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**The Nineteenth-Century Social Imaginary of the**

**Rebellious Maidservant**



Jessica Mary Rushton

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

Durham University

2023

## Short Abstract

This thesis argues that the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie created and reproduced a ‘social imaginary’ of the figure of the rebellious female servant: a socio-cultural construct that is created and understood through elements of nineteenth-century literary and non-literary discourses. I argue that it is thanks to the identification and analysis of a new nineteenth-century literary subgenre that I label *le roman de la servante* that we can recognize and study the workings of this interconnected network of discourses. In its most schematic form, *le roman de la servante* is a corpus of literary texts foregrounding a rebellious maidservant as literary protagonist in its own right. It includes works by Stendhal, Balzac, the Goncourts, Barbey d’Aurevilly, Maupassant, Zola, Mirbeau and Léon Frapié. The nineteenth-century authors whose works make up my corpus of texts initially represent a fictional maidservant heroine who implements different strategies of revolt against her bourgeois masters and mistresses in order to escape her oppressive situation as a servant and obtain a sense of power and freedom. I identify and analyse these strategies of revolt through Georges Didi-Huberman’s recent theory of *soulèvements*, as outlined in his recent study *Désirer désobéir: Ce qui nous soulève I* (2019). These methods of revolt through the maidservant’s appearance, voice and thoughts consequently allow female servant characters to reverse the prevailing power dynamics between servants and their masters and mistresses, as well as between men and women. I then combine this theory of *soulèvements* with a third-wave feminist reading of nineteenth-century fictional representations of female freedom in order to argue that it is through *soulèvements* that maidservant protagonists are only able to gain a ‘sense’ of freedom, and therefore happiness, from their oppressive situations. In the process, I demonstrate how the social imaginary limits the representation of the fictional maidservant’s agency in their respective plots whilst simultaneously restricting the male author’s freedom in

his representation of the fictional female servant's revolt to a reproduction of the stereotypes and prejudices that surrounded her. The figure ultimately remains part of a masculine fantasy about subservient female figures, despite any limited amount of freedom she achieves. The fictional servants in *le roman de la servante* therefore can never fully transcend their roles as servants: they are either punished or remain subservient to the male characters. The social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant serves as a new category through which the representation of the female servant in the nineteenth-century French novel and short story can be understood insofar as it deepens our understanding how the bourgeoisie's fragile class position, alongside their collective, misogynistic stereotypes and prejudices concerning categories of class, race and gender, had imagined the female servant as a potential thief, spy and a gossip; a possible temptress with the capacity to corrupt men and children alike; a probable contagion of (sexual) diseases and even a dangerous threat to the bourgeois family.

## Long Abstract

This thesis studies how the rebellious female servant emerged in the nineteenth century as a ‘social imaginary’: a collective socio-cultural construct created from an interconnected network of literary and non-literary texts. By revealing how idiosyncrasies and representative patterns in the various texts produced by novelists, household manual writers, doctors, government officials, lawyers, lay writers and journalists constitute a collective cultural fantasy surrounding the subversive female servant, I propose that the emergence of the nineteenth-century maidservant as both a subject of fascination and fear should also be considered as a socio-cultural construct. This thesis argues that it is through the identification and analysis of a new nineteenth-century literary subgenre that I label *le roman de la servante* that we can identify and study the workings of this social imaginary.

Stendhal, Balzac, the Goncourts, Barbey d’Aurevilly, Maupassant, Zola, Mirbeau and Léon Frapié are shown to create as well as reproduce the stereotypes and prejudices that constituted this social imaginary by writing narratives that specifically focused on a rebellious female servant protagonist. I argue that the fictional methods of revolt used by these fictional maidservants emerge as new categories through which these female protagonists can be understood as obtaining this limited sense of freedom in their respective narratives as well as serving as a marker for this social imaginary. By applying Georges Didi-Huberman’s recent theory of *soulèvements*, as outlined in his recent study *Désirer désobéir: Ce qui nous soulève I* (2019), I explore how fictional maidservants revolt against their bourgeois employers through the subtle methods of appearance, voice and thoughts. These strategies of revolt consequently allow female servant characters to reverse the prevailing power dynamics between servants and their masters and mistresses, as well as between men

and women. Yet these methods of revolt also serve as an index for the construction of the rebellious maidservant. By identifying and analysing the methods of revolt that these fictional maidservants have at their disposal, this project therefore demonstrates how nineteenth-century writers of fiction were actively producing and feeding into a contemporary network of non-literary discourses, despite the different purposes behind the publication of their texts.

I then combine this theory of revolt with Maria Scott's third-wave feminist reading of nineteenth-century fictional representations of female freedom in her analysis of *Stendhal's Less-Loved Heroines* (2013) in order to argue that it is through *soulèvements* that maidservant protagonists are able to gain a 'sense' of freedom, and therefore happiness, from their oppressive situations. In the process, I demonstrate I argue that the fictional maidservant's freedom is ultimately limited. By arguing that fictional heroines obtain a 'sense' of freedom, I show how the social imaginary limits the representation of the fictional maidservant's agency in a twofold manner. On a diegetic level, the amount of freedom that the fictional female servant obtains through her strategy of revolt in her respective narrative is constrained: she remains ultimately trapped in her role of servitude. Yet on an extra-diegetic level, the literary writer's freedom in his representation of the rebellious fictional female servant is likewise confined by the misogynistic stereotypes and prejudices that are constituting the social imaginary. In other words, the representation of the fictional maidservant's agency in *le roman de la servante* is constrained by the socio-cultural construct invoked, while the author himself remains limited by this same socio-cultural construct as he creates and develops the social imaginary of a fictitious rebellious female servant.

Chapter One deepens our understanding of how, why and when nineteenth-century France constructed a social imaginary of the rebellious female servant by tracing the

historical, social, political and cultural factors that brought about its existence, as well as the discourses that spawned it. As part of these discourses, the subgenre of *le roman de la servante* also emerges in the nineteenth century as a crystallization of this socio-cultural construct, and this chapter seeks to respond to the question of why nineteenth-century literary writers became fascinated with the female servant as literary protagonist in its own right. After this historical and socio-cultural overview of the factors leading to the construction of the social imaginary, Chapters Two, Three and Four analyse how nineteenth-century discourses tied the female servant to the prejudices and stereotypes that surrounded lower-class female outsiders, trapping the social imaginary of the female servant in this masculinist economy that viewed them as sites of pleasure and repulsion.

Chapter Two analyses how three real-life maidservant cases helped the maidservant to become established as a murderous figure in the nineteenth-century public consciousness and thus came to permeate the nineteenth-century social imaginary: Henriette Cornier in 1825, H el ene J egado in 1851 and C eline Masson in 1891. These cases demonstrate how the female servant was demonized and masculinized in criminological reports and trial documents, as well as sensationalized by the press. These discourses, with their insistent descriptions of the female servant, can similarly be found in *le roman de la servante*. Yet, as this chapter outlines, nineteenth-century fictional maidservants cannot revolt in the same way as their real-life equivalents. For fictional maidservants to perform acts of physical violence within the main narrative of realist fiction is shown to be largely unthinkable, and thus unwritable, in the nineteenth century for two reasons. First, this would create a plot too closely connected with popular fiction, a genre that novelists such as Stendhal sought to distance themselves from; and second, while Naturalist and particularly Decadent fiction represented strong fears of women and women's sexuality in this period, the intersectionality of the class and gender

categories embodied by the figure of the maidservant combined with her violence nature appears to have been unthinkable in bourgeois nineteenth-century society and so unwritable from the perspective of bourgeois author. One must wait until the twentieth- and twenty-first-century fictionalisations of the modern maidservant avatar through fictional characters of the maid, the cleaner and the nanny for the representation of a lower-class violent female household employee. Using Didi-Huberman's categories of revolt, Chapters Three and Four of this thesis then investigate these subtler methods of rebellion as a way of further uncovering what constitutes the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant.

Chapter Three analyses *le roman de la servante* through the emergence of its stock maidservant protagonists: the 'cross-class maidservant': a woman from the bourgeoisie or the aristocracy who dons the disguise of a maidservant in order to revolt against the constraints and conventions of nineteenth-century polite society. I show how Stendhal's *Mina de Vanghel*, Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*, Barbey d'Aurevilly's 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' and Maupassant's *La Chambre 11* use the maidservant disguise as a narrative device and argue that this should be read through the lens provided by Didi-Huberman's category of *le soulèvement gestuel*: as a rebellion of the entire body. This method of revolt raises bourgeois fears of class blurring, as male master characters find themselves no longer able to tell the difference between their wives and their maidservants. These texts allude to a bourgeois anxiety that they are only separated from their servants by money. Authors of *le roman de la servante* provide their cross-class maidservant heroines with a sense of freedom and happiness through this revolt by playing with the rules surrounding the female servant's appearance. The act of self-debasement through the maidservant disguise paradoxically allows this reversal of power. Yet this *soulèvement* creates, as well as reproduces fears that were surrounding the nineteenth-century female servant as shown through examples of

nineteenth-century written discourses. Ultimately these writers are shown to confine the female figure to the masculinist economy that punishes heroines who step out of their bourgeois and aristocratic roles in nineteenth-century society.

Chapter Four then examines how the fictional maidservant protagonists in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux* and Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* revolt through their voice and thoughts by applying Didi-Huberman's categories of *pensées* and *paroles*. The Goncourts and Mirbeau play with the rules that governed the female servant's voice in this period. While household manuals attempted to silence the maidservant as part of their bid to erase her presence and thus her threat in the home, authors of *le roman de la servante* show how this silence can be manipulated by fictional servants as a form of rebellion. The two fictional maidservants in this chapter rebel by means of their imaginations, suppressed words and laughter well before they openly lash out verbally at their masters and mistresses. Building on Chapter Two's analysis of maidservant violence, this chapter uses Germinie and Célestine as the two main examples of fictional maidservants who can only violently attack their masters and mistresses through their imaginations. The rebellious fictional maidservant will never be allowed to fully realize her violent desires in the nineteenth-century novel; it is not until the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that the modern fictional avatars of the maidservant (such as the nanny, the cleaner and the hotel maid) can violently rise up against the modern bourgeois household. The nineteenth-century fictional maidservant can only achieve a full sense of freedom in her mind. This chapter concludes by showing how the female servant remains trapped inside the masculinist economy of the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant insofar as their *pensées* and *paroles* are trapped inside the language of the master, or rather, the language of the dominant class. Germinie and Célestine become ventriloquized puppets through which the bourgeois

male author speaks; he imposes his social biases, misogyny and/or anarchist opinions onto these fictional characters through his representation of their *paroles* and *pensées*. I then turn my attention to how the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious female servant creates a foundation for future research and critical enquiry into the figures of rebellious maids, cleaners and nannies in modern French cultural studies such as twenty-first-century literature and cinema.

One of the key findings of this thesis is that the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious female servant not only allows us to see how bourgeois nineteenth-century authors were generating and reproducing a socio-cultural construct through a new genre of literature, but how this social imaginary was fundamentally tied to issues surrounding class gender and race in the nineteenth century.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to Lisa Rushton who over the years has sacrificed so much to ensure I can live my life with as much freedom and happiness as possible. Mom, I made it.

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Figure 1: Harembert's diagram of Jégado's skull divided into her psychological attributes.

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## Conventions

I refer to all titles in this thesis in footnotes according to the MHRA system and its presentation guidelines. The dates placed after the titles of books in the main text refer to their first appearance in printed form. Any suggested emendations, such as the modernization of spelling or of punctuation of French words is stated in the footnotes. I italicize French words such as *faits divers* when to refer to the specific French usage of such terms that would be otherwise lost if rendered in modern English. I label the new nineteenth-century subgenre in French as *le roman de la servante* in order to emphasize the gender of the female servant at the heart of these narratives and to create a distinction between studies in English literature that focus on ‘servant fiction’; this label is also plays on the conventions of titles that make up this subgenre of French literature.

## Introduction

In his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, Gustave Flaubert satirizes attitudes commonly voiced by the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie with regard to their female servants: ‘Bonne. Les bonnes sont toutes mauvaises! Il n’y a plus de domestiques!’,<sup>1</sup> and ‘*Femmes de chambre*. Plus jolies que leurs maîtresses. – Connaissent leurs secrets et les trahissent. Toujours déshonorées par le fils de la maison.’<sup>2</sup> Flaubert created a catalogue of satirical definitions such as these from an accumulation of nineteenth-century bourgeois commonplaces in order to criticize the bourgeoisie for their dullness and stupidity. He mocked the bourgeoisie for automatically and unthinkingly accepting such clichés that explained their world, no matter if they were true or not. Yet these pretentious, empty and fixed bourgeois formulations should not only be read as a way for Flaubert to mock his society’s prejudices; rather, these satirical definitions simultaneously reinforced and created the bourgeoisie’s anxiety about the maidservant and her proximity to the family. The maidservant’s role provided her with access to the most intimate secrets, which she could then use to betray her masters and mistresses and destroy their reputations. While Flaubert notes that the maidservant is always dishonoured by the younger male members of the home, he also suggests that the maidservant’s alluring appearance is to blame for attracting the male gaze: she is notably prettier than her mistress and could deflect the master’s gaze from his wife and tempt him into committing adultery. Whilst they mock the bourgeoisie’s mistrust of the maidservant, these clichés reinforce, as well as create, the notion of an everyday bourgeois wariness that the maidservant was not a hard-working employee and that her loyalty to the household was not automatically to be assumed.

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Stéphanie Dord-Crouslé and others, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2013-21), v, 1135-1265 (p. 1120).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1158.

This thesis proposes to study how nineteenth-century literary writers were actively feeding into a network of literary and non-literary discourses that created and developed a nineteenth-century ‘social imaginary’ of a feared, rebellious maidservant. Nineteenth-century literature, through the identification and analysis of a new literary subgenre that I label *le roman de la servante*, actively contributed to a network of interconnected discourses that imagined the maidservant as a potential thief, spy and gossip; a possible temptress with the capacity to corrupt men and children alike; a probable vector of contagion for various (sexual) diseases and even a dangerous threat to the bourgeoisie’s lives. The identification of this new subgenre will deepen our understanding of how the bourgeoisie’s fragile class position, when set alongside their collective stereotypes and prejudices concerning categories of class, race and gender, together constituted this social imaginary of a maidservant figure who represented a threat to their reputation and to the structure of the family, as well as a microcosm of the moral and hierarchical order of nineteenth-century society.

My deployment of the term ‘social imaginary’<sup>3</sup> particularly aligns with Dominique Kalifa’s definition of the social imaginary in his sociocultural study of the emergence of the *bas-fonds* in the nineteenth century:

un système cohérent, dynamique, de représentations du monde social, une sorte de répertoire des figures et des identités collectives dont se dote chaque société à des moments donnés de son histoire. Les imaginaires sociaux décrivent la façon dont les sociétés perçoivent leurs composants – groupes, classes, catégories –, hiérarchisent leurs divisions, élaborent leur avenir. Ils produisent et instituent le social plus qu’ils ne le reflètent. Mais ils ont besoin pour cela de s’incarner dans des intrigues, de raconter des histoires, de les donner à lire ou à voir. C’est pourquoi l’imaginaire est surtout, comme le suggère Pierre Popovic, un ‘ensemble interactif de représentations corrélées, organisées en fictions latentes’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> While the term originates in Cornelius Castoriadis, *L’Institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), see also more recent application of the term in the following studies: Bronislaw Baczko, *Les Imaginaires sociaux: Mémoires et espoirs collectifs* (Paris: Payot, 1984); Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary 1750–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Nathalie Jakobowicz, *1830: Le Peuple de Paris: Révolution et représentations sociales* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009); Marilyn R. Brown, *The Gamin de Paris in Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture: Delacroix, Hugo, and the French Social Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Dominique Kalifa, *Les Bas-fonds: Histoire d’un imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), pp. 20–21.

By revealing how idiosyncrasies and representative patterns in the various texts produced by novelists, household manual writers, doctors, government officials, lawyers, lay writers and journalists constitute a collective cultural fantasy surrounding the subversive female servant, this thesis argues that the emergence of the nineteenth-century maidservant as a subject of both fascination and fear should also be considered to constitute a social imaginary. Just as Kalifa argues that the *bas-fonds* should be read as a social imaginary insofar as they are ‘un lieu où s’enchevêtrent mille images, mille références venues de la littérature, des enquêtes sociales de l’hygiène publique, des faits divers, des sciences morales et politiques, de la chanson, du cinéma’,<sup>5</sup> so this thesis proposes that the literary and non-literary texts generated the fears that they claimed to describe. I apply Michel Foucault’s theory of performative discourses to these literary and non-literary texts that constitute the socio-cultural construct of the rebellious female servant and argue that they are ‘comme des pratiques qui forment systématiquement les objets dont ils parlent.’<sup>6</sup> It is by describing the fears and fascination surrounding the female servant that these discourses simultaneously reproduce these anxieties and feed into this interest.

This thesis explores the factors that contributed to the emergence of this nineteenth-century social imaginary in the nineteenth century and seeks to show how *le roman de la servante* crystallizes this social cultural construct through its literary representations of the nineteenth-century female servant. By pursuing these principal research questions, this thesis reveals how the imaginings surrounding the rebellious maidservant emerge as an attempt by the bourgeoisie to control the nineteenth-century lower-class female body, and so to preserve their society’s moral and hierarchical class order.

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<sup>5</sup> Kalifa, *Les Bas-fonds*, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *L’Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 67.

Literary and non-literary representations of the maidservant are thus intertwined in their production of this socio-cultural construct.<sup>7</sup> Historicism theorizes that each expressive act, whether recorded in a historical or literary document, is embedded in a network of practices.<sup>8</sup> This network supposes that literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably from one another, and thus that both type of texts must be read alongside one another. It also states that no discourse is exempt from history, but is instead shaped by the historical context in which it is produced. This thesis therefore also proposes to respond to the question of how and why literary and non-literary writers created representations of the maidservant that simultaneously engaged with the period's collective 'bourgeois' imaginings regarding the maidservant's class, race and gender.

I label the class status of these literary and non-literary writers with the noun 'bourgeoisie' and adjective 'bourgeois' in order to describe a specific mentality originating from the social elites of nineteenth-century society that produced the stereotypes and prejudices which together constructed the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant. In her study *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie* (2003), Sarah Maza acknowledges that while the term 'bourgeoisie' is used frequently by modern historians to label the 'social elite of postrevolutionary France', who were believed to have 'loomed large' as 'the normative group in French society',<sup>9</sup> there is also a 'sociological fuzziness' created by grouping together everyone 'from the richest banker through intellectuals and professionals to the struggling neighbourhood grocer' as bourgeois insofar as these people were neither nobles nor manual

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<sup>7</sup> Sharon Marcus has a similar methodology in which she argues that the 'apartment story' is found in both historical and literary discourses. See her *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> See Paul Hamilton, 'Reconstructing Historicism', in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 386-404.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*, p. 13.

labourers.<sup>10</sup> Maza argues that this vague classification of the bourgeoisie is paradoxically ‘accompanied by an extraordinary specificity about its culture and its mentality’ in modern scholarship.<sup>11</sup> She shows how and why such a group came to be perceived as central to society, and then systematically vilified as a class responsible for negatively defining ‘France’s deepest social, cultural and political ideas’.<sup>12</sup> I build on her argument, focusing on how the writers who explicitly scorned the bourgeoisie in their works – one may think, in this context, of the obvious example of Flaubert, as well as Mirbeau and Maupassant – never thought to give up their own privileged class, retaining the very class mentality they sought to vilify.<sup>13</sup> I develop David McNally’s argument in his study *Bodies of Meaning* (2001), arguing that the nineteenth-century authors who engaged with the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant wrote from a primarily male bourgeois perspective that viewed labouring bodies in nineteenth-century society, such as those of maidservants, as belonging to social outcasts:

A central feature of bourgeois thought [...] has been its othering of the body and its embodying of the other. Proletarians, women, Blacks, the colonized: these groups of the oppressed and exploited have long been assigned the category of the body by dominant discourses. The bourgeois outlook demeans the laboring body as an object of grotesque and repulsive processes, the site of biology, instinct, sweat, and desire. [...] Bourgeois culture is constituted in and through a process in which bodiliness is ascribed to outcast others. ‘It could be said as a broad generalisation,’ write two ethnologists, ‘that bourgeois culture was like an organism with a hidden body. The body was there, to be sure, but its existence was persistently denied by the head. Bourgeois culture was spiritual, not physical.’ Bodies appeared outside bourgeois society, therefore, as attributes of foreign or alien social types. These non-bourgeois others, these ‘people of the body,’ to use Himani Bannerji’s wonderful expression, were feminized, racialized, and animalized; they were constructed as members of a radically different race, sex, and species.<sup>14</sup>

As the chapters in this thesis explore in depth, the interconnected network of literary and non-literary texts that created and developed the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant in

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<sup>10</sup> Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 12.

<sup>13</sup> See Alan Raitt, *Gustave Flaubertus Bourgeoisophobus: Flaubert and the Bourgeois Mentality* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005) and Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*, pp. 168, 178.

<sup>14</sup> David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 4.

the nineteenth century are written from this primarily male bourgeois perspective that others and demeans the maidservant by connecting her body to stereotypes of other female outsiders and reducing her to a figure of either sexual desire or disgust. This thesis explores in depth how this social imaginary can and should be read as a construction of the ‘master’s discourse’ (see in particular Chapter Four), for the male authors of *le roman de la servante* were part of the class that employed servants in this period and constructed the social imaginary of the maidservant by means of their bourgeois stereotypes and prejudices concerning her class, gender and race. The authors of *le roman de la servante* also fed into the construction of the rebellious maidservant by limiting the agency of their fictional maidservant heroines finally leaving them constrained by a masculinist, bourgeois mentality and so prevented from becoming fully liberated and autonomous women.

The social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant serves as a new category through which the representation of the female servant in the nineteenth-century French novel and short story can be understood insofar as it deepens our understanding of class, gender and racial issues in that period. In its most schematic form, *le roman de la servante* is a corpus of literary texts foregrounding a rebellious maidservant protagonist; it includes Stendhal’s *Mina de Vanghel*, (1829-30, [1853]) and *Lamiel* (1839-42); Honoré de Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette* (1846) and *Le Cousin Pons* (1847); Edmond and Jules de Goncourt’s *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865); Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly’s ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’ (1871); Guy de Maupassant’s *Histoire d’une fille de ferme* (1881), *La Mère aux monstres* (1883), *La Chambre 11* (1884), *Rose* (1884), *Sauvée* (1885), and *Rosalie Prudent* (1886); Émile Zola’s *Pot-Bouille* (1882); Octave Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* (1900); and the lesser-known Léon Fropié’s *La Figurante* (1908): the story of a *bonne à tout faire* who obscurely revolts against the Parisian bourgeois household and is seduced by one of its male members. These novels

and short stories, written over the course of a displaced nineteenth century, beginning with the Restoration and ending with the start of the First World War, build on the fears and anxieties concerning the female servant that the mid-eighteenth century generated before the disorder of the Great Revolution. The Revolution then intensified these underlying tensions between masters, mistresses and their servants, as Chapter One will show. By examining a corpus of literary as well as non-literary texts that extend across the long nineteenth century,<sup>15</sup> I argue that authors *le roman de la servante* and non-literary discourses were producing similar anxious imaginings of the rebellious maidservant across this period, despite the shifting political regimes during this period. Andrew J. Counter points out that while there were various attempts to improve the conditions for servants at local and national level under the Second Empire and the Third Republic, non-literary texts such as household manuals ‘themselves generally fail to acknowledge such changes or the reformist discourses from which they emerged, preferring instead to promote the entirely privatized, strictly domestic resolution of social tensions by means of good manners, exemplary behaviour, and (above all) sound religious instruction.’<sup>16</sup> For Counter, this is a fact that is itself indicative of ‘the extreme conservatism of [the French nation’s] social outlook’ in the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The literary and non-literary narratives that construct the rebellious maidservant are not removed from their historical or political contexts and do also seemingly choose to concentrate – whether consciously or subconsciously – on the growing social tensions between masters and servants through the creation of a rebellious servant figure.

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<sup>15</sup> Of the many texts considered in this thesis, the earliest household manual included dates from 1812 while the final texts considered were published in 1908. The Conclusion of this thesis looks forward to twentieth- and twenty-first-century texts that foreground avatars of the nineteenth-century maidservant.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew J. Counter, ‘Bad Examples: Children, Servants, and Masturbation in Nineteenth-Century France’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 22.3 (2013), 403-25 (p. 407).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

*Le roman de la servante* created, narrativized – by means of plots, scenes, events and characterization – and fed into this social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant through its representations of the maidservant as a new literary protagonist in her own right, as Chapter One explores. The nineteenth-century writers whose works make up my corpus of texts initially represent a fictional maidservant heroine who implements different strategies of revolt against her bourgeois masters and mistresses in order to escape her oppressive situation as a servant and obtain a sense of power. I first define ‘revolt’ through Georges Didi-Huberman’s recent theory of *soulèvements*, as outlined in his recent study *Désirer désobéir: Ce qui nous soulève I* (2019). I then identify and analyse the methods of revolt found in nineteenth-century rebellious maidservant fiction by using the categories of *soulèvement* provided by Didi-Huberman’s theory (*gestes, pensées* and *paroles*). These methods of revolt by means of the maidservant’s appearance, voice and thoughts allow female servant protagonists to reverse the prevailing power dynamics between servants and their masters and mistresses, as well as between men and women.

I then combine this theory of *soulèvements* with Maria Scott’s third-wave feminist reading of nineteenth-century fictional representations of female freedom in her *Stendhal’s Less-Loved Heroines* (2013) in order to argue that it is through *soulèvements* that maidservant protagonists are able to derive a ‘sense’ of freedom and happiness from their oppressive situations. In the process, I demonstrate how the social imaginary limits the representation of the fictional maidservant’s agency twofold. On a diegetic level, the amount of freedom that the fictional female servant obtains through her strategy of revolt in her respective narrative is constrained: she remains ultimately trapped in her servitude. Yet on an extra-diegetic level, the literary author’s freedom in his representation of the rebellious fictional female servant is likewise confined by the misogynistic stereotypes and prejudices that constitute the social

imaginary. In other words, the representation of the fictional maidservant's agency in *le roman de la servante* is constrained by the socio-cultural construct invoked, while the author himself remains limited by this same socio-cultural construct as he creates and develops the social imaginary of a fictitious rebellious female servant. This argument builds on Foucault's theory that discourse is conditioned and constrained by a set of explicit and implicit rules: 'on découvre ainsi non pas une configuration ou une forme mais un ensemble de *règles* qui sont immanentes à une pratique et la définissent dans sa spécificité.'<sup>18</sup> These rules enable the creation of this social imaginary, while at the same time reduce the depiction of fictional female servants to a specific set of stereotypes and prejudices. These 'règles' at play in the social imaginary consequently reduce the character's freedom on a diegetic level.

The fictional maidservant ultimately remains trapped within a masculine fantasy of subservient female figures, despite the limited amount of freedom she sometimes obtains for herself, for example by rebelling against the sexual mores of nineteenth-century polite society. Indeed, Chapters Three and Four explore how the fictional rebellious maidservant heroine serves as the ultimate male bourgeois sexual fantasy. Authors of *le roman de la servante* often romanticize her role as anything but laborious and repeatedly represent the maidservant as an overtly sexual figure who provides the male characters with sexual services as well as tending to their domestic needs. The maidservant figure thus contrasts with her bourgeois mistress who must abide by society's strict mores concerning class and sexuality. Yet the maidservant must never transcend her position below that of the master or mistress in terms of class hierarchy and power structures for the bourgeois male must be allowed to continue to feel he has power over the maidservant, thereby reinforcing his class

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, p. 63, emphasis in the original.

position. The fictional servants in *le roman de la servante* therefore can never fully transcend their roles as servants: they are either punished or remain subservient to the male characters.

The strategies of revolt used by female servant heroines not only emerge as new categories through which female protagonists can be understood as obtaining their limited sense of freedom in their respective narratives, but also serve as an index for the construction of the rebellious maidservant. By identifying and analysing the methods of revolt that these fictional maidservants have at their disposal, this thesis therefore demonstrates how nineteenth-century writers of fiction were actively producing and feeding into a contemporary network of literary and non-literary discourses, despite the different purposes behind the publication of their texts.

The nineteenth-century novel and short story sought to include the maidservant as part of the realist aim of representing all walks of life within their literary aesthetic, as Chapter One analyses. Yet non-literary documents aimed to ease the social tensions between masters and servants by promoting the tight control of the maidservant's presence and proximity to the family. These documents written by doctors, judges, journalists and authors of household management guidebooks implicitly sought to condemn and erase the presence of the maidservant. The household manuals in this period prescribed strict rules over the maidservant's appearance, body, voice and thoughts in an attempt to remove the threat of her potential rebellion by making her presence invisible in the home. Other non-literary documents such as sociological reports, doctors' reports and *faits divers* warned the public about the potential risks of disloyal and mischievous servants through the circulation of reports of maidservant crimes and their trials. Paradoxically these discourses that sought to control the maidservant's existence by attempting to reduce her bodily presence, voice and

thoughts to those of an empty vessel are shown to draw yet further attention to her presence as a figure of fear and fascination in this period. Despite their texts' different purposes, nineteenth-century writers of fiction engage with, and subvert, the prescribed rules surrounding the maidservant's presence in this period, as well as the collective nineteenth-century class, gender and racial stereotypes and prejudices that constructed the myth of the rebellious maidservant.

Yet the different levels at which this socio-cultural construct develops in *le roman de la servante* should also be read as twofold. Writers are not only actively creating, engaging with and subverting the circulating construct of the rebellious maidservant, but also, on a diegetic level, fictional maidservant heroines are seemingly aware of these discourses surrounding their character. For example, the bourgeois and aristocratic heroines featured in Chapter Three suggest that their different class perspectives provide them with an understanding of the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the maidservant's '(in)visible' appearance and thereby choose to don the disguise of a servant in order to revolt against the regimented expectations placed on aristocratic and bourgeois women. Like other fictional maidservants featured in this thesis, these fictional heroines appear to take advantage of the imagined rebellious nature of the female servant, whilst also reinforcing such imaginings through their actions as part of their strategies of revolt.

By identifying and classifying a new subgenre of nineteenth-century literature that foregrounds the figure of an insubordinate female servant, this thesis draws our attention to a collection of works that may otherwise have remained invisible or overlooked had they been left to their conventional genre classifications as examples of realist, Naturalist and Decadent fiction. Defining and identifying texts by means of a new categorization provides one of

many possible ways of reading these texts, and thus *le roman de la servante* does not invalidate a text's previous genre categorization(s). In his lecture 'La Loi du genre' (1980), Jacques Derrida emphasizes the need to study genre in this spirit of flexibility:

C'est précisément un principe de contamination, une loi d'impureté, une économie du parasite. Dans le code de la théorie des ensembles, si je m'y transportais au moins par figure, je parlerais d'une sorte de *participation sans appartenance*. Le trait qui marque l'appartenance s'y divise immanquablement, la bordure de l'ensemble vient à former par invagination une poche interne plus grande que le tout, les conséquences de cette division et de ce débordement restent aussi singulières qu'inimitables.<sup>19</sup>

Derrida outlines a paradox in the rules determining how we define and identify genres: the defining 'trait' (or generic repertoire) that classifies a genre does not belong to that specific genre category alone. A text can therefore *participate* in multiple genre categories, rather than holding a membership to one genre only with its prescribed set of genre rules. When applied to the study of *le roman de la servante*, Derrida's theory suggests that the generic repertoire that classifies *le roman de la servante* should not be seen as exclusive; these texts may also be categorized as examples of other genres like the ones already mentioned. I therefore propose in this thesis to expand previous typologies of nineteenth-century realism, Naturalism and Decadence to include *le roman de la servante*. This adds to existing scholarship in nineteenth-century French studies that has likewise sought to define hitherto undiscovered masterplots and subgenres in the nineteenth-century novel.<sup>20</sup> Genre serves as a key tool for mapping the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious servant insofar as the identification and classification of *le roman de la servante* reveals how the bourgeois crystallized the socio-cultural construct of the female servant as a dangerous figure in the home.

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'La Loi du genre', in *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), pp. 249-87 (p. 256).

<sup>20</sup> For some examples see Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories*; Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Francesco Manzini, *The Fevered Novel from Balzac to Bernanos: Frenetic Catholicism in Crisis, Delirium and Revolution* (London: University of London IGRS, 2010); Steven Wilson, *The Language of Disease: Writing Syphilis in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2020).

The subgenre of *le roman de la servante* also provides a lens through which to survey the novel more generally. For example, Balzac's heroine Bette can help us to find other subversive female characters who are forced into a state of servitude by their family members, and manipulate their positions, despite not being defined as literal *femmes de chambre*. Existing categorizations classify literary heroines such as Bette or even Zola's Thérèse Raquin as part of a generalized category of nineteenth-century heroines who are brought to their doom by their rebellious behaviour, yet the genre of *le roman de la servante* demonstrates how the representations of these female characters employ similar stereotypes to those that were circulating around the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant. *Le roman de la servante* therefore provides a new way of observing the forgotten, rebellious female servant characters that emerge in other novels as secondary characters yet are still integral to the plots of nineteenth-century novels. The actions of the rebellious secondary character Élisabeth in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830), for example, are a catalyst for the subsequent events in the novel. *Le roman de la servante* can therefore help us to uncover how numerous nineteenth-century authors contributed to the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant through both their primary and secondary characters.

In what follows, I outline why I have chosen to focus on the female servant in nineteenth-century literature before situating this thesis in the context of existing scholarship on the nineteenth-century female servant and her place in the social imaginary, as well as scholarship on servant texts in this period. I then set out the hybrid methodological framework I use to analyse my corpus of texts before finally outlining the scope and structure of each chapter within this thesis's investigation of how the socio-cultural construct of the rebellious female figure came to be crystallized within this new literary subgenre.

## 1. The Nineteenth-Century Female Servant/Maidservant

This thesis concentrates its analysis on the female servant figures who serve in the private sphere of the household and who emerge as the protagonists of a new subgenre of literature. In Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, M. de Rênal defines the word *domestique*: 'Tout ce qui n'est pas gentilhomme [ou dame], qui vit chez vous et reçoit un salaire, est votre domestique'.<sup>21</sup> The category defining domestic service in nineteenth-century France was indeed extensive. Until 1896, France's population census defined the category as including both the servants who were part of the agricultural sector and those who were attached to the personal service of their masters and mistresses.<sup>22</sup> The former were then separated from the domestic category and placed into 'agriculture' in 1896. From 1901, domestic service was then streamlined into two groups: 'A: Bains, gymnase, décrotteur, masseur, pédicure, coiffeur, perruquier fabricant de postiches, tondeur de chevaux, etc. [...] B: Domestique particulier, nourrice, cocher particulier, dame de compagnie, femme de ménage, cuisinier(ière), concierge, frotteur, garde etc.'<sup>23</sup> The category was then revised again in 1911 to include four distinct classifications (whilst placing cooks in an entirely separate category): '1: domestiques du service industriel et commercial, 2: domestiques-service personnel, 3: concierges, 4: gardes, gardiens, veilleurs de nuit.'<sup>24</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, and the start of the twentieth century, the crisis surrounding the decreasing number of servants led to the incorporation of these different classifications into one female servant type: *la bonne à tout faire*. Yet before this, the *femme de chambre* was seen as one of the principal maidservant types. This thesis concentrates its analysis on these female servant figures who

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<sup>21</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, in *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, ed. by Yves Ansel, Philippe Berthier, Xavier Bourdenet and Serge Linkès, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2005-14), I, 349-807 (p. 385).

<sup>22</sup> Anne Martin-Fugier, *La Place des bonnes: La domesticité féminine en 1900* (Paris: Grasset 1979), p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

served in the private sphere of the household, bringing together in their persons the ambiguous categories of ‘domestiques-service personnel’, ‘concierges’ and *bonnes à tout faire*.<sup>25</sup> I collectively label these female figures ‘female servants’, yet detail when their roles are specifically those of maidservants in *le roman de la servante*. The maidservant sleeps in the same home as her masters and mistresses and is there to serve their every basic need – dressing, undressing, bathing, feeding and generally taking care of their masters and mistresses. While Chapter One describes how, why and when the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant emerges, I here note that the feminization of the service was crucial to a nineteenth-century social imaginary that focused particularly on the female servant figure. After 1800, nineteenth-century domestic service became characterized by its feminization, with seventy percent of domestic workers being females by the middle of the century, reaching ninety percent at the century’s end.<sup>26</sup> In parallel, the female servant figure became crystallized as a new fictional heroine in her own right through the emergence and development of a new subgenre of literature, *le roman de la servante*, that constitutes the central focus of this thesis.

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Chabot points out that there was a male (albeit rare) equivalent to the *bonne à tout faire* at the end of the century, as his grandfather was known as an ‘homme à tout faire’ and ‘le domestique “toutes mains”’. See his *Jean et Yvonne: Domestiques en 1900* (Paris: Les Éditions 1900, 1988 [1980]), p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> See Madeleine Auger, ‘Condition juridique et économique du personnel domestique féminin’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Paris, 1935) p. 17; Marcel Cusenier, *Les Domestiques en France* (Paris: Adegis Graphics LLC, 1999 [1912]), pp. 9, 17; and Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 241; Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 317; Theresa McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France, 1820-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 9, 39, 45; François-Xavier Devetter and Sandrine Rousseau, *Du balai: Essai sur le ménage à domicile et le retour de la domesticité* (Paris: Raisons d’agir, 2011), p. 34.

## 2. Contribution to Scholarship

### 2.1 The Nineteenth-Century Female Servant: A Dichotomy in the Social Imaginary

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century historians have focused on the day-to-day life of the real nineteenth-century female servant,<sup>27</sup> with other feminist scholars outlining how nineteenth-century domesticity was transformed into the modern-day services provided by the maid and the cleaner.<sup>28</sup> However, this existing historically-focused scholarship uses nineteenth-century literary examples in order to illustrate its arguments as there is a lack of first-hand sources from real-life servants in this period.<sup>29</sup> David Hopkin has recently argued that the lower literacy rates amongst servants are not solely to blame for the absence of the real-life maidservant's voice, for servants were frequently forced into silence by their employers,<sup>30</sup> a theme we shall explore in Chapter Four. Literary texts have therefore been used in scholarship as a way of investigating the female servant. For example, in her detailed feminist investigation into the daily life and social world of the maidservant in the nineteenth century, *La Place des bonnes: La domesticité féminine à Paris en 1900* (1979), the historian

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<sup>27</sup> See Pierre Guiral and Guy Thuillier, *La Vie quotidienne des domestiques en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1978); Theresa M. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*; Claude Petitfrère, *L'Œil du maître: Maîtres et serviteurs de l'époque classique au romantisme* (Brussels: Complexe, 2006); Rachel G. Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) as well as the final chapters in Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France* and Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies*.

<sup>28</sup> See Martin-Fugier; Jacqueline Martin-Huan, *La Longue Marche des domestiques en France du XIXe siècle à nos jours* (Nantes: Opéra, 1997); Geneviève Fraisse, *Service ou servitude: Essai sur les femmes toutes mains* (Latrene: Le Bord de l'eau, 2009); François-Xavier Devetter, and Sandrine Rousseau, *Du balai*; and most recently on the modern servant: Alizée Delpierre, *Servir les riches* (Paris: La Découverte, 2022).

<sup>29</sup> While there are not many first-hand accounts of nineteenth-century servants, I have found the following (auto)biographical texts: Chabot, *Jean et Yvonne: Domestiques en 1900*; Pierre Piegay, *Domestiques agricoles et servantes de ferme dans les sociétés paysannes (de 1900 aux années 1960)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007); Laure Guérin-Chalot, *Rose Harel 1826-1885: Poétesse et Servante* (Cabourg: Cahiers du Temps, 2020). David Hopkin has also uncovered the first-hand account of a farm servant: see 'Cinderella of the Breton Polders: Suffering and Escape in the Notebooks of a Young, Female Farm-Servant in the 1880s', *Past and Present*, 238:1 (2018), 121-63. Marcel Proust's maidservant, Célestine Albaret, is also one of the only first-hand accounts of a female servant at the end of the nineteenth century: see Célestine Albaret, *Monsieur Proust: Souvenirs recueillis par Georges Belmont* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1973).

<sup>30</sup> David Hopkin, 'Intimacies and Intimations: Storytelling between Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of Social History*, 51:3 (2018), 557-91 (p. 558).

Anne Martin-Fugier draws from a variety of literary sources, as well as non-literary texts such as household manuals, using these to argue that the female servant becomes the object of fascination for an assortment of discourses in the nineteenth century,<sup>31</sup> forming an ‘entité dans l’imaginaire bourgeois’<sup>32</sup> and ‘un personnage fantasmatique’.<sup>33</sup> She goes on to argue that the figure of the female servant is constructed through a dichotomy between the loyal and rebellious female servant in the bourgeois imagination.<sup>34</sup> Susan Yates’s subsequent literary study on the nineteenth-century maidservant, *Maid and Mistress: Feminine Solidarity and Class Difference in Five Nineteenth-Century French Texts* (1991), builds on Martin-Fugier’s argument, maintaining that the maidservant appears as two entities in the bourgeois imagination, the *perle* and the *souillon*, as demonstrated by an in-depth analysis of five nineteenth-century novels: Balzac’s *Eugénie Grandet* (1833); the Goncourts’ *Germinie Lacerteux*; Flaubert’s ‘Un cœur simple’ (1877); Maupassant’s *Une Vie* (1883) and Zola’s *Pot-Bouille*.<sup>35</sup> Other scholars then contrast these two servant types with the mistress of the household in order to explore the sexuality, exoticism and rebelliousness of bourgeois women.<sup>36</sup>

This thesis also recognizes that the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant functions as part of a dichotomy that includes loyal female servants in the bourgeois imagination. The two maidservant constructs echo Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s observation – in their renowned social-historical study of women’s writing, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) – that throughout history, male artists impose the extreme ‘images of the

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<sup>31</sup> Martin-Fugier, p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-98.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Yates, *Maid and Mistress: Feminine Solidarity and Class Difference in Five Nineteenth-Century French Texts* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> See Yates, and Jennifer Yee, ‘The Black Maid and Her Mistress’, in *The Colonial Comedy: Imperialism in the French Realist Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 144-66.

“angel” and the “monster” onto women by ubiquitously creating, and recreating these two figures in their works.<sup>37</sup> With a particular emphasis on nineteenth-century male writers, Gilbert and Gubar go on to describe how ‘[t]he ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel’; ‘the “angel in the house” is the most pernicious image male authors ever imposed upon literary women’; she is the ‘eternal type of female purity’ that can be traced from the Virgin Mary, and the secular domestic ‘angel in the house’ as found in Dante, Milton and Goethe (among others).<sup>38</sup> As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> the figure of the loyal maidservant and her eternal feminine qualities of selflessness, motherhood and self-sacrificial devotion to her masters also derives from Catholicism through the representations of saints and biblical servants, for example, Saint Zita, the patron of servants and working women. Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge that the angel’s double – the monster – emerges from the ways in which women, ‘imprisoned in the coffinlike shape of a death angel,’ may indeed ‘long demonically for escape’.<sup>40</sup> For Gilbert and Gubar, as well as for Martin-Fugier and for Yates,<sup>41</sup> these women ‘incarnate male dread of women’, that is to say, male fears that the women who

deliver the male soul from one realm to another, [...] [also contain] the fearful bondage of mortality into which every mother delivers her children. The fact that the angel woman manipulates her domestic/mystical sphere in order to ensure the well-being of those entrusted to her care then subsequently reveals that she can manipulate; she can scheme; she can plot – stories as well as strategies.<sup>42</sup>

Thus while nineteenth-century writers may seemingly praise the figure of the angelic servant (as we shall see in novels and non-literary texts such as household manuals), these same writers also reveal their fears by demonizing her if she turns into her foil; they provide her

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<sup>37</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020 [1979]), p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Jessica Rushton, ‘Unmasking the Loyal Maidservant in *Germinie Lacerteux*’, *MuseMedusa*, 10 (2022) <<http://https://musemedusa.com/dossier-10/287-2/>> [accessed 27 October 2022].

<sup>40</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Yates argues that ‘both [...] positive and the negative qualities [are] projected onto Woman in the masculine mythology’ (p. 1).

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 26.

with ‘masculine’ agency, assertiveness and aggressiveness that are all shown to be ‘unfeminine’ for going against this ideal image.<sup>43</sup> All four chapters of this thesis show that while the male authors of *le roman de la servante* may provide their heroines with a sense of agency, assertiveness and aggression through their different strategies of rebellion and thus feed into the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant, this freedom is limited insofar as the social imaginary simultaneously restricts the amount of agency these heroines obtain through their rebellious acts. The maidservant heroine can never truly escape her oppressive situation and is often punished by the author for going against the image of the loyal servant. This demonization of rebellious female figures is a key theme that is also analysed in Chapter Two, where I argue that real-life criminal maidservants are masculinized and vilified by the discourses that seek to describe their cases.

Emily Apter argues that the rebellious maidservant narrative of the second half of the nineteenth century is an “‘anti-maid’s discourse”, set up by, among others, Zola, Maupassant and Mirbeau as an antidote to the saccharine, orthodox model’ provided by previous nineteenth-century loyal maidservant narratives.<sup>44</sup> While it is true that the majority of rebellious servant texts emerge in the latter part of the century, it is important to note that the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant had already emerged in literature in the first half of the century, for example in Stendhal’s *Mina de Vanghel* (1829-30) and *Lamiel* (1839-42). My analysis therefore seeks to go beyond Apter’s argument by showing how the nineteenth-century loyal maidservant narrative can just as well be read as an implicit response to the fear of the rebellious figure. I also apply Gilbert and Gubar’s observation that writers fear that ‘the monster may not only be concealed behind the angel, she may actually

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<sup>43</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 196.

turn out to reside within (or in the lower half of) the angel'.<sup>45</sup> While Chapter One notes how the origins of the nineteenth-century loyal maidservant figure can be found in religious texts as well as medieval literature, the *commedia dell'arte* and the theatre of the Ancien Régime, it also explains how the loyal maidservant figure becomes a silenced empty vessel in the nineteenth century. I demonstrate how nineteenth-century writers of literary and non-literary discourses create and reinforce the image of the ideal female servant as a way of masking their fears of the servant they believed to truly exist: her rebellious foil. As the cultural historian Cissie Fairchilds rightly maintains, the image of the loyal maidservant in the nineteenth century 'represented what the worried employers of the nineteenth century desperately hoped their servants would be.'<sup>46</sup> The nineteenth-century *perle* is a 'myth' that is idealized by nineteenth-century society as a way of concealing its fears of the rebellious female servant. I argue that the authors of *le roman de la servante* paradoxically debunk the loyal maidservant as a bourgeois idealization by reinforcing, as well as creating the construct of a rebellious maidservant as a dangerous figure. While the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant also appears as a type of 'myth',<sup>47</sup> this should be read in the sense that literary and non-literary documents make such invention seem natural: they offer a sense of verisimilitude, bringing the fears surrounding the figure to life.

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<sup>45</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> Fairchilds, p. 243.

<sup>47</sup> I read the term myth through the established definition by Roland Barthes: 'le mythe est un système de communication, c'est un message. On voit par là que le mythe ne saurait être un objet, un concept, ou une idée ; c'est un mode de signification, c'est une forme [...] puisque le mythe est une parole, tout peut être mythe, qui est justiciable d'un discours. Le mythe ne se définit pas par l'objet de son message, mais par la façon dont il le profère: il y a des limites formelles au mythe, il n'y en a pas de substantielles. [...] Chaque objet du monde peut passer d'une existence fermée, muette, à un état oral, ouvert à l'appropriation de la société, car aucune loi, naturelle ou non, n'interdit de parler de choses. Un arbre est un arbre. Oui, sans doute. Mais un arbre dit par Minou Drouet, ce n'est déjà plus tout à fait un arbre, c'est un arbre décoré, adapté à une certaine consommation, investi de complaisances littéraires, de révoltes, d'images, bref d'un *usage* social qui s'ajoute à la pure matière.' (*Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), pp. 181-82, emphasis in the original).

## **2.2 The Servant Novel: A New Nineteenth-Century Subgenre**

In a chapter entitled ‘Master Narratives/Servant Texts: Representing the Maid from Flaubert to Freud’, Apter also recognizes that the female servant becomes part of ‘a neglected genre of servants’ tales in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature’,<sup>48</sup> which she labels the ‘*récit de la bonne*’,<sup>49</sup> arguing that this genre is shaped by a dichotomy between narratives of loyal and rebellious maidservants.<sup>50</sup> Miriam Thompson’s unpublished thesis, ‘Maid in Space: Contemporary French Cinematic Translation of the 19th Century Rebellious Maid Figure’ (2013) has recently argued that the figure of the nineteenth-century rebellious maidservant ‘is an historical, social and cultural construct’<sup>51</sup> insofar as ‘[o]ne of the primary sources that underlie specialist understandings of 19th century maids’ lives and the related manner in which they occupied the popular imagination continues to be a body of mid-to-late century novels by realist and naturalistic French authors.’<sup>52</sup> Thompson also analyses how this figure is continuously employed in contemporary cinematic representations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>53</sup> I build on this previous scholarship by defining and identifying this subgenre of literature as *le roman de la servante*, made up of a corpus of texts that emerge as a marker of the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant. It is through the analysis of this emerging subgenre that we gain a deeper understanding of class, gender and racial issues in the nineteenth century through the stereotypes and prejudices that nineteenth-century writers of fiction manipulated and sometimes created in order to constitute the social

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<sup>48</sup> Apter, p. 190.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 178

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Miriam Thompson, ‘Maid in Space: Contemporary French Cinematic Translation of the 19th Century Rebellious Maid Figure’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

imaginary of the rebellious female servant. These fictional methods of revolt also draw attention to the female servant figure as an object of fascination and fear for the bourgeoisie.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Theory of Revolt: ‘Soulèvements’

The theoretical framework for identifying and analysing methods of revolt in nineteenth-century rebellious maidservant fiction builds on Didi-Huberman’s theory of *soulèvements* in his recent study on revolt, *Désirer désobéir: Ce qui nous soulève I. Désirer désobéir* provides an abundance of examples of the representation of *soulèvement* in politics, philosophy, art, literature and cinema. The *Petit Robert* (2015) defines a *soulèvement* as a ‘mouvement massif de révolte’ and its verb form, *soulever*, as ‘[a]nimer (qqn) de sentiments hostiles, indisposer; Exciter puissamment (un sentiment); Faire naître (un évènement).’ This definition suggests that a *soulèvement* is formed by external conditions such as oppressive environments and constraints enforced by society’s institutions, which in turn provoke hostility. This process is therefore connected to emotions of anger and disgust which consequently give rise to new actions or events. In his study, however, Didi-Huberman begins by arguing that a *soulèvement* is first formed as a result of internal forces: ‘[c]e qui nous soulève? Ce sont des forces, bien sûr. Des forces qui ne nous sont pas extérieures ou imposées’.<sup>54</sup> He develops this idea further, hypothesizing that a *soulèvement* is produced by ‘la force de nos mémoires quand elles brûlent avec celle de nos désirs quand ils s’embrasent – les images ayant à charge, quant à elles, de faire flamboyer nos désirs à partir de nos mémoires, nos mémoires

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<sup>54</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir: Ce qui nous soulève I* (Paris: Minuit, 2019), p. 9.

au creux de nos désirs.’<sup>55</sup> A first reading may lead one to conclude that Didi-Huberman has overlooked how interior forces that form a *soulèvement* result primarily from an oppressive situation in the external world. Didi-Huberman’s study seems to focus on the ways in which forces build up internally and transform themselves into gestures, rather than considering the way in which the world provokes these forces in the first place by means of oppression and domination. In her review of Didi-Huberman’s text, entitled ‘Le Soulèvement n’est pas qu’un geste’, Zoé Carle outlines the limits to this approach:

avant d’être des gestes ou des formes corporelles, les soulèvements sont des réactions à des situations d’oppression, de domination, à des entreprises de destruction et de négation de droits politiques et sociaux, des résultats de rapports de force politique, produits au sein de mondes sociaux. Tout cela disparaît comme par enchantement des analyses de Didi-Huberman.<sup>56</sup>

Although Didi-Huberman does not refer explicitly to external forces in his analysis, he does appear implicitly to argue that individuals revolt in order to liberate themselves from an oppressive situation, for at the centre of individual desire within the process of *soulèvement* lies the human need for emancipation: ‘ce désir de liberté qui nous constitue, mais que tant de contraintes veulent étouffer’.<sup>57</sup> For Didi-Huberman, the need to achieve liberation from life’s constraints and oppressions is essentially what triggers a *soulèvement*. He argues that ‘lorsqu’il se soulève (ou même: pour qu’il se soulève), un peuple part toujours d’une situation d’impouvoir. Se soulever serait alors le geste par lequel les sujets de l’impouvoir font advenir en eux – ou survenir, ou revenir – quelque chose comme une *puissance* fondamentale.’<sup>58</sup> A *soulèvement* is therefore an act of force that is produced from a position of inferiority, without any guarantee of obtaining power. One can argue that the strength required to revolt is paradoxically fuelled by a people’s or individual’s initial position of powerlessness. Didi-

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<sup>55</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Zoé Carle, ‘Le Soulèvement n’est pas qu’un geste’, *En attendant Nadeau*, 23 April 2019, <<https://www.en-attendant-nadeau.fr/2019/04/23/soulevement-geste-huberman/>> [accessed 11 April 2020].

<sup>57</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 109.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Huberman seems also to imply this in his observation: ‘[s]oulèvements, donc: puissances de, ou dans l’impouvoir.’<sup>59</sup> He uses the French Revolution as an example of a historical moment in which power is reversed through the strength of inferior subjects: ‘un pouvoir monarchique se trouvât renversé par un pouvoir républicain’.<sup>60</sup> I demonstrate how the fictional figure of the rebellious maidservant is shown to embody this very notion of ‘impouvoir’. This reversal of power emanating from a situation of powerlessness is also apparent in the theory of the master-servant dialectic.

In his theory of self-consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel introduces his concept of the master-servant dialectic which suggests how the power dynamic can alter between the two figures.<sup>61</sup> He shows how this dialectic first provides the master with power: masters have the authority to dismiss the servant whilst also having the power to threaten her health and even life through punishment. The servant is consequently forced into submission by her fear and anxiety – principally the ‘fear of death’.<sup>62</sup> Yet Hegel believes that it is the role of servitude in relation to, and through the oppression of, the master that the servant paradoxically becomes self-conscious of her own existence;<sup>63</sup> she realizes that the master is as dependent on her for his existence as she is on him.<sup>64</sup> A double self-consciousness thereby arises in which the master also realizes that he is not in control of his servant’s mind and thereby fears that she has the power to alter his existence as the master – and therefore the status quo.<sup>65</sup> One finds in Hegel, as in Didi-Huberman, the idea that oppressive circumstances can also give rise to a change in power structures. I argue that this

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<sup>59</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>61</sup> See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. and trans. by Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 [1807]), pp. 108-16, in which he discusses the master-servant dialectic.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Hegel, p. 116.

reversal of power through the process of a *soulèvement* is one that can be applied to the figure of the fictional maidservant in nineteenth-century fiction.

Maidservant characters perform *soulèvements* in order to reverse or to destabilize the power dynamic that is present in the master and servant relationship. It is through the process of *soulèvement* that maidservants are able to fight back against their oppressed situations by reversing the balance of power. The maidservant's *soulèvement* thus upsets and defies the regimented order of society. This connects to Didi-Huberman's definition of *se soulever*: '[s]e soulever, c'est briser une histoire que tout le monde croyait entendue (au sens où l'on parle d'une "cause entendue", c'est-à-dire close): c'est rompre la prévisibilité de l'histoire, réfuter la règle qui présidait, pensait-on, à son développement ou à son maintien.'<sup>66</sup> The female servant figure reverses 'la prévisibilité' of the power dynamic installed in society, and consequently destabilizes the roles of the master and the servant.

While Didi-Huberman's theory of revolt typically favours collective *soulèvements*, such as those implemented in political uprisings, he does include specific representations of collective female revolt,<sup>67</sup> making particular reference to an individual servant-like figure in Henri Michaux's essay, 'Le Poltergeist' (featured in Michaux's collection of essays, *Une voie pour l'insubordination* [1980]). Michaux describes the poltergeist as a 'fille (soit de la famille, soit travailleuse attachée à la maison)':<sup>68</sup>

Aussi longuement qu'on l'observe, on ne lui voit pas faire un geste suspect. Elle se tient habituellement tranquille. Aucun effort sur le visage. Pas une crispation. Pas une tension. Dans son maintien rien de spécial. [...] Elle serait capable d'*insoumission*, et une fameuse

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<sup>66</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> The study begins with an analysis of two girls playacting before examining the collective mourning of women featured in Chris Marker's *Le Fond de l'air est rouge: Scènes de la Troisième Guerre Mondiale 1967-77* (1977) and Sergueï M. Eisenstien's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) (Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, pp. 9-24).

<sup>68</sup> Henri Michaux, *Une voie pour l'insubordination* (Saint-Clément-de-Rivière: Fata Morgana, 2011 [1980]), p. 11.

insoumission avec une force de géant. Fatiguée sans doute des attitudes de contrainte, elle dérangerait l'insupportable intérieur où rien ne se passe.<sup>69</sup>

For Didi-Huberman, Michaux 'a bien raison d'affirmer dans ces pages [...] que l'insoumission est d'autant plus radicale qu'elle n'a rien à voir'.<sup>70</sup> He goes on to argue that '[I]a puissance et la profondeur des soulèvements' proceed from subtle gestures '[d']innocence' such as those implemented by the poltergeist figure.<sup>71</sup> One can apply this reading to the fictional maidservant's internal revolt; like the poltergeist figure, the fictional maidservant relies on her outward appearance of submission in order to keep her livelihood and even her physical body safe from the threat posed by their masters. She should not raise any suspicions. In his two studies on methods of resistance used by subordinate groups, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), James C. Scott explains how throughout history, subordinate classes such as the peasantry, slaves and serfs, and by my extrapolation, fictional maidservants, 'dare not contest the terms of their subordination openly'<sup>72</sup> as 'such activity was dangerous, if not suicidal'.<sup>73</sup> Scott argues that subordinate groups can disguise their resistance by creating, 'out of its ordeal, a "hidden transcript" that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant';<sup>74</sup> 'the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask.'<sup>75</sup> Female servants must therefore deceive their masters and mistresses into thinking they are ideal servants in order to protect

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<sup>69</sup> Michaux, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 27.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), p. xi.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), p. xv.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. xii.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

themselves while continuing to revolt in secret. Read through Scott's theory, female servants are thus forced by the threat of violence and possible death to invent 'low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name'.<sup>76</sup> Scott labels these methods of resistance the 'infrapolitics of the powerless'.<sup>77</sup> these are 'everyday' forms of revolt that allow individuals to conceal anger and violence in the face of domination<sup>78</sup> such as 'foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage'<sup>79</sup> as well as 'rumours, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms'.<sup>80</sup> Didi-Huberman's theory of revolt also categorizes several forms of *soulèvement* that when applied to the maidservant protagonists of *le roman de la servante* builds upon Scott's concept of 'infrapolitics': for example, 'gestuel, verbal, psychique ou atmosphérique':<sup>81</sup> '[n]e se soulève-t-on pas avec des pensées, des paroles, des émotions, des gestualités, des formes et des actions [...]?'<sup>82</sup> Didi-Huberman's categories of *soulèvement* thus provide a further scale for classifying more discreet and secretive forms of revolt, or 'infrapolitics', specifically used by fictional servants as well as their more visible acts of defiance, including those enacted through violence. Didi-Huberman's more nuanced categories of thoughts and atmosphere can thus be used to explain how fictional maidservant characters seek to revolt secretly through imaginative non-verbal forms of rebellion in an attempt to obtain a certain sense of freedom from their oppressive situations.

Yet as Scott points out, 'powerholders', for example the fictional masters and mistresses in *le roman de la servante*, 'may well not know what lies behind the facade, but it is rare that

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<sup>76</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., *Weapons of the Weak*, p. xv.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 31.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

they merely take what they see and hear at face value.’<sup>83</sup> For Scott, this scepticism leads the common fear held by dominants ‘that those beneath them are deceitful, shamming, and lying by nature.’<sup>84</sup> Thus while Chapters Three and Four of this thesis engage with and build on Didi-Huberman’s categories of *gestuel*, *pensées* and *paroles* to *le roman de la servante* in order to show how the fictional maidservant’s revolt allows her to obtain a limited ‘sense’ of freedom and autonomy, they simultaneously reveal the bourgeoisie’s fears of the potential hidden forms of resistance used by their female servants.

### **3.2 Feminist Reading: A ‘Sense’ of Freedom and Happiness**

I combine Didi-Huberman’s theory of revolt with Maria Scott’s analysis of fictional representations of female freedom and happiness in Stendhal’s work in order to argue that *soulèvements* are a way for fictional heroines to gain a limited ‘sense’ of freedom, and therefore happiness, from their oppressive situations. In *Stendhal’s Less-Loved Heroines: Fiction, Freedom and the Female* (2013), Scott argues that, like the Ideologues before him such as Antoine Destutt de Tracy, Stendhal believed that happiness is ‘the ultimate goal, while freedom is the ability to achieve it [...], each individual has both the right to achieve happiness by satisfying his desires and the duty to use his freedom for this purpose.’<sup>85</sup> Scott notes that in Stendhal, as well as in the later existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, freedom lacks any substantial meaning without the existence of a constraint: ‘the existence of constraint can itself give rise to desire and, by extension, to the possibility of achieving happiness through the exercise of the freedom to act on that desire.’<sup>86</sup> This notion of freedom

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<sup>83</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Maria Scott, *Stendhal’s Less-Loved Heroines: Fiction, Freedom and the Female* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 13.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

therefore echoes Didi-Huberman's theory on oppressive situations leading to the inversion of power structures. Didi-Huberman's *soulèvement* should therefore be considered as the way in which fictional maidservants exercise such freedom. Yet, the freedom and autonomy that the rebellious female servant achieves remains limited. Fictional maidservants do not escape their subservient roles by means of their violent backlashes against their masters and mistresses, nor do they escape the fantasies of male bourgeois writers who constantly submit their female protagonists to the often misogynistic constraints and stereotypes that make up the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant. I refer to the fictional maidservant's 'sense' of freedom and happiness as a way of describing how the social imaginary finally limits the fictional maidservant heroines' agency in their respective plots whilst simultaneously restricting the male author's freedom in his representation of the fictional female servant's revolt to a reproduction of the stereotypes and prejudices that surrounded her. Nineteenth-century fictional maidservant heroines can and should be read as a further example of heroines who fail to liberate themselves fully from 'a masculinist economy': a reading that Eliza Jane Smith has previously applied to the Goncourt brothers' *Germinie Lacerteux* and Zola's *Nana* (1880) insofar as both heroines fail to escape the masculinist projections that prevent both characters from achieving complete subjectivity.<sup>87</sup> I explore this argument further by analysing how the representation of the female servant in the social imaginary is used as a form of control; rebellious maidservant texts represent the female servant's rebellion in order to reinforce bourgeois fears, and thereby bolster methods of control over the female servant's body (her sexuality and her body's functions) and her mind. My corpus of nineteenth-century literary writers finally endorses society's regimented class

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<sup>87</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, *Literary Slumming: Slang and Class in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), p. 201.

hierarchies; their female figures are either punished for their *soulèvements* or remain part of the male bourgeois (sexual) fantasy of subservient women.

