

TWO GONCOURT WOMEN AND FRUSTRATION

by

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91

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 1979

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Abstract

This thesis was commenced with the idea of studying woman as she is portrayed by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt in the mid-nineteenth century. The two novels under discussion, Germinie Lacerteux and Renée Mauperin, were chosen to provide examples of two very different kinds of woman: one, a servant girl from a provincial background, and the other, a younger girl from the bourgeoisie. This study is divided into three sections: such an arrangement is in keeping with the way the Goncourt Brothers saw the development of their characters. The first section presents a study of woman in the nineteenth century; more particularly, it is a study of Renée and Germinie in relationship to their environments. The second part is a study of the frustration which motivated them both and played a large part in the development of their character. The final portion is a study of death, which is seen as their ultimate frustration and which nonetheless provided them with insight into the reasons for their ultimate acceptance of their fate. In addition to these studies, an analysis of the role of Naturalism with respect to the works of the Goncourt Brothers is included. It is hoped that some light is thus shed upon the female character itself, and that this will lead to a greater understanding of the Goncourt Brothers as painters of realistic portraits of people of the nineteenth century.

To Ted
With Love.

<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	v
Introduction	1
Chapter I - The Portrait of the Women	14
Chapter II - Two Heroines in Frustration	32
Chapter III - The Portrait of Death	75
Conclusion	102
Bibliography	109

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Dr. Floyd St. Clair and Dr. David Niederauer for their thoughtful help and encouragement during the preparation of this thesis.

Introduction

The Goncourt Brothers utilized the vehicle of the novel to portray real people of the mid 1800's. They were not the first to do so, but their novels were unique in the approach they took to such a portrait. Their subject matter, that of woman, was innovative and clearly showed their concern with and attitude towards the female character.

Their vision of woman in the novels Germinie Lacerteux and Renée Mauperin is an important step in the development of character portrayal within the vehicle of the novel. They look at woman with open eyes and portray each woman's struggle against the frustrations which beset her with honesty and sympathy. These works exhibit an intimate picture of each woman. They are esthetically valuable works to succeeding generations in that the reader is permitted to view both the external and the internal struggles to which each woman was subjected.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine these novels with an eye to establishing where the women represented fit into the society of the time. The theme of frustration is important here since its effects encroach upon the day-to-day lives of each of these women. Since these novels are important to the representation of woman in the nineteenth century, they deserve a close examination today.

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt wrote their novels in order to attempt an accurate description of an event so as to evoke the same emotional response in the reader as that perceived

at the occurrence of the original event by the authors. This was their goal.

During the period in which they wrote, the major literary trend was realism. Its tenets were as follows:

1° le droit pour l'artiste de faire ce qu'il veut; 2° le droit de choisir des sujets contemporains; 3° le droit de représenter avec vérité les mœurs actuelles, pour en laisser un document.¹

This realistic view permitted the Goncourt Brothers to attach significance to each gesture and each statement within their novels but their wholehearted desire was to contribute more than mere documentation to the literature of the period. They sought a means to inject a tone of sensuality into their literature. This led them to adopt realism as the basis of their works, and then to strive for another, more emotional, dimension. This new dimension was the first step towards the concept of naturalism.

Peut-être parce qu'ils sont venus plus tard, ils ont plus complètement réalisé les aspirations principales et diverses de la doctrine réaliste, qui se manifestaient depuis une quinzaine d'années: le roman sociologique de Balzac; le goût pour l'information minutieuse et méthodique à la manière de Flaubert; la préférence pour les tableaux et les personnages empruntés aux milieux populaires, comme le voulait Champfleury; la conception de la monographie scientifique formulée par Taine... Ils ont ainsi présenté, vers 1865, un système littéraire fort cohérent, qui est, à vrai dire, la première forme de la doctrine naturaliste, et non plus réaliste.²

The following formula by P. Martino expresses quite well the spirit of naturalism:

L'idéal du roman: c'est de donner avec l'art

la plus vive impression du vrai humain, quel qu'il soit.³

Thus, the Goncourt Brothers also sought to add the dimension of the vrai humain to the concept of art in literature. They had to define both the vrai humain and the art which they intended to incorporate into their works in order to fully develop the doctrine of naturalism.

For the Goncourt Brothers, the vrai humain centred on the perception of life as a whole, and the perception of intimate and discrete occurrences, both interior (cerebral) and exterior (sociological). This appears as the keynote of their works in the form of an analysis of the relationship of the exterior and the interior. They sought to mirror the exterior on the interior, to give a tangible point of reference to the perception of an event, since the interior, with its sensations and visions, more often than not dominates the perception of the exterior. What is perceived by one person will not have the same point of reference as that which is perceived by another. Therefore, the Goncourt Brothers devoted their lives to the search for a vehicle capable of reproducing their own emotions and sensations so that they could be felt by the reader.

Their path towards this goal, however, was arduous and long. In their search for the vrai humain and a manner in which to express themselves and their thoughts, they tried many different media, both artistic and literary, but all were deemed unsatisfactory. They originally concentrated on the visual arts of painting and sculpture. However, they found that their works were essentially a plastic version of their perception of an

object or a person. They could not capture the myriad sensations and impressions which were evoked by the meeting of artist and canvas, but could only choose one or two of the more outstanding impressions. For them, the vrai humain was a momentary glimpse into a person's reality, a fleeting sensation which a painting on a canvas could never succeed in fixing.

They were also documenters of history and society. By writing and correlating a true picture of society, complete with its situations, its mores and its standards, they had thought to capture the interior perception as it mirrored the exterior. This, however, did not take into account their own perceptions and sensations, and they found within themselves "...un certain mépris pour la transcription du vrai, du non imaginé..."⁴ Thus, they desired to communicate a certain duality of thought,

...une double fidélité, au monde des objets
et à la perception qu'ils en ont comme ar-
tistes...⁵

Historical documentation did not possess the scope with which to deal with this double fidélité; an emotional or sensual response could not be repeated as it was felt at the time described by the document, since perceptions and biases are in a constant state of fluctuation.

Thus, the vehicles of art and historical documentation were not practical forms of literary and artistic expression. The Goncourt Brothers, therefore, became novelists. Through fiction they felt they could convey to others, by means of minute analysis and intimate description, all those physical and emotional sensations. Fiction permitted them to add their personal in-

terpretations of the events they described, to give their writing the added dimension of emotional response.

Notre chemin littéraire est assez bizarre.
 Nous avons passé par l'histoire pour arriver
 au roman. Ce n'est guère l'usage et pourtant
 nous avons agi logiquement. Sur quoi écrit-
 on l'histoire? Sur des documents. Et les
 documents du roman, qu'est-ce sinon la vie?⁶

In examining society, they looked at the various social classes as they existed at the time. Their own class, the bourgeoisie, they considered to be artificial and unnaturally conscious of moral and social conduct. The bourgeoisie as a whole appeared to be emotionally stunted and an adequate description of any emotions or sensations there would be difficult to note.

This led the Goncourt Brothers to commence an examination of the basses classes, those people in society who are employed as menial labour. Edmond wrote in 1871 that

...c'est dans le bas, dans l'effacement d'une civilisation,...que se conserve le caractère des choses, des personnes, de la langue, de tout,...⁷

They were convinced that the unfortunate and the miserable of society gave the clearest portrait of the interior and the exterior. These people's situation could be mirrored in their actions, so engrossed were they in the realities of living. Their emotions were openly expressed, their lives attuned to the situation surrounding them.

In documenting these people, the Goncourt Brothers were aware of the openness of their lives. Details of their emotions, sensations, perceptions and milieux enabled the Goncourt Brothers to see these people as they really were but it was their actions

which divulged their innermost secrets. Each nuance, each carefully preserved action, served to crumble a portion of man's fragile concept of self and gave an opportunity to perceive life at its very roots.

...ils se réfugient dans le subtil, le domaine des réalités fuyantes et apparemment insaisissables, de ce qu'ils nomment des nuances. Nuance, détail minuscule de la couleur ou de la forme, mais surtout détail en mouvement, inflexion, passage; c'est seulement dans l'éclair de l'instant que l'observateur a des chances de la surprendre: L'artiste peut prendre la nature au posé, l'écrivain est obligé de la saisir au vol, et comme un voleur.⁸

Thus, at the cornerstone of Naturalism was the necessity to capture each nuance, to lead the reader into sacrosanct and private sectors of each character's mind. This allowed the reader to examine each character as he really was and to react to emotional stimuli presented by the writer.

...dans des lettres, dans le roman surtout, c'est la continuelle compilation des documents humains, c'est l'humanité vue et peinte, résumée en des créations réelles et éternelles. Tout notre siècle est là, tout le travail gigantesque de notre siècle...⁹

By portraying society, the Goncourt Brothers were in essence portraying each and every one of us. That they could elicit an emotional response from their readers is obvious. However, they desired to carry that response one step further.

...ils sont venus au réel pour l'attaquer, pour le démasquer, en un sens même pour le nier. En quoi ils montrent qu'ils n'ont pas tellement évolué; en quoi leur réalisme porte bien les traces de ses origines: car c'est au nom du rêve qu'ils protestent contre la vie; au nom de leur idéal qu'ils honissent le réel contemporain; au nom d'un passé refait

à leur usage qu'ils méprisent le présent. leur réalisme est nourri sur le plan humain, par une arrière-pensée de polémique et de vengeance liée à une vision de la condition humaine, qui, elle, n'est pas du tout réaliste, mais bien plutôt idéaliste, romantique, utopique même.¹⁰

Using reality as a basis for their works, the Goncourt Brothers injected fleeting glimpses of the subconscious and the unconscious, stimulated by their personal experiences in self-examination. They sought to bring to life those, macabre, marginal impulses which influence man and to set free man's most intimate being. Through their own self-analysis, they were aware of a deeper consciousness of being when under stress or when influenced by what they termed their maladie nerveuse.

Notre oeuvre repose sur la maladie nerveuse; les peintures de la maladie, nous les avons tirées de nous-mêmes, et, à force de nous disséquer, nous sommes arrivés à une sensibilité supra-aiguë que blessaient les infiniment petits de la vie.¹¹

This maladie nerveuse gave the Goncourt Brothers a hypersensitivity to all stimuli. Under its influence, they were aware of a more fervent need for self-analysis, and were confronted by fleeting sensations of the mind and body which transformed their perception of the exterior.

In the novels, characters cursed with a maladie nerveuse become animal-like: they are governed entirely by the external world as a result of internal pressures. They are incapable of forestalling their destiny and they become prisoners of their own sensitivity.

...prisonnier du même monde instantané, superficiel et fragmentaire, où nous les

avons vus depuis le départ enfermés.¹²

Since man was thus often a prisoner, without any means of self-examination, he could not escape his situation. The inability to disengage himself from his situation relieved him of the moral responsibility to justify his actions to others. Man no longer had to pretend that he was in control, either of himself or of his situation. He could explain and excuse himself by offering the reader a sordid description of his situation and his inability to act. This vision can give the reader insight into the very character of man.

The Goncourt Brothers had finally arrived at their stylistic approach and were satisfied that their formula would be convincing and adequate for their needs. However, they lacked a subject with which to experiment. They had to guard not only against overwhelming their reader with a new genre but also against choosing an area of study which would be too far away from their own experience. Too, they required a subject that could be closely studied. Their choice of woman was not a whim but a serious attempt on their part to select a subject which would stand up to their detailed survey. Woman seemed an ideal subject on which to study the effects of the interior and exterior phenomenon including the maladie nerveuse.

Because of their experience with certain lorettes, those elegant women dedicated to the pleasure of man, the Goncourt Brothers were led to consider woman to be little more than a toy. For them, she was full of contradictions and incapable of handling herself when presented with an unusual situation. They were con-

vinced that woman was an emotional, irrational creature whose only thoughts were of her toilette and of her conquests. She was weak, capricious, inane and totally at the mercy of her upbringing. Here is how they described her in their Journal.

La femme semble toujours avoir à se défendre de sa faiblesse. C'est à propos de tout et de rien un antagonisme de désirs, une rébellion de menu vouloir, une guerre de petites résolutions incessante et comme faite à plaisir. La combativité est à ses yeux la preuve même de son existence. La caprice est la façon d'exercice de sa volonté. La femme gagne à ces batailles sourdes, courtoises, mais irritantes, une domination abandonnée, des victoires sur la lassitude, en même temps qu'un peu de mépris de l'homme qui n'aime et ne sait dépenser sa force et son gouvernement en détail, à toute heure et sur tout.¹³

However, as they devoted themselves to their research, they realized that the women of their acquaintance were not typical of all women: certainly there was a woman whose only thought was of her amorous conquests, but there was also a woman who was capable of wisdom and forethought. It is interesting to examine the Goncourt Brothers' philosophy concerning woman in a state of transition within the context of two of their novels. Renée Mauperin, written in 1864, and Germinie Lacerteux, written in 1865, are similar and yet different novels. They describe in detail the lives of two women living at different levels of society and yet who deal with similar problems and frustrations. These are stories taken from real life, and the characters described are based on persons the Goncourt Brothers knew. Renée Mauperin was based on the life of a childhood friend whose sphere was that of the bourgeoisie. Germinie Lacerteux was drawn from

the life and actions of their maid, Rose. Thus, these novels are a study of society, a sociological portrait of two women of the period.

Given the Goncourt Brothers' own sociological bent, the major theme of this dissertation will also be sociological. By concentration on the characters of Renée Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux, many of the characteristics of the society in which they lived will be revealed. Similarly their bitter frustrations will be catalogued. This study looks at three important areas in the lives of these women, and thus will be divided into as many sections: the first will be a basic character study of each of the women, to situate them within society and to determine their essential identity; the second section of this work will study their frustrations; finally, the last section will focus on the death of each woman.

By dividing the work in this manner, the development and downfall of each woman becomes a logical progression of events, based on each woman's interpretation of her situation. Their decisions, however, ultimately reflect the attitudes and biases of their own time.

It is important to situate these women within their own milieux for several reasons. The concern of this study is with these two women of the nineteenth century, a century very different from our own. In order to examine the theme of frustration from an unbiased point of view, it is essential to establish these women within their own society and not let the changes which have occurred since then influence the reading of the novels.

An examination of the environment in which they lived also serves to spotlight each woman's character, since it has become largely accepted that environment is an integral part of a person's personality. Finally, those people who exert a major influence on the lives of these women will be studied in order to determine their roles and their spheres of influence.

In the second section of this dissertation, the theme of frustration as a major influence on the lives of both women is studied. Again, we must clarify and establish these frustrations as they pertain to the lives of both Renée and Germinie, and it will be seen that the struggles of these women bear a close resemblance to the struggles to which women are subjected in the twentieth century as well. The frustrations of each woman are examined from two points of view: the interior, that is, those frustrations resulting from a personal inability to cope with their situation, and the exterior, those frustrations resulting from society's pressures and artificial standards.

The final section is a study of the deaths of Renée and Germinie. The focal point of this section is the contrast between the portrayal of death as a release and a purification on the one hand, and its portrayal as a condemnation and an escape on the other. The ritual of death to which these women subject themselves and to which they are subjected by society will be examined and discussed with reference to the theme of frustration, since death is an important facet of this theme.

By studying in detail the lives of Renée Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux, insight into the ebb and flow of human life

as well as an interpretation of the Goncourt Brothers' philosophy becomes apparent, and with it, a convincing portrait of the society of a sector of France in the 1860's.

NOTES:

1. P. Martino, Le Roman réaliste sous le Second Empire (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1913), p. 77.
2. Ibid., p. 228.
3. Ibid., p. 235.
4. A. Billy, Les Frères Goncourt (Paris: Flammarion, 1954), p. 86.
5. E. Caramaschi, Réalisme et Impressionnisme dans l'oeuvre des Frères Goncourt (Pisa: Libreria Goliardica, s. d.), p. 30.
6. A. Billy, p. 98.
7. Ibid., p. 172
8. J-P. Richard, "Deux Ecrivains épidermiques: Edmond et Jules de Goncourt," Littérature et Sensation (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954), p. 269.
9. E. Zola, Le Naturalisme au théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1912), p. 183.
10. E. Caramaschi, p. 142.
11. J-P. Richard, p. 280.
12. A. Billy, p. 227.
13. A. Billy, p. 227.

Chapter I
The Portrait of the Women

The influence of environment and surrounding upon the conduct of man cannot be denied, and it is a challenge to determine the pervasiveness of this influence. For Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, this challenge became a focal point in their writing and their philosophy.

It is important, then, to consider physical environment as well as the personal characteristics of each woman when dealing with the works of the Goncourt Brothers. Chosen for this study of woman in the nineteenth century were the novels Renée Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux because they present two very different environments which produced two exceedingly different women.

To begin, one must ask and answer several questions. First, who were these women that they became so important to the Goncourt Brothers? What type of environment surrounded them and how did this environment affect their perception of the world around them? What attitude did they have towards themselves and towards their relationships with others? And finally, how did others around them see these women? These questions must be answered before any study of the frustrations and ultimate death of these women can be commenced since the difference in attitude and thought between the nineteenth century and the twentieth have become too great to simply embark upon a study of women. The great contrast must be made visible.

The Goncourt Brothers were men who wrote of what they knew, what they saw, and what they studied. The characters in their novels, especially their female characters, were not just composite pictures of many different people, rather they were portraits fashioned from one single model, and from people whom the Goncourt Brothers had known intimately. Their portraits were possessed of a personality, interesting in its complexity and astonishing in its vividness. The vehicle of historical documentation, which served as the basis of their works, was highlighted by the Goncourt Brothers' ability to interpret and demand an emotional response from themselves and from their readers. The effect was, especially when it concerned the female element in their novels, vigour, enthusiasm and vitality in what might otherwise have been simply biographical data laid out to be read by others.

In order to accomplish this goal the Goncourt Brothers had to analyse their choice of woman as subject of their novels. It was not whimsical fancy which motivated them, but the intriguing aspects of a unique juxtaposition: they had to come to terms with their own and society's views on women and meld this with a basic desire to portray a contemporary, transitional society which was still only on the verge of accepting women as intelligent, sensitive beings.

