

# Exotic fictions of the domestic in eighteenth-century France: The case of *Paul et Virginie*\*

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For Roland Barthes: “Le premier homme qui a vu la première photo... a dû croire que c’était une peinture: même cadre, même perspective. La Photographie a été, est encore tourmentée par le fantôme de la Peinture... [“The first man who saw the first photograph must have thought it was a painting: same framing, same perspective. Photography has been, and is still, tormented by the ghost of Painting”]<sup>1</sup>. This essay explores the tableau in terms of its role as a “phantom” or “ghost” that effectively shadows the family photo as a previous and significant early paradigm of domestic intimacy<sup>2</sup>. I suggest that family photos constitute an ulterior development of eighteenth-century representations. My essay is attempting, in other words, to trace this genealogy of the family picture.

Increasingly, “intimacy” has become in the last fifteen years the object of literary, historical, social and psychological analysis, though recently the term has often been confined primarily to describing western romantic sentiments in terms of relations within and increasingly outside of conventional marriage. Such is the case in Anthony Giddens’ *Transformations of Intimacy*, Zygmund Bauman’s *Liquid Love: The Frailty of Human Bonds*, and Laura Berlant’s edited collection entitled *Intimacy*<sup>3</sup>. In effect, sociologist Stephanie Coontz recently contrasts a concept of Intimacy with marital relations in her latest book, *History of Marriage*, subtitled *From Obedience to Intimacy: or How Love Conquered Marriage*<sup>4</sup>. “Intimacy” in these texts and contexts is a term and a concept that has been appropriated most recently to define what lies specifically outside the domestic as well as marital spheres.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire*, Cahiers du Cinéma (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 54-55. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, transl. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 30.

<sup>2</sup> This essay derives from my larger book-length project to be entitled “Domestic Intimacy: Snapshots of the Family in Eighteenth-Century France.”

<sup>3</sup> I refer to such studies as those which address “intimacy” in their title such as Anthony Giddens’ *Transformations of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), or Laura Berlant, ed. *Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), as well

Yet the relation of intimacy to the domestic sphere does have resonance today even if the exact term is not always used. There is a current attempt in sociological studies to understand whether the *lack* of family closeness, of intimacy that many feel stems, as Coontz says, from a “nostalgia trap” for “The Way We Never Were”, or whether such a thing as domestic intimacy has in a real sense has been lost and that “The Way We Really Are Now” involves coming to grips with families that are indeed changing<sup>5</sup>. My study employs the term “domestic intimacy” in order to raise the issue of close family sentiment which those historians, particularly of *mentalités*, have studied as emerging in the eighteenth century<sup>6</sup>. Thus, my interest in the subject of domestic intimacy derives from a question I pose at a time in contemporary society when intimacy has come into focus as a problematic notion both in terms of conjugal and couple relations as well as in terms of a mythical and/or changing landscape of the family.

An often neglected aspect of what now binds or what in the past bound family members together is the way this closeness or lack thereof was and is conceived, perceived; that is, how it has been represented at particular moments and through which media. I do not look here to historical or sociological evidence to understand attitudes in the late eighteenth century toward the question of family bonds. Rather, this essay turns to the textual and/or pictorial strategies that uncover the inclinations and (dis)avowed desires and tendencies as they inhabit and organize representations of domestic intimacy.

In his text *Emile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau mentions, seemingly in passing, what became in effect a powerful cultural convention: “Il n’y a point de ‘tableau’ plus charmant que celui de la famille” (my emphasis)<sup>7</sup>. “Picture” here could refer to painting or engraving, as well as to a concept of tableau, but of course, certainly not to the photograph of late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet Rousseau articulated what did emerge in the nineteenth-century photograph and what remains operative today as well: the family as a domestic unit is “charming” perhaps because it is conceptualized and often conceived as a cohesive picture.

Rousseau goes on in this beginning of Book I of *Emile* to elaborate on the dangers and pitfalls that can disrupt such a charming picture<sup>8</sup>. What disfigures [“défigure”] the picture of the family is precisely the dispersion of its members: if the children are “*éloignés*”, or “*dispersés*” in convents, colleges, etc., they no longer dwell in the home; as Rousseau says, they are “*ailleurs*”, “elsewhere.” They thus dwell outside the common space of “the paternal home” and outside the picture as well. Even at such times as they might gather for a family ceremony, when they will be “*rassemblés*”, they would remain distant, “*étrangers*” [“strangers”] to each other. The sense of family union is generated from notions of the collective living space. The spatial elements of the tableau are paralleled

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as books which while not featuring “intimacy” in the title nevertheless make it a major concern throughout the study. These include Zygmund Baumann’s *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), and Richard Sennett’s *The Fall of Public Man* (New York and London: Alfred Knopf, 1977; W.W. Norton, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgic Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> This includes such historians as Phillipe Ariès, Georges Duby, Roger Chartier, Daniel Roche, etc., and projects such as *Histoire de la vie privée*, sous la direction de Philippe Ariès et Georges Duby, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1985, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, eds. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond, édition de La Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 262 [“There is no more charming picture than that of the family...”].

<sup>8</sup> The entire passage, reads as follows:

Il n’y a point de tableau plus charmant que celui de la famille, mais un seul trait manqué défigure tous les autres. Si la mère a trop peu de santé pour être nourrice, le père aura trop d’affaires pour être précepteur. Les enfants, éloignés, dispersés dans des pensions, dans des couvens, dans des collèges, porteront ailleurs l’amour de la maison paternelle, ou pour mieux dire, ils y rapporteront l’habitude de n’être attachés à rien. Les frères et les soeurs se connoîtront à peine. Quand tous seront rassemblés en cérémonie, ils pourront être fort polis entre eux; ils se traiteront en étrangers. Sitôt qu’il n’y a plus d’intimité entre les parens, sitôt que la société de la famille ne fait plus la douceur de la vie, il faut bien recourir aux mauvaises mœurs pour y suppléer. Où est l’homme assés stupide pour ne pas voir la chaîne de tout cela (262).

by the enclosures of the paternal home. From the moment family members do not inhabit the same space, they become distant strangers to each other. And once they have left the home they are no longer part of the picture. The unity of both family and its collective image is threatened. To put it another way, the spatial organization that defines tableau also constitutes a principal defining criterion of the thriving “charming” family. The family picture is thus not just a convenient metaphor for representing domestic intimacy; here, it is also an analogue that introduces and thematizes a spatial model.

