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36

Spatial Scale and the Urban Everyday:
 The Physiology as a Traveling Genre
 (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

HARSHA RAM

Genre, Scale, and World literature

World literary studies today seem caught between several competing spatial models: on the one hand, an abstract globalism, frequently mapped as a dynamic system of hierarchical relations between centers and peripheries, and – on the other – an insistence upon cultural specificity and artistic agency, verifiable to the extent that it is site-specific, or as a material circuit of exchange traceable as a series of interconnected networks.

In essence, we are faced with three distinct if not antithetical understandings of literary space. Resting as it does on the foundational assumption of a *unified* – albeit *uneven* – planetary scale, the center/periphery model underpins some of the most influential theorizations of world literature to have arisen in recent decades (see Casanova 1999; Moretti 2000: 54–68; Jameson 2002; Parry 2009: 27–55; and WreC 2015). Most commonly derived from world-systems analysis, these theories model the dynamic of literary circulation across world regions according to the uneven access to socio-economic and cultural resources which distinguishes the world's dominant core from “semi-peripheral” and “peripheral” regions (see Wallerstein 1979; and Hopkins, Wallerstein et al. 1982). The inequalities between center and periphery are perceived as the by-product of two distinct spatial logics proper to the modern era: the deterritorializing dynamic of the expanding world market and the reterritorializing effect of the prevailing Westphalian system of sovereign and competing nation-states. It might well be argued that alternatives to the planetary scale of world-systems theory merely privilege one of these two spatial logics over the other,

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693

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HARSHA RAM

without examining the deeper correlation between the nation-state and the market.¹ Site-specific scholarship as practiced by area studies specialists thus reifies local, national, or regional space (the latter often the legacy of premodern world-systems), while the network model views world literature not as a fixed canon of texts but as whatever is gained, culturally speaking, when texts undergo translation and transnational circulation (Damrosch 2003: 3).² Implicitly or explicitly, then, each model privileges the determining force of a given spatial *scale* – put simply, the global versus the local/national/regional, – or a specific *patterning* of space – vertical structure versus horizontal network. To place these models in dialogue by rendering them pertinent to distinct levels of scalar analysis is one goal of this chapter.

How, then, do things stand with literary genres? Fredric Jameson long ago argued that the “strategic value” and “mediatory function” of genre lay in its “allow[ing] the coordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life” (1981: 105). Jameson’s formulation has matched a decline, within genre studies, of strictly taxonomic approaches which regard genre as a normative means of grouping texts according to a set of shared formal and thematic traits. Genres are increasingly regarded not only or primarily as features *of* texts, but as frames serving to mediate *between* texts, their authors, and their readers. As such genres enact an evolving social contract between writers and their public. Such a contract does not preclude recurrent formal features and thematic topoi, but it also requires a regulative frame materially manifest as a work’s paratextual apparatus. The latter may explicitly identify the genre to which a work is said to belong or, at the very least, highlight the pragmatics of where and to whom the work is addressed or to be performed: both gestures point beyond the work to the wider literary field in which it circulates and which it seeks to modify. These elements of the generic contract in turn correspond to distinct levels of sociality. Firstly,

- 1 Pheng Cheah makes this point forcefully: “To think of the dynamics of world literature in terms of those of a global market is precisely to think of world literature as mimicking those global forces, of being a displaced and delayed communication of socio-economic forces at work in the real world” (2014: 308). For Cheah, literature’s worldliness is in fact ontologically distinct from the economic logic of globalization, because the latter is spatial, while the former is temporal. Cheah’s insistence that literary semiosis is something different from capitalization restores the transformative and “world-making” power of literary creativity (309). One wonders, however, whether the “world versus globe” argument renders what is in fact a dialectic into two irreconcilable antinomies.
- 2 Theo D’haen suggests that Damrosch’s mapping of world literature would result in “networks of partially overlapping ellipses in space and in time, leading to changing constellations over time” (2012: 416).

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

literary forms are seen to emplot or enact representations of social relations, or perform their symbolic abstraction. Secondly, literary forms circulate as material products within a specific literary field, typified by a dynamic genre system and a print market in which they are produced and consumed. Thirdly, the literary field is in turn embedded in a wider set of social relations, involving structures such as the family, class, artistic networks, and the state, as well as concrete or interpellated publics constituted by the act of reading, listening, or viewing. Yet the pragmatic-contractual model cannot readily explain the persistence of genres over time nor their mobility through space: the correlation between generic markers and sociality would appear subject to multiple variables, including the spatial and temporal remove arising between a given text and the genre or genres it references.

Novel theory has dealt with this dilemma in sweeping if suggestive ways. Even as the novel is regarded as the paradigmatic narrative form of modernity, it is also said to be marked by a totalizing imperative, a cognitive mapping of the social whole, a task formerly seen as the purview of myth or epic. In inheriting the task of expressing a mimesis of totality, the novel is necessarily embedded in these older forms, whose correlation can be celebrated as progress (the novel being capable for Mikhail Bakhtin of cannibalizing older genres in a perennial search for a literary form adequate to the dialogism of social life) or as devolution (the novel being for György Lukács marked by a disjuncture between hero and the outside world that was unknown to the epic) (Bakhtin 1975: 447–83; Lukács 1977: 66; see also Hale 2006 and McKeon 2000).

This amalgam of theoretical orientations – expressive-ontological, formal-historicist, and pragmatic-contractual – also characterize the spatial dimension of novel theory. In addressing the worldwide portability of the novel form, Franco Moretti has proposed an essentially diffusionist model of novelistic evolution, typified “most frequent[ly]” by a wave-like “movement from the centre to the periphery,” from the West to the non-West (2003: 76). Moreover, “in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system, the modern novel does not first arise as an autonomous development but as a compromise between western formal influence (usually French and English) and local materials” (2003: 58). A curious equivocation arises in Moretti over the precise morphology of the local: the latter is, for Moretti, at once “material” and “reality,” “form” and “narrative voice” (58, 64, 65). Given the generative priority accorded to metropolitan forms, Moretti has been criticized for not according the dynamic of local appropriation adequate weight, even as he recognizes the cultural logic of the global periphery as constituting the “rule” rather than the “exception” within the contemporary

HARSHA RAM

world literary system. “What is crucially absent from the aerial view of global flows and circulation,” argues Francesca Orsini, “is the local,” unless the latter is viewed as “produced by the global” (2015: 351). Orsini’s eloquent insistence on the “multilingual local,” however necessary, must amount to more than the disciplinary vindication of area-studies expertise.³ Orsini’s empirical case study – the multilingual and multigeneric literary world of early modern North India – does not in itself serve to dismantle Moretti’s model, which in fact posits “two world literatures, – one that precedes the eighteenth century . . . involving a mosaic of separate ‘local’ cultures” and a second, the “contemporary world literary system,” being the “product of a unified market” and generating “new forms mostly by convergence” (2011: 75). Moretti can rightly be faulted for simplifying or misidentifying the local, as well as for regarding the commodity logic of the world market as a singular and homogenizing force, rather than as producing unevenness everywhere as a matter of course. Orsini, meanwhile, marshals the legacies of the early modern to critique the contemporary, without recognizing that world-systems theory ascribes distinct spatiotemporal dynamics to both.

It is my operative assumption that Moretti’s and Orsini’s models of literary space are *not*, in fact, incompatible, acquiring their relative pertinence as a result of a theoretical determination of spatial (and temporal) *scale*. The goal of this article is to reconcile both models as distinct moments of a necessarily *multi-scalar and cross-scalar* method of analysis (see also Ram 2016). In the pages to come I will seek to elaborate some of the empirical and theoretical challenges involved in multi-scalar and transregional analysis, that is to say, the scholarly study of how texts and genres circulate and mutate as they move between multiple, distinct centers, as well as between centers and multilingual borderlands. My generic focus will not be the novel but the *physiology* or *physiological sketch*, a popular quasi-journalistic genre dedicated to the taxonomic description of mores, customs, and social types found in the modern city. The heyday of the physiology coincided with the July Monarchy in France (1830–48), not coincidentally the period during which the French bourgeoisie rose to dominance, and when modernity itself came to be marked, in Margaret Cohen’s words, by the “creation of the everyday as a practice” (1996: 227). It was at this time that quotidian life became the object of intense reflection across Europe, whether in the nascent social sciences or in new representational forms, from the realist novel to genres on the very margins of literature. One such genre was the physiology, which gave rise to a sustained poetics of the *local everyday*,

3 On the limits of area studies and alternative models of time-space, see Harootunian 2005.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

understood not as the immemorial routine of tradition but as the mutable materiality of modern life as manifested by people, practices, sites, and things. The stated goal of the nineteenth-century physiology was to provide taxonomies and itineraries of the familiar but overlooked phenomena of a generally urban existence; its effect was equally to make social space palpable as a process and as a practice, an experiential present marked by the varied, discontinuous but coexisting rhythms which comprise the everyday.