### **3.3 Foucault and the Control of Women's Bodies**

A Foucauldian reading of the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant supposes that (bourgeois male) writers are forever seeking to control both the lower classes and women's bodies. Foucault argues that the nineteenth century regulated women's bodies through a process he labels the '*hystérisation du corps de la femme*' in which discourses that medicalized women's bodies produced a contrast between the hysterical woman and the healthy bourgeois woman.<sup>88</sup> He states that the hysterization of women's bodies 's'est faite au nom de la responsabilité qu'elles auraient à l'égard de la santé de leurs enfants, de la solidité de l'institution familiale et du salut de la société',<sup>89</sup> before going on to explain that this process 'a été mis en communication organique avec le corps social (dont il doit assurer la fécondité réglée), l'espace familial (dont il doit être un élément substantiel et fonctionnel) et la vie des enfants (qu'il produit et qu'il doit garantir, par une responsabilité biológico-morale qui dure tout au long de l'éducation)'.<sup>90</sup> For her part, Jann Matlock states that 'Foucault might have argued that the hysterization of women's bodies required the participation of the prostitute';<sup>91</sup> '[t]he hysteric and the prostitute provided opposite models against which an orderly body could be measured – the one tormented by desires welling up from the inside, the other transformed into a holding tank for desires that might contaminate society from the outside.'<sup>92</sup> For Matlock, it is through the body of the prostitute that the workings of

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<sup>88</sup> Michel Foucault, *L'Histoire de la sexualité 1: la volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 137.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>91</sup> Matlock, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

nineteenth-century power relations become visible; the discourses surrounding prostitution, similar to those concerning hysteria, were used as a way to contain the desires of bourgeois women.<sup>93</sup> While Matlock goes on to argue that the barrier between the hysteric and the prostitute was blurred ('the hysteric became the prostitute'<sup>94</sup>), I show how the discourses that created the rebellious female servant also connected her body to these two disorderly figures. Misogynistic stereotypes and prejudices linked the rebellious maidservant's physiognomy to her presumed overt sexuality which in turn was associated with the figure's potential for diseases and for mental illness. These stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the maidservant's class, gender and race connected her to figures of the hysteric, the prostitute, the criminal and the black woman. I therefore build on Matlock's claim by showing how nineteenth-century discourses that created and developed the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant used the subversive servant as a standard against which an orderly body could be measured.<sup>95</sup> In what follows, we shall see that the social imaginary of the maidservant created not only a contrast between the dangerous female servant and the devout, loyal and perfect maidservant, but also a distinct class difference between the servant and her mistress. Demanding constant surveillance over the servant's disorderly body (via her appearance as well as her voice and thoughts), nineteenth-century literary and non-literary texts seek to distance the healthy, natural bourgeois woman from the sexual deviancy encapsulated by the servant's body, and in doing so, illuminate the period's fears of blurred class distinctions.

Rather than suggesting that the rebellious female servant figure is yet another defined female type to be added to the Foucauldian taxonomy of 'aberrant individuals' – the

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<sup>93</sup> Matlock, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple and the perverse adult – as she too emerges through nineteenth-century disciplines of alienism, criminology and sexology,<sup>96</sup> I argue that she should be considered a hybrid in the nineteenth-century imagination. The fictional maidservant Célestine, in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900), defines the maidservant as 'un monstrueux hybride humain'<sup>97</sup> insofar as she is considered an outsider in the bourgeois home, yet also a figure who works too closely within it to be seen only as a working-class woman. In their introduction to their edited volume, *Monstre et imaginaire social: Approches historiques* (2008), Anna Caiozzo and Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini's demonstrate how the notion of a monster, and by my extrapolation the nineteenth-century maidservant's monstrosity, is defined by a sense of ambiguity:

Notion opaque, en effet, confuse et ambiguë. C'est que la notion de monstre s'appréhende par rapport à la notion de norme dont elle revêt les ambiguïtés. La norme étant tout à la fois moyenne et idéal, le monstre revêt à la fois une acception descriptive et une acception normative. Tout l'intérêt et la richesse de la notion, sa puissance évocatrice, résident dans cette hésitation essentielle, qui veut que le monstre soit à la fois insolite et contre nature, exception au cours ordinaire en même temps que transgression à l'ordre du monde, écart statistique et défi axiologique. Négliger l'une de ces dimensions, c'est rater l'essence même du monstre.<sup>98</sup>

I add to this definition of a monstrous hybrid creature by demonstrating how the maidservant comes to embody the various stereotypes and prejudices projected onto society's female outsiders who threaten bourgeois ideals. The female servant thus is shown not only to embody an ambiguous lower-class figure in society and in the home, she also exemplifies the fears surrounding the female criminal, the hysteric, the prostitute, the *grisette*, the *femme fatale* and the black woman, as we shall see in Chapters Two, Three and Four. The social imaginary of the maidservant layers the fears of these lower-class female outsiders onto a

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<sup>96</sup> See Lisa Downing, *The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality and the Modern Killer* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 7-8 and Matlock, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> Octave Mirbeau, *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 203.

<sup>98</sup> Anna Caiozzo and Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini, 'L'histoire des monstres: questions de méthode', in *Monstre et imaginaire social: Approches historiques*, ed. by Anna Caiozzo and Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini (Paris: Creaphis, 2008), pp. 4-25 (p. 11).

single body through a variety of different discourses that are intertwined in their depictions of the female servant through their stereotypes and prejudices, as found in literature, medical and criminological treatises, household manuals and more broadly in the press. The female servant then emerges as monstrous as she is placed in direct contrast with the bourgeois mistress in the home as this Introduction has explored.

Another way of understanding how the female servant was deemed as a monstrous, hybrid human is to apply René Girard's concept of dedifferentiation as outlined in his study *La Violence et le Sacré* (1972). In his chapter titled 'Du désir mimétique au double monstrueux', Girard argues explains how rivals always see themselves 'séparés de leur vis-à-vis par une différence formidable' insofar as there is a constant threat of contagious and mimetic violence.<sup>99</sup> Rivals are threatened by the erasure of these differences which would reveal not only a similar desire for an object (such as kudos or power) but also how both rivals are in fact doubles of each other.<sup>100</sup> Read through Girard, the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie creates and reinforces the differences between the mistress and the maidservant in order to produce 'une entité hallucinatoire qui n'est pas synthèse mais mélange informe, difforme, monstrueux, d'êtres normalement séparés.'<sup>101</sup> The mistress and maidservant are thus differentiated in their common hallucinatory state as monstrous doubles of each other; as Girard states, '[l]e principe fondamental, toujours méconnu, c'est que le double et le monstre ne font qu'un. Le mythe, bien entendu, met en relief l'un des deux pôles, généralement le monstrueux, pour dissimuler l'autre.'<sup>102</sup> If the only thing that separates the maidservant from her mistress is money, the bourgeoisie must eliminate any chance of radical sameness drawn between these two women who live alongside each other in the same home. This monstrous

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<sup>99</sup> René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972) p. 221.

<sup>100</sup> Girard, pp. 221-223.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

double creates this clear distinction. Girard argues that it is only from an impartial, outside perspective that these differences are no longer visible and a similarity between the two rivals is then revealed: ‘[d]e l’intérieur du système, il n’y a que des différences; du dehors, au contraire, il n’y a que de l’identité.’<sup>103</sup> In Girardian terms, read through an outside perspective, or rather, by using the novel as a lens through which to discover the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant, the chapters of this thesis establish and analyse the female servant’s monstrous hybridity. While the differences between the maidservant and the mistress are merely an illusion, they are fundamental to the power dynamic at play between masters, mistresses and maidservants.

#### **4. Chapter Structure and Scope**

Chapter One proposes to deepen our understanding of how, why and when nineteenth-century France constructed a social imaginary of the rebellious female servant by tracing the historical, social, political and cultural factors that brought it about, as well as the discourses that spawned it. As part of these discourses, the subgenre of *le roman de la servante* also emerges in the nineteenth century as a crystallization of this socio-cultural construct, and this chapter seeks to respond to the question of why nineteenth-century literary writers became fascinated with the female servant as a literary protagonist in her own right. I use the chapter to describe and identify the main features of this literary subgenre, and to set out the dichotomy of loyal and rebellious maidservant novels, showing how the former is born out of the fears of the latter.

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<sup>103</sup> Girard, p. 221.

After this historical and socio-cultural overview of the factors leading to the construction of the social imaginary, Chapters Two, Three and Four analyse how nineteenth-century discourses tied the female servant to the prejudices and stereotypes that surrounded lower-class female outsiders, trapping the social imaginary of the female servant in this masculinist economy that viewed them as sites of pleasure and repulsion. Chapter Two begins by analysing the impact of a real-life criminal case brought against the maidservant Henriette Cornier in 1825. It then goes on to investigate two other criminal cases brought against the cook H el ene J egado and the maidservant C eline Masson in 1851 and 1891 respectively. These three real-life maidservant cases helped the maidservant to become established as a murderous figure in the nineteenth-century public consciousness. I explore how the female servant was demonized and masculinized in discourses presented in criminological reports and trial documents, as well as sensationalized by the press. These three cases provide examples of how the depiction of the female servant as a criminal came to permeate the nineteenth-century social imaginary. These discourses, with their insistent descriptions of the female servant, can similarly be found in *le roman de la servante*. Yet, as this chapter shows, nineteenth-century fictional maidservants cannot revolt in the same way as their real-life equivalents. For fictional maidservants to perform acts of physical violence within the main narrative of realist fiction is shown to be largely unthinkable, and thus unwritable, in the nineteenth century for two reasons. First, I argue that for them to do so would be to create a plot with generic conventions closely connected to popular fiction, a type of literature from which realist novelists sought to distance themselves. Second, while later Naturalist and, in particular, Decadent fiction did represent strong fears of women and female sexuality in this period, the representation of a violent, sexualized working-class woman overturning the class hierarchy in the home appears to have been unthinkable in bourgeois nineteenth-century society and so unwritable from the perspective of bourgeois

authors. The intersectionality embodied by the violent fictional maidservant's class and gender is arguably a step too far for these authors. The social imaginary constrains the female servant's revolt and thus does not allow the heroine to obtain her full freedom by violently murdering her employers. Violent maidservants would only come to be represented in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fictionalizations of the nineteenth-century maidservant's avatars: the modern maid, the cleaner and the nanny. Nineteenth-century fictional maidservants are instead shown finding alternative means, in the form of subtler *soulèvements*, to rise up against their masters and their mistresses, whilst remaining part of the masculinist economy of both the novel and the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant. Using Didi-Huberman's theorized categories of revolt, Chapters Three and Four of this thesis investigate these subtler methods of rebellion as a way of further uncovering the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant.

Chapter Three analyses *le roman de la servante* in particular through the emergence of its stock maidservant protagonists: the 'cross-class maidservant', that is to say a woman from the bourgeoisie or the aristocracy who dons the disguise of a maidservant in order to revolt against the constraints and conventions of society. I show how the nineteenth-century narrative device of the maidservant disguise as featured in Stendhal's *Mina de Vanghel*, Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*, Barbey d'Aurevilly's 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' and Maupassant's *La Chambre 11* should be read through the lens provided by Didi-Huberman's category of *le soulèvement gestuel*, as a rebellion of the entire body. This method of revolt raises bourgeois fears of class blurring, as male master characters find themselves no longer able to tell the difference between their wives and their maidservants. These texts allude to a bourgeois anxiety that they are only separated from their servants by money. Authors of *le roman de la servante* provide their cross-class maidservant heroines with a sense of freedom

and happiness through this revolt by playing with the rules surrounding the female servant's appearance. The act of self-debasement by means of the maidservant disguise paradoxically allows this reversal of power. The heroines 'stoop to conquer' insofar as their new identities provide them with the freedom to counteract the constraints and conventions of their class. Yet this *soulèvement* creates fears about nineteenth-century female servants and reproduces the anxieties already in circulation in nineteenth-century non-literary discourses surrounding the female servant's sexuality. The cross-class maidservant highlights the erotics of the master-servant relationship; in particular it analyses how the maidservant's body and uniform are part of an erotic economy surrounding the submissive female servant.

Chapter Four examines how the fictional maidservant protagonists in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux* and Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* revolt through their voice and thoughts. Reading these texts through Didi-Huberman's categories of *pensées* and *paroles*, this chapter argues that the Goncourts and Mirbeau play with the rules that governed the female servant's voice in this period. While household manuals attempted to silence the maidservant as part of their bid to erase her presence, authors of *le roman de la servante* show how this silence can be manipulated by fictional servants as a form of rebellion. Indeed, the two fictional maidservants in this chapter are shown to revolt by means of their imaginations, suppressed words and laughter well before they openly lash out at their masters and mistresses. This chapter ends by showing that, despite the limited freedom they obtain, these heroines remain as mouthpieces for both writers to set out their own political positions. I then turn our attention briefly to how the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious female servant creates a foundation for future research and critical enquiry into the figures of rebellious maids, cleaners and nannies in modern French studies such as their representation in twentieth- and twenty-first-century

literature and cinema. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries build upon the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the maidservant, but go further in their representations by presenting her as an outwardly violent and dangerous figure. One may think of Jean Genet's *Les Bonnes* (1947), inspired by the real-life 1933 case of the Papin sisters (two maidservants who murdered their employers), or the twenty-first-century fictional murderous nanny protagonist in Leïla Slimani's Goncourt winning novel, *Chanson douce* (2016). We also see the emergence of a subgenre of twenty-first-century diaries of these modern avatars: cleaners, nannies and maids are now writing their own first-hand accounts of their (mis)treatments in bourgeois homes, offices, hotels and public spaces. They describe their own secret forms of revolt against their positions of servitude.

This thesis argues that the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant is a vital component for how the nineteenth century narrativizes servitude in the short story and the novel. *Le roman de la servante* not only allows us to see how bourgeois nineteenth-century authors both generated and reproduced a social imaginary that was also to be found in other literary and non-literary discourses of this period, but how this social imaginary was fundamentally tied to issues surrounding class, gender and race.

## **Chapter One**

# **The Emergence of the Nineteenth-Century Social Imaginary of the Rebellious Maidservant**

### **Introduction**

Why and how did literary and non-literary discourses interpret the female servant as a rebellious, dangerous figure in the nineteenth century? How did this discursive landscape subsequently construct the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant? This chapter explores how nineteenth-century historical, political and social factors created a breeding ground for the period's cultural beliefs that formed a socio-cultural construct of the rebellious female servant. The recurrence of the subversive female servant as a figure of fear and fascination in nineteenth-century novels, short stories, panoramic literature, domestic guides, doctors' reports, government documents, police dossiers and newspapers owed much to two interconnected factors: middle-class insecurities about the stability of their (fragile) new class position and their resulting need to exert social control over the lower classes and in particular lower-class women. I build on previous scholarship that recognizes that discourses concerning nineteenth-century maidservants are constructed through a 'master's discourse'<sup>104</sup> – for these writings are predominately created by bourgeois (male) writers – to show how the social imaginary of the rebellious servant emerges constantly from such insecurities. For example, Martin-Fugier and Yates both claim that nineteenth-century maidservants presented

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<sup>104</sup> See Martin-Fugier, p. 182; Yates, p. xiv and Apter, p. 178.

bourgeois nineteenth-century writers with a double threat as this figure embodies a ‘combination of fear and fascination associated in nineteenth-century thinking both with the figure of Woman and with the figure of the People’.<sup>105</sup> In the first part of this chapter, I connect this fear and interest that surrounded the nineteenth-century maidservant to changing perceptions around the master and servant relationship in the mid-eighteenth century, which began to set the scene for how the nineteenth century would view and represent its servants. This chapter then moves on to discuss the impact of the Revolution, before analysing the impact of an influx of female servants due to migration. The maidservant is not only shown to embody fears surrounding women and the masses but is also viewed as dangerous due to her ambiguous status in society and in the home as a hybrid creature.

The period’s emerging discourses concerning national health reforms, criminology, and the medicalization (and theorization) of the female body, added to and reinforced fears about the maidservant, connecting her to the bourgeoisie’s anxieties with regard to class, criminality and disease. The social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant was born out of a rising awareness of the mixing of classes, the fear of contamination and the threat of insurrections during the nineteenth century. This chapter then shows how the social imaginary emerges out of institutional affiliations, rhetorical codes and political objectives – all principally stemming from a need to exert social control and restrict expressions of sexuality.

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<sup>105</sup> Yates, p. 65; see also Martin-Fugier, pp. 9, 31.

After establishing why the female servant became a figure of fascination and fear in the nineteenth century, this chapter turns its attention to the specificity of the period's literature, analysing the dichotomy of the loyal and rebellious maidservant outlined in the Introduction. I argue that *le roman de la servante* paradoxically served to debunk the myth of the loyal maidservant as a bourgeois ideal; it did so by reinforcing, and at times inventing, a social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant as a dangerous figure who is presented as real, but who was in fact every bit as mythical as the loyal servant. Rather than provide a historical overview of the servant's emergence as a figure in French literature,<sup>106</sup> the second part of this chapter traces the emergence of the maidservant as the rebellious protagonist of a specific subgenre of nineteenth-century literature.

## **1. The Emergence of the Nineteenth-Century Social Imaginary of the Rebellious Maidservant**

### **1.1 Changing Notions: The Master-Servant Relationship from the Ancien Régime to the Nineteenth Century**

What are the socio-cultural historical factors that brought about the emergence of the social imaginary of the rebellious servant in the nineteenth century? In their in-depth historical studies of master and servant relationships in the Ancien Régime, the cultural historians Sarah Maza and Cissie Fairchilds analyse how from the middle of the eighteenth century, France saw the notion of the master-servant relationship change in ways that would in turn

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<sup>106</sup> Kathryn Simpson Vidal provides just such an overview of the servant's emergence as a literary figure from medieval to eighteenth-century literature with a particular focus on the rise of the male 'servant-hero'. See Simpson Vidal, 'Masters and Servants in the French Novel 1715-1789' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rice University, 1983), pp. 14-52; see also Yates, pp. 2-5.

have implications for how nineteenth-century society was to view and thus write about its female servants.<sup>107</sup> Both historians argue that the Revolution of 1789 alone did not change the ideals and realities of domestic service; rather they suggest that the class warfare of the Revolution served to increase the existing pace of change in notions of the family, and therefore of the servant's role in the home.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, in the seventeenth century, the definition of the term *domestique* consisted of all those who lived under the male head of the household, including wives and children, as well as actual servants.<sup>109</sup> Yet by the 1750s, the servant's role as a wage earner began to be emphasized, leading to servants no longer being counted as members of the household or parts of the family, which was now only defined by its nuclear members.<sup>110</sup> As Fairchilds notes, from 1750 to 1789, 'the traditional patriarchal family was replaced by a more modern, more affectionate, more egalitarian and more child centred one'.<sup>111</sup> As a knock-on effect, eighteenth-century aristocratic and bourgeois families came to see the servant as a stranger who therefore needed to be distanced from the nuclear family, an attitude that would become even more prevalent in the nineteenth century.<sup>112</sup>

Fairchilds notes how this eighteenth-century shift inwards

was reinforced by new notions about the nature and prerequisites of social status. The social thought of the Enlightenment challenged the traditional, rigidly hierarchical society and sought to replace it with a more egalitarian one. In this new society prestige derived less from inherited rank than from social usefulness and individual worth, qualities which were more difficult to exemplify by outward signs of social status. Therefore these signs – the size of ones household for example – began to lose their importance.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> See Fairchilds and Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*. All other references to Maza refer to this text unless otherwise stated.

<sup>108</sup> Fairchilds, p. 156, and Maza, p. 328.

<sup>109</sup> Jean-Pierre Gutton, *Domestiques et serviteurs dans la France de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1981), p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-56. He also notes that this status often depended on the type of servant. *Domestiques à gages* worked for an annual salary, but this was often only paid at the end of their service whereas *domestiques à recompense* technically worked for free but were periodically given a sum of money at their master's discretion. Such sums were often greater than the total money earned by servants throughout their entire service, creating an internal hierarchy between the servants in the home.

<sup>111</sup> Fairchilds, p. 16.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242. Although the Revolution promoted equality, servants were still deemed to be illegitimate citizens. See Fraisse, p. 36.

<sup>113</sup> Fairchilds, p. 17.

These new notions surrounding the family transformed the servants' roles: their main duties were now focused on ensuring domestic comfort through housework rather than providing a public-facing display of class status.<sup>114</sup> Yet despite these efforts to erase the role of servants as public signifiers of wealth and power, the employment of domestic servants would remain an indicator for how society understood household wealth and status.<sup>115</sup> One may think of the scene in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* in which Baron Hulot insists that he and his wife keep at least one servant each when he is forced to downsize his home.<sup>116</sup> He refuses to succumb to the humiliation and disgrace of losing all his servants, even when faced with the possibility of financial ruin. As Chapter Three explores, in the nineteenth century, both the servant's appearance and the fact of her existence in the household remained essential ways of displaying the wealth of the household to guests.

The servant's newly defined role influenced how society perceived household staff as self-interested social climbers. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of literary male servant protagonists, who rose from rags to riches in the manner of the eponymous hero of Alain-René Lesage's *Gil Blas* (1715-35). The feminization of service in the nineteenth century (as already discussed in the Introduction) helped to generate representations of ambitious female servants in the social imaginary, as will be shown in the second half of this chapter.<sup>117</sup> While Fairchilds notes that, by the end of the Ancien Régime, masters and mistresses already feared that their servants would steal from them or harm them in their

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<sup>114</sup> Fairchilds, p. 17.

<sup>115</sup> Martin-Fugier explains that the number of servants in a nineteenth-century household would determine its categorization (p. 72). She labels four types of households: *les grandes maisons* were divided into two categories: those who were extremely rich had thirty servants, the moderately wealthy had eighteen; *les maisons moins importantes* such as bourgeois homes had no more than three servants, whilst the common household (neither rich nor extremely poor) could only afford one servant: 'la bonne à tout faire'. See also Fraisse, p. 77.

<sup>116</sup> See Balzac, *La Cousine Bette* (Paris: Gallimard, 2019 [1846]), p. 165.

<sup>117</sup> See Auger, p. 17; Cusenier, pp. 9, 17; Fairchilds, p. 241; Maza, p. 317; McBride, pp. 9, 39, 45.

sleep,<sup>118</sup> these fears became more intense in the nineteenth century in the wake of the Revolution.

## **1.2 The Revolution: The Female Servant and ‘*les classes dangereuses*’**

The Revolution of 1789, as well as the various revolutions and insurrections of 1830, 1848, 1851 and 1871 (the Paris Commune), led to a perpetual fear of uprisings in the nineteenth century.<sup>119</sup> The increasing fears that surrounded the female servant in the nineteenth century emanated from this threatened sense of hegemony.<sup>120</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon expresses his century’s concerns that the Revolution of 1789 also heightened a sense of wariness around servants by introducing and complicating the idea of possible equality between masters and servants:<sup>121</sup>

Pourquoi cette tendance, chez le domestique de nos jours, à considérer comme dégradante sa situation? C’est là l’écueil du nouveau régime fondé sur le principe de l’*égalité*, tandis que l’ancien régime, basé sur la hiérarchie des classes et des personnes, imprimait un caractère d’honorabilité à toute subordination. – Et par conséquent, c’est une erreur déplorable que celle qui pousse le serviteur dans le rêve et la poursuite d’une égalité absolue tout à fait contraire aux vrais principes de la démocratie!<sup>122</sup>

Bouniceau-Gesmon longed for a return to the social hierarchies of the Ancien Régime. As Jacqueline Martin-Huan points out, class dominance was not such an issue for the aristocrats of the Ancien Régime, who felt a natural distance between themselves and the other classes: ‘[I]a distance naturelle, que lui conférait sa naissance, permettait au noble d’être familier avec ses gens. Le maître nouveau riche craint le peuple; il sait que seul l’en sépare l’argent qu’il vient d’amasser, et que, par roublardise ou filouterie, on pourrait le lui enlever. [...] Il devient

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<sup>118</sup> Fairchilds, p. 156.

<sup>119</sup> Yates, p. 70.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> See also Fairchilds, p. 242.

<sup>122</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, pp. 192-93.

soupçonneux.’<sup>123</sup> Yet the rising middle classes of the nineteenth century wanted to appear as though they were distancing themselves from the aristocracy and the values of the Ancien Régime, whilst still needing to affirm their class position as separate from the working class.<sup>124</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon goes on to describe how nineteenth-century bourgeois masters (and mistresses) began anxiously to assume that their servants had a new sense of social equality which would in turn cause them to become unruly and uncontrollable:<sup>125</sup> ‘[I]a domesticité, partie intégrante de la famille, en a donc ressenti le contre-coup. Car, en jetant l’incertitude sur le principe des obligations sociales comme sur l’origine, sur la légitimité et la mission de tous les pouvoirs, nos révolutions ont ainsi, en remettant tout en question, fait naître dans l’âme du serviteur un dégoût profond de l’autorité du maître.’<sup>126</sup> The bourgeoisie’s anxious need for dominance only increased their desire to assert their class position in their homes.<sup>127</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, female servants were also seen as outsiders as they formed a large proportion of the influx of poor migrants from the countryside or distant small towns to the large cities.<sup>128</sup> Young women, often under the age of twenty-four years old,<sup>129</sup> sought to fill the rising number of new servant positions in middle-class urban homes during the early decades of industrialisation in France,<sup>130</sup> in order either to earn a dowry, or to leave their previous homes for good.<sup>131</sup> One of the consequences of this migration was the ubiquity of the female servant’s presence in France. Around fifteen percent of all households

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<sup>123</sup> Martin-Huan, p. 26.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Maza, p. 318.

<sup>126</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, p. 179.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Maza, p. 314. Charle points out that Paris, for example, doubled in population in the first half of the century due to the poor leaving the densely populated countryside (*Histoire sociale de la France*, p. 36).

<sup>129</sup> McBride, p. 38 shows how the age group of female servants under twenty-four years old increased between 1820 to 1901.

<sup>130</sup> Maza, p. 314; Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France*, p. 317; McBride, p. 13.

<sup>131</sup> Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France*, p. 317.

in France employed at least one servant between 1830 and 1885.<sup>132</sup> By 1866, female servants constituted twenty-nine percent of the active female population of France, while in 1901, they represented forty-five percent of all working women in Paris.<sup>133</sup> In Paris, the servant class then continued to grow beyond the domestic service's overall decline in 1900, creating an larger concentration of female servants in France's capital.<sup>134</sup> The female servant's strong presence in large cities such as Paris and Lyon<sup>135</sup> suggests a further reason for her emergence in the period's literary texts: this large migration increased the fascination and wariness around the female servant figure as she was the stranger in the home, yet she was also isolated within the city she inhabited as a migrant and separated from the working classes by living with her employers.<sup>136</sup> This wariness was not so evident in earlier periods, in which masters typically hired servants recommended by family and friends, relatives of other servants, or children from loyal families.<sup>137</sup> From the late eighteenth century, France saw a rapid turnover of servants which made these traditional recruitment methods difficult to implement.<sup>138</sup> Servants were typically no longer known to the household prior to their service, increasing the need for background checks.<sup>139</sup> This high turnover of female servants also illustrated a high level of mobility within the job role itself: nineteenth-century maidservants changed positions, and often geographical areas, every year or two as a result of either promotion, dismissal or replacement.<sup>140</sup> Servants thus had the highest rate of geographical mobility than any other job category during the nineteenth century: by 1901, forty-eight percent of servants had moved from their natal departments for work in

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<sup>132</sup> McBride, p. 34.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>136</sup> Maza, p. 314.

<sup>137</sup> Fairchilds, p. 157.

<sup>138</sup> Maza, p. 314.

<sup>139</sup> Maza, p. 314.

<sup>140</sup> McBride, pp. 74-75 explains how young servants either acquired new skills which often led to them finding a better paid position in a different household, or they were fired or replaced due to their inability to learn on the job.

comparison to thirty percent of industrial workers.<sup>141</sup> Towns and cities did not welcome these strangers; as the majority of young women came from the peasant families of the provinces, their country accents were mocked and their masters often punished any use of *patois*.<sup>142</sup> Servants thus became ostracized by the families they worked for, as well as by the populations of the towns and cities they inhabited. This resulted in servants often marrying people from their hometowns rather than from the cities in which they worked.<sup>143</sup>

Their ‘foreignness’ increased the bourgeois need for social control; as Charle notes, this influx of poor migrants, including that of women taking their roles as servants, ‘fait naître, dans l’opinion bourgeoise, une inquiétude sociale fondée sur l’équivalence entre classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses.’<sup>144</sup> The downward mobility of female servants also led to their classification amongst the poor; as Theresa M. McBride points out, ‘the servant population had high rates of illegitimate births, thefts, drunkenness, prostitution, infanticide, suicide’, often due to their status of unemployment.<sup>145</sup> As servants rarely had a separate home outside of that of their employer, they were often isolated from possible family and friendship networks that could help them if they found themselves in precarious situations.<sup>146</sup> As shown in Louis Chevalier’s monumental study, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses* (1958),<sup>147</sup> the bourgeoisie confused their perception of the working classes with that of the ‘dangerous classes’, made up of criminals and society’s outsiders on the margins

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<sup>141</sup> McBride, p. 35.

<sup>142</sup> Martin-Huan, p. 23. As Chapter Four of this thesis demonstrates, nineteenth-century writers also mocked and imitated female servants’ voices in their fictions.

<sup>143</sup> See Maza, p. 57 and McBride, pp. 83-97.

<sup>144</sup> Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France*, p. 36.

<sup>145</sup> McBride, pp. 99-100.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>147</sup> Charle, *Paris: ‘Capitales’ des XIXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 2021), pp. 57-58 notes that this study is ‘dramatique, voie mélodramatique’ and does not correct the bias it describes; it has been criticized by Fernand Braudel for ‘un usage peu critique des textes littéraires, la faiblesse des analyses économiques, le recours incantatoire au terme “histoire biologique” et la réduction du social au démographique, ainsi l’absence des comparaisons internationales’.

of the law.<sup>148</sup> One may think of Honoré-Antoine Frégier's *Des classes dangereuses dans la population des grandes villes* (1840), its principal themes also appearing in Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-43).<sup>149</sup> Poverty thus became naturally assimilated with uprisings and crime.<sup>150</sup> The female servant's ambiguous position in society therefore collectively crystallized nineteenth-century society's fears of an outsider, or even a 'foreigner', infiltrating the home and possibly harming the family. The following chapters go on to explore how the female servant figure is shown to embody the period's stereotypes and prejudices that surrounded the lower-class female figures such as the *servante-maîtresse*, the *souillon*, the prostitute, the black woman, the hysteric and the female criminal.

### **1.3 The Nineteenth-Century Press and the Criminal Servant**

Newspapers played a fundamental role in constructing the female servant as a part of the *classes dangereuses*. In the 1830s, advances in printing press technology, together with cheaper newspaper subscription costs and innovations in transport, allowed for a distribution and circulation of newspapers (particularly Parisian newspapers) that was more efficient than ever before.<sup>151</sup> This widespread circulation allowed for criminal cases, including those of maidservants, to permeate the general public's imagination; newspapers now obtained a larger readership that extended to the uneducated, to the lower classes and to women.<sup>152</sup> Eliza Jane Smith notes that during the nineteenth century, public interest in the criminal world, and therefore its more prevalent presence in the press, was due to the fact that law enforcement

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<sup>148</sup> Yates, p. 4.

<sup>149</sup> Charle, *Paris: 'Capitales' des XIXe siècles*, p. 59.

<sup>150</sup> See Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2002 [1958]).

<sup>151</sup> See Eliza Jane Smith, p. 103 for an in-depth discussion on the increasing circulation of print copies and distribution of newspapers in the nineteenth century.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

had become a larger part of public life as a result of reforms at the start of the century: in 1800, the police force was modernized into three principal divisions (the state civilian police, civilian police and state military police) and ‘[i]n 1810, Napoleon established the French Penal Code, which outlined various criminal offenses and their corresponding punishments’.<sup>153</sup> By distributing daily reports on criminal cases and their eventual trials, the press therefore helped to establish a shared sense of societal mores insofar as it created and developed a binary opposition between figures in society who were deemed as respectable or unlawful.<sup>154</sup> Together with the period’s invention of new discourses such as pathology, criminology, crime statistics and law reports, the circulation of the press illustrated a nineteenth-century ‘obsession’ with the idea that criminality was inherently connected to the lower classes.<sup>155</sup> Smith points out that ‘by 1848, the portrayal in the press of the riots at Saint-Lazare, an all-women’s prison in Paris, shifted the image of lower-class women from that of victims of circumstance to uncontrollable criminals.’<sup>156</sup> The maidservant was no exception to this criminalization. As Matlock points out, the detailed descriptions of la Femme Delannoy, a maidservant who robbed and set her mistress on fire, became inseparable with the name of the prison: ‘[her] trial, detailed daily in the *Gazette des tribunaux*, must have so permeated the public imagination during late 1846 and early 1847 that the very mention of Saint-Lazare recalled the evil servant’s presence there.’<sup>157</sup> The daily reports of real-life maidservant crimes fed into these fears that attached themselves to society’s female outsiders during this period, and thus helped to create and feed into the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant figure. The second chapter of this thesis goes on to analyse three examples of real-life nineteenth-century criminal maidservants – Henriette Cornier (1825), H  l  ne J  gado (1851)

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Kalifa, *Crime et culture au XIXe si  cle* (Paris: Perrin, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>156</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 204.

<sup>157</sup> Matlock, p. 98.

and Céline Masson (1891) – in order to investigate how real-life maidservant crimes provoked a widespread public fascination with the figure of the rebellious female servant across the century. These crimes permeated other nineteenth-century discourses such as criminological reports, sociological reports and medical treatises. The next chapter uses these crimes to demonstrate how stereotypes surrounding lower-class female criminals were layered onto the body of the maidservant.

The reduction in newspaper subscriptions due to advances in printing-press technology in the 1830s not only allowed for a mass circulation of the press, but also for the serialized novel, *le roman-feuilleton*. This new genre of literature was likewise essential to the construction of the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant. The book market during the July Monarchy saw an increase in demand from the literate public, including, for the first time, that of the working classes, and thus in the 1830s publishers and enterprising booksellers sought to target a wider readership.<sup>158</sup> This urban readership drove the invention of new techniques in distribution and printing to provide cheaper literature.<sup>159</sup> From 1836, with the emergence of the newspaper *La Presse*, the *roman-feuilleton* obtained its means to reach a wide public effectively and cheaply. Although its readership was predominantly made up of the middle class, it did also reach the lower, less educated classes, as well as the illiterate public through word-of-mouth, allowing its contents to gain further exposure.<sup>160</sup> Smith points out that, '[i]n order to establish their larger reputation in the popular sense, upper-class writers thus began to experiment with representations of criminal and working-class characters within their works.'<sup>161</sup> The *roman-feuilleton* confronted readers with

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<sup>158</sup> Matlock, p. 35.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 95.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

melodramatic social realities that represented the *bas-fonds*, criminality and prostitution.<sup>162</sup> Depictions of the rebellious female servant also emerged through newspapers, with many of the texts that make up *le roman de la servante* originally appearing as serials, or short stories in the press, as for example Stendhal's *Mina de Vanghel*; Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* and *Le Cousin Pons*; Maupassant's *Rosalie Prudent*, *Histoire d'une fille de ferme*, *La Chambre 11*, *La Mère aux monstres*, *Rose, Sauvée* and *La Fenêtre*; Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*; and Zola's *Pot-Bouille*. The newspaper therefore combined *faits divers* with fiction.

For example, on 13 October 1846, the newspaper, *Le Constitutionnel*, published an instalment of Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* next to a report that a maidservant, Virginie Pagnier, had been accused of stealing by her mistresses. The mistress had found her lost earring alongside a variety of clothing items and handkerchiefs that belonged to her and to her daughter in the maidservant's bedroom. During her trial, the maidservant stated that she planned to return these items and that it was all a misunderstanding. Whether the servant was honest or not matters less for our purposes than the fact that this *fait divers* highlights another example of female servants being accused of rebellious behaviour. The journalist adds that these accusations against female servants were common in this period:

Pourquoi s'étonner dès lors qu'elle ait placé à la caisse d'épargne une somme assez rondelette, provenant de ses petits profits auprès de ses maîtresses? Pourquoi dire qu'elle est une voleuse et la traduire sur les bancs de la cour d'assise! Ah! C'est qu'il n'y a pas de cette seule circonstance, il en est d'autres encore qui viennent aggraver sa position.<sup>163</sup>

On the next page, readers could find adverts placed by bourgeois families in search for 'loyal' servants. On 12 November 1846, another instalment of *La Cousine Bette* is then placed in *Le Constitutionnel* next to an advertisement for the household manual writer Louis-Eustache Audot's *La Cuisinière de la campagne et de la ville, ou la nouvelle cuisine*

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<sup>162</sup> Matlock, p. 34.

<sup>163</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 15 October 1846, p. 2.

*économique* (1818), extolling its advice for bourgeois mistresses in the instruction of servants in the following categories: ‘table des mets selon l’ordre du service’, ‘service de la table’, ‘manière de server et de découper à table’ and recipes.<sup>164</sup> These examples show how the nineteenth-century press constructed the image of a feared female figure by merging different discourses to help to create the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant. In his recent study of *Fictions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (2018), Edmund Birch observes that, like the realist novel, the newspaper ‘fabricates, constructs, organises a certain version of the everyday, the coherence of which must ultimately be imagined (or, rather, experienced in imagination) by the reader.’<sup>165</sup> The *faits divers* of these maidservant crimes, placed alongside Balzac’s novel, together constructed representations of the maidservant in the reader’s imagination. Georges de Peyrebrune’s *Victoire la Rouge* (1883) even provides a fictitious nineteenth-century example of how the bourgeois mistress’s perception of her maidservant was altered by her reading of an unnamed *roman-feuilleton* and of a *fait divers*: ‘Mme Maleyrac, l’esprit encore brouillé par la lecture de son feuilleton, ne se souvenant plus qu’elle faisait tuer un porc, s’imagina tout à coup que la Victoire [sa servante] venait d’assassiner quelqu’un’.<sup>166</sup> Yet, as we will see in Chapter Two, the novels that make up *le roman de la servante* did not merely replicate the crimes found in *faits divers*; rather they created new crimes that served to confirm existing fears of the real-life rebellious female figures reported in the press.

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<sup>164</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 12 November 1846, p. 4.

<sup>165</sup> Edmund Birch, *Fictions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 6.

<sup>166</sup> Georges de Peyrebrune, *Victoire de la Rouge* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1888 [1883]), p. 119.

## 1.4 The Fear of Woman

In the nineteenth century, the need to dominate the female servant was also rooted in the belief that women were social inferiors.<sup>167</sup> As Charle notes in his social history of nineteenth-century France, whether a woman was rich or poor, she was eternally seen as a minor and a dependent.<sup>168</sup> Yet, as Charle argues, the bourgeoisie believed that working-class women were more at risk of ‘la déchéance dans la prostitution ou la criminalité spécifique de l’abandon d’enfants, de l’infanticide ou du vol’.<sup>169</sup> The discourses that surrounded female criminality and sexuality also saw women as potentially destructive; these figures threatened the order of the family and therefore the organization of society.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, as Chapter Two demonstrates, female servants who stepped out of their feminine roles of virtue were also seen as threats to their society. The criminological discourses surrounding the three real-life maidservant criminals analysed in Chapter Two show how deviant behaviour was pathologized in the nineteenth century as evidence of borderline disorders such as monomania. In her chapter on ‘Madness and Writing’, Miranda Gill notes that nineteenth-century alienists – specialists in psychiatry, a field known in the nineteenth century as *aliénisme* or *la médecine mentale* before its establishment as an independent profession<sup>171</sup> – defined monomania as

a form of partial insanity [that emerged] in the 1820s and 30s. Monomaniacs, startlingly depicted in paintings by Théodore Géricault, were held to be dominated by a single fixed obsession, though were otherwise disconcertingly lucid. The alienist styled himself as an expert witness or *médecin légiste* in court, proposing that many criminals were undiagnosed victims of maladies such as homicidal monomania. These debates, which raised complex issues of free will and agency, threatened the dogma of the unified bourgeois self. Later in the century the odd, rebellious, and eccentric were targeted by alienists, in their efforts to map the allegedly vast ‘territory’ of *névroses*, *neurasthénies*, and *névropathies*.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> See Yates, pp. 69-70.

<sup>168</sup> Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France*, p. 37.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Yates, pp. 69-70.

<sup>171</sup> Miranda Gill, ‘Madness and Writing’, in *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, ed. by William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 488-95 (p. 488)

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 489.

This condition, analysed further in Chapter Two, tied the figure of the servant to the mentally ill woman as a way of comprehending murderous crimes. As Gill points out, in the nineteenth century, madness (*la folie*) and the newer concept of mental illness (*l'aliénation mentale*) 'were defined in opposition to a normative model of good health, implicitly identified with the perspective of male bourgeois rationality.'<sup>173</sup> Monomania was then later replaced by hysteria. In her study on female criminality, Lisa Downing points out that 'hysteria is inseparable from a notion of femininity as out of control, teeming beyond the confines of its embodiment, tipping over, almost, into its opposite and becoming threatening, aggressive, *unfeminine*.'<sup>174</sup> She goes on to explain that '[f]eminine pathologies, such as nymphomania, frigidity, lesbianism, and most especially hysteria were coined or gained further currency in the course of the nineteenth century, concretizing sometimes contradictory deviations from the norms of gendered behaviour.'<sup>175</sup> These deviations from social norms, or 'abnormalities', fascinated and repulsed nineteenth-century society, as Chapter Two explores in relation to three real-life cases which saw maidservants commit murder.

In the 1870s, the neuropathologist Jean-Martin Charcot reinforced the connections between hysteria and the alleged threats women – including maidservants – posed to society through his public demonstrations of hysterical patients.<sup>176</sup> Charcot was based at the Parisian women's institution, La Salpêtrière, the largest female hospice in Paris, which from 1690 housed a variety of female outsiders characterized by Didi-Huberman in his study of hysteria as 'paupers, vagabonds, beggars, "decrepit women", "old maids", epileptics, "women in second childhood", "misshapen and malformed innocents", incorrigible women —

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 488.

<sup>174</sup> Lisa Downing, 'Murder in the Feminine: Marie Lafarge and the Sexualization of the Nineteenth-Century Criminal Woman', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18.1 (2009), 121-37 (p. 128).

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., pp. 124-25.

<sup>176</sup> Lisa Downing, 'Murder in the Feminine', p. 121.

madwomen’;<sup>177</sup> by 1873, this also included ‘*reposantes*’, ‘administered women’ and ‘demented women’, as well as children.<sup>178</sup> He worked primarily with female patients; men did not enter the Salpêtrière as patients until the opening of the outpatient clinic on 21 June 1881.<sup>179</sup> While Charcot acknowledged that hysteria could also be found in men, mysteriously no photos were ever taken, and hardly any experiments were ever performed on male patients.<sup>180</sup> Rather, Charcot argued that overt expressions of female sexual desire indicated hysteria, publicizing his theories to a public principally composed of male elites via the new medium of photography in his three volume series, titled *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1876-77; 1878; 1879-80), as well as via sensational and theatrical seminars attended by men, famously including Freud, whose own work was influenced by these teachings.<sup>181</sup> Among Charcot’s patients, we find the unemployed, the poor, laundresses, linen maids and florists, as well as servants.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, as Didi-Huberman points out, women hired to work in the hospital as maidservants were diagnosed as hysterical after only a few days.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, the most famous of the patients chosen for public displays of hysteria was a maidservant, Louise ‘Augustine’ Gleizes, who first entered the Salpêtrière in 1875 at the age of fifteen and a half.<sup>184</sup> Didi-Huberman analyses Charcot’s experiments and photography and argues that ‘Augustine was the star model for a whole concept of hysteria’.<sup>185</sup> He argues that Augustine was ‘more like a marionette’<sup>186</sup> who was ‘forced to perform, all the movements of

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<sup>177</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. by Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>180</sup> Jessie Hewitt, *Institutionalizing Gender: Madness, the Family, and Psychiatric Power in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), pp. 167-68.

<sup>181</sup> Hewitt, p. 168.

<sup>182</sup> Olivier Walusinski, ‘The Girls of the Salpêtrière’, *Frontiers of Neurology and Neuroscience*, 33.1 (2014), 65-77 (p. 65).

<sup>183</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 279.

<sup>184</sup> Daphne de Marneffe, ‘Looking and Listening: The Construction of Clinical Knowledge in Charcot and Freud’, *Signs*, 17:1 (1991), 71-111 (p. 73).

<sup>185</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 117.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

all her limbs executed beyond her will, with a view to a representation of which she is utterly unaware', namely the construction of hysteria and its symptoms by the male doctors and by the observers around her.<sup>187</sup> Thus Charcot's experiments tied the figure of the female servant explicitly to the symptoms of hysteria in the public imagination at the end of the century. In his study of hysteria, Didi-Huberman repeatedly emphasizes that the maidservant remained at the will of these male onlookers. He does, however, also argue that Augustine's symptoms of hysteria 'produc[ed] the greatest resistance, fight, refusal, and countertransference',<sup>188</sup> in a foreshadowing of his later work on female revolt. As Chapter Four shows, the Goncourt brothers not only built on their period's ongoing ideas about hysteria by presenting a literary maidservant with hysterical tendencies, but also provided an example of this connection between refusal and hysteria. I argue that Germinie Lacerteux dreams or 'hysterical hallucinations' are a form of revolt. Just as Didi-Huberman argues that Augustine experiences an 'insurrection of her body',<sup>189</sup> describing how she 'went into rages',<sup>190</sup> I show how Germinie revolts against her situation by unleashing similar rage through her thoughts and voice. Alongside the real-life criminal cases analysed in Chapter Two, the narratives produced by nineteenth-century literary authors provide a further example of how female servants were connected to hysteria, and so to the figure of the female criminal, in the nineteenth-century social imaginary.

In his 1889 study of the delinquent woman, the subsequently discredited founder of criminology, Cesare Lombroso, argued that women were inherently hysterical and unable to

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<sup>187</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 162.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

control their violent outbursts, which explained why some of them became criminals.<sup>191</sup> Raymond de Ryckère, a Belgian judge at the Brussels Court of First Instance,<sup>192</sup> legal theorist and self-professed specialist in female servant criminality, then sought to ‘legitimize’ the connection between domestic service and female criminality in his widely acclaimed study on the topic, *La Servante Criminelle: Étude de criminologie professionnelle*.<sup>193</sup> Published in 1908, but focusing on the nineteenth-century female servant, this study shows how criminological discourses tied the figure of the female servant to these misogynistic ideas.<sup>194</sup> Ryckère argues that female servants are amongst the most dangerous of all female criminals as he uses his study of the criminal to build on Lombroso’s *Criminal Woman* (1893),<sup>195</sup> itself based on the latter’s *Criminal Man* (1876). Lombroso used *Criminal Woman* to examine the psychological and physical differences between the female criminal, the prostitute and the bourgeois woman. In his observations, Lombroso argues that the ‘normal woman’ was a pleasant, bourgeois female who was recognizable as good from her appearance.<sup>196</sup> The criminal woman instead steps out of her role as a nurturing, maternal woman to embody masculine traits both through her physiognomy and through her violent actions that together connect her closely to the figure of the criminal man.<sup>197</sup> Ryckère similarly maintains that ‘la criminalité ancillaire [...] occupe la place la plus importante dans la criminalité féminine.’<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, trans. by Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 237. All references to Lombroso and Ferrero refer to this translation unless otherwise stated.

<sup>192</sup> See Mario Ponzio, ‘Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency’, in *Early Film Theories in Italy 1896-1922: The Little Magic Machine*, ed. by Francesco Casetti, Silvio Alovio and Luca Mazzei (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), pp. 297-304 (p. 297) and Didier Boden, ‘Resistance Through Law: Belgian Judges and the Relations Between Occupied State and Occupying Power’, in *Peace Through Law: The Versailles Peace Treaty and Dispute Settlement After World War I*, ed. by Michel Erpelding, Burkhard Hess and Hélène Ruiz Fabri (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019), pp. 323-36 (pp. 327-28).

<sup>193</sup> Marilyn Barber, ‘Valérie Piette, Domestiques et servantes: des vies sous condition’, *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 35:69 (2002), 266-67 (p. 267).

<sup>194</sup> Thompson also argues that this study provides a ‘contemporary recognition’ of the nineteenth-century obsession that the maidservant was a criminal (p. 29).

<sup>195</sup> Downing, ‘Murder in the Feminine’, p. 121.

<sup>196</sup> Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill* (New York: Feminist Press, 2009 [1980]), p. 3.

<sup>197</sup> See Downing, *The Subject of Murder*, p. 64.

<sup>198</sup> Raymond de Ryckère, *La Servante criminelle: Étude de criminologie professionnelle* (Paris: A. Maloine, 1908), p. 2. All future references to Ryckère relate to this text unless otherwise stated.

Ryckère's report at the end of the long nineteenth century provides direct evidence that the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant is constructed through different types of nineteenth-century discourses that focus on the rebellious servant. By using the period's *faits divers*, doctors' reports, household manuals and literary texts to inform his arguments, Ryckère's report helps to summarize the social imaginary at work in the nineteenth century. Indeed, when discussing the real-life psychology of female servants in his work, Ryckère explicitly connects his analysis to the fictional maidservant Célestine in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*:

Dans le *Journal d'une femme de chambre*, ce livre de vérité et de pitié, si douloureusement sincère et angoissant, Octave Mirbeau nous révèle en ces termes toute la psychologie du domestique de nos jours: 'Un domestique, ce n'est pas un être normal, un être social... C'est quelqu'un de disparate, fabriqué de pièces et morceaux qui ne peuvent s'ajuster l'un dans l'autre, se juxtaposer l'un à l'autre... [...] De la bourgeoisie, il a gagné les vices honteux, sans avoir pu acquérir les moyens de les satisfaire... et les sentiments vils, les lâches peurs, les criminels appétits, sans le décor, et par conséquent sans l'excuse de la richesse... [...] Le portrait, volontairement poussé au noir, n'est guère flatté. Il y a certes des exceptions, beaucoup d'exceptions, mais il faut pourtant reconnaître que, malgré son outrance voulue, il est malheureusement trop souvent exact. Il est profondément triste de devoir constater, pour rendre hommage à la vérité, que les exceptions tendent plutôt à diminuer et que le type décrit par Mirbeau semble devenir de plus en plus la règle générale.<sup>199</sup>

The criminologist's argument that disobedient servants are often produced by tyrannical masters is directly influenced by the fictional servant Célestine in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (this text also provides most of the literary examples cited in this chapter). Ryckère then goes on to claim that Célestine 'est comme la cousine de Germinie Lacerteux',<sup>200</sup> the Goncourt brothers' fictional rebellious maidservant protagonist. Ryckère paradoxically draws on the personalities and actions of these fictional servants, and later even Leo Tolstoy's Katucha and Henrik Ibsen's Regine Engstrand, in order to bring his arguments about actual criminal maidservants to life.<sup>201</sup> By using nineteenth-century fiction to prove his

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>200</sup> Ryckère, p. 4.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

criminological theory, Ryckère discredits his own methodology. He goes on to quote from Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*, Dr Armand Corre's study, *Crime et Suicide* (1891), and an anonymous writer's household advice manual, *Le Guide du domestique à l'usage du simple domestique* (1857), to defend his argument that deviant and (at times) criminal female servants are subjected to vice due to their masters' behaviour. The construction of a rebellious maidservant figure in this report has therefore crossed the boundaries between fact and fiction. The social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant thus feeds into this 'scientific' reality in Ryckère's work, as well as being further emphasized. Ryckère's study can therefore be read as a crystallization of the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant originally born out of these nineteenth-century discourses. The links between these discourses provide an example of how criminologists take direct influences from the literary genre of *le roman de la servante*. The writers who produced these literary and non-literary discourses were reading and sharing their texts on the female servant in order to build their arguments, shape their plots and represent the female servant as a dangerous figure. The nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant is therefore shown to be constructed through a circular network of interconnected discourses that distributed and replicated a similar representation of this figure.

### **1.5 Expelling the Servant: The Maidservant as the Embodiment of Dirt and Disease**

The emergence of the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious female servant also stems from the period's growing concerns about the connection between the lower classes and disease. At the end of the eighteenth century, the science of hygienics and the concept of public health emerged and played a major role in shaping the social and urban

planning in the nineteenth century.<sup>202</sup> The large influx of migrants (including maidservants) from the provinces to Paris in the first half of the century led to mass overcrowding; this consequently resulted in housing shortages, cholera epidemics, malnutrition, infant mortality, diseases and increased crime rates.<sup>203</sup> When commenting on Paris, doctors, novelists and moralists all insisted on the metaphor that the city was morally and physically diseased.<sup>204</sup> In major European texts dealing with the idea of the city in this period, the lower classes were deemed to be the cause of this moral illness, as well as of disease, criminality, animality, mob violence and social unrest.<sup>205</sup> If the maidservant in the social imaginary was the embodiment of the masses and their vices entering the home, she therefore also became the point of contact for the bourgeoisie with the outside world of dirt, disease and depravity.<sup>206</sup> The fears that formed around the figure of the rebellious maidservant also originated from fears of the possible unknown diseases that this figure could bring into the home from the outside world. She therefore posed a threat not only to the family's class position but also to their health. In *Germinie Lacerteux*, the maidservant protagonist secretly conceals her symptoms of tuberculosis: '[e]lle ne disait rien, ne se plaignait pas, faisait son service comme à l'ordinaire',<sup>207</sup> telling her mistress that her illness was nothing more than 'un gros rhume, tout bonnement...'.<sup>208</sup> As a result, her character projects the bourgeois fear that the maidservant's body could contaminate her masters and mistresses without their knowledge.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Macs Smith, *Paris and the Parasite: Noise, Health, and Politics in the Media City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2021), p. 5.

<sup>203</sup> See Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 75.

<sup>204</sup> Yates, p. 73.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 74, Charle, *Paris: 'Capitales' des XIXe siècles*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>206</sup> See Yee, pp. 145-46, Yates, pp. 74-76 and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 48.

<sup>207</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017, [1865]), p. 232.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Isabelle Grellet and Caroline Kruse, *Histoires de la tuberculose: Les fièvres de l'âme, 1800-1940* (Paris: Ramsay, 1983) pp. 50-74.

The nineteenth century's increasing obsession with cleanliness consequently linked the expulsion of physical dirt to the need to keep the dirty classes – or, to use Christopher Prendergast's phraseology, the 'polluted people' of society<sup>210</sup> – out of sight. The influx of poor migrants into the larger cities increased the amount of dirt and disease in circulation.<sup>211</sup> The lack of running water meant that the poor hardly washed their clothes or their bodies, and this increased sickness, as well as the number of parasites living on the bodies of the poor, with whom the servant was of course associated.<sup>212</sup> By the middle of the century, Haussmannization had pushed the lower classes to the outer suburbs of the city, changing its topography and sociology as well as its patterns of criminality.<sup>213</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that the maidservant figure – who was connected to the lower classes in the social imaginary, and who was explicitly hired to expel the dirt from the home – should likewise have been pushed to the peripheries of her workplace and of her society as a result of her association with dirt and disease. As Emily Apter argues, the maidservant's body was connected to the unsightly and foul-smelling areas of the house, such as the kitchen and the toilets, that she inhabited as part of her work: '[a]s a result of its direct physical contact with the secret detritus of the bourgeois household, the maid's body became symbolically contaminated by the *taches*, or traces of dirt, that it was her *tâche*, task or work, to efface.'<sup>214</sup> One may think of the scene in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* in which a fictional maidservant, Louise, is found to have a 'grand défaut... C'est ce qui l'empêche de trouver une place':<sup>215</sup>

Pourquoi sentez-vous mauvais comme ça?... vous avez donc de la pourriture dans le corps?... C'est affreux!... C'est à ne pas croire... Jamais quelqu'un n'a senti, comme vous sentez... Vous avez donc un cancer dans le nez... dans l'estomac, peut-être? [...] Mon Dieu!... Mon Dieu!... Est-ce possible? Mais vous allez empester toute ma maison... Vous ne pourrez pas rester près de moi...<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Prendergast, p. 79.

<sup>211</sup> Charle, *Paris: 'Capitales' des XIXe siècles*, p. 97.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> See Kalifa, *Crime et culture au XIXe siècle*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>214</sup> Apter, p. 190.

<sup>215</sup> Mirbeau, p. 375.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., pp. 375-76.

The potential new mistress is shocked at the smell emanating from the maidservant's body. Mirbeau here creates, as well as feeds into, fears of the female servant as a dirty figure contaminating the home with her presence. He demonstrates the bourgeois woman's fears of being too close to the maidservant, who draws attention to her unclean presence, a theme that is also explored in Chapter Three.

At the end of the eighteenth century, servant quarters and their workspaces were already beginning to be relocated in the home in order to detach the female servant in particular from the main household.<sup>217</sup> Earlier houses had likewise separated these spaces, usually pushing them to a separate part of the house alongside other unsightly and unpleasant areas such as the stables and the toilets.<sup>218</sup> Yet by the beginning of the nineteenth century, dormitories were being also introduced and distanced still further from the private areas of the home, relegating servants to the attic or to the cellar.<sup>219</sup> Separate servant staircases then ensured that family members of the household, and their guests, would never come across servants unexpectedly.<sup>220</sup> These new floorplans went on to influence the layout of nineteenth-century homes, which continued to separate servants physically from their masters; Charle notes how, through the process of Haussmannization in the mid-nineteenth century, the new bourgeois apartment was built so as to create 'une séparation entre sphère publique et sphère privée', but also between 'masculin et féminin, maîtres et serviteurs.'<sup>221</sup> One may think, in this context, of the separate servant world of the attic in Zola's *Pot-Bouille*. This spatial discourse not only reinforced class boundaries between masters and servants, pushing the latter out and away from the private spaces of the bedrooms and the salons, but also fed into,

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<sup>217</sup> Fairchilds, p. 52.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Fairchilds, p. 52.

<sup>221</sup> Charle, *Paris: 'Capitales' des XIXe siècles*, p. 306.

as well as created, nineteenth-century insecurities concerning the proximity of the servant to the nuclear family. As Charle points out, '[c]ette normalisation de l'habitat unifie formellement les modes de vie des classes moyennes et supérieures: on le retrouve depuis les classes moyennes (la petite bourgeoisie emploie des bonnes à l'époque) jusqu'à la grande bourgeoisie.'<sup>222</sup> Floorplans were thus integral to the reinforcing of class boundaries and especially the reassertion of the bourgeoisie's class position. While, on the one hand, the maidservant was expelled to a new type of spatiality in order to protect the family, on the other hand, the need for this expulsion paradoxically emphasized the servant's close proximity to the family, thereby increasing the family's fears of her presence in the home.

The invention of the servant bell in the nineteenth century also emphasized this distance between masters and servants: a servant would now be physically present only when requested.<sup>223</sup> One may think of the scene in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900) in which the mistress toys with her servant by using the bell to make her go up and down the stairs: 'drinn!... drinn!...drinn!...il faut se lever et repartir. Cela ne fait rien qu'on soit indisposée...drinn!... drinn!... drinn!...'.<sup>224</sup> Servants were forced to become invisible, forbidden to leave any trace of their presence in the bourgeois home. In Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884), the admittedly aristocratic des Esseintes forces his servants to wear slippers around his new bourgeois-sized house in Fontenay-aux-Roses (to which he moves from his crumbling ancestral seat, the château de Lourps) in order to silence their movements and therefore their presence.<sup>225</sup> Yet while, on the one hand, nineteenth-century

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>223</sup> Gutton, p. 55. Chabot also explains that larger nineteenth-century households installed 'le tableau d'appel. Un système mécanique y reliait toutes les pièces de l'hôtel. Un coup de sonnette faisait sauter une des petites fiches en bois, qui indiquait immédiatement la pièce d'où on venait d'appeler' (pp. 37-38). By the end of the century, electric-powered buttons for calling servants were beginning to be installed around these rich homes.

<sup>224</sup> Mirbeau, p. 103.

<sup>225</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 2004 [1884]), p. 55.

bourgeois society attempted to erase the presence of the (female) servant, it is paradoxically this desired invisibility of the servant that drew the bourgeoisie's attention to the frightening presence of these figures who existed in a state of limbo between visibility and invisibility. They are the necessary evil that the bourgeoisie cannot live without. Chapter Three explores this point by analysing how bourgeois and aristocratic female characters in *le roman de la servante* seek to manipulate this (in)visible presence of the maidservant. For her part, Mirbeau's maidservant protagonist Célestine tells the reader that 'je m'habitue à glisser mes pas, à "marcher en l'air" [...] je me fais, à moi-même, l'effet d'un spectre, d'un revenant'.<sup>226</sup> It is by attempting to erase her own presence that she becomes paradoxically more terrifying, and thus, more present.

This bourgeois need to achieve control over the servant's presence also stemmed from fears concerning the maidservant's sexuality. As an embodiment of a lower-class woman, the female servant was deemed to be a sexually promiscuous figure who could force her sexuality onto her masters, as well as onto their children.<sup>227</sup> She was therefore not only connected to the spread of illness generally, but also to the spread of sexual diseases specifically. One may think, in this context, of the scene in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* in which Célestine plays on the bourgeoisie's fears of the maidservant's sexual diseases in order to elude her master's sexual advances: 'Mais, Monsieur sait bien que je suis une roulure...[...] Une sale fille... [...] Que j'ai de mauvaises maladies...'<sup>228</sup> Célestine mimics the vocabulary used by her previous masters and mistresses to steer herself away from the male figures in the home. This fear of the sexually diseased domestic female figure was not ill-founded in the period. The wetnurse – occasionally situated outside of the home –

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<sup>226</sup> Mirbeau, p. 204.

<sup>227</sup> See Yates, p. 79, and Counter, 'Bad Examples'.

<sup>228</sup> Mirbeau, p. 163.

was also a female domestic employee connected, both in the public imagination and in reality, to the spread of congenital syphilis in babies during this period. In her study on wet nurses, Joan Sherwood maintains that despite the fact that congenital syphilis was in fact passed on from the mother to the foetus during pregnancy, certain nineteenth-century families scapegoated the wet nurse as the source of this illness in her nursling.<sup>229</sup> Nineteenth-century medical experts had also concluded that the wetnurse was an immoral figure; it was assumed that she had the potential to pass on ‘psychological traits’ such as bad character and physical weaknesses through her breast milk due to her depravity as a lower-class woman.<sup>230</sup> Thus, in a manner echoing the discourses that surrounded the female servant, the bourgeoisie were also advised on how to choose their wetnurses to ensure the safety of their children.<sup>231</sup> The wetnurse was therefore another female stranger that the bourgeoisie used to assert their class position<sup>232</sup> and to ensure the domestic comfort of their homes.

Chapter Three explores how the social imaginary of the maidservant was further associated with the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the prostitute and the black woman, two other female outsider figures who were also seen as a source of corruption and disease.<sup>233</sup> By demonstrating how fictional representations of the rebellious maidservant’s skin tone, body shape and hair style connect to the racist and misogynistic stereotypes and prejudices the nineteenth century placed onto the black woman’s physiognomy, which in turn shaped certain stereotypes that are associated with the figure of the prostitute, I reveal the period’s ongoing concerns about the maidservant’s overt sexuality and potential powers of

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<sup>229</sup> Joan Sherwood, *Infection of the Innocents: Wet Nurses, Infants and Syphilis in France 1780-1900* (Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Although Sherwood does note that ‘Hired nurses were the custom, not only for the well-to-do bourgeoisie but also for the working woman whose child depended on the milk of a woman who may have been only slightly lower on the economic scale.’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>233</sup> See Yee, p. 146.

seduction. As Jennifer Yee puts it, '[t]he maid is a *souillon*, that is a slattern, but she is also *souillée* or soiled.'<sup>234</sup> These insecurities surrounding the servant as a contaminant thus added to the bourgeoisie's desire to distance themselves from their servants, as well as reinforce their authority over them.<sup>235</sup>

Female servants were easy scapegoats for vice in the bourgeois home and so they were blamed for contaminating bourgeois children with *mauvaises habitudes*, for example by passing on sexual knowledge.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, one nineteenth-century magistrate states that '[c]'est [la servante] à qui sont confiée l'innocence et la première éducation de nos enfants';<sup>237</sup> thus the household manuals of the period forbid all *bonnes d'enfant* from exciting children's potential passions.<sup>238</sup> While Counter focuses on the obvious example of Gide's mother's maidservant in *Si le grain ne meurt* (1924) as an example of such rebellious maidservants and their bad influences on children in literature,<sup>239</sup> one may also think of Mirbeau's fictional maidservant, Célestine, who has sex with the sickly son of the family in one of her households.<sup>240</sup> One of Zola's fictional female servants, Lisa, featured in *Pot-Bouille*, also becomes a bad influence on Angèle, the child in her care. Angèle's parents are blind to their bond: 'Toutes deux se vengeaient de la soumission hypocrite de la journée, et il y avait, chez Lisa, une jouissance basse, dans cette corruption d'Angèle, dont elle satisfaisait les curiosités de fille malade, troublée par la crise de ses quinze ans.'<sup>241</sup> As Anne O'Neil-Henry rightly

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<sup>234</sup> Yee, p. 146.

<sup>235</sup> See Fairchilds, pp. 38-60 for an account of the other methods masters and mistresses used to keep servants at a distance.

<sup>236</sup> See Counter, 'Bad Examples'.

<sup>237</sup> Marius-Henri-Casimir Mitre, *Des domestiques en France, dans leurs rapports avec l'économie sociale, le bonheur domestique, les lois civiles, criminelles et de police* (Paris: Delaunay et Dentu, 1838), pp. vi-vii.

<sup>238</sup> Madame Celnart – in her *Manuel complet des domestiques, ou l'art de former de bons serviteurs* (Paris: Librairie Encyclopédique de Boret, 1836), p. 194 – notes that 'l'indulgence corruptrice, la flatterie et la dangereuse manie d'exciter [l]es passions [d'un enfant]' should be strictly forbidden.

