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## Crèvecoeur in the Wyoming Valley

The greatest obstacle to reading any well-known and eminently canonized author is often the mythology long accumulated around that writer. Critics undoubtedly labor to offer new perspectives, foreground previously unappreciated dimensions and elements, or make new connections with contexts or texts, but the myth persists with tremendous power. Crèvecoeur is no exception to these obvious remarks, though the challenges of creatively and productively reading *Letters from an American Farmer* are compounded in two ways. The Crèvecoeur myth, for one thing, is overdetermined by the mythologies of his historical moment, within which he is expected to fulfill a certain role. He is the embodiment of the simple agrarian voice, the farmer's *mentalité*, the American connection with nature, the hesitant, cautious, and apolitical settler, and so on. This combination of emphases allows us to find in Crèvecoeur an American sensibility conveniently set apart from the political turmoils of his time: reactive to them, to be sure, but otherwise conservatively maintaining a safe barrier between his economic existence and the political goings-on of the seaport cities. To read Crèvecoeur anew would thus require extricating (as opposed to removing) him from this mythologized context—in other words, upsetting both the Crèvecoeur myth and the myths surrounding the revolutionary era.

This entanglement speaks to the other obstacle that concerns me here—the use of Crèvecoeur as an historical resource, as a nonfictional reporter, as an archive. This trope has been repeated again and again in the biographical writings, in the insistence that yes,

Crèvecoeur kept bees, and yes, he must have put his son Ally on his plow...<sup>1</sup> Together these additional assumptions about Crèvecoeur—they could better be called burdens—produce a reading of the *Letters* as a quasi-factual account of late eighteenth-century America, in which the text's literary elements are minimal, relatively unobtrusive, and easily corrected or by-passed. As a result, Crèvecoeur is more frequently read as an ideologist, a vessel of the ideas of his time, than as a writer, creatively crafting and reworking them. The well known melting pot theory of immigration from the "What is an American" letter, for example, is certainly understood as an ideological fantasy with limitations (e.g., the notorious exclusion of non-Northern Europeans), yet is frequently cited as a more or less expressive account that, besides, exemplifies early US attitudes. Ultimately, then, this highly functional, familiar, and frequently tedious Crèvecoeur becomes an obstacle to historical knowledge. Inasmuch as the *Letters* are snatched from the field of literature and rendered a faithful chronicle or an ideological artifact, they can only yield the information we already expect to find there.

If this diagnosis strikes some as an overstatement, they need only remark on the amazing disinterest in Crèvecoeur's literary productions, even among his most devoted critics. Although we've had (heavily expurgated) versions of his unpublished English writings available for almost nine decades, and now, with Dennis Moore's *More Letters from an American Farmer*, have full access to these materials, they have yet to seriously transform our overall reading of Crèvecoeur. More stunning, I think, is the neglect of Crèvecoeur's French versions of the *Letters*—the two volume first edition of 1784 and the three volume expansion of 1787. These works not only revised the London text of the *Letters*—sometimes subtly,

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<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon occurs most crudely with Crèvecoeur's biographers. Gay Wilson Allen and Roger Asselineau, for example, write: "we can assume that the author was speaking his own sentiments when James writes in the first letter that of all agricultural labors 'ploughing is the most agreeable because I can think as I work...'" (*An American Farmer: The Life of St. John de Crèvecoeur*, 39).

sometimes dramatically—and incorporated many of the unpublished English materials—again revised in interesting ways—but also added a substantial body of new materials as well. The lack of familiarity with these texts among American literary critics cannot be explained by the language barrier alone, for Crèvecoeur's last American-focused work, *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et l'État de New-York* (1801, 3 volumes) has been translated from French to English for decades with no discernible impact. “More of the same! Variations on a theme!” would seem to be the verdict, and it would not be too cynical, I hope, to suggest that the recent interest in the unpublished writings on the Caribbean has been driven more by an interest in finding Caribbean-related texts than by an attempt to rethink Crèvecoeur's significance.

My goals in this essay, then, will be to (1) briefly reexamine Crèvecoeur's oeuvre as a whole, in order to (2) resituate him historically as a *writer*, and (3) return to the question of how Crèvecoeur might be read historically, as something more than an archive or fantasist of a unified, naïve agrarian ideology. These observations will be based on several years of working with Crèvecoeur's unpublished English and published French writings, a complicated task made all the more difficult by the imprecise dating of the various letters and sketches. Yet I am convinced that these hitherto auxiliary bodies of writing provide the absent center of gravity of Crèvecoeur's work: his fascination with the conflicts in the Wyoming Valley. The clash between the Connecticut settlers in the Susquehanna Valley and their “Pennamite” neighbors, the specifically backcountry dynamics of revolutionary violence, and the historically distinctive process of interior settlement all combined to motivate Crèvecoeur's break with essayistic reportage and reflection, leading instead to a “mosaick” theory of experimental writing which, in turn, suggests a very different reading of Crèvecoeur's well-known *Letters*. So I must stress at the outset the tentative nature of these

observations, which may be more useful in defamiliarizing Crèvecoeur's oeuvre and opening up new readings, than in suggesting a definitive counter-reading.

## 1

The master text of the Crèvecoeur canon—practically the only text in that canon, in fact—was likely established by a British printer in 1782. In the resulting sequence, published under the title *Letters from an American Farmer*, an “Introduction” to the narrator, farmer James, was followed by a second letter, “On the Situation, Feelings, and Pleasures of an American Farmer,” and a third, “What is an American?” before a sharp and perplexing shift to five letters on New England (IV through VIII), a single letter on Charles Town (IX), a natural sketch (X, “On Snakes: And on the Humming-bird”), a portrait of the naturalist John Bartram, in the form of a letter from a Russian traveler (XI), and finally, returning to Farmer James, “Distresses of a Frontier Man” (XII). This was a confusing and dubious arrangement, one that has since given readers a muddled sense of Crèvecoeur's project, in which Farmer James is introduced, other venues in America are examined (by James? by Crèvecoeur? does it matter?), and, by the concluding letter, the utopian sentiments of the first three letters are undermined. Whatever problems this sequence posed were further sidestepped in the nitty-gritty of canonization, namely the cannibalization of the *Letters* into anthologized morsels. The constellation of anthologization is revealing. “What is an American?” is easily the brightest, most central star.<sup>2</sup> The ninth letter (on slavery, with the famous caged slave scene) and the twelfth (the dystopian “Distresses of a Frontier Man”) vie

<sup>2</sup> Crèvecoeur appeared not at all in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren's 1973 *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, but two anthologies of the 1970s excerpted Letter 3 (Poirier and Vance, *American Literature* [1970] and Levin and Gross, *America in Literature* [1978]). “What is an American?” is now the commonly reproduced excerpt from Crèvecoeur's work.

for the vicinal, even geminal, position, as if contending for the best counterpoint—slavery? frontier panic?—to the agrarian ideal.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, three or four other letters sparkle from the edges,<sup>4</sup> forming abbreviated constellations that allow teachers and readers to totalize the whole, while brushing under the carpet a number of underutilized sketches that highlight the tenuousness of the text as a whole. What are we to make, for example, of the odd sketch on snakes, of the seemingly digressive letters on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, or of the account of John Bartram, perplexingly given a Russian correspondent? We should at least acknowledge that this disordered canonical framework, which makes the *Letters* a sandwich with Farmer James as the bread and decidedly incongruous materials as the filling, points to a still indiscernible larger literary project, occluded by the current arrangement of texts and its dampening of problematic juxtapositions, different narrative voices, and overt contradictions.

From the canonical *Letters*, then, we may turn to the unpublished English-language notebooks, “discovered” by Henri Bourdin, Stanley T. Williams, and Ralph Henry Gabriel in the 1920s. A few words are necessary about the first editions of these texts. The aforementioned scholars pulled most, but not all, of the materials together, heavily and erratically editing them as the misleadingly labeled *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century Life* (published by Yale University Press), which would be further naturalized by the inclusion in Albert E. Stone's

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<sup>3</sup> Three anthologies of the 90s added portions of Letter 9 (Elliott et al, *American Literature: A Prentice Hall Anthology* [1991]; G. Gunn's *Early American Writing* [1994]; and McQuade et al, *Harper American Literature* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1993]). Castillo and Schweitzer's *The Literature of Colonial America* (2001) excerpts Letters 3, 9, and 12; Warner and Jehlen's *English Literatures of America, 1500-1800* (1997) Letters 2 and 12; and Carla Mulford's *Early American Writings* (2002) Letters 2, 3, 9, and 12.

<sup>4</sup> The two largest anthologies, *The Heath* and *The Norton*, offer portions of 1, 2, 3, 5 (on Nantucket), 9, and 12, and 3, 4 (on Nantucket), 9, 10 (on snakes), and 12, respectively. For the Tables of Contents of the major American literature anthologies, see Kenneth Roemer's valuable website at [www.uta.edu/english/roemer/ctt/index.html](http://www.uta.edu/english/roemer/ctt/index.html).

Penguin edition of 1963—still the most influential classroom text.<sup>5</sup> Serious examination of the English manuscripts would have to await Dennis D. Moore's 1990 dissertation, later expanded and published as *More Letters from the American Farmer: An Edition of the Essays Left Unpublished by Crèvecoeur* (1995, University of Georgia Press). There Moore would describe the 1925 edition of the *Sketches* damningly—five pieces omitted, four sketches conflated, one split in two, other passages randomly excised—while inviting a legitimate wariness about the existing *Letters*, though as some reviews noted, this scholarly text, reproducing deletions and insertions with the original misspellings and grammatical errors, poses its own challenges to contemporary readers.

