Novels, Myth, and the Image of the 1851 Anti-Coup Insurgents

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In the decades following Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's 1851 coup d'état, the nearly twenty-eight thousand provincial republicans who had been captured and sentenced after the failed anti-coup insurrection worked to mold a collective identity for themselves. They honed that image through pamphlets written by exiled republicans, concrete actions taken by political deportees in Algeria and Guiana, and even the very requests for pardon penned by individual prisoners directly to the new Emperor. Such writings and actions depicted the insurgents as honest, hardworking fathers roused from their everyday lives in defense of the established constitution and represented their pardons not as signs of the Emperor's generosity but as necessary acts of justice, humanity, and law, well deserved by men who were both exemplary republican citizens and integral parts of their families and local societies. This version of the insurgent identity later became a key component of the founding myth of the Third Republic, which in 1881 bequeathed pensions on former insurgents as war heroes, emphasizing the ordinary patriotism of men.
who thirty years earlier had jeopardized their families to save the republic.¹

The exact parameters of such a group identity were never crystal clear because they were shaped only partially through the conscious efforts of established republican writers. More frequently, insurgent identity emerged in an amorphous, unself-conscious way in letters to the erstwhile enemy written by ordinary citizens grappling with the individual, often isolating impact of punishment for their political affiliations. Both the authors of republican pamphlets and the former insurgents requesting pardon or pension faced an underlying conundrum: in the face of massive government propaganda depicting the now-punished insurgents either as antisocial criminals or as wayward dupes in need of imperial benevolence, which facets of insurgent identity should be stressed? In both the repressive days of the early Second Empire and during the later republican re-envisioning of the coup's story during the first decades of the Third Republic former insurgents found it difficult to craft one narrative that served larger republican political ends yet also met the concrete needs of the individual deported, exiled, or otherwise punished insurgent.

An analysis of pardon requests and non-fictional accounts of the insurgents' fates suggests one understanding of the collective identity of the 1851 insurgents. Two works of fiction, *La Fortune des Rougon* and *Le Ventre de Paris*, written by Emile Zola in 1870 and 1873, suggest another. Zola was certainly a committed republican by the time he wrote *La Fortune*, and he openly modeled the story of the insurrection in that novel partially on Eugène Ténot's 1865

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La Province en décembre 1851: étude historique sur le coup d'État and on Noël Blache's 1869 Histoire de l'Insurrection du Var en décembre 1851. More important than any factual resemblance between the plot of La Fortune and the December 1851 insurrection in the Var is what both this novel and Le Ventre de Paris, as novels, in terms of their plot structure, symbolism, and language, can reveal to the historian about the collective identity of the punished republicans.

In 1980 Frédéric Robert noted that in the lengthy, stirring descriptions of the insurgents' singing of the Marseillaise in the opening chapter of La Fortune des Rougon "it seems that the novelist sought to develop, to magnify in some way the evocations of our anthem by the historian [Ténot]." As Robert shows, where Ténot writes that "the crowd set out on the road to Bordeaux, singing the Marseillaise in a formidable unison," Zola amplifies and poeticizes this moment in La Fortune: "Then one could distinguish from this continual, growing roar, the brouhaha of the crowd, strange hurricane-like gusts, cadenced and rhythmic. . . . And, suddenly, a black mass appeared at the bend in the road; La Marseillaise, sung with a vengeful fury, exploded, formidable." The anthem, which Ténot mentioned as helping to gather and unify the insurgents, becomes symbolically in the novel a force of nature resonating with the strength of a windstorm, transforming the individual anger of the insurgents into a super-human drive for vengeance that seems unstoppable in its power.

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3 Frédéric Robert, "Emile Zola face à 'La Marseillaise'," in Cassaing and Mitterand, 167, 168.
Here is where *La Fortune des Rougon* and *Le Ventre de Paris* can help the historian. Just as Zola's fictional account "magnifies" the import of one song, so too do the novels magnify and distill, in symbolic form, key aspects of the republican myth of the collective identity of the anti-coup insurrectionaries. A study of these novels can open the historian's eyes to new ways of reading the key tensions facing very real republicans during the Second Empire in ways not readily apparent through the conventional perusal of archival documents.