<sup>239</sup> Counter, 'Bad Examples', p. 403.

<sup>240</sup> Mirbeau, pp. 176-77.

<sup>241</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1984 [1882]), p. 346.

points out, Lisa unravels ‘the bourgeois education provided by the Campardons directly under their noses [...] by talking explicitly about and mocking her parents, focusing in particular on her father’s romantic escapades’.<sup>242</sup> Chapter Two will look at how the case of Henriette Cornier added to this social imaginary of the maidservant as a threat to children. Chapter Three of this thesis then explores how the nineteenth century sought to control the appearance of the maidservant in order to eliminate the threat posed by dirt, disease and debauchery, whilst also removing the maidservant from the (male) bourgeois gaze. As we shall see, however, the attempt to desexualize her presence inevitably drew attention to her body, a theme often explored in *le roman de la servante*.

### **1.6 Household Manual Advice: Reinforcing the Need for Control Over the Servant**

The nineteenth-century household manual presented a set of discourses that emphasized the need for the maidservant’s body and her sexuality to be controlled, whilst also constructing the social imaginary of the rebellious servant. Maza recognizes that fears about the cleanliness of maidservants in the nineteenth century overtly expressed a new set of phobias, as early-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century household manuals had not expressed these concerns.<sup>243</sup> The depiction of the maidservant in these manuals was secondary to their principal aim of educating the bourgeoisie, especially in the effective running of a household, but nevertheless fundamental in reinforcing and even creating the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant. While in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these guides were written by members of the first and second estates, or by their entourage, and were aimed at masters with large households of servant staff,<sup>244</sup> nineteenth-century household manuals were

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<sup>242</sup> Anne O’Neil-Henry, “‘M. Zola n’observe plus’: The Bourgeois Type in Zola’s *Pot-Bouille*”, *Symposium*, 74:3 (2020), 125-38 (p. 131).

<sup>243</sup> Maza, p. 324.

<sup>244</sup> See Maza, p. 7.

predominantly authored and read by bourgeois women.<sup>245</sup> Household manuals were now addressing the inexperienced mistresses of bourgeois homes who had taken over from aristocratic masters responsibility for the hiring, education, well-being and potential dismissal of household servants; these inexperienced mistresses typically employed no more than three or four servants.<sup>246</sup> The emphasis on servant unruliness in these guides seems entangled with the perceived insecurities and nervousness of these new mistresses, resulting in tighter rules designed to keep their servants under firm control.<sup>247</sup> The mistress's authority is viewed as something that must be taught, rather than simply assumed, while the servant is portrayed as a threat to this authority. These manuals emphasized the importance of promoting efficiency and productivity as a way for mistresses to prevent servants from falling into forms of immorality such as laziness, theft and vice.<sup>248</sup> As Chapters Three and Four explore, mistresses were instructed to control the appearance, voice and movements of their maidservants in texts that would continue to be reproduced in popular editions well into the twentieth century.<sup>249</sup>

These household manuals also created and developed the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant by emphasizing the need to find and employ her foil: the loyal, saintly maidservant already discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Counter notes that by the start of the nineteenth century, while a significant minority of household manuals were 'authored by Catholic clergy, published by Catholic publishing houses or at the behest of Catholic societies, or reported by Catholic bibliographies,'<sup>250</sup> the manuals written by lay

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<sup>245</sup> Petitfrère, p. 11.

<sup>246</sup> McBride states that 'One of the problems of the housewife at the beginning of the nineteenth century was her lack of training for her "profession"' (p. 28). See also Maza, p. 19 and Fairchilds, p. 52.

<sup>247</sup> See Maza, p. 319.

<sup>248</sup> Petitfrère, pp. 22-23.

<sup>249</sup> For example, Madame Pariset's *Nouveau manuel complet de la maîtresse de maison, ou lettres sur l'économie domestique* came out in three editions (1822, 1852 and 1913) and Madame Aglaé Adanson's household manual, *La Maison de campagne*, in six (1822, 1825, 1830, 1836, 1845, 1852).

<sup>250</sup> Counter, 'Bad Examples', p. 40.

authors and bourgeois female authors also followed a Catholic social framework in the advice they gave, even if they did not directly engage with doctrinal matters.<sup>251</sup> As one typical household manual points out, with regard to the servant, whether male or female: '[a]ussi doit-il obéir en tout, sans hésitation, sans observation, sans répugnance, à moins qu'il s'agisse de commandements contre la morale, car maîtres et domestiques doivent avant tout obéir à Dieu.'<sup>252</sup> These manuals therefore promoted the idea that servants should be considered as 'chrétiens', and encouraged qualities such as 'l'obéissance', 'une fidélité scrupuleuse', 'un zèle de tous les instants' and 'une discrétion à toute épreuve'.<sup>253</sup> These manuals idealize the previous century in which master-servant relations were seen as a paternalistic contract in which the master was responsible for his servants' religious education, food and shelter, in return for which the servants accepted their status as 'child-like, dependent beings'.<sup>254</sup> The prescriptive and performative narratives of the household manual thus sought to promote female servant archetypes in the bourgeois imagination by reinforcing the myth of the angelic, loyal servant – the *perle* – in a revealing attempt to mask concerns over the *souillon*, a figure, as we have already seen, connected to dirt, sickness, animality, criminality and sexuality.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

<sup>252</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 9.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>254</sup> Maza, p. 9.

<sup>255</sup> Yates, p. 5.

## 2. The Social Imaginary of the Rebellious Maidservant in Literature

### 2.1 The Maidservant as a Fully-Fledged Protagonist: From the Theatre to the Novel

While the first half of this chapter has shown how the maidservant became a figure of fear and fascination for such members of the nineteenth-century bourgeois elites as hygienists, doctors, journalists, criminologists, architects and household manual writers, I here explore how this interest in the female servant is also founded in the period's literature. The maidservant became a fully-fledged literary protagonist in the nineteenth century, emerging in a new subgenre: *le roman de la servante*. By tracing the emergence of the maidservant figure as part of this new subgenre in nineteenth century literature, I show how literary writers were part of the creation and development of the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant in this period.<sup>256</sup>

While it is not my intention to trace the emergence of the female servant as a literary character in the *longue durée* of literary history,<sup>257</sup> I here show how authors of *le roman de la servante* were writing with a previous theatrical servant type in mind. While they were rarely principal protagonists, theatrical servant characters drove the plot and became the foils for their master's more gallant qualities.<sup>258</sup> Fairchilds argues that early-seventeenth-century servant characters were presented as mere stereotypes on the stage:

[t]heir behaviour conformed to the common image of servants: they were lusty, loutish, cowardly dishonest, and stupid (except when they had to be conniving to help the plot along). Only in Molière do we find more well-rounded and sympathetic portrayals of servants, and his domestics, with their refreshing common sense and their attractive mixture of sturdy independence and loyalty to their masters.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> See also *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>257</sup> Yates traces the archetypes of the loyal and rebellious maidservant back to classical comedy and medieval literature (pp. 2-3).

<sup>258</sup> Fairchilds, p. 150.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

Fairchilds recognizes that the theatre of the Ancien Régime produced a specific servant type that originated from upper-class perceptions of servants.<sup>260</sup> This theatrical figure became a comic topos from which Marivaux and Beaumarchais to some extent departed in the eighteenth century. Like Molière's well-known *soubrettes*, such as Dorine and Lisette, Marivaux's and Beaumarchais' *femmes de chambre* were sharp, outspoken characters who were not afraid to speak their minds and question the intelligence and morality of their mistresses and more especially their masters,<sup>261</sup> their subordinate class position allowing them to read the world from the perspective of the Other. In particular, Marivaux also showed his servant characters exchanging roles with their master and mistress – Chapter Three will analyse how this theatrical topos of the servant disguise is used and subverted in such nineteenth-century texts as Stendhal's *Mina de Vanghel* and Barbey d'Aurevilly's 'Le Bonheur dans le crime'. But it is Beaumarchais' Figaro who most stands out as a male servant figure sufficiently exceptional to take centre stage. Read by Fairchilds as 'the counter ideal to all the traditional stereotypes of servant licentiousness, cowardice, and stupidity', Figaro was 'a man of emotions complex enough to make his master look like a wooden stereotype'.<sup>262</sup> Yet in *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1778), it is Figaro's prospective bride, the maidservant, Suzanne, who emerges as an even more exceptional figure. In this play, Figaro and Suzanne expect loyalty to be reciprocal between themselves and their master, the Count. It is only when disrespected by their master that the two servants seek their revenge. In the case of Suzanne, it is hard to agree with Yates that the female servant's *raison d'être* is always to act in the best interest of her masters and mistresses,<sup>263</sup> that any form of rebellion 'is motivated not by class resentment but by a desire to protect the masters against

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<sup>260</sup> See Fairchilds, p. 150 and Thompson, p. 28.

<sup>261</sup> Fraisse explains that '[j]adis, au théâtre, le valet et la servante remplissaient une fonction critique. À travers eux, le discours théâtral témoignait souvent de la liberté de pensée' (p. 14).

<sup>262</sup> See Fairchilds, p. 150.

<sup>263</sup> Yates, p. 2.

themselves'<sup>264</sup> and that the servants 'are quite content to accept the master's authority again' when order is restored.<sup>265</sup> Even though Marivaux and Beaumarchais were writing in a period in which to be a servant role was considered an *état* rather than a *métier*,<sup>266</sup> their plays took care to portray servant loyalty as dependent on their masters' behaviour and attitudes towards them.

In the *Vie de Henry Brulard*, Stendhal's memories of his family's servant, 'la vieille Marion', provides further evidence that there was a specific type of 'servante de théâtre' that persisted in the nineteenth-century imagination. He describes Marion as a 'vraie servante de Molière, amie de ses maîtres mais leur disant bien son mot, qui avait vu ma mère fort jeune, qui l'avait vu marier dix ans auparavant, en 1780, et qui m'aimait beaucoup'.<sup>267</sup> Stendhal connects his actual servant to the theatrical stereotype in order to allude to her fidelity, yet also her courage to speak out. This image adds to the nineteenth century's idealized view of master and servant relations in the Ancien Régime, seen as a microcosm of the way in which French society was perceived to have been governed and constructed.<sup>268</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon provides an example of how the nineteenth century glorified the social relations between masters and servants in the Ancien Régime through the figure of the 'servante de théâtre':

Ne trouvons-nous pas encore la trace saisissante de cet attachement fidèle des anciens domestiques à leurs maîtres jusque dans le théâtre en dépit des allures progressivement révolutionnaires, comme nous le verrons, des valets de comédie? Car, sans parler de Martine, de Toinette et de tant d'autres, quel type plus parfait de ce dévouement et de ces vertus

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>267</sup> Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, in *Œuvres intimes*, ed. by Victor Del Litto, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1981-82) II, 525-981 (p. 563).

<sup>268</sup> While the historians Jean-Pierre Gutton and Fairchilds both stress that loyalty ruled master and servant relationships in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the historian Sarah Maza questions this fact, doubting 'that under the Old Regime very many masters and servants were ever bound to one another by ties that were primarily moral or psychological' (Maza, *Servants and Masters in Seventeenth-Century France*, p. 15). While money was an undeniable factor in this relationship, the servant was reliant on their master for food, water, clothing and shelter. In theory, a master was responsible for their servant's material as well as moral wellbeing which included their religious education. (Maza, *Servants and Masters in Seventeenth-Century France*, pp. 9-10; see also Fairchilds, p. 6).

domestiques que même la caustique Dorine, dont l'humeur mordante et frondeuse jaillit constamment en saillies à l'emporte-pièce! [...] Comme elle prend les intérêts de ses maîtres qu'elle considère comme les siens propres!<sup>269</sup>

For Bouniceau-Gesmon, the loyal servant of the Ancien Régime had been 'effacé par le progrès social' of his century.<sup>270</sup> He goes on to show how the bourgeoisie looked to hire a perfect servant that no longer existed: '[l]e domestique court de porte en porte, poursuivant un idéal chimérique de condition introuvable, puisqu'il la veut avec de gros gages et de petits travaux. Le maître, à son tour, poursuit un idéal non moins chimérique de domestique parfait, et chacun se morfond dans l'énervement d'insatiables exigences.'<sup>271</sup> It is little surprise that the bourgeoisie, whose anxieties with regard to their class position were exacerbated by their period's social upheavals, should have looked back at this period with a sense of nostalgia and that this nostalgia should have given rise to the figure of the *perle*, the better to mask their fears of rebellious maidservants.

Yet the nineteenth-century figure of the loyal servant, or to use Yates's term, the *perle*,<sup>272</sup> differs from her precursor, the 'servante de théâtre'. While her identity does indeed seem tied to her duties as a servant, and thus to the desires of her master, in the manner of the comic maidservant,<sup>273</sup> the nineteenth-century maidservant is reimagined as a much more silent and devout figure. One can therefore apply Gilbert and Gubar's reading of the angel in the house to this figure emerging in the nineteenth-century novel. They state that the eternal female construct should in fact also be read as 'an "Angel of Death"' as she is 'already dead' due to her 'charms' of passivity, slimness and paleness that 'recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead.'<sup>274</sup> As this chapter has explained, the bourgeoisie sought to distance

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<sup>269</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, p. 77.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>272</sup> Yates, p. 1.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 25.

themselves from the presence of this necessary female figure in the home, and so nineteenth-century literary writers also contributed to transforming her into a ghost-like figure. Yet, paradoxically, as Chapter Three shows in further detail, these writers subsequently drew further attention to her existence by emphasizing the common stereotypes and prejudices linked to her appearance.

This image of the loyal, silent maid is then further destabilized in the nineteenth-century literary text; it is debunked as a myth by the emergence of another imaginary: a new feared, mistrusted, and manipulative servant character who drives the plot for her own benefit. As we shall see, the nineteenth-century novel's inclusion of the maidservant as a worthy subject of literature is born out of the century's growing curiosity and fear of figures drawn from subaltern categories of society such as women, children, the working class, black people and, indeed, servants.<sup>275</sup>

## **2.2 The Servant in the Nineteenth-Century Novel**

The nineteenth-century realist novel saw an increasing interest in the lower classes that culminated in the Naturalist movement, with proletarian or bourgeois heroes featuring prominently compared to previous aristocratic types of hero.<sup>276</sup> Even prior to Naturalism, this interest expressed itself very visibly through characters such as Stendhal's Julien Sorel, from *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Balzac's Vautrin from *Le Père Goriot* (1835), the denizens of *les bas-fonds* as depicted in Eugene Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-43) and the working-class characters featured in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862). Yet, as Alison Finch writes,

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<sup>275</sup> Yates, p. 66.

<sup>276</sup> Alison Finch, 'Reality and its Representation in the Nineteenth-Century Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel: From 1800 to the Present*, ed. by Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 36-53 (p. 45).

there are no absolute chronological divisions here: previous comic or picaresque novels frequently had lower-class heroes or heroines (as in the eighteenth-century *Le Paysan parvenu* (1734-5) by Marivaux); conversely, the nineteenth-century novel may still choose heroes of aristocratic family, like Balzac's Rastignac or Stendhal's Fabrice del Dongo, in *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839). But even where nineteenth-century heroes are upper-class, there is still often a clear intention to question both their aristocratic and their heroic stature.<sup>277</sup>

This new type of nineteenth-century protagonist is read as an antihero on account of the character's frequent lack of high social or moral status, in contravention of previous conventions associated with the heroes of tragedy.<sup>278</sup> This new type of antihero was born out of the nineteenth-century novelist's aim to represent and narrativize all walks of life of everyday society. In his famous 'Avant-propos de *La Comédie humaine*' (1842), Balzac describes himself as the impartial secretary of French society who, '[e]n copiant toute la Société, la saisissant dans l'immensité de ses agitations,'<sup>279</sup> depicts 'les deux ou trois mille figures saillantes d'une époque'<sup>280</sup> through his multitude of character types, including servants. Stendhal likewise presented himself, however ironically, as the chronicler of his epoch, labelling *Le Rouge et le Noir* both a 'Chronique du XIXe siècle' and a 'Chronique de 1830'. He refers to the novel by means of the metaphor of a mirror through which one represents all aspects of society in order to reveal '[l]a vérité, l'âpre vérité'.<sup>281</sup> This depiction of the 'truth' also included servant characters.

In his renowned study, *Mimesis* (1953), Erich Auerbach's reading of the emergence of modern realism in the nineteenth century provides an explanation for how the maidservant became a part of the 'serious' aesthetic in the nineteenth-century novel and short story. He observes that since the age of French classicism and absolutism, attitudes surrounding the

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<sup>277</sup> Finch, p. 45.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>279</sup> Balzac, 'Avant-propos de *La Comédie humaine*', in *La Comédie humaine*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex and others, 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976-81) I, 7-20 (p. 14).

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., I, 18.

<sup>281</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 351.

representations of the everyday, and thus the commonplace, lower-class subjects who were part of this depiction, renounced ‘the tragic and problematic as if it were principle’;<sup>282</sup> thus ‘a subject from practical reality could be treated comically, satirically, or didactically and moralistically; certain subjects from definite and limited realms of contemporary everyday life attained to an intermediate style, the pathetic; but beyond that they might not go.’<sup>283</sup> For Auerbach, the emergence of modern realism then altered this representation of everyday reality insofar as it was now perceived as ‘serious’.<sup>284</sup> Yet this ‘serious’ treatment of lower-class figures like the maidservant, situated in their precisely defined historical, political and social settings,<sup>285</sup> created the ‘realist myth’ in which imagination and reality blurred in an attempt to create an ‘actual world’.<sup>286</sup> This blurred reality took the form of a ‘mimetic pact’ with the reader, encouraging the belief that that the novel represented true events.<sup>287</sup> The representation of the maidservant in nineteenth-century literature thus feeds into this realist aesthetic of a ‘serious’ representation of the world, and the characters within it. As we shall see in what follows, as part of the realist aesthetic, the rebellious maidservant allows nineteenth-century writers to break from previous conventions that saw the lower classes as unworthy subjects, as well as draw attention to the threat posed by the female servant.<sup>288</sup>

The Naturalist novel further emphasized the focus on the female servant as a subject of interest. Naturalism, which exploits both the realist mode (the linguistic conventions used to create an acceptable vision of reality) and realist themes,<sup>289</sup> likewise includes the

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<sup>282</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013 [1953]), p. 481.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>286</sup> See David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>287</sup> Baguley, p. 48.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

maidservant figure as part of its ‘objective’ or ‘documented’ vision of reality.<sup>290</sup> The Naturalists sought to trace the psychology, physiology and living conditions of the lower classes by means of in-depth observation and scientific detachment.<sup>291</sup> They variously favoured the washer woman, the prostitute and the hysterical woman as the (anti)heroines of their works – as for example in Zola’s *L’Assommoir* (1877) and *Nana* (1880), Maupassant’s *Boule de Suif* (1880) and the Goncourt brothers’ *La Fille Elisa* (1876) – as well as, of course, the maidservant, most notably in the Goncourt brothers’ *Germinie Lacerteux*. Based on the secret double life of the Goncourts’ actual servant, Rose Malingre, *Germinie Lacerteux* places the rebellious maidservant at the centre of their study, intended as a social enquiry.<sup>292</sup> This nineteenth-century novel then became one of the first examples of Naturalism.<sup>293</sup> The Goncourts’ preface to *Germinie Lacerteux* sets out their need to create a ‘livre [qui] vient de la rue’,<sup>294</sup> and their aim of investigating whether ‘les misères des petits et des pauvres parleraient à l’intérêt, à l’émotion, à la pitié, aussi haut que les misères des grands et des riches’.<sup>295</sup> This novel became an example of how writers sought to observe the lower classes in their social environments as a way of finding new territory for literary exploration.

Yates argues that nineteenth-century writers focusing on the lower classes, including servants, should be read as ‘colonial’ insofar as they write as though they were entering ‘strange uncharted regions’ while also observing the curious inhabitants found there with wonder, but also with disgust.<sup>296</sup> She points out that writers and intellectuals of this period (such as doctors, priests, lawyers, literary authors and scholars) saw society’s outsiders as

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>291</sup> Yates, p. 67.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> See Baguley, pp. 76-77.

<sup>294</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 55.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>296</sup> Yates, p. 66.

‘exotic’ or ‘foreign’ and, as a result, conducted countless investigations into their lives.<sup>297</sup>

Edmond de Goncourt seems to confirm this when he explicitly states that there is something exotic about lower-class subjects:

Mais pourquoi, me dira-t-on, choisir ces milieux? Parce que c’est dans le bas qu’au milieu de l’effacement d’une civilisation se conserve le caractère des choses, des personnes, de la langue, de tout et qu’un peintre a mille fois plus de chances de faire une œuvre ayant du *style* d’une fille crottée de la rue Saint-Honoré que d’une lorette de Bréda.

Pourquoi encore? peut-être parce que je suis un littérateur bien né et que le peuple, la canaille si vous le voulez, a pour moi l’attrait de populations inconnues, et non découvertes, quelque chose de l’*exotique* que les voyageurs vont chercher avec mille souffrances dans les pays lointains.<sup>298</sup>

As Chapter Four shows, the Goncourts did not choose a maidservant protagonist in order to advocate for better treatment of, and working conditions for, household staff. Rather, the maidservant became part of their literary aesthetic. Accordingly, Claire White argues that ‘the widening-out of representation conceived by the Goncourts as an act of political generosity, was nothing other than arbitrary inclusiveness which constituted the betrayal of an aesthetic order, or “aristocracy of letters”’.<sup>299</sup> Yates notes that nineteenth-century writers, such as the Goncourt brothers, who prided themselves on their scientific detachment and open-mindedness, were in fact unable to rid themselves of their prejudices, and their writing consequently becomes a way of dominating the servant subject as a way of reinforcing the writer’s own sense of class and gender superiority.<sup>300</sup> I build on Yates’s argument and suggest that the prejudices surrounding class, gender and race that constructed, as well as constrained, the representation of the rebellious female servant in these different discourses are indeed also those that described and developed the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant in this period. As the following chapters of this thesis show, the social

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>298</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, ed. by Robert Ricatte and Robert Kopp, 3 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989 [1956]), II, 476, emphasis in original.

<sup>299</sup> Claire White, *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century Literature and Visual Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>300</sup> Yates, p. 67.

imaginary of the rebellious maidservant therefore not only embodies the fears of the period, but also emphasizes them further by providing a warning to the writers' contemporaries that focuses on the appearance, voice and violence of the maidservant.

In the Naturalist text, the maidservant also feeds into one of the Naturalist themes that Baguley defines as part of the 'predictable scandals and disasters' that characterize Naturalist texts: 'the calm bourgeois interior [which is] to be disrupted by some secret vice'.<sup>301</sup> By imposing their revenge plots of divorce, adultery, murder and bankruptcy, maidservant heroines unleash chaos in the bourgeois household. Indeed, the texts that make up *le roman de la servante* disturb the conventions of the comedic theatrical maidservant in a similar way to how the later Naturalist texts undermine readers' expectations as part of the 'realist contract' by instigating a new form of 'disorder'.<sup>302</sup>

Alongside Naturalism, the discourses describing as well as creating the rebellious maidservant in the nineteenth-century public consciousness also coincided with her increased representation at the end of the nineteenth century in a literary period known as Decadence. Decadent writers tended to argue that women were the cause of society's moral decline,<sup>303</sup> and therefore represented them in their Decadent texts as dangerous, sexual temptresses who were inherently destructive beings.<sup>304</sup> As Bram Dijkstra states, Nature 'was no longer viewed as a benevolent, guiding force',<sup>305</sup> and '[w]oman, as the embodiment of Nature, was therefore

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<sup>301</sup> Baguley, p. 4.

<sup>302</sup> Baguley, p. 177.

<sup>303</sup> Marie Kawthar Daouda, *L'Anti-Salomé: Représentations de la féminité bienveillante au temps de la Décadence (1850-1910)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020) counteracts this argument with examples of 'benevolent femininity' in Decadent writings.

<sup>304</sup> Laurence M. Porter, 'Decadence and the fin-de-siècle novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel: From 1800 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 93-110 (p. 97).

<sup>305</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 236.

continuously at war with man, whose very purpose was to go against or beyond Nature.’<sup>306</sup> Decadent writers therefore perpetuated a dichotomy of Man and Woman which defined Man as a creative intellect and Woman as incapable of intellectual thought.<sup>307</sup> Man was the essential instigator of procreation, whilst Woman was the simple receiver of his ‘seed’; she was viewed as a natural reproductive mechanism and the embodiment of Nature.<sup>308</sup> This influenced the belief that Woman was primitive and therefore degenerate.<sup>309</sup> She became the Decadent writer’s feared *femme fatale* who could destroy Man through her seductive powers.<sup>310</sup> This concept had already been at the core of Baudelaire’s notorious assertion that ‘[l]a femme est *naturelle*, c’est-à-dire abominable.’<sup>311</sup> Baudelaire’s quotation links to original sin: Woman is the embodiment of this corrupted Nature, as the original sin stems from the figure of Eve. A tension is therefore created in Decadent literature surrounding Woman: while she was no longer ‘a passive human clay which man could mould accordingly to his fantasies’, and therefore a feared figure of excess,<sup>312</sup> she was recreated by the male bourgeois writer as a figure of fear and fascination that would bring the downfall of society. One may think of Flaubert’s eponymous heroine in *Salammbô* (1862), Sara in Auguste Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s *Axël* (1890), the heroines of Barbey’s *Les Diaboliques* (1874) and the precursors of these *femme fatales* in Prosper Mérimée’s short stories such as *La Vase étrusque* (1830), *Carmen* (1845) and *Colomba* (1840). Mario Praz argues misogynistically that ‘[t]here have always existed Fatal Women both in mythology and in literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of various aspects of real life, and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1975-76), I, 677.

<sup>312</sup> Dijkstra, p. 237.

characters.<sup>313</sup> The cruel fictional maidservant, as well as the three real-life criminal cases discussed in Chapter Two, embody these masculine fears of the female figure. The social imaginary of the rebellious female servant should thus be read as part of this male and misogynistic discourse surrounding the *femme fatale*. Yet the female servant not only holds the fate of men in the palm of her hands, but also that of the bourgeois family. This monstrous figure, however, does not emerge in contrast with that of the *perle* but rather reveals the latter's mythical and idealized status in the bourgeois imagination. While the rebellious maidservant is a figure that the bourgeois fear is real, she is nonetheless as mythical as her foil.

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<sup>313</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. by Angus Davidson (New York, New York: Collins, Fontana Library, 1962 [1933]), p. 215.

## **2.3 Loyal Maidservant Narratives as Contributing to the Social Imaginary of the Rebellious Maidservant**

‘*Félicité*. Est toujours “parfaite.” “Votre  
bonne se nomme Félicité, alors elle est  
parfaite.”’<sup>314</sup>

The loyal maidservant narrative focuses on an ideal, model female servant who is devoted to her household and fulfils her duties perfectly. The etymology of the French term ‘bonne’ for a female servant also possesses overtones of this moral goodness: according to the *Petit Robert*, ‘bonne’ derives from the word ‘bon’ and is therefore defined through its meaning of usefulness: the maidservant should fulfil her function perfectly in order to be deserving of recognition.<sup>315</sup> The nineteenth-century *Dictionnaire littré* then also describes the origin of ‘bonne’ to stem from the naturally good friendship the maidservant has with her masters and mistresses.<sup>316</sup> While this thesis’s focus is not on these loyal servant figures, I show how the loyal maidservant is a construct that is also forever present in the eyes of the bourgeoisie as an idealization they wish their servants would realize. This construct is consequently revealed as a myth promulgated by bourgeois writers who expose the ‘real’ maidservant as rebellious. Writers such as Balzac and Maupassant created both types of maidservant novel, exploiting this dichotomy. Apter describes that the loyal maidservant narrative first emerged as

stock low literature of the nineteenth century, featuring the maid as a servant of God. Heroic feats of selflessness constituted the standard trope of the genre, which was especially popular

<sup>314</sup> Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes*, v, 1237 (*Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*).

<sup>315</sup> ‘Bon’ in *Le Petit Robert*, < <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/bon> > [accessed 6 April 2023].

<sup>316</sup> ‘Bonne’ in the *Dictionnaire littré* < <https://www.littre.org/definition/bonne> > [accessed 6 April 2023].

for obvious propagandistic reasons among the clergy, the bourgeois matron, and the directors of employment agencies for the placement of domestics.<sup>317</sup>

There are a wealth of nineteenth-century loyal maidservant narratives, such as Jeanne-Iris des Atours's *La Femme de chambre ou le chansonnier des toilettes* (1826); an anonymous writer's *Louise ou la bonne femme de chambre* (1841); Eugène Louis Guérin's *Isabelle ou femme de chambre et comtesse* (1841); Henri de Pène's *Mémoires d'une femme de chambre* (1864); Zulma Carraud's *Une servante d'autrefois* (1866); Caroline Gravière's *La Servante* (1872); Georges de Peyrebrune's (Mme Mathilde-Georgina-Elisabeth de Peyrebrune's) *Victoire la Rouge* (1883); Raoul Vast's *La Femme de chambre* (1886); and, in the twentieth century, Edgy's (Louise Thioust's) *La Servante* (1905). This 'low stock literature' constitutes a category of literature that Stendhal had already labelled 'les romans pour les femmes de chambre' and should be understood as contributing to the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant only insofar as it emphasizes the bourgeoisie's idealization of the loyal maidservant type as her foil.<sup>318</sup>

Addressed to his friend Vincenzo Salvagnoli in 1832, Stendhal's 'Projet d'article sur *Le Rouge et le Noir*' describes how in the early nineteenth century '[t]outes les femmes de France lisent des romans, mais toutes n'ont pas le même degré d'éducation', creating a 'distinction qui s'est établie entre les romans pour les femmes de chambre (je demande pardon de la crudité de ce mot inventé, je crois par les libraires) et le roman des salons.'<sup>319</sup> In her article 'Qu'est ce qu'un roman pour femmes de chambre' (2010), Catherine Mariette notes that this literary category was also labelled 'romans pour portières' and 'romans pour

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<sup>317</sup> Apter, p. 193.

<sup>318</sup> Stendhal, 'Projet d'article sur *Le Rouge et le Noir*', in *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, ed. by Yves Ansel, Philippe Berthier, Xavier Bourdenet and Serge Linkès, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2005-14), I, 822-838 (p. 824), my emphasis.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

cuisinières’,<sup>320</sup> arguing that it ‘ne désigne évidemment pas les “femmes de chambre” *stricto sensu*’.<sup>321</sup> She explains that the *roman pour les femmes de chambre* was an invented, blanket term in the nineteenth-century imagination that evoked a particular type of reader:

[l]a ‘femme de chambre’ est devenue un ‘type’ de lectrice (et parfois de lecteur) dont le mode de lecture et le choix des lectures l’emportent sur les contours réels de celle qui ‘appartient exclusivement à la maîtresse de maison’. Le syntagme ‘roman pour femmes de chambre’ désigne alors un comportement face aux livres et surtout un circuit de lecture qui va du domestique (au sens large) à la marquise.<sup>322</sup>

Mariette uses evidence from nineteenth-century sources in order to demonstrate the popularity of *les cabinets de lectures* amongst the higher and the lower classes from the beginning of the Restoration until the start of the July Monarchy.<sup>323</sup> Stendhal lists ‘M. le baron de La Mothe-Langon, auteur du roman intitulé *Monsieur le Préfet*, et de vingt autres’ alongside ‘MM. Paul de Kock, Victor Ducange, etc.’ as the popular authors of these types of novels, and suggests that the *roman populaire noir* and *gai* were part of this category of literature that depicted ‘événements [...] absurdes, calculés à point nommé pour faire briller le héros, en un mot ce qu’on appelle par dérision *romanesques*.’<sup>324</sup> Flaubert’s heroine, Emma Bovary, famously also reads this popular literature that is negatively labelled *romanesque*, alongside novels by Sand and Balzac.

Maidservants also read these kinds of novels,<sup>325</sup> which circulated from mistresses to servants. These books were seen as a form of education and a means of access to culture.<sup>326</sup> The ‘low stock’ loyal servant narrative, therefore, would have been approved by the bourgeoisie as suitable reading material for their servants. Authors of loyal maidservant

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<sup>320</sup> Catherine Mariette, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un roman pour femmes de chambre’, in *La littérature en bas-bleus: romancières sous la restauration et la monarchie de juillet (1815-1848)* ed. by Andrea Del Lungo and Brigitte Louichon (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010), pp. 83-100 (p. 89).

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>324</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 824.

<sup>325</sup> Mariette, p. 89.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

narratives depict the maidservant as ‘une fille dévouée’,<sup>327</sup> ‘une brave petite fille qui nous est fort attachée’<sup>328</sup> and ‘plus qu’un domestique’ for her mistress: ‘elle la faisait souvent la confidente de ses pensées, et se guidait sur les actions.’<sup>329</sup> They represent the maidservant as a self-effacing figure who is completely devoted to her masters and mistresses. One may think of the loyal maidservant novel *Une servante d’autrefois* by Balzac’s close friend<sup>330</sup> Zulma Carraud, in which the maidservant Fanchette sucks the pus out of her mistress’s daughter’s skin in order to save her from smallpox,<sup>331</sup> or Pène’s fictional loyal servant heroine Annette who serves her mistress unpaid: ‘[j]e ne recevais point de gages. Je comprenais bien que madame appréciait mon dévouement, et je ne connaissais assez les hausses et les baisses de ces existences pour m’inquiéter beaucoup.’<sup>332</sup> Through these representations, loyal maidservant narratives seem to exemplify advice provided in the period’s household manuals: ‘[i]l faut pourtant qu’une femme de chambre obéisse’,<sup>333</sup> ‘une femme de chambre digne de ce nom a des yeux pour ne point voir, des oreilles pour ne point entendre et une bouche pour ne point parler’;<sup>334</sup> ‘elle ne pouvait donner que ses soins et elle les donnait avec tout le zèle, d’un bon cœur et d’une âme profondément religieuse.’<sup>335</sup> While the final example is taken from the anonymous *Louise, ou la bonne femme de chambre*, a text that was part of the collection of volumes featured in the Catholic library of Lille and whose main purpose was ‘à instruire et à intéresser’,<sup>336</sup> the other authors of loyal maidservant narratives are shown also implicitly to contribute to the mistress’s and the maidservant’s

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<sup>327</sup> Henri de Pène, *Mémoires d’une femme de chambre* (Paris: Dentu, 1864), p. 124.

<sup>328</sup> Zulma Carraud, *Une servante d’autrefois* (Paris: L’Hachette, 1866), p. 8.

<sup>329</sup> Unknown author, *Louise, ou la bonne femme de chambre* (Lille: Lefort, 1854 [1841]), p. 87.

<sup>330</sup> See Apter, p. 194.

<sup>331</sup> Carraud, p. 16. This scene is also analysed by Apter, p. 194.

<sup>332</sup> Pène, p. 127.

<sup>333</sup> Jeanne-Iris des Atours, *La Femme de chambre ou le chansonnier des toilettes* (Paris: L’Éditeur rue Hauteville, 1826), p. 19.

<sup>334</sup> Pène, p. 114. This advice is repeated by the maidservant after her mistress instructs her that ‘[v]ous aurez des yeux et vous ne verrez point... vous aurez des oreilles, et vous n’entendrez point... vous aurez une bouche, et vous vous tairez...’ (see Pène, p. 112).

<sup>335</sup> Unknown author, *Louise, ou la bonne femme de chambre*, p. 7.

<sup>336</sup> See the final cover page of unknown writer, *Louise, ou la bonne femme de chambre*.

education concerning how a servant should act, reinforcing a sense of control for the bourgeoisie. In Stendhal's unfinished novel, *Lamiel* (1839-42 [1889]), Stendhal's fictional servant heroine is employed to read to her mistress, the Duchesse, each evening. It is a means of education for the servant who at first does not understand half of the words she is reading; the Duchesse then provides Lamiel with books to help improve her reading skills. Yet it was a luxury to possess both the capacity and the leisure time to read these novels, and Mariette thus notes that the servant would have to interrupt their household work in order to do so, often reading in secret.<sup>337</sup> The emergence of this loyal maidservant literature *pour les femmes de chambre* should also be considered as contributing to the construct of the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant. It produced and reinforced the fantasy of the loyal maidservant as a way of masking the growing fears that surrounded her rebellious counterpart.

*Louise, ou la bonne femme de chambre* provides a specific example of a loyal maidservant narrative contrasting the loyal figure with her foil: Louise 'avait une figure où se peignaient la douceur, la paix et la sérénité de son âme', whereas Stéphanie 's'était depuis longtemps accoutumée à la dissimulation, et, comme elle ne s'acquittait des fonctions de sa charge que dans un esprit d'intérêt personnel, elle se trouvait souvent en faute; et alors, sa ressource ordinaire pour cacher ses négligences ou ses torts était le mensonge.'<sup>338</sup> This Catholic instructional text does not, however, foreground the same rebellious maidservant type to be found in *le roman de la servante*. While Stéphanie frames Louise for smashing her mistress's vase, she finishes her story as a repenting, 'malheureuse'<sup>339</sup> female figure who deserves the sympathy of her mistress, Louise and arguably the reader. The writer reinforces the need for society to have 'bonne[s] chrétienne[s]'<sup>340</sup> as servants: 'la maîtresse ne tarda pas

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<sup>337</sup> Mariette, pp. 89-90.

<sup>338</sup> Unknown author, *Louise, ou la bonne femme de chambre*, p. 53.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 82.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

ainsi à s'apercevoir de la différence du service d'un domestique qui a de la religion, avec ceux qui n'en ont pas.'<sup>341</sup> Beyond this religious example, Pène's text implicitly contrasts the loyal maidservant with the fears of her foil: while Annette 'voulait parfois se révolter' against her mistress's decisions in her love affairs, the writer immediately follows this with 'mais je lui imposais silence, me disant que cela me regardait pas, et qu'après tout j'avais une bonne place et une bonne maîtresse. Je me trouvais aussi bien que possible.'<sup>342</sup> While the nineteenth-century loyal servant's characteristics originated in the comedic characters of the Ancien Régime, with one fictional mistress even telling her servant that '[t]u devrais t'appeler Martine ou Lisette',<sup>343</sup> this new loyal servant type did not have the right to speak up. Annette suppresses her desires by repeating the advice given to servants to remain silent, as Chapter Four explores. Readers of loyal servant narratives neither gain a sense of the protagonist's thoughts on the events happening around them, nor are given descriptions of their appearance apart from the fact they are 'modeste'.<sup>344</sup> As the following chapters of this thesis show, the nineteenth century emphasized the importance of controlling the maidservant's appearance, voice and thoughts in order to prevent potential rebellion. If women, and particularly female servants are, as Stendhal concludes, the primary readership of these types of loyal servant novels, their authors show women that they will be punished if they do not live up to the standards of the angelic image of the female servant in their households and in their societies.

This loyal maidservant plot, and thus the fantasy of the *perle* also percolates into highbrow literature, for example in Flaubert's 'Un cœur simple' (1877). It is possible that Flaubert had in mind Balzac's loyal maidservant character La Grande Nanon in *Eugénie*

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<sup>341</sup> Unknown author, *Louise, ou la bonne femme de chambre*, p. 21.

<sup>342</sup> Pène, p. 70.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>344</sup> Unknown author, *Louise ou la bonne femme de chambre*, p. 6.

*Grandet* (1833), or Lamartine's *Geneviève: Histoire d'une servante* (1850), as well as the works of George Sand, his friend and correspondent at that time. These narratives also appear through representations of a pseudo-family servant in Mme de Duras's *Ourika* (1823), which inspired Mme M. A. Dudon's *La Nouvelle Ourika* (1824). Loyal maidservants proper feature most notably in Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* (1833) and *Pierrette* (1840); George Sand's *Indiana* (1832), *Pauline* (1839-40), *Jeanne* (1844) and *La Petite Fadette* (1849); Lamartine's *Geneviève: Histoire d'une servante* (1850); Lafontaine's *La Servante* (1879); and Maupassant's *Histoire d'une fille de ferme* (1881) and *Une vie* (1883). In 1816, inspired by the *Mémoires* of Mme de Staël (who had previously been a servant to Louis XIV's legitimate son, the Duc de Maine), Jules Michelet also abandoned an idea for a novel focusing on the voice of a female servant protagonist, *Sylvine ou les mémoires d'une femme de chambre*.<sup>345</sup> These novels alongside earlier nineteenth-century loyal maidservant narratives, help us to understand that these authors were implicitly creating and adding to the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant by reinforcing the idea of her opposite: the guardian angel, the perfect *perle*, the loyal servant.

This corpus of loyal servant novels not only reveal how the female servant became a fashionable figure of study for nineteenth-century writers, but also how authors of *le roman de la servante* played with previous conventions laid out in popular 'low stock' literature: *les romans pour les femmes de chambre*. One can read this diffusion of the female servant as a protagonist in a new genre of literature through the theory of genre laid out by the Russian Formalists, who argued that genre evolution is not a continuous, linear process of

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<sup>345</sup> See Martine Gantrel, 'Michelet, la femme de chambre et la sorcière: À propos de "Sylvine"', *Romantisme*, 58 (1987), 47-57 (pp. 47-48) and Richard Millet, 'Préface', in Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), pp. 7-26 (p. 10).

replication.<sup>346</sup> Each text that is characterized as contributing to a genre may emphasize different generic features. Tzvetan Todorov observes that the individuality of each text should not be forgotten when analysing genre in so far as ‘*toute œuvre modifie l’ensemble des possibles, chaque nouvel exemple change l’espèce.*’<sup>347</sup> Each text adds to, as well as alters, the definition of that genre, making room for further texts to be included in a definition. This idea of an indirect chain of evolution was then later adapted by Dugald Stewart in his theory of ‘family resemblance’, which was also developed by Wittgenstein as a philosophical idea for classifying things (Wittgenstein uses games as an example) as families that may have overlapping similarities instead of one single point in common.<sup>348</sup> Applied to genre, a family of texts may not share a single common feature, rather various links that relate these texts together to form a group. This theory sought to do away with previous frustrations at texts not replicating the entire generic repertoire of other works and therefore to see genre as a family rather than as a class. For example, Flaubert’s maidservant novel in some respects follows the plot patterns of a low-stock maidservant novel, yet it is laced with the author’s characteristic irony, while exploring his familiar interest in ideas of stupidity and saintliness. I apply this theory to the texts participating in *le roman de la servante* in order to show how texts contribute to a subgenre, yet each remain individual. It is by reinforcing and thus repeating this image of a loyal servant, that nineteenth-century literature, alongside other prescriptive forms such as the household management guide, implicitly draws its reader’s attention to her foil: the rebellious female servant who the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie fear might secretly lurk behind the loyal maidservant’s mask.

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<sup>346</sup> David Duff, ‘Introduction’, in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-24 (p. 7).

<sup>347</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 10, emphasis in original.

<sup>348</sup> See Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 41.

## **2.4 Rebellious Maidservant Narratives**

The emergence of the rebellious maidservant narrative as part of the subgenre of *le roman de la servante* then explicitly allows us to see this social imaginary at work. At its most schematic, the recurring plot revolves around a rebellious female servant who revolts against the bourgeois family she serves. The maidservants featured in the rebellious narrative often appear at the beginning of the novel as loyal servants, donning the mask of a *perle* in order to achieve their aims. They are then revealed not to be the loyal maidservant protagonists that the reader might have been expecting. The protagonists of *le roman de la servante* therefore exemplifies Bouniceau-Gesmon's fears of a new type of servant emerging in the nineteenth century:

À un certain zèle apparent, en effet, qui signale son début dans la maison et qui est habilement destiné à inspirer confiance au maître, en lui faisant croire à un dévouement réel, mais tout de surface, succède bientôt une sourde hostilité suivie presque aussitôt d'une succession de taquineries systématiques plus ou moins vexatoires, attestant que le serviteur, se croyant maître de la place, lève carrément le masque qui dissimulait d'abord son arrière-pensée préconçue d'inimitié.<sup>349</sup>

Rebellious maidservants implement various strategies of revolt in order to obtain a certain sense of freedom from their oppressive situations. The first type of maidservant plot is explored in Chapter Three: the cross-class maidservant disguise plot. This involves bourgeois and aristocratic heroines donning the disguise of maidservants in order to achieve their aims. The second type of maidservant plot is that of the rebellious maidservant novel per se that focuses on the subversive figure of the maid. Some of the methods of rebellion represented in these texts include concealing a double life, theft, abusing the household's children, plotting against masters and mistresses, inventing terrible scenarios for them, abusive speech and on rare occasions, imagined violence.

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<sup>349</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, pp. 100-01.

This chapter has explored the socio-cultural, historical and political factors that contributed to the emergence of the rebellious maidservant in the social imaginary of the nineteenth century. It has investigated how these factors then influenced the literature of this period by turning the maidservant into a worthy subject, and therefore protagonist, of literature. The remaining chapters of this thesis investigate how this social imaginary came to be articulated in *le roman de la servante* and non-literary discourses. The next chapter starts by analysing the cases of three real-life criminal maidservants, showing how their crimes permeated the social imaginary. I argue that these real-life criminals not only demonstrate how the female servant was embedded into the collective social imagination as a feared, dangerous figure, but also how the discourses surrounding their cases fed into similar scenes in *le roman de la servante*.

## **Chapter Two**

# **Murderous Maidservants: How Three Real-Life Maidservant Criminals Helped to Construct the Social Imaginary of the Rebellious Female Servant**

### **Introduction**

The second chapter of this thesis analyses how three real-life maidservant cases facilitated the permeation of the idea of the maidservant as a murderous figure into the nineteenth-century public consciousness. While Chapter One examined the sociocultural and historical factors that created the breeding ground of this social imaginary, this chapter analyses how the crimes of Henriette Cornier, H el ene J egado and C eline Masson helped to construct the rebellious female servant in the nineteenth-century social imagination. Their respective arrests and trials in 1825, 1851 and 1891 provide examples of how the real-life criminal female servant emerged into the public's consciousness over the course of the century. In particular, the discourses representing their crimes and trials in *faits divers* and other non-literary texts (such as criminological reports, sociological reports and doctors' research monographs) facilitated the period's mass fascination and fear of the female servant. This chapter also provides evidence that this social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant continues to exist in modern-day France, not least through depictions of Cornier's and J egado's cases in twenty-first-century multimedia.

In analysing nineteenth-century representations of the real-life criminal maidservant, I highlight the period's stereotypes and prejudices that constrained the female figure to a gendered – and misogynistic – social imaginary. This social imaginary ultimately vilifies the female servant whose character transgresses the period's lauded feminine virtues of kindness, passivity and benevolent maternal instinct.<sup>350</sup> In facilitating the construction of the rebellious female servant, the discourses focusing on the trials of Cornier, Jégado and Masson therefore support an argument laid out in Chapter One that nineteenth-century bourgeois (male) writers reveal a class anxiety that the female servant is a genuinely dangerous figure who must be brought under societal control. Yet, while reinforcing the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant as a 'real' figure, non-literary discourses such as *faits divers*, criminal trial reports and doctors' reports paradoxically demonstrate how the loyal maidservant figure is a mere myth within the nineteenth-century social imagination.

As Chapter One points out, the female servant became naturally associated with the lower classes of nineteenth-century society, as well as the figures of the female criminal, and the murderer. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of this last as a subject of scientific study,<sup>351</sup> which then produced a gendered specificity with regard to the extreme act of murder at the start of the century.<sup>352</sup> Discourses surrounding public hygiene and criminology assumed that the proletarian male was the principal culprit of violent crimes, while lower-class women tended to be associated only with prostitution.<sup>353</sup> While Downing points out that 'the figure of the bourgeoisie murderess complexifies this neat distinction, as does the Romantic figure of the aesthete murderer in the 1830s',<sup>354</sup> I suggest that the figure of the

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<sup>350</sup> Lisa Downing, 'Murder in the Feminine', p. 122.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., *The Subject of Murder*, p. 3.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 'Murder in the Feminine', p. 123.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

maidservant also calls this regimented binary division into question whenever she steps out of her assigned role as a selfless, devoted caregiver.<sup>355</sup> By applying Downing's argument in her study, *The Subject of Murder* (2013), to the discourses surrounding criminal maidservants, I demonstrate that the female servant was demonized and 'hysterized'<sup>356</sup> through discourses that aimed to transcribe socially constructed depictions of acceptable gender norms (such as the feminine virtues), onto women:

what is said and written about murderers as aberrant subjects is an index of socially constructed perceptions of (gendered) normality and abnormality, [...] [and] subtle normative prescriptions and proscriptions about acceptable subjectivity and agency are embedded into this discourse that purports to be *only* about the immoral minority, the exception par excellence.<sup>357</sup>

Literature, newspapers, doctors' reports and legal documents highlight how the maidservant is yet another female figure who breaches traditional gender-normative roles that posit femininity to be 'naturally' nonviolent. By prescribing gendered norms surrounding categorizations of 'normal' and aberrant women, these discourses create a form of social control. Read alongside examples from *le roman de la servante*, as well as other literary and non-literary texts that also engage with the figure of the murderous maidservant, the way in which these three crimes are focused upon and narrativized helps us to understand the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant, which they of course helped to create through their own widespread circulation in non-literary discourses.

This chapter begins at the start of the century with the case of Henriette Cornier that brought to life the literary (and non-literary) discourses of the maidservant as a danger to children. It goes on to explore the fears of the servant as a serial poisoner brought to life by

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<sup>355</sup> I show how the rebellious maidservant social imaginary foregrounds the myth of the 'Angel in the House' in the bourgeoisie imagination in Rushton, 'Unmasking the Loyal Maidservant'.

<sup>356</sup> A term first used by Foucault in *Histoire de la sexualité I*, p. 137, as already discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>357</sup> Downing, p. 101.

the case of H  l  ne J  gado. Some of the discourses that surrounded her case can also be found in Barbey's short story, 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' with its fictional maidservant protagonist, Hauteclair  /Eulalie, as well as some of Maupassant's short stories. The final part of this chapter then looks at a lesser-known nineteenth-century *fait divers* of a violent maidservant, C  line Masson. This case study differs from those of Cornier and Jegado insofar as it raises a contrast between literary and non-literary discourses concerning the rebellious female servant. In the case of real-life maidservants, these lower-class female figures are shown to murder members of the bourgeois family, often using brutal violence. Although authors of *le roman de la servante* capture the underlying fears of the female servant's dangerous presence, they do not explicitly allow their heroines to lash out through violence. This final section of the chapter seeks to address the question of why fictional maidservants' explicitly violent *soul  vements* are absent in *le roman de la servante* even though acts of violence and murder were inherently connected to the maidservant in the nineteenth-century social imagination that emerges from non-literary documents. Indeed, Barbey's fictional maidservant, Hauteclair  /Eulalie, and Balzac's fictional *port  re*, Madame Cibot, are the only two fictional maidservants in my corpus of texts respectively to kill their mistress and master; yet their methods are shown to be discreet and non-violent. The actions of fictional maidservants are restricted within their plots and they can only violently lash out against the bourgeois family in their imaginations. By looking at the plots of *le roman de la servante*, I seek to respond to this question of why the authors working within this subgenre seem to limit their fictional maidservant heroines' capacity to overturn social structures and hierarchies between servants and their masters and mistresses, as well as between men and women, by means of violence.

## 1. The Case of Henriette Cornier: The Social Imaginary of Servants Who Kill

### Children

In November 1825, in Paris, a twenty-seven-year-old servant, Henriette Cornier, was left to take care of her local fruit seller's twenty-two-month-old baby, whom she apparently adored.<sup>358</sup> Upon the fruit seller's return, Cornier decapitated the baby with a meat cleaver.<sup>359</sup> One of the newspaper accounts explicitly described how the baby's body was left on the table while its head rolled out of the door.<sup>360</sup> While this criminal case emerged before the advances in printing of the 1830s, its notoriety did manage to spread beyond Paris, with newspapers in provincial capitals such as Bourges also circulating updates of her trial.<sup>361</sup> Cornier's crime lingered in the cultural imagination well into the twentieth century. In his lecture series 'Anormaux' (1974-75), Foucault uses Henriette's case as one of his examples of infamous crimes which shifted from the judicial to the pathological.<sup>362</sup> Twentieth-century artists were also inspired to paint scenes from the trial.<sup>363</sup> More recently still, Cornier's crime and its trial have re-emerged in a radio programme.<sup>364</sup>

Cornier's crime helped to create, as well as feed into, bourgeois paranoia about the safety of their children in the care of servants insofar as the latter were the most prominent

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<sup>358</sup> See *Journal des débats: Politiques et littéraires*, 6 November 1825, p. 3.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> See *Journal du cher*, 12 November 1825, pp. 2-3.

<sup>362</sup> Michel Foucault, 'L'Évolution de la notion d'"individu dangereux" dans la psychiatrie légale', *Déviance et société*, 5:4 (1981 [1978]), 403-22.

<sup>363</sup> In *Le Petit Journal Illustré* (1908) <<http://cent.ans.free.fr/pj1908/pj91424051908b.jpg>> [accessed 1/1/2023]. 'Henriette Cornier sur le banc des accusés en 1876 (gravure du Petit Journal en 1931)', in *Le Petit Journal Illustré* (1931) <<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/henriette-cornier-a-nursemaid-charged-with-the-murder-of-a-news-photo/146140041>> [accessed 1/1/2023]. See also Maja, 'Le Crime d'Henriette Cornier', 2019, *Touche à tout* <<http://www.revue.francefineart.com/index.php/chroniques/14-agenda/agenda-news/2651-163-chroniques-maja>> [accessed 28/12/2022].

<sup>364</sup> 'Les Complaintes criminelles: chanter le crime!', *Le Vif de l'histoire*, France Inter, 28 March 2019, <<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/la-marche-de-l-histoire/les-complaintes-criminelles-chanter-le-crime-1612100>> [accessed 12/1/23].

social group found to have committed infanticide.<sup>365</sup> Indeed, due to their desperate situations – as their jobs (along with those of seamstresses and washerwomen) provided inadequate wages and often made them susceptible to sexual exploitation or prostitution – female servants frequently abandoned, or even killed, their children in cities such as Paris.<sup>366</sup> By the first half of the nineteenth century, illegitimate births accounted for one-third of all births in Paris.<sup>367</sup> Ryckère’s criminological report at the end of the century emphasizes this fact by dedicating an entire chapter to the female servant’s ‘crimes contre l’enfance’.<sup>368</sup> He argues that some of these crimes were committed ‘pour vengeance, pour rien, en guise de passe-temps [et] pour le plaisir de mal faire. Après le vol, l’infanticide et l’avortement sont les crimes par excellence de la femme, et surtout de la servante.’<sup>369</sup> Authors of *le roman de la servante* had already articulated these fears. The sub-plots of Barbey d’Aurevilly’s *Une histoire sans nom* (1882) and Zola’s *Pot-Bouille*, as well as the main plots of Maupassant’s short stories, *La Mère aux monstres* (1883) and *Rosalie Prudent* (1886), all feature maidservants committing infanticide. Alongside the *fait divers* of Cornier’s case which permeated other discourses, these *romans de la servante* also circulated in the public consciousness, reinforcing the social imaginary of the rebellious servant as a dangerous figure around children. The real-life case of Cornier murdering a baby brought these fears to life, creating as well as feeding into these other representations of the female servant as a malevolent figure in the nineteenth-century imagination. The daily updates on her trial in the newspapers, as well as its mention in criminological and doctors’ reports, acted as constant reminders to both the literate and the non-literate public (in the latter case through word of mouth as this chapter will explore) that female servants kill children.

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<sup>365</sup> See Apter, p. 198; McBride, p. 99; Mitre, p. vi; Ryckère, p. 145.

<sup>366</sup> Sherwood, p. 6.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> See Ryckère, pp. 145-93.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

Although Cornier's crime was not technically an infanticide, usually defined as a parent killing their own child(ren), the discourses surrounding her case highlight how real-life criminal maidservants were seen to have violated the period's positive definitions of femininity, all couched in terms of maternal virtues of caregiving, compassion and selflessness.<sup>370</sup> As Downing argues, 'all women, whether technically mothers or not, are symbolically charged' in the socio-cultural imagination 'with maternity, with the burden of *caaring for children*, and that dereliction of this duty carries a heavy penalty.'<sup>371</sup> By murdering a baby, Cornier destabilized not only the stereotype that the maternal instinct is natural in women,<sup>372</sup> but also the idea that it is intrinsic to the existence of the loyal maidservant. In this vein, Ryckère's criminological report argues that '[I]'amour pour l'enfant est si naturel, si aisé chez la servante que les mauvais traitements dont elle se rend coupable sont considérés à juste titre comme monstrueux.'<sup>373</sup> The supposed maternal instincts of the loyal maidservant were celebrated in Georges Morren's oil painting, *À l'harmonie (Jardin Public)* (1891) in which he captures a loyal maidservant carefully looking after two young girls playing in the park. A nineteenth-century household manual writer, Madame (Élisabeth) Celnart (also known as Élisabeth-Félicie Canard Bayle-Mouillard), famous for her manuals seeking to moralize middle-class women and young girls,<sup>374</sup> also reaffirmed these virtues by advising that the *bonne d'enfant* ought to possess the following qualities: 'patience et douceur', 'pureté des mœurs' and 'propreté'.<sup>375</sup> These various discourses reinforce the idea that a loyal, acceptable servant must never transgress feminine virtues predicated on maternal instinct. Female servants who kill children therefore not only violate the cultural construction of

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<sup>370</sup> Downing, *The Subject of Murder*, p. 107, emphasis in original.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>373</sup> Ryckère, p. 145.

<sup>374</sup> See Joseph-Marie Quérard, *La France littéraire ou Dictionnaire bibliographique des savants, historiens et gens de lettres de la France, ainsi que des littérateurs étrangers qui ont écrit en français, plus particulièrement pendant les XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, 14 vols (Paris: Chez Firmin Didot, 1826-1842), II, pp. 98-99.

<sup>375</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 193.

femininity and its association with motherhood,<sup>376</sup> but also the myth of the loyal maidservant as a protector of children.

During her trial, the *Gazette de France* published a profile of the killer in the court room: ‘Henriette est de sang-froid; son pouls est assez lent; elle ne paraît avoir éprouvé aucune émotion.’<sup>377</sup> As a woman who transgresses feminine virtues, Cornier is depicted as cold-blooded killer who feels no sense of remorse. One of the doctors analysing Cornier’s case, Dr Marc, then explicitly points out how Cornier’s case demonstrates that the façade of a loyal nineteenth-century servant may hide the rebellious female servant: ‘[[]es anciens maîtres [de Henriette] [...] l’ayant toujours reconnue *très-fidèle*’,<sup>378</sup> ‘rien dans son extérieur, quoique triste et abattu; rien dans ses réponses, quoique brèves et se faisant attendre, ne leur a paru de nature à déceler un désordre actuel dans l’état moral de cette femme’.<sup>379</sup> Dr Marc argues that while Cornier did in fact adore ‘naturellement les enfants et les comblait de caresses’, ‘depuis son arrivée à Paris, Henriette Cornier s’était malheureusement détachée de tous sentiments de religion, et, n’en remplissant plus aucun devoir, elle finit par perdre ses mœurs.’<sup>380</sup> Writing within a similar Catholic framework to that adopted by the authors of household manuals described in Chapter One, as well as by the scientist in Hélène Jégado’s case in the next section of this chapter, Dr Marc emphasizes that a lack of religious devotion can lead to the loss of a servant’s virtues such as those associated with maternal instinct. He implicitly cautions his readership, made up of male elites, and therefore the masters of households, to be aware of any subtle changes in their allegedly ‘loyal’ female servants’

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<sup>376</sup> Lizzie Seal, *Women, Murder and Femininity: Gender Representations of Women Who Kill* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>377</sup> *Gazette de France*, 29 January 1826, p. 3.

<sup>378</sup> C.-C.-H., Marc, *Consultation médico-légale pour Henriette Cornier, femme breton, accusée homicide commis volontairement et avec préméditation* (Paris: Roux Libraire, Palais-Royal, 1826), pp. 2-3.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

behaviour, and suggests that the bourgeoisie should proceed with caution when hiring a female servant for their childcare. He suggests that the rebellious female servant uses the mask of the loyal maidservant to hide her true nature.

Cornier's crime therefore creates, as well as feeds into nineteenth-century bourgeois wariness with regard to the female servant in charge of the care of their children, an anxiety that Chapter One briefly described. Bourgeois masters and mistresses feared that certain servants had the capacity to use 'psychic revenge for the mistreatment they themselves had experienced' by abusing the household's children.<sup>381</sup> This abuse came with the understanding that, unlike the masters and mistresses, children would be too weak to fight back; this mistreatment could include violence and neglect through starvation.<sup>382</sup> These fears were embodied in household management guides which devoted entire sections to advising inexperienced bourgeois mistresses on such matters as how their servants should look after their children.<sup>383</sup> Madame Celnart also argues that 'personne n'aime à voir [...] ses enfants négligés' when asserting the need for 'correct' childcare.<sup>384</sup> One anonymous author even goes so far as to state a nineteenth-century belief that servants commonly hurl angry reproaches at children, causing the latter to appear 'bizarre[s] et de méchante humeur, sans que le père et mère en sachent la véritable cause'.<sup>385</sup> The female servant is a necessary evil; she is a danger to her household and its children, yet she usefully reinforces the class status of bourgeois parents and removes the burden of childcare from the mother.

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<sup>381</sup> Fairchilds, pp. 207-08.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> See for example, Madame Celnart, 'Soins des enfans et des malades', pp. 193-195.

<sup>384</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 10. I have modernized the spelling of 'enfans' and 'négligés' here.

<sup>385</sup> See Gutton, p. 54.

Cornier's case is shown to be part of the larger socio-cultural construct that emerges from literary and non-literary documents that were written to create new fears, as well as to intensify existing fears relating to the maidservant's proximity to the bourgeois family. Nineteenth-century 'panoramic literature', for example, reinforced this anxiety. In *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1977), Walter Benjamin uses the term 'panoramic literature' to compare this type of literature to the visual display of the painted panoramas, which featured individual sketches of social types to be found in society from the upper to the lower classes.<sup>386</sup> In her study of popular literature in France, Anne O'Neil-Henry notes that '[t]his so-called panoramic literature dated roughly from the early July Monarchy (1830) until about 1845, peaked around 1840–42 [...], and comprised a number of texts featuring nonfiction observations on urban life written by well-known and obscure authors alike.'<sup>387</sup> These works sought to classify the everyday life in the city:<sup>388</sup> its inhabitants, mores and trends, and helped to create as well as examine urban social types or specific stereotyped 'Parisian phenomena'.<sup>389</sup> In the ten-volume encyclopaedia, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes: Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle* (1840-42) brought out by the publisher Leon Curmer, that also included contributions from literary authors such as Balzac,<sup>390</sup> the author and journalist, Louis Amédée Achard creates the caricature of 'la nourrice sur place' – although the wetnurse's role typically differed from that of the female servant as she was often based outside of the home, most notably in hospitals,<sup>391</sup> the caricature of this particular servant is set inside the home. Alongside the discourses circulating with regard to Cornier's case, this caricature served to exemplify the bourgeois

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<sup>386</sup> See Anne O'Neil-Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 25.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Anne O'Neil-Henry and Masha Belenky, *Popular Literature from Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: The Modern Association of America, 2021), p. xxii notes how panoramic literary texts emerged in different formats. See for example the *Physiologie-Aubert* series and Paul de Kock's *La Grande Ville* (1844).

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> See Sherwood, pp. 75-113 on the wet nurse.

fear of the female servant as a potential threat to the safety of the family. Tongue-in-cheek, the writer begins his sketch by admitting that:

Si j'avais l'honneur d'être père de famille, je n'oserais pas écrire cet article, tant je craindrais d'exposer ma race au ressentiment des nourrices futures; il y a trop de petits vices, trop de péchés mondains, trop de qualités négatives à dévoiler. La seule chose qui pourrait peut-être accroître mon courage, c'est cette pensée consolante qu'en général les nourrices ne savent pas lire.<sup>392</sup>

The writer blames the change in the wetnurse's behaviour on her exhausting job, her terrible treatment by her masters and mistresses – and the hierarchy of servants in the home that places her at the bottom.<sup>393</sup> The child is then seen to take the brunt of her frustrations: '[de] nouvelles manifestations agressives éclatent dans son geste et dans sa parole ; des réponses aigres-douces se croisent sur ses lèvres, et les symptômes de sa mauvaise humeur apparaissent surtout au retour de la promenade.'<sup>394</sup> This document serves as a warning to masters and mistresses: the female servant may seek secret revenge for her own mistreatment in the household by abusing the master and mistress's child.

