

No author mais *Seulement un Ecrivain*: J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur as Self-Translator

Michael Boyden

This article examines the connections between translation and authorship in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* and its French self-translation, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*. Drawing on Erving Goffman's theory of footing, the article argues that the relation between original and self-translation can be understood as a form of limited liability partnership.

Keywords: Self-translation, authorship, Crèvecoeur, Goffman, footing

Cet article examine les rapports entre la traduction et l'autorité auctoriale dans *Letters from an American Farmer* de Crèvecoeur et son auto-traduction française, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*. S'inspirant de la théorie de « position » (*footing*) proposée par Erving Goffman, l'article soutient que la relation entre un texte original et son auto-traduction peut être envisagée comme une forme d'association à responsabilité limitée.

Mots-clés : Auto-traduction, autorité auctoriale, Crèvecoeur, Goffman, position

In a letter addressed to Louis-Alexandre de la Rochefoucauld, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur noted: "I am no author, but a Plain Scribler [sic], who has, he hardly knows how, compiled Great Many Sheets."¹ When he made this remark, Crèvecoeur was at the high point of his literary fame, having just brought out a French version of his *Letters from an American Farmer*, which upon its first publication in London in 1782 had made him the talk of the town on both sides of the Atlantic. Not just the timing of the remark is puzzling; by capitalizing "Plain Scribler," Crèvecoeur seems to have turned it into a sobriquet that paradoxically proved both his sincerity as an author and the literary value of his "Great Many Sheets." In a variation of this apparently self-degrading statement, Crèvecoeur adds another dimension to it by switching from English to French between clauses: "I am no author mais Seulement un Ecrivain."² This mixed sentence again seems to underwrite Crèvecoeur's authority through negation: contrary to an "écrivain" (a writer), an "écrivain" is simply a letter writer with no outspoken literary aspirations, while an "Ecrivain" may be someone who turns his epistles

into a legitimate (public) form of authorship; but, most interestingly, the sentence also highlights how the question of authorship is intimately linked to language. Crèvecoeur's American farmer became a different sort of farmer in the metropolitan centers of London and Paris, which generated conflicting expectations about the author's identity and credibility.

This article examines the connections between language, translation and authorship in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* and its French self-translation, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*. The opening section begins by sketching the authorship debate in translation studies, which revolves around the opposition between creativity and responsibility. Drawing on Erving Goffman's theory of footing, I then argue that translation can be approached as a form of embedding of normal talk. In the second section, I focus on self-translation as a complex in-between form that raises special questions about authorship. Tabulating various discourse genres on the basis of the three production roles distinguished by Goffman, I suggest that self-translation comes close to a form of pseudo-authorship. The third section introduces the case of Crèvecoeur, which is addressed in terms of Goffman's concept of footing. The fourth section offers an extended comparative analysis of the first farmer's letter in the first English and the second French edition. The conclusion returns to the question of the translator's authorship, arguing that Crèvecoeur's self-translations can most productively be analyzed as pseudo-originals.

Translation and Authorship

In recent decades, the issue of authorship and translation has been subject to intense scholarly debate. Postmodern theorists have insisted on according authorship to the translator as a co-producer of meaning.³ On one level translations transform rather than merely reproduce texts. On another, insofar as all texts go back to other texts, meaning production is always to some degree translational. In a provocative contribution to the debate, Anthony Pym has recently argued that such claims to translational authorship are misguided insofar as they draw on a

limited conception of authorship as creative self-expression, which slights the important dimension of ethical responsibility. In response to this, Pym refers to Erving Goffman's analysis of authorship in oral narrative. Goffman makes a crucial distinction between the author as creator and the author as "principal," the person "whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say."⁴ Pym carefully unpacks these clauses, showing in each case how the role of the translator is different from that of the "principal."⁵ If translators were entirely like authors, Pym asks, then how could we account for such phenomena as pseudo-translation, through which responsibility over a text is deferred to another, nonexistent agent, or pseudo-originals, whereby a text is (mistakenly or deliberately) attributed to someone who appears not to be the principal? The existence of pseudo-translations proves that translators are not required to attest to the truth of what is said in the same way as authors do, since otherwise the temptation would never arise to deflect attention from the intellectual authorship of one's words by masking them as translations. In similar fashion, pseudo-originals highlight the limits of the translator's commitment to the words of which she is the co-producer.⁶ In different ways, therefore, pseudo-translation and pseudo-authorship confirm the structural differences between authorship and translation.

In Pym's optic, what he calls the "translation form" in Western culture is ultimately founded on the distinction between authorship and translation. Even though translators may be involved in creating meaning, their activity necessarily involves a first-person displacement, as a consequence of which they cannot be committed to the words to the same degree as is the case for authors.⁷ According to Pym, the role of the translator comes closest to what Goffman calls the "animator," i.e. "the talking machine, a body engaged in acoustic activity, or, if you will, an individual active in the role of utterance production."⁸ Pym makes this definition of the "animator" serviceable to translation scholars by paraphrasing it as follows: "a person who

says the words but might be doing so on behalf of someone else, perhaps by citing, using indirect reported speech, parodying, or indeed translating.”⁹ Although a translator may “animate” a text in various ways, she can only do so because it has already been “authorized” by someone else. Pym’s insistence on the ethical dimension of authorship is no doubt a relevant corrective to some of the more problematic assumptions underlying the recent “creative turn” in Translation Studies. At the same time, his polemical intent in relation to the authorship debate leads him to partly misrepresent Goffman’s concepts, which can be seen as a missed opportunity to arrive at a more fine-grained understanding of the translation form. It is symptomatic that Pym does not distinguish between the role of the “animator” and that of the person “who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded.”¹⁰ The latter production role is properly referred to by Goffman as the “author.”

