

# The Uses of Inventories in Early Modern France, from the Bureau de la Ville de Paris to Antoine Furetière's »Roman bourgeois«

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## Introduction

*inventory: description and itemization in written form, of the goods and papers which are to be found in a house. (Furetière, »Dictionnaire universel«, 1690)<sup>1</sup>*

Early modern inventories of papers, books, and other assorted artifacts have survived in great numbers and in many different forms. What was the wider cultural valence of making and checking them in domestic, public, and bureaucratic settings across early modern France? This essay addresses that question via a new interdisciplinary approach, drawing on the municipal registers of the Bureau de la Ville de Paris, a treatise by a distinguished librarian, Gabriel Naudé, and a comic novel by a renowned lexicographer, Antoine Furetière. The aim is to show how particular practices of record-keeping might inform our understanding of a broader constellation of inventorial practices in the seventeenth century. My analysis centres on the specific uses of inventories found in two interconnected spaces, the office and the library, together with the discursive space of the literary text which extends and problematises

the practices of verifying and sharing information found in the other two spaces. Thus, it will be shown that to the early modern mind at least, administration had a worrying and perennial tendency to overflow its specific physical environs, what we might now call the »semiotope« office (in Bernard Siegert's terms).<sup>2</sup>

Taken at face value, pre-modern inventories can tell us much about how artifacts were grouped together; yet historians are increasingly alert to the ways in which inventories exceeded their instrumental usage, testifying to deeper archival practices of storage and circulation that were subject to competing impulses. As Elizabeth Yale has reminded us,<sup>3</sup> the more we understand the ecologies of writing, paperwork and print that surrounded early modern archives, the better placed we shall be to comprehend their records and inventorial procedures within the knowledge economies they served. Yale is one of several scholars to have recently appraised the history of the archive,<sup>4</sup> and it is in this context of appraisal that I position my readings of my primary source material.

My entry point is recent work on the particularities of paperwork. The study of paperwork is now a recognizable offshoot of book history, as Ben Kafka has demonstrated in a 2009 survey article.<sup>5</sup> Kafka dwells on the significance of contemporary office filing systems, as brought to light in major studies such as Bruno Latour's 2002 ethnographic enquiry, «La Fabrique du droit». Here, Latour demands that the ethnographer must »set aside vague propositions on rights, laws, and norms in exchange for a meticulous investigation into dossiers – grey, beige, or yellow; fat or thin; simple or complicated; old or new – to see where they lead us«. <sup>6</sup> They lead us, as Kafka remarks, to places that are simultaneously dull and fascinating. Likewise, starting with a mundane assortment of red and green municipal registers, this essay will explore places where objects become repositories of useful information, affording different kinds of knowledge, whilst the materiality (as opposed to the abstraction) of that knowledge draws attention to its transience.<sup>7</sup>

A useful lens for focalising the transient nature of inventory-based knowledge is Thing Theory. Promulgated by the work of Bill Brown,<sup>8</sup> and more recently reformulated as Stuff Theory by Maurizia Boscagli,<sup>9</sup> this line of cultural-materialistic enquiry interrogates the »thingness« latently inherent in an object and manifested in what Brown calls »object events« that occur when a subject interacts with the object in question. Such interactions are often haphazard, and even when they happen in the context of a methodical process (the checking of an inventory, for instance) there is still considerable scope for unexpected discoveries. This is all the more acute when things did not go to plan, so to speak. Since the eighteenth century, jokes about faulty administrative procedure have, as Kafka notes, inescapably informed our cultural orientation towards bureaucracies. The humorous side of inventorying is, I shall argue, a latency of my sources, especially Furetière. To make full sense of this, however, requires serious scrutiny of the lengths to which administrators and librarians were prepared to go to make their resources purposely retrievable; it is here that inventories and their sister lists (catalogues, registers, accounts) come into their own.

## A *récolement* gone awry

At the centre of seventeenth-century Paris's municipal governance was the Bureau de la Ville de Paris: an administrative body whose powers derived from a fifteenth-century ordinance that remained in force until 1789. The Bureau's headquarters were housed in the impressive premises of the Hôtel de Ville (completed 1628), and its chief responsibilities included the upkeep of municipal infrastructure (buildings, bridges, quays, fountains) and the regulation of supplies (including wood, coal, munitions).<sup>10</sup> It also oversaw a range of civic and religious festivities, in consultation with the king. Like other municipal authorities in France, the Bureau de la Ville de Paris archived its registers; and the responsibilities for curating this mammoth archive, stretching back to the early sixteenth century, fell to the chief clerks (*greffiers*) who typically held their office for a number of years (some died in post). Handovers of the office of chief clerk are significant milestones in the registers documenting the principal administrative acts of the Bureau. The appointment of a new chief clerk was a ceremonial event accompanied by a *récolement*: a periodic review of the inventory of all the municipal title deeds and treasures. This was a laborious task, all the more so given the infrequency with which it was performed, and the irregular fashion in which it was conducted—as we may readily appreciate by considering the records of one such *récolement* conducted at the turn of the eighteenth century.

It took place on 11 August 1698, and was duly recorded in the registers of the Bureau. The official record (*procès-verbal*) of this particular *récolement* offers an unusually clear insight into the processes and problems of municipal inventorying in early modern France. On this occasion, the retiring officer, Jean-Martin Mitantier, was succeeded by Jean-Baptiste Taitbout, the new post-holder.<sup>11</sup> At 8 am, a small party of notables, consisting of Taitbout, Mitantier, the first alderman (*premier échevin*), and the royal procurator (*procureur du roi*), gathered to swear in Taitbout as the new Chief Clerk (*greffier*) of the Municipality of Paris. Henceforth, Taitbout would have responsibility of the registers and of the two municipal coffers containing title deeds, rent monies, and the city's treasured artifacts. Taitbout was to maintain henceforth all the registers

and the two coffers for use and consultation by other members of the Bureau de la Ville; but first, the task of verifying the inventories. On this occasion the Royal Procurator insisted upon a thorough overhaul of the register inventory, and not without reason. Mitantier's predecessor, Jean-Baptiste Langlois (who had served as chief clerk from 1660 to 1681), had hardly been model of punctiliousness: period records reveal that Langlois had only kept a complete register for the first two years of his tenure, relying thereafter on transcriptions of minutes from Bureau council meetings.<sup>12</sup> Mitantier had inherited »an endless heap of papers and files in such disarray that it was impossible to find what one was looking for«.<sup>13</sup> This problem played out on a massive scale throughout the Ancien Régime. According to modern historians of France's Archives Nationales, the early modern administrator constantly struggled to separate in physical space those documents deemed to be still in administrative use from those which had acquired the status of historic artifact.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Mitantier, we learn, had been sternly commissioned to work *incessantly* at rectifying the disorder, and to create sufficient space in locked cabinets and open shelves for all of the Bureau's paperwork, past and present.