The transnational circulation of the physiology has become of the object of renewed attention in recent decades. In *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century* Martina Lauster attributes the Europe-wide popularity of the physiology to its ability to give verbal and visual form to the general transition from “polite to mass culture” most evidently manifested in the great metropolises of Europe (2007a: 24). In Paris and London, Berlin and Vienna, sites of a civilization then on the verge of the “commodification and reification of all aspects of life,” the physiological sketch spread thanks to innovations in publishing and print culture as well as to the rise of “social type[s] reproducible as printed type,” offering a model of “middle-class introspection,” the “moral grammar” of a modernity increasingly identified with new modes of circulation and consumption (309, 85, 22, 314). Lauster’s work offers a significant reassessment of the physiological sketch, which had been dismissed by Walter Benjamin – arguably its most influential reader in the twentieth century – as a “petty-bourgeois genre . . . harmless and perfectly affable” (2003: 18–19).⁴ Yet even as she questions Benjamin’s assessment, rehabilitating the physiological sketch as a self-reflexive mode of social consciousness if not critique, Lauster’s account, like Benjamin’s, remains avowedly within the confines of Western Europe.

The pages to come propose a somewhat different itinerary. They begin with an account of the Parisian physiology, focusing on its protagonist, the iconic urban figure of the flâneur, before moving to St. Petersburg, the site of the physiology’s dramatic initial success on Russian soil. The physiological sketch was then adapted to the circumstances of Russia’s own imperial borderlands, specifically in the city of Tiflis (today Tbilisi), the colonial administrative capital of Russian Transcaucasia in what is today the republic of Georgia. The fate of the physiology in the Caucasus has yet to be studied, while the physiology’s successful Russian adaptation – a story familiar to Russianists⁵ – raises further questions about genre as a formal construct and social marker in world literature.

4 For a very different account, which insists on the physiology’s intimate relationship with critical realism, see Iakimovich 1963: 153–81, 197–230.

5 See Tseitlin 1965; Kuleshov 1991: 216–43; and Marullo’s outstanding introduction to his translation of *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City* (2009: xix–xci).

HARSHA RAM

The trajectory I propose to follow, in tracing the physiology from its Parisian beginnings via Russia to the boundaries of Europe and Asia, would appear to confirm the centre/periphery model of literary circulation. At the same time, the movement of the physiology beyond France raises additional questions about the nature of modernity outside western Europe. The modernizing mission which in France fell to the bourgeoisie was accomplished in nineteenth-century Russia by an autocratic *ancien régime*, caught in an increasingly antagonistic relationship with the Russian intelligentsia. This dynamic lent an entirely different color to the Russian physiology, both in terms of its textual representation of the urban everyday and in terms of the entirely distinct place the physiology acquired in the Russian literary field, within which prose had only recently begun to displace the lyric. The fate of the physiology in Russia and Georgia, then, will require a nuancing of our understanding of the modern world system as a model for world literature, specifically in its insistence that bourgeois relations of production have been the principal means of correlating the global and the local in the modern era.

My desire, then, is to move beyond cultural specificity, the easy refuge of specialists and proponents of “alternative modernities.” Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre and Harry Harootunian, I wish to propose an account of a traveling genre that acknowledges centers, peripheries, and the movements between them as a *dual* process: firstly, as the production of (abstract) *space*, readily mappable as sites marked by the accumulation of economic and cultural resources gained through the domination and peripheralization of rural and colonial hinterlands, and secondly as the production of (sensuous) *place*, manifested in the physiology as an articulation of the urban everyday in its asynchronous spatiotemporal rhythms (see Lefebvre 1986; Harootunian 2000). A simultaneous awareness of space *and* place, I suggest, will prevent us from misreading dominant centers as sites of pure origination as well as fetishizing peripheral locations as sites of a still unsullied *couleur locale*.

The *Physiologie* in Paris: The Flâneur and the Marketplace

Derived from the natural sciences – principally biology and medicine – where it had designated the scientific study of living organisms and bodily processes, the French term *physiologie* underwent a significant semantic extension in the early nineteenth century involving its displacement from the natural to the social sciences. In 1874 Larousse’s *Grand dictionnaire universel* noted an

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

“irresistible craze” for the “study of manners [*étude des moeurs*] bearing the name ‘physiology’” which had arisen in France “around 1840” (918). In seeking to analyze “all the professions, all the characteristic types” of human society, the scope of the newly ascendant genre was at once “vast,” in being able to “encompass absolutely everything,” and yet specific, in examining every phenomenon “down to the least particularity” (918). At once infinitely expansive and strictly delimiting, the physiology completed its expansion from the sciences into the realm of letters over the course of the July Monarchy. To justify the transposition of scientific method onto the study of society, Honoré de Balzac would refer in 1830 to the recent precedent of “Lavater, Gall and other physiologists” who had “found the secret of divining people’s moral, physical and intellectual sympathies through the thoughtful inspection of their physiognomies, their gait, their skulls” (1940: 62). The pseudo-science of physiognomy had sought to derive a set of normative standards of physical beauty as well as moral character from the external features of individuals – from their silhouette and profile to specific facial proportions.⁶ The nineteenth-century physiology extended the analytical principle of an observable or legible externality to the study of social customs and manners. What emerged was a worldly “hybrid of science, art and popular culture” that moved between the inventorizing of specific social types characterized by professional activity, clothing, and behavior and intimations of city life glimpsed in passing as fragments of an interlocking whole (Lauster 2007a: 211). Primarily a form of particularizing – and overwhelmingly Parisian – urban ethnography, the physiology ramified in multiple directions, from descriptive accounts of prevalent mores, fashions, professions, and sites of leisure and consumption to prescriptive manuals of taste and *savoir-vivre*.⁷

A significant milestone in the transformation of the book form itself into a commodity intended for mass consumption, the French physiology appeared in two formats. The first involved serially published volumes, encyclopedic in aspiration, collectively authored and distributed by subscription, such as the *Paris ou le livre des Cent-et-un*, published in fifteen volumes between 1830 and 1834,⁸ or *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840–42), whose

6 The key text is Johann Kaspar Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, published between 1775 and 1778, which appeared in French in 1806–9.

7 For an account of the thematic range, geographical provenance, and material appearance of the French physiology during its heyday in the early 1840s, see van Biesbrock 1978: 72–199; for an account of stylistic and generic affiliations, see Preiss 1999.

8 The Preface to Volume I of *Paris ou le livre des Cent-et-un* (1831) states that the “plan is to review modern Paris as it actually is” in its “multiplied, tricolour” state, for which no

HARSHA RAM

eight illustrated volumes authored by 130 contributors strove to cover all the social classes and professional vocations of France, from Paris to the provinces.⁹ The second format – pocket-size books of around 120 pages and costing 1 franc each – arose as the parodic reduction of the encyclopedic pretensions of the collective series: some half a million circulated in France alone between 1840 and 1842 (Sieburth 1985: 39–42). Both the serial volumes and the pocket-books of the 1840s took advantage of recent advances in visual design to combine text and illustration: indeed the word *type* – which in the original Greek signifies “impression,” “outline” as well as “pattern” – referred at once to the verbal rendering of a human figure and to wood engravings of the same, distinguished by dress, accessories, or professional activity, sketched as a silhouette against the blank surface of a page, with little or no situational background (see Le Men 1993). The physiology was, thus, the by-product of a revolution in print technology no less than of social-scientific and journalistic discourse. With the mass production of illustrated books now commercially viable, the physiology catered to an expanding urban readership with little use for high literature. “These days,” declared the anonymous author of *Physiologie des physiologies* (1841), “a serious book is a nonsensical idea . . . Ask any bookseller for a good book . . . and he will offer you a Physiology” (28).

Animating the French physiology, its consistent authorial subject as well as its occasional object of scrutiny, was the flâneur, pedestrian denizen of the streets of Paris. When in 1863 Charles Baudelaire famously defined the flâneur a “passionate observer” of city life whose “element” was the “crowd,” who existed “amidst the ebb and flow of movement” in order to “see the world” while himself “remain[ing] hidden,” the poet was generalizing and updating a decades-long discursive and social history to which the physiologies of the July Monarchy had given shape and form (1976: 691–92).¹⁰ In the

single writer would suffice; hence the need to attract “all the contemporary imaginations with their diverse colours” (vi–vii). From the library to the mortuary to domestic interiors, from the bibliophile to the charlatan to the police inspector, *Paris ou le livre des Cent-et-un* shows a marked interest in bourgeois Paris, even as the materials published in its volumes cannot all be classified as “études des moeurs.” Unlike later encyclopedic physiologies *Le livre des cent-et-un* was not illustrated.

⁹ *Les français peints par eux-mêmes: Encyclopédie morale du XIX-e siècle* (8 vols.; Curmer 1841–42) generated 22,700 subscribers within a short period of time (Tseitlin 1965: 53). In the Introduction, Jules Janin justified its massive effort as dictated by the drastic changes experienced by the nation: if the seventeenth century knew only the “court and the city,” then today the “great kingdom has been sliced into so many small republics, each of which has its laws, its customs, its jargon and its heroes” (Vol. I: x). From Janin’s introduction it becomes clear that the encyclopedism of the physiological collection was an attempt to apply the natural scientific model of taxonomy to the increasing differentiation produced by capitalist society.

¹⁰ On the flâneur, see Ferguson 1994; Burton 1994; Tester 1994; and Lauster 2007.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

select number of French physiologies where subject and object explicitly converge, the flâneur emerges as a singular paradox: all-seeing yet himself invisible, surrounded by the teeming masses yet alone, an everyman endowed with unique powers of discernment, situated on the very confines of urban typology.¹¹ Capable of classifying all things and people around him, the flâneur himself cannot easily be defined, whether by professional occupation, wealth, rank, social obligation, or patterns of consumption. Always male and always unattached, the flâneur is a limit-case, distinguished only by an ambulatory relationship to urban life and a detached engagement with its external surfaces.

