
Women and Planters during the American Revolution War as Narrated in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782)

Livia Traesar

Universitas Gadjah Mada
Email: liviatraesar@mail.ugm.ac.id

Danika Rahma Irianti

Universitas Gadjah Mada
Email: danikarahmairianti@mail.ugm.ac.id

Ferry Hidayat

Universitas Gadjah Mada
Email: ferryhidayat1973@mail.ugm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to discover a historical fact of American women's educational achievement and self-image as well as to unravel a psychological fact of American planters' existential crisis in the historical period of the Revolution War by means of the information reported by Jean Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813) in his famous *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). To make the attempt successful, two literary criticisms are done by the writers of this paper, namely feminist criticism and existentialist criticism. Feminist criticism is carried out to dig up data from the *Letters* and analyze it through a feminist lens, while existentialist criticism is performed to unearth signs of existential crisis experienced by the Southern planters during the Independence War of America. After scrutinizing *the Letters*, it is found that Southern women during the war of independence are well-educated but have an inferiority complex and that Southern planters suffer anguish and despair of woeful political revolution which shutter their existential equilibrium.

Keywords: *Existential crisis; Nantucket women; Pennsylvanian women; Planters; Revolution War; Second sex*

Article information (Filled by Editorial Management)

Received: 16 March, 2022
Revised: 08 September, 2022
Accepted: 08 September, 2022

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v9i2.73609>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/73609>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

INTRODUCTION

Letters from an American Farmer is a literary work written by Jean Hector St. John

de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813), a Frenchman who migrated to America and became a successful farmer, a botanist, and a diplomat for the French government in America. The work was

written in 1782, during which American Independence War broke out. In the history of American literature, therefore, it is considered one of the representatives of literature surrounding the American Revolution, besides Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, among others (Gray, 2004, p. 73).

Letters are fictional letters, written by two fictional letter writers. *First*, a fictional American farmer named James who sent his letters to a mysterious English recipient named "Mr. F.B." (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 42) and *second*, a fictional Russian gentleman named "Mr. Iwan Al—z" who reported his visit to Farmer James, then the farmer included Mr. Iwan's report in his letter to Mr. F.B. (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 169).

Letters consists of twelve letters, arranged numerically. *Letter I* introduces the fictional American farmer, James, telling the reason why he wrote the letters to the Englishman, "Mr. F.B.". *Letter II* tells how thankful Farmer James is and what makes him thankful as a successful farmer in the US. *Letter III*, which entitles "What is an American?", tells his gratifying description of American land and American people, differentiating them from European people. This letter is the most famous and the most quoted by American Studies students and instructors. *Letter IV* and *Letter V* give an anthropological account of the people of Nantucket Island in Massachusetts; their customs, manners, governmental policy, trade, education and employment. *Letter VI* describes another island located in Massachusetts, The Island of Martha's Vineyard, where whale fishery is cultivated. *Letter VII* and *Letter VIII* supplement the cultural account of Nantucket Island inhabitants already described in previous

letters. *Letter IX* describes a town called Charles Town (nowadays, it is named Charleston in West Virginia) which Farmer James visited; a town "... filled with the richest planters in the province..." whose "... ears by habit have become deaf, their hearts are hardened; they neither see, hear nor feel for the woes of their poor slaves, from whose painful labors all their wealth proceeds." (Crèvecoeur, 1983, pp. 152-153). *Letter X* describes the fauna which people can find in Charles Town such as snakes and hummingbirds. *Letter XI* reports a visit by a Russian named Mr. Iwan to Mr. John Bertram's botanical garden around his house in Pennsylvania. Mr. John Bertram himself is a successful farmer, telling what plants he grew in his garden, and *Letter XII*, the last letter written, describes completely how distressful Farmer James was when American Independence War occurred, and how his family life and political conviction were badly affected by the war.

It is interesting to know how American women in the period of the American Revolution are viewed by Crèvecoeur through his *Letters*. For that purpose, feminist criticism is conducted. Also, it is interesting to know how Crèvecoeur confirms and justifies his human existence as well as expresses his existential anxiety, despair and anguish as an immigrant farmer in a whilst-revolution period of American history through his letters narrator, Farmer James; that's why an existentialist criticism is then carried out. Both feminist and existentialist criticisms hopefully can enrich understanding of American women in the time of revolution and can enhance understanding of the existential crisis faced by planters whose farming lands are badly affected by the war in the southern part of America.