Did Mitantier manage to resolve the bureaucratic chaos he inherited? The short answer is no. The record states that when Taitbout was led into Mitantier's office, he was immediately confronted with the same underlying problems of archival disorder that had by no means gone away. There were gaps in recent registers and the bulging cabinets could barely contain the archived volumes and single-leaf parchments dating back to 1300 (so some attempt had been made to keep historic documents away from those in current use). One wonders whether Mitantier had been so consumed in bringing *some* semblance of order to the affairs of his predecessor that he had neglected his own affairs; in any case he was forced to admit he had fallen a long way behind, and had not managed to complete the registers for a period of twelve years. With an ironic and mildly amusing sense of déjà vu we see history repeating itself: the new chief clerk, Taitbout, was ordered to transcribe »incessantly« until the backlog was cleared—only this time Mitantier was ordered to pay his successor for any extra expense incurred in completing the missing registers.<sup>15</sup>

If this *récolement* speaks to a wider narrative of work backlogs and clerical shame, it is also an object-oriented story about the materiality of the Bureau's diverse artifacts: the insistent objects that command the solemn attention of those at Taitbout's investiture. These objects largely shape what we know of the event and its protagonist, whose inventorial aptitudes come under immediate scrutiny from Mitantier, the first alderman, and the royal procurator. Taitbout's identity is the outworking of his inspection of each and every object put before him. Out comes the inventory of the municipal treasures, followed by registers of various shapes and sizes: small red registers, larger ones bound in tanned green leather, others still enclosed with the parchment of old rent constitutions. An incipient filing system can be seen in this colour-coding: another small step in the direction of purposefully retrievable documentation.<sup>16</sup> All these registers are inspected and then put away in the cabinet, whilst Taitbout shows eager willingness to look after them, promising to make them available on demand as per the requirements of his office.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless as the investiture tour moves on, one can imagine his face falling again, after what happens in the next two rooms.

Next Taitbout is led into the Hôtel treasury, to verify the inventory of its valuable relics kept under lock and key. Here the object-immediacy is at its most intense in the listing of these items. Thirty-one treasures are inspected:

*Two large ingots, a large round bowl, two medium-sized oval bowls, two baskets, two large flagons and four medium-sized flagons, an ornamental receptacle in two pieces, six salt cellars, six candlesticks, four cups, all of the aforementioned made of silver, coated in gold-vermilion gilt, and embossed with the city's coat of arms.*<sup>18</sup>

Here we are given a window into the Bureau's long history of collaboration with goldsmiths and silversmiths, at a point where their art was flourishing at the instigation of Louis XIV's finance minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert.<sup>19</sup> Parisian goldwork (*orfèverie*) was stringently regulated to promote elite craftsmanship: the city hallmark (the *poinçon de Paris*) signified »the guarantee of public confidence« by eighteenth-century

standards.<sup>20</sup> Historically, the work of Paris's elite craftsmen represented stellar examples of the city's largesse, its capacity to offer and receive sumptuous gifts.<sup>21</sup> But that is only half of the story of the thingness (as Brown would say) told by the objects in Taitbout's hands. These treasures now look jaded: there are chipped edges and decorative pieces missing from some.<sup>22</sup> And the bathos is compounded as the tour moves on into the next room, the Salle des Colonels, where hung on the walls there are nine tapestries of mixed size representing the labours of Hercules: these are »very ancient and in quite poor condition«. As objects with ekphrastic potential, such tapestries do not score highly;<sup>23</sup> rather, they suggest, figuratively and ironically, the laboriousness of the municipal administration. All in all, the so-called »treasures« belonging to the Hôtel de Ville, and their years of neglectful obscurity, seem to represent the aftermath of municipal prestige.

As ceremonial investitures go, Taitbout's is rather pathetically mundane. Nevertheless, the very act of his inventorying, for all its mundanity, sites municipal administrative procedure in a potentially richer frame of cultural reference. With every coffer Taitbout unlocks, the importance of the vestigial is strikingly showcased: relics that have lingered in obscurity suddenly come to light again, perhaps for the first time in decades. Each one has acquired a further degree of decrepitude since the previous *récolement*; and, paradoxically, this very decrepitude invites us to acknowledge (as Taitbout would have done) the historic importance of *la Ville de Paris* as an enduring hub of commerce and artisanal creativity, notwithstanding the poor condition of the city's residual treasures. We might thus consider Taitbout as a record-keeper in archaeological mode; operating as such, he can be situated in a retrospective movement of historical reflection carrying seventeenth-century municipal administration upstream to an earlier point in French culture, where records and ceremonial artifacts join literary works in a converging heritage.

One thinks back to François Rabelais's sixteenth-century fictional accounts of Paris that inventory the city's treasures. A lengthy book catalogue of one of the city's leading libraries (to which we shall later return) is given as the seventh chapter of »Pantagruel«. Earlier, the unearthing of an ancient tomb reveals the source-

text of the chronicles of »Gargantua« together with several flagons and a genealogy scribed in a spidery chancery hand.<sup>24</sup> Rabelais »translates« and indeed interpolates this obscure text into his rendering of the adventures of his famous giant. So, if Rabelais's sixteenth-century masterpieces self-consciously blur the boundaries between present text and historic documentation, might we look again, perhaps more generously, at the heap of registers confronting Taitbout over a hundred and fifty years later? Could it be said that during his administrative career, Taitbout would seek not so much to prevent the merging of historic and present documents, as to preserve, as far as functionally possible, a continuous series of registers from the recent to the arcane? One might even venture that the new chief clerk, like his predecessors and his successors, had to weigh up the symbolic cost of removing the most ancient parchment records of Paris to an off-site location. Perhaps he decided against such a removal, lest he and other municipal officers be deprived of the silent presence of the past, the witness of the city's administrative longevity, within physical proximity if not touching distance.

What we can say with some historical certainty, is that Taitbout, for all his professed eagerness, did not institute an archival system to the satisfaction of his eighteenth-century successors. Following the death of Taitbout in 1711, we find the Hôtel de Ville commissioning its agents to go out into public and private libraries, to buy back copies of the Hotel's missing registers.<sup>25</sup> But even this did not go far enough. A later procurator, Antoine Moriau, would in 1735 voice familiar complaints about incomplete records and a number of missed *récolements* in the Hôtel de la Ville's administration.<sup>26</sup> Moriau provided the first attempt at producing a continuous historical record of municipal inventorying up to 1735. In a longer historical perspective, then, Moriau represents a pivot towards decisive rationalisation in the administration of the city's archives. Indeed, his refusal to tolerate any further inconsistency in record- and relic-keeping by the chief clerks points to a need for a new cultural space for the Hôtel de Ville, one where it could better manage its treasures and eventually house its own collection of books. Sure enough, the 1760s would see the inauguration of the Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville (1763), the library that would curate

the Hôtel's artifacts for a wider audience.<sup>27</sup> Rationalized inventorying—on a much more regular basis than the seventeenth-century chief clerks, Langlois, Mitantier, and Taitbout, had managed—would remain at the heart of the administrative operation of this new library, according to its statute of 20 July 1770:

