

BALZAC'S BEDROOM



*I am as happy to be here
as a monk in a monastery.*

Honoré de Balzac, letter to Madame Hanska, Paris, late March 1833.

Whenever Balzac stayed at Château de Saché, the Margonnes reserved this small bedroom for him, which the curious already come to see out of curiosity¹ from the 1830s. Balzac particularly appreciated the calmness of the place, and the fact that Jean Margonne left him free to write as he wished : his life here was in contrast to the society life that monopolized him in Paris.

A place to write

Amongst the collection of works of *La Comédie humaine*, approximately ten were partially redrafted or edited here, as testified by the letters that Balzac wrote from Saché to his friends, publishers, his mother and Madame Hanska. When he was working, Balzac tended to get up very early in the morning, around 2 a.m. or 3 a.m., and then work furiously until 5 p.m. He would then get ready to join his hosts and their guests, even if sometimes he would have preferred to benefit from inspiration, as suggested by these words to his friend Zulma Carraud : *Here, I am disturbed by château life : there a people, one must dress at a particular time, and it seems strange to people in the country to stay without dining to follow an idea – they have already completely choked me with their bell².*

COFFEE : SOURCE OF INSPIRATION ?

In order to sustain a steady pace of work, Balzac drank large amounts of coffee. He had it sent from Paris as he found the coffee served at Saché revolting : *The days are not long enough for me. I work from 5 a.m. until dinner. At 7 a.m. I have an egg and half a cup, but oh Lobligeois³!...where are you ?...I find no great inspiration from this coffee⁴.*

In Balzac's eyes, coffee stimulated his imagination, as evoked in this extract from Robert Onopa's translation of *Traité des Excitants Modernes* on the effects of a cup of coffee :

From that moment on, everything becomes agitated. Ideas quick-march into motion like battalions of a grand army to its legendary fighting ground, and the battle rages. Memories charge in, bright flags on high; the cavalry of metaphor deploys with a magnificent gallop ; the artillery of logic rushes up with clattering wagons and cartridges ; on imagination's orders, sharpshooters sight and fire ; forms and shapes and characters rear up ; the paper is spread with ink.

Literary works written or edited at Château de Saché

1831
*Maître Cornélius
Village Scene (The Country
Doctor)
Les Contes drolatiques*

1832
*Louis Lambert
The Chouans (new edition)
Conversations entre onze
heures et minuit (Contes
Bruns)*

1834
*Father Goriot
Séraphîta
César Birotteau*

1836
Lost Illusions

1. Honoré de Balzac, letter to Madame Hanska, Saché, 25 August 1837.
2. Saché, 10 July 1832
3. Lobligeois : Balzac's Parisian grocer.
4. Honoré de Balzac, letter to Madame B.-F. Balzac, Saché, 13 June 1832.

A place of inspiration



MUSÉE BALZAC
Château de Saché

The *little room* at Saché was a truly inspiring place for Balzac. Indeed, the novelist was to use it in *Lys dans la Vallée* when Félix de Vandenesse moves to Château de Saché: *I stayed for a few days in a bedroom whose windows looked out over the quiet and solitary vale that I have told you about. It is a wide crease in the land framed by two hundred year old oaks, where a torrent of water flows due to the heavy rain. This aspect favours the rigorous and solemn meditation that I was seeking.*

The fictional view described by Balzac in *Le Lys dans la Vallée* joins the *solitary vale* and the *two hundred year old oaks* evoked in his correspondence. In a letter to Madame Hanska, Balzac nonetheless adds a supplement to the view from his bedroom: *I embrace the view of the Indre and the little château I have named Clochegourde*⁵ (Saché, 25 August 1837). Balzac allowed himself to take a few liberties here with regard to reality: as is often the case in his novels, he adopts a panoramic view to poetically recreate the surroundings.

5. Clochegourde: the name of Henriette de Mortsau's château in Le Lys dans la Vallée, which Balzac situated in the same location as Château de La Chevrière to the north of the Indre, in the municipality of Saché.



Balzac's bedroom, Paul Mantelier, photograph, 1899, Tours, Société archéologique de Touraine, BFP 6015-0114.

DECOR AND FURNISHINGS

This room has been listed as a Monument Historique (Historic Monument) since 1968. According to old photographs, the bed, the wing chair and the chest of drawers (see plan below: A, D and F) were already in this room as of the first quarter of the 20th century: at this time, these pieces of furniture were considered to be those used by Balzac. Recent work done by experts shows that the furniture dates from the second half of the 18th century.

The bed is an old *lit à la polonaise* (Polish-style bed) that originally had metal upper parts supporting a baldachin. It rests on original wooden castors mounted on pivots. The long sides display old velvet beading made of red Utrecht wool, showing the refined character of this well-made bed. The interior of each long side carries the inscription "Mr St Aubin n° 1". Written in brown ink by one of the manufacturers, the annotation refers to the bed's first owner. It is possible that Honoré de Balzac was told of that by Jean Margonne, and that the name inspired him to choose the pseudonym "Horace de St Aubin", under which he wrote the novels of his youth from July 1822 onwards.

The *bergère* chair is dated circa 1780. It appears to have been adapted for use as an office chair in the 19th century. A survey shows that the leather was laid on older Utrecht velvet. Moreover, the *bergère* initially had castors that enabled it to be raised.

From the creation of the museum in 1951, Paul Métadier added to the furniture of this room in order to recreate a hushed atmosphere and evoke Balzac's habits: use of a paper knife to make small savings, excessive coffee consumption... After having been decorated with several wallpaper designs over the course of the 20th century, since 1991 the room has been decorated in a golden beige colour, which was inspired by original fragments discovered behind a bedhead. The "bows of ribbons" border uses a pattern which dates from 1845.

1. Crucifix

Carved ivory and wood, C19th.
Property of the Indre-et-Loire Departmental Council.

2. Paper knife

Metal and oak, C19th.
BZ 1999.1.109

3. Cafetière and dish-warmer

Brass, date unknown, BZ 1999.1.121

4. Oil lamp

Gilt brass, C19th, BZ 1999.1.108

5. Coffee mill

Carved wood, gilt brass,
date unknown, BZ 1999.1.119

6. Clock

Marble, late C19th, BZ 1999.1.114

7. View of Tours and the banks of the Loire

Unknown artist, oil on canvas, c. 1850,
from the stores of the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tours. BZ 1999.2.138

A. Bed

Grey lacquered wood, C18th
BZ 1999.1.113

B. Bedside table

Walnut, C19th. BZ 1999.1.112

C. Desk

Walnut and oak, early C19th
BZ 1999.1.107

D. Louis XVI wing chair

Grey lacquered wood, leather and yellow velvet, C18th. BZ 1999.1.110

E. Writing desk chest

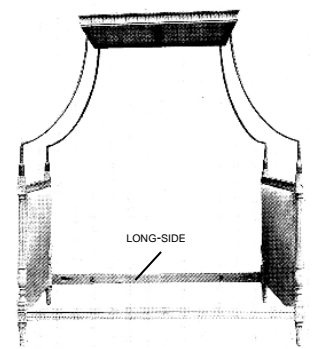
Walnut, late C18th
BZ 1999.1.106

F. Regency style chest of drawers

Walnut, early C18th.
BZ 1999.1.111

G. Trunk

Leather, C19th, BZ 1999.1.149



Lit à la polonaise, end 18th century under the Directoire (Directory period), formerly in the Jansen Collection, Paris.



Mr St Aubin n° 1, inscription in brown ink on the inside of one of the long sides of the wood of Balzac's bed. 18th century, photograph, 2014.

