READING READERS' MINDS:  
AN AUSTRALIAN EDITION OF PAUL ET VIRGINIE  
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Recent scholarly interest in historical reading practices has highlighted the difficulties in determining such practices, be it through a dearth of primary material, or through the problems associated with interpreting data. Questions arise as to how much information about the reading of a text we can derive from the way it was marketed, for example, or what general conclusions we can reach from the comments of a diarist who was unusual enough to note her or his reading habits in the first place. In this article I will make a case study of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's phenomenal bestseller Paul et Virginie (1788), demonstrating another way in which we might determine (or at least conjecture) how a work may have been popularly read. The opportunity to do so arises from Paul et Virginie's remarkable trajectory from the top of the charts, as it were, both in terms of popular appeal and critical acclaim — a position it sustained for over a century — to critical disdain and popular oblivion. The particular reading of the text that I will outline below accounts for these extremes; moreover, I argue that this reading is itself 'materialised' in the form of bowdlerised editions of the work. I believe such editions not only literally affected Saint-Pierre's work with rewordings and elisions, but continued (and still continue) to effect the dominance of a peculiar reading of the original text as it stands, ultimately contributing in no small way to its demise. I will approach this issue by focusing on the only Australian edition of the work, which is one such variant version of Saint-Pierre's text.

This was a version of the work 'edited for use in School' by E.J. (Emil Julius) Trechmann and published in Sydney by McCredie and Philip in 1893. Paul et Virginie's linguistic simplicity, and popularity, made it ideal for the teaching of French, creating a market opportunity which was taken up early by publishers and proved an enduring one. Bibliophile Paul Toinet notes a parallel text edition from as early as 1796, published in Boston. A similar work, published in 1820, was sold as 'A new method of studying the French language without a master.' An

2. Paul Toinet, Paul et Virginie, répertoire bibliographique et iconographique (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1963), no.312, p.73. On editions for learning French, see also Philip Robinson, 'Traduction ou traduction de Paul et Virginie: L'exemple de Helen Maria Williams', Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 89(5), 1989, p.850. By way of indicating the popularity of Paul et Virginie, it is worth noting that Toinet cites in his extensive if not exhaustive bibliography, 275 editions in French and a further 250 translations, not counting his citation of theatrical productions (melodrama, play, opera and ballet), engravings, broadsheets, porcelain, toile and papier peint.
3. Toinet, no.353, p.79.
interlinear edition was published in Paris in 1833, in which the English was a direct translation, before the text was given a second time 'suivant la génie de la langue anglaise' ("in accordance with the spirit of the English language"). The earliest school edition noted by Toinet, in the same mould as Trechmann's ("avec des notes en anglais à l'usage des écoles", 'with notes in English for use in schools'), was published in the United States in 1836.

Trechmann's introduction to his edition shows his consciousness of writing for students on the other side of the globe to where the work originated:

It is now a little over a century since this pretty idyll first charmed the reading public in Europe, and its popularity with both old and young shows no sign of dying.

His words may ring with a certain irony today, but the universal and timeless appeal of Paul et Virginie was a commonplace in nineteenth-century introductions to the work. In his rapturous 'Essai philosophique sur Bernardin de Saint-Pierre', introducing an 1852 edition, d'Albanès wrote:

C'est assez dire que l'œuvre de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre non seulement est impérissable, mais qu'elle ne peut rien perdre de ses heureux effets sur le cœur des hommes. L'histoire de son avenir est l'histoire de son passé. Elle versera dans chaque siècle sa philosophie morale, son baume consolateur, son orientalisme parfum. Et chaque siècle, avec les idées nées de ses impressions, avec le caractère qui lui sera propre, connaîtra la génie de l'auteur, l'heureuse influence de son œuvre sur les cœurs, qu'elle saura toujours gagner.

It is enough to say that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's work is not only imperishable, but that it cannot lose its happy effects on men's hearts. The story of its future is that of its past. On each century it will pour its moral philosophy, its consolatory balm, its oriental perfume. And each century, with ideas born of its sensations, with the character appropriate to it, will know the genius of its author, the happy influence of his work on hearts, which it will always know how to win.

