The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime

Author(s): Anthony Vidler

Source: *Assemblage*, Jul., 1987, No. 3 (Jul., 1987), pp. 6-29

Published by: The MIT Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3171062

Anthony Vidler
The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime

Anthony Vidler is Professor of Architecture and Director of the Program in European Cultural Studies at Princeton University. His book *The Writing of the Walls* is published by Princeton Architectural Press; his monograph on Claude-Nicolas Ledoux is forthcoming from MIT Press.

1 (frontispiece). Victor Hugo, *Vieux Saint-Malo*, June 1866

1. Haunted Houses

With the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. . . . The feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. . . . There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart — an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime.
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*[1]

The haunted house has been a pervasive leitmotiv of literary fantasy and architectural revival alike since the early nineteenth century. Its depiction in fairy tales, in horror stories, in Gothic novels gave rise to a genre of writing unique in itself, one that was preoccupied with the "uncanny," and that, by the end of the century, stood for romanticism itself. The house provided an especially favored locus for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits.

In Poe's description, the House of Usher, while evoking premonitions of "shadowy fancies," exhibited nothing untoward in its outer appearance. Its "bleak walls" and "vacant eye-like windows" were stark, but any sentiments of doom were more easily attributed to the fantasies of the narrator than to any striking detail in the house itself. Indeed, when looked at objectively, its ancient stones, carvings, tapestries, and trophies were all familiar enough. The

7

VIEUX S† MALO

"atmosphere" that surrounded the house, its smell of the grave that "had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the grey wall and the silent tarn," was difficult to account for: "vague sentiments," seemingly the products of a *dream*. The slow realization that these were properties of the house, embedded in the very stones, which possessed a fatality in themselves, that the house was itself an uncanny power, came unwillingly, against all reason, and was the more disquieting for the absolute normality of the setting, its *absence* of overt terror. The effect was one of the disturbing unfamiliarity of the evidently familiar:

While the objects around me . . . were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy — while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this — I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up.[2]

But in Poe's paradigmatic haunted house, all the telltale signs of haunting were present, systematically culled from their romantic predecessors. The site was desolate; the walls were blank and almost literally "faceless," the windows, "eye-like" but without life — "vacant." The house was, besides, a repository of centuries of memory and tradition, embodied in its walls and objects: the walls were marked by crumbling stones and the "discoloration of ages"; the furnishings were dark, the rooms vaulted and gloomy; it was, in fact, already a museum, a collection such as that assembled by Albert de Sommerard in the Hôtel de Cluny, here preserved in memory of a family. Finally, the family itself was almost extinct, doomed by a history that lent the air of the tomb, the family vault, to this once living abode; its fabric was reminiscent of "old wood-work which has rotted for some years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air."[3] The house, then, was a crypt, predestined to be buried in its turn, an event prefigured in the "barely perceptible fissure" that ran vertically from roof to foundations.

Abandoned houses, real or imaginary, had a similar effect on the viewer. Those on the islands of Jersey or Guernsey described by Victor Hugo, veritable figures of his own unhomely exile, shared characteristics with the House of Usher; they were "haunted," however, not by some imaginary family spirit, but by virtue of the superstitions of the islanders.

It sometimes happens, in Jersey or Guernsey, that in the countryside, or even in the town, when passing through some deserted spot or a street filled with people, you will see a house with a barricaded entrance; holly obstructs the door; one knows not what hideous layers of nailed planks fill the windows of the ground floor; the windows of the upper floors are at once closed and open, all the casements are barred but all the window-panes are broken.[4]

Such a house, killed by its very emptiness, and by the superstitions that have built up in the region, "is a haunted house [*une maison visionnée*]. The devil comes there in the night."[5]

Among these "dead houses" one in particular fascinated Hugo, an empty house in the Guernsey village of Pleinmont. He returned three times in seven years to sketch it from various angles, and used it as a central motif in *Les travailleurs de la mer*, the *maison visionnée* of "Plainmont." Drawn in brown ink and wash, this small, two-story stone cottage seemed to have little out of the ordinary about it. With its four windows, walled up on the ground floor, its single door, pitched roof, and chimney, it seems no more than the archetypal "child's house," a commonplace compilation of the fundamental elements of dwelling. As Hugo himself noted, "the site is fine, the house is good."

This house, built in granite and two stories high, is surrounded by grass. It is in no way ruined. It is perfectly habitable. The walls are thick and the roof solid. Not a stone is lacking in the walls, not a tile from the roof.[6]

Nevertheless, it had the reputation of being haunted, and despite its simplicity, "its aspect was strange." First, the deserted site, almost entirely surrounded by the sea, was perhaps too beautiful: "the site is magnificent, and consequently sinister." Then the contrast between the walled-up windows on the ground floor and the empty windows on the upper floor, "opening onto the shadows of the interior," gave a quasi-anthropomorphic air to the structure: "One would say that the empty holes were two gouged out eyes."[7] An enigmatic inscription over the closed-up door added to the mystery and told of a building and abandon-

8

2. Victor Hugo, *La maison visionnée*, June 1866

ment before the Revolution: "ELM-PBILG 1780." Finally, the silence and emptiness contributed the aura of a tomb; "one thought one saw a sepulcher with windows allowing the specters to look out." It is by such mysteries, adding to local lore, that Hugo explains the haunting. Who were the original inhabitants? Why the abandonment? Why no present owner? Why no one to cultivate the field? These questions, all inexplicable without some unknown and metaphysical cause, added to the atmosphere:

This house is uncanny at mid-day; what is it at midnight? Looking at it one looks at a secret. . . . Enigmas. Sacred horror is in these stones. This shadow inhabiting these walled up rooms is more than a shadow; it is the unknown.[8]

Thus guarded by terror, the house, as Hugo develops the narrative, becomes paradoxically secure for those unaffected by the haunting; it is the secure home of smugglers and renegades, exiles and fugitives. Only those on the margin would feel at home in so disquieting an abode. The legend of a crime committed in the house, an indelible act from which it had never recovered, thus rejoined the present it sheltered, and the circle of a home killed by memories was completed in this image of a tomb inhabited by its robbers.

The Margins of the Sublime

The genre of the uncanny, appropriately enough for its position in romantic aesthetics, was, as Edgar Allen Poe noted, intimately bound up with, but strangely different from the grander and apparently more serious "sublime," the master category of aspiration, nostalgia, and the unattainable. Together with other subgenres of the sublime — the grotesque, the caricature, the fairy story, and the melodrama — the ghostly romance and the horror story were essentially subversive of its overarching premises and its transcendent ambitions.

From the middle of the eighteenth century, the domain of the sublime had been forced to protect its high-flown forms from erosion at its margins. While Edmund Burke returned all sublime emotions to their sources in terror, not everything that induced terror was, as he readily admitted, sublime.[9] By the same token, Kant's description of a sublimity residing entirely in the mind as it was drawn to

"think the unattainability of nature" did not mean that all ideas of things unattainable were necessarily sublime. Indeed, lurking behind all attempts to achieve sublime expression were a host of pitfalls that ranged from the bathetic to the nonsensical; rhetoricians from Longinus to Jean Paul had understood this tendency of the sublime to fall into the ridiculous, an opposite that, however, shared many characteristics with its more serious antecedent. Out of this and other slippages were born the side, or sub, genres of the sublime that were explored with such eagerness by a romanticism critical of the static categories of neoclassic appreciation. All were based, in differing degrees, on exaggeration, fear, and terror, but not all aspired to the absolute dimension consonant with the high sublime. "Ugliness," stated Burke, "I imagine to be consistent enough with an idea of the sublime. But I would by no means insinuate that ugliness of itself is a sublime idea unless united with such qualities that excite a strong terror."[10]

Most subversive of all, not only because it was easily trivialized, but also because it seemed at times indistinguishable from the sublime, was the realm variously called "the uncanny" or *das unheimliche*. Burke himself had included this ill-defined but increasingly popular sensation among those associated with the obscurity that provoked terror, along with the night and absolute darkness: "how greatly the night adds to our dread in all cases of danger," he observed, "and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds."[11] Such was the fascination of the uncanny throughout the romantic period that Hegel, in his vain effort to preserve the memory of an authentic sublime in the Hebrew texts, tried to close the door on this province of "magic, magnetism, demons, the superior apparitions of clairvoyance, the disease of somnambulism," banishing these dark powers from the clear and transparent sphere of art; but he was nevertheless forced to admit the general preoccupation of his contemporaries with those "unknown forces" wherein "there is supposed to lie an indecipherable truth of dreadfulness which cannot be grasped or understood."[12] Among the foremost practitioners of this genre of "visionary notions," where "nothing is expressed except a sickness of the spirit," where "poetry runs over into nebulousness, insub-

stantiality and emptiness," Hegel cited E. T. A. Hoff-mann, who had indeed made the uncanny a genre of his own.

More than eighty years later, in an essay dedicated to clarifying the roots and pathological nature of this "sickness" of the uncanny, Freud himself took the stories of Hoffmann as his major example, observing that the subject of the uncanny lay directly within the boundaries of "all that is terrible," that is, within the sublime.[13] He set himself the task of identifying "what this peculiar quality is which allows us to distinguish as 'uncanny' certain things within the boundaries of what is 'fearful,'" of exploring, against those "elaborate treatises on aesthetics which . . . prefer to concern themselves with what is beautiful, attractive and sublime," feelings of an apparently opposite kind, those of unpleasantness and repulsion:[14] of exploring, that is, the margins of the sublime against its acknowledged center, determining the specificity of the uncanny within the terrible sublime.