A survey of these unpublished English materials is revealing.<sup>6</sup> Of twenty-two pieces, four seem related to the well-known Farmer James letters: “Thoughts of an American Farmer—on Various Rural Subjects,” and three additional texts presented as enumerated letters, “Fifth Letter,” “Sixth Letter: Various Customs and Methods,” and “Seventh Letter: Description of Various Implements.” I will return to these in a moment, but would note here that they stand as exceptions. Nine of the other unpublished pieces refer directly to the conflict in the Wyoming Valley, most notably a series of character sketches of idealized farm families brought to ruin. These include “An Happy Family Disunited by the Spirit of Civil War,” “Letter: Frontier Woman,” “History of Mrs. B.: An Epitome of all the Misfortunes which can possibly overtake a New Settler, as related by herself,” “The American Belisarius, or the History of S.K.,” and “The Man of Sorrow.” The longest of the Wyoming sketches,

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<sup>5</sup> Dennis Moore is currently preparing a new version of the *Letters* and selected unpublished materials for Harvard University Press; it will likely appear in the next year or two. It is scheduled to include the *Letters* and a majority of the unpublished English manuscripts, all in more readable format.

<sup>6</sup> I've reproduced the Tables of Contents of the *Letters*, the unpublished notebooks, and the two French editions in the attached appendix. The sequence for the unpublished manuscripts follows Moore's decision to reproduce the texts as they appear in the notebooks, though this is no guarantee of the order of their composition.

titled “Susquehannah” [sic], describes a narrator’s detailed journeys through the Wyoming Valley from the New York region where Crèvecoeur resided, to Wyoming proper, into surrounding areas (including settlements of Pennamites), and up into New York state territory, while also summarizing the growing conflicts among settlers. It also briefly describes the Wyoming Massacre of 1778, and in more detail attempts to explain how that episode of violence came to be.<sup>7</sup> Several other sketches—including “Liberty of Worship” and “Ingratitude Rewarded”—seem to refer to this broader context as well.

The remaining seven sketches focus on broader comparative treatments of colonization, most obviously in “Sketch of a Contrast between the Spanish and the English Colonies,” “Sketches of Jamaica and Bermudas and other Subjects,” and “Ant-Hill Town” and “A Snow Storm as it affects the American Farmer,” which seem to complement one another in contrasting southern natural phenomena with northern counterparts. There are also a few pieces that seem more anomalous in this grouping, including the possibly autobiographical “Rock of Lisbon”<sup>8</sup> and “Hospitals.”

What does this broader array of materials tell us about *Letters*? At a most basic level, it tells us that at some point—perhaps as early as 1770, but certainly by the mid-1770s—Crèvecoeur viewed the Wyoming context as absolutely central to his understanding and presentation of America. It is possible that he turned to events in the Wyoming Valley as he was drafting the Farmer James letters, and that his writing took a subsequent shift; if this is the case, it is likewise possible that the London *Letters* reproduced an earlier, pre-Wyoming

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<sup>7</sup> The “History of Mrs. B...” also describes the so-called “Massacre,” and concludes with the widowed Mrs. B. carried back to the New York state region from which Crèvecoeur hailed. Most of the other Wyoming sketches refer to more generalized political intimidate, vigilantism, dispossession, and the like, suggesting that the Wyoming Valley context was significant beyond and before the 1778 massacre.

<sup>8</sup> Several biographies have suggested that Crèvecoeur left Europe via Portugal, and that the “Rock of Lisbon” piece confirms his visit there.

project, and that the later Wyoming texts should be considered separately. I would venture an alternative interpretation here, one that hinges on the odd location of Farmer James in Pennsylvania, although Crèvecoeur was living in New York state. Crèvecoeur had earlier had contact with settlers in the Wyoming Valley: the Susquehanna Company Papers compiled by Julian Boyd reveal that the family from whom Crèvecoeur purchased his New York farm had relocated to the Susquehanna tracts,<sup>9</sup> and it is even possible that Crèvecoeur considered a similar relocation. The “Susquehannah” sketch implies that Crèvecoeur followed the emerging conflict between “Pennamites” and “Yankees” in the region, which began in the late 1760s.<sup>10</sup> If the Wyoming Valley conflict—not just the massacre, but the

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<sup>9</sup> Crèvecoeur purchased his farm from one James Nesbit. A “James Nessbut” appears in the papers of the Susquehanna Company, buying a tract of land in 1765; a “James Nisbitt” is one of a large group of petitioners to the General Assembly of Connecticut asking for ratification of a land purchase from “several Tribes of Indian Nations that Claim<sup>d</sup> the same”; apparently the same “James Nisbitt” appears in another 1769 petition to the Connecticut Assembly asking for a tract for New Yorkers “Opprest by Quit Rents and under Great Necessity for lands for Ourselves and Children,” and later that year in a document listing “the names of the men left at Wyoming.” This was the year that Crèvecoeur purchased his farm from Nesbit. A “J Nisebit” appears in Wyoming settler Zebulon Butler’s memorandum book in 1770, apparently involved in the conflicts with Pennsylvania settlers. A “James Nessbitt” (or “James Nisbut” or “James Nisbitt”) appears in three petitions from 1772 and 1773, asking the Connecticut Assembly for official formation of a Connecticut county. Then, almost a decade later, in 1781, a “James Nesbit” appears as a selectman for the newly-formed Westmoreland County, petitioning the Connecticut Assembly for the formation of a local militia, and in 1783 a “James Nisbitt” signs a petition asking the New York government for a tract of land for the Wyoming Massacre survivors; finally a “James Nisbitt” appears as a signatory to Zebulon Butler’s petition to the Continental Congress for relief for the survivors of the massacre, before disappearing from the records. All citations are from the *Susquehanna Company Papers*, ed. Julian Boyd: 1765 references at 2.311 and 3.170-73; 1769, 3.182-83 and 3.202; 1770, 4.79-80; 1772-73, 5.41-44, 5.80-86, and 5.215-17; 1781, 7.79-81; 1783, 7.261-65 and 7.320-24.

<sup>10</sup> Actually, the New England push to colonize the Wyoming Valley traces back to the land crisis of mid-eighteenth-century Connecticut. Land speculation in the colony had taken off in the late 1730s with the sale of the western lands and the involvement of many high officials, including Governor Roger Wolcott, in land speculation (Boyd, SCP 1:xliii-xliv). Driving this speculation were the deteriorating quality of land and a lack of convenient market outlets for inland Connecticut farmers—both concerns treated by Crèvecoeur—as well as the initial successes of missions like David Brainerd’s near the Delaware Water Gap (xlivii-lv). At the 1754 Albany Congress, as well, Thomas Pownall, Lewis Evans, and others

long-running battle over settlement—was on Crèvecoeur's mind as he began the Farmer James pieces, this might explain the location of James in Pennsylvania: the farmer was to be peaceful Pennamite whose rural serenity was gradually shattered by conflicts with competing settlers. If this is the case, then the other sketches of Wyoming-area farmers—many of whom implicitly settle under the auspices of the Connecticut-based company—complement

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had advocated a new policy of interior, western “barrier” colonies to provide protection to coastal colonies against the French and the Indians (lxv-lxix). So in the 1750s the Susquehanna Company took shape in Connecticut, arguing that Connecticut's charter, once it skipped over New York's Hudson Valley (Crèvecoeur's eventual home), extended westward indefinitely, making the northernmost portions of the Pennsylvania colony technically Connecticut territory. The Company was determined that the Wyoming Valley should become “literally a New Connecticut, in institutions, laws, and people” (lxiv-lxv).

Connecticut settlers managed to move into the territory claimed by Pennsylvania and become a viable threat by the 1760s, before Pennsylvania's proprietary took them seriously and ventured a response. The result was a coalescing of distinct parties—popularly known as “Yankees” and “Pennamites” that would eventually wage the small-scale “Yankee-Pennamite War” against one another. The military conflict accelerated in the early 1770s—during the time when Crèvecoeur's narrator said he was in the area—with the December 1775 “Plunket Expedition” (Pennsylvania against New Englanders), with a September 1776 response at Freeland Mills, and a November 1776 follow-up, also initiated by the Yankees. (Crèvecoeur's French version of the Susquehanna sketch, incidentally, speaks of a stay with Plunkett.) By this point, lines hardened, with the local Yankee Committee of Inspection pursuing Pennamites and their sympathizers with charges of treason and espionage. Pennamites in the region began to congregate upriver near Wyalusing, where they would establish contact with both Senecas and British forces, creating the conditions for the 1778 confrontation.

