



BEDROOM OF THE VICAR OF TOURS

TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN A HOME OF ONE'S OWN

In counterpoint to the very real room reserved for Honoré de Balzac at the Château de Saché, the room of Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours) was, like its resident, designed with the trappings of a monk's cell.

The apartments of *Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours)* in the home of Mlle Gamard, in the shadow of Saint-Gatien Cathedral, contains an accumulation of furniture, bequests and gifts from women. Here a piece of furniture, here a bed or a rug, each devout woman contributes to Abbot Chapeloud. Not to mention the delicate attentions of Mlle Gamard, who allows Abbot Chapeloud to expand his apartments and gives him canes and bellows. Each furnishing in that interior seems to have its own story: "an oak bookcase, the relic of a chateau pulled down by the Bande Noire, the carving of which deserved the admiration of all artists" and then "another lady gave the canon a set of furniture for his bedroom, the covering of which she had embroidered". Abbot Birotteau, the heir to Chapeloud, rests on his Gothic seat, reads the books in his library and sleeps in his bed with its tomb-like canopy. But amongst these *Célibataires (Celibates)*, the erotic aspect of all these goods becomes a fixation with power that is fatal to one and all.

SYMBOLIC OBJECTS

As the plot unfolds, Abbot Birotteau notices small details that show him he is not receiving the same treatment as Abbot Chapeloud. As a result, lost slippers and an incorrectly placed candlestick become symbolic objects that herald the vicar's coming fall.

[Birotteau] said nothing and followed Marianne towards the kitchen to get his candlestick, which he supposed had been left there as usual. But instead of entering the kitchen Marianne went on to his own apartments, and there the vicar beheld his candlestick on a table close to the door of the red salon, in a sort of antechamber [...]. Now, as the nature of narrow minds induces them to study trifles, Birotteau plunged suddenly into deep meditation on these four circumstances, imperceptible in their meaning to others, but to him indicative of four catastrophes. The total loss of his happiness was evidently foreshadowed in the neglect to place his slippers, in Marianne's falsehood about the fire, in the unusual removal of his candlestick to the table of the antechamber, and in the evident intention to keep him waiting in the rain. When the

fire was burning on the hearth, and the lamp was lighted, and Marianne had departed without saying, as usual, "Does Monsieur want anything more?" the Abbot Birotteau let himself fall gently into the wide and handsome easy-chair of his late friend; but there was something mournful in the movement with which he dropped upon it. The good soul was crushed by a presentiment of coming calamity. His eyes roved successively to the handsome tall clock, the bureau, curtains, chairs, carpets, to the stately bed, the basin of holy-water, the crucifix, to a Virgin by Valentin, a Christ by Lebrun,—in short, to all the accessories of this cherished room.

Honoré de Balzac
Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours)

COVETED OBJECT(S)

"Nothing short of strange, the appetites of a man of the cloth during the Restoration, missing the 'union' and 'forgetfulness' of the revolutionary era, for ecclesiastical honours: when one is Troubert, one aspires to the vicariate general of the archdiocese; when one is vicar of Saint-Gatien Cathedral, one aspires to canonry, for want of canonization. Stranger still the reduction of the world's seductions to those of an interior, however richly furnished and 'comfortable' it may be [...], such as that of Chapeloud, with its sumptuous red lampas curtains, its mahogany furniture, like the armchairs of Meunier and the chairs of Georges Vacher [...]. In short, Abbot Birotteau or the shrunken world, that of small objects, tongs and bellows, small passions and small problems, with great effects."

Nathalie Preiss, excerpt from "Être ou ne pas être dans ses meubles. L'appartement du curé de Tours", in Balzac, *architecte d'intérieurs*, cat. exp., Somogy, 2016, pp. 191-192.

The bedroom then had the same effect upon the vicar that the gallery had long had; it dazzled him. Lastly, about three years before the Abbot Chapeloud's death, he completed the comfort of his apartment by decorating the salon. Though the furniture was plainly covered in red Utrecht velvet, it fascinated Birotteau. From the day when the canon's friend first laid eyes on the red damask curtains, the mahogany furniture, the Aubusson carpet which adorned the vast room, then lately painted, his envy of Chapeloud's apartment became a monomania hidden within his breast. To live there, to sleep in that bed with the silk curtains where the canon slept, to have all Chapeloud's comforts about him, would be, Birotteau felt, complete happiness; he saw nothing beyond it.

Honoré de Balzac
Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours)

Etienne Meunier

Armchairs

Natural beechwood and needlepoint tapestry, ca. 1770

H: 0.87, L: 0.57, W: 0.50 m

Paris, Mobilier National, GMT 12987/1 to 5

Etienne Meunier (dates of birth and death unknown) had a workshop on Rue de Cléry in Paris. The remaining pieces bearing his stamp date mostly from the reign of Louis XV. The needlepoint tapestries appear to date back to around the late 19th century. In *Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours)*, a lady gave the canon a set of furniture for his bedroom, the covering of which she had embroidered.

