



Subject Centre Occasional Paper

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These publications are all papers generously donated by colleagues who have participated in Subject Centre workshops.

In this issue the papers relate to a workshop held on 26th April 2002 on the teaching of literature to language students. The authors are:

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Teaching language and writing through the World Wide Web: The Digital Variants archive¹

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1. What is Digital Variants? <http://digitalvariants.org>

Digital Variants (DV) is a digital archive project of contemporary authors. It was created in 1996 by Domenico Fiormonte and was supported by the Italian Department at the University of Edinburgh. The main objective of DV is to preserve and make available on the internet texts of living authors at different stages of writing.

DV was first conceived in 1991 in response to a relatively new issue relating to the contemporary literary writing process: as the manuscript writing space fades away, replaced by electronic processes, we face the inevitable disappearance of variants (along with that of traditional philological methodologies and concepts). Fewer writers save the various electronic versions of their texts, and the new writing technology implies a loss of the knowledge of the *genèse du texte*. DV aims to provide a useful tool for the understanding of the literary writing process through the digitisation of writers' drafts and pre-texts in both text and image formats. Well-known writers from Italy and Spain agreed to provide the DV archive with various electronic versions of their works. Since these texts are copyrighted, only short, though strategic, portions of text are on-line. At present, the archive contains about a hundred web documents by nine authors.

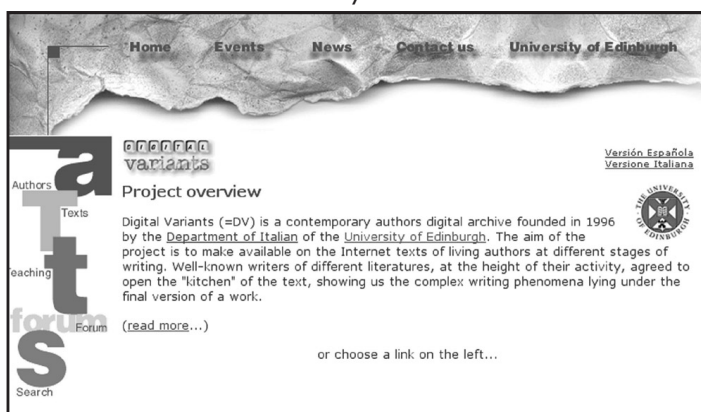


Figure 1. The home page of Digital Variants

2. What is DV for?

The main objectives of DV are to collect and catalogue electronically, textual variants of contemporary authors, and create a selection of multimedia resources, for each author, with original interviews, bibliographies, photographs, book covers, critical essays, and so on. In addition, DV aims to explore innovative philological solutions for the World Wide Web and, potentially, to propose an e-philology paralleling the traditional one. Other feasible applications of these archival materials are in teaching Italian and/or Spanish as L1 and L2 as well as in studying and teaching the writing process per se. Flexible textual forms and extended dynamic archives of texts are among the new teaching instruments of the digital era. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and, in particular, the study of the writing process, can benefit greatly from the use of these tools.

Our project turns the cognitive approach to the writing process upside down. Texts (and authors) in the DV archive do not tell students how to write, they simply show it. They disclose the internal labour with grammar and spelling mistakes, inconsistencies, disorganisation and so on, that will result, eventually, in the finished text.

Therefore, DV is not simply a problem-solving tool; rather, it fulfils a proper empirical purpose with two main research objectives:

¹ This article is the outcome of a joint labour. Its authors have discussed every part of it collectively. As for its drafting, paragraphs no. 1, 2 and 3 are by Luisa Carrer, paragraphs no. 4 and 5 are by Luana Babini, and paragraphs no. 6 and 7 are by Domenico Fiormonte.

- 1) The understanding of the writing process, which is potentially relevant to both Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Science experts
- 2) Textual criticism for teaching and research purposes. In fact, DV provides users with materials and tools enabling them to create, autonomously, a critical electronic resource.

Let us consider, for instance, Fernando Savater's *Scriptorium*. Two variants of an article by Savater on the magical power of reading are presented here: the first version (first published in "Babelia", "El País" cultural supplement) goes back to 1993, whereas the second version is dated 1995, when Savater revised and adapted it for the entry "Leer" (Spanish for 'to read') of his *Diccionario Filosófico*.

It is possible to view the two versions of the article either independently or together. In the *Comparación de los textos* (Spanish for 'text comparison') we marked the textual variants in light blue in both versions. Also, we underlined those pieces of text which were added by the author to his 1995 version. Thanks to these intra-textual links users can navigate easily through the texts, make comparisons, and perform their own textual analysis.



Figure 2. Comparison of Savater's variant texts

3. Who are the DV users?

Thus it emerges that DV addresses scholars and students (the latter at both under- and post-graduate levels) working in the literary and linguistic fields, with emphasis on second language acquisition as well as creative writing studies. Contemporary writers might also find it helpful in the analysis and understanding of the various techniques and writing strategies of other authors.

