

What's in a Name? The Role of Souvarine and Pologne in *Germinal*

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RÉSUMÉ

Au vu de la valeur symbolique de nombreux noms propres dans les œuvres de Zola, il semble intéressant de prêter une attention particulière au nom de l'anarchiste russe Souvarine et à celui de la lapine Pologne. Évocateur du mot "souverain," le nom Souvarine suggère l'extrémisme, l'exercice unilatéral du pouvoir, ainsi que l'action irrévocable, autant de traits constitutifs de la personnalité de l'anarchiste. Aussi le nom de ce dernier constitue-t-il une annonce de la destruction qu'il imposera aux mineurs. De même, le nom Pologne, associé aux souffrances répétées infligées à l'animal, évoque-t-il la destruction de la Pologne par d'autres états aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles. En mangeant ce lapin qui lui est cher, Souvarine montre qu'à l'instar de la Russie, principal agresseur de la Pologne même si les tsars prétendaient la protéger, il n'est pas un ami fiable, et sa destruction involontaire de Pologne anticipe sa destruction future des mineurs. L'anéantissement du Voreux confirme toutes les caractéristiques négatives qui s'attachent au nom Souvarine et au rapport du personnage avec la lapine.

"Un nom propre est une chose extrêmement importante dans un roman," Flaubert declared, "une chose *capitale*," and Zola clearly agreed, for the names of his characters often have a particular symbolic value.¹ At the beginning of the *Rougon-Macquart* series, the name Silvère, taken from a pope of the sixth century, helps make a naive young revolutionary into a secular saint in *La Fortune des Rougon*;² at the series' end, *Le Docteur Pascal* shows its namesake hero as a kind of sacrificial victim who gives his life for others in what could be considered a *paschal* sacrifice. And nowhere in Zola's works are names imbued with greater symbolic value than in *Germinal*. Étienne, the preacher of a new gospel of socialism, is ultimately stoned by those he sought to teach, like Saint Étienne, or Stephen, of the Bible;³ Chaval, the antagonist who abuses Catherine and fights with Étienne, sounds like an animal, whether *cheval* or, more ominously, *chacal*, a predator.⁴ Similarly,

¹ Flaubert's statement comes from a letter to his cousin Louis Bonenfant. Quoted in Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale*, ed. Claudine Gothot-Mersch (Paris: Flammarion, 1985) 511, n. 1. In his account of the legal imbroglio surrounding the company chartered to build the Zola canal, Henri Mitterand notes the role played by a certain Lépargneux and comments: "tous ces gens ont des noms prédestinés, comme les futurs personnages de Zola." See his *Zola. Tome I. Sous le regard d'Olympia* (Paris: Fayard, 1999) 86. Perhaps these early experiences led Zola to give symbolic names to many of his characters. Of course, Zola told a newspaper editor that he simply took names from "un vieux *Bottin* des départements." Quoted in James B. Sanders, "Onomastique zolienne: les listes inédites de noms dressées par l'écrivain," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 65 (1991): 215. This may be true for many – even most – of his characters, but this still does not cancel the symbolic role of many other names. As Sanders notes, "Il est évident que le choix des noms propres par Zola est rarement dû au seul hasard" (216).

² See Kristof Haavik, "Le saint martyr du 2 décembre," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 75 (2001): 111-20.

³ He is described as "l'apôtre apportant la vérité" (285), instilling in the miners "la foi aveugle des nouveaux croyants, pareils à ces chrétiens des premiers temps de l'Église" (182). All page numbers in *Germinal* will refer to the 1968 Garnier-Flammarion edition and will be indicated in brackets.

⁴ Whichever animal is emphasized, David Baguley notes that Chaval represents "the bestiality in man"; see Baguley, "The Function of Zola's Souvarine," *Modern Language Review* 66.4 (1971) 797.

