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Sexual Relationships between Master and Servant

The ideal serving-woman is faithful, ugly, and unapproachable.
—Bonacossa, De Servis hominibus proprius et families, quoted in Abbé Grégoire,
De la Domesticité chez les peuples anciens et modernes

Most intimate of all the relationships between the “domestic enemies” were sexual affairs between master and servant. Such relationships are worthy of the historian’s notice not only because they form an important chapter in the until recently little explored history of sexual behavior and attitudes, but also because they reflect the broader patterns of relationships within the household—and indeed in Old Regime society as a whole. For even this most intimate form of the master-servant relationship was strongly conditioned by the basic assumptions about the social positions and roles of master and servant which governed all associations between employer and domestic within the household. The relationships of the bedroom grew naturally out of those of the antichambre, and each affected the other. It was the fundamental premises of patriarchalism that condoned and indeed encouraged the formation of certain types of sexual relationships between master and servant—the seduction of a female servant by her male master, for example—and discouraged others. And it was the atmosphere of what we have termed pseudo-intimacy within the patriarchal household that allowed these acceptable forms of master-servant sexual relationships to flourish. And when, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the underlying assumptions of patriarchy were challenged and relationships within the household transformed, sexual relationships between master and servant changed too. Revelations of the “secrets of the alcove,” as French specialists in petite-histoire like to put it, can therefore show us a great deal about master-servant relationships in general.
The Psychology of Sexual Relationships between Male Masters and Female Servants

The most common type of sexual relationship between master and servant was of course that between a male employer and his female domestic. Just how common such relationships were is impossible to say, but all evidence suggests that they were widespread. The major source of information on illicit sexual activity during the ancien régime is the déclarations de grossesse, and in every sample of déclarations studied by historians a fairly substantial proportion of the women (ranging from a low of 3.6 percent in my sample from Provence for 1750–89 to the high of 36 percent which Depauw found in Nantes in 1737–46) were female servants who stated that they had been made pregnant by their masters. These figures, substantial as they are, probably represent only a small proportion of all master-servant sexual encounters. Many masters who seduced their servants were probably not identified as such in the déclarations, and therefore escape our notice. Many doubtless persuaded their servants either to make a false déclaration blaming a fellow servant or other lower-class type for their plight, or to conceal or terminate their pregnancy and make no déclaration at all. These too would escape our samples. And many servants may have had intercourse with their employers without becoming pregnant, or may have had sexual encounters with their masters that took forms other than completed coitus. Lawrence Stone’s well-documented explorations of the sexual habits of English gentlemen show that, in their sexual contacts with female servants, such men often preferred, because of fears of venereal disease or emotional involvement, to stop short of full intercourse and content themselves with fondlings, gropings, and mutual masturbation. There is no reason to believe that the French gentilhomme behaved any differently; in fact, the phrase “he wanted to play with me,” found frequently in the déclarations, probably denotes this kind of behavior. All of these possibilities suggest that master-servant seductions that eventually resulted in a déclaration formed only a small proportion of the sexual encounters between masters and servants during the Old Regime. It seems probable that most female servants, unless they spent all of their working lives in exclusively female households, experienced some form of sexual harassment by their masters at one point or another in their careers.

Why were master-servant sexual relationships so widespread? Why did masters pursue their servants so assiduously? And why did servants so often give in to their masters’ demands? Of these questions the last is probably the easiest to answer. As we have seen in chapter 3, servantes sometimes entered into sexual relationships with their masters from motives of loneliness, sexual frustration, and even genuine affection. But more often they were spurred by
self-interest: by promises of care or money if they gave in, by threats of withheld salaries and dismissal if they did not. Living under the same roof as her master, a servant had nowhere to hide if he was bent on her seduction. She was all too easily cornered on her daily rounds or attacked as she slept. Given the immense and inescapable economic, physical, and psychological pressures that masters could bring to bear on their employees, it is not surprising that most servantes felt as Thérèse Roux, a farm servant, did. She stated in her déclaration that she had at first resisted the propositions of her employer, Louis Seste, but finally gave in to what seemed to her to be inevitable: “since he was my master I was obliged to consent.”

Yet if a servante was “obliged to consent” to her seduction, her master was not obliged to seduce her. Why so many masters did so is more difficult to answer. In a society like that of Old Regime France, where both arranged marriages and the double standard flourished, it was doubtless inevitable that upper-class men would indulge in pre- and extramarital sexual affairs. And it was only slightly less inevitable that the bulk of these affairs would be with women of inferior social status. A gentleman could not seduce an unmarried girl of his own class without ruining her marriage prospects, and he could not sleep with the wife of a friend without challenging the legitimacy of families and the lawful descent of property. The former prohibition seems to have been effective: in Old Regime France unmarried upper-class girls were rarely seduced by their social equals. Adulterous relationships were more common, especially at the highest levels of the court nobility, where one gathers from the memoirs of noble Don Juans like the Duc de Lauzun and the Comte Dufort de Cheverny that any married woman was fair game. But in the more closely knit and moralistic society of the provincial robe nobility even such adulterous relationships were rare. This left for the sexual adventures of gentlemen only lower-class women: kept mistresses installed in rooms in town; textile workers or street peddlers encountered by chance, who, as the déclarations de grossesse show, could be persuaded to have sex by promises of food or money; habitual prostitutes—and the household servante.

Among these types of women the servant had certain clear advantages. She was likely to be cheaper than the kept mistress, more certain than the chance pickup, and the less disease-ridden than the prostitute. The servant was there, like Mount Everest: under his eye every day, she was bound to catch her master’s notice. If she had no other physical attractions (and it is hard to imagine that these ill-nourished country girls did), she usually at least had the bloom of youth, attractive no doubt in a period when the posturing nymphets of Greuze were worshiped. For as we saw in chapter 3, most servant girls seduced by their masters were in their late teens and early twenties. The servant also had the appeal of what has been called “the eroticism of inequality”—the attractions of helplessness and dependency. That many men find such qualities erotically appealing is suggested by the large numbers who have affairs with
women dependent upon them: the bosses who sleep with their secretaries, the professors who seduce their female students. Finally, servants had another attraction, probably the most important of all: they were convenient and easy to seduce, easily cornered as they went about their work, easily pressured by promises or threats.

Perhaps these simple factors are all we need to explain the majority of master-servant seductions. Yet so widespread were such relationships and so automatic was the impulse to seduce one's servant that we cannot help but suspect that these obvious explanations are inadequate, and that sexual attractions of servants stemmed from factors deeply rooted in their masters' psyches. Isolating these factors is not an easy task. Conventional psychological theories offer little help, for few psychologists have explored the question. Historians too have generally ignored it, and those few who have treated it have dealt with nineteenth-century situations which have little relevance for earlier periods. A good example is Leonore Davidoff's ingenious reading of the sexual obsession of English Victorian gentleman Arthur Joseph Munby with his female servants as stemming from his association of them with the forbidden delights of dirt and disorder. But it is hard to imagine that in seventeenth-century households, whose standard of cleanliness fell deplorably short of those espoused by Mrs. Beeton, dirt would have had such an aura of the forbidden as to make it the root of sexual obsessions.

It seems probable that the clues to masters' sexual interest in their servants during the Old Regime can be found in the way the household functioned in that period. Here two possible explanations emerge. One grows out of the longstanding tradition that made sexual relationships between master and servant seem "natural" and socially acceptable: the tradition that the enjoyment of the sexual favors of his female domestics was part of the privileges of a patriarch. The belief that a master had the right to exploit his servants sexually was as old as domestic service itself, and like the occupation it had its origins in ancient Greece and Rome. In the ancient world household slaves had no control over their own sexuality. Instead, their sexual favors were controlled by their masters, just as their labor was. Both formed a part of the owner's property rights in his slave. Masters regularly took the female slaves as concubines, and the bastard children of these unions were usually acknowledged by their fathers and raised within his household. Slaves could not bring their masters to court for rape, but owners could sue anyone who raped or seduced their slaves. And slaves of course could not marry without their masters' permission.

