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Encarnación Medina Arjona, ed., *“Germinal”, la mine et les arts*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2017. 269 pp. Bibliography. \$61.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN: 978-3-0343-1368-1.

Review by Dorothy Kelly, Boston University.

This collection of seventeen essays is a bit different from others that study a single literary work. Rather than focusing directly on Zola’s *Germinal*, for the most part each essay investigates a number of widely varied contexts surrounding mining and its representation as they relate to the novel. Even though several articles concentrate solely on *Germinal*, they connect to issues beyond the text in various ways.

The introduction by Encarnación Medina Arjona provides a useful summary of the articles. I have grouped my discussion of them in a slightly different order than that of the collection and give below a short précis of each in the hopes of giving an idea of its content to scholars who might want to read the full article. As this collection belongs to the series “Espacios Literarios en Contacto,” dedicated to the study of French literature and its contact with Hispanic literatures, two of its essays are in Spanish, and another on the reception of *Germinal* in the Spanish provinces quotes extensively in Spanish. The remaining essays are in French. Authors come from both Spanish and French universities and include some very prominent Zola scholars.

The first group of five essays analyzes French texts that deal with mines and that were written before *Germinal*. The first, a literary prehistory of the mine written by Sylvain Menant, reviews poetic works on mining, which were for the most written in the second half of the eighteenth century, when coalmines developed and the École des Mines was created. These poems include descriptions of the contemporary world of the eighteenth-century mine alongside traditional themes from classical antiquity. Late eighteenth-century poetry contrasts the mine with a pastoral setting and uses themes that recur in later literature, such as the mine’s inhospitable space and the terror of the dark labyrinth. Mines are also condemned for taking riches from the earth, for providing metal for war, and for the harsh treatment of the miners.

The second essay by Geneviève Artigas-Menant reviews entries on the mine in the *Encyclopédie*. These entries are addressed to a privileged reader with the aim of teaching about the realities of the mine and of eliminating prejudiced views. Although there is no encyclopedia entry on miners, the dangers of the job, such as poisoning, drowning, and crushing, are described. One entry emphasizes the need for schools that can pass on mining knowledge and also gives information on what a good manager should do. Finally, the “philosophy” of nature is revealed when nature, rather than God, is described as the maker of mines, and man as capable of eventually understanding and reforming nature.

The next two essays analyze novels by George Sand. Àngels Santa’s piece on Sand’s *L’Homme de neige* begins with a lengthy analysis of the character, Cristiano, and his quest for his origins. The remaining pages of the essay study Cristiano’s work in a mine, and at this point the novel changes from a quest

novel to a social novel that describes how he is initiated into mine culture and becomes a good socialist worker, helping his fellow miners and teaching them about mineralogy. Sand describes the mines as hellish and dangerous, but also as an idealized shelter.

The second Sand essay, written in Spanish by M. Carme Figuerola, examines *La Ville noire*, a novel that explores the life of industrial workers in the *Ville noire*. This essay reveals numerous similarities between Zola and Sand, such as their use of the color black and of supernatural references, such as hell, to qualify the workers' space; the representation of women workers; the burden of work and family; and class conflict. Distinguishing marks of Sand's novel include the achievement of progress and the creation of a communal society, the poetic use of the mountain region, and the absence of the images of animality that one finds in Zola's descriptions of workers.

The final essay on precursors of Zola is Claude Schopp's analysis of the idealist novel of 1861: *Raymon* by Mario Uchard. The first section of the essay provides information on this little-known author and then attention turns to the main character of the novel, Raymon. A former student at the *École des mines*, his job is to save a mining company, and he works with a miner to find a new vein, and later to make a scientific discovery. Schopp concludes that this novel is quite different from Zola's: there is no Lantier nor Maheu, no crisis, and no revolt.

In my second grouping, four essays discuss *Germinal* itself, while concentrating on contextual topics. The first in this group, by Jacques Noiray, examines what at first might seem to be a surprising theme for this naturalist writer: mysticism and religion. Noiray notes that the *dieu caché* in the mine represents capitalism, and thus in the symbolism of the text, socialism replaces Christianity and makes it seem that paradise is realizable in the present. The symbolism of high and low spaces, of light and dark join to give the image of germination that rises to the light. However, paradise does not come, and one illusion is substituted for another.

Colette Becker provides a genetic analysis of a number of changes in the various stages of drafts of *Germinal*, as well as a specific reading of two examples: the emasculation of Maigrat and the development of Souvarine's character. She traces some interesting changes as the writing of the text progressed, such as the switch of seasons at the end of the novel from winter to spring. The Maigrat episode was developed late: it was first to feature an animal, then a boss who used women, then Zola decided on Maigrat and his store. As for the Souvarine episode, it was first to be a natural accident, and then an educated Russian was chosen. Souvarine becomes colder, more disdainful of the miners in the revisions. Becker concludes that the changes in these two scenes serve to attenuate the optimism of germination.

The next essay, by Éléonore Reverzy, again centers specifically on *Germinal*, in this case as a *mise-en-abyme* of its own construction, and studies the way the novel draws on metaphors and mythic contexts beyond the novel. She emphasizes the *métapoétique* of the miner as writer: for example, the mine, a human construction described in the text, also figures the text itself. Zola's image of the characters digging represents the act of exploring the underside of things, and how the writer-carver creates the work of art. Finally, the miner represents the artist who gives his name, for example that of the *veine Guillaume*, to the coal vein he discovers and then works, and thus the mine itself becomes a symbol of the work of art itself.