Heimlich / Unheimlich

Some languages in use today can only render the German expression 'an *unheimlich* house' by 'a *haunted* house.'[15]
  Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," 1919

The common denominator between the early-nineteenth-century romantic and the early-twentieth-century analyst, between Hoffmann and Freud, was, at root, etymological. Both were struck by the strange coincidence of two German words, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, that is, roughly translated, "homely" and "unhomely." The string of definitions cited by Freud in his search for the meaning of the sensation colloquially known as "uncanny," and taken from the two standard dictionaries of the mid-nineteenth century, made the point.[16] The brothers Grimm, indefatigable collectors of folklore and myth, defining the word *heimlich* in their *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, traced the idea of the homely, that which belongs to house and home, a sentiment of security and freedom from fear, as it gradually took on the ominous dimensions of its apparent opposite, the unhomely:

4. *From the idea of 'homelike,' belonging to the house, the further idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of strang-*

ers, something concealed, secret. . . . 'Heimlich' is used in conjunction with a verb expressing the act of concealing. . . .

Officials who give important advice which has to be kept secret in matters of state are called *heimlich* councillors; the adjective, according to modern usage, has been replaced by *geheim* [secret]. . . .

Heimlich, as used of knowledge — mystic, allegorical: a *heimlich* meaning, *mysticus, divinus, occultus, figuratus*.

Heimlich in a different sense, as withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious. . . . *Heimlich* also has the meaning of that which is obscure, inaccessible to knowledge.

The notion of something hidden and dangerous . . . is still further developed, so that 'heimlich' comes to have the meaning usually ascribed to 'unheimlich.' Thus: 'At times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is *heimlich* and full of terrors for him.'[17]

The ambivalent relations between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* were similarly explored in Daniel Sanders's *Wörterbuch*. The feeling of the "friendly, intimate, homelike; the sense of peaceful pleasure as in one within the four walls of his house," as in the example "the cottage where he had once sat so often among his own people, so *heimelig*, so happy," was joined immediately to the sense of the secret, the "concealed, kept from sight," as in "to do something *heimlich*, i.e., behind someone's back" and "*heimlich* places (which good manners oblige us to conceal)."[18] The notion of *heimlich* was then elided with "buried":

'To throw into pits or *Heimlichkeiten*.' . . . 'I have roots that are most *heimlich*, I am grown in the deep earth.'[19]

From there to the "negative" of *heimlich* — *unheimlich* — was a short passage:

Note especially the negative '*un*': eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear: 'Seeming quite *unheimlich* and ghostly.' . . . 'Feels like an *unheimlich* horror.' '*Unheimlich* and motionless like a stone image.' 'The *unheimlich* mist called hill-fog.'[20]

Directly joining these two opposites was the notion of something once buried and then reappearing, as Sanders pointed out in a quotation from the dramatist Karl Ferdinand Gutzkow:[21]

'The Zecks are all *heimlich*.' . . . '*Heimlich*? . . . What do you understand by *heimlich*?' 'Well . . . , they are like a buried spring

or a dried-up pond. One cannot walk over it without always having the feeling that the water might come up there again.' 'Oh, we call it *unheimlich*; you call it *heimlich*.'[22]

To conclude this set of citations, Sanders introduced a sentence from the philosopher Schelling that seemed to summarize the strange bond between the homely and the unhomely, a fragment that was immediately to strike Freud's attention:

Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light.[23]

This enigmatic definition came from Schelling's late attempt to synthesize the history of religion with the anthropology of cults, his *Philosophie der Mythologie* of 1835. Schelling's definition of the "uncanny" proposed an origin for the feeling that was itself joined to the origins of religion, philosophy, and poetry. Indeed, his formulation, anticipating Nietzsche, asserted the necessary existence of the uncanny as a force to be overcome, a first step toward the birth of poetry. Speaking of the Homeric songs, for him among the purest examples of the sublime, Schelling proposed that they were precisely the result of an initial suppression, the civilized subjugation of mystery, myth, and the occult. Like the birth of the Apollonian out of the Dionysian, and with similar interdependencies, the Homeric sublime was founded on the repression of the uncanny:

Greece had a Homer precisely because it had mysteries, that is, because it succeeded in completely subduing that principle of the past, which was still dominant and outwardly manifest in the Oriental systems, and in pushing it back into the interior, that is, into secrecy, into the Mystery (out of which it had, after all, originally emerged). That clear sky which hovers above the Homeric poems, that ether which arches over Homer's world, could not have spread itself over Greece until the dark and obscure power of that uncanny principle which dominated earlier religions had been reduced to the Mysteries (all things are called uncanny which should have remained secret, hidden, latent, but which have come to light); the Homeric age could not contemplate fashioning that purely poetic mythology until the genuine religious principle had been secured in the interior, thereby granting the mind complete outward freedom.[24]

This account of the "uncanny principle," besides providing a convenient starting point for Freud — as based on a

primal repression, a slaying of the father ("Homer," stated Schelling, "is not the father of mythology, mythology is the father of Homer")[25] — summarized the idea of *unheimlich* as evoked by the romantics. At once a psychological and an aesthetic phenomenon, it simultaneously established and destabilized. Its effects were guaranteed by an original authenticity, a first burial, and made all the more potent by virtue of a return that, in civilization, was in a real sense out of place. Something was not, then, merely haunted, but rather revisited by a power that was thought long dead. To such a force the romantic psyche and the romantic aesthetic sensibility were profoundly open; at any moment what seemed on the surface homely and comforting, secure and clear of superstition, might be reappropriated by something that should have remained secret but that nevertheless, through some chink in the shutters of progress, had crept back into the house, of all topoi in literature and art, the *locus suspectus* of the uncanny.[26] As Freud was to note, the systematic nature of what Schelling referred to as "the uncanny principle" was explored in all its variations by E. T. A. Hoffmann, himself an amateur of architecture and an aesthetic theorist. In the tale of "Councillor Krespel," initially published in 1818 and included the following year in the first volume of his *Serapion Brethren* (*Die Serapionsbrüder*), the relationship between the uncanny in general and the house in particular was drawn with analytical clarity.[27] The story opened with an apparently incidental description of the building of a house, on the surface, indeed, as the narrator notes, no more than an illustration of one of "the craziest schemes" of this Councillor, himself "one of the most eccentric of men." This house, described as having been the gift of a local lord in payment for legal services, was built at the bottom of the Councillor's garden according to his own, somewhat peculiar, specifications. Having bought and assembled all the building materials, stacked and cut the stones, mixed the lime and sifted the sand, the Councillor had proceeded to amaze the neighbors by refusing all architectural help, directly employing a master mason, journeymen, and apprentices on the work. What was more extraordinary, he had neither commissioned nor drawn up a plan for the house, but had simply excavated a perfectly square foundation for the four walls. These, following his instructions, were built up by the masons, without win-

dows or doors, just as high as the Councillor indicated. Despite the evident madness of this procedure, the builders seemed happy enough, plentifully supplied with food and drink. One day Krespel shouted "Stop!" and the walls were finished.[28]

Then the Councillor began a most strange activity, pacing up and down the garden, moving toward the house in every direction, until, by means of this complex triangulation, he "found" the right place for the door and ordered it cut in the stone; similarly, walking into the house, he performed the same method to determine each window and partition, deciding, seemingly spontaneously, their position and size. The house was then complete. To celebrate the completion of his new home, Krespel invited the builders and their families, but no friends, to a feast at which he played the violin. The result of his maneuvers was a home "presenting a most unusual appearance from the outside — no two windows being alike and so on — but whose interior arrangements aroused a very special feeling of ease."[29]

This short, anecdotal introduction serves in Hoffmann's story to present the peculiar character of the musician, lawyer, and violin-maker Krespel, whose beautiful but ill-fated daughter Antonia, blessed with an uncannily harmonious singing voice is trapped within the house, unable to sing lest she die of the effort. The crazy house seems one more nonsensical trait of its owner, a literary conceit, like that of his clothes, also made to his own specifications. But on another level, when understood in the light of the ensuing narrative, which involves the gradual revelation of goodness out of apparent evil, of real harmony out of surface disorder, the house assumes the status of a model, an architectural paradigm of the story as a whole. In the first place, the house allows Hoffmann to develop the theme of harmony, musical and architectural, of a kind of natural, original, and unself-conscious architecture, based on geometry and craft lore — a kind of literary illustration of the "architecture as frozen music" analogy advanced by Schelling. Secondly, the house is a direct replication in stone of the character of the Councillor, decribed as a man whose madness was on the surface, concealing a sanity within. His "mad gestures" and "irrational leaps" were thereby mirrored by a dwelling that seemed irrational from the outside, yet contained a sense of order within. But this

interpretation leads to the final observation that as a house "unusual" from the outside, and homely inside, it is a structure that reverses the general drift, traced above, of the uncanny movement from homely to unhomely.

