2022

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Publication Information

Devereux Herbeck, Mariah. (2022). "Lost in Adaptation:The Silencing of the French Female Concierge". *Women in French Studies, 30*, 54-66. https://doi.org/10.1353/wfs.2022.0005

LOST IN ADAPTATION: THE SILENCING OF THE FRENCH FEMALE CONCIERGE

Mariah Devereux Herbeck

As Jean-Louis Deaucourt explains in his comprehensive examination of the 19th-century Parisian concierge, paradox is inherent to the study of this ubiquitous working-class figure:

> Traiter des concierges, c'est aussi se heurter à un obstacle majeur que rencontre l'historien dès qu'il prétend ressusciter les 'classes infimes' dont parle Balzac : le silence, avec ici cette difficulté supplémentaire que s'ils se sont tus, on a surabondamment parlé d'eux. (9)

For as much as has been said about the concierge, as Deaucourt's evocation of these "insignificant" members of society suggests, the vast majority of this discourse has been overwhelmingly negative. Throughout the concierge's existence in the Parisian urban landscape, the figure has possessed dualistic qualities at best: "Réputé(e) bavard(e), connaissant les moindres horaires, les moindres disputes, les baisers sous le porche, le concierge qui sait tout, qui voit tout, mais qui ne dit rien a joué un rôle de surveillance sociale plus ou moins appuyé" (Richeux, Marchal interview). According to Caroline Strobbe, however, it is the female concierge who has long been "l'objet de critiques plus acerbes et virulentes" than that of her male counterpart:

> À la femme donc de rester dans la loge toute la journée et d'accomplir les nombreux devoirs de la fonction, ce qui contribue d'un point de vue numérique à en faire le principal réceptacle de la rancune, voire de la haine des locataires chez lesquels elle 'habite'. (137-38)

Even today, according to Hervé Marchal, the modern HLM (*habitation à loyer modéré*, or low rent housing building) *gardien-concierge* is at pains to distance him or herself from "*la* concierge," who continues to be perceived stereotypically as someone who "prendrait un réel plaisir à '*fouiner*' et à '*dénigrer*'" (Marchal's emphasis, 43).

Curiously, the paradoxical persona of the concierge can be attributed literally to her very position in society, where she lives and works. The French concierge's loge is most frequently located near the front door of the urban apartment building, thereby providing her first-hand knowledge of the comings and goings as she cleans the common spaces and delivers mail in the building. However, her propitious position for surveillance and observation also allows her to know and retell what others would prefer remain unknown. Fictional representations of the

female concierge frequently underscore her perceived negative attributes, above all with regard to her meddlesome discourse. Nineteenth-century authors depict her as a villain ("cette affreuse lady Macbeth de la rue" [*Le Cousin Pons*, "Comédie" VII 628]) or "venimeuse" and "hargneuse" (Sue 53). The trend continues into the twentieth century when one concierge's discourse is described as a "polka des chaises" during which she chooses residents or "victimes" of her gossip at random (Richaud 35). In the recent novel *Mémé dans les orties* (2015), the much-despised Mme Suarez is described as possessing "une langue de vipère" (Valognes 46). Often the meddling concierge is nothing more than a nuisance for main characters, a hurdle that stands between them and their goals. As such, while in many ways all-knowing and all-seeing, the female concierge is seldom privileged or respected and her voice is thus often missing or maligned in French fiction and history.

Georges Simenon's 1933 novel, *Les fiançailles de M. Hire*, provides a striking contrast to the ways in which the status, role and character of the female concierge are frequently depicted. Although she is neither a main character nor a heroine by any stretch of the imagination, what she sees and says is of import both to other characters in the novel and the plot itself. The novel opens with a scene in which she spies supposed evidence of a crime. Subsequently, as a result of her eye-witness account, detectives pursue the eponymous M. Hire as the primary suspect in the murder of a prostitute. Despite the fact that her testimony is erroneous (as we will explore here), narratively speaking, she plays a pivotal role in motivating the investigation of the title character. Simenon's novel has been adapted for the big screen twice—Duvivier's *Panique* (1946) and Patrice Leconte's *Monsieur Hire* (1989)—and, although the plots of the films maintain myriad aspects of the novel, both lack a clearly identifiable, speaking female concierge character. It goes without saying that a written text adapted for the big screen undergoes limitless transformations, resulting in the alteration or elimination of numerous elements of the original text. Notwithstanding, the elimination of Simenon's concierge's role in both films is noteworthy. As I will demonstrate, from page to screen, the concierge's role is dissected, disembodied, displaced, and all but erased entirely in Duvivier's and Leconte's films. After analyzing the concierge's fundamental role in Simenon's novel and contextualizing her unique narrative function in relation to fictional female concierge characters who precede her, I will examine how Duvivier's and Leconte's films all but eliminate the concierge's role both mimetically (at the level of the plot) and diegetically (at the level of the narration). In conclusion, I will reflect upon the significance of her silencing in the context of the two filmic adaptations.