*The Librarian of the City will be charged with updating the General Inventory, according to its diverse artifacts (books, dossier boxes, registers, manuscripts, ephemera, medals, tokens, and other collections) as often as new items are acquired by the Library. The Librarian will also be held responsible for drafting an account of all new items three months after said items are approved by the Bureau, and the account shall be submitted to the Office of the Chief Clerk of the City.*<sup>28</sup>

## Gabriel Naudé's treatise on libraries: The bookish ideals of inventorying

Studying the evolution of inventorying in the Hôtel de Ville de Paris has offered us a route into a larger archival problem that was articulated with increasing directness from the seventeenth century. This was the phenomenon of what we might call the office-cum-library: or to put it another way, the coexistence of administrative and intellectual labour in the same physical space or in interconnected physical spaces. In early modern France, writers often dictated their writings to servants and secretaries working alongside them in their libraries and studies.<sup>29</sup> As well as dictation, these servants carried on with routine administration: managing the master's accounts, keeping his family records, answering correspondence, and acting as librarian for his collection of books. Library-office settings were furnished with cabinets, shelves, and desks, replete with sprawls of books, registers, and related artifacts—not all of which were readily retrievable for the task at hand, be it daily paperwork, or literary and academic pursuits. Managing one's resources required practical administrative solutions, particularly where large numbers of books were involved. Few perceived this more clearly than Gabriel Naudé (1600–1653), whose treatise on libraries clearly sets out his thinking.

The son of a minor Parisian bureaucrat, Naudé was an erudite man. He had a doctorate in medicine but is best known for his service as librarian to great men and women of state, notably Cardinal Mazarin in France (1642–1652) and Queen Christine of Sweden (1652–3). Naudé wrote his «*Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*» (1627) for his earliest patron, the magistrate Henri de Mesmes who had a large private library; and although it described ideals for *bibliothéconomie* (library management), it was rooted in Naudé's extensive experience as a librarian and book collector. As Estelle Boeuf has shown, the «*Advis*» bears a close resemblance to the inventories Naudé made of his own private book collection, allowing him to expand his vision of bringing together an encyclopaedic range of knowledge from Antiquity to the present.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, as Warren Boutcher argues, Naudé's work can be read as a lens for understanding two key trends in the development of early modern libraries.<sup>31</sup> Firstly, the «*Advis*» attests to the coexistence of documentary archives (such as those of the Hôtel de Ville de Paris) with older and predominantly manuscript collections, and with newer and predominantly printed collections open regularly to the public. Secondly, the «*Advis*» signals the development of distinct but overlapping cultures and economies of collection, one centred on luxury or customized artefacts, whether manuscript or print, the other a burgeoning information culture dependent on the diffusion of cheaper print and scribal copies. Naudé's ideal library would be one that drew together, under one roof, various kinds of print, manuscript, and documentary resources, to maximise the production of knowledge and the reputation of the library owner. Such a library would be open to all, but especially to scholars, statesmen, and other notables, putting at their disposition its extensive holdings, both rare and ordinary, as opposed to the small, restricted collections of rare and expensive books found in private cabinets of curiosity.<sup>32</sup>

Order by means of the catalogue is Naudé's *sine qua non* for the establishment of a well-run library. Naudé understands the use of catalogues in two distinct but complementary ways: the first is to exploit lists of books in pre-existing catalogues to inform one's own selection and acquisition of books; and the second is to draw up an accurate, methodical inventory of one's own stock.

The first usage turns the catalogue into a heuristic tool of discovery. Here, Naudé encourages his librarian to use his commercial contacts who have access to sales catalogues of books commercially available on domestic and overseas markets.<sup>33</sup> He also tacitly appeals to a crucial element embedded in the European knowledge economy since the mid sixteenth century: published volumes—known in their own right as *librairies*—that inventoried the range and scope of printed books currently available in a particular location, or on a given topic, thus providing models that could inform the holdings of aspiring librarians.<sup>34</sup> In France, largescale inventories of works published in French had been in circulation since the publication of the »Bibliothèques« of François Grudé La Croix du Maine (1584) and Antoine du Verdier (1585).<sup>35</sup> Naudé's »Advis« suggests he is conversant with these works, but he is at pains to stress that the best librarian will want to go further still:

*One must not neglect to procure and transcribe copies of all available catalogues, not only those of the great and renowned libraries, both ancient and modern... but also those of particular studies and cabinets which are little known, unfrequented, and thus sealed in a perpetual silence.*<sup>36</sup>

For Naudé, therefore, it is crucial to use one's personal and professional contacts to access and thereby open up the arcane world of the private cabinet. Naudé developed a formidable reputation for this kind of information-gathering;<sup>37</sup> it formed an integral part of his inventorial practice, and nourished his ideal of making ever-more patent that which private book collectors had shut away. Naudé had privileged access to the cabinets of learned men and was openly critical of a certain »Mr T.« (a thinly veiled reference to Jacques-Auguste de Thou, a magistrate whose cabinet was notoriously inaccessible).<sup>38</sup> It is thus a small wonder that some of Naudé's erudite associates (notably the Dupuy brothers) viewed the »Advis« with some suspicion, for it violated the very foundation of the privileged cabinet that served as the model of their own library.<sup>39</sup>

Naudé's ideal library is a front for a new kind of erudite civility that seeks to put knowledge in the hands of an expanding community of *gens de lettres*. But this lofty ideal is never severed from practical,

administrative tips to make it a reality onsite, within a purposefully constructed library building. Much of the »Advis« is devoted to discussion of the quantity of books a librarian should acquire and the material conditions in which books should be stored. Naudé's proposed solutions are underpinned by his second major usage of cataloguing. Use of library space will correspond closely to »a catalogue accurately drawn up according to each and every class and faculty divided into precise subunits as far as is practicable«. <sup>40</sup> Naudé sees the value in simple yet rigorous classification systems based on key subject areas (theology, medicine, jurisprudence, history, philosophy, mathematics, humanities) so that one can easily ascertain the state of one's stock. He recognises, moreover, the importance of having the right furnishings if books are to be easily retrievable. Here we find him wrestling with not dissimilar problems of storage as those facing the chief clerks of the Bureau de la Ville de Paris.<sup>41</sup>

One of the difficulties surrounding record accessibility in the Hôtel de la Ville was that everything was locked away, requiring the personal intervention of the chief clerk whenever a member of municipal personnel wished to consult a register. Naudé, by contrast, wants his library users themselves to locate their desired books as quickly as possible: this is to be achieved by visibility of book stock on flat shelves (*tablettes*),<sup>42</sup> and concealment only for the most valuable manuscripts in the collection. The savvy librarian, furthermore, will factor in excess shelf space at the ends of subject sections, so that over time new stock can be comfortably accommodated without having to cram too many books per shelf. Indeed, a large library will require an entire section devoted to recent acquisitions: new stock should remain there for six months, after which it can be absorbed into the main body of the library. All of these administrative operations depend, once again, on the precise inventory of library stock—an inventory that is kept legible, dynamic, and regularly updated.

