

Furetière's *Le Roman Bourgeois* and 'la rage de causer'
Nicholas Hammond

Abstract: This article explores and reassesses Furetière's *Le Roman Bourgeois* (1666), taking as its starting point its Parisian setting, and applying in particular the self-reflexivity of gossip to the narrative construction and digressions of the text. It is argued that the overlap between oral and written discourses forms one of the main unifying factors of the book as is the role played by literal and figurative keys. The article concludes with analysis of the distinction between notions of public and private.

Key words: Furetière, narrative, gossip, orality, keys, public, private.

In a letter, dated 28th February 1689, the Marquise de Sévigné observes to her daughter that 'la rage de causer' forms an essential part of her writing.¹ This 'rage', I would argue, gives her letters the freedom both to reflect upon modes of narration and to traverse expected boundaries of narrative technique.² In this article, I would like to apply this idea of chatter to a piece of prose narrative which is similarly self-reflexive and experimental and which has all too often been underestimated or dismissed by scholars: Antoine Furetière's *Le Roman bourgeois* (1666).

Although Sévigné herself never mentions the text in her correspondence, her expression of distaste for Furetière the man in a letter of 14th May 1686 to her cousin

¹ Madame de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. Roger Duchêne (Paris: Gallimard, 1972-1978) 3 volumes, vol. 3, p. 518. Randle Cotgrave's 1611 French-English Dictionary defines the verb 'causer' as 'to prattle, bable, talke idly, reason foolishly, use much speeche to little purpose'. Sévigné also uses the term 'caquet' (defined by Cotgrave as 'Pratling, tatling, babling, tittle-tattle, much talking') at various points in her correspondence, at one point responding to a letter from her daughter with the words 'voilà mon caquet bien revenu' (21 June 1671, vol. 1, p. 277).

² This apparent disparity between spontaneity and generic self-awareness has been debated at some length in critical scholarship, led by Roger Duchêne, who interprets the letters as spontaneous outpourings of maternal love, and Bernard Bray, who considers Sévigné's letters to be self-consciously literary. See Duchêne, *Réalité vécue et art épistolaire: Madame de Sévigné et la lettre d'amour* (Paris: Bordas, 1970), and Bray, 'Quelques aspects du système épistolaire de Madame de Sévigné', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 69 (1969), 491-505. Cf. Marie-Odile Sweetser, 'Madame de Sévigné, écrivain sans le savoir?', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 39 (1989), 141-157; and Bernard Bray, Christoph Strosetzki, eds, *Art de la lettre, Art de la conversation* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995). See also Monika Kulesza, *Le Romanesque dans les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).

Bussy-Rabutin, who had written in defence of La Fontaine and Benserade in Furetière's dispute with the Académie Française, provides an interesting overlap with some of the central concerns of *Le Roman bourgeois*:

Je trouve que l'auteur fait voir clairement qu'il n'est ni du monde, ni de la cour, et que son goût est d'une pédanterie qu'on ne peut pas même espérer de corriger.³

Sévigné's accusation of pedantry against Furetière clearly evokes the work that he was doing in preparation for his *Dictionnaire Universel*, which was published posthumously in 1690, four years before the appearance of its rival, the Académie Française dictionary.⁴ But her comment that Furetière does not belong to any of the civilized social circles in town or at Court brings to the fore a crucial component of the borderlands inhabited by *Le Roman bourgeois*. Interestingly, one of Furetière's characters, Nicodème, who is courting the young *ingénue* Javotte, is called 'amphibie',⁵ because he moves between the City and the Court, without quite belonging to either. One could similarly call the whole work 'amphibie', starting with its hybrid title, followed by the descriptor 'ouvrage comique'. Furetière is deliberately exploiting and playing with generic possibilities here, crossing over from one to the other. As Craig Moyes puts it, 'the titular vectors have become muddled'.⁶ In the original edition, the word 'Roman' was placed in large type on its own line. In so doing, to quote Moyes again, we find the suggestion that 'the genre will in some way also form the *subject* of the text that follows'.⁷ However, any thoughts that the idealized and aristocratic Romance tradition may be the true subject matter of the

³ Sévigné, *Correspondance*, vol. 3, p. 254.