One other facet of the Wyoming conflict—seemingly trivial but quite significant—deserves mention here. When the Paxton Boys, the notorious murderers of Indians in the aftermath of the Seven Years War, observed the successful resistance to state authority posed by the Yankees to their north, they turned to Wyoming as a safe haven. In 1769, a number of Paxtoneers petitioned the Susquehanna Company “for a six-mile-square township at a reasonable price and without quitrents,” promising “that fifty of their number would move immediately to the Valley, obey all company rules, and help to defend the region against the Penns” (Martin, “Return” 129). Of the forty-one Paxton men who relocated in early 1770, nineteen had been participants in the slaughter of Native Americans and the aborted march on Philadelphia (130). Lazarus Stewart, one of the alleged leaders of the Paxton Boys, became a paramilitary leader in the Wyoming Valley, figuring prominently in the Yankee-Pennamite War before meeting the hatchet in the 1778 massacre.<sup>10</sup> (See Cavaoli, 88-92.) Crèvecoeur may have known of this connection as well: he describes “Demagagues” moving into the area, decries the Yankee party's poor treatment of an Indian delegation, and later refers to survivors of the massacre fleeing to “Paxtung.” One wonders if he reflected on the odd coincidence, that the idyllic settlement of his writings was also the eden of the Paxton Boys.

the longer Farmer James, and indeed follow the same trajectory of descent from pastoral idyll to violent dystopia. In this larger context, it should be added, some of the celebrated details of the Farmer James letters take on a new light. James's celebration of American ethnic diversity and anti-communalism, his insistence that Americans lose their religious zealotry, or his claims about Americans' indifference to political institutions, all refer to specifically Pennsylvanian phenomena, contrasted with the greater cultural and ethnic homogeneity, religious fidelity, and political institutionalization of the Connecticut settlers.

Publication of the full range of texts would have been difficult in London, for the very allusion to Wyoming was a reference to an English atrocity: Butler's vicious use of Native American warriors to slaughter American revolutionaries. Crèvecoeur in fact disputes this interpretation of the event, going so far as to blame the Yankees for the turning the local Native Americans to the British side.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the references to Wyoming, and the general lamentations about frontier violence, may have required excision of these texts, leaving the most abstract and seemingly benign Farmer James pieces to stand alone.<sup>12</sup> I would suggest, then, that the never-materialized project of the English writings, taken as a whole, was much broader and more complex than the narrow enterprise seemingly realized in the *Letters*. And most importantly, the Wyoming conflict was absolutely central to this big picture, though the London edition was to render it almost invisible.

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<sup>11</sup> The famous reference to Crèvecoeur's first-hand knowledge of the Wyoming Massacre, in Thomas Jefferson's letters, has Crèvecoeur claiming that the event "must assume a different face" than the anti-British, pro-American accounts, adding that "[h]is veracity may be relied on." Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 11: 1 January to 6 August 1787. Eds. Julian P. Boyd, Mina R. Bryan and Fredrick Aandahl (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1955), 56. See also Jefferson's follow-up letter to Soulés on 110.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Russian letter-writer "Ivan," purported author of the John Bartram portrait included in the *Letters*, appears one other place in the English manuscripts: in the dramatic "Landskapes," he is a sullen observer of political animosity in a Wyoming-area tavern.

I've outlined two interpretations of Crèvecoeur's English writings then: one in which the *Letters* retains its relative autonomy from the very different Wyoming-based manuscripts, and one in which the two are part of the same project, with Farmer James representing the Pennsylvanian side of the conflict. Though the latter framework has more explanatory power, the truth is perhaps somewhere in between, and I would like to briefly examine one of the unpublished Farmer James pieces, the "Seventh Letter," which is both chaotic and cumbersome in its subject matter. The letter, focusing on "Implements," moves from the two-horse wagon to the plow, brakes briefly for some reflections on simplicity, then carries on with farm buildings and related apparatuses (the barn, the hog-pen, the hen-house, the shop, the oven, the well, the corn-crib, the "Negro kitchens"), digresses briefly to explain why there are no gardens (farmers are too busy cutting wood, making rope and horse-collars), then veers back to buildings (smoke-houses, Dutch cellars, house cellars, bee-houses, fanning-mills), ventures once more to vehicles (sleighs, sleds), and then suddenly opens on to a winter landscape, shifting from enumeration to tableau—winter travel, market activity, falling through the ice, the recreation of virtuous whites and semi-degenerate blacks, winter guests, and the conventions of rural hospitality—at which point the letter takes one last sharp turn to reflect on American poverty, giving the example of the settlement at "Pa—an" before concluding with these seemingly un-Crèvecoeurian words: "But, you'll say, what could induce people to settle on such grounds? The extreme fertility of the soil, necessity, and poverty? This it is, sir, which drives people over the hills and far away."<sup>13</sup>

We already see here, in this brief summary, several points at which the narrative seems to venture off course, where new directions seem to be announced. The first comes

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<sup>13</sup> 320. All further citations to Moore's edition will be given parenthetically, and reproduced Moore's presentation—excised passages marked with a strikethrough, and Crèvecoeur's inserted passages in brackets.

in the discussion of the corn-crib, where the narrator adds, “Some people are, and all should be, furnished with electrical rods” (314). The narrator proceeds to tell us that this invention saved his barn full of £700 of goods, adding “What should I have done, had not the good Benjamin Franklin thought of this astonishing invention?” (314). The homage to Franklin is not new. Letter VI (“Customs”) gives us these lines: “Happy Pennsylvania! Thou Queen of Provinces! Among the many useful citizens thou hast already produced, Benjamin Franklin is one of the most eminent of thy sons” (300). It is as if the narration wants to turn away from the more abstract landscape of all corn-cribs to the more interesting electrical rods, then on to the history of Great Men, to the inventor, scientist, and statesman, to Pennsylvania as a particular colony, worthy of a sketch alongside those of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard.

In fact, this interest in ethnographic, and oftentimes comparative, portraits of the colonies appears elsewhere with different inflections. After bringing up the smoke-houses, the narrator tells us that “Virginia is the country where they eat the greatest quantity of smoked meat as well as of all other kinds. There they raise their hogs with more facility than we do” (315). Here we again take momentary leave of the so-called American Farmer for a comparative tour of the colonies, this time contrasting northern regions with southern counterparts. If the Franklin reference pointed to a broader cultural and political portrait of Pennsylvania, the smoke-house reference indicates a slightly different project of comparative climate-based ethnography.

More pronounced, however, is the shift from implements to the winter landscape, triggered by the paragraph on sleighs and sleds. We have come close to another of the English-language sketches, “A Snow Storm as it affects the American Farmer,” which will reiterate many of the observations made here, though with an important change in setting.

If Farmer James tills the soil of Pennsylvania, the narrator of “Snow Storm” describes winter in New York’s Mohawk Valley, at German Flats, speaking of “Mohawk and Canadian” winters. What’s more, the manuscript “Snow Storm” piece itself heads in different directions, including a condemnation of George Washington as the murderer of Jumonville during the Seven Years War. The Yale editors found this disjunction so perplexing that they lopped off the political and military observations, forming an entirely new sketch, “The English and the French Before the Revolution,” whose title echoes that of another manuscript piece, “Sketch of a Contrast between the Spanish and the English Colonies,” that they left out of *Sketches*. If the messiness of the English materials is not confusing enough, the 1784 French edition presented an expanded treatment of “La Chute de Neige” (snowfall, not snow storm), which combined portions of the “Implements” letter with the manuscript “Snow Storm” piece, but removing the Washington references. The point here, however, is that the shift in “Implements” to the winter scene was entangled with a series of departures from the scenario of James in Pennsylvania.

And a fourth departure, this one as the letter’s last two paragraphs turn to “Pa—an, where several families dwelt on the most fruitful soil I have ever seen in my life” (319). Crèvecoeur wrote these paragraphs on a new leaf of his notebook,<sup>14</sup> and while we have no clues to the location of “Pa—an,” its radically different geographical imaginary suggests that he’s speaking of a community in the Wyoming Valley, most likely Pawpackton, mentioned in the long “Susquehannah” sketch. In Pa—an, the flight from poverty has left the people, tragically, in poverty; having moved away from rivers for more fertile and inexpensive land, they now lack the nails to build their homes, while their plants lie rotting in the fields. This is certainly not the optimistic world of Farmer James, nor even of Ben Franklin or the

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<sup>14</sup> See Moore, 391.

Mohawk Valley. Rather than a spatially remote land of a different lifestyle, there is the hint of a very different historical sensibility, as if Pa—an is a land of the past (settlement before prosperity) or, perhaps, of the future (settlement away from Farmer James's prosperous area, with new historical consequences).

Four possible spin-off points, then, from this enumeration of implements. One path to Franklin, political and scientific reflection, and the crown jewel of colonies, Pennsylvania—as if the lightning rod is here drawing on a different narrative spark, pulling it for a moment around the quotidian corn-crib. Another, smoldering path, that of the smoke-house, in which a comparative ethnography is being cured, Virginia hams ominously suggesting the unpleasant talk of slavery. A third path, that of the sleigh, but to a North that is at once the site of a winter pastoral *and* of intra-imperial conflicts. And a fourth path, to somewhere not here, a place of an imperfect, tragic, and impoverished America. Adding the original Farmer James framework, then, we have five hazily defined (but defined nonetheless) Americas: (i) an America of romantic agricultural practice branching off to (ii) an America of scientific progress and civilization, (iii) an America of regional diversity and contradictions, (iv) an America as an imperial outpost, and (v) an America of rural poverty. If “Implements” begins like a tedious capstone to the *Letters*, its progressive dispersal suggests a range of different literary projects, and may signal the moment when Crèvecoeur more actively began to pursue a less integrated or focused writing project.

