Posthumous America

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SAINT-JOHN DE CRÈVECŒUR AND NOSTALGIA FOR COLONIAL AMERICA

People complained in colonial times also; for it is man’s fate:
this time was nonetheless the true golden age of this
new part of the world.
—Crèvecoeur, Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New York

Prologue: Saint-John de Crèvecoeur’s Fracture

A SPLIT SUBJECT

“Of course all life is a process of breaking down, but the blows that do the
dramatic side of the work—the big sudden blows that come, or seem to come,
from outside—the ones you remember and blame things on and, in moments
of weakness, tell your friends about, don’t show their effect all at once.” 1
Just like the experience described by Fitzgerald, Saint-John de Crèvecoeur’s existence is
proof that a deep-seated fracture is at the origin of literary creation, writing being
an attempt to compensate for the pain that defines a before and an after in the
flesh of a life. “I am no longer the person you formerly knew when I was happy
and free,” 2 Crèvecoeur declared following his imprisonment in 1779, but “a very
different man from what I was before.” 3 Why was he locked up in New York jails
during the American revolution? In what circumstances did his second “self,” of
which he speaks previously, come into existence, and to what extent does this
event coincide with Crèvecoeur’s entry into the realm of literature?

Everyone is an autobiographer who chooses, from among the nearly infinite
range of experiences, a narrative that is able to describe for himself and for others
the person he has become. In the case of Créveceur, this narrative constantly returns to the fault line that cuts his life in two, the break that defines not only two periods in his life but, in fact, two identities. The subjective representation of his past is crucial if one is to understand his work, which may be seen as the space in which his second self, haunted by a poignant nostalgia, strives to recreate the existence formally led by the first. Insatiable, this nostalgia nourishes and constantly refuels a literary undertaking that attempts to enter into communion with a past period that it eventually reinvents in an elegiac mode. As Bernard Chevignard writes, “Letters is thus the projection of a retrospective gaze that reinvents the past through contrast and lives it again like an inverse image of a present that has become unbearable.”

One can only reach a similar conclusion in reading the Lettres d’un cultivateur américain (Paris, 1784 and 1787) and the Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New York (Paris, 1801), texts to which the present chapter is devoted. But before proceeding to the analysis of the posthumous representation of America in his works, a prologue devoted to Créveceur’s personal journey is essential: it will permit the reader to determine to what extent he has deformed or reinvented the original biographical material he shares, just as it is necessary to study the norm to be able to judge the extent of a variation from that norm.

THE YOUTH OF A PROTEUS

Crèveceur’s life has been studied in several very fine works that strive to retrace the various stages of the adventurous existence of the “American farmer.” This is nonetheless a considerable challenge, because there is no lack of shadowy areas in the story of this elusive and wandering “Proteus.” As suggested previously, this story includes two distinct periods, a before and an after. Before the war, the destruction, before the abuses and the inner wavering caused by the metaphysical experience of evil, there was the first life of a man that in no way foreshadowed his future as the overzealous and suspicious advocate of the United States of America. Crèveceur’s father, heir of a family of provincial magistrates, was the first to raise his lineage to the level of the provincial elites. Guillaume-Augustin de Crèveceur married into a distinguished family in the Norman aristocracy, the Blouet de Cahagnolles, and cultivated the friendship of the Turgots and the Houdetots, the latter of whom would one day become his son’s protectors. On January 31, 1735, his son Michel-Guillaume-Jean de Crèveceur was born in Caen. He studied at the Jesuit Collège du Mont, where he was particularly interested in mathematics, especially geometry. In 1751, he went to live with two aunts residing in England. The reasons for this “exile” are not known: Thomas Philbrick suspects that a quarrel between Michel and his
father might have been at the bottom of it, but whatever the causes of this early emigration, it helped Crèvecoeur learn English at a young age.7 During his stay in England, he became engaged to a young lady whose name has been lost. Of her nothing is known, other than she was the only daughter of a merchant, and that she died before the marriage could be celebrated. The disappearance of his fiancée seems to have precipitated Crèvecoeur’s departure for Canada. In 1755, perhaps as early as 1754, he joined the free companies of the Navy and served in the artillery and the corps of engineers.

What kind of man was Crèvecoeur when he embarked for the New World? Contrary to Chateaubriand, he was not a writer seeking a personal experience with the exotic;8 unlike Lezay-Marnésia, he was not a mature man with extremely set ideas when he emigrated.9 Crèvecoeur was still a young man who, perhaps attracted by the appeal of adventure, his heart prematurely heavy with the loss of a loved one, set out to invent himself in America.

FROM CANADA TO THE ENGLISH COLONIES

Crèvecoeur remained in Canada from 1755 to 1759. He devoted his first years to his profession as a cartographer and took long journeys that served as an opportunity to observe several American Indian tribes.10 In 1757, he joined the Montcalm army and took part in the attack of Fort George before drawing a map of it that the famous explorer Bougainville (serving as captain in the dragoons in Canada since 1756) presented to King Louis XV. Begun with brilliant prospects, his military career nonetheless came to a brutal end.11 Following the fall of Quebec to the English (September 13, 1759), Crèvecoeur left the army under ambiguous circumstances: cowardice in combat, independence of mind, and disgust with the war are all explanations advanced by biographers to explain his departure.12 At the age of twenty, he broke his ties to the French army and traveled to the English colonies of America under the name of Mr. John Hector Saint-John. Why adopt this new identity at this pivotal moment of his life? “Saint-John” is the English translation of his given name, as Crèvecoeur himself explained to Benjamin Franklin.13 The choice of English suggests a desire to invent a new persona for himself in a new culture, to create a double that demonstrates by its “anglicized” identity his voluntary integration into the community of settlers in the New World. Conversely, the choice of the name Hector is more surprising: why adopt the name of a Trojan warrior? Did Crèvecoeur give himself a heroic name to compensate for the cowardice in combat that he may have shown in Canada? Language would then be functioning as a revenge on reality, a corrective function more generally assumed by Crèvecoeur’s literary writings. Unless, after witnessing the fall of Quebec, he ultimately identified with the figure of Hector, another warrior vanquished
after a murderous siege? Whatever may be the symbolic dimension of this new baptism, it is no less true that he was responding to a necessity: in entering the territory of the English colonies, it was clearly in Crèveœur’s interest to disavow his identity as a former officer in the army of the enemy.

Once he had passed into the colonies, he undertook a variety of activities. Surveyor, cartographer, peddler of books, medicine, and lace, he roamed from Newfoundland to the banks of the Mississippi. The richness of his knowledge of America and the length of his sojourn distinguish him from the majority of French travelers on the other side of the Atlantic, and from Lezay-Marnésia and Chateaubriand in particular, who explored a much smaller territory and stayed a little less than two years in the United States in the case of the first, and scarcely five months in the case of the second.14 Naturalized on December 23, 1765, in the colony of New York, Crèveœur married four years later (on September 20, 1769) an Anglo-American, Mehetable Tippet, from a family residing in Westchester County. Three children were born of this union: America-Françes, or “Fanny” (December 14, 1770); Guillaume-Alexandre, or “Ally” (August 5, 1772); and Philippe-Louis (October 22, 1774). By the choice of these surnames, Crèveœur was demonstrating his attachment to both his motherland and his adopted country and transmitted to his children the double heritage of their parents. On September 12, 1769, he acquired the fifty hectares of the Greycourt estate at Goshen in Orange County. In English first, then in French, his works will reinvent the decade that now opened for him.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

What is the relationship of Crèveœur to these two languages, and how did they evolve over time? He wrote the Letters from an American Farmer (1782) in English. He translated the letters himself into French in 1784 and 1787: these are the Lettres d’un cultivateur américain. The first of the “Lettres servant d’introduction” to those of the “cultivateur américain,” written by Lacretelle and sent to the editor of the Mercure de France on January 4, 1783, traces the linguistic evolution of Crèveœur: “Having adopted, in his youth, an English motherland, he threw himself whole-heartedly into the language of the country; it is in that language that he read and wrote, to such an extent that his native tongue became for him a foreign language.”16 To say of Crèveœur that he had almost forgotten his French upon his return in 1781 is hardly an exaggeration. Invited several times by Madame d’Houdetot, the former expatriate initially preferred to avoid her despite the honor that this great lady was doing him: “Seized with panic at the thought of exposing his shaky French and ‘foreign manners’ to a lady whose refinement was so well known, Crèveœur pleaded illness.”17 Crèveœur was in fact painfully aware of the weakness of his French: “I do not know what she
saw in the style of my letter (that I wrote first in English and then translated as well as I could into French), but the odd turns of phrase, the use of words that I thought were French, *instead of making her feel scorn for a man who didn't even know his own language, increased her desire to see him.*  

He eventually yielded to the urging of the countess, however, and the deep gratitude that he later expressed to her may be explained in particular by the progress in the mastery of French that her company helped him to achieve.

As his French slipped away in America, English was slowly replacing his mother tongue. He acquired it by following a method that he described in a letter to his son Ally: “Write one page every day in English and French; that will teach you spelling and style. . . . Make an outline first, as I always do myself when I write something important. Put that into writing that evening, then the next morning reread and correct it, and after that make a clean copy.” This immersion in the English language, accompanied by daily writing exercises, helped Crèvecoeur wield it with a clarity that would be admired by D. H. Lawrence and lead his readers to think that it was his mother tongue. In fact, in the *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur wrote under the guise of an Anglo-American colonist having no other ties with Europe than the friendship of a noble Englishman to whom he was sending his missives. The specialists of the *Letters* have regularly denounced the naive reading of said letters, identifying the persona created by the author with the author himself. This confusion indicates, in any case, that the mastery of the English language by Crèvecoeur was so remarkable that it could pass for his mother tongue. From the beginning of the 1900s, excerpts of the *Letters from an American Farmer* were widely reproduced in anthologies of American literature. This is the case, notably, of the famous Letter III, titled “What is an American?,” the “shining star of the Crèvecoeurian constellation,” to quote Edward White. That a Frenchman was able to write what is often described as the first masterpiece of American literature is a veritable tour de force of linguistic adaptation of which there are very few examples in the history of world literature.

However, following the publication of the *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur reserved the use of English for his personal correspondence. After writing a *Traité de la culture des pommes de terre* (*Treatise on Potato Farming, 1782*) for his Norman countrymen and finishing the French translation of the *Letters* in 1787, it is in French that he chose to continue his œuvre. In 1801, he published the *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New York* (1801) before tackling the *Voyage aux grandes salines tyroliennes de Reichenhall* between 1808 and 1809. After having begun to learn to write in French, Crèvecoeur decided to remain in this mode of expression. In addition, the political context at the end of the eighteenth century certainly influenced his choice of language: a publication in English in London like he had done with the *Letters* was no longer an option.
after 1792, at the time of the European coalitions against France, especially since the *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie* begins with vibrant praise for the Premier Consul (Napoleon), described as the “Washington of France.” While he never returned to English or to the United States after 1790, Crèvecoeur never stopped thinking about the New World, as is witnessed by the American memories that arise in his final work.

**FATE AND PLEASURES OF AN AMERICAN FARMER**

In English, then in French, Crèvecoeur spoke of the Pine Hill Estate that he bought in 1769. Despite the numerous pages in which he describes the “fate and pleasures” of an American farmer, what he chose to publish under his name should not be confused with a documentary account of the life he led in the New York colony. Without expecting to find therein the truth of an experience that the *Letters*, and then the *Lettres*, would simply embellish, it is nonetheless stimulating to read the texts gathered in two volumes published after the death of the author, *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* and *More Letters from the American Farmer*, in order to note how they differ from *Letters from an American Farmer*. These works present fragments that the author refused to include in his 1782 collection and that remained unpublished until the twentieth century. They give an image of life in America in which the difficulties met by the farmers are not passed over as systematically as they were in *Letters* and a fortiori in *Lettres* and *Voyage*. In “Thoughts, Feelings and Pleasures of an American Farmer,” the farmer of the *Letters* rejoices over the economic and political independence that forms the basis of his happiness: “I owe nothing to my country other than a pittance, a meager tribute to my king to which I add my loyalty and the respect that is due him. I know no other sovereign than He who reigns over the universe, to whom I owe the most sincere gratitude.” On the contrary, the narrator of the “Thoughts of an American Farmer on Various Rural Subjects” in *More Letters from the American Farmer* deplores the endemic indebtedness of farmers: “flourishing as we may appear to a superficial observer, yet there are many dark spots which, on due consideration, greatly lessen that show of happiness which the Europeans think we possess. The number of debts which one part of the country owes to the other would greatly astonish you. The younger a country is, the more it is oppressed, for new settlements are always made by people who do not possess much. They are obliged to borrow; and, if any accidents intervene, they are not enabled to repay that money in many years. The interest is a canker-worm which consumes their yearly industry.” Crèvecoeur sets the euphoric discourse of Europeans on America against the more somber reality that is revealed to those who look more closely. In *Letters*, and even more so in *Lettres*, he demonstrates the same
glowing ardor for America for which he reproached “superficial observers” when he lived in the English colonies.

**GENERAL SHIPWRECK**

Whatever may have been the degree of Crèvecoeur’s happiness during his time at Pine Hill, it is certain that worry and fear replaced it during the American Revolution. Crèvecoeur depicts it as a historical and personal disaster that left him with a fragmented self, like those shipwrecked vessels that haunt his literary work. The War of Independence marks the fracture evoked in this chapter’s prologue that splits Crèvecoeur’s existence into two distinct periods. While the expression “War of Independence” may call to mind the effort of a people to liberate itself from an oppressive foreign power, Crèvecoeur depicts the conflict as a civil war during which friends, neighbors, and members of the same family joined opposing sides and slaughtered each other on the ruins of their former relationships.

The question of Crèvecoeur’s allegiance was in serious doubt in his time and still is in ours. Was he a loyalist, a faithful subject of the King of England and determined to live under his aegis? Or a patriot, resolved to shed the yoke of the English occupier? The last of the *Letters from an American Farmer* depicts the dilemma of the narrator whose anguish very likely reflects Crèvecoeur’s own during the war: “If I attach myself to the mother country, which is 3,000 miles from me, I become what is called an enemy to my own region; if I follow the rest of my countrymen I become opposed to our ancient masters: both extremes appear equally dangerous to a person of so little weight and consequence as I am, whose energy and example are of no avail.”

At first glance, it would appear that Crèvecoeur was leaning toward the side of the loyalists, since he couldn’t bear to see the end of the existence he had been leading during the English reign; the crown afforded its distant subjects a liberty of action and enterprise that was consistent with his principles. Myra Jehlen has in fact described Crèvecoeur’s political ideal as the paradoxical a priori conjoining of monarchism and anarchism. The radical self-determination for individuals of which Crèvecoeur dreamed is more easily reconciled, in his mind, with a monarchical government having minimal impact on local communities than with a democracy whose nature is to subject individual interest to the general will. Nonetheless, despite his reticence regarding the cause of the patriots, Crèvecoeur is in no sense a confirmed loyalist. It appears that he had wanted to stay above the fray, an attitude that, far from winning him the esteem of both sides, earned him hostility from everyone.

At the beginning of 1778, he requested permission to travel to New York, at that time in the hands of the English. But after the month of July 1778 and the arrival of the French fleet, it was now the supporters of the British crown
who held him in suspicion. Crèvecoeur made contact with his countrymen, and rumors flew that he was frequenting La Fayette. In February 1779, he finally decided to leave for New York. During this journey, he was only accompanied by his son Ally; his wife and two other children remained at Pine Hill. Why didn’t he leave with his whole family? In all likelihood, he preferred to have his wife take care of their property in his absence.

While awaiting the opportunity to embark for Europe, Crèvecoeur survived in New York by plying his trade as a surveyor. But on July 8, 1779, suspected of spying by the English, he was imprisoned. With an energy that is characteristic of his writing when he expresses torments of conscience, Crèvecoeur describes the experience of prison as a metaphysical crisis, marked by the sudden consciousness of the omnipresence of evil: “I suddenly became a Manichean; I thought I saw in man a degree of corruption which I had never suspected. Ah! What an image of human nature I entertained! What unholy questions I dared to ask the great Creator when I saw society as a group of lions tearing to shreds the weakest but most numerous of its members.”

Crèvecoeur was beginning to muse about suicide when his friend William Seton obtained his release. The man who emerged from prison on September 17, 1779, was a deeply changed person. At the end of these two months of detention, his health had severely deteriorated, in regard to both his physical condition and his morale, but he had also developed new faculties, as is demonstrated in a most striking manner by a text edited by Chevignard in 1983:

“I became a new man: ashamed not to be able to laugh with others or share their gaiety, I avoided the company of my closest friends. In my solitude, I had discovered pleasures that I had never experienced before. I could meditate at length on the same subject without being disturbed. I could converse with myself and give rise through this conversation to ideas that simple meditation didn’t produce. I could, finally, in the moments of calm remember those ideas and write them down.”

