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## Émile Zola's *Germinal* and Raimond Kaugver's *In the Seventh West*: A comparison from a geographer's point of view

The presentation compares two mining novels: Émile Zola's famed *Germinal* (1885) and the Estonian writer Raimond Kaugver's *In the Seventh West* (1965). To be able to write the latter, the author actually worked in the mine for a while. It has been said that in comparison with a coal mine an oil-shale one resembles a church, yet the topics of the two novels remain similar, although the texts were written in different socio-economic formations with a whole healthy lifetime between them. The paternalistic North-Eastern France of the 1860s and the oil-shale basin of North-Eastern Estonia during the unravelling of Stalin's cult of personality in the 1950s emerge from lonely breaking late-winter darkness on a desolate flat landscape of sedimentary rock where huge structures of the above-ground parts of mines loom and enticing lights twinkle. Work processes, objects and materials, as well as their failures, are comparable in the novels, while the advancement of machinery and technology is important in both works; the role of women, children and horses has fortunately changed during the time gap. An important role is played by smells and rudimentary environmental aspects such as water from mines, air pollution and bad planning solutions. The mines and settlements are numbered and the nickname of the white-collar neighbourhood *Bas-de-Soie* [Silk Stockings] sets it apart from that of the workers' estate called *Paie-tes-Dettes* [Pay-Your-Debts]. In the social sphere, housing problems, love, intergenerational and power relations, and the possibilities of the individual functioning as a cog in the machine are foregrounded. The miner's vocation and work means being a pioneer who is daily shifting boundaries within himself, in his community and in the struggle with an oppressive system, rising from underground to renew the social order.

The three centuries of coal mining in France survive on the UNESCO World Heritage List, while in Estonia the hundred-years-old industrial oil-shale mining continues as the utilisation of alternative power sources proceeds slowly. The time may be ripe for sending another writer down the mines as even the crisis of the 1990s has not been written about yet...