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Research Article

# Architectural References within Émile Zola's Novel, *The Ladies' Paradise*

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**ABSTRACT**

The depiction of space in literature is crucial to every story as it guides the reader's imagination regarding the story's location and the characters' surroundings. This paper studies the relationship between architecture, interiors, and literary spaces by using a methodology that draws on architectural literary analysis, a methodology that uses literature as a medium to define and analyze architectural spaces and cues. Specifically, it investigates the connections between architectural and spatial references and their influences on societal concerns in literature – the literary space within *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883), a novel by Émile Zola (1840-1902). The retail space portrayed within the novel dominates the narrative. Thus, the architectural spaces are described to support the storyline. These spatial cues indicate a specific overall theme, namely capitalism – an important issue to discuss within architectural discourse. Zola reveals a new perspective on the social and architectural impacts on society under capitalism through the public interior space of Ladies' Paradise. The research also indicates the correlation between architecture, public space, and retailing culture through the birth of the "department store," thus forever altering society's ideology on retail culture. Although the novel is categorized as fictitious, the representation of 19th-century retailing culture, women's role within society, and the significance of architecture are shown to be realistic to that time. In conclusion, this paper reveals the dialogue between architecture, societal gender issues, and the evolvement of retail culture through the medium of literature and derives lessons from this dialogue.

**Keywords:** Architecture and literature, capitalism, Émile Zola, literary space, *The Ladies' Paradise*

## Introduction

Novelists often create a physical environment for the main characters by constructing a scene, an ambiance, and a literary space for the reader to imagine and sometimes almost feel and smell the characters' surroundings. In addition, they argue that literature and architecture are correlated: the former represents a fictional or nonfictional city, a building, or an interior space through the form of words; the latter represents these spaces physically (Grafe et al., 2006). While one cannot often translate writings into physical architectural forms, it is possible to translate architecture into literature. Furthermore, one of the fascinating aspects of literature is that it allows readers to revisit and, in a sense, reminisce about a certain time or place. It also allows readers to imagine fictional places that the reader has never experienced before, which is perhaps its strongest feature. According to Havik (2006), the reflection of the environment within literature allows readers to analyze and conceptualize the experience of places. That is, literature serves as a channel to humanize a space or a place; by situating people along with their stories and fictitious or non-fictitious histories, it allows the reader to experience and empathize with the space described. However, rather than describing all the features of a building, which might be overwhelming, the novelist makes the space more relatable to the reader by incorporating the human element into architectural descriptions.

This paper explores the connections between architecture and interiors, and between social and economic issues through literary fiction. The main objective is to investigate spatial references and their influences on societal concerns within Émile Zola's 1883 novel, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*The Ladies' Paradise*). Zola (1840-1902) was a Parisian novelist, poet, dramatist, and essayist, and active member of the literary world, who contributed to literature and literary theory, which shaped many of his literary works.

Zola, being the founder and pioneer of naturalism, with his literature of analysis based on solid documents and scientific observation, documents everyday life in the city of Paris in the 19$^{th}$ century with objectivity and avoids slipping into idealism (Çağlar & Tuna Ultav, 2004). Spatial problems are important for Zola, who is aware that people's daily life practices have a spatial dimension. Zola, therefore, presents the reader with a spatial-temporal picture of the elements of daily life by transforming problems into spatial relations. Zola's literary practice is based on a realistic view of the relationship between the individual and society within the framework of modernization in Paris at a time when the bourgeoisie was growing. Zola captured the theme of transformation

during the modernization of urban life in Paris and injected his dynamism by attributing mythical and epic qualities to the city (Knapp, 1980). According to Berg (1992), Zola likens Paris to an ocean as Balzac does. Zola only conveys what he sees and reflects the apparent qualities of a particular place, whose metaphor arises from Paris itself. When Paris was being transformed by Haussmann between 1853 and 70 (Knapp, 1980), Zola aimed to expose the sterility of bourgeois life, people's reckless individualism, and the collapse of a dissolved society due to unorganized human energy (Nelson, 1986).