This passage reveals the mechanisms of a personal and artistic evolution. Solitude is the means of a new kind of meditation. Before the experience of imprisonment, this deep reflection was not only less extensive and less intense but was also monological: his thought applied itself to a problem more or less consistently from a single perspective. The moral consequences of the ordeals he had undergone during the Revolutionary War led him to embrace a dialogical approach: his thought became “an internal discourse that the soul pursued silently with itself,” to use Plato’s expression; that is to say, the examination of a problem or of a situation is no longer carried out from a single viewpoint, that which an individual is spontaneously led to adopt on a question, but is henceforth opened up to a series of opposing hypotheses and contradictions that he spontaneously contemplates as if he embodied the two adverse parties at the
same time. Undoubtedly, the metaphysical experience of the omnipresence of evil in the world, which had suddenly made him “a Manichean,” had revealed to him the greater complexity of human nature and of historical events that only a dialogical style of reflection was capable of portraying for himself and his future readers. By opposing “conversation” to “meditation,” Crèvecoeur emphasized moreover the productive character of the former, given that it permits the rise of ideas that the latter would not have inspired. This is, however, only a first stage in the writing process, since these moments of solitude, in which the author confronts conflicting perspectives before giving birth to new ideas through an internal dialog, precede the moment of writing itself that records the results of this process of investigation and creation. In this essential text, Crèvecoeur describes the effects of this crisis of the winter of 1779, following which he became a writer endowed with a superior power of concentration and analysis, the one who was going to publish just a few years later the *Letters from an American Farmer.*

However, Crèvecoeur’s difficulties did not cease on the day of his liberation: he continued to live in misery until September 1780, at which time he finally managed to embark for Europe with his son. After a month’s crossing, they reached Ireland, then England. On May 20, 1781, while passing through London, Crèvecoeur sold the manuscript of the *Letters from an American Farmer* to the publishing house of Thomas Davies and Lockyer Davis. That a virtual unknown succeeded in having his first book published by such an important house is the sign of the burning interest this text held for the English people. Finally, on August 2, 1781, Crèvecoeur set foot on his native soil.

**RETURN TO THE MOTHERLAND**

What man had Crèvecoeur become after twenty-seven years in exile? The *Mémoires* of Brissot de Warville help us to understand. The two men met in 1786 and were soon drawn together by “the most affectionate friendship.” With Étienne Clavière and Nicolas Bergasse, they founded, on January 2, 1787, an association intended to promote the intellectual and commercial relations between France and the United States: the Société Gallo-Américaine. In the portrait that he draws of his friend, Brissot emphasizes the anguish that characterized him during this period: “Crèvecoeur always had a somber look about him, a worried air; he seemed to fear being found out. He never shared his emotional turmoil; sometimes he even seemed frightened by the success of his work and appeared to have a secret that weighed heavily on his soul and that he feared might be revealed.” If we are to believe Brissot, Crèvecoeur’s melancholy on the eve of the French Revolution was the result of his political vacillation during the War of Independence: “This indecisiveness had bred in
the Republicans a deep scorn for him; if they did not consider him a dangerous person, they saw him as a man with neither energy nor character, and closer to slavery than liberty.” Crèvecœur had good reason to conceal this ambiguous past when he translated the Letters. On the one hand, he now belonged to a circle that was entirely behind the cause of the American rebels, and this exerted a profound influence on his rewriting; on the other hand, the French public was then possessed of a “craze for America” that strongly predisposed it to praise for the patriots and would have led it to rebel against any discourse that was in any way favorable to perfidious Albion. A third reason was added to these first two in 1783 when the maréchal de Castries appointed Crèvecœur to the position of French Consul in New York: “[The Republicans] were understandably astonished that the French minister would give the first consulate in America to an enemy of the Revolution and of American independence. Himself overcome by his prodigious success in France, Crèvecœur feared being exposed and losing a position that he held very dear.”

It was thus with the anguish of being seen as a partisan of the British crown that the author of the Letters from an American Farmer translated them into French. As I attempt to demonstrate in the following part of this chapter, this context played a dominant role in the redefinition of both the aesthetics and the political discourse of his work in the French language. Ultimately, the war and its consequences created in Crèveceur’s existence a fracture that preceded the publication of his works and created two distinct periods with effects that were as lasting as those provoked by the powerful moral shocks experienced by more famous authors. This notion of a split that his ensuing misfortunes only increased, separating not only two periods but also two identities, helps us understand Crèveceur’s work as an attempt to recreate a past that, since it was lost forever, appeared infinitely desirable to him. The posthumous representation of America was thus not only an undertaking designed to protect a historical period in order to pass on its memory to future generations: for Crèveceur, it simultaneously constituted an attempt to relive, through his writing, a vanished and otherwise unreachable happiness.

In Search of Lost America: The Lettres d’un cultivateur américain (1784–87)

THE LETTRES OF 1784: AMERICA RECOMPOSED

Frenchification and Idealization

When Saint-John de Crèveceur moved into Madame d’Houdetot’s home in the spring of 1782, his hostess’s encouragements, the praise of their mutual friends, and the growing success of the Letters from an American Farmer soon convinced him to undertake a French translation of his work. Published in 1784,
the first two volumes of the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* were followed in 1787 by a new edition with a third volume. The numerous divergences between the English and French versions have been analyzed by Howard C. Rice and Bernard Chevignard. This question will be taken up again by highlighting two processes that organized the work of translation and rewriting undertaken by Crèvecoeur, “Frenchification” (*francisation*) and idealization, in order to establish their internal logic, their diverse manifestations, and their role in the production of a posthumous representation of America.

Frenchification is making a literary text correspond to the expectations, aesthetic preferences, and values of French society in a given period, eliminating what the author assumes would go against its tastes or its prejudices and adding what, instead, appears to be likely to garner its approval. It concerns consequently a form of translation in a system of values that is socially constructed and subject to change, given that the definitions of the beautiful, of the good, but also of the proper are, of course, apt to evolve within a community. The “idealization” is a similar operation to the extent that it too comprises a double movement of addition and rejection. It consists of the production of a representation that is commensurate with the aspirations of its readers, eliminating what might render it less desirable and including, on the contrary, what may correspond to their highest expectations. Idealization presupposes the existence of a representation upon which there is already a consensus in the community of the audience of the work, just as a translation transfers a given text into a system of signs whose meaning is agreed upon by its users. By means of more or less numerous and subtle erasures and supplements that, rather than being detrimental to “truth,” redefine it as they invent it, the author engaged in an idealizing process thus seeks the most precise correspondence between the representation that he is producing and the ideal image embedded in the collective consciousness, and for which he also serves as the guardian. The identification of these two processes helps us account for Crèvecoeur’s choices in the course of the translation of the *Letters from an American Farmer* and, ultimately, explain the difference between the posthumous America he constructs and its supposed referent.

**Transposition and Adaptation**

The Frenchification and idealization of the *Letters* are made possible by a theory of translation in the eighteenth century that is the antithesis of contemporary thought on this subject. In the history of translation, two methods came to be opposed: transposition (or faithful translation) and adaptation (or integral translation). Although differing opinions were held in the eighteenth century, the adaptation approach generally won out. A good translator transposed the ideas and the style of the source text into the target language with a view toward correlating them with the tastes of his new readership and correcting what
he perceived as awkward turns of phrase or just plain bad writing.\textsuperscript{53} His role consisted of lending to the author the language that he would have adopted if he had been not only his contemporary but his countryman. The liberty of the translator in relationship to the original work is still greater when, as in the case of Crèvecœur, he is also its author. The French translation of the \textit{Letters from an American Farmer} belongs to the category of adaptation: it modifies the first text and adds numerous passages, so that the length of the French version far exceeds that of the original.\textsuperscript{54} In the course of his work, Crèvecœur sought the counsel of six people whose advice turned out to have considerable influence on the final version of the \textit{Lettres d’un cultivateur américain}: the comtesse d’Houde-tot; Jean-François de Saint-Lambert, contributor to the \textit{Encyclopédie} and author of \textit{Les Saisons} (1769); the prince and princesse de Beauvau; Louis de Lacretele, publisher of the \textit{Mercure de France}; and Gui-Jean-Baptiste Target, a lawyer.

Several reasons explain Crèvecœur’s receptiveness to the influence of his friends and protectors. When he decided to translate the \textit{Letters}, his native tongue became a foreign language to him.\textsuperscript{55} Painfully conscious of the weakness of his French, he asked the enlightened readers surrounding him to verify the correctness of his writing. In addition, Crèvecœur was never confident in his talent as a writer and felt that he had only come to literature by accident.\textsuperscript{56} He thus took the advice of his protectors all the more willingly since he considered them to be arbiters of good taste and even models in the art of writing, since one of them, Saint-Lambert, was a member of the French Academy. Finally, Crèvecœur was caught in a knot of material and moral obligations that prevented him from ignoring the literary advice that his friends offered him so generously: he was in fact greatly in debt to the latter, who, not content to introduce him into the best society, used their influence with the highest authorities of the monarchy to obtain for him the highly coveted position of French Consul in New York. His protectors were thus implicated in each stage of the writing of the \textit{Lettres d’un cultivateur américain}: they convinced Crèvecœur to undertake the translation of the \textit{Letters};\textsuperscript{57} they recommended amendments and proposed their own works as models for him to learn from; they participated in the commercial launching of his work; and Crèvecœur went so far as to entrust to them the final revision of his text, which he was prevented from carrying out himself.\textsuperscript{58} It was thus under their auspices that the \textit{francisation} of the text accompanied its translation: following their advice, Crèvecœur adapted the \textit{Letters} to the sensitivity and convictions, if not the prejudices, of his new public.

\textbf{A Superficial Rousseauism}

The Frenchification of America manifests itself particularly by the introduction of a superficial Rousseauism, that is, references that demonstrate the familiarity of an author with the literary and philosophical works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
Occasionally explicit, these references are more often simply implied, since the extremely widespread diffusion of Rousseau’s writings, and the commentaries provoked by them, created in the minds of his contemporaries such a familiarity with his works that any allusion to the idea that his community of readers had of his intellectual production was immediately recognized by them. This idea, however, was little more than a simplified version, diluted and partially false, of works whose complexity proved to be irreducible to the process of simplification performed by the collective consciousness when it tried to come to grips with the aesthetics and the philosophical thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This simplification, or popularization if you will, is the ransom of the success of operative philosophical concepts that, owing to their ability to grasp reality in order to make useful and fertile distinctions, lend themselves to endless reformulations during which their initial significance—enriched by its internal tensions, the examples and details provided by its creator—is progressively impoverished to the point of no longer being anything but a sign partially emptied of its substance. Such, for example, is the case of the concept of “state of nature,” which, while recalling Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), is most often, under the pen of Rousseau’s imitators, only a pale version of this same concept, whose philosophical foundation is more apt to be the reductive idea that the contemporaries conceived than the meaning that was in fact given to it by the citizen of Geneva.59 Similarly, the use of a pastoral tone in the description of a rural landscape, a certain effusion in the expression of sensibility, a variation on the theme of sovereign virtue accompanied by an irrevocable condemnation of the seductions of vice have as their referent the aesthetics of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and are perceived as signs that the author who employs them adheres to the moral values that underlie the actions of Julie and Saint-Preux. This superficial Rousseauism, in which the adoption of a concept takes as its referent a philosophical system constructed elsewhere, while partially betraying it, in which the use of a literary tone expresses an aesthetic that it gradually caricatures as it systemizes its use, is also found in the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* and notably in the texts that concern the Amerindian world. It is true that the image of the Native American is sometimes threatening in the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*60 and may be distinguished from the topos of the “noble savage” that is one of the principal clichés of superficial Rousseauism; several passages nonetheless dwell at length on a potential harmony between their society and that of the colonists, as in the case of a text particularly admired in Crèvecoeur’s time, the “Anecdote of the Wild Dog.”61

Recounted for the first time in a passage that is not in the *Letters from an American Farmer* but was published by the editors of the *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America,*62 this anecdote reappears in a watered-down form in
the *Lettres* of 1784 (1:199–211). Crèvecœur tells the story of a child believed to be dead after disappearing for a whole day in the forest before an Amerindian found him with the help of his dog. The scene in which the young boy is returned to his parents gives rise to an outpouring of tears and gratitude (204), and even the Native American warrior is moved and cannot hold back his tears in observing the extreme happiness he has caused. The next day, Le Fèvre (the father of the child) holds a meeting of eighty-three people—friends, neighbors, and servants—before whom he swears to the “savage” an eternal friendship: “Téwénissa, with this branch of wampum, I touch your ears; Téwénissa, I am speaking to you: my heart was broken, you cured the wound. I cried bitter tears for fear of having lost my child; you dried my tears by finding him with the help of your faithful dog. . . . My wife and I were like two grass snakes, stiff and lifeless; you revived us by bringing us close to the fire” (207–8).

This scene is a celebration of the marriage of the Western and the Amerindian worlds. Le Fèvre’s borrowing of one of his benefactor’s customs and of rhetorical practices that are characteristic of Amerindian eloquence accompanies a series of performative declarations. After giving him a very valuable carbine, Le Fèvre makes a first promise to Téwénissa: he will shelter him under his roof and take care of him if he were ever to fall ill or sought refuge in old age. Then he publicly announces a solemn adoption, recognizing his benefactor as a member of his family (208). Sanctified by the approval of the gathering, the fraternal bonds between the two men are made yet stronger by the second baptism of the rescued child; the name by which he had been known before his disappearance will be forgotten, and he will answer henceforth to that of “his liberator and uncle Téwénissa” (209). The latter then adopts Le Fèvre and swears a friendship that lasts after their disappearance, since their children likewise recognize each other as brothers.

By means of this anecdote, Crèvecœur presents an ecumenical image of the relations between the white settlers and the Native Americans. An image from the present, the harmony between the two peoples had always existed, if we are to believe Le Fèvre, who describes the appropriation of the ancestral lands of the latter by the former—a land grab that was accomplished by force, ruse, and broken promises—as the result of a willing gift that the Europeans received with gratitude: “I offer you no land, for you do not want any; it is from you and your ancestors that we received the land we cultivate” (208). The expression “received” implies the idea of a transfer that was effected with neither conflict nor abuse and casts a veil over the reality of the historical process, so much more somber and unjust, in the course of which the American national territory was constituted. At this time, the worlds to which the colonists and the Amerindians belong are not only able to coexist peacefully but are in fact intertwined: the cultural differences are overridden by the sharing of symbols
and linguistic practices mastered by the members of the two groups owing to their long familiarity with each other. It is possible to travel between their respective territories, as is demonstrated by the presence of Téwénissa on Le Fèvre’s lands and the trip of the latter’s son to his adoptive uncle’s village; a complex network of relations maintained over the years, as well as mutual obligations, gradually created a social fabric joining the two communities. While it is true that cultural difference is never completely surmounted, as evidenced by the fact that it must be occasionally transcended by means, for example, of the goodwill showed by Le Fèvre in adopting the customs of his benefactor on a solemn occasion, it nonetheless permits the creation of a shared universe whose harmony reaches its zenith in the course of ceremonies in which individuals are united in a common emotional experience. From beginning to end, a superficial Rousseauism infuses this anecdote in which the Amerindian protagonist demonstrates the generosity and selflessness that a reader of Rousseau expects from a “noble savage,” while the philosophical message slipped in at the beginning of the text—“only wholesome morality and virtue are shared by all countries” (200)—prepares the intensely emotional spectacle of a reciprocal adoption between representatives of distinct cultures and serves discreetly as an echo of the outpourings of the “Profession du vicaire savoyard” (“Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar”) concerning the innate origin of our moral conscience.63 The readers of Crèveœur did not miss the reference and gave a particularly favorable reception to this anecdote that confirmed their preconceptions about an American state of nature inhabited by “savages” who demonstrate all the virtues originally rooted in the human heart.64 This representation of a “primitive” world in which the natural goodness of human beings is given free rein is indissolubly linked to the philosophy of Rousseau or, more precisely, to what has been called here the superficial understanding of it. In any case, Rousseau’s work is only the place where a discourse about the morally exemplary nature of the savage crystallizes, a discourse that originates in the first contacts between the New World and the Old.