Rasseneur, the *possibiliste* voice of reason against Étienne's millennial vision, is a *raisonneur* who uses careful analysis rather than emotional rhetoric, and proves to be more *raisonnable* than his adversary;⁵ in a world divided into *maigres* and *gras* as Zola suggests through Claude Lantier in *Le Ventre de Paris*,⁶ Maigrat straddles the divide as a working class person who sides with the rich, a sellout who betrays his own – as well as perhaps, given his odious character, a rat. It seems useful, then, to explore the possible connotations of the name of the Russian anarchist Souvarine, as well as those of the rabbit Pologne.

Souvarine is a perplexing character, for he is a mass of contradictions. His fundamentally divided nature is visible the first time he appears in the novel: delicate and feminine in appearance – “mince, blond, avec une figure fine, [...] Ses dents blanches et pointues, sa bouche et son nez minces, le rose de son teint, lui donnaient un air de fille” – he also has a hidden anger that wells up periodically and can present “un air de douceur entêté que le reflet gris de ses yeux d'acier ensauvageait par éclairs” (155). Dedicated to a form of rebellion more complete than that of any of the other characters, he is nevertheless a model worker, “sobre, silencieux, si exact, que les chefs le citaient en exemple” (156). Given his hatred of the mining company and eventual destruction of the mine itself, he might be expected to participate in the strike, which he did accept as a “premier pas” (195), but instead he continues to work: “il n'avait pas quitté sa machine un seul jour, depuis le commencement de la grève” (413). The fact that the machinists are not on strike (243) is irrelevant to so determined an individualist as Souvarine: his decision to continue working is a personal choice. He is much more educated than either Étienne or Rasseneur, fluent in at least three languages, and able to understand issues like the effect of supply and demand on workers' wages that escape them: “Quand il s'oubliait de la sorte, abordant des sujets de socialiste instruit, Étienne et Rasseneur demeuraient inquiets, troublés par ses affirmations désolantes, auxquelles ils ne savaient que répondre” (159). Yet he has contemptuous disregard for intellectualism, even in the service of revolution: “Tous les raisonnements sur l'avenir sont criminels, parce qu'ils empêchent la destruction pure et entravent la marche de la révolution” he boldly tells Étienne (249), and thinks to himself that “la sainte et salutaire ignorance devait être le bain où se retremperaient les hommes” (287). He attempts to make friends among the miners – “il s'était montré si fraternel pour eux, sans fierté, distribuant à la marmaille du coron tous les sous de ses poches” (155). Yet, he resolutely refuses any kind of intimacy, condemning his love for a female revolutionary in Russia and preferring social isolation: “Ah! rien, ni parents, ni femme, ni ami” (438). Friendship and love are dirty words for him, ridiculous ideas to be scorned – despite his search for acceptance by the miners. Whatever character trait he displays, its opposite always seems to accompany it.

Readers may struggle to make sense of these conflicting signals and search for some kind of steady anchor in the swirling currents of Souvarine's thought. His name offers one possibility for finding a bottom line that defines him. Its similarity to the term *souverain* suggests a number of connotations. It may be a reminder of his aristocratic background, in contrast to his anti-establishment beliefs, and of his aloofness; but more lies beyond these immediate associations. The word *souverain* is defined in the 2014 *Petit Larousse*, first in its adjectival usage, as: “1. Litt. Qui atteint le plus haut degré; extrême: *Un souverain mépris*. 2. Qui exerce le pouvoir suprême: *Le peuple est souverain*. 3. Qui n'est susceptible d'aucun recours: *Décision souveraine*” (1085). All three definitions seem applicable to Souvarine: he has a degree of devotion to his cause, and, more alarmingly, of willingness to employ violence, that go far beyond those of other characters; he exercises supreme power when he

⁵ He also seeks to *rasséréner* the emotional miners with a “discours d'apaisement” (287), both when they follow Étienne's proselytizing and when they subsequently turn against him.