⁴ For more on Furetière's dispute with the Académie Française, see David Eick, 'Redefining the culture wars: Furetière and the Académie française', *Cahiers du Dix-Septième* 9:1 (2004), 91-104.

⁵ Furetière, *Le Roman bourgeois*, in *Romanciers du XVIIe siècle*, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Gallimard Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), p. 907. All quotations will be from this edition, and the page number will henceforth appear in the main text. Quotation from Sorel, Scarron and Lafayette will also be taken from the same volume.

⁶ Craig Moyes, *Furetière's "Le Roman bourgeois" and the problem of exchange: titular economics* (Leeds: Legenda, 2013), p. 21. See also Kathleen Wine, who calls the title 'an oxymoron, a deliberate marriage of an incompatible form and subject matter', 'Furetière's *Roman bourgeois*: the triumph of process', *L'Esprit Créateur* (1979) XIX no. 1, 50-63, p. 50.

⁷ Moyes, p. 21.

book are immediately undermined by the placement, in slightly smaller type but again on its own line, of the word 'Bourgeois'. The added words on another line and in yet smaller type of 'ouvrage comique' bring in yet another literary genre. Yet, unlike Scarron's *Roman comique*, which plays upon the term 'comique' as both 'comical' and 'pertaining to the theatre', as the text concerns a troupe of actors, Furetière's generic appellation refers mainly to the first category and only to the second if we bear in mind that bourgeois characters belonged to the comic genre in the theatre and never to tragedy, which was the sole domain of the nobility.

An English translation of the text was published five years after the French version under the title *City Romance* and wrongly attributed to Scarron,⁸ perhaps, as Steven Moore has suggested, because the publisher thought it was a translation of or sequel to *Le Roman comique*,⁹ but possibly also as a deliberate ploy to sell more copies, given the success of the Scarron text. The title page in some ways replicates the original French version by placing the words 'City' and 'Romance' on different lines and in different-sized type, except that 'City' (an imperfect rendition of the word 'Bourgeois') is placed in larger font than 'Romance'. However, all reference to 'ouvrage comique' is removed. Although the book did not enjoy wide popular success in France or England, its influence can be seen in the work of novelists from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. William Wycherley even made use of the Charroselles/Collantine subplot in his Restoration comedy *The Plain Dealer* (1676) as did Racine in his only comic dramatic work, *Les Plaideurs* (1668).¹⁰

Most critical assessments of *Le Roman bourgeois* are grudging in their evaluation of its worth. Antoine Adam, for example, while comparing some of the text to mediocre realist novels of the nineteenth century,¹¹ judges the book to have very few positive

⁸ Furetière, *Scarron's City Romance* (London: H. Herringman, 1671).

⁹ Steven Moore, *The Novel: an alternative history, 1600-1800* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 230.

¹⁰ See Moore, p. 236. See also Edwin E. Williams, 'Furetière and Wycherley: *Le roman bourgeois* in Restoration Comedy', *Modern Language Notes* (1938) LIII, 98-104.

¹¹ Antoine Adam, 'Le roman français au XVIIe siècle', in *Romanciers du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 50.

qualities.¹² Astonishingly, Jean Sgard, in a study devoted to the French seventeenth-century novel,¹³ chooses to analyse the narrative strategies of *Le Roman comique*, but fails even to mention *Le Roman bourgeois*. Maurice Lever, in his *Romanciers du Grand Siècle*, does at least consider Furetière's text, but asserts that, while the book concerns 'tous ces menus faits d'apparence triviale qui ancrent le récit dans le quotidien',¹⁴ 'le roman naît de sa propre négation'.¹⁵ For Henri Coulet, in his magisterial evaluation of the novel up to the Revolution, *Le Roman bourgeois* is 'instructive par son échec même'.¹⁶ Similarly, Jean Serroy, while devoting a large section to the work and giving a refined reading of many passages, is still able to assert that 'si Furetière n'a pas été romancier, c'est au fond qu'il ne croyait pas au roman'.¹⁷

