

## Paris: Capital of the 19th Century

### Panoramic Literature in 19th Century Paris: Robert Macaire as a Type of Everyday

by Alexander Zevin (2005)



"*Robert Macaire ne pouvait apparaître dans un autre temps que le nôtre.*" Thus begins the *Physiologie du Robert-Macaire*, printed in Paris in 1842, with text by James Rousseau and illustrations by Henri Daumier. Rousseau's opening refrain aptly applies to *Robert Macaire's* genre as well: physiologies, pocket-size books which juxtaposed descriptions of Parisian life with street scenes, portraits and mawkish caricatures, were uniquely popular in early 19th century Paris. One of the tasks of this paper is to ask why panoramic literature, of which physiologies are but one instance, could not have existed in any other time or place. What do such claims to exceptionality, as espoused in the opening line of *Robert Macaire*, reveal about cultural production in 19th century Paris? Thanks, in part, to advances in printing technology and the cheap availability of paper, all manner of printed material swept the streets of Paris beginning in the 1830s. Among them are the first daily mass-circulation newspapers as well as broadsheets, guidebooks and physiologies. These urban genres, abetted by new modes of marketing, advertising and distributing, vastly expanded the literary market.

The focus of this paper is on panoramic literature, the name bestowed on it by Walter Benjamin, who described the genre, in *The Arcades Project*, as a series of social sketches or "moral dioramas...of unscrupulous multiplicity" (Q2, 6). As Benjamin makes clear, panoramic literature sought to represent the city in ways at once exhaustive in scope and meticulous, dioramic in its detail of city types — of *blagueurs* and *blanchisseuses*. At the same time, its "unscrupulous multiplicity" and its relationship to other emerging print media, mark panoramic literature as a hybrid genre: pictorial as well as written, reportorial, pseudo-scientific, as well as literary and imaginative, widely circulated but marketed as one-of-a-kind. The in-between-ness of panoramic literature highlights its development within a larger explosion of affordable printed material and popular urban culture in 19th century Paris. The

"uniquely 19th century" character of Robert Macaire offers a point of entry into this morass of texts about Parisian everyday life. By tracing the transformation of Robert Macaire, from play to caricature to physiology to feuilleton, we can begin to examine what in particular is special about *physiologies* vis-à-vis their intertextuality.

Contemporary discourses on physiologies like *Robert Macaire*, particularly those of Margaret Cohen, Richard Sieburth and Priscilla Ferguson, tend to locate them in a transitional, ephemeral moment of Parisian cultural production during the July Monarchy. I suggest that we miss some of panoramic literature's urgency, its cultural specificity, by looking both behind and ahead of it, from the guidebooks of Mercier to the novels of Zola and the cinematic shorts of Lumière. In contrast, I wish to explore the ways in which such phenomenon as newspapers and novels were *concomitant* with panoramic literature, particularly with respect to *Robert Macaire*, and the issues this raises about authorship, aesthetic viability and representation in a wider urban marketplace.

### **Into the Breach...**

The question of representation — of how ideologies, institutions, names and images are codified — is of central importance in panoramic literature. In *Paris as Revolution*, Priscilla Ferguson looks at representation as a far-reaching and constant concern in France, focused literally and metaphorically on Paris throughout the 19th century. In this schema, panoramic literature is merely one phase of an ongoing obsession.

The source, the symbolic inauguration of this "urban crisis," was the decapitation of Louis XVI in 1793. As Ferguson points out, this decapitation made much of Paris — its streets, its seal, a heraldic crown and fleurs-de-lys, its history as the "king's city" — irrelevant, symbolic nonsense (37). In a perfect illustration of Paris's symbolic flux, the very site of the King's *décapitation* kept changing: née *Place Louis XV*, renamed *la Place de la Révolution*, it later became *la Place de la Concorde*. These oft-changing, often wildly contradictory, designations point to a city of contested meanings and revolutionary uncertainty. They indicate, moreover, that the city already functioned as a powerful and gripping text. The revolution, as a usurpation of power, necessarily destabilized that text. Thus, Ferguson writes, "The city, in a very real sense, had to be re-written before it could once again be read" (37).

The King, as center of the symbolic order, abdicates his position to writers who are eager to re-write the city, to make the city read. The emergence of new guidebooks helped make sense of the shifting urban scene for both foreigners and, increasingly, Parisians. Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*, first published in 1781 and subsequently revised over many years, is of particular importance as a guidebook for Parisians. In it he stakes out a Paris that includes prisons and cemeteries and seedy *quartiers* as well as executioners and washerwomen and rats. Less a guide, and more a topography of the social life of Parisians, both Cohen and Ferguson cite Mercier as the beginning of a literature of the everyday and, thus, a prefiguration of panoramic texts.