DV also strongly encourages *interaction* between the authors and the scholarly community on topics related to research and the teaching process.

4. DV Archive History

Two phases can be outlined in the history of the archive. In the first phase (1996-1999), the preliminary graphic interface and hypertextual structure of the site were created. The first international scientific board

across Italy (Università 'La Sapienza', Rome), Spain (Universidad Autónoma de Girona), the United Kingdom (University of Edinburgh) and the USA (Brown University) was also established. The number of authors collaborating with the project rose from three in 1991-1994 to seven in 1996-1998, with the first variants being edited and published along with the relevant bio-bibliographical material. The first e-philology experiment was carried on Francesca Sanvitale's *Orient-Express* interactive manuscript, which allowed users to navigate through a multi-frame system with inter- and intra-textual links between different passages.

In this first phase, the aim of the project was essentially the preservation of original materials (drafts, manuscripts, variants, etc.) already being collected from Italian and Spanish writers between 1991 and 1996. At this point DV was conceived of as an *archive-site*, mainly, as a tool for study and research.

Yet, we soon realised the greater potential of such an archive. From the idea of a site-archive, we moved to the concept of a *site-community*, enabling us not only to provide contents, but also to create a scholarly community. The second phase (1999-2001) included the complete restructuring of the site and a brand new graphic interface. The web site (available in English, Spanish, and Italian) was structured in four main sections: *Authors*, *Texts*, *Teaching*, and *Search* (see Figure 1).

New functions were planned, tested and implemented, namely a personalised search engine (which allows searches by entire site, by author, by text or by single text variant), a forum, and interactive exercises for students. A link to international-scaled events relevant to research and teaching in writing process studies and Humanities

Computing is also available. Finally, the News link reports on new developments and/or technical communications related to the site.

New texts were also added: besides the hundred or so html documents from the nine authors, every author has his or her own personal page. Francisco Solano's home page is one example of how multimedia resources have been integrated in order to provide users with exhaustive information about the authors and their works. It includes Solano's book cover and review, photograph, and an original Real Audio interview available for downloading.

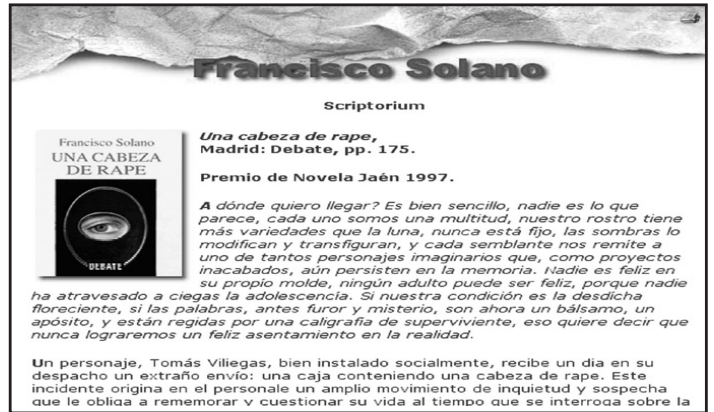


Figure 3. Francisco Solano's main page

At present DV archive holds (or will soon make available on-line) variants by Vincenzo Cerami, Ángel García Galiano, Antonio Millán, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Manuel Rico, Fernando Savater, Francisco Solano, and Roberto Vacca (see Table 1). In the summer of 2002,

AUTHOR	TEXTS (of which in electronic format No.)		INTERVIEW (Audio Yes/No)	VARIANTS (n · v)	BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY	ICONOGRAPHY (Photos, Images, etc.)	LINK
VINCENZO CERAMI	20	11	Yes	11 x 5		✓ (+manuscripts)	✓
ÁNGEL GARCÍA GALIANO	2	2	Yes	1 x 3	✓	✓	✓
FRANCESCA SANVITALE	6	5	Yes	1 x 8	✓	✓ (+manuscripts)	
VALERIO MAGRELLI	5	4	No	1x5	✓	✓ (+manuscripts)	✓
ANTONIO MILLÁN	3	2		1 x 3	✓	✓	✓
MANUEL VÁZQUEZ MONTALBÁN			No				✓
MANUEL RICO	2	2	Yes	1 x 2		✓	
FERNANDO SAVATER	2	2	Yes	1 x 2		✓	✓
FRANCISCO SOLANO	1	1	Yes	1 x 5	✓	✓	
ROBERTO VACCA	4	3	Yes	1 x 2 1 x 2	✓	✓ (+manuscripts)	✓

Table I. DV Authors and Material

Key: *n* indicates the numbers of documents (short stories, essays, etc.) whereas *v* indicates the number of variants (drafts or versions, different stages of writing in electronic format or not) owned by the archive.

permission has been obtained from the Italian poet Valerio Magrelli. Tommaso Lisa, PhD student at the University of Florence, is working with the DV staff on a *variorum* edition of the collection of poems *Ora Serrata Retinae* (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1980) which we hope to put on-line at the end of October. DV will make available, along with an interview and a bio-bibliography, a number of excerpts from the original notebook in which the author drafted the first poems in the 1970s.