Moyes is one of the few scholars not to dwell only on the text's perceived failures. In the only full-length book in English on *Le Roman bourgeois*, he gives a useful corrective to the view that Furetière is some kind of primitive Balzac, and summarizes other critical opinions thus: 'Whatever the benchmark, Furetière is always hopelessly out of date, either producing a coarse parody of a genre whose time had already past [sic], or confusedly blazing a trail towards a genre whose time had not yet come'.¹⁸ Moyes takes an interesting approach to the book, by applying a sociocritical interpretation. Instead of focusing on the social world behind the text, he concentrates on the subtle interplay between social and literary representation. In particular, Moyes sees the Furetière text as an important reflection on 'the mechanisms of literary, financial and social exchange'¹⁹ as evidenced by the trial and imprisonment of the Minister of Finance under Louis XIV, Nicolas Fouquet.

¹² Antoine Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Doma, 1954), 4 volumes, IV, p. 210.

¹³ Sgard, *Le Roman français*.

¹⁴ Maurice Lever, *Romanciers du Grand Siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1996, first edition 1981), p. 169.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁶ Henri Coulet, *Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), p. 277.

¹⁷ Jean Serroy, *Roman et réalité: les histoires comiques au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Minard, 1981), p. 600.

¹⁸ Moyes, p. 13.

¹⁹ Moyes, p. 4.

My focus will be different. For all that the anti-novels (or, more accurately, anti-romances) of the seventeenth century engage with and confront narrative conventions of the time, *Le Roman Bourgeois* is the most prominent text that situates itself explicitly in a contemporary urban setting, deliberately eschewing the pastoral situation of works like *L'Astrée* or the historical and aristocratic setting of heroic novels like *Clélie* or *Le Grand Cyrus* or even the movement between the provincial town Le Mans and its surroundings in *Le Roman comique*. Seventeenth-century Paris, which, as we are told, 'est tellement remply de crottes' (p. 926), is in many ways the text's central character. As the narrator/author tells us in the opening pages, 'je veux que la scène de mon roman soit mobile, c'est à dire tantost en un quartier et tantost en un autre de la ville' (p. 904). By locating the tale more specifically in the place Maubert, the narrator explains that

Je dirai seulement que c'est le centre de toute la galanterie bourgeoise du quartier, et qu'elle est très-fréquentée, à cause que la licence de causer y est assez grande. (p. 905)

Unlike the picaresque novel, which usually ranges across wide geographical and often fictional locations, *Le Roman Bourgeois* remains firmly located in factual Paris, but the variety of Parisian outdoor settings, such as the Pont-Neuf (locus of street theatre, puppet theatre, song performances and gossip, pp. 960-1, and, as Joan DeJean has shown, one of the few spaces where people of all classes mingled²⁰), the Marais district (p. 927), the area where young lovers were afforded more liberties than elsewhere in the city,²¹ and the Saint-Germain fair (p. 945), gives space to the narrative and freedom to talk away from the confines of constricted interiors.

Like Sévigné's 'rage de causer', chatter or gossip functions as a principal driving

²⁰ Joan DeJean describes the Pont-Neuf as 'a great social leveler', in *How Paris became Paris: the invention of the modern city* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 28. As the first bridge to cross the Seine in a single span, DeJean sees the bridge as emblematic of the modern city, pp. 21-44. Furetière also evokes another space built in the seventeenth century, the Place Royale (p. 904), now known as the Place des Vosges.

