

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO BALZAC

One of the founders of literary realism and the serial novel, Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) was a prolific writer who produced more than a hundred novels, plays and short stories during his career. With its dramatic plots and memorable characters, Balzac's fiction has enthralled generations of readers. *La Comédie humaine*, the vast collection of works in which he strove to document every aspect of nineteenth-century French society, has influenced writers from Flaubert, Zola and Proust to Dostoevsky and Oscar Wilde. This *Companion* provides a critical reappraisal of Balzac, combining studies of his major novels with guidance on the key narrative and thematic features of his writing. Twelve chapters by world-leading specialists encompass a wide spectrum of topics such as the representation of history, philosophy and religion, the plight of the struggling artist, gender and sexuality, and Balzac's depiction of the creative process itself.

OWEN HEATHCOTE is Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Modern French Studies at the University of Bradford. He researches on the relation between violence, gender, sexuality and representation in French literature from the nineteenth century to the present. His many publications include *Balzac and Violence. Representing History, Space, Sexuality and Death in 'La Comédie humaine'* (2009) and *From Bad Boys to New Men? Masculinity, Sexuality and Violence in the Work of Éric Jourdan* (2014).

ANDREW WATTS is Senior Lecturer in French Studies at the University of Birmingham. His research focuses on the representation of provincial life in *La Comédie humaine* and, more recently, on the adaptation of nineteenth-century French novels in different artistic media. He is the author of *Preserving the Provinces: Small Town and Countryside in the Work of Honoré de Balzac* (2007) and the co-author (with Kate Griffiths) of *Adapting Nineteenth-Century France: Literature in Film, Theatre, Television, Radio and Print* (2013). He has also co-edited (with Michelle Cheyne) a critical edition of Balzac's *Le Nègre* (2014).

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
BALZAC

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>Chronology</i>	xiv
<i>Balzac’s Work: An Overview of ‘La Comédie humaine’</i>	xviii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xxiii
 Introduction	 I
ANDREW WATTS	
 1 Balzac: A Portrait of the Novelist as Social Historian and Scientist	 II
ELISABETH GERWIN	
 2 Balzac’s Early Works	 27
MICHAEL TILBY	
 3 Balzac’s Correspondence	 40
EWA SZYPULA	
 4 Fantasy and Reality in <i>La Peau de chagrin</i>	 52
DAVID F. BELL	
 5 Balzac, Money and the Pursuit of Power	 67
ALLAN H. PASCO	
 6 <i>Le Père Goriot: Arrivisme</i> and the Parisian Morality Tale	 81
ARMINE KOTIN MORTIMER	
 7 <i>Illusions perdues</i> : Writers, Artists and the Reflexive Novel	 97
SOTIRIOS PARASCHAS	
	v

CONTENTS

8	Balzac, Gender and Sexuality: <i>La Cousine Bette</i> DOROTHY KELLY	111
9	Space, Religion and Politics in the <i>Scènes de la vie de campagne</i> OWEN HEATHCOTE	127
10	BALZAC’S SHORTER FICTION TIM FARRANT	140
11	Adapting Balzac ANDREW WATTS	157
12	Balzac’s Legacy SCOTT LEE	175
	Epilogues	189
	Dual Balzac CHANTAL CHAWAF	189
	Living Balzac ÉRIC JOURDAN	193
	<i>Guide to Further Reading</i>	200
	<i>Index of Characters</i>	207
	<i>General Index</i>	210

ILLUSTRATIONS

1	The Château de Saché in Touraine, where Balzac wrote some of his most celebrated works. © Ed Buziak / Alamy Stock Photo.	page 9
2	Rudolph Valentino (Charles) with Alice Terry (Eugénie) in <i>The Conquering Power</i> (1921, dir. R. Ingram). © Kobal Images.	160
3	The police arrest Vautrin (Pierre Renoir) in <i>Le Père Goriot</i> (1944, dir. R. Vernay). © René Chateau Vidéo / www.renechateauvideo.com .	162
4	Alice Sapritch (Bette) and Jacques Castelot (Hulot) during filming of <i>La Cousine Bette</i> (1964, dir. Y.-A. Hubert). © INA via Getty Images.	167

