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'Ne vous effrayez point du costume bizarre dans lequel vous me voyez': The Maidservant Disguise in Stendhal's *Mina de Vanghel* and Barbey d'Aureville's 'Le Bonheur dans le crime'

Jessica Rushton

MLAC, Durham University, Durham, UK

ABSTRACT


This article analyses how the nineteenth-century fictional heroines in Stendhal's *Mina de Vanghel* and Jules Barbey d'Aureville's 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' don a maidservant disguise in order to revolt against their society's oppressive mores and subsequently reverse the power dynamics between men and women, as well as servants and their masters and mistresses. By drawing on the period's non-literary discourses that likewise depicted a fascination with the servant's appearance, this article argues that Stendhal and Barbey were creating, as well as feeding into, a particular nineteenth-century socio-cultural construct of the female servant as a rebellious, sexually promiscuous figure.

KEYWORDS

Stendhal; Barbey d'Aureville; servants; maidservants; disguises; social imagination; revolt

'Hauteclair, 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'. (Barbey d'Aureville 1966, II: 102 ['Le Bonheur dans le crime', hereafter *LBC*])

In their bid to revolt against the constraints placed upon them in the bourgeois or aristocratic milieus of nineteenth-century French society, milieus of nineteenth-century French society, the eponymous heroine of Stendhal's novella, *Mina de Vanghel* (written between December 1829 and January 1830), and Hauteclair Stassin, the female protagonist in Barbey d'Aureville's short story, 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' (featured in his collection of short stories, *Les Diaboliques* [1874]), devise a cunning ruse. Both heroines choose to don the disguise of a maidservant in order secretly to live alongside their married lovers, Alfred Larçay and Serlon de Savigny respectively. While previous scholarship has also recognised that there is a connection between these two plots (Berthier 2018, 12; Marcandier-Colard 1998, 87), that connection has not otherwise been investigated – 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 (Manzini 2011, 93). This article thus proposes to investigate the connection between these two texts by analysing the representation of the maidservant disguise. It seeks to

CONTACT Jessica Rushton  jessica.m.rushton@durham.ac.uk  MLAC, Durham University, Elvet Riverside I, 83 New Elvet, Durham DH1 3AQ, UK

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demonstrate how the adoption of this ‘costume bizarre’ (Stendhal 2005–14, I: 306; hereafter *MDV*) in both narratives can be read as a marker for how Stendhal and Barbey were creating, as well as feeding into, a particular nineteenth-century socio-cultural construct of the female servant as a rebellious figure. Both writers manipulate their period’s prejudices and stereotypes that surrounded the female servant in order to create a form of revolt that allows their fictional heroines to alter power structures between men and women, as well as servants and their masters and mistresses. Yet in creating this form of rebellion, Stendhal and Barbey subsequently describe, as well as develop, nineteenth-century bourgeois fears surrounding the servant as a dangerous, sexually promiscuous figure.

The nineteenth century became increasingly aware of, and therefore concerned about, the female strangers working amongst them in their homes. For Anne Martin-Fugier and Susan Yates, these increasing anxieties emanated from ‘the combination of fear and fascination associated in nineteenth-century thinking both with the figure of Woman and with the figure of the People’ (Yates 1991, 65; see also Martin-Fugier 1979, 9, 31). The Revolution of 1789, as well as the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the bloody coup of 1851, and the Paris Commune of 1871, led to a perpetual fear of uprisings in the nineteenth century (Yates 1991, 70). Nineteenth-century middle-class masters and mistresses thus felt threatened by the increasing discontent of those who were excluded from power (Maza 1983, 318), fearing that the class hierarchy could rapidly change, with uprisings bringing the potential destruction of society’s social order as they once knew it (Yates 1991, 70). This anxious need to preserve their dominance only increased their desire to assert their class position in their homes (Maza 1983, 318). The Revolution of 1789 also heightened the sense of wariness around domestics by introducing and complicating the idea of possible equality between masters and servants (Fairchilds 1984, 242). Bourgeois masters and mistresses anxiously assumed any such equality would in turn cause their servants to become unruly and uncontainable (Maza 1983, 318). Yet it was also particularly during the Terror of 1793 that the figure of the servant became an active threat, with many servants denouncing their masters to revolutionary tribunals as acts of revenge (Fairchilds 1984, 237). The aristocracy watched their servants shed their masks of loyalty and show their true character. This disloyalty during the Terror added to social tensions between masters and servants throughout the nineteenth century. Thus in 1814, the Revolutionary and former bishop of Blois Henri Grégoire maintained that ‘[s]i, dans le régime de la Terreur, des domestiques estimables ont montré de l’attachement à leurs maîtres, d’autres ont conduit les leurs à l’échafaud. Après dix ans, vingt ans d’une fidélité apparente, des domestiques ont volé, assassiné, empoisonné’ (1814, 154). Yates and Christophe Charle both also point out that nineteenth-century France lived in perpetual fear that the bloodbath of the Terror would happen again (see Yates 1991; 71 and Charle 2015, 34); this fear was stimulated in the heart of the home due to the presence of the servant. The female servant was thus yet another figure that needed to be contained and surveyed in French society (Yates 1991, 61); she was potentially dangerous as she had the power to harm the family as well as undermine the class system (Yates 1991, 71).

As a marginalised figure, often originating from the countryside,¹ the female servant was also perceived as too closely connected to the poor, and thus to their vices (see Charle 2015, 36). Indeed, poverty became naturally assimilated with uprisings, crime,² dirt, and

disease.³ Laws collectively ranked servants among the *bas-fonds* of society, denying them the right to political participation alongside criminals, bankrupts, paupers, and women, and in many other instances, the poor (Maza 1983, 312). The bourgeoisie thus perceived the nineteenth-century maidservant as an individual who embodied their fears of the *bas-fonds* infiltrating the home; she was seen thus a threat not only to the family's class position but also to their health (Prendergast 1992, 79).

The bourgeoisie's need for domination over the female servant was also rooted in emerging criminal discourses that worked to reinforce the belief that women were social inferiors (Yates 1991, 69–70). Discourses focusing on hysteria, female criminality and sexuality saw women as potentially destructive to nineteenth-century society; they threatened the order of the family and therefore the organisation of society (Yates 1991, 69–70). The servant was feared as a potential corruptive sexual force on the children in the home, as well as the male members of the family (Counter 2013; Yates 1991, 84–88). The nineteenth century thus constructed the maidservant as a purveyor of putridity and contamination: for the bourgeoisie, she represented the primary contact with the dirt, disease, criminality, and sexual debauchery of the lower classes (McClintock 1994, 48; Yee 2016, 145–46; Yates 1991, 74–76.) The maidservant was thus seen as contaminated and a contaminant; as Jennifer Yee puts it, '[t]he maid is a *souillon*, that is a slattern, but she is also *souillée* or soiled' (2016, 146). These insecurities surrounding the servant as a contaminant added to the bourgeois desire to distance themselves from their servants, as well as to reinforce their authority over them.⁴ The period's increasing wariness of the female servant thus originated from the stereotypes and prejudices, and therefore the fears, that surrounded the figure of the lower-class woman. In what follows, I propose to show how through their representations of the maidservant disguise, Stendhal and Barbey were subsequently helping to create – as well as feed into existing conceptions of – the figure of the maidservant as rebellious and dangerous that transcended this époque after the Revolution.

