From Gaston Bachelard’s *THE POETICS OF SPACE* “NESTS” chapter.

In one short sentence, Victor Hugo associates the images and beings of the function of inhabiting. For Quasimodo, he says, the cathedral had been successively “egg, nest, house, country and universe”. One might almost say that he had espoused it’s form the way a snail does the form of its shell. It was his home, his hole, his envelope… he adhered to it, as it were, like a turtle to its carapace. This rugged cathedral was his armor.” All of those images were needed to tell how an unfortunate creature assumed the contorted forms of his numerous hiding places in the corners of this complex structure.

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Later, Bachelard talks about the comfort he feels taking refuge in his house, in front of his fireplace: “A rat in his hole, a rabbit in its burrow, cows in the stable must all feel the same contentment I feel. Thus, well-being takes us back to the primitiveness of refuge. Physically, the creature endowed with a sense of refuge, huddles up to itself, takes cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed. If we were to look among the wealth of verbs that express the dynamics of retreat, we should find images based on animal movements of withdrawal, movements that are engraved in our muscles. How psychology would deepen if we could know the psychology of each muscle! And what a quantity of animal beings there are in the being of man!

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A nest is generally considered to be one of the marvels of animal life. An example of this much vaunted perfection may be found in one of Ambroise Pare’s works: “The enterprise and skill in which animals make their nests is so efficient that it is not possible to do better, so entirely do they surpass all masons, carpenters and builders; for there is not a man who would be able to make a house better suited to himself and to his children than these little animals build for themselves. This is so true, in fact, that we have a proverb according to which men can do everything except build a bird’s nest”

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…In everyday life too, for a man who lives in the woods and fields, the discovery of a nest is always a source of fresh emotion. Fernand Lequenne, the botanist, writes that one day while walking with his wife, Matiliday, he saw a warblers nest in a black
hawthorne bush: “Matilda knelt down and, holding out one finger, barely touched the soft moss, then withdrew her finger, leaving it outstretched… suddenly I began to tremble. I had just discovered the feminine significance of a nest set in the fork of two branches. The thicket took on such a human quality that I called out “Don’t touch it, above all don’t touch it!”

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A nest house is never young. Indeed… we might say that it is the natural habitat of the function of inhabiting. For not only do we come back to it, but we dream of coming back to it, the way a bird comes back to its nest, or a lamb to its fold. This sign of return marks an infinite number of daydreams…

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…Michelet suggests a house built by and for the body, taking form from the inside, like a shell, in an intimacy that works physically. The form of the nest is commanded by the inside. “On the inside, the instrument that prescribes a circular form of the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird. It is by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls on every side, that it succeeds in forming a circle… the house is a bird’s very person; it is it’s form and it’s most immediate effort, I shall even say, its suffering. The result is only obtained by repeated pressure of the breast. There is not one of these blades of grass that, to make it curve and hold the curve, has not been pressed on countless times by the bird’s breast, its heart, surely with difficulty in breathing, perhaps even, with palpitations.”