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Redaktører / Editors:

Karina Lykke Grand (kunklg@dac.au.dk)

Lis Møller (litlm@dac.au.dk)

Adresse / Address:

Nordisk Selskab for Romantikstudier / Nordic Association for Romantic Studies (NARS)

Langelandsgade 139

DK-8000 Aarhus C

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Matti Jatkola,
Sverigefinska Folkhögskola Svefi

**In Paradise You Are not
Alone:
the Romantic Subject of
Jacques-Henri Bernardin de
Saint-Pierre and Karen Blixen**

In Paradise You Are not Alone: the Romantic Subject of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Karen Blixen

Nobody knows about my man.
They think he's lost on some horizon.

Kate Bush, 'The Man with the Child in his Eyes', 1978

In this article, I will examine romantic representations of the subject in Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788) and in Karen Blixen's short story 'The Immortal Story' (1958). Literary intertexts from the period of romanticism and after – Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), and William Hurrell Mallock's *The New Paul and Virginia* (1878), and a much later novel *Perillisen ominaisuudet* (1963) by the Finnish author Pentti Holappa – will also be discussed.

The starting point for my discussion of the intertextual recurrence of literary characters is Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's highly successful novel *Paul et Virginie*.¹ In the course of the nineteenth century, Paul and Virginie, the eponymous main couple of Bernardin's novel, became a synonym for the romantic success stories avidly consumed by the reading public. No less than nine editions of the English translation had been published in England by the end of the 1790s.² In the nineteenth century, twenty-five editions of the novel were published in the United States against a few hundreds in the novel's land of origin, France.³

I

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that teacher Lucy Snowe, the suffering recluse, represents more than merely the protagonist of the novel *Villette*.⁴ Gilbert and Gubar believe that Brontë's complex and rich description of Lucy's mind also illustrates the general difference between the situations of romantic male and female authors in the nineteenth century.

¹ Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul and Virginia*, trans. John Donovan (London: Peter Owen, 1788/1982).

² Josephine Grieder, *Translations of French Sentimental Prose Fiction in Late Eighteenth-Century England: The History of a Literary Vogue* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), 68.

³ Richard F. Hardin, *Love in a Green Shade: Idyllic Romances Ancient to Modern* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 84.

⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, with introduction and notes by Tim Dolin, *Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1853/2008).

Thus, where the male Romantics glorified the "buried life" to an ontology, Brontë explores the mundane facts of homelessness, poverty, physical unattractiveness, and sexual discrimination or stereotyping that impose self-burial on women. While male poets like Arnold express their desire to experience an inner and more valid self, Brontë describes the pain of women who are restricted to just this private realm.⁵

Gilbert and Gubar argue that whereas in the poet Matthew Arnold's view the artistic objective of the romantic male author was to withdraw into the realm of private experience, the emotional experience of the female subject in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* is quite the opposite. Gilbert and Gubar interpret the character of Lucy Snowe followingly:

For Lucy's ambivalence about love and about men is now fully illuminated: she seeks emotional and erotic involvement as the only available form of self-actualization in her world, yet she fears such involvement will lead either to submission or to destruction, suicide or homicide.⁶

According to Northrop Frye, the relationship of the novelistic genre to its predecessor, the romance, is parodic.⁷ If we follow this line of argument, Lucy Snowe's arduous journey as the secluded teacher, as well as the final news about M. Paul drowning on the Caribbean with the ship *Paul et Virginie*, can be interpreted as a disillusioned, ironic bent in the novel.⁸

In keeping with Frye's view, it does seem that the new versions of and intertextual references to the eponymous characters of *Paul et Virginie* in post-eighteenth-century novels indicate a trace of the parodic and satiric element in the genre. This phenomenon, in turn, could be interpreted as a response to the new questions and challenges of the new era.

John Lucas argues that in *The New Paul and Virginia*, William Hurrell Mallock's initial intention was to aim a Voltairean critique towards the excessively liberal representatives of the learned class.⁹ However, as Lucas argues further, Mallock noticed that his own moralistic pathos eclipsed his Voltairean critique of the contemporary zeitgeist. Lucas suggests that Mallock therefore

⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979/1984), 402.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 432.

⁷ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1974–1975*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 38–9.

⁸ Brontë, *Villette*, 479.

