

18 AND OVER ONLY

dark museum

María Negroni

translated by **Michelle Gil-Montero**

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

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Prologue

*Wonder —is not precisely knowing
And not precisely knowing not—*

EMILY DICKINSON

A body dreams in the miniature of its night. What is housed in the museum of grief? A musician caged in his luxurious pride. Two cruel children in a mansion of rain and toys. A girl-crypt that anticipates and duplicates a countess-tower. People drifting through poverty and cold. Exiles. Inveterate travelers. Land surveyors. Alchemists. A man made of writing and modeling clay. A sea captain who will forever lead the funeral procession of water. And that orphan vampire of Transylvania, tending the coffin of maternal cooing. All of them, as you can see, nomadic types, aliens, vagrants—in other words, eternal widow-children clinging to a world of old catalogs, lost objects. Need I say that these “monsters” gravitate without exception to the shadows of chaos, sexuality, and night? That they are the heroes and heroines of

solitude and desire? That while methodically executing their forbidden fantasies, they're alert to death's slightest twitch, and *that* is what turns them into predators?

In this book, I set forth some arguments to support the idea, surely preposterous, that such beings resemble poets. It is not my intention to convince. Instead, I want to share something of that fascinating imaginary, packed with castles and lakes, crypts and laboratories, music boxes and evil gardens, urban ruins and boats like coffins ferrying magnificent dreams. Because in that atmosphere, it is my impression, something crucial materializes: a purely sentimental domain where it is suddenly possible to perceive, under any light, the critical link between childhood and atrocity, art and crime, passion and fear, and the desire for fusion and writing.

In the night within, melancholy is a second, ghostly sky. A bluing reminiscence, forming a backdrop to things. Onerous, the game of creating. The body dreams, records what it doesn't see, and then, as one transforms obsession into a series, pours that composition into the mold of fever, hoping for some unexpected incantation or melody. Art as customs office? Maybe. If it's a vestige of astonishment, anything might be. If it's a vestige of astonishment, anything might not be. Like in *The Enchanted Catastrophe* by Le Corbusier, changing the order of factors does not change the image; it only manages to convey the sorrow, the fleeting ingenuity of the collectible.

A sad beauty resides in the biographical museum. A (childhood) secret that invariably vanishes, leaving abrupt juxtapositions, magic threads, heaps of unhealthy toys, and the sanctuary space of the great carnival imaginary. Thus, you cross the desert. Thus, you enter the beautiful cemetery of the poem.

The Lyric Castle

In 1796, baffled or bored with the course of the French Revolution, William Beckford, eccentric dilettante and author of *Vathek*, abandoned Paris and returned to England where he oversaw the construction of our most sensational example of Gothic revival, Fonthill Abbey. There he lived uninterruptedly as a recluse, collecting curiosities for more than fifty years until his death in 1844.

Beckford was not alone in dreaming up, or seeking refuge in, a castle. Earlier, Sade and Walpole, and later Breton and Jung, imagined or actualized similar feats. In Walpole's case, for example, it is said that in 1748 he began obsessively constructing Strawberry Hill. For more than sixteen years, he labored at that collage, constantly tacking new structures onto his mansion, while furnishing it all with the slightly contemptuous patience of a dandy, as nothing managed to satisfy him. One day, while fighting a fever, he dreamed of another castle and the imperative to bring it to be. This second castle, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), is a book that he wrote in a single sitting, by channeling the excesses of his dream. And so, he built a house not for himself but for his desire and finally grasped the imagined—that is, real—form of his castle.

This episode is crucial. It shatters, for the first time, the effective myth of the Enlightenment. Here, its confidence wilts; night tinges its sunshine. His intuition