

STUDY AND BOUDOIR



An evocation of interiors from La Comédie humaine (The Human Comedy), with a juxtaposition of two worlds, two lifestyles that should have no intersections, public space vs. private space: a study and a boudoir.

The study is as close as possible to the study of the lawyer Derville described in *Le Colonel Chabert* (*Colonel Chabert*). The same furniture decorates nearly all the studies of the lawyers, bankers, doctors and usurers that appear in *La Comédie humaine*. Thanks to his experience clerking for lawyers and notaries from 1816 to 1819 and his high society acquaintances, Balzac positioned himself as a witness to social justice when it plays out in these private places, making us take on the eye of Justice – human or providential – in the tragic endings to his plots.

In contrast, the ideal boudoir is revealed. This interior borrows from the boudoirs of *La Comédie humaine*: that of Paquita, *La Fille aux yeux d'or* (*Girl with the Golden Eyes*), the one at the beginning of *Une fille d'Ève* (*A Daughter of Eve*) and, more specifically Fœdora's boudoir in *La Peau de chagrin* (*The Wild Ass's Skin*) with its neo-Gothic furniture. Through the importance attributed to fabric, the boudoir merges with stage props: draped window and door curtains, festoons, valances and curls, adorned with decorative trimmings. They share the same refinement, although the significance can change by the space occupied by the boudoir in the apartments: its greater or lesser proximity to company spaces like the drawing room – such as Mme de Bargeton's boudoir in *Illusions perdues* (*Lost Illusions*) – defines its real level of privacy.

STUDY OF LAWYER DERVILLE

The office was a large room furnished with the traditional stool which is to be seen in all these dens of law-quibbling. The stove-pipe crossed the room diagonally to the chimney of a bricked-up fireplace; on the marble chimney-piece were several chunks of bread, triangles of Brie cheese, pork cutlets, glasses, bottles, and the head clerk's cup of chocolate. The smell of these dainties blended so completely with that of the immoderately overheated stove and the odor peculiar to offices and old papers, that the trail of a fox would not have been perceptible. The floor was covered with mud and snow, brought in by the clerks. Near the window stood the desk with a revolving lid, where the head clerk worked, and against the back of it was the second clerk's table. The second clerk was at this moment in Court. It was between eight and nine in the morning. The only decoration of the office consisted in huge yellow posters, announcing seizures of real estate, sales, settlements under trust, final or interim judgments, all the glory of a lawyer's office. Behind the head clerk was an enormous room, of which each division was crammed with bundles of papers with an infinite number of tickets hanging from them at the ends of red tape, which give a peculiar physiognomy to law papers. The lower rows were filled with cardboard boxes, yellow with use, on which might be read the names of the

more important clients whose cases were juicily stewing at this present time. The dirty window-panes admitted but little daylight. Indeed, there are very few offices in Paris where it is possible to write without lamplight before ten in the morning in the month of February, for they are all left to very natural neglect; every one comes and no one stays; no one has any personal interest in a scene of mere routine—neither the attorney, nor the counsel, nor the clerks, trouble themselves about the appearance of a place which, to the youths, is a schoolroom; to the clients, a passage; to the chief, a laboratory. The greasy furniture is handed down to successive owners with such scrupulous care, that in some offices may still be seen boxes of remainders, machines for twisting parchment gut, and bags left by the prosecuting parties of the Chatelet – a Court which, under the old order of things, represented the present Court of First Instance (or County Court). So in this dark office, thick with dust, there was, as in all its fellows, something repulsive to the clients – something which made it one of the most hideous monstrosities of Paris.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC
Le Colonel Chabert (*Colonel Chabert*)

BOUDOIR OF FŒDORA

Each apartment had a character of its own, as in wealthy English houses; and the silken hangings, the style of the furniture, and the ornaments, even the most trifling, were all subordinated to the original idea. In a gothic boudoir the doors were concealed by tapestried curtains, and the paneling by hangings; the clock and the pattern of the carpet were made to harmonize with the gothic surroundings. The ceiling, with its carved cross-beams of brown wood, was full of charm and originality; the panels were beautifully wrought; nothing disturbed the general harmony of the scheme of decoration, not even the windows with their rich colored glass. I was surprised by the extensive knowledge of decoration that some artist had brought to bear on a little modern room, it was so pleasant and fresh, and not heavy, but subdued with its dead gold hues. It had all the vague sentiment of a German ballad; it was a retreat fit for some romance of 1827, perfumed by the exotic flowers set in their stands.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC
La Peau de chagrin
(*The Wild Ass's Skin*)



Panel section

Sculpted, painted oak, ca. 1790. On loan from the Mobilier National, GME C 269
Panel section from the Palais de la Conciergerie in Paris. The presence of a compass indicates Masonic symbolism. On both his paternal and maternal sides, Balzac's family were staunch Freemasons.