The tradition that a master had rights over the sexuality of his servants persisted through the coming of Christianity and the transformation of the slavery of the ancient world into the domestic service of the Middle Ages. Where slavery itself remained, as in fourteenth-century Florence, masters retained their legal rights of access to the sexual favors of female servants, and
slaves could not marry without their masters' permission. Where it died out, as in the feudal West, masters gradually lost their legal rights over the sexuality of their domestics, but they continued to behave as though they had not. In medieval France the droit de seigneur may have been largely a myth, but the seduction of female servants and other dependent women by their lords was standard practice. In the medieval domus master-servant sexual relationships were often self-perpetuating. The bastard offspring of such encounters were raised in the household, and the women among them became what Georges Duby has described as “a kind of pleasure reserve”: they in their turn worked as servants and were available for seduction by the young knights of the domus.

Even as late as the sixteenth century the legal and popular traditions of a master’s right to control the sexuality of his underlings persisted. By a French law of 1567 servants could not marry without their masters’ permission, and legally any child of a female servant conceived while she was in her employer’s household was automatically considered the offspring of the master unless he could prove otherwise. This law was similar to the legal custom that regarded any child borne by a married woman as the issue of her husband. Both had their roots in the notion of the right of a patriarch to control access to the sexual favors of the women of his household.

Thus there was by the Old Regime a long and quasi-legal tradition of the sexual exploitation of female servants by their masters, a tradition that had its ultimate foundation in the supposed property rights of a master over the bodies of his servants. But this tradition was not without its ambiguities. For by the late seventeenth century there had grown up around the patriarchal household an elaborate ideology whose basic tenets denied a master the right to exploit his servants sexually. In traditional theories of patriarchy, a master’s rights over his servants supposedly rested on his performance of certain duties, among the most important of which was the moral supervision of the members of the household. Obviously masters who seduced their servants were not acting as model patriarchs. Indeed, in the light of the familial rhetoric that pervaded the discussions of patriarchy, such masters committed a sin equivalent to incest. It was to this tradition of patriarchal duty that Richardson’s Pamela, the most famous seduced servant of the eighteenth century, appealed when she fought off her master’s assaults on her virtue. When Mr. B. demanded, “Do you know whom you speak to?” she replied, “Yes I do, sir, too well! Well may I forget that I am your servant when you forget what belongs to a master.”

Thus on the question of sex between master and servant, patriarchal theory was paradoxical. A patriarch had a clear right to the sexual favors of his servants, but he also had an equally clear duty to refrain from exercising that right. But as we argued in the last chapter, patriarchal theory was generally little more than an ideological veil drawn over the naked reality of a relation-
ship based solely on power. Most masters forgot their inconvenient "duty" and exercised their traditional "right" at will.

The notion that masters had a right to the sexual favors of their servants encouraged sexual relationships between them in two ways. First of all, it provided an excuse for such relationships: they were acceptable because they had always been so. Second, it heightened the awareness of both parties of each other as sexual objects. For if both master and maid have in the back of their minds from the day of her hiring the possibility of an eventual sexual relationship between them, they doubtless act toward each other in ways which help make the possibility a reality.

Similar effects stemmed from another psychological factor that promoted sexual relationships between master and servant: the widespread popular image of the lusty servant. Masters seem to have been convinced that domestics of both sexes were uncontrollably lusty, even more so than other lower-class types, and that their sex lives were a steady series of guiltless gratifications of their base desires.

This is how servants are inevitably portrayed in the literature of the Old Regime. When, for example, the sixteenth-century poet Christophe de Bordeaux wrote his "Le Varlet à louer à tout faire," and "La Chambrière à louer à tout faire," verses that supposedly captured the thoughts and feelings of typical male and female domestics, he had them boast about their amatory accomplishments as proudly as they detailed their skills in the kitchen and anti-chambre. The servante announced that she could take her mistress' place in the master's bed and do

\begin{verbatim}
Aussi bien qu'elle ce qu'il fault,
Soit pour coucher en bas, en haut,
Au grand lict . . . .
\end{verbatim}

and the valet was even more frank. He bragged of being a:

\begin{verbatim}
Grand despuceleur des nourrices
Ramonneur de bas et de haut
Femelles qui ont le cul chaut
Je les guaris avec froide glace.12
\end{verbatim}

Similarly outspoken servants populated the popular comedies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Plays are full of the love affairs of servants, which are usually deliberately contrasted with those of their masters. Not for servants were the conflicts between love and honor, inclination and interest, which bedeviled their betters. The wooings of servants were straightforward rather than circumlocutory, lewd rather than courtly, and they ended in sexual gratification rather than marriage.13 On the stage, the world below stairs was, as Michel Lemain, one of the most perceptive commentators on French drama, put it, "a world of liberated sexuality,"14 and servants were creatures of
unbridled lust and untrammeled libido, almost pagan in their instinctual enjoyment of the pleasures of the flesh.

Lemain suggests that the image of the lusty servant arose from the necessity in plays of what he calls “doubles.” In real life, people are mixtures of good and bad characteristics, but, Lemain maintains, in a drama the single mixed personality is often split in two, creating two characters, one embodying all the good and the other the evil. The stark contrast between the two creates the dramatic tension necessary for the play to succeed on the stage. Lemain argues that in plays servants embodied the “bad” characteristics denied to their noble masters. Masters were all conscience and honor, while servants were pleasures easily and guiltlessly gratified. The lusty servant in plays therefore symbolized the instinctual life which his master had to deny himself in order to remain a gentleman.\textsuperscript{15}

There is much to suggest that servants played the same role for their masters in real life. Certainly the image of the sexually promiscuous domestic is found as frequently in memoirs and advice books as it is upon the stage. Domestic manuals take the lustiness of servants for granted. “Finding [sexual] modesty in a lackey,” one states, “is like finding the fruits of autumn in the spring. . . . It appears that the name of ‘modesty’ and that of ‘lackey’ are so contrary that as soon as a young man puts on livery, he must cease to be modest.”\textsuperscript{16} Manuals abound with suggestions of how masters might control this lustiness: by keeping male and female servants apart as much as possible, by seeing that they slept in separate beds, and above all, by setting them a good example.\textsuperscript{17}

The image of the lusty servant had of course a certain basis in fact. The difficulties servants faced in marrying and the intimacies of life below stairs did tend to encourage illicit sex among them, as shown in chapter 3. But so pervasive was the association of servants with unbridled sexuality that this seems inadequate to account for it. Instead I think that a psychological phenomenon similar to Lemain’s notion of “doubles” was at work. The origins of the image of the lusty servant may lie in masters’ association of servants with the darker side of their own sexual impulses. This association arose because servants were witnesses to and accomplices in the most private and intimate details of their masters’ lives. Servants made their masters’ beds, washed their soiled linen, and emptied their slop pails. Servants, even those of the opposite sex, saw their masters and mistresses naked, as the famous example of Mme. du Châtelet bathing in front of her lackey suggests. Domestics performed the most intimate bodily services for their employers. Lackeys laced their mistresses into their stays, and maids combed through their masters’ hair for fleas and lice. Servants frequently saw their masters having sex, and not simply because the sharing of a room or even a bed with their masters made this unavoidable. Servants were at times deliberately summoned to watch. The fille de service of the newlywed wife of the sixteenth-century apothecary Felix Platter was called in to see her mistress enjoying the privileges of the
wedded state, and the seventeenth-century Marquis de Combalet was so proud of his sexual endowments that he frequently summoned his domestics to watch him make love to his wife.  

