



5: KILL

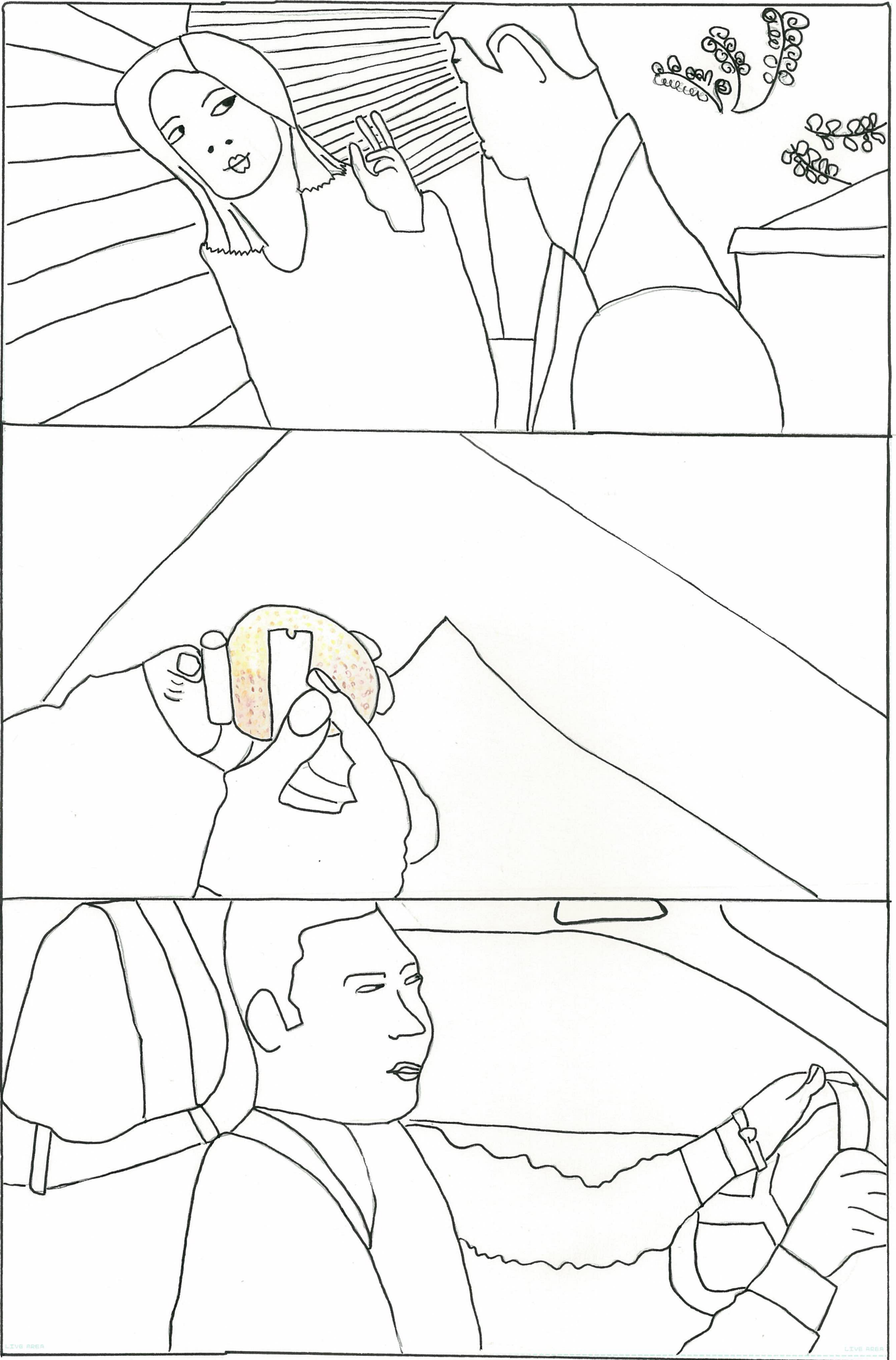
Who can blame slaves for being cunning?  
They are constantly compelled to resort to  
it. It is the only weapon of the weak and  
oppressed against the strength of their  
tyrants.

