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NOT A NOVEL AT ALL, BUT SIMPLY A CATALOGUE OF THINGS: THE DEHUMANIZATION OF THE NOVEL IN PETR BOBORYKIN'S *KITAI-GOROD*

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Abstract

This article examines the novel *Kitai-Gorod* (1882), a key text in the *oeuvre* of the notoriously prolific, much lampooned, and now little read writer Petr Dmitrievich Boborykin (1836–1921). Rather than seeing this novel as a representative example of Boborykin's consistent failure to write well, the article focuses on what is distinctive about its technique: the massive descriptions of commercial street traffic that introduce the novel's plot seem to be something wholly new in Russian literature. Boborykin's narratorial disposition, frequently described by his detractors as abnormally exuberant, is understood here as a formal effect of the representational challenges posed by this endless array of commodities streaming into Moscow from all corners of the world. As presented here, *Kitai-Gorod* emerges as a sign that the loosening of realist conventions and the emergence of unprecedented representational problems at the turn of the twentieth century brought about a period of extraordinary technical and formal experimentation that remains to be rediscovered.

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Keywords: Petr Boborykin; Russian literary realism; Affect; Capitalism; Novelistic description

On the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday in 1911, Petr Dmitrievich Boborykin was honored in the popular weekly magazine *Niva* (*Grainfield*) with a retrospective article about his long and fruitful career in Russian *belles lettres*. “Немного в русской литературной семье как прошлого, так и настоящего таких исключительных счастливых, каким является Петр Дмитриевич Боборыкин. Кажется, чего только не дал Бог знаменитому русскому писателю!” (“There are few members of the Russian literary family, whether now or in the past, who have been as exceptionally lucky as Petr Dmitrievich Boborykin. What didn’t God grant to the famous Russian writer?”; *Niva*, 1911, p. 647). It is true that the highly educated, well-travelled, and prolific writer had a remarkable career, but his good fortune evidently did not extend to his reputation, to which literary history has not been kind. For much of that career, Boborykin bore mockery and derision from fellow writers and critics that was intense even by the standards of nineteenth-century Russian public discourse. The immense productivity of this publisher, novelist, journalist, dramaturge, theater critic and pedagogue, literary historian, public lecturer, essayist, and memoirist itself provoked a reaction in many contemporaries bordering on revulsion. Though distinguished (the Boborykin family traced its lineage back to the thirteenth century), Boborykin’s name was infelicitous: it evokes the words “*bob*” (literally “bean”, but proverbially “nonsense”) and “*ryk*” (“roar”), and so it inspired the verb *boborykat’*, meaning to write quickly and badly (McNair, 1994, p. 114). He was insulted in print – Dostoevsky’s ‘Bobok’ may have taken its title from one of the writer’s pseudonyms, Pierre Bobo (Saraskina, 1998; McNair, 2006) – and ridiculed in private correspondence. Ivan Turgenev (1986, vol. 2, p. 306), writing near the end of his life to Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, complained, “Я легко могу представить его на развалинах мира, строчащего роман, в котором будут воспроизведены самые последние ‘веяния’ погибающей земли [...] Посмотрите, он кончит тем, что будет воссоздавать жизненные факты за пять минут до их рождения!” (“I can easily imagine him atop the ruins of the world, dashing off a novel that will reproduce the very latest ‘currents’ of the dying earth [...] Look, he’ll end up recreating the facts of real life five minutes before their emergence!”). This image of Boborykin as a pathologically productive writer enthusiastically generating endless masses of pointlessly up-to-the-minute literary impressions was widely shared.

This cruel remark came at a time when Saltykov-Shchedrin’s longtime working relationship with Boborykin had recently come to an end. For

about ten years, from the early 1870s to the early 1880s, *Otechestvennye zapiski* (*National Annals*), where Saltykov-Shchedrin was literature editor (and, after Nikolai Nekrasov's death in 1878, general co-editor with Nikolai Mikhailovsky), relied on Boborykin's steady output of fiction and reporting to fill its issues (see, for example, Saltykov-Shchedrin, 1965–1977, vol. 19, bk. 1, p. 164). It was an awkward match: the leading journal of the *narodniki* regularly published work by a writer known for his ideological indifference and lack of any “общий принцип” (“common principle”), the absence of which allowed him to publish in periodicals all across the ideological spectrum (Protopopov, 1892, p. 160). Already in 1868, before their collaboration had begun, Saltykov-Shchedrin lampooned Boborykin's scandalous novel *Zhertva vecherniaia* (*The Evening Sacrifice*) for its prurient attention to “нимфомания и приапизм” (“nymphomania and priapism”; Saltykov-Shchedrin, 1965–1977, vol. 9, p. 38). In late 1882, Boborykin approached his editor with a large novel about the rise of the Moscow merchantry to economic and cultural dominance. Saltykov-Shchedrin rejected it. At an editorial meeting, a memoirist recalls him remarking, “Да что вы, батенька, какой же это роман! Это просто-напросто *каталог вещей*, вовсе не роман! У нас, слава богу, не магазин!!” (“Come on, man, what sort of novel is this! This is simply a *catalogue of things*, and not a novel at all! Thank God we are not a store!!”; quoted in Shcheglov, 1975, p. 306).

Kitai-Gorod was published soon after, in *Vestnik Evropy* (*The Herald of Europe*), where it fit the editor Mikhail Stasulevich's interest in “photographic depictions of contemporary human life” (Fedyashin, 2012, p. 165). The novel's reputation as an accurate, if not particularly insightful, reproduction of the social and economic life of 1880s Moscow has not changed in the ensuing century and a half. It has generally been regarded as Boborykin's most successful work, and the literary historian and bibliographer Semen Vengerov praised its depiction of the Moscow business class as something completely new in Russian literature (Vengerov, 1895, p. 233). A century later, the literary scholar Vasilii Kuleshov (1986, p. 189) offered a relatively generous assessment – in *Kitai-Gorod*, he writes: “впервые предстал облик Москвы купеческой, дворянской, капиталистической, мануфактурной, биржевой, канцелярской, фабричной, заводской, богатой и нищей, деловой и разгульной. Сведены в единое целое все эти реалии старого и нового в Москве” (“for the first time, there emerged the image of the Moscow of merchants, nobles, capitalism, manufactures, the stock exchange, chancelleries, factories, plants, Moscow poor and rich, businesslike and carousing. All these realities, the old and the new in Moscow, are united in a single whole”). It is, then, at best, a colorful glimpse into a vanished pre-revolutionary world, rendered vivid by its author's indefatigable search for

novel impressions and precise rendering of contemporary details, but lacking in the synthesizing power through which the classics of nineteenth-century Russian realism achieved profound insights into their changing society.

