

# Introduction

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**N**icholas Royle lives in Seaford, a coastal town in the county of East Sussex. As he notes in the interview that opens this issue, Raymond Williams once lived in Seaford as well. While an undergraduate, I learned from Williams that words have a history, something I should have known long before then. I recall being struck by the word “individual” which, until relatively recently, meant “indivisible,” that which cannot be understood through division into its constituent parts or bifurcation from the community of which it is member (Williams 161-65). The modern sense of the word—a divided self (essentially mind, not body), to be understood as a single or separate *human* being, as distinct from a group (*OED*)—is a product of Cartesian-Newtonian science, analytic philosophy, an atomistic economy, and, not the least, a rights-based political and ethical theory. At least some scholars question whether the modern notions of the individual and of individual rights, the very notions that provided a conceptual underpinning for the enterprise of colonialism, can and will lead to a more equalitarian, “post-colonial” world. And some wonder whether, with their decidedly anthropocentric bias, these notions enable us to open to non-human animals other than by calculating the extent to which animals are, or are not, “like us.”

In his essay “Mole,” Nicholas Royle cites Jacques Derrida’s remark from *Specters of Marx* “that ‘no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved,

or exterminated on the earth,” this as indissociable from the question “of what is becoming of so-called ‘animal’ life, the life and existence of ‘animals’ in this history” (245). Without frontal attack, without recourse to the positional/oppositional logic that set modern individualism on its way, Royle’s (at once creative and critical) writing “deconstructs” anthropocentrism, its same/different, self/other, man/animal binaries, and in complex, nuanced, multi-layered, and poetic texts, he suggests the crucial role that literature might play in forging a more responsible political and ethical discourse. In “Mole,” for instance, and leading to some profound conclusions, Royle explores the “‘massively unavoidable’ question of animals” (245), in part by asking what happens to the mole in *Specters of Marx*, in part by way of noting how, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the mole unsettles the human/animal opposition. In elaborating a theory of literature that is non-anthropocentric, Royle’s *Veering* is, really, innovative. His novel, *Quilt*, embarks on a non-anthropocentric way of storytelling, and an astonishing, auto-bio-graphical telling of the story of mourning. Look for his forthcoming novel, the research for which involves him in a study of birds.

**N**icholas Royle is Professor in the School of English at the University of Sussex, and an Editor of the *Oxford Literary Review*. His books include: *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (2011); *Quilt* (2010); *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, co-authored with Andrew Bennett (2009, 2004, 1999, 1995); *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (2009); *How to Read Shakespeare* (2005); *Jacques Derrida* (2003); *The Uncanny* (2003); *E.M. Forster* (1999); *After Derrida* (1995); *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives*, co-authored with Andrew Bennett (1995); and *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (1991). He is the author of numerous essays, reviews, and shorter publications; has participated in many interviews, radio talks, and published discussions; has translated works by Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard; has published a number of short fictions; and has delivered many invited lectures.

*Mosaic* is most grateful to Nicholas Royle for his visit to the University of Manitoba in October 2013 as a Distinguished Lecturer.

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