Yet, as far as Dr Marc was concerned, Cornier's case went against these stereotypes; he implicitly connects the female servant to these nineteenth-century fears in the social imaginary by showing his surprise that '[i]l n'existait entre les époux Belon et Henriette Cornier ni haine, ni intimité, ni jalousie'.<sup>395</sup> This maidservant would not go on to serve as an example of a vengeful servant, but rather as a primary case in the study of monomania, the nineteenth-century psychiatric condition eventually replaced by hysteria.<sup>396</sup> As Chapter One has already briefly explored, monomania was a condition in which will was assumed to be

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<sup>392</sup> Amédée Achard, 'La Nourrice sur place', in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes: Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Léon Curmer, 1840-42) 10 vols, I, 293-300, (p. 293).

<sup>393</sup> Servant hierarchies are also discussed in Guiral and Thuillier, *La Vie quotidienne des domestiques en France au XIXe siècle*.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 296-97.

<sup>395</sup> Marc, p. 8.

<sup>396</sup> Despite the rise in discourses surrounding hysteria in the nineteenth century, Janet Beizer traces the condition back to Egyptian antiquity. See her *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 3-8.

separated from emotion, reason from will and emotion from reason.<sup>397</sup> Monomaniacs could nevertheless continue to act as ‘normal’ individuals, suggesting that appearances could be deceiving.<sup>398</sup> This condition would also come to be connected to the behaviour of the second criminal maidservant in this chapter, H  l  ne J  gado; both maidservants don the appearance of a ‘loyal’ female servant, before using this guise to commit crimes.<sup>399</sup> The contrasting behaviour of the female servant therefore became inherently linked to these scientific studies surrounding monomania, and later hysteria, in the public consciousness. Cornier’s case, however, not only became a prime example of monomania, but also an example of how the notoriety of a criminal, female servant (via the press and word-of-mouth) was seen to influence other lower-class women in this period to commit similar crimes. As we shall see in what follows, the widespread circulation of Cornier’s crime not only allowed it to remain in the public consciousness, but also to be blamed for triggering a series of infanticides.

### **1.1 The Monomaniac Maidservant in the Public Consciousness: How Cornier’s Case Triggered an ‘Epidemic’ of Monomaniacs**

Upon her arrest, Henriette declared that she was pregnant.<sup>400</sup> While her statement suggests that she might have been pleading for the criminal justice system to take her condition into account, it also connected to the period’s ongoing discourses surrounding female mental illness, referred to in the nineteenth century principally as *la folie*, but also as *l’ali  nation mentale*.<sup>401</sup> As Beizer points out, hysteria in French was also known as ‘mal de m  re’

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<sup>397</sup> Simon During, ‘The Strange Case of Monomania: Patriarchy in Literature, Murder in *Middlemarch*, Drowning in *Daniel Deronda*’, *Representations*, 23 (1988), 86-104 (p. 86).

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>399</sup> The Papin sisters would exploit the same mask of loyalty before committing their murders in 1933.

<sup>400</sup> *Journal des d  bats: Politiques et litt  raires*, 6 November 1825, p. 3.

<sup>401</sup> Gill, p. 488.

(mothersickness), and in English as ‘fits of mother’ and ‘rising of the mother’.<sup>402</sup>

Accordingly, Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, the famed specialist in mental illness who worked at the Salpêtrière asylum for women in the early decades of the nineteenth-century,<sup>403</sup> also Cornier’s principal doctor, argued that pregnancy and post pregnancy can trigger madness in women.<sup>404</sup> In 1858, the psychiatrist Louis-Victor Marcé then compiled an extensive monograph that analysed psychiatric disorders in women during and following pregnancy.<sup>405</sup> These studies led to the discovery of what is now known as postnatal or postpartum depression and psychosis. Cornier’s declaration consequently placed her in medical discourses that related maternity, menstrual dysfunctions and bodily fluids to a woman’s hysterical state.<sup>406</sup> Indeed, a year later, Dr Marcé connected his diagnosis of Cornier’s crime to the discourses surrounding hysteria by drawing explicit attention to the fact that the female servant

avait ses règles. Ce fait, selon moi, est d’une importance extrême ; et, pour prouver que mon opinion de l’influence qu’il a pu exercer sur l’acte commis par Henriette résulte de mon intime conviction, et non d’un désir de chercher péniblement des possibilités en faveur de l’accusée, il suffira de rapporter textuellement ce que j’ai consigné il y a quatorze ans, comme principe de doctrine, sur ce sujet (*Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*, article, *Aliéné.*) ‘Les femmes sont, en général, plus sujettes que les hommes à ce genre de manie (la manie sans délire), particulièrement à l’époque de la menstruation, surtout quand elle présente des conditions morbides, ou pendant la gestation.’<sup>407</sup>

Three newspapers – the *Journal de Paris*, *Le Courrier* and *Le Drapeau Blanc* – subsequently published demands that Henriette Cornier’s alleged pregnancy be verified,<sup>408</sup> and the trial was indeed extended in order to examine Henriette’s condition.<sup>409</sup> Cornier was then examined

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<sup>402</sup> Beizer, p 37.

<sup>403</sup> Matlock, p. 1; Hewitt, pp. 19-42.

<sup>404</sup> See Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales considérées sous le rapport médical, hygiénique, et médico-légal*, 2 vols (Paris: Libraire de l’académie royale de médecine, 1838) I, 71-72.

<sup>405</sup> See Katharina Trede, Ross J. Baldessarini and others, ‘*Treatise on Insanity in Pregnant, Postpartum, and Lactating Women* (1858) by Louis-Victor Marcé: A Commentary’, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 17:2 (2009), 157-65.

<sup>406</sup> Beizer, pp. 39-41.

<sup>407</sup> Marcé, p. 63.

<sup>408</sup> See *Le Courrier*, 9 November 1825, p. 2; *Journal de Paris*, 9 November 1825, p. 2; *Le Drapeau Blanc*, 9 November 1825, p. 3.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

for signs of monomania; she would go on to be cited as a notorious example of this construction of mental illness.<sup>410</sup> Indeed, nineteenth-century scientific reports suggest that Cornier's crime remained in the public consciousness throughout the period insofar as it influenced a series of a series of similar criminal cases. In his *Des maladies mentales considérées sous le rapport médical, hygiénique, et médico-légal* (1838), Esquirol argued that Cornier's crime had seemingly triggered other lower-class women to commit, or consider committing, infanticide.<sup>411</sup> Esquirol describes a handful of instances in which the descriptions of Cornier's actions lingered in the consciousnesses of different mothers, driving them slowly to insanity.<sup>412</sup> In his first example, Esquirol describes how a washerwoman in her mid-twenties with two children overheard the story of Cornier's case from the other washerwomen at the river.<sup>413</sup> At first, Esquirol reports, the woman felt nothing, but the following day, '[en] voyant son fils aîné près d'elle, elle devient inquiète, agitée, elle entendit quelque chose (ce sont ses propres expressions) qui lui avait dit: *prends-le, tue-le.*'<sup>414</sup> Esquirol then depicts how two similar cases were allegedly triggered by the trial's circulation via the press.<sup>415</sup> Towards the end of the century, Armand Corre, a doctor of medical criminology, likewise argued that the coverage of Cornier's case in the press had elicited a series of similar murders at the time of her trial, with the majority of these crimes being committed by other female servants.<sup>416</sup> Both doctors therefore believed that the press's intense coverage of Cornier's crime had allowed its details to permeate the public's (and specifically, the lower-class female's) mind, subsequently creating, as Esquirol puts it, an 'epidemic' of monomaniacs.<sup>417</sup> Whether their observations and claims are factually accurate

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<sup>410</sup> See During, p. 86.

<sup>411</sup> Esquirol, II, 819-31.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., II, 819.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., II, 826, 830.

<sup>416</sup> See Doctor Armand Corre, *Crime et suicide: étiologie générale, facteurs individuels, sociologiques et cosmiques* (Paris: Octave Doin, 1891), pp. 225-26.

<sup>417</sup> During, p. 88.

matters less for our purposes than the fact that Esquirol's and Corre's reports highlight how Cornier retained a high-profile presence in nineteenth-century public consciousness via the newspaper and word of mouth. These doctors' reports, alongside the press and psychological reports, were constantly recycling the image of the rebellious female servant. Ryckère points out that there is indeed a 'mauvaise influence de la presse, de la littérature et du théâtre sur les crimes passionnels';<sup>418</sup> one of the nineteenth-century household manuals for servants similarly notes that 'les domestiques, après que leurs maîtres seront couchés, ne demeureront pas à s'entretenir dans des conversations inutiles avec les autres personnes dans la maison, ou à lire ou à travailler pour elles-mêmes'.<sup>419</sup> Reading books and newspapers, and having discussions with other servants (a theme which Chapter Four explores at length), are shown as potentially dangerous activities for servants, a theme explored by Stendhal through his eponymous servant-heroine, *Lamie*, who finds it thrilling to read about crimes in newspapers, as well as in the books that were forbidden to her by her parents and mistress. Yet these concerns over the contents of newspapers and books are arguably used as an alibi in order to mask the bourgeoisie's need for (and therefore anxiety about) control over the maidservant and her body each second of the day. These non-literary discourses prescribed not allowing the maidservant any free time to reduce the risk that she might have time to plot against the family.

Thus Cornier's case not only vilified the female servant in the social imaginary, presenting her as a potential danger around children, as well as a figure who is inherently connected to the monomaniac and later the hysteric, but also prompted bourgeois attempts to control the female servant's body and mind. The widespread circulation of accounts of the

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<sup>418</sup> Ryckère, p. 234.

<sup>419</sup> Unknown author, *Règlement general pour des filles domestiques et ouvrières de l'association de Notre-Dame-de-bonne-garde* (Nantes: Merson, 1844), pp. 20-21.

crime and its alleged ramifications highlights how the figure of the rebellious female servant came to permeate the public consciousness as a threat to bourgeois lives, as well as the class position of the bourgeoisie. The various discourses surrounding Cornier's case also reveal (male) fears of the subservient woman stepping out of her role of servitude and femininity to revolt against the bourgeois family. The serial killer Hélène Jégado went on to amplify these fears by connecting the figure of the female servant to that of the poisoner.

## 2. Hélène Jégado: The Social Imaginary of the Female Servant as a Poisoner

From 1833 to 1851, Hélène Jégado was hired as a domestic servant – often, yet not exclusively, in the position of the cook – in various households in Bubry, Brittany. On 6 December 1851, Jégado was put on trial for having poisoned thirty-seven victims with arsenic, resulting in the deaths of twenty-five people in total. These victims included masters, mistresses and servants alike, as well as Jégado's aunt and sister. The crimes of this serial killer created a widespread sensation across France, as alluded to by one of the trial's observers in a description of the court sessions: 'cette séance a été courte, mais l'intérêt qu'elle a présenté a été immense',<sup>420</sup> '[I]a foule qui se presse depuis huit jours au Palais-de-Justice loin de diminuer, a encore augmenté. Dès midi moins un quart, il est impossible de trouver une place dans la grande salle des assises.'<sup>421</sup> Jégado's crime, and the details of her trial, also circulated beyond these packed court rooms via the *faits divers* of the newspaper; as one nineteenth-century pseudo-scientist points out: '[t]ous les journaux ont reproduit le

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<sup>420</sup> Unknown author, 'Hélène Jégado. Empoisonnements. Vols. Condamnation à mort.', *Cour d'assises d'Ille-et-Vilaine. Audiences dès 12-14 décembre 1851*, 12 December 1851 (Nantes: William Busseuil, 1851).

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

procès de la grande empoisonneuse Hélène Jégado<sup>422</sup> for example the *Journal des faits*, the *Journal de Toulouse*, the *Journal des débats*, *Le Messager du Midi*, *Le Pays*, *La Presse* and *Le Petit Journal*.<sup>423</sup> The widespread reporting of this real-life criminal maidservant's case via the press allowed the figure of the female servant to permeate scientific accounts of poison, as well as studies of criminology that also dedicated entire sections of their studies to Hélène Jégado.<sup>424</sup>

Jégado's case has since re-emerged in twentieth- and twenty-first-century popular culture via national newspapers,<sup>425</sup> case studies, books, film adaptations, podcasts, graphic novels and works of art.<sup>426</sup> The continuing reproduction of this criminal maidservant's case through various modern-day media shows how the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant transcends the nineteenth century, keeping this figure present in the public

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<sup>422</sup> Armand Harembert, *La Vérité, fusion du matérialisme et du spiritualisme, opérée par la connaissance simultanée du magnétisme et de la phrénologie, et démontrée par l'application de la nouvelle organographie du crâne humain sur la tête de la célèbre empoisonneuse Hélène Jégado* (Paris: Dentu, 1853), p. 13.

<sup>423</sup> For example: *Journal des faits*, 11-21 December 1851 and her trial is featured from 5 January until 29 March 1852; *Journal de Toulouse*, 3-12 March 1852; *Journal des débats: Politiques et littéraires*, 19 December 1851 and 2-29 March 1852; and then retold as a story in 1864, 1889 and on 26 December 1937; *Le Messager du Midi*, 4 March 1852 and 28 February 1862; *Le Pays*, 13-15 December 1851 and 29 February-3 March 1852; *La Presse*, 18 December 1851 and 1 March 1862; *Le Petit Journal*, 3 January 1887 then includes her in a list of the women guillotined in 1852.

<sup>424</sup> See for example Mathieu-Joseph-Bonaventure Orfila, *Traité de toxicologie* (Paris: Labé, 1852), pp. 969-76; Arthur Mangin, *Les Poisons* (Tours: Alfred Lame et Fils, 1869), pp. 136-155; Dr Armand Corre, *Les Criminels: Caractères Physiques et Psychologiques* (Paris: Octave Doin, 1889), pp. 193, 207; Albert Bataille, *Causes criminelles et mondaines de 1889* (Paris, Édouard Dentu, 1890), p. 420; F. Ernest Barillot, *Histoire des empoisonnements* (Nevers: Imprimerie Nivernaise, 1893), p. 13; Robinet de Cléry, *Les Crimes d'empoisonnement* (Paris: Bureaux de La Vie Contemporaine, 1894), pp. 23-24; Raymond de Ryckère, *La Femme en prison et devant la mort: Étude de criminologie* (Lyon: Astock, 1898 and Paris: Masson, 1898), p. 227.

<sup>425</sup> Newspapers across France were still publishing on Hélène Jégado's case in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See for example: *La Dépêche Bretonne*, 16 November 1901, p. 3; See also *L'Ouest-Éclair*, 28 November 1932, p. 4; *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire*, 14 December 1937, p. 9.

<sup>426</sup> A few examples include Pierre Bouchardon, *Hélène Jégado: L'Empoisonneuse Bretonne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1937); Peter Meazey, *La Jégado: Histoire de la célèbre empoisonneuse* (Guingamp: La Plomée, 1999); Jean Teulé, *Fleur de Tonnerre* (Paris: Julliard, 2013); Julien Moca and Gérard Berthelot, *Hélène Jégado ou la triste vie d'une tueuse en série bretonne* (Turquant: L'Àpart Editions, 2013); *Fleur de tonnerre* dir. by Stéphanie Pillonca-Kervern (Sophie Dulac Distribution, 2017); Cassell, *Helene Jégado Mixing Poison With Her Victims' Food, c.1898*, engraving, Private Collection, Illustration for *Mysteries of Police and Crime* by Arthur Griffiths; Frédéric Lewino and Mégane Chiecchi, 'Hélène Jégado, l'empoisonneuse en série', 21 April 2020, podcast, *Les Amants de la guillotine*, <[https://www.lepoint.fr/podcasts/les-amants-de-la-guillotine/les-amants-de-la-guillotine-7-helene-Jégado-l-empoisonneuse-en-serie-21-04-2020-2372272\\_4231.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/podcasts/les-amants-de-la-guillotine/les-amants-de-la-guillotine-7-helene-Jégado-l-empoisonneuse-en-serie-21-04-2020-2372272_4231.php)> [accessed 23 February 2022].

consciousness as a figure of fascination and reinforcing the nineteenth-century discourses that vilified the maidservant figure by replicating similar themes and stereotypes in modern narrativizations of her figure. The multiple retellings of Jégado's story not only demonstrate an enduring interest in the maidservant's crimes, but also how the nineteenth-century real-life maidservant criminal forms part of the continuum of an ongoing form of entertainment that sensationalizes serial killers and crime for the public.<sup>427</sup>

## **2.1 Feeding into the Fears of Women as 'Natural' Poisoners**

Jégado's crimes also feed into a long-standing gendered stereotype that poisonings were naturally associated with women.<sup>428</sup> By demonstrating how Jégado's crimes connected the maidservant to this misogynistic stereotype found in literary and non-literary discourses, one can see how the widespread reporting of her criminality generated and reinforced (male) bourgeois fear of, and fascination with, lower-class female figures as potential killers. The literary and non-literary texts that foreground these stereotypes consequently reinforced the bourgeoisie's need to control the maidservant's every move. Jégado's crimes were part of the period's growing suspicions with regard to poisonings. As José Ramón Bertomeu Sánchez points out, during the 1830s and 1840s '[m]any French people at that time felt that they were living in a "wave of poisoning crimes"', and thus poison became an accepted explanation for

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<sup>427</sup> See Scott Bon, *Why We Love Serial Killers: The Curious Appeal of the World's Most Savage Murderers* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2014). While the non-literary documents circulating around nineteenth-century crime demonstrated the period's specific fears of a lower-class female figure and her capacity to overthrow power structures in the home and in society, the modern adaptations of Jégado's case also provide an insight into modern-day French society: the crimes of a nineteenth-century maidservant as a sensationalized form of entertainment could implicitly be masking wider issues of class, race and gender concerning the mistreatment of cleaners, nannies and maids, as the Conclusion of this thesis points out.

<sup>428</sup> See Downing, 'Murder in the Feminine' p. 134; see also Ryckère who provides evidence that nineteenth-century society believed that poisonings by women began during antiquity (p. 264). Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016 [1862]) also demonstrates how poison was connected to the figure of the witch in history (p. 32).

otherwise inexplicable deaths during this period.<sup>429</sup> Yet at the end of the nineteenth century, there were more than twice as many women accused of poisoning as men (forty-one as opposed to nineteen between 1875 and 1880), even when the overall number of poisonings was in decline.<sup>430</sup> In her study of the poisoner Marie Lafarge, Downing notes that the reason behind this gendered stereotype was that poison was perceived by the (male) upper classes as a crime that revealed duplicity and deviousness.<sup>431</sup> Downing goes on to state that women were believed to use poison ‘because it is seen as unnatural and cold-blooded’, rather than ‘hot-blooded’ – a reference to the medical discourse of the period that defined women as ‘cold’ and men as ‘hot’ in the context provided by humoral theories.<sup>432</sup> During Jégado’s trial, the female servant’s doctor confirms this nineteenth-century belief by stating that her case involved ‘une série de crimes calculés avec tant d’audace, exécutés *avec tant de sang-froid*, envisagés avec aussi peu de remords’,<sup>433</sup> a view which is then repeated by the judge: ‘[le] poison administré par Hélène Jégado, *avec un sang-froid*, une audace, et une perversité que l’on a peine à comprendre.’<sup>434</sup> Like Cornier, Jégado is also labelled a cold-blooded killer. According to the nineteenth-century criminal justice system that favoured a misogynistic discourse directed against female poisoners, Jégado’s sex was just as important as her state of mind when assessing her case; her doctor states to the court room that a criminal’s acts should be considered ‘selon son âge, selon son sexe, selon son tempérament’.<sup>435</sup> For his part, Ryckère argues that, at the end of the nineteenth century, lawyers believed that ‘l’empoisonnement [...] est plutôt le crime des femmes que des hommes, parce que, n’ayant

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<sup>429</sup> José Ramón Bertomeu Sánchez, ‘Arsenic in France: The Cultures of Poison During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century’, in *Compound Histories: Materials, Governance and Production, 1760-1840*, ed. by Lissa L. Roberts and Simon Werrett (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 131-58 (p. 131).

<sup>430</sup> Downing, ‘Murder in the Feminine’, p. 134.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Subject of Murder*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>433</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d’Hélène Jégado, accusée de nombreux empoisonnements: Arrêt de la Cour portant condamnation à mort de la fille Hélène Jégado* (Rennes: Bureau de progrès, 1851), p. 145, with my emphasis.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, with my emphasis.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

pas le courage de se venger ouvertement, et par la voie des armes, elles embrassent ce parti qui favorise leur timidité et qui cache leur malice.<sup>436</sup> As argued by Alexandre Lacassagne, a professor of medicine and one of the founders of criminal anthropology along with Lombroso, poison is ‘l’arme des lâches’ because it does not raise any suspicion.<sup>437</sup> Poison is thus connected to femininity in these discourses insofar as it is perceived as a nonviolent weapon that evokes deviousness and cowardliness; Jégado’s doctor connects the maidservant’s use of poison to this stereotype, declaring that ‘elle était lâche, et voilà pourquoi sa main versait le poison’.<sup>438</sup>

By contrast, swords and guns are connected to masculinity as they are seen to be weapons used by the courageous insofar as they are explicitly violent. Ernest Abravanel provides an insight into this gendered perception of weapons through his analysis of poison in the nineteenth-century works of Stendhal: ‘[l]’empoisonneur court peu de risques personnels et reste caché’, insofar as poisoning kills the victim ‘sans trop de scandale’,<sup>439</sup> whereas shooting or stabbing someone is deemed as courageous as both acts are public and risk the victim fighting back.<sup>440</sup> The killer is put ‘corps à corps’ in a potential ‘duel’ with the victim.<sup>441</sup> Jégado’s prosecutor connects the maidservant’s use of poison for her crimes to this discourse by labelling the poisoner ‘l’assassinat le plus lâche parmi les plus atroces [...] L’empoisonnement est aussi le crime le plus facile à commettre.’<sup>442</sup> His prosecution connects the maidservant’s crime to the gendered discourses that portrayed female poisoners as deceitful and faint-hearted. Abravanel even suggests that in suicide, the sword or the gun is

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<sup>436</sup> Ryckère, p. 264.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d’Hélène Jégado*, p. 147.

<sup>439</sup> Ernest Abravanel, ‘Le Thème de poison dans l’œuvre de Stendhal’, in *Première Journée du Stendhal Club*, ed. by Ernest Abravanel and others (Lausanne: Grand-Chêne, 1968), pp. 7-17, (pp. 13-14).

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d’Hélène Jégado*, p. 172.

seen as a heroic choice in the nineteenth-century text over the use of poison: ‘Hélène Campireali se poignarde sans hésitation pour ne pas paraître diminuée aux yeux de son amant, c’est, pour employer le mot de Jean Prévost, une amazone’.<sup>443</sup> Abravenel implicitly adds to the gendered discourse surrounding violent weapons by arguing that the use of a dagger instead of poison allows the Stendhalian heroine to transgresses her role as a passive female figure and become an Amazon with a masculine virtue of agency.<sup>444</sup> One may also think of Stendhal’s cross-class maidservant, Mina de Vanghel, who, as we shall see in Chapter Three of this thesis, chooses to shoot herself rather than drink poison.<sup>445</sup> Abravenel implicitly suggests that violent crimes are thus principally masculine in the nineteenth-century social imaginary and that women who use violence take on masculine traits. The non-literary texts narrativizing Jégado’s crimes therefore feed into a characterization of the female criminal, and thus the figure of the servant, as a cowardly, devious figure in the nineteenth-century social imaginary. Her case ultimately reinforces the misogynistic belief that Woman is socially degenerate (as set out in Chapter One) and is therefore likely – or even predestined – to commit crimes with poison. While Jégado’s prosecutor goes on to blame ‘les progrès de la science en favorisant les criminelles pratiques des empoisonneurs’ for recently creating ‘de nouveaux périls pour les sociétés qu’ils doivent rendre plus heureuses’,<sup>446</sup> the trial and the circulation of its report in various newspapers during this period specifically highlight how the female servant is a figure in society likely to commit such crimes. Jégado’s poisonings should therefore also be thought of in terms of another socially constructed stereotype that poison was also a ‘natural’ weapon of choice for servants.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d’Hélène Jégado*, p. 13.

<sup>444</sup> Seal, p. 24.

<sup>445</sup> Julien Sorel also considers shooting himself in *Le Rouge et le Noir*.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> See Fairchilds, p. 131.

## **2.2 The Nineteenth-Century Rebellious Maidservant as a Poisoner**

Hélène Jégado's criminal case fed into a larger societal fear during the nineteenth century that servants had the potential and the opportunity to poison their masters and mistresses; as Fairchilds notes, French society believed that servants 'had unparalleled [*sic*] opportunities to administer [poison], and the stealthiness involved in its use seems to accord with the character of servants, those creatures who listened at keyholes and indulged in petty pilfering.'<sup>448</sup> Ryckère's criminological report on the female servant then describes, as well as develops this social imaginary surrounding the maidservant as a poisoner. Building on the longstanding stereotype that poison was a woman's weapon, as well as feeding into Lombroso's misogynistic claims that Woman is an innate criminal (as outlined in Chapter One), Ryckère argues that '[l]es servantes qui peuvent être rangées dans la catégorie des criminelles-nées sont assez rares. Tel est le cas notamment pour les célèbres empoisonneuses: Hélène Jégado, Marie Jeanneret, la femme van der Linden'.<sup>449</sup> He goes on to argue that these infamous servant poisoners were inherently doomed as criminals from birth but that the male equivalent, *l'empoisonneur-né*, does not exist. Ryckère thus feeds into the gendered discourse that poison is not just principally a weapon for women, but it is also tied to the servant class.<sup>450</sup> He connects the discourses surrounding the (male) upper-class fascination with, and fears of, Woman and the lower classes to the female servant as a dangerous figure in the home that needs to be controlled. Non-literary discourses such as these were thus providing the bourgeoisie with a justification for tightening their surveillance of their maidservants by exacerbating a class fear that these lower-class female figures could revolt against their subservient roles by discreetly poisoning the household. The criminologist dedicates an entire

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<sup>448</sup> Fairchilds, p. 131.

<sup>449</sup> Ryckère, p. 3.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

chapter to the female servant poisoner, describing various cases in nineteenth-century France, England and Europe.<sup>451</sup> These prejudices surrounding the female servant as a poisoner were already circulating in the social imaginary through the literature of the period, showing how Jégado's crimes helped to increase her society's existing fears.

In Balzac's *Le Cousin Pons*, the lawyer Fraisier explains to the rebellious maidservant/concierge Madame Cibot that if she succeeds in becoming the sole inheritor of her master's fortune, Pons's family will plot against her; he does so by using the prejudices surrounding the female servant as a poisoner:

Un beau jour, la justice arrive, on saisit une tisane, on y trouve de l'arsenic au fond, vous et votre mari vous êtes arrêtés, jugés, condamnés, comme ayant voulu tuer le sieur Pons, afin de toucher votre legs... J'ai défendu à Versailles une pauvre femme, aussi vraiment innocente que vous le seriez en pareil cas ; les choses étaient comme je vous le dis, et tout ce que j'ai pu faire alors, ç'a été lui sauver la vie. La malheureuse a eu vingt ans de travaux forcés et les fait à Saint-Lazare.<sup>452</sup>

Madame Cibot then worries that 'elle serai[t] guillotinée comme une empoisonneuse...'.<sup>453</sup>

Corrupt, bourgeois society has the power to frame Madame Cibot by manipulating the gendered stereotypes that connect the murderous act of poison to the maidservant. Jégado's prosecutor likewise assumes that the motive behind maidservant's poisonings was to inherit their fortunes: '[r]appelons qu'elle a voulu hériter de celle qu'elle assassinait'.<sup>454</sup> While Chapter One explored how the bourgeoisie now feared the maidservant as an ambitious female figure who had the capacity to destroy the family, and thus society's regimented hierarchical structure, from inside of the home, these texts demonstrate how this anxiety was also tied to the threat of potential poisonings. Other authors of *le roman de la servante* also connect the female servant to the figure of the poisoner, crystallizing this

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<sup>451</sup> See Ryckère, pp. 264-76.

<sup>452</sup> Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, pp. 239-40.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>454</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d'Hélène Jégado*, p. 181.

bourgeois anxiety. As set out in Chapter Three, Barbey's fictional maidservant heroine, Hauteclair Stassin, in his short story, 'Le Bonheur dans le crime', purposefully dons the disguise of a maidservant and manipulates the servant's invisible presence in the home in order to poison her mistress, and rival, Delphine de Cantor. The narrator in the framed narrative of this short story, Dr Torty, explains that:

la comtesse était morte empoisonnée... [...] Par sa femme de chambre, Eulalie, qui avait pris une fiole l'une pour l'autre et qui, disait-on, avait fait avaler à sa maîtresse une bouteille d'encre double, au lieu d'une médecine que j'avais prescrite. C'était possible, après tout, qu'une pareille méprise. Mais je savais, moi, qu'Eulalie, c'était Hauteclair ! [...] Le monde n'eut pas vu ce que j'avais vu. Le monde n'eut d'abord que l'impression d'un accident terrible.<sup>455</sup>

While the accepted explanation for the countess's death was that it had been an unfortunate accident, the doctor claims that his powers of observation as a medical expert have luckily allowed him to see the truth: the maidservant had plotted against her mistress.

Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* presents a further example of how authors of *le roman de la servante* create and develop the fears of the servant as a potential poisoner. His fictional maidservant heroine, Célestine, imagines that the cook has the capacity to kill the entire household: '[q]uand je pense qu'une cuisinière, par exemple, tient, chaque jour, dans ses mains, la vie de ses maîtres... une pincée d'arsenic à la place de sel... un petit filet de strychnine au lieu de vinaigre... et ça y est !...'<sup>456</sup> Célestine is projecting the bourgeoisie's fear that the female servant now recognizes the power she holds over the family she serves. Like Jégado, and the disguised Hauteclair, the female cook also has the opportunity to swap ingredients whilst going undetected. Nineteenth-century literature, especially when placed alongside the discourses surrounding Jégado's case, therefore

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<sup>455</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, 'Le Bonheur dans le crime', in *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, ed. by Jacques Petit, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1966), II, 81-128 (p. 116).

<sup>456</sup> Mirbeau, p. 317.

highlights how society believed the servant could secretly hide her ‘true’, dangerous nature behind a mask of loyalty.

In a nineteenth-century *complainte*, a poem associated with a popular oral tradition that also came to mean ‘crime song’ in nineteenth-century France,<sup>457</sup> Jégado is described as donning the disguise of an angelic, loyal servant: ‘[o]n la voit soir et matin / Cachant, sous un air bénin, / Ses goûts de libertinage, / Pour un ange on la prendrait, / C’est un démon fieffé.’<sup>458</sup> The writer assumes that Jégado used the mask of a loyal servant in order to hide her intentions, much like Hauteclair Stassin, as well as other fictional maidservant protagonists in *le roman de la servante* analysed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.<sup>459</sup> This *complainte* emphasizes a clear religious and moralizing message through a Catholic framework in a similar manner to the household manuals already discussed: ‘Chrétiens, sachez résister; / Car Dieu sait où retrouver / Le serviteur, la servante, / Qui se croyaient assurés / De voir leurs crimes caches.’<sup>460</sup> The song seems to warn masters and mistresses that both male and female servants have the capacity to hide their crimes – and thus their ‘true’ natures – while also threatening servants with execution for their crimes. These fears of the criminal lurking behind the mask of the servant were used as a narrative device by nineteenth-century writers, as Chapters Three and Four will show.

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<sup>457</sup> Una McIlvenna, ‘Singing Complaintes Criminelles Across Europe’, in *Criminocorpus: Les complaintes criminelles en France après 1870: inventaire, problématisation, d’un corpus méconnu*, <<http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/8608>>, [accessed 9 March 2022].

<sup>458</sup> Unknown author, *L’Empoisonneuse Hélène Jégado, accusée d’avoir attenté à la vie de 37 personnes, dont 23 ont succombé* (Paris: Pellerin, 1852).

<sup>459</sup> See also Rushton, ‘Unmasking the Loyal Maidservant in Germinie Lacerteux’.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*

### **2.3 Jégado's Trial: The 'Monsterization' of the Murderous Maidservant**

Jégado's crimes brought to life the fears that already surrounded the figure of the rebellious maidservant. The nineteenth-century documents that circulated the details of Jégado's trial across France provide examples of how the period constructed the social imaginary of the rebellious servant, as well as a form of societal control over women by prescribing gendered categorizations of 'normal' and aberrant female figures. In her gender-analytical study on women who kill, Lizzie Seal notes that '[w]omen who seem to be especially difficult to construct in relation to acceptable performances of femininity are, according to Morrissey (2003), open to "monsterization" and "mythification" as evil, placing them beyond human understanding and making them outlaws.'<sup>461</sup> An analysis of the discourses surrounding Jégado's trial shows how the female servant was 'monsterized' in this way insofar as, like Cornier, she was presented as a figure who deviated from the prescribed gendered norms of nurture, passivity and kindness; she goes against the 'true' feminine nature of the 'angel in the house', consequently revealing the latter to be a mere myth. Jégado is described in her trial as a 'monstre qui empoisonne':<sup>462</sup> 'violente et en discussion perpétuelle avec son maître [...] elle n'aimait pas les enfants et se montrait dissimulée'.<sup>463</sup> The rebellious female servant steps out of her role as a nurturing, maternal woman, and embodies masculine traits, both through her physiognomy and through her violent actions.<sup>464</sup> Jégado is therefore the foil to the angelic loyal maidservant figure as outlined in Chapter One of this thesis, as well as the respectable, pleasant, upper-class 'normal woman' categorized in Lombroso's study of the criminal woman,<sup>465</sup> perceptible as good simply from her appearance.<sup>466</sup> Dr Pitois, the official

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<sup>461</sup> Seal, p. 2.

<sup>462</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d'Hélène Jégado*, p. 14.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>464</sup> See Downing, *The Subject of Murder*, p. 64.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>466</sup> Jones, p. 3.

doctor assigned to Jégado's case, likewise described Jégado as 'une erreur de nature'<sup>467</sup> and 'hors de l'humanité'.<sup>468</sup> The widespread reporting of this criminal case therefore served to reinforce the association of the maidservant with that of a demon in the social imagination. As we shall see, the representations of Jégado, as well as fictional maidservants in *le roman de la servante* illuminate how nineteenth-century literary and non-literary writers sought to warn society about women who transgress these gendered norms by demonizing them in their writings.

Certain female servant protagonists in *le roman de la servante* similarly transgress society's prescribed gender norms that saw women's roles as maternal caregivers, resulting in a 'monsterization' of their characters. One may think, in this context, of Balzac's fictional maidservant Madame Cibot who tortures rather than cares for her master by exercising her 'tyrannie de la portière'<sup>469</sup> and is repeatedly described as a 'monstre'.<sup>470</sup> In Maupassant's short story, *La Mère aux Monstres* (1883), a maidservant used a corset to deform her unborn children in order eventually to exhibit them for money from bourgeois male onlookers. Maupassant's male narrator depicts this rebellious servant as 'une femme abominable, un vrai démon',<sup>471</sup> 'la Diable',<sup>472</sup> and a 'demi-brute et demi-femme',<sup>473</sup> echoing the nineteenth-century *complainte* previously discussed in this chapter that deemed Jégado to be a 'démon fieffé'.<sup>474</sup> Maupassant describes how this fictional maidservant's body also possesses masculine traits: 'ce grand corps osseux, trop fort, aux angles grossiers, qui semblait fait pour

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<sup>467</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d'Hélène Jégado*, p. 147.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>469</sup> Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, p. 220.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>471</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La Mère aux monstres*, in *Contes et Nouvelles*, ed. by Louis Forestier, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1974-79 [1883]), I, 842-47 (p. 842).

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 845.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 843.

<sup>474</sup> Unknown author, *L'Empoisonneuse Hélène Jégado, accusée d'avoir attenté à la vie de 37 personnes, dont 23 ont succombé* (Paris: Pellerin, 1852).

les gestes véhéments et pour hurler à la façon des loups'.<sup>475</sup> As Downing notes, 'the most abnormal woman is the most "masculine"'<sup>476</sup> insofar as she steps out of her prescribed gender role as a 'physically feminine, maternal, passive' woman exempt from all sexual desire.<sup>477</sup> The maidservant is seen to disturb the masculine/feminine gender binary by transgressing its boundaries, disrupting cultural notions prescribing how a woman, and by extension a servant, ought to act.<sup>478</sup> Barbey's *Hauteclair* has a similarly masculine figure: '[e]lle était grande comme [son mari]'.<sup>479</sup> Indeed, Barbey goes one step further by inverting the gender roles between *Hauteclair* and Savigny: 'Chose étrange! dans le rapprochement de ce beau couple, c'était la femme qui avait les muscles et l'homme qui avait les nerfs...'.<sup>480</sup> The female servant is shown to be the dominant figure in the household. Gender is here presented as flexible in a partial challenge to the enforced binary opposition between masculine and feminine that is integrated into society. By questioning the very binary structure around which society is constructed, gender becomes part of the Decadent artifice that creates anarchy, as Chapter Three analyses. The female servant poisoner as a masculinized figure thus embodies a paradox: while the poison is perceived as a 'feminine' weapon, the urge to kill is viewed as masculinizing insofar as it respectively forces Hélène Jégado, *Hauteclair* and the *Mère aux Monstres* out of their prescribed gender roles.<sup>481</sup>

Jégado's aberrant actions connect the maidservant to studies of hysteria, with her crime permeating into scientific discourses by becoming a prime case study. These scientific texts not only demonstrate the period's fascination with the maidservant, but also show how

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<sup>475</sup> Unknown author, *L'Empoisonneuse Hélène Jégado*.

<sup>476</sup> Downing, *The Subject of Murder*, p. 64.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, p. 22.

<sup>478</sup> Seal, p. 1.

<sup>479</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 85.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>481</sup> See Downing, *The Subject of Murder*, p. 62.

this figure became associated with hysteria in the public consciousness. An analysis of Jégado's case shows how the 'hysterization' of the maidservant sought to explain and thereby control aberrant behaviour in lower-class women.

#### **2.4 The Criminal Maidservant as a 'Hysterical' Subject of Study**

While Jégado's trial report repeatedly claims that '[l]e caractère d'Hélène était difficile',<sup>482</sup> Dr Pitois argues that 'Hélène n'est point monomane'.<sup>483</sup> The medical expert refuses to tie Jégado's behaviour and personality to monomania, the psychological condition of which Cornier had already become an infamous example. Although Hélène Jégado's doctor disregarded monomania in his diagnosis, Ryckère would eventually note that Lombroso believed Jégado possessed hysterical tendencies because she 'souffrait continuellement de la tête, et on l'avait vue un jour déchirer les habits et les livres de pauvres pensionnaires contre lesquelles elle n'avait aucun motif de haine.'<sup>484</sup> In her study of hysteria, Janet Beizer notes that hysteria had become an indefinable condition in the nineteenth century due to its numerous causes and symptoms: 'it was a ready vessel for medical and literary authors alike, a crucible that received the fears and desires of a culture and melded them into myth.'<sup>485</sup> One can also apply this reading of the creation of hysteria in the nineteenth-century imagination to that of the construction of the rebellious maidservant as a social imaginary: she is a hybrid bound up of different fears and fascinations on the part of literary and non-literary writers, as well as misogynistic stereotypes and prejudices, such as those contained within the notion of hysteria.<sup>486</sup> In the 1870s, Dr Jean-Martin Charcot then argued that the origins of hysteria were

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<sup>482</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d'Hélène Jégado*, p. 147.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>484</sup> Ryckère, p. 266.

<sup>485</sup> Beizer, p. 35.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Hewitt, p. 2.

physical rather than psychological and that hysteria weakened the nervous system, which then led to a variety of physical manifestations – these often included the loss of bodily control in various forms.<sup>487</sup> As Chapter One has already noted, the majority of Charcot's most famous public displays of hysterical women made use of lower-class women, including maidservants, thus associating the figure of the female servant with that of a dangerous, hysterical patient in the public consciousness of nineteenth-century society.

For the criminologist Lombroso, Jégado served as a prime case study for his (later discredited) theories regarding the criminal woman; he argued that she was an example of how the female born criminal can embody contradiction:<sup>488</sup> she was seemingly loyal to her masters and mistresses, as well as to her fellow servants, until they began to offend her.<sup>489</sup> Lombroso therefore categorizes Jégado as an example of a criminal woman who sought revenge – he makes the more general claim that ‘the chief motive for female crime is vengeance’.<sup>490</sup> The criminologist's misogynistic argument is that while the female criminal is dangerous, ‘she revenges herself more slowly than men. She has to develop her plan little by little because her physical weakness and fearful nature restrain her even when her reason does not’.<sup>491</sup> Strongly prejudiced against women, Lombroso inaccurately concluded that Woman will always remain the physically weaker sex, even in her revenge. He goes on to argue that Jégado allegedly presented the traits of a born female criminal through the obstinacy with which she denied her killings: ‘despite the wealth of evidence against her, she continued to assert that she knew nothing about arsenic and that her only fault lay in being too kind. She persisted in these claims to the end.’<sup>492</sup> Although Lombroso's theories of

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<sup>487</sup> Hewitt, p. 167.

<sup>488</sup> Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, p. 188.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

criminology are now of course discredited, his inaccurate claims surrounding Jégado's mental state form part of a larger discourse created by nineteenth-century medical writers who saw the hysteric as 'insincere and deceitful; she is a forger of fictions and lies.'<sup>493</sup> The criminologist thus implicitly associates the figure of the servant with the deceitful, dangerous figure of Woman that would influence further generations of criminologists; indeed, Lombroso's followers maintained the theory that '[l]'empoisonneuse est le plus souvent une dégénérée hystérique'.<sup>494</sup> The inaccuracy of Lombroso's study matters less for our purposes, however, than how it highlights the ways in which the criminal case of a female servant had come to permeate criminological theories by the end of the nineteenth century.

Ryckère's study of the criminal servant bizarrely argues that the servant's role as a cook, like that performed by Jégado, inevitably leads to hysteria – and even in some cases to crimes such as poisoning – as a direct result of the toxins found in nineteenth-century kitchens. The criminologist transcribes supposed 'evidence' from '[l]e docteur F...' in which a range of female cooks were said to have had hysterical breakdowns caused 'surtout par le séjour prolongé dans une cuisine surchauffée, où l'aération est défectueuse';<sup>495</sup> he goes on to explain that 'la chaleur du fourneau [...] chauffe le sang et provoque une altération des centres nerveux. Les accès primitifs sont violents et inattendus; plus tard, ils deviennent chroniques et se repénètrent à intervalles réguliers'.<sup>496</sup> While Ryckère connects the cook's day-to-day work and the harmful conditions in which it is performed to her mental health, he does not consider how the extremely hard work demanded by masters and mistresses could provide an alternative explanation. Despite the criminologist's claims that further examples are needed of other working-class women in different workplaces such as factories, Ryckère

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<sup>493</sup> Beizer, p. 19.

<sup>494</sup> Ryckère, p. 266.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

concludes that '[i]l est évident que cet état maladif inhérent au métier peut éventuellement produire certains effets en matière de criminalité ancillaire.'<sup>497</sup> The real-life criminal servant had become part of a social imaginary onto which the period's discourses of aberrant women were transcribed and within which these discourses flourished.

## 2.5 The Criminal Female Servant's Anatomy

Despite Dr Pitois's refusal to tie Jégado's crime to hysteria, he does conclude that the servant's behaviour must be inherently connected to her female biology:

je dis que si un organe est lésé, les manifestations intellectuelles qui lui correspondent seront en dehors des conditions normales. [...] chez Hélène les organes de la ruse, du vol, du meurtre, ont reçu un immense développement. Elle a l'instinct du meurtre; il faut qu'elle tue. Elle a l'instinct du vol; il faut qu'elle vole. Ainsi, loin de ne pas admettre l'existence des crimes qui lui reproche le ministre public, je soutiens, sans crainte de me tromper qu'elle les a tous commis, et bien d'autres encore, dont la trace échappe à la justice. [...]

Examinez sa tête et ses traits: ne dirait-on pas que c'est elle que tout à la fois Gall et Lavater ont voulu décrire? Ce front déprimé, fuyant vers les tempes, ce sinciput écrasé, ce diamètre transversal trop large, me font supposer, presque à coup sûr, un plan perpendiculaire du vertex à l'occiput, la région supérieure de la nuque étant circonscrite d'ailleurs par une demi-circonférence très large.<sup>498</sup>

The doctor is adopting the discredited nineteenth-century medical discourse that assumed that a female criminal's biological makeup revealed her 'true' persona. By focusing on how Hélène's bestial physiognomy reflects her immoral nature, the doctor's observations add to the vilification of the figure of the maidservant in the public consciousness by describing her difference, thereby 'monsterizing' her body. Dr Pitois's work foreshadows Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1876) that preceded his study of the criminal woman.<sup>499</sup> Despite Lombroso's theories only surfacing at the end of the century (influencing writers such as Zola), Smith notes how early depictions of female criminals in literature, such as those to be found in the

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<sup>497</sup> Ryckère, p. 29.

<sup>498</sup> Unknown author, *Affaire d'Hélène Jégado*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>499</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 207.

works of Balzac and Sue, demonstrate that there was already a ‘clear-cut link between the physical and the moral’ in this period.<sup>500</sup> Dr Pitois shows how this was still the case in the middle of the century. The widespread circulation of Jégado’s trial transcriptions via the various newspapers’ coverage of the case (as previously stated at the start of this chapter) sought to confirm a growing nineteenth-century theory not only that medical observations of the body could detect criminality, but also that an analysis of the female servant’s body could show how she was inherently destined to commit crime(s).

In 1853, a year after Jégado’s trial, the phrenologist Armand Harembert picked up on her case, showing how the widespread reporting of Jégado’s case had raised her profile.<sup>501</sup>

Harembert criticizes Dr Pitois, arguing that

[il] a commis, je crois quelques erreurs. Il n’a pu bien connaître Hélène Jégado [*sic*]. C’est la comparaison de la manière dont était rompu l’équilibre de ses facultés primitives, avec le milieu dans lequel le sort l’avait placée, qui seule pouvait faire comprendre ce résultat épouvantable de la victoire remportée par la bête puissante sur une âme qui, pour être mise en rapport avec la terre, avec reçu de la nature un instrument imparfait et surtout mal dirigé; car les hommes doivent s’aider réciproquement, la civilisation doit les compléter.<sup>502</sup>

Harembert’s believed that the brain had two interior faculties:

ceux que j’ai appelés des facultés de l’âme: la pénétration, la conscience, le respect, l’imagination, l’harmonie, la mémoire des formes et celles de sons; et ceux des instincts, destinés à la conservation du corps, communs aux hommes et aux animaux: la prévoyance, la fermeté ou persévérance, la fierté, la sympathie, l’amour, le courage et l’alimentivité.<sup>503</sup>

He goes on to argue that ‘[c]e que l’on remarque d’abord chez [Jégado], ce qui dépasse les limites ordinaires, ce qui rompt l’équilibre de ses organes, ce qui l’empêche de ressembler à tout le monde, c’est la *fermeté* et la *fierté*; tout le reste de sa tête est dans des limites ordinaires.’<sup>504</sup> The reason behind this, he states, is that weaknesses, or a lack of activity in the faculties of the soul had been allowed to dominate her brain; thus, ‘la fermeté devient de

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<sup>500</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 209.

<sup>501</sup> Harembert, p. 13.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

*l'indépendance*, de *l'opiniâtreté*; la fierté dégénère en *orgueil*, *jalousie*, *envie*; la prévoyance se change en *ruse*, *mensonge*, *vol*; le courage et l'alimentivité, qui donnent la soif du sang, font naître la *cruauté*; la sympathie elle-même n'est plus qu'une disposition à contracter certaines habitudes.<sup>505</sup> Harembert's study also includes a diagram of Jégado's skull (Figure 1). Thanks to its widespread circulation, Jégado's criminal case not only spread the myth of the rebellious maidservant across France (with newspapers also circulating her crime in Toulouse for example), but also showed how this figure had become an object of both fear and fascination in the nineteenth century.

For Harembert, the makeup of Jégado's skull could have been altered by means of religious devotion as 'chez Hélène, l'*imagination* et l'*harmonie* sont très faibles, car alors la prière est incomplète',<sup>506</sup> '[l]a foi d'Hélène, incomplète, ne pouvait donc seule diriger les deux instincts dont la puissance a fait sa triste célébrité. La fermeté, devenue de l'indépendance, de l'opiniâtreté, a causé ce caractère entier qui l'a privée des sympathies dont, cependant, un organe assez développé lui donnait le besoin.'<sup>507</sup> Harembert argues that in the absence of the proper religious direction, the female servant allows the bestial part of her brain to take over: 'la bête, souveraine, fait de l'homme le plus méchant des animaux.'<sup>508</sup> This brings to mind the theories eventually applied to the human instinct by Zola, for example in *Thérèse Raquin* (1868) and *La Bête humaine* (1890) which explore the mechanical, involuntary, automatic aspects of human behaviour such as mankind's primitive instincts for destruction, aggression and passion.<sup>509</sup> Harembert writes within a Catholic framework that sought to moralize and control the female servant, mirroring the discourses

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<sup>505</sup> Harembert, p. 22.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., p. 40, emphasis in original.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>509</sup> See Rae Beth Gordon, 'La Bête Humaine: Zola and the Poetics of the Unconscious', in *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, ed. by Brian Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 152-68.

that surrounded Cornier's case. Harembert demonizes the figure of the female servant by showing that those who step away from God are inherently doomed due to alterations in their brains. He suggests to his readers that the figure of the female servant ought to remain devout as a way of preventing criminal behaviour. Harembert therefore highlights how religious discourse was also used as a way to reinforce the bourgeoisie's need to control the body and mind of the maidservant.

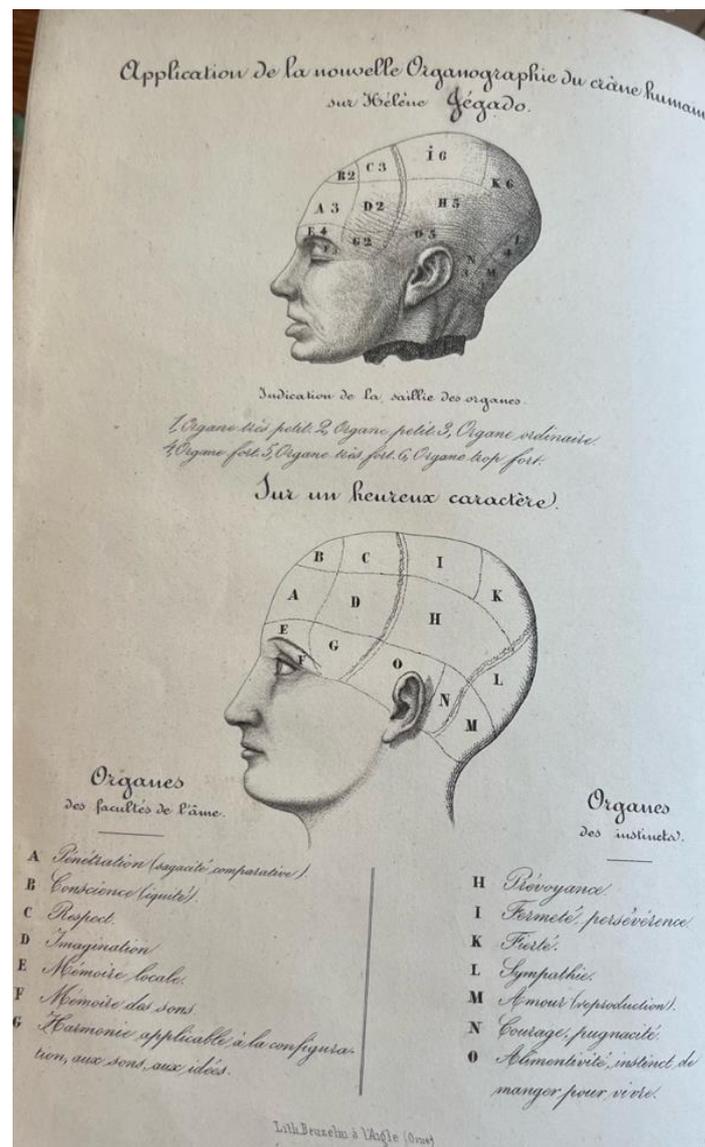


Figure 1: Harembert's diagram of Jégado's skull divided into her psychological attributes.

While Cornier's and Jégado's crimes help to show how the nineteenth-century social imaginary vilified and 'hysterized' the figure of the female servant, the last part of this chapter shows how the case of a real-life maidservant added to the bourgeois fear that the female servant was a dangerous lower-class woman seeking to take her revenge directly on her mistress by means of violence. As Chapter One explored, the bourgeoisie tied the imaginings of the female servant to the dangers emanating from women as well as the lower classes of society. The case of Céline Masson brings these imaginings to life by demonstrating a real-life account of a maidservant turning on her mistress by employing brutal violence. The depiction of this crime and its later appearance in a sociological report highlights how the period represented female servants as potentially deranged and violent on account of their class, gender and sexuality.

### **3. The Case of Céline Masson: The Violent Maidservant**

In his sociological report, *Domestiques et maîtres: Question sociale* (1896), the examining magistrate, Prosper-Georges-Marcelin Bouniceau-Gesmon, provides an example of a *fait divers* from an 1891 issue of the *Gazette des Tribunaux* that encapsulates bourgeois fears of a female servant who could physically lash out, and even kill, her masters and mistresses. This case study differs from that of Cornier and Jégado insofar as it involves the physical violence of a female servant directly targeting the mistress of the home. This real-life case of a physically violent maidservant helped further to construct this social imaginary of an unpredictable female figure capable of lashing out at any moment. Masson, and through her the figure of the violent female servant, passed from nineteenth-century newspapers into the sociological research of an examining magistrate as evidence for why master and servant relationships had to be improved. Yet while this report aimed to tighten the bonds between

masters and servants, it implicitly showed a need to distance the servant from the main household, creating a sense of dread around the figure of the female servant.

On 26 July 1891, Céline Masson was arrested for the following brutal crime against her new mistress:

Céline se jetait sur elle, et d'une violente poussée, essayait de la précipiter dans les puits. – La malheureuse tomba. Céline Masson, éteignant la lumière, la tira par les épaules et une lutte effroyable s'engagea dans l'obscurité entre les deux femmes. [...] L'abominable fille lui labourait le visage à coups d'ongles, la mordant avec rage et essayant de lui écraser la tête contre les pierres qui entouraient le bord du puits. – Bientôt épuisée et perdant connaissance, la jeune femme cessa de lutter, Céline Masson lui appuya un genou sur la poitrine, essaya de l'étrangler avec un bout de corde qui lui tomba sous la main, et la voyant enfin complètement évanouie et à sa merci, la précipita dans le vide. [...] Elle alla chercher deux ou trois pavés qui servaient à caler les tonneaux et les jeta dans les puits, comptant bien écraser la tête de sa victime ; mais celle-ci avait pu se mettre à l'abri dans une sorte d'anfractuosité, et les pierres l'effleurèrent sans l'atteindre.<sup>510</sup>

Masson was a long-standing servant who had fallen in love with her master before watching him marry another woman. This *fait divers* helped to add to the gendered discourse that demonized the rebellious maidservant in the social imaginary by categorizing the servant as an 'abominable fille'.<sup>511</sup> Not only was Céline Masson vilified by the word 'abominable', her overt sexuality was also implicitly referenced through her categorization as a 'fille' – also the word for a prostitute.<sup>512</sup> This non-literary document tied the maidservant's overt sexuality to her violence, providing a further reason for the bourgeoisie to seek to control the maidservant's body. Masson's crime of brutal violence also fed into larger discourses emanating from the Salpêtrière that connected female sexuality to hysteria; the patient and maidservant Augustine was reported to display fits of 'violent anger' as part of her symptoms.<sup>513</sup> This misogynistic discourse tied Augustine's violence to her sexual desires,<sup>514</sup>

<sup>510</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, pp. 262-63.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., p. 263

<sup>512</sup> Yates, p. 32.

<sup>513</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 128.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

as well as to her previous sexual traumas in the form of sexual assaults.<sup>515</sup>

Bouhiceau-Gesmon criticizes the justice system that gave Masson twenty years of hard labour rather than the death penalty.<sup>516</sup> He adds his misogynistic opinion that this violent female servant was an ‘infernale créature’ who had ‘mérité la mort’.<sup>517</sup> The *fait divers* encourages its readers to side against the servant by using emotionally charged language that sympathizes with the ‘malheureuse’<sup>518</sup> mistress. Yet the document purposefully contains no information surrounding the treatment of the servant in the household; we are left to imagine that the female servant is the one who is entirely in the wrong, lashing out due to her unstable mental state, her overt sexuality and her jealousy: Bouhiceau-Gesmon suggests that the maidservant had been ‘mordue au cœur par le serpent de la jalousie’.<sup>519</sup> Bouhiceau-Gesmon therefore connects this crime not only to the sexual desires of the maidservant, but also to the corrupting force of Eve, a figure analysed in Chapter Three in relation to representations of the fictional maidservant’s hair. The maidservant’s temperament is thus portrayed as unstable and uncontrollable: a further reason for the bourgeoisie to seek to control her mind, as Chapter Four explores.

Like *faits divers*, nineteenth-century household manuals also evoked the fear that, even though a maidservant might appear genuine, her personality was liable to sudden change given her susceptibility to hysteria. In her household advice manual, *Une maison bien tenue: conseils aux jeunes maîtresses de maison* – published in 1901, yet with the nineteenth-

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid., pp. 153, 160-63.

<sup>516</sup> Bouhiceau-Gesmon, p. 264.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

century female servant in mind – Marie Delorme describes her fear of an unexpectedly violent servant:

Après plusieurs essais, tous plus malheureux les uns que les autres, je finis par arrêter une fille de trente-cinq à quarante ans, parfaite cuisinière, ayant servi dans des maisons fort honorables, de bonne façon d'ailleurs, quoique d'un air un peu sombre. Elle avait les certificats les plus élogieux, signés par des personnes du pays ou des environs que je connaissais de nom. Les premiers jours, son service me parut répondre de tous points à ces promesses favorables, mais peu à peu son caractère devint bizarre, irascible, violent... Au bout de six semaines, je dus la renvoyer, et il me fallut l'intervention de la police pour la forcer à partir.<sup>520</sup>

Delorme's account comes as a warning to her fellow 'jeunes maîtresses de maison' in the form of the 'utile leçon' that their servant is not to be trusted;<sup>521</sup> the female servant represents a potential danger to the bourgeois household insofar as she will deceive the family into thinking that her fine behaviours are a reflection of her good character. Delorme suggests that one must be especially careful when hiring a maidservant as it is only once she has a secure footing in your household that her true nature reveals itself. Upon entering into the service of a different household, Delorme's servant 'avait voulu larder le valet de chambre à coups de couteau', and so the mistress of the home concludes: 'Et voilà comment, même ce que l'on voit, il ne faut pas toujours le croire.'<sup>522</sup> Delorme's manual does not simply advise her contemporaries to try and recognize a good, loyal servant from the outset in order to avoid possible servant unruliness; rather, it seeks to alert mistresses about the existence of rebellious, dangerous servants who infiltrate the home by misleading and manipulating them. Delorme's account suggests that the servant may even have mental health issues, echoing the discourses of hysteria surrounding Héléne Jégado and, before her, Henriette Cornier. Delorme serves as an example of how female, bourgeois writers show no affiliation with their gender, but rather their class ties them to the misogynistic discourses surrounding hysteria.

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<sup>520</sup> Marie Delorme, *Une maison bien tenue: Conseils aux jeunes maîtresses de maison* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1901), p. 74.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Towards the start of the period, Esquirol had shown a fascination for violent crimes committed by servants. He provides various examples of criminal cases in which servants purposefully set fire to their masters and mistresses' homes as acts of revenge,<sup>523</sup> or who end up as violent monomaniacs.<sup>524</sup> Towards the end of the period, Ryckère's criminological report is similarly filled with various examples of different servant crimes committed throughout the nineteenth century, including violent crimes. The publication of these different non-literary discourses throughout the century shows that the figure of the violent maidservant was forever present in the nineteenth-century social imaginary. These non-literary texts depicting the violent maidservant foreshadow the discourses that surrounded the Papin sisters' murder case in the twentieth century.<sup>525</sup> Their murders deployed the same excessive violence and energy against the figure of the bourgeois mistress (and her daughter): they ripped out the eyeballs of their victims and violently abused their bodies; yet in their case their crime was explicitly defined as class revenge.<sup>526</sup> Céline Masson's case was not presented as an example of class revenge, perhaps because the very idea of class revenge was deemed to be too dangerous to acknowledge in nineteenth-century France, with its repeated insurrections and revolutions. Rather, Bouniceau-Gesmon portrays it as an example of why the maidservant's affection for her master should not be ignored; he emphasizes the need to control the maidservant's sexuality in a bid to improve relations with her employers: the maidservant could otherwise become a threat to her mistress's life out of jealousy and the selfish desire to become the mistress of the household.<sup>527</sup> Like Barbey's fictional maidservant, Hauteclair, the servant who harbours affections for her master could thus become a potential threat to the home and consequently to class and power structures. As

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<sup>523</sup> Esquirol, II, 84, 86.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 792.

<sup>525</sup> See Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader, *The Papin Sisters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) for an extensive study on the case and its broad cultural resonance across French literature and cinema.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>527</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, p. 264.

Chapter Three shows, the bourgeoisie also feared that the female servant's affections would be reciprocated by the master, allowing her to become the *servante-maîtresse*.

Despite the murderous, violent criminal cases of real-life maidservants that were circulating during this period, nineteenth-century literary discourses seem to offer a different representation of the female servant. Whereas real-life maidservant cases overtly depict female servants brutally attacking and even murdering their masters and mistresses, the fictional maidservant protagonists of *le roman de la servante* seldom resort to physically violent *soulèvements*. The last section of this chapter seeks to answer the question of why there is this discrepancy between literary and non-literary documents that represent the female servant by arguing that the lack of physically violent revolts in *le roman de la servante* is a choice made by male bourgeois writers in order to keep the figure of the maidservant trapped within a masculinist economy.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 201.

### 3.1 A Contrast: (Non)Violent Fictional Maidservants in *le roman de la servante*

This chapter has argued that the use of poison – as employed by Barbey’s Hauteclair Stassin – fed into a larger discourse that stereotyped poison as a non-violent, discreet weapon used principally by women and servants insofar as it was deemed to be cowardly. In Balzac’s *Le Cousin Pons*, Madame Cibot explains that she will not risk murdering her master by means of violence or poison but that ‘elle fera pis, elle l’assassinera moralement, elle lui donnera mille impatiences par jour.’<sup>529</sup> Cibot also causes Pons to think that he is going mad.<sup>530</sup> Both fictional maidservants are shown to avoid explicitly lashing out at their masters and mistresses as a way of hiding their murderous acts and thus avoiding the guillotine. Maupassant’s short story, *Histoire d’une fille de ferme* (1881), is the only text within my category of *le roman de la servante* that contains an explicit example of a fictional maidservant lashing out directly at her master through violence. The first instance of this violent behaviour is directed against her lover and fellow servant, Jacques: ‘elle le gifla, forte [...] elle le frappa en pleine figure si violemment qu’il se mit à saigner du nez’.<sup>531</sup> Rose then revolts against the male violence of her master: ‘[il] la saisit par le cou et se mit à la frapper au visage à coups de poing’; ‘[a]lors elle eut un instant de révolte désespérée, et, d’un geste furieux le rejet[a] contre le mur’.<sup>532</sup> Rose, however, differs from the other servants in *le roman de la servante* in that she is a servant on a farm in the countryside. Maupassant presumes that rural class distinctions are not the same as those found in the bourgeois home in the city:

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<sup>529</sup> Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, p. 267.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>531</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *Histoire d’une fille de ferme*, in *Contes et Nouvelles de Maupassant publiés entre 1875 et mars 1884*, ed. by Louis Forestier, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1974-79), I, 225-44 (p. 227).

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 242.

Il ne pouvait d'ailleurs exister entre eux de scrupules de mésalliance, car, dans la campagne, tous sont à peu près égaux: le fermier laboure comme son valet, qui, le plus souvent, devient maître à son tour un jour ou l'autre, et les servantes à tout moment passent maîtresses sans que cela apporte aucun changement dans leur vie ou leurs habitudes.<sup>533</sup>

As we have already seen in Chapter One, the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie perceived the countryside as the place from which the lower and thus unruly classes, including that of the female servant, had migrated. The countryside is therefore deemed to be a more 'acceptable' place for this type of violence between a master and servant. Maupassant implies that the violence between the servant and her master ought not to be read as a moment of class revenge insofar as it is gender that separates the master and the servant in the countryside (and thus defines the power structure of this relationship) more than class status. The female servant is simply attacking a male predator.