Perhaps the most telling account of the flâneur belongs to Louis Huart, to whom contemporaries would accord the “glory and the crime” of having invented the physiology, at the very least in its pocket-book format, and who is now remembered chiefly for his contributions to the oppositional satirical daily *Charivari* (Texier 1851: 235).¹² Huart’s *Physiologie du flâneur* (1841) reproduces the characteristic structure of the pocket-book physiology in its heyday, even as it offers the most exacting disquisition on the flâneur to date. It begins with a mock-zoological definition of the flâneur as exemplary of the entire human race, since “man rises above all other animals for the sole reason that he knows how to stroll about (*flâner*)” (7). For this reason it is fitting to define man as a “bipedal animal, devoid of feathers, in a topcoat (*paletot*), who smokes and strolls about” (8). This “new definition of man” is followed by a series of shorter chapters describing comparable urban types – such as the loiterer (*le musard*), the pounder of pavements (*le batteur de pavé*), the street urchin (*le gamin*), and the out-of-town tourist (*le badaud étranger*) – all of whom fall short of being authentic flâneurs. The book’s operative premise and ultimate goal, then, is specification through differentiation, moving from the universal to the particular by invoking a series of variables, both subjective and objective, to reach a working definition of the flâneur: unlike the busy man “who looks without seeing” and the idler (*l’oisif*) “who sees without looking,” the flâneur, we are told, both “sees and looks (*le flâneur voit et regarde*)” (120).

What are we to make of this classification of the urban everyday? Like its protagonist the flâneur, the French physiology has been frequently dismissed as a travesty of science as well as literature produced for mass consumption.

11 See “Le flâneur à Paris” (characteristically signed “Un flâneur”), in *Paris, ou le livre des Cent-et-un* (1832, VI: 95–110); Lacroix, “Le flâneur” (1840); and Huart 1841.

12 Cf. Preiss(-Basset) 1999: 6–7. For a useful if tendentious account of Huart’s career as a physiologist, see Iakimovich 1963: 202–7.

HARSHA RAM

For Richard Sieburth, the taxonomic differentiations generated by the French physiology create the “*effect* of science whose comic character is located in the obvious lack of fit between the sophisticated technical-scientific nature of the description and the extreme banality of the social type in question” (1985: 45). Hans-Rüdiger van Biesbrock has suggested that the ideological ambiguity of the physiology derived precisely from its unstable relationship to natural-scientific taxonomy: the more serious its relationship to categorization, the more mordant or satirical its social critique; by contrast, the more parodic its taxonomies, the more whimsically entertaining its relationship to the representation of social reality (357–58).¹³ The physiology’s kinship with novelistic prose is similarly ambiguous. At once an embodied denizen of the streets and an all-seeing yet invisible eye, the flâneur can be said to approximate the phenomenological ambiguity of the omniscient narrator. Yet the physiology falls distinctly short of the vaster ambitions of the urban fictions associated with French naturalism.¹⁴ As Balzac himself noted in his “*Avant-propos de la Comédie humaine*” (1840), while the novelist, like the physiologist, could be a “more or less faithful . . . painter of human types,” he was at the same time required to go beyond a purely taxonomic account of the present, by “studying the reasons or the reason of these social effects, catching the meaning hidden in this immense assemblage of figures, passions, and events,” and “meditating . . . as to the ways in which societies deviate from or approach the eternal rule of truth and beauty” (1940: 7). Although its typological aspirations converged with the social analysis offered by the nineteenth-century novel, the French physiology remained a petit-bourgeois and para-literary form, falling well short of Balzac’s imperative of correlating surface and depth, or Baudelaire’s later call, in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, to “draw the eternal from the transitory” (1976: 694).

At the same time, we should not deny the French physiology its critical insight into the Western metropolis. Louis Huart’s typology of idlers, loafers, and do-nothings, however playful, serves to elevate the flâneur as privileged witness to the profound transformations taking place in the urban sensorium. In a city where “water, air, fire and earth, love, honour, spirit and matter are being sold, rented out and exploited in all manner of ways,” and where

¹³ Ruth Amossy notes that it was not the typological predilections of the physiology but rather its “vulgarity” or “levity” of tone which were the source of controversy at the time (1989: 121).

¹⁴ Although French physiologies, starting with Balzac’s *Physiologie du mariage*, frequently identify the flâneur with the artist or poet, the allusions are frequently shallow: cf. Lacroix, “Le Flâneur” (1841), who states that the flâneur “loves the arts like a constitutional monarch. He is a dilettante, a painter, a poet, an antiquarian, a bibliophile” (67).

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

“under the pretext of embellishment” any form of urban pleasure or spectacle which can be experienced free of charge is being steadily eliminated, “what is left,” asks Huart, “for the flâneur to enjoy?” (1841: 46, 98–99). Cognizant of the increasing pervasiveness of commodity culture, a world in which “glass, marble and bronze, once the sole preserve of palaces, today adorn all manner of stores,” and acquainted with “every street, every boutique in Paris,” the flâneur follows “the will of chance,” propelled from “accident to accident,” “bump to bump,” “find[ing] in all he encounters something to nourish his mind” (102, 121, 123, 124). The flâneur’s apparently random movements, in fact, mimic the circulation of the commodity and its consumer: yet even if he “tarries for two hours before the same piece of merchandise,” the flâneur – unlike his philistine antithesis the grocer – does not think to effect its purchase, preferring to contemplate “the general look of its design, the effect of its colour, the marriage of tones which compose the ensemble” (124). The authentic flâneur, then, neither recoils from the commodity’s phantasmagoric lure nor surrenders blindly to the logic of exchange value. Indeed his principal merit lies in rejecting any instrumentalization of urban space, foreshortening immediate gratification in favor of imaginative reverie:

[The flâneur’s] spirit abandons the display window and returns to the article’s manufacturer, transporting itself to the means of its production, surveying the output of his mills, following the manufacturer to the squares of Leipzig, London and St. Petersburg; that is to say, the very same piece of fabric offers him a thousand subjects to reflect upon of which the other onlooker had no inkling, providing the occasion for a long journey into the world of the imagination.

(124–25)

Lines such as these allow us to modify Walter Benjamin’s mordant assessment of the flâneur in his essay “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century”:

In the person of the flâneur, the intelligentsia becomes acquainted with the marketplace. It surrenders itself to the market, thinking merely to look around; but in fact it is already seeking a buyer. In this intermediate stage, in which it still has patrons but is starting to bend to the demands of the market (in the guise of the *feuilleton*), it constitutes the *bohème*. The uncertainty of its economic position corresponds to the ambiguity of its political function.

(1986: 21)

Historicized as an “intermediate stage” between feudal patronage and literary commerce, yet already compromised by his gingerly flirtation with market forces, the bohemian flâneur would appear to offer little by way of social insight. Yet Huart’s pocketbook, written over a decade prior to the sweeping

HARSHA RAM

renovation of Paris known as *Haussmannisation*, suggests that commodification is a *process* rather than a completed *state*, one that can be imaginatively reflected and even reversed through the power of reverie: unlike the buyer, the flâneur derives aesthetic pleasure by inverting the dynamic of consumption, retracing the material history of the commodity back through the networks of distribution which service the metropole to its origins in the production process.

Whatever its limitations, the French physiology was a commercially successful means by which to articulate and celebrate a new and distinctly urban modernity. By no means a vehicle of explicit social critique, its voyeurism playful rather than moralizing or sentimental, the Parisian physiology dramatized the modern metropolis to its own inhabitants as a spectacle of social signs and visual surfaces. It registered the uneven rush of sensory impressions assailing the man on the street who lacked recourse to the safety or comfort of an aerial view. These impressions – the experiential present lived at street-level – were refracted and organized through various modes of abstraction, from “scientific” typology to “artistic” reverie, allowing the urban everyday to emerge in the dialectic between place and space.

The *Fiziologiia* in St. Petersburg: Toward a Non-Bourgeois Public Sphere

The rapid adaptation of the physiology on Russian soil reflects the accelerating synchronization of Russian letters with those of Western Europe, following a century during which Russian culture had played a game of catch-up with Europe. Since its founding in 1703, the imperial capital St. Petersburg had served as the site as well as the supreme expression of Russia’s cultural modernization. At once the symbol of Enlightenment values and cultural progress and the residence of an absolutist monarchy which had been the initial catalyst for change, St. Petersburg came to embody the antinomies of Russian modernity, increasingly defined by the struggle of Russia’s nascent intelligentsia with the forces of an entrenched *ancien régime*.¹⁵ The Russian physiology was drawn into this struggle almost from its inception.