-- Harriet Ann Jacobs,  
*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

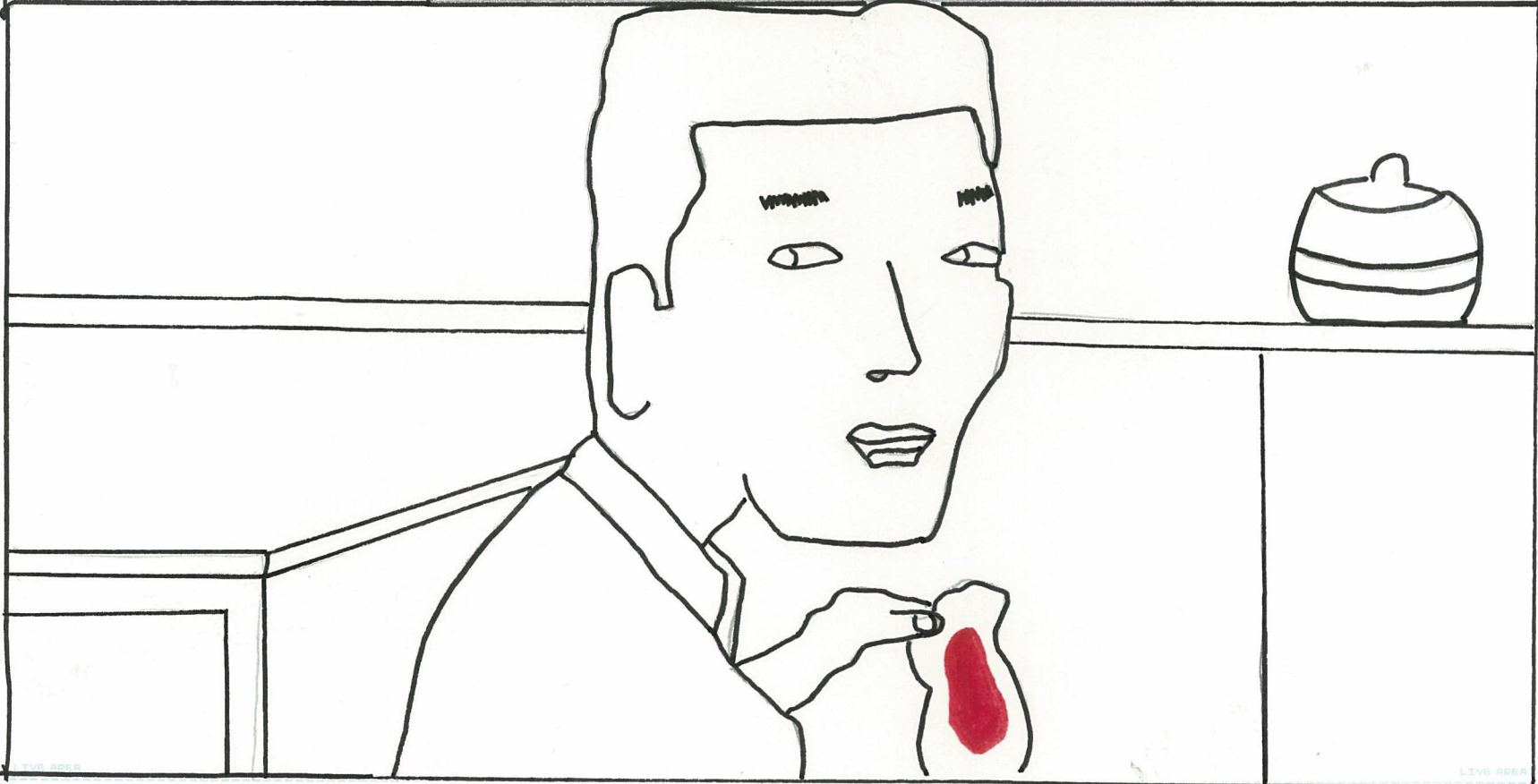
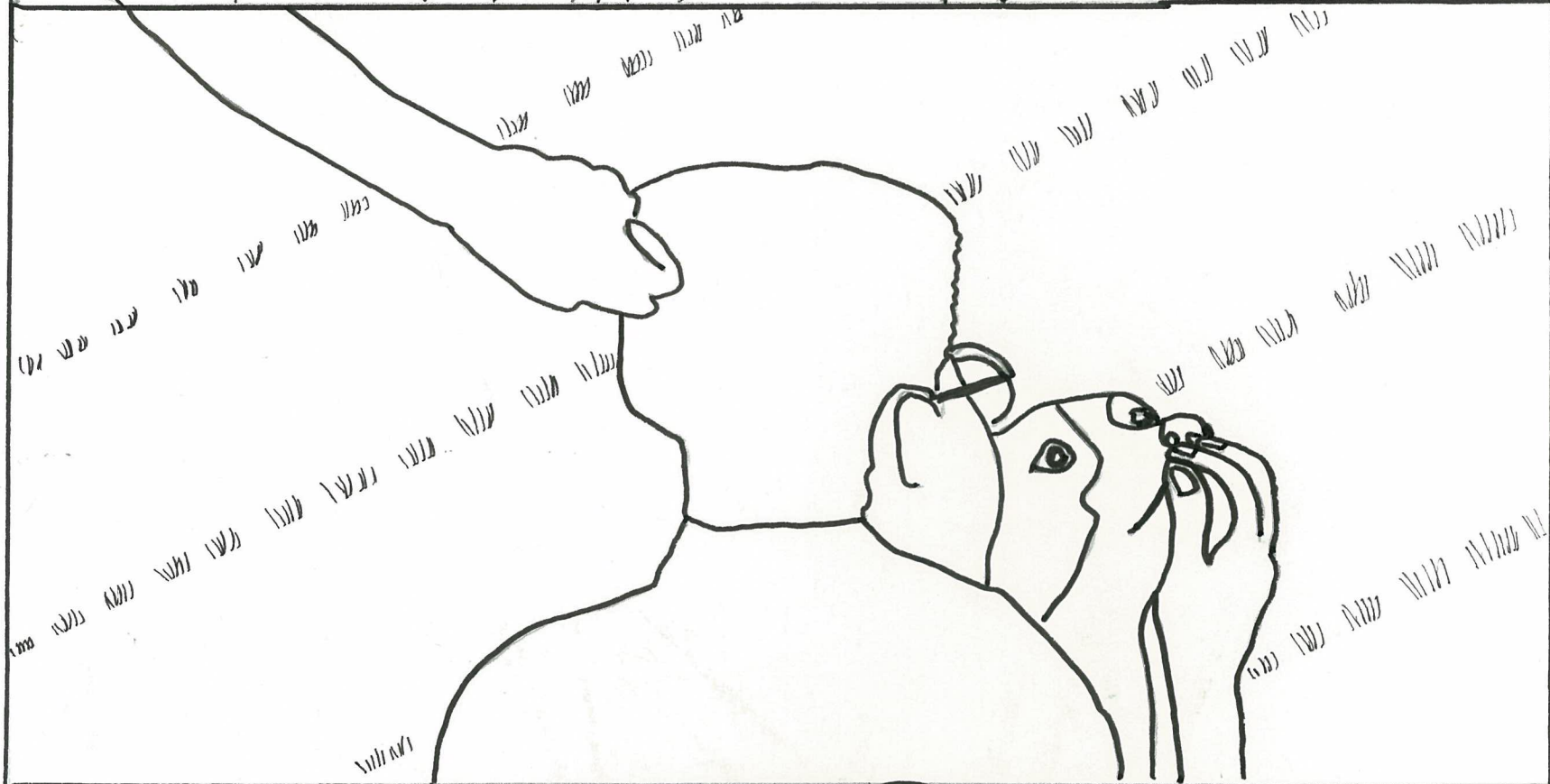














## REMEMBER SCHOLAR JUDITH ROLLINS?

The mistress-servant relationship is one of the more private labor arrangements existing. It takes place within private households between fairly isolated individuals.



