

Literature review on tone

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



Introduction

Letters From an American Farmer by Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, written around 1782, is a series of 12 letters written by Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman who was naturalized as an American, who lived from December 31, 1735 – November 12, 1813. The letters were written before the American Revolutionary War as if to an interested European about the unique customs, enterprises, philosophies, and government style of the new American people who were subject to the rule of Britain across the ocean. His audience makes the tone and rhetoric of the piece very important.

The tone of Letters From an American Farmer is supposed to be informal because it is in the form of a letter written from a farmer to a European man interested in the customs and manners of Americans. The farmer begins with a tone of modesty as the farmer. He says, “ I wish I could be acquainted with the feelings and thoughts which must agitate the heart and present themselves to the mind of an enlightened Englishman” (22). However, anyone who has read the piece will realize that though Letters is informal, it has very few “ errors of language.” Crèvecoeur introduces this idea of modesty in his letter writer not to make excuses for his grammar and spelling problems, of which he has few, but to flatter his intended European audience. With cultural and educational superiority set as a frame for readers, they would be more willing to read the letters for the sake of novelty and information.

The middle part of the letters have a different tone, which is informal, serious,

pro-American and moralistic as the author discusses many of the virtues of parts of American life, especially in comparison to the lives that the émigrés had while they were in Europe or the issue of slavery. The farmer says about Americans that “ We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed; we are the most perfect society now existing in the world” (23-24). Though the modesty in the introductory letter was not intended to be false modesty, the tone of the middle part of the letters demonstrates that the author believes that America has the potential to be a far superior place than Europe because of the freedom and abundance of resources for every enterprising man who has a good work ethic.

When it comes to slavery, the author’s tone is one of distress and moral horror. “ 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,” Crèvecoeur says (27). Through this experience, he relates the darker side of America, showing some of the injustices that still exist.

Rhetoric

The tone of modesty is, in part, also a rhetorical device of comparison designed to interest and flatter the readers, which were primarily a European audience. He flatters his audience by referring to them as “ enlightened” (22). He gives credit to the European nations which had a hand in the founding of the colonies by saying, “ They brought along with them their national genius” and “ this is the work of my countrymen” (23). This rhetorical device, which flatters the European audience, allows the reader to take a more interest in the letters, because it is as if the letter were written

to the reader personally.

This device of comparison is used in other ways in the letters as well. For instance, Europe is compared negatively to America when it comes to the lifestyles of poor people. He says in letter three that in America, “ Everything has tended to regenerate them; new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system; here they are become men: in Europe they were as so many useless plants, wanting vegetative mold, and refreshing showers” (24). This and other similar examples throughout the letter are designed to show the superiority of the new small government style of America which allows Americans to have not only profits and success for themselves, but also good morals and freedom.

Additionally, the author uses many picturesque rhetorical devices to discuss the many virtues America offers. “ Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men,” he writes, with the metaphor of the melting pot (25). The author’s use of metaphor and visual imagery throughout is a rhetorical device that presents a vivid picture of early America, one that would spark the interest of his readers as Britain and the colonies descended into the Revolutionary War.

Finally, Crèvecoeur uses analogies, questions, and personal testimony as rhetorical devices to discuss the evils of slavery. “ Republics, kingdoms, monarchies, founded either on fraud or successful violence, increase by pursuing the steps of the same policy, until they are destroyed in their turn,” he writes (26). It would be easy for his readers to think of some examples of this type of doomed government, such as the Roman Empire, and to realize that the author is connecting slavery as this type of fraud and successful

violence. He questions, “ Where do you conceive then that nature intended us to be happy? Would you prefer the state of men in the woods, to that of men in a more improved situation?” (26). He then answers this by saying, “ Evil preponderates in both.” (26). The questions are designed to get the reader to think further about the situation of slavery he is presenting. His personal testimony, his experience of seeing a slave left to die in a cage, allows the reader to move from philosophical analysis to a more direct confrontation with what slavery means for humanity.

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