5. For example, the direct translation of Virginie's bath scene reads as follows: 'She herself set off at the light of the moon, towards her fountain; she of it perceives the source, which, notwithstanding the dryness, flowed in long streams of silver on the sides brown of the rock. She herself plunged into its bason [sic].' The work remains quite useful. [Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre], Paul et Virginie en français et en anglais, avec deux traductions, l'une interlinéaire, l'autre suivant le génie de la langue anglaise (Paris: Lance, 1833), p.260. In this article, unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.
6. Toinet, no.95, p.32. See also no.444, p.92 and no.466, p.94, for editions published in 1871 and 1883 respectively.
That I am writing an article such as this one today evinces the failure of d'Albanè's prophecy. And d'Albanè's own action in drawing from the text a particular 'philosophie morale'—in his case, the purity of the heroine—could be deemed the cause of the story's demise, as we shall see.

I would characterise Paul et Virginie as a collapsing pastoral narrative. Though the old man who narrates the tale evokes, at first, an idyllic picture of the childhood lives of his story's protagonists, from the very beginning we know that the ending will be an unhappy one for them, because the story is told at the site of the two ruined cabins in which Paul and Virginie formerly lived. The old man tells of an attempted return to 'nature': two women, suffering the misfortunes of fate, have found each other in the French colony of Ile de France (now Mauritius) and set up huts and gardens with the aid of two old slaves in a spot remote even from the main settlement on the tropical island. Madame de la Tour, noble but disinherited for marrying an inferior, is widowed before giving birth to a daughter, Virginie. Marguerite, of peasant stock, has been seduced by a gentleman of her neighbourhood in Brittany and, having given birth to Paul, is in self-imposed exile in the colony. Together the women raise their children as 'brother' and 'sister', ignorant of social distinction.

However, the destroyer of this idyll as told by the old man is the advent of Virginie's sexuality, the initiation of which is recounted in a highly erotic bath scene; Virginie must face the 'reality' of her own desires. I will quote the passage at length, as it is this section which is most often elided in reworkings of the text:

Cependant depuis quelques temps Virginie se sentait agitée d'un mal inconnu... Un mal n'arrive guère seul.

...C'est à des nuits qui désolent de temps à autre les terres situées entre les tropiques vint étendre ici ses ravages... La nuit même n'apportait aucun refraîchissement à l'atmosphère embrasée. L'orbe de la lune, tout rouge, se levait, dans un horizon embrumé, d'une grandeur démesurée... Dans une de ces nuits ardentes, Virginie sentit redoubler tous les symptômes de son mal. Elle se levait, elle s'asseyait, elle se recouchait, et ne trouvait dans aucune attitude ni le sommeil ni le repos. Elle s'acheminait, à la clarté de la lune, vers sa fontaine; elle en aperçoit la source, qui, malgré la sécheresse, coulait encore en filets d'argent sur les flancs bruns du rocher. Elle se plonge dans son bain. D'abord la fraîcheur ranime ses sens, et mille souvenirs agréables se présentent à son esprit. Elle se rappelle que dans son enfance sa mère et Marguerite s'amusaient à la baigner avec Paul dans ce même lieu; que Paul ensuite, réservant ce bain pour elle seule, en avait creusé le lit, couvert le fond de sable, et semé sur ses bords des herbes aromatiques. Elle entenait dans l'eau, sur ses bras nus et sur son sein, les reflets des deux palmiers plantés à la naissance de son frère et à la sienne, qui entrelaçaient au-dessus de sa tête leurs rameaux verts et leurs jeunes cocos. Elle pense à l'amitié de Paul, plus douce que les parfums, plus pure que l'eau des fontaines, plus fortes que les palmiers unis; et elle soupire. Elle s'envole à la nuit, à la solitude, et un feu dévorant la saisit. Aussitôt elle sort, effrayée de ces dangereux
Virginie comes to realise, to her horror, that with the fall from innocence occasioned by the onset of puberty 'virtue' can never decisively distinguish itself from its constant assailant 'vice'; the tendency to vice is all-pervasive, including within. This internal struggle ('contre elle-même'; literally 'against herself') is then externalised into the form of Virginie's vicious great aunt, who now recognises her niece and insists that she come to France. A letter arrives from the previously illiterate young woman, telling of her unhappiness and of her aunt's corruption. Then news comes that she has fled the court and is on her way home. But a violent storm pushes her ship onto the rocks; in the story's dramatic climax, famous in its day, infamous today, Virginie refuses the aid of a naked and muscular sailor, who wants to take off her clothes so she might swim to safety.

