

**PAUL AND VIRGINIE - Joseph van Lierus ( 1823 – 1876)**



A young couple is sheltering from tropical rain under a banana leaf.

The painting, dated 1850, is by Joseph van Lierus, a Belgian painter specializing in portraits.

As usual Lauronce's fan reproduces the printed version: here, an engraving dated 1865 by Jos Franck.



The title suggests it is an illustration for the novel by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, the tragic love story set on Mauritius Island. Indeed a chapter of the novel describes how Paul and Virginie are drenched by a tropical downpour. Yet their makeshift umbrella is not a banana leaf:

“ Virginie was running towards the house, her head covered with her petticoat, which she had pulled from the back to keep off rain (...) she was holding Paul’s arm, himself quite entirely wrapped in the same covering, both laughing to be protected under an umbrella of their own making.”

It seems that the reference would not be the novel but to an opera in six scenes written in 1876 by French composer Victor Massé, on a libretto by Barbier and Carré. The magazine *Le Monde Illustré* published in November 1876 a review of the performance with the following engraving.



A series of six trade-cards edited by Bognard between 1876 and 1890, each illustrating one of the scenes of the opera, shows a great similarity to the painting by J.van Lerijs and the illustration in *Le Monde Illustré*. What could be written in 1787, Virginie with her petticoat over her head, could surely not be displayed on a 19<sup>th</sup> century stage.



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