

VIRTUAL TOURISM: BALZAC'S HOUSE IN PARIS (FRANCE)

TURISMUL VIRTUAL: CASA LUI BALZAC DE LA PARIS (FRANȚA)

IOAN PETROMAN, CORNELIA PETROMAN, M. BRĂTULESCU,

Agricultural and Veterinary University of the Banat, Timișoara, Romania

Abstract: *This paper aims at showing that by just visiting the house of a famous person (in our case, the house of the French novelist Honoré de Balzac in Paris, 47, Rue Raynouard) one can also travel back into the 19th century and get to know, through reading and studying, the society of the time through thousands of representative characters. We have visited this house located on top of the Passy Hill and we came to the conclusion that it seems to have been designed especially for Balzac so that he can escape creditors through the back door. Besides this, the study and the desk on which Balzac used to write using a pen and ink, the imposing yet modest bookcase he used to document, where anybody can read documents, manuscripts, original editions, etc., all remake the past and give you the illusion of reality.*

Rezumat: *Această lucrare arată că, doar vizitând casa unei persoane faimoase (în cazul nostru, casa romancierului francez Balzac de la Paris, de pe Strada Raynouard), poți călători înapoi în sec. al XIX-lea și cunoaște, prin lectură și studiu, societatea timpului prin mii și mii de personaje reprezentative. Am vizitat casa aflată în vârful dealului Passy și am ajuns la concluzia că ea pare să fi fost special construită pentru ca Balzac să poată scăpa de creditori pe ușa din spate. În plus, biroul și masa la care Balzac scria cu pana mutată în călimară, impunătoarea și totuși modesta bibliotecă din care își lua cărți pentru a se documenta și în care oricine poate citi astăzi documente, manuscrise, ediții originale etc. – toate acestea reînvie trecutul și îți dau iluzia realității.*

Key words: *virtual tourism, Balzac, Paris, The Human Comedy*

Cuvinte cheie: *turism virtual, Balzac, Paris, Comedia umană*

INTRODUCTION

The author of “The Human Comedy” was born on May 20, 1799 in Tours (France), son of a modest administrator of a hospital and of the fortune of his future wife. Moved to Paris as administrator, his father takes all his family with him to the Capital.

The oldest son, Honoré Balzac, becomes an intern of the Lepître Boarding School, and then he studied law. He starts as a lawyer and a notary, jobs that do not appeal to him.

He wants to engage in writing, which was disapproved by his family (1, 2).

After Balzac's death, the Principal of the College in Tours answered a series of questions, as follows:

- Balzac Honoré, aged 8 and a half, had small pox, but shows no disability: a sanguine person that flares up quickly;
- during his first 2 years in school, nobody could ever communicate with him or make him do anything at all;
- he spent most of this time carrying out punishments; very indifferent, silent, lacking meanness, original in all.

Despite his family opposition, he starts writing decided to conquer Paris and then France.

He publishes “The Inheritance of Birague” (1822), “Jean-Louis or the Found Girl”, “Clothilde de Lusignan”, but without the expected success.

He wrote, “I start to realise what my forces are, to get aware of them. Being aware of

what they are worth and sacrificing one's best ideas in vain is discouraging!" (3)

MATERIALS AND METHOD

It was in this house in Paris when, now mature and famous, Balzac has the idea of completing Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy" by creating a world made up of our sinner pairs. His work was named "The Human Comedy" after the suggestion made by the Marquis de Bellay who had visited Italy and got impressed by the grandeur and originality of Dante's work.

We have tried to structure the studies making up "The Human Comedy" as he did it, which may not be the best, since morals and manners cover most of his works. "Maybe if he had lived, he would have done it himself". (3)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Balzac's time, in one of the rooms of his house in Paris, I contemplated the portrait of Laure Sallambier, Balzac's mother, that of his father, Bernard Balzac, and that of Countess Hanska, his friend and lover.

I could only imagine him working hard and waiting to see her again.