In this context, it should be remembered that in fabricating the house Krespel's activities were themselves decidedly *unheimlich*:

'Make way!' cried Krespel, who then ran to one end of the garden and paced slowly toward his square building. When he came close to the wall, he shook his head in dissatisfaction, ran to the other end of the garden and again paced toward the wall with the same result. He repeated this tactic several times, until finally, *running his sharp nose hard against the wall*, he cried, 'Come here, come here men, make me a door right here.'[30]

Like a blind man with only his cane and his nose to guide him, Krespel did not, like normal men, see and then point, but rather ran toward and touched. If he saw at all it was with a very myopic vision, an impression confirmed in a description of him the next day moving like a drunken or blind man: "he looked as if he would bump into or damage something at any moment," but by some uncanny sense he avoided breaking the cups on the table and was able to maneuver around a full-length mirror that he initially thought was a void.

In this repression of the eye, a deliberate forcing of the self into blindness, Krespel was no doubt privileging touch and hearing, the primary sense of the musician. He was also, in the context of a romantic mythology that endowed sight with the sinister properties of destruction — the evil eye — and dissimulation — masking — achieving a kind of willed innocence through a childlike perception of the world of objects. Only by so doing could he fabricate a house that was not an evil "double," a willed projection of his worst passions, but that, rather, contained his inner self, whole and untroubled within. And this would be why the outside of the house seemed *unheimlich* and the inside *heimlich*: as a blind transcription, an automatic writing of his undivided soul, it operated as a return route, a passage back from the uncanny to the homely. In this respect, the house was a therapeutic instrument: Krespel, who knew, we are informed, "how to preserve the divine," found in this mask of madness a way to rebuff the world and

achieve inner composure. This was, after all, a canny way to follow what Hoffmann called his *Serapions Prinzip,* which united the brotherhood of his tales. In this ideal, the outer world was used as a lever to set the inner world of the artist in motion by realizing a clear sense of the boundaries between poetry and life. For this the artist had to cultivate a special kind of composure, a *besonnenheit,* or mental state that controlled the release of images and translated stimuli from the outer world into the spiritual domain. As Maria Tatar has concluded, "without this gift, the painter's canvas remains empty, the writer's manuscript consists of blank pages, the composer's score contains not a single note and the artist in general is branded a madman by society."[31] Krespel, before the age of analysis, had preserved his poetic self by means of an artificial boundary, a house that was, in a special sense, a mirror of his soul.

Pipe Dreams

The special relationships between exterior and interior privileged in the uncanny were, of course, fully exploited by authors throughout the nineteenth century. The typical context for the telling of ghost stories, the apparently homely interior that gradually turns into a vehicle of horror, was described in numerous versions: a cheerful household, generally following dinner, the men smoking pipes before the blazing fire, the women sewing, the children allowed to stay up late. This was the nostalgic evocation of the *veillée,* a "cottage" vision of house and home especially relished in the age of rural displacement and urban emigration. In such a secure setting, stories of terror might be tasted with delight; many writers insisted on the need for a storm outside, to reinforce by contrast the snugness within. This is the scene of Hoffmann's "Uncanny Guest," where "the four ingedients, autumn, a stormy wind, a good fire and a jorum of punch," engendered a strange sense of the awesome, provoked a fear of the supernatural, that was then deliciously prolonged by stories that reminded the listeners of the spirit world surrounding them.[32] Similarly, Thomas de Quincey, an adept in the art of evoking dreams of terror, sometimes with the artificial help of opium, was equally convinced of the need for a secure vantage point from which to start the interior journey. The site of his

reveries, stimulated by laudanum, was a simple white cottage, formerly owned by Wordsworth, in the valley of Grasmere. "Embowered by flowing shrubs," this was a homely house in a sheltered valley, its simple rooms lined with books and warmed by cheerful hearths.[33] De Quincey, too, insisted on the need for winter and a storm outside for his adventures of the mind, as, almost innocently, he sipped from the ordinary decanter containing the deceptive liquid, an instrument of those fantasies of the architectural sublime that he remembered being described by Coleridge, himself inspired by faulty recollection of Piranesi's *Carceri* etchings.

From the simple cottage to the abyssal terraces of the *Carceri,* the passage from homely to unhomely, now operating wholly in the mind, reinforced the ambiguity between real world and dream, real world and spirit world, in such a way as to undermine even the sense of security demanded by professional dreamers. Following Kant's prescription for the achievement of delight through terror through certain knowledge of safety — "provided our own position is secure [the aspect of terrifying natural phenomena] is all the more attractive for its fearfulness" — the aesthete of terror succeeded in barricading the walls against nature in order to indulge a taste for fear. But the locus of the uncanny was now in the mind, and the mind recognized no such barriers, dissolving them into the fabric of the dream, haunting the site of its own dread.

Thus the *veillée,* or "stay-up-late-evening" as Michael Riffaterre translates the title of Rimbaud's poem,[34] becomes itself uncanny, its security belied and clouded by its anticipated end, from the nights when, as in Hoffmann's story, Nathanael's father awaits the arrival of the Sandman, sitting silently in his armchair "blowing out billows of smoke till we all seemed to be swimming in clouds,"[35] to that evening described by Rimbaud when mantleshelf and wallpaper merge with the dream of a voyage, only to return as the sign of normalcy and thereby of death.[36] Indeed, in many *veillées* smoke is an agent of dissolution by which the fabric of the house is turned into the depth of the dream; in the same way, as an instrument of the sublime, smoke has always made obscure what otherwise would have seemed too clear.

On the surface, nothing seemed to be more settled, more at home, than the life of the narrator of Melville's short story "I and My Chimney," as he sat contentedly puffing his pipe beside an equally puffing chimney stack.[37] Resisting modernization, and determined to maintain an amicable pact between himself and his old, silent friend, the chimney, this narrator has indeed captured the imagination of those who have seen something pragmatic and sturdily "American" in one who finds the center of the home in the fireplace, a tradition of settler origins, rooted in the anthropology of Semper and finding its architectural expression in the Prairie homesteading of Frank Lloyd Wright.[38]

Certainly the narrator loved his chimney; it provided warmth and stability for the entire house, as structure and function; it did not, like his wife, "talk back" and it represented, symbolically enough, a last bastion of the good past against the intrusions of a bad present. And yet the chimney, as he readily admitted, was something of a tyrant. Twelve feet square at the base, four feet wide at the top, it completely usurped the center of the house, permitting no passage from one side to another, forcing the inhabitants into continual peripheral movement. So strong was its presence, indeed, that the narrator had become its slave. The chimney was master of the house; its "owner" stood behind it, deferring to it on every count, finally protecting it from destruction by withdrawing from the outer world and mounting a continuous vigil lest it be demolished while his back was turned. Fear pervades this story: fear of being deprived of a "backbone" with the removal of the chimney; fear of losing the "one permanence" of the dwelling; fear of confrontation with the wife; fear, given the chimney's shape and vertical power, of loss of manhood.

The chimney provided another kind of support also. It was the central object of the narrator's fantasy-life, a reminder at once of the distant pyramids of Egypt and of the dark Druidical ritual standing stones, it stood for the entire romantic history of origins, an ur-monument, both life-giving and life-taking, harbinger of the eternal fire and tomb of kings. It was further an instrument of knowledge, an observatory pointed toward the heavens. In its bulk almost incommensurable, irreducible to the mathematical calculations of the architect, contemptuously called "Scribe," it could not be cut down to size. Its inner recesses hiding unknown mysteries and its external walls impermeable and silent, it was, as Hegel would have characterized it, the perfect type of *Symbolic* architecture, an object not yet separated from the magical world of demons or the projected fantasies of men. Around this pyramid-tomb, the house deployed itself, depending on the chimney for sustenance and support; it was, because of its position, a kind of labyrinth protecting the inner center from profane intrusion. The resulting confusion of rooms, each forced to act as a passage to the next, one with as many as nine doors, generated a complex network of relations: "almost every room, like a philosophical system, was in itself an entry, or passageway to other rooms and systems of rooms, a whole suite of entries in fact."[39] And, like the daydreamer whose mental map these rooms seemed to emulate, "going through the house you seem to be forever going somewhere and getting no where." Indeed, one might entirely lose one's way:

It is like losing oneself in the woods; round and round the chimney you go, and if you arrive at all it is just where you started and so you begin again and get nowhere.[40]

Here, we are reminded of a similar pattern of uncanny repetition in Freud's description of his strange experience of a particular quarter in a provincial town, "the character of which could not long remain in doubt," as painted women filled the windows of the small houses. Freud recounts that, hastening to leave this threatening place, unintentionally and by devious paths he was forced to return twice more, provoking a feeling he could only call "uncanny."[41] Like Freud, Melville's narrator had a sense of helplessness before the uncanny might of his chimney; and he seemed as unwilling as Freud to track down the causes of his involuntary acts.

This need to veil the source of dependency was mirrored in the narrator's resistance to deciphering or interpreting his hermetic chimney. It was as if his own body were threatened with extinction. He preferred the pyramid to remain a primal force, before writing, resisting all explanation, like the hieroglyphs before Champollion. Even when, as a last resort to persuade the owner to demolish

his mainstay, the architect, modern scriptor, invented the fiction of a "reserved space hermetically closed . . . a secret chamber . . . hid in darkness," the narrator refused to search. Not because he disbelieved in its existence, but rather the opposite: he believed too much in mysteries. What the chimney concealed, its and his nether world, should remain concealed. "Infinite and sad mischief," he held, "has resulted from the profane bursting open of secret recesses," thus precisely locating the principle of the uncanny previously identified by Schelling. By this means, a kind of tacit treaty was reached between the subversive and comforting powers of the house, allowing it, during the life of its owner, to remain a home.

