

Slavery in Enlightenment America – Crèvecoeur’s Bilingual Approach¹

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1. Introduction

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813) lived his life between at least two languages and cultures. He was born in France, spent time in England at 17, and subsequently French Canada (surveying, and then unhappily fighting the English), before settling happily as an American farmer (and thus a British citizen). He fled back to France during the American Revolution - having to leave his wife and two of their children. He returned to the United States as French consul in 1783, establishing, amongst other things, a steamboat service between France and the U.S. (a synecdoche of his activities to bring the two countries into dialogue and exchange), until the French Revolution summoned him back to France, albeit with time in exile in Germany. His publications introduced to the French and English the new American – now a citizen of the new US. Furthermore, he presented this idealized figure of the American to Americans themselves with lasting impact. Crèvecoeur combines a great deal of factual information, including the human and physical geography, history, economy and agricultural science of America, with philosophical argument and rhetorical and fictional, or auto-fictionalized, episodes to illustrate his underlying moral and political claims about this exciting new country and new citizen. The complexity of his use of genres and personas is a key element in my interpretation of Crèvecoeur. What has been seen as contradiction, may also be understood as a staging of complexity via a series of thought experiments.

I shall first introduce Crèvecoeur’s work and the thorny question of the largely monolingual history of his reception over the last two centuries – which has, I argue, done him a great disservice. A strange feature of this reception is the lack of attention that has been

paid to three elements of his work which contemporary readers found important and fascinating. The first of these is the question of slavery, my topic in this article. The other two are the representation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, which is very significant particularly in his French writings, and the material on animals, their domestication, and the relationship between the farmer and ‘his’ animals. In fact, as I shall show as part of my argument on slavery, the three elements are to some extent intertwined. Arguably, each can act as a screen both showing and hiding the others. By analysing passages from Crèvecoeur’s French writings on enslaved people, *sauvages*, and animals, in dialogue with each other, I am able to investigate the vexed questions of exploitation and the different modes of liberty, not only as philosophical absolute but also in relationship to what is presented as happiness. I began reading Crèvecoeur in *Derrida and Other Animals: the Boundaries of the Human*, and am now embarked on a long-term project on his work.

2. The Monolingual Enlightenment

A few introductory words are necessary because this is a British journal for modern languages specialists, and so I assume few readers will be familiar with Crèvecoeur. If this were an audience dominated by Americans, or American Studies specialists, the large majority would know of him. Because so few Americans and Americanists today, unlike the situation in the eighteenth century, have fluent French, this divide has been very detrimental to the understanding of this major writer. *Letters from an American Farmer*, published in 1782 in London to great acclaim, has been canonized for its early formulation of American identity, and the Letter ‘What is an American?’ is frequently anthologized. This relatively short book is Crèvecoeur’s only major publication in English² but is very well known to Americans and Americanists. It was championed by D. H. Lawrence in his controversial and important *Studies in Classic American Literature*, published as a book in 1923 – when many

thought *Classic American Literature* was an oxymoron. Crèvecoeur is therefore best known for his characterization of America as the new land of the free, against the servitude, poverty and hunger of the old world of Europe; he emphasizes the importance of farming and self-sufficiency, so that the independent self-made man can feed himself and his family, and play a full role in civil society, eventually passing on a good life to his descendants. He is seen as an origin for the notion of the melting pot, and for the theory of the stages of frontier development. Scholars are also particularly interested in his focus in *Letters* on Nantucket and whaling before Melville's *Moby Dick*.

Anglophone scholarship, though probably not popular understanding of Crèvecoeur, was, however, transformed a couple of years later when Henri L. Bourdin, a scholar working on François-Jean de Chastellux, stumbled across an exciting pile of unpublished manuscripts in English in the Crèvecoeur ancestral home in Normandy – more than double the number of ‘unknown’ texts than had been published as *Letters*. Most of these came out as *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America. More “Letters from an American Farmer”* – and they have all been re-edited, re-published a number of times since, and have generated a great deal of commentary.³ The manuscripts are all interesting, and some have proved particularly controversial, for example, those which seem to suggest Loyalist sympathies (in other words, support for Great Britain and the Tories) at the time of the American Revolution - by showing Patriot atrocities, hypocrisy, self-seeking and cruelty. Other texts, however (and particularly those in French), detail atrocities on the part of Loyalists, or on the part of English troops and their Indian allies, deployed to terrorize settlers. After Crèvecoeur's experience of fighting for France against England in the war in Canada, he was of the view that military engagement should be avoided as much as possible – although he was not exactly a pacifist and was concerned that soldiers and sailors should be well treated, and had an interest in military and naval hospitals. But since history is written by victors, any hint of Loyalist sympathies – and

by a Frenchman born – are something of an object of horrified fascination for Americanists. One piece, ‘Sketches of Jamaica and Bermudas and Other Subjects’ (1773), which is more pertinent to this paper, was in fact not published until 1995, but has become of considerable interest to critics for its transnational connections. For example, Crèvecoeur’s *Letters* are re-interpreted in the light of this sketch in an interesting chapter by Christopher P. Iannini in his *Fatal Revolutions*.⁴ Caribbean islands are indeed very significant for colonial America and then for the U.S.A.; as Iannini points out, they are an import-export market far more important to America than any other in this period including England. However, in the light of the full body of Crèvecoeur’s work, Jamaica may not play quite the pivotal role that Iannini suggests.

Crèvecoeur’s major writings in French did not achieve the place in the canon that the English-language *Letters* does, although they were widely circulated in full and in extract at the time. *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* (1784) is misleadingly branded a translation of *Letters* although it is far longer (12 Letters become about 90 by the second French edition in 1787) and radically different.⁵ In 1801 Crèvecoeur produced another three-volume opus: *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l’État de New-York depuis l’année 1785 jusqu’en 1798 par un membre adoptif de la Nation Oneida; traduit et publié par l’auteur des Lettres d’un cultivateur américain*. Amongst much new material, *Lettres* includes rewritings of almost all of the manuscripts in English – sometimes little changed but usually expanded, sometimes cut, sometimes radically re-worked. From a scholarly perspective it might seem that the final version of what Crèvecoeur wrote, the version that he chose to publish, would have special status and that the unpublished sketches would be treated as drafts, of course of genealogical interest to specialists – but superseded by the final published version. However, because the final version is *in French* and also seen as *French* in character, spirit, style, perhaps even tailored to a French readership – these two works have been utterly neglected.⁶

Lettres has never been translated into English (while *Letters* has been translated into French more than once), with the honourable exception of White's recent publication of 'Origin of the Settlement at Socialburg' and 'Forty-Nine Anecdotes' in *Early American Studies* and *Early American Literature* respectively (White, 2008, 2009). *Voyage* was translated into English in 1964, but this did not stimulate much interest – perhaps in part due to the quality of the translation.⁷ Largely overlooked in the recent history of the reception of the work, as a consequence of this, are the important negative elements in the construction of the United States: the French works bring greater emphasis both to the urgent need to abolish slavery, and to the plight of indigenous peoples, their numbers decimated by the end of the eighteenth century.