Zola's novel, *The Ladies' Paradise*, is the eleventh in his twenty-book The Rougon-Macquart Series: Natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire (1871-1893). Set in late 19th century Paris, it focuses on a large, successful department store in the heart of Paris called *Ladies' Paradise*. A romance develops within this store between the two main characters, Denise Baudu (employee) and Octave Mouret (store owner). According to Ramazani, Zola intended his novel to be "the poem of modern-day activity" (Ramazani, 2007, p. 126). The first department store in Paris was established to succeed the Parisian arcades, which were first built in the first half of the nineteenth century (Benjamin, 1982/2002). Zola expands his social perspective to embrace all socio-economic realities. "[…] Zola is known for conducting extensive on-site research, cutting and pasting newspaper articles, and making formal studies with eyewitness testimony and his own first-hand accounts, his novels are thus much more than the literary equivalent of a film documentary" (Kew, 2006, p. 6). He writes about new forms and capitalist private enterprise. Although the department store destroys the small old shops around it, it is seen as an inevitable product of progress and economic modernization (Çağlar & Tuna Ultav, 2004). According to Zola, the development in large-scale companies was an important factor that created the essence of late 19th century France. The development of trade at this level is seen as a phenomenon that causes changes in social values and traditions (Bozbeyoğlu, 2002). Zola questions the cross-section of modernity with the department stores that emerged with the development of the clothing industry at the intersection of modernity and (Çağlar & Tuna Ultav, 2004). Nelson argues that *The Ladies' Paradise* is an important text because it marks Zola's desire to broaden his social perspective and embrace the whole of socioeconomic reality through his description of the establishment of the first great Parisian department store (Nelson, 1986).

The depiction of space in literature is crucial to every story as it guides the reader's imagination of the story's location and [the] characters' surroundings. Glaser (2014)

defines literary interpretations of space as "architectural description in prose fiction as a privileged narrative space ... the unfolding of architecture, and its capacity to create powerful thematic resonances" (p. 11). The retail space, *Ladies' Paradise,* portrayed within the novel dominates the narrative; descriptions of its architectural spaces support the storyline. Émile Zola creates an almost divine version of a retail store, thereby establishing a utopian architectural adaptation of the regular retail space that was popular at that time. While utopia can be described simply as the perfect form of a scenario or space, Coleman (2007) suggests it is "a concept (even a force) with both a positive and a negative dimension, each counter-balanced by ideology, which itself has positive and negative dimensions counter-balanced by utopia" (p. 10). Additionally, the spatial cues in Zola's novel indicate a specific overall theme, namely capitalism – an important issue to discuss within architectural discourse. The novel was written during a crucial part of retail space history when consumerism was being boosted by the shift from small retail spaces to larger department stores. As Tamilia (2007) notes, "the evolution of the department store is intimately related with the processes of urbanization, transportation, and industrialization. The department store was marketing's contribution to the Industrial Revolution" (p. 229).

Zola's novel, *The Ladies' Paradise,* was chosen as the subject of this paper due to his elaborate illustrations of social and economic issues during the late 1800s through spatial representations, as well as his firm criticism of capitalism through literary fiction. Kamm (1983) states that in Zola's work the department store is a symbol and an embryo "of vast working societies of twentieth century, unveiling and even eclipsing new activity, a new city, a new life" (p. 325). The main discussion focuses on the new utopian retailing typology and its social and economic dominance in the novel as well as the spatial representations of the architectural and urban environment surrounding the storyline. The research methodology used within this paper draws on architectural literary analysis, a methodology that uses literature as a medium to define and analyze architectural spaces and cues (Tuna Ultav, Çağlar & Durmaz Drinkwater, 2015). While *The Ladies' Paradise* explores the role of capitalism within a society, it is not limited to the social and economic issues surrounding this matter but also evaluates capitalism's effects on architectural spaces surrounding the storyline. This paper, therefore, looks into Zola's novel in terms of capitalism and the parameters encircling it, as well as the novel's exterior and interior environments. Zola's subtle criticisms of social and economic issues have been comprehensively studied within the literature as he created an extravagant utopian haven in *The Ladies' Paradise*. This paper evaluates the importance

of architecture within Zola's literary fictional text and assesses how the physical architecture affects the book's characters. It also explains how the author successfully provided such detailed descriptions of the department store and surrounding buildings.

## Capitalism and Retail Culture

As a new type of retailing, department stores created a new culture during the 19th century, starting in Paris. Au Bon Marché, built in 1838 and catering to Paris's emerging middle class, was arguably the world's first department store and the first specifically designed for this function (Carlson, 2006). In a letter dated 1882, Zola describes the story as "the creation of one of those big department stores, like the Bon Marché or the Louvre, that have stirred up and revolutionized commerce in France". As with all his novels, he makes observations about *The Ladies' Paradise* before writing it. He wrote 64 pages of his 100-page novel in the time he spent in Le Bon Marché and 34 pages in Le Louvre (Bozbeyoğlu, 2002). He also mentions that "[he] shows it at war with small commerce, which little by little is devoured by it" (Ramazani, 2007, p. 129). The store created a new wave of consumer behavior amongst women, as described by Miller (2014): "It was the world of leisurely women celebrating a new rite of consumption" (p. 3). Miller also describes this new form of retailing as the "bourgeoisie's world" – connoting the middle class, regarding their materialistic values. According to Carlson (2006): "There is little wonder why the department store was 'one of the sights of Paris', as it encompassed all the novel spectacles of the 19th century under one roof: the crowd, electrical lighting, wall-length mirrors, modern architecture, wax mannequins, and perhaps the most sensational, the frequent public arrest of a shoplifter" (pp. 151–152).

