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

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1 Helene Moglen intends to challenge the traditional view, most famously expressed by Ian Watt in "The Rise of the Nopvel" from 1959, that the English novel as a genre developed in the eighteenth century in response to the "rise" of capitalism and the ascent of the middle class. As a starting point for her study, she takes Nancy Armstrong, who argues in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press 1987)that the economical and political concerns central to the eighteenth century novel were often masked as problems of gender relations. Moglen claims that gender relations in the novel were not, in fact, a mask for other concerns but themselves the central problem which caused the development of the novel as a means of articulating and negotiating it. Her "feminist theory of the novel" is based on the assumption that the rigid definition of "masculinity" and "femininity" as complementary and mutually exclusive categories, and of gender as a natural and immutable part of every person's identity, which gradually became the dominant view from about 1650 onwards as a result of economical development, philosophical discourse, and anatomical research, caused "the trauma of gender." Individuals, Moglen argues, originally in possession of all possible traits, felt the need to conform to the prescribed gender roles and to suppress all those aspects of their personality that did not fit in. This resulted in strain, fear, and a feeling of loss. Moglen's theory of the novel is feminist in the sense that she intends to contribute to the uncovering and understanding of the psychic costs of this sex-gender system and its influence on the Western world until today, thus aiming at social and psychological change.

2 According to Moglen, the struggle of each new generation to adapt successfully to the appropriate gender roles - as well as their secret fears and melancholy resulting from the loss of the original ungendered wholeness - found expression in the novel. Rejecting the conviction of most literary historians that the early English novel was predominantly a realist genre, Moglen holds that it combined fantastic narrative structures with realistic ones to produce a special bimodal form well suited to investigate the sex-gender-system: the fantastic is suited for investigating the intrapsychic state of the traumatised gendered subject, the realistic to describe gendered society. Moglen links the development of this bimodal form to the emergence of individualism. Individualism has an outward-looking aspect - the endeavour to be autonomous -, which corresponds to the realistic narrative mode. It also has an inward-

looking aspect - the interest in one's own interior life -, which corresponds to the fantastic mode.

3 To exemplify her "feminist theory of the English novel," Moglen analyses novels by four well-known eighteenth-century authors, two of them traditionally considered to be the "fathers of the novel" (Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson), the other two dismissed as minor talents (Horace Walpole) or atypical (Laurence Sterne) by Watt and later theorists of the English novel as a realist genre. Moglen concentrates entirely on male authors, as in her view the differences between male and female experience of the "trauma of gender" require a separate treatment of each.

4 Moglen's approach is based on psychoanalysis, which she considers to be especially appropriate for the English novel because both Freud and the novel describe alienated subjects, who strive for autonomy but are traumatised by the sex-gender system. She focuses on the authors' biographies and the veiled layers of meanings they unconsciously inserted as subtexts into their novels, as well as on the intentionally produced and therefore more accessible parts of the texts. Her interpretation is based on feminist object relations theory with its emphasis on the central role of the mother as primary object and dominant presence in the child's interior life. (Yet, in disturbing contradiction to this, the mother is reduced to a minor role in the family and society by the patriarchal sex-gender system.) In addition, Moglen uses different psychoanalytic theories to interpret the works of individual authors: Heinz Kohut (Defoe), Jessica Benjamin (Richardson), Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva (Sterne), and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (Walpole). Assuming an interdependent relation between literature and psychoanalysis, she also uses her interpretation of the novels to point up flaws and limits of psychoanalytic theories.

