Printed in Paris by Renaudie [no first name known] for Duringe [no first name known] in Paris and [Leonard] Smithers in London. The relationship of this text to Teleny (1893) is problematic. As I show in my Notes to Teleny, Smithers, who was responsible for publishing both texts, added material to the original MS paving the way for a sequel, and this appears to be that sequel. The question is—was this text part of the original MS of Teleny, which passed from Smithers to Duringe, his Parisian agent, and then to [Charles] Hirsch, who later published a French translation of the unedited MS? (Smithers had effected some important changes—deletions as well as additions).

Internal evidence from both texts suggests that Des Grieux was indeed written by the same hand(s) as Teleny, and possibly before Teleny at that, though not published until 6 years later, by which time Smithers had broken with [Harry Sidney] Nichols (printer of Teleny) and was using French printers (mainly Renaudie) commissioned by his agent in Paris, the mysterious Duringe. The evidence, not conclusive, is as follows:

(a) Both texts are written in a similar mélange of styles, all literate, ranging from the attempt at the Paterian purple passage to the straightforward scientific recounting of sexual development reminiscent of Havelock Ellis’ case-histories.

(b) The ‘plot’ of Des Grieux takes the form of the case-history of the birth and sexual development of Des Grieux up to early youth; in which the author traces the roots of Des Grieux père’s sexual neurotism (‘hysteria’ is a word used several times in describing his mental state) to the traumatic shock his mother (i.e. Des Grieux fils’ grandmother) receives at his conception (the first chapter of the book) when she is sexually approached by her aunt’s large white poodle. This is picked up in the final section of the book in which Des Grieux père relates his early sexual development: ‘…My days would have flowed by monotonously, had it not been for an infirmity of mine, which really tortured my life. I was terribly frightened of poodles, they were the bane of my existence…I grew deathly pale…almost fainted from fear…I have been told that my mother—during her pregnancy—had been frightened by a poodle that my aunt had at that time…can such a circumstance have produced so great an impression on the foetus in the earlier stages of gestation?…’

Now this traumatic fear resurfaces momentarily in an important passage in Teleny, when Des Grieux fils relates a dream he has in which he sexually ravishes an imaginary ‘sister’ when he sees her asleep. When he awakes, he is thrown again into fear and trembling by what he thinks he sees: ‘…And how did that accursed white cur, sitting & staring fixedly at me, get into my room? Coming to my senses, I realized that this dog was no more than my shirt which I had thrown carelessly onto a char on going to bed.’ (This dream of rape was reprinted by Duringe as Chapter II of ‘Erotic Fragments…by a Parisian Student’ in Female Lust, 1901; but mention of the ‘accursed white cur’ is excised from that version.) Since there is no other mention of Des Grieux’s fear of dogs in Teleny, this must surely be a reference back to a ‘prelude’ to the major text, suggesting that this neurotic anxiety about dogs had been transmitted from father to son?

Another possibility is that Smithers, on preparing the original MS of Teleny for publication, sensed the possibility of a follow-up instalment, and hired someone to add passages to Teleny whetting the appetite of his prospective readers for a sequel. Hence the number of added passages in which Des Grieux fils promises, in Teleny, to relate the histories of his father and mother ‘later on.’ In this reading, the person who added these ‘extra’ passages (possibly Smithers himself) would have gone on to produce the ‘Prelude’ (in face, sequel).

In the event, the ‘Prelude’ traces Des Grieux’s ancestry back to his grandparents ‘Gaston Des Grieux’ and to his female cousin Camille and their son (unnamed), who gives an
account in the first person of his sexual history up to adolescence (i.e. before he meets and
marries the mother of the Camille Des Grieux of Teleny, who seems to have been named
after his grandmother).

From Peter Mendes, *Clandestine Erotic Fiction in English 1800—1930: A Bibliographical Study.*
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