This article applies Dominique Kalifa's definition of the social imaginary in his study, *Les Bas-fonds: histoire d'un imaginaire* (2013), to the creation of this figure of the rebellious and dangerous female servant in the nineteenth century in order to understand how Stendhal and Barbey create and feed into a socio-cultural construct:

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'. (2013, 20–21)

While 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' (2013, 20), this article applies such a reading to the emergence of the rebellious female servant, and demonstrates how *Mina de Vanghel* and 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' offer two examples of how nineteenth-century literature actively contributed to a network of interconnected discourses that emerged from the work of novelists, household manual writers, doctors, government officials, lawyers,

lay writers and journalists.⁵ These literary and non-literary texts 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 maidservant disguise in Stendhal and Barbey then feeds into a new literary sub-genre that I label *le roman de la servante*. 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 Frapié'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 literary texts, 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 Great Revolution intensified. By examining the Stendhal's and Barbey's representation of the maidservant disguise alongside other *romans de la servante* and non-literary discourses that extend across the long nineteenth century, I argue that authors *le roman de la servante* and writers of non-literary texts were producing similar anxious imaginings of the rebellious maidservant that transcended 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 privatised, strictly domestic resolution of social tensions by means of good manners, exemplary behaviour, and (above all) sound religious instruction' (2013, 407). 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 (2013, 407). The literary and non-literary narratives featured in this article 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. In drawing on nineteenth-century non-literary discourses that also depict the period's fascination with the servant's appearance, I not only reveal the interconnectedness of these various literary and non-literary discourses, but also how Stendhal and Barbey describe as well as amplify larger contemporary debates concerning these fears.

Building on previous scholarship that recognises that discourses concerning nineteenth-century maidservants throughout the long nineteenth century are constructed through a 'master's discourse' (see Martin-Fugier 1979, 182; Yates 1991, xiv; Apter 1991, 178) – as these writings are predominately created by bourgeois male writers – I argue that the stereotypes and prejudices constituting the maidservant disguise confine

both heroines to the social imaginary of the female servant figure; yet, paradoxically, I also show how this social imaginary provides Mina and Hauteclaira with an ingenious way of revolting against their society's oppressive mores. Both heroines obtain a certain amount of freedom and agency that was not possible in their original roles through their disguises; the mask of the maidservant allows them to alter the power dynamics between men and women, and servants and their masters and mistresses.

I first examine how Stendhal and Barbey transform the maidservant disguise from a comic trope found in eighteenth-century theatre into a form of revolt for nineteenth-century fictional heroines. By analysing how this maidservant disguise trope passes generically from the eighteenth-century theatre to the nineteenth-century text (and therefore from comedy to realism and Naturalism), the nineteenth-century maidservant disguise is shown as a part of the realist/Naturalist aesthetic as a manipulative, dangerous method of revolt that is used by fictional heroines in order to satisfy their own desires for love and revenge. I then show how both Mina and Hauteclaira respectively achieve a limited sense of agency, as well as obtain a form of sexual liberation, by manipulating the stereotypes and prejudices that constitute the social imaginary. Both representations of the maidservant disguise help to create and exemplify two bourgeois concerns: first, the middle-class anxiety that the female servant is an imposter in the home with the power to topple the social order by dismantling the family structure; and second, the fear that women have the potential power to blur class distinctions through their control over their physical appearance. Stendhal's and Barbey's representations of the maidservant disguise thus evoke the bourgeoisie's growing anxieties concerning their class position; the heroine in a maidservant mask symbolises their fear of social chaos if one's class is no longer identifiable with their appearance. The blurred class distinctions rid the bourgeoisie of their hierarchical position in society, showing their wealth to be based on mere outward appearance rather than noble heritage. The maidservant disguise 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.

This article, however, ultimately concludes that, despite the freedom Mina and Hauteclaira obtain by paradoxically confining themselves to the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the female servant, this sense of liberty remains limited. Both heroines ultimately remain confined as objects of a nineteenth-century male fantasy, or rather, 'male gaze', and thus the sources of middle-class dread and fascination in this period. 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' (1988, 58), 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: the Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) and Zola's *Nana* (1880) (2021, 197–250). While Smith acknowledges that 'film serves as the ultimate medium for revealing male projection, pleasure, and desire' (2021, 200), she argues that Mulvey's theory can and should also be applied to nineteenth-century literary studies and, in my extrapolation, to the works of Stendhal and Barbey, insofar as their fictional female characters are portrayed as provocative figures via a masculine perspective. By seeking to become an 'invisible' maidservant, and deter the male gaze, Mina and Hauteclaira paradoxically draw attention to the female servant's body and her sexuality. They begin to attract the gaze

that they initially sought to deter, yet both heroines manipulate it to their own advantage. I conclude, however, that the maidservant disguise traps both heroines in a ‘masculinist economy’ (Smith 2021, 200) by demonstrating Mina’s and Hauteclair’s limited success in displacing the male gaze as subservient female figures. Both heroines stand out as a sexually deviant, audacious women whose identities as a maidservants become intertwined, in the period’s imagination, with stereotypes of the *servante-maîtresse*. Both heroines then must remain ultimately as two sites of male pleasure and desire, or consequently become punished for their audaciousness.

‘She Stoops to Conquer’

The foregrounding of the maidservant disguise in *Mina de Vanghel* and ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’ can be traced back to eighteenth-century comic theatre. In a similar manner as their eighteenth-century literary predecessors, such as the masters and mistresses featured in comedies such as Marivaux’s *La Double Inconstance* (1723), *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard* (1730) and *Les Fausses Confidences* (1738), Mina and Hauteclair adopt the disguise of a servant in order to gain secret, intimate access to their married lovers. The servant disguise consequently deflects attention away from a character’s social rank, whilst providing them with a sense of freedom and power. In *Souvenirs d’égotisme* (1832), Stendhal describes his admiration for Oliver Goldsmith’s role-reversal comedy, written by in 1773, that he saw in London in 1826: ‘*She stoops to conquer* [...] 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’ (1981–82, [1832], II: 478). Mina de Vanghel’s maidservant disguise appears to originate in these works, as well as more indirectly in the works of Shakespeare and Florian (Berthier 2005, 940). Stendhal’s description of Mina’s role reversal indeed makes use of this comedic theatricality within his text. Mina learns that the male object of her desire, Alfred, is leaving for Aix-en-Savoie with his wife: ‘Cette nouvelle fut une révolution dans l’esprit de Mina; elle éprouva un vif désir de voyager’ (MDV, 304). 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 (MDV, 304). The servant’s name, Aniken, is also introduced in the narrative without any explanation. Stendhal leaves his readers to fill in the blanks in order to interpret the events that have happened ‘off stage’ in the narrative. 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 recognise 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’ (MDV, 305). 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 thématise dans ses romans [...] Les gestes, les tons et les mots des

personnages stendhaliens construisent une dimension d'artifice susceptible sinon de détrôner le texte' (2003, 75). 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 female actresses (1942, 16). Yet as Emmanuel de Waresquiel points out in his recent study, *J'ai tant vu le soleil* (2020), Henri Beyle may have even adopted a (male) servant disguise himself in order to get closer to his future mistress, Angela (see Waresquiel 2020, 53). Stendhal's heroine also wishes to gain the same intimate access to her lover: 'Voir et entendre à chaque instant l'homme dont elle était folle était l'unique but de sa vie: elle ne désirait pas autre chose' (MDV, 309). 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, destabilising the essentially comedic figure of servant on stage.

Like the eighteenth-century theatrical mistress-in-disguise, Mina rids herself of her beauty that ties her to the social hierarchy in order to be seen and loved for her authentic qualities, rather than for her noble status. She consequently obtains a sense of freedom to speak her mind: 'Mina, voyant dans ses yeux qu'il l'écoutait, se permit quelques réflexions délicates et justes, surtout quand elle avait l'espoir de n'être pas entendue ou de n'être pas comprise par Mme Larçay' (MDV, 309). For Maria Scott, it is the most performative of Stendhal's female characters who are, paradoxically, the most authentic and therefore the freest: 'through performance, the Stendhalian self can be simultaneously invented and discovered, its boundaries temporarily unfixed' (2013, 47). While Scott connects authenticity in Stendhal to Sartre's existential philosophy of good and bad faith (2013, 48), Mina's desire to exist and be seen as her truest self must also be read in relation to the eighteenth-century thinkers who influenced the thoughts and writing of Stendhal: Abbé Prévost, Diderot, Jean-Jacques Rousseau,⁶ Voltaire, Montaigne, Molière, La Fontaine, Corneille, Racine, Montesquieu (May 1981, 223, 227–28), as well as that of Destutt de Tracy (Scott 2013, 6). These writers together influenced the *beyliste* 'chasse du bonheur'⁷ through their writings on 'l'homme moral et social' (May 1981, 223). Michel Crouzet describes a Rousseauian notion that one can apply to Mina de Vanghel's choice to don the maidservant disguise; for Rousseau, society felt false, and he argued that one must therefore search for a 'Moi naturel' (Crouzet 1985, 27): 'le plus difficile, le plus rare, est d'être sa sensation, son âme, d'être soi. S'il faut *oser* pour être soi, c'est qu'il est nécessaire de braver un principe de truquage, de remonter le courant de la contre-nature, devenue norme de l'existence. L'adhérence à l'être est devenue problématique' (1985, 44). Mina likewise dares to be her most authentic self by paradoxically hiding behind the appearance of a maidservant. It is only when she is stripped of her class status that the heroine can feel her most true self; she thus rejects the expectations placed on her to marry into the upper classes of Restoration aristocracy. One can thus apply Crouzet's reading to Mina – and later respectively in the narrative of Stendhal's eponymous *Lamiel* – that

