

Original manuscript translation of a Gothic Novel: the twilight of a literary collaboration

Bénédict-Henry Révoil. [Gerstäcker, Friedrich]. *Le Logis Mystérieux*.
[*Das Alte Haus*].

S.l., [before 1875].

(23.5 x 20 cm). 208 leaves, manuscript written in ink on rectos only.
Original thick paper wrappers, label pasted on front cover with the title
and the translator's name in ink. Some wear to the covers and faint
scattered spotting or tanning to the leaves, but overall a near fine original
manuscript in the hand of the author-translator.

\$2,700

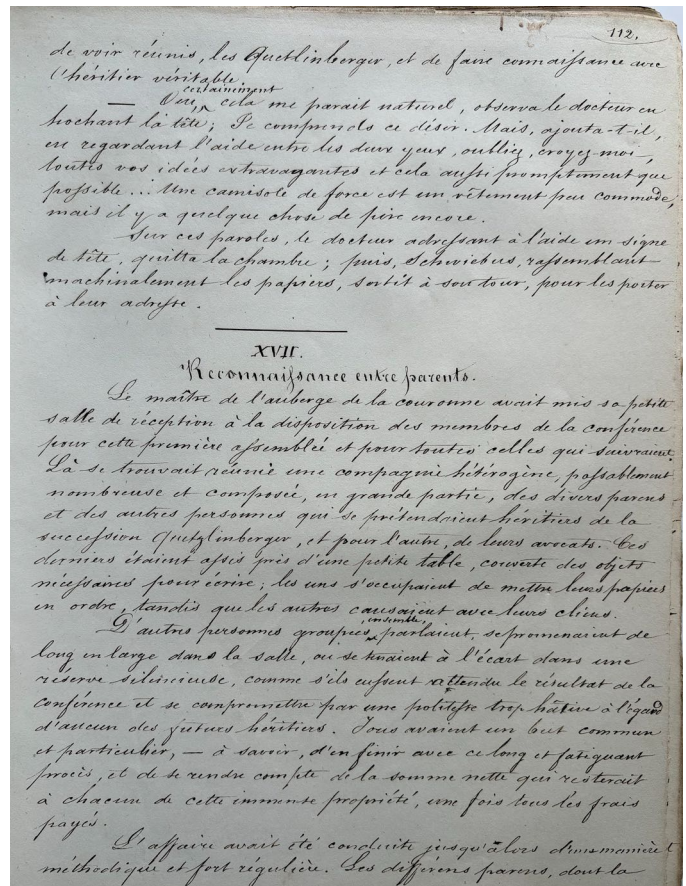


The original draft of a French translation by Bénédict-Henry Révoil, Gerstäcker's frequent collaborator:

A neatly written autograph manuscript translation of
Friedrich Gerstäcker's, *Das alte Haus*, which first
appeared in the Munich daily newspaper *Der
Bayerische Landbote* in April 1856, and then in book
form in 1857, the same year it was published in English
as *The Haunted House*, in London by Routledge.

The first French edition of the work, translated from
the English, was published in two separately titled
works in Paris: the first 16 chapters as *La Maison
Mystérieuse*, and the second 16 chapters as *Une
Charmante Habitation*, both by Michel Lévy, 1875.
Our manuscript contains all 32 chapters as they were
originally composed by Révoil.

Gerstäcker's *Das Alte Haus*, which features many of
the primary elements of the Gothic novel—medieval
architecture, often in ruin, supernatural events
populated by frightening specters or ghosts, dark
passages where frightening mysteries unfold, and
persecuted young women in distress—bears witness to the longevity of the genre. Révoil's collaboration with his
German counterpart also reflects the publishing tradition of near simultaneous translation and shared literary taste
among French, German, and English readers of Gothic literature, of which this title is a prime example.