Because of his insistence on the status of the translator as a “non-author,” Pym slightly alters Goffman’s terminology, linking the latter’s definition of the “principal” to that of the author as the source of an utterance. In doing so, Pym subsumes what Goffman understands by the “author” under the category of the “animator.” In Goffman’s framework, however, these roles are analytically non-coterminous. Pym is right in saying that the animator is someone who says things “on behalf of someone else.” But there are different ways of doing so. A person reciting a text, for instance, is doing something different than an interpreter, who translates the words into another language (usually her own). Of course, reciting may be a very creative, “animating” activity, which may involve parody and the like (as Mick Jagger famously said, alluding to the difference between composing and performing, “it’s the singer, not the song”). But it is clear that reciting or reading a text out loud is very different from interpreting it, and the difference lies mainly in the fact that the activity of interpreting involves putting things in one’s own words, even if one is doing so on someone else’s behalf and according to strict

rules of equivalence. Precisely this is what makes the interpreter an “author” in Goffman’s sense.

The translator’s authorship (in Goffman’s sense) has important consequences. For Theo Hermans, translation is a form of quoting involving a mixture of direct and indirect speech (both of which, according to Pym’s characterization of the animator, constitute animating rather than scripting activities). The translator does not merely mimic or re-enact the author’s words (as is the case in a verbatim report), but also frames it in a certain way (through commentaries, disclaimers in footnotes, introductions, etc.). Therefore, Hermans argues, the translator can or should be held accountable (as principal) for the “diegetic aspect” of her translation.¹¹ Pym does not deny the relevance of the translator’s diegetic activity, but from his point of view such interventions do not amount to translating. In such instances, the translator does not assume the discursive position of the “non-manifest I” but becomes an author, i.e. she becomes the source of the utterance. In Pym’s reasoning, the translator does assume important responsibilities, mainly towards the goal of ensuring intercultural cooperation, but ultimately she cannot be taken to account for the author’s viewpoints, just as a weather forecaster is not responsible for the weather but only for the accuracy of the forecast. Pym thus employs Goffman’s concepts as “convenient hooks” to reassert the structural distinction between authorship and translation in response to recent calls to relativize that distinction.¹²

My aim here is not so much to add another turn to the authorship debate as to explore how Goffman’s concepts can be operationalized more consistently to analyze how authorial power is allocated in and through translations. It is somewhat ironic that, by insisting on the categorial distinction between the author as a producer of meaning and the translator as a relay of someone else’s intentions, Pym forces Goffman’s production roles back into a dyadic model of communication, while they were initially formulated to break open a binary

understanding of interaction as a transfer of information between speaker and hearer. Goffman was mainly interested in what he called shifts in “footing,” or the ways in which we relate to each other in conversation. Often, this involves much more than a simple speaker-hearer format: “A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance.”¹³ To analyze such shifts in footing, Goffman decomposed the category of speaker into those of animator (who voices the words), author (who scripts the words) and principal (the source of the words), which together make up the “production format” of an utterance.¹⁴ Likewise, the category of hearer was replaced by what Goffman (somewhat confusingly) refers to as the “participation framework,” including official or ratified recipients (who may or may not be explicitly addressed) and unrated ones or “bystanders,” who are not official participants in a conversation but still take part in it, either deliberately (eavesdroppers) or inadvertently (overhearers).¹⁵

Communication thus involves multiple “changes of interactional gears,” whereby interactants are included in or excluded from interaction through subtle mechanisms such as by-, side-, and crossplay, innuendo and response cries.¹⁶ While Goffman’s theory of footing is not without its problems, I believe that some of his ideas can be made serviceable to translation research. Translation is traditionally conceived as a mediation between source and target, but the adequacy of these concepts is seldom questioned. Take, for instance, Ilan Stavans’s Spanglish translation of the first chapter of *Don Quixote*, which was primarily addressed at a readership of Latino’s who understand and appreciate this in-between language, but the larger aim of which may have been to prove to language purists, who would frown upon such a “corruption” of Cervantes’s masterpiece, that Spanglish constitutes a legitimate form of expression.¹⁷ In other words, the purists here are the indirect “target” of the translation, even though they are not the official recipient. Goffman’s framework thus encourages us to

appreciate the complex ways in which we align ourselves in interaction. The most fascinating part of his theory, in my opinion, is that it allows us to think about “how [...] we can convey words that are not our own.”¹⁸ According to Goffman, one important function of talk is that it creates the possibility of displacement in time and space by embedding utterances in other utterances.

As Goffman stresses, there is often more than one animator involved in an interaction: the one linked to the here-and-now of the utterance (the “addressing self”) and the one(s) embedded in it: the embedded animators or “figure(s),” i.e. the protagonist(s) belonging to the there-and-then of the narrated events.¹⁹ Addressing self and figure may of course refer to one and the same person (for instance, in an autobiographical account), but their communicative function is very different. As Goffman states, drawing on George Herbert Mead’s social behaviorism, “a ‘me’ that tries to incorporate its ‘I’ requires another ‘I’ to do so.”²⁰ That is why, for instance, we can communicate our speechlessness by saying that we are speechless. Goffman also indicates that we may embed not just utterances but whole interaction arrangements, a process he refers to as ritualization, as when people start whispering even though there is nobody around to overhear the conversation.²¹ The ubiquity of embedding mechanisms in discourse should perhaps make us wary of distinguishing all too sharply between production roles as a means of bracketing off authorship from translation. Although Goffman does not directly address translation issues, his insights on the self-dissociative and ritualized nature of the interaction order can illuminate our understanding of the translation form. Translation can then be conceptualized as an embedding mechanism, which involves a ritually enacted understanding that we are reading the author’s exact words, which paradoxically comes about through the (largely unspoken) differentiation between the “I” of the translator (the addressing self) and that of the author-figure.