5. Second Language Acquisition and DV

In a decade when much of the cognitive and metacognitive work in the learning process is taking place outside the classroom and increasingly often within the web domain, DV's potential in second language acquisition is considerable. Its rich and dynamic archive holds textual variants which are flexible and easily accessible, making it a challenging but rewarding environment for teaching purposes. The visibility of the writing process, particularly of its dual dimension, that is both linguistic and literary, makes digital variants an effective teaching tool for L1 as well as L2. Working with DV not only improves students' digital literacy but, more specifically, it allows L2 learners to become acquainted with the basics of textual criticism, and reflect on how computers can influence the writing process.

The archive contains variants of several pieces of Italian and Spanish fiction, which intermediate to advanced students of either language can examine to discover how writers experiment with language in their prose and styles. As already mentioned, interviews with the authors (in their mother tongue) are also available as both in audio format and transcripts. Learners can thus work on authentic sources which support activities focused on reading, listening and writing, and all exclusively in the target language, which makes their study more effective.

Insights into the complexities of the writing process are most likely to be achieved through the analysis of works by Fernando Savater and Ángel García Galiano for Spanish language students, or by Francesca Sanvitale and Vincenzo Cerami for students of Italian. Eight passages of Sanvitale's short story *Orient-Express* can be downloaded from the author's *Scriptorium* hosted in our site, and learners of Italian can analyse the on-line excerpts through an online questionnaire which examines both her use of language and narrative styles. Each excerpt constitutes a passage of about thirty lines, numbered for reference, organised into one column and paired with the subsequent version to make the texts more accessible and readable for the purposes of analysis. Students can also view the original manuscript from Sanvitale's first draft of *Orient-Express* where an image map is linked to the following version (bottom frame), and to a pop-up window showing the transcription of a hand-written paragraph added by the author (see).

The students' questionnaire, also available in English, is divided into three sections devoted to:

- 1) comprehension and linguistic analysis,
- 2) style and narrative
- 3) literary writing and the computer.

The questionnaire guides learners through Sanvitale's prose and makes them reflect on the literary writing process. It has been used at the University of Edinburgh with upper intermediate and advanced groups in first and second year as part of language courses, but has also proved extremely useful for the introduction and development of critical thinking and literary criticism. Most of the students, at least in linguistic analyses, tend to reach consistent and similar results. For instance, it is generally noted that Sanvitale's prose tends towards shorter sentences yet maintains the same rhythm throughout the different editions, or that she relies more on co-ordination than subordination, and prefers nouns

and verbs to adjectives, practically ignoring the use of adverbs. Linguistic investigation also plays a part in those aspects of analysis devoted to style and narrative techniques. Students often identify a crescendo in Sanvitale's evocative style, achieved not only thematically but also through linguistic strategies. Thus it is generally realised that Sanvitale moves towards a leaner but more vivid prose by lightening her syntax, and experimenting with her lexis by adding to and subtracting from the nominal aspect while leaving the verbal aspect almost unmodified. The third section of the questionnaire is the most 'creative' part as it asks students to produce their own variant of the passage, and finally to comment on the relationship between the word processor and the writing process. Students usually agree that computers ease and speed up the writing process by making it a better organised activity. Some students note how electronic writing is faster than the manual form, and allows a more rapid transfer of ideas onto the page. Other answers pinpoint the visual aspect of word-processed texts as potentially having a stronger influence on writers in so far as the appearance of words, sentences, and finally texts might have become a key factor in the writer's decision making.

Asked to comment on DV, as an instrument of textual criticism, almost every student recognises it as a valid tool for research, speeding up the process of textual comparisons and enabling more incisive analyses. Another positive aspect of studying textual criticism in L2, through DV, is that tutors' instructions and feedback tend to become marginal to the learning process. Students acquire the skills for the critical analysis of digital literary texts mainly through the questionnaires, but once they have become familiar with the site and its tools, individual explorations of the different authors can be carried out independently. Ultimately, the learning process underlying the textual investigations in DV becomes more and more independent of the tutor's direction as the acquired skills and easy access to other texts trigger new interests and paths of independent research.