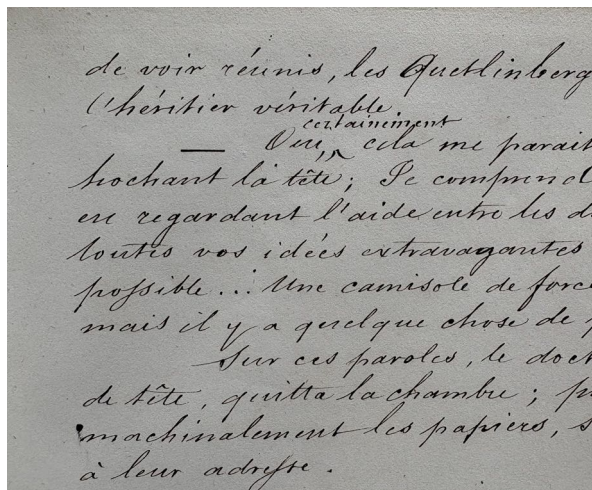


One for the price of two: doubling your money

A close look at this manuscript shows Révoil was nearly finished with his translation. The draft is neatly written in a consistent hand, but there are numerous corrections, word changes, and erasures scattered throughout the text. In this draft there is no indication that Révoil had considered breaking the story into two parts, nor is there a similar indication in the German original.

It was likely the decision of the publisher, Michel Lévy, who began issuing translations of Gerstäcker's work in 1874-75. Gerstäcker had died in 1872, and as Révoil had translated his German counterpart in the

past, he was a natural choice for a new collection that featured six titles. Gerstäcker had died in 1872, and as Révoil had translated his German counterpart in the past, he was a natural choice for a new collection that featured six titles, all translated by Révoil, that included the two-volume translation of *Das Alte Haus*, i.e., our manuscript, which had not previously appeared in French. It seems likely that Levy acquired the rights to Gerstäcker's work and to make it a more profitable project split the present work, *Le Logis Mystérieux*, into the two subsequently published works, allowing one work to be sold for the price of two.



The turning of literary tides: the last frisson of the international Gothic novel:

The international Gothic novel, such as *Das Alte Haus*, characterized by collaborative publication and speedy translation and dissemination across Franco-German-Anglo cultures, had, by 1857, reached a height that it would not exceed. The year was an auspicious moment for literature which saw the publication of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, works that would turn away from idealized romanticism and toward Modernism. The collaboration of Gerstäcker and Levy/Révoil on a work like *Das Alte Haus* is in many ways the final frisson of the Gothic novel, and an important marker for the literary traditions practiced in the last part of the 18th and early half of the 19th century.

The Plot:

Le Logis Mystérieux is set in the town of Hellburg, where the eponymous and appropriately spooky residence, said to be the oldest in the town, is characterized by "strangely carved gables and cornices" and "large iron gargoyles in the form of dragon's heads and other monsters." Having been sealed off since the death of its last owner the house is the source of rumors and superstitions that fill local citizens with dread, especially the servants of the neighboring house, inhabited by a local councilman Hechner and his daughter Marie, whose home is separated from the mysterious dwelling by only a single door. Flickering lights, nocturnal noises, and unexplained knocking are observed from the abandoned house, leading Hechner to seal up the connecting doorway. Nonetheless, Marie experiences haunting visions and dreams populated by the deceased owner and a pale child with a disturbing scar. Eventually, a young man arrives on the scene, Conrad G. Schierling, the missing adopted son of the owner.... Whether Marie and Conrad will safely navigate this narrative we leave to the curious reader to discover...

Bénédict-Henry Révoil (1816-1882), was a French author and traveler who published novels and plays during a productive career that included nine years in the United States, where he wrote and collaborated on theatrical works staged at Mitchell's Olympic Theatre in New York during the 1840s. Among his more than 20 published novels, he is widely held to be the author and the source of the experiences described in *Un Gil Blas en Californie*. *Un an sur les bords du San Joachim et du Sacramento* (1852), a story of the gold rush, signed by Alexandre Dumas. Révoil contributed to many periodicals in the 1850s, like *L'Illustration*, *L'Ordre*, and *Le Mousquetaire*.

He also translated more than 20 works into French from German and English by Maria Ward, William Harrison Ainsworth, and especially Friedrich Gerstäcker, for whom he translated at least nine works, for example, *Les Pirates du Mississippi* (1858), at times from the English translation.

Friedrich Gerstäcker (also "Gerstaecker") (1816-1872), was a German novelist and adventurer who spent time in the United States, working odd jobs ranging from deckhand on a steamboat to the fur trade. He published a number of novels based on his adventures in North America. In addition to his travels, which included journeys not only the US but also Mexico, South America, Polynesia, Australia, and Africa. He published nearly 50 works of travel and adventure literature and was widely translated. The result of the author's time spent in the US, led the Governor of Arkansas (Bill Clinton) to declare May 10, 1986 as Friedrich Gerstäcker Day.