When writers like Mercier step into the vacuum left by the *ancien régime*, they take up an authority, to know the city, to make it cohere in writing, that Ferguson calls "necessarily political." I would add that the new position of the author in the hierarchy of producing meaning is an *ethical* one. The author in post-revolutionary Paris was a "new sort of subject" wielding a new sort of power. He both arrogates to himself and is assigned what Foucault terms an "author function," or the "principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning" (Foucault 220). In this sense the role of the author that emerges out of the symbolic chaos and

uncertainty of the revolution, first of 1789, and subsequently of 1830 and 1848, expresses the realist's belief in the power of the author to represent the city, to know the city, to use the streets of Paris to symbolize the whole of society.

### ...Panoramic Literature

How did panoramic literature, and its authors, so successfully step into make sense of the now nonsensical city of Paris? More precisely, what was panoramic literature and what did it *do*?

Richard Sieburth, in *Same Difference: The French Physiologies 1840-1842*, characterizes the interest in small, illustrated volumes — physiologies — as a "craze" that swept Paris in the 1830s and 1840s (163). About 120 different physiologies were issued between 1840 and 1842 alone; in that time, it is estimated that around 500,000 copies of these "pocket-size books" were printed for a population of just over one million (163). Sieburth provides us with a list of alphabetic physiologies, which includes titles such as *Physiologie des amoureux*, *Physiologie du cocu*, *Physiologie des demoiselles de magasin*. These cheap, throwaway books contained illustrations of each of these types along with mocking pseudo-scientific descriptions ("*Le Rentier* stands anywhere between five and six feet tall, his movements are generally slow...").

While physiologies were sold to the buyer off the street for about one franc, the massive, expensively bound anthologies, like *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-1842), were meant for the more affluent bourgeoisie as domestic "objects of display" or "coffee table books" (166). Both physiologies and larger panoramic texts, however, functioned to reduce and classify the city, to make it knowable, through a juxtaposition of pictures, and episodic stories, essays, jokes and journalistic pieces. The larger panoramic texts, as their various titles suggest, were ambitious in their portrayal of city life, sites and types: *Paris, ou le livre de cent-et-un* (1831-1834); *Paris au XIXe siècle* (1841); *Recueil de scènes de la ville de Paris* (1838); *Le Muséum Parisien, histoire physiologique, pittoresque, philosophique et grotesque de toutes les bêtes curieuses de Paris et de la banlieue* (1841); *Le Prisme, encyclopédie morale du XIXe siècle* (1841-1850); *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-1842); *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* (1842); *La Grande ville, nouveau tableau de Paris, comique, critique, et philosophique* (1842-1843); *Le Diable à Paris, Paris et les parisiens* (1845-1846).

These texts, which cluster around the late 1830s and early 1840s, were indeed characterized by an "unscrupulous multiplicity." Their status as panoramic is thus not merely a result of their encyclopedic perspective on the city, what Hugo called "a birds eye view," but their ceaseless and seemingly limitless production. The city is *made to read* in a double sense: as both a fully realized text and also a publicly consumable product. Panoramic literature, when considered alongside concomitant genres like newspapers, stepped into the symbolic flux of Paris with a vengeance. In *Utopia Commodified*, Dean de la Motte gives us a concise political and technical reason for the proliferation of print media during the July Monarchy of 1830 to 1848. In so doing, he opens up ways of thinking about the intertextuality and interdependence of panoramic literature with other "everyday genres:"

It can be argued that the July Revolution created the two conditions most necessary for the development of the first truly mass medium, the inexpensive daily newspaper: a hitherto unknown degree of freedom of the press, and educational reform culminating in the Guizot Law of 1833, which guaranteed French males access to elementary education, ultimately raising literacy rates considerably. These combined with innovations in printing and

marketing techniques to allow the capabilities of production and consumption that would in turn enable the introduction in 1836 of the first mass dailies. (146)

The same technological and political innovations that led to mass print newspapers, broadsheets, illustrated pamphlets and posters, gave rise to hundreds of physiologies and panoramic books. Encouraged by the cheap availability of paper, lithographic ingenuity increased alongside rolling and typesetting technologies. Several genres were born out of this common stock: illustrated dailies like Girardin's *Le Presse* and Philipon's *Le Charivari*, panoramic texts, visual and textual hybrids, like Janin's *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* and affordable novels like Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* and Hugo's *Les Misérables*. These genres shared more than political and technological origins: they existed contemporaneously, sharing writers, illustrators and even texts. Balzac, for example, wrote for the *romans feuilletons*, for panoramic texts like *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* (1842) and in novel form in *Père Goriot*. This roaming body of work attests to the blurring of these emergent genres.