Virginie, voyant la mort inévitable, pons une main sur ses habits, l'autre sur son cœur, et levant en haut des yeux sereins, parut un ange qui prend son vol vers les cieux. 10

Virginie, seeing death inevitable, placed one hand on her clothes, and the other on her heart, and lifting up her serene eyes, appeared like an angel taking her flight to Heaven.


After this disaster, Paul, his mother, the slaves and the pet dog all die of grief.

Though the ending of the tale has become a source of embarrassment for scholars, 11 Saint-Pierre's work is really a discourse on the concepts of 'innocence', 'virtue' and 'vice', placed in the context of Christian cosmic history. The return to 'innocence' or 'nature' which the two women attempt on the Ile de France is exposed for its proud assumption that such an enterprise is possible on earth since the Fall. Virginie chooses rather to restore her lost innocence in Heaven alone. Recent scholarly debate about why Virginie dies has tended on the one hand to be based on the assumption that she is unquestionably 'innocent' when she stands on the deck of the sinking Saint-Éden, or on the other hand that she has been corrupted in France. In truth, it is the loss of her 'innocence' which counts, and this happens in the bath before she leaves for France. But Virginie is not 'corrupt' in the 'fallen woman' sense, just appalled by her own subjection to vice as an earthly being. 12 She rejects the all-pervasive pollution of vice as a post-lapsarian condition of life on earth; the maturation of her body merely evinces the inevitable repetition of the historic Fall. This is an important distinction in the assessment of her moral status, because the text itself in this way problematises the state of virginity (Virginie-ty). Saint-Pierre gives us a virgin struggling with the knowledge of vice, knowing her virtue is forever imperfect because of Original Sin. It is this problematisation, however, no matter how important to the operation of meaning in Saint-Pierre's work, which appears to have been most difficult for readers to accept in an otherwise appealing tale. It is significant then that under the guise of

13. Though this reading is not entirely orthodox, it recalls the reading outlined by Joyce Lowrie in 1971. She writes: 'A reason which is perhaps more ingredient to the structure of the novel, however, especially in terms of the Paradise, Fall, and Death movements already delineated, is that even though Saint-Pierre was incapable of having his Eve succumb to sexuality as such, he did translate, by means of his imagery, the intimate development of her knowledge of sensuality. Biblical exegetes tell us that man's Fall was caused not by his sexuality but by his desire for knowledge. If such an interpretation is applied to Paul et Virginie, one must conclude that Virginie was a prime candidate for the retribution Saint-Pierre felt obliged to impose on her at the end of his work ... The loss of Eden is followed by solitude, alienation, and despair.' See Joyce Lowrie, 'The Structural Significance of Sensual Imagery in Paul et Virginie', Romance Notes 12(2), Spring 1971, pp.355-56. For an analysis of the concepts of 'nature' and 'virtue' in Paul et Virginie see Jean-Michel Racault, 'Virginie entre la nature et la vertu: cohésion narrative et contradictions idéologique dans Paul et Virginie', Dix-huitième siècle 18, 1986, pp.389-403; on Paul et Virginie generally see Jean-Michel Racault, ed., Études sur Paul et Virginie et l'œuvre de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (Paris: Didier, 1986).
'censoring' the work for youthful readers it is this problematisation of virgin innocence which is modified.

From the late 1830s, editions of the work began appearing 'adapted' for the use of young readers or aimed at Christian youth. In his introduction, Trechmann alludes to this convention when he writes:

This edition, it is hoped, will not prove unacceptable as a class-book in schools, and to students reading in private. The work in its entirety is, partly on account of its length, partly on account of the sentiments, not quite adapted for junior students, and I felt the less scruple in clipping and pruning as this labour had already begun in French editions for the young.

