

MAIRIE DE PARIS



Tour guide

La Maison  
de  
Balzac

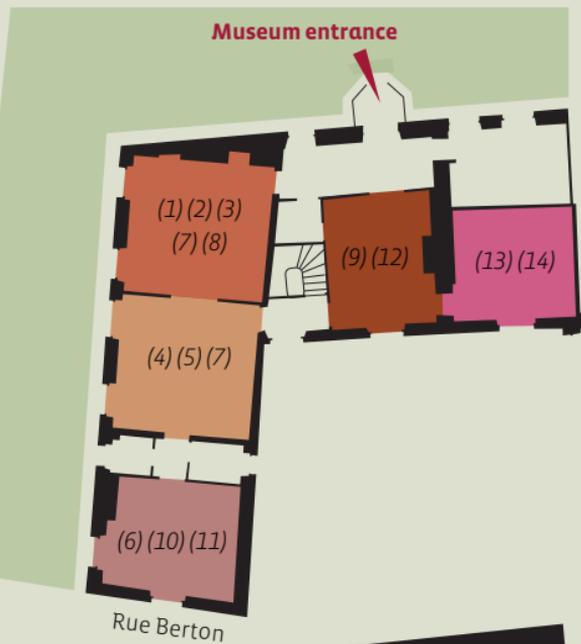
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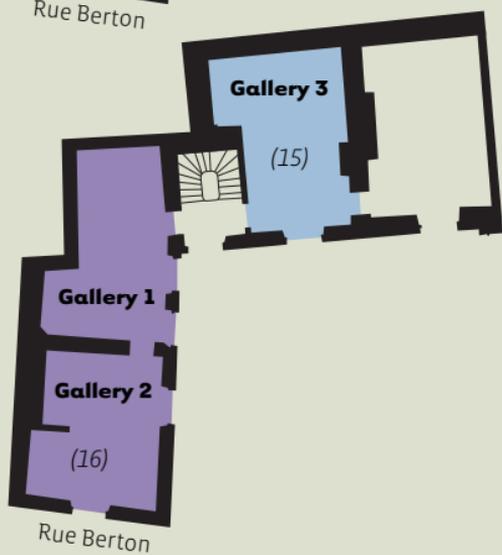
[musees.paris.fr](http://musees.paris.fr)

## Plan of the apartment occupied by Balzac from 1840 to 1847



### Garden apartment

- Garden
- Study
- Reception room
- Bedroom
- Dining room
- Guest room



### First floor

- Temporary exhibition galleries
- Gallery 3: Sculptures of Balzac

# The House in Passy

There is evidence that the site of the house in Passy has been occupied since the Middle Ages, well before the arrival of Balzac, who lived in part of this house from 1840 to 1847. Excavations carried out in 2002 revealed that the cellars contained late mediaeval troglodyte dwellings, the only ones of their kind in Paris, dating from a period when Passy was just a village inhabited by farmers, winegrowers and quarry workers. Under the Ancien Régime, the hillsides were terraced and humble dwellings stood side by side with luxurious town houses, which were transformed into multiple occupancy properties after the French Revolution. In October 1840, Balzac rented an apartment located in the outbuildings of a town house at what is currently 47 rue Raynouard, comprising a dining room, reception room, bedroom with study and the use of a cellar and garden.

When Passy was incorporated into Paris in 1860, the village began to be built up, becoming one of the capital's most

The garden



elegant districts in the twentieth century. Balzac's house now offers a last glimpse of the hillsides of Passy as they were under the Ancien Régime and in the nineteenth century. The house was saved by a man of letters in 1910 when he established a museum dedicated to the writer, which became a municipal museum in 1949.

The Maison de Balzac now extends over three levels between the rue Raynouard and rue Berton, incorporating the garden apartment, as well as various rooms and outbuildings originally occupied by other tenants.

## The permanent collections

### The Garden

Imagine, if you can, the writer dressed in a monk's habit walking along the vines bordering the wall above the rue Berton, admiring his fruit trees or picking roses and violets to send to Ève Hanska.



Balzac's house from the garden, Paris (16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement), 2007.