As the first novel in the twenty-volume naturalistic study of the inherited character flaws that plague the extended Rougon-Macquart clan, *La Fortune des Rougon* does a double duty. Through the story of Adélaïde Rougon and her three offspring it launches the tale of the family by establishing the various nervous dispositions that will determine the fate of so many sons, daughters, cousins, and grandchildren. It also recounts the events of the anti-coup d'état insurrection and its aftermath in one southern French town and the surrounding countryside. The insurgency triggers both the deceitful, egotistical rise of Pierre Rougon and the martyrdom of the idealistic, pure, adolescent Silvère of the Macquart line. *Le Ventre de Paris* similarly contains two intertwined threads: it recounts the inability of the returned deportee Florent to reincorporate himself into the society which eventually betrays him, and it simultaneously depicts in astounding detail the new central Parisian marketplace, *les Halles*, and, by implication, French consumption at the height of the Empire in all its excess. Thus both novels use moments in the history of the political opposition to Napoleon III as important plot devices but by no means as the sole focus or even the main point of each narrative.
Silvère and Florent play astonishingly similar roles in the two novels. They share nearly indistinguishable political opinions. Both embody a lofty, naïve republican idealism through their dreams of general human happiness, everlasting fraternity, and the triumph of a vague system of eternal, universal justice. Barely more than a child, young Silvère is "un naïf sublime" who learns from his reading to long for "an Eden where eternal justice reigns . . . an ideal government of complete justice and liberty." Older though no more practical, Florent takes refuge from his petty workaday life in his vision of a republican utopia "just as desperate girls enter the convent."4 For both men, their identities cannot be separated from their political opinions: Silvère knowingly gives up the possibility of a peaceful, isolated future with Miette to join the band of insurgents, while Florent learns that his head and his heart feel desperately empty unless he thinks, writes, and talks politics.

More importantly for this analysis, La Fortune des Rougon includes a powerful collective image of the anti-coup insurgents. In the first chapter of the novel, bands of insurgents materialize on the nocturnal horizon as if out of the very earth itself. They rouse the countryside as they sing the Marseillaise:

for it was not only the band which sung; bits of horizon, far away rocks, plots of labored land, prairies, groupings of trees, the smallest of bushes, seemed to find human voices . . . the countryside, amidst the shaking air and earth, cried for vengeance and liberty.5

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These rural republicans are further linked to the land through their professions and choice of weapons: as one group passes, Silvère notes their long axes and cries that these woodcutters from the forest of la Seille would, if needed, "march all the way to Paris, prying open the doors of the city with axe blows, just as they fell the old oak trees of the mountains." Hunters, charcoal makers, farmers with hoes and pitchforks – band upon band of insurgents are so intimately connected to the rural land that their naïve fury, their anger, and their "burning desire for liberty," in short, their republican idealism, seem a force of nature. Indeed, Zola compares the insurgents who barrel through Plassans during the night only to have disappeared by daybreak to a passing thunderstorm. The novel heightens this connection by drawing a sharp contrast between the open spaces of the insurgent-filled countryside and the unnatural, enclosed, yellow salon in which Pierre and his fellow reactionaries plot the downfall of the republic or the locked-down town of Plassans as a whole.

From their first appearance, these insurgents are a band of brothers, a mass of republicans moving as one towards a common goal. As they pass Silvère and Miette like a military parade on review, the adolescent describes them, calling each group of men by the name of their village: "Here's Nazères! Here's Poujols! They're all here, not one missed the call . . . Valqueyras!" Silvère’s enthusiasm gives the impression that the entire population of each town or the town itself has risen to join the fight. No individuals stand apart from the crowd; rather, the insurgents blend together into one determined troop, resolutely facing the

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6 Zola, La Fortune, 43.
7 Ibid., 185.
8 Ibid., 45.

Volume 33 (2005)
enemy as one, defining at each instance the brotherhood that both Silvère and Florent worship. Interestingly, throughout the novel Zola refuses to individualize the insurgents apart from Silvère, his girl Miette, and his treacherous uncle Macquart; this anonymity obviously contrasts with Zola’s detailed descriptions of at least six members of Pierre Rougon's salon. In describing the distinct personalities, motivations, and character flaws of Plassans' minor reactionaries, Zola highlights their petty natures and thus the pettiness of their political views. By contrast, his description of the multitude of undifferentiated insurgents preserves their basic nobility, for all his asides about their naivety, the inebriated quality of their republican passion, and the doomed nature of their battle.