Indeed, it is probably the common view of *Kitai-Gorod* as an informative and apolitical description of daily life that granted it a second life in the Soviet period, during which it appeared in five different editions intended for a mass audience. Meanwhile, the author's reputation evolved from that of a “выразител[ь] интересов и настроений просвещенной буржуазии” (“mouthpiece for the interests and inclinations of the enlightened bourgeoisie”) during the Stalin period (Kubikov, 1930) to a representative, in later Soviet decades, of the amorphous mass of minor imitative naturalists who emerged during the decline of the realist novel at the end of the nineteenth century. Besides these Soviet editions, *Kitai-Gorod* appeared in at least two pre-revolutionary editions and at least one post-Soviet one, meaning that this novel has been published far more extensively than any of Boborykin's other works. Despite its relative popularity, *Kitai-Gorod* remains little studied, whether in the context of Russian realism or of Boborykin's vast and virtually unexplored individual corpus. Perhaps it seems to many readers that there is not much to say about this accumulation of colorful details loosely glued together by a tenuous plot.

Boborykin claimed in an interview to have published 125 novels (quoted in Shcheblykin, 2002, p. 99). The vast majority of these have never been republished, and most of the work that appeared in Boborykin's collected writings (two separate twelve-volume editions, published in 1886 and 1897) has not been republished since the nineteenth century. Boborykin was rarely celebrated as a good writer. He was, however, widely known and read, and his steady output over the decades attracted substantial critical attention. Like some other, arguably more artistically gifted contemporaries, like Aleksei Pisemskii and Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia (both examined in other essays in this special issue), he sank into obscurity and remains little-read and little-known today. A handful of scholars, notably Kirsten Blanck, Sergei Chuprinin, A.M. Linin, John McNair, Anton Shcheblykin, and Ewa Sławęcka, have focused their attention on Boborykin's work and legacy. In general, as both a writer of fiction and as a broader participant in late-imperial public discourse in the capacities of essayist, journalist, and critic, Boborykin has been examined as part of larger trends, such as naturalist theory and practice (Sławęcka, 1981; Blanck, 1990), the powerful impact of Zola's writing on Russian public culture (McNair, 2000), or fin-de-siècle narratives of degeneration (Nikolozzi [Nicolosi], 2019). The consensus is that he was not a particularly innovative writer and that he drew much from the work of others, particularly Zola. Recently, Susan Layton has inquired in a different direction, suggesting

that Boborykin's novel *Tiaga*, published just before *Anna Karenina* in the same journal (*Russkii vestnik* [*The Russian Herald*]), bears a number of notable similarities to Tolstoy's novel and might plausibly have influenced him (Layton, 2022, pp. 392–410).

A few scholars have examined Boborykin's works for their distinctive formal features, rather than as one of many fungible instances subsumed by the naturalist paradigm. In Linin's (1935, pp. 109, 113) view, Boborykin's manner of writing exemplifies the bourgeois attitude to life and work: "Он всегда спешит. [...] Купчий, неутомимый, изумительно работоспособный, он всегда бодр, энергичен, жизнерадостен. [...] Боборыкин замечателен именно как *своеобразный тип писателя, созданного буржуазной культурой*" ("He is always in a hurry [...] Mercantile, indefatigable, capable of astonishing amounts of work, he is always vigorous, energetic, exuberant. [...] Boborykin is remarkable precisely as a *distinctive type of writer generated by bourgeois culture*"; italics in the original). Linin identifies a distinctive mood, a particular affective disposition in Boborykin's authorial attitude toward his material that is not a matter of intention so much as a direct consequence of Boborykin's status as a function of bourgeois culture. We will return to this distinctive aspect of Boborykin's work in the discussion of *Kitai-Gorod* below. Indeed, this vivaciousness is so characteristic of Boborykin that Vengerov (1895, p. 211, n. 1) credits him with coining the word *zhizneradostnyi* ("full of the joy of life") in his novel *Polzhizni* (*Half a Lifetime*, 1873).¹

Chuprinin (1993, p. 13) characterizes Boborykin's entire decades-long project as "нечто похожее на иллюстрированную газету или, лучше, на ежегодно обновляющийся многотомный беллетризированный энциклопедический словарь" ("something resembling an illustrated newspaper, or, better, an annually updated, multi-volume novelized encyclopedic dictionary"). According to Shcheblykin (2002, p. 254), who has offered the most sustained examination of Boborykin's fictional works, Boborykin had to invent a new novelistic form, less dependent on the subjectivity of well-defined characters, in order to accommodate social transformations of such complexity that "выявление их закономерностей не могло быть осуществлено по какой-то одной жизненной линии" ("the elucidation of their laws could not be accomplished through the course of any individual life"). Linin, Chuprinin, and Shcheblykin all suggest that Boborykin's novels were particularly responsive to contemporary social developments on the level of their form. Written as rapidly as possible by a writer facing lifelong financial constraints (Boborykin was burdened with debts from his time as editor of *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* [*Library for Reading*] between 1862 and its demise in 1865), these were manifestly not works composed in detachment and repose. They derive some of their contemporaneity from Boborykin's own reporting

on the latest cultural and social developments and express his theoretical and critical views, which attempted to synthesize scientific precision with artistic freedom (Blanck, 1990, p. 97).

Boborykin's avowed purpose in writing *Kitai-Gorod* was to demonstrate the obsolescence of the conventional literary image of the Russian merchant, which had crystalized in the plays of Aleksandr Ostrovskii: "Центральный тип смехотворного 'Кита Китыча' уже сошел со сцены. Надо было совсем иначе относиться к московской буржуазии. А автор *Свои люди – сочтемся!* не желал изменять своему основному типу обличительного комика, трактовавшего все еще по-старому своих купцов" ("The central type, the ridiculous 'Kit Kitych', had already departed the stage. A completely different attitude toward the Moscow bourgeoisie was needed. But the author of *Svoi liudi – sochtemsia!* [*It's a Family Affair – We'll Settle it Ourselves*] did not want to betray his principle role, the comedian of exposés who interpreted his merchants in the old way"; Boborykin, 1965, vol. 1, p. 295). Instead, his novel was meant to be a reliable "художественн[ое] преддверие к 'познанию старой столицы'" ("literary threshold to 'knowledge of the Old Capital'"; cited in Mudrov, 1926, p. 143). This was not a matter of bare reportage however; Boborykin composed his novel carefully, with a structure that alternated descriptive sections with action (cited in Mudrov, 1926, p. 143).

