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## The Representations of Women in Nineteenth Century French Fiction

Discuss the representations of women in La Curee (by Zola), Germinie Lacerteux (by Edmond et Jules de Goncourt), La Dame aux Camelias (n. bthe play, not the novel by Dumas fils) and Le Spleen de Paris (by Baudelaire).

This research investigates in depth therepresentations of women in such French fiction as La Curée by Emile Zola, Germinie Lacerteux by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, La Dame aux Camélias by AlexanderDumas the younger and Le Spleen de Paris by Charles Baudelaire. The receivedfindings suggest that in these literary works the writers maintain the ideas ofrealism and naturalism in regard to female characters, rejecting the romanticportrayal of females and stressing on their freedom and sexuality. Somefindings of the dissertation are consistent with the earlier studies of Frenchliterature in the nineteenth century, while other results provide newinterpretations of a female issue.

1 Statement of the problem

The representations of women in Frenchliterature of the nineteenth century reflect the writers’ attempts to providetheir own vision on females in the era of Libertinage, praising theirprinciples of liberty, but implicitly criticising their sexuality and weakness. Contrary to Romantic writers, such authors as Emile Zola, Charles Baudelaire, AlexanderDumas the younger and the Goncourt brothers adhere to the ideas of realism andnaturalism in their portrayals of women, proving that only the observation of differentsides of a person’s essence can provide understanding of the reasons behindfemale degradation and failure. In this regard, these writers represent theirfemale characters through social, cultural and familial contexts.

2 Introduction

In France the nineteenthcentury was characterised by various social changes that gave rise to theprinciples of libertinage and equality, but also negatively influenced the mostsubordinate group – French females. The pleasure became the principal featureof French style of life. In view of these changes French fiction of thenineteenth century was divided into four literary movements: naturalism, symbolism, romanticism and realism. Although the currents differed from eachother, they stressed on the importance of a person and the rejection of purereason and social standards. Following these movements, French writers started todiscuss a female issue through their female characters, uncovering such negativesocial phenomena as female subjugation, divorce, prostitution, psychologicaldisorders of women and depopulation. In particular, they revealed that, despitefemales’ attempts to achieve equality with males, society continued to impose certainsocial norms and stereotypes on women, depriving them of the possibility tofollow their own paths. A woman who worked as a prostitute or a servant wasusually regarded as a subject, a person of secondary importance in patriarchalFrench world, but it was this female who was often portrayed innineteenth-century fiction.

The aim of thisdissertation is to discuss the representations of females in La Curée by EmileZola, Germinie Lacerteux by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, La Dame aux Caméliasby Alexander Dumas the younger and Le Spleen de Paris by Charles Baudelaire. The paper is divided into several chapters. Chapter 1 provides a statement ofthe problem that reveals the core of the analysis. Chapter 2 reflects a generaloverview of the issue, observing the social and historical contexts of theperiod when the discussed works are written. Chapter 3 evaluates some criticalanalyses of nineteenth-century French fiction. Chapter 4 demonstrates thetheoretical research methods that are utilised in the research. Chapter 5investigates in depth the representations of women in each novel, focusing onboth principal and secondary female characters. Chapter 6 summarises thereceived results, and Chapter 7 points at the limitations of the dissertation andproposes some suggestions for further research of Zola, Edmond and Jules deGoncourt, Dumas the younger, and Baudelaire.

3 Review of the literature

Nineteenth-century French literatureattracts attentions of various critics who provide rather contradictoryviewpoints on literary works of French writers. This can be explained by thefact that in the period of the French Revolution and Libertinage, Frenchliterature began to move away from the traditional portrayals of characters to themore realistic representations. As Desmarais puts it, all the writers of the19 th century are more or less romantic; but none of them could bedescribed as traditional. Introducing innovative elements intotheir literary works, these French writers made attempts to either uncoverdifferent sides of reality or to contrast the nineteenth century with the past. For instance, analysing the literary legacy of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, ElisabethBadinter cites words of Juliette Adam who claims that the Goncourts so lovedand frequented eighteenth-century women that they despised the women of thenineteenth, consigning them to wickedness, debauchery or imbecility.