Nelson (1993) describes the store as "a model of the new capitalism, of an economic system based on the principle of circulation, movement, turnover, the constant and increasingly rapid renewal of capital in the form of commodities" (p. 233). The department store not only aimed to sell merchandise, it also sold its own invented culture of modern retailing. This new culture served as the epitome of modernity as it not only promised material consumerism but also provided a space that curated cultural events for the public (Kaiser, 2012). That is, it was an enclosed public space where people could spend their leisure time. However, that is not to say that nothing like it had existed previously, as the department store was a product of evolution. Merchants often owned stores selling specific merchandise, acting as niche markets, with similar stores habitually found in the same area. Since this increased competition, some merchants decided to

scatter throughout the city with various specialty shops forming a shopping arcade, a constellation of retail stores selling different products that went together, thus utilizing cross-selling methods (Clausen, 1985).

These shopping arcades also encouraged more consumption, mainly because it was effortless, as consumers only needed to visit one area to purchase a variety of goods. Clausen (1985) also mentions that the evolution of retail stores was not the only factor encouraging the emergence of department stores. In addition, production was also evolving, specifically booming mass-production, which made large quantities of products available at significantly reduced prices, thereby promoting consumerism while feeding the needs of the bourgeoisie world (Clausen, 1985; Miller, 1981).

Consumer capitalism can be loosely defined as a manipulative tool to mold the needs and wants of consumers in a way that benefits the product or service distributor (Silla, 2018). This is important for this paper since the strategy of consumer capitalism accelerated with the birth of the *grand magasin* (Hennessy, 2008) at the time when Zola was writing his novel and criticizing the conditioning techniques throughout *The Ladies' Paradise:*

> New choices about consumption are not made at random. They conform to norms [that] guide behavior in every society. When the individual is uncertain about what choices are appropriate, he or she will look for guidance. [...] The real problem, therefore, is to explain the emergence, development, and elaboration of the various norms of consumption in society. (Sartroi, 1991, as cited in Trumbull, 2018)

In the novel, Zola addresses the social and economic issues of capitalism and criticizes the evolution of retail spaces. Zola's point of view on the rise of capitalism that emerged in France in those years and the reputation of department stores in the business field is twofold: on the one hand, he is disappointed by the situation of small shops, on the other hand, he is happy with the future promises of department stores (Bozbeyoğlu, 2002). He illustrates this through the literary spaces of the narrative. That is, the architectural spaces depicted in the novel support the storyline, and architecture and literature rely on one another to provide a realistic approach (Nakai, 2000). This realistic approach was also important to Zola in his plays. He bases his Theatrical Naturalism on three principles: *faire vrai* (make it real)*, faire grand* (make it big)*, and faire simple*

(make it simple) (Madsen, 1973). While these three principles were mainly adopted in his plays, they can also be used to analyze his style of writing in *The Ladies' Paradise*. Zola's first principle, *faire vrai,* is seen in the novel in his thorough study of human behavior and his realistic approach to people's reactions and consumer behavior. His depiction of how women react to the department store can be everywhere, as people are attracted to larger stores offering a wider variety of goods for a lower price: "[Denise] saw more people in an hour than she had seen at Cornaille's [a drapers store] in six months" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 56). Since the overarching theme of *The Ladies' Paradise* is capitalism, it can also be associated with the Darwinian approach that only the most successful survive (Claeys, 2000). In the novel, Zola increasingly defines the department store as a machine that grows larger and more powerful. This forces neighboring business owners to shut down: "In the old days, when trade was trade, drapery meant materials and nothing else. Nowadays their only aim is to expand their business at the expense of their neighbors and to eat everything up" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 75). The second principle, *faire grand,* refers to conflicts in the storyline (Madsen, 1973). In the case of *The Ladies' Paradise*, Zola addresses the issue of capitalism, particularly how larger corporations drive local companies out of business. This occurred frequently in the late 19th century as capitalism and monopolies became dominant. As Ramazani (2007) notes, the main idea of Zola's novel is to describe the department store as something which crushes or absorbs small businesses around it (p. 126). The third principle, *faire simple,* meaning the content should be easy to follow (Madsen, 1973), is also evident throughout the novel, as it is a simple and relatable read that takes you gradually through the storyline. Zola's writing also allows the reader to easily imagine the surroundings.