In this article, I assume that *Kitai-Gorod* deserves careful examination and approach it as a case study in the transformation of the realist novel in the final decades of the nineteenth century. I take my cue from Margaret Cohen's (1999, p. 25) observation, apropos the now mostly forgotten sentimental novels that dominated French literature before the rise of Balzac and Stendhal around 1830, that "too often, noncanonical texts are fragments of lost solutions or answers to questions we no longer hear." My hypothesis is that criticisms frequently aimed at Boborykin's novels (and at *Kitai-Gorod* in particular) – their formlessness, their superabundance of arbitrary detail, their weak characters and vague plots, the impossibility of figuring out where the author stands in relation to the frequently polarizing social phenomena described in them – are meaningful developments in the history of the novel worth studying in their own right.² Bad works of art can be illuminating in the particulars of their badness. Perhaps it has proven so difficult to make sense of Boborykin's work because it resists the kinds of reading that scholars of Russian literature have traditionally employed and that the canonical works of Russian realism encourage. They feature little of the epistemically fruitful generalization, the depth psychology, or the tone of moral seriousness often associated with Russian literature. The frequently noted weakness of Boborykin's characters and the overwhelming accumulation of details in his works displace the human from the center of the story, in a striking departure from the humanism of the

mainstream literary tradition. The novels themselves, seemingly arbitrary in their construction and constantly succeeded by new publications, frustrate the predominant scholarly approach of treating each separate work as an integral whole.

My proposal is therefore to treat the author's inability to control his material as a significant marker of a development in the history of literary representation rather than as a failure of individual skill. Drawing on Boborykin's own literary criticism and journalism, as well as contemporary reactions to *Kitai-Gorod*, I argue that this novel registers the disintegration of those organizing models of the world that had made the classic Russian realist novel possible, and that this is most evident in the novel's seemingly autonomous descriptions. Decades before such pronouncements as Osip Mandel'shtam's (1990, p. 203) 'Konets romana', which claims that "дальнейшая судьба романа будет не чем иным, как [...] катастрофической гибелью биографии" ("the subsequent fate of the novel will be no other than [...] the catastrophic death of biography"), *Kitai-Gorod* demonstrated that the modern commercial city could not be comprehended by a narrative on the human scale. To the extent that *Kitai-Gorod* is a novel, its primary object of representation is a city, not the people whose lives unfold within it – something that has few, if any precedents in the Russian literary tradition. No character can take it all in, the way that Rastignac surveys Paris from a height at the end of Balzac's (1951, p. 304) *Père Goriot*, nor is this the claustrophobic St Petersburg of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (*Crime and Punishment*), where no viewpoint can fully conjoin the capital of palaces and ministries and the city of slums. In *Kitai-Gorod*, as characters weaken, description intensifies, and this description therefore does not belong to any unified point of view. It requires a virtual observer, untethered to the human body with its physical limitations. Seen in this light, Boborykin's commonly noted weaknesses as a writer enabled him to write about something as vast and amorphous as the transformation of Moscow into a hub of global commerce. Crucially, what he gives us is not a synthetic, bird's-eye view of this process, but rather, a phenomenological immersion in it, a glimpse of what it is like to be swept away by physically overpowering historical change.

The Novel as a "Catalogue of Things"

Instead of seeking to penetrate into the deep meaning of contemporary life, Boborykin's works spread over its surface, accumulating as much information as possible. Indeed, Boborykin understood his own literary project as developing "экстенсивно, а не интенсивно" ("extensively, not intensively"; italics in the original; quoted in Mudrov, 1927, p. 15). *Kitai-Gorod*, described by a contemporary as "художественная физиология московского Мам-

мона” (“an artistic physiology of Muscovite Mammon”), amply demonstrates the distinctiveness of this new kind of novel (Mikhnevich, 1884, p. 19). Whether called a naturalist novel or, following Boborykin’s (1876) own terminology, a “реальный роман” (“real novel”), *Kitai-Gorod* is precisely not a work of *critical* realism. Through such procedures as typification and the careful curation of epistemically fruitful details, the classic realist novel, as contemporaries tended to understand it, labored to let the essence of reality shine through mundane appearances, much as G.W.F. Hegel (1975, vol. 1, pp. 165–166) described the work carried out by Dutch Golden Age painting in his *Lectures on Fine Art*:

In the *case* of the human form, for instance, the artist does not proceed, as may be supposed, like a restorer of old paintings who even in the newly painted places reproduces the cracks which, owing to the splitting of the varnish and the paint, have covered all the other older parts of the canvas with a sort of network. On the contrary, the portrait painter will omit folds of skin and, still more, freckles, pimples, pock-marks, warts, etc. [...] For in all this there is little or nothing of the spirit, and the expression of the spiritual is the essential thing in the human form. (Emphasis in the original.)

This was the reason that the metaphor of “daguerreotyping” – the mindless photographic reproduction of reality – was so frequently employed as a criticism of writers who were not sufficiently selective toward their material.³ *Kitai-Gorod* departs from this paradigm. Instead, it seeks immersion in the immediate sensuous experience of the present and tends to avoid generalization. Mediating categories like plot, character, narratorial or authorial judgement dissolve in order to bring the reader closer to the feel of the contemporary moment. The bodily experience of this presentness – expressed as the *zhizneradostnost’* condescendingly attributed to Boborykin by his contemporaries – is a crucial part of this procedure. Boborykin’s novel mobilizes and organizes affect in a distinctly different way from its canonical predecessors.

Kitai-Gorod is a novel about the economic transformation of Moscow, about the “медовый месяц российского капитализма” (“honeymoon of Russian capitalism”; Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, 1910, p. 139). It brings the reader into an emergent world crowded with commodities and populated by people who live to make money. In both Russian literature and elsewhere, this process was often represented as a catastrophe, or at least with a substantial allowance for the grief felt at the loss of social relations and systems of value that cannot survive in the capitalist world. But *Kitai-Gorod* is uncommonly optimistic about these changes. The primary mode of this optimism’s expression is not,

as may be expected, narrative. Although the ending of the novel does suggest a bright future for Russia, this future is disconnected from the plot. All that its erstwhile protagonist, Andrei Paltusov, manages to do is commit mild-to-moderate embezzlement in the service of a vague idea and escape serious punishment. This mediocrity is characteristic of Paltusov; he has a great deal of energy, but he is not the “ростовщик с поэзией” (“usurer with poetry”) that Dostoevsky (1972-1990, vol. 9, p. 142) imagined in the drafts to *Idiot*. Nor does he measure up to titanically ambitious characters like Balzac’s Rastignac or Zola’s Saccard, whose pursuit of power embodies the dynamics of an entire era.⁴ Paltusov’s rise and fall do not structure the narrative of the novel, which consists of innumerable episodes teeming with characters not closely connected to his plotline. In general, the novel’s characters seem rather cold and lifeless, an observation curiously hinted at by their piscine names (Paltusov – halibut, Krasnoperiy – rudd, Osetrov – sturgeon).⁵ The characters are less individuals than embodied social forces, and the focus throughout the book is on the description of the world that these social forces are making.