Whether a nostalgic idea of the past, an ideal never actually realized, or a truly lost history, domestic intimacy claims a salient place in western conventions of the family in the eighteenth century as well as in contemporary culture through a vital link to pictorial representation. Rousseau is certainly not alone in identifying new family sentiment within the frame of a spatial entity such as the tableau. Diderot’s use of “tableau” was crucial to his aesthetic and social theory of bourgeois drama, as Peter Szondi first pointed out in his distinction between Diderot’s notion of “Tableau versus coup de théâtre”<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, examples of this privileged figure of “tableau” abound in Diderot’s critical writing about theater as well as in his plays. The *philosophe* is struck, for instance, by the picture of maternal love in a particular scene of Racine’s tragedy *Iphigenia*. Diderot singles out her domestic role in contrast to the public or political role of Iphigenia’s mother, and this focus takes shape in his discussion precisely within the semantic and visual frame of “tableau”:

Si la mère d’Iphigénie se montrait un moment reine D’Argos et femme du général des Grecs, elle ne me paraîtrait que la dernière des créatures. La véritable dignité, celle qui me frappe, qui me renverse, c’est le *tableau de l’amour maternel* dans toute sa vérité<sup>10</sup>.

The sentiment of domestic love that Diderot identifies here with tableau becomes the central preoccupation of this new genre of domestic tragedy. I have discussed Diderot’s dramatic theories and theatrical practice in his plays *Le fils naturel* and *Le Père de famille*, which were both constructed on the model of the tableau: these plays featured description of stage props clearly demarcating the enclosures of domestic interiors; characters both physically and discursively framed within family blood relations; thematic boundaries distinguishing between strangers, even intruders, and family members within; frames sharply delimiting the stage from an audience positioned external to it<sup>11</sup>. Diderot’s and Rousseau’s configuration of family in and as tableau participates in and helps institute a western tradition that dictates the experience of family attachment as deeply rooted in the

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My translation:

[“There is no more charming tableau than that of the family, but only one missed feature disfigures all the rest. If the mother has too poor a health to nurse, the father will be too busy to be their tutor. The children, far away, dispersed in pensions, convents, schools, will always bring elsewhere the love of the paternal home, or to say it better, they will develop the habit of being attached to nothing. Brothers and sisters will scarcely know each other. When assembled all together for special events, they might be very polite to each other; they will treat each other as strangers. As soon as there is no longer any intimacy between the parents, as soon as the society of the family no longer constitutes the pleasures of life, there is necessary recourse to bad habits as compensation. Where is the man stupid enough not to see the chain linking all that”].

<sup>9</sup> Peter Szondi, “Tableau and Coup de Théâtre: On the Social Psychology of Diderot’s Bourgeois Tragedy”, *New Literary History*, 11.2 (1980): 323-343.

<sup>10</sup> Denis Diderot, *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1965), 91, my emphasis and my translation:

“If the mother of Iphigenia behaved for one moment as the Queen of Argos and wife of the Greek commanding general, she would seem to me the least worthy of creatures. True dignity, that which strikes me, which astounds me, is *the tableau of maternal love* in all its truth”].

For Jay Caplan, “The tableau in Diderot is a sort of fetishistic snapshot in which the transitoriness of the real world is magically transformed into an ideal fixity” (*Diderot’s Genealogy of the Beholder* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985], 18. As I am developing it here, the *tableau* is linked most specifically to the fixity of the ideal family.

<sup>11</sup> “Snapshots of the Family: Picture Perfect”, *Esthetics of Intimacy/Esthétiques de l’intime, L’Esprit Créateur*, eds. Elizabeth Arnould-Bloomfield and Suzanne R. Pucci, 44.1 (2004): 68-82.

enclosures and frames of pictures and ultimately in the snapshots that in our own century document but also still give shape to domestic intimacy.

In effect, those whose objective as historians is to document the family tend themselves to use the picture and its frames or enclosures to delineate domestic intimacy in its substantive difference from earlier models. Thus, Lawrence Stone refers to the “more sealed off and private family type that was to develop in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries;” indeed, Stone speaks of “walling off of the nuclear family”<sup>12</sup>. It is no coincidence that the historian Raffaella Sarti introduces her book on the early modern European family in terms of a painting:

If this book is a painting, then what does it depict? And what does the frame exclude? The title provides the answer: *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500-1800*. Its spatial and chronological boundaries are those of Europe in the early modern era<sup>13</sup>.

Sarti describes her history of the family in terms of temporal boundaries that parallel architectural and spatial boundaries of the home and that constitute as well the conceptual enclosures of home.

Most importantly, Philippe Ariès emphasizes the introduction of a new kind of interaction between family members in terms of a distinctly spatial model reminiscent of the enclosure of tableau:

Dans le monde des sentiments et des valeurs, la famille ne comptait pas [auparavant] autant que le lignage. Or [ce lignage] apparaît très différent du *sentiment de famille*, tel qu'on l'a vu se dégager de l'iconographie des 16<sup>ème</sup>-17<sup>ème</sup> siècles... [Le lignage] s'étend aux liens du sang sans égard aux valeurs nées de *la cohabitation et de l'intimité*. *Le lignage n'est jamais réuni dans un espace commun, autour d'une même cour. Au contraire, le sentiment de famille est lié à la maison, au gouvernement de la maison, à la vie dans la maison*<sup>14</sup>.

“Maison” in French refers of course both to the house, its architectural and physical properties as a domicile, as well as to the sense and sentiment of home. The relation between architectural and emotional enclosures becomes explicit here as Ariès’ remark reveals a new focus that in my opinion reflects a major cultural shift reorienting the representation of family experience from a previously dominant *diachronic* model of lineage to a *synchronic*, thus indeed spatial, model of domestic intimacy.

The historical line of descendants passing from one generation to the next offers a concept of family that is diachronic, that is, developed and continued through time, while the synchronic presents a distinctly spatial model formulated in and as the place of house and home. As Ariès remarks, “a common space, a single courtyard” is where the “line”, or lineage, is gathered into one common collective entity. The opposition between genealogical relations linking family members across generations, even distant centuries, and the contrasting interaction of individuals relating in a simultaneous contemporary moment within a particular intimate domestic space introduces a useful and suggestive paradigm, one that explains, at least in part, Ariès’ own emphasis on representation

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977 [1979, 1982]), 69; 149.

<sup>13</sup> Raffaella Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture, 1500-1800*, trans. by Allan Cameron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 3; *Vita de Casa, Abitare, mangiare, vestire nell'Europa* (Rome, Italy: Laterza & Figli, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960), 239, my emphasis; Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Random House, 1962), 356:

[In the world of sentiments and values, the family didn't count previously as much as lineage... Now, [lignage] is very different from the concept of family such as we have seen it develop in the iconography of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. [Lineage] extended to the ties of blood without regard to the emotions engendered by *cohabitation and intimacy*. *The line was never gathered together within a common space, around a single courtyard. On the contrary, the sentiment of family is tied to the house, to the government of the house, to life in the house* (this last important sentence of the quote was left out in Baldick's English translation of the French text. The translation and emphasis are mine).

and iconography throughout his book. From the family conceived in the chronological blood filiations of genealogy according to the model of lineage, a major shift takes effect to a *spatial model* of the domestic: to the *domestic* articulated as a *spatial* entity. I propose this shift to spatial enclosure and simultaneous interaction within that space as an explicit paradigm for those “charming pictures of the family” that retain a certain continuity throughout early modern society and that carry over into our own current preoccupation with photographs, with snapshots of the family.