This is where Balzac structured his studies making up "The Human Comedy", as follows:

1. *Studies of Manners:*

a) *Scenes from Private Life:* "Gobseck", "A Marriage Contract", "Le Colonel Chabert", etc.;

b) *Scenes from Provincial Life:* "The Vicar of Tours", "The Muse of the Department", "Lost Illusions", etc.;

c) *Scenes from Parisian Life:* "The Thirteen", "Poor Relations", "The Middle Classes", etc.;

d) *Scenes from Political Life:* "The Gondreville Mystery", "An Episode under the Terror", etc.;

e) *Scenes from Military Life:* "A Passion in the Desert", etc.;

f) *Scenes from Country Life:* "The Country Parson", "The Peasantry", etc.;

2. *Philosophical Studies:* "The Magic Skin", "The Quest of the Absolute", "The Elixir of Life", etc.;

3. *Analytical Studies:* "Physiology of Marriage", "Pathology of the Social Life". (1)

But life had no patience with Balzac – maybe because they were both competitors.

He wrote over 100 volumes, with about 3,000 characters, making up a vast painting of the eternal human and an invaluable document for the history of France under the Restoration.

The human types he imagined in his house on the Passy Hill in Paris are numerous, some of which have become true symbols (Table 1):

Table 1

Human types created by Honoré de Balzac in his "Human Comedy"					
Character	<i>Rastignac</i>	<i>Gobseck</i>	<i>Nucingen</i>	<i>Grandet</i>	<i>Bette</i>
Symbol	- self-seeker - nouveau-riche	- usurer	- banker	- miser	- envy - jealousy

The most prolific French writer of the 19th century created true symbols: the self-seeker (Eugene de Rastignac), the easy woman (Madam Marneffe), the usurer (Gobseck), the banker (Nucingen), the miser (Grandet), the jealous and envious (Cousin Bette), exaggerated parent love (Goriot).

But he was not only the greatest French novelist of all times: he also was one of the most refined economists of his time, as even Karl Marx suggested, when he said that, if you wanted to have an idea of the economic life of the 19th, the only thing you should do is to carefully read Balzac.

This is how he created a world that really corresponded to his contemporary world, a world in which live over 3,000 characters that represent human types specific to his time.

Balzac died in the house that has become a museum on August 19, 1850, while having serious financial problems, despite his late marriage with Countess Hanska.

He was buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery, together with other personalities of world culture: the Pole composer and pianist Chopin, the Romanian composer and violinist Enescu, the English writer Oscar Wilde, the French novelist Marcel Proust, the Romanian poet Marta Bibescu, the French singer Edith Piaf, the American pop singer Jim Morrison, and so many others...

To honour him, Auguste Rodin exposed, Rue Varenne, a few models for the great novelist, of which we would like to remind the following:

- head;
- full figure;
- athlete figure;
- dressed in a long mantle;
- dressed casually

All of them are to be admired in their splendour, despite the critics concerning the monument and each of its variants.

We also admired the statue situated at the crossroads between Boulevard Montparnasse and Avenue Raspail.

And it was not in vain that we did it: we now can better understand the way a nation understands to honour its sons among which, of course, Honoré de Balzac, the novelist that shocked the entire world with his vision of the “Human Comedy”.

CONCLUSIONS

Honoré de Balzac created a vast work covering 100 novels and long short stories.

He is considered the father of realist literature and the most hardworking of all novelists – a true servant of the pen and ink.

The house in which he worked hard writing and correcting most of his works and that is nowadays a museum seems to have been designed for the novelist that always had debts and had to escape somehow from the house.

You cannot but be impressed to see the chair on which used to sit this great novelist while writing his famous novels “Modeste Mignon”, “The Peasantry”, “The Cousin Bette”, etc.

Though he structured his studies making up the “Human Comedy” in studies of manners, philosophical studies, and analytical studies, this way of structuring works now seems inconclusive.

Maybe if he had lived, he would have done it otherwise himself, refining the vast painting of the human type and an unpaired document of the history of France such as it was in Balzac’s time.

His work was meant to complete Dante Alighieri’s “Divine Comedy”, but it is even more than just a mere completion.

LITERATURE

1. DRIMBA, O., *Istoria literaturii universale*, Ed. Saeculum, Bucuresti, 1996.
2. DUNCAN, FIONA, *Insight Guide. France*, Editura Aquila, Oradea, 2005.

3. PETROMAN, I. & PETROMAN, P., Turismul cultural, Editura Eurostampa, Timisoara, 2005.