Through this rigorous ideal of inventorying, Naudé thus envisages a physical space where the intellectual labour of readers is silently harmonised with the administrative tasks of the librarian and his staff. Although the »Advis« does not directly mention the latter, their background presence is implied in several

places.<sup>43</sup> Assistants are required to maintain good levels of lighting and aeration throughout the library, and to carry out basic maintenance of library book stock, mending damaged volumes, and dusting down surfaces.<sup>44</sup> A competent secretary, one may surmise, might assist the librarian in maintaining the book lending register which forms a key administrative counterpart to the library catalogue.<sup>45</sup> Again, Naudé is remarkably clear on the practical details, although his proposed system falls short of double-entry precision; nonetheless, if implemented, it would entail the crossing out of complete entries, thus making it not dissimilar to early modern merchant account ledgers. In the main column, the register must alphabetise the names of all borrowers along with the following details: date of loan, the size of the volume, its place and date of printing, and finally, the borrower's signature. All of these details are to be crossed out upon return of the book, with the date of return noted in the margin and brief remarks on the condition of the book upon return—only careful borrowers are worthy of further loans.

Strict rules around book handling and lending, moreover, are necessary to prevent the public library from descending into disorder. Naudé warns in a later work that without such restrictions, members of the public would spend all day leafing through as many books as they could get their hands on—or even using the free paper, ink, and desk space for an array of writing tasks.<sup>46</sup> Clearly Naudé wished to avoid what we might now call »hotdesking«, since the proliferation of office paperwork within the library environs would frustrate the intellectual labours of reading of his high-minded readers. Naudé's ideal library, then, is more than the sum-total of its books. It is, in fact, a self-sustaining knowledge economy in which intellectual curiosity in the widest sense is shaped by administrative prudence, from the macro-level of the library layout to the micro-detail of the catalogue and of the loan register.

There is, furthermore, a visual dimension of this knowledge economy that further enhances the cognitive benefits of a well-administered library: its ornamentation. The ornaments of a library, says Naudé, must continually impress the readers who study there. When it comes to library ornaments, Naudé is nonetheless still a pragmatist.<sup>47</sup> He advocates the use of tapestries as an anti-humidity precaution more than for

display.<sup>48</sup> He acknowledges that some wealthy patrons want to spend large sums on luxury book covers,<sup>49</sup> though he would prefer to invest in bigger and better editions of key texts rather than in sumptuous book binding. As for other visual artifacts, antiqueness plays second fiddle to visibility. For Naudé, what counts is that the visual artifact, statue or painting, should be a striking corporeal or physiognomic likeness of a famous writer or philosopher—and this physical likeness should complement what a reader learns from studying biographies of the author in question. Naudé savours how the reader's eye moves from ornament to text, whereby the textual-aesthetic conformity produces a stimulating cognitive experience: what he calls the »powerful goad that will excite a generous and noble spirit to follow in the footsteps of great minds«.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the very thingness of books and ornaments in Naudé's ideal library is constituted at the convergence of aesthetic and textual detail, silently playing out in countless felicitous object-events as readers acquaint themselves with the prestigious materials that the library has to offer.

## Antoine Furetière's »Roman bourgeois«: The comedy of inventorying

How does Naudé's ideal library compare with other imaginative projections of book-collecting and record-keeping in seventeenth-century France? The thingness of books and papers looks very different in our final text, the »Roman bourgeois« (1666), by Antoine Furetière. A mid-seventeenth-century writer and a controversial member of the Académie française, Furetière is nowadays best known for his lexicographic masterpiece: his »Dictionnaire universel« (1690). His »Roman bourgeois«, a quirky novel by any standards, proposes an altogether different set of object-events from that which we have previously seen, centring on the inventory of a defunct poet. Here, at last, we come to fiction proper. Furetière's inventive inventorying offers a snapshot of a satirical penchant for cataloguing imaginary books that can be traced back to the fictitious library of Saint-Victor of Rabelais, as Claudine Nédelec

has recently shown.<sup>51</sup> For all its overtly burlesque and satirical elements, Furetière's comic novel is, nonetheless, deeply invested in the material existence of the bourgeoisie in 1660s Paris.<sup>52</sup> As such, the «Roman bourgeois» affords an oblique counterpoint, both to Naudé's «Advis» and to the Bureau de la Ville's records of *récolement*. Furetière gives an anarchic twist to the ideal of object collections smoothly conforming to the records made of them—perhaps the greatest illusion of so many *inventaires généraux* that populate early modern French archives.

The «Roman bourgeois» is an anti-novel in two books; each book narrates a mock love triangle between three middling persons of Paris, and there is (deliberately) no meaningful narrative progression from the first to the second book.<sup>53</sup> We shall focus on the second book, at the point where the three adversarial protagonists—an impecunious writer, (Charrosselles), a pompous magistrate (Belastre), and a litigious woman (Collantine)—are forced to break off their querulous conversation in Collantine's salon, when the magistrate's clerk (Volaterran) hurriedly arrives from the lawcourts with an inventory that urgently requires his master's signature. The inventory in question is that of a well-known and recently deceased poet, Mythophilacte (a Greek-sounding name meaning «guardian of the tale»), whose goods, papers and books are to become the driving force of the rest of the novel.<sup>54</sup> Suddenly, the text acutely focuses on the object-events that ensue from the legal paperwork of the inventory, thereby affording, to my knowledge, the most subtle portrait of the administrator in action in pre-Balzacian French fiction.

The arrival of Volaterran jolts the narrative out of a parodic judicial register (the protagonists' airing of mock-legal arguments ending with neither sentencing nor a transaction) and into a new idiom that derives its substance from an informal reading of the freshly drafted inventory.<sup>55</sup> What we find is an altogether complex performance of inventorying that generates comic friction as bibliographic and bureaucratic impulses rub against each other. Both are portrayed as vanity; both are nonetheless indulged at some length, in an alternating pattern, the one keeping the other in check. The narrative becomes discontinuous, torn between the voice of the clerk, reading proudly and then irritably from his inventory, and the voices of his

three hearers, who constantly interject, ever insistent on expressing their views on Mythophilacte's papers and books listed in the inventory. Eventually, an exasperated Volaterran, resenting what has amounted to a good hour of unpaid overtime, exclaims, »Truly, I cannot earn my living here!« and storms out of the room, presumably to return to his lawcourt office where he can get back to the «real» business of administration.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Furetière calls time on an odd experiment with grafting bureaucratic styles into a novelistic narrative about book lists.