6. Teaching textual scholarship and technology: L1 use of DV

During the Spring semester of 2002, the DV materials were also used in the course "Writing for New Media" (*Scrittura per i nuovi media*) at the University of Rome "La Sapienza". This course can be taken by any student studying for an arts degree at the Faculty of Humanities (*Scienze Umanistiche*), and is organised and taught by Domenico Fiorimonte. Since a basic competence in computing is required for obtaining the three-year degree, the Faculty offers a range of four-credit courses (up to 35 hours of class teaching) in Humanities Computing (*Informatica Umanistica*). The pedagogical aims of such a class, addressed to second and third year students, are therefore quite different from the Edinburgh course. At "La Sapienza" we used DV for other purposes: from basic training in mark-up languages, to principles of hypertext building. Although the course programme focuses mainly on developing a broad writing competence within electronic environments (i.e. CD-ROM and the Web), in showing linking strategies among variant texts, images, transcriptions, etc. we also make students aware of the complexities of representing dynamic and fluid textual traditions.²

The author analysed this year was Vincenzo Cerami. Cerami is a well-known Italian novelist, poet and scriptwriter (his last success being the subject of *La vita è bella*, the multiple Oscars-winning film directed by Roberto Benigni). We received from him eleven short stories, in two different versions: the first block of about twenty texts was published in the summer of 1991 in the daily newspaper "Il Messaggero"; the same texts, corrected and revised, appeared with other stories in the collection *La Gente* (Torino, Einaudi, 1993). Cerami also offered us the unique opportunity to see and reproduce two intermediate (and unpublished) versions of each of the twenty original texts.

A group of fifteen students were assigned one story, consisting of up to four variants for each text, to encode in html. They created inter-textual links between the variant texts, and were asked to set up a method for displaying how each story evolved and changed through time. Each group adopted a different representational strategy – either more ‘textual’, or more ‘visual’ – depending on their technical, organisational, and editorial skills (for an example see Fig. 4). A selection of these ‘hypertext editions’ of Cerami’s works will be soon available on-line in the *Teaching* section of the DV web site.

In the Italian academic system students are usually evaluated at the end of the course through an oral examination, but in this case they get credits for developing their digital project. This tends to increase their motivation to carry out their work, and help distribute their energies and attention throughout the term time.

For next year we are planning to improve the technical side of the course (more Java script, DHTML, XML, etc.), but also introduce some elements of digital textual criticism. In producing their final project, students would have to compare their results with well-known and established international projects. Balancing these two aspects – technology and a humanities-focused project – is a main concern of the Faculty. At “La Sapienza” the “Informatica Umanistica” courses are taught within the specific theoretical methodologies of the Humanities.

7. DV achievements and future developments

One of the strongest points of the DV archive is to combine quality original materials with the best use of the World Wide Web as an *authorial* environment. Its extendibility and modularity in terms of both multidisciplinary and multilingualism, makes DV an effective tool for the collection, preservation and analysis of Italian and Spanish contemporary literary resources.

It is one of the future aims of DV to extend and improve the textual

archive with new materials and, possibly, languages other than Italian or

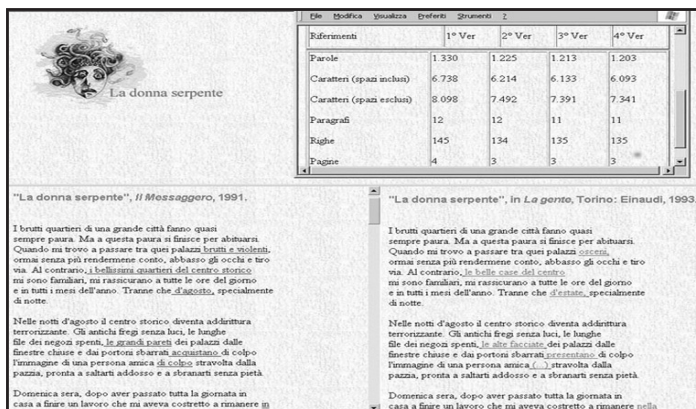


Figure 4 . Comparison of 1991 and 1993 versions of Cerami’s “La donna serpente” realised by “La Sapienza” students M. Macciocca and D. Rana. The top left window displays statistics referred to all four versions.

Spanish. In this respect, we have to mention, on the one hand, web copyright issues for contemporary works of art and, on the other hand, authors’ availability as two of the limits of DV. Furthermore, the long-term digital preservation of the materials will require TEI-XML encoding.

Other future developments will include improvements in authors-user and user-user interactivity, with further SLA applications. Particularly auspicious would be an exchange with similar projects across and beyond Europe, as well as the first delivery of DV for use in Distance Education.

² For a recent discussion on this see J. McGann, *Radiant textuality. Literature after the World Wide Web*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Teaching realist literature through the medium of film: the example of *Germinal*

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For many students, Zola’s *Germinal* can be a daunting text: it is undeniably long, full of unfamiliar mining terms and lacks the immediate appeal of an action-filled narrative. Indeed, impatient readers may well judge the opening chapters to be over detailed in establishing character and setting and perversely short of significant events to grip the imagination. Readers already familiar with Balzac or Flaubert will more readily accept the crucial importance of the novelist’s detailed exposition of character and situation, but for many students, struggling with limited French, the researched documentary descriptions characteristic of the Nineteenth century realist novel become potential barriers to reading and enjoyment. *Germinal* is no exception. All that information about the pit, the background to the recession and the factual account of working underground seem to hold back the narrative itself. For many the story does not really begin until, well until something *happens* at a personal level, like Etienne meeting Catherine, and then Chaval showing signs of jealousy. At last the sentimental interest, something to relate to...A large number of students will ‘solve the problem’ of *Germinal*’s dense narrative by turning to an English translation simply to find out more quickly what is happening. Imperfect though this is, particularly in terms of foreign language acquisition, at least, so the rationalisation runs, a knowledge of the story has been gained.