To be sure, the waning of character is a feature widely observed across European novels toward the later stages of realism. Important for my argument is how Fredric Jameson (2013, pp. 28, 29) has linked this process to a new representational emphasis (if not to say discovery) of affect – to the process, captured at a crucial stage in the development and decomposition of realism, by which “the isolated body begins to know more global waves of generalized sensations”, which are distinct from the familiar “named emotions” in many ways, including in their resistance to meaning. In Boborykin’s case, the result of the diminishment of character and the narrative in which characters develop is that descriptions – of objects, of places, and, most of all, of the bustling streets of Moscow’s merchant neighborhood – displace all other elements of novelistic construction to the periphery. Decades after Saltykov-Shchedrin’s caustic remark about Boborykin’s novel, Nikolai Mikhailovskii made a similar observation: the author heaps up disorganized images and scenes “как товар в мебельной лавке Гостиного двора” (“like the wares in a Gostinyi Dvor furniture shop”; Mikhailovskii, 1895, p. 111). In these critics’ view, there is an odd inertness about this novel, despite its subject matter; no unifying idea cuts across the accumulated facts to elucidate their deeper meaning.

One source of this abundant information is Boborykin’s own reporting about Moscow life. About a year before the serialization of *Kitai-Gorod* began, Boborykin published a series of ‘Pis’mo o Moskve’ (‘Letters about Moscow’), also in *Vestnik Evropy*. These letters describe the distinct character of Moscow and its recent transformation into a commercial and cultural center of the Russian Empire. The neighborhood of Kitai-Gorod plays a central role in the city’s life:

Это – громадный мир, приемник многомиллионной производительности, проявившей собой все яркие свойства великорусского ума, сметки, мышечной и нервной энергии. На исследование этого приемника надо положить долгие годы. Он-то впоследствии и выльется в особого рода столицу все-русской промышленности и торговли, как Нью-Йорк стал по этой части столицей Американских Штатов.

(This is a vast world, receiving the productivity of many millions of people, expressing all the prominent qualities of the Great Russian mind, its cleverness and the energy of its muscles and nerves. The study of this receiver would take many years. It will eventually emerge as a particular kind of capital of all-Russian industry and trade, like New York became in this sense the capital of the American States.) (Boborykin, 2000, p. 261)

The rise of the Kitai-Gorod district, its emergence as the commercial heart of the whole empire, is what Boborykin's novel will ostensibly be about.

The letters also describe the transformation of the Moscow merchantry into a new cultural elite, which coincides with the decline of the nobility: “Мануфактура, амбар, банк и лавка все больше и больше поднимали голову не в умственной жизни, но в жизни городской, по своему материальному, а затем и общественному влиянию” (“The factory, the warehouse, the bank, and the shop raised their heads, not in intellectual life, but in the life of the city, thanks to their material and, consequently, social influence”; Boborykin, 2000, p. 262). It is clear that the journalistic account of Moscow life provides some of the novel's structure, for example the relationship between declining nobility and ascendant merchantry. Boborykin devotes a large part of his ‘Letters’ to the description of an ostensibly heretofore unknown social group – merchants who are making strides in intellectual and cultural development, casting off the costume and mores of the traditional merchantry, and founding cultural institutions with their wealth. The story of these new, educated, merchants will form a significant strand of the novel, where, however, they are largely represented by women and young people rather than rich male patrons of the arts.

Journalistic technique also provides some of the novel's narrative devices. This is apparent at times when the third-person narration is interrupted by the narrator addressing “you”, such as this: “За несколько шагов до квасной лавки обдаст вас сырой свежестью погреба, и ягодные газы начинают вас щекотать в ноздрях (“a few steps before you reach the shop selling *kvas*, you will feel the damp freshness of the cellar, and berry-flavored gasses will start to tickle your nostrils”; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 37). Immediately preceding this passage, a character had been reminiscing about his visits to

this shop, but the source of the passage's perspective is ambiguous. With this sudden intrusion of the second-person plural, it seems as if the narrator of an immersive piece of travel writing is recalling his own visit and taking the reader along.

The narrative of declining nobility and ascendant merchantry is incorporated into the novel with familiar naturalist techniques and shaped by a degeneration narrative. At a ball organized by a merchant's wife,

Свежие лица, стройные или пышные бюсты резко отличали купеческие семейства. Уж не в первый раз замечал это Палтусов. К Рогожиным ездило и много дворянок. У тех попадались больше худых, сухих талий, слишком длинных шей. Лица были нервнее, но неправильнее, с некрасивыми носами. Туалеты купчих решительно убивали дворянские.

(The fresh faces, the slender or voluptuous busts, sharply distinguished the merchant families. Paltusov noticed this, not for the first time. Many noblewomen also came to the Rogozhins. Those more often had thin, dry waists, excessively long necks. Their faces were more expressive, but less symmetrical, with unattractive noses. The merchants' toilettes were gaining decisive ascendancy over those of the nobles.) (Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 328)

The decline of the nobility even extends to their physical condition. The Dolgushin family is ostensibly representative of the urban nobility circa 1880: the mother is terminally ill and addicted to morphine; the father, a retired general, spends his time on pointless financial schemes and refuses a job offer as supervisor in a tobacco factory. Of the family's three children, the two sons are depraved gamblers, while the daughter, Tasia, the only member of the family with the potential for a future, dreams of becoming an actress – a career which she is finally able to pursue only because she marries the rising young merchant and soon-to-be factory director Rubtsov, who, being more open-minded than a nobleman, will likely accept this not altogether respectable occupation for his future wife.

