

Assignment: Houses, Buildings, Interiors

Some writers are obsessed with houses. Maybe all of them. I am. Off the top of my head, I can think of dozens of books that feature a house as a character – Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, with its “diseased” mansion in which no corner is a right angle...the vacation house in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*, where the protagonist finds a secret room with a strange little man living in it...Mark Danielewski's metafiction *House of Leaves*...the hundred-room apartment building in George Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*...and of course a whole big pile of Stephen King novels.

In one Haruki Murakami story, the protagonist recalls a sexual encounter by describing it *as if it were a room*:

It made him think of a small room – a nice, *neat* room that was a comfortable place to be. It had strings of many colors hanging from the ceiling, strings of different shapes and lengths, and each string, in its own way, sent a thrill of excitement through him. He wanted to pull one, and the strings wanted to be pulled by him. But he didn't know which one to pull. He felt that he might pull a string and have a magnificent spectacle open up before his eyes, but that, just as easily, everything could be ruined in an instant. And so he hesitated, and while he lingered in confusion another day would end.

In fiction, a house is not just a house: it's the entire universe. It's the mind, the imagination. For your assignment, write a page or three, using one of the following templates:

- 1) A woman enters, for the first time, the apartment where her estranged mother has been living alone for the past forty years.
- 2) A traveler arrives at a vast underground city of the future.
- 3) A man takes a journey in a car that is his only home.

- 4) The underpaid employee of a large company, unable to afford a decent apartment, figures out a way to live at the office.
- 5) The world's most elaborate doghouse.
- 6) A haunted shopping mall.
- 7) A teenager strives to achieve privacy in a family home made entirely of glass.
- 8) A college student is forced to return to her dorm room, where, over spring break, her roommate committed suicide.
- 9) An extremely fastidious man, after his lover leaves him, lets the whole place go to hell.
- 10) A very tiny explorer sets off across the inside of a refrigerator.
- 11) A living house that changes its shape every day.