Yet Maupassant's views on servant violence potentially explain one reason why physical violence is not inflicted in *le roman de la servante*. In the city, a violent action would be deemed as an unthinkable form of revolt against the bourgeoisie, and an unacceptable endorsement of the bourgeoisie's fears of female figures who violate not only their class positions, and thus the social hierarchy on which society is built, but also the gender norms that reinforce a sense of control over the women in nineteenth-century society. While Naturalist (and later Decadent) literature emphasized the figure of Woman as a threat to society and did not shy away from creating scandalous texts through the representations of gruesome details, the intersectionality embodied by the class and gender categories of the female servant character – a lower-class sexualized woman who then violently kills the bourgeois master in his own home – seems to represent a step too far in their works. As we shall see in Chapters Three and Four, the maidservant ultimately remains trapped within this logic as a way for male bourgeois writers to control the body and mind of the maidservant;

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<sup>533</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, I, 235.

she must finally remain a subservient female figure or be punished by the male author for her trajectory.

This lack of violence may also be a way for authors of *le roman de la servante* to distance themselves from the sensational aspects of popular literature – a genre that writers such as Stendhal, Flaubert and Zola all wished to distinguish themselves from, for example when Flaubert explicitly states that he fears he might ‘tomber dans le Paul de Kock’.<sup>534</sup> Popular novels were often presented with melodramatic excess, filled with violence, passion and plot twists, as well as violent lower-class women.<sup>535</sup> Marc Angenot analyses how, although ‘le roman populaire se développe en symbiose avec la presse et notamment avec le fait divers criminel, il ne peut manquer d’absorber les grands thèmes des fantasmes de ces années’.<sup>536</sup> One of these themes came from the brutal crimes committed by lower-class female figures, as Angenot notes: ‘[à] la fin des années 1880, un type de crime nouveau s’est mis à proliférer, les histoires de *vitrioleuses*: la femme abandonnée ou négligée qui, tapie dans une encoignure, attend son amant ou sa rivale et leur jette au visage une bouteille de vitriol. Le roman populaire et la peinture “de genre” s’empara vite de cette épidémie de vengeances atroces.’<sup>537</sup> These crimes were often committed ‘à l’intérieur du milieu ouvrier’ by a lower-class woman who had been seduced by the offer of marriage before being abandoned when pregnant.<sup>538</sup> While Chapter Four shows how the Goncourts foreshadowed this kind of crime by having their fictional maidservant heroine wish to commit the same crime against her lover’s new mistress, the Goncourts distinguish themselves from the press

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<sup>534</sup> O’Neil-Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace*, p. 1.

<sup>535</sup> O’Neil-Henry provides examples of violent lower-class female characters, sorcerers and *femme fatale* figures in Sue’s work (see *ibid.*, pp. 110-13).

<sup>536</sup> Marc Angenot, *Le Cru et le faisandé: Sexe, discours social et littérature à la belle époque* (Charleroi: Labor), p. 81.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*

and the popular literature by only allowing Germinie to commit this crime in her imagination. On the one hand, authors of *le roman de la servante* are acknowledging the popular tastes of the period by including borrowings from melodramas;<sup>539</sup> on the other hand, the authors of rebellious maidservant texts position themselves in opposition to melodrama by subverting its representation. One may think, in this instance, of how Stendhal acknowledged the difficulties of creating a literature that addressed the current popular tastes (and thus would sell his novels) whilst separating himself from this low-brow literature that he despised: ‘il est si difficile de faire un roman qui soit lu à la fois dans la chambre des bourgeoises de province et dans les salons de Paris.’<sup>540</sup>

The lack of explicit violence in *le roman de la servante* may also be a way for writers merely to suggest the threat posed by the maidservant: by only allowing fictional female servants to lash out violently in their imaginations, they retain a sense of ambiguity and latent danger with regard to the power of the lower-class female figure and her proximity to the bourgeois family. As the Conclusion will explain further, it is only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that the fictional female servant – through her modern avatars of the nanny, the cleaner and the maid – can fully act upon their violent desires in literature and other media such as cinema; for example, one may think of the dangerous secretary character Marie-France who manipulates her position in *bonne à tout faire* in Christophe Ali’s and Nicolas Bonilauri’s film *La Volante* (2015).

In his study, *Reading for the Plot* (1984), Peter Brooks argues that plots are the ‘motor forces that drive the text forward, of the desires that connect narrative ends and

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<sup>539</sup> O’Henry-Neil, *Mastering the Marketplace*, p. 2.

<sup>540</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 825 (‘Projet d’article sur *Le Rouge et le Noir*’).

beginnings, and make of the textual middle a highly charged field of force;<sup>541</sup> ‘[p]lots are not simply organizing structures, they are also intentional structures, goal-orientated and forward-moving.’<sup>542</sup> Read from this perspective, the plots of *le roman de la servante* are thus not purposefully building up to violent backlashes against the bourgeoisie; instead these plots drive their texts in a different direction. Their maidservant heroines rebel against their employers and their society’s oppressive mores by means of more discreet strategies of revolt. By reading the fictional maidservant’s revolt through Didi-Huberman’s theory of *soulèvements*, I argue in the subsequent chapters of this thesis that the maidservant does not obtain a sense of agency and freedom through physical violence, such as that deployed by Masson, but rather through more subtle methods of revolt. Nonetheless, these different discreet *soulèvements* do themselves contain a certain amount of ‘imagined’ violence. In the nineteenth century violence must remain as a threat that is only enacted in the fictional maidservant’s imagination, hence Didi-Huberman’s claim that ‘[o]n ne refuse, on ne désobéit, on ne se révolte, on ne se soulève pas sans violence, à quelque degré que ce soit.’<sup>543</sup> *Le roman de la servante* ultimately serves as a reflection on the bourgeoisie’s anxiety about their hegemony by seeking to reinforce the master and mistress’s power in the home by limiting the fictional maidservant’s explicit violence. The subsequent chapters explore this argument in depth as they analyse the fictional maidservant’s *soulèvements* and how these serve as an index of the social imaginary that surrounded (and to some extent continues to surround) the figure of the rebellious female servant. These *soulèvements* illustrate how literature fed into and reimagined the key discourses governing real-life maidservant cases that served to vilify and ‘hysterize’ the female servant. The fears surrounding the three real-life maidservants examined in this chapter are shown to enter the literature of the period

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<sup>541</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003 [1984]), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>542</sup> Brooks, p. 12.

<sup>543</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 183.

through *le roman de la servante*. Yet authors of *le roman de la servante* play with these discourses, engaging with and subverting the stereotypes, prejudices and rules surrounding the female servant in this period in order to provide a sense of freedom for their heroines. This thesis, however, concludes that this sense of freedom and autonomy must be considered as severely limited; not even in fiction could the maidservant entirely escape the constraints imposed on her by the social imaginary.

## Chapter Three

### The Maidservant Disguise: ‘*Un soulèvement gestuel*’

#### Introduction

‘Hauteclaire, devenue Eulalie, et la femme de chambre de la comtesse de Savigny! ... Son déguisement – si tant est qu’une femme pareille pût se déguiser – était complet.’<sup>544</sup>

This chapter seeks to identify and investigate how and why one of the stock maidservant protagonists featured in *le roman de la servante*, the ‘cross-class maidservant’,<sup>545</sup> helped to create and add to the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant in the nineteenth century. The cross-class maidservant protagonist differs from the other fictional rebellious female servant heroines in *le roman de la servante*. She is a heroine from either the bourgeois or aristocratic milieus of nineteenth-century society who revolts against her period’s social mores by donning the disguise of a maidservant. It is paradoxically through self-abasing, and thereby masking her true nature, that the fictional heroine obtains a sense of her autonomy and sexual freedom. The fictional heroines featured in Stendhal’s *Mina de Vanghel* (1829-30), Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette* (1846), Barbey d’Aurevilly’s ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’ (1871) and Maupassant’s *La Chambre 11* (1884) are therefore not nineteenth-century

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<sup>544</sup> Barbey d’Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 102 (‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’).

<sup>545</sup> Kirsti Bohata uses the term ‘cross-class disguise’ to describe how mistresses and maidservants crossed class boundaries by disguising themselves as each other in English literature. She goes on to describe how cross-class disguises were also used by middle-class investigators (philanthropists and tourists) to get closer to their lower-class subjects. This was also known as ‘slumming’. See Kirsti Bohata, ‘Mistress And Maid: Homoeroticism, Cross-Class Desire, and Disguise in Nineteenth-Century Fiction’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45:2 (2017), 341-59 (p. 342). Barbey labels his heroine ‘Hauteclaire-Eulalie’ to show her cross-class double identity when in disguise.

maidservant characters per se; rather, these female protagonists transgress class boundaries by manipulating the mask of a maidservant, and therefore the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the social imaginary of the female servant in this period.

This chapter first seeks to demonstrate how four authors of *le roman de la servante* play with the stereotypes and prejudices that constitute the female servant's appearance in the social imaginary. They transform the female servant disguise from a comedic topos found in eighteenth-century theatre into a tool of self-empowerment allowing nineteenth-century fictional heroines to revolt against their society's expectations and mores. I analyse how the maidservant disguise becomes part of the realist/Naturalist aesthetic as a manipulative, dangerous strategy of revolt that allows all four fictional heroines to reverse the roles of the subject and the object of desire, as well as to alter the power dynamic between masters and servants. This chapter applies Didi-Huberman's category of a 'soulèvement gestuel'<sup>546</sup> to the maidservant disguise in these narratives in order to read it as a form of revolt that consists of 'un mouvement du corps' of the fictional female body, as well as an 'acte, action'.<sup>547</sup> As a *soulèvement gestuel*, the maidservant disguise first alters the heroine's physical appearance. Through the process of play-acting, this *soulèvement* then leads the heroine to combine all her bodily movements in order to present herself as a convincing maidservant. These movements range from the ways in which the maidservant walks, runs, talks, cleans and positions herself in a room. It is thus through the combination of their physical appearance and their bodily movements that these four heroines rebel against the conventions imposed on aristocratic and bourgeois nineteenth-century women. While Didi-Huberman argues that '[o]n se soulève pour manifester son désir d'émancipation, non pour l'exposer comme un

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<sup>546</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 31.

<sup>547</sup> 'Geste', in *Le Petit Robert*, <<https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/geste>> [accessed 7 May 2021].

bibelot dans une vitrine, comme un vêtement dans un défilé de mode ou comme une “performance”<sup>548</sup> this chapter shows how all four fictional heroines revolt by performing the role of the female servant, thereby creating and redefining the stereotypes and prejudices that construct the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious female servant.

I situate the narratives of Stendhal, Balzac, Barbey and Maupassant alongside other discourses of the period, such as household manuals, *faits divers* and Ryckère’s criminological report in order to reveal how these writers were playing with (as well as feeding into) the socio-cultural construct that envisaged the female servant as a dangerous figure living in the shadows of the home. As Chapter One has already discussed, nineteenth-century society sought to erase the maidservant’s presence in the household; non-literary and literary texts reinforce the need to distance the lower-class female figure from the nuclear family, while also prescribing that her appearance be non-descript. Mina, Bette, Hauteclair and Madame Amandon manipulate the prescribed invisible presence of the female servant in order to step out of their aristocratic and bourgeois milieus and reject the plots imposed on them by other characters. This then allows them to remove themselves – albeit for a limited time – from the master’s male gaze.

While the concept of the ‘male gaze’ derives from Laura Mulvey’s film theory, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in which she describes how women in film are ‘a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies’,<sup>549</sup> Eliza Jane Smith has recently shown that Mulvey’s film theory can be applied to two nineteenth-century novels that focus respectively on the maidservant and the prostitute:

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<sup>548</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 27.

<sup>549</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by Constance Penley (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 57-68 (p. 58).

the Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) and Zola's *Nana* (1880).<sup>550</sup> While Smith acknowledges that 'film serves as the ultimate medium for revealing male projection, pleasure, and desire', she argues that Mulvey's theory can and should also be applied to nineteenth-century literary studies and, in my extrapolation, to *le roman de la servante*, insofar as fictional female characters are portrayed as provocative figures via a masculine perspective. By seeking to become an 'invisible' maidservant, and deter the male gaze, the cross-class maidservant heroine paradoxically draws attention to the female servant's body and her sexuality. The heroine stands out as a sexually deviant, audacious heroine whose identity as a maidservant becomes intertwined, in the period's imagination, with stereotypes of lower-class female figures such as the black woman, the prostitute, the *grisette* and the *servante-maîtresse*. This chapter thus seeks to analyse the eroticism of the master-servant relationship in which there is, as Apter points out, 'a servant-inspired erotic economy expressed through specific laws, codes'.<sup>551</sup> In particular, I analyse the eroticism of the maidservant's submission, as well as the sexual attraction surrounding her physical appearance. While the heroine begins to attract the gaze that she initially sought to deter, she does, however, manipulate it to her own advantage. By reading the maidservant disguise as a *soulèvement gestuel*, I therefore not only demonstrate how authors of *le roman de la servante* play into, as well as add to, the societal fears surrounding these female outsiders in the social imaginary of the dangerous female servant, but also deepen our understanding of how the myth of rebellious female servant is a hybrid socio-cultural construction – a figure created and reinforced by an amalgamation of various discourses circulating in this period.

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<sup>550</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, pp. 197-250.

<sup>551</sup> Apter, p. 178.

The duplicitousness of the maidservant disguise then sheds light on how nineteenth-century writers exemplify and reinforce two bourgeois fears: first, the anxiety that the female servant is an imposter in the home with the power to topple the social order; and second, the male bourgeois fear that women have the potential power to blur class distinctions through the manipulation of their physical appearance. In all four texts, there is an underlying uneasiness around the social chaos that may result if one can no longer clearly distinguish a woman's class from her physical appearance. The cross-class maidservant figure thus emerges as a dangerous threat to the existing social order insofar as she is a figure who can transcend and disrupt regimented class divisions. This protagonist consequently becomes a tool for male bourgeois writers to project their fears about women who are in pursuit of their own freedom, including sexual, or of revenge.

Despite the limited amount of freedom all four heroines obtain through inhabiting these stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the female servant, this form of revolt ultimately leaves them trapped within the masculine projections that construct the maidservant as a rebellious figure, as well as a sexual fantasy. This chapter therefore complicates Maria Scott's observation that Mina de Vanghel, and in my extrapolation, Bette, Hauteclaire and Madame Amandon, are entirely self-authoring heroines who frustrate their fellow characters', as well as the reader's, expectations.<sup>552</sup> Instead, I argue that my cross-class maidservant heroines ultimately remain confined as objects of a nineteenth-century male fantasy, or to use Eliza Jane Smith's term, a 'masculinist economy',<sup>553</sup> insofar as they either become sites of male pleasure insofar as they are eroticized figures of servitude, or are punished for their audaciousness.

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<sup>552</sup> See Scott, 'Mina, Vanina, and the Logic of the Strange Step', in *Stendhal's Less-Loved Heroines*, pp. 12-46.

<sup>553</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 200.

### The Cross-Class Maidservant as a Protagonist

Whereas Maupassant's short story *Rose* (1884) also focuses its plot on the maidservant disguise, donned by a male criminal to hide from the police, this chapter focuses on four narratives in which nineteenth-century women from the aristocratic and bourgeois milieus disguise themselves as maidservants and explores how four authors of *le roman de la servante* amplify larger contemporary debates concerning the fears of the female servant as a dangerous, sexually promiscuous figure. Written before *Le Rouge et le Noir*, between December 1829 and January 1830, and published posthumously in 1853, Stendhal's novella features Mina de Vanghel, the daughter of a Prussian general, who dons the disguise of a maidservant in order to live with her married lover, Alfred de Larçay. Barbey d'Aurevilly's short story 'Le Bonheur dans le crime', featured in his collection of short stories, *Les Diaboliques* (1874), also depicts a heroine, Hauteclaira Stassin, who plays the role of a maidservant in order to live alongside a married man, Serlon de Savigny. Yet Hauteclaira is not an aristocratic heroine like Mina de Vanghel. Barbey's heroine enjoys an ambiguous class identity that derives from her family heritage. Hauteclaira's father was 'un ancien prévôt du régiment',<sup>554</sup> and is highly respected by the old nobles of her town for his prowess as a fencer, which he displays by opening a new fencing school. Her mother was a local *grisette* – the term for a working-class woman also associated with prostitution.<sup>555</sup> Hauteclaira seems to sit in between the upper and lower classes of society, an ambiguity which is emphasized by her role as a fencing instructor (her unusual name is in fact given to her by her father after the name of Olivier's sword in *La Chanson de Roland*<sup>556</sup>). On the one hand, Hauteclaira's skill at fencing – an aristocratic pursuit – makes her appear aristocratic

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<sup>554</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 90.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 91.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 93.

and grants her access to an aristocratic milieu. On the other hand, as an instructor, Hauteclair is paid for her services and so associated with the servant class. The choice to don a maidservant disguise thus rids Hauteclair of any potential ties to the aristocracy; it degrades the heroine to the same level as her mother, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Mina and Hauteclair are both self-abasing heroines; they become cross-class maidservants in order to live with their married lovers, and to plot against the mistress of the household. Hauteclair even goes as far as using poison to kill her mistress: a murder weapon that the nineteenth century tied to cowardice and femininity due to its apparent discrete and non-violent nature as already noted in Chapter Two. While Philippe Berthier and Christine Marcandier-Colard have previously acknowledged the connection between *Mina de Vanghel* and 'Le Bonheur dans le crime', they do not explore the links between the two narratives.<sup>557</sup> These links have not otherwise been investigated by scholarship, even though it is known that Barbey was an enthusiastic reader of Stendhal ever since his first discovery of the author in the summer of 1838.<sup>558</sup> By drawing attention to the manipulation of the maidservant disguise as a *soulèvement gestuel* in *le roman de la servante*, this chapter demonstrates their close connections in terms of how they construct and develop the myth of the rebellious female servant by exploiting, as well as subverting, the stereotypes of other lower-class female figures. I then draw on examples from two other nineteenth-century literary texts which similarly depict the cross-class maidservant figure in two different plots.

Maupassant's short story, *La Chambre 11*, likewise depicts the tale of an upper-class woman who adopts the disguise of a maidservant. The *soulèvement gestuel* of the

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<sup>557</sup> See Philippe Berthier, 'Préface', in Stendhal, *Mina de Vanghel*, ed. by Philippe Berthier (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), pp. 7-16 (p. 12) and Christine Marcandier-Colard, *Crimes de sang et scènes capitales: Essai sur l'esthétique romantique de la violence* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), p. 87.

<sup>558</sup> See Manzini, *The Fevered Novel from Balzac to Bernanos*, p. 93.

maidservant disguise allows Madame Amandon to commit adultery, and thus provides her with a way of obtaining her sexual liberation. While Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* may initially seem like a departure from the previous texts insofar as it does not contain an explicit maidservant disguise or transformation scene, a more careful, in-depth reading demonstrates how Bette can and should also be considered as a cross-class maidservant, for she manipulates her ambiguous class status in order to plot inconspicuously under her family's noses and ultimately succeeds in destroying the bourgeois family from inside the home. Balzac blurs Bette's social identity between that of a working-class woman and a female servant when he describes how, as the poor relation, Bette first became an unpaid servant: her family 'avait immolé la fille vulgaire à la jolie fille, le fruit âpre à la fleur éclatante. Lisbeth travaillait à la terre, quand sa cousine était dorlotée'.<sup>559</sup> This practice was not uncommon in the nineteenth century when poor, unmarried relations were often taken in by wealthy family members who needed cheap labour.<sup>560</sup> While twentieth-century scholars explicitly focus on the heroine's unmarried status, labelling Bette an 'old maid' (or *vieille fille*),<sup>561</sup> Yates points out that there is a double meaning of 'old maid' that can also be extended to include Bette: '[o]ften, the two meanings coincided: a female servant was most often single, and conversely, an unmarried woman often played the role of unpaid domestic when living as a poor relation in lower- and middle-class homes.'<sup>562</sup> Although Yates connects her argument specifically to Mlle de Varandeuil in *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865), Bette also understands that she has become an unpaid member of the domestic help in the Hulots' home: 'Adeline et moi, nous

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<sup>559</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 73.

<sup>560</sup> Fairchild's appears to confuse Balzac's novel with Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867): 'Balzac's murderous Theresa Raquin is a nineteenth-century example of the poor relation taken in by better off relatives to do domestic chores' (p. 18).

<sup>561</sup> The following critical texts all refer to Lisbeth Fischer, seemingly unironically, as an 'old maid': H. J. Hunt, *Balzac's Comédie Humaine* (London: Atholone, 1964 [1959]), p. 380; Frederic Jameson, 'La Cousine Bette and Allegorical Realism', *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 241-52 (p. 248); David Bellos, *Balzac: La Cousine Bette* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1980), p. 12; Christopher Prendergast, *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 99, 107; Diana Knight, 'Reading as an Old Maid: *La Cousine Bette* and Compulsory Heterosexuality', *Quinquereme*, 12.1 (1989), 67-79.

<sup>562</sup> Yates, p. 32.

sommes du même sang, nos pères étaient frères, elle est dans un hôtel et je suis dans une mansarde'.<sup>563</sup> As Balzac points out at the end of the novel, 'les mansardes [sont] où couchaient les domestiques'.<sup>564</sup> As the plot progresses, Balzac also depicts how even in Valérie's home, Bette had obtained 'la position d'une parente qui aurait cumulé les fonctions de dame de compagnie et de femme de charge; mais elle ignorait les doubles humiliations qui, la plupart du temps, affligent les créatures assez malheureuses pour accepter ces positions ambiguës'.<sup>565</sup> The heroine is thus pushed to the margins of her milieu as a working-class woman who is viewed as a female servant: a *dame de compagnie* and a *femme de charge*. Rather than succumbing to the humiliations of this self-abasing position, Bette manipulates the invisibility it provides as part of her revenge plot. It is by acting as a dependent servant that Bette plots her revenge without raising suspicions: 'Elle n'avait donc qu'à pourvoir à son déjeuner et à son loyer; puis on l'habillait et on lui donnait beaucoup de provisions acceptables, comme le sucre, le café, le vin, etc.'.<sup>566</sup> Accordingly, Sharon Marcus uses her analysis of *La Cousine Bette* to argue that Bette should be read as masquerading as a servant:

Bette poses as a domestic angel in order to infiltrate and destroy several households, while Pons's constricted private space is invaded by female caretakers who dispossess him of everything he values: Bette can become a virtual *portière*, while Pons literally becomes the victim of one. [...] Bette, like a *portière*, always knows too much about what happens in each household, while other characters always know too little.<sup>567</sup>

Bette is indeed perceived by other characters in the novel as 'une bonne confidente', possessed of 'une fausse bonhomie'.<sup>568</sup> Donning the disguise of this *servante fidèle*, Bette becomes another example of how authors of *le roman de la servante* destroy the myth of the 'angel in the house' as discussed in Chapters One and Chapter Two. Marcus then compares

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<sup>563</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 75.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., p. 592.

<sup>565</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 232.

<sup>566</sup> Marcus, p. 77.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

Bette to the figure of the *portière*, making an implicit connection to the character of Madame Cibot in Balzac's pendant 'cousin' novel, *Le Cousin Pons*.<sup>569</sup> The *portière* is another type of servant who looks after the apartment building whilst also infiltrating the space of the home by taking on chores for the bourgeois families that live there.<sup>570</sup> Madame Cibot is paid extra to become the *femme de chambre* for Monsieur Pons and his friend, Schmucke.<sup>571</sup> Yet she too hides behind the mask of an 'ange gardien', or loyal maidservant, in order to steal from her master, and eventually to torture him emotionally. As Chapter Two argues, the maidservant cannot risk her own execution by killing her master by means of violence; thus Mme Cibot chooses to torture Pons emotionally so as to not leave any trace of her murder.<sup>572</sup> By hiding behind a similar servant mask, Bette finds out her family's secrets whilst remaining firmly on the outside of the family unit as an unsuspected figure of destruction.

In what follows, this chapter demonstrates how all four of my chosen fictional heroines manipulate the maidservant disguise in order to create a counterplot against the constraints placed on women in nineteenth-century society. This disguise provides Mina, Hauteclair, Mme Amandon and Bette with the power of invisibility associated with the maidservant, allowing them to commit crimes without being detected. The *soulèvement gestuel* thus allows the cross-class maidservant to gain a sense of freedom from the constraints of the aristocratic and bourgeois milieus of nineteenth-century society. Balzac's novel in particular also highlights how the maidservant disguise forms part of a strategy of revenge.

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<sup>569</sup> Balzac observes in his preface to *La Cousine Bette* that *La Cousine Bette* and *Le Cousin Pons* were 'comme deux jumeaux de sexe différent' (Balzac, *Cousine Bette*, p. 34).

<sup>570</sup> Marcus describes how the *portière* 'selected tenants for the landlord and collected rents; [...] she distributed mail, cleaned landings and entrances, did light housekeeping for some tenants (especially unmarried men); and she responded when tenants (who did not have keys to the main door) and visitors rang the bell' (p. 42).

<sup>571</sup> See Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, pp. 99-101.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 246.

# **1. Revolting through the Nineteenth-Century Maidservant Disguise: Creating Counterplots and Complots**

## **1.1 Maidservant Disguise: From Comic Topos to *soulèvement gestuel***

The foregrounding of the maidservant disguise in *le roman de la servante* can be traced back to eighteenth-century French comic theatre, as Chapter One has already noted, and its ‘servante de théâtre’. Marivaux’s *La Double Inconstance* (1723), *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard* (1730) and *Les Fausses Confidences* (1738), as well as Beaumarchais’ *Le Barbier de Séville ou la précaution inutile* (1772), serve as notable examples of plays that feature masters and mistresses who change roles with their servants in order to be seen and loved for their qualities, rather than for their noble status. The servant disguise deflects attention away from a character’s social rank, whilst providing that character with a sense of freedom and power. The traditional ending of such role-reversal comedies then reveals the characters’ original identities. For example, in his comedy, *L’Île des esclaves* (1725), Marivaux constructs a utopic world in which masters and servants trade places with comedic consequences. In *Souvenirs d’égotisme* (1832), Stendhal describes his admiration for such role-reversal comedies, when he discusses an 1826 London performance of Oliver Goldsmith’s *She stoops to conquer* (1773) which ‘m’amusa infiniment à cause du jeu de joues de l’acteur qui faisait le mari de Miss [Hardcastle] qui s’abaissait pour conquérir: c’est un peu le sujet de [*Fausses confidences*] de Marivaux. Une jeune fille à marier se déguise en femme de chambre.’<sup>573</sup> Mina de Vanghel’s maidservant disguise appears to originate in these works, as well as more indirectly in the works of Shakespeare and Florian.<sup>574</sup> Stendhal’s

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<sup>573</sup> Stendhal, *Souvenirs d’égotisme*, in *Œuvres intimes*, ed. by Victor Del Litto, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1981-82) II, 425-521 (p. 478).

<sup>574</sup> Philippe Berthier, ‘Mina de Vanghel: Notice, Notes et Variantes’, in Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2005), I, 938-55 (p. 940).

description of Mina's own role reversal makes use of this comedic theatricality within the text. Mina learns that the male object of her desire, Alfred, is leaving for Aix-en-Savoie (Aix-les-Bains) with his wife: 'Cette nouvelle fut une révolution dans l'esprit de Mina; elle éprouva un vif désir de voyager.'<sup>575</sup> The next paragraph announces that 'une dame allemande' and 'une femme de chambre' are arriving in Aix-en-Savoie without giving any further details as to their identities.<sup>576</sup> The servant's name, Aniken, is also introduced in the narrative without any explanation. The inattentive reader may therefore be deceived, viewing Aniken as Mina's maid. Stendhal, however, trusts the 'Happy Few' – his ideal readers, named in part after a quotation taken from Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* – to recognize that this servant is not all she appears; she easily bribes Madame Toinod with large amounts of money to place her 'dans une famille française'.<sup>577</sup> Mina therefore changes roles with her lady's companion, who was originally sent from the German court Mina grew up in to accompany the heroine on her quest to find a husband. Mina thus becomes the servant to her servant, in the same way that Silvia becomes her servant's servant in Marivaux's *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*. Stendhal's refusal to reveal his heroine's identity allows him to make use of comedic theatricality within his text. One can therefore agree with Francesco Spandri that 'le théâtre se trouve thématé dans ses romans [...] Les gestes, les tons et les mots des personnages stendhaliens construisent une dimension d'artifice susceptible sinon de détrôner le texte'.<sup>578</sup> For his part, Jean Prévost also argues that 'le déguisement de Mina, qui sert de nœud à l'intrigue, était un thème cher au cœur de Stendhal. Ce thème lui rappelait ses premières admirations théâtrales', as well as his attraction to actresses.<sup>579</sup> Yet as Emmanuel

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<sup>575</sup> Stendhal, *Mina de Vanghel*, in *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2005), I, 293-329 (p. 304).

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., I, 305.

<sup>578</sup> Francesco Spandri, *L'Art de komiker': Comédie, théâtralité et jeu chez Stendhal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), p. 75.

<sup>579</sup> Jean Prévost, *Essai sur les sources de Lamie. Les Amazones de Stendhal. Le Procès de Lacenaire* (Lyon: Imprimeries réunies, 1942), p. 16.

de Waresquiel points out in his recent study, *J'ai tant vu le soleil* (2020), Henri Beyle may have even adopted this disguise himself in order to get closer to his future mistress, Angela.<sup>580</sup> Stendhal's cross-class maidservant heroine also wishes to gain the same intimate access to her lover: '[v]oir et entendre à chaque instant l'homme dont elle était folle était l'unique but de sa vie: elle ne désirait pas autre chose'.<sup>581</sup> Yet operating within the realm of the nineteenth-century realist novel, rather than the comic play, the maidservant differs from her eighteenth-century counterpart. She has become corrupt and malicious, destabilizing the essentially comedic figure of the 'servante de théâtre'.

'Le Bonheur dans le crime' provides an example of how the 'servante de théâtre' has become destabilized in the nineteenth-century text:

Mais, outre que les patriciennes de V..., aussi fières pour le moins que les femmes des paladins de Charlemagne, ne supposaient pas (grave erreur; mais elles n'avaient pas lu *Le Mariage de Figaro*!) que la plus belle fille de chambre fût plus pour leurs maris que le plus beau laquais n'était pour elles, je finis par me dire, en quittant l'étrier, que la comtesse de Savigny avait ses raisons pour se croire aimée, et qu'après tout ce sacripant de Savigny était bien de taille, si le doute la prenait, à ajouter à ces raisons-là.<sup>582</sup>

Barbey links his text to Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro*, a comedy in which the mistress and the maidservant also trade identities. Barbey is further indicating, through this connection to eighteenth-century comedy, that it is the maidservant's charming looks in combination with her inferior position that will allow her to attract her master's eye. The self-reflexive dimension of this quotation allows us to see that the 'grave erreur' was that of the countess for not realizing that beautiful maidservants attract the master's eye, just as handsome lackeys may attract hers. This is a theme that is explored later in this chapter with

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<sup>580</sup> See Emmanuel de Waresquiel, *J'ai tant vu le soleil* (Paris: Gallimard, 2020), in which he states that 'Angela le rend idiot. Il compte les minutes qui le séparent d'elle. Ces moments-là lui sont insupportables. Un jour, il s'accroche à l'arrière de sa voiture déguisé en laquais, un autre il lui subtilise une lettre qu'elle avait glissée dans un livre de sa bibliothèque' (p. 53).

<sup>581</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 309.

<sup>582</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 104.

the emergence of the *servante-maîtresse* in the nineteenth century. Yet in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Suzanne was not a typically loyal ‘servante de théâtre’; she plots her revenge against her master with her fellow servant and her betrothed, Figaro. The intertextual reference to Beaumarchais’s play suggests that this rebellious comic female servant figure is taken up again in the form of Barbey’s protagonist, Hauteclaira Stassin. Rather than serving as a mere reincarnation of the rebellious Suzanne, however, Hauteclaira becomes a much more dangerous figure in the nineteenth-century text. With the help of her married lover (and master), she poisons her rival and mistress, Delphine de Cantor, killing her in cold (as opposed to hot) blood, a distinction already explored in my analysis of the use of poison in Chapter Two. Becoming the principal protagonist of the novel, the rebellious female servant character plots against her mistress in the cruellest way possible, as also shown in Stendhal’s novella when Mina stages Madame Larçay’s affair in order to ruin her marriage with Alfred. While maidservant disguises therefore allow both Hauteclaira, Mina and, as we shall see, Madame Amandon to rid themselves of their social status in order to attract men who might otherwise feel threatened by their high social standing, as well as their wealth and their influence, they also provide the rebellious maidservant character with new agency as part of the new subgenre of *le roman de la servante*. Authors of *le roman de la servante* thus show how the comic topos of the maidservant disguise served as a direct influence on their realist plots. They repurpose this comic topos in order to create a rebellious cross-class maidservant figure; she revolts against the expectations placed on women in nineteenth-century society by donning the maidservant disguise and displaying the prescribed characteristics of a prevailing socio-cultural construct. By analysing how this topos passes generically from eighteenth-century theatre to nineteenth-century prose fiction, and therefore from comedy to realism and then Naturalism, we can see how the nineteenth-century maidservant disguise becomes part of the realist/Naturalist aesthetic of the novel as a ‘serious’ *soulèvement gestuel* on the part of

fictional heroines. As Chapter One has already set out, the maidservant became a protagonist as part of the nineteenth-century realistic aesthetic that sought to engage with working class characters. In particular, representations of the maidservant disguise in Stendhal, Balzac, Maupassant and Barbey feed into this realist representation. As we shall see, this disguise evokes fears of the possible danger posed by the figure of the female servant; the maidservant disguise thus allows nineteenth-century writers not only to break with previous conventions that saw the lower classes as unworthy subjects, but also to draw attention to the threat posed by the female servant.<sup>583</sup>

By analysing how all four of my chosen literary heroines implement this method of revolt in their respective plots, Stendhal, Balzac, Maupassant and Barbey provide their protagonists with an apparent means of escape from the oppressive nineteenth-century social mores that were imposed on aristocratic and bourgeois women. The *soulèvement gestuel* enacted by the cross-class maidservant allows her to turn herself into the subject as opposed to the object of desire, thereby reversing the prevailing power dynamics between men and women, masters and servants.

## **1.2 A Revolt Against Nineteenth-Century Social Mores**

The *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise allows all four of my cross-class maidservants to rise up against the aristocratic and bourgeois social mores of nineteenth-century society. Mina uses her maidservant disguise to escape the *ennui* produced by these mores within the confines of her aristocratic milieu.<sup>584</sup> Her revolt through role play allows her

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<sup>583</sup> Baguley, p. 47.

<sup>584</sup> Scott also observes how '[a]ll [of Stendhal's heroines] are prone to *ennui* and frustration', p. 16.

to escape the constraints of her society that seeks to trap her in a marriage plot. Both Mina's mother and the German court wish to secure the heroine's position within the German aristocracy and so seek to arrange Mina's marriage. Mina, however, wants to marry for true love and not for social status. Stendhal connects this rebellion to his Romantic cliché regarding the heroine's German origins: 'Il y avait une grande objection: les Allemandes, même les filles riches, croient qu'on ne peut épouser qu'un homme qu'on adore.'<sup>585</sup> As Scott points out, this was no small demand, '[i]n the France of the 1820s and 1830s, by contrast, so severely was women's emotional freedom curtailed both by law and by custom that the "droit d'aimer" was one of the prime demands of defenders of women's rights such as George Sand and Marie d'Agoult.'<sup>586</sup> Yet for Stendhal, 'le pays du monde où il y a le plus de mariages heureux [...] Incontestablement c'est l'Allemagne protestante.'<sup>587</sup> Having been born 'dans le pays de la philosophie et de l'imagination',<sup>588</sup> Mina 'conserva le naturel et la liberté des façons allemandes',<sup>589</sup> which stand in firm contrast with the manners of the 'femme française' who possesses 'une politesse extrême', but that is no more than a façade: 'et après six semaines de connaissance, [Mina] était moins près de leur amitié que le premier jour'.<sup>590</sup> Mina's German heritage<sup>591</sup> serves as a possible alibi for the heroine's outrageous actions later in the novel; as a foreigner, Mina is an outsider, and therefore does not fit into the strict social mores of French Restoration society.<sup>592</sup> Her escape to Paris, and subsequently to Alfred's

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<sup>585</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 302. Stendhal repeatedly argues in his work that, in the nineteenth century, only Romantic Germany and Italy can still produce examples of aristocratic and bourgeois young men and women marrying for love.

<sup>586</sup> Scott, 'Performing Desire: Stendhal's Theatrical Heroines', *French Studies*, 62 (2005), 259-70 (p. 261).

<sup>587</sup> Stendhal, *De l'Amour* (Paris: Garnier, 1959 [1822]), p. 222.

<sup>588</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 297.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 302.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 299.

<sup>591</sup> Victor Del Litto notes that Beyle had read about 'les "mœurs des dames allemandes"' in *Mme de Staël's De l'Allemagne* (1813). See *La Vie Intellectuelle de Stendhal: Genèse et évolution de ses idées, 1802-1821* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1997, [1962]), pp. 469-70.

<sup>592</sup> Stendhal even goes as far as hiding his authorship of the story by means of a similar alibi: in the preface to *Mina de Vanghel*, he claims that the story is a 'conte imité du danois de M. Oehlenschläger' in which '[l]e traducteur n'a connu ce conte que par les vives critiques des journaux allemands qui trouvent l'auteur immoral et lui reprochent un "systeme". On a cherché à diminuer la saillie de ces défauts.' (*Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 293-94 [*Mina de Vanghel*]).

home in the guise of a maidservant, functions as a revolt against the duties and conventions imposed on women by Restoration society; the maidservant disguise therefore allows the heroine to follow her passions.

Stendhal's narrative rejects the traditional conventions surrounding Restoration fiction in which it is the male hero, such as Julien Sorel, who is the self-inventing protagonist who decides his own destiny. Francesco Manzini makes a similar point when he suggests that *Mina de Vanghel*, alongside *Armance* (1827) and *Vanina Vanini* (written between 1827 and 1829 and published in December 1829) 'together pose the problem of the male Restoration hero, a problem the female titles of these works were presumably intended to underline.'<sup>593</sup> As a woman, Mina therefore challenges the very idea of a Restoration hero. After falling in love with the married Alfred de Larçay, she rejects societal expectations by disguising herself as a maidservant. Mina comments on her transformation by asking a rhetorical question: 'Est-ce ma faute si la recherche du bonheur, naturelle à tous les hommes, me conduit à cette étrange démarche?'<sup>594</sup> She is therefore contradicting Juliet Flower MacCannell's observation that 'In Stendhal it is always only the men who seek "*le bonheur*". Women in his writings never entertain these illusions.'<sup>595</sup> As a method of revolt, the maidservant disguise allows Mina to escape this *ennui* of attending balls and socializing in salons and to follow her own path, much to the frustration of the other characters in Stendhal's novella.

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<sup>593</sup> Manzini, *Stendhal's Parallel Lives* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 280.

<sup>594</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 307.

<sup>595</sup> Juliet Flower MacCannell, 'Stendhal's Woman', *Semiotic*, 48.1-2 (1984), 143-68 (p. 160) (with my emphasis).

Bette also adopts her disguise as part of her *soulèvement gestuel* in order to escape the expectations placed on her as a bourgeois woman in nineteenth-century society and to revolt against the plots that her family try to impose on her. Like Mina, Bette rejects the marriage plots that other characters in her novel try to place upon her. The heroine refuses the four potential suitors that Hulot finds for her: ‘[c]et esprit rétif, capricieux, indépendant, l’inexplicable sauvagerie de cette fille, [...] lui méritait le surnom de Chèvre que le baron lui donnait en riant.’<sup>596</sup> Bette is mocked by her family for rejecting their conventional marriage plots; she becomes the object of their rude jokes that serve to animalize her. Yet these insults also show a sense of frustration towards Bette’s refusal of the marriage plot, and thus, a sense of her family’s own societal imprisonment – ostensibly written in conservative support of the family, *La Cousine Bette* paints a bleak picture of family relations and the institution of marriage, which in no way works out to the advantage of Adeline Hulot. Instead, Bette as the heroine chooses her freedom by living separately to her family in a hovel-like home. Like Mina de Vanghel and Hauteclair Stassin, Bette experiences freedom by escaping her family’s surveillance and gaining a sense of power from her ability to observe them, herself unobserved thanks to her disguise. By lowering her to the level of an unpaid servant who comes and goes at her own will, the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant mask that she adopts paradoxically allows Bette to guard her independence.

Balzac also claims that Adeline had tried to involve Bette in a different plot: she had ‘l’intention de l’arracher à la misère en l’établissant.’<sup>597</sup> Hulot places ‘Lisbeth en apprentissage chez les brodeurs de la cour impériale’,<sup>598</sup> yet the heroine then rejects the opportunity to progress through the ranks of the Pons brothers’ business. Hulot ‘la crut

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<sup>596</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 79.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*

folle'.<sup>599</sup> An initial reading shows that Bette's refusal came from her fears of the Restoration: '[I]'olivier de la paix que tenaient à la main les Bourbons effraya Lisbeth, elle avait peur d'une baisse dans ce commerce'.<sup>600</sup> Yet, a second reading suggests that in rejecting 'les diverses chances de l'industrie',<sup>601</sup> Bette refuses to comply with another plot that has been imposed on her by her family. The heroine thus refuses to be trapped in a future that others have created for her:

Cette fille avait en effet peur de toute espèce de joug. Sa cousine lui offrait-elle de la loger chez elle?... Bette apercevait le licou de la domesticité; maintes fois le baron avait résolu le difficile problème de la marier; mais séduite au premier abord, elle refusait bientôt en tremblant de se voir reprocher son manque d'éducation, son ignorance et son défaut de fortune; enfin, si la baronne lui parlait de vivre avec leur oncle et d'en tenir la maison à la place d'une servante-maîtresse qui devait coûter cher, elle répondait qu'elle se marierait encore bien moins de cette façon-là.<sup>602</sup>

Bette realizes that moving into Adeline's house will put an end to her freedom to come and go as she pleases. Accepting a position in Adeline's home under these terms would also force Bette to abide by her family's rules, making her feel even more trapped. The heroine therefore seems to reject the plots that would force her either to become a wife or a live-in servant on the terms of others. By means of her choice of disguise, however, Bette retains control over when she enters and leaves the bourgeois home, much like Madame Cibot in *Le Cousin Pons*. It becomes the heroine's choice to manipulate her obscure class position and enter her family's homes freely and inconspicuously in the guise of the servant-like character that her family clearly perceives her to be. Therefore, when Balzac states that 'On croyait cette pauvre fille dans une telle dépendance de tout le monde, qu'elle semblait condamnée à un mutisme absolu',<sup>603</sup> the writer hints at how the heroine's form of revolt plays on her milieu's jaded perceptions. Bette takes advantage of her blurred class status only to appear as

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<sup>599</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 74.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid., p. 78, with my emphasis.

dependent: ‘elle avait fini par comprendre la vie en se voyant à la merci de tout le monde’.<sup>604</sup>

Yet this dependency is not the truth behind her mask. Rather, Bette seeks to construct her own revenge plot in order to cause the downfall of the bourgeois family. She will only become her family’s servant in so far as it serves her own plot; it must be the heroine’s choice to self-degrade rather than that of her family to degrade her.

Hauteclair’s and Madame Amandon’s *soulèvements gestuels* also trigger the frustration of their societies for going against the strict nineteenth-century social expectations placed on bourgeois women. Maupassant’s third-person narrator describes the elegance of Madame Amandon at the start of the short story, noting that ‘[j]amais on ne l’avait suspectée, jamais on n’aurait pensé que sa vie n’était pas limpide comme son regard, un regard marron, transparent et chaud, mais si honnête – vas-y voir!’<sup>605</sup> The repetition of ‘jamais’ highlights the shock that comes from the deceptive appearance of the heroine. She has defied her society’s conventions by stepping out of her role as bourgeois woman, and self-abasing in order secretly to live her sexually frivolous lifestyle. Hauteclair’s flight is similarly deemed as scandalous by her society. Doctor Torty acts as the representative of the townsfolk living with the shock of her disappearance, emphasizing their confusion by means of a series of questions: ‘pourquoi?... comment?... où était-elle allée? [...] Comment, et avec qui, cette fille si correcte et si fière s’en était-elle allée?... Qui l’avait enlevée? Car, bien sûr, elle avait été enlevée...Nulle réponse à cela.’<sup>606</sup> The ellipses that follow these questions illustrate the lack of clarity with regard to Hauteclair’s situation. Torty continues: ‘C’était à rendre folle une petite ville [...] on l’avait jugée incapable de disparaître *comme ça*... Puis, encore, on perdait

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<sup>604</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 77.

<sup>605</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La Chambre II*, in *Contes et Nouvelles*, ed. by Louis Forestier, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1974-79 [1884]), II, 393-400 (p. 393).

<sup>606</sup> Barbey d’Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 98.

une jeune fille qu'on avait cru voir vieillir ou se marier, comme les autres jeunes filles de la ville.<sup>607</sup> With the use of free indirect speech, we see the villagers' frustration and anger running through these lines. Just as Mina, Bette and Madame Amandon defy their societies by donning maidservant disguises, so Hauteclair disrespects her society's expectations and the conventions that have been placed on her as a woman. Her actions, however, clearly do not please the townsfolk, who realize that Hauteclair has acted against their society's code. She has left them dumbfounded, without any explanations or motivations for her actions. Frustration also arises from the townsfolk's belief that they knew the true Hauteclair, a belief the doctor admits he also shared.<sup>608</sup> By only revealing one side of their mask, all four cross-class maidservants infuriate those who thought they knew their 'true' character.<sup>609</sup> The *soulèvement gestuel* therefore allows all four heroines to rise up against their societies and exasperate those around them.

Yet these heroines differ from other more conventional literary heroines who seek to escape the traditional marriage plot by retreating to convents, as for example Balzac's heroine in *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1834). At the beginning of *Mina de Vanghel*, Stendhal's heroine initially states she would rather change 'religion et aller mourir religieuse dans le fond de quelque couvent catholique' than marry for anything less than true love.<sup>610</sup> In her study on convent spaces in France, Barbara R. Woshinsky notes that 'the convent offered an alternative for women, a feminine space where they were sometimes able to achieve a

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<sup>607</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 98-99.

<sup>608</sup> M. l'abbé de Frilair in *Le Rouge et le Noir* faces a similar sense of frustration when faced with Julien's actions. He is surprised that the same man he thought possessed good qualities was also able to shoot Madame de Rênal. But Frilair is even more shocked that he does not in fact understand a man he thought he knew: 'Ce Julien est un être singulier, son action est *inexplicable*, pensait M. de Frilair, et rien ne doit l'être pour moi...' (Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 763 with my emphasis).

<sup>609</sup> This is also a theme found in Maupassant's *Rose* (1884) in which the heroine is disgusted that a criminal deceived her into believing he was a loyal maidservant.

<sup>610</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 298.

degree of agency and autonomy – sheltered, if never wholly free, from the male gaze and male control.<sup>611</sup> Mina, however, ultimately seeks to create her own plot. By donning a ‘costume bizarre’,<sup>612</sup> she and the three other cross-class maidservants featured in this chapter attempt to conceal themselves from becoming the object of the male gaze by means of a *soulèvement gestuel*, rather than by retreating to a convent. These heroines therefore prefer to take on great risk, and thereby effect a greater revolt against the conventions set by their society, by rejecting the traditional convent plot. Mina claims that the courage of her ancestors ‘me jette, moi, au milieu des seuls dangers qui restent, en ce siècle puéril, plat et vulgaire, à la portée de mon sexe’.<sup>613</sup>

Scott likewise argues that Stendhal’s *Mina de Vanghel* and *Vanina Vanini* offer two examples of narratives in which the writer ‘repeatedly represents their desire for self-authorship as a kind of counter-plot, that is, as a reaction against the constraints imposed by the plans and plots of others.’<sup>614</sup> While I have shown how the maidservant disguise functions as a *soulèvement gestuel*, and thus a way for Mina, and by extension, Bette, Hauteclair and Madame Amandon, to construct their counterplots against the expectations placed on women in nineteenth-century society, it is questionable whether we can accurately describe these plots as a form of ‘self-authorship’. As the rest of this chapter seeks to show, the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise is inherently connected to the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant; her invisibility originates in the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding this lower-class female figure as a dangerous spy in the home, or a potential

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<sup>611</sup> Barbara R. Woshinsky, *Imagining Women’s Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>612</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 306.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 307.

<sup>614</sup> Scott, *Stendhal’s Less-Loved Heroines*, p. 18.

criminal in disguise.<sup>615</sup> As we shall see in what follows, all four heroines manipulate, as well as add to, this social imaginary as part of their revolt, while finally remaining trapped within it.

## **2. The Cross-Class Maidservant Manipulating and Adding to the Social Imaginary of the Rebellious Servant**

### **2.1 The Female Servant as a Criminal in Disguise**

The maidservant disguises in the plots of *Mina de Vanghel*, *La Cousine Bette*, ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’ and *La Chambre 11* reflect and develop the period’s existing fears of the female servant as a criminal in disguise. Stendhal, Balzac, Barbey and Maupassant each depict the female servant disguise as a persona that can be donned in order to commit either crimes or adultery in the private sphere of the home. As Chapter Two has shown, the press, trial reports, criminological reports and doctors’ reports following on from three real-life maidservant crimes spanning the century helped to disseminate the social imaginary of the female servant as a criminal woman who hides behind the persona of ‘the angel in the house’. These discourses ultimately debunked the figure of the loyal servant, showing it to be no more than a myth. The literary cross-class maidservant texts likewise contribute to the destruction of this image of the loyal servant in the nineteenth-century imagination.

Stendhal’s *Mina* provides an example of how the maidservant can be hired mistakenly based on a false impression that she succeeds in creating: ‘[I]’air sérieux de la jeune

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<sup>615</sup> The servant as a dangerous spy is also a secondary character in other nineteenth-century novels such as Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir*. The maidservant character, Élisabeth, who is in love with Julien, spies on him and her mistress, later causing the discovery of their secret affair.

Allemande plut à Mme Larçay'.<sup>616</sup> As the cross-class maidservant slowly begins to step out of her role, 'elle reconnut avec plaisir que sa nouvelle maîtresse ne voyait en elle qu'une fille moins habile à la couture que la femme de chambre qu'elle avait laissée à Paris.'<sup>617</sup> Mina revels in the deception she has created in her role as a servant; her mistress now merely believes her to be an insolent servant, rather than a threat lurking behind a disguise. In 'Le Bonheur dans le crime', Hauteclair's mistress is also deceived into believing she has hired a trustworthy maidservant: 'elle me sert fort bien [...] C'est une perfection de femme de chambre. Je ne crois pas qu'elle ait un défaut'.<sup>618</sup> Dr Torty repeatedly labels Hauteclair 'la fausse Eulalie'<sup>619</sup> in order to emphasize that she had fooled her mistress completely; he even goes so far as to label the mistress a 'dupe'.<sup>620</sup> These examples feed into the fears of hiring a dangerous maidservant who hides behind a mask of loyalty circulated by nineteenth-century household manual writers such as Marie Delorme, discussed in Chapter Two.

Ryckère's criminological report builds on this social imaginary by suggesting that entire networks of female criminals are hiding under the masks of maidservants:

[l]es criminelles d'habitude sont, entre autres, les servantes qui font partie de ces associations de malfaiteurs qui mettent les maisons de maîtres en coupe réglée et fabriquent de fausses pièces d'identité et de faux certificats à l'usage de leurs affiliées qui sont introduites dans la place.<sup>621</sup>

The criminologist goes on to describe a specific nineteenth-century *fait divers* in which the role of the maidservant was entirely manipulated for monetary gain. Madame Fernande K..., a German woman who 'ouvrait, au commencement de l'année 1888, un bureau de placement pour domestiques, aux Batignolles, à Paris', forged the *certificat* '[d]es filles les moins

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<sup>616</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 305.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 308.

<sup>618</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 107.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 105, 106.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 106.

<sup>621</sup> Ryckère, p. 3.

recommandables’<sup>622</sup> in order to place them in well-respected, wealthy homes. In April 1889, it was then reported that one of Fernande K...’s maidservants, Eugénie D..., ‘Après quelques jours de service, [...] disparaissait enlevant pour 3.000 francs d’argenterie et de bijoux.’<sup>623</sup> It was later declared that ‘La dame K... était associée avec les domestiques —presque toutes des filles de mauvaise vie du quartier ; — elle leur fournissait des certificats et partageait le produit de leurs vols.’<sup>624</sup> Ryckère’s report uses this *fait divers* as an example of maidservant criminality, and warns his bourgeois readership of the use of the *faux certificat*. As Martin-Fugier explains, the *faux certificat* would extol the ideal qualities of a servant, subsequently luring masters and mistresses into allowing a potential criminal or even the mentally deranged to enter their home.<sup>625</sup> Yet it became normal practice for a *certificat* purposely to omit certain information, such as the reasons for the servant leaving his or her previous employment.<sup>626</sup> Although an explanation of a servant’s motivation to transfer between households ought to have been invaluable information for a master or mistress seeking a reliable servant, it became an ever less common feature of the *certificat* as it often resulted in conflict between masters, mistresses and servants.<sup>627</sup> Ryckère’s criminological report thus adds to the fears of that the maidservant may in fact have a hidden agenda, manipulating her position in order to plot against the bourgeois household.

Stendhal’s fictional auberge owner, Madame Toinod, can be read as providing an early example of a servant placement service, of the kind eventually provided by *bureaux de placements* proper. These were placement services that specialized in the hiring of domestic

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<sup>622</sup> Ryckère, p. 117.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Martin-Fugier, p. 66.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>627</sup> Martin-Fugier provides examples of various real-life cases in which servants summoned their masters and mistresses to court over the disapproving comments in their *certificat*. These criticisms had prevented the servant from obtaining further employment; the court cases resulted in the masters and mistresses being fined fifty francs each. (See *ibid.*, pp. 65-66).

employees, charging servants a fee to find them a position.<sup>628</sup> There had been no need for this kind of service in previous centuries as the turnover of servants had been small: they had often remained in just one household their entire lives.<sup>629</sup> By contrast, the nineteenth-century *bureaux de placement* took advantage of the fact that this period saw a large turnover of female servants, charging the latter large fees that led to their financial ruin.<sup>630</sup> Mirbeau's literary maidservant protagonist, Célestine, describes these fears as a 'un abominable vol'.<sup>631</sup> The *bureaux de placement* sought to reassure masters and mistresses that they were hiring reliable and trustworthy servants by claiming to have previously interviewed the potential employee before recruiting them.<sup>632</sup> Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* includes several scenes set in a *bureau de placement*, seemingly inspiring a similar scene in Léon Frapié's *La Figurante* (1908). Much earlier in the century, Stendhal had already shown how easily Mina could manipulate this kind of system in order to obtain a position in Alfred's home. The disguised heroine bribes Madame Toinod with forty francs on top of her regular charge of sixty francs and promises to deposit a further 'vingt louis d'or'<sup>633</sup> with her new master and mistress as a pledge of her loyalty. After she has paid Mme Toinod, Stendhal finally reveals that Aniken is in fact our heroine. He humorously shows the easy success of Mina's manipulation whilst also poking fun at his narrative structure: '[l]e hasard favorisa le roman qui avait déjà coûté deux ou trois cent louis à Mlle de Vanghel.'<sup>634</sup> This self-reflexive dimension foregrounds the way in which Mina's plot is put into motion by her bribe; Stendhal's heroine is miraculously hired by her lover who also happened to be looking for a

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<sup>628</sup> Martin-Fugier states that this rule was in place until 1904; thereafter, it was the masters and mistresses who had requested a servant who were required to pay this fee (p. 49).

<sup>629</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>630</sup> Martin-Fugier notes how the 'bureaux de placement municipaux' were created in 1848 to prevent this exploitation. (See *ibid.*, pp. 50-51).

<sup>631</sup> Mirbeau, p. 346.

<sup>632</sup> Martin-Fugier, p. 50.

<sup>633</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 305.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*

servant at precisely the right time. The reader is ironically told that ‘[e]nfin parut Aniken dont les cent francs avaient redoublé l’adresse naturelle de Mme Toinod.’<sup>635</sup>

## **2.2 The Fear of the Maidservant’s Gaze**

In her household management guide for mistresses (1836), Madame Celnart warns of the servant’s ‘infâme rôle d’espion’.<sup>636</sup> She claims that rebellious servants purposefully use their positions of invisibility to spy on their masters and mistresses and then spread gossip about their intimate secrets: ‘Monsieur tel qui faisait tant de visites à Madame, n’en fait plus!’.<sup>637</sup> Marius-Henri-Casimir Mitre, a lawyer at the Court of Cassation and a lay author,<sup>638</sup> also agrees, stating that certain servants become ‘l’espion de la maison’ in order to help others commit crimes within the private sphere of the home.<sup>639</sup> Although these two authors were writing in different contexts, they both highlight the same bourgeois fear that also emanates from *le roman de la servante*: the fear of the maidservant’s gaze. For the bourgeoisie, the female servant knows everything, she is always watching and listening. By donning the maidservant disguise, all four heroines are also feeding into the fears that the female servant manipulates her position in order to spy on the bourgeois household.

Stendhal’s cross-class maidservant manoeuvres herself in a particular way so as to be able to listen to her lover’s private discussions: ‘[p]lacée auprès d’une fenêtre dans la chambre de Mme Larçay, et occupée à arranger des robes pour le soir, vingt fois par jour elle entendait parler Alfred et avait de nouvelles occasions d’admirer son caractère.’<sup>640</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>635</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 305.

<sup>636</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 15

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> See Counter ‘Bad Examples’, p. 406.

<sup>639</sup> Mitre, p. 48.

<sup>640</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 308.

Maupassant's Madame Amandon makes her lover wait 'un mois ou six semaines, pour l'épier, le connaître et se garder s'il avait quelque défaut dangereux.'<sup>641</sup> While Maupassant does not elaborate further on her method of surveillance, one possible reading is that Madame Amandon also uses her maidservant disguise in order to spy on her lovers, and obtain a better understanding of their character. Yet this intimate information is then used in order to commit adultery: the male suitor becomes a prey for the heroine's sexual conquest. Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* also acknowledges that the servants have access to their household's private information that the cross-class maidservant can then use against her family. By becoming the servants' equal, Bette can manipulate her position in order to carry out her revenge plot. She feeds off their knowledge of the family: 'Cette familiarité par laquelle elle se mettait franchement au niveau des gens, lui conciliait leur bienveillance subalterne, très essentielle aux parasites.'<sup>642</sup> This social imaginary of the rebellious female servant as a spy is also present in other *roman de la servante* texts. Balzac's other rebellious female servant, Madame Cibot, is described as an 'espion'<sup>643</sup> acting on behalf of the other characters who also wish to rob Pons of his fortune. Zola's *Pot-Bouille* likewise describes how bourgeois families are worried about speaking in front of their servants: '[Mme Duveyrier] ne parlait plus, de peur d'en trop dire en présence des bonnes.'<sup>644</sup> The maidservant, Rachel, is then depicted as a feared and dangerous spy who knows too much about her mistress's affair.<sup>645</sup> These fears then lead to her mistress, Berthe, bribing her with extra money and new dresses.<sup>646</sup> One may also think, in this context, of Mirbeau's maidservant protagonist Célestine who tells the reader all of her household's secrets through her first-person narrative, and gossips with the other servants. Yet, as we shall see in what follows, all four cross-class

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<sup>641</sup> Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, II, 395.

<sup>642</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 77.

<sup>643</sup> Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, p. 267.

<sup>644</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1984 [1881-82]), p. 230, see also pp. 295, 302.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302-07.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 306, 316.

maidservant heroines manipulate this social imaginary for their own gain. They use the maidservant's alleged invisibility to achieve a sense of autonomy. Paradoxically this invisibility is also connected to the fears of the maidservant's gaze; she has the capacity secretly to observe the private lives of other characters and uses this intimate information against them. This disguise, however, ultimately traps all four heroines in a masculinist economy that perceives the female servant as a site of pleasure or repulsion. Thus while the nineteenth-century cross-class maidservant initially appears to create her own plot, a more careful reading shows how these fictional heroines remain constrained by the social imaginary of the rebellious female figure.

### **2.3 The Mask of Ugliness: Reversing the Subject and the Object of the Gaze**

The nineteenth-century maidservant disguise provides the heroine with a sense of invisibility insofar as it rids the heroine of their beauty that ties them to social hierarchy, and so to the gaze of others. Mina completely alters her appearance:

Chaque jour, Mina se levait de grand matin afin de pouvoir pendant deux heures se livrer aux soins de s'enlaidir. Ces cheveux si beaux, et qu'on lui avait dit si souvent qu'il était si difficile d'oublier, quelques coups de ciseaux en avaient fait justice; grâce à une préparation chimique, ils avaient pris une couleur désagréable et mélangée, tirant sur le châtain foncé.<sup>647</sup>

The cross-class maidservant's mask of ugliness, as artificially produced in *Mina de Vanghel* by the heroine's application of holly-paste, shows how the period's perceptions of beauty were intertwined with notions of class. Mina's beauty predetermines the way in which her class is perceived by others; attractiveness is linked to the aristocracy and, to a lesser extent, the bourgeoisie, whilst ugliness is associated with lower- and working-class women.<sup>648</sup> One

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<sup>647</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, 1, 305.

<sup>648</sup> Beauty and its relation to class can also be found in Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-42), in which the heroine's beauty allows her to be perceived as an aristocrat, despite her possible lower-class heritage. A counter-argument to this, however, is George Sand's fictional maidservant Noun in *Indiana* (1832). Noun and her mistress (as well as her *sœur de lait*) Indiana are both described as beautiful, but in very different ways.

may think of the ugly maidservants in Zola and Balzac: the ‘pouilleuse’ Adèle, with ‘sa saleté’;<sup>649</sup> La Grande Nanon, whose ‘figure semblait repoussante’.<sup>650</sup> This link between class and the perception of beauty is also apparent in Stendhal’s unfinished novel, *Lamiel*, for example when the heroine is viewed as ‘trop jolie pour voyager seule,’<sup>651</sup> by the ‘commis voyageurs’.<sup>652</sup> *Lamiel*’s beauty thus also associates her with the upper classes of society. ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’ explicitly confronts this relationship between beauty and class when Doctor Torty states that Hauteclair ‘est trop belle [...] elle est réellement trop belle pour une femme de chambre.’<sup>653</sup> For the heroine to become an acceptable representation of the maidservant figure, she sees a need to degrade her beauty in order to obtain the freedom to exist in the shadows of society, away from the male gaze. The heroine’s altered physiognomy, as part of the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise, therefore manipulates the representation of the female servant in the nineteenth-century social imaginary as a principally invisible figure.

While this *soulèvement gestuel* connects to the disguises of the Ancien Régime, it can also be read as a cloak of invisibility that derives from the fairy tale genre. In Charles Perrault’s version of *Peau d’Âne* (1694),<sup>654</sup> the princess’s flight is enabled by her ‘degrading

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Consistently typed as non-white, Noun’s beauty is represented by Sand as a function of her vigorous health and, implicitly, her sensuality. As a white aristocrat, Indiana is Noun’s foil: her descriptions highlight how she is chaste, pale and sickly. Sand then complicates this binary opposition when, in a state of sexual frenzy, the male character, Raymon, confuses the maidservant for her mistress (see pp. 211-12 of this thesis for an analysis of this scene).

<sup>649</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p. 39.

<sup>650</sup> Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, Livre de Poche, 1972 [1833]), p. 28.

<sup>651</sup> Stendhal, *Lamiel: version d’octobre-décembre 1839*, in *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, ed. by Yves Ansel, Philippe Berthier, Xavier Bourdenet and Serge Linkès, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2005-14), III, 867-963 (p. 909).

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Barbey d’Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 107-08.

<sup>654</sup> Christopher Betts notes that ‘although the authors of such works liked to be considered their inventors, it was really a matter of oral tradition’ where stories would pass down a ‘long line of tellers’ before writers sought to improve them with their extra details, including humour. See Charles Perrault, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. and ed. by Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018 [2009]), pp. xi-xxxix (p. xxii).

disguise'<sup>655</sup> of a donkey skin; this is a stinking, disgusting disguise that repulses everyone the heroine passes, allowing her to travel incognito and escape her father's kingdom (in this disguise, she too takes on the role of a servant). Like the donkey skin, Mina's maidservant disguise initially appears as a mask of ugliness that allows the heroine to avoid attracting the male gaze: '[c]ontente de son déguisement qui la rendait plutôt trop laide, Mina songea à ne pas avoir d'idées d'un ordre trop remarquable.'<sup>656</sup> Her disguise masks both the heroine's beauty and her social class, allowing Alfred to see her as a woman stripped of all her advantages. Like Mina, Stendhal's Lamiel also masks her beauty through her application of a disfiguring holly paste in order to gain a sense of freedom; in other words, she avoids becoming the object of the masculine gaze and so manages to travel freely. Maupassant's Madame Amandon, 'cette jolie petite brune maigre, si distinguée et fine',<sup>657</sup> similarly conceals her beauty through the maidservant disguise.<sup>658</sup> Her revolt allows her to travel undetected to her lovers at the Cheval-d'Or hotel: 'elle n'avait jamais été reconnue par personne dans toutes ses visites [...] Jamais! Par personne!'.<sup>659</sup> As Prévost's argues, in Stendhal '[l]a vraie amazone est quelquefois ennemie de sa propre beauté, et s'en débarrasse lorsque cette beauté la gêne.'<sup>660</sup> The heroine's altered appearance, however, provides her with a sense of invisibility while also providing her with strength and courage. Mina addresses her ancestors, telling them that she too has 'du courage' and a 'flamme secrète d'honneur et d'héroïsme' in her 'costume bizarre'.<sup>661</sup> One can therefore apply Bettina L. Knapp's reading of the disguise in *Peau d'Âne* to Mina's maidservant disguise: while it serves as a form of

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<sup>655</sup> Betts, p. xxiii.