Charles Baudelaire’scollection of prose texts La Spleen de Paris was published only after his deathand the critics paid no attention to this literary masterpiece; only at thebeginning of the twentieth century Baudelaire’s work was acknowledged as one ofthe best prose fiction. In particular, Robert Kopp draws a parallel between LaSpleen de Paris and Baudelaire’s poetry, pointing at the fact that these prosetexts reflect the themes raised in the majority of Baudelaire’s poems. Emile Zola’s novel La Curée was exposed to censure since its publication, butat the end of the twentieth century it was praised by modern critics as asplendid literary work of naturalism. Contrary to Zola and Baudelaire, the playLa Dame aux Camélias by Dumas the younger was accepted by French audience ofthe nineteenth century with delight, and its principal character Marguerite becamethe prototype of many female characters in films, plays and musicals. One ofthe most famous opera produced on Dumas’ play was Verdi’s La Traviata.

4 Research methodology

The research in this dissertation isconducted, utilising a social constructionist approach and a feminist approach. Applying to these methods, the paper analyses the representations of women fromdifferent perspectives and interpretations. The social constructionist approachuncovers the impact of society on the formation of women and its attitudetowards those females who reject the existing stereotypes. Thus, this method iscrucial for investigating the portrayal of women in French fiction. Anotherappropriate method is the feminist approach that is aimed at observing genderissues in literature, criticising patriarchal society that specifically createsthe differences between men and women and imposes specific roles on women. Asfemales have been usually conformed to certain stereotypes in literature, thefeminist approach makes an attempt to destroy these stereotypicalrepresentations. In this regard, both approaches analyse the portrayal of femalesin nineteenth-century French fiction through social contexts.

5 Discussion

5. 1. Naturalism of La Curée by EmileZola

Emile Zola belongs tothose writers who in their literary work present the characters that areclosely connected with their environment. In the novel La Curée Zola reflectsfemale characters through social contexts, demonstrating the impact of theenvironment on them. Thus, the writer is more interested in the temperaments ofhis women rather than in other aspects of their personalities. Zola considersthat female temperaments can explain their emotions and actions, theirrelations with other people and their attitudes to the world, in which theylive. In La Curée female characters are greatly influenced by the events of theSecond Empire and the changes that Baron Haussmann introduced in Paris. As a resultof these changes, Zola’s women are in search of pleasure and money. After thedeath of Aristide Rougon’s wife, the character is left with two children anddecides to marry a wealthy female Renée Beraud de Chatel, transforming his nameinto Aristide Saccard.

Their marriageprovides Aristide with financial security, but this marriage of conveniencesproves to be unfortunate for the principal female character that is finallyleft without means of subsistence and a family. Renée looses her childrenduring pregnancy and becomes engaged in various sexual intercourses. At firstshe initiates the relations with Saccard’s son, until he marries anotherwealthy but very ill woman Louise who dies soon after the marriage. Thus, Zolacreates two male characters – a father and a son – who marry women withdisabilities for money, because they do not have another way to enrichthemselves. But Zola doesn’t consider that these men are responsible for females’failure. Renée is portrayed as a woman who constantly suffers from neuroticattacks and devotes her life to balls, talks and sexual pleasures. Renéeappears to be a product of French patriarchal society that puts a woman into asubordinate position, destroying her self and making her suffer from ownweakness.

According to thefeminist approach, such subjugation results in negative consequences for awoman, because she starts to substitute one extreme for another. Inother words, a woman turns from excessive subordination to uncontrollablefreedom. Before her marriage to Aristide, Renée gets pregnant and is abandonedby one of her lovers, and Aristide appears to be a rescue for woman’sreputation. This female character is portrayed as a simple sensualist who findsreal pleasure in social life and sexual relations. When she meets Aristide’sson Maxime, a young teenager who greatly resembles her, she becomes his lover. Althoughthe writer implicitly criticises Renée, he constantly points at the fact thatit is French society that shapes this female who finally destroys not onlyherself, but also people around her. Renée is against Maxime’s marriage toLouise, considering her to be a weak and ugly girl. She is not able to realisethe power of money for such people as Maxime and Aristide; she is used to spendmuch money and she regards it only as means that help her exist in Frenchsociety. Renée is emotionally involved into the affairs with Maxime and sheutilises this young person for her own pleasures. This female is amazed bythese forbidden relations and doesn’t want to think about the consequences ofher action.