The monolingual reading of the Enlightenment does not only detract from Crèvecoeur scholarship: early modern America and the new United States are places of intense exchange and circulation of ideas with rapid translation between English and French, and far more wide-spread fluency in English on the part of the French, and French on the part of Anglophones of all classes than is the case in America today. The seminal debates between Buffon, Raynal, Franklin, and Jefferson, which had a major impact on the development of natural history and ethnography, or the influence of French thinking on so many political thinkers are at least recognized, but still under-investigated.⁸

3. The Horror in the South

The one piece of writing by Crèvecoeur on slavery that is regularly cited in the secondary material is a moving section of Letter IX (written about 1773) of *Letters from an American Farmer* in which Crèvecoeur's protagonist Farmer James, who lives in Pennsylvania in the Northern provinces of America, is walking in the woods in South Carolina.⁹ He comes across a hideous sight – a slave who has been left hanging in a cage as (the reader learns later) a

punishment for killing an overseer. It is a slow and agonizing death from starvation and from the ravages of insects and birds of prey described in some detail. Crèvecoeur writes:

the birds had already picked out his eyes; his cheek bones were bare; his arms had been attacked in several places, and his body seemed covered with a multitude of wounds. From the edges of the hollow sockets, and from the lacerations with which he was disfigured, the blood slowly dropped and tinged the ground beneath. No sooner were the birds flown, than swarms of insects covered the whole body of this unfortunate wretch, eager to feast on his mangled flesh and drink his blood. (*Letters*, 164)¹⁰

This episode was much debated at the time with defenders of slavery saying it was untrue, in other words, he, Crèvecoeur, did not see this thing at that time¹¹ and, more importantly, impossible, for such punishments did not take place.¹² Anti-slavery activists across the Western world, on the other hand, circulated the extract widely as part of their campaign to abolish slavery as a cruel and unnatural practice. It was reprinted, for instance, in *The European Magazine*, *The Scot's Magazine*, *The Hibernian Magazine*, and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, referenced in the article *Etats-Unis* in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique* by Dêmeunier – and also published as a brochure.¹³ It is understandable that this story should also be much studied today as it is a striking and disturbing piece of writing – and in tune with our understanding of slavery as violent abuse, and with (particularly Anglophone) interest in the history of chattel slavery. More surprising to me is the fact that a number of present-day critics seem to want to undermine the episode as a critique of slavery. This can be because they read it as a demonstration of the instability of the narrator – and there is considerable debate amongst critics as to the status and reliability of James as ‘author’ of most of the *Letters*.¹⁴ James has a very strong visceral reaction to the encounter; to me, however, this is absolutely normal rather than pathological – I think that it is an appropriate response to a

horrifying sight. The other (less common) way in which critics effectively undermine the episode as a contribution to anti-slavery work is to see it as figural, for example relating more to a Whig battle to free America from the tyranny of Great Britain.¹⁵

This kind of reading is possible partly because so little attention has been paid to Crèvecoeur's role in abolitionism. Yet he played a significant part in terms of the circulation of extracts from his writings, notably the cage episode which exists in both English and French, but also others only in his French publications – in particular the edifying story of the Quaker Warner (or Walter) Mifflin and his freeing of his slaves. (I analyse this episode in Still 2015: 285-7). The explicit anti-slavery material in the French publications includes 'Voyage à la Jamaïque et aux Isles Bermudes' with its distressing example of the cruelty of an English woman to her slave in Jamaica (*Lettres* I, 258), and several documents on the abolitionists Anthony Bénézet and Dr Benjamin Rush in the third volume of *Lettres*. The same 1787 volume also reports the progress made for the liberation of slaves in the United States. In other words, it is very up-to-date in terms of the campaign. Altogether there is enough I would say, echoing Rice's judgment, (1932: 114), for a modest abolitionist book.

Crèvecoeur's *Voyage*, which is even less studied than *Lettres*, also has a long chapter on the evils of Caribbean slavery – and indeed of slavery in general. The first person narrator and his travelling companion Mr Herman are entertained at the elegant house of a cultured Jamaican (Chapitre XI, *Voyage* I) who left the island to settle in the U.S. both because of the evil of slavery and because of the climate and its effect on his health. After an exchange of questions the host tells his story. His father:

'avait des nègres, et quoiqu'il en fût plutôt l'ami que le maître, il regretta toujours d'être obligé de commander à leur volonté et de se servir de leurs bras. Il m'en parlait souvent. Ces étincelles, qui éclairèrent mon adolescence, n'ont point été

infructueuses; mais le gouvernement de l'île ne permettant l'émancipation qu'avec beaucoup de difficultés, je n'ai pas pu suivre les inclinations de mon cœur.'

[‘had negroes, and although he was more their friend than their master, he always regretted being obliged to command their will and make use of their arms. He would often talk to me about it. These sparks of illumination during my adolescence have not been without fruit, but since the government of the island makes emancipation very difficult, I was not able to follow the inclinations of my heart.’]

He asks his father: how did “ce commerce impie et sacrilège” (161) [“that impious and sacrilegious trade”] come about? And why “l’homme, né sous l’équateur, serait-il condamné à travailler toute sa vie pour celui qui aurait vu le jour sous le cinquième degré de latitude? Serait-ce de cette latitude que viendraient la force et la prééminence?” [“should the man born below the equator be condemned to work his whole life for the one who saw the day below the fifth degree of latitude? Could it be latitude that bestowed that strength and pre-eminence?”] Upon hearing the point that others came to take slaves in Africa even before Europeans (162), the son responds “N’est-il pas possible qu’un jour le plus grand nombre soumette enfin le plus petit? Alors les vengeurs de tant d’années d’oppression souilleront la terre de nouveaux crimes, et leur vengeance n’effacera ni l’horreur ni la mémoire de ceux que leurs oppresseurs ont commis.” [“Is it not possible that one day the greater number will finally make the smaller number submit? Then those taking vengeance for so many years of oppression will despoil the earth with new crimes, and their revenge will not efface either the horror or the memory of those committed by their oppressors.”] This may well make the contemporary reader think of the Haitian Revolution.¹⁶ The Jamaican is permanently damaged by his observation and his experience as a slave-owner; he is too embittered about mankind to marry and have children – the natural goal of all men, according to Crèvecoeur, in a situation where those children can thrive.