In the sixteenth century, travelers such as Jean de Léry brought back to Europe a description of the mores, customs, and social organization of the inhabitants of the New World that contributed to the nascent image of America among his fellow countrymen. A reader of Léry, Michel de Montaigne describes the Amerindian society, in a famous essay titled “Des cannibales,” as the most faithful to what he calls the “natural laws,” questioning the so-called barbarity of the peoples of America and offering the European readers a comparison with their own vices.65 Following Montaigne, the Dialogues de Monsieur le Baron de Lahontan et d’un sauvage (1704) contribute to the diffusion in European thought of the dream of a state of nature that is combined, in Lahontan’s work, with a nostalgia for “the mythical situation of the feudal nobility when it was escaping
the domination of the monarchy.” Rousseau, who was a reader of Lahontan, takes up again the question of the state of nature in the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality by describing, in solitary primitive man, characteristics bordering on animality. While the state of nature, under Rousseau’s pen, is a largely theoretical conceptual artifact, a tool allowing him to imagine the situation of the human race before the rise of property and society—and not the description of a particular historical moment in the evolution of mankind—the popularity of this theme contributed to its perception in the course of its multiple reworkings as an accurate description of the reality of primitive life. For the imitators of Rousseau, the state of nature is not a fiction cast on the origins of human history: it becomes a proper description of man at the margins of European civilization, both a contemporary of the Europeans and a reincarnation of his ancestors by dint of belonging to a civilization considered primitive. When Crèvecoeur tried his hand at representing the “primitive” world, the Rousseauist tropism was so strong that he could not resist it: the Amerindians were also noble savages, capable of sublime devotion and elevated sentiments. In this manner, he offered the guarantee of his vast experience to what had only been philosophical speculation and tireless repetition of the same themes. Since it is confirmed by Crèvecoeur, himself an “American savage” and soon to be consul of his very Christian majesty in New York, America must be, indeed, this Arcadia where European settlers and Amerindian hunters make merry together as he claims.

The circularity of the representations achieves yet another rotation that reinforces its power in the collective imagination when travelers such as Brissot and Lezay-Marnésia go to the United States with expectations based on the reading of Crèvecoeur’s works. When Brissot visited America, he saw it through the lens of the Lettres d’un cultivateur américain; he did not describe the country he was discovering using his own sensitivity and judgment but rather by constantly calibrating his observations on those of Crèvecoeur. It is those observations that he corroborated in publishing his own account in which the reader is constantly referred to the works of his predecessor, such that Brissot’s journey, far from correcting the image he had of America before going there, has no other effect than to confirm the accuracy of this prior representation. The French send back to each other a mimetic representation of the United States, their imagination influencing the observations they make in America before providing preconceived models upon which they narrate their memories.

In this respect, the composition of the French discourse on America is a particular case of a phenomenon that can be observed on the scale of Europe as a whole: “The New World was invented before it was discovered. Mythology preceded exploration; and discovery happily fitted previous invention,” observes Marcus Cunliffe.
and themes to which reality was summoned to conform by the very certainty that it had acquired during its innumerable repetitions, what Cunliffe calls a “mythology,” referred to previously as a “doxological America,” is subject to national variations and historical evolution. A global study of the American “mythology” in the European consciousness would reveal, most certainly, topical components that are shared by different nations, just as a diachronic study would show, without the slightest doubt, the very long period of time in which a network of preconceptions and prejudices about America is embedded in a given country. However, each nation includes different materials in the course of the creation of its own “doxological America” depending on the relations that it has maintained with the United States over time and the critical moments that have marked their common history, and it is, similarly, the historical evolution of these relations that influences the slow recomposition of this complex web of images and discourses within a given country. The end of the eighteenth century is one of these privileged moments, and the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* played a considerable role in the construction of the meaning of the sign “America” in the French consciousness before its progressive reconfiguration.

As it is recreated in Paris by Crèvecoeur, posthumous America is the fruit of this meeting between a collective image and an individual nostalgia inventing a fictitious country whose purely literary existence will nonetheless have direct consequences on reality. Crèvecoeur’s depiction of a past period in American history, although based on the experience of prolonged contact with the United States, is in fact affected by a discourse constituted prior to this experience and to which it refers to confirm its problematical veracity. Parallel to its commemorative function, which consists in protecting the idealized image of a period prior to the ravages of the war, a period in which harmony reigned between the Native Americans and the settlers as illustrated in the “Anecdote of the Wild Dog,” the function assumed by this representation is one of advertising, given that it offers to doxological America the guarantee of an author who refrains from revising it based on the observations that he has made across the Atlantic. It is also a form of advertisement in a complementary sense, since by satisfying the expectations of the contemporary readership, it strived simultaneously to promote itself to the same public and achieve a commercial success that, moreover, it succeeded in doing on a grand scale, the literary product offered to the public having corresponded perfectly to its desires. A complex montage of temporal strata in which the influence of the context of the translation and rewriting bears on the aesthetics and the underlying philosophy of the text, the posthumous America of Crèvecoeur is the depiction of a defunct past that pervades in advance the imagination, voyages, and even the narratives of his successors.
The phenomenon of francisation of American reality goes hand in hand with that of idealization, as witnessed by numerous choices made by Crèvecoeur in the course of the translation. The second letter of the *Letters from an American Farmer* relates, for example, the reflections of the narrator, James, while contemplating the bees that live on his farm: “My bees, more than any other inhabitants of my land, command my attention and my respect. I am astonished to see that nothing exists that has no enemy; one species pursues and lives upon the other.” The conception of the world that arises from this spectacle is both neutral and pessimistic: James limits himself to the description of the necessity of the mutual destruction of species; rather than regret or revolt, his observations lead to surprise. Not content to lengthen the English text, the French version radically changes the philosophical lesson: “My bees, more than any other inhabitants of my land, command my attention and my respect. . . . What a shame that in the midst of this harmony, of this differentiation of the species, none can exist independent of the others! All of them have their enemies. The genius of the Creator, perhaps fearing the excessive fertility he had given to matter, found it necessary to temper it by this system of destruction.”

The French translation adds to this passage a Latin erudition absent from the original: the celebration of the industriousness of the bees is a theme that is indissociable from pastoral literature and in particular the works of Virgil. Without it being even necessary to explain the Virgilian allusion, the mention of these industrious bees alone signals to the reader that he has just entered the bucolic universe of the *Georgics*. For what reasons did Crèvecoeur include in the French text a Virgilian intertext that is not found in the original?

In the “Preliminary Discourse” of *Les Saisons* (1769), Saint-Lambert admits that he has borrowed themes explored by the author of the *Aeneid* and tried to imitate his style. Before giving his opinion of *Les Saisons*, Diderot reread the *Georgics* on the suggestion of his friend Jacques-André Naigeon: the comparison was not favorable to the academician. In all probability, the reading of Saint-Lambert (if not the advice of this man who was part of Crèvecoeur’s immediate entourage during his stay in Paris) was one of the direct sources of the pastoral tone that permeates the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*, which depict primitive American nature as a bucolic garden and do not spare references to Roman antiquity. This propensity for idealization is confirmed later in the same missive: while the text of *Letters* refers directly to the fight to the death between species (“one species pursues and lives upon the other”), that of *Lettres* bemoans their lack of “independence,” disguising with this abstract term the necessary destruction of the ones by the others. What the French text strives to guarantee above all is the “harmony” of the American creation. This term, present in this passage, is its key.
The French translation introduces two philosophical systems that are absent from the original: deist thought and a theodicy. The text refers to a “Creator’s genius,” a circumlocution that belongs to the deist tradition. This “genius” guarantees the perdurability of His work, since the principle of destruction that He introduces into it is intended to contain the exuberance of nature, the excessive “fertility” that would risk, in the long run, compromising its fine scheme. Through the reflection on bees, it is thus the question of evil in the world that is implicitly posed, the animal kingdom playing here the role of a metaphor for the human race. In the English text, the brief development on the struggle between the animal species has a proleptic function: it predicts the war between the loyalists and the patriots in the American Revolution, another example of the destructive instinct that drives living creatures. For its part, the French text is quick to disperse the shadow of violence cast over the American Eden by surreptitiously introducing the notion of theodicy. Far from leading to chaos, the destruction of the species is a principle established by the “great Watchmaker” to guarantee the smooth functioning of His creation. The posthumous America of Crèvecoeur is not only the recovery of a lost paradise; it represents the best of all possible worlds.

Memories Reproduced by Memories
Crèvecoeur’s posthumous America is thus the result of an a posteriori reconstruction that leans toward idealization. It is likewise the result of a double memorial reconstitution that increases still more the gap between this representation and its object. The genesis of the Lettres of 1784 was marked by an unforeseen circumstance: the necessity of a rewriting. In the Mercure of January 1783, Lacretelle announced the imminent publication of the work of his friend: “Around the same time, M. de Néville of the bookseller’s staff sent the manuscript to the minister Vergennes for his approval, or at least he thought he had sent it, but when he requested it three months later, he learned that Vergennes had never received it. They ascertained that the manuscript had been removed from M. Néville’s office, an unforeseen mishap that was to delay the publication.”80

Crèvecoeur is forced to produce a new manuscript that isn’t published until the end of 1784. It is difficult to determine how much work he was condemned to do by this unfortunate event. In a letter addressed to the editor of the Courrier de l’Europe, Crèvecoeur stated that he was in the process of retranscribing the 320 pages that were stolen from him and that “the fruit of this theft isn’t even half of the whole that is to be published very soon.”81 There is no way of knowing if he had rough drafts to work from during his labor; however, it is certain that this misadventure forced him to undertake a new attempt at recollection, since not only did he have to recall his past but also try to remember the written pages that had disappeared and in which this same work had already been accomplished a
first time. The resulting text is therefore, at least in part, the fruit of a second gen-
essis during which Crèvecoeur had to rewrite the original version that had been stolen from him, which turned this work, as Chateaubriand has written about another book, into a collection of “memories reproduced by memories.”

Thus the posthumous America reinvented in the Lettres of 1784 may be described as the image of an image representing an idealized and Frenchified version of the New World.

**LETTERS FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE**

*Imagining the Loss*

Following the death of his father, discontented with his life of labor and dreaming of changing it, the narrator of the “Pensées d’un cultivateur américain sur son sort et ses plaisirs” (“Thoughts of an American Farmer on His Fate and Pleasures”) imagines what would become of him if he decided to sell his property:

I saw myself wandering; it seemed to me that I would lose all my weight and importance, as well as the esteem of my friends; ... and then my land, my house, my fields, and my meadows appeared suddenly in my imagination, in the dearest and most cheerful colors; the idea of a home, stability, and civil rights, the idea of property, finally, that up to now I hadn’t considered seriously, appeared in my imagination in the most attractive colors; and what I formerly believed to be chimerical became for me a genuine source of satisfaction and pride.

The imagined departure from his plantation embellishes the image of the latter and of its existence in the eyes of the narrator: suddenly his domain appeared to him as the foundation of his respectability, his pride, and his happiness. If the very idea of the loss of his property alone provoked a metamorphosis of the image Crèvecoeur had of his own condition, one can just imagine to what extent the dispossession he experienced during the War of Independence must have changed his image of prerevolutionary America! From the moment that the supposed loss became a reality, the reevaluation of his fate by the American farmer could not lead to an increased enjoyment of his current possessions, nor to a renewed satisfaction at the idea of the position he still enjoyed in this world, but to an impression of irremediable loss accompanied by regrets whose pangs could only be alleviated by writing. “As far as I can tell, there is little nostalgia on either side of the Atlantic for the time when England’s thirteen American colonies were part of Great Britain,” states Jim Cullen in the work that he devotes to the origin and development of the ideology of the American dream. The Lettres d’un cultivateur américain are nonetheless saturated with a nostalgia that is given
free rein when the author depicts the bucolic scenes of his existence before the war and develops the posthumous representation of the colonial period.

Temporal Strata
Just like Chateaubriand’s Mémoires, Crèvecoeur’s Lettres had multiple starting points. In the margins of his chapters, Chateaubriand indicated both the time of the first writing of the text and the moment when he returned to it years later. Book VI of the Mémoires is, for example, written in “London, from April to September 1822” and “revised in December 1846.” Whereas Chateaubriand displays these two strata of writings, Crèvecoeur conceals them. The paratext of his letters regularly presents them as missives written before the American Revolution: the first in the volume is, for example, sent from “Carlisle County” on “August 18, 1770” while the “[l]etter written by Ivan Al-Z, a Russian nobleman, to one of his friends in Europe” is dated October 12, 1769. Other letters have no explicit temporal reference but nonetheless reveal, by certain details in the text, that they were written from the viewpoint of a writer who in no way foresees the imminence of the war. This is the case of the “Second Letter,” in which the narrator attributes the rapid population growth of the colonies to the “blessings of peace.”

However, these texts are not what they pretend to be, that is, documents that have miraculously escaped the wreckage of the American Revolution and bear the echo of voices now extinct. While the Lettres of 1784 are based on previous texts and on contemporary impressions of the facts they describe, they are nonetheless translated, revised, enriched, organized into a volume, and published in a period in which Crèvecoeur is no longer the “self” he was before the Revolution, but this “second self” that he struggled to reconstruct after the war. The documentary effect that they produce is thus a matter of art and not of sincerity. Crèvecoeur offers the reader a representation of colonial America supposedly written before its disappearance, whereas he transmits to his narrator the idealized vision he developed following his inner fracture. His letter writer had, however, never witnessed the period he depicts; it is Crèvecoeur who attributes to him the idyllic description of an America that only exists in his memory. Thus, the representation of the colonial era that he wishes us to accept as contemporary of the facts related is on the contrary a posthumous representation that reinvents a past age of American history as it appears to him retrospectively. In Crèvecoeur’s Lettres, the term “America” does not designate a country located on the other side of the Atlantic; it refers to an imaginary space that the author has recreated in the light of his nostalgia and in which he can only travel by means of memory and writing. Crèvecoeur manages to dispel this confusion of the present and the posthumous, of a faithful description and a nostalgic reinvention, in the mind of Brissot, who saw in emigration to the United States a possible alternative to the constraints of prerevolutionary France:
As a man of letters, I did not wish to bow down to the idols of the day, and nonetheless I could only manage to exist through this type of servility. I preferred [I said to Crèvecœur], plying some difficult trade in the United States, but perhaps I could hope that my talents might one day bring me some affluence there. . . . Such were my ideas each day, such was the theme of my conversations. Crèvecœur constantly tried to discourage me, to combat my plan, to emphasize the injustices of my enemies, to exhort me to stop attacking them, to choose another genre for my writing.  

Crèvecœur’s behavior toward his friend consisted of an effort to moderate the enthusiasm he had himself inspired and is an indication of the ambivalence of his thought, which oscillates between retrospective idealization within a commemorative representation and the growing disappointment he felt toward the real country of which the former is supposedly the image, an ambivalence that was to become even more difficult to assume when his official functions in New York prevented him from publicly expressing all the concerns he had about present-day America when he compared it to his posthumous version.  

**Harmony and Discord**

This process of retrospective idealization is not only an implicit development in the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*; Crèvecœur regularly contrasts in the same text the harmony of colonial America and the current agitation of the war. Crèvecœur writes certain letters from the viewpoint of a contemporary of the American Revolution who recalls an earlier era while in the midst of the turmoil of war. The passages in which the vision of an idyllic past and the intolerable reality of the conflict are collapsed together indicate the therapeutic effect of the writing on a narrator who is explicitly identified with the author. This effect is suggested in the conclusion of the “Anecdote of the Sassafras and the Wild Vine,” a charming and bucolic text in which Crèvecœur describes the planting of a tree that he hopes will remain, after his own disappearance, the living proof of his love for his daughter. He finishes it with these remarks, which project a retrospective shadow on the luminous memory he is recounting: “I forget for a moment, in repeating these pleasant details, the misfortunes the war inflicted on me.—This sweet memory still swells and stirs my heart. In the middle of the storm that surrounds me, I have no other consolation than drawing for you a weak sketch of the happy days I’ve lived.” This comment indicates the role played by literary writing for Crèvecœur, which helped him escape the present impression of the misfortunes caused by the war by recalling the memory of “days” made all the more “happy” by the fact that they are forever gone. When he declares that his descriptions are only a “weak sketch,” the reader must see in this statement more than the affected modesty of a writer admitting his
inability to depict satisfactorily the memories he has retained. It is precisely in the impossible superimposition of the memorial scene and the text charged with expressing it that resides, for Crèvecoeur, the drive to write, a constantly renewed drive, as is demonstrated by the resumption and progressive augmentation of his *Lettres*. The feeling that literary writing is incapable of representing the past in a manner that conforms to the internal image lodged in the memory of the author constantly refuels his work, and it would be tempting to compare Crèvecoeur to Sade based on their comparable practice of rewriting and of textual expansion if the thirst for experimentation and desire for exhaustiveness, if not “the obsessional force of a character, scenario, and argument”94—rather than the nostalgia and tragic consciousness of a destructive temporality—were at the source of a process of amplification whose only possible interruption is that imposed by the death of the author.95

It is, however, in the work of Marcel Proust that may be found the most fertile point of comparison with the attempt at reinventing lost days undertaken by Crèvecoeur. In *En lisant en écrivant* (*Reading Writing*), Julien Gracq describes the typical principle of development in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*): “The genetic imperative of proliferation and enrichment takes precedence over the principle of organization every time in the book.”96 Initially conceived as a diptych, then as a triptych, Proust’s novel underwent a rapid expansion that was only terminated by the writer’s disappearance.97 This other attempt to recreate the past that is seen in Crèvecoeur’s *Lettres* exhibits a similar potentially exponential dynamic of augmentation. The twelve texts that compose the thin volume of *Letters from an American Farmer* are succeeded in 1784 by the two volumes of the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*, which are joined by a third in 1787 to reach a total of around fifteen hundred pages. Crèvecoeur intended to add a fourth volume that eventually became a fully autonomous work, the *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New York*, a tome of thirteen hundred pages on the New World whose encyclopedic ambition is demonstrated by the abundance of historical notes that accompany this travel narrative.98 His writing, however, can never exhaust the subject of America: whether the latter has changed between the time of its discovery and that of its appearance in his texts (in accordance with the first paradox of the New World), or it embodied for the writer an Eden whose disappearance will ever remain the subject of infinite and inexpressible regret, it occasioned the constant resumption of a literary labor that was incapable of expressing its subject in a satisfactory manner.