Bernard Bray has made an interesting survey of the variants of Paul et Virginie, and his overall assessment of them is succinct and accurate:

Ce qui est censuré? Les allusions trop suggestives à la nudité et à la sexualité, la mention des sentiments amoureux, la rude critique des personnages représentant l'autorité (de la tante en particulier), l'imprécision dans l'évocation des pratiques religieuses du groupe familial, certaines phrases de position philosophiques aventureuses, enfin quelques longs passages renfermant des descriptions de caractère technique. Ces actes de censure, à tendance générale évidemment conservatrice, ne sont pas gouvernés par une intention intelligemment cohérente, et ils aboutissent parfois à des formulations naïves, ou fades, ou même absurdes. 15

What is censored? Overly suggestive allusions to nudity and sexuality, mention of amorous sentiments, harsh criticism of characters in authority (the aunt in particular), imprecision in the evocation of the religious practices of the family group, certain takes on risky philosophical positions, and finally, some long passages containing descriptions of a technical nature. These censorships, obviously of a generally conservative nature, are not governed by an intelligently coherent intention, and they occasionally result in naive, insipid, or even absurd, expressions.

So there are three major objections to the text which engendered such changes. Firstly, despite the overall Christian tone of the story, much of the old man narrator's extensive philosophising, of a deist bent, was liturgically suspect, with the obvious influence of the 'Creed of the Savoyard Priest' recounted by Saint-Pierre's mentor Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Émile (1762). Secondly, the extent of the old man's philosophical and political lectures to Paul are sometimes cut for the sake of the work's popular appeal. This is a tradition perhaps beginning with the popular English translation by Helen Maria Williams (first published in 1795), in which cuts were justified on the grounds of an English reader's need for a 'rapid succession of incidents' compared to the French enjoyment of 'long philosophical reflections'. 16

14. Trechmann, pp.ii-iii.
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Thirdly, and most importantly for my argument, several passages were frequently deemed too sensual, particularly the famous bath scene in which Virginie’s sexual desire for her childhood companion is initiated. Also problematic was the nakedness of the muscular sailor on the deck of the sinking ship, considered too arousing even granted Virginie’s refusal of his aid. The explicit fact that Paul’s mother bore him out of wedlock was also frequently elided.

The editor of an 1837 Tours edition enunciates the distrust in all the variant editions of the effect of the sensuality of Saint-Pierre’s text on young readers:

Nous avons ... retranché de Paul et Virginie, toutes ces descriptions molles et voluptueuses que des maîtres vigilants dérobent à leurs élèves avec tant de soin. Puise notre travail être utile à la jeunesse! C’est pour elle que nous l’avons entrepris; employé depuis plusieurs années dans l’instruction, nous avons reconnu par l’expérience combien une page, une phrase, un mot peuvent produire des ravages dans un jeune cœur; aussi notre voeu le plus ardent est-il que tous les écrivains comprennent enfin ce qu’il y a de poésie dans l’innocence, et s’abstiennent de toute parole capable de la flétrir.\textsuperscript{17}

We have ... cut from Paul et Virginie, all those languid and voluptuous descriptions that vigilant masters conceal from their students with so much care. May our work be advantageous to the young! It is for them that we have undertaken it; employed teaching for several years, we know by experience how a page, a sentence, a word can produce storms in a young heart; so our most ardent wish is that all writers ultimately understand what poetry there is in innocence, and that they abstain from any word which is capable of erasing it.

It is hardly surprising that Virginie’s bath scene is excised in almost every revised edition, but this was to have a profound effect on the fate on the fate of the text. For the suppression of the scene in which Virginie is exposed to her own vices means that, on the deck of the sinking ship, she is not a young woman struggling with the concept of virtue but an entirely innocent victim. Her consequent actions become the climax of a rather dull moral tale.

I would further argue that works retelling the tale for children — for example the edition I shall discuss by Adolphe Dugard published in 1862 might be seen as emblematic of how Paul et Virginie generally came to be read in the nineteenth century. In the case of Dugard’s work, the two mothers’ pre-existing faults — Marguerite’s sexual recalcitrance and Madame de la Tour’s proud disdain of social convention — faults which help establish the hubris of their attempts to defy ‘reality’ on the Île de France, are elided in the broad brush strokes of the new story:

Dans l’Île de France, vers le milieu du dernier siècle, une jeune femme, sans fortune, vivait avec une fille qui touchait à sa quatrième année, et un nègre.