<sup>656</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 308.

<sup>657</sup> Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, II, 393.

<sup>658</sup> In another of Stendhal's short stories, *Vanina Vanini* (1829), the eponymous heroine also dons the disguise of a servant (albeit male) in order to travel undetected and threaten the Minister of State.

<sup>659</sup> Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, II, 396.

<sup>660</sup> Prévost, p. 17.

<sup>661</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 306.

self-punishment, it is also paradoxically self-empowering, for the princess becomes ‘mentally stronger’, having to withstand hard labour, ‘continuous jerks, insults and mockery’.<sup>662</sup>

It is by disappearing into the invisibility of a servant that Mina can observe Alfred’s private life without being caught or questioned: ‘elle ne songeait qu’au bonheur de voir Alfred tous les jours’.<sup>663</sup> Her original role as an aristocratic woman would not give her the same subversive power. In disguise, Mina (just like Hauteclair) can live intimately with a man without the need for marriage. Mina defies her society’s expectation of courtship; she does not need to attend balls or the aristocratic court where ‘[t]out le monde s’empressait de [lui] parler, et [elle], [elle] [s]’ennuyai[t]...’.<sup>664</sup> Instead, Mina is able to choose her suitor and observe all of his qualities without his knowledge before she decides if he is worthy of her love, rather than the other way around. Scott similarly discusses how Mina’s disguise as a servant allows the heroine to occupy ‘the position of the desiring spectator rather than that of desired object’.<sup>665</sup> Yet when Stendhal provides his cross-class maidservant heroine with the time to become a ‘desiring spectator’ while also completing the maidservant’s chores, he demonstrates an unrealistic, romanticized view of nineteenth-century servitude: [Mina] était obligée de coudre beaucoup, elle prenait gaiement les devoirs de ce nouvel état. Souvent il lui semblait jouer la comédie. Elle se plaisait elle-même quand il lui échappait un mouvement étranger à son rôle.’<sup>666</sup> Mina finds particular joy in making false moves, including stepping into a carriage first when she sees the footsteps lowered. This causes her mistress to believe that ‘[c]ette fille est folle’.<sup>667</sup> While these scenes show that there is a clear sense of joy in

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<sup>662</sup> Bettina L. Knapp, *French Fairy Tales: A Jungian Approach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1926), p. 75.

<sup>663</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 307.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Scott, ‘Performing Desire’, p. 266.

<sup>666</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 307.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid.

playing the role of someone else, and so escaping the confinement of her aristocratic society, they also implicitly demonstrate how servitude is presented by Stendhal as a light-hearted game, rather than strenuous and difficult work. Mina therefore feeds into the male writer's fantasy surrounding servant figures, an argument that the latter part of this chapter explores in more depth. There is, however, a clear act of defiance as Mina makes herself ugly through her *soulèvement gestuel*: she reverses the power dynamics between the object and subject of the (male) gaze, as well as between the hidden power of the female servant and that of her masters.

Barbey's 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' likewise explores the power of the heroine's revolt to divert the desiring gaze thanks to its invisibility. From a young age, Hauteclair is taught to fence and to ride horses; she performs these acts behind a mask which she refuses to remove.<sup>668</sup> Hauteclair's entire social identity is therefore created – and masked – by her profession as a fencer: 'la figure sous les mailles de son masque d'armes qu'elle n'ôtait pas beaucoup pour eux, elle ne sortait guère de la salle de son père'.<sup>669</sup> The mesh of the mask, consisting of a series of small metal links, conceals the heroine's identity. The reader is similarly informed that she wears a laced veil.<sup>670</sup> The lace is also described as tightly bound, shielding Hauteclair's beauty from the gaze of others. These initial masks do not, however, fully meet the heroine's need to escape the constraints her society imposes on her. She continues to live a monotonous life amongst the bourgeoisie of her town and must comply with their rules and expectations. Her various masks do not entirely stop Hauteclair from becoming an object of desire, as Doctor Torty explicitly states that they only increase the excitement of the townsfolk's 'imagination curieuses'.<sup>671</sup> Hauteclair realizes that she

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<sup>668</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 93.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 94.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*

cannot completely stop herself from becoming the object of the town's curiosity and so decides simply to remove herself from society. This *soulèvement gestuel* indeed reverses her role from being the object of the town's attention, to becoming an invisible subject inside a private household. Torty describes 'Eulalie, cette effrayante Eulalie, insinuée, glissée chez elle, je ne savais comment', as a spectre.<sup>672</sup> The maidservant disguise provides both Mina and Hauteclair with ghost-like qualities; existing as female servants who are pushed to the peripheries of the home, as well as of society, both heroines thus remove themselves from society's (primarily male) gaze.

Bette likewise adopts a mask of ugliness in order to avoid becoming the object of the male gaze as an eligible woman. She purposely ruins any beautiful clothes that are given to her, transforming them into the haggard rags of a poor, servant woman:

Bette retravaillait chez elle, à sa façon, chaque chose, et la gâtait en s'en faisant un costume qui tenait des modes impériales et de ses anciens costumes lorrains. Le chapeau de trente francs devenait une loque, et la robe un haillon.

Bette était à cet égard, d'un entêtement de mule; elle voulait se plaire à elle seule et se croyait charmante ainsi.<sup>673</sup>

Like Perrault's princess in a donkey skin, Bette also becomes a pariah in her rags: 'tandis que cette assimilation, harmonieuse en ce qu'elle la faisait vieille fille de la tête aux pieds, la rendait si ridicule, qu'avec le meilleur vouloir, personne ne pouvait l'admettre chez soi les jours de gala.'<sup>674</sup> By degrading her appearance, and therefore downgrading her class status, Balzac's heroine escapes the expectations placed on her to attend meals and parties with her family's bourgeois circle. Her *soulèvement gestuel* allows Bette to remove herself from society's gaze, specifically, that of male bourgeois suitors. This disguise reverses the way the heroine had previously stood out as 'la brune piquante de l'ancien roman français. Son regard

<sup>672</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 106-07.

<sup>673</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 79.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

perçant, son teint olivâtre, sa taille de roseau pouvaient tenter un major en demi-solde.<sup>675</sup>

Bette ‘obtint alors un moment de splendeur pendant lequel le baron [Hulot] la trouva mariable.’<sup>676</sup> Yet only wanting to please herself, rather than the eyes of potential male suitors, Bette revolts against the conventions of how a woman should look in order to reject the marriage plot. She lets herself become inconspicuous and invisible in her household, as well as in her society:

si la cousine Bette avait voulu se laisser habiller à la mode ; si elle s’était, comme les Parisiennes, habituée à porter chaque nouvelle mode, elle eût été présentable et acceptable ; mais elle gardait la roideur d’un bâton. Or sans grâces, la femme n’existe point à Paris. [...] ses singularités n’étonnaient plus personne, et disparaissaient au-dehors dans l’immense mouvement parisien de la rue, où l’on ne regarde que les jolies femmes.<sup>677</sup>

Bette remains invisible in the hustle and bustle of the crowd, as well as in the four walls of the bourgeois home. As a result, her cross-class disguise allows her to plot her class revenge in secret.

## 2.4 Fears of the Disorderly Maidservant

Nineteenth-century household management guidebooks provide a further way of reading how the mask of ugliness helps to create, as well as feed into, the social imaginary of the rebellious servant. The household management guidebook writer, Madame Pariset, advises that mistresses should constantly inspect their maidservant’s appearance:

Des cheveux mal tenus, un bonnet ou un mouchoir mis sans soin, une robe mal attachée, bien trainante pour cacher des bas sales et des souliers usés, le tout accompagné de certains affiquets de coquetterie; un châle jeté négligemment sur les épaules, en voilà plus qu’il n’en faut pour donner la preuve de tous les défauts opposés aux qualités que l’on doit désirer [...].<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 76.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.

<sup>678</sup> Madame Pariset, *Nouveau manuel complet de la maîtresse de maison; suivi d’un appendice par Mmes Gacon-Dufour, Celnart, etc...* (Paris: Librairie Encyclopedie de Robert, 1852), p. 73. This was the fourth edition of this household manual, the first having appeared in 1821, the second in 1822 and the third in 1825.

Madame Pariset warns her fellow mistresses that slovenliness is a general indicator of moral corruption. When slovenliness is accompanied by other signs, such as ‘un châle jeté négligemment sur les épaules’, it is also associated with *coquetterie* in the nineteenth-century social imagination. As already discussed in Chapter One, dirt is shown to be connected to a maidservant’s vice, turning her into a physical and moral pollutant within the bourgeois household. If the maidservant is seen as too disorderly, ugly or dirty, there is a risk that she will draw too much attention to her body that is supposed to remain nondescript. Female servants who stand out from the shadows therefore emerge as a threat to the household. This view is reinforced by Madame Celnart, who explicitly links her advice to an observation made by Madame Pariset.<sup>679</sup> Both household manual writers argue that mistresses should not tolerate dirtiness and a lack of care in a servant’s appearance; rather, as Madame Pariset states, mistresses should favour ‘la propreté, la simplicité et l’ordre’<sup>680</sup> when inspecting their servants’ appearance.<sup>681</sup> As Chapter One has already argued, the female servant represented the bourgeois family’s wealth, and helped to determine the household’s reputation in the eyes of guests. A disorderly maidservant suggested a lack of authority, showing that the outward appearance of the female servant also influenced the status of the bourgeoisie. In Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*, the mistress seems to echo the household manual’s advice by asking Célestine ‘Êtes-vous très propre? Moi, je suis exigeante sur la propreté’<sup>682</sup> and the maidservant explains the hypocrisy behind it all: ‘[e]lles disent toutes ça... et, souvent quand on va au fond des choses, quand on retourne leurs jupes et qu’on fouille dans leur linge... ce qu’elles sont sales!... Quelquefois à vous soulever le cœur de dégoût!’<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Madame Celnart describes Madame Pariset’s earlier work: ‘Dans ses lettres sur *l’Economie Domestique*, madame Parizet dit qu’elle a coutume d’examiner la mise des bonnes qui se présentent à elle’ (p. 29).

<sup>680</sup> Madame Pariset, p. 73.

<sup>681</sup> This is also mentioned in the anonymous *Le Guide du domestique: À l’usage du simple domestique, du valet de chambre, de la femme de chambre et de la cuisinière [...]* (Paris: Chez Martinon, 1852), p. 161.

<sup>682</sup> Mirbeau, p. 49.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

Madame Pariset even goes as far as stating that the servant should have ‘une parfaite santé. Un domestique infirme ou difforme est l’objet le plus affligeant que l’on puisse avoir sous les yeux.’<sup>684</sup> Although alarming to the modern reader, this rejection of physical disability shows how the appearance of the maidservant needed to be controlled. Stendhal and Balzac therefore manipulate this social imaginary through their representations of ugly disguises in order to hint at the cross-class maidservant’s rebellion from the very outset. Both heroines’ appearances are layered with the same fears surrounding ugly maidservants as found in the household manuals of the period. Yet as this chapter shall show, beautiful maidservants are also to be feared as potential temptresses.

On the one hand, the cross-class maidservant protagonist obtains a certain amount of agency, and thus a sense of freedom away from the gaze of others, by making herself artificially ugly: the maidservant disguise as a method of revolt allows all four heroines to decide their own destinies, creating their own narratives that go against those laid out for them in nineteenth-century polite society. Yet, on the other hand, these disguises of invisibility also play on the fears of the rebellious maidservant in this period, paradoxically drawing the bourgeois reader’s attention, as well as that of the bourgeois characters in the plot, to the female servant figure’s body and sexuality. The maidservant disguise therefore provides a sense of (in)visibility. In the following section of this chapter, the (in)visibility of the rebellious female servant via the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise is used to show how the audacious female figure’s identity is explicitly tied to the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding female outsiders: the black woman, the *servante-mâîtresse*, the prostitute and the *grisette*. These stereotypes reveal how there was an eroticism surrounding the figure of the submissive female servant.

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<sup>684</sup> Madame Pariset, p. 72.

## 2.5 The Hybridity of the Maidservant Mask: ‘Racial Regression’

Stendhal explicitly connects Mina’s *soulèvement gestuel* to race: ‘[c]haque matin aussi, ce teint si frais prenait quelques-unes des teintes désagréables que rapportent des colonies les Blancs dont le sang a eu quelque rapport avec la race nègre.’<sup>685</sup> Mina’s mask therefore not only allows her to become part of an inferior class through its ugliness but, in the racist mentality of the nineteenth century, her rebellious maidservant role also hints at a form of ‘racial regression’. In her recent study on black women in nineteenth-century France, *Vénus Noire* (2020), Robin Mitchell provides the historical context that deepens our understanding of Stendhal’s comment: ‘[i]n the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a second wave of anxiety emerged around racial mixing in the colonies [...] a flurry of legislation attempted to calm fears of racial inundation and contamination.’<sup>686</sup> Stendhal’s portrayal of the rebellious maidservant heroine draws on the fears surrounding race and contamination. Mina’s disguise exacerbates and embodies the fears of the servant class, while also showing how such fears became intertwined with racial anxieties during the nineteenth century. In *Imperial Leather* (1994), Anne McClintock focuses specifically on Victorian England, yet one can apply to *Mina de Vanghel* her observation that

Women who transgressed the Victorian boundary between private and public, labor and leisure, paid work and unpaid work became increasingly stigmatized as specimens of *racial regression*. [...] Female domestic servants were frequently depicted in the iconography of degeneration - as ‘plagues,’ ‘black races,’ ‘slaves’ and ‘primitives’.<sup>687</sup>

Mitchell provides a further insight into the reasoning behind this connection between class and race in the nineteenth-century social imaginary: ‘[b]lack women helped France’s white men and women fantasize about their black colonies and often served as substitutes for

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<sup>685</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 308.

<sup>686</sup> Robin Mitchell, *Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2020), p. 17, emphasis in the original.

<sup>687</sup> McClintock, p. 24.

making sense of white bodies “behaving badly”.<sup>688</sup> We can read Stendhal’s description of Mina’s skin as an implicit sign of the heroine manipulating this racist stereotype that surrounded the figure of the rebellious female servant; she is a woman who steps out of her upper-class role and who seeks to ruin Alfred’s marriage to suit her own purposes. Mina’s disguise also places the heroine, and therefore the rebellious maidservant, amongst those deemed as illegitimate in French society. As Mitchell observes, in nineteenth-century France, the black female body ‘was represented as savage, hypersexual, and above all an existential threat to the purity of the French nation.’<sup>689</sup> Stendhal uses a racial marker to set a further clear boundary between those accepted as forming part of French society and those who are left on its perimeters. Yet Mina, as a German woman, was already outside of the French body politic regardless of the colour of her skin, belonging to a different ‘race’ according to early nineteenth-century classifications. As Holly L. Collins points out, ‘race can be used to categorize people in a number of ways based on their physical appearance, culture, nationality, or ethnicity depending upon which method(s) of categorization prove most convenient to a particular context.’<sup>690</sup> Race is therefore tied to Mina’s behaviour, which is presented (positively) by Stendhal as constituting a threat to societal order.

Balzac hints at this same racial regression when describing Bette’s degrading disguise: ‘la chevelure noire, les beaux yeux durs, la rigidité des lignes du visage, la sécheresse calabraise du teint [...] sa mise étrange surtout, lui donnaient une si bizarre apparence, que parfois elle ressemblait aux singes habillés en femme, promenés par les petits Savoyards.’<sup>691</sup> The emphasis placed both on the Calabrian (from a Parisian perspective, primitive) appearance of

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<sup>688</sup> Mitchell, p. 16.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>690</sup> Holly L. Collins, “‘This African blood that burned in her veins’: Rereading Race in Emile Zola’s “Thérèse Raquin””, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 106 (2015), 79-90 (p. 81).

<sup>691</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 81.

Bette's skin and her resemblance to a monkey serves to degrade the heroine's class status by degrading her racial status. As a threat to the bourgeoisie's class position, and therefore society's hierarchical order, Bette is inherently connected to the danger presented by the black woman in the racist mentality of the nineteenth century. When analysing Zola's description of the fictional maidservant Lisa in *Pot-Bouille*, Yates similarly observes how another writer of *le roman de la servante* connects the identity of the female servant to the black woman through a reference to skin colour: 'the adjective "noiraude", which is a pejorative synonym for "aux cheveux noirs" [...] hints also at the swarthy skin tones associated with the "inferior" races.'<sup>692</sup> One may also think, in this context, of the fictional maidservant Zoé in Zola's *Nana* who is described as 'très brune, coiffée de petits bandeaux, avait une figure longue, en museau de chien, livide et couturée, avec un nez épaté, de grosses lèvres et des yeux noirs sans cesse en mouvement.'<sup>693</sup> Zoé is again marked by the period's racial and racist taxonomy of brown skin, and again compared to an animal, in this case a dog. Her class status alters her physiognomy and therefore her racial profile. These descriptions together highlight how the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant inherently connects her class identity with racial identity.

Balzac develops this idea further by suggesting that there is an element of savagery in Bette: '[l]a cousine Bette présentait dans les idées cette singularité qu'on remarque chez les natures qui se sont développés fort tard, chez les Sauvages qui pensent beaucoup et parlent peu.'<sup>694</sup> The maidservant is again being typed as 'primitive', 'uncivilized' and 'savage' in the nineteenth-century imagination. Yates likewise argues that members of the working class 'were seen as being closer to nature, to the instinctual and primitive realm, than the rational

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<sup>692</sup> Yates, p. 115.

<sup>693</sup> Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002 [1880]) p. 43.

<sup>694</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 76.

middle-class male who dominated educated opinion.’<sup>695</sup> While Yates suggests that this racial regression influenced how society perceived female servants as ‘potentially dangerous to society, beings whose behaviour needed to be watched and contained’ as part of the working classes,<sup>696</sup> her argument does not consider how such *sauvagerie* could also provide literary maidservants with a sense of power. In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust alludes to how the narrator’s maidservant, Françoise, may in fact have a special power to see directly through the family’s lies thanks to her ‘primitive’ nature: ‘Je pense que Françoise ne me crut pas, car, comme les hommes primitifs dont les sens étaient plus puissants que les nôtres, elle discernait immédiatement, à des signes insaisissables pour nous, toute vérité que nous voulions lui cacher [...]’.<sup>697</sup> Although Mina and Bette do not explicitly embody such mysterious powers, their *soulèvement gestuel* by means of the maidservant disguise reveals how appearance, class and race became intertwined in this period.

Race was also connected to the cross-class maidservant’s audacious behaviour and overt sexuality in the social imaginary through the literary motif of cats. According to Terrie Waddell, cats are associated with women insofar as they evoke a woman’s ‘mystery, suspicion, duplicity, temptation, eroticism, and evil’.<sup>698</sup> As Bette begins to burn with anger, she becomes increasingly animalistic: ‘[s]es yeux noirs et pénétrants avaient la fixité de ceux des tigres. Sa figure ressemblait à celles que nous supposons aux pythonisses, elle serrait ses dents pour les empêcher de claquer’.<sup>699</sup> Bette is transformed by her vengeance into a hungry wild tiger. In Balzac’s *Le Cousin Pons*, Madame Cibot is also transformed into a feline

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<sup>695</sup> Yates, p. 66.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid.

<sup>697</sup> Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992 [1913-1927]), p. 34.

<sup>698</sup> Terrie Waddell, ‘The Female/Feline Morph: Myth, Media, Sex and the Bestial’, in *Cultural Expressions of Evil and Wickedness*, ed. by Terrie Waddell (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003) pp. 75-96 (p. 75).

<sup>699</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 163.

predator waiting to pounce: '[I]a portière se posa au pied du lit, les poings sur ses hanches et les yeux fixes sur le malade amoureux; mais quelles paillettes d'or en jaillissaient! C'eût été terrible comme un regard de tigre, pour un observateur.'<sup>700</sup> Cats large and small are a recurring literary motif in nineteenth-century literature, emerging in the poetry of Baudelaire, in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) and *La Curée* (1872), as well as in the works of Poe and Flaubert, evoking the dangers of female sexuality, the *femme fatale*, as well as a female character's race.<sup>701</sup> One may think of Zola's eponymous heroine in *Thérèse Raquin*, who is repeatedly represented as a cat and a tiger in order to emphasize the wild and savage nature of her African blood.<sup>702</sup> In her article on race in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, Holly L. Collins notes how tigers and cats were also used to exoticize and eroticize the Oriental woman.<sup>703</sup> Balzac connects Bette to this literary motif, evoking not only the heroine's diabolical nature and animalistic tendencies, but also how the cross-class maidservant was connected in the nineteenth-century social imaginary to these exoticized representations of women due to her 'savage' behaviour. For her part, Hauteclaira is also repeatedly referred to as a panther in 'Le Bonheur dans le crime', with the writer even creating a mirror image of the heroine with the animal from Java caged in the *Jardin des Plantes* at the beginning of the text:

Eh! eh! panthère contre panthère! – fit le docteur à mon oreille; mais le satin est plus fort que le velours. Le satin c'était la femme, [...] Noire, souple, d'articulation aussi puissante, aussi royale d'attitude, – dans son espèce d'une beauté égale, et d'un charme encore plus inquiétant, – la femme, l'inconnue, était comme une panthère humaine, dressée devant la panthère animale qu'elle éclipait; et la bête venait de le sentir, sans doute, quand elle avait fermé les yeux.<sup>704</sup>

The cross-class maidservant's seductiveness is evoked through her bestial representation. Yet Hauteclaira is shown to go one step further. She becomes more powerful than the panther in

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<sup>700</sup> Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, p. 166.

<sup>701</sup> Elizabeth M. Knutson, 'The Natural and the Supernatural in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 55:3 (2010), 140-54, (p. 146).

<sup>702</sup> This is also argued in Collins, p. 87.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>704</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 86.

front of her. The heroine's overt sexuality is linked to this feline motif, unsurprisingly since in the nineteenth-century imaginary race also became inherently linked to specific stereotypes surrounding the figure of the prostitute.

## **2.6 Rebellious Maidservant and the Prostitute: Intersecting Stereotypes**

The use of the maidservant disguise as a method of revolt in *La Chambre II* reveals how the perceptions that surrounded the race of the rebellious maidservant were also intertwined with stereotypes of the prostitute in the nineteenth-century imagination.<sup>705</sup> Donning her disguise, Madame Amandon is suddenly described as having 'les hanches découvertes'.<sup>706</sup> As Sander L. Gilman points out, stereotypes of the prostitute were, in the nineteenth century, linked to stereotypes of the black woman as possessed of broad buttocks, large hips, wide pelvises and even different genitalia.<sup>707</sup> 'Primitive' traits were connected to deviant sexuality in the racist mentality of the period.<sup>708</sup> Madame Amandon's outwardly sexual behaviour thus seems predetermined by her physicality that connects the heroine back to the 'primitive' nature of the prostitute's physiognomy.<sup>709</sup> Her maidservant appearance echoes that of the Goncourts' fictional maidservant, Germinie Lacerteux, with her 'ressaut des hanches'.<sup>710</sup> The link between the prostitute and the maidservant was not unusual. As the historian Rachel G Fuchs points out, a prostitute's previous employment would often have been in domestic service: 'Indeed, when historians examine the rolls of registered prostitutes in France, Italy, Germany and Russia, they find that more than half had been domestic servants.'<sup>711</sup> This was also

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<sup>705</sup> Fairchild explains that this was also the case during the Ancien Régime (p. 75).

<sup>706</sup> Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, II, 396

<sup>707</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 85-91.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>710</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 96.

<sup>711</sup> Fuchs, pp. 121-22.

reported in sociological and criminological documents of the period.<sup>712</sup> It was feared in particular that it was their sexually promiscuous behaviour as servants that led them to enter this profession.<sup>713</sup>

Both Madame Amandon and Germinie Lacerteux can therefore be read as inherently doomed simply on account of their physiognomy; their rebellious life was not a choice but rather biologically determined. Naturalist fiction famously presented mankind as determined by race, heredity and milieu;<sup>714</sup> in other words, characters were shaped by circumstances beyond their control. For Philip A. Lee Jr., even Germinie Lacerteux's name can forebode the fictional maidservant's difficult life: Lacerteux seemingly suggests French word 'lacertien', a group of saurian reptiles who are able to withstand lives of degradation.<sup>715</sup> Yet unlike Germinie Lacerteux, Madame Amandon is in disguise; she therefore exists between two class identities. Whereas Gilman points out that Friedrich Hügél claimed that it is 'by nature' that the lower-class female is 'physically weaker and more given to "coquetry, love of pleasure, dislike of work, desire for luxury and ostentation, love of ornament, alcoholism, avarice, immorality, etc." than women of the middle and upper classes',<sup>716</sup> Madame Amandon's revolt through the maidservant disguise contradicts this idea of determinism. Indeed, when transformed into the maidservant, Madame Amandon ceases to be 'de qualité supérieure', possessing 'la modestie du vrai';<sup>717</sup> rather, she is now a lower-class woman whose physicality hints at her sexual freedom. As a bourgeois woman using the maidservant disguise, Madame Amandon inhabits the stereotypes surrounding the rebellious maidservant that were

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<sup>712</sup> See Bouniceau-Gesmon, p. 9 and Ryckère, p. 20.

<sup>713</sup> McBride, p. 104.

<sup>714</sup> Baguley, p. 86.

<sup>715</sup> This reptilian symbolism is explored further in Philip A. Lee Jr., 'Name Symbolism in The Goncourts' "Germinie Lacerteux", *Romance Notes*, 20:1 (1979), 65-67.

<sup>716</sup> Gilman, p. 43.

<sup>717</sup> Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, II, 393-94.

inherently connected to prostitution and race. She inevitably becomes associated with the poor and sexualized servant whom the bourgeois feared would contaminate their household. As a ‘servante mince et vive’,<sup>718</sup> Madame Amandon’s identity, like that of the other cross-class maidservants, is degraded by its association with nineteenth-century stereotypes.

Hauteclair’s *soulèvement gestuel* is similarly layered with stereotypes that deepen our understanding of how the female servant was connected to other overtly sexual figures in the nineteenth-century social imaginary. In her disguise, Hauteclair’s hair has ‘ces espèces de tire-bouchons que les prédicateurs appelaient, dans ce temps-là, des serpents, pour en dégoûter les jolies filles, sans avoir jamais pu y parvenir’.<sup>719</sup> In her study of hair in nineteenth-century literature and culture, Carol de Dobay Rifelj observes that curls had connotations of lust, desire, sexual deviancy and sin which originated from Renaissance depictions of Eve, as well as of sirens with long curly or wavy hair.<sup>720</sup> In their snake-like form, Hauteclair’s curls connote original sin, depicting the maidservant as a sexual threat.<sup>721</sup> This image of snake-like curls also connects to the figure of Medusa. Like the monster turning her victims to stone, Hauteclair shows no mercy, poisoning her victim and mistress. Hauteclair is thus depicted, on the one hand, as a marginalized, lower-class outsider and, on the other, as a powerful and diabolical woman, filled with rage.

Mina is overcome with the same sense of rage when she conceives the ‘projet de sa vengeance’ against Madame Larçay: ‘Mina versait des larmes de rage en songeant au peu de moyens de vengeance que lui laissait l’étrange position où elle s’était jetée’.<sup>722</sup> Her ideas

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<sup>718</sup> Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, II, 396.

<sup>719</sup> Barbey d’Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 102.

<sup>720</sup> Carol de Dobay Rifelj, *Coiffures: Hair in Nineteenth-century French Literature and Culture*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), p. 63.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>722</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 316.

become ‘cruelle[s]’ as she plots to remove Madame Larçay, the obstacle to her happiness.<sup>723</sup> This rage is also shared by Bette who famously erupts at the discovery of Hortense’s plot to marry Wenceslas: ‘elle brûlait! La fumée de l’incendie qui la ravageait semblait passer par ses rides comme par autant de crevasses labourées par une éruption volcanique. Ce fut un spectacle sublime.’<sup>724</sup>

Hauteclaira flaunts her sexual deviancy by letting her hair flow freely as an explicit marker of her femininity and overt sexuality, drawing too much attention to herself given her lowly status. This choice immediately goes against the rules outlined in the nineteenth-century household manual:

Ne frisez point vos cheveux: cela ne convient ni à votre état ni à la nature de vos occupations [...] Que vos cheveux soient bien peignés et lisses; relevez-les sans préention, et ne venez jamais dans l’appartement la tête nue: peu de maîtresses le permettent [...] Que votre bonnet soit léger, si un bonnet trop chaud vous incommode; mais portez-en-un; c’est une habitude qu’on a bientôt prise. Dans votre condition, une mise modeste vous attirera le respect de vos égaux et l’estime de vos supérieurs.<sup>725</sup>

Hauteclaira’s choice of hairstyle constitutes a form of revolt against the idea of appearing as a loyal servant, such as Flaubert’s Félicité who wears her bonnet in order to hide her hair.<sup>726</sup>

The wearing of hats and bonnets was seen as a form of modesty for women in the nineteenth century; a woman’s bare head was immediately presumed to denote a lower-class status and its associated loose morals.<sup>727</sup> The use of the bonnet was therefore part of a socially encouraged effort to suppress any potential sexual attraction.<sup>728</sup> One may think, in this context, of the scene in Georges de Peyrebrune’s *Victoire la Rouge* in which the mistress,

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<sup>723</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 316.

<sup>724</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 163.

<sup>725</sup> Unknown author, *Le Guide du domestique*, pp. 163-64.

<sup>726</sup> The Goncourt brothers’ eponymous fictional maidservant protagonist, *Germinie Lacerteux* is also a rebellious servant, and is described as having frizzy, stiff hair that is always unruly despite her attempts to put lotion on it.

<sup>727</sup> Rifelj, pp. 67-69.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

having seen her maidservant's 'beaux cheveux fauves que le bonnet ne pouvait retenir',<sup>729</sup>

'lui avait montré à serrer ses cheveux dans un fichu de couleur tortillé autour de sa tête.

C'était plus propre, mais ça l'enlaidissait.'<sup>730</sup> Hauteclair, however, goes so far as to flaunt

her curls:

Hauteclair, si peu coquette pourtant, avait en écoutant, quand on lui parlait, des façons de prendre et d'enrouler autour de ses doigts les longs cheveux frisés et tassés à cette place du cou, ces rebelles au peigne qui avait lissé le chignon, et dont un seul suffit pour *troubler l'âme*, nous dit la Bible.<sup>731</sup>

Hauteclair's hairstyle not only marks her social position as a lower-class female figure, but also provides clues about the danger and sin that her curls represent.<sup>732</sup> Indeed, Hauteclair's curls make the heroine's appearance conform to one of the nineteenth-century stereotypes of the common prostitute. A. J. B. Parent-Duchâtelet's influential study of prostitution in Paris in the nineteenth century, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1836) had previously categorized common stigmata to identify the figure of the prostitute in this period, including thick black hair.<sup>733</sup> Similarly, in his 1893 study of the delinquent woman, Cesare Lombroso studied the common tropes of the prostitute and the female criminal, concluding that both often had dark, thick and curly hair.<sup>734</sup> Following the publication of Parent-Duchâtelet's study, which noted that the prostitutes of Paris were often first seduced by their masters in their roles as servants, other sociological and criminological texts of the period associated the female servant with the figure of the prostitute.<sup>735</sup> Mitre used his 1838 sociological report on servants to give voice to the nineteenth-century belief (and fear) that some masters secretly hired prostitutes under the 'voile de la domesticité'.<sup>736</sup> Whilst trapping the heroine within

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<sup>729</sup> Peyrebrune, p. 3.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>731</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 114.

<sup>732</sup> Rifelj, p. 59.

<sup>733</sup> Gilman, pp. 95-96.

<sup>734</sup> Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La Femme Criminelle et la prostituée*, trans. by Louise Meille. (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière et cie, 1896 [1893]), p. 309.

<sup>735</sup> See Bouniceau-Gesmon, p. 9, Ryckère, p. 20 and Mitre, p. 61.

<sup>736</sup> Mitre, p. 68.

these stereotypes, Hauteclair's hairstyle also allows the heroine to manipulate her position as an overtly sexualized figure in order to attract the attention of her male lover.<sup>737</sup>

The maidservant disguise in 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' also explicitly connects Hauteclair to another sexually promiscuous figure in the nineteenth-century social imaginary: 'Elle portait le costume des grisettes de la ville de V...'.<sup>738</sup> The *grisette*, like the *servante-maîtresse*, loomed large in the bourgeois imagination as a dangerous sexual temptress.<sup>739</sup> Dressed in grey, much like the loyal maidservant figure, this figure was part of male sexual fantasies in this period, appearing in works such as Louis Huart's *Physiologie de la grisette* (1841), Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-43), Alfred de Musset's *Mimi Pinson, profil de grisette* (1845), Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851) and Champfleury's *Les Aventures de Mademoiselle Mariette* (1853).<sup>740</sup> By donning her maidservant disguise, Hauteclair blurs the boundaries between her social class, servitude and prostitution. Her maidservant disguise is thus layered with stereotypes of different female outsiders, each commonly associated with overt sexual behaviour. These fictional descriptions demonstrate how the nineteenth-century female servant was eroticized as a submissive, overtly sexual figure that was paid not only to maintain the cleanliness of the house but also to perform sexual favours. This explicit sexual behaviour, however, was also bound up with the bourgeoisie's fears of the *servante-maîtresse*.

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<sup>737</sup> In Georges de Peyrebrune's (Mme Mathilde-Georgina-Elisabeth de Peyrebrune's) *Victoire la Rouge* (1883), she also depicts a maidservant protagonist with thick, curly red hair who attracts the attention of other male characters. This character is then replicated in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* in the scenes of the *bureau de placement*.

<sup>738</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 102.

<sup>739</sup> Paul Gibbard, 'Zola's Needleworkers: From Angélique in *Le Rêve* to the *Grisettes*', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 57:1 (2020), 141-53 (p. 150).

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.7 Manipulating the Social Imaginary of the Beautiful Maidservant: *la servante-maîtresse*

The overtly beautiful maidservant was of course perceived as threatening in the nineteenth-century social imaginary. As we have already seen in ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’, the doctor warns the narrator, as well as Barbey’s readership, that it is the most beautiful maidservant who will attract the master’s eye.<sup>741</sup> The cross-class maidservants of *le roman de la servante* finally use their beauty in order to conquer their lovers, having already drawn attention to themselves (and in particular their bodies) in the rebellious performance of their maidservant duties. As Mina removes her disguise by allowing herself to appear more attractive, thereby enticing Alfred into giving her his attention, Madame Larçay starts to become jealous and suspicious of her maidservant, to whom she attributes ‘une extrême coquetterie.’<sup>742</sup> Madame Larçay begins to spy on Mina’s purported previous mistress to try to work out what her maidservant is up to before voicing her suspicions to her husband:

[Madame Larçay] essaya de faire croire à [Alfred] qu’Aniken n’était qu’une aventurière qui, poursuivie à Vienne ou à Berlin, pour quelque tour répréhensible aux yeux de la justice, était venue se cacher aux eaux d’Aix, et y attendait probablement l’arrivée de quelque chevalier d’industrie, son associé. Cette idée présentée comme une conjecture fort probable, mais peu importante à éclaircir, jeta du trouble dans l’âme si ferme d’Alfred. Il était évident pour lui qu’Aniken n’était pas une femme de chambre; mais quel grave intérêt avait pu la porter au rôle pénible qu’elle jouait ?<sup>743</sup>

Scott concludes from this scene that ‘Mina’s efforts to elude wealth-inspired love have thus ironically given rise to a story in which she plays the role of gold-digger’.<sup>744</sup> Madame Larçay’s suspicions are, however, quite commonplace. By placing this scene in its larger context of the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant, we can see

<sup>741</sup> Mirbeau notes that the fictional maidservant, Célestine, feels like it is as if her master ‘me voyait réellement, pour la première fois’ when attracting his gaze (p. 293).

<sup>742</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 312.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Scott, *Stendhal’s Less-Loved Heroines*, p. 23.

that Stendhal is both generating and reproducing anxieties about beautiful maidservants becoming potential temptresses.

Beauty is thus not only linked to the cross-class maidservant's aristocratic or bourgeois identity, but also connected to a nineteenth-century fear concerning the rebellious maidservant's sexuality. These fears are also embedded in household manuals and guides which, as has already been noted, prescribe that the maidservant should not draw attention to her appearance:

Nous lui répéterons seulement ce que nous lui avons déjà dit sur son habillement; il doit être simple, propre et ne pas attirer les yeux. Elle doit avoir l'air sérieux, décent, et ne pas tourner la tête de tous côtés, surtout si elle accompagne des jeunes personnes.<sup>745</sup>

The female servant's appearance should blend into the background of nineteenth-century society; she should become invisible. Yates uses Flaubert's fictional maidservant, Félicité, as an example of the ideal servant in the bourgeois imagination: 'her clothes seem calculated to reduce her to insignificance' and Flaubert 'dehumanizes and defeminizes her' so as not to allow her sexuality to interfere with her functionality as a servant.<sup>746</sup> Unlike Félicité, Hauteclair fails to conceal both her beauty and her feminine form as a servant from Dr Torty's (male) gaze: 'S'en douterait-on? pensais-je, en l'apercevant avec son tablier blanc et ces formes que j'avais vues, comme si elles avaient été nues, dans le cadre éclairé du balcon, noyées alors dans les plis d'une jupe qui ne pouvait pas les engloutir...'.<sup>747</sup> From the perspective of the male bourgeois writer, as well as that of the male doctor character narrating the story, the cross-class maidservant stands out as overtly drawing attention to her sexuality. She fails to conceal herself from the masculine gaze and so goes against the rules of the household manual. As Mirbeau points out in *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*, the

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<sup>745</sup> Unknown author, *Le Guide du domestique*, p. 175.

<sup>746</sup> Yates, pp. 29-30.

<sup>747</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 114.

appearance of the beautiful maidservant thus attracts the master's and mistress's gazes for different reasons:

Ils m'observaient, chacun, selon les idées qui les mènent, conduits, chacun par une curiosité différente ; Madame, sévère et raide, méprisante même, de plus en plus hostile, et songeant déjà, à tous les sales tours qu'elle me jouera; Monsieur en dessous, avec des clignements d'yeux très significatifs et, quoiqu'il s'efforçât de les dissimuler, d'étranges regards sur mes mains...<sup>748</sup>

While Apter has analysed the scene of foot-fetishism in Mirbeau's novel,<sup>749</sup> this quotation highlights a further example of how the maidservant's body is part of an erotic economy. Célestine's hand operates as both an erotic symbol for sexual encounters as well as a sign of servitude insofar as it is the female servant's principal tool for her work. While Apter notes that it is only 'dirty and evil-smelling feet that become sexual objects' of foot-fetishism,<sup>750</sup> the servant's hands that scrub dirt all day can also be read as a fetishism for the master. In this way, from her boots to her hands, the maidservant's body is eroticized and fetishized as a tool for the home, and therefore for the master to utilize. The female servant thus needs to remain invisible, and not to draw attention to herself as a potential threat to the marriage of the bourgeois master and mistress.

Marie Delorme's manual develops this advice further, instructing mistresses that their female servants should neither have 'de coiffures à prétention [...] des cheveux crépés, des chignons extravagants', nor 'des blouses à sensation'<sup>751</sup> that could reveal their flesh. In Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, Trublot defends his affair with a maidservant, Julie, by showing Octave her clothes:

il ouvrit des tiroirs, montra un chapeau, des bijoux, des chemises garnies de dentelle, sans doute volées à Mme Duveyrier. Octave, en effet, remarquait à présent une coquetterie dans la

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<sup>748</sup> Mirbeau, p. 54.

<sup>749</sup> Apter, p. 178 analyses the boot scene in Mirbeau's text, describing it as an example of how 'foot fetishism are curiously enmeshed within a complex system of representation centering on the maid'.

<sup>750</sup> Apter, p. 182.

<sup>751</sup> Delorme, *Une maison bien tenue*, p. 66.

chambre, des boîtes de carton doré rangées sur la commode, un rideau de perse tendu sur les jupes, toute la pose d'une cuisinière jouant à la femme distinguée.<sup>752</sup>

For Trublot, this is 'une fille parfaitement bien';<sup>753</sup> yet Zola seems to play on the other meaning of the nineteenth-century term *filles*. Although Octave also believes Julie's clothes to have been stolen from her mistress, these maidservant possessions are in any case of the type that Madame Celnart warns against. Indeed, the items listed, along with bonnets, ribbons, aprons<sup>754</sup> and boots, were all tied to the same erotic imagery of the maidservant in the nineteenth-century imagination,<sup>755</sup> as most famously explored in the boot scene in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*. Mirbeau's text provides a fictional account of the flouting of the rules that governed the maidservant's appearance. For example, Célestine begins to attract the master's attention by using perfume, infuriating the mistress: '[j]e n'aime pas qu'on se mette des parfums [...] Vous entendez Célestine?'.<sup>756</sup> Célestine, Julie, Hauteclair and Mina each serve as examples of how authors of *le roman de la servante* reveal and play on the fears that surrounded maidservants who draw attention to their beauty and their female form.

Underpinning all these anxieties is the fear of the *servante-maîtresse*.<sup>757</sup> As Martin-Fugier puts it, 'Le XIXe siècle est hanté par la spectre de la domestique qui devient maîtresse.'<sup>758</sup> Zola's real-life liaison with his washerwoman, Jeanne Rozerot, serves as a well-known example, and numerous novels of the period featured fictional masters entering

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<sup>752</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p. 130.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>754</sup> Mitchell describes the apron's connection to the representation of the black female body on account of the apron shielding the genitalia of Sarah Baartmann, also known as the Hottentot Venus, also eroticized in caricatures. She goes on to note that the apron had further sexual connotations in relation to the bodies of female domestic servant, observing that Baartman herself worked as a domestic servant for a period of time (p. 61).

<sup>755</sup> See Petitfrère, p. 138.

<sup>756</sup> Mirbeau, p. 55.

<sup>757</sup> Petitfrère states that this was no longer 'un thème d'opéra-bouffe', for example in *La Serva padrona* (p. 140).

<sup>758</sup> Martin-Fugier, p. 174.

into affairs, or even marriages with their female servants.<sup>759</sup> Balzac's real-life love affair with his housekeeper Madame de Brugnol (Louise Breugnot) also allegedly inspired the writer to create both Madame Cibot and Bette, even though he wished to hide the truth of his affair from his future wife, Ewelina Hańska.<sup>760</sup> Martin-Fugier notes that the two meanings of mistress connote danger in the social imagination: first, a woman who conquers the heart and body of the master (or indeed his son<sup>761</sup>) and second, the woman who is '*l'autre femme dans la maison, l'usurpatrice en puissance du titre de maîtresse de maison, du nom et de la fortune.*'<sup>762</sup> For his part, Claude Petitfrère describes how the close proximity of masters and servants, as well as 'une puissante charge érotique' that comes with 'la fonction ancillaire', gave rise to relationships between masters and servants in the home.<sup>763</sup> The accusations of Madame Larçay and Doctor Torty play into this underlying anxiety of the *servante-maîtresse* as a woman who will topple the bourgeois order of the home and take the master as her lover. Torty goes so far as to question how 'l'éclatante beauté de Hauteclair n'eût pas été un obstacle à son entrée dans le service de la Comtesse de Savigny, qui aimait son mari et qui devait en être jalouse.'<sup>764</sup> Unlike Mina, Hauteclair is not feared for her beauty by her mistress who seems strangely blind to her machinations.

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<sup>759</sup> See, for example, Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*, the Goncourt Brothers' *Germinie Lacerteux*, Zola's *Pot-Bouille* and Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900). The figure of the *servante-maîtresse* is also present in twentieth-century literature: see, for example, Jérôme and Jean Tharaud's *La Maîtresse servante* (1911), a novel that depicts the story of a mistress who is employed as the family servant in order to keep her close to her lover.

<sup>760</sup> Graham Robb, describes how 'Cousin Bette maybe a partial mental image of [Louise Breugnot], though the character's evil genius reflects the role she came to play in Balzac's life rather than her personality; and even then, he may have invented her 'crimes' in order to persuade Eveline that his feet were clearly in the mud.' See his *Balzac: A Biography* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1994), pp. 344-45. Gérard Gengembre also notes that 'Après la tableaumanie, Mme de Brugnol, à partir de laquelle la Cibot fut créée. Plutôt que d'y voir un simple démarquage, A.-M. Meininger propose d'y voir "un simulacre caricatural, poussé au paroxysme de l'image fausse que Balzac fabriquait à l'usage de Mme Hanska" [...] depuis que celle-ci avait découvert en 1845 la vérité sur les relations de Balzac avec sa "gouvernante".' See his 'La Genèse du *Cousin Pons*', in Honoré de Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, ed. by Gérard Gengembre (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 33-44 (p. 39)).

<sup>761</sup> See Petitfrère, p. 138.

<sup>762</sup> Martin-Fugier, p. 174.

<sup>763</sup> Petitfrère, p. 137.

<sup>764</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 104.

In his *Physiologie du mariage* (1829), Balzac describes how the female servant in the home casts a witch-like spell over the master in the home:

Oh! après dix ans de mariage trouver sous son toit et y voir à toute heure une jeune fille de seize à dix-huit ans, fraîche, mise avec coquetterie, dont les trésors de beauté semblent vous défier, dont l'air candide a d'irrésistibles attraits, dont les yeux baissés vous craignent, dont le regard timide vous tente, et pour qui le lit conjugal n'a point de secrets, tout à la fois vierge et savante ! Comment un homme peut-il demeurer froid, comme saint Antoine, devant une sorcellerie aussi puissante, et avoir le courage de rester fidèle aux bons principes représentés par une femme dédaigneuse dont le visage est sévère, les manières assez revêches, et qui se refuse la plupart du temps à son amour?<sup>765</sup>

Balzac acknowledges that there are also fears about how the masters will act around their female servants. Bouniceau-Gesmon cites this extract from Balzac in order to argue that masters are at fault; they have transformed their female servants into 'instruments dociles des plus viles passions'.<sup>766</sup> At the end of *La Cousine Bette*, Balzac ironically places the blame on the female servant for this type of seduction when the monomaniacal elderly lecher Hulot makes his servant Agathe his mistress and then his wife after having been 'séduit par [s]es charmes'.<sup>767</sup> The author adds that '[l]es filles de cuisine sont aujourd'hui des créatures ambitieuses'.<sup>768</sup> The nineteenth-century servant's ambition to become the mistress of her own household is ironically presented as the cause of Hulot's problems, rather than the master's incapacity to control his sexual urges towards his maidservant.

The cross-class maidservant seems to play with the social imaginary of the beautiful servant as a possible threat to her household. Mina begins to entice Alfred, provoking his lust. As a maidservant, she ostensibly poses little or no threat to Alfred's self-esteem: she is no longer part of high society and therefore seen by him to be easily attainable, with the result that she captures his desire: 'il eut un moment de fatuité: "Pourquoi, se dit-il, ne pas

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<sup>765</sup> Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage ou Méditations de philosophie éclectique sur le bonheur et le malheur conjugal* (Paris: Charpentier, 1838 [1829]), pp. 334-35.

<sup>766</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, p. 258.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid., p. 591.

<sup>768</sup> Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 592.

agir comme le ferait un de mes amis? Ce n'est après tout qu'une femme de chambre."''<sup>769</sup>

After this cynical thought, Alfred behaves self-consciously in the presence of Mina: 'Ce fut peut-être à cette disposition qu'elle dut la véritable indignation avec laquelle elle repoussa les entreprises d'Alfred.'<sup>770</sup> The reader is expected to decode the euphemistic 'entreprises' and assume that Alfred has made sexual advances towards his maidservant. This narrative silence goes with an absence of dialogue in the scene.<sup>771</sup> The maidservant captures the interest of the male master, suggesting his attraction to submissive, invisible servants. In other words, Alfred is not attracted to the 'real' Mina, stripped of her social advantages; rather he is attracted to a woman over whom he thinks he has power. One can therefore apply Apter's term of 'erotic submission'<sup>772</sup> to this scene in order to describe how the master is aroused by a female servant's forced subjection: she must clean the home as well as a perform sexual acts. This scene highlights the behaviour that masters deem to be acceptable in nineteenth-century society. This fear is reinforced by other authors of *le roman de la servante*, as well as twentieth-century writers. By leaving the reader to interpret the scene, Stendhal (just as ironically as Balzac) assumes a shared understanding of the mistreatment of maidservants.

Mina audaciously resists, pushing Alfred away and refusing to talk to him. For a nineteenth-century maidservant, this would have been a very bold act, typically leading to dire consequences. In their historical study of servitude, *La Vie quotidienne des domestiques en France au XIXe siècle* (1978), Pierre Guiral and Guy Thuillier note that 'une bonne est mal placée pour résister aux avances de son maître ou du fils âgé. Elle peut essayer, mais ses

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<sup>769</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 310.

<sup>770</sup> Petitfrère, p. 310.

<sup>771</sup> See Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir* (2005-14, I: 673) for Julien and Mathilde's first sexual encounter, which is similarly recounted by means of ellipses and an absence of description. Counter also explores the blanks left by Restoration censorship within the periodical press and newspapers, which, he argues, 'had as much subversive power as the material they replaced'. See Andrew J. Counter, *The Amorous Restoration: Love, Sex and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 21.

<sup>772</sup> Apter, p. 178.

chances de résistance sont minces et la durée de résistance est souvent brève, elle aussi'.<sup>773</sup>

One may think of the scene in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*, set in a nominally more progressive era, in which the maidservant is pushed onto the bed and raped by her master who covers her mouth.<sup>774</sup> Mina is therefore extraordinary in her actions, as befits a Stendhalian protagonist. She assumes that she has the power to resist Alfred's advances and is insulted by his actions; she deems his behaviour to constitute an example of 'fausseté'.<sup>775</sup> Mina's resistance, however, does soon come to an end. After spending some time not speaking to Alfred, the heroine seems to forgive him. Importantly, Stendhal also suggests that it is Mina's choice, rather than Alfred's, that they continue their liaison. Mina's maidservant disguise therefore allows Stendhal to critique the power structures at play in the master/maidservant dynamic. Her decision takes an element of power away from the male master.

Pascale Auraix-Jonchière labels Hauteclair as 'la "servante-maîtresse"'.<sup>776</sup> Although Hauteclair's appearance degrades the heroine to leave her occupying an inferior class position, she manipulates her role in order to reverse the power structures in her household. On her deathbed, Delphine realizes that she has been poisoned by her servant and declares: 'Mais, à présent, nous ne sommes plus les maîtres chez nous.'<sup>777</sup> Hauteclair, like Mina, uses her disguise as a maidservant to gain dominance over the household. Hauteclair is at once the leading lady and the stage director of a household that has become a 'silencieux et discret théâtre.'<sup>778</sup> In Balzac's *Le Cousin Pons*, Madame Cibot similarly becomes an actress: 'cette

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<sup>773</sup> Pierre Guiral and Guy Thuillier, p. 33.

<sup>774</sup> See Mirbeau, p. 296 and also the scene in which the master assumes he can obtain sexual favours from his maidservant as part of her service (p. 368).

<sup>775</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, I, 310.

<sup>776</sup> Pascale Auraix-Jonchière, *Les Diaboliques de Barbey d'Aurevilly* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 56.

<sup>777</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 119.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 106.

affreuse lady Macbeth' in a 'comédie du danger',<sup>779</sup> in order to transform her master into a feeble 'homme-enfant'.<sup>780</sup> Balzac uses the Shakspearian heroine as a cliché and misogynistic figure of male dread: she represents the terrifying consequence of women's desire for power. Like Lady Macbeth, Cibot forces Pons into submission, altering the power structures not only between men and women but also between servants and masters. The character of Lady Macbeth also influences the Decadent period<sup>781</sup> through the emergence of the *femme fatale* figure in *fin-de-siècle* literature as exemplified by the *diaboliques* in Barbey's collection. Although Barbey repeatedly refers to both Serlon and Hauteclair as 'acteurs',<sup>782</sup> he makes it clear that Serlon is the weaker of the two: Serlon is dominated by Hauteclair, playing his part in her highly calculated plot. The introduction foreshadows her supremacy, as the reader is told 'Chose étrange! dans le rapprochement de ce beau couple, c'était la femme qui avait les muscles et l'homme qui avait les nerfs...'<sup>783</sup> This inversion of gender roles foreshadows the control Hauteclair will exert over the relationship. This is then stated by Torty as the couple's play-acting develops: '[Savigny] avait, en dévouement, la position inférieure.'<sup>784</sup> In *Figures et formes de la décadence* (1994), Jean de Palacio concludes that in Decadent fiction the *femme fatale* or, to use his terminology, 'la Femme-sans-cœur', exhibits the 'mauvais désir de la femme à domestiquer les plus nobles et les plus féroces mâles'; '[elle] n'exacerbe pas seulement le désir du mâle pour mieux l'asservir; elle inverse véritablement les voies de la création naturelle en opposant à un masculin acéphale un féminin polycéphale, en concluant un pacte nouveau dont l'enjeu est le sexe et le prix est la tête.'<sup>785</sup> As a *femme fatale*, Hauteclair therefore castrates Serlon, stripping him of his male dominance by reversing the

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<sup>779</sup> Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, p. 223.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>781</sup> One may think of John Singer Sargent's well-known portrait of the English actress *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889), painted during this Decadent period and highlighting male fears of female power.

<sup>782</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 105.

<sup>783</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 85.

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 108.

<sup>785</sup> Jean de Palacio, *Figures et formes de la décadence* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Séguier, 1994), p. 32.

gender roles in their relationship. The *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise thus allows both Mina and Hauteclaira to reverse the power dynamics between men and women, but also between male masters and female servants. Implicitly, however, these literary and non-literary texts evoke a further anxiety about the restraint of male sexuality around these female figures in the home.

While this second section of the chapter has highlighted the ways in which the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise deepens our understanding of how the rebellious maidservant's identity was inherently connected to other female outsiders in the social imaginary, it is important also to note that the four cross-class maidservants discussed evoke the fears of a blurring of class distinctions whereby class is no longer identifiable from a woman's appearance.

### 3. Trapping the Maidservant in the ‘Masculinist Economy’: The Control of the Female

#### Body

#### 3.1 The Fear of Class Blurring and the Need for Social Control

By focusing on the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise, this chapter has also shown how non-literary discourses provided advice on, and thus sought to control, the female servant's appearance. As already shown in the Introduction, a Foucauldian reading of these non-literary discourses suggests that the nineteenth century sought to control the lower classes by enforcing a regimented social hierarchy, as well as by seeking to restrict and confine women's bodies, and thus, their sexuality; in particular, the social imaginary of the subversive maidservant was used as a standard against which the orderly body could be measured. This not only created a contrast between the dangerous female servant and the *perle*, but also a distinct class difference between the servant and her mistress. However, *Mina de Vanghel*, *La Cousine Bette*, *La Chambre 11* and 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' all work to blur the distinction between what is perceived to be a healthy, aristocratic or bourgeois female body and that of a rebellious maidservant. These narratives embody fears also current in non-literary discourses that class markers and the class hierarchy are unstable. Indeed, Celnart suggests an example of how the bourgeoisie feared that class distinction between servants and their employers could easily become blurred. A household manual of 1852 explicitly warns servants against imitating their mistresses:

Ne cherchez pas à imiter votre maîtresse dans ses manières ou dans son langage; soyez tout bonnement vous-même, entièrement occupée de remplir vos devoirs. N'ayez pas la prétention d'avoir le même genre de mise ou les mêmes couturières que votre maîtresse; il est douteux que cela lui convînt, et vous pourriez vous attirer une réprimande qu'il vous eût été facile d'éviter.<sup>786</sup>

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<sup>786</sup> Unknown author, *Le Guide du domestique*, pp. 164-65.

The unknown writer then goes on to tell servants not to wear any clothes the mistress might gift to them.<sup>787</sup> The servant must stay in her role, and therefore in her class position. In *Les Artisans et les domestiques d'autrefois* (1886), Albert Babeau notes that while the nobles of the *Ancien Régime* let their female servants dress themselves in the ‘dépouilles encore fraîches de leurs maîtresses’,<sup>788</sup> to help them better outwardly represent their household’s wealth, the bourgeoisie during this period were scandalized by such practices.<sup>789</sup> As one author put it in 1838:

cette manière de payer une partie des gages serait, sans contredit, beaucoup moins fréquente, s’il arrivait un peu plus souvent à nos dames ce qui arrive à quelques-unes, de voir leur soubrette en bonnet élégant prise pour la maîtresse de la maison.<sup>790</sup>

Mittre goes on to note that ‘ces habitudes de luxe’ are often ‘la source de [...] désordres’,<sup>791</sup> emphasizing his period’s underlying fear that class boundaries between maidservants and their mistresses could easily become blurred by their dress and appearance. The maid must therefore remain inconspicuous in her uniform, hence the ‘tablier blanc’ as also worn by Hauteclair and Mme Amandon. Babeau states that in bourgeois homes, the maidservant ‘a souvent deux robes, l’une noire et l’autre grise. Sa garde-robe était en rapport avec la modestie du costume bourgeois. Une marchande ou une procureuse aurait été offusquée, si, comme à Londres, sa domestique avait été mise comme elle.’<sup>792</sup> Uniforms set the maidservant apart from their mistresses. Demanding constant surveillance over the servant’s disorderly body, the nineteenth-century non-literary texts featured in this chapter seek to distance the healthy, natural bourgeois woman from the sexual deviancy represented by the servant’s body. However, the authors of *le roman de la servante* play with the possibilities of distinctions becoming blurred, as for example in Maupassant’s comedic short story *La*

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<sup>787</sup> Unknown author, *Le Guide du domestique*, p. 165.

<sup>788</sup> Albert Babeau, *Les Artisans et les domestiques d'autrefois* (Paris: F. Didot, 1886), p. 270.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Mittre, p. 40.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

*Fenêtre* (1883), in which a male suitor confuses the mistress of the household's backside for that of her maidservant, kissing it with disastrous consequences. The four texts analysed in this chapter are predicated on this blurring of distinctions, foregrounding women from the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie passing as maidservants.

### **3.2 The 'Cross-Class Mistress': Further Class Blurring with the Servant**

The 'cross-class mistress'<sup>793</sup> is the reverse of this cross-class maidservant protagonist type; she is a fictional nineteenth-century female servant who disguises herself as a mistress, illustrating similar fears of class distinctions becoming blurred. Yet this figure appears as neither a stock character, nor a protagonist in *le roman de la servante*. Rather, I have found only three scenes in *le roman de la servante* which depict maidservants disguising themselves as mistresses. In George Sand's *Indiana* (1832), the male protagonist, Raymon, in a state of sexual frenzy, confuses the maidservant Noun with her mistress and *sœur de lait* Indiana when the former dons the latter's 'chaste robe' and 'parures'.<sup>794</sup> Although Sand uses subtle markers of the period's racial taxonomy in order to hint at Noun's blackness, such as descriptions of 'ses bras fais et bruns [...][,] cette volupté tout orientale [...] ses grands yeux noirs'<sup>795</sup> and 'ses cheveux noirs'<sup>796</sup> in contrast to the depictions of Indiana's paleness,<sup>797</sup> Sand blurs the boundaries between the racial identity of the two female characters in her novel, which helps Raymon to mistake the maidservant for the mistress and vice versa. Sand

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<sup>793</sup> She is a stock character in Victorian literature: See Elizabeth Steere, 'She Had Her Role to Play': East Lynne and the Servant Actress', in *The Female Servant and Sensation Fiction: 'Kitchen Literature'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 115-40.

<sup>794</sup> George Sand, *Indiana*, in *Romans*, ed. by José-Luis Diaz, Brigitte Diaz and Olivier Bara, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2019), I, 3-252 (p. 52).

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 54.

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 51.

describes both female characters as ‘Creole’: a concept which in the nineteenth century could mean both a person of white race and European ancestry born in the island colonies and the black or mixed race inhabitants of those same colonies.<sup>798</sup> Pratima Prasad notes that while Creole ‘was [neither] a term of racial classification per se’ nor ‘a term that denoted racial mixing’,<sup>799</sup> Sand’s depiction of Noun’s and Indiana’s ‘creoleness’ ‘attempts its own typology of the creole woman, as if she belonged to a different race’, and this race was often seen as ‘intermediate’ and ‘degenerate’.<sup>800</sup> Prasad concludes that ‘[i]n Sand’s novel, ‘Creole’ works as a convenient umbrella term for many of the ambiguities and threshold identities that were the product of miscegenation and interracial contact: bodies that were racially unreadable; uncertain lineages; boundary-crossing filiations such as interracial *frères* and *sœurs de lait*.’<sup>801</sup> It is this ambiguity that raises the question of *métissage* in Sand’s work<sup>802</sup> and, in the process, serves to blur the class roles of maidservant and mistress. In ‘la robe d’Indiana’, Noun is transformed into her mistress in Raymon’s mind: ‘[s]’il baisait ses cheveux noirs, il croyait baiser les cheveux noirs d’Indiana. C’était Indiana qu’il voyait’.<sup>803</sup> Later in the novel, Indiana also dons the disguise of her maidservant in order to prompt Raymon to confess to his previous affair with her maidservant. While Jennifer Yee has rightly argued that the ‘[b]lack maid stands for her mistress’s exotic side by descriptive metonymy and in opposition to her whiteness by contrastive metonymy’,<sup>804</sup> *Indiana* also provides an example of how the maidservant can be seen as elevated to the position of mistress through her appearance, even if only for a short period of time. Sand’s later novel *Jeanne* (1844) likewise features a maidservant who, for an April fool’s joke, is dressed up as a mistress: Jeanne’s beauty

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<sup>798</sup> See Pratima Prasad, *Plotting Colonial Intimacies: The Miscegenated Subjects of the Romantic Novel* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 59.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>803</sup> Sand, *Romans*, I, 54.

<sup>804</sup> See Yee, p. 145.

overwhelms one of the male characters, Arthur, who instantly falls in love with her and asks for her hand in marriage. Both texts focus on the idea that it is easy to confuse male bourgeois men into falling in love with women they believe are part of their own bourgeois milieu. Mirbeau's fictional maidservant Célestine for her part dons the clothes of her master, thereby blurring distinctions of gender as well as of class:

Je me souviens qu'un après-midi on m'obligea à revêtir un costume très chic de Monsieur [...] Naturellement on joua à toutes sortes de jeux risqués; on alla même très loin dans la plaisanterie. Et j'étais si drôle en homme, et je ris tellement fort de me voir ainsi que, tenant plus, je laissai des traces humides dans le pantalon[.]<sup>805</sup>

This scene shows Célestine cross-dressing in order to make fun of her master, yet it also highlights a rare moment when the maidservant has lost control and can no longer suppress her laughter (as analysed in Chapter Four). Mirbeau emphasizes the maidservant's body as a site of repulsion drawing attention to the maidservant's bodily fluids. While one can assume that Célestine has urinated in her master's trousers, 'des traces humides' also suggests a sexual connotation. On the one hand, Célestine's cross-dressing can thus be read as feeding into the fears of servants who don their masters' and mistresses' clothes. Yet, on the other hand, it also feeds into a male imagining of a sexually overt female figure leaving her bodily fluids in his clothes.

### **3.3 The Cross-Class Maidservant as a Male Fantasy**

My analysis of the maidservant disguise has not only shown that authors of *le roman de la servante* added to existing fears, and even created new fears, of the rebellious maidservant in this period, but also that they represented the manipulation of these fears by their literary heroines as part of their attempts to achieve a measure of happiness and freedom. Indeed, it is

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<sup>805</sup> Mirbeau, p. 106.

only when transformed into the maidservant that Mina, Bette, Madame Amandon and Hauteclaira paradoxically obtain their sexual freedom by donning the stereotypes and prejudices linked to lower-class women. It is their inferior position, and its attendant ‘invisibility’, that draws the bourgeois master’s attention (and then subsequently, that of his wife) to the maidservant’s presence as a potential *servante-maîtresse*. The social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant is exploited by Mina and Hauteclaira to acquire the limited amount of agency and freedom that both heroines obtain through donning the maidservant disguise. However, Mina and Hauteclaira ultimately remain the object of the male writer’s fantasies as sites of pleasure or repulsion.