What readers are left with, nevertheless, is not principally a gratuitous satire of library catalogues à la Rabelais, and of the socio-economic challenges facing writers in mid-seventeenth-century France (*pace* Nédelec). Furetière is doing something more fundamental: he is showing how readers, unused to encountering administrative forms in literary narrative, might go about reading an inventory. It is a deliberately selective process of uneven pace, accelerating in certain places and slowing down at other points. Furetière assumes that in the first place, we will identify with Charrosselles in wanting to skip the «notarial preamble» covering the deceased Mythophilacte's moveable goods:

*First, a bed on which the aforementioned deceased was discovered, consisting of three planks on two trestles, a mattress, with an old suitcase serving as a headrest, and a cover made from a section of Rouen tapestry. The lot priced: 25 sous.*

*Item, two weave-rush chairs, with an armchair covered with a quilt. The lot priced: 10 sous.*

*Item, a white wooden chest, on which we have placed our full and wholesome [judicial] seals, and in which has been found nothing except papers inventoried as follows, the aforementioned chest priced: 12 sous.<sup>57</sup>*

These furnishings, instantly recognizable as the drab stuff of everyday existence, are objects that have been through the mill, as Boscaqli would say. They have been legally deactivated until their next lease of life which will begin only upon re-sale. If the moment of the vestigial is to be glimpsed here, it is without the protracted ceremonial solemnity of Jean-Baptiste's *récolement* that

we encountered earlier. For in Furetière's narrative, all of these objects except the papers are denied a future story—this is as far as Volaterran gets with his list of them—and Charrosselles has his way, forcing the clerk to fast-forward and concentrate on the papers in the chest that will disclose the details of Mythophilacte's books.

One should ponder the significance of this change of pace. Malcolm Walsby notes that in the early modern world, probate inventories were the most commonplace type of list to feature books, and such books would often be among the most valued possessions of the deceased.<sup>58</sup> So in fast-forwarding to the books, Furetière is, in a sense, going along with the probate norms of his day—but he does so in a slippery fashion. It is not so much the intellectual or monetary value of the deceased's books as the listing of titles (of works, and of subsections of those works) that is under scrutiny. Collantine, furthermore, regrets the absence of »title deeds, house-sale contracts, rent constitutions«<sup>59</sup>, saying that »these are the principal articles of an inventory«<sup>60</sup> rather than books. In the narrative economy of book two of the »Roman bourgeois«, an important choice has been made: contractual paperwork and writs for debts are to be a narrative dead-end, whereas testamentary paperwork and catalogues will provide the way forward. A timely reminder, then, that whatever else the »Roman bourgeois« is, an unmediated, fetishist inventorying of all kinds of bureaucratic document it most certainly is not.

Each interruption, or re-direction of Volaterran's reading of the inventory diminishes the administrator's power, but it would be mistaken to conclude that this is purely to facilitate literary satire. Furetière's route to the latter always starts with the administrator's selection of material, which is consciously signalled to us; and it is, moreover, the administrator who betokens the »voice« of the defunct poet, as he reads aloud from the latter's writings.<sup>60</sup> This is most clearly visible as Volaterran is directed to read from the last will and testament of Mythophilacte. Readers acquainted with the genre of the literary testament would instantly recognise some of the bequests formulae (*Item, je donne et lègue*) that now frame the text with respect to a well-established French tradition. Some of its salient generic features are duly emphasized: the post-mortem divvying up of

property among selected individuals (in this case jotters and books, both printed and in unpublished draft) along with snide jibes at »false patrons« whose largesse never materialized and »nasty printers and booksellers« who profited unfairly from the deceased's works.<sup>61</sup> As the satire heats up we start to forget that it comes through the conduit of the administrator. This, as Craig Moyes points out, is the subtlety of Furetière's lampooning of the articulations (in the sense of connective structures) that quietly link writers to the social world they inhabit, and without which they would be even less successful in denouncing their exploitation by those in the book trade and by glory-hunting patrons who stifle their creative genius.<sup>62</sup> Writing at the interface of administration and the literary economy, Furetière offers a sharp, meta-fictional critique of both.<sup>63</sup>

In filtering the authorial voice of a deceased poet through the voice of an increasingly irritated clerk, Furetière furthermore forces his readers to rethink what authorship amounted to in his day. In an age where the literary field was not yet an autonomous entity,<sup>64</sup> where writers could not guarantee a stable income from their works, and where few would become household names, what trace did writers leave behind other than that which probate inventories record? Which of a writer's surviving possessions reveals most about him—his non-literary objects, or his books? Ironically, we learn about as much about Mythophilacte's life through his »Almanach of dinner invitations« (a small carnet tabulating wealthy Parisians known to offer dinners to parasitical authors, one for each day of the month) as we can glean from the »Catalogue« of his books (of which only twenty-one titles are inventoried). In the bathetic style of the »Roman bourgeois«, the revelation of Mythophilacte, not as a literary genius, but as an arch-toady, should come as little surprise. As Charrosselles, himself given to sponging, puts it, »how else could an author make a living, if he lacked patrimony«?<sup>65</sup>

It is equally unsurprising that, once the titles of Mythophilacte's books are read out, the one that really grabs Charrosselles's attention is a »Somme dédicatoire« (a four-volume *summa* of dedications) which dissects, chapter by chapter, the art of dedicating one's work to patrons. For Moyes, this is where Furetière really puts his finger on the pulse of 1660s authorial anxieties, namely the prospect that autonomous author-patron

relationships might disappear now that the state has taken charge of administering gratifications for authors.<sup>66</sup> The »Somme dédicatoire« does not, however, disclose a comprehensive digest of strategies for authorial survival. We are simply left guessing what further insights it may disclose, if perused in its entirety. The limits of fictional orality manifestly will not stretch to a complete narration of this work by Volaterran, much to the disappointment of Charrosselles. Instead, the titular *précis* of each chapter of the »Somme dédicatoire« will have to suffice. Ironically, these *précis* still occupy some eleven pages of text, over twice as many pages as the preceding »Catalogue«. One wonders just how much lower Furetière's narrative baseline can go—and yet he still finds a substrate, beneath the *précis* of the twenty-ninth and final chapter of the fourth and final volume of the »Somme«.<sup>67</sup> Here at last is the *reductio ad absurdum*: yet another list, this one taking the form of a roll of taxes on patrons to establish a fund for the subsistence of impoverished authors. Under this ingenious fiscal scheme, the sum-total (»sommés«) of known poetic genres, together with diverse components of the heroic novel, its characters, its episodic plot devices, its pastoral scene-settings—all of which are incessantly mocked throughout the »Roman bourgeois«—are duly monetized and become taxable entities. The list of entries is pointedly open-ended, given that (and here Furetière again winks back at Rabelais) rot or rat damage has defaced the paper, eventually to the point of illegibility.<sup>68</sup>