2. Buried Alive

Rome is only a vast museum; *Pompeii is living antiquity.*[42]

The pleasures of Pompeii in comparison to those of Rome were, all visitors agreed, dependent on its *domestic* nature. Its streets, shops, and houses seemed to the traveller from the north at once intimate and private. Chateaubriand, who passed through in 1802, was struck by the contrast between "the public monuments, built at great cost in granite and marble," typical of Rome, and the "domestic dwellings," built with "the resources of simple individuals," of Pompeii. He even dreamed of a new form of nonmonumental museum, which would leave in place the tools, furniture, statues, and manuscripts found among the ruins, and normally displaced to the museum at Portici, with the roofs and walls of the houses rebuilt as a mise-en-scène of everyday life in ancient Rome. "One would learn more about the domestic history of the Roman people, the state of Roman civilization in a few restored promenades of Pompeii, than by the reading of all the works of antiquity," he observed, proposing in this way an anticipation of the folk museums of the twentieth century:

It would only need a little brick, tile, plaster, stone, wood, carpentry and joinery . . . a talented architect would follow the local style for the restorations, models for which he would find in the landscapes painted on the very walls of the houses of Pompeii.[43]

Thus at little cost might be created "the most marvellous museum in the world," "a Roman town conserved in its
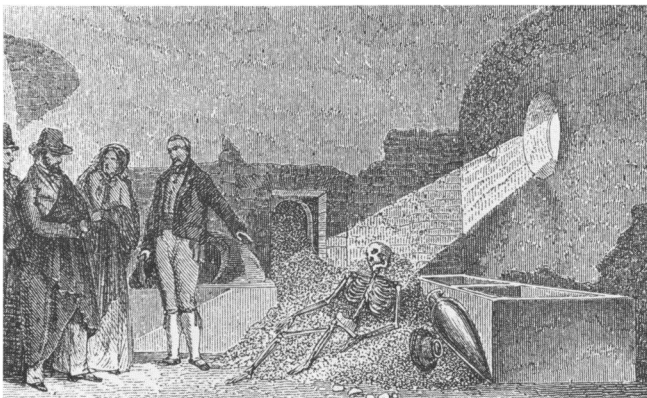
3. Exhibiting the skeleton, Pompeii
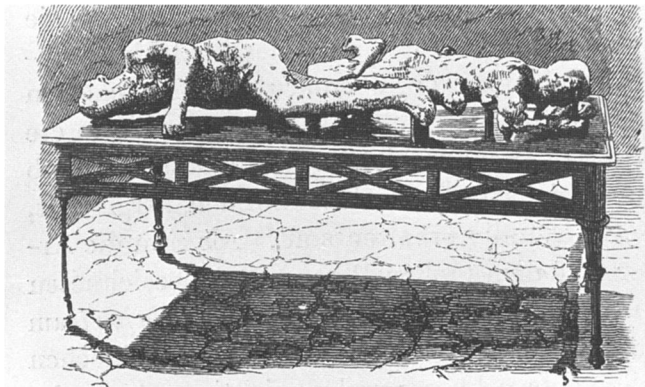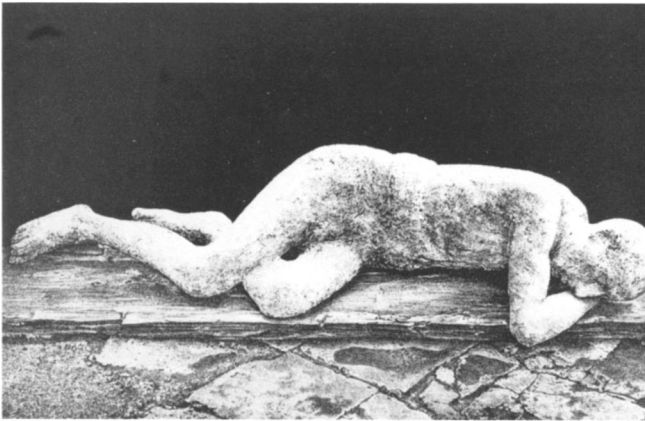
4. Burnt remains of a man, woman, and child, Pompeii, as exhibited in the Naples Museum

entirety, as if its inhabitants had just left a quarter of an hour before."[44]

Other writers, from Winckelmann to Le Corbusier, have attested to this humble, workaday quality of the ruins: the so-called Villa of Diomedes, the House of the Faun, the House of Championnet, the House of the Baker were only a few of those dwellings painstakingly described and "restored" by generations of architectural students. The sense of having intruded on a domestic scene not long abandoned was increased by the plethora of household goods uncovered by the excavations, some of which were carefully left in place for the benefit of visitors, but also by the intimate glimpses into the customs, mores, and even sexual life afforded by the wall paintings. What had been shrouded for reasons of prudery in museums was displayed as part of a complete panorama, a veritable ethnographic study, on the walls. Pierre-Adrien Pâris lovingly drew the priapic bas-relief on the wall of a small shop, while the young Flaubert found it the only memorable ornament of the town.[45]

And yet, despite the evident domesticity of the ruins, they were not by any account homely. For behind the quotidian semblance there lurked a horror, equally present to view: skeletons abounded. In the soldiers' quarter, as Cruezé de Lesser noted, "the judges perished with the accused," and the remains of the prisoners were still chained to the walls.[46] As opposed to the death of Herculaneum, which according to popular mythology was slow — "the lava filled up Herculaneum, as the molten lead fills up the cavities of a mold," wrote Chateaubriand — that of Pompeii was sudden.[47] Gérard de Nerval recreated the terrifying vision of the fiery rain of ashes, suffocating and burning those in flight; hidden until the mid-eighteenth century, this hideous destruction was revealed side by side with its less disturbing and apparently more normal context. The archaeological gaze was pitiless:

In the middle of the last century the scholars began to excavate this enormous ruin. Oh! incredible surprise; they found a city in the volcano, houses under the ash, skeletons in the houses, furniture and pictures next to the skeletons.[48]

The town was evidently no common archaeological site, its ruins bleached by the sun and exorcised of social memo-

ries: history here seemed to be suspended in the gruesome juxtaposition of these grisly remains and their apparently homely surroundings. Chateaubriand's folksy museum was, in fact, still inhabited.

It was, of course, this dramatic confrontation of the homely and the unhomely that made of Pompeii a locus of the literary and artistic uncanny for much of the nineteenth century; whether in the mystical formulations of Nerval, the popular melodramas of Bulwer Lytton, the full-blown romanticism of Théophile Gautier, or the dream narratives of Jensen. *L'étrange, l'inquiétant, das unheimliche,* all found their natural place in stories that centered on the idea of history suspended, the dream come to life, the past restored in the present. Pompeii, in contrast to the conventional settings of haunting and horror, possessed a level of archaeological verisimilitude matched by historical drama that made of it the perfect vehicle, in a century obsessed by the fugitive relations between past and future, of what Gautier variously called *"l'idéal rétrospectif," "la chimère rétrospectif," "le désir rétrospectif,"* or, in relation to Pompeii, *"l'amour rétrospectif."*[49] The special characteristic of this retrospctive vision was its unsettling merging of past and present, its insistence on the rights of the unburied dead, its pervasive force over the fates of its subjects. In Pompeii, it seemed, history, that solid realm of explanation and material fact, was taking a kind of revenge on its inventors.

In these terms, Pompeii evidently qualified as a textbook example of the uncanny on every level, from the implicit horror of the domestic to the revelations of mysteries, religious and otherwise, which, in Schelling's view, might better have remained unrevealed. Gautier's tale *Arria Marcella* insistently contrasted the banal and the extraordinary, the trivial and the momentous, the sublime and the grotesque aspects of the town: the brilliance of the light and the transparency of the air were opposed to the sombre tint of the black volcanic sand, the clouds of black dust underfoot, and the omnipresent ashes. Vesuvius itself was depicted as benign as Montmartre, an old fellow like Melville's chimney owner, quietly "smoking his pipe" in defiance of its terrifying reputation. The juxtaposition of the modern railway station and antique city; the happiness of the tourists in the street of tombs; the "banal phrases" of the guide as he recited the terrible deaths of the citizens in front of their remains: all testified to the power of the place to reproduce, quite systematically, the structures of the uncanny.[50]

On a purely aesthetic level too, Pompeii seemed to reflect precisely the struggle identified by Schelling between the dark mysteries of the first religions and the sublime transparency of the Homeric hymns, but as if reenacting the battle in order to retrieve the uncanny, in reverse. For, of course, what the first excavations of Pompeii had revealed was a version of antiquity entirely at odds with the sublime vision of Winckelmann and his followers. The paintings, sculptures, and religious artifacts in this city of Greek foundation were far from the Neoplatonic form of neoclassical imagination. Fauns, cupids, satyrs, priapi, centaurs, and prostitutes of every sex replaced the Apollonian grace and Laöcoonian strength of Winckelmann's aesthetics. The mysteries of Isis and a host of Egyptian cults took the place of high philosophy and Acropolitan rituals. Archaeology, by revealing what should have remained invisible, had irredeemably confirmed the existence of a "dark side" of classicism, thus betraying not only the high sublime, but a slowly and carefully constructed world of modern mythology. Schelling, with Goethe and Schiller, a true believer in the "congealed music" of classical architecture, had consciously resisted this undermining archaeology in his ambiguous assessment of the temple sculptures of Aegina, "perfected" as much as possible by Thorvaldsen, but betraying all the distortions characteristic of a presublime art. Their masklike features, he proposed, embodied a "certain character of the uncanny," the product of an older mysterious religion showing through.[51]

Perhaps the least forgivable aspect of this archaeological treason was its blatant display of classical eroticism, a world hitherto circumlocuted and circumscribed, but now open to the view of tourists and the interpretation of historians. Not only did such a scandalous unmasking support a literature of dubious quality, from d'Hancarville to de Sade, it also, as a next generation of romantics demonstrated, dangerously unsettled the apparatus of classical aesthetics. For of all the disturbing fragments found in the

city, it was the erotic traces that most exercised the imaginations of those who, from Chateaubriand to Gautier, were concerned themselves to undermine the high sublime.