This enumeration of slightly different, but not necessarily contradictory, literary projects seems confirmed, in retrospect, by the disparate elements of the *Letters*, most obviously in the New England and Carolina sketches, but also within the Russian traveler's portrait of Bartram, written in a celebratory enlightenment vein quite remote from the Farmer James pieces. And indeed, Crèvecoeur's juggling of these different tendencies is

evident when we turn to the French editions of the *Lettres*, as a brief survey of the two editions will indicate. The 1784, two-volume edition contained an amazing sixty-six sketches. After three introductory letters, three more letters reproduce versions of the first three Farmer James pieces of the London edition, with the episode of “André l’Hébridéen” now cast as a separate text. This is followed by the “Histoire de S.K., colon américain,” a revision of the unpublished English-language piece entitled “The American Belisarius.” (What is notable about the French revision, however, is that the tragic conclusion of the English draft is removed, as if deliberately heightening the sense of utopian pastoral.) The next three pieces focus extensively on Quakers<sup>15</sup>, eight subsequent and shorter pieces offer brief anecdotes of natural life or Connecticut society, and a French version of the “Voyage à la Jamaïque & aux isles Bermudes” follows as well. Of the remaining fourteen pieces of Volume One, all but one refer to the upheavals of the American Revolution, including six revisions treating the Wyoming Valley conflict. Several pieces treat Crèvecoeur’s New York incarceration. Volume Two may be more easily summarized; of thirty-one pieces, twenty-six offer ethnographic portraits of the American colonies, including four on Canadian territories, nineteen on New England (with sketches of Rhode Island, Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut complementing revised accounts of “l’isle de Nantucket” and “l’isle de la Vigne de Martre”), and three on the mid-Atlantic colonies (New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania). The final installments include “L’homme des frontieres” (a revision of Letter XII of the *Lettres*); a letter from an Irish colonist to Cherry Valley, New York, recounting frontier violence in the region and a final flight to live among the Indians; a revised version of the Charleston letter on slavery; and a concluding imaginary dialogue between “Métacomet” and “Siccacus, Sachem des Péquods.”

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<sup>15</sup> These are the sketch of John Bartram by the Russian traveler Ivan, and two essays about Walter Mifflin, a prominent Quaker abolitionist.

The first French *Lettres*, probably the edition most clearly prepared under Crèvecoeur's guidance, helps us to clarify still further the arrangement of the published and unpublished English-language materials—most of which were used, if nonetheless revised—in productive ways. For one thing, the *Lettres* are more clearly autobiographical. The introductory epistles introduce Crèvecoeur, the Frenchman, while the prison stories at the end of Volume One roughly match the details of Crèvecoeur's own incarceration, including his separation from and reunion with his son "Ally." One short sketch, "Anecdote du sassafras & de la vigne sauvage," relatedly describes a more patrician farm in New York, worked by slaves and with elaborate gardens; again Crèvecoeur names a family member (his daughter "Fanny") and gives a date (1774) for the episode. These details are less important in revealing the "true" Crèvecoeur—they remain highly stylized and obviously fictional pieces—than for suggesting that the Farmer James (now Farmer *Jean*) pieces are *not* autobiographical. They are rather experiments in creating the voice of one possible American farmer, and, among the full range of materials, offer one voice among many others, including the Russian traveler Ivan, Andrew the Hebridean, S.K., the Williams family, Francis Ab—y (the Irish colonist), Doctor M—r, and Rachel Budd. (Rachel Budd is the name now given for the Wyoming Massacre survivor "Mrs. B." of the unpublished manuscripts, and was the name of an actual survivor of the massacre; additional details of her flight offered in the French version, combined with Crèvecoeur's claims to have assisted survivors,<sup>16</sup> suggest that Crèvecoeur may have met Rachel Budd and reworked first-person testimony into a literary sketch.)

The first volume of the *Lettres*, then, is more clearly a mosaic of texts with a tragic trajectory, and is followed by a more ethnographically remote second volume that

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<sup>16</sup> Documented by Thomas Jefferson in the aforementioned letter.

nonetheless repeats the tragic conclusion with first-person narratives of revolutionary violence and, as the capstone, the tragic dialogue between two Native Americans of the seventeenth century. The third French edition, published in three volumes in 1787, essentially conforms to this program. It reproduced virtually all the materials of the 1784 edition, adding to the first and second volumes some sketches of a Native American (Nesquehounah) and Benjamin Franklin. But it also added a long third volume which included reworked versions of the English writings (the snake and humming-bird piece from *Letters*, the “Susquehannah” piece, now divided into two installments), a few more sketches of American localities (“Esquisse du Fleuve Ohio & du pays de Kentuckey”) and above all a number of new materials heavily focused on the American Revolution and George Washington. Among these is a fascinating piece entitled “Quarante-Neuf Anecdotes” (Forty-Nine Anecdotes), offering a series of short and exemplary mini-narratives of the revolution, about half of them focused on military figures, and entirely pro-Independence. As such the second edition of the *Lettres* seems to announce several remarkable shifts in Crèvecoeur’s project: in the aftermath of independence, he is aggressively pro-US; he turns more and more to the celebration of heroic Founders, more often than not military in background; and he increasingly emphasizes urban life, especially in New York City (where Crèvecoeur resided from 1783 to 1785, and 1787 to 1790). All of these shifts indicate a different orientation for the second edition of the *Lettres*, at least in the completely new third volume. Yet despite these reorientations, Crèvecoeur remained committed to the Wyoming-based portrait of American life, adding revised versions of the “Susquehannah” piece and a new essay on Cherry Valley, NY, a territory that experienced similar conflicts.

## 2

What does this broader picture of the *Letters/Lettres* tell us about Crèvecoeur as a writer? I want to reiterate here my opening point that this literary question is very much related to the question of Crèvecoeur's usefulness to the historian. As I suggested, the misleading view of the author autobiographically chained to Farmer James has significantly simplified and distorted matters, allowing readers to find the *Letters* essayistic sources with the faintest hint of fiction, rather than the reverse: fictional works with hints of the essay. Once we enhance our sense of Crèvecoeur-as-writer, then, we are obliged to view his work as a very different kind of historical resource. In my view, there are three essential matters at stake here: Crèvecoeur's subject matter; his artistic method, and why he adopted it; and finally the most productive and useful interpretive practices for reading Crèvecoeur.

As I've been suggesting, the Wyoming Valley conflicts play a fundamental role in Crèvecoeur's larger oeuvre, as the subject matter for a substantial portion of his texts and as the implicit reference or foil of many others. It may help here to turn to the "Susquehannah" sketch, in which the region was treated most systematically. The essay opens with the narrator chastising those European visitors who assess America through its "old Provinces"—New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut (163). But "'tis not by the History of these Provinces at Large or of the Foundation of our great Sea ports, that these Curious details [of America] can ever be Known" (165). Only in the *interior* settlements, the new colonies of the frontier, would one be able "to Trace & to follow, the first foundation [Rudiments] of such a colony from its first Embrio, to the Time it began to acquire Ease & opulence, & observe the primitive & original foundation of Future Towns & Villages & to Trace the simple & Natural growth & progress of all ~~so~~ human societies, a progress you can follow now no where but in this country" (165). To the European, the tale of the interior

colonies thus amounts to something of a secret history of America, revealing “the Means by which Secretly & unnoticed are Laid the foundations of new Empires, new Gov<sup>ts</sup>” (178).

Where might one find “Mankind Living in the greatest Plenty & with Infinitely less Labour than in the more Maritime Settlements” (164)? The narrator offers several possibilities. One could turn to “the Lands about Batavia, Pawpacton, Skohanry Round the Lakes Contadavagè, Otsegè Lakes, &c<sup>a</sup> & views the Low Lands on onion, otter Creeks on Lake Champlain” (164); one could look at “Fincastle county & all the other Interior Settlements of Virginia” (164); one “Must visit the Shores of Kennebecke up to its Falls” or “the Mohawk, the Susquehannah as well as those Innumerable streams on which Ceres & Pomona have fixed their Pleasing abode” (164). Maine, New York, northern Pennsylvania, Virginia, Vermont...we are offered here a full theory of differentiated colonization, pitting the “Old Provinces” against their newer, interior counterparts, “within 60 or 70 Miles of their Sea shores” (163-64). And this general observation treatment of “the History of the New England Settlements on the East Branch of the River Susquehanna” as “the most convincing Proof of what I [have] advanced” (164). Just exactly “what I [have] advanced” seems deceptively simple: a theory of the eighteenth-century wave of colonization. And joined to this historical claim is its more abstract counterpart: in this place and in this time, we can see the origins of society. But let us remember the sketch’s conclusion: the coming of the American Revolution, the destruction of this interior colony, the murder of hundreds and the destruction of the interior colony, and a mass of refugees uprooted from the area. Could it be, then, that “what I [have] advanced” is a somewhat gloomier theory, namely a story of the origins of social violence, or to put it in different terms, the theory of revolution itself?

That Crèvecoeur was familiar with the Susquehanna Company's colonization venture is evident from the references to Connecticut's reinterpretation of their charter, the colony's first missionary ventures into the region, and the resulting land sales (166-67). He mentions too the "the Long dispute between the Provinces of Connecticut & Pensilvania," the "Petty wars they carried on in Support of their mutual Claims," even the "considerable paper war...carried on by the Two Provinces, which convinced none of the Parties concerned" (165, 167). But the real interest, as is fitting for a theorist of interior colonies, is the unusual situation of Yankees set loose in Pennsylvania and "their Modes of Governing themselves when left to the dictates of simple Nature" (165). *This* is the fascinating situation, the "new & uncommon Spectacle": "to See this people pass over the whole weadth of the Province of New York...to go claim Possess and Inhabit at Such a distance an Extensive district which they cou'd not be supposed they were able to Govern so far removed from the Metropolis—" (167-68). The interior colony, cut off from the maritime metropolis, finds itself reinventing government.