The “Anecdote of the Sassafras and of the Wild Vine” gave free rein to reminiscence before emphasizing at the end of the text the destruction of an age whose memory it was commemorating. Crèvecoeur also occasionally interrupted the temporal continuity in a letter to highlight the historical and personal fracture that the War of Independence represented. In a text dated January 17, 1774,
Crèvecoeur depicted the work and the general life of his family in wintertime. Hospitality was the rule during this period in which the harshness of the season was compensated by a “keen, pure joy” in the domestic space. Nevertheless, this description is interrupted by a question put to the addressee:

You once enjoyed these winter diversions . . . tell me, doesn’t the feeble image that I’m offering here still give you pleasure? That is how I spent the happiest moments of my life, in the bosom of liberty, material comforts, gentle familiarity, and friendship. . . . Delightful moments, when will I see you again! Alas! the union, harmony, and fraternity that we enjoyed at that time are replaced today by deep distress, tears, jealousy, and the war with all its murders and flames. I wish to forget them and soothe my heart by turning my thoughts to sweeter memories.99

This commentary by the narrator on his own narrative betrays the subterfuge of the writing: the letter cannot have been written on “January 17, 1774,” as the paratext asserts; it was necessarily written after the beginning of the American Revolution, since it alludes to its terrible consequences. While the present tense used in the text seems to express the contemporaneous character of the discourse and of its object, it indicates in fact the subjective topicality of the reminiscence: writing is a way to forget momentarily the suffering caused by the war and to return to a yet earlier period when happiness was supposedly felt in all its fullness. The posthumous representation of America thus allows the double updating of the past that it recalls: it commemorates for the reader the defunct age that it undertakes to describe, but it also permits the author to live a past reconstituted in an affective mode in which time is briefly abolished. Whether he is describing colonial America from the viewpoint of a colonist oblivious to the impending war or from that of a contemporary of the conflict, Crèvecoeur adorns it with all the characteristics of a Golden Age: the comparison of this epoch of American history to a mythical period is the clearest sign of the retrospective idealization that plays out in posthumous representation.100

*Portrayal of the Golden Age*

In *More Letters from the American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur was already comparing colonial America to the Golden Age by identifying it with the tradition inherited from Hesiod and Ovid.101 According to him, the realization of an ideal of insularity is a necessary condition for the reproduction of this ideal state of history. The family unit presents a first form of self-sufficiency: its members are isolated on the farm like Robinson on his desert island, their autonomy guaranteeing their prosperity and felicity.102 This unit is characterized by the harmony that reigns there: the American farmer is overwhelmed with emotion to the point
of shedding tears when he contemplates, in their abode, his wife cradling their child on her breast. In the *Lettres* of 1784, the themes of family and paternity appear several times. Crèvecoeur describes the revolutionary effect on him of the birth of his child and declares that the power of paternal sentiment is inconceivable for someone who has never experienced it. The recurrence of this theme is a new sign of the therapeutic function that Crèvecoeur attributed to the writing of his *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*, since at the time he composed the first two volumes, he had no knowledge of the fate of his wife and two children who remained at Pine Hill, a fate that he would only learn of upon his return to the United States in 1783. The descriptions of domestic bliss that are found in the *Lettres* can be read as a literary compensation for the anguish he experienced in the period when he was finishing his book, in the form of an attempt to commune with the time when such harmony was still possible.

Crèvecoeur’s American Golden Age is characterized moreover by the political autonomy of communities, as proved by his remarks on the founding of Connecticut: “During the first years, each family lived isolated on its land, occupied solely with its work, with no coercive bonds and with no laws, and they were happy.—This period was the Golden Age of this province; they were bound solely by the principles of benevolence, by the need of mutual assistance, by the desire to live in peace.” The resurrection of this age of innocence, prosperity, and justice can, however, only be effected if the characteristic insularity of the family unit is reproduced on a broader scope. Ideally, this larger community is subject to an exterior power that imposes as few constraints as possible, a legislative code reduced to its simplest expression being, according to Crèvecoeur, the best guarantee of public felicity. Crèvecoeur sets in opposition to the legislative constraint put into effect by a political authority the self-regulation of the communities by the reciprocal benevolence of their members and the need for mutual assistance. In the letter titled “Story of André l’Hébridéen,” he emphasizes the custom of *trolique*, an instance of mutual aid by the inhabitants of a township when one of them is confronted by a job that exceeds his strength. The praise of this tradition by Crèvecoeur illustrates his predilection for the autonomy of small communities and his rejection of an excessive intervention on the part of the state. This political choice explains in part his initial sympathy for the loyalists during the War of Independence: before this event, the distance from the city guaranteed the blessed isolation of the colonies deep in the American forests. Crèvecoeur’s imagined Golden Age turns the American continent, under the distant *dominion* of the British Iles, into an archipelago that owed only the slightest tribute in money and obedience to the English crown. This inversion prepares the fusion between the tropes of the Golden Age and utopia, the utopian societies being traditionally located in an inaccessible elsewhere. In the *Lettres*, the American colonies are isolated in time as well as in the vast area of the American solitudes.
Characteristic of the Golden Age of Antiquity, the prosperity that reigns in America in the colonial period is praised by Crèvecoeur as the result of economic and social conditions that make what one would call today the “American Dream” available to everyone. Crèvecoeur repeats it incessantly: the hardworking, the sober, and the enterprising individuals will discover on the other side of the Atlantic inexpensive lands that will allow them to rise to the dignity of citizen and achieve the prosperity of an honest man. Over and over again, he relates the archetypal story of impoverished Europeans who discover in America the reward for the wager of emigration. Like an empirical philosopher following the development of a child, he follows the steps of André l’Hébridéen, who is for him what Émile is for Rousseau: an experimental subject whose development serves as an example. “This feeble description will be sufficient,” Crèvecoeur hopes, “to convince you that any poor, wise, hard-working and grateful European cannot fail to obtain here, if not riches at least the ownership of some land, work and good wages, happy affluence, and the protection of the laws.” Crèvecoeur is diffusing a dream of prosperity that was considered at the time to be an invitation to emigration for which Benjamin Franklin himself expressed gratitude. However, it would be nonsense to turn Crèvecoeur’s Lettres into one of the founding texts of the ideology of the American Dream. If the conditions that favored the realization of such a dream may have existed, in the eyes of the author they had already disappeared at the time of the first publication of his work in 1784. The domestic harmony, the independence of the communities, and the prosperity collapsed in a “general shipwreck” so violent that the author could not bring himself to describe it: “How could a man with all my limitations describe for you the progression that led us from the respect of the laws to disorder, insults, anarchy, the spilling of blood? . . . Alas! You would only see powerfully shaken clouds, burning meteors, horrible flashes, threatening lightning bolts, the convulsions of a great continent, a general debacle: such is the image of our situation.”

In 1784, Crèvecoeur is no longer like those Americans on a never-ending quest for greater prosperity of which a British governor said, ten years earlier, that they would desert paradise itself if they heard of another Eden located farther to the west. The American Dream is already dead in the Lettres, and Crèvecoeur writes in the present the posthumous representation of a reinvented Golden Age: this paradox escaped those of his readers who crossed the ocean with the hope of finding in the New World the idyllic society that his works depict.

THE LETTRES OF 1787: FROM A POSTHUMOUS AMERICA TO A POSSIBLE AMERICA

Nostalgic Paradigm, Progressive Paradigm

In the definitive study he devotes to the images of America in French thought, Echeverría distinguishes between two interpretive paradigms of the New World
in the works of the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century: the first characterizes America by the return of a distant past, while the second, turned toward the future, emphasizes the notion of progress. In this study, the first paradigm will be called “nostalgic,” since it conceives America as a space in which a past age is revived, and the second “progressive,” America serving as the model for a better society made possible by the spreading of Enlightenment thought. According to Echeverria, the 1784 version of the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* is representative of the first interpretive current. The critic nonetheless observes a significant inflection in the 1787 version, since this edition belongs more to the current of the second paradigm that is illustrated in particular by the political writings of Condorcet: “In the augmented 1787 edition of his *Lettres*, Crèvecoeur added two letters which indicated that he too was shifting to this progressive line. He claims that political and intellectual freedom allowed the American to make a maximum contribution to the material well-being of the community, and at the same time permitted him to develop fully his natural talents and to add to the store of useful knowledge, to the enlightenment of mankind, and to the general progress of civilization.”

In the third volume of the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*, a gap thus appears between the two interpretive paradigms of the New World, and the reader sees the beginning of a redefinition of the idea of America in French thought, a major reinterpretation that attempts to reformulate a sign defined by the resurgence of an ideal past as a synonym for the promises of the future. While this reconceptualization keeps France in a median position—as a reference point—on the temporal axis, it effects the translation of America in relation to the former by placing it in the far reaches of a future that may possibly be achieved in Europe after having offered to it a mirror in which it may contemplate its origins. When all is said and done, it is in the ambiguity of the characterization of America as a “New World” that are rooted the two contradictory paradigms used to interpret it for the French: “new” both in the sense that it is still in its infancy compared to the ancient civilization of the latter, and because it is still the idea of newness that it projects to the Old World by embodying the future that is going to be realized universally—if not “transmitted,” as some would say in order to identify American civilization with an epidemic being spread to the rest of the Western world. An analysis of the *Lettres* of 1787 will demonstrate the coexistence of the progressive and the nostalgic paradigms within a third volume that announces the birth of a possible America after having invented the posthumous representation of a defunct America.

**A Tendency Toward Allegorization**

The evolution of the image of America between the first and second editions of Crèvecoeur’s *Lettres* is immediately indicated by their respective illustrations.
The illustration on the first page of the 1784 edition plays a simple ornamental role: it suggests the ideas of exoticism and travel by means of a globe without having the slightest allegorical function (see fig. 1). Conversely, the 1787 edition of the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* is accompanied by illustrations that are more complex visually and that invite the reader to a hermeneutic activity bearing both on the allegorical motifs they introduce at the beginning of the book and the relation of these motifs to the whole volume.

These two illustrations are the work of the painter Claude Bornet and the illustrator Pietro-Antonio Martini. The first serves as a frontispiece to the first volume of the *Lettres* of 1787: Rice describes it as an “allegorical representation of America”117 (see fig. 2). The children embody, according to him, the idea of abundance, while the Native American woman personifies America. In *Beyond Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors criticizes Rice’s reading because it employs
two hermeneutic approaches that seem at odds: certain motifs are interpreted figuratively (the woman and the putti), whereas others (the Quakers and the immigrants) are assigned a literal meaning. Sollors suggests the application of a single reading grid to this image and to interpret it as the symbolic representation of a process of naturalization: “Seen this way, the engraving symbolizes the rebirth of immigrants as American infants, sequentially shown in the stages of the transatlantic journey, arrival, dance in a magical circle which leads to the unrepresented transformation itself, the new birth through a nourishing Indianized mother figure, and the prosperous settlement in smoke-stacked houses.”

The woman in the foreground on the left is an abstract representation of the New World according to Sollors, who calls her an “Indianized and female allegory of America” and identifies her with the historical figure of Pocahontas. She gives a new birth to the immigrants as American citizens by offering them a

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FIG. 2
Frontispiece for Lettres d’un cultivateur américain, 1787 edition. Photo courtesy Université de Montréal Library.
nourishing breast, in accordance with the process described in the Latin maxim beneath the image: “Ubi panis, et libertas, ibi Patria” (“Where bread and liberty are found, there lies the motherland”). This maxim had already been quoted by Crèvecoeur in the third missive of the Letters from an American Farmer (“What is an American?”), although in an abbreviated form. The phrase placed beneath the allegory therefore adds the idea of liberty, which is absent from the 1782 text.

In the medallion decorating the first volume of the 1787 edition, America is represented, allegorically, by the figure of a Native American princess, weeping next to a grave on which are inscribed the names of generals fallen during the War of Independence (see fig. 3). A Latin inscription surrounds the medallion: “O manes heroum vestra libera est patria” (Oh spirits of the heroes, your motherland is free).

By depicting America as a woman moved to tears by the death of those who gave their life for hers, this image expresses the political position of the author
in favor of the patriots, whereas the allegiance of the author of the *Letters from an American Farmer* was much more ambiguous. As for the frontispiece of the 1787 edition, it represents the American continent as a space of regeneration: the nourishing breast of America turns out to be a Fountain of Youth for the Europeans, who return to childhood after being suckled. Simultaneously, it offers us a metaphorical representation of the “melting pot,” since the immigrants who have come from different European countries are transformed into identical creatures who have been given a virginal nudity that equates their arrival in the New World to a second birth.

**Liberty and Cultural Homogeneity**

Absent from the Latin maxim quoted by Crèvecoeur in 1782, the idea of liberty is added under the frontispiece of 1787 (see fig. 2). In order for America to become the new motherland for European immigrants and the place of their rebirth, it must offer more than material resources and the opportunity for a more comfortable existence; it must also hold out the possibility of freedom. Interestingly, in a letter written only a few months after the publication of the third volume of his *Lettres*, it is precisely for the misuse of their liberty that Crèvecoeur criticizes the Americans: “How can you subject to the rule of law a people that for such a long time has not known its salutary restraints, that confuses Liberty with unlimited licentiousness, that believes one can be free without government and rich without industry? How can you control a people that inhabits such a vast, unlimited continent, a people whose behavior has changed so much?”

In addition, while the frontispiece of 1787 represents an allegorical process of naturalization of the immigrants, Crèvecoeur expresses doubts, in a letter written in the same period, about the capacity of the Americans to become in the near future a united people: “Many years will pass before the Americans have become a nation; it will even take more than a century before we may observe among them the moral and physical traits of homogeneity that produce those characteristic national nuances; for, as you know, what we see today is only a conglomerate of Europeans set on different soils and climate, all coming from equally different countries, who cannot yet have any other bonds than those of their needs and their petty local ambitions.”

This letter helps us to imagine an alternative illustration to the edition of 1787 of the *Lettres* in which, instead of nearly identical cherubs, a crowd of Europeans distinctly different in appearance would leave a ship and go wherever their fancy takes them to found a multiplicity of communities that are culturally homogeneous but devoid of any ties between them. Consequently, the 1787 frontispiece represents, in an allegorical mode, the process of naturalization that depends on one condition (liberty) and leads to a result (cultural homogeneity) that calls precisely into question the correspondence carried on by the author.
during the same period. Is this contradiction between the allegorical discourse of the frontispiece and the private letters of Crèvecoeur an indication of the difficulty the author met in expressing publicly the concerns he had about the American Republic during his consular appointment? More broadly, is such an opposition discernable between the third tome of the Lettres d’un cultivateur américain and the thoughts shared by Crèvecoeur in the private letters he sent at the time of its writing? To answer these questions and show that, contrary to the nostalgic paradigm (that glosses over shadowy zones in the depiction of an ideal age), the progressive paradigm of the interpretation of America is inseparable from anxiety and threat, it will be necessary to return to the origin of the edition of 1787.

Two Contradictory Discourses
Thanks to the intervention of Madame d’Houdetot, Crèvecoeur began working in the spring of 1783 for the Minister of the Navy, Maréchal de Castries, who wished to know more about the population, geography, and industries of the United States.\textsuperscript{124} Crèvecoeur drew maps and wrote a report on the young republic, as well as an essay on the establishment of regular postal links between France and the United States, works that he submitted to Benjamin Franklin for comment. Combined with the unfailing support of the comtesse d’Houdetot and that of the Beauvau and La Rochefoucauld families, Crèvecoeur’s energy is rewarded with the prestigious and newly created position of French Consul in New York.\textsuperscript{125} The competition, however, had been ferocious: “I learned later,” wrote Crèvecoeur, “that nothing less than the combined influence of these great families had been necessary to obtain a consulate that seventeen strongly backed individuals were seeking.”\textsuperscript{126}

Once he had become an official representative in the United States, he was no longer free to criticize it. He was all the more inclined to play the role of apostle of the young Republic since the memory of his vacillating attitude during the War of Independence had not faded away: the literary panegyric is Crèvecoeur’s way of making amends for his political inconstancy. In addition, he frequents George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, tutelary figures of the new nation who would have taken umbrage had the French Consul written diatribes against their newly founded country.\textsuperscript{127} Crèvecoeur also counts among his friends the marquis de Lafayette, to whom he dedicated the Lettres d’un cultivateur américain.\textsuperscript{128} Crowned with glory after his brilliant contribution to the War of Independence, Lafayette is honored by the friendship of Washington himself.\textsuperscript{129} While the Letters from an American Farmer were dedicated to the abbé de Raynal and celebrated “belonging to a common and universal humanity,” their French rewriting is concerned solely with the community of victors, out of fear that the author be confused with the partisans of England; he
congratulated Lafayette for throwing off the “yoke” and punishing the “hubris” of the former rulers.  

