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The transformation of the figure of a maid in three adaptations of *The Diary of a Chambermaid* by Octave Mirbeau

Abstract

This article discusses three adaptations of the novel *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (*The Diary of a Chambermaid*) by Octave Mirbeau, published in 1900, by Jean Renoir in 1946, by Luis Buñuel in 1964 and by Benoît Jacquot in 2015. It examines the effect of the time and, to some degree, the places where these films were made, on the representation of the characters and stories adapted by the respective directors. It is particularly interested in the transformation of the main character, Célestine, her labour and her sexuality, and the gender dynamics in the respective films, as reflection of the dominant discourses about gender roles pertaining to the times these films were made. It devotes most attention to the most recent film, due to the heaviest intertextual baggage which it carries and also given this adaptation has the most relevance to contemporary issues about women's work and social position.

Key words

The Diary of a Chambermaid; Octave Mirbeau; Jean Renoir; Luis Buñuel; Benoît Jacquot; female labour; affective labour.

The novel *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (*The Diary of a Chambermaid*) by Octave Mirbeau, published in 1900, has been adapted for the cinema four times. The first time it happened in Russia in 1916 by Mikhail Martov; the second time in 1946 in the United States by Jean Renoir, the third time in 1964 in France by Luis Buñuel, and the fourth and last time in 2015, again in France, by Benoît Jacquot. There have also been numerous theatrical versions of the novel. Given the breadth of the countries and the nationalities of directors who took it on board, one can speculate that the story endures the passage of time. Each generation of filmmakers finds something in the plot and characters that is relevant to his audience, which can be updated and amplified. In this article I investigate the effect of the time and, to some degree, the places where these films were made, on the aspects highlighted in specific adaptations. I am particularly interested in the transformation of the main character, Célestine, her labour and her sexuality, and the gender dynamics in the respective films. I omit from my analysis the first film, due to its unavailability and the lack of secondary sources describing it.

In my analysis I follow the idea advanced by many authors discussing adaptation (Sheen 2000; Stam 2000; Elliott 2003), that it is more illuminating to move away from treating the books as the original texts and the films based on them as copies of such, but instead regard the two versions as two potentially equal pieces of art, each unique, but not entirely original. Robert Stam, following the work of the French literary theorist, Gérard Genette, maintains that 'film adaptations are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation and transmutation, with no clear point of origin' (Stam 2000: 66). Every literary adaptation is a 'hypertext', which follows a number of hypotexts, rather than merely the literary 'original', which the hypertext 'transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends' (ibid.: 66). From this perspective, the 'original' and 'adaptation' are both regarded as adaptations to numerous aspects of the environment in which they find themselves. The

author of an adapted book is the originator of a discourse, not the creator of a work that remains insensitive to – or immune from – the context in which it is located (Sheen 2000). One of them is the literary source, on which the film is based, another are previous adaptations. In line with this approach, I consider the Buñuel and Jacquot's adaptations as reworkings of Mirbeau's novel and reworking of previous film adaptations. These hypertexts also adapt themselves to the dominant ideology of the day and the audience they try to target.

I devote most attention in this article to the most recent film, due to the heaviest intertextual baggage which it carries and also because this adaptation has the most relevance to contemporary issues about women's work and social position, which are of specific interest to me here. My main interest is the central character. Hence, I give special attention to how they are portrayed and their story lines. I draw particular attention to the differences in relation to the novel, as they indicate important ideological shifts that occurred over the course of 115 years, between the publication of the novel and its last adaptation.

It shall be emphasised that although the four texts place a woman at the centre of their stories, they do not fit the dominant idea of women's cinema, understood as cinema practice responding to a desire of women to tell their own stories (Johnston 1999 [1973]; De Lauretis 1984; Butler 2002). This is due to the fact that, in the case of the novel, its author is a man and in the case of films, their principal authors, namely directors, are also men, as well as the majority of their crews. Nevertheless, they are made from a position which is sympathetic to women's plight and cast in the main roles actresses who connote certain political and social attitudes, either due to films in which they played or their extracinematic activities. Moreover, as some authors argue, the issue of authorship cannot be reduced to the role of directors and scriptwriters and the issue of 'women's cinema' cannot be reduced to the question of women behind the camera (De Lauretis 1992; White 2015). Rather, we shall regard 'women's cinema' as a matter of collaborative authorship, in which actresses play a major role.

The maid in Mirbeau's novel

Octave Mirbeau (1848 – 1917) was a French novelist, art critic, travel writer and playwright, who reached fame during his life, chiefly thanks to two novels: *Jardin des supplices* (*The Torture Garden*, 1899) and *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, in which he explores sexual relations, often including violence and abuse. He was also a first-class satirist. His work is full of humour, often based on the contrast between what his characters say and what they do.

As Sharif Gemie observes, during his life Mirbeau changed his political position several times, first contributing to the right-wing and then left-wing press (Gemie 2001: 72-3). However, he is largely associated with the left and anti-monarchist causes, not least due to being a supporter of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish officer unjustly accused of treason. He criticised French colonialism and showed sympathy to the unemployed and the poor (ibid.: 72-4). At the same, as the author of the quoted essay argues, his works can be regarded as misogynist. Gemie bases his assertion on two traits of Mirbeau's writing. First, through sexual relationships with women, men run the risk of losing vital qualities of integrity and morality. Woman are in his works a conduit for artificial values, who brings about the decay of a valued sphere of ethical male companionship (ibid.: 79). This refers both to sexual relationship within marriage, as well to extra-marital affairs, whose pleasures turn out to be illusory. Second, Mirbeau portrays situations in which the wives, such as Juliette Roux in *Le*

Calvaire (*Calvary*, 1886), assert their control over the domestic space, and then use their authority to reduce the home to a cold and unfeeling space (ibid.: 77). It shall be added that Juliette Roux was based on Judith Vinmer, with whom Mirbeau had an affair, which had a traumatic effect on him.