⁹ W. H. Mallock, *The New Paul and Virginia: or, Positivism on an Island*, ed. John D. Margolis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1878/1970).

withdrew from emphasising the connection to Voltaire and chose instead to name his work after Bernardin's romantic success novel *Paul et Virginie*.¹⁰

Researchers outside the field of literary criticism have been univocal in their conviction that the success of Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie* cannot be explained simply by the novel's sentimental pathos. Richard H. Grove summarises this reading by stating that *Paul et Virginie* is an innovative combination of several literary genres that embodies both the monolithic, pre-revolutionary class society and this same society's disintegration. In Grove's opinion, Bernardin (a former officer and self-taught natural scientist) made a lasting impact with his novel both on his time and on the times that followed.

However, it was in *Paul et Virginie* that Saint-Pierre probably made his longest-lasting contribution to fictionalising and thus implanting the island motif in Romantic culture. He was successful in the novel in resolving some of the practical and thematic tensions between the isolation (as it is dramatised in *Crusoe*) of the individual European (man) on an island and the idyllic society, and between European and noble savage.¹¹

During her East African years, Karen Blixen lived quite close to the island of Mauritius. It was there, in the midst of booming commerce, that Bernardin's ideas regarding the ill effects of colonialism on innocent natives first took shape. Biographies of Karen Blixen include no references to Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie*. Instead, Blixen's long-time secretary Clara Svendsen recollects that Danish author Karl Larsen's short story 'En rigtig Sømand'¹² influenced the structure of Blixen's 'The Immortal Story'.¹³ The narratives of both Larsen's short story and Blixen's "Immortal Story" have similar opening lines: a fine-looking gentleman greets an unknown sailor on the street and asks him if he wants to earn five pounds (in Larsen's story) or five guineas (in Blixen's story).¹⁴

As far as Danish literature is concerned, it is interesting to note that Holger Drachmann published a novel entitled *Poul og Virginie. Under nordlig Bredde* in 1879. Drachmann's own English

¹⁰ John Lucas, *Romantic to Modern Literature: Essays and Ideas of Culture 1750-1900* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 139–40.

¹¹ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*, *Studies in Environmental History*, eds. Albert W. Crosby and Donald Worster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995/1996), 253.

¹² Karl Larsen, 'En rigtig Sømand', *Udvalgte Skrifter: andet bind* (København: M. P. Madsens boghandel, 1909/1921), 115–127.

¹³ Karen Blixen (aka Isak Dinesen), 'The Immortal Story', *Anecdotes of Destiny* (London: Michael Joseph, 1958), 141–209. Originally published in *Ladies' Home Journal Magazine – The Magazine Women Believe In*, vol. LXX, no. 2 February (Philadelphia: The Curtis Publishing Company 1953), 34–5, 91–108.

¹⁴ Clara Svendsen, *Notater om Karen Blixen* (København: Gyldendal, 1974), 72.

translation of the work, entitled *Paul and Virginia of a Northern Zone*, came out in 1895.¹⁵ In the posthumous catalogue made of Blixen's home library, Drachmann's version of *Paul et Virginie* is not mentioned, but instead three other works by Drachmann.¹⁶

II

In an intertextual sense it is useful to read Bernardin's novel and Blixen's story side by side. The protagonists of these narratives carry the same names, which automatically creates an intertextual relationship between the two texts, but this does not obliterate the fundamental asymmetry existing between the works. Writing as she was within nineteenth-century narrative conventions, Blixen's story simply cannot evoke in the reader a sense of destiny in the unanalytical and sentimental fashion of romanticism. The concept of 'destiny' itself, thematised in the title of Blixen's collection of stories, becomes in the hands of the modern author a matter of whimsical play.

Mr Clay's capitalistic rationalism, which yet poses definite limits, is a more important theme in Blixen's 'Immortal Story' than the romantic anachronism of the characters of Paul and Virginie. Modern scholars have quite uniformly deemed the characters of Bernardin's novel to suffer from excessive sentimentalism. Consequently, for the modern reader lacking the transcendental orientation of the romantic period, the original Paul and Virginie seem more comical than tragic.

Joshua Wilner summarises M. H. Abrams's literary-historical interpretation of the reasons behind the birth of the romantic movement. In his study, Wilner expresses doubt and raises questions concerning Abrams's traditional view. As we consider the comparisons made between the prophecies of Isaiah and the human imagination in Karen Blixen's 'The Immortal Story', Wilner's summary of Abrams's view increases our understanding of the romantic context.