There were still problems associated with this effort. Looking at this society from the vantage point of our own era, it is relatively easy to see the changes taking place in the mid 1800's. However, at the time, the prevalent philosophy of con-

formism and the normal reticence to changes in the status quo made portraying a 'modern' society a relatively difficult feat. It meant that previous concepts had to be reanalysed and rearranged; it meant too, that society as a whole had to be subjected to a rigorous examination of its social elements. As Martino explains,

...il faut envisager "le côté social de l'homme, qui est le plus visible, le plus compréhensible et le plus varié,...reproduire les choses qui touchent à la vie du plus grand nombre"; il faut représenter le peuple, et non pas en se bornant aux habituelles aventures sentimentales, ou même aux tracasseries d'argent, comme faisait Balzac; qu'on nous montre l'ouvrier au travail, le commerçant dans son magasin, toutes les manifestations de l'activité sociale...Mais ce n'est pas assez de peindre la société, il faut instruire; l'art a un but, non pas avant tout artistique et littéraire, mais pratique; ...le réalisme attribue à l'artiste un but philosophique, pratique, utile, et non un but divertissant,...¹

7 The Goncourt Brothers had to accept the traditional concepts of femininity and convey them via their literature to a new space and a new vision of reality. They looked at the woman of their era, restricted by convention and unable, in the main, to assert herself or to develop a unique or private attitude towards the world around her. On their own admission, this woman contributed little of significance. She was confined to role playing: innocent young girl, marriageable young woman and then wife and mother. She was held to the traditional concept of a woman's life.

...[L]e mariage est bon, c'est la loi de la nature. Un époux, des enfants: voilà la destinée normale de la femme.²

She was given little opportunity to voice her own desires. This had to change, and the Goncourt Brothers were becoming more and more aware of what this implied. In their search for a 'modern' woman, they found that academic learning, so essential to the coming changes in society, was then ineffectual and was little more than rudimentary. Artistic pursuits, which were considered suitable for the female estate, were encouraged. This, naturally, did not give woman a solid basis from which to deal with men in a predominantly male world, and it caused the Goncourt Brothers to remark in their Journal (tome I):

Il est rare que la pensée de la femme trouve compagnie à la pensée de l'homme. Ou elle est à la pensée de son sexe, toilette, chiffons, etc. Alors, vous avez le bruit et l'occupation d'un corps en agitation et en froufrou. Ou bien si elle veut faire la cour à ce que vous pensez, l'être frêle se trouve avoir de si grosses mains, des mains si maladroites, qu'elle touche à côté ou qu'elle fait mal quand elle heurte.³

Woman's inability to interrelate effectively caused the Goncourt Brothers a certain amount of concern. They discovered that a single-faceted character did not possess the qualities necessary to a 'modern' society. Instead of a flat, stationary character, they required an extraordinary woman, whose life was a series of remarkable events not only in the fact of their occurrence, but also because she was central to their occurrence. The analysis of this event could yield a wealth of material under examination by two men interested in the unique and the unconventional.

In their search for a 'modern' woman, they often found a woman in a state of revolt, whether against the society as a

whole, or against her own inability and frailty. She was frustrated by the sluggishness and obstinacy of society's transition. Too often she was considered abnormal and perhaps slightly deranged. However, in that age of realism in literature woman was just beginning to examine the reality of her situation. This abnormal woman, railing against artificial barriers became the object of the Goncourts' sympathetic attention. She led them toward

...l'étude des cas anormaux, ces cas sont vrais d'une vérité particulièrement riche, qu'on peut étudier à loisir, comme on ferait dans une clinique; à condition de les bien choisir, ils ne sont que des déformations étranges, ils sont le grossissement de tendances normales de la société.⁴

The Goncourt Brothers thus felt that this woman was the personification of society. The entire fabric of society was becoming frayed and weakened. There was no escaping the inevitable disappearance of all that was familiar and the rise of a new and more liberal era.

C'est pourquoi leur schéma romanesque le plus familier, et à vrai dire même le seul à travers lequel ils se sentent capables d'animer un livre et de faire avancer une intrigue, est celui de la décomposition. Ils nous présentent des personnages en train de se désagréger et dont l'essence s'affirme à travers cette destruction elle-même.⁵

In the final analysis, woman was, through the medium of her own fate, permitted to discover her own essential intrinsic value. She was permitted to make a statement about herself, which, even in the throes of torment, proved that she had freed herself from conforming to a mold of society's making.

...les Goncourt s'élèvent contre l'esclavage de l'esprit et de la parole dans lequel on tenait la jeune fille de leur temps.⁶

Their woman showed determination and character, a far cry from the flat, monotonous woman condemned to artificial and bourgeois conformism.

While they could have portrayed this woman as harsh and hardened by her experiences, they did not. The Goncourt Brothers saw this woman as requiring sympathy and extended their humanity to her. It was she who was going against the grain, she who was taking the first step towards a better world, she who was clashing with society's repressive morality.

Si leur pitié s'adressait en général à la classe pauvre, elle allait plus particulièrement à la femme, être faible, qui subit plus douloureusement les contre-coups de la misère. C'est donc à elle qu'ils ont consacré leurs pages les plus pitoyables. Nous verrons comment ils la jugeaient. A défaut d'amour, leur préférence allait à la jeune fille. Et leur pitié, aux femmes que les conditions matérielles de la vie et la souffrance morale font misérables.⁷

The qualities of this woman caused Zola to remark that the novels have

...une indomptable énergie, un mépris souverain du jugement des sots et des timides, une audace large et superbe, une vigueur extrême de coloris et de pensée, un soin et une conscience artistiques rare en ces temps de productions hâtives et mal venues.⁸

Two women who figured largely in the above quotation are Renée Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux. Their stories examined in detail woman's struggle for recognition and truth. Each of these heroines made an undeniable contribution to the portrait of the era; their story revealed a mass of information

hitherto lacking in most novels and presented in a way which engendered a binding emotion of sympathy and understanding.

As with all of the Goncourt Brothers' characters, the girl who became Renée Mauperin in the novel was well known to them. The critic P. Martino remarks that

Renée Mauperin a été faite à la ressemblance d'une amie d'enfance, "Mlle M..., la cordialité et la loyauté d'un homme alliées à des grâces de jeune fille; la raison mûrie et le coeur frais; un esprit enlevé, on ne sait comment, du milieu bourgeois où il a été élevé, et tout plein d'aspirations à la grandeur morale, au dévouement, au sacrifice; un appétit des choses les plus délicates de l'intelligence et de l'art."⁹

The woman described here was the epitome of the 'modern' woman, and thus was deserving of the spotlight into which she was thrust by the Goncourt Brothers.

In the story, Renée was born the third and last child of Charles-Louis Mauperin and his wife. In this position, Renée became the focal point of her parents' lives, the youngest child and therefore much petted and cosseted. However, she was also the pivot point in the relationship between Monsieur Mauperin, who found undisguised joy with this child, joy he never had with his elder daughter and his son, and Madame Mauperin, who viewed Renée as an intrusion who would diminish the fortunes of the two elder children.

Mme Mauperin, elle n'avait point si bien accueilli cette dernière fille. Bonne femme, bonne mère, Mme Mauperin était dévorée de cet orgueil de la province, l'orgueil de l'argent. Elle s'était arrangée pour avoir deux enfants; le troisième était mal venu d'elle, comme dérangeant la fortune des deux autres, comme rognant surtout la part de son

files. La division des terres réunies, le partage des biens amassés, et par là une déchéance future de position sociale, une diminution de la famille dans l'avenir, voilà ce que cette petite fille représentait à sa mère.¹⁰

This attitude must have been difficult for the child Renée to understand: on the one hand, a father whose life revolved around her, in whose eyes she could do no wrong, and on the other, a mother who tolerated her only because it was a duty, with no particular sentiment attached. And too, parental roles were reversed from the norm: it was to her father that she turned for love and affection, while her mother's affection was withheld. Thus, lacking the normal upbringing of a young girl, almost constantly in the company of men, Renée was permitted the freedom to question the events around her and to become aware of many concepts forbidden to many of her female contemporaries.

This open and challenging environment could not help but influence Renée's attitude towards her life and the lives of those around her. One of the most difficult things for her to accept was the fact that she was female. It was not the actual physical implications of being female that she could not deal with. It was, instead, a mental and spiritual inability to accept that others still looked upon her in the traditional manner. Exposed as she was at an early age to the society of men and the subjects they discussed, she was unable to accept that as she grew older she would have to regress to the traditional role of the female. What she needed and desired above all else was acceptance as a person rather than as just a female. She searched and struggled for the right to view real life unhindered:

Renée hated the well-meaning concern of people around her which meant that she was guarded from exposure to subjects not deemed fit for an impressionable young girl. It was only with resignation that she accepted these circumstances, as is shown when she wishes to see a new art acquisition belonging to her godfather.

-Peut-on voir, parrain?

-Non, filleule, vous n'êtes pas encore assez grande. Et il lui donna sur la joue une petite tape d'amitié.

"Ah! c'est toujours comme cela ce que vous achetez!" dit Renée en tournant le dos au vieillard...¹¹

The paradoxes which made up her life caused Renée torment and frustration concerning her particular niche in society. She was unsure of the nature of her role in the flow of events around her, but she had unerring sense of reality and a flair for the truth, and was willing to make any sacrifice to preserve these concepts.

For Renée, this meant a personal evaluation of those people who made up her little world. She regarded each of them with a discerning eye, and was quick to reveal their small deceptions both to themselves and to her. Only those who were passionately loved by her escaped this analysis and were accepted on the strength of her love alone.

Her family was scrutinized with no less discriminating an eye, although her father's position in her life was obvious: she was her father's companion and sounding board, having a role similar to a wife. However unconscious it might have been, Renée was certainly competing with her mother for her father's affection, and may have felt a thrill of pleasure when she succeeded in

capturing his attention to the exclusion of everyone else. The strength of her love for Monsieur Mauperin made it impossible for her to envision conjugal love.

Vois-tu, disait-elle à son père, moi je ne pouvais aimer personne; tu me rendais trop difficile en fait d'affection. J'étais si sûre d'avance que personne ne m'aimerait comme toi! Je voyais passer tant de choses sur ton visage quand j'étais là, tant de joie! Et quand nous allions quelque part ensemble, avais-tu assez d'orgueil de moi! Etais-tu assez fier de me donner le bras! Va, père, on aurait eu beau m'aimer, je n'aurais jamais retrouvé mon papa; tu m'avais trop gâtée...¹²

And there was certainly no question of her marrying solely for convenience. The 'rewards' of marriage, money, position, status and security held no attraction for her, and the possessors of these things were weak and characterless for her. Denoïsel, her childhood mentor, described the type of man Renée might consider marrying to her brother, Henri, in this manner.

...pourvu qu'il fût intelligent, qu'il eût un caractère, une personnalité, quelque chose capable de dominer ou de remuer une nature féminine comme la sienne,...¹³

This situation caused Renée's mother a good deal of unhappiness and was viewed with humour by Renée herself. Unconcerned with convention and formality, Renée was unimpressed with her mother's adherence to custom and ritual. Renée found the limiting conformism impossible to handle and succeeded in making it bearable only through her own scandalous behaviour. The vicious circle effect of the sparring between mother and daughter only made the mother more sure that Renée needed the discipline of husband and family, and Renée more sure that such a situation

would be intolerable.

Renée's view of her brother is complex. She respected his position as a successful lawyer and writer, but it is difficult to determine how much he influenced her life. He lived in Paris, quite out of the family sphere, although his many visits for dinner and the like are mentioned in the novel. His contacts with the intellectual world brought Renée an awareness of political and social problems. Through these people she was allowed to view the complexities of the thought process and the logical development of modern sociological changes. This influence caused her to regard with some disdain those whose thoughts were not so uplifting.

Voilà l'effet que me fait le monde, à moi. Peut-être ça tient à ce que je n'ai pas eu de chance. Je suis tombée sur des jeunes gens sérieux, des amis à mon frère, des jeunes gens à citations, comme je les appelle. Les jeunes personnes, on ne peut leur parler que du dernier sermon qu'elles ont entendu, du dernier morceau de piano qu'elle ont étudié, ou de la dernière robe qu'elles ont mise: c'est borné, l'entretien avec mes contemporaines.¹⁴

Renée placed her sister, Madame Davarande, with those people whose lives were concerned with trivialities. Renée considered her sister an example of what she did not want to be: married for convenience and position to an eligible man. She found the falseness of such a situation contrary not only to her desires but to her sensibilities as well.

It was through Denoisel, a companion and friend, that many of Renée's thoughts and sensibilities were formed. He was the son of her father's close friend, and had been raised like a

son by Renée's family. He was independent and long-seeing. His concept of the world was a unique one, and he endeavoured to instill in Renée a knowledge and a respect for her own capabilities. He, even more than Renée's father or her brother, realized the extent to which women would be challenged in a new, modern world.

On demande à une jeune fille des impressions, des expressions personnelles et naturelles. Elle peut parler, et elle doit parler de tout. C'est passé dans les mœurs. Elle n'est plus tenue de jouer l'ingénuité, mais l'intelligence originale.¹⁵

Renée's background, while never being described in detail in the novel, is clearly that necessary for the development of a 'modern' woman. This was the goal of the Goncourt Brothers when they undertook the work and their success is due to the character of each woman they chose to document and to their own skill as writers.

The character of Germinie Lacerteux presents a different case to the reader. Germinie belonged to the basses classes, previously described. She was a servant girl with a provincial background; orphaned at a tender age, she was soon sent to work for her keep in Parisian establishments. The story, a true one based on the life of their maid, Rose, led the Goncourt Brothers to write in the preface to Germinie Lacerteux

Vivant au dix-neuvième siècle, dans un temps de suffrage universel, de démocratie, de libéralisme, nous nous sommes demandé si ce qu'on appelle "les basses classes" n'avait pas droit au Roman; si ce monde sous un monde, le peuple, devait rester sous le coup de l'interdit littéraire, et des dédains d'auteurs qui ont fait jusqu'ici le silence sur

l'âme et le coeur qu'il peut avoir. Nous nous sommes demandé s'il y avait encore, pour l'écrivain et pour le lecteur, en ces années d'égalité où nous sommes, des classes indignes, des malheurs trop bas, des drames trop mal embouchés, des catastrophes d'une terreur trop peu noble. Il nous est venu la curiosité de savoir si cette forme conventionnelle d'une littérature oubliée et d'une société disparue, la Tragédie, était définitivement morte; si, dans un pays sans caste et sans aristocratie légale, les misères des petits et des pauvres parleraient à l'intérêt, à l'émotion, à la pitié, aussi haut que les misères des grands et des riches; si, en un mot, les larmes qu'on pleure en bas pourraient faire pleurer comme celles qu'on pleure en haut.¹⁶

By studying this girl from the lower class, the Goncourt Brothers sought to establish the differences in environment which made Germinie's life so different from Renée's. In addition, they wished to describe the life of the lower class, aware that many of those who read their novels had no experience or understanding of the circumstances surrounding such a person. By emphasizing Germinie's humanity and vulnerability, the Goncourt Brothers elevated an otherwise common servant girl into a dynamic, intriguing character.

Like Renée, Germinie was the last child born to her parents. Although she added another mouth to an already poor and hungry family, she too was petted and spoiled. She saw little of her father, who was a labourer, and her mother died when she was five years old. From that time onward, the family seemed dogged by unfortunate circumstances. A strike, her father's death, her brother's death, her sisters' move to Paris and her own move to her aunt's village caused confusion and misery for young Germinie. Unable to settle in her new surroundings with

unfamiliar faces, she was sent to Paris, aged fourteen, to live with her sisters. Once there, Germinie was sent to work in a café.

There, she became aware of her burgeoning sexuality, and yet she was not sufficiently informed about such subjects to understand their implications. Germinie felt incapable of describing the horror to which she was subjected. This left her open and vulnerable to the jibes and insults of the men around her. In the end, she was sexually attacked by Joseph, an old retainer who worked in the café. The results of this incident were many: Germinie became pregnant and therefore, an outcast, alone in a hostile atmosphere. Her sisters, shamed by her "disgrace" brutally reviled Germinie, both verbally and physically. Germinie developed a morbid fear of any man and a part of herself became shuttered and denied. Germinie's confusion regarding herself, her relationships with others and her concept of life in general was profound and tragic.

In terms of emotional adjustment, Germinie never got over her unhappy childhood, her shame at the calumny of her sisters nor her own insecurities. Even when she finally found a sort of permanence in the employ of Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, she faced the world alone. With no close friends and cut off from her family, she had no one to turn to for advice. As a result, with each new situation, she reacted in a different way, and her confusion mounted. She could never, therefore, count upon her own resources and be ensured of a predictable outcome.

[Germinie Lacerteux] , c'est l'histoire des

métamorphoses constantes du personnage dans des situations où le changement brusque et inexpliqué reste constant.¹⁷

Her personality was in a constant state of transition and fluctuation, where her impressions depended upon her mood, her concept of how others viewed her and her own situation. This instability was a direct result of unfavourable environmental conditions. She was unsure of any reality outside her own, but she was aware of the possibility of escape. She craved love and affection to the point of degrading herself and causing herself misery and shame in order to obtain companionship, but she nevertheless retained a certain concept of honour and loyalty. These concepts, when juxtaposed with her later actions in the novel, caused her a great deal of pain, shame and frustration.

Germinie, due to her deep need for love and care, was easy to dupe. Those around her made good use of her weakness, with Germinie giving her all in order to obtain any small favour offered to her. Her one redeeming quality was her overriding devotion to Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, which never faltered.

Germinie knew many people, living as she did in an honourable position as Mademoiselle's maid. However, as her good judgement was clouded by her unrelenting need for love, she often made friends with undesirable people. She could not see how these people ingratiated themselves into her favour, nor could she see how she devoted herself to them for little in return. To her, anyone who professed to show concern for her was deserving of anything she could offer.