\textsuperscript{17} The edition referred to is amongst those discussed by Bray, corresponding to his edition ‘A’: Paul et Virginie suivi de la Chaumière indienne et de nouveaux choisis des Harmonies de la nature par J.-H. Bernardin de St. Pierre, avec une notice sur sa vie écrite par lui-même, ‘Bibliothèque de la jeunesse chrétienne approuvée par M. Gr L’archevêque de Tours’ (Tours: A. Mame, 1837), pp. xii [sic]–xiv (henceforth ‘Tours’).
Marguerite has been ‘abandonnée de son mari’ (‘abandoned by her husband’) rather than indulging in sex out of wedlock.\textsuperscript{18} Needless to say, there is no ‘bain de Virginie’. Barely a pause separates Virginie’s departure and the shipwreck, and not a naked sailor in sight. With the greatly reduced text, and the explicit address to very young children (the book is in a small format with large-print text), the old man’s meditation on the afterlives of Paul and Virginie is given greater emphasis by being quoted almost in full from the original, now positioned as an explicit moral at the very end of the tale:

Paul mourut deux mois après la mort de sa chère Virginie, dont il prononçait sans cesse le nom. Marguerite vit venir sa fin, huit jours après celle de son fils, avec une joie qu’il n’est donné qu’à la vertu d’éprouver. Madame de La [sic] Tour ne leur survécut que d’un mois.

On a mis auprès de Virginie, au pied des mêmes roseaux, son ami Paul, et autour d’eux, leurs tendres mères et leurs fidèles serviteurs. Leur mémoire est restée ineffacable. Leurs ombres s’intéressent encore à ce qui se passe sur la terre, elles aiment à errer sous les toits de chaume qu’habite la vertu laborieuse; à consoler la pauvreté mécontente de son sort; à nourrir dans les jeunes gens le goût des biens naturels, l’amour du travail et la crainte des richesses.\textsuperscript{19}

Paul died two months after the death of his dear Virginie, whose name he continually spoke. Marguerite’s life came to an end a week after her son’s, with a joy which is only given to virtue to experience. Madame de La Tour survived them only a month.

They placed next to Virginie, at the foot of the same canes, her friend Paul, and around them, their tender mothers and their faithful servants. Their memory has never been forgotten. Their shades are still interested in what occurs on earth, they love to wander on the thatched roofs where hardworking virtue lives; to console the poor, unhappy with their lot; to nurture in young people taste for natural good deeds, the love of work and the fear of wealth.

Paul and Virginie, shades of their former selves, are now ever-present, textual conduct guides for children.

\textsuperscript{18} Paul et Virginie de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Raconté aux Enfants par Adolphe Dugard, ‘Texte illustré de huit jolies lithographies, Lithographie artistique de la Lorraine’ (Pont-à-Mousson: Haguenthal, 1862), pp.3-4 (henceforth ‘Dugard’).
\textsuperscript{19} Dugard, p.6.
\textsuperscript{20} Dugard, pp.30-31.
The tenor of my reading of the variants of Paul et Virginie is different from Bray's, who, despite noting the generally conservative bent of the cuts and alterations, believes Saint-Pierre's novel is not profoundly changed. Bray writes:

Aussi (sauf réductions systématiques à des formats d'album, à l'usage des tout jeunes enfants) le livre de Bernardin n'est-il pas profondément transformé par ces variantes, qui ne portent, somme toute, que sur des détails: sa fonction didactique en est seulement affirmée.

Consequently (excepting systematic reductions in the form of books for very young children) Bernardin's book is not profoundly transformed by these variants, which in all are only details: its didactic function is only confirmed.

I see the exception to Bray's rule, represented by retellings like Dugard's, as emblematic of the profound changes wrought by the elision of 'small' details like Virginie's bath scene. I would argue, moreover, that bowdlerised editions in turn merely reflected a dominant reading of the original text which refused to problematise Virginie's innocence: such editions were affected by and continued to effect a dominant, popular reading of the Saint-Pierre's work.