Despite the natural camaraderie and shared republican idealism of the insurgents, both Silvère and Florent are strangely alone. *Le Ventre de Paris* includes no bands of insurrectionaries, beginning as it does seven years after the coup d'état in a Paris where the remaining republicans are tracked by police, watched by stoolpigeons, and denounced by their neighbors. Florent's isolation is profound; he returns to Paris to find his beloved brother estranged from his new wife and profession and to discover that all of society is both literally and figuratively too fat. Even the few fellow democrats who meet at a local café turn out either to be police informers or to shun Florent’s benevolent version of republicanism. Even more tellingly, in *La Fortune*, Silvère the orphan remains strangely separate from the mass of insurgents. Throughout the novel his only companion is Miette, a girl so virginal and symbolic of the republic itself that she hardly seems human. Although Silvère watches the insurgents pass by with awe, he never merges with them. Instead, Silvère and Miette take a short cut, spend the night in the hills in isolation, and join the
band only at the moment of battle, when Miette's silent
death preoccupies Silvère so completely that he takes no
notice of the action around him. Finally, both men are
isolated in their demise. Although Silvère is chained to
another insurgent in the moments before his death, the
other man, a stupid peasant who neither speaks French nor
understands the gravity of the moment, provides Silvère
with no final camaraderie.\textsuperscript{9} Similarly, although Florent is
tried for political crimes alongside twenty others, he
recognizes few of the men on the court benches beside him,
and their presence in the courtroom does not mitigate
Florent's isolation.\textsuperscript{10}

Why this isolation? The reader doesn't have to agree
with critic Naomi Schor's interpretation of both novels as
mythic narratives replaying the archetypal story of ritual
slaying to see that Silvère and Florent are both martyrs to
the Republic and sacrificial victims precisely because they
remain complete outsiders and slightly other-than-human in
comparison to the myriad petty characters populating both
tales.\textsuperscript{11} In each novel, the destruction of the republican
dreamer marks the climax and end of the story. Indeed,
tensions within the narrative itself demand their downfall.
Foretold by Tante Dide and envisioned by Silvère and
Miette themselves, Silvère's death becomes inevitable, a
necessary retribution once the gendarme has been injured.
Moreover, Zola links Silvère's death, like a necessary
sacrifice, to the future successes of Pierre and Félicité
Rougon by tying the dead boy's congealing blood to the
blood on his uncle's shoes in the final image of \textit{La Fortune}.
Similarly, the antagonisms between the female vendors of

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 344.  
\textsuperscript{10} Emile Zola, \textit{La Ventre de Paris} (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 409.  
the Paris market, which threaten to rip apart that contented, self-satisfied society of consumption, can only be mended by Florent's return to Guiana, an exile so inevitable that even Florent accepts it.\(^\text{12}\)

Silvère's death and Florent's demise carry great narrative weight because each man is a symbol of republican sacrifice and suffering rather than a simple individual. To achieve this mythic impact, Zola has magnified and augmented Silvère's and Florent's idealism, isolation, and outsider status. Though Florent meets other disgruntled democrats in the café, he is consistently alone as he plans a republican insurrection and in his disgust at the market's abundance. In the end the friends he makes either betray him or remain so self-absorbed that they exert no effort to help him. His exile returns Second Empire Paris to its self-centered ways. Even more tellingly, Silvère's death in *La Fortune* creates its impact because Silvère has not blended with the crowd of insurgents, because no one comes to his aid, and because he does not die on a crowded battlefield but alone on the *aire Saint-Mitre*. He is not merely one of a band of brothers; he is naïve republican hope itself.

Thus, for the narrative structures of Zola's novels to work, Silvère and Florent must be both exemplary insurgents yet also isolated from any republican brotherhood, Silvère from the crowd of undifferentiated republicans who march with courage, fortitude, and fraternity through *La Fortune des Rougon*, and Florent from any similar group present only by implication in his own utopian revolutionary plans in *Le Ventre de Paris*. Can Zola's narrative device, crucial as it is for the structure of his fiction, tell us anything about the collective image of

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 25.
the real insurgents during the Second Empire and early Third Republic? A quick glance at another novel, this one written in exile in 1853 by a republican sympathizer of the insurrection, suggests so.

