



International Conference on Medical Science, Medicine and Public Health

Hosted online from Jakarta, Indonesia

Website: econfseries.com

30th May, 2025

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF FRENCH SOCIETY IN BEL-AMI

Novik Karina Rishatovna

Teacher at Uzbekistan State University of World Languages

E-mail: karri199825@gmail.com

Abdumalikova Oyimmiso, FING-2101

Student at Uzbekistan State University of World Languages

E-mail: abdumalikovao15@gmail.com

Annotation

This essay analyses *Bel-Ami* by Guy de Maupassant as a scathing indictment of the French Third Republic, emphasising the institutional corruption in the media, politics, and church as well as the moral decline of bourgeois society. Georges Duroy, the main character of the essay, is the quintessential “male prostitute”—a man motivated by opportunism and prepared to sacrifice morals in order to further his career. The systemic venality of the time is revealed by Maupassant through Duroy’s quick ascent in Parisian society. The text offers an interdisciplinary approach to the novel’s issues by incorporating significant quotes from Maupassant along with Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Lenin’s critical viewpoints. In the end, *Bel-Ami* is shown as a timeless critique of a culture where deceit and corruption are prevalent in both public and private spheres.

Keywords: *Bel-Ami*, Guy de Maupassant, Third Republic, Journalism, Corruption, Venality, Male prostitution, Georges Duroy, Ambition, Press, Politics, Bourgeoisie, Institutional decay, Tolstoy, Lenin, Moral compromise, Social critique, Power prostitution, Manipulation, Social ascent.

The novel “*Bel-Ami*” by Guy de Maupassant, serialized in 1885, provides a critical depiction of the Third Republic in France, focusing on the pervasive corruption and venality of the era. Maupassant’s portrayal is centered around the character of Georges Duroy, who embodies the “male prostitute” type – a figure defined by opportunism and moral flexibility – and his ascent through Parisian society and journalism. Through the narrative of Georges Duroy’s rise to power, “*Bel-Ami*”



International Conference on Medical Science, Medicine and Public Health

Hosted online from Jakarta, Indonesia

Website: econfseries.com

30th May, 2025

functions as a scathing critique of the Third Republic's systemic corruption, illustrating how personal ambition intertwines with societal decay across various institutions, including the press, politics, and even the church.

Maupassant introduces and exemplifies the concept of the “male prostitute” as a dominant figure in French society, characterized by fickleness, treachery, and a willingness to compromise principles for personal gain, particularly within the political and journalistic spheres, as he states in his essay, “How often one hears: ‘He is charming, this man, but he is a prostitute, a real prostitute!’ This is said of the male prostitute, the ulcer of our country. For all of us in France are male prostitutes: fickle, capricious, unconsciously treacherous, inconsistent in our convictions and aspirations, impulsive and weak, like women”. “Our Chamber of Deputies is flooded with male prostitutes. They form a large party here, charming opportunists who could be called sirens”. “Every good journalist must be a bit of a prostitute, (...) always be convinced without believing in anything”. Georges Duroy’s journey from a returned soldier to a powerful figure in Parisian society exemplifies the pervasive venality of the Third Republic, as he manipulates relationships and exploits the corrupt systems of journalism and politics for personal advancement: “In his novel *Bel-Ami*, serialized in *Gil Blas* from April 8th to May 30th, 1885, Maupassant set himself the task of portraying the male prostitute in full, showing him as a product and carrier of the atmosphere of universal venality, leading him through the world of journalism and opening the way to a significant political career”. “Georges Duroy served his military service in Algeria as a non-commissioned officer in the colonial troops, quickly learning the methods of legally robbing the Arabs and prospering. However, upon returning to Paris after his service, he was only capable of being a minor official with a meager salary, and the primitive Algerian methods of plunder were no longer applicable. He managed to enter journalism”. “The further he went, the more the ‘higher secrets’ of bourgeois journalism were revealed to him: he saw not only the petty bribery of the reporter Saint-Potin but also the major behind-the-scenes operations of the ‘independent’ press, its connection to the stock exchange and banks, its involvement in shady government machinations, and he successfully amassed a fortune through stock market speculation.”



International Conference on Medical Science, Medicine and Public Health

Hosted online from Jakarta, Indonesia

Website: econfseries.com

30th May, 2025

Maupassant extends his critique beyond individuals to illustrate the widespread corruption within various societal institutions, including the press, politics, high society, and even the church, suggesting a systemic moral decay: “Maupassant portrays the life of French bourgeois society, the French press, and French political circles as a form of universal prostitution. Absolutely everything is for sale, and everyone trades in themselves.” “We see both ordinary street prostitution (Rachel) and the prostitution of a society lady (Madame de Marelle), the psychology of the male prostitute embodied in Georges Duroy's amorous and journalistic adventures, and the same male prostitute in politics (Laroche-Mathieu), and the entire colorful world of newspaper prostitution (Walter, Forestier, Saint-Potin, etc.), and the prostitution of the noble aristocracy (the fiancés of Rose and Suzanne), and the prostitution of the law (the police commissioner), and the prostitution of the church (the bishop.” “The reader clearly sees Georges Duroy as a seducer and exploiter of women, as a hero of alcove adventures, but his activities as a journalist are outlined more fleetingly, although there is no doubt that Maupassant had a wealth of colors at his disposal for the most complete exposure of the world of journalistic venality.” Leo Tolstoy, while acknowledging Maupassant’s talent, critiqued the novel's focus on “dirty details” but also recognized the author's “indignation at the prosperity and success of a crude, sensual animal who makes a career and achieves a high position in society through this very sensuality, and indignation at the depravity of the entire milieu in which his hero achieves success... Here he (Maupassant. Y. D.) seems to answer: ‘Everything pure and good in our society has perished and is perishing because this society is depraved, insane, and terrible’.” Vladimir Lenin, in his 1914 pamphlet “Capitalism and the Press,” echoed Maupassant’s depiction of a venal press, characterizing the mores of the bourgeois press as “Universal venality. Prostitution of all kinds, illegal and legal, sanctified by marriage. (...) Thieves, public men, venal writers, venal newspapers. (...) This is the flower of ‘high’ society. ‘Everyone’ knows these people; they have connections ‘everywhere’...”.

In conclusion, “Bel-Ami” uses the trajectory of Georges Duroy to expose the pervasive corruption of the Third Republic, revealing how personal ambition and societal venality were deeply intertwined across various levels of society. The novel critiques the “male prostitute” archetype, demonstrates the corrupting influence of



International Conference on Medical Science, Medicine and Public Health

Hosted online from Jakarta, Indonesia

Website: econfseries.com

30th May, 2025

societal institutions, and paints a picture of a society where moral compromise is the norm. Maupassant's work, as observed by critics like Tolstoy and Lenin, serves as a powerful indictment of a specific historical context, but also offers a timeless commentary on the dangers of unchecked ambition and systemic corruption.

References

1. Danilin, Yu. *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Mopassana* [Life and Works of Maupassant]. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1968.
2. Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. *Capitalism and the Press*, 1914.
3. Maupassant, Guy de. "A Male Prostitute." *Gil Blas*, March 1883.
4. Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. Harvard University Press, 1995.
5. Beller, Manfred. "The Role of Journalism in the Works of Guy de Maupassant." *Neophilologus*, vol. 66, no. 1, 1982, pp. 117–125.