

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The Ladies' Paradise, a classic novel written by the French writer Émile Zola in 1883, explores the socio-economic aspects of French history during the late 19th century. The beginning and heyday of the department store become a new commercial tool that marked rapid social and economic change, fueled by capitalism and consumerism (Williams, 1982:2-3). In this context, *Le Bon Marché*, founded by Aristide Boucicaut in the 1840s in Paris, became the world's inaugural department store, thereby pioneering a reformed retail model. Zola characterized the department store as a “*new religion*” that displaced the role of the church, with women seeking identity through consumption (McBride, 1978:664). This business development not only revolutionized small stores under the same roof but also redefined the role of society, marking a cultural shift towards modern consumption.

Behind this massive transformation, it is a shift in traditional values that have begun to fade and are being replaced by economic demands and accelerated lifestyles, the result is of a society bound to uninterrupted consumption. This dependency signals that consumption is no longer a need or a desire, but it also shapes new behaviors. It is supported by the observations done by a sociologist, George Simmel, that individuals can find their identity through consumption in modern society (Simmel, 1900:509). The belongings are not purchased by the need, but it symbolizes who and what they are. This analysis will examine in depth how

The Ladies' Paradise gives rise to symbolic consumption and the dynamics of a highly consumptive modern society. It analyzes the complex ways in which Zola demonstrates the department store as an essential site. The object material, symbolic values, and the forces of social identity are interwoven while also uncovering the broader cultural and economic implications of consumption as a characteristic of modern life.

The concept of consumerism, those who possess a significant amount of wealth that is held in high regard within the community (Veblen, 1899:29). It asserts that an individual is judged by what he possesses. Baudrillard, in his book *The Consumer Society* (1998), later, expanded Veblen's idea that the object of consumption is no longer the basic needs of the individual, but the center of power of social structures.

Baudrillard argues the possession of goods has shifted from symbols to instruments of social expression, defining relationships and empowering societal positions by framing material objects as symbols of social position. Veblen and Baudrillard's complementary idea has revealed the fundamental role of consumerism influences the social structure of modern society. With this perspective, modern consumption becomes more than just an economic activity, but its dominant function in creating the structure of society, the complexity of power, and the meaning in ownership that continues to evolve. Baudrillard adds his idea from other figures to complete his concept of consumerism as follow.

Baudliard incorporates the insights of his other predecessor, James Duesenberry from *Income, saving, and the theory of consumer behavior*. It explains how Duesberry's view opposes two aspects of social consumption: firstly, other individuals do not influence people's consumption behaviour, and secondly, consumption relationships do not change over time (Duesberry, 1949:01),. Duesenberry's opposition to these two things is aligned with Baudrillard's perspective that contemporary consumption is driven by forming identities that are shaped by the influence of others, rendering consumption a more intricate phenomenon. Consequently, Duesenberry serves as a foundation for Baudrillard to challenge the logic of consumption and the consumptive society. Based on this framework, the researcher needs to do analysis on Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* focusing on how the complex relationship between goods, status, and social structure showing the significance of symbolic consumption.

The dynamics of consumerism have become the center of attention of researcher, especially studies on the formation of modern societies formed by consumption. Although many study Baudliard's theory to analyze socio-economic phenomena, studies for literary studies are still minimal and have not been explored in depth. This research comes to fill this gap. Recent research related to the classic novel *The Ladies' Paradise* (Nelson, 2020) has focused on the gendered behaviour of class classification caused by the advent of modern industry, Nelson's research presents a valuable opportunity for further analysis of symbolic consumption at the dawn of the modern industry. Kolsenik (2020) also conducted research on Zola's book *The Ladies' Paradise*, which focused on the representation of capitalism

associated with Zola's novel. The aforementioned gap in research focus provided an opportunity for researcher to focus on symbolic consumption using Baudrillard's theory (1998). Recent research on *The Ladies' Paradise* was conducted by Alsahli et al. (2021), but the focus of this research was on the impact of architecture in building the narrative of the story. This provides a gap for researcher to deepen the analysis of the consumerist society. Remus (2020) also conducted a research with a similar theme about the consumptive society but in a different location and a different era from Emily Remus's book *A Shoppers' Paradise*. However, there are still gaps and opportunities for researcher to analyse the consumerist society in the early modern industry reflected in the classic novel *The Ladies' Paradise*.

From previous research by Dalimu et al. (2020) examined a society trapped in a world of digital simulation and the impact of symbolic consumption with which people prefer a simulated world full of pleasure and wealth to the original reality that is increasingly marginalized. The findings reveal how these simulations shape individual experiences and remodel social and economic structures. Fitriani's (2021) research is pertinent to Baudrillard's theory on the representation of modern advertising as objects and signs that exert influence on the audience. The focus of this research is semiotic analysis, a field that has not yet been explored about *The Ladies' Paradise* using Baudrillard's theory of the formation of identity through symbolic consumption.