Self-Translation as Pseudo-Authorship

What happens if the author and the translator of a text are one and the same person? Should we suppose that the author-translator assumes the same production roles while producing and translating her own work? On the one hand, most scholars agree that a self-translation is not entirely the same thing as a “normal” allographic translation. Self-translations appear to violate Pym’s maxim of translational quantity (the translation may not be longer than the original) and that of first-person displacement (the pronominal position of the translator is different from that of the author). On the other hand, a self-translation may equally be irreducible to a form of (re-)writing, as is well illustrated by the 1993 controversy over Nancy Huston’s receipt of the Governor General’s Award for Fiction in French for her novel *Cantique des plains*. The debate revolved around the question as to whether the book could be regarded as an “original” publication, or whether it was *merely* a “translation” of Huston’s English novel *Plainsong*.²² Nobody would have thought of withholding literary fame from the official 1850 version of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* after it was discovered that it was a reworking of an earlier, quite different version dating from 1805 (in itself based on a two-part epic poem completed in 1799). Likewise, it would be absurd to stop reading Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* in its 1908 New York edition, on the ground that it constitutes a revised version of the 1881 original.

It is precisely in response to such deep-seated valuation orderings that postmodern translation scholars have pleaded for increased recognition of the translator’s authorship.²³ But what kind of authorship is at stake here? Does being an author always mean taking (or being granted) responsibility over one’s words? Below, I have attempted to tabulate different kinds of meaning production in terms of Goffman’s tripartite model of production roles (I leave the coparticipants at the receiving end out of consideration for the moment). In doing so, I disregard some of the problems inherent in Goffman’s concepts.²⁴ The production formats

sketched here, moreover, should be approached as ideal-typical cases, since reality is often immeasurably more complex. My aim is simply to stake out some of the constraints involved in different kinds of meaning production in order to arrive at a better appreciation of the specificity of self-translation as a discourse genre.

	Animator	Author	Principal
<i>Normal talk</i>	+	+	+
<i>Ghostwritten speech</i>	+	-	+
<i>Direct reporting</i>	+	-	-
<i>Interpreting</i>	+	+	-
<i>Translation</i>	-	+	-
<i>Pseudo-translation</i>	-	+	(+)
<i>Pseudo-Authorship</i>	-	+	(-)
<i>(Re-)Writing</i>	-	+	+
<i>Author-with-Ghost</i>	-	-	+

Among the different production formats in the table, normal talk (face-to-face interaction, Goffman’s primary object of study) can be regarded as prototypical insofar as, here, the roles of animator, author and principal normally converge in one and the same person (although, as stated above, multiple animators, authors, and principals may be embedded in everyday conversation). Of the other genres listed, direct reporting (which includes recitals, acting and other kinds of performance) on the one hand, and authorship-with-ghost (for instance, encyclicals or military orders) can be approached as limit cases, which mirror each other in interesting ways. In the former instance, the speaker of the words is almost totally detached from them and consequently has complete freedom to “animate” them in any way desirable. In the latter, the opposite seems to hold true: the person responsible for what is said does not normally compose the message or physically utter it. This apparent absence of the principal is what may explain the wide, quasi-universal applicability of such utterances (as opposed to, for

instance, a ghostwritten political speech, which against all odds appears as a one man's view, because the principal also animates the words).

The other production formats in the table are to be situated somewhere between the two extremes of verbatim reporting and authorship-with-ghost. Thus, interpreting is closer to direct quoting but departs from it in that the speaker co-authors the words by translating them. There are of course many degrees of authorial involvement here. A consecutive interpreter has for instance more freedom to modulate and organize the message than a simultaneous one, and that freedom will grow in proportion with the temporal and physical distance from the principal (until the interpreter becomes a spokesperson of sorts).²⁵ With translation, one could argue that the involvement is different in kind rather than degree, since the translator does not animate the words the way an interpreter does. In this regard, a translator is not unlike a ghostwriter: both are "authors" of a text, but they are not, nor are they supposed to be, visible in any other way. This invisibility, so extensively lamented by postmodern translation scholars, may allow the translator to be more directly involved as a co-producer of the words, while the interpreter's physical presence sets strict limits to the range of options available to depart from the original. The production format of translations can be said to occupy a pivotal position between the upper and lower parts of the table. It is probably also the most precarious footing of all: How can one script the words, without actually saying them and without being asked to commit to them or to vouch for their truth value (as would be the case with an original text or utterance)?

This uncertain alignment of translations may explain the attraction of such in-between phenomena as pseudo-translation and pseudo-authorship. While it constitutes a complex genre hard to pin down, pseudo-translation is often used as a means to elide the responsibility attached to the role of principal by pretending to be *merely* translating (unless, of course, the idea is to mock the conventions of the genre and intentionally expose the fraud). In other

words, successful communication here depends on the degree to which the actual principal manages to delegate the question of the text's truth value to another agent or replace that question with that of faithfulness to a nonexistent original. Contrary to an actual translator, the pseudo-translator functions as the *de facto* principal of the words, but this connection remains hidden from the participation framework in which they are received (hence the brackets in the table). It is only retroactively, in another interaction context, that the supposed translation is uncovered as an original work (which, often in the same movement, ceases to be regarded as "original"). With pseudo-authorship, the opposite dynamic can be observed. Here, the words are openly attributed to an assumed principal, whose position is in a different constellation called into doubt. In some cases, the original turns out to have functioned as a mere "pretext" for another principal to obfuscate her commitment to the words by pretending to have acted as a translator not committed to the words.