Georges Simenon, the famed author of the popular "Jules Maigret" detective series who reportedly wrote sixty to eighty pages daily, penned 500 novels in his lifetime. *Les fiançailles de M. Hire* is what Simenon referred to as one of his *romans durs*, or his more serious novels (Mcintyre). While concierges figure more or less prominently in Simenon's other *romans durs* (e.g. *L'enterrement de Monsieur Bouvet*, *Les innocents*) as well as his Maigret series—"In Maigret novels, there is always a twitching net curtain behind which lurks an inquisitive

concierge" (Robbins)—*Les fiançailles de M. Hire* is unique in its privileging of her role from the outset. The novel opens with what she sees while delivering mail to M. Hire's apartment: "La concierge toussota avant de frapper, articula en regardant le catalogue de *La Belle Jardinière* qu'elle tenait à la main: —C'est une lettre pour vous, M. Hire" (7). What the concierge spies immediately thereafter in his apartment launches an investigation that will motivate the entire plot:

> […] un homme tendit la main, mais la concierge ne le vit pas, ou le vit mal, en tout cas, n'y prit garde parce que son regard fureteur s'était accroché à un autre objet : une serviette imbibée de sang dont le rouge sombre tranchait sur le froid du marbre. (7)

While Leonard Koos underlines the importance of blood as a "fundamental figure of the story" (206), I would argue that the incipit is equally unique for its privileging of a female concierge's voice and gaze as she discovers presumed evidence, as well as for the narrative role she plays: although not a narrator, the concierge is a character-based focalizer in the novel.[1]

Unlike Simenon's famous Maigret, the detectives in M. Hire's neighborhood lack skill and spend their days drinking at the local bar while waiting for leads: "L'inspecteur s'ennuyait. A cause du froid il avait bu, depuis le matin, neuf ou dix verres de rhum" (16). Given the detectives' lack of leads and state of inebriation, the female concierge's word may be as good as any. Notwithstanding, taking the concierge seriously represents a departure from the norm. The term "concierge" has long been synonymous with "uneducated gossip" and her voice has been scorned in the history of French literature for countless other reasons—the most surprising perhaps being that authors envied her position, according to Sharon Marcus. Marcus purports that the concierge's negative portrayal paradoxically stems from what was perceived as her *privileged* station at the heart of the urban landscape, a position coveted by contemporary authors. As Marcus points out, male authors shared commonalities with concierges since they too collected stories, crafting narratives based on observations of the ever-changing, industrializing French society. All the same, authors preferred to distance themselves from those employed in the apartment building:

> Writers did not explicitly acknowledge their resemblance to the [concierge], but their satirical portrayals of her can be read as defensive attempts to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable social climbing during a period of intense class mobility, as well as between their culturally endorsed interpretive activities and those of the [concierge], whose information gathering was denigrated as feminized prying and gossip. (Marcus 43)

Given the history of the concierge in French literature, Simenon's novel presents new narrative opportunities for the traditionally maligned character.

Self-assuredly, the concierge in M. Hire's building insists that the inspector trust her testimony as she strives for accuracy in her retelling of the events, seemingly confirming her narrative authority: "Attendez! Je voudrais être sûre… Elle grimaçait comme un médium en transes… Je jurerais que quand je lui ai

remis le catalogue il n'était pas blessé…" (11). The description of her deposition recalls the nineteenth-century stereotype of the psychic concierge. In his 1841 illustrated anthology, *Physiologie de la portière*, James Rousseau extols the visionary and clairvoyant powers that she wields: "On ne saurait croire quelle puissance occulte est attribuée à la portière; elle joue dans notre vie le rôle du destin" (63). Similar to Rousseau's concierge who possesses an occult power, M. Hire's concierge grimaces like "un médium en transes" (11), seemingly tapping into otherworldly knowledge in order to recall what occurred the night of the murder. She states that M. Hire was not injured but that he was wearing a bandage as an alibi for the bloodied towel that she spied in his apartment. Trusting her hypothesis and upon seeing the suspect return to the apartment building, the inspector rips the bandage off M. Hire's face only to reveal a very real gash on the suspect's face. Even with the blow to the concierge's hypothesis, the inspectors continue to pursue the title character.