On such person was Madame Jupillon, the crémière on

the street where Mademoiselle and Germinie made their home. Germinie's hunger for affection and her willingness to be of service to Madame Jupillon made her needs obvious. Germinie's desire to confide her intimate secrets and exchange confidences with Madame Jupillon, gave the latter a perfect opportunity to see her son, a good deal younger than Germinie, set up in business for himself. Madame Jupillon was quick to recognize in Germinie all the symptoms of unrequited love, and with a little persuasion, Jupillon himself saw the tempting rewards of a successful wooing of Germinie. Mother and son both had

...déjà deviné tous les avantages et toutes les sécurités que cette conquête d'une femme plus âgée que lui, sérieuse et en possession d'une place honorable, assurera à son garment de fils.¹⁸

Jupillon became a master of deception, pretending at once to love Germinie, and yet disdainful of a creature who could be so easily taken in. His empty promises and frequenting of other women left Germinie hurt and overwhelmingly jealous, but her faith in her own love for Jupillon remained alive.

This love persisted even after Germinie finally found out the truth. Realizing that she had been duped and used, she retreated into a protective shell, unwilling to risk intimate contact with anyone. Afraid of her own need for devotion and love, she feared her need overpowering her innate sensibilities.

However, her denial was fruitless. Conscious of her considerable physical needs, she began to haunt the streets using any man she could find and offering what she could in return for his favours. The ultimate humiliation struck Germinie

to the core of her existence and yet she no longer had the power to fight against it. Her relationship with Médéric Gautruche indicated the depths to which she had fallen. Nights of alcoholic debauchery followed days spent hiding her double life. Her mind became conditioned to her situation, no longer differentiating morality and decadence.

Her only remaining loyalty was to Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle was the one person who had treated her with kindness and sympathy, who had given her a home and constant, honourable employment. In all that she was to do, Germinie's one justification was that she had to protect Mademoiselle from herself becoming poisoned by Germinie's conduct.

Et Germinie malgré son existence de plus en plus déchirée conserve à sa maîtresse le même dévouement, le même attachement total.... Elle la trompait uniquement par respect et pour garder sa tendresse.¹⁹

Whereas Renée Mauperin wanted to be accepted for what she was, Germinie wanted to be something she could never be. Both characters were searching for the elusive state of interior peace. Both desired acceptance, knowledge and contentment, but they were both denied these things by the society in which they lived. The frustration of such denial is portrayed in great detail by the Goncourt Brothers and thus, having established some of the societal pressures of the nineteenth century, it becomes important to study in depth the basic human emotion of frustration as it related to the lives and the characters of Renée Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux.

NOTES:

1. P. Martino, Le Roman réaliste sous le Second Empire (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1913), p. 91.
2. G. Reynier, La Femme au xvii^e siècle (Paris: Editions J. Tallandier, 1929), p. 196.
3. L. Prajs, La Fallacité de l'oeuvre romanesque des Frères Goncourt (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1974), p. 254.
4. P. Martino, p. 237.
5. J-P. Richard, "Notes sur les Goncourt," Revue des sciences humaines, (janv. - mars, 1953), p. 55.
6. M. Immergluck, La Question sociale dans l'oeuvre des Goncourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), p. 120.
7. Ibid., p. 81.
8. E. Zola, Mes Haines (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1923), p. 67.
9. P. Martion, p. 241.
10. E. & J. de Goncourt, Renée Mauperin (Paris: Arthème Fayard et Cie, 1875), p. 16.
11. Ibid., p. 18.
12. Ibid., p. 118.
13. Ibid., p. 26.
14. Ibid., p. 9.
15. Ibid., p. 26.
16. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux (Paris: Flammarion, 1929), p. 6.
17. L. Prajs, p. 29.
18. P. Sabatier, Germinie Lacerteux des Goncourt (Paris: Sfelt, 1948), p. 64.
19. Ibid., p. 76.

Chapter II

Two Heroines in Frustration

The theme of frustration is one of the major themes treated by the Goncourt Brothers in their novels concerning women. Their treatment of the physical and emotional effects of this theme gives a detailed portrait of each woman's situation and an accurate picture of personalities and backgrounds.

The novels Germinie Lacerteux and Renée Mauperin are excellent examples of the Goncourt Brothers' careful notation of the character and reactions of women affected by frustration. Each of these women comes from a different social class and yet they have common goals: the respect of others and their own self-fulfillment.

Germinie and Renée had to deal with frustration on two levels: they had to come to terms with their own internal frustrations and they had to live with the frustrating pressures which society placed upon them. It becomes difficult to know exactly where each level assumes its importance, since the internal and external pressures are so closely interrelated. This too, provided problems for each woman.

Neither Renée nor Germinie were aware that many of their problems stemmed from their unfulfilling day-to-day existence. Although the concept was relatively undefined in their own minds, each woman certainly felt an emptiness and a malaise within herself which prompted thought and questions. That the Goncourt Brothers were aware of this phenomenon and noted it in their works serves to confirm their desire to portray a 'modern' woman

different from the woman portrayed by other authors.

Goethe, a German philosopher of the eighteenth century remarked that

Le moindre individu peut être complet à condition de se mouvoir dans les limites de ses aptitudes et de ses compétences.¹

This universal philosophy was an example of the changing attitude of the nineteenth century as well. It indicated that fulfillment is a realistic possibility in spite of the conditions contained in the quotation, and it certainly did not exclude women from its dictum. To achieve fulfillment, however, an analysis of several factors was implied within the statement. First, a person had to have a certain concept of self, in order to be aware that the opportunity for advancement lay within the self. Second, it was necessary to understand one's capabilities and talents. In this way, it would be possible to define the parameters for action without misjudging either oneself or the potential for action. This was the task of each woman in the novels.

However, a woman's self-analysis occasionally came into direct conflict with the precepts of society. In general, a woman's own concept of self relied on what society dictated. She was not encouraged to define for herself what she felt, how she thought or what she wanted. She could only accept those modes of conduct which she was given by society. In addition, her lack of formal education limited her potential. She could not comprehend how society was duping her; she therefore was unwittingly a victim of circumstance.

In viewing Renée and Germinie, we see the genesis of

self-awareness and self-fulfillment. The pressures of society and their innate reluctance to break with society's customs dominated their lives. However, their willingness to come to a conscious decision based on their appraisal of a situation, whatever the outcome, was an indication of their optimism tinged with a frustration caused by the minor accomplishments they appeared to achieve.

In comparing the accomplishments of the two women, a striking dissimilarity appears. While each woman searched for self-confidence and attempted to deal with the outside world on its own terms, the quality of the achievement for each was quite different. Their different social backgrounds made the challenge to each woman entirely different. They each grappled with the concepts of society as they perceived them and they arrived, through frustration, at the same destiny.

The Goncourt Brothers have examined in their works the various aspects of religion, love, honour and justice as they were viewed by each woman. These concepts are the focal point of the challenge to each and by spotlighting the universality of the subjects, the Goncourt Brothers have emphasized the overriding pervasiveness of the societies about which they write. Also, they have contributed their personal interpretation of each woman's situation to their works in order to encourage in their readers an emancipation of their own lives and thus of society as well.

The Goncourt Brothers' portrait of religion as it related to Renée and Germinie was important. Since the majority of

their readers were Roman Catholics, the Goncourt Brothers could be assured of an awareness on the part of their readers: what they read and understood from the portraits in the novels could apply to their own lives. The reading public would be forced to think and to analyse the writing of the Goncourt Brothers.

They were themselves disillusioned and contemptuous of the Catholic faith. In their examination of the influence of religion on the lives of their characters, they reveal the disappointment they found inherent in their own concept of the faith. They attempted to give their female characters a consoling and comforting faith, but the women only found the frustrations and anguish which had troubled the Goncourt Brothers. The following statement describes their faith as they desired to see it.

A la misère réelle du peuple, les Goncourt donnent l'adoucissement de la religion, de cette religion qui devient de plus en plus le bien exclusif de ceux qui pleurent. "La plus grande force de la religion chrétienne, c'est qu'elle est la religion des tristesses de la vie, des malheurs, des chagrins, des maladies, de tout ce qui afflige le coeur, la tête et le corps. Elle s'adresse aux gens qui souffrent. Elle promet des consolations à ceux qui en ont besoin, l'espérance à ceux qui désespèrent. - ... Ils estiment donc la religion comme une consolation. Sa nécessité se présente à eux sous une forme d'ordre et de pitié.²

But the Goncourt Brothers were unconvinced that complete and unquestioning devotion to religion would provide solace and help. Neither Renée nor Germinie found a haven from their problems, nor did they find the advice and the consolation they sought. Instead, they encountered frustration and deceit.

Germinie's concept of religion was an interesting facet

of her character, and she demonstrated the emotions and devotion expected in a simple, provincial woman. Having only the education of the streets, Germinie accepted willingly the teachings of the Church. In not examining any of the precepts of the Church, she became incapable of detaching herself from it. She was invaded by a sort of religious ecstasy, not unlike a form of physical pleasure.

...[L]a religion pour la femme n'est pas la discipline à laquelle l'homme se soumet; c'est un épanchement amoureux, une occasion de dévouement romanesque. C'est dans les jeunes filles un exutoire licite, une permission d'exaltation, une autorisation d'avoir des aventures mystiques.³

For a woman such as Germinie, this deep emotional attachment took on great meaning. Through the Church, Germinie found the channel of devotion she needed. Alone in a seemingly friendless world, she found the attentions of the Church and of the priest who heard confession enabled her to accept her fate. In this one place, she knew she was welcome and there was always someone who was interested and was capable of delivering guidance. In her penitance and her confessions, she found a sympathetic and understanding man in priestly and sacred robes.

Les Goncourt ont noté avec délicatesse ce rôle de confident de leurs misères que le prêtre joue parmi les femmes du peuple; elles trouvent, auprès d'un prêtre charitable et patient, un peu de douceur inhabituelle, qui les reconforte et peut-être empêche certaines d'entre elles de se laisser aller au désespoir.⁴

Her close contact with the Church had made it impossible for her to examine her own position. This man to whom she devoted her longings was bound by a sacred vow of chastity. His was an

unselfish devotion to the world which he could not forsake, and the realization that Germinie brought a more profane emotion into the confessional forced him to sever contact with her.

Her distress was magnified by her incomprehension of his action. His rejection sapped her self-confidence. She was unaware that her devotion to the Catholic faith was in actual fact a devotion to the human representative of that faith, the priest.

Cette fièvre de religion dura plusieurs années pendant lesquelles Germinie vécut concentrée, silencieuse, rayonnante, toute à Dieu, - au moins elle le croyait. Cependant peu à peu son confesseur avait cru s'apercevoir que toutes ses adorations tournaient vers lui. A des regards, à des rougeurs, à des paroles qu'elle ne lui disait plus, à d'autres qu'elle s'enhardissait à lui dire pour la première fois, il comprit que la dévotion de sa pénitente s'égarait et s'exaltait en se trompant elle-même. Elle l'épiait à la sortie des offices, le suivait dans la sacristie, s'attachant à lui, courait dans l'église après sa soutane. Le confesseur essaya d'avertir Germinie, de détourner de lui cette ferveur amoureuse. Il devint plus réservé et s'arma de froideur. Désolée de ce changement, de cette indifférence, Germinie, aigrie et blessée, lui avoua un jour, en confession, les sentiments de haine qui lui venaient contre deux jeunes filles, les pénitentes préférées de l'abbé. Le prêtre alors, l'éloignant sans explications, la renvoya à un autre confesseur. Germinie alla se confesser une ou deux fois à cet autre confesseur; puis elle n'y alla plus; puis elle ne pensa plus même à y aller; et de toute sa religion il ne lui resta plus à la pensée qu'une certaine douceur lointaine et comme l'affadissement d'une odeur d'encens éteint.⁵

Religion had offered Germinie a certain solace, but it could never fill the void left by her continuing need to find someone to love. It was not within her understanding to accept

a God whose existence was based on abstract principles, and she could not associate spiritual rewards with her real life on earth. The priest offered a physical existence, but his devotion to his religion and to the precepts of his office made it impossible for him to fulfill the dreams and desires of a lonely and troubled woman.

The frustration of this incomprehension left her confused and withdrawn. Her primitive being needed the religious fervour which transformed her world and gave her hope and courage. She resented the forces which wrenched her from the bond of security she had found within the Church, to condemn her to her day-to-day existence. In removing the lifeline of the Church from Germinie, the Goncourt Brothers left her at the mercy of herself and of fate. As will be shown later in this dissertation, that decision was a momentous one.

Religion for the bourgeoisie usually carried with it none of the religious ecstasy found in the more primitive classes. Their religion was no longer a sanctuary and a haven where daily burdens could be lifted for a time, since there were few burdens left to bear. It was rather a social organization designed as a higher authority not just for religious matters, but also for matters of a social nature. Its popularity as a last word on conduct and custom overrode its function and the consolation in its teachings became limited. The Church became the focal point for many bourgeois families in their search for the accumulation of wealth and for immortality. The priest functioned as a consultant in social matters rather than a healer of souls.

Leur abbé Blampoix, dans Renée Mauperin, est un "agent social" qui "exerce une influence sur la famille et sur la société." Influence qui pénètre dans les familles, juge, pèse les possibilités des vertus à demander à chacun, unit ces mêmes familles, les relie par un mariage qui souvent n'est pas l'union de deux âmes, mais celle de deux intérêts. Le prêtre prêche la religion comme un apaisement aux passions, prêtre assez sceptique en somme, qui se sert de la religion pour arriver à ces fins. Il est presque Jésuite; à coup sûr, il pratique la fameuse maxime des Jésuites: "la fin justifie les moyens."

Son rôle est grand dans les familles bourgeoises. Il y maintient l'ordre, passe l'éponge sur les scandales, les fait oublier en leur donnant une autre signification, marie les filles, conseille utilement les mères. C'est le frein social de la bourgeoisie qui use d'une religion aimable pour arrêter la corruption.⁶

The overt deceit within this religion so intent on supporting the bourgeoisie gave Renée grave doubts in her own faith. She was not a primitive woman searching for an escape from her dreary world. Renée was an intelligent woman, capable of examining society and the concepts around her. She was not subjected to the religious ecstasy Germinie felt and she was not therefore firmly bound to the Church. She was able, in this way, to detach herself from the Church, to examine it, and to determine for herself its function in her life.

Where Germinie found an object of devotion in her priest, Renée was able to look beyond the man and analyse his function in religion. Her confessor, the abbé Blampoix mentioned above, was a man who lived in ease and graciousness while tending his flock. The Goncourt Brothers describe him vividly.

L'abbé Blampoix avait le charme du prêtre qui a l'éducation, des talents et des grâces. Il

savait mettre de la causerie dans la confession, du sel dans l'exhortation, de l'agrément dans l'onction. Il s'entendait à émouvoir et à intéresser. Il connaissait les paroles qui touchent, les paroles qui carressent et les paroles qui chatouillent. Sa voix était musicale, son ton fleuri. Il appelait le diable le "prince du mal" et l'Eucharistie "l'aliment divin". Il abondait en périphrases colorées comme des images de sainteté. Il parlait de Rossini, il citait Racine, il disait "le bois" pour le bois de Boulogne. Il parlait de l'amour divin avec des mots qui troublaient, des vices du jour avec des particularités piquantes, du monde avec la langue du monde. De temps en temps, les termes à la mode et tous frais, les mots intimes de la langue, passaient dans ses consultations spirituelles, ainsi que des morceaux de journal dans un livre ascétique. Il sentait agréablement le siècle. Sa robe avait comme l'odeur de toutes les jolies fautes qui l'avaient approché. Il était profond et aiguisé sur les tentations subtiles, admirable de finesse, de flair et de décence sur la casuistique des sensualités. Les femmes en raffolaient.⁷

Renée was revolted by the obsequiousness of this man who claimed to be a personification of the holy rules. She saw him for what he was: a selfish man who knew the advantages of pandering to the rich, and making their lives more tolerable to the profit of his own pocket. His refusal of a bishopric was not a sacrifice to remain in the service of those who needed him, but rather a desire on his part to remain among those people who would reward his aid in the most profitable manner.

Le fretin des fautes allait à d'autres; à lui, on apportait les péchés de choix. Autour de lui, c'était un bruissement de grands noms, de grosses fortunes, de jolies contritions, et de belles robes. Les mères le consultaient pour mener leurs filles dans le monde, les filles s'éclairaient auprès de lui avant d'y aller. Il était l'homme auquel on s'adressait pour avoir l'autorisation de se décoller,

l'homme qui réglait la pudeur des robes de bal et la décence des lectures, l'homme à qui l'on demandait le titre des romans à lire et la liste des pièces morales à voir.⁸

His hold over the people he claimed to serve was a strong one. They consulted him on every matter pertaining to themselves and their relationships with others. A hint or a bad word from him could be cause enough to sever a relationship forever.

For Renée, the frustration of being constantly reined in or controlled by such a man was intense. She needed the freedom to decide for herself the manner in which she lived her life; having to consult a man who lived a life of deceit was impossible. Also Renée found that not only was he deceiving his flock regarding his own conduct, but he was also deceiving them about the quality of their own faith.

C'était un homme de sens et d'esprit, un prêtre facile et qui accommodait tout au précepte: La lettre tue et l'esprit vivifie. Il était tolérant et intelligent. Il savait comprendre et sourire. Il mesurait la foi au tempérament des gens, et ne la donnait qu'à petite dose. Il adoucissait la pénitance, il ôtait les noeuds de la croix, il sablait le chemin du salut. De la religion dure, laide, rigoureuse des pauvres, il dégageait comme une aimable religion des riches, légère, charmante, élastique, se pliant aux choses et aux personnes, à toutes les convenances de la société, à ses moeurs, à ses habitudes, à ses préjugés même. De l'idée de Dieu, il faisait quelque chose de confortable et d'élégant.⁹

Renée found it hard to accept the concept of inequality before God. A sin was a sin, no matter who had committed it, and she saw no reason for making allowances simply because one was rich. The deceiving nature of the religion as preached by

abbé caused her to turn her back on the Church, and live by her own understanding of right and wrong. Renée, like Germinie, was eventually condemned for such a decision. This decision, though, was purely hers, made of her own free will, regardless of the consequences. Whereas Germinie left the Church because her own longings could never be satisfied, Renée left because she knew she could never conform to the constraints placed upon her by the outside world.

