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Spain's defeat in the war with the Americas for independence eradicated the last remnants of its empire and provided momentum for many writers and thinkers to embark on a period of self-searching and an analysis of Spain's problems and its destiny. The realist novel served as an outlet for social and political commentary. These novels in Spain as well as their counterpart in France served to criticize and expose the materialism of the new bourgeoisie. The city, reworked by Baron Haussmann in the 1860s, became the place of modernity and desire for social growth. The building of the modern department store soon followed, which eliminated the need for family-run establishments where artisans individualized products and each item was found in a specific store, for one stop shopping where one could find all things fashionable. Spain imported everything from France from clothes to literary styles. Consumerism and the role men and women had in balancing the new power structure

served as key elements in the success of the department store, evidence of the economic transition. This economy changed the possibilities for women, who now could leave their rural homes to work in the city. This opportunity for women could be seen as empowering, but when analyzed in greater detail they become just another pawn in the new commercialist power structure. In my thesis I want to examine several novels and artworks produced between 1849 - 1895 that deal with the emergence of the modern city and consumerist culture and its effects on class and gender structures. The novels which I will be working with are Rosalia de Castro's *El Caballero de las botas azules* (1867), Benito Perez Galdos's *La de Bringas* (1884), Fernán Caballero's *La gaviota* (1849), Emile Zola's *Ladies Paradise* (1883) and *Nana* (1880). The novels explore the impact that the newly-established fashion industry had on the lives of the urban bourgeoisie who arguably wished to climb the social ranks. I



Edouard Manet, *Nana* 1877. Oil on canvas. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany

will also analyze a series of artworks by Edouard Manet, and others, beginning in the 1860s study their portrayal of women in society. The way in which representation of women's clothing expressed the importance of socio-economic status as well as the material culture in which they too became objects to be observed seem to be important factors in the artistic production of the time, since it illustrates the consumerist nature of the bourgeoisie.