For Richard Sennett, the “home” during this early modern period became the secular version of spiritual refuge, what he terms the “geography of enclosure.” A new “geography of safety” was established in a “shift from sanctuaries in urban centers such as the protective spaces surrounding the cathedral to the enclosures of the domestic interior”<sup>15</sup>. The move to a new intimacy of the domestic interior takes place through the multiple enclosures that mark off and separate those excluded from those who dwell within the bounded spatial and simultaneously constructed sentimental formation and formulation of home. Ariès relies in his book on spatial representation, on family pictures to document, to *explain* the shift to the new social and cultural phenomenon of domestic intimacy; my own perspective locates these prevalent spatial representations as constitutive themselves of the phenomenon of domestic intimacy.

These “charming tableaux” elaborate spatial and visual properties that were produced in often exclusively verbal as well as in theatrical and in actual pictorial representations, such as in the growing number of genre paintings exemplified by Greuze’s depictions of domestic dramas and interiors. Yet, the measure of the tableau as an exceptionally operative paradigm of domestic intimacy can be illustrated just as well if not tested perhaps best of all in fiction. Although conceived at this time mainly as linear and chronological, narrative is in effect enlisted toward new, contrasting ends, specifically in the text of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s novel *Paul et Virginie*. Published in 1788<sup>16</sup>, 1789, 1800, and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it became a best seller of huge proportions, published in more than 500 editions through 1960<sup>17</sup>. One reason it might have garnered such interest is this novel’s subversion of its generic form by deploying a shift to spatial as opposed to linear and temporal paradigms. And the determining cause for this shift is directly traceable to the dominant concern in this text with representing domestic intimacy.

Initially, the novel appeared as part of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s larger work, *Etudes de la nature*, studies on the flora and fauna as well as on the society and culture of the island he visited, Mauritius (then called the Ile de France). Its success was such that it soon had become translated in many European languages; thus, in the last thirteen years of the century it was published in thirty-six French editions and twenty translations<sup>18</sup>. *Paul et Virginie* overdetermines the “geography of enclosure” in this tale of exotic distances whose principal subject turns out, surprisingly, to be domestic intimacy. In effect, the novel short-circuits a linear development of the plot by depicting

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1990; Norton, 1992), 21.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques-Henri-Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* in *Etudes de la Nature*, (Paris: P.F. Didot le jeune, 1788), vol. IV, 1-227, BN (Res. P. R. 641).

<sup>17</sup> The popularity of this text was enormous. As Robert Mauzi relates: “*Paul et Virginie* fut après *La Nouvelle Héloïse* et *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, le dernier triomphe de la littérature Romanesque du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle” (*Paul et Virginie*, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, éd. établie par Robert Mauzi [Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966; Flammarion, 1992], 9) [*“Paul & Virgine* was after the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* the last triomphe of Romanesque literature of the eighteenth century”]. The number of editions of this novel from the time of its initial publication is quite astounding. And the accompanying prints that were published almost from the beginning (and that I will discuss) continued to proliferate in most editions as well as to appear independently without the text of the novel. See Paul Toinet (*Paul et Virginie: Répertoire bibliographique et iconographique* [Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1963]), who enumerates the more than 500 editions of the novel in 170 years from the time of its appearance until 1963; his book also traces the diverse sets of prints that appeared separately from the novel.

<sup>18</sup> At first, the novel *Paul et Virginie* was placed within the larger work volume IV of *Etudes de la nature*, published in 1788. The first time this novel appeared separately was in 1789. Speaking of the novel’s astounding success, P. Toinet proclaims:

from the very outset its tragic end. Along with its geographical distance from France, from Europe, comes a temporal distance which, we will see, also entails a spatial displacement from the story's events. These are strategies which employ narrative in the service of fashioning a picture. In the novel's first sentence, we are transported to a far away place and to a distant time:

“Sur le côté oriental de la montagne qui s'élève derrière le Port-Louis de l'Ile de France, on voit dans un terrain jadis cultivé, les ruines de deux petites cabanes”<sup>19</sup>.

These cabins are the vestige of lives now over; they become a focus for the story which has already ended before it has begun. As European readers, we are not just far from this land geographically; we also have been positioned outside the temporal limits of events that have already taken place. The reader is situated as spectator, as viewer of “ruins” whose history we are about to uncover as in a kind of archeological excavation. Far from being placed *in medias res* of the characters' dilemmas or actions, the reader beholds the site of the island and the story from the distant quiet and stasis of its aftermath, its tomb.

Most significant in this *incipit* to *Paul et Virginie* is the detailed picture of the natural setting that necessitates a spectator's, a listener's as opposed to a reader's, perspective:

A l'entrée de ce bassin, ... les échos de la montagne répètent sans cesse le bruit des vents qui agitent les forêts voisines, et le fracas des vagues qui brisent au loin sur les récifs; mais au pied même des cabanes on n'entend plus aucun bruit, et on ne voit autour de soi que de grands rochers escarpés comme des murailles<sup>20</sup>.

The crashing of waves and whipping of the wind that form the backdrop and offer a visual and audible panorama create a profound silence by forming a protective barrier around the cabins. And this silence that surrounds the viewer/reader disconnecting us from the past of any noise or life of the former inhabitants has a distinctly visual counterpart in the “huge rocks” [“escarpés”] that surround one like walls. The effect of such textual indices is to frame through distancing and separating the world that once resided within that domain from the rest of the island, from Europe and France, and from the reader/viewer. As also becomes clear, this representation functions in its physical, visual, and (non) audible depictions to cut off the time of the story from the time of the narration itself. The novel enlists silence and ruins for a purpose that coincides with its subversion of narrative structure.

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Car, ce succès, il fut d'emblée foudroyant et universel: si l'édition originale, enrobée dans les *Etudes de la Nature* est de 1788, la première édition séparée hors de France – peu importe qu'elle ait été une contrefaçon – est de la même année; si la première édition séparée en France est de 1789, elle est de la même année en Angleterre, de 1791 en Italie, de 1794 en Allemagne, de 1798 en Espagne. Les treize années du xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle finissant voient apparaître 56 éditions dont 36 du texte français et 20 de traductions; encore ne faut-il pas oublier les adaptations théâtrales et les gravures ou suites de gravures séparées” (*Paul et Virginie: Répertoire bibliographique et iconographique*, 2).

[For, this success was from the start amazing and universal: if the original edition, enclosed in *Studies of Nature* is from 1788, the first separate edition outside of France – no matter that it had been pirated – is from the same year; if the first separate edition in France dates from 1789, it dates from the same year in England, from 1791 in Italy, from 1794 in Germany, from 1798 in Spain. The last thirteen years of the eighteenth century saw 56 editions 36 of which in French and twenty translations; moreover, the theatrical adaptations and the engravings or separate sets of engravings should not be forgotten].