In *Utopia Commodified*, Dean de la Motte argues, persuasively, "that literature's uneasy inscription within journalism allowed it to flourish" (155). For this very reason it "also generates a rift — at times more rhetorical than substantive — between pure (autonomous and thus unprofitable) and prostituted (profitable, because in the service of an implicit or explicit ideological agenda) writing" (155). This syncretic view of print culture calls into question Ferguson's claim that, "Balzac's incorporation of his occasional pieces into his novels does not fundamentally alter either genre [*feuilletons*, guidebook or novel]" (69). In reality these genres were fluid — alarmingly so — to the authors choosing amongst them. Balzac's private writings as well as those of Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas and Georges Sand, demonstrate their anxiety over these competing modes of textual production and aesthetic transmission (Ferguson 66). "Sell Cheap, Sell a lot; — Sell a lot, Sell Cheap." The shopkeeper's words, recorded by Girardin and cited by de la Motte, did not sit well with authors who perceived themselves to be torn between financial success in newspapers and physiologies and artistic purity in, for example, novels and books of poetry. As de la Motte suggests, though, this anxiety was based largely on constructed notions of high and low culture. "*The press à bon marché or l'art pour l'art?*," is, in the end, a false question. The uneasiness it summoned in authors — vis-à-vis its division of journals, physiologies and novels, among others — attests to how thoroughly these genres were inscribed not only within each other, but within a wider marketplace in which speed, volume and price were king.

Ferguson's contrast, between the publications of Janin or Ladvoat and the "fully realized, self-contained" novels of Balzac, is thus untenable — based on a fictive break between newspapers and physiologies (ephemeral and widely available) and the novel or book of poems (durable, limited and costlier). The book, in this reified view of cultural production, somehow exists outside of commerce, of commodities, of which it is nevertheless, and all the more, a part. For this reason, Ferguson's and, to an extent Cohen's, privileging of the realist novel as at the "high end of the spectrum (Cohen 229)," is an internalization of the angst-filled mythology of 19th century authors. Taking their word for it, so to speak, tends to sequentialize and hierarchize literary production: from guidebooks, to literary guidebooks and panoramic texts, to the realist novel. These genres were, in reality, contiguous creations with common authors and similar stakes in commercial success.

