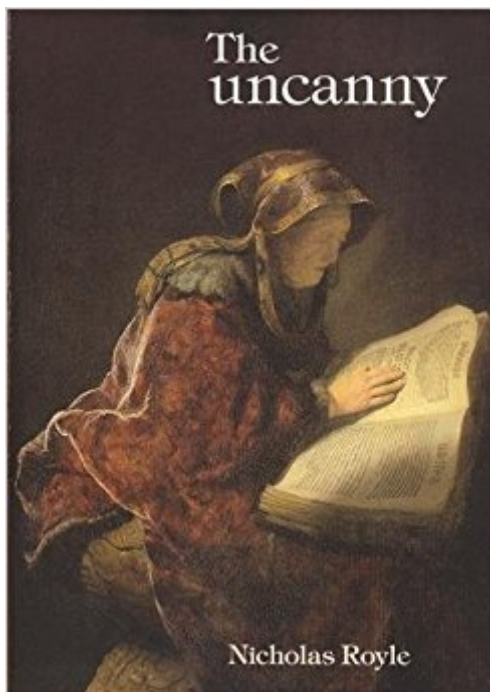


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The Uncanny: An Introduction



Synopsis

This is the first book-length study of the uncanny, an important topic for contemporary thinking on literature, film, philosophy, psychoanalysis, feminism and queer history. Much of this importance can be traced back to Freud's extraordinary essay of 1919, 'The Uncanny' (Das Unheimliche). Above all, Freud was perhaps the first to foreground the distinctive nature of the uncanny as a feeling of something not simply weird or mysterious, but strangely familiar. As a ghostly feeling and concept, however, the uncanny has a complex history going back to at least the Enlightenment. Royle offers a detailed account of the emergence of the uncanny, together with a series of close readings of different aspects of the topic. Following a major introductory historical and critical overview, there are chapters on literature, teaching, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, film, the death drive, dream, silence, solitude and darkness, the fear of being buried alive, the double, ghosts, cannibalism, telepathy, madness and religion.

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'Without doubt the outstanding book in critical and cultural theory published in 2003' -- Martin

McQuillan, Editor of The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory, for the English

Association 'This is a brilliant book, Royle's writing is astonishingly adventurous. The book is

indispensable to any study of the uncanny and thus to any study of literature. A critical tour de force.'

-- Textual Practice 'A playful, scholarly study. Densely and allusively argued, yet also full of pregnant one-liners. A fascinating and ambitious work.' -- The Guardian 'At last, a philosophical work that

discusses ghosts and madness seriously. Royle, in a style that is warmly engaging right from the preface, speaks directly to the reader. For an academic book this is a hell of a page-turner. A compulsive book.' -- Pireandello.org.uk

Nicholas Royle is Professor of English at the University of Sussex

Nicholas Royle is a brilliant academic author. You will enjoy reading his prose: it flows and he talks to you in a wonderful conversational style. There is no obscure jargon, nor are there any impenetrable sentence structures. I am studying the topic of the "Uncanny and Death" in relation to dying from Cancer. Royle's book is my bible. He includes a very extensive annotated bibliography. This is the definitive text on the Uncanny. I have been using it since it was first published in 2003.

I decided to read this book due to an interest in unusual psychological experiences and I must say that the experienced sense of the "uncanny" is a decidedly interesting psychological experience. However it must be emphasised that this book is more a book that analyses the notion of the uncanny as a literary phenomena rather than a purely psychological phenomena. The result is that within this book there is a lot of self-referencing by the author who is writer discussing an aspect of writing, namely the uncanny aspect of writing. There is much analysis of how the uncanny and its related psychological manifestations are written about by the likes of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida with Freud's text "The Uncanny" being interpreted as in some way itself "uncanny" in nature. I found the first half of the book which discusses Freud writing on the uncanny as more tangible to read than later chapters which seem to focus more on discussing the writings of the philosopher Jacques Derrida. It has sometimes been said that Derrida's writing is obscure with references to subject matter and ideas that are never made clear to his readers. The inaccessible nature of Derrida is doubled by Royle's equally inaccessible elaboration on his ideas and it left me feeling confused as to why I can understand the meanings of the individual words but not always sentences that they form. Also, the conversational tone of Royle's writing at times left me feeling like I was simply not part of the conversation. As a result I am tempted to take the view that maybe some of the Derrida-based analysis in this work is all part of some "post-modern gibberish," as the mathematician Alan Sokal might argue, but perhaps I am missing the context. Fortunately, some of the "being-too-clever-for-my-good" was not lost on me. I particularly enjoyed one chapter in which Royle discusses the uncanny relation between himself and another writer who shares his name. A photo is shown of the two "Nicholas Royles" standing side-by-side. Because "The Uncanny" is more

a book about literature then it is about human psychology I felt that Royal extends the notion of the uncanny far beyond the scope that most psychoanalysts, psychologists and psychiatrists would perhaps extend it. For example, the uncanny is seen in Royal's analysis as manifesting not just in unusual psychological moments such as Deja Vu or epilepsy but also in the very act of writing. Once that leap is made, the subject matter quickly transmutes into discussion more about writing and the canon of literature then about the uncanny. Still, until someone brings out a book on the uncanny that is more psychology focused, this book stands as the only one that explores this fascinating and "uncanny" subject.

Royle is absolutely brilliant as a writer and thinker. This book will teach psychoanalysts and any intellectual the complexity what it means to be human.

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