Zola mostly presents his viewpoint through the eyes of Denise. It is as if she is the judging character, the one that views and, in her thoughts, criticizes her uncle's shop. It made her feel "ill at ease; she felt an unreasonable disdain, an instinctive repugnance for this cold, icy place, the home of old-fashioned trading" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 56). As Denise enters her uncle's shop/house, she criticizes the interiors: "the open door seemed to lead into the darkness and dampness of a cellar" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 35). After experiencing the department store, these features of her uncle's shop, The Old Elbeuf, became apparent to Denise: "The Old Elbeuf, with its rusty front and lifeless windows, appeared to her so ugly, so miserable, seen thus from amidst the luxury and life of her present standpoint" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 136). Thus, Zola emphasizes the shift in consumer ideology under capitalism and the new retail culture through his literary comparison

of the "old and outdated" with the "new". As Ballantyne (2011) remarks, "the signs of poverty and neglect […] become more pronounced as the novel progresses, and it is hardly a surprise to learn that the business does not thrive" (p. 178). He also notes how Denise is embarrassed to find that her family loyalties oblige her to affiliate herself with this failing enterprise when she can see that it is doomed – as can everyone except the long-established shopkeepers, who feel that because they have been there for a long time, they have a right to continue to be there into the future. They have an ill-founded conviction that their loyal customers will keep them afloat, even if they can buy goods more cheaply and in more pleasant surroundings across the road (Ballantyne, 2011, p. 178).

Likewise, Zola elaborately illustrates Denise's thoughts when she experiences the department store. He adopts a different literary tone, almost a different sense of writing that adds much more color, passion, and excitement. By explaining through Denise's eyes, he allows the reader to fully comprehend both the retail space itself and its effects on the consumer:

> [The shop] detained her there, interested, impressed, forgetful of everything else. The lofty plate-glass door in a corner facing the Place Gaillon reached the first storey amidst a medley of ornaments covered with gilding. Two allegorical female figures, with laughing faces and bare bosoms unrolled a scroll bearing the inscription "The Ladies' Paradise". (Zola, 1883/1895, pp. 26–27)

Although historians of gender in the 1970s and 1980s regarded domestic spaces as more feminine spheres, they later claimed that department stores, as the earliest manifestation of modernity, were feminine public spaces. Nelson (1993) also points out that the department store "shows women emerging more and more into the public spaces of the city" (pp. 236–237). Thus, they confused the traditional understandings of gender in public and private spheres (Kaiser, 2012, p. 52). As Carlson (2006) notes, "this 'temple to woman' greatly influenced Zola's interpretation of the department store, as indicated by its title, Au Bonheur des Dames, which translates to 'the pleasure, or the paradise, of women'" (p. 155). Denise's curiosity and excitement about The Ladies' Paradise is Zola's interpretation of not just Denise but women in general. Her thoughts represent other women's views about the department store. The display of merchandise throughout the interior was also something new to consumers. Zola highlights this by

noting how Denise experiences the array of silks: "In the middle of the department, an exhibition of summer silks illumined the hall with an aurora-like brilliancy, like the rising of a planet amidst the most delicate tints" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 580).

Consumer capitalism encouraged new forms of marketing tools that led to a new wave of retail culture. Alongside the birth of the department stores was the birth of a new business model that the new retailing style created and implemented to thrive in the business world. Zola elaborates on these methods throughout the novel by showing how Mouret, the store owner, uses them in The Ladies' Paradise. The commercial business model employed by Mouret uses six methods: "price-fixing and price list, the consumers' free entrance to the stores, the creation of different departments with varied products, return policy, price reduction united with sales increase and investment in advertising" (Verheyde, 2012, as cited in Rocha et al., 2014, pp. 56–57). Zola describes this new marketing approach and its effects on women like Denise through her eyes: she "was absorbed by the display at the principal entrance. There she saw, in the open street, on the very pavement, a mountain of cheap goods – bargains, placed there to tempt the passers-by, and attract attention" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 28).