By leaving the Church, Renée and Germinie lost their faith in one form of devotion, that unconscious and ecstatic surrender to the spiritual world, which left them susceptible to doubt and questions concerning that other, more conscious form of devotion which is love. Both women had little understanding of love and all its implications; the joyful experiences associated with the love of a man were not within their comprehension. What they had experienced were the more negative aspects of such a relationship, the boring, the frightening or the incomprehensible. This had an unsettling effect upon their lives and led to mental anguish and frustration.

Each of these women was searching for different qualities in her love of a man. Renée sought a partner, a man who would deal with her on equal terms, and who would accord her honour, respect and dignity. Not for her the man who would use her for no more than an object of his desires. He had to be intelligent and far-seeing; a man who would make the most of his abilities and talents. If he possessed these qualities, Renée's strength of character and pride could deal with almost anything

life meted out. Germinie, on the other hand, insisted on only two things in love: security and unstinting devotion, not only on her part, but from her mate as well. Her great capacity for loving and giving became her curse. She was plagued by thoughts of love and devotion, yet she could not exist without them. This left her vulnerable and brought her only humiliation, degradation and dishonour.

The love in Germinie's life was a constant duel between the pleasant and the sordid, each warring with the other to achieve ultimate supremacy. This constant vacillation was a result not only of society and its pressures, but also of the inherent duality of Germinie's character itself. She was "un être passionné et violent, un être tendre et dévoué."¹⁰ This paradoxical juxtaposition of violence and passion tempered by tenderness and devotion left Germinie confused and tortured.

The Goncourt Brothers labelled this phenomenon the mélancolie des viêrges. They described this condition in the novel by saying that

En parlant mariage à Germinie, Mlle de Varandeuil touchait la cause du mal de Germinie. Elle mettait la main sur son ennui. L'irrégularité d'humeur de sa bonne, les dégoûts de sa vie, les langueurs, le vide et le mécontentement de son être, venaient de cette maladie que la médecine appelle la mélancolie des viêrges. La souffrance de ses vingt-quatre ans était le désir ardent, irrité, poignant, du mariage,...¹¹

The devotion which Germinie accorded to her mistress was unable to fill this other longing which she found so overpowering. Her need for the passion found in the love of a man began to control her life and interfere with her day-to-day activities. This left

Germinie vulnerable and caused her to view love in an unrealistic, impassioned manner. "En tout, son coeur était exigeant et des-pote."¹²

She was unable to understand that a person has many different ways to love: self-love, love of a man, love of a child, even love of humanity as a whole and each different kind of love contributes in a unique way to the formation of the whole person. Because Germinie was concentrating on only one form of love, the desire for the love of a man, any intrusion or invasion of another kind of love caused her anguish and pain. Germinie, in truth, was subject of three very separate forms of love, each of which was pervasive in its influence upon her life. The first type of love was her love for and devotion to Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, an emotion which was to outlive all others; the second was her love for a child, both for her niece and her own children, born out of wedlock by Jupillon; and lastly, her love of a man, first the youth Jupillon and then the painter, Gautruche. She reacted in a very different way to each of these forms of love.

Her love for and devotion to Mademoiselle was a pure and unstinting action. Grateful to Mademoiselle for providing her honourable work and a decent home, Germinie did everything in her power to maintain the confidence and the respect which Mademoiselle had for her, even in circumstances which were debasing and dishonourable. Germinie found a certain conflict in her vision of her relationship with Mademoiselle when she was confronted with saving herself or condemning herself to Mademoiselle's wrath and disappointment. In a later section of this

chapter, this concept will be discussed in more detail with respect to Germinie's personal concepts of honour and truth.

The love Germinie had for 'her' children, her niece, and then her own children born out of wedlock, was the one relationship in which she found security and happiness. They were people to whom she could devote herself and live for. Her own child, a product of herself and her lover, Jupillon, was a relationship which would grow with the passing years. There would never be any question of the loyalty and devotion of the child's thoughts: a child's love for its mothers is usually unquestioning and profound. In spite of the scandal and the humiliation associated with the birth of her child, Germinie knew no greater joy than with her precious daughter.

La joie et l'orgueil d'avoir donné le jour à une petite créature où sa chair était mêlée à la chair de l'homme qu'elle aimait, le bonheur d'être mère, la sauvèrent des suites d'une couche mal soignée. Elle revint à la santé et elle eut à vivre un air de plaisir que sa maîtresse ne lui avait jamais vu.¹³

However, she approached the third sort of love in her life, the love of a man, from an altogether different point of view. This was not a comfortable form of devotion. In this love, she was insecure and frightened by her mental and physical reactions over which she had no control and which seemed to pervade her entire being. Coupled with the medical definition of the mélancolie des vierges, the Goncourt Brothers emphasized her confusion and susceptibility by portraying in great detail the anguish in her soul as a result of her innate sensibilities.

And yet,

De cette femme laide s'échappait une âpre et mystérieuse séduction. L'ombre et la lumière, se heurtant et se brisant à son visage plein de creux et de saillies, y mettaient ce rayonnement de volupté jeté par un peintre d'amour dans la pochade du portrait de sa maîtresse. Tout en elle, sa bouche, ses yeux, sa laideur même, avait une provocation et une sollicitation. Un charme aphrodisiaque sortait d'elle, qui s'attaquait et s'attachait à l'autre sexe. Elle dégagait le désir et en donnait la commotion. Une tentation sensuelle se dégageait naturellement et involontairement d'elle, de ses gestes, de sa marche, du moindre de ses remuements, de l'air où son corps avait laissé une de ses ondulations. A côté d'elle, on se sentait près d'une de ces créatures troublantes et inquiétantes, brûlantes du mal d'aimer et l'apportant aux autres, dont la figure revient à l'homme aux heures inassouvies, tourmente ses pensées lourdes de midi, hante ses nuits, viole ses songes.¹⁴

Unwittingly, Germinie's desires and intrinsic sensuality were mirrored in her every movement. She laid herself open to being taken in and used by unscrupulous and selfish people. They saw in her overt seduction a means to ingratiate themselves into her favour, and to obtain from her, on the pretext of love and devotion, all that she was capable of giving them. Mère Jupillon, a devious and clever creature, employed this particular facet of Germinie's character to the fullest. Using all her wiles to dupe Germinie, the crémière soon had Germinie in the palm of her hand. By merely hinting of the possibility of a union between Germinie and her son, Madame Jupillon made Germinie a willing victim.

Germinie fut bien vite séduite et apitoyée par cette crémière câline, bavarde, toujours émue, appelant à elle l'expansion des autres et paraissant si tendre.¹⁵

The crémière was well aware of Germinie's weaknesses. Playing up to the obvious gratitude in Germinie's obsequious

patronage, Mère Jupillon laid her plans well.

Sans jamais parler, sans prononcer un mot qui pût être un engagement, sans s'ouvrir ni se lier, et tout en répétant que son fils était encore bien jeune pour entrer en ménage, elle encouragea les espérances et les illusions de Germinie par l'attitude de toute sa personne, ses airs de secrète indulgence et de complicité de coeur, par ces silences où elle semblait lui ouvrir les bras d'une belle-mère. Et déployant tous ses talents de fausseté, usant de ses mines de sentiment, de sa finesse bon enfant, de cette ruse ronde et enveloppée qu'ont les gens gras, la grosse femme arrivait à faire tomber devant l'assurance, la promesse tacite de ce mariage, les dernières résistances de Germinie qui à la fin se laissait arracher par l'ardeur du jeune homme ce qu'elle croyait donner d'avance à l'amour du mari.

Dans tout ce jeu, la crémière n'avait voulu qu'une chose: s'attacher et conserver une domestique qui ne lui coûtait rien.¹⁶

Germinie guessed none of the deception inherent in the crémière's seemingly innocent friendship. Germinie did not stop to examine the motives of those around her: to anyone who offered her the single-minded devotion for which she was searching, Germinie in her turn gave a devotion which bordered on the fanatic. She became animal-like in her determination to preserve the relationship and to protect herself at the same time.

La jalousie était le fond de sa nature; c'était la lie et l'amertume de ses tendresses. Ceux qu'elle aimait, elle voulait les avoir tout à elle, les posséder absolument. Elle exigeait qu'ils n'aimassent qu'elle. Elle ne pouvait admettre qu'ils pussent distraire et donner à d'autres la moindre parcelle de leur affection: cette affection, depuis qu'elle l'avait méritée, n'était plus à eux; ils n'était plus maîtres d'en disposer.¹⁷

Jealousy was one of the effects love had upon her personality. Her love committed her to an inevitable course of self-destruction, simply because she was unaware of the powerful influence

which love had upon her mind and her body. She was insecure in her relationship with Jupillon and this impaired her judgement. It was not until the twentieth century that anyone overtly remarked upon the destructive aspect of love, and then Germaine Greer wrote in her treatise The Female Eunuch:

Women must recognize in the cheap ideology of being in love the essential persuasion to take an irrational and self-destructive step.¹⁸

Germinie's course of self-destruction commenced with her overwhelming need for love and devotion. This began to manifest itself in more harmful ways as time progressed. Naturally, she was jealous of the freedom with which Jupillon conducted himself. She desired to see reflected in him the overwhelming passion and love which she felt for him. Instead, she never knew where she stood with him; one day their relationship would be all that she might hope, and the next, there would be nothing.

L'amour n'avait été pour le jeune Jupillon que la satisfaction d'une certaine curiosité du mal, cherchant dans la connaissance et la possession d'une femme le droit et le plaisir de la mépriser. Cet homme, sortant de l'enfance, avait apporté à sa première liaison, pour toute ardeur et toute flamme, les froids instincts de polissonnerie qu'éveillent chez les enfants les mauvais livres, les confidences de camarades, les conversations de pension, le premier souffle d'impureté qui déflöre le désir. Ce que le jeune homme met autour de la femme qui lui cède, ce dont il la voile, les caresses, les mots aimants, les imaginations de tendresse, rien de cela n'existait pour Jupillon. La femme n'était pour lui qu'une image obscène; et une passion de femme lui paraissait uniquement je ne sais quoi de défendu, d'illicite, de grossier, de cynique et de drôle, une chose excellente pour la désillusion et l'ironie.¹⁹

As a result of her relationship with Jupillon, Germinie

forced to contemplate her situation. She was becoming more and more aware of discrepancies in both his actions and her own. She had begun to see her situation as it really was, although actual acceptance was still a long way ahead of her. However, it was a beginning, and her sudden understanding that momentary pleasures were just that and that there was no way in her power to change circumstances, gave her an added bolster.

C'était la première fois qu'elle avait le sentiment, l'impression à la fois âpre et douce, violente et divine, du jeu de la vie éclatant dans sa plénitude, sa régularité, sa puissance.²⁰

Faced with the realities of her existence and the inevitability, by virtue of her love for Jupillon, of her impossible situation, Germinie exhibited signs of physical and emotional fatigue. She was aware of her condition and yet her love was still able to make physical and emotional suffering bearable. The Goncourt Brothers show this with

...la notation patiente et clairvoyante des manifestations extérieures de ce sentiment naissant et de ce désir qui s'intensifie dans un être peu à peu privé de la volonté de réagir et qui s'enivre du bonheur dont la fragilité et le danger ne lui échappent pas dans l'obscurcissement de sa conscience.²¹

Other incidents, however, contributed to her total submission and subsequent acceptance of her fate. Germinie was a proud woman, proud of her stature as Mademoiselle's maid and proud of the obvious respect she received from the community. In her dealings with the Jupillon family, she became the object of discussion and speculations of the community and the scandal-mongers among them made haste to inform the community of her

liaisons.

Alors il n'y eut plus doute dans le quartier sur les relations de la domestique de mademoiselle avec Jupillon, relations que quelques âmes charitables contestaient encore. Le scandale éclata et, en une semaine, la pauvre fille, traînée dans toutes les médisances du quartier, baptisée et saluée des plus sales noms de la langue des rues, tomba d'un coup, de l'estime la plus hautement témoignée, au mépris le plus brutalement affiché.²²

This was a blow to Germinie's self-esteem. She could do nothing to halt the gossip.

Ce fut pour elle une horrible déchéance d'elle-même. Elle souffrit comme si on lui arrachait, lambeau à lambeau, son honneur dans le ruisseau. Mais à mesure qu'elle souffrait, elle se serrait contre son amour et se cramponnait à lui.²³

Only by binding herself irrevocably to Jupillon could she, in a small measure, protect herself from the jibes and the insults of the majority of the community. At this point in her life, as an undeniable link between herself and Jupillon, she set him up in business as a glove merchant. She provided a shop and rooms fit for his position as a businessman in society. Germinie sacrificed her total life savings in order to give her lover the best that could be provided.

By giving Jupillon what he wanted, Germinie ceased to be attractive to him. There was no longer any reason for him to court her exclusively, and he began to frequent the dance halls and the bars with women who were younger and more attractive than Germinie. She was cast aside like the proverbial old shoe, and all her attempts to maintain the relationship were greeted with contempt and mockery.

Her love began to turn to hate: the jibes and the taunts of those around her began to infect her mind.

Longuement empoisonné, l'amour se décomposait et se tournait en haine. Germinie se mettait à détester son amant, à chercher tout ce qui pouvait le lui faire détester davantage.²⁴

She was faced with the frustration of her rejected love. She had sacrificed, by her own actions, the sympathy which might have been forthcoming from those around her, and she had placed herself in a humiliating and degrading position. She had lost her fine reputation, had sacrificed all her savings to support Jupillon in his venture and was left with the shreds of her existence in confusion and turmoil. Her suffering was intense and bitter.

However, the power of her love for Jupillon was not reduced by these upsetting circumstances. She was still haunted by thoughts of him. This was made perfectly clear when he approached her for money to buy his way out of the army. She could not, either physically or mentally, deal with the thought of Jupillon being injured or possibly killed through his service with the army. As a final humiliation, Germinie begged, borrowed and mortgaged her life to find sufficient funds to see him paid out.

L'humiliation d'avouer qu'elle n'avait pas d'argent placé, comme on le croyait et comme par orgueil elle le laissait croire, la commisération des gens qu'elle méprisait, les refus, les aumônes, elle avait tout subi, essuyé ce qu'elle n'aurait pas essuyé pour trouver du pain, et non une fois auprès d'une personne, mais auprès de trente, de quarante, auprès de tous ceux qui lui avaient donné où dont elle avait espéré quelque chose.²⁵

This was the final breaking point of her spirit. She had sacrificed everything, even her life to this ungrateful, calculating man. She would no longer be leading a life of her own, but she would be existing for the benefit of those to whom she owed money. They would extract from her all that she possessed, including finally, her very life.

Il semble que, sous l'influence de cette maladie d'impressionnabilité, les sensations aiguës, raffinées, spiritualisées, dépassent leur mesure et leur limite naturelles, atteignent au delà d'elles-mêmes, et mettent une sorte d'infini dans la jouissance et la souffrance de la créature.²⁶

For Germinie, it became necessary to lose herself, to retreat from the realities of the contempt of society and her own internal and unceasing recriminations. She sought a means of blotting out the past and the future, of becoming a part of oblivion, deep, dark and hidden away from taunting eyes.

Dans la torture de cette vie, où elle souffrait mort et passion, Germinie, cherchant à étourdir les horreurs de sa pensée, était revenue au verre qu'elle avait pris un matin des mains d'Adèle, et qui lui avait donné toute une journée d'oubli. De ce jour, elle avait bu....elle avait bu avec Adèle qui buvait comme un homme et qui prenait un vil plaisir à voir descendre aussi bas qu'elle cette bonne de femme honnête.²⁷

Drinking was a means to ignore the passage of time and to bar the intrusion of people into her life.

Car ce qu'elle voulait ce n'était point la fièvre de tête, le trouble heureux, la folie vivante, le rêve éveillé et délirant de l'ivresse; ce qu'il lui fallait, ce qu'elle demandait, c'était le noir bonheur du sommeil, d'un sommeil sans mémoire et sans rêve, d'un sommeil de plomb tombant sur elle comme un coup d'assommoir sur la tête d'un boeuf: et elle le trouvait dans ces liqueurs mêlées qui

la foudroyaient et lui couchaient la face sur la toile cirée de la table de cuisine.²⁸

But for her, the shock and distress of reviving and finding herself in the same place facing the same problems in that first instant of recognition, placed a great strain on her. At that point, the force of her decadence and dilemma was overpowering and she was blindingly aware of each action, almost as if she was reliving it again at that moment.

Chez elle, une sensibilité malade, une sorte d'éréthisme cérébral, une disposition de tête à toujours travailler, à s'agiter dans l'amertume, l'inquiétude, le mécontentement d'elle-même, un sens moral qui s'était comme redressé en elle après chacune de ses déchéances, tous les dons de délicatesse, d'élection et de malheur s'unissaient pour la torturer et retourner, chaque jour, plus avant et plus cruellement dans son désespoir, le tourment de ce qui n'aurait guère mis de si longues douleurs chez beaucoup de ses pareilles.²⁹

Perhaps at this point in her life, had she been of a stronger character and able to face up to the realities of her existence, she might have been able to reverse the trend of her life and regain her esteemed position within the community. However, she was so convinced of her delinquency and of the impossibility of her redemption, that she condemned herself to the horrors of mental and physical demoralization. Here she conforms to a pattern of behaviour that Germaine Greer has noted.