However, even if we agree that Mirbeau was a misogynist, his misogyny is directed towards bourgeois women. He treats women of a lower class with much more sympathy and *The Diary of a Chambermaid* is a perfect example of his class politics overriding his sexual politics. His sympathy for the eponymous character is signalled by the mode of narration. It is told in the first person, by Célestine, a chambermaid.

Célestine has a wealth of experience as a maid, due to her frequently changing employers, often because her employers see her as 'difficult'. While her manual work is of a high standard, her 'affective labour', to use the term employed by authors such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Hardt 1999; Negri and Hardt 1999), is less appreciated. 'Affective labour' (a form of immaterial labour, which does not produce a material good, but an affect and requires human contact) is used to capture changes which took place under late, postindustrial capitalism, when more people are employed in services than in the production of material goods. However, it can be also applied to earlier periods, as affective labour was always a required service in domestic work and prostitution.

The book opens with her employment by a rich bourgeois family, the Lanlares, who live on the outskirts of a village - Mesnil-Roy - in Normandy. From the perspective of her new employment Célestine looks back on her previous jobs, as well as her unhappy childhood when she was beaten up by her alcoholic mother. Despite her experiences, Célestine comes across as an upbeat person, who wants to make the most of her opportunities by marrying somebody wealthier than herself, even if this person is an old man. Although she would like to leave her life as a servant, she admits to gaining pleasure from it, which comes mainly from the insights she gains into the lives of her employers. For example, she confesses, 'I simply love waiting at table. That is where your employers give themselves away, revealing all the beastliness, all the squalor of their inner nature' (Mirbeau 2001: 25). She also uses the knowledge she gains to her advantage, whether that is getting extra money or making fun of and feeling superior to her employers. This happens when her masters display what Célestine perceives as weakness, like the wife of a scientist, who went to great pains to attract her husband so that he would have sex with her, but to no avail. Descriptions of such situations are full of dark humour, as they are based on the juxtaposition of high expectations and meagre results.

Taking advantage of her employers includes having sex with her male masters, especially those who are handsome and appreciative of Célestine's charms. Célestine presents herself as somebody who gains much pleasure from erotic encounters and prefers the company of men over women. She frequently rejoices in the difficulty of women of a higher class to fulfil desires of their husbands and lovers, knowing that in this respect she is superior over them, being young and attractive. The disdain with which she treats her female bosses confirms Genie's assertion that Mirbeau was a misogynist.

Célestine also feels superior over other female servants, as well as country girls, due to coming from Paris, being elegant and reading fashionable books. Although these character traits suggest a ruthlessness to Célestine, she has a good heart. When she harms somebody,

she feels ashamed of it; for example when she challenges the neighbour of the Lanlares, Captain Mauger, to kill his pet ferret. At the same time, she admits that the world is organised in such a way that we admire the rich and powerful, even if their wealth and power was gained by immoral means, as is the case with the Lanlares.

Of her two employers, she prefers Mr Lanlaire, whose sexual advances flatter her. However, she regards him as weak as he is emasculated by his overpowering wife, again a manner typical for Mirbeau. Madame Lanlaire's control over her husband extends to issuing him with pocket money, even though they are the wealthiest people in the village. Moreover, she does not allow him to spend time among ordinary villagers. Célestine indulges Mr Lanlaire, but ultimately she decides to marry the Lanlares' butler-cum-gardener, Joseph, as he offers her an exit from her role as a chambermaid and the stability she seeks after a turbulent life as a servant. She chooses Joseph, despite his numerous vices, such as being an anti-Semite and possibly a murderer. Richard Ings, the author of an introduction to the English edition of Mirbeau's book, writes that 'The fact that she succumbs in the end to the evil around her does not weaken the overall effects of her scathing and often riotously funny diagnosis of the petty-minded inanity and the callousness of the bourgeoisie' (Ings 2000: 5). In my opinion, however, it rather points to the fact that, ultimately, Célestine chooses her prosperity and pleasure over more lofty ideals. Another point of the plot is that, even in the arguably more egalitarian post-Revolutionary France – albeit during the middle years of the conservative Third Republic – a servant marrying a rich man was still unlikely.

Mirbeau's novel is full of vignette-like episodes and characters, from which there is much to choose, if one wants to make a film. It is also a novel which puts the life of servants in different contexts, such as class struggle, the nature of sexual attraction, the difference between the province and the centre, and anti-Semitism, discussed in the context of the Dreyfus affair. The filmmakers might endeavour to include all these aspects in a film, but the sheer volume of the different 'topics' available from which to draw would likely dilute the impact of any messages being conveyed, should they not limit the range of subjects addressed. This is indeed the case with all three cinematic adaptations, which proved highly selective in their choices of material. All of them condensed the story and – what is most important from the perspective of this article – adapted the figure of the maid to the artist's vision and to the dominant ideology of the specific period.

Renoir's adaptation: finding a prince

Jean Renoir's *The Diary of a Chambermaid* was made in the United States in 1946, a period marked by unrivalled optimism. The country emerged victorious from the Second World War, avoiding war destruction, enjoying the status of the global super-power and with notions of American Exceptionalism unchallenged either domestically or internationally. The American war economy had also resulted in hitherto unseen levels of affluence and independence enjoyed across society, not least by women and returning servicemen. However, the period after the war also resulted in the call for women to return to their traditional roles of wives and mothers – a call, which was, however, met with resistance (Anderson 1944).

In cinema, the early 1940s was a period of the hegemony of classical Hollywood style, marked by smooth editing, use of stars, plot trajectories with clear, upbeat messages. and happy endings (Neale 2012). Jean Renoir, on the other hand, was renowned for a

directorial style which ran in contrast to 'Hollywood rules'. Developing his approach throughout the 1930s and culminating in *La Règle du jeu* (1939), his style included fluid camera movements and long takes, often presenting many characters interacting with each other. As Alexandre Saisonske observes, 'Renoir arranged his actors in deep space; long takes in deep focus allowed them to move freely in this space and gave them time to seek and achieve convincing characterizations' (Saisonske 2011). However, at the time of its premiere, *La Règle du jeu* received a hostile reception from critics and ordinary viewers, leaving the director despondent and faced with the dilemma whether to emigrate, or stop making films altogether (Davis 2012: 1). He chose the former, leaving the occupied France in 1940 for the United States, where he lived until his death in 1979. Outside of France, Renoir directed fourteen more films, including five in the US. Generally, they are regarded as being of a lower quality than his French films (ibid.: 4-5). This belief is attributed to Renoir's inability to reconcile the requirements of the Hollywood studio system with his own artistic sensitivities. What is of importance to me, however, is that, in his version of *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, he is trying to conform to the requests of his financial backers.