Where does self-translation fit into the (somewhat rudimentary) scheme? As suggested above, although self-translations share properties with both translations and original utterances, they seem to be irreducible to either category. Contrary to a dominant position in the field which approaches self-translations as second originals, I claim that their production format is much closer to that of pseudo-originals. It is true that a self-translator has or takes more freedom to change the original than a common translator does. However, contrary to the latter, the self-translator remains bound by the expectation of consistency with the self projected in the source text. Although she may extensively rewrite the original, she is not in a position to explicitly contradict it, even though (or precisely because) in all other respects she has to take credit for it. To contradict oneself would be to disavow a binding allegiance. Such a break of allegiance is fully legitimate in the case of allographic translations (a point that deserves broader consideration from scholars poised towards greater recognition of the translator's authorship), where the translator may "freely" dissociate herself from the original through

various diegetic gestures. Such (self-)dissociative moments are equally common in the case of rewritings, which as it were graft a second principal onto the first (the incentive behind rewritings is after all to do things differently). Elie Wiesel's French self-translation of his Yiddish Holocaust memoir raised issues which no "common" translation or adaptation ever would.²⁶ The self-translator thus appears much less in control of *her own* words than is commonly supposed. Although there are significant differences between the two, the discourse genre of self-translation shows a number of similarities with that of pseudo-authorship, whereby the assumed principal on closer inspection dwindles away or gets replaced by another authority.

Crèvecoeur's *Letters-Lettres*

The issue of authorship in relation to so-called double texts and self-translations will probably always be fraught with contradictions. Things get even more complicated, once we turn our gaze to texts written before the category of literature in the modern sense was fully differentiated. It is to be regretted that the majority of studies on literary self-translation focus most attention on paradigmatic, twentieth and twenty-first century works.²⁷ Here, I want to confront the question of self-translation by way of J. Hector St. John (born Michel-Guillaume Jean) de Crèvecoeur, an eighteenth-century author and diplomat who wrote both in French and English. The little we know about the biographical person Crèvecoeur is that he was born in Normandy around 1735, that he went to study in England during the 1750s and then enlisted in the French army during the Seven Years' War (known in America as the French and Indian War, 1754-1763). We also know that, after deserting the army for an unspecified reason, Crèvecoeur eventually took up farming in the Hudson Valley, until the American Revolution compelled him to go back to Europe. Despite his loyalist sympathies, he was imprisoned for three months in New York by the British on the charge of treason, before being allowed to board a ship to London (where his *Letters from an American Farmer* were

first published). After the Treaty of Paris, however, he was back in America, this time as French consul of Louis XVI in New York. Somewhere in the 1790s he returned to France for good and settled down on land inherited from his father in Sarcelles near Paris, which is where he died in the year 1813.²⁸

Letters from an American Farmer, Crèvecoeur's best-known work, was brought out by the London publisher Thomas Davies in 1782. The author's name as it appeared on the title page was "J. Hector St. John." The book, which is literary in a broad sense, presents itself as a series of twelve (supposedly) autobiographical letters, written by "James," a Pennsylvania farmer, to an unspecified friend in England, describing the state of the middle colonies in America during the running-up phase of the Revolution. A new edition with some alterations and an index appeared in 1783, which many consecutive editions consider to be the most authoritative version, although it is very likely that Crèvecoeur was not directly involved in its production. As Chevignard argues, at the time when the revised English edition came out, Crèvecoeur was busy preparing the first French edition, which came out in 1784 under the title *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*.²⁹ Although it presents itself as a self-translation, the two-volume French edition contains fifty-five chapters that do not appear in the English edition. In 1787, a second French edition appeared in three volumes, considerably revising the first edition and adding seventeen further chapters to the mix. It is thus unclear to what extent the *Lettres* can be regarded as a "translation," although it should be taken into consideration that, while working on the French republication, Crèvecoeur in all probability took recourse to the original manuscript of his *Letters*, which is much more extensive than the twelve published letters that established his fame in Britain and the United States.

In Anglo-American criticism in particular, the French Crèvecoeur has long been regarded as derivative. Thus, in his introduction to a 1904 reprint of the first English edition, which responded to growing interest in the author after a century of relative neglect, Ludwig

Lewisohn stated plainly that “Crèvecoeur’s French writings are of no great importance.”³⁰ Probably drawing on a stray remark in the author’s correspondence, Lewisohn claimed that Crèvecoeur had “unlearned his native speech” after many years of residence in America and therefore his French translation of the *Letters* “lose considerably in translation.”³¹ The other chapters, Lewisohn thought, yielded only one passage that was really interesting (a description of eighteenth-century New York). Not all critics are as outspoken as Lewisohn in rejecting the *Lettres*, but they have been quite unanimous in their neglect of them. This skewed critical reception stands in sharp contrast to the position taken by the author himself, who does not seem to have shown much interest in his *Letters* after his return to France in the early 1780s. This is apparent not only from his hands-off approach to the 1783 edition, but also from the fact that a projected sequel (announced in the first edition) never materialized. The most compelling argument, however, is a remarkable shift in Crèvecoeur’s self-presentation, or what Goffman would call the text’s footing. In the English editions, Crèvecoeur made use of the persona of “farmer James” to voice his ideas about the Revolution. In the French edition, by contrast, this prop falls away and the author openly identifies with the narrator of the letters, who is referred to as “St. John.” The eleventh letter is the only in the English version that is not signed by James. Instead, the author is identified as “IW-N AL-Z,” a (fictitious) Russian gentleman who (apparently with a letter of introduction from James) visits a famous Quaker botanist named John Bertram (a character inspired by the historical figure John Bartram). In the *Lettres*, Iwan (as he is called by Bertram) becomes “Ivan AI-Z,” and his letter is addressed to “un de ses Amis en Europe.” Here, St. John is explicitly cast in the role of “translator” of the letter, which is thus at the same time a self-translation and a pseudo-translation.