However, perhaps a more instructive and more immediate alternative route to this knowledge is a subtitled film adaptation of the novel, such as Claude Berri’s self-proclaimed faithful heritage version. This is a tempting proposition since students are usually more than comfortable with screen versions and are familiar with the ready, if deceptive, access such films provide to prescribed texts. Given Zola’s apparent affinity with the film medium as a ‘pre-cinematic’¹ writer, screen version and source text should have much in common. Here is an author, the argument runs, with a keen sense of the visual and whose characteristic method of establishing characters in a chosen setting though long and detailed descriptions can be readily translated to the screen with considerable economy and impact. A study of Zola’s creative methods confirms this affinity with the work of the filmmaker: researching locations, casting his chosen ‘star’, or Rougon-Macqart character for main role and scripting virtually every move, with an almost story-board approach to choreographing events within chapters or sequences. Finally it might be argued that students brought to the book via the film will at least develop some language acquisition and, in particular, improved aural comprehension. There are several undeniably convenient, and even spurious justifications for approaching *Germinal* through the medium of film but there are also many which are pedagogically defensible.

At a purely pragmatic level, a collective viewing of a screen adaptation does ensure that all members of a seminar group have a working knowledge of the story, instead of the mere handful of conscientious students who have actually read the text and, more usually, the vast majority making up the 'we-have-not-quite-finished-so-don't-tell-us-the-ending' group. A film version ², particularly Claude Berri's 1993 rendering with a near-authentic reconstruction of the mining environment should do the trick. If nothing else this version provides authentic illustration of the novel's settings, covers the main events and the issues pretty faithfully and includes the majority of Zola's characters. Well it does and it doesn't.

Berri's version does include almost all the principal events and major characters, it is true, but it does leave out, for example, disreputable mining families, Etienne's relationship with La Mouquette, Jeanlin's assassination of the soldier, various political figures such as the trades unionist Pluchart and the socialist priest abbé Ranvier. It also plays down drinking and promiscuity in the mining community, comes close to turning the bourgeoisie into near caricatures and cuts back considerably on political content, including the shaping of Etienne's political consciousness. These omissions naturally prompt important questions in themselves and, once the text has been sufficiently mastered to permit comparison, the director's reading can provide productive areas for discussion.

Why have particular elements been discarded? What difference do such changes make? How does the omission, say, of Etienne's relationship with La Mouquette change our perception of the failed political firebrand and his status as working-class hero? To what extent has the reduction of political representations seriously attenuated the message of Zola's original narrative? The discarding of elements presumably considered essential by the author to his original vision and narrative design clearly affects the balance of the narrative and as such calls into question the reliability or fidelity of Berri's version. Once the book has been studied alongside the film adaptation, a consideration of omissions, or indeed, additions can illuminate a reading of both film and novel.

However, let us deal with what the film does offer. At least a viewing of Berri's version provides a sense of knowing the story, the themes, the key events, the contrasting lifestyles of the miners and their masters, the basic nature of the characters, the moral issues, the epic struggle for justice... More than enough here to hold a meaningful seminar discussion.

But are we talking about Zola's *Germinal* or a paraphrase of the novel à la Berri? Can we understand what Zola was attempting, and how he proceeded as a realist novelist simply by watching the film? Have we understood the fundamentals of his narrative technique, his vision, his style? Has Berri reflected correctly Zola's ideological position? Is the film version no more than a 20th century commercial exploitation of a 19th century canonical text which substitutes an image of the text for the text itself. Is Berri's heritage film with its meticulous recreation of the past no more than a counterfeit antique?

It can be argued that any film adaptation implicitly refers the viewer back to the pre-existing text, and that one of the prime reasons for screening 'the film of the novel' is to promote a renewed awareness of Zola's novel through the perceived strengths and limitations of Berri's version. The purpose of film in this context is *not* to replace Zola's text as the object of study, but as a means of opening up the source material through a comparative study. In short, film can be used to stimulate a better understanding of the source text itself. The comparative approach is clearly not the most direct route, but if the vehicle of film eventually gets us there should we complain about the circuitous nature of the journey?

An examination of the first chapter of *Germinal* and the screen version provided by Berri will serve to illustrate the way in which an understanding of 19th century realist practice can be approached through the medium of film.