²¹ See DeJean, p. 59.

force in *Le Roman bourgeois*, and the self-reflexivity of gossip can easily be applied to a text that is so acutely aware of the processes of its own construction. On a spatial front, Patricia Meyer Spacks's description of gossip inhabiting 'borderlands of socially sanctioned oral discourse'²² pertains particularly well here, for, as can be seen above, not only is the place Maubert the location where 'galanterie' can be openly displayed but it is there that the bourgeois characters have the 'licence' to gossip. Furetière's own *Dictionnaire Universel* is helpful in its definitions for both 'causer' and 'licence'. While 'causer' can signify 's'entretenir de choses familiares et peu importantes', it also brings to the fore the illicit pleasure of communicating confidential information, as can be seen in Furetière's supplementary definition: 'parler trop, ou indiscrettement, lascher quelque parole qui fait descouvrir un secret'. The word 'Licence' can mean 'congé et permission d'un Superieur', and 'se dit aussi de l'abus de ces permissions qu'on étend au-delà de leur intention ou de la liberté qu'on prend de soy-même'. Spoken discourse within the urban setting affords both characters and text a freedom that might be denied elsewhere, and the use of that space and other spaces related to it remains fundamental to such freedom.²³ As Michel de Certeau puts it, 'tout récit est un récit de voyage – une pratique de l'espace'.²⁴

One of the most active uses of space on the page in early modern prose narrative can be found in digressions, where autonomous narratives break away from a central narrative, often in the form of a story told by a character within the fiction.²⁵ The

²² Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 65.

²³ See also Jörg R. Bergmann, who writes that 'places or occasions for gossip are found everywhere acquaintances – accidentally or unintentionally – meet, pass the time undisturbed, or better still are able to combine the passing of time with other activities', *Discreet Indiscretions: the social organization of gossip*, translated by John Bednarz Jr and Eva Kafka Baron (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), p. 15.

²⁴ Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien: 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Folio, 1990), p. 171. See also John Forrester who, in applying a psychoanalytical reading, describes joking and gossip as inhabiting 'a sharply contoured space of the forbidden and the enticing', *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, first published 1990), p. 248.

²⁵ For different readings of digression within early modern texts, see Will McMorran, *The Inn and the Traveller: digressive topographies in the early modern European novel* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), and Anne Cotterill, *Digressive Voices in early modern English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

narrator's comment in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* that

Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; -- they are the life, the soul of reading; -- take them out of this book for instance, -- you might as well take the book along with them,²⁶

can easily be applied to most romances, heroic novels and anti-novels of the seventeenth century. However, as Richard Parish puts it, 'whereas digressions are a feature of most fictional works of the period, they are, in the case of *Le Roman bourgeois*, the whole of the novel'.²⁷ Described in the Furetière dictionary as a 'vice d'éloquence, où l'on tombe lorsqu'un Orateur sort de son principal sujet pour en traiter un autre', the digression belongs not only to written but also to spoken discourse. I have described elsewhere the various digressions in *La Princesse de Clèves* as 'gossip narratives',²⁸ because all the digressions consist of tales told by members of the court about other members of the court to the princess herself. If we apply this sense of digression as gossip to the Furetière text, both the setting of the place Maubert in *Le Roman bourgeois* as a locus of gossip and Parish's idea of the whole text as digression show us ways in which gossip acts as a guiding principle in this disparate and seemingly inchoate text.

More particularly, much of *Le Roman bourgeois* engages with the overlap between oral and written discourses. In many ways, the different kinds of discourse cohere with Bakhtinian heteroglossia. The multiplicity of social voices, within dialogues, intercalated stories and narratorial/authorial interventions, is vividly represented in the text. Not only is language of the romance tradition parodied, but so too are bourgeois attempts to replicate *galant* turns of phrase (shown most strongly in the written declaration of marriage to Javotte by Jean Bedoul in Book I which he is then obliged to read aloud). *Le Roman bourgeois* connects also in a number of ways with other parodic novels, with Charles Sorel, very thinly disguised as Charroselles, as the key. Like Sorel's

²⁶ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman*, Book I, ch.14.22.