© A. Laurency et St. Piéra / Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

### Balzac's circle

The portrait of Louis Philippe (1)\* emphasises the fact that Balzac was active as a writer during the July Monarchy (1830-1848) and worked as a political journalist. Balzac began an association with Charles Philipon in 1830, writing articles which appeared in *La Caricature*, a satirical magazine which folded in 1835 under an avalanche of libel writs. Philipon, who is better known today for representing the King of the

#### Louis-Philippe

by Auguste de Creuse, oil on canvas, circa 1830.



© Stéphane Piéra / Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

French as a pear, is shown in profile on a bronze medallion by David d'Angers (2), a sculptor who was also close to Balzac and offered him the gift of a monumental marble bust of himself. Balzac's interest in journalism encouraged him to take on the role of editor of the newspaper *La Chronique de Paris*, where he fostered the talents of young writers, including Théophile Gautier, who was to become a

\*This refers to the number of the gallery in which the item mentioned is displayed.

## The permanent collections

### Charles Philipon

by David  
D'Angers,  
patinated  
bronze  
medallion,  
1834.



© Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

friend and one of the few people admitted to the house in Passy.

A number of women played a crucial role in Balzac's life and work, especially his first lover, Madame de Berny and his faithful friend Zulma Carraud. The portrait

of Madame Béchet (3),

testifies to the wealth of this bookseller with whom Balzac signed a deal on 20 October 1833 to publish *Études de mœurs au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* [*A Study of 19th Century Manners*], a first collection of works prefiguring the publication of *La Comédie Humaine* in 1841.



© Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

**Madame Béchet** by Eugène Goyet,  
oil on canvas, circa 1840.

### Madame Hanska

From 1832 to 1848, Balzac was involved in a relationship with Ève Hanska (1805 or 1806-1882), the young wife of a Polish nobleman, characterised by years of separation and producing a large body of correspondence.

During his seven years in Passy, Balzac searched continuously for a “gem of a house” worthy of his “darling louloup”.



© Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

**Madame Hanska**  
by Jean Gigoux,  
oil on canvas, circa 1850.

## The permanent collections

**Hôtel  
de la rue  
Fortunée**  
by Victor  
Dargaud,  
oil on  
board,  
1889.



© Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

Balzac's writing  
desk, walnut,  
sixteenth  
century.



© E. Emo et St. Piéra / Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

Victor Dargaud painted the town house in the rue Fortunée (4) (now rue Balzac) which Balzac purchased on 28 September 1846 and decorated with meticulous elegance, as demonstrated by the inlaid door in the reception room. Ève was widowed in 1841, but did not marry Balzac until March 1950, five months before the writer's death. She spent her remaining days in the town house which was destroyed a few years after her death.

Ève is portrayed by the painter Gigoux (5) in a reception room cluttered with objects testifying to Balzac's love of bric-a-brac, a passion for collecting which he shared with Cousin Pons, the eponymous hero of the novel written in Passy.

A wooden figure of Christ, which he attributed to Bouchardon or Girardon and for which he paid 150 francs in 1844, is one of Balzac's many purchases. Some of the objects intended for the rue Fortunée house were stored in the study, where the simple walnut table is now displayed (6). This table, on which Balzac wrote or corrected all of his works, followed the writer from house to house.

## The permanent collections

### Balzac, the society figure and dandy

From 1829 onwards, Balzac the novelist, journalist, social observer and author of the *Traité de la vie élégante* [*Treatise on elegant living*] in 1830, could be found in salons such as those of Delphine de Girardin, Charles Nodier or even the Duc de Fitz-James. To secure readers, it paid to be seen and the turquoise-studded walking stick (7)

Balzac's walking stick, by Lecoite, Malacca, gold, turquoises and seed pearls, 1834.

commissioned from the jeweller Lecoite by the writer in 1834 was the emblem for this campaign. The “jewel” is surprising on several counts, notably by its size, its rosettes of turquoises - a feminine stone -, the fine chains on the wrist-strap taken from a necklace belonging to Madame Hanska as a girl, and lastly the escutcheon as a mark of nobility on the band.

With this walking stick, Balzac shamelessly flaunted his status as an artist-dandy, his singularity and intellectual superiority. He was an immediate success.

As early as 1835, Jean-Pierre Dantan (1800-1869) produced two statuettes of him, one of which is preserved in the museum (8). The pommel of the walking stick-cum-sceptre held by a pot-bellied man is decorated with a sun depicting Balzac's face. Balzac was initially delighted by his success, but then changed his mind. These early public depictions of the man focusing on his physique and eccentricities were widely disseminated, but threatened to compromise the greatness of the work in progress. In 1836, the artist decided to promote a different image of himself.