<sup>19</sup> [“On the eastern side of the mountain which rises behind Port-Louis of the Ile de France, one can see on a piece of once cultivated land the ruins of two small cabins.”]. *Paul et Virginie*, préface, commentaires, notes par Jacques Van Den Heuvel (Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1984), 155. All quotations from the novel will be taken from the above illustrated edition which derives from: Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1838, 1938), BN [Y2 758, Y2 186, etc.]. All English translations of *Paul et Virginie* are my own.

<sup>20</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 155-157. [“At the entrance to this basin..., echoes from the mountain incessantly repeat the sound of winds that stir the neighboring forests, and the fracas of waves that break far away on the reefs; but at the foot itself of the cabins one can no longer hear any noise at all; one can only see the surrounding huge rocks steep as walls”].

Narrative voice plays a crucial role in this strategy of estrangement and framing. Though first-person discourse does emerge after the opening lines in the figure of a traveler attracted by this site in his trips around the island, the initial description takes place in the third-person-impersonal “on” [“one”]. Nothing personalizes the estrangement and separation that permeate the novel’s opening picture (“On n’entend plus aucun bruit, on ne voit autour de soi...”). Following the introductory paragraph, a shift to first-person narration seemingly brings the text into line with conventional eighteenth-century fictional discourse. Yet, the first-person “I”, so customary from Montesquieu to Rousseau and throughout the popular eighteenth-century epistolary genre, functions here to attenuate the importance and effect of first-person narration, in which, as Montesquieu said about telling one’s own story, “D’ailleurs, ces sortes de romans réussissent parce que l’on rend compte soi-même de sa situation actuelle; ce qui fait plus sentir les passions que tous les récits qu’on en pourrait faire”<sup>21</sup>.

In effect, the first-person narrator – this anonymous stranger on the island – meets and immediately defers to the narrative of a second first-person narrator, an old man, a *vieillard*, who knew and loved the cabin dwellers and witnessed all past events of the story leading to this scene of desolation. This solitary witness only at moments is actually incorporated into the story; he represents himself consistently as belonging to the *outside* of the story, to its frames. Thus, the first-person here is the one who is actually the furthest from the story. For what he will recount will be for the most part not his own; his voice is placed at various removes from the events and situation of the main characters. Thus, we are relayed from a pictorial scene and a disembodied perspective of “one who sees” [“on voit”] or “hears” [“on n’entend plus”], to an anonymous traveler beholding the tableau of sea and landscape which enclose the cabins, to a narrator who does not belong to the family whose story he will tell but who, mainly as spectator himself, witnessed the lives of those whose absence, whose distance is so pronounced, so acutely and carefully measured and whose lives are seemingly so inaccessible.

Yet it is precisely these manifold separations, distances and estrangements produced at the outset – geographical, spatial, temporal, narrative – that constitute the crucial frames that enclose and illustrate within them a tableau of domestic intimacy. Like the initial descriptions of the exotic silent and solitary place of the two cabins, other pictures are introduced throughout that insist on the complementary attributes of distance and proximity as crucial signifiers of domestic intimacy. The narrative systematically dissolves all the initially imposed distances and boundaries.

The story tells of two women, one of modest birth called throughout the novel only Marguérite and one of aristocratic lineage, Mme de la Tour, both of whom from a necessity born of scandal have fled into exile far from French society and their own blood relations. Mme de la Tour fled with her beloved husband from the family who had spurned her choice of a less than aristocratic *gentilhomme*. On the other end of the social spectrum, Marguérite, from a simple Breton family, had been abandoned by an aristocratic lover despite her pregnancy. In both cases, the scandal stems from social conventions based on lineage and birthright that interfere with, indeed preclude conjugal and familial love or accord. The tension in French society between such dominant social conventions and the growing importance of domestic life and sentiments are separated into contrasting geographic sites and worlds. The exotic Mauritius in this way becomes the site of a new kind of domestic world.

The exile of these women is articulated from the outset in spaces that signify at the same time both estrangement and all-encompassing enclosures. Leaving Europe behind and a husband who soon died trying to provide for them, Mme de la Tour seeks “un petit coin de terre” where she and her one possession, a woman slave from Madagascar, might cultivate enough to live on<sup>22</sup>. Mme de la Tour

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<sup>21</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, texte présenté et commentaires par Laurent Versini (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1986), 43. “D’ailleurs, ces sortes de romans réussissent ordinairement, parce que l’on rend compte soi-même de sa situation actuelle; ce qui fait plus sentir les passions que tous les récits qu’on en pourrait faire” [“Besides, these kinds of novels usually succeed because one renders an account oneself of one’s present situation; which makes one feel more passions than all the stories one can tell about them” (my translation)].

<sup>22</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 160 [“a little piece of land”].

seeks out a place even more remote and removed from the already scarce population of the island. Thus, she leaves the city of Port-Louis and moves from the “île presque déserte” to an even more remote site where she hopes to find an “asile caché” and where she can “s’y retirer comme dans un nid”<sup>23</sup>. Her desire to “se réfugier” to “take refuge, to withdraw”, is complemented by the appearance of Marguérite already settled at the deserted site and by their progressively concerted joint attempt to raise their children. Terms abound that signify enclosure: “enclos”, “retraites charmantes”, “retraites paisibles” etc.<sup>24</sup>. The description of these women, their children born on the island (Paul and Virginie), and their faithful servants who establish intimacy also among themselves with their marriage, draws numerous protective enclosures around the domain of their cabins, their land, and their reciprocal emotional attachments.

In contrast to the lineage of blood relations which both at the beginning and at the end of the novel reaches from France as far as Mauritius to differentiate between social and economic classes and privileges, causing disruption and ultimately disintegration of the family entity, the two households share everything. They become one unit in which can be discerned no differentiation, no spatial, temporal, or emotional distance. Marguérite and Mme de la Tour are united by the same needs and almost identical misfortunes, calling each other “les doux noms d’amie, de compagne, de sœur; elles n’avaient qu’une volonté, qu’un intérêt, qu’une table. Tout entre elles était en commun”<sup>25</sup>. In cabins which are contiguous, each woman owning a slave married to the slave of the other, their parcels of land like their homes are not just touching, they are cultivated each for the other; they dissolve into one<sup>26</sup>.

The narrator recounts the dissolution not just of territorial and property boundaries but of all barriers. In constant focus, this new domestic intimacy is carried over from mothers onto the relations between them and their children, and between Paul and Virginie. Like brother and sister, they are fed at the same breast, each woman nursing her own and the child of the other mother: “Elles prenaient plaisir à les mettre ensemble dans le même bain, et à les coucher dans le même berceau. Souvent elles les changeaient de lait”<sup>27</sup>. More and less than siblings, these two children, like twins, like lovers, occupy the same cradle, the same bed, the same small enclosure of the bath, the same daily and hourly space: “La nuit même ne pouvait les séparer; elle les surprenaient souvent couchés dans le même berceau, joue contre joue, poitrine contre poitrine, les mains passées mutuellement autour de leurs cous, et endormis dans les bras l’un de l’autre”<sup>28</sup>.