5 In the chapter "Daniel Defoe and the Gendered Subject of Individualism," Moglen compares Kohut's "narcissistic individuals," who are characterised by a quick alternation between feelings of grandiosity and feelings of worthlessness and fear, to Defoe's protagonists. Defoe's characters fight ruthlessly for autonomy under the conditions of entrepreneurial capitalism in the realist parts of his novels, but their unconscious fears and insoluble conflicts are exposed in a fantastic mode of writing. These conflicts, caused by the collision of individualism with the sex-gender system, make the characters' achievement of complete autonomy impossible; for the female protagonists, even the thought of autonomy appears obnoxious. Since a successful achievement of bourgeois individuality is impossible for Defoe's protagonists, Moglen rejects Kohut's attempt to adapt the "narcissistic individual" to bourgeois society by therapy as also impossible

6 According to Moglen, Richardson's central topic is male psychosexuality. In *Clarissa* he reproduces the model of gender relations typical of the "pornographic imagination" as described by Benjamin: In the realist parts of his fiction autonomous, dominant men have exploitative relationships with women, whom they misogynistically divide into desexualized potential future wives and sexual - and therefore despicable as well as desirable - whores. Women react by either going along with the masochistic part or trying to protect their own individuality by virtuous resistance and withdrawal. While approving of this model of gender roles, Richardson involuntary reveals the deficient nature of it in the fantastic parts of the novel: his characters not only fear but also secretly long for the strong affective ties they once experienced in a primal ungendered past but sacrificed for the sake of autonomy.

7 *Tristram Shandy*, according to Moglen, depicts men who try to escape from the pressure exerted by their masculine gender role (in which their phallic power, in contrast to Lacan's definition taken to be quite literally based on the [im]potence of the penis, is continually questioned) as well as from the misogynistic fears evoked by the remembrance of their primal past dominated by a creatively fertile mother. They create an intermediary space in between the realistic and the fantastic for themselves: the realm of the "hobbyhorse," which Moglen describes as similar to the *semiotic* defined by Kristeva as an affective dimension in between the infantile state of mind (corresponding to the fantastic) and the Lacanian symbolic (corresponding to the realistic). At the intersection of realistic and fantastic narrative modes, Sterne's male characters experience a state of self-transcendent being comparable to Lacan's *jouissance*, which replaces gender oppositions with all-male sameness, desire with homosocial friendship and female fertility with male cultural productivity.

8 While in all the novels by Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne the realist mode dominates, in Walpole's gothic fiction the fantastic mode is more conspicuous, since it interrogates and criticises the realist narrative. The realist plot of the autonomous male individual and his exploitative relationships with others becomes a grotesquely exaggerated parody. Unconvincing motivations and anticlimactic scenes call the significance of the realist narrative into question and point to the fantastic narrative as a source of more significant meanings. The way in which Walpole deals with the fantastic is similar to the theories of Abraham and Torok, who link the uncanny to melancholia, and use gothic metaphors to capture melancholic affectivity: Walpole's fantastic plot about the son's estrangement from an aggressive and competitive father and longing for a mother who is desired, feared, and lost is saturated with melancholia and expressed in uncanny, gothic images of a past haunting the present, of incestuous desire and unrestrained rage.

9 The complexity of the interrelations between the narrative modes, the different works by one author, the author's biography and the psychoanalytic theories used to interpret the author's works almost exceeds the limits of chapters of about thirty pages each and makes them difficult reading. Yet on the whole Moglen presents an interesting and thought-provoking new approach to the old question of why the English novel came into being in the eighteenth century. The spread of complementary concepts of gender caused - even if not necessarily a "trauma" - a flood of fictional and non-fictional writings dealing with the new forms of behaviour and thinking required of each sex. This intense interest in gender roles and gender relations was most probably more than just a "mask" for economical or political concerns. A psychoanalytic, rather than a historical or purely feminist approach, proves helpful in highlighting the sexual and intrapsychic implications of the changes in gender relations. Moglen's flexible and undogmatic use of different theories enables her to adapt them to the novels she discusses, rather than ignore features of the texts which do not fit in. Convincing as her analysis of the four famous eighteenth century novelists is, one would wish for the inclusion of texts by female authors and of novels from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in order to be better able to judge whether Moglen's "theory of the English novel" is indeed applicable to the genre as a whole. This, as she announces in a footnote to the introduction, is of continued research interest to her.