[Stendhal] demeure fidèle à tous ceux qui au siècle précédent, et surtout Helvétius, Diderot, ou Buffon, ont revendiqué les droits du corps contre la morale, et la vérité des *désirs de la nature* contre la convention répressive. Aussi n'a-t-il guère fait de crédit aux 'honnêtes femmes', suspectes de jouer un rôle pesant, et toujours eu l'indiscrétion de révéler le

‘tempérament’ ou sa rébellion chez ses héroïnes, de l’orgueilleuse Mathilde, à la prude Fer-vaques, ou la chaste Chasteller (1985, 28).

This sense of rebellion shines through Mina de Vanghel who revolts against her society’s constraining mores in order to achieve a sense of freedom and happiness. 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’ (MDV, 307). Manzini describes how this, in, essence is *beylisme*: ‘a defence and assertion of the singular self’ (2019, 59).

Yet as the plot of *Mina de Vanghel* develops, Arnaldo Pizzorusso’s observes that Stendhal’s heroine partakes in a ‘libertine conversion’ (1974, 130–41) which Berthier develops in his analysis of the text: ‘ce qui la fait passer du côté de Rousseau au côté de Laclos. Cette jeune fille en quête d’absolu implacable araignée, tisse sa toile autour de sa victime et ne lui laisse aucune chance, menant de bout en bout un scénario ‘atroce’ (Berthier 2005, 940). To see Mina’s narrative as her hunt for happiness is thus also to view Alfred as her prey. After being fired by her mistress who labelled Mina an *aventurière*, the heroine ‘forma dans son esprit tout le projet de sa vengeance’ (MDV, 317); she hatches a plan with M. de Ruppert to destroy Alfred’s marriage. This reading of a vengeful trapping can also be extended to Barbey’s heroine, Hauteclaira Stassin, who, alongside the help of her married lover (and master), manipulates the invisibility of the maidservant mask in order to poison and kill her rival and mistress, Delphine de Cantor. Thus while the maidservant disguise first allows these heroines to rid themselves of their social status in order to attract men who might feel threatened by their high social standing, their wealth and their influence (in a similar manner to the eighteenth-century comedic trope), their disguises also tie both heroines to nineteenth-century discourses that developed, as well as described, the female servant as a dangerous figure. By transforming the maidservant disguise trope into a form of revolt for nineteenth-century fictional heroines, Stendhal and Barbey ultimately destabilise the previous comedic use of the maidservant disguise and transform it into a form of revolt that inverts power structures between men, women, masters, mistresses and servants.

Barbey also connects his short story, ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’, to this theatrical use of the maidservant disguise by describing the narrative setting of the upper-class home as a ‘discret théâtre’ (LBC, 106), in which Hauteclaira and her lover, Savigny, are the ‘acteurs’ (LBC, 105). Yet while Hauteclaira also uses the same strategy of revolt, she is not an aristocratic heroine like Mina. Her connection to the upper classes of her society is ambiguous given that her father was ‘un ancien prévôt du régiment’ (LBC, 90), who is highly respected by the old nobility of her town for his skill in the aristocratic art of fencing, which he teaches professionally in his fencing school. Her mother, however, was a local *grisette* – a working class woman also associated with prostitution (LBC, 90). Hauteclaira therefore seems to fall between the upper and lower classes of society, as well as between female and male gender roles, ambiguities which are emphasised by her role as a fencing instructor. On the one hand, Hauteclaira’s own skill at fencing makes her appear upper-class and grants her access to an upper-class milieu. On the other hand, as an instructor, Hauteclaira is paid for her services and so already associated with the servant-class. The choice to don a maidservant disguise thus rids Hauteclaira of any potential ties to the upper classes; it lowers the heroine to the same

level as her mother or to the status of the servant she fears others may already perceive her to be. Mina and Hauteclaira are thus self-abasing heroines, although their new identities of Aniken and Eulalie see them stooping to conquer by allowing them private access to their married lovers and commit plots against their mistresses.

'Le Bonheur dans le crime' likewise provides an example of how the 'servante de théâtre' has become destabilised 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 [...] (LBC, 104).

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 realising that beautiful maidservants attract the master's eye, just as handsome lackeys may attract hers. Yet in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Suzanne was not a typical '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 short story: 'le comte de Savigny et Hauteclaira Stassin jouaient la plus effroyablement impudente des comédies avec la simplicité d'acteurs consommés, et qu'ils s'entendaient pour la jouer' (LBC, 105). With the help of her married lover (and master), she poisons her rival and mistress, Delphine de Cantor, killing her in cold blood. 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 and Mina 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. The comic topos of the maidservant disguise served as a direct influence on Stendhal's and Barbey's realist plots, yet it is repurposed in order to create a rebellious maidservant figure. Indeed, rather than a comedic figure, the nineteenth-century heroine-in-disguise emerges 'de l'ombre qui noyait le pourtour profonde du parloir' (LBC, 101) as a dangerous, deadly female figure: 'C'était à couper la respiration qu'une telle vue!' (LBC, 101–02). 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 'serious' aesthetic, instigating a new form of 'disorder' (see Baguley 1990, 177).

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 fictional maidservant became a part of the 'serious' aesthetic in the nineteenth-century novel and

short story (2013 [1953], 481). He observes that since the age of French classicism and absolutism, attitudes surrounding the 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’ (2013 [1953], 481); 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’ (2013 [1953], 491). For Auerbach, the emergence of modern realism then altered this representation of everyday reality insofar as it was now perceived as ‘serious’ (2013 [1953], 473). Yet this ‘serious’ treatment of lower-class figures like the maidservant, situated in their precisely defined historical, political and social settings, created the ‘realist myth’ in which imagination and reality blurred in an attempt to create an ‘actual world’ (Baguley 1990, 7). This blurred reality took the form of a ‘mimetic pact’ with the reader, encouraging the belief that that the novel represented true events (Baguley 1990, 48). 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 (Baguley 1990, 47).

The Naturalist text also further emphasised 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 (Baguley 1990, 47), likewise includes the maidservant figure as part of its ‘objective’ or ‘documented’ vision of reality (Baguley 1990, 4). The Naturalists sought to trace the psychology, physiology and living conditions of the lower classes by means of in-depth observation and scientific detachment (Yates 1991, 67). 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* placed the rebellious maidservant at the centre of their study, intended as a social enquiry. The representation of the maidservant disguise in the nineteenth-century works of Stendhal and Barbey thus feeds into this realist/Naturalist aesthetic of a ‘serious’ representation of the world and the lower-class female characters within it.

By analysing how Mina and Hauteclair are shown to manipulate the prescribed, non-descript presence of the female servant in the nineteenth century to their own advantage, Stendhal 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 maidservant disguise can and should be read as a form of revolt that allows both fictional heroines to turn themselves into the subjects as opposed to the objects of desire, thereby reversing the prevailing power dynamics between men and women, masters and servants.