Dr Torty remarks that even after Hauteclaira has committed murder ‘la pile de linge à la même place, et les ciseaux et l’étui, et le dé sur le bord de la fenêtre disaient qu’elle devait toujours travailler là, sur cette chaise vide et tiède peut-être qu’elle avait quittée, m’entendant venir.’<sup>806</sup> Hauteclaira has no practical or malicious motive to persist in her disguise now that her crime has been carried out successfully. The doctor explains that after having spoken to a servant on the way to the chateau, ‘Eulalie y était toujours... A l’indifférence avec laquelle il me dit cela, je vis que personne parmi les gens du comte, ne se doutait qu’Eulalie fût sa maîtresse’.<sup>807</sup> This attitude later seeps into the town’s opinion that ‘on devait la voir maîtresse’.<sup>808</sup> Thus while the heroine ‘n’avait plus à [...] craindre’ her mistress,<sup>809</sup> she continues to do the chores for her household, and presumably to teach Serlon how to fence in the evenings. Hauteclaira appears to derive an exultant satisfaction from wearing her disguise: ‘Femme de chambre, elle l’était encore ce jour-là, de tenue, de mise, de tablier blanc; mais l’air heureux de la plus triomphante et despotique maîtresse avait remplacé

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<sup>806</sup> Barbey d’Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 123.

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 121.

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 123.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*

l'impassibilité de l'esclave'.<sup>810</sup> While an initial reading of this scene sees Hauteclairre occupying a position of dominance in the household, thereby reversing the roles between a servant and her mistress, a second reading shows that Hauteclairre has in fact been transformed into the ultimate male fantasy of the *servante-maîtresse*. At the end of the novel, after the heroine marries Savigny, she declares 'Je ne suis plus Eulalie [...] Je suis Hauteclairre, Hauteclairre heureuse d'avoir été servante pour lui...'.<sup>811</sup> This is the only time in the entire short story that the heroine speaks, declaring her adoration of her husband as his servant. Barbey creates a male fantasy whereby Hauteclairre is the dominant, sexual figure in her relationship with her husband, yet also a woman who derives her pleasure from serving him, allowing Serlon to obtain the best of both worlds at the price of Hauteclairre's continuing servitude.

Alfred, however, cannot remain with Mina the moment she steps out of her subservient role, for she has taken on too much agency and her aristocratic heritage exerts too much dominance in their relationship. Mina shoots herself at the end of her story, continuing her pattern of exhibiting male agency (as Chapter Two analysed), and identifying her life's purpose, and thus its happiness, with the need to serve her lover, or at least her exalted idea of her lover. Whereas Scott believes that Mina's final act of suicide should be read as a final triumph of the heroine's freedom,<sup>812</sup> and that the author was naturally drawn to 'female defiance',<sup>813</sup> Stendhal is nonetheless illustrating the danger of an aristocratic woman deciding to remove her mask and reveal her truest self in high society. One can therefore go beyond Andrew Counter's observation that 'however modern [Stendhal] may have been on questions concerning women, [he] was not entirely above a certain, rough sexism',<sup>814</sup> and argue that

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<sup>810</sup> Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, II, 124.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 125.

<sup>812</sup> Scott, *Stendhal's Less-Loved Heroines*, p. 31.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Performing Desire', p. 262.

<sup>814</sup> Counter, *The Amorous Restoration*, p. 150.

Stendhal's heroine, no matter her limited amount of freedom and agency, remains trapped in Stendhal's fantasy of a woman who possesses the qualities of an aristocrat whilst occupying the subordinate role of a female servant, reduced to killing herself when her master abandons her, thereby turning her into a social outcast. The plots of both texts allow both heroines a certain degree of agency before imprisoning them once again within the confines of their servant roles and their gender.

Although Madame Amandon ends her short story unaffected by its events, the same cannot be said for her husband's career: '[I]e mois suivant, M. le Premier Amandon recevait un avancement avec une nouvelle résidence.'<sup>815</sup> At the beginning of the short story, the two characters in the framed narrative tell the reader that M. le premier président Amandon has never understood why he was transferred, yet this ending suggests that the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise was in fact the cause. Maupassant is warning his male bourgeois readers that their wives may lead double lives that could affect their own lives (and their careers) without their knowledge.

Neither Bette's revenge plot nor her hatred towards her family is ever revealed to the bourgeois household in *La Cousine Bette*. Yet the figure is far from triumphant in her revolt; Bette dies of tuberculosis towards the end of the novel, which might be read as Balzac punishing his heroine for her actions, particularly given his Maistrean tendencies to conflate disease with sin and the workings of divine providence. Again, the cross-class maidservant is

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<sup>815</sup> Maupassant, *Contes et Nouvelles*, II, 400.

punished in the narrative: heroines who live audaciously must either remain as part of a male sexual fantasy or be expelled from the narrative as dangerous figures.

These four cross-class maidservant narratives in *le roman de la servante* show how audacious literary heroines can subvert the stereotypes and prejudices constructing the myth of the rebellious maidservant in order to obtain a sense of freedom by revolting against their society's conventions. These women alter the power dynamics that structure male and female, as well as master and servant relationships. Yet the authors of *le roman de la servante* cannot allow their heroines to succeed in their *soulèvement gestuel*; all four nineteenth-century writers ultimately leave their cross-class maidservants trapped in a masculinist economy in which they are eroticized as submissive, sexualized figures or expelled from the narrative.

## Chapter Four

### Vocalizing the Maidservant: *Pensées et Paroles*

#### Introduction

This chapter investigates how the fictional maidservant heroines in the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865), and Octave Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900) add to the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant by applying Didi-Huberman's categories of *soulèvement* by means of *pensées* and *paroles*<sup>816</sup> to their respective narratives. By identifying and analysing how the fictional maidservants, Germinie Lacerteux and Célestine, revolt in thought and word, this chapter demonstrates how the Goncourts and Mirbeau play on the bourgeoisie's distrust of the maidservant's voice and mind. I show how bourgeois masters and mistresses sought to control the female servant's speech and thoughts as a way of preventing her from revolting against the social order of the household, for example by using gossip to tarnish the household's reputation or private information to plot against them. Bourgeois masters and mistresses were also wary of the maidservant potentially lashing out verbally in ways that could lead on to violence. By subverting as well as engaging with these fears through the fictional maidservant's *soulèvements*, Mirbeau and the Goncourts provide their heroines with both a sense of autonomy and the opportunity, however briefly, to reverse the prevailing power dynamics between masters and mistresses and their servants, as well as between men and women. Yet as we shall see, this picture is complicated by the strong

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<sup>816</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, p. 305.

biographical element in *Germinie Lacerteux*, a novel based on the hidden life of the Goncourts' actual maidservant, Rose Malingre.

Both the *romans de la servante* analysed in this chapter differ from the other works in this subgenre in that they are the first in-depth studies of maidservant heroines per se. Mirbeau's *roman de la servante* is also innovative within this subgenre as the earliest first-person singular narrative written from the perspective of a disobedient, female servant character.<sup>817</sup> This chapter argues that the standardized deployment of the French language used by Germinie and Célestine in their respective narratives does not reflect the use of language portrayed by other secondary female servant characters in *le roman de la servante*. Both texts exploit the bourgeois fear of class blurring by creating an exceptional servant heroine whose language cannot be distinguished from that of the mistress.

Analysis of the fictional maidservant's voice and thoughts raises questions about the representation of the female maidservant which Apter also identifies in her reading of the figure of the female servant. In particular, she recognizes that representing the female servant creates 'problems of class structure within literary hierarchy itself – questions concerning textual agency, typology and stereotype, boundaries holding between “master narratives” and “servant texts”'.<sup>818</sup> I argue that despite providing their heroines with a limited amount of freedom, the authors of *le roman de la servante* ultimately establish that the rebellious female servant protagonist is a hybrid figure constructed in the social imaginary from an amalgamation of non-literary documents authored by bourgeois and principally, albeit not exclusively, male voices. I shall conclude this chapter by arguing that Germinie and Célestine

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<sup>817</sup> While *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* is not the first first-person maidservant narrative – for which see Henri de Pène, *Mémoires d'une femme de chambre* (Paris: Édouard Dentu, 1864) – it is the first *rebellious* female servant first-person narrated text.

<sup>818</sup> Apter, p. 178.

finally remain trapped inside the masculinist economy of the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant insofar as their *pensées* and *paroles* are trapped inside the language of the master, or rather, the language of the dominant class. Naomi Schor has already argued that the Goncourts' Germinie Lacerteux speaks 'the master's discourse',<sup>819</sup> and argues that 'the disorigination of discourse that constitutes *écriture* not only naturalizes *la femme du peuple*, but also legitimizes the theft of her language'.<sup>820</sup> I build on these observations to suggest that Germinie, and by my extrapolation, Célestine, become ventriloquized puppets through which the bourgeois male author speaks, ascribing his own social, gender and political biases to her voice. The Goncourts' and Mirbeau's fictional maidservant heroines remain ultimately confined within the social biases, misogyny and anarchist opinions that these authors impose onto them through the representation of their *paroles* and *pensées*.

Perhaps surprisingly, this chapter is the first scholarly attempt to read *Germinie Lacerteux* and *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* comparatively.<sup>821</sup> Franco Fiorentino provides a possible reason for this when he implies that the two novels cannot be compared due to the writers' differing political standpoints: '[Célestine] ne ressemble pas non plus aux femmes de chambre qui, depuis la Germinie des Goncourt, paraissent dans la littérature naturaliste. Célestine n'est pas l'humble victime de ses tares et des injustices sociales.'<sup>822</sup>

This chapter begins by exploring how and why the Goncourts depict Germinie as predetermined by her class, biology and environment to play the role of the victim in order to show how her representation differs from that of Célestine. The Goncourts fictional

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<sup>819</sup> Naomi Schor, *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 133.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>821</sup> Jean-François Nivet acknowledges that the Goncourt brothers' investigation of the lower classes was a possible source of inspiration for Mirbeau's *fin-de-siècle* novel. See 'Le Journal d'une femme de chambre: Année Zéro', in *Un moderne Octave Mirbeau*, ed. by Pierre Michel (Paris: Eurédit, 2009), pp. 107-27 (p.110).

<sup>822</sup> Franco Fiorentino, 'Le Scandale de Célestine', *Littératures: Octave Mirbeau*, 64 (2011), 64-72, <<https://journals.openedition.org/litteratures/484#ftn5>> [accessed 15 November 2021].

maidservant leads a double life. Her duplicity, however, is marked by contradiction: she wishes to maintain her close, quasi-familial relationship with her mistress while secretly asserting her autonomy. Mirbeau is shown to use his representation of the maidservant's rebellious behaviour in order to advance his anarchist view of society as corrupt and sick. This corruption, he argues, has been passed on from the bourgeoisie to the servant thanks to her proximity to the family – a theme that this chapter investigates further. While Célestine is shown to secretly revolt against her masters and mistresses, it is far more deliberate than Germinie's duplicity; Célestine plots directly against the bourgeoisie whereas Germinie attempts to live a double life. An investigation into the differences between the writers' political standpoints (and therefore also their cultural and historical frameworks) shows how, despite pursuing different aims in their representations of the maidservant, the Goncourts and Mirbeau were in fact constructing very similar depictions of the fears surrounding the nineteenth-century maidservant. Contemporaries saw obvious parallels between Germinie and Célestine. For example, as Chapter One has already noted, Ryckère states that Célestine 'est comme la cousine de Germinie'<sup>823</sup> and that the fictional maids should be seen as two 'real' examples of how servants everywhere in France exhibit the same kinds of subversive behaviour.

This chapter builds on Didi-Huberman's theory of the internal *soulèvement* in order to demonstrate how fictional maidservants rebel not just through their words, but also through their thoughts. In his second volume, *Imaginer recommencer: Ce qui nous soulève II*, (2021), Didi-Huberman observes that in order to revolt, one must 's'imaginer[r]: délivrant ses images, ses feux d'images, pour que le "grand temps" prenne forme à travers le mouvement même de

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<sup>823</sup> See Fiorentino.

nos désirs.’<sup>824</sup> He suggests that desire takes the form of images in the mind which the workings of the imagination then construct into *soulèvements*. Building on the work of Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg, Carl Einstein and Siegfried Kracauer, who ‘avaient la particularité d’avoir placé les images au cœur de leur interrogation du temps, et le temps au cœur de leur expérience des images’,<sup>825</sup> Didi-Huberman investigates how throughout history, images surface in the political mind to then be transformed by the imagination into *soulèvements*:

Les images surgissent comme les interfaces mouvantes, changeantes, actives de mémoires souvent enfouies depuis longtemps et de désirs souvent informulés. Elles agissent comme des opérateurs de conversion, de métamorphose: par exemple là où une expérience présente se transforme en espérance, c’est-à-dire en souhait pour l’avenir, en *pensée d’advenir*.<sup>826</sup>

Didi-Huberman notes that ‘le désir qui vient à la pensée par tout un flot d’images qui vont bientôt innerver notre corps, nos gestes, notre agir’, is a revolutionary desire that launches the body into physical action.<sup>827</sup> Whereas Didi-Huberman applies his reading of *soulèvements* to the political imagination that emerged during various republican, communist and socialist uprisings throughout history, extending his theory to the fictional maidservants of *le roman de la servante* helps to provide an insight into how these fictional characters transform their desires and memories into a *soulèvement* at an individual level.

The *soulèvement* of thoughts allows the fictional heroine to appear to be following society’s prescribed rules that sought to silence the maidservant’s voice, whilst secretly rebelling in an internal revolt against her oppressive servitude and/or tyrannical masters and mistresses. The Goncourts and Mirbeau debunk the figure of the loyal female servant as a myth or cultural construct by showing how the rebellious female servant manipulates a mask

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<sup>824</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Imaginer recommencer: Ce qui nous soulève II* (Paris: Minuit, 2021), p. 11.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 305-06.

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

of loyalty in order to revolt discreetly. The fictional female servant's revolt therefore forms part of their 'non-descript' presence; she rebels by repressing her emotions. Through her thoughts, as well as through her repressed laughter and humour, the heroine transforms her oppressive situation into dreams of revenge.

Didi-Huberman's writings build on the theories of images proposed by Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud<sup>828</sup> in order to argue that it is through the images conjured in the imagination (created from desire or from suppressed desire) that we reach 'un temps inactuel':<sup>829</sup> 'une inactualité en acte [...] Ni tout à fait passée, ni tout à fait présente et déjà en attente de futur'.<sup>830</sup> He then applies Bloch's theory of hope to demonstrate the importance of optimism in this process of creating a separate moment in time by means of a revolt through thoughts:

Espérer c'est voir un temps que ne voit pas l'actualité où nous sommes plongés. C'est voir le temps à même sa possibilité de remise en jeu. C'est voir un "vrai temps" peut-être, en tout cas un "grand temps" qu'à toute force nous désirons et que veut offusquer l'histoire présente quand cette histoire est aux mains de maîtres décidés à ne rien lâcher sur l'aliénation de leurs sujets.<sup>831</sup>

The images that Germinie and Célestine form through their *soulèvements* are read in the second part of this chapter as emerging from their hope to alter the status quo by seeking revenge and thereby creating a new reality for themselves. While this reality may last only a few moments in their thoughts, this *soulèvement* is a way of escaping their oppression whilst providing both heroines with a sense of power. As Didi-Huberman observes, 'espérer invente le temps au sens où celui-ci devient une *instance de recommencer*'.<sup>832</sup> This chapter analyses how Germinie and Célestine exist (albeit only for a few moments) in this separate time that is

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<sup>828</sup> See Ernest Bloch's theory of "images-désirs", ou "images-souhais" as set out in *The Principle of Hope* (1854-59), as well as Walter Benjamin's theory of 'images dialectiques' and Freud's 'épiphanyes symptomales' analysed by Didi-Huberman (*Imaginer recommencer*, p. 305).

<sup>829</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Imaginer recommencer*, p. 64.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>832</sup> Ibid.

neither past, present nor future as they revolt in their minds. During this suspended sense of time, Célestine gains a sense of power over her masters and mistresses while Germinie is empowered to take a stand against her lover. Hope, Didi-Huberman maintains, ‘c’est avoir le courage de persister dans son désir, de résister à tout ce qui nous porterait au renoncement, à la désolation, aux petits arrangements, à la soumission.’<sup>833</sup> Didi-Huberman’s theory illuminates a new method for seeing how servant characters transform their oppression into an internal revolt; Germinie and Célestine hope to change the status quo between servants, masters and mistresses, as well as between women and their lovers, inventing violent scenarios as a form of revolt to reflect their desires and resist their oppressive situations. As Chapter Two analysed, *Germinie Lacerteux* and *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* show how it is only through the fictional maidservant’s imagination, and thus an internalized form of revolt, that the heroine of *le roman de la servante* can violently lash out against her masters, mistresses and lovers.

Didi-Huberman maintains that this metamorphosis of images and thoughts in the imagination occurs because reality is ‘encore insatisfaisante ou “défectueuse”’: ‘elle nous laisse donc en proie à une sensation de creux, de vide.’<sup>834</sup> In *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*, Célestine describes this oppressive situation: ‘on n’a pas le droit de souffrir... La souffrance, c’est un luxe de maître... Nous, nous devons marcher, et vite, et toujours... marcher au risque de tomber...’<sup>835</sup> The Goncourts’ narrator also describes Germinie’s miserable life: ‘[s]a vie lui semblait enfermée à jamais dans son désespoir: elle devait continuer à être toujours la même chose implacable, la même route de malheur, toute plate et tout droite, le même chemin d’ombre, avec la mort au bout. Dans le temps, il n’y avait plus

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<sup>833</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>834</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Imaginer recommencer*, p. 319.

<sup>835</sup> Mirbeau, p. 103.

d’avenir pour elle.’<sup>836</sup> Didi-Huberman’s theory helps us to understand how both fictional maidservants seek to overcome their oppressive situations by imagining themselves reversing power dynamics between masters, mistresses and servants, as well as men and women through their violent words and actions:

il revient justement à l’imagination de convertir ce *creux* (ce vide statique et refermé sur soi, avare et donc, toujours déjà vieux) en *ouverture* (ce vide dynamique, accueillant l’altérité généreux et, donc, toujours mû par la jeunesse et la possibilité du nouveau.)<sup>837</sup>

The mind ‘transforme le moins en plus, la négativité abstraite en chatoulements sensibles, l’insatisfaction en exubérance.’<sup>838</sup> Yet for fictional maidservants to overcome and transform the negativity in their lives, bitterness must first build up inside the character. This intensifying resentment then activates a revolt through the imagination which then exacerbates the resentment, producing a kind of feedback effect that can be read through Didi-Huberman’s claim that ‘gestes de soulèvements se voient menacés de l’intérieur’ through a process he refers to as *tourner vinaigre*: ‘[l]e vinaigre, comme son nom l’indique, est un “vin aigri” par la production d’acide acétique. Il connote l’affliction’.<sup>839</sup> Applied to both Germinie and Célestine, the theorization of this process provides a way of understanding the anger that builds up in their minds<sup>840</sup> as a function of their hope to achieve a better reality for themselves, as well as their need to obtain revenge. The imagination transforms their present confinement into an opening, a possibility for action. The second part of this chapter shows how the silenced voice eventually turns into an outward, verbal attack against the bourgeoisie. While this verbal backlash helps to create and develop the socio-cultural

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<sup>836</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 196.

<sup>837</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Imaginer recommencer*, p. 319.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid., *Désirer désobéir*, p. 139.

<sup>840</sup> See Jessica Rushton, ‘Destabilizing the Nineteenth-Century Maidservant Revolt Narrative: Leïla Slimani’s *Chanson douce* (2016)’, in *Echo*, ed. by Hannah McIntyre and Hayley O’Kell (MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities, 15 [2021]), 38-46 <<http://www.mhra.org.uk/publications/wph-15>> [accessed 28 December 2022], pp. 44-45 where I apply this theory to Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* and Leïla Slimani’s *Chanson douce*.

construct of the rebellious maidservant, it is also a narrative device that is used by authors of *le roman de la servante* to give voice to their own critical opinions.

This chapter also builds on Didi-Huberman's analysis of Sigmund Freud's theory of dreams and more especially his dream interpretation, which would later result in the theory of the Oedipus complex. Freud argues that it is through dreams that one gains access to a previously forgotten or censored desire: '*the contents of a dream is thus the fulfilment of a wish; its motive is a wish-fulfilment.*'<sup>841</sup> Freud emphasizes the importance of the past in the present mind of the dreamer,<sup>842</sup> noting that wish-fulfillments may even arise from a censored (suppressed) infantile state.<sup>843</sup> Didi-Huberman, however, recognizes Bloch's argument that '[i]l faut dépasser la *nostalgie* fondamentale de l'inconscient freudien et lui substituer *l'espérance*,<sup>844</sup> qui s'adresse à l'autre vecteur du temps psychique' by reinventing '*l'art de rêver le jour*',<sup>845</sup> or in Bloch's terms, 'rêves éveillés'.<sup>846</sup> For Bloch, these 'daydreams' arise from 'un mélange de savoir [...] et d'émotion', but should not be idealized as containing the solution to every problem, or the fulfilment of every desire.<sup>847</sup> Rather, it is an '[a]ttente du nouveau' and an opening that leads us forward.<sup>848</sup> Based on this theory of daydreaming, in which a sense of hope triggers images that arise from the imagination, Didi-Huberman maintains that 'il faut rendre nos rêves fauves, enflammés, appétents, dionysiaques, révolutionnaires. Il faut oser *rêver rouge*, rêver tout haut la liberté: l'exclamer et la mettre en œuvre.'<sup>849</sup> While Didi-Huberman connects Bloch's theory to the political imagination, I

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<sup>841</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by A.A. Brill (Ware: Wordsworth, 1997), p. 31, emphasis in original.

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80, 404-05.

<sup>844</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Imaginer recommencer*, p. 283 notes that 'on pourrait dire aussi que cette espérance n'est autre que le nom, éthique ou politique, du désir en tant que tel, dont Freud n'a jamais nié la faculté protensive'.

<sup>845</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>848</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 283-84.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

apply it to the scenarios invented by the Goncourts and by Mirbeau in order to demonstrate how fictional maidservants revolt through their thoughts in the form of daydreams, before analysing how Germinie revolts against her lover in her nightmares. While on the one hand, the psychoanalysis of a fictional maidservant is potentially problematic, especially given the fact that both Germinie and Célestine form part of a larger socio-cultural construct created by bourgeois writers, on the other hand, investigating the psychological state of fictional maidservants through their dreams can reveal how both characters are shown to revolt internally against their societies. Revolting through dreams is an initial way for the fictional maidservant to envision herself overturning power structures in the home and in society. I then analyse how both maidservants revolt by means of the verbalized techniques they employ in speeches denouncing their employers.

In what follows, I demonstrate that despite their different socio-cultural frameworks (the Goncourts published their novel during the Second Empire, whereas Mirbeau published his during the Belle Époque), their differing political standpoints and their contrasting use of aesthetics, Mirbeau and the Goncourts arrive at the same conclusion that the female servant's duplicity not only threatens the lives of the bourgeoisie, but also the moral order and class hierarchy of nineteenth-century society.

# 1. Differing Contexts Yet Similar Maidservants: The Goncourts' and Mirbeau's romans de la servante

## 1.1 Germinie Lacerteux: 'Documents Humains'

On Thursday 21 August 1862, Jules and Edmond de Goncourt discovered that Rose Malingre was someone other than their devoted servant, '[u]ne habitude, une affection, un dévouement de vingt-cinq ans, une fille qui savait toute notre vie, qui ouvrait nos lettres en notre absence, à laquelle nous racontions tout.'<sup>850</sup> The uncovering of Rose's hidden life thus produced 'une grande amertume'<sup>851</sup> in the brothers, who had naively assumed that they knew their servant's true character: '[c]'est affreux, ce déchirement de voile; c'est comme l'autopsie de quelque chose d'horrible dans une morte tout à coup ouverte.'<sup>852</sup> The Goncourts were both horrified and fascinated by the discovery of the 'true' nature of their female servant. They describe in their diary the shocking discovery that Rose had accumulated large debts, stolen from them, engaged in multiple love affairs, developed a drink problem and possibly exhibited hysterical tendencies (a label that Chapter Two has already looked at in relation to the maidservant).<sup>853</sup> This scandal went against the period's belief that the maidservant's life was subsumed within her service, as Marcel Cusenier summarizes: '[l]a vie privée des domestiques appartient aux maîtres'.<sup>854</sup> The shock of these revelations influenced the Goncourts' narrativization of their eponymous fictional maidservant. *Germinie Lacerteux* was therefore one of the Goncourts' novels that they labelled 'documents humains'<sup>855</sup> insofar as their contents derived not from

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<sup>850</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, I, 848.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 850.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 849.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>854</sup> Cusenier, p. 176.

<sup>855</sup> See Edmond de Goncourt, 'Préface', in *La Faustine* (Paris: Georges Charpentier, 1882), pp. i-vi (p. ii), which appears to be a nod to Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Charpentier, 1902 [1880]), p. 51: 'Nous préparerons les voies, nous fournirons des faits d'observation, des documents humains qui pourront devenir très utiles'.

their imaginations but rather from a collage of various documents and sources from their investigations into real-life settings.<sup>856</sup> The brothers undertook ‘expeditions’ into the world of the lower classes, accumulating these various documents and sources in order to create works that explicitly showed the ‘true life’ of lower-class people: for example, *Henriette Maréchal* (performed in 1865 and serialized in 1866) and Edmond’s *La Fille Élisa* (1877).<sup>857</sup> When it came to transforming Rose’s double life into fiction, they used the preface to *Germinie Lacerteux* to describe it as ‘un roman vrai [...] ce livre vient de la rue.’<sup>858</sup> The Goncourts use their real-life enquiry into their maidservant’s past as the basis of their scientific experiment to delve into the mind of the maidservant and therefore the minds of the lower classes. The Goncourts’ allegedly scientific method of observation of the female servant then went on to influence the works of the Naturalists.<sup>859</sup>

For David Baguley and Naomi Schor, *Germinie Lacerteux* is *a* if not *the* founding text of Naturalism,<sup>860</sup> a literary genre that Baguley describes as seeking likewise to unmask the hidden nature of reality and so reveal ‘[l]ife stripped of its veils, its illusions, its pretensions, its poetry. Life in its monstrous, demystifying nakedness.’<sup>861</sup> It is therefore ironic that the Goncourts, who prided themselves on their powers of observation of the lower classes in their artistic creation, and who influenced an entire genre of literature that was motivated by a scientific, observational approach, had in fact so long been blind to their servant’s double

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<sup>856</sup> Katherine Ashley, *Edmond de Goncourt and the Novel: Naturalism and Decadence* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005) pp. 71-72 describes that ‘written, oral, or painted “documents”, in the form of letters, memoirs, diaries, library research or field work, were acquired, noted observed or carried out’ by the Goncourts when writing their novels.

<sup>857</sup> See George Joesph Becker, ‘On True Novels’, in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. by George Joesph Becker (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 117-19 (p. 117).

<sup>858</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 55.

<sup>859</sup> Ferdinand Brunetière, *Le Roman naturaliste* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1882) p. 259 produces a counter argument to this stating that ‘leur naturalisme consiste surtout à manquer de naturel’.

<sup>860</sup> See Baguley, pp. 71-96, and Schor, p. 128.

<sup>861</sup> Baguley, p. 177.

life.<sup>862</sup> Furthermore, the Goncourts' aesthetic was created less from their objective observations of the world than from their culturally constructed fantasies of their servant's hidden life. For our purposes, this biographical dimension adds a further layer of complexity to the representation of the maidservant in the Goncourts' novel; *Germinie Lacerteux* emerges as an indirect warning to the nineteenth-century bourgeois readers that the loyal maidservant is a mere idealization or, as this thesis has previously argued, a myth in the bourgeois imagination. The authors of *le roman de la servante* like the Goncourts highlight how an anxious bourgeoisie believed that it was only a matter of time before the 'loyal' maidservant figure showed her true colours. It is through the debunking of the loyal maidservant myth that they reinforce the image of a rebellious female servant as the 'real' figure in their homes.

## **1.2 The Goncourts' Lack of 'Social Impulse'**

The representation of the maidservant in *Germinie Lacerteux* was also influenced by the Goncourts' interest in the lower classes; yet, as we shall see, this interest was aesthetic rather than political. According to the Goncourts' preface to *Germinie Lacerteux*, living and writing 'dans un temps de suffrage universel, de démocratie, de libéralisme' of the Second Empire caused them to question why the lower classes, 'ce monde sous un monde, le peuple', did not also deserve to be the subject of a novel.<sup>863</sup> Following the Revolution of 1848, the proletariat were now at the forefront of the social and political scene,<sup>864</sup> influencing the Goncourts to create a novel that would focus on a woman of the people. On 1 July 1856, their diary describes their desire '[de] [f]aire quelque chose comme *La Lorette*: sur le peuple, intitulé *Le*

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<sup>862</sup> Baguley, p. 75 also makes a similar point.

<sup>863</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 55.

<sup>864</sup> See Thaler, p. 8.

*Peuple*, y mêler le cru et le haut, l'observation et les considérations en deux lignes.’<sup>865</sup> As Chapter One has shown, while the bourgeoisie perceived the maidservant as their principal contact with the lower classes, other working-class citizens distanced themselves from servants, deeming them to be too intimately connected with the bourgeoisie. Auerbach also complicates the Goncourts’ claim of representing ‘le peuple’<sup>866</sup> in *Germinie Lacerteux*: ‘[t]he very fact that *Germinie Lacerteux* is once again a novel about a maid, that is, about an appendage of the bourgeoisie, shows that the task of including the fourth estate in the subject matter of serious artistic representation is not centrally understood and approached.’<sup>867</sup> While the female servant was ostracized by the working classes, this thesis has likewise shown how the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant projected the identities of various lower-class female outsiders onto the identity – and body – of the maidservant. In representing a lower-class female figure, the Goncourts sought to create a new aesthetic. As Auerbach explains, the Goncourts were not championing the fourth estate when they chose the maidservant as a literary heroine:

As soon as we examine the content carefully, we recognize the driving force to be an aesthetic and not a social impulse. The subject treated is not one which concerns the center of the social structure; it is a strange and individual marginal phenomenon. For the Goncourts, it is a matter of the aesthetic attraction to the ugly and pathological. By this I do not mean to deny the value of the courageous experiment the Goncourts undertook [...] Their example helped to inspire and encourage others who did not stop with the purely aesthetic.<sup>868</sup>

The maidservant, like the prostitute, was appealing insofar as she contributed to the strangeness, or originality, of the Goncourts’ artistic representation of the world;<sup>869</sup> she was an example of the particularly morbid aesthetic that both fascinated and repulsed them, as well as the experience of the unknown amongst the everyday.<sup>870</sup> As Chapter One has already noted, the Goncourts saw themselves as seeking out the same type of exoticism in their

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<sup>865</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, I, 185.

<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.*, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 55.

<sup>867</sup> Auerbach, pp. 498-99.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 505.

<sup>869</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498.

<sup>870</sup> Auerbach, p. 498.

everyday subject, that is to say as travellers who venturing into the unknown. The maidservant is thus a part of this ‘strange’ subject matter that the authors of *le roman de la servante* enjoy exoticizing in order to attract a bourgeois readership<sup>871</sup> and therefore sell their novels. As Danielle Thaler notes, the Goncourts made the proletariat ‘un produit de consommation littéraire neuf’.<sup>872</sup>

### **1.3 The Goncourts’ Class Biases**

By representing the maidservant as part of the exoticism of their novel’s aesthetic, rather than advocating for the female servant’s cause, the Goncourts tell us more about their own biases and prejudices with regard to the female servant than about the lives of actual maidservants. The maidservant’s fate in the novel is shown to be predestined, her behaviour deterministically controlled by biology, class and environment. As Chapter Three explored, there was a common idea circulating during the second half of the nineteenth century that the lower-class female is determined by her very nature to succumb to vices. In his laudatory review of *Germinie Lacerteux* in *Le Salut public*, Zola likewise observes that the fictional maidservant’s fate ‘dépend uniquement des événements de la vie, du milieu. Mettez Germinie dans une autre position, et elle ne succombera pas; donnez-lui un mari, des enfants à aimer et elle sera excellente mère, excellente épouse.’<sup>873</sup> In their response to Zola’s article, the Goncourts were in full agreement: Germinie would indeed have only succeeded in life had she been part of a different class. The Goncourts suggest through their class prejudices that even the most loyal of servants will inevitably succumb to vice due to their class

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<sup>871</sup> For nineteenth-century authors’ reactions to *Germinie Lacerteux* (such as those of Flaubert and Zola), see Nadine Satiat, ‘Réactions diverses’, in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), pp. 275-89.

<sup>872</sup> Danielle Thaler, *La Clinique de l’amour selon les frères Goncourt: Peuple, femme, hystérie* (Montreal: Naaman de Sherbrooke, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>873</sup> Zola, ‘*Germinie Lacerteux*: par MM. Ed et J. de Goncourt’, in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017, [1865]), pp. 277-88 (p. 279).

position. The representation of the female servant is therefore a way for the Goncourts to feed into the class biases of their period, as well as discourses surrounding gender.

#### **1.4 The Goncourts' Misogynistic Representation of the Maidservant**

The Goncourts' perception of the maidservant also connects to a general misogynistic perception of women by male writers. As Marie-Agnès Sourieau argues, the determinism featured in *Germinie Lacerteux* is the Goncourts' attempt at capturing 'une "vérité" de la femme' as an 'énigme sexuelle' – a theory which obsessed male writers and doctors during this period.<sup>874</sup> The Goncourts had read Jean-Baptiste Louyer-Villermay's article 'Hystérie' (1818) in Nicolas Adelon and others' *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* (1812-22), and Jean-Louis Brachet's *Traité de l'hystérie* (1847); they had also attended Charcot's famous lessons on hysteria at the Salpêtrière.<sup>875</sup> As a result of their fascination with the hysterical woman, Sourieau argues that 'c'est parce que pour [les Goncourt] le comportement de Rose/Germinie ne peut s'expliquer et s'excuser qu'en raison d'un dérangement psychopathologique lié à ses origines sociales, qu'ils vont en faire une hystérique.'<sup>876</sup> Such readings of the novel therefore maintain that *Germinie Lacerteux* depicts the naturalization of the lower-class woman who is predetermined to succumb to hysteria and vice as a part of her condition as a woman. The misogynistic tendencies and class biases of the Goncourts therefore condition the representation of the maidservant in this novel. Rather than advocating for the female servant, the Goncourts are contributing to a misogynistic social construct of her by claiming to reveal her hidden nature.

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<sup>874</sup> Marie-Agnès Sourieau, 'L'Expression du mutisme dans *Germinie Lacerteux*', in *Repression and Expression: Literary and Social Coding in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by Carrol F. Coates (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 73-79 (p. 73).

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>876</sup> *Ibid.*

### 1.5 *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre: The Anarchist's Fictional Servant*

Mirbeau's political views differed markedly from those of the Goncourts. In his later life,<sup>877</sup> his anarchist sympathies inspired the creation of *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* and therefore his representation of the female servant.<sup>878</sup> Rather than using class and gender determinism to explain the female servant's condition, Mirbeau chose to criticize French society. He suggests that the corruption of French society (notably that of the bourgeoisie) is responsible for creating rebellious female servants. As Counter notes, narratives of the maidservant as victim of her master's conduct can be traced back to a 'seventeenth-century homiletic discourse' which suggested 'that the servant's debauchery typically reflect[ed] the master's'.<sup>879</sup> Although the Naturalists had influenced Mirbeau's choice of lower-class subject matter,<sup>880</sup> his *fin-de-siècle* anarchism encourages him to transcend the conventions of Naturalism<sup>881</sup> and goes beyond the call for social reform found in Zola's *Trois Villes* (1894-98) and his *Quatre Evangiles* (1899-1903).<sup>882</sup> Mirbeau believed that anarchism was the most impactful and revolutionary force to change French society insofar as it demolished the existing state order.<sup>883</sup> Reg Carr notes that Mirbeau's novels uphold '[a]nti-Clericalism, anti-militarism, anti-parliamentarianism, the abolition of the death-penalty, internalism, pacifism, the secularism of education, the reduction of State interference in individual enterprise, anti-

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<sup>877</sup> Mirbeau's politics in the early 1870s took a sharp turn to the right; he published in right-wing papers and showed some preference for Bonapartist circles. In 1884-85, he moved to the left, and showed a clear attachment to the anarchist movement. See Sharif Gemie, 'Mirbeau and the Politics of Misogyny', *Journal of European Studies*, 31:121 (2001), 71-98 (p. 72).

<sup>878</sup> Robert Ziegler, 'Anarchism as Fiction in Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*', *Romance Quarterly*, 43:4 (1996), 195-205 (p. 195).

<sup>879</sup> Counter, 'Bad Examples', p. 407.

<sup>880</sup> Reg Carr, *Anarchism in France: The Case of Octave Mirbeau* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 3.

<sup>881</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *Mirbeau's Fictions* (Durham: University of Durham, Durham Modern Languages Series, 1996) argues that Mirbeau 'helps explode the predictable conventions of the naturalist novel laid down and practiced by a predecessor like Zola' (p. viii).

<sup>882</sup> Carr, p. 3.

<sup>883</sup> Gemie, p. 73.

patriotism, anti-capitalism.’<sup>884</sup> The fictional maidservant, Célestine, serves as a literary tool for Mirbeau to articulate these opinions. While Mirbeau probably read the Goncourts’ maidservant text and considered it a possible model alongside Georges de Peyrebrune’s loyal maidservant novel *Victoire la Rouge*, his anarchist sympathies led him to represent the female servant in such a way as to denounce all forms of authoritarian control over society. Thus Marie-Bernard Bat observes that ‘Mirbeau dote sa narratrice de sa propre verve satirique, dénonçant le cynisme et l’hypocrisie de la bourgeoisie *mais aussi* de la domesticité.’<sup>885</sup> The final part of this chapter delves into the problem of representation that stems from authors of *le roman de la servante* appropriating the maidservant’s voice to endorse their own ideals, social biases, stereotypes and prejudices. Bat’s observation is nevertheless borne out by the scene in which Célestine denounces the mistreatment of servants as modern slaves in a clear echo of Mirbeau’s own condemnation of bourgeois society:

On prétend qu’il n’y a plus d’esclavage... Ah! voilà une bonne blague, par exemple... Et les domestiques que sont-ils donc, eux, sinon des esclaves?... Esclaves de fait, avec tout ce que l’esclavage comporte de vileté morale, d’inévitable corruption, de révolte engendreuse de haines...<sup>886</sup>

One of Mirbeau’s colleagues at *La Revue Blanche* – the one paper in which *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* first appeared in serialized form – read this speech as an important step towards social reform and progress, concluding that a civilized society should abolish domesticity as it had previously abolished slavery.<sup>887</sup> Yet as Robert Ziegler states in his study of Mirbeau’s anarchism, the latter merely ‘contented himself with diagnosing the social ills for which he offered no cure’;<sup>888</sup> as Mirbeau had previously stated elsewhere, anarchism is

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<sup>884</sup> Carr, pp. 135-36.

<sup>885</sup> Marie-Bernard Bat, ‘Octave Mirbeau romancier: Les Paradoxes d’une écriture entre deux siècles’, in *Romanciers fin-de-siècle*, ed. by Edyta Kociubińska (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 93-108 (pp. 102-03), with my emphasis.

<sup>886</sup> Mirbeau, p. 315.

<sup>887</sup> See Carr: ‘Une civilisation supérieure doit abolir [la domesticité] comme fut aboli l’esclavage dont elle n’est que l’insuffisante atténuante’ (p. 137).

<sup>888</sup> Ziegler, ‘Anarchism as Fiction in Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*’, p. 196.

‘the production of nothing’, a type of statelessness where ‘slavery, religion and war’ do not exist.<sup>889</sup> *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* was therefore not seeking to provide the solution to the servant’s oppressive situation, rather it was an attack on the institutions of power that allow this modern slavery to occur. Célestine’s speech promotes the writer’s desire for a free (and almost utopic) world as outlined by Noël Arnaud in his preface to the novel: ‘[Mirbeau] rêve d’une société libre, sans obligations ni sanctions, une société sans État, sans religion ni lois, une société du bonheur.’<sup>890</sup> This ‘free’ world was, however, gendered in the sense that Mirbeau still sought to maintain the patriarchy. Yet, as we shall see in what follows, Mirbeau’s misogynistic views are also – and paradoxically – used as part of his attack on society.

### **1.6 Mirbeau’s Slippery Misogyny**

For Sharif Gemie, Mirbeau ‘was a misogynist and an anarchist’,<sup>891</sup> insofar as the writer’s ‘desire to reform society did not preclude misogynistic fears and fantasies, which were a common theme in avant-garde painting and writing during the *fin-de-siècle*.’<sup>892</sup> Despite Mirbeau’s anarchist politics,<sup>893</sup> he – like the Decadent writers at the end of the nineteenth-century such as J.-K. Huysmans – saw Woman as part of the decay of society.<sup>894</sup> They are described in many of Mirbeau’s works as agents of immorality, as for example Clara, the terrifying, sexual heroine of *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899), or, to a certain extent, Célestine,

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<sup>889</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>890</sup> Noël Arnaud, ‘Préface’, in Octave Mirbeau, *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984 [1900]) pp. 7-27 (p. 7).

<sup>891</sup> Gemie, p. 98.

<sup>892</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>893</sup> Ibid. describes how during the Dreyfus Affair, Mirbeau criticized himself by renouncing his own writing as antisemitic; he also condemned colonialism in his writing and evoked a deep sympathy for the lower-class vagabonds in his fiction.

<sup>894</sup> Ibid.

who is shown to have sexual liaisons with another maidservant and with a mistress's son. There is also the scene in *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* that objectifies the mistress's naked body.<sup>895</sup> While Mirbeau neither condemns nor glamorizes this sexuality, both heroines are sexually affirmative women who seek to fulfil their own desires, thereby falling into the topos of the *femme fatale* figure.

Yet in Mirbeau's fictions, his misogynistic treatment of his heroines often serves as an allegory of the corrupt and feverish condition of France.<sup>896</sup> Mirbeau thus degrades women in a similar way to Rimbaud in his misogynistic poem, 'L'Orgie parisienne, ou Paris se repeuple', in which he personifies Paris as a whore whom her conquerors have abused time and time again: 'la putain Paris [...] La rouge courtisane aux seins gros de batailles'.<sup>897</sup> However, Célestine – alongside other servants in his short stories, 'La Bonne' (1885) and 'Les Abandonnés' (1890) – are not blamed for their fate or condition by Mirbeau. Rather, these are attributed to the actions of men in their texts, as well as the complicity of their corrupt wives.<sup>898</sup> Thus, as Gemie argues, Mirbeau's misogyny seems to critique 'male behaviour' and 'men's moral hypocrisy' as much as it produces a 'critical reflectio[n] on the nature of French society'.<sup>899</sup> Mirbeau's fictional servants are forced into terrible situations, such as that of prostitution, but are not viewed as passive victims of their social and gender identities as in *Germinie Lacerteux*. Instead, Mirbeau sees these women as forced into moral dilemmas by their corrupt societies.<sup>900</sup> It is indeed the corrupt hypocrites of the bourgeoisie that Mirbeau, and thus Célestine, blames for her vices: 'Les domestiques apprennent le vice

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<sup>895</sup> See Mirbeau, p. 72.

<sup>896</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>897</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies, Une saison en enfer, Illuminations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 71.

<sup>898</sup> This is also argued in Gemie, pp. 84-85.

<sup>899</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid.

chez leurs maîtres.<sup>901</sup> Carr maintains that ‘this corruption of the working classes by its employers was a cause of concern to Mirbeau who, in his opposition to the middle class, dreaded the thought of the perpetuation of those bourgeois faults he hoped would disappear.’<sup>902</sup> He goes on to state that *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* demonstrates how a woman who has the potential to be ‘sincere’ and ‘kind’ is corrupted by her ‘constant contact with a degenerate class’.<sup>903</sup> Although this reading blames the bourgeoisie for creating the dangerous social climbers that have been lurking in the shadows of their homes,<sup>904</sup> it also reveals a gendered discourse that the ‘angel in the house’ disappears as soon as she steps out of her feminine attributes of kindness and sincerity. Mirbeau’s misogynistic representation of the servant in his texts is wrapped up in his anarchist sympathies for the purposes of critiquing society.

This perception of masters and mistresses corrupting their servants can also be found in nineteenth-century household manuals. In her 1884 contribution to the genre, Mlle E. Dufaux de la Jonchère notes that the century’s ‘expression proverbiale: ‘Tel maître, tel valet’ est surtout juste en ce sens, que le domestique est toujours quelque peu l’œuvre inconsciente de maîtres qu’il a servis, et même du maître qu’il sert.’<sup>905</sup> Mirbeau’s novel then agrees with such a view, suggesting that Célestine has become an imitation of her masters and mistresses. Indeed, Célestine describes how her masters see her ‘comme quelque chose d’intermédiaire entre un chien et un perroquet’.<sup>906</sup> As a parrot – no doubt in a nod to Flaubert’s Loulou in ‘Un

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<sup>901</sup> Mirbeau, p. 315.

<sup>902</sup> Carr, p. 136.

<sup>903</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>904</sup> This is also a point made by Carr, pp. 136-37 and Robert Ziegler, *The Nothing Machine: The Fiction of Octave Mirbeau* (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>905</sup> Mlle E. Dufaux de la Jonchère, *Ce que les maîtres et les domestiques doivent savoir* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1884), p. 22.

<sup>906</sup> Mirbeau, p. 166.

cœur simple’ – Célestine is an imitator of her employers. One may also think, in this context, of Claire White’s analysis of the salesgirls in Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883 [1882-83]) in which they acquire the same habits as their rich customers, forming ‘a vague class floating between the workers and the middle classes’ much like that of the maidservant who begins to don her employers’ mannerisms.<sup>907</sup> While later in this chapter I shall show how the maidservant is given the language and voice of the master’s discourse, Célestine also embodies this metaphor through her mannerisms. In the closing scenes of the novel, she too is a tyrannical mistress: ‘Il est vrai qu’en trois mois nous avons changé quatre fois de bonne... Ce qu’elles sont exigeantes, les bonnes, à Cherbourg, et charpardeuses, et dévergondées!...Non, c’est incroyable, et c’est dégoûtant...’.<sup>908</sup> While an initial reading of this scene focuses on how Mirbeau is attacking the bourgeoisie, a second reading highlights an implicit bourgeois fear that the only point of difference between the mistress and her servant is money. This scene plays on the fears of the servant becoming exactly like her mistress by mimicking her behaviour. *Germinie Lacerteux* suggests a related fear by presenting the mistress and maidservant as both tied to servitude due to their sex. As the only woman left in her family, Mlle de Varandeuil is forced by her father to become a servant just as Balzac’s Bette becomes her family’s servant (see Chapter Three). The Goncourts describe how the father no longer recognizes Mlle de Varandeuil as his daughter: ‘Ce n’était plus quelqu’un de son sang, quelqu’un qui avait l’honneur de lui appartenir: c’était un domestique qu’il avait là sous la main’.<sup>909</sup>

Yet, by occupying a position somewhere in between that of a parrot and a dog, Célestine is also depicted as the bourgeoisie’s pet: their supposedly ‘loyal’ companion who

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<sup>907</sup> Claire White, p. 65.

<sup>908</sup> Mirbeau, p. 448.

<sup>909</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 69

should passively accept their every command. Germinie Lacerteux is likewise described as a canine in her respective narrative: '[e]lle se mit à aimer cette femme avec une sorte de dévouement animal et à lui obéir avec des docilités de chien.'<sup>910</sup> Yet a dog, like Flaubert's Loulou, also retains an underlying capacity to turn on its owners. The maidservant can thus be seen as retaining the potential to bite back against the bourgeoisie. Mirbeau's dog and parrot metaphor can also be applied to how the fictional maidservant is constructed through the voice of the master: Célestine is an anarchist attacking the bourgeoisie as a mouthpiece for Mirbeau. She therefore contrasts with Germinie Lacerteux who symbolizes the morbid and the repulsive in the Goncourts' work.

## **2. Revolting Against the Nineteenth-Century 'Loyal' Servant: *Pensées et Paroles***

By analysing household manuals further, the second section of this chapter identifies and analyses how and why the upper and middle classes attempted to silence the servant, in the process showing how the Goncourts and Mirbeau manipulate bourgeois fears relating to the servant's presence in the home. The two fictional maidservants in their novels first revolt internally (through their *pensées*): they appear to wear the silent mask of the loyal maidservant even as they find ways to draw attention to their deviancy. This mask serves to suppress their thoughts, feelings and actions (ranging from laughter to extreme violence), which are then shown to take the form of *soulèvements*. These two maidservant heroines invent scenarios in order to revolt against their oppressive situations. These scenarios take the form of daydreams or hallucinations, as well as of nightmares. It is during these dream states that the maidservants also speak from their subconscious. As we shall see in what follows,

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<sup>910</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 86.

the *soulèvements* of *pensées* and *paroles* initially provide both heroines with a sense of freedom from their oppressed situations, as well as a sense of power insofar as they reverse existing power dynamics between men and women, masters and servants. Yet, as the third section of this chapter concludes, this sense of autonomy and power obtained thanks to the heroines' *soulèvements* are limited to the diegetic level of the text, for the authors of *le roman de la servante* usurp the maidservant's voice in order to express their own (political) agendas.

## 2.1 Silencing the Maidservant

In an attempt to erase the female servant's presence in the home, and therefore increase the bourgeoisie's distance from these lower-class figures, authors of nineteenth-century household manuals such as Madame Celnart advise the bourgeoisie to keep their servants 'dans un humble et profond silence':<sup>911</sup>

le babillage est chez les domestiques un défaut très dangereux, quoiqu'au premier abord, il paraisse peu important. En effet, il ne s'agit pas seulement de temps perdu en causant sans cesse avec les gens de la maison, les fournisseurs, tout le monde; des impatiences causées par les retards commissions auxquelles, à force de conversations, on met souvent trois heures où suffiraient vingt minutes; de la familiarité que contracte nécessairement un domestique bavard, qui en vient à parler sans qu'on l'interroge, à se mêler de la conversation, soit quand ses maîtres sont seuls entre eux, soit lorsqu'il y a des étrangers, ce qui est tout-à-fait inconvenant et ridicule.<sup>912</sup>

Madame Celnart is here implying a sense of uneasiness about the separation between the bourgeoisie and the servant class in the private sphere of the home. If servants were allowed to talk to their master and mistress as equals, this could result in a breakdown of the strict class hierarchy. This chattiness would thus result in a loss of power over the servant, damaging the bourgeoisie's credibility and thus class status. For the nineteenth-century

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<sup>911</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 7.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

historian Albert Babeau, this was not so much a fear under the Ancien Régime, a period in which masters and servants were perceived as closer, and more familiar with each other:

il s'était établi entre eux une sorte de familiarité qu'on a peine à comprendre de notre temps, où le sentiment du respect est affaibli. Aujourd'hui, au théâtre comme dans la vie réelle, le maître est froid, le valet subordonné. Le premier ne parle trop souvent que pour donner des ordres, le second pour dire qu'il les a compris.<sup>913</sup>

Babeau argues that it is this lack of familiarity that explains 'une sorte de répugnance' that the nineteenth-century servant inspires.<sup>914</sup> As Chapter One of this thesis has explored, the nineteenth-century maidservant was perceived as the bourgeoisie's principal point of contact with dirt and disease. The servant therefore needed to be kept at a safe distance. One mistress in *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* tells her husband: '[j]e ne veux pas qu'on soit familier avec mes domestiques...'<sup>915</sup> Yet this mistress's fears of the proximity of the master and the servant seems to reflect ongoing fears of the servant becoming a *servante-mâîtresse*. There is a need to distance the male members of the household in particular from the seductive dangers posed by the female servant; familiarity between the maidservant and her master would only increase the chance of secret affairs and therefore provide her with opportunities to corrupt the bourgeois household with her sexual diseases. By attempting to erase the female servant's voice, alongside her appearance through a non-descript uniform, the bourgeois mistress seeks to remove the eroticization of the female servant.

In addition to the concern that a servant's talkativeness would increase her familiarity with her masters and servants, household manuals also suggest an apprehension about servants chatting among themselves and to other members of the lower classes. Madame Celnart observes that if female servants are given too much time to buy provisions, they will

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<sup>913</sup> Babeau, p. 297.

<sup>914</sup> Ibid.

<sup>915</sup> Mirbeau, p. 82.

chat for ‘des heures entières’ with other servants and market sellers:<sup>916</sup> ‘leur principale provision est celle des paroles inutiles’,<sup>917</sup> but her manual also voices the fear that servants who are allowed to chat to one another may share intimate information about their households.<sup>918</sup> James C. Scott points out that ‘[b]itter criticism via gossip is also used routinely by those at the bottom of the caste system to destroy the reputation of their high-caste superiors’.<sup>919</sup> He goes on to explain that ‘[g]ossip is perhaps the most familiar and elementary form of disguised popular aggression’,<sup>920</sup> insofar as it is a ‘relatively safe social sanction’ in situations where power and oppression makes open acts of revolt and disrespect too dangerous.<sup>921</sup> Scott maintains that gossip is a safe method of resistance as it ‘has no identifiable author, but scores of eager retailers who can claim they are just passing on the news.’<sup>922</sup> A female servant therefore takes less risks in seeking to damage her mistress’s and master’s reputations and relies on its contents to interest her peers enough that they then spread it. As we have seen in the previous chapter, rebellious female servants in the social imaginary were perceived as purposely spying on their masters and mistresses, and spreading gossip.<sup>923</sup> For her part, Madame Pariset likewise maintains that servants in larger households should be kept busy to avoid ‘le bruit insupportable des causeries ou des ronflements, qui ordinairement occupent les domestiques’<sup>924</sup> – one may think here of the servants in Zola’s *Pot-Bouille* who shout out of the windows to each other.<sup>925</sup> She also highlights a similar

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<sup>916</sup> Mirbeau, p. 41.

<sup>917</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 41.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>919</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 143.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid.

<sup>922</sup> Ibid.

<sup>923</sup> Ibid.

<sup>924</sup> Madame Pariset, p. 11.

<sup>925</sup> See Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, p. 18 ‘Un terrible bruit s’en échappa. La fenêtre, malgré le froid, était grande ouverte. Accoudées à la barre d’appui, la femme de chambre noire et une cuisinière grasse, une vieille débordante, se penchaient dans le puits étroit d’une cour intérieure, où s’éclairaient, face à face, les cuisines de chaque étage. Elles criaient ensemble, les reins tendus, pendant que, du fond de ce boyau, montaient des éclats de voix canaille, mêlés à des rires et à des jurons. C’était comme la déverse d’un égout: toute la domesticité de la maison était là, à se satisfaire. Octave se rappela la majesté bourgeoise du grand escalier.’

concern to Madame Celnart that servants who talk to each other could band together: ‘[p]lus vos domestiques seront occupés séparément chacun de leur devoir, moins ils auront de causeries communes, et mieux cela vaudra.’<sup>926</sup> These household manuals implicitly suggest the fears outlined in Chapter One that female servants could rise up together against their masters and mistresses if they were given the opportunity. Thus in *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*, Célestine teams up with Joseph in order to steal from their master and mistress. By attempting to erase the maidservant’s voice, the bourgeoisie thus hoped to diminish her potential threat to the order of the household which in turn served as a microcosm for the class structure of society.

Mirbeau explicitly feeds into the fears concerning talkative servants that are outlined in these household manuals. Upon entering the service of a provincial household as a new servant, Célestine ‘[a] demandé des renseignements sur la maison, s’il venait souvent du monde et quel genre de monde, si Monsieur faisait attention aux femmes de chambre, si Madame avait un amant?’.<sup>927</sup> Yet Célestine’s fellow servants, Joseph and Marianne, ‘étaient scandalisés et ridicules’<sup>928</sup> by Célestine’s attempt to pry into her the private lives of the masters and mistresses. They stand in contrast to the rebellious maidservant by following the rule set out in the period’s household manuals that private household matters should never be discussed. As a maidservant previously based in Paris, Célestine is shocked: ‘[o]n n’a pas idée de ce qu’ils sont en retard en province’;<sup>929</sup> she explains that in the city, the ‘valet de chambre [...] nous racontait des histoires polissonnes et touchantes, [...] il nous mettait au courant des lettres de Monsieur’.<sup>930</sup> Joseph and Marianne are therefore used, by way of

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<sup>926</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 26.

<sup>927</sup> Mirbeau, p. 59.

<sup>928</sup> Ibid.

<sup>929</sup> Ibid.

<sup>930</sup> Ibid.

contrast, to emphasize the stereotype that servants normally gossip about the lives of her masters and mistresses. Later in the novel, Célestine describes how in another household, ‘nous parlions à l’office’ after discovering the mistress’s romantic affair.<sup>931</sup> The servant manipulates her position in order to find out secret information about the household, before sharing it with the other in-house staff members. The maidservant must be kept ‘isolée’<sup>932</sup> to ensure that she remains loyal and does not revolt. *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* shows that these concerns thus limited the amount of time a servant could enjoy outside of the home, with certain mistresses refusing to let their servants leave it at all.<sup>933</sup> Through his representation of Célestine, Mirbeau therefore feeds into the social imaginary that produced fears that servants could damage a household’s reputation by gossiping, whilst also providing his heroine with a sense of her power over the masters and mistresses she serves.

The novel’s form as a fictional diary then emphasizes how Mirbeau manipulates the social imaginary of the female servant as a gossip who shares the intimate information of her household with others. Yet while the diary is ordinarily a form in which the writer of the text may assume they are the work’s exclusive reader,<sup>934</sup> Trevor Field points out that the diary aspect of Mirbeau’s novel ‘becomes almost incidental’: ‘the novel’s concentration on past events turns it into a memoir novel [...] the dates at the start of each entry are less important to Mirbeau [...] [H]is true aim in the novel may be seen in the fact that Célestine writes “this journal” with an audience in mind’.<sup>935</sup> Although Célestine does not explicitly refer to the reader in her writing, Ziegler argues that it is part of the character’s position as an ‘interloper trespassing in the house where another is the master who lays down rules and defines reality.

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<sup>931</sup> Mirbeau, p. 75.

<sup>932</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>933</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 103, 358.

<sup>934</sup> Robert Ziegler, *Octave Mirbeau’s Fictions of the Transcendental* (Newark, DE, University of Delaware Press, 2015), p. 113.

<sup>935</sup> Trevor Field, *Form and Function of the Diary Novel* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989), p. 42.

In her writing and service, Célestine's work is structured by building and destroying, authoring herself through the demolition of employers whose imposture and perversions are unmasked in her narrative.<sup>936</sup> Yet the reader is no doubt partakes in this demolition. Through the intimate, first-person account of the female servant, the reader partakes in the gossiping, and therefore participates in the novel's voyeurism as Célestine digs up the dirt on bourgeois households. The reader becomes the maidservant's true confidant as she denounces her society's hypocrisies in her diary:

J'adore servir à table. C'est là qu'on surprend ses maîtres dans toute la saleté, dans toute la bassesse de leur nature intime. Prudents, d'abord, et se surveillant l'un l'autre, ils en arrivent, peu à peu, à se révéler, à s'étaler tels qu'ils sont, sans fard et sans voiles, oubliant qu'il y a autour d'eux quelqu'un qui rôde et qui écoute et qui note leurs tares, leurs bosses morales, les plaies secrètes de leur existence, tout ce que peut contenir d'infamies et de rêves ignobles le cerveau respectable des honnêtes gens. Ramasser ces aveux, les classer, les étiqueter dans notre mémoire, en attendant de s'en faire une arme terrible, au jour des comptes à rendre, c'est une des grandes et fortes joies du métier, et c'est la revanche la plus précieuse de nos humiliations.<sup>937</sup>

By listening in on her masters' and mistresses' private discussions, Célestine goes against the advice of household manuals to maintain a respectful distance. Instead, Mirbeau's character is made to embody the period's fears of an all-seeing, all-listening and therefore all-knowing servant, before showing her turning this information into a weapon against her household. The fictional maidservant becomes the bourgeois reader's nightmare as she manipulates her position of servitude in order to gain power and control over her masters and mistresses.

Célestine likewise gains a hidden power and freedom by playing with the period's rules for how to address the master and mistress of the home. Jacques-Charles Bailleul, a politician, magistrate and one of the first authors to publish a nineteenth-century household manual in 1812, points out that servants, whether male or female, ought to respond to their masters

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<sup>936</sup> Zielger, *The Nothing Machine*, p. 137.

<sup>937</sup> Mirbeau, p. 55.

toujours à la troisième personne: “*Que demande Monsieur?... Je me rends aux ordres de Monsieur ou de Madame... J’ai fait les commissions de Monsieur...*” [...] Il doit répondre simplement: *Oui, monsieur*, ou un équivalent. Le domestique ne prononcera jamais le nom de ses maîtres en leur parlant. On en voit qui ne se contentent pas de parler à la seconde personne, mais encore qui prononcent le nom: *Voulez-vous, Monsieur un tel, que je fasse telle chose, ou que j’aie à tel endroit?* Ce sont des mal appris; rien ne prouve mieux qu’ils ont appartenu à des maîtres sans éducation, et qui ne savent pas se faire server.<sup>938</sup>

The bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century society therefore imposed their own language onto that of the servant – a theme that the latter part of this chapter explores in depth. Madame Celnart even sought to control the servant’s tone of voice, recommending a ‘bon ton’ and not ‘une voix retentissante’.<sup>939</sup> Célestine initially seems to stick to these kinds of rules, even labelling her masters and mistresses Monsieur and Madame in her diary entries. Yet, while it was advised that servants address their masters and mistresses as ‘Monsieur’ and ‘Madame’, Christopher Lloyd points out that Mirbeau is in fact manipulating these rules in order to provide the maidservant heroine with a sense of her own power:

if the employer attempts to transform the servant into an automation of will, Célestine reverses the process by presenting her masters and mistresses as a set uniformly characterized by repugnant bodies, ridiculous tics, abject urges and ludicrous names. Employers are often referred to simply as a ‘Monsieur’ or ‘Madame’, a purely false mark of respect, particularly when the full name is an absurd one.<sup>940</sup>

Lloyd suggests that Célestine is altering the power dynamics in her home by manipulating the household rules prescribed to servants.

The first master in Célestine’s account changes her name as she enters his household:

Célestine?... Diable!... Joli nom, je ne prétends pas le contraire... mais trop long, mon enfant, beaucoup trop long... Je vous appellerai Marie, si vous le voulez bien... C’est très gentil aussi, et c’est court... Et puis toutes mes femmes de chambre, je les ai appelées Marie. C’est une habitude à laquelle je serais désolé de renoncer...<sup>941</sup>

<sup>938</sup> Jacques Charles Bailleul, *Moyens de former un bon domestique* (Paris: Bailleul, 1814 [1812]), pp. 118-19.

<sup>939</sup> Madame Celnart, pp. 136-37.

<sup>940</sup> Lloyd, pp. 60-61.

<sup>941</sup> Mirbeau, p. 38.

By changing Célestine's name, the master erases the maidservant's original identity.<sup>942</sup> This not only distances the servant from her masters and mistresses, but also groups servants together as a collective, uniform and uniformed group. Fairchilds notes that this was a common practice that was also implemented in the Ancien Régime: servants were often treated as if they had no identity at all, some masters doing away with the need for names altogether.<sup>943</sup>

Célestine reverses this humiliation by reducing every master and mistress in her diary to the same name. She announces the names of her masters and mistresses to the reader in a bid to ridicule them further:

Je n'ai pas encore écrit une seule fois le nom de mes maîtres. Ils s'appellent d'un nom ridicule et comique: Lanlaire... Monsieur et madame Lanlaire... Monsieur et madame v't'faire Lanlaire !... Vous voyez d'ici toutes les bonnes plaisanteries qu'un tel nom comporte et qu'il doit forcément susciter. Quant à leurs prénoms, ils sont peut-être plus ridicules que leur nom et, si j'ose dire, ils le complètent. Celui de Monsieur est Isidore ; Euphrasie, celui de Madame... Euphrasie !... Je vous demande un peu.<sup>944</sup>

Mirbeau's representation of the maidservant therefore subverts the ideal of a loyal servant who remains silent and does not name her master and mistresses, showing this ideal to be no more than a bourgeois construct. The jokes Célestine makes at her employers' expense can also be read through Freud's theory on jokes and laughter, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), in which he argues that by 'making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him – to which the third person, who has no made efforts, bears witness by his laughter.'<sup>945</sup> The maidservant overcomes her oppressors by making such jokes, allowing her to gain a sense of autonomy. The third person here is the reader who bears witness to Célestine's jokes. Yet as

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<sup>942</sup> See Chabot for a real-life example of a master changing his maidservant's name (p. 156).