In addition to his publications, Crèvecoeur was involved in practical activism particularly in the mid and late 1780s (see Rice 1932 and Rossignol 2014). In August 1785 he was accepted as a member of the fledgling New York Manumission Society – the only foreigner to be so invited (Rossignol 2014: 187). In 1787, Crèvecoeur and Brissot de Warville created the Gallo-American Society whose agenda included the abolition of slavery (one year before the creation of the British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade). After Crèvecoeur left for the United States in Spring 1787 the GAS was no longer active – but the anti-slavery work blossomed in January 1788 into the *Société des Amis des Noirs* founded by Brissot; Crèvecoeur joined the same year.¹⁷ It is in this context that I would turn to a more difficult question – that of Crèvecoeur’s representation of happy slaves in the North.¹⁸

4. Northern Slavery

Abolitionists, and indeed historians of slavery, understandably tend to focus on plantation slavery in the United States (or elsewhere) since this is where the vast majority of slaves lived and died, and where treatment was harshest.¹⁹ However, there were enslaved people throughout America and Canada at the time of Crèvecoeur’s writing, and it is striking how often this is occluded both at the time and in subsequent scholarship.²⁰ Crèvecoeur mentions Northern slaves occasionally in *Letters*,²¹ and on numerous occasions in *Lettres* – but usually in passing – and so readers seem on the whole to pass over these references which, I argue, do at least two things. First, by presenting enslaved people who are apparently much better off than, say, European peasants, they may paradoxically direct the reader’s attention to the question of what is fundamentally wrong with slavery. Emphasis on Southern cruelty can make it seem as if it is violence and poor living that is the issue, and so happy and well-fed slaves are much less of a priority than unhappy slaves. However, French Enlightenment

philosophers such as Rousseau or Jaucourt (in his lengthy articles in the *Encyclopédie*) hammer home that it is the status of one human being as the property of another (“my” Negroes’) that is impossible *de iure* though clearly not *de facto*. This relates to the troubled question of figural slavery. Some postcolonial theorists critique Enlightenment philosophers on the grounds that they frequently used the terms slave and slavery to refer to the situation of white men subject to the tyranny of crown, Great Britain, church, landlords and so on – and indeed Crèvecoeur too is guilty of this (and on another occasion I should like to look at some of these examples in his writing in detail).²² The issue here for me is whether, as some post-colonial critics claim (and it is true in some cases of course), this means *ignoring* real slavery, or whether in some instances it *reinforces* the case against real slavery. In fact this is as much about today’s reception of these texts – as in the example earlier of the critic reading the slave in the cage as a Whig protest against the enslavement of America by Great Britain – which jars with reception at the time. So the first point is what it is that is wrong with slavery, or what *is* slavery. Second, setting aside the crucial philosophical and ethical question of slavery as a labour relation and mode of existence, Crèvecoeur’s references to slaves in the North are a powerful reminder of the complex integration of black slaves, and indeed freed African-Americans,²³ in the everyday lives of so many Americans of European descent, for instance, on farms in the eighteenth century. This is something which is hard to see in the historical record, or indeed in popular culture with black cowboys and black soldiers almost invisible in Westerns or war movies, for example. There is an issue of genre. From a philosophical perspective all slavery is simply wrong for Crèvecoeur as for Jaucourt. However, fiction or semi-fictional narratives such as he includes in his work, can both show cruelty and also community, commonality, and the detail of historical material lives even if these are somewhat idealized.

One typical example of happy Northern slaves runs as follows:

Mes Nègres sont assez fidèles; ils jouissent d'une bonne santé, sont gras et contents; ils travaillent avec bonne volonté. Je leur ai toujours donné le samedi pour eux, de la terre à tabac, tant qu'ils en veulent ; les deux plus âgés en sont au moins pour cent soixante piastres par an; ils sont nourris de la même sorte et vêtus du même drap que moi. ('Pensées d'un cultivateur américain, sur son sort et les plaisirs de la campagne', *Lettres I*, 1787, 52-88, 59-60)

[My Negroes are very loyal; they enjoy good health, they are plump [or *fat*] and contented; they work with good will. I have always given them Saturdays off, and as much land to grow tobacco as they want; the two older ones get at least 160 dollars a year from it; they are fed the same food that I eat and given the same cloth to wear.]

On the assumption that these slaves are successfully growing tobacco for profit as well as for personal use, this demonstrates their rational economic aims like free farmers.²⁴ This is an implicit argument for manumission against a certain paternalistic defence of slavery that would claim that child-like Africans could not survive independently in a market economy. The unstated comparison with appalling labour conditions in Europe, say, is, however, double-edged since comfortable slavery can be paraded by its supporters to justify the patent injustice of buying and selling human beings. Indeed Southern apologists notoriously utilised the critique of wage 'slavery' to argue that their slaves were better off than the white workers in the Northern towns. We might note that, although it is fine that the slaves have the same food and clothes as their master, the passive turn of phrase 'ils sont nourris' [they are fed] is tellingly ambiguous – the master too is probably given food by his wife – but the phrase also takes the reader to cattle or children fed by owners or parents, rather than to independent beings who can choose what they have to eat.

Crèvecoeur often mentions blacks (which usually, but not necessarily, means slaves) and whites joining in the same social events – with the same emotions of joy or grief. For

example there is a party when a young child who had been lost in the woods is found by a Native American and his dog (I analyse this episode in Still 2015: 229-30). The gathering is mixed ‘car les noirs, comme les blancs, partageaient la joie de ces bons parents, et voulaient les féliciter’ (‘Anecdote d’un chien sauvage’, *Lettres* I, 1787, 223-42, 231) [‘for blacks like whites shared these good parents’ joy and wanted to congratulate them’]. This is important for its showing of an integrated *community* and also a *commonality of response*. However, I would suggest that by looking at Crèvecoeur’s writings on Native Peoples and domestic animals the picture becomes less comfortable.

5. Screening Slavery: Savages and Animals

“Nous, qui regardons la liberté comme le premier de tous les biens, pourquoi la refuserions-nous à ceux qui vivent avec nous ?” (‘Anecdote de Warner Mifflin’ *Lettres* I, 197-222, 220) [“We who see liberty as the greatest of goods – why would we refuse it to those who live with us?”]

Freedom is a very complex concept – but one that we need to get a handle on if we are to understand the complexity of slavery. Freedom is often understood as the absence of constraint, and slavery as unfree labour. However, there are many forms of forced labour, not all involving the (racial) slavery of the Americas.²⁵ Slaves may be defined as living property, like domestic animals. Slavery can be described as social death (Patterson 1982); this humiliating exclusion from the norms of humanity may also be said of other forms of exploitation. While there is a legal framework (varying through time and place) regarding the treatment of slaves, the cruel punishments and killing of slaves is a feature of much abolitionist material including Crèvecoeur. Equally, *freedom from* (physical) constraint is a minimal consideration, but *freedom to* participate in the society that governs your existence is

paramount for settlers in America. Freedom from chattel slavery may be a first step, but citizenship, and full participation in civil society, is also critical. African-American and other abolitionist activists campaigned for civil rights from the earliest days. There are at five kinds of freedom that I could discuss in Crèvecoeur: innate liberty, natural liberty, manumission, moral liberty and civil or political liberty. But in this short essay I shall only touch on these, focusing first on natural liberty and then on civil liberty.