⁶ *Le Ventre de Paris* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971) 273.

single-handed destroys the mine; finally, by his very action, he makes a choice that offers no chance for appeal by anyone, neither the miner owners nor even the workers whom he (theoretically) supports. The *Larousse* definition of *souverain* as a noun follows from the second adjectival meaning: “Personne qui exerce le pouvoir suprême; roi; empereur” (1085). Here again, the term neatly encapsulates Souvarine’s unilateral action. Yet this very isolation clashes strongly with the supposedly egalitarian basis of his socio-political beliefs; like an absolute monarch, he consults no one, defers to no one, and pursues his own goals regardless of the suffering they inflict on others. Despite his claim of preparing a better world for all, Souvarine remains isolated, unable to cooperate or even to communicate with others, trapped in the cage of his aloofness; the same “réserve farouche” (155) that Étienne finds in him when they first meet remains nearly unbroken until the end. It is difficult to see how such a man can be anything but a force of destruction, and his name warns of this from the beginning.

Critics have suggested many models for Souvarine,⁷ and one possibility is the character Bazarov in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*. Like Souvarine, Bazarov is a young Russian nobleman who rejects tradition and any concept of authority; he too seeks only to destroy with no thought of what will follow.⁸ Like Zola’s character, he is inhabited by a violent anger that worries those around him: “[...] in his friend’s face he [Arcady] surprised such a malevolent expression, in his crookedly smiling lips and glinting eyes such a serious threat, that he instinctively felt uneasy” (156), as does Étienne at times with Souvarine: “Cette face blonde, dont les yeux rêveurs s’ensauvageaient parfois d’une clarté rouge, l’inquiétait” (247-48). Souvarine’s favorite word to dismiss all objections or suggestions of sentimentality – “des bêtises!” (157, 188, 249, 393) echoes Bazarov’s verbal tic: “Bazarov was on the point of uttering his favourite word – ‘Romanticism’ – but he refrained and said instead: ‘Rubbish’” (132). For him, the two are synonymous: both are *bêtises*. Indeed, this similarity may be the most significant of all: Bazarov, like Souvarine, is contemptuous of the very idea of emotional closeness: his declarations “love... Why, it’s merely an imaginary feeling” (208) and “That’s the one thing I’m really proud of. I am not ‘divided’ and no female can break me either” (152) are quite similar to Souvarine’s attitude: “La femme était pour lui un garçon, un camarade, quand elle avait la fraternité et le courage d’un homme. Autrement, à quoi bon se mettre au cœur une lâcheté possible?” (156); and “Quand il y avait une femme dans le cœur d’un homme, l’homme était fini, il pouvait mourir” (445). Emotional attachment is yet one more subject of his *souverain mépris*.

There is an important difference between Bazarov and Souvarine, however, in the ways in which each of them develops over time. Despite his bold statements, Bazarov falls in love with a woman, and shows a certain tenderness toward his parents; he even encourages a friend to get married and have children. Does this make him untrue to his principles? Perhaps, but it reveals a softer side of him, a human side that makes him more sympathetic to most readers. Souvarine, on the other hand, evolves *away* from softness and intimacy: his only romance lies in a distant past, told as a kind of flashback, and he condemns himself for ever having indulged such feelings: “Nous étions coupables de nous aimer... Oui, cela est bon qu’elle soit morte” (438). If he briefly shows concern for Étienne and wants to prevent him from entering the sabotaged mine – “Il l’empoigna par une épaule, il le rejeta vers le coron. ‘Rentre chez toi, je le veux, entends-tu’” – he quickly reverts to his emotional

⁷ See E.T. Dubois, “Un modèle insoupçonné de Souvarine,” *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 40 (1970): 144-50, and Baguley who acknowledges Turgenev as a possible source but sees his works as of only peripheral relevance (788).