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This book represents for me the fruit of almost twenty years of working on Balzac. Since writing my first essay on *La Comédie humaine* as a second-year undergraduate, I have been enthralled by its larger-than-life characters and the extraordinary genius that produced this great literary monument. Writer, lover, debtor and inveterate coffee addict, Balzac has, in all his contradictions and rich diversity, never lost his power to fascinate me. My enthusiasm for his work owes much to the many inspirational scholars who have shared their knowledge with me so generously over the years. At the University of Bristol, the late Dr David Meakin encouraged me to consider undertaking postgraduate work on Balzac, an option that I later pursued under the guidance of Dr Richard Bolster, who kindly agreed to supervise me in his last year before retirement, and Professor Tim Unwin, who oversaw the successful completion of my doctoral thesis in 2004. Since that time, I have benefited from the advice and expertise of numerous colleagues in nineteenth-century French studies, many of whom I am lucky to count among my closest friends. In particular, I would like to record my warmest thanks to Anne-Marie Baron, Michelle Cheyne, Lisa Downing, Kate Griffiths, Bradley Stephens and Tim Unwin, for their unfailing generosity and scholarly insights. I am especially grateful to my co-editor Owen Heathcote for his many years of kindness and support, not least in introducing me to the Balzac studies community in France. This volume would have taken considerably longer to complete without him. As always, my friends and family have been instrumental in helping this book towards completion. My wife Claire, who has heard more about Balzac than she might ever have envisaged when we first met as undergraduates, has provided encouragement and practical wisdom throughout, and in my parents, Janet and John Watts, I know that I can always count on my two most steadfast supporters. My contributions to this volume are for my mother, whose energy, willpower and unflinching courage Balzac himself would have surely admired.

Andrew Watts

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Owen Heathcote
Andrew Watts

CHRONOLOGY

20 May 1799	Honoré Balzac is born in Tours to Bernard-François and Anne-Charlotte-Laure Balzac. The infant Balzac is sent immediately to a wet nurse in the village of Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire.
29 September 1800	Birth of Balzac’s first sister, Laure-Sophie.
18 April 1802	Birth of Balzac’s youngest sister, Laurence.
21 December 1807	Birth of Balzac’s brother Henry, whose father is presumed to have been Jean de Margonne, owner of the Château de Saché in Touraine.
1807–13	Balzac attends the Oratorian boarding school in Vendôme.
1814	Having been named director of military supplies in Paris, Bernard-François moves his family to the capital, setting up home in the Rue du Temple.
1816	Balzac completes his secondary education and registers at the Paris Law Faculty. He is also apprenticed to a lawyer, Jean-Baptiste Guillonnet de Merville.
1819	Balzac obtains his degree but rejects a legal career in favour of writing. He rents a garret room in the Rue Lesdiguières and starts work on a five-act tragedy in verse entitled <i>Cromwell</i> , followed by an epistolary novel, <i>Sténie ou les Erreurs philosophiques</i> , which he later abandons.
1820	<i>Cromwell</i> fails to impress Andrieux, a professor at the Collège de France, who advises Madame Balzac that her son should pursue any career other than literature.