## **Robert Macaire and the Urban Stage**

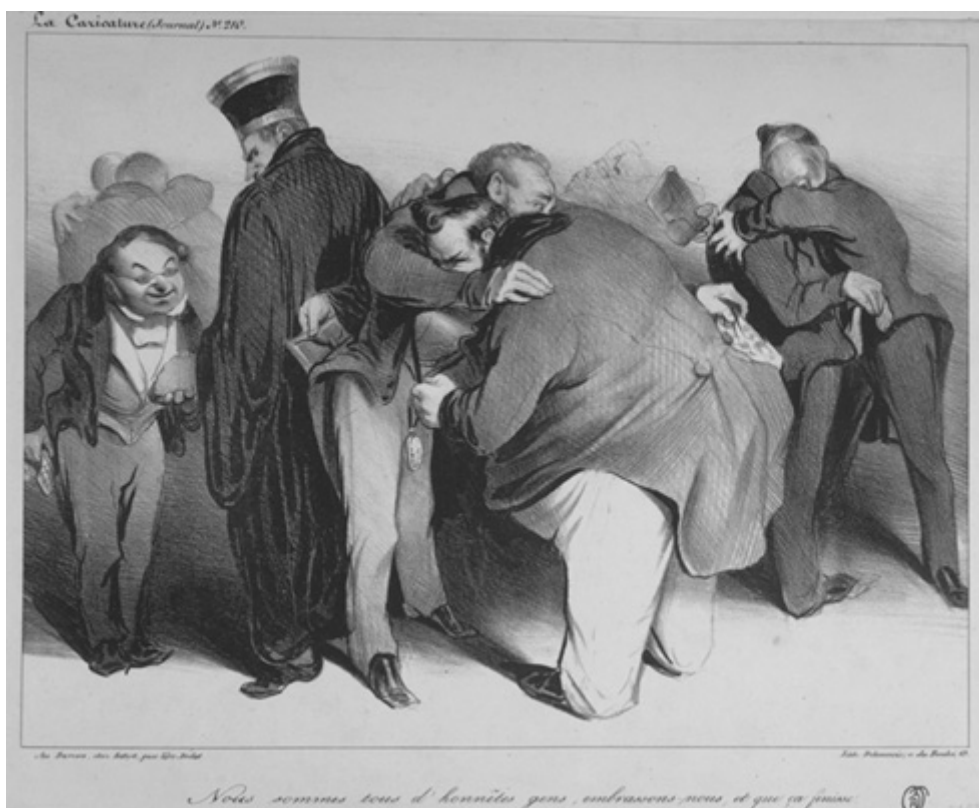


As a way of exploring the heterogeneity (Cohen 232) of panoramic literature, and its itinerant authors, it is perhaps best to begin by looking at the movement of a particular story or type between mediums. Such a story roguishly presents itself in the form — the guise really — of *Robert Macaire*. Macaire, who by the 1840s was a ubiquitous character in popular culture, is the consummate knave: a scallywag, huckster, trickster, a cheat looking to make a quick profit. Macaire, in his variable guises, as rentier, avocat and soon, is always concerned with pecuniary gain. As such Macaire not only traces print culture's expansion and transformations, but also acts as a self-commentary on the commodity-status of newspapers and physiologies and novels. Indeed, Daumier often depicts Macaire as a duplicitous editor, un *journaliste*, an *auteur dramatique*. Macaire, though, becomes more than just a metaphor for print-culture, or even for the city; through his avarice, he comes to represent an entire age. As Rousseau writes in his introduction to *Physiologie du Robert-Macaire*: "*il est l'incarnation de notre époque positive, égoïste, avare, menteuse, vantard ... essentiellement blagueuse*" (1). Benjamin cites Edward Fuchs to describe Robert Macaire: "Philipon invented a new character type... which was said to have brought him nearly as much... popularity as his pears: 'Robert Macaire,' the type of the unscrupulous speculator and promoter" [b1 7]. Macaire *is* a type, but because of his functionality as everything from a matchmaker to a *médecin*, he is something of a type of types. He is not, however, the editor Philipon's invention. Neither is he Daumier's. Macaire's origins are, at their base, plural. He thus serves as an apt metaphor for panoramic literature, which is itself a pastiche of different authors and genres.

The character of Robert Macaire is generally traced to an 1823 play, *L'Auberge des adrets*, written by Benjamin Antier, Saint-Amand and Paulyanthe (Osiakovski, 388). The play was first performed at the Paris theater Ambigu Comique. The plot, a colorless melodrama in which justice triumphs over criminal guilt, concerns a bandit who is finally shot and dies a repentant sinner (Newman, 619). The play was poorly received and survived solely because of one of its actors: Frédérick Lemaître who, despite the writers protests, introduced more and more comedy and satire into Robert Macaire, at first a minor character, until by the early 1830s the play had become a veritable *comédie-bouffe* (Osiakovski, 389). Indeed, the play had

been entirely inverted. Instead of a final scene of moral rectitude, Macaire and his side-kick Bertrand are admitted to the *Panthéon des Voleurs*, the highwayman's hall of fame -the bourse. Lemaître created social satire out of melodrama by exaggerating not only Macaire's gestures and mannerisms but by creating an unforgettable costume: he added a dented top hat, tilted to the side, a ratty scarf, a gnarled walking stick, and most prominently an eye patch. This first incarnation, a sort of derelict bourgeois, resurfaced in every Macaire thereafter. In 1834 Lemaître rewrote the play entirely, entitling it *Robert Macaire, ce cynique scapin de crime*. Buoyed by audience response (a largely working class audience according to Osiakovski), Lemaître had literally pulled Macaire from the play, making a bourgeois morality-tale into a vicious satire of bourgeois greed with a triumphant a-moral protagonist. In case there was any doubt as to whom this satire was indicting, when the 'September Laws' prohibited the play in 1835, Lemaître appeared in the final show made up as Louis-Philippe (Wechsler, 85).

Henri Daumier, who saw the play sometime in 1834, immediately recognized Lemaître's Macaire as an attack against the financial oligarchy of the July Monarchy (Osiakovski, 389). On 13 November 1834, anticipating Lemaître's final performance, Daumier published his first caricature in which Robert Macaire and Louis-Philippe embrace while picking each other's pockets, as do the attorney-generals Thiers and Persil.