Russians became acquainted with the French physiology in numerous ways, “in theory and practice, in originals, translations and reworkings”

¹⁵ For a brilliant recent account of the relationship between literary genre and allegorical figurations of the autocratic state in Russian realism, see Klinger 2018.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

(Marullo 2009: xxiii). The memoirs of Dmitrii Grigorovich describe an apparently simple pattern of market inundation and commercially driven imitation by which the French physiology came to be adapted by the competing figures of Faddei Bulgarin – an energetic cultural entrepreneur, influential reactionary, and rumoured police informant – and Nikolai Nekrasov – a disinherited provincial who would give voice to Russia’s emergent *déclassé* intelligentsia:

Around this time [the early 1840s – *H.R.*] small books under the general title of “physiology” began appearing in great quantities in shops selling foreign books; each book contained the description of some type of Parisian life. The progenitor of such descriptions was the well-known Parisian publication *The French as Depicted by Themselves*. Russian imitations appeared instantaneously. Bulgarin began to publish exactly such books; . . . each of them containing the sketch of a type of Petersburg life . . . Nekrasov, whose practical mind was always on the lookout, conceived the idea of publishing something of this kind as well: he imagined a publication in several volumes entitled *The Physiology of Petersburg*. In addition to types, these volumes were intended to contain scenes of everyday life as well as sketches on the street life and domestic life of Petersburg. (Grigorovich 1987: 80–82).

As in France, the explosion of Russian physiologies in the 1840s was motivated in the first instance by the commercial opportunities made available by a transnationally circulating genre designed to satisfy an expanding reading public eager to discover its immediate urban environs represented accessibly in print. “The trade in Russian mores,” declared one reviewer in 1843, “has reached feverish heights: there are even speculators and stock exchanges of such things” (Anon. 1843: 16).

Yet the logic of market circulation, which clearly dictated the physiology’s movement from Paris to St. Petersburg, should not be read as the ready monetization of national or local particularism. The animated debates surrounding the physiology in the Russian press, and the physiological almanacs which soon followed, reveal a substantially different theory and practice of the genre on Russian soil. These differences related to literary form, to urban social differentiation as the object of physiological representation, and to the relations of force that arose between the Russian state, the literary market, and competing networks of Russian literati. However commercially driven, the Russian adaptation of the physiology was an eminently *literary* and *political* affair. In the void created by the death of Pushkin and Lermontov as well as by Gogol’s ambiguous silence following the publication in 1842 of *Dead Souls*, the physiology emerged as a crucial arena of cultural contestation

HARSHA RAM

between a new breed of radical intellectuals and reactionary literati aligned with the tsarist state.

Literary conservatives associated with the widely read *Northern Bee*, Russia's first daily newspaper to champion the priorities of the state while at the same acknowledging the needs of the emerging private consumer, assailed the underlying premise of the physiological sketch by deriding its social base:

The French, the Germans and the English have certain literary back lanes which mimic all the literary phenomena of the main street, just as whatever happens in the salon and drawing room is repeated in the kitchen and the servant's quarters. The fact is that everybody in France, England and Germany reads and wants to read. The yard keeper reads, the maidservant reads, the cabby reads, the housekeeper reads. All of these people need their own literature and their own literati . . . The principal merit of any literature of the back-alley is its lack of expense along with readerly accessibility. These two expectations are generating the vast quantities of rubbish inundating the literatures of Paris and London . . . The back-alley readers are in ecstasy over physiologies!
 (Z.Z. 1843: 322–23)

Striking here is the Russian reviewer's willful refusal to grasp the novelty of mass literacy as representing anything more than the debasement of aristocratic sensibility. In the revealing article "Petersburg Types" (1841), Faddei Bulgarin highlighted the divergent social structures of Europe and Russia as a means to undermine the very possibility of a Russian physiology. "In France," he wrote, "every social class (*soslovie*) has its own characteristics, its own habits, a language filled with expressions of the trade, . . . its favorite places of revelry, its own neighbourhoods . . . theatres, coffeehouses, and fashions. Every social class bears the deep imprint of originality" (87). Unlike France, where "people are in constant movement," thus allowing for "true novels and genuine comedy," the Russian character was distinguishable only in terms of the static traits of its most prominent – and traditional – estates: the nobility, the merchant class and the rural folk (88). For this very reason, Bulgarin argued, Russia could generate manners and customs (*nравы*) but not types (*типы*): "in our country, how do the professions and trades differ? They do not. An undertaker is the same as an artisan, and when he enters the home of a wealthy deceased person to arrange for his funeral, he in no way differs from the vendor who delivers wood, bricks, hay or straw . . . Government officials do not differ from each other in the slightest . . . Russian merchants are also all of a similar cut. Exceptions to the general rule are exceptions, not types!" (88). In rejecting "typological" analysis in favor of the satirical and edifying study of manners which he himself had cultivated for many years,

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

Bulgarin was championing far more than his own literary predilections.¹⁶ The critics of the *Northern Bee* were questioning the very possibility of according Russia's amorphous urban "middle strata" (*srednee soslovie*) the internal differentiation and social dynamism which had made them a legitimate object of journalistic and literary interest in France. The stakes of the physiological sketch in Russia were thus both literary and broadly civic.

Opposing the voices of officialdom were the so-called *raznochintsy*, socially displaced literati who, in the words of Julie Buckler, were "neither tied to the countryside by the feudal system nor firmly established in the bureaucratic centers of the large cities . . . The social and spatial mobility of the *raznochinets* thereby determined his consummate literary function – arriving from outside, he sets the plot into motion. Lacking a group affiliation, the *raznochinets* strove to distinguish himself, often through writing, and thus join the pantheon of Russian writers" (2007: 197). Led by the critic and literary canon-maker Vissarion Belinskii and the poet-editor Nikolai Nekrasov, the *déclassé* intelligentsia embraced the physiological sketch as an instrument of cultural combat. Excoriating Bulgarin's commercially driven and blandly edifying representations of Russian society, Belinskii and Nekrasov also avoided the "levity, playfulness and wit" characteristic of the French physiologies (Belinskii 1955, VII: 80; see also Nekrasov 1843). Their stylistic and ideological orientation was fully evidenced in their crowning achievement, the publication of the multi-author two-volume *Physiology of Petersburg* in 1845. Inspired by *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* but falling well short of its encyclopedic ambitions, *Physiology of Petersburg* was the clarion call of what came to be known as the Natural School of critical realism. Nekrasov identified the two volumes' "difficult, delicate and in some ways dangerous duty" as a probing of the cityscape, not only to "disclose . . . all the sources of what occurs on the street-level; the pace and direction of our civic and moral formation . . . the typical characteristics of all ranks of our population," but also to "reveal secrets spied through keyholes and seized unawares from nooks and corners" (1967, VII: 96). Indeed for Nekrasov the physiology was nothing less than the "story of our inner life [*istoriia nashei vnutrennei zhizni*], deep and obscure, concealed by tinsel and glitter, masked by luxurious façades, sumptuous

¹⁶ Premised on the belief that "virtues and vices . . . are found in a perfect balance within human nature," Bulgarin's own studies of Russian manners balanced light entertainment, edifying satire, and the indirect advertising of consumer items (2010a: 47). Bulgarin acknowledged social differentiation in the form of static traits and standard accessories; his goal was moral portraiture rather than the depiction of social dynamism. See Konechnyi 2010: 5–42; Marullo 2009: xxxvi–xxxvii; and Tseitlin 1965: 79–84.

HARSHA RAM

dinners, surface cleanliness and brilliance” (VII: 96).¹⁷ In speaking here of “inner life,” Nekrasov’s intent was not to introduce psychological interiority, but rather to redefine the physiology away from Petersburg’s statist patriarchy of architectural monumentalism toward an unsentimental exploration of the city’s social underbelly.

The editors’ stated goals corresponded to a dramatic loosening of the almanac’s generic constraints. *Physiology of Petersburg* is, in fact, not a sketch collection at all but a literary almanac, in which a short story, essays, a satirical poem, and even a theatrical sketch are to be found alongside conventional physiologies. Vissarion Belinskii himself described the volume as a “prose almanac” containing “something like stories, sketches, and sometimes even views expounded in the form of a journal article,” all unified by the common goal of “acquainting provincial and especially Petersburg readers” with the capital city (IX: 47). Belinskii’s literary criticism of the same years turned repeatedly to the question of the physiological sketch’s relationship to *belles lettres*: the representation of social “types” in narrative prose – and even verse – became a key element of Belinskii’s programmatic vision for Russian literature.¹⁸ Although a similar diversity of genres is found in the contemporaneous two-volume *Le Diable à Paris. Paris et les Parisiens* (1845–46), the last of the great physiology collections of the 1840s to appear in France, the radical erosion of the generic boundaries of the physiological sketch, its transformation from a genre to a mode assimilable to the short story and even to the lyric poem, may well be a Russian legacy.¹⁹

In his unsigned introduction to the *Physiology of Petersburg*, Belinskii went beyond the formal and representational aspects of the physiological sketch to

17 Nekrasov’s comments did not appear in the volume itself, but as part of an unsigned review published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Vol. 13 (April 5, 1845: 229–31).

18 See Belinskii’s reviews of the “physiological tales” of Vladimir Dal’ (V. Luganskii), “Ural’skii kazak” and “Russkii muzhik,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1955, VI: 559–60, and 1956, X: 42–43, respectively); and his assessment of Dal’ as a “true poet” because he “is able to make a typical personage the representative of a social class, elevate him to an ideal . . . in the true sense of reproducing reality in its full truth.” See Belinskii, “Russkaia literatura v 1845 godu” (1956, IX: 399). On the physiological sketch and the problem of literary genre in Russia, see Meilakh 1973: 247–58. Belinskii was a practical critic rather than a theorist, but his ideas clearly inform the mature work of Georg Lukács: see Lukács 1964: 97–126.