Galatea Rediviva

Death, like a sculptor, has molded its victim.[52]

One of the more fascinating remains of Pompeii, described in detail by many early visitors, and with relish by every guide, was a fragment of scorched earth found beneath a portico of the House of Diomedes, and kept in the museum at Portici. Chateaubriand noted:

The portico that surrounds the garden of this house is made up of square pillars, grouped in threes. Under this first portico, there is a second: there it was that the young woman whose breast is impressed in the piece of earth I saw at Portici was suffocated.[53]

This simple but lugubrious "impression" became the focus of a series of meditations, each a reflection on its predecessor, the burden of which was the strange way in which nature, in its own death throes, had, so to speak, become its own artist: "death, like a sculptor, has molded its victim." The coincidence with the story of Pygmalion and Galatea was too close to avoid, and it was somehow satisfying, if depressing, to find the classical theory of imitation thus trumped by fate. The sculptor whose creation was so lifelike that she seemed to blush at his embrace, who fell in love with and "married" his ivory statuette, was now replaced by nature, or even better, history, who had molded its own work of art from the life, turning, in a reversal that caught the romantic imagination, living beauty into dead trace. And, following the hardly subdued erotic subtext of the buried city, this trace was not simply a mumified body or skeleton, but the ghost of a breast, a fragment, which, in an age preoccupied with the restoration and completion of broken statues, demanded to be reconstituted, in imagination at least.

As a fragment, this negative petrified sign of *nature morte* easily took its place among other similar fragments in literature and art that at once signalled an irretrievable past and evoked an unbearable desire for future plenitude: the Belvedere Torso, the Elgin Marbles, the Venus de Milo.

But unlike these the Pompeiian *terre cuite* in its isolated anatomical specificity represented a far more brutal cutting of the body, and thus imposed a greater interpretative effort. Its status was more that of the lost arm of the Venus de Milo than of the statue itself. Its archaeological equivalent would perhaps be the posthole of a hut or the pattern of woven cloth retained in dried mud.

The cutting of the body into significant parts, each representative of the perfect beauty of the whole was, of course, a commonplace of classical aesthetics. Zeuxis after all had assembled the type of beauty by the selection and combination of the best parts of his models. It was precisely against this kind of mechanical imitation that Winckelmann and his students had fought, proposing a kind of pre-romantic Neoplatonism, an enthusiatic idealism in its place. But the romantics themselves, while agreeing with Winckelmann's dislike of the copy, nevertheless invested the fragment with more than fragmentary significance. Forced to reconcile the material existence of fragments — the increasing quantity of bits and pieces from the past piled up in the basements of the new museums — with their organicist metaphysics, they preferred to take the fragment as it was and to cultivate it as an object of meditation. In Schlegel's celebrated formulation, the fragment "like a small work of art, should be totally detached from the surrounding world and closed in on itself like a hedgehog."[54] This closure, turning the fragment in on itself like an aphorism, on the one level, monumentalized it and allowed it to be framed and stabilized in the context of its historical origins. On another level, however, it released a kind of metahistorical potentiality by virtue of its incompletion, forming part of an imaginary dialogue, "a chain or a crown of fragments."[55] In this way the fragment might become a "project," the "subjective germ of an object in becoming," a "fragment of the future." As Schlegel concluded, "numerous works of the Ancients have become fragments. Numerous works by Moderns are fragments from their birth."[56]

If in these terms the status of Chateaubriand's "piece of earth" was enhanced, it was even more so by its role as an object of impossible love, a theme given full play in Gautier's *Arria Marcella*. In this story of the buried city as

19

uncanny habitat, the "hero," Octavien, loses himself in a "profound contemplation":

What he looked at with so much attention was a piece of coagulated black ash bearing a hollowed imprint: one might have said that it was a fragment of a mold for a statue, broken in the casting; the trained eye of the artist had easily recognised the curve of a beautiful breast and a thigh as pure in style as that of a Greek statue. It was well known, and the least of guide-books pointed it out, that this lava, cooled around the body of a woman, had retained its charming contour.[57]

Out of such contemplation was engendered the uncanny dream of Arria Marcella's feast, where Octavien, long an admirer of statues, who had been known to cry out to the Venus de Milo, soliciting an embrance from "her marble breast," was finally brought face to face with the original of the molded copy. She, true to his desires, "surrounded his body with her beautiful statue-like arms, cold, hard and rigid as marble." The reversal is clear and pointed directly by Gautier: the living body, impressed in its mold of earth, when revived took on the attributes of the artistic imitation. Classical aesthetics was thereby rendered dead, in favor of the life of "natural" fragments, themselves destined to be completed only by the powerless form of dreamed desire.

According to this analogy, we might also interpret the dreamlike "restoration" of the fragmented buildings of Pompeii that, in Gautier's tale, preceded Octavien's meeting with his Galatea. In this already strange night, a "nocturnal day" where the bright moonlight seemed to disguise the fragmentation of the buildings, repairing "the fossil city for some representation of a fantasy life," Octavien noted a "strange restoration," which must have been undertaken since the afternoon at great speed by an unknown architect:

This strange restoration, made between the afternoon and the evening by an unknown architect, was very troubling to Octavien, certain of having seen the house on the same day in a sorry state of ruin. The mysterious reconstructor had worked quickly enough, because the neighboring dwellings had the same recent and new aspects.[58]

Such a dream of the past restored, like some exact copy of an architectural student's *renvoi* for the Ecole des Beaux-

Arts, acted, like the vision of Arria Marcella, to return history, not to life, but to death: "All the historians had been tricked; the eruption had not taken place." Archaeology with its precise materialism had overcome temporality at least for a moment. It would be tempting to read into Gautier's narrative an implicit attack on restorers, Beaux-Arts and medievalist alike, as they searched desperately to make contemporary historical monuments out of the remains of the past.

But where, in the too-complete visions of a literal architect, whether restorer or conserver, the aesthetic effect verged on a touristic sublime, all too often a response to something that through endless re-representation and reproduction had become a copy of itself — Carcassonne, the Acropolis, and of course Pompeii itself would be examples — the effect of the uncanny in Gautier's treatment was less predictable. As a feeling of inadequacy in the face of superior powers, the sublime, defined in this way by Kant, joined all such metaphysical sentiments, and with them was equally subject to banalization. As a mental state, tied to the death or frustration of desire, the uncanny remained a threat to the high sublime, and, in its literary portrayal at least, was a harbinger of a living death in the face of which the historical fate of Pompeii's inhabitants seemed almost preferable. Thus Octavien, returning to the site of his dream, finding the remains of Arria "resting obstinately in the dust," despaired, suspended in the same state of coldness, distance, banality as the statue he desired. In the same manner, d'Aspremont, in another tale by Gautier, *Jettatura*, having courted death in a duel only to slay his opponent in the ruins of Pompeii, leaves the city like "a walking statue," finally to die by his own hand, his body never to be found.[59] Those who courted the remains of the buried alive, evidently risked sharing the same fate.