In his preface to Jeanne et Louise, novelist and journalist Eugéne Sue wrote that his story would highlight the predicament of the deportees, those insurgents sent to penal colonies in Algeria or French Guiana, who, "completely ignorant of the fate of their loved ones . . . ask themselves every hour of the day . . . my wife? my mother? my children . . . where are they? . . . what will become of them?"13 Here Sylvain, a good-hearted farmer, is linked to republican utopianism and a love of the constitution just as closely as Silvère and Florent. In the face of growing evidence of an approaching coup, Sylvain repeats his mantra: "the Republic is the best heritage we can leave our sons." When he joins a secret republican society, the constitution becomes the sacred text of his initiation.14 Furthermore, Sylvain is a wonderful husband, father, and son: the opening scenes of Jeanne et Louise, with Sylvain reading political journals by the fire while his wife sews, his son whittles, his little daughter knits, and his aged father fashions a wooden shoe, are the very picture of republican rural domestic harmony. After the coup, Sylvain reacts because he has a family to protect.15

With the coup the little idyll turns tragic. After the republican defeat, soldiers tracking the fleeing Sylvain ransack his home, upending his family's domestic bliss in an instant. Eventually Sylvain sacrifices himself to keep his pregnant wife out of prison, but he is too late and the few

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13 Eugène Sue, Jeanne et Louise, in Oeuvres complètes XXIX-XXX (Paris: Slatkine Reprints, 1992), vii, x.
14 Ibid., 4, 21, 31.
15 Ibid., 7, 28.
hours she spends in police custody doom both her and his unborn child. Eventually Sylvain's young children end as wards of the state, mixing with vagabonds and criminals in correctional custody. The family of Sylvain's bourgeois counterpart, deported cashier Edmond Morand, suffers an equally horrifying fate: his now-impoverished wife is forced to leave her children and take a job as a shop assistant that threatens to compromise her honor.

The fate of Edmond, Sylvain, and their families is so tragic because Sue portrays them as utterly alone once the republican insurgency has been defeated. Local folk are so paralyzed by fear that no one comes to the aide of Sylvain's wife, Jeanne, who dies with her stillborn child precisely because she could find no shelter during her long trek home from prison. After her death, her children remain alone, orphaned and abandoned, for days. Similarly no one is there to lend money to Edmond's wife, to help with medical expenses, or even to listen sympathetically to her plight. Sue clearly uses the absence of a larger social support system to heighten the effects of Sylvain's and Edmond's deportation to Algeria; each page of his novel emphasizes the cruelty of a punishment, which ripped away the sole male provider from needy women and children. Thus for Sue, as for Zola decades later, the insurgent hero's isolation amplified and crystallized his martyrdom.

The story of Sylvain and Edmond, like those of Silvère and Florent, illuminates a fundamental tension facing republican outlaws as well as those who professed to write for them either in exile during the early Second Empire, back in France as the regime liberalized, or after its fall. Was the memory of the anti-coup insurrection most powerful as the story of a band of brothers united for the good of all society or as the tale of the cruel, illegal, and dictatorial persecution of individual victims? In the face of
massive imperial propaganda portraying the erstwhile insurgents as criminals bent on destroying national unity through bloodshed and pillage, the vision of insurgents as a near mythic brotherhood imbued with an almost meteorological force and super-human selflessness like that conjured up by Zola in *La Fortune des Rougon* seemed particularly useful to writers crafting a positive, republican image of the vanquished insurrection. Republican writings from the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s are replete with details of the fraternal bond between insurgents both during the struggle and later among imprisoned combatants. To mention just one example, Charles Ribeyrolles' 1853 *Les Bagnes d' Afrique: Histoire de la transportation de décembre* portrayed deportees as dignified comrades infused with the spirit of cooperation and resolute in their continued republicanism, singing republican anthems as they marched through the African desert towards their penal camps. Furthermore, republican authors in exile consistently downplayed their often bitter divisions in writings destined for a French audience so as to present a unified attack on the Empire. The image of the undifferentiated throng of exiled republicans suffering *en masse* just as they had battled together for the constitution could take on a mythic quality in ways which helped expatriate writers imagine a republican future as well as mourn the republican past. For instance, an 1852 pamphlet published in London entitled *La Voix mystérieuse* conjures streams of nameless French exiles fleeing their homeland "on all the roads, on all the seas." The anonymous author urges his bourgeois audience to protest Bonapartist injustice towards the insurgents and to ally themselves with

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the "people," opening the way for a new, albeit vague, era of political liberty and social justice. Finally, during the early Third Republic, former insurgents across France drew upon an almost sacred image of their collective identity as they formed clubs, planned elaborate commemorative banquets, or voted for representatives to 1881 departmental commissions which would allocate the pensions due them by the new "law of national reparation." In Montpellier, for example, former outlaws gathered on the day of the election, 10 October 1881, in a ceremony which included a solemn, "imposing" processional through the streets of the city accompanied by the "strains of the national anthem." Their arrival at the town hall must have conjured up memories, or perhaps constructed images, of the original republican band's similar march in defense of a government thirty years before.