Clock

Gilded bronze, ca. 1830

Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.1.138

Pedestal table

Mahogany, ca. 1810

H: 0.70, D: 0.75

Paris, Mobilier National, GME 9650

Three footed pedestal table with a fluted baluster shaft and a mahogany top. This pedestal table comes from the Château de Compiègne (C 6152).

Chimney grate

Mahogany, ca. 1820

H: 0.91, L: 0.60, W: 0.21

Paris, Mobilier National, GMT 12861

Crucifix

Wood and ivory, 18th century

Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.1.118

Night stand

Mahogany, ca. 1830

H: 0.80, L: 0.97, W: 0.37

Paris, Mobilier National, GME 8713

Carpet

198x87 cm, Paris, Mobilier National, GMT 2157/1

Virgin with Child

Oil on canvas, 18th century

H: 41 cm, L: 35.8 cm, D: 4.7 cm

Collection of the Archaeological Society of Touraine, on loan from the Hôtel Gouin, HG 946.002.0065

Marguerite de Rousselé Receiving Carmelite Vestments from the Holy Family

Oil on canvas, ca. 1630

Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.2.547

Marguerite de Rousselé (1608-1628) was the daughter of former owners of the Château de Saché. Denied her parents' permission to enter the Carmelite convent of Tours, she formed the habit of withdrawing to a cave in the woods for silent contemplation. The victim of daily mortification that she inflicted on herself, she died in an odour of sanctity at the age of 20. In her epitaph in Latin, engraved on a funerary plaque in Saché Church, the young woman was described as *dilecta* (beloved), a word that Balzac used in reference to his first love, Laure de Berny.

Pair of candelabra

Bronze and marble, 19th century

Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.1.115.1-2



Georges Vacher (active from 1805 to 1830)

Mlle Dubuquoy-Lalouette (active from 1806 to 1834)

Chair

Mahogany with ebony threads, needlepoint tapestry, ca. 1825,

H: 0.86, L: 0.47, W: 0.40 m

Paris, Mobilier National, GMT 31950

This model of chair, produced a great number of times, was delivered for the Administration of Little Pleasures that Balzac would occasionally cite, a very ancient administration in charge of the old monarchy's entertainment, celebrations, performances and ceremonies. Some of the embroidery was signed Dubuquoy-Lalouette which appears to correspond to the years 1826-1834 of that company, that occupied two successive addresses on Rue de l'Arbre-sec. Mme Dubuquoy-Lalouette was the Dauphine's protégée. The tapestry features a fleur de lys in a crown of laurels. The neo-Gothic décor of the back was adapted for a structure that was still Neoclassical. In *Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours)*, Balzac wrote of "Chapeloud's fine Gothic chair" and emphasized that this style corresponded to "the fashionable taste, daily growing in Paris".

Louis Bellangé

Bed

Mahogany, ca. 1820

H: 1.05, L: 2.30, W: 1.14 m

Paris, Mobilier National, GME 9628

Bed ornamentation created by the tapestry workshop

Le Crin et la Plume

Single mahogany bed and two unequal bedside tables capped with volutes and bearing the marks of the Château de Compiègne from which it came in 1943: C 14200, C 4366, as well as the mark E 6419. Complemented by a recently created canopy, this bed is reminiscent of that in *Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours)*, used in turn by Abbots Chapeloud, Biotteau and Troubert. It is called "tomb-like", which refers – as Balzac accurately defines it – to a model that was undoubtedly originally adapted for the roof breaks in attic rooms. The canopy, above the bedside table at the head of the bed, breaks to join the bottom table, assuming the form of a tomb. Other beds with tomb-like canopies can be found in *La Comédie humaine (The Human Comedy)*, "with slopes and good graces" and "with feathers" in *Les Employés (Bureaucracy)*.

Chest of drawers

Mahogany, early 19th century

H: 0.90, L: 1.14, W: 0.59

Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.1.78

Secretary desk

Mahogany, early 19th century

H: 1.43, L: 0.81, W: 0.41

Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.1.54

Fire tongs and ash shovel

Metal, undated

L: 60 cm

Collection of the Archaeological Society of Touraine, on loan from the Hôtel Gouin in Tours, HG 2002.013.0147 and HG 2002.013.0146

Bellows

Wood, leather and cooper, inscription: L'INUSABLE (THE INDESTRUCTIBLE)

L: 50 cm, D: 23 cm

Collection of the Archaeological Society of Touraine, on loan from the Hôtel Gouin in Tours, HG 2002.013.0150

Pietà

Sculpted oak

4th quarter of the 15th century

L: 33 cm, W: 24 cm, D: 17 cm

Collection of the Archaeological Society of Touraine, on loan from the Hôtel Gouin in Tours, HG 870.051.0001

Holy water font

Earthenware, 18th century

L: 10.2 cm, P: 7 cm, H: 21.3 cm

Collection of the Archaeological Society of Touraine, on loan from the Hôtel Gouin in Tours, HG 2004.009.0012