Incest in a sense is not a threat since the children are not blood related; yet their physical and emotional closeness is informed by the appellations of brother and sister early on: “Lorsqu’ils surent parler, les premiers noms qu’ils apprirent à se donner furent ceux de frère et de sœur”<sup>29</sup>. These terms are only partially metaphorical. The intimate proximity of their everyday lives lacks only genetic ties which are compensated by the insistence everywhere on the absence of distance or separating boundaries. Sibling incest here is both avoided and consistently intimated. Their latent romantic attachment is prevented from developing into a fully sexual, indeed marital, rapport only by the death of Virginie in the latter part of the novel; but their relation serves the purpose of signaling an

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<sup>23</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 160 [“almost deserted island”]; [“hidden sanctuary”]; [“withdraw there as in a nest”]; [“to take refuge there”].

<sup>24</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 193 [“enclosures”]; 194 [“charming retreats”]; 199 [“peaceful retreats”].

<sup>25</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 167, 169 [“the sweet names of friend, of companion, of sister; they had only one will, one interest, one table. Everything between them was in common”].

<sup>26</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 166.

<sup>27</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 169 [“They took pleasure in washing them in the same bath and in putting them to sleep in the same cradle. Often they exchanged their milk”].

<sup>28</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 170 [“Even night couldn’t separate them; it surprised them often sleeping in the same cradle, cheek against cheek, breast against breast, their hands mutually clasped around each other’s neck, asleep in each other’s arms”].

<sup>29</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 170 [“When they learned how to talk, the first names they learned to call each other were those of brother and sister”].

affirmative, desirable if unresolved ambiguous link between romantic love, conjugal relations and domestic intimacy<sup>30</sup>.

The concrete proximity within the quotidian creates the love that binds individuals to each other in contrast to the ties of blood relations alone which remain in this novel abstract and distant geographically as well as sentimentally. Here as elsewhere in the eighteenth century the model of close family sentiment and attachment is articulated, as we saw above in the passage from Rousseau, in pictures of enduring continuous physical, emotional, temporal and spatial proximity. As Virginia says, “Tout ce qui a été élevé ensemble s’aime”<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, lineage and blood relations are persistently trumped by, and rerouted through, those ties that become intimate in the experience and shared sentiment of living in close domestic proximity. Multiple terms work to minimize any space, physical and or sentimental, separating the members of this utopic clan and in particular of Paul and Virginie. Lack of distance and separation in terms such as “attachement” abound: “Rien en effet n’était comparable à l’attachement qu’ils se témoignaient déjà”<sup>32</sup>. As the old man observed the two children one day taking refuge from the rain: “Ces deux têtes charmantes renfermées sous ce jupon bouffant me rappelèrent les enfants de Leda enclos dans la même coquille”<sup>33</sup>.

So overdetermined is the emphasis on intimacy in this domestic vision that everything distant takes on negative value, particularly anything coming from Europe. Thus, Mme de la Tour a propos of a nasty letter from her aunt in Paris: “Le malheur ne m’est venu que de loin; le bonheur est autour de moi”<sup>34</sup>. Within these delineated spaces, even the children’s education underscores a rejection of distant past and far away events in favor of local, present intimacy repeated endlessly in the replication of everyday ritual:

Ils ne s’inquiétaient pas de ce qui s’était passé dans des temps reculés et loin d’eux, leur curiosité ne s’étendait pas au-delà de cette montagne. Ils croyaient que le monde finissait où finissait leur île; et ils n’imaginaient rien d’aimable où ils n’étaient pas<sup>35</sup>.

Indeed, the temporal dimension of Paul and Virginie’s childhood is basically transformed into a repetition of their daily life pattern in which each day and activity resembles, is identical, to the next: “Chaque jour était pour ces familles un jour de bonheur et de paix”<sup>36</sup>. The experience of close sibling and parental relations where there are no differences coincides with this insistence throughout the first

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<sup>30</sup> Reference to their eventual marriage and “félicité conjugale” [“conjugal felicity”] is made by the two mothers from the children’s infancy (169). See my essay, “The Nature of Sibling Incest and Domestic Intimacy in Diderot’s *Le Fils naturel*” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30.3 (1997): 271-287, in which I discuss the many eighteenth-century representations of near sibling incest as a formulation of a new kind of close family attachment. One hypothesis for its repetition is that intimate emotional experience was identified primarily until then as romantic love. Because of its component as intimate emotional experience, which was known then particularly as romantic love, this new familial close sentiment is articulated through those already known conventions of amorous sentiment. Sibling intimacy/incest functions as in the rhetorical figure of catachresis. This is a figure, like the *leg* of a table, a term borrowed to signify what doesn’t (yet) have its own name. This essay along with my article mentioned above, “Snapshots of the Family: Picture Perfect” shows a similar process of framing in both theater and narrative. As my book-length study on domestic intimacy will reveal, the tableau with its frames and focus on simultaneous grouping/delimiting of family within the same space functions in painting, theater and as shown throughout my article here in narratives of the later eighteenth century.

<sup>31</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 216 [“All who have been raised together love each other”].

<sup>32</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 170 [“Nothing in effect was comparable to the attachment they already showed each other”].

<sup>33</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 171 [“Those two charming heads enfolded in these bouffant skirts reminded me of the children of Leda enclosed in the same shell”].

<sup>34</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 177-178 [“Misfortune has come to me only from afar; happiness is right next to me”].

<sup>35</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 171 [“They were unconcerned by what happened in distant times and far away from them; their curiosity didn’t extend beyond this mountain. They believed that the world finished with their island; they imagined that nothing could be agreeable there where they weren’t”].

<sup>36</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 191 [“Every day was for these families a day of happiness and peace”].

part of the story on similarity and resemblance between daily recurring activities. One of the rare uses of the narrator's first-person "I" comes as the old man recounts the meals he shared with them: "Combien de fois, à l'ombre de ces rochers, ai-je partagé vos repas champêtres...?"<sup>37</sup>. Even the seasons resemble each other from year to year as they form the background for activities that in their recurrence suspend movement and time.

Dans la saison pluvieuse ils passaient le jour tous ensemble dans la case, maîtres et serviteurs, occupés à faire des nattes d'herbes et des paniers de bambou. On voyait rangés dans le plus grand ordre aux parois de la muraille des râpeaux, des haches, des bêches; et auprès de ces instruments de l'agriculture les productions qui en étaient les fruits, des sacs de riz, des gerbes de blé, et des régimes de bananes<sup>38</sup>...