Feminist criticism “examines the ways in which literature... reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women ...,” (Tyson, 2006, p. 83) whereas existentialist criticism analyzes the problem and the crisis of human existence described in literature and tries to discover in it “... the whole spectrum of existence... the actualities of existence...” so clearly identified in literary themes of human freedom, decision, and responsibility (Macquarrie, 1973, pp. 2-4). Psychological oppression of women is hardly identified and scarcely discovered without the use of feminist criticism; sexist lines and patriarchal women representations within *Letters from an American Farmer* cannot be sensed with appropriate sensibility but by its use. Existentialist criticism helps focus on existential problems and crises faced by the main characters of a literary work.

DISCUSSION

Women are Well-educated but Inferior

Women in the work of *Letter from an American Farmer* become as important as men to be discussed. In the early part of the *Letters* (namely, *Letter D*) James, the farmer, has introduced the role of his wife in the discussion. He even mentioned that perhaps his wife is as important as his letter companion by saying that “my letters shall not be sent, nor will I receive any, without reading them to you and my wife” (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 43). The statement that he threw perhaps describes enough that his wife is as important as his letter companion since he drew the analogy so. However, in the text, James is not only describing his wife and typical Pennsylvanian wives but he is also describing another womankind such as the Nantucket women who

have a very different role and status compared to those of Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvanian woman or wife to be exact is described in the *Letters* as someone who has enough intelligence to know and give her opinions toward her husband's businesses. *Letter I* mentioned about his wife repeatedly. At the beginning of the text, he said “My wife (and I never do anything without consulting her) laughs and tells me that you cannot be in earnest.” (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 38). In the text it is explicitly described that James, in writing the letters, always makes consultations first with his wife. This can be understood that James appreciated his wife and not underestimating her. He acknowledged the intelligence of his wife at the same time. James then continues in the next part saying: “She then read it herself very attentively; our minister was present, we listened to and weighed every syllable; we all unanimously concluded that you must have been in a sober earnest intention, as my wife calls it” (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 38).

From the quotation above it can be observed that James is describing his wife as someone who possessed good intelligence since she was able to read the letter well (Rudy & Adhitya, 2022, p. 338). James even used his wife's choice of words. When someone employs wording from other people, it means that the person agrees with it since it describes the situation well. We may conclude that James agreed with his wife and again he implicitly acknowledged the intelligence of his wife.

However, besides the intelligence that James's wife possessed, it is an irony that she weighs herself less.

... paragraph by paragraph, and warily observe whether thee canst perceive some

words of jesting, something that hath more than one meaning; and now I think on it, husband, I wish thee would'st let me see his letter; though I am but a woman, as thee mayest say, yet I understand the purport of words in good measure, for when I was a girl, Father sent us to the very best master in the precinct (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 38).

From the quotation above, it can be seen that James's wife might be at a higher level of intelligence. She advises James to read each paragraph in a more detailed way because there might be a double meaning. We can see as well that James's wife was learning from a very good master when she was young. She knew that she was good at it. However, it is sad that before she acknowledged her intelligence she said "*though I am but a woman*". When we see further, we can see a very ironic meaning behind that. She said so, which might be because the doctrine of women is already rooted in her that they are useless, as implied in her statement "though I am but a woman". This assumption became clearer because then she added "*as thee mayest say*" meaning that her husband James also always said so.

Women Play Important Roles but Become Sexual Objects for Men

In *Letter VIII* titled "Peculiar Customs at Nantucket", the discussion also puts some focus on a woman as a wife. In the letter, it is described whilst the husbands are away from home and when the sea excursions are often very long, the wives are in charge of their husband's duties. It can be seen from the line:

As the sea excursions are often very long, their wives in their absence are necessarily obliged to transact business, to settle accounts, and, in short, to rule and provide for their families. These circumstances, being often repeated, give women the

abilities as well as a taste for that kind of superintendency, to which, by their prudence and good management, they seem to be in general very equal (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 143)

The quotation above proves that the Nantucket wives are in charge of any accounts including rules and provide any business related to the family. Crèvecoeur further said in the line that "they seem to be in general very equal". It can be concluded that the subject "they" here refers to the equality between men and women.