Removed from the Connecticut government, now "Governing themselves," how do the Yankees cope with their fragile state of quasi-anarchy? The variable Crèvecoeur to which turns is "the Native characteristick of the first settlers" (165), elsewhere referred to as "their National Characteristick" (167). True to the Yankee stereotype, this characteristic is none other than the inclination "to aggrandisement & New schemes" (167), and the nature of these schemes is spelled out in two seemingly antithetical passages deleted by Bourdin and Williams. The first stresses the legal conventions of colonial land purchases, all carefully overseen by the state. Were anyone capable of purchasing land from Indians, "there wou'd araise an almost Indefinite mixture of property as well as Jurisdictions which wou'd destroy the harmony of settlement and that ~~hu~~ uniformity which constitutes the beauty of these

Provinces” (167). So had Connecticut carefully and legally purchased the Susquehanna territory. But the next passage shows the Yankees’ “National Characteristick” finding another outlet:

these bold adventurers divided the Country at Least the Shores of the East Branch according to the Impulses of their heated Imaginations they Painted its beauties Fertility & other advantages in the most lively collours They s Ideally subdivided it into Townships, agreeable to their own Custom at Home, then Each Townships in great many Lotts, these soon became the object of an Extensive Trade a sort of agio<sup>17</sup>; nothing was so common at that Time as to See a Variety of those Small grants & shares given & received in Payment for Goods & Merchandise supplying the place of Monney in most Exchanges; this division & subdivision of a country so Little Known as yet unlocated & unsurveyed open'd a door to much Fraud & deceit, many shares were sold more than once; their Prices either arose or Fell Just as the sanguine Imagination of the Purchasers represented to them the Validity of the New Englanders' Right. (168)

So it happens that a capitalist sensibility heats Yankee imaginations, painting the land in “lively collours” to create a sometimes fraudulent local currency of land deeds. What drives this frenzied agio? Our narrator is clear: “the sanguine Imagination” of possession, which correlates directly with the rise and fall of deed prices. Removed from the normal governmental constraints—the kind that ostensibly regulated the Indian deals—the marketplace becomes the de facto government of the Valley.

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<sup>17</sup> The OED defines “agio” as “The percentage charged for changing paper money into cash, or an inferior for a more valuable currency,” and “agiotage” as “Money-changing business; speculation in stocks; stock-jobbing.”

Is this a critique of capitalism? Taken at face value, the argument seems radical, financial speculation so infiltrating the imagination as to form the very basis of society. Remove government, and it is the profit-motive, production, and primitive accumulation that determine social interaction. But this analysis is not maintained throughout the sketch, or throughout the Wyoming pieces. Capitalism returns at various points, but its explanatory power is constantly shifting: when “government” returns to the Wyoming Valley in the form of the American Revolution, for example, capitalism is not put back in its place but this time adapts state institutions to its own ends. Rather than settling on a Crèvecoeurian view of capital, then, we must pay attention to its relative function within the narrative. For what we’re calling capitalism here is not a sociological phenomenon for Crèvecoeur as much as it is a problem of subjective motivation—imagination—emerging from and ambivalently opposed to structures.

The narrative subsequently turns to the narrator’s voyages through the region, each stop—Menisink Heights, Shoholy, Blooming Grove, Wallenpaupack, the Great Swamp, Wiomen, Warrior’s Run, Shamoctin, Anaquaga, Pawpacton—evoking specific reflections about colonization, culture, religion, economics, and politics.<sup>18</sup> And then we return to the Massacre of 1778, an event that the English-language narrator tries frenetically to explain. One sentence in the manuscript reads “these Passions were soon Kindled by the new situation of these People & they flourished very rapidly,” and is later rewritten, “the new situation of these People soon Kindled these Passions & they flourished very Rapidly.”<sup>19</sup> A subtle shift, to be sure, but one that indicates the narrator’s uncertainty about priorities: is it

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<sup>18</sup> I don’t have the space to summarize these, but would note that there are interesting divergences in the presentations of these stops between the English and French versions as well.

<sup>19</sup> Moore presents the edited sentence, with Crèvecoeur’s parenthetical numbers indicating the reordering, like so: “[4] these [5] Passions were [2] soon [3] Kindled by [1] the new situation of these People [2] & they flourished very Rapidly” (184).

the situation or the passions that should take center stage? And is it the people that flourished or their passions? In fact, these first pages explaining the massacre present any number of possible explanations that the text is later at pains to order. They include, offered in the order of their presentation, the following:

- “the Long delay of the Proprietors”
- “the Ignorancy, & carelessness of the first surveyors”
- “perhaps Some from fraud in the first ~~purch~~ Settlers”
- “a degree of Pride”
- “the original Plan of settlement was partly oversat”
- “Chicannery”
- “contention the Love of Party & Tumults”
- “a Set of people & who from being Debtors, needy, oppressed with large families, uneasy & a Variety of other characters, found themselves in a short Time possessed of considerable property & the founders of an opulent Sett<sup>l</sup>”
- “they were hardly fit to receive the benefits of any [law]”
- “they are all Instinctively Indued with a Sufficient Stock of cunning & sagacity as to be able to do themselves Justice & repell fraud with fraud”
- “the successes of these settlers...[were] perhaps represented in a more advantageous light than it really deserved”
- “the Lasy the non Industrious”
- “the Man who dreaded the Law”
- “people unsupported by their metropolis”
- “without Law or Govt without any Kind of social bond to unite them all”
- “a Strange Variety of sects & Nations”
- “that pride which Sudden Ease & consequence Necessarily inspires”
- “At last Some Demagagues appeared”
- “few men arrived from Connecticut of more property & Knowledge”
- “so much art & so much Intrigue”
- “Trade Knows no Ennemies”
- “at Last they had the boldness to think of disposessing by arms the hPensilvanians who were settled on the W. Branch”
- “believing with the antient credulity of N. England Men that the charter words of Charles y<sup>e</sup> 2<sup>d</sup> cou’d possiblyl give them an Indefeasable Right to this great Dominion”
- “open’d war was declared on both sides, on both sides shocking retaliations Took place”
- “as is always the case between two Small Rival Nations which are Limitrophes”
- “their primitive Ru Rule & mode of governing themselves entirely ceased”
- “Magistrates Inferior Municipal officers were Established”
- “Militia Laws & Establishment took place”

- “in this new order of things most of the antient claims & shares of the first adventurers became wholly oversat & Extinct”
- “The opinions of the people grew more & more divided”
- “secretly caused a very great ferment, which soon swelled to rancour, to Ill blood”
- “the name of Yankees and Pennamites were Invented”
- “no provincial or national Jealousys is ever the Source of any discord, this Memorable Instance is the first of the Kind”
- “there were Several who less sanguine or more prudent than the rest had secretly purchased the right of soyl from Pensilvania in order to secure them if possible from both sides”
- “Publick Insult, some times banishment”
- “the Rulers thought themselves obliged to punish with Severity those New adversaries whose conduct tended to Invalidate the Title of their Lands”
- “a vindictive spirit”
- “this Persecution was rather Incourage than ~~ab~~ repressed by their new made officers”
- “Religion was as yet silent” (184-88)

Situations to passions and back to situations, as if all the possible cards must be laid on the table in order to sort them out, find patterns, locate the system.

Crèvecoeur returns briefly to the “National Characteristhick” of the Connecticut settlers, and traces the collapse in the play of economic forces, expanding on the insights gained at Pawpackton. In this account, avaricious and sometimes fraudulent speculators tried to amass as much wealth as possible in “the grand Landed contest” (188). The lazy and indolent poured into the area, and they too acquired great wealth “with little Labour” (188).

Nature, in giving its riches too easily, betrayed these people, for it promised them

the greatest share, where the prospect of Life is the most pleasing, health, preserved by Labour without Excess, competency even to riches without desperate undertakings, ample provision for the most numerous family a corroding thought in all Large societies, a Governement under which every man enjoys Some degree of consequence the very diversions ~~of th~~ afforded

by the Woods the water, without Trouble or danger, these are the Rude out  
lines of that Picture I'd willingly convey to your Inspection. (189)

When dissenting families are eventually driven northward, from the valley, to live among the Indians, some of the Indians return under a flag of truce to retrieve livestock and other goods abandoned by their new white neighbors. The arrogantly rich settlers, “Instead of complying with this Just request in the hour of y<sup>e</sup> utmost Infatuation... Seised those Ambassadors, wipt them & Sent them away,” and later repeated this crime against a “second Embassy” (196). In this account, it is precisely the utopian bounty of the Susquehanna that forms the basis of its dystopian destruction, much as its excellent soil allows the destructive wild cucumber to thrive. Nature’s easy gifts *appear* solely the result of hard work, which fuels an acquisitiveness that leads to conflict. In some respects, this is the sketch’s most radical and most tragic argument, for it is precisely America’s abundance, combined with the American’s ingenuity and toil that together unfold as violence and destruction.