A Revolt Against Nineteenth-Century Social Mores

In their respective plots, Mina and Hauteclair seek to take advantage of the invisibility of the maidservant in order to gain intimate access to their lovers and enact their plots away

from the aristocratic and bourgeois eyes of society. Mina's revolt through role play allows her 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' (2005–14, I: 302). 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' (2008, 261). Yet for Stendhal, 'le pays du monde où il y a le plus de mariages heureux [...] Incontestablement c'est l'Allemagne protestante' (1959, 222). Having been born 'dans le pays de la philosophie et de l'imagination' (MDV, 297), Mina 'conserva le naturel et la liberté des façons allemandes' (MDV, 302), 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' (MDV, 299). Mina's German heritage⁸ 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.⁹ Her escape to Paris, and subsequently to Alfred's 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' (2004, 280). 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?' (MDV, 307). 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' (1984, 160). As a method of revolt, the maidservant disguise allows Mina to escape this *ennui* of attending balls and socialising in salons (as Mathilde de la Môle also feels) and to follow her own path, much to the frustration of the other characters in Stendhal's novella.

Hauteclair's disguise also triggers the frustration of her societies for going against the strict nineteenth-century social expectations placed on bourgeois women. Doctor Torty acts as the representative of the townsfolk living with the shock of her disappearance, emphasising 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' (LBC, 98). 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 une jeune fille qu'on avait cru voir vieillir ou se marier, comme les autres jeunes filles de la ville' (LBC, 98–99). With the use of free indirect speech, we see the villagers' frustration and anger running through these lines. Just as Mina defied her society by donning maidservant disguise, so Hauteclair disregards 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 realise 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.¹⁰ By only revealing one side of their mask, both maidservants infuriate those who thought they knew their 'true' character.¹¹ The maidservant disguise therefore allows fictional heroines to rise up against their societies and exasperate those around them. These heroines therefore prefer to take on great risk, and thereby effect a greater revolt against the conventions set by their society. Mina and Hauteclair's defiant act against the aristocracy and bourgeoisie allows them to exist as their truest selves through the invisibility of the maidservant's mask.

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' (2013, 18). While I have shown how the maidservant disguise functions as a form of revolt against nineteenth-century social mores and thus a way for Mina, and by extension, Hauteclair, 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 article seeks to show, 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 criminal in disguise.¹² As we shall see in what follows, both heroines manipulate, as well as add to, this social imaginary as part of their revolt, while finally remaining trapped within it.

The Female Servant as a Criminal in Disguise

The maidservant disguises in the plots of *Mina de Vanghel* and 'Le Bonheur dans le crime' reflect and develop the period's existing concerns that the female servant was a criminal in disguise. Stendhal and Barbey both depict the female servant as a persona that can be donned by aristocratic and bourgeois heroines in order to commit either adultery or even murder. Mina provides an example of how the maidservant can be hired mistakenly based on a false impression that she succeeds in creating: '[l]'air sérieux de la jeune Allemande plut à Mme Larçay' (MDV, 305). As the heroine 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' (*MDV*, 308). 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' (*LBC*, 107). Dr Torty repeatedly labels Hauteclair 'la fausse Eulalie' (*LBC*, 105, 106) in order to emphasise that she had fooled her mistress completely; he even goes so far as to label the mistress a 'dupe' (*LBC*, 106). Nineteenth-century household manuals also evoked and reinforced the period's fear that, even though a maidservant might appear genuine, her personality was liable to sudden change.¹³ In her household advice manual, *Une maison bien tenue: conseils aux jeunes maîtresses de maison* – published in 1901, yet with the nineteenth-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. (1901, 74).

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 (1901, 73); 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' (1901, 74). Delorme's manual does not simply advise her contemporaries to try and recognise 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.

Raymond de Ryckère, a Belgian judge at the Brussels Court of First Instance, legal theorist and self-professed specialist in female servant criminality, sought 'legitimize' the connection between domestic service and female criminality in his widely acclaimed study on the topic, *La Servante Criminelle: Étude de criminologie professionnelle* (Barber and Piette 2002, 267). Published in 1908, but also focusing on the nineteenth-century female servant, his study shows how criminological discourses tied the figure of the female servant to the figure of the criminal 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. (1908, 3)

The criminologist goes on to describes 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 recommandables’ in order to place them in well-respected, wealthy homes (1908, 117). 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’ (Ryckère 1908, 117). 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’ (Ryckère 1908, 117). 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 (1979, 66). 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 (Martin-Fugier 1979, 65). 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.¹⁴ 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. The plots of *Mina de Vanghel* and ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’ thus feed into these discourses that warned of the ‘loyal’ maidservant’s false appearance.

The Fear of the Maidservant’s Gaze

A nineteenth-century household manual writer, Madame (Élisabeth) Celnart (also known as Élisabeth-Félicie Canard Bayle-Mouillard), famous for her manuals seeking to moralise middle-class women and young girls, also warned of the maidservant’s ‘infâme rôle d’espion’ (1836, 15). She claims that rebellious female 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!’ (1836, 15). Marius-Henri-Casimir Mitre, a lawyer at the Court of Cassation and a lay author, also agrees, stating that certain servants can become ‘l’espion de la maison’ in order to help others commit crimes within the private sphere of the home (1838, 48). Although these two authors were writing in different contexts, they both highlight the same bourgeois anxiety that also emanates from the maidservant disguise in the works of Stendhal and Barbey: the fear of the maidservant’s gaze. By donning the maidservant disguise, Mina and Hauteclair created as well as fed into the imaginings that the female servant could manipulate her position in order to spy on the bourgeois household.

Stendhal’s fictional maidservant heroine 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’ (MDV, 308). Although Mina does not use this information in a malicious way, her

character's behaviour suggests the period's belief that the female servant was all seeing and therefore all knowing. Hauteclaira is also described as using her disguise as a way of keeping a watchful eye – and ear – over her mistress, as well as Doctor Torty:

Hauteclaira redevenue Eulalie, assise dans l'embrasement d'une des fenêtres du long corridor qui aboutissait à la chambre de sa maîtresse, une masse de linge et de chiffons sur une chaise devant elle, occupée à coudre et à tailler là-dedans [...] D'ordinaire, lorsque je passais le long de ce corridor où elle travaillait toujours, quand elle n'était pas de service auprès de la comtesse, elle m'entendait si bien venir, elle était si sûre que c'était moi, elle ne relevait jamais la tête (*LBC*, 113–14).

This social imaginary of the rebellious female servant as a spy is also present in other *roman de la servante* texts. In his novel *Le Cousin Pons* (1847), Balzac's rebellious female servant, Madame Cibot, is described as an 'espion' (1993, [1847], 267) acting on behalf of the other characters who also wish to rob Pons of his fortune. Zola's *Pot-Bouille* (1882) 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' (1984, [1882], 230, see also 295, 302). The fictional maidservant, Rachel, is then depicted as a feared and dangerous spy who knows too much about her mistress's affair (Zola 1984, [1882], 302–07). These fears then lead to her mistress, Berthe, bribing her with extra money and new dresses (Zola 1984, [1882], 306, 316). 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. Thus, while both Mina and Hauteclaira manipulate this social imaginary for their own gain by using the maidservant's alleged invisibility to achieve a sense of autonomy, this invisibility is paradoxically 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 Mina and Hauteclaira in a masculinist economy that perceives the female servant as a site of pleasure or repulsion.