The story of Tasia and Rubtsov, as well as other members of the younger generation of their respective classes, points to an anticipated unification of the two classes. On the other hand, Paltusov, the novel's ostensible protagonist, is an enterprising nobleman who sets out to defend the fortunes of his estate and declares it his mission to “бороться с купеческой мошной” (“fight the merchant moneybag”; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 392). However, at the end of the novel, he is on course to marry a rich merchant's widow. From the merchant

side, the widow of a major businessman identifies herself as a “дворянящаяся мещанка” (“a bourgeois woman affecting gentry manners”) and seeks to overcome the cultural divide between merchants and nobles (Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 135). Through this (occasionally literal) marriage of the estates, Boborykin suggests that new social groupings are possible beyond the hereditary confines of the earlier noble and merchant identities. As Nikolozi [Nicolosi] (2019) has shown, degeneration is a powerful narrative-generating device. However, in *Kitai-Gorod* the degeneration narrative is one of several narrative strands that seem insufficient to unify the novel’s descriptions.

Kitai-Gorod* and *Au Bonheur des Dames

Given Boborykin’s reputation as an imitator of Zola, it would be reasonable to assume that *Kitai-Gorod* is a derivative work, perhaps inspired by *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*The Ladies’ Paradise*), a novel set in the new type of Parisian department store that emerged in the 1860s. Zola’s book teems with commodities and has a great deal to say about the fascination that the sight of consumer goods can elicit in the shopper. But Boborykin’s novel preceded Zola’s: *Kitai-Gorod* was published in the first five months of 1882, while *Au Bonheur des Dames* was serialized in the journal *Gil Blas* between December 1882 and March 1883, after which it appeared as a separate volume.⁶ Turgenev encouraged Zola to have the book translated almost simultaneously with its serialization, and it was published in Russian in 1883 as a supplement to the journal *Budil’nik* (*The Alarm Clock*).⁷ Boborykin then published a lengthy review of Zola’s novel and a more general discussion of his work in the November and December 1883 issues of the journal *Nabliudatel’* (*The Observer*). Boborykin’s discussion of Zola’s novel makes implicit comparisons to his own recently published *Kitai-Gorod*.

In this remarkable review, Boborykin draws attention to the link between the description of consumer goods and the intensity of the consumer experience. Anticipating Rachel Bowlby’s (1985, pp. 66–80) examination of the interplay of “dream and machine”, of eroticized consumerism and rational planning in Gustave’s department store, Boborykin describes the novel as “поэма [...] дающая нам чувствовать, что такое женская страсть к наряду, к моде [...] в особенности к новизне. И все эти инстинкты женщины сделались рычагом новой торговли; ими сумели воспользоваться те новаторы, которые создали эти колоссальные каравансарай парижской модной торговли” (“a poem [...] allowing us to experience woman’s passion for clothes, for fashion [...] especially for novelty. And all these women’s instincts have become the lever of a new business; they have been utilized by those innovators who have created these colossal caravanserais of the Parisian

fashion trade”; Boborykin, 1883, p. 219). Boborykin particularly marvels at Zola’s achievement in writing a novel whose true protagonist is a department store:

И как легко человеку с могучим талантом увлечь нас историей магазина, описаниями, картинами модных *эталажей*, сделать из товаров, из прозы торгашества завлекательный роман, дающий нам не только художественные впечатления, но интересующий нас, точно будто бы дело шло о каком-нибудь романическом герое. Никогда еще в беллетристике жизнь целого предприятия, состоящего из цепи денежных расчетов, не была так слита с историей любви, как в этом романе.

(How easily can a person of great talent engross us in the story of a store, in descriptions, pictures of fashionable shop windows, to make an engrossing novel out of merchandise, out of the prose of mere trade, a novel that offers us not only artistic impressions, but also interests us, just as if the matter concerned some novelistic hero. Never before in *belles lettres* has the life of a whole business, consisting of chains of monetary calculations, been so conjoined with a love story as in this novel.) (Boborykin, 1883, p. 220)

Boborykin notes, somewhat coyly, that Zola’s only predecessor in this respect might be the German realist Gustav Freytag and his novel *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit*, 1855). But *Kitai-Gorod* is very much a novel in which “деловой торговый интерес играл главную роль” (“the interests of practical trade played the main role”; Boborykin, 1883, pp. 219–220). Boborykin insists repeatedly that the story of Gustave and Denise forms a large part of the novel’s interest, but that it is intimately related to the story of the store, which is not mere background for the love story. This new relationship between characters and their setting supersedes that older novelistic technique, whose practitioners “слишком много занимались отдельными личностями, их психологией и романическими приключениями” (“were too concerned with individual personalities, their psychologies and novelistic adventures”; Boborykin, 1883, p. 220). This critique of the psychological novel recalls Shcheblykin’s (2002, p. 182) observation that in *Kitai-Gorod* characters are not developed in depth; rather, the author chooses characters who are distinguished by “контактностью с окружающей средой, умением понять ее, влиться в нее, а в иных случаях и подчинить своим личным интересам” (“contact with their environment, the ability to understand it, enter into it, and in some cases to utilize it for their personal interests”). In Boborykin’s own novel even more than in Zola’s, characters will become a pretext for bringing that material environment into view.

Especially noteworthy for Boborykin are the descriptions in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. He observes that:

рядом с новизной этого оттенка есть и большее совершенство формы, вызванное не столько детальной отделкой [...] сколько яркостью общего колорита, нервностью тона, способностью и умением заинтересовать читателя всеми этими неодушевленными вещам, представляющими собою на житейский взгляд ничто иное, как пестрый базар всякой дорогой и дешевой рухляди.

(Alongside the novelty of this accent there is a greater perfection of form, which is brought about not so much by a meticulous finish [...] as by the vividness of the overall coloring, the nervous energy of the tone, the ability and skill to interest the reader in all these inanimate things which, from an everyday point of view are nothing more than a motley bazar of all manner of expensive and cheap bric-a-brac.) (Boborykin, 1883, p. 221)