Supernatural abilities are not to be confused with intelligence. A tertiary definition of "concierge," classified as "plaisant et péjoratif," in the *Trésor de la langue française*, describes the figure as "une personne sans finesse, sans éducation." Conversely, Simenon's novel underscores her acumen by describing her glasses, which age her but also provide "une certaine distinction" (69). The narrative voice further states that, when she wears them, the concierge has "une expression réfléchie" (75). The police question her again regarding M. Hire's whereabouts the night of the murder and, according to the narrative voice, her efforts at reflecting on what happened make her appear more intelligent: "cela l'affinait de réfléchir ainsi" (75).

Regardless of her seemingly intelligent answers, supposedly accurate recall and ostensibly psychic powers, the concierge is wrong. She is not a detective; in fact she is known only as "la concierge" (unlike other Simenon concierges who are named, e.g. Mme Jeanne in *L'enterrement de Monsieur Bouvet*). While M. Hire is a man of questionable morals who frequents prostitutes, was convicted for trafficking pornography, and whose "job" consists of a mail order scam, he did not commit the crime. The concierge never references M. Hire's Jewish background—a fact instead revealed during an inspector's interrogation of the suspect—but one can assume that anti-Semitic sentiments in 1930s France make him an easy target for the authorities and the community. While the police and neighborhood collectively pin the murder on him, the unsuspecting M. Hire continues enjoying his pastimes—namely, bowling and spying on Alice, the woman who lives across the courtyard from him. Over the course of the novel, he becomes obsessed and subsequently acquainted with the object of his voyeurism. Thanks to their conversations, he comes to believe that she will leave her boyfriend Emile (the actual murderer) and run away with him (hence the *fiançailles* of the novel's title). Unbeknownst to M. Hire, Alice uses him and his interest in her so that evidence (the victim's bloodied purse) can be planted in his apartment, thus helping Emile avoid suspicion.

After Alice stands him up at the train station, M. Hire returns to an angry mob outside his apartment building.[2] Fear pushes him to run to his refuge, his apartment, where he climbs out the window onto the roof in an attempt to escape

but falls to his death subsequent to a heart attack. A doctor pronounces his death the result of an "arrêt du cœur" (189), a cause perhaps both literal and figurative given that he has just been stood up by Alice. The concierge speaks for the final time on the last page of the novel when, after the doctor proclaims M. Hire's cause of death, she asks him about her own daughter's health: "Je me demande si ce n'est pas le croup et..." (190). Although ambiguity surrounds M. Hire's demise, the concierge expresses no remorse regarding the death of an innocent man she considered a criminal, and instead immediately turns her attention to her own family's needs.

The concierge's role in the novel remains equivocal. Mimetically, at the level of the plot, she is dead wrong about M. Hire. In fact, one could propose that she represents the epitome of the meddling concierge, whose interference is so heinous that it precipitates a man's death. In spite of her intelligent appearance and auspicious position in the building, she is a horrible detective and possibly anti-Semitic. Her accusation based on fear and intuition serves to jeopardize her character's potential for narrative authority. Nevertheless, one does not have to be accurate in order to wield authority. Although not a narrative agent, she is a character-based focalizer, which is a privileged status for a female concierge character in French literature. Right or wrong, she plays a role in the novel—from spying the bloodied towel to convincing the police officers to pursue M. Hire—and her voice returns throughout the novel from the first page to the last.