CHRONOLOGY

1821	Balzac agrees to produce a series of novels in collaboration with Auguste Lepoitevin de l'Égreville.
1822	Balzac publishes his first five novels under the pseudonyms Lord R'Hoone (an anagram of Honoré) and Horace de Saint-Aubin. <i>Le Vicaire des Ardennes</i> is banned for offending morality and religion. Embarks on an affair with a married woman, Laure de Berny, who would remain a cherished friend and confidante until her death in 1836.
1823	Balzac completes another play, <i>Le Nègre</i> , which is rejected by the Théâtre de la Gaîté.
1825	Frustrated by his lack of success as a writer, Balzac bids farewell to literature in the preface to his novel <i>Wann-Chlore</i> and decides to set himself up as a printer and publisher. His youngest sister Laurence dies in August.
1826–28	In partnership with André Barbier, Balzac runs a printing workshop in the Rue des Marais-Saint-Germain. The venture proves a commercial disaster. Narrowly avoiding bankruptcy, Balzac is left with a debt of 60,000 francs.
September 1828	Having decided to return to writing, Balzac travels to Brittany to research a historical novel, <i>Le Gars</i> , which would later become <i>Le Dernier Chouan ou la Bretagne en 1800</i> .
1829	Publication of <i>Le Dernier Chouan ou la Bretagne en 1800</i> , the first novel that Balzac signs with his own name. The publication of a second version of <i>Physiologie du mariage</i> (1826) reinforces Balzac's growing popularity with readers.
1830	Publication of <i>Scènes de la vie privée</i> , six short fictions that Balzac would later incorporate into his <i>Études de mœurs au dix-neuvième siècle</i> .
1831	Publication of <i>La Peau de chagrin</i> .
1832	Balzac receives an admiring letter from a Polish countess, Eveline Hanska. The couple embark on a romantic relationship which continues, mainly by correspondence, for the next eighteen years.
1832–34	A period of intense creativity in Balzac's career as he completes several of his most celebrated works,

CHRONOLOGY

	including <i>Le Colonel Chabert</i> (1832), <i>Eugénie Grandet</i> (1833) and <i>Louis Lambert</i> (1833).
26 January 1834	Meets Madame Hanska for the first time in Geneva.
1835	Publication of <i>Le Père Goriot</i> , in which Balzac inaugurates his system of reappearing characters.
1836	Publication of <i>Le Lys dans la vallée</i> and <i>La Vieille fille</i> , the first novel ever serialised in a French daily newspaper.
1837	Balzac narrowly avoids the debtors' prison following the collapse of the <i>Chronique de Paris</i> , a newspaper of which he was the editor and majority shareholder.
1838	Travels to Sardinia, where he considers becoming involved in the silver mining industry.
1839	Becomes President of the Société des Gens de Lettres, and argues for stricter laws for the protection of intellectual property.
1840	Balzac's play <i>Vautrin</i> is banned after only one performance for appearing to mock King Louis-Philippe. Balzac searches for a suitable publisher for his collective works, to which he gives the title <i>La Comédie humaine</i> .
1 October 1840	Balzac rents an apartment in Passy, where he would live for the next seven years. The Maison de Balzac (47, Rue Raynouard) is Balzac's only surviving Parisian home, and is now a museum and research centre.
November 1841	Death of Madame Hanska's husband, Venceslas Hanski. Balzac becomes increasingly preoccupied with attempting to persuade the newly widowed Madame Hanska to marry him.
1842	The first three volumes of <i>La Comédie humaine</i> go on sale. Balzac writes a preface, the 'Avant-propos', in which he explains the underlying principles of his literary enterprise.
1843	Travels to Saint Petersburg, where he meets Madame Hanska for the first time in eight years. Publication of <i>Une ténébreuse affaire</i> and <i>La Muse du département</i> .
1846	<i>La Cousine Bette</i> , the last great literary success of Balzac's career, is serialised in the newspaper <i>Le Constitutionnel</i> .

CHRONOLOGY

23 February 1848	Another revolution breaks out in Paris as the July Monarchy is overthrown. Balzac is present to witness the sacking of the Tuileries palace.
1849	Spends the year at Wierzchownia, the home of Madame Hanska in the Ukraine. An adaptation of <i>La Cousine Bette</i> is staged in Paris.
14 March 1850	Balzac marries Madame Hanska. By now in poor health, he departs Wierzchownia for Paris with his new wife on 24 April.
18 August 1850	Balzac dies at his Paris home in the Rue Fortunée (now the Rue Balzac).
21 August 1850	Balzac's funeral is held at Père-Lachaise. Victor Hugo pays tribute to his friend's genius in a graveside eulogy.
1854	Posthumous publication of <i>Le Député d'Arcis</i> , completed by Balzac's former secretary Charles Rabou.
1855	Posthumous publication of the unfinished novel <i>Les Paysans</i> .