Zola displays Mouret's marketing tactics ingeniously and horrifyingly. The store owner claims that his new pricing tactics both attract female consumers and give him control over them within his department store. He believes that female psychology is easily manipulated because women cannot resist the bargains he offers:

> We shall lose a few sous on the stuff, very likely. But what can that matter, if in return we attract all the women here, and keep them at our mercy, fascinated, maddened by the sight of our goods, emptying their purses without thinking? The principal thing, my dear fellow, is to inflame them, and for that purpose you must have an article which will flatter them and cause a sensation. Afterwards, you can sell the other articles as dear as they are sold anywhere else, they'll still think yours the cheapest. For instance, our Golden Grain, that taffetas at seven francs and a half, sold everywhere at the same price, will go down as an extraordinary bargain, and suffice to make up for the loss on the Paris Delight. (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 109)

Another of the store's persuasive tactics discussed within the novel, the returns policy, was a new idea then. Zola approaches this through Mouret's thoughts on the

reasoning behind it. He explains that it is the answer to hesitant female consumers, who are not sure whether they want to buy something or not: "Take whatever you like, madame; you can return it if you find you don't like it" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 542). Thus, the store creates a solution, which was revolutionary to retail culture:

> He claimed that a woman [was] powerless against advertising, that she was bound to be attracted by [the] uproar. Analyzing her more ... Thus, he had discovered that she could not resist a bargain ... And he had penetrated still further into the heart of woman, and had just planned the system of 'returns', a masterpiece of Jesuitical seduction. (Zola, 1883/1895, pp. 541–542)

Since this department store was the first of its kind, the building's architecture also affected the general public portrayed within the novel. Other stores operated in niche markets whereas *Ladies' Paradise* offered everything under one roof much more cheaply. This encouraged consumer capitalism, monopolized the clothing industry, and stole customers from neighboring stores through Mouret's marketing tactics.

> His creation was a sort of new religion; the churches, gradually deserted by a wavering faith, were replaced by this bazaar, in the minds of the idle women of Paris. Women now came and spent their leisure time in his establishment, the shivering and anxious hours they formerly passed in churches: a necessary consumption of nervous passion, a growing struggle of the god of [the] dress against the husband, the incessantly renewed religion of the body with the divine future of beauty. (Zola, 1883/1895, pp. 960–961)

Zola's novel provides a significant discussion of the very first examples of department stores by considering their social and architectural impacts on society under capitalism. His novel reveals a new perspective while focusing on consumerist society by taking into consideration gender roles and the contribution of architecture. Zola presents retailing culture through the lens of women as a crucial target for the new department stores. These can also be considered as interior public spaces for socializing in a patriarchal society. They also demonstrate the effects of architecture on capitalism while serving as a public space.

## Architecture, Public Space, and Retailing Culture

A prologue to the novel of The Ladies' Paradise, it is essential to put forward the amount of research Zola commenced before writing his novel. Conferring to Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF), as well as Zola's preparatory files, which included his personal notetaking and sketches as part of his own personal take of department stores, he would visit establishments such as the Bon Marché and the Louvre day after day to study the exterior and interior architecture of these establishments in order to fully capture the essence of the architecture within his novel. He would also study other details within the stores, such as the positioning of products, the way people would move within the establishment, as well as their social interactions. As for the exterior environment of the establishments, Zola would also study the façade and the environment populating the surroundings of the two establishments. He would also make note and study the way the people looking into the establishment from the outside would interact and react to these establishments.

His remarks and studies were translated into notes, which were a part of his preparatory notes, which were later translated into drafting the initial novel of The Ladies' Paradise. His notes aided the creation of his fictitious building, as well as his characters that inhabit the novel in such a way that it dictated the characters' social interactions within the novel itself. In order for Zola to create such a realistic approach for a novel, he even chose a real-life location for the ladies paradise within the heart of Paris, France (Figure 1) that was situated "at the corner of the Rue de la Michodière and the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 25). With this, the readers would be able to physically imagine where the store would be and made it somewhat relatable to them.