In the adaptation, Renoir purged Mirbeau's novel of its darkest moments, and by extension, its dark humour. He also removed its flashbacks. Mirbeau's novel is a proto-filmic work, because it largely relies on montage. By contrast, Renoir's film, like his previous movies, is a work in which mise-en-scene matters more than editing. Renoir also eliminated references to the Dreyfus affair, probably in part because Americans, who were his target audience, were unfamiliar with it. Additionally, he rearranged the book's content as to render the film an uplifting near-Cinderella fairy-tale, updated for the American audiences of the 1940s. It can be argued that Renoir decided to make this film in Hollywood precisely because he did not want his *The Diary of a Chambermaid* to be a realistic film. Renoir himself commented on his choice, saying

Now why shoot *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, which is such a French subject, in America? Why in English? Well, this is why: *The Diary of a Chambermaid* represents one of my antirealist crises . . . There are times when I wonder whether the only truth isn't interior truth, and whether the accuracy of makeup, costumes, of appearances, of furniture, the exterior truth, if all that shouldn't be neglected so that we can plunge a little deeper into this interior truth. *The Diary of a Chambermaid* represents this concern . . . [T]he period that would allow us to abandon our concern with exterior truth, the right period to choose just might be this 1900 period. (Renoir, quoted in Golsan 2008: 47)

Catherine Golsan writes that 'understanding the film first as a fairytale is critical to an appreciation of its convergence with 1940s Hollywood melodrama. 'Fairytale structures and motifs abound in this film: the cardboard sets; the simple village folk; the wishing tree that unites shepherdess and prince; the stereotyped characters; the mysterious locked room where George resides; the vault full of silver' (ibid.: 47-8). The idyllic atmosphere is augmented by choosing spring as the time of the film's action – in contrast to the novel, whose action takes place in autumn. Tom Milne is of similar opinion as Golsan about the fantasy character of the film, writing, 'It would be more accurate to describe it as *La Règle du jeu* on a wider register. Everything is carried to greater extremes: on the one hand, the fantasy and artificial comedy, on the other, the paroxysmal cry of anger' (Milne 1964: 178).

The impression of *The Diary of a Chambermaid* being a fairytale is also conveyed by the casting. Carroll notes that the casting choice activates the potential of duality of the actor

(Carroll 2008: 255–56). Stam notes that ‘in the cinema the performer brings along a kind of baggage, a thespian intertext formed by the totality of antecedent roles’ (Stam 2000: 60).

Célestine is played by Paulette Goddard, who previously was cast as a good-hearted and beautiful orphaned girl Ellen in Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936), who feeds hungry children with stolen bread and subsequently is saved by the hapless Tramp and saves him back. According to Geoff Brown, ‘Renoir has declared that Goddard was the reason why he made the film, and it’s clear that he has shaped Mirbeau’s heroine to the star’s thoroughly American energy and emotional honesty’ (Brown 1978: 76). This is true, but ‘energy and emotional honesty’ are also the main characteristics of Mirbeau’s heroine: she often acts on impulse and always speaks her mind, at least to her diary.

Célestine is at the centre of this magical world as practically there is no scene in the film without her. Like in a novel, she is a young, pretty woman who takes a post of a chambermaid in a provincial gentry home, belonging to the Lanlares. She is also good-hearted and strong-willed, as we learn in an early scene, when Joseph, the Lanlares’ trusted butler, meets her and another prospective servant, Louise, at the railway station and asks Louise to return to Paris, bringing the poor woman to tears. Célestine then threatens Joseph with returning to Paris with Louise, if the other servant is dismissed. Joseph gives into her demand.

The chambermaid moves to the province with an intention to marry well and to become a lady who has her own servants. To achieve this goal, she is prepared to forfeit her romantic dreams, as shown by her entry in her diary: ‘No more love for Célestine.’ The fact that she puts it in her diary, however, suggests that deep in her heart she is a romantic, as subsequent events demonstrate. Such an aspiration suggests that she accepts the fairytale order, according to which the main character is allowed to climb the social ladder, typically by marrying a prince, but the social structures remain unchanged by her ascent. Such an order is also, essentially, the order of Hollywood films, in which individual characters advance, while the world in which they operate, remains the same. Célestine’s acceptance of the status quo is also conveyed by her telling Joseph at one point: ‘You are a valet and you always will be’.

Célestine came to work for the Lanlares, but in practice this means taking orders from Madame Lanlaire, who comes across as severe and bitter. She is also materialistic and traditional, as reflected by her attachment to the family silver, which is totemic of both her family’s wealth and their attachment to the Monarchist tradition. Her husband, on the other hand, is an emasculated fool, easily controlled by his wife who pays no attention to him, conforming to the scheme of family life in Mirbeau’s works, as described by Sharif Gemie. The only redeeming feature of Madame Lanlaire is her unconditional love of her sick and estranged son, Georges. When Georges informs his parents that he intends to return home, Madame Lanlaire decides to use the pretty Célestine as a flypaper to attract and keep him at home. She asks Célestine to do her hair in a specific way, dress seductively and bring him broth at night, so that he might stay there permanently. Célestine is thus requested to perform a fair amount of affective labour on top of her manual work. In this way her employer also assigns the maid the role of stand-in: her younger, more attractive version. Georges, however, finds out about her mother’s plot and dismisses Célestine on the grounds that she conspired with his mother against him, hurting her feelings and prompting her decision to leave the

service with Joseph, who offers her marriage and business partnership in Cherbourg. However, this plan is frustrated by Georges, who has fallen in love with the chambermaid and decides to prevent her escape. Joseph himself is revealed to be a murderer and a thief, who stole the Lanlares' silver and money from their wealthy neighbour, Captain Mauger, killing him in the process. The film finishes with the villagers stopping the cart in which Joseph and Célestine are leaving the Lanlaire's household, and Joseph losing his life in a confrontation with the villagers. In this part of the film Célestine offers to people in the village the silver which Joseph took from the Lanlares, again bringing to mind Ellen in Chaplin's *Modern Times*, where she adopted the role of a champion of the people. This happens during the celebrations of the 14th of July, Bastille Day, a symbol of a triumph of ordinary people over those who enjoyed aristocratic privileges. The whole village is celebrating, except from Célestine's employers, who ask to put shutters on the windows in their house, to be insulated from the celebrations.