But a second explanatory framework shifts back to “Modes of Governing” to explain the descent into violence. As “the great contest between the Mother Country & this” began, it “[Spread] among the Lower Class Like an Epidemy of the Mind” (194). All other conflicts—competing land claims, disputes over horses, fraud—were soon “Swallow’d up” by the master conflict, and the locals “rapidly Lau[n]ch’d forth into all the Intricate mases of this grand Quarrell as their Inclinations prepossessions & Prejudices Led them” (194). Some few traditionalists “Still respected the name of Englishmen & cherished the Idea of antient connection” but most turned to the “Modern opinions” of revolution, and as “the strongest party... were guilty of many persecutions, a Horrid Policy” (194). The shift from the earlier account of government is thus marked by a new variable: faction.

Is this a condemnation of the Revolution *in toto*? At times it sounds like one, at others not. At Wyoming the vicious and triumphant Connecticut settlers “readily Enlisted” in the militia, eager to convert their newly-exercised political strength into military muscle as well, but are then horrified to hear their revolutionary marching orders: “to Join General Washington’s head Quarters” (196). Now they “too late began to Emerge from that State of blindness,” realizing that while they use the Revolution, the Revolution will use them too. They suddenly foresee that the removal of 400 soldiers will bring down vengeance upon their weakened state, and that their exiled adversaries, sent north to Indian territory, may also draw on the resources of the revolution, in the form of English officers, soldiers, and Indian allies. Thus the political channeling of the originally economic conflict brings Colonel Butler’s forces down to the Wyoming Valley. Rather than read this as a simple condemnation of revolution per se, we should instead find here a theory of revolution, not as a grand transformation but as the sudden electrification of political institutions.

There is a third explanatory framework reluctantly introduced. As economic conflicts take their governmental form, the narrator insists that “Relligion was as yet silent” and “did not decorate by its benign Presence & effects those happy shores” (188). Yet the story of the settlement and its destruction is dotted with religious tropes, from the fruitful multiplication in the Susquehanna valley to the arrival of serpent “Demagagues...of so much art & so much Intrigue” (185), to the first spilling of blood, “for where are the societies of Men that are not Tinged with this pretious liquid” (186), to the concluding valley of death. And are not both both greed and party betray signs of a “new Zeal” (194). The full surrender to the religious interpretation may be said to occur at the moment when the text also surrenders its sense of Wyoming’s uniqueness. If, early in the explication, we’re told that “no provincial or national Jealousys is ever the Source of any discord” in America, and

that “this Memorable Instance” of Yankees against Pennamites “is the first of the Kind” (187), by the time we get to the “disgusting details” of the massacre, we’re told such an exercise is “but a repetition of what has been done from one End of y’ continent to the other.” For “this New Ebullition of the Mind was E Every where Like one & y’ Same cause & therefore every where produced the Same effects” (194). Thus the concluding pages of the sketch are given over to expostulations to “ye philosophers ye divines,” and reflections on Man, God, and Human Destiny. Humans, we’re told, are “carnivorous animals avidly seeking to Glutt themselves with the blood of the other,” filled with “demoniack fury,” an “Incomprehensible Race [being], uniting some time the sublimity of angels to the depravity of Demons,” subject to “some Malediction anterior to thy Knowledge,” the type of creatures who will “Tear Each other’s Limbs,” whose gore will “feed the flies” (202-03). We blaspheme, we’re told “when we dare pronounce man to be the Image of God,— such a reptile, so restless so vain, so cruel so vindictive, the Image of the father of Nature, no ‘tis Impossible” and in the end we witness “that Strange concatenation of Events which establishes every thing in Evil” (203).

I have dwelt on these passages because they reveal a very different Crèvecoeur than that of the Farmer James pieces. This is a Crèvecoeur grappling with a particular set of historical problems: interior colonization, economic motives, political institutions, religious belief, and revolutionary violence. All of these variables are explored further in the account of the Wyoming Massacre, which, in its first, English version, expresses remarkable sympathy for the alleged perpetrators (the Native Americans), surprising hostility toward the alleged victims (the Yankee farmers), and strongest affinity with the witnesses (the families of the killed men). If the resulting analysis lacks coherence—it is, in fact, rife with contradictions—we nonetheless get a sense of the American situation as Crèvecoeur

understood it. Again, a recontextualization of the Farmer James pieces is helpful here. Far from being interested in presenting a representative, idyllic portrait of American agricultural life, Crèvecoeur sought to explore how Farmer James and variants were formed, what motivated them, and how they might end up engaging in, or subject to, acts of violence.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Crèvecoeur is a political and social theorist more in the line of the Abbé Raynal or, later, de Tocqueville. Any assessment of Crèvecoeur that fails to grasp this larger analytical project misses the ironic distance toward Farmer James, and thereby the insights of Crèvecoeur's analysis.

Without belaboring this point, I will turn to Crèvecoeur's aesthetic method—largely absent in the “Susquehannah” piece's long expository passages. There is a passage, however, that suddenly shifts from the conventional terms of historical analysis to an artistic theory, that of the mosaic. Its fullest formulation comes in the following passage, portions of which I have already quoted.

I mean to make you remark the effects which have follow'd from the Native charactheristick of the first settlers, their Modes of Governing themselves when left to the dictates of simple Nature they had no Gov<sup>t</sup>, & finally the ultimate catastrophe which they have meet with. these objects Taken together may perhaps become worthy your attention. That variety of subjects I have held to your View may when taken Sèparatly appear Trifling but like the various pieces of a Mosaick work properly reunited dare I flatter myself that the collective whole will Tend to Elucidate & make you better acquainted with a country the Interior Policy and Economy of which are so

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<sup>20</sup> One of the Wyoming sketches presents a narrator who belongs to a vigilante group, shamed into changing his behavior only when he is ordered to kill a nursing mother and her children. Another sketch graphically describes a vigilante gang hanging a suspected neighbor in front of his children.

little Known:— tis not by the History of these Provinces at Large or of the Foundation of our great Sea ports, that these Curious details can ever be Known, 'tis not from the multiplied essays you have perused concerning the English colonies you can ever have a sufficient & adequate Idea of this country most of them have been wrote by Europeans & from superficial Information... (165-66)

Taken separately, the subjects of the sketches may “appear Trifling,” but their local insignificance becomes clear when “properly reunited”—a clear enough argument for the mosaic. But the context in which this method is articulated should not be passed over too quickly. The narrative has suddenly shifted to the mosaic theory because it is unsure how to balance the political-institutional with the economic-cultural variables. The mosaic thus offers a solution to comprehensive and unified accounts by turning to *tragedy*—that is, the sociological elements can be ordered only when juxtaposed as irreconcilable variables of character.<sup>21</sup> I'd suggest that the mosaic method, explicitly dedicated to tragedy, aimed to piece together various sketches evoking strong and conflicting emotional reactions for cognitive effect. Just as the depiction of a happy journey into the region—a vicarious participation in the “sanguine Imagination”—is a necessary complement to the tale of violence, so too the celebration of the interior settlements is necessarily matched with an account of destruction, as virtues become flaws. Indeed, the mosaic theory articulated here is the best evidence for the increasingly popular reading of the *Letters* as tragedy. It is not that Crèvecoeur began the project naively, encountered the brutalities of war, and then, with heavy heart, drafted the final “Distresses of a Frontier Man.” If he followed the same path

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<sup>21</sup> The Yale editors ignored this aesthetic argument twice over, first in deleting the above passage, and again when they published the first half of the Susquehanna segment separately from the narrative of the Wyoming massacre.

in the James letters that he follows in the Wyoming sketches, the utopian tone of the early letters is for deliberate effect. Put more bluntly, the utopian or idyllic moments of the *Letters*—so often read “straight” or in self-congratulatory fashion—are absolutely integral to Crèvecoeur’s critique and analysis of American society. Taken together the fragments of Crèvecoeur’s oeuvre may be said to *challenge*, rather than *endorse*, simplistic celebrations of America. Thus the clear condemnation of histories “of these Provinces at Large.” Likely written by Europeans with only the most superficial sense of America, such celebratory pieces are merely “multiplied essays” reiterating the same naïve points again and again. Crèvecoeur’s sketches, by contrast, are not to be read as variations on a theme, but as dialogically contentious pieces, read against one another for effect.

I’m suggesting that the mosaic theory emerges as a strategy of historical analysis, one that acknowledges or perceives the limits of conventional historical analysis, and responds by accepting seemingly, even actually disparate modes of analysis as a means of capturing the “big picture” of America. We may now step back from the “Susquehannah” sketch, to the *Letters/Lettres* as a whole, and identify a series of literary modes that constitute the mosaic strategy. First among these would be the character portraits or life narratives, stressing subjective experience of certain “National Characteristicks”: among these would be the Farmer James pieces, the first-person Wyoming sketches, the abolitionist sketches focused on Walter Mifflin, and the portrait of John Bartram, as well as Crèvecoeur’s more autobiographical pieces. Occupying a second position would be a series of ethnographic portraits of the colonies: the Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard pieces, and all the colony sketches that appear in the first French edition, as well as the accounts of western territories that appear later. These “objective” ethnographic portraits may be said to function as the counterpoint to the more subjective pieces of the first category, and are the site in

Crèvecoeur's writing where comparisons and contrasts become most clear, most famously in the accounts of southern slavery. Complementing these two modes, and achieving ever greater importance in the French editions, is a series of anecdotes: mini-narratives of events or episodes. The anecdotal moments are one important site where Crèvecoeur attempts to bridge the gap between the subjective and objective modes of writing. The "Forty-Nine Anecdotes" on the American Revolution, for example, include tales of sailors, soldiers, ministers, farmers, women, slaves, merchants, and printers from the Caribbean to New England, clearly demonstrating the varieties of American experience. But there is a fourth mode that similarly attempts this synthesis: the nature sketch, most familiar to Crèvecoeur's readers in Farmer James's narrative of kingbirds and bees, but including his portrait of snakes and the hummingbird, the account of sassafras and the vine, the dog, or the ant-hill. These heavily allegorical pieces, I would argue, constitute something of a structuring mythology of America, a moment in which the subjective and the objective collide in the form of "natural" characteristics, like the intrinsic violence of the hummingbird, or the contentiousness of snakes.