In the characterof Renée, the writer embodies the essence of Parisian life; similar to Paris, Renée is obsessed with luxury and pleasures, but behind this gorgeousappearance there are degradation and suffering. This female character reflectsreality of the nineteenth century when people run to certain extremes and werefurther destroyed by these extremes. Renée’s wrong ideals are a result of herlack of appropriate education and social permissiveness that deprive a youngwoman of creating a normal family with loving husband and children. By the endof the narration Renée is completely destroyed by her obsession with pleasure; but Zola observes her weakness and foolishness through the social pressure thatshe is not able to withstand. As Zola puts it, she had slid down a slipperyslope, yet she had not remained passive the whole way down. Desire had awakenedin her too late to combat it, after the fall had become ineluctable.

The same regardsthe secondary female character of the novel – Angèle, the first wife ofAristide. She is also portrayed as a weak, passive and unhealthy female who isnot able to endure life in Paris. Contrary to Renée, Angèle is not involvedeither in social life of Paris or in sexual relations because of her povertyand poor health, but her submissiveness is also formed by society, in which shelives. As Zola claims, To be poor in Paris is to be poor twice over. Angèleaccepted misery with the passivity of the anemic woman she was. She spent herdays either in the kitchen or lying on the floor playing with her daughter. Angèle is really devoted to her husband and children and refuses to be isolatedfrom young Clotilde when Aristide decides to move to Paris. However, Paris, thecity of changes in nineteenth century France, requires changes in individualsas well. Those people who fail to adjust to these changes are destroyed, thatis just the case with Angèle.

Aristide’s firstwife appears too kind and weak, the features that do not allow her to survivein the cruel and degrading Parisian world; however, such characters as MmeSidonie, a sister of Aristide, is aware of the role of money in Paris. Zolaportrays this secondary character as a person who eliminates her emotions andinstead applies to pure reason. When Sidonie visits a dying Angèle, shecompletely ignores any morality or decency in her talk with Aristide: She wasa good woman, his sister continued, speaking as though Angèle were alreadydead. You can find women who are wealthier. Zola criticises suchfemale scorn, implicitly demonstrating that Paris destroys the souls of womenand makes them act, like machines, without any emotions and feelings. Thisrealistic portrayal reflects the negative impact of certain social norms onindividuals. Sidonie is used to interfere into the lives of other people anddecide their fates. Therefore, in his representations of women Emile Zolastresses on the fact that power and wealth deprave females in France, butsimultaneously he contrasts these mean women with such good females as Angèleand Céleste. As the writer describes, Céleste’s devotion pleased Renée all themore because she knew her to be honest and thrifty, a woman without a lover anduntouched by vice.

5. 2. Misogyny in Germinie Lacerteux

Similar to Zola, Edmondand Jules de Goncourt in their literary work Germinie Lacerteux create thefemale characters that reflect the ideals of femininity existed in Frenchsociety in the nineteenth century. Although their women reveal certain liberty, they are too preoccupied with their own sexuality. Through their femalecharacters the Goncourt brothers reflect their misogynistic vision of femaleswho are not able to suppress their sexual desires and who become the slaves oftheir natural instincts. Throughout the narration Edmond and Jules de Goncourtexpress their longing for eighteenth-century females with their refinedappearances, exquisite manners and flirtation; they long for the period ofstrong aesthetic values and cultivated morality. Thus, their female charactersare usually portrayed as depraved females who end tragically because of theirweakness, poor education and lack of intelligence.

GerminieLacerteux, the principal female character, is a woman who is sexually abused inearly years and who is not able to marry when she comes to Paris. However, hermotherly instincts are too powerful and she starts to look after a niece andanother child Jupillon. But when Jupillon is transformed into a man, Germinieexperiences a sudden passion towards him, and it is this passion that destroysher reputation and turns into poverty, because the love had been for theJupillon young person only the satisfaction of a certain curiosity of the evil, seeking in the knowledge and in the possession of a woman the right and thepleasure of scorning it. When Jupillon abandons Germinie, shestarts drinking and is involved in numerous sexual intercourses that bring herto death, similar to Dumas’ Marguerite and Zola’s Renée. In this regard, Edmondand Jules de Goncourt uncover female passion that can gradually destroy a womanand depreciate her, criticising Germinie’s uncontrollable sexual desires andinstead maintaining the ideas of female virginity. As Jupillon tells Germinieduring one of their talks, you appear yourself well still, you are not myheart, you are not my life, you are only my pleasure.