19 See Hetzel 1845–46; a mediocre Russian translation, stripped of the almanac’s erotic and satirical elements, appeared in 1846: see Tseitlin 1965: 60–66, 77–78 and Iakimovich 1963: 285–91. Belinskii explicitly mentions *Le Diable à Paris* in his introduction to the *Physiology of Petersburg*. The introduction was written in October 1844: one wonders, therefore, whether Belinskii had actually seen a copy of the work. A review of *Le Diable à Paris* appeared in *Severnaia pchela* (June 2, 1845) No. 123, while the first part of *Physiology of Petersburg* appeared on March 28 (Z.Z.). The features common to the Russian and French almanacs are more likely due to convergent trajectories than imitation.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

identify the wider cultural deficiencies the almanac sought to address. Firstly, the publication highlighted a “retinue of talents” who were to “serve as intermediaries” between the higher realm of *belles lettres* and the general public, a need all the more urgent given that Russians “do not have the slightest understanding of the public sphere (*publichnosti*)” (Kuleshov 1991: 9, 11). Secondly, the almanac sought “not to *describe* Petersburg . . . but to *characterize* its mores and the distinguishing features of its inhabitants” (12). The programme of the emerging *déclassé* intelligentsia is here evidenced in full: the physiologist served at once to *mediate* between elite culture and the newly literate masses, to typologically *characterize* the masses to themselves, and – ultimately – to *foster* through the discursive act of representation the growth of a self-reflexive public sphere, which Belinskii elsewhere in the almanac identified as the very “foundation of European life” (12).²⁰

The threat posed to Russian autocracy by the physiological sketch thus lay not merely in its chosen object of representation, but in the possibility of a *public sphere* arising from a mass readership seeing itself addressed and represented critically in print for the first time. In Europe the public sphere had arisen over the course of the eighteenth century out of changes in the modes of bourgeois sociability, with the rapid diffusion of the periodical press and the rise of theater, café, museum, salon, and concert-going publics defined by education and property rather than rank (Hölscher 1978: 431).²¹ Mediating between the private concerns of home and family life and the official realm of state power, what Jürgen Habermas has called the “bourgeois public sphere,” consisted of “rational-critical public debate” conducted in print or verbalized in the social spaces where autonomous individuals gathered (1991: 28). Championed as a means by which to oppose the secretive and arbitrary operations of state power, public opinion rested on the “fictitious identity” of what were in fact two distinct, if complementary, modalities: a *literary* public sphere, focused on the subjective realm of affect and the passions, sensibility and interiority, and a *political* public sphere, based on communicative reason rather than force, within which property owners sought to regulate the exchange of both goods and ideas (55–56). As such, the European public sphere acquired the “normative status of an organ for

20 The activities Belinskii associates with the public sphere are the reading of newspapers and journals and attending the theater.

21 The French term *publicité* found its first dictionary definition in 1694 in the context of criminal law: it acquired the meaning of the free exchange of speech and writing only in the second half of the eighteenth century. The German term *Öffentlichkeit* emerged even later, around the turn of the nineteenth century (Hölscher 1978: 446).

HARSHA RAM

the self-articulation of civil society” (74) (See also Calhoun 1992 and Eisenstadt, Schluchter, and Wittrock 2001.)

Unrelenting censorship, low rates of literacy, and the severe limits placed by the state on civil society would prevent anything like a robust public sphere, bourgeois or otherwise, from emerging in tsarist Russia before the 1905 revolution. As Ol’ga Malinova has observed, the nineteenth-century Russian public sphere, such as it was, was typified by “oral exchange, localized in semi-private spaces,” in combination with “written communication, whose content was limited by the constraints of censorship (the latter partly overcome by virtue of written manuscripts and foreign editions). This combination allowed for the spread of ideas but allowed few opportunities for their open and critical discussion. The interpretation of socially significant problems was conducted primarily in the milieu of private individuals: the conditions of public discourse did not assume any direct influence exercised by public opinion on the authorities” (2012: 439–40).

A desired goal more than a reality, the Russian public sphere was first articulated within circumscribed networks of literati. Unsurprisingly, it was expressed as an aspirational engagement with a Western European inheritance looking back to the Athenian agora through the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to the more recent writings of the French utopian socialists.²² In his thirteen “Letters from Abroad” (published between 1841 and 1842 in *Annals of the Fatherland*, then the flagship journal of Russia’s progressive intellectuals) the publicist, literary critic, and close associate of Belinskii Pavel Annenkov described the European public sphere as one where “journalistic polemic proceeds with ardour and vigour, parties collide and clash on paper,” where “everyone speaks, but without moving beyond the sphere of their private obligations, and disputation resolves all things” (1983: 38–39). Annenkov concluded that for him, “a modest denizen of the North,” it was edifying to make a “scientific observation of the struggle of passions as they dissipate in declamatory statements or become sealed in print” (44). It was in a Europe saturated by a lively print culture, a land of “cafés and (innumerable) reading rooms, always crammed with people,” where “politics . . . [had]

22. It was under the impact of French utopian socialism that the first generation of Russian radicals articulated their understanding of the public sphere and the civic goals of literature: see Bowman 1954; Kuleshov 1958; Reeve 1959; Malia 1961; Nechaeva 1967; Weber 1971; Terras 1974: 69–76. Terras observes that “owing to censorship considerations” Belinskii never mentioned his French sources in print with the exception of the writers Eugène Sue and George Sand, but points to Pierre Leroux as the “single most important utopian socialist influence on Belinskij” (69, 71): this influence was expressed principally in the promotion of literature and the arts as a vanguard of social progress.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

exiled artistry [and] pure inspiration,” that Annenkov became the first Russian to observe and report on the new Parisian craze for the pocket-size physiology: “Thousands of little brochures with vignettes and engravings have appeared, literally flooding the libraries. What isn’t a physiology these days? There are physiologies of the workman, the deputy, the soldier, the flâneur, etc. etc. Finally there will be a physiology of the glove, a physiology of the cab horse and before you know it you will see the appearance of a physiology of an idle Slav traversing unknown lands with my own portrait in it” (45, 46).

Witticisms aside, Annenkov’s letters clearly situate the French physiology as a vital part of a wider European civic culture to be emulated and fostered at home. At the same time the *absence* of a political public sphere in Russia could only lead to its compensatory *substitution* by the realm of letters (unlike the complementarity, verging on “fictitious identity,” of the literary and political public sphere which Habermas discerned in bourgeois Europe) (Annenkov 1983: 55–56). This crucial difference was made explicit in Belinskii’s contemporaneous article “The General Meaning of the Word ‘Literature’” (1842), which distinguished literature (*literatura*) from verbal creativity *tout court* (*slovesnost’*) in the following way: “literature relies on the public sphere (*publichnost’*) and receives its confirmation from public opinion (*obshchestvennogo mneniia*)” (1955, V: 625). If “in France the word ‘press’ (*la presse*, or book printing) has now come into use to express a concept wider and more general than literature,” then in Russia “it was literature which laid the foundations of public culture and public opinion” (V: 626, 653).²³

The singular urgency of Belinskii’s contributions to *Physiology of Petersburg* derives from an expanded sense of the literary field confronting the absence of a wider bourgeois public culture in the Russian capital. “In no way does Petersburg recall Rome, London and Paris,” Belinskii observed in the opening essay “Petersburg and Moscow”: “If Petersburg resembles any cities at all, it would most likely be the big urban centers of North America, which, like it, were also built according to a calculated plan” (1953, I: 21). The expression of autocratic will and administrative design, St. Petersburg was “devoid of domestic or familial seclusion,” a city of exterior surfaces but also of collective gatherings – “the street, popular festivity, the theatre, coffeehouses, places of merriment, in other words, all public establishments” – which nevertheless fell short of a “public sphere in the genuine sense of the word” (24). In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel had viewed modern civil society as “the realm of

²³ The article was never published in Belinskii’s lifetime.

HARSHA RAM

difference, intermediate between the family and the state” (2001: 154). By contrast, in St. Petersburg the state appeared to overshadow both family life and civil society, leaving only a plebeian public sphere arising from the everyday practices of the urban underclass. If Russian modernity had “developed in a manner opposite to that of Europe, top-down rather than from the bottom-up,” then it was Belinskii’s implicit goal to invert this logic (Belinskii 1955, X: 22).

