

endeavoured to answer. Among them, just what did the readers of the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* make of George Meredith's *The Egoist*?

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***The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel*, by Helene Moglen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.**

The characteristic of literary criticism which has most powerfully enabled its continuation is perhaps its ability to adopt tools of analysis from other fields of study. Aspects of such disciplines as economics, psychology, sociology and history have been seized upon by critics who see fruitful possibilities for the analysis of literature. With the diminution of the theory wars of the 80s, however, critics have tended not to set up their tents in opposing camps, but rather to take tools from different stalls in a kind of critical bazaar. Instead of trying to argue that a Marxist or historicist or queer reading can explain a text, critics increasingly tend to be occupied in synthesising useful approaches, adjusting and taking account, for a longer view.

Helene Moglen's latest book enacts this impulse of critical synthesis. While it is most heavily informed by psychoanalytic argument, it also uses Marxist, feminist and narratological criticism. It tends, too, towards the refinement of, rather than disagreement with, previous arguments. Moglen opens *The Trauma of Gender* by stating her intention to challenge two assumptions: that the ascension of capitalism and the bourgeoisie were responsible for the development of the novel, and that realism is the novel's dominant tradition. But she does not want completely to deny these contentions. Rather, she tempers them, arguing that the modern sex-gender system was an equal influence with the rise of capitalism, and that the novel has not one but two "mutually defining traditions," the fantastic and the realistic. Moglen argues that bimodal novels – those containing fantastic and realistic narratives – reflect the tensions generated by a particular psychic and social process: the imposition of the modern sex-gender system. This imposition instigated the "trauma" of gender.

Moglen argues that all the texts she examines are shaped by loss, conscious and unconscious, much of which is the psychic cost of the repressive sex-gender system. When these losses are not properly acknowledged, they are not mourned and are therefore experienced as melancholia. She defines realism as a fundamentally social form, "shaped by the consciousness of the self in its moral, ethical, and psychological relationships with others," while fantastic narratives map interiority and, particularly, expose "the anxious melancholy that the modern order of social differences induced." In the interaction between the fantastic and the realistic may be seen the propagation of and resistance to gender categories. To expose the submerged fantastic narratives in realistic texts, as Moglen aims to do, is to facilitate the "productive, recuperative work" of mourning.

The first chapter lays out a particularly rigorous and engaging analysis of the way economic structures combined with influences on the individual to influence novelistic form. Moglen examines novels by Defoe, contending that between *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* his novels betray a shifting attitude towards entrepreneurial capitalism. Convincingly she argues that in *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe identifies with the social and psychological processes by which the self-dependent male becomes entrepreneurial capitalist. However, by *Roxana*, Defoe begins to represent the divided consciousness brought about by individualist capitalism. The interplay of realistic and fantastic modes is central to this argument; Moglen contends that the fantastic narrative dominates the island section of *Robinson Crusoe* but is neatly bracketed by the realistic, whereas in *Roxana* the fantastic narrative interrupts and then eventually subverts the realistic by focusing on the heroine's inner feelings. Her chapter's successful aim is to show how the dynamic between realist and fantastic modes provides access to the psychological struggles of the modern individual.

The following chapter, "Clarissa and the Pornographic Imagination," examines the construction of sexual identity. It argues that the disjunction between the realistic and fantastic narrative modes in this book reflects the schisms imposed by the social construction of sexual difference. This disjunction not only reflects the incompatibility of the protagonists but tracks the disjunction between men and women, who have been culturally constructed as so radically different that they become alien to one another. Moglen describes the operation of an emergent pornographic imagination in the realist mode which "eroticizes gender difference and the power relations by which that difference is organized and reproduced." Fantastic narratives, in contrast, "uncover the primal, psychic past that underlies the cultural present" and "demolish conventional categories of gender to the extent that they reveal ungendered bodies, which are solipsistic and indeterminate in their desire." Moglen makes a convincing case for the subversive nature of the fantastic, here demonstrating how the tendency of the realistic mode to desexualise women produces in the fantastic mode an obsession with the sexuality of the mother.

The following two chapters become more heavily psychoanalytical. While they seem slightly repetitive and contribute less to the forward movement of her argument than the previous chapters, they are nonetheless engaging and thorough. Moglen argues that fantastic narratives represent a self which is deeply divided. She shows the ways that Richardson in *Tristram Shandy* represents a subversive play with subjectivity which resists social forces of containment. Although she regards the novel as ultimately misogynous and heterophobic, she finds that of the novels she examines, Richardson's is the only one which represents as possible the achievement of a kind of equality in heterosexual relationships.

The chapter on Walpole examines how this author narrativised elements of his own emotional life in fiction. For example in *The Castle of Otranto*, Moglen finds an obsession with incest which, she argues, is motivated by a need for recuperation which results from an alienation of fathers from their children. Moglen argues in this chapter that fantastic narratives are inherently repetitive because, driven by the

compulsion to repeat, fantastic fictions tend to “resist the resolution that they also crave.”

Moglen sees psychoanalytic theory as offering a retrospective illumination of these eighteenth-century novels, arguing that theory invented a language to describe the alienated self, which bimodal novels represent “perceptively but without full consciousness.” The obvious objection to this argument is the charge of anachronism. Moglen herself attempts to forestall this criticism – that she is “conceptualizing the past to conform to and anticipate a version of the present” – by saying that this is inevitable, because it is how we read, that is, “revising memory as current patterns of experience provide access to conscious and unconscious material that has been inaccessible before.” She argues that “texts written in the past achieve importance for us because we find them eloquent in the present moment. Their resonance is cultural as well as personal: a sign of collective and individual inheritance.” Although there might now be a loose consensus about the inevitability of our readings being at least informed by our position in the present, what you think of Moglen’s defence will depend on how you think this affects our conception of the text.

For me, the tendency to find in past texts phenomena related to present concerns – because they are “eloquent in the present moment” – is not a problem. Most texts are susceptible to analysis on a multitude of topics, and the most fruitful research is often centred upon those subjects which we find most pressing today. Of more concern is the possibility that we might be making texts “conform to” the present by using potentially anachronistic reading paradigms. Such readings do not necessarily warp the text; whether or not they do depends on the integrity of the analysis. Yet if such reading tools are to be valid, what needs to be remembered is the extent to which specific paradigms *limit*, even if they do not warp, our perceptions. While Moglen’s analysis convincingly details how the self represented in these texts corresponds to the language invented by modern psychological theory, it must be remembered that this language is not necessarily all-encompassing. There may be many other elements of the self – or perhaps even different concepts of self and identity – represented in these texts, which in these readings remain opaque to us because they remain uninterpretable in modern psychoanalysis. Moglen’s analysis is of high quality; the only defensive statement she needed was an acknowledgement of the inevitable boundaries of her psychoanalytic paradigm.

Such an acknowledgement is, of course, inherent to the integration of economic, feminist and narratological analyses with psychoanalytic readings. This is a lucid, rigorous and energetic piece of scholarship. Moglen provides generous footnotes, bibliography and index, and her prose is enjoyably elegant and precise. Particularly refreshing is the consideration of the interplay between fantastic and realistic elements of fiction. A useful addition to the analysis of novelistic form, this book affirms that analyses which combine different approaches are gathering power in an increasingly co-operative critical landscape.

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