Transposing this into Goffman’s terminology, this would mean that, whereas in the *Letters* Crèvecoeur so to speak hides behind his “animator” James, in the *Lettres* he takes full

responsibility as the text's principal. As Chevignard puts it, the French version imperceptively mixes the "passé fictif" of James with the "passé 'réel'" of St. John de Crèvecoeur (the brackets in Chevignard's quote, however, should already make us wary about hasty generalizations pertaining to the "real" Crèvecoeur).³² This shift in footing equally results in changes at the receiving end. The fact that the English *Letters* are dedicated to abbé Raynal, while the dedicatee of the French *Lettres* is Marquis de Lafayette, reveals different, possibly conflicting participation frameworks for Crèvecoeur's work. A dedicatee can be approached as a "bystander" in Goffman's sense, someone who is not part of the ratified interaction but whose presence has a strong impact on it. In this case, the dedicatee's function is clearly to sanction the words through the authoritative position accorded to him in society. The change in the dedication can be accounted for in two ways. First, by the time Crèvecoeur started working on the French translation, Raynal had become *persona non grata* in France, which thus cancelled his consecrating function in the new reception context. Second, the Crèvecoeur who emerges from the English *Letters* was highly ambivalent about the American Revolution and openly expressed his unease about the violent conflict between the colonies and the mother country. Back in Paris, however, Crèvecoeur's changed social position impelled him to adopt a pro-revolutionary stance, which explains the choice for Lafayette, the famous French war hero who fought with Washington against the British, as the dedicatee for the *Lettres*.³³

In what follows, I will address the changes in footing in the two language versions of Crèvecoeur's text in somewhat more detail by zooming in on the first letter of the first English edition and comparing it with its translation (if that is what it is) in the second French edition (which can be regarded as the most definitive version of the *Lettres*). My choice for the first letter is motivated by the fact that it dramatizes some of the salient differences between the two language versions. The introductory letter, moreover, is the one which

students of literature tend to be most familiar with, as it has been frequently anthologized (usually alongside the famous third letter, “What Is an American”). It commands particular interest here because it lays out some of the justifications for initiating and sustaining the epistolary exchange. The epistolary genre itself is a highly ritualized literary form, which involves the transplantation of a dialogic and private interaction arrangement into a context that is monologic and public (the *Letters from an American Farmer* only includes James’s letters, not the responses of his English friend). As I will show, this ritualization of the letter format is explicitly staged in the first letter. Through my analysis of a single letter, I do not pretend to offer many new insights to Crèvecoeur scholarship. However, my concern is primarily with the intricacies of the dynamic relationship between authorship, identity and self-translation, as it manifests itself in Crèvecoeur’s interesting double text.

Correspondence as Conversation

Above we mentioned that the embedding function of talk constitutes an important component of Goffman’s theory of footing. For instance, in a replay or retelling of past events, the “addressing self” embeds the utterances of characters (or figures) into his own. The recipients of the narrative are then cast in the role of story listeners, and are not supposed to intervene for as long as the story lasts. However, storytelling may also involve subtle changes in footing, whereby the teller of the tale at crucial moments breaks through the narrative frame to address the listeners directly, for instance to reassure them or to recapitulate something mentioned in the story.³⁴ In the case of Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*, such out-of-frame interventions are quite frequent, particularly at the beginning and end of the letters. To give an obvious example, chapter ten of the *Letters*, which deals with kinds of snakes in the colonies, opens with the following exclamation from James: “Why would you prescribe this task?”³⁵ The out-of-frame remark here announces a shift in the mood of the letters, which become more brooding as the revolution approaches. The assigned topic of the

snakes threatens to shatter James's utopian vision of the middle colonies as a modern garden of Eden and consequently also the fragile bond with his friend in England. But let us now look at how this bond is established in the first place.

Crèvecoeur's introductory letter of the first English edition famously opens with a series of rhetorical genuflections, elaborate expressions of humility and (supposed) inadequacy, which *a contrario* serve to underscore the legitimacy of the exchange. In the *Letters*, James reveals himself as a person with "a very limited power of mind," who does not possess the "variety of talents" needed to sustain a correspondence with an enlightened European.³⁶ Unlike his correspondent, who during a five-week visit had "instructed" him on "our famed mother-country" as well as several European countries *and* American colonies, James has never traveled far outside of Pennsylvania. He has not received much of an education, and what he has learned comes from "a few musty books" which his grandfather had brought with him to America. Even at this stage, it is clear that James is not only very different from his correspondent, who is later on identified by the initials F.B., but also from Crèvecoeur himself, who was both well-educated and well-traveled, and thus in no way resembled the "simple farmer" of the *Letters*. Unlike James, a third-generation immigrant whose grandfather had followed William Penn to America, Crèvecoeur was not a "native" American and moreover lived in New York rather than Pennsylvania. Crèvecoeur's decision to situate his farmer in Pennsylvania may have had to do with the idea, expressed in contemporary literature, that this colony constituted something of a modern-day utopia, which stood apart from both the North and the South.

After the *incipit* we witness a discussion between James, his wife and a neighbor, the local minister, about F.B.'s request to start an exchange of letters, in which James responds to his questions about local conditions in the middle colonies. While James's wife tries to dissuade him from accepting this invitation on the ground that it would be presumptuous to "send

epistles to a great European man,” the minister manages to convince the hesitant farmer by pointing out that what F.B. expects from him is nothing more than “talking on paper”: “Suppose the questions he will put to you in his future letters to be asked by him *viva voce*, as we used to call it at the college; then let your answers be conceived and expressed exactly in the same language as if he was present.”³⁷ This passage evokes a number of oppositions, such as that between an old but overcivilized Europe and a primitive but pure America, by which Crèvecoeur inscribes his work in the public debates of the time. The minister represents the voice of learning (he has studied at Yale), but at the same time his intervention underscores the value of the imagination and experience vis-à-vis learned knowledge. The fact that James got his education from “a few musty books” is thus turned into advantage, as he can observe the emergent American society in a fresh and unencumbered way, contrary to the enlightened Englishman whose gaze is directed at the “musty ruins” of old civilizations.³⁸ With his minister’s moral support, James finally accepts the epistolary engagement on the realization that letter writing is merely “conversation put down in black and white.”³⁹