Often servants were not only witnesses but also accomplices in their employers' sexual adventures. Every Old Regime Don Juan knew that the first and most important step in the seduction of a married noblewoman was the bribing of her suisse and her femme de chambre: the former so that he could have easy access to the lady's hôtel at all hours, the latter so that she could be relied on to carry messages, stand guard over the bedroom door, and, if necessary, pretend that she rather than her mistress was the object of his attentions. In his seduction of his first great love, Mme. de Stainville, the Duc de Lauzun followed the classic pattern, bribing the suisse to leave open a small gate near the stables, and setting the femme de chambre to guard the bedroom door and warn the couple if Madame's husband should approach. Servants also often served as procuresses and pimps for their masters and mistresses. If, for example, the Comte Dufort de Cheverny wanted to spend a quiet evening in female company he had only to give the word—and ten louis d'or—to his invaluable servant Marnier, "the most intelligent man possible," to find, when he left the theater that night, a discreet hired house at his disposal, with a supper all laid out and a complaisant young woman waiting. Both the supper and the woman were exactly to the Comte's taste.

Sometimes servants' involvement in their masters' sexual lives went so far as to include the sharing of a sexual partner. Stories of noblemen who surprised their mistresses in the arms of their lackeys are legion, as are those of noblewomen who found their lovers courting their maids. At times these cross-class triangles created painful jealousies. A Toulousan servante, Jeanne Bellegarde, poisoned her mistress, the Dame de Lesmitoire, in a quarrel over the favors of their joint lover, the noble François de Timbourne de Montjoie. But more often all parties accepted the situation as inevitable. In the early seventeenth century Mme. de Cornuel had an affair with the Marquis de SourdIs, who amused himself with her maid while he waited in the antichambre for Madame to receive him. When the maid eventually gave birth to a son, Mme. de Cornuel had the child raised in her household, "because," as she cheerfully explained, "he was produced in my service."

Thus servants were bound up in the most intimate moments of their masters' lives to a degree that is hard for us to comprehend. This helped to encourage sexual relationships between master and servant in two ways. First of all, the intimate tasks that domestics performed for their employers were often so charged with erotic overtones that they aroused the sexual appetites of both parties. Of course we must be careful here not to project the standards of our own culture back into an earlier one. What would seem sexually charged to us did not necessarily appear so to a society with different standards of privacy, modesty, and shame. Public nakedness, for example, was taken much more lightly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it is today. It was
shameful only to expose the body in the presence of one's superiors; to do so in front of one's inferiors was, on the contrary, a mark of special favor. But it is hard to believe that even in a society with different standards the physical intimacies of the type that occurred between master and servant were completely without erotic overtones. Certainly the act of delousing, to take just one example, had been a standard preliminary to making love ever since the Middle Ages. In the previously quoted boast of the Varlet à tout faire that he was a “grand despuceleur des nourrices,” the play on the word despuceleur, which meant both “delousing” and “deflowering,” suggests the close association of the act with sex in the public mind (see figure 8). And Lawrence Stone’s researches indicate that at least one English master, Samuel Pepys, took advantage of the intimacy of delousing to make advances to his female servants. It is probable that the other intimate tasks that servants performed were invested with erotic invitation as well. For example, Restif de la Bretonne, surely an expert in eroticism, maintained that the notorious Comtesse du Barry was born of an affair between a noblewoman and her lackey, first consummated when the noble lady summoned her servant to help undo her stays.

Thus the intimate nature of servants’ tasks helped promote master-servant sexual relationships by creating erotically arousing situations. But it also contributed to sexual relationships within the household in another way. For it was the intimacy of daily contacts between master and servant which created and reinforced in the minds of employers the image of the lusty servant. Because of servants’ close association with the most private and “shameful” aspects of their lives, masters projected onto them their own worst impulses. The resulting image of the promiscuous domestic became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It encouraged the master-servant affairs both by heightening employers’ awareness of their servants as sexual objects and by providing excuses for masters who wished to seduce their servants, since they could easily convince themselves that their servants welcomed such seduction. In these ways the image of the lusty servant functioned similarly to the tradition of the sexual exploitation of domestics discussed earlier. Both combined to create a situation in which the collective erotic imagination of the master classes was haunted by images of its domestics. It is not surprising then that they so frequently seduced them.

**Sexual Relationships between Male Masters and Female Servants**

While sexual relationships between master and servant shared a common psychological background, they were not all alike. From the information about them in memoirs and déclarations de grossesse, it is possible to distin-
The image of the lusty servant. A cook, her legs apart, examines her bodice for fleas. Such tasks of bodily grooming were standard preliminaries to sex in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Five different patterns of master-servant sex. Three of these involved a male master and a female servant. The other two were relationships of a female mistress and her male servant and homosexual relationships between employers and domestics of either sex.

The first of the male master–female servant relationships, in the chronological order of the master's life at least, was the sexual initiation of a young man.
of the elite by a female domestic in his father's household. The memoirs of
noblemen that discuss such matters almost always tell of a sexual initiation by
a female servant at an early age—thirteen or fourteen, or even, in some cases,
as early as nine or ten. So typical were such experiences, in fact, that when an
anonymous author decided to concoct the fake memoirs of the "Comte de
Bonneval" he included a scene of the young man's introduction to sex by a *fille
de lingerie* as a matter of course. And lest it be thought that such seductions
were mere literary conventions, we should note that a *servante* was hanged in
eighteenth-century Paris for "seducing" and "communicating a venereal dis-
ease" to the ten-year-old son of her master.

The extremely early ages of such seductions suggest that these relationships
show a reversal of the usual pattern of master-servant sex: in this instance the
servant was the aggressor and the master the largely innocent victim. These
relationships seem to have been outgrowths of the sexual teasing to which
adults regularly subjected children in the seventeenth and early eighteenth
centuries. The taunting and abuse endured by the young Louis XIII, whose
genitals were caressed by his ladies-in-waiting, and who was encouraged by
them to play sexually with himself, his younger sister, and the adult serving
women at court, were probably more typical of the experiences of the young
men of the French elite than historians have been willing to believe. We
know of at least one other victim of such games, Cardinal de Bernis, who
wrote a solemn warning about them to parents: "Nothing is so dangerous for
morals and perhaps for health than to leave children too long under the care of
*femmes de chambre*. . . . I would add that the wisest among them are not
always the least dangerous. One dares with a child what one would be
ashamed to risk with a young man.

As the boy grew into his teens, these games began to take the form of
invitations to sexual intercourse. But the pattern of servant as the aggressor
remained, as the Duc de Lauzun's account of his experience as fourteen-year-
old with Mlle. Julie, *femme de chambre* of the Duchesse de Gramont, sug-
gests:

At this time she (the Duchesse) brought me to Menais, to the household of
Mme. de Pompadour. Mlle. Julie, *femme de chambre*, who had all her confi-
dence . . . believed that what her mistress kept for herself suited her well
also, and destined for me the honor of being initiated into worldly matters by
her. She gave me many caresses and provocations [which were] useless, be-
cause I was very innocent. One day she put my hand on her throat. My whole
body burned for several hours afterward, but I did not advance any further.

The Comte Alexandre de Tilly tells a similar story of an abortive sexual initia-
tion, which occurred at the early age of nine:

I was nine years old, and my father saw that I was too susceptible to the ro-
bust charms of a *femme de charge* named Mme. Roher, whose caresses, pro-
voking my desires, made him suspect my innocence. He wanted to clear every­thing up, and ordered her to encourage me. I soon came, by pure instinct I believe, to beg her to receive me in the modest alcove where [she slept].

. . . Mounting to the distant room which would become the theater of my precocious felicities, I proposed to receive a lesson which I was scarcely able to render when my father entered quickly by another door armed with a hunting crop. He beat me severely . . . I felt that there had been a plot against me, and this hurt my proud and generous character.34

In both these stories we sense uneasiness below the surface bravado. Both young men were exposed to situations and emotions that they simply could not handle, and they knew it. Both got little help from the adults around them. The intervention of Tilly’s father, for example (this was one of the few times he paid any attention to his son), obviously did more harm than good. We sense that he staged the scene more for his own amusement than for the edification of his son. Finally, both boys sensed that they were being manipulated, used as playthings, by adults, and both consciously or unconsciously resented this.