Courtesy of Brandeis University

The lithograph ran in *Caricaturana* with a caption by its editor Philipon: "We are all honest men — let us embrace, and put an end to our disagreements." The 'September Laws' of 1835 suppressed this brazen political attack on the leaders of government as financially corrupt speculators. In a testament to their interconnected portrayals, both *Caricaturana* and Lemaître's play were specifically forbidden (Childs 43). The play had been transformed from its inception: first by Lemaître and his audience from the original melodrama, and then by Daumier's lithographs in *Caricaturana*. Daumier highlighted the political dimensions of the

play, associating Macaire and Louis-Philippe, before Lemaître had done the same in his finale. Thus the play existed in a kind of limbo between stage and newspaper that served to seismically magnify its effects.

In response to the government's interdiction, the explicitly political Robert Macaire ended. But, as Philipon's *Le Charivari* stated at the time, while Macaire had been banned from the stage, "his type persists as the most complete personification of the period. Because of censorship we can't stigmatize the political Robert Macaire, so we look to the businessman Macaire" (qtd. In Wechsler, 86). *Les Robert-Macaire*, a series of 101 lithographic stories by Daumier with captions by Philipon, was published in *Le Charivari* from 1836 to 1839. In them Macaire is continually transformed by Daumier: he is depicted as a *banquier*, a *notaire*, a *boursier*, a *rentier*, a *négociant*, an *agent d'affaires*, a *propriétaire* as well as a *restaurateur*, an *avocat*, a *professeur*, a *médecin*, an *architecte*. Robert Macaire is clearly a universal type — a knave present in all walks of Parisian life. Indeed, the slightly bumptious Macaire with his meager-looking side-kick Bertrand, continually make their mischief on the city streets. In one, published in *Le Charivari* on March 30th 1837, Macaire and Bertrand are putting up posters in the street advertising their ongoing debate in the newspapers:



"Hot Stuff! Hot Stuff!," shouts Macaire in the caption, adding, we "must bolster our sales, Bertrand, must beat the big drum... attack ourselves in the papers, write, reply to ourselves, retort, insult ourselves and above all advertise ourselves." This lampooning of the methods used to sell newspapers is unmistakable. At the same time, the image relies on the reader's familiarity with a newly pervasive and urban print culture — the act of advertising on city walls — to be legible. The fact that they are putting up posters further calls attention to the inescapable *printedness* of Daumier's caricatures. The self-reflexivity of this caricature, a trait shared with physiologies, is humorously apparent in another lithograph from 1838:



In it Macaire addresses Daumier who is sitting at his desk drawing: "Monsieur Daumier, your Robert Macaire series is delightful! It's an exact picture of the thievery of our times...the faithful portrait of innumerable crooked characters who turn up everywhere — in business, in politics, in the bureaucracy, in finance, everywhere! The rascals must bear you quite a grudge...." In this lithograph, as in the other, Daumier both implicates himself in the 'Macarism' of selling newspapers, but this time positions himself firmly outside of the rascally establishment. As Baudelaire, in *Some French Caricaturists*, noted:

Macaire was the clear starting point of the caricature of manners...The political pamphlet gave way to comedy...And so caricature took on a new character, and was no longer particularly political. It became the general satire of the citizenry. It impinged on the domain of the novel. (222)

In this sense, Robert Macaire is not only born out of an inter-textual dialogue between Daumier and Lemaître, he anticipates future generic blurring between caricatures and novels. Macaire specifically heralds the social typing of the citizenry, a movement from "political pamphlet" to social satire, in physiologies.

If Robert Macaire can disguise himself as anything, and thereby lampoon any type, he also turns up everywhere — put through a veritable paper mill of cultural production in 19th century Paris. By the 1840s "macarism" had become a social concept, a recognizable behavior, a part of speech (Osiakovski, 389). Balzac describes his Baron de Nucingen, an exploitative and cruel banker who appeared in many of his novels including *Père Goriot*, as "*ce vieux Robert Macaire de Nucingen*" (Wechsler 88). Marx, taking a cue from Lemaître and Daumier, called "The July Monarchy...no more than a joint-stock company for the exploitation of French national wealth...Louis-Philippe was a Director of this company, the Robert Macaire on the throne" (Marx, VII 3). At the same time, Lemaître was performing his Macaire in French cities and abroad, in London, where the play was well-received (Newman

619). In 1850 an English playwright, Charles Selby, even adapted it, calling his version *Robert Macaire*, or, *Les auberges des ardets*, a melo drama in two acts.