It is significant that for James the agreement is conditional on the promise that the letters will be submitted to the “joint opinions” of his both wife and the minister before they will be sent to England.⁴⁰ A lot of critical attention has been devoted to the wife’s countervoice in the *Letters*. For Chevignard, the wife’s worries about her husband becoming a “scribbling farmer” and its consequences for their household economy prefigure the fiscal controversies of the prerevolutionary period, which would also upset the long-held critical conviction that the early letters were composed *in tempore non suspecto*.⁴¹ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook argues that the wife’s doubts “articulate, in displaced and domesticated disguise, Crèvecoeur’s own fears about how public authorial status can be established in the context of a literary and political culture in the throes of ‘convulsion.’”⁴² Here, my interest is directed not at the historical dynamics of eighteenth century literary culture as such, but rather the textual

mechanisms by which authorial power is allocated. The conversation between James, his wife and the minister constitutes an embedded, parenthetical narrative, which allows the “addressing self” (i.e. James, Crèvecoeur’s first-degree animator) to spread responsibility over the contents of the letters. Another mechanism is that of ritualization. I already mentioned that the epistolary genre as a literary form constitutes a ritualized participation arrangement. In its turn, the minister’s definition of correspondence in terms of conversation entails a ritualization of a conversational mode of address through the letter form.

Such multiple shifts in footing serve to articulate as well as obfuscate Crèvecoeur’s status as principal of the *Letters*. By framing his work as a series of letters from a simple American farmer and by delegating authorial responsibility to various (fictitious) animators and participants, Crèvecoeur anticipated criticism of his work at a time when sedition could result in serious problems. How were these positionings and laminations transferred to the French reception context? I already mentioned that, in the French self-translation, Crèvecoeur substituted Lafayette for Raynal as the dedicatee of the letters. Another striking difference is that the French version opens with two letters of introduction (as well as an extract from a review) by Louis de Lacretelle, editor of the *Mercure de France* who was involved in promoting Crèvecoeur’s work in French intellectual circles. The most important change, perhaps, is that the title page of the *Lettres* no longer refers to the addressee as F.B. but rather as “W^m S... on” (later explicitly identified as William Seton). While F.B. may have been simply another alias of Crèvecoeur himself, which served to underscore his double French-British identity, William Seton was an actual friend of Crèvecoeur’s who had stood by him during his captivity in New York. But here too, it is possible that Crèvecoeur was pulling the wool over the reader’s eyes, since the first letter is addressed to “Williams. S...” rather than William S. However this may be, the play with acronyms is indicative of a change in footing on the part of Crèvecoeur, who now signs the *Lettres* with his American name, “St. John.”

Turning to the first letter itself, we can observe two major displacements in the self-translation. First, while in the *Letters* the wife's reservations served to offset James's enthusiasm about the transatlantic correspondence, these contrapuntal interjections are significantly erased from the French *Lettres*. As suggested above, an important function of the wife's objections was to absolve James of the charge of self-interest or vanity. When she finally resigns herself to her husband's decision to take up the gauntlet, she expresses the hope that the exchange will remain "a profound secret among us" (16). Strictly speaking, of course, this utterance makes no sense at all, since the *Letters* were designed to be published. Crèvecoeur uses the demand of privacy as a rhetorical ploy, a trope of truthfulness (whereby the reader is cast in the role of bystander). This trope falls away in the French version, where the wife does not take part in the embedded debate, and it is left up to James himself to imagine his wife's reaction: "que dira ma femme quand elle me verra ainsi occupé; elle s'imaginera que la tête m'a tourné?"⁴³ These words do not have the same force as those uttered by the wife herself, who as a representative of the American household economy can freely chafe the "strange people" in England who make a living by "sending epistles to and fro."⁴⁴ By the time when Crèvecoeur was composing the French version, the revolutionary war was over and the now famous author had found a place for himself among the ranks of the "strange people" in the Parisian salons.

A second important displacement in the *Lettres* concerns the role of the minister, also referred to as "voisin Robert." As in the English version, the minister provides encouragement for the epistolary exchange by stating that letters "ne font que des images de la conversation."⁴⁵ But in the *Lettres*, in which the minister is oddly enough not an alumnus of Yale but of the college of "Prince-Town," he goes further, promising that he will attempt to appease St. John's diffident neighbors who might suspect that he is corresponding with the "Gouverneur du Roi, ou avec quelques gens du pays d'Angleterre."⁴⁶ Hereupon, James suggests that the minister

become his co-author, which the latter readily accepts: “je vous aiderai avec plaisir, puisque vous l’exigez.” This promise on the part of his neighbor, “homme sage & éclairé,” is what finally warms St. John to the challenge: “j’accepte l’invitation de l’ami W.S. & dès aujourd’hui je vous prends pour mon associé.”⁴⁷ In this way, quite remarkably, the minister’s position is upgraded from that of simple participant in the embedded narrative to that of a second addressing self, although the extent of his involvement is nowhere specified and will remain unclear throughout. On the one hand, the introduction of the “associé” may be an implicit acknowledgement of the help which Crèvecoeur received from the circle around Mme d’Houdetot, which according to Rice explains “le caractère trop élégant” of the French translation.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the formula of the associate can be read as a response to the persistent critique to the first English edition, notably by Samuel Aiscough, that the book was a fraud, since its author would have been, not an American-born farmer, but a “petty philosopher of France.”⁴⁹

Conclusion

What can we infer from this admittedly brief comparison about the issue of authorship and translation? In terms of the production format, the most important change in footing seems to be that, in the *Lettres*, Crèvecoeur no longer hides behind the persona of James but rather openly assumes responsibility over his work by signing the letters with the name by which he was naturalized in America, “St. John.” On the one hand, his 1781 return to France may have allowed him to speak his mind more freely on the subject of the American colonies without running the risk of being charged with sedition. On the other hand, having assumed the position of first French consul to New York after the Revolution, Crèvecoeur must have been anxious to stress his privileged relation to the new Republic. The French self-translation thus allowed him to refashion himself as the true “cultivateur américain,” while at the same time somewhat modulating his former views on American Independence. This is not to say that

“St. John” is any less fictitious than “farmer James.” In Goffman’s terminology, we can observe the addressing self (the main animator) moving towards the work’s principal, but not necessarily towards the author, the producer of the words. We can only guess to what extent editors in London and Paris (Crèvecoeur’s acknowledged and unacknowledged “associés”) were involved in the various editions. But it is clear that, when translating the English *Letters*, Crèvecoeur was as much conforming his own life story to that of the American farmer – who remains a Pennsylvania farmer – as the other way around.