⁸ Jane Castlow comments in her Introduction to the novel: “Bazarov’s method is indiscriminating and crude, calling for the destruction of the present order without thinking about what to put in its place.” Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, ed. Jane Castlow (New York: Signet Classics, 2007) xii. All page numbers in *Fathers and Sons* will refer to this edition and will be indicated in brackets.

distance, precisely because he sees Étienne with Catherine: “les yeux du machineur allèrent de la jeune fille au camarade; tandis qu’il reculait d’un pas, avec un geste de brusque abandon. [...] Il dit simplement: ‘Va’” (445). It is the very closeness between the two, something that others would take as all the more reason to save them from impending disaster, that leads him rather to abandon them to their fate – if fate is the correct term, since Souvarine himself has created the danger. He is, once again, isolated, proud, and intransigent, as his name suggests.⁹

With such an attitude, it is surprising that this cold-hearted man feels tenderness toward, of all things, a rabbit.¹⁰ Yet he shows affection for Pologne repeatedly throughout the novel. In a passage that immediately follows his refusal of female companionship, he is shown treating the animal with almost fatherly care: “il finissait, d’habitude, par installer sur ses genoux un lapin familier, une grosse mère toujours pleine, [...] Cette lapine, [...] s’était mise à l’adorer, venait flairer son pantalon, se dressait, le grattait de ses pattes, jusqu’à ce qu’il l’eût prise comme un enfant” (156). It is not only Pologne who is calmed by this closeness; Souvarine himself finds it a tranquilizing influence on his troubled mind: “sans se lasser, d’un geste de caresse inconsciente, il passait la main sur la soie grise de son poil, l’air calmé par cette douceur tiède et vivante” (156).¹¹ Souvarine is often showing gentleness to the animal and “gratt[ant] tendrement la tête de Pologne” (157); even after his violent words advocating destruction – “la terre lavée par le sang, purifiée par l’incendie” – he still is careful to avoid harming the rabbit: “Souvarine, [...] prenait délicatement la grosse lapine sous le ventre, pour la poser à terre” (159). Moreover, the rabbit’s constant pregnancy makes it a symbol of fertility, and thus of the uniting of the two sexes: this possible expression of mere animalistic desire that cannot be considered emotional closeness offers a close parallel to the unrestrained sexuality of the miners, in which Souvarine alone refuses to participate. For this reason, as well as for the emotional vulnerability it brings out in him, Souvarine might be expected to despise the rabbit, yet he does exactly the opposite. His unusual attachment to – perhaps even dependency on – the animal is most apparent when he learns that he has unwittingly eaten it: “il devint très pâle, une nausée contracta son menton; tandis que, malgré sa volonté de stoïcisme, deux grosses larmes gonflaient ses paupières” (394).

What the incident shows about Souvarine is, however, only one aspect of the passage; his role in killing the rabbit may have much broader implications on a symbolic level. From the barnyard and garden of *La Faute de l’abbé Mouret* to the aging dog in *La Joie de vivre* and the murdered horse in *La Débâcle*,¹² animals often appear in Zola’s texts as symbols to underline the main themes, and this too is nowhere more evident than in *Germinal*. Bataille, the horse lowered into the mine in Part I, represents the struggles of the miners, whose lives are a constant battle for survival; Trompette, who seems resigned to his fate, ultimately rebels against it at the end, seeking a way out of the darkness, as if following the *corne d’appel* that Jeanlin uses to summon the strikers in Part V (324). Other animals may also be intended to carry a message: in the *ducasse* (III: 2), it is tempting to see the fighting cocks, harming those like them for the amusement of others, as an allegory of the plight of the miners, who only a few pages earlier are forced to compete with each other for the company’s benefit when new work sites are put up for bid:

⁹ David Baguley notes the progressive change in Souvarine’s character: in a true nihilist, he argues, “humanity and his hopes for its redemption would be abandoned in an uncompromising assertion of the principle of negation. This is precisely the direction of Souvarine’s intellectual development” (792).

¹⁰ Zola’s daughter notes “une opposition curieuse entre l’amour des bêtes et la haine des hommes”; see Denise Leblond-Zola, “Émile Zola et l’amour des bêtes,” *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 2 (1956): 301.