That this elision of Virginie's struggle 'against herself' represents a popular reading of Paul et Virginie seems further endorsed by the appearance of popular versions of the story with happy endings. In James Cobb's musical of Paul and Virginia, first performed in London in 1800, and produced three times on the popular stage in Australia in the 1840s, Virginia is saved from the storm and restored to Paul as reward for her constancy and moral inviolability. The threat to her moral status has been entirely externalised in the figure of an intended Spanish husband, who endeavours to abduct her. Where the monstrous aunt in Saint-Pierre's text is an external symbol of Virginie's internal tendency to vice (vice is strongly gendered feminine in the work), 'Antonio' is the foreclosed and masculine embodiment of vice in the popular play, representing masculine carnal desire preying on an innocent female victim. For refusing to succumb to his sexual and fiscal temptation, Virginie is rewarded with marital bliss. As Paul and Virginia sing on the stage, 'The wealth of the cottage is love'.

Virginie's unquestionable innocence, then, conveniently endorses a nineteenth-century bourgeois construction of feminine sanctity. As it was the middle classes whose literacy increased exponentially during the nineteenth century, the implicit reading of the original text which bowdlerised editions explicitly represent – affirming the values of that class – could well account for the work's phenomenal popularity. In discussing the fluctuating success of the work, Jean-Marie Goulemot writes:

plus généralement, le succès n'a pas été immédiat, malgré un nombre relativement élevé d'éditions de Paul et Virginie au XVIIIe siècle. Même sous la Révolution où Bernardin est un personnage officiel. Le succès est modéré sous l'Empire. Il s'accélère à partir de 1815 comme si le livre trouvait son public dans la bourgeoisie modérée qui inscrit ses origines dans les œuvres du XVIIIe siècle.

More generally, success was not immediate, despite a relatively high number of editions during the eighteenth century, even during the Revolution when Bernardin held an official position. Success was moderate during the Empire. It took off after 1815 as if the book found its public among the middle bourgeoisie who inscribed their origins in the works of the eighteenth century.

By 1868, a guide to marital happiness, expressing as it does the very epitome of bourgeois self-fulfilment, was published in Paris – with a couple using, of all those at their disposal, the pseudonyms 'Paul et Virginie'. That Saint-Pierre's couple never achieved anything like domestic bliss seems to have been beside the point. This was the logical end of Goulemot's conjecture about the cause of the work's post-1815 popularity. Even the unaltered, original text came to be read as the inscription of feminine purity and ideal middle-class love, only thwarted – if the ending is not changed altogether – by aristocratic corruption.

If it was indeed the way the figure of Virginie was read which allowed sales of Saint-Pierre's book to 'take off' after 1815, the same reading could also account for the work's later downfall. As Bernard Bray writes:

C'est parce que beaucoup de lecteurs ont vu dans l'ouvrage de Bernardin une naïve leçon de morale à l'usage des enfants, que le roman a été si souvent traité avec dédain, et rejeté hors du cercle restreint des chefs d'œuvre nobles, porteurs d'une idéologie sériouse. It is because many readers have seen a naive moral lesson for children in Bernardin's work, that the novel has been so often treated with disdain, and thrown back outside the restricted circle of noble masterpieces, purveyors of a serious ideology.

Obviously, Virginie's struggle is the site of the philosophic complexity of the work, whether one agrees with the ideology behind that struggle or not; without that

24. L'Art d'être heureux en ménage par Paul et Virginie, 'Bibliothèque des honnêtes gens' (Paris: chez les principaux libraires, 1868). Nancy Armstrong sees the principal political partnership in the new middle-class hegemony of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as that between man and wife, identifying this social contract as a sexual one: 'the female relinquishes political control to the male in order to acquire exclusive authority over domestic life, emotions, taste and morality'. To maintain this authority, woman must sacrifice her own desires. Middle-class domestic women became a community of Rousseau's Sophies, overseeing the home, and their husbands' desires. Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1987]), p.41.
tension, the work seems unworthy of serious adult attention. In her journal entry for 7 September 1841, Georgiana McCrae notes the gift of *Paul and Virginia* to a three year old:

Farquar's third birthday. Jenny McCrae came to dine with him, and Aunt Agnes gave him a beautiful copy of *Paul and Virginia*, in English, with illustrations.