The central protagonists of *Physiology of Petersburg* are the socially marginal or geographically peripheral: yard keepers, servant girls, scavengers, pick-pockets, petty tradesmen, organ-grinders, street clowns, retired clerks, court lackeys, ruined speculators, house serfs, drunken landladies, along with the occasional prosperous civil servant. The plebeian or lumpen figures retain their links to the feudal countryside, while the outlying neighborhoods of the lower to middling strata “resemble provincial towns in their architecture and mores” (Grebenska, in Kuleshov 1991: 91). An artificial city inhabited by the displaced and the uprooted, lacking a native population of its own, the imperial capital which emerges from the *Physiology* nevertheless seethes with life. Indeed, sociability is arguably the almanac’s most consistent concern, whether in the form of verbal exchange and commercial transaction, or modeled performatively as street spectacle, theater show, spontaneous song, or bouts of drunken revelry. The beating heart of imperial Petersburg is not the chimerical bourgeois public sphere but discrete theatrical publics whose aesthetic taste has yet to evolve into a self-reflexive faculty. Its plebeian apotheosis is the open-air puppet show which concludes Dmitrii Grigorovich’s “The Petersburg Organ-Grinders,” briefly generating what Thomas Marullo calls a “carnavalesque communit[y] . . . open and spontaneous, informal and free” (2009: lix–lx). Its petit-bourgeois counterpart is the Alexandrinsky Theatre, whose audience is described by Belinskii as constituting “a public in the real, the genuine sense of the word: it lacks varying social strata, consisting entirely of clerical employees [*sluzhashchego naroda*] of a certain rank, it is not a multitude but a single man, respectably dressed and solid . . . holding constantly to the judicious middle . . . like the respectable classes in France and Germany: the bourgeoisie (*burzhuazii*) or philistines” (Kuleshov 1991: 128). Pinning his hopes on the aesthetic education of Petersburg’s theater-going public, Belinskii concludes that its taste “can and indeed must change with time” (128). The “man of the judicious middle” is also the subject of the only poem in the almanac, Nekrasov’s “The Civil Servant,” a satirical rendering in iambic pentameter of the physical appearance, anodyne tastes, and leisure activities of a Petersburg official

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

(“Chinovnik,” in Kuleshov 1991: 142–46). The only establishment figure to be represented in the almanac, the Russian civil servant was then the object of ongoing journalistic and literary debate. Hailed by Belinskii as a “native, the true citizen of Petersburg,” the civil servant was at once a cog in the machinery of the state and an outsider for whom the administrative table of ranks was the only means of self-advancement (Kuleshov 1991: 32).²⁴ Not only is Nekrasov’s poem striking for its satirical description of the workaday and domestic life of an average bureaucrat of middling rank, it also contains the only moment in the entire collection in which an urban type as *object* and the déclassé intellectual as authorial *subject* overtly collide: encountering the satirical depiction of a clerk accepting a bribe, the official expresses his astonishment that such a thing could appear in print, exclaiming that “for such displays of impudence authors should be exiled to Siberia!” (146). Here the social mission of the writer collides with the cultural limitations of the representatives of the state.

What have we learned thus far about the physiological sketch as a traveling genre? The popularity of the Russian physiology was determined in the first instance by transnational market forces which flooded local bookstores with French physiologies, thereby stimulating their translation and adaptation to Russian conditions. In France, as in Russia, the physiology served to codify and rehearse the dynamics of social differentiation for a new mass readership. The striking divergences between the French and Russian variants of the genre can be seen to derive from the vastly different class and social configurations obtaining in both countries, as well as from their distinctly configured literary fields. In France the bohemian flâneur came to serve as the physiology’s moment of greatest self-reflexivity, its true protagonist and occasional object of study. In the Russian physiology, subject – the déclassé intellectual – and object – the urban masses – would never coincide, except to the extent that neither fitted easily into existing hierarchies of rank and estate. Furthermore, its two principal objects of interest – the plebeian underclass and petty officialdom – whom Belinskii regarded as the bearers of a future public sphere, never did come together as a “middle class” in the European sense: indeed, they mirrored the contradictions of Russian modernization, a lumpenized peasantry and the agents of autocracy, trapped in an uneasy coexistence until the heirs of the déclassé intelligentsia unleashed the revolutions of 1917.

²⁴ The petty clerk often figures in the stories of Gogol and the young Dostoevsky; he was also the subject of a sketch by Bulgarin himself: see “Chinovnik (Ocherk)” (originally published in 1842), in *Peterburgskie ocherki F.V. Bulgarina* (2010a: 329–41).

HARSHA RAM

In approximating the role played in France by the bourgeoisie, Russia's radical literati, like their competitors aligned with the state, in fact pursued an entirely distinct set of aesthetic and civic priorities. In Russia the delineation of social difference acquired a sharply polemical coloration, as a means of stimulating the growth of a public sphere which had yet to emerge rather than reflecting the inroads of commodification on a public sphere already in existence. For these very reasons the physiological sketch would remain central to Russian literature and cultural life, imposing its logic and concerns on high literary genres, from the short story to the lyric. In the absence of a civil society and given the still nascent state of literary prose, the Russian physiological sketch acquired a centrality inconceivable in France.

The Physiology in the Periphery: The Ethnographic Picturesque

It is customary for histories of Russian literature to trace the further evolution of the physiological sketch from St. Petersburg to Russia's vast rural hinterland, where it would confront the realities of serfdom.²⁵ The concluding section of this chapter takes a somewhat different turn, to recount the lost story of the constitutive role played by the physiological sketch in shaping modern representations of the city of Tiflis (or Tbilisi), the provincial administrative capital of Russian Transcaucasia throughout the nineteenth century, today the capital of the republic of Georgia. The physiological sketch reached Tiflis under the modernizing viceroyalty of Count Mikhail Vorontsov, administrator of the Caucasus from 1844 to 1854: its local manifestations are thus closely tied to the civilizing mission which Vorontsov promoted to compliment as well as mitigate Russia's conquest of the Caucasus.²⁶ Its earliest champion on Georgian soil was the Russian poet Iakov Polonskii, who spent no less than five years in Tiflis (1846–51). An impoverished provincial whose first volume of verse failed to secure his literary reputation in metropolitan circles, Iakov Polonskii moved south to take advantage of the new professional and cultural opportunities afforded by Vorontsov's reforming administration, working as a state functionary in the Viceroy's chancellery. As an administrator, Polonskii was entrusted with the gathering of statistical data, a task he supplemented with a range of related editorial,

25 See Ivan Turgenev's sketch "Khor' and Kalinych" (1847), which would become the first story in his celebration sketch collection *A Hunter's Notebook* (1852).

26 On Mikhail Vorontsov and the Europeanizing Enlightenment elements of Russian colonial rule in Georgia, see Rhineland 1996; and Jersild and Melkadze 2002.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

journalistic, and literary activities. Unlike the preceding generation of Russian romantics, for whom state service and the literary life were largely antithetical and thus carefully compartmentalized, Polonskii's Georgian years witnessed the renewal of his poetic talents as well as his earliest efforts in prose, in close tandem with his official activities.²⁷

The breadth of Polonskii's Caucasian corpus is considerable, varying from statistical, ethnographic, literary, and historical surveys to physiologically inspired verse and prose.²⁸ Never collected and published in one volume, and today largely unknown even to residents of the city, these scattered texts constitute an unrealized physiological almanac of Tiflis and its environs comparable to Nekrasov's in their urban focus and stylistic range. The specific interest they pose to a study of traveling genre is at once thematic and formal. How was the physiology's rendering of the urban everyday transformed by its shift in locus, from Paris to Petersburg to Tiflis, from the European metropole to a colonial administrative and trading center on the crossroads of Europe and Asia? And how did its geographical mobility affect its formal traits? Polonskii's relevant literary works exhibit a lively interest in the social and ethnic diversity for which Tiflis was celebrated: a literary (originally painterly) strategy one might call the *ethnographic picturesque*. An abundance of visual detail, duly assessed and catalogued, is of course typical of the physiology. Far less typical of the physiological sketch in Paris and Petersburg, but markedly present in Polonskii's work, is an embodied and intrusive authorial self confronting a clearly foreign setting. The sharp polarization between subject and object, unknown to the

27 Polonskii was initially appointed assistant to the head of the Viceroy's chancellery; in 1849 he was made a roving official to the Viceroy. Tiflis officialdom held no personal attraction for Polonskii, but he clearly benefited from the various administrative niches and activities that Vorontsov's Tiflis offered him. See Eikhenbaum, "Poèziia Polonskogo," in Polonski 1933a: xvii–xviii; Orlov 1961: 17–20; and Bogomolov 1963: 40–41.

28 Polonskii's Caucasian works have never been collected, and his non-belletristic writings on the region have not been republished. Among his most significant non-belletristic works are the historical and statistical surveys "Kratkii ocherk nekotorykh gorodov Kavkaza i Zakavkazskogo kraia" (1846a), "Statisticheskii ocherk Tiflisa" (1946b: 7–173), the incomplete physiological sketch "Tiflis na litso i naiznanku," (1850), and "Saia Nova" (1851), Nos. 1–2.

Twelve of his lyric poems of the time were published locally under the title *Sazandar* (1849): all of his Georgian poetry – some thirty lyrics – can be found in *Ia. P. Polonskii. Stikhotvoreniia i poëmy* (1933a: 38–96). Polonskii's Georgian prose "sketches" – as he himself called them – "Delibashtala. Gruzinskaia skazka (Iz putevykh zapisok 1847 g.," (1848), "Kvartira v tatarskom kvartale" (1849), and "Tiflisskie sakli" (1853) – can be found in Polonskii 1988: 22–116. For a critical discussion of Polonskii's Caucasian works, see Bogomolov 1963: 1–200, and 1983: 18ff.; Romanenko 2006; Morozova 2010, and Bogomolov 2002: 257–78.

HARSHA RAM

physiological sketch in Europe, is readily explained by the greater cultural distance arising between the author and what he sees. Far from home, the author becomes self-reflexively present, not merely as a seeing eye but as a visible if alien part of the very landscape he surveys. The author's struggle to reconcile (Russian) subject and (local) object within a typological frame serves to stretch the very limits of the genre.