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. (*MDV*, 308)

This disguise not only connects to the comic use of a maidservant disguise in the theatre of the Ancien Régime but can also be read as a cloak of invisibility that derives from earlier fairy tales. In Charles Perrault's version of *Peau d'âne* (1694),¹⁵ the princess's flight is enabled by the 'degrading disguise' of a donkey's skin (Betts 2018, xxiii); this stinking and disgusting camouflage repulses everyone the heroine encounters, 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's skin, the maidservant disguise initially

serves as a mask of ugliness, allowing Mina (and in the future, Stendhal's heroine, Lamiel) to avoid attracting the male gaze by using '[u]ne légère décoction de feuilles de houx, appliquée chaque matin sur ses mains délicates' (*MDV*, 308). By disappearing into the invisible form of a servant, Mina is able to observe Alfred's private life without being caught or questioned: 'elle ne songeait qu'au bonheur de voir Alfred tous les jours' (*MDV*, 307). Her original role as an aristocratic woman would not give her the same subversive and voyeuristic power. 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. In disguise, Mina (just like Hauteclaira) 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] ...' (*MDV*, 307). 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. As Scott has pointed out, Mina's disguise as a servant allows the heroine to occupy 'the position of the desiring spectator rather than that of desired object' (2013, 266). Yet when Stendhal provides his maidservant heroine with the time to become a 'desiring spectator' while also completing the maidservant's chores, he demonstrates an unrealistic, romanticised view of nineteenth-century servitude: [Mina] était obligée de coudre beaucoup, elle prenait gaie-ment les devoirs de ce nouvel état. Souvent il lui semblait jour la comédie. Elle se plaisait elle-même quand il lui échappait un mouvement étranger à son rôle' (*MDV*, 307). 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' (*MDV*, 307). While these scenes show that there is a clear sense of joy in 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 article explores in more depth. There is, however, a clear act of defiance as Mina makes herself ugly through her disguise: 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 mask to divert the gaze of others. Like Mina, she escapes to the private sphere of the home, away from the eyes of the public; it gives her the seclusion to exhibit her freedom and commit her murder plot. From a young age, Hauteclaira is taught to fence and to ride horses; she performs these acts behind a mask which she refuses to remove. The women of the town tell Doctor Torty that 'elles n'avaient jamais bien vu que la tournure de cette fille, faite pour l'amazone, et qui la portait comme vous – qui venez de la voir – pouvez le supposer, mais dont le visage était toujours plus ou moins caché dans un voile gros bleu trop épais' (*LBC*, 94). A thick veil masks Hauteclaira's identity and therefore her beauty in public. Her riding outfit ('amazone') similarly conceals any sign of traditional femininity; indeed, it explicitly indicates a masculine quality, as Amazons are of course defined by their masculine attributes.¹⁶ Hauteclaira's profession as a fencing instructor likewise rids the heroine of the conventions surrounding her role as a woman.

Rather than becoming a lady who has been taught to read, to sew, and to play a musical instrument, Hauteclaira is transformed by her father into ‘cette Saint-Georges femelle, dont la beauté, disaient-ils, égalait le talent d’escrime’ (*LBC*, 93). Named after ‘le nom d’épée d’Olivier’ from *La Chanson de Roland* (*LBC*, 94), Hauteclaira’s name is unconventional, emphasising the phallic status of a sword which is then attached to her persona. The heroine’s entire social identity is therefore created – or masked – by her profession. Her physiognomy is hidden from the public as a result of her vocation 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’ (*LBC*, 94). The mesh of the mask, consisting of a series of small metal links, conceals the heroine’s identity behind it.¹⁷ The reader is also told that ‘le dimanche à la messe, comme dans la rue, elle était presque aussi masquée que dans la salle de son père, la dentelle de son voile noir étant encore plus sombre et plus serrée que les mailles de son masque de fer’ (*LBC*, 94). The tightly bound lace shields Hauteclaira’s beauty from the gaze of others.

These initial masks do not, however, fully meet Hauteclaira’s need to escape the constraints her society imposes on her. They do not completely stop her from becoming an object of desire; as Doctor Torty explicitly states, her masks only serve to increase the excitement of the townsfolk’s ‘imaginations curieuses’ (*LBC*, 96). Hauteclaira realises that she cannot stop herself from becoming the object of the town’s curiosity, and so decides to remove herself from society by using the maidservant disguise. The disguise reverses her role: she goes from being the object of the town’s attention to becoming an invisible subject, or rather, a spectre, inside a private household. She becomes the ‘effrayante Eulalie’, insinuée, glissée chez elle [Mlle Delphine de Cantor]’ (*LBC*, 106–07) in order to commit her murder plot.

Both writers therefore play with the stereotypes and prejudices that constitute the female servant’s appearance as a way of providing their fictional heroines with a sense of (sexual) liberation and autonomy. This freedom, however, should be read as quite limited, for their representations of the maidservant disguise add to existing fears surrounding the female servant as found in other non-literary discourses in this period. While the nineteenth-century maidservant initially appears to create her own plot through the reversal of the male gaze, a more careful reading shows how these fictional heroines remain constrained by the social imaginary of the rebellious female figure.

Class and Beauty

Mina’s and Hauteclaira’s disguises raise the question of how perceptions of beauty and class are intertwined in this period. Attractiveness is linked to society’s upper classes, whilst ugliness is connected to lower-, and working-class women in the nineteenth-century imagination.¹⁸ One may think of the ugly maidservants in Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola, such as La Grande Nanon, whose ‘figure semblait repoussante’ (Balzac 1972, 28), and the ‘pouilleuse’ Adèle, with ‘sa saleté’ (Zola 1984, 39). This link between class and the perception of beauty is also apparent in Maupassant’s *La Chambre 11* (1884), when the heroine, Madame Amandon, initially described as ‘cette jolie petite brune maigre, si distinguée et fine’ (Maupassant 1974–79, II: 393), similarly

conceals her beauty through the maidservant disguise in order to travel undetected. Like Mina (and in the future, Lamiel), Madame Amandon masks her beauty in order to gain a sense of freedom, that is to say to avoid becoming the object of the masculine gaze and to travel freely. As Prévost argues, ‘La vraie amazone est quelquefois ennemie de sa propre beauté, et s’en débarrasse lorsque cette beauté la gêne’ (1942, 17). ‘Le Bonheur dans le crime’ then 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’ (LBC, 107–08). For the heroine to become an ‘acceptable’ representation of the maidservant figure, she must therefore degrade her beauty in order to obtain the freedom to exist in the shadows of society.

Yet a further reason for Mina to adopt her mask of ugliness also stems from fears that the maidservant would be unrecognisable from her mistress were she to be as beautiful as her (or more so). Madame Celnart also warns her fellow bourgeois mistresses about their maidservant’s beauty and the vanity it inspires. She suggests that maidservants may start considering themselves above their position:

C’est encore cette femme de chambre vaine qui se pare au-dessus de sa condition, affecte une toilette analogue, autant que possible, à celle de madame, va jusqu’à déprécier, auprès des autres filles, la mise de leurs maîtresses [...]. (1836, 12)

Servants should never dress nor act above their station. Celnart implicitly suggests the bourgeois nightmare 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. (1852, 164–65)

The unknown writer then goes on to tell servants not to wear any clothes that the mistress may gift them (1852, 162). In *Les Artisans et les domestiques d’autrefois* (1886), Albert Babeau explains that while the nobles of the Ancien Régime let their female servants ‘s’habill[er] des dépouilles encore fraîches de leurs maîtresses’, as they outwardly represented their household’s wealth (1886, 270), the bourgeoisie during this period were also scandalised by this practice (1886, 270). As Mitre 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. (Mitre 1838, 40)

He notes that ‘ces habitudes de luxe’ are often ‘la source de tous ces désordres’ (1838, 40), highlighting his period’s underlying fear that class boundaries between maidservants and their mistresses could easily become blurred by their dress and appearance.¹⁹ Mina and Hauteclair thus manipulate the belief that the maidservant becomes inconspicuous on account of her uniform; their appearance does not initially give rise to anxiety on the part of their respective mistresses. 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' (1886, 275). The maidservant's uniform sets the female servant apart from their mistresses, even in working-class homes.

Yet Stendhal and Barbey are also implicitly hinting at the period's fear of women blurring boundaries between different social classes by focusing their plots around two self-abasing heroines. In their disguises, Mina and Hauteclaira simultaneously exist as two opposing figures: the servant and the mistress. Thus, while the non-literary discourses appear to try to define and regulate the differences between the bourgeois and aristocratic, healthy and pure bourgeois mistress of the household and her lower-class, sexually promiscuous servant, Stendhal and Barbey blur these distinctions. Their two texts thus draw attention to a similar fear to the one that is depicted in the household manuals: sexually promiscuous women can easily manipulate, or even eradicate, class markers.