I should here mention one other literary mode with which Crèvecoeur briefly flirts: the dramatic sequence. Among the unpublished English manuscripts one finds the remarkable "Landskapes," later labeled "An American Perspective divided into 6 Landkapes" [sic], a series of brief scenes set in the Wyoming Valley during the revolutionary conflicts. Jeffrey H. Richards has offered a nice introduction to the scenes themselves,<sup>22</sup> but Crèvecoeur's prefatory comments deserve our attention as well. In contrast to the "Province of y' Historiographer Byographer &<sup>ca</sup> my simple wish is to shew you the Vulgar threat of that cannevas once so Rude & Neglected the work of Low & Ignorant artists"

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<sup>22</sup> In "Revolution, Domestic Life, and the End of 'Common Mercy' in Crèvecoeur's "Landscapes," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 55.2 (Apr 1998), 281-296.

(231). Or again: “my simple Wish is to present you with some of the primary Elements & original component parts in their Native appearances before they were artfully gathered united new Modeled & Polished by our Modern Legis Lators—” (231). One could continue, for Crèvecoeur goes on for pages spinning metaphors for his aesthetic, almost always contrasting a “high” term (history, legislation, biography, fine art, painting) with a “low” term (sketches, anecdotes, scenes, ordinary people). Thus one more example: “it is not every Lung tis not every breast which can bare Long [&] unaffected, the subtle the Penetrating air of Tereniff’s Top, or the [Earth breathed on ye] Exalted Crater of Mount Vesuvius but in my descent I find Crevices Low as a Variety of new Plants which afford me some Amusement as I proceed down wards—” (233). It is notable, I think, that these “Landskapes” were among the only unpublished manuscripts that did *not* make it into the French editions of the *Lettres*.<sup>23</sup> Does this indicate that Crèvecoeur balked at executing a fully dramatic version of the *Lettres*? One may note, first, that this dramatic sequence does seem to structure the little-treated *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New-York*. The French *Lettres* also increasingly use bits of semi-dramatic dialogue (in the Rachel Budd story, in the revision of the Susquehanna travels, in the inclusion of the Metacom-Siccacus dialogue, and so on.) But the *Lettres* were also already committed to literary modes that could not be easily translated into dramatic form—the nature sketch and the provincial ethnography, above all—and the mosaic of the *Letters/Lettres* is one of different epistolary modes. Here we might reflect once more on the full French title and its ambiguous preposition: *Lettres d’un Cultivateur Américain* could be more accurately translated as “Letters of an American Farmer,” rather than “Letters from an American Farmer.” For they are the

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<sup>23</sup> The same is true of the related text, “The Grotto—.”

disparate and accumulated letters gathered and harvested by an American Farmer, not unified texts by or about one lone American Farmer.

### 3

How then might Crèvecoeur be read historically? That is: what can we learn from him, and what are his historical insights about his moment and location? My conclusions here are more tentative and general, though guided by the conviction that Crèvecoeur is a much more historically engaged and historiographically-attuned writer than we have long assumed.

1. Crèvecoeur was interested in the processes of colonization, yes, but specifically the interior, second wave of colonization underway in the mid-eighteenth century. Whether this interest was motivated by location, personal experience, or literary competition (Crèvecoeur defining his writing against the European tendency to focus on the littoral settlements), this was the primary problem of the English manuscripts, the first French edition, and to a lesser extent the second French edition, which turned increasingly to the problem of revolutionary culture.

2. In order to analyze these processes of interior colonization, one needed to examine multiple historical variables, including economic norms, political institutions, religious and cultural traditions, relations with Native Americans, climate and natural environment, and institutions of labor and servitude. In short, Crèvecoeur was more interested in, and aware of, the variegated histories of these variables in the New World than has previously been appreciated.

3. The aggregate of the *Letters/Lettres* shows that the different sketches can only be read in relation to one another. Farmer James's insistence that religion becomes less

significant in America is simply not an accurate assessment of Crèvecoeur's views, which, in the Wyoming segments, explore the fundamental role of religion. (The unpublished English sketch "Liberty of Worship" is perhaps the bridge text here, presenting a tolerant farmer trying to dissuade his zealous neighbor to be more ecumenically tolerant.) Farmer James's assessment of agrarian settlement is likewise limited in its scope, and, far from an account of "America" may be juxtaposed with his other Wyoming writings.

4. What this juxtaposition reveals is that Crèvecoeur is a profoundly comparative writer, interested in the disparities between the various New World colonies, interested in how the interior colonies often mix these different elements with horrible consequences. It is here that we find the continuity between the early, Wyoming-oriented letters and the increasing interest in the American Revolution (in the third volume of the second *Lettres*), for the later writings to some extent treat the problem of the integration of disparate elements in a new national framework.

5. Crèvecoeur's comparative project is more complicated than comparing different colonies—say, Connecticut and Pennsylvania—and in his writing takes the form of competing literary modes of presentation. The most obvious example is the split between his ethnographic writings about colonies (the Nantucket sketches of the *Lettres*, the bulk of volume two of the *Lettres*) and the personal narratives (most of the Wyoming sketches, the portraits of Quakers, the Farmer James letters). In one sense, as I've argued above, these modes of writing examine a discrepancy between the subjective experience of colonization and the objective parameters. The insight may be said to be that certain objective conditions create subjective perceptions, habits, and emotions that may distort or mislead. The most obvious example here is Farmer James's idealistic reading of Pennsylvanian settlement patterns, religious sensibilities, and political commitments, which are dashed against the

rocks of the very different practices and traditions of Connecticut. The tragedy of the Farmer James narrative is the tragedy of subjective experience misreading objective realities, and suggests a historical sensibility interested in unintended consequences and cultural blindnesses—a very different Crèvecoeur than the naïve farmer we've imagined him to be.

6. Let me offer one more reading of the tension between the ethnographic sketches and the personal narratives: the juxtaposition also seems to highlight the clash between two very different intellectual cultures, the elite tradition of comprehensive cultural analysis and a more vernacular tradition of testimony. These two modes of writing (among others) mark political competition between rulers and ruled throughout the eighteenth century, for example in the phenomenon of farmers' petitions (practical and collective personal narratives) and Land Office reports. We could say that, in writing in these different modes, Crèvecoeur's writing has the potential to illuminate, indirectly, some of the tensions existing between subcultures. The increasing turn to the anecdote, clearly influenced by the revolutionary era's newspaper explosion,<sup>24</sup> gives us some sense of a different interpretive sensibility emergent from the rise of print culture. The occasional employment of the natural essay may be similarly linked to the increasing importance of a transatlantic scientific tradition.

7. Given the moment when Crèvecoeur did the bulk of his writing, his interest in colonization is also specifically focused on the problem of its endpoint—the revolutionary violence that so disrupted the interior of Pennsylvania, and more broadly the transformation of the thirteen colonies into the United States. This interest bridges the gap between the more “colonial” *Letters* and the post-revolutionary, second edition *Lettres*, the thematic shifts marking the different components at stake for Crèvecoeur's analysis, not to mention his

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<sup>24</sup> Many of the “Forty-Nine Anecdotes” read like short newspaper items, many actually citing newspapers. A few refer to Rivington's famous loyalist newspaper in New York City.

different geographic location (not his upstate estate but New York City). Far from being a writer who shirked political questions surrounding the revolution, Crèvecoeur was fundamentally engaged with this problem, and used the mosaic theory as his primary aesthetic tool for thinking through the question of national unity.

8. What all of these details and observations suggest is that our best and most productive reading of Crèvecoeur must commence from a sense of his mosaic, and that rather than read isolated texts for source data, buried beneath minor literary flourishes, we should read his texts more dynamically and relationally. Perhaps it would even be useful to think of Crèvecoeur as an emblematic instance of revolutionary consciousness, in the sense of an ever-increasing appreciation of the competing modes, places, populations, voices, and affects of the gradually forming United States of America. As a loyalist sympathizer turned nationalist, agrarian turned urbanite, slave-owning abolitionist, traveler and surveyor, and above all as writer trying to capture these shifts and turns, tensions and contradictions, Crèvecoeur offers us something of a map of the moment's changing sensibilities. He is not the eighteenth-century farmer set in amber, for us to contemplate. Perhaps the better metaphor would be the lightning rod drawing different atmospheric charges, bringing them down to earth through different structures.

