



Balzac

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Honore de Balzac (1799-1850), one of the great European writers and founder of the modern novel, is the embodiment of nineteenth century France. His monumental work, LA COMEDIE HUMAINE (1829-1848; THE HUMAN COMEDY [1885-1893]), comprising over a hundred novels, short stories, studies and several unfinished works, chronicles the transition from a feudal society to an industrialized economy.

His 1842 preface to THE HUMAN COMEDY, an attempt to marry science and art in the nineteenth century, outlines the guiding principles of his panoramic thought through its comparison of human types to animal species, its theory that all creation proceeded from a single, primordial entity and diversified under the influence of environment, the destructive power of passion and the perfecting power of society. By the time the preface was written, Balzac had had several lovers, including the Russian countess, Eveline Hanska, whom he eventually married shortly before his death, and had established a pattern of behavior that included coffee-fueled writing marathons and a distinct inability to extricate himself from a crushing debt load.

BALZAC: A LIFE is a spellbinding account of the man, literary genius, philosopher, observer of the human condition, and defender of the throne and altar. Graham Robb's meticulous and rich anecdotal retelling of Balzac's ideals, passions and failures reveals his dichotomous nature, driven by his love for Countess Hanska, partially in compensation, perhaps, for the erratic behavior of his clearly nonmaternal mother, and his boundless intellectual curiosity. Intertwined with probing comments that evoke the richness and complexities of THE HUMAN COMEDY, this biography offers a beautifully told and supremely sensitive rendering of the life of one of France's most influential writers.

Sources for Further Study

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