Daumier, meanwhile, continued to sketch Macaire. The success of the Robert Macaire series was instantaneous and so great that the size of *Le Charivari* had to be enlarged (Osiakowski, 391). It was published as an album by Aubert in an edition of 2500 copies, a far larger number than for any other series (Wechsler 38). The demand was so great that Aubert came out with an additional 6000 copies of reduced two-volume sets, called *Les cent-et-un Robert Macaire* in 1839. The title is borrowed from one of the early physiologies, *Paris, ou le livre de cent-et-un* (1831-1834). The relationship between Daumier's Macaire series and the physiologies were reciprocal. In *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, published from 1840-1842, Robert Macaire turns up explicitly in the text and, for the initiated, quite clearly in the illustrations of *Le Spéculateur*. Like Macaire himself, this episode in *Les Français* is something of a patchwork. Facing the first page of text is a posed *spéculateur* by Gavarni: he is, perhaps, a little thinner, but his shabby petticoat, lopsided hat and walking stick, and his dramatic gesture of thumbing his nose at us, mark him unmistakably as a Robert Macaire. The facing *tête de page*, by the illustrator Trimolet, depicts a vast group of *spéculateurs*, in similar garb, at the *bourse*. One, in direct imitation of Lemaître, appears to be wearing an eye-patch. The implication is clearly that Macaire is the dominant bourgeois type, multiplying as quickly as money itself. Indeed, the text by d'Arlincourt begins: "*Le spéculateur est l'homme par excellence de l'époque actuelle, le caractère dominant de la génération présente, la physionomie-modèle du siècle de l'argent*" (573). In a textually symbolic reiteration of Macaire's dominant status, *le spéculateur* is the final entry in the first volume of *Les Français*. D'Arlincourt goes on to ask: "*Enfin, n'est-ce pas lui qui en est arrivé à faire du commerce un assaut de supercheries, de la politique un tripotage d'écus, de la morale publique une combinaison de finance, et de la société en masse une caverne de Roberts Macaires?*" Here Macaire is specifically mentioned as the enemy, or at least the debaser, of public morality and

civic-minded politics. And yet Macaire is not the exception, according to the physiology, but the rule — society *en masse*.



In 1842, after the first volume of *Français* had already appeared, *La Physiologie du Robert Macaire* by James Rousseau was published with "vignettes de H. Daumier." In it Robert-Macaire, now with eye-patch, is again figured as "*l'enfant de ce siècle...l'incarnation de notre époque*." He flits through the episodic text in many of his familiar poses: as composer, chemist, journalist, pharmacist, notary. In the illustration to the final episode, "*Le Robert-Macaire défunt*," Macaire peaks out from under his own grave. Macaire has played the ultimate con: faking his death so as to write a flattering obituary about himself in a Parisian journal, which runs "*C'est une perte pour la littérature et pour la société*" (103). Despite this epitaph's joking vanity, Macaire had indeed become an inescapable part of the landscape and literature about Paris. As Rousseau acknowledges, even if he had really had Macaire die in his physiology, "*Le Robert-Macaire n'est pas mort, le Robert Macaire ne peut pas mourir*" (106). Macaire had long since slipped out of any one author's control and into the milieu of popular culture enabled by the availability of cheaply printed material. As this market grew, Robert Macaire, in an act of meta-fictional willpower, prospered right along with it.



### "Physiology, what would you with me?"

What does it mean that the physiologies chose to depict the scoundrel Robert Macaire as the definitive, the universal type of Parisian urban life? What does it mean that these physiologies, particularly *Les Français*, were a collage of explicit authors — of illustrators, typesetters and writers — as well as of implicit inter-textual sources? Robert Macaire complicates the referential status, the representational project, assigned to panoramic literature by Ferguson and Sieburth. If the city is *made to read* by panoramic literature, as Ferguson argues, it reads like something other than a guide or a rendering of "the full range of social diversity" (Sieburth). Robert Macaire, to name one particularly important example, is not culled from the streets of Paris but from within a mediocre melodrama in two acts. Moreover, Robert Macaire is not a type but, as the caricatures, physiologies, novels and plays stridently and repeatedly declare, "*l'enfant de ce siècle*," the spirit of the age. Macaire somehow transcends types precisely by being present — or at least able to *do* — all of them. If the point of the physiologies was merely to comfort a populace anxious about the industrial and demographic growth of the city (Sennett 9), it chooses a protagonist whose pecuniary lust and infinite adaptability oddly reinforces both.