²⁷ Richard Parish, *Scarron: Le Roman Comique* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1998), p. 15.

²⁸ Nicholas Hammond, *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal in France 1610-1715* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), p.129.

‘berger extravagant’, Lysis, who consciously models himself on other literary creations, most particularly those that feature in *l’Astrée*, Furetière’s characters are constantly interacting with heroes and heroines of the romance tradition. Thus, we are told that Nicodème, in trying to woo Javotte, ‘avoit fait son cours exprés dans Cyrus et dans Clelie’ (p. 911). Similarly, the narrator interjects at various points, reminding the reader of his book’s failures to follow the example of earlier textual models, such as when the reader is told,

Si vous estes si desireux de voir comme on découvre sa passion, je vous en indiqueray plusieurs moyens qui sont dans l’Amadis, dans l’Astrée, dans Cirus et dans tous les autres romans, que je n’ay pas le loisir ni le dessein de copier ny de dérober, comme ont fait la plupart des auteurs. (p. 936)

Furetière does not confine his parody of learning the art of loving to higher forms of narrative alone, he also readily evokes popular culture. Song, for example, is evoked in the wooing of Lucrece by the marquis, where the narrator tells us: ‘Vous verrez seulement que le refrain d’une chanson quand on en écrit le premier mot avec un etc., c’est assez de vous dire maintenant que notre marquis fut amoureux de Lucrece, etc.’ (p. 936).

Even the inventories, catalogues, chapter headings and legal proceedings that punctuate Book II, as ‘written’ as they appear to be, are accompanied by spoken dialogue or oral disputes at almost every juncture. The final image of the book, with Charroselles and Collantine’s unending legal argument, leaves us with both a written and a spoken sense of the verb ‘plaider’; the Furetière dictionary defines ‘plaider’ as both ‘intenter un procès, estre en procès’ and ‘On dit aussi dans les conversations, qu’un homme a bien plaidé sa cause’:

Ils ont tousjours plaidé et plaident encore, et plaideront tant qu’il plaira à

Dieu de les laisser vivre. (p. 1104)²⁹

The scene in *Le Roman bourgeois* which most vividly stages the overlap between written and oral discourse, between ‘high’ and ‘low’ levels of spoken exchange, and between language and silence, is the passage in Book I devoted to Angélique’s literary salon, the kind of salon with which a writer like Sévigné herself was well acquainted. Significantly, this is the first time that Charroselles, who will play a prominent part in Book II, appears in the text: ‘un certain auteur, nommé Charroselles, y venoit aussi’ (p. 970). Although most critical scholarship tends to see the second Book of *Le Roman bourgeois* as both incoherent and pettily personal, unrelated to the first Book,³⁰ the presentation of Charroselles here is key (in more than one sense of the word), as we will see.

The young Javotte is introduced to the salon, where ‘la conversation y fut assés agréable et spirituelle’ (p. 970), but she herself remains silent. As she tells Pancrace later, she is both ‘honteuse de ne point parler’ (p. 1004) and would love to have ‘le secret de ces demoiselles, qui causent si bien’ (p. 1004), even going so far as to ask whether there is a book where she can learn to chatter with such facility. Within the circle, one woman, Hippolyte, upholds the value of lofty, learned conversations, while another, Laurence, engages in the latest gossip:

Hyppolite, qui n’aymoit que les entretiens sçavans, esloigna bientost ces discours communs qui se font dans les visites ordinaires. Elle se plaignit de

²⁹ This passage is translated particularly colourfully in the 1671 translation as ‘they have ever pleaded, plead still, and plead will, as long as Heaven spares their lives’, *City Romance*, p. 244.