Too often the errant women abuse themselves with excessive shame and recrimination, degrading themselves more in their own estimation than they do by their behaviour. The compulsiveness of this behaviour is the direct result of repressiveness in education: women are drawn to sexual licence because it seems forbidden and exciting, but the price they have to pay for such delinquency is too heavy. The result is functional nymphomania.³⁰

This too, was Germinie's fate. The search for love became no more than an excuse for promiscuity and the satisfaction of overwhelming physical desires. She was plagued by the excesses demanded of her by her physical nature. She became essentially a creature for whom life was reduced to the next drink or the next encounter with a man.

Malgré tout, elle ne pouvait s'apaiser ni se refroidir. Ses mauvaises pensées se rallumaient toutes seules, vivaient et s'agitaient sur elles-mêmes. A toute heure, l'idée fixe du désir se levait de tout son être, devenait dans toute sa personne ce tourment fou qui ne finit pas, ce transport de sens au cerveau: l'obsession, - l'obsession que rien ne chasse et revient toujours, l'obsession impudique, acharnée, fourmillante d'images, l'obsession qui approche l'amour de tous les sens, de la femme, l'apporte à ses yeux fermés, le roule fumant dans sa tête, le charrie tout chaud dans ses artères!³¹

The constant suffering of Germinie's mind and body and the obsessive and possessive qualities of her physical nature tormented her. The frustration caused by her inability to assuage her physical needs grew with each passing moment. But she was past conscious action and she was content to let herself be swept along by the current of humanity which surrounded her and bound her to its turbulent flow. She sought out those people who could give her pleasure and make her forget herself. She gave herself up a bohemian existence of raucous and bitter debauchery.

Et maintenant, quand elle sortait de son abrutissement, quand, dans la distraction et le plaisir, elle se retrouvait et renaissait, il fallait qu'elle pût s'amuser avec des égaux à sa portée. Elle voulait, autour d'elle, des hommes qui la fissent rire, des gaietés violentes, de l'esprit spiritueux

qui la grisât avec le vin qu'on lui versait. Et c'est ainsi qu'elle roulait vers cette bohème canaille du peuple, bruyante, étourdis-sante, enivrante comme toutes les bohèmes: c'est ainsi qu'elle tombait à un Gautruche.³²

Médéric Gautruche was the personification of the bohemian lifestyle. His was the life of wine and women, pausing only momentarily to earn his daily bread. The Goncourt Brothers describe him in detail and it becomes obvious why Germinie became attracted to this type of man.

Toujours un peu ivre, ivre de la veille quand il ne l'était pas du jour, il voyait l'existence au travers du coup de soleil qu'il avait dans la tête. Il souriait à son sort, il s'y laissait aller avec l'abandon de l'ivrogne, souriant sur le pas du marchand de vin vaguement aux choses, à la vie, au chemin qui s'allonge dans la nuit. L'ennui, les soucis, la dèche n'avaient pas prise sur lui; et quand par hasard il lui venait une idée noire ou sérieuse, il détournait la tête, faisait un certain psitt! qui était sa manière de dire zut! et le bras droit au ciel en caricaturant le geste d'un danseur espagnol, il envoyait par-dessus l'épaule sa mélancolie à tous les diables. Il avait la superbe philosophie d'après boire, la sérénité gaillarde de la bouteille. Il ne connaissait ni envie ni désir. Ses rêves lui étaient servis sur le comptoir. Pour trois sous, il était sûr d'avoir un petit verre de bonheur, pour douze un litre d'idéal. Content de tout, il aimait tout, trouvait à rire et à s'amuser de tout. Rien ne lui semblait triste dans le monde - qu'un verre d'eau.³³

This man relieved for the moment the terrible pressures which Germinie was experiencing. Because he was unaffected by morose and depressing sentiments, he conveyed to Germinie a small measure of comfort, encouraging her to live for the moment and to take from that moment all the pleasure possible. He came to Germinie (or Germinie to him) when the measure of relief was

carnal and the necessity savage and violent.

Et c'étaient, entre ces deux êtres, des amours terribles, acharnées, et funèbres, des ardeurs et des assouvissements sauvages, des voluptés furieuses, des caresses qui avaient les brutalités et les colères du vin, des baisers qui semblaient chercher le sang sous la peau comme la langue d'une bête féroce, des anéantissements qui les engloutissaient et ne leur laissaient que le cadavre de leurs corps.³⁴

Together, these two creatures abandoned reality in pursuit of a nebulous netherworld, where they could be as the dead, unconscious and unaware. They sought to halt the passage of time through their decadent encounters, hoping perhaps that their overwhelming emotions would be appeased through alcohol and violent debauchery. They were no longer searching for pleasure in their relationship, but were bound by an addiction as binding as an addiction to potent drugs.

Women are happy to replace spontaneous association for pleasure's sake with addiction because it is more binding.³⁵

Gautruche and Germinie were inextricably bound to each other, Germinie as a relief for her frustration and physical agony, and Gautruche for the more profitable aspect of the relationship, a contemplated marriage.

Here for the first time, Germinie was approached by a lover who did want to marry her. She, however, had learned from her entanglement with Jupillon that men only wanted one thing from her, and that was the security of her position as personal maid to Mademoiselle, and the accompanying financial security that implied. She saw through the mask of sincerity worn by Gautruche, and finally made a conscious decision based on her

own personal values and her new found courage to look out for herself. She refused his proposal. Even while she was aware that she had made the right decision concerning her future and her life, she was flung into the depths of despair by the fact that she had lost a man who could, for a short while, make her forget her situation and her mental anguish.

De cette rupture, Germinie tomba où elle devait tomber, au-dessous de la honte, au-dessous de la nature même. De chute en chute, la misérable et brûlante créature roula à la rue. Elle ramassa les amours qui s'usent en une nuit, ce qui passe, ce qu'on rencontre, ce que le hasard des pavés fait trouver à la femme qui vague. Elle n'avait plus besoin de se donner le temps du désir: son caprice était furieux et soudain allumé sur l'instant. affamée du premier venu, elle le regardait à peine et n'aurait pu le reconnaître. Beauté, jeunesse, ce physique d'un amant, où l'amour des femmes les plus dégradées cherche comme un bas idéal, rien de tout cela ne la tentait plus, ne la touchait plus. Ses yeux, dans tous les hommes, ne voyaient plus que l'homme: l'individu lui était égal. La dernière pudeur et le dernier sens humain de la débauche, la préférence, le choix, et jusqu'à ce qui reste aux prostituées pour conscience et pour personnalité, le dégoût, le dégoût même, - elle l'avait perdu!³⁶

Germinie was a creature condemned by her own desperate need for love. In writing a novel about her, the Goncourt Brothers have allowed their character to chart her own course through her life of desire and debauchery. She was affected by fatality alone, unable to extricate herself even if she wanted to. Yet Germinie was aware of her circumstances even though frustration and mental and physical anguish overruled all other sentiments.

Love was Germinie's downfall. The Goncourt Brothers have successfully shown their readers the treacherous course

traversed by Germinie, and have conveyed this through

...la notation patiente et clairvoyante des manifestations extérieures de ce sentiment naissant et de ce désir qui s'intensifie dans un être peu à peu privé de la volonté de réagir et qui s'enivre d'un bonheur dont la fragilité et le danger ne lui échappent pas dans l'obscurcissement de sa conscience.³⁷

This is one aspect of the philosophy of Naturalism. It is the clear documentation of the events of a character's life, a progression which leads to an awareness of self, in spite of an inability to change or control these events. In recounting the tale of Germinie's life and loves, the Goncourt Brothers placed their faith in the ability of society to feel and to think, not only with respect to themselves but with the whole of society as well.

The Goncourt Brothers utilized the same approach when writing of Renée Mauperin. In this case, they were telling the story of a young girl from their own social background, a young girl of the bourgeoisie. Here, being familiar with the attitudes and lifestyles of the people described, the reader could more easily associate themselves with the events described. They would be able to see within the story a small portion of their own existence, and therefore be benefitted by the observation of the anguish and frustration of a creature such as them.

The attitude towards love and the concept of love in Renée's life was very much different from that in Germinie's life. Renée lived the sheltered life of a young bourgeoisie and had therefore been exposed only to those men within her family or to whom her family had introduced her. Renée was untouched

by the sordid elements of love which had plagued Germinie, and thus was able to consider love from an entirely different point of view. Renée was none the less frustrated and angered by the concept of love and all it represented, but she was frustrated for reasons not entirely of her own design.

In general, the concept of love and the concept of marriage in the mind of the bourgeoisie were inextricably linked. If one was loved, one married and if one was married, one loved. However, in a society where the maintenance of the status quo and the ultimate conformity of the society were all-important concepts, marriage was not usually solemnized because the parties loved each other, but rather for financial consolidation or for territorial acquisitions promised in the female's dowry.

This led to many marriages which were consummated merely to produce heirs and once accomplished, permitted each party to lead a perfectly unopposed life. Only in cases which smirched the family name or place the fortunes in jeopardy would anything be done to control or limit one's personal conduct.

The emptiness of such an arrangement caused Renée grief and fear. She was convinced that love was a sentiment only capable of being evoked by authors in the books they wrote, that it was not something encountered in the real world.

...tous les livres qu'on lit sont remplis d'amour, il n'y a que de ça! Et puis, dans la vie, on n'en voit pas...Moi, du moins, je n'en voit pas; je vois, au contraire, tout le monde qui s'en passe, et très bien...Il y a des jours où je me demande si ce n'est pas fait seulement pour les livres, si ce n'est pas une imagination d'auteur, vraiment.³⁸

There were no concrete examples of the joining of two lives in

love rather than some baser purpose of which Renée was aware. Her parents had not married for love. They had married to consolidate family holdings and establish in perpetuity family and financial stability. M. Mauperin married his cousin, a choice which his mother had made to assure herself of heirs once she died.

Ce fut par condescendance pour elle, par pieux respect pour ses désirs de malade, qu'il se maria. Il épousa sans grand goût une cousine désignée au choix de sa mère par une mitoyenneté de propriété, par des terres bout à bout, par tout ce qui renoue et recroise en province, les familles et les fortunes.³⁹

Even Renée's elder sister, Henriette Davarande, had married in order to achieve for herself a position, money and access to society.

Elle s'était mariée toute jeune. Elle avait pris le premier homme "bien" qu'on lui avait présenté, sans hésitation, sans trouble, du premier mouvement. Ce n'était point M. Davarande, c'était une position qu'elle épousait. Le mariage, pour elle, était la voiture, les diamants, la livrée, les invitations, les connaissances, la promenade au Bois. Elle eut tout cela, se passa d'enfants, aima ses toilettes, et fut heureuse. Trois bals dans un soir, quarante cartes à mettre avant dîner, courir des jours, en tenir un, hors de là, elle n'imaginait point qu'il y eut de bonheur.⁴⁰

Renée did not want a man solely for the material things with which he could provide her. She needed a man who could inspire her thoughts and who was capable of achieving great heights himself. Marriage to some respectable and eligible man would not and could not allow her to be the person she desired to be: free to make her own choices concerning the way she lived her life and the way she perceived situations and people around her.

Her parents' vision of Renée's future husband was clouded by the obligatory provincial attitudes which had controlled their lives. They could not envisualize or perceive Renée's needs or desires, only make assumptions based upon their personal previous experiences. Renée might have married but only

...pourvu qu'il fût intelligent, qu'il eût un caractère, une personnalité, quelque chose capable de dominer ou de remuer une nature de femme comme la sienne,...⁴¹

None of the men considered by her parents to be suitable possessed these qualities, and naturally, Renée exhibited her most scandalous behaviour in their presence. In this way, she was successful in rebelling against her parents' choice of suitor, and made it clear that such a union would only come to grief and destroy whatever her parents had hoped to achieve by such a marriage. This wilful conduct did cause her much pain since she had no desire to willingly hurt either parent, although she knew that she would never be able to fall in with their wishes on the subject of marriage.

Renée had a second and more dominant reason for rejecting the suitors introduced to her by her parents. She had for her father an all exclusive and possessive love and admiration. In him, she saw the personification of all the virtues she herself sought in a man. No man, in her eyes, could come close to the example set by her father. Love of another man was impossible and, moreover, undesired.

Mais moi, je ne suis pas un exemple. Je crois que ces choses-là arrivent surtout aux personnes qui ont le coeur vide, le coeur inoccupé, qui ne sont remplies, possédées, défendues par une de ces affections qui vous

prennent et vous gardent toutes, par exemple l'affection qu'on a pour un père.⁴²

This affection for her father did pose problems for her. She was unable to accept the love of another man out of the fear that this man would not devote himself to her as her father did - she was afraid of becoming a cast-off or a possession deemed fit only to satisfy a man's baser instincts. From a strictly selfish point of view, she coveted the exclusive attention paid to her by her father and she realized perhaps that she would not be able to require such behaviour from another man. She would be beyond controlling such a relationship, and she would be unable to pursue her chosen course in life.

Her resentment of conformity and the overwhelming love she had for her father became her banner and her retreat. Safely surrounded by her trust in these two concepts, she felt secure enough to defend them against all odds, although she must have been aware of society's changing attitude towards the maintenance of the status quo, and the inevitable time limit of life itself. However, she was naive and as such, was unaware that she could not impose her own concept of love and honour on others. To do so was folly.

The Goncourt Brothers set out to portray the bourgeoisie as they viewed them

...avec l'idée de montrer les travers de la jeune bourgeoisie, son égoïsme, son hypocrisie, ses conventions, le tissu d'intrigues moyennes qui fait sa vie, et sa soif d'honneur et de richesses au mépris des aspirations individuelles des âmes. Dans ce milieu étouffant ils ont placé leur héroïne Renée qui sera naturellement en révolte contre lui, ...comme eux-mêmes n'ont jamais cessé d'être des révoltés

contre les injustices et les laideurs de la vie. Ce thème de la révolte leur sera toujours cher.⁴³

Renée personified their desire to portray a more elevated character, a character who had the courage to defend those virtues she truly believed in. In doing so, Renée brought on her own downfall, but she exemplified the philosophy which exposed life as it really was and permitted a greater insight into the character of man and of life as a whole.

Her love was pure and untainted by sexual overtones, and her commitment to the pursuit of freedom undeniable. She had a certain concept of each of these things, one to which she held no matter what the circumstances. The Goncourt Brothers describe a personal situation which challenged all her concepts: love, loyalty, family devotion and honour. It is interesting to examine in relation to her ideals and life.

As with most bourgeois families, parents desired to see their sons married for the same reasons as their daughters: establishment in society, monetary gains or augmentation of lands and titles. This was the case with Henri Mauperin, Renée's older brother. However, Henri had taken the situation into his own hands, and only became a part of his parents' plans when it suited his purpose to do so.

Henri had established alliaison with Madame Bourjot, the mother of Renée's childhood friend, Noémi, unbeknownst to any member of his family, and well before plans had been made to unite him to the Bourjot family through marriage to Noémi. This relationship was profitable to him in that it established

him with Madame Bourjot, and made it impossible for her to object to the marriage of Noémi to him since she would be incriminating herself if she did so. Thus protected, Henri had few worries concerning his situation.

All that was left, then, was to find a situation which would serve to reveal himself to Noémi, and to extricate himself from his relationship with her mother. Such an occasion was the family theatre production, suggested by Henri. A romantic comedy was slated and players were duly required. However, there was a lack of female talent, and again Henri showed his foresight when he casually mentioned Noémi Bourjot, who happened to be in residence in the neighbourhood. He was assured of an interest on the part of his mother, who wished to see him married and was attracted by the amount of Noémi's dowry.

Henri's deception might have remained a closely guarded secret except that Noémi found out about Henri's liaison with her mother, and in her shame and distress, had confided in her close friend, Renée.

Her brother's attempts to secure in this fraudulent way a wealthy and well-known bride angered and distressed Renée. She felt sympathy for her friend who had been so ill-used, and determined to rectify the situation. By helping Noémi, she would also be defending her own principles.

Elle se sentait la force d'une femme et
presque les devoirs d'une mère auprès de
cette enfant.⁴⁴

Even though Renée did not believe that love existed in the real world, she still desired that marriage be entered into for better

reasons than simply money, and that the parties involved have a certain respect for each other which might grow into love as the years passed. She believed that Henri had no feelings for Noémi and that Noémi was simply a pawn to be played when it suited him.

Renée's concept of love was at stake in the midst of this sordid intrigue. To marry Noémi, Henri had pledged to replace his father's name with a more noble one. This angered Renée since she felt that it was a denial of the love and respect of a man who had provided well for his children. Her own love for her father was so strong that she could not understand how anyone else's love for him could not be as binding. Of her own volition, Renée went to plead with Henri:

Et puis, ça porte malheur de quitter le nom
de son père...C'est notre sang, ce nom-là,
Henri...Notre brave père! Ne fait pas ce
mariage, je t'en supplie...⁴⁵

But Henri was determined to succeed in his venture.

Renée was angered for a second reason. Had she remained unaware of Henri's liaison, Renée might have remained untainted by the deceitfulness of his action. She would not have been exposed to the sordid aspects of life and might have remained innocent and pure. Instead, she was embroiled in a situation which placed the family name in danger of being besmirched by rumour and accusations.

-Ah! c'est de la boue que je ne devrais pas
connaître, c'est vrai!...et que je n'aurais
jamais connue sans toi!⁴⁶

Renée's concept of honour was also at stake. She had been raised in a bourgeois society where honour and position were

to be maintained at all costs. She was very sure of what she believed: honour implied total honesty in conduct.

...moi, je ne connais que deux sortes de gens,
d'abord: ceux qui sont honnêtes...et les
autres...⁴⁷

She was outraged that her brother had flagrantly ignored those concepts of honour and honesty with which he had been raised.