The final essay that deals directly with *Germinal* centers on the physical noises described in the novel and reads them as being a kind of language that is translated by the author's words. Here Lola Bermúdez shows how Zola provides a discourse for the workers' voices, which are the "seeds" that germinate in the novel and explode into the cries and howls of those who revolt. The sounds of pickaxes, the animalistic howls of the crowd, the sounds of people living in close proximity, such as

snores and snuffles, create through Zola the discourse of real life and of social discontent that the miners cannot themselves articulate, but towards which some of them make progress.

The next two essays on the peripheries of *Germinal* deal with the theater. The first by Silvia Disegni studies the censorship of the theatrical version of *Germinal*, which was composed in collaboration with Busnach, banned in 1885, and then revised several times before its first production in 1888. Disegni reviews how Zola publicly criticized this censorship, which was targeted at the theater, in particular, because plays were produced before a crowd and could result in an uprising. The manuscript of the play shows the editorial cuts in marks of different colors by different censors, some of which were self-censorship by the author. Disegni claims that the general goal of this censorship was a conservative one to maintain classical, and thus non-threatening theatrical stereotypes.

Béatrice Didier examines Zola's work as a librettist in his collaboration on several works with Bruneau. She explores the reasons why Zola might want to do this work and some of the problems that arose for a novelist, such as the impossibility of using description and the domination of words by the music. She looks at *L'Ouragan*, but most specifically at the libretto for *Messidor*, the name of the tenth month of the Revolutionary calendar, which thus provides a first link with *Germinal*. The story does not feature a mine but rather a stream containing gold, and two of the characters resemble two characters from *Germinal*. Didier ends with an appreciation of the mythic aspect of the characters and the symbolism of gold that turns from literal riches to the riches of beauty and charity.

The last category of essays examines influence: foreign literary influence on *Germinal*, the influence of *Germinal* outside of France, the influence of a Belgian economist on Zola, the relation of industrial photography to *Germinal*, and the various film adaptations of Zola's novel. In the first of these essays, Estrella de la Torre examines the interaction between certain French and Belgian writers who represented miners in their works. In the mid-nineteenth century, Belgium was an important industrial power, and some authors writing on the mines had experienced that life. One Belgian writer, Paul Heusy, wrote a tragic history of a coal miner, *Antoine Mathieu*, seven years before *Germinal*. A French writer, Maurice Talmeyr, published *Le Grisou* in 1880, which is said to have influenced Zola. The Belgian author Camille Lemonnier wrote at about the same time as Zola, communicating with him, and they wrote similar novels about workers. Finally, the Belgian Marius Renard wrote a "complement" to Zola's novel in 1894. Estrella de la Torre notes a number of similarities among these works.

Jean-Louis Cabanès analyzes the influence of Émile de Laveley, a Belgian economist, on Zola's writing. Zola's notes on de Laveley's *Le Socialisme contemporain* were written at the same time as the first plans for *Germinal*. Cabanès finds that Zola took a certain typified discourse from de Laveley and put it in the novel. Thus, socialism is a discourse of formulas repeated by the novel's characters. Zola was also interested in the relation between religion and Marxism, and de Laveley's observation of the Russian mysticism in Bakounine's ideas finds its way into the ideology of *Germinal* and Souvarine's discourse. Most interesting is that some characters, such as Ranvier, seem to emerge from these notes on de Laveley.

Pedro Méndez studies the reception of *Germinal* in the press of Spanish provinces (the article is written in French with quotations in Spanish). Zola had been known in Spain for several years before the first translation of *Germinal*, and the first translations were an immediate success. In the provincial press, there appeared moral denunciations of Zola, who was viewed as representing vice and prostitution, and some critics suggested that he and his novels instigated anarchism. Yet there was also praise for the potency of his writing and his representation of modern society, and some critics expressed the belief that his works helped to mobilize the improvement of workers' conditions.

Diana Cooper-Richet claims that *Germinal* became a kind of cult novel in the mining community, which saw itself represented in the novel. Evidence of this can be found in the seventy or eighty texts written

by miners in France and Belgium, most of whom say they felt legitimized by Zola. She goes through the literary works, both poetry and prose, of several of these writers, from Elie Berthet in 1866 to Jean-Louis Vandermaesen in the twentieth century. She also notes the touching fact that the miners who were hired to play a part in the 1992 film by Berri addressed a poem that they wrote to the actor, Renaud, who played Étienne.

Photographic images of the coalmining and other industries by several twentieth-century photographers form the basis of Jean Arrouye's essay. The photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch brings mines into the visual arts with his artistic, documentary photos of industrial scenes devoid of human presence. The mines' monumental aspect and the importance of the towering chimneys echo descriptions in Zola's works. The works of Bernd and Hilla Becher document mining and other industrial structures threatened with disappearance. Their works feature a single isolated building or large industrial complexes, and bring out the strangeness of these structures, such as the *beffroi* tower in *Germinal*. Although there are no photographs included with the essay, works by these photographers are accessible on several museum websites.

The final essay, written in Spanish by José Luis Campal Fernández, reviews the film versions made of *Germinal*, with mention of several television programs. The names of the films are in themselves interesting: as well as *Germinal*, one finds *La Grève*, *Au Pays noir*, and *Au Pays des ténèbres*, for example. The early films dealt with a specific aspect or part of the novel and contain several "scenes" with titles such as "La Descente." Fernández analyzes the faithfulness of the films to the novel and brings out certain resonances between scenes in the novel and in the films, such as the white flesh of Catherine and its meaning in the black environment of the mine. He also looks at the critical reception of the films, in particular those of Capellani and Berri.

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