Although Georges does not talk throughout the film about his political views, given his friendly attitude to the villagers and his love of Célestine, we might conjecture that he is on the side of the 'people' rather than the aristocracy, epitomised by his haughty mother. These celebrations can be seen also as a reference to the end of the Second World War, given the time Renoir's film premiered. 'How could they not do so in 1946', asks rhetorically Martin O'Shaughnessy (O'Shaughnessy 2000: 175), referring to the celebrations. In the closing scene we see Célestine and Georges heading in a carriage to Paris, and Georges telling Célestine the vows from a wedding ceremony, 'Till death do us part', suggesting that they soon will get married.ⁱ

During the course of the film, Célestine's work as a servant is of little importance. At one point we get a glimpse of her different duties, such as washing clothes, polishing floors and the Lanlares' silver, but it feels as if Renoir is going through a checklist to ensure that we, the audience, do not forget that Célestine is a chambermaid. The only time when work is given more prominence is when Madame Lanlaire prepares the house for her son's arrival and wants all rooms to be spotless. Importantly, no servant in the film complains about their work – they take it for granted and do not seem overwhelmed by their tasks. At no occasion do menial activities stand in the way of Célestine's private life, which consists of visiting her neighbour and other villagers and spending much time with Georges.

Célestine's low class background matters only for Madame Lanlaire, who being a monarchist, is excessively preoccupied with social hierarchies. Her son does not care about it and the same is true of the villagers, arguably because Célestine's beauty and grace conceal her humble background and physical work (as was the case with Cinderella). The villagers treat the servant almost like royalty and see her as cosmopolitan while themselves as parochial provincials. The village is depicted as consisting of simpletons and innocuous eccentrics, who spend much of their time fooling around and celebrating. The neighbour, Captain Mauger is also portrayed in this manner. He runs around and throws stones into the Lanlares' greenhouse, seemingly for fun, rather than because of a dispute. The ultimate sign of his eccentricity is keeping a pet squirrel. The squirrel dies when he shows it to Célestine, but the death is presented as an accident rather a murder, unlike in the novel and the newest adaptation.

I have mentioned earlier that Renoir's adaptation was made at a time of the re-domestication of women, following the wartime mobilisation when women had worked in factories and other manual roles, replacing the men in the armed services. In his film, Renoir also embraces this programme of re-domestication. He does so by presenting domesticity, understood as serving a man, as a noble pursuit, while paid work for a woman as being unsatisfactory and demeaning and the consequence of an absence of better options. All conflicts in the film are not around the quality of service or work more generally, as all service is excellent and embarked upon diligently and unquestioningly by the servants, but about whether there is something more to service than pure work. In the crucial confrontation between Georges, his mother and Célestine, Georges accuses his mother of trying to possess him as she possessed her husband and Joseph. At the same time, he accuses the maid of conspiring with Madame Lanlaire to deprive him of autonomy and of not loving him. Célestine, for her part, expresses her frustration with Georges, who, like his mother, treats her merely as a servant, making her appear and disappear at his whim. This treatment, which, to Célestine, demonstrates that Georges neither loves nor cares about her love, prompts her to accept Joseph's offer to marry him and leave the service to the Lanlaire. When Georges realises that he loves Célestine too much to let her go - even if she conspired against him with her mother - she changes her mind. In this way her Cinderella dream is fulfilled; her story can just serve as a projection of every girl who dreams about marrying a prince, who, although sickly, is not decadent, as proven by the fact that he is able to stand up to the strong and healthy Joseph.

For such romantic trials and tribulations the fact that Célestine is a servant is of little importance, not least because we can assume that she would remain a servant to Georges after their marriage, even more so as her hours of service would be extended, but without financial remuneration. Moreover, when Georges becomes her master, she would lose her voice. This is intimated in the last episode of the film, when Georges takes the diary and asks Célestine to write there their marriage vows, which he dictates to her.

Buñuel's adaptation: punishing a murderer

Luis Buñuel embarked on *The Diary of a Chambermaid* when he was already a well-established director, having worked in Spain and Mexico. He wanted to make a film based on Mirbeau's novel in Mexico, but his new producer Serge Silberman convinced him to make the film in France, with Jean Moreau in the main role. He also persuaded the then 63-year-old director to collaborate with the young scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carrière (Bergan 2003). This project began a long-term collaboration, resulting in some of Buñuel's most accomplished films, such as *Belle de Jour* (1967), *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), all films offering a scathing portrayal of bourgeois life. *The Diary of a Chambermaid* initiated this trajectory by focusing on the sins of this stratum of society. At the same time, it revealed Buñuel's preoccupation with the sensationalist, the obscure, the idiosyncratic, and the repulsive. Mirbeau's original contains many such examples, often humorous, leading Tom Milne to describing it as an anthology of Sunday newspaper revelations (Milne 1964: 178). Hence the challenge for the filmmaker was to choose the most cinematic of such surreal moments.