Contrary toother French writers of the nineteenth century that mainly portray females fromthe upper-class society, the principal female characters of Edmond and Jules deGoncourt belong to the middle-class. Such shift from aristocratic females topoor females reflects great realism of the narration, eliminating romanticismthat is usually utilised in French novels. The Goncourts’ naturalism explainsthe reasons of female sexuality and their further failure. According to the writers, it is really difficult for such a woman as Germinie to suppress her naturalinstincts and adhere to social morality that rejects any powerful emotions. Such females make attempts to change their conditions of living, but finallythey appear in the similar conditions as at the initial stage of life. TheGoncourts present this viewpoint not only on the example of Germinie, but alsoon the example of a secondary character Miss de Varandeuil, an old kindspinster who hires Germinie as a servant to her and who becomes fully attachedto a young girl. As Edmond and Jules de Goncourt put it, This old womanisolated and forgotten by death, only at the end of her life, trailing heraffections of tomb in tomb, had found her last friend in her servant.

However, suchclose relations between a master and a servant are not unusual fornineteenth-century French literature that usually reflects female servants asdevoted and hardworking people who gradually occupy the principal place in thenarration. Despite their different social positions, Germinie and Miss deVarandeuil finish their lives in loneliness, with the only difference thatGerminie doesn’t suppress her sexual desires, while Miss de Varandeuil isolatesherself from the rest of the world, as well as from her powerful emotions. According to the social constructionist approach, a woman is created bysociety, in which she lives; thus, her sexual behaviour is also formed by theenvironment. In this regard, the differences in sexual desires ofGerminie and Miss de Varandeuil can be explained by their different backgroundsand upbringing. Miss de Varandeuil is the representative of a brokenaristocratic family that loses its fortune during the French Revolution, whileGerminie comes from a middle-class society that adheres to easier manners.

5. 3. Realism of La Dame aux Camélias

The play of Dumas theyounger La Dame aux Camélias portrays a beautiful prostitute Marguerite Gautierwho breaks the relations with her lover, Armand Duval, to improve hisreputation and soon dies of her incurable illness. In this female character thewriter embodies his lover Marie Duplessis who died at the age of twenty-three. Dumaspresents Marguerite as a romantic woman, despite the fact that her real lifewas not so romanticised. At the end of the play Marguerite claims that she haslived for love and she doesn’t hesitate to die for love. By applying to suchtragic end, Dumas uncovers the social system of his times, when a woman fromthe middle-class couldn’t be engaged in the relations with a male of the upper-class, or otherwise she could destroy his life and reputation.

On the exampleof this character Dumas the younger reflects woman’s degradation, but Marguerite’sdeath as a result of illness evokes sympathy towards her. Marguerite saves notonly Armand, but also his sister who at last receives an opportunity to occupyan appropriate position in upper-class society. In this regard, a life of onefemale is sacrificed for the sake of another woman, although Marguerite ispresented as an unusual female with many virtues. She is not only beautiful, but is also intelligent and noble. In the play Dumas the younger portraysMarguerite as a person with a slender figure, white face and dark hair. She hasamazingly bright eyes, full lips and unusually white teeth. She possesses agood taste in her dresses, in music, in art and behaves in a noble way. But, above all, this courtesan has a big heart, expressing sympathy andunderstanding towards other people. As Dumas describes her, There was a kindof candour in this woman. You could see she was still in the virginity of vice. No wonder that Armand falls in love with Marguerite from the first sight; however, this popular French prostitute has never loved before she meetsArmand. As Armand tells the truth about his feelings towards her, Margueritelaughs at him, but he gradually persuades her in his love, and she returns hisaffection. When Armand speaks with his father, he says, Perhaps I am in thewrong, but I can only be happy as long as I am the lover of this woman.

However, whenMarguerite finds out that she is ill, she realises that her past has deprivedher of future. Although noble people in nineteenth-century France were usuallyengaged in sexual relations with prostitutes, and these relations were regardedas natural, the situation was different in regard to love. The relations basedon love were fully prohibited by upper-class society, and an aristocratcouldn’t love or marry a prostitute, because such action would destroy him. Marguerite has no choice, but to destroy the relations with her lover in themost complex period of her life. Dumas the younger reveals that Frencharistocratic society creates certain social norms; those persons who try tooppose to them, are excluded from society. Thus, Marguerite appears to be avictim of these social norms, as she is engaged in illicit sexual relationswith men. As these relations are concealed, they are ignored by society, butwhen they are exposed, they destroy the reputation of a person who belongs tothe upper-class. Marguerite realises that her bad reputation threatens not onlyArmand, but his family as well, and she decides to break her relations with theonly person she truly loves.

