

Nicholas Royle

Nicholas Royle was born in London in 1957. He studied at Exeter College, Oxford, and completed his doctoral thesis on the poetry of Wallace Stevens in 1984. He taught at Oxford until 1987, and at the University of Tampere, Finland, from 1987 until 1992. It was at Tampere



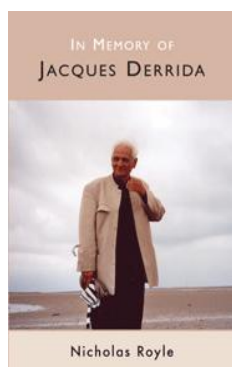
that he first encountered Andrew Bennett in 1989, and it was during the long dark Finnish winters that they first began collaborating together, first on a book about the novels of Elizabeth Bowen, and later on the *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. (For more on this, see the accompanying interview.) Royle took up a post at the University of Stirling in 1992. Since 1999 he has been

Professor of English at the University of Sussex. He has also been Visiting Professor at the University of Santiago, Compostela, Spain (2003) and at the University of Århus, Denmark (2005-8). He is sometimes referred to as a literary theorist but, for reasons that may be evident from reading Bennett and Royle, this is not a description with which he would identify. He is the author of numerous books and essays (see select bibliography below) but also works of fiction (some of which are surreptitiously implanted in his ostensibly ‘critical’ writings). He has published fiction under the name N.W.O. Royle, as well as pseudonymously. At the University of Sussex he specializes in teaching in the areas of modern literature, psychoanalysis (especially Freud), deconstruction, creative writing and the uncanny. He is also co-editor of the *Oxford Literary Review*.

Select Bibliography

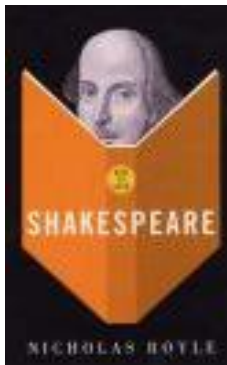
Books:

[*Veering: A Theory of Literature*](#). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. (Forthcoming)



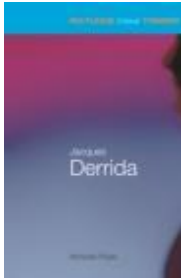
[*In Memory of Jacques Derrida*](#). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Many people acknowledged that, with the death of Jacques Derrida in October 2004, an era had effectively come to an end. Especially from the 1980s onwards Derrida was, as the *New York Times* once described him, not so much the most famous as the *only* famous philosopher in the world. As became increasingly clear in more recent years, however, he was also an extraordinarily inventive writer and a marvellously sharp and thought-provoking reader of literary texts. *In Memory* is a collection of linked essays that tries to think about some of the remarkable legacies of Derrida's work. It covers topics as various as Shakespeare, children's literature (*Not Now, Bernard*), 'the Gothic', Osama bin Laden, football, mourning, Elizabeth Bowen, queer theory, forgetting and dreams.



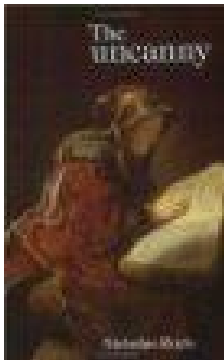
[*How to Read Shakespeare*](#). London: Granta and New York: Norton, 2005.

You might think this title is a joke. I did for a while. Then I remembered I'd signed a contract to write a book under that heading. I decided to deal with this intimidating, even impossible task by writing seven brief essays about seven words in Shakespeare. So, for example, in the case of *As You Like It*, I consider the compound word 'love-shaked' (a word apparently made up by Shakespeare, roughly meaning love-sick, in a fever of desire, shaken and still trembling) as a way of thinking about the play as a whole. And in the chapter on *Macbeth* I explore the word 'safe' (can you ever be safe, especially if you have murdered someone?) in ways that relate Shakespeare's play to more contemporary concerns about the often self-destructive and effectively anti-democratic pursuit of safety in the name of national or global 'security'. As *Macbeth* in various ways makes clear, one of the more disturbing meanings of 'safe' is 'dead'. (Remember Banquo, 'safe in a ditch'...?)



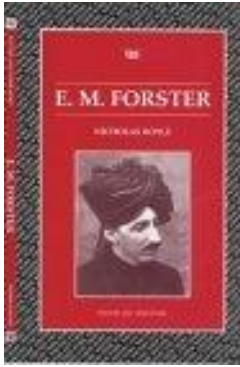
[Jacques Derrida](#). (Routledge Critical Thinkers Series.) London: Routledge, 2003.