Julien Duvivier's *Panique* is far from a carbon copy of the novel. James Quandt describes Simenon's text as "little more than an armature for Duvivier." The dramatic title change, abandoning M. Hire's ironic "engagement" in favor of highlighting the fear that colors the fictional world, is but one of many alterations Duvivier made when adapting Simenon's novel into a post-war film noir. Similarly, Patrice Leconte's neo-noir 1989 *Monsieur Hire*, with its minimalist interpretation of the novel's title and plot, gives no false pretense of faithfully reproducing Simenon's novel: "Claiming to ignore the novel and ostensibly Duvivier's film, Leconte and [co-scriptwriter] Dewolf proceeded with their version of the Hire story" (Koos 213). Although neither filmmaker purports to reproduce Simenon's novel faithfully, enough similarities exist for multiple critics to analyze the significance of the divergences between the novel and the films. The concierge, her role in the novel, and her subsequent silencing in the two films, have, however, remained unexamined. Although Leonard Koos states that Duvivier's film pursues "fuller character development" (209) than found in Simenon's novel, he does not address the diminished concierge's role. Molly Haskell briefly mentions the concierge's presence in the novel when describing the community portrayed in the 1940s film—"Duvivier turns Simenon's petty-minded community of nosy concierges and gossiping tradespeople into a roaring lynch mob" (23)—but does not explore the absence of the "community of nosy concierges" (23) in the first film. Jean H. Duffy comments on Leconte's approach by which he "adapted his original source—Simenon's novella, *Les fiançailles de Monsieur Hire*—to fit [the] thematic priorities [of film noir]" (210) but does not touch on the silencing of the novel's concierge character as one of the modifications made in the name of film noir.

Film adaptations exist as their own art form. Consequently, one approach to adaptation suggests that what is "left out" in the move from page to screen is not of interest:

> Film reviewers today are often unconcerned as to whether a film adaption is "faithful" to its literary source, in the sense of attention to detail and inclusiveness. Rather than what's left out, more attention is cast on what is added; it is the additions, not the deletions to the source that are largely responsible for an adaptation's box-office and critical success. (Cartmell and Whelehan 73)

For myriad reasons, adaptations cut material from the original text. In addition to financial and practical concerns (i.e., the aforementioned "box-office success"), according to Susan Hayward, what is left out is often simply undesirable: "[A]daptations will cut sections of the novel that are deemed uncinematographic or of no interest to the viewers. In other words, there is always a motivation behind the choices made" (14). Aspects of the original written text are eliminated when they are deemed hard to portray on film or uninteresting to the viewer and, as a result, can be potentially detrimental to a film's financial and/or critical success.

What is the motivation (financial or otherwise) behind the elimination of Simenon's concierge? Who deemed the character unnecessary and/or "uncinematographic" in not one but two film adaptations of the novel and why? A response to such a line of inquiry is impossible to ascertain. Thus, the following analysis instead proposes to examine how both films fill the gap(s) left by her elimination as a means to understand her absence. As Thomas Leitch explains, gaps in film adaptations are significant:

> [T]hink of each adaptation not in terms of what it faithfully reproduces—what it selects, emphasizes, and transforms—but of what it leaves out. Instead of acting as if the power of a story lay in what it explicitly portrayed, we might explore further the 'gaps' [. . .] because 'whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins.' (18)

Furthermore, according to feminist film critic Annette Kuhn, examining what is absent in films, especially when it pertains to gender, is a fundamental aspect of feminist film studies:

> The concern then is [. . .] that of becoming sensitive to what often goes unnoticed, becomes naturalised, or is taken for granted. . . These matters are centered not only around presences—the explicit ways in which women are represented, the kinds of images, roles constructed by films—but also around absences—the ways in which women do not appear at all... The fundamental project of feminist film analysis can be said to centre on *making the invisible visible*. (My emphasis, 7)

In the vein of Leitch's and Kuhn's theories, and with the intent to render the "invisible visible" (and, in the case of Simenon's concierge, the silenced heard), the remaining analysis examines how Duvivier's and Leconte's films fill the

gap(s) created by the concierge's absence on both a diegetic and mimetic level and reflects upon the significance of her silencing.

Panique opens with a male policeman forcing a homeless man from a bench. The film then cuts to M. Hire (Michel Simon) hopping off a trolley in front of an inn. In this opening, there is no concierge, no visit to an apartment, no blood spied furtively. From the outset, Duvivier's film underscores male presence and activity, an observation supported, albeit subtly, by an establishing shot approximately fifteen minutes into the film during which a business sign is seen that states "Fraternité." In the context of the film, the sign suggests that men, not women, concierges or otherwise, will dominate and motivate the film's action.[3]

In the following scene, Monsieur Breteuil, the innkeeper,[4] calls M. Hire into his office to speak to an inspector investigating the latter as a potential suspect in the murder of a woman found in an abandoned lot. Despite sharing similar societal functions, Monsieur Breteuil should not be interpreted as a masculinization of the novel's concierge character; quite to the contrary, he is a fond supporter of M. Hire, a resident who "pays on time." Later, the innkeeper attempts (albeit unsuccessfully) to dissuade a mob from entering M. Hire's room. The character most likely to play the concierge's role and to call for the investigation of M. Hire instead protects him from scrutiny.