His argument, in outline, is that Romanticism is an internalization of biblically sanctioned modes of thought and, more specifically, of the historical scheme of creation, fall, and millennial redemption that Abrams presents as definitive of Judeo-Christian thought: in Romanticism the "design of biblical history" becomes reinterpreted as a drama of consciousness, with the human imagination replacing supernatural intervention as the agency of redemption.¹⁷

¹⁵ Holger Drachmann, *Paul and Virginia of a Northern Zone*, trans. Holger Drachmann (Chicago: Way & Williams, 1879/1895).

¹⁶ Pia Bondesson, *Karen Blixens bogsamling på Rungstedlund: En katalog*. (København: Gyldendal, 1982), 155–6.

¹⁷ Joshua Wilner, *Feeding on Infinity: Readings in the Romantic Rhetoric of Internalization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 15.

The freedom of the human imagination as well as its limitations are both central themes in Blixen's story. Frantz Leander Hansen writes about the characters of 'The Immortal Story' followingly:

Elishama informs Clay that his story has never really happened, but is a fairy tale told among sailors; it is only effective because it is a fairy tale. Seafaring folk do not concern themselves with realistic stories. Sailors will not talk about things that can happen in reality, because then it is not an authentic tale. Like the sailor on dry land who loses his *raison d'être*, a story will die without the element that the sea symbolises in Karen Blixen's writings: the dark, unpredictable and fairy-tale-like which provoke the reader's imagination.¹⁸

Frantz Leander Hansen does not compare the two appearances of the eponymous characters of *Paul et Virginie* and the credibility of their intertextual repetition in Blixen's work. In this article I shall present an initial, tentative idea on the subject. The rupture and limit between the romantic and the modern subject is clear to the extent of attenuating the intertextual element, if we observe the distance between the characters and world of *Paul et Virginie* and those of Blixen's story.

The comparison between the consciousnesses of the characters in these two fictional worlds is conveniently undertaken by first comparing how the characters in the two different frame narratives define the eponymous characters. In Bernardin's novel the narrator of the frame narrative is 'the old man'. In Blixen's story tea merchant Clay and his clerk Elishama are in dialogue in which they strive to understand the two embedded narratives: the seafaring story and the prophesy of Isaiah. The main characters' ability to influence the subsequent events is very limited and their role in them is marionette-like. With marionettes, I am alluding to Heinrich von Kleist's aesthetics and his description of the relationship between the human being and the imagination, which was very important to Blixen.

In Bernardin's novel, even though the old man acquaints Paul with didactic philosophical works, the results are meagre. Interpreters of *Paul et Virginie* have repeatedly noted, and been puzzled by, the incredible naiveté and simplicity of Paul.¹⁹ The moral tone of *Paul et Virginie* is created by the old man, who recounts past events to the narrator of the main narrative. For the old man, reading and peace of mind are the most important things in life, and this tranquillity is not disturbed even by the fact that at the end of the novel, Virginie's ship is wrecked and the child lovers are parted.²⁰

¹⁸ Frantz Leander Hansen, *The Aristocratic Universe of Karen Blixen: Destiny and the Denial of Fate*, trans. Gaye Kynock (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998/2003), 58.

¹⁹ Bernardin, *Paul and Virginia*, 103–4; Robin Howells, *Regressive Fictions: Graffigny, Rousseau, Bernardin*. (London: Legenda, 2007), 110–1.

²⁰ Hardin, *Love in a Green Shade*, 86–7.

The presence of the old man – a character who knows the young people’s tragedy – is partly dictated by the narrative conventions of eighteenth-century literature, in which even past events had to be related by a credible character who belonged to the same narrative world as the events. At the same time, the old man’s reclusiveness represents the very ideal of the solitary male subject defined by Gilbert and Gubar and mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Frantz Leander Hansen claims that Karen Blixen was a romantic and unconventional writer. Besides including a number of intertextual literary references in her stories, she also based her evaluations of the concept of the human being on mystical and erotic experiences. Hansen writes in his monograph on Blixen followingly:

Karen Blixen also considers the erotic to be a crucial factor behind decisions that pass themselves off as personal choice. Therefore she is of the opinion that it is not the selection of a particular partner — the individual may on the contrary be chosen quite by chance — but ‘the force of erotic feeling’ as such that leads to love affairs and marriage.