The narrative content of Zola's opening chapter may be summarized as follows. In the early hours of the morning the unemployed Etienne Lantier arrives, hungry and cold, at the Montsou coalmines looking for work. He meets an old miner, Bonnemort, who informs him of the problems facing the mining industry. The despairing Etienne begins to discover the nature of the pit for himself.

Berri's equivalent rendering in colour supported by an evocative soundtrack mixing sombre music with the noise of pit machinery, follows the same narrative line. The film shows Etienne walking in darkness towards the mine lit by occasional braziers whose leaping flames indicate a powerful cold wind. After an informative discussion with Bonnemort about the mine and widespread unemployment, Etienne proceeds to explore the workings of the pithead.

A more detailed examination of key features of text and film is required. Our discussion will be structured around the following narrative elements: setting; time; mood; characterization and the functional role of characters; narrative development; themes.³

Setting. Amongst the defining characteristics of the nineteenth century realist text is the way authors anchor characters and action firmly in time and place. To some degree film does this automatically through establishing shots, but often lacks the precision of the novel's description. Zola's opening paragraphs contain more information than is available to Berri's spectator. In summary mode, the author informs the reader that the as-yet-unidentified male has walked from 'Marchiennes à Monsou'.⁴ The distance is 'dix kilometres' (p. 7) and he has crossed 'un champ de betteraves' (p.7). The film lacks this degree of typically realist precision simply showing a mine as the general location. Indeed, throughout the chapter Zola provides the researched documentary information Berri cannot easily incorporate except, perhaps, through cumbersome dialogue. In his setting for the action Zola spells out the impact of the economic crisis by identifying the factories closing and listing the idle pits, characteristically validating his fiction by naming each and every one of the pits involved (p.15)

Time. Apart from self-evident indications of a night scene, Berri's film is again less precise than Zola's account. The cold wind is a 'vent de mars' (p. 7) the newcomer has been walking 'depuis une heure' (p.7) and it is now 'vers deux heures' (p.7) in the morning. The reader learns of his long frustrating journey looking for work: 'depuis huit jours (p.9)' and how he was forced to move on over 'samedi... dimanche' (p.9) Similarly, the duration of the action is more clearly delineated by the clock striking four: 'Quatre heures sonnaient au clocher de Montsou.' (p.14),. Reference to the expeditionary force to Mexico places the action in 1867 (p.10), but no such information is offered in the film. These absences from the film serve only to highlight for the reader how Zola has managed to anchor the action more precisely in time. His is set in the late 1860s with the specific event of the arrival at the pit taking place on a Monday in March between 2 and 4 in the morning.

Mood. In his screen evocation of the bleak mood, Berri has little difficulty in conveying the pitch blackness of the night and the implied strength of the cold wind through images of the braziers' bending flames. He also has the advantage of a soundtrack, and with its powerful mix of pit noises and sombre music, a considerable impact is achieved. However, despite this powerful opening, a comparison with Zola's presentation proves highly instructive in terms of the deeper resonance of the novelist's evocation.

An examination of the lexis Zola deploys in the opening paragraphs reveals how he conveys through repetition and synonym the impression of an all enveloping blackness: 'nuit', 'obscurité', 'noir', 'ténèbres' (p.7) The very absence of light is conveyed through a series of negations and restrictions: 'Sans étoiles, il ne voyait même pas, il n'avait... que... Aucune ombre.... ne...' (p.7) Images and epithets evoke the cold, flat landscape as the newcomer makes his way in the almost total darkness: 'd'une obscurité et d'une épaisseur d'encre...' (p.7). The wind's presence is conveyed by reference to gusts of wind at sea: 'des rafales larges comme sur une mer' (p.7) while a further maritime comparison indicates the straightness of the path Etienne treads: 'avec la rectitude d'une jetée' (p.7).

Zola's description proves to be more than the transparent realism he had claimed to espouse. Here is a carefully constructed evocation of atmosphere relating to the reader's key senses. The marrow-chilling wind experienced by the shivering Etienne is conjured up in a variety of ways. The following terms are used, *passim*, 'vent', 'bourrasque', 'rafale', 'bise', but more significantly adjectives and epithets suggest the force of this wind which cuts into Etienne: 'des lanières du vent d'est (p.7)'; 'une bise glaciale, dont les grandes haleines régulières passaient comme des coups de faux' (p.8).

Zola's various descriptions establish not only the real coldness of the night but, by metaphorical extension, also speak of the hunger and suffering of the unemployed: 'N'est-ce pas un cri de famine que roulait le vent de mars, au travers de cette campagne nue? Les rafales, elles semblaient apporter la mort du travail, une disette qui tuerait beaucoup d'hommes.' (p.11)

Characterisation: In the opening pages two principal individuals are identified, namely Etienne and Bonnemort, though in Zola's fictional world the pit itself is transformed into a living presence. The film viewer shares with the reader the appearance of the two male protagonists, and though there are some inevitable minor differences between text and film in this respect, the essential visual characteristics are reproduced by Berri. Common to both narrative forms will be the role of dialogue as characters inform not only each other about themselves but also the reader/viewer. However, important differences are seen to emerge in the range and nature of Zola's character presentation in comparison to Berri's depiction.

