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ABSTRACT

TITLE: Breaking the Boundaries of Flesh: Medical Procedures and the Uncanny in Contemporary Literature

When describing the uncanny valley, Masahiro Mori posits a boundary between what is essentially human and what is not. More precisely, he writes of a *loss of affinity* which occurs when a healthy human being realizes that the hand, they had believed to be real is in fact a prosthetic (99). It is this familiar which suddenly becomes unfamiliar that evokes “an eerie sensation” (99). Likewise, medicine and medical procedures, can elicit uncanny feelings, particularly when the boundary of flesh is broken. In my paper, I will focus on the uncanniness experienced by people in a liminal phase, brought to or kept in life, using the examples from some contemporary novels and self-life writing which address issues like medical procedures and the artificial prolongation of life, especially in reference one’s perception of self. I would like to demonstrate that medicine’s precarious existence between life and death, despite its ability to save life, often makes us uncomfortable (as in: *unheimlich*) because death and vulnerability of the flesh is not something humans necessarily like to contemplate. In short, between the alive (top of the uncanny graph) and the dead (in the valley), there now usually lies medicine, a harbinger of the posthuman.