Further deviating from the novel, Duvivier's M. Hire is not a meek man made up of "une matière douce et moelle" (Simenon 13). When Duvivier's M. Hire accepts to speak with the inspector, he asks the innkeeper to leave the office so that he may speak to the detective in private, demonstrating his clout. In contrast, Simenon's M. Hire is called to the police station where the police chief controls the conversation, including when he can speak: "Le commissaire pressa un timbre. M. Hire ouvrit la bouche, mais on lui fit signe de se taire" (114). Throughout the conversation, or more aptly, interrogation, the novel's M. Hire is forced repeatedly to defend himself, in particular with regard to the concierge's statement ("la concierge prétend que vous êtes rentré vers sept heures dix … [115]) as well as to explain the origins of his real name, Hirovitch (his father was a Russian Jew). On the contrary, Duvivier's M. Hire immediately announces his real name ("Désiré Alphonse Hirovitch") and responds to the detective's questions curtly, often with sarcasm or questions. When asked about his profession, he responds simply, "affaires." When asked to specify, he answers enigmatically: "Je vends de l'espoir comme les curés et des remèdes comme les docteurs, vous comprenez?" To which the inspector responds, "c'est moi qui interroge!" Duvivier's M. Hire is presumed all but innocent, as his dominance of the situation is made clear in the shot-reverse shot sequence in which M. Hire sits higher than his interlocutor, allowing him to look down at his inquisitor.

Whereas Simenon's novel opens with the focalization of the concierge and the inspectors question the concierge repeatedly before calling M. Hire down to the station, in Duvivier's film, the word "concierge" is not even uttered until approximately halfway into the film. Alice (Viviane Romance) tells her lover, Alfred (the murderer), how to find M. Hire's apartment so that he may plant evidence there. She states that the building lacks a concierge: "Pas de concierge." With these three words, she emphasizes the concierge's *absence* from both the

building and, by extension, from the film. The task of framing M. Hire is rendered less complicated for the characters in Duvivier's film—without the eyes and voice of a concierge to witness and question their actions, they can enter his room much more easily. For the adaptation, the three words underline the film's break with the novel, seemingly announcing the decision to eliminate entirely the female concierge and her integral role from the film. Regardless of whether Simenon's concierge character is right or wrong about the murderer, representation of a working-class female capable of instigating the investigation of the title character is eliminated.

Only one character in *Panique* seems to resemble a concierge: a woman who carries a mop on a flight of stairs. Shortly after the beginning of the film, she descends a staircase during two seconds of a longer shot of M. Hire returning to his room. Approximately fifteen minutes later, she is on screen for eight seconds when she climbs the stairs past Monsieur Hire who is spying on Alice through a window. Given her location and prop (a mop), she is likely part of the housekeeping staff in the hotel. Notwithstanding, her placement and limited representation are remarkably similar to that of the concierge in cinema as summarized by Raphaëlle Moine: "Films tend to place [the female concierge] between the street and the building, either at the entrance of her *loge*, on the staircase or in the hallway. In fact, films favour the functions of mediation and communication and thus often limit her role to one part of her duties and to a brief sequence" (148). The unnamed woman says nothing during the accumulated ten seconds during which she scurries past the title character. Silenced and unacknowledged, she is the closest a character comes to representing a female concierge in *Panique*.

Aforementioned traits of Simenon's concierge surface in one other character in the film. Alice and Alfred visit a carnival fortune-teller, "Mme Blanche," a character who could conceivably take up aspects of the novel's seemingly psychic concierge. However, Mme Blanche's psychic abilities are demeaned by M. Hire who insists that Alice instead seek guidance from "un homme sérieux, un de mes amis, le docteur Varga." When Alice pays the "friend" a visit, Dr. Varga is in fact M. Hire himself. While the novel bestows authority and hints of clairvoyance upon a female concierge, the film denigrates the film's one female psychic and confers any credible occult vision upon the main male character. Thus, aspects of Simenon's literary concierge are dissected and bestowed upon other characters, namely men: the police officer present in the opening scene, the innkeeper, and M. Hire as Docteur Varga, the clairvoyant. The one character who resembles a female concierge—the woman with the mop—remains silent. Thus, for all intents and purposes, Simenon's concierge has no role in Duvivier's film.