The key to events which followed Noémi's revelation to Renée can be summed up in Renée's own words:

Mais toutes les fois que je vois quelqu'un
que je connais...ou même que je ne connais
pas...manquer à ce que vous, les hommes, vous
appelez l'honneur...eh bien, c'est plus fort
que moi...c'est comme si je voyais un crapaud!
Çe me répugne, ça me dégoûte...et je marche
dessus!⁴⁸

When confronted with her brother's decision to legally assume a noble name in order to marry Noémi, Renée was seized with an overwhelming desire to prevent this marriage, in an attempt to appease the hurt and anguish suffered by her friend, Noémi, and the dishonour which would be the family's fate should Henri be successful in his undertaking. Renée had overheard a conversation at the Registry Office which concerned her brother and the name which he had decided to use. Information came to her that the family concerned had not completely died out; there was still one member, who was rarely heard from and was considered to be a recluse. Renée, in her concern for her friend and for her brother whom she considered to have done wrong, mailed a copy of the Moniteur which contained the declaration of her brother's intention of changing his name. In her innocence, she did not stop to consider the possible consequences of her action. She was con-

vinced only of her honour in the action. She had acted to protect her family and her friend; nothing else was of any consequence.

It is sometimes better to wait and to be patient, to let actions continue through their normal course to their conclusion, such might have been the best course for young Renée to follow. In her inexperience with affairs of the heart, and her innate and powerful desire to maintain her ideals of love and honour, she had not reckoned with the transitory nature of human emotions.

At the grand ball given to celebrate the engagement of Noémi Bourjot and Henri Mauperin de Villacourt, as he was now known, Noémi confided to Renée that her mother no longer loved Henri and that she herself loved him with all her heart.

L'aveu de Noémi avait fait passer dans Renée un éclair de joie. Le sourire de son amour la pénétra. Elle eut un immense soulagement de délivrance. En un instant tout changea pour elle; et cette idée: elle l'aime! emporta toutes ses autres idées. Elle ne vit plus les hontes, elle ne vit plus le crime qu'elle avait vu si longtemps dans ce mariage. Elle se répétait que Noémi l'aimait, qu'ils s'aimaient tous les deux... Le reste était le passé, un passé qu'ils oublieraient l'un et l'autre, Noémi à force de le pardonner, Henri à force de le racheter. Soudain un souvenir lui revint, une pensée d'inquiétude, une crainte vague. Mais en ce moment elle ne voulait rien voir de noir à l'horizon, rien de menaçant sur l'avenir.⁴⁹

Renée had only acted as she thought she should, after examining the circumstances presented to her, and taking into consideration those events within her comprehension. She could not foresee that Henri and Noémi would find love together nor that as a result of her actions, her brother would die from stab wounds inflicted in a duel between the surviving de Villacourt

and himself. Her error was impatience brought about by inexperience and the necessity innate to her to maintain truth, honesty, honour and love.

Her frustration was with the fickleness of human nature and her own incapacity to accept that those around her viewed their situation in a much different manner than she did. In her overwhelming desire to preserve her ideals and virtues, she condemned herself to an existence of fear and regret until she finally came to grips with her situation and her ultimate course of action.

For Germinie Lacerteux, life comprised the same fear and regret that was viewed in Renée's. However, Germinie's fears were not because she could not convince others of the virtues of honesty and honour, but because her life was based on dishonour and dishonesty. Her degradation in the eyes of society, and her constant and excessive debts plagued her. She spent all her time concealing her actions and hiding behind excuses and alibis. She was two women in the one: she was a loyal servant to Mademoiselle, who did her job with care and consideration, and she was a harlot, a woman of the streets, who debased herself in order to satisfy her lust and physical torment.

Elle menait ainsi comme deux existences. Elle était comme deux femmes et, à force d'énergie, d'adresse, de diplomatie féminine avec un sangfroid toujours présent dans le trouble même de l'alcool, elle parvint à séparer ces deux existences, à les vivre toutes les deux sans les mêler, à ne pas laisser se confondre les deux femmes qui étaient en elle, à rester auprès de Mlle de Varandeuil la fille honnête et rangée qu'elle avait été, à sortir de l'orgie sans en emporter le goût, à montrer quand elle venait de quitter son

amant une sorte de pudeur de vieille fille dégoûtée du scandale des autres bonnes.⁵⁰

That she was able to accomplish this deception successfully serves to emphasize her care and consideration concerning Mademoiselle and the concept of honour which she still retained in spite of her decadence. Never once did a word of her torment or distress give her away. All of her hidden, frustrated life remained locked inside, eating away at those last remnants of self-respect and honour.

De sa nature passionnée, débordée, qui se versait si naturellement dans l'expansion, jamais ne s'échappait une phrase, un mot qui fût un éclair, une lueur. Déboires, mépris, chagrins, sacrifices, mort de son enfant, trahisons de son amant, agonie de son amour, tout demeura en elle silencieux, étouffé, comme si elle appuyait des deux mains sur son coeur.⁵¹

Even in the agony which accompanied her lying and her cheating of her mistress, Germinie's conscience was appeased by the thought that Mademoiselle would continue to love and honour her. This was absolutely necessary to Germinie's self-preservation.

I Il ne venait pas d'une duplicité perverse, d'un calcul corrompu: c'était son affection pour mademoiselle qui la faisait être ce qu'elle était chez elle....Elle la trompait uniquement pour garder sa tendresse, avec une sorte de respect; et dans l'horrible comédie qu'elle jouait, un sentiment pieux, presque religieux, se glissait pareil au sentiment d'une fille mentant aux yeux de sa mère pour ne pas lui désoler le coeur.⁵²

Germinie's concept of honour was that of a child. She desired simply that others love and honour her and she did not possess the experience to enhance the notion of honour to include

society's concept as well. Renée's attitude towards honour was a more adult one, which included the respect and discipline required by society.

Each woman regarded her concept of honour and love within the bounds of her own knowledge. For each woman to act as she did was reasonable and in character, given her particular surroundings and attitudes. The Goncourt Brothers remained in constant touch with reality and with the portrayal of truth.

Avec les Goncourt, nous demeurons toujours au contact de la réalité. Dans leur roman, on rencontre à toute page le document vécu, le souvenir évoqué.⁵³

The constant contact with reality that the Goncourt Brothers maintained in their novels allowed the reader to the events leading to Renée's and Germinie's penultimate frustration. For each woman, this frustration was the same and was a decision which challenged them, while at the same time, prompted resentment in the inevitability of their course of action.

Both Renée and Germinie were challenging the course of justice; each woman was placed in a situation which forced her to contemplate her own situation, and come to her own conclusions. Each woman was challenging a justice which pertained to her alone: did she condemn society for leading her into her own personal hell of frustration and bitterness, or did she condemn herself for being led and easily swayed? However, the challenge of this justice is an empty one, for in actual fact, neither woman had any choice in her decision. The decision itself could be made, but the course of action had been determined by fatality and nothing would or could be changed.

Cette sensation de déterminisme, de fatalité qui pèse sur les êtres revient dans toutes les oeuvres des Goncourt comme un leit-motiv. Ils pensent volontiers que le destin de chacun est tracé d'avance et qu'une des erreurs de l'homme est de croire qu'il peut y échapper.⁵⁴

Each woman realized and accepted her fate in a different way. In each case, it is important to examine this fate in view of its tragic effects upon their lives and on the lives of those around them. Destiny can sometimes be cruel and frustrating. For Renée and Germinie, death is the ultimate frustration.

NOTES:

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2. M. Immergluck, La Question sociale dans l'oeuvre des Goncourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), p. 59.
3. E. Caramaschi, Réalisme et Impressionnisme dans l'oeuvre des Frères Goncourt (Pisa: Libreria Goliardica, s. d.), p. 118.
4. M. Immergluck, p. 61.
5. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux (Paris: Flammarion, 1929), pp. 56-57.
6. M. Immergluck, p. 60.
7. E. & J. de Goncourt, Renée Mauperin (Paris: Arthème Fayard et Cie, 1875), p. 33.
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13. Ibid., p. 119.
14. Ibid., pp. 60-61.
15. Ibid., p. 70.
16. Ibid., p. 90.
17. Ibid., p. 75.
18. G. Greer, The Female Eunuch (Frogmore, England: Paladin, 1971), p. 170.
19. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, p. 94.
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22. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, p. 105.
23. Ibid., p. 107.
24. Ibid., p. 131.
25. Ibid., p. 152.
26. Ibid., p. 154.
27. Ibid., p. 158.
28. Ibid., p. 159.
29. Ibid., p. 164.
30. G. Greer, p. 266.
31. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, p. 196.
32. Ibid., p. 213.
33. Ibid., pp. 208-209.
34. Ibid., p. 255.
35. G. Greer, p. 156.
36. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, p. 233.
37. P. Sabatier, p. 62.
38. E. & J. de Goncourt, Renée Mauperin, p. 48.
39. Ibid., p. 14.
40. Ibid., p. 67.
41. Ibid., p. 26.
42. Ibid., p. 48.
43. P. Sabatier, p. 27.
44. E. & J. de Goncourt, Renée Mauperin, p. 71.
45. Ibid., p. 72.
46. Ibid., p. 72.
47. Ibid., p. 75.
48. Ibid., p. 76.

49. Ibid., p. 86.
50. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, pp. 168-169.
51. Ibid., p. 167.
52. Ibid., p. 170.
53. P. Sabatier, p. 77.
54. Ibid., p. 78.

Chapter III

The Portrait of Death

Death is an integral and inevitable fact of life. It cannot be escaped. The Goncourt Brothers were fascinated by the manifestations of death as it affected each of their characters and it is an important facet of their works. Each of their characters regarded death from a different point of view, making the portrait of death a distinctive and varied feature of each of the novels.

Few people wish to die. The thought of death is a disturbing and awesome phenomenon which provided the Goncourt Brothers with a wealth of observations concerning the human mind in turmoil and the changes in the processes of thought which result. The Goncourt Brothers used the phenomenon of death to penetrate the intimate thoughts of their characters. This highlighted the mental and emotional states of the characters which resulted from their perception of external events. This in turn embroiled the reader in the description making him undergo the emotional anguish that is suffered by the characters. Thus, death presented to the Goncourt Brothers the ultimate portrait of the human mind under stress.

...ce qui l [es] intéresse, ce sont les phénomènes qui se passent à une certaine profondeur de l'être, ainsi que les modifications qu'apportent à ceux-ci les changements dans l'espace et dans le temps.¹

However, the Goncourt Brothers were relatively uninterested in their characters' physical death as a phenomenon. What was more interesting and yielded far more useful material for

study was the concept of death as a process which provoked anguish in the minds of their characters. They desired to examine the physical and emotional reactions of their characters during the time leading up to their deaths, that knowledge exhibited as a person approaches death and, in a sense, is actually living death. The Goncourt Brothers sought to describe death for the progressive decomposition inherent in its path.

Ils aiment la mort et les êtres en train de mourir: mais c'est justement pour les saisir en train de vivre leur maladie, leur vice ou leur mort, donc tout simplement de vivre. Pourrissement et corruption les attirent par toute la chaleur vitale que nécessairement ils dégagent:....²

They were not morbid in their curiosity. Each event described by the Goncourt Brothers brought to light an emotion or a reaction on the part of their characters which was important to the portrait of human experience. They presented a living, breathing portrait of their characters in the process of accepting and coming to terms with their impending death. The Goncourt Brothers' attitude was one of concentrating their novels "...à rechercher la vie au coeur même de la mort."³ In this way, the portrait of the Goncourt Brothers' characters was at once as poignant and as realistic as possible.

Each woman in the Goncourt Brothers' novels had faced death, either the death of a person or the death of a concept or belief, several times during her life. Each occurrence was to play a major role in her outlook and attitude both towards life and towards death. Each was a turning point, causing anguish and grief, but also re-establishing each woman's ultimate interior

strength.

C'est dans la douleur, devant la douleur, contre la douleur que l'âme de la femme se manifeste le plus et le mieux, comme si c'était là sa fonction terrestre souveraine, l'autre étant de contempler Dieu.⁴

By following the progression of their characters' death, the Goncourt Brothers showed the spiritual purging inherent in each woman's death agony. In the anguish of death is revealed a certain rationale, determined and accepted by each of the women. In their description of Renée and Germinie as they approached their death, the Goncourt Brothers showed them strong and well able to accept their fate, even more so perhaps than the characters who surrounded them. Renée and Germinie were able to accept their destiny because they were able to view their past in perspective with the ability to rationalize each event with respect to the others. These women acknowledged their past and accepted their suffering. In so doing, they transcended it.

La transmutation de la douleur en joie surnaturelle, du mal en bien, c'est le principe de l'âme féminine.⁵

However, the process of accepting suffering and according it characteristics of virtue and necessity was a long and a hard one for each of the women. During their lifetime, they were confronted with death of others around them, which served to prepare them for their own death. They were also witness to the death of some of their most important concepts and beliefs, which forced them to reconsider their attitude towards life and society.

Thus, the Goncourt Brothers established several types of death within their novels: death of the spirit, death of

sentiment and death of the physical body. Not every one can be considered an actual death in the true sense of the word, since nothing physical is lost, and nothing changes except the attitude of the character herself. However, the loss of a thought or a possible event or the abandonment of an action on the part of the character might be considered to be equally important in examining death as a phenomenon in the works of the Goncourt Brothers.

Germinie's life was one of manifold tragedy. In her case, the concept of death in life is a prophetic one, for she experienced death at a very early age, and almost continuously until her own death. Germinie's mother died when she was five years old, leaving a family ill-equipped to look after itself. Already she was being prepared for her own death: her mother's death deprived her of love and affection and left her at the mercy of her family, her sisters, her brother and her never-do-well father. Both her sisters were jealous of the place Germinie had held in her mother's heart, and with her death, they began to tease their small sister. Germinie's elder brother saved this small child and provided as many luxuries as he could in order to ease her sense of loneliness and deprivation. In Germinie's eyes, her brother was a saint and she loved him for the devotion and sacrifices he made for her benefit. Her father, on the other hand, she regarded with a certain disdain. He only worked when he felt like it, and was unable to provide for his family. His death did not really affect the family fortunes and little affected Germinie's life.

The death of Germinie's brother deeply affected her

however. She was left alone, at the tender age of fourteen, to make her way in the world. In the break-up of the family, Germinie was the loser. She no longer had anyone to look after her, since both her sisters were occupied in earning their own living. In her brother's death was a pattern which was to repeat itself in the death of other people around her, and in her own death. The person she loved above all else died, leaving her at the mercy of cruel or unsympathetic people who could not give her the support she needed in her time of crisis. In her own death, she is still at the mercy of others who attack and revile her. In this way, she began to look at the dead as the fortunate ones, and saw in the possibility of her own death the release and escape from the horrors of living.

The deaths of her mother, her father and her brother shattered the innocence of her childhood. Germinie had to face the realities of life and she was sent to work in a Parisian restaurant. In that restaurant, she experienced the final death of her childhood and the growing knowledge of her womanhood. The death of her childhood was brutal and cruel. Exposed as she was to the rough, ribald men in the café, she became aware of her budding sexuality and the effects a woman might have on a man. Through her innocence and her inability to explain her worries and doubts to her sisters, she became the victim of an old man's lust.

La petite voulait se confier à ses soeurs, elle n'osait. Comme, avec la nourriture, il lui venait un peu de chair au corps, un peu de couleur aux joues, une apparence de femme, les libertés augmentaient et s'enhardissaient. Il y avait des familiarités, des gestes, des

approches, auxquels elle échappait et dont elle se savait pure, mais qui altérerait sa candeur en effleurant son innocence. Rudoyée, grondée, brutalisée par le maître de l'établissement habitué à abuser de ses bonnes,...⁶

The death of her innocence through these conditions and through the physical attack by a loathsome man left a lasting impression on the young Germinie. It coloured her perception of men and left her with memories of horror and shame, not only of herself but of what men signified. This first contact with the opposite sex was to blind Germinie and cause her to carry misconceptions about men, love and lust to her deathbed.

That might have been the end of the incident, and Germinie might have been able to forget it in time, but she discovered that she was pregnant as a result of the old man's attack. When her sisters were told of her condition, Germinie's hope of understanding and support died with the blows of her outraged sisters.

Les révoltes d'orgueil intraitables et brutales qu'à l'honneur du peuple, les sévérités implacables de la dévotion, éclatèrent chez les deux femmes en colères indignées. Leur confusion se tourna en rage. Germinie reprit connaissance sous leurs coups, sous leurs injures, sous les blessures de leurs mains, sous les outrages de leur bouche. Il y avait là son beau-frère qui ne lui pardonnait pas l'argent qui avait coûté son voyage et qui la regardait d'un air goguenard avec une joie surnoise et féroce d'Auvergnat, avec un rire qui mit aux joues de la jeune fille plus de rouge encore que les soufflets de ses soeurs.⁷

She was again left to stand by herself and face the knowing smiles of those around her who were aware of her shame. For Germinie, an intensely withdrawn person, the recriminations of

those around her brought her more anguish than her actual condition.

Germinie's child was born dead. Another death for Germinie to face, although in truth, it was a blessing. Had this child lived, it would have been a constant reminder of her shame and dishonour. This child could never have brought her happiness and contentment because of the circumstances under which it was brought to life. As it was, Germinie felt "...la joie d'une sortie de prison."⁸ She was free to recommence her life and to establish herself anew. She had no ties with the father and she had lost no love; she had merely been freed from tormenting circumstances.

Her first child little affected Germinie's spirit. She had been tormented until the child's birth, but with its death, she had been liberated and given a fresh start. However, Germinie reacted in a totally different manner to the death of her niece, and to the deaths of her own second and third children. These children of love, that is, Germinie devoted herself to them, and in the case of her own children, loved the father as well.

In losing these children, whose innocence gave their love a special quality, Germinie was made brutally aware of her lack of vision and her lack of judgement concerning her commitment to herself. Until death caused her to think and contemplate, she had been content to remain convinced that her salvation lay in her children and that being a mother would control all those emotions which tormented her soul.

Pleurant sa fille, la malheureuse se pleurait elle-même. Une voix lui murmurait que, cet enfant vivant, elle était sauvée; que cet enfant à aimer, c'était sa Providence; que tout ce qu'elle redoutait d'elle-même irait sur cette tête et s'y sanctifierait, ses tendresses, ses élancements, ses ardeurs, tous les feux de sa nature. Il lui semblait sentir d'avance son coeur de mère apaiser et purifier son coeur de femme. Dans sa fille, elle voyait je ne sais quoi de céleste qui la rachèterait et la guérirait, comme un petit ange de délivrance, sorti de ses fautes pour la disputer et la reprendre aux influences mauvaises qui la poursuivaient et dont elle se croyait parfois possédée.