Led to frequent the elites of the American republic, Crèvecœur multiplied his declarations of optimism about the future of the United States in the third volume of the Lettres: “This progress is independent and shielded from all the revolutions that may afflict the rest of the universe. There are no places on earth in which the same number of years could produce a series of events so important and useful to humanity as will the populating, clearing, and embellishment of the fertile and vast region that is traversed by the Ohio River and by the rivers that empty their waters into it.” However, just as it was instructive to compare the Letters from an American Farmer to the texts in More Letters from an American Farmer, it is revealing to confront the 1787 Lettres to Crèvecoeur’s private correspondence in the same period. A missive written to Brissot in December 1787 suggests a very different discourse on the United States. It reproaches the Americans, in fact, for being less worthy of a free government than they were at the end of the War of Independence:

I can assure you that there is almost no virtue or honor any longer, at least among those who are involved in public affairs. That is harsh, but it is true, and I’m beginning to believe that man is not made to enjoy as great a degree of liberty as I thought in 1776. I’m ashamed of all my former dreams. . . . The spectacle that the Americans have been giving for twelve years is very instructive: the first part was beautiful to see, the second is a process of trial and error, a heap of errors mostly, which will plunge them back into disunity, anarchy, and a host of calamities that it is useless to warn them about.

As Chevignard writes, “[O]ne discovers between Crèvecoeur and his narrator St. John the same gap that we saw formerly between J. Hector St. John and Farmer James: on the concrete America that the colonist or the consul analyzes with a merciless lucidity is superimposed an imaginary America that his literary double rolls out with an untiring poetic verve.” Witness to a troubled age in the history of the United States, Crèvecoeur expresses bitter concerns in his private correspondence while creating an imaginary America in his Lettres of 1787, in which the posthumous representation of an idealized past cohabits with the promise of a glorious future, in which the nostalgic paradigm of representation of the New World does not prevent the development of the progressive paradigm. This duality of the 1787 Lettres becomes clear in the analysis of their underlying structure.

**Fragmentation and Structure**

Heterogeneity is one of the major characteristics of Crèvecoeur’s Lettres, which treat a variety of themes and move forward by temporal leaps and bounds,
disorienting a reader who values the indications of place and time at the beginning of letters between which he expects, to no avail, a chronological progression, since the author passes, arbitrarily it seems, from the end of the war to its horrors, from the colonial period to the tale of events that occurred after the independence of the United States. While Lezay-Marnésia’s *Letters Written from the Banks of the Ohio* accompany the trip toward the west, then the retreat of their author, the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* practice a constant historical back-and-forth and include, in addition to the letters signed by Saint-John, tales whose source is not specified, the translation of speeches and newspaper articles as summaries of the progress of the United States since peacetime, so that the proliferation of the discourses and the overlapping of periods recall far more the Harlequin suit that is Chateaubriand’s *Voyage en Amérique*: battered by misfortunes and embodied in his work, Crèvecoeur’s memory resembles a shore the day after a shipwreck, where one seeks the fragments of scattered reminiscences.

Nonetheless, without claiming to discover in the 1787 *Lettres* a rigorous structure so artistically hidden that it is invisible to a superficial gaze, it is possible to discern a conscious organization that governs the apparently aleatory succession of the texts. The reader will remember Julien Gracq’s comment, earlier, on Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*: “The genetic imperative of proliferation and enrichment takes precedence over the principle of organization every time in the book.” Beside the imperative of “proliferation” that dominates Crèvecoeur’s work as well, that of “organization” asserts itself in order to structure his opus: in the same way as the *Recherche*, the *Lettres* demonstrate an effort to manage and contain the proliferation of the text, itself engendered by the nostalgia for a past that the author strives to reinvent. To determine the principles dictating the organization of the third volume of the *Lettres*, it is useful to study Crèvecoeur’s manuscripts conserved by the Beinecke Library of Yale University, and especially a handwritten manuscript titled “Les Treize [sic] Chapitres du Troisième Volume du Cultivateur Américain” (The Thirteen Chapters of the Third Volume of the American Farmer). One observation is imperative in comparing this manuscript and the third volume of the *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* as Crèvecoeur published it in 1787: the distribution of the texts in a different order evinces a well-thought-out intent to organize the volume according to criteria that remain to be identified.

Placed second in the manuscript, the text devoted to the establishment of “Socialbourg” slips to fifth place in the final version. Initially followed by a letter “Sent August 24,” it precedes the first of the “Forty-Nine Anecdotes” in the printed version. Likewise, the letters devoted to the postwar period (“Triumphant Entrance of General Washington,” “Progress of Things Since the Peace,” and “Dismissal of the American Army”) are found at the end of the volume in
the 1787 version, whereas they were located in the first half of the manuscript. These changes in the order of the texts in the volume thus obey a principle of regrouping: on the one hand, the letters that address the postwar period are sent to the end of the volume while, on the other hand, Crèvecoeur alternates, in the first part of the book, the letters on the colonial period and those on the War of Independence, so that they shed light on each other.

The letter allotted to Socialbourg describes the foundation of an imaginary city in the northwest section of Albany County. It relates a dialogue between five men from five different European countries, a miniature drama in which each describes the tribulations he had to endure in his motherland and the dreams he pursued in crossing the Atlantic. Soon these foreigners resolve to join forces to found a settlement in the New York colony; then they endeavor to define the principles that will guide the community, in the area of religion in particular, since the specter of dogmatic quarrels could just as well arise between them as it so often did among their countrymen in the Old World. These individuals, all of different faiths, resolve to combat this eventuality in every way possible and to revere the “Supreme Being” within a “Christian Church,” an appellation chosen in an ecumenical spirit.

Religion is not the only aspect of community life that they decide to organize. By mutual consent, they establish an “agreement” that will determine the details of their association: “The following day, this agreement consisting of seventeen articles written by the vice president was ratified and signed by all. In time, this settlement flourished.” Clearly attached to the utopian tradition by the adoption of a large number of characteristic traits—built on a “parallelogram of three thousand acres,” Socialbourg belongs to the tradition of utopian cities whose geometric form expresses the dominion of reason over community life and establishes the order that reigns in a society frozen in the eternal present of an inalterable happiness—the letter contains nonetheless subtle differences by not establishing a sole legislator, as in the originary texts of the genre, but rather five men who determine by a democratic process the political principles on which their association will rest. Edward White rightfully sees therein a new variation on the famous “What is an American?” in the third missive in the Letters from an American Farmer, since it proposes the renunciation of each individual’s original sense of identity and the creation of a social pact that results in a new identity for each person. But it is also the depiction of an age in which harmony between peoples was possible, an idyllic period whose disappearance the reader is suddenly made to feel by the withering conclusion he gives to this letter: “N.B. [This settlement] was nearly completely destroyed during the last war.” The irremediable character of this loss is underlined ever more by the organization of the tome, which places immediately after the description of the circumstances of the founding of Socialbourg—a text filled with optimism until
the hammer blow at the end—a series of forty-nine tales related to the War of Independence. The latter describe the various events of the Revolution with a striking tendency to praise American virtues and denounce the cruelty of the British.\textsuperscript{142} By means of the passage from the description of a blessed city to the spectacle of its ruins, Crèvecœur shows to the reader how the utopian project of Socialbourg—a project infused with deism and the Enlightenment faith in the power of reason to prevent violence from breaking out—was wrecked on the reefs of the war with the British.

Two other letters, separated in the manuscript, follow one another in the final version and obey the same logic of confrontation between the posthumous representation of colonial America and the depiction of the horrors that followed. Dated October 28, 1774, the letter titled “Sketch of a Journey by Ménéssink on the Delaware to the Wyoming Valley”\textsuperscript{143} precedes, in the printed version, a missive written on November 15, 1778, “Sketch of the Destruction of the Settlements That the Inhabitants of Connecticut had Founded on the Eastern Branch of the Susquehanna River in 1766.”\textsuperscript{144} Contrary to a large number of letters that follow one another with no thematic link and very often no chronological continuity, the one on “November 15, 1778,” is explicitly linked to the preceding letter: “After having enjoyed the pleasure of contemplating this long chain of settlements of which I spoke to you four years ago, after having followed with the keenest interest the development of these young societies, the wonderful progress of so much effort and enterprise: was it really necessary for my personal situation to nearly make me a witness of their destruction?”\textsuperscript{145}

Once again, the brutal transition from one text to another expresses the shock of the destruction of the settlements founded during the colonial period. The brief silence between these texts is the literary equivalent of Crèvecœur’s internal fracture: the organization of the volume is intended to sensitize the reader to the end of the Golden Age by means of the surprising leap from the idyllic representation of the past to the American Revolution, whose injustices are amply described in the book. Following these letters, however, another tale is begun by Crèvecœur: no longer that of the destruction of the New World but that of its progressive reconstruction.\textsuperscript{146} The posthumous representation of a past destroyed by war is succeeded by the evocation of a period that is contemporary with the writing, in which one may read all the hopes but also all the fears of the future.

\textit{Visions of a Possible America}

Crèvecœur devotes the end of the third volume to the first steps of the American republic. The last seven letters cover a period that goes from the departure of the British from New York City in 1783 to the month of December 1786. Significantly, the volume concludes with the translation of a form letter from
Washington whose concerns echo those expressed by Crèvecoeur in his private correspondence at the end of the 1780s. This missive celebrates the opportunity offered to Americans to become happy and prosperous but nonetheless describes the beginnings of the Republic as a crucial period that will decide its future. An “indissoluble union of the States” must be adopted as quickly as possible, Washington concludes in the text quoted by Crèvecoeur.

The opposition between the federalists and the antifederalists was raging at the time of the publication of the Lettres of 1787. Ten years earlier, the Second Continental Congress (composed of the thirteen original states) had proposed “Articles of Confederation” that, signed in 1781, favored the sovereignty of each state over any centralized federal authority. It was not until December 17, 1787, that a convention in Philadelphia accepted the Constitution of the United States of America, which still would not be ratified before March 4, 1789. The correspondence of Crèvecoeur demonstrates unambiguously his political antipathies, in particular toward Patrick Henry, who, after having been the first governor of Virginia (1776–79), refused to take a seat at the 1787 convention, owing to his commitment to the sovereignty of the states: “Mr. P. Henry is in my eyes a very guilty man, for I abhor Antifederalists and cannot help considering them as people who want to sacrifice the glory, the prosperity of this country to their selfish, or rather hellish, views.”

The antifederalist tendency of the southern states provokes most particularly Crèvecoeur’s anxiety: “The southern States, whose interests are so different, who are so jealous and fear so much the energy, activity, and enterprise of the inhabitants of the North, will form alliances in Europe; then, everything will be irremediably lost. That may well be the consequence of all these democratic ideas, so fine on paper but which will turn out to be so many noxious and deceptive dreams.”

The private epistles of Crèvecoeur and those that he published under his name exhibit some important similarities, since the reader meets again, in the 1787 Lettres, the expression of the same fears: “The hopes of the United States,” he wrote in his volume of letters, “will be fulfilled for the greater good of humanity, unless the evil genius of our race nips in the bud such beautiful, comforting hopes; unless, inspiring in Americans the spirit of disunity and delusion, it plunges them into anarchy and leads them to regret that so many efforts have been made and so much blood spilled.” According to Crèvecoeur, this “spirit of disunity and delusion” was propagated by two types of antifederalists. The first were the partisans of independence and the sovereignty of their state, resolved to defend their economic interests and unwilling to follow the customs system implemented by the federal government. Crèvecoeur described the second as evil creatures, driven by the corruption of human nature and ready to plunge America into civil war out of love for anarchy. In his grievances against the antifederalists, Crèvecoeur betrayed the anguish he felt before the hidden recesses of
human nature, a fear that had never left him since his sojourn in the New York jails. The specter of a corrupt humanity relentlessly determined to do evil for its own sake appears once again in its enigmatic substance at the time of his appointment in New York and causes him to fear for the future of his second motherland.

The Lettres simmer with both the hopes and fears that obsessed Crèvecoeur regarding the future of the United States. On the one hand, they emphasize the progressive reconstruction of the country and the still-fragile recovery of maritime commerce and agriculture. However, the promises of prosperity will only be fulfilled if the “redoubtable enemies” are vanquished: “[L]uxury and squandering; the business and deceptive lure of credit, such are the redoubtable enemies that the Americans have to combat, especially in the Southern States; much less frugality and enterprise than before the war, a false idea of liberty that has just cost them so dearly, an idea that it is so easy and so dangerous to abuse, a jealous suspicion of the representatives and leaders that they choose themselves, such are the great pitfalls to which the inhabitants of the North are exposed.”

This suspicion toward money and credit is typical of the physiocratic discourse for which Turgot (1727–1781) was one of the most famous theoreticians. His brother, Étienne-François Turgot, was Crèvecoeur’s protector upon his return to France in 1781; he encouraged him to write the Traité de la culture des pommes de terre (1782) and received him in his mansion on the Île Saint-Louis. In the tradition of physiocratic principles, Crèvecoeur considered land as the primary source of wealth of a nation and warned against money and credit that corrupted its products. On the foundation of these economic principles, the period before the war is again set up as a model by Crèvecoeur: the frugal and laborious customs common at that time gave way to the “sentiment of self-interest” that a countryman had already noticed in the United States, as well as that “commercial spirit” whose development Chateaubriand was to observe a few years later during his own journey in America.

Ultimately, the third volume of the Lettres d’un cultivateur américain proves to be structured by the two interpretive paradigms of America that Echeverria distinguished. The first part of the volume is organized around the nostalgic paradigm, reviving various scenes from the colonial period that are then opposed to scenes taken from the war: no shadow darkens the posthumous representation of an idealized period, since it is the fratricidal conflict of the loyalists and the patriots that plays the contrapuntal role. Conversely, the second part is marked by the hope for prosperity that is inseparable from the progressive paradigm, but also by severe anguish: this felicity promised to the Americans can only be achieved if they embrace political union instead of an antifederalism that would lead them to ruin, and, likewise, only if they resist the penchant for violence,
represented by a metaphor that Crèvecoeur placed at the beginning of his volume. Titled “Combat Between Two Snakes,” the fourth of the 1787 Lettres may indeed be read as a meditation on the penchant for destruction in the natural world and by extension in the human sphere. The fierce struggle between the two reptiles, without our ever learning which one is the winner, serves as a warning: although America is described as a new Eden, it is nonetheless already corrupted.

“The flip side to the sense of hope that goes to the core of the Declaration and the Dream,” writes Cullen, “is a sense of fear that its promises are on the verge of being, or actually have been, lost.” This paradoxical union of hope and anxiety is also found in the Lettres of 1787, which contain both the prediction of a glorious future and the simultaneous fear that this will never come to pass, as well as the last trace of a posthumous America and the uncertain vision of a possible America.

Return to America: Journey in Upper Pennsylvania and the State of New York (1801)

Displacement of the Golden Age

In Space and in Time
In the last pages of L’Étudiant étranger (The Foreign Student, 1986), Philippe Labro relates his return to Paris in the 1950s, after his studies at Washington and Lee University in Virginia. Over the next months and years, the young man observed his countrymen adopting the modes of dress and musical tastes that he had observed during his stay in the United States. Owing to the slow seepage of the “American way of life” into France, the country lags perpetually behind in its imitation of the American model, just as there is often a gap, emphasized by many novelists, between the fashions of the French capital and those of the provinces. To leave Paris is to discover what was in style months earlier, so one has the impression that this geographic move is a journey back in time: the difference between France and the United States in L’Étudiant étranger is similar to that between Angoulême and the French capital in Balzac’s Illusions perdues (Lost Illusions, 1837–43). However, America has not always represented the future on the symbolic axis connecting it to France. The Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New York depuis l’année 1785 jusqu’en 1798 plunges us back into a time when the roles were reversed, France embodying the possible future of the United States, whereas the latter country represented the mythical past of the former. The following section is devoted to the establishment of this symbolic relationship between the two countries, as well as to the manner in which the posthumous representation of America plays a specular function in the narrative published by Crèvecoeur in 1801.
Shipwrecked America

In the guise of a translator, Crèvecoeur begins the *Voyage* by a preface in which he recounts the destiny of the *Morning-Star*, a ship from Philadelphia that wrecked on November 12, 1798, on the coast of Denmark. Among the objects strewn on the beach were the manuscripts of a tale of travel in the United States, unfortunately so damaged by the salt water that they had become nearly illegible.\textsuperscript{165} The translator deems it possible, nonetheless, to put them in a satisfactory order and make them available to the public. Some of his friends advise him against it: the French will never be interested in them, having just survived the horrors of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{164} However, others encourage him to publish them, using an argument that renders explicit the metaphorical dimension of the storm during which the *Morning-Star* had sunk: “At what happier time could this work appear than during the return to calm, justice, and true liberty, after so many years spent in the grip of the violent unrest, spasmodic storms, and volcanic shocks of the Revolution?”\textsuperscript{165} A land of storms and revolutions, France cannot be approached without the risk of a shipwreck that serves as a warning for the United States.