In *La Physiologie du Robert Macaire* Rousseau notes that during the reign of Louis XIII one thinks of Richelieu; during Louis XV "*avec orgueil à la postérité Voltaire et Jean-Jacques*" (6). "*Quand, dans cent ans,*" he continues, "*on demandera le nom des grands homes qui on marqué la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle, on citera Robert-Macaire, rien que Robert-Macaire, toujours Robert Macaire.*" In recalling previous centuries Rousseau refers to the reign of Kings. In the symbolic vacuum left by royal power, the physiology literally steps into name this century — the 19th now — after a fictional character. Though its language is flippant and self-promoting, it also clearly stakes out the vantage point of *La Physiologie du Robert Macaire*: it is not necessarily referential, at least to the present, but anticipatory. "How will the future see us?" it asks. In the introduction to *Les Français*, Jules Janin gives the

rationale for the physiologies as a document for the future, adding, "people will recount this city...was divided like so many separate universes (qtd in Ferguson 61).I would argue that this theme — of positing physiologies as documents of record for the future — says less about their representative status than it does about the type of reading that they invited. By self-consciously framing the text as historical, reading about Robert Macaire becomes an imaginative glimpse not *of* the present so much as *into* the future. While the enshrinement/denigration of Robert Macaire as the universal type may signal anxieties about urban life, it just as likely indicates a general anxiety about — but also a fascination with — what the future holds. The physiologies approach this problem by self-consciously taking-stock of "our century" from the position of future readers and in contrast to past ages.

Panoramic literature straddles times as well as genres; it contains elements of realist novels, newspapers, lithographic broadsheets, all as they develop in a miasma of popular printed culture. That is to say, panoramic literature is fundamentally hybrid. It is not authored so much as it is assembled, the sum of many who write, with different voices in different mediums. There is something inherently transgressive about such mixing: *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, for example, includes pseudo-scientific anecdotes on the grocer as well as novellas on fashionable ladies (Cohen 232). The general and the *grisette* — two otherwise unmeeting social types — appear, without a scandal, in the same folded sheets together. These uncharacteristic meetings once again call into question the referential stability, and I would add, intent, of panoramic literature and the everyday. In *Les Français*, the characters are clearly unrealistic in the sense that they pose for us, *les lecteurs*, gesturing, looking, batting their eyelashes, on a blank white canvas. Therein lies their humor. In the *table des matières* in the back of *Les Français*, it depicts two editors playing with miniature Frenchmen on a mound of grass; in another, a writer places them all in a wicker basket labeled "Les Français." This serves precisely to undermine the imposed cohesion of the text and the authority of its authors. In fact, the group of munchkin men who wobble into the editors hands, proffer a way of reading these physiologies as fantastical romps and not just social satires or, for that matter, social representations or social controls.



Cohen connects this paradoxical detachment, or fictive quality, of panoramic literature with the spectacularization and commodification of the everyday. Physiology as phantasmagoria. While panoramic literature's relationship to the everyday is certainly commodified, it is also never really or even purportedly correspondent. Rather, it toys with realism: skilled

engravings by Daumier or Gavarni posed bemusedly on white backgrounds; retired generals mocked to journalistic pieces; Robert Macaire disclaiming for six hours in a courtroom. Panoramic literature, I suggest, is more than a hybrid genre or a mere stepping stone to the realist novel or cinematic short. The fluidity of its illustrated and textual elements is not reproduced elsewhere. More importantly, the interactivity of the physiologies, their constant interruption of narrative flow, their joking self-referentiality, are part of a unique literary moment. *La Physiologie du Robert Macaire* ends by addressing the reader, "*chers lecteurs...rassurez-vous*" (106). In *The Physiology of Marriage* Balzac accosts the reader: "Good people, God save you and keep you! Where are you? I cannot see you. Wait while I put on my spectacles. Ah! Now I see you. Are you, and your wives and children in good health? I am glad to hear it." Since marriage has been written on so often, since it is such an object of scorn, why, Balzac continues, should he write about it? "Physiology, what would you with me?" Perhaps these are merely dialogic gimmicks. But, if they are, they have far more in common — at least to this essayist — with narratively fractious postmodernism than with the unifying project of realism. Italo Calvino, hyper novelist *par excellence*, begins *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979) by announcing, "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door" (1). I am also guilty of looking ahead of panoramic texts — even father away, as it were, to postmodern literature. My intention, though, is to argue that panoramic literature does not fit neatly into a sequential or hierarchical order somewhere between the newspaper, the novel and the film.