Quand elle commença à sortir de ce premier anéantissement de son désespoir, quand, la perception de la vie et la sensation des choses lui revenant, elle regarda autour d'elle avec des yeux qui voyaient...⁹

The deaths of her children brought Germinie a hint of the self-realization with which she would eventually rationalize her existence. She began to understand that her salvation lay within herself, not with the belief that others would help her if only she devoted herself to them. These others were gradually being taken away from her, forcing her to make her own decisions and to accept the results of them. Germinie's spirit was being worn down by circumstances, but she grew in strength with the knowledge that she was capable of clear vision and rationalization of her existence.

The death of sentimental concepts of love and marriage contributed in their way to Germinie's growth and maturation as an individual. She was profoundly affected by the loss of sentimental, if not conjugal, love.

Her love and her expectation of marriage to Jupillon were doomed to die, since the relationship was one-sided. She

had given all her love, sacrificed her savings and still could not buy his total commitment to her. However, she had not chosen her lover well either. She had been blinded by her overwhelming desire for love and companionship, and she did not notice at first that Jupillon was totally unresponsive and that

L'amour n'avait été pour le jeune Jupillon que la satisfaction d'une certaine curiosité du mal, cherchant dans la connaissance et la possession d'une femme le droit et le plaisir de la mépriser.¹⁰

She gave totally of herself, unaware that she was feeding an insatiable beast. In his lack of attention to her devotion, she grew confused, unable to hide her incoherence and her vulnerability. This gave Jupillon the means to degrade her. As a result, the love which she so desired soured and became a hatred of all things associated with Jupillon. Love's death brought with it a realization of the true character of Jupillon.

Elle voyait qu'elle n'avait pu attacher Jupillon par le dévouement de son amour, le dépouillement de tout ce qu'elle avait, tous ces sacrifices d'argent qui engageaient sa vie dans l'embarras et les tranches d'une dette impossible à payer. Elle sentait qu'il lui apportait à regret son amour, un amour où il mettait l'humiliation d'une charité.¹¹

Love's death also brought a descent into the hell of unrequited passion, for love had been cast aside as useless and traitorous. The death of sentiment as something meaningful and noble caused Germinie to lose sight of herself and the commitment she had to herself.

L'amour qui lui manquait, et auquel elle avait la volonté de se refuser, devint alors la torture de sa vie, un supplice incessant et abominable. Elle eut à se défendre contre les fièvres de son corps et les irritations

du dehors, contre les émotions faciles et les molles lâchetés de sa chair, contre toutes les sollicitations de nature qui l'assaillaient.¹²

The desires of her body overwhelmed her spirit. For a time, she thought she could hide behind her desires. She had wanted to be loved for herself, but she had reached a point where, in her torture and condemnation, she could only degrade herself in the base debauchery of a series of one-night stands, whose only purpose was to satisfy carnal instinct. Even in her relationship with Gautruche, the painter, the physical aspects of the encounter were more important than any others: love was not involved in this relationship. When Gautruche suggested marriage, the forced of Germinie's sarcasm proved conclusively that she no longer believed in the sentimental concepts of love and marriage.

This death of sentiment is important in Germinie's development and in her ultimate acceptance of death as her fate. Freed from her self-imposed concepts of sentiment, and having experienced spiritual death, Germinie had been liberated from the artificial bondage of society. She was capable of examining her situation from the reality of her own position in it, unaffected by the opinions and attitudes of those around her.

As she approached the end of her life, Germinie had rationalized her situation. She was convinced that there was happiness for some, and yet some people were doomed to a vicarious existence, obtaining happiness through the observed experiences of others.

...elle se disait qu'elle était de ces malheureuses vouées en naissant à une éternité de misère, de celles pour lesquelles le bon-

heur n'est pas fait et qui ne le connaissent qu'en l'enviant aux autres.¹³

That she was one of these people she had no doubt. She had spent her whole life searching for happiness, contentment and love, and had found nothing but despondency, depression and re-crimination. She thought of death as an escape. She wished and hoped for death, and even considered suicide as a way to escape from the realities of her existence.

...une idée qui n'avait fait jusque-là que tourner autour d'elle: l'idée de suicide. Elle se mettait à écouter, la tête dans les deux mains, ce qui lui parlait de délivrance. Elle laissait venir à son oreille ce bruit doux de la mort qu'on entend derrière la vie comme une chute lointaine de grandes eaux qui tombent, en s'éteignant, dans du vide.¹⁴

The thought of suicide moved Germinie closer to death. However, even with the thought of death, Germinie would have to pay the piper and play the charade of her existence to its ultimate conclusion: she would not be permitted the luxury of ending her life before the final act could be played out.

For Germinie, death would be a release and an escape from the countless eyes which watched her every step, waiting for a hint or an indication that she would be unable to repay her enormous debt. Faced with this knowledge, Germinie exhibited strength and endurance in her spiralling descent into the peace of death. Never once did she utter a word of her previous life; she hardened herself to all physical pain and the mental anguish she suffered and was suffering remained locked within her. She had to maintain appearances, both to bolster her own senses of honour and dignity, and also in order not to disclose her shame

and distress to Mademoiselle.

Cette comédie horrible et nécessaire, elle la soutint. Elle fut héroïque à faire mentir son corps, redressant, devant les boutiques qui l'épiaient, sa taille affaissée, pressant son pas traînant, se frottant les joues, avant de descendre, avec une serviette rude pour y rappeler la couleur du sang, pour farder sur son visage les pâleurs de son mal et le masque de sa mort.¹⁵

Germinie was aware of her impending death and accepted it as the only justification to her sordid existence. As she was absorbed by her life, so she was absorbed by her death. She was unaware of the external world, as if she were already caught by the soothing void of oblivion.

Au milieu des inquiétudes désespérées que donnait à Mlle de Varandeuil la maladie de sa bonne, se glissait une impression singulière, une certaine peur devant l'être nouveau, inconnu, mystérieux, que le mal avait fait lever du fond de Germinie. Mademoiselle ressentait comme un malaise auprès de cette figure enfoncée, enterrée, presque disparue dans une implacable dureté, et qui ne semblait revenir à elle-même et se retrouver que fugitivement, par lueurs, dans l'effort d'un pâle sourire. La vieille femme avait vu bien des gens mourir; sa longue et douloureuse mémoire lui rappelait bien des expressions de mort tristes, accablées, désolées, mais aucun des visages dont elle se souvenait n'avait pris en s'éteignant ce sombre caractère d'un visage qui s'enferme et se retire en lui-même.

Toute serrée dans sa souffrance, Germinie se tenait farouche, raidie, concentrée, impénétrable. Elle avait des immobilités de bronze. En la regardant, mademoiselle se demandait ce qu'elle couvait ainsi sans bouger, si c'était la révolte de sa vie, l'horreur de mourir, ou bien un secret, un remords. Rien d'extérieur ne semblait plus toucher la malade. La sensation des choses s'en allait d'elle. Son corps devenait indifférent à tout, ne demandait plus à être soulagé, ne paraissait plus désirer guérir. Elle ne se

plaignait de rien. Ses besoins de tendresse eux-mêmes l'avaient quittée. Elle ne donnait plus signe de caresse et, chaque jour, quelque chose d'humain quittait cette âme de femme qui paraissait se pétrifier. Souvent elle s'abîmait dans des silences qui faisaient attendre le déchirement d'un cri, d'une parole; puis, après avoir promené le regard autour d'elle, elle ne disait rien et recommençait à regarder au même endroit, dans le vide, devant elle fixement, éternellement.

Quand mademoiselle rentrait de chez l'amie où elle allait dîner, elle trouvait Germinie dans l'obscurité, sans lumière, affaissée dans un fauteuil, les jambes allongées sur une chaise, la tête penchée sur sa poitrine, et si profondément absorbée que parfois elle n'entendait pas la porte s'ouvrir. Dans la chambre, en avançant, il semblait à Mlle de Varandeuil déranger un épouvantable tête-à-tête de la Maladie et de l'Ombre, où Germinie cherchait déjà dans la terreur de l'invisible l'aveuglement de la tombe et la nuit de la mort.¹⁶

Germinie regarded her impending death in a different manner than might have been expected. She did not fight for her life and she made no attempt to control her mental or physical state. By so minutely describing Germinie's attitude and noting her physical appearance, so unlike those normally preceding death, the Goncourt Brothers emphasize the completeness of Germinie's acceptance of her fate. There would be no further attempt to halt death's progress, for Germinie had reached the knife-edge between life and death.

In their description of Germinie's sordid little room on the sixth floor of Mademoiselle's apartment building, the reader is compelled to an understanding and a sympathy for Germinie's death. By escaping the prison of this room and of her life, Germinie would finally be free of a society and a situation which did not even give her room to die, and which had, since her

childhood, been tightening its stranglehold upon her. The Goncourt Brothers' description equated the sordid, enclosed room with the base, degrading life Germinie had been forced to live.

Mademoiselle s'assit et resta quelques instants regardant cette misérable chambre de domestique, une de ces chambres où le médecin est obligé de poser son chapeau sur le lit, et où il y a à peine la place pour mourir! C'était une mansarde de quelques pieds carrés sans cheminée, où la tabatière à crémaillère laissait passer l'haleine des saisons, le chaud de l'été, le froid de l'hiver. Les débarras, de vieilles mallès, des sacs de nuit, un panier de bain, le petit lit de fer où Germinie avait couché sa nièce, étaient entassés sous le pan coupé du mur. Le lit, une chaise et une petite toilette boiteuse avec une cuvette cassée, faisaient tout le mobilier. Au-dessus du lit était pendu, dans un cadre peint à la façon du palissandre, un daguerréotype d'homme.¹⁷

The confusion of the objects in the room, and the broken, useless ornaments were a reflection of Germinie's life.

Her death in the hospital of Lariboisière, too, emphasized the conditions of Germinie's life and the impossibility of a release from her past agony. The hospital itself, with its long, impersonal wards,

...l'hôpital où on meurt dans l'indifférence administrative de l'état-civil, de la fosse commune où vont pourrir pêle-mêle dans un espace mesuré au minimum pour le temps les restes de ceux auxquels la vie a interdit de s'élever jusqu'à un minimum d'aisance, toutes les horreurs disons-le, dans l'esprit des Goncourt étaient voulues, cultivées, malgré l'amertume et la souffrance qu'ils en éprouvaient...¹⁸

The Goncourt Brothers introduced all these horrors to make the reader regard Germinie with a modicum of humanity and to accept her choice of death not as a weak, selfish one, but

rather as a choice made with strength and foresight. Germinie's visitors, all those people to whom she owed money, came to make Germinie's last moments ones of torment and emotional anguish. This emphasized the situation of her final moments and the lack of sympathy and understanding with which she was regarded. That she was so degraded highlights the poignancy of her experiences.

C'est que ces visites qu'elle venait de recevoir, c'étaient la fruitière, l'épicier, la marchande de beurre, la blanchisseuse, - toutes ses dettes vivantes! Ces baisers, c'étaient les baisers de tous ses créanciers venant dans une embrassade, flairer leurs créances et faire chanter son agonie!¹⁹

Germinie's burial in an unmarked grave revealed the ultimate unimportance of her existence and her effect upon the conduct of society. She had died as she had lived, with no one to remark upon her existence and no one to care for her or alleviate her suffering. She had been alone, in a selfish society which had not noticed the struggle of a woman who desired only to be happy and content.

Mademoiselle se mit à remonter ces croix, se penchant sur chacune, épelant les dates, cherchant les noms avec ses mauvais yeux. Elle arriva à des croix du 8 novembre: c'était la veille de la mort de Germinie, Germinie devait être à côté. Il y avait cinq croix du 9 novembre, cinq croix toutes serrées: Germinie n'était pas dans le tas. Mlle de Varandeuil alla un peu plus loin, aux croix du 10, puis aux croix du 11, puis aux croix du 12. Elle revint au 8, regarda encore partout: il n'y avait rien, absolument rien... Germinie avait été enterrée sans une croix! On n'avait pas même planté un morceau de bois pour la reconnaître!

A la fin, la vieille demoiselle se laissa tomber à genoux dans la neige, entre deux croix dont l'une portait 9 novembre et l'autre 10 novembre. Ce qui devait rester de Germinie

devait être à peu près là. Sa tombe vague était ce terrain vague. Pour prier sur elle, il fallait prier au petit bonheur entre deux dates, - comme si la destinée de la pauvre fille avait voulu qu'il n'y eût, sur la terre, pas plus de place pour son corps que pour son cœur.²⁰

Mademoiselle was brought to a realization of the situation of her maid. She had at first felt angry and betrayed, cursing and denigrating what she had considered the lying and deceitful life her maid had led. But ultimately, she came to realize that Germinie's situation was not totally her fault, that outwardly Germinie had tried to overcome the effects of a society which had repressed her and contributed to her downfall. However, Germinie alone had not been strong enough to overcome the power of that society and the people within it. She had had to act in whatever way she could, based on what her own instincts conveyed to her. Germinie had needed the guidance of people with vision, who were dedicated to helping others, but there was no one around her who understood. Even Mademoiselle herself had not been open to the confidences of her maid, and she had been blind to the silent pleas for help.

In the final analysis, Mademoiselle realized that Germinie had acted as her concepts of honour and dignity had told her she should. Germinie was possessed of "...une Passion de honte qui n'osait demander pardon qu'avec son silence!"²¹ By maintaining her silence, Germinie had protected Mademoiselle in the only way she knew how and she had born the brunt of the horror herself. She had prevented Mademoiselle from becoming involved in her decadent life. In the end, Mademoiselle pardoned

Germinie, the first and only occasion in which anyone exhibited humanity and understanding towards her, although for Germinie it came too late. However, pardoning Germinie had opened Mademoiselle's eyes and made her examine the circumstances around her.

Elle se demandait si la pauvre fille était aussi coupable que d'autres, si elle avait choisi le mal, si la vie, les circonstances, le malheur de son corps et de sa destinée, n'avait pas fait d'elle la créature qu'elle avait été, un être d'amour et de douleur...²²

By asking these questions of herself, Mademoiselle was in reality voicing thoughts which the Goncourt Brothers themselves had expressed. In writing a novel of such a woman, they had hoped to force an awareness of the situation of less fortunate people upon the reader, and extract from the reader a moral judgment. The Goncourt Brothers desired to have the reader ask the same questions Mademoiselle had asked in order that they might examine the situation around them and perhaps purge their society of some of its evils. In this way, Germinie's death would serve some purpose.

The portrait of Renée's death in no way resembles that of Germinie. Germinie died in sordid, solitary circumstances, with each event depicted in a manner which reinforced the portrait. Renée's death, however, was the central element in a glorified portrait of a young, innocent girl, who died solely because the overwhelming belief in her ideals caused her to make extraordinary sacrifices. In no way did the events described in the novel serve to tarnish Renée's image.

Dans la thérapeutique qu'inventent les romanciers comme dans l'imprécision des symptômes

et dans cette mort idéalisée de Renée, on surprend le même parti pris de ne point enlaidir leur héroïne par des soins ou des souffrances indignes d'elle.²³

Each situation served to spotlight the idealistic view of Renée's character.

Renée had been little exposed to death in her childhood, living as she did, an easy and carefree life. As she grew older, she became aware of death only as it pertained to the death of the spiritual and sentimental illusions which had been a part of her childhood and which she had discovered to be deceptive and misleading.

Her spiritual belief in religion died when she examined the manner in which the abbé Blampoix conducted his life and the religious life of his congregation. The members of the upper bourgeoisie who went to the abbé's confessional were cosseted and forgiven for their sins without ever having to make any kind of effort for their redemption. Renée believed that each person should be responsible for his own actions without needing them softened or made less painful by an intermediary. In the faith of the bourgeoisie, Renée saw only the weakness of the people as a result of the abbé's teachings. Individuality was an unknown entity among those who followed the precepts of this priest. This quality of individuality was inherent in Renée's character and the death of her spiritual faith in religion gave her the freedom to examine her situation without the ideas received from the Catholic religion.

The death of her illusion of sentimental love was also important in preparing Renée for death itself. She did not be-

lieve in sentimental love for two reasons. She knew that no man would be able to give her the love which her father already gave her, and that to ask for such a sacrifice from another man would be a selfish and foolish action. Nor would she be a party to a marriage made solely for benefit, since without love and mutual respect, the parties to the marriage would suffer. Her abandoning of marriage and of the chance to have children was a sacrifice she was willing and eager to make.

The spiritual and sentimental death of her illusions purified Renée's thoughts. She had matured in her outlook on life and was capable of examining her situation, although her ideals ~~tatt~~ at this point were still only concepts. They had yet to be tested and analysed by this intelligent but innocent girl.

The death of Renée's brother, her first encounter with the death of a person, was a great shock to her. In this event, she faced a situation which she had instigated, although she could in no way be blamed for it. However, even though she had acted in innocence and in defense of concepts which were important to her, she would be solely responsible. For her, the death of her brother represented a new look at reality, one which she would be compelled to act upon and challenge. For the first time, instead of merely believing in a concept, she would actually have to analyse it and act upon her analysis. Renée matured in her attitude almost overnight. In her mind, she knew that she must expiate her brother's death. In the illness which followed the news of her brother's death, Renée found the suffering she would have to endure and accepted it with grace and honour.

Car Renée, pour mourir, s'y prend autrement que Barnier ou Germinie: la souffrance la change, la purifie, la mûrit, la dépouille de toutes les scories de l'humain: en un sens elle accepte sa mort au lieu de la subir.²⁴

The Goncourt Brothers stress the purification of Renée's soul in their analysis of her death. Renée becomes the epitome of young womanhood, soft and malleable, and yet still possessed of the strength to sustain others as death gradually conquers.