Another scenario shows the equality between men and women can be seen from the description that Nantucket prevails a singular custom among women there. Crèvecoeur said:

They have adopted these many years the Asiatic custom of taking a dose of opium every morning, and so deeply rooted is it that they would be at a loss how to live without this indulgence; they would rather be deprived of any necessary than forego their favorite luxury. This is much more prevailing among the women than the men... (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 145)

The description of the peculiar customs above shows that women in Nantucket might be having a stronger and bolder position compared to men because women in that place have the culture to take a dose of opium every morning whilst the men did not (Adhitya, Rosmawati & Fainnayla, 2022, p. 69). At least in some patriarchal places, using their point of view, they might think so. However, on the next page, Crèvecoeur writes something which might crumble our thought and the earlier statement about equality between men and women in Nantucket. Crèvecoeur continues with,

I was once invited to that house, and had the satisfaction of conducting thither one of the many beauties of that island (for it abounds with handsome women), dressed in all the betwitching attire of the most

charming simplicity; like the rest of the company, she was cheerful without loud laughs, and smiling without affectation. They all appeared gay without levity. I had never before in my life seen so much unaffected mirth, mixed with so much modesty. The pleasures of the day were enjoyed with the greatest liveliness and the most innocent freedom (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 143)

From the point one discussion, the significance of women's representation concludes that women in that era, in the *Letters from an American Farmer*, were put as an object. Although the status quo seems to show that wives in Pennsylvania were able to express themselves, give an opinion to the husband, and smart enough to advise the husband, but the mindset and doctrine that women are weak and useless already had been planted deeply into them; it is proven by the line as already mentioned in the first discussion, that James' wife weighs herself low "though I am but a woman, as thee mayest say". Not only once, she mentioned it twice, followed by the line "though I am a woman. Yet I know what it is to be a wife" (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 45). The quotation draws a clearer and bolder conclusion that a woman is nothing, weak, and useless. However, to be a wife is a brand new different thing. It shows us that women are treated as an object and as a lower class society and that their status can be changed only when she gets married and becomes a wife. It implicitly shows us that the success of a woman is when she is succeeded to be a good wife. If we go into further analysis, of the text, we can see that the freedom of speech and expression itself is limited only to private or housing areas, not public areas.

The representation of women and wives in Nantucket also brings us to a similar conclusion. Although at first it is described that Nantucket's women are capable of doing many things that their husbands usually did and Crèvecoeur also mentioned that, there in Nantucket, men and women seemed very equal; however, in the last text, the description and wording that he used is breaking down his statement about the equal position. He said that he was satisfied with the island of handsome women. This might be translated as he enjoyed seeing those beautiful women which placed women as an object to satisfy men's desires.

Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex*, writes about "The Married Woman". She said: "There are young women who are already trying to win this positive freedom; but seldom do they persevere in their studies or their jobs for long: they know the interests of their work will most often be sacrificed to their husband's careers;" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p. 641). Beauvoir writes quite in the modern era married women are often sacrificed for the benefit of their husbands. Even nowadays, in this globalization and very modern era, there are still many societies that hold on to that system: patriarchy. There is a term best describing this situation: "mere-exposure effect." It happens when somebody tends to develop a preference that sounds more familiar to them. When we try to make a comparison between today's women and the women of Crèvecoeur's era, it seems so obvious why women accepted their condition as it is without resistance; it happens because they did not have another exposure to challenge their status and it seems that they did not have any choice. Thus, it makes sense when we see many texts from that era we can see women treated as second sex and it seems

that they are also accepting that; one example is those wives of Pennsylvania and Nantucket.

Colonial America in American history showed that middle-class women had a relatively good education, like what is shown from a statement of Farmer James' wife when she said "... when I was a girl, Father sent us to the very best master in the precinct." Huey B. Long discovered in colonial American history there were a lot of well-educated women who were highly educated:

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that even with limited formal public education, a significant number of colonial women were well educated for their day and country. A representative group of intelligent and well educated women would include Abigail Adams, Hannah Adams, Cornelia Beekman, Margaret Brent, Elizabeth Ferguson, Zilpah Grant, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, Sarah Knight, Eliza Lucas Pinckney, Catherine Van Rensselaer Schuyler, Mercy Warren, and Meriam Wood of Dorchester whose epitaph notes that when she died "she scarcely left her mate," mate in this instance meaning peer (Long 1975, p. 104).