5 (i). Natural liberty - Savages

While the English usually refer to the native peoples of the Americas as Indians, the French very rarely call them *Indiens* (as Voltaire points out (1761: 410)). The preferred French term in the Early Modern period is *sauvages*. ‘Savage’ clearly has pejorative connotations, and this is discussed in passionate terms in *Lettres* by some indigenous figures, such as Nesquehiounah: “‘Sauvage, répéta-t-il encore? J’ai vécu assez longtemps parmi les Blancs, pour savoir que c’est eux, et non les gens du bois, qui méritent d’être appelés Sauvages. Connaissons-nous comme eux les prisons, les cachots, les procès? - Non. - Ne sommes-nous pas libres comme les oiseaux, et eux esclaves comme les chiens? Oui’” (‘Nésquéhiounah, connu sous le nom de Colonel Louis’, *Lettres*, II, 1787, 406-15, 412) [“‘Savage?’” he repeated once more. “I have lived long enough among Whites, to know that they are the ones who deserve to be called savages, not the people of the woods. Do we make use of prisons, dungeons, trials?” “No.” “Are we not free like birds, while they are slaves like dogs?” “Yes.”] Nevertheless Crèvecoeur’s other personas do sometimes use this common term which does capture something about the beliefs of the period in terms of the natural or wild freedom of native peoples as opposed to so-called civilized men (see Diderot and D’Alembert; volume 14, 728-9).²⁶ This natural freedom is one mode of the innate freedom that radical French philosophers would give to all human beings. Those whom Crèvecoeur

usually calls *naturels* in the 1787 edition of *Lettres*, or *indigènes* in *Voyage*, are often given orations or dialogues in his French texts - where they name Europeans slaves, as in the example above.²⁷ Crèvecoeur is struck by Native Americans' stoicism in the face of torture and execution, yet asserted refusal to live with the loss of freedom (whether imprisonment, 'enslavement' or other forms of dependency).²⁸ Thus Native Americans and Canadians are seen as the antithesis of slaves.

This dialogue between a Senecan who comes across a virtuous settler, S.K., who is clearing the woods, with two slaves, so that he can plant the land, is typical of the charge made that Europeans have given up their natural liberty:

'Fumes, toi, dans la mienne ; tu n'as rien à craindre des Seneccas; cette terre a été vendue aux tiens il y a bien des lunes... Que les Blancs sont fous et esclaves ! Il n'y a que nous, gens des bois, qui soyons libres et sages.'

'Hé bien, Tiènadérha, avec toute ta liberté et ta sagesse, les tiens diminuent cependant tous les jours, et nous augmentons.'

'Oui, je le sais; c'est qu'il faut qu'il y ait toujours plus de mal que de bien sur la terre. Puisse Manitou dessécher tes sueurs, mon frère!'

'Puisse Manitou te procurer du gibier en abondance, Tiènadérha!' ('Histoire de S. K. Colon Américain', *Lettres*, I, 1787, 120- 49, 128)

['You can smoke my pipe; you have nothing to fear from the Seneca; this land was sold to your people many moons ago... Whites are mad and they are slaves! We, people of the woods, are the only ones who are free and wise.' 'Well, Tiènadérha, with all your freedom and wisdom, your people are declining in numbers every day, and we are growing.' 'Yes, I know; that is because there always has to be more evil than good on the earth. May Manitou dry the sweat from your brow, my brother!'
'May Manitou bring you game in abundance, Tiènadérha!']

This citation raises a whole host of questions including the offer of a pipe as vestigial hospitality, a virtue strongly associated with America for Crèvecoeur; reassurance about land ownership (with the question of inheritance for children as one frame of the discussion); the opposition between hard work, or the ‘sweat of your brow’, and ‘savage’ hunting; the ironic echo of Crèvecoeur’s sometime philosophical pessimism; his concern about the decimation of indigenous peoples; the use of ‘tu’ (echoing Quakers, natural and plain, as well as realistic), and the issue of knowledge as well as freedom. However, what I would underline here is the *silent* presence of S.K.’s real slaves juxtaposed with the ‘figural’ language of Tiènadérha. His words are nevertheless just a pause for thought – the work of ‘progress’ rolls on.

Later in the same essay the good settler who had been clearing the land has retired:
 S.K. et sa femme ont cessé de travailler depuis bien des années: leurs Nègres ont multiplié presque dans la même proportion que leurs enfants: les vieux fument leurs pipes et se reposent, ainsi que leur maître: il a distribué les jeunes parmi tous les siens, à mesure qu’ils se sont mariés.

[Foot note] *Fumer la pipe*, est une expression en usage parmi les Sauvages, pour désigner l’aisance, la paix, la tranquillité, et par conséquent le bonheur. (‘Histoire de S. K. Colon Américain’, *Lettres* I, 1787, 120-49, 147)

[S.K. and his wife stopped working many years ago: their Negroes multiplied in almost the same proportion as their children: the old ones smoke their pipes and relax as their master does: he distributed the young ones among his children as they got married.

[Foot note] *Smoking a pipe*, is an expression used by savages, to indicate ease, peace, tranquillity, and consequently happiness.]

My question here is: why does Crèvecoeur need to explain pipe smoking by reference to *sauvages*, the epitome of freedom? He has not done so elsewhere, and yet he gives many descriptions of slaves (and farmers) smoking pipes by the fire. There is a striking accumulation of four nouns to conjure up tranquillity. Use of synonyms is not uncommon in his style, but still he seems to be over-egging the pudding in order to assert: yes, they are happy by the standards of freedom. In some ways this is like his accounts of his domestic animals; but the reader may ask whether the lack of freedom trumps the described happiness or vice versa. Crèvecoeur has just mentioned S.K.'s pleasure in his grandchildren, and he knows that slaves often lose their progeny. When Mifflin, the kindest of masters, frees his slave Jacques he tells him that *now*: “tu élèveras tes enfants” (‘Anecdote de Warner Mifflin’ *Lettres* II, 197-222, 220) [“you will bring up your children”]. There is ambiguity about who gets married – presumably S.K.’s children, but what about the young slaves distributed between them?²⁹ I would juxtapose this with the later chapter from *Voyage*, which I cited earlier, in which the Jamaican has lost all appetite for reproduction in a cruel world where there are masters and slaves; he will not found a dynasty as S.K. does – the goal of all settlers and indeed of savages, according to Crèvecoeur, but refused to slaves.