Etienne: Additional information is provided in summary mode. Zola's protagonist is identified as an 'ouvrier sans travail et sans gîte' (p.7) Further background information is provided by access to Etienne's reflections:

'Il songeait à lui, à son existence de vagabond, depuis huit jours qu'il cherchait une place; il se revoyait dans son atelier du chemin de fer, giffant son chef, chassé de Lille, chassé de partout' (p.9) Such information is denied the film viewer who will have to wait for a conversation between Etienne and Catherine before learning of Etienne's history. Also absent from the film is Etienne's important subjective perception of the pit and his sense of hopelessness. The shift to internal focalisation allows the reader to share Etienne's subjectivity as Zola registers his innermost thoughts and feelings. He is initially seized with fear at the appearance of the pit; 'D'abord, il hésita, pris de crainte' (p.7) and then ashamed at having to almost beg for work: 'Il fut repris de honte: à quoi bon? Il n'y aurait pas de travail?' (p.8)

The ease with which the author moves in and out of the consciousness of his character is a distinguishing feature of the literary text. Particular significance is added to the presentation of the pit when external reality is filtered through the consciousness of Etienne as a newcomer to the industry. He is filled with apprehension at the seeming monstrous

nature of the now anthropomorphised pit: 'et, de cette apparition fantastique, noyée de nuit et de fumée, une seule voix montait, la respiration grosse et longue d'un échappement de vapeur, qu'on ne voyait point'. (p.8) Zola builds on this subjective impression in a series of restatements which emphasise the destructive reality of working underground: '[Cette fosse]... lui semblait avoir un air mauvais de bête goulue, accroupie là pour manger le monde.' (p.9). Finally, this is how Zola concludes the chapter, leaving the reader with an unmistakable sense of the pit's monstrous, lethal presence: 'Et le Voreux, au fond de son trou, avec son entassement de bête méchante, s'écrasait davantage, respirait d'une haleine plus grosse et plus longue, l'air gêné par sa digestion pénible de chair humaine.' (p.16)

Zola then not only relays Etienne's state of mind and feelings as a thinking sentient being but also conveys a strong political message. Coal mining is alienating and destructive and the unemployment that forces men to work in such dehumanizing conditions offends any normal sense of justice. In this respect, the ideological importance of Etienne as an 'oeil naïf' discovering the nature of the pit for himself and more significantly, perhaps, for the unaware reader cannot be overstated.

Bonnemort

Zola is again able to provide a more complete presentation of his character than appears in the film. The background information provided, namely his family history, his years down the mine, and his lack of political awareness further helps the reader to understand the nature of the mining community (pp.12-14). His dramatic coal stained phlegm, reproduced faithfully in the film, provides a concrete illustration of Zola's positivist conviction of the formative relationship between the individual and his working environment: 'Enfin, il cracha, et son crachat sur le sol empourpré, laissa une tache noire' (p.9)

Character as surrogate narrator.

We have already established how Etienne is used by Zola as an 'oeil naïf', as a fresh consciousness which can register the new environment. It will be seen that Zola regularly uses Etienne and Bonnemort to provide factual information and to advance the narrative in the manner of surrogate narrators.

This functional aspect to the Etienne's role is witnessed throughout the chapter when Zola's protagonist serves as a pretext for a description of the locality. Passages of description are prefaced by verbs of perception attributed to Etienne, the most common of which are 'regarder', 'voir', 'entendre', 'apercevoir', 'reconnaître' (*passim*). This borrowed point of view allows Zola to give a fuller picture of the mine as Etienne moves around and to offer some explanation as to the function of the machinery. A few examples will confirm his mediating presence: 'L'homme avait à sa droite une palissade...' (p.7). After a description of the village, the text describes Etienne's movement: 'Il fit environ deux cents pas.' (p.8) and the locality is further described from his new vantage point: 'un autre spectacle venait de l'arrêter' (p.8). Through him, the reader will observe Bonnemort's role in collecting coal from the pithead. (p.10).

It is through Bonnemort that Zola chooses to relay information about the community and the power which the company wields. In conversation with Etienne he spells out the unemployment in the area (p.11) and names all thirteen pits that are on short time working (p.15). The film version, out of dramatic necessity, understandably curtails this documentary material. More significant, however, is the loss of Zola's commentary on Bonnemort's response to Etienne's query about ownership of the mine. The film retains Bonnemort's reply 'Hein? à qui

tout ça?...On n'en sait rien. A des gens.' (p.15). However, this is how Zola's text continues;

Et de la main, il désignait dans l'ombre un point vague, un lieu ignoré et reculé, peuplé de ces gens, pour qui les Maheu tapaient à la veine depuis plus d'un siècle.