The forces of nature achieve full expression when, in the aristocratic manner, one has the unity of the divine and the demonic in one's backbone. Should one not be fortunate enough to belong to a cultural set or milieu that lives according to this natural twofoldness, one has to acknowledge it and thereby rescind the unnatural schism. This is the message, first and last, in Karen Blixen's writings; in the outline of her works we can see a total exposition of this twofold vision in a poem from her teenager years and in her first published story, “The Hermits”, written when she was 22 years old.²¹

Following Judith Lee, we can, however, ask where exactly in the romantic and modern context we ought to place the encounter between Paul and Virginie in Blixen’s ‘The Immortal Story’. Lee claims that the intertextual repetition of Paul and Virginie’s encounter is already a modern interpretation of the romance as an illusion.²² Hans Leander Hansen, in turn, underlines Blixen’s continuous belief in the strong romantic artist. Hansen interprets Blixen’s variation on the theme of Paul and Virginie as the awakening of initially marionette-like, unconscious characters to the power of the imagination, rejecting the dictates of realism that businessman Mr Clay simple-mindedly believes in.²³

²¹ Hansen, *The Aristocratic Universe*, 140–1.

²² Judith Lee, ‘Rough Magic: Isak Dinesen's Re-Visions of The Tempest’, ed. Marianne Novy, *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 87.

²³ Hansen, *The Aristocratic Universe*, 58.

III

In the novel *Belinda* the Anglo-Irish author Maria Edgeworth made an early rewrite of the characters of Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie*.²⁴ Susan C. Greenfield notes that in *Belinda*, Maria Edgeworth does not recreate Bernardin's (nor, in my opinion, Blixen's) problematic, exceedingly naive character of Paul. Instead of depicting vacuous, irresponsible male characters, Edgeworth's novel ventures to describe the actions of real people living in the real world in all their complexity.

Mr. Vincent, a Creole from Jamaica, comes to England to be educated and falls in love with Belinda, who is enamored of Clarence Hervey. Mr. Vincent's fate is intertwined with that of Mr. Hartley, a middle-class Englishman who made a fortune in Jamaica and, having narrowly survived a slave rebellion, has returned home to marry off the daughter he deserted. As Mr. Vincent's and Mr. Hartley's stories converge, the problems of homoeroticism and gender ambiguity are gradually replaced by questions about heterosexuality, nation, and race. Does the Creole born abroad have as much right to Belinda as her countryman Clarence Hervey? And should Mr. Hartley, who abandoned his family in England to become a bigamist slaveowner in Jamaica, be allowed to bequeath his English daughter tellingly named Virginia — to the man of his choice?²⁵

Greenfield notes further that in the large variety of different characters in Edgeworth's novel, it is the men with Creole backgrounds returning from Britain's Caribbean colonies who attempt to take control of the woman characters. Even though Edgeworth maintains a developmental optimism and conciliatory attitude towards relationships between the sexes and the opportunities offered by new kinds of education, at this point of her novel she expresses more realism than Bernardin, Blixen, or even Charlotte Brontë.

The modern quality of Edgeworth's *Belinda* is indicated by the fact that in the novel's intertextual rendering of *Paul et Virginie*, the relationship between the native country and the world outside becomes crucial: not as an idealised, distant, paradisiacal island viewed from the midst of European decadence and from behind the shield of Rousseauian moralism, but instead as a real confusion in identity as people change their realm of activity and are suddenly evaluated by others from the outside in a new, unexpected way.

²⁴ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick, *Oxford World's Classics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1801/1994).

²⁵ Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance: Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 116.

The plethora of characters in Edgeworth's novel has caused criticism.²⁶ On the other hand, the theme of the novel has been defined as mobility – an interpretation supported by the name originally proposed for the novel: 'Abroad and at Home'.