## Conclusion

But what of Balzac's question: "*Physiology, what would you with me?*" He never answers it, and moves on to write yet another text about marriage, a subject "ever new, ever old." The unapologetic repetitiveness of Balzac's *Physiology of Marriage*, and of *Le Physiologie du Robert Macaire*, inscribes them in what Barthes terms the *déjà-écrit* and the *déjà-lu* (Sieburth 173). Sieburth proffers this in an exclusively negative sense: panoramic literature's endless, self-serving repetition, links it to Barthes' conception of *la doxa* — the dominant strictures of popular thought. Is it also possible to think about the intertextuality, the playful authorial interaction with the reader, as part of a hedonistic (and narcissistic) pleasure of the panoramic text? Is it all *doxa* or is it also *jouissance*? For Sieburth the answer is clear: not only are the physiologies essentially "*rienologies*" — studies of nothing — but they enforce and perpetuate certain social controls. These panoramic texts do not "imitate ... contemporary social life, but rather the immense fund" of the already written, and the already read. The physiologies, "more often than that... simply imitate each other (173). How, one might ask, are the physiologies both imitations, representations, of nothing but also the enforcers of contemporary *moeurs*?"

But Sieburth makes an important point, even if he veers away from it to deride the physiologies. Indeed, the physiologies not only imitate each other but also borrow from the whole field of 19th century cultural production. Robert Macaire is the product of numerous authors working within numerous genres: playwrights like Lemaître, caricaturists like Daumier, and writers and editors like Philipon and Rousseau. As has been adumbrated above, the physiologies were not reportorial or self-contained accounts of the city that somehow fell short. They were, as their narrative and pictorial interactivity and self-mocking humor suggest, more than mere representations of the urban environment. Physiologies were read, I suggest, not primarily to type "anonymous *passantes* in the street" but as dialogic texts for city dwellers. They did not act as guides to Paris proper so much as they created a self-styled and illusory version of the city. This nevertheless provided an important set of common

cultural figures with which to navigate the *texts* of the city and also its *readers*. Robert Macaire, after all, "l'expression de notre siècle," is derived from a fictional play. Rousseau, in *La Physiologie du Robert Macaire*, contrasts a great man under the reign of Louis XIV, Molière, with the great man of this century, Robert Macaire. Panoramic literature, here, does respond to the symbolic flux of the city, but it does so by self-consciously "re-writing" it as one text among many. Its enshrinement of Robert Macaire over Molière is partly satirical but also revealing: printed texts, the "representations" of history, had become more important and more pervasive than the "real thing." Robert Macaire, as such, becomes representative not just of society but of panoramic literature — a character to be recognized in journals or physiologies or plays.

Sieburth cites a passage from the *Physiologie des physiologies* in which the narrator bemoans these 'damn physiologies!' "Do you know what is going to happen because of them in just a little while," he continues, "everybody will look alike. A cobbler will recite verse like a poet. A prostitute will smile like a lady. Even the grocer will be witty toward his customers." Sieburth finds this ironic. Whether feigned or not, though, the narrator's concern over the mixing and blurring of types precisely mimics the structure and content of panoramic literature. The street copies its so-called parody in the ultimate inversion of urban representation. These "damned physiologies" have created an eager audience of cultural connoisseurs and readers. The fact that "even the grocer will be witty" to his customers attests to panoramic literature's wide accessibility as a cultural primer for 19th century Parisians.

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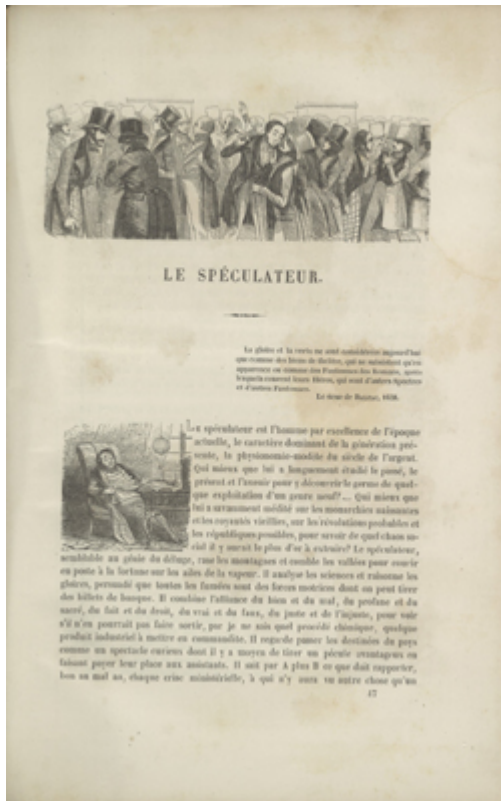
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## **Appendix**



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