¹¹ Carol S. Fuller notes the animal’s role as a calming influence on Souvarine and argues that its death, removing this influence, is what pushes him from words to action, leading to the destruction of the mine. See Fuller, “The Infertile Rabbit: Ambiguities of Creation and Destruction in *Germinal*,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 10.3-4 (1982): 343-45.

¹² See Kristof Haavik, “Le Cheval assassiné: augures dans *La Débâcle*,” *Excavatio* 19.1-2 (2004): 89-99.

Il fallut que Maheu, pour avoir ses cinquante mètres d'avancement, luttât contre un camarade, qui s'obstinait, lui aussi; à tour de rôle, ils retiraient chacun un centime de la berline; et, s'il demeura vainqueur, ce fut en baissant tellement le salaire, que le porion Richomme, debout derrière lui, se fâchait entre les dents, le poussait du coude, en grognant avec colère que jamais il ne s'en tirerait, à ce-prix-là." (161)¹³

In this context, it is worth exploring Pologne's symbolic role in the novel, and how its connection to Souvarine may reveal the author's underlying ideas.¹⁴

Besides Rasseneur, the owner who ultimately kills and cooks the rabbit, the only other characters who interact with the pet are the children of the mining village. In one scene, having ventured outside, Pologne is pelted with stones by the village children and seeks refuge on Souvarine's lap: "elle vint se réfugier contre ses jambes, l'implorant, le grattant, pour qu'il la prît" (188-89). The Russian kindly takes the animal on his lap like a mother comforting a frightened child. But the violence continues later, led, predictably, by Jeanlin. He displays a kind of slowly developing obsession with the rabbit: "Depuis longtemps, Pologne, [...] le tracassait" (278). The phrase foreshadows the passage describing his plan to kill the young soldier Jules: "Depuis trois jours, il en avait envie. Ça le tourmentait, la tête lui en faisait du mal, là, derrière les oreilles, tellement il y pensait" (404). In the same way he shows malevolence toward Jules, Jeanlin feels an increasing desire to kill Pologne: first he simply puts the rabbit in his basket (278); later, he and his friends release and chase it; then, laughing, they throw stones at it and drag it by a cord (279). Only the fact that Madame Rasseneur saw them take the animal prevents him from killing it, and they are in fact responsible, indirectly, for its death, since their violence makes it barren and therefore useless to Rasseneur. Moreover, even as he plans to avoid punishment by surreptitiously returning Pologne to the inn, Jeanlin brandishes the very knife he will use to murder the soldier: "il hurla plus fort, il ouvrit son couteau neuf, dont il brandissait la lame, glorieux de la faire luire" (292). The incident with the rabbit is a kind of apprenticeship for Jeanlin, through which he learns how to use gross violence; if Pologne is no longer available as victim, he will seek another.

The influence of the events on Jeanlin is important, but more significant for this study is what they reveal about Pologne. The animal, it seems, was born to suffer. And if Pologne is destined to suffer, Souvarine is destined to be the cause of her death: it is he, not Jeanlin, who ultimately eats the rabbit. Why Souvarine, who sought to defend it? While critics have studied both the animal's symbolic value and the names of some characters as two separate subjects,¹⁵ the intersection of

¹³ Similarly, the contest for singing birds can be read as a metaphor for the miners: the birds are kept in cages, like the workers with no way out of their difficult lives; they are blinded, like those working in eternal darkness; they start slowly, timidly, then sing more steadily, "tout d'abord timides, ne risquant que de rares phrases, puis s'excitant les uns les autres, pressant le rythme" (168-69), like Maheu in his statement to M. Hennebeau: "Il commença, la voix hésitante et sourde d'abord" (225); "Du reste, Maheu coupa la parole au directeur. Maintenant il était lancé, les mots venaient tout seuls" (226). Furthermore, the birds risk death from the activity – "on en voyait tomber et mourir" (169) – just as Maheu dies, not from speaking but from the action his words supports. At the risk of stretching the argument too far, one may also note that the birds sing on command, making the sound their controllers want, as the miners in general, and Maheu in particular, find themselves forced to do when confronted by power. Reproached by the company's secretary for his association with Étienne's radical ideas, Maheu only stammers what he is supposed to say: "Certainement, monsieur le secrétaire... J'assure à monsieur le secrétaire..." (192); for this behavior he soon blames himself: "Je suis un jean-foutre, j'aurais dû répondre!" (192).

