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Stiénon, Valérie. *La Littérature des Physiologies. Sociopoétique d'un genre panoramique (1830-1845)*. Études romantiques et dix-neuviémistes 26. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012. Pp. 354. ISBN: 978-2-8124-0613-3

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Emblematic of their era, *physiologies*—small-format (in-18° or in-32°) and humorous books on types written and illustrated by artists active in the world of journalism—developed in the 1820s, proliferated in the 1840s, and faded from view by the 1850s. Renewed interest in the study of *physiologies* was spurred by Walter Benjamin's references to them in his writings on Charles Baudelaire. Subsequent articles by Richard Sieburth (1985) and Margaret Cohen (1995), and book-length studies by Nathalie Preiss (1999) and Martina Lauster (2007) fleshed out the significance of these works to nineteenth-century French literature and culture. Lately, attention to the history of the press, as well as book history, word-images studies, and text technologies have renewed scholarly interest in *physiologies*. Stiénon's study is a valuable book-length examination of these works in both their sociological and literary dimensions. She combines an investigation into their generic cohesion and structural principals too often dismissed as a paraliterary genre, with nuanced textual readings of individual, little-known *physiologies*, and their authors' stylistic, thematic, and pragmatic choices.

Seven chapters plus an introduction and conclusion (but alas no comprehensive index) creatively organize with one-word titles the clearly-argued but dense treatment of her subject in *La Littérature des Physiologies*. The first chapter, "Contextualisation," examines *physiologies'* connections to scientific, literary, and journalistic discourses, whereas the second chapter "Conceptualisation" questions their central and privileged relationship to "panoramic literature" as defined by Benjamin. Such a move tends, Stiénon argues, to obscure practices other than the panoramic at work in *physiologies* as a genre. Building on Lauster's critique of Benjamin (2007), Stiénon argues against a conception of *physiologies* as reassuring and facile, and undertakes an analysis of these texts' complex negotiations of sociological and scientific expertise. In "Médiations," chapter three, the production and circulation of *physiologies*, including the role of editors (Aubert and Curmer), of illustrators (Gavarni and Daumier), and of the educated bourgeois readership (often interpellated in the text), are analyzed to explain how and why they were marginalized. Her analysis foregrounds the pragmatic context wherein the *mise en abyme* of *physiologies'* reception turns the reader into the writer's accomplice. *Physiologies* are compared to various alternative formats such as encyclopedias, albums, and keepsakes, but the latter are not discussed at length.

The next three chapters were to my mind the most stimulating. "Configurations" examines the textual characteristics of the genre with an emphasis on the self-reflexive treatment of editorial practices and reception in *physiologies*. Prefaces, for instance, are displaced and used deceptively; menus or account ledgers are included; taxonomy is comically exaggerated; and attention is drawn to the act of reading *physiologies*. The pinnacle of metadiscourse is surely reached with *La Physiologie des physiologies*. According to Stiénon, the proliferation of types and taxonomies serves not only as humorous vulgarizations of science, but creates "distance à l'égard de tout savoir un peu trop normatif et de toute institution de parole menaçant de se figer en principes sentencieux" (133). In chapter five, "Affiliations," Stiénon turns her attention to the social conditions that produced and the collaborative networks that sustained the authors who wrote *physiologies*. Here, the links between journalism, theater, the *feuilleton*, and political pamphleteering are explored, and the solidarity and complicity among these "physiologists" emphasized. Louis Huart, the best known physiologist, credited with the invention of the genre, was, for example, journalist at *Le Charivari*, editor of *La Caricature*, and author of six *physiologies*. Few women participated in this genre (Sophie Gay being a notable exception), though many female types (such as Huart's *grisette*) inspired *physiologies*. These writers frequently referred to each other's works, such that intertextuality and autopastiche are *pistes de lecture* worth pursuing. Indeed, one of the lessons learned from Stiénon's emphasis on the collective nature of the genre is that too many academic studies isolate *physiologies* from the vast network in which Stiénon productively situates them in

La Littérature des Physiologies, as well as in her 2012 issue of the journal *Interférences littéraires*, entitled *Croqués par eux-mêmes. La société à l'épreuve du panoramique*.

The uses of humor to react and critique topical subjects or expert opinion, combined with the processes by which the physiologists perform their complex, often-pseudonymous, and part-collective identities (“scénographies auctoriales”) are taken up in chapter six, “Expressions.” Self-derision and humor—as both historically contextualized and aesthetically charged tools—created solidarity among the physiologists and shored up their precarious status in the literary field. The seventh chapter, “Reconfigurations,” argues that *physiologies* were not unmediated reflections of the era but rather proto-sociologies that strived for a new participatory and inquisitive rapport with scientific discourse. Throughout, Stiénon makes an original and significant contribution to the understanding of *physiologies* by accentuating their combination of incisive social critique and satire, and playful metadiscourse.

With her joint emphasis on context and poetics, Stiénon’s study brings to the fore *physiologies*’ role in the development of modernity as prefiguration of avant-garde parody, and as self-conscious critique of the power in/of discourse. *La Littérature des Physiologies* will be invaluable for scholars working in the history of journalism, book history, popular culture, and nineteenth-century French cultural studies.