Such actiondemonstrates that Marguerite is better than females of the upper-class, becauseshe understands her responsibility. Marguerite creates her own existence, but, as the writer puts it, Do not let us despise the woman who is neither mother, sister, maid, nor wife. Although this female character has neverbelieved in love and has utilised males for her own benefits, the relationswith Armand change her. Marguerite doesn’t want to destroy Armand’s life, as shehas destroyed her own. As she tells him, your family would cast you off if youwere to live with a woman like me. Let us be friends, good friends, but nomore. Despite the fact that Marguerite takes this seriousdecision because of her sincere love to Armand, Dumas the youngersimultaneously shows that she adheres to the demands of French society. Marguerite is used to act independently, but in this particular case shedecides to reveal her subjection to society. In this regard, the writer provesthat the principles of Libertinage that were established in France in theeighteenth century were attributed only to males, while females were punishedfor any display of independence.

In the case ofMarguerite, this female is first punished for her illegal sexual intercoursesand further – for her love to Armand, the representative of the upper-class. Throughouther life Marguerite has collided with many obstacles and has successfullyovercome them. But she fails to defend her love against social prejudices. Contrasting Marguerite with females of the upper-class, Dumas the younguncovers the degradation of French society that rejects emotions and insteadadheres to the failed morality. When Marguerite abandons Armand without anyexplanation, he constantly humiliates her during their meetings. As Margueritefeels that her illness progresses, she comes to Armand one more time and she can’tsuppress her desires. But Marguerite understands that she has to leave Armandwho is unaware of true reasons behind her escape. As a result, Armand destroysMarguerite during the ball by publicly giving money to her. After suchhumiliation Marguerite looses her friends and clients and dies in poverty andloneliness. In prologue Marguerite’s lover receives her letter and realises thetrue virtues of this beautiful and intelligent female. As Dumas claims, Margueritewas a pretty woman; but though the life of such women makes sensation enough, their death makes very little.

In real lifeMarie Duplessie greatly influenced Dumas the younger, but it is he whoabandoned her, realising that he didn’t have enough money to support this richcourtesan. However, as Dumas became more involved into the life of Frenchsociety, he began to observe the social attitude towards courtesans and decidedto reflect this attitude in his play La Dame aux Camélias. Through the characterof Marguerite the writer reveals his own opinion of a female. He portrays abeautiful and intelligent woman, providing her with many virtues and love, butsimultaneously depriving her of the possibility to marry a person she lovesbecause of her bad reputation. When after their prolonged parting Armand asksMarguerite, whether she is happy, she answers: Have I the face of a happywoman, Armand? Do not mock my sorrow, you, who know better than any one whatits cause and its depth are. Thus, Dumas the younger implicitlydemonstrates that ideal love relations can be established only between a virginand a man with sexual experience.

At the same timeDumas regards close relations between opposite sexes as a battle. AlthoughMarguerite has a kind heart and sincerely falls in love with Armand, she is nota virgin and is not able to fully belong to one man, with all her heart, bodyand soul. On the one hand, Dumas the younger reveals that a prostitute may be abetter woman than a virgin, but, on the other hand, he rises againstprostitution that transforms women into the subjects and deprives them of thepossibility to become good mothers and wives. According to the socialconstructionist approach, it was natural for a man of the nineteenth century toestablish sexual relations with different women, but women had to adhere tostrict social norms. In the play Dumas shows that the marriage with aprostitute is equated with a crime, but Marguerite redeems her reputation. Butsuch prostitutes, with a heart, were infrequent in Dumas’ time, although someof his secondary female characters are also beautiful and intelligent. Forinstance, he introduces M de N. into his narration, a prostitute and anacquaintance of Marguerite. As the writer characterises her, the man who wasthe lover of such a woman might well be as proud as M. de N., and she wasbeautiful enough to inspire a passion. When Armand utilises herto revenge Marguerite, she reveals an unusual intelligence when she claims, you love Marguerite, and you want to have revenge upon her by becoming mylover. You don’t deceive a woman like me, my dear friend.

5. 4. Ambiguity of Le Spleen deParis by Baudelaire

Similar to Emile Zola, Baudelaire reveals his female characters through social environment; this isespecially obvious in his collection of prose texts Le Spleen de Paris, wherehe shows an impact of Paris on women. When Baudelaire arrived to Paris, he hadto live in various parts of the city, observing the life of women in theseplaces. In the text The Despair of the Old Woman, the writer reflects hissympathy to an aged female who experiences great despair, as she sees a childand wants to smile at him, but the child is afraid of this old woman who doesn’thave hair and teeth. This lonely woman is horrified by such attitude and shecries: Ah! For us, unhappy female old women, the age passed to like, even withthe innocent ones, and we make horror with the little children that we want tolike.