¹⁴ Robert Ponterio studies the importance of the animal in "Souvarine and His Rabbit: Using Images to Define Character in *Germinal*," *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 35 (1989): 37-45. Marie-Sophie Armstrong argues that by eating the rabbit, Souvarine reenacts a totemic feast of the type described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*. See "Le chapitre de Jenlain' ou la mise en abyme fantasmatique de *Germinal*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 37.1-2 (2008): 81-96. Jean-Pierre Davoine briefly discusses the symbolic value of Pologne in "Métaphores animales dans *Germinal*," *Études françaises* 44 (1968): 383-92.

¹⁵ See Sanders on the symbolism of names, and Fuller, Davoine, Armstrong and Ponterio on animal symbolism.

these two lines of inquiry in Pologne offers an intriguing answer. Souvarine himself named the animal – “il [l'] avait lui-même appelée Pologne” (156) –, and while this moniker shows his affection for the animal, the choice of name is surprising. To unpack its full value and open what Claude Duchet calls “le jeu libre des connotations,”¹⁶ it is important to recall the history of Poland at the time of Zola’s writing. Poland, like its namesake animal, was the victim of repeated violence by those around it, suffering dismemberment by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in three successive partitions in 1772, 1792, and 1795, the last of which wiped it completely off the map. For the following hundred and twenty years, Poland was dominated by other powers. Napoleon briefly recreated the rump of a Polish state in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, which enjoyed a short semi-autonomous life from 1807 to 1813, but the duchy fell with him; at the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and 1815, although Austria and Prussia each gained a share of Polish land, the largest part by far went to Russia. Tsar Alexander saw himself as a friend of Poland, and agreed to its being constituted as a separate kingdom rather than incorporated in the Russian Empire, but the two were united in his person, since he was King of Poland at the same time as Tsar of Russia. His good intentions toward the Poles, granting them a constitution and many internal freedoms, were insufficient to avoid future conflict. The harsh policies of his more authoritarian brother Nicholas I led to an uprising against Russian control in 1830; and, after its bloody suppression, the tsar was determined to take away what little freedom or national existence Poles enjoyed. Another, larger armed revolt broke out in 1862; when it too failed to win independence, the country was integrated even more completely into the Russian Empire, of which it was supposed to be just another province, deprived of its very name – it was to be called the Vistula Land – and the Polish language was forbidden in public, other than in church ceremonies. Moreover, this debacle occurred when the events of *Germinal* were unfolding, as shown by references to Napoleon III’s 1863-1866 Mexican campaign in the opening chapter. Poland, like the rabbit Pologne, was a long-suffering victim.¹⁷

Things were bad for Poles under all three empires, but Russia’s imperialism was distinctly the worst. Prussia initially gave its Polish citizens the same rights as other citizens, although more discriminatory legislation was passed when the kingdom was succeeded by the German Empire in the 1870’s; Austria, shaken by the internal disputes through which the Magyars won equal status in the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary in 1867, was in no position to crack down on nationalities and granted autonomy to its Polish lands. But Russian policy grew steadily more oppressive over time, culminating in the harsh measures following the 1863 rebellion. Faced with these circumstances in their daily lives, many Poles fled the Russian-controlled area for a better life in the regions held by Prussia/Germany and Austria/Austria-Hungary, which were perceived as the lesser of the evils. Russia, on the other hand, *was* the evil.¹⁸

This painful history constitutes what Marc Angenot calls a work’s *discours social*, “la vaste rumeur des paroles et des discours qui coexistent et interfèrent dans une société,”¹⁹ shaping readers’

¹⁶ Claude Duchet, “Pour une socio-critique, ou variations sur un incipit,” *Littérature* 1 (1971): 7.