Buñuel's adaptation is set later than Mirbeau's novel, in the late 1920s-early 1930s, judging on the style of clothes, cars and political issues, which the film references. The

setting has also changed as the village where Célestine arrives, looks less pastoral and more urban in comparison with the village in Renoir's film. It gives a little sense of a community, as we do not see the villagers engaged in any common activities, such as games and celebrations or even talking to each other at the village square. Inevitably, it is also less idyllic. Part of this impression is to do with the fact that this adaptation is set, as Tom Milne puts it, in 'the encroaching gloom of Autumn' (ibid.: 178), in line with the literary source.

Buñuel's film, being produced in 1964, also represents a different period than those of Mirbeau and Renoir, because the 1960s are remembered as a decade of women's emancipation, particularly in sexual matters, thanks to the introduction of the contraceptive pill, the increase of women's participation in higher education and changes in fashion. It can be argued that the 1960s created a more self-confident and resourceful woman (Diski 2009; Marwick 2012).

While Renoir was a master of *mise-en-scène*, Buñuel was more focused on editing. His first film, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), is renowned for putting together objects belonging to different places and even ontological orders, to make the viewer connect them in their mind. In due course, Buñuel became less extreme in his juxtapositions, subordinating them to the requirement of telling a story. This is also the case with *The Diary of a Chambermaid*. That said, still in this film we find many examples of juxtapositions which produce surprise or humour. One example is the motif of shoes. Shoes in this version are an object of men's fascination, as well as being evidence of their perversions and criminality.

The maid in this version is played by Jeanne Moreau, who in the 1960s was one of the most famous actresses in French and European cinema and epitomised the new woman. Moreau, even in her youth, did not play youthful, careless characters, but rather mature women who pursued their own interests or took care of men their age or younger than them. An emblematic part, from this respect, is her role of Catherine in *Jules and Jim* (1962) by François Truffaut, where she is an object of erotic interest of two young friends of different nationalities.

In Buñuel's film Moreau was 36 years old, the same age as Paulette Goddard in Renoir's film, but visibly older and more 'regal' than her cinematic predecessor, in part due to her clothes which come across as more refined than those of Goddard's Célestine and, indeed, her employer, Madame Lanlaire. As Victoria Roy states, '[Célestine] gorgeously clad in a modish coat, leather gloves and fur muff, [is] looking far more like a member of the upper class than one who polishes their cutlery' (Loy 2018). We can assume that marriage is not on the Moreau's Célestine's agenda, or at least not a romantic type, which was the case with Goddard's heroine, despite her protesting that she wouldn't like to fall in love again.

While Renoir's Célestine had ambitions to climb the social ladder, the motives of Buñuel's Célestine in entering service to the Lanlaire (here renamed the Monteils) remain initially unknown. Moreau does not come across as an ordinary maid, but rather like somebody who comes to the province to conduct research about the moral health of the provincial upper class.

This idea can be conjectured from an accumulation throughout the film of instruments suggesting of inquiry, such as magnifying glasses and close-ups of various objects, as well as Célestine's attire, which frequently looks more akin to that of a nurse or laboratory worker

than a servant. The provincial bourgeoisie does not disappoint her in her pursuits, revealing eccentricities and decadence; depictions in which Buñuel would indulge in many of his later films. For this reason - in comparison with Renoir- Buñuel multiplies the number of older male characters of the household where the maid serves. There are two men living there: in addition to Monsieur Monteil there is the elderly father of the mistress of the house. The male members of the Monteil household come across as weak and a source of their weakness is their inability to control their sexual urges. They go where their hormones take them, figuratively. Madame's Monteil's father reads decadent books and has a fetish for female boots. Her husband is a sex-hungry simpleton. Such a representation of emasculated men is in line with Mirbeau's assertion that sex with women weakens men, as well as Buñuel's penchant to showing old, lecherous or emasculated men with sexual problems. As weak men, the Monteil men are similar to the character of Mr Lanlaire in Mirbeau's novel, but in the novel he is, at least, presented as a serious character. The same is also the case in Renoir's film. By contrast, Michel Piccoli, who plays this role in Buñuel's adaptation, presents him as a caricature. Monsieur Monteil lusts for the classy Célestine, but when she rebuffs him, he contents himself with another servant, the dim-witted Marianne. At most, these men engage in neighbourly disputes and they lack interest in wider issues, such as politics. Madame Monteil has her hands full keeping these men in check, not least because every infidelity costs her money and she turns to the local priest to help her in this task.

Another important character in the film is a local priest, absent in Renoir's version, who, again in a way, typical for Buñuel, is depicted in a very negative light. He tricks Madame Monteil into paying money to the church's renovation, in exchange for increasing her chances of salvation. He also plots with Joseph to distribute anti-Jewish leaflets to stir anti-Semitic sentiments among the villagers.

Célestine is acutely aware of the weaknesses of the upper classes and therefore she is more interested in her fellow servant, Joseph, than any of the representatives of the upper class, sensing that they are too decadent to be dangerous. Joseph is anything but decadent, but for this very reason he is also more dangerous than the members of the provincial bourgeoisie. She observes him keenly, suspecting that he raped and killed Claire, a little peasant girl, whom the maid befriended, when the girl was collecting snails and brambles in a local wood. Joseph confesses to Célestine that he was in proximity of Claire the day she disappeared and we see him lurking around the girl, but the very act of killing her is off-screen. Because Célestine suspects Joseph of murdering Claire, she decides to stay in the service of the Monteils and seduce Joseph, hoping to extract a confession from him and, when she fails to do so, she plants a seg from his shoe at the scene of the murder, to implicate him. This plan works only partly because, although Joseph is imprisoned, he is ultimately not convicted due to a lack of evidence. Joseph even fulfils his plan to move to Cherbourg, where we see him standing at the door of his café, most likely with his wife and cheering a Fascist parade. Raymond Durnat observes that 'Buñuel is noting a possible, unsuspected affinity between physical aggression and political aggression. The potential criticism here is, surely, that of excessive consistency, rather than of excessive contradiction' (Durnat 1967: 134). Importantly, on this occasion, aggression is perpetuated by the members of the subordinate class, which affords Buñuel's version an anti-socialist inflection and undermines his assumed progressiveness, a fact of which he was perhaps not fully aware. It can be argued, however, that this is a consequence of the adaptation, as the novel contains a fair dose of cruelty

perpetuated by the working class, which can be linked to the deprivations it suffers. By and large, both Mirbeau and Buñuel seem to argue that class allegiance does not make one automatically 'progressive', a message we can also find in Marx's writings, especially his attacks on the lumpenproletariat.