³⁰ See, for example, James A. Parr, who writes that ‘there is precious little originality in the verbose and otiose compilations that conclude part 2’, *Don Juan, Don Quixote and related subjects* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2004), p. 107. There are exceptions, most notably Michèle Vialet, who sees the incoherence of the two books as an important aesthetic statement, in *Triomphe de l’iconoclaste: “Le Roman bourgeois” et les lois de la cohérence romanesque* (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1989), and Moyes, who argues that ‘the second book makes explicit what is at the very least already implied in the first, that the matter of the *Roman bourgeois* is to be found first of all in the activity of exchange and the various *liminary* spaces where it takes place’, p. 28.

Laurence, qui avoit commencé à parler des nouvelles de la ville et du voisinage, luy disant que cela sentoit sa visite d'accouchée, ou les discours de commeres, et que parmy le beau monde il ne falloit parler que de livres et de belles choses. (p. 971)

As much as Hyppolite might consider her verbal exchanges to be of greater value than Laurence's love of gossip, significantly she then 'se jetta sur la friperie de plusieurs pauvres auteurs' (p. 971), a habit which, we are told, is habitual amongst 'fausses pretieuses' (p. 971). At this point, the narrator intervenes, in effect cutting short the reader's eavesdropping upon the conversation, and seemingly imposing another form of silence:

Mais dispensez-moy de vous reciter cet endroit de leur conversation, que je veux passer sous silence, car je n'oserois nommer pas un des auteurs vivans: ils m'accuseroient de tout ce qui auroit esté dit alors, quoy que je n'en pusse mais. J'aurois beau condamner tous les jugemens qui auroient esté prononcé contre eux, ce seroit un crime capital d'en faire seulement mention. Ils me traitteroient bien plus rigoureusement qu'un historien ou un gazetier, qui ne sont jamais garands des recits qu'ils font. Outre que ces messieurs sont si delicats, qu'il faut bien prendre garde comme on parle d'eux; ils sont si faciles à piquer. Que le moindre mot de raillerie, ou une louange mediocre, les met aux champs et les rend ennemis irreconciliables. Apres quoy, ce sont autant de bouches que vous fermez à la Renommée, qui auparavant parloient pour vous, et cela fait grand tort au libraire qui est interessé au débit d'un livre. (p. 971)

Again, oral discourse is set against written account, and each is deemed by the narrator to be as unreliable as the other. Yet, it is the written or oral report of others' conversations that, according to the narrator, are viewed by other authors as more reprehensible than any historical account or article in a gazette.

J'ay mesme ce respect pour eux, que je ne veux pas faire comme certains escrivains, qui, lorsqu'ils en parlent, retournent leurs noms, les escorchent, ou les anagrammatisent. Invention assez inutile, puisque, si leur nom est bien caché, le discours est obscur et perd de sa force et de sa grace, ou n'est tout au plus plaisant qu'à peu de personnes; et si on les descouvre (comme il arrive presque tousjours) ce déguisement ne sert de rien, veu que les lecteurs font si bien qu'ils en attrapent la clef, et il arrive souvent qu'il y a des larrons d'honneur qui en font faire de fausses clefs. C'est pourquoy je ne parlerai point du detail, mais seulement de ce qui fut dit en general, et dont personne ne se peut choquer, s'il n'est de bien mauvaise humeur, et s'il n'a la conscience bien chargée. On s'estendit d'abord sur les poëmes et sur les romans, et l'on y parla fort de l'institution du poëte, de la maniere de devenir authour, et d'acquérir de la reputation dans le monde. (pp. 971-2)

Not only is the salon fashion for disguising names within keys ruthlessly satirized here (and this kind of game was especially common in the literary portraits composed both for salon participants and within literary fiction of the time³¹), but the narrator is continuing a theme that has already been announced in the Notice of the Bookseller/Author to the reader:

Je sçais bien que le premier soin que tu auras en lisant ce roman, ce sera d'en chercher la clef; mais elle ne te servira de rien, car la serrure est mêlée. (p. 901)