**Honoré de Balzac,**  
by Jean-Pierre  
Dantan  
(1800-1869),  
tinted plaster,  
1835.



## The permanent collections

### A selection of Balzacian poses

Several portraits of Balzac were produced during his lifetime.

While some remained private property, others were circulated

even though the sitter was not always satisfied with them in the long term, as is demonstrated by Dantan's caricatured statuette. Portraits of Balzac in shirtsleeves with his right hand over his heart in a Napoleonic pose are private portraits. He presents himself simply dressed as a "prisoner of literature", chained to his writing table and also as an entrepreneurial man, possessed of a powerful

energy and will. The pencil portrait (9) by Bertall (1820-1883) on a board is a prime example. It has similarities with the double daguerreotype created by Louis-Auguste Bisson in May 1842, a copy of which exists in the Maison de Balzac.

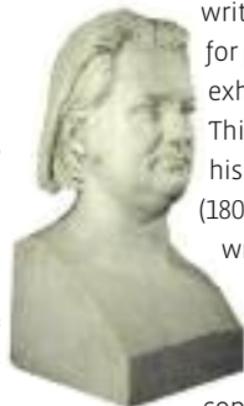
By contrast, the figure of the writer in his customary writing dress of a monk's habit makes a statement for public consumption in the wake of the portrait exhibited by Louis Boulanger at the 1837 Salon.

This outfit was also chosen in that same year by his friend the sculptor Alessandro Puttinati (1801-1872) for his full-length marble statue of the writer (10).

For Boulanger, Bisson, Bertall and Puttinati, Balzac posed as a worker and therefore claimed the right to treat his literary creations as his own property at a time when copyright was still treated with contempt. However, the famous monumental bust (11) created in 1844 by David D'Angers (1788-1856) belongs to the ancient Roman tradition and is



**Honoré de Balzac**,  
by Bertall,  
lead pencil  
on board,  
post May 1842



**Honoré de Balzac**,  
by David D'Angers,  
marble, 1844.



**Honoré de Balzac**,  
by Alessandro  
Puttinati,  
marble, 1837.

## The permanent collections

faithful to the subject and his timeless nobility. It elevates the author of *La Comédie Humaine* to the ranks of the great. A bronze copy was placed on the writer's tomb in Père Lachaise cemetery at the request of Ève de Balzac.

### **La Vieille Fille: the birth of the serialised novel**

Published in Émile de Girardin's *La Presse* from 23 October to 4 November 1836, *La Vieille Fille* [*The Spinster*] is the first serialised novel in French literature. This was actually the first time that a novel appeared in successive instalments in a cheap daily newspaper. The format was aimed at encouraging subscriber loyalty, but also allowed the author to reach a wide audience before the work became available in bookshops.

© Paris-musées, cliché Karim Maucotel



Serialisation of  
**La Vieille Fille**,

by Honoré de Balzac  
in *La Presse* in the  
main body of the  
newspaper beneath  
the Miscellaneous  
events column,  
23 October -  
4 November 1836,  
Bibliothèque  
de l'Institut,  
Spoelberch  
de Lovenjoul  
collection.

### **“I corrected the published version which acts as a manuscript”**

The file on *La Vieille Fille* which is preserved in the library of the Institut de France contains the manuscript and numerous drafts (12), a selection of which is displayed in the museum in the form of ektachromes (photographs created with colour reversal film). It demonstrates the writer's working method of using the printed work as a manuscript which he then corrects ad infinitum. There were nine sets of proofs for the first chapter, thirteen for the second, not to mention the corrections made to the columns of the serialisation once it was printed. Successive printings and editions provided new stimulus for the writing process, creating a permanent work in progress. From this period onwards, copies of serialisations by counterfeit publishers constituted an infringement of the artist's moral rights over his creation.

## The permanent collections



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Printer's plate drawn by François-Louis Français for **La Vendetta**, Furne edition, 1846.

### “I carried a whole society around in my head”

Most of the printer's plates displayed here (13, 14) come from a collection of nearly seven hundred items from a printer's workshop. Drawn by Charles Huard (1874-1965) and engraved onto wood by Pierre Gusman (1862-1942), they were duplicated onto metal to print Conard's *Complete Works of Balzac* (1912-1940). This collection also contains a few nineteenth century printer's matrices, some of which are exceptional as they refer to the Furne edition (1842-1848), the first illustrated edition of *La Comédie Humaine* and the only edition supervised in its entirety by the author.

