

Stone on Arjona, ed. (2017)

Arjona, Encarnación Medina, editor. *Germinal, la mine et les arts*. Peter Lang, 2017, pp. 269, ISBN 978-3-0343-1368-1

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In *Le Roman naturaliste—anthologie* (1999), we find outlined the Zolian formula for the pre-writing preparation of the Naturalist novel. Émile Zola details the principles that should guide the *romancier naturaliste* in this way, “Son premier soin sera de rassembler dans des notes tout ce qu’il peut savoir sur ce monde qu’il veut peindre,” then explains certain steps whereby the novelist can capture this new world (66). Significantly, he adds, “il ira aux documents écrits, lisant tout ce qui peut lui être utile” (67). Through a conscientious investigation, the Naturalist writer explores existing documents, stories, and histories to weave together a technical savoir-faire of the subject with his/her fictional imagination in order to construct the novel. Though *Germinal* is a uniquely developed fiction about the mining world, Zola assuredly followed his own precepts as he explored the archives and composed meticulous notes on the extant literature before setting out to write his own masterpiece.

Germinal, la mine et les arts is a compelling anthology edited by Encarnación Arjona. It brings together insightful commentary on the established mining narrative that had already saturated much of literature before Zola took his Naturalist novel underground. As Arjona explains in the introduction, this anthology allows us to reevaluate *Germinal*’s preeminent historical status and to “situer le thème de la mine dans le contexte littéraire avant le roman naturaliste” (7). While *Germinal* is regarded as the linchpin of mining literature, the Zolian formula invites us to read beyond the novel into the historical, cultural, political, and social spaces that define our understanding and recollection of the nineteenth-century archives. The vast array of contributions included in this edition explore—through diverse genres of the arts—the question “Quelle est la préhistoire littéraire du thème de la mine?” (7). Arjona has beautifully brought together a variety of scholarly essays to respond to this question through analyses of pre-*Germinal* literature; Zola’s pattern of literary construction; the novel’s reception at home and abroad; and finally, its adaptation to theater and film.

While the Introduction highlights the purpose of each author published in the anthology, there is no mention of any special organization of the articles. However, Arjona chronologizes the essays through a temporal progression which addresses the literature from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Sylvain Menant appraises how poetry from the eighteenth century tackles the question of the mine through the paradigm of ancient philosophers who condemned the underground as a space of greed, transgression, secrecy, and hell. Nonetheless, this imagery established a lingering dialogue about the physical dangers inherent to the industry. Geneviève Artigas-Menant examines the role of the mine in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert. According to her, the authors of the *Encyclopédie*’s entries contextualize the human nature of the workers, stressing their vulnerability while also seeking to “proposer [...] une certaine image du héros moderne” (31), an innovative approach that would be exploited by novelists George Sand and Mario Uchard, the focus of the next section of the pre-Zola writers. Essays by Angels Santa, M. Carme Figuerola, and Claude Schopp analyze Sand’s and Uchard’s creation of a miner-hero who discovers the dangers, solidarity, and camaraderie of the mining community. For her part, Santa describes the paradoxical worlds created by Sand—the bon/mauvais mineur and the mine as mère/marâtre, abri/menace—which expands into a story-within-a-story wherein the protagonist, Christiano/Christian, struggles to find harmony within himself and within the mine. As for Schopp, he characterizes Uchard, a relatively unknown nineteenth-century author, as the antithesis of Zola because of his idealistic portrayal of his miner-hero who becomes a benefactor for a floundering mining community.

The bulk of the essays focus on *Germinal* itself, from Zola’s process of creation to its adaptation in theater and cinema and finally its reception as a “roman culte” that Diana Cooper-Richet says developed within France in the twentieth century. Tucked inside essays by Jacques Noiray, Jean-Louis Cabanès, and Éstrélla de la Torre, we see emerge the Zolian pattern of searching the archives to extract the useful social, political, and economic data that would become *Germinal*. Through a close examination of Zola’s “Ébauche,” Noiray and Cabanès shed light on the author’s mastery of mimesis as he digested, for example, *La Question ouvrière au XIX^e siècle* (Noiray) and *Le Socialisme contemporain* (Cabanès), to shape the political economy of his novel. Noiray synthesizes the mystical aspects of Zola’s research as a revelatory experience for the author who envisioned a social paradise constructed through science. Cabanès deduces that Zola masterfully transforms material from the *mémoire* through his expertise of invention to create a fiction that echoes historical facts. Moreover, Torre emphasizes that there was a reciprocity between Belgium writers and Zola as each took from the other specific details related to the social customs of miners and the actual mining operations. While there were many similarities in structures and storylines, Torre differentiates the Belgian authors who remained anchored in pessimism and fatalism while Zola found optimism in the hope of germination. This is a very useful collection unearthing the literature that already existed at the time of *Germinal*, thus

allowing us to discover the histories, cultures, portraits, technologies, and experiences that undergirded mining as a cultural phenomenon in France by the 1880s.

Germinal, la mine et les arts is an engaging and valuable resource for scholars and novices interested broadly in the work of Zola but more specifically in *Germinal*. The articles discussed here, as well as the others unmentioned, accurately depict the landscape of the mining archive pre- and post-Zola, which allows us to (re)situate *Germinal* in the mining novel archives and more broadly in the novel's historical substrate.

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