Both heroines then manipulate the non-descript presence of the maidservant as prescribed by the century's advice manuals. Nineteenth-century maidservants are indeed instructed by household manual guides not to draw attention to their physical 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. (*Le Guide du domestique* 1852, 175)

The female servants should blend into the background of nineteenth-century society. Beauty is not only linked to the aristocratic and bourgeois identities of these heroines; it also connects to a nineteenth-century fear of the rebellious maidservant's sexuality. Accordingly, 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'; Flaubert 'dehumanises and defeminizes her' so as to prevent her sexuality from interfering with her functionality as a servant (Yates 1991, 29–30). Marie Delorme, a nineteenth-century bourgeois household manual writer, develops her advice to mistresses further, instructing them to ensure that their female servants should have neither 'des coiffures à prétention [...] des cheveux crêpés, des chignons extravagants', nor 'des blouses à sensation' (1901, 66) that could reveal their flesh. Bonnets, ribbons, aprons,²⁰ and boots were all similarly tied to the same erotic imagery of the maidservant in the nineteenth-century imagination (Petitfrère 2006, 138). One may of course think of the famous boot scene in Octave Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900). Mirbeau's text also provides a fictional example of these rules around the maidservant's appearance. Célestine begins to attract her master's attention by using perfume, infuriating the mistress: 'Je n'aime pas qu'on se mette des parfums [...] Vous entendez Célestine?' (Mirbeau 1984, 55). Rather, as household manual writer Madame Pariset states, mistresses should favour 'la propreté, la simplicité et l'ordre' (1852, 73) to all forms of adornment (see also *Le Guide du domestique* 1852, 161). Like Flaubert's loyal fictional maidservant heroine, Félicité, they should 'dispar[aitre] dans l'ombre' (Flaubert 2013–21, V: 219).

Yet unlike Flaubert's Félicité, Hauteclaira fails to fully conceal both her beauty and her feminine form as a maidservant from the male gaze:

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 ... Je passai, mais sans lui parler, car je ne lui parlais que le moins possible, ne voulant pas avoir avec elle l'air de savoir ce que je savais et ce qui aurait peut-être filtré à travers ma voix ou mon regard (*LBC*, 114).

Through the eyes of the male, bourgeois author, as well as through the perspective of the male doctor narrating the story to another male character in the framed narration, Hauteclair stands out as overtly drawing attention to her sexuality. Despite donning the maidservant's inconspicuous uniform, the heroine fails to conceal her body from the masculine gaze, and therefore she revolts against the rules outlined in the household manuals. By choosing to draw attention to her body, and thus her overt sexuality, Hauteclair can therefore be read as playing with the social imaginary of the female servant as a seductive, dangerous figure in order to capture the attention of the master (and subsequently that of the doctor) in the private sphere of the home. It is Hauteclair who decides when she appears or disappears into the background of the home:

Il est vrai encore que si c'était une visite d'hommes, Hauteclair pouvait ne pas paraître. Et si c'était une visite de femmes, ces femmes de V ... pour la plupart, ne l'avaient jamais assez bien vue pour la reconnaître, cette fille bloquée, pendant des années, par ses leçons, au fond d'une salle d'armes, et qui, aperçue de loin, à cheval ou à l'église, portait des voiles qu'elle épaississait à dessein (...) (*LBC*, 103–04).

The maidservant disguise thus provides Hauteclair with a sense of power over the gaze of others.

While these texts initially highlight a fear of the maidservant as a sexual temptress, they also suggest a further, implicit anxiety with regard to male sexual continence in the presence of these female figures in the home. Madame Pariset therefore 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 traînante 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 [...] (1852, 73)

The female servant poses a threat if she is seen as beautiful or disorderly, thereby drawing too much attention to a figure who is supposed to remain a nondescript presence. Both Madame Celnart and Madame Pariset reinforce the same discourse that nineteenth-century mistresses should not tolerate dirtiness and a lack of care in a servant's appearance.²¹ 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' (1852, 72). This rejection of physical disability illuminates just how far the appearance of the maidservant needed to be controlled. The fears of the rebellious maidservant's sexuality were therefore shown not only through her body being overtly beautiful, but also through its exhibition of deformity. While Mina uses her ugliness as a mask, she might also therefore be drawing attention to her body (and thus her sexuality) by disfiguring her face through the holly paste.

It is by emphasising the proscription of the maidservant's proscribed non-descript presence in the home that paradoxically draws the reader of the manual's attention to

the maidservant's appearance. Indeed, in their attempt to desexualise the maidservant through their advice, these nineteenth-century upper-class writers subsequently sexualise the figure by implicitly exhibiting their fears around the physicality of her body. Both texts show how the inferior, so-called invisible position of the servant paradoxically draws attention to the female figure, thereby attracting the eyes of the master.

La Servante-Maitresse

Although Mina initially feared that Alfred would not speak to her in her inferior position as a maidservant, stating that 'jamais j'ai parlé devant ma femme de chambre. [...] Jamais il ne daignera me parler' (*MDV*, 306), she soon realises that 'Alfred la regarda beaucoup et lui trouvait une grâce parfaite' (*MDV*, 307). The master's gaze is paradoxically drawn to the 'invisible' lower-class woman due to her inferiority. Barbey's text, through the perspective of a male bourgeois doctor depicted in a framed narrative by another male bourgeois character, also focuses on the maidservant figure. Doctor Torty repeats that this is only a natural 'intérêt de l'observateur qui ne voulait pas qu'on lui fermât la porte d'une maison où il y avait, à l'insu de toute la terre, de pareilles choses à observer' (*LBC*, 103). Yet while Torty emphasises his 'plaisirs de l'observateur' (*LBC*, 103) as a doctor who, like the Naturalist writer, has the supposed 'unbiased' position of recording the truth (see Baguley 1990, 174), his narration focuses more on his observations of the maidservant than that of Savigny. Both Stendhal and Barbey thus demonstrate how the invisibility of the maidservant disguise through her lower-class position paradoxically draws attention to the presence of the female figure. On the one hand, then, Mina and Hauteclair obtain a certain amount of agency, and thus a sense of freedom away from the gaze of others in so far as the maidservant disguise as a method of revolt allows both heroines to decide their own destinies and create 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 principally bourgeois male characters in the plot, to the female servant figure's body and sexuality. The maidservant disguise therefore provides a sense of (in)visibility: it diverts and yet draws attention to itself.

In *Mina de Vanghel*, Madame Larçay becomes jealous and also suspicious of Mina in her guise of Aniken as the heroine begins to reveal her true beauty: 'Peu à peu Mme Larçay devint décidément jalouse d'Aniken. Le singulier changement de la figure de cette file ne lui avait point échappé' (*MDV*, 312). The mistress fears that her servant could potentially corrupt her husband through her 'extrême coquetterie' (*MDV*, 312). Madame Larçay then 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? (*MDV*, 312)

While 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’ (2013, 23), 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 that Stendhal is both generating and reproducing anxieties about beautiful maidservants becoming potential temptresses.

Underpinning Madame Larçay’s suspicions, as well as the previous non-literary nineteenth-century discourses surrounding a maidservant’s beauty discussed in the previous section, is indeed the fear of *la servante-maîtresse*.²² Martin-Fugier explains that ‘Le XIXème siècle est hanté par le spectre de la domestique qui devient maîtresse’ (1979, 174). She goes on to note that the two meanings of mistress each pose a danger: first, that of a woman who conquers the heart and body of the master, (or indeed his son [Petitfrère 2006, 138]) and second, that of ‘*l’autre femme dans la maison, l’usurpatrice en puissance du titre de maîtresse de maison, du nom et de la fortune*’ (1979, 174). 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’, gives rise to relationships between masters and servants in the home (2006, 137). One may think of Émile Zola’s real-life liaison with his washerwoman, Jeanne Rozerot, as well as novels in this period that included fictional masters entering into affairs, or even marriages with their female servants.²³ While Mina’s plot to destroy Alfred’s marriage in order to marry him herself initially seems simply to reinforce the period’s existing fears of the *servante-maîtresse*, a second reading of this scene shows how Stendhal’s heroine manipulates this discourse to her own advantage.

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 agir comme le ferait un de mes amis? Ce n’est après tout qu’une femme de chambre”’ (MDV, 310). 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’ (MDV, 310). 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.²⁴ The maidservant captures the interest of the male master, suggesting his attraction to submissive, invisible servants. Put another way, 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. This scene highlights the behaviour between masters and maidservants deemed acceptable in nineteenth-century society. By leaving the reader to interpret the scene, Stendhal (ironically) assumes a shared understanding of the mistreatment of maidservants.