Overall, then, the second book of Furetière's »Roman bourgeois« orchestrates a deft comic sequence of object-events that pique but quickly fail to sate readerly and writerly curiosity. If the spoof *récolement* performed by Volaterran and his three hearers yields a handful of anecdotes about Mythophilacte's career, these are but wistful recollections of an absent author sinking fast beneath the historical horizon as his remaining writings fade into obscurity. They will not be posthumously rescued by a fellow author: Charrosselles is not prepared to issue the extant, fragmentary oeuvre into print at his own cost.<sup>69</sup> And yet, such is the persistence of Charrosselles's attachment to the paper-trail of Mythophilacte's inventoried works that the narrative keeps on going and going. Thus, Furetière's inward meta-discursive trajectory offers a shifting critique

of the material conditions of authorship, through an intercalation of four kinds of lists, which may be schematized as follows:

*INVENTORY OF MYTHOPHILACTE'S POSSESSIONS*

*CATALOGUE OF MYTHOPHILACTE'S BOOKS*

*DEDICATORY SUMMA*

*TAX ROLE*

In this way, on four levels—the notarial, the bibliographic, the recapitulatory, and the fiscal—Furetière keeps open the underlying question of the documentary value of literature. He does not so much exalt the novel's power to document material and historical »reality«, as demonstrate, with extraordinary precision, how a literary narrative can be construed and prolonged from an assemblage of apparently dead-end documents. One might even ask whether the resultant text is more archive than narrative, more document than book.

## Conclusion: The sheeves that got away

Not even a mouldy old tax role is enough to kill off the absurd fascination with papers and books in the »Roman bourgeois«. Volaterran is still forced to read out a dedicatory epistle from the »Somme dédicatoire« before he escapes back to his office. As he hastily gathers his papers, heading for the door, two loose sheeves fly out of his case-bag whereupon they are seized by Charrosselles and Collantine. We are left to imagine Volaterran's chagrin upon unpacking his sack and discovering that, in spite of all his inventorial acumen, there are documents missing. The sheeves that got away, that refused to sit flat, that would not lie still, are emblematic of this study's inquiry into the unsettledness of storing and maintaining collections of information-objects in early modern France—problems that played out in the course of various administrative operations in adjacent office, library and fictional spaces. Registers missing from the municipal archives, unreturned library books, mildewed pages, and bindings defaced by rodents...

such »de-filing« mishaps were routinely incurred across early modern knowledge economies, as their objects were moved from one orbit to another, only to be left for long periods unattended.<sup>70</sup> We should not, however, dismiss such mishaps as mere symptoms of pre-modern administrative clumsiness. The challenges of storage and circulation spurred inventive practical solutions, such as Naudé's, or those of the eighteenth-century clerks of the Hôtel de Ville de Paris. Indeed for Naudé, intellectual curiosity and administrative finesse were attainable ideals; they went hand in glove. But as we have seen, in Furetière, curiosity finds curious outlets beyond the august catalogues and walls of a Naudean library. Even the humble inventory, that most basic and indispensable tool of the clerk, has an extraordinary fictional mileage for those of a suitably eccentric sense of humour.

Two hundred or so years later, and we arrive at Honoré de Balzac's »Comédie humaine« that represents arguably the most coherent endeavour ever undertaken by a French writer to write archival fiction.<sup>71</sup> Balzac's literary representations of bureaucracy merit a brief mention by way of concluding remarks:

*France possesses the most ferreting, meticulous, scribbling, paper-pushing, inventory-keeping, cross-checking, tidy set of bureaucrats—in fact, the famed housekeeper of administrations!<sup>72</sup>*

Balzac is looking at a burgeoning state administration: one that has expanded enormously since the Revolution, and that is developing an anxious self-consciousness vis-à-vis its own efficiency.<sup>73</sup> Balzac's wry comments furthermore indicate just how much more fictional mileage paper-pushing office clerks would wrack up in nineteenth-century France.<sup>74</sup> But Balzacian administration is by no means a meticulous, well-oiled machine. In his »Comédie humaine«, the office semiotopos is documented with a punctilious vacuity. Work at the bureau becomes petty and monotonous, slouching in offices, where one is surrounded by things—words, objects, people—without meaning, or rather with a meaning but no dimension to it.<sup>75</sup> In a world of monotonous paperwork for signing and collating, not every process, it turns out, is tidy: copies of papers are left carelessly lying around; some sheaves

inevitably get away and end up in the wrong hands. Déjà-vu? Yes, to an extent. The fear of archival irregularity and the shame of discovering it were abiding latencies of those red and green registers under lock and key in the seventeenth-century Bureau de la Ville de Paris, with which this study began. The age-old fears of missing records and anxieties over incorrect procedure are summoned to the surface of Balzac's prose, where they now sit as full-blown tropes in his heavy-handed depictions of bureaucracy. At the slightest error in format, the Balzacian civil servant is shocked, for he lives by his fussy scruples for regularity, however time-consuming.<sup>76</sup> Balzac bemoans the bureaucratic as the »weighty veil between the task at hand and the man who can get it done«;<sup>77</sup> and yet, he is in no hurry to tear away the veil of institutional memory and procedure that inevitably prolongs the task at hand, which in his case, is the task of literary composition.<sup>78</sup> Instead, Balzac thinks narratively about documents as objects needing to be compiled, catalogued, and even commodified. In »Les Employées [engl. title: The Bureaucrats]«, how-to-do-it administrative treatises are (mis)categorised under the heading of »Historical and Geographic Catechisms« at the university library; but some of these volumes, bound red Morocco leather, are on sale.<sup>79</sup> Where else can such apparently inconsequential artefacts wad out a literary narrative to point where they become a *recherché* item offered at a work social event? Furetière's »Roman bourgeois«, with its demi-monde of collectors, clerks, and parasites would seem to offer an oblique but compelling antecedent which likewise provides the right conditions for the monetization of all kinds of writing. An expedient reminder, then, that Furetière's strategies of representation, foreshadowing those of Balzac, are constantly recalibrating and totting up documentary forms within and alongside literary *écriture*. This is but a single thread in the tangled skein of inventorial discourses, both modern and pre-modern.<sup>80</sup>