Baudelaireregards such women as victims of life who symbolise loneliness and misery. Applyingto such horror portrayals, the poet implicitly criticises those women who areobsessed with their material well-being, ignoring the reality and the beauty ofthe world around them. In Le Spleen de Paris Baudelaire draws a parallelbetween one woman and another, as well as between a man and a woman. In thetext The Wild Woman and the Small Mistress the poet presents a dialogue betweentwo females, uncovering their views on life. Though both persons belong to onesex, they are different, as the wild woman describes a mistress, you whichrest only on fabrics as soft as your skin, which eat only cooked meat, and forwhich a skilful servant takes care to cut out the pieces. Suchportrayal reveals the poet’s double vision, his attempts to evaluate varioussides of people’s consciousness.

But Baudelaireis especially sympathetic to widows and old females who are forgotten andneglected by society. In his text Widows the poet provides a detailed portrayalof widows in the parks, claiming that it is easy to recognize them, because each widow reflects loneliness, pain and isolation. Baudelaireintensifies their misery by contrasting these lonely and poor widows withwealthy and idle people who walk in the park: It is always somethinginteresting that this reflection of the joy of the rich person at the retina ofpoor. These reflections show the ability of Baudelaire forobservations and his understanding of a female essence. In his text BeautifulDorothée the poet describes a beautiful Dorothée strong and proud like thesun who walks along the street, bare-footed, and smiles. Perhaps, Baudelaire ponders, she goes to a young officer to talk with him, that’s whyshe is so delighted. Such is the image that the girl creates for the rest ofthe world, but no one knows that she gathers each piaster to redeem her littlesister. In another prose poem Which is the true one Baudelaire reveals thestory of a beautiful and unusual girl Bénédicta who is portrayed by the poet asideal. But as he claims, this miraculous girl was too beautiful to live a longtime and she dies very young. Baudelaire realises that femalebeauty and youth are temporary, and many good women die at an early age.

In the textPortraits of Mistresses the poet describes four males who talk about theirmistresses, implicitly uncovering their inability to accept femaleindependence. According to the feminist approach, female characters are usuallyportrayed from two different perspectives: either as chaste wives, if theyadhere to the standards of patriarchal society, or as mistresses, if theyreject social rules and stereotypes. However, in La Spleen deParis Baudelaire reveals that such attitude is also aggravated by class andeconomic differences.

6 Conclusions

The dissertation has analysed therepresentations of women in La Curée by Zola, Germinie Lacerteux by Edmond and Julesde Goncourt, La Dame aux Camélias by Dumas and Le Spleen de Paris byBaudelaire. In these works the portrayal of females reflects complex socialstereotypes and norms existed in French society. In the play La Dame aux CaméliasDumas the younger reveals that French aristocracy was engaged in sexualrelations with courtesans, but, as these relations became a threat to theirreputation, they destroyed any intercourse with their lovers. On the example ofthe principal female character – the prostitute Marguerite Gautier – the writerdemonstrates that a woman of a low social position with a reputation of aprostitute has no chances for better future, even if she possesses many virtuesand beauty. Although Marguerite sincerely falls in love with Armand Duval, sherealises that their relations destroy not only Armand, but his family as well. Suffering from an incurable illness, Marguerite nevertheless decides to abandonher lover for his sake. Thus, Dumas the younger proves that independent andintelligent females collide with many restrictions and stereotypes inpatriarchal world. The libertine ideas that were proclaimed throughout Francein the eighteenth century were mainly maintained by males, while womencontinued to occupy inferior position to men. Such female oppression wasaggravated by social biases of the upper-class towards people of themiddle-class, the biases that were mainly based on economical differencesbetween two classes.

In GerminieLacerteux Edmond and Jules de Goncourt provide a misogynistic vision onfemales, trying to prove that women are too preoccupied with sexuality andsocial position. Similar to Dumas’ Marguerite, the Goncourts’ principal femalecharacter also belongs to the middle-class society and who is destroyed by herpassion to a young male. Following the principles of naturalism, the Goncourtsobserve a female from biological and social perspectives. Emile Zola goesfurther; in his novel La Curée the writer reveals that social environmentshapes