However, like Farmer James' wife showed in the *Letters*, these well-educated women of colonial America had been patriarchal women whose culture was extremely patriarchal. A Pennsylvanian governor's wife, Esther De Berdt Reed (1746-1780), wrote "The Sentiments of an American Woman" (1780), in which she informed: "... if opinion and manners did not forbid us to march to glory by the same paths as the Men, we should at least equal and sometimes surpass them in our love for the public good" (Reed in Sinopoli 1997, p. 109).

The governor's wife admitted that opinion and the manners which prevailed in her era

forbade the women of Pennsylvania to join the Continental Army, which discriminated against the gender role of women. The patriarchal culture of her era prohibited women to join the Continental Army and joined the men.

Paradisiac Existence of Pre-War Planters of the South

Farmer James' existence is analyzed herein in three states. First, an analysis of the American farmer's existence when he becomes a successful farmer in New York; second, an analysis of his existence among the black slaves of Charles Town; and third, an analysis of his existence amidst the war of the American Revolution.

The research begins with the first analysis of existence. In *Letter I*, it is stated that Farmer James comes from an English parentage:

My father left me a few musty books, which his father brought from England with him; but what help can I draw from a library consisting mostly of Scotch divinity, the Navigation of Sir Francis Drake, the History of Queen Elizabeth, and a few miscellaneous volumes? (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 37).

His father migrated to the US alone, being a bachelor, equipped with "all the arts, sciences and ingenuity which flourish in Europe" (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 61). He arrived on "a new continent... different from what he had hitherto seen... in Europe". In this new continent, James' father enjoys liberty: "no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion... no great manufacturers... no great refinements of luxury". He enjoys freedom from feudalism, colonial law, colonial government, religious authority, economic hegemony, and from oligarchical power of Europe. He is a free man; "free as he ought to be... In this great American asylum" (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 61-

63). The liberty he enjoys, however, has a consequence; he must strive hard, and face all dangers to survive in “the unknown bounds of North America” (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p.62). He must survive poverty and get through it so that he can “rank as citizens”. James’ father then plucks up all his courage to survive in this terra incognita and to live dangerously as an existential hero:

... the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to live dangerously! Build your cities under Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors, as long as you cannot be rulers and owners... Soon the age will be past when you could be satisfied to live like shy deer, hidden in the woods! (Nietzsche in Kaufmann, 2016, p. 130).

His struggle eventually paid off; James’ father becomes a successful farmer in New York. He married a woman and had children. James reminisced about his father’s victory: “He left me no good books it is true, he gave me no other education than the art of reading and writing; but he left me a good farm, and his experience; he left me free from debts, and no kind of difficulties to struggle with” (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 49). James inherited all his father’s riches, married an intelligent woman, had vast plantation land, had abundant livestock, and owned some loyal Negroes working for his plantation, just like other planters of the South. James becomes an existential hero:

My father left me three hundred and seventy-one acres of land, forty-seven of which are good timothy meadow; an excellent orchard; a good house; and a substantial barn. It is my duty to think how happy I am that he lived to build and to pay for all these improvements; what are the labours which I have to undergo,

what are my fatigues, when compared to his, who had everything to do, from the first tree he felled to the finishing of his house? Every year I kill from 1,500 to 2,000 weight of pork, 1,200 of beef, half a dozen of good wethers in harvest; of fowls my wife has always a great stock; what can I wish more? My Negroes are tolerably faithful and healthy; by a long series of industry and honest dealings, my father left behind him the name of a good man (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 49).