For the young men’s families the major concern posed by such relationships seems to have been the fear that an unscrupulous servant could manipulate the boy, helpless in the throes of his first love, into an unsuitable marriage. This situation was sketched in the apocryphal memoirs of the “Comte de Bonneval”: the seduced thirteen-year-old wanted to marry his mistress, but his mother talked him out of it.35 It was to guard against such mésalliances that the famous Ordinance of Blois of 1579 was promulgated, outlawing the marriage of minors without their parents’ consent. This ruling was reinforced by a royal ordinance of 1730 which defined the seduction of a minor child under twenty-five, male or female, by a household servant, for the purpose of luring him or her into an unsuitable marriage, as the crime of rapt de séduction, punishable by death.36

For the modern historian the greatest danger of such relationships lies in the psychological damage they could do to the young men involved. It is probable that many men who were sexually abused as children had difficulty forming normal heterosexual relationships as adults. Certainly Cardinal de Bernis did, although admittedly his position as a churchman may also have been an inhibiting factor. At any rate, Bernis grew up to be a notorious voyeur, best known for watching Casanova service two nuns simultaneously in the courtyard of a Venetian convent.37 It also seems probable that the teen-agers who suffered through such anxious sexual initiations developed unconscious desires for revenge which poisoned their later relationships with women, especially with women servants. This was apparently true of Lauzun and Tilly at least. Both grew up to be archtypical Don Juans, manipulators of women, whose memoirs are endless catalogs of loveless, heartless seductions. Both were especially nasty in their encounters with female servants. Tilly, for example, once seduced the maid of his former mistress simply to have an excuse
to continue to visit the household and see the real object of his pursuit, his mistress's niece. He wrote smugly of this episode: "I put all my effort into corrupting one of her women, and I succeeded."

After their uncomfortable sexual initiations upper-class young men continued to enjoy the sexual favors of female servants, especially while they remained unmarried. In my sample of déclarations de grossesse from Provence, 58.8 percent of the master-servant relationships from 1727 to 1749 and 42.0 percent of those from 1750 to 1789 involved young men (sons, nephews, etc.) of the household. But as the youths grew into their teens and twenties, the balance of power in these relationships shifted, and the female servant abandoned her unaccustomed role of aggressor to take up her more usual stance as victim. One example is eighteen-year-old Thérèse Cavaillon, servante to the receveur des gabelles in Berre, who was raped at knifepoint by the son of the house. Such incidents suggest in the households of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century France, master-servant sexual exploitation was a self-perpetuating syndrome, which drew generation after generation into a (truly) vicious circle of abuse. Female servants got revenge for the misuse they suffered through the exploitation of the children of the household, and these exploited children grew up to misuse servants in their turn.

For the adult male master, female servants filled two sexual roles. One was that of servante-maitresse, or servant-mistress. She was precisely what her name suggests: a domestic who was the long-term mistress of her employer, and more or less openly acknowledged as such. The servant-mistress was most common among single men. She was the obvious companion of the scion of a robe family waiting to complete his legal studies before marrying, and of wealthy widower who had suffered through one arranged marriage and could not stomach a second. She was especially likely to be found in the countryside, as the mistress of the cadet of a petty noble family too poor to marry off any son but the eldest. In such households the servant-mistress was a wife in everything but name. She not only shared her master's bed and bore his children (which he often acknowledged), but also ran the household and supervised the other servants, if any.

The servant-mistress seems to have been tolerated by her master's family, as long as she did not attempt to alienate his affection from them, or, worse yet, try to marry into the family herself. It was, for example, the former situation that aroused the ire of the Marquise de Ferrières against Mlle. Guignard, the servant-mistress of her father-in-law. The Marquise noted indignantly in her memoirs that Mlle. Guignard "looked only to blacken us in the mind of her master by bearing a thousand tales, true and false, against us. This woman was a troublemaker (méchante) and had similarly aroused my father-in-law against his daughter, whose femme de chambre she had been."

Even more likely to cause family tensions was the prospect of a marriage between master and servant-mistress. If the man in question was a minor son
of the house, below the age at which he could marry without his parents’ consent, the match could of course easily be blocked. In such cases it was apparently the fact that the woman was the young man’s *servant*, rather than the fact that she was his *mistress*, which parents found objectionable. At any rate, when the father and mother of Antoine Demortain petitioned the church court to dissolve his engagement to Anne Marie Ghislain, they gave as their reason that she “was a *servante* in the household of the petitioners, at a yearly wage of twelve *écus*, taking care of the cows and going to sell in the market at Quesnoy like other *servantes* . . . her father is a *journalier* and her sisters and relatives are of the same occupation. . . . Because of this difference of condition the petitioners never dreamed that their son wished to marry a girl of this type.”

If, however, the man in question had reached his majority—if he were an elderly widower, for instance—relatives could do little to prevent the match. Widowers did sometimes marry their servants: Sr. Charles Cadithon, Bordeaux widower and *cabaretier*, married his servant Marie Surin in 1778, for example. Though not uncommon, such marriages nevertheless met with widespread social disapproval. The memoirs of the Baronne d’Oberkirch record an anecdote that illustrates this. The Duchesse de Bourbon, while doing charity visiting, met an old man, “a sort of King Lear, who complained harshly about his daughters. She gave him money and ended by asking: ‘Have you done any wrong to your children? Consult your conscience.’ ‘No, madame, they have nothing to reproach me for, apart from having married my servant.’ ‘Isn’t that enough?’ she answered impatiently. ‘You needn’t say anything more.’”

Because of such disapproval, few servant-mistresses could hope to regularize their position through marriage. Nonetheless they could expect other, often substantial, rewards. Masters usually felt a duty to “take care of” a servant-mistress “for the rest of her days,” as M. François promised his maid Marguerite Donnat when he propositioned her. Such care might take the form of gifts of money, clothing, or jewelry, in the case of widowers often those belonging to their late wives. (One M. Caillol, eager to make his laundress, Marguerite Guierand, his mistress, jumped the gun a bit and gave her his wife’s clothing before the sick woman had actually died). Servant-mistresses were also provided for by legacies in their masters’ wills. Pierre de Lavaissière, an *écuyer* living in Bordeaux, left land and a house in the country to Françoise Brune “who lives at present in my service,” and 6,000 livres to Françoise’s (and probably his) bastard daughter Jeanne “to give her an education and favor her establishment” in life. Finally, the future of a servant-mistress might be assured through an arranged marriage with a fellow servant or other lower-class dependent of the master. Such matches usually carried the understanding that the master would support the couple financially and would of course continue to have access to his mistress. The Seigneur de
Haucourt even tried to inveigle his nineteen-year-old nephew into such a match, first getting the youth drunk and then calling in a notary to witness the marriage contract. This marriage was, however, annulled by the church.49

While it was fairly common for a bachelor or widower to take a servant-mistress, it was quite unlikely that a married man would do so. This had not always been true. From ancient Greece down through the sixteenth century, married men lived openly with servant concubines and raised their bastard children along with their legitimate families. The sixteenth-century nobleman, Géri de Rabutin, great-grandfather of Mme. de Sévigné, kept an acknowledged servant-mistress, and the Sieur de Gouberville, a sixteenth-century Norman gentilhomme campagnard, was raised in a household that included his father’s four bastards.50 But the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, with their emphasis on the conjugal bond and their repression of sexual activity outside its limits, made the flaunting of a servant-mistress by a married man unacceptable.51 From the seventeenth century on, husbands might still seduce their servants, but they could not live openly with a servant-mistress. What wives apparently found objectionable in these relationships was not the adultery itself, but rather the mistress’s public usurpation of honors and attentions that should belong to the lawful spouse. Wives might tolerate a series of casual flirtations with servant-girls who were easily dismissed. But they ran to the church courts to demand separations if their husbands behaved like the Sieur de Henin, who, when his beloved servante Marguerite fell ill, had his bed moved into her room and cared for her himself, even emptying the chamber pot; or like Joseph Lecherq, who allowed his servante Marguerite to eat at the family table and showed his affection for her by “serving her the best cuts.”52 These two erring husbands at least confined their display of affection within the household. But the Sieur de Biseau, madly in love with his servant, “showed her off in front of the whole parish, walking with her, accompanying her to Mass, giving her his arm.”53 In this case not just de Biseau’s wronged wife but also his neighbors complained to the church court; the open flaunting of a servant-mistress had created a public scandal.