The rain outside helps focus this picture of intimate family life within the confines of their modest cabin as in a genre scene; while the description of the tools positioned along the walls with the fruits of their labor arranges these objects almost as would a still life painting. Whether it be the storms of the season or the stories told to the children of robbers and shipwrecks, the outside often hostile world repeatedly frames this little familial utopic society within the safety of its own company and walls:

La nuit venue, ils soupaient à la lueur d'une lampe; ensuite Mme de la Tour ou Marguérite racontaient quelques histoires de voyageurs égarés la nuit dans les bois de l'Europe infestés de voleurs, ou le naufrage de quelque vaisseau jeté par la tempête sur les rochers d'une île déserte<sup>39</sup>.

Stories of lost travelers, European thieves and violent shipwrecks surround the family like a cocoon, separating fictions of lost souls, adventure and danger from the eventless everyday of home until a real ship erupts into the plot, wrecking the tranquility as well as the unity of the family and breaking up the family picture. Before this catastrophic event which begins with Virginie's taking the ship to France and her aunt in Paris to claim her birthright and rightful place within the family lineage – before the shipwreck that ruins all hope of Virginie's reaching again the sacred boundaries of home – the plot languishes. The insistent present and local symmetry of everyday domestic repetition and stasis have allowed, in effect, no interruption, little action, no event<sup>40</sup>. The family tableau remains intact as a fixed unity unto itself due in great part to the narrative which, particularly in this first section of the novel, functions to undermine its own generic linear tendencies.

The first-person narrative of the *vieillard*, as discussed earlier, functions most often in the capacity of a first-person but who disappears into the voice of a spectator or witness – a witness to family unity, a necessary spectator to their story, to their family pictures. Earlier in the century, such an external first-person voice is often found in the preface to novels such as in Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne*, the "I" of the Preface. This "I" refers to one who found Marianne's "authentic" manuscript and delivered it to an editor; or, in the case of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, the preface presents the first-person voice of a neighbor who lived for years next to the two Persians and who introduces their letters through his role as mere mediating translator. The *vieillard* of *Paul et Virginie* is a neighbor as well who in the second part

<sup>37</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 201 ["How many times in the shadow of these rocks did I share your rustic meals...?"].

<sup>38</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 201 ["In the rainy season, they spent the day all together in the cabin, masters and servants, occupied in making braids of herbs and baskets of bamboo. On could see arranged in the greatest order on the wall rakes, hatchets, hoes; and next to these instruments of agriculture the fruits of their labors, sacks of rice, sheaves of wheat, bunches of bananas"].

<sup>39</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 201 ["Come night, they supped by the light of a lamp; then Mme de la Tour or Marguérite recounted some stories of travelers lost in the night in the woods of Europe infested with robbers, or the shipwreck of some ship thrown by the storm against the rocks of a deserted island"].

<sup>40</sup> See Robert Mauzi (*Paul et Virginie*, édition établie par R. Mauzi [Paris: Garnier-Flammarion 1992], Préface, 20) who comments on the lack of event in the first part of the novel: "Toute une première partie du récit est consacrée à l'évocation du monde détruit, monde immobile où le temps ne coule pas, où il ne se passé rien. Les anecdotes, les épisodes n'introduisent aucune action" ["The whole first part of the narrative is devoted to evoking a world destroyed, immobile where time doesn't pass, where nothing happens"].

of the story plays a larger though not really personal role in the story. He recounts, witnesses and will even share in the family sorrow, attempting, without success, to help Paul overcome the loss of Virginie with the wisdom of a hermit. So the first-person “I” of earlier eighteenth-century novels, possibly an editor or translator outside the story, here takes up that external first-person perspective within the story itself. And whereas Montesquieu’s Persians, Marivaux’s Marianne, and Rousseau’s characters in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* tell their story in first-person epistolary or memoir discourse, the first-person narrator’s role in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s novel is clearly relegated to an exclusively external perspective where it is undermined by other priorities.

An assertion of the “I” point of view would be disruptive, would make too much of an exception in a narrative attempting to create a tableau of domestic unity. First-person discourse is thus limited to conversations among the four major characters, conversations with each other. We can listen in on these conversations in the novel as the members of this family recount their sentiments and thoughts to one another. But this kind of interrelation takes place most frequently in third person-narration. In effect, the mention of Virginie in this novel takes place most often in a context in which Paul is invoked and vice versa. Mention of either one of the children or of the mothers always immediately contextualizes that person in relation to at least one of the three others and often to all four. Such interrelations of one person with another take place without necessarily using the labels of “mother”, “daughter”, “son”, etc., but function throughout just like the familial labels that by definition always invoke more than one family member. “Mother”, for instance, is a relational term since it signifies more than a woman in a particular role. The term “mother” always of necessity implies the child; “brother” necessarily invokes a sibling, etc. The first part of the novel that sets up such a family community weaves a domestic intimacy out of just such continued criss-crossing references. To tell a story as “I” has become too lonely, too disconnected from the domestic picture.

This is precisely the dilemma of Mistress Henley in the novel *Lettres de Mistress Henley publiées par une amie*, written at the end of the century in 1784 at about the same time as *Paul et Virginie*<sup>41</sup>. In Isabelle de Charrière’s celebrated novel, a woman recounts her personal story in first-person letters written to a friend. The subject of these letters and of her emotional turmoil involves the very question of whether she can, whether she wants to, integrate herself as wife and mother into the family into which she has recently married. The narrator recounts her life story and present difficulties to a friend – it could have been to her diary, to the reader, but to no one with whom she lives her life. Mistress Henley is most unhappy as this outlying “I” who can not find her own individual place within the family. Letters provide her a place where she can give vent to her personal sentiments and thus where she defines an individual if isolated identity. This text is indeed an excellent example in epistolary fiction of the ability of the letter writer to “render an account of one’s own present situation” (Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, “Préface,” cited above). And clearly in this novel, letters have themselves become the only place for her to achieve such self expression and definition.

Written laments to a friend about her unhappiness focus on the ways she has been expected to assimilate into the household of her husband, his daughter from a previous and now deceased wife, and his servants. The desire to become part of this family is from the outset mitigated by frustration at not being able to lay claim to a domestic role that allows her an identity of her own. And with these failures of successful integration comes a contrasting desire not to fit into the family structure that would incorporate her entirely or, it seems, not at all. Her letters constitute an outpost where such conflicting sentiments can be articulated, where the desire to be appreciated is accompanied by resistance to her husband and the family group which would assimilate and appropriate her.