Sa voix avait pris une sorte de peur religieuse, c'était comme s'il eût parlé d'un tabernacle inaccessible, où se cachait le dieu repu et accroupi, auquel ils donnaient tous leur chair, et qu'ils n'avaient jamais vu. (p.15)

The dark forces of capitalism which shape the destinies of men are clearly discernible in the disconcerting reverence of the faithful, powerless servant Bonnemort.

Narrative development

Zola's realist narrative technique is a mixture of mimesis and diagesis: he shows (description) and tells (advances the story line). Here dialogue becomes an important device both in bringing dramatic immediacy to the text but also to inform the reader. The importance of this technique becomes apparent when Zola provides time for his protagonists to talk by having the pit machinery come to a temporary halt. (pp.12-15) The narrative pattern is followed closely by Berri as his camera alternates between revealing the mine and conveying the information contained in the exchanges between Etienne and Bonnemort. However, what is missing in the screen version is the degree of understanding Zola supplies: there is more showing than explaining.

Themes

Finally, in the course of the chapter Zola establishes a number of themes which he will develop in the course of the narrative. The theme of food and hunger is anchored in the narrative as three times Etienne mentions directly the need for bread (pp.10,14,16), while also reading into the wind the cry of hungry men. This element does not come across in the film, yet it is central to the narrative which distinguishes between the overfed bourgeoisie enjoying sumptuous meals and starving miners finally driven to strike action and violence. The conduct and fate of Maigrat is an important working through of the food theme. Other elements are clearly those of political consciousness, the monstrous nature of capitalist society, the need for change, and the presence of the red fires of revolution. These aspects are readily embedded in Zola's fiction but are less apparent in the non-discursive nature of Berri's film version.

CONCLUSIONS

By examining Zola's text and Berri's film version, a number of important features of Zola's poetic realist style become apparent. The author's description is detailed, informative and important to our understanding of issues such as unemployment and the power of capital. However, Zola does not simply describe, he evokes a powerful mood of cold, black despair which serves to underpin his ideological position.

Although Zola's presentation of character has frequently been described as simplistic with his creations lacking depth, the opening pages of *Germinal* serve to reveal a degree of sophistication as Zola moves in and out of Etienne's consciousness allowing the reader to share both his physical perceptions as well as his thoughts and feelings as he reacts to the pit. His overwhelming sense that the mine is a monstrous creation is important in shaping our perception of the world

of coal mining. Zola also conveys information by borrowing the perceptions of his characters, modulating his narrative viewpoint so that knowledgeable characters (Bonnemort) can pass information to the innocent (Etienne) and necessarily the reader. To these surrogate voices he will add his own commenting on the implications of the revealed position. This mixture of subjective impression, characterial insight and authorial omniscience contributes to the explanatory depth and richness of Zola's presentation which is absent from the screen version. In common with the film version Zola's presentation is seen to alternate between mimesis and diagesis. Passages of description alternate with action or dialogue which itself brings a dramatic immediacy to the narration. Finally Zola's presentation allows for the development of thematic concerns with the importance of food as a defining difference between rich and poor, the winds of change and the fires of impending revolt skilfully woven into the text.

The understanding of Zola's narrative derived from comparative juxtaposition with Berri's screen version will make the student of both literature and film more critically aware of the specificities of each narrative form. It is not a question of seeking to establish the superiority of one form over another, but rather, though difference, to highlight the workings of the other. In the above discussion the emphasis has been on features of Zola's realist text rather than on the particular nature of Berri's filmic discourse. For the student acquiring an initial working knowledge of Zola's story through the screen adaptation there should be ample opportunity to understand better both the workings of the novel as well as the film.

NOTES

1. The Zolist Armand Lanoux uses this description in his review of Clément's *Gervaise* (1956) which appeared in *Les Lettres françaises*, 636, 13 September 1956, p.12.
2. The most readily available subtitled version is that by Claude Berri made in 1993, although other versions may be considered to provide further perspectives. A silent version by Capellani made in 1913 is not easily obtainable but the 1963 version by Yves Allégret is and has several merits. Through his experienced adapter Charles Spaak, Allégret provides a condensed, more rapidly moving narrative, though the meagre black and white visual introduction to the pit lacks Zola's documentary detailing and has little sense of menace. The emphasis is on action and characters are given less background as Bonnemort quickly moves the story on by indicating that Florence has died and that his son Maheud will need a replacement for his team. He also hints at Madame Hennebeau's infidelities. All this is contained in the opening sequence and as such provides a provocative contrast to Berri's detailed and slow moving exposition.
3. Individual students or possibly teams of two or three can productively work on these aspects, or indeed others, to illuminate Zola's text through a comparison of novel and film.
4. E. Zola. *Germinal*, Livre de poche (p.7). All subsequent pages are to this frequently reprinted edition.