BALZAC'S WORK: AN OVERVIEW OF 'LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE'

La Comédie humaine (The Human Comedy)[†]

Avant-propos (Foreword) (1842)

Études de mœurs (Studies of Manners)

Scènes de la vie privée (Scenes of Private Life)

La Maison du chat-qui-pelote (At the Sign of the Cat and Racket) (1830)

Le Bal de Sceaux (The Ball at Sceaux) (1830)

Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées (Letters of Two Brides) (1842)

La Bourse (The Purse) (1832)

Modeste Mignon (1844–45)

Un début dans la vie (A Start in Life) (1842–44)

Albert Savarus (1842)

La Vendetta (The Vendetta) (1830)

Une double famille (A Second Home) (1830)

La Paix du ménage (Domestic Peace) (1830)

Madame Firmiani (1832)

Étude de femme (A Study of Woman) (1830–31)

La Fausse maîtresse (The Imaginary Mistress) (1841–42)

Une fille d'Ève (A Daughter of Eve) (1838–39)

Le Message (The Message) (1832–33)

La Grenadière (1832–33)

La Femme abandonnée (The Deserted Woman) (1832–33)

Honorine (1842–43)

Béatrix (1839–45)

Gobseck (1830)

La Femme de trente ans (The Woman at Thirty) (1832–34)

Le Père Goriot (Old Goriot) (1834–35)

BALZAC'S WORK: AN OVERVIEW OF 'LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE'

Le Colonel Chabert (1832–35)
 La Messe de l'athée (The Atheist's Mass) (1836)
 L'Interdiction (The Commission in Lunacy) (1836)
 Le Contrat de mariage (The Marriage Contract) (1835)
 Autre étude de femme (Another Study of Woman) (1832–42)

Scènes de la vie de province (Scenes of Provincial Life)

Ursule Mirouët (1841–42)
 Eugénie Grandet (1833)

Les Célibataires (The Celibates)

Pierrette (1840)
 Le Curé de Tours (The Vicar of Tours) (1832)
 La Rabouilleuse (The Black Sheep) (1841–42)

Les Parisiens en province

L'Illustre Gaudissart (The Illustrious Gaudissart) (1833)
 La Muse du département (The Muse of the Department) (1843)

Les Rivalités (The Jealousies of a Country Town)

La Vieille fille (The Old Maid) (1836–37)
 Le Cabinet des antiques (The Collection of Antiquities) (1836–39)

Illusions perdues (Lost Illusions)

Les Deux Poètes (The Two Poets) (1837)
 Un grand homme de province à Paris (A Distinguished Provincial in Paris)
 (1839)
 Les Souffrances de l'inventeur (The Trials of the Inventor) (1843)

Scènes de la vie parisienne (Scenes of Parisian Life)

Histoire des Treize (The Thirteen)

Préface (1834)
 Ferragus (1834)
 La Duchesse de Langeais (The Duchess of Langeais) (1834)
 La Fille aux yeux d'or (The Girl with the Golden Eyes) (1834–35)

Histoire de la grandeur et de la décadence de César Birotteau (The Rise and
 Fall of César Birotteau) (1837)
 La Maison Nucingen (The Firm of Nucingen) (1838)

BALZAC'S WORK: AN OVERVIEW OF 'LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE'

Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes (A Harlot High and Low) (1844–47)
 Comment aiment les filles (How Young Women Love)
 À combien l'amour revient aux vieillards (What Love Costs an Old Man)
 Où mènent les mauvais chemins (The End of Evil Ways)
 La Dernière incarnation de Vautrin (Vautrin's Last Avatar)

Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan (The Secrets of the Princess of Cadignan) (1839)
 Facino Cane (1836)
 Sarrasine (1830)
 Pierre Grassou (1839)

Les Parents pauvres (The Poor Relations)
 La Cousine Bette (Cousin Bette) (1846–47)
 Le Cousin Pons (Cousin Pons) (1847–48)

Un homme d'affaires (A Man of Business) (1846)
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 L'Initié (The Initiate) (1848)

Scènes de la vie politique (Scenes of Political Life)

Un épisode sous la Terreur (An Episode under the Terror) (1829)
 Une ténébreuse affaire (A Murky Business) (1843)
 Le Député d'Arcis (The Deputy for Arcis) (1847)
 Z. Marcas (1840)