¹⁷ Anita J. Pramożwska, *A History of Poland*, 2nd edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 130-58; Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 158, 163-68; Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) 101; Philip Mansel, *Paris Between Empires: Monarchy and Revolution 1814-1852* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1991) 273; Adam Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007) 162, 266, 274-77, 316, 391, 483, 531.

¹⁸ Prazmowska 153-55; Davies 194; W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Romanovs: Autocrats of All the Russias* (New York: Dial Press, 1981) 583-84.

¹⁹ Marc Angenot, “Analyse du discours et sociocritique des textes,” in Claude Duchet and Stéphane Vachon (eds.), *La Recherche littéraire: objets et méthodes* (Montreal and Paris: XYZ/Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1998) 134. Duchet himself points out that “Toute rencontre avec l’œuvre, même sans prélude, dans l’espace absolu entre livre et lisant, est déjà orientée par le *champ intellectuel* où elle survient” (“Pour une socio-critique” 7-8).

reactions. Aware of these relatively recent events, readers of the late nineteenth century would inevitably have seen the suggestion of Russia being the friend of Poland as a virtual oxymoron: regardless of the promises made by Tsar Alexander or Slavophile intellectuals who exalted all things created by Slavs, Russia was inevitably a threat to the Polish people.²⁰ In this context, Souvarine's nationality becomes important: he is, after all, a Russian, one who rejects tsarist imperialism, but a Russian nonetheless. His naming the rabbit Pologne and taking it under his protection is akin to Russia's absorbing of Poland: in both cases, despite sincere claims of good intentions, only harm can result. Simply put, in this context a Russian *cannot* be a friend of Poland; even his best intentions will inevitably lead to his harming it. And French readers would have been more aware of this fact than any others, with the exception of Poles themselves, for France harboured the largest and most influential Polish expatriate community in Europe – a virtual “alternative Poland” in the words of one modern historian.²¹ Its ruler in exile, Prince Czartoryski, reigned over a colony so numerous that it had its own necropolis in the Père Lachaise cemetery.²² French writers of the period repeatedly refer to the problem of Poland. In *Les Misérables*, several acts of *realpolitik* are said to outrage Feuilly, among them “La Russie sur Varsovie,” but the personage considers the first partition of Poland as a kind of original sin that is worse than the others: “Entre toutes, la grande voie de fait de 1772 le soulevait.”²³ The reputation of exiled artists like Chopin undoubtedly raised the colony's profile, and Parisian intellectuals like the Goncourts and Heine make frequent reference to the fate of Poland during these years.²⁴ But it was not the concern only of an educated elite: the Goncourts report in their journal that an abortive uprising against the republican government in 1848 was motivated first and foremost by concern for the Polish question, with the raucous crowds in front of – and soon inside – the Palais Bourbon chanting “Vive la Pologne!” Attempts to raise other issues were met with cries of “À la question! à la Pologne!”²⁵ The matter continued to be important in France later in the century: during both the Crimean War of 1853-1856 and in the Polish uprising of 1863, when public opinion in France again supported the Poles, Napoleon III wanted to force the tsar to restore an independent Poland and entrust it to Napoleon's own cousin. Polish expatriates in Paris made sure the issue remained in the public consciousness by trying to assassinate Tsar Alexander II during his visit to Paris for the 1867 Exposition.²⁶ Living in this socio-political environment, Zola's readers would have been acutely aware of Poland's conflicted relationship with Russia, and would have quickly understood the contradiction inherent in a Russian supposedly befriending Poland. Thus, Souvarine's relationship with the animal warns of what will happen to the miners: they too are sought out by him as friends, but will reap only pain and suffering from his actions.