Antique Burials

To many people the idea of being buried alive while appearing to be dead is the most uncanny thing of all.
  Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

In an apparently strange reversal, the tombs in Pompeii, city of the dead, were, unlike the catacombs of Naples and

Rome, rarely the subjects of necropolitan meditations. To Octavien's companions, indeed, they were positively pleasant:

This road lined with sepulchres which, according to our modern feelings would be a lugubrious avenue in a town . . . inspired none of that cold repulsion, none of those fantastic terrors that our own lugubrious tombs made us feel.[60]

Rather they experienced "a light curiosity and a joyous fulness in existence," in this pagan cemetery. Like shepherds in Arcadia, they frolicked conscious of the fact that in these tombs "in place of a· horrible cadaver" were only ashes, "the abstract idea of death" and not the object itself.[61]

Such pleasure in the face of a ritualized death contrasted with the terror felt at the untimely death of the inhabitants under the eruption; it seemed to exorcise, in some way, the uncanny effect of the guide's recital of the death of Arria Marcella. "'It was here,' said the Cicerone in his nonchalant voice, the tone of which hardly matched the sense of his words, 'that they found, among seventeen skeletons, that of the woman whose imprint can be seen in the Museum at Naples.'" The fear stimulated by *"l'amour rétrospectif"* was countered by the security, almost *heimlich*, to be found in tombs "embellished by art," as Goethe had it. Ritually placed ashes were part of a human plan, naturally created they were a terrifying catastrophe.[62]

In his essay on the uncanny, Freud commented on this fear of being buried alive, which he linked to other uncanny tropes common in nineteenth-century literature, such as the forces of animism, witchcraft, magic, the evil eye, and especially the *"Gettatore*, that uncanny figure of Roman superstition," that had, fifty years before, also inspired Gautier.[63] His long analysis of Hoffmann's tale "The Sandman" persuaded him that, on one level, Schelling had been correct in ascribing the feeling of the uncanny to the return of "a hidden familiar thing that has undergone repression and emerged from it." In this way, the fragment — "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist"[64] — might be related to the castration complex, and superstition itself might be traced to the return of a primitive fear, long buried but always ready to be awakened in the psyche. In this sense, Freud reinterpreted

Schelling's definition in terms of a recurrence of the repressed, the uncanny as a class of morbid anxiety that comes from something "repressed which *recurs."* Similarly the use of the word *heimlich* in such a way that it extended to its seeming opposite, *unheimlich*, might be explained by the fact that "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression."[65] Thus the phenomena of haunting:

Many people experience the feeling [of the uncanny] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts. As we have seen some languages in use today can only render the German expression 'an *unheimlich* house' by 'a *haunted* house.' . . . There is scarcely any other matter . . . upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times, and in which discarded forms have been so completely preserved under a thin disguise, as of our relation to death.[66]

Freud, himself an amateur archaeologist, was well aware of the uncanny effects of Pompeii: he had devoted a long essay to the analysis of Wilhelm Jensen's fantasy *Gradiva*, in which a young archaeologist found the original of his model — a bas-relief of a young girl "splendid in walking" — amidst the ruins of the city. Jensen's Pompeiian fantasy was indeed a reworking of Gautier, with the addition of the archaeologist's dream content.[67] But Freud, in this analysis, strangely refused any direct reference to the uncanny, or even to the buried discoveries of archaeology, preferring to enunciate the principles of the interpretation of dreams as represented in fiction. Perhaps this, in turn, was his own repression, for in *The Interpretation of Dreams* itself, he had fully explored the question of the *unheimlich* with reference to one of his own dreams: one that incorporated both the fear of being buried alive and the desire for a fully restorative archaeology. It was also, as he noted, "strangely enough" an account of a dream that "related to a dissection of the lower part of his own body," a kind of self-fragmentation.[68]

In this dream, which he attributed to the reading of a popular melodramatic novel by Rider Haggard, *She*, Freud found himself, following the self-dissection scene, driving in a cab through the entrance of his own apartment house, thence to make his way over an Alpine landscape, and
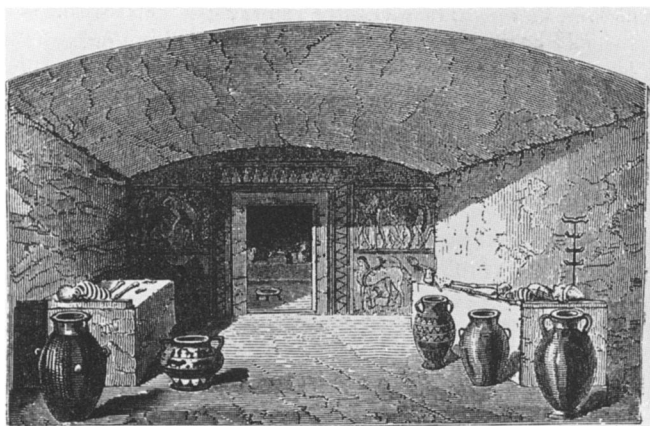
5. Etruscan tomb called *La Grotta Campana* at Veii

finally to arrive at a primitive "wooden house" within which were men lying on benches along the walls. His interpretation, refusing the more obvious allusion to *She* as a dramatization of the return of the repressed, a figure of woman triumphant over history on the model of Arria Marcella, turned instead to his archaeological fantasies:

> The wooden house was also, no doubt a coffin, that is to say, the grave. . . . I had already been in a grave once but it was an excavated Etruscan grave near Orvieto, a narrow chamber with two stone benches along its walls, on which the skeletons of two grown men were lying. . . . The dream seems to be saying: 'If you must rest in a grave let it be an Etruscan one.' And, by making this replacement, it transformed the gloomiest of expectations into one that was highly desirable.[69]

Much later, in *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud was more explicit on this desire for archaeological fulfillment: "The sleeper may be seized with a presentiment of death, which threatens to place him in the grave. But the dream-work knows how to select a condition that will turn even that dreaded event into a wish fulfillment: the dreamer sees himself in an ancient Etruscan grave which he has climbed down into, happy to find his archaeological interests satisfied."[70] Freud's self-satisfying explanation of his visit to the haunted house of his desire does nothing to dispel the truth of his own perception that "psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people for that very reason." Perhaps it was out of homage to the power of an archaeology that refused to hide what it had laid bare, and that should have remained repressed, that Freud hung on the walls of his consulting room, just above the famous couch, a large photograph of the rock temple of Ramses II at Abu Simbel, and beside this a bas-relief in plaster copied from the Museo Ciaramonti in the Vatican, portraying one of the Horae, goddesses of vegetation, otherwise known as the "Gradiva" relief that inspired Jensen.

3. Homesickness

The perpetual exchange between the homely and the unhomely, the imperceptible sliding of cosiness into dread, was, in Hoffmann and de Quincey, a carefully arranged affair, where architecture operated as a machine for defin-

ing boundaries that in the end were to be overcome. In Melville, the divisions, while still essentially embodied in physical spaces and objects, are less clear: between literal concealment and projected fantasy, settled comfort and lurking dread, the smoke raised an ill-defined wall. We are even left in some doubt whether the house and its chimney are not in fact some elaborate symbol for the mind of the narrator, at home in its unhomely thoughts. In Walter Pater's fragment "The Child in the House" there is no longer any question: memory of the house and the house itself have become subsumed in the dream.[71]

At first the dream of Florian seems homely enough; it parades as the very essence of remembered homeliness: for, as we are told, "in Florian the sense of home was singularly intense," as "the special character of his home was so essentially homelike" — a repetition that, like the repetition of the term "behind" by the narrator in Melville's story, tends to undermine itself by positive assertiveness. The remembered attributes of Florian's childhood house, however, confirm this picture: its garden, trees, walls, doors, hearths, windows, furnishings, even its scent, contributing to make it the very type of home, a typicality reinforced by its position in the English Home Counties and their homely landscapes. So secure was this house to the child Florian that even the fog and smoke that occasionally drifted in from the nearby town held no ominous air. It was in every way a "place 'inclosed' and 'sealed.'"[72]

But, of course, this house was only a remembered house, and this itself recalled in a dream. Its aspect was clear but, "as sometimes happens in dreams, raised a little above itself," heightened, half-spiritual, and merged with the knowledge, later acquired, of its essential impermanence. In retrospect, watching the growth of his soul in the house from a distance, Florian would give significance to things that, when a child, held only a vague portent. The dream rapidly became a history of the growth of fear, a tracing of the sources of what were, to the child, uncanny sensations, and remained, with the adult, the permanent springs of unease. Windows were, so to speak, left half-open inadvertantly; a "cry in the stair, sounding bitterly through the house," heralded the news of Florian's father's death; a visit to the churchyard provoked questions as to the nature of a final resting place.

Finally, Florian's house became haunted: a "certain sort of figure that he hoped not to see," a shadow of the father, remained each night by his bed, and did not entirely leave in the morning. The move from this childhood home simply confirmed this foreknowledge of death, the death of the child of course, but also of security and of homeliness. Returning for an instant to the already abandoned rooms, "lying so pale, denuded and meek," the "aspect of the place touched him like the face of one dead." Henceforth the soul would have no rest but in nostalgia, in that malady provoked by all apparently secure enclosures, homesickness. The childhood home was transformed into no more than a locus for dreams, for what Pater called "that clinging back towards it" that lasts for a long time and eventually spoils all anticipated pleasure.

In Pater's palely sublime dream, the return of a sense of primary narcissism gave an uncanny aura to the memory of the house, a repetition of something half suppressed in the mind, of the once intimate relationship between ideas and things. It was at least significant for literary history and the establishment of the Proustian mode that Florian's dream was stimulated, not by actually revisiting the site of childhood, nor by hearing a description of it that awakened memories, but by the simple conjuring of the "name of the place." Henceforth the uncanny will manifest itself no longer in the prolonged and artistically delivered ghost story, but in the fragmentary, chance occurrence of a word, a phrase that, suspended as it were in ordinary discourse, demanded, as one of a series of such linguistic fragments of a once whole past, to be interpreted.

Nostalgia

If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, . . . we shall arrive at the 'House-Machine,' the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful.
    Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, 1920

The house, like man, can become a skeleton. A superstition is enough to kill it. Then it is terrible.
    Victor Hugo, *Les travailleurs de la mer*, 1866[73]

The therapeutic programs of the Modern Movement, dedicated to the erasure of nineteenth-century squalor in all its

forms, proposed an alliance between the hygienists and the architects that would be reinforced on every level by design. The destruction of the street, last trace of that "Balzacian mentality" so despised by Le Corbusier, and its replacement by expanses of verdure; the zoning of industry away from the centers of habitation; the endless biological analogies applied to functionalist mechanics were only a few results of this polemical equation between art and health to be legislated by the Athens Charter. On the level of the house, too — its roof removed and replaced by a garden, its cellars filled in and its first floor open to the park, its horizontal windows and terraces encouraging the ceaseless flow of light and air — modernism proposed to consign the cluttered interiors and insalubrious living conditions of centuries to oblivion. By these means it was thought that disease, individual and social, might be eradicated once and for all and the inhabitants of the twentieth century rendered fit for the marathon of modern life.