Scènes de la vie militaire (Scenes of Military Life)

Les Chouans ou la Bretagne en 1799 (The Chouans or Brittany in 1799) (1829)
 Une passion dans le désert (A Passion in the Desert) (1837)

BALZAC'S WORK: AN OVERVIEW OF 'LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE'

Scènes de la vie de campagne (Scenes of Country Life)

- Les Paysans (The Peasantry) (1844–55)
- Le Médecin de campagne (The Country Doctor) (1833)
- Le Curé de village (The Village Priest) (1841)
- Le Lys dans la vallée (The Lily of the Valley) (1836)

Études philosophiques (Philosophical Studies)

- La Peau de chagrin (The Wild Ass's Skin) (1830–31)
- Jésus-Christ en Flandre (Jesus Christ in Flanders) (1831)
- Melmoth réconcilié (Melmoth Reconciled) (1835)
- Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu (The Unknown Masterpiece) (1831)
- Gambara (1837–39)
- Massimilla Doni (1839)
- La Recherche de l'absolu (The Quest of the Absolute) (1834)
- L'Enfant maudit (The Hated Son) (1831)
- Adieu (1830–32)
- Les Marana (The Maranas) (1832–34)
- Le Réquisitionnaire (The Conscript) (1831)
- El Verdugo (1830–31)
- Un drame au bord de la mer (A Tragedy by the Sea) (1834)
- Maître Cornélius (1831–32)
- L'Auberge rouge (The Red Inn) (1831–32)

Sur Catherine de Médicis (About Catherine de Medici)

- Le Martyr calviniste (The Calvinist Martyr) (1841)
- La Confidence des Ruggieri (The Ruggieri's Secret) (1836–37)
- Les Deux rêves (The Two Dreams) (1830–44)
- L'Élixir de longue vie (The Elixir of Life) (1830–31)
- Les Proscrits (The Exiles) (1831)
- Louis Lambert (1832)
- Séraphîta (1834–35)

Études analytiques (Analytical Studies)

- Physiologie du mariage (Physiology of marriage) (1829)
- Petites misères de la vie conjugale (Little Miseries of Conjugal Life) (1830–46)

BALZAC'S WORK: AN OVERVIEW OF 'LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE'

Pathologie de la vie sociale (Pathology of Social Life)
Traité de la vie élégante (Treatise on Elegant Life) (1830)
Théorie de la démarche (Theory of Walking) (1833)
Traité des excitants modernes (Treatise on Modern Stimulants) (1839)

NOTE

1. The dates of individual works by Balzac presented in this overview are based on those given by S. Vachon, *Les Travaux et les jours d'Honoré de Balzac: chronologie de la création balzacienne* (Paris: Presses du CNRS and Presses universitaires de Vincennes; Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1992). Given the complexity of dating Balzac's works, which often have a highly checkered production and publication history, some contributors to this volume foreground a date which corresponds to their own chapter requirements.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the volume. Unless otherwise stated, references to works by Honoré de Balzac are parenthesised in the main text, using the relevant abbreviation followed by the volume and page number.

AB	<i>L'Année balzacienne</i>
CH	Honoré de Balzac, <i>La Comédie humaine</i> , eds Pierre-Georges Castex et al., 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1976–81)
Corr.	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Correspondance</i> , eds Roger Pierrot and Hervé Yon, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 2006–)
LH	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Lettres à Madame Hanska</i> , ed. Roger Pierrot, 2 vols (Paris: Laffont, 'Bouquins', 1990)
OC	<i>Œuvres complètes de Honoré de Balzac</i> , eds Marcel Bouteron and Henri Longnon, 40 vols (Paris: Conard, 1912–40)
OD	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Œuvres diverses</i> , eds Pierre-Georges Castex, Roland Chollet and René Guise, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1990–)
PR	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Premiers romans</i> , ed. André Lorant, 2 vols (Paris: Laffont, 'Bouquins', 1999)

Quotations are preceded by a translation into English where appropriate. Translations are those of individual contributors unless otherwise stated. In chapter 12 ('Balzac's Legacy') quotations are given only in English for the sake of clarity. All ellipses are editorial unless otherwise specified.