L'âme de Renée se transfigure au milieu des ruines de son corps. Il se fait en elle des changements divins. L'enfant hardi et moqueur redevient une vierge timide. Comme une guerrière blessée qui redemanderait ses vêtements de femme, Renée reprend, pour mourir, la faiblesse et la douceur de son sexe. Son esprit de lutin, brillant et mobile, revient encore sur ses lèvres, mais tendre maintenant et mélancolique: On dirait un feu follet dansant sur une tombe.... Cependant la mort s'avance; à mesure qu'elle approche le récit s'élève et se sanctifie. Les paroles de la malade deviennent plus rares et plus solennelles. De grands silences se font dans sa chambre. On n'y entend plus que le soupir de celle qui souffre et le sanglot de celui qui veille....²⁵

Renée no longer held immovable ideals and thoughts. She was prepared to stop and spend time in contemplation. Her rashness of the past was tempered by books which presented ideas which provoked thoughts about nebulous dreamlike qualities and tender, emotional situations.

A peine si, par instants, une expression du passé lui revenait; alors elle disait en souriant: "C'est de la vieille Renée, cela!..." Elle se rappelait des paroles qu'elle avait dites, des audaces qu'elle avait eues, le ton qu'elle prenait, sa familiarité avec les jeunes gens; elle n'aurait plus osé de cela. Elle s'étonnait d'elle-même, et ne se reconnaissait plus. Elle avait quitté ses lec-

tures de livres sérieux ou amusants; elle n'aimait plus que les oeuvres qui font rêver la pensée, les livres qui ont des idées tendres.²⁶

Already she was contemplating the release that death would bring. Her thoughts were free, no longer trapped by the revolt and anger against restricting convention. She had become mature enough to accept and resign herself to the course of death and find within her resignation calm strength.

Renée, at this point, was capable of sharing her strength with those who witnessed her quiet death. She had the courage to assure those around her that she did not hate death, and that it was not without meaning.

Moi, vois, je me résigne...Non, il ne faut pas en vouloir tant que cela à la souffrance... Elle nous a été donnée pour quelque chose, on ne nous fait pas seulement souffrir pour souffrir.²⁷

She was also capable of sensing the insights which death could bring if one was willing to analyse and contemplate it unflinchingly. Death alone reduces all human beings to the same level: no one can escape death and therefore everyone, in the final analysis, is brought to the same level of humanity.

Elle parla encore de la souffrance comme du mal qui nous ôte l'orgueil, qui nous rappelle notre infirmité, qui nous fait humains, qui nous mêle à tous ceux qui souffrent, qui nous enfonce la charité dans la chair.

"Et puis, sans elle, ajouta-t-elle, il nous manquerait quelque chose!...d'être triste...²⁸

In this way, she reassured her father, who watched over her so diligently and with so much sadness, that in death was strength of character and the virtue of awareness, of the self and of others.

The Goncourt Brothers described the feelings of Renée's father during her illness. He was deeply affected by the coming death of his beloved daughter, and the suffering of the father emphasized the sublime suffering of the daughter. It was the double agony of the sufferer and of the observer which reinforced the sacrifice and self-denial of the patient.

...M. Mauperin est le père dont l'héroïne du livre avait besoin pour pouvoir s'épanouir dans toute sa spontanéité. Il est l'être capable de polariser toutes les puissances d'affection de la jeune fille et en présence duquel s'ouvre et révèle son âme délicate et fière: le regard indulgent, le sourire complice sous lequel se trouve à leur aise ses vivacités et ses gamineries: le point de vue qui ouvrira aux auteurs les perspectives les plus directes, leur permettra les prises de vue les plus poignantes sur son agonie et sa mort, quand nous aurons la double agonie de l'être qui meurt et de l'être qui voit mourir. Ce père, commandé dans son comportement par la logique de l'ensemble, est employé avec discrétion dans les scènes de mœurs (sans qu'on puisse le qualifier d'utilité) pour assumer et incarner ensuite peu à peu, vers la fin du livre, toute la douleur humaine.²⁹

Renée's death was a death of sad and sombre poignancy. She was transformed and elevated by the angelic quality of her death. She was a girl of immense courage who faced this final test of character with an open heart. In their description of her final moments, the Goncourt Brothers emphasize the spiritual ecstasy of her surrender to the solace of oblivion.

En quelques minutes, la maladie, les signes et l'anxiété de la souffrance s'étaient effacés sur la figure amaigrie de Renée. Une beauté d'extase et de suprême délivrance, devant laquelle, son père, sa mère, son ami étaient tombés à genoux. La douceur, la paix d'un ravissement était descendue sur elle. Un rêve semblait mollement renverser sa tête

sur les oreillers. Ses yeux grands ouverts, tournés en haut, paraissaient s'emplier d'infini, son regard, peu à peu, prenait la fixité des choses éternelles.

De tous ses traits se levait comme une aspiration bienheureuse. Un reste de vie, un dernier souffle tremblait au bord de sa bouche endormie, entr'ouverte et souriante. Son teint était devenu blanc. Une pâleur argentée donnait à sa peau, donnait à son front une mate splendeur. On eût dit qu'elle touchait déjà de la tête un autre jour que le nôtre: la Mort s'approchait d'elle comme une lumière.

C'était la transfiguration de ces maladies de coeur qui ensevelissent les mourantes dans la beauté de leur âme, et emportent au ciel le visage des jeunes mortes!³⁰

Renée's death was a tribute to her stalwart and courageous character. She had traversed the path from child to woman with her sole desire being to achieve the most possible as a person. Her maturity and forthright attitude towards her fate help reveal the purification of her thoughts and ideals, and served as a justification for her ultimate release from the bonds which tied her to herself and to society.

For these two heroines, death had a special meaning. Neither died unjustified nor unjustifiably. For Germinie, death was an escape and a condemnation: unable to control her physical and mental anguish, humiliated by her debts and her debauchery, she could only rationalize the events of her life by allowing her fate to follow its true course, to a death which would bring her to freedom from guilt and prompt understanding and forgiveness from those who were left behind. For Renée, death was a release and a purification: she was permitted at last to ride herself of the revolt against artificial concepts of society and to become a person whose convictions were honest and honoured. Each heroine's

death brought the reader a complete portrait of a modern woman. The reader is compelled to examine each woman's struggle to live life fully and honestly, and while the common result of this struggle was death, it was a death with exceptional meaning and social implications.

In general, the Goncourt Brothers' female characters were treated with sympathy and humanity. The reader is enlightened by the struggles of each woman to achieve fulfillment and acceptance of her destiny.

Le lecteur se sent en face d'une fatalité inexorable, mais il éprouve en même temps intensément l'humanité du personnage - et celle des auteurs.³¹

Death was the true test of each woman's character, but it was also her ultimate frustration. Each was faced with a situation about which she could do nothing except concede to the superiority of fate. She was prevented in some way from justifying her action to others, although in her own mind, she was satisfied with her reasons for death. Each was protecting those innocent people around her who would otherwise be made to suffer the consequences of her actions. In death, neither would be able to refute the speculation and rumour which would follow her death. Justice in the eyes of others would be beyond reach.

Le personnage qui en est victime voit son mal s'aggraver inexorablement; quelques chapitres de roman suffisent à le surprendre aux diverses étapes descendantes de son avancée vers la mort. Mais de chapitre en chapitre, de phase en phase, aucun lien réel, aucune suggestion comme dans les meilleures réussites de Zola d'une force héréditaire qui soulève et mine à la fois les êtres et les destinées, ou comme chez Flaubert d'un temps qui fatigue

et marque toute réalité de sa fondamentale usure; ou encore d'une énergie qui comme chez Balzac ronge et détruit les hommes, mais reste leur énergie. C'est une fatalité tout extérieure, donc parfaitement inhumaine qui vient à bout des personnages des Goncourt; et ce n'est point hasard si cette fatalité revêt le plus souvent une apparence médicale qui en mécanise encore davantage la progression. Ce mal qui les tue ne leur appartient pas, il ne fait que les occuper avant de les détruire. La pourriture se dépose sur eux et les gagne sans qu'ils aient seulement l'occasion d'en faire leur pourriture, de se l'assimiler et de la vivre comme une ultime expérience. Et d'ailleurs on ne les voit plus que de fort loin, absorbés par le mal, absents, inexplicables: tous victimes du même cancer. Si bien qu'à travers la peinture des épuisements et des décadences les Goncourt parviennent seulement à se signifier à eux-mêmes l'avancée objective, impersonnelle de leur mort. L'échec de leurs héros les renvoie à leur propre échec.³²

Death did in one way defeat the Goncourt Brothers. Death was one experience that neither would be able to document from personal experience. They would never be able to feel and transmit the feelings and emotions felt in that fleeting instant when the body and soul balance precariously between life and death. For the Goncourt Brothers, as for us all, the mystery of death remains invincible and eternal.

NOTES:

1. A. J. Salvan, "L'Essence du réalisme français," Comparative Literature III, p. 231.
2. J-P. Richard, "Deux Ecrivains épidermiques: Edmond et Jules de Goncourt," Littérature et Sensation (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954), p. 279.
3. Ibid., p. 280.
4. L. Daudet, La Femme et l'Amour (Paris: Flammarion, 1930), p. 258.
5. Ibid., p. 258.
6. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux (Paris: Flammarion, 1929), p. 45.
7. Ibid., p. 47.
8. Ibid., p. 49.
9. Ibid., pp. 128-129.
10. Ibid., p. 94.
11. Ibid., p. 155.
12. Ibid., p. 195.
13. Ibid., p. 198.
14. Ibid., p. 216.
15. Ibid., pp. 245-246.
16. Ibid., pp. 252-253.
17. Ibid., pp. 254-255.
18. P. Sabatier, Germinie Lacerteux des Goncourt (Paris: Sfelt, 1948), p. 92.
19. E. & J. de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, p. 262.
20. Ibid., pp. 281-282.
21. Ibid., p. 274.
22. Ibid., p. 275.
23. R. Ricatte, "Les Romans des Goncourt et la Médecine," Revue des sciences humaines, (janv. - mars, 1954), p. 37.

24. E. Caramaschi, Le Réalisme romanesque des Goncourt (Pisa: Editrice Libreria Goliardica, 1964), p. 96.
25. Ibid., p. 132.
26. E. & J. de Goncourt, Renée Mauperin (Paris: Arthème Fayard et Cie, 1875), p. 117.
27. Ibid., p. 120.
28. Loc. cit.
29. E. Caramaschi, Le Réalisme romanesque des Goncourt, p. 96.
30. E. Caramaschi, Réalisme et Impressionnisme dans l'oeuvre des Frères Goncourt (Pisa: Libreria Goliardica, s. d.), p. 242.
31. E. & J. de Goncourt, Renée Mauperin, p. 124.
32. J-P. Richard, "Notes sur les Goncourt," Revue des sciences humaines, (janv. - mars, 1953), p. 56.

Conclusion

As Martino pointed out, the Goncourt Brothers goal was

...[à] introduire dans l'invention la réalité du document humain, à faire entrer dans le roman un peu de cette histoire individuelle qui dans l'histoire n'a pas d'historien.¹

They desired to write about people first and foremost, and to describe events and circumstances with respect to the reactions of these people. Their female characters epitomized the Goncourt Brothers' investigation of human nature and their clear, concise documentation of the intimate details of existence.

Using the medium of Naturalism, the Goncourt Brothers have taken their readers on a journey through the human mind, documenting its most intimate sensations and the perception of reality through the eyes of their characters. Their desire was to approach the soul and create for the reader as close a portrait as possible of an event, so as to evoke a physical and emotional response similar to that felt by the character.

...it is of the sensations that they have resolved to be the historians; not of action, nor of emotion, properly speaking, nor of moral conceptions, but of an inner life which is all made of the perceptions of the senses.²

In their works, they sought a realistic portrait of the people of an age. They desired to portray the lives of their characters as they really were, examining in depth the situations which influenced their decision-making processes and their actions once their decisions had been made. More important to the Goncourt Brothers than the simple documentation of external events was the perception of these events in the minds of their charac-

ters. They followed their characters through the course of their lives and their destinies, neither embellishing nor neglecting important facets of their existences. The Goncourt Brothers were

...largely concerned with truth - truth to the minute details of human character, sensation, and circumstance, and also of the document, the exact words, of the past; but this devotion to fact, to the curiosities of fact, has been united with an even more persistent devotion to the curiosities of expression.³

The female characters portrayed in the novels Renée, Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux were each based on a woman known well by the Goncourt Brothers. They became important to the Goncourt Brothers due to the social impact the documentation of their lives might have upon society. The Goncourt Brothers' two-fold purpose was to portray each woman's life as it was led, as truthfully as possible, and yet convey to the reader the demoralizing effect which society's conventions and artificial morality had on innocent people.

...les Goncourt s'élèvent contre l'esclavage de l'esprit et de la parole dans lequel on tenait la jeune fille de leur temps.⁴

The woman the Goncourt Brothers chose to write about personified the enslaved, dispirited woman. Renée and Germinie were women of their era, but, unlike the great majority of women of the period, Renée and Germinie sought to overthrow society's predetermined course and attempt to achieve an autonomy which would permit them to lead fulfilling and happy lives. They were heralds of modern woman, a woman eager to make her way in the world and to become active in determining her personal parameters. They desired to be allowed to accept the consequences of their

actions freely, with no intermediary to cushion or excuse the consequences.

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This dissertation examines the course of Renée's and Germinie's lives from a sociological viewpoint in parallel with the Goncourts' own view of these women. Each woman's background is discussed with reference to how her environment produced frustration and agony for her. The theme of frustration, a major topic in the works of the Goncourt Brothers, shows the gradual development of each woman from an innocent, child-like creature who examined her surroundings from a one-dimensional point of view, to a more mature, analytical adult, capable of envisualizing future consequences. At their death, the reader is witness to the final step in their development, a transition which comes far too late to save the women, but which affords a priceless final moment of awareness.

Renée and Germinie grew up in totally different settings. Renée's childhood was one of relative luxury, surrounded by the warmth of her father's devoted love. Germinie, however, was a child of the provinces where her family laboured hard to obtain enough of life's necessities. She was denied the love of her mother when she died early in her life, and although her family cared for her, they were busy keeping body and soul together. The family broke apart upon the deaths of her father and her older brother. At this point, Germinie was shunted from pillar to post, until she was finally placed in a café to earn her living.

Renée had the freedom to enjoy her youth, cossetted and indulged by her father.

From these backgrounds developed two very different women. However, they did have one thing in common. Both were dissatisfied with their situation and they had problems adjusting to and accepting their destined place in society.

Germinie's life was a series of tragedies. She wanted to be loved and desired, as a creature capable of devoting herself unstintingly to someone who would return her love in kind. She found bitter disillusionment in her devotion to her faith, unable to accept that the priest was not a personification of God who would devote himself exclusively to her. Her faith in the sentimental concepts of love and marriage was severely tested in her relationship with Jupillon and later with Gautruche. In her desperate need, she was incapable of examining either man's ulterior motives, and as a result she was duped and tricked by their apparent sincerity. Finally, as the power of these frustrations wore her down and drained her spirit, she began to glimpse the reality of life. Her thoughts matured and she began to rationalize her existence. Suddenly, she was capable of accepting with grace her ultimate destiny.

Renée's frustration stemmed from the restraints which society had placed on the life of its people. She had been raised in a liberal, open-minded family where little was hidden from her. She was capable of examining the institutions which touched her life, in order to determine their influence upon her. Her frustration with religion came from the deception it practised

on the rich, who were convinced that they could be redeemed for very little effort and a contribution to the Church. She was also angered by the influence which the Church had over its members. The priest had the power to approve or deny a marriage, and sometimes acted as a matchmaker in a marriage which had as its basis financial or material gain. She was frustrated by the concept of honour, which more often than not was based upon wealth rather than virtue.

By describing in such detail how each woman reacted to the frustrations of her life, the Goncourt Brothers brought their characters closer to the epitome of a modern woman. Renée and Germinie as modern women reacted to each succeeding event by changing imperceptibly until each of them had accepted the challenge of life and the inevitability of destiny. Until that point, they had been examining circumstances from a selfish point of view, avoiding their responsibilities for their own achievement.

In death, each woman had embraced her fate, finally realizing that fulfillment was not only the act of determining the parameters by which one lived one's life, but was also the honouring of one's commitment to life. Renée and Germinie gained in strength from the acknowledgement of their commitment. Each woman was able to protect those people closest to them from the pain of knowing the real cause of her death. For each woman, death was the ultimate frustration because it prevented them from revealing their way to self-awareness and from justifying to others their reasons for pursuing their fate.

The Goncourt Brothers succeeded in portraying what they

considered the essential vérité moderne,

"...le poignant des choses qui nous touchent,
nous font vibrer les nerfs et saigner le
cœur."⁵

This they accomplished by a strict adherence to detail and by a precise description of the most intimate thoughts of their characters, delving into the most minute details of human experience.

Their goals were accomplished with the writing of the novels Renée Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux. They achieved exacting and complex portraits of a situation as it existed at the time. They tackled the infinitesimal, reaching into the nebulous regions of the human mind in order to achieve the ultimate reality of the soul.

To quote an early, but astute British observer of the period, the Goncourt Brothers were

...not merely novelists (inventing a new kind of novel), but historians; not merely historians, but the historians of a particular century, and of what was intimate and what is unknown in it; to be also discriminating,... their bold novelty and their scrupulous exactitude in detail, are characteristics of what is the finest in the modern concept of culture and the modern ideal in art.⁶

NOTES:

1. P. Martino, Le Roman réaliste sous le Second Empire (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1913), p. 234.
2. A. Symons, "Edmond et Jules de Goncourt," The Symbolist Movement in Literature (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1919), p. 147.
3. Ibid., p. 146.
4. M. Immergluck, La Question sociale dans l'oeuvre des Goncourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), p. 120.
5. Given in P. Martino, p. 232.
6. A. Symons, p. 146.

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