Working against the jaded “everyday point of view”, for which the department store goods are “all manner of expensive and cheap bric-a-brac”, Zola succeeds in imbuing these objects with “nervous energy”. It becomes clear that the method of description is particularly important to Boborykin. Far more than inert inventories of objects, the descriptive passages in *Au Bonheur des Dames* are points of particularly concentrated interest. Here, too, it seems that Boborykin is explaining his own priorities in *Kitai-Gorod* as much as analyzing what makes Zola’s novel so successful. The reviewer goes on: “Магазин, расширяющий свои дела, превращается под его пером в целый мир, где материал, изученный добросовестно, становится уже не голым инвентарем, а целым художественным зданием с необыкновенно гармоническим распределением частей и богатством творческого изобретения в малейших подробностях” (“The store, expanding its operations, becomes under his pen a whole world where the material, studied conscientiously, becomes not a bare inventory but a whole artistic edifice with an extraordinarily harmonious distribution of parts and a wealth of creative invention in the smallest details”; Boborykin, 1883, p. 222). These explanations for the success of Zola’s project seem especially pertinent to the descriptions in *Kitai-Gorod*. An effective presentation of a complex assemblage of objects has to offer the reader not just a list of things but a unifying feeling, characterized here by Boborykin as “яркость общего колорита” (“vividness of the overall coloring”) and “нервность тона” (“nervous energy of the tone”). It is clear from Boborykin’s analysis of the department store’s significance that the success of Zola’s project depends on

his successful communication of how the women feel when shopping there; that is, Zola has to convey the intensity of the experience. Even if the goal is maximal objectivity, the success of the project depends on the novelist's ability to capture and communicate the subjectively experienced effects of this consumer abundance. Only the successful representation of what it is like to be enraptured by the department store can capture what is historically significant about this phenomenon and avoid becoming a "bare inventory". It makes sense, then, that the flow of goods through the Moscow streets of Boborykin's novel will also be presented in a style that is anything but soberly objective. As important as the description of the traffic is the registration of the peculiar *joie de vivre* that emanates from this beating commercial heart of the empire.

If we follow the logic of Boborykin's argument, what is historically novel about the shopping experience is not specific to any particular person. Everyone who enters the department store will share in the same category of experiences induced by the new environment. If the main object of representation is this general experience, felt individually but common to all, then elaborated characters would limit the representational aims of the description. The feelings and sensations, belonging to no one in particular, have to be untethered from the necessarily individualized perspectives from which they are experienced. If anything, *Kitai-Gorod* goes farther in this regard than *Au Bonheur des Dames*. The characters are less developed, and whatever the possible explanation for this in the writer's limitations, it ends up augmenting what is distinctive about this work. Because the characters are so weak, the novel's massive descriptive passages are not focalized through them, but instead, come to the reader by an endlessly shifting series of viewpoints. The setting of *Kitai-Gorod* is also more dispersed than in Zola's novel: instead of a department store, there is the entire city of Moscow.

Exuberant Description

The comparisons of *Kitai-Gorod* to a store catalogue or a furniture warehouse by Saltykov-Shchedrin and Mikhailovsky make for cutting deflations of Boborykin's literary ambitions, but they are not altogether accurate. Leaving aside the possibility that these readers simply did not get very far in their reading, *Kitai-Gorod* likely produced such an impression in part because the episodic narrative, quite hard to follow on its own, is bookended by descriptive chapters that have no direct connection to its plot. At the start, before any of the novel's characters have been introduced, the reader encounters a three-page chapter taken up by a description of commercial traffic in the Kitai-Gorod neighborhood. The attention devoted to bales of cotton and crates of tea in

these pages seems too extensive and too enthusiastic to be mere scene-setting. As a device for introducing Paltusov, who is the first character to appear, it is excessive. In a sense, it does characterize him as a product of this milieu. But his subjectivity does not motivate the description. The perpetually hurrying businessman does not have time for this kind of observation. Although he loves Moscow and feels energized by its vitality, “мысль его не могла долго оставаться на художественной стороне предмета” (“his thoughts could not remain for long on the aesthetic side of any object”; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 20).

There are earlier models of chaotic urban energy in Russian literature. The opening pages of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* provide a vivid description of the stifling heat and dirt of St Petersburg in July, for example. As has often been noted, in Dostoevsky's novel the city and the protagonist are closely intertwined. As a consequence of the interpenetration of the setting and the protagonist's subjectivity, objects in the city take on a symbolic character. The narrator presents to us the things that Raskolnikov sees and leaves out what he does not. As a result, the imperial capital becomes a city of taverns and tenements rather than palaces and statues. In *Kitai-Gorod* the relationship between individual and milieu is unidirectional. Paltusov, with his determination to get rich at any cost, seems to emerge out of the atmosphere “where everything thirsts after profit, where it is not possible to live a day without selling and buying” (Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 8). Paltusov is just a tiny particle in the ceaseless churn of the city, and it is the motion of the streets and the less perceptible mechanisms of the economy they suggest that become the novel's main focus.

The novel's first words throw us into the middle of a busy square. All around, countless carts and wagons laden with the most variegated goods are streaming into the merchant quarter. The paragraphs that follow are prone to lists – of the motley line of shop signs and advertisements lit up by the midday sun, of produce on display in rows of bins, of the plodding commercial vehicles carrying goods and cabs and carriages darting between them, of cursing draymen and coach drivers. The sequential refocusing on different sets of objects suggests a concrete observer looking first at one thing and then at another. However, this is not, strictly speaking, a narrative. Although the various parts of the scene are not at a standstill, there is no discernible temporal trajectory, and we soon become aware that time has taken on a heterogeneous quality. An unfortunate woman who is stuck between two lanes of traffic also appears to be stuck in time: she drops her bag imperfectly – “Растерявшаяся покупательница, не добежав до другого тротуара, роняла картуз с чем-то съестным и громко ахала” (“A bewildered shopper, having failed to reach the other side of the street, was dropping her package

containing something edible and gasping loudly”; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p.7). The moment of her mishap here undergoes a strange temporal dilation as the woman, instantaneously observed, becomes part of the processual description. In contrast, when the narrator describes smells, these come to us as a sequence of perfective verbs, each given its own moment of experience: “то отдаст москательным товаром, то спиртом, то конфетами” (“one moment it smells like drysalts’ goods, then alcohol, then sweets”). However, the implication is that there is no end to this succession of smells, no progress through time to any culminating olfactory event. These grammatical shifts register the rapidly shifting position from which the narration is occurring, from a spatially localized, at least potentially embodied, perspective, to one that seems to anticipate the spatial and temporal dilations and discontinuities of film editing.

The counterpart of the unfortunate shopper stuck perpetually between two lanes of traffic is a composite laborer, simultaneously “на возах и в обозах, рядом и позади телег, ломовой, в измятой шляпенке или засаленном картузе” (“on the carts and trains, alongside and behind the wagons, a drayman, in a crumpled hat or a greasy cap”; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 8). The general and the particular, the singular and plural, are all mixed together. Although critics routinely attacked Boborykin for his failure to generalize, it is clear that what we read is not a verbal snapshot of any particular moment, but an attempt to lift some general impression out of the succession of such moments. It is just that this general impression itself has to be in disorderly motion in order to capture what is most important about the commercial life of the city: its ceaseless activity, the performance of an “endless song” (Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 9).