As with many of Edgeworth's novels, however, there are so many characters in *Belinda* that it is hardly a matter of privileging either Belinda or Lady Delacour. The novel has the quality of a kaleidoscope, in which flashing images of belles, beaux, rakes, fops, servants, conjurers, colonials and émigrés pass before our eyes in sometimes bewildering sequence. The original sketch for the tale focused on the contrasting figures of Belinda and Lady Delacour, but the finished novel includes (amongst other characters) two additional female figures, Harriet Freke and Virginia St Pierre, a young girl with whom Clarence Hervey, Belinda's would-be lover, becomes entangled.²⁷

In contrast to archetypal generalisations, Maria Edgeworth does not make the female breast (a key characteristic of Lady Delacour), a symbol of sexuality, caregiving or belated pastoral idyll. Instead, Lady Delacour's fear of breast cancer that develops in secret is a symbol of her socially feigned lifestyle based on acting and secrecy.²⁸

Both Lady Delacour and Belinda experience the objectification of the entire personality caused by the codes regarding dress and social mores.²⁹ Blixen's solution for avoiding the objectification of personality in her story is to emphasise the artistic imagination as the human resource for achieving autonomy. Blixen's Virginie, who is a prostitute and thus at the bottom rung of the social ladder, fantasised as a child – and still imagines as the story unfolds – that she could be an actress.³⁰

By the following my aim is to argue that archetypal generalisations *à la* psychoanalysis are based on an assumption about the superhistorical nature of the human mind. The differences evident in the intertextual successors of *Paul et Virginie* are due to changes in normative views concerning the human being, to which the authors are reacting to and commenting on. Neither Maria Edgeworth's colourful, comical *Belinda*, Charlotte Brontë's melancholic and reclusive *Villette*, M. H. Mallock's moralistic and puritan *The New Paul and Virginia*, nor Blixen's 'The Immortal Story', with its emphasis on the independent romantic artist, touch upon the question of desire in one archetypal way.

²⁶ Cliona O. Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006), 38.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸ Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters*, 116.

²⁹ Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth*, 39–40.

³⁰ Blixen, 'The Immortal Story', 169, 192; Hansen, *The Aristocratic Universe*, 59.

Romanticism can be characterised as a transitional epoch in a longer historical process in which the self-reflection of the European human being gradually transformed into that of the modern individual. In this process, both popular and elite literature played an important part, examples of which are the enormous success of Bernardin's novel or the moral indignation caused by Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

The psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel notes that Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie*, as well as many other utopian stories, represent nature in the form of mountain peaks resembling the mother's breast.³¹ Chasseguet-Smirgel adds observantly that in utopias, starting from Plato's *The Republic*, sons never learn to know their fathers, and patrilinear ownership has disappeared.³² In Bernardin's novel, the women who have arrived on Mauritius as single mothers represent, together with their children, a return to an agricultural, quasi-Edenic community unburdened by class problems.³³

IV

An interesting and much later intertextual work situated in the modern world is the novel *Perillisen ominaisuudet* ('Qualities of the Heir') by the Finnish author Pentti Holappa.³⁴ In this modern depiction of factory life, the utopian denial of patrilinear ownership and paternal identification is articulated more powerfully than in the above-mentioned new versions (mainly authored by women) of Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie*.

In Holappa's novel, the intertextual connection to the characters of Paul and Virginie is not directly evident, in the names of the characters or otherwise. Instead, the characters of the frame story and the themes of their conversations allude, quite recognisably, to Blixen's 'The Immortal Story'. Blixen's tea merchant Clay and his clerk Elishama have become, in Holappa's novel, the factory director and his economist.

Karen Blixen's 'The Immortal Story' is indeed a presence in literary and cinematic Modernism. Finnish Pentti Holappa wrote his novel in the Paris of the *nouveau roman* at the beginning of the

³¹ Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1984/1986. 'The Archaic Matrix of the Oedipus Complex in Utopia', trans. Maisey Paget, in *Sexuality and Mind: The Role of the Father and the Mother in the Psyche*, published in series *Psychoanalytic Crosscurrents*, ed. Leo Goldberger (New York: New York University Press, 1984/1986), 94.

³² Chasseguet-Smirgel, 'The Archaic Matrix', 95.

³³ Howells, *Regressive Fictions*, 129-30.

³⁴ Pentti Holappa, *Perillisen ominaisuudet: romaani* (Helsinki: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö. 1963). Published in Swedish in 1964.