And if the doctors were thus served by the *Ville Verte* and the *Maison Dom-ino*, then, by implication, so were the psychoanalysts. An open, fresh-air existence would finally address the causes of those pathologies so painstakingly treated on post-Freudian couches, purging society of its totems, taboos, and discontents. If houses were no longer haunted by the weight of tradition and the imbrications of generations of family drama, if no cranny was left for the storage of the bric-a-brac once deposited in damp cellars and musty attics, then the prison house of memory would be released from its unhealthy preoccupations to live in the present. Side by side with the ubiquitous image of the modern bureaucrat as athlete, measuring his strength against a punching bag while contemplating a Léger painting, was the vision of biological functions cleanly subsuming psychological traumas: to picnic on the grass was not to recline on the couch, which, in any case, had been stripped of its layers of oriental rugs to be redesigned according to the curves of the body and sprung like a trampoline.

Yet, inevitably, this house-cleaning operation produced its own ghosts, the nostalgic shadows of all the "houses" now condemned to history or to the demolition site. Once reduced to its bony skeleton, transformed out of recognition into the cellular fabric of the *unité* and the *seidlung*, the

house was itself an object of memory, not now of a particular individual for a once-inhabited dwelling, but of a collective population for a never-experienced space: the house had become an instrument, that is, of generalized nostalgia.

In 1947, two years after the end of the war, and with Europe poised for full reconstruction, the philosopher Gaston Bachelard completed a book entitled, significantly enough in the context of this exhaused battlefield, *La terre et les rêveries du repos*, the second volume in his study of what he called "material imagination."[74] In this work he was concerned to examine what he called the "counter-materiality" to be found in dreams of rest, of intimacy, of interiority, of involution.

We will examine — he wrote — images of rest, of refuge, of rootedness. . . . The house, the stomach, the cave, for example, carry the same overall theme of the return to the mother. In this realm the unconscious commands, the unconscious directs. Oneiric values are more and more stable, more and more regular. They are entirely concerned with nocturnal forces, and subterranean powers.[75]

In this plumbing of the depths of a terrestial unconscious, of *la vie souterraine*, Bachelard found the topos of the house and home, *la maison natale*, to stand at the center of his nostalgic vision.

This house is far away, it is lost, we inhabit it no more; we are, alas, certain of inhabiting it never again. It is, however, more than a memory. It is a house of dreams, our oneiric house.[76]

But such a house of dreams, a mental construct that included all houses yet inhabited and to inhabit, a true "birthplace" or site of origins, was not to be found in the present, and certainly not in the present provided by modern life and modern apartments. Bachelard was clear in his rejection of urban contemporaneity:

I do not dream in Paris, in this geometric cube, in this cement cell, in this room with iron shutters so hostile to nocturnal subjects. When I dream well, I go yonder, to a house in Champagne, or to a few houses within which the mysteries of happiness are distilled.[77]

Bachelard's resistance to dreaming in his "geometric cube" might of course simply be interpreted as the anti-urban stance of a *rêveur* in the long tradition established by

6. Freud's couch and study,
Berggasse 19, 1938
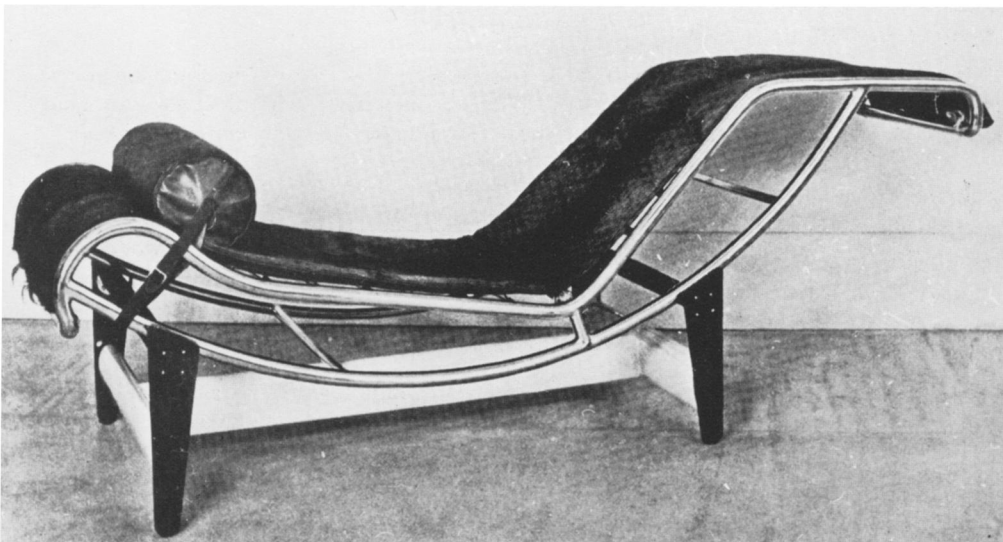
7. Le Corbusier and Charlotte
Perriand, chaise longue, 1929

Rousseau. But in the aftermath of the war, it might more properly be seen in the context of the antimodern discourse that, since the early 1930s, had been gaining ground with critics skeptical of "progress" and its supposed benefits. Philosophers on both the right and left of the political spectrum, from Theodore Adorno to Martin Heidegger, Max Horkheimer to Hans Sedlmayr, contributed to this sensibility, which amounted to no less than a concerted attack on the founding premises of modernism, or at least those that seemed to blame for the form of the "modern" house, its "geometric cubes" stacked up or laid out in "cement honeycombs."

Against the prismatic model of the *Maison Dom-ino*, a modernist primitive hut in the line of many such structural and rationalist types since the Enlightenment, these critics advanced the complaint of *uninhabitability*. As Adorno wrote in 1944, "In truth, it has become entirely impossible to inhabit," a sentiment that was echoed by Heidegger seven years later in his celebrated "to build, to inhabit, to think." Adorno despaired of retrieving the house of yesterday in the city of tomorrow, castigating that

functional architecture, which has made a *tabula rasa* of all superfluity, producing only boxes for Boetians constructed by experts . . . which have not the least relationship to those who inhabit them; such dwellings are a slap in the face to any nostalgia for an independent existence, which in any case exists no more.[78]

Reduced to "sleeping next to the ground like an animal," modern man would soon be forced into a new nomadic primitivism, living in the *bidonvilles*, bungalows, and no doubt the garden-huts, caravans, or even cars of the near future. Heidegger was to blame the triumph of technique, Sedlmayr the "loss of center," but the refrain was similar. Paul Claudel summed up the feeling in characterizing his Parisian apartment as a mere number, "a kind of geometrical place, a conventional hole, between its four walls." Even a detached house was no longer rooted, but "fixed with asphalt on the ground so as not to be dug into the earth."[79] The house was no longer a home, ran the refrain, a burden that has since emerged as a principle leitmotiv of postmodernism.

The ensuing attempt to rebuild the home on more stable foundations, according to the specifications of countermodernists and nostalgic dreamers, complete with its cellar and its attic, its aged walls and comforting fireplace, has, however, inevitably fallen victim to a complaint inseparable from all nostalgic enterprises: that of the triumph of image over substance. In its aspiration to recover the past, postmodernism has generally substituted the signs of its absence, perhaps, in the process, engendering a house more truly haunted than that of modernism, but for all this, hardly a more comforting or stable entity. Certainly it remains to be seen whether the mere image of "houseness" provides a sufficient substitute for what has been lost, or even an effective site for oneiric play. For, like its predecessors, nostalgia for a fixed abode inevitably falls into the paradox of all nostalgia, that self-consciousness that, despite a yearning for a concrete place and time, the object of desire is neither here nor there, present nor absent, now nor then. It is, as the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch put it, caught in the irreversibility of time, and thus fundamentally unsettled.[80]

Perhaps it was prescient of Poe that, in describing one of Usher's painted fantasies, he envisioned a scene that in its character seemed to his narrator the most uncanny of all, in its "abstraction," a frightening foresight of modernism's own dreams:

One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly, in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor.[81]

