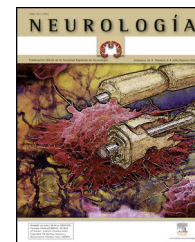




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REVIEW ARTICLE

Balzac and human gait analysis[☆]

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Abstract

Introduction: People have been interested in movement analysis in general, and gait analysis in particular, since ancient times. Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Leonardo da Vinci and Honoré de Balzac all used observation to analyse the gait of human beings. The purpose of this study is to compare Honoré de Balzac's writings with a scientific analysis of human gait.

Sources: Honoré de Balzac's *Theory of walking* and other works by that author referring to gait.

Development: Honoré de Balzac had an interest in gait analysis, as demonstrated by his descriptions of characters which often include references to their way of walking. He also wrote a treatise entitled *Theory of walking (Théorie de la démarche)* in which he employed his keen observation skills to define gait using a literary style. He stated that the walking process is divided into phases and listed the factors that influence gait, such as personality, mood, height, weight, profession and social class, and also provided a description of the correct way of walking.

Conclusions: Balzac considered gait analysis to be very important and this is reflected in both his character descriptions and *Theory of walking*, his analytical observation of gait. In our own technology-dominated times, this serves as a reminder of the importance of observation.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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Balzac y el análisis de la marcha humana**Resumen**

Introducción: Desde tiempos remotos, el hombre se ha interesado por el análisis del movimiento y especialmente por el estudio de la marcha. Aristóteles, Hipócrates, Galeno, Leonardo Da Vinci u Honoré de Balzac analizaron, mediante la observación, la forma de andar del ser humano. El objetivo de este trabajo es mostrar la relación de Honoré de Balzac con el análisis científico de la marcha humana.

Fuentes: *Teoría del andar* de Honoré de Balzac y otras obras de este autor que hacen referencia al modo de andar.

Desarrollo: Honoré de Balzac se sintió atraído por el análisis de la marcha, aspecto que se demuestra en las descripciones de sus personajes que incluyen, con frecuencia, referencias a la forma de caminar. Además, escribió un tratado sobre la marcha titulado *Teoría del andar*, en el que con un estilo literario y con gran capacidad de observación definió la marcha, mencionó que se divide en fases, indicó cuáles son los factores que la modifican como la personalidad, el estado de ánimo, la estatura, el peso, la profesión o la clase social, y describió cuál es la forma correcta de andar.

Conclusiones: Balzac considera muy importante el análisis de la marcha y esto se manifiesta tanto en sus descripciones de personajes como en su *Teoría del andar*, en la que realiza una observación analítica de la manera de caminar. En una época dominada por la tecnología como la nuestra nos recuerda la importancia de la observación.

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Introduction

Bipedal gait is a typical form of locomotion in humans, and one of the distinguishing features of our species. Numerous neurological disorders, including hemiplegia or hemiparesis, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's disease, and multiple sclerosis, give rise to alterations in gait. Alterations, which include impaired balance or coordination, changes in muscle tone, and paralysis, are common reasons for consultation. Gait analysis may be either instrumental or observation-based and complemented by the Tinetti Assessment Tool, Get-up-and-go test, etc.¹⁻³ At present, movement analysis laboratories are equipped with sophisticated instruments and systems, including dynamometric platforms, instrumented insoles, infrared cameras, and electromyography and posturography techniques, all of which measure gait parameters. In this technologically advanced setting, it may come as a surprise that there could be a link between gait analysis and Balzac (Fig. 1), a French novelist active in the first half of the 19th century. And yet, several published medical articles have already mentioned Balzac's fascination with the study of human gait.⁴⁻¹⁰ Balzac felt it was important to describe the walk of the characters in his novels, and he also wrote a treatise on gait titled *Theory of Walking*¹¹ in which he employed a literary style, his usual dose of sarcasm, and in many cases, a measure of social criticism. This erudite personal style, however, does not detract from the fact that Balzac's pronouncements on gait were quite accurate.

The purpose of this study is to highlight Honoré de Balzac's interest in human gait, which can be observed in the descriptions of many of his characters as well as in his *Theory of Walking*.



Figure 1 Honoré de Balzac

Gait in Balzac's character descriptions

Balzac's novels contain detailed descriptions of their characters, and the author often made ironic mention of their ways of walking.

In *The Vicar of Tours*, to name an example, he offers a sarcastic description of the walk of an old maid: "...her movements were not equally distributed over her whole person, as they are in other women, producing those graceful undulations which are so attractive. She moved, so to speak, in a single block, seeming to advance at each step like the statue of the Commendatore".¹² This description invokes physical factors, such as stature or rigidity in movement,

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