Another study by Scoot et al. (2024) found that, in line with modern consumerist behaviour, the focus is on cultural intermediaries of sustainable consumption. Another study from Attarzadeh et al. (2022) is related to Baudrillard

who explored the effects of ‘simulation simulacra’ in hyperreality, but in this study there is no sign of examining symbolic consumption which is the main thing in this study.

In a further study, Maddison (2024) examines how Zola employs the portrayal of a collective to elucidate the psychological consequences of consumption on women. Maddison concentrates on department stores as a domain of individual identity inextricably linked with consumption. Maddison's research elucidates the role of gender in influencing extensive consumerist behavior. Meanwhile Agani and Lukmantoro (2022) studied the views of female characters by Simulacra. This study shows a close relationship between Baudlliard's theory and how larger social forces shape reality and simulation.

On the other hand there is the latest research by Albert (2021) *La Vie à crédit. La consommation des classes populaires à Paris (années 1880–1920)* which focuses on the working class in Paris in the 19th century in the role of consumerism and there is De Smeta (2023) –*Towards a bourgeois public sphere of consumption: the language of consumption as found in auction advertisements in late eighteenth-century Paris (1760–1778)* which focuses on research on bourgeois class consumption in the 18th century. In addressing this gap, the researcher seeks to illuminate the complex relationship in literature and socio-culture. Though, the object material of this research is a classic novel, it will be challenging to uncover that the shifting of modern society forms a consumer society. It will show how the importance of symbols identified in early modern era.

Considering the problem of this study, the researcher relies on Baudrillard's ideas which show that possessions not only function as symbols of power but also secure social validation, creating a new cycle where individual identity becomes subject to collective symbolism that makes individuals dependent on external validation. Baudrillard's ideas show that possessions not only function as symbols of power but also to secure social validation, creating a new cycle where individual identity becomes subject to collective symbolism that makes individuals dependent on external validation. This research raises a critical question: If material possessions measure identity, does this consumerism diminish authenticity? This friction highlights a cultural paradox, as the obsession with social recognition can erode the unique value of the individual, turning social identity into a reflection of wealth. This research seeks to deepen the understanding of symbolic consumption in its early days through Zola's novel and drawing on Baudrillard's theory.

B. Delimitation of the Study

1. Time scope and historical context: The research focuses on the socio-economic context in France at the end of the 19th century. The capitalist system emerged during this time, marked by the rise of large shopping centers. In the late 19th century marked a fundamental shift in consumer culture, where buying goods became a symbol of social identity (Trentmann, 2006:07).
2. Characters analyses: The research is limited to the behavior of the characters in the novel, which is specific to Mouret as a businessman who applies the entrepreneurial system of capitalism, and the research will focus on Mouret's female customers, who trapped in endless consumption. Therefore, the analysis

will cover only some of the novel's characters but only those relevant to the consumptive phenomenon in late 19th century France.

3. This research will focus on using Jean Baudrillard's consumer society theory as the main framework to understand the purchase of items not only for necessity but also to build social power identity.

C. Problems of the Study

1. How are consumer society and symbolic consumption reflected in *The Ladies' Paradise*?
2. Why does consumer society and symbolic consumption emerge in *The Ladies' Paradise*?

D. Purposes of the Study

1. Identifying consumer society and symbolic consumption in *The Ladies' Paradise* during the early modern industrial society.
2. Analyzing the emergence consumer society and symbolic consumption in *The Ladies' Paradise*.

E. Research Significance

Theoretically, this research contributes and enhances the understanding of the academic discourse between literature and socio-economic reality, mainly how the narratives of classic literature can serve as a lens to analyze the historical and cultural context of consumerism and symbolic consumption. In addition, this research can also contribute to the fields of literary studies, socio-economics, and consumerism.

Practically, this study is expected to reflect academics, business people, and marketing who are interested in the history of the development of consumer behavior and business marketing strategies. It is also important to the class of Classics in which insights and values are a lot to elevate the awareness of people behaviors.

F. Definition of Operational Term

This research study presents operational definitions, which are descriptions of the components in the study. The definitions are presented to provide information related to the research title.

1. Consumer Society: a societal phenomenon characterized by a rise in consumption
2. Symbolic Consumption : the act of acquiring objects for reasons that extend beyond mere utility, such that the objects in question serve to affirm one's identity and social status
3. Émile Zola: Émile Édouard Charles Antoine Zola was a classic French novelist, journalist, and playwright.
4. The Ladies' Paradise: Zola's eleventh novel, which was originally titled *Au Bonheur des Dames* and published in 1883.