Polonskii's struggle to accommodate *both self and other* into the representational framework of the sketch generated a series of formal experiments based on grafting the physiological mode onto older, apparently antithetical genres. Curiously, the two texts by Polonskii in which the dynamic of genre hybridization is most palpable are also the two in which the specific contours of Tiflis's urban landscape are most vividly and memorably identified.²⁹ The first is Polonskii's earliest Tiflis text, "A Letter to Moscow" (1847), published anonymously in the "unofficial" supplement to the *Transcaucasian Herald*, the provincial news weekly of the Russian authorities. This section, which had become a regular presence barely two years earlier, inaugurated a new cycle of local Russian-language journalism in which Polonskii played a formative role, involving the collaboration of prominent native (Georgian, Armenian, and Turkic) as well as Russian literati under the watchful gaze of the enlightened Viceroy (see Makharadze 1984: 9–20). Polonskii's text contains what may well be the earliest "physiological" account of Tiflis in print, curiously embedded within the genre of the traveler's epistle, a sentimental-romantic genre associated in Russia with the bygone era of poet, travel writer, and historian Nikolai Karamzin (1790s–1820s), although continuously renewed and updated, as evidenced by Annenkov's recent "Letters from Abroad." The goal of sentimental epistolary writing had been to overcome the physical distance between the writer and his addressee through effusive affirmations of shared intimacy. Polonskii's letter to Moscow, by contrast, establishes geographical distance but fails to overcome it through sentiment. The first part of Polonskii's letter reads like a satirical feuilleton whose sole purpose is to demolish the very cult of friendship upon which the epistolary genre was based. Before establishing the primacy of new forms, Polonskii's letter must invoke and partly dismantle the old.

In the letter's most aphoristic passage, Polonskii writes: "Tiflis is – and may Allah forgive my simile – somewhat akin to Janus, its one face fixed upon Asia, the other looking to Europe. The one face bears the flaccid and aging

²⁹ For an account of the relationship between genre hybridization and world literature, as illuminated by the Russian tradition of historical poetics, see Kliger and Maslov 2017 ("Special Section: Historical Poetics in Theory"); Holland 2017 and Kliger 2017.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

features of oriental types; the other, still too youthful to convey a fully defined character, hints at a Russian physiognomy” (“Pis'mo v Moskvu” [1987: 48]).³⁰ This passage squarely addresses the challenge posed to physiological representation by an “Asiatic” city in the full throes of colonial modernization. In such a city, ethnographic “types” do not serve merely to designate class or profession: they demand to be read *temporally*, as residues of a way of life soon to be made obsolete, situated in opposition to the still incipient dynamic of Europeanization. This aphorism is in fact the culmination of a striking account of Polonskii’s earliest impressions of Tiflis:

To enter Tiflis by the Moscow or Yerevan checkpoint is to enter two cities which are entirely unlike each other. Here you ride along a wide, regular street – Golovinsky Avenue –; there, ascending from hill to hill, you make your way through the dark, crooked, and chaotically congested streets of the old city. Here, on the right, beyond the River Kura, on the smooth flatland you see the green expanse of the German colony arranged in regular fashion; there, on your left, rise the protruding remnants of ruined fortifications which over nearly a thousand years seem to have grown into the cliff edge where they stand, still preserved by time. Here you find government bureaucrats strolling cane in hand, dressed in fashionable Polish topcoats (*paletots*); you see carriages hurtling in your direction and feathers fluttering on women’s Parisian hats; there you make your way through a dense crowd of Georgians dressed in dark-blue *chokhas* (capotes) with long folding sleeves, you bump into Tatars with shaven napes, Ossetians bearing daggers tucked into their belts, Imeretians wearing flat pancakes on their head instead of caps, women picturesquely swathed in white chadors. Here there is little by way of greenery; there gardens surround you on all sides. Here you find yourself in a town from the Russian provinces (*gubernskii gorod*), with stone houses, mostly two-storied, each situated at a respectful distance from the next; there each home seems to thrust itself unceremoniously upon its neighbor, its cage-like upper chambers peeping out from behind compact windowless ground floors occupied by shops, taverns, Tatar coffeehouses and so forth. Here there is a sense of space; there it is cramped and crowded, and yet in this crampedness everything willy-nilly draws your attention, especially if you are visiting Georgia for the first time. In all honesty I say to you that if I were a painter I would prefer the old city. (47–48)

30 While the letter is unsigned, all evidence points to Polonskii’s authorship: the date of its publication, the location of its addressee, the similarity of its content to other known works by Polonskii, not to mention Polonskii’s recent appointment to the editorial board of the newspaper itself.

HARSHA RAM

Here the urban everyday unfolds in *both* its bewildering and its potentially overwhelming diversity *and* as two contrasting itineraries which bifurcate difference along a rigidly observed East/West civilizational divide. The reader is invited to savor the exoticism of oriental color and the encroachment of modern urban planning, all at once. Polonskii's dual itinerary corresponds precisely to Count Vorontsov's most significant initiative, the construction of a "European" Tiflis, in contradistinction to the city's residual "Asiatic" – essentially Persian – core but adjacent to it. Count Vorontsov's urban renewal saw the construction of Golovinskii Prospect (now Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi's main artery), a rectilinear boulevard boasting the Viceroy's palace and other government buildings, Georgia's first proscenium theater, and the suburb of Sololaki, a European-style residential neighborhood designed for the ascendant Armenian merchant class. How might Vorontsov's transformation of Tiflis compare to the nearly contemporaneous restructuring of Paris by Baron von Hausmann, a process that, along with the reverberations of the failed revolutions of 1848, arguably provoked the earliest articulations of aesthetic modernism in France?³¹ If *Hausmannisation* was intended to facilitate the free circulation of industrial and commercial capital and bring about the eventual *embourgeoisement* of Paris, then Count Vorontsov was inspired by the very different legacy of eighteenth-century Petrine modernization, which reinforced the autocratic state as the primary agent of economic development and cultural progress (Jersild 2002: 63).³² The restructuring of Tiflis had the precise goal of spatially encoding Russia's civilizing mission in its Eurasian peripheries, reasserting imperial authority even as it offered local elites the beguiling benefits of cultural enlightenment and political cooptation (Brower 1990: 9).³³ Vorontsovian urbanism is palpable both in the changes made to the built environment and in the Parisian fashions of the local Russian élite: tellingly, the *paletot* is not the garment of a bohemian flâneur but a strolling government bureaucrat.

31 On the political economy of Baron Haussmann's urban renovation of Paris, see Harvey 1985; on its relationship to literature and the arts, see Benjamin 1986; Clark 1984.

32 Cf. Bater 1984: "In Russia . . . the development of cities and life within them was very much under the thumb of officialdom from at least the middle of the 17th century until well into the 19th . . . In an absolute autocracy, in which the city performed the administrative service on behalf of the state, where the mercantile function was purposely restricted, and where an industrial function with the specter of a seething lumpenproletariat was perceived as a real threat to social and political stability, city growth was something to be closely monitored and to be limited in impact" (135).

33 For a case study of urban transformation in British India, see Oldenburg 1984. For a wider discussion of the relationship between colonialism, modernity, architectural modernism, and urban space, see Avermaete, Karakayali, and von Osten 2010.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

To grasp the implications of this colonial and statist variant of the urban everyday for the physiology as a travelling genre, let us accompany Iakov Polonskii on one final walk through Tiflis. Arguably the finest literary accomplishment of his Georgian sojourn, Polonskii's "A Stroll through Tiflis" ("Progulka po Tiflisu," 1846, published 1849) elaborates what is surely the earliest sustained literary account of Tiflis street life to be found in the modern era.³⁴ It would also appear to be at the furthest remove conceivable, formally speaking, from the physiological sketch: a lyric epistle in irregular iambic verse dedicated to Lev Sergeevich Pushkin, the younger brother of Russia's most celebrated poet. The choice of the friendly epistle as a genre, as well as of its recipient, betrays a carefully cultivated tension between the old and the new. As in the case of Polonskii's "Letter to Moscow," an older – sentimental-romantic – form must be replenished with newer – "physiological" – content, even as this newer content must be tested by a crisis of vision characteristic of the romantic lyric. "A Stroll through Tiflis" begins unexpectedly: the poet-flâneur, we soon discover, is no déclassé bohemian, but a government official, caught between the rhythms of work and leisure on a typical day in the chancellery of Count Vorontsov. This scenario, however implausible in Louis Huart's Paris, is entirely in keeping with Russian literary and social history: the only existing Russian precedent for a physiology in verse was Nikolai Nekrasov's "Civil Servant," published just a year earlier.

The poem's opening lines elaborate the routine tedium of office work and the prosaic discomforts of Tiflis's ferocious summer heat: both will be finally mitigated by the cooling onset of evening, permitting a delineation of the poem's central itinerary. Even as the poem outlines the lyric hero's path, its spatial clarity is held in check by a repeated confounding of perspective. Elapsing as it does during the fleeting moments of sunset, the poem struggles

³⁴ Russian flâneurie has its own literary history, linked closely to the European, yet diverging from it. We may note Konstantin Batiushkov's "Progulka po Moskve" (1811–12, but published only in 1869; in *Sochineniia* [1934]), and "Progulka v Akademii khudozhestv" (1814; in *Opyty v stikhakh i proze* [1977]). Equally relevant are the journalistic study of manners and the feuilleton: see, for example, Faddei Bulgarin's early piece "'Progulka po trotuaru Nevskogo prospekta'" (1824; in *Peterburgskie ocherki F.V. Bulgarina* [2010]). Polonskii's poem would appear to be a generic crossing of the sentimental friendly epistle as practiced by Batiushkov and the later journalistic traditions of the feuilleton and the physiology. The Russified French term *flanër* first makes its appearance in the works of the young Dostoevsky: see, for example, his announcement of the publication of the comic almanac *Zuboskal* in the journal *Otechestvennye zapiski* (November 1845: 43).

