur’s letters were first published, and was successful. In letter nine, Crèvecoeur links Charleston, South Carolina
with Lima, Peru as “capitals of the richest provinces of their respective hemispheres” (151). In the index, Charleston is categorized as “the capital of North-America” and Lima is identified as the “capital of South-America” (220, 222). Crèvecoeur deliberately elevates both cities into capitals of their respective continents. This geographic misinformation makes Charleston the capital of North America during the allusive revolutionary war. Charleston, in this context, stands for revolutionary “America.”


31. With reference to England’s “philanthropic government” (66), compare “Ingratitude Rewarded” and the narrator’s antirevolutionary lament: he has lived to see “that Philanthrophick Government is now gone” and replaced with the Revolution’s madness. Moore, More Letters from the American Farmer, 317.

32. Rattlesnakes as a symbol of revolutionary America: Ian Barnes, The Historical Atlas of the American Revolution, 42, 127. For an Internet discussion and illustrations of rattlesnakes on American flags during the Revolution, see www.foundingfathers.info/American-flag/Revolution.html; Dr. Johnson, The Works of Samuel Johnson (Troy, New York: Pafraets & Company, 1913), 14: 116. At the beginning of chapter 32 of The Linwoods (1835), Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s novel about the American Revolution, Mrs. Meredith, the British anti-American, is apprehensive about strolling along the bank of the Hudson since she had “heard bugbear stories about American rattlesnakes.”

33. The mention of the two Floridas suggests the time is just after the French and Indian War: The Royal Proclamation of 1763 created the two new provinces of East and West Florida. See Anderson, Crucible of War, 565.

34. In “Frontier Woman,” one of Crèvecoeur’s unpublished letters and probably the basis for letter twelve, the context is a little clearer, as the American frontiersman laments the massacre of innocent whites by “5 White People & 18 Indians of the very Worst Class.” The bad Indians and whites are working for the British, and the whites are dressed like Indians and carry tomahawks, prefiguring the theme of “new-made Indians.” See Moore, More Letters from the American Farmer, 153–62, especially 159–60. There is an apparent ideological disconnect between letter three and letter twelve, in that the barbaric revolutionary backwoodsmen of letter three become white mercenaries who join with pro-British Indians to kill vulnerable Americans in letter twelve. Transformation, however, is a central theme of letter twelve, and all bad transformations are blamed on the Revolution.

35. Compare Crèvecoeur’s “Frontier Woman” in More Letters from the American Farmer: “Who can see the enormous Mass of Political Moral & Physical Evil with which this Country is afflicted. [W]ho can view this once fair this [once] happy Country, which served as an Assylum for all the Poor of Europe which supplied them all with Bread, and fed [a] great Part of the World besides, that Country once the Seat of civil Happiness under 13 different Modes now presents nothing but an extensive Wreck.” Moore, 156.

36. In letter twelve there is another kind of conversion: the narrator’s fantasized religious conversion of the Indians (210), which conjures up ironically his previous statement in letter three: “After this explanation of the effects which follow by living in the woods, shall we vainly flatter ourselves with the hope of converting the Indians?” (53).