In this vision of the modernist crypt, buried and without exit, Poe assayed the counterimage to his rich, deep-colored, red and brocaded description of "philosophical furniture." The tomb that was finally no longer a house, destined to become the modern house itself, was perhaps
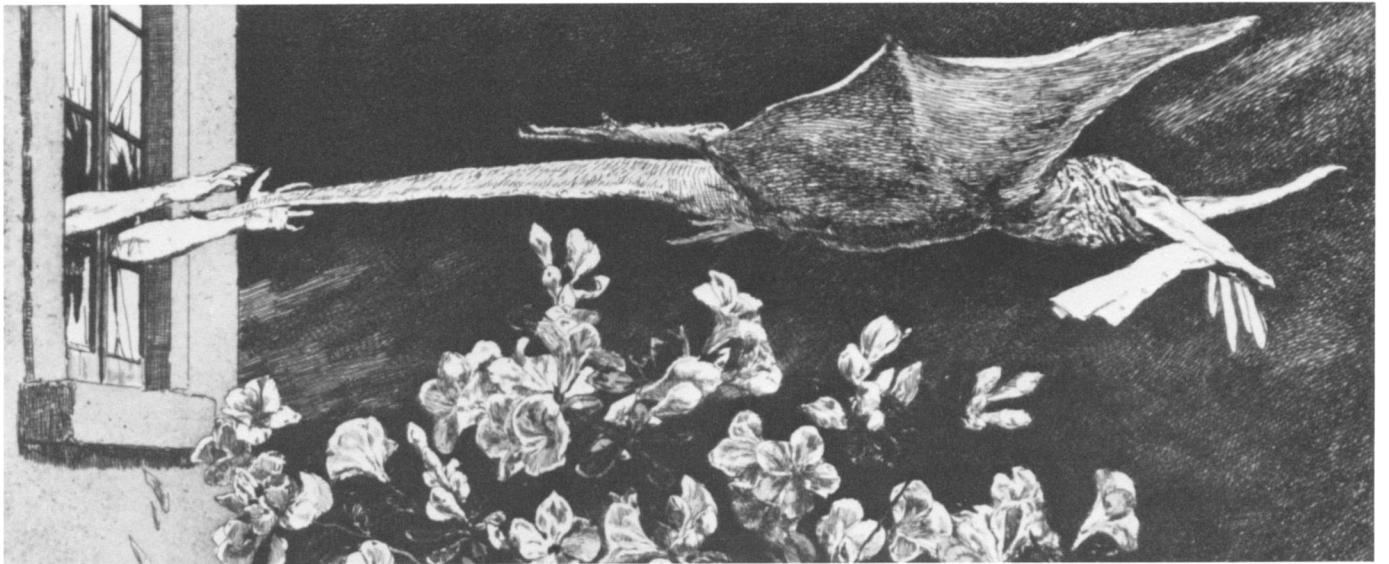
8. Max Klinger, *Ein Handschuh:*
Die Entführung (A Glove: The
Abduction), 1881

the most telling image of the uncanny environment: one that despite its evident associations to horror, melodrama, and psychic disturbance, nevertheless evinced only a negative, a blank, an absence, before a gaze perhaps too eager to discover presence.

Notes

This article is based on a paper originally delivered at the Humanities Center, Johns Hopkins University, in the Spring of 1984; it has been revised and much expanded under the auspices of a Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for the academic year 1985–86. A version of the section "Buried Alive" was published in *Quaderns d'arquitectura i urbanisme* 166 (1985): 124–35. This is a condensed version of a chapter in my book in preparation, *The Architecture of Romanticism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, forthcoming).

1. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Tales and Poems* (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), p. 231.

2. Ibid., p. 233.

3. Ibid.

4. Victor Hugo, *Les travailleurs de la mer* (1866), in *Oeuvres complètes: Roman III* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985), p. 50.

5. Ibid., p. 51.

6. Ibid., p. 119.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 120.

9. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), edited with an introduction and notes by James T. Boulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), pp. 39–40.

10. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 119.

11. Ibid., p. 59.

12. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1835), 2 vols., translated by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1:243.

13. Sigmund Freud, *"Das Unheimliche"* (The Uncanny), translated in Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature* (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), p. 339. This essay first appeared in *Imago* 5 (1919): 297–324, and was translated in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 17: 217–52. All references to Freud's essay in this piece will be taken from the Penguin edition.

14. Ibid., pp. 339–40.

15. Ibid., p. 364.

16. The English word "uncanny," although not a direct translation of *unheimlich*, reveals similar relationships with "house and home." Thus "canny," from the root "can" (knowledge and skill), led to the frugal and the careful — the household virtues — and then to comfort and cosiness by the fireside — household qualities — and thence to the idea of the supernaturally wise; "uncanny" while not precisely the opposite of canny, nevertheless retained connections with both the haunting of houses and the strange, unfamiliar, mysterious presence of the supernatural. The earliest use in English cited in the Oxford English Dictionary is significantly enough connected to architecture: a remark by Emerson visiting Stonehenge,

"We walked in and out, and took again a fresh look at the uncanny stones."

17. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1877), vol. 4, pt. 2, p. 874.

18. Daniel Sanders, *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (1860), 1:729.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Karl Ferdinand Gutzkow (1811–78), novelist and playwright, whose early romances were in the fantastic genre but who joined with the Young Germans in Frankfurt against the romantic current; later he succeeded Tieck at the court theater Dresden.

22. Sanders, *Wörterbuch*, 1:729.

23. Ibid.

24. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie*, vol. 2 of *Ausgewählte Werke* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), p. 649. I am grateful to E. R. Miller for providing a finished translation of this passage.

25. Ibid.

26. *Locus suspectus*, the nearest Latin equivalent for the uncanny.

27. E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Rat Krespel," in *Die Serapionsbrüder*, vol. 5 of *Poetische Werke* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1957), pp. 32–56. Cited in "Councillor Krespel," trans. L. J. Kent and E. C. Knight, in *Tales*, ed. Victor Lange (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 80–100.

28. Ibid., pp. 80–81.

29. Ibid., p. 82.

30. Ibid., p. 81, emphasis added.

31. Maria Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 126.

32. Hoffmann, "Der Unheimliche Gast," in *Die Serapionsbrüder*, vol. 7 of *Poetische Werke*, pp. 103–53.

33. Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, in *Selected Writings of Thomas de Quincey*, ed. Philip van Doren Stern (New York: Modern Library, 1937), pp. 814ff.

34. Michael Riffaterre, "Hermeneutic Models," *Poetics Today* 4, no. 1 (1983): 7–16.

35. Hoffman, *Tales*, p. 278.

36. J. N. A. Rimbaud, "Veillées," in *Illuminations, Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 248.

37. Herman Melville, "I and My Chimney," in *Pierre, Israel Potter, The Confidence-Man, Tales, and Billy Budd* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 1298–327.

38. See, for example, V. H. Litman, "The Cottage and the Temple: Melville's Symbolic Use of Architecture," *American Quarterly* 2 (1969): 638ff.

39. Melville, "I and My Chimney," p. 1311.

40. Ibid.

41. Freud, "The Uncanny," p. 359.

42. Baron Taylor, letter to Charles Nodier, "Sur les villes de Pompéi et d'Herculanum," in François-René de Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres romanesques et voyages* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969), 2:1505.

43. Ibid., p. 1475.

44. Ibid.

45. Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondence, I, 1830–1851* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1973), p. 773; Letter to Louis Bouilhet, "Ah! poor chap, how I

missed you in Pompeii! I send you flowers that I picked from a brothel over the door of which is set an erect phallus. There were in this house more flowers than in any other. The sperm of ancient penises, fallen to the earth, have perhaps fertilized the earth."

46. Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres*, p. 1783.

47. Ibid., p. 1472.

48. Gérard de Nerval, *Oeuvres*, (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952), 1:1175.

49. Théophile Gautier, *Récits fantastiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 246.

50. Ibid., pp. 240ff.

51. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie*, p. 653.

52. Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres*, p. 1474.

53. Ibid.

54. Freidrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum*, Fragment 206, quoted in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'absolu littéraire: Théorie de la litterature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), p. 126.

55. Ibid., p. 101.

56. Ibid.

57. Gautier, *Récits fantastiques*, pp. 237–38.

58. Ibid., p. 253.

59. Ibid., p. 379.

60. Ibid., p. 243.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Freud, "The Uncanny," pp. 365–66.

64. Ibid., p. 366.

65. Ibid., pp. 363–64.

66. Ibid., p. 364.

67. Wilhelm Jensen, *Gradiva: A Pompeiian Fantasy* (1903), translated in Sigmund Freud, *Delusion and Dream and other Essays*, ed. Philip Rieff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), pp. 147–235.

68. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1955), p. 491.

69. Ibid.

70. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 23.

71. Walter Pater, "The Child in the House" [1878], in Harold Bloom, ed., *Selected Writings of Walter Pater* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 1–16.

72. Ibid., p. 6.

73. Hugo, *Les travailleurs de la mer*, bk. 1, pt. 2, p. 2, in *Oeuvres complètes, Roman III*, p. 51.

74. Gaston Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries de la volonté* (Paris: Librarie José Corti, 1948).

75. Gaston Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries du repos* (Paris: Librarie José Corti, 1948), p. 6.

76. Ibid., pp. 95–96.

77. Ibid., p. 96.

78. Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (1951; London: Verso Editions, 1974).

79. Paul Claudel, *Oiseau noir dans le soleil levant*, p. 144, quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1957), p. 42.

80. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'irréversible et la nostalgie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), pp. 346ff.

81. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, p. 237.

Figure Credits

1, 2. Victor Hugo, *Les travailleurs de la mer* (Paris: L'Impremerie Nationale, 1911), pp. 563, 561.

3, 4. Johannes Overbeck, *Pompegi* (Leipzig, 1884), figs. 4–6.

5. George Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (London, 1883), vol. 1, p. 31.

6. Photograph by Edmund Engelman. From *Berggasse 19* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

7. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Oeuvre complète de 1929–34* (Zurich: Verlag H. Girsberger, 1929).

8. Courtesy of Carus Gallery, New York.