The narrator/author's insistence upon the uselessness of trying to decode names of characters is itself dismantled by the very signs contained within the text, for the one character to appear in both books of *Le Roman bourgeois*, Charroselles, is, as we have seen, himself a thinly disguised key for the author of other parodic novels, Charles Sorel. In other words, the only unifying figure in a deliberately discontinuous text (after all, we

³¹ See Jacqueline Plantié's *La Mode du portrait littéraire en France 1641-1681* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1994). She discusses Furetière's use of the portrait, pp. 538-541, making the point that he 'se fait portraitiste pour se moquer du portrait mondain', p. 539.

are reminded in the preface to the second book, ‘pour le soin de la liaison, je le laisse à celui qui reliera le livre’. p. 1025) is a character whose very existence as a name to be decoded is warned against at several junctures in the text. On a certain level, the narrator would seem to be engaging in a game of paralipsis with his readers: by cautioning against decoding signals, he is simultaneously drawing greater attention to those very signs. This is very much a feature of the meta-communication of gossip-songs that proliferated in seventeenth-century France, where silence is advised at the very moment that scandalous information is being divulged, involving what Jörg Bergmann calls ‘the social form of discreet indiscretion’.³²

At the same time that the reader is seemingly being dissuaded from searching for figurative keys in the book, the text is populated by literal keys, at all times related either to the act of reading or to written promises or contracts. Javotte, for example, locks herself away in order to read the books that Pancrace has sent her (p. 1005), including five volumes of *L’Astrée*, thereafter enabling her to assert herself in conversations which previously had left her mute (p. 1007). The marquis, whose passion in taking sexual advantage of Lucrece, has ‘refroidie’ (p. 944), takes her to the Saint-Germain fair in order to buy her an ebony cabinet in which Lucrece will inevitably lock away his written promise of marriage:

Le marquis prit le soin de le luy faire porter chez elle; mais auparavant il commanda secrettement au marchand d’y faire des clefs doubles, dont il garda les unes par devers lui et il fit livrer les autres à Lucrece avec le cabinet. (p. 945)

Inevitably, the marquis is then able to remove the contract from the cabinet, and abandon Lucrece without there being any written proof of their relationship.

³² Bergmann, *Discreet Indiscretions*, p. 149. See Hammond, *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal*, pp. 39-47, for analysis of meta-communication in street-songs.

To conclude, Furetiere brings to fore the complexities in seventeenth-century France of an oppositional pair of terms that I have deliberately not used thus far: public and private. Habermas's famous notion of the emergence in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries of a 'public sphere' in contradistinction to the private sphere,³³ while useful, has been contested, developed and nuanced by subsequent scholars.³⁴ Hélène Merlin-Kajman in particular has argued that in the seventeenth century, the words 'public' and 'private' cannot be viewed simply as opposites, as the two terms 'entretiennent un rapport de contradiction dynamique qui parfois s'aiguise, parfois s'annule dans la complémentarité, mais toujours dans un même espace de présupposés communs, au point que l'opposition semble toujours implicite même quand l'un des deux termes se présente sans l'autre'.³⁵

In *Le Roman bourgeois*, Furetière makes interesting use of public spaces, for, as we have seen, paradoxically it is in public (and geographically real) spaces like the Place Maubert that private courtship can most successfully be undertaken rather than in closed rooms, where the young women are being rigorously watched.

Through his exploration of the 'rage de causer', he manages to exploit the slippage between fact and fiction, between formal and informal modes of discourse, always maintaining a heightened self-awareness, thereby satisfying what Sévigné calls in another letter to her daughter 'le désir [...] de conter'.³⁶

³³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

³⁴ See, for example, Philippe Ariès, 'Pour une histoire de la vie privée', in P. Ariès and G. Duby, eds., *Histoire de la vie privée: 3. De la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), p. 19 ; Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

³⁵ Hélène Merlin-Kajman, *Public et Littérature en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 2004), pp. 47-8.

³⁶ Sévigné, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. 504.