Mistress Henley tells throughout her letters of countless episodes in which her reserved, highly rational and rather dismissive though kind husband does not understand nor appreciate her sentiments, her character, her ideas. These conflicting aims of assimilating into versus existing outside

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<sup>41</sup> Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres de Mistress Henley publiées par son amie*, ed. Joan Hinde Stewart and Philip Stewart (New York: MLA Publications, 1993). Translation of this text will be from the English edition: *Letters of Mistress Henley published by her friend*, Trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (New York: MLA, 1993)

the family structure continues throughout five of the six letters. Yet in the novel's last letter, Mistress Henley announces the end of this special kind of correspondence. "Après celle-ci [letter] je n'en veux plus écrire du même genre"<sup>42</sup>. The epistolary "I" remains separate and separately defined, which is, of course, the very problem. For the continuation of this personalized subject perspective in writing acts as an impediment to the assimilation of Mistress Henley into domestic life. Seen from the exigencies of the family picture, Mistress Henley understands the necessity precisely of renouncing her first-person perspective in favor of joining for better and for worse the greater domestic entity.

The shift to a more integrated family role is prepared, indeed, already performed, in the sentence that describes what will now transpire: "Un billet vous apprendra de loin en loin que *votre amie* vit encore jusqu'à ce qu'elle ne vive plus (my emphasis)<sup>43</sup>. This is Mistress Henley's announcement that she will from now on assimilate, fade, into the family unit. In the reference to herself now as "votre amie" ["your friend"], she has already become a third-person, "amie." And though we never do get a family picture, the integration of Mistress Henley into the domestic scene takes place definitively through this repudiation of a first-person writing "I". This first-person narrative is being subsumed under a new kind of relationship to the domestic community.

Mistress Henley intends to fit into her name, her surname, her husband's family name, which is tellingly the only proper name used throughout. On such a note of renunciation, the novel ends. "Dans un an, dans deux ans, vous apprendrez, je l'espère, que je suis raisonnable et heureuse, ou que je ne suis plus"<sup>44</sup>. Either she survives as part of the picture she will now join, or she will no longer exist. This allusion to her possible real death includes a somewhat happier alternative; yet in either case, whether she dies a literal death or whether the death is that of her individuated perspective, Mistress Henley ceases to exist as the "I" of her letters.

The nineteenth century tended to move away from use of first-person perspective. For various reasons, a shift takes place to a third-person narrative voice in most novels, from Georges Sand to Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, Hugo, Zola, etc. One possible reason for this shift becomes apparent at the end of the eighteenth century in such a seminal novel as that of Bernardin de Saint Pierre in which the first-person point of view is relegated through a displacement to the margins as a spectator of the domestic picture; or in a related scenario, as in the case of Mistress Henley, the story involves precisely the drama of renouncing a first-person perspective in favor of a domestic unit. In both these eighteenth-century novels, a first-person narrator assumes a transitional role, one in the process of shifting into a third-person narrator.

The emphasis everywhere apparent in the text of *Paul et Virginie* on pictures of domestic intimacy is thus projected onto narrative perspective and descriptive strategies of spatial as well as temporal distancing and proximity. From the first pages of the novel, descriptions of nature play a considerable role in this formation of family pictures. As mentioned earlier, the exotic Indian ocean and the mountains, wind, and forests of the Ile de France form natural barriers that enclose these intimate households. But trees, clearings, even bird nests participate in lending shape to spaces that inform and replicate the maternal and sibling enclosures of intimacy. Nature in this novel is introduced as wild and virgin in pointed contrast to European formalized cultivation at the same time that nature operates as the domesticated and domesticating frames of the family picture<sup>45</sup>. We are told, for

<sup>42</sup> *Lettres de Mistress Henley*, 38 ["After this one, I do not wish to write any more [letters] in this style", 36].

<sup>43</sup> *Lettres de Mistress Henley*, 38 ["A note will inform you from time to time that *your friend* still lives until she no longer does", 36 (my emphasis)].

<sup>44</sup> *Lettres de Mistress Henley*, 45 ["In a year, in two years, you will learn, I trust, that I am reasonable and contented, or that I am no longer", 42].

<sup>45</sup> See Michel Racault's excellent essay ("Système de la toponymie et organization de l'espace Romanesque dans *Paul et Virginie*", *SVEC*, 242 [1986]: 377-415), which centers on a study of names of places, particularly proper names given by the characters throughout the novel. Racault points out the named open and closed spaces that dominate and that create spatial distances on the one hand and close intimate spaces on the other (387); he doesn't, however, relate the production of both these kinds of spaces to the intimacy of family pictures.

instance, that Paul upon reaching adolescence learned to cultivate their land, their “vaste enclos” that he transformed into an “amphithéâtre de verdure”, but without straying from nature’s order: “Mais en assujettissant ces végétaux à son plan, il ne s’était pas écarté de celui de la nature”<sup>46</sup>... What is this nature that is identical to its domesticated and artful cultivation?

Such domestication is visible, moreover, in the names with which this community endows each site in nature where they shared some regular activity. In their “vast enclosure”, or “bassin”, “Rien n’était plus agréable que les noms donnés à la plupart des retraites charmantes de ce labyrinthe”<sup>47</sup>. A particular rock, or clearing, “un cercle d’orangers, de bananiers et de jameroses plantés autour d’une pelouse, au milieu duquel Virginie et Paul allaient quelquefois danser se nommait LA CONCORDE”<sup>48</sup>. The most prized site is endowed with a name: “Mais de tout ce que renfermait cette enceinte rien n’était plus agréable que ce qu’on appelait LE REPOS DE VIRGINIE”<sup>49</sup>. And within these special enclosures – clearing, circle, lawn – situated already within the “enceinte” of their land, situated within the larger enclosure of the island, two fruits, cocoanuts, gifts to Paul and Virginia, were planted and soon grew into trees, trees which like the persons of this intimate world, “Déjà [ils] entrelaçaient leurs palmes”<sup>50</sup>... The ultimate proximity and intimacy between the mothers, between mothers and their children and their servants, between brother and sister is framed again by the tableaux of nature that accompany this text both in the multiple verbal descriptions as well as in the proliferation of illustrations, of actual pictures that frame the family from the very early editions of this novel.

It is thus not surprising that just about every edition of *Paul et Virginie* has been accompanied by pictorial illustrations<sup>51</sup>. Says Jean Adhémar of these illustrations: “Les illustrateurs, donc attirés comme le public par cet exotisme et ces vives couleurs, ont bien souvent su rendre le ton du roman; leurs images, plus encore que le texte, ont nourri les imaginations au dix-neuvième siècle...”<sup>52</sup>. Whether these illustrations capture the tone of the novel better than the text itself is a moot question. As can be seen in the illustrations unfortunately not included here, these graphic depictions constitute an additional domestic frame in that they reinforce, duplicate the already pictorial moments of domestic intimacy captured, frozen in time in the narrative. Within these pictures, the profusion of nature’s flora functions consistently to frame the picture of intimacy. With the exception of its first appearance as part of the third edition of Bernardin Saint-Pierre’s *Etudes de la Nature* in 1788, the novel has included engravings, which often like the luxurious Curmer edition of 1838 were carefully supervised by the author himself<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 193 [“vast enclosure”]; [“amphitheater of vegetation”]; [“But in subjecting this vegetation to his plan, he hadn’t strayed from that of nature”].