*Letters from an American Farmer* (1782 London edition)

1. Introduction
2. On the Situation, Feelings, and Pleasures of an American Farmer
3. What is an American?
4. Description of the Island of Nantucket, with the Manners, Customs, Policy, and Trade of the Inhabitants
5. Customary Education and Employment of the Inhabitants of Nantucket
6. Description of the Island of Martha's Vineyard and of the Whale Fishery
7. Manners and Customs at Nantucket
8. Peculiar Customs at Nantucket
9. Description of Charles Town; Thoughts on Slavery; On Physical Evil; A Melancholy Scene
10. On Snakes; And on the Humming-bird
11. From Mr. Iw—n Al—z, a Russian Gentleman, Describing the Visit He Paid at My Request to Mr. John Bertram, the Celebrated Pennsylvanian Botanist
12. Distresses of a Frontier Man

*Sketches* (unpublished English mss)

1. An Happy Family Disunited by the Spirit of Civil War
2. Thoughts of an American Farmer—on Various Rural Subjects
3. Fifth Letter
4. Sixth Letter: Various Customs and Methods
5. Seventh Letter: Description of Various Implements
6. Rock of Lisbon
7. Sketch of a Contrast between the Spanish and the English Colonies
8. Reflections on the Manners of the Americans
9. Sketches of Jamaica and Bermudas and other Subjects
10. Ant Hill-Town
11. Hospitals
12. Liberty of Worship
13. A Snow Storm as it affects the American Farmer
14. Letter: Frontier Woman
15. Susquehannah
16. History of Mrs. B.: An Epitome of all the Misfortunes which can possibly overtake a New Settler, as related by herself
17. The American Belisarius, or The History of S. K.
18. Landskapes
19. The Grotto
20. The Commissioners
21. Ingratitude Rewarded
22. The Man of Sorrow

*Lettres d'un Cultivateur Américain* (1784 edition)

Tome Premier

1. Epitre dédicatoire
2. Lettre, au rédacteur du mercure de France
3. Autre lettre au rédacteur du mercure de France
4. Premiere lettre
5. Seconde letter
6. Pensées d'un cultivateur américain, sur son sor & les plaisirs de la campagne
7. Histoire d'André l'Hébridéen
8. Histoire de S. K., colon américain
9. Lettre écrite par Ivan AI-Z, gentilhomme Russe, à un de ses amis en Europe
10. Description abrégée de la secte des quakers ou amis; anecdote de Walter Mifflin, membre de cette société
11. Autre anecdote de Walter Mifflin
12. Anecdote d'un chien sauvage
13. Anecdote
14. Seconde anecdote
15. Troisieme Anecdote
16. Quatrieme Anecdote
17. Cinquieme anecdote
18. Sixieme anecdote
19. Anecdote du sassafras & de la vigne sauvage
20. Voyage à la Jamaïque & aux isles Bermudes
21. Anecdote de la famille de Williams X...
22. L'humanité recompense
23. Pensées conçues en entrant dans un hospital militaire; anecdote d'un soldat reconnoissant
24. Extrait d'une letter du docteur M.—r

25. Lettre de Culpepper County
26. Description d'une chute de neige
27. Pensées sur la guerre civile; histoire de Joseph Wilson
28. La femme des frontières
29. La fille généreuse
30. Anecdote du sergent B. A.
31. Le pere infortuné
32. Histoire de Rachel Budd
33. L'atrocité de la perfidie
34. Circonstances dans lesquelles s'est trouvé l'auteur pendant son séjour à New-Yorck

Tome Second

35. Canada
36. Isle Saint-Jean
37. Acadie ou Nouvelle-Ecosse
38. Terre Neuve
39. Territoire de Sagadahock & de Main
40. Massachusset-Baye
41. Nouvelle Hampshire
42. Isle de Rhodes
43. Connecticut
44. Province de Nouvelle-Yorck
45. Description de l'isle de Nantucket
46. Deuxieme lettre. L'isle
47. Troisieme lettre. Sauvages
48. Quatrieme lettre. Education
49. Cinquieme lettre. Progressive industrie des premiers colons
50. Sixieme lettre. L'isle de la Vigne de Martre
51. Huitieme lettre. Moeurs
52. Neuvieme lettre. Mariages
53. Dixieme lettre. Emigration
54. Onzieme lettre. La religion de l'isle

55. Douzieme lettre. Coutumes particulieres
56. Treizieme lettre. Singuliere coutume
57. Quatorzieme lettre. Plaisirs champêtres
58. Quinzieme lettre. Excursions vers la partie orientale de l'isle
59. Seizieme lettre. Livres & réflexions finales
60. Province du nouveau Jersey
61. Pensilvanie
62. L'homme des frontieres
63. Esquisse
64. Lettre écrite par F—IS, AB—Y, irlandois, colon de l'établissement de Ce—y-V—y
65. Lettre d'un voyageur européen sur la situation de Charles-Town, sur le commerce & les moeurs de ses habitans, & de ceux des campagnes; pensées sur l'esclavage, sur le mal physique; barbarie des planteurs
66. Conversations entre Métacomet, fils de Massasoit, frere de Wamsuta, & le vieux Siccacus, Sachem des Péquods, extraite des journaux Manuscrits de B. Wentworth, écuyer, gouverneur du nouveau Hampshire

*Lettres d'un Cultivateur Américain* (1787 edition)

Tome Premier

1. Epitre dédicatoire
2. Lettre, au Rédacteur du Mercure de France
3. Autre lettre au même rédacteur
4. Extrait donné dans le Mercure en 1785
5. Première lettre
6. Seconde letter
7. Pensées d'un cultivateur américain, sur son sort & les plaisirs de la campagne
8. Histoire d'André l'Hébridéen
9. Histoire de S. K., colon américain
10. Lettre écrite par Ivan AI-Z, gentilhomme Russe, à un de ses amis en Europe
11. Description abrégée de la secte des quakers ou amis; anecdote de Walter Mifflin, membre de cette société
12. Autre anecdote de Walter Mifflin
13. Anecdote d'un chien sauvage
14. Anecdote
15. Seconde anecdote
16. Troisieme Anecdote
17. Quatrieme Anecdote
18. Cinquieme anecdote
19. Sixieme anecdote
20. Anecdote du sassafras & de la vigne sauvage
21. Voyage à la Jamaïque & aux isles Bermudes
22. Anecdote de la famille de Williams...
23. L'humanité recompense
24. Pensées conçues en entrant dans un hospital militaire; anecdote d'un soldat reconnoissant
25. Extrait d'une letter du docteur M—ro

26. Lettre de Culpepper County
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30. La fille généreuse
31. Anecdote du sergent B. A.
32. Le pere infortuné
33. Histoire de Rachel Budd
34. L'atrocité de la perfidie
35. Circonstances dans lesquelles s'est trouvé l'auteur pendant son séjour à New-Yorck
36. Réponse à C.C., Écuyer
37. Dernière Lettre

#### Tome Second

38. Canada
39. Isle Saint-Jean
40. Acadie ou Nouvelle-Ecosse
41. Terre Neuve
42. Territoire de Sagadahock & de Main
43. Baie de Massachussets
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57. Onzieme lettre. La religion de l'isle
58. Douzieme lettre. Coutumes particulieres
59. Treizieme lettre. Singuliere coutume
60. Quatorzieme lettre. Plaisirs champêtres
61. Quinzieme lettre. Excursions vers la partie orientale de l'isle
62. Seizieme lettre. Livres & réflexions finales
63. Province du nouveau Jersey
64. Pensilvanie
65. L'homme des frontieres
66. Esquisse
67. Lettre écrite par Francis H—U—R
68. Pensées sur l'esclavage & sur les Negres
69. Conversation entre Métacommet, fils de Massasoit, frère de Wamsuta, & le vieux Siccacus, Sachem des Péquods, extradite des Journaux Manuscrits de B. Wentworth, Écuyer, Gouverneur au Nouveau Hampshire
70. Nesquéhiounah, connu sous le nom du Colonel Louis
71. Arrivée du Docteur Benjamin Franklin à Philadelphie

#### Tome Troisieme

72. Première Lettre, écrite de Boston le 28 Mars 1784
73. Deuxième Lettre. Esquisse du grand Cohos de la rivière de Connecticut
74. Troisième Lettre. La femme Allemande.
75. Quatrième Lettre, Combat d'Oiseaux Mouches & de deux Serpens
76. Cinquième Lettre. Quarante-neuf Anecdotes

77. Septième Lettre. Lettre circulaire de l'Assemblée des Quakers, Éloge de Bénézet, &c.
78. Huitième Lettre, Esquisse d'un voyage de Ménessink sur la Delaware, &c.; à Wioming, sur la Susquéhannah, &c.
79. Neuvième Lettre. Esquisse de la destruction des établissemens des Habitans de Connecticut, sur la branche orientale de la Susquéhannah
80. Dixième Lettre. Histoire de l'établissement connu sous le nom de la Vallée des Cerises, par le fils d'un des premiers Colons
81. Onzième Lettre. Détail de plusieurs circonstances intéressantes qui ont précédé & suivi l'entrée triomphante du Général Washington, dans la Ville de New-York. Départ des Anglois; -- Restauration du Gouvernement Américain; --le Général résigne sa Commission; son retour à la vie privée, &c, &c.
82. Douzième Lettre. Licenciement de l'Armée Américaine
83. Treizième Lettre. Relation de quelques circonstances relatives au voyage que M. le Marquis de la Fayette vient de faire parmi nous
84. Quatorzième Lettre. Esquisse du Fleuve Ohio & du pays de Kentucky
85. Quinzième Lettre. L'esquisse de la civilisation dans les Treize-Etats-Unis
86. Seizième et Dernière Lettre. Idem. De plusieurs choses utiles faites par les Américains, depuis la Paix
87. Lettre circulaire du Général Washington