²⁰ So notorious was this story of oppression that it was even known in distant America: a character in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* describes his father's ruthlessness by stating: “He could have divided Poland as easily as an orange.” Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Ann Arbor, USA: Borders Classics, 2004) 234.

²¹ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917* (London: Fontana Press, 1998) 32; See also Davies 194, 197-98, 258; Prazmowska 141.

²² Hosking 32; Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, vol. 1 (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989) 53; Mansel 274, 410. Pierre Larousse's 1866-1879 *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe Siècle* notes that after the 1862 uprising “il s'ensuivit une nouvelle émigration de Polonais en Occident, principalement en France” (vol. 12, 1318).

²³ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, vol. 1 (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951) 691 and note by Maurice Allem on 1635.

²⁴ Goncourt, *Journal*, vol. 1., 262, 268, 327, 412; Heinrich Heine, *De la France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) 270.

²⁵ Goncourt, *Journal*, vol. 1, 21, 23.

²⁶ Trevor Royle, *Crimea: The Great Crimean War 1854-1856* (New York: Saint Martin's Griffin, 2000) 434; William E. Echard, *Napoleon III and the Concert of Europe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983) 46, 48, 51, 67, 150-51; Alistair Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004) 246. The *Larousse Dictionnaire universel*, composed during these years, refers to the initial partition of 1772 as an “acte de brigandage politique” that even the Empress of Russia initially hesitated to commit (vol. 12, 1316).

The destruction of the mine, for which Souvarine bears sole and entire responsibility, clearly shows this deadly force. The collapse of Le Voreux as seen from outside is juxtaposed with the repeated sight of Souvarine silently watching the destruction that he has wrought. These passages carefully bring out the connotations of aloofness, of arbitrary and irrevocable action, suggested by the name Souvarine: “Et, là-haut, sur le terri, dans la cabane de Bonnemort, il y avait, assis par terre, un homme, Souvarine, qui ne s’était pas éloigné, et qui regardait” (452). His name is given, but as a kind of afterthought, as though his real identity is to be simply “un homme,” isolated from all the others, both emotionally and physically. The next mention insists on the contrast between his solitude and the masses of people he watches, demonstrating ever more forcefully his isolation. Like the constantly smiling mask of Dionysus in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, his soft, feminine appearance becomes more disquieting as it contrasts with his manifest nature: “Et l’homme, en haut, sur le terri, l’homme blond, à la figure de fille, fumait des cigarettes pour patienter, sans quitter la fosse de ses yeux clairs” (456). The final passage emphasizes Souvarine’s indifference to the suffering he has caused, even his contempt for the victims: “Il avait reconnu la Maheude et Zacharie, sanglotant en face de cet effondrement, dont le poids pesait si lourd sur les têtes des misérables qui agonisaient au fond. Et il jeta sa dernière cigarette, il s’éloigna sans un regard en arrière” (459). Nightfall is associated with him as “son ombre diminuait, se fondait avec l’ombre” (459), as if he were personally responsible for it as the bringer of darkness, both literal and metaphorical. Moreover, his elevated position, watching the scene unfold from above, while showing his *souverain* detachment from the suffering below like an Olympian god, is quickly inverted when he is said to be lurking *below*, the one responsible for making “éclater le pavé des rues.” Despite what some readers may see as the justice of his cause, Souvarine is last seen as the virtual incarnation of evil.

Thus, Zola ends Souvarine’s role in the novel, like Pologne’s, on an ominous note. The prophecy contained in Souvarine’s relationship with the rabbit is fulfilled, but on a much grander scale, involving the death not of one animal but of numerous human beings. As Zola approached the end of his career, he would turn to more positive – and openly prophetic – writing, giving the name of the Biblical leader of the apostles to the creator of a new religion in the *Trois Villes* and those of the Christian evangelists to his sons in the *Quatre Évangiles*. The symbolic value of these names is clear; but perhaps, like Souvarine and Pologne, they, and those of other characters, contain other messages that remain to be deciphered.