Suppressing her voice could simply be considered part and parcel of adapting a literary work for the big screen. That said, the absence of the concierge, when viewed in artistic and historical contexts, remains puzzling to say the least. In post-war French cinema, in general, women frequently play the role of the enemy. Ben McCann contextualizes the primary female character's portrayal in Duvivier's film specifically in terms of the post-war atmosphere that dominates the film:

> Alice's representation in barely concealed misogynistic terms is part of a wider post-war canvas that focused on the victimisation of men by manipulative women. This emphasis can be seen as a paranoid interpretation by men of their own predicament at the Liberation, which led to a scapegoating of women for war-time collaboration. (147)

According to the autobiography of Holocaust survivor Maurice Rajsfus, World War II concierges frequently worked with the Gestapo to reveal the whereabouts of Jewish residents: "Flic ou concierge. Un couple bien fait pour s'entendre… Bien entendu, il n'est pas question de dire que toutes les concierges ont été des adeptes de la collaboration" (162). The overwhelmingly negative perception of the role the concierge played in World War II, especially during the Vél d'Hiv round-up, is similarly underlined in fictional works such as Tatiana de Rosnay's 2006 novel *Elle s'appelait Sarah*: "J'avais lu beaucoup de choses sur le rôle des concierges pendant les arrestations. La plupart s'étaient pliées aux ordres de la police et certaines avaient même été plus loin, indiquant à la police où se cachaient certaines familles juives" (127). The general scapegoating of women in French film noir, when viewed in tandem with the historical accounts of collaborationist concierges, thus renders the concierge's absence in Duvivier's film conspicuous and in fact hard to explain.

Flash-forward to Patrice Leconte's 1989 neo-noir adaptation of Simenon's novel, *Monsieur Hire*, which opens with a detective's voice-over as he describes a murdered young woman and asks questions about her assailant. He is a far cry from the novel's clueless police officers who idly drink rum while waiting for leads or the detective who sits in his office waiting for M. Hire to arrive so that he may interrogate him. Instead, Leconte's detective is restored to the traditional role of intuitive observer with privileged access to the narration in the form of voiceover. Deviating further from the novel, the detective's dogged pursuit of the suspect is not motivated by the insistence of a worried concierge but instead by the detective's own unexplained personal motivation, which borders on obsession.

Monsieur Hire features five named and approximately ten unnamed characters. The only named female characters are the dead woman (Pierrette Bourgeois) and Alice. According to Jean H. Duffy's analysis of the film, in this pared-down neo-noir, Alice possesses "traces of three traditionally distinct and frequently opposing female *noir* types" (211). Alice experiences an evolution whereby she is first "the innocent victim of an unstable male predator" when Monsieur Hire spies on her from his apartment. Subsequently, in her role as Emile's partner, she plays the role of "the nurturing woman" in "helping him to conceal incriminating evidence" (212). Finally, by the end of the film, she is a "highly manipulative woman who lures innocent Hire into a trap" (212). Thus, instead of featuring a varied cast of female characters (or at least three), the film bestows upon Alice *all* the quintessential film noir female roles. Alice's appropriation of multiple roles could be seen as extending (if only symbolically) to that of the concierge of the novel because she is the only woman in the film who climbs the staircase to Monsieur Hire's apartment. The similarities between Alice and the concierge all but end here. Upon her first visit, Alice purposefully

spills a grocery bag of bright red tomatoes that she then provocatively picks up on hands and knees as Monsieur Hire watches her silently. While Simenon's concierge is the first character to visit M. Hire's apartment, and there spies a red, bloodied towel that sparks an investigation, in the case of Leconte's film, Alice spills blood-red tomatoes at his door in a seductive manner as if to suggest she is romantically interested in him.