Crèvecoeur was not the only one to describe France as a turbulent zone to be avoided. On the point of returning to his homeland, Lezay-Marnésia expressed a similar anxiety: “This France formerly so fortunate and so beautiful has become a land of fire that is very dangerous to approach.”\textsuperscript{166} Chateaubriand established, for his part, an analogy between the raging natural elements and the political storm ravaging his country, describing in the *Mémoires d’outre-tombe* a “riot of waves”\textsuperscript{167} foreshadowing the revolt of the people that he was preparing to find in his country. According to the “translator” of the *Voyage*, the political upheaval in France increases the urgency of the publication of a book devoted to the United States. This text will play both a pedagogical and a therapeutic role for its readers, who will find in it tableaus that are “at the same time instructive, enjoyable, and comforting.”\textsuperscript{168} Although Crèvecoeur describes henceforth the aftermath of the War of Independence, the celebration of America in this preface has a familiar ring for the readers of *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*.

The Republican Golden Age

Indeed, what Crèvecoeur said about colonial America in the *Lettres*, he now, in 1801, asserts about the American Republic. What, exactly, does he state about the government? Crèvecoeur described it as “just and equitable” at the time of British domination,\textsuperscript{169} but when he speaks of the young Republic, the description has hardly changed, since he now refers to it as “fatherly.”\textsuperscript{170} And what about taxes? “Our taxes are light and fairly assessed,” an American farmer declared before 1776,\textsuperscript{171} whereas similar praise is offered under the Republic, the colonists paying “no other levies to the government than affection and gratitude.”\textsuperscript{172} Likewise, in the *Lettres*, as in the *Voyage*, Crèvecoeur compares America and
Europe to the detriment of the latter. Published in the 1784 *Lettres*, the “Esquisse” (“Sketch”) contrasted an overpopulated Europe with a “here” where the immigrants finally have the opportunity to take their destiny in hand: “[I]n Europe, I heard that the excessive population of society stifles the most outstanding talents. Here, the broad range of things allows them to flourish and grow: this is how Europeans become Americans.” It is no different in the *Voyage*, where a Scottish officer exclaims, after 1783: “What was I in Scotland . . ., where I had a position that was so easily filled by another? . . . Here, being a member of a rising society, property, laws, and local circumstances have lent me a certain ascendancy and given me a certain weight on the social scale.” All in all, nothing has changed in Crèvecoeur’s discourse on America; nothing other than the date of its production and the period it describes.

From the *Lettres* to the *Voyage*, there is a homology between the American and the French Revolutions. It is created in particular by the use of an identical metaphor: that of the storm. The French Revolution embodies in the *Voyage* the historical fracture that inaugurates the posthumous representation of America, the role formerly assumed by the American Revolution in the *Lettres*. While Crèvecoeur, in the latter, contrasts the colonial period with that of the War of Independence, the narrator of the *Voyage* compares the happiness of the young United States to the turmoil of his country since the summer of 1789. Alternatively, the War of Independence is completely absent from the *Voyage*. To be sure, the long voyage that this text relates occurs after the conflict, since it is supposed to take place between 1785 and 1789: that the American Revolution is less present in the *Voyage* than in the *Lettres*, since the narrator was its contemporary and one of its victims, is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, the heroes of the *Voyage* meet men and women who were actors in a war that had just been brought to an end. Questioned by the travelers, certain Americans remember the war but only touch on the subject lightly and move on to others more in line with the praises of America being sung by Crèvecoeur: “After having shared with my new countrymen the dangers of the Revolution that emancipated this great country, I took great pleasure in the interesting spectacle of the prodigious growth of its population and that of the ultramontane colonies,” states a Dutchman who had settled in Indiana after many travels. Now it is France that appears to be the repository of the human malice that seems to be spared the New World for the moment.

The War in the Background
Chapter 13 of volume 2 is nonetheless an exception to the extent that it is devoted to an episode of the American Revolution: the flight of a family into the Appalachian Mountains. While the *Lettres* relate the anguish of a narrator who fears for his life and that of the members of his family, the character at the center
of the “Tale of a Flight into the Appalachians During the War of Independence” chooses to abandon his plantation in South Carolina. In order to escape from the English, he takes refuge with his family and servants in the forest, where four years go by with no misfortunes of any kind. The flight of the family of the “patriarch of Orangebourg County” resembles a pleasant hike: the trek through the forests poses no greater difficulty than stepping over small streams, the milk and butter produced on the banks of the Pacolet are superior to those back home, and even the harsh weather is less a problem than one might have feared. In the shelter of a “spacious and comfortable” cabin, the daughters of the patriarch give him two grandchildren. While many characters in the *Lettres* counted their dead at the end of the war, the community led by the patriarch was increased by “seven children, two white and five black” (201). The members of the expedition are referred to as “family,” whether they were free or slaves before the war. The highly unusual situation created by the war permits not only the integration of the slaves into the family of the patriarch on a sentimental level but also introduces a short-lived apprenticeship of democracy that excludes no one. The planter abandons in effect the autocratic functioning that he had adopted in Carolina in favor of an infinitely more liberal system: “Back home, I was the absolute authority, but as soon as I became a forest dweller, I established a democratic government: each individual had his vote, the Blacks just like the Whites. I was only the executor of the will of the majority, and each person, by submitting to it, felt that it was his own will. But, I confess, if my family had been larger, I would have modified a little this system, having often had occasion to observe that wisdom does not always result from a greater number of opinions” (200; emphasis added).

The renewal of the social relations within the group hiding in the forest goes further than the welcoming of the slaves into the planter’s family, already a rather remarkable phenomenon in itself: the blacks are considered to be the whites’ peers and participate with them on an equal footing during community deliberations. Alas, the following text does not say if, upon returning to Carolina, the patriarch kept in place the social contract adopted in the forest; in all likelihood, on the contrary, the old man became again the autocratic figure he was before the war. Of the horrors of this conflict, obsessively present in the *Lettres*, Crévecœur says nothing in this bizarre chapter. They are off-camera, outside the story as they are out of the sight of the members of this itinerant family; only when they return home do they learn that they had been surrounded by multiple dangers during their journey, dangers that had never even existed for them since they had not even suspected them, and that have now disappeared for good (2:245).

Crévecœur thus slipped into the *Voyage*, with regard to the American Revolution that represented in the *Lettres* a counterpoint to the colonial period,
the “yang” of the dreadful memories systematically opposed to the “yin” of the happy times. The deep structure of the narrative has changed. The Lettres obeyed a logic of temporal alternation: the colonial period was opposed to the era of the American Revolution, in the explicit comparisons in the text as well as in the sequencing of its parts. The Voyage, for its part, is structured by a system of spatial oppositions in which each term has an axiological value: Europe embodies the negative Other of America, the latter being the idyllic flip side of the former. This symbolic value of one country in relation to the other overlaps with an opposition regarding their respective places on the temporal axis. The representations of the United States and of France have a specular function in that each country may recognize in the other a reverse image of itself. On the one hand, France embodies the disquieting yet possible future that awaits the United States: “Will the distance that, fortunately, [separates us from the Old World] preserve us from its storms? . . . Would the demon of human nature return to exercise its formidable empire on the world? Would it be possible that there are men here who . . . , to spread among us the new European opinions, have resolved to plunge us into the horrors of chaos and to deliver us to the gory fury of anarchy?” (1:83–84).

Confined for the moment to the Old World, this spirit of discord could very well spread to the United States if Americans allowed themselves to be persuaded by the “European opinions” that have sowed chaos in the Old World (1:84). In its turn, America offers France a reflection of its own past: “What a great distance there is between our state of infancy and the nations of Europe that have reached the fullness of things: surrounded by fortifications, possessing all the means of warfare, in a state of perfection through centuries of experience, and countries on which we depend, unfortunately, for a multitude of objects that we could easily produce ourselves if we were more numerous!” (151). Still struggling in a “state of infancy,” the United States certainly does not have Europe’s sophistication, but what it lacks in conveniences and comfort it amply compensates for with the social equality and public tranquility that its people enjoy (143). In this society that has reached a lesser degree of technical and demographic development, the Europeans can recognize the image of an earlier stage of development of their own civilization, a stage that, if it may be described as inferior in terms of progress, is perceived as superior in terms of felicity. Serving as mutual mirrors, the United States and France recognize in each other, respectively, their future and their past.

While the Letters reserved the use of the pastoral tone for the depiction of the colonial period, the Voyage sees the flowering of a postrevolutionary Golden Age with similar characteristics. After having halted it at the American Revolution in the Lettres, Crèvecoeur advances the frontier of the Golden Age here to the end of the eighteenth century. The redefinition of posthumous America in the Voyage
in relation to the *Lettres* is therefore considerable by its implications, although limited in its means of expression: it is the signifier that changes (colonial America is replaced by the Republic) and not the signified, since the two periods are the object of identical praise. No matter that Crèvecoeur’s narrative attempts to root itself in its period of production by alluding to the most significant events of the end of the century—beginning with the French Revolution and the rise to power of Napoléon Bonaparte—he still continues to idealize a defunct America whose characteristics are identical to those of the colonial age. This era remains, in Crèvecoeur’s eyes, the only veritable period of bliss he has known: in the posthumous representation of this age is played out the painful and stubborn quest for a happiness that has vanished. More broadly, a relationship of symbolic equivalence between the United States and France is established in the *Voyage,* such that the depiction of one of these countries always contains an implicit commentary on the situation of the other. The posthumous representation of America thus never has the sole function of preserving the memory of a past period or serving as an outlet for the author’s nostalgia: it puts in place an implicit discourse on France as the symbolic double of the United States and permits the former country to see itself as it is perceived from the other side of the Atlantic.

**A MIRAGE IN THE PAST**

**A Tableau Composed of Memory**

In describing the evolution of America between the end of the sixteenth century and the end of the eighteenth century, a prominent New Yorker that the heroes of the *Voyage* encounter describes the literary project of Crèvecoeur: “What an interesting tableau a clever writer could make of this long series of events, efforts, and adventures, more or less happy or unhappy, from the first colonists that Sir Walter Raleigh led to Roanoke in 1577 . . . to the . . . founding of the interior states of Vermont, Kentucky, and Tennessee! I know of no other subject that is more worthy of the brush of a great painter” (339). The *Voyage in Upper Pennsylvania and the State of New York* embodies the “tableau” suggested by this character: in this vast canvas, the intercalated stories take us back to the origin of the colonization of the American continent, while the peregrinations of the two main characters help us to embrace the shifting totality of a country in constant mutation. Contrary to the *Lettres,* however, this work is not composed by an artist placed before his model.

The *Lettres* of 1784 were based on literary material produced at the time of the author’s stay in America—“Frenchified” and “idealized,” it is true, in the course of the translation as well as enriched by later additions. Likewise, the *Lettres* of 1787 gathered the translation of texts predating the War of Independence.
as well as new passages, written during the period when Crèvecoeur was the French Consul in New York. Conversely, the *Voyage* was written between 1794 and 1800, that is, after the author’s definitive return to Europe: Crèvecoeur does not take America as a model as he sees it at the time of his writing but as he remembers it. In addition, it is an imaginary journey that takes place in this country remembered. Contrary to the *Lettres*, which include a majority of letters signed “Saint-John,” the *Voyage* relates the roaming of fictitious people. It is, moreover, the fictional nature of this text that dissuaded several houses from publishing it, at a time when authentic travel narratives, rather than fictitious works, were in favor among the public.

Thus, the work and existence of Crèvecoeur came to form a surprising chiasmus: whereas he, for his part, moved away from the United States, ashamed of “all [his] former dreams,” extending his stay in France, and the concomitant leave of absence from his consular position in New York, so long that he eventually lost his post, his writings constantly return to the America he desired and missed so much. This paradox is resolved when we take into account the silence of Crèvecoeur when Brissot suggested to him, as a remedy for the hassles of consular life, a return to rural living: “You will be happier as a simple farmer than as a slave of the great. The shake of his head and the silence of Crèvecoeur proved to me that this moralistic advice, good in books, was not at all to his taste.” The discourse that Crèvecoeur met with silence was none other than his own, found in the mouth of a friend who rivals the narrator of the *Lettres* in enthusiasm. It is in a book, and in a book alone, that Crèvecoeur had the luxury of rediscovering his America.

“If it would seem that America became for Crèvecoeur something less and less real, almost a dream world in which he was traveling by memory, a refuge where he could escape from the realities that were troubling him,” muses Rice. If America embodies, in the French mind, this “mirage to the West” analyzed by Echeverria, for Crèvecoeur it is above all a mirage in the past. While the *Voyage* is striking primarily by the magnitude of its erudition and the abundance of notes that offer an encyclopedic knowledge of the geography and history of the American continent, America is still the object of a posthumous re-creation that reinvents it as an imaginary country.

*Carnal Reminiscences*

In 1792, the French Republic revoked the eulogist of the American Republic, and the Revolution of 1789 widens the internal fracture caused by its counterpart in 1776: “*Victim of the events in the two Republics* that are to change the face of the earth and affect everyone everywhere, I will finish my career like so many others by carrying with me to the grave the fears and worries that are unavoidably provoked by the state of things, a turbulent and military government that sooner or
later will render extremely precarious our life, pleasures, personal security, and property," states Crèvecoeur. Violently shaken by the War of Independence, he underwent another political convulsion that confirmed this pacifist all the more firmly in his horror of bloodshed. If we are to believe Rice, Crèvecoeur spent the Revolutionary period in “the greatest darkness.” Mitchell agrees: “Crèvecoeur . . . occupied himself during those dark days with his notes and memoranda, and fell to writing energetically eight hours a day.” This dedication to writing, which seems to be an attempt to substitute for historical reality a personal “reality,” the memory of a past idealized by nostalgia, recalls the literary enterprise of Giacomo Casanova, who, during the period in which Crèvecoeur was writing the Voyage, was busy writing “thirteen hours a day,” in the solitude of Dux in Bohemia, the Histoire de ma vie (Story of My Life). For both men, the remembering of the past is a way to commune with a bygone happiness: the former sensations return to the writer’s body when he strives to describe them.

In Histoire de ma vie, Casanova relates the failed reunion with Henriette, a woman he had left in Geneva in 1749 after sharing with her “the greatest romance of his chequered career.” Their new meeting occurs in 1763, when the Venetian adventurer asks for hospitality in a Provençal house without knowing that Henriette is the owner. She avoids being recognized by her former lover but gets a letter to him that he only opens after his departure. Upon learning the identity of his hostess the night before, Casanova sinks into reflections in which times melt together:

Dear Henriette whom I loved so dearly and whom I felt I still loved with the same passion. You saw me, and you did not want me to see you?—Perhaps you thought your charms may have lost the power with which they enslaved my soul sixteen years ago, and you did not want me to see that I had only loved a mortal woman. Ah, cruel Henriette, unjust Henriette! You saw me, and you did not want to know if I still loved you. I didn’t see you, and I was unable to learn from your beautiful mouth if you are happy.

Several stylistic characteristics of this text convey the feelings that the act of remembering produced in its author: the agitated writing expresses the emotion of the memorialist and shines through the reiteration of the direct addresses as it does through the repeated variations on the use of the verb “see” (“You saw me, and you did not want me to see you?”; “You saw me, and you did not want to know if I still loved you”). The direct address of the narrator to Henriette—as in a real exchange between two individuals—expresses for its part the emotion of a man who has before his eyes the very object of his thoughts. As for the use of deictics in the rest of the passage, it conveys the emotion of an author who has reached the twilight of his existence, and who, through writing, transports
himself back into the very situation of the person he was at the time he lived the event he is recalling several decades later. For Casanova, writing involves the whole being; it is not a simple remembering freely aroused in the mind but, instead, an emotional reiteration of a past experience. “Rather than a lament consolidating a sense of loss flowing from a juxtaposition of then and now, of memory and reality,” observes Kavanagh regarding this scene, “Casanova strives for a discourse retrieving the lost beloved as a presence so intense that it recreates the past as present.”

The Voyage of Crèvecoeur is also the theater of curious overlappings of temporal strata. During their stay in Connecticut, the two heroes visit a colonist living a few miles from New Haven. This individual tells how the difficulties of farming are offset by the pleasures offered by the winters:

As for me, if I were a poet, I would take pleasure in singing about the peace that we enjoy when these numerous enemies are buried beneath the winter snows; the rest and leisure of this season when, like us, the hard-working ox recovers, in his warm stable, from his long, patient weariness. . . . I would not forget the pipe, leading sometimes to dozing off, sometimes to meditation, but always to calm, nor the can of cider mixed with ginger, nor the heat of a good fire around which one sees his wife, children, and often his neighbors.