Théophile Steinlen’s illustration for J. Ricard’s short maidservant story, *Eugénie*, in the 1893 newspaper *Gil Blas illustré* provides us with a visual image that seems to capture Alfred’s desired outcome to this scene (see Figure 1). The story describes a master who is having an affair with his servant, Eugénie. He secretly invests in a small apartment and begins to make plans to continue his affair outside of the home. Based on the story of a *servante-maîtresse*, the illustration shows a large master figure grabbing a maidservant by her hips. The master appears to be looking at the maidservant’s body rather than at her

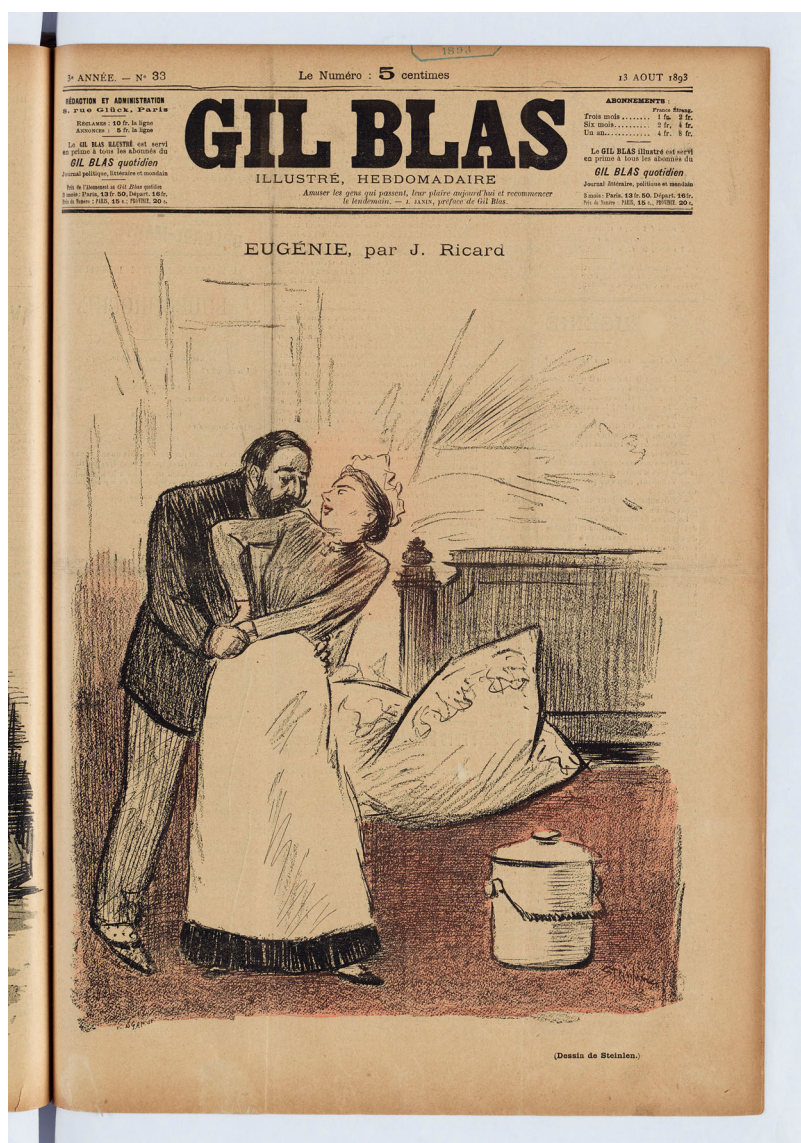


Figure 1. Steinlen, Théophile. 1893. *Eugénie*. Illustration in *Gil Blas illustré*. August 13, 1892. Gallica. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bd6t5144909f/f1.item>.

face, while the servant's reaction is hard to interpret: she appears almost flattered by his advance.

Circulated in a popular nineteenth-century newspaper, and specifically placed on its front page, this illustration acts as a warning message to mistresses like Mme Larçay: the maidservant is a sexually promiscuous figure who will trap your husband. Yet *Eugénie* concludes its story with the mistress becoming pregnant; she consequently pulls the master away from the grasp of the female servant. The writer suggests that it is only by reinforcing the bloodlines of the bourgeois family that the wife can turn her husband's attention back to his duties.

In his *Physiologie du mariage* (1829), Balzac also creates and reinforces the fears of the *servant-maitresse* by describing how the female servant in the home exerts 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? (1838, [1829], 334–35)

While the *Physiologie du mariage* was written in a satirical style, Balzac's writing is another example of the period's growing awareness of how masters act in the presence of their female servants. In his sociological report aimed at improving master and servant relationships from the end of the century, *Domestiques et maitres: Question sociale* (1896), the *juge d'instruction* Prosper-Georges-Marcelin 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' (1896, 258). At the end of *La Cousine Bette*, Balzac then 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' (2019, 591). The author adds that '[l]es filles de cuisine sont aujourd'hui des créatures ambitieuses' (2019, 592). 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. Yet Stendhal's heroine can be read as using this stereotype of the *servante-maitresse* to her own advantage, reversing the power structure between female servants and masters, as well as men and women.

Mina audaciously shows her resistance against the mistreatment of maidservants by pushing Alfred away and refusing to talk to him. For a nineteenth-century maidservant, however, this is a 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 chances de résistance sont minces et la durée de résistance est souvent brève, elle aussi' (1978, 33). It is in this context that Mina can be seen as extraordinary in her actions. She assumes that she has the power to resist Alfred's advances and is insulted by his actions; she deems his behaviour as inauthentic, perceiving his actions as an example of 'fausseté' (MDV, 310). Mina's resistance, however, soon comes to an end. After spending some time not speaking to Alfred, the heroine seems quickly to forgive him. Yet, Stendhal also suggests that it is Mina's choice, rather than that of Alfred, that they continue their liaison. Mina's maidservant disguise therefore allows Stendhal to critique the power structures at play in regard to the master and the female servant dynamic. Her decision removes an element of power from both the master and therefore the male in the relationship.

In 'Le Bonheur dans le crime', Doctor Torty questions 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' (*LBC*, 104). Unlike Mina, Hauteclaira is not feared for her beauty by her mistress; she is blind to the threat she poses as 'la "servante-maîtresse"' (Auraix-Jonchière 1999, 56). This blindness seems to derive from the fact that the mistress is 'une vraie femme de V ... , qui ne savait *rien de rien* que ceci: c'est qu'elle était noble, et qu'en dehors de la noblesse, le monde n'était pas digne d'un regard ... ' (*LBC*, 105). As a servant, Hauteclaira poses no initial threat to her mistress. Neither her looks nor her behaviour are of immediate concern to the countess, whose social ranking blinds her to those beneath her in the social hierarchy. Doctor Torty, however, tries in vain to warn the mistress of her maidservant's beauty: 'Et ce sera, peut-être, un homme comme il faut et de votre monde qui s'en amourachera, madame la comtesse? Elle est assez belle pour tourner la tête à un duc. [...] Il n'y a pas de duc à V ... , — répondit la comtesse' (*LBC*, 108). The representation of the countess thus stands in opposition to that of a more bourgeois mistress, such as Mme Larçay, who anxiously perceives her maidservant as a potential *servante-maîtresse*. Barbey's plot thus inevitably warns his readers of the dangers of this blindness: the mistress is 'broyée sous les pieds de cette fière Hauteclaira, qui s'était courbée devant elle jusqu'au rôle de servante' (*LBC*, 106). It is only on her deathbed that the countess realises that she has been poisoned by her servant and declares: 'Mais, à présent, nous ne sommes plus les maîtres chez nous' (*LBC*, 119). Hauteclaira, like Mina, has used her disguise as a maidservant to reverse the power structures in the home between masters and mistresses and their servants, and thus to gain dominance over the household.