A sense of isolation surrounds the job and the relationship: there are no co-workers or co-managers on the spot to support, reinforce, compete with or guide behavior.

The job situation is typically one of a single employer dealing with a single employee.



BOTH MISTRESS AND SERVANT BEHAVE ACCORDING TO A CODE OF BEHAVIOR EMERGING FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE CULTURES.

WITH THESE INTRODUCTORY REMARKS IN MIND, LET US TURN TO OUR FIRST EXAMPLE OF DOMESTICS GONE MENTAL.

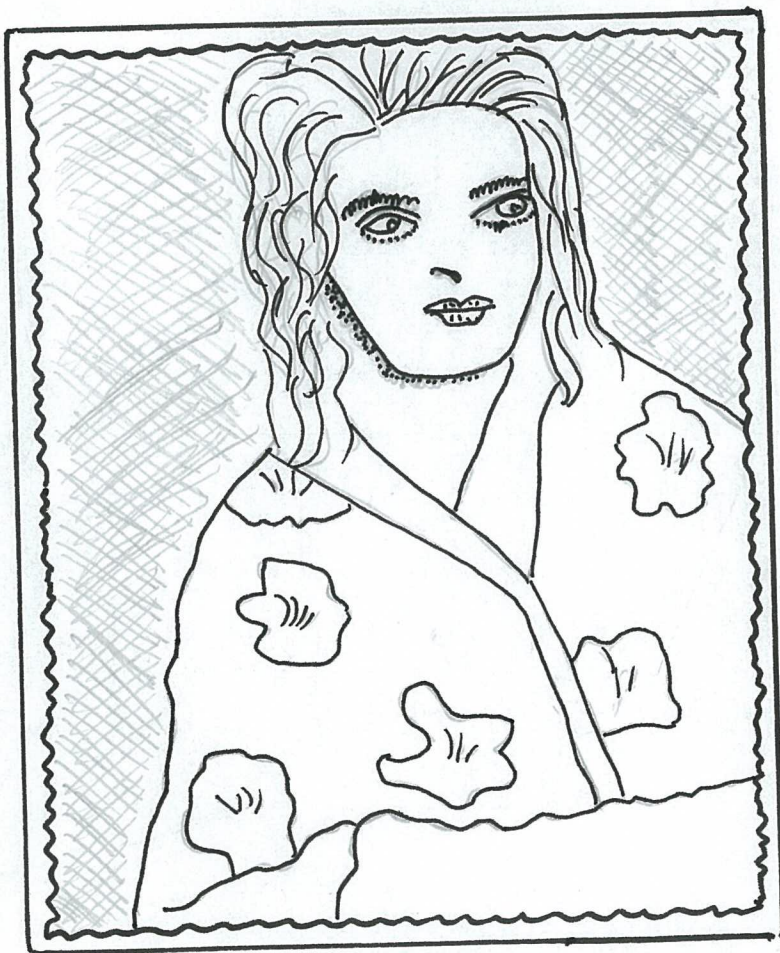
THE KOREAN MOVIE "PARASITE" (2019) BY DIRECTOR BONG JOON-HO HAS GAINED QUITE A LOT OF TRACTION WITH ITS TREATMENT OF THAT VERY SUBJECT.