5 (ii). Natural liberty - Animals

While *sauvages* represent natural liberty, the antithesis of slavery, domestic animals are a parallel to slaves.³⁰ They too have free counterparts in the woods as the *Encyclopédie* articles on the term *sauvage* point out. Meat eating is part of a complex network of associations for the ‘American farmer’ in this triangular relation between *sauvages*, domestic animals and slavery. This is even more striking in the extreme case of cannibalism. Meat eating is part of a continuum which ranges from eating men via eating animal friends (worse of all, a dog) to eating wild animals and then fish. *Sauvages* are generally represented as hunters, and thus

carnivores, and it was a trope in the period that they were also cannibals – cannibalism usually features in European representations to differentiate between white men and their absolute other, the savage. This is, however, rarely a feature of Crèvecoeur’s writing; his emphasis is more on proximity – once we were all cannibals. When he does mention cannibalism, he usually *either* tries to understand the circumstances under which cannibalism might be perfectly natural³¹ *or* gives examples of native peoples who find cannibalism disgusting. Some of his personas argue, however, that it is domestication of livestock that means cannibalism is no longer necessary for survival in hard times, and moreover that the move away from hunting towards farming implies that a more peaceful character is developed, and so ritual torture which may involve cannibal elements will also decline. Thus eating beef might save us from eating men.³² Slave owners (in the South) are frequently named as the real cannibals or ‘véritables anthropophages’ (‘Pensées sur l’esclavage et sur les Nègres’, *Lettres* II, 1787, 372-84, 376).³³ And yet... I think that the ambiguity over ‘kind’ slave-owning in the North – Farmer James himself owned slaves for a while, freeing them at the time of the Revolution, and Crèvecoeur’s neighbours and friends (such as Cadwallader Colden) did too – is also a shadowy presence in his writings on animals.

Crèvecoeur is pulled emotionally in the direction of vegetarianism (like Rousseau), but meat eating is integral to the American farmer’s role.³⁴ In a chapter of *Voyage* set in Virginia, Crèvecoeur tells the tale of an old Southern gentleman who spent the years of the Revolution in the woods like a *sauvage*. There, the old man claims, without giving any detail, black slaves and white masters were equal. In the subsequent chapter, the old man tells at length of his fondness for his cattle, especially since he lived with them for a long time, isolated in the woods, “comme leur maitre et leur ami” [“as their master and friend”], and therefore he knows their characters and has studied them:

‘Je ne saurais dire combien il est amusant et instructif de les voir journellement, de vivre, et, pour ainsi dire, de converser avec eux, de les gouverner, enfin, en s’en faisant aimer et craindre. L’esclavage, la solitude, la dureté avec laquelle on les traite en Europe, les ont tellement abrutis, dégradés, que ce ne sont plus les mêmes êtres intéressants, qu’ils n’ont plus la même intelligence. Ils ont perdu ce caractère originel, et cette perfectibilité qui est si frappante ici. Il faut les voir libres dans nos champs, plus libres encore dans nos forêts, où ils passent une partie de leur vie; c’est là que l’expérience développe leurs facultés, et que, dans plusieurs circonstances, l’instinct m’a paru s’élever au niveau de la raison.’ (Chapitre XIV, *Voyage II*, 256)

[‘I could not say how pleasurable and instructive it is to see them every day, to live, and, so to speak, to converse with them, to govern them, finally, by making them love you and fear you. The slavery, solitude, harshness which was their lot in Europe, brutalized them, degraded them, so they are no longer the same interesting creatures, they no longer have the same intelligence. They have lost the original character and the perfectibility which is so striking here. You have to see them free in our fields, even more free in our forests, where they spend part of their lives; that is where experience develops their faculties, and where, in many situations, it seems to me that instinct is raised to the level of reason.’]

This is a complex chapter. The Virginian farmer (or plantation owner) who tells his story is friend - and master; he must make his animals love him – and fear him. He denies that they are slaves as they are in Europe because they spend some months of the year running free. Perfectibility is that innate liberty unique to man for Rousseau since animals are governed by instinct, but here it is ascribed to cattle. In old Europe, however, domestic animals are made brutes (as men are). This is reminiscent of debates over environmental determinism and black slaves: the case was sometimes made by abolitionists that, however debased as slaves, when

free, black men could be rational (women were not always included in this pious hope). However, even in America, the cattle must come when they are summoned. The kind way of achieving this is to offer them salt: salt is a lure, and a real pleasure, and improves the meat. But sometimes old horses (who roam with the cows) are not duped by the salt treat if they spot the bridle (259). If you cannot be the friend who asks, then you have to be the master who orders; if not the master, he explains, then you must use leather *entraves* on their legs - this usually means shackles – and could here be a hobble, but the word does conjure up the treatment of disobedient slaves. When his cattle return he has “le plaisir de les revoir sains, gras, luisants” (Chapitre XIV, *Voyage II*, 251) [“the pleasure of seeing them once more healthy, fat, shining”]. This farmer consistently avoids the question of eating meat, but is pleased to see his cattle have fattened up. Interestingly *gras* is an adjective that Crèvecoeur’s protagonists often apply to their happy slaves – as in the citation earlier. Thus *gras* is an uncanny term pointing both to good treatment, good health and contentment, yet also to exploitation to the point of consuming and selling flesh.

Another farmer attempts to resolve this dichotomy by presenting his cattle as offering themselves in happy self-sacrifice:

‘Le bœuf va nous nourrir de la meilleure des viandes; après tant d’années de services, il s’offre enfin en sacrifice; son suif réjouit et éclaire la famille; sa peau couvre nos pieds et les garantit des pluies, des boues et des gelées; son poil et sa bourre donnent à nos plafonds une solidité nouvelle: la nature ne pouvait créer un animal qui pût nous être plus utile.’ (‘Description d’une chute de neige, Dans le pays des Mohawks, sous le rapport qui intéresse le Cultivateur Américain’, *Lettres I*, 1787, 289-314, 293-4).
 [‘The ox will feed us with the best of meat; after so many years of service, he finally offers himself as a sacrifice; his fat delights and gives light to the family; his skin covers our feet and protects them from rain, mud and ice; his hide and his hair give

our ceilings added strength: nature could not create an animal which could be more useful to us.’]

The using of all elements of the animal is reminiscent of the Native Americans’ ecological approach, for example, to bison. However, I would argue that there is a lurking unease in such a description of human-animal proximity – this comes close to the surface in a chapter in *Voyage*.

Here Crèvecoeur describes a bee hunt excursion by the first-person narrator (often read simplistically as Crèvecoeur himself, but only ever losing anonymity when he is in dialogue with Native Americans who call him by his adopted Oneida name, Kayo) and the German Herman who become lost in the forest and are in danger of starving. The European pushes his American companion to kill his dog (Ontario), a faithful friend – and this leads to a discussion of cannibalism. After the episode I note that they do not return to meat eating for a while. The narrator writes: “‘la distance est moins grande qu’on ne pense entre tuer son chien et tuer son ami, pour se repaître de ses membres palpitants: comme nous, après avoir longtemps lutté contre la faim, irrité jusqu’à la frénésie, faute de chien, le plus fort aura tué le plus faible”” (Chapitre 3, *Voyage II*, 59) [“‘the distance is smaller than you think between killing your dog and killing your friend to feed yourself on his palpitating limbs: like us, having long battled hunger, goaded to a frenzy, for lack of a dog, the strongest would have killed the weakest””]. It is domestication, he concludes, that stopped a centuries-old practice: “‘L’anthropophagie n’a donc dû cesser que par la connaissance des moyens d’apprivoiser et d’élever des bestiaux”” (60) [“‘Thus cannibalism must only have come to an end thanks to knowledge of the methods for taming and raising cattle””]. ‘Je’, the first-person narrator, asks himself if he has personally touched cannibalism now:

‘Oui, sans doute, puisque j’allais me rassasier de la chair d’un être que j’aimais, puisque j’allais immoler un compagnon qui, pendant tant d’années, m’avait rendu des

services importants, avait sauvé ma vie en traversant une rivière; un ami, j'ose le dire, dont l'expérience, la sagacité, l'affection, m'avaient si souvent frappé de respect et même d'admiration. Ah ! pauvre Ontario! quel bonheur pour toi, plus encore pour moi, que tu ne puisses jamais savoir que j'ai été au moment de lever sur toi ma main fratricide! Mais quand même tu le pourrais, ou tu ne voudrais pas le croire, ou tu me le pardonnerais.' (60-1)

['Certainly yes, since I was going to gorge myself on the flesh of a being I loved, since I was going to slaughter a companion who had done me so many valuable services over so many years, had saved my life while crossing a river; a friend, I dare call him that, whose experience, wisdom, affection, had so often struck me with feelings of respect and even of admiration. Ah! poor Ontario! what a boon for you, even more for me, that you can never know that I was on the brink of raising my fratricidal hand against you! But even if you could, you would not want to believe it, or you would forgive me.']

This 'hinge' episode both brings together and separates Europeans and Native Americans – we are all the same under the skin – but at different stages of development in relation to domestication. This very long and strangely disordered fantasy of being obliged to eat your noble dog/friend/brother, because of the particular circumstances in which you are stuck, obviously relates to the question of the survival cannibalism of indigenous peoples, but seems to me also to touch on the 'need' to have slaves because of the dire shortage of labour, and therefore the high wages, in the Northern provinces. The necessarily carnivorous (exploitative) farmer paradoxically yearns, in the interstices of the text, for friendship with his animals (and slaves).

In the influential Hobbesian tradition you can only claim that people are held against their will if there is coercion by force such as the emblematic use of iron chains. However,

Crèvecoeur's accounts of happy slaves and domestic animals raise the question of other kinds of bonds – and indeed not only for those who are bought and sold as chattel. Beyond shackles and enclosure, there are complex emotional ties,³⁵ bribery by gifts which create dependency such as salt or alcohol or tobacco, or simply the need for food (remembering Crèvecoeur's emphasis on the well-fed, plump animals and slaves). Outside the confines of this essay, I would note that is a familiar colonizing strategy to deprive indigenous peoples of the ability to feed themselves, for instance exterminating bison, so that Native Americans, originally the epitome of freedom for Crèvecoeur become dependent on settlers, as domestic animals become dependent.³⁶ Trade too can create new needs to be satisfied – as he underlines in *Voyage* (see Murray 2000).

6. Civil liberty

What is the freedom offered to 'refugees' from the Old World of Europe, the *ancien regime*? Many Europeans are forced to emigrate because of their religion, politics or ethnicity; many settlers are also asylum-seekers as Crèvecoeur repeatedly underlines, and they travel to find freedom from oppression. Economic migration – notably from Europe to the New World, but also within North America – is also seen as a form of liberation for Crèvecoeur, liberation from entrapment in poverty, misery and ignorance. Crèvecoeur writes with knowledgeable passion of these phenomena: and he himself is more than once a refugee from war and revolution. He is imprisoned, his home is burnt down, his wife killed and children reduced to destitution, and he describes these experiences in his French writings. But adoption in America does not only mean freedom from persecution and poverty. Crèvecoeur, seen as an origin of the notion of 'melting pot', hammers home in *Lettres* that liberty means that migrants, disenfranchised in their native lands, may be adopted as *citizens* in America and have every opportunity to play a full role in civic life for the good of the fraternal community

as well as the individual.³⁷ We are still haunted by the questions: who is a full member of our community and who can be excluded or put to death? And so what is the contemporary relevance of Crèvecoeur's thought – when American myths have global power and influence? I would argue that we need to think carefully about the meaning of freedom and of slavery – this will help us to understand how all inhabitants of a country can be treated hospitably as full participating members – regardless of origin, race, sex or religion. In the nineteenth century, Amendment XIII (1865) to the United States constitution, which abolishes slavery as forced labour, except *nota bene* as punishment for a crime, had to be followed by Amendment XIV (1868) and XV (1870) which relate to suffrage and citizenship regardless of race (though not of sex). And the struggle for civil rights did not end there of course. The question of what makes a good society drives Crèvecoeur's dream of an America which welcomes settlers regardless of nationality, religion or social status. Yet nightmares of exploitation sometimes bleed into that dream in unexpected ways. This continues to be of burning importance today as nation states respond to the challenges of globalization and diversity sometimes with a rhetoric of equality and fraternity or hospitality, and sometimes with a reaffirming of their borders, both internal and external, including those between races and between species.

In general, reading Early Modern America via the medium of English alone oversimplifies the picture. With Crèvecoeur in particular, the monolingual approach both underplays his importance in the anti-slavery struggle, and also fails to tackle his fictionalized accounts of Northern slaves living in harmony with their 'masters' as 'friends', which make queasy reading today. The parallel descriptions of the relationship between farmers and their livestock, and the antithetical figure of the Native American/Canadian as the epitome of freedom, are also neglected. These are important in their own right, but also add depth and complexity to our understanding of Crèvecoeur's representations of slavery – going beyond

the extreme figure of the tortured body. Finally, I would underline the value of looking beyond freedom from constraint to the larger question of citizenship in Crèvecoeur's writing – civil liberty being the best guarantee of other freedoms.

¹ My thanks to Matthew Pethers who first drew the bilingual Crèvecoeur to my attention, and has proved a generous and helpful interlocutor ever since – with many recommendations for further reading. Thanks also to Joanne Collie, Dave Murray and Kathryn Shingler.

² Crèvecoeur also wrote reports, newspaper articles as 'Agricola', and other short works.

³ See Crèvecoeur (1995) for a more recent and fuller version of the manuscripts with different editorial decisions.

⁴ See Iannini (2012), in particular, Chapter 3 "'The Itinerant Man": Crèvecoeur's Caribbean, Raynal's Revolution, and the Fate of Atlantic Cosmopolitanism', 131-76. Anglophone scholars typically do not make reference to the substantially revised French version 'Voyage à la Jamaïque et aux Isles Bermudes' in *Lettres*, I, 229-40.

⁵ The 1784 edition of *Lettres* is two volumes; the 1787 edition, to which I shall refer, adds an important third volume as well as making some changes to the first two volumes.

⁶ This point is made by one of the very few scholars to work on the French material; see Ed White (2009).