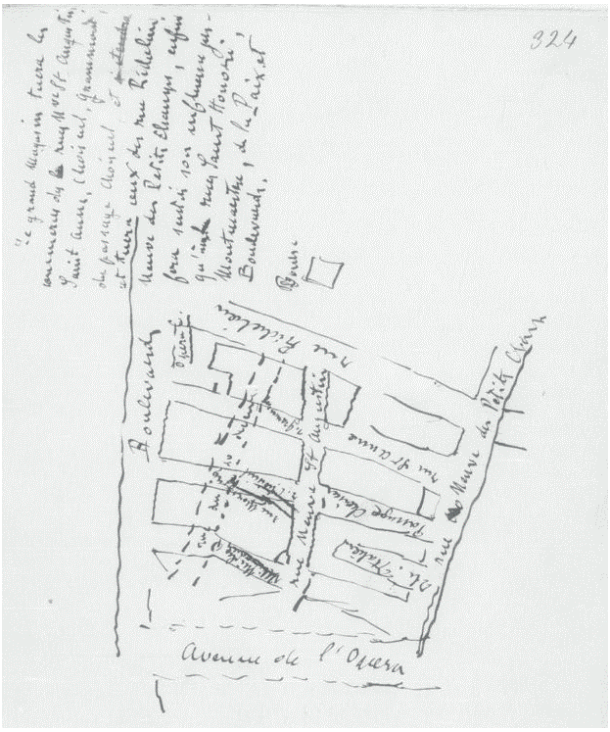


**Figure 1.** Zola's sketch of the location of The Ladies' Paradise in Paris (Zola, 1881)

Additionally, Zola's preparatory notes included sketches of The Ladies' Paradise's store: location within the city, floorplans, and shelving system, meaning how the merchandise would be on display within the store (Figure 2). Whilst reading Zola's preparatory files, one can argue that his substantially detailed research ultimately led to the writing of the novel. The reasons for writing such a successfully naturalistic novel and the writing elements that aided in this success were his attention to architectural details within his novel, such as the railings that surrounded the interior staircases or the metal beams that would support the ceiling. These details ultimately allowed readers during his time and decades later to abundantly experience a nineteenth century Parisian department store.

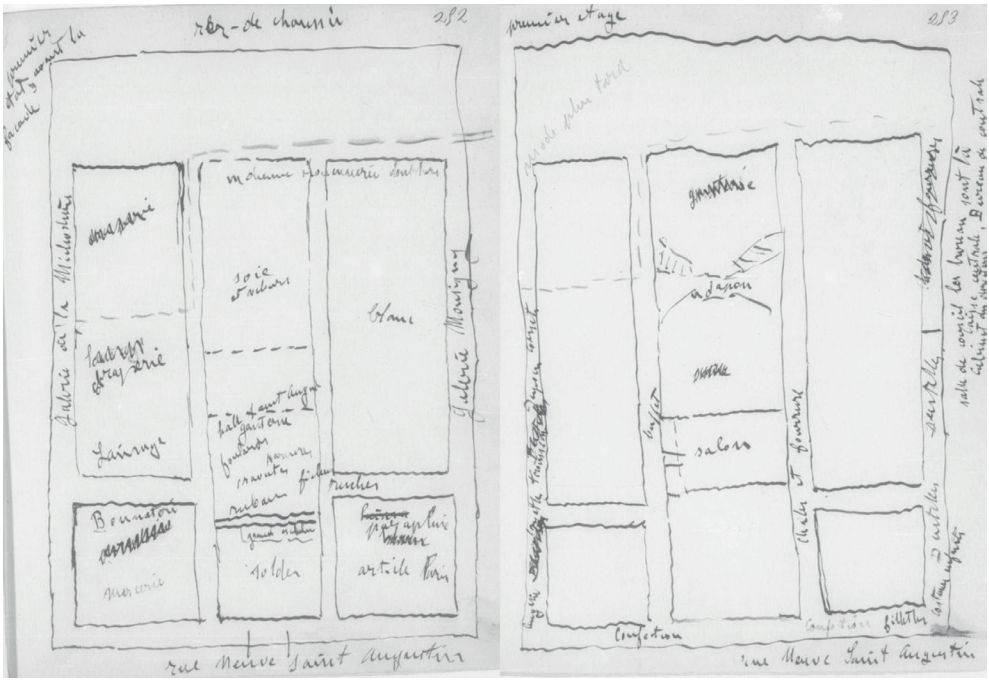

**Figure 2.** Zola's sketch of The Ladies' Paradise Floorplans (Zola, 1881)

For Bishop (2011), the novel – as is typical of Zola's writing – "is crafted with precision, attaining a perfect marriage of architecture and plot: the novel infuses the department store with life, whilst the building invests the plot with a sense of concrete reality" (p. 5). The architecture of *Paradise* is notable because it demonstrates how the retail dynamic shifted from niche stores to department stores. Nava explains this new retail and consumer culture as follows:

> The new stores modernized retailing not only by offering a wide range of cheaper, mass-produced fashionable clothes or other commodities, but also by rationalizing the use of space, making economies of scale, introducing clear pricing systems and displaying goods in a safe and pleasant environment so that customers could look and compare without obligation to buy." (Nava, 1996, as cited in Koch, 2007, p. 40)

According to Hobsbawm (2010), department stores are the product of an era in which "with the growth of population, urbanization and real incomes, the mass market, hitherto more or less confined to foodstuffs and clothing, i.e. to basic

subsistence needs, began to dominate the industries producing consumer goods" (p. 53). Thus, Zola's *Ladies' Paradise* store can be seen as a step up from the limitations of item-specific stores that required the customers to move from store to store and area to area.

Zola also successfully adopted architectural realism in his writing. To depict such a detailed atmosphere, he worked closely with French architect and writer Frantz Jourdain, who designed the fictional department store with Zola through drawings and literature (Nakai, 2000). Zola writes through the eyes of one of the novel's female characters to exaggerate the grandness of the space:

> It was like a railway span, surrounded by the balustrades of the two storeys, intersected by hanging stairways and crossed by flying bridges. The iron staircases developed bold curves, which multiplied the landings; the bridges suspended in space, ran straight along at a great height; and in the white light from the windows all this ironwork formed an excessively delicate architecture, an intricate lace-work through which the daylight penetrated, the modern realization of a dreamland palace, of a Babel with storeys piled one above the other, and spacious halls affording glimpses of other floors and other halls ad infinitum. (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 468)

Zola provides such great detail to allow the reader to fully imagine the store's interior architecture, particularly the grandeur of the structure itself. By enlightening his readers with these architectural descriptions, Zola engages in an architectural analysis through literature. He also depicts his creation through another character, Madame Desforges. His descriptions of the store's interior architecture are always elaborate and offer much detail, with a consistently positive and lively writing tone:

> Then as the metallic work ascended, the capitals of the columns became richer, the rivets formed ornaments, the shoulder-pieces and corbels were covered with sculptured work; and at last, up above, glistened painting, green and red, amidst a prodigality of gold, floods of gold, heaps of gold, even to the glazed-work, whose panes were enameled and inlaid with gold. In the galleries, the bare brickwork of the arches was also decorated in bright colors. Mosaics and faience likewise formed part of the decoration, enlivening the friezes, and lighting up the severe ensemble with their

> fresh tints; whilst the stairs, with red-velvet covered hand-rails, were edged with bands of polished iron, which shone like the steel of armor. (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 469)

In complete contrast, Zola portrays the other businesses around *Ladies' Paradise* grimly. The surrounding buildings are mostly described in a limiting sense, meaning that the architecture lacks something. He exaggerates this by using words like "only" and "nudity", emphasizing the shortcomings of the architecture of the other shops as juxtaposed with *Ladies' Paradise*:

> The house, coated with an ancient rusty white-wash, quite flat and unadorned, amidst the mansions in the Louis XIV style which surrounded it, had only three front windows, and these windows, square, without shutters, were simply ornamented by a handrail and two iron bars in the form of a cross. But amidst all this nudity, what struck Denise the most, her eyes full of the light airy windows at The Ladies' Paradise, was the ground-floor shop, crushed by the ceiling, surmounted by a very low storey with half-moon windows, of a prison-like appearance. (Zola, 1883/1895, pp. 34–35)

The department store created a new form of space and architecture: "It was the cathedral of modern commerce, light but strong, the very thing for a nation of customers" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 539). It also offered a new form of public space, specifically to women, as most women then could only be seen in public with their families or a male relative (Nava, 1996, as cited in Koch, 2007, p. 63). This new form of architecture created a public private space within the city of Paris. It was public in the sense that everyone was welcome to the store regardless of whether they were there to buy something there or just to spend their leisure time within the establishment. It allowed people, specifically women, to leave their homes and be within the city of Paris in a respectable manner. This form of architecture was not available for women before the start of the department store as women were not to be seen without a male chaperone. Yet, it was private in a sense that it was not a public square or a park that was available all times during the day, it had opening and closing hours which limited the visitations of the public to those specific hours of the day. With that, the department store evidently represents consumer capitalism in the novel and shows how such an establishment became a place for both shopping and entertainment.

Rather than being a necessity, these stores became a medium for socializing for families and friends (Tauber, 1972). As emphasized in the novel, 19th-century department stores were places for social interaction as well as commerce. According to Rappaport (2000), the lack of material history of women and consumption in 19th century London is a significant gap in commodity culture theory. She argues that the identities of women and public space were co-constituted. In this case, department stores are one element forming the desires and identities of women, which mostly relate to commodification instead of freedom on the streets. According to Beaumont (2006), department stores "described an urban space in which middle-class women, in particular, could circulate safely and pleasurably, as independent individuals that were at the same time the components of a distinctively modern kind of community" (p. 195). Similarly, Sewell (2011) views department stores as "privatized feminine public spaces, a feminine island within the more masculine city" (p. 599) while their ideological purpose was to constrain women by keeping them off the streets. Thus, *Ladies' Paradise* was not just a typical retail department store offering goods. Rather, it also served the leisure needs of its visitors. Zola created a form of public space within the department store, where Mouret offered his customers a reading room where the public could spend their time in for free:

> A few gentlemen, lolling back in armchairs, were reading the newspapers. But a great many people sat there doing nothing: these were husbands waiting for their wives, who were roaming through the various departments, young women on the watch for their lovers, and old relations left there as in a cloak-room, to be taken away when it was time to leave. And all these people lounged and rested whilst glancing through the open bays into the depths of the galleries and the halls, whence a distant murmur ascended amidst the scratching of pens and the rustling of newspapers. (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 464)

Zola describes the store as a machine of many components, including the people who work and shop. From Denise's perspective, Zola mentions the idea of being "inside the machine" several times (Zola, 1883/1895, pp. 49, 155) while the women working there are "cogs, caught up in the workings of the machine, surrendering their personalities" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 134). Thus, this department store is Mouret's machine, which works perfectly with its all cogs, including women. As Ballantyne (2011) notes, "the whole operation is portrayed programmatically as a machinic production of desire, which is

well understood by Mouret, and less consciously assimilated by his customers, who know that they want to buy the products but are not altogether clear why they would need them" (p. 183).

Thus, Zola uses detailed architectural elements and interiors to strengthen his machine-like environments. For example, the staircases are constructed "in the manner of the grand staircase of the stately home, thereby imparting to the customer both a sense of occasion and an uninterrupted vista of goods on display at all levels" (Bishop, 2011, p. 4). According to Bishop (2011), climbing the stairs rewards the customer for her effort in going up by considering the vantage points for the goods (p. 4). Benjamin (1982/2002) notes the "specifics of [a] department store: the customers perceive themselves as a mass; they are confronted with an assortment of goods; they take in all the floors at a single glance; they pay fixed prices; they can make exchanges" (p. 60). *The Ladies' Paradise* reflects the 19th century understanding of department stores by revealing the existing details in reality.

Parker (2003) points out that early department stores in the 19th century also included exotic signs, such as items from the Orient, Japanese gardens, and Byzantine bazaars (p. 364). He remarks on how consumers in the novel are impressed by "the exotic sign-values of the rugs in their symbolically charged environment, the oriental hall of the *Bonheur des Dames"*. These are significant additions to attract customers' attention (Parker, 2003, p. 364). According to Parker (2003), the 19th-century department store customers "engaged in an activity now referred to in the sociology of consumption as 'lifestyle consumption'" (p. 367) the traces of this description can be found in Zola's novel.

Zola repeatedly emphasized the power of *Ladies' Paradise* on its customers, describing it as a comforting and secure space for the women who visited. As Mouret explains, "These ladies are not in my house, they are at home here" (Zola, 1883/1895, p. 467). Additionally, this form of architecture offered people a place of leisure and community because the visitors were not forced to buy anything. They were not visiting The Ladies' Paradise for the sole purpose of purchasing; rather, it was a place to be rather than home. Older stores were the complete opposite. For instance, a person would go to the carpet store merely to buy carpets; that ideology was changed by the department store.

## Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we investigated Zola's social and economic views through his writings while drawing on different disciplines, including architecture, interior architecture, and consumer capitalism. Zola's interpretations of the characters and their social interactions, as well as the spatial representations in *The Ladies' Paradise,* were important factors to understand the social and economic issues highlighted by Zola.

Zola describes neighboring stores within a negative, grey, and dim overall setting, which can be felt and imagined by the reader. In contrast, one imagines *Ladies' Paradise* as a kind of heaven, with an airy feel and beautifully orchestrated window displays, and which is warm and inviting to the general public. The store has a duality: on the one hand, it is a public space for women to socialize. On the other hand, it depicts a consumeristic prison in which women are encouraged to buy more things and become social in a "safe place". In that era, these enclosed spaces provided practical public interiors, which scholars have described as a second home with security and sociability, as if this was the only suitable environment for women in that society. The society's ideology creates a false consciousness that affects women who want to be both safe and social within these consumeristic prisons. Thus, architecture is an important figure in the novel that highlights the link between consumerism, retail culture, and gender issues at that time and the general conditions of the 19$^{th}$ century.

Many studies have investigated architecture, public space, and capitalism through retail culture. However, this study discussed these issues through the perspective of Zola in terms of the relationship between literature and architecture. Literary analysis can be used for understanding such subjects through their depiction in novels. *The Ladies' Paradise* is a valuable example of a clear and realistic representation of the 19$^{th}$-century retailing culture, the roles of women in society, and the importance of architecture. In Zola's novel, spatial representations play a significant role in fully comprehending how Parisian department stores affected society regarding these issues. Zola's novel helps the reader to construe these issues in connection with each other while this study reveals these connections through literary analysis. The study aimed to reveal the triangular relationship between architecture, gender issues in society, and retail culture under capitalism, so further studies could investigate other subjects in Zola's novel from the same interdisciplinary perspective.

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