As regards the participation framework of the letters, the renaming of the addressee as W.S. can be interpreted as an authenticating gesture, since William Seton was a personal acquaintance of Crèvecoeur’s. The most interesting things, however, are those taking place *around* the private correspondence, in the conditional sphere of non-participants present in the exchange of letters as intended or unintended bystanders. How can we account for the fact that, in the French *Lettres*, St. John has no skeptical wife looking over his shoulder? By the time the first French edition came out, Crèvecoeur had assumed his diplomatic post in New York, where he learned about his wife’s death. It is a matter of speculation as to whether this trauma may have impelled him to remove her (or rather the persona of farmer James’s wife) from the first letter. However that may be, it seems that in the French reception context after the revolutionary war, such a countervoice was deemed unnecessary or even inappropriate. On the other hand, the circle of bystanders around the addressee has widened significantly. The English *Letters* had been intended primarily for a “good and enlightened Englishman,” and by extension for “English travellers” curious about the emergent civilization on the other side of the Atlantic.⁵⁰ In the French *Lettres*, by contrast, St. John expresses the concern that W.S. might show the letters to his friends, “ces Européens accoutumés à ne voir que des Ouvrages académiques, à ne voir que des arbres bien taillés.”⁵¹ America, at the time, may not have had famous scholars or well-trimmed gardens, but this, as his co-author “voisin Robert”

argues, was precisely what made it attractive to “les curieux de l’Europe.”⁵² This broadened scope is indicative of some of the subtle realignments in the self-translation, which allowed Crèvecoeur to reanchor his public image (as the “Ecrivain” of a supposedly secret correspondence) that was instrumental in shaping European conceptions of America at a crucial juncture in transatlantic relations.

It is tempting to interpret the complex realignments in the French self-translation of Crèvecoeur’s famous *Letters from an American Farmer* as an argument in favor of the commonly held view that the self-translator is vested with special “authorial” powers. After all, Crèvecoeur’s far-reaching changes, not just to the contents of the original letters, but also to the ways in which they are framed and presented to the reader, would be considered inappropriate in any regular, allographic translation. However, this perspective suffers from a lack of historical contextualization. It has been extensively attested that eighteenth-century France did not just require its trees to be well-trimmed, but also its translations.⁵³ Crèvecoeur took great liberties in translating his *Letters from an American Farmer*, not out of a purely individual desire for self-expression but to conform to the self-image assigned to him by French society at the time of Louis XVI’s reign. Of course Crèvecoeur skillfully manipulated that self-image, but he did so in accordance with the norms of the host culture. Significantly, Crèvecoeur for a while entertained the idea of retranslating the first French edition of his farmer’s letters into English when French censorship laws stalled the publication of the manuscript.⁵⁴ The conditions of eighteenth-century publishing definitely help to explain the layering and embedding effects present in Crèvecoeur’s epistolary fiction, although they often remain difficult to gauge from the vantage point of a society where freedom of expression is, if not always respected, then at least accepted as a common good. From this perspective, Crèvecoeur’s French self-translations can best be approached as pseudo-originals, not in the sense of a misallocation of authorial identity but rather of a highly weakened principal, who

paradoxically has to rely on affiliated principals (the author's all too present associates) to assert that the words on the page are merely those of a "plain scribbler."

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Notes

¹ Chevignard, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur* (Thèse de 3e cycle. Bordeaux III, 1989), Vol. 1, p. 3-4.

² Chevignard, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur*, Vol. 1, p. 4.

³ The most vocal defender of the translator's authorship is Lawrence Venuti. See Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (2nd ed. London/New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁴ Anthony Pym, "The Translator as Non-Author, and I Am Sorry About That," in *The Translator as Author: Perspectives on Literary Translation*, eds. Buffagni, Claudia, Beatrice Garzelli and Serenella Zanotti (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), p. 32; Ervin Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 144.

⁵ Pym further links what he defines as Goffman's three conditions of authorship (positioning, beliefs, commitment) to Jürgen Habermas's formal pragmatics, and in particular his three validity claims which every speech act raises: truth, normative rightness and truthfulness. As Pym acknowledges, the connection between the two triads is somewhat uncertain, and therefore I leave Habermas's pragmatics out of the discussion here. Moreover, contrary to what Pym's article seems to suggest, formal pragmatics does not claim that the three validity dimensions are equally present in all communicative utterances. In the case of jokes or anecdotes, for instance, the speaker may be less committed to what is said than to the way things are told. For a discussion, see Maeve Cooke, *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT, 1994), p. 86. We could approach translations as speech acts of this type.

⁶ Pym gives the example of Günter Deckert, a German neo-Nazi who was put on trial for translating a speech delivered in English by the American Fred Leuchter minimizing the impact of the Holocaust. Since the so-called *Auschwitzlüge* is a crime in Germany, Deckert used his translation to voice opinions which he could not utter directly. He did not do this by writing an original text and presenting it as a translation, but rather by selecting and translating an actual text (Deckert invited Leuchter to Germany to deliver his lecture) that confirmed his own beliefs (the trick did not work). As Pym argues in more detail elsewhere, Deckert was hiding behind his status as translator "pour prononcer les mots qu'il ne faut pas et précisément là où il ne faut pas." See Anthony Pym, *Pour une éthique du traducteur* (Artois Presses Université/Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1997), p. 45.