Despite abundant wealth, as a second-generation migrant, James still “have but to tread his paths to be happy and a good man like him.” Luckily, he is equipped with “freedom of action, freedom of thoughts” as a wealthy planter (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 49). He can easily make excursions to many places, like Nantucket Island, the Island of Martha’s Vineyard, Charles Town, etc. without thinking much about the money spent. Farmer James’ depiction of himself in the *Letters* as a wealthy planter of the South mirrors Crèvecoeur’s real life as a wealthy planter whose existence was fully free:

In 1765 he became a naturalized citizen of New York and in 1769 married Mehitable Tippet of Westchester. Three months after the wedding, he purchased 120 acres of uncleared land in Orange County... planted an orchard on the hillside behind his house... Crèvecoeur soon established himself in the society of freeholding farmers, mill owners, and local officials in the county and extended his acquaintance to include Cadwallader Colden, the distinguished scholar who served as lieutenant governor of the colony, and William Seton, a prosperous and well-read merchant in New York City (Philbrick 1976, p. 23).

Charleston Planters' Attitude to Their Slaves

However, his existential equilibrium is disturbed when he visited Charles Town. He found the inhumanity and barbarism of Charles Town's farmers in their treatment of their slaves; "*my mind is, and always has been, oppressed since I became a witness to it.*" (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 161). "Oppressed with the reflections which this shocking spectacle afforded me." (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 162). James eyewitnessed Charles Town farmers' brutality against their black slaves:

I was leisurely travelling along, attentively examining some peculiar plants which I had collected, when all at once I felt the air strongly agitated, though the day was perfectly calm and sultry. I immediately cast my eyes toward the cleared ground, from which I was but at a small distance, in order to see whether it was not occasioned by a sudden shower; when at that instant a sound resembling a deep rough voice, uttered, as I thought, a few inarticulate monosyllables. Alarmed and surprised, I precipitately looked all round, when I perceived at about six rods distance something resembling a cage, suspended to the limbs of a tree; all the branches of which appeared covered with large birds of prey, fluttering about, and anxiously endeavouring to perch on the cage. Actuated by an involuntary motion of my hands, more than by any design of my mind, I fired at them; they all flew to a short distance, with a most hideous noise: when, horrid to think and painful to repeat, I perceived a negro, suspended in the cage, and left there to expire! I shudder when I recollect that 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 feed on his mangled flesh and to drink his blood. I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror; my nerves were convoked; I trembled, I stood motionless, involuntarily contemplating the fate of this negro, in all its dismal latitude. The living spectre, though deprived of his eyes, could still distinctly hear, and in his uncouth dialect begged me to give him some water to allay his thirst. Humanity herself would have recoiled back with horror; she would have balanced whether to lessen such reliefless distress, or mercifully with one blow to end this dreadful scene of agonising torture! Had I had a ball in my gun, I certainly should have despatched him; but finding myself unable to perform so kind an office, I sought, though trembling, to relieve him as well as I could. A shell ready fixed to a pole, which had been used by some negroes, presented itself to me; filled it with water, and with trembling hands I guided it to the quivering lips of the wretched sufferer. Urged by the irresistible power of thirst, he endeavoured to meet it, as he instinctively guessed its approach by the noise it made in passing through the bars of the cage. "Tanke, you white man, tanke you, pute some poison and give me." "How long have you been hanging there?" I asked him. "Two days, and me no die; the birds, the birds; aaah me!" (Crèvecoeur, 1983, pp. 161-162).

Although James himself owns some black slaves working for his plantation, he never treats them as brutally as the planters of Charles Town. Here, the second analysis of James' existence must then be conducted.

James' sight of brutality makes him question human freedom: freedom owned by

the white planters who own the black slaves for their plantations, and freedom owned by the black slaves who are owned by the white planters. Do they have the same freedom? Is freedom a natural right of all humans, including the slaves? Must some humans not enjoy, by their wretched destiny, the natural right of freedom? These questions disturb his existential peace. Now James questions the humanity of existential heroes of Charles Town who seem to jeopardize intentionally the existence of their black slaves:

This great contrast has often afforded me subjects of the most afflicting meditations. On the one side, behold a people enjoying all that life affords most bewitching and pleasurable, without labour, without fatigue, hardly subjected to the trouble of wishing. With gold, dug from Peruvian mountains, they order vessels to the coasts of Guinea; by virtue of that gold, wars, murders, and devastations are committed in some harmless, peaceable African neighbourhood where dwelt innocent people who even knew not but that all men were black. The daughter torn from her weeping mother, the child from the wretched parents, the wife from the loving husband; whole families swept away and brought through storms and tempests to this rich metropolis! There, arranged like horses at a fair, they are branded like cattle and then driven to toil, to starve, and to languish for a few years on the different plantations of these citizens. And for whom must they work? For persons they know not, and who have no other power over them than that of violence, no other right than what this accursed metal has given them! Strange order of things! Oh, Nature, where art thou? Are not these blacks thy children as well as we? On the other side, nothing is to be seen but the most diffusive misery and wretchedness, unrelieved even in thought or wish! Day after day they drudge on without any prospect of ever reaping for themselves;

they are obliged to devote their lives, their limbs, their will, and every vital exertion to swell the wealth of masters who look not upon them with half the kindness and affection with which they consider their dogs and horses. Kindness and affection are not the portion of those who till the earth, who carry burthens, who convert the logs into useful boards. This reward, simple and natural as one would conceive it, would border on humanity; and planters must have none of it! (Crèvecoeur, 1983, pp. 152-153).

James further questions the existential authenticity of 'the American man' of the South whom he has glorified in his previous letters:

What, then, is man, this being who boasts so much of the excellence and dignity of his nature among that variety of unscrutable mysteries, of unsolvable problems, with which he is surrounded? The reason why man has been thus created is not the least astonishing! It is said, I know, that they are much happier here than in the West Indies because, land being cheaper upon this continent than in those islands, the fields allowed them to raise their subsistence from are in general more extensive. The only possible chance of any alleviation depends on the humour of the planters, who, bred in the midst of slaves, learn from the example of their parents to despise them and seldom conceive either from religion or philosophy any ideas that tend to make their fate less calamitous, except some strong native tenderness of heart, some rays of philanthropy, overcome the obduracy contracted by habit (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 155).

He protested Charles Town planters' brutal treatment of their slaves when the slaves struggle to regain their natural right of freedom:

They are neither soothed by the hopes that their slavery will ever terminate but with their lives or yet encouraged by the goodness of their food or the mildness of their treatment. The very hopes held out to mankind by religion, that consolatory system, so useful to the miserable, are never presented to them; neither moral nor physical means are made use of to soften their chains; they are left in their original and untutored state, that very state wherein the natural propensities of revenge and warm passions are so soon kindled. Cheered by no one single motive that can impel the will or excite their efforts, nothing but terrors and punishments are presented to them; death is denounced if they run away; horrid delaceration if they speak with their native freedom; perpetually awed by the terrible cracks of whips or by the fear of capital punishments, while even those punishments often fail of their purpose (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 156).

Using existentialist vocabulary, James' awareness of his being a rich farmer is called 'being-for-itself' (*être-pour-soi*). With his being-in-itself, James enjoys full freedom of action and freedom of thought—a natural rightfully enjoyed by rich planters of the South. However, when eyewitnessing the brutal treatment suffered by Charles Town's slaves, James begins to be aware of his 'being-for-others' (*être-pour-autrui*) (Gregory, 2012, p. 155-156). With his being-for-others, James voices lucidly his harsh protest against the inhuman treatment of Charles Town planters towards their slaves. He undertook a project for the slaves to make America a better place for the slaves to live. He wrote letters, and sent them to Mr. F.B. in England, hoping that Mr. F.B. would spread the letters and tell the world about the inhuman cruelty the slaves suffer. Like the existentialist Nicolas Berdyaev, James now has existential enlightenment that "human worth is liberation from slavery... from the

enslaving power of ... society, of the Kingdom of Caesar..." (Berdyaev, 1944, p. 27).

Charles Town (nowadays Charleston), is notorious for the export of slaves, especially of colored people; "... enslaved Indians were a major export out of Charleston, South Carolina, through 1715" (Newell in Vickers 2006, p. 185). It is "... one of the principal centers for black slavery ..." (Newell in Vickers 2006, p. 514). At first, Charleston planters allowed their slaves to market fruit, vegetables, eggs, poultry, and other plantation commodities in the 'black market' in their masters' names (Newell in Vickers 2006, p. 219). This gave the slaves some sense of freedom, especially when the slaves even '...gathered during hours when not working...' However, this slaves' freedom '...increased fears over how to regulate them...', so that the South Carolinian government instituted dress codes and curfews over the slaves, and "... the colonial militia was given the responsibility over local slave patrols ..." (Geiter & Speck 2002, p. 109). The slaves responded to the codes negatively and reacted to it with violence:

Tensions finally came to a head in 1739 when a group of slaves stole guns and ammunition from a store at the Stono River Bridge near Charleston. While making for Florida, they destroyed plantations and killed whites. Reprisals from the militia were brutal (Geiter & Speck 2002, p. 109).

