

THE MANUSCRIPT ROOM



*If you knew how I work ;
I am a slave to quill and ink,
a true dealer in ideas.*

Honoré de Balzac, Letter to Zulma Carraud, Saché, 2 July 1832.

Writing by printing

Very frequently, Balzac worked on several books at the same time. In this way, he could work on the manuscript of a book whilst receiving the proofs of another work for editing. For the writer, editing the proofs was such an integral part of his writing process that it has been said that Balzac *wrote by printing*¹ : the **manuscript** was an initial framework from which were printed the **galley proofs** and then the **proofs**, to which Balzac made additions and expanded sentences. Three to eight revisions of a single passage were sometimes needed before Balzac would sign off the final proof.

Once the text was published, in a journal or a bookshop, Balzac was in the habit of looking at his text anew with a view to a new edition. Thus, when the Furne edition of *La Comédie Humaine* appeared in seventeen volumes between 1842 and 1848, Balzac re-read the volumes as they were published and noted changes on his personal copies (which we call '*corrected Furne*') with a view to re-publication. However, this was not to happen during his lifetime.

1. Stéphane Vachon, 'Honoré de Balzac au travail', in Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, Paris, Verdier, 2010, p. 13-28.

Balzac's proofs are more instructive than any thesis.

André Malraux, *L'Homme précaire et la Littérature* (1977)

Honoré de Balzac was one of the first French writers to keep his manuscripts. He had them proofread and, sometimes, gave them away.

FROM MANUSCRIPT TO THE FINAL PROOF

TITLE PAGE

The title pages of Balzac's manuscripts were often covered with additions, lists of titles, names of characters, drawing and various inscriptions, with the title of the novel taking its place in the middle of all this. When Balzac tackled his drafts, the work often seems to have been well-advanced in his mind. He worked without framework, plot, or plan.

MANUSCRIPT

From Balzac's manuscripts comes an incredible impression of speed. There are no line breaks, and the punctuation is confusing and the spelling sometimes archaic or erroneous. In the margins, in handwriting which is not Balzac's, are the names of workers who worked in relay to carry out the typesetting.

GALLEY PROOFS

Galley proofs are the initial typesetting of a manuscript, in columns, without page numbering or running title. When galley proofs were not printed directly on large format pages, Balzac used to cut them up and stick them on large pages in order to increase the space available for his corrections and additions.

PROOFS

Balzac used to ask his printers for his proofs to be accompanied by the previous proof so that revisions could be made. None of the edited sets of proofs preserved from one work cover the whole book : each correspond to stretches of text of varying lengths. Balzac edited his partial sets of proofs as many times as he judged necessary before signing off the final proof, moving onto new batches of layouts that he had received in the meantime.