The Maidservant Disguise: A Male Fantasy

The analysis of the maidservant disguise in this article has not only shown that Stendhal and Barbey added to existing concerns, and even created new fears, of the rebellious maidservant in this period, but also that these fears are then manipulated by their literary heroines in order for them to achieve a measure of happiness and freedom. Indeed, it is only when transformed into the maidservant that Mina and Hauteclaira paradoxically obtain their sexual freedom by taking on the constraints of the stereotypes and prejudices linked to lower-class women. Both heroines become associated with a poor and sexualised servant whom the bourgeois feared would steal the master from the mistress. It is this inferior position, also seen as 'invisible' that paradoxically 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.

Yet if clothes indeed 'maketh the (wo)man', both heroines' identities are not only transformed through their disguises but are also concurrently constrained by the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding female servants during this period. The social imaginary of the rebellious maidservant exploited by Mina and Hauteclaira is bound up with the fears that surrounded these figures. Indeed, despite the limited amount of agency and freedom that both heroines obtain through donning the maidservant disguise, Mina and Hauteclaira ultimately remain the object of the male writer's sexual fantasy.

Dr Terty remarks that even after Hauteclair 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’ (*LBC*, 123). Hauteclair 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’ (*LBC*, 121). This attitude later seeps into the town’s opinion that ‘on devait la voir maîtresse’ (*LBC*, 123). Thus while the heroine ‘n’avait plus à [...] craindre’ her mistress (*LBC*, 123), she continues to do the chores for her household, and presumably to teach Serlon how to fence in the evenings. Hauteclair 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 l’impas-sibilité de l’esclave’ (*LBC*, 124). While an initial reading of this scene sees Hauteclair occupying a position of dominance in the household, thereby reversing the roles between a servant and her mistress, a second reading shows that Hauteclair 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 Hauteclair, Hauteclair heureuse d’avoir été servante pour lui ...’ (*LBC*, 125). 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 Hauteclair 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 Hauteclair’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 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.

In *De l’Amour* Stendhal acknowledges that his ideal reader would have been someone like Mme Roland, the leading heroine of the French Revolution and a bold figure that outshone her husband (Manzini 2019, 12–13). This female figure is echoed through the boldness of Mina de Vanghel. Thus, if Stendhal is intending to write for young women, who he also outlines are largest readers of novels in the nineteenth century in his ‘Projet d’article sur “Le Rouge et le Noir”’ (2005–14, I: 824), what message can we interpret from a heroine that is punished for her audacious actions? Whereas Scott believes that Mina’s final act of suicide should be read as a final triumph of the heroine’s freedom (2013, 31), and that the author was naturally drawn to ‘female defiance’ (2013, 262), Stendhal is nonetheless illustrating the danger of an aristocratic woman deciding to remove her mask and reveal her truest self in high society. As Scott points out, Henri Beyle was horrified that his sister Pauline was attempting to disguise herself in men’s clothing as this would ‘reduce her chances of marriage and therefore happiness’; rather, ‘he advises her to hide her brilliance from others in order to remain charming to them, even while cultivating her mind and her intellectual freedom through her reading’ (2013, 14). Beyle knew that his sister would become an outcast if she were to

reveal her authentic self and advised that she exhibited her freedom through her imagination. Marriage, he believed, was the best way for a woman to exhibit other forms of freedom (see Scott 2013, 14). Thus Beyle would never have wanted his sister, and thus arguably his reader, to fully step out of her role in society like the fictional Mina de Vanghel. His novel warns of the consequences of these actions. Instead, he suggests that a woman can only gain a sense of autonomy through their imagination. 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' (2016, 150) and argue that 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.

Notes

1. Christopher Prendergast argues that, in the first half of the century, as a result of the large influx of migrants (including that of maidservants) from the provinces to Paris, overcrowding led to housing shortages, cholera epidemics, malnutrition, infant mortality, diseases, and increased crime rates (1992, 75; see also Charle 2015, 33–36).
2. Louis Chevalier (1958) shows how the upper classes confused the working classes with that of the 'dangerous classes' of criminals and society's outsiders on the margins of the law.
3. Prendergast highlights how the nineteenth century's increasing obsession with cleanliness linked the expulsion of physical dirt to the need to keep the perceived 'polluted people' of society out of sight (1992, 79).
4. Fairchilds notes other methods that masters and mistresses used in order to keep servants at distance in the late-eighteenth century and that these methods had consequences for how nineteenth-century masters and mistresses would in turn control their servants (1984, 38–60).
5. This argument builds on Michel Foucault's theory of performative discourses in which he suggests that discourses are 'comme des pratiques qui forment systématiquement les objets dont ils parlent.' (1969, 67).
6. Raymond Trousson observes two clear connections to Rousseau in *Mina de Vangel* – that of Alfred's interest in botany or the choice of Mina's rented home being close to Chambéry, and the location in which Rousseau believes he passed the happiest moments of his life (1999, [1986], 140).
7. For a typical example of the habitual phrase 'la chasse du bonheur' see Stendhal's *Vie de Henry Brulard* (1981–82; II, 635).
8. 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, 1802–21* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1997, [1962]), pp. 469–70.
9. 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 "système". On a cherché à diminuer la saillie de ces défauts.' (2005–14: I, 293–94).
10. 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 2005–14: I, 763 with my emphasis).

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. This is also a theme explored in Jessica Rushton, ‘Unmasking the Loyal Maidservant in *Germinie Lacerteux*’, *MuseMedusa*, 10 (2022).
14. 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. (1979, 65–66).
15. 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 (2018, xxii).
16. Jean Prévost discusses the audacity and rebelliousness of Stendhal’s various Amazons (1942, 9).
17. In these respects, Hauteclair brings to mind Flaubert’s heroine, Salammbô, whose final costume is also shaped out of tiny metal hooks. Naomi Schor’s reading of this costume is that Salammbô becomes ‘a bound woman [...] enveloped in a network of tiny links’ (1985, 123–24).
18. Beauty and its relation to class is also seen in Marivaux’s *La Vie de Marianne* (1731–42) in which the heroine’s beauty allows her to be perceived as an upper-class woman, despite her possible lower-class heritage. A counter argument to this, however, is George Sand’s secondary fictional maidservant, Noun, from her novel, *Indiana* (1832). Noun and her mistress (as well as her *sœur de lait*), Indiana, are both described as beautiful, but in very different ways. 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.
19. Jean Genet’s *Les Bonnes* (1947), inspired by the Papin sisters, brought these fears of class roles blurring into the twentieth century. The play depicts two maidservants who don the clothes and therefore the role of the mistress in an imaginary and ultimately murderous game.
20. Robin Mitchell describes the apron’s connection to the representation of the black female body on the account of the apron used to shield the genitalia of Sarah Baartmann, also known as the Hottentot Venus, as eroticized in caricatures. She goes on to note that the apron had further sexual connotations in relation to the bodies of female domestic servants, observing that Baartman herself had worked as a domestic servant for a period of time (2020, 61).
21. Madame Celnart connects her advice to Madame Pariset’s earlier work: ‘Dans ses lettres sur *l’Economie Domestique*, madame Pariset dit qu’elle a coutume d’examiner la mise des bonnes qui se présentent à elle’ (1836, 29).
22. Petitfrère notes how this was no longer ‘un thème d’opéra-bouffe’, as seen in examples such as Giovanni Battista Pergolesi’s 1733 two-part intermezzo, *La serva padrona*, to a libretto by Gennaro Federico, originally inspired by a comedy by Jacopo Angello Nelli (2006, 140).
23. See, for example, Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette* (1846), the Goncourt Brothers’ *Germinie Lacerteux* (2017 [1864]), Zola’s *Pot Bouille* (1882), 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.

24. 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. In *The Amorous Restoration: Love, Sex and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century France* (2016), 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' (2016, 21).

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Notes on contributor

Jessica Rushton is a Ph.D. student at Durham University. Her doctoral project, titled 'Revolting Maids: The Nineteenth-Century Social Imaginary of the Rebellious Maidservant', explores how a socio-cultural construct of the female servant as a dangerous and rebellious figure is produced and reinforced through nineteenth-century literary and non-literary discourses. She has also published in the Francophone journals *MuseMedusa* and *Acta Fabula* as well as in MHRA's Journal: *Working Papers in the Humanities*.

Jessica.m.rushton@durham.ac.uk

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