Derrida (1930-2004) was an amazingly productive writer – author of dozens of books and countless essays. As the inventor of ‘deconstruction’, he was a major philosopher as well as a groundbreaking literary theorist: no other contemporary thinker has more – or more original – things to say about literature, or about its relation to such a striking swathe of issues: responsibility, pleasure, democracy, law, spectrality, the university, drugs, secrecy and so on. This book attempts to elucidate such connections while maintaining a central focus on a reading and analysis of specific literary works, from Shakespeare to Brontë, from Coleridge to Kafka.



[The Uncanny](#). Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Is it weird or is it strange? What is ‘the uncanny’? This book is an extended meditation on the idea, originally formulated by Freud in his essay ‘The Uncanny’ in 1919, that uncanniness has to do with the unfamiliar suddenly becoming familiar or the familiar becoming uncomfortably strange. This book attempts to consider in depth some of the aspects of the uncanny discussed in Chapter 5 of our *Introduction*. I discuss uncanniness in literature, but also try to think critically about it vis-à-vis the real world, for example in relation to politics and religion. There are chapters on a wide range of topics, including cannibalism, silence, being buried alive, the double, madness, déjà vu, ghosts, Jesus Christ and death.



E.M. Forster. Plymouth: British Council/Northcote House, 1999.

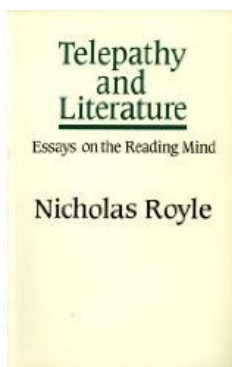
This is one of those slender volumes in the ‘Writers and Their Work’ series (like Andrew Bennett’s *Katherine Mansfield*). I agreed to write it because it would never have occurred to me to do so off my own bat: when the series editor invited me to do it I experienced a surprise of pleasure. This pleasure stayed with me: I reread all of the novels of Forster (1879-1970) and was repeatedly struck by how beautifully written they are, how clever, how funny and also how subtly but pervasively anti-authoritarian. You may know *A Room with a View* or *Howards End* or *A Passage to India*, for example, in their film adaptation forms but, as we say in the ‘Moving Pictures’ chapter in the *Introduction*, ‘the film of the book is a film, it’s not a book’. Forster wrote six wonderful novels, each of them immensely rewarding to read. Two things in particular intrigued and fascinated me while writing: the place of homosexuality (then illegal in England) and the role of telepathy in his works.

[*After Derrida*](#). Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

Yet another book about Derrida? Will it never end? If the title of this book seems intriguing you might want to consider the image on the front cover. Readers tend to think either it’s really funny and interestingly weird, or it’s gross and disgusting. It’s not a real photo, after all! (In fact it was originally used in New York in the 1980s as part of an anti-smoking campaign.) If you can get beyond the front cover you’ll find essays on, among other things, the nature of history (including the most important differences between ‘new historicism’ and ‘deconstruction’), the implications of Derrida’s work for writing literary criticism, why Freud had such a bee in his bonnet as to whether or not Shakespeare was really the author of the plays ascribed to him, and why it might be worthwhile setting up a ‘foreign body’ in your university.

[*Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives*](#). London and New York: Macmillan/St Martin's Press, 1995. Co-author (with Andrew Bennett).

We argue that the twentieth-century Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen is one of the most important, though undervalued, practitioners of the twentieth-century novel in English. Bowen's first novel, *The Hotel* (1927), begins with a young woman, Miss Fitzgerald, hurrying out of a hotel and stopping: she is 'frightened by an interior quietness and by the thought that she had for once in her life stopped thinking and might never begin again'. Such moments of pausation, of suspense or abeyance, seem to us characteristic of Bowen's work and give us pause: we linger over them and try to work out how such a stilling of life, of thought, works in and through Bowen's ten novels. Through a series of detailed readings, focusing on effects of immobility, catatonia, shivering, dream, trance, and convulsions, we contend that Bowen's work calls for a radically new way of doing criticism. As in our *Introduction* we work hard to avoid the abstract and often rather dull use of 'isms' and theoretical jargon. Instead we try simply to read and respond to Bowen's extraordinary novels – works that are more haunting and more thought-provoking (more thought-stopping, indeed) than any critical or theoretical attempt to appropriate them.



[*Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind*](#). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.

You might suppose that 'telepathy' is as old as the hills. Actually the word was invented only in 1882. Its emergence as a concept was closely bound up with that of other phenomena of what we might call tele-culture: photography, telegraphy, the phonograph, the telephone and so on. Telepathy or 'sympathetic clairvoyance' (as George Eliot called it) is a striking and widespread motif in later nineteenth-century literature, and of course in modernist writing and beyond. But what is telepathy, in fact? This book explores the topic in fiction (Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Virginia Woolf and Raymond Chandler, for example), in poetry

(Wordsworth and Coleridge) and in drama (Shakespeare), and suggests that telepathy and literature are intimate in stranger ways than you might imagine.

See [Nicholas Royle's website](#) for details of further publications