It was this public disapproval which put an end to the acknowledged servant-mistress for married men from the seventeenth century on. Husbands of course continued to seduce the household servants, but now they tried to keep these exploits from public knowledge. If a man wanted a long-time relationship with his servant, he usually removed her from the household and installed her in a room in town which he could discreetly visit. This is what Sr. Louis Cloche did with his servant Suzanne Laugière in a relationship that lasted for nine months.54 More typically, however, married men contented themselves with short-term affairs, seducing their servants and sleeping with them until either the servant became pregnant, or the wife discovered what was going on, or both happened at once, as was usually the case.55 When any
of the above occurred, the servant was inevitably fired, and the master usually wasted little time in regrets before setting his sights on her replacement.

This sort of casual short-term seduction forms the third and final category of male master-female servant sexual affairs, a category for which I have borrowed the French phrase "ancillary amours."

The ancillary amour was by no means confined to married men; the unmarried who wished to avoid the economic, social, and emotional burdens of a servant-mistress also made use of it. Therefore it was undoubtedly the most common form of sexual relationship between master and servant.

But common as it was, it was by no means inevitable. Evidence from the déclarations suggests that it was more likely to occur in some types of households than in others. The major determinants seem to have been household size and location. These are summarized for the "ancillary amours" in my sample of déclarations from eighteenth-century Provence in tables 24 and 25.56

Table 24 shows that the ancillary amour was more common in rural areas, and that this became increasingly true as the eighteenth century progressed. Most women servants were employed in urban areas, yet even in the first half of the eighteenth century towns contributed only 63 percent of the master-servant seductions. And in the last half of the eighteenth century almost three-fourths of the cases occurred in the countryside.57 As table 25 shows, certain types of households were more conducive to the ancillary amour than others. Servants employed in the small households of the bourgeoisie and artisanate were more likely to be the victims of their masters' sexual approaches than were servants in the hôtels of the nobility. Noble masters contributed relatively few of our cases—only 8.8 percent of the cases of master-servant sex in our sample of déclarations from Provence during 1727–49. This was much lower than we would expect, given the high proportion of female servants employed by the nobility. I have no accurate figures for Aix, but in Toulouse, a city much like Aix in social makeup, in 1750 the nobility employed 18.6 percent of all female servants. Conversely, lower-class households in Tou-

**TABLE 24**

| Master-Servant Sexual Relationships, by Location, Provence, 1727–89 (in %) |
|------------------------|------------------|
|                        | 1727–49 | 1750–89 |
| Rural                  | 37.0%    | 74.0%   |
| Urban                  | 62.9     | 26.0    |
| N                      | 35       | 50      |

*Sources: See Bibliography, section I. C.*
louse employed only 16 percent of all female servants. Yet in Aix lower-class households contributed 41.2 percent of all master-servant seductions. 58

Two factors seem to lie behind these patterns: the extreme physical vulnerability of servants in small and/or rural households, and the lack of alternative sexual outlets for their masters. The female farm servant on an isolated bastide was obviously at her master's mercy. So too was the lone servante in a bourgeois or artisan household, forced to sleep on the kitchen hearth or on a lit de domestique outside her master's room. In large noble households, by contrast, servants were more likely to have their own quarters and female servants came into contact with their employers relatively rarely. Also, in large households the presence of male domestics provided sexual competition for masters, and the other female servants provided counsel and advice to the object of their attentions. The lone servante in a modest household lacked these protections: she was constantly in her master's company, and she had to deal with his advances alone.

Thus the extreme vulnerability of the lone servante in small and rural households seems to have been an important factor in the pattern of incidence of the ancillary amour. But probably equally important were the sexual alternatives available to masters. A townsman could take his pick of shopgirl and comédienne, textile worker and tavern wench, street peddler and prostitute, but these sexual alternatives to the servante were scarce in the countryside. Similarly, noblemen had the money and leisure time to pursue any lower-class woman they wished. And the court nobility also apparently had the option of adulterous relationships with the wives of their friends and acquaintances. But if an artisan or a bourgeois wanted an extramarital fling, his servant was not just his obvious choice but often his only one.

These patterns of the incidence of master-servant sexual relationships are strikingly similar to the patterns of master-slave miscegenation in the antebellum American South. It was on small rural plantations, where slaves lived in the same house as their owner and the owner had few sexual outlets other than his slave women, that master-servant sexual relationships were most likely to take place. 59 But while master-servant sexual relationships may have been

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**TABLE 25**

Master-Servant Sexual Relationships, by Type of Household, Provence, 1727–89 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>1727–49</th>
<th>1750–89</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noble</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: See Bibliography, section I, C.*
more likely in some households than in others, no female servant was really immune from sexual harassment by her master, just as no southern slave woman was immune from the white man's sexual attentions. In both these patriarchal societies, the sexual exploitation of dependent women revealed the hollowness of patriarchal pronouncements about the reciprocity of rights and duties between master and servant, master and slave. In both societies patriarchal relationships were based in reality not on reciprocity but on naked power, and in both societies the female servant, doubly vulnerable because of her status and her sex, was this power's most likely victim.

**Sexual Relationships between Mistress and Male Servant**

While seduction of a female servant by her master was the most widespread type of sexual relationship between masters and servants, obviously it was not the only possibility. There were also cases of liaisons between a mistress and her male domestic. These relationships were not the simple obverse of the seduction of a maid by her master. In both law and public opinion the two situations were poles apart. A male master had what amounted to a quasi-legal right to the sexual favors of his female servants; socially he suffered few ill-effects if his amorous activities became known. By contrast, sexual relationships between mistress and man were illegal and might carry the death penalty for the servant involved. And any woman rumored to sleep with her male domestics could have her reputation ruined for life. The different way in which the two relationships were regarded is perhaps best epitomized in the royal ordinance of 1730 on *rapt de séduction*. This ordinance made it illegal for a female servant to marry her young master, but it prohibited both marriage and sexual relationships between a male servant and the daughter of the house.60

More lay behind this distinction than the simple fact that in a society with a double standard respectable women were expected to be chaste while respectable men were not. The most basic notions of the proper functioning of a patriarchal society were involved. Male master–female servant sexual relationships were treated so leniently they offered what was in reality a confirmation of one of the most basic principles of patriarchy: the power of a master over the bodies and souls of his servants. Sexual relationships between mistress and man, by contrast, constituted a flagrant betrayal of patriarchy's most sacred precepts. In patriarchal theory women were regarded as the property of their fathers or husbands, and their chastity was thus a family asset. And in patriarchal theory the first duty of a loyal servant was to guard his masters' property. A servant who seduced his master's wife or daughter therefore was doubly disloyal, robbing his master of the very thing he was to guard. These
attitudes were probably summed up best by Saint-Preux, the low-born tutor in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. When he realized that he was falling in love with his employer's daughter Julie, he wrote to her:

> What am I really to your father . . . ? A mercenary, a man paid by him, a kind of *valet*; and he has for my part, to guarantee his confidence, and for the security of that which belongs to him, my tacit word. . . . Now, what is more precious to a father than his only daughter . . . ? [If I seduced her] would I not seem to such a master a scoundrel who tramples on the most sacred rights, a traitor, a domestic seducer whom the law very justly condemns to death?" \(^{61}\)

Death was indeed the penalty faced by a domestic seducer. In the *coutume de Bordeaux* and other law codes of the Old Regime, the rape of his master's daughter by a male servant was classified as *vol domestique*, and it carried the same penalty, death by hanging. \(^{62}\)

Perhaps because of this, cases of seduction of the daughter of the house by a male servant were relatively rare. I found none in the two samples of *déclarations de grossesse* I analyzed. This of course does not mean much, since families had strong motives to conceal their dishonor by obtaining an abortion, preventing a *déclaration*, or acquiescing in a forced marriage for their daughters. Nonetheless, the scarcity of such cases among *déclarations* suggests that they were in fact infrequent.