- 1 All translations from French are my own.
- 2 On signifying practices as connected to specific spaces («semiotopes»), see Bernard Siegert: *Passage des Digitalen. Zeichenpraktiken der Neuzeitlichen Wissenschaften 1500–1900*, Berlin 2003, p. 14.
- 3 Elizabeth Yale: *The History of Archives. The State of the Discipline*, in: *Book History* 18 (2015), pp. 332–359.
- 4 See in particular the two edited volumes by Liesbeth Corens / Kate Peters / Alexandra Walsham: *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World*. Oxford 2018; *The Social History of the Archive. Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe*, in: *Past and Present* 230/11 (2016).
- 5 Ben Kafka: *Paperwork. The State of the Discipline*, in: *Book History* 12 (2009), pp. 340–353.
- 6 Bruno Latour: *La Fabrique du droit. Une ethnographie du Conseil d'État*, Paris 2002, pp. 83–84.
- 7 I follow Ann Blair's helpful distinction between «information» (processed and thus meaningful «data»), and «knowledge» (requiring a cognitive engagement with its object). Ann Blair: *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*, New Haven 2010, pp. 1–2.
- 8 Bill Brown: *Other Things*. Chicago 2015; Bill Brown: *Things*, Chicago 2004.
- 9 Maurizia Boscagli: *Stuff Theory. Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism*, New York 2014.
- 10 The main extant source of documentation is the vast series of «Registres des délibérations du Bureau de la Ville de Paris» published by the Services des travaux historiques de la Ville de Paris since 1883.
- 11 For the complete record, see François Bonnardot (ed.): *Registres des délibérations du Bureau de la Ville de Paris*, Paris 1883, pp. vii–xiv.
- 12 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xviii.
- 13 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xviii.
- 14 See notably Ernest Coyecque: *Recueil d'actes notariés relatifs à l'histoire de Paris et ses environs au XVIe siècle*. 2 vol., Paris 1905–1923.
- 15 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xii.
- 16 On the emergence of the purposely retrievable file as an epistemic practice, see Matthew Hull / Stefan Nellen / Thomas Rohringer: *Towards a History of Files*, in: *Administrory* 4 (2019), p. 4; Lisa Gitelman: *Paper Knowledge. Towards a Media History of Documents*, Durham 2014, p. 1.
- 17 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xiii.
- 18 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xiii.
- 19 The most notable example of goldwork commissioned directly by the Bureau was the 1740 *Lampadaire* placed in the the Abbaye de Sainte-Geneviève. See *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et l'île de France* 14 (1887), pp. 135–142. For a list of Parisian goldsmiths who held municipal offices, see Charles Ginoux: *Les Orfèvres de Paris officiers municipaux (1557-1735)*, in: *Revue de l'art français ancien et moderne* 2 (1885), pp. 21–23.
- 20 This is the judgement of master goldsmith Pierre Le Roy, in: Pierre Le Roy: *Statuts et privileges du corps des marchands orfèvres-joyailliers de la Ville de Paris*, Los Angeles 2003 [1734], p. 3.
- 21 See Henry Havard: *Histoire de l'orfèvrerie française*. Vol. 2, Paris 1896.
- 22 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xiii.
- 23 Hercules-themed tapestries were widespread across early modern Europe, though few have survived. See Anne-Sophie Laruelle: *Hercules in the Art of Flemish Tapestry (1450-1565)*, in: Valerie Mainz / Emma Stafford (eds.): *The Exemplary Hercules from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and Beyond*, Leiden 2020, pp. 97–118.
- 24 François Rabelais: *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen, Harmondsworth 1955, p. 42: «Opening this tomb at a certain place... they found nine flagons...; and beneath the middle flagon lay a great, greasy, grand, grey, pretty, little, mouldy book.... In this book was found the said genealogy, written out at length in a chancery hand, not on paper, nor on parchment, nor on wax, but on elm-bark, so worn however by old age that scarcely three letters could be read.»
- 25 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xxv.
- 26 Bonnardot: *Registres*, p. xiv.
- 27 See L. M. Tisserand: *La Première Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville de Paris (1760-1797)*, Paris 1873, p. 97 and p. ii for the socially diverse users of the library. Both the first and the second Bibliothèques de l'Hotel de Ville were destroyed; eventually, after the insurrections of 1870–1871, two libraries emerged: a Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville de Paris and a Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris (the latter originating in the private collections of Antoine Moriau).
- 28 Tisserand: *La Première Bibliothèque*, p. 97.
- 29 Leading writers who relied on the services of secretaries included Michel de Montaigne, the Duchess of Montpensier and the Duke of Sully (who employed four secretaries to draft and compile his memoirs). See George Hoffmann: *Montaigne's Career*, Oxford 1998; in a wider administrative context, see Nicolas Schapira: *Maitres et secrétaires (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles): l'exercice du pouvoir dans la France d'Ancien Régime*, Paris 2020.
- 30 Estelle Boeuf: *La Bibliothèque parisienne de Gabriel Naudé en 1630. Les lectures d'un libertin érudit*, Geneva 2007, pp. 101–2. Naudé left three partial inventories of his private holdings which amounted to around 8000 books distributed between his residences in Paris and Rome. Manuscripts of these inventories are held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France: i) «Catalogus manuscriptorum bibliothecae olim Naudanae» (MS Lat. 10381); ii) «Inventaire de mes livres qui sont à Rome» (MS Fr. 5863); iii) «Catalogue des livres qui sont en l'estude de G. Naudé à Paris» (MS fr. 5681).
- 31 Warren Boutcher: *Collecting Manuscripts and Printed Books in the Late Renaissance: Naudé and the Last Duke of Urbino's Library*, in: *Italian Studies* 66 (2011), p. 206–220 at 220.
- 32 Roger Chartier: *Libraries Without Walls*, in: R. Howard Bloch / Carla Hesse (eds.): *Future Libraries*, Berkeley 1995, pp. 38–52; Chartier: *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Stanford 1992. Under Naudé's librarianship, Cardinal Mazarin's rapidly expanding library was open to the public on Thursdays, according to Louis Jacob's «Traicté des plus belles bibliothèques publiques et particulières» (1644).
- 33 See Isabelle Moreau: *Collections et bibliothèques selon Gabriel Naudé*, in: Claudine Nédelec (ed.): *Les Bibliothèques. Entre imaginaires et réalités*, Arras 2020, pp. 159–176.
- 34 Important examples included Conrad Gesner's «*Bibliotheca Universalis*» (1545) and Antonio Possevino's «*Bibliotheca Selecta*» (1593).
- 35 Chartier: *The Order of Books*, pp. 69–71.
- 36 Gabriel Naudé: *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, Paris 1627, pp. 27–8.
- 37 Boeuf: *La Bibliothèque Parisienne de Gabriel Naudé*, p. 102.
- 38 Robert Schneider: *Dignified Retreat. Writers and Intellectuals in the Age of Richelieu*, Oxford 2019, p. 160.
- 39 Schneider: *Dignified Retreat*, p. 160; Fabienne Queyroux: *Recherches sur Gabriel Naudé (1600-1653), érudit et bibliothécaire du premier XVIIe siècle*. Doctoral Thesis, Ecole des Chartes, 1990, pp. 60, 301.