⁷ For a more thorough discussion of the "translator form," see Anthony Pym, "Propositions on Cross-Cultural Communication and Translation," *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies* 16, no. 1 (2004): pp. 1-28.

⁸ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, p. 144.

⁹ Pym, "The Translator as Non-Author," p. 32.

¹⁰ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, p. 144.

¹¹ Hermans, Theo, *The Conference of the Tongues* (Manchester/Kinderhook, NY: St. Jerome), p. 85.

¹² Pym, p. 32.

¹³ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, p. 128.

¹⁴ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 144-146.

¹⁵ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 131 a.f. In my view, Goffman's participant roles are irreducible to the traditional categories of "narrator" and "narratee" introduced by classical narratology, which does not differentiate between ratified and non-ratified participants. For an interesting application of Goffman to narratology, I refer to David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln/London: Nebraska University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ The phrase "changes in interactional gears" is taken from Greg Smith, *Erving Goffman* p. 64.

¹⁷ The translation, first published in 2002 in the newspaper *La Vanguardia*, is included in Stavans's *Spanglish* (New York: Harper Collins Rayo, 2003).

¹⁸ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, p. 150.

¹⁹ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 146-152.

²⁰ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 148.

²¹ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 153-155.

²² Hermans discusses the case of Huston as one where "authentication has reached [...] its most diluted form." *The Conference of the Tongues*, p. 24.

²³ Susan Bassnett, for instance, regards self-translation (and translation in general) as a form of re-writing pure and simple. See Susan Bassnett, "Rejoinder," in Special issue *Orbis Litterarum* on Literary Self-translation, eds. Michael Boyden and Liesbeth De Bleeker,, forthcoming. Christopher Whyte holds the opposite view, namely that of the self-translator as a translator with no privileged relation to the source text. See Christopher Whyte, "Against Self-Translation," *Translation and Literature* 11, no.1 (2002), pp. 64-71.

²⁴ Stephen Levinson distinguishes more production and reception roles than Goffman, and thus arrives at a more sophisticated taxonomy. See Stephen Levinson, "Putting Linguistics on a Proper Footing: Explorations in Goffman's Concepts of Participation," in *Goffman: Exploring the Interaction Order*, ed. Paul Drew (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 161-227. Although Levinson discusses simultaneous translation, he does not belabor the point. For the present purpose, I stick to Goffman's taxonomy, which possesses the virtue of simplicity.

²⁵ However, things are different again for a liaison interpreter, who asserts his or her presence by means of such insertions (or what linguists would call hedges) as: "The interpreter wishes to add that..." Here, the interpreter clearly takes on the role of both author and principal. I wish to thank Dimitra Krystallidou for pointing this out to me.

²⁶ For a discussion of Wiesel's memoir, see Susan Suleiman, "Problems of Memory and Factuality in Holocaust Memoirs: Wilkomirski/Wiesel," *Poetics Today* 21.3 (2000), pp. 543-559.

²⁷ Notable exceptions are Leonard Forster, *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson, *The Bilingual Text: History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation* (Manchester, UK/Kinderhook, NY: St. Jerome, 2007).

²⁸ For more detailed biographical information, I refer to Howard Rice, *Le Cultivateur Américain. Etude sur L'oeuvre de Saint John de Crèvecoeur* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1933); Gay Wilson Allen and Roger Asselineau, *St. John De Crèvecoeur: The Life of an American Farmer* (New York: Viking, 1987); and Bernard Chevignard, *Michel Saint-John de Crèvecoeur* (Paris: Belin, 2004).

²⁹ Chevignard, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur*, Vol. 1, p. 63.

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- ³⁰ Ludwig Lewisohn, "Introduction," J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904), p. xxiv.
- ³¹ Lewisohn, "Introduction," p. xxiv.
- ³² Chevignard, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur*, Vol. 1, p. 66.
- ³³ Chevignard, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur*, Vol. 3, p. 8. The peritextual framing of Crèvecoeur's work is discussed in more detail in Boyden and Jooker, "A Privileged Voice? J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's 'Story of Andrew, the Hebridean' in French and Dutch Translation," eds. Michael Boyden and Liesbeth De Bleeker, Special issue *Orbis Litterarum* on Literary Self-translation, forthcoming.
- ³⁴ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, p. 152.
- ³⁵ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (London: T. Davies, 1782), p. 246.
- ³⁶ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 2.
- ³⁷ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 2, 5.
- ³⁸ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 8.
- ³⁹ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 11.
- ⁴⁰ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 13.
- ⁴¹ Chevignard, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur*, Vol. 1, p. 8.
- ⁴² Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 157.
- ⁴³ Crèvecoeur, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain* (Paris: Cuchet, 1787), Vol. 1, p. 8.
- ⁴⁴ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 18.
- ⁴⁵ Crèvecoeur, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, Vol. 1, p. 3.
- ⁴⁶ Crèvecoeur, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, Vol. 1, p. 8.
- ⁴⁷ Crèvecoeur, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, Vol. 1, p. 3, 13.
- ⁴⁸ Rice, *Le Cultivateur Américain*, p. 80.
- ⁴⁹ Samuel Ayscough, *Remarks on the Letters from an American Farmer* (London: John Fielding, 1783), p. 10.
- ⁵⁰ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 9.
- ⁵¹ Crèvecoeur, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, Vol. 1, p. 5.
- ⁵² Crèvecoeur, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, Vol. 1, p. 10.
- ⁵³ For a discussion, see for instance Johan Heilbron, "Towards a Sociology of Translation. Book Translations as a Cultural World-System," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2.4 (1999), pp. 429-444.
- ⁵⁴ See Rice, *Le Cultivateur Américain*, p. 86-7.