Cylinder secretary desk Pierre ROUSSEL

Mahogany and gilded copper, ca. 1785. On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 13343

A piece of furniture that became widespread after 1770 and that offered the benefit of securing one's papers by means of a rolling quarter cylinder. Like with roll top secretary desks, a portion serves as a secure box for papers or money. Balzac describes one of these in Derville's study (*Le Colonel Chabert / Colonel Chabert*), at Brulard's home (*Illusions perdues / Lost Illusions*), and two are mentioned in the office of banker Adolphe Keller (*Cesar Birotteau*) and the financier Claparon (*Un Homme d'affaires / Man of Business*).

Filing cabinet

Mahogany, 19th century
On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 11828

This type of furniture is described in certain interiors with studies (*Honorine*), like in the home of the lawyer Fraiser on Rue de la Perle (*Le Cousin Pons / Cousin Pons*). The filing cabinet is a necessity for any lawyer's or banker's workspace. At the home of the Mongenod brothers, "Godefroid, as he looked about him, noticed on a shelf certain boxes ticketed" (*L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine / Seamy Side of History*).

Filing cabinet

Mahogany, 19th century
On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 16986

Desk

Consulat era
On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 16397

Desk

Louis XVI era. On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 16397



Desk

Undetermined wood (alder?), ca. 1815
On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 170
Louis XVIII must have been very attached to this desk since we can see him sitting at it in his study at the Tuileries, as painted by Baron Gérard and exhibited at the 1824 Salon. Delivered by the cabinet-maker Clément in 1815: "a walnut office table tinted mahogany, table feet with sheaths [...], around the circumference a moulding with a lip...".

Writing case with accessories

Wood, leather desk blotter, 1st Empire period.
Hôtel Gouin museum collection, Tours, HG 935.010.0001, from the stores of the Société Archéologique de Touraine.

Chocolate cups and saucers

Sarreguemines earthenware, China model, XIXe siècle. Hôtel Gouin museum collection, Tours, HG 2002.014.72/73/74/78, from the stores of the Société Archéologique de Touraine.

Carpet

Orient Boukahara, 20th century.
On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 2860.

Lamp of Bellona

Argan oil lamp, 19th century.
Property of the Indre-et-Loire Departmental Council

Office chair

Mahogany, ca. 1820
On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 10707
Young Balzac wrote of an "armchair made of oak painted in mahogany, covered in morocco leather that he had seen of a green colour, and with gilded studs" (*Annette et le criminel / Annette and the Criminal*).

Office chair

Mahogany, ca. 1820.
On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 10760
Office chairs are often made of cane, like the one used by Castanier (*Melmoth réconcilié / Melmoth Reconciled*). Cane chairs other than office chairs refer to the 18th century. They can be found as dining room chairs in the homes of Mlle Gamard (*Le Curé de Tours / The Vicar of Tours*) and Mlle Cormond, "chairs in varnished cane" (*La Vieille fille / The Old Maid*).

Pair of chairs

Painted wood, 19th century.
On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 6808/1 et 3

Public sale notice

H. de Balzac Print Works
Facsimile based on an original notice from 1828, conserved at the Balzac Museum (BZ 1999.2.189)

Views of Paris

Lithographs with watercolour light, from the book *Paris dans sa splendeur. Monuments, vues, scènes*, Charpentier, 1861. Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.1.533-539



Furniture comprising a divan, two corner benches, four armchairs and two chairs

Amaranthine speckled maple, ca. 1830. On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 31102, 31103, 31104 and 31105
This set was acquired by the Mobilier National in Paris, from Hôtel Drouot, on 14 June 1996.
The divan appears at the homes of Canalis, Mme Moreau, Beatrix, Lucien de Rubempré, the Duchess of Langeais and more. A "square divan in the centre of the salon", ancestor to the round sofa, is even included in *Une Fille d'Eve (A Daughter of Eve)*.



Pair of Medici vases

Sèvres porcelain, 1814
On loan from the Mobilier National, GML 883/1 and 2
Model gifted by Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart in 1806. It seems to only have been made in the size of 32 cm. Balzac frequently referenced Sèvres. He never mentioned Parisian porcelain, although we know he would get his in Paris and in Limoges from Nozet, Zulma Carraud's brother-in-law.

Carpet

Wool, ca. 1850
On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 2119/2
Attributed to the Manufacture de Beauvais.

Writing table

Amaranth and copper, interior in lemon wood, 1830
Paris, Mobilier National, GME 409
It was noted that a table of this type arrived at the Château de Saint-Cloud in 1831 for the Duchess of Berry's Indian drawing room, with a "Gothic shape and amaranth inlay".

Rural Scene

Oil on canvas, 19th c.
Donated by Dr. Henry Du Buit (1988)
Saché, Balzac Museum, BZ 1999.2.553



Clock

« Héro and Léandre »

Pierre-François FEUCHÈRE (1737-1823)
Gilded, patinated bronze, ca. 1820. On loan from the Mobilier National, GML 243

Fireplace rack

Gilded, patinated bronze, ca. 1840
Paris, Mobilier National, GML 390
Acquired in 1841 from Nicolle et Finbert, then located at 64 rue Amelot in Paris. It bears two marks from the Tuileries. For Balzac, like many of his contemporaries, the greyhound was associated with the aristocracy. It is even the title of a chapter in *Les Paysans (The Peasants)*, and its death with its throat cut announced the end of a certain nobiliary lifestyle.

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