⁷ Bostelman asserts in her preface that 'The shackles of blind servitude to the literal meaning must not clank.' (1964: x) See the work of Percy Adams (e.g. Adams, 1980), who wrote his PhD on *Voyage* in 1946. Adams is one of the few critics to address *Voyage*, and his scholarship is welcome, but he has a particular focus on the idea of 'travel liars', and is largely concerned to indicate possible examples of 'plagiarism' or potential inaccuracies in travel writing of the period. In my view, the critique of plagiarism can be a red herring for the cultural historian dealing with C18 'encyclopaedic' material. Crèvecoeur certainly acknowledges some sources, but, like many of his contemporaries, is more concerned with

his progressive pedagogical project to inform his readers about America, and convince them of his New World vision of freedom, equality and hospitality, than with intellectual property rights. While factual accuracy matters to his project in some contexts, in others, as Rousseau would argue, the social and moral message is primary – and the author should convey this as effectively as possible. Imaginative ‘truth’ can outweigh, for instance, the question whether the author himself was present at the event where he places his persona.

⁸ In the case of Crèvecoeur, John Dickinson’s *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1768) is cited as a possible model as often as any French work (with the exception of the obligatory namecheck of Raynal to whom *Letters* is dedicated) – and yet this political tract against British taxation without representation has almost nothing in common with Crèvecoeur’s work beyond the title.

⁹ Crèvecoeur regularly recommends that farmers travel and get to know America more widely – though typically before settling to cultivation – this is, of course, a useful literary device, but is also a predilection and passion.

¹⁰ See Still (2015), chapter 5 for further analysis of this passage. For another view see Ruttenburg (1998). She argues that there is a challenge to Farmer James’s claim to representative status from the slave in the cage who ‘conspicuously bears the traits of democratic personality’ (187) – he ‘erupts unexpectedly into the represented domain, emerging from a space within its confines that the author, because he scrupulously restricts his gaze to what is visible in the American landscape, had not discerned. The character’s exclusive knowledge of the invisible domain of slavery – articulated as a request for poison – repudiates the author’s claim, upon which his authorial prerogative is explicitly based, to speak for the represented world’.

¹¹ This question of literal truth still dogs the reception of all Crèvecoeur’s writing today since he is regularly identified with most of his many protagonists, often without careful attention

to eighteenth-century genres, and to his pedagogical political and ethical project. See, for instance, Adams, or Myers (2014), which follows in Adams' footsteps with the idea of the 'travel liar'.

¹² See Rice (1932), Chapter 3 'Crèvecoeur, ami des noirs', 107-24. This an early, but very important, scholarly study of Crèvecoeur. It remains one of very few to devote serious study to Crèvecoeur and slavery, but has had less influence than it merits – perhaps because it is written in French. Rice remarks that, when *Lettres* came out in 1784, reviews noted this anecdote - and some challenged it e.g. Filippo Mazzei, *Recherches* (1788) who asserts that there is no one in Carolina who does not think this is pure invention (1932:119).

¹³ See Rice (1932: e.g. 118) for the enthusiastic reception of Crèvecoeur's contribution, and its use for anti-slavery purposes from the publication of *Letters* onwards. In the *Courier de l'Europe* 18 April 1783 there is a letter on slavery (probably by Brissot de Warville) which proclaims: 'à quel excès d'horreurs peut porter la soif de l'or et de jouissances !... il ne faut pas cesser de répéter avec M. de Saint-John, avec tous les Quakers, les philosophes, que l'achat d'un nègre est un double crime' ['to what excessive horrors can the lust for gold and pleasure lead!.... we must not cease from repeating with Mr Saint-John, with all Quakers, with philosophers, that buying a Negro is a double crime'] (Rice 1932: 120). For other references in various languages, in particular German, and for American re-tellings of the anecdote, see Rice (1932: 121-2).

¹⁴ For example, Rucker claims that James is 'basically insecure and incapable of comprehending phenomena rationally and thereby mastering them' (1978: 195) James's response to the caged slave shows him to be 'a victim of his acutely fragile psyche'. Philbrick argues that, in Letter 9, personal vision gains ascendancy with James's response to the slave, and his 'urgent, emotionally charged voice verges on hysteria. All intellectual attempts to explain away the experience are doomed to failure' (1991: 425). He continues: 'The tragedy

of the *Letters* is that James is never able to reconcile these two halves of his sensibility; his all-or-nothing emotional life constrains his intellect to provide a retreat from the world's problems rather than a means of confronting them'.

¹⁵ See Saar (1987). Chiles (2014: 107-47), Chapter 3 'Transforming into Natives: Crèvecoeur, Marrant, and Brown on Becoming Indian', reads the passage figuratively and is thus able to conclude that slavery is here represented as natural, and that the slave's blood fertilises the soil in which Europeans thrive.

¹⁶ In the 1790s and early 1800s there was extensive press coverage of Haiti. See Fischer, (2004) for an account of the impact of racial revolution – as promise and threat.

¹⁷ In 1808 the prominent abolitionist Abbé Grégoire actually includes Crèvecoeur twice (once as Hector Saint-John and once as Saint-John Crèvecoeur) in the list of men to whom he dedicates *De la Littérature des Nègres*: 'A tous les hommes courageux qui ont plaidé la cause des Malheureux Noirs et Sang-mêlés, soit par leurs ouvrages soit par leurs discours dans les assemblées politiques, dans les sociétés établies pour l'abolition de la traite, le soulagement et la liberté des esclaves' ['To all those brave men who have pleaded the cause of the unhappy Blacks and those of Mixed Blood, either in writing or in speeches in political assemblies, in societies established for the abolition of the slave trade, and for the relief and freedom of slaves.']

¹⁸ The trope of a rational, industrious and ethical North versus a passionate, idle and cruel South reoccurs in much eighteenth-century writing in Europe as well as the Americas.

¹⁹ According to the *Documentary History of New York* in 1771 the colony of New York had 148,124 whites and 19, 833 blacks; in Orange county 9,430 whites and 662 blacks (volume I, 474, cited in Rice 1932: 107).

²⁰ Shane White (1991) makes the case that far more attention should be paid to slavery and its demise in New York and New Jersey where many households owned slaves according to the

1790 census. He also makes the point that a number of observers (he does not cite Crèvecoeur) remarked on the *relatively* good conditions of Northern slaves; see, for example Chapter 4 ‘A Mild Slavery?’ (1991: 79-113). He argues that Northern slavery was not quite as benign as the ‘myth’ suggests. Rice (1932) says very little on the North; he focuses on the South and abolition as his chapter title ‘Crèvecoeur, l’ami des noirs’ suggests with its nod to the famous ‘Société des amis des noirs’ in *Le Cultivateur américain*.

²¹ The reader learns from James early on that ‘My negroes are tolerably faithful and healthy’ (*Letters*, 26); his repeated use of the possessive directs the modern reader to the main issue.