In the midst of this activity, one particularly vivid detail stands out, prepared by the word “now” (*vot*), as if it is being thrust into the reader’s awareness (Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 8). A ray of sun draws our attention to a wagon laden with some amorphous and disgusting substance. As the description directs us to the figure on the wagon (*na vozu*), we also get a good idea of what the cart is carrying. Atop this pile of manure – *navoz* – sits a young man. Indifferent to the smell, he is entirely absorbed in the consumption of an open-faced sandwich of not entirely fresh yellow roe. The eater’s enjoyment is the centerpiece of the description, which informs us both of his “delight” (*udovol’sstvie*) and “pleasure” (*naslazhdenie*). The spatial center of the description then shifts to him. He becomes the reference point toward which, from all sides, from all corners of the world, the traffic continues to flow. This scene of consumption marks the transition from the general, continuous motion of the merchant quarter to the particular episode. It is clear that the devourer of the sandwich serves a function in establishing important themes,

such as insatiable hunger and unlimited consumption, which will lend some organization to the material of the following four hundred pages (in this regard, the scene of mindless delectation anticipates the opening episode of Anton Chekhov's 'V ovrage' ['In the Ravine']). He already adumbrates that this world is neither elegant nor easy on the senses, but is both fascinating and, in its way, beautiful. Moscow is presented here in implicit contrast to the constraints and euphemisms of St Petersburg and thus emerges as the setting that allows unrestrained appetites and feelings to flourish.

Like the introductory chapters as a whole, there is some excess to the description of the young man; it is too intense, too full of sensuous detail to collapse into any theme. The sensory intensity of the description – bright sun, choking dust, the nauseating smell of the cart, the saltiness of roe – becomes the main object of representation. Since this is not a psychological novel, it is not the young man's subjective experience that matters, but the overwhelming intensity itself. The narrator's perspective soon shifts again, now soaring "над этой колышущейся полосой из лошадей, экипажей, возов, людских голов стоит стон: рубль купца, спина мужика поют свою нескончаемую песню..." ("over this swaying line of horses, carriages, wagons, and human heads, a groan rises: the merchant's ruble and the peasant's back sing their endless song..."; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 9). Like the introduction of the theme in the description of the young man eating, here we find only the suggestion of a possible analytical stance. The novel will have little to say about social inequality or class conflict, supporting the critics' case that Boborykin had no firm political principles. Detractors of Boborykin's work were nearly unanimous that the author was frivolous, flitting effortlessly and indifferently from topic to topic. Considered on the scale of Boborykin's entire project, it is possible to see this indifference as a failure to commit to any principles, but in the case of the street scene in *Kitai-Gorod*, the lightness of the implied author's disposition grants a special kind of buoyancy to the narratorial perspective. It leaps from place to place, refusing analytical distance from the scene, instead repeatedly throwing the reader into the midst of this overwhelming chaos.

Instead of understanding, the scene offers rapidly alternating sensory intensities. There is a kind of free-floating excitement in these pages that is not linked to any subjective standpoint in particular, but seems to suffuse the entire scene, filling the very air: "Улица и площадь смотрели веселой ярмаркой" ("The street looked like a cheerful fair"). The excess of description recalls Jameson's (2013, pp. 54–55) discussion of the famous lists of objects in the novels of Zola:

a tremendous fermenting and bubbling pullulation in which the simplicity of words and names is unsettled to the point of an ecstatic dizziness by

the visual multiplicity of the things themselves and the sensations that they press on the unforewarned observer. The unexpected result is that far from enriching representational language with all kinds of new meaning, the gap between words and things is heightened; perceptions turn into sensations; words no longer take on a body at prey to its nameless experience. Finally the realm of the visual begins to separate from that of the verbal and conceptual and to float away in a new kind of autonomy.

The accumulation of sensorially precise detail exceeds any conceivable illustrative purpose. By virtue of its sheer length and the extraordinary proliferation of precisely rendered details, the overlong description breaks out of description's ostensibly subordinate role to narration. So, too, in the opening chapters of *Kitai-Gorod*, it seems as if the colossal energy of the scene overwhelms any attempt by the novelist to press it into service of his goals. The very narrator seems to be dazzled by the surroundings.

The energy of business powers the endless flows of wagons and people. No one seems to have agency in this process. Nobles and merchants alike are shaped by their heredity and their milieu, in line with the deterministic logic of naturalism. Even the most powerful merchants and entrepreneurs seem like tiny particles in this vast, unsystematized mass. The final scene of *Kitai-Gorod* features another scene of busy Moscow life. Everywhere, new restaurants are being established – another indication of the unimpeded growth of the city's appetites. The state, appearing briefly as the juridical apparatus that fails to punish Paltusov, has a very limited role in the novel. In the final chapter, in the course of another massive description, this time of a newly built restaurant, a song is overheard: “славься, славься, святая Русь” (“glory, glory to you, holy Rus’”; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 418), from Mikhail Glinka's opera *Zhizn' za tsaria* (*A Life for the Tsar*). The state's sudden appearance at the end suggests that it is the economy that is driving the state toward glory rather than the other way around. As the narrator follows the traffic along a horse-drawn railway – once again, as in the opening chapter, the movement of the city generating the text to no particular narrative end – we catch a glimpse of the old building of the municipal and provincial government offices, which were awaiting demolition to make way for the new building of the Moscow City Duma.⁸ In the midst of the revitalization of the Kitai-Gorod neighborhood, the dilapidated seventeenth-century government building, “скучное и плотно сколоченное, навевающее память о ‘яме’ и первобытных приказных” (“dull and thoroughly boarded up, carrying recollections of the ‘pit’ [debtor's prison] and primitive officials”; Boborykin, 1993, vol. 2, p. 417), reinforces the sense of the state's withdrawal.

The verb in this passage is important: “*navevat*” and its nominal counterpart, *veianie*, are words commonly associated with Boborykin (as in Turgenev’s disparaging remarks, quoted above). Many readers thought that what Boborykin sought to capture were these ephemeral breezes and currents of time. It took great sensitivity to do so, but it ultimately yielded no reward in greater insight into the dynamics that determined the course of the age. In the passage from *Kitai-Gorod*, the memories belong to no one in particular; they simply emanate from the gloomy sight of the old government building. And although there is a content to those memories, what overlays them is a mood – and a mood strikingly at variance with the boisterousness that is generated by the surrounding neighborhood. The final image of the paragraph – dust, thrown up by the traffic and suspended in the sunlight – seems to capture Boborykin’s manner of writing in its unceasing motion, its lightness, and its ephemerality.