Although Célestine fails to frame Joseph, she manages to climb the social ladder by marrying Monteil's neighbour, Captain Mauger. Not only that, but she makes him serve her, bringing her breakfast in bed, as we see in one of the last scenes in the film. Again, the reversal of traditional gender roles is in line with Mirbeau's view that women weaken men through their sexual power. We can expect that, from this position, she will keep an eye on the village, making sure that another murderer does not escape justice.

In neither Renoir nor Buñuel's versions do we see Célestine working hard, either in terms of manual and affective labour. The hard work is left to the scullery maids. Unlike Goddard's Célestine who is genuinely devoted to the son of her employers, Moreau's character withdraws her affective labour. For example, when Madame's Monteil's father asks her to parade in boots, she does so in a mechanical way, showing no emotion, so that the man does not dare to ask her for more.

As noted by Durgnat,

Jeanne Moreau, thoroughly Bunuelised, catches the nuances of a complex character with a mesmerising precision. Celestine's behaviour to her employers is a mixture of deference and insolence. She has a nose for where the real power lies, for whom she can insult and whom she can't. At the same time, she has a certain consistency and dignity, so her insolence is quiet and her deference is suave. (Durgnat 1967: 132)

This very apt description captures well Moreau's cinematic presence. In 1960s cinema, as I mentioned, she became the emblem of a liberated woman. Such a woman knows how to win in each situation thanks to her intelligence and dignity and even when she loses, she does not despair, but carries on. My argument in the next section is that such strong women are less common in contemporary European cinema – even in films with feminist leanings. Their focus is no longer on winning, but on losing and Benoît Jacquot's version presents this shift well.

Jacquot's adaptation: surviving inequality and abuse

Of the three directors who embarked on adapting Mirbeau's novel, Benoît Jacquot (b. 1947) has the lowest profile. He directed some popular and critically acclaimed films, most importantly *Farewell, My Queen* (2012), but is not regarded as a director-auteur at the level of Renoir and he has been overshadowed by many younger French directors, such as Luc Besson. Jacquot's films are typically female-centred and they show sympathy towards women of the lower classes, as with *Farewell, My Queen*, where a female servant of the queen is the main character.

Jacquot's adaptation of Mirbeau's novel can be regarded as the most French of the three films, on account of the director being French, the actress playing the lead role - Léa Seydoux - and practically all the cast being French, and the film being shot in France. Jacquot also preserved the flashback structure of the principal hypotext and the flashbacks fill a large part of the film. In this way, this version covers more of the original story than its two predecessors. Despite such loyalty to the novel, it is also, however, the least faithful to its

main character, by emptying Célestine of her joy of life and replacing it with fatigue and sullenness.

While Célestine in Renoir's version came to the village and the service of the Lanlares to marry a rich man, in Buñuel's to solve a murder, Jacquot's chambermaid most likely travels to the village in Normandy because she has no better options. This is what we can deduce from the flashbacks. The opening scene shows Célestine talking to a female head of an agency which specialises in finding work for domestic workers (described as a registry office in the novel). She tells Célestine that she has found for her a good posting in the provinces, which leaves the young maid unenthusiastic. Later they discuss Célestine's negative attitude to work, during which the maid provocatively asserts 'there is not a good position anywhere' and 'all masters are bad', to which the agent responds that 'this is a good position' and 'there are no bad masters, there are only bad servants.' This exchange demonstrates that, unlike her two cinematic predecessors - and Célestine in Mirbeau's novel - Célestine is hostile to and resentful towards all forms of service, as opposed to serving in this or that house. As one reviewer put it, she 'radiates resentment at the indignity of being in service and having to kowtow to her employers' (Bradshaw 2015). We can infer that she views service as a 'structural injustice', resulting from the imbalance of power. We can thus regard her as a proto-Marxist character, who opposes all forms of labour under capitalism, regarding them as inherently exploitative and alienating. This position explains Célestine's attitude to her employers throughout the rest of the film: whether they treat her gently or not, she despises them and does not stay in the service of any one employer for long. The only partial exception is her service to an old, gentle woman with a sick grandson, George, who becomes her lover and dies during intercourse. Subsequently Célestine leaves her post; most likely because she feels guilty for killing the man or because she does not want to feel indebted to the gentle lady. The story of this love affair mirrors that presented in Renoir's version, but then, reflecting the time when the film was made, there was no sex between the couple and, as in a fairytale, it finished with a happy ending. Jacquot's contrasting suggestion is that there is no realistic prospect of a happy ending for a servant. Following her encounter with George, Célestine starts to work as a prostitute. Such an occupation might be the result of this job being easier and better paid than domestic service, but also reflects her wish to purge herself of any romantic illusions.

Célestine's opening meetings with her employers confirm her prejudices against people of the higher class. Madame Lanlaire comes across as snobbish, suspicious, cold and demanding. She instructs Célestine to look after her precious possessions, such as an English lamp, which has to be sent to England for repairs, to which the maid asks sarcastically whether Madame's chamber pot also needs to be sent to England. Madame also asks Célestine to change into less attractive clothes, betraying an envy of her servant's charm and beauty. These mocking questions and comments can be regarded as an equivalent of the original Célestine's entrances into her diary; they are a form of the chambermaid's inner monologue. They also address her future readers. Such mode of address is lacking in the previous films discussed here: Renoir's and Buñuel's Célestines live for the present, while Jacquot's Célestine lives for the future.