TO RECAP, A FAMILY LIVING LIKE RATS IN A SUBTERRANEAN CRAMPED APARTMENT IN SEOUL CONCOCT A PLAN WHEREBY THEY ALL END UP BEING HIRED SEPARATELY BY A WEALTHY FAMILY WHO DO NOT KNOW THAT THEIR NEW EMPLOYEES ARE ALL RELATED. WHEN THEY LOSE CONTROL OF THE LIE, ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE. THE MOVIE HAS A COUPLE OF BLOOD BATHS.





BEFORE



AFTER





IT TURNS OUT THAT THE DIRECTOR WAS INSPIRED BY THE REAL-LIFE STORY OF THE PAPIN SISTERS.

THAT PAPIN TABLOID STORY, OF TWO SISTERS WHO WORKED AS MAIDS FOR A COUPLE IN LE MANS, FRANCE, AND MURDERED THEIR MISTRESS AND HER DAUGHTER, HAS INSPIRED MANY A RETELLING.

## EXHIBIT A

TWO SISTERS, CHRISTINE AND LÉA, ARE CONVICTED OF MURDER IN 1933. THE MOTIVE? THE TRIAL NEVER REALLY MADE THAT CLEAR. PERHAPS THE MORE DERANGED SISTER OF THE TWO, CHRISTINE, LOST HER MIND AND DECIDED, IN A FIT OF RAGE, THAT SHE REALLY HATED HER MISTRESS. THE MURDER WAS EXTREMELY BRUTAL, INVOLVING KITCHEN KNIVES AND A HAMMER. BOTH SISTERS WERE IMPRISONED, ONE DIED FROM A HUNGER STRIKE, THE OTHER LIVED INTO OLD AGE.

THE SISTERS HAD HAD MISERABLE CHILDHOODS, ABANDONED BY THEIR MOTHER, MISTREATED BY THEIR FATHER.



Jean Genet  
Les Bonnes

Jean Genet

Les Bonnes

folio

folio





## EXHIBIT B

FRENCH PLAYWRIGHT JEAN GENET WRITES "THE MAIDS" (1947). MEANT MORE AS A CRITIQUE OF THE BOURGEOISIE AND ITS HYPOCRITICAL MODE OF BEHAVIOR, RATHER THAN A DENUNCIATION OF THE OPPRESSION OF THE "UNDERCLASS" BY THE UPPER CLASSES, IT STILL GARNERS A LOT OF ATTENTION TODAY.

SOME FEMINIST CRITICS HAVE THEORIZED THAT THE THEME OF "DOUBLING"-OF EACH OTHER BUT ALSO OF THEIR MISTRESS WHOM THEY MIMIC IN THEIR GAMES- CONFIRMS THAT IN PATRIARCHY WOMEN CAN ONLY BE POOR REFLECTIONS OR MIRROR IMAGES OF AN IDEA/IDEAL OF FEMININITY AS DEFINED BY MEN.

THE FACT THAT THE DOUBLING GAME DETERIORATES INTO MADNESS AND VIOLENCE ALIGNS GENET'S PLAY WITH A SORT OF CRITIQUE OF THE RIGID PARAMETERS PLACED AROUND WOMEN.





THE SISTERS ARE ALSO PATHOLOGICAL BECAUSE THEY DESIRE EACH OTHER, A DESIRE THAT THEY MUST REPRESS BECAUSE OF THE TABOO AGAINST INCEST.

ACCORDING TO LITERARY CRITIC LARA COX, FEMALE KILLERS...



... are made to occupy the somewhat less glamorous role of disempowered "monsters."

## EXHIBIT C

THE CRIME NOVEL *A JUDGMENT IN STONE* BY RUTH RENDELL (1977), ADAPTED TO THE SCREEN BY CLAUDE CHABROL (1995) IN WHICH A MAID MURDERS THE FAMILY FOR WHOM SHE WORKS WITH THE HELP OF ANOTHER FEMALE PSYCHOPATH, NOTABLY THE TOWN'S POSTMISTRESS.