<sup>47</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 194 [“Nothing was more agreeable than the names given to most of the charming retreats in this labyrinth”].

<sup>48</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 196 [“A circle of orange and banana trees and wild roses planted around a lawn, in the middle of which Virginia and Paul went sometimes to dance was named HARMONY” (author’s emphasis)].

<sup>49</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 196-197 [“But of everything this enclosure encircled, nothing was more agreeable than what was called VIRGINIE’S HAVEN” (author’s emphasis)].

<sup>50</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 197 [“Already [they] intertwined their fronds”].

<sup>51</sup> Toinet, *Paul et Virginie: Répertoire bibliographique et iconographique*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> As cited in Toinet, *Paul et Virginie: Répertoire bibliographique et iconographique*, 134 [“The illustrators, thus attracted as was the public by this exoticism and bright color, often knew how to render the tone of the novel; their images even more than the text, nourished the imagination of the nineteenth century” (my translation). The edition of 1789, which is the first edition of *Paul et Virginie* standing alone, is also the first illustrated edition done by Moreau le Jeune and J. Vernet. The first suite of illustrations separate from the book were done by Shall, in 1791 (Toinet, 135-136).

<sup>53</sup> Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, Paris: L. Curmer, 1838, 1938, BN (Y2 758, Y2 186, etc.). A “Table des noms des dessinateurs et des gravures” lists 315 drawings and engravings in this edition. The most interesting and commonly used illustrations are typically taken from the 1838 Curmer edition. A more accessible edition of *Paul et Virginie*, Préface, commentaire de Jacques Van Den Heuvel [Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1984] and based on the Curmer edition includes several though far from all of the prints from the Curmer edition.

Genre scenes, images of common domestic life, are dominant in these illustrations<sup>54</sup>. These scenes tend to show the children Paul and Virginie enfolded in each others' arms in the enclosures of cradle, bath, and in the arms of their mothers; in most all these illustrations, the children are also held within the frames of a highly stylized and exotic flora and fauna. These floral borders that edge the illustrations seem to hold these families within their embrace. For the principal characteristic of this pictorial nature is the climbing, the intertwining of branches, flowers and vines that not only frame the scene but also grow into the picture where they function visually to interlace, to entwine, one person or group, one cabin, with another. This is a nature both domestic and wild in its intertwining that at moments breaks into the frame and invades the pictures.

Thus the island, while often the scene of utopic experiment in the eighteenth century as in the *Ile des esclaves* of Marivaux or much earlier in the model *Utopia* of Thomas Moore, plays here a different and in a way more significant role in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel. The spatial enclosure of the island that provides protection and distance from the conventions of European society while similar to other utopias has a particular resonance within this text. The island replicates itself and is replicated ad infinitum throughout the novel in its capacity of spatial, physical and sentimental closure and enclosure that shapes the text into its myriad pictures of domestic intimacy.

In this *mise en abîme*, this imbrication of frames and enclosures that holds the world still, any event that erupts into such pictures is bound to be catastrophic. The violent storm and ship that breaks up on the rocky shores of the island bring a tragic end to this family. Yet, the choice of a shipwreck defines not just the climactic event of the story; it defines the nature of event itself as being catastrophic to the intimacy, to the stability and immobility of these domestic pictures. The ship comes from afar, from Europe, and constitutes the liaison with the world that this other world is protecting against. As the ship crashes into the island reef, it crashes into that world, disrupting it forever.

The death of each one of the family members after the shipwreck taking the life of Virginie is consecrated in the tombs that are often represented in illustrations accompanying the text:

On a mis auprès de Virginie, aux pieds des mêmes roseaux, son ami Paul, et autour d'eux leurs tendres mères et leurs fidèles serviteurs. On n'a point élevé de marbres sur leurs humbles tertres, ni gravé d'inscriptions à leurs vertus; mais leur mémoire est restée ineffaçable dans le cœur de ceux qu'ils ont obligés<sup>55</sup>.

The term "tertre" with reference to a funereal site denotes simply "une elevation de terre recouvrant une sepulture"<sup>56</sup>. In other words, no grave stone was erected according to the text to identify the family members. Yet in the illustrations for several editions, including that of 1806 and the Curmer edition of 1838, we see rectangular if blank stones leaning against the mounds of earth that hold the family sepultures. The tomb stones that frame nothing but their own stasis, their own stillness, are lying within a sheltering forest glade and framed as well as attached to each other by the vines and tropical abundance that proliferate in all the illustrations. The stasis of death resembles the repetition of their daily domestic intimacy in life created in pictures of this calm immobile society in which nothing happens. The tombs that are represented in text and in illustration occupy the same

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<sup>54</sup> See Richard Rand, "Love, Domesticity, and the Evolution of Genre Painting in Eighteenth-Century France", *Intimate Encounters: Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France*, (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College; Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1997), 4. "The increasingly narrow meaning of the term was in large measure a response to the new seriousness with which scenes of everyday life were regarded in the second half of the century". According to Rand, the growing importance of the term "scenes of life" distinguished genre from landscape and still life. "In 1791, Quatremère de Quincy would define genre painting as a 'scene of common or domestic life'".

<sup>55</sup> *Paul et Virginie*, 309 ["Next to Virginie, at the foot of the same reeds, her friend Paul was placed, and around them their tender mothers and their faithful servants. No marble was raised on their humble graves, neither were inscriptions on their virtue engraved there; but their memory has remained indelible in the hearts of those they helped"].

<sup>56</sup> *Le Petit Robert* ["elevation of earth covering a grave" (my translation)].

position as previously these family members occupied in life, residing each one next to the other, and now without any event able to interrupt, to intrude on, this ultimate enclosure.

Death is familiar to the photograph. It is, as Barthes says, a witness to “ce qui a été”, to the “what has been”<sup>57</sup>. Indeed, photography brings back, re-presents each time one looks, what is now no longer: “cette chose un peu terrible qu’il y a dans toute photographie: le retour du mort”<sup>58</sup>. In *Paul et Virginie*, the reader looks at each tableau, each family picture that repeats what is missing – a domestic intimacy that is already no more – and yet in terms of a social and historical referent, which perhaps has not yet been. The tableaux both written and pictorial in this novel give evidence of an intimacy situated in an exotic world that evokes, that introduces a new private domestic sphere. Before the age of photography, yet already *foreshadowing* this very modern age, before the “explosion of the private into the public” the reality of domestic intimacy emerges in the bounded shape of tableaux that must of necessity be framed by the outsider, the viewer, the reading public<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Barthes, *La Chambre Claire*, 97; *Camera Lucida* [“what has been”] trans. Howard, 85.

<sup>58</sup> Barthes, *La Chambre Claire*, 9; *Camera Lucida* [“this rather terrible thing in all photography: the return of the dead”] trans. Howard, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 98, trans. Howard.