The few cases that were recorded suggest that these relationships followed a certain pattern. The flirtation was often initiated by the girl: the Dlle. Elizabeth de Regnoval, daughter of a *lieutenant de robe-courte* in Beauvais, confessed at the trial of her lover, her father's farm servant, "that she herself had solicited the *valet* to make love, and that she had had and still had the desire to marry him." \(^{63}\) Apparently flirtations with household domestics were a diversion allowed to young ladies, so long, of course, as they remained platonic. Such relationships gave girls a chance to test their skills with the opposite sex without serious risk to their reputations or their hearts. Typical of these relationships is one of the best documented: that of the future Mme. de Sévigné with her tutor, Gilles Ménage. The sixteen-year-old girl described him as her "dearest Friend," wrote love letters to him and allowed him to embrace her publicly. But apparently she never granted him what her contemporaries called the last favors. The tenor of their relationship is summed up in the following exchange: when Ménage complained of her cruelty and described himself as her "martyr," she tartly replied, "And I, Monsieur, I am your virgin." \(^{64}\)

But it was not always easy for the girl to control these relationships. She might be betrayed by her own appetites, as Dlle. de Regnoval was, or an unscrupulous servant might take advantage of her interest to try to force a wealthy marriage. This was the motive universally attributed to servants in
such cases during the Old Regime. For example, public opinion said of the clerk of the mayor of Cessenon in Languedoc, who seduced his master's daughter, Marie-Louise Milhé: "‘to make his fortune, he had to make the Milhé girl pregnant; he deserves to be shot.’"65

But the most frequent target of the male servant on the make was not the daughter of the house but instead the well-off widow. A widow who hired a domestic to help her farm the land or run the shop her husband had left her quite often found herself the object of his advances, and these were not always pleasant. Either because the common reputation of widows for lustiness (Lawrence Stone tells us of an English proverb: “he that wooeth a widow must go stiff before”) made their suitors disregard refusals, or simply because their obvious lack of masculine protection made them easy victims, widows were often the targets of sexual violence by their male servants.66 Typical of the relationships involving a widow and her male domestic is that of forty-year-old Catherine Boule, widow of a Provençal ménager, who was raped by Pierre Guivre, the valet she hired to help her work her land. According to Boule, Guivre had propositioned her and proposed marriage for months, but she had always turned him down, and she tried to stay out of his way. One night, however, she had to leave her chamber and come into the kitchen where he slept because she had to fix a meal for her young daughter, who was ill. Guivre came up behind her, grabbed her, threw her on the floor, and raped her.67 In my samples of déclarations there were three cases involving widows, and in two of these violence was used.

The most puzzling type of sexual relationship between mistress and man was that between a married woman and her domestic. Were such relationships relatively frequent, or were they not? Certainly rumors of such liaisons abounded in fashionable Parisian and court circles. A German traveler, Baron Pollnitz, wrote of Paris in the 1730s:

there are Ladies, even of the first Quality, who don't always treat their lackeys like servants. 'Tis true, they most commonly take them out of the Livery, and in order to bring them near their Persons, they make them their Pages or Valets de Chambre. Nothing is thought too good for these Favorites of Venus; they are rigg'd out like Princes, and were you to see one of these fortunate Lackeys, you would naturally take him for some Person of Consequence.68

Eighty years earlier, Parisian society had rocked with the scandalous behavior of Mme. d'Olonne, who openly pursued her servants. She became so notorious that her tastes were immortalized in song sheets hawked on street corners:

La d'Olonne
N'est plus bonne
Qu'à ragouter les laquais.69
And fifty years after Pollnitz wrote, rumors of liaisons between mistress and servant touched even the royal family. The Baronne d'Oberkirch recounted in her memoirs, with a relish not very well concealed by her pious assertions that she, of course, believed not a word of them, the rumors surrounding the Comtesse d'Artois. She was said to display an undue interest in one member of her household, a man, the Baronne wrote, “of a fabulous handsomeness, of a beauty that passes into proverbs and serves as a point of comparison.” When he began to boast publicly of his intimacies with the Comtesse, Louis XVI had him arrested and forced him to retract his statements. The Comtesse was applauded at the Opéra the first time she appeared in public after the scandal.70

Even the most notorious crime of the eighteenth century was said to have its roots in a flirtation between mistress and servant. It was rumored that Damiers, the would-be assassin of Louis XV, was in love with his employer, Mme. de Sainte-Rheuse, who was in turn the mistress of the Marquis de Martiguy, brother of Mme. de Pompadour. The assassination attempt was said to be a blow of revenge against the brother and sister.71

How much credence should we give such rumors? It is hard to know. On the one hand, cases of sexual relationships between married mistress and domestic undoubtedly occurred. In 1778 in Toulouse, for example, forty-three-year-old Claire Raynaud, wife of a menager and mother of four children, poisoned her husband in order to marry Pierre Coulet, her young servant.72 We know of this case only because of its tragic ending. Many others could have occurred leaving no traces for historians to find, since married women who took lovers did not have to make déclarations; they could simply pass off the fruit of their illicit adventures as their husband's work. But on the other hand, it is hard to imagine that many women, especially those of high social position, would undertake the risks involved in such relationships. For a married noblewoman who chased her servants appeared not only wanton, but what was even worse, ridiculous. Ridiculous because déclassé: a woman, unlike a man, sank to the social level of her sexual partner. And wanton because, given the stereotype of servants as good for bed but little else, it was impossible to imagine that a woman who slept with her domestic could be genuinely in love with him; only overpowering lust could make her do it. Indeed, so deeply embedded was this notion in the common psyche that to accuse a married woman of sleeping with her servants was apparently equivalent to labeling her a common whore. It was for this reason a favorite insult of the scorned lover. An admirer repulsed by the Marquise de Langallery is said to have snapped at her, “Aren't you in the mood to give me what you give your palefrenier every day?,” and Restif has a story about the would-be lover of a respectable married woman who threatened that if she did not yield to him, “he would dishonor her by writing to her husband, and proclaiming to all the world, that he has surprised her with the lackey.”73

Given the risks to their personal dignity and reputation, it is hard to imag-
ine that many married noblewomen had affairs with their servants. And the noblewomen of the 1770s and 1780s, newly enchanted with the charms of domesticity and energetically devoting themselves to being model wives and mothers, seem especially unlikely candidates for the role of Lady Booby. Yet in precisely these years rumors and accusations of such behavior were most prevalent. The *libelles* of the gutter press of pre-revolutionary Paris were full of insinuations that “an epidemic [venereal] disease is raging among the girls of the Opéra, it has begun to reach the ladies of the court, and it has even been communicated to their lackeys.” Or again, that “The devout wife of a certain Maréchal de France (who suffers from an imaginary lung disease), finding a husband of that species too delicate, considered it her religious duty to spare him and so condemns herself to the crude caresses of her butler, who would still be a lackey if he hadn’t proved himself so robust.”

As the most devoted chronicler of Old Regime smut, Robert Darnton, has pointed out, such insinuations proliferated because they made effective political propaganda. The impotent noble husband whose wife was forced to seek sexual satisfaction with her (inevitably) lusty lackey was a striking metaphor for his whole degenerate class. Sexual relationships between mistress and servant symbolically reversed most basic principles of patriarchy. This explains both their scarcity in real life and their abundance in the mass of rumor, scandal, and innuendo that formed much of the political discourse of prerevolutionary France.