At this point, some of the flaws that critics frequently identified in Boborykin’s work, and which are evident in *Kitai-Gorod*, take on a greater significance. The narrative vagueness, the lack of any firm principles or ideas, the poorly developed characters and, hovering over it all, the sense of energetic and cheerful indifference, which critics attributed not just to Boborykin’s narrators in their particular works but to the author himself: all this signals how Boborykin’s work diverged from the Russian literary norm. The foolish cheerfulness – the *zhizneradostnost’* – often imputed to Boborykin is strikingly at variance with the emotional tonality that predominates in Russian realism.

We can find a clue to the deeper significance of this variance and why contemporaries found Boborykin’s cheerfulness so irritating in Ilya Kliger’s recent work on Russian realism’s shared social imaginary. Developing Jameson’s argument that the increasing prominence of affect shapes the representational procedures of realism, Kliger (2024, p. 228) argues that in the Russian context, a range of affects mark a character’s encounter with “substantive life”, that is, “the conscious life of participation, to whatever extent possible, in the affairs of the state”. In a literary tradition shaped by the dominating presence of the state and the relative devaluation of nonpolitical private life, characters’ affects register “distinctive alignments between the acting/suffering individual and the substantive order in which they act/suffer” (Kliger, 2024, p. 216). Most important for my purposes here are the affects of deadlock, languishing, and melancholy, which Kliger associates with a character’s progressive separation from the sphere of the political. In contrast to the paradigmatic European novel, characters in Russian novels are not freed by the withdrawal of state coercion to pursue private happiness; they are instead left burdened by their sense of alienation from “the question of the common good” and “excluded from the

zone of political sovereignty” (Kliger, 2024, p. 231). The remoteness of any such affects from the diegesis of *Kitai-Gorod* signals the novel’s separation from the entire social imaginary in which the content of a character’s life inheres in his or her participation in substantive life. Contemporaries tended to read this separation as Boborykin’s triviality.

Moreover, absent in *Kitai-Gorod* are not just these – as Kliger shows us, political – affects, but even anyone who could feel them. We return here to the diluteness of the novel’s characters and the corresponding looseness of the plot. As a contrastive example, *Kitai-Gorod* reminds us that the major works of the nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition relied on characters who had to be rendered with enough vividness to stand both as fictional individuals permeated by historical forces, that is, as epistemologically illuminating types, and as representatives of whole generational dispositions. That sense of the power and vividness of characters was dependent, as Chloë Kitzinger (2021, p. 155) has argued, on a “presupposition of the work’s own organic coherence – the purposive ‘labyrinth of linkages’ that the context of novel reading encourages us to think we will find”. Along with vividly legible characters, *Kitai-Gorod* denies the reader this sense of coherence and, with that, a sense of the novel’s separation from the unmediated flow of life.

For generations of readers, starting in Boborykin’s time and extending to the present, it has proven hard to read a novel like *Kitai-Gorod* with expectations trained on the major works of the Russian literary tradition. Here the reader finds no analytical purchase on the economic and social forces whose particulars Boborykin so scrupulously documented, and no synthesizing power that would organize this mass of particulars in a narrative focused on one or several typical characters. What I have proposed here is that instead of critical realism, what this novel offers is a phenomenological investigation into an experience so sensorially intense that no single subjective standpoint is sufficient to capture it. As heavily peopled as the streets of Moscow are in *Kitai-Gorod*, we are confronted here with a dehumanized novel that is not principally concerned with an individuated character’s experience of any internal or external world. Much as Lenin described Boborykin himself as a writer created by bourgeois society, we can now see *Kitai-Gorod* as a catalogue of ambient intensities, of moods generated as by-products of Moscow’s commercial energy. This is a radical departure from what we know as realism – one that points to modernist or even postmodernist experimentation of the next century. Only further reading in nineteenth-century Russia’s “great unread” (Cohen, 1999, p. 23) can tell us what other remarkable experiments in the capabilities of the novel await our recognition.

Notes

1. Characteristically, Boborykin (1886, vol. 9, p. 181), a self-conscious linguistic innovator, identifies his source for the calque in the German “Lebenslustig”.
2. Several of the ostensible flaws in Boborykin’s writing, including an overabundance of detail and an inability to separate the accidental from the typical, resembles those that critics identified with the style of women writers in the middle of the century. See Vaysman (2021).
3. See, for example, Dostoevsky’s (1972-1990, vol. 19, pp. 178–186) review of the sketches of N.V. Uspenskii or Mikhailovskii’s (1957, p. 606) critical review of the early works of Anton Chekhov, in which he likens the writer to a “механический аппарат” (“mechanical apparatus”). The same criticism, unsurprisingly, was often directed at Boborykin.
4. Capitalists in works of Russian realism tend to be bland, marginal figures, who nevertheless can wield a great deal of narrative power. See Shneyder (2021, pp. 23–27).
5. Regarding these names, Shcheblykin (2002, p. 185) observes: “В перечисленных фамилиях, как видим, нет ничего романтического, одухотворяющего и даже, можно сказать, личностного. Есть только указание на успех в деле или его ожидание” (“In the enumerated names, as we see, there is nothing romantic, nothing animating, or even, we might say, personal. There is only the indication of success in business or its expectation”).
6. Boborykin (1965, vol. 1, p. 318) himself insisted that his signature method of writing had matured long before the emergence of the French naturalists, a claim supported by the unadmiring literary historian Konstantin Golovin (1904, p. 397).
7. Zola apparently read Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s *Chto delat’?* while working on his novel, and Vera Pavlovna may have left a faint trace on the protagonist of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Denise (See Brakhman, 1963, pp. 873–874). On Zola’s success in Russia, see Nicolosi (2019, pp. 69–78).
8. I take this translation of the term *prisutstvennye mesta* from Antonov, 2016. As he explains, in the nineteenth century this building housed a number of important government offices, including the main police office and provincial treasury. In his words, persons of property “could hardly avoid visiting the building, either in person or through a representative, on a multitude of errands and matters that bound the early industrial state and its subjects, whether it was to register a debt transaction, to request a police debt collection proceeding, to purchase stamped paper used for all official business, or to pursue a court case” (Antonov, 2016, pp. 19–20).

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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