If Farmer James' story is well-understood that the slave whom the planter saw on his trip to Charles Town was thus punished "... on account of his having killed the overseer of the plantation ...," the brutality which the Charleston masters did over their slaves is merely due to the slaves' killings which prevailed in the town in the historical period.

The Planters' Existential Crisis in the Revolution War

James' existential crisis finally worsens when New York, his hometown, was ravaged by the American War of Independence; "I am conscious that I was happy before this unfortunate Revolution. I feel that I am no longer so; therefore I regret the change." (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 184). His authentic existence is disturbed. His freedom of action and freedom of thought are denied before inhuman total submission demanded by his countrymen who are divided into two groups: the Patriots and the Loyalists:

As a citizen of a smaller society, I find that any kind of opposition to its now prevailing sentiments immediately begets hatred; how easily do men pass from loving to hating and cursing one another! I am a lover of peace; what must I do? I am divided between the respect I feel for the ancient connexion and the fear of innovations, with the consequence of which I am not well acquainted, as they are embraced by my own countrymen. I am conscious that I was happy before this unfortunate revolution. I feel that I am no longer so; therefore I regret the change. This is the only mode of reasoning adapted to persons in my situation. 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 (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 184).

James did not see that the war was the best solution for both political parties; he loves peace. He hates the war very much since it makes his family disbanded; his wife and children departed due to regrettable war:

... the howling of our dogs seems to announce the arrival of our enemy; we leap out of bed and run to arms; my poor wife, with panting bosom and silent tears, takes leave of me, as if we were to see each other no more; she snatches the youngest children from their beds, who, suddenly awakened, increase by their innocent questions the horror of the dreadful moment. She tries to hide them in the cellar, as if our cellar was inaccessible to the fire. I place all my servants at the windows and myself at the door, where I am determined to perish. Fear industriously increases every sound; we all listen... (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 183).

James now questions citizens' obedience to the revolutionary state vis-à-vis human individual freedom. Can humans escape from the political structure that violates their natural freedom? Can humans escape from external power that imposes forcedly everyone to wage war against each other? Is war existentially justified? Can a political aspiration have a right to kill humans who used to be our nearest neighbors? Can Politics deny Existence? These questions shutter his existential assurance.

The innocent class are always the victim of the few; they are in all countries and at all times the inferior agents, on which the popular phantom is erected; they clamour, and must toil, and bleed, and are always sure of meeting with oppression and rebuke. It is for the sake of the great leaders on both sides, that so much blood must be spilt; that of the people is counted as nothing (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 184).

In his "existential heaven", in New York, James was proud of his being an American: "What then is the American, this new man?... strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country," (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 64). while among Charles Town fellow planters, in his "existential Pandora's box", James questions his being of an inhuman, brutal

American: “What, then, is man, this being who boasts so much of the excellence and dignity of his nature among that variety of inscrutable mysteries, of unsolvable problems, with which he is surrounded?” In the Independence War of America, in his “existential hell”, James laments over his being an American with a divided self: “... what is the man when no longer connected with society; or when he finds himself surrounded by a convulsed and a half dissolved one?” (Crèvecoeur, 1983, p. 181).

The Southern planters of New York in the revolutionary period, as depicted in Crèvecoeur’s *Letters*, mourn the insecurity of their existence. The existentialist Nicolas Berdyaev expresses the woeful trait of a revolution:

The destined fate of revolution is that it inevitably leads to Terror and Terror is the loss of freedom, the loss of everybody’s freedom, the loss of freedom for all. At the outset revolution is pure and single-minded, it proclaims freedom, but as the development of its immanent forces goes on, in the power of the fateful dialectic which takes place in it, freedom disappears and the reign of Terror begins (Berdyaev, 1944, p. 195).