It is likely Farquar received the highly illustrated Orr edition, published in London two years earlier, and based on the French deluxe Curmer edition published in Paris in 1838. It included the 29 'grand sujets' ('large subjects') and 'environ 300 vignettes' ('around 300 vignettes') of the French original, and is frequently identifiable in Australian advertisements of the 1840s. My point is that this was an unaltered version of the text. Although Mrs McCrae could have 'edited' the work as she read it aloud to her son, the possibility that *Paul and Virginia* is of questionable relevance to - or far beyond the comprehension of - a child goes unquestioned.

Although Trechmann evidently saw explicit changes to the text as still very necessary, significantly this is not the case with another edition for schools, 'edited with grammatical and explanatory noted by A. Jules Dubourg, French Master, Royal High School, Edinburgh', published a decade earlier. Dubourg emphasises the purity of the work in his short 'Preface', in accordance with the dominant reading which cut-down versions reflect:

As this edition of *Paul et Virginie* is intended to be used as a class-book, I have carefully omitted the very few passages and expressions which are unsuitable for translation in class. Though written at a time when works of fiction often contained very questionable sentiments, and even immoral principles, this master-piece of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre breathes, from beginning to end, the purest morality, and teaches in beautiful language love to God and man.

In so emphasising an uninterrogated purity in the work, Dubourg is free to leave it virtually untouched. Despite admitting to some omissions, he retains Marguerite's sin, the bath scene in its entirety, and the naked sailor. Dubourg's comments and lightness of editorial hand are testimony to the power by the late nineteenth century of what I believe was a dominant middle-class reading of Saint-Pierre's work.

The high status of *Paul et Virginie* during the nineteenth century also seems to endorse the suggestion that Virginie was read as a foundation figure of feminine moral perfection. The work is referred to as a 'livre sacré' ('sacred book'), and as belonging to 'le temple de nos gloires littéraires' ('the temple of our literary glories')

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27. Toinet, no.390, p.84.
by the publisher of an 1869 edition. Australian booksellers also ranked the work at lofty heights. Often the 'Paul and Virginia' of Australian auction catalogues and book advertisements is an exceptional novel among works of more privileged genres. It can appear in the exalted company of religious works, Shakespeare, and Scott. In the *Hobart Town Courier* of 3 March 1841, Macmichael's auction catalogue lists 'Paul and Virginia' before 'Whitfield's Sermons, Pictorial Pilgrim's Progress, Shakespeare' and 'Morrison's family prayer', in an overall list which highlights in capitals 'COMPLETE SET OF WAVERLEY NOVELS'. In the 'splendid collection' advertised by Yares in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 5 March 1841, of the ten items listed, the only novels are 'Paul and Virginia', listed after the 'Waverley Novels', and both listed immediately after the 'Family Bible'.

Although the dominant reading I have conjectured was genuinely popular, as manifest in long-running stage productions like Cobb's, it does render *Paul et Virginie* a suitable text for the imposition of middle-class values on lower-class readers, as its privileging in the Australian marketplace suggests. A sign of this 'usefulness' is seen in the library of Henry Parsons, who Elizabeth Webby conjectures was a Catholic schoolteacher. This library was auctioned 'at the Angel Inn, West Maitland', near Newcastle, north of Sydney, as advertised in the *Maitland Mercury* on 18 January 1845. It principally comprised religious fare, including moral tales with titles like 'What have I done' and 'The fruits of a single Error', as well as other more straightforward devotional texts. The presence of *Paul and Virginia* in such company helps to suggest its prevalence as an amputated moral tale during the nineteenth century, here doubtless aimed at some hapless young person, compelled into worship – or personification – of the morally inviolable domestic woman.

To return to Trechmann's Australian edition, Virginie's bath scene is entirely dropped. Indeed, even Paul's and Virginie's rapturous odes to each other – beautiful passages of speech in the original which are reminiscent of the Song of Songs – are elided. The question of Marguerite's marital status is subtly elided:

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32. Trechmann, p.61.
Elle était née en Bretagne, d'une simple famille de paysans, et avait un enfant qui avait perdu son père avant de naître. Elle s'était déterminée alors à quitter le village où elle était née et à se rendre aux colonies.