In such instances republican writers and former insurgents drew upon a collective image, as in Zola's *La Fortune des Rougon*, in which the symbolic import and emotional impact of the insurgents depend upon individuals remaining undifferentiated, absorbed into the mass. Occasionally this image of the collective could become a searing indictment of the horrors of Bonapartist repression, as in the poems of Victor Hugo's *Les Châtiments*, where the deported insurgents become the voices of a faceless chorus.

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17 *La Voix Mystérieuse* (London: Jeffis Libraire-Editeur, 1852), 12, 29. Sylvie Aprile, "FAIRE VIVRE LA RÉPUBLIQUE. PAROLES ET ÉCRITS DES EXILÉS AU LENDEMAIN DU COUP D'ÉTAT," IN *COMMENT MEURT UNE RÉPUBLIQUE: AUTOUR DU 2 DÉCEMBRE 1851*, EDs. SYLVIE APRILE, NAthalie Bayon et al. (Paris: Creaphis, 2004), 51-62, notes the importance of this move from lamentations of the past to constructions of positive visions of the republican future.

describing the misery of their punishment.\textsuperscript{19} Crucially, however, the most emotionally gripping republican tales of insurrection, exile, transportation, or imprisonment often turned to accounts of individual martyrdom not unlike those of Silvère, Florent, Sylvain, and Edmond to voice their harshest condemnations of the imperial regime. Scholar Alain Garrigou has recently highlighted the growing importance of the story of the death on the Parisian barricades of the previously unremarkable representative from the Ain, Alphonse Baudin, in republican accounts of the coup beginning with Victor Schoelcher's 1852 \textit{Histoire des crimes du 2 décembre}. By 1868 Baudin had been refashioned as the quintessential martyr who deliberately sacrificed himself with courage and a prescient sense of the republic's future struggles. Eugène Ténot's 1868 \textit{Paris en décembre 1851} focused on Baudin, and his grave became the site of an impromptu pilgrimage of opposition journalists, writers, and politicians later that year.\textsuperscript{20}

In these accounts, Baudin's death shocks not only because it is so quick and seems so resolute, but also because he seems so very alone atop his barricade as he faces down Napoleon's troops. Noël Blache's 1869 \textit{Histoire de l'Insurrection du Var en décembre 1851}, one of the accounts used by Zola as a template for \textit{La Fortune}, similarly crafts images of republican heroes whose deaths


\textsuperscript{20} Alain Garrigou, "Mourir pour des idées: Les récits de la mort d'Alphonse Baudin," in Aprile and Bayon, 75-87.

\textit{Volume 33} (2005)
resonate because the victims die alone, in profound isolation. For instance, the gentle wigmaker Besson is shot like a hunted animal as he scrambles across a rooftop of an isolated ruin, and the farmer Panisson is wounded as he walks, again alone, down a moonlit road and is then dragged to the town square to lie dying, a lone figure against a giant plane tree.\(^\text{21}\) Such isolation dramatizes these otherwise unimportant deaths, transforming the victims from ordinary men into mythic martyrs.

As long as the victim's simultaneously heroic and tragic isolation exists against a backdrop of the collective fraternal action of the united crowd of insurgents, as it does in Blache, the individual's martyrdom remains inextricable from the larger movement. Victor Hugo achieves such a balance in his moving ode to deportee Pauline Roland in *Les Châtiments*, where Pauline's individual sacrifices and those of her unnamed companions mirror one another.\(^\text{22}\) Blache's history and Hugo's poem work through the same narrative structure as Zola's *La Fortune des Rougon*, which juxtaposes Silvère's solitary death with the collective fortitude of the insurgents.