IN THIS VERSION OF THE MURDERING MAID, IT IS HER DESIRE TO HIDE HER ILLITERACY THAT CAUSES DEEP PSYCHOSIS.





Sandrine Bonnaire and Isabelle Huppert  
in "La Cérémonie"

ANOTHER NOTORIOUS PATHOLOGICAL MAID IS MRS. DANVERS WHO SETS HER MASTER'S MANSION ABLAZE IN THE NOVEL AND THE FILM "REBECCA."

FILM THEORIST TANIA MODLESKI ATTRIBUTES MRS. DANVERS' PATHOLOGY TO AN OVER-ATTACHMENT TO THE NOW DEAD FIRST WIFE/MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE, WHO REPRESENTED SOME KIND OF ORIGINAL FEMININE/FEMALE IDEAL, AS OPPOSED TO THE MUCH LESS INTERESTING SECOND WIFE. HENCE THE "DOUBLING" IN THIS CASE ALSO INTRODUCES ANOTHER TYPE OF SEXUAL DESIRE THAT IS PROSCRIBED AND PATHOLOGIZED, NOTABLY HOMOSEXUAL DESIRE.

FOR MODLESKI, HITCHCOCK'S FILM DRAWS ATTENTION TO...



... the perils and ambivalences involved in the very processes of identification.

... There is a danger that the other with whom one identifies may usurp and annihilate the personality - a danger which is especially keen when the other is a woman...





MUCH OF POP CULTURE'S FASCINATION WITH MURDEROUS MAIDS REVOLVES AROUND THE ANXIETY FELT BY THE MASTERS (OR THE BOURGEOISIE) NOT SO MUCH ABOUT THEIR DOMESTIC EMPLOYEES' POTENTIAL NEUROSES, BUT ABOUT SOCIETAL TABOOS LIKE INCEST, FEMALE "EXCESS" (EXCESSIVE SEXUALITY) AND HOMOSEXUALITY.

DOMESTICS ARE CONVENIENT CHARACTERS TO EMBODY THOSE ANXIETIES.



WITH THE MORE RECENT EXAMPLE OF THE FRENCH NOVEL *CHANSON DOUCE* (2016, ENGLISH TITLE, *THE PERFECT NANNY*) BY LEÏLA SLIMANI, ANOTHER ANXIETY IS AT PLAY, ONE THAT IS MORE TROUBLING.

WHY? BECAUSE THE NOVEL, WHICH WON FRANCE'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS LITERARY PRIZE, THE *PRIX GONCOURT*, PAINTS THE PORTRAIT OF THE WORST NANNY ONE COULD EVER IMAGINE, NAMELY ONE WHO ENDS UP KILLING THE CHILDREN IN HER CARE.

BASED AGAIN ON A REAL EVENT, THE NOVEL (AND THE FILM, WITH POPULAR ACTRESS KARIN VIARD PLAYING WITH COLD DETACHMENT THE NANNY LOSING HER GRIP ON REALITY) REGURGITATES OLD BOURGEOIS TROPES ABOUT DERANGED LOWER-CLASS FEMALE SERVANTS.



THIS REPETITION OF OLD TROPES OF THE SCARY SERVANT PERPETUATES DISTRUST OF THE EMPLOYEE BY THE EMPLOYER WHILE DOING NOTHING TO HUMANIZE THE CAREGIVER. IF CHILDREN ARE HARMED AT HOME, ULTIMATELY, THE PARENTS MIGHT ALSO INTERROGATE THEIR OWN BLINDNESS AND DEAFNESS?

MEANWHILE.

WHY NOT, FOR A CHANGE, WRITE A NOVEL ABOUT A GREAT NANNY, A NANNY WHO IS SMART, DEVOTED AND STRONG, AND DEVELOPS AN INTRIGUING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILDREN THAT SHE CARES FOR, WHILE THE BOURGEOIS PARENTS ARE TOO BUSY AND NARCISSISTIC TO PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO WHAT IS GOING ON AT HOME?