²² See for example ‘Lettre écrite par F-IS, A-B-Y., Irlandais, Colon de l’établissement de Ce-y-V-y’, *Lettres* II, 1784, 344-387, “‘Tandis que nous n’avons plus de chaîne, irons-nous rentrer dans l’esclavage pour six sols par jour?’” (356) [“‘While we no longer bear chains, are we going to return to slavery for six sols a day?’”].

²³ The letter describing a visit to John Bartram – and particularly the dinner – shows the ambiguity between slaves and freed blacks. It is a celebration of abolition, but equally the black people sitting at (the bottom of) Bartram’s dining table could have been slaves granted the *familia* mythology or reality. See ‘Lettre écrite par Ivan Al-Z, Gentilhomme Russe, à un de ses amis en Europe’, *Lettres* I, 150-86.

²⁴ A piastre is usually taken as a dollar, and was multiplied by 5 for US dollars in 1968 i.e. 800 dollars; for today’s prices we could multiply again by 6.5= 5,250 dollars. This is an extremely rough calculation.

²⁵ I should note of course that while the large majority of slaves in the Americas were black, not all were black. A number of indigenous peoples were also enslaved.

²⁶ See Still (2011), chapters 2 and 3, and Still (2015), chapter 4 for more on the question of naming the First Nations, and what ‘sauvage’ implies.

²⁷ Indian eloquence and censure of Whites' behaviour is a recurring trope in literature of the period; this is another key difference with Early Modern images of black slaves (noted by critics writing on Jefferson for instance). There are a number of works that address this desirable rhetorical prowess, and the complex uses made of it in American writing; see, for example, Eastman (2009: 83-111), chapter 3 'Mourning for Logan'. Crèvecoeur is typically absent from these studies although, in *Voyage* in particular, there are a large number of significant examples.

²⁸ In fact of course, as Crèvecoeur shows, this is precisely what many Native peoples were forced to live with – but he suggests that this often results in depression, sickness and death. It can be argued that the rhetorical evocation of Indians as free masks their enslavement (including their use as 'servants'.)

²⁹ White argues that it was even more difficult for slave families to live intact in the North (because of the small numbers of slaves held by any one master) than in the South (1991: 89-93).

³⁰ This point is made by many anti- and pro-slavery writers at the time, and is also analysed by a number of historians and activists today. See, for example, Davis: 'he or she was always at risk of "bestialization", a word that refers to the degradation and dehumanization signified by the repeated descriptions through history of slaves being stripped naked, driven like cattle, and sold like livestock' (2003: 6). See also (Still 2015), chapter 5.

³¹ See 'Lettre d'un Voyageur Européen, sur la situation de Charles-Town, sur son commerce et les mœurs de ses habitants, et de ceux des campagnes; Pensées sur l'esclavage, sur le mal physique, barbarie des planteurs' (*Lettres* II 1784, 388-408), which suggests that men are unhappy everywhere. 'Les habitants des bois se mangent souvent faute de nourriture; ceux des plaines s'affament et se détruisent faute de place.' (404) ['Those who live in the woods

often eat each other for lack of food, those who live on the plains starve and kill each other for lack of space.’]

³² Derrida argues that eating is haunted by sacrifice: ‘J’irai jusqu’à soutenir que, plus ou moins raffiné, subtil, sublime, un certain cannibalisme reste indépassable.’ (2001: 113) [‘I would go as far as maintaining that we still cannot eradicate a kind of cannibalism, more or less refined, subtle or sublime’].

³³ Crèvecoeur is not the only abolitionist to use this language; see for example the letter on slavery probably by Brissot in which he writes with respect to Crèvecoeur’s episode of the slave in a cage: ‘Qui ne frémira pas en lisant cette histoire digne de cannibales?’ [‘Who will not shudder upon reading this story worthy of cannibals?’] cited by Rice (1932: 118).

³⁴ The farmer presents domestication, above all of animals although also of plants, as key to civilization and progress. The ‘failure’ of indigenous peoples to domesticate the natural world is an intermittent marker of their inferiority for some of Crèvecoeur’s personas or characters in *Voyage*. This is the period of the agricultural revolution, and he is fascinated by the potential for ‘improvement’ of land, farming methods and food production. Yet, I argue that, particularly, in the French material, there is a counterpoint of predicted environmental disaster due to deforestation, drainage and the exhaustion of the fertility of the land, in tandem with over-hunting. This is juxtaposed with what *he says* must be considered ‘inferior’ forms of subsistence typical of the First Nations which, *he shows*, do not deplete the land and do not bring animal populations close to extinction until the arrival of Europeans. Crèvecoeur relates production *inter alia* to the vexed questions of ownership and inheritance of land (entailing enclosure) and the relationship to indigenous peoples; access to cheaper food for the hungry, and making large profits from cash crops with slave labour; the sexed division of labour; and human relations with other animals (domesticated and wild).

³⁵ This could be related to women – wives and mistresses. In the case of Native Americans, many women were intermediaries; Sir William Johnson and his Mohawk ‘wife’ Molly are a good example. There is a footnote relating to them in *Voyage I*, 347-9. See O’ Toole (2005).

³⁶ Jeremy Rifkin focuses on nineteenth-century (and twentieth-century) America rather than eighteenth in his history of beef, but nevertheless has interesting material on the policy of starvation, see, for example, chapters 12 ‘The Great Bovine Switch’ and 13 ‘Cowboys and Indians’ in Rifkin (1994). According to Rifkin, the buffalo were slaughtered in order to starve out Indians (e.g. 1994: 78-80) as well as to make space for cows – vast herds were eradicated in just a few years. Europeans and Americans had previously attempted to clear Indians from the plains by direct violence and massacres – but starvation was more successful – in reservations they became dependent on government rations to survive (82-3). Already at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, Crèvecoeur is preoccupied by the fate of bison (or buffalo); in a long footnote to chapter one of *Voyage II* he explains how they were once populous, but are now being destroyed by settlers (1801: 376-7).

³⁷ The Enlightenment is fascinated by environmental determinism as it battles with fundamental questions about human nature, universal or specific. Crèvecoeur produces a series of thought experiments to question which factors in the environment encourage which kind of beliefs and behaviour. In *Letters* his focus is more on the positive effects of hospitable and egalitarian America on the settlers she ‘adopts’ - as opposed to the negative effects of the unnatural and fixed hierarchies of the Old World, damaging to poor and rich alike. In his French writings, he turns equally to the puzzle why ‘men’ behave badly or stupidly even in a relatively good environment - how can things deteriorate? America is characterized by collective support (hospitality and generosity), according to Crèvecoeur, yet there is still competition for resources. Nature is harmonious - but that includes a balance of predation. How does predation become *unbalanced*? One factor in the analysis is

temporality– when does inequality become lasting and hence significant? Here Crèvecoeur is vexed by the matter of inheritance – the natural desire to support the family you love versus the danger of increasing long-term inequality of wealth and power. Another issue to be considered is the presence of an economy of abundance or of scarcity – and whether this is a matter of natural circumstances (such as fertile or barren land) or education and opinion or both? This relates to the balance between self-sufficiency and trade.

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