**Homosexual Relationships between Master and Servant**

A similar dichotomy between facts and rumor is evident in those sexual relationships that reversed not only the principles of the patriarchal social order but also (so it was thought in the eighteenth century at least) those of the order of nature and of nature’s God—that is, homosexual relationships between master and servant. Undoubtedly there was a male homosexual subculture in eighteenth-century Paris, as there was in all large European cities, a subculture in which both masters and servants probably participated, separately or as partners. But because of the penalties for homosexual activities—throughout the Old Regime sodomy was punished by burning at the stake—this gay world was necessarily a hidden, underground one. It surfaces for the historian only in police records, especially in the relatively rare legal prosecutions for sodomy (the standard reference, *Les Procès de sodomie au 16e, 17e, et 18e siècles*, discusses only ten cases for a period stretching from 1540 to 1789.) Because these are so rare, one gets the impression that the homosexual world of Paris was rather small. This may not be true, because historians
of France have not yet done the sort of digging necessary to uncover a large and socially complex homosexual subculture of clubs and coffee houses similar to that which Randolph Trumbach and Lawrence Stone have found in eighteenth-century London. But on the other hand, it may be that homosexuality was indeed in the eighteenth century "the English vice," and that there were no French equivalents to London's relatively large and visible gay world or of the increasingly open toleration of homosexual behavior which Stone found among the eighteenth-century English elite. The less rigid divisions between male and female spheres in France, the prominence of leisure-time activities in which both sexes took part (the female-dominated salon, so important to both the social and intellectual worlds of eighteenth-century France, had no English counterpart), the absence of the English public school tradition, and the prevalence of early heterosexual experiences among noble youths all may have given the sexual activities of at least the nobility of France a more heterosexual orientation than those of their English contemporaries. This is not to suggest that homosexuality was nonexistent among the French elite. Among those prosecuted for sodomy in the ten published cases were an écuyer and two bourgeois. Yet the memoir literature of the period suggests that transvestism, which appealed to the elite's obsession with role-playing in a society of changing social roles (see Rameau's Nephew), and voyeurism, increasingly fascinating as conceptions of privacy and prudery altered, were, rather than sodomy, the fashionable eighteenth-century French "vices." The haut monde of the salons had goodly numbers of Cardinals de Bernis and Chevaliers d'Eon, but seemingly few Oscar Wildes.

Yet rumors of homosexual activities, especially between master and servant, were plentiful. The ubiquitous Baron Pollnitz has his usual salacious anecdotes about Parisian lackeys:

There are others of the menial class that enjoy the Favour of their Young Masters, in a Way so uncommon that one knows not what to think of it; and many of those young Gentlemen, forgetting the Respect that is due to their own Persons and their Families, make Parties at Supper with 'em, at which Time I fancy Conversation is the least Part of the Entertainment. But such is the Spirit of Debauchery, that has infected the Generality of the young People at Court.

Restif has tales of noble youths corrupted by their lackeys, for example, the beautiful young woman he followed at a carnival, who turned out to be a beautiful young man: "The youth wanted to run away. Two lackeys stopped him: they put him in a carriage. . . . I draw a veil over the next episodes of this horrible story. Suffice it to say that the boy is today a homosexual; that he occupies a place at——, that this deadly adventure has caused, besides the loss of his morals, the despair of his parents." The libelles also have tales of innocent lackeys corrupted by their masters: "The Count de Noail . . . hav-
ing taken some scandalous liberties with one of his lackeys, this country bumpkin knocked over Monseigneur with a slap that kept his lordship in bed for eight days. . . . The lackey . . . is a Picard of the first order who had not yet been instructed how to serve a Spanish grandee, Knight of the Royal Orders, Lieutenant General, Governor of Versailles. . . .”

But such tales apparently had little basis in fact. None of the published cases involved a master-servant relationship. The prevalence of rumors about such affairs therefore seems to have stemmed less from the facts than from their effectiveness as political propaganda. For whether they pictured the noble as the passive “effeminate” partner, traditionally the object of popular contempt, or as the debauched corrupter of innocent lower-class youth, the stories of the master-servant homosexual relationships conveyed powerful images of a nobility unfit to rule. Doubtless there was a homosexual milieu in Paris and other large French cities, and doubtless both masters and servants were a part of it. But the present, admittedly limited, state of research suggests that tales of male homosexual relationships within the household are simply that: tales with only a slight foundation in fact.

With regard to lesbianism, the situation is reversed. There were probably more lesbian affairs between mistress and maid than there were rumors about them. What lesbianism there was in eighteenth-century France (and in the present state of research we have no idea how much) probably occurred within the household, for lesbians, on the one hand, lacked the public milieu in which male homosexuals could find partners, while, on the other hand, the traditional closeness between mistress and maid may have encouraged physical intimacies to blossom. At any rate, the one lesbian affair for which we have evidence involved an employer and her servant. Parisian police records yield the story of La Maréchale, a petty informer and spy whose specialty was helping prisoners buy their way out of jail. She obtained the release of one Geneviève Pounnier from La Salpêtrière in exchange for her services as maid and sexual partner. When Pounnier complained of mistreatment to the police, La Maréchale replied that “if she knew the pleasure two women could give to one another, she would give up Durot [her lover] and men would cease to mean anything at all to her.”

How many other such relationships existed we simply cannot know. Rumors about them are scarce, but this is probably because lesbianism did not provoke the public interest and indignation that male homosexuality did, for it was always considered more “innocent” and less sinful. Also, rumors about lesbian affairs between mistress and servant lacked the social and political overtones that made those about mistress and male servant and master and man so titillating. To modern feminists lesbianism may be the ultimate challenge to the patriarchal organization of society, but it did not appear so in the eighteenth century. In the Old Regime the alliance of two by definition subordinate members of a household was neither an affirmation nor a denial of the
patriarchal order. Therefore such an alliance attracted little attention. For, as we have seen, it was the fundamental premises of patriarchy that determined both how master and servant behaved toward each other sexually and how society viewed such behavior.

**Master-Servant Sexual Relationships after 1750**

Sometime around 1750 a major change occurred in the legal position of domestic servants seduced by their masters. Whereas in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it was assumed that any child born to a servant living under her master’s roof was his unless he could prove otherwise, in the last decades of the Old Regime the master was no longer automatically held responsible: it was now up to the woman to prove his paternity. This change is indicative of the revolution in sexual relationships between master and servant which came about with the disappearance of patriarchal conceptions of the household in the last half of the eighteenth century. By the eve of the Revolution masters had lost both their traditional rights over the bodies of their servants and their moral responsibility for their servants’ conduct which had characterized the traditional patriarchal household. Servants were now considered free, independent, and adult human beings who were tied to their masters by the terms of their labor contract, but were otherwise totally responsible for their own behavior. The sexuality of a servant was now his or her own property and responsibility, and no longer that of the master. Whereas domestic manuals of the Old Regime had ignored the problem of master-servant sex, those of postrevolutionary France treated it openly, and they stressed that it was the servant’s responsibility to see that nothing untoward occurred. For example, *Des Devoirs des serviteurs, des maîtres, des parents, de tous les hommes envers l’église et l’état*, published in Lyons in 1830, stated emphatically that if a master made unseemingly advances a *servante* should immediately “shake the dust of that household off her shoes,” although it added reassuringly that such incidents were becoming increasingly rare. This seems to have been true, for the disappearance of the master’s traditional and quasi-legal right to the sexual favors of his servants spelled the disappearance of the subtle psychological encouragement this had given to sexual relationships between employer and domestic.

Other factors involved in the decline of the patriarchal household also discouraged sex between master and servant. One was the rise of domesticity, with its emphasis on the joys of family life and of the love and devotion between spouses. The notions of romantic love between husband and wife that appeared among the nobility and upper bourgeoisie in the late eighteenth century may not have made married men less inclined to be unfaithful to their
wives, although this is certainly possible. But they definitely made them more anxious to conceal their lapses from their loving spouses. Consequently illicit sexual adventures had to take place outside the home. The household, that nest of conjugal love and domestic felicity, was now a refuge from the dangers and corruptions of the outside world, and it was not to be sullied by sordid sexual encounters. The well-known if rather odd provision of the Code Napoléon that allowed a wife to divorce her husband if he forced her to share a house with his mistress is a testimony to the new inviolability of the conjugal nest.