Unlike in Duvivier's adaptation, the word "concierge" is never uttered in *Monsieur Hire*. The only character who may conceivably be a concierge is the mother of a girl with whom M. Hire interacts, and the only clue that she may be a concierge is that, in a medium-long shot, she holds a wooden handle of what appears to be a broom or a mop. Presumably, this woman is "la gardienne" listed in the credits of the film.[5] According to Moine, female concierges in French film are often identifiable thanks to props such as brooms: "Visually, she can be immediately identified by her body language (standing straight at the entrance of the building, hands on the hips or arms crossed) as well as by her iconic attributes (the broom and later on, the vacuum cleaner) and her clothes" (148). In *Monsieur Hire*, the presumed concierge's gaze falls on M. Hire but since the following shot is not a point of view shot, her focalization in the film is not of import. She is at most a marginal figure who neither talks nor determines what is seen in the film.

The concierge's disappearance from Leconte's film is perhaps not altogether surprising within the setting of the late twentieth century. In contrast to Duvivier's post-war *Panique*, Leconte's reinterpretation of the M. Hire story takes place when the profession is in decline. As concierges retire, fewer and fewer are replaced: "À partir de la Libération et jusqu'au début des années 1990, le nombre des concierges n'a fait que s'éroder dans le secteur résidentiel privé : il est passé à Paris de 60,000 en 1965 à 20,000 en 1992" (Stébé et Bronner 97). In the case of *Monsieur Hire*, the concierge's disappearance could be understood simply as a sign of the times. Artistically, one must wait another twenty years for the concierge character to be in vogue in novels (e.g. *L'élégance du hérisson*, Muriel Barbery, 2006) and films (e.g. *La cage dorée*, Ruben Alves, 2013).

As Duffy states, *Monsieur Hire* is "not a radically innovative film. It is not a landmark in the history of French cinema or of film noir" (223). That said, both Leconte's and Duvivier's films are of importance to the study of the female concierge for what they suggest about her role in visual art forms, such as film, and in particular within the noir genre. Should we choose to "bridge the gaps," as Leitch suggests and, as Kuhn encourages, "become sensitive to what often goes unnoticed," we could posit that Duvivier and Leconte follow in the footsteps of the nineteenth-century authors mentioned by Marcus who chose to eliminate or belittle the meddling, unattractive concierge and her questionable contributions to narrative authority. In films that emphasize "fraternité" (*Panique*) and bestow almost omniscient-like narrative authority upon a detective character (*Monsieur Hire*), the "uncinematographic" female concierge has no place.

Amy Lawrence describes the woman's voice in cinema, in general, as disruptive to "the dominant order": "The language she speaks is an affront to male authority and middle-class decorum: her very ability to make sounds is fraught with obstacles: and, in the final instance, the story she tells threatens to undermine

the patriarchal order" (32). In both Duvivier's and Leconte's films, the female concierge from Simenon's novel is barely recognizable and completely silenced; her meddlesome discourse no longer poses a threat to Monsieur Hire, or by extension, to middle-class patriarchal order. Narratively speaking, however, the dissection of and distribution of aspects of her role represent the silencing of yet another "troubling" female voice. Deborah Walker-Morrison's assessment of the role of women in French film noir can also sum up the central role of Simenon's concierge in the film adaptations of his novel: "When one 'looks for the [concierge]'… [she] more or less vanishes" (27).

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Notes

[1] Female concierges are rarely narrative agents of their stories: "Although … the male concierge in André Dahl's *Voyage autour de ma loge* (1924) and Pierre Lunère's concierge / psychic (who happens to share the author's name and professions) in *Dans la loge de l'ange gardien* (2014) are the primary narrative agents of their respective novels, such narratological privilege is rare for the fictional male concierge character and practically unheard of for a female concierge" (Devereux Herbeck 81).

[2] According to James Quandt, the novel was inspired by Simenon's "memory of witnessing a group of surly inebriates turn on a man they accused of being a German spy and chase the innocent onto a rooftop."

[3] "Fraternité" reappears later on the building of another business, "Lavoir de la fraternité." The repetition of "fraternité" contrasts with another large print ad for women's wrestling, "Luttes féminines." The subtle placement of the large print words may imply that men in Duvivier's film work together, while women are associated with conflict ("lutte") and spectacle.

[4] Leonard Koos refers to Monsieur Breteuil of Duvivier's film as the "hotel owner" (210) and Quandt refers to the building in which M. Hire resides as the "hotel".

[5] A minor character in Simenon's novel is the concierge's daughter. Both films retain some form of this character. In *Panique*, M. Hire offers her an apple, and her mother calls her back upstairs. In *Monsieur Hire*, the title character plays a game with a girl who is later seen with the presumed *gardienne*. In both films, M. Hire interacts with this minor character but not with a concierge.

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