She was born in Brittany to a simple peasant family, and had a child who had lost its father before being born. She had therefore determined to leave the village where she was born and take herself to the colonies.

The sailor loses his explicit musculature and nudity, while large passages of the dialogue between Paul and the old man are cut, sparing the young reader comments on the state of politics in France and general social conditions in Europe.

More unusual than his continued abidance with conventional changes is Trechmann's addition of chapter titles to various sections of Saint-Pierre's narrative. The addition of spaces in the text, or even chapters, is not of itself new; Dubourg had made numbered chapters, twelve of them, to Trechmann's fifteen (including the 'Introduction'). Trechmann, however, unlike Dubourg, names his chapters as follows:

- Introduction
- 1 The Little Colony
- 2 Paul and Virginia
- 3 The Aunt
- 4 Lost in the Bush
- 5 The Two Cocoa Palms
- 6 Kind Offices and Rustic Pleasures
- 7 First Love
- 8 A Letter from Home
- 9 Left Alone
- 10 Virginia Writes
- 11 The Philosopher
- 12 Ambitious Aims
- 13 The Shipwreck
- 14 Conclusion

These English titles would have assisted students with determining the meaning of the French text, but they also provide some interesting insights into Trechmann's reading of Saint-Pierre's work. The reference to 'First Love' is noteworthy for the elision of the scene in which the initiation of its sexual component is explicitly depicted. It seems significant, then, that Trechmann leaves in Marguerite's suggestion that Paul and Virginia marry, a suggestion cut by other editors. This is to be the story of frustrated marriage, and a tragic denial of bourgeois fulfilment.

33. Trechmann, p.9. In the original Marguerite is seduced and abandoned.
34. Trechmann, p.129.
36. Trechmann, p.64.
37. In the 'Tours' edition, for example.
Perhaps most interesting is the use of ‘Lost in the Bush’ to describe the episode in which Paul and Virginie lose their way in the jungle after coming to the aid of a starving slave. Trechmann deploys a familiar trope in Australian literature and draws the parallel between life in two colonies. 38 The parallels are further underlined by the explicit reference to Madame de la Tour’s and Marguerite’s homes as ‘The Little Colony’, and the notion that the Aunt’s letter comes from ‘Home’, the familiar colonial name for Britain. However, the loss of the bath scene has a further profound effect on the reading of the work, relative to Trechmann’s drawing out of the parallels between the story and the experience of his readers. Virginie’s internal imperfections in Saint-Pierre’s work show that no one on earth, colonists in the New World included, can ever really wipe the slate clean and make a fresh start. So eluding the depiction of Virginie’s inevitable fall from innocence admits the suggestion that proximity to ‘nature’ or the ‘Bush’ might create the opportunity for privileged new life in the New – rather than the next – World. Despite Virginie’s unfortunate end, now symbolising a ridiculously exaggerated moral prescription against taking off one’s clothes in public, feminine sanctity and the colonial project are both endorsed in Trechmann’s Australian edition of Paul et Virginie. Certainty about the one assures hopes for participants in the other. For with angels in the colonial house, God’s own country is at your feet.

While continuing a tradition of making use of Paul et Virginie as a pedagogical tool, Trechmann also reinforced the reading of the text which signed its death warrant as far as ‘serious’ approval was concerned. Yet it could be argued that this very trajectory, and its probable cause, give a unique insight into the way a particular ‘classic’ was popularly read during the nineteenth century. The clipped and pruned editions for youthful scholars, and the dramatically altered versions for children, seem to form a collective imprint of hundreds of enthusiastic readers’ responses to the original text.

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38. Like Marguerite, Trechmann appears to have left the place of his birth and taken himself to the colonies. He is labelled on the title page ‘Lecturer in Modern Literature at the University of Sydney’. According to the Calendar of the University of Sydney for the year 1894 (Sydney: W. E. Smith, 1894), p.193, Trechmann was ‘Assistant Lecturer in French and German’, with a Master of Arts degree from Oxford and a doctorate from the University of Heidelberg. He appears to have resigned under a cloud after an enquiry into his teaching. See Ivan Barko’s article on the early years of French teaching at Sydney University, in Seventy Years of the McCaughrey Chair of French, French Department pamphlet, p.8.