Another aspect of the decline of the patriarchal household which contributed to the decline of sexual relationships between masters and servants was the emergence of new standards of privacy and decorum. By the late eighteenth century the standards of decorum that we now associate with the nineteenth century were beginning to emerge. The major bodily functions were now considered shameful and performed in isolation; private (let alone public) nakedness was avoided as much as possible. In the sixteenth century Christophe de Bordeaux had his Chambrière à tout faire say of her mistress, “I have often seen her nude, but it’s all one between her and me.” But in the 1780s Marie Antoinette wore a shift when bathing in front of her servants. As the body was hidden from the gaze of servants, so too was the heart. The newly affectionate nuclear family wanted to enjoy its domestic happiness in private, and did its best to conceal its emotional life from the prying eyes of servants. In the seventeenth century Mme. de Cornuel made her maid her confidante in her love affairs, and even shared her lover with her. But in the 1780s Princess Louise de Conde lived in terror that her servants would discover her quite innocent epistolary flirtation. By the eve of the Revolution servants had lost their old role as witnesses and accomplices in the most intimate details of their masters’ lives. This not only reduced the moments of intimate contact which had earlier provided occasions for sexual relationships between master and servants, but also divested domestics of that aura of sexuality which had made them so attractive to their masters.

The result of all of these changes within the patriarchal household was a massive transformation of the sexual habits of the elite. Upper-class men increasingly refrained from seducing lower-class women, and when they did, they increasingly chose as their sexual partners women outside the home—street peddlers, couturières, prostitutes—rather than their servants. The déclarations, analyzed in table 26, indicate that the proportion of women seduced by their social superiors decreased over the course of the eighteenth century, as did the proportion of cases involving master-servant relationships, while a growing proportion of women chose a sexual partner from their own social class. Of the female servants who made declarations in the years 1727–49, 32.8 percent claimed their master or some other gentleman as the author of their pregnancies, while in the period from 1750–89 only 26.9 percent did so. (see table 14). And of the upper class men cited in the déclarations,
41.9 percent chose servants as their sexual partners in the first part of the eighteenth century, while only 34.5 percent did so in the years from 1750 to 1789.

These patterns are visible in other samples of déclarations as well. In De­pauw's from Nantes the proportion of illegitimacies resulting from sexual relationships between master and servant shows a dramatic drop, plunging from 36 percent in 1737–46 to 9 percent in 1780–87. Historians have long noticed these trends but they have consistently misinterpreted them. Edward Shorter used Depauw's findings as part of his evidence for a revolution in the sexual mores of lower-class women. He argued that this revolution had its roots in a rejection of traditional values fueled by industrialization and urbanization, was characterized by a search for personal fulfillment through sexual pleasure, and had as its ultimate result the rising rate of illegitimacy in the nineteenth century. Ever since then these statistics have been interpreted as showing a rejection by lower-class women of the sexual advances of upper-class men in favor of relationships with presumably younger and more attractive men of their own social class. But the controversy that grew out of Shorter's hypothesis of a sexual revolution has, I think, proven conclusively that the sexual attitudes of lower-class women did not change during the late eighteenth or indeed during most of the nineteenth century. Levels of illegitimacy seem to have been characterized by immense local variations that grew out of traditional courtship customs and persisted even through industrialization and urbanization. This persistence of traditional modes of behavior in new economic conditions seems to have caused the rise in illegitimacy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. And when the lower classes finally did discard their traditional modes of behavior, they apparently did so not in order to assume the individualism and hedonism Shorter postulated, but instead to adopt a middle-class family-centered domesticity. In the face of this evidence, it seems sensible to turn our attention to the other side of the equation, and to interpret the changing patterns of the déclarations as the result of a transformation of the sexual behavior of upper-class men rather
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than lower-class women. The changes that had revolutionized master-servant relationships within the household probably made women domestics less attractive sexually to their masters, and men of the upper classes increasingly sought partners for their illicit sexual activities outside the home. This is not to say that sexual relationships between masters and servants disappeared completely. Anne Martin-Fugier’s study of late-nineteenth-century Parisian bonnes shows that they were still common in that period. Indeed, sexual abuse remains one of the hazards of domestic service to this day, as reports of the sexual exploitation of so-called Tiajuana maids (illegal Mexican immigrants employed as domestic workers in southern California) attests. Nonetheless, the evidence of tables 24 and 25 suggests that in late-eighteenth-century France and probably in the early nineteenth century as well, sexual relationships persisted longest in the sorts of households where they had always been most common: the small households of petty rural landowners and urban artisans. But employers of servants among the urban elite increasingly sought alternative sexual outlets. One of these was the couturière, who in the last half of the eighteenth century made her first timid appearance on the sexual stage. The assistant in the shop of a dressmaker or purveyor of other aspects of feminine finery, she copied as well as she could the dress and manners of women of fashion, and this made her attractive to upper-class men—and to male servants who aped their masters’ tastes. In my sample of déclarations from Bordeaux, 1.5 percent of the seduced women were couturières, and of these 24 percent had upper-class lovers and another 47 percent had been made pregnant by male servants.

The ultimate beneficiary of the sexual reorientation of men of the upper classes was, however, the prostitute. Prostitution increased dramatically in the nineteenth century. Most of this increase had its roots in the changes that urbanization and industrialization brought to women’s work in the nineteenth century, changes that made more and more women depend on prostitution for survival. But the increased demand of gentlemen of the elite for the services of prostitutes also was a factor. Indeed, Alain Corbin argues in Les Filles de noce, his extremely perceptive study of prostitution in nineteenth-century France, that it was the growing demand from gentlemen of the elite that triggered the major change reshaping prostitution in the late nineteenth century: its transformation from the pattern inherited from the Old Regime of casual and part-time “amateur” and uncontrolled prostitution practiced by lower-class women for economic survival to a closed and organized profession that catered to the sexual fantasies of its increasingly middle-class clientele. By the 1880s, when this transformation was complete, the sexual reorientation of the male members of the French bourgeoisie was obvious: the focus of their illicit sexual lives had shifted from the household to the brothel. The monetization of servants’ work had therefore an ironic parallel in a monetization of sexual activity: just as masters now had to pay their servants for the labor they
had formerly expected as a duty, they now had to pay for the sexual services that had formerly been their "right."

For in the course of the nineteenth century the prostitute took over the sexual functions formerly performed by the female servant. It was the prostitute who now provided the sexual initiation of the young men of the elite, ceremoniously introduced to brothels in their mid-teens by doting uncles or their school fellows. In one nineteenth-century survey 47 percent of the male respondents said they had received their sexual initiation from a prostitute.\(^99\)

The prostitute now also provided the sexual outlet of the unmarried student or clerk. The *ménage* of a bourgeois bachelor and his *demimondaine* mistress is a fixture of nineteenth-century literature, as the novels of Huysmans and Alphonse Daudet attest.\(^100\) The prostitute also became in the nineteenth century the ancillary amour of the respectable married man, as visits to the brothel grew to be a standard part of "les dépenses de Monsieur" among the French bourgeoisie.\(^101\) And the prostitute even took over one final sexual role which had fallen to the servant: that of literary symbol of unbridled sexuality. The ultimate hedonist in nineteenth-century literature was not a servant: she was Zola's Nana. The transformation of relationships within the household in the last half of the eighteenth century had stripped servants of their aura of sexuality, and therefore they ceased to haunt their master's erotic fantasies.\(^102\) By the nineteenth century the traditional patriarchal household was gone, and with it the sexual tensions which had formerly bulked so large in the relationship between master and servant.