36.9: Who You Calling a Plant?

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* goes through the process of explaining why the American Identity is so pleasing as well as outlining the negative output of the created identity. The first part of this text is mainly contrasting the differences between the new and old worlds and showing through cultural examples why American identity is a wonderful thing. One of the major concepts I see being repeated is this idea of new and plentiful. This idea of the American “new” is a start over and a separation from the frustrating hierarchy that plagues European governments. In America, it is new and mostly populated by the poor of other countries which makes sense because America is a start over where one can become more than just poor. They also bring up the point of, “A country that had no bread for him, whose fields procured him no harvest, who met with nothing but the frowns of the rich, the severity of the laws, with laws and punishments; who owned not a single foot of the extensive surface of this planet?” (19). This ties into the other major concept of plentiful. Since America is new that means the resources are up for the taking and there is so much that everyone can have a piece. The idea of being able to own land in itself must have drawn so many people. These ideas interconnect with each other explaining how one can become more than they already are through work is a major concept the author seems to be trying to get across.

Going along with this positive look on American identity, Farmer James compares men to plants a couple times. He uses this comparison to explain environment possibility of pleasure. He says that “[m]en are like plants; the goodness and flavor of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow” (21). A government sets up a people for their potential. If there are limits set in place then most people will never be able to get past those systematic barriers. But what he is saying is that, with America, those do not exist because of what kind of people populate the new country. He compares this to plants because they can only do as good as the soil they are on to show how an environment is what makes or breaks a person.

While reading through the rest of the texts he continues to explain the differences between people from the types of geography American encompasses. This is when he gives examples to show the dark side of American identity. One of
the first negatives he talks about is the people who live on the frontier (west of the Mississippi River): “there, remote from the power of example and check of shame, many families exhibit the most hideous parts of our society” (22). This quote shows how the author wants to highlight the importance of society and how without these social structures, life only lead to chaos. People on the frontier, away from society, will be consumed by their environment of absolute wilderness. I believe this is to be an example of the importance of the governmental environment. Overall the texts seem to be saying the environment that is the American Identity is one comparably more positive than any European identity or one that is absent of society.