Crucially, however, the largest body of writings to contribute to shaping the former insurgents' collective identity parallels *Le Ventre de Paris*, where no larger-than-life republican fellowship mitigates Florent's isolation or brings even a hint of meaning to his demise. These writings are not works of fiction or general accounts of the insurrection's aftermath published by exiles safe in London or Jersey. Rather, they are the thousands of pardon requests that punished insurgents and their families penned to Napoleon III himself. Demands for pensions written three

\(^{21}\) Blache, 36-7, 52-4.
decades later to the administrators of the Third Republic used similar narrative strategies. Punished republicans responded to Napoleon's call for letters requesting clemency by emphasizing their positive roles as fathers, husbands, and family breadwinners. Furthermore, many referred to notions of universal justice, which underscored the cruel nature of their sentences.

In crafting their requests for pardons, insurgents consistently emphasized their utter isolation. Deportee Prosper Jalaquier, for instance, insisted that no one else would come to the aid of his eighty-year-old mother and septuagenarian mother-in-law. His fellow Algerian deportee Etienne Rocher wrote of his desperate pregnant wife and infant child, left completely alone and "now reduced to the hardest of privations." That Jalaquier's and Rocher's accounts and thousands like them echoed the dramatic plight of the wretched families in Eugène Sue's Jeanne et Louise makes enormous practical sense. As early as 1853 imperial administrators in the Ministry of Justice were recommending the pardon of the neediest convicts, especially those with families who faced starvation or risked burdening local charities. Many of the insurgents who had not been deported to Algeria or Guiana were suffering their punishment alone; the lesser penalty of internal exile (internement) required them to relocate at least one hundred kilometers from their home towns in order to break up networks of friends and political sympathizers. Furthermore, pardons were generally refused to those men suspected of having been members of secret societies before the coup or of retaining connections with former republican comrades afterwards. Police also treated any meeting between former insurgents as potentially

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23 Archives nationales, Paris, BB30, 463, and BB30, 467.
criminal in nature. It is no wonder that insurgents painted a picture of themselves as alone both by necessity and choice.\(^{24}\)

Driven by the strictures of the pardoning process itself, each punished insurgent wrote a story in which he fashioned himself as an individual acting and suffering in isolation, connected only to his immediate family in a domestic, never a political, way. Indeed, in the pages of each pardon request, the convict becomes a long-suffering martyr set apart from the larger French society. Thirty years later the moderate Third Republic accentuated this trend, for its deputies did not choose to honor Napoleon's opponents by designating a day each year to commemorate the insurrection, minting a coin with images of mythic insurgents, or even erecting a monument to the coup's opposition, all acts which would have highlighted the fraternal image of the insurgents and perhaps even created a space for their symbolic collective presence at the heart of the new republic. Instead, the 1881 law of reparations dictated that pensions be awarded to all those worthy individuals based on the suffering of each petitioner and his family. The scheme triggered a new set of letters in which each writer fashioned himself as the hero of his own narrative. In writing these letters, the ex-insurgents, Napoleon III's former deportees, convicts, and exiles become so many Florents.

Although Silvère dies separated from the mass of insurgents in *La Fortune des Rougon*, the presence of this collective force whose symbolic strength resonates like the chant of the *Marseillaise* and the toll of church bells

\(^{24}\) Stacey Renee Davis, "Transforming the Enemy: Algerian Colonization, Imperial Clemency and the Rehabilitation of France's 1851 Republican Insurrectionaries" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999).
transforms Silvère's martyrdom. Instead of a death relevant only in terms of his own family saga, Silvère's sacrifice forms part of the larger, ongoing struggle between forces of republican idealism and reactionary egotism. No comparable imagery accompanies Florent's demise in *Le Ventre de Paris*, and thus this story seems more firmly closed. It is as if the "Fats" of Parisian consumer society have definitively won and as if Florent is the last, or rather the only, idealistic republican to challenge them. In a similar way, the stories republican writers and the punished insurgents crafted for themselves and sympathetic audiences shifted between the models of Silvère and Florent. Even as accounts by writers like Hugo, Blache, and Ribeyrolles designated a few martyrs as symbolic rallying points around which opposition to the Empire could crystallize, they presented these martyrs against the background of a republican movement of thousands of nameless, faceless supporters. Yet most punished insurgents, concerned with the very real goals of returning home from exile or deportation, breaking the last requirements of police surveillance, or, later, securing a government pensions, emphasized the individual stories of their own suffering or heroism to the exclusion of all else. Both during the 1850s as former insurgents penned requests for pardon and in 1881 as they demanded pensions, that very emphasis on the individual's narrative, working in isolation from a tale of the larger collectivity, reinforced the notion that the insurrection of 1851 was over, cut off from any future republican movement, truly a thing of the past.