



Thomas De Quincey and the Cognitive Unconscious (Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine)

Markus Iseli

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This book examines Thomas De Quincey's notion of the unconscious in the light of modern cognitive science and nineteenth-century science. The cognitive unconscious, which postulates complex, rational, and beneficial mental processes, opposes the instinctive and intellectually primitive psychoanalytical unconscious. On this basis, this book challenges Freudian theories as the default methodology in order to understand De Quincey's oeuvre and the unconscious in literature more generally. His coinage of subconscious and his theories of language impressively demonstrate De Quincey's conviction of rational unconscious processes. With its cognitive historicist methodology this book further shows that De Quincey participated in the nineteenth-century discourse about the mind/body relationship and about the embodied, rational unconscious. Animal magnetism and physiology in particular fostered theories of the cognitive unconscious and some of De Quincey's most famous passages rely on the same ideas. The cognitive approach to the unconscious provides incisive insights that enable us to understand the nineteenth-century debate on the unconscious as well as De Quincey's work because they both deal with issues that are highly relevant in cognitive science today.

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