These matrices offer a glimpse of the society constituted by the 2,500 characters of *La Comédie Humaine*. Real or fictional, recurring in several novels or not, many of them are still writ large in the collective imagination, including Rastignac, Vautrin, Raphaël de Valentin or even Père Goriot.

Three genealogical charts on the display tables unravel the threads of the relationships, lines of descent and love affairs connecting over one thousand characters. The aristocratic family crests scattered around them were mostly designed between 1839 and 1843 by two friends and contemporaries of Balzac, Ferdinand de Grammont and Countess Ida de Bocarmé, based on mottoes chosen by the author. Careful examination of this genealogy emphasises certain traits of *La Comédie Humaine*, including the predominance of the aristocracy and upper and lower middle classes over the working classes and peasants.

Printer's plate drawn by Bertall for **Le Curé de village**, Houssiaux edition, 1853-1855.



© Maison de Balzac / Roger-Viollet

## The permanent collections

### An evergreen presence and ideology

“For me, Balzac was first and foremost a creator and that's what I would like to show in my statue”, announced Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) when he was entrusted by the Société des gens de lettres to sculpt a monument to the writer. The plaster study for the 1897 head, which is very close to the final version (15), and the enamelled stoneware version created with Paul Jeanneney (1861-1920) circa 1899 are the fruit of nearly eight years of research. The modelling of the hair and face, especially the eyes, which are two black specks under exaggeratedly large eyebrows, contribute to the symbolic expressiveness of the portrait and the enormous power which it exudes.

In 1999, the Italian painter, Enrico Baj (1924-2003) offered a different interpretation of the writer entitled *Ubuzac* (16), in the form of a hybrid cross between the statue of Balzac by Rodin and the portrait of Père Ubu, the grotesque literary character dreamed up and drawn by Alfred Jarry. *Ubuzac* (16) debunks the myth of the great writer. As an anarchist,

Baj attacked the very notion of a “great man” and the exemplary status attributed to him. Anybody looking at this quirky painting, which undoubtedly has a plastic quality, can reflect on their own image of Balzac and whether it has an impact on their reading of his œuvre.



**Study for the head of Balzac** by Auguste Rodin. Plaster, 1897, Reith-Dennery bequest.



**UBUZAC**, by Enrico Baj. Acrylic on canvas, 1999, donated by the artist.

## **Maison de Balzac**

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Fax. : +33 (0)1 45 25 19 22.

[www.balzac.paris.fr](http://www.balzac.paris.fr)

This site allows you to access *La Comédie Humaine*, carry out research or read reviews of the writer's work.

### **Getting there**

Metro stations: Passy or La Muette

RER station: Radio France (line C)

Bus lines: 32, 50, 70, 72

 Vélib' stations (self-service cycle hire): Rue du Ranelagh, Rue de Passy, Rue Chernoviz.

### **Opening hours**

Tuesday-Sunday: 10am-6pm. Closed

Mondays and public holidays.

### **Admission charges**

**Permanent collections and displays: free admission.**

Temporary exhibitions: charges vary depending on the event, including

- reduced rates

- young person's rate (13-25 years old)

- free admission for under 13s.

### **Luggage lockers**

These are free of charge and mandatory for bulky items.

## **Library**

Opening hours:

Tuesday-Friday: 12.30pm-5.30pm

Saturday: 10.30am-5.30pm (except public holidays).

Specialist library catalogue available online at [www.balzac.paris.fr](http://www.balzac.paris.fr)

### **Educational and cultural department**

Guided lecture tours, story-telling sessions and children's workshops.

Information and bookings:

+33 (0)1 55 74 41 80.

### **Tour booklets**

For 11-14 year olds: Six characters in search of an author - Vautrin and Balzac.

Price €1.

### **The Society of Friends of Balzac and the Maison de Balzac**

Founded in 1949, it aims to raise awareness of Balzac the man and his life and works, to enrich and organise events at the Maison de Balzac, to promote Balzacian culture and to provide a modern twist in understanding *La Comédie Humaine*.

Information and membership:

+33 (0)1 55 74 41 80.