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Hazel Hutchison

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Rossetti, and Swedenborg's
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Hazel Hutchinson

Ideal Homes: James, Rossetti, and Swedenborg's House of Life

In 'The Art of Fiction' Henry James writes, 'Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue.'¹ The idea of consciousness as an architectural space is a recurring motif in the history of thought from the Old Testament to post-structuralist theory.² It flourishes especially vibrantly in the poetry and fiction of the nineteenth century, both British and American. The reasons for this are complex. Public structures on a new, bewildering scale, such as the Crystal Palace built for the Great Exhibition of 1851, civic museums, hospitals and railway stations sprang up in towns and cities as capitalist cathedrals for the industrialised era. Urbanisation and the rise of the middle classes meant that more people owned or rented substantial houses, and the growing cultural emphasis on individualism and privacy also placed a new focus on the success and security of family life within the home, as celebrated by John Ruskin in *Sesame and Lilies* (1862):

This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate

1. Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction' (1884); repr. in *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 44–65, 52.

2. In his essay 'White Mythology', Jacques Derrida discusses the house as one of the preferred metaphors of philosophical language, and wrestles with the problem of