Monsieur Lanlaire turns out to be a lecherous fool, not unlike his predecessor in the Buñuel's version, but while Piccoli's indiscretions are mostly off-screen, on this occasion we see him in action, first asking Célestine to take his boots, so that he can look at her cleavage

and then grabbing her when she does not expect it. The motif of boots as a sexual fetish takes us back to the 1964 version, but while in Buñuel's film it is Célestine who is wearing boots for the old man's enjoyment, hence she has no direct contact with his body, on this occasion the man is too carnal to displace his lust into an inanimate object – he wants a direct contact with the young woman's flesh. He is also too philistine to ask Célestine to read for him. But the main difference between Monsieur Lanlaire in 1964 and 2015 version, as well as in Mirbeau's novel, concerns Célestine attitude to him. Mirbeau's Célestine is flattered by Monsieur Lanlaire's interest and considers having sex with him out the pleasure obtained in giving a man pleasure. Jacquot's heroine, in contrast, has nothing than contemptuous scorn for her master and finds him repulsive.

Célestine's indignation towards Madame Lanlaire results both from her employer's spiteful behaviour, as illustrated in an episode when the maid is compelled to go upstairs on three successive occasions to fetch sewing utensils, separately a needle, thread and scissors, as well as from Célestine's conviction that she is equal to her mistress. Consequently, serving her amounts to social injustice, even though she is paid for her work. Célestine repays Madame Lanlaire with small acts of disobedience, such as eating some of the prunes which she is meant to serve to the couple – a fact which is noted and disapproved by Madame Lanlaire. In her internal monologue, she also reveals a desire to poison them.

Célestine's lack of interest in her work is noticed by Madame Lanlaire, who accuses her of having a disagreeable manner. This leads to a vicious circle – the more Célestine resents her employer, the more Madame Lanlaire tries to punish her by piling additional tasks upon her. On occasion Célestine challenges Madame Lanlaire; in one scene she invites Madame Lanlaire to dismiss her, if she thinks she is a thief. The chambermaid wins on this occasion, as she is not dismissed. But these small acts of rebellion, and victories over her superiors, fail to conceal the fact that she has no viable strategy to escape her life as a maid. She is destined to move from one place of service to another, unless she finds a man to save her from her predicament. Célestine's sense of entrapment is conveyed by her general demeanour. She rarely smiles and only does so when people above her in the social hierarchy suffer misfortune, for example when her previous female employer is caught by customs officer hiding a dildo in a locked box. On most occasions, she comes across as sad and fatigued. By the same token, she does not exude the aura of self-confidence as do Célestines in Renoir and Buñuel's films. Such an impression is strengthened by Jacquot's casting choice. Léa Seydoux, who plays Célestine, specialises in roles of tormented and sullen heroines, who are betrayed or unfulfilled in love or themselves betray people who love them, as in *My Wife's Romance* (2011), directed by Jamshed Usmonov or *La vie d'Adèle* (*Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, 2013) by Abdellatif Kechiche. In Jacquot's own film, *Farewell, My Queen* Seydoux also played a servant, albeit a loyal one, who realises that being a servant she is a nobody.

As in Renoir's film, Célestine operates in two microcosms: the wealthy house of her employers and the village. Both are pretty and blooming and, this way, closer to Renoir's than Buñuel's film.ⁱⁱ However, they are more corrupt than in any of the previous versions, while at the same time cruder. Madame Lanlaire lacks the sadness of her cinematic predecessors, who mourn the fact that they are unloved by their sons or cannot fulfil their husband's sexual urges. Instead, in Jacquot's version, she comes across as simply bored and tries to alleviate this condition by demanding constant service or snooping. Of all the female

Lanlares in film presented here, this one is also physically least mobile, spending almost all her time in her room.ⁱⁱⁱ Unlike her filmic predecessors, she is also unable to make people around her to submit to her will and practically has no purpose in life. When she notices that her husband is attracted to Célestine, she asks him to go to bed with her, as if she wanted to have it out of the way and is irritated by the chambermaid's resistance, which emphasises the lack of power the Lanlares have over their servants.

Although the village is in bloom, it is unlike the jolly place in Renoir's film, where men and women engaged in celebrations. Instead, it reflects the same division of roles and asymmetry of power as the house in which Célestine works, with men keeping all power in their hands and women trying to escape from them, because all close contact with the opposite sex is ultimately to their disadvantage. This is most poignantly conveyed by the motif of abortion and infanticide, absent in the previous cinematic versions, although present in the novel. As soon as Célestine arrives in the village, fellow maids take her to a woman who performs abortions as she seems to be the most important person in their lives. We can assume that the cook, Marianne, was also using her service. Marianne also confesses to killing her baby when a man who impregnated her threw her out. The work of the maid is thus presented as vulnerable to double exploitation: combining menial work and prostitution. By and large, Jacquot purged his story of humour, as if wanting to tell us that abortion, infanticide or cruelty towards animals are too serious topics to joke about.

Men in these films are also doubly guilty: for imposing themselves on women and refusing to take responsibility for their actions. Moreover, their actions include gratuitous violence, as shown by the Lanlares' neighbour, Captain Mauger, who boasts to Célestine that he ate everything in his life before introducing her to his pet ferret and when she jokingly says that he wouldn't kill his ferret, he kills it and asks his maid to make a stew of it. This act contrasts with Mauger in the Renoir's version who accidentally killed his pet squirrel. Finally, when a sexual assault and a gruesome murder of a small girl is discovered in a village, and the maids discuss who might commit them, they come to conclusion that - in the light of their previous predatory conduct - it could be every man in the village, including Monsieur Lanlaire.

Given the moral rot permeating the higher classes, Célestine gravitates more to Joseph than any of her predecessors in Renoir and Buñuel's versions. Joseph in this film is a thief and rabid anti-Semite, who regards Jews as not fully human. Célestine does not share his views, telling him that she worked for Jewish employers and they were not any worse than her Christian masters. Ultimately, however, she regards him as better than the Lanlares, or their neighbours, because he does not take advantage of her and, through his offer of marriage and partnership in his business, provides her with a pathway out of service. She ultimately waits for Joseph to finish his affairs in the village - which includes stealing silver from the Lanlares - and leaves her service when he gives her a sign to follow him.