Although this passage is written from the viewpoint of a fictitious settler who lived in the period he is describing, it is inspired by the memories of the author, who, already in More Letters from the American Farmer, spoke of the snowfalls and comforting pipe smoked next to the hearth. Thus, behind the imaginary character making this speech we can detect the voice of Crèvecoeur as he strives to recall a time to which he no longer belongs. Although he affects, with his customary modesty, not to fulfill the condition necessary to the undertaking he conceives (“if I were a poet”), Crèvecoeur exhibits an undeniable poetic talent in bringing back to life from an unfathomable abyss the multitude of reminiscences he contemplates from the balcony of his memory. It is a form of poetic paralipsis declaring an inability to express something that is contradicted at the very moment of its expression. This retrospective evocation of a period that is dear to him resuscitates not only a flood of images but a range of sensory impressions involving both taste and smell, leading to the nearly total re-creation of the past as he proceeds to describe it. The use of the conditional betrays both the limits of the person who feels incapable of recovering in their fullness the memories he is seeking and, by the anaphoric use of the verbs employed in this mode, each provoking the rise of additional memories, the will to attempt at any cost to revive a past experienced again as if it were the present.
Manipulation and Invention of Sources

Not content to represent contemporary America in the light of memories that are twenty years old, Crèvecoeur resorts in the *Voyage* to borrowed erudition. He describes spaces that he never personally visited, initiating a practice often reproached to Chateaubriand at the same time since he draws from the same literary sources as the latter, both men having carefully perused the *Travels Through North and South Carolina* . . . by William Bartram. Crèvecoeur includes in his travel narrative multiple annotations that use the simple mention of a name or place to justify a learned disquisition about them. Despite this apparent concern for exactitude and completeness, he displays a surprising casualness in the treatment of his sources: “First, facts supposed to be original are sometimes not facts and sometimes not original; second, facts said to be from one source are usually from another.”

Adams bases his revelation of Crèvecoeur’s deliberate liberties with the truth on his observations on chapter 2 of the first volume. In this passage, Crèvecoeur claims to have traveled to Lancaster on June 6, 1787, to attend the inauguration of Franklin College along with Benjamin Franklin. In the course of the ceremony, the famous inventor supposedly gave a speech on the origin of the North American natives, the probability of their common ancestry with the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere, and the recent discovery of tombs and former fortifications—but neither Crèvecoeur nor Franklin were present at this event. The former was somewhere between France and America, where he was traveling to assume his functions as French Consul in New York, while the latter was dining at the table of George Washington. As for the speech that Franklin is supposed to have given, it turns out that it is a compilation of facts gleaned in various works devoted to North America and particularly in the *Notes on the State of Virginia* by Thomas Jefferson. Not satisfied with attributing to Franklin the paternity of a speech composed of textual fragments from a variety of sources, Crèvecoeur invented the very circumstances in which it was supposed to have been given. What is the role of this fictitious anecdote? It allowed him first of all to emphasize his acquaintance with Benjamin Franklin: by exaggerating his relationship with this iconic figure, famous in both the Old and New Worlds, Crèvecoeur presented himself as the author of a reference book that should be preferred by readers to any other work devoted to the United States. It is likewise a way to introduce a discourse on the future of the Amerindians that belongs to the recurrent themes of the narrative and serves to unify the patchwork that composes the *Voyage*, a veritable Harlequin’s coat whose many snags and tears are clearly visible.

The posthumous representation of America in this narrative is thus the result of a double process of fictionalization: the phenomenon of retrospective idealization is completed by deliberate fabrication for purely commercial reasons. Paradoxically, while the journey of Crèvecoeur’s hero is a narrative pretext
to share with the reader the state of the most recent knowledge of America, the liberties the author takes with the facts contribute to the creation of a fictitious image of the United States.

_A Fragmentary Narrative_

Another characteristic of the narrative adds to the imaginary dimension of this tableau of the United States: its fragmentation. The _Voyage_ offers a scenario that justifies the nonlinear nature of the text, that is, the deterioration of the manuscript during the wreck of the _Morning-Star_. The reader finds himself immersed in a work in which the actors are unknown to him and that begins _in medias res_ with an exuberant declaration of the interest of the study of the former and the new inhabitants of North America.\(^{199}\) The chapters regularly finish with notes by the translator in which he points out a lacuna.\(^{200}\) Although Crèvecoeur reproduced maps that demonstrated his wish to create an objective representation of America, the _Voyage_ establishes a very unreliable geography, traversed according to the whims of an inner journey whose itinerary is just as fuzzy as the chronology. The passage from one episode to the next exhibits the capriciousness typical of the chronology of a dream: the reader drifts along with the wandering of the characters, overdetermined by the wandering of the manuscript on the waves of the Baltic Sea. The uncertainty that presides over the connection between the different parts is observable, notably, in chapter 11 of volume 2, when the two travelers are the guests of a certain M. E., whose home is located near Niagara Falls. This chapter ends with silence and a rumor: “The two following chapters were so badly stained that the translator couldn’t read them. It appears that the travelers boarded a ship on Lake Erie to go to Detroit and Michillimakinack.”\(^{201}\) Despite this declaration by the translator, in the following chapter we are again at M. E.’s home with no way of knowing if this trip really took place. The gaps in the narrative contribute greatly to the destabilization of the reader, who goes from one place to another without the text being oriented toward the resolution of a quest, the reaching of a goal, or the arrival at a specific destination. They are the narrative equivalents of blanks in a memory shot through with forgetfulness and evidence that this America described in such great detail is the product of a posthumous reconstitution, gnawed by time, and interrupted by silences that are impossible to fill.

When all is said and done, this ideal country to which Crèvecoeur returned through memory perished completely, like the _Morning-Star_, at the very moment he described it. All that was left for him was to attempt to save what he could by means of his text, which gives a posthumous vision of America. The _Voyage_ is posthumous in the primary sense of the term, since it is the work of an author who is supposedly deceased at the time of its publication: “Persuaded that the author was among the unfortunate who had perished within sight of
Hellégaland, this merchant readily granted me permission to take a copy of the manuscript,” the translator declares. It is also posthumous if we consider the implications of its date of publication: 1801.

**America on the Other Side of the Century**

A changing of centuries is not as objective a phenomenon as one might believe, since it depends on a calendar that is not universally accepted and whose use coincides with other religious or traditional calendars throughout the world. The German Protestants, for example, refused the papal calendar until 1700; likewise, Great Britain did not adopt it until 1752 and Russia until 1918. Nonetheless, the closing of one century and the opening of another are endowed with a symbolic dimension that gives rise to meditation on the past decades and those to come, since this break in the calendar, however arbitrary it may be in reality, is no less a significant experience for mankind, which finds therein a reference point in the temporal flow. The fiction of the shipwreck of which the manuscript of the *Voyage* is part of the debris condenses this tension between the end and the beginning, between the fear and the hope that blend together at the turn of a century. The name of this ship is precisely endowed with a symbolic ambivalence: although swallowed up by the sea, the *Morning-Star* still connotes the idea of a rebirth.

Bearing both hopes and warnings, the *Voyage* represents America as if it were a mirage in the past whose example France should follow, placed by its own Revolution in a situation that is similar to that of the United States. The posthumous America of Crèvecoeur seeks to be an inspiration for France’s future, and perhaps the star that will arise from the revolutionary abyss will be none other than Bonaparte, whom Crèvecoeur hopes—before Chateaubriand takes the opposite position in a famous parallel in the *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*—will become for his country what Washington was for the United States. The function of the evocation of the past is not only to conserve the memory of a past period of American history; it is also an opportunity to present to France, through the United States as its symbolic double, the outline of its own future. Alternatively, Crèvecoeur embarks on an essentially commemorative description of the Amerindian cultures that exhibits both his empathy for the first inhabitants of America (the feeling of guilt that accompanies the contemplation of their progressive annihilation) and his inability to imagine among these peoples the slightest faculty of durable resistance to the pernicious influence of the white colonists.

**A MEMORIAL OF THE AMERINDIAN CIVILIZATIONS**

**Facing the Power of Time**

In chapter 14 of the first volume, one of the heroes of the *Voyage* reveals his predilection for ancient objects going back to his earliest childhood memories
and comments on it in these terms: “Everything that has survived the destructive power of time and men attracts and rivets, I know not why, the stream of my thoughts: the further and more uncertain its origin, the more I find it interesting.” Volney and Chateaubriand share his fascination for the “destructive power of time,” the former having discovered in “solitary ruins” lessons on the revolutions of empires, while the latter recognized in Crèvecoeur’s *Voyage* “his own dizziness before the flight of time and the ‘debris’ of history,” before devoting to it two articles, one of which was republished in the *Génie du christianisme* (*The Genius of Christianity*, 1802). What are the congruences and fracture lines between the reflections that Chateaubriand and Crèvecoeur devote to the Amerindian civilizations, and to what extent do the posthumous representations that both of them offer describe them as the victims of an inevitable disappearance?

*Languages and Posterity*

The *Voyage* of Crèvecoeur is haunted by the awareness of the ephemeral nature of beings and of their works—of the decline of the Amerindian tribes in particular—and it is because of a similar interest in the vestiges of the past observed in America that Chateaubriand developed his own meditations on the decline of civilizations. Much like an ossuary, Crèvecoeur’s *Voyage* collects fragments of Amerindian culture in order to preserve them from complete annihilation. In this respect, he once again foreshadows the undertaking of the *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, an edifice built “with bones and ruins.” Nonetheless, there exists between Crèvecoeur and Chateaubriand a significant difference: the two men do not have the same degree of confidence in the capacity of writing to preserve what it evokes.

For Crèvecoeur, writing is capable of transmitting to posterity the memory of a moribund civilization. Already in the *Letters from an American Farmer*, the translation of the Bible into Natick was considered a “monument” capable of surviving the destruction of the tribe itself. This belief did not abate in the *Voyage*, where the faculty of French to transmit fragments of Amerindian culture to posterity through translation was not put into question in any way. Conversely, Chateaubriand stresses a little more than Crèvecoeur the tragic awareness of the omnipotence of time, since, according to him, it does not even spare languages themselves: “The Oranoke tribes no longer exist; all that remains of their tongue is a dozen words pronounced at the crown of trees by parrots turned loose, like Agrippina’s thrush cheeping Greek words on the balustrades of Roman palaces. Sooner or later such will be the fate of all our modern dialects, fragments of Greek and Latin.”
The inevitable destruction of languages implies the impotence of writing to protect in the long run the memories of men: a literary monument crumbles and disappears when the language in which it was written is no longer intelligible to anyone. Even if the title “Mémoires d’outre-tombe” suggests, to its author, the idea of the survival of the text and thus the perspective of a kind of immortality, this discourse will eventually no longer be comprehensible by future generations: thus the vanity of writers who believe they are building for centuries when they are constructing castles of sand. According to Chateaubriand, literature ultimately refuses to grant men of letters the promise of posterity that it dangles before them for a moment. Sooner or later, their existence will disappear from memory when the language in which their talent won them fame is no longer understood by anyone. To the men who seek to accept death by hoping that the memory of their existence will be preserved in a book, or at least associated with the permanence of a text, Chateaubriand responds by pointing out the gulf of time in which fame is inhumed. Before the towering vanity of the literary enterprise, the Mémoires show that man can only hope in God, and that posterity is not a slab of marble on which one can engrave one’s name for centuries to come but a period of temporary reprieve before the final night into which all of us will plunge sooner or later, the humble and the powerful, the anonymous and the artists. Chateaubriand does not put his final hope in literature but in Christ: “All I can do now is sit down at the edge of my grave; after which I will boldly descend, crucifix in hand, into eternity.”

Before the Mémoires d’outre-tombe and with more faith in the power of literature to effect passage to the posterity of what it recounts, Crèvecoeur’s Voyage produces a posthumous representation of the Amerindian world, both as a proof of its entry into twilight and as an attempt to safeguard its memory, since the ambition of this work is to collect its vestiges and preserve them in the pages of a book: while Chateaubriand stands before the tomb, Crèvecoeur is an herbalist of the past.

The Birth of Ecological Thought
Crèvecoeur explains this decline of the Amerindian tribes, for which he sees no solution, by the disastrous influence of white colonists, while accusing the latter of also being responsible for the progressive destruction of the American wilderness. Crèvecoeur’s perspective on these two phenomena, which he attributes to the same cause, remains nevertheless ambivalent throughout the Voyage, in which he seeks moral and practical justifications for the colonization of North America while simultaneously pondering the concrete measures that could be implemented to preserve what it is still possible to save of the virgin New World that was no sooner discovered than lost by the European travelers. The Voyage presages by more than seven decades the American ecologist movement and
heralds its two principal, and partially conflicting, currents: preservation and conservation.

The preservation movement was at the origin of the creation in 1872 of the first American national park, Yellowstone, and was inspired by the writings of John Muir (1838–1914), whereas the principles of the conservation movement were established by Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946), who defended a planned renewal of the forests. The goals of these two currents are different: while the preservation movement strives to create an aesthetic and sacrosanct territory to glorify the work of the Creator, the conservation movement encourages a rational and moderate use of natural resources to satisfy human needs without damaging nature in a permanent way. To use Pinchot’s terms, the goal of the “conservationists” is “producing from the forest whatever it can yield for the service of man.”

As Figueiredo observes, these two conceptions of protection of the environment are anchored in two philosophical views of nature that are not mutually exclusive and that coexist in Crèvecoeur’s *Voyage*.

This work emphasizes the ambivalence of the colonization of the American continent, which results in the creation of zones of fertility that, like swarms, spread out into the rest of America (1801, 1:54). However, the farmer is also a destroyer who must cut down trees and burn them, “drain the swamps, plant orchards and enclose them, build roads, houses, and barns” (64). The planning of human territory is done at the expense of vegetable species that Crèvecoeur would like to see protected by the colonists. He urges them to destroy only the trees that are harmful and only according to the quantity of wood they will need over the following years to construct and repair their buildings and farms: encouraged for anthropocentric ends, the preservation of nature serves the future interests of mankind (65). In this respect, Crèvecoeur’s discourse foreshadows that of the conservation movement that advocates the moderate and careful use of natural resources in order to guarantee their survival for future generations. However, these reasons are not the only ones that justify the respect he considers important regarding the vegetable species: “A landowner, after a few years of enjoyment, is instinctively more moved, more flattered, to cross over his forests than his fields. Once cleaned and submitted to the plough, the latter appear to him to be the result of his own work exclusively; here, nothing grows that was not sowed or planted by him; in his forests, however, everything bears the print of grandeur and time, and those feelings unwillingly strike all men, even the most ignoran” (65–66).

While the fields reflect back to man the image of his own power, the forests exhibit a form of transcendence, since their existence is independent of his own will: the impression of grandeur that he experiences when he passes through them is inseparable from the divine of which they are a visible expression. But still more than a sign of the existence of God, it is a form of temporal coalescence
that Crèvecoeur sees in the trees: they are the incarnation of time, the sign of a duration that infinitely exceeds that which man can ever hope to experience. The ancientness of nature renders it more vulnerable than the works recently produced by the human mind, so its oldest products must be protected: “May future generations preserve with care these beautiful cedars, these gigantic pines, these venerable hemlocks, these oaks more than a centennial, which human industry could never replace and whose crowns, agitated by the winds, sway today on all these summits as well as on the ridges of these coasts!” (2002, 129). It is because they are the link between the present and an age-old past that the forests must be safeguarded, an ideal that relates to the second current in the American ecological movement, preservation, which strives to create “a staging of a ‘culturized’ nature, archetype of the virgin wilderness, pure, uninhabited, allowing a privileged contact with the divine.”

A Paradoxical People

In the *Voyage*, the ideal of preservation of nature has as its corollary the protection of the Amerindian culture, equally threatened. However, just as he exhibits an ambivalent viewpoint on the colonization of the American territory, Crèvecoeur produces a finely shaded discourse concerning the tribes of the New World, fluctuating between the empathy he feels for the Amerindians and the unequivocal rejection of the violence they display, between a disparagement of their so-called inferiority to the Europeans and a discreet identification with their cause. He comments explicitly on “the astonishing contradiction” that the first inhabitants of America embody, exhibiting at the same time a great gentleness in their domestic life while treating their prisoners with a terrifying ferocity (2002, 40–41). More than any other circumstance, it is their stubborn rejection of agriculture and a sedentary lifestyle that are most damning in his eyes. One of his characters declares, speaking of the Shawnees: “It is a shame that this nation, one of the largest in the continent, among which you can see so many tall men, whose language is so harmonious and sweet, has always opposed all the efforts that were done in order to inspire its members with the taste of the sedentary and agricultural life!” (271). In addition, Crèvecoeur rebels against the Rousseauean writers who praise the Amerindian way of life that he blames, for his part, for the devastating wars (1801, 1:95–96).