HARSHA RAM

to vouchsafe its superabundance of visual detail against the constant threat of ineffability, as the picturesque panorama of Tiflis's street life yields to what the poet Keats once called "negative capability."³⁵ This movement, from the sensory abundance of the visible world to a crisis of visibility which precipitates a return to the self, is the poem's essential dialectic. Let us briefly examine both moments in turn:

Where shall I go? I walk across Mukhran
 Bridge along the ravine, and straight to the Armenian
 Bazaar – there the populace,
 Awake since dawn, whether for work, for need or out of indolence
 Seeks cooling shade on the narrow pavement,
 Walking, sleeping, working, drinking. –
 A unique populace! I like to idle here –
 to silently observe – and silently admire
 Paintings such as I of course
 never before did see. (Polonskii 1933b: 39)

The poet's chosen itinerary can – *mutatis mutandis* – be followed to this very day, if one can account for the dizzying change in toponyms over the centuries: after crossing the Mtkvari (Kura) River over Mukhran (now Baratashvili) Bridge to Mukhran Street (now Baratashvili Avenue) – the western edge of the historical city once marked by a fortified wall that ran along the Sololaki ravine (mostly filled in or demolished beginning in the 1820s) – the poet swerves southward toward the Armenian Bazaar, today K'ot'e Apkhazi (and until recently Leselidze) Street, the Old City's primary thoroughfare leading from Yerevan (now Freedom) Square to the Maidan, for centuries Tiflis's principal trading center (now Vakhtang Gorgasali Square). The poet's itinerary, then, first traces part of the old city's vanishing premodern boundaries and then pierces it along its primary economic artery and surrounding alleyways through to its pulsating heart and oldest historical site. Both these spatial strategies – delimitation and penetration – resonate in the context of the Vorontsov era: the construction of European Tiflis, actively pursued during Polonskii's sojourn, required the *physical delimitation* of its "Asiatic" neighborhoods as well as their partial *aesthetic recuperation*, to be contrasted with the modernizing architectural vision of the Russian viceroy. The poet's stroll through the Armenian Bazaar and its neighboring alleyways constitutes the poem's descriptive core: caravanserais and hole-in-the-wall stores, tradesmen

³⁵ By "negative capability" Keats meant the ability to dwell in "uncertainty, mysteries and doubt without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (1899: 276). See John Keats's letter to George and Thomas Keats, December 22, 1817.

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

and artisans, camels, donkeys, and buffaloes, everyone and everything is subject to the poet's seemingly exhaustive physiology of ethnic identities, market activities, and traded goods from as far afield as "Persia and the banks of the Moscow River" (40). Yet if the Parisian flâneur confronts the circulation of industrial commodities within a city increasingly subsumed by exchange value, then Polonskii collides with the world of the oriental bazaar. This world, easily misread as *couleur locale* but representing what is, in fact, a still robust mode of artisanal production, ultimately defeats the classifying impulse of the physiologist. If Tiflis is "a real find for a painter," then this is one painting Polonskii "cannot complete." In one of two key moments of visual vertigo, the agglomeration of types – "donkeys, / carpets, soldiers, buffaloes, Georgians, / coolies, balconies, Ossetians, / [and] Tatars" – begins to "blur together" in the poet's eyes, just as the built environment – "this mass of buildings, / this entire mishmash of wreckage without legend / of homes built perhaps of older ruins / Of gardens all enmeshed in vines of grape" – similarly defies delineation. "Drawing Tiflis," the poet concludes, "lies beyond my reach" (42, 44).

These concluding lines enact what is, in fact, a dialectic of two distinct aesthetic modes – the mundanely *picturesque* and the ineffably *sublime* – which together constitute the poem's visual parameters. Emerging as an aesthetic category in the eighteenth century, the picturesque embraced irregularity, intricacy, sudden variation, and ruggedness of contour as painterly values.³⁶ Positioned ideally in-between the beguiling harmony of the Beautiful and the terrifying formlessness of the Sublime, the Picturesque sought to "frame roughness and variety," thereby both celebrating and containing nature's diverse bounty (Punter 1994: 223, emphasis added). Yet if the picturesque, adapted by the physiology to the specifics of urban rather than natural landscape, constitutes Polonskii's positively embraced goal, then the poem's moments of stark crisis, in which typological distinctions collapse into indeterminacy, also suggest the limits of the picturesque gaze. In contrast to Russia's romantic poets, for whom the sublime was the positive marker of a predominantly alpine landscape, here the sublime marks the negative limits of the poet's power to visually capture the *city*. This was Iakov Polonskii's no small achievement as the first Russian writer to have lived in Tiflis for a sustained period of time.

36 See Gilpin 1792: 3–33. Entering Russia in the late eighteenth century via horticultural manuals, the picturesque achieved popularity in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars as a means of envisioning a properly national landscape that escaped the limitations of the pastoral idyll as well as the extremes of the sublime: see Fusso 1993: 129–40; and Ely 2002: 59–86.

HARSHA RAM

How, then, did Polonskii's Caucasian corpus modify the achievements of the *Physiology of Petersburg*? Petersburg's progressive intelligentsia had sought to liberate representations of the urban everyday from state control; by contrast Polonskii's Georgian texts overtly acknowledge the workings, at once colonizing and modernizing, of the Russian state. Formally, Polonskii's texts further radicalize a tendency, already noted in the works of Nekrasov, toward genre hybridization. His grafting of the physiology onto older romantic genres is neither purely parodic nor purely nostalgic. It resurrects the figure, foreclosed by the Parisian physiology, of an embodied, culturally marked, and socially alienated authorial subject. This subject is at once an agent of the imperial state and the bearer of aesthetic sensibility: as such he is symptomatic of a historically determined configuration between the state, the literary and print market, and the dynamics of urban modernization in the Russian periphery.

What then might we conclude from the physiology's journey from Paris to St. Petersburg and thence to Tiflis? I began by suggesting that world literary studies appear caught between three competing conceptual models: an abstract globalism, generally mapped as a hierarchical system of center/periphery relations, an insistence upon cultural specificity, understood in local or regional terms, or as material circuits of exchange, generally traced via transnational networks. The first model assumes a unified but uneven planetary scale, divided by national boundaries but linked by market exchange. The second and third celebrate the circulation and proliferation of differences, often understood as the abundance of irreducible local particularities. How, then, does my story relate to these two models? This chapter's external trajectory confirms the European provenance of the physiology as a genre, tracing its movement from the Parisian center to the Russian metropole, and subsequently from the Russian metropole to the Caucasian periphery. Such a trajectory would appear to readily conform to the diffusionist model of world literature most recently associated with Franco Moretti, for whom it is precisely the "compromise between the foreign and the local" which elevates the experience of peripheral and semi-peripheral literatures – as against the Anglo-French core – to exemplary typicality (2003: 58).

The center/periphery model, which posits the origins of literary modernity in Europe, is clearly pertinent to the spread of many of the ascendant genres of the modern era, including the physiology. At the same time, I would argue that the center/periphery model needs to be complemented by greater attention to the trans/regional and the local as defining levels of geographic scale in the realm of cultural production. A genre such as the physiology, which draws on local ambiances as its primary material, is

The Physiology as a Traveling Genre (Paris, St. Petersburg, Tiflis)

singularly useful in this regard. To what extent do the formal features or the local content of the physiology reflect a singular and externally imposed socio-spatial logic such as the one suggested by Moretti? The physiologies of Paris and St. Petersburg sought to represent local urbanity for a metropolitan but democratizing public situated in a dramatically distinct set of relations to the market, the state, and the public sphere. The French *physiologie* celebrated or satirized petty-bourgeois taste in a Paris increasingly marked by the circulation of commodities and private capital, while the Russian *fiziologiia*, as practiced by the progressive intelligentsia, was arguably the expression of a search for urban forms and practices that would serve as the basis for an incipient non-bourgeois public sphere. Polonskii's Caucasian corpus performed a different function again: to represent colonial difference to the metropolitan Russian reader, but also to convey the limits of typological perception. The writer acknowledges his role as a state functionary but conveys a burgeoning visual realm beyond the imperial state, expressed as the triumph as well as the crisis of the picturesque.

The social life of circulating genres thus points to their often-discrepant role in different literary systems, and to the distinct formal and ideological solutions they propose within regional or local contexts. Only a trans-scalar analysis, moving between multiple spatial levels – city, nation, and empire – allows us to honor what humanists partly misread as cultural specificity without sacrificing the global perspective offered by such models as world-systems theory. In this regard, the physiology serves as a privileged case study of traveling genres. Its transnational circulation between different cities and distinct literary systems revealed both the mutability of genres within a given literary field and fundamental transformations at work in the urban everyday. Neither was simply the work of culture, or of literary history narrowly understood. Rather it was the product of a complex configuration of forces, in which the form-giving power of literary genre countered the centripetal force of the state and the circulatory mechanisms of the market by reflecting to their reading public the uneven experience of the urban everyday.

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HARSHA RAM

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HARSHA RAM

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HARSHA RAM

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