

Department of English, Carleton University

ENGL 5002W
Winter 2013

*** Preliminary Course Outline / Subject to Change

Studies in Theory: The Uncanny and Its Doubles

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Course description:

Freud's theorization of the uncanny as both affect and aesthetic mode in "*Das Unheimlich*" (1919) has proven enormously generative for contemporary theory. Over the past several decades literary and cultural critics have turned repeatedly to Freud's psychoanalytic notion of an unsettling "return of the repressed" to account for the ways in which a variety of normative discourses—from the epistemologically enclosing space of ideology to linguistic "sense" itself—are interrupted by moments of strangeness or illegibility that produce unease, anxiety, and uncertainty. The goal of this course will be to examine what is at stake in such moments of cognitive rupture by locating them within the theoretical legacy of Freud's uncanny, particularly as the concept has been developed by subsequent psychoanalytic theorists: Jacques Lacan, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Slavoj Žižek. Taking Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as our point of focus, as well as supplemental stories by E. T. A. Hoffmann, Rudyard Kipling, and Franz Kafka, we will compare Freud's account of the uncanny to Lacan's notion of *extimité* and Kristeva's concept of abjection with an eye to developing a deeper understanding of the intersections between psychoanalysis, literature, and cultural theory.