The inability of the “savages” to foresee the future is another cause for condemnation in Crèvecoeur’s narrative. Like an animal “tied to the post of the moment” of the *Second Untimely Meditation* of Nietzsche, the Amerindians pay no attention to the passage of time and only grant importance to plans for war and rampages that divert them from cultivating the land and raising monuments that could prove their existence to future generations: “[T]heir way of living is as empty as an arrow that misses the target,” remarks Crèvecoeur (2002, 192).
Nonetheless, the representation of the Amerindian world in the *Voyage* cannot be limited to this occasional criticism. The polyphonic character of the text allows Crèvecoeur to distribute among several characters the nuanced reflections that the North American tribes inspire in him. Signed by “an adoptive member of the Oneida nation,” the *Voyage* exhibits from the outset a strong sympathy that is evidenced many times in the text, especially when he strives to gather traces of the existence of tribes whose survival is threatened. For these both gentle and ferocious peoples are aware of their impending disappearance. If the Europeans assert that the Amerindian nations are heading for annihilation at an astonishing speed (36), the Amerindians themselves share the same conviction: “The race of those who sow the small and marvelous grains must eventually put an end to those who hunt the flesh, unless the hunters choose to sow grains as well” (49). Their resistance to religious education, their dependence on merchandise from the Old World (e.g., powder and lead), as well as their addiction to alcohol—everything points to a rapid annihilation and demonstrates “that their intelligence is less amenable to perfectibility than ours, and that these races are inferior to those of Europe and Asia,” according to Crèvecoeur (39).

In these circumstances, the implementation of a museographic undertaking becomes urgent. If the annihilation of the debris left by the Amerindians is compared to a sacrilege, their conservation is, conversely, perceived as a religious act. Paradoxically, the protection of the ruins of a civilization judged inferior is presented as a sacred duty: the responsibility of the Europeans in the disappearance of the Amerindians imposes on them the moral obligation to preserve the vestiges of a culture whose ruin they brought about. First of all, Crèvecoeur encouraged the preservation of the toponyms:

> It is a precaution I have frequently recommended to the founders of new settlements across the Alleghenies, in Indiana, Washington, in the great Meneamy, in Kentucky, Wabash, Tennessee, etc. This respect for these names should even have been prescribed by law . . . let’s transmit to posterity their original names so we will prevent that the memory of these tribes be forever lost in the depths of time and we will make eternal the only proof of gratefulness that we can give and that we certainly owe to the former masters of this continent, whom we have so frequently seduced and abused. (271)

The idea of safeguarding the past is associated by Crèvecoeur with that of moral compensation: according to him, the Europeans have the duty to preserve the memory of the Amerindian place names, since their hunger for land took it away from its original occupants. Of course, such compensation may seem very paltry in comparison with the immense territory seized by the white colonists,
but Crèveœur suggests nowhere that the Amerindians should be satisfied with these highly unjust reparations that remain largely symbolic. On the contrary, the encyclopedic ambition of this long travel narrative, in which a considerable proportion of the text and notes is devoted to the patient gathering of linguistic and historical information about the Amerindians, is the indirect expression of an unassuageable guilt whose effect is to constantly strengthen Crèveœur’s resolve to preserve additional cultural fragments for future generations.

Cultural Samples
At the end of Atala (1801), Chateaubriand’s narrator describes his meeting with some “miserable Indians” who are wandering in the deserts of the New World “with the ashes of [their] ancestors”; following the example of the latter, Crèveœur turned the Voyage into a portable ossuary of Amerindian customs. Chapter 5 of volume 1 reproduces, for example, a letter in which a European relates the circumstances during which he wrote down a tale dictated by a young Shawnee warrior. This document is all the more exceptional in that it comes from very far away and that poets are exceptions among these peoples of warriors and hunters. At first glance, the European exhibits a certain condescendence toward the Amerindian’s work: “It is the fruit of a wild child, which, helped by a grafting, might have produced something better.” Moreover, he denounces the inability of the Algonquin language to express abstract ideas: “Despite my best efforts to translate this little piece as literally as possible, I confess that I had to use some words that do not exist in their language, such as, for example, soul, which they replace by life, animation; or shadow, by dark form; absence, by remoteness. It is because of their incapacity to conceive of the metaphysical ideas attached to some of our words that they have never been able to understand several truths and historical points of our religion.”

It would be easy to accuse Crèveœur of racism toward the Amerindians, given that this statement about their incapacity to understand metaphysical ideas could easily be taken for a denigration of their intellectual capacities. Racism was common among his contemporaries, Volney stating, for example, that the Amerindians are “dirty, alcoholic, lazy, prone to steal, exceedingly proud,” and that “nothing is easier than offending their vanity and in this case they are cruel, bloodthirsty, implacable in their hatred and atrocious in their vengeance.” However, such a remark from Crèveœur’s pen does not indicate a radical rejection of the peoples of the New World: he expressed many times a predilection for the depiction of emotions that make him a “farmer of feelings,” a brother of these Amerindians for whom imagination was the dominant faculty. For his part, he described his writing as an effort to formulate sensual impressions, and not as the implementation of these “metaphysical ideas” that the Algonquin language was supposedly unable to grasp: “I have no method other than relating, as
best I can, the impressions that I receive (for what I have to tell you will concern
the sensations I feel rather than my reflections).”

The Amerindians display in
addition a singular talent in areas where sharing feelings are more important
than using discursive thought: Crèveceur lavishes praise on the speeches of
several chiefs that seem, to him, to reach sublime heights.

It is thus a character-
istic sample of the Amerindian eloquence whose aesthetic is close to that of
his own writings that Crèveceur reproduces, a sample that is accompanied by
a direct indictment of the Europeans for having rendered necessary the posthu-
mos representation of a culture whose decline they facilitated:

Panima sits under the great Nemenshehela, while the moon is beautiful and glit-
tering, and says to her friend Ganondawé. Your doorstep has been removed,
the ashes of your hearth dispersed, and your fire extinguished, brave Ganon-
dawé! So you have abandoned your wigwam and the village to go to the
country of Oans, where White men have made both shadow and freshness
disappear! Why do they ignore how to make their living as we do, by hunt-
ing and fishing? Why do they ignore how to sleep on the skin of a bear and
to drink the water of the stream! They would be less thirsty for our lands,
and we would be neighbors and friends.

In this paragraph, Crèveceur offers a pastiche of the style he attributes to
the Amerindians. In accordance with the idea he had of Amerindian languages,
the abstract notions are translated by concrete images: the violence that Ganon-
dawé undergoes is expressed by three images that describe the disorder that
befalls his abode; his exile is suggested by the abandonment of his wigwam; as
for the deforestation and the transformation of the land by the Europeans, they
are evoked by a formula describing sensual impressions. The last phrase of the
paragraph reveals once again Crèveceur’s ambivalence toward the Amerindi-
ans: while he blamed them for their inability to adapt to a sedentary lifestyle and
to agriculture, at the same time the Europeans do not know how to be happy
with the simple nomadic lifestyle of the natives. Crèveceur thus proved himself
capable of adopting the viewpoint of the Amerindians and of recognizing the
legitimacy of their demands to be allowed to adopt the lifestyle of their choice,
demonstrating by this fact his desire to reconcile the cultures that shared the
American continent.

Since the Amerindian tribes were the new victims of the millenary conflict
between nomad and sedentary peoples, Crèveceur’s task was to save through
language what could still be saved. The posthumous representation he gives
of the Amerindian civilizations thus has a commemorative function; it results
both from a sense of responsibility as a European but also from his underlying
identification with the cause of a people whose manner of thinking is deeply
similar to his own. Nonetheless, it implicitly denies the natives any capacity to resist actively the pernicious influence of a European civilization that he accuses of causing their woes. Crèvecoeur, like Chateaubriand, considered the extinction of the Amerindian tribes to be inevitable, and the representation he gave of it expresses precisely the urgency he felt before a decline that its victims were powerless to check. Chateaubriand observed, for example, that the depopulation of the peoples of the New World was imputable to those well-known scourges of alcoholism, diseases, and the wars generated by the Europeans. Facing a situation that they considered unresolvable, Crèvecoeur and Chateaubriand turned to writing to preserve and transmit the fruits of their observation of their “savage” hosts before they disappeared. Nevertheless, what Crèvecoeur presents as one of the most brilliant successes of this museographic undertaking illustrates simultaneously the distortion suffered by the culture he claims to safeguard through his posthumous representation.

The *Voyage* relates the following tale: “[The missionaries] translated into the Natick language not only the catechism and the prayer books, but also the entire Bible: I saw a copy printed at Harvard University (Cambridge) in 1663. They taught them a few cultural principles, as well as the morality preached in the gospel and whose tenets they had so thoroughly ignored with respect to the natives.” Already in the *Letters from an American Farmer*, this translation was referred to as an “extraordinary monument,” directly alluding to the famous lines by Horace: *Exegi monumentum / Perennius acre* (I finished a monument / More durable than bronze), and to the ambition to pit the permanence of writing against the destructive forces of time. Although this passage stresses the contradiction between the moral principles spouted by the Europeans and their treatment of the Amerindians, the criticism does not go so far as to denounce a second paradox between an action that purports to be reparative and the assertion of the European universalism that underlies it. Indeed, it is not an Amerindian legend that is preserved by the missionaries but the founding text of their own culture. Thus, the preservation of the Natick language that is presented by Crèvecoeur as a form of symbolic compensation offered to moribund tribes only serves to prepare their last members for inclusion into the Christian community, the translation of sacred texts being a precondition of their conversion: “Jesuits maintained the primacy of writing and the centrality of the Holy Scriptures amid an oral culture. They compiled dictionaries and grammars and translated hymns, psalms, and catechisms,” notes Sayre.

In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau reflects on the causes of this “primacy of writing” and on the relations of power between written and oral culture: “To writing, which invades space and capitalizes on time, is opposed speech, which neither travels very far nor preserves much of anything. In its first aspect speech never leaves the place of its production. In other words, the
signifier cannot be detached from the individual or collective body.” By separating an utterance from its original context and from the community to which it was first addressed, writing preserves orality intact, while the latter transmits fables whose origin, in the end, is forgotten. But writing is also responsible for the exportation of texts that do not necessarily return to their source of production: the European archivist is like those archeologists at the beginning of the twentieth century who, on the pretext of preserving cultural artifacts, spirited them off to their own countries where they were never again seen by the descendants of the peoples who had produced them. Similarly, the cultural samples frozen and preserved through translation are no longer available to those peoples in the name of whom their safeguarding was effected in the first place. Clements observes, on this subject, that it has become common in our times for the transcription of oral Amerindian legends to be “published in professional journals or museum series that are largely unavailable in the communities where the expressions originally occurred.” When he sets out to translate an Amerindian legend, Crèvecoeur does not wonder about the social impact of the transcription of the oral culture, since he is convinced of the superiority of the written over the spoken word. By striving to preserve a tale, Crèvecoeur disrupts the normal functioning of the Algonquin culture, which is distinguished by the context of a “student-teacher relation” in which the elders play a dominant role in the transmission of knowledge. The following thoughts of McNally bear on the Anishinaabe culture to which the tale translated by Crèvecoeur belongs: “The primary orality of the Anishinaabe tradition has secured a certain prestige for the religious and cultural authority of elders who can choose, or not, to relate their knowledge depending on the circumstance and intentions of the student. And that prestige, though local, can still be maintained precisely by not participating in such projects that commit knowledge to posterity through technologies of print, recording, publishing, and the Internet.”

Paradoxically, the museographic undertaking of Crèvecoeur and Chateaubriand altered precisely what it strived to keep intact: the very effort to transmit cultural artifacts to posterity changes their meaning and, indirectly, the communities that gave them life. The posthumous representation they give of Amerindian civilizations indirectly conveys, at the very moment that it fulfills a commemorative function implying empathy and respect, their underlying conviction of European superiority based on mastery of writing. For neither Crèvecoeur nor Chateaubriand assume that the Amerindians have sufficient resilience to protect themselves against a decline for which the two authors agree the Europeans are responsible. Likewise, neither of them sees in the Amerindian culture any monuments capable of passing on to posterity the memory of these dying cultures. While it is true that Crèvecoeur mentions buildings raised centuries ago by the Amerindians, edifices that have survived up to his period,
the sight of them only raises “doubts and conjectures,” given that the name, origin, degree of development, and the causes of the disappearance of the people who built them remain a permanent mystery. They do not demonstrate the grandeur of a civilization whose memory is perpetuated forever but only leave us to decipher the mute traces of an obliterated existence. Unaware of the capacity of oral cultures to pass on, from generation to generation, a collection of immutable images that relate the origins and history of a tribe “with remarkable consistency,” and neglecting to mention the sharing of cultural expertise and expressions during “ceremonial rituals,” Crèvecoeur and Chateaubriand root in the supposed inability of the Amerindians to resist the destructive power of time an implicit disrespect of their culture that, paradoxically, is accompanied by the desire to safeguard it through its posthumous representation.

**An Unforeseeable Causality**

This patient collecting of the debris of the past, that the author of the *Voyage* views as the links of “the chain that ties the nebulous past to the fleeting present and will tie the latter to the future,” is an occasion for a melancholy meditation on the passage of time and the causality at work in the world. At the end of the *Voyage*, M. G., a prominent New York citizen, shares the following reflections: “Such are the imperceptible springs of human destinies. And one wishes to foresee, organize future events, as if they weren’t necessarily preordained, engendered by those of the past! It was necessary, however, for all of those diverse circumstances to have occurred for my ancestors to be forced to flee their homeland like criminals, and for me to have the pleasure of receiving you under my roof and hearing the interesting tales of your travels in the interior of the continent, which is as foreign to me as if I were born in Europe.” The future appears to Crèvecoeur as the necessary product of a meeting between causal chains so numerous that it is impossible to foresee their consequences. A new underlying affinity between Crèvecoeur and the Amerindians is revealed here, for if he describes them as the perpetual inhabitants of a present in which concern for the past or future have no place, he neither has any illusions as to the capacity of the human spirit to anticipate the future based on knowledge of the past. Provoked by a similar meditation on the sequence of historical events, an identical judgment regarding their unpredictability may be found in Chateaubriand’s works: “Memorable example of the sequence of human affairs! A finance bill, passed by the English Parliament in 1765, causes the rise of a new empire in 1782 and the disappearance of one of the oldest kingdoms of Europe in 1789!” Crèvecoeur and Chateaubriand share an identical astonishment when they reflect on the causality at work in history. It is the feeling of the profound fragility of men’s works that they express, since an uncontrollable causal link proves capable of falling and building empires. Both of them turn toward
America with a feeling of responsibility, for if Chateaubriand presents himself as “the last historian of the peoples of the land of Columbus,”²⁴⁰ the *Voyage* of Crèvecoeur also exhibits the ambition to pass on to posterity fragments of their rhetoric, toponymy, legends, and beliefs, in short, everything language can seize to tear it from the grip of time. Both produce a posthumous representation of the Amerindian world, their works transmitting to posterity the ultimate vision of peoples on the verge of disappearing. In looking toward the West, they are also thinking of the destiny of their fatherland, whose decline is forecast by that of the Native American tribes, proof of the inscription in an erosive and destructive temporality of everything humans produce: the posthumous representation of America is a warning for France. Despite the numerous similarities between their ideas and the subjects that inspired them, however, the works of Crèvecoeur and Chateaubriand did not meet the same success.

The *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New York* (1801) appeared the same year as a “kind of poem, half descriptive, half dramatic” written “in the desert and in the huts of savages”: *Atala*.²⁴¹ The exceptional success of this “little work” by Chateaubriand, so rousing that it embarrassed the author,²⁴² is in stark contrast to the lukewarm, indeed hostile, reception accorded Crèvecoeur’s book: “Crèvecoeur saw everything that Chateaubriand saw and wished to express everything that Chateaubriand expressed. But he didn’t possess the genius; his book is bad. Their descriptions are identical with the sole difference that genius makes,” states Faÿ.²⁴³ If the author of *Atala* relates a story outside history in an idyllic cadre, Crèvecoeur describes, on the contrary, the modifications of the American territory, progressively conquered and developed by an enterprising people: his work is much less inviting than that of his young colleague to a French public more drawn to a dreamy meditation on the Edenic solitudes of the New World. Moreover, its encyclopedic and dense character resembles much more the end-of-the-century travel narratives, whereas *Atala* may be considered to be the harbinger of French Romanticism:²⁴⁴ Crèvecoeur was at the twilight of his life and of the Enlightenment, Chateaubriand at the dawn of his work and of the nineteenth century.

Although their first publication was in 1792, *Les Lettres écrites des rives de l’Ohio* by Claude-François de Lezay-Marnésia, immediately censured by the Girondins, also reappeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in 1800, a year before the publication of the *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie* and *Atala*. Ahead of his two colleagues, Lezay-Marnésia reflected on the destiny of France through his depiction of America, but while Crèvecoeur and Chateaubriand discovered a possible adumbration of the decline of French civilization in the example of the Amerindian civilizations, Lezay-Marnésia clung to the hope that America still represented the promise of a revival of the Old World in the New.