- 40 Naudé: Advis, p. 140.
- 41 Naudé: Advis, pp. 137–142.
- 42 Tisserand: La Première Bibliothèque, p. 6 notes that by the eighteenth century, simply leaving books on *tablettes* would expose them to too much wear and tear.
- 43 Naudé is more explicit about the role of auxiliary library staff in a later work, his apology for Cardinal Mazarin that became known as the «Mascurat». Here he offers more negative reflections on the public library, deploring the prospect of the librarian and his staff endlessly fetching books for students. Naudé: Jugement de tout ce qui a esté imprimé contre le cardinal Mazarin, depuis le sixième janvier, jusques à la declaration du premier avril mil six cens quarante-neuf, Paris 1650, pp. 242–3. On the wider significance of the «Mascurat», see Alfredo Serrai: Istruzioni per allestire una biblioteca, Macerata 2012.
- 44 Naudé: Advis, pp. 126–8, at 148.
- 45 Naudé: Advis, pp. 162–3.
- 46 Naudé: Jugement [Mascurat], pp. 242–3.
- 47 Naudé: Advis, pp. 147–9.
- 48 Naudé: Advis, p. 126.
- 49 On the role of the consumer in the physical appearance of books, see Jeffrey Knight: Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature, Philadelphia 2013, p. 5.
- 50 Naudé: Advis, p. 149.
- 51 Claudine Nédelec: Trois Catalogues de Saint-Victor au XVIIe siècle, in: Anne-Pascale Pouey-Mounou / Paul J. Smith (eds.): Early Modern Catalogues of Imaginary Books. A Scholarly Anthology, Leiden 2019, pp. 215–229.
- 52 On the novelistic status of the «Roman bourgeois» see especially Craig Moyes: Furetière's «Roman bourgeois» and the Problem of Exchange: Titular Economies, London 2013; Jean Serroy: Roman et réalité. Les histoires comiques au XVIIe Siècle 32 (1981). For more focused studies of the legal language of the «Roman bourgeois», as well as Moyes (2013), see Marine Roy-Garibal: Furetière et le droit bourgeois de la langue, in: Littératures classiques 40 (2000), pp. 103–118; Jean Nagle: Furetière entre la magistrature et les bénéfiques. Autour du livre second du «Roman bourgeois», in: XVIIe Siècle 32. 1981, pp. 293–305.
- 53 There are two modern editions of the «Roman bourgeois»: the 1981 Gallimard edition by Jacques Prévot, and the 2001 GF Flammarion edition by Marine Roy-Garibal. I cite the Roy-Garibal edition. All following citations are therefore taken from Antoine Furetière: Roman bourgeois, Paris 2001 [1666].
- 54 On the word-play of Furetière's names and on their possible relation to historical individuals, see Moyes: Furetière's «Roman bourgeois», chapter 5.
- 55 Furetière: Roman bourgeois, p. 285.
- 56 Furetière: Roman bourgeois, p. 316.
- 57 Furetière: Roman bourgeois, p. 287.
- 58 Malcolm Walsby: Book Lists and Their Meaning, in: Malcolm Walsby / Natasha Constantinidou (eds.): Documenting the Early Modern Book World. Inventories and Catalogues in Manuscript and Print, Leiden 2013, pp. 1–26, at p. 6.
- 59 Furetière: Roman bourgeois, p. 290.
- 60 For example: «Once everyone had sat down and fallen silent, Volaterran thus began to read out the inventory [...]» (p. 286); «so Volaterran, having skipped several pages, continued with his reading [...]» (p. 288); «the clerk took hold of this testament and having muttered his way through several pages full of vain notarial formulae, he started to read more slowly the following clauses [...]» (p. 288); «Volaterran, picking up on Belastre's nod for him to resume [...] continued with his reading» (p. 293).
- 61 See further Helen Swift: Fictional Will, in: W. Michelle Wang / Daniel K. Jernigan / Neil Murphy (eds.): The Routledge Companion to Death and Literature. New York 2021, pp. 256–64. Swift enumerates the salient features of the genre as follows: *autobiographical and confessional elements; moral reflection and/or instruction (recognizing, alongside a juridical model, the biblical heritage of testament as covenant); the post-mortem disposition of the body and property; and political or social commentary, mobilized through satire* (p. 256)
- 62 Moyes: Furetière's «Roman bourgeois», pp. 127–128.
- 63 See further Nathalie Grande: La Bibliothèque dans quelques fictions en prose à l'aube des temps modernes. Un imaginaire critique, in: Nédelec (ed.): Les Bibliothèques, pp. 295–308.
- 64 The classic study remains Alain Viala: Naissance de l'écrivain. Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique, Paris 1985.
- 65 Furetière: Roman bourgeois, p. 293.
- 66 Moyes: Furetière's «Roman bourgeois», chapter 6. Grandees continued to support artists and writers throughout the seventeenth century, but under Louis XIV, the Colbert administration went to considerable lengths to recentre the notion of patron on the single figure of the king. See Christian Jouhaud / Hélène Merlin: Mécènes, patrons et clients. Les médiations textuelles comme pratiques clientélares au XVIIe siècle, in: Terrain 21 (1993), pp. 47–62.
- 67 Furetière: Roman bourgeois, pp. 311–12.
- 68 Rabelais: Gargantua and Pantagruel, p. 42: «At the end of the book was a little treatise entitled «Corrective Conundrums». The rats and moths, or to be more truthful, some other venomous vermin, had nibbled off the opening; but the rest I have here put down, out of reverence for antiquity».
- 69 Furetière: Roman bourgeois, p. 312.
- 70 See for instance Heather Wolfe / Peter Stallybrass: The Material Culture of Record-Keeping in Early Modern England. In: Archives and Information in the Early Modern World. pp. 179–208.
- 71 Marco Codebò: Narrating from the Archive. Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age, Madison NJ 2010, p. 79.
- 72 Honoré de Balzac: The Bureaucrats, ed. Marco Diani / trans. Charles Foulke, Evanston IL 1993, p. 243.
- 73 Balzac had no direct professional experience of working in public administration; he relied on contacts within or close to municipal offices. See further Guy Thuillier: Comment Balzac voyait l'administration, in: La Revue administrative 8 (1955), pp. 384–397.
- 74 One thinks, for instance of Flaubert's «Bouvard et Pécuchet», documenting the adventures of its eponymous clerks whose fervid cataloguing impulses are transposed from scrivening to the pursuit of knowledge.
- 75 Marco Diani: Balzac's Bureaucracy. The Infinite Destiny of the Unknown Masterpiece, in: L'Esprit créateur 34 (1994), pp. 42–59, at p. 47. See also Thuillier: Comment Balzac voyait l'Administration, p. 385.
- 76 Balzac: The Bureaucrats, p. 243.
- 77 Balzac: The Bureaucrats, p. 15.
- 78 Balzac was renowned for his incessant editorial revisions to his texts: see Thuillier: Comment Balzac voyait l'Administration, p. 385.
- 79 Balzac: The Bureaucrats, p. 90.
- 80 See further Dean de La Motte: Writing Fonctionnaires. Functions of Narrative, in: L'Esprit créateur 34 (1994), pp. 22–30, at p. 30.

## Abstract

This essay eclectically traces the cultural significance of making and checking inventories in domestic, public, and bureaucratic contexts in early modern France. The analysis centres on the specific uses of inventories found in two interconnected spaces, the office and the library. A third space, the discursive space of a literary text (Antoine Furetière's »Roman bourgeois«), problematises the inventorial practices found in the other two spaces. Furetière's strategies of representation, foreshadowing those of Balzac, constantly recalibrate and tot up documentary forms of writing within and alongside literary forms.

## About the Author

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