All which is described by the fictional Farmer James in the *Letters* happened to Crèvecoeur himself. Crèvecoeur had to ride out suspicions of his patriot neighbors and at the same he faced the threat of Indians who sided with Great Britain. To avoid taking sides, Crèvecoeur escaped to New York, leaving his vast plantation, wife, and children in his friends’ care. When in New York, Crèvecoeur was thrown into prison due to the British garrison’s suspicion of him. This made his health seriously impaired and he suffered from a nervous breakdown. In 1781, Crèvecoeur finally escaped safely to France. King Louis

XVI was impressed by his vast knowledge of America, so he appointed Crèvecoeur to be his official representative. In 1783, Crèvecoeur was sent by the French king to represent him in America. When Crèvecoeur arrived a second time in New York, he was extremely frustrated: “... his plantation had been burned to the ground in an Indian raid, his wife was dead, his children had disappeared” (Stone in Crèvecoeur, 1983, pp. 15-16).

The American Revolution also brought about the financial ruining of the planting class of the South. Eliza Lucas Pinckney, a successful indigo planter in Charleston, got a decimated plantation during the revolution:

When war broke out between the colonies and Great Britain in 1776, Eliza and her family sided with the Patriots. During the southern campaign of the war, British forces decimated Eliza’s plantations in South Carolina, leaving the family financially ruined (Carlisle, 2009, p. 82).

All in all, the grave reminiscence of the Revolution War leaves an irrecoverable wound in Crèvecoeur’s anguished soul. Through Farmer James’ words in the *Letters*, Crèvecoeur told his terrible experience during the American War of Revolution. Desperately, he finally left America, left his most beloved plantation, and died in France.

CONCLUSION

If the data included in the *Letters* were true, it can be concluded that women in two places—Nantucket and Pennsylvania—in the pre-revolution era (the late 17th century America) play important socio-economic roles in their society. However, they do not yet have awareness of their important status; they still consider themselves second sex. This is perpetuated by the general view widespread in society that women are men’s sexual objects.

The *Letters* also mirrors the existential condition of planters of the South before and during the Revolution War. Before the war, planters of the South have existential peace since they have full freedom of thought and freedom of action laboring in plantations inherited from the first generation of Southern wealthy farmers. However, this existential peace was broken when they eyewitness the inhumanity, brutality, and vulgar cruelty of planters of Charles Town suffered by the black slaves. The planters denied humanity and caged the natural freedom of the slaves. The existential crisis even worsens when the planters of New York, including James (and personally, Crèvecoeur himself as a real farmer) face and harshly experience the grave consequences of the Revolution War. They are devastated by their grief to witness their beloved country torn and divided.

REFERENCES

- Berdyaev, N. (1944). *Slavery and freedom*. Geoffrey Bles The Centenary Press.
- Carlisle, R. P. (2009). *Handbook to life in America: Volume 1, The Colonial and Revolutionary Era Beginnings to 1783*. Facts On File, Inc.
- De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. Vintage Books.
- De Crèvecoeur, J. H. St. J. (1983). *Letters from an American farmer* (A. E. Stone, Ed.). Penguin Books.
- Geiter, M. K. & Speck. W. A. (2002). *Colonial America from Jamestown to Yorktown*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gray, R. (2004). *A history of American literature*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Gregory, M. E. (2012). *Free will in Montaigne, Pascal, Diderot, Rousseau, Voltaire and Sartre*. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Kaufmann, W. (2016). *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Pickle Partners Publishing.
- Long, Huey B (1975). Women education in colonial America. *Adult Education*, XXV(2), 90-106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367502500202>.
- Macquarrie, J. (1973). *Existentialism*. Penguin Books, Ltd.
- Philbrick, T. (1976). Crèvecoeur as New Yorker. *Early American Literature*, 11(1), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199313501.003.0004>.
- Sinopoli, R. C. (1997). *From many, one: Readings in American political and social thought*. Georgetown University Press.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide, Second Edition*. Routledge.
- Vickers, D. (2006). *A companion to colonial America*. Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (2014). *A vindication of the rights of women*. HarperCollins.