1960s. Jeanne Moreau was an important French actress in the art films of the era, including the films of the American director Orson Welles. Only a few years after Holappa's novel, Welles made a film of Blixen's 'The Immortal Story' with Jeanne Moreau starring as Virginie (*Une histoire immortelle*, Spain 1966).³⁵

Loneliness is the theme in Constance Beresford-Howe's novel *A Population of One*.³⁶ The first-person narrator, Miss Wilhelmina Doyle, has moved to Montreal to teach literature at the university. In her thoughts she often compares her own experiences to those of Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. Wilhelmina calls herself 'a Victorian heroine absurdly planted in the twentieth century'.³⁷

After all, even Lucy Snowe met four men on her first night in *Villette*. Yes, strangers meeting. Two lonely people. Enough problems and obstacles to make a satisfactory plot. Then the happy ending ... lovers united. No more loneliness.³⁸

As Brontë's novel has made such a lasting impact on the literary scene one might ask: why is not her romantic subject mentioned in the subtitle of this article and discussed alongside those of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Blixen? Recent literary criticism on the topic makes a very convincing argument that the problems of Lucy Snowe, as they are played out in her mind, are already more strongly related to the problems of the Victorian and modern subject than to romanticism, which was already by the time of the novel's publication turning into a past epoch. Sally Shuttleworth summarises the new challenges faced by Lucy Snowe followingly:

Far from depicting romance as a great union of souls, Brontë cuts through such ideological camouflage to show the competitive ethos of capitalism at work in the private domain.

Brontë's protagonists possess all the striving aspirations of the Romantic hero, but their forms of expression are firmly Victorian. In the paradigmatic Victorian discourse of phrenology to which Brontë subscribed, social surveillance was linked to ideas of social mobility and self-improvement, and selfhood defined by the experience of conflict and struggle, both internally, between competing faculties, and externally, between self and other. All these elements are to be found in other contemporary writers, but no one else brings them together with such clarity, nor explores their consequences so remorselessly. Competition and conflict, for Brontë, define not just the realms of economics and labour, but the interior domain of

³⁵ Judith Thurman, 'When Women Make Movies: Jeanne Moreau Talks about Seduction, Aging, and Fame', *Ms. Magazine*, No. 7, Volume V, 2 (New York: Ms. Magazine Corp., Jan 1977), 50–2, 86–8.

³⁶ Constance Beresford-Howe, *A Population of One: A novel* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

selfhood. The yearning towards romance which runs through all her fiction is decisively undercut by her dissection of its workings.³⁹

However, Brontë's protagonist Lucy Snowe definitely lacks one characteristic so realistically depicted later in the modern era. Despite her unsatisfying occupation as a teacher Lucy does not use, or even come upon, mass-produced entertainment as an escape from a suffocating life situation. This line drawn by Brontë situates the novel firmly within the definition of a Victorian novel of ideas. The mental image haunting Lucy is that of a nun, not the 'bold and the beautiful' heroes and heroines of the surrounding metropole of Villette.

The vacuous characters and melodramatic dialogue in Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie* make the hit novel fall somewhat short of the standard of a high literary work. In fact, the said features are part and parcel of the conventions of romantic mass entertainment.

In a letter to her publisher Robert H. Haas, Karen Blixen compared the narrative tone of 'The Immortal Story' to "light chamber music".⁴⁰ Blixen wanted to describe herself to the publisher as a writer who mastered a wide range of narrative registers. This was in spite of the fact that 'The Immortal Story' was one those Blixen's stories which were first published in a commercial magazine. The serious questions posed by Mr. Clay, clerk Elishama, Miss Virginia and Paul about transcendence and the conditions for individual uniqueness in the modern age were illustrated by the glossy product advertisements of the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

The literary texts discussed in this article contain a dialogue between moral didactics and naive erotic sentimentalism spanning almost two hundred years, establishing an intertextual chain that reaches beyond the historical era 1770–1830 traditionally defined as the period of romantic literature. To sum up, I would argue that the rupture and limit between the romantic and the modern subject is clear to the extent of attenuating the intertextual element as soon as we recognise the distance between the characters and world of *Paul et Virginie* and those of Karen Blixen's 'The Immortal Story'.

³⁹ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, 7, ed. Gillian Beer and Catherine Gallagher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996/2004), 245.

⁴⁰ Karen Blixen, *Karen Blixen i Danmark: Breve 1931-62*, vol. 2, ed. Frans Lasson and Tom Engelbrecht (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996), 160.