<sup>943</sup> Fairchilds, p. 102.

<sup>944</sup> Mirbeau, p. 63.

<sup>945</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1960 [1905]), p. 103.

Freud points out, ‘the hearer, who was indifferent to begin with’ can be turned into ‘a co-hater or co-despiser’ by listening to a joke.<sup>946</sup> Mirbeau therefore transforms his readers into accomplices of the rebellious maidservant and her internal *soulèvement*. A Freudian reading sees how Mirbeau attempts to ‘shatter respect for institutions and truths’, thereby undermining oppressive, authoritarian rule in society.<sup>947</sup>

While the nineteenth-century household manuals prescribe that the maidservant ‘doit faire ce service adroitement, silencieusement, respectueusement’, they also recommend that she should not ‘parler à moins qu’on ne l’interroge.’<sup>948</sup> The maidservant must remain silent, but she is still required to respond when her masters and mistresses address her. Thus, when Célestine ‘ne répondai[t] pas, faisant semblant d’ignorer que cette phrase s’adressât à [elle]’,<sup>949</sup> Mirbeau is highlighting the way in which the maidservant’s silence can also serve as a form of insolence, or revolt, as opposed to obedience. The maidservant again manipulates the rules surrounding her silence in order once again to assert a sense of authority over her masters and mistresses, even if only for a short period of time. As Madame Celnart observes, occasionally ‘ce silence absolu n’est pas nécessaire; il peut même être pris en mauvaise part, et déplaire à des maîtres raisonnables’.<sup>950</sup> Indeed, Célestine’s mistress begins to become agitated when she realizes her servant has chosen to ignore her; she demands her attention: ‘[v]ous entendez, Célestine?’<sup>951</sup> Madame Celnart advises mistresses that servants must learn how to explain themselves ‘avec politesse et clarté, s’arrêtant dès que son maître voudra parler, et ne se permettant jamais de l’interrompre. Si ses explications ne sont pas bien accueillies, loin de s’obstiner à vouloir avoir raison, il se refermera dans un

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<sup>946</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>947</sup> Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 133.

<sup>948</sup> Madame Pariset, p. 78, with my emphasis.

<sup>949</sup> Mirbeau, p. 55.

<sup>950</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 7.

<sup>951</sup> Mirbeau, p. 55.

humble et profond silence.’<sup>952</sup> Yet ‘si le domestique craint d’être entraîné par la vivacité, il fera sagement de se taire’.<sup>953</sup> Her household manual illustrates a regimented yet complex code that governed and controlled the maidservant’s voice.

Marcel Cusenier sums up the nineteenth-century myth of the loyal servant: ‘[d]ans l’esprit du maître, le domestique rêvé serait un être silencieux et qui ne trouverait la parole que pour lui répondre. Il n’aurait aucune accointance, aucune relation, ni dans la maison ni au dehors.’<sup>954</sup> Yet by reinforcing these rules, household manuals drew attention to the bourgeoisie’s fears of the potential hidden deviancy of the maidservant who has the capacity to rise up. Like the cross-class maidservant in the previous chapter, Germinie and Célestine also manipulate the mask of a loyal maidservant in order to avoid raising the suspicions of their employers as they ostensibly do their bidding.

## **2.2 Manipulating the ‘Silent’ Loyal Servant Façade**

Germinie Lacerteux manipulates the silence of the ‘loyal’ maidservant in order to maintain her close relationship with her mistress but still live a double life. She cannot outwardly lie to Mlle de Varandeuil, a woman to whom she feels indebted. Even when the female servant’s secret child is sick, the maidservant cannot find an excuse to leave her mistress: ‘elle ne put inventer un mensonge; son imagination était stupide.’<sup>955</sup> On the one hand, the Goncourts’ misogynistic critique of Germinie’s imagination suggests that the maidservant does not possess the intelligence to lie. On the other hand, this inability to articulate a lie paradoxically aids the maidservant in her deceitfulness. By suppressing her words, and therefore the story

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<sup>952</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 7.

<sup>953</sup> Madame Celnart, p. 7.

<sup>954</sup> Cusenier, p. 177.

<sup>955</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 144.

of her alternative lifestyle, Germinie appears as the ‘angel in the house’ yet internally revolts against her situation in order to obtain a sense of freedom from her life of servitude. The Goncourts describe how Germinie’s ‘voix sourde [...] étouffe un secret’:<sup>956</sup> ‘[elle] n’en laissa rien monter à ses lèvres, elle n’en laissa rien voir dans sa physionomie, rien paraître dans son air, et le fond maudit de son existence resta toujours caché à sa maîtresse.’<sup>957</sup> For Sourieau, this mutism is ‘cause et conséquence d’une sexualité effrénée qui doit se taire mais que transgressent les divers langages “parlés” de son corps: anorexie, vomissement, convulsions, regards insistants, délire, etc.’<sup>958</sup> Yet Germinie is also manipulating her society’s rules instructing servants to remain silent in order to revolt secretly through her double life. The Goncourts’ depiction of Germinie thus debunks the loyal maidservant as no more than a mere myth or construct of the nineteenth-century social imaginary, for she is manipulating her guise of a silent loyal maidservant in order to deceive her mistress and therefore maintain their quasi-familial relationship:

Elle menait ainsi comme deux existences. Elle était comme deux femmes, et à force d’énergie, d’adresse, de diplomatie féminine, avec un sang-froid toujours présent dans le trouble même de la boisson, elle parvint à séparer ces deux existences, à les vivre toutes deux sans les mêler, à ne pas laisser se confondre les deux femmes qui étaient en elle, à rester auprès de Mlle de Varandeuil la fille honnête et rangée, qu’elle avait été [...] Elle n’avait ni un propos ni un genre de tenue qui éveillât le soupçon de sa vie clandestine; rien en elle ne sentait ses nuits.<sup>959</sup>

The mask of the loyal servant is used to hide the rebellious female servant, perceived as the ‘true’ or ‘real’ maidservant in society. Germinie Lacerteux therefore serves as a fictionalized representation, albeit based on a real example of the Goncourts’ actual maidservant Rose, of the maidservant hiding her true nature and leading a secret double life. She functions as a

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<sup>956</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 158.

<sup>957</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>958</sup> Sourieau, p. 74.

<sup>959</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 178.

warning to the Goncourts' readership to reinforce their control over these female figures in the home in order to avoid falling victim to the same 'loyal' masquerade.

Mirbeau similarly suggests that the rebellious maidservant can inhabit the persona of a loyal maidservant figure as a way of hiding her rebellious nature. Like Germinie, Célestine also informs the reader that she will outwardly seek to appear as a loyal maidservant in order to leave her job without causing her mistress to question her true motives: 'je me promis de devenir une femme de chambre modèle, une perle, moi aussi... Toutes les intelligences, toutes les complaisances, toutes les délicatesses, je les prodiguai... Madame s'humanisait avec moi; peu à peu, elle se faisait véritablement mon amie...'.<sup>960</sup> Célestine follows 'les conseils de Joseph' in which he seems to also echo the instructions found in nineteenth-century household manuals: 'Soyez bien gentille, bien douce, bien dévouée... travaillez bien... Ne répondez pas...'.<sup>961</sup> Mirbeau's fictional maidservant implies that the mask of the loyal servant is easily implemented as a disguise within the rebellious maidservant plot. *Germinie Lacerteux* and *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* warn their contemporaries that even the most long-serving, apparently loyal servants are not fully to be trusted.

### **2.3 Suppressing Words and Laughter: Techniques of 'Displacement'**

An additional way that the maidservant internally revolts, and therefore appears as the 'loyal' angel in the house, is through the suppression of her words; rather than directly voicing her thoughts against her masters and mistresses, Célestine hides them in her diary. Like Germinie, Célestine remains silent in her role, outwardly projecting the image of an obedient servant. Yet in a bid to tackle her oppressive situation, and gain an albeit limited power over

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<sup>960</sup> Mirbeau, p. 445.

<sup>961</sup> Ibid.

her masters and mistresses, the fictional maidservant heroine performs a *soulèvement* through her thoughts. She suppresses her outward emotions like Germinie, yet the intimate account of the diary tells us her true feelings, in particular revealing the heroine's desire to laugh at her masters and mistresses and ridicule them for their hypocrisy. There are many scenes in *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* in which Célestine notes that she must conceal her laughter: 'J'avais grande envie de rire'.<sup>962</sup> Aleksandra Gruzinska analyses this suppressed laughter as a form of revolt: 'C'est une arme (à feu) qui la protège contre les tracasseries et les malheurs (im)prévisibles de sa profession. [...] Frustrations, humiliations, haine des maîtres, désir de se venger, voici les sentiments qui provoquent chez elle le rire.'<sup>963</sup> She goes on to argue that Célestine's 'rire, même lorsqu'il est caché, exprime le mépris envers l'opresseur.'<sup>964</sup> Freud's writings on jokes and laughter underpin this reading of Célestine's laughter as an internal revolt. He argues that laughter can 'be a release from a constraint'; it is a part of a 'defensive process', the release of which is then transformed by the discharge of laughter 'into pleasure'.<sup>965</sup> As Célestine notes: '[c]e rire ne vient pas de la joie rencontrée, de l'espoir réalisé, et il garde l'amère grimace de la révolte, le pli dur et crispé du sarcasme. Rien n'est plus douloureux et laid que ce rire; il brûle et dessèche... Mieux vaudrait, peut-être, que j'eusse pleuré!'<sup>966</sup> Read through Didi-Huberman's theory of *tourner vinaigre*, laughter transforms Célestine's anger towards her employers into revolt as she internally escapes her oppressive situation. Sharing her laughter with her readers encourages them to participate in her hatred of the bourgeoisie.

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<sup>962</sup> Mirbeau, p. 418, see also pp. 51, 53, 63, 114, 115, 119.

<sup>963</sup> Aleksandra Gruzinska, 'Une relecture du *Journal d'une femme de chambre*. Humiliation, haine et vengeance: le rire de Célestine', *Les Cahiers Octave Mirbeau*, 4 (1997), 223-35 (p. 223).

<sup>964</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>965</sup> Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 233.

<sup>966</sup> Mirbeau, p. 203.

As readers, we are party to the witty remarks that the maidservant would have uttered to her mistress had she not feared losing her job: ‘J’ai eu envie de lui répondre: – Hé! dis donc, la petite mère, et ton pot de chambre... est-ce qu’il coûte très cher? Et l’envoie-t-on à Londres quand il est fêlé?’<sup>967</sup> These kinds of *soulèvement* allow the maidservant heroine to revolt without risking her livelihood, producing a string of unvoiced insults: ‘Je m’écrie, en dedans: – Zut!... zut!... et zut!... Tu m’embêtes...’;<sup>968</sup> ‘ces monstres-là’;<sup>969</sup> ‘une pimbêche’;<sup>970</sup> ‘bête’;<sup>971</sup> and ‘chameaux’.<sup>972</sup> These suppressed insults all serve to protect the heroine from releasing a violent tirade against her masters and mistresses, and therefore ending her employment in their service. Servants hurling insults featured in the social imaginary of the rebellious servant that found its origins in the Ancien Régime; as Fairchilds notes, there are standard insults used by servants against their masters and mistress that appeared in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century police reports, such as ‘*gueuse, putain, coquine* if the employer is a woman; *foutre* and *bougre de gueux* if he is a man.’<sup>973</sup> Such insults provide maidservants with an outlet for their anger through humour. As Freud states, ‘a joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which we could not, on account of obstacles in the way, bring forward openly or consciously. [...] the joke *will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible*.’<sup>974</sup> Read through Freud, then, Célestine revolts against her oppressive situation through this form of ‘displacement’:<sup>975</sup> the maidservant’s other emotions such as ‘anger, and pain’<sup>976</sup> are

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<sup>967</sup> Mirbeau, pp. 46-47.

<sup>968</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>969</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>970</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>971</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>973</sup> Fairchilds p. 126.

<sup>974</sup> Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 103.

<sup>975</sup> Ibid.

<sup>976</sup> Ibid.

transformed into humour in order for the heroine to gain a limited sense of freedom and thereby achieve a sense of power.

In a different scene in which Célestine's mistress advises her not to see the next-door neighbour's maidservant, Rose, as she is 'une très mauvaise connaissance',<sup>977</sup> the maidservant again erupts:

Et je répète intérieurement, avec une énergie sauvage:  
 – Chameau!... chameau!... chameau!...  
 Mais j'eusse été bien mieux soulagée si j'avais eu le courage de lui jeter, de lui crier, en pleine face, cette injure...<sup>978</sup>

This rage-filled repetition of 'chameau' seems to echo Clara's triple cry of 'charogne' in Mirbeau's earlier novel, *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899). Célestine shows her mistress an outward obedience through her silence whilst internally insulting her with a wild sense of energy. She almost parodies the advice found in nineteenth-century household manuals by stating that: 'il ne faut rien dire; il faut sourire et remercier, sous peine de passer pour une ingrate ou un mauvais cœur'.<sup>979</sup> Her repression here again connects the maidservant to a Freudian mechanism of defence through humour. This internal revolt, however, does not calm the maidservant down, and it seems only to augment her bitterness towards her household. Célestine and Germinie both have a sense of resentment that becomes amplified as they begin to inconspicuously revolt through their thoughts. In the final part of this chapter, we then see how both fictional maidservants' anger and violence intensifies, resulting in an outward backlash through voice. Gruzinska rightly observes that the diary form of the text allows Célestine 'de se débarrasser de la tension et de la violence qui bout en elle chaque fois que son maître l'humilie'.<sup>980</sup> Yet while on a diegetic level the diary provides

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<sup>977</sup> Mirbeau p. 99.

<sup>978</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>979</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>980</sup> Gruzinska, p. 223.

the heroine with an outlet, her voice should not be confused with that of the male bourgeois writer who also uses Célestine as his outlet for his anarchist views. As the maidservant's anger increases, the *soulèvement* transforms her thoughts into (day)dreams that reveal her violent tendencies. In what follows, we shall see how both fictional maidservants revolt through their thoughts as part of (day)dreams, and even hallucinations. These *soulèvements* are the first explicit instances of direct violence against the bourgeoisie in *le roman de la servante* yet ultimately show how the fictional maidservant's revolt remains limited in the nineteenth-century novel.

#### **2.4 Daydreams and Nightmares: Transforming Anger through the *Soulèvement* of *Pensées***

Freud's analysis of one of his own dreams leads him to argue that the wish-fulfilment that emerges in dreams serves to 'avenge' an oppressive situation by inflicting anger and violence upon someone else.<sup>981</sup> Germinie's suppression of her emotions, thoughts and desires creates an increasing bitterness that likewise serves to avenge her oppression through wish-fulfilment. After seeing her lover, Jupillon sneaking off to sleep with his new lover, Germinie's anger rises: 'tout son sang lui monta à la tête avec une seule idée, une seule idée que répétait sa bouche idiote: "Du vitriol!"'.<sup>982</sup> Her rage leads the maidservant's thoughts towards an imagined crime, plunging Germinie into a sort of hallucination, or to borrow Bloch's term, *un rêve éveillé*:

Et sa pensée devant instantanément l'action même de sa pensée, son délire la transportant tout à coup dans son crime, elle montait l'escalier avec la bouteille bien cachée sous son châle; elle frappait à la porte très forte, et toujours... On finissait par venir; il entrebâillait la porte... elle ne lui disait ni son nom ni rien... Elle passait sans s'occuper de lui... Elle était forte à le tuer! Elle allait au lit, à *elle*! Elle lui prenait le bras, elle lui disait: Oui, c'est moi... en voilà pour ta vie! Et sur sa figure, sur sa gorge, sur sa peau, sur tout ce qu'elle avait de jeune et

<sup>981</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>982</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, pp. 169-70.

d'orgueilleux, de beau pour creuser, bouillonner, faire quelque chose d'horrible qui l'inondait de joie! La bouteille était vide, et elle rirait!<sup>983</sup>

The Goncourts transport the reader into the violent *soulèvement* of Germinie's thoughts. The fictional maidservant watches her rival's skin (an indicator of her youth) boil and melt in a crime that foreshadows the 1880 *faits divers* of the *vitrioleuses* discussed in Chapter Two. This horrific description brings the maidservant a malevolent sense of joy in her revolt as she begins to cackle like a witch at her crime. The ongoing actions situated in the imperfect tense fluidly transition into each other as the maidservant becomes overwhelmed by her anger and desire to kill her rival, Jupillon's younger, prettier lover. It is only when the Goncourts follow this passage with the line '[e]t, dans son affreux rêve, son corps aussi rêvant, ses pieds se mirent à marcher'<sup>984</sup> that the reader realizes that this crime has not taken place outside of Germinie's internalized *soulèvement*. Germinie's crime is portrayed as an event that is neither part of the past nor of the present. Germinie seeks her vengeance over her lover through her imagination, as she hopes to take control over her oppressed situation as an unloved maidservant to the Jupillon family by removing any obstacles in her way.

The Goncourts describe how Germinie 'était si pleine et si possédée' by her thoughts that she managed to walk herself to the local grocers in a trance, and attempts to buy alcohol: 'Ce que je demande?... Elle se passa la main sur son front. – Ah! tiens, je ne sais plus...'<sup>985</sup> Germinie's growing need to act upon her violent desires has transported the heroine in a trance or form of hallucination that causes the narrator to describe her as possessed. The maidservant then appears to have forgotten why she was there, existing in a delirious state as she begins to come back to reality. The fictional maidservant lets the dream-like state – a time between present, future and the past – melt away as she re-enters the present moment.

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<sup>983</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>984</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 170.

<sup>985</sup> Ibid.

This episode is later described in the novel as ‘l’affreuse rencontre où sa pensée touch[ait] au crime comme avec les doigts’.<sup>986</sup> In her study on hysteria (1994), Janet Beizer notes how the nineteenth-century doctor Jean-Baptiste Louyer-Villermay argued that hysteria proceeded from ‘une imagination brûlante’.<sup>987</sup> Indeed, Charcot’s patient Augustine was said to have had been subject to ‘hysterical visions’<sup>988</sup> that Didi-Huberman has categorized as involving recurring themes such as ‘rape, blood, fires, terrors, and a hatred of men.’<sup>989</sup> These categories then highlight Didi-Huberman’s argument that one can and should question whether these allegations of hysterical visions were true or a further way for the misogynistic, male bourgeois elites to seek to control women’s bodies. These hysterical visions were said to trigger fits of rage in the maidservant and Didi-Huberman connects these symptoms to revolt as they exhibited ‘refusal and hatred, insidious or explosive’.<sup>990</sup> The Goncourts’ representation of Germinie’s possessed state therefore foreshadowed Charcot’s observations of the real-life ‘hysterical’ maidservant. The fictional maidservant appears to exhibit hysterical tendencies that lead her to the crimes of her internal *soulèvement*. The Goncourts therefore suggest an ambiguity surrounding the dangers posed by the maidservant: if she exhibited certain hysterical tendencies, she could one day act on her desires and harm the lives of the bourgeoisie.

While the threat of the fictional maidservant’s violence and power remains, the Goncourts do not dare to recreate the bourgeois nightmare of a female servant who directly inflicts her violence on her masters and mistresses. On the one hand, by revolting only through her thoughts, the fictional maidservant does not run the risk of imprisonment;

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<sup>986</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 172.

<sup>987</sup> See Beizer, p. 34.

<sup>988</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 167.

<sup>989</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>990</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

Germinie redirects her anger and violence without risking her livelihood in a similar way to how Célestine displaces her emotions through humour. On the other hand, as Chapter Two explored, while Naturalist and in particular Decadent literature, displays a strong fear of women and women's sexuality, the intersectionality of class and gender through the portrayal of a violent, sexualized working-class woman remains a step too far in the nineteenth-century novel; it is either unthinkable and too frightening or too close to the sensationalized fiction of popular literature.

Célestine also uses her thoughts to fantasize about enacting violent crimes, yet unlike Germinie, Mirbeau's fictional maidservant directs her violence against her employers. Célestine imagines slapping her mistress across the face: '[m]algré ma douleur, je l'aurais giflée...'<sup>991</sup> She also describes a strong desire violently to attack her mistresses when doing their hair: '[q]uelquefois, en coiffant mes maîtresses, j'ai eu l'envie folle de leur déchirer la nuque, de leur fouiller les seins avec mes ongles...'<sup>992</sup> Read through Freud's theory on dreams, both heroines show that by 'not obtaining what one wants in the day, [a dream can] lea[d] to this wish-fulfilment.'<sup>993</sup> Both servants cannot risk jeopardizing their jobs and their lives by physically acting out their desires. They provide insights into both writers', as well as their society's, fears of the hidden deviancy and thus the hidden violence of the female servant. These two violent episodes therefore feed into the creation of a social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant as a potentially violent woman plotting against her oppressors. Revolting by means of their thoughts, and therefore their repressed emotions, Germinie and Célestine obtain a certain sense of power – even if this is for a limited amount of time. Both maidservant's violent thoughts chime with bourgeois fears of violent maidservants of the

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<sup>991</sup> Mirbeau, p. 105.

<sup>992</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

<sup>993</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 39-40.

kind looked at in Chapter Two. Yet like Germinie, Célestine can only find a sense of freedom by imagining her violence. The nineteenth-century maidservant's violence remains as a threat in the *le roman de la servante* but is never fully realized.

The Goncourts show how the rebellious female servant's *soulèvement* through both her *pensées* and *paroles* can be exhibited to the reader through her unconscious state when Mlle de Varandeuil overhears Germinie talking in her sleep:

Ce qui lui échappait, ce qu'elle répandait dans des paroles coupées et sans suite, c'était autant que pouvait le comprendre mademoiselle, des reproches à quelqu'un. [...] Jamais elle n'avait entendu le dédain tomber de si haut, le mépris se briser ainsi et rejaillir dans le rire, la parole d'une femme avoir tant de vengeances contre un homme.<sup>994</sup>

Barbara Giraud observes that, while the novel emerged thirty years before Freud's theory of the unconscious, this scene explicitly shows how 'l'inconscient de Germinie se projette comme dans un traitement psychanalytique et donne sa parole en spectacle'.<sup>995</sup> While the Goncourts prevent the reader from entering the mind of the maidservant in this scene, one can infer that the maidservant is dreaming about confronting Jupillon. The mistress tries to understand what her maidservant was dreaming about: 'Ah ça ! Veux-tu me dire un peu ce que tu rêvais?... Il y avait un homme... tu te disputais...'.<sup>996</sup> Yet Germinie appears not to remember this dream at all. Applying Freud's theory on dreams, Germinie illustrates how 'everyone has wishes which he would not like to confess to others, which he does not care to admit even to himself.'<sup>997</sup> Germinie can be read as achieving a wish that she could not obtain in reality as she does not feel powerful enough to stand up against Jupillon. Her dream should thus be read as a form of a *soulèvement*. The maidservant unconsciously revolts against her lover and reclaims a sense of power over a male figure through her imagination. These urges

<sup>994</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>995</sup> Barbara Giraud, *L'Héroïne goncourtienne: Entre hystérie et dissidence* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 77.

<sup>996</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 191.

<sup>997</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 67-68.

are suppressed in Germinie's day-to-day life and so at night they take on a new form in the unconscious. Freud describes how an energy is released at night that causes 'the unconscious excitations [...] they dominate our speech and action, or they enforce hallucinatory regressions', producing 'psychosis'.<sup>998</sup> One may think, in this context, of Charcot's 'hysterical' maidservant patient Augustine who was reported as having dreams that linked to revolt: 'dreams of no longer being sequestered at the Salpêtrière, dreams of leaving and attending a "theatre where a revolution was being performed", dreams of blood, often horrid dreams, the details of which the patient refuses to provide.'<sup>999</sup> Germinie's dream therefore adds to the Goncourts' representation of the female servant as a hysterical woman. It serves as another symptom of her condition. Like the maidservant's daydream, or hallucination, this nocturnal dream allows Germinie to create an alternative universe in which she has dominance over the man to whom she is normally a slave. She shouts back in her dream, allowing her to reverse the power dynamic between men and women.

Germinie's unconscious *soulèvement* can also be read as a form of revolt triggered by repressed emotions. When Mlle de Varandeuil hears her maidservant sleep talking, Germinie's unconscious is initially revolting against her day-to-day suppressed nature as a *servante fidèle*:

Germinie dormait et parlait. Elle parlait avec un accent étrange, et qui donnait l'émotion presque de la peur. La vague solennité des choses surnaturelles, un souffle d'au-delà de la vie s'élevait dans la chambre, avec cette parole du sommeil, involontaire, échappée, palpitante, suspendue, pareille à une âme sans corps qui errerait sur une bouche morte. C'était une voix lente, profonde, lointaine, avec de grands silences de respiration et des mots exhalés comme des soupirs, traversée de notes vibrantes et poignantes qui entraient dans le cœur, une voix pleine du mystère et du tremblement de la nuit où la dormeuse semblait retrouver à tâtons des souvenirs et passer la main sur des visages.<sup>1000</sup>

<sup>998</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 405.

<sup>999</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 137.

<sup>1000</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 190.

Beizer notes that the nineteenth century characterized the hysteric's voice as inherently female, delivering 'an irrepressible flow of words and noises'.<sup>1001</sup> She maintains that this voice would be described as the

devil's ventriloquist [...] Unable to hold her tongue, helpless to contain the flood of fictions, words, yaps and cries endlessly welling up within her and spilling out, the nineteenth-century hysteric presents an extreme version of the image of a 'leaking vessel' traditionally associated with the verbally and sexually excessive woman.<sup>1002</sup>

As Germinie's words flow out, the Goncourts suggest that she has now become a 'leaking vessel' as she revolts through her sleep: 'elle avait des mouvements de tendresse coupés par des cris; puis [...] un accès de rire nerveux qui répétait et prolongeait'.<sup>1003</sup> Accordingly, Sourieau observes that this scene depicts Germinie

comme une patiente des conférences de Charcot. [...] [...] comme les hystériques de la Salpêtrière, elle entretient un discours de victime et de révoltée qui ne peut pas être entendu puisqu'il produit et masque tout à la fois une vérité inacceptable dans ses manifestations, et ininterprétable dans son fondement.<sup>1004</sup>

Sourieau therefore believes that this representation of the maidservant's unconscious revolt is inherently tied in the Goncourts' minds to the sexual deviancy and corruption imputed to lower-class women. Germinie is thus placed in front of the reader like a patient in front of the spectators at Charcot's demonstrations. She inspires fear and fascination in her mistress, just as the maidservant patients in Charcot's hospital inspired fear and fascination in the Goncourts: 'Une sensation d'horreur lui venait: [Mlle de Varandeuil] avait l'impression d'être à côté d'un cadavre possédé par un rêve.'<sup>1005</sup> The theatricality of Germinie's words in this scene is also described as mimicking the stage performances of the actress Mlle Rachel.<sup>1006</sup> The servant provides a spectacle for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. Yet moving beyond Sourieau's reading, the Goncourts representation of the maidservant's *soulèvement* as

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<sup>1001</sup> Beizer, p. 43.

<sup>1002</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>1003</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 191.

<sup>1004</sup> Sourieau, p. 78.

<sup>1005</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 190.

<sup>1006</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

a further symptom of hysteria not only ties the female figure to that of the hysteric, but also creates an alibi for her behaviour. Connecting Germinie's imagined physical violence against the bourgeoisie to the misogynistic discourses surrounding her mental health masks the possibility that there might be motives for wanting to exact class revenge on the bourgeoisie.

Germinie's speech also echoes the Goncourts' descriptions of a lover, 'saoule d'absinthe',<sup>1007</sup> whom they once watched sleep talking:

C'est une voix singulière et qui fait une émotion étrange, presque peur, que cette voix involontaire et qui s'échappe, la parole sans la volonté, la voix du sommeil – une voix lente et qui a la coupe, l'accent et le poignant des voix de drame au Boulevard. [...] Oui, il y a comme une terreur à être penché sur ce corps, où tout semble éteint et où la vie animale seule semble veiller, et à étendre ainsi le passé y revenir, comme un revenant dans quelque chose d'abandonné! Et puis, ces secrets prêts à jaillir et qui s'arrêtent machinalement, ce mystère d'une pensée sans conscience, cette voix dans cette chambre noire, c'est quelque chose d'effrayant, comme un cadavre possédé par un rêve... [...]

Et chose étrange, cette femme, si *peuple* de langue et de ton, eut dans tout ce récit non seulement une langue orthographiée, mais encore la diction d'une admirable comédienne. [...] C'était une verve, des arguments, une éloquence, une science de dire merveilleuse et qui me confondait et par laquelle j'étais ravi comme la plus étonnante scène de théâtre. Je n'ai connu que Rachel pour dire certains mots, pour jeter certaines phrases comme elle les jetait. [...] Car sa voix était changée, transposée je ne sais comment, amère et douloureuse.<sup>1008</sup>

As this chapter has noted, the Goncourts were often inspired by their real-life observations which they then fictionalized in their novels. Germinie's representation is therefore not only tainted by the discourses surrounding hysteria but also by the Goncourts' own misogyny. The fictional maidservant's revolt through her dreams and visions thus serves as a warning to the bourgeoisie to survey their maidservant for hysterical tendencies that could lead to dangerous backlashes. The Goncourts implicitly reinforce the bourgeoisie's need to control the maidservant's mind in their attempt to protect their lives, as well as their class status.

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<sup>1007</sup> Ibid., *Journal*, I, 471.

<sup>1008</sup> Ibid., *Journal*, I, 471-72.

The nineteenth-century fictional maidservant protagonist of *le roman de la servante* is only allowed to fulfil her violent desires, and thus gain her freedom and power over her masters and mistresses, as well as her lover, by revolting through her imagination. Mirbeau and the Goncourts demonstrate that this is as far as authors of *le roman de la servante* are willing to go in terms of how they create and narrativize the threat posed by the maidservant's violence; they will not let their fictional heroines completely reverse the status quo. In what follows, we shall see how the representations of Germinie's – and by extension Célestine's – *soulèvements* through *paroles* were used by the Goncourts and Mirbeau to impose their class and gender biases onto the voices of their lower-class female protagonists.

### **3. The Servant's Voice or the Master's Ventriloquism?: Representing the Rebellious**

#### **Maidservant's Voice**

##### **3.1 The Master's Discourse**

As Germinie continues to talk in her sleep, the Goncourts describe the strange language that the maidservant articulates:

Et à mesure qu'elle parlait, son langage devenait aussi méconnaissable que sa voix transposée dans les notes du songe. Il s'élevait au-dessus de la femme, au-dessus de son ton et de ses expressions journalières. C'était comme une langue de peuple purifiée et transfigurée dans la passion. Germinie accentuait les mots avec leur orthographe; elle les disait avec leur éloquence. Les phrases sortaient de sa bouche, avec leur rythme, leur déchirement, et leurs larmes, ainsi que la bouche d'une comédienne admirable.<sup>1009</sup>

Even as she sleeps, the maidservant censors her use of language in her subconscious.

Germinie adopts the voice of the working classes that has been 'purifiée' insofar as it does not include any traces of slang, profanities or grammatical errors. As Yates points out, this

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<sup>1009</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 191.

monitored content does not contain ‘a word unfit for her mistress’s ears’;<sup>1010</sup> it is, as Schor states, ‘a kind of idealized popular discourse’.<sup>1011</sup> Germinie’s voice rising from her unconscious is one that has been adapted for bourgeois ears. As Fairchilds observes more generally: ‘servants had to function in what was in essence a foreign language: the proper, grammatically correct French of their social superiors. Most domestics of rural origins spoke the local *patois* of their birthplace.’<sup>1012</sup> Germinie therefore embodies the nineteenth-century servant who is forbidden to speak in her local dialect. Yet this reading does not explain why Germinie does not slip into such *patois* with her fellow servants. As we shall see, the other servants in *Germinie Lacerteux* do not speak in a standardized form of French. One explanation may be that, at least prior to the serialization of Zola’s *L’Assommoir* in 1876,<sup>1013</sup> it was assumed that a novel containing a great deal of *patois* or *argot* would fail to attract a bourgeois readership. Yet Cusenier provides a second theory: ‘[d]ès que le domestique a pénétré dans la maison, les maîtres interviennent. Ils le dépouillent de sa personnalité pour le revêtir ensuite comme d’une livrée morale. Ils étouffent ses paroles. Ils limitent ses gestes. Ils mesurent ses pas.’<sup>1014</sup> One can argue that, just as nineteenth-century masters and mistresses sought to moralize the servant by controlling their *paroles*, so bourgeois authors impose their language onto the fictional maidservant in order to ‘moralize’ her character.

Focusing on the characterization of the maidservant’s voice thus inherently connects to the issue of representation. For Schor, Germinie’s command of the language is ‘somewhat implausible, even uncanny’;<sup>1015</sup> she therefore argues that ‘under the guise of giving the

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<sup>1010</sup> Yates, p. 139.

<sup>1011</sup> Schor, p. 133.

<sup>1012</sup> Fairchilds, p. 105.

<sup>1013</sup> Claire White explains how ‘[o]n the one hand, Zola’s transcription of the proletariat’s *langue verte* for the bourgeois reader signalled an attempt to bring about a sort of experimental *rapprochement* between classes. On the other, this linguistic exoticism attested to a prevailing sense of social alienation insofar as it probed the limits of readability’. See White, *Work and Leisure*, p. 39.

<sup>1014</sup> Cusenier, p. 177.

<sup>1015</sup> Schor, p. 132.

people *voix au chapitre*, what the Goncourt in fact do is to give the people the voice of the bourgeoisie. Germinie's mastery of discourse is obtained only at the cost of speaking the master's discourse.'<sup>1016</sup> I build on Schor's claim and argue that the rebellious maidservant becomes a puppet for bourgeois male authors to speak through as they are using her voice to articulate their own social, gender and political biases. Yet I likewise argue that authors of *le roman de la servante* establish that the rebellious female servant protagonist is hybrid insofar as she is constructed through various literary and non-literary discourses, and so becomes an amalgamation of bourgeois voices. These voices, although predominantly male, also include those of the bourgeois women who authored household manuals in the period.

Germinie's voice stands in contrast to the other fictional servant featured in the novel. The Goncourts represent Adèle as speaking with a working-class accent: '[d]is donc, tu serais bien gentille de me faire un mot pour mon chéri... Labourieux ... tu sais bien, je t'en ai parlé... Tiens v'là la plume à madame... et de son papier, qui sent bon... Y es-tu ? En v'la un vrai, ma chère, c't' homme-là!'<sup>1017</sup> The Goncourt purposefully seek to imitate the language of a servant woman by using elisions and colloquialisms like 'dis donc', 'ça' and 'v'la t'il pas que madame est toquée de ce gamin de Jupillon!'<sup>1018</sup> Germinie, however, rarely ever uses slang and does not drop her letters.<sup>1019</sup> As Yates points out,

The use of *argot*, reserved by earlier writers such as Hugo and Balzac for characters belonging to the criminal underworld, often symbolizes baseness and depravity. The fact that Germinie uses a purer version of popular speech than many of the other working-class characters in the novel points to her superior moral character.<sup>1020</sup>

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<sup>1016</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>1017</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 120.

<sup>1018</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1019</sup> Eliza Jane Smith points out that there is only one brief instance in which Germinie's speech is characterized by phrases that are indexical of the working classes and this is when she rants at her lover, the working-class painter Médéric Gautruche (see *Literary Slumming*, p. 218).

<sup>1020</sup> Yates, p. 138.

One may think of Eliza Jane Smith's recent study of slang, *Literary Slumming* (2021) in which she argues that slang is the primary feature through which writers were perceived to craft 'believable' and 'recognizable' criminal characters for contemporary readers.<sup>1021</sup> Authors such as Sue and Balzac use slang as a primary means of constructing a literary criminal type, yet they also set themselves apart from this lower-class criminal culture as moral superiors.<sup>1022</sup> She goes on to argue that '[w]riters such as Eugène-François Vidocq, Eugène Sue, Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, and Émile Zola each altered nineteenth-century slang's referential meanings through their individual stylizations of its connotations of the criminal and lower classes.'<sup>1023</sup> While Chapter One and the start of this chapter have shown how the widening out the representation of the lower classes to include the female servant in literature was for principally aesthetic reasons,<sup>1024</sup> nineteenth-century writers likewise sought to other the maidservant by seeking to replicate her slang. For example, in *Le Cousin Pons*, Balzac adds the letter 'N' to the start of words when Madame Cibot speaks to demonstrate her inferiority and class status.<sup>1025</sup> One can also add the example of Mirbeau, as well as that of Maupassant, who depicts the distancing slang of maidservants in his short stories *Histoire d'une fille de ferme* (1881), *La Mère aux monstres* (1883), *Rosalie Prudent* (1886) and *Rose* (1884). These authors all use slang to reinforce the class position of the bourgeoisie as their servants' superiors, thereby limiting the impact of the *soulèvement* produced by the maidservant protagonists' *paroles*. In *Combray*, Proust's narrator explicitly pokes fun at the way his servant, Françoise, speaks. He creates a sidenote in brackets after she has spoken: '(Pour Françoise la comparaison d'un homme à un lion, qu'elle prononçait li-on n'avait rien de

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<sup>1021</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 1.

<sup>1022</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1023</sup> Eliza Jane Smith, p. 2.

<sup>1024</sup> Claire White makes a similar point, p. 40.

<sup>1025</sup> See Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, p. 29.

flatteur.)'<sup>1026</sup> By drawing the reader's attention to the difference in control over the French language, the writer distinctly shows that the maidservant is beneath him intellectually, as well as in terms of her gender and class.

Yet, as we have already seen, the Goncourts' fictionalized maidservant does not speak in argot. The Goncourts reserve the use of slang for characters they deem to be beneath Germinie. As a result, both Schor and Danielle Thaler also argue that the Goncourts have created an exceptional heroine due to her mastery over the French language.<sup>1027</sup> The Goncourts themselves make this point:

Germinie n'était pas la bête de service qui n'a rien que son ouvrage dans la tête. [...] Elle était arrivée à surprendre souvent Mlle de Varandeuil par sa vivacité de compréhension, sa promptitude à saisir des choses à demi dites, son bonheur et sa facilité à trouver des mots de belle parleuse [...] Elle comprenait un jeu de mots. Elle s'exprimait sans *cuir* [...] Elle avait aussi ce fond de lectures brouillées qu'ont les femmes de sa classe quand elles lisent.<sup>1028</sup>

On the one hand, this linguistic mastery distinguishes Germinie in a positive sense from other female servants. Yet, on the other hand, it can also be implicitly read as a subtle threat to the bourgeoisie. While Chapter Three demonstrated how the bourgeoisie sought to distinguish the female servant's physical appearance from that of her mistress in order to avoid class blurring, this scene from *Germinie Lacerteux* can also implicitly highlight a fear of the female servant adopting her mistress's language. Although the household manuals of the period reinforced a specific intonation and tone of the female servant's voice,<sup>1029</sup> it would be unthinkable to the bourgeoisie that their female servant's voice could become indistinguishable from that of the mistress of the home. The opportunities for the servant to speak were therefore restricted: she could respond to orders and announce the arrival of

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<sup>1026</sup> Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992 [1913-1927]), p. 78.

<sup>1027</sup> See Schor, p. 132 and Thaler, p. 11.

<sup>1028</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 210.

<sup>1029</sup> See Bailleul, p. 98 and Madame Celnart, p. 137.

guests. There is therefore a contradiction surrounding the female servant's voice: the bourgeoisie sought to rid the maidservant of her *patois*, yet they still wished to keep her silent and thus distinguishable from the mistress of the home. By adopting the dialogue of the bourgeoisie, Germinie begins to blur the differences between the voice of the mistress and the servant.

Only at the start of the novel do we see a change in this mastery when Germinie speaks in a haphazard, first-person narrative that is overflowing with aposiopesis,<sup>1030</sup> a structure also imposed on Célestine's voice by Mirbeau. For her part, Valerie Raoul argues that Mirbeau's use of aposiopesis is not tied to the character's gender:

this style is usually depicted by the generous use of suspension marks to suggest hesitation, rhetorical questions, exclamations, parentheses, very short or meandering sentences, abrupt cut-offs due to interruptions, and gaps attributed to erasures or torn-out pages. It is a style not actually typical of writing by women, but associated with diary-writing, whatever the sex of the diarist. It is therefore determined by genre rather than by gender.<sup>1031</sup>

Yet I argue that the inclusion of aposiopesis in both the Goncourts' and Mirbeau's novel can and should be read as indexical of how nineteenth-century authors of *le roman de la servante* mediate the lower-class female figure's voice and thoughts. Through the use of aposiopesis, these writers impose interruptions and silence onto the maidservant's speech in an attempt to restrict the fictional female servant's revolt; they weaken the strength of the character's control over her words and allow her to gain only a limited amount of autonomy through her revolt.

Apter claims Mirbeau uses 'lower-class speech patterns' in his novel,<sup>1032</sup> but, apart from the occasional vulgar insult, Célestine rarely employs a lower-class register. Célestine

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<sup>1030</sup> Schor p. 128 makes a similar point.

<sup>1031</sup> Valerie Raoul, 'Women and Diaries: Gender and Genre', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 22:3 (1989), 57-65 (p. 62).

<sup>1032</sup> Apter, p. 197.

in fact demonstrates a similar mastery over the French language as that deployed by Germinie. Her diary entries are not written in the maidservant slang as mimicked by Balzac, Maupassant or Proust. Rather, like Germinie, Célestine is set apart from the other maidservants when she describes hearing the language they use *chez l'épicière*:

Là-dessus, les histoires, les potins recommencent... C'est un flot ininterrompu d'ordures vomies par ces tristes bouches, comme d'un égout... Il semble que l'arrière-boutique en est empestée... Je ressens une impression d'autant plus pénible que la pièce où nous sommes est sombre et que les figures y prennent des déformations fantastiques [...] chacune de ces créatures, tassées sur leur chaise comme des paquets de linge sale, s'acharne à raconter une vilénie, un scandale, un crime... Lâchement, j'essaie de sourire avec elles, d'applaudir avec elles, mais j'éprouve quelque chose d'insurmontable, quelque chose comme un affreux dégoût... [...] ces voix aigres qui me font l'effet d'eaux de vaisselle, glougloutant et s'égouttant par les éviers et par les plombs...<sup>1033</sup>

The maidservant sees herself as above the other servants and seems just as disgusted by her peers as a bourgeois mistress would have been of her servants. Célestine ironically echoes some of the earlier comments made in household manuals that maidservants who regularly gossip are dangerous and scandalous. This is yet another way in which Mirbeau shows how the bourgeois mistress's manners have begun to corrupt those of her maidservant. Like Germinie, Célestine appropriates the language of the bourgeoisie, yet she also explicitly critiques those who are part of her own class. Lloyd's reading of this, that as a café owner Célestine 'aspires to escape defilement and obtain power for herself, rather than achieve social justice for her peers, in other words',<sup>1034</sup> can also be applied to this scene. The maidservant wants power over her peers as much as over her masters and mistresses.

Yet by creating the exceptional servant heroine, both novels paradoxically feed into a stereotype image of the dangerous, intelligent female servant whose language cannot be separated from that of the mistress. Mirbeau similarly shows Célestine mimicking her mistress's voice like a parrot:

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<sup>1033</sup> Mirbeau, pp. 93-94.

<sup>1034</sup> Lloyd, p. 62.

Elle doit être, sans cesse, sur le dos des gens à les asticoter de toutes les manières... Et des 'savez-vous faire ceci?'... et des 'savez-vous faire cela?' Ou bien encore 'Êtes-vous casseuse? Êtes-vous soigneuse?... Avez-vous beaucoup d'ordre? Ça n'en finit pas... Et aussi: 'Êtes-vous très propre?'[...]'.<sup>1035</sup>

The reader can feel the tone change as Célestine takes on the voice of her mistress, foreshadowing the later instances in which her narration blends with some of the harsh comments that come from a mistress's mouth. The servant thus becomes the mistress, echoing Lloyd's argument that Célestine alternates between the roles of a mistress and a slave in this novel.<sup>1036</sup> Beyond the diegetic level of the text, Mirbeau's narrator similarly reverses the roles of the master and servant by mimicking her voice. As Marie-Bernard Bat points out, the narrative voice must be read as that of Mirbeau: 'Mirbeau dote sa narratrice de sa propre verve satirique, dénonçant le cynisme et l'hypocrisie de la bourgeoisie *mais aussi* de la domesticité.'<sup>1037</sup> Arnaud similarly makes use of the Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi!' in order to argue that 'si Flaubert, peut-être, ne l'était pas: Célestine, à l'évidence, c'est Mirbeau.'<sup>1038</sup> The rebellious maidservant is constructed through the master's discourse of the male bourgeois author.

Yet *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* begins with an editor's note: '*Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* a été véritablement écrit par Mlle Célestine R..., femme de chambre'.<sup>1039</sup> Mirbeau adds that the editor has tried to make as few corrections to this text as possible, but inevitably was forced to intervene by putting 'çà et là, quelques accents à ce livre'.<sup>1040</sup> At first this epigraph seems to act as a 'paratonnerre' of the kind habitually deployed by Stendhal, for example in *Mina de Vanghel*. This literary technique of claiming

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<sup>1035</sup> Mirbeau, p. 49.

<sup>1036</sup> Lloyd, p. 62.

<sup>1037</sup> Bat, pp. 102-03, with my emphasis.

<sup>1038</sup> Arnaud, p. 17.

<sup>1039</sup> Mirbeau, p. 32.

<sup>1040</sup> Ibid.

that the account is ‘real’ and written from the perspective of the female servant also connects to similar mystificatory prefaces used in eighteenth-century novels,<sup>1041</sup> for example Marivaux in *La Vie de Marianne*, as well as at the start of Lamartine’s loyal maidservant novel, *Geneviève: Histoire d’une servante*. While Noël Arnaud argues that Mirbeau’s editorial note would hardly have been taken seriously by his contemporary readership,<sup>1042</sup> its inclusion does show how the male writer seeks to manipulate the representation of the maidservant as a way of smuggling in – and excusing – his own opinions. Thus, although Célestine gains a certain sense of freedom on a diegetic level through her revolt of writing her thoughts and feelings down in a diary, the fictional female servant is always contained within and thus constrained by the author’s opinions and biases. In the last section of this chapter, I shall focus on how rage builds within the fictional maidservant in such a way as finally to produce a verbal outburst.

### **3.2 Vocalizing the Servant’s (Anarchist) Backlash**

Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* provides examples of when Célestine can no longer contain her bitterness. There are some instances where her outbursts take the form of short, poignant backlashes: ‘Je réplique d’un ton un peu bref, car cette injustice me révolte: – Mais, Madame m’a dérangée, tout le temps.’<sup>1043</sup> Rather than staying silent, Célestine verbalizes her *soulèvement* to gain a sense of power over her mistress. Even when Célestine has fewer problems with her mistress, she tells the reader that

A la suite d’une discussion futile où j’avais tous les torts, j’ai quitté Madame. Je l’ai quittée salement, en lui jetant à la figure, à sa pauvre figure étonnée, toutes ses lamentables histoires, tous ses petits malheurs intimes, toutes ses confidences par quoi elle m’avait livré son âme, sa

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<sup>1041</sup> Lloyd, p. 53 also describes Mirbeau as using a similar technique to an eighteenth-century novelist’s preface.

<sup>1042</sup> See Noël Arnaud, ‘Notes et Variantes’, in Octave Mirbeau, *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* (Paris: Gallimard Folio, 1984), pp. 495-507 (p. 495).

<sup>1043</sup> Mirbeau, pp. 104-05.

petite âme plaintive, bête et charmante, assoiffée de désirs...Oui, tout cela, je le lui ai jeté à la figure, comme des paquets de boue.<sup>1044</sup>

This description constructs the rebellious female servant as a figure who is constantly seeking to humiliate and insult the bourgeoisie. Yet while Célestine launches her *soulèvement* through this verbalized attack the reader does not get to hear her insults. More generally, the reader is unable to hear the fictional maidservant's thoughts, just as they were unable to enter Germinie Lacerteux's mind when she was dreaming. One reason for this restricted access could be that this is simply due to the maidservant's guilt:

Il y a des moments où c'est en moi comme un besoin, comme une folie d'outrage...une perversité qui me pousse à rendre irréparables des riens...Je n'y résiste pas, même quand j'ai conscience que j'agis contre mes intérêts, et que j'accomplis mon propre malheur...

Cette fois-là, j'allai beaucoup plus loin dans l'injustice et dans l'insulte ignominieuse.<sup>1045</sup>

Yet the female servant's backlash also feeds into the societal fears of servants who suddenly rise up against their oppressive situations, thereby changing personality. Mirbeau can also be seen to use Célestine turning on her mistress through this outburst as a symbolic way of attacking authoritarian representations of control. As Célestine notes at the start of her diary: 'ce n'est pas ma faute si les âmes, dont on arrache les voiles et qu'on montre à nu, exhalent une si forte odeur de pourriture.'<sup>1046</sup> The maidservant is therefore attacking the hypocrisies of Mirbeau's society.

*Germinie Lacerteux* also reflects fears of the servant's verbal backlash. Mlle de Varandeuil embodies the figure of a terrified mistress in *Germinie Lacerteux*, too fearful to put a stop to Germinie's behaviour: '[u]ne dizaine de fois, mademoiselle avait tenté de piquer là-dessus l'amour-propre de Germinie; mais alors, tout un jour, c'était un nettoyage si forcené et accompagné de tels accès d'humeur, que mademoiselle se promettait de ne plus

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<sup>1044</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>1045</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>1046</sup> Mirbeau, p. 35.

recommencer.’<sup>1047</sup> After attempting to reprimand her servant, the repercussions prove too much for the mistress. She decides henceforth to keep up appearances by explaining to her friends that ‘Germinie est malade, et j’aime mieux qu’elle ne se tue pas.’<sup>1048</sup> Mlle de Varandeuil’s *laissez-faire* attitude masks her concerns about having to replace Germinie were she to die or be dismissed. The mistress’s fears of losing Germinie have become greater than her fears of keeping a potentially deranged servant in her home: ‘L’habitude, la volonté qui s’éteint, l’horreur du changement, la crainte des nouveaux visages, tout les dispose à des faiblesses, à des concessions, à des lâchetés. [...] [M]ademoiselle ne disait rien. Elle avait l’air de ne rien voir.’<sup>1049</sup> The narration repeats this reasoning when Mlle de Varandeuil’s suspicions of Germinie increase: ‘comme elle connaissait la nature entêtée de sa bonne et qu’elle n’espérait pas la faire changer, elle ne lui parlait de rien.’<sup>1050</sup> Mlle de Varandeuil reflects the period’s anxieties around the hiring of new servants, and thus strangers, into the home.<sup>1051</sup> Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the ‘bureau de placement’ emerged as a business in the nineteenth century specifically in order to provide masters and mistresses with the reassurance that they were hiring reliable, trustworthy servants.

This scene also feeds into a warning provided by Bouniceau-Gesmon: just as the servant must ‘éviter avec soin la vue de certaines choses et surtout de celles qui ne regardent guère que ceux qui cherchent à les renfermer intimement entre eux seuls’, so too should the master turn a blind eye to ‘des méfaits habilement cachés par un serviteur vicieux’ in order to avoid ‘la vengeance d’un domestique surpris dans son secret’.<sup>1052</sup> This exposé reveals the

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<sup>1047</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 186.

<sup>1048</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.

<sup>1049</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59.

<sup>1050</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>1051</sup> See Martin-Fugier, pp. 65-66.

<sup>1052</sup> Bouniceau-Gesmon, pp. 170-71.

fears of the period that the servant could lash out at any moment against their masters and mistresses.

This chapter has analysed how the fictional maidservant's *pensées* and *paroles* constitute two strategies of *soulèvement* that provide both heroines with a limited sense of agency in their respective narratives. It allows them to overcome their oppressors by belittling them, or living a separate, secret lifestyle under their noses. These methods of revolt feed into a larger social imaginary that surrounded the servant during the nineteenth century. The female servant is presented as a dangerous social climber; she is perceived as having the capacity to mount a social uprising, and therefore to perform violence against the bourgeoisie. Yet despite any freedom both heroines obtain on a diegetic level, the social imaginary of the maidservant remains constantly confined by the master's discourse that transcribes her story. The Goncourts and Mirbeau use the figure of the maidservant as a mouthpiece for their own (political) biases, whether against lower-class female outsiders, or against the bourgeoisie. This chapter has shown how and why the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie also sought to control, and subsequently erase, the female servant's voice. One may think of Maza's reading of servants in the eighteenth century, that can be extended to the nineteenth-century upper-class perception of the servant in that '[g]roups placed in a state of transition or marginality, [...] are usually stripped of their names and clothing, clad in uniforms, forced into humility, silence, and sexual continence, and regarded as fools and simpletons. Yet such persons are feared because their very marginality invests them with powers that challenge the ordering of society.'<sup>1053</sup>

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<sup>1053</sup> Maza, p. 137.

## Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the identification and analysis of the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant is integral to an understanding of the emergence of a new subgenre of nineteenth-century literature, *le roman de la servante*. This subgenre representing both loyal and rebellious female servants shows how the maidservant became a fashionable subject for writers of both low and high forms of literature. By exploring literary depictions of rebellious maidservants, this thesis has highlighted how nineteenth-century literary writers created, as well as added to, the period's evolving discourses, fears and fascination with this figure. By combining Didi-Huberman's theory of *soulèvements* with a third-wave feminist reading of the fictional freedom of nineteenth-century literary heroines, as grounded in a historicist approach, I have shown how a hybrid methodology is essential in identifying and analysing the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant in the nineteenth century. The analysis of fictional strategies of revolt used by female servant heroines reveals how writers often subvert, as well as create and disseminate, the stereotypes and prejudices that surrounded the female servant in the nineteenth century in order to provide their fictional maidservants with new strategies of revolt against their oppressive situations. The cross-class maidservant disguise allowed Mina, Bette, Madame Amandon and Hauteclairre to manipulate the stereotypes and prejudices placed onto the maidservant, in particular, those surrounding her physical appearance. The maidservant's revolt through thought and words then allowed Célestine and Germinie to gain a sense of power and revolt against their masters, mistresses and even their lovers. These various methods of revolt provide fictional female servants with a way of reversing the power dynamics that governed class and gender. This analysis then explored how each method of revolt also revealed ways in which the bourgeoisie sought to control and distance themselves from the female servant.

However, the fictional servant's freedom and autonomy is fundamentally limited. The fictional female servant's strategies of revolt ultimately reveal that the maidservant is a construct of the bourgeois social imaginary. She remains trapped in the masculinist economy as an eroticized fantasy or a site of repulsion, while simultaneously the male bourgeois writer is likewise constrained by the very social imaginary he is creating and feeding into. As Chapters Three and Four explored, even when fictional maidservants appear to have succeeded in becoming the mistresses of the home, for example Hauteclaira or Célestine, these heroines remain trapped in their roles as eroticized, submissive wives who must serve their husbands' (sexual) needs. Célestine may become a tyrannical café owner with her own servants as we have seen in Chapter Four, but she is also forced to dress up and parade around in an eroticized 'joli costume d'Alsacienne',<sup>1054</sup> in order to 'enflamme[r] les cœurs [...] [et] excite[r] le patriotisme' of her customers, as well as that of her husband.<sup>1055</sup> At first Célestine refuses, angering her husband Joseph: 'Tu ne faisais pas tant de manières quand tu couchais avec tout le monde...'.<sup>1056</sup> Even elevated to the position of Joseph's wife and café owner, Célestine can never escape the stereotypes surrounding the maidservant's sexuality. Célestine then concludes that 'je suis sans force contre la volonté de Joseph. Malgré ce petit accès de révolte, Joseph me tient, me possède comme un démon. Et je suis heureuse d'être à lui... Je sens que je ferai tout ce qu'il voudra que je fasse, et que j'irai toujours où il me dira d'aller...jusqu'au crime !...'.<sup>1057</sup> Célestine is trapped as an eroticized fantasy: she is sexually compelled by her desires to serve her husband's every need. Her final declaration echoes that of Hauteclaira who likewise claims she is happiest when attending to her husband's desires. The endings of both texts reduce two strong heroines to their eroticized functions as servants, despite their social elevation.

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<sup>1054</sup> Mirbeau, p. 452.

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>1056</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1057</sup> Ibid., p. 452.

Other *roman de la servante* narratives end in death. Chapter Three explained how Mina de Vanghel steps out of her role of servitude and realizes that as a woman in the nineteenth century, she can only remain free in her imagination. Her story ends in death in order to set herself free from the constraints of her society – these are the social mores that Madame Amandon must continue to abide by even after her love affairs. Germinie Lacerteux's double life ends with her painful death, echoing the ending of Bette who dies from a stomach disease. The death of the rebellious female servant demonstrates a further example of how a fictional female servant's freedom is ultimately limited by the social imaginary.

The first chapter of this thesis examined the historical, political and socio-cultural factors that created a breeding ground for the social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant in the period's various discourses, including the novel. The social imaginary is at the centre of a new subgenre of literature that included novels and short stories by Stendhal, Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, the Goncourts, Maupassant, Zola and Mirbeau, and that focused on the disloyal female servant. Subsequent chapters analysed the idiosyncrasies and representative patterns that helped to constitute this social imaginary by providing examples of various discourses written by nineteenth-century literary authors, household manual writers, journalists, doctors, lawyers, sociologists and criminologists. Chapter Two directly built on Chapter One's analysis of how the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant permeated the socio-cultural construct of the maidservant thanks to the widespread circulation of the press and analysed the real-life cases of three maidservant murderers drawn from across the century: Henriette Cornier, H  l  ne J  gado and C  line Masson. These criminal cases highlighted fears of the maidservant as a potential killer in the home. Yet as

Chapter Three and Chapter Four showed, the fictional maidservants of *le roman de la servante* rarely murder their masters and mistresses or are directly violent towards them. Instead, these fictional maidservants employ other forms of revolt in order to obtain a ‘sense’ of freedom and autonomy. This freedom is ultimately shown to be limited by the male bourgeois writers who create and reproduce the stereotypes and prejudices around the maidservant figure as part of the construction of this social imaginary.

Chapter Three examined the figure of the cross-class maidservant in works by Balzac, Stendhal, Barbey d’Aurevilly and Maupassant, arguing that the *soulèvement gestuel* of the maidservant disguise reveals the bourgeois stereotypes and prejudices that surrounded the maidservant’s appearance, as well as the need to control her ‘non-descript’ presence. It explored how the maidservant became an erotic fantasy in the nineteenth century. The maidservant disguise then illuminated how the period feared the blurring of class boundaries. Chapter Four then showed how *soulèvements*, whether through *pensées* or *paroles*, in two novels by the Goncourts and by Mirbeau respectively, helped to illuminate the fears and anxieties that surrounded the maidservant’s hidden deviancy and her potential capacity to rise up, including alongside other servants. These forms of revolt highlighted a bourgeois need to silence the servant in the home. Taken together, Chapters Three and Four demonstrate through the analysis of fictional strategies of revolt that the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, by seeking to erase the presence of the maidservant, paradoxically drew further attention to her existence as a figure of fear and fascination. The nineteenth-century subgenre of *le roman de la servante* shows how fictional maidservants revolt against their oppressed situations, yet ultimately exposes the rebellious female servant as a socio-cultural construct trapped within the masculinist economy.

The social imaginary of the nineteenth-century rebellious female servant thus exposes the power relationships of class and gender that operated between maidservants and their masters and mistresses. These power dynamics highlight not only bourgeois concerns about maintaining class distinctions, but also the fear inspired by women who transgress their gendered roles as passive, maternal figures. *Le roman de la servante* explores these dynamics in the home by representing maidservants who attempt to reverse the resulting power structures. Ultimately, however, these texts reinforce the patriarchal control over the lower-class female outsider by reinstating her role of servitude in the endings of the texts.

The fictional nineteenth-century rebellious female servant therefore provides a means to explore the collective imaginings of the masters and mistresses in this period. *Le roman de la servante* therefore tells us very little about the actual lives of nineteenth-century female servants; rather, it evokes the fears and fantasies that the bourgeoisie were projecting onto the figure of the maidservant. This subgenre of literature ultimately shows how the servant-employing classes sought to erase the female figure, turning her into a voiceless, invisible body, yet in doing so paradoxically drew even greater attention to her as a threat inside the home.

The social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant developed still further in the twentieth century, especially in the wake of the real-life case of the Papin sisters, maidservants who killed their mistress and her daughter in cold blood. These murders were identified by contemporary critics as acts of class revenge, provoking the interest of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Genet, while Jacques Lacan argued it was an act of paranoia, or ‘folie à

deux’ .<sup>1058</sup> The widespread cultural impact of the case – perhaps best represented Genet’s *Les Bonnes* (1947) – has then been traced by Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader.<sup>1059</sup> Fictional female maids, nannies and cleaners in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century French novel have been represented in ways that exacerbate the fear produced by the nineteenth-century social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant by depicting her modern avatar rebelling by means of violent acts, described in graphic detail. One may think in particular of the twenty-first-century killer nanny in Leïla Slimani’s *Chanson douce* (2016), whose representation echoes many of the fears projected onto the social imaginary of the murderous maidservant in the nineteenth century – fears then realized in the form of explicit violence against the bourgeois family.<sup>1060</sup> Yet these modern novels featuring maidservant avatars are now being written by female authors, as opposed to the nineteenth-century male bourgeois authors of *le roman de la servante*. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have also seen the emergence of memoirs written by actual maids and cleaners such as Maria Arondo’s *Moi, la bonne* (1975), Christiane Dupuy’s *L’Employée de maison* (2002), Lydia Lecher’s *Bienvenue chez les riches* (2016) and Isaure and Bertrand Ferrier’s *Mémoires d’une femme de ménage* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2012). This thesis’s analysis of fictional strategies of revolt can therefore be extended to these various twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary texts. Applying Didi-Huberman’s different categories of revolt to their protagonists reveals how real-life female domestic staff obtain a secret sense of freedom through their imaginations and small gestures of rebellion despite the ongoing problems (and thus oppression) caused by the class, gender and racial prejudices that persist in modern-day France. This theory can also be applied to

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<sup>1058</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, ‘Aujourd’hui sont jugées Christine et Léa Papin Meurtrières de leurs patronnes.’, *L’Humanité*, September 29, 1933; Jean Genet, *Les Bonnes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947). Lacan published on the Papin sisters’ case in *Le Minotaure* (1933), which were collected again under the title *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité, suivi de Premiers Écrits sur la paranoïa* (Paris: Seuil, 1975). See also more generally Christine Coffman, *Insane Passions: Lesbianism and Psychosis in Literature and Film* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006) pp. 30–65.

<sup>1059</sup> See Edwards and Reader, *The Papin Sisters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>1060</sup> See Rushton, ‘Destabilizing the Nineteenth-Century Maidservant Revolt Narrative: Leïla Slimani’s *Chanson douce* (2016)’.

film studies, with a variety of twenty-first-century films now exploring the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant in France.<sup>1061</sup>

This project uncovers the stereotypes and prejudices that remain at the heart of modern-day relationships with cleaners, nannies, maids and domestic servants. In Alizée Delpierre's most recent sociological study, *Servir les riches: les domestiques chez les grandes fortunes* (2022), readers will find the same cruel stereotypes and prejudices that were held by nineteenth-century bourgeois writers now applied to real-life household staff in rich Parisian households. Delpierre not only describes her own experience as a nanny but also transcribes the real-life accounts of actual live-in servants, and their employers in modern France. The latter are shown to stereotype their servants as dirty, smelly, seductive, dangerous and thieving, forcing them to exist between visibility and invisibility. This thesis on the social imaginary of the rebellious female servant is an essential foundation that allows us to understand on a deeper level how, when and why these stereotypes emerged in France, and how they underpin the power dynamics that still exist in households today. While this thesis opened with the voice of a male bourgeois writer, and thus, the master's discourse that constructs this social imaginary, it will close with the voice of a real-life modern female servant in the hope that French studies will further investigate the maidservant's discourse: 'Tu sais, pour eux, on n'est que des torchons, des trucs qu'on prend et qu'on jette. Puis en plus, je suis Arabe, alors t'imagines bien le respect qu'ils n'ont pas pour moi.'<sup>1062</sup>

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<sup>1061</sup> See for example *Chanson Douce*, dir. by Lucie Borleteau (StudioCanal, 2019); *La Tourneuse de pages*, dir. by Denis Dercourt (Diaphana Distribution, 2006); *La Volante*, dir. by Christophe Ali and Nicolas Bonilauri (Bac Films, 2015); *Le Hérisson*, dir. by Mona Achache (Pathé Distribution, 2009); *Ma part du gâteau*, dir. by Cédric Klapisch (Studio Canal, 2011).

<sup>1062</sup> Delpierre, p. 169.

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