Some reviewers suggested that her choosing of Joseph as her future life companion is unconvincing, because there are no 'sparks' between them (Bradshaw 2015). My argument is that the lack of sexual attraction on Célestine's part does not matter as at this stage she neither believes nor seeks romance. She only strives for freedom and Joseph offers it to her or, at any rate, this is the best offer she can get. Moreover, in Cherbourg, where Joseph wants

to take her, her past won't matter, unlike in services in 'good homes', which require from the servants to uphold certain moral standards.

Unlike in the previous films, where we saw little of the chambermaid's labour, in Jacquot's version Célestine works to the point when she is exhausted and her work involves all kinds of toil, such as washing windows, scrubbing floors, sewing, doing laundry and fetching things from the village. Her very title, chambermaid, does not convey a sense of superiority over other maids, but rather the fact that she needs to scrub chamber pots – this activity gets most attention among the maid's tasks. She is thus more of a slave to her employer than scullery maids. In addition, Célestine is asked to perform affective labour by being nice, especially to Madame Lanlaire. Unlike her predecessors, she does not like any part of her work, especially that which involves close interaction with her employers and showing affection or devotion, such as waiting at the table – which, for Mirbeau's heroine, was the best part of her job. Her indispensability, however, also gives her power over her masters. This is revealed when she decides to leave her service and Madame Lanlaire asks her to stay, offering her a pay increase. This is because she warms to Célestine, maybe finding her like a 'sister', suffering from men's selfishness and violence.

While Célestine in Renoir's version reflected postwar optimism and the call for women to return to domesticity and serving their 'princes' in exchange for economic and emotional security, Célestine in Buñuel's adaptation fitted the model of an emancipated woman of the 1960s, able to use her sexuality for her advantage, Célestine in Jacquot's film, in my view, foretells the ascent of the #MeToo movement. This is because she rejects the entire structure of female oppression by patriarchy, rather than trying to navigate it and use it for her benefit. This is reflected in her wholesale disillusionment with men and employers, rather than any specific man or employer, and her lack of interest in romantic liaisons, seeing them all as a trap. Célestine's musing through her semi-internal monologues can be seen as addressing women of future generations, asking them to harden up, because there will be nobody to rescue them. Moreover, Célestine's double exploitation, of her labour and sex, mirrors how women's work was framed in testimonies against Harvey Weinstein and other powerful men in the film industry. Accusations against these particular men led to a wider charge that the film industry is systemically exploitative and it needs changing to allow women a larger representation in the film industry, especially in positions of power, such as directing and producing. There is a scene in Jacquot's film when Célestine is offered a role of an actress of sort. It happens in one of flashbacks when she is asked by a female owner of a luxurious brothel to play a 'role', entertaining rich men. When she says that she does not have the required skills, she is told that she would get the best clothes to look attractive and be taught how to play her role. She refuses, but the woman leaves her a visiting card, where Célestine reads: 'Models'.

We can speculate that Léa Seydoux would identify with Célestine's weariness to try her hand in 'acting' or 'modelling', given that she is among the most critical women about the film industry, writing an opinion piece on this topic for *The Guardian*, where she documented her encounters with Harvey Weinstein, as well as more general views about the working of film industry, writing:

If you're a woman working in the film industry, you have to fight because it is a very misogynistic world. Why else are salaries so unequal? Why do men earn more than women? There is no reason for it to be that way. (Seydoux 2017)

The director of this adaptation emphasised during his press conference at the Berlinale that his film is not a 'period piece' about a world which vanished, but rather a film about the beginnings of the present situation (at least in France) in terms of employment and gender relations, positioning himself as a feminist.^{iv}

Although Célestine in this film is the most critical of her situation and a wider world in which she operates, of the three chambermaids discussed in this article she is also the one who holds no victory, real or moral. At best, this renders her a survivor, able to move from one place to another without sinking into poverty and depression. Such representation, on one hand, brings much sympathy to her. On the other hand, however, it renders her as devoid of agency. In this respect, again, Célestine evokes #MeToo victims, who were criticised by some feminists for presenting themselves as 'cringing wallflowers terrified of the advances of men' (Chaplin 2018), without ability to enjoy a sexually liberated existence with all of its benefits and drawbacks.

Conclusions

In this article I presented the evolution of a figure of a maid in three films based on the novel by Octave Mirbeau, suggesting that the maid gets progressively less happy. Moreover, while in Buñuel's film this is largely due to unfavourable political circumstances, in Jacquot's film this is due to patriarchy, which puts women at the mercy of men, who use them solely for their own advantage. Such trajectory can be regarded as paradoxical, given that thanks to feminism and other types of activism towards equality, the situation of women has improved considerably since Mirbeau published his novel. However, what cinema shows is never a crude reality, but a reality refracted through a dominant ideology or at least ideology fashionable among those making films. Rather than celebrating the progress of women, the focus in Jacquot's version thus seems to be on the lack or insufficient progress in the women's fight to achieve equality with men. The dominant ideology also includes the 'cult of vulnerability', marked by emphasising the structural reasons for failures of specific groups or individuals, rather than their own role in creating and exacerbating their problems. Mirbeau's book is useful from this respect, as it sheds light on the history behind women's oppression and provides first-hand account of them.

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ⁱ Some critics claim that this scene is unconvincing, coming abruptly after the killing of Joseph. Martin O'Shaughnessy claims that the 'tacked-on romantic happy ending suggests mockery of the [Hollywood] dream factory and its products' (2000: 176). In my opinion, however, this can be said about all 'Cinderella stories'.

ⁱⁱ The director during the Press Conference at the Biennale Film Festival mentioned that the beauty of the landscape and the light was meant to highlight the horrific life of the character. ((102) *Diary of a Chambermaid | Press Conference Highlights | Berlinale 2015 - YouTube*)

ⁱⁱⁱ In this sense she is similar to Queen Marie Antoinette from *Farewell, My Queen*.

^{iv} The interview is available on YouTube

((102) *Diary of a Chambermaid | Press Conference Highlights | Berlinale 2015 - YouTube*)