

**The Portrayal of the *Femme Fatale*:**  
**A comparative study of Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* and *Pour une nuit***  
***d'amour***

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C. Bertrand- Jennings states that “Zola’s female characters are inevitably linked with evil and death. Indeed they often represent the very principle of evil” (1984, p. 27). This research aims to present a comparative study on the portrayal of *femme fatale* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century French literature by examining the female protagonists of Émile Zola’s: Thérèse Raquin in *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) and Thérèse de Marsanne in his novella *Pour une nuit d’amour* (1883). Jennings affirms that one needs to delve into Zola’s writing in a subconscious level to analyse the significance of his female characters; ‘probably in an effort to absolve a deep-seated guilt, Zola shows his female characters as tempters and initiators in matters of sex and love.’ (1984, p. 29). The objective of this study is to explore how Zola depicts the criminality of female protagonists and how they are portrayed as *femme fatale*. Further, the researcher interrogates as to why Zola presents female as evil in his fiction. A qualitative analysis of data is done by using comparative methodology. This research reveals the similarities of the female protagonists. The negativistic perspective of female sexuality is evident. The significance of this research lies in bringing out how women, sexuality, and sin, depicted in Zola’s fiction are fused in presenting his subconscious level of guilt with regard to nervousity. According to C. Jennings neurosis is a feminine ailment. In Zola’s fiction, the *femme fatale* depicts the author’s subconscious level of nervousity. The neurosis of women eventually paves